

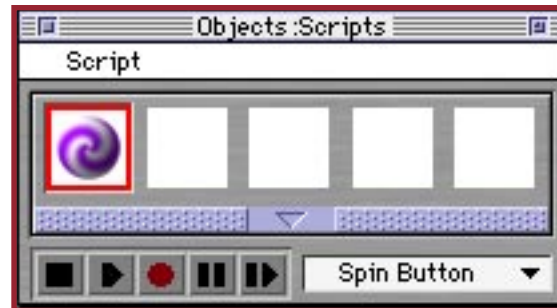
Button Animation & Tubular Neon

It may sound redundant, but Tubular Neon has some unique capabilities. Since this is the second in the Neon tutorial series, you've likely already seen how easily 3D like tubular shapes can be made to move. Well, the same principle applies to the nozzle elements themselves. These rounded buttons can also move and it's very easy to do. This tutorial shows you how.

Why would someone want a spinning button? Well, they can dress up a web site. As GIF animations, they're often as small or smaller than two mouseover images. The big advantage is you can employ rotational patterning that provides for spiral and other types of animated effects. These small animations command visual attention which can make site navigation easier. We've used them with great success as simple orientation markers that redirect the eye to the navigation frame. The best part is that these animations can be created very quickly. The idea is to use the nozzle's structure in combination with Image Hose capabilities.

Nozzles are essentially databases, of images. Nothing original there. Like most databases, the records—or in this case images—can be sorted. Since nozzles work as fixed databases, the sorting is done when the nozzle is made. That means you can't shuffle the images around like you can with most databases. To make up for this limitation, the image sprayer tool is engineered to read the fixed database in a variety of ways including Sequential and Random patterns.

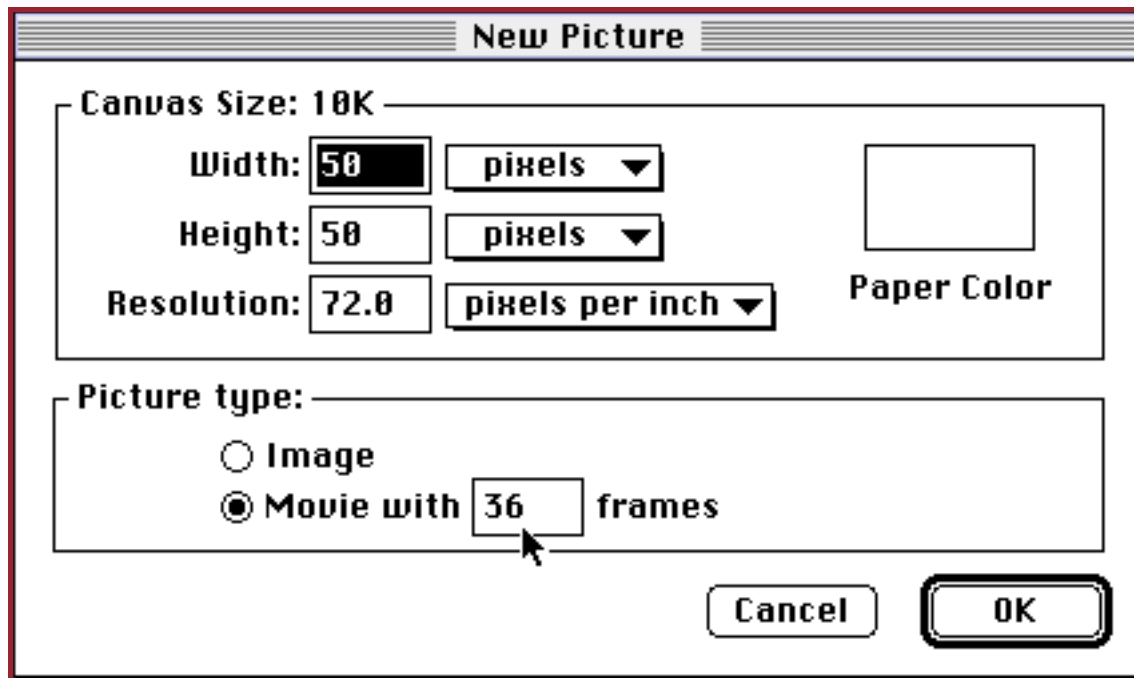
This limitation has some cool advantages. Since the tool can access the images sequentially, all you have to do to make a movie is to tell the tool to read the database sequentially applying one image per frame. What happens is you get a movie that sequentially displays the nozzle images. If the nozzle images have coherent, illustrated patterns than shift, you get logical animation. Enough of theory. It's easier that it sounds anyway.



