



Corporate Flow



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Creating Transparent GIFs for the Web



Creating a Transparent GIF for the Web

Learn how to create pixel-perfect, transparent GIFs using Canvas' Guides and Camera Tool.

If you have spent enough time surfing the net then you have no doubt seen them. Those jagged white pixels surrounding an image common in many transparent GIFs. In this exercise, we will show you how to create transparent GIFs free of these little pests, and at the same time we will revisit some basic techniques for rendering images using Canvas' Guides and Camera Tool.

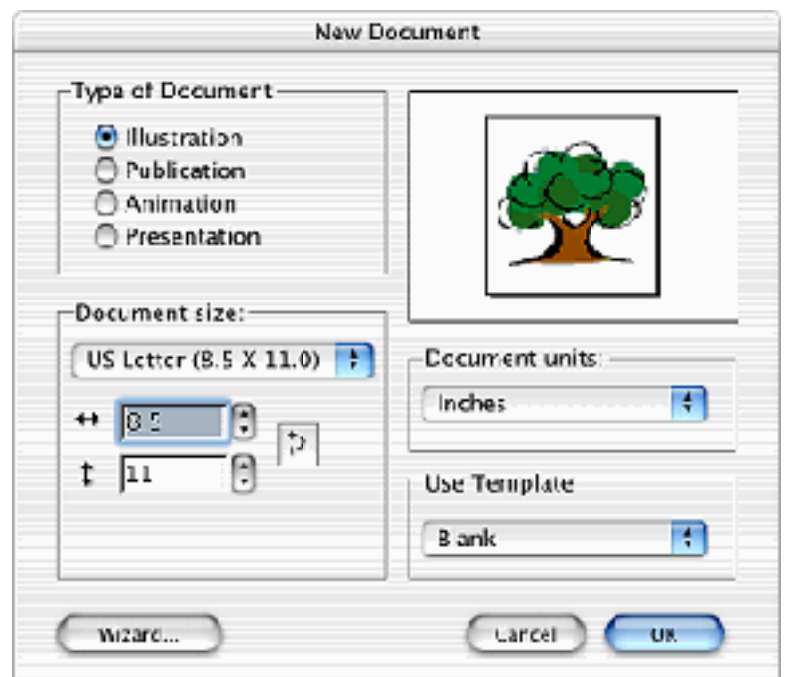
If you are not familiar with GIFs (Graphic Interchange Format), they are a bit-mapped graphics file format used primarily on the Internet. Built into the GIF specs is the ability to make some of the image's color transparent or "invisible". This ability allows Web designers to designate certain sections of the image transparent. When this GIF is placed on a Web page the transparent sections allow background images, colors, or textures to show through.

In the following tutorial, we will create a transparent GIF for a fictitious bicycle company's (Solar-Cycles) Web site. They have advised us that they will be using a blue background on their web site and they need the image to be exactly 170 pixels wide by 145 pixels high.

Step 1

Creating a New Document

Open a new Canvas file. Choose Illustration as the file type and press OK.

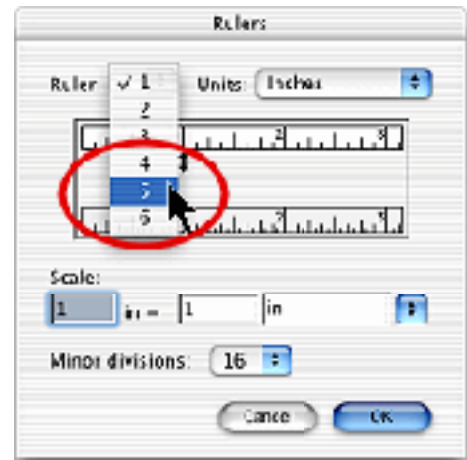


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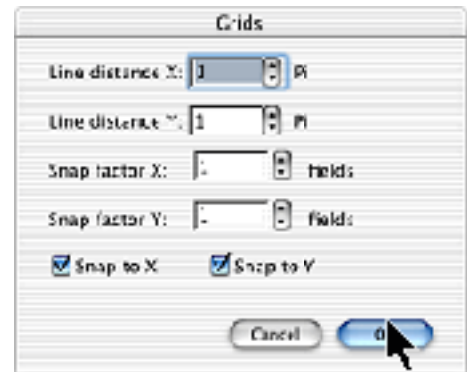
Step 2

Preparing the Document

Next, we will prepare the document to measure in pixels. To do this, choose Layout > Rulers from the Menu bar. When the Rulers dialog box opens, pick Ruler 5 from the drop-down menu (see example) and press OK. Ruler 5 is preset to measure in pixels.



