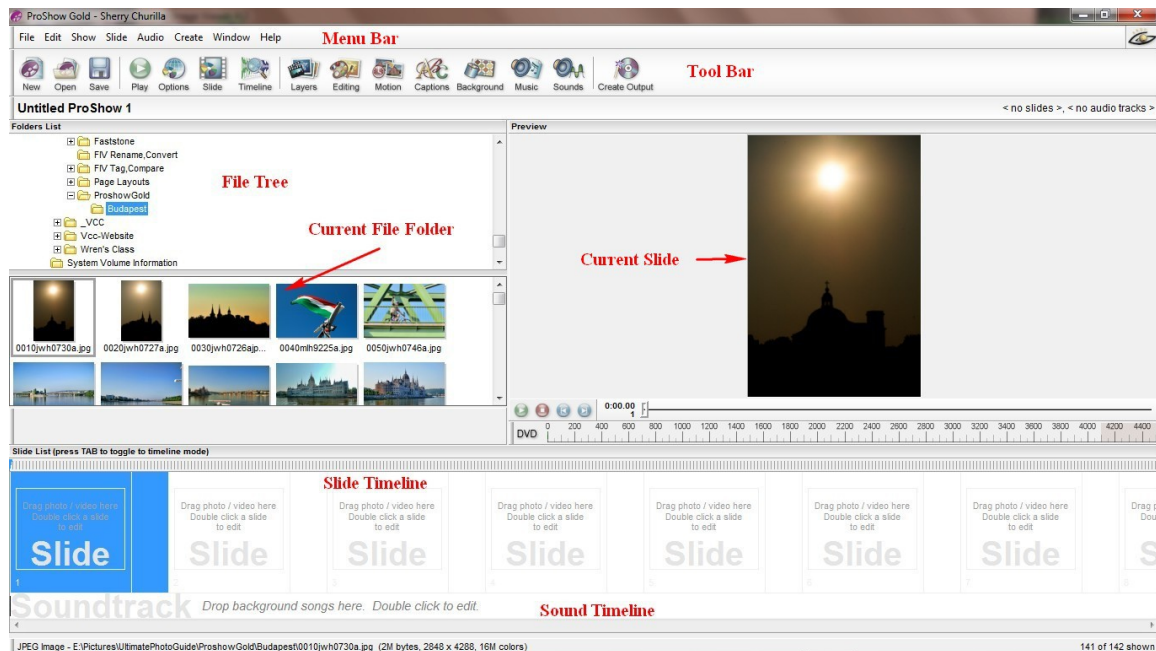Introduction to ProShow Gold
Slide Show Program
By
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ProShow Gold (PSG) by Photodex is my favorite program for creating slide shows. It is similar to Microsoft Movie Maker. which was introduced with Windows Vista, but much more powerful. It is available at http://www.photodex.com.

Let's take a look at the PSG environment, and I will give you some tips on how I put a side show together. The environment is a normal window with a menu bar and a tool bar at the top, file tree and current folder on the left, current slide preview on the right and slide and sound timelines on the bottom.
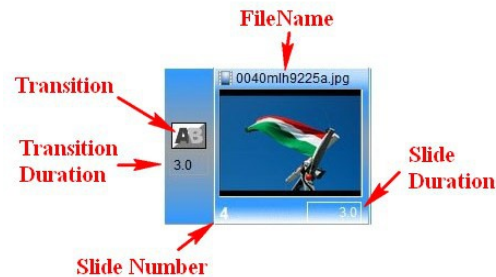

Before you start, I recommend that you gather all of the images and music that you indent to use on the slide show into one file folder. Also save the slide show in the same file folder. Although this is not technically necessary, is a good idea for both ease of use and portability. By portability I mean the ability to take the whole folder with the slide show and all of the assets (images and music) to another computer that has PSG on it, and work on it. If your assets are located on a variety of folders it makes them harder to locate and destroys portability.

