



Automation for Video Pros

With RICHARD HARRINGTON

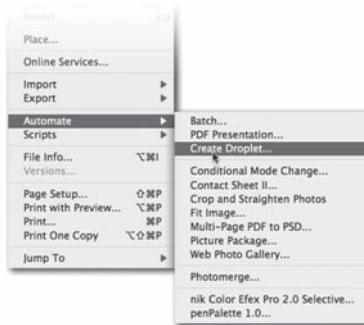


Richard Harrington President, RHED Pixel

Richard Harrington is a certified Project Management Professional, Adobe Certified Expert in Photoshop and After Effects, and Apple-certified instructor in Final Cut Pro. Additionally, he has completed Avid's Master Editor Workshop and the Avid Certified Instructor Program. His visual communications consultancy, RHED Pixel, creates motion graphics and produces video and multimedia projects. He is a faculty member at The Art Institute of Washington and American University, a popular speaker at conferences, and an instructor for Future Media Concepts. He is the author of *Photoshop CS for Nonlinear Editors* and as well as a moderator Creative Cow's Photoshop Forum. Richard is an accomplished video producer, having been named to AV Multimedia Producer's List of Top Producers for 2004 and winning a Cine Golden Eagle Award.

Video is a demanding business with lots of deadlines. Photoshop's automation tools are a HUGE timesaver for video pros and they are pretty easy to utilize. There are three major categories of automation techniques:

- Actions are pre-recorded or user created macros that can play back several menu operations on an image
- Automate commands perform complex tasks that are common for production.
- The final category, Scripts allow you to perform tasks that are more complex than actions. Scripts are new to Photoshop CS and are beginning to make an impact on complex workflow issues.



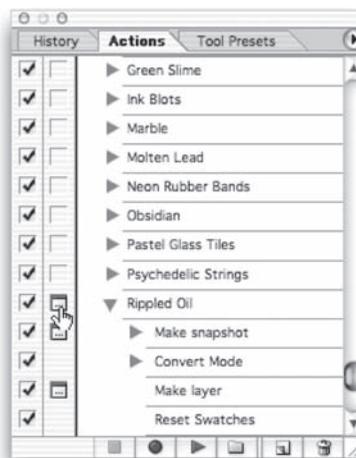
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Actions

Virtually every command (and better yet, series of commands) can be captured and played back later. Basic actions will play back one command, such as a resize command or image mode change. In fact, these simple actions often can take advantage of your empty function keys on the keyboard. By combining the **Shift** and **Option** (Alt) key modifiers, a standard keyboard has 48–60 customizable keys.

Consider creating actions for:

- Applying an adjustment layer with output levels set to 16 and 235 to make the image broadcast safe fro whites and blacks
- Running the De-Interlace filter
- Converting JPEGs to TIFFs or TARGAs



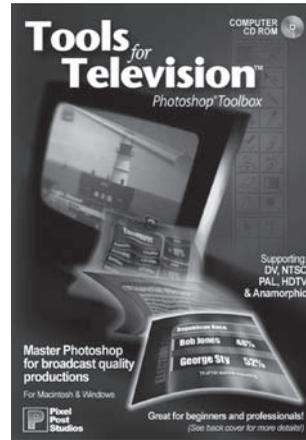


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But no one said Actions had to be basic:

- Check out Tools for Television's Photoshop Toolbox for video-friendly actions
- Visit www.adobeevangelists.com for a very elegant (and free!) solution called the Deflickerator (it's in the Encore DVD section: <http://www.adobeevangelists.com/deflickerator.zip>).
- For complex text and special effects, check out the excellent site www.actionfx.com.
- Some of the first available packages came from nik Multimedia. Be sure to check out nik Efex! and nik Type Efex!



Some Actions to Build

Here are a few of my favorite Actions. Try these out and see if they help you gain back some time on your next deadline.

Safe Title Area (NTSC DV)

Step 1: Create a new document sized 720 X 534. Set the document to RGB mode.

Step 2: Choose Select All by pressing Cmd+A (Ctrl+A). Then, choose Edit>Fill and fill with black.

Step 3: Create a new (empty) layer, and then name it Safe Area Overlay. You should still have an active selection.

Step 4: Scale the active selection to 90% by choosing Select> Transform Selection, and then typing in 90% in the Options bar for width and height. Press Return (Enter).

Step 5: Load a red swatch as the foreground color. Then choose Edit>Stroke and specify four pixels centered. This is the action safe area.

