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Artistic streaks



Give **free rein to the artist in you** and check out our selection of image-editing packages, especially if you want to be able to manipulate pictures for the web, says Ken McMahon.

Image editing packages were once the preserve of the digital artist, but the availability of cheap digital cameras, scanners and colour printers, plus the need to generate colourful graphics for web pages, means even the most artistically challenged PC users are calling on the power of image-editing packages.

We've looked at 12 applications for editing digital images. Four are pro packages, aimed at photographers, graphic designers and anyone who works for print media or the web. The remaining eight are for home users, many of whom will probably own a digital camera.

Web tools figure highly on the feature lists of the professional packages as rapid expansion of the medium has created a huge demand for tools to create and publish images suitable for the web, be they photos, buttons or animations. We've looked at how these new features have been integrated, how well they do the job and whether the interface works to help or, as is often the case, hinder these everyday tasks.

On the home front, two things have driven the development of digital darkroom applications. One is the proliferation of digital cameras brought about by better picture quality and tumbling prices. The second is that digital camera owners want to organise pictures into easily viewable albums they can share with friends and family, by printing hard copies, or creating and displaying electronic albums or slide shows via email and the web.

For home users the most important criteria is ease of use, so we've put this above lengthy feature lists in compiling our star ratings. In our view it's more important to be able to produce results quickly and easily without having to read manuals and plough through help files.

Painter 6.0

When Metacreations released Painter 5.5 Web edition there were those who lamented the fact that yet another great specialist application had succumbed to the web-with-everything tide. The release of version 6.0 will knock any such worries firmly on the head. Metacreations has, it seems, decided to concentrate on Painter's strengths, enhancing and expanding its already powerful complement of natural media brushes and cleaning up what was widely recognised as a complicated interface.

At its worst, Painter's interface was a case of not being able to see the painting for the palettes. But now many of the palettes have been combined into one scorecard-style, collapsible 'master brush control palette'.

In its most compressed format the palette displays a single line for each brush parameter, with a numeric display of the primary control. Clicking on the triangular side button expands the single-line display to show the entire palette and, once you've made changes, you can re-collapse it using the same button. You can even re-order the list so that your most often used brush controls are at the top and, with all of the palettes expanded, you can scroll up and down through them elevator-style.

The second gripe from users was the absence of proper layers. In the latest version Metacreations has changed this so the floaters palette has been abandoned in favour of Photoshop-style layer management. You can make selections on layers, cut and paste between them and move from layer to layer effortlessly. Layers have transparency masks and you can paint using texture tools to reveal the layer beneath. You can also make use of all the usual compositing options to determine how layers interact with one another.

Painter's new 'brush engine' – the software that controls brush behaviour – has been completely re-engineered to provide faster, more flexible and more realistic results. The main implication of this is that brushes behave more like the

► **NEW SCORECARD-STYLE PALETTES**
MAKE IT EASIER TO GET AT BRUSH CONTROLS



real thing, or as Mark Zimmer, one of Painter's original creators puts it:

'This is the fourth incarnation of our attempt to create a bristly brush.'

Each bristle can have its own paint colour and pick up paint 'contamination' when you overpaint on existing painted areas. Instead of painting in pixel dabs of varying sizes the new brush engine renders continuous one-pixel lines of colour. This, combined with 'multi-stroke spooling' means an end to the delay experienced between the execution of a stroke and its appearance

on the canvas – particularly when working on large files.

The other significant

brush enhancement is the addition of support for tilt and bearing sensing when using a tablet and stylus. Using the airbrush, for example, paint splatters over a widening arc in the direction the stylus is pointing. 'Continuous time deposition' means that, with the flow control on, the brush continues to deposit ink, as would the real thing.

If you don't have the luxury of a stylus there are several 'mouse looks' – brushes that incorporate pressure, tilt, bearing and velocity data that can be applied with the mouse. The interactive image hose also takes advantage of tilt and

bearing so that, as well as scaling images by varying the pressure as you spray, you can now rotate them. Nozzle enthusiasts will be well pleased with the expansive array on offer, some of the more interesting of which include 3 jungle, 29 rock (geological, not music), cumulus clouds, Mediterranean village and sushi.

