

## Shoot your screen

By Tom Pitts

I must confess to being a little intimidated. In an age when most featured reviews are about high-powered color video applications like CameraMan and Premiere, all I want to discuss is how best to make a simple screen shot—that is, one measly picture or frame. But isn't that all *most* of us need to do for our routine work when we want to demonstrate a point about the Mac or its software? Of course, it is—for example, my user group newsletter usually sports several screen shots in each issue, but we've yet to add a QuickTime movie to one of our articles. And if we did, you'd never see it, unless we sent the newsletter out on a disk.

There are numerous programs available that let you capture the image, or a portion thereof, that is on the Mac's screen. You can include that graphic in a document and print it in the hard copy. That's how authors create the fancy screen shots you've seen in manuals (if you read them), books, magazines, newsletters, etc. At one time or another I've used virtually every one of these applications. Naturally I have developed some personal preferences, but the choice of which application to use is not as easy as it might seem. Each program has strengths and weaknesses and a program that is useful in one situation might be inappropriate in another. Herein we will review several of the utilities that are currently available to create screen shots on the Macintosh.

Starting at the bottom...

You are probably familiar with the cheapest screen capture program—it's included with the Mac system software. If you depress the key combination Command-Shift-3, the entire image on the screen will be captured to a PICT file. It is named generically "Picture 1", "Picture 2," etc., and stored on the desktop of your start-up drive. (See Figure 1.)

Some folks will find this little feature sufficient to meet their needs. Of course, the disadvantage is that you have no control over the size or content of the image—you get the entire screen image, even the portions that are not relevant to the point you wish to illustrate. You can use a graphics application to "clean up" your image, but that is tedious at best. Moreover, you cannot capture any pull-down menus with this method. Most people require a more sophisticated program to get the best screen shots.

Shareware to the rescue

Several shareware screen capture utilities are available. Unfortunately, one of the first efforts of a budding shareware programmer is often a screen shot application. Thus, the "market" is fraught with many potential system crashes if a "shopper" experiments with all possibilities that can be found on local bulletin board systems and commercial services such as America Online or CompuServe. Since I have a bit of experience in the shareware world, I can recommend a program that will be safe to try out.

My personal favorite, the one I give to folks who write for my newsletter and need such a program, is Flash-It. Written by Nobu Toge, of Menlo Park, CA, Flash-It is an extension/Control Panel combination that lets you capture all or parts of your Mac screen in color or black and white, with system 6 or above. It is configured in its Control Panel (See Figure 2.) where you can set such features as the "hot keys" needed to capture the screen, whether or not the cursor will be captured in the screen shot, a magnification factor, and whether the image will be sent to the printer or Clipboard, or saved as a PICT file and named and placed in a selected folder before it is saved. You can capture a selected portion of

the screen, including a pull-down menu by scrolling around the desired area. Or you can easily capture just a window if that's all you need.

Although Flash-It is not as easy to use as *some* commercial products, or as powerful as *others*, it has been around for a number of years and is very stable. In general, it is as good a program as most commercial ones, and at a shareware price of \$15 it is an incredible software bargain.

Other fine share/demo-ware programs have been around in one version or another for a long time also. I do not intend to malign one that you may like by omitting it. If you venture to the information services and bulletin boards to download screen capture utilities and experiment with them, I recommend caution. You can occasionally find a nice program, but, more often, you will be in for a system crash or two.

### Commercial programs

My personal favorite of *all* screen capture programs is Snipper, a part of the little-known (poor marketing) but outstanding QuickTools utility package from Advanced Software. In its Control Panel window you define a hot key combination to activate its capture function and select a graphics application—whatever you use on your machine—to serve as the creator type for the screen image. Thus, later, when you double click on a screen image that you have captured, it will open in your graphics application. Images are saved in PICT format and can be opened with (or imported into) any application that supports (or imports) PICT files—including SuperPaint, Canvas, Photoshop, Word, Quark Express, and PageMaker. Many of the screen shots in this article were directly imported from a PICT image created with Snipper.

The outstanding features of Snipper are its intuitive interface and ease of use. It can capture all or part of a screen, including a pull-down menu, saving to the clipboard or to disk. It will include the cursor if so desired. Simply select its activation key combo; the screen is frozen and a Snipper dialog box appears letting you determine what part of the screen you want to save. (See Figure 3.) If you want just a menu or a window it will cleanly capture only that portion of the screen. There's no need for you to mess around trying to encircle the desired image with squinted eyes and a shaky hand on the mouse. Of course, if you need to capture a specific part of the screen other than a simple menu or a window, you can squint your eyes, steady your hand and enclose the area you want with a mouse selection. The image can even be constrained to include the smallest possible area by depressing the Command key as you select it with the mouse. A clean screen shot that requires no editing takes just a second—a mere mouse click—with Snipper.

