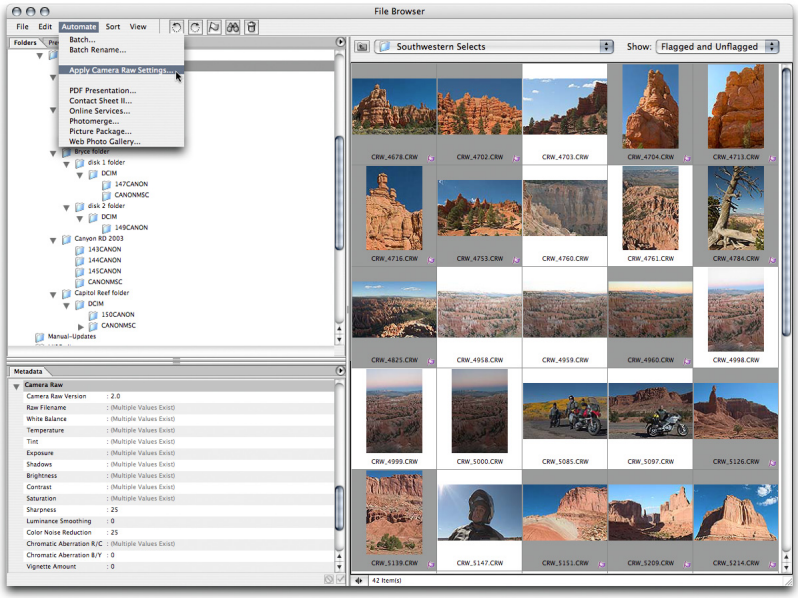
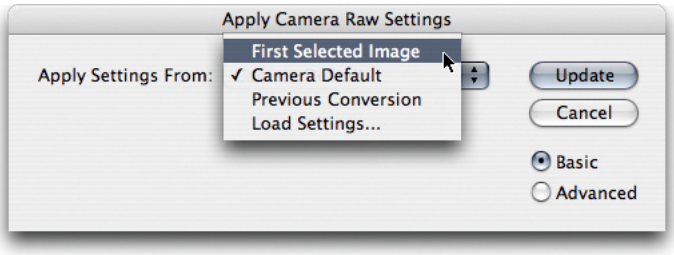
A Digital Workflow for Raw Processing Part Four: Simple Batching



The Apply Camera Raw Settings command is on the Automate menu in the File Browser.

I hear a lot of questions about the best method to automate raw processing in Adobe® Photoshop® software. The cornerstone is for you to learn how to use the File Browser, and of course, Camera Raw. However, this front end is only part of an efficient raw workflow. Simply opening raw images in Photoshop software is an inefficient way of working, so the next part is the back end, which is critical.

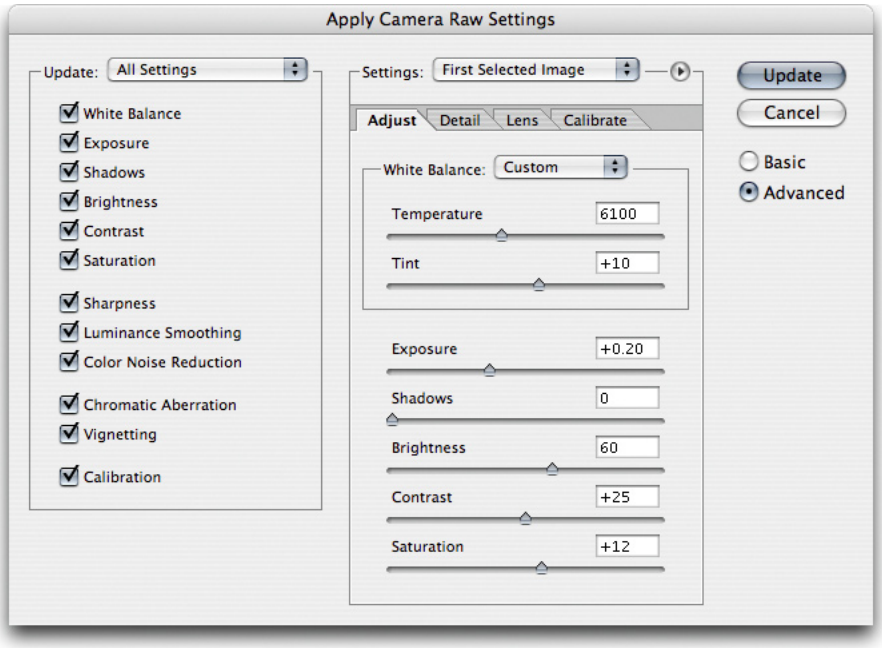
The first step in putting together an efficient back-end process is for you to learn how to use the Apply Camera Raw Settings command in the File Browser. As indicated in the Camera Raw section of this paper, there's no need to open each and every image you shoot to set the Camera Raw settings. You can open the first in a series of similar images and apply the result of that image's setting to all of the selected raw images in the File Browser. You should get used to the process of setting single image settings and applying them to other images.



