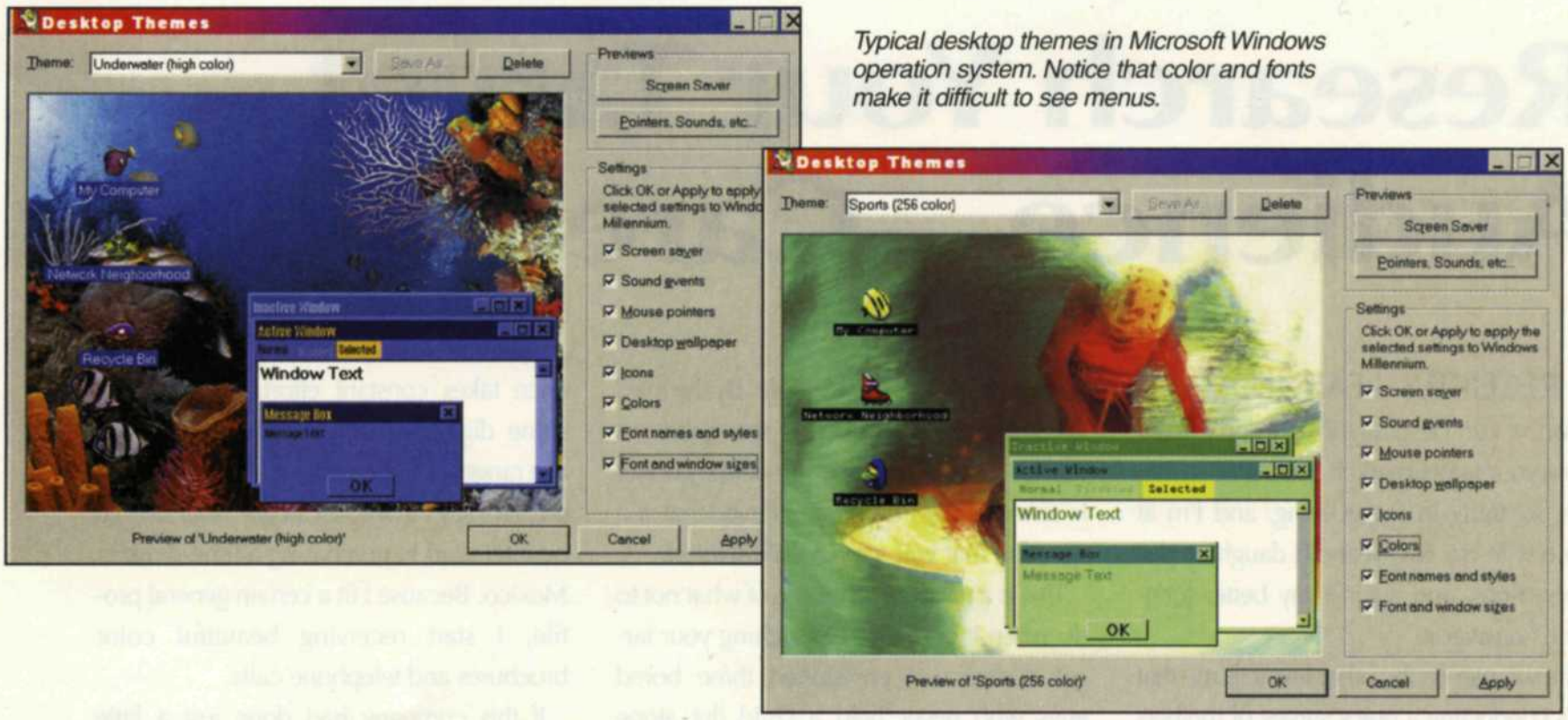
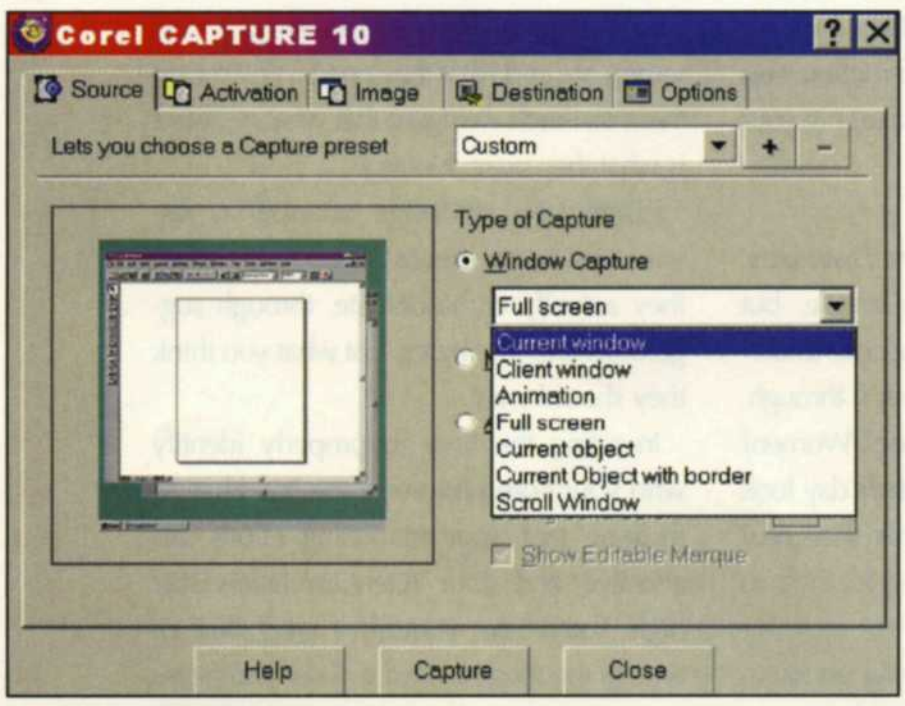


