

Making Photos Larger ... It Can Be Done

by Kevin Slimp, August 2006

Clothing fashions aren't the only styles that have gone retro. Lately, I've noticed it's become fashionable to offer Photoshop training for newspapers again.

A couple of years ago I discussed the upswing in software training, since the advent of Adobe InDesign, with a friend who was also in the training business. We agreed on a couple of points. First, it seemed like everyone wanted training in InDesign. Second, getting folks to come out for Photoshop training was like **pulling teeth**.

I did a national tour with a buddy a couple of summers ago. I led the sessions on InDesign and Acrobat. He led the sessions on Photoshop and Advanced Photoshop. You guessed it. The InDesign and Acrobat sessions garnered four times as many registrations as the Photoshop classes.

Lately, however, I'm noticing more e-mails requesting Photoshop training than just about anything else. Especially from community newspapers.

And classes sponsored by press associations are filling up. Go figure.

One question that seems to get asked in every Photoshop class is, "***How can I take a small photo, provided by a client or downloaded from a web site, and make it bigger in the paper?***"

I usually respond with something like, "Just take the photo and stretch it out on the page." You should see the looks I get.

The truth is you can just stretch it out on the page, but the results will probably be terrible. A few years back, an editor friend told me he regularly took photos and stretched them three to four times their original sizes on the Quark page. This I had to see. A few days later, I received an envelope with several copies of his newspapers. The photos looked awful. I called him and told



The user interface is very friendly in Alien Skin's Blow Up



This image was enlarged 400 percent in Photoshop.

him those were the worst photos I'd ever seen in a newspaper. His response: "I knew you'd say that."

Several months ago I wrote a review of onOne Software's **Genuine Fractals**; I've since recommended the product to several photo editors. This plug-in helps Photoshop users get better results when enlarging pictures.

Recently, I received a copy of **Blow Up**, from Alien Skin Software. I decided to see how it compares with Genuine Fractals.

First, remember that both of these products are Photoshop plug-ins. This means they both work as "add ons" to Photoshop, working within the application. After installing both plug-ins, the user will find them under the File>Automate menu. Alien Skin's marketing folks say that Blow Up works better than any other plug-in that enlarges images. So I put it to the test.

Basically, it worked like this. I began with three photos. **The first was a 72 ppi image of a golfer, about 3 inches wide** that I shot a couple of months ago. For this comparison, I enlarged the image by 200 percent, using Blow Up without changing any of its default settings. Next, I did the same thing using Genuine Fractals. I placed the photos on an InDesign page, side by side, along with the original photo enlarged 200 percent using Photoshop alone. I printed the page on a Xerox color proofer and took it around my office for people to view. I asked which of the three images looked the best. Of the seven people I asked, all seven said the image done in Photoshop alone was much worse than the others. 6 of the 7 thought the image enhanced with Blow Up and Genuine Fractals looked the same.

Next, I took two photos. One was very small, approximately 2 inches wide at 72 ppi, and the other was approximately 5 inches wide at 72 ppi. The first image was similar to one taken from a Web site. The second was better, but at an 85 or 100 line screen, the photo would have to print pretty small to retain its quality. In this test, I used a feature available in Blow Up called



This image was enlarged 400 percent using Alien Skin's Blow Up plug-in for Photoshop. Notice the smooth lines.



“Adding Grain.” One of my chief concerns about using a plug-in to enlarge an image is the plasticized look that commonly appears. Images can appear overly smooth, as if they made of - or covered with - plastic.

According to the Blow Up instruction guide, the Adding Grain feature simulates film grain. So I increased the grain amount till I could see grain begin to appear in the preview window.

I enlarged the first, smaller, image 400 percent. The second, larger, image I enlarged 200 percent.

When I asked my colleagues which of the larger images looked best, six of seven selected the Blow Up photo. One thought the Genuine Fractals image looked better. All said both looked much better than the image enlarged in Photoshop alone.

When I asked them about the smaller image, which had been enlarged 400 percent, five thought the Blow Up enhanced image looked best. Two thought the images edited using Blow Up and Genuine Fractals were about the same.

I agreed with my colleagues in all three instances. Without tweaking either plug-in, both seemed to provide similar results. But the Add Graining feature significantly improved the look of the images when printed at a 100 line screen.

Here are a few other details concerning Blow Up. Blow Up resizes multi-layered documents without flattening. It also offers the ability to create a new image when resizing, leaving the original untouched. Blow Up works with 8, 16, and 32-bit images. It’s quick and easy to use. I like it.

MSRP of Blow Up is \$199 (US). Upgrades are available for registered users of any other Alien Skin Product for \$99 (US). Blow Up works with both Macs (OS 10.3.9 or later) and Windows (2000 or XP). For more information, visit www.alienskin.com.



This image was enlarged 300 percent using Photoshop alone.



This image was enlarged 300 percent using Alien Skin's Blow Up plug-in for Photoshop.

