Chapter 5:

GET IMPORTING THOSE GRAPHICS!

WORKING WITH OUTSIDE GRAPHICS

Ready to incorporate some outside graphics into your movies? Flash offers up the ability to import and work with graphics and artwork that has been cooked up in some of your other favorite applications, including Illustrator and Photoshop. So, lets say that you're going along building your Flash movie, and you realize you want to use a photo from the last family reunion or incorporate some buttons you whipped up in Illustrator. No worries, Flash can handle this type of content without much hassle.

We'll take a look at working with Illustrator and Photoshop content shortly, but first up, it's wranglin' all those other pesky file formats—TIFs, JPEGs, GIFs, and their rowdy gaggle of trouble-makers.

But before we get to all that, I gotta throw a few things at ya. First, in this chapter, we'll be making reference to vector and raster images. Do you remember the difference between these? We discussed these two fellas way back in Chapter 2, in the sidebar *"The Happs in Graphics: Raster vs. Vector,"* so head back if you need a refresher.
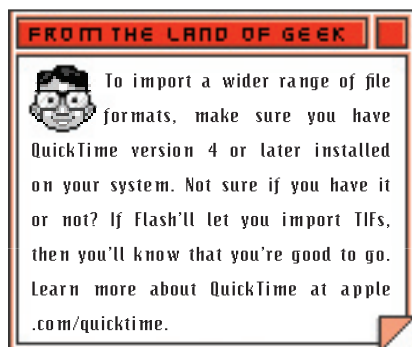
Know too that Flash refers to raster images as bitmaps (not to be confused with the BMP file

HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER

It's all about messin' about with graphics in Flash here, kids. First up, we'll take a look at importing regular file formats like JPEGs and GIFs, then later on you'll see how well Flash plays with Illustrator and Photoshop. It's a real smooth process, with lots of control over how you want Flash to handle this type of content. Later on, you'll see how you can set image compression, manipulate your graphics in an external editor, and even use your graphics as fills for other objects. A few other surprises await along the way, so let's check 'er out!

Cross-eyed, toothless, walkin' with a limp kinda carnival folk a common sight in your town? Why, you must be from Orillia!

FLASH'LL LET YOU IMPORT A WHOLE BUNCHA OF GRAPHIC FILE FORMATS, INCLUDING JPEG, GIF, TIF, BMP, PNGS, AND A WHOLE LOT MORE.

This probably won't come up too often, but it's worth a mention: The graphics that you wanna bring into Flash have to be at least 2 pixels by 2 pixels. 1 by 1 graphics ain't supported! Damn!

format). Often, the two terms are used interchangeably, but they both refer to the same thing. Confusing, especially if you're a noob.

Alright, so assuming that you're cool with raster (bitmap) and vector graphics, and the differences between the two, then strap in and lets get going.

GETTIN' TA GRIPS WITH GRAPHIC FILE FORMATS IN FLASH

Here's a list of file formats that Flash will allow you to import—assuming that you have QuickTime 4 or higher installed. If you don't have QuickTime installed, the list is pretty much the same, you'll just be missing a few formats. Most notably, TIFF and the Silicon Graphics Image format.

AutoCAD DXF	FutureSplash Player	PNG
Bitmap	GIF	QuickTime Image
Enhanced Windows Metafile	Illustrator AI	Silicon Graphics Image
Flash Player 6/7	JPEG	TGA
FreeHand	MacPaint	TIFF
	Photoshop PSD	Windows Metafile
	PICT	

Droppin' JPEGs, GIFs and More Into Flash

So as mentioned, Flash'll let you import a whole buncha of graphic file formats, including JPEG, GIF, TIF, BMP, PNGs, and a whole lot more. If you're unsure if your graphic file will import, follow these steps anyway, and odds are, everything'll work out just dandy. And if it doesn't, just drink instead. Either way, you're sure to have a good time.
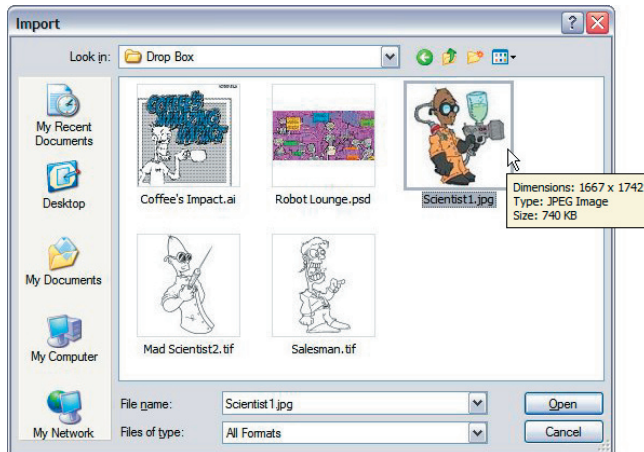
One thing to keep in mind before getting too far into this is file size. Obviously, like an afternoon at a Chinese buffet, graphic files can really start to bloat your size—er, your Flash movie's file size, that is. Put your files on the Atkins the easy way by simply applying a bit of compression to your imported graphics. You can do this either before you import 'em (like back in Photoshop, for example), or you can apply compression to your graphics after they've been imported into Flash. You'll see how to apply compression with Flash later on in this chapter. 'Til then, let's take a look at how all this importing stuff works.

Here's how to get 'er done:

1.   Choose File > Import > Import To Stage.

     Alternatively, you can choose File > Import > Import to Library if you want to import the graphic directly into your movie's Library, without having it appear on the Stage initially. We'll take a closer look at the Library later on in Chapter 7.

2.   In the Import dialog box that appears, navigate to, then highlight the graphic that you'd like to import; then click Import.
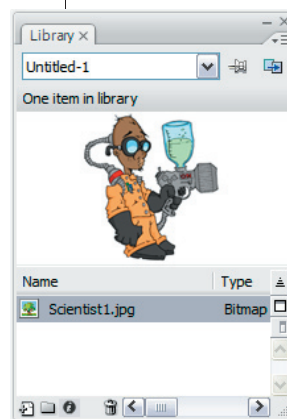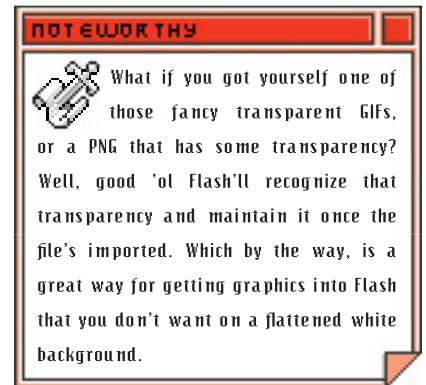

Your images appears directly on Flash's Stage as a flat object. In other words, no options or settings, just the flat graphic dropped onto the Stage. This'll happen regardless of what graphic format you're importing. Now, if you're working with layers in the Timeline (a topic which we'll discuss in Chapter 8), know that the imported graphic was dropped onto your active layer.