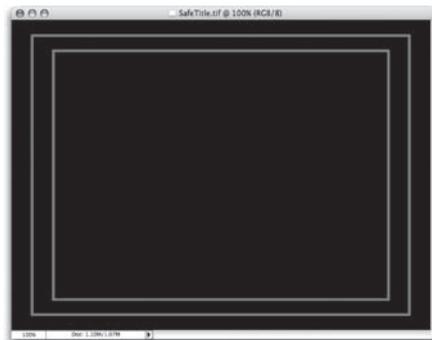
Step 6: Choose Select All by pressing Cmd+A (Ctrl+A), and scale the active selection to 80% by choosing Select>Transform Selection.

Step 7: Type in 80% in the Options bar for width and height. Press Return (Enter).

Step 8: Choose Edit>Stroke and specify four pixels centered. This is the Safe Title Area.

Step 9: Lock the Safe Area Overlay layer by clicking on the **Lock** icon in the layer's palette.

Step 10: Save your work.



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Flatten Layer Styles

Run this action on a layered PSD file for smoother import into most video editing and compositing programs. Run this on a copy of the original document in case you need to make changes.

Step 1: Create a new layer named Flattened.

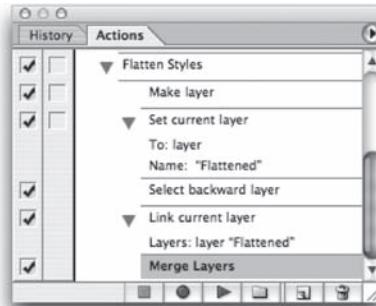
(It will be created by default right above selected layer.)

Step 2: Press Option+[(Alt+[) to select the layer below to be flattened.

Step 3: Link to the layer named Flattened.

Step 4: Choose merge linked from the palette's submenu.

Press STOP. (You can choose Option (Alt)+Merge Linked instead for targeted flattening).



Tips for Better Actions

- Brush strokes, cloning, and most manual tools from the toolbox do not work. There are several alternatives, such as using a Gradient Fill layer instead of the Gradient tool.
- Set the Playback Options from the Actions palette submenu to play back an action accelerated. Photoshop can process faster than it can redraw the screen.
- You can batch multiple folders at once. Create aliases or shortcuts within one folder that point to the desired folders. Be sure to click the Include All Subfolders option.
- Back up your custom actions to two folders, the default location and a secondary backup. This way, a reinstall or upgrade won't blow your custom actions away.
- To create an action that will work on all files, you must record some commands with the rulers set to percentage.
- Use File>Automate>Fit Image to resize images for a specific height or width.
- Photoshop will record the names of layers as you select them. This may cause playback issues, because the action will look for specific names. Use keyboard shortcuts to select layers and such so that the action won't look for a specific name for that step.
 - o Choose layer above Option+] (Shift+Alt+])
 - o Choose layer below Option+[(Alt+[)
 - o Choose top layer Shift+Option+] (Shift+Alt+])
 - o Choose bottom layer Shift+Option+[(Shift+Alt+[)
 - o You can also arrange layers with shortcuts.
 - o These will move the current layer:
 - Up the layer stack Cmd+] (Ctrl +])
 - Down the layer stack Cmd+[(Ctrl +[)
 - To the top Shift+Cmd+] (Shift+Ctrl+])
 - To the bottom Shift+Cmd+[(Shift+Ctrl+[)

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Automate Commands

The Automate commands fall into two major categories: those that relate to actions (Batch and Create Droplet) and Pre-built Production Commands.

Batch Processing

Photoshop allows you to run actions on an entire folder of images. This can significantly cut down your production time.

Step 1: To apply an action to several images, place them into one folder.

Step 2: Load the desired in the Actions palette.

Step 3: Choose File>Automate>Batch.

Step 4: Select the desired set and the action.

Step 5: Choose the folder to process in the Source area. You may want to work with a duplicate copy so that you don't accidentally erase your images.

Step 6: Choose a destination folder for the new images. Choose None to leave the files open or Save and Close to overwrite the original images.

Step 7: Choose an error processing method: Stop for Errors or Log Errors to File.

Step 8: Click OK.



Droplets

A droplet is a Photoshop action conveniently stored as an icon on your desktop. Files or folders can be dragged on top and batch processed.

Step 1: Choose File>Automate>Create Droplet.

Step 2: Specify a location to save the droplet by using the Save Droplet In section of the dialog box.