There's no question that version 6.0 delivers pretty much everything that artists have asked for. There was never anything natural about seeing your strokes appear on the canvas several moments after you painted them, or not being able to work out whether you're holding a large watercolour brush or a small pastel crayon. With the latest version, the new brush engine and other performance enhancements mean that speed is no longer an issue. The interface enhancements go some way to addressing the second problem, though they still fall short of the standard which Adobe has set.

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price 351.33 (£299 ex VAT)

Contact Computers Unlimited
0181 358 5857

www.metacreations.com

Good points Nothing like it for that painted look and feel

Bad points Interface still lacks clarity

Conclusion The only real choice for that brush and canvas look

Adobe Photoshop 5.5

Photoshop is and will probably continue to be the professional image-editing application of choice for the graphics industry. In a decade it's become the undisputed industry leader through a combination of powerful, well-honed tools, excellent interface design and an open standard interface for third-party plug-in filters.

With the last two versions (5.0 and 5.5) Adobe has managed to maintain its lead by a wide margin. Version 5.0 introduced innovative new features like the history palette, editable type, layer effects (live effects like drop shadow and glow which remain editable and update with type changes), magnetic selection tools and extended scripting capabilities.

is little significant tonal or colour difference or where the edges are soft, the only option has been the slow and painful manual method. Photoshop 5.5's three new masking tools push back the threshold at which you need to abandon the quick in favour of the painful.

In order of magnitude there's the magic eraser, the background eraser and the extract image command. The first works with a single click, removing detail and creating transparency, but only erases either all pixels that are similar in value to the first pixel erased or similar contiguous pixels. Effectively the magic eraser performs the same function as clicking a pixel with the magic wand, selecting either grow or

the extract image command which displays a large preview image in a dialog box. You isolate the main subject by drawing a closed path around it with an outliner tool. The outliner size is variable, so you can reduce it for detailed areas and enlarge it for quick, course tracing. The target area is then filled and you click the preview button, sit back and await the results.

Producing images for the web in Photoshop used to mean saving in gif or jpeg format and hoping for the best. Now, the Save for Web window eliminates the guesswork, allowing you to visually assess the consequences of changing bit depth, compression options and file formats. You can have up to four thumbnails displayed at once and a status bar beneath each provides the relevant formation and tells you how

long the image would take to download.

The integration of Image Ready 2.0 provides a raft of additional web features including image slicing, Javascript roll-overs and gif animation. Image Ready now looks a lot more like Photoshop, with the same toolbars and palette. You can toggle between the two applications using a button at the bottom of the toolbar and layers, effects and type formatting are preserved.

If Adobe's strategy is to remove the need for Photoshop users ever to use another image-editing package, either for preparing images for the web, producing cutouts, or creating special effects, then it's succeeding. Integrating Image Ready 2.0 means the web features are there if you want them, but don't get in the way if you don't. Adobe has, quite cleverly, both increased its pull with existing users while attracting the growing number of graphics professionals working purely for the web.

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price £410.08 (£349 ex VAT)

Contact Adobe 0181 606 4001

www.adobe.com

Good points Power, control, features, flexibility, design

Bad points What bad points?

Conclusion The professional choice



Version 5.5 added web optimisation features, new masking tools, art history brush and, with the integration of Image Ready 2.0, an entirely new set of tools for preparing visual content for the web.

The two most exciting developments are the masking tools and the web features. One of the most difficult tasks in image editing is producing cutouts – removing background detail by manually tracing round the main subject, usually with a bezier curve tool, making a selection, inverting it and deleting unwanted areas.

Where it's difficult for software to distinguish between wanted and unwanted detail, for example where there

similar from the select menu and pressing the delete key.

The background eraser works in a similar fashion, but you drag, rather than click. As you drag pixels are erased depending on their proximity in value to either the first selected pixel or the background colour. As with the magic eraser you have contiguous and non-contiguous options, you can also set the brush size, tolerance and softness of the remaining edges. The background eraser also 'decontaminates' edge pixels of any remaining background pixels so you can cleanly composite them without an unsightly halo.

But the mother of all masking tools is

Corel Photo-Paint 9

Corel has made many small but significant changes to Photo-Paint. The longstanding criticism has been the complicated and cluttered interface, but the numerous dialog boxes and roll-ups have been replaced by dockers – dockable palettes that can be

Clicking on any prior action takes you back to that stage. When there isn't enough memory to store the undos they are saved as a script which can be edited.

