

Learning how to take advantage of automation in Photoshop is key to helping you speed up certain tasks. While computers are not that good at making subjective creative decisions for individual images, they excel at repetition and automation so it makes sense to leverage this power to streamline your workflow whenever you can. Photoshop and Bridge offer a number of ways that you can automate common procedures. To start this module off, let's take a look at the Image Processor, one of the most useful automated features for converting files into another format.

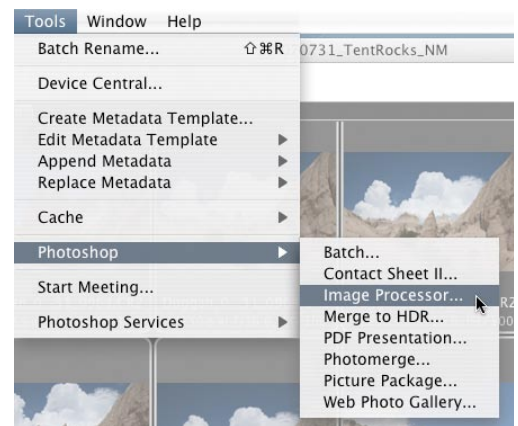
## Image Processor

The basic functions of the Image Processor enable you to save a batch of selected files in the JPEG, PSD or TIFF formats or convert a set of files simultaneously to all three formats. You can resize the images to fit within a certain pixel dimension, as well as include an ICC color profile, and copyright metadata. The dialog also features the ability to run an Action on the files before they are saved in the specified format. This extends the Image Processor's functionality to include a variety of processes that can be recorded as Actions, making it a very customizable feature.

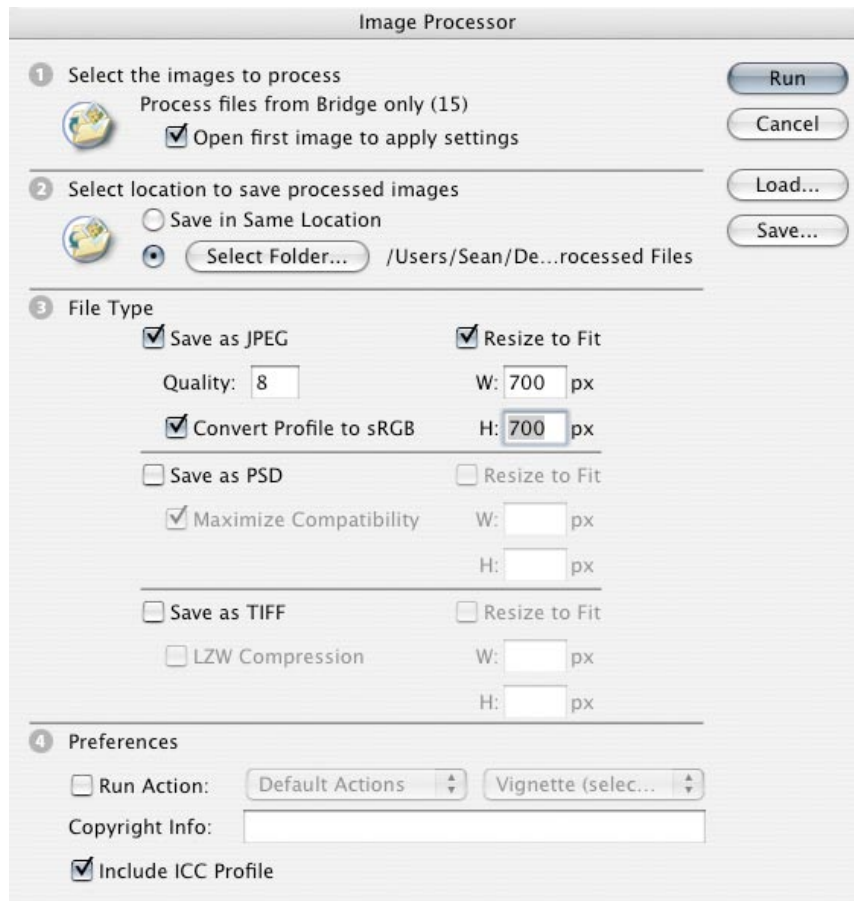
Image Processor can be accessed from the main menu in Photoshop by choosing **File > Scripts > Image Processor**, but the easiest way to use it is to access it through Adobe Bridge. Simply select the thumbnails of the images you want to process and choose **Tools > Photoshop > Image Processor** (Figure 1).