The first thing that I do when I start a new slide show is to click on File | New, give the show a title and save it in the same file folder as the assets. It is saved as a PSH file. Note: When you open a slide show, the current folder does not automatically change to the folder containing the assets for that show, because it is not really necessary to gather

you assets together into one folder, although it is a good idea. You will need to navigate to the appropriate folder using the file tree.
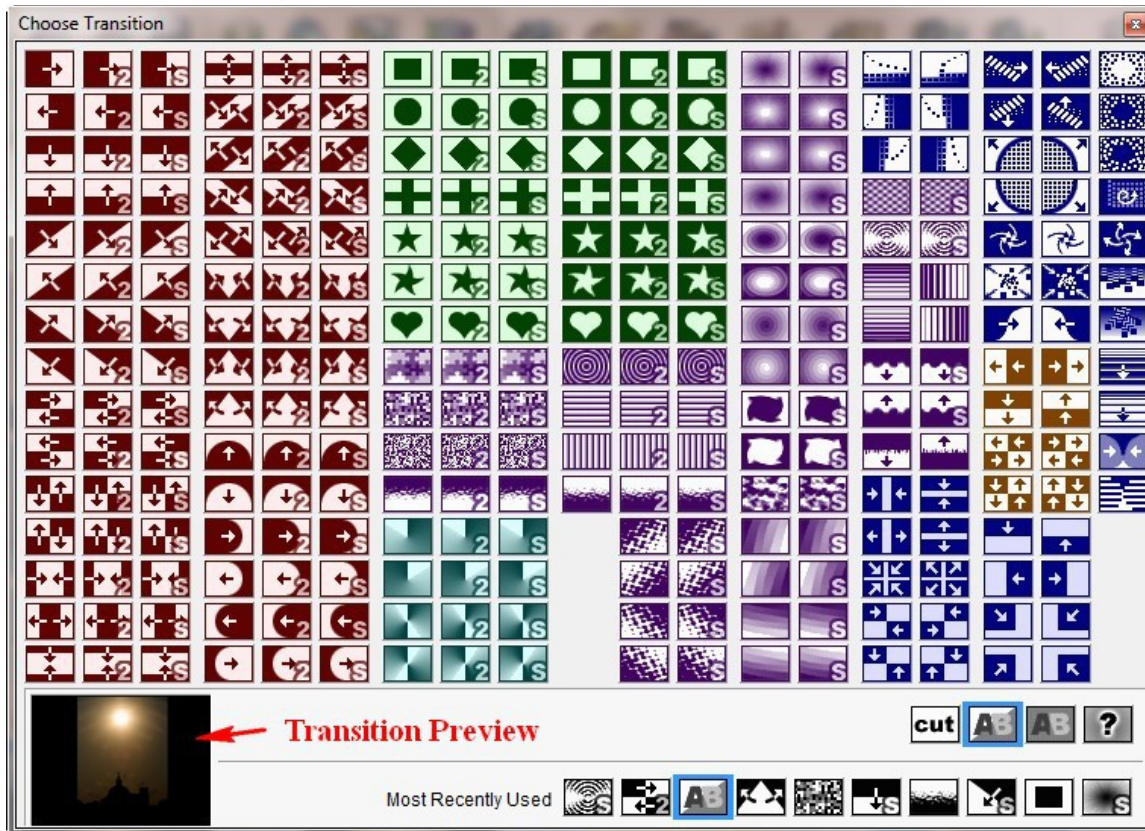
Locate that file folder by using the file tree. You can click and drag individual images onto the timeline, or you can select all of the images (CTRL + A) and drag and drop them on the timeline all at once. If they are not in the right order you can reorder them right on the timeline by clicking and dragging. Whenever an image is placed on the timeline, a checkmark will appear on the lower left corner of the thumbnail. You can add background music to your show by clicking and dragging the music file onto the Sound Timeline. Right click on the music timeline and you will get some options for your music. The "edit fades and timing" option is especially useful if you need to shorten a piece of music or eliminate the silence at the beginning or end of it.

