

## A senior's guide to free photo editing programmes

By Graeme Eggins

A major advantage of digital photography is manipulation – you have the ability to crop, colour-correct and otherwise fiddle with the image on a computer.

According to America's *Consumer Reports*, the photo-editing software that comes with digital cameras is getting better, although it usually emphasizes editing or organising, but not both.

If you want the most flexibility, you'll need to supply your own software.

So what would you like? You can choose ...

- programmes that cost you real money (including those that come “free” when you buy a camera)
- download free programmes from the Net into your computer. (You may also be able to get a copy from a computer magazine CD)
- use free on-line programmes where you upload and download to programmes kept on giant computers overseas (aka “the Cloud”)

Whatever programmes you choose, ALWAYS work on a copy of your original photo. Then, if you stuff it up, you can still go back to your original.

Most experts suggest you make your corrections in the following order:

1. **Rotate** to straighten the horizon
2. **Crop** to highlight the important part of the photo
3. Fix under/over **exposure** also contrast
4. **Convert** to black and white (greyscale) if needed
5. **Repair** any damage
6. **Retouch** and/or soften skin tones etc
7. Add **layers** if you want to
8. Add **text** and/or a frame
9. **Resize** to suit

Note that most programmes allow you to use **Control Z** to undo any change.

### Bought programmes

Experts agree the best professional photo-editing software currently available is **Adobe Photoshop CS3**. It is the de facto industry standard.

However, it costs \$A1,415 and you probably need to take a class in order to learn how to use it effectively. Photoshop CS3 is capable of almost any type of modification you desire, but it is not always easy to grasp.

What's next best?

Two of the best competitive consumer-level photo-editing programs are **Adobe Photoshop Elements 6** and **Corel Paint Shop Pro X2**.

Reviews say Adobe Photoshop Elements 6 (around \$A175) and Paint Shop Pro X2 (about \$A160) are suitable for most home users. Both have similar functionality.

Both programmes have tools to help you download and organise your photos, along with features for re-sizing, colour correction, special effects, image enhancements, light fixes, noise reduction and many other tools.

In the past, these two programs were almost evenly matched but for the latest versions, reviewers give the edge to Photoshop Elements 6.

## Free downloadable programmes

So let's say you don't want to spend money but you'd still like to do more than you can with the "free" programme that came bundled with your scanner or digital camera.

What's good for free? A surprising lot. A quick search on the Net will lead you to free software to create and edit images. Some of this software is developed by individuals, and some is feature limited or an earlier version of a more advanced program.

In some rare instances, there are no strings attached, but most often you will need to provide information to the company by registering, or endure ads or "nag" screens.

Four of the best are **Paint.NET**, **Photoscape**, **Gimp** and **Picasa**

But you can choose from many more, including **Photofiltre**, **PhotoPlus**, **Vicman** (ugly interface) and **Pixia** (very Japanese).

## Paint.NET

<http://www.paint.net/>

**Paint.NET** a free image and photo manipulation software for Windows 2000, XP, and Vista.

It was originally intended as a free replacement for the Microsoft Paint software that comes with Windows, but has grown into a powerful yet simple image and photo editor.

It started development at Washington State University with additional help from Microsoft, and continues to be updated and maintained by some of the students that originally worked on it.

Paint.NET features layers, painting and drawing tools, special effects, unlimited undo history, and levels adjustments. If you want something that's near professional class, download it.

## Photoscape

<http://www.photoscape.org/ps/main/index.php>

**Photoscape** is a French programme that does not include layers. However its features do include:

- Editor: resizing, brightness and colour adjustment, white balance, backlight correction, frames, balloons, mosaic mode, adding text, drawing pictures, cropping, filters, red eye removal, blooming. It also has some very funny filters.
- Page: Make one photo by merging multiple photos at the page frame
- Combine: Make one photo by attaching multiple photos vertically or horizontally
- Print: Print portrait shot, visiting card, passport photo
- Splitter: Divide a photo into multiple parts
- Rename: Change photo file names in batch mode

## GIMP for Windows

<http://www.gimp.org/windows/>

GIMP for Windows is a popular open-source image editor originally developed for Unix/Linux. It has been called the "free Photoshop," and does have an interface and features similar to Photoshop, but with a steep learning curve to match.

Because it is software updated by volunteers, stability and frequency of updates could be an issue; however, many happy users report using GIMP without significant problems.

It offers most of the features of leading image editors.

### **Picasa 3**

<http://picasa.google.com/>

This is Google's photo manager. It is designed to make it easy for you to download pictures from a digital camera, organise them and edit and share them.

Picasa offers you some basic editing and attractive enhancement tools which are very easy to use. It can also turn out posters and collages.

However, Picasa is primarily photo organising software, and if you are not careful from the start, it will take over your photos and organise them the way it likes. Of course you can over-ride it – I think!

### **Online photo editors**

Your third choice in photo editing programmes is to upload your photos and work on them in cyberspace, using free online programmes.

Of course if you do a lot of editing online your internet usage will skyrocket. So be aware you may need a more generous – i.e. expensive - broadband plan.

If you would like to try an online editor, here's a few of the best:

#### **Picture2life.com**

<http://new.picture2life.com/>

Picture2life is in many ways just another online image editor. But what makes it stand apart is its desktop design.

Unlike many classical picture editors with toolboxes and a number of buttons, Picture2life has a descriptive side panel stacked into four vertical tabs – Quick Fixes, One Clicks, All and Featured. Selecting any tab replaces the sidebar with a new sidebar that contains a number of options like Brightness, Colour, Contrast etc.

But, instead of showing them as buttons, it takes your picture and shows you how the picture will look if the effect is applied and uses this as thumbnails for the buttons

#### **Picnik**

[www.picnik.com](http://www.picnik.com)

[Picnik](http://www.picnik.com) seems to be one of the most popular online image editors. You don't need to know anything about photo editing to use Picnik. Most noteworthy feature is its integration with other Web2.0 services.

#### **Pikifx.com**

[pikifx.com](http://pikifx.com)

Pikifx.com emphasises special effects such as added text and borders.

#### **Splashup**

[www.splashup.com](http://www.splashup.com)

Splashup is a web based photo editor that looks just like a desktop application. You can open files from your computer or from all popular photo sharing sites. You can open multiple images in a tabbed environment. It supports the concept of layers, like Gimp and Photoshop. Splashup also has the ability to import images from your webcam.

#### **Windows Live Photo Gallery**

[get.live.com/photogallery](http://get.live.com/photogallery)

Windows Live Photo Gallery gives Picasa a run for its money, with many of the same photo-enhancing and sharing features—red-eye reduction, exposure adjustment, cropping, colour, sharpen, and auto-adjust.

What's more, Microsoft serves up histogram adjustment, panorama creation, and photo-CD burning.