If you access the Image Processor from within Photoshop, the top section lets you choose between processing the currently open files or selecting images from your hard drive. If you access it from Bridge using specifically selected files, it will show that the selected files from Bridge will be processed and it will list the number of files in parentheses. If you have selected no thumbnails it will process all of the images in the folder that is currently being browsed in Bridge.

**Note:** The Image Processor works with Photoshop (PSD), JPEG, and camera raw files.



**Figure 1.** Accessing the Image Processor from Adobe Bridge CS3.



**Figure 2.** The Image Processor dialog.

## The Image Processor Deconstructed

Using the Image Processor is pretty simple since the interface practically walks you through the process. I'll just clarify some of the options below.

### Section 1, Select the Images to Process:

If you are targeting raw files, the Open First Image to Apply Settings option will open the first file in the group and allow you to apply Camera Raw settings that will then be applied to all the other files in the batch. This is useful if all the files were shot in the same lighting and can benefit from the same set of adjustments or white balance correction. For PSD and JPEG file you can use it to convert to a profile for the first image and all the subsequent images.

### Section 3, File Type:

**Save as JPEG** allows you to choose a quality level. The higher the number, the better the quality, with 12 as the maximum quality setting.

**Save as PSD** allows you to choose the Maximize Compatibility option. This is recommended if you want your layered files to properly preview in other applications.

**Save as TIFF** allows you to choose the lossless LZW compression scheme to yield a smaller file size.

The **Resize to Fit** controls let you specify the maximum height and width of the image in pixels. For example, if you enter 800x800 pixels, the longest dimension of the image, be it height or width, will be 800 pixels. This is the same functionality offered by the Fit Image command that was discussed in the previous **Working with Actions in Photoshop CS3** article, and it allows you to resize verticals and horizontals using the same settings.

#### Section 4, Preferences:

**Run Action** lets you choose an Action set and specify the particular Action within that set. With this option you can customize the functionality of the Image Processor so that it does more than just resize and save files in a different format.

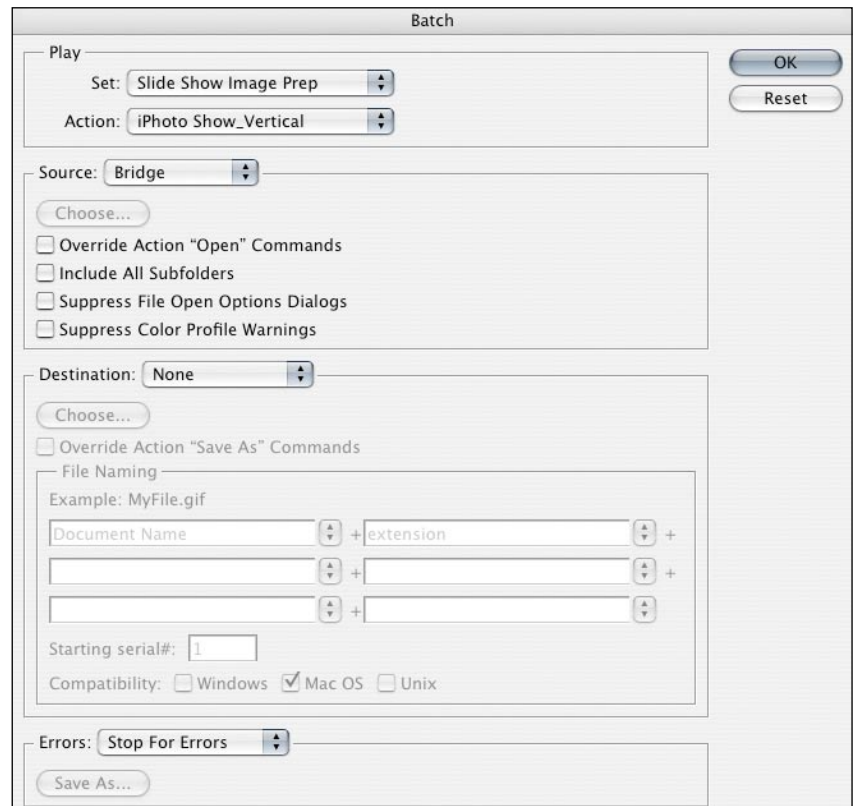
**Copyright Info:** I feel that the layout of this feature in the dialog needs to be re-designed since it's not immediately clear how it works (especially since there is no check box). If you have previously used the File Info dialog (or similar dialogs in another program) to add any copyright information to the IPTC copyright meta-data fields, it will be automatically included in the converted files. Any text that you enter in the text field in the Image Processor dialog will overwrite existing IPTC copyright information.

