Using E-Mail With Paint Shop Pro

by Joe Stoddard

When it comes to construction projects, a picture is worth a thousand words — maybe even a thousand bucks, if it can prevent a mistake. By now, almost all contractors are accustomed to sending and receiving drawings by fax, but few consider using e-mail because they think it's only for text messages. Not so. With a couple of simple software tools, you can share just about any image or document imaginable.

Format conflicts. One obstacle to working with images via e-mail is that not all imaging software is compatible. For example, MIME (multipurpose Internet mail extensions) refers to a standard that allows e-mail to be exchanged between all the different systems that coexist on the Internet. But unless everyone who receives the file is using the same exact software you used to create it, there's a very good chance they won't be able to open the file. Other formats, like .GIF (best for drawings) or .JPG (best for photographs), work with Web browsers such as Microsoft Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator, but reliability is still a problem.

To the rescue. One solution is Paint Shop Pro 6.0 (PSP), which does for $99 what it would have cost $500 or more to do only a couple of years ago. With PSP, you can open images (from digital cameras, scanners, videotape, photo CDs, or captured computer screens), mark them up with built-in text and drawing tools, then compress the images to make them easy to send by e-mail. The software can be downloaded or ordered at www.paintshop pro.com, and is also available at retail software stores.

A Real-World Example

To get an idea of how this software works, imagine that your client has selected a fancy bathtub that differs from what was specified on the plans. You want to make sure your plumber notices some special fixture clearances and other requirements *before* she runs the pipes. You're not equipped to plot full-sized drawings, and you don't want to risk circulating incorrect paper versions of the plan. With PSP, you can mark up a portion of the drawing electronically, and e-mail it to your plumber instead, by following a few easy steps:

1. Set up the Paint Shop Pro 6.0 screen capture utility (see Figure 1).

2. Position the portion of the image you want to send on your computer screen. (This can be a CAD file, a digital image, or a scanned photo or set of prints.) Push the "hot key" — a keystroke combination set up in PSP — to capture the image.

3. Add notes and highlights using the PSP drawing and text tools (Figure 2, next page), then save the file. You might also want to use the capture feature and mark up part of a page from an online catalog.

4. Before sending, use the optimization wizard to make the files as small as possible. The wizard shows you the approximate size and predicts how long it will take to download at various connection speeds.
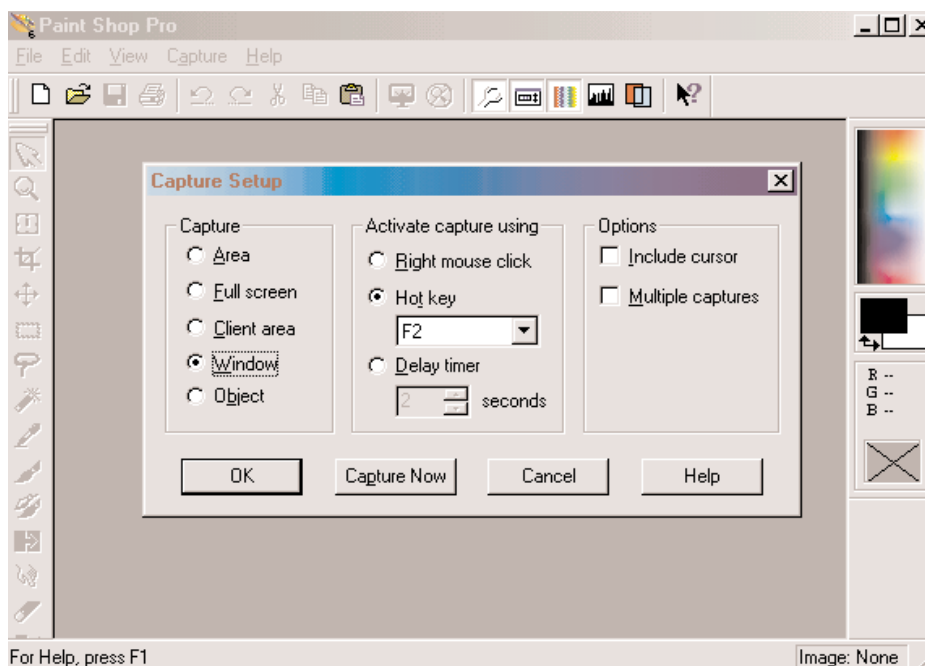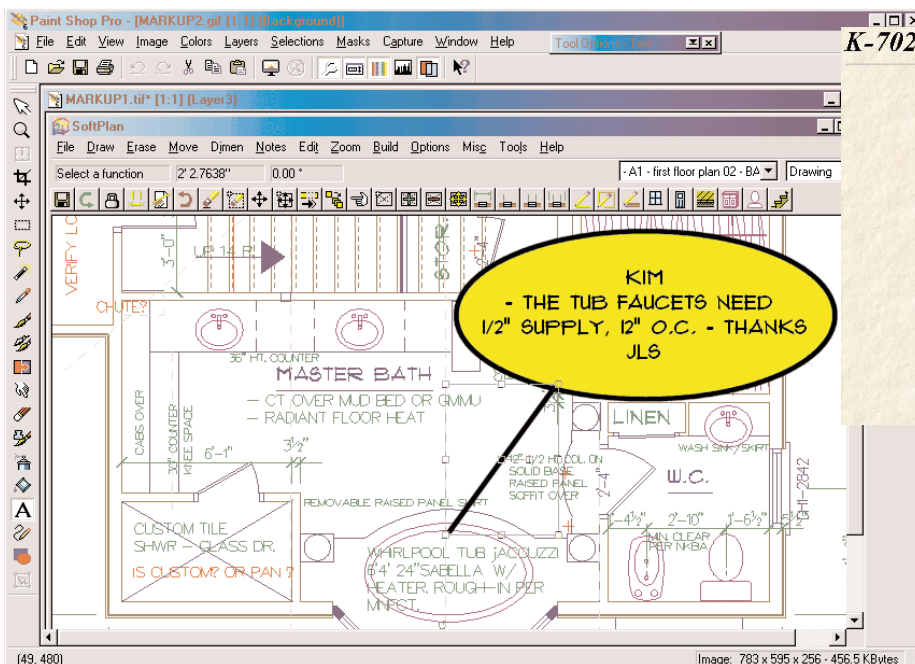

