

PhotoCaster™ 3

User Manual

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Overview

What Does PhotoCaster Do?

PhotoCaster is an Xtra for Director 7 and later that imports Photoshop files directly into the Director cast. Each of your Photoshop layers is brought in as it's own cast member. PhotoCaster preserves the registration and anti-aliasing of each layer, making the transfer of your Photoshop files into Director as painless as possible. It can even automatically place these new castmembers as sprites on the stage - exactly where they appeared in the original document! It will save you hours of development.

PhotoCaster gives you full control over how the Photoshop file is imported, letting you control the color depth and palette mapping on import (it can even create a "super palette" from your Photoshop file), preserve the Photoshop anti-aliasing and transparency, and a host of other controls.

PhotoCaster will forever change the way you work with graphics in Director!

What's New in Version 3?

Version 3 of PhotoCaster is significantly enhanced. It contains:

- * Improved color management
- * Support for Photoshop 5 & 6 layer effects
- * Photoshop text layers can be imported as editable styled text castmembers

Operating Systems Supported

Mac OS

PhotoCaster for Mac OS supports system versions 7.0 and higher

PhotoCaster for Win 32 supports Windows 95, 98, ME / 2000 / NT

Installation

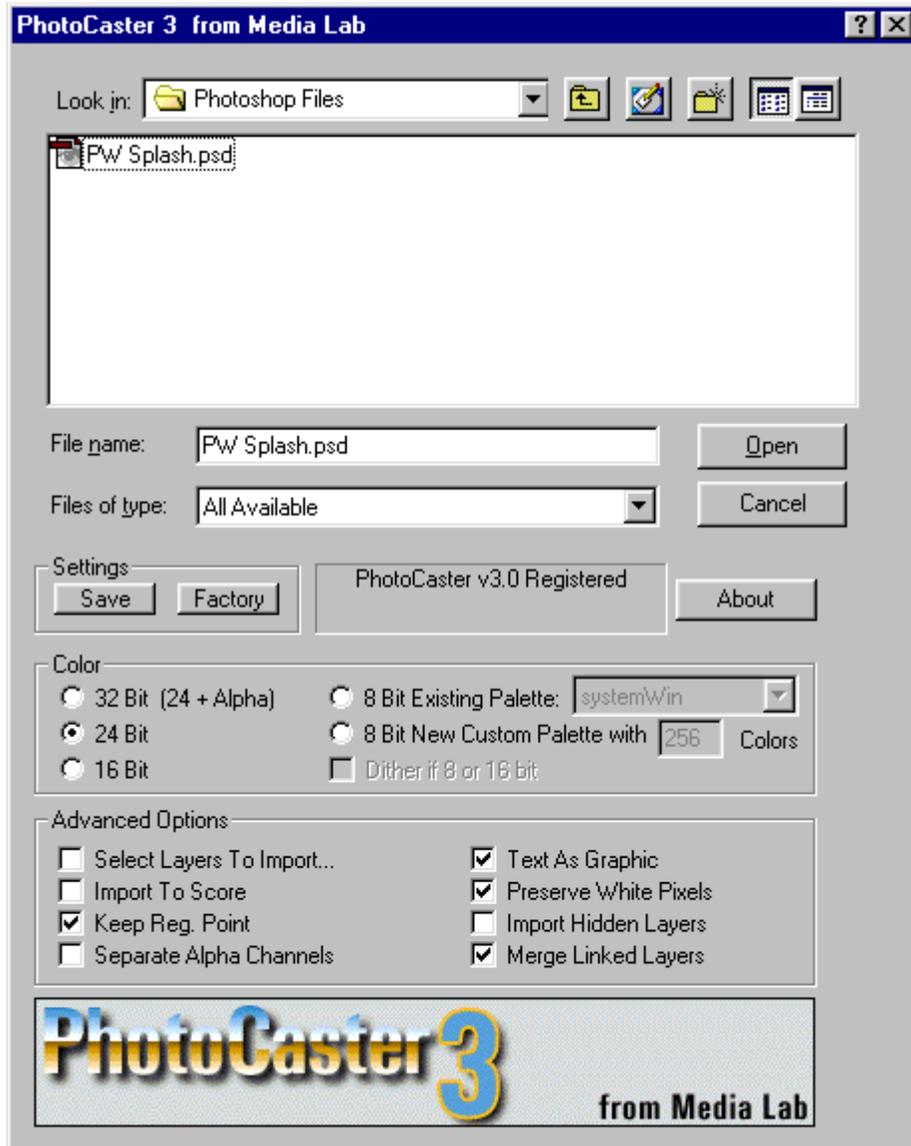
To install PhotoCaster, place the PhotoCaster (PhotoCaster.x32 under Windows) file in the "Xtras" folder located in the same folder as the Director application. Then launch Director. To confirm that PhotoCaster has loaded, go to the Insert Menu. You should see the entry Media Lab Media, which gives you access to a popup menu from which you can choose PhotoCaster.

Using PhotoCaster

To access PhotoCaster, choose the Insert menu and select the Media Lab Media submenu. PhotoCaster will appear on the submenu, together with any other Media Lab Xtras installed. Choosing PhotoCaster brings up the main PhotoCaster dialog box.

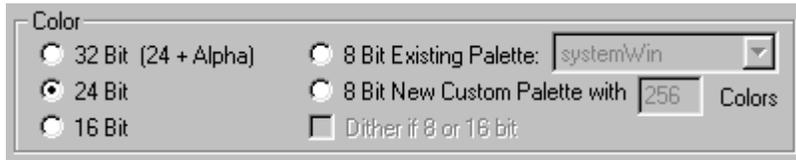
The PhotoCaster File Selection Dialog Box

The PhotoCaster dialog box will display any Photoshop 3.0 or later files (.psd files) in a selected folder. It will not display files saved from Photoshop in PICT, TIFF or any other file format aside from Photoshop's native file format. Simply locate your Photoshop file, click "Open", and stand back! PhotoCaster may take a few seconds to completely import your Photoshop file, but it will inform you of its progress as it goes.



MacOS Users Note: If you want to import a Photoshop file created under Microsoft Windows, you will need to ensure that the filename ends with ".psd". For example: "WINPSFIL.PSD"

Color Import Options



This group of options allows you to control the color mapping of the cast members created by PhotoCaster. The default setting for Color Import Options is Remap to Current Palette.

32-Bit

This option is only supported under Director 7. It creates a bitmap cast member with 24 bits of color information and an additional 8-bits of alpha channel information. The 'Use Embedded Alpha' cast member option is automatically activated when using this option.

NOTE: Unless you choose the "Separate Alphas" option, no color depths below 32-bit will provide variable transparency levels and so will require PhotoCaster to pre-merge semi-transparent pixels with layers below them. Part of PhotoCaster's usefulness is in the flexibility it gives you when performing this task. See the FAQ and "Tips and Techniques" sections below for more info.

24-Bit

Checking this option will preserve the colors exactly as they appear in the Photoshop file (since Photoshop files are always in 24-bit color). This option is effective independent of the color depth setting of your monitor at import time.

16-Bit

Checking this option will convert the Photoshop graphics to 16 bit color depth. Dithering is available for 16 bit graphics. 16 bit graphics that are exactly one half as large in RAM as 32 bit graphics, but you may notice significant degradation in smooth color ramps unless dithering is chosen.

8 Bit Existing Palette

This choice will cause PhotoCaster to reassign the colors in the imported file to the closest values in the color palette currently chosen in the palette menu. The palette menu contains both built-in Director palettes as well as any custom palette members in any open movie.