The Apply Camera Raw Settings dialog box with the Basic option selected. The menu shows the options that let you choose which settings to use.

The first time you choose Apply Camera Raw Settings, a dialog box with the Basic option opens. Click the Advanced option to gain a better understanding about how batching the Camera Raw settings to multiple files actually works.

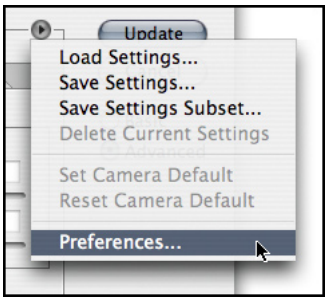
Adobe



The Apply Camera Raw setting dialog box with Advanced option selected.

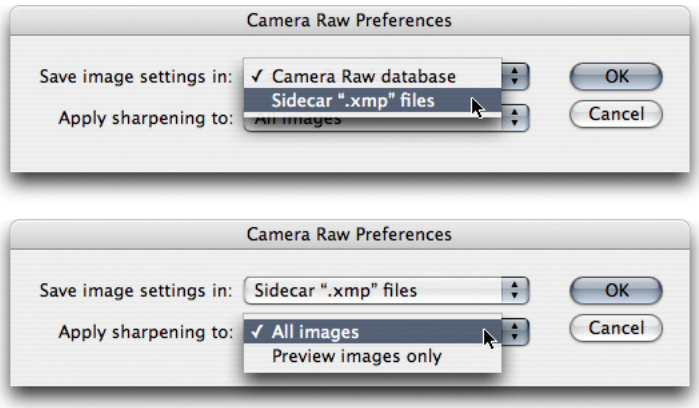
It's also useful to understand the options for determining an image's Camera Raw settings to apply to a group of images. When I begin applying the Camera Raw settings, I try to select the image that I've already updated. It simplifies the process until you get used to the other options. However, if you've created a series of your own custom settings, you can use these settings in the Apply Camera Raw Settings command. On the other hand, because each series of images may need different tone settings, the saved settings may not contain the correct settings you need to apply. When you select the Advanced option, you're presented with the full array of settings you can apply. You can deselect certain settings in which case, the settings either in the camera default or previously updated images will prevail.

You can set Camera Raw Preferences from the pull-down menu in this dialog, or from within the Camera Raw dialog itself.



The Preferences dialog is accessed from the menu that appears when you click the arrow.

By choosing Preferences, you are presented with two options: Camera Raw Database and Sidecar ".xmp" Files.



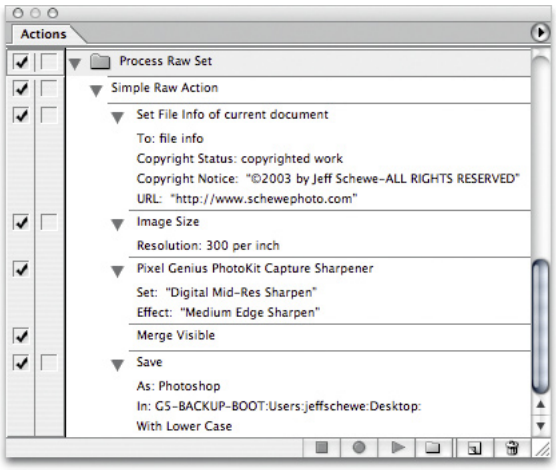
The Save Image Settings In options.

