June 2008

Photoshop tips
Dirty Little Secrets – Efficiency
By Kevin Kubota

Sometimes it's the little things that make a big difference. Take, for example, Photoshop. Most of us spend quite a lot of time working our images in this powerhouse of a program, and we certainly appreciate cool new techniques; but sometimes the most significant gains to productivity can be had by simply being more efficient.

Here are a few of my time-saving tips that have amassed quite a savings of time through the years I've been working in Photoshop. In fact, I've done the math; and I've actually added 2 years to my life by saving time with these tips! Wow, let's get busy.

Train your mouse
Any Photoshop user worth their weight in pixels probably spends a serious amount of time with layer masks. I use my Actions to enhance all my images, and they often create layer masks for me to paint in or out part of an effect. To paint on a layer mask, you use the brush tool – and you constantly need to change the brush size while moving about the image. So, why not train your mouse wheel to change the brush size for you?

You'll need an extra piece of inexpensive software to handle this; but I assure you it's well worth it. In fact, I feel like a rat in a cage when I hop on someone else's computer to work and they don't have the mouse trained! Mac users can download a program called SteerMouse, and PC users can try Mouse Wheel Control. Both programs can be had in a minute on **Google** for about $20.

The idea is to program your mouse wheel to type the keys when you roll the wheel up or down, and replace the keyboard shortcuts to reduce or enlarge brushes in Photoshop. The software lets you make this change only in Photoshop, so the mouse behaves normally in other programs.

Here's the basic setup in SteerMouse **(Fig. 01).**
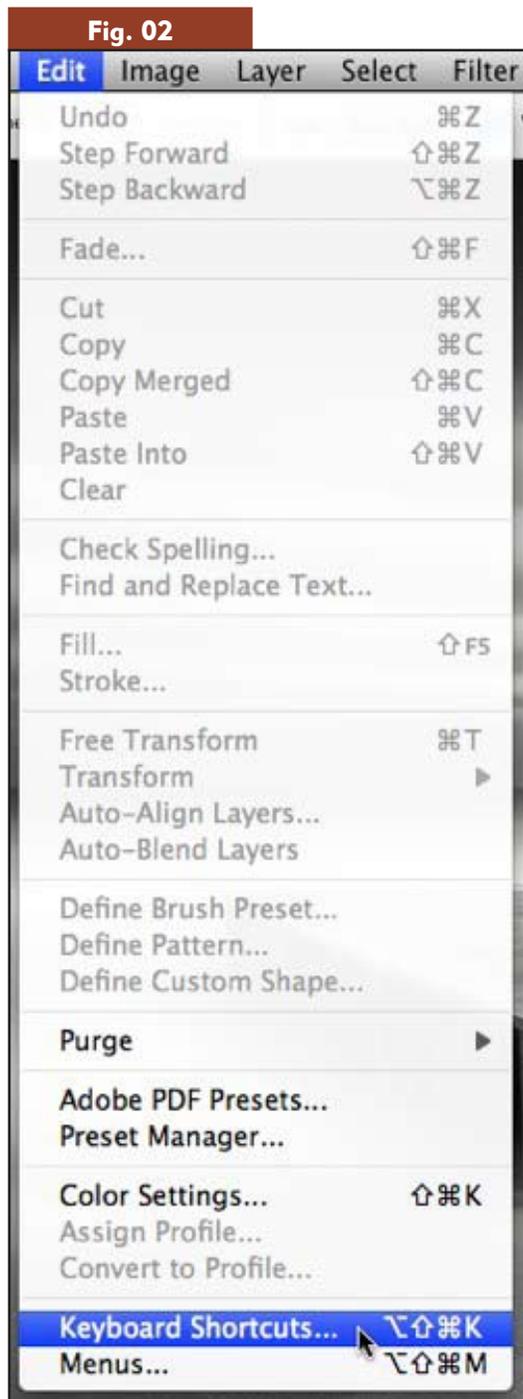