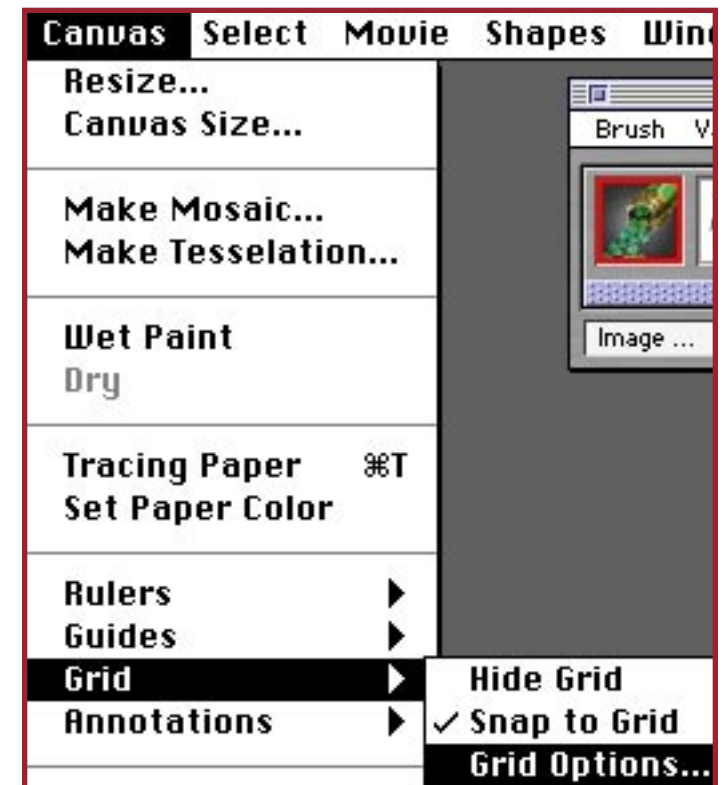
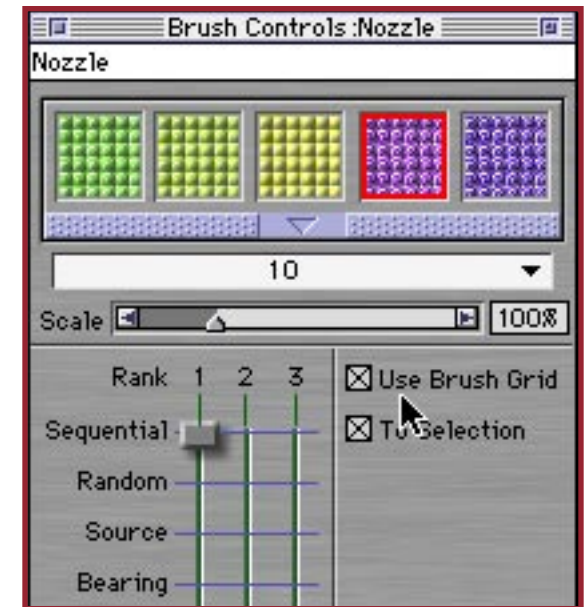
- 1) First, you'll need the right Nozzle, Brush and Script libraries. We've provided these for you, so download and expand the compressed Button Files if you haven't already.
- 2) Launch Painter and load the three libraries by selecting the Load Library command found at the bottom of the Nozzle, Brush and Script palette lists. It's just below the blue bar shown here.
- 3) Choose the Ranks: Sequential variant. If you're using Painter 6, load the P6 Brushes. Your brush and script palettes should look something like the above.



- 4) So where are we? We've got the demo Brush, Script and Nozzle libraries loaded. Good, now select the Spin Button script icon and the "10" nozzle icon on the nozzles palette.
- 5) Be sure to check the Use Brush Grid box on the Nozzles palette. If you want to save a mask of the animation, leave the To Selection checkbox selected.
- 6) If you're using Painter 6, you don't have a To Selection checkbox so don't worry about it. Unfortunately, I can't seem to get P6 to draw a Selection Outline correctly, so you may have problems saving the nozzle mask (no big deal with button animations).
- 7) Now create a New Picture that's a Movie containing 36 frames. The dimensions should be a square 50 pixel image.



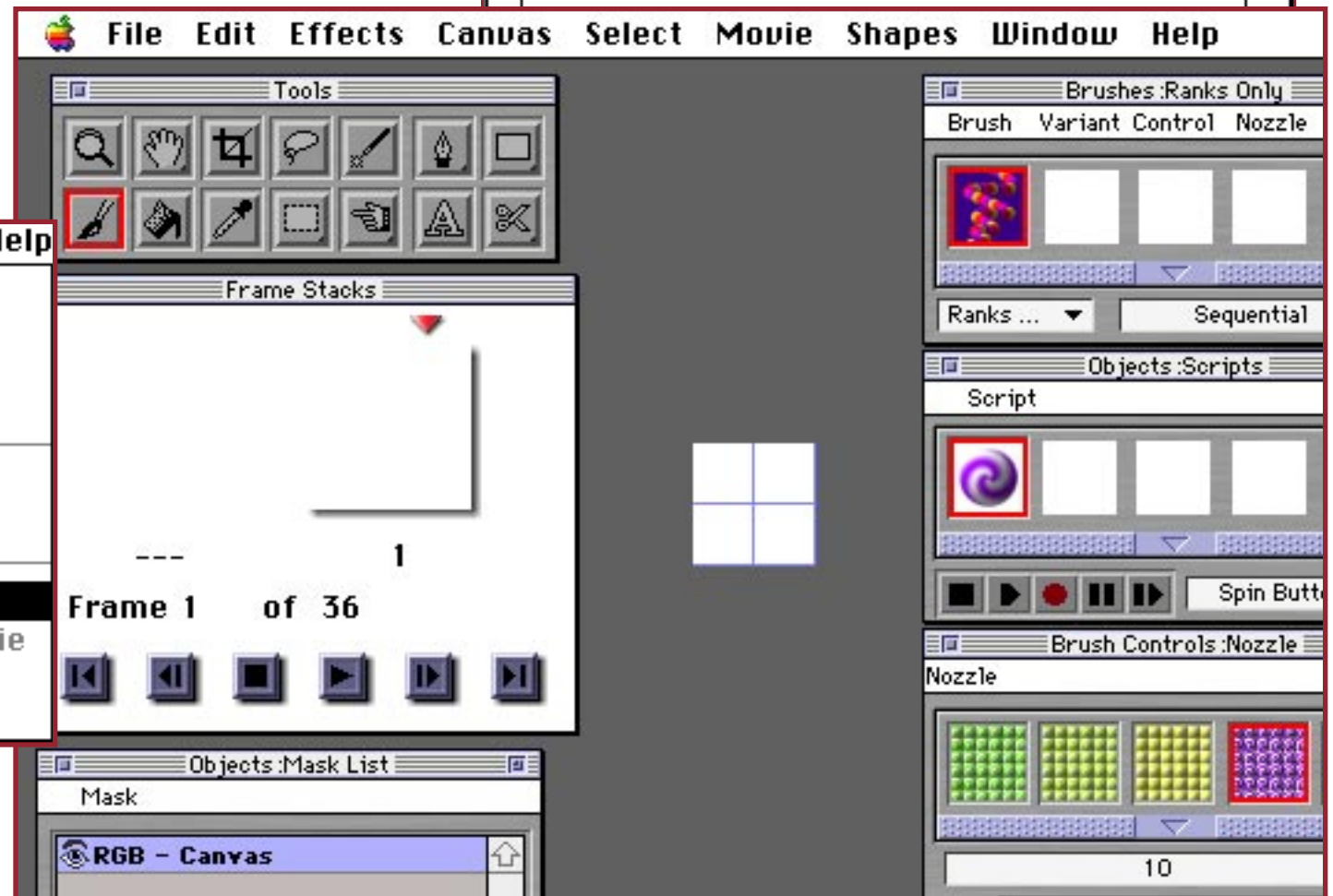
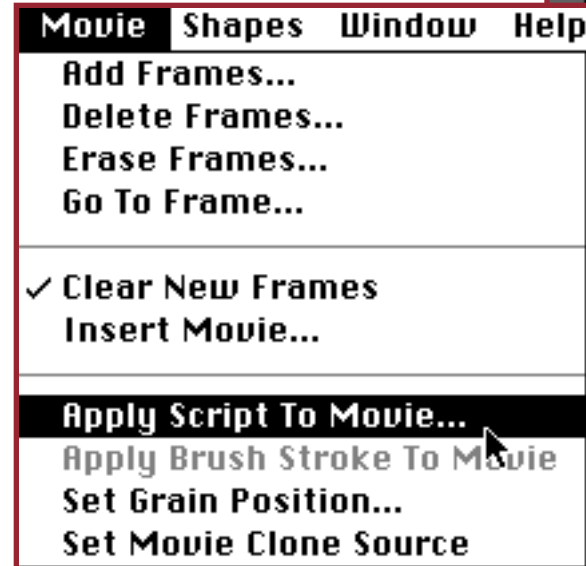
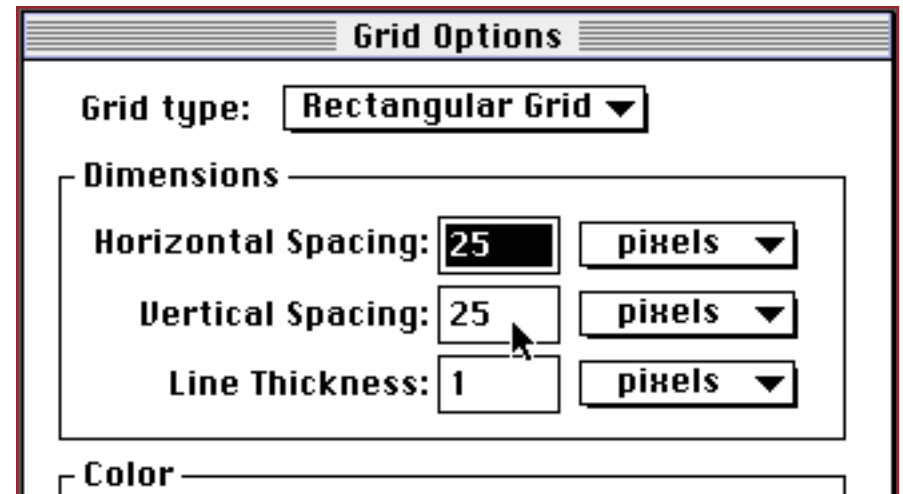
- 8) you may not want to know why those dimensions are important, but I'm going to explain it anyway. Once you understand what's going on, you'll be able to apply these same principles elsewhere.
- 9) Before I do, select select Show Grid from the Canvas pull down menu. Then select Grid Options. Set the Rectangular Grid dimensions to 25 x 25 pixels. Make the background transparent as well. Now