The Save Image Settings In drop-down menu lets you choose where the settings files that you create with Camera Raw are saved. Consider this choice carefully because your choice depends largely upon the stage of the workflow and whether or not you need to copy the folder of images elsewhere. While exporting the images, the File Browser cache lets you transfer your image's cache, which also transfers the Camera Raw Sidecar metadata files with your images to keep your Camera Raw settings. If you move your images to a different computer, you don't want to risk losing all of your edited settings. While some people may argue that the metadata should be embedded into the raw file, I believe that's a mistake. Doing anything to the original raw file, even writing metadata, could cause problems with the file itself. I believe it's far safer to leave the raw file pristine and untouched. So, if you need to change file locations, it's wise to save the sidecar files in the folder where the raw files reside.

The Apply Sharpening To drop-down menu lets you to decide whether or not the raw thumbnails should receive any sharpening. If you choose Preview Images Only, the File Browser will not spend any time processing the thumbnails to appear sharp. For LCD monitors, you may want to turn off this option because digital LCDs are so sharp that the thumbnails may appear too overly sharp. If you need to reset the Camera Raw defaults, hold down Command+Option+Shift (Mac OS®) or Control+Alt+Shift (Windows®) when you open a raw image. You will be presented with a warning message that confirms you want to reset the Camera Raw preferences.

When you use the Apply Camera Raw Settings command, understand that you could really make a mess of the raw settings. If you change settings in this dialog box, you can radically change the processing parameters without actually seeing any changes until after you apply the settings. So be sure you are applying the correct settings. If you goof up, select the images and apply new settings, or reapply the camera default settings. Also, if you selected multiple images that have Camera Raw settings already applied to them, those files will appear in the Apply Settings list. By the files appearing in this list, you are warned that you are about to apply settings to files that already have them. However, if you want to overwrite the settings, you have nothing to worry about.

When you batch apply the Camera Raw settings, it would be nice if those images were somehow marked as having updated settings so you could select groups of images to which you've already applied settings. Since that isn't the case, a workaround is to always remember to flag images after you have batch applied the settings. Then you can tell at a glance which images you have and haven't updated with new settings. If you forget this workaround, you can browse through the folder and watch the Camera Raw metadata tab to see which images have and don't have settings and flag the files.



The Actions palette shows the steps you've taken to use the Batch Action automate feature.

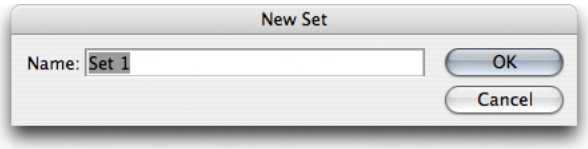
To continue, you need to learn how to use Actions. This technique is not too difficult to learn, and you need to use it anyway if you want to fully integrate an automated raw processing workflow.

The Actions palette shows a series of simple recorded steps that let you process using the Batch Action automate feature. In a simple series of steps, you can add copyright information to the processed file, make sure your image is at the correct resolution, run an automated capture sharpening, and record the save parameters for the processed files.

The critical action step is to be sure you don't record an actual Open command because you don't want to record the Camera Raw settings in an action—you can use the Apply Camera Raw command to do that. Another critical step is that you record a Save As command.

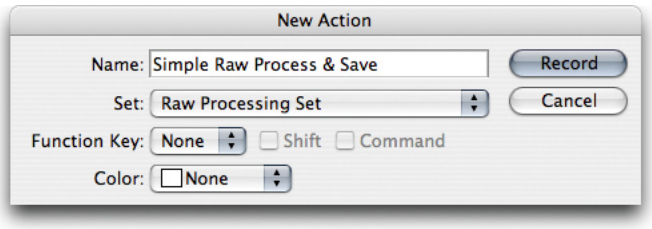
The Save action and its detail.

The lack of this step confuses some people because they think they don't want to save the actual location in the steps of the action. But, it is important that you record the file format and the file format options when you record the Save As command. You will override the actual location in the Batch dialog box, but you will need the file format options recorded. This step applies regardless of the file format you may be using.



The New Set dialog box lets you name the action set.

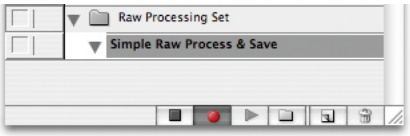
To record an action, you should create a new action set in which to save the action. All actions must live in an action set. Using a proper naming convention when you create sets and actions will help you keep them organized.



The New action dialog box.

