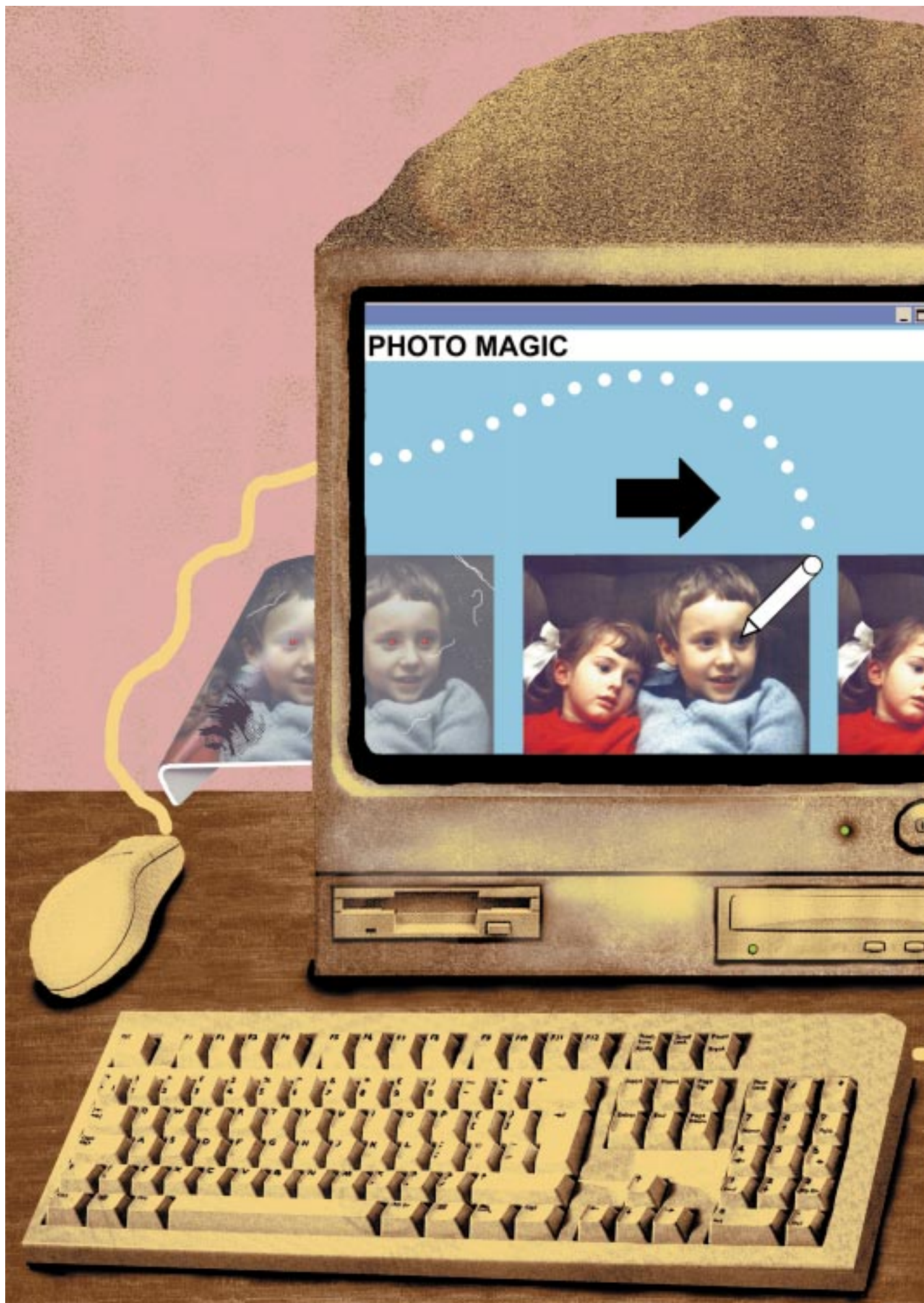


Illustration by Matthew Kenyon





Picture perfect

What you see in your photos need not be what you get: you can change it with **image editing software. Ken McMahon checks out ten packages within the reach of most people's pockets.**

The days of taking your film to the high-street chemist for processing are numbered — the digital revolution has caught up with your photo album. As with all revolutions, this one has slowly been creeping up on us unnoticed and there are a number of protagonists. Cheaper, better scanners, bigger hard drives, faster CPUs, cheaper RAM and the proliferation of CD as an inexpensive mass-storage medium have all played their part. But the big breakthrough has been with colour inkjet printer technology; only recently has photo-quality reproduction on affordable inkjet printers become a reality. Once, digital photo editing was the preserve of professionals. Now you can view your photos on your PC and make inexpensive hard copies as often as you like.

The software industry has not been slow to recognise an emerging market, and over the past two years consumers have been able to choose from an expanding range of products aimed squarely at the home user. Rather than aiming at the professional or even the enthusiast, these packages are targetted at those whose knowledge of photography is limited to point-and-shoot cameras. The focus is on simplicity and ease of use rather than power features, and they mostly cost less than half a dozen rolls of film, including processing.

It's a fair bet that within a few years, conventional film photography will be all but obsolete and everyone from Kodak to Microsoft will want to be at the front of the queue with the products that are going to replace it. Those companies which succeed will be the ones which make it easiest to get the pictures from your camera to your printer with the best possible reproduction quality. Consumers also want added value: to be able to play with their pictures and incorporate the results in anything from a Christmas card to an email. Here, we look at sub-£100 packages designed to do just that. Next month, we'll concentrate on packages designed for professionals and enthusiasts. These are not cheap, but provide the power and versatility to make virtually anything possible.