Fig. 01
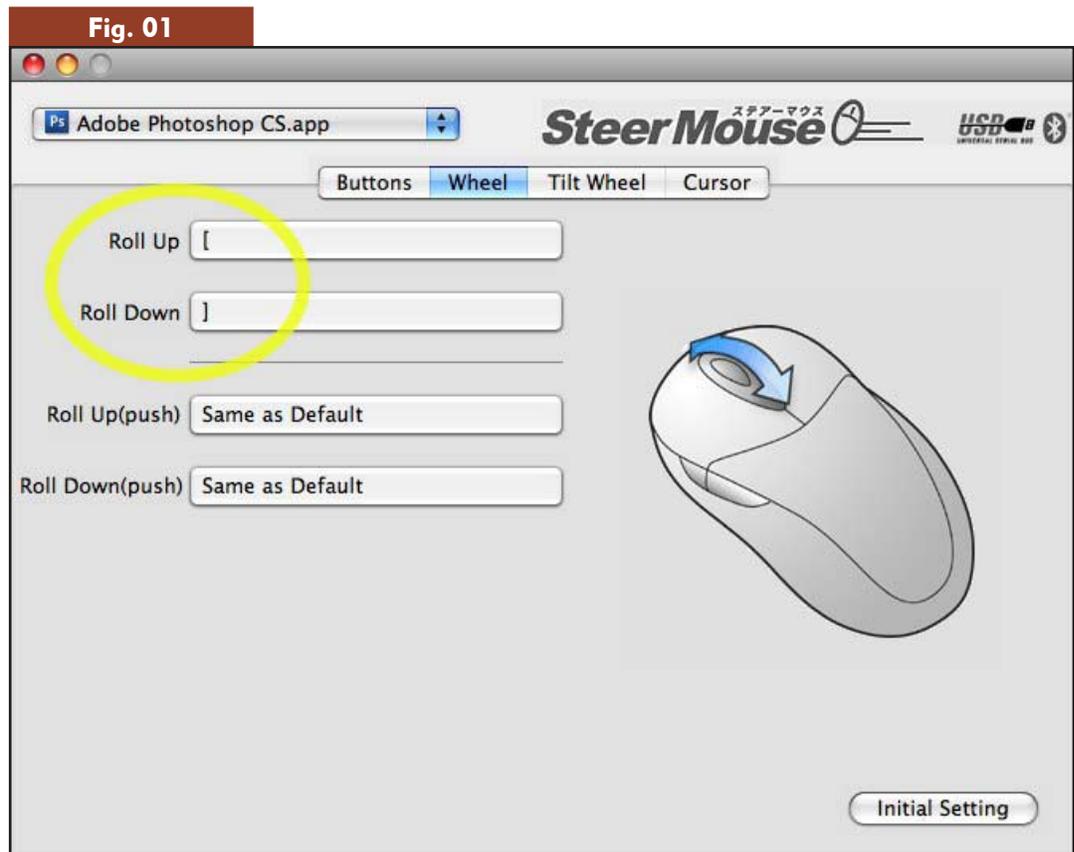
Now, rolling the wheel up or down changes your brush size on the fly!

Be the boss of keyboard shortcuts

Everyone should be using keyboard shortcuts for any common task in Photoshop. Most every menu item and tool has a shortcut assigned to it; all you have to do is learn them. Here's a simple way to make yourself learn the shortcut: Whenever you go to a menu to do something or select a tool, look for the shortcut and make a mental note. Then, back out of the menu without selecting the item, and use the shortcut instead. After doing this a few times, you'll remember that key sequence!

What if an item doesn't have a keyboard shortcut? Here's where you take control. Photoshop lets you assign shortcuts to just about anything available in a menu using the **Edit > Keyboard Shortcuts** command **(Fig. 02).**

Fig. 02

Edit	Image	Layer	Select	Filter

|	
Undo	⌘Z
Step Forward	⇧⌘Z
Step Backward	⌥⌘Z
Fade...	⇧⌘F
Cut	⌘X
Copy	⌘C
Copy Merged	⇧⌘C
Paste	⌘V
Paste Into	⇧⌘V
Clear	
Check Spelling...	
Find and Replace Text...	
Fill...	⇧F5
Stroke...	
Free Transform	⌘T
Transform	▶
Auto–Align Layers...	
Auto–Blend Layers	
Define Brush Preset...	
Define Pattern...	
Define Custom Shape...	
Purge	▶
Adobe PDF Presets...	
Preset Manager...	
Color Settings...	⇧⌘K
Assign Profile...	
Convert to Profile...	
Keyboard Shortcuts...	⌥⇧⌘K
Menus...	⌥⇧⌘M

