How to
CREATE A NEON OBJECT.

Photoshop sports a basic set of path tools. While they are no rival to dedicated programs like Adobe Illustrator or Macromedia FreeHand, they do service a great many tasks. In future issues, we will be using paths to create complex silhouettes.

In this issue, we will be introducing paths to create a special neon effect. This will provide a foundation for understanding paths and their functions.

Neon effects created in Adobe Photoshop can quickly brighten up existing graphics or logos. Glowing neon signs have a distinctive look. They can vary from a flickering sign in the window of a local pub to the spectacle of a Vegas casino. This is not a technique you will use every day, but it is nice to know how to get it when you need it.

Step 1

Create a colored canvas for your image

Although this effect can work on any color background, the neon glow shows up best on darker background colors. This effect also works equally well on top of background photos.

Step 1

Step 2

Draw a shape using Photoshop's Pen tool.

The pen tool in Photoshop is similar to the pen tools in either Adobe Illustrator or Macromedia FreeHand. This path will become the shape for your neon tubing. At the end of this technique are two other approaches to building your path.

A: Make sure the Paths palette is visible.
If the Paths palette is not already visible, choose "Show paths" from the Window menu.

Step 2

B: Select the pen tool.
Shortcut: Press the T key to select the pen tool.

C: Draw a simple path with the pen tool.
Simple shapes work best for this type of effect. Keep in mind that the completed neon tubes will be much thicker than the lines you create with the pen tool.
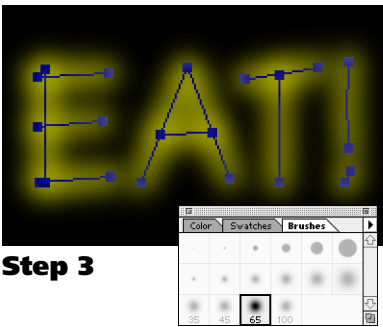
Step 3

Create the neon "glow."

The neon effect is created by stroking the path shape with brushes set at three different thicknesses. This first stroke lays in a light glow of the final neon color.

A: Choose a color for your neon light.
Bright, light colors work best. Click on the foreground color box to pick a new color, or use the Colors palette.

Step 3

B: Choose the airbrush in the toolbox.
Shortcut: Press the A key to select the airbrush tool.

C: Choose a large, soft brush from the Brushes palette.
A soft brush creates the glow's soft fade at the edges. If the Brushes palette is not already visible, choose "Show Brushes" from the Window menu.

D: Set the Opacity slider to 20%
Shortcut: Press the 2 key to set 20% opacity.

E: Click the Stroke Path icon in the Paths palette.
Shortcut: Press the Enter key to quickly apply the stroke.
The Stroke Path command automatically strokes your path with the selected brush.

Step 4

Step 4

Create the neon "tube."

To create the neon tubing, we select a smaller brush with a hard edge. This brush is set to 100% of the neon color. This stroke will form the actual neon tube.

A: Choose a smaller, hard brush from the Brushes palette
Shortcut: Move between brushes by pressing the [and] keys.
Use a hard-edged brush to create a clear edge to the neon tube.

B: Set the Opacity slider to 100%
Shortcut: Press the 0 key to set 100% opacity.

C: Click the Stroke Path icon in the Paths pallet.
Shortcut: Press the Enter key to quickly apply the stroke.

Step 5

Step 5

Create the neon "highlight."

The final stroke will add a fine white highlight to the center of our bright neon tube. To create the neon tubing, we select a tiny brush with a hard edge and stroke the path with a percentage of white.

A: Change the foreground color to white.
*Shortcut: Press the D key to reset default colors (B/W);
Then Press the X key to switch the foreground and background color.*

B: Choose a small brush from the Brushes palette.
Shortcut: Move between brushes by pressing the [and] keys.
Note: Using the smallest brush will sometimes create a highlight with rough edges. Pick the second-smallest brush.
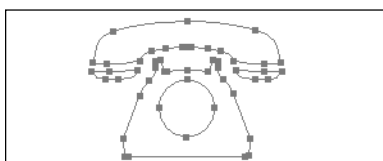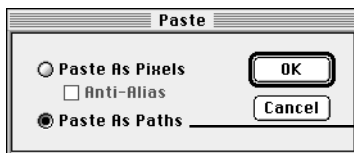
C: Set the Opacity slider to 50%
Shortcut: Press the 5 key to set 50% opacity.

D: Click the Stroke Path icon in the Paths palette.

Option 1: Copying from paths from Illustrator
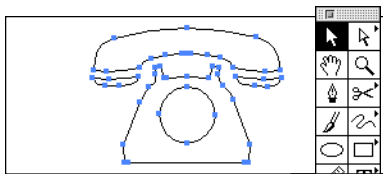
Option 1A-B (Illustrator)

(Use in Place of Step 2)

A: In Illustrator, select a path using the arrow tool.

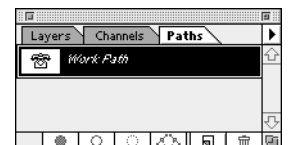**B: Choose Copy from the Edit menu.**

C: Switch to Photoshop.

D: Choose Paste from the Edit menu.
You should get a dialog box asking you to chose between pasting the path as pixels or as a path.
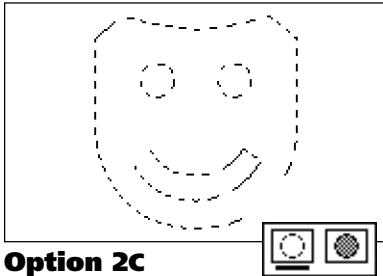
E: Choose "Paste As Paths".
Your copied path should now appear as a new path in Photoshop's Path's pallet.
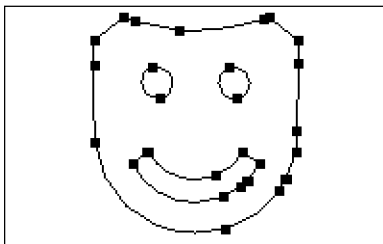

Option 1C-E (Photoshop)

Option 2A-B

Option 2C

Option 2D

Option 2: Converting scanned/existing art

(Use in Place of Step 2)

A: **Turn on Quick Mask mode.**

Shortcut: Press the Q key to turn Quick Mask on (or off).

The Quick Mask controls are found at the bottom of Photoshop's tool palette (see left). For an introduction to the Quick Mask controls, refer to Photoshop Techniques 001.

B: **Place or Paste in the source artwork.**

Artwork can be copied from another Photoshop file, placed from an existing EPS, or even created with the type tool.

C: **Turn off Quick Mask mode.**

Shortcut: Press the Q key to turn Quick Mask off (or on).

Click on the icon directly to the left of the Quick Mask icon. This converts the graphic you pasted in the last step into a selection outline. You should see a moving dotted outline where your graphic used to be.

D: **Choose Make Path from the Path submenu.**

This will convert your selection outline into a drawing path. After selecting the "Make path" command you will be presented with the Tolerance dialog box.

Enter a Tolerance amount of 1 and press Return. Photoshop will process for a moment or two and create a path from your original selection.

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