I have only one complaint about Snipper. When you save an image to disk, there is no opportunity to name it and select a destination folder. Your screen shots are saved to the hard disk window and named generically, for example, "Finder Snip 00," "Finder Snip 01," etc. This can be annoying if you are making a series of images and don't want to pause between each to name them and put them in a folder. If that is a major problem for you, I'd recommend another program, like Flash-It or SnapJot. Otherwise, you can't beat Snipper, and for a price less than most screen shot-only programs, you get one of the best utility *packages* around—seven or eight terrific utilities!

### The best of the rest

SnapJot is one of the better commercial screen capture utilities. It is a Desk Accessory and INIT combination. Its features are configured from the Preferences... menu item in its desk accessory interface. (See Figure 4.) Its capabilities are similar to most screen capture programs. It can capture a color, B&W, or grayscale image in PICT or paint format with user-selected creator (also called "owner") applications. SnapJot can capture a screen image to the clipboard, to a file on disk, or send it to the printer. You may also have it capture the cursor, if you wish. User-defined activation keys are set in the Preferences menu. You'll have to remember a different activation key combo for each of its capture options, unless you want a single key combo to perform more than one of these options simultaneously.

SnapJot gives you the very useful option of naming the file to be saved and selecting the folder in which it will be placed—on the fly, as you save the image. Also, it can display the captured image on screen in a special SnapJot window from which it can be viewed and copied, printed or saved later if it satisfies your needs. Multiple captured images can open in SnapJot windows, allowing you to capture several images quickly and save them later. This type of activity is limited by the available RAM, of course.

A disadvantage of SnapJot is that you must use the mouse to scroll and enclose that part of the screen you want to capture. It does not automatically capture a part of the screen, such as a dialog window or a pull-down menu—you *must* select manually. This makes it a little tedious to use and can result in less precise or “clean” screen shots, especially if you don’t have a sharp eye and trained mouse hand. By having the captured image remain on screen, you can scrutinize it to determine if the area you captured is exactly what you want. If it isn’t, you can just do it over until you get something you like.

For me this is too tedious. Most of my screen shots are of menus, windows or well defined, clean areas of the screen image. The major advantages offered by SnapJot over Snipper are its abilities to review the shot on the screen, to name the image when you save it and to put it into the folder of your choice. If these strengths are of greater importance to you than ease of use, then SnapJot should be your choice.

Another keeper

Capture, an extension/Control Panel, by Mainstay, is another excellent screen capture utility. Its features are configured in its Control Panel window. (See Figure 5.) It is similar to SnapJot in most of its abilities. (Because it is a Control Panel rather than a Desk Accessory, it is more easily accessed if you want to alter its configuration.) The captured image can be color, grayscale, or B&W, and it lets you pre-set the destination folder and name the file as you capture the image. If you like, it will automatically name the images for you, allowing you to capture many images quickly. The cursor can be included. The activation keys are user-defined, as are the creator applications for the various formats in which you can save a file.

Some handy features of Capture include the ability to reduce the image and to delay the capture a few moments. The latter facilitates your capture of a rapidly changing screen, such as a game or a screen saver. However, most programs can capture in such situations with no delay feature. The most prominent advantage of Capture is that it can save the image in TIFF 4.0 and 5.0 formats (in addition to PICT and paint formats, and to the scrapbook or the Clipboard). If you are a graphic artist, the extra formats might come in handy.

Unfortunately, Capture is no easier to use than SnapJot. You must encircle the desired area of the screen with the mouse cursor. Unlike Snipper, and to a lesser extent, Flash-It, Capture offers no automatic selection of menus or windows. Unless you need one of Capture’s unique features, Snipper and Flash-It are easier to use and better bargains.

Top dog

The clear-cut, top-of-the-line screen capture utility is Exposure Professional. This program, written by Mike Wittingham and distributed by Baseline Publishing, is the “big brother” to ScreenShot, an older Wittingham capture program similar in abilities to Flash-It. Fact is, it is more than a big brother: It is almost another species altogether. There is little that Exposure Pro cannot do to and for screen captures.

