tools of the trade

T-Mobile Sidekick II

Photos from Camera to Album to Disc

The **Concord Eye-Q 5062** is one of **Polaroid's** newest compact digital cameras. It offers high-quality, 5-megapixel images and a moderate price under $230. The Eye-Q 5062 has a professional black finish, features 5-element all-

Concord Eye-Q 5062

glass lens, and has a 16MB internal memory and slot for SD cards. Multizone focusing lets you choose center auto focus or three-area focus where the camera looks at three areas in the screen to determine correct focus. You can select a specific area for the exposure reading or let the camera average values in the scene. Take

photos in color, black-and-white, sepia, or solarized, or record AVI video at 30 frames per second with audio. There's a 6x digital zoom, and you can choose from six levels of image resolution (VGA 1.2, 2, 3.1, 4, and 5 megapixels). The macro focusing range extends the camera's range from about six inches to infinity. The auto flash has five user-selectable modes along with seven preset scene modes for beach/snow, party/indoor, sunset, night landscape, night portrait, fireworks, and sports. Video out and USB cables are included along with Arcsoft PhotoImpression 2000 software.
www.concord-camera.com

Adobe has combined two of its best photo software products, Photoshop Album and Photoshop Elements, into the new version of **Photoshop Elements 3.0**. With this single program you can organize and store all your digital

photos (from camera, disc, scanner, wherever) in albums that are arranged by date and with a tagging system that lets you sort and easily locate your photos. Go to the day or month or year on the time bar at the top of the album, or call up a calendar and look at thumbnails on the days, or call up all those filed under the cat's name or event tag—you design the visual database with a lot of help from Adobe. Then you can create and burn slideshows with music or commentary for viewing on computer or DVD player or to be sent as an e-mail. Create photo
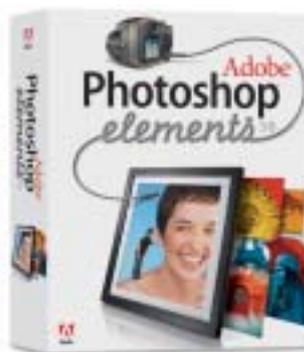
Adobe Photoshop Elements 3.0

books or electronic or print cards. The Elements part of the program offers Photoshop-strength editing with layer management, filters, and effects, or you can choose Smart-Fix to fix photos with a single click. The red-eye removal tool is improved in this version of Elements, and a new tool called the Spot Healing Brush has been added. The icon looks like a band-aid, and the tool works like the clone tool, where you mark an area and the blemish, scratch, shadow, or whatever is removed. With it you can also remove large objects that you don't want appearing in the frame—trees growing out of peoples' heads, even old boyfriends/girlfriends. There is everything you need in one box to import, sort, store, fix, and creatively present your digital photos.
www.adobe.com/products/photoshopelwin/main.html

How We Read Web Pages ◆ Michael Castelluccio, Editor

■ ED KOCH, MAYOR OF NEW YORK CITY IN THE '80S, often greeted his constituents with a big grin and "How'm I doin'?" A great opening line. Most owners of websites—companies and individuals—use a set of basic metrics to answer the mayor's question for their online pages. The metrics measure such things as hits, pages opened, links accessed, length of visit on the page, and so on. And if everything's working well, the question remains as rhetorical as the mayor's greeting.

But if a page or section isn't generating opens or views are short-lived, further analysis is required. And that's when you're likely to discover that people don't read pages online the way they read print in hand.

Reading Print Pages
Readers of English begin at the top left of a page and

scan lines, sweeping horizontally from left to right, down to the right corner of the page. Newspapers lay out their pages to take advantage of this diagonal progression. Photographs or illustrations can interrupt the flow of this pattern—drawing the eye first before it begins to scan—but the gravitational pull on a page of English print drags us forward and down, diagonally. The descent on a page of Chinese calligraphy is less like a vector—you read in a pattern more faithful to gravity's draw.

That's what we've been conditioned to do with print pages, and many Web designers have transferred the same set of design rules to their online pages. But do we read words under glass in the same way? And if we don't, how would we discover the differences? Advertisers use surveys and focus groups to help figure out what works,


The **T-Mobile Sidekick II** is a smart phone with a camera, e-mail, instant messaging, games, a calendar, an address book, and a Web connection. The screen spins around to reveal a keyboard beneath for thumb typing. The screen is 240 x 160 pixels, and even though it's large and in color a battery charge will last several days. The Address Book and e-mail function are linked, and you can upload contacts to the Sidekick with T-Mobile's desktop Web interface. You can sync your calendar events from Outlook, and you can browse the Web by typing addresses into the browser. A version of Asteroids is included, and you can download a few other

games. The VGA camera has a built-in flash. Sidekick II also includes speakerphone, photo caller ID, and Vcard support. You can sign up for the phone plan at www.t-mobile.com.