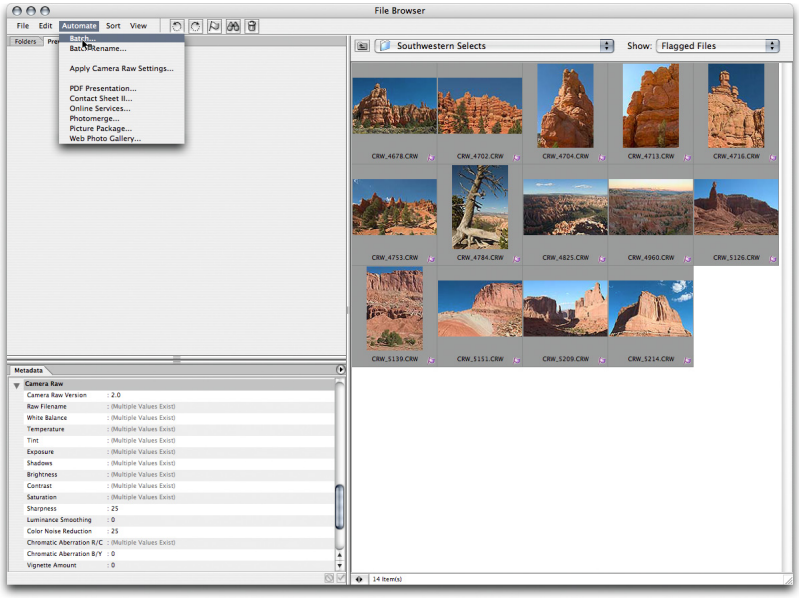
Next, begin recording the action. On the Actions palette, click the New Action icon to open the New Action dialog box.

When you click Record, you'll see a red light on the palette that signals you are in record mode.

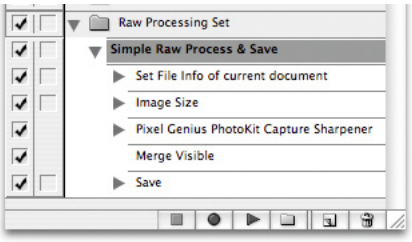


The red light in the Action palette lets you know that your action is being recorded.

Then perform the steps in the order that you want to record them. Even though you can edit actions after you have recorded them, it's complicated and can cause unexpected results, so I recommend practicing the steps on a sample file until you get the correct order. It's also helpful to take notes so that you can refer to them. Don't worry about how long you pause while recording the actions; the playback runs as fast as Photoshop can—assuming that the action options are set correctly. There is another critical step regarding the writing of actions; they live a very fragile life shortly after you create them. By recording an action, you temporarily place it in the Actions palette until you either quit and reopen Photoshop, or you actually take the safety step of saving the action set. If you experience a crash or you quit Photoshop ungracefully (force quit), you lose any actions you recorded since you last started the application. Learn from my experiences losing data, you should either quit and restart Photoshop or save your newly-created action sets and actions to the hard disk as an .ATN file after you record the action.

