

Corel PhotoPaint 9

GLOARIOUS GRAPHICS AT NO COST

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Corel has decided to make the Linux version of its image editing software PhotoPaint 9 available free-of-charge on the Internet. We decided to take a closer look at this gift.

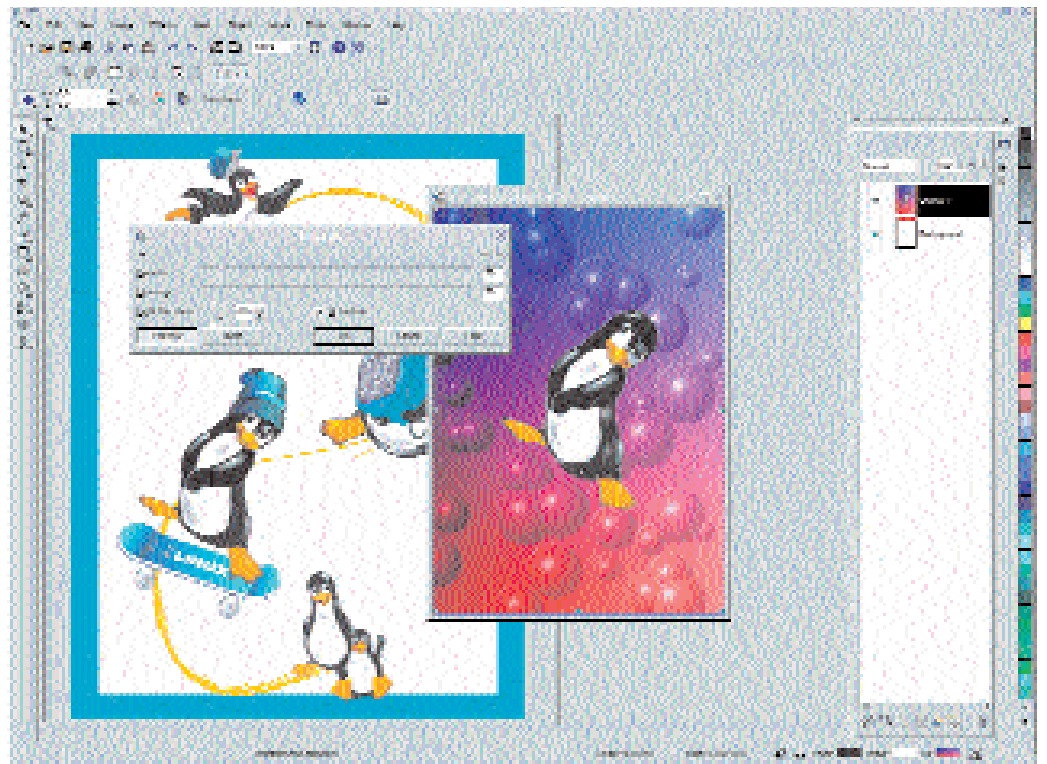


Fig. 1: A penguin in PhotoPaint 9. In the background the relevant filter is blowing bubbles

PhotoPaint 9 is an image editing program for bitmap and raster images. But although the program can import vector graphics it is not suitable for manipulating them. This task can be handled by Corel Draw which will be appearing for Linux shortly. However, Corel Draw will not be free-of-charge.

The free download of PhotoPaint is available on Corel's Linux web site, making it a direct competitor for GIMP, the "market leader" until now in Linux image editing programs. Installation worked perfectly. As is the case in WordPerfect Office 2000 the user is forced to select the directories pre-specified by Corel.

The help uses the established WordPerfect format of HTML pages. It is detailed and successful overall. Unique to this type of program is the integrated tutorial. This introduces the beginner to working with PhotoPaint 9 in several tutorial sessions.

Given that PhotoPaint runs under *Wine* the speed is pretty good. However, the program has difficulty dealing with large images or extensive manipulation. Consequently, the minimum hardware requirements must be observed. A Pentium 200 with 64 MB RAM and at least 170 MB free space on your hard disk are needed, but the faster the computer, the faster the

working speed. In this respect PhotoPaint compares unfavourably with the GIMP. However, unlike WordPerfect Office 2000, no further errors occurred in the graphical display during our test.

Initially, the screen may appear crowded, especially as all the elements such as the symbol bars can be removed or repositioned in every conceivable way. At the same time, the user is almost overwhelmed by the array of tools on offer. But if you take the time to get used to it, the graphical user interface offers easier, more intuitive user prompting than GIMP. Users switching from Windows will feel more at home in PhotoPaint.

This is especially true when using graphics tools. For example, to draw a simple rectangle all you have to do is select the appropriate tool. In GIMP you have to call the elaborate masking functions. The shadow function is also simple to use. If you want to add a shadow to an object all you have to do is select the tool and then click on the object in question. You can then simply drag the shadow with the mouse until it lies in the right direction.

As in WordPerfect Office 2000, Corel has integrated a real-time preview feature into PhotoPaint. Before you use a filter on the picture, PhotoPaint shows you how it will look. Unfortunately, features like this again demonstrate the need for a powerful computer.

GIMP requires extra development for plug-ins. PhotoPaint can in theory make use of PhotoShop plug-ins already used widely under Windows, thanks to the Wine emulator. However, the support under Linux is somewhat limited, so we were unable to make the "KPT Convolver" plug-in run in PhotoPaint. When a filter works and when it doesn't rather depends on luck – all you can do is try it out. In general, though, all filters with a separate screen, as well as filters located deep in the operating system scarcely have a chance in Linux.

PhotoPaint recognises file filters for all current graphics formats. Only a few animation filters, such as AVI, MPEG and QTW formats, had to be left out when converting to Linux. This is a shame when it comes to saving animations. All you have left is the GIF format with all its limitations.

Professional users searching for exotic graphics formats will be disappointed. However, Linux users will be reassured by the availability of filters for XPM and GIMP formats.

If you want to convert lots of images or need to perform the same sequence of editing operations on them you can make use of PhotoPaint's "Batch Processing" feature. PhotoPaint will process specific script commands for a list of image files without the user having to intervene. In this way you could easily convert a CD full of pictures in GIF format into JPEG format.

As with all other version 9 Corel programs, PhotoPaint now supports the direct output of pictures in PDF format. PhotoPaint uses the SANE package for integrating scanners (as does GIMP) which should be included with every distribution, guaran-



Quick as a flash you've already forgotten about loading "GDI32.DLL" ...

No longer unusual: program installation is just like in Windows.

teeing the integration of future generation scanners for the first time.

The colour management system is many steps ahead of GIMP and will satisfy the needs of semi-professionals and even professionals. Apart from predefined colour palettes and use with different colour formats, such as CMYK and 48 bit RGB, as well as suitable colour separation, PhotoPaint also offers ICC profiles for colour management. With the colour manager provided (*Tools/Color Manager/Color Management*) even different connected devices can be matched to one another using profiles. This feature means that colours will be printed true to their appearance on the monitor.

What starts with colour management continues with the print functions. The options you can set extend from printable trimming marks via colour separation to the exact positioning of the image on the paper. At this point GIMP just has to throw in the towel. With these functions PhotoPaint clearly stretches way beyond just home use. In fact, it could only be beaten on Linux by porting Adobe PhotoShop.

Conclusion

PhotoPaint 9 far outperforms GIMP, especially as far as colour management is concerned. With Corel's image editing program we now have a professional, yet free-of-charge alternative to GIMP. In particular, those who cannot or could not get used to working with GIMP will soon feel at home with PhotoPaint, as long as they have a fast computer.

This new product is good news for the Linux fan. The invasion of professional applications is gathering more and more momentum. ■

Info

Corel Linux web site
<http://linux.corel.com/>
