enuine Fractals - by Karl-Peter Gottschalk

he most incredible Photoshop plug-in of the last year is not one that looks flashy on the surface, has an amazing drop-dead gorgeous interface or produces wild-looking images that send your neighbours green with envy. It is a solid and quiet little performer that does its work by virtue of some truly cutting edge mathematics - fractals - to create levels of compression and expansion that have been hitherto impossible without major compromises in image quality.

t blows traditional image editing software resizing methods like bicubic or nearest neighbour

interpolation out of the water. Altamira's Genuine Fractals 1.0 is, in short, revolutionary. I have been using it to create images in Photoshop that I want to send as email attachments without clogging up all the phone lines from here to Europe for hours on end.

Because those images are Web page design roughs or are to be used in a Web site with further work, but must first be seen and approved by a client in another country, fast, then I have been creating moderately sized originals. This is Australia and I do not have the luxury of affordable ISDN or cable connections to the 'net.
The images in question have multiple layers which preclude me from saving them as GIFs or JPEGs, so I have exported them as Genune Fractals files with the suffix .fif, run them through Aladdin's DropStuff to further compress them, and then emailed them to the client. They have the Genuine Fractals plug-ins on their Macs, so all they do is import the file and expand it to whatever setting is appropriate for their needs.

Incredible file size savings

By using this method, I have squashed a typical Photoshop file of 208K down to 46K with no visible loss of quality, and then when it arrives on the other side the client simply reconstitutes it back to its original size, or bigger if they so desire. I could choose to squash the file even more by choosing Tiny Impressionistic rather than my usual Small Photographic but I am so impressed with the savings I am getting right now. However I have tried the bigger compression ratio on similar images in the past, and frankly I could not tell the difference in terms of visual quality onscreen.

Unfortunately none of my work is currently for anything other than Web reproduction, so I have not put Genuine Fractals to the test with large continuous tone images to be reproduced in four-colour offset or as traditional photographic prints. But I have heard reports of incredible image quality from very small originals processed with Genuine Fractals at the Pro Graphics Encode Bias settings.

Hardware not such an issue

What this means is that you are no longer limited by the amount of computer hardware you can afford. Once, if you were to be outputting to A3 or larger, you would have needed a lot of processing power. Now you can do it on a far smaller machine.

Compare the cost of a Genuine Fractals CD with a bigger hard drive and more RAM, even at today's prices, and the Fractals alternative is by far the cheaper. The fact that .fif files are so small also means you can standardise on smaller electromagnetic storage media such as Zips or Imation SuperDisks to send your massive images out to a bureau.

You may also discover as I did that Genuine Fractals has made the telecommuting life just a little bit sweeter again.

Karl-Peter Gottschalk
<mailto:karlpeter@bigpond.com>