

DIGITAL DIRECTIONS

Running Old Programs from CDs

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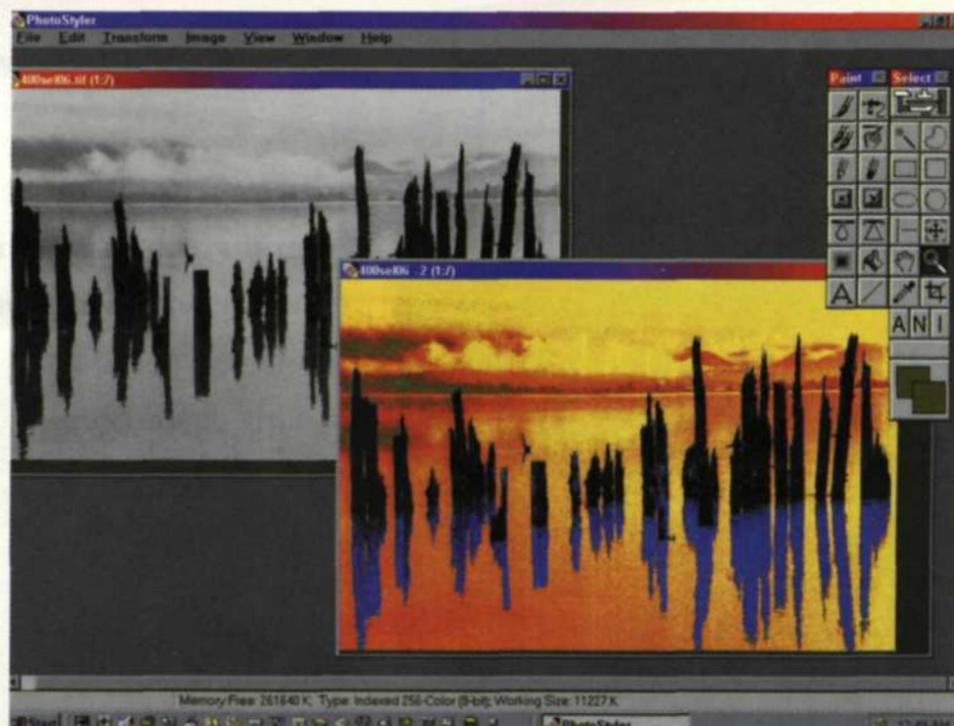


Original stock image from Image Concepts (above)

Electronic Posterization created in PhotoStyler 1.0 from CD (right)



Screen shot of PhotoStyler 1.0 (Windows 3) running in Windows 98



Walking the fine line between forefront technology and actual usability can be difficult. Often an older version of software will contain options that are more comfortable than the latest version, even though the newer software is more powerful. Keeping both programs on your hard drive can quickly eat up all the space on it. Is there an easy solution to this problem? The answer is, Yes—writable CDs.

IF YOU HAVE been involved with digital photography for any time, you have experienced the need to upgrade and software. New versions of programs are advertised to run faster, offer more features and fix those pesky bugs.

This sounds great, but the trade-off is constant investment in new software, having to re-learn new features and hoping that the program is backwards compatible.

Unfortunately, most upgrades rarely go as smoothly as the manufacturer indicates. We often find that software programs are not 100% compatible with older versions and file format changes; old features are missing, color management systems handle colors differently and fonts don't work.

For example, we have been using Ulead's PhotoImpact ever since its

name was changed from Image Pals. Version 3.0 featured a very nice screen capture program, but it was missing from version 4.0. It was back again in Version 5.0, but it captured screens totally differently.

Our very first editing program, Aldus PhotoStyler 1.0, had a very agreeable photographic posterization program that exactly simulated posterizations done in a traditional photo lab. It assigned false colors to a converted 256 step gray scale. Other versions since then offer posterization functions, but they don't resemble the photographic process. All they do is reduce the colors from 17 million to 256, or whatever you type in.

Recently, we looked through our archives to find a couple of JPG files we needed. We found the file, but it seemed to be corrupt when we tried it in the most recent version of our editing program. We went back to an older version and the file loaded fine. We simply saved it as a TIF file and it loaded perfectly into the new editing software.

We have been using every version of Corel Draw/Paint since version 1.0 and love the program. Sadly, we find font handling from one version to the next confusing. When we load in an older Corel version file, they don't always match.

In order to keep the ability to use the older features of earlier versions while staying on the cutting edge of new technology, it is sometimes necessary to keep two versions of a program on a computer. But this can really eat away at disk drive space.

It's true, we are being very nit picky about compatibility. Programs today are really incredible, but still not perfect. That's why you will always have version x.x to buy next month.

If all your clients upgraded their software at the same time as you and no one went back to files created on older software versions, we would

have nothing to write about. So, what's the solution? We found no easy answers, so we analyzed the situation and think we have re-invented the wheel with the help of CD writer technology. The key to the solution is data storage.

Now that affordable CD-Rs are available, we recommend installing old software programs onto CD. If you had unlimited hard disk space, you could just keep adding the new software versions to separate directories. Although hard disk space is relatively cheap these days, CDs are even cheaper.

Previously, install programs would only write to re-writable storage devices. Direct CD, from Adaptec Corporation, is a unique program that takes advantage of new CD writer technologies.

This program can write to a CD using packet technology, which makes the CD appear to the install program like it is a re-writable storage device. When you install the Direct CD program, blank CDs in the writer become a virtual unformatted 650 MB hard disk. Once you take a minute to format the CD, you can drag and drop files from your hard disk to this Direct CD disk as it was another hard disk.

We found Direct CD the perfect solution for storage of older software versions. When you run the program from Direct CD, it tends to run slower than your hard disk, but it still acts just like one. If you make a change to the program requiring data to be written in the programs directory, Direct CD will write a new file with the same name and mark the old one as not being used.

In other words, it will look as though you are overwriting data, even though you aren't. It will be just like a hard disk that holds space for deleted files. Once you have Direct CD installed, the amount of space

you have to store programs is limited only by the amount of blank CDs you have.

Since you will not use these CDs very often, it is best to keep them out of the mainstream file system. When we install these programs, we disable

all faststart, shortcuts, or any features that might use memory.

The only access to these programs is in the program menu. Here we list all the Direct CDs installed on system and exactly which programs are on each CD.

If we want to use a program, we just check this directory, load the appropriate CD, and we're off and running.

We have found that about 95% of the programs we own designed for Windows 3.0, 3.1 and 95 will install on CDs. We have even gone back to some very old DOS versions of some presentation programs to bring in old data.

Many of these older programs will have shared system files that are older than ones already installed on the computer. When the install program wants to know if you want to replace the file with the older version, just say no! If you find that you need to use the Direct CD disk on a computer without a CD-R, simply use the Direct CD program to temporarily convert the disk to a standard CD ROM disk. You can then convert the disk back to a Direct CD later for use on the original computer.

Keep in mind that every time you change the Direct CD disk or add new preference files, it will write a new file to the CD. For this reason, we recommend that you only use about 450 MB of the CD when you install programs. That way, as you make changes, the CD will slowly add data up to the 650 MB and you won't fully fill the CD.

Here are a few final words of caution. Take care in setting up this type of system. Take it slow and try just a few programs at a time. Read the flags that come up during installation very carefully.

We have not tried this system on every version of every program, so we never know for sure what to expect from one program to the next. Remember that these CD programs will run slightly slower, but at least now you can access older software versions.

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