**Include ICC Profile:** If an ICC profile is already present in the file, this option embeds the color profile into the converted files. Since the presence of profiles ensures that your images are displayed correctly (as long as they are being displayed by programs that are ICC-savvy, that is), this option is always recommended.

### Batch Processing with Actions

Batch processing with actions is an excellent way to save time when you need to apply the same tasks and commands to a group of files. You can run an action on a group of images that are contained in a folder on your hard drive, or from selected files in Adobe Bridge.

In Adobe Bridge, select several images you want to batch process by command clicking (Mac) or control clicking (PC) on their thumbnails. If you have a group of thumbnails that are contiguous to each other (i.e., like a row of images), you can click on one and then shift-click on the thumbnail at the end of the row to select them all. Then choose **Tools > Photoshop > Batch**. If you want to start from within Photoshop and select a specific folder on your hard drive, choose **File>Automate>Batch**.



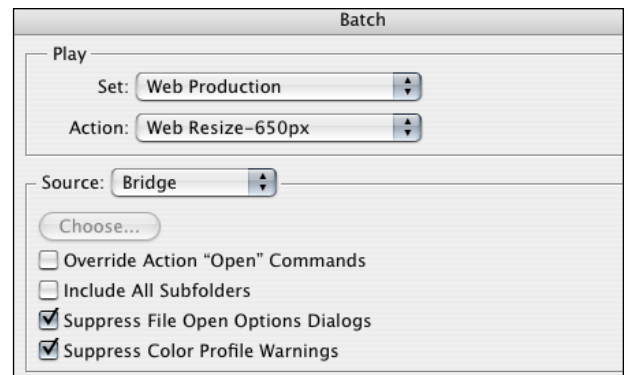
**Figure 3.** The Batch dialog.

The Batch dialog is divided into four parts:

**Play, Source, Destination,** and **Errors.**

**Play:** In the top section (Play), you tell Photoshop which Action you want to use. If you had the action highlighted in the Actions palette before you brought up this dialog, then it should already be selected for you. If it is not, choose the correct set and the correct action.

**Source:** In the Source section, you specify which images you want to process with the action. You can choose from a folder, opened images, imported images, or the selected files Bridge. This section also contains four options that control how the actions behave regarding open commands in the action itself, images in subfolders, file open dialogs, and color profile warnings.



**Figure 4.** The Play and Source sections of the Batch dialog.

**Override Action "Open" Commands** – If there are any specific steps in the action that open specific files, choosing this will ignore those steps and use the selected images instead. Do not use this unless the action does contain a step to open a previously saved file or it will ignore the files that you have selected.

**Include All Subfolders** – If you are targeting a folder of images, any files contained within subfolders will also be processed.

**Suppress File Open Options Dialog** – This is useful when batching actions on camera raw image files where you do not want the Camera RAW dialog to open for each image. If checked, then the default or previously specified Camera Raw settings will be used.

**Suppress Color Profile Warnings** – This will turn off any profile mismatch or missing profile messages.

I generally choose to suppress both file open options dialogs and color profile warnings if I am running a batch on a large group of images. If these are left unchecked, then you have to sit at the computer and deal with a dialog every time a file opens up (not exactly a hands-free, time-saving experience). I should note that before I run actions on large groups of images, I have usually already resolved any conflicting color profile issues, which is why I turn off the color profile warnings at this point.