Step 3: Choose the specific set and action from the Set and Action menus. The action you want to use must be currently loaded.

Step 4: Specify Play options for the droplet

Step 5: Decide if you want to include all subfolders to process files in subdirectories of drag-and-drop.

Step 6: Select Suppress Color Profile Warnings to ignore color policy messages. These can cause a batch to hang waiting for your input.

Step 7: Specify a destination for the batch-processed files in the Destination menu. . Choose None to leave the files open or Save and Close to overwrite the original images. You can also specify a folder to save the new images to as well.

Step 8: If choosing Folder, you must specify a file-naming convention for the batch-processed files.

Step 9: Specify an error-processing option from the Errors pop-up menu. **Log Errors to File** is generally best for batching.



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Web Gallery

Need to get a bunch of images in front of your client for review? Photoshop gives you several templates to choose from for use in the **Web Photo Gallery** command. If you know HTML, or if you have a web developer on staff, you can use a customized style for pages that feature your company logo and colors.

Step 1: Choose

File>Automate>Web Photo Gallery.

Step 2: Specify the site's appearance:

Step 3: Under Folders, specify the image source:

Step 4: Modify the banner options with the rest of the site information that you want displayed.

Step 5: Choose Large Images from the Options pop-up menu and specify how big the display images should be.

Step 6: Next, modify the thumbnails from the **Options** pop-up menu.

Step 7: If you want, modify the colors for the page.

Step 8: You can add a watermark over each image (such as Confidential or For Approval Purposes) by choosing Security from the **Options** pop-up menu.

When you run the automation, Photoshop will go into autopilot and begin building the site. In the destination folder, you will find an image's subfolder, a thumbnail subfolder, an htm subfolder, and an index page. The index page should be opened in a standard browser to view the preview site (or light box).

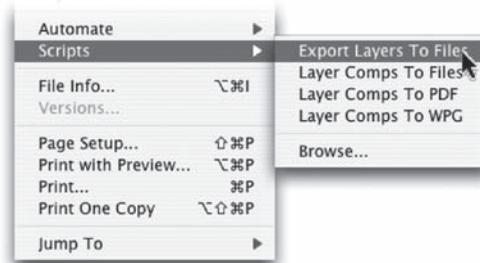


Scripting

Scripting in Photoshop offers a more powerful automation technology than actions. With scripts, you can choose to perform more elaborate tasks than an action can perform. Photoshop CS comes with four built-in scripts, all of them designed to automate saving multiple layers or layer comps off to new files.

Writing scripts is far more challenging than actions. Actions use a GUI with obvious controls (Play, Record, Stop). Scripting on the other hand requires you to use a scripting language. On a Mac, you can use AppleScript or JavaScript. On a Windows box you can use any scripting language that supports OLE automation, such as Visual Basic or JavaScript.

One script that is really handy is Export Layers to Files. This can be used to import a layered file into a program that doesn't recognize layers (such as Apple's LiveType).



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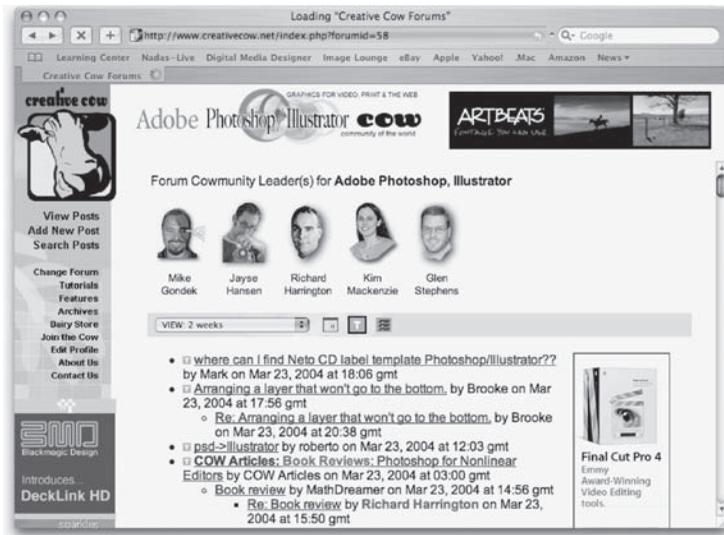


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Want to keep in touch?

The Creative Cow website (<http://www.creativecow.net>) offers several free forums and tutorials. With a distinct slant towards video professionals, the Photoshop/Illustrator forum offers a great place to look for ideas or troubleshooting advice.



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