Chapter 8

Repurposing and optimizing

Most of us who work on the computer view our finished, printed art as the final step in a long creative process. When we gather our work for a portfolio, it's natural for us to think of that physical artifact as the work we should show. After scanning, shooting, and agonizing over lost details, it can suddenly dawn on us that the best art is the original version — the file forgotten on the disk.

Returning to your original work is sometimes your only choice. When you freelance, or leave a company while a project is still in production, you may never receive a copy of the final work. Then there are the times when you create something you're particularly proud of, only to see the final, produced work and groan. The printer erred, or the client decided to make last-minute changes against your better judgment. Templates are particularly dangerous. After they're out of your hands, anyone with technical competence and no taste can "improve" your best decisions.

You can return to your original file, but you can almost never use it exactly as it is. Working files are too big, and in the wrong file format. This chapter provides some suggestions for repurposing and optimizing your existing artwork for your portfolio.

File Adaptation Strategies

Designers do more than create onscreen. They choose colors and types of ink, select paper, and specify die-cuts. Sometimes those choices are the ones that make a project great. Unfortunately, finesse can be hard to capture in a scan, and even harder to see at the size work is presented in a digital portfolio. You can accept the scan's limited representation, and bring samples of special work to interviews. But doing that with too many pieces negates the point of a digital portfolio. And if the pieces are part of your best work, not showing them hurts your marketability.

Repurposing is particularly attractive for oversized work that has no special paper stock, like a poster, but it can work in lots of other situations. Here are a few suggestions to illustrate possible solutions:

- If you have an original file and a paper sample, scan in the latter and use it as a texture with the original file.
- If the paper sample you chose is transparent or translucent, you can mock up the finished piece and use transparency to let a background slightly show through.
- Using animation, you can show a piece at various stages of opacity if it was printed both front and back, or create the effect of turning pages to show a transparent overlay.
- Shooting an oversized book can leave shadows in the gutter, obscuring details. You can take a two-page spread into Photoshop, and use a displacement map to give the "book" a curve and a slight, non-destructive shadow in the center.
- A metallic ink often just looks like a flat color when scanned. Try suggesting graphic metallics in Photoshop, or with a mesh in Illustrator.
- Embossing is impossible to capture in a scan. Bring the file to Photoshop, select the embossed element, and then sharpen its edges. Run a light brush over the insides where the sharpening effect is too obvious.

You're much more removed from the print work in a digital portfolio. Many of the subtle production choices that can make or break a great piece are simply lost in a 72-dpi image. Paper weight, finish, size, scale, varnish, binding—all those cues are lost in the digital world. The only things you have left are shape, color, and imagery. I've seen pieces online that don't even begin to resemble or represent the real thing.

—Michael Borosky

The things that I bring to my print work are often hard to photograph. If I've done a piece that has metallic inks on it, it might have this mysterious glow in person, but when it's printed in an annual or turned into a JPEG on a website, the shimmer is gone, and the ink just looks lifeless.

—Gunnar Swanson

www.gunnarswanson.com
If used tastefully, animation can be a good tool for indicating a special effect. Here, Gunnar Swanson uses animation to simulate the twinkle of gloss varnish on matte paper.

Repurposing with PDFs

One of the best ways to repurpose published work is to create a PDF. It can be a good way of presenting a file that was originally created in a page layout or illustration program, or to bring together multiple image files in a coherent single file.

Screen-based PDFs are pretty easy to make, but they deserve just as much attention as larger, more complete presentations. They can often be the key to winning an interview.

A PDF is more flexible. It's like showing boards, because you can put pieces on different pages and they can be various sizes.

—Yang Kim

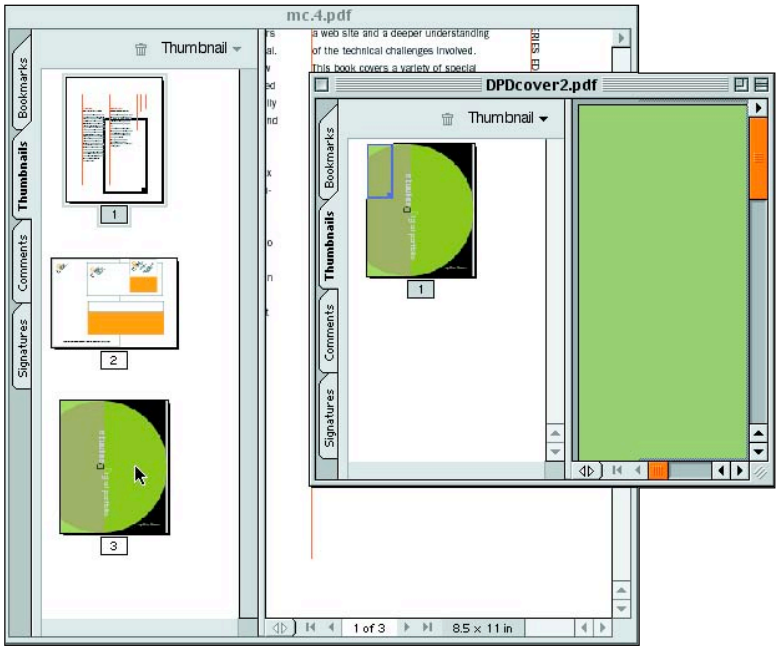
You owe it to the people who'll receive your files to create your PDFs correctly, and in a format they'll find easy to view. Many applications allow you to save your files directly as PDFs. However, a full version of Acrobat will allow you to create an integrated portfolio, not just a loose affiliation of files. That can be a critical difference. Many people quickly print a PDF and take it with them in paper form for review. They won't want to fuss with settings, or multiple files.

Here are tips for creating good PDFs:

- **Avoid scrolling.** Create letter-sized pages, so viewers can view and print them out easily. Set up your PDF in landscape format to fit better onscreen.
- **Shoot original files.** Always return to your original file for your PDF material if you can. For example, Flash-based websites can be shot from the .FLA file, not from a browser window.
- **Use TIF files.** If you're creating screen shots, shoot them as TIF, not JPEG, files. You are certain to end up needing to scale them as you lay out your pages, and scaled JPEGs quickly lose quality.

