



Jim Endicott

# PowerPoint toolbars save time, money and aggravation

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The other day I had a new business phone line installed, and the guy who made it all happen looked like he had worked for the phone company for 50 years. I tried to start a conversation by saying things like, "I bet this isn't the first one of these you've hooked up," but his only response was to smile and nod.

Because he wouldn't talk, my attention moved to his leather utility belt. Batman had nothing on this guy. Every tool known to man hung meticulously from his belt, waiting to be called into service.

Not once did he get up to go back to his van. There was no point: He had everything he needed.

In the old days, when we were working with scanned photos (here comes the clever segue) we were forced to jump out of PowerPoint and, if we had some limited grasp of Photoshop or some other paint program, we tweaked our scanned photos and dropped them back into PowerPoint.

Not any more. This month we're going to take a look at two very helpful toolbars in PowerPoint 97 that reside right under our noses, eliminating the need to jump around in search of alternative tools.

## Improving photos once they're inserted

One of the more challenging issues we've always struggled with is how to import high-quality scanned photos, also known as bitmapped images or raster art. The INSERT TO PICTURE TO FROM FILE command sequence brings them in, but the images are often too dark, too contrasty, in need of cropping or are bordered by a clunky reference rectangle. In the

past, these problems may have sent us back to the drawing board, but now the tools for fixing them are right on the desktop. Here's how to use them:

After importing your scanned photo into PowerPoint 97, right-mouse-click on your scan to reveal a SHOW PICTURE TOOLBAR option. Select it and a small toolbar appears onscreen, which looks like this.



Once you've selected this option, it will pop up every time you select an object that PowerPoint recognizes as a picture. Pictures can be bitmapped images as well as grouped vector art such as clip art. The icon on the far left of the picture toolbar provides a shortcut for inserting additional pictures. The next icon provides a set of image controls that can remap the image as a black-and-white, gray-scale or give it a watermark look.

Let me give you an example of how this might be helpful. In a recent project I did for a customer, he was comparing the cost of labor in 1975 and 1997. We took a picture of a worker and placed it next to the 1997 number, then pasted a gray-scale version of the same photo next to the 1975 number. This gave the image a vintage look but kept the context the same. It worked.

The next two icons on the picture toolbar make contrast adjustments possible. If you frequently import scans made from 35mm slides, they often appear to have very high contrast (the darks too dark and the highlights too

washed out). With these icons, the contrast can be changed.



The next two icons deal with the relative lightness or darkness of an image. By clicking on the appropriate icon you can alter the brightness of the image.



Use the next icon to CROP. Although the cropping tool has been around for a while, it's never been

this accessible. You simply click on the cropping tool icon and move the cursor over any of the image resizing handles. Then click and drag to crop the image.



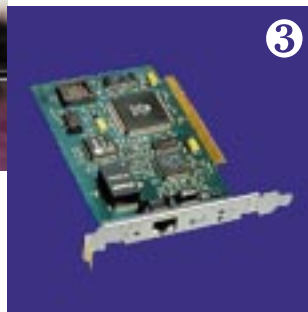
The RECOLOR PICTURE icon can be selected, but only if the object selected is made up of vector-based artwork (such as clip art). Scanned photos can't be recolored in PowerPoint.



The next icon represents the FORMAT PICTURE option. If you're working with scanned photos that you want to optimize for electronic viewing, the SIZE tab will reveal an option allowing you to select BEST SCALE FOR SLIDE SHOW; choose the particular resolution of your laptop and projector. Although this is not as critical a step as it was for PowerPoint 95, it is still valuable.



I've saved my personal favorite for last: the TRANSPARENT PIXEL option. In the past, I've gone to great lengths to eliminate the rectangular box that surrounds scanned photos. Many of us often want the specific image to float gracefully over the background without a telltale rectangle. The PowerPoint



To eliminate the rectangular box that surrounds scanned photos (1 and 2), use PowerPoint's TRANSPARENT PIXEL option in FORMAT PICTURE. The background will drop out (3) and, when imported into your slide, will appear to float over the background (4).

development people at the Graphics Business Unit in Cupertino heard our cry, but a few things need to be done to make it work even better.

In the example shown, a product shot was scanned from the original photo — so far so good. But the background consisted of more than one color. (Remember, though, that PowerPoint will only make one pixel color transparent. If it happens to be anywhere else, you'll find tiny holes in your target image.) The image then was pulled into Adobe Photoshop and the lasso tool was used to trace around the object, turning the background behind the product shot into a single, unique pixel color that was not present in the product itself.

After importing the edited image into PowerPoint (save yourself some space and import it as a JPEG image), right-mouse click and select FORMAT PICTURE, then select the TRANSPARENT PIXEL option and select the unique background color you've created. The background will drop out and the image will appear to float over your presentation background. A word of caution: The edge will need to be a clean, hard edge. An anti-aliased edge (anti-aliasing is a function of the paint application that creates extra transition pixels, giving the appearance of softer edges) from your paint package will result in a jagged edge on your target image after the transparent pixel option is applied.

### Use drawing tools to further improve images

A paint application can add even more uniqueness to your images, but I realize that not everyone is proficient in one. If this describes

you, there are a few options available to you. First, check out MS Paint (in your Windows 95 Accessories window). Or, for a quick job, you can use the PowerPoint drawing tools to draw transparent masks over portions of your scanned photo.

Of particular help might be the FREEFORM drawing tool, found by clicking on the AUTOSHAPES box in the bottom left corner of your PowerPoint screen, then selecting LINES, then the FREEFORM polygon tool. Once your objects are created, fill them with the BACKGROUND COLOR option, select NO LINE around the masking objects and GROUP them to your scanned photo.

### Easily add 3D elements

Another valuable toolbar is one found by selecting an object, then clicking on the OBJECT 3D icon at the far right of your bottom toolbar. After clicking on the icon, select the 3D SETTINGS option to display another toolbar. There, you'll find enhancement options that allow you to modify the lighting of your 3D PowerPoint objects, rotate them, change the default extrusions and angles, as well as the surface appearance.

Try it. With a freshly drawn rectangle selected, click on the 3D box option in the bottom right-hand corner, adjust the attributes of the object and, just for fun, double-click on the face of your new object. Select the COLOR option, then select FILL EFFECTS and go to the PICTURE tab. Choose SELECT PICTURE and find a scanned image. After an OK, your newly created 3D box will take on a photographic face.



It used to be that presentation support graphics were treated as an afterthought — a necessary evil that didn't require the same level of consideration as a direct-mail piece, printed collateral or a Web site. What's changed is that the stakes for presenting badly are much higher today. Deals can be won or lost on the professionalism of our presentations.

Tools like the ones we've discussed this month can dramatically improve the level of professionalism displayed in the images you create. In the past, the presentation software we selected betrayed itself through stock templates, a predictable look and limited image options. But it didn't matter because, heck, it was *only* a presentation.

Well, there's no such thing as *only* a presentation anymore. So stretch the limits of your next presentation by leveraging what's already on your desktop to take your images to a whole new level. There are no longer any excuses. ■