But something else happened which is kinda cool. In Flash's Library panel (Window > Library), you'll notice your imported file. Here's the deal: Whenever you drop a graphic into Flash, it appears on the Stage, but also gets stored in the Library for future use. What you see on the Stage is what's referred to as an *instance* of your graphic. We'll talk more about this later on when we get into the Library panel and symbols.
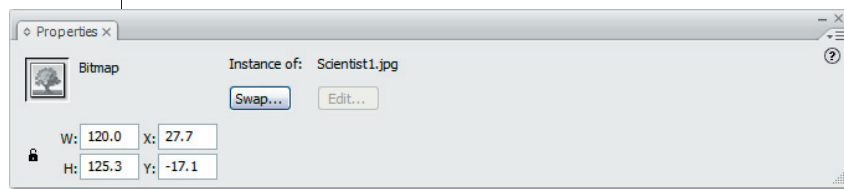
What's also important to know is that Flash creates a path between the movie that you're working on and the original graphic file. What I mean by this is there's a connection between your Flash movie and the original graphic file that you imported. This'll come into play later on when we talk about updating graphics.

NOTEWORTHY

What if you got yourself one of those fancy transparent GIFs, or a PNG that has some transparency? Well, good 'ol Flash'll recognize that transparency and maintain it once the file's imported. Which by the way, is a great way for getting graphics into Flash that you don't want on a flattened white background.

FROM THE LAND OF GEEK

Remember animated GIFs, which were ohh so cool about 150 years ago? Well if you try and import one into Flash, your animation will be translated into what are called keyframes on the timeline. We'll talk about animation and keyframes later on in Chapter 8.

3. To set options for your imported graphic, use the settings on the Properties inspector.

The Properties inspector provides options for setting your graphic's width, height, and X and Y co-ordinates. Use the small padlock icon to the left of the width and height fields to lock the two values to one another (thus ensuring that your graphic won't distort).

You'll also see a Swap button. This guy will allow you to switch your graphic for any other graphic that's been imported into your movie—and man is this handy. Just click Swap, choose a new image from the dialog box, and click OK. It's real easy.

4. If you'd like to delete a graphic, select it on the Stage with the Selection Tool; then press delete.

Of course, the graphic disappears from the Stage, but notice that it still lingers in the Library. What the? It's like the house guest that just wouldn't leave! Deleting a graphic in the way described above only deletes that particular *instance* of the graphic. To permanently boot the graphic out of your Flash movie, right-click on it in the Library and choose Delete; or just use the trash can icon at the bottom of the panel. Now the graphic's gone for good.

Keep in mind too that if you delete a graphic from the Library, any instances of that graphic on the Stage immediately disappear—without warning!

IMMINENT DOOM

Remember that Flash is a vector editing environment, and that means that your movie has the ability to scale in size to fit different monitor sizes. Where things get nasty is if your Flash file, containing imported raster images, scales larger than the raster image's original size. The result? Massive pixilation...and unrelenting humiliation...

NOTEWORTHY

Flash provides a way to quickly create animation sequences out of imported graphics. It's very cool stuff, and you'll definitely want to check it out. We discuss exactly how to do this later on in Chapter 8, where we get into animating in Flash.

See? Told you importing graphics was easy, so long as you understand that the Library panel keeps track of all the graphics that you import. And the Library panel will play an even bigger role in the next few sections when we begin importing Photoshop and Illustrator files—so let's keep going!

Think That's Sweet? How About Importing Layered Photoshop Files!

So importing GIF's, TIFFs, and the like is easy stuff right? Then it's time to get a wee bit more sophisticated and start importing Photoshop files—fully layered Photoshop files that is! So if you're using Photoshop to create interfaces, layouts, and layout components, you're gonna want to pay attention to this next bit.

Of course, since Photoshop and Flash are a part of Adobe's Creative Suite, they work like magic together. All the effects and layouts you've labored to create in Photoshop should come across into Flash; and that includes things like layers, editable type, color effects, and even a handful of blending modes. Lets give 'er a try.

Get up on it like this:
1. Choose File > Import > Import To Stage.

2. In the dialog box that appears, navigate to and select the layered Photoshop file that you'd like to import; then click Import.
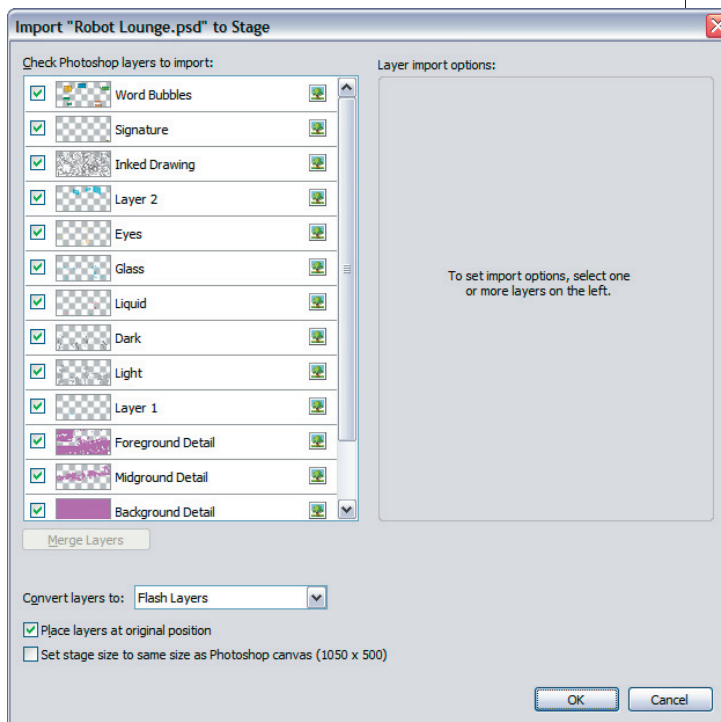
   When you select the Photoshop file that you want to import, Flash'll give you an Import dialog box, where you can set options that determine how the Photoshop file will be brought into your Flash movie.
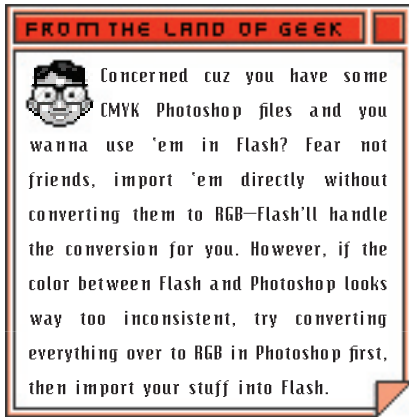
3. In the Import dialog, set the Import options that you'd like to use.

