Alien Skin Software, LLC

1111 Haynes Street, Suite 113, Raleigh, NC 27604 USA

Phone: 1-919-832-4124 (Toll-free in USA: 1-888-921-7546)

Fax: 1-919-832-4065

Email: alien-skinfo@alienskin.com

For tech support: support@alienskin.com

On the Web: http://www.alienskin.com

i

Table of Contents

Getting Started

Welcome to Blow Up

Blow Up is a Photoshop-compatible automation plug-in that offers the highest quality image enlargement available. Blow Up is great for resizing images for large format printing, taking web graphics to print, and creating gallery prints from digital snapshots. We think you will find that Blow Up preserves the crisp lines and smooth colors of your original image. Enlarge without the stairstep, halo, and fringe artifacts of bicubic interpolation.

As an automation plug-in, Blow Up works with only Photoshop and Photoshop Elements. Blow Up does, however, support 8-, 16-, and 32-bit images, as well as RGB, CMYK, Lab, Grayscale, and Duotone image modes.

Blow Up can also be recorded and played back in a Photoshop action. This will increase your efficiency and maintain consistency when resizing a batch of images.

Blow Up will run faster on multiprocessor, multi-core, and hyper-threading computers. The more processors or cores you have, the faster Blow Up will run. While a dual processor machine has two CPU chips, a dual core machine has most of two CPUs crammed onto one chip.

Finding Blow Up

Please note that because Blow Up is an automation plug-in, it is listed separately from our other plug-ins.

To start using Blow Up in Photoshop, select **File>Automate>Alien Skin Blow Up**.
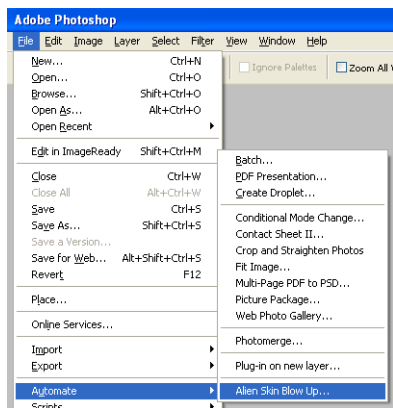
In Elements, select **File>Automation Tools>Alien Skin Blow Up**.
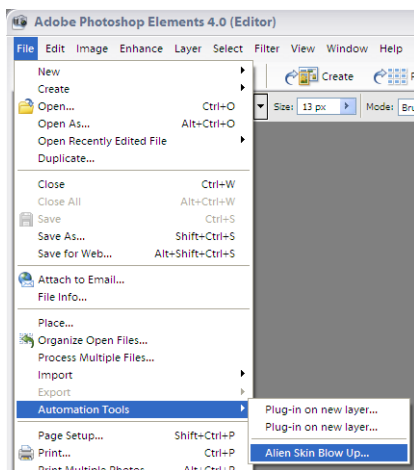
Using this Manual

Installation

This chapter provides information on installing and registering Blow Up, as well as host and system requirements. If you cannot get Blow Up to install, this is the place for you.

User Interface Overview

This chapter presents the general features of the Blow Up user interface. Check out what to do with that thumbnail and why the preview is fixed at 100% magnification.

Resizing Controls

Looking for the important stuff, like how to use the resizing controls? Well, most of the plug-in works like the **Image Size** dialog, but key differences are laid out here.

Using Blow Up with Photoshop Actions

Blow Up works great with actions, just like the Image Resize command of Photoshop. Read this chapter for more details.

UpToDate System

Check out this chapter for info on how to find out about the latest Alien Skin Software products, as well as special offers, updates and other news.

Keyboard Shortcuts

The mouse is *so* 1963. Blow Up recognizes some nifty keyboard shortcuts. Check the back cover of this manual for a complete list.

Chapter 1: Installation

Installing Blow Up is quick and painless, but to be safe, please follow these instructions.

