CHAPTER 1

An Overview of Pixlr Editor

This chapter covers several basic but important aspects of Pixlr Editor that will be especially useful for those new to image editing. This chapter covers the following topics:

- *Launching Pixlr Editor*: In this section, we'll take a look at launching the application for the first time.
- *The Pixlr Editor Workspace*: This part essentially provides an overall look at the interface and where all of the tools and functions in Pixlr Editor are located.
- *Pixel-Based Images Explained*: Pixlr Editor works with pixel-based (or raster) images, which will be covered in this portion.
- *File Formats*: In this section, we'll take a look at the types of file formats Pixlr Editor can open and save, as well as the differences between them.
- *Opening Images*: This part provides guidance in how to open images in Pixlr Editor.
- *Saving Images*: Shows where to save your images, and the file format options available to save them as.

Note If you're new to image editing, I suggest following along on your computer after launching Pixlr Editor to become better acquainted with the start screen, workspace, and opening/saving files.

Launching Pixlr Editor

The fact that Pixlr Editor works in web browsers makes it very convenient to access and simple to launch. However, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- The Adobe Flash plug-in must be installed on your system for the application to work. It's highly likely that it's already on your computer, but if it's not, you can get it free by following this link: `https://helpx.adobe.com/flash-player.html`.

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- A fast, reliable Internet connection is required.
- Pixlr Editor works in most web browsers, but it may not work in older, outdated versions. For best results, make sure you have the latest version installed on your system.
- Your computer should have sufficient RAM installed (I suggest a minimum of 2GB).

There's more than one path to launch the application, but the most direct way is to use the following URL: `https://pixlr.com/editor/`. The application interface will launch, displaying a start screen with options to create or open images (Figure 1-1).

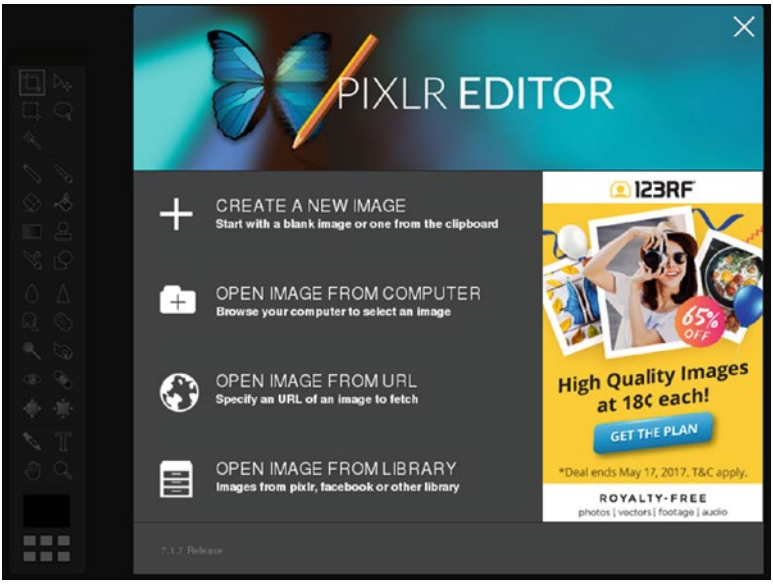

Figure 1-1. *The Pixlr Editor start screen*

We'll take a closer look at the start screen a little later in this chapter, but for now (if you're following along on your computer) close it out by clicking the white X in the upper-right corner of the butterfly graphic. This will allow an unobstructed view of the workspace.

The Pixlr Editor Workspace

Now, let's become better acquainted with the Pixlr Editor workspace—we'll just take a quick tour in this section for now, but topics such as tools, the menu bar, etc., will be explored in greater depth in later chapters. Figure 1-2 shows the Pixlr Editor workspace and identifies the main parts.