Other docker improvements include a redesigned script recorder and objects docker, new paths brush settings and artistic media dockers. Brush settings for the Paint, Effect Clone and Image Sprayer tool can be set from a single docker.

Supplied scripts include Web Page Image Cutter and Contact Sheet Wizard. The Image Cutter slices up pictures for incorporation in an HTML table. It's less flexible than tools in Painter or Photoshop, and the HTML code failed to materialise. The Contact Sheet Wizard works on a

folder of pictures to create an HTML page of thumbnail images which are linked to a page with the full-sized original.

More than one colour palette can now be open at the same time and there

are several new ones, including metallic and Hexachrome Pantone colours.

Photo-Paint also has the most sophisticated tools for producing Acrobat pdf files other than Adobe.

Photo-Paint supports Quicktime 3.0 VR – you can create single and multiple-node Quicktime VR panoramas and objects with hyperlinks. In combination with the stitch command this provides one of the easiest ways to create Quicktime VR panoramas.

Corel has gone much further than providing a couple of new features and an interface tidy-up, but the problem of complexity remains.

PCW DETAILS

★ ★ ★

Price £278.23 (£236.79 ex VAT)

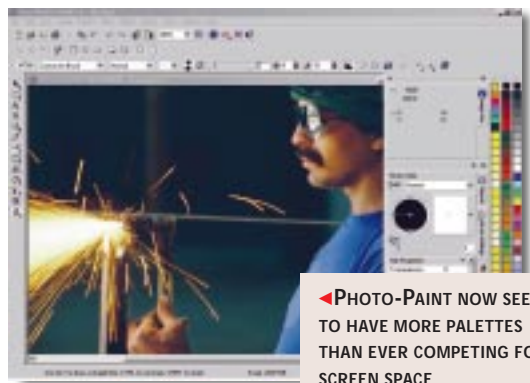
Contact Corel 0800 973189

www.corel.com

Good points Undo history, more dockers

Bad points Feature-heavy, steep learning curve

Conclusion Still falls way behind Photoshop



torn off and rearranged.

Most of what the roll-ups did could be done on the properties bar and this itself has been further developed.

The new undo/redo docker is a fair imitation of Photoshop's History palette.

Ulead PhotoImpact 5.0

PhotoImpact, like Paint Shop Pro, packs in a lot of power features, but is less sophisticated in terms of its user interface than Photoshop, Photo-Paint or Painter. In terms of looks, very little has changed from version 4.2. The edit window occupies most of the screen. There's a standard office-style menu bar at the top, below which sits a context-sensitive attribute bar which changes depending on the tool selected from the main toolbar on the left.

The best thing about the interface is the easyPalette, which accommodates

everything from special-effects filters, lighting, texture and type effects and buttons, to picture frames and paint and cloning tools. The easyPalette doubles up as an object layer manager which means less screen clutter, but you do have to constantly switch back and forth.

Most of the new features are production tools for the web. There's an image slicer and Javascript roll-over assistant, as well as a component designer which can be used for anything from banners to button bars. A separate application, PhotoImpact Album 5, takes care of organising picture collections, and Gif Animator has been upgraded.

The image slicer is more versatile than Photo-Paint's, (but not as good as Painter's), allowing you to create segments of different sizes and shapes, set differing file formats and assign



hypertext links. The easiest way to create Javascript roll-overs is from within the component designer, which offers a selection of button templates. You can alter the text colour, position and drop shadow on each of the normal, mouseover and mousedown states.

These new web features are well implemented and useful tools, but they do nothing to overcome the clunky nature of PhotoImpact's slow and often obstructive interface.

PCW DETAILS

★ ★

Price £116.33 (£99 ex VAT)

Contact BIT UK 01420 83811

www.ulead.com

Good points Easy web components, easyPalette

Bad points Slow, clunky, unintuitive, old-fashioned

Conclusion Lacks a good feature set for either pro or home use

Instant Photo Effects

Professor Franklin's Instant Photo Effects was one of the first packages to give home users quick and simple photo editing. One of the great things about it is the interface which is both fun and functional.

Along the bottom of the picture window six film canisters provide access to editing activities – edges, frames, darkroom, accents, photography and artistic. When you click on one of the canisters it travels to the far left of the screen and ejects a short length of film displaying that category's style previews. Each style's variations are displayed in a panel underneath the picture window.