There is a lot of information on the timeline for each slide, as seen below:

Next I like to set the default transition, transition duration and slide duration. Click on one of the slides on the timeline and then click CTRL + A to select all of the slides. I usually pick a plain fade transition, as in the above example, a transition duration of 1 second and a slide duration of 3 seconds, then change any of these on individual slides for emphasis. To change a transition, double click on the icon. People who are inexperienced at making slide shows have a tendency to put different transitions on each slide. This gets distracting for the viewer, and the show becomes more about the transitions than the images. Keep the transitions to a minimum. For a show of 150 slides, I might use a transition, other than the default transition, about 10 times or less. I use them to emphasize image I think are important or when the show changes from one location to another. Experiment with long transitions too. It can add interest to have one slide fade into another over a 10 second interval.

PSG offers a wide array of transitions. There is a preview window where you can see what the transitions look before you chose them.

To run the show from a particular slide forward, select that slide by clicking on it, and then click on the run icon on the tool bar or under the slide preview window. Use the escape key to stop the show,

Now that you have the preliminaries out of the way, it is time for some enhancements. With PSG there are many ways to enhance the show. Each of the tool bar icons seen below opens a window full of controls that are mostly intuitive. First click on the slide you would like to enhance and then open the appropriate icon on the tool bar.

Layers

Layers are for putting more than one image on the same slide. You can put one image on top of another or make a blank slide and place several images on it. To create a blank slide click on slide | insert | blank slide (CTRL + I) from the menu bar and a blank slide will be inserted before the selected slide. You can even make each image move independently by double clicking on one of the images in the Layers window to open another window of options.

PSG also gives you the ability to insert videos on slides. The controls for videos are also on the Layers window.

Editing

This window is very self explanatory. When I make a slide show I have all of the images edited before I start by using Photoshop and other programs. This window can be useful for people who can't edit images otherwise and it might even save some time too.

Motion

Adding some motion to a slide makes it more interesting. Once again, don't go overboard with it. The motion you set will occur over the whole duration of the slide. Sometimes this looks good and sometimes it would be beneficial if the image would become static for an instant at the beginning or end of the slide. To make the slide stop moving before the next one begins:
- Insert a blank slide after the current slide
- Change the transition time to zero
- Change the blank slide time to 1 second
- Select the moving slide and click on the motion icon on the tool bar
- At the bottom of the window, click on "copy" and select "Copy end to next slide"

Captions

Labeling a few slides with captions is useful too. Once again this can get distracting fast, especially if you use a lot of text effect like fly in and fade out. The text effects are ok once in a while but I think static captions work best most of the time. There are several ways to position the text. Choose an alignment option, enter numbers in the position boxes, or simply click and drag the text on the slide. The easiest way to get the text to be the appropriate size for the slide it is on is to use the transform boxes on the rectangle surrounding the text.

Background

If one of your slides doesn't fill the frame you might like to add a background to that slide. I usually leave my backgrounds black. Sometimes I use a different color for emphasis or when I have a slide with more than one image on it. I think image backgrounds are distracting unless they are very plain. To allow the default background to be altered for this slide check the On/Off checkbox at the top. Then select the radio button for either a sold color background or a background image. Use the color picker or browse for a background image. The Scaling drop down menu will help you get the background fit the frame as you would like it.

Music

With this window you can add, delete and change the order of the background music. You can also do this by clicking and dragging onto the sound timeline. You can set the default volume of the background and foreground sound. I usually reduce the volume of the background music whenever there is foreground sound to less than 10%.