Now we want to set our grids to snap to pixels. This will prevent object from falling between pixels. To set your grids, choose Layout > Grids. In the Grids dialog box, change the Line Distance X and Y to 1 pixel. Then, check Snap to X and Span to Y. Finally click OK to save your choices and close the dialog box.



Our transparent GIF will reside on a Web page with a blue background (Web-safe color value #0099cc). Our challenge is to create a transparent GIF that will have smooth edges when used on this color background.

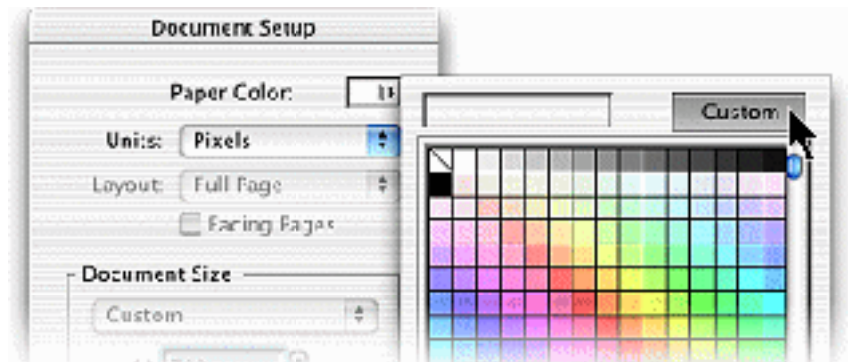


Step 3

Changing the Paper Color

To create smooth edges on a transparent GIF you must use a paper color close to the color that you will use on your Web page background, e.g., using white will leave rough, jagged, pixelated edges around the image when it is placed over the colored background.

To change the paper color choose Layout > Document Setup. Click on Paper Color and choose the color from the Inks palette. If you wish to use a custom color or if you know the Web-safe color values, choose Custom from the Inks palette, see example.

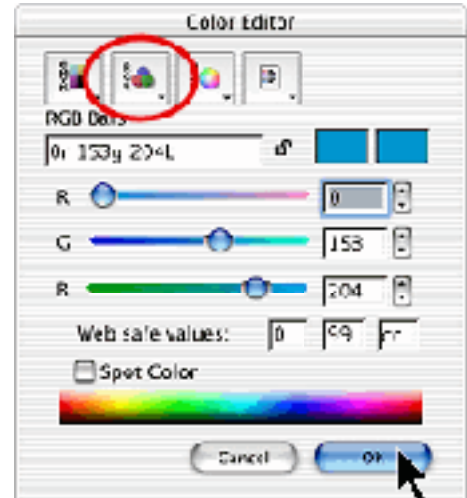
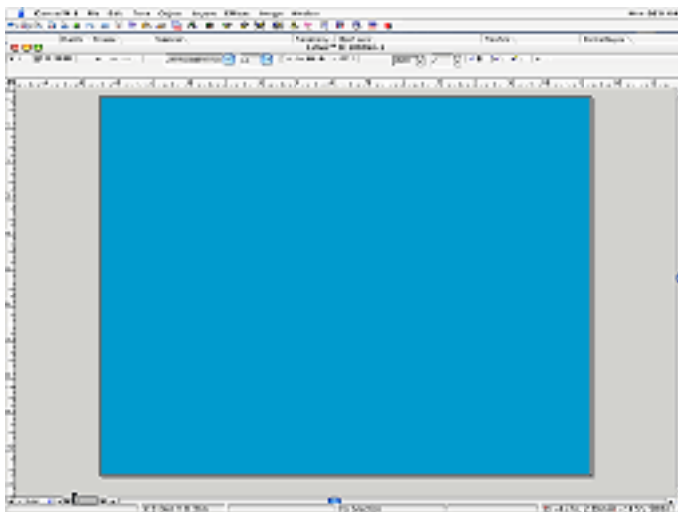


- It is best to use Web-safe colors that match that of your Web page but you could still get good results using a color close to the one used on the Web page.