Host Requirements

Blow Up is an automation plug-in. That means that you must already have installed one of the following host programs:

• Adobe Photoshop CS or later

• Adobe Photoshop Elements 3 or later

System Requirements

Macintosh Systems
• 1 GHz PowerPC G4 processor

• Mac OS X 10.3.9 or later

Windows Systems
• 2 GHz Pentium 4 processor

• Windows 2000 or Windows XP

Macintosh Installation

Use the following instructions to install Blow Up:

1 Shut down your graphics host program.

Note: To install Blow Up, your OS X user account must have administrator privileges. For information on configuring your user account for administrator privileges, talk to your IT guy or consult your OS X user manual.

2 Insert the Blow Up CD into your computer. Or, if you purchased an electronic version of Blow Up, locate the installation program that you downloaded from the online store.

3 Double-click the **Blow Up** icon.

4 Click **Continue**.

5 Read the important note about where to find Blow Up.

6 Click **Continue**.

7 Read the License Agreement.

8 Click **Continue**.

9 Click **Agree**.

10 Enter your name, company name (optional) and your registration code.

Note: The registration code is a 12-letter sequence inside the front cover of your manual. If you purchased an electronic version of Blow Up, you will find the 12-letter code in the e-mail invoice, sent with your downloaded software. Store this e-mail in a safe place for future installations.

11 Click **Register**. Our installer will search for all compatible graphics programs on your computer and display them in a list.

12 Highlight one program and click **OK**. You can only install into one graphics program at a time. So rerun the installer if you wish to install Blow Up into another graphics program.

Windows Installation

Use the following instructions to install Blow Up:

1 Shut down your graphics host program.

Note: To install Blow Up, your Windows 2000 or XP user account must have administrator privileges. For information on configuring your user account for administrator privileges, talk to your IT gal or consult your user manual.

2 Insert the Blow Up CD into your computer. Or, if you purchased an electronic version of Blow Up, locate the installation program that you downloaded from the online store.

3 Double-click the **Setup.exe** icon.

4 Click **Next**.

5 Read the important note about where to find Blow Up.

6 Click **Next**.

7 Read the License Agreement.

8 Click **Accept**.

9 Enter your name, company name (optional) and your registration code.

Note: The registration code is a 12-letter sequence inside the front cover of your manual. If you purchased an electronic version of Blow Up, you will find the 12-letter code in the e-mail invoice, sent with your downloaded software. Store this e-mail in a safe place for future installations.

10 Click **Next**. Our installer will search for all compatible graphics programs on your computer and display them in a list.

11 Highlight one program and click **OK**. You can only install into one graphics program at a time. So rerun the installer if you wish to install Blow Up into another graphics program.

Registration

You must register your software to receive technical support and critical product updates. Registration also qualifies you for product discounts and upgrade pricing on future versions of Blow Up.

If you purchased Blow Up directly from Alien Skin Software, you are automatically registered with us. You need to register only if you purchased Blow Up elsewhere.

You can register online at http://www.alienskin.com/register. If you do not have access to the World Wide Web, please mail in the registration card included with your software.

Chapter 2: User Interface Overview

This chapter outlines the general features of the Blow Up user interface including command menus, the preview window, buttons and the navigation thumbnail. The resizing controls are described in detail in the next chapter.
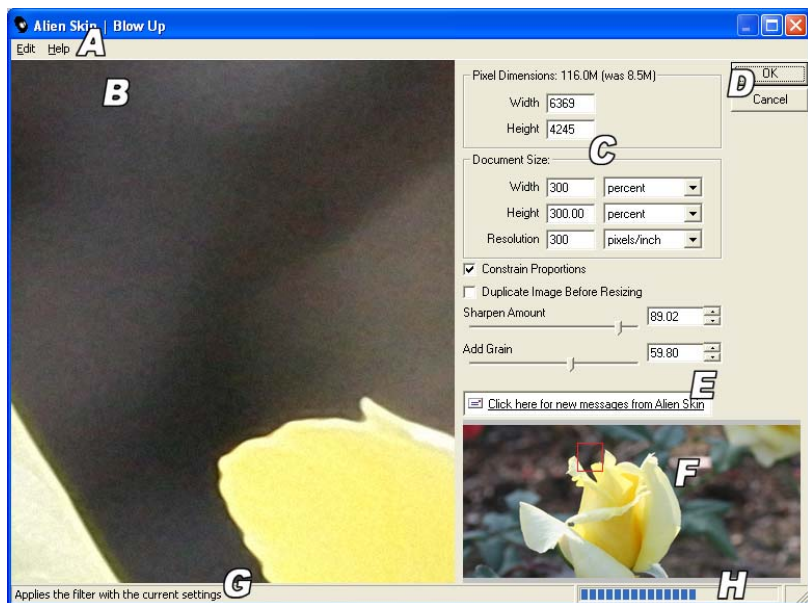
Menus (A)