- **Optimize JPEGs.** Once you know the size of your JPEG on your designed PDF page, optimize your images (see below). Maximum-quality JPEGs in a PDF just bloat file sizes.
- **For a fast attachment, merge your PDFs.** If you have several individual PDF files from different projects, it's easy to combine them into one PDF file.

To make one PDF out of many, open all the PDFs at once, then open each of their Thumbnail palettes. Drag all the thumbnails to one document. You can reorder them as you like in the final document's thumbnail palette.

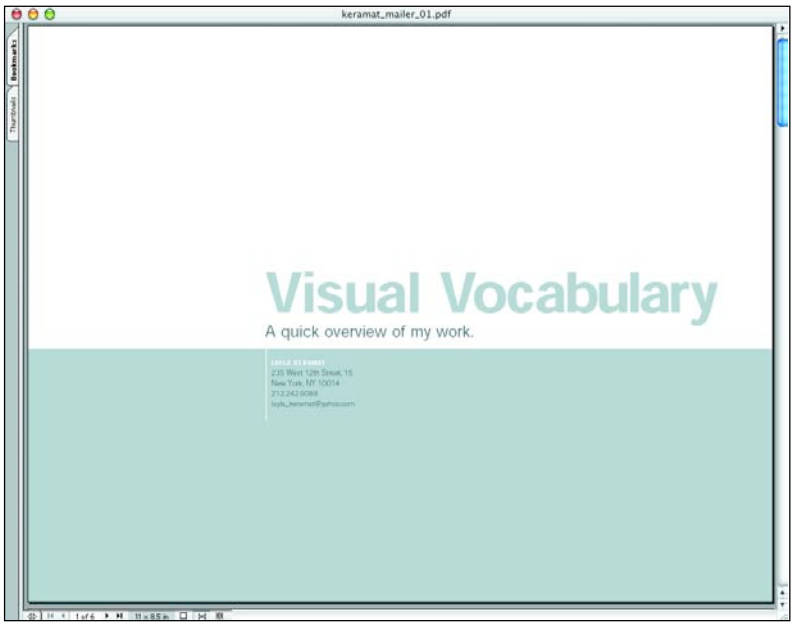


- **Make your PDF a project.** A graphic designer should have a designed PDF, with a redesigned resume as part of the package. It's often useful to export your Quark files in EPS format, and then lay out selected sample pages in Illustrator. They become very easy to scale, retain their crispness, and remain editable if you need to tweak them. When you're done, you can save the Illustrator file as an EPS, then drop the file back into Quark as one piece of artwork.

My preference is not to get an email with twenty PDFs attached to it. I don't want to have to hop around to open them all up. If I can't get one PDF file, I'd rather have a URL that directs me to a website.

—Cynthia Rabun

- **Create a cover page.** If you have a multiple-page PDF, create a cover page with your contact info as the first page, then place your name and the page number as a header or footer on each subsequent page. If your work is printed, the pages will still be identifiably yours, and remain together.
- **Watch your file sizes.** Even in these days of cable modems and DSL lines, no PDF should exceed 1 MB. Many recipients who have fast connections still have limited storage space on a mail server.
- **Label your artwork.** Just as you would on a website or disk, your artwork should include captions that identify it.



Layla Keramat provides a well-designed cover page for her PDF portfolio that will print equally well in color or on a standard laser printer.

- **Name your PDF sensibly.** Don't call it "mywork" or "myportfolio." Use your full name in the file label. If you must send more than one PDF, name the files similarly, so they'll appear together when sorted.
- **No headshots.** Unless you're a performing artist, don't ever put a picture of yourself in your PDF. You're not entering a beauty contest, nor are you a member of a corporate sales force. Creative directors and placement agencies target you as clueless as soon as they see the photo.

Optimizing image files

All your files will eventually need to be optimized—altered to fit the requirements of transmission. Websites, emailed images, and those dropped into PDFs will need the most shrinking. CDs and DVDs have less stringent requirements, but optimized files will take less time to load.

A well-optimized file looks good onscreen, but takes up very little file space. The smaller the file space, the faster the file. With the exception of your creativity, nothing will have more bearing on how your portfolio is perceived than how much time the viewer must invest to see it.

Designers who are designing in an office don't always remember that not everyone has DSL or cable access. So your design may be wonderful, but if it takes way too long to load, I need to move on.

—Cynthia Rabun

About slicing

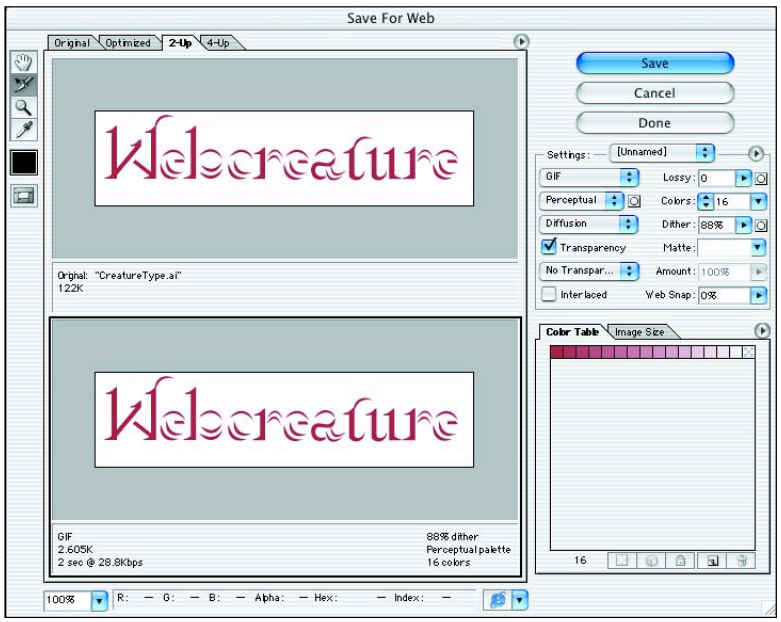
Slicing is a way to break up large images and interfaces into small, bite-sized elements that load more quickly than a single image would. Many applications, including Photoshop, offer a slicing feature that helps you to slice an image before you optimize it. But slicing is often an unpleasant distraction. Unless you have a good visual place to break the file (like in the center of a two-page spread), it's better to use optimizing techniques to have the file load progressively, or simply keep your file sizes down.

Optimizing basics

Optimizing is a delicate balance of four elements: color, image quality, image size, and file size.