NOTEWORTHY

Much of what we discuss in this section I also discuss in a video tutorial called "Mixin' It Up With Photoshop And Flash," which is posted over on the Ten Ton website. Have a look at tentonbooks.com/videos/Photoshop-and-Flash.html.
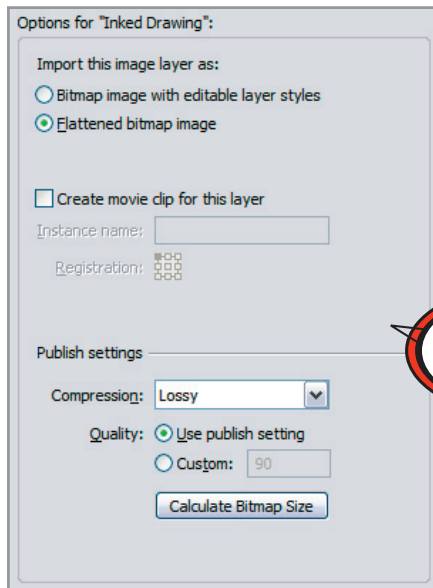
As with importing JPEGs, GIFs, and so on, you could choose File > Import > Import To Library to import a file directly to Flash's Library panel without dropping it onto the Stage. This command is handy when you want to import some content that you won't be working with right away.
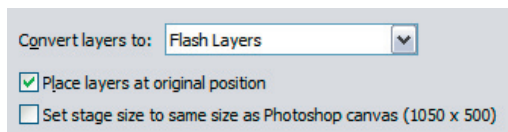
This dialog provides a whole lotta options, so lets take a closer look. First off, the large area on the left lists the layers within the Photoshop file that you're importing. Using the checkboxes beside the layer thumbnails, check and uncheck which layers you'd like to import into your movie.

Highlighting an individual layer will present you with a range of options on the dialog box's right side. If your selected layer is a regular old Photoshop layer, you'll be given options to bring in the layer with fully editable layer styles, as a flat graphic, or as a movie clip. Further, you'll see some compression options towards the bottom. If your highlighted layer contains editable text, you'll be given additional options to import the text as fully editable text, vector outlines, or as a flat image.

Great scott! So what if your Photoshop file makes heavy use of blending modes back in Photoshop's Layers panel? Well, here's a list of blending modes that Flash'll preserve for you: Normal, Darken, Multiply, Lighten, Screen, Hard Light, Difference, and Overlay. If you're using a blending mode that doesn't make the grade, you can either remove the effect or rasterize the layer.

At the bottom of the dialog box, use the Convert Layers To menu to bring your Photoshop layers in as layers or keyframes in your Flash movie. Below the Convert Layers To menu, you can choose to position your layers as they were back in Photoshop, and set Flash's Stage size to match the dimensions of your Photoshop file. As you can see, there's some pretty powerful stuff in here.
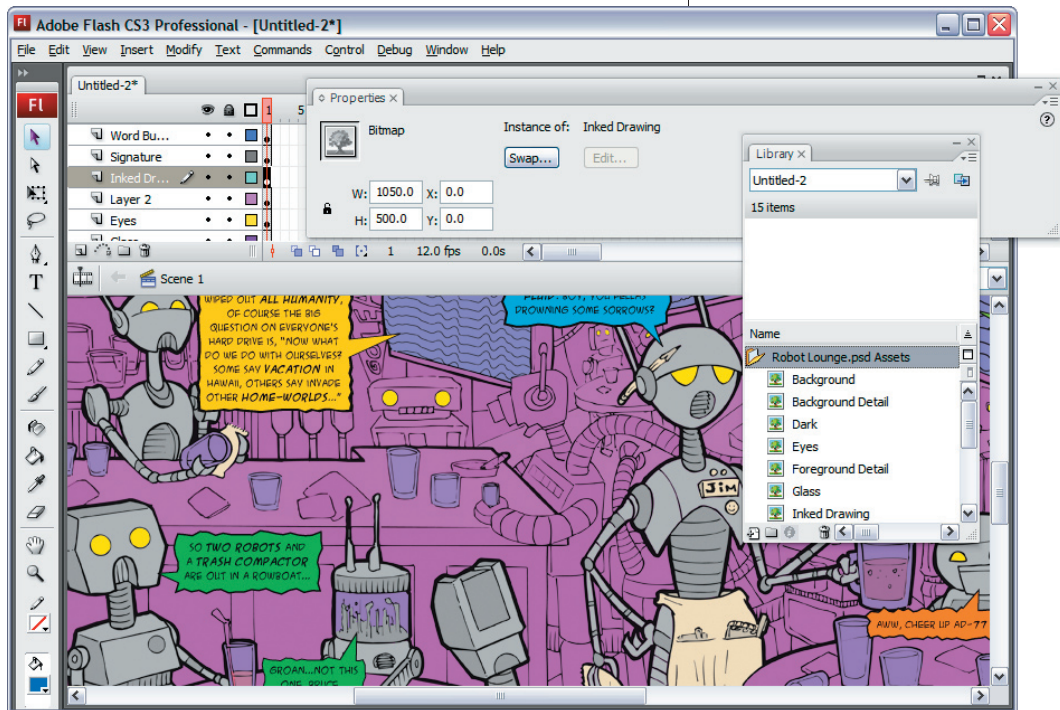

4. When you're ready, click on OK.

The Photoshop file imports into Flash using the settings you'd specified in the Import dialog box. For example, if you chose to import the Photoshop layers as Flash layers, you'll see them appear in the Timeline at the top. Also, you'll see a folder in the Library panel that, when double-clicked, reveals your layers as individual objects.

Ever heard of Layer Comps in Photoshop? Well you can use 'em between Flash and Photoshop. This is one sweet topic, so hop over to tentonbooks.com/flash/flash-photoshop-layer-comps.html and read up!

THIS IMPORTING STUFF IS BULL—JUST COPY AND PASTE!

Okay, so you can import fully layered Photoshop files—that's pretty cool. But what if you're in a huge rush, and don't even need the whole Photoshop file, just a specific portion of it? Then get reading to see how you can copy and paste content from Photoshop into Flash. To get this to work, you'll need a layered file open and ready to go in Photoshop.