8 Bit New Custom Palette

When this option is chosen, PhotoCaster will create a new, custom 8-bit palette that best represents all the colors in the file (i.e. a "super palette" of the layers). PhotoCaster gives equal weight to each pixel of each layer to calculate the colors in the custom palette. PhotoCaster will create a custom palette cast member, and map each imported cast member to it. You may specify the number of colors that will be used to create the palette.

Settings Control

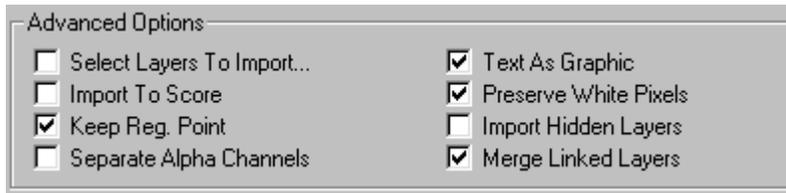
Save Settings

Clicking the Save Settings button will save the current settings and will restore them into the PhotoCaster dialog every time it is called in the future.

Factory Settings

Click this button to restore the settings to the recommended factory defaults.

Other Options



Select Layers to Import

If this option is chosen, then when you click the Okay button PhotoCaster will present you with a dialog that allows you to select particular layers for import rather than importing every layer in the file. See “Layer Selection” below.

Import To Score

With this option selected PhotoCaster will add a new frame to your movie and place all of the newly created castmembers on stage in position for you! This option is independent of the Keep RegPoint option and will allow you to have all of your registration points centered within the castmembers without having to position them on stage manually. The new frame will be created at the current location of the playback head. The sprite will be placed in layer order, and will start at the lowest channel currently selected, or channel one if no channel is selected. The default setting for this option is On.

Keep RegPoint

No more having to create – and then delete – big rectangle outlines to keep everything registered! Checking this option will preserve the relative registration of all objects in all layers of the Photoshop file upon import. After importing a multi-layer file with Keep RegPoint checked, all cast members created can be dragged to the stage or score together and they will all align exactly as they were in the original Photoshop file. The registration point is the exact center of the frame of the Photoshop document. If this option is not checked, the registration point of each cast member will be set to the exact center of the object itself. This option is very useful for maintaining the alignment of cast member variations for character animation. NOTE: the Import to Score option overrides this option. If import to score is chosen, the layers will be placed on the stage in the proper place, and the regpoints will be centered for each layer. The default setting for this option is On.

Separate Alpha Channels

(Director 7 only) This option will create grayscale castmembers corresponding to each imported layer's alpha channel next to the newly created cast member in the cast. This is mainly useful for supporting Director 7's version of the mask ink-effect. The default setting for this option is Off. The 'Import To Score' option will automatically handle the mask ink effect if this option is enabled, so it's recommended that if you are using the Separate Alphas option that you also use the Import to Score option.

Preserve White Pixels

(PhotoCaster 2 users note: this option was previously named “White Reduction.”)

Photoshop supports both white pixels and transparent pixels, and they are not the same.

Unfortunately, Director does not make this same distinction. Normally, when importing graphics containing both white and transparent areas in the interior of the graphic, the transparent pixels would come in as pure white, along with the truly white pixels. In this case, neither the Background Transparent nor the Matte ink effect produces the desired result of preserving *both* transparent and white pixels in the interior of the graphic.

PhotoCaster once again comes to the rescue – with the Preserve White Pixels option on, the important distinction between transparent and white is preserved. If Preserve White Pixels is checked, any pure white pixels in the imported layer will be changed to an off-white just different enough from pure white that Director's Background Transparent ink effect will not interpret it as white, thus maintaining the opacity of your white pixels. The transparent pixels in the Photoshop file will be mapped to pure white and thus will become transparent when Background Transparent is applied to the cast member. The default setting for this option is On.

Import Hidden Layers

Normally any hidden layers in your Photoshop file will be ignored by PhotoCaster upon import. However, if you do wish to import them, check this option. (See the Tips and Techniques section for an example of how using this option facilitates the creation of different button states.) The default setting for this option is Off.

