How to work with alpha channel transparencies

Many graphics have what are called *alpha channels:* portions of clips that Adobe Premiere Pro CS4 can make transparent, revealing what's below those clips on lower-numbered video tracks in a sequence.

You can put graphics files with alpha channels in motion or apply video effects specifically geared to work with alpha transparency graphics. Those effects treat the visible part of the graphic as an object so you give can that object a glow, color shifts, beveled edges, or a shadow. In addition, you can use keyframes to animate all these effects and their parameters over time.

This task introduces *compositing.* Compositing is the process of creating a compound image by superimposing one or more clips on another clip. Adobe Premiere Pro has several compositing tools in addition to alpha channel transparencies: reducing opacity, keying effects, mattes, and masks. You will work with all these methods later.

To complete this task you need:

- A graphics file with an alpha channel (most Adobe Photoshop CS4 files fit that description)
- A still image or video file to use as a background for the graphics file

We recommend that you complete the "How to apply and adjust video effects" and the "How to use the Motion effect" guides before tackling this task. The former teaches the basics about working with video effects, and the latter covers Motion effect options and keyframes, which are used extensively in this guide.

How to use the Motion effect with an alpha transparency graphic

1. Start Adobe Premiere Pro, start a new project, and import the two file types described above.

Note: If you import an Adobe Photoshop graphic with multiple layers, the Import Layered File dialog box will appear. You must specify which layers to import, or indicate how to merge the layers, and then click OK.

2. Select Window > Workspace > Editing.

3. Drag the background clip to the Video 1 track.

4. Drag a graphic with an alpha channel to the Video 2 track above the background clip.

The sequence should look like **Figure 1**. The Program Monitor should look something like **Figure 2**—a background with a graphic over it.

Note: By default, Premiere Pro makes the graphic opaque and its alpha channel transparent, allowing whatever is below the alpha channel on the sequence to show through.

5. In the Program Monitor, set the View Zoom Level to 25%.

This sets up your workspace to add some Motion effect parameters to the graphics clip.

6. In the Timeline panel, click the graphic clip (in the upper track) to select it, move the CTI to the beginning of the clip, and then display the Effect Controls panel.

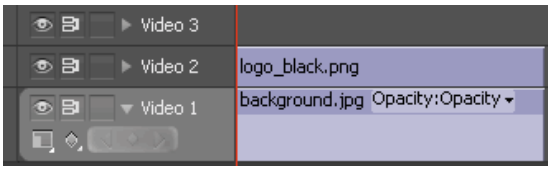

Figure 1 Timeline panel

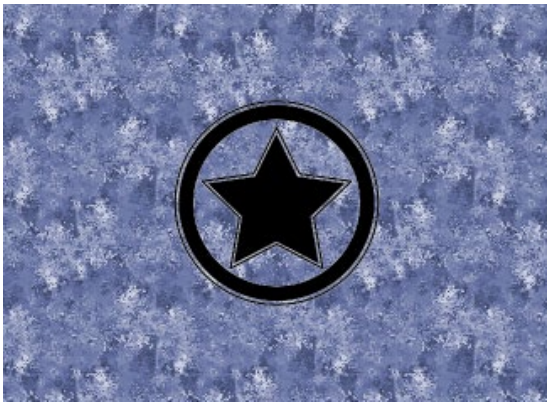

Figure 2 Program Monitor screen

7. In the Effect Controls panel, expand the Motion effect parameters and set the following for your graphics clip:

- Click the Toggle Animation buttons for Position, Scale, and Rotation.
- Select the Motion effect heading in the Effect Control panel. In the Program Monitor, drag the graphics clip until its graphics portion is completely offscreen to the left (**Figure 3**).
- In the Effect Controls panel, set Scale to 0%.
- In the Effect Controls panel time ruler (or the Timeline panel), move the CTI about a third of the way into the clip.
- In the Effect Controls panel, click the Motion effect Reset button (to the right of Motion) to set default values for Scale (100%) and Position (center of the screen).
- Set Rotation to 1x0.0°.

The Motion effect parameters should look like **Figure 4**.

8. In the Program Monitor, click the Play button to view this clip.

The graphics clip should start offscreen as a dot, slide on-screen while making a full clockwise rotation, and stop full size and centered on the screen.

Review step 6 and make sure you can identify how each action you took in that step led to the final sequence of effects.

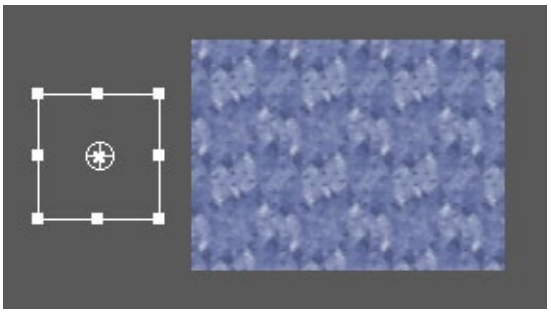

Figure 3 Program Monitor, with graphics clip moved offscreen to the left

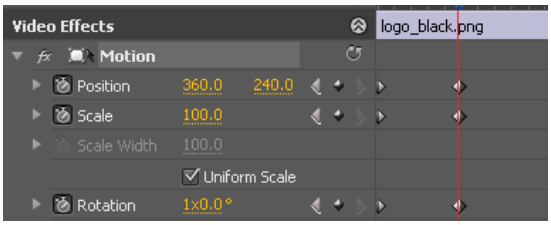

Figure 4 Effect Controls panel, Motion effect values

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How to use video effects that work with alpha channel graphics

Some Premiere Pro effects are intended to be used only with graphic files that have alpha channels. Those effects generally treat graphics as separate objects so you can apply effects such as a glow or drop shadow directly to them.

