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Test Strip 3.1

Photoshop Plug-in Eases Color Correction

MANY FACTORS can affect color accuracy in a digital image. Adobe Photoshop's Variations feature offers a visual way to correct color, but it's limited, and more-complete tools such as Curves and Levels can be intimidating. Vivid Details' Test Strip 3.1, a Photoshop plug-in, takes a friendlier approach to color correction. It can't solve all your color woes on its own—for the most-accurate results, you must also calibrate your equipment—but it goes a long way.

Familiar Features

Test Strip divides an image into pre-defined sections that preview the results of adding or subtracting colors, contrast, density, and saturation. The new Gels feature lets you create independent, resizable strips. It's easy to create a Gel, assign 6 percent cyan to it (for example), and then drag it over the image to preview the effect.

Even color-science novices can improve images with the new Metamorphosis tool. It works like an eye exam: you see two side-by-side slices of your image and click on the slice that most appeals to you. Choose the best of several more pairs, and Test Strip alters the original image's dynamic range, brightness, color, and saturation. Metamorphosis combines that series of changes into just a few

corrections, helping avoid the data loss that comes with overprocessing. It doesn't work well with all images—particularly dark photos—but it's a good starting point.

Text labels would make Test Strip even easier to use—the functions of many components aren't clear. Deciphering the program's mysterious icons required many trips to the manual.

Although version 3.1 is designed to run in Mac OS 7.6, 8, or 9, you can also run it in OS X's Classic mode. I tested it in OS X 10.0.4 on a G4/450, and windows didn't always fully redraw. And unless the Dock was hidden, it obscured key Test Strip buttons. Vivid Details says it will release a native OS X version when Adobe ships a Carbonized Photoshop.



Image Pepper-Upper Test Strip's Gels feature lets you preview changes to your image in 1 percent increments.

Macworld's Buying Advice

Prepress operators and other professional image editors should still do their color correction in Photoshop. But for the rest of us, Test Strip 3.1 is well worth buying.—TERRI STONE

Rating: ★★★★★

Pros: Provides easier color correction than Photoshop; new Metamorphosis feature is a great time-saver.

Cons: Interface can be unintuitive; Metamorphosis fails with some images.

Company's estimated price: \$200; upgrade, \$50

OS compatibility: Mac OS 9

Company: Vivid Details, 800/948-4843, www.vividdetails.com

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