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price £39.95 (£34 ex VAT)

Contact Guildsoft 0800 289041

www.guildsoft.co.uk

Good points Great fun, lots of cool projects

Bad points No web features

Conclusion One of the first, still one of the best

There is a good selection of edge effects and a terrific collection of ornate gilt, wood and wild frames. There's also a small but great collection of stamps, greetings cards and movie posters.

In the artistic category you can apply 18th century paint techniques to photos. Professor Franklin categorises these by artist, so you can turn beach scenes into pointillist masterpieces after Seurat. You can also try painting, drawing etching and embossing. With the exception of watercolour (only if you're painting on toilet roll was our verdict), results are superb.

The photography canister holds less impressive material. The antique filter does the best job we've ever seen of making your pictures look like they were taken by W H Fox-Talbot with a pinhole camera and stored in a damp cellar for the past 150 years. All the other processes, however, are unremarkable.

The darkroom is where you make below-par shots look shiny and sharp. As well as an auto-correct button you can alter the colour balance, brightness and



► **ONE OF THE BEST ANTIQUE FILTERS AROUND – AGE YOUR PHOTOS BY HUNDREDS OF YEARS IN ABOUT THREE SECONDS**

contrast, focus, and invert negatives to make a positive image.

If you want to go beyond simply applying effects, a toolbox works in tandem with dialog box settings to enable you to do your own thing.

Because of its age it lacks any web features and has no slideshow facilities, though you can hook up a digital camera using the TWAIN interface. Despite that, Professor Franklin is both simple to use and a lot of fun.

Microsoft Picture It 2000

New features in Microsoft's home picture editor include guides and rulers, multiple select, align and grouping, 3D effects, fades, photo and art brushes and those all-important web features. There's also a minilab which offers quick touch-up facilities for brightness and contrast, colour balance, cropping, rotating and red-eye removal.

The interface is neat; to the left are the workbench and project tabs which provide access to most

of the editing activities. The stack – a layer or object manager – is on the right-hand side and at the bottom is a film strip to keep photos for quick access.

The workbench offers 10 editing options. Some of the more interesting include cutouts, touch-up, paint, colour and edge effects. Each of these has a flyout – a panel that appears if your cursor hovers over it – with up to nine options.

Illusions is a set of special-effect filters which add texture. Some work quite well to produce paint-like effects, others are

disappointing. Emphasis is interesting; you can only make use of it if there is more than one object in your image, the idea, presumably, being that by applying a special-effect filter to the unselected object, the selected (and unaffected) one is given emphasis. While some of the filters produce

interesting results, to straitjacket them this way instead of letting you apply them where you want is plain daft.

Projects include collages, cards, calendars, fun stuff and web. The latter lets you create web pages, slide-shows and animations. This, and the e-mail postcard project are the highlights of the collection.

Picture It 2000 has a great interface, but is let down by editing activities and projects that mostly range in scope from average through dull to mediocre. In a word, boring.

PCW DETAILS

★★★

Price £39.95 (£34 ex VAT)

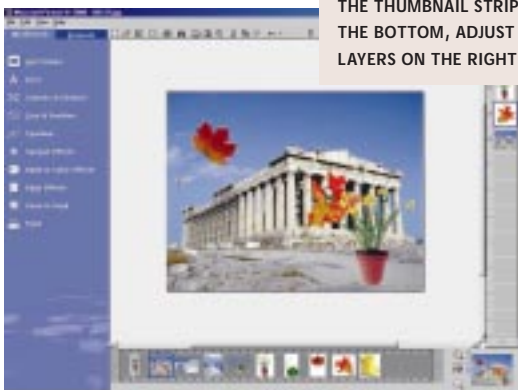
Contact Microsoft 0345 002000

www.microsoft.com

Good points Web features, email postcard

Bad points Dull collection of projects you won't want to do

Conclusion It almost makes you want to go back to film and chemicals



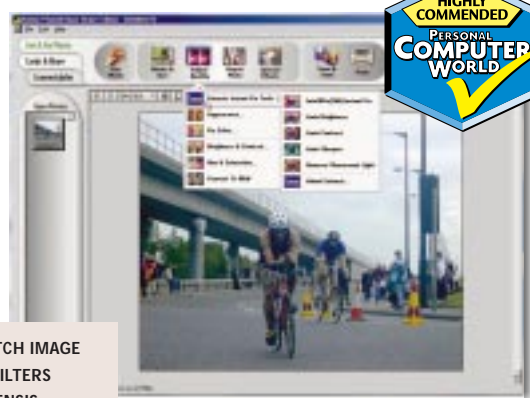
Adobe PhotoDeluxe 3

PhotoDeluxe has two strengths. The design of its interface, which is second to none and the power of its tools which are based on those found in its big brother, Photoshop. Previous versions have made that power available to novices through step-by-step guided activities and projects. Version 3 builds on that by further streamlining the interface, providing new tools and activities and extending its web links.

