Designing DVD Menus

Photoshop and DVD Studio Pro Make Menus Together

*By Anton Linecker*

A great meal at a restaurant would be difficult without a menu, which tells you the dishes being served, how they're prepared, and how much they cost--a menu is an indispensable communication tool. Using a DVD also requires menus; they power a DVD's interactivity. Without well-designed and complete menus, users won't be able to reach your DVD's content--or won't even know what's available to them.

Earlier this year, Apple released a new tool for making DVDs: DVD Studio Pro ($999; 800/692-7753, [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)). It's a valuable resource for professionals, but the application provides no way to create menus; you can add interactivity only to menus created elsewhere. This may seem odd, but authoring a professional-level DVD, like HTML editing, involves assembling final elements: the video and audio should already be compressed, and the menus already complete.

So if you don't make your menus in DVD Studio Pro, where should you make them? In the industry standard: Adobe Photoshop (800/833-6687, [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)). The following steps illustrate how to efficiently build a DVD menu in Photoshop 6.0, but the basic instructions work in versions 4.0, 5.0, and 5.5, as well. Any static menu can be built on these steps; the complexity of the artwork is up to you.

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Make Your Background  If interactive buttons are the brains behind DVD menus, backgrounds are the beauty. Though there are a few technical restrictions to keep in mind, backgrounds can be as simple or as elaborate as you wish. In this example, we start by making a background for a fictitious training DVD called "Scuba Safety."

In Photoshop, create a new project with an image size of 720 by 540 pixels and a resolution of 72 pixels per inch. This approximates the way your menu will eventually look on a TV screen. Choose the RGB mode.
Choose a color for the background, and fill it in using the Paint Bucket tool (under the Gradient tool in Photoshop 6). This gives you a base to work on, even if it's only temporary.

Place and size the images you want on your menu background. Separate layers make the elements easier to manage in Photoshop. (Layers also add functionality to a menu once it's imported into DVD Studio Pro.)

TVs crop the outer edges of a picture. To avoid having important information cut out of your image, keep it away from the outer 10% or 20% of the image area. The middle space is called the title safe area.

Once you have the background you want, flatten the image (Layer: Flatten Image).

**Design Your Title and Buttons** Adding a title is straightforward; buttons are a little more complex. Clicking on a button in a DVD menu starts an event, such as playing a movie, displaying a picture, or changing languages. Although you add the action in DVD Studio Pro, you make the static image of the button in Photoshop.

With the Text tool, create and place the DVD title. Overly thin fonts tend to flicker when displayed on a TV, so make sure your type has enough heft. You may want to add a drop shadow (Layer: Layer Style: Drop Shadow).
Lines are another potential problem. Make horizontal lines at least 2 pixels thick, or they’ll flicker.

For the first button, set the foreground color, making sure to avoid overly saturated colors, which can cause problems on NTSC displays. (NTSC is a video standard used in the United States.) Although buttons can be any shape, for this example, we selected the Rounded Rectangle tool and drew our button.

In the real world, buttons are usually raised from a surface. To imitate this look in the 2-D world of a DVD menu, give your button a raised appearance by applying the Bevel And Emboss effect. (Layer: Layer Style: Bevel And Emboss). So viewers will know the button's purpose, you need to identify it. Use the Text tool to create a title, size it, and position it over the button.
Text alone can be a button. With the Text tool, we created chapter titles and made the text stand out from the background (Layer: Layer Style: Outer Glow).

3 **Link and Merge Layers**  DVD Studio Pro doesn't recognize effects layers. You have to * rasterize* text and layer effects to make them visible on your finished DVD. (In previous versions of Photoshop, this process was called *rendering*.)

Under the Layer menu, choose Rasterize and then select All Layers.

Next, select each layer that has layer effects, and choose Layer: Layer Style: Create Layer. This separates the effects layers from the target layer.

Link each layer with its effects layer. Click on the text layer so it's the active layer; then pick Merge Linked from the Layers Menu.
When merging the text (in our example, *Play Movie*) onto the rounded rectangle, include the text and effects layers to complete the button C.

Finally, link your title and background image layers together and merge them.

4 **Add Layers and Button States**  In DVD Studio Pro, menu buttons have three states: normal, which is the default display; selected, when the remote control passes over the button; and activated, when the user has chosen the button. You can emphasize each state with different visual effects that exist as individual layers in the Photoshop file.

In step 2, you created your buttons' normal states. To differentiate the selected and activated states, add color casts.

To create a selected state for the Play Movie button, we duplicated the layer and called it "Play Movie-Selected." (This naming convention helps when you load the file into DVD Studio Pro.)

First, you'll set your foreground color. Go to Edit: Fill, and choose Foreground Color from the Contents pop-up menu A. As the Blending mode, select Multiply so the button's text will show through.
Duplicate the button layer again. We called this layer "Play Movie-Activated" and used a different color fill. You can even add an outer-glow effect in the same color if you want the button to appear to flash when activated on screen B.

Repeat this process for the text buttons, but use the Normal Blending mode for the fill so the black text will also fill. Be sure to rasterize all effects and merge them with their layers. You should now have three separate layers for each of your buttons.

5 Check, Resize, and Save  You have built your DVD menu. Now you must prepare it to be imported into DVD Studio Pro.

Check your work. Make sure that you've rasterized your layers and your text, and that each layer is properly identified.
Group your layers in button clusters (normal, selected, and activated) by clicking and dragging their titles in the Layers palette A.

Add new, blank layers between your button groups and name them "-" (hyphen) B. These blank layers will appear as dividers when you import the menu into DVD Studio Pro and will help you manage your buttons.

Next, resize the overall image. Under the Image menu, choose Image Size. Set the image size to 720 by 480 pixels. You will notice that this distorts your picture slightly, squeezing it vertically. This is normal. NTSC video is displayed at 720 by 480, but it uses non-square pixels. When you see the finished DVD displayed on a TV screen, the menu will be the correct size.
Finally, save the resized static menu, launch DVD Studio Pro, choose the File menu's Import command (command-I), and navigate to the Photoshop menu file. Click on Add; then click on the Import button. Now the menu is in your Studio Pro Assets bin, ready for you to add interactivity and make it functional.
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