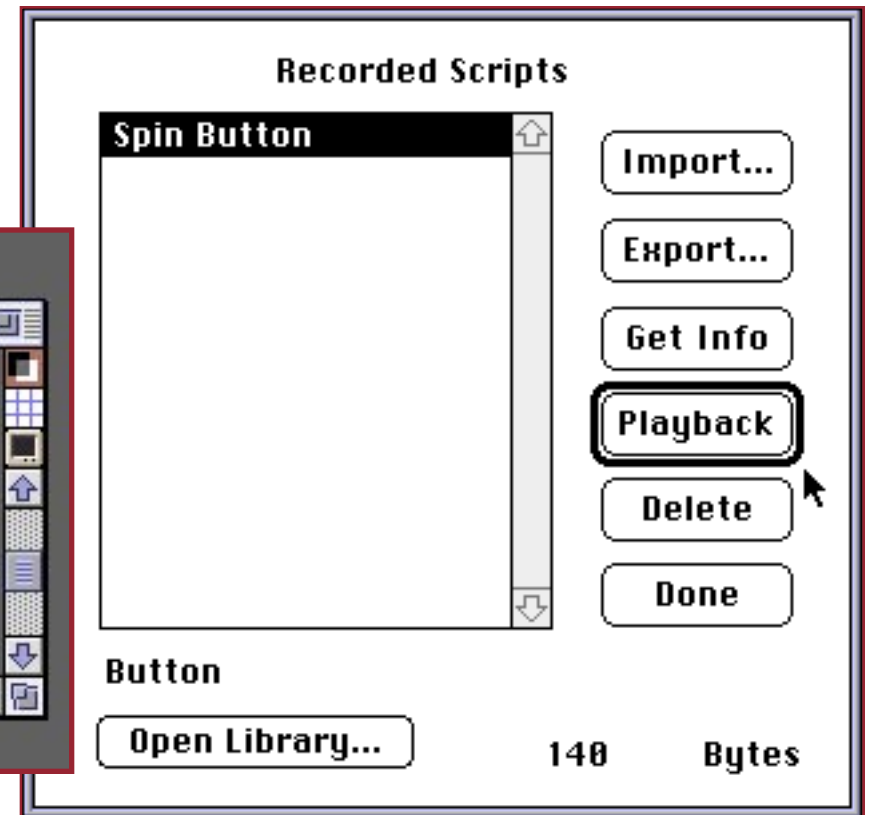
- 10) Okay, here's the theory: A) You want 36 frames because that "10" nozzle has 36 images in it. B) You want a 50 pixel square because each image in the nozzle is 50 pixels across. C) You want a grid that's half the size of the nozzle.

