Example Chapter 08-Number 09: This example demonstrates some simple uses of common canned effects found in popular photo editors to stylize photos.
Fake Masks

Shortly after ProShow Producer was released, ProShow Gold was updated to support multiple image layers and transparency. Although these aren’t true masks, they can act similarly. I call layers with transparent parts that are used to reveal things below them fake masks.

A masking layer is a layer that only controls the visibility of a series of layers contained within it. Masking layers allow the contained layers to move about and appear only where the masking layer allows. Anywhere the mask layer does not reveal the layers contained within, it leaves the rest of the show surface untouched. There are many powerful advantages to masking layers that cannot be realized without them.

In contrast, a fake mask must conceal the layers below it using opaque pixels. We can think of this like a wall with a window in it. The audience members see the layers beyond it through the window, but the only reason they cannot see more of the obscured layers is because the wall is in the way. There are problems with this. A good example I call the two-window problem is shown in Figure 8.20.

A fake mask with two windows is used to frame moving photos behind each window. As each photo zooms in, one of the photos incorrectly appears in the wrong window because the fake mask cannot constrain the visibility of each photo separately.

Figure 8.20

Fake masks do not actually limit the display of the layers they frame completely, so be careful when zooming or panning.
Example Chapter 08-Number 10: This ProShow Gold example shows that without masking found in ProShow Producer, certain types of motion with layers having multiple windows are not possible.

With masking layers, the two-window problem cannot exist, as shown in Figure 8.21. Within each mask, none of the contained layers can appear anywhere except within each mask layer's area. Using ProShow Producer with real masking layers eliminates the two-window problem.

Figure 8.21
ProShow Producer's mask layers eliminate the two-window problem and make a vast set of visual effects possible.

Example Chapter 08-Number 11: This example demonstrates the use of masking to solve the two-window problem. ProShow Gold users can view this example using the included executable (EXE) file.

Fake masks are powerful despite their limitations. Depending on the problem at hand, they can be the perfect solution. The key is understanding when and how to use them.
Employing Holes and Windows

An easy way to use a fake mask is to make a layer that is exactly like a matte in a picture frame. It is simply a large rectangle with a border in it, and the rectangle inside the border is cut out with a photo editor to contain only fully transparent pixels. This kind of matte image is easy to make with any photo editor and results in the same effect as a picture frame, except you can move the photo behind it to add motion to your show. You can see an example of a matte layer in Figure 8.22.

Figure 8.22
A rectangle with a hole in the middle can act exactly like a matte in a picture frame.

Note
A simple trick is to take high-quality photographs of some matte cardboard of varying textures. Experiment with different textures. If you have a picture frame handy on your wall, you can even take a photo of it on the wall if you are careful and the lighting is right. Once you bring these photos into your photo editor, you can easily add a rectangle in the center and chop out a transparent hole. Use these images in your shows as photorealistic mattes over other photos. They will look exactly like real photo frame mattes—because they are!
If your goal is to show a scene with a window in it, a photo of a wall with a window that has had the glass cut out to be fully transparent is an obvious trick. I’ve seen this used effectively to show scenery passing by on a train trip as viewed from inside the train car.

Create the illusion of clouds moving across a sky by applying a low level of transparency to the sky part of a photo and then moving another layer of clouds behind it.

Example Chapter 08-Number 12: This example demonstrates the use of partial transparency in a photo with a layer of clouds moving behind it. To fully understand this, examine the foreground layers and notice which parts of the foreground layers are partially transparent. These are the parts the cloud layer will show through.

A similar effect requires applying a low level of transparency to the windows of an office building. By moving a photo of clouds behind the frame mask office building photo, the partially visible clouds appear to be a reflection in the windows. This takes some careful editing, but the results can be impressive.

Example Chapter 08-Number 13: This example demonstrates a compelling cloud reflection on the side of a glass building. The effect is very compelling even though the reflected clouds are moving in the wrong direction!

Creating Layered Depth
A technique common in cartoons is to use multiple layers that move proportionately to create the illusion of depth. This can be done with photos to create the same illusion. It does require some careful editing and can be time consuming. However, as seen in the DVD example, the results are worth it. The structure of a multilayer scene is shown in Figure 8.23.

Example Chapter 08-Number 14: This example shows the use of four layers to create the illusion of depth.
Controlling Attention

Sometimes it is important for the audience to follow along with a narration track and avoid distraction. These are usually situations in which there is more information on the screen than necessary at any given point in time and you really need the audience to focus. A fake mask can be a perfect way to guide the audience to ignore most of the visual.

The spotlight mask is just a large, partially transparent black rectangle with a completely transparent hole in it, preferably with edges that are a little blurred just to make it look nicer. See Figure 8.24 for an example of a spotlight layer.

Figure 8.23
Using four layers moving at different speeds, you can create the illusion of depth.
You can move around and scale the mask layer to change where the hole appears. The dark area of the mask is partially transparent black, so most of the visual underneath it shows through as if it were darkened.

![Semitransparent spotlight mask](image)

**Figure 8.24**
The spotlight mask is simply a rectangle with a hole in it.

Set up your slides to follow the narration, and move the hole in the mask from one subject to another as appropriate. You can pan and zoom the mask. You can include slides that hold the mask in one spot during the duration before moving onto the next location.

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**Example Chapter 08-Number 15:** This example demonstrates the use of a partially transparent layer with a fully transparent hole in it to guide the audience’s attention to various coins.