Merge Linked Layers

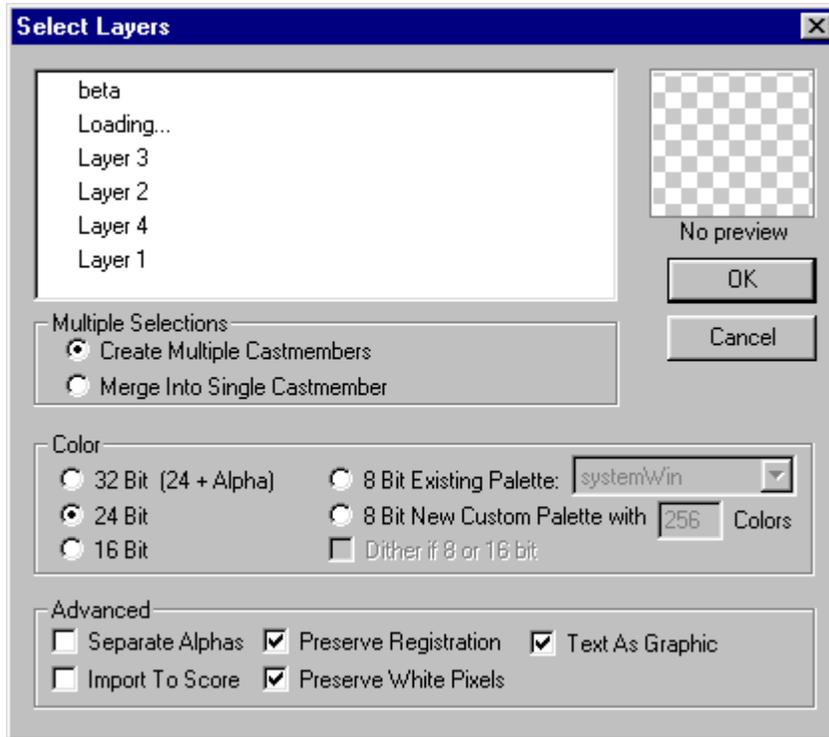
Photoshop layers may be linked by using the Link function in the Layers palette. Clicking on the link column (in the Photoshop Layers palette) of any layer or layers will connect that layer or layers to the currently selected layer, so that if one of the linked layers is moved using the Move tool, the other(s) will move along with it. If Merge Linked Layers is checked when importing a multi-layer file, any set of layers designated as linked together will be merged into a single cast member upon import, rather than imported separately. The default setting for this option is On.

Text as Graphic

Photoshop text layers contain two kinds of information: the text's exact graphical representation and its editable text and style info. PhotoCaster versions previous to version 3 would always import text as graphical castmembers. This did a great job preserving the exact appearance and position of the text, but sometimes it is more appropriate to use "live" editable text in your Director movie. Advantages of live text include small download size and the ability to change the text on the fly via lingo as the movie plays back. For this reason, PhotoCaster 3 now allows you the choice of importing text as graphics when this option is on, or as styled text castmembers when this option is off. The only disadvantage to styled text members is that while PhotoCaster 3 attempts to match as many of the font and style settings from Photoshop as Director will support, the results are not always identical to the way the text layers look in Photoshop. The most dramatic differences can be seen with advanced text manipulation in Photoshop, such as text on a curve. To reproduce text layers with such visually dramatic differences you will want to turn this option on. The default setting for this option is On.

Layer Selection

If you have checked the “Select” check box in PhotoCaster’s Layer Options (see “Layer Options” above) then when you click the “Open” button you will be presented with the following dialog:



This dialog allows you to choose individual layers to import. To select a layer, simply click on it. Select one layer or use the standard system modifier keys to select a number of layers. Command-A on the Macintosh or Control-A under MS Windows will select all of the layers.

Multiple Selection Options



Create Single Cast Member

This option causes all of the selected layers to be flattened into a single cast member.

Create Multiple Cast Members

This option causes each selected layer to be imported as its own cast member.