The ratio among these four elements shifts as technology improves. Browser limitations and platform differences still compromise color (see "Color profiles and JPEG files" later in the chapter), but good image quality is finally attainable. So is a decent onscreen image size. Unless you have a very budget-conscious client base, you can optimize for 16 million colors displayed on a 17-inch monitor. No more 216-color non-dithering palette and postage stamp-sized projects.

We all know connection speeds have improved. The rule used to be that no web page should take more than 30 seconds to load on a 28.8 modem. That's no longer the case. Most users are working with at least 56k modems, and in many urban markets, the minimum standard crests at 128k, often with cable modem connections. But that doesn't give you the license to throw anything you'd like into a portfolio. Image sizes are cumulative on a page, and even as our options have



This type design has been optimized as a GIF. The original file appears at the top for comparison. Although the two images look very similar, the GIF is a minute fraction of the file size of the original.

increased, viewer expectations have too. No one will actually wait 30 seconds to watch a portfolio page render. And during really high-traffic times or in the middle of a worm attack, even a cable modem connection can slow to a crawl. Every .5kb saved in optimizing will still be appreciated.

You'll need to optimize before you begin actual production on your portfolio, but you'd be wise to already have sketched out a layout for a typical portfolio page before you optimize. It's always possible to downsize art in HTML or Flash, but the closer you are to optimizing your work at 100% of the size it will be onscreen, the happier you'll be with the results.

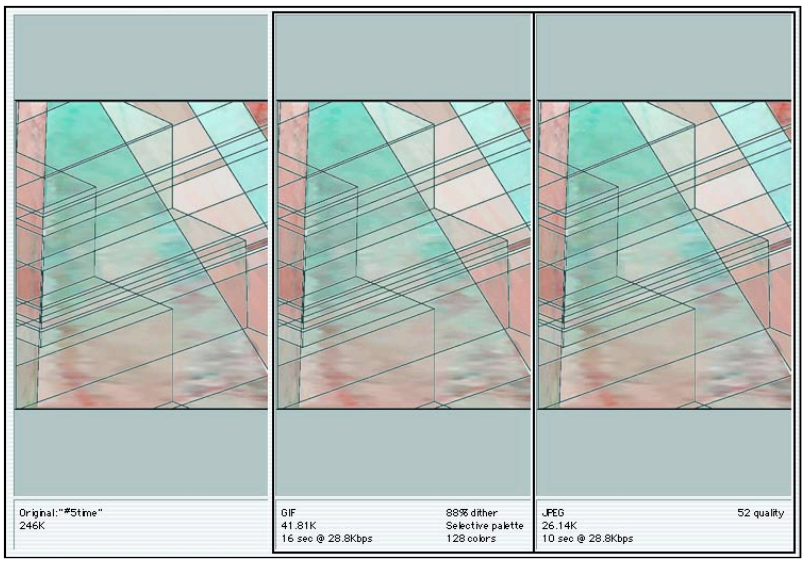
The number-one killer on a website is the speed. Corporate clients will run out of patience. They have high-speed connections, and they're not used to waiting. We try to keep to a certain number file size. We're always hovering just below what we think might break people's patience.
—Yang Kim

Optimizing process

There are some specialized tools for optimizing, like Debabelizer, but the easiest and most common method is to bring the file into either Photoshop/ImageReady or Fireworks. Both programs have similar optimizing windows and offer the same range of variables.

In either software, you can choose between optimizing the file as a JPEG or as a graphics file, usually GIF. The standard rule of thumb is that photographic images are optimized as JPEGs and graphic images are optimized as GIFs. This rule can be bent, especially for portfolio pieces, as what works best varies based on the nature of the file.

Optimizing applications provide presets as jumping off points. Many people who don't know much about optimization select one of these presets and just apply it globally to their images. That's better than not optimizing it all, but it usually leads to files that load too slowly, or are significantly smaller onscreen than they need to be.



A graphic image with a mixture of flat areas and smooth blends should be tested as both GIF and JPEG to find the best combination. Here, either version has reasonable quality, but the JPEG is much smaller than the GIF.

Optimizing hints

Let's examine some of the ways optimizing can improve your portfolio and impress your target audience. There's one set for GIFs, and another for JPEGs.

> No matter how slick the presentation is, it won't make mediocre work better. I sometimes wonder if the reason people keep their work so small is to hide the funky details.
>
> —Michael Borosky

To begin, set a goal for each page's download. For a standard, non-animated portfolio, a good goal is eight seconds, based on a 56.6kb modem or ISDN. If your images are photographs, you can set it a second or two higher. Assume that your portfolio image can represent the bulk of that time, since it's the focus of your site. Then change the setting in your software's preview menu to reflect your target access speed.

You can process files in bulk, using a standardized optimization setting and the software's automation menu. I don't recommend it. Although we've come a long way since the days when everything had to be coded manually, optimizing still requires a commitment to examine every image individually.

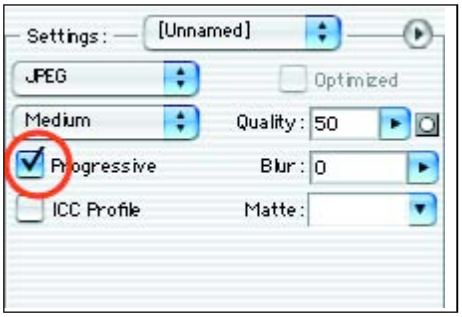
GIFs

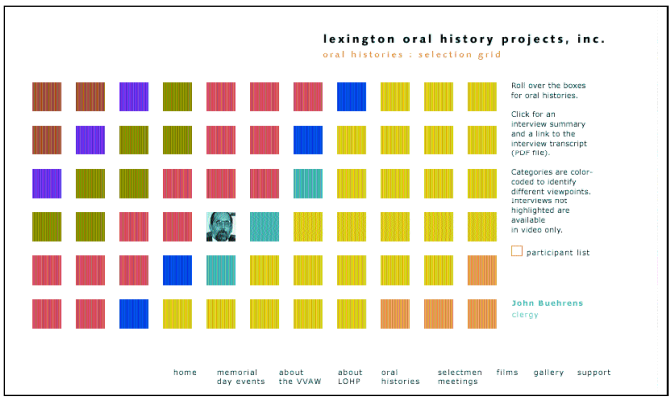
It's not a problem to get acceptable-looking GIF files. The difficulty is to shave little bits of file size from them without making any dismal changes in the appearance of the finished file.