To paste from Photoshop, here's the steps:

1. In Photoshop, grab the Rectangular Marquee tool and select the area of your image that you'd like to use in Flash.

2. Choose Edit > Copy Merged.

    Choosing Edit > Copy will only copy content from your file's active layer. Choosing Copy Merged will copy from all the layers that fall within your marquee selection. Remember that one, it's handy!

3. Flip back to Flash and choose Edit > Paste In Center.

Flash pastes the content into the center of the Stage as a single, flat object. Check out the Library panel, where you'll find something like *Bitmap 1*. That's your pasted graphic. And that's all there is to it!

So there it is—there's how to import fully layered Photoshop files into Flash. Pretty sweet huh? Well, not as cool as importing Illustrator content. Imagine, Illustrator layers, symbols, text, and a whole lot more. It's no dream, keep readin' to find out how it all works!

Pullin' Illustrator Content Into Flash: CS3's Best Kept Secret

Flash and Illustrator very much kindred souls, as they're both vector-based creation tools. Call it a match made in Creative Suite heaven. Aside from all the mushy stuff, know this: A new set of features in Flash allows for better handling of imported Illustrator content, which is a godsend for a guy like me, as I do a lot of prep work in Illustrator before dumping it all over into Flash. This *dumping* I speak of certainly wasn't without its challenges in previous versions of Illustrator and Flash, but the latest versions of each program make this process a heckuva lot smoother.

Unlike previous versions of Flash, CS3 now recognizes Illustrator layers and symbols, which makes the task of bringing an Illustrator layout into Flash all the more easier. To begin, make sure that you have an Illustrator layout handy that you can use—it's gotta have layers for this to work. If you wanna make this more interesting try using a few symbols in your Illustrator layout, too.
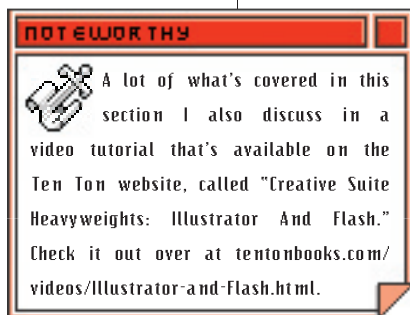
Ready? Okay, we're ready to import some Illustrator content directly into Flash. You'll see that when you do this, Flash'll present you with a dialog box similar to the one you saw when importing Photoshop files, which includes a pile of options that makes the whole process that much easier—and you can do some pretty powerful things too, like preserve layer editability and so on.

Here's how to import Illustrator content into Flash:

1. In Flash, choose File > Import > Import To Stage.

2. In the dialog box that appears, navigate to the Illustrator file you'd like to import; select it; then click Import.

3. In the Import dialog, set the Import options you want.

    Just as you saw when importing Photoshop files, Flash'll give you an Import dialog box, where you can set options to determine how the Illustrator file will be brought into your Flash movie. The large window on the left lists all the layers and sublayers contained in the Illustrator file you're importing. Not sure what sublayers are? Basically, they're layers inside other layers—it's an Illustrator thang.

NOTEWORTHY

A lot of what's covered in this section I also discuss in a video tutorial that's available on the Ten Ton website, called "Creative Suite Heavyweights: Illustrator And Flash." Check it out over at tentonbooks.com/videos/Illustrator-and-Flash.html.
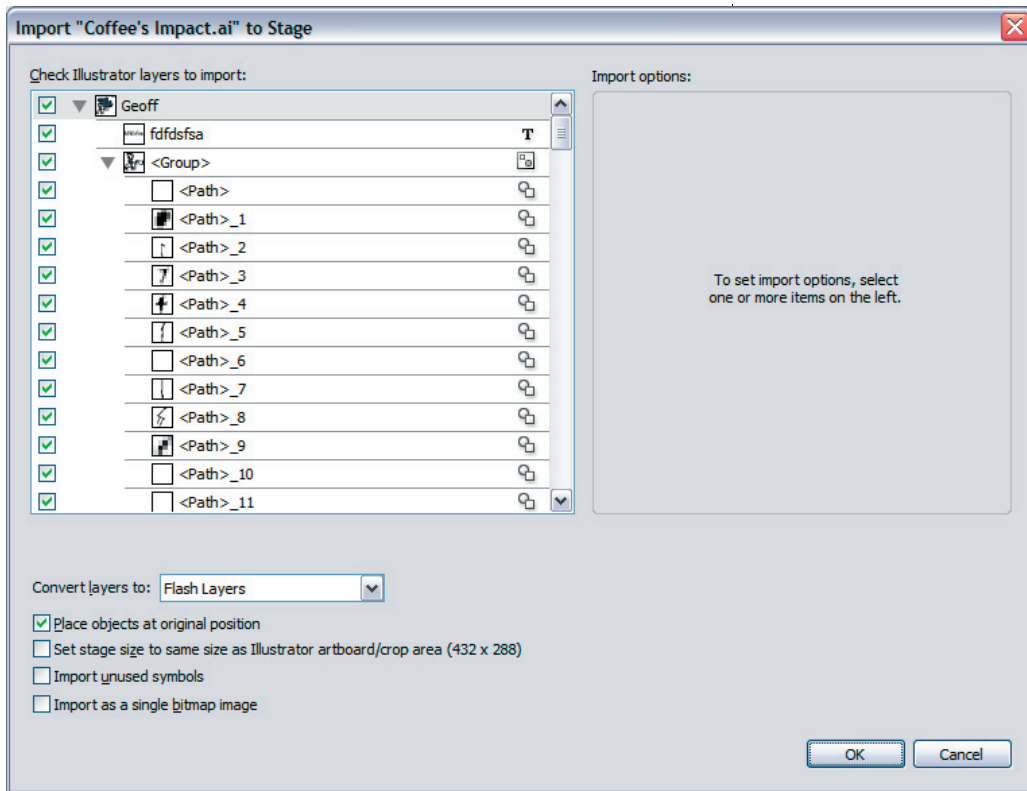
Hey, what about FreeHand and Flash? Well, if you're a FreeHand user, know that Flash'll handle content in much the same way as it does content from Illustrator. Only catch is your FreeHand files have to be saved in version MX or earlier. Now please, join the rest of us in the 21st century.
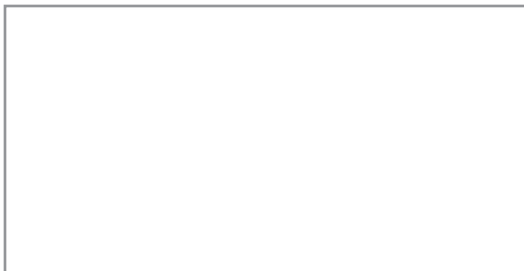
Don't forget your keyboard shortcuts: Ctrl+R (Windows) or Cmd+R (Mac) to import a file.