Figure 1. The built-in screen capture utility in Paint Shop Pro 6.0 grabs images off the computer screen. The process starts by pressing a user-defined "hot key" on the keyboard.
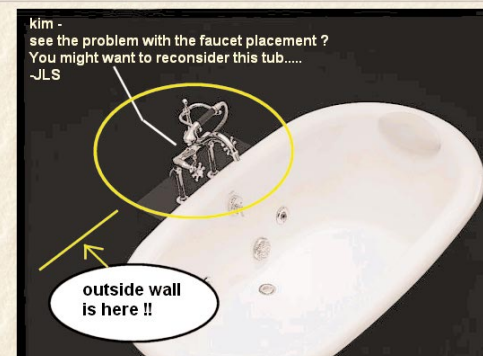
Figure 2. To add notes or to draw attention to special details, use any of the drawing and text tools (top). The images you mark up can be CAD files, digital or scanned photos, or images captured on screen from a Web site (above).
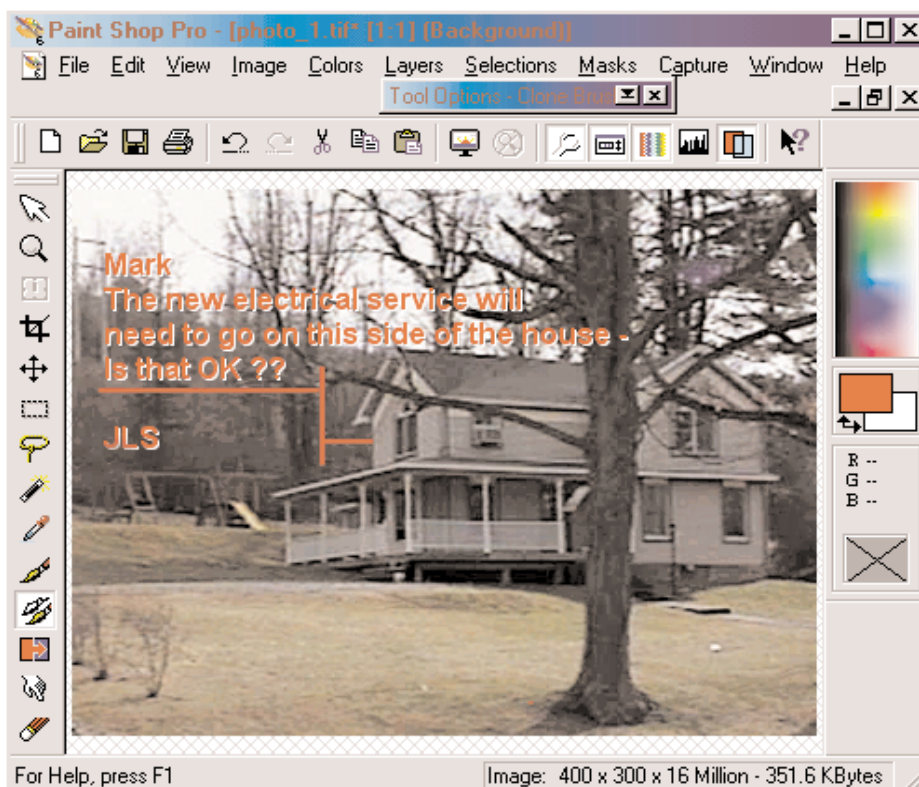
5. To send the images, simply click on *File | Send*. Your e-mail software will launch automatically with the image already attached. All that's left is to enter the recipient addresses and send the message, just like ordinary e-mail.

Other Uses

Once you discover how easy it is to grab and manipulate images from different sources using Paint Shop Pro, you're sure to find all kinds of uses for the software. Remember, you're not limited just to CAD files or images you can grab off the Internet.

For example, what if you're not going to be on site the day the electrician is coming to set the new service? No problem. A digital photo, a scan of a paper photo, or an image from videotape can be captured and marked up in PSP, then e-mailed to your sub (ure 3).

Or how about a new kitchen design for which you need approval from an out-of-town client? The designer gives you a nice CAD rendering of the new cabinet layout, but your clients don't have any CAD software. With PSP, you can grab the image with the screen capture utility, mark it up with comments and questions, and e-mail it to your clients. Not only will you have your answer in no time, you'll have a complete electronic record of the original message and the reply.

Figure 3. Digital or scanned photos can also be marked up and sent to clients or subcontractors via e-mail.