

New Jersey Computer Club

The Best Photo Apps and Sites



Every aspect of digital photography is advancing at breakneck speed, and that certainly includes the applications, online and off, for altering and sharing images. Professionals and serious amateurs will find software that can take their images to new levels. Even software applications and sites aimed at consumers are building in features previously found exclusively in professional-level products. Yet, as the technology gets more sophisticated, products are increasingly hiding the complexity from users. As a result, even those with little photography or image-editing experience reap the rewards of powerful features that, not so long ago, they would have found frustrating or impossible to use. Among the photo-editing software, the best products are:

- Adobe Photoshop
- Gump.com (free)

The best Online photo sharing services are:

- Facebook.com
- Flickr.com

How to Upload HD YouTube Videos

Few people can resist uploading videos to YouTube, whether as a simple way to share their work with friends or to launch a production upon the unsuspecting world. The traditional downside, however, has been video quality that ranged from fair to, frankly, poor.



However, YouTube recently launched a new option that encodes some videos to both standard and high-quality parameters. The difference between standard and high-quality video is striking. Not all uploaded videos get encoded into the high-quality format, but if you follow a few simple rules, it's likely that YouTube will produce yours in both formats. I say likely because YouTube is a bit of a black box, and no one knows for sure what goes on behind the curtain. Here's what worked for me, however, and it should work for you, too.

First, let's examine the difference between the standard and high quality. When producing videos at standard quality, YouTube encodes at 320-by-240 resolution and a data

rate of about 330 Kbps, with mono audio at 64 Kbps. At the new higher quality, YouTube produces 480-by-360-resolution videos with a data rate of 630 Kbps, and mono audio at 96 Kbps. I uploaded files at 29.97 frames per second on my tests, and YouTube produced both files at that rate. No matter whether YouTube encodes at standard or high quality, the site displays the video at 480-by-360 resolution, which means that it stretches the lower-resolution video to 480-by-360 during display, while the higher-quality file plays at native resolution.

To entice YouTube into rendering your video at the higher quality, you have to upload video at a resolution of 480-by-360 or higher. While maintaining the 10-minute duration limit for most uploaded videos, YouTube has increased the maximum allowable file size from 100MB to 1GB.

Program Your Own Keyboard Shortcuts

Pressing buttons isn't particularly good for you. Jane Jetson knew it as early as 1962, and your friendly neighborhood orthopedic surgeon would be hard-pressed to argue with her today. Problem is, you can't very well answer your daily deluge of e-mails without typing, and as if to add insult to injury, odds are you're pretty much typing the same thing again and again.



One approach is the macro: a tiny program you write (or have generated automatically) that can lift the burden of repetitive tasks—like typing email replies—by doing them for you. Macros have been around for decades, but there's usually a catch that makes them not worth the trouble. You can write a macro in Word or Excel, but you can't use it outside Microsoft Office (nor inside Office in some cases, depending on your antivirus settings). Windows includes the Script Host, but it's hard to use, and it's lousy at controlling programs and typing text. But a small, free download called AutoHotKey takes a different tack—one that, as it turns out, might actually save you some time.

AutoHotKey has no interface to speak of; you use only a plain text editor (for example, Notepad) to write your scripts, and then save them with the AHK filename extension.