Flash and Illustrator work so well together, that Illustrator'll even letcha tag text for specific use in Flash movies. Find out more about this in the sidebar Text From Illustrator: CS3's Two Vector Apps on Kickin' Ass with Text, in the next chapter.
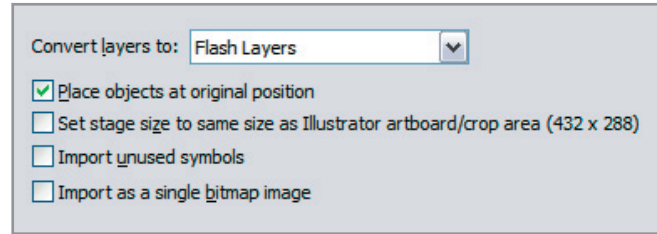
Now, you can do a coupla cool things here. First, you can check and uncheck which layers and sublayers you want to import into Flash. Pretty slick. Even better, selecting any layer or sublayer will present some additional options on the right side of the dialog box. If you select a full Illustrator layer, you can choose either Import As Bitmap or Create Movie Clip. If you select an Illustrator sublayer that contains normal objects, you'll get the option to import the sublayer as an editable path—that is, they'll be fully editable in Flash (cuz both Flash and Illustrator are vector drawing tools, right?). Lastly, if you have a sublayer that contains text, you'll be given options for importing the text as editable text or vector outlines. For a full explanation of each of these options, head to tentonbooks.com/flash/illustrator-import-options.html.

> **NOTEWORTHY**
>
> A fantastic new feature in Flash CS3 is the ability to recognize Illustrator symbols. In fact, Flash can even detect symbol types, which itself is a new feature in Illustrator CS3. Now that Flash and Illustrator are a part of Adobe's Creative Suite, they work like magic with one another. Don't forget to check out Chapter 7 for more on working with symbols.
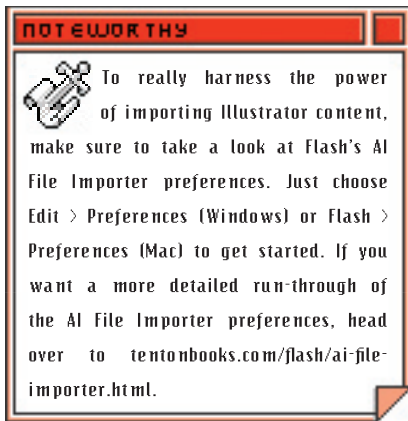
Next, from the Convert Layers To menu, you can set how you'd like Flash to handle your Illustrator layers. For example, you can convert the Illustrator layers directly to Flash layers, convert them to Keyframes, or flatten them into a single layer in your Flash file.

The remaining options below the Convert Layers To menu should be fairly self-explanatory. Place Objects At Original Position drops the imported objects at the same location as they appear back in the Illustrator file. Set Stage Size simply sets Flash's Stage size to the same size as Illustrator's artboard size. Import Unused Symbols brings in any unused symbols that were created in the Illustrator file (you'll see 'em all back in Illustrator's Symbol palette). Finally, Import As A Single Bitmap Image…err…imports the Illustrator file as a single bitmap image. Pretty simple.

4. When you're feelin' good, click OK.

Flash imports the Illustrator file using the options that you'd set. If you chose to import Illustrator layers as Flash layers, check out the Timeline at the top of your Flash file, where you should see a buncha layers—the same ones that were in your original Illustrator file.

NOTEWORTHY

To really harness the power of importing Illustrator content, make sure to take a look at Flash's AI File Importer preferences. Just choose Edit > Preferences (Windows) or Flash > Preferences (Mac) to get started. If you want a more detailed run-through of the AI File Importer preferences, head over to tentonbooks.com/flash/ai-file-importer.html.

THINK YOU'RE SO BIG? HOW ABOUT PASTING STUFF FROM ILLUSTRATOR?

Think you're all that cuz you're gettin' up to speed with importing Photoshop and Illustrator content? Well hold on a sec, there's one more thing to show ya. What about pasting content directly from Illustrator? Go ahead and fire up Illustrator and follow these steps to see how she's done!
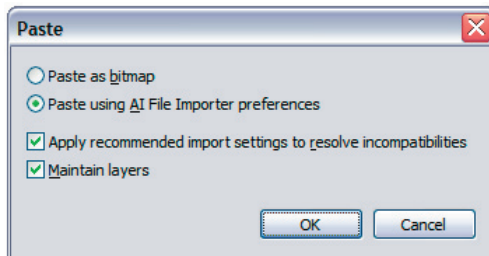
Here's whatcha do:

1. In Illustrator, select the object that you'd like to copy; then hit Ctrl+C (Windows) or Cmd+C (Mac).

   That's Edit > Copy for you slow pokes.

2. Switch over to Flash and hit Ctrl+V (Windows) or Cmd+V (Mac).

   Or the good 'ol Edit > Paste will work just fine. Either way, Flash presents you with a Paste dialog box.

3. Choose whether to paste your content as a bitmap or by using Flash's AI File Importer preferences.

   Remember, go to Edit > Preferences (Windows) or Flash > Preferences (Mac) and click on the AI File Importer category to set 'em up (read up on this at tentonbooks.com/fla/AIFileImporter.html). Back in the Paste dialog box, you can also choose whether to maintain your Illustrator content's layers. Now that's cool!

4. When you're ready, click OK.

   Flash pastes the Illustrator content using the settings that you'd specified. If your Illustrator content happened to be organized into separate layers, Flash will create the necessary layers in the Timeline. And what's more, Flash'll even handle color conversion for you, so if you copied a CMYK object, it'll be converted to RGB for you. It's that easy. One final note: If it's text you'll be pasting, be sure to check out the sidebar *Text From Illustrator: CS3's Two Vector Apps on Kickin' Ass with Text* in the next chapter.

What's more, depending on the import settings you used, you may have gotten a whole pile of goodies in Flash's Library panel. But we're getting a bit ahead of ourselves. We'll be talking about Flash layers, the Timeline, and the Library panel in upcoming chapters. For now, just know that this is how Flash is handling your Illustrator content.

