Getting Better Highlights -
Essential Skills for Menu Creation

With RICHARD HARRINGTON, PMP

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.

notes

Creating a DVD Overlay

Creating buttons for a motion menu can be a time consuming task, figuring out the highlights, complex selection techniques, and getting the perfect edge. Unless you do it the east way! Here are two approached that work very well for both Adobe After Effects and Apple's LiveType.

Design specifications & constraints

When designing for DVD, you must keep a few key specs in mind.

- Square vs. Non-Square Pixel Aspect Ratio: DVDs use non-square pixels. If you are building in Photoshop CS, this is no problem. If you are using an earlier version of Photoshop, you will have to resize your graphics. Both After Effects and LiveType can also work in non-square pixels.
- The Screen is Smaller than You Think: A certain portion of the menu design will be lost by consumer TV sets. To counterbalance this, we reserve a bleed area. Title safe is 80% of the screen; action safe is 90% (but the background goes edge-to-edge however).
- Final File Ends Up 720 X 480 Pixels: Whether its widescreen or standard, you still only have an area that's 720 pixels across and 480 pixels tall to design for. Extra ppi (often called dpi) are as useless as an elephant at a backyard barbeque.
- Buttons Use Grid Slices: You need adequate separation around buttons. Links are assigned to a rectangular target and you must be able to draw a clean rectangle with no overlapping between button areas.
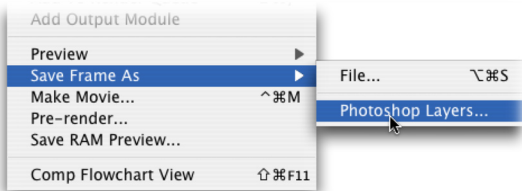

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- Swapping Layer – OR – a Motion Menu: Many designers like to build "Photoshop" style menu where different layers are substituted during the click or highlight stages (think GIF rollover). Other designers build elaborate menus with video and motion using After Effects and other content apps. Never shall the two meet, you can have layers that sub in and out, or a motion menu with a colored highlight layer.

In After Effects: Export Highlight Layer

Your DVD authoring app is going to need a image map to determine what lights up. This grayscale image identifies where the glows appear. It is an overlay for the moving video file.

1. Complete your DVD menu and render out the final version.
2. Save your File to capture any changes.
3. Set your Comp Window to 100% and Full Quality.
4. Go to an appropriate frame and choose Composition>Save Frame As>Photoshop Layers
5. Open the file in Photoshop
6. Turn off the visibility icon for all layers that are not part of the Overlay.
7. Select one of the visible layers and choose Merge Visible from the layer palette submenu.
8. Lock the transparency for this new merged layer by clicking on the Lock transparent pixels box.
9. Choose Edit>Fill and fill with Black (or White, depending on your DVD application)
10. Create a new Empty layer and place it in the background.
11. Select All and Fill this layer with White (or Black, again depending on your DVD application)
12. Delete any unused layers
13. Choose File>Save As and save a flattened PICT or TARGA file to create an overlay layer. Again, you don't need to save layers or alpha channels.
14. Save the layered PSD file in case you have changes.
15. Duplicate the Flattened file, open it and choose Select All. Pressing Cmd+I (Ctrl+I) to Invert the image. This way you'll have both versions for your DVD authoring application if needed.

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## In LiveType: Export Highlight Layer

LiveType does not feature the ability to write out layers. However it can embed alpha channels. This feature will enable you to create the needed highlight layers for a DVD.

1. Complete your DVD menu and render out the final version.
2. Save your File to capture any changes.
3. Then use the File> Save As command to create a new working copy.
4. Delete all layers except for your text and buttons.
5. Some templates have a background color built in. It is necessary to turn this background Off.
6. Choose File > Export Frame (Shift + Cmd + E) and save a PSD file. The resulting document will have transparency embedded.
7. Open the file in Photoshop.
16. Lock the transparency for this button layer by clicking on the Lock transparent pixels box.
8. Fill the button layer with white
9. Make a new layer and fill it with black.
10. Flatten the image.
11. Save the resulting matte graphic for use in your DVD authoring environment.
12. For safety, you should also choose to invert the image (Cmd + I) to create an opposite matte; this may come in handy depending upon which DVD authoring software you are using.

Want to keep in touch?

The Creative Cow website (http://www.creative-cow.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.
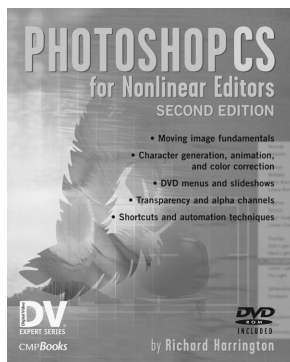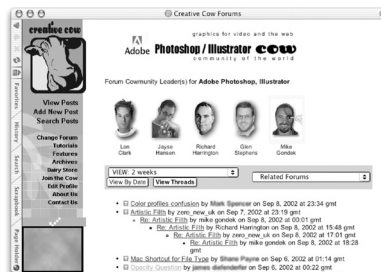
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