Why? Because you want each frame of the animation to match the others. To get that result, you're going to apply the nozzle elements using a Brush Grid. Since the nozzle elements are 50 pixels in diameter, you want a 50 pixel frame. By making the Grid dimensions 25 pixels, you establish the center point for each application of the nozzle. That positions each button in exacting the same place throughout the animation.

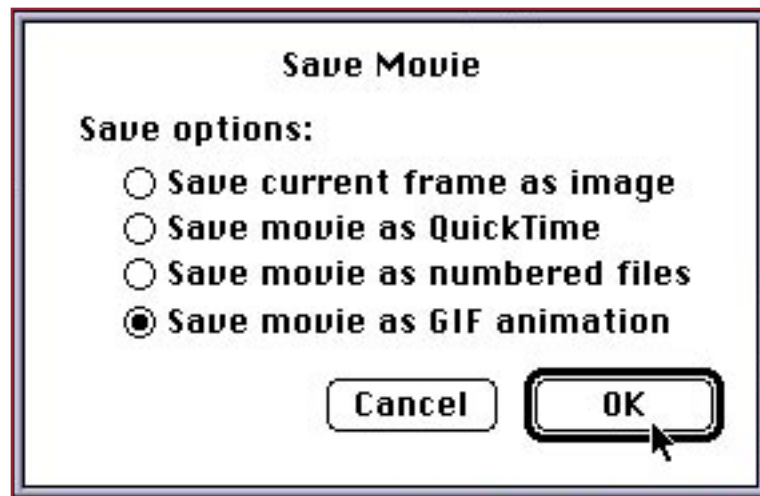
- 11) Let the fun begin. You've got a 36 frame movie. You've got the brush, script and nozzle selected and set up correctly. So pull down the Movie menu and select Apply Script to Movie.



- 12) Select the “Spin Button” script and click on Playback. Stand back, because the machine may begin to rumble and smoke.
- 13) When it’s done, you should have a 36 frame movie. Test it by turning off the grid and clicking on the Play button.



- 14) If it spins, you’re done. Choose Save As GIF



- 15) Here are a few caveats and tips. Your movie has 36 frames. That means it’s going to be near 40 K in size. That’s way too big for a web button.

There are two ways to shrink the size. One way is to reduce the number of frames in the animation. To do that, you can use Painter’s Delete Frame command, but you have to be careful. If you delete 20 frames off of the end, your button will start to spin and then jump to the beginning because those last 20 frames that completed the rotation are missing.

The solution is to remove every other frame like 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 etc. That would reduce the number of frames to 18 (half of 36). If you repeat the process, you’ll get to five, but be careful. The problem is, when you remove frame two, the other frames automatically renumber themselves. So, frame four becomes frame three and it gets really confusing.

- 16) The other way to reduce the file size is to limit the number of colors. Painter gives you this option when you save the movie as a GIF animation. Just limiting the colors won't get you there, however.
- 17) I usually switch to Adobe's ImageReady about this time. It opens Painter's GIFs and lets you edit frames, not the least of which are crop, reverse the frame sequence, tween and apply layers across frames. These are very handy and powerful tools that can help to speed the process.

If you plan to do more work with the animation using another program like ImageReady or Gifmotion, choose the 256 colors settings when you save. You can reduce the number of colors later.

- 18) We were able to create a few ImageReady Actions that reduce the frame count for you. All you have to do, assuming you own it, is put the actions in the ImageReady Actions folder and run them like a Painter script.

The Delete Frames script will pass through your 36 frame movie deleting every other frame. It makes the pass several times until the 36 frame movie is reduced to 5 frames.

