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TIME NEEDED

3 hours

INFO



Darren Firth is currently working as a designer for Un.titled, located in the Midlands, UK. Alongside his personal website – www.wearitwithpride.com – he is also the founder/brand manager for the collaborative project www.wearitwithpride.com and the T-shirt company Branddead. Darren is also a member of the US publication *The Royal Magazine*.

→ FLASH • FREEHAND • PHOTOSHOP

EASY VECTOR COMPOSITIONS

Computer Arts newbie **Darren Firth** demonstrates the advantages of mixing up software packages and uses *Flash*, *FreeHand* and *Photoshop* to tackle the troublesome issues of picking colours and creating random shapes

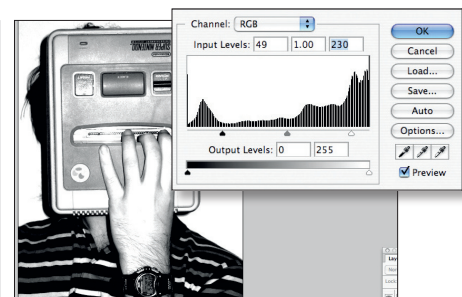
→ Creating busy compositions is one of the hardest things for a designer to approach. Where do you start? And, more importantly, when do you stop? Which colours are best? What a headache! And all this is made twice as hard when working with vectors, because all your assets must be produced from scratch.

There is no sure-fire way of producing a composition, and the best pieces often materialise from unplanned sparks of imagination. Rather than getting all technical, this tutorial will take an informal tour through my design process, offering practical advice and opinions along the way. It's important to develop

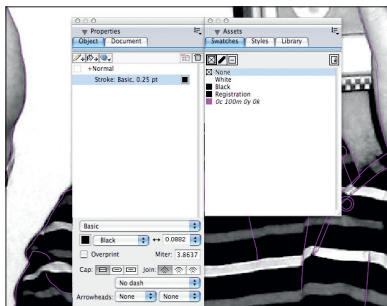
a strong idea before even thinking about turning on your machine. If you have a strong idea, good things should follow. So don't be scared to deviate from the original concept, because this is usually where the more interesting work occurs.

Most of this tutorial will be based in *Flash*, a process that you may find strange, especially when producing work for print. Remember that there are no set rules to follow when creating vector illustrations, so experiment with different software and techniques.

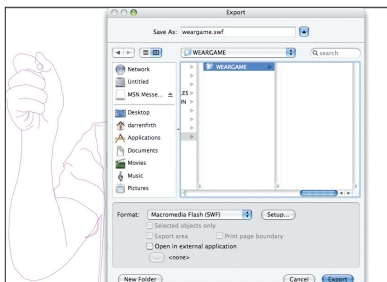
Illustration and tutorial by **Darren Firth**
www.keepsmesane.com



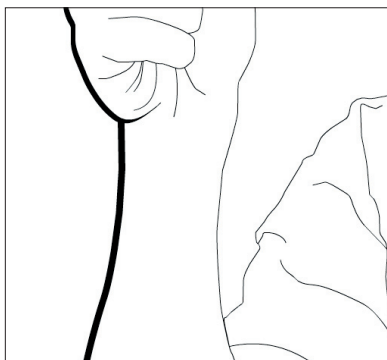
1 To get started, open the *face.jpg* file from the CD and in *Photoshop* convert the image to Greyscale. Use Image→Adjust→Levels to saturate the image – giving the details more definition. There is no exact setting here, just move the arrows towards the centre until you're happy.



2 In *FreeHand*, import the image file to the stage. Zoom into the image and draw around the outlines of the person using the Pen tool. You will find that turning the Path's Stroke to Hairline and selecting a bright colour will make this process easier. Delete the photographic image from the stage and export the artwork as a SWF.