PhotoDeluxe 3 has three nested activity tabs, get and fix photo, cards and connectables. The first is where all the image editing happens, the second contains projects and the last connects to various Adobe and third-party websites which offer content in the form of photos, clipart, templates, and more guided activities.

Get and fix photo is where most of the action takes place. Options include adjust quality, repair photo and special effects. Clicking on an icon produces a menu of further options and selecting

▶ **TOP-NOTCH IMAGE ENHANCE FILTERS FROM EXTENSIS**



further reinforced with Extensis tools. Instant fix and auto brightness, contrast, sharpen and remove fluorescent light filters are based on the Extensis Intellihance Photoshop plug-in used by the professionals and the results are very good.

There's a generous range of categorised guided activities and projects, including old photo restoration, artistic filters,

numerous collage projects, cards, calendars, labels and frames.

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price £41.12 (£35 ex VAT)

Contact Adobe 0181 606 4001

www.adobe.com

Good points Very easy to use, lots of guided activities

Bad points No album facility

Conclusion Still the best of the home digital darkrooms

one of these takes you into

a guided activity, each step of which is explained, together with the tools you need, on numbered tabs.

Most of the activities take a maximum of three steps. Remove red-eye, for example, involves dragging around the eyes with the rectangular marquee tool (provided on the tab), clicking on the 'remove red eye' button on the second tab, then clicking 'done'.

PhotoDeluxe's already powerful image enhancement tools have been

Kai's Photo Soap 2

Soap 2 is more mainstream and less eccentric than its predecessor.

Gone is all the weird but beautiful interface design – rubberised drawers, glowing buttons, throbbing sliders – replaced by a more conventional interface.

This interface is still clear and easy to follow with activities split into five tabbed categories: organise, clean, compose, album and print.

You can open not just one image but an entire folder in organise – displayed as thumbnail images on the desktop. Once loaded you can arrange and sort them,

not just by date, size and kind, but by beauty! You can view the images either as a contact sheet (filename appears in handwritten script typeface) or in lightbox mode, complete with cardboard mounts. Dragging images to the transport palette allows retouching, montaging or inserting into an album at any time. You can also play a slide-show from here.

Clean is the heart of Soap's activities. A button bar provides cropping and rotation, quick colour correction, brightness, contrast, hue and saturation controls by means of a graphic equaliser-style panel, painting tools and effects.

These tools are effective and a pleasure to use. The quick colour fix provides a window with two zoomable preview windows and a series of button presets. Easier still is the auto-enhance



▶ **SOAP'S BIG CLEANUP – IMAGES FOR PROCESSING ARE STORED IN THE TRANSPORT AREA AT THE BOTTOM.**



button which produced marked improvements in our digital camera test pictures.

Albums and desktops can be exported to an HTML page and, if the recipient has the Metastream plug-in, you can export photos and compositions as a 3D six-sided photocube.

Soap has less to offer in terms of projects and activities than rivals, but it's good for organising, working with and displaying large collections of photos.

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price £29.99 (£25.52 ex VAT)

Contact Computers Unlimited
0181 358 5857

www.scansoft.com

Good points Looks stunning, good album features and enhance filters

Bad points Short on projects

Conclusion Cleans and catalogues better than anything else

Art Dabbler 2

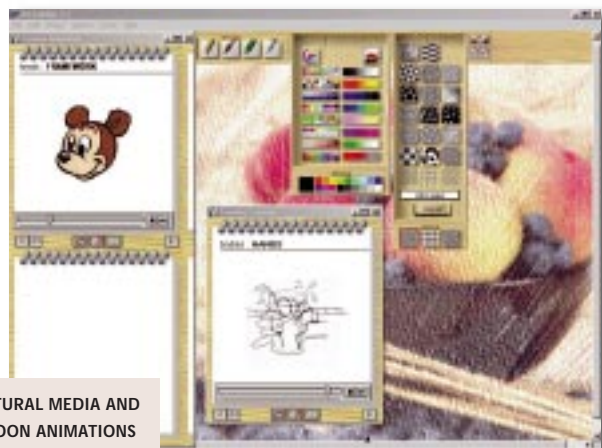
Since the release of Art Dabbler 2, which must have been at least two years ago, not a lot has happened and, sad as it is, it looks as though Metacreations has no plans to continue with the product. Sad, because it's an excellent package, created by the same people responsible for Painter, and it fills a niche that none of the other packages here even want to approach.