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Digital pictures for all

Even if you take **simple pictures** on a box Brownie, you can still get them into digital format.

Image editing is only for those photographers who can afford digital cameras costing more than £500.

Right? Wrong. Even if you are still using a box Brownie, you can easily get your pictures into digital format. If you have overflowing shoeboxes full of prints, you need a scanner (approximate cost, £100. Check out the budget scanners group test in the September 1998 issue of *PCW*, p168). If you want your future photography to be digital, you need not necessarily invest in a digital camera. Kodak's Image Magic service provides a means of getting your photos into digital format without the expense of a digital camera — and you can still have your glossy prints. Kodak provides two options. Either you can have all of your images recorded onto a CD-ROM in

FlashPix format, or they can be saved as JPEG images on floppy disk. You can have up to 300 images stored on one CD at a cost of £18.99 for a film of 36 shots, plus £4.99 for the CD. It is a multi-session version, so you can take it back later and have another film added if you want, or you could even turn up with your shoebox-full of pictures and have some old images added to a CD-ROM. For the JPEG images on floppy disk you will have to pay £12.49 for a film of 36 shots, over and above your normal processing costs. Another advantage of the FlashPix format is that if you are using a FlashPix-based editor such as LivePix [p194] or PictureIt! [p199] some editing functions are supposedly faster, although this



▲ THIS RICOH CAMERA IS JUST ONE WAY TO GET A DIGITAL IMAGE

claim was not borne out by our experience with LivePix. The maximum resolution of FlashPix images supplied by Kodak is 1536x1024 pixels. The JPEG images supplied on floppy are a mere 600x400 pixels, which is fine for viewing print-sized on a monitor and you will get reasonably good quality prints on your printer, but you can forget about enlarging them.

Colour management

Vibrant colour pictures can turn out as **wishy-washy prints**. Here's how to prevent it happening.

You scan-in your favourite shot: there is a turquoise sea, sand the colour of Demerara sugar and a beautiful azure sky. On your monitor, the sea looks good despite the fact that it may look a little more green than before. The sky has gone paler, though, and the sand is almost white. Oh well, not to worry, it will probably look acceptable when it has been printed out. Won't it? Don't count on it.

Colour management software attempts to correct this nightmare and make your scanner, display and printer all talk the same colour-language. Physically this is something of an impossibility, because your monitor creates

colour using *transmitted* light from red, green and blue phosphors, whereas your printer makes use of *reflected* light from a combination of yellow, magenta, cyan and black inks. Nonetheless, by careful adjustment of your monitor and by

using colour management software, it is possible to get a much better colour match between various input and output devices.

The first thing to be certain of is that your monitor is properly adjusted.

- Make sure it has been switched on for at least an hour before making any adjustments.
- Check out your image editing package to discover whether or not it includes a calibration strip or an image which you can use to optimise the brightness and contrast levels. If one is not supplied, you

should be able to find one, as well as plenty of advice on calibrating your monitor, at www.csf.org.uk.

- Most displays have an adjustment which allows you to alter the white-point colour temperature. Usually the factory default is set to around 9,000K which is much too blue, so try adjusting it downwards to around 5,500K.

Or, using a test image, make trial-and-error adjustments until you get the best match with your printer.

If you are still dissatisfied with the results, you need colour management software. This works by producing a profile for each device, comparing the device profile with a reference and adjusting the output to compensate for the variation.

Many applications now provide colour management support. If you have CorelDraw 7, take a look at our *Hands On Workshop* [p214] in the September 1998 issue for an explanation and advice on how to use it.

Agfa's web site at www.agfahome.com contains information about colour management generally as well as the company's Fototune and Colortune products. You can get ICC device profiles for printers, monitors and scanners from most manufacturers' web sites. Mac users can find out about Apple's Colorsync system by visiting the Apple web site at www.apple.com.

Colour management software attempts to correct this nightmare

Adobe PhotoDeluxe 2



Adobe is a recognised master of interface design and developer of the industry-standard image editing application, Photoshop 5. PhotoDeluxe 2 also combines a top-rate interface with powerful image-processing muscle. Adobe has taken all the common photo-editing tasks and presented them as step-by-step projects which are accessed from a selection of tabbed palettes.

First step is the Get Photo palette. Most applications assume you know enough about Windows to accomplish something as simple as opening a file. In PhotoDeluxe 2, even this procedure is guided and various buttons give you the option of opening a file, a library, sample pictures and clipart from the CD, or selecting one of several input devices. Having obtained your picture, the next two tabs provide an armoury of retouching projects including cropping and rotating, red-eye removal and colour balancing. For lazy types, an instant fix button does the necessary while you sit back and watch. If you want to get more involved, you could try your hand at colour balancing.

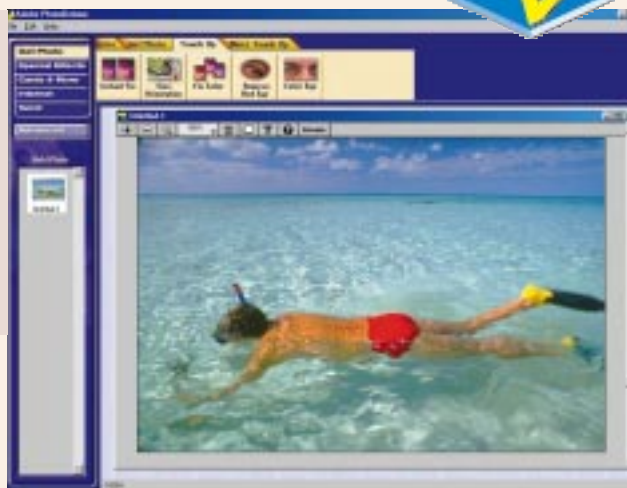
The size orientation button provides a good example of PhotoDeluxe's guided approach. On pressing the button, a palette with five tabs appears. Each describes the next stage of the operation and provides the tools you need to carry it out. First, an intro tab explains how cropping works and provides a couple of small graphics as illustration. In case you're wondering what to do next, a red arrow with the words Start Here points to the next tab, which is labelled Adjust. This explains rotation and provides two buttons for clockwise and anti-clockwise rotation. Trim Size and Done tabs follow

► **BASIC TOUCHING-UP IN PHOTODELUXE 2. THE TABBED PANELS GUIDE YOU STEP-BY-STEP THROUGH THE PROCESS, PROVIDING ONLY THE TOOLS YOU NEED**

in the same fashion, each with a straightforward explanation of what's going on, and the tools to do the job.

Beyond basic image enhancement and retouching there's a special effects category which holds five palettes: art, fun, collage, cool and cooler. Each of these contains around half-a-dozen projects. The art projects concentrate on turning your photos into something that look more like they were created with a pencil or brush than film and flash. You can choose from sketch, old-fashioned, posterise, impression, hand colour, tint, and glowing edges. Fun has a multitude of distortion and perspective tricks based on special effects filters. Collage projects include switching backgrounds, elementary "transplant surgery" (putting your head on someone else's body), trick scaling ("Honey, I shrunk the kids/dog") and a disguise section which lets you attach clipart moustaches to your least favourite aunties.

The special effects projects work in the same step-by-step fashion. Old-fashioned lets you turn your sharp,



colourful, pristine pictures into tatty faded brown things that look like they've been in your grandad's back pocket for the past half-century. It's a three-step project. First, you convert the image to black and white. The tint tab provides a colour picker for you to select your favourite shade of sepia, and then the age panel provides a noise and blur button. It would be nice if there was some way of adjusting the amount of noise as the button applies it by the bucketload. Conversely, the blur button undercooks it, but you can overcome this by pressing it more than once. In fairness, I believe Adobe has got the balance between control and ease of use just right.

If you want to break the bonds of handheld image editing you can always take a deep breath and press the Advanced button. You then have access to tools and commands in a more conventional menu-driven environment. You can disable the one-document-window-at-a-time limitation and display the layers palette. In truth, you are unlikely to need the advanced option other than where you can't get quite the effect you want, or want to use third-party plug-ins.

PHOTODELUXE 3.0

As we went to press, Adobe released PhotoDeluxe 3.0 Home Edition. It features a new-look interface in which round-cornered palettes are a big feature, and access to the many guided projects is via a more direct menu system.

Other new features include digital camera direct access software, basic colour management, Extensis instant-fix filters and a panorama facility for stitching together side-by-side photos. There's also Photoparade, a slideshow which plays themed picture albums. Web content has been extended via the Adobe Connectables web site, although it is not possible to use a guided activity directly over the web, as with the previous version.

The verdict? This new version is not a radical revamp of version 2.0, but more of the same-quality Adobe product we have come to expect.

PCW DETAILS



Price £45.83 (£39 ex VAT)

Contact Adobe 0131 458 6842

www.adobe.co.uk

Good Points Ease of use. Lots of guided projects.

Bad Points None — it does what it says on the box.

Conclusion If you're not sure what you're doing, this is the one to go for.

Kai's SuperGoo

SuperGoo is something out of the ordinary. It lets you stretch, twist, pinch, pull, twirl and otherwise distort your photos. You can elongate chins, make eyes bulge, extend foreheads and turn pictures of ordinary people into grotesque caricatures.

In the Goo room your picture takes centre stage, with two palettes to the left: one contains nine Goo brushes, the other has Goo effects which work on the entire image. With a Goo brush selected you can adjust the size and fluidity. Then, it's really a case of experimental dragging. When you click and drag, the part of the image under the brush is dragged in the direction of the stroke. The most effective brushes are pinch/bulge, twirl, smear, smudge and nudge. There's a very useful Ungoo brush (you just paint over goo'd bits to progressively ungoo the damage) as well as a global ungoo slider. At the bottom of the screen a filmstrip palette provides storage for up to 64 frames



► **IF YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE THIS ALREADY, SUPERGOO HAS ALL YOU NEED TO PRODUCE THAT MELTED LOOK**

which can be played in sequence as a movie (or "Goovie").

The transition from one frame to the next is slick as Goo creates intermediate frames to produce smooth animation. You can export Goovies as AVI or QuickTime files. The Effects palette is a set of eight distortion filters from zig-zag, to squeeze, to spike and wave. There are three settings available from sliders on the right. When you select an effect, all three sliders cycle through

their values to give you an idea of the possibilities. Used in conjunction with the filmstrip, it's a great way to produce quick, easy, fluid animations.

In the Fusion room you can mix facial features. A library of parts is supplied for you to mix and match, and the dedicated can make their own bits from the family photo album. However, fancy tricks like the gender slider and the mutate button do little to diminish the gimmicky feel of this.

PCW DETAILS



Price £49.95 (£42.51 ex VAT)

Contact Computers Unlimited
0181 358 5858

www.metacreations.com

Good Points Highly-flexible distortion. Good animation feature.

Bad Points A dog that knows only one trick.

Conclusion One for the specialist or as a complement to an existing package.