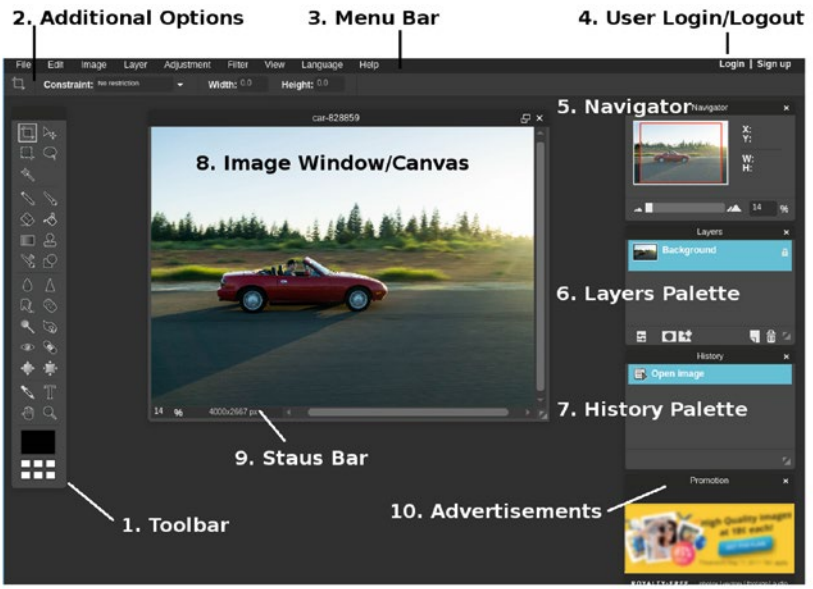

Figure 1-2. *The Pixlr Editor workspace*

Here's a quick breakdown of the Pixlr Editor workspace:

1. **The Toolbar—**This palette contains the digital tools you'll work with. There are tools for making selections, applying colors, erasing portions of an image, etc. Because there are so many, each tool will be examined more closely in Chapter 2.

2. **Additional Options—**Most tools can be configured as needed. For example, you can adjust the diameter, shape, opacity, and flow of the brush tools. Not all tools have additional options.

3. **The Menu Bar—**The menu bar contains a sundry of functions for image editing. You'll find commands for opening and saving images, adjusting images, applying filters for effects, and much more. There are many functions contained in the menu bar, all of which will be examined more closely in Chapter 3.

4. **User Login/Logout and User Settings—**After creating a Pixlr account, this area is where you can log in or out, as well as update your account information.

■ **Note** Creating a Pixlr account is free, and you are not required to submit any sensitive personal information. Pixlr Editor can be used without an account, but you won't be able to save images to the Pixlr Library, only to your computer (or an external storage such as a flash drive).

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5. **The Navigator Palette—**This feature helps you find your way around the image at close magnification (Figure 1-3).

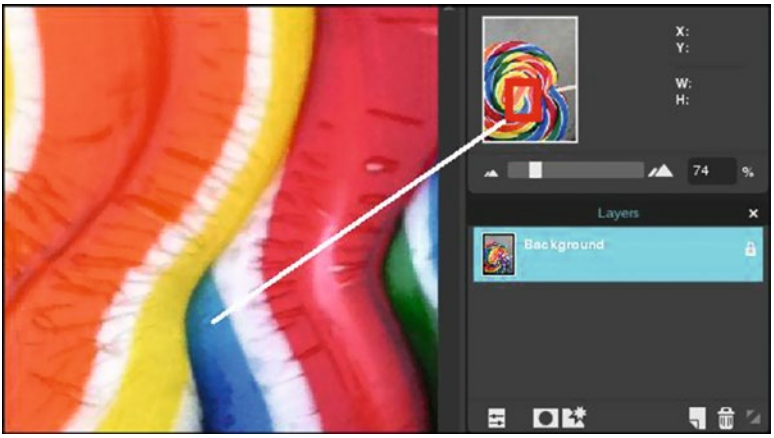

Figure 1-3. *The Navigator Palette*

6. **The Layers Palette—**This is one of the areas where you'll work with layers (you can also access them from the menu bar to some extent). The Layers Palette displays a thumbnail image of each layer (Figure 1-4). Each layer can be named, be re-ordered in the stack, the opacity lowered, deleted, etc.

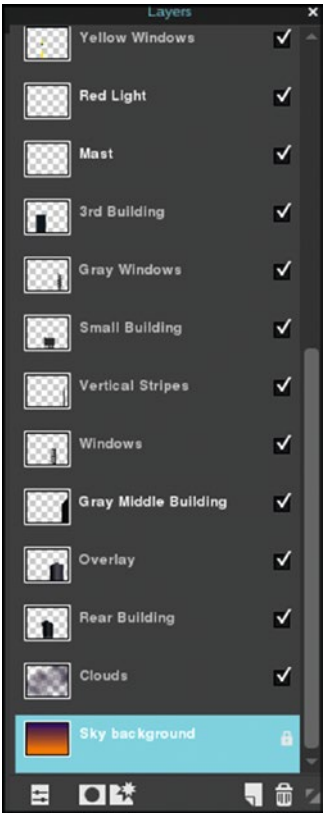

Figure 1-4. *The Layers Palette helps manage layers*

■ **Note** If you're a complete beginner to image editing, layers can be thought of as clear sheets that contain a graphical element. When stacked one on top of another, they combine to form a complete image. To learn more, refer to the *The Beginner's Guide to Layers* PDF, which can be obtained from the Source Code/Downloads tab of this Apress page: http://www.apress.com/9781484226971.