Once the dialog is open, find the menu you want to which you want to assign a shortcut and type it in. I use the **flatten image** command quite a bit; but, oddly, it doesn't have a built-in shortcut **(Fig. 03).** So I'll create one here. First, find the **layers** menu:

Fig. 03
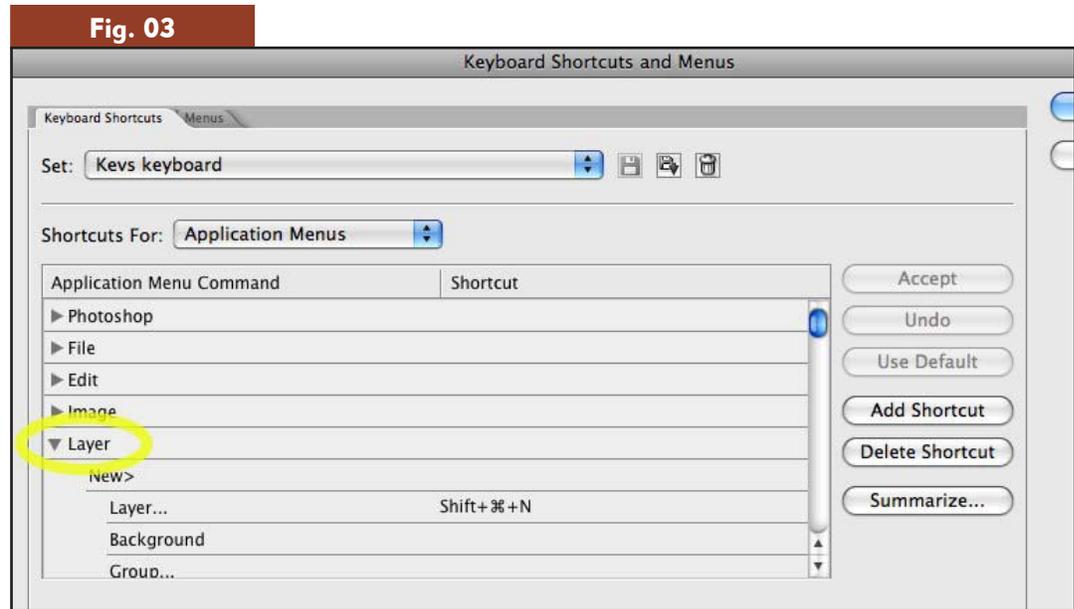
Scroll down until you see **flatten image (Fig. 04).** Type in the shortcut you want. If it's a key combo already used elsewhere, you'll be asked if you want to overwrite it. Once you've found one you like, click **Accept** to save the change.

Now, there's no excuse for slacking on your shortcuts!