Kai's Photo Soap

Photo Soap's interface looks so stunning, it's easy to get carried away as ribbed and rubberised drawers slide smoothly open and shut, panels slide out to reveal 16-slider graphic equaliser-style panels, and tools give off an eerie glow as your pointer hovers over them. Tools look like the real thing. Brushes have visible bristles and long, pointed, wooden handles that might take your eye out if you don't watch it. Erasers are made of chunky, thick rubber, and pencils are yellow with a rubber attached to the end by a thin strip of tin.

Soap uses a room metaphor to give your photo-editing a structured approach. You start in the In room and end in the Out room, passing through the prep, tone, colour, detail and finish rooms in between. You don't have to do it in that order or include every room, as any of them can be entered at any time via a map button at the top of the screen. Right from the start in the prep



► **UNIQUE INTERFACE. BEFORE AND AFTER VIEWS, LEFT AND RIGHT: THE TOOLBOX IS ON THE LEFT; THE 'MEMORY DOTS' ON THE RIGHT STORE THUMBNAIL VIEWS**

room you get a chance to make big improvements. As well as cropping and rotating

there's an enhance button which samples an area of the image and makes improvements to exposure, tone and colour balance. The other rooms require more judgement on your part. In the colour room you control hue, saturation and lightness via a three-slider control, or you can have a crack at the 12-band colour equaliser. The detail room holds a comprehensive

array of retouching tools including red-eye removal, a heal tool for spots, wrinkles, dust and scratches, and smooth, sharpen and clone brushes. In the finish room you can add backgrounds, edge textures and other clipart objects to your pictures.

Soap won't be to everyone's taste.

The interface can slow things down considerably and the hardware-challenged will need to turn off some features to avoid gridlock. But the tools and features are first rate.

PCW DETAILS



Price £46.95 (£39.96 ex VAT)

Contact Computers Unlimited 0181 358 5858
www.metacreations.com

Good Points Gorgeous interface. First-rate tools. Unconventional.

Bad Points Slow. Unconventional.

Conclusion As good as anything else, the interface is a love or hate thing. I love it.

LivePix 2.0

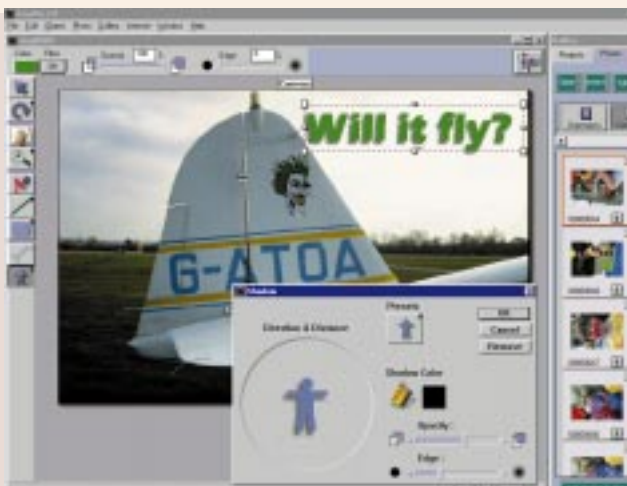
Big pictures make big files in conventional, pixel-based editing. Each pixel needs a byte to represent all the colour information, so an A4 photo at sufficient resolution for good-quality output to an inkjet printer will occupy around 15Mb on your hard drive and up to five times that when pulled into memory by your application (additional space is needed to store previous versions for undo, layer information, alpha channels and so on). LivePix uses an image format called FlashPix which stores the image in several resolutions. This speeds up display and editing because the image is never displayed at a higher resolution than is required. Some editing operations, like resizing and colour adjustments, are stored as scripted "viewing parameters" and are applied to the original image data each time you view or print, rather than as a destructive edit changing the actual image pixels.

The LivePix interface is basic. To the left of the main picture window is a tool palette which holds nine tools, some with flyout options. At the top there's a thumbnail which you click to resize or crop, an opacity slider and an edge softener. To the right, the gallery window displays albums of photos and projects. Most of the tools actually do basic things: there is move, rotate, pan/zoom, type, outline, filled shapes, cutout and effects. Text, outline and filled objects are non-destructive.

The problem with pixel-based image editors is that any changes you make permanently alter the image. If you place text or an object over a picture, the pixels underneath are wiped out. Applications like PhotoDeluxe and Paint Shop Pro overcome this drawback by using independent layers; LivePix and others use independent editable objects. The object approach works particularly well with text because you can edit it at any time. Applying special effects like drop shadows is similarly straightforward and the effect is also an editable object, so if you later decide you don't like it, you can change or remove it. It's really only when you get to the bottom end of the toolbox, however, that LivePix does anything beyond the ordinary. There are eight

► **LIVEPIX DROP SHADOW IS ONE OF THE EASIEST TO USE. THUMBNAIL IMAGES ARE DISPLAYED IN THE GALLERY ON THE RIGHT**

▼ **LIVEPIX OFFERS A GENEROUS RANGE OF CUTOUT TOOLS INCLUDING TWO EDGE-HUGGING VARIANTS FOR JOBS LIKE THESE PENCILS**



cutout tools — surely more than any other application can boast. Three of these are quite useful. There's a standard freehand cutout tool, an edge highlighter and an edge detector, which is a more accurate version of the highlighter. Besides a cutout edit tool, the remaining four are "cookie cutters" (preset shape cutouts). Leaving the best for last, the fx tool flyout contains a red-eye corrector, distort, colour correction, drop shadow and clone tool.

The gallery is an advanced browser which allows you to organise pictures and projects into albums and drag and drop images between them. There are a number of sample albums provided on the CD and you can create your own. Additionally there is a range of quite well-designed project templates for things like calendars and greetings cards into which you can substitute your own pictures, making extensive use of the many cutout tools provided.