Other Options

The other options are identical to the corresponding options in the PhotoCaster main dialog.

Tips and Techniques

Link Layers Effectively

Sometimes people are overwhelmed by the number of cast members a single Photoshop file can create when imported with PhotoCaster. Remember that judicious use of layer linking can let you have the best of both worlds: you can keep layers separate for easy editing in Photoshop and link them to create only the separate cast members you need in Director. This conserves sprite channels and simplifies cast file management.

Name Layers Effectively

Because PhotoCaster preserves layer names, you can start thinking about your Lingo programming for interactive elements while you are still in Photoshop. One common technique is to base button scripts on extensions to the cast member names. For example “start.u” might be the up state for the button and “start.d” might be the cast name for its down state. If you know this in advance you can name the layers in such a way that the right graphics become attached to the right scripts at the moment you import them! If you decide to change the button graphics in Photoshop, just keep the layer names the same, reimport, and voilà! no reprogramming necessary.

Use Hidden Layers to Import Multiple Button States Simultaneously

Frequently multimedia designers use Photoshop layers to design and preview their different button states. Turning one state's layer on and another state's layer off simulates what will happen in the final product. Because these different button states will never appear at the same time, they should each be anti-aliased to the elements behind them but not to each other. Simply hide them all, or all but one, and then import them with PhotoCaster using the Import Hidden Layers. Then all of your button states will be properly anti-aliased to the background, be already registered to each other, and look great!

Eliminate Intermediate Files

This one seems obvious, but old habits are hard to break. Now that you can use PhotoCaster to import Photoshop format files, don't bother to save flattened copies solely

for the purpose of importing into Director anymore. This will save both disk space and version-control headaches.

Estimating Needed Memory

Importing a large Photoshop document can be rather memory intensive. PhotoCaster needs a large scratch space to pre-render for the purposes of anti-aliasing and other alpha channel compositing. There are two methods for estimating how much RAM will be needed:

1. When a Photoshop document is open in Photoshop, in the lower left corner of the document frame there is a pop-up menu that displays 'Document Sizes' or 'Scratch Sizes'. Using the 'Document Sizes' choice, PhotoCaster typically needs free RAM equal to the sum of the two numbers displayed there to completely import a document, assuming all layers in the document are being imported.
2. Each layer takes up *height X width X 4* bytes to import. When importing, you can calculate the amount of RAM needed for each layer in this fashion. To calculate additional overhead, add to that sum the bytes needed for an extra layer that has the dimensions of the entire document.

Reducing Needed Memory

Try some of these techniques if you are running short of memory when importing:

1. Allocate more memory to Director, and turn on the 'Use System Memory' option (on the Mac) in Director's preferences dialog (File-Preferences-General).
2. Try importing with the new 'Select' checkbox. Then select only a few layers at a time, reducing the amount of memory PhotoCaster needs at any one time.
3. Occasionally we have had people call who have made a 2000 X 2000 pixel document, but have populated it with only small layers, leaving lots of unused empty space. PhotoCaster needs a scratch space as big as the document, so memory could be radically conserved if the document was cropped down to the rectangle enclosing the needed layers eliminating the expanses of unused space.

Change the Way You Author

These tips have been included to start you thinking about the new power that PhotoCaster puts in your hands as an author. They are just the tip of the iceberg. Now that the transition from your graphics editor to your authoring environment is an organic and easy one you no longer have to put off importing graphic elements until they are absolutely finished because it takes so much tedious labor. Bring them in as they develop, then later delete them and reimport them into the same cast member slots and with the same layer names, and none of your work in scripts or the score will have to be redone! Create template Photoshop documents that will be associated with particular cast files. There are many more ideas that we haven't thought of. Watch our Web site for more techniques, or invent your own.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is there a product that can turn a Photoshop file into an interactive web page as quickly and easily as PhotoCaster turns a Photoshop file into a Director movie?