Creating Transparent GIFs for the Web (Continued)

After selecting Custom from the Inks palette, the Color Editor will appear. Choose RGB as the color type, then use the sliders to create a custom color or enter the Web-safe value and press OK. For our example, we used the Web-safe value 0099cc.

Your paper color will now look like the example below.



Our fictitious company, Solar-Cycles, told us they wanted their logo (see right) displayed on their Web site as a transparent GIF measuring 170 pixels wide by 145 pixels high.

[In the next step, we are going use guides to make the GIF exactly 170 x 145.](#)

If you don't have a logo to follow this exercise you may download ours by [clicking here.](#)



Creating Transparent GIFs for the Web (Continued)

Step 4

Preparing the Guides

To easily create accurate, pixel perfect GIFs, we are going to set up guides around the logo and then use the Camera tool to render the final image.


To do this, first move the logo to the top left hand side of the work area

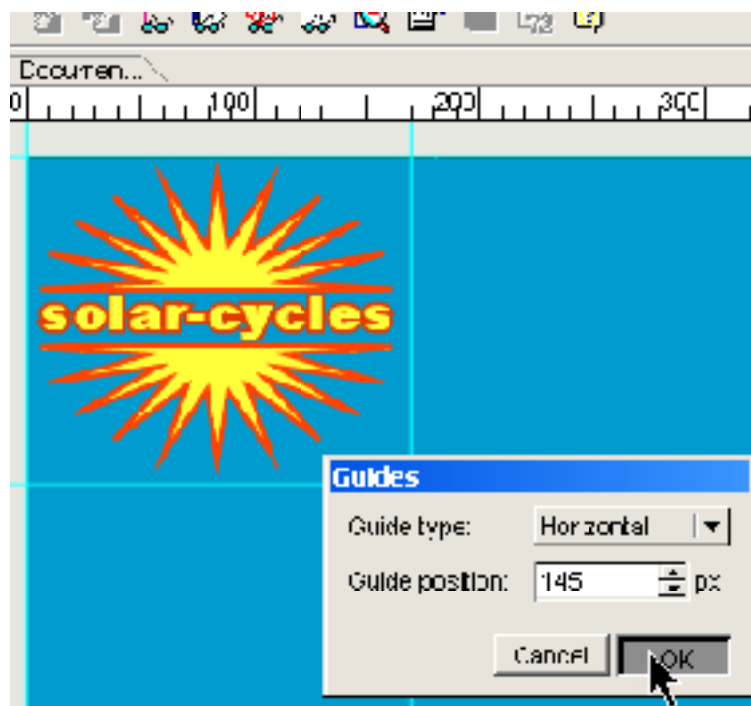


Then choose Layout > Display > Show Rulers to make your rulers visible.

Next, place your cursor on the ruler and drag down a guide. The guides will appear as light blue lines. To accurately position the guide, double-click on it to bring up the Guides dialog box. Enter the Guide Position and press OK.

You should have a total of 4 guides, two vertical guides at Guide Position 0 pixels and 170 pixels. And two horizontal guides at Guide Position 0 and 145 pixels. The guides will create a rectangle around the logo. This rectangle is exactly 170 x 145 pixels.

 To remove or delete a guide, just drag it back into the ruler.