Performance was a little disappointing. I opened a FlashPix-format file in LivePix and Adobe Photoshop 4 and cropped, rotated and zoomed. LivePix opened the document in half the time it took Photoshop, but in all other operations Photoshop was considerably faster.

Magnifying the image on-screen, where you would expect LivePix to have a significant edge, was virtually instantaneous in Photoshop but in LivePix it took nearly ten seconds.

FlashPix or not, LivePix is in need of a major injection of excitement if it is to have a hope of competing successfully. Although a big improvement on version 1.0, the general impression is of a dull experience in need of livening up with more sophisticated editing tools and more interesting projects.

PCW DETAILS



Price £39.95 (£34 ex VAT)

Contact LivePix 01429 855048

www.livepix.com

Good Points Good collection of projects. Flashpix compatible.

Bad Points Slow. Poor feature set.

Conclusion A lacklustre performer.

Metacreation's Art Dabbler 2.0

Dabbler is a different kettle of fish to the other packages here, in that it has more in common with paint and canvas than film. In most image editors you work on a page at a time. If you need a new page, you start a new document. Dabbler uses a multi-page approach. The sketchpad is exactly that — a book full of blank pages awaiting your inspired doodling. You can use the sketchpad browser to flip backwards and forwards and to rearrange the page order.

The Dabbler interface looks worryingly bare as initially there are no toolbars or palettes to be seen anywhere: everything is tucked away in drawers just under the menu bar at the top of the screen. The drawers display the most commonly used tools on the front where you can get at them instantly. All the others are neatly tucked away inside. When you grab a drawer handle to open it, you can select from any of the remainder and the newly selected tool replaces one of those on the front. Closing the drawers provides more viewing space for your work, but if you're anything like the artists I know, you'll leave them all open. In this respect, Dabbler's interface is a little dated. Context-sensitive floating palettes would bring it up to date.

The tools drawer contains a good selection of drawing and painting tools, each available in five different sizes. An ink bottle, oil brush, crayon, chalk, pencil, spray can and liquid brush are included. In addition there are tools for rotating and magnifying, an eye-dropper for selecting colour from the image, a hand grabber and a selection of stencils. The stencils work in exactly the same way as real-life ones. Looked at from a software perspective they are, of course, just selection masks available in a variety of shapes. The default selection includes a few geometric shapes but the CD is packed with stencil libraries containing anything from farm animals to fried eggs. Next along is the colour drawer where you can choose from a selection of palettes or use a colour wheel to select a specific hue/saturation/brightness combination. An insignificant-looking little button in the top right-hand

corner allows you to clone from the preceding page in the sketchbook.

Using the painting and drawing tools as modifiers, you can achieve some interesting effects this way. Another drawer is full of paper textures. Again there's a good choice, and each texture is illustrated by a little swatch. If you can't find what you're looking for, there are additional libraries on the CD.

Dabbler's multi-page capabilities combined with its tracing-paper feature make it an excellent animation tool. The tracing-paper command makes the top drawing layer transparent so you can view the preceding page beneath it. In fact, you can make up to three preceding or subsequent pages visible in addition to the current one. Using Dabbler's flipbook feature you can build up animations frame by frame and play back and edit using a viewer applet. Completed animations can be exported as QuickTime or Video for Windows movies. Flipbook animations are put to good use as a series of tutors. As well as How To Use Dabbler there are two other excellent tutors: Drawing Cartoons, and Cartoon Animation. Additional bits and pieces include a small stock-photography library and

◀ **YOU NEED TO GET INSIDE DABBLER'S DRAWERS TO DISCOVER WHAT'S AVAILABLE**

▼ **CREATING FLIPBOOK ANIMATIONS WITH THE HELP OF TRACING PAPER**



three KPT plug-ins — Gradient Designer, Page Curl and Planar Tiling.

It's one thing to scan a photo and apply a few filters. Creating your own illustrations and animations from scratch is in a different creative league. If you feel more at home with a few felt tip pens, poster paint, bits of paper and PVA glue, or fancy yourself as the next Tex Avery, then Dabbler is the way to go.

PCW DETAILS



Price £46.95 (£39.96 ex VAT)

Contact Computers Unlimited
0181 358 5858

www.metacreation.com

Good Points Natural media tools. Multi-page sketchbooks. Animation features.

Bad Points Interface looks a little dated.

Conclusion Great fun. A must for budding cartoon animators.

MGI PhotoSuite II

MGI has responded to the changing market by restarting from scratch. PhotoSuite II bears no resemblance to its predecessor (version 8.05). Tools and menus have been replaced by a graphical interface organised around six modes and selected via a button panel. Areas of activity are: Photos, Projects, Albums, Slide Shows and Guides.

A selection of these activities, based on the current mode, appears beneath the mode panel. In photo mode you can edit, rotate, crop, touch-up and transform or save, print and send. As well as the standard toolbar, you are provided with tools to do the job. A control panel at the foot of the window displays fine tuning adjustments for the selected tool. It may sound complicated but is simple in practice: select a mode, then an activity, then a tool.

The edit photo activity is equipped with a good set of easy-to-use tools including a cloner, filled and unfilled



shapes, an eye-dropper colour selector and an undo eraser. Touch up and transform has four options: remove red-eye, touch-up, special effects and warp. Touch-up provides a pull-down menu of image enhancement options including one-touch enhance, colour balancing, scratch removal and soften and sharpen filters. Warp provides Goo-style image distortions. But the special effects option has a disappointingly thin selection of filters.

The remaining five modes leave plenty to do. Albums provides a way of organising your digital picture

◀ **PHOTOSUITE II OFFERS A RANGE OF GUIDED ACTIVITIES WITH THE RIGHT TOOLS TO HAND WHEN YOU NEED THEM**

collection. Projects lets you create cards, collages and so on. The quality of the template collection is nothing to shout about but you can at least edit object layers (not possible in photo mode). The internet mode provides seamless web access to browse online picture resources.

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price £49 (£41.70 ex VAT)

Contact MGI software 01628 680227

www.mgisoft.com

Good Points Well structured. Lots of features in an accessible format.

Bad Points Poor-quality templates. Few filters.

Conclusion Comprehensive. Nicely presented package.

Microsoft PictureIt! 2

The PictureIt! interface has a familiar look. A central picture window is flanked on the left by a workbench and projects tabs. There's an object stack to the right and a filmstrip at the bottom for storing and retrieving open picture files.

The interface divides editing tasks into two groups. The workbench tab provides a set of tools for photo retouching and you can add text to pictures, make cut-outs, crop, size and position images, remove red-eye and scratches, apply special effects, save and print. Click on the adjacent projects tab and you can choose from a selection of guided activities such as collages, invitations, frames and others. Workbench tools are straightforward to operate and step-by-step guidance is provided. Most operations are completed in just a couple of steps.

Performance was rather slow. PictureIt! needs to redraw the screen almost every time: when you click to select the crop tool or a new shape,



and when you click to enter precise dimensions, and when you click to cancel. Each redraw takes about five seconds and it all gets rather tedious. The slow speed may have been partly due to the multi-layered nature of the test document which was one of the excellent project templates supplied.

One of the good things about PictureIt! is the way that it handles object layers. These are available in workbench and project views and are displayed in the object stack. You just drag objects to a new position in the stack to reorder them, or right-click to get a menu from which you can delete,

◀ **PICTUREIT! HAS EXCELLENT PROJECT TEMPLATES AND CLEAR GUIDANCE**

promote and relegate layer objects, or view a movie tutorial.

Although it's looking a little dated and will shortly be replaced by PictureIt 99, PictureIt 2.0 is still a pleasure to use. The help facilities are bettered only by Adobe's PhotoDeluxe 2.0 (see p191). But PictureIt! is slow, and more recent releases of image editing software have the edge in terms of features.

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price £49.99 (£42.54 ex VAT)

Contact Microsoft 0800 002000

www.microsoft.com/pictureit

Good Points Clear uncluttered interface. Good guidance and collection of project templates.

Bad Points Slow. A little dated.

Conclusion Nice, but just past its sell-by date.

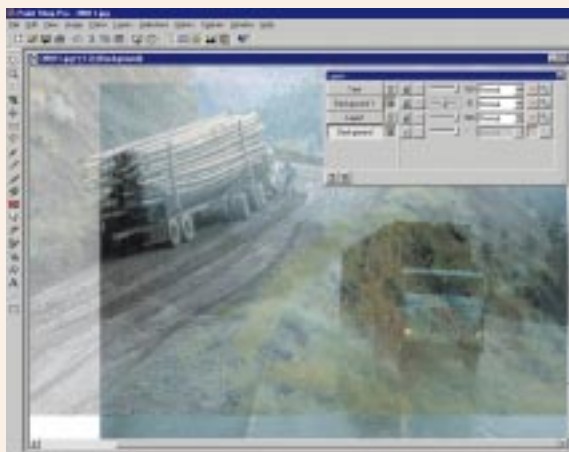
Paint Shop Pro 5

One of the many things Paint Shop Pro has going for it is that it is shareware. You can download it from the web or get it from our PCW cover-mounted disc and play with it for 30 days before shelling out. If you decide it's not worth it, you can send it to the recycle bin but, given what this modestly-priced program can do, it's unlikely.

Paint Shop Pro has evolved from a one-trick file conversion utility to one of the most able image editing packages around. Most of its new features have been introduced with version 5, so if you're still plugging away with version 4.14, an upgrade is in order. New features include support for Adobe-compatible third-party plug-in filters, layers, alpha channels, Bezier-curve drawing, picture tubes, multiple undo and CMYK separations. If all that means little to you, don't fret. While it doesn't provide the kind of guidance you get with PhotoDeluxe 2, with a little knowledge of how digital images work you can get Paint Shop Pro to do almost anything the "professional" packages can manage.

The editing window is uncluttered, so even on a 14in monitor you get a clear view of what you're doing. There's a toolbar with the standard file and edit buttons, as well as some toggle buttons for things like full-screen preview, control, colour, layer and histogram palettes. The bulk of the remaining tools live on the left of the main image window. A status bar shows short descriptions of each tool as you point to it and, if you hover, a hint panel appears with a one- or two-word description.

Layers have become the must-have feature for image editors and Paint Shop Pro's implementation is comprehensive and versatile. The layers palette displays the layer name together with toggle buttons for visibility, grouping, transparency protect and layer mask functions, and an opacity slider. With transparency protect selected you can only edit non-transparent areas of a layer. You can assign layers to different groups simply by clicking on the toggle button which then displays the number of the group to which it belongs. There's also a pull-down list of blend options. These define how pixels in the layer will interact with those below it.



The retouch tool is a versatile brush which lets you selectively apply special effects. Used in combination with the control panel, you can select from a variety of retouch modes including dodge and burn, emboss, smudge, push and a variety of colour modifications. You can also select

from dozens of paper textures which give the effect of painting onto marble, canvas, fruit peel, nail clippings or whatever.

Version 5 now provides web animation facilities in the form of Animation Shop. This separate application creates animated gifs using a filmstrip approach and dropping in images one frame at a time. An animation wizard takes you through the process of adding the frames and setting the frame rate, then you can play the sequence and make edits. There's an excellent optimisation wizard which ensures that your file is small enough and fast enough to play over a slow-speed internet connection. In combination with Paint Shop Pro 5's layer capabilities, Animation Shop provides as good an environment as any (with the exception of specialised tools like Debabelizer) in which to create GIF animations for the web.

If you see yourself using Photoshop, but can't afford it or perhaps you are not quite ready for it, Paint Shop Pro is the next best thing. It provides the same kind



◀ **PAINT SHOP PRO'S LAYER CONTROLS** MAKE THIS KIND OF THING EASY, IF A LITTLE SLOW

▼ **A GOOD BROWSER** GOES A LONG WAY TO HELPING FIND THE RIGHT IMAGE

of power and versatility and it's disappointments are few. The undo history, for example displays all your recent actions but will only undo them in reverse order, so you cannot be selective. Furthermore, if you make several brush strokes with one tool, undo undoes them all — not just the last one. This is criminal. The whole point of an undo is that it lets you correct a slip without having to go back to the beginning.

PCW DETAILS



Price £69.95 (£59.53 ex VAT)

Shareware. Full working version on 30-day trial.

Contact Digital Workshop 01295 258335, www.jasc.com

Good Points Great layer control. Excellent retouch tool. Nice image browser. Animation shop.

Bad Points Slow under pressure. Poor undo.

Conclusion Power without the price tag to match.

Professor Franklin's Instant Photo Effects

Instant Photo Effects is a relative newcomer to the digital photo-editing scene. It's aimed at home users who are substituting a roll of film and a trip to the chemist for a digital camera and colour inkjet printer.

Its interface is cute and not intimidating. Beneath the picture window there are six film canisters labelled Photography, Artistic, Edges, Frames, Darkroom and Accents. Click on any of them and it unravels a menu that looks like a length of film, based around half-a-dozen options. Selecting one of these presents a further level of choices. So, if you start with the artistic canister, the film unravels to reveal impressionism, painting, drawing, lithographic, etching and embossing. Selecting one provides a further half-dozen effects.

Drawing effects include charcoal, pen and ink, pencil, colour and black and white chalk, and marker. Accents includes lighting effects, texture filters



and drop shadows. Many of these are like mini macros: one-touch buttons which build up complex effects by automatically applying a number of processes. The Antique option from the photography canister, for example, removes colour, adds a sepia tone, fades and scratches the image, produces a torn-edge effect and adds antique-style photo corners.

The greetings card templates are high calibre and there is a nice collection of frames, with styles ranging from traditional to modern, to just bizarre.

◀ **A GREAT SELECTION OF FRAMES AS WELL AS EFFECTS IN DEPTH, ALL WRAPPED UP IN A FUN INTERFACE**

Some of the touch-up tools leave much to be desired, though. Red-eye removal and the dust and scratches filters in

particular are rather poor. That aside, Professor Franklin's is an enjoyable image-editing experience. It lacks the guidance and flexibility of PhotoDeluxe 2 but makes up for it with an in-depth selection of good effects.

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price £29.95 (£25.89 ex VAT)

Contact Guildsoft 01752 895100

www.swsoftware.com

Good Points Good range of effects. Few duds. Lots of fun.

Bad Points Little to offer besides prepackaged effects and processes.

Conclusion Fun, but you could quickly outgrow it.

Ulead Photo Express 2

Photo Express 2 sports a brand-new interface built around a central workspace which holds your image. There is a command panel with five buttons: get, edit, print, share and express. A context-sensitive toolbar provides appropriate tools, depending on which of the command panel buttons you press. The toolbar provides six sources from which to pull-in pictures: from a digital camera to a plain-old file on your hard drive.

If your own collection of digital snaps is a bit sparse, there are albums of Ulead ones for you to play with. Clicking on a category displays the first four images. Then a slide show starts. The show can be controlled using VCR-style buttons, which looks impressive but is not a practical way of choosing pictures. When you have found the picture you want, you can go to edit mode. The global viewer then comes into play: whenever you open a file a thumbnail view is added, making it a quick and easy way to switch between images.



▲ **EDITABLE TEXT EFFECTS ARE SIMPLE. A PREVIEW, AND CONTROLS FOR COLOUR, POSITION, TRANSPARENCY AND SOFT EDGE ARE ON THE RIGHT**

A wide selection of editing tools is supplied: rotate, trim and size, sharpness, lighting, colour balance and retouching are shown on the top

toolbar when the Adjust sub-mode is selected. Options for each are available on the options panel so when you click, say, colour balance the panel displays eight preset thumbnails showing colour variations.

The toolbar-options panel combination works a treat. To apply text, press the text button, select add/edit from the toolbar and key the text into the window in the options panel choosing font, colour and other attributes (but oddly, not size). Then you can click any of the modifier tools, such as shape effects, 3D or shadow and go to work using the options displayed — usually a two-tab affair offering presets or variable control.



PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price 34.95 (£29.74 ex VAT)

Contact BIT 01420 83811

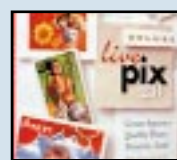
www.ulead.com

Good Points Great interface. Fast, in-depth tools.

Bad Points Cheesy project art.

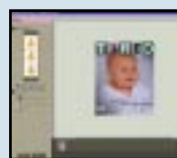
Conclusion Straightforward, no-nonsense image editing that works.