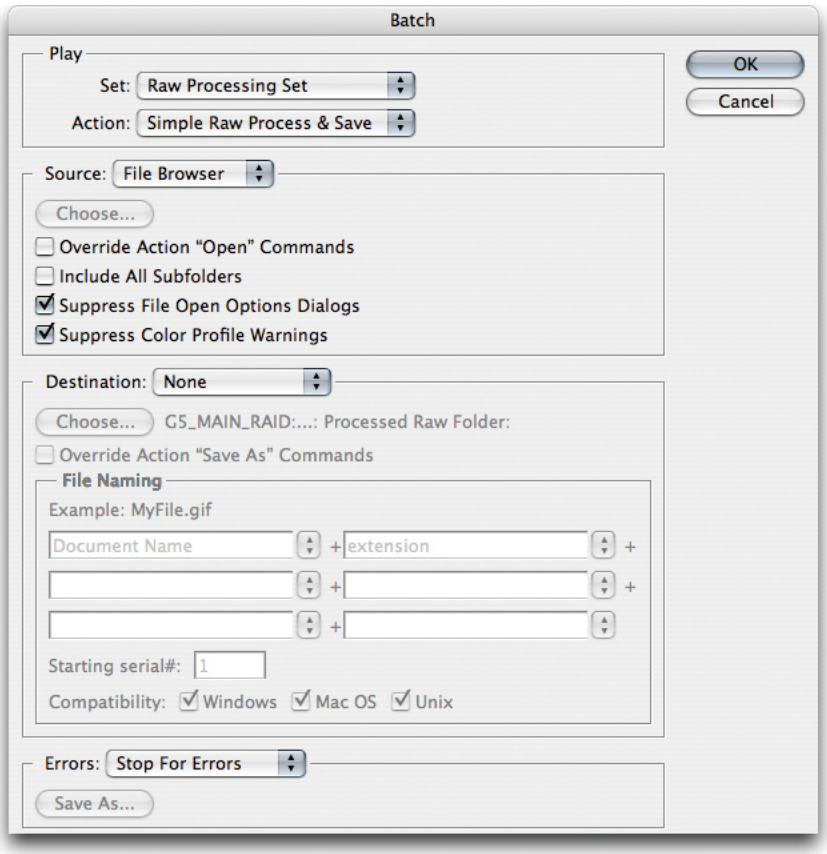


Choose Automate > Batch to use the Batch automate command.



The newly-created action appears in the Photoshop Actions palette.

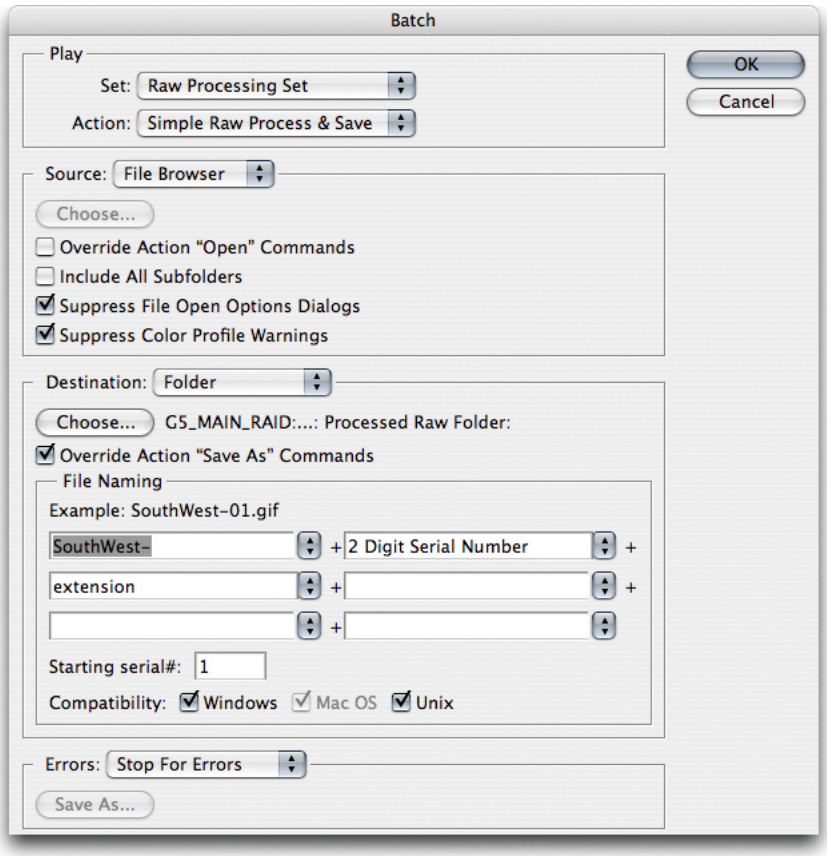
If you preselect the action you want to use in the Batch command, the Batch dialog box automatically points first to that action. After selecting the images from within the File Browser, you should use the Batch automate command. Remember to use the Flag command to tag your images for easy and fast selection before you choose the Batch command.



Create settings for your action in the Batch dialog box.

By default, the Batch dialog box opens with your preselected action, and, you need to create some accurate settings. First, you should always select the Suppress File Open Dialogs option, unless you specifically want to use a recorded open sequence. You should also select the Suppress Color Profile Warnings option—you don't want to have color dialog boxes appearing in the middle of your batch operations. Because you'll be using the files you selected in the File Browser, you don't need to choose a Source.