**Destination:** In the Destination section, you tell Photoshop where to place the files once the action is completed.



**Figure 5.** The Destination section of the Batch dialog.

**None** – this will leave the files open in Photoshop without saving them (unless you want to immediately check the files and will be saving them as a duplicate files yourself, this is generally not a good idea, especially if you're dealing with lots of files).

**Save and Close** – this is also not one of my favorites, because it overwrites the original file in the current location. The reason I do not care for this is that it could cause problems if the action does not run as expected. I never want to overwrite my original files when I run an action.

**Folder** – I use this last option 99% of time because lets me save the processed files to another location and it preserves my original images in case there was a problem with the way the action affected the files.

**Override Action “Save As” Commands:** This option and the various permutations it can assume, can vary, depending on other settings in the Batch dialog, as well as on specific steps in the action itself.

**Scenario #1:** If this is turned on (checked) the processed files are saved to the destination folder specified in the Destination section of the Batch dialog. If you have selected Save and Close in the Destination menu then the files are saved back to their original folder. In both cases the files are saved with their original names or the names you specify in the File Naming section of the Batch dialog box.

**Scenario #2:** If this option is not selected (unchecked) and the action includes a Save As command, the files will be saved into the folder specified by the Save As command in the action, and any folder specified in the Destination section of the Batch command will not be used.

**Scenario #3 (“Danger, Will Robinson!”):** Additionally, if you do not select this option and the Save As command in the action uses a specific filename, the Batch command overwrites the any file with the same name (the file name specified in the action) each time it processes an image. This can cause big problems since the action will overwrite each previously processed file, leaving you with only a single file at the end of the batch process.

**Scenario #4:** If you want to batch process files using the original file names in the folder you specified in the Destination section, create a step in the action that saves the file. Then, when you create the batch, select the Override Action “Save As” Command (checked) and specify a destination folder.

**Scenario #5:** If you specify new file names in the Batch dialog and do not choose Override Action “Save As” Command, then Photoshop will save your processed images twice: once with the new name in the specified folder, and once with the original name in the folder specified by the Save As command in the action.

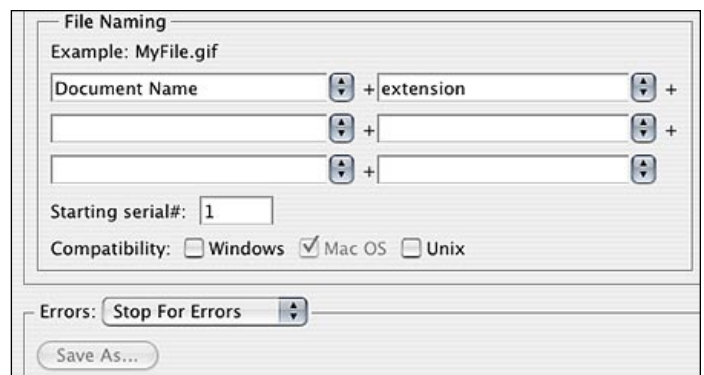
**Note:** To use this option, the action must contain a Save As command. If no Save As command exists, the Batch command will not save the processed files.

**File Naming:** This contains some fairly conventional file naming options that apply *if writing files to a new folder*. Select different name elements from the menus or enter custom text into the fields to be added into the default names for all files.

**Important:** You must include at least one field that is unique for every file (for example, file name, serial number, or serial letter) to prevent files from overwriting each other.

**Starting Serial Number** specifies the starting number for any serial number fields. Serial letter fields always start with the letter “A” for the first file.

**Compatibility:** Makes file names compatible with Windows, Mac OS, and Unix operating systems (do not use slashes in file names as this conflicts with characters reserved by the Unix system).



**Figure 6.** The File Naming and Errors sections of the Batch dialog.

**Errors:** Finally, in the very last section, Errors, you can control how the program behaves if it runs into any errors while the batch operation is in progress.

**Stop For Errors** – as the name suggests, this halts the action until you confirm the error message.

**Log Errors to File** – Records each error in a file without halting the action. If errors are logged to a file, a message will appear after the action has run. To review the error file, open with a text editor after the Batch command has run.