Typical desktop themes in Microsoft Windows operation system. Notice that color and fonts make it difficult to see menus.

Screen Capture Magic: We'll Show You How!

Jack and Sue Drafahl



CorelDraw 10 Screen capture program. Menu for type of capture can include full screen, select areas, active screen, objects, animation, and a variety of other types of screen captures.

The display properties menu allows you to select each menu component on the screen and modify it so that it is more visible for screen capture.

When we first started working with computer systems in our photo lab in the mid-eighties, we faced the problem of capturing data from our green screen. If we used a command line at the prompt, we were able to send the text screen to a printer or text file. If we wanted to copy some of the basic graphics, it was more difficult. We had to set up a camera in a darkened room and take long exposures of the screen. Thankfully, computer systems have improved since then, so now high quality screen captures are just a keystroke away. Sounds simple, huh? Well unfortunately, due to the increased variables of screen resolution and fonts, you need to prepare your computer display before attempting the capture. If you don't, the results may be very difficult for viewers to see.

BEFORE WE GIVE YOU the punch line on how to accomplish good screen captures, we need to mention why today's digital photo lab even needs screen capture expertise. The most obvious reason is to capture data for future reference, emergency recovery of a system, or to educate employees.

When you set up a hardware system like a network, there are many specific data fields that can change from one work station to the next. Since the files containing these settings are often hard to locate, a screen capture of each menu is the easiest way to save this unique data. If a work station crashes and needs to be rebuilt, you can use the menu captures for reference.

Another very practical use is to help estab-

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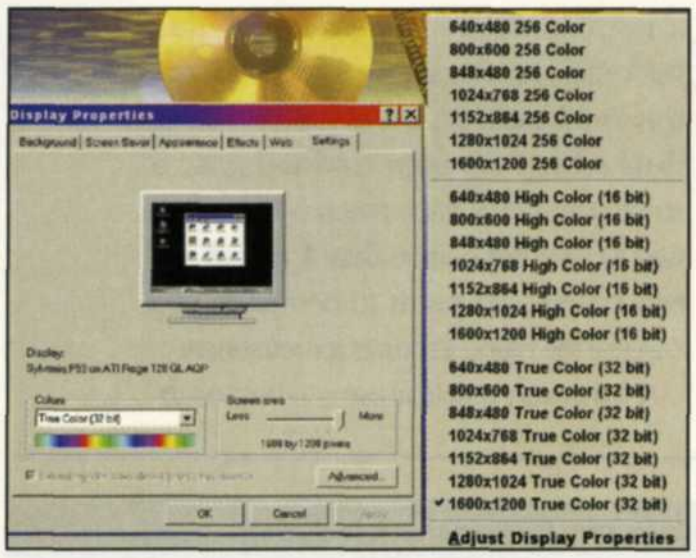
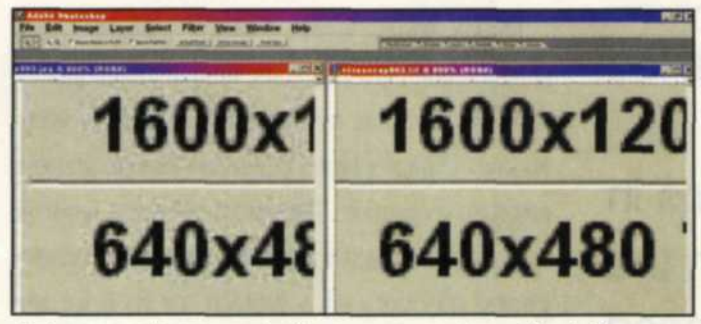


The display settings also allows you to pick screen resolution and color levels of your monitor.