Photographic files

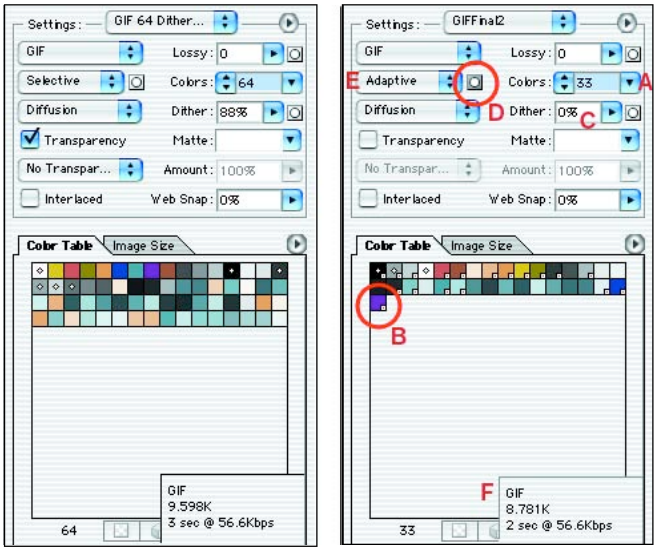
There are fewer elements to consider when creating JPEGs. The most important thing to remember is the difference between the general categories — Low, Medium, High, and Maximum — and the quality gradations within each category. You continue to have a high quality at any setting between 60 and 79, but the file size you generate can be radically different at these settings.

One extremely useful option is the Progressive setting. The larger your JPEG is, the longer it will take to load. If you choose Progressive, your JPEG will begin to load immediately at low quality, improving as it goes until it is completed. Progressive loading gives the viewer a sense that something is happening.





There's more than one way to optimize a file. This image is the result of creating custom settings (the dialog box on the right, below) instead of accepting a preset (like the dialog box to the left, below).



A. Minimize the number of colors. Starting with a 64-color preset, I've dropped colors from the palette one by one until I reached the minimum acceptable for the image.

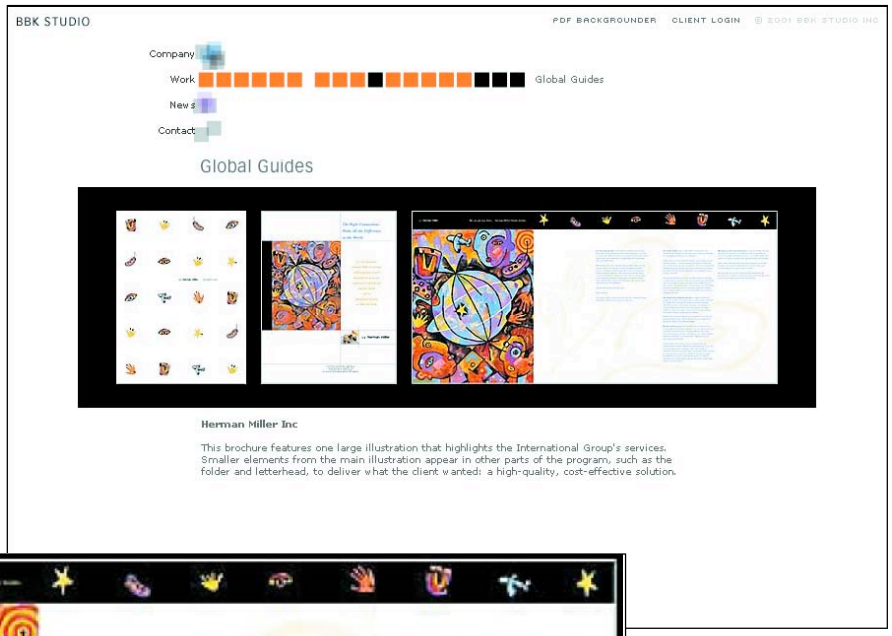
B. Several colors dropped too soon. I stepped backwards, selected the most important colors to preserve, and locked them. Locked colors can't be dropped as colors decrease.

C. This image is mostly made up of flat color and type. Through experimentation, I've found that I need no dither at this size. In fact, the type is crisper without it.

D. It was important to hold some details in the face icon when decreasing the number of colors. I created a mask of that box and saved it. Then I enabled the mask by selecting the mask button next to the palette type and protected this small detail from being posterized. This strategy is called "weighted optimization" and it works for both GIFs and JPEGs.

E. There are different methods of selecting colors for a palette. Adaptive palettes are determined by the most common colors in the image—good for pieces with lots of flat color.

F. As a result, the final optimized image will take a full second less to load. That doesn't seem like much, but when the goal for your entire page is five seconds, one second is 20% of the time.



www.bbkstudio.com
The JPEG portfolio image on this page takes up a lot of screen real estate, and appears to be a high-quality image. Yet, it was saved at Medium, tweaked upward to a quality level of 40. When you zoom it up to 300%, you can see that some areas are surprisingly well defined, while others (like the type) are barely gestures. As with GIFs, you can use a mask to weight the quality in the areas that are most important, allowing less critical areas to slide. The result is a much smaller JPEG.

Color profiles and JPEG files

A *color profile* holds information about the color space of an image or a device. If every device you use is calibrated and has a color profile, the computer can translate color between the devices so you will always see the same range of colors no matter where your file is.

Photoshop allows you to embed a color profile to an image, which is invaluable for most graphic and art purposes.

Unfortunately, most browsers don't yet read these profiles. They just show all artwork in sRGB. If you want to have an accurate assessment of what colors will look like in a browser, prepare your files in sRGB, and bring them to a browser window before you create your portfolio.

These are exactly the same JPEG file, with the same ICC profile, captured on the same monitor and operating system. The top image is color corrected. The bottom image is how it appears in a browser.

Optimizing video

After editing a video file in a non-linear editing program — cutting, splicing, adding effects, and cleaning it up — you encode it: Save it in a different, compressed format. Your major decision is to figure out what format or formats you should use to create your new file. From there, you select settings that determine the final quality and file size of your clip.

