

The Ultimate Productivity Automator Review

by Jim Bodkin

The Ultimate Productivity Automator Action Pack from Automated Workflows, LLC

The Ultimate Productivity Automator Action Pack is a collection of 49 actions to make the use of Automator immediate, productive and fun. For some background, the Apple Automator application is a wonderful way to speed-up tasks that you repeat on a regular basis and comes as part of OS X 10.4 Tiger. While it is not a true development environment like many of the programming languages and not as flexible as some scripting applications such as Apple's Applescript, Automator meets the needs of many Mac users who want to perform some type of repetitive tasks and don't want to learn a programming language or scripting process. Automator receives its instructions from 'actions', which are constructed into workflows and are much easier to arrange than programming Applescript. The Ultimate Productivity Automator collection of actions makes the process even easier by providing additional specialized building block to generate application specific workflows not possible by regular users. The developer's website has a complete listing of the various action packs at <http://www.automatedworkflows.com/automator/actions.html>.

You may recall that The NorthWest of Us was provided an excellent presentation of Automator by George Dorner at the January 2006 Meeting where he spoke about Automator basics and also demonstrated how to create workflows from actions already in OS X.

The actions on this CD improve the usability of various portions of OS X (Finder, System and Text Edit) as well as key user applications such as Adobe Photoshop, Adobe InDesign, Quark XPress and FileMaker Pro. The on-disk documentation is extensive (110 pages) and directs the user through the steps of installing the actions into Automator and details all of the variables and input and output parameters for each action on the CD.

List of all The Ultimate Productivity Automator Action Pack actions

Adobe InDesign Actions

- Add Pages to InDesign Documents
- Export InDesign Documents to PDF
- Open Documents in InDesign
- Place Images In InDesign Document
- Place Text In InDesign Document
- Save InDesign Documents
- Update Modified Links in InDesign Documents

Adobe Photoshop Actions

- Add IPTC Captions to Photoshop Documents
- Apply Unsharp Mask to Photoshop Documents
- Apply Watermark to Photoshop Documents
- Assign Color Profile to Photoshop Documents
- Close Photoshop Documents
- Extract IPTC Captions from Photoshop Documents
- Flip Photoshop Documents
- New Photoshop Documents
- Open Photoshop Documents
- Resize Photoshop Documents
- Rotate Photoshop Documents
- Save Photoshop Documents
- Trigger Photoshop Action
- Trim Photoshop Documents

Automator Actions

- Choose List Items

Finder Actions

- Empty Trash
- New Subfolder
- Quit Application
- Wait for Finder Items

iPhoto Actions

- Find iPhoto Item Paths

Preview Actions

- Filter ICC Profile Images

QuarkXPress Actions

- Add Pages to QuarkXPress Documents
- Apply Quark Box Names
- Open Documents In Quark
- Place Images In Quark Document
- Place Text In Quark Document
- Retrieve Quark Box Names
- Save Quark Documents
- Save Quark Pages to EPS

System Actions

- Get Clipboard Contents
- Type Keystroke

My desire in testing and reviewing the action pack was to perform some of the repetitious tasks associated with Adobe Photoshop easier. Of the 14 Automator actions included in the Action Pack for Photoshop, the one that had the most interest to me was adding a watermark to a photo. In order to use the actions on the CD though, they must be included in a workflow. Normally, the user would have to generate a workflow; however in this case, there was a sample workflow on the Automated Workflows web site (<http://www.automatedworkflows.com/automator/workflows.html>) which I was able to use to demonstrate the installation and operation of Automator. compatability. Some of the other available workflows are listed in below.

Adobe InDesign Example Workflows

- * Build Real Estate Catalog Desktop

Publishing Example Workflow (1.5 MB)

- * Image Placement Example Workflow (1.2 MB)
- * Text Placement Example Workflow (232 KB)

Adobe Photoshop Example Workflows

- * Apply Watermark Example Workflow (1.5 MB)
- * Photography Example Workflow (7.9 MB)

Aperture Example Workflows

- * Email PDF Contact Sheet from Aperture (4.3 KB)
(Walkthrough this workflow on on Apple.com...)