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7. **The History Palette—**When working with Pixlr Editor, a snapshot of each editing step is stored in the History Palette, showing up to 16 actions (Figure 1-5). This allows you revert to an earlier point in the editing process should you find it necessary to revise any previous editing steps or eliminate mistakes.

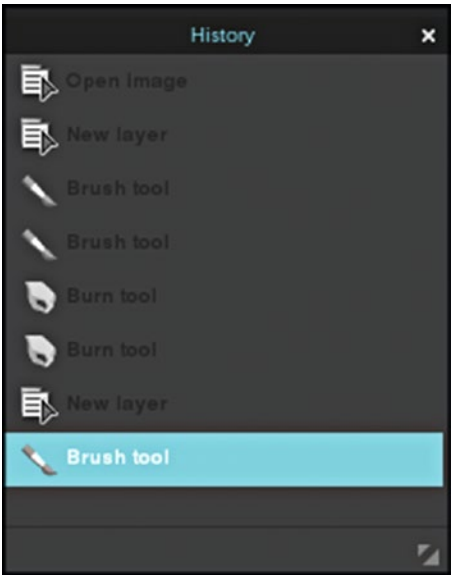

Figure 1-5. *The History Palette allows the user to revert to an earlier point in the editing process*

8. **The Image Window/Canvas—**This is where the image you are working on appears. The image may be a digital photograph or a blank canvas for a graphic design you intend to create.
9. **Status Bar—**This shows the dimensions of the image in pixels, as well as the zoom percentage.
10. **Advertisements—**Because Pixlr Editor is free, it's supported by advertisements. The ad is small, but can be closed if desired.

Pixel-Based Images Explained

Pixel-based images (also known as raster images) are comprised of many tiny squares called *pixels.* A pixel (derived from the term *picture element)* is an individual unit of color and tonal value as represented on a computer display. The color and value of each pixel can vary—when viewed at close magnification, the block-like appearance is obvious (Figure 1-6), but when viewed from a distance the colors and tones appear to gradually and smoothly transition in the image.

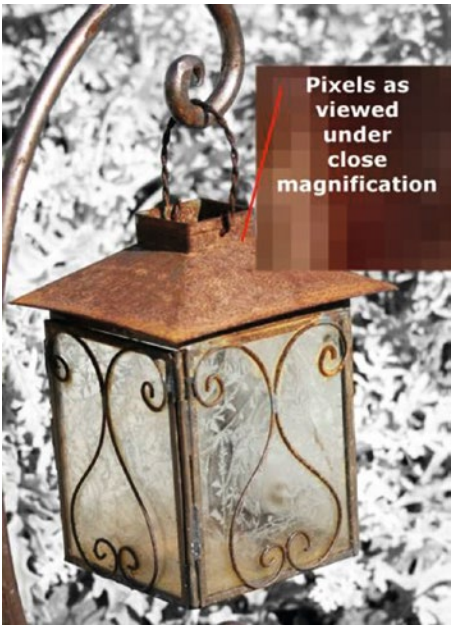

Figure 1-6. *Pixels appear as blocks under close magnification*

As the name suggests, Pixlr Editor is a pixel-based image editing application. This means that images are resolution-dependent. When a digital photo is resized too much, the image quality diminishes. Pixlr Editor is designed to output images for digital/web-based displays, not high-end print such as that one would acquire from a service bureau. However, it is possible to output files as standard-sized photographic prints, provided you start with a high resolution image to edit. This will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 4.

You may have heard the term vector graphics, but aren't sure what it means. Even though they aren't relevant to Pixlr Editor, vector graphics warrant some explanation. Vector graphics are different than raster graphics in the sense that they are created using mathematical formulas to form geometric shapes. Unlike raster graphics, vector graphics are scalable, meaning they can be enlarged or reduced in size with no image degradation.

However, photographs don't generally display well as vector-based images. Whereas pixel-based images such as digital photos show a transition of color and tone, vector graphics are usually composed of areas of solid color (Figure 1-7).

Figure 1-7. *A pixel-based (raster) image and a vector-based image*

In addition to being an advanced photo editing application, Pixlr Editor can also serve as graphics creation tool. However, unlike those created using a vector-based program, graphics created using this program are pixel-based. The illustration of the city scape was created using Pixlr Editor (Figure 1-8).

Figure 1-8. *A pixel-based (raster) illustration created using Pixlr Editor (Copyright 2016 Phillip Whitt)*

Image File Formats

Image file formats are standards for storing digital data as a computer file. Each different file format is best suited for a specific purpose. Pixlr Editor handles a number of image file formats.

Here is a look at the formats Pixlr Editor can work with:

- **PXD (Pixlr Document)**—This is the proprietary file format used by Pixlr Editor and should be used to preserve layers for future editing or revisions of your project. It's good practice to always keep your work saved as a PXD file, then output a copy of the finished of the work in another file format. Pixlr Editor can both open and save files in the PXD format.
- **JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group)**—The JPEG file format is one of the most common file formats in use for digital images. The JPEG format is versatile because it can compress image data for a manageable file size while maintaining good image quality. The JPEG format is known as a *lossy* format. Compressing an image discards image data—if an image is compressed too much, the quality will suffer. Image files saved in the JPEG format are normally used for display on the web. They can also be used for print, as long the resolution is sufficient. Pixlr Editor can open and save JPEG images.
- **GIF (Graphics Interchange Format)**—GIF is another format commonly used on the web. Unlike JPEG files, GIF files can support transparent backgrounds. This file format is often used for simple web animations. Pixlr Editor can open GIF files as flattened, static images, but cannot save images as GIF files.
- **PNG (Portable Network Graphics)**—The PNG image file is a lossless format. This format provides image data compression with little loss of image quality. PNG files are also typically used on the web. Unlike JPEG files, PNG files support transparent backgrounds. Pixlr Editor can open PNG images and save images as PNG files.
- **BMP (Bitmap Image File)**—The BMP is a raster graphics file format that is non-destructive. Images are saved in high quality, but result in large file sizes. Generally, BMP files are better suited for print and not web use. Pixlr Editor can save files in the BMP format, and can open most. However, extremely large BMP files would likely be an exception.
- **TIFF (Tagged Image File Format)**—This is a versatile, widely used format used in the graphics industry. Like BMP, this is a good choice when image quality is important and destined for print rather than web use. Pixlr Editor can save files in the TIFF format as flattened images, but can't open TIFF files.

- **PSD (Photoshop Document)**—This is the default file format used by Adobe Photoshop. PSD files often contain layers utilizing features unique to Photoshop that aren't supported in Pixlr Editor. Therefore, the application's ability to handle some PSD files is limited. Pixlr Editor can open (with limits) PSD files, but can't save image files in the PSD format.

Opening Images

Upon opening Pixlr Editor, the start screen will appear (as you saw earlier in this chapter). There following options are presented in Figure 1-9.

- Create New Image
- Open Image From Computer
- Open Image From URL
- Open Image From Library

Figure 1-9. *The options presented on the start screen*

■ **Note** These options can also be accessed from Pixlr Editor's menu bar under File. We'll look closer at the Create New Image option in Chapter 10.

To open an image from your computer, simply click that option and navigate to the folder containing that image. The example in Figure 1-10 shows that the image I want to open is in a folder titled `Photos to Edit`, which is on the computer's desktop.

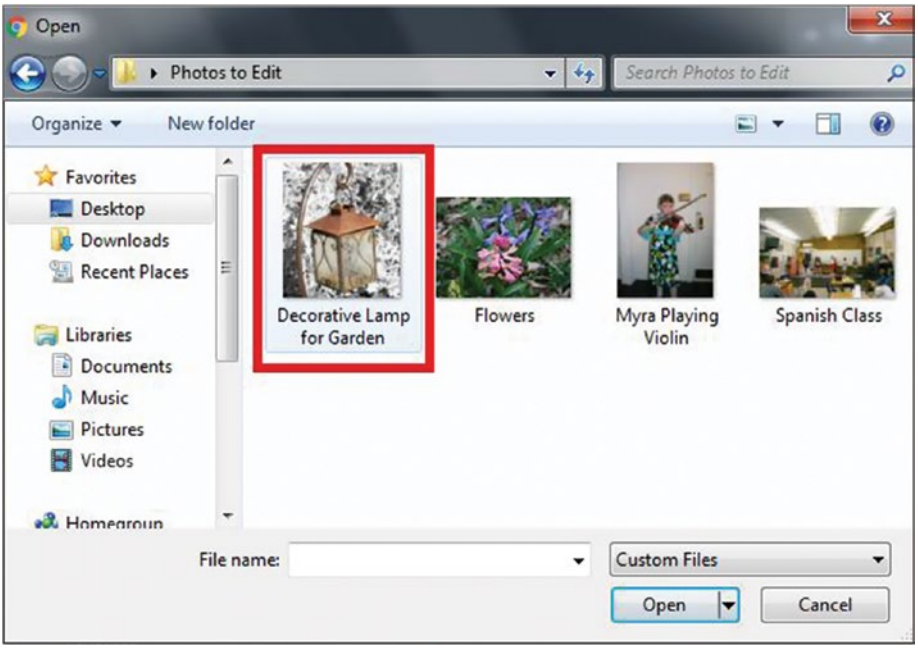

Figure 1-10. *Opening an image contained in a folder on the computer desktop*

To open an image an image from a URL, follow these steps:

1. Click Open Image From URL in the Pixlr Editor start screen.
2. Open a new tab, then navigate to the web page hosting the image you want.
3. Right-click on the image and click Copy Image Address (Figure 1-11).

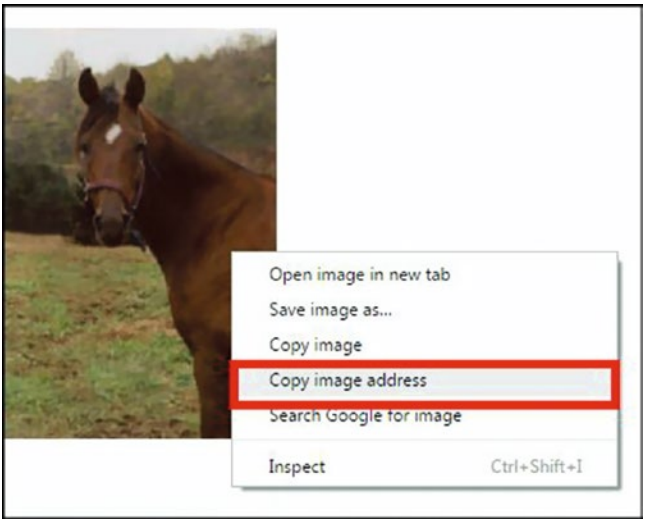

Figure 1-11. *Copy the image address of the image you want to open*

■ **Note** The example shown here is using Google Chrome—the wording in the command may vary depending on the browser being used.

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4. Click the tab running Pixlr Editor and paste the address in the dialog box (Figure 1-12). Then click OK.

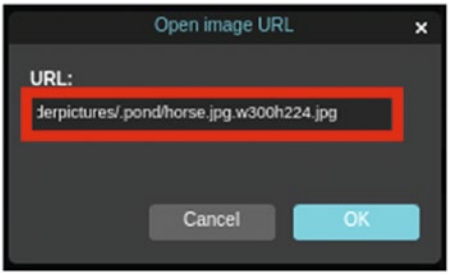

Figure 1-12. *Paste the image address in the dialog box to open in Pixlr Editor*

The image should now be opened in Pixlr Editor, ready to edit, as shown in Figure 1-13.

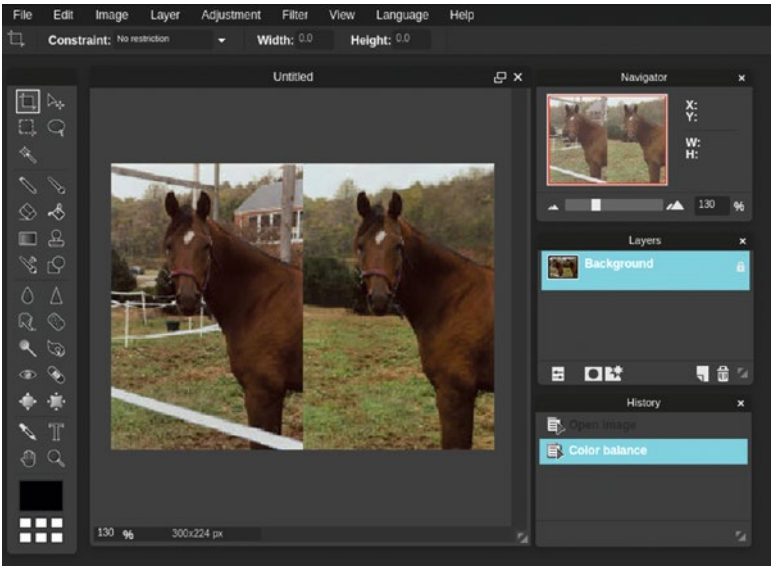

Figure 1-13. *The image now opened in Pixlr Editor*

■ **Note** It's important to remember that images hosted on the web (unless they're in the public domain) are protected by copyright laws. It's always advisable to obtain written permission from the copyright owner before using an image hosted on the Internet for publication.

