

ProShow Producer: The Top of the Line Content Creation Software

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I have been using ProShow Gold for several years now and around last Christmas I upgraded to version 3. It is a software title from Photodex that creates digital slide shows and saves them in dozens of different formats, 100 is the cited number on their Web site. When I purchased ProShow Gold I considered purchasing ProShow Producer, in fact even purchased it, only to cancel it almost immediately. The price was steep, I swallowed that; but it also used a “dongle” for copy protection. I called them and cancelled my order on the principle that I would not use software whose functioning is tied to a piece of hardware, no matter how durable it might be. I consider any and all devices like that a punishment that legitimate users have to endure while the unscrupulous pirates enjoy their copies with utmost freedom. I am very happy to report that Photodex has taken steps to remedy my concern over the dongle and lowered the price substantially to make ProShow Producer a worthy product to consider. The software is copy – protected to prevent unlicensed use but it no longer requires a hardware dongle. Producer is priced at \$270 for a boxed copy with a manual, and \$250 for a downloaded copy. Photodex provided me with a review copy with the manual, I must say the book is substantial and covers all the technical bases. Photodex also provides online training material on their Web site and training DVDs are available for purchase. (PSRI members receive a 20% discount on ProShow Producer and ProShow Gold. See an officer for details.)

The interface

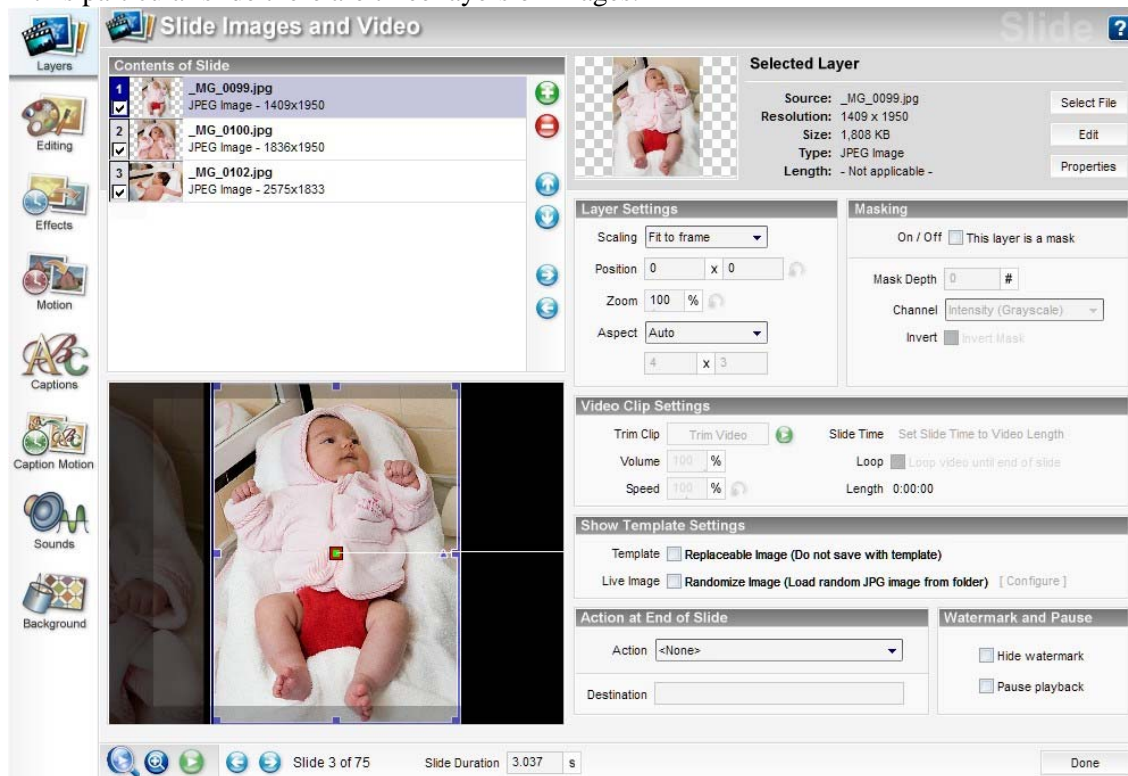
Upon starting, Producer presents an interface very similar to that of ProShow Gold . Below is a screen capture:



The typical menu bar is followed by an extensive toolbar. The other panels, the folders list, image thumbnails, the slide list, the preview windows can be opened or closed at will. Closing the file list, for instance, will provide more room for the thumbnails. Under the slide list/timeline area is the audio list bar and below the preview window is the size indicator of the selected output, here an EXE file is chosen. The interface is clean and intuitive.