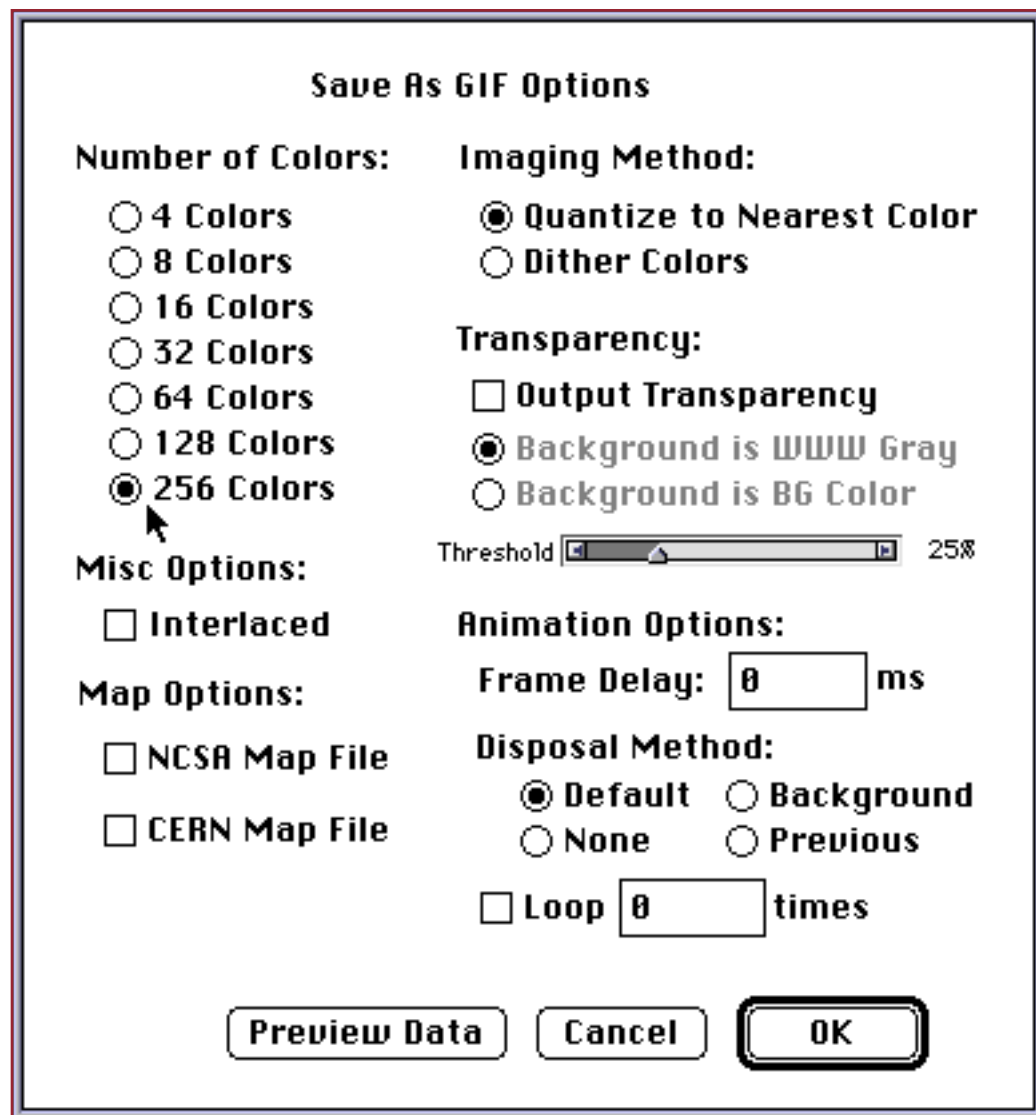
Reducing the colors to 16 results in a 3k file. That's small, but wait... the button is way too big anyway.

- 19) We've also included an action that reduces the button's dimensions to 20 pixels. The file size is only 930 bytes, which takes just 1 second to load at 28.8 bps. Now that's small.

A Few Tips & Tricks,

Move the rank slider to Random and Playback the same script in a new movie. You'll a different kind of motion. Remember too, you have the option of saving a precise, antialiased mask for the button. That lets you add all sorts of effects and filters, and without altering the background. And that's not all. Painter 6 now lets you modify nozzles in new ways.

Hopefully, the tutorial has given you a few ideas. If you can do this to a simple text graphic, the same applies to illustrations and they can make for very sophisticated works of "moving" art. That will be the subject of the next tutorial. Have fun.



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