Funny you should ask, as a matter of fact there is! It's called PhotoWebber and it is the fastest, easiest, and most powerful tool for turning a layered Photoshop file into an interactive web page. In many cases it takes less than thirty seconds! But don't take my word for it, check out the great reviews and testimonials at <http://www.photowebber.com>. (Sorry, we couldn't resist. All other FAQ entries are non-gratuitous. ☺)

Why do my imported graphics look different once they are imported into Director?

There are a number of reasons why this might happen. If you are using layer effects, adjustment layers, or non-normal blend modes, some differences in appearance from the original layer may be noted. See "Known Bugs, Limitations, and Caveats" below for work-arounds.

If you are importing to a color depth less than 32 bits and you have not chosen "Separate Alphas", semi transparent areas will not look the same if they are not against the same background they were against in the Photoshop document. This is inevitable because Photoshop layers are 32-bit and any lowering of color depth will no longer have variable transparency and will force you to make some choices about what to do with the semi-transparent areas. See "What is this jaggy stuff surrounding my cast member?" below for more info.

Choosing not to dither when importing at 8 or 16 bit will often cause banding or other visual problems.

I imported my Photoshop file, which had many layers, but only one layer came in! What happened?!?

In Photoshop it's all too easy to inadvertently click on the eyeball icon of an unselected, hidden layer in the Layers palette. When this is done, the layer will become selected and visible, and all other layers will be simultaneously hidden. If you don't realize this and you save your file in this condition, and then import it into Director via PhotoCaster with the Import Hidden Layers option turned off, only the single visible layer will be imported. To check this, go back to your Photoshop file and be sure all layers you wish to import are visible.

Not all my layers imported, what happened?

1. Are the missing layers hidden in the original Photoshop file? If so, either change that setting in Photoshop, or turn on the 'Import Hidden Layers' check box options in the 'Advanced' PhotoCaster settings.
2. Are the missing layers linked to other layers in the original Photoshop file? If so they were combined with the other linked layers to form just one cast file. Either change the links in Photoshop, or turn off the 'Merge Linked Layers' check box option in the 'Advanced' PhotoCaster settings.

I received an “out-of-memory” message while using PhotoCaster – what should I do?

Try some of the following:

1. Increase the amount of memory allocated to Director.
2. Turn on 'Use System Memory' in Director's Preference (File->Preferences->General). Applies to Mac only.
3. Use the Layer Select Dialog to import fewer layers at a time.

Consult the Tips and Techniques for more memory discussions.

I'm selecting only one layer for import, but PhotoCaster seems to be reading and rendering all the layers before it gets to the one I selected. Why?

To calculate the anti-aliasing for a layer, PhotoCaster needs to render all the layers beneath it. If you want to avoid this, you can use Director 7's feature of dynamic alpha compositing instead. Select '32 Bit Color' as your color depth choice, or use the 'Separate Alphas' option to split the alpha channel out. Both options preclude the necessity of rendering every single layer.

What other file formats will PhotoCaster import?

While PhotoCaster currently only supports Photoshop 3.0 and later files, other software packages can save in this format. Painter 4.0, for example, can save a file in Photoshop 3.0 format and its “floaters” will be translated into Photoshop layers upon import. Illustrator 9 is another example of a very useful package that can save as a .psd file.

What is this jaggy stuff surrounding my cast member?

The jaggy fringe which may appear around some cast members is the anti-aliasing rendered into the cast member. You will notice that the cast member looks perfect when layered in the same location that it appeared in the Photoshop file, but may look 'jaggy' when over other layers. If this jaggy fringe is a problem (it isn't always) here are some considerations:

1. Avoid wide feathering. The more feathering there is in a layer, the more background it will have to have rendered into itself, and thus the more jaggy fringe it will have. If you simply must have wide feathering, then you simply must have AlphaMania.
2. If you are using Director 7 or later, use the '32 Bit Color' option – then your castmembers will automatically use the embedded alpha channel and you won't need pre-calculated fringe, and you won't have anti-aliasing problems. Or, use the 'Separate Alphas' checkbox, and use your castmembers with the Mask ink effect (again, Director 7 and later only).
3. Use AlphaMania. Rather than using Director's flat bitmap castmembers use AlphaMania. AlphaMania is a custom cast type that supports dynamic anti-aliasing and other alpha channel compositing effects. It can use PhotoCaster to grab individual Photoshop layers. It is way cool, and much easier to use than regular bitmap castmembers.