Command menus are accessible when you launch Blow Up. Macintosh users will see the menus in place of their usual menu bar. Windows users will see the menus at the top of the plug-in window.

Edit Menu

The **Edit** menu provides an unlimited ability to undo or redo changes. If you experiment with the sliders and find that you prefer a previous group of settings, select the **Undo** command from the **Edit** menu or click Command + Z (Control + Z on a Windows machine) to back up as many times as necessary. The **Edit** menu also lets you copy, cut, and paste values from parameter fields.

Clicking **Edit>Preferences** lets you change **UpToDate** settings. See the UpToDate System chapter for details.

Help Menu

The **Help** menu leads to local documentation and online Web pages. Clicking **Help>Help...** accesses documentation on the resizing controls. The same assistance can be reached by pressing **F1** (Windows) or **Help** (Macintosh). Clicking **Help>Contents** brings up a Table of Contents for all the local documentation.

Preview (B)

The **Preview** fills most of the Blow Up window. This area shows what your image will look like after resizing. The **Preview** is fixed at 100% magnification to avoid confusion between zooming and actual resizing of the image. If the resized image is larger than the preview area then you can move it by clicking in the **Preview** and dragging. For large images, navigation is much easier with the **Navigation Thumbnail**.

Only the currently selected layer is previewed. However, clicking **OK** will resize every layer in the document.

You can make the **Preview** larger by resizing the Blow Up window. The Blow Up window is resized just like any other standard window on your system. On Macintosh, grab and drag the lower right corner of the window. On Windows, grab and drag any side of the window.

Resizing Controls (C)

These controls set the size and quality of your final image. They are documented in detail in the next chapter.

OK and Cancel Buttons (D)

Clicking **OK** resizes the document with the current settings. Clicking **Cancel** closes Blow Up without changing the document.

UpToDate Message Indicator (E)

When you see this visual cue, you have a new message from Alien Skin Software. Click the **UpToDate** button to see your messages. See the **UpToDate** chapter for more details.

Navigation Thumbnail (F)

The **Navigation Thumbnail** is a copy of your image in the lower right corner of the Blow Up window. The red rectangle in the thumbnail indicates the part of your image that is being displayed in the **Preview**. To move the preview area, simply click anywhere in the **Navigation Thumbnail**. This is the easiest way to navigate around large images.

Mouseover Help Area (G)

As you mouse over most parts of the Blow Up window, short, helpful descriptions appear here.

Progress Bar (H)

This rectangle fills as the preview is rendered.

Chapter 3: Resizing Controls

Most of the resizing controls in Blow Up behave like the **Image Size** dialog in Photoshop. If you are familiar with that then you can skip to the new controls: **Duplicate Image**, **Sharpen Amount**, and **Add Grain**.

When Blow Up starts, the **Pixel Dimensions** and **Document Size** sections are set to the current image size. The rest of the controls are set to the values from the last time you used Blow Up.

You can control the new size of the image through **Pixel Dimensions** or **Document Size**. Changing one will automatically update the other.

Pixel Dimensions

Pixel Dimensions are usually used for images destined for the Web or digital display. The top border of the **Pixel Dimensions** section displays the amount of memory needed to hold the original and new image. If you notice that the new memory size is gigantic, then check your **Resolution** to make sure it is reasonable.

Document Size

For images destined for print, the most intuitive way to specify their size is in the **Document Size** section. This section uses real world units like inches and centimeters. **Resolution** is important for print quality. High quality printing typically requires 300 pixels/inch. Images viewed from a large distance may be okay with much lower resolution.