So how's all that? You saw how to import JPEGs, GIFs, and a whole pile of other graphic formats, and you saw how to work with content from Photoshop and Illustrator. So now that you've got yourself some coolio content from these outside sources, now what? Well, keep those eyes moving, cuz in the next section you'll see how you can begin managing and manipulating your newly imported content.

MUCKIN' AROUND WITH IMPORTED GRAPHICS

So now that you have some imported graphics, let's take a look at what you can do with them in Flash. In the first section, we gotta cover the more technical issues of setting compression for your imported images, and seeing how to update them in Flash. But then it's quickly on to some fun stuff. Namely, converting your images to vector objects, and how to use 'em as fills on some of your shapes. Alrighty, let's see what it's all about.

FLASH HAS SOME BUILT IN COMPRESSION OPTIONS THAT'LL HELP REDUCE YOUR IMPORTED IMAGE'S FILE SIZE.

Alternatively, you could compress your images in Photoshop before importing them into Flash.

Graphics Feelin' Pudgy? Setting Image Compression

Remember, web design is all about speed, right? One of the big things going for Flash is that because it's vector-based, file sizes are next to nothing. That is until you begin dropping a bunch of graphics into your Flash movie. As you most likely already know, images usually tend to have file sizes. Pile three or four of them into a Flash file, and your movie will be begging for mercy.

To combat this problem, Flash has some built in compression options that'll help reduce your imported image's file size, and thus your overall movie's file size, so lets take a look.
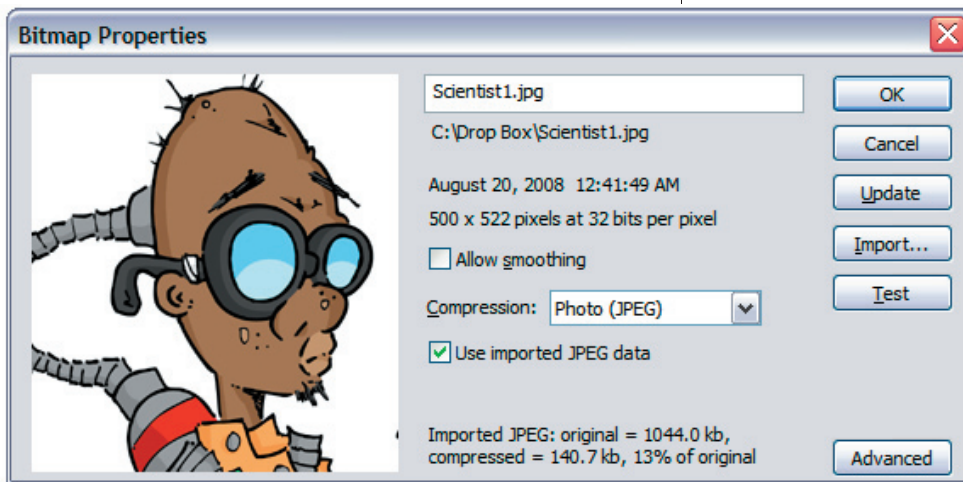
Here's how it works:

1. In the Library panel, double-click on the image that you'd like to manipulate.

   Alternatively, you could right-click on your imported graphic and choose Properties, or just click on the Properties icon at the bottom of the panel.

   Either way, the Properties dialog box appears. As you can see, the dialog box displays the name of the graphic, the file path, the date the graphic was created, and the pixel dimensions.

2. Turn on Allow Smoothing to smooth out the rough edges of your raster graphic.

   This is what's commonly known as anti-aliasing.

3. From the compression pull-down menu, choose either Photo or Lossless.

   Photo (JPEG): Uses JPEG compression to reduce file size, which works very well for photographic-like images, or images made up of millions of colors. The JPEG compression method removes image quality in an effort to cut down on file size. To use the compression amount that's already been applied to the image (that is, outside of Flash), make sure the Use Document Default Quality checkbox is selected. This checkbox will be called Use Imported JPEG Data if your imported graphic is a JPEG.

   If you'd like Flash to handle the compression, uncheck Use Document Default Quality (or Use Imported JPEG Data), and you'll be provided with a Quality field. Pop a compression value into the field to set your

FROM THE LAND OF GEEK

In the wonderful world of graphics, there are two primary types of compression, lossy and lossless. Lossy sacrifices image quality for file size, where as lossless reorganizes color to reduce file size.

own compression amount. A higher value increases the image's quality, thus applying the least amount of compression, resulting in a larger file size.

Lossless (PNG/GIF): Compresses the image without a loss in image quality. This setting is best suited for images that are made up of solid areas of color, like graphics that originated as vector objects.

4. To see your results, click on Test.

    The thumbnail graphic that appears on the left side of the dialog will show you what your image will look like if you use the current settings. If you just turned your graphic into a Lego mosaic, you might want to fiddle with the settings a bit more to try and get something a bit better.

    Further, down at the bottom, the dialog box will display the original file size, followed by the compressed file size. You can use these readings to determine the results of your fine tuning. Now it's on to editing and updating all these graphics you've imported.

Great, your images are compressed and lookin' good. Now it's on to editing and updating the graphics you've imported into your movie.

FLASH CAN MAKE THE PROCESS OF UPDATING IMPORTED GRAPHICS UTTERLY SIMPLE, OR COMPLETELY FRUSTRATING.

Editing and Updating Those Imported Graphics

If you're coming from the print world, or even from traditional web design, you know how easy it is to edit the images your currently using, then have them update back in your project files. Well, Flash sorta works the same way, although this task can be utterly simple, or down right frustrating. First, we'll check out how awesome Flash can be at updating your images. For a taste of the nasty side of updating content in Flash, see the sidebar *"Arggh! I Just Smashed Up My Keyboard: Manually Updating Imported Graphics."*

Here's getting Flash to play nice:

1. From the Library panel, right-click on the graphic that you'd like to edit; then choose Edit With.

2. In the Select External Editor dialog box that appears, navigate to and select the program that you'd like to use to edit your image with; then click OK (or Open on the Mac).