Where can I get AlphaMania?

The same place you got PhotoCaster - from Media Lab! Check out <http://www.medialab.com> , or see the section on contacting Media Lab, below.

What are the blue lines?

You are using an unregistered version of PhotoCaster. Once you purchase and register PhotoCaster, it will stop importing with blue lines. Director 7 users can use PhotoCaster to import one layer at a time and they won't get any lines at all.

What are the red lines?

If you are getting thin red lines, you must be creating AlphaMania castmembers using an unregistered version of AlphaMania. Once you purchase and register AlphaMania, it will cease importing with red lines.

Hey, I moved my registered copy of PhotoCaster to this other machine and I'm getting blues lines and an Unregistered message. What gives?

When you register PhotoCaster it locks itself to the serial # of the copy of Director you are running it under. Running it with a different copy of Director reverts it to demo mode. You can always re-register it if you have to move machines, re-install Director, etc. but it must be running with the same Director serial # that it was originally registered for. Simply re-enter your unlock code.

I've registered PhotoCaster but it keeps "unregistering" itself each time I use it. I have to keep registering it every time I import a file.

You probably have (or had) on your system an old version of PhotoCaster that had this bug. First, make sure you have at least version 1.2.2 or the most current version of PhotoCaster installed. Next, delete your PhotoCaster preferences files. On the Mac they are located in your System/Preferences file. On Windows they are in your Windows folder (or WIN/NT folder). Then restart Director.

Can I give PhotoCaster to a friend?

Yes, please do. Just don't give them your unlock code.

Why do some transparent areas of my layers import with "blotches" that don't seem to exist in the original Photoshop document?

It is possible to create invisible "residue" as a by-product of certain processes in Photoshop, for example: using the eraser to delete part of a layer while the eraser is not set to be fully opaque, use of the Paintbrush tool set to an opacity less than 5%, or failing to delete all of a previous selection that was created using very diffuse feathering, among others. Since most monitors will not display the difference between full transparency and color opacity of less than 5%, you will not be able to see this residue on the screen, but it exists in the file nevertheless.

As mentioned above, Photoshop uses a secret "alpha channel" to track the transparency of all pixels in the layer. PhotoCaster interprets any pixel in this alpha channel –which includes these residual almost-transparent pixels as well as pixels legitimately requiring anti-aliasing – as needing to be anti-aliased to the colors in the layer beneath them.

Therefore PhotoCaster dutifully “anti-aliases” all of them by altering them based on the colors in the layers beneath them, creating odd blotches in your cast member where this almost-transparent residue had been.

You can eliminate this problem by selecting the correct outline of the graphic in the Photoshop layer you want, inverting the selection, deleting the contents of the selection, and reimporting. To avoid this problem in the first place, keep very aware of the opacity of the tools you are using in Photoshop and use the selection/inversion/deletion process on any layer you have doubts about prior to importing it into Director.

Known Bugs, Limitations, and Caveats

Unlinked external cast files (Director 5 only).

In Director 5, PhotoCaster cannot import into external cast files that have not been linked to the current movie.

RGB Mode images only

PhotoCaster can import RGB Mode images only. It does not support CMYK, index, grayscale, or other modes. It also only supports 24 bit color images, 48 bit images are not supported.

‘Normal’ Layer Blend Mode only

At this time, PhotoCaster only supports the ‘Normal’ layer blending mode compositing operation. In the future it may support additional layer blending modes.

