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Editing photos in Photoshop

There always seems to be an influx of new employees at newspapers and I keep trying to find a simple way to show them how to edit their photos. This is my tried-and-true method, which always seems to produce a good product.

If you learned to correct photos by eyeballing the screen, you probably aren't that familiar with the info window in Photoshop. But, as they say, the eye can fool you. If you ever change presses the numbers in the info window are of great value.
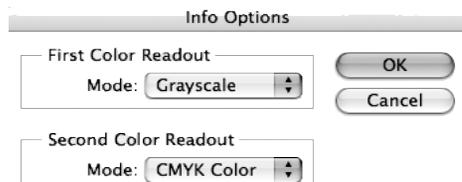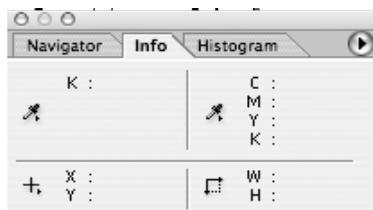
If you really want to improve photo reproduction, keep some copies of photos you corrected that reproduced well in your paper. I recommend keeping both the RGB and CMYK versions.

While trying to train new employees, open a few of those photos and leave them up in the background. Personally, I think photos of streets and people work best.

Use the photos in the background as a reference. Just click back and forth between the photo you're correcting and the one you know is right. As you run your cursor over the photos, compare the numbers in the info dialogue box.

computer notes from the road

by WILMA MELOT

Check the lightest and darkest area of the corrected photo and try to match the numbers in the info window with the lightest and darkest area of the photo you're correcting.

Continue checking the numbers in the info window of both photos until they are similar.

The number in the info window is the percentage of gray/colors in the pixels your cursor is touching. For example, if your cursor is on a pixel that reads about 30 percent gray, the number 30 appears by the 'K' in the info window.

Although this is only a general comparison, it's a good way to start developing an eye for what a good photo should look like.

To set up the info dialogue box use the pop-up button in the window and go to 'info options.' Set the box up as follows:

First color readout: Grayscale

Second color readout: CMYK Color

Once you start understanding the importance of numbers, you'll be able to look at a fair-skinned person's face in a photo and know that the skin color should be about five percent gray in the lightest part and 15 percent gray in darkest part.

I recommend keeping a written record of

the correct percentages for things like a gray street, people's faces (both dark and light skinned), a basketball at the local gym. In fact, just keep a record for all the standard places and items you shoot. What are the colors of your local football team? How about the mayor's hair color? Don't forget ordinary items like the color of grass or the local firetruck and record the type of lighting that was in play at the time.

The written records will be your best friend when you're trying to train new people so you can go on vacation.

If you correct color photos in RGB mode and then let Photoshop handle the CMYK conversion, keep a copy of the RGB version just before it was converted to CMYK. Although it's an extra step and takes up some disk space, it will help you produce the perfect photo every time.

It's important to note the numbers you so carefully recorded will have to be changed if you change printing locations, or buy a new press or Imagesetter. You may be in the ballpark with the old numbers, but the new press may have a very different dot gain and need a lighter or darker set of numbers.

Correcting photos by the numbers also gives you the ability to switch machines. Once the CMYK conversions are set the same on all machines you can switch and remain confident your photos will turn out well. Although colors may appear off on a different monitor, the number correction assures that the photo will print well.

I wish I could just give everyone a set of numbers that would make perfect photos but since each press has its own standards, that's impossible.

Give the numbers a chance. I think you'll like the results.

Making PCs and Macs share a network

I've been asked several times to make a Windows XP Home Edition network to an old AppleTalk printer.

Seems like a simple enough request but the solution is going to cost you money – there's no way around it.

The majority of people who write software for mail labels only make it available in PC format so many of you went out and bought a cheap little Windows computer to print your labels.

You brought it back to the office, set it up and tried to hook it into your existing Apple network and print. That's when you call me.

The problem is that Windows XP doesn't support the AppleTalk protocol thinking, which believes everyone has TCP/IP networking available.

That's not true in the publishing world where we try to make our printers last at least 10 years or so.

At any rate, the cheapest solution to this little problem is PC MacLAN.

Older printers, those that were produced before TCP/IP protocol, are able to work after you install PC MacLAN, which retails for around $50 – a lot cheaper than a new printer.

PC MacLAN provides easy, streamlined access between Macs and PCs. Both worlds come together seamlessly, without jeopardizing home network security. PC MacLAN also includes a powerful print server, so you can use your printer – in either direction – regardless of the computer to which it's connected. Setup is easy with the following features:

• Simple Setup – User-friendly wizard interface makes the setup for sharing drives and printers quick and easy

• File Flexibility – Enhanced support for longer file names, larger partitions, and files over 2 GB

• Full Mac OS X Support – Offers users of the latest Mac OS convenient, cross-platform file sharing

• Complete Bi-directional Printer Sharing – Covers all PostScript, non-PostScript, and inkjet printers

• Network Compatibility – Allows you to share any and all network drives with Macs.

PC system requirements:

Pentium CPU or higher, 32 MB of RAM

Windows NT/2000/XP

Network Interface Card and/or Modem

Microsoft TCP/IP installed

Macintosh system requirements:

Mac OS 8.6 -Mac OS X.x

Network Interface Card and/or Modem

A free trialware version can be downloaded if you want to try before you buy. Google PC MacLAN for the link

PDF in 9 steps

1 Make sure all photos are linked.
2 Check that all fonts are switched on in your font utility program, and that all fonts are imbedded in your page layout program. You may need to look at the preflight.
3 Clean up your pasteup board.
4 Use the selection tool and do a select all. Look for text blocks that are overlapping the page and get rid of them.
5 Name all colors you use and delete all colors not used in the document. Be sure all colors are converted to CMYK. You usually only make this mistake once.
6 Be sure there are no commas in any file or font names. Check your system folder.
7 Cleanup overset text. Look for symbols that indicate text continues beyond the visible area of the text box or frame. As a general rule, don't PDF files with overset text.
8 Check distiller settings. Make sure to use settings that your printer expects from you.
9 Check the read/write privileges on the PDF file you create and be sure other users in your shop will be able to use the document.

If you receive an error, check your document's artwork. Take off a few elements at a time to see which one is causing the problem. If a certain piece of artwork is causing the problem, open it in Photoshop and save it as another format.

For font problems, check out Font Doctor, a program that locates and tries to repair damaged fonts. Font Doctor is part of the Suitcase program put out by Extensis software.

Word count in InDesign

Most new InDesign users want to know where the word count is located. Word count is found in the Info palette, although you may not notice it at first glance.

To use word count, place your cursor in the copy block making sure no other objects are grouped to it. I also watch out for white/clear boxes on top of the copy. An easy way to check this is to select the black pointer tool, choose "select all" from the pop-up menu and look for all those pesky boxes. If that doesn't work, hold down the command key and try clicking through the boxes until you reach your type block and then go to the **Object menu > arrange > bring to front**. It works but it's not as straight forward as I like it to be.