Saving Images

Pixlr Editor offers two places to save your images—your computer or the Pixlr Library (Figure 1-14).

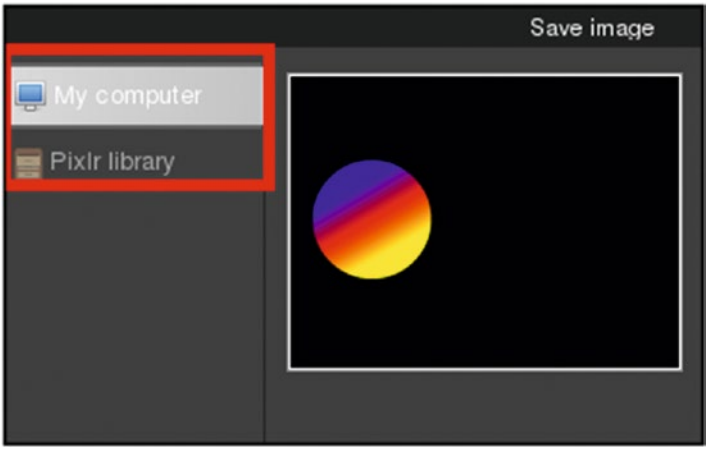

Figure 1-14. *Pixlr Editor can save images to your computer or the Pixlr Library*

A Pixlr account isn't required to use the application and to save images to your computer. Of course, the advantage to having an account is access to the library, thus saving space on your computer. The library can serve as a backup of your work if you save your images to both places after each editing session.

If you prefer not to set up a Pixlr account, you should always back your work up *somewhere*—on a flash drive, external hard drive, or cloud service.

Your images can be saved in the following file formats using Pixlr Editor (Figure 1-15):

- JPEG
- PNG
- BMP
- TIFF
- PXD (Pixlr Editor's native format for using with layered images)

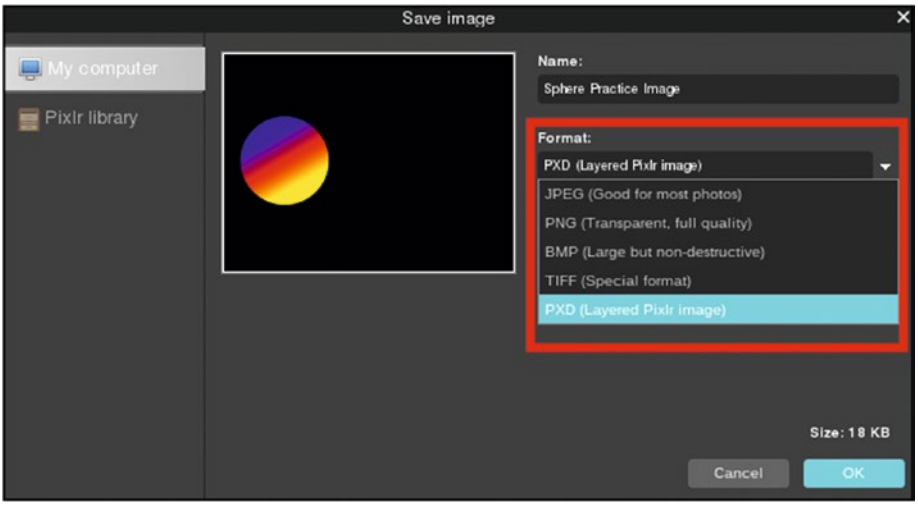

Figure 1-15. *File format options for saving images*

Summary

If you're a beginner at image editing software, hopefully you now have some rudimentary understanding of this program. If you feel lost or overwhelmed, don't worry—things will make more sense the further into this book you go.

This chapter provided an overview of Pixlr Editor—we looked at launching the application, using the workspace, pixel-based images, image file formats, and opening/saving images.

The next chapter includes an in-depth look at the tools used in Pixlr Editor.