Adjustment Layers in Photoshop

PhotoCaster does not support adjustment layers in Photoshop. These layers must be merged with the layers they affect before importing with PhotoCaster.

How to Register PhotoCaster

PhotoCaster is distributed as an unlockable demo, which can be unlocked with a code number which you receive at time of purchase. The demo version of PhotoCaster defaces the imported graphics with blue lines. See Where To Find PhotoCaster below for common locations to find up to date versions. Download the demo to try it out and then call in to order.

To purchase the produce and deactivate the defacing function, you will first need to determine your product ID. To do this:

1. Install PhotoCaster into Director and launch Director.
2. Go to the Insert menu and choose Media Lab Media, then choose PhotoCaster. Click the “About” button.

In the About box for PhotoCaster you will find the 7-digit PhotoCaster product ID. With that number handy, simply phone us (*1-800-282-5361*) to place your order for PhotoCaster and we'll give you your product unlocking code. Or you can order via fax or email by

filling out the order form that comes with the PhotoCaster downloadable version, being sure to include the Product ID number. Enter that unlocking code into the “unlock” field in the About box and you're done! Keep that code safe somewhere in case you have to re-install PhotoCaster or Director for any reason.

IMPORTANT: PhotoCaster locks itself to the copy of Director in which it is installed. Moving it to a different copy of Director with a different serial number will cause it to revert to “demo” mode, reactivating the defacing function. So make sure you are getting your product ID from the copy of Director you expect to be using PhotoCaster with.

Purchasing

Call **1-800-282-5361** to purchase PhotoCaster using your Visa or MasterCard, at which time you will be given an unlock code. Alternatively, you may order on-line, by email or fax and receive the code number via electronic mail. If you are ordering PhotoCaster without having already downloaded and installed a demo version, we encourage you to have the last 10 digits of your Director 5 serial number ready when you call. This is not required, but will mean you won't have to call back for an unlock code once you receive the product.

Purchasing On-line

Media Lab has installed a new secure on-line purchasing system. By simply filling out a web page form you can quickly and easily purchase PhotoCaster or AlphaMania. Go to www.medialab.com and follow the link to the on-line ordering section.

Ordering by Phone

In the U.S: 800.282.5361

International: +1.303.499.5411

Orders can be taken Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM Mountain Standard Time.

Ordering by E-Mail

xtra-sales@medialab.com

There is an order form (ORDER.TXT) provided with the electronic download. Fill in all the information it requests, including your Product ID (see above), and e-mail back to xtra-sales@medialab.com

Ordering by Fax

+1.303.497.9454

There is an order form (ORDER.TXT) provided with the electronic download. Fill in all the information, including your Product ID (see above), and fax it back to us.

Technical Support

To receive technical support for PhotoCaster, send electronic mail to xtra-help@medialab.com. No telephone technical support is available for PhotoCaster.

Where to Find PhotoCaster

Media Lab Web Page: <http://www.medialab.com>

The Media Lab web page always has the most current updates as well as new software demos and releases. As different language versions become available they will be posted here, as well as any interim updates to PhotoCaster itself. From here you can download the full electronic version of PhotoCaster to demo and try out before purchasing.

Media Lab FTP Site <ftp://ftp.medialab.com/pub/>

This site is also available through our web page, but if you don't have web access, you can find the most up to date Xtras here.

Contacting Media Lab, Inc.

Media Lab, Inc.
2501 Lanyon Drive
Longmont, CO 80503

Phone: 800.282.5361 to purchase PhotoCaster
+1.303.774.0353 all other calls

Fax +1.303.485.9069

Website: <http://www.medialab.com>

Distribution Inquiries: sales@medialab.com

Press and Advertising: sales@medialab.com

email: xtra-help@medialab.com

xtra-sales@medialab.com

xtra-bugs@medialab.com

Technical support.

Place orders for PhotoCaster

Report any bugs or request new features.

Legal Stuff

Copyright Information

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