   In Windows, you'd be after the actual .exe file inside the Program Files folder. On the Mac side, look for the actual program icon in Applications, often ending with .app.
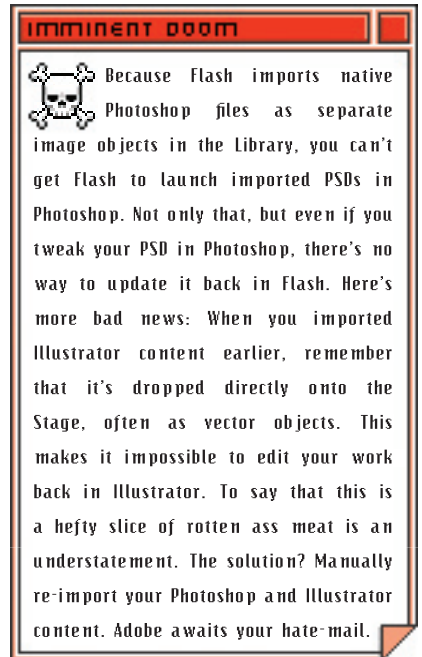
   Your image editing application launches, and then opens the file that you had back in Flash.

3. In your image editor, make whatever changes that you'd like to your image; then save your work.

   In your external image editor, you don't have to choose File > Save As. Going File > Save is all you need, cuz remember, Flash creates a path between your movie file and your external image. If the external image changes, then it'll update back in Flash; which you'll see next.

4. Head back to Flash.

   Before you even have a chance to think about it, Flash updates your imported image automatically. How sweet is that? So unlike some other applications that can handle outside images, you don't have to tell Flash to update its links or re-import any content. Flash is smart enough to handle all that for you.

IMMINENT DOOM

Because Flash imports native Photoshop files as separate image objects in the Library, you can't get Flash to launch imported PSDs in Photoshop. Not only that, but even if you tweak your PSD in Photoshop, there's no way to update it back in Flash. Here's more bad news: When you imported Illustrator content earlier, remember that it's dropped directly onto the Stage, often as vector objects. This makes it impossible to edit your work back in Illustrator. To say that this is a hefty slice of rotten ass meat is an understatement. The solution? Manually re-import your Photoshop and Illustrator content. Adobe awaits your hate-mail.

ARGGH! I JUST SMASHED UP MY KEYBOARD: MANUALLY UPDATING IMPORTED GRAPHICS

It's great that Flash automatically updates those imported graphics for you, but there's a nasty "gottcha" that you're gonna love: Flash has to be running in order for your graphics to update. In other words, lets say that you make a change that's being used in one of your movies, but Flash isn't running at the time. The next time you open your movie up, the graphic won't update; you'll have to manually update your graphics instead.

The even bigger problem is, as soon as you open your movie, Flash doesn't tell you if any imported graphics have changed, unlike, uhh…every other graphics program in the universe.
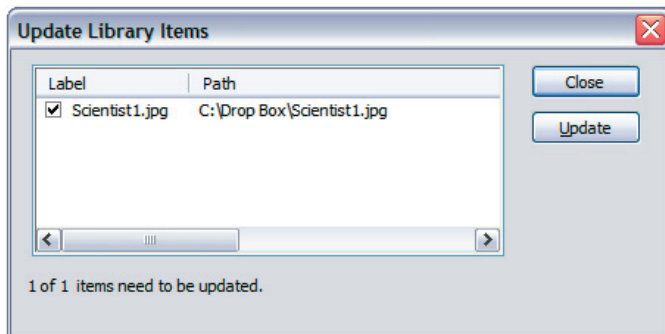
So, you either gotta keep track of what files you've changed, or manually check every single graphic that you've imported. As a matter of fact, just a second ago, I opened one of my movies, and just realized that I have to manually check 15+ graphics. That's why I'm typing this entire sidebar with a keyboard that's in two-hundred pieces—I just smashed up my freakin' keyboard!

If your mouse is still intact, here's how to manually update your graphics:
1. In Flash, open the movie that needs to be updated.

Notice that any images that have been changed since the movie file has been closed are not updated. In other words, how would you know that they need to be updated if you didn't remember which ones you'd changed? The lesson is, lay off the booze while doing this stuff so at least there's a chance you'll remember...

2. In the Library panel, right-click on the graphic that needs to be updated; then choose Update.

In the Update Library Items dialog that appears, Flash'll list the item that needs to be updated—But Flash falls flat when it comes to updating multiple items. This dialog will only list out the current library item, even if several need to be updated. So you gotta do 'em one at a time. Sucks eggs.

3. In the Update Library Items dialog, click Update; then click Close.

The graphic updates on the Stage and in Flash's library. Now you have the delightful task of going and checking all your other graphics in the Library to make sure they're all updated.

As you can see, this stinks. So to avoid all this, make sure that when you're making your changes in your external editor, that you also have your movie file open in Flash. That way, Flash will update everything automatically and you can avoid this updating insanity—and save on the bloody knuckles and busted keyboards.

You can also update your imported graphics manually by right-clicking on the image in the Library, choosing Properties; then clicking on Update.

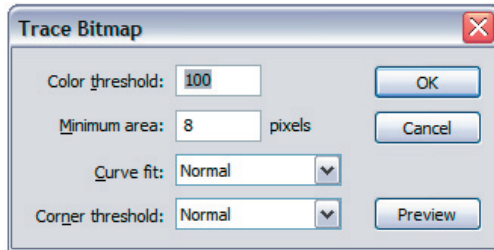*A REALLY COOL EFFECT IN FLASH IS TO CONVERT IMPORTED RASTER IMAGES INTO VECTOR OBJECTS.*

So there you go, there's a look at getting Flash to play nice with your external editors. Next up, we have a few cool topics, including converting raster images to vector objects, using 'em as fills and a few other goodies. Let's check it out!

Converting Raster Images to Vector Shapes In Flash

A really cool effect in Flash is to convert imported raster images into vector objects. Why would you wanna do this? Hey man, I just write the books! Seriously, this is pure special effects and eye-candy here. In fact, on many occasions I've used this capability in Flash not for a web-based animation or movie, but for a print job where I've wanted this sort of effect. It's pretty cool, so lets see how it's done.

If you'd like to convert a raster image to a vector graphic, follow these steps:

1. On the Stage, select the graphic that you'd like to convert.

2. Choose Modify > Bitmap > Trace Bitmap.

3. In the Trace Bitmap dialog box that appears, set the following options; then click OK:

Color Threshold: Determines how many colors will appear in your converted graphic. You can set a value between 0 and 500; and a higher threshold means you'll wind up with fewer colors.

Minimum Area: Sets the number of nearby pixels Flash'll lump together when assigning color throughout your graphic. A lower value will result in more detail, while a higher number gives you large blotches of color. You can experiment with numbers between 1 and 1000.

Curve Fit: Decide how Flash should re-draw your artwork. You can choose Pixels, Very Tight, Tight, Normal, Smooth, and Very Smooth. Try each out, and click Preview to see how they work.

Corner Threshold: Determines how Flash handles sharp corners and edges. Try choosing Many Corners, Normal, and Few Corners.