Like most such utilities, Exposure Pro has a user-defined activation key combination that you set in its Control Panel window. When you activate it, the screen is frozen (including any windows,

menus and hierarchical sub-menus) and a floating, movable work palette appears. (See Figure 6.) At this point all similarity to other screen capture programs ceases.

You now are working in an environment like a paint program, complete with a full set of paint and color graphics tools. Numerous options are available in the Exposure Pro menus. (See Figure 7.) With these tools and options you can move, delete, enhance, etc., any part or parts of the image, just as if you were using a dedicated paint program. The list of paint features is long, and rivals that of such programs as SuperPaint and MacPaint. To avoid sounding like a salesman I'll list just a few. You get: grayscale and color support up to 32-bit modes; dithering and bleaching features; multiple, rotatable text blocks, with multiple fonts, styles and sizes; a fat bits mode that has up to ten-fold enlargement for precise work; customizable fill patterns, lines, arrowheads, brushes, erasers, and colors, etc. You can manipulate the image to your heart's content, with an end-product that doesn't need to have much (or any) resemblance to the original screen. (See my rearrangement of a popular screen saver image, Figure 8.)

The program can also *automatically* isolate an open window (or multiple open windows—see Figure 9) or a pull-down menu, yielding a clean image with no need for you to perform tedious paint work.

Many other features let you modify the screen image to suit your needs. With a customizable Tear-off tool you can create an image with serrated edge(s) lending the impression that parts of the image were omitted. (See Figure 10.) A Frame tool lets you frame your image in one of 12 frame borders in rectangular or rounded and/or shadowed styles. There are 14 images you can choose from to represent the cursor—or show no cursor if you wish. There are more nuances that you will discover after some experience with the program. There's also a Personalizer application that gives the “power user” even more power.

Once you have created an image that you want to save, you'll be faced with a multitude of options (surprised?). You can save the image to the Clipboard or send it to the printer. You can save it to disk in many formats including PICT, PICT2, and paint, with a user-defined creator application for each format. You can save an image to a Scrapbook, with support for multiple scrapbooks. The image can also be saved as a resource, including color or black and white icon, cursor and pattern types. (See Figure 11.) You can also save the captured image as a StartUpScreen, either the standard small black and white screen, or as a full screen-size image in B&W, gray scale, or color. Beginner and experienced “hackers” will love these capabilities of Exposure Pro.

Is it Camelot?

The only problem with Exposure Pro, that which prevents my using it as my everyday screen capture utility, is its extreme complexity. It takes a long time to learn the program and occasional reference to the manual is necessary even after a good deal of experience has been gained. Because of its more complicated interface it is slower to use than other screen capture programs. It has a “mini-exposure” mode that can help speed things a little, and is necessary in low-memory situations.

Fortunately, the manual is very well written and quite complete—one of the best manuals you'll find. Nonetheless, the program remains too complex and slow for the simple screen shots—the type I most often make. Even the author of the manual confesses: “I used Exposure Pro in conjunction with ScreenShot, a simpler screen capture program. If you want the ultimate in flexibility, you should really have both programs.”

I agree wholeheartedly: That sums it up nicely. If you make only simple screen shots, Exposure Pro is more that you'll want to deal with. If you make a lot of screen shots, including some fancy

or complex ones, you'll need an easy-to-use program as well as Exposure Pro. For me, the combination of Snipper and Exposure Pro offers the best in flexibility and power.

The bottom line

Although I love both Exposure Pro and Snipper, and recommend the pair without reservation, there may be another program that's right for you. For most folks, I think Flash-It will fill the bill at a great price. Pay your shareware fee and you will be rewarded with free upgrades later. SnapJot and Capture are fine programs, as long as you don't mind the need to scroll to capture the desired screen area. I have found SnapJot the handiest program when I need to name and place a file as I save it. Finally, you graphic artists might prefer Capture for its range of file saving formats. Your hardware and system configurations shouldn't drive your choice as these programs are compatible with color and black and white and with system 6.x and above, including System 7.x. I have tested them all on an SE/30, but I *do* recommend you check their compatibilities with your particular Mac.

Financial facts:

Flash-It

\$15, shareware

Snipper

\$79.95 (part of QuickTools package)

SnapJot

\$32 (street)

Capture

\$129.95

Exposure Professional

\$139.95

Except where noted, prices are List; "street" prices run about 30–50% less, depending on the vendor.

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