There is no standard format for video, which is a tremendous headache for portfolio creators and viewers alike. Each format is optimized to be viewed from within its own player (see the next section, "Encoders and players"). Some players allow you to view other formats, but the quality is often compromised. Unless you are quite certain of your target audience's platform and technology, you'll have to output in more than one format.

Video optimization terminology

Aspect ratio is the proportion of the horizontal to the vertical dimensions of an image. The computer/standard TV ratio is 4:3. Film/HDTV (the new standard, and the ratio of Apple Cinema Displays) runs at 16:9.

Codecs are algorithms that are built into software. They are converters that **co**mpress and **dec**ompress digital data, particularly video files. There are dozens of video codecs, including DV, MPEG-4, and Cinepak. Some are better for your purposes than others.

Fast Start is pseudo-streaming. When you play QuickTime and Windows Media Player files from a regular web server, the file downloads to the viewer's computer at the best speed for its connection and begins to play while the download is still taking place.

Hint Tracks tell a streaming server how to prepare video clip data for successful streaming. Without a hint track, the video will not stream. Hint tracks aren't needed for downloading or pseudo-streaming.

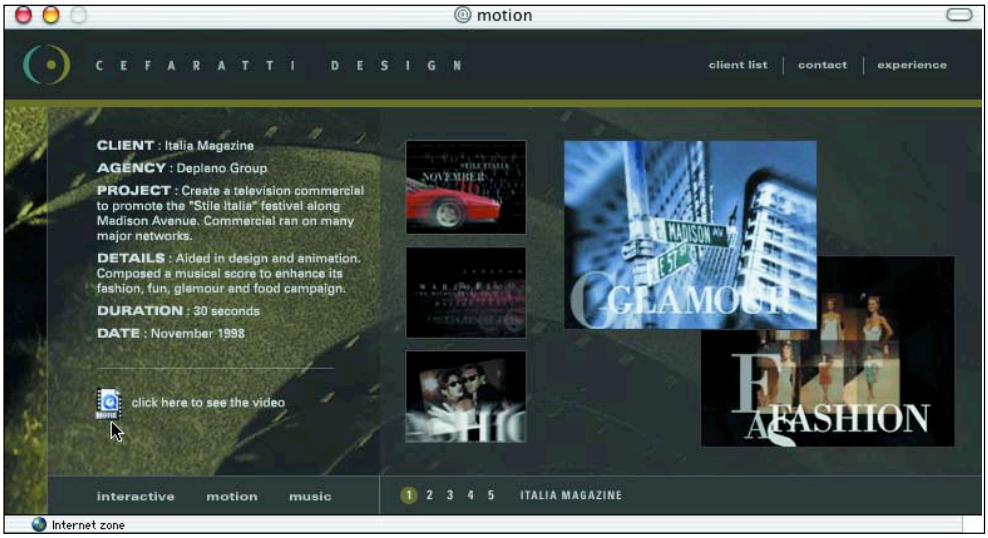
Streaming is the process of sending data to a computer in real time. The viewer doesn't have to wait for the clip to download before they can see it.

Encoders and players

To see encoded video, the viewer needs a player in your format. The "best" player format for you is one that is already installed on your viewer's computer. Because you can't always predict what that will be, you'll need to create files for more than one player. The players mentioned below are the most popular ones.

If you are creating movies for both Mac and PC users, save your edited files in at least two formats—AVI (for Windows users) and MOV (for Mac users). Even though both movie types can be played on both platforms, very few Mac users have Windows Media Player. Conversely, although a reasonable number of Windows users have QuickTime, all have WMP.

- **QuickTime.** QuickTime is Apple's cross-platform video software. It imports many other file formats, including .AVI and output to a variety of codecs. Windows users of IE5.5 and later need to download a special Active-X file to be able to see QuickTime content.



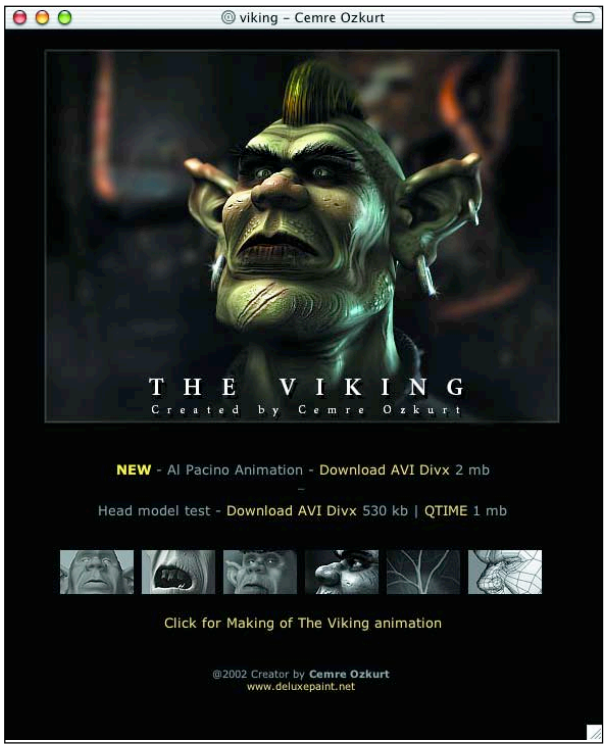
www.cefaratti.com
Like Mike Cefaratti, most graphic designers who show video in their portfolio use QuickTime as their format.

- **Windows Media.** Windows Media is installed on all Windows computers, making it the single-most popular player. The player is cross-platform, but must be downloaded by Mac users and does not support some competing formats.
- **RealOne.** RealNetworks is a provider of a codec for streaming video. Because the company's codec is used to deliver music and video content files by large corporations, the Real player has good coverage on Windows and Mac computers alike. Only the Real player can read and play a Real-encoded file.

There are two additional ways of encoding and/or playing audio and video on the Web or on a disk. Each of them relies on one of the main technologies listed previously, but requires an additional player or software on the user's computer:

- **Flash.** Macromedia Flash allows you to import video from other sources and add an interactive layer to it. You can output files in Flash's own .SWF format, or as a QuickTime or Windows Media file.
- **DivX.** DivX is a popular codec with 3D animators and DV enthusiasts. It offers high-quality, large window sizes and fast performance. It uses the Windows Media Player in Windows, and QuickTime on the Mac side.

www.deluxepaint.net
Animators like Cemre Ozkurt consider DivX a requirement for serving 3D animation over the Web.



