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The Fine Art of “People Removal:” Photo Editing Simplified

A sample copy writer article by TMAF Art & Design

We’ve all had it happen. You have the perfect angle, the perfect lighting, the perfect moment to capture your once-in-a-lifetime photograph, and find yourself photo-bombed. Take heart in the fact that an editing pro can likely fix your image with some Photoshop Magic. Here’s an example of what creative photo editing can do for you. Whether it’s Uncle Ned, throwing the peace sign as you snap the wedding kiss, or a local brat, stomping through your frame during the perfect sunset, there is hope for your winning snapshot. Try to remember this during your moment of frustration: Take as many shots as you can by electing the photo-burst option or multi-shot on your camera or mobile phone.

Adobe Photoshop has many novel layering options. They allow a professional photo editor to patch a faulty photograph by layering images on top of it. New layers exist as independent objects in the Photoshop file. They can be turned on and off to view the layers underneath. This is called a “non-destructive edit,” because the new layers can be easily removed, revealing the original. My most recent example occurred with a photograph of a soccer game.

It was an emotional moment when a forward walked away from the goal, holding his arms high, after scoring the winning point. It would have been perfect, if not for a handful of spectators giving obscene gestures from the bleachers. But wait, we have multiple snapshots of the scene, and luckily one of those depicts the same bleachers from a few milliseconds earlier. With creative use of the “polygonal lasso tool,” a professional can copy the bleachers from moments earlier, and paste this over the top of the perpetrators. A quick application of “feathering” or gradient masks erases all indications that the image has been retouched.

Having a plethora of images of the same scene is the best advantage, when a large portion of the image contains offensive content that needs to be hidden. In some circumstances, however, those extra photographs are just not present. One possibility to mask the image is using stock photography from a website such as Shutterstock.com or Alamy.com. I recently had such a job. It was a modern black and white photograph of siblings gathered in an alley – a very touching family photo of an army officer, with his younger brothers in arms-length. The expressions were perfect, the graffiti on the wall behind them, not so much. Enter Alamy with a twenty-dollar stock image of a concrete wall. A bit of creative patching, sets that new image beside the brothers and erases all traces of the vandalism.

There are several fans of two particular Photoshop Tools called the “Patch Tool” and the “Healing Brush Tool.” These applications can repair isolated portions of an image by copying segments from one location – “sampling” – and pasting them over an imperfection in another area. Unlike the methods I’ve described so far, which create new layers that can be turned off, these tools are termed “destructive edits.” They altar the image on the same layer. Yes, you can use the undo command to take back your edits, but it becomes difficult to preserve desired edits while stepping backwards to remove edits that you’re not happy with. The Patch Tool and Healing Brush are among Photoshop’s oldest “legacy” tools, so there are pros who swear by them. Personally though, if I’m going to edit the image “destructively,” I will always opt for the modern convenience of Content Aware Fill, which I will talk about next.

Technology can do marvelous things, and I have yet to hit on Photoshop’s most dynamic corrective tool. Content Aware Fill is an intelligent tool with an uncanny ability to erase our oversights. In the simplest possible terms, it approximates what the photograph would look like if the offending person or object was not there. It edits destructively but, unlike the Patch Tool and the Healing Brush Tool, it welds and diffuses the repair into the photograph, erasing sharp edges and blending colors, to hide the touchup from the viewer. Content Aware Fill works splendidly to remove power lines and airplanes from the cloudy sky, picnickers from grassy fields, and offenders from large abstract and solid color backgrounds. It may need additional retouching when a background includes pattered stones, bricks and fences. For quality photo editing consider TMAF Art & Design, where editing time is billed at the great rate of \$20/hour.