First of all, with the exception of a photo cloning option, Dabbler has little to do with photo editing. So, if you've just bought a digital camera and want to play digital darkrooms this one's not for

you. Dabbler has more in common with earlier paint programs in that it's designed for the creation of illustrations using painting tools.

Dabbler is a multi-page package and stores collections of pages, or sketchpads as a flipbook file. It has a tracing paper feature which enables you to see through the top page of the flipbook to pages underneath. Combine this with animation controls and a good selection of brushes, pens and pencils and you have the perfect tool for the production of short cartoon animations.

The interface is beginning to look a bit long in the tooth and, had Dabbler received the revisions it deserved, we would no doubt be able to talk about animated gif export, Quicktime 4.0 support, web optimisation features and



► NATURAL MEDIA AND CARTOON ANIMATIONS ARE DABBLER'S STRENGTHS, BUT FOR HOW MUCH LONGER?

new and exciting art brushes.

As it is you get the ability to export to Quicktime and avi formats, a basic, but workable selection of brushes including marker pens, chalk, crayons, ink and a spray gun and a couple of excellent tutorials on cartoon drawing and animation in flipbook format. There's also three free KPT plugins – Gradient designer, Page curl and Planar Tiling.

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price £46.94 (£39.95 ex VAT)

Contact Computers Unlimited
0181 358 5857

www.metacreations.com

Good points Great cartoon animation features and tutorials

Bad points Ancient brush and tool collection, no support for web technologies

Conclusion One for Looney Toons lovers

MGI PhotoSuite III

PhotoSuite III splits the digital darkroom into eight categories accessed from a web-like button bar at the top of the picture window. More web-style buttons (which glow

manager. Both the library window and toolbar can be turned off to give your picture more screen space

Clicking on 'prepare' displays seven buttons in the activity panel, including touch-up, cutouts special effects, stitching and phototapestry. Touch-up removes red eye, scratches, blemishes and wrinkles. One-touch enhance brightened up the contrast a little, but wasn't up to the standards of either PhotoDeluxe or Soap.

Stitch lets you create panoramic pics by joining together adjacent shots. You can join up to five pictures and let the software

▲ THE PHOTOTAPESTRY FEATURE AT WORK. THIS USED TO BE A BABY, IN CASE YOU'RE WONDERING



green when your cursor rolls over them) in an Activity Panel on the left-hand side display the options within the category selected.

On the right a library window displays albums, photos, projects and slide-shows and doubles up as an object

decide where the joins go, or position the pictures yourself, though this is hard in the absence of a keyboard nudge.

Phototapestry automatically creates an image from lots of other tiny images.

Just specify the source photo and select a library that will be used to compose it.

PhotoSuite III has good support for digital camera users including a direct link so you don't have to use the manufacturers' software, and a slide-show facility with editable transitions.

Unfortunately it also has a bug which causes it to crash if you attempt to click the 'share' button. This happens if your PC is fitted with an ATI Rage card and can be fixed by installing up-to-date drivers from the ATI website – probably not a bad idea in any case.

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price £49.99 (£42.55 ex VAT)

Contact MGISoft 01628 680227

www.mgisoft.com

Good points Albums, slide-shows and good guidance

Bad points Poor templates, lacklustre enhance, the ATI bug

Conclusion An average performer in most respects

Paint Shop Pro 6

Paint Shop Pro sits between expensive professional packages and those aimed at home users. It has lots of the power tools and features you'll find in Photoshop and Photo-Paint, but costs less.

Chief among the new features are



vector object and text tools, text on a path, node-level drawing and editing, adjustment layers, new effects and deformations, a gradient editor, optimised gif and jpeg export and command history.

This version includes roll-ups for the layers, histogram and tool option (formerly the control palette) palettes. These roll down when your cursor hovers over the title bar and disappear when you venture elsewhere.