You can't offer too many formats, but you absolutely can offer too few. You can include a player on a CD or ask a viewer to download one, but most people find that extra step extremely irritating… if they are willing to do it at all.

Encoding settings

After you've determined what format or formats best meet your needs, your next step is to select the settings that will determine the final quality and file size of your clip. Rule number one is that the more you compress, the smaller your file is and the faster it will download and play, but the worse it will look. You can maintain more quality by keeping your window playback size small.

Rule number two is that no setting is perfect for every clip. You'll want different settings for two clips in a Web-based portfolio if one is a full-motion video and another is a 2D typographic animation. Also, every person's eye and tolerance is a little different.

Window size

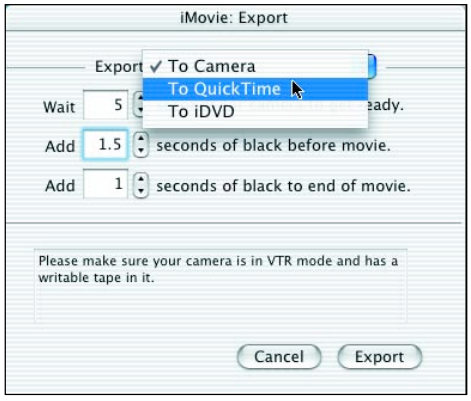
Everyone wants to show their work as large as possible, but unless your Web portfolio will reside on a streaming server, you'll have to compromise. If your movie is just a slide show or simple animation, you might be able to get as large as 320×240, because the still images or those with a static background will compress efficiently. Although standards are always improving, it's safest to display motion video in a small window, usually 160×120. If you really want to upsize to take advantage of better technology, create two window sizes and allow your viewers to choose.

Work on CD can be somewhat larger, with 320×240 being a good starting point. DVD is usually designed for a full TV screen, although you can use it to show smaller clips.

Compression type

There are too many compression types to choose from, and it can be bewildering to see the list of codecs in a typical export menu. In fact, most of them are completely useless for your portfolio. Some are for videoconferencing, for example, and others are actually almost obsolete. Even more frustrating is the list of audio codecs. Unless you have high-quality music as part of your video, you won't want to compress audio at all. Compressed audio sounds really bad, and you don't even get the benefit of smaller file sizes.

After you eliminate all the unnecessary complications, you're left with two preferred compression codecs: Sorenson and Cinepak. Cinepak is a better choice for cross-platform video clips. Sorenson is wonderful for Macintosh movies, but it isn't supported consistently enough on Windows machines to make it a safe bet for every clip. You can, however, create your .AVI files with Cinepak and your .MOV ones with Sorensen.



Always place a black or white leader—a few frames of empty background—at the beginning and at the end of a video clip. That gives the person a chance to find the video's open window and focus on it before the action begins. iMovie allows you to set this in a dialog box.

Frame speed

A higher frame rate per second gives a smoother look to your clip, but adds size to the file. Over the Web, you should probably stick with 10–15 fps. Moving up to 15–20 fps on a CD should be fine.

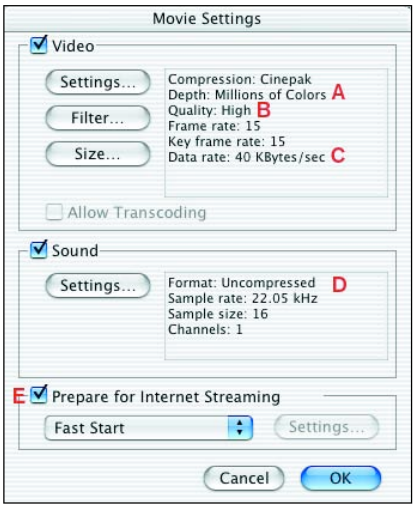
Key frame rate

Encoders can determine how much a movie changes from a reference frame (called a *key frame*). To make movies smaller, they only send information about the things that change in the frames that follow. The more key frames, the smoother the movie will appear, but the larger it will be. Too few key frames, and the movie will be small but jerky. I recommend 5–7 key frames for a CD. Web settings should be tested, depending on how much actual movement takes place in the clip. A setting of 15 ensures an update every second if your movie is playing at 15 frames per second.

File naming

It is very important to name your files with the correct extensions. Be careful not to delete these extensions by mistake, or they will not be recognized properly by their players. QuickTime uses .MOV, Windows Media uses .AVI, and Real One uses .RM.

The settings for this QuickTime movie have been set assuming cross-platform delivery. They are a compromise to allow someone on a 56kb modem to see the work at reasonable quality. Your mileage will vary.



A. Color depth. Select the highest option available.

B. Quality. For the Web, start with Medium, and test. For a CD, start with High.

C. Not all encoders let you set a data rate. If you can do so, keep the number above 30Kbps.

D. Sound. These are standard settings for portfolio audio. Set the Channels for Mono (one channel). If your video is accompanied by high-quality audio, select Qdesign on a Mac and MP3 for Windows.

E. Even if you are downloading, not really streaming, you must check this box for Internet delivery.

AFTER THE ARTWORK

Repurposing and optimizing will frequently represent the single-most intense amount of time in preparing your portfolio. Like most production work, it can feel like an obstacle in the way of the fun, creative part of portfolio development. But when you're finished, you'll be able to reuse most of it again and again as your portfolio requires.

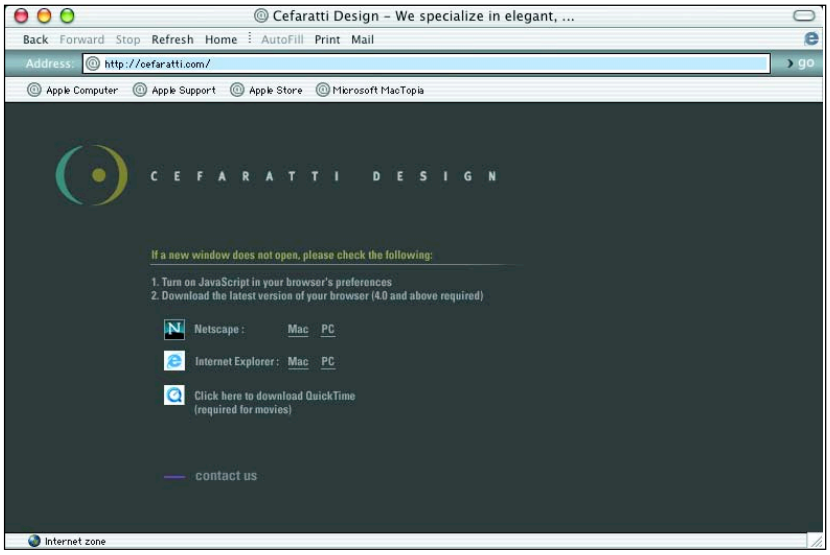
Portfolio highlight: Michael Cefaratti | Exquisite detail