Table of features



PRODUCT	PHOTODELUXE 2	KAI'S SUPER GOO	KAI'S PHOTO SOAP	LIVEPIX 2	ART DABBLER 2
MANUFACTURER	ADOBE	METACREATIONS	METACREATIONS	LIVEPIX INC	METACREATIONS
Contact	Adobe	Computers Unlimited	Computers Unlimited	LivePix Inc	Computers Unlimited
Tel	0181 606 4001	0181 358 5858	0181 358 5858	01429 855048	0181 358 5858
Web URL	www.adobe.co.uk	www.metacreations.com	www.metacreations.com	www.livepix.com	www.metacreations.com
Price ex VAT	£39.00	£42.51	£39.96	£34.00	£34.00
Price incl. VAT	£45.83	£49.95	£46.95	£39.95	£39.95
Layers/objects	3	2	x	3	x
Special effects	4	4	4	2	3
Colour correction	3	x	4	2	x
Web support	3	2	x	3	x
Animation	✓	3	x	x	✓
Cloning	3	2	3	3	3
PS Tablet support	x	x	x	x	Y
Multiple/Selective undo	x	x	x	x	x
Flashpix support	✓	✓	✓	✓	x
Projects	✓	x	✓	x	x
Text	1	2	1	2	2
Album	✓	x	x	✓	x
Selection tools	3	1	1	2	2

Table of features



PROFESSOR FRANKLIN'S					
PRODUCT	PHOTOSUITE II	PICTURE IT! 2	PAINT SHOP PRO 5	INSTANT PHOTO EFFECTS	PHOTO EXPRESS 2
MANUFACTURER	MGI SOFTWARE	MICROSOFT	JASC	STREETWISE SOFTWARE	ULEAD
contact No	MGI software	Microsoft	Digital Workshop	Guildsoft	BIT
Tel	01628 680227	0800 002000	01295 258335	01752 201706/8	01420 83811
Web	www.mgisoft.com	www.microsoft.com	www.jasc.com	www.guildsoft.co.uk	www.ulead.com
Price ex VAT	£ 41.70	£ 42.54	£ 59.93	£ 25.89	£ 29.74
Price inc vat	£ 49.00	£ 49.99	£ 69.95	£ 29.95	£ 34.95
Layers/objects	2	2	4	N	3
Special effects	1	2	3	3	3
Colour correction	1	1	2	3	4
Web support	2	x	3	3	3
Animation	x	x	✓	x	✓
Cloning	x	x	3	x	3
PS Tablet support	x	x	x	x	x
Multiple/ Selective undo	M	x	S	M	x
Flashpix support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Projects	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
Text	2	2	2	2	3
Album	✓		x	x	✓
Selection Tools	3	1	3	✓	4

Editor's Choice

Home photo-editing is easy. Here is our summary of **snappy photo-editing** software to suit you.

Photo editing is becoming the consumer killer app for the late nineties. There are few, if any, home applications where the PC has so comprehensively taken on an existing technology (film) and made it quicker, simpler, and cheaper than it was previously. This is a relatively new development, though, and the software industry is only just catching up with products that are truly consumer orientated.

Until recently, image editing packages looked and worked like any other windows package; all lengthy menus and impenetrable dialogue boxes. You needed to be both an expert in digital imaging and well acquainted with the software to attempt even the most straightforward operations. In this

PhotoDeluxe 2, rather than add a raft of new features, it further improved the interface by, for instance, reducing the number of steps required to complete projects. Where Adobe has led, others have followed, and a loose-knit standard seems to be emerging.

Ulead's PhotoExpress, MGI PhotoSuite II, and Microsoft PictureIt! all opt for a dual photo-editing/project approach. First, you retouch and edit your pictures, then incorporate them in a publishing project. Another thing these applications have in common is that they provide space on-screen for project and photo libraries, or albums. And one thing all are attempting, some with more success than others, is to limit what's displayed on-screen, be it editing tools or other information, to only what you need for the task in hand.

PhotoDeluxe has held top spot among the consumer titles for a long time. Although much of the competition has caught up, few have surpassed it, so it is **Highly Commended**.

It has an excellent range of guided projects combined with powerful tools. Its tabbed, panel-guided, project approach remains one of the most accessible methods for achieving results quickly and easily.

Paint Shop Pro 5 is also **Highly Commended**. This may seem a strange choice because, in terms of interface design, it has none of the new consumer features mentioned above and belongs to what you might call the unreconstructed school of image editing. It does, however, offer a remarkable range of features and the kind of flexibility and power you'll find only in professional packages. It's shareware, too, and it includes one of the best little animation applications around in the form of Animation Shop.



▲ **ADOBE**
PHOTODELUXE 2



Ulead Photo Express is our **Editor's**

Choice. It includes everything that's best about the other packages. In photo mode you have the option of pre-set editing modes or custom adjustments for each function. So, in addition to the simple fast-track route, there's more power and control available for those who want it. And the custom options are almost as easy to use as the pre-set ones.



▲ **ULEAD PHOTO**
EXPRESS 2



market, developers competed on features, adding more effects and tools with every new version. But as home photo editing becomes a reality, it is interface design rather than features that separates the top packages from the merely adequate. Those which succeed have focused from the outset on what consumers want, rather than on what the technology can provide.

The first to try this approach was Adobe. With PhotoDeluxe 1, the company successfully provided many of Photoshop's sophisticated tools and features in an intuitive, easy-to-use format. When Adobe released



▲ **PAINT SHOP**
PRO 5



Its interface is clearly structured and every aspect has been considered. The command panel, toolbar and options panel work together to provide the resources you need at the appropriate level for the task in hand. Ulead has succeeded superbly in removing the frustration factor involved in getting to grips with digital pictures: PhotoExpress II is a pleasure to use.

• See our group test next month of professional-level photo-editing packages.