The vector and text tools are functional. Used in conjunction with the tool options window you can use the draw tool for single lines, bezier curves or in freehand mode and shapes created this way can be stroked and filled. Floating a vector object should turn it into a selection (enabling you to use the bezier drawing tool to create cutouts), but we didn't have much success with this. PSP's got the power, but you often need to make

more of an effort than you would in the pro packages.

The included Animation Shop 2 is one of the best applications for creating

gif animations for the web. New features include a banner wizard, new effects and transitions and a frame registration mark tool. Features for optimising animations for the web have been improved and there's better integration with PSP so you can pull frames in to edit them and then update them into your animation.

This is without doubt the poor man's Photoshop. If you yearn to get your hands on powerful image-editing and animation tools, but don't have the cash to spare this is an excellent alternative.

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price £99.81 (£84.95 ex VAT)

Contact Digital Workshop
01295 258335

www.jasc.com

Good points Text and vector tools, adjustment layers and Animation Shop

Bad points Creaky interface and it costs nearly £20 more than version 5

Conclusion Pro features, budget price – just about

Ulead Photo Express 3

This version of Photo Express has a reorganised interface and a number of new features mainly aimed at digital camera users and those who want to put pictures on the web.

The album functions, previously accessed from a toolbar, now have a mode tab. Having organised photos into albums you can use photo mode for editing and project mode to apply special effects, add text, frame your photos, produce morph effects, make a calendar and create windows wallpaper.

All of these activities are selected

from a command panel to the left of the editing window. This, along with the toolbar, changes according to the work mode selected. So, if you're in photo mode the command panel displays all the image-editing options along with buttons for print, share, express and Web Studio. Click on the print button and the toolbar at the top displays the options.

To the right, the options panel gives guidance on how to complete these activities, providing, among other things, tools, menus and radio buttons. There is also a thumbnail strip storage area at the bottom of the edit window from which you can drag and drop images.

There are lots of pointers to help you find your way. Guide tip windows occasionally pop up out of nowhere and all the tools and buttons have balloon



hints to tell you what they do.

Conversely, the tendency to provide more than one way of doing things can lead to some clutter and confusion. For example, clicking on a button in the command panel produces a flyout with the various options, but these also appear on the toolbar at the top.

In addition to the web album and slide-show features a rather good application – cool 360 – helps produce 3D panoramas.

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price £44.06 (£37.50 ex VAT)

Contact BIT UK 01420 83811

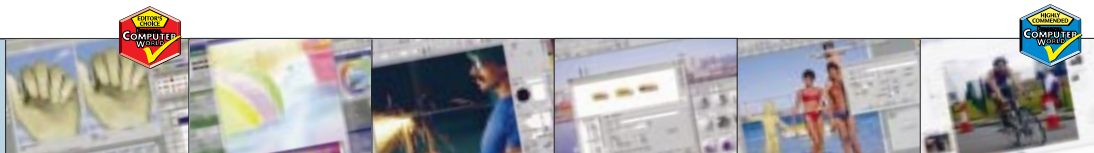
www.ulead.com

Good points Web albums and slide-shows, good guidance and the panoramic picture applications

Bad points Duplication and screen clutter

Conclusion A good range of features fairly well presented

Table of features



MANUFACTURER	ADOBE	METACREATIONS	COREL	ULEAD	JASC	SCANSOFT
PRODUCT	PHOTOSHOP 5.5	PAINTER 6	PHOTO-PAINT 9	PHOTOIMPACT 5	PAINT SHOP PRO 6	KAI'S PHOTO SOAP 2
Price ex VAT (inc VAT)	£450 (£528.75)	£299 (£351.33)	£236.79 (£278.23)	£99 (£116.33)	£84.95 (£99.81)	£25.52 (£29.99)
Contact number	0181 606 4001	Computers Unlimited 0181 358 5857	0800 973189	BIT UK 01420 83811	Digital Workshop 01295 258335	Computers Unlimited 0181 358 5857
URL	www.adobe.com	www.metacreations.com	www.corel.com	www.ulead.com	www.jasc.com	www.scansoft.com
FEATURES						
Layers/objects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Album/slide-show	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Auto-enhance	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓
Digital camera direct input	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
TWAIN input	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Panoramic stitching	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Plug-in support	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Vector paths/objects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Scripting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Colour management	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
WEB FEATURES						
Gif animation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Image slicing	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Javascript roll-overs	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
Web album	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Image optimisation	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗

MANUFACTURER	STREETWISE	ADOBE	MICROSOFT	METACREATIONS	MGI	ULEAD
PRODUCT	PROF. FRANKLIN'S INSTANT PHOTO EFFECTS	PHOTODELUXE HOME EDITION 3	PICTURE IT 2000	ARTDABBLER 2	PHOTO SUITE III	PHOTO EXPRESS 3
Price ex VAT (inc VAT)	£25.49 (£29.95)	£35 (£41.12)	£34 (£39.95)	£39.95 (£46.94)	£42.55 (£49.99)	£37.50 (£44.06)
Contact number	Guildsoft 01752 201706/8	0181 606 4001	0345 002000	Computers Unlimited 0181 358 5857	01628 680227	BIT UK 01420 83811
URL	www.guildsoft.co.uk	www.adobe.com	www.microsoft.com	www.metacreations.com	www.mgisoft.com	www.ulead.com
FEATURES						
Layers/objects	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Album/slide-show	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Auto-enhance	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Digital camera direct input	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
TWAIN input	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Panoramic stitching	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
Plug-in support	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
Vector paths/objects	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Scripting	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Colour management	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
WEB FEATURES						
Gif animation	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
Image slicing	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Javascript roll-overs	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Web album	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Image optimisation	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

Editor's Choice



It's been difficult to decide on an Editor's Choice because, obviously, what appeals to professionals isn't going to suit home users who have very different needs. Nevertheless, **Photoshop 5.5** picks up the top award because, judged on its

scripting, layer control and undo history are managed in an easy and consistent fashion.

Photoshop's web optimisation features do exactly what's required of them – show you how your pictures will look and how long they will take to download with a given compression setting and file format. The Image Ready 2.0 software provides equally functional tools for creating animations, image slices, Javascript roll-overs and other web graphics. All of these are almost seamlessly integrated so you can achieve results in a familiar working environment.

Of the other professional packages, Painter 6 merits a mention simply because there is nothing else like it. In a

◀ **KAI'S PHOTO SOAP – GREAT FEATURES FOR DIGITAL CAMERA USERS**

power features, productive and intuitive tools, accessible interface and recently added web features, it beats the competition by a wide margin.

Everyday editing tasks such as cutout masking, colour balancing, creating montages, retouching and text effects can be accomplished faster and more easily than with any of the other packages. Information is provided when and where you need it without cluttering up the screen. More complicated procedures like batch processing,

in a professional context, you either use Painter or the real thing and it's increasingly the case that Painter offers a broader scope for creative illustration than the physical stuff.

◀ **Both of our Highly Commended** awards go to home digital darkroom packages. **Kai Photo Soap 2** is first up,

not just because it looks so fantastic, but because it offers by far the best facilities for organising, viewing and sharing albums – something digital camera users will appreciate as their archives expand.

Another area where Soap scored highly was its enhance filters which produced consistently good results with a range of images and were matched only by Adobe's PhotoDeluxe.

◀ **The second Highly Commended** award goes to **Adobe PhotoDeluxe Home Edition 3**, which has the edge over all the other packages in three respects. First, it has a clear, uncluttered interface so you know what's going on at every stage of the process. Second, its

projects and activities are well conceived and designed. They are mostly things that you would want to do with your images, from retouch and restoration to collages and panoramic pictures. Most

can be completed in fewer than three steps and ample tools and guidance are provided to ensure you don't get lost. Lastly, PhotoDeluxe has the best tools and filters for enhancing and restoring less-than-perfect pictures.

Last year Photo Express 2 had the edge on Adobe's PhotoDeluxe 2. This time around Photo Express 3 comes a close runner-up. Photo Express 3 matches PhotoDeluxe for features and projects and has better album facilities and more sophisticated tools for creating panorama pics. But,

◀ **PHOTOSHOP'S INTERFACE, TOOLS AND WEB FEATURES BEAT RIVALS BY A WIDE MARGIN**



▶ **PHOTODELUXE 3 – GOOD TOOLS TO ENHANCE AND RESTORE PICTURES**

although it offers plenty of help and guidance, we thought that, overall, its interface lacked the clarity and ease of use of the Adobe product. □