

Fig. 1:
Notice the light colored pixels around the edges of this cartoon. Since the edges of the lineart layer are partially transparent, the color beneath shows through creating a 'halo'.

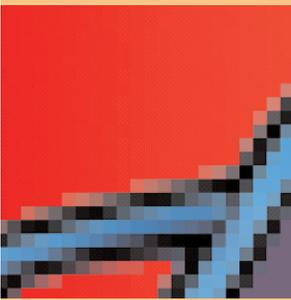
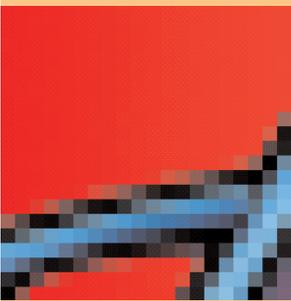


Fig. 2:
In this version, the outer edge pixels of the coloring layer were deleted before adding color, eliminating the possibility of any halo. The result looks crisper and more professional.



The lineart has been scanned and cleaned up, you've converted it to vectors with Streamline®, knocked out the holes in Illustrator, so now you're ready to color your cartoon. Fire up Photoshop and open the EPS at the resolution and size you want. Rule of thumb guidelines are 72 dpi for web use, 200 dpi for newspaper reproduction, 300 dpi or more for magazine printing.

The coloring method I describe here is a fairly straightforward technique, but certainly not the only one. I'll pass along another, more time consuming, but very useful method in a later article.

Before we start actually coloring the cartoon, we need to duplicate the cartoon layer to give us something to color on. Lock the transparency of the duplicate layer, then fill with white. Now if we try to color transparent areas, nothing will happen, making the process simple and much less tedious. We can use large brushes without concerning ourselves with 'overspray' of color into areas outside the image. But don't grab the paintbrush just yet. First select the Magic Wand with the Tolerance set to zero, and click in the white filled cartoon area. Then Select>Modify>Contract... and contract the selection by 1 or 2 pixels. Then Select>Inverse and hit Delete. The object is to slightly shrink the area that will hold color so that colored pixels will not 'halo' around the edges when you place the cartoon on a background.(Fig. 1 & 2)

The last step before coloring is to select the original lineart layer and set the blending mode to Multiply. This allows us to see the color as we paint on the duplicate layer, with the lines unaffected.

Now grab your virtual paintbrush and pencil, make sure you have the duplicate layer

active, and color to your heart's content. I always start by adding the largest areas of base color first, and/or any complex gradients that might be awkward to confine at a later point. Usually my last step is to add a layer between the color and lineart layers, one for highlights and another for shadows, with the blending modes set to Overlay. Paint with black to add shadows and white to add highlights, but don't forget to experiment with the layer opacity slider to get the look just right. Since they're on a separate layers from the base color, you can play around all you like.

"Keeping major elements on separate layers insures that if you somehow make a mistake, it's likely only a small portion of your effort and time will be lost."

Add backgrounds and text on separate layers to give yourself as much versatility as possible in positioning and editing. Layers are your friend and safety net. Keeping major elements on separate layers insures that if you somehow make a mistake, it's likely only a small portion of your effort and time will be lost. Developing methods and habits that allow for mistakes to be easily corrected or client changes to be made quickly will serve you well and save you a lot of headaches.

Finally, always remember to save your file in a layered PSD format before exporting to anything else.