Extreme enlargement of a screen capture. The left pane is the result of saving the file as a high quality JPEG image. The right pane is the same capture saved as an uncompressed TIFF file.

Some programs such as Ulead PhotoImpact 7 allow you to enlarge the fonts inside the program. The first image, left, is the default setting while the second, right, is the same program with enlarged fonts.

ACDsee includes a program called PicaView which allows you to select a specific image from Windows Explorer and zoom in on the image before the screen capture is made.

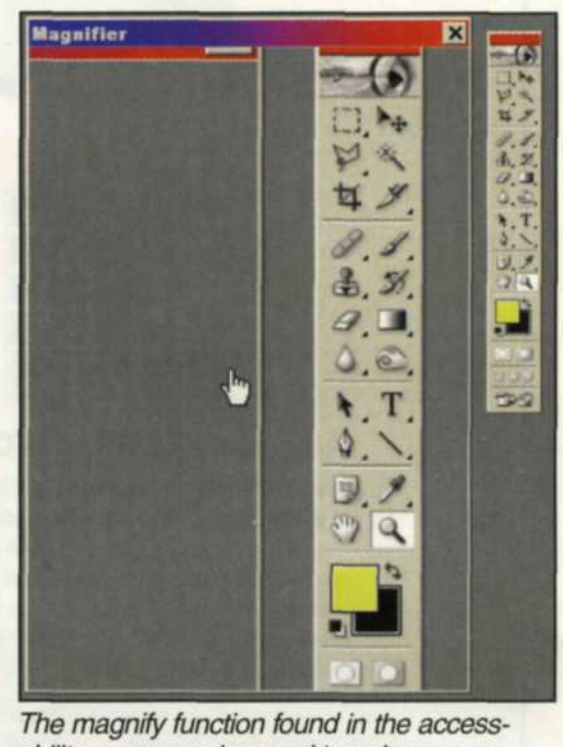
lish a procedure for your employees to follow when working on specific tasks. For example, you probably have a specific method for creating archival DVD data disks. If you screen capture each step, you can then print them to provide a lab procedure instruction manual. This sure helps bring everyone in the lab up to speed on lab protocol.

Using screen capture can save you hours of computer technical support woes. If you are having specific hardware or software problems, you can send screen captures to technical support so that they can visually analyze the problem. This will help put you back on line and reduce the onset of gray hair.

Another important screen capture application is when you need to display a specific portion of a software program to show how it looks when in operation. These captures can include splash screens, menus, image editing, and new features of a new program version. These screen captures can be used on software boxes, instruction manuals, internet advertising, or for product reviews in magazine articles like those we do for *Focus on Imaging*.

Step by Step

Now let's tackle the variables found in creating screen captures. On both Mac and PC platforms, you can press a specific combination of keys to capture your computer screen to clipboard. On a PC, press the Print Scrn key and the entire screen is copied to clipboard. If you want to capture only the active window, press the Alt and Print Scrn keys for a screen capture. On the Mac side, press the Command/Shift/3 keys to capture the entire screen, or the Command/Shift/4 keys to select only a portion of the screen.



The magnify function found in the accessability menu can be used to enlarge a section of the screen before the capture is made.

Once you have the image in clipboard, you can then paste it into most any editing program, or save it to file. With most editing programs you can paste it as a new image, but with Adobe Photoshop, you will have to open a new file first, and then paste the image.

If you want more control over your screen capture, such as single or multiple hot keys, auto numbering, file type and resolution, you may want to consider one of the dozens of screen capture programs. Some come as stand-alone programs while others are part of editing programs. With these capture programs you can assign file names, saving directories, and decide if you want to capture the mouse with your image. If you don't have screen capture capability with your editing program, log onto the Web and type PC screen capture, or MAC

screen capture for a list of screen capture programs.

File Type

File type is critical in the screen capture process. Do not use the JPEG format for screen captures as it will try to interpolate font edges, which degrades the image, even with high JPEG quality. Most uncompressed formats work well with screen captures, but we find the most compatible is the TIFF format. If you need to enlarge a section of a screen capture, we recommend that you re-save the TIFF in a Fractal file format and reload the image at a higher resolution. The jaggies in the new enlarged file will be reduced, without too much loss to the overall image.