Fig. 04
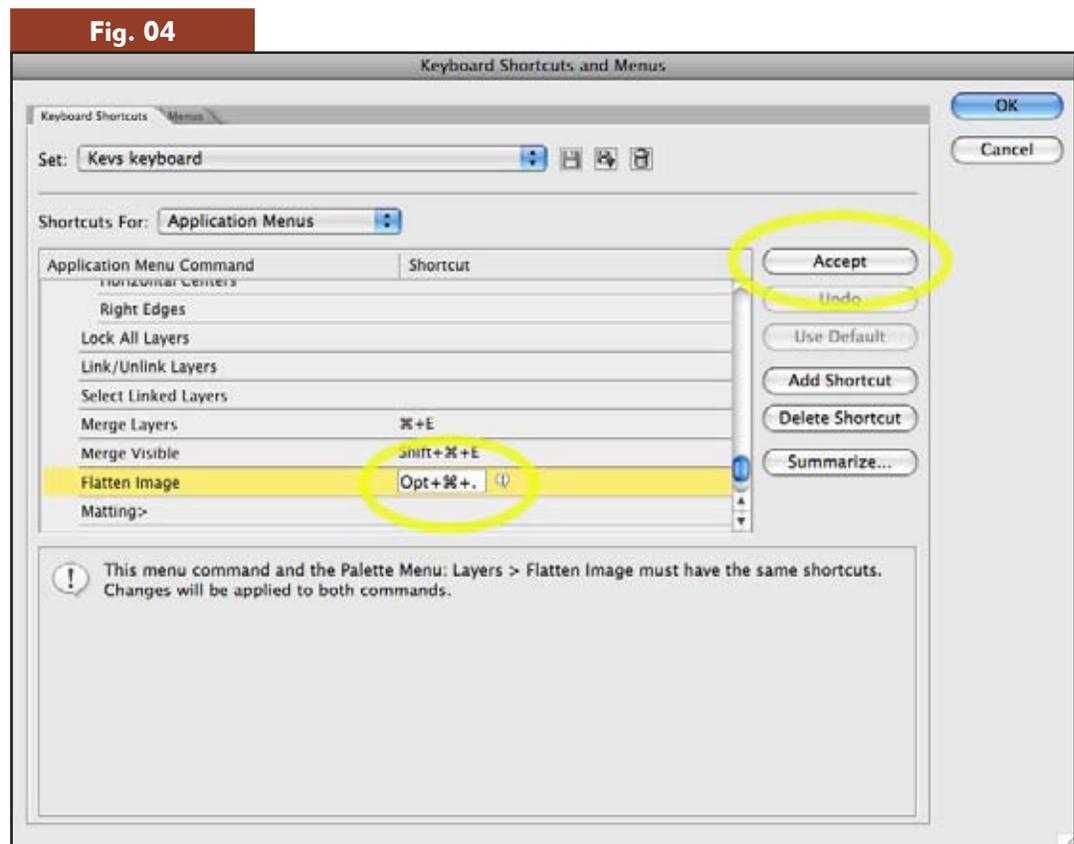
## Scripting Events Manager – scary words, scary fun

Wouldn't it be great if Photoshop would do something for you every time you opened an image? Or every time it launched? Or every time you forgot to take out the trash? I can help you with the first two.

Create an action for the thing you want to do. For example, I use **Bay Photo Lab** for my printing, and I like to soft proof with their color profile when I'm working on images. The only problem is soft proofing has to be turned on each time you open a new image. I can't remember all that!

The solution is to create an action to select the appropriate color profile from my proofing menu, turn proofing on **(Fig. 05)**, and give me a little love note that reminds me it's on so I won't forget. The action steps look like **Fig. 06.**

Fig. 05

Fig. 06
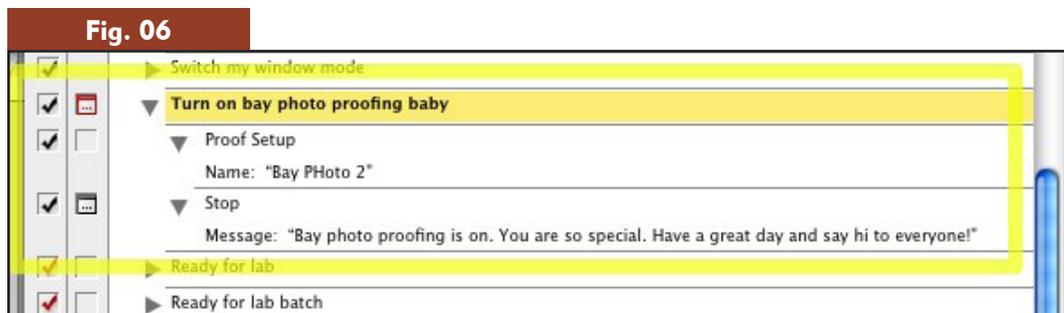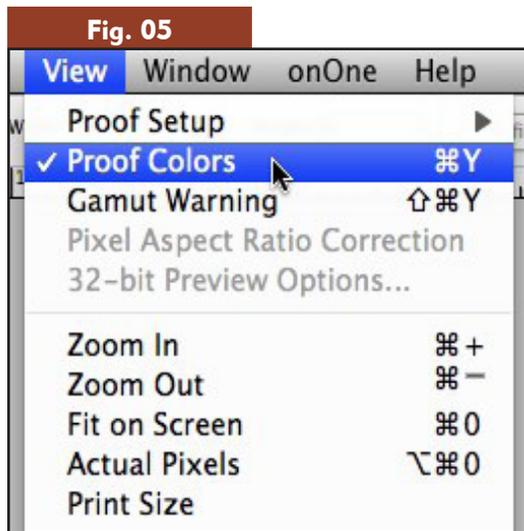
Now, I'll use the **Script Events Manager** to tell Photoshop to play this action automatically whenever I open an image **(Fig. 07).** Cool.


Fig. 07
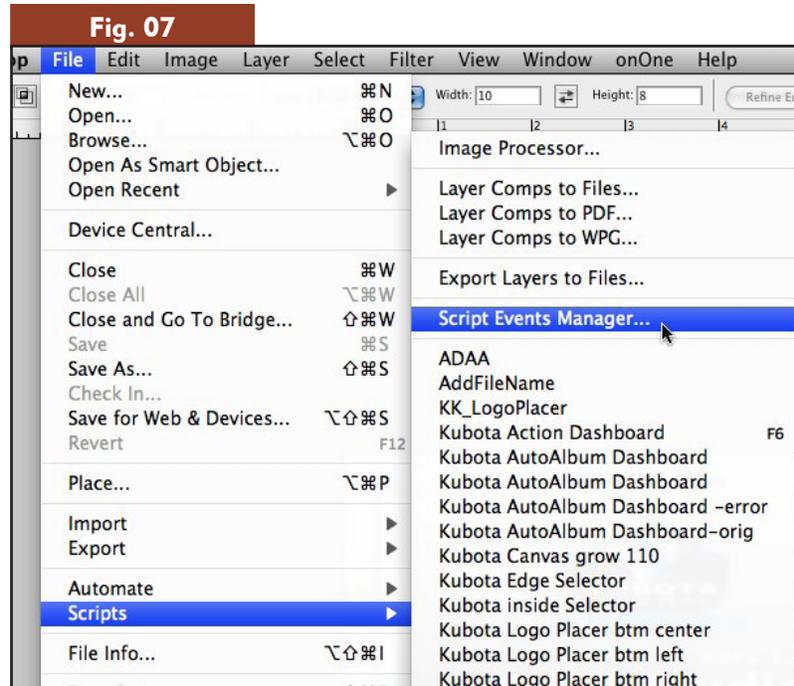
With the dialog open, check the options as shown, and then click **Add** to add it to the list of events that will happen **(Fig. 08).** Then click **Done.**

Fig. 08
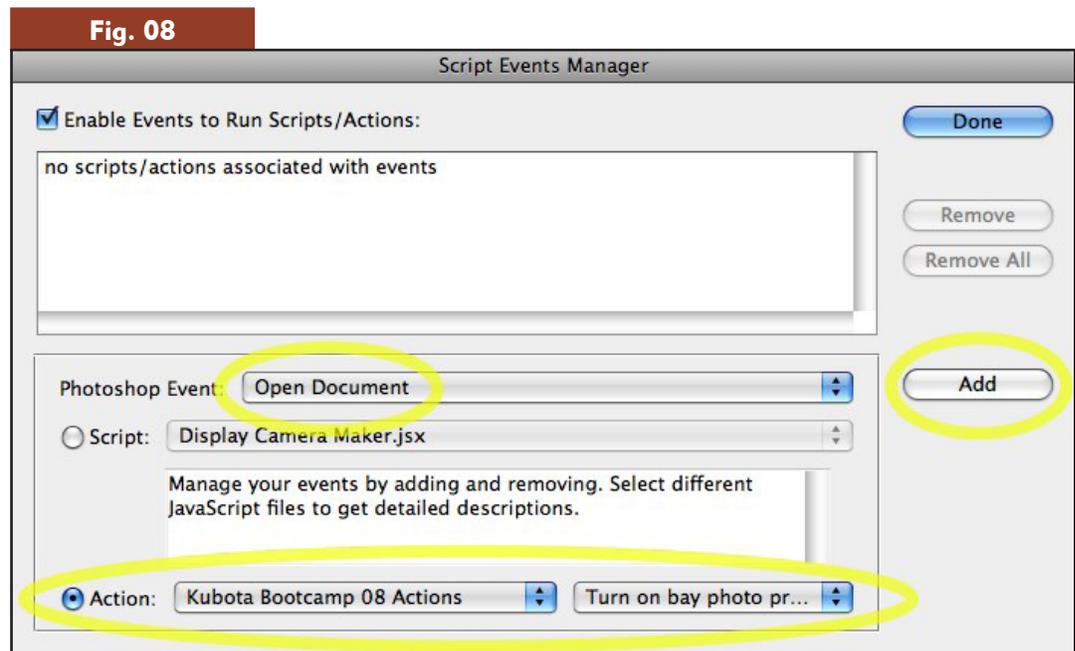
Now try it out. Whenever you open an image, soft proofing is turned on and you get a little love note reminder. Just hit **enter** to clear the note and start working the image, confident in the knowledge that what you see on screen is what you'll get from your lab.