Now that CD and DVD discs are ubiquitous and the hinges of their gem cases so fragile, stacks of unprotected discs are showing up on desks, shelves, car seats, and even floors. And they get scratched, which is bad enough when it's a favorite music CD, but the damage can be much more expensive with PlayStation or Xbox discs. If it's a data CD with critical information, it can be a real problem. One ingenious solution is the

d_skin™ Protective Disc Skin, an optically clear protective cover for the playing side of the disc. The outer ring of the Skin snaps on your disc, covering it with a laser-transparent protection that is so thin it doesn't interfere with playing and is meant to remain per-

manently on the disc. No need to put the disc back in a box or sleeve once it's skinned, and if the protective coating ever gets scratched, you can just throw it away and replace it with another. The d_skin Protective Disc Skins are sold in tins of five. www.d-skin.com
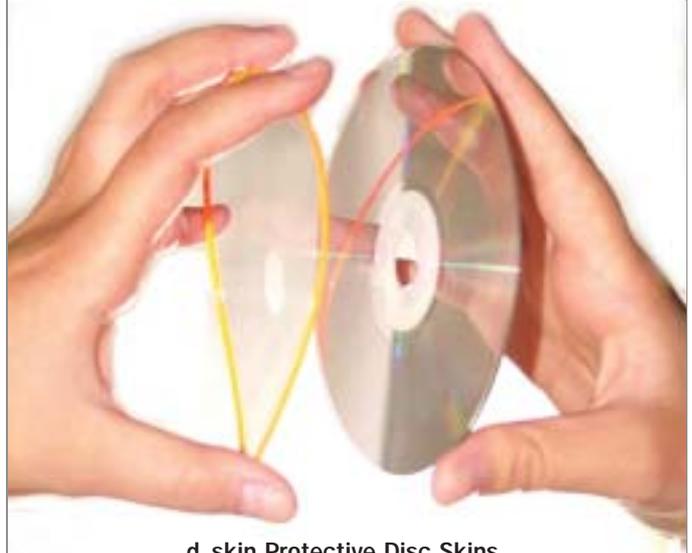
d_skin Protective Disc Skins

but a clear picture of how we look at words and images on computer screens would certainly help.

One direct measure would be to track eye movement as the viewer opens a page, scans its content, and then reads whatever he/she finds important. Map that a number of times, and you'll have an idea of the most and least important areas of your Web page.

Eyetrack III was a joint project of the Poynter Institutue, the Estlow International Center for New Media and Journalism at the University of Denver, and Eyetools, a California-based eyetracking software and services company. The researchers tracked the eye movements of 46 people as they read mock news websites and real multimedia content.

Twitches and Heat Maps

Web designers use hits, opens, links, and duration to gather their statistics on Web pages. The Eyetrack III team took a closer look at the eyes of the user and measured fixations and saccades to create what they call heat maps of Web pages. A fixation is defined as "a brief, but measurable, pause of the eye when looking at a word or phrase [image or graphic]." Saccades are the paths between these fixations. And the heat map that results from this charting of the 46 readers shows amorphous splotches of yellow and red (most fixated on) on a general field of blue (some fixations) and gray (neglected) areas. If you go to http://www.poynterextra.org/eyetrack2004/heatmap.htm, you will find 10 sample heat maps of home pages, with interactive legends under a top button and a very interesting slider dial that cranks the page back to white and black so you can look it over and

guess how you are tracking the page. Take a closer look if any of the 10 has a pattern similar to your personal or company home page.

A Few Surprises

As expected, a common pattern presented itself. "The eyes most often fixated first in the upper left of the page, then hovered in that area before going left to right. Only after perusing the top portion of the page for some time did their eyes explore further down the page." There's a line schematic of this movement as well as a chart of three priority areas on a page at www.poynterextra.org/eyetrack2004/main.htm.

Back in 1990, Poynter did this kind of eyetracking with newspapers and found that photographs exerted a strong pull on the reader's attention. But "text rules on the PC screen—both in order viewed and in overall time spent looking at it." If you review the 10 heat maps, you'll see that dominant headlines draw the reader when he or she first enters the page whether the placement is top left or right.

Another surprise emerged when the researchers tested headline and type size. "Smaller type encourages focused viewing behavior (that is, reading the words), while larger type promotes lighter scanning." In other words, people spent more time focusing on small type than large type. "Larger type resulted in more scanning of the page—fewer words overall were fixated on."

If you like to underline text on your pages to create emphasis, there's a warning in Poynter's findings. An underlined headline actually discouraged people from proceeding to the smaller text below. "This may be related to a phenomenon that we noted throughout the testing: visual

breaks—like a line or rule—discouraged people from looking at items beyond the break, like a blurb." They found this fencing-off kind of reaction affected ads also.

Not surprisingly, the researchers found that headlines and blurb (short summaries) copy have to be short. You have less than a second to capture a reader with a headline. Shorter paragraphs performed better than longer ones.

Navigation elements (lists of other sections on the site, for instance) usually appear at the top or on the left side of the home page. The Eyetrack III discovered a useful anomaly here. "We observed better usage (more eye fixations and longer viewing duration) with right-column navigation than left." They guess that the improved attention on the right side might be due to a novelty factor, but, whatever the reason, it's an idea worth remembering.

What they discovered about advertising might not be encouraging to sponsors. First, they say most people disregard ads, and when they do look at them, it's usually for only 0.5 to 1.5 seconds. You can improve these factors with good placement. The top left portion of the home page is the best, with close proximity to popular content listed second. But avoid fencing off the ad with lines or boxes as they decrease fixations. An unexpected result was that "text ads were viewed most intently of all types we tested. On our test pages, text ads got an average eye duration time of nearly seven seconds; the best display-type ad got only 1.6 seconds, on average."

There's other useful information on the Poynter website, and it's worth a look if you have anything to do with managing or paying for the management of a website. ■