Creating a Show

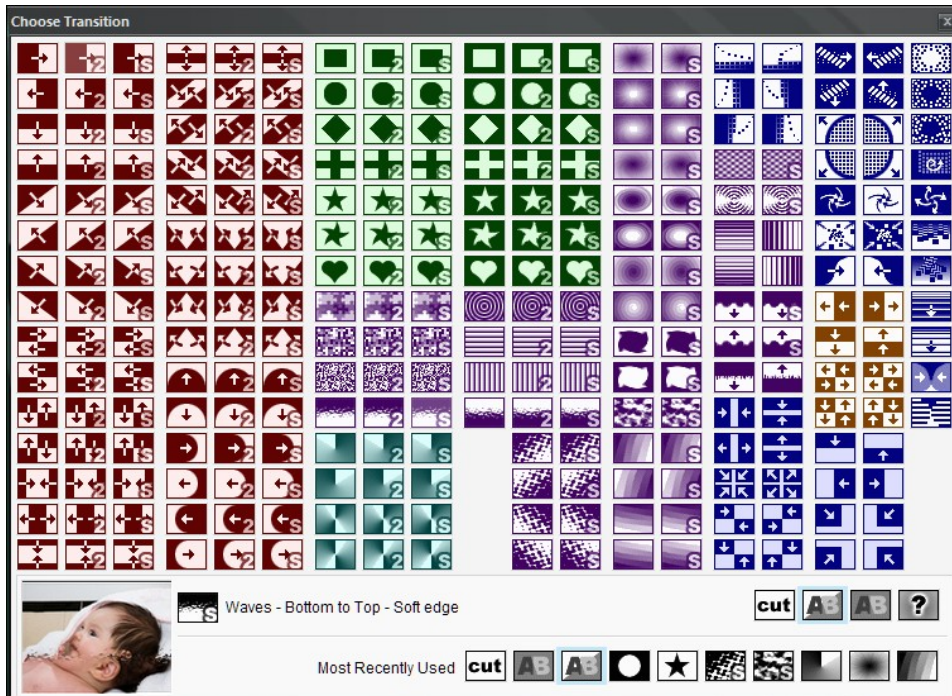
Creating a simple show is, well, simple; but to produce high quality content you should plan ahead, have an idea about how your show should look, etc. This review is not about that however. So, navigate to the directory containing the images you want to include in the show using the “File List” panel. Under that the thumbnails of the images will show up. ProShow Producer is fluent in many image formats, including RAW if you must include them in your show. The next step is to drag the images from the thumbnails panel to the slide list of the show. Here Producer honors multiple file selection that your system supports. In Windows XP, which is what I use, Ctrl-Click selects multiple noncontiguous files, and Shift-Click selects the adjacent files between clicks. It is almost this simple to create a show, you can preview the creation in the preview window but there are many more adjustments at your fingertips. I rate the show creation process as simple yet with sophisticated options if necessary. For instance, one slide may include multiple layers all independently controlled. You can see the many options available in the image below. In this particular slide there are three layers of images.



Transitions and Timing

What gives a slideshow its fluidity is the sequencing of the images that transition from one to the next. Each slide remains visible for a given duration which can be different for each slide, and there is a specified time for the transitioning from one to the next. In the screen capture above, you can see that each slide is to remain visible for 3.037 seconds and the first two transitions will last for 1.301 seconds and the last two for one second each.

The transition timing and the transition to use can be selected from a large list of transitions, over 280 transitions are available. To bring up that screen, simply click on the transition icon between the two slides you want to change. It will bring up the transition chooser shown below.



At the bottom of the window the chosen transition is displayed to indicate how it will look but at a fixed transition time. You can change the transition time by clicking on the timing window and writing the desired transition time. Remember that the transition time reduces proportionate amounts of display time from the two adjacent slides; you need to account for that in deciding how long each slide should be visible. There are ways of making sure that the slide duration never goes below a certain length, you will discover them on your own when you need to have that kind of control.

Although you can control each transition individually, a global adjustment may make the task simpler even if some will have variations. Simply select all the slides in the timeline and then change the transition and the duration. You can do the same for the slide duration as well, sometimes accidentally so be careful. Also keep in mind that the slideshow is about the content not to showcase the technology you are using. Simple transitions, limited to a very few, say 2 or 3, will keep the content as the primary element in your production. You should also consider the duration of each slide very carefully as too little time will not allow the viewer to appreciate that image and too long a time may cause them to lose concentration.

Adding Sound

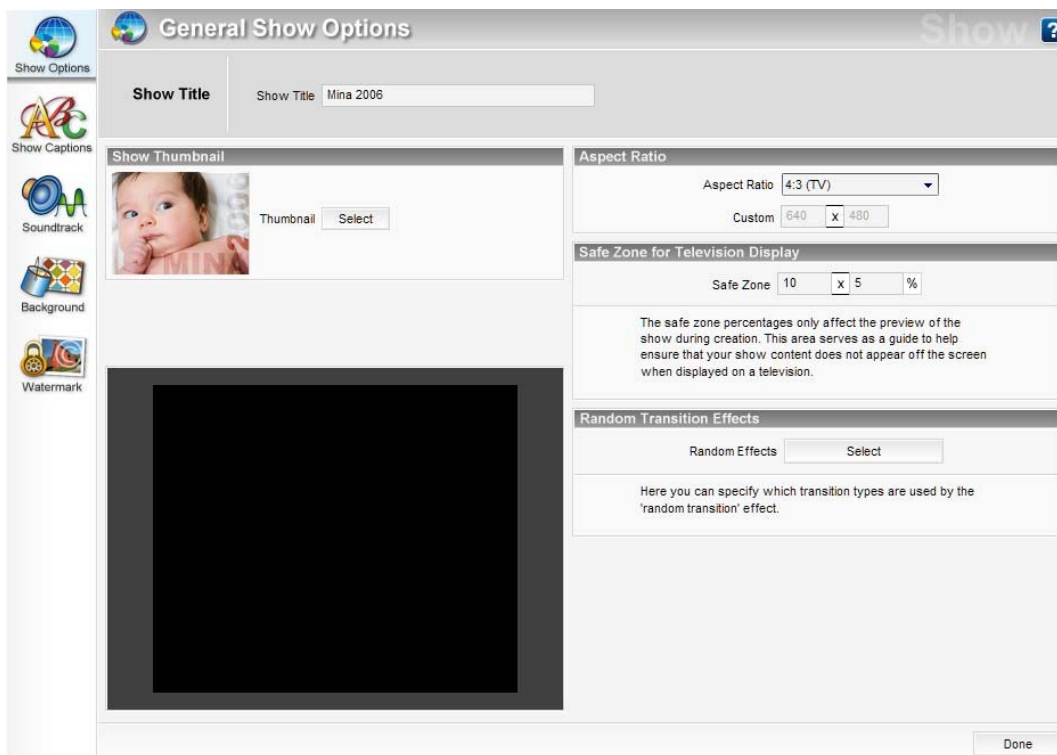
In the old days, when we viewed slides there was no sound, unless it was a “professional” production. With the advent of digital slideshows using some sort of music has become almost mandatory, expected. However, you should be aware of the inherent power and difficulties in combining two art forms when you choose the music or narrative for your slideshow. Music has a language that is different from that of photography or video creations. Doing some research either by consulting people who are knowledgeable about music or through some reading you may have a better chance of choosing the music that will not compete with the visual content. There are also “formulas” for creating slideshows, which I encourage you to read or hear, but for goodness

sake, do not take them as Gospel. This is your show, carrying your message; someone else's formula may not be suitable.