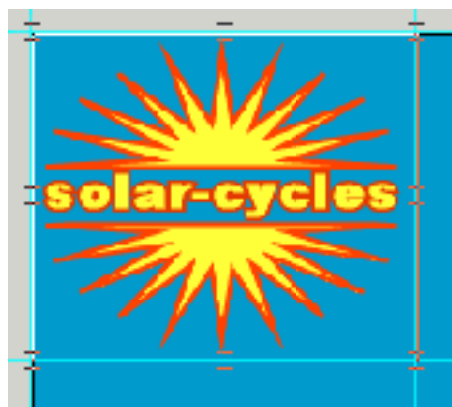
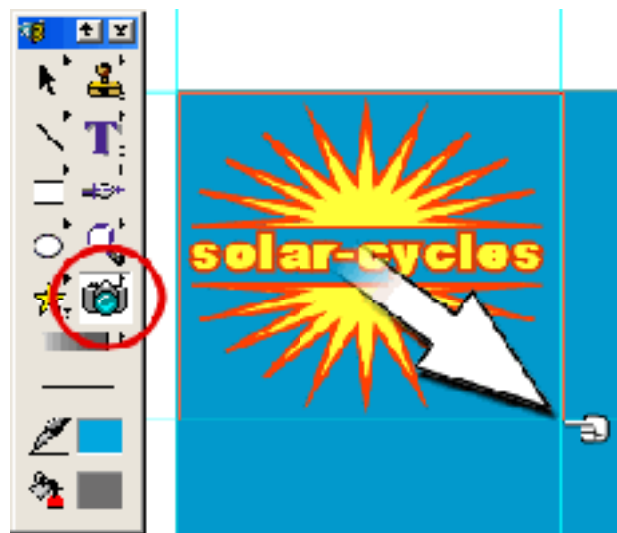
Creating Transparent GIFs for the Web (Continued)

Step 5

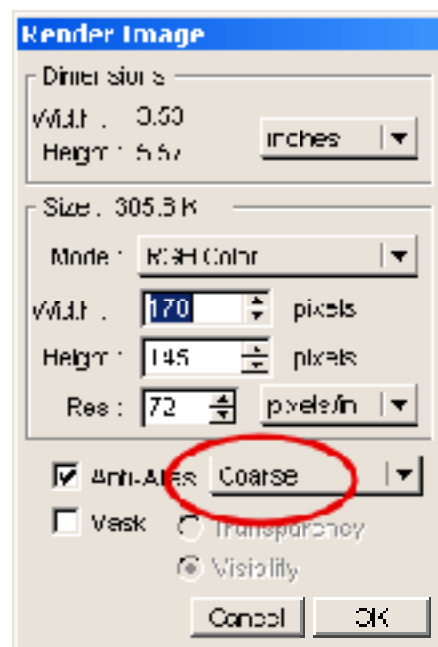
Rendering the Logo

To render the logo, we will use the Camera tool located in your Toolbox. With the Camera Tool selected, click on the top left corner of the rectangle defined by the guides you just created. Then, drag the cursor across to the bottom right corner of the rectangle. The guides will cause the Camera tool to snap to the rectangle you create around the logo. This will give the Camera tool pixel perfect accuracy when rendering the image.

A bounding box with handles will appear around the area to be rendered, see below.



Next, click inside the bounding box to bring up the Render Image dialog box. When it appears select the options you want to use and press OK. Since this example is for Web use, we chose RGB as the color mode and 72 ppi resolution (Web standard). To make the edges smooth, select Anti-Alias, Coarse.



You will be left with a rendered 170 x 145 image with a blue background.

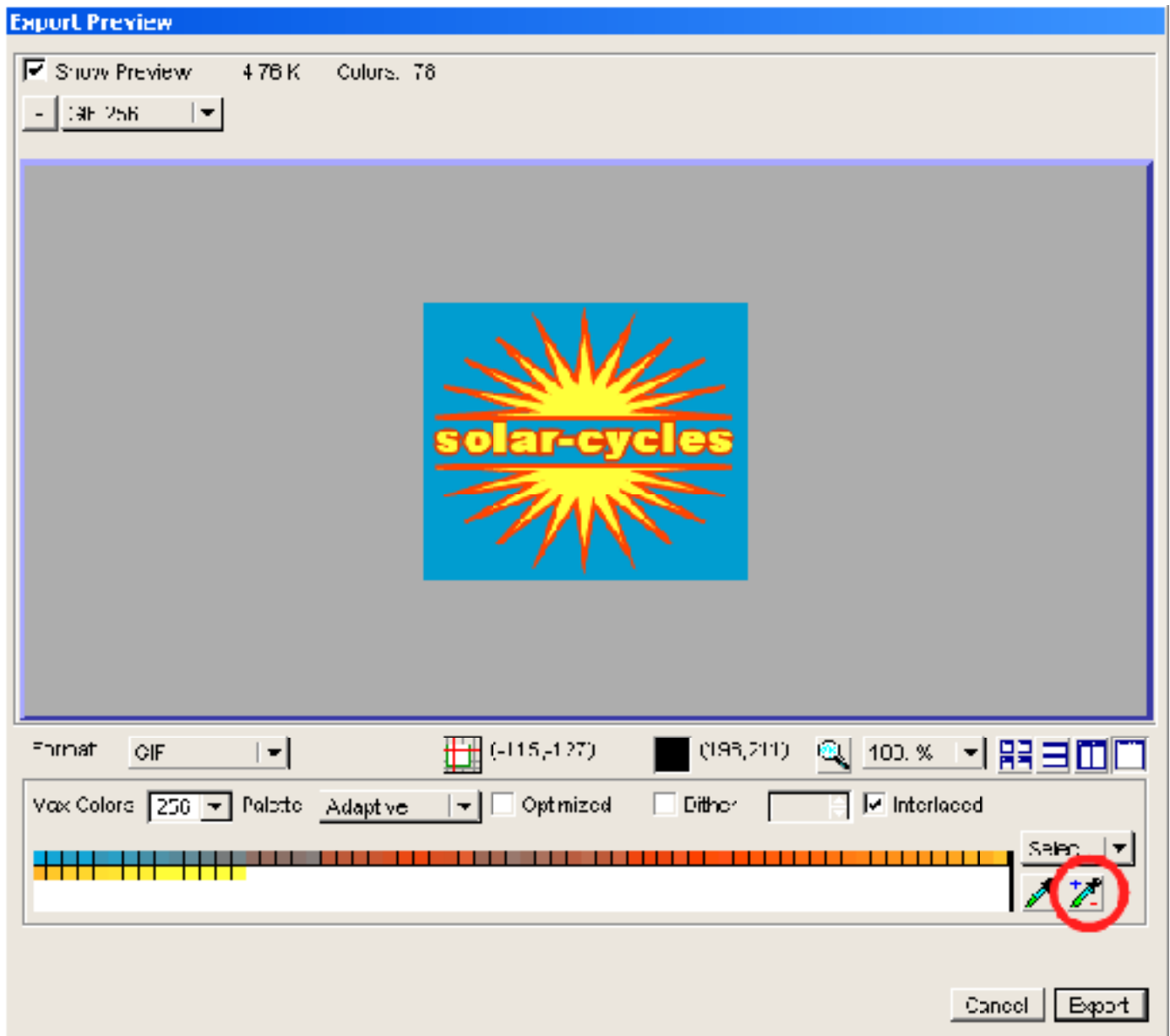


Creating Transparent GIFs for the Web (Continued)

Step 6

Removing the background

The background is removed during the export of the logo. To export the logo, first select it. Then, choose Image > Export > GIF/JPEG from the Menu bar. You will be presented with the Export Preview dialog box. Choose GIF 256 from the file type selector on the top left. Then choose the Add/Remove Transparency Color Dropper on the bottom right corner of this palette.



Creating Transparent GIFs for the Web (Continued)

With the dropper selected, click on the blue background to delete it. You will be left with a transparent image like our example on the right.

Now, press Export to name and save your GIF and you are done.



[See examples](#)

On the right are two examples of the same GIF. The difference is the one on top was created using the blue paper color. The one on the bottom was created with a white (default) paper color.

As you can see, the use of the default paper color left the image with a white pixelated edge; however, the image created with the blue paper color appears to have a clean transition between the logo and the background.



In this second example we used the same images with a striped background. Again the blue paper image appears clean and precise, whereas the white paper image is surrounded by stray white pixels.



Creating Transparent GIFs for the Web (Continued)

It is also a good idea to use transparent backgrounds even when you are using a Web-safe colored image on a Web-safe colored page due to the inconsistency between Web browsers. In other words, the blue color we used for this tutorial (#0099cc) could appear slightly lighter or darker on different browsers or platforms leaving a visible border around your image.