cefaratti.com

The best technology appears effortless. If you do everything right — repurpose, optimize, design — nothing will pull attention away from your work. Of course, if you are also someone whose favorite projects involve manipulating bleeding-edge combinations of media, anyone who needs your talents will pay as close attention to how you do your work as to how elegantly it is designed. Mike Cefaratti's portfolio holds up to both types of scrutiny.

I am challenged by opportunities where I can create fully immersive, interactive experiences that draw upon new technologies.

—Mike Cefaratti



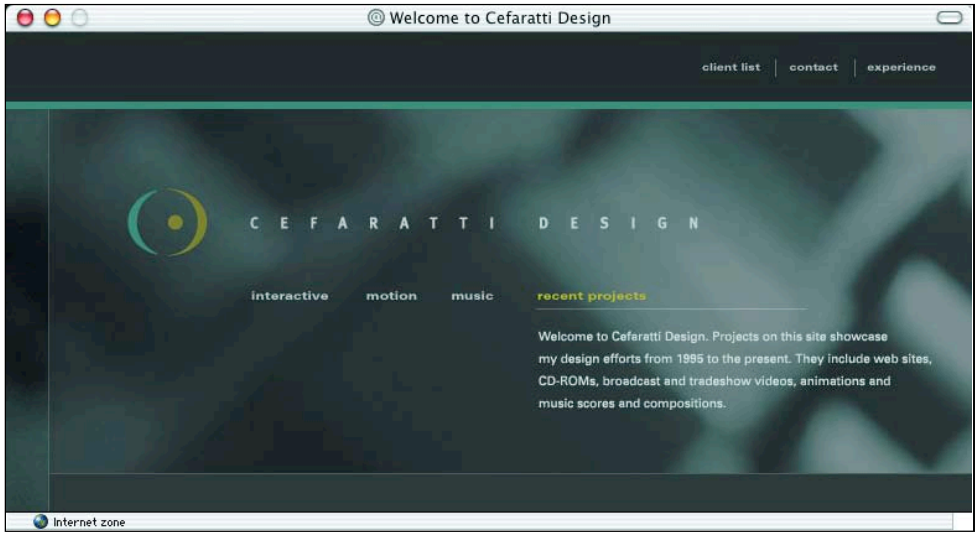
Like most savvy interface designers, Cefaratti knows that you can't take anyone's technology for granted. Although his home page should pop up only a moment later, on the opening page he offers contingencies. There are directions, as well as every link his viewers might need to see his site. One very savvy detail: He puts his contact link right on this first page. If someone is just looking to get in touch with him, they don't have to wade through an interface to find it.

An accomplished interface designer in New York, Cefaratti works full-time in his own freelance design firm. Although he also considers his peers in the mix, his primary target audience is his clients. They're people who want to see his work as quickly as possible. Knowing their needs, he keeps distractions to a minimum: Every element serves a purpose, and there is not a single wasted gesture or word.

Cefaratti's presentation may be very straightforward, but it doesn't come across as stark or cold. Design choices and details make the pages feel rich and visually satisfying.

I refrained from using complicated navigation and animation that might detract from the overall user experience. A good user experience allows the work to suggest a voice that doesn't "shout" at the user.

—Mike Cefaratti



The site's predominant color is a cool teal, with a soft photographic image providing texture. Hairline rules define the portfolio display area, and combine with transparent overlays to define page architecture. His crisp white text is small but highly legible.

Front and center are the main portfolio branches, including the highlighted link to his most recent projects. This link is set off by color and positioning to make it the most prominent one on the page.

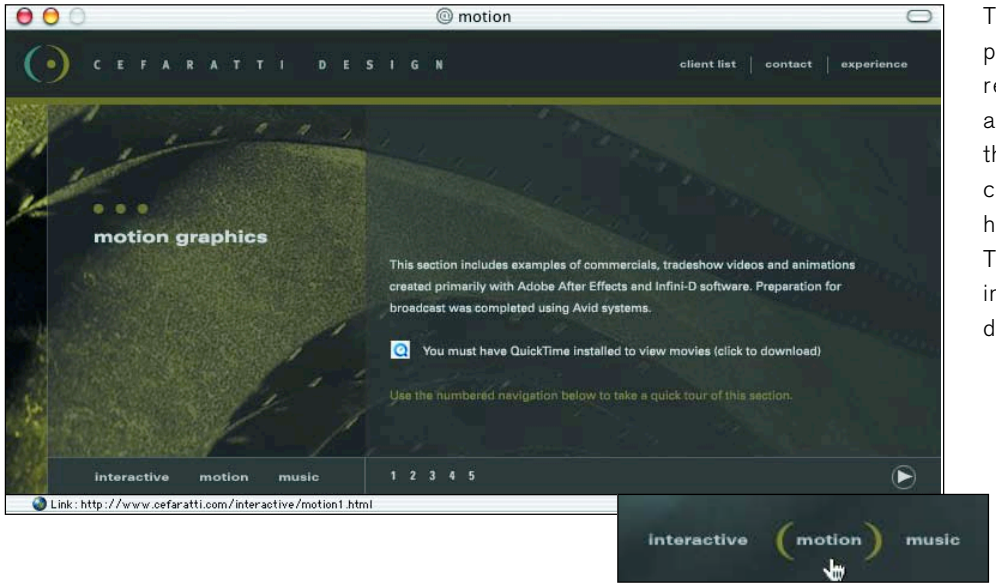
Navigation and architecture

Cefaratti is a good host. He's given a lot of thought to what brings a prospective client to his site, and what they expect to find when they arrive. First, they'll want to know what he's done lately, to see that he is active and to scope out his current clientele. Then they'll want to see some examples of prior work, to examine his capabilities. If they have time, they'll look deeper, but most won't click past the first few projects in each sequence.

Knowing what they want, Cefaratti streamlined his navigation and architecture. Everything is immediately accessible and intelligently organized. His linear groupings aren't arranged by something arbitrary like chronology or alphabet. His best projects come up first. This strategy also ensures that if they're in a hurry, prospective clients will only see the projects he thinks are his best.

It's very important to choose work that best describes you as a designer and is also appropriate for your audience. I strategically placed some of my strongest work at the beginning of each section for ease of reference.

—Mike Cefaratti

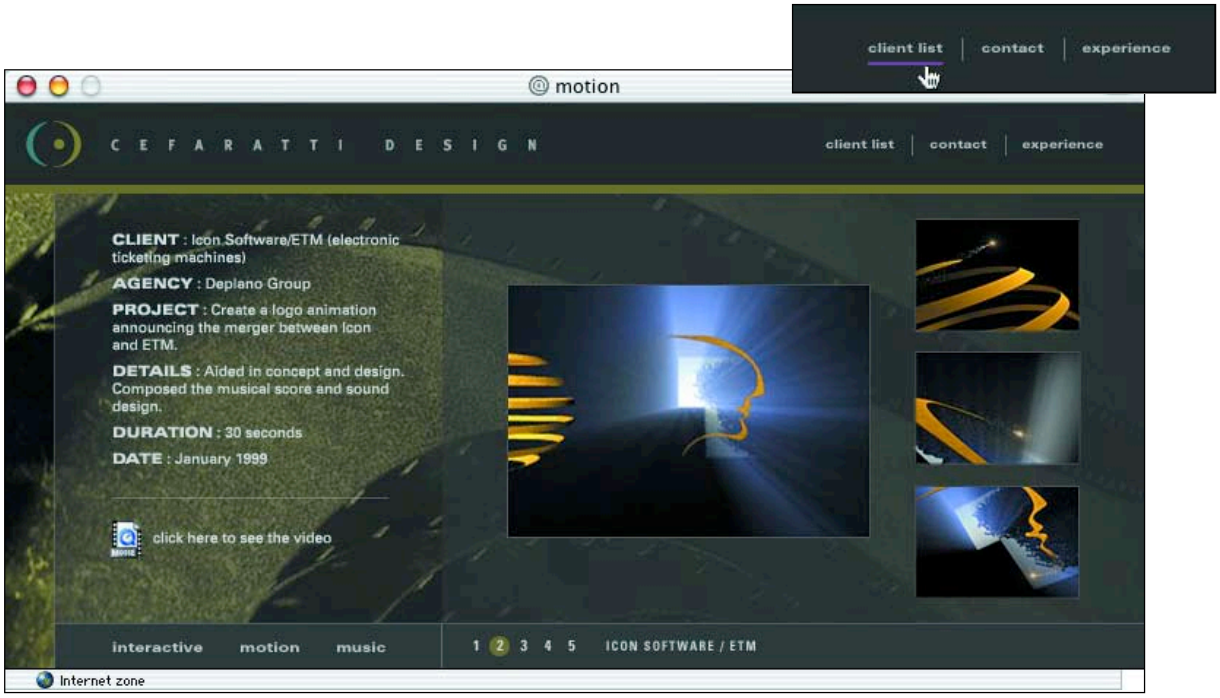


The bulk of Cefaratti's professional work can be reached from the interactive and motion branches. Roll over the other project links, and color-coded brackets that echo his logo appear around them. The colors dominate the interface design for each distinct area.

Although Cefaratti's architecture is meant to be experienced linearly, his navigation offers viewers many opportunities to take control if they wish. They can view projects out of planned order, jump to one of the other main portfolio sections, or explore some projects in more depth. The site is an excellent compromise between the designer's need to control and the user's desire for choices.

Content

As you enter each portfolio section, Cefaratti presents a short introduction to the type of work it includes and his share of the projects. Doing this upfront lets you know that he is capable of playing multiple roles. Every page that follows is specific as to what he did and the client brief he met. There is no guessing about what his responsibilities might have been—a problem that can readily crop up in collaborative projects.



A second set of links appears in the upper-right corner of the page, separated cleanly by a horizontal bar that defines the portfolio display area. These persist throughout the main portfolio sections. Instead of brackets, a thin plum underline appears on rollover. This color change reinforces the distinction between the portfolio and the person behind it.

Below the display area is a new set of links: a numbered sequence. The links make it easiest for you to view the work in Cefaratti's preferred order, but don't prevent you from jumping around. To keep you oriented, the page you are on is highlighted with a circle, and the client name appears with the navigation.

At any time, a click on the logo above the bar returns the viewer to the home page.

All too frequently, work online is small and typographic details are non-existent. Most of Cefaratti's images can actually still be read, and his typographic aesthetic understood. His optimizing in both still images and video clips is impressive.

Not unexpectedly, Cefaratti's content appears with blinding speed. What is extraordinary is how beautiful it looks. There is almost no *posterization*, or the jpeg artifacts that often appear when the quality level is too low. Cefaratti maintains image quality and achieves good download times by using Equilibrium's Debabelizer to create custom palettes and experiment with compression settings. No potential client will ever be surprised by the difference between what they think they've seen online and what the project actually is.

Savvy content choices extend beyond accomplished repurposing. In interactive work, you often have several screens that represent different levels in a site. Showing too many examples could bore some viewers, while others might be genuinely interested in seeing how an entire project was handled. Cefaratti's solution serves both needs. Some projects have additional links that allow the viewer to explore a project in depth.

When a project has additional examples, a forward arrow appears and blinks discretely, accompanied by explanatory text. The arrows become back and forward arrows as the sequence unfolds.

Future plans

Cefaratti's ultimate goals are to combine his interactive talents with his interests in broadcast design and music in kiosk or tradeshow installations. To ensure that people will be aware of these interests, his portfolio currently includes separate sections for motion and music composition. The recent projects section is fairly new. In the future, it will allow him to keep his existing site intact while building a small subset of new projects that he can add to as they are completed—a clever solution to the update problem.

I highlighted one or two visually strong images for each project, and then gave the user the choice of either seeing more examples of that project or moving on. This also worked better on a visual level. I had more real estate and was able to maintain an uncluttered interface.

—Mike Cefaratti