ProShow Producer will use any mp3 or wav file or even convert the music from your CD. It is simpler if you have a list of suitable files that you would like to use rather than losing time converting them from a CD. When you decide on what music to use, simply drag the file on the audio list bar. The approximation of the wave form will show in green and the music will most likely extend beyond the screen. Here is a challenge, how will you adjust the timing of your slides and transitions to fit the music. Sounds very time consuming and tedious but the program offers a simple solution. You can "sync show to audio", a selection under the "Audio" menu and Producer will proportionately adjust the timing of the slides and the transitions to fit the duration of the music. There are other options there, particularly useful if you use more than one audio file, which will make the selected slides to fit the audio. Your show is ready, play the preview and see how you like the finished product. Remember that you can start playback on any slide and move forward by simply clicking on the slide before starting the preview. This is useful if you want to review timing and transitions of a small section for fine tuning.

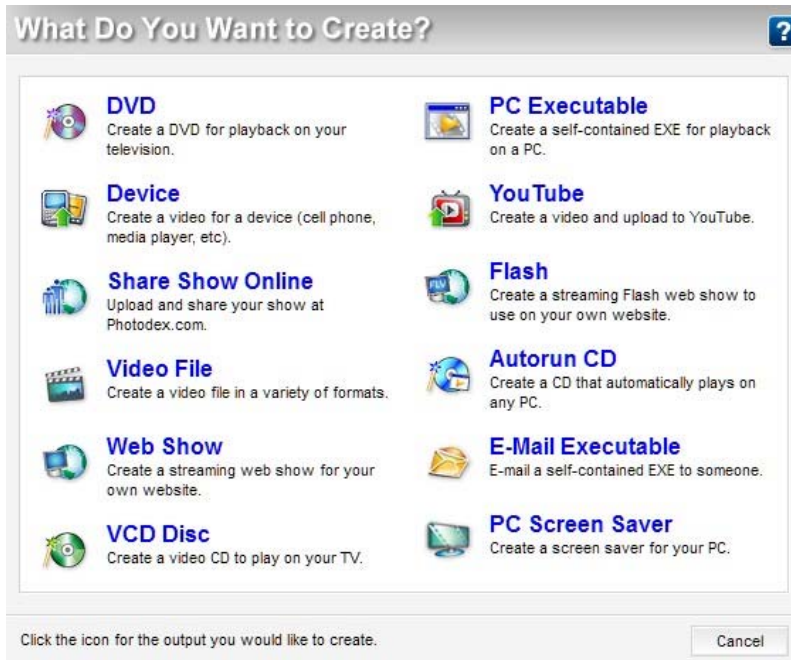
Creating the Output

To serve a purpose, your slideshow needs to exist outside the Producer so that you can share it with others. Before jumping to that point, however, you should make some choices about your show such as the dimensions, the format, the menus, and the like. From the menu, select "Show/General Show Options" and you will see the window shown below.



Here, you can choose all the relevant options like the aspect ratio, captions, background and so on. After you choosing the show options, the show is ready to be output in the desired format or formats. Here too, you will find a multitude of output options and devices supported. Not only can you output for, say DVD or video CD, you can also output in executable format and in formats supported by many other devices. (Yes, iPod Touch is among the supported devices!)

When you choose “Create/Create Output” from the menu the selection window appears; a very convenient feature that lists all available options.



Selecting any of these options will bring the appropriate output window where additional options are available. This process is much more convenient than what ProShow Gold used to offer. I am pleased to report that the same output workflow has been incorporated into the latest version of ProShow Gold as well.

There, you have your show, from beginning to end a rather simple process. Admittedly, I have not delved into the sophisticated features like layer transparency, layer controls, key framing, inclusion of video clips (be careful here!) They are all there. For a complete feature set and comparison to ProShow Gold, visit the Photodex Web site where they list them side-by-side showing the features each support.

Conclusion

Coming from ProShow Gold, I found using Producer very easy. Even if you have never used any of their offerings, learning to produce simple and reasonably complex shows is quite straight forward. Their online tutorials are good and cover introductory and advanced topics. If the additional features that Producer offers are important to you, you will find the product well worth the price. If the additional features are not important, then you may consider ProShow Gold, which offers most of the features of Producer except some business oriented features like on the fly slideshow creation and other esoteric functions. I recommend ProShow Gold if you are new to digital slideshow creation. If you need to put together industrial grade shows that are not possible with Gold, then don't hesitate to give Producer a strong try. Neither will disappoint you.

[Product comparison between ProShow Gold and Producer](#)
[Photodex tutorials](#)
[Sample show \(requires plugin download\)](#)