The effectiveness of your screen capture will depend on two variables; screen resolution and font size. Your screen resolution is based on the capabilities of your computer monitor and display adapter. The higher the resolution of the system, the better the screen capture. If you want to include photos in your screen capture, the display should be set to 24bit or 32bit color, as 16 bit and lower will yield a posterized effect.

Screen Resolution

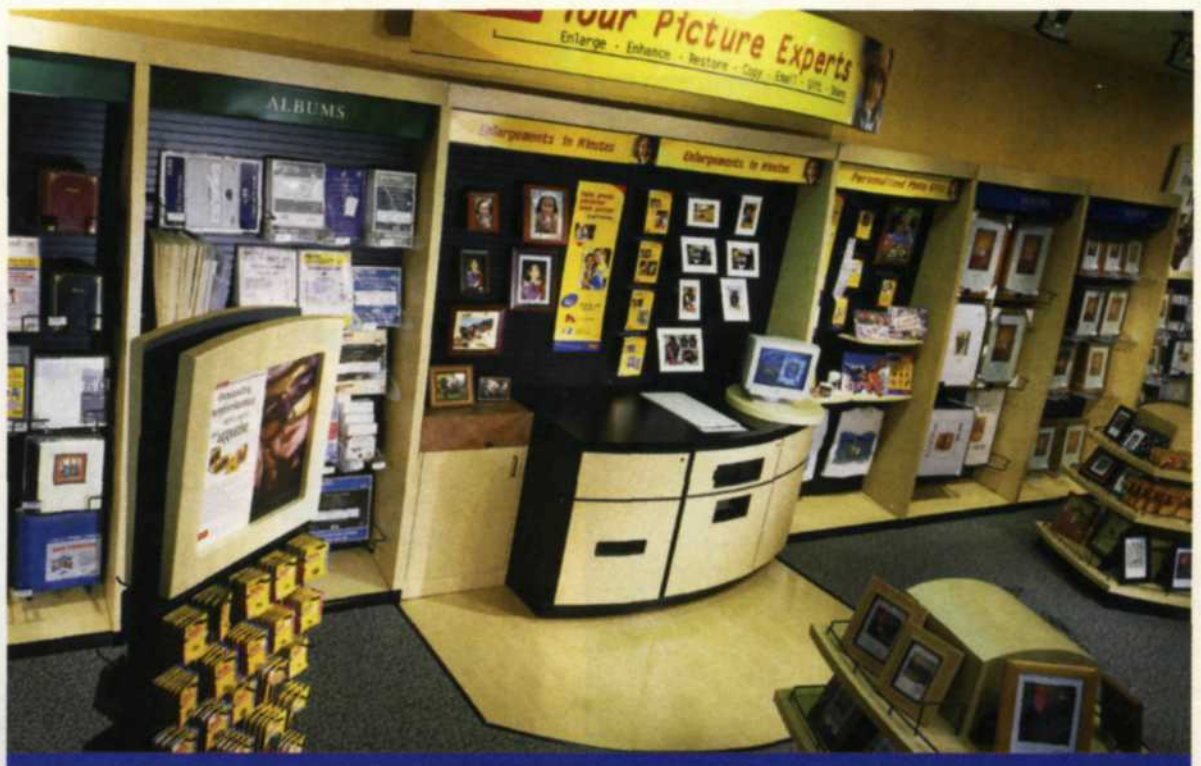
The second setting is the screen resolution. A screen set to 1024 x 768 will provide reasonable screen captures, but if you can boost the resolution up to 1600 x 1200, the quality of the capture will improve dramatically.

The downside to increasing your screen resolution is that the icons and fonts become smaller and harder to read. You can compensate for this problem in two ways.

First, go to the display properties, select the advanced tab in the settings function and change the fonts from small to large. This will increase the font size, but changing this setting usually requires that you re-boot your system. You can also increase the size of specific menu fonts with the appearance tab in the display properties menu. With this menu, you can scroll down through each specific font and increase their size. We recommend that you apply them one at a time to see which fonts are affected. Be aware that some screen fonts cannot be increased in size.

For those using desktop themes, you will quickly discover that colors and fonts are generally not conducive to screen capture. Using the display appearances, you can change most of the menu colors to whites or variations of grays. The fonts can be changed to a bolder font and your settings can be saved as a special screen capture desktop for any future screen capture projects. ●

Jack and Sue Drafahl are freelance writers and professional photographers living on the Oregon Coast.



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