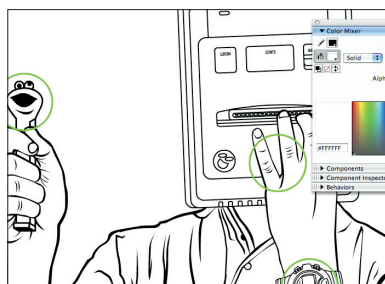
3 In *Flash*, make a new document, import the artwork, or open the example *Flash* file, example.fla, provided on the CD. The imported image will be grouped together, so Select All and choose Modify→Break Apart. Delete unwanted overlaying lines and pull lines into shape with the Arrow tool.



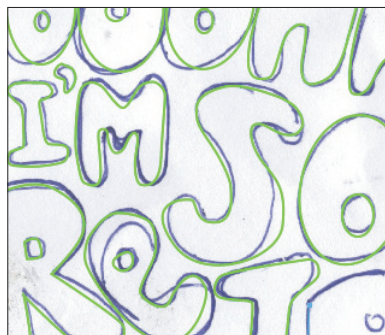
4 Select lines in your illustration, Copy and Paste in Place. Now move the duplicate lines to the side until they are the desired thickness. Go to View→Snapping→SnapToObjects and use the Arrow tool to pull each end of the duplicate lines until they meet the ends of the original stroke. Use the Paint Bucket tool to fill in the gaps created.



5 It's often easier to trace objects in *Flash*. In this instance, the games console is a good example. Double-click the Rectangle shape tool and input a Corner Radius in the Settings pop-up. Select a Hairline stroke in the Properties window and a bright colour.



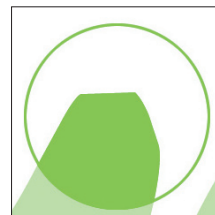
6 Once the outline is finished, start to add detail, referencing your original photo as you go. Take your time – these details will differentiate your final image and add to its quality. Creases can be added using the same process as before, bending them to shape, duplicating and then snapping their ends together using the Arrow tool.



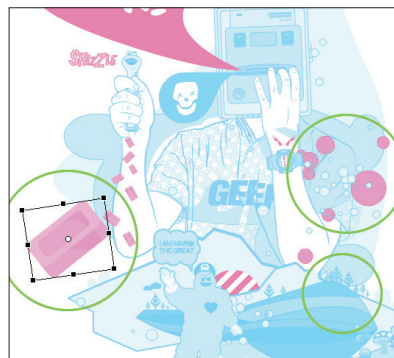
7 To create the hand-drawn text, import your sketch into *FreeHand* and follow the process explained back in step 2. Try to use as few points within your paths as possible to achieve a smoother outline for your font. Delete your sketch from the stage and export the artwork as a SWF.

8 In *Flash*, make a new document and import the artwork. Use Break Apart again, as in step 3. Bucket fill the text outlines and delete the original lines.

Now use the Arrow tool to bend any remaining edges into shape. Copy and Paste the text into your final working file.



9 Lock your illustration layers and import assets to the stage on a separate layer. Move and scale your assets until you're happy, before importing them into a separate *Flash* file to trace them. Group each object and Copy them into a final working file.



10 Copying and reusing assets can save time at this stage. Randomly placing them never looks natural, so select the Circle tool in *Flash* and frantically draw circles holding down Shift. It will take a few attempts, but you'll be pleased with the results. **arts**

PHOTOS MATTER

When preparing photography to use for your illustration, it's best to take several shots of the subject. These should include a full body shot (full size of final illustration) and numerous close-up shots, usually face and hands. It's worth spending quite a bit of time at this stage to get these shots right. A better photo gives you more scope for producing a more detailed illustration.

CHOOSING COLOURS

Picking colours can be such a hard task at times. Some designers are naturally gifted in finding and executing good colour combinations; others have to work at it, me included! I find it useful to keep a scrapbook of colour combinations that I come across. These range from club flyers all the way up to food and hair product packaging. Collecting all these together in one place means you have instant access to a range of your favourite ready-made colour combinations.