1. Drag another instance of the graphics clip from the Project panel to the Timeline panel, placing the clip to the right of the graphics clip already there (**Figure 5**).
2. If the background clip is not long enough, add another instance of it in the Video 1 track as well—or you can drag the background clip to make it longer.
3. In the Timeline, drag the CTI until you can see the second graphics clip in the Program Monitor.
4. Click the Effects tab (not the Effect Controls tab) to display the Effects panel.

   Note: If you don't see the Effects tab, select Window > Effects to display it.
5. In the Effects panel, display the Video Effects > Stylize bin.
6. Drag the Alpha Glow video effect to the second graphics clip in the Timeline panel on the Video 2 track.

   A glow appears on the edges of the graphic displayed in the Program Monitor (**Figure 6**).

   Note: Alpha Glow and three other video effects—Bevel Alpha, Channel Blur, and Drop Shadow—all work well with graphics files that have alpha channels. You work with all four effects in this task.
7. In the Effect Controls panel, expand Alpha Glow and make note of its parameters (**Figure 7**).
8. Click the Alpha Glow Start Color swatch (**Figure 7**).

   The Color Picker appears (**Figure 8**).

   Note: The start color appears around the edges of the graphic. The end color appears on the fringes of the glow and, by design, is very faint.
9. Select a color and click OK.

   This new color appears around the edges of the graphic in the Program Monitor.
10. Drag another instance of the graphics clip from the Project panel to the Timeline panel, placing the clip to the right of the two graphics clips already there.
11. If the background clip is not long enough, add another instance of it in the Video 1 track as well or extend the background clip if necessary.

Figure 5 Timeline panel

Figure 6 Alpha Glow video effect

Figure 7 Alpha Glow video effect parameters

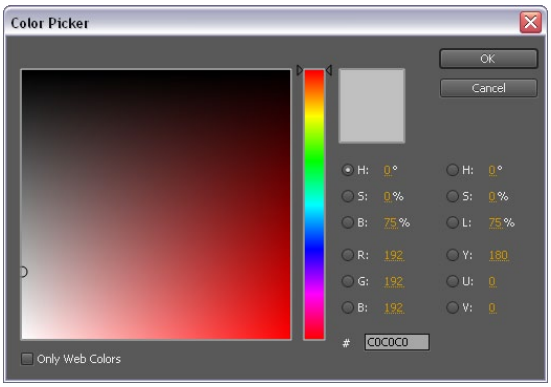

Figure 8 Color Picker

12. From the Video Effects > Perspective bin in the Effects panel, drag Bevel Alpha to the third graphics clip in the Timeline panel. Expand the Bevel Alpha parameters.

13. Move the CTI to the middle of the third clip.

14. In the Bevel Alpha parameters, increase the values of Edge Thickness and Light Intensity (**Figure 9**).

The graphic in the Program Monitor now has a beveled effect (**Figure 10**).

Note: You can add multiple video effects to the same clip, as in the following step.

15. From the Video Effects > Blur & Sharpen bin, also drag Channel Blur to the third clip in the Timeline panel.

The Channel Blur effect appears in the Effects Control Panel effect list

16. Expand the Channel Blur properties in the Effects Control panel (**Figure 11**).

17. Change the values of some of the Channel Blur parameters.

Shifting individual color values—red/green/blue—blurs those colors into the graphic's alpha channel.

18. From the Video Effects > Perspective bin, also drag Drop Shadow to the third graphics clip in the Timeline panel.

Drop Shadow appears in the Effects Control panel list below **(Figure 12)**.

19. Expand the Drop Shadow parameters in the Effects Control panel.

20. Increase the Drop Shadow Opacity and Distance values and change the drop shadow's direction to see how that works (**Figure 13**).

Note: If the graphic you're working with has holes or gaps like the one used in the exercise, Drop Shadow creates realistic shadows within those gaps.

Figure 9 Bevel Alpha video effect parameters

Figure 10 Bevel Alpha video effect

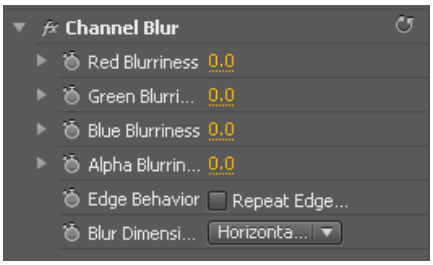

Figure 11 Channel Blur video effect parameters

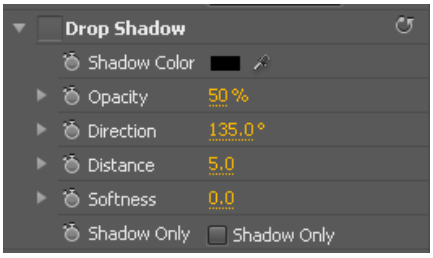

Figure 12 Drop Shadow video effect parameters

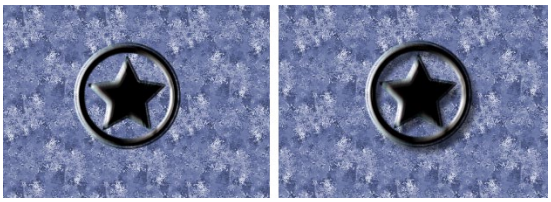

Figure 13 Channel Blur (left) and with Drop Shadow

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