Sounds

The Sounds dialog box allows adding sounds to your slides, other than the background music. With it you will have the ability to import a sound file or record a voiceover. You will be able to make the sound start after the slide has already started by changing the offset. You can also make the slide duration equal to the sound duration, or allow the sound to continue after the slide has finished. Note: When you are finished recording a voiceover, make sure you click the "Stop" button, that ends the recording, before you click the "Done" button, which closes the window, or else you will need to start over. It is an easy mistake to make.
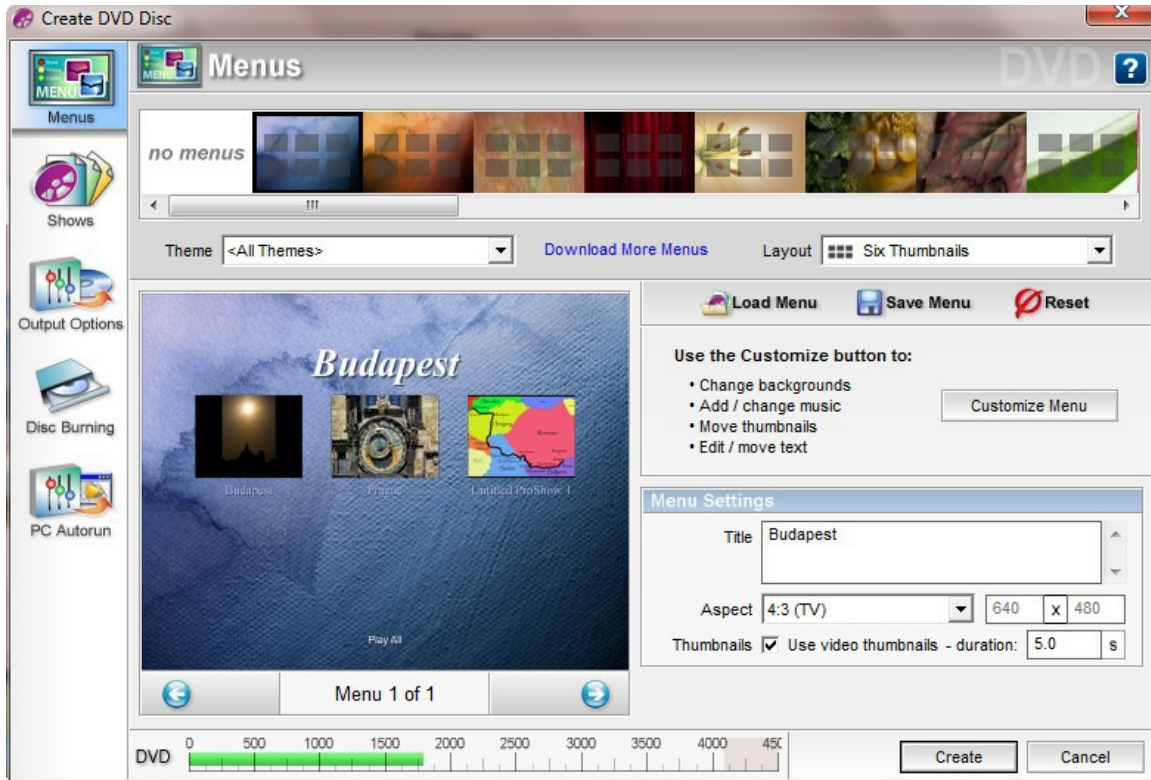
Create Output

Once you have done all of your enhancements it would be time to create the slide show. As you can see, PSG allows you to create the output in a variety of different formats.

Let's look at creating a DVD.

Menus

There are 5 windows of options to consider. The menus window allows you to create your menu style and it is very customizable. I usually put 6 to 8 slide shows on one DVD. You can have up to 8 menu icons on and screen and multiple screens if there are more shows. There is a check box to use if you would like the menu icons to be animated. If you want static menu icons, uncheck it.

Shows

The Shows window allows you to add delete and change the order of the shows to be included on the DVD. On the right side, set the menu title and choose an image to be the menu icon. Notice that show 3 above is titled "Untitled". That is because I forgot to set the menu title. Not a good idea. On the lower right side, uncheck the "Include Intro Show" checkbox or else you will get the ProShow Gold introduction at the beginning of your DVD.

Output Options, Disc Burning and PC Autorun

There are many options on these three windows and I have found the defaults work perfectly well for me. On the Disc Burning window you can specify the number of copies to be burned. At the top of the PC Autorun window you have the option to turn off Autorun, which I do, because I want the DVD to start with the menu first instead of staring to run the first show.

When you have completed all of the options, click "create" and the computer will do its thing. It will have to render all of the images and depending on the speed of you computer this could take a while. I have seen this take the better part of an hour. If you intend to make several copies it is best to have indicated that on the Disc Burning window instead of making individual copies because the program will have to render the images all over again.

ProSHow Gold is a great program and there is much more to it than I can even introduce you to in this article. I have had a great deal of fun with it. Try it and I am sure you will too.