General Use Example Workflows

- * Backup Current Week's Files (3.5 KB)
(Walkthrough this workflow on on Apple.com...)
- * Rename, Convert, and Caption images (4.1 KB)
(Walkthrough this workflow on on Apple.com...)

The Ultimate Productivity Automator (continued)

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Preview Example Workflows

* Filter ICC Profile Images Example Workflow (1.4 MB)

QuarkXPress Example Workflows

* Build Real Estate Catalog Desktop Publishing Example Workflow (1.4 MB)

* Box Naming Example Workflows (220 KB)

* Image Placement Example Workflow (1.1 MB)

* Text Placement Example Workflow (116 KB)

With the workflow identified, it was a simple matter of double clicking it to open the workflow in the Automator application. When the workflow opens it appears like a flow of information through a series of boxes, each box being an Action with a specific purpose. The type, sequence and number of actions determine the overall function of the workflow.

To explore the function of Watermark Image workflow, refer to Figure 3.

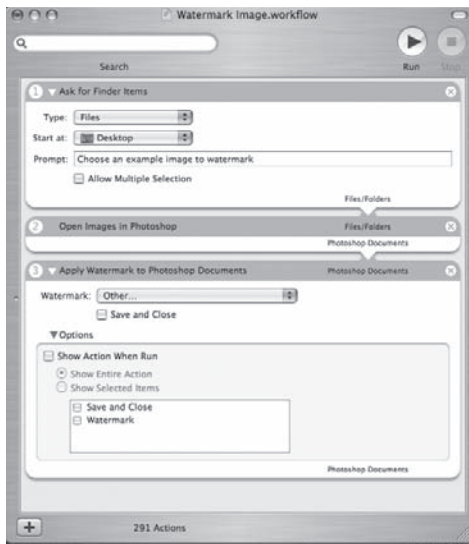


Fig 3 – Watermark Image Workflow

The Watermark Image workflow includes three actions. The first one is a standard action to find a file. The second action, which is part of the CD, opens the selected file in Photoshop. The third action, which is also part of the CD, applies a selected watermark image file to one or more identified photo files. This is a very simple workflow, however its value comes from its ability to process a large number of photo files effortlessly.

To test the workflow, I used one of my wildflower images as shown in Figure 4.



Fig 4 - 4647 Before Watermark Testing-small.jpg

I identified the provided example watermark and was now ready to watermark my first photo file. I could have generated my own or used any other file as the watermark source. With the files identified, I ran the workflow in Automator. The workflow opened the appropriate folders, located the requested file, and merged the photo file and the watermark file together on a single layer of Photoshop as shown in Figure 5. I could have saved the new file and gone on to another photo in a very efficient manner.



Fig 5 - 4647 After Watermark Testing-small.jpg

The sample workflow I used, or any workflow, could be modified to incorporate additional actions, such as resizing a photo or sharpening a photo or rotating a photo. The power of Automator comes from repeating the workflow many times. In my simple test, the workflow was very fast and only took 5-10 seconds once the files were identified. So if I had 100 photos to watermark, I could perform the task over 30 times faster using Automator and in the process eliminate a lot of meaningless labor that can be better applied to more productive tasks.

My testing was performed on Adobe Photoshop CS2 and worked flawlessly. The new version available from their website is compliant with Adobe Photoshop CS3.

The other actions in the Ultimate Productivity Automator Action Pack likewise interact with other applications or portions of OS X, and permit the same efficiency and time savings.

For Mac users who use or desire to use Automator, the Ultimate Productivity Automator Action Pack by Automated Workflow is available from their website (<http://www.automatedworkflows.com/index.html>) and is a great productivity tool, well worth the \$39.99. 🍷