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**Chopping Up Photos**
Starting with a photo, you can use your photo editor as a tool to change the material you use in your show. Often, the background of a photo takes attention away from the subject. Depending on the photo, you may be able to remove the background with your photo editor to increase the impact of the main subject and avoid distraction. Figure 8.25 shows an example of using a
flower with a different background. With some effort, you can replace some or all of a photo with transparency to guide the audience to focus on exactly what you want. Remember, what the audience members cannot see cannot distract them.

One detail can make or break this technique, as shown in Figure 8.26. Be careful about the outlines of what you crop out and the contrast in the edges. It is easy to make minor errors in the edges of a cropped image; high-contrast pixels that are sometimes difficult to see in the photo editor you are using are often left behind. Consider the colors of the background you’ll be using the photo against, and try to remove pixels that would cause a high-contrast border around your images.

Figure 8.25
Modern photo editors have tools to selectively remove parts of a photo.
Changing Backgrounds

Once you’ve removed the background around the subject of a photo, you can create some interesting effects by placing the subject on different backgrounds from other photos. This can easily lead to a surreal look because the placement looks unnatural. See an example in Figure 8.27. Notice how the choice of background significantly impacts the perception of the image. Surprisingly, this often works to your advantage depending on the purpose of the visual, especially if you add a small amount of motion.

Keep in mind that you do not have to place the image on the background in the photo editor. Instead, leave the background transparent and use it as a layer positioned over the background image in ProShow. This enables you to apply motion to the subject photo or the background in the slides they are used in.

Using Pieces of Photos

The television show Home Improvement popularized an effect using pieces of images that flew together or fell apart during transitions in the show. Figure 8.28 shows how a photo can be cut apart similarly into different layers that can each be moved separately. Slide show software allows you to make the pieces follow their own paths that either start out or end up together to appear as one seamless image.
Figure 8.27
The same subject of a photo chopped out and placed on three different backgrounds.

Figure 8.28
Breaking a photo into multiple pieces is a great way to add a stylish transition to a show.

This trick is often used to make puzzle effects in ProShow. Each piece is usually a full-sized image with transparency everywhere except for the individual piece the layer represents. This uses many layers but makes it easy to align all the pieces. It is possible to crop each image and avoid all the blank transparent space, but aligning the pieces is much more difficult this way and creates more work to get it right.
There is always more room for more transitions. Figure 8.29 shows how to make a photo appear to be a sheet of glass breaking and falling away to reveal the next photo underneath.

There are three tricks in this example that help the effect work. The first trick is that the pieces of the photo that represent the glass should be partially transparent. When the slide with the glass pieces occurs with a cut transition, the original photo appears to instantly reveal the underlying photo, but only partially. This gives the slide the psychological effect of the glass breaking all at once. Your mind sees it as if it were a sharp event that broke the glass.

The second trick is to set the motion type for each of the glass pieces to accelerate so they start slowly and move faster and faster as they go. All the pieces will be moving downward, so this will make it look like they are falling because of gravity.

The third trick is something that I will cover only partially here because I will cover it in more detail later. The idea is that the sound effect has an offset of 0.1 second. This means that the crash sound actually happens just after the glass breaks. Because the “crash” sound is unexpected, the audience members need to hear it about one-tenth of a second after they see the event occur. If this offset isn’t there, people will think the sound isn’t properly synchronized. For more information about this oddity of human audio/visual perception, see Chapter 9, “Audio and Synchronization.”
Example Chapter 08-Number 16: This example demonstrates using multiple pieces of an image to simulate the image being broken and falling downward.

**Tricking ProShow Gold with Video Output+Input**

ProShow Gold supports video layers. This opens up a lot of possibilities to do things that cannot be done with ProShow’s features alone. Anything that you can do with ProShow or any other tool that outputs video can be dropped into ProShow as a video layer.

**Creating Moving Backgrounds**

An easy way to create interesting moving backgrounds is to set up a show with a single slide with a 0.0 second transition. In the slide, insert several layers with varying levels of transparency. Using linear movement, rotate the layers in different directions such that at the end of the slide, they end up at the same rotation they started at. Figure 8.30 shows an example of the setup for a moving background with rotation settings.

**Figure 8.30**

Setting up a moving background isn’t terribly difficult once you understand a few simple tricks.
If you export this single slide show to a video file, you can use this video as a layer. When you loop the video, it appears to be continuous because the end of the video is identical to the beginning and the motion is linear. The audience does not see a change between when the video loops.

You can use as a background anything you can create with ProShow. Just create a show that does an effect and export a video file. Use that video file as a layer in another show.

**Morphing Images**

ProShow Gold doesn’t support varying the transparency of layers or keyframes. How can we trick ProShow Gold into transforming one image into another while it is moving? The answer is to create a video to help you.

Make a short show of two slides transitioning from one to the other. Export this as a video file, and bring the video file into ProShow as a layer in a new show. The video shows the photos changing from one to the other; you can move the video around just as you would a still photo.

**Cheating with Animated Caption Layers**

Sometimes you really need to have captions move below other layers. You can accomplish this easily the same way. Just create a video of the caption effects, and bring them into ProShow as a video layer.

People are sensitive to the quality of text on the screen. Make sure you use a video resolution high enough to satisfy the resolution requirements of your final show, or your captions will appear soft or blurry. Also, do not use an interlaced video format if you can avoid it. Caption motion with interlaced video can cause various types of motion artifacts. Noninterlaced video formats do not have this problem.
**Review**

Although there are many ways to use ProShow to create a fantastic slide show, don’t forget about the myriad ways you can use other tools to create content that will increase your options within ProShow. Some techniques require you to think about your visuals in ways that at first are not obvious. Others require using facilities in ways that aren’t the usual ways you’d normally think to use them.

Creative manipulation and refinement of your source material always results in better productions. The saying goes, “Better material in, better slide show out!”