

Using Corel KnockOut

(Corel's newly acquired masking tool)

What is it?

Corel KnockOut is a stand-alone program recently purchased by Corel. It was formerly marketed under a different name (Ultimate KnockOut... I think). Anyway, it is a sophisticated masking tool, designed to be used in compositing images.

What's compositing, you ask? It's the merging of elements from several original images. Most often, it involves separating a foreground element, such as people or animals from the original background, and placing them into a new background. It could also be used for the ever popular activity of placing one person's head on the body of another.

Below I've placed two images. The first is the original. The second is a composite. The dogs are obviously from the first image. They are the magical result produced by KnockOut. The rest of the second image was created by me using bitmap tile fills.



While Corel provides a fair number of tiles on the bitmap CD (number 3 for CorelDRAW 9), I used some that I got from a website called *Blade's Textures and Tiles*. Blade—Brian Rollason—has placed a sampling of tiles there that are available for free. They represent just a small sampling of those available on a CD he has produced that includes 1,400 separate tiles! Brian has generously donated one that is today's door prize. He has also offered to make a special deal for our group. The CD is normally \$49 plus shipping. He will sell it for \$40 and free shipping to interested members. I just need to email a list of those interested with their names and email addresses.

If you are interested, go to his website (<http://www.bladestextures.com/>) and answer "Yes" to the interest form question on the order form. Even if you decide not to purchase the CD, you can take advantage of some of the free samples. Brian is a Corel user and lives in Irvine, so don't be surprised if he makes an appearance at a future meeting.

How does it work?

The manual part of the process (your job) is not too different from using the freehand masking tool in Photo-Paint. In fact, it behaves very similarly, in that you can draw continuous freehand curves or a series of line segments. You can also add to and delete portions of existing masks.

The big difference, is that you create two selection areas to define the object you want masked. The selection areas represent inside the object and outside the object. Once you've defined these, it is the program's job to accurately determine the transitions between the "inside" object—the thing you want to separate from the background—and the background.

Below is a screen capture showing how this is done. Notice, that unlike the tedious job this would be trying to accurately mask in Photo-Paint, you only have to loosely define the inside and outside. How accurate you have to be depends on the particular image.



(Over)

Once you draw the inside and outside selection areas to your satisfaction, you tell the program to process the image. The result shows your knocked-out foreground object against a solid background. You can choose from a number of colors so that you can see how effective you were.



You can also toggle between the original image, the processed image and a depiction of the mask that processing created. The processed image and mask or alpha channel are shown below:

If you aren't satisfied with the results, it's easy to toggle back to the original image, rework the selection areas, and try again.

When you start out, you open a bitmap in any of a number of formats (including JPG, CPT, PSD, BMP and TIF). However, if you expect to work on the project some more, refining areas, etc; you will need to save it as a project (UKO) file.

OK, you've processed the image, now what?

After you get a processed image you are satisfied with, you export the image to whatever file format works best with your image editor (i.e. CPT). What you will find when you open the image in your image editor, is the foreground "object" on a black background with a mask or alpha channel.

In Photo-Paint, you would then create an object out of the masked area and then do a "Remove Black Matte" to improve the resulting edges. Now, you are free to take the object and build an image behind it, like I did, or copy and paste it into an existing image.

Just the beginning...

I've just started working with this program and still have a lot to learn, but already I'm impressed! I haven't worked with it yet, but you can not only knockout the object, but if shadows exist, you can knock those out too; *and preserve their transparency.*

