Pro

Automator Workflow Techniques

Creating a Folder Watching Workflow

By Ben Waldie

A very powerful automation feature that is often overlooked in Mac OS X is folder watching. Prior to Mac OS X Tiger, folder watching was possible by writing custom AppleScripts and attaching them to folders to process incoming items. Now, with Automator in Mac OS X, it is easier than ever to turn any folder into a watched folder, with no scripting necessary.

The following steps will walk you through the process of using Automator to create a folder watching workflow in Mac OS X. This particular workflow will automatically create padded thumbnail versions of full size image files as they are placed into a watched folder.

Step 1: Create a folder named Create Padded Thumbnails on your desktop.

Step 2: Launch Automator, located in the Applications folder, and create a new workflow window.

Step 3: Select the Preview category, located in the Library list in Automator. Select the Create Thumbnail Images action in the Action list, and drag it into the workflow area on the right side of the Automator window. Set the size of the thumbnails to 128 pixels, and the suffix of the thumbnails to _tn.
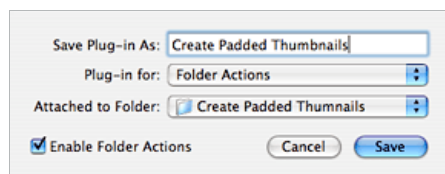

Step 4: Locate and select the Pad Images action in the Preview category, and drag it into the workflow area. In doing so, you will be presented with a message notifying you that the Pad Images action will modify the image files passed to it, and asking if you would like to add a Copy Finder Items action into the workflow first, in order to preserve the originals. This is unnecessary, since the images passed to this action will be thumbnail images created by the previous action in the workflow. Click the Don't Add button to proceed without adding a Copy Finder Items action.
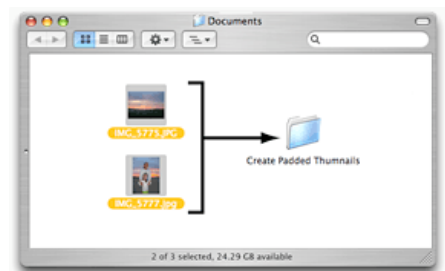

Step 5: Configure the Pad Images action settings to pad images to a height and width of 150 pixels, leaving the Scale image before padding checkbox deselected.
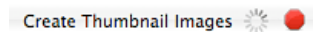
Step 7: Name the plug-in "Create Padded Thumbnails" and choose Folder Actions from the Plug-in for popup. Select Other… from the Attached to Folder popup, and choose the Create Padded Thumbnails folder on your desktop, to serve as a watched folder. If an Enable Folder Actions checkbox is visible, select it. Click the Save button to save the workflow.

Step 8: The watched folder has now been created. To begin processing, drag one or more image files into the folder.

Step 9: Once the images have been placed into the watched folder, they will be processed by the Automator workflow. During processing, the workflow's status will be displayed in the menu bar.

Step 10: Once processing is complete, the watched folder will contain the original dropped images, as well as padded thumbnail versions of the images.
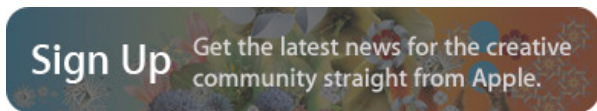

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Downloads and Useful Links

▷ Download the workflow described here
▷ Learn more about Automator
▷ Download more Actions and Workflows
▷ Learn more about AppleScript
▷ Learn more about Folder Actions
▷ TECSoft Automator Workshop

Automated Workflows, LLC's Wait for Finder Items action can be used to ensure that a folder watching workflow does not begin processing incoming files until they have finished writing to the watched folder. A demonstration version of this action is available for download from Automated Workflows, LLC's website.
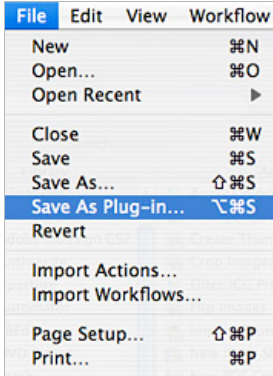

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Step 6: Select Save as Plug-in... from the File menu in Automator.

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