Batch processing is great when you have a lot of images to deal with and they all need the same treatment. I once had to convert to CMYK, resize and sharpen over 500 product shots for a client's catalogue. Having a good action and batch processing meant that I could start the action on the folder of files and go to lunch. When I returned from my break, the batch had finished and the images were ready for delivery. Now that's what I call better living through technology!

## A Word of Advice on Batch Processing

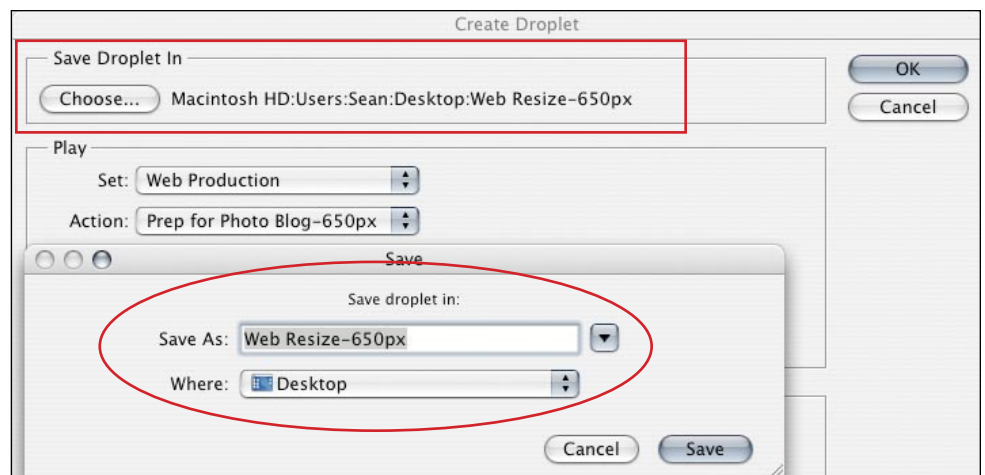
Before you get excited and start batch processing bulging folders of images, take the time to make sure that you've thought of everything and that the action is "bullet-proof" and up to the task at hand.

Will it affect all images the same way? Do the images need to be in a certain state (i.e., no layers) in order for the action to run properly? Was it designed for a horizontal image only? Will it create the wrong result if it's run on a vertical image? These are the type of questions you want to ask and answer before you start a big batch process job. *Thorough testing of the action is recommended before you unleash it on a folder of important images.* Investing the time up front to make sure the action works perfectly will ensure a successful batch with no unpleasant surprises. And, just to insulate yourself against unexpected disasters, remember to always save your processed files to a separate folder so that the original files are preserved in case there is a problem.

## Droplets

A Droplet is another way to run a commonly-used action on a single image or group of images without actually having to deal with the Batch dialog settings. You can create a droplet from an existing action by choosing **File > Automate > Create Droplet**.

The Batch dialog will open with a slight change at the very top: you need to choose a location where the droplet will be saved (Figure 7). Next, select the action you want to use in the droplet, specify any file handling options, such as ignore color profiles, and choose a destination for the processed files and click OK.



**Figure 7.** Creating a Droplet from a specific Action.

To use a Droplet to process images, just drag folder or image icon onto the droplet icon and the batch will start automatically, even launching Photoshop if it is not currently running. The nice thing about droplets is that they save you from having to enter Batch dialog settings every time you want to run that action on a folder of images. For high-volume production environments, Droplets can save a lot of time.

### Droplets & Cross-Platform Compatibility

If you create a droplet on a Windows system and want to use it on a Mac computer, you have to update it for use on the Mac platform before you can use it. To do this, after you have copied the file to the Mac, simply drag the droplet icon onto the Photoshop application icon and Photoshop will open and update the droplet. Droplets created on a Mac can be used on Windows computers with no updating as long as you add the “.exe” suffix after their name.



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**Figure 8.** A droplet icon.



**Figure 9.** Dragging the target folder of images onto a droplet icon will launch the batch process and apply the droplet's action to all of the files in the folder.

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