

Photoshop, Premiere and Alpha Channels

Creating images with alpha channels in Photoshop

Introduction

When we create a title for example, in Premiere, we can easily make its background transparent by selecting "alpha channel" in the transparency window. This is the case because Premiere automatically creates an alpha channel for the title, a part of the image which can be selected as transparent.

We can also make parts of other images created in say Photoshop, transparent when imported into Premiere, but to do this we have to manually create our own alpha channel for that image ie. manually define which part of the image will be transparent . . .

1/. Open the image you want to work on in Photoshop. Open the Channels palette from the Windows menu.

Assuming the image is an RGB colour image, you will see four channels: a composite RGB channel and separate Red, green and Blue channels. When we create an alpha channel it will appear as a new channel, labeled "alpha 1".

2/. Before creating an alpha channel we have to select those parts of the image we want to be transparent when the image is imported into Premiere.

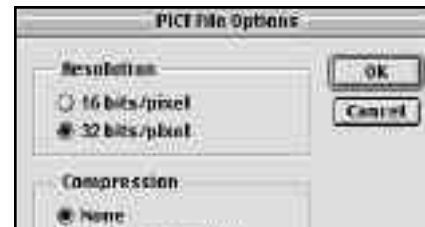
To do this we use any of the selection tools in Photoshop's tool palette, eg. the magic wand.

When you make your selection, select the area in the image, which you do not want to be transparent in Premiere



above: the save selection as channel button at the bottom of the channels palette

below: the channel window in Photoshop showing the alpha channel created using it.



3/. Having made your selection, you have to create an alpha channel, to do this you use the "save selection as channel" button at the bottom of the channels palette.

This automatically creates the alpha channel you need in Premiere and masks the part of the image you wish to keep opaque.

4/. You have to save your image as a PICT file to import it into Premiere and before you do this you must flatten any layers you may have in your Photoshop image. To do this, select "flatten layers" from the layers menu.

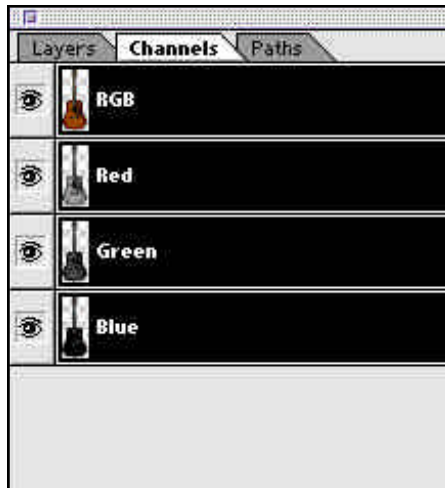
When you save your image as a PICT you will be given the various options. Choose 32bit/pixel.

Note

Premiere generally works with a screen which has a length to width ratio of 4:3 (the standard TV screen ratio), therefore images imported into Premiere regardless of size, need to conform to this same 4:3 ratio.

To make sure of this, use canvas size from the image menu in Photoshop to adjust the canvas overall size of an image without distorting it.

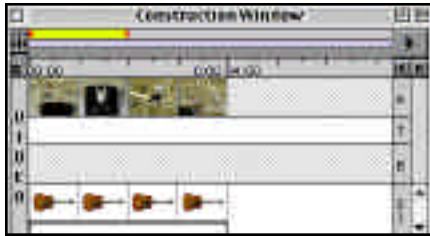
5/. Close Photoshop and open Premiere.



Four basic channels shown for an RGB image in Photoshop's channels window



An image imported into Premiere can take on a squashed appearance if you fail to change its canvas size to a 4:3 width to height ratio.

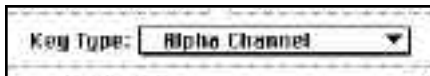


The construction window showing the stretched image in the super-imposition channel



above: the transparency window

below: the key type selected to alpha channel



The page peel icon and above it the preview of the super-imposed image in the transparency window.

6/. Once in Premiere, choose import from the file menu to place your image in your Premiere project window. The image is now a clip and can be dragged to the construction window.

In order to make a part of the image transparent it should first be placed into one of Premiere's "super-imposition" channels (not video channels A or B).

You can create multiple superimposition channels, labelled S1, S2, S3 etc by selecting "add / delete tracks" from the project menu.

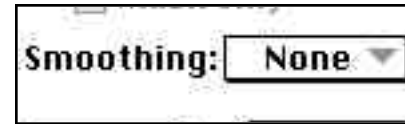
Once it is in one of the S channels you can click on your image to select it and drag its right side to extend it to the desired length.

7/. Making sure that the image is selected in the construction window, select "transparency" from the Clip menu. The transparency window appears.

8/. With the transparency window open, select "Alpha Channel" from the "key type" pop-up menu

To see a preview of the effect of your image super-imposed on the clip 'below' it, click on the page peel icon in the transparency window.

Click on OK to apply the transparent effect.



Problems

If when you apply the alpha channel in the transparency window, the part of the image you wanted opaque is transparent and vice-versa click on the "reverse key" button in the transparency window in order to make transparent areas opaque and opaque areas transparent.

If the edges of your superimposed image are jagged or have a white fringe you can help to cure this by changing the "smoothing" option in the transparency window from "none" to "high".