If you ever want to stop the automatic proofing, just re-open the **Script Events Manager** window and uncheck **Enable Events to Run Scripts/Actions (Fig. 09).**

Fig. 09
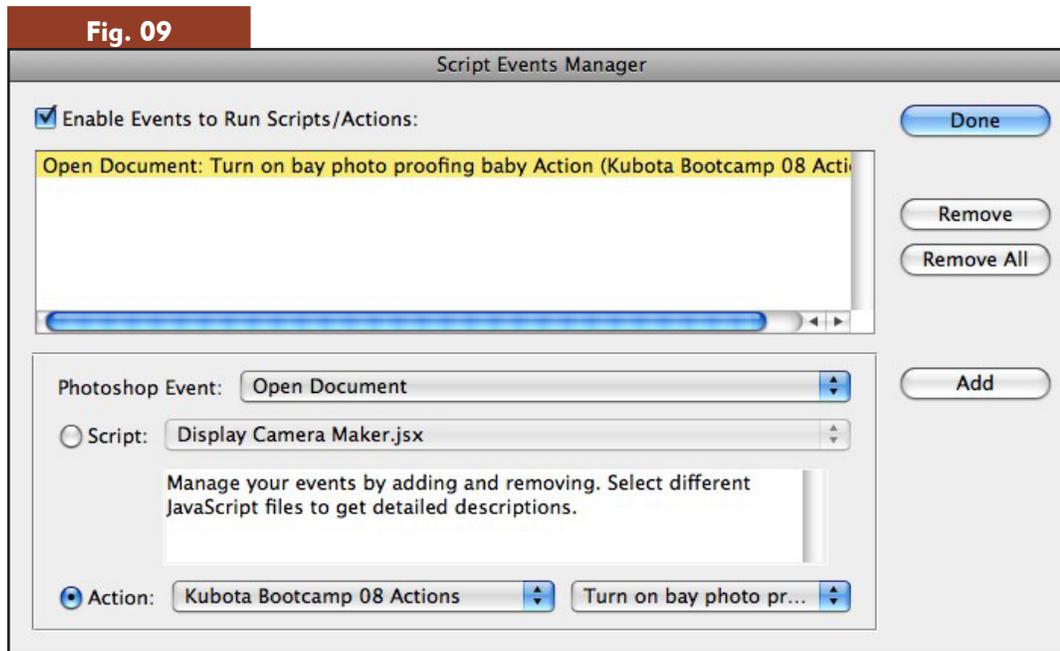
These are just a few of my favorite time savers. Stay tuned for the next episode, where we either learn how to fly or learn hot tips for writing our own actions!

Visit our website at **www.KubotaImageTools.com** for more info on Actions, Workshops, and other goodies.

About Kevin Kubota

Kevin Kubota, president and owner of *Kubota Photo-Design Inc.,* Bend, Ore. Kubota is a wedding and portrait photographer with images that speak to the heart – filled with emotion, joy, intimacy, and impact. His photos have been featured on the covers and within the pages of many popular magazines and photography books. He has been a *Nikon-*sponsored speaker, and his work with the Nikon digital camera has been the focus of Nikon advertisements. He is listed in the "Legends" section on the Nikon website. Kubota is also a *PPA* Photographic Craftsman.

  Kubota is an internationally recognized speaker and educator whose digital expertise prompted him to create the popular "Digital Photography Bootcamp." These programs consistently sell out nationwide. He is also the author of the book, "Digital Photography Boot Camp: A Step-By-Step Guide for Professionals," published by *Amherst Media.* His Photoshop Actions are standard equipment in the tool belts of the world's top photographers.