

Scanning Line Art as Contone

- Advanced Technique -

Line Art needs to be scanned at a higher resolution than grayscale or color files. Sometimes we need to adjust or rotate images in Photoshop. This is easier to do in a continuous tone mode. To make editing easier we often scan at 1200 ppi continuous tone, rotate the photos and then convert into 1200 dpi bitmap mode (the correct mode for this type of artwork) before saving.

Note that line art will shrink to 1/8 the continuous tone file size when we convert the mode from grayscale to bitmap and even smaller when saved as a TIFF file with LZW compression turned on.

1) Scan at 1200 ppi continuous tone. (The 1200 figure has been the standard for eight years although some users now scan at 2400 ppi.)

2) Proceed with any basic retouching. Many of the retouching tools work differently (or not at all) in Photoshop when converted to line art (Photoshop bitmap) mode.

3) Use the command <Image:Map:Threshold...>. Use the slider to adjust the image: the slider sets the point at which the image posterizes. The default is 127 which makes grays lighter less than 50% gray white and areas darker than 50% gray black. The image will look worse onscreen after this command, this is typical.

4) Execute the command <Image:Mode:Bitmap...> making sure that the output resolution is equal to the input resolution. Set the conversion mode to 50% threshold (the tonal threshold has been manipulated in step 3). The image will change only in the way Photoshop and other applications treat the file. This command essentially tells the laser printer to treat the file as line art and thus not apply a halftone screen (which in this case would lower the quality of the line art).

5) Save the file with the <File:Save As>, pick the TIFF format and (after clicking Save) make sure LZW is turned on. The TIFF format is ideal for line art because it allows for high resolution but is simple enough for almost any page layout program to manage correctly.

6) Once placed, the background will come in as transparent (or can be set that way). The foreground can be recolored at will with the fill command or fill palette. For instance, a black and white logo can be set to blue on a transparent (black, for instance) background.