

PLUG-INS

Manipulate the ageing process with this innovative 3D plug-in

info

COMPANY
Abalone LLC

WEB
www.abalonellc.com

PRICE
\$30 (Intro price – Reg: \$40)

OPERATING SYSTEM
Windows Vista/
Windows 7

SPECS
Pentium 4 min 1.3GHz (2GHz dual core or faster recommended), Windows 2K (XP or Vista recommended), 1GB RAM min (2GB recommended), 100MB free hard drive space (200MB recommended), OpenGL 1.3 compatible graphics card with at least 128MB RAM (hardware accelerated OpenGL 2.2, or higher, compatible recommended with 512MB RAM)

Abalone FaceAge

There are many plug-ins available to help you perfect your portraits in Photoshop, but most operate on a strictly two-dimensional plane, and are often geared more towards smoothing and slimming models' features, making them appear more youthful, rather than offering the option of taking things to the other end of the scale.

Enter FaceAge, the latest launch from Abalone LLC, distributors of the popular FaceShop line of products. The plug-in works with Photoshop and Photoshop Elements, but only on computers running Windows software – so Mac aficionados will unfortunately have to look elsewhere.

Once installed, you'll find the plug-in in the usual Filters drop-down menu in Photoshop. It's easy to get started: you just need to make a rough rectangular selection around the area of the image containing your subject's face, then select Pantomat>FaceAge from the menu.

The interface (which appears in a new window) couldn't be much simpler to navigate, with a large preview image of your subject alongside the program's modest toolset in a floating palette on the left. The somewhat perturbing 3D model of a male face is designed to show you where to place the dots that the program needs to identify where key features appear on your subject's own face, so it can create a 3D version for you to manipulate.

You start by placing dots on the outer corner of each eye and the bottom of the chin, then the software uses these points to extrapolate where it thinks the rest of your subject's features should be. These aren't usually totally correct, but they're not far off for the most part, so just a little tweaking is needed to get them placed perfectly. Grabbing each dot in turn causes the corresponding dot on the male 3D model's face to flash, showing you where it



The FaceAge interface couldn't be easier to interpret. Minimal controls and easy-to-use sliders keep things simple

needs to be positioned for accuracy. This is the hardest and most time-consuming part of the process, but it's worth taking the time to get everything perfect, as it improves the final result.

You also need to tell the software how old your model is in the photo and how under/overweight they are to begin with, before it can generate a 3D version of their face for you to alter.

DOT PLACEMENT

Get this stage right for the best results

This is the most important part of the process involved with using the FaceAge plug-in, as the information about where your subject's features appear is what the software uses to build its 3D rendition of their face. Cleverly, FaceAge uses information about where your subject's ears and other features are in relation to each other, to figure out how much your subject's head is tilted, and builds its 3D model on top, making it much easier to combine the finished manipulated image with your original shot, for more realistic results, whatever you choose to do with your subject's facade.



Careful attention to the placement of these dots will ensure more accurate results in your final image

The 3D model produced varies in accuracy according to the image you started with – subjects wearing glasses, for example, will produce less realistic results, as facial adornments are stretched and warped with the rest of the face, leading to some oddly shaped eyewear. Sometimes we found it was necessary to go back a stage and reposition our dots further to help improve the look of our 3D model, particularly where our subject's eyes were narrowed, for example.

Fortunately, you're not restricted to working on images of people who are facing the camera square-on. FaceAge

asks you to place dots around the top and bottom of the ears, which tells it whether your subject's head is tilted and to what degree, improving accuracy further.

We found the software to be quite successful at producing uncanny results, whether turning back the clock for older subjects or prematurely ageing younger ones. The 3D mesh that FaceAge uses moulds itself to your subject's contours, then uses the data you've entered about their features to realistically induce the characteristics associated with ageing – from wrinkles and fine lines to eye bags and sagging of the cheeks and jaw line. The



Use the FaceAge plug-in to add weight to your subject's features and age them beyond their years

further to the right you push the slider, the more extreme the effect. The ability to add or subtract weight from a subject is another option, which can be used to your subject's detriment or otherwise, depending on what you're trying to create!

Overall, FaceAge is easy to use, produces some interesting results and should provide hours of fun for budding digital artists.

Tip



Until September 30, Abalone LLC is offering the FaceAge plug-in for the introductory price of \$29.95, a significant saving compared to the regular price of 39.95. Pick up this fun piece of software for a bargain price while you still can, and be sure to check out the online resources to learn how to make the most of the program's functions.

A CLOSER LOOK

We show you how to manipulate time with FaceAge's powerful tools



01 Pick your shot You'll find that FaceAge works better with some portraits than others: trial and error is the best way to learn, but go for someone with a clean outline and no glasses for best results. With your chosen portrait open, you just need to draw a rectangular selection box around your subject's face, then click on the FaceAge option to initialise the plug-in.



02 Get to work Within just a few moments you'll see a new window open which shows a large preview image on the right, and a 3D model of a man's face on the left, along with a range of controls. We're going to use these controls in order to construct a 3D model of our subject's own face.



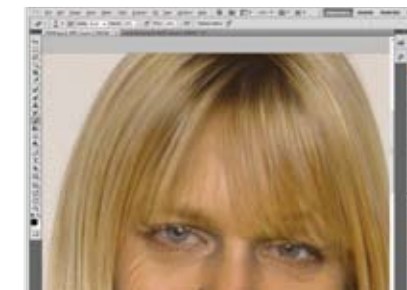
03 Go dotty Start by following the guide on the 3D model to place dots on key points around your subject's face. First show the software where your subject's eyes and chin are, then more dots will appear, positioned roughly where the program guesses your model's other features are. They're rarely spot-on, so you'll need to fine-tune their placement.



04 Fine-tune As you grab each dot to move it, the position that it should correspond to on your subject's face flashes on the 3D model, so you know where it needs to go. Once you've finished positioning all these dots in the right places, you need to tell the software how old your subject is in the shot and how under/overweight they are (if applicable).



05 Take control Now click Next, and a 3D model of your subject's face will be overlaid on top of your preview image. This can be grabbed and panned or tilted to view it from different angles. If you need to fine-tune any dot placement further, you can go back at this point and do so – otherwise you are now ready to manipulate time!



06 Time-travel Use the sliders on the left to age your subject, make them younger, help them lose a few inches or make them larger, depending on the effect you want to generate. Once you're happy with the result, click Photoshop to export it to the clipboard. Create a new layer, paste your new image in, then use a soft eraser to clean up the hard lines.

“YOU'RE NOT RESTRICTED TO WORKING ON IMAGES OF PEOPLE WHO ARE FACING THE CAMERA SQUARE-ON”

PROS

- Quick to run
- Capable of good results
- Easy to use

CONS

- No support for Mac users
- Hair over ears causes problems
- Doesn't work with all portraits

VERDICT

8.0

An easy-to-use plug-in, capable of producing some great results from most images