

Review: LightLib Images

by Chris Frizelle

It is becoming an increasingly common requirement for applications today to work with images: on screen, on disk or both. When Delphi's built-in support runs out of steam you will need to turn to a third-party package and one such is LightLib Images from DFL Software in Toronto, Canada. We've tested version 1.10.

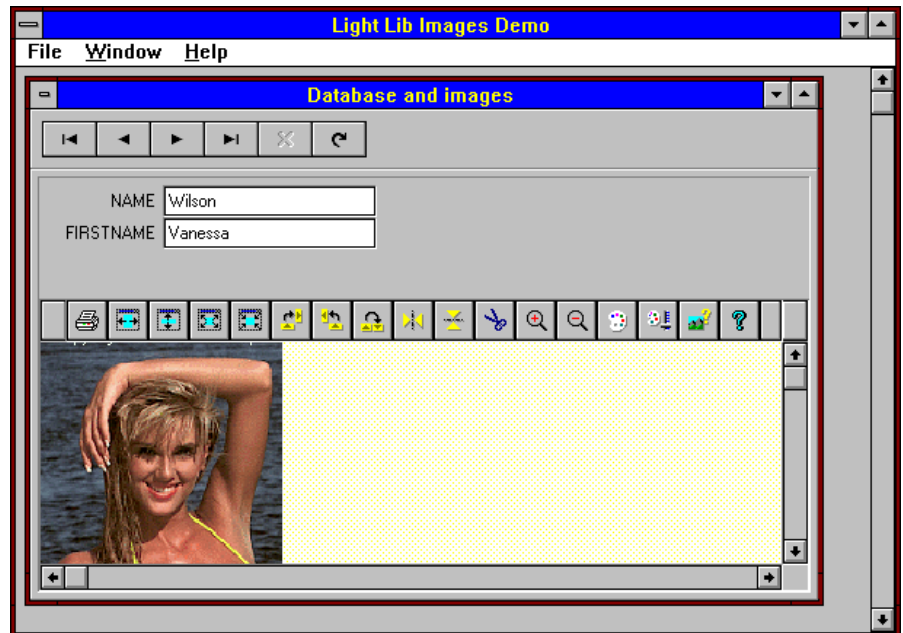
As well as supporting a number of file formats, the package also includes TWAIN scanner support, image conversion and printing.

Installation

The software comes on 3 floppies and to get everything onto your hard disk there's an install program: the usual kind of thing, with some nice pretty gauges. You will need about 6Mb of disk space, plus another 860Kb or so in your Windows SYSTEM directory. It asks for your name, company and the serial number (which is printed on the registration card and must be the longest I've seen at 28 characters). After a few minutes all is done and you get the chance to peruse the README file.

In the program group which is created there's also a README file for the Delphi version, which contains a brief overview of how to use the Delphi components. There is no printed documentation, but a Windows Help file is provided.

You need to install the Delphi components, of course, in the usual way. The next hurdle was that my search path in Delphi had come to the end of its tether (grrr!) and I needed to move some stuff around. To try and minimise this problem, I have all my Delphi components in subdirectories of D:\D. The subdirectories have single letter names too, eg LightLib Images is in D:\D\N. I reserve D:\D\A for all the small components that can happily live together (ie where there are no clashing filenames, usually the case for small freeware and shareware components).



► Part of the sample Delphi application included with LightLib Images, showing the display of images from a database table and the built in toolbar. (If these girls all work for DFL I want a job please...)

Quick Start...

After sorting out Delphi's little problems I got to work. There are two components included: one is TLightLibRegister, which registers your application with the DLLs which do all the work, and the other is TImageWindow, which is used to display images in. Dropping one each of these onto a form and applying common sense to some property settings got me a small application to open and manipulate various kinds of bitmap files working in about 2 minutes.

However, shortly after this I had a GPF when converting an image to greyscale. This worked fine on the sample images supplied by DFL, but it's a little disconcerting.

There is one demonstration program for Delphi included, which shows how to display and manipulate images from files as well as from database tables. The screenshot above shows part of it. It would have been nice to have more examples, especially of calling the various DLL functions direct from code (eg for batch

conversions of image files). It looks like these are easy enough but not quite as straightforward as using the Delphi components.

Toolbar

When you have an image displayed in a TImageWindow a toolbar can also be displayed (as in the screenshot), packed with useful goodies like file open/save, scanner access, printing, image rotation and flipping, cropping, zooming, palette change, colour operations (eg conversion to less or more colours or to greyscale), image information and help access.

You can set up the toolbar to include as many or as few of the buttons as you wish, by amending the ToolBarSetup property via a nice little dialog box.

Scanner Support

Included in LightLib Image is TWAIN support for acquiring images from a scanner. This is a nice feature to have, unfortunately I couldn't test it as my scanner doesn't have a TWAIN driver. As

well as scanning using the toolbar, you can also make a call to a DLL.

Printing

Printing support for all the image types is included. Clicking the relevant toolbar button brings up a print dialog which allows you to set margins, scaling and position.

Click OK and the dialog disappears, the progress gauge goes quickly up (presumably to indicate image preparation) and then you wait. Bitmaps can take a long time to print but there's no print progress indicator and the part of the image where the dialog was is not repainted until printing's finished. I can see lots of end users saying 'I started printing then it hung!' Even the tiniest image was slow to print. A few rough edges here, then.

Documentation

I've already had a whinge about the lack of printed documentation. Ok, so it saves trees and that's to be commended. The disk documentation is not, I'm afraid, the best I've seen. The README file is more up to date than the Help file, which has a few omissions. It's quite possible that by now DFL have updated the files, if not I'd suggest they do so. However, if you are keen enough to be developing image manipulation programs then you will probably be sharp enough to find the information you need.

Distributing Applications

Surprisingly, nowhere could I find details of what files I needed to include when shipping an application which uses LightLib Images.

On installation, four DLLs, totalling 860Kb, had been placed into my Windows SYSTEM directory, but I don't know whether all four are needed in every case (hunting around with a utility that finds what DLLs an application uses tends to indicate they are not). For image conversion and manipulation I use a version of PaintShop Pro which does much more than LightLib Images and has an EXE size of less than 300Kb (as well as being quite a bit faster), so there's room for improvement perhaps.

File Format	Type	Compression
Standard Edition		
BMP	B&W, Colour	Uncompressed
PCX	B&W, Colour	RLE
PNG	1,4,8,24 bits	LZW
TGA	8 to 24 bits	Uncompressed
TIF	B&W, Colour (to 8 bits)	Uncompressed, RLE
Professional Edition (in addition to those above)		
TIF	B&W	Group 3 & 4 Fax, Huffman
	B&W, Colour to 24 bits	LZW
GIF	Colour	LZW
JPG	Colour	JPEG
BLOB	Colour	Proprietary DFL

► LightLib Images file format support

One would have to assume that as a developer you are licensed to distribute these DLLs, but the documentation doesn't tell you.

Conclusions

If you want to manipulate bitmaps and find that Delphi's built-in support is not adequate, LightLib Images would be very useful. I've not seen scanning support advertised in competing products, which sets this package apart.

There seem to be a few rough edges in the version we reviewed and I have reservations about the documentation and the size of the DLLs, but the package is certainly easy to use and contains the functionality you'd need.

There are three versions: the basic Delphi version is without source code at about £99 in the UK.

It shares its file format support (see the table above) with the Standard Edition which adds source code and is available from about £140 upwards in the UK. The Professional Edition supports more file formats and costs from £259 in the UK. The Standard Edition seems to be able to *open* all of the formats in the Professional Edition, but can't *save* to the extra ones. I'd prefer just one full version with keener pricing – those extra formats are often needed, seem to cost a lot extra and are included in at least one cheaper competing product.

LightLib Images is produced by DFL Software Inc in Canada, Tel: +1 416 789 2223, Fax: +1 416 789 0204, Web <http://www.dfl.com> or Email: CompuServe 74723,3321