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SNAGIT, VERSION 6.1 FOR WINDOWS

SnagIt, Version 6.1
for Windows;
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As with most other professions, ecology has become increasingly dependent on information technology and on the ability to service journals, scientists, resource managers, and the taxpaying public with digital files. Ecologists who once devoted their careers to field experimentation now find themselves scrambling to organize web sites and multimedia presentations, or trying to meet publication expectations for electronic submissions. Working with technology may facilitate the tasks at hand, but it may also prove to be a challenge to master these new tools in addition to the science. Fortunately, software like SnagIt makes the process more efficient and enjoyable. SnagIt is an effective and affordable screen capture utility that, over the years, has evolved into a capable, multi-feature graphics package.

SnagIt is actually two separate programs: a simple, yet flexible, graphics package (SnagIt Studio) and the capture utility (SnagIt). One can think of SnagIt Studio as a functional version of Microsoft Paint or a stripped-down version of some of the pricier graphics packages offered by Adobe or Corel. Although it is lacking in some tools, SnagIt Studio provides such features as clipart, object prioritizing and grouping, flow-charting, highlighting, flexible zoom, multiple bitmap import and export formats, and bitmap editing, among other functions. As an example, one can import a JPG and edit the image using the customary tools such as flood fill, cropping, freehand erase, text or polygon insertion, line drawing, etc., and then save it as a BMP file. For those who repeatedly use customized bitmaps, another handy feature of SnagIt is the ability to add bitmaps to a catalog of images for later insertion as clipart.

The SnagIt capture utility can do far more than simple screen captures (although it does this very effectively). Unless one has specifically purchased a screen capture program, pressing the <PRINT SCRN> button is the preferred way to capture what is seen on the screen. While simple, this approach has its disadvantages. First, <PRINT SCRN> sends a low-resolution bitmap image to the Windows clipboard, which then must be pasted into another program for cropping or annotation. SnagIt's image capture utility allows the user to pick what is to be captured, potentially including the entire screen, a pop-up window, part of a window, a region on the desktop, any screen object (e.g., a floating box or program icon), a menu, an area corresponding to a shape that the user selects (including freehand drawing), the contents of the clipboard, a TWAIN device (e.g., a scanner or digital camera), or from program files, wallpaper, scrolling DirectX, and even DOS-based screen captures. The image capture utility can also be directed to select multiple areas, adjusted so as not to show the cursor arrow, and to generate high-quality bitmaps im-

mediately viewable in a capable screen preview tool.

This image capture flexibility, alone, would justify the purchase of SnagIt, but TechSmith has added even more helpful features. SnagIt can also perform text captures (when you want only text and not images), screen video capture (which can include audio and keystroke or cursor movement, saved as an AVI output), web capture, and printer capture. The last two items of this feature list are particularly useful. Web capture allows the user to extract individual components found on an accessible web page, including graphics, video, text, and sounds. The printer capture function is one of the most practical utilities that I have seen. This feature (found only in SnagIt version 6.1 and higher) emulates a printer, allowing the user to select it instead of traditional printers or print files. Once initiated, any print job is then captured by SnagIt (at a customizable resolution) for conversion to a bitmap. Thus, Windows programs that do not generate graphics acceptable for journal submission or other needs can be induced into producing universal bitmap types (e.g., TIFF, GIF, BMP, and JPG). I have used the SnagIt printer capture feature to get output from programs including word processors, statistics software, presentation graphics, text editors, and web browsers. The quality is good and is adjustable to the software's printing capacity. Even multi-page outputs can be created if GIF or TIFF files are used. Once the image is captured, the SnagIt preview tool allows for easy drag-and-cropping, editing (many of SnagIt Studio's capabilities are available in the preview tool), printing, or saving to a file. I have run into problems using the printer capture feature only when I have attempted to generate a large graphic in Adobe Illustrator. Other images and text captured from Illustrator worked fine.

In addition to customizable input features, SnagIt can output to multiple sources like files, the clipboard, e-mail, the Web, or SnagIt Studio, regardless of the capturing approach taken. Several graphics filters are available in SnagIt, including color conversion (monochrome, half-tone, grayscale, or custom color resolution from 1 to 32 bit), color substitution (inverting or custom substitution), color effects (brightness, contrast, hue, saturation, and gamma), image resolution and scaling, annotation, simple borders, watermark, and pixel trimming.

As with any inexpensive program, SnagIt has its limitations; it cannot perform some of the more sophisticated graphic manipulations found in the pricier packages. File import and export formats are restricted to the most common bitmap formats (BMP, TIFF, PNG, TGA, GIF, JPG, PCX), and no metafiles, postscript, or PDF capabilities are currently available. Text recognition (OCR) is lacking, as are most other word-processing options (e.g., spell-checking). The features of the SnagIt suite are available only for Windows 95B, 98, NT 4.0 (except the printer capture tool), Me, 2000, and XP; Mac and UNIX users need to look elsewhere.

In short, SnagIt is quite a graphics workhorse for a fairly minimal ($40) investment. SnagIt uses relatively few system resources, requiring only 11 MB of hard drive space and 16 MB of RAM to install and run. TechSmith recommends at least a 400-MHz processor (although a 90-MHz chip is listed as the minimum). A fully functional download of the latest version of SnagIt (6.1) from the TechSmith website (www.techsmith.com) can be freely previewed for 30 days. Those who find their work more and more dominated by a graphics-rich digital environment will appreciate the many little features that go along with the powerful capture utilities bundled in this package. I would recommend SnagIt to both novice and expert users, as it has much to offer.

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