Making an Image Transparent

Manual written by Jeremy Ahn, 25 September 2018

Overview

Many digital images -- when embedded into websites, overlayed onto other images, or even inserted within a PowerPoint presentation -- tend to have an ugly, (usually) white background behind the image's focal object(s). This is because images can be transparent, but many are not.

In this manual, you will be instructed step-by-step to eliminate this phenomenon using the *GNU Image Manipulation Tool* (hereinafter referred to as GIMP), a free and open-source software which can be downloaded online.

Notice: This manual only applies with images with solid-color backgrounds. It is also most effective with images that are saved in lossless file types (e.x. .PNG) instead of file types that reduce photo quality to reduce file size (e.x. JPEG).

Pre-instruction: Installing GIMP

GIMP is free software that can be downloaded online and installed thereafter.

1. To proceed, go to https://www.gimp.org/ and click the "Download 2.10.6" button (latest version at the time of this writing).
2. You will be directed to a new page with two buttons -- downloading via BitTorrent, or direct download. In this manual, you will be instructed to download directly.
3. Once the file finishes downloading, open the installation wizard by double-clicking it. Press *Install* once the splash screen opens and wait.
   a. If you are using Google Chrome, the bottom side of the window would indicate the download progress. Once downloaded, you can single-click the button.
4. If successful, it should leave behind a message indicating a successful install. Press *Finish* to exit.

Instructions

1. Start up GIMP.
2. Once the application is opened, you can either create or open a preexisting file. Open a file by going to File > Open or the CTRL + O shortcut and select your file.
   a. In this instruction manual we will be working on files that already exist.

3. To enable transparency on the image, go to Layer > Transparency and click *Add Alpha Channel.*
    a. If the button is disabled, then transparency should already be enabled. If such is the case, this step can be disregarded.
4. On the left-hand side of the GIMP window, you should see the Toolbox. Click on the magic wand icon among the buttons at the top (see image to the right).
    a. There may be instances in which it does not show up or you accidentally closed the sidebar. If this is the case, go to Windows > Recently Closed Docks and then select Toolbox.
5. With the magic wand tool selected, click the solid color you would like to make transparent.
6. Press the DELETE button on your keyboard. The layer should be deleted.
7. File > Save to save to a GIMP .XCF file, or File > Export to save to an image. .XCF files retain layer data but are unusable as standalone images!

Conclusion

Thank you for reading! If you require further assistance, do not hesitate to contact me at jeremy.ahn@stonybrook.edu.