Like digital spoonfuls of alphabet soup, graphics files are a good example of acronym gibberish. Online, you've got JPEGs and GIFs with the occasional PNG mixed in here and there. Offline, you've got PICT files, TIFFs, PPATs, BMPs, and hordes of application-specific formats like the Photoshop PSD. With all these letters, converting from one format to another could easily turn into a nasty case of indigestion. Fortunately, there's GraphicConverter.

Unlike many programs that can only recognize the most common picture formats, GraphicConverter is far from picky when it comes to alphabetical persuasion. No matter what the format, if it's any sort of picture file then there's a strong chance this program will be able to open it. Frequent updates keep it alive and kicking—at last count, GraphicConverter could import over 100 of the most common Mac, IBM, ATARI, and Amiga graphics formats and export to any of forty.

More than just a conversion utility, GraphicConverter is also a picture editor. Its capabilities are a far cry from high-end imaging applications like Photoshop, but there's still plenty of room to manipulate and monkey around. You can reduce the total number of colors in the image, for example. You can alter a picture's contrast and brightness settings, then adjust the gamma. You can work with a file's alpha channel, or add one. You can even create animated GIFs. The forty-eight improvements in version 3.5 include a smorgasbord of bug fixes, expanded import options, and improved compliance with Mac OS 8.5

No matter what you do, beware monster-sized files. Like any image program, GraphicConverter can move slower than molasses when conditions turn megabyte-heavy. In

some situations, though, this program can one-up even the mighty Photoshop. I once had to open a PC file saved in Photoshop's native format, and it was GraphicConverter that saved the day. For whatever reason, Photoshop just couldn't hack it.

GraphicConverter's interface is heavily menu-based. In spite of four floating palettes—an information window; a toolbar; a thumbnail of the entire image; and a magnification window —most of the program's abilities can only be accessed from the menu bar.

here are ample keyboard shortcuts available and contextual menu support as well, but expect to put your mouse and your wrist through their paces when the task at hand calls for anything beyond minor cosmetic changes. The four palettes have a habit of getting in the way when you have more than one file open or need to resize the window frequently, although there are preference settings that attempt to address this.

One of the best features of GraphicConverter beyond its conversion capabilities is the ability to browse through all the graphics in a folder you specify. The program will return a list of thumbnails which can be sorted in whatever fashion strikes your fancy, and clicking on one displays a larger preview in an adjacent pane of the browser window. All these previews take a few seconds to pop up, depending on the size and number of the files, but it's still more efficient than manually opening ten or twenty files at once. Aside from using the browser, you can also have GraphicConverter display a slide show.

uttons as well as keyboard shortcuts allow you to throw the current picture in the trash, rename it, or create an alias. Best of all, if you don't quite remember a file's exact name, you can run a file search and then slide show through the results.

Although slide shows can be turned into hard copy by printing a catalog of images, getting them to look their best can be tricky. For single images, you can print part of the image or all of it, and have GraphicConverter reduce or enlarge it to fit the page if necessary. But catalog printing can be dicey in that you can't see a preview beforehand. Assuming you want uniform size, the number of rows and columns on each page depends on what resolution you print at—as the resolution gets larger, the printed image gets smaller. If your pictures are all the same size, all is well. But if you've got a mixture of sizes with different resolutions, layout will be more of a chore. This is alleviated by an option to create single page layouts by hand, but doing so requires having all the images open at once.

For all its file-format savvy, GraphicConverter's knowledge is by no means exhaustive. I found this out when I tried to open an EPS file, and received this message.

t least the program offers a solution, instead of just giving up.

In ATPM 4.11, we reviewed Adobe Fireworks, a graphics program that specializes in the production of web graphics. Unlike that program, GraphicConverter isn't really a web specialist, nor does it have bragging rights when it comes to drawing editable paths with bitmap attributes. On the other hand, GraphicConverter still has plenty of editing power to shrink file sizes without emptying your wallet. The manual weighs in at a whopping 110 pages, and although they aren't the place to learn about the overall intricacies of file conversion and compression, they meticulously go through each and every menu item.

Funky, foreign files could be lurking around any corner, waiting to frazzle your nerves with never-before-heard-of suffixes. Think of GraphicConverter as a batch converter on steroids. With it, you can be assured that a picture, no matter how it is dressed, is still just a picture.