

TooningNews Creating Vectors

www.wizardofdraws.com - Cartoons with a Touch of Magic™

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Some useful items:

- Scanner
- Adobe Photoshop
- Wacom tablet
- CD Burner or -
- Zip Drive for storage and archiving files
- Compression software for emailing large files to clients

Now that we've inked our cartoon, scanned it into the computer and saved it as a hi-res TIF, what's the next step? In this edition I'll describe what I do and the reasons behind my method. We can open our TIF, prepare it for coloring, and go to finish without creating a vector version, but I'll relate that slightly different workflow and it's merits in a later issue.

I start by opening Adobe Streamline, a raster-to-vector conversion program. Streamline is a one-trick-pony program (albeit a very good one) designed to take pixel or raster images and create vector files from them. Why would we want a a vector file you ask? Vector files are useful because they are resolution-independent, meaning you can scale them up or down without any worry of image degradation. The lines that make up a vector image are actually mathematical representations, like Pi, rather than individual pixels. The size of a circle is irrelevant to Pi, it's always the same; the only difference in the circle is the diameter. This is how vector images create nearly infinite scalability with perfect precision, a very handy feature for images like logos, where they will be used in a wide variety of media and reproduced at sizes ranging from business cards to billboards.

With our hi-res cartoon open in Streamline, go to Options>Conversion Setup (Fig. 1) and check Conversion>Outline. In the same dialog box under Accuracy>Noise Suppression,

set a low value. If you've cleaned up your scan, this shouldn't be much of a concern anyway. What this option is telling Streamline to do is ignore any stray pixels less than this size, but after our repeated cleanup efforts, there shouldn't be many annoying homeless pixels left. Accuracy>Tolerance will tell Streamline how closely to trace your lines. If this tolerance is set low and you have a bitmap image, the number of points required to trace the image will be very high and there is a good likelihood that you might not be able to print your cartoon due to the number of points defining the image. Under Path Options>Lines, choose Curved & Straight Lines, and I generally leave the default of 3.0 so there will be a good mix of both.

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Once our preferences are set, all that is left is to make the vector image. Chose File>Convert and sit back as Streamline automatically traces your cartoon. By the way, Adobe illustrator also has an autotrace feature built in, but the options to control the trace are less precise, and as a manual task, it takes much longer, especially if you have a very complex cartoon. After Streamline has finished the trace, save the EPS.

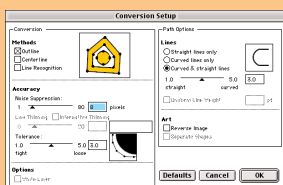


Fig 1.
The Conversion Setup dialog box in Adobe Streamline with default settings.