Constrain Proportions

Selecting **Constrain Proportions** ensures that your image is resized regularly, that changing height proportionally changes width and vice versa. You should leave this on in almost all cases.

Duplicate Image before Resizing

If this checkbox is on then a copy of your image will be resized, leaving your original image untouched. Otherwise your image will be resized in place.

Sharpen Amount

Enlargement always softens edges to some extent. Increasing the **Sharpen Amount** slider restores much of the sharpness of strong edges. This is accomplished by compressing the distance over which an edge transition occurs. The result is very different from traditional unsharp masking. Unsharp masking often creates distracting halos and sparkles. The sharpening of Blow Up does not have these problems and, as a result, is more subtle. It can, however, make your image overly smooth. So use only as much as is necessary.
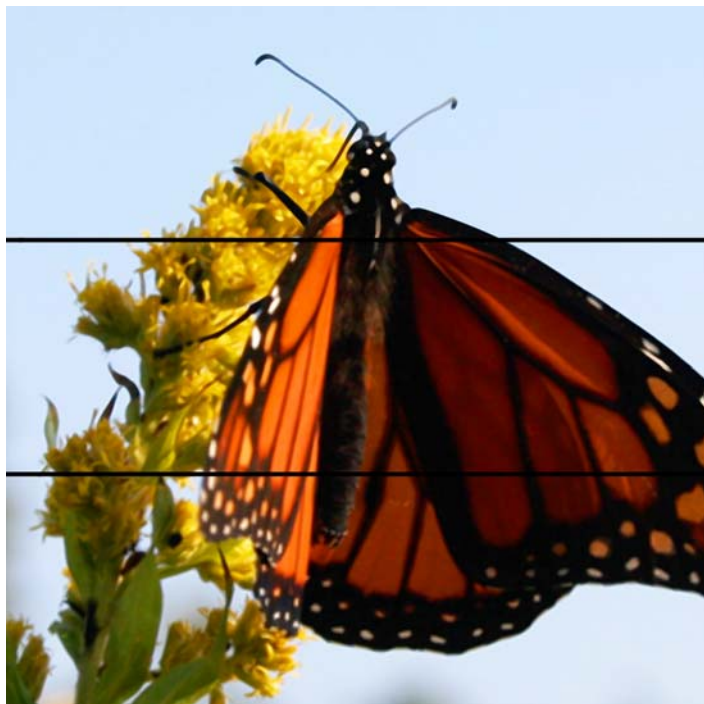
In this image, sharpen values of 100, 35, and 0 were applied. Notice that the spots and edges of the butterfly wings appear more clearly defined in the upper panels where sharpening took place.

The sharpening of Blow Up is only designed to counteract softening caused by enlargement. If your original image is blurry, the plug-in will not be able to fix that. In that case you should use other sharpening techniques, such as unsharp masking, before enlarging with Blow Up.

Add Grain

Extreme enlargement and sharpening can result in an overly smooth image that looks like plastic. Adding some artificial film grain can provide a surprisingly realistic illusion of detail. Usually you only need to consider adding grain