When you click OK, Flash converts your raster image to vector shapes. Click away from your image to deselect it and see your results.
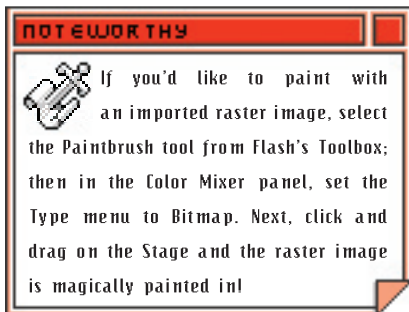
Because the graphic is now completely made up of vector shapes, you can use any of Flash's object editing tools to manipulate your artwork. For example, you can fill areas with different colors, transform them, and so on.

4. To manipulate your new vector artwork, select an object within it; then edit as normal.

While you're dinkin' with the settings in the Trace Bitmap dialog, click the Preview button to see what you'll get.

One final thought you might want to consider: You might want to group your vector objects together, just incase you decide to move and resize your artwork.
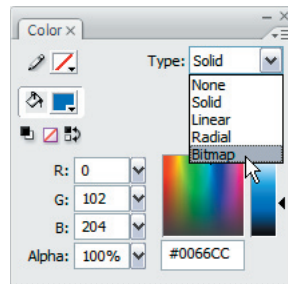
With that out of the way, here's another cool effect that you can pull off: Using an imported graphic as a fill. Word.

Filling A Shape with an Imported Graphic

Did you know that you can fill your shapes in Flash with the graphics you've been importing? It's kinda neat. To use a graphic as a fill for your shapes, first make sure that you've imported a graphic that you'd like to use as the fill, and also make sure that you have a vector shape (a rectangle, circle, or whatever) ready to be filled. When you're ready, keep reading to see how to apply the graphic as a fill.

Here's how to use a raster image as a fill:

1. Using the black arrow tool in Flash's Toolbox, select your shape's fill.

2. Open the Color panel (Window > Color); then switch the Type menu to Bitmap.

Right away, your shape is filled with your first imported graphic. Notice too that if your shape is larger than your graphic, that the graphic tiles over and over. We'll address that in a second. But first, take a look at the bottom of the Color Mixer panel, where you'll see thumbnails for each of your imported graphics.

3. To use a different image as fill, move your mouse over a thumbnail; then click on it when your cursor changes to an eyedropper.

    Easy. Now what about that image tiling that you might be getting? Well, here's whatcha do…

4. With your fill still selected, choose the Gradient Transform tool from the Toolbox; then use the handles that appear to scale, size, and otherwise manipulate your graphical fill.

A NEAT EFFECT IN FLASH IS TO USE AN IMPORTED GRAPHIC AS A FILL FOR YOUR SHAPES.

Notice the wee Import button in the Color panel? Use that guy to go and import more images into your movie.

NOTEWORTHY

If you'd like to paint with an imported raster image, select the Paintbrush tool from Flash's Toolbox; then in the Color Mixer panel, set the Type menu to Bitmap. Next, click and drag on the Stage and the raster image is magically painted in!

You might recall this fella from back in Chapter 3 when we were messing around with gradients. When you're done scaling and distorting your fill, just click on the Select tool back in the Toolbox.

Of course, every shape you draw from this point forward will use the same graphical fill. It's Flash's awkward way of trying to lend a helping hand. To get back to regular old shapes and fills, select a shape's fill; then just switch the Type menu in the Color panel back to Solid.

BUSTIN' UP IMAGES AND USING 'EM AS FILLS

All of these lovely images that you've brought into Flash can all be broken apart, manipulated with Flash's drawing tools, and also used as fills for other objects. You can select the components with the selection tools, and fill them with different colors. It's kinda nifty, but isn't nearly as cool as it sounds…And probably doesn't have much application in the real world. Check it out anyway, and who knows, you might find it useful in your work.

 Here's how to do it:

1. On the Stage, select the graphic that you'd like to break apart.

2. Choose Modify > Break Apart.

   The image breaks apart into separate components.

   Keep in mind that once an image has been broken apart, the link between your Flash movie and your original image file is broken, meaning no updating.

3. From Flash's Toolbox, use the Lasso, Magic Wand, or other selection tools to select the components of your image.

   Once you have a selection, you can use the Fill Color option at the bottom of the Toolbox to fill that area with a new color. You can also use your broken apart image as a fill for other objects.

4. To use your broken apart image as a fill, select it with the Eyedropper tool; then use Flash's Paint Bucket tool to fill other shapes with the image.

So as I say, kinda cool to impress the girls with, but it lacks a bit in real-world application. Anyway, have fun with it.

Extending Fills Across Multiple Shapes

Normally fills are set for individual objects—in other words, each shape has its own individual color or graphical fills. But with Flash's Lock Fill command, you can use the same gradient or raster image fill on multiple shapes, giving the appearance of the fill continuing from one shape to the next—neato! Here goes!

To fill a set of shapes with a raster image, try this:

1. Using the drawing tools in the Toolbox, draw a few shapes on the Stage.

   You can draw rectangles, ovals, stars—whatever you want.

2. If you'd like to use a raster image as a fill then import it and break it apart by choosing Modify > Break Apart.

3. Select the Paintbucket tool; then in the Color panel, set the Type menu to Bitmap.

   If you'd rather fill continuously with a gradient, just set the Type menu to either Linear or Radial.

4. Back in the Toolbox, click the Lock Fill modifier in the Options area at the bottom.

   With the Lock Fill modifier turned on, you can now begin filling your shapes with the same raster image or gradient—allowing your fill to flow from one shape to the next.

5. Click in the first shape to set the center of the fill; then click in other shapes.

   Flash extends the fill from the first shape all the way through to the last shape. Cool! And don't forget that you can always transform and manipulate your fills with the Gradient Transform tool.

6. If you'd like to adjust the fill on your shapes, choose the Gradient Transform tool from the Toolbox; then

And there's how to fill shapes with your imported graphics!

CHAPTER WRAPPER!

Holy hell, you saw it all in this chapter, huh? Everything from bringing in regular old images like JPEGs and GIFs, to seeing how Flash's importing options allow you to control content coming in from Photoshop and Illustrator—you saw how to control their layers, keep their text editable, and a few other goodies. After that, it was all about managing and updating your graphics, converting your images to vector shapes, and how to use 'em as fills. Yup, we did a lot…and now I need a nap. When you're ready to keep going, just give me a nudge and we'll keep the party going in the next chapter, where it's all about handling text in Flash. See ya then!