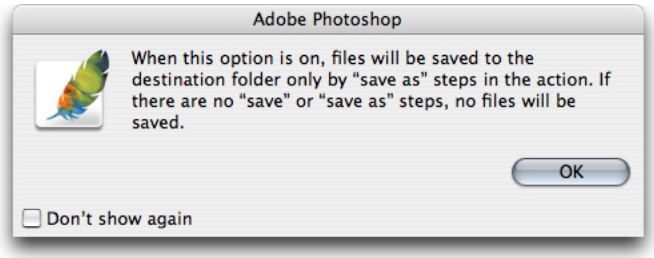
For the next section of the dialog box it is very important that you do exactly what you want to do to avoid overwriting files or making costly mistakes.



Choose a location for the processed raw files in the Batch dialog box.

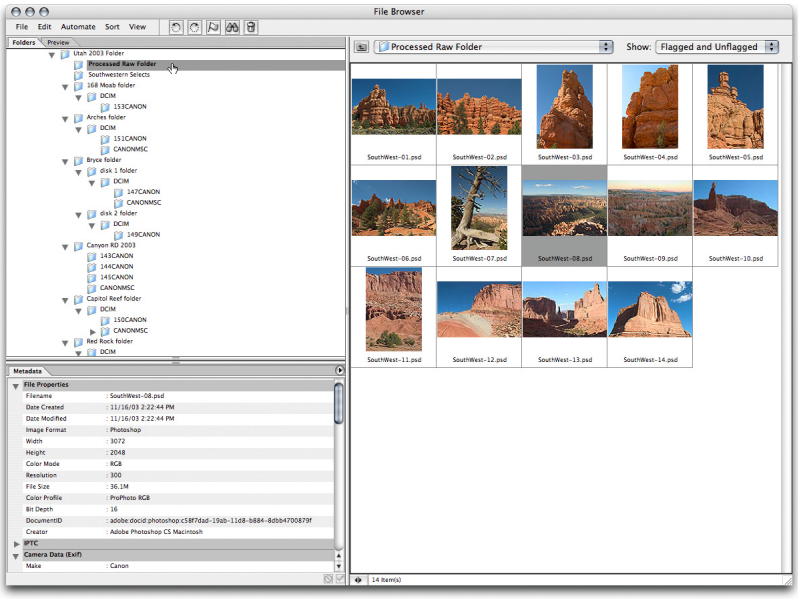
When processing raw files, it's convenient to create a standard location (Destination folder) to save the processed raw files in. It doesn't matter where you put it, but the folder should be on a hard disk with lots of room to grow. So, in the Destination menu, select Folder, and then click the Choose button to navigate to your folder. This step is important to avoid accidentally choosing None or Save and Close.

When you recorded the action, you specified both where and how the file was saved. Therefore, you need to select Override Action "Save As" Commands. This option overrides where you saved the file while preserving the file format parameters of the action.



Photoshop warning message.

The first time you select this option, Photoshop returns a warning message for you to make sure you actually recorded a Save command as step; otherwise nothing will happen. (Also, if you don't select the Don't Show Again option, this message can be a good a reminder to make sure you've set the Batch up correctly.)



The Photoshop File Browser with processed images.

Also note that in the Batch dialog box, I'm using the renaming function rather than the Batch Rename option from within the File Browser. The basic premise is the same regardless whether you change the file name in the Batch dialog box or the File Browser's Batch Rename. However, in this case, it was useful to do the processing and naming in the Batch dialog box so the original files in the SouthWest Selects folder remain unchanged. Also, you should not use spaces or special characters when you name images for delivery. There should only be one period separating the file name from the file extension (and you really should be using the file format extensions!). Also in the Batch dialog box, I set the Errors menu to Stop For Errors because I want to make sure that there are no errors before the images get messed up. You can also choose to log the errors to a text file for your review at a later time.

Once you've double-checked each setting to make sure it is correct, check them again. Actually, I'm only half kidding. The real key to successful action and batching is to pay very close attention to details and follow a consistent routine. After you've checked the settings, click OK to run the Batch, and Photoshop will fill up your destination folder with processed images.

Jeff Schewe
Jeff, a summa cum laude graduate of Rochester Institute of Technology, has been an advertising photographer in Chicago for over 25 years. He has been doing digital imaging for over 14 years and is widely known and respected in the digital imaging community as a leading pioneer in the field. Jeff is a feature consultant and alpha tester for Adobe Photoshop.

Adobe Systems Incorporated • 345 Park Avenue, San Jose, CA 95110-2704 USA • *www.adobe.com*

Adobe