when your image is being enlarged over 200%. As with any effect, you should make it so subtle that most viewers will not know you did anything. Start by increasing **Add Grain** until you can see the grain. Then back the effect off until you can barely tell the grain is there.
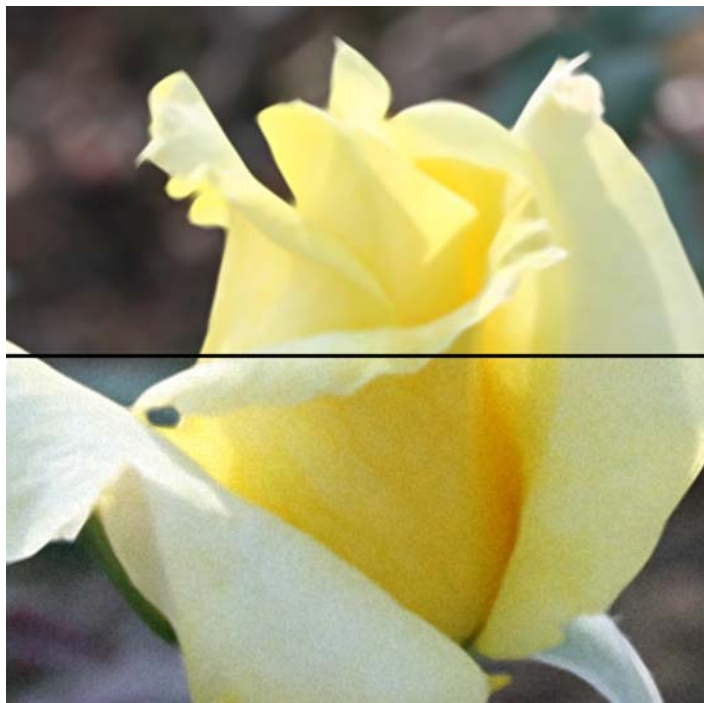
This image looks a bit plastic when enlarged to 1000% original size. To give the illusion of detail, grain was added to the lower panel.

The film grain used in Blow Up is a simplified version of the film grain in our Exposure product. The grain is monochromatic (only affecting luminance, not hue or saturation). Grain size grows as the enlargement factor grows. If you enlarge 500% or more, then you can see the lumpy fractal nature of the grains. If you need more control over the look of the grain, turn off grain in Blow Up and apply it using Exposure.

Chapter 4: Using Blow Up with Photoshop Actions

Blow Up can be recorded and played back in a Photoshop action. An action increases efficiency and maintains consistency. It lets you apply the same resizing to a batch of images. For basic information on how to record an action and then apply it to batches of images, see Photoshop's documentation.

If you are familiar with how Photoshop's Image Size command is recorded, then using Blow Up with actions will be very familiar to you. Blow Up behaves just like the Image Size command.

Recorded Information

The following are always recorded in a Blow Up action:

• State of **Constrain Proportions** checkbox

• State of **Duplicate Image Before Resizing** checkbox

• **Sharpen Amount** slider value

• **Add Grain** slider value

In contrast, **Pixel Dimensions** or **Document Size** information is only recorded if you edit **Width**, **Height**, or **Resolution**.

Constrain Proportions

As mentioned in the previous chapter, **Constrain Proportions** should remain selected most of the time. When **Constrain Proportions** is selected, only the last dimension you edit will be recorded in the action. This means that if you edit Width and then edit Height, only Height will be recorded.

If you change a dimension when **Constrain Proportions** is cleared, it will be recorded in the action. If you change both Width and Height, then both will be recorded.

Units

When recording an action, it is important to carefully choose the parameters you edit. If you edit a **Pixel Dimensions** parameter, the action records the change in pixel units. If you edit a **Document Size** parameter, the action records the change in the selected physical units such as inches or picas. This choice will have a large impact on the action output. If the action is recorded in physical units, then the resolution of the image will be taken into account.

Chapter 5: UpToDate System

The **UpToDate** messaging system informs you about the latest Alien Skin Software products, special offers, software updates and other news.

When UpToDate is enabled, an unobtrusive visual cue announces, "Click here for new messages from Alien Skin Software." Click this link to read your new messages. See the interface example below:
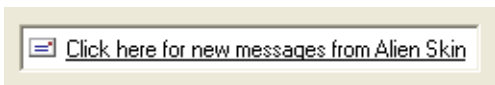
Customizing UpToDate Preferences

Receiving messages is optional. You can specify the intervals at which your **UpToDate** system checks for messages. To customize your **UpToDate** message preferences, follow these instructions:

1 Click **Edit>Preferences**.
2 Select the frequency at which you would like the **UpToDate** system to check for new messages. If you do not want to receive messages, select **Never**.

Windows users: if you have a dial-up Internet connection, you should select the **Ask me before making an Internet connection** option. If not, your computer will make unexpected phone calls.

Macintosh users: if you have a dial-up Internet connection, clear the **Ask me before making an Internet connection** option. You must establish an Internet connection before receiving **UpToDate** messages.