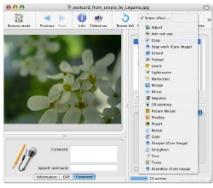


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Picture Arena: The Better to Work with Your Images

One of those applications that grows on you

If you deal everyday with heaps of pictures whether it's at work or at home, you need a tool to help you do things faster. I'm not talking about hardcore image editing here... more like keeping track of your personal photos and stocks, making presentations easy, keeping an up-to-date web gallery for your blog or presentation site. If you do any of these things, you probably have a set of tools you already use to get the job done. This here program, who goes by the name of Picture Arena, will help you do all those things by yourself, and automate many of those redundant tasks, so you don't have to bother with the legwork.

Browse Although this feature is present in nearly all image related applications, Picture Arena has a pretty good implementation that is geared towards finding what you want fast and easy. When in browse mode, the bigger chunk of the window will show files and folders in a mode very similar to the Finder's icon view. In addition to this, in the browse of the right hand drawer, you can see a list of all the files in the current directory with file size next to each name; this can be alternated with a thumbnail view using the buttons at the bottom of the drawer. Unfortunately, when in browse mode, the information on the currently selected file is not updated in the bottom of the screen, you have to enter the view mode for this to be updated every time you change pictures. Another quirky choice is the keyboard for the parent folder or 'up' command. While you can navigate deeper into folders using the arrows and enter key, you can only move up using Command-U, which might just as well be on another keyboard or another desk. Fortunately the drop down menu on top of the browse area is to hold all the recent and frequently used location on your drive. Another thing I noticed is that the information display is badly split up, what is now found in the Information and EXIF tabs would have been better shown at the same time, under one tab, with the comments in the other. There is so much empty space in both of those info tabs that everything could be packed in a single one easy.

Import with ease Picture Arena makes it very easy to get everything sorted up into albums. If you have been using iPhoto you will be glad to hear that this program, despite being able to replace iPhoto, is nice and shares so that your photos will be discreetly synchronized between the two. If you wish, you can permanently convert your iPhoto albums into Picture Arena ones and stop using the former altogether, but this is in no way forced upon you. You can import your files directly from the Finder, and if you've been keeping them organized there, Picture Arena will let you keep that structure intact with just a few simple clicks. If you don't want to import everything just browse the currently selected folder in the import window and tick off any folders you don't want. You can also choose to ignore those files that Picture Arena cannot display. To help organize albums better you can use album folders. Personally, I would have preferred if these were created automatically, instead of the Finder file structure being used in the album name. You can also import images directly from your digital camera with some very nice features, such as having it automatically correct the orientation of the photos and changing file dates to the moment the picture was actually taken.

Touch up those photos Picture Arena has a very loose and easy approach to touching up photos and images. You add filters to the filter list, and you are then free to reorder them and play around with their settings. And the best part is everything you do you can see in real time, there is no preview window. The only thing that is missing from this approach is a way to quickly disable and enable those effects, like with a tick box in the list. The list of filters includes everything you could possibly need without going into serious image editing. And if you find yourself applying the same effects over and over, it is very easy to set up a "recipe" so that you can apply them with the click of a button. You can even apply them while browsing using the

contextual menu. The effects list has too many for me to start listing them all, but I will make special mention of the Straighten tool which is a gem. Using a slider you can carefully adjust the tilt of an image within a range of 25 degrees. The second you click on that slider to start scrubbing, a grid shows up so that you may easily align objects from within the image to the axes. It's a simply marvelous tool the likes of which I have not seen anywhere else.

Show the world Once you have all those images organized and edited, you are probably going to want to share them with others. Picture Arena gives you many choices on how to do this. You can export web albums with just a few clicks, it automatically generates the thumbnails and web pages for them, and if you have PHP support, you can even benefit from an interactive database and greeting cards code. All you have to do is upload the files. Want to send a few images with you e-mail? Nothing simpler, just select those images and choose Send via Mail. You can then select which mail client you want to use, the size of the image and whether you want various information to be introduced into the body of the mail. Whether you want to backup your albums, or share them with friends and family, you can do so straight from within the program using the Burn CD/DVD function. There are three ways of writing the images: Backup (original unmodified images); Slideshow (just the pictures, video friendly resolution); and Interactive HTML (burned HTML export). If presentations are your thing, then you will love this program because with it you can create presentations that are controlled by your voice. That's right, it uses the speech recognition capabilities of OS X to give you customizable voice commands with which you can control presentations, giving them an extra edge. You can even mirror and rotate the slides using your voice, and assign a keyword to every slide that will let you jump to it. Gives new meaning to the term "loaded words".

The Good This program does so many things well it's hard to choose anything specific. The best part about it is that it is designed with the user in mind and is powerful yet simple to use.

The Bad There are a few minor things that I do not like one bit, like the fact that you cannot choose the size of the on-mouse-over thumbnail, the placement of the list and thumbnails buttons in the bottom of the Browse drawer, a few keyboard shortcuts and the three tabs in the information window, but these are minor issues.

The Truth A great program that can quickly become the application you can't imagine working without. It has so many features that I have not even mentioned and is so well designed. A definite "must try". Here are some screenshots I took while trying it out, click to enlarge: