



Lightroom Image Overlays

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In this lesson, we're going to cover a feature in Lightroom that will allow you to overlay one picture on top of another. It can be useful when trying to figure out which picture to use in a layout design.

Magazine Cover Example

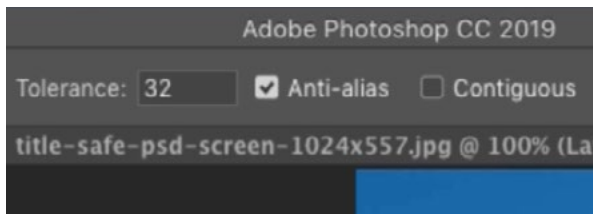
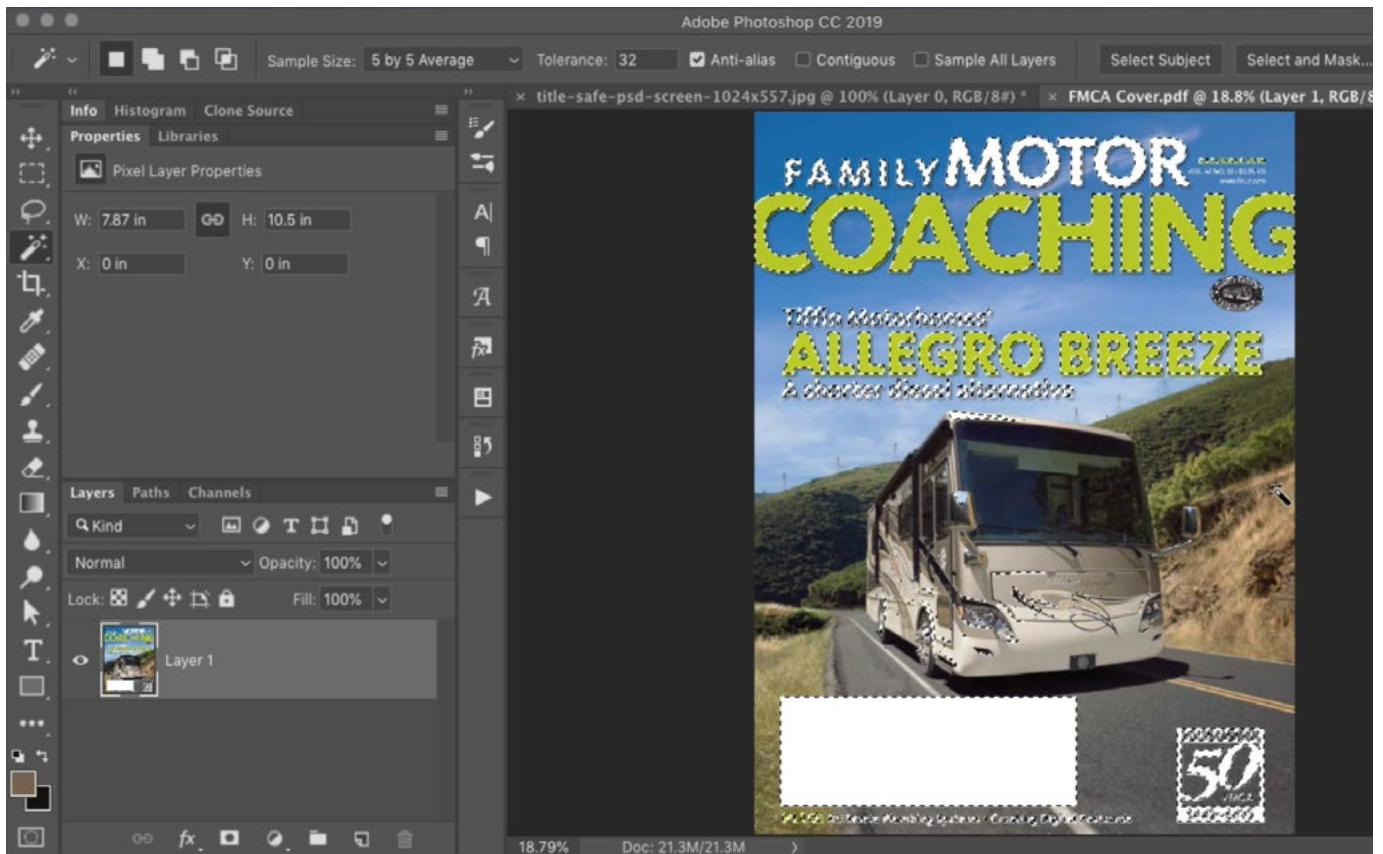
Let's say that you had to choose an image that will be featured on a magazine cover. This would be a good example of where the image overlay feature would be useful because it will allow you to see what different images look like on the cover template.

Removing the background to create a template You may have a template for the cover of the publication, where you have the title and supporting text, along with any other standard graphics, set on a transparent background. If that's the case, you won't need to do this first step.

I was given a pdf of one of the covers for the magazine I would be providing an image for. It's just one solid image with text and images. I would like to remove the background image so that the background is transparent. This way, I can place my own images on the cover to see how they look.

To start, I'll open the pdf in Photoshop. Whenever you open a pdf in Photoshop, a dialog box will pop up where you can choose which pages to open (if there are more than one), what resolution to use, etc. There is also a setting in the top left corner of the box where you can choose between opening Pages or Images. I'm going to make sure this is set to Pages so that the entire cover opens and not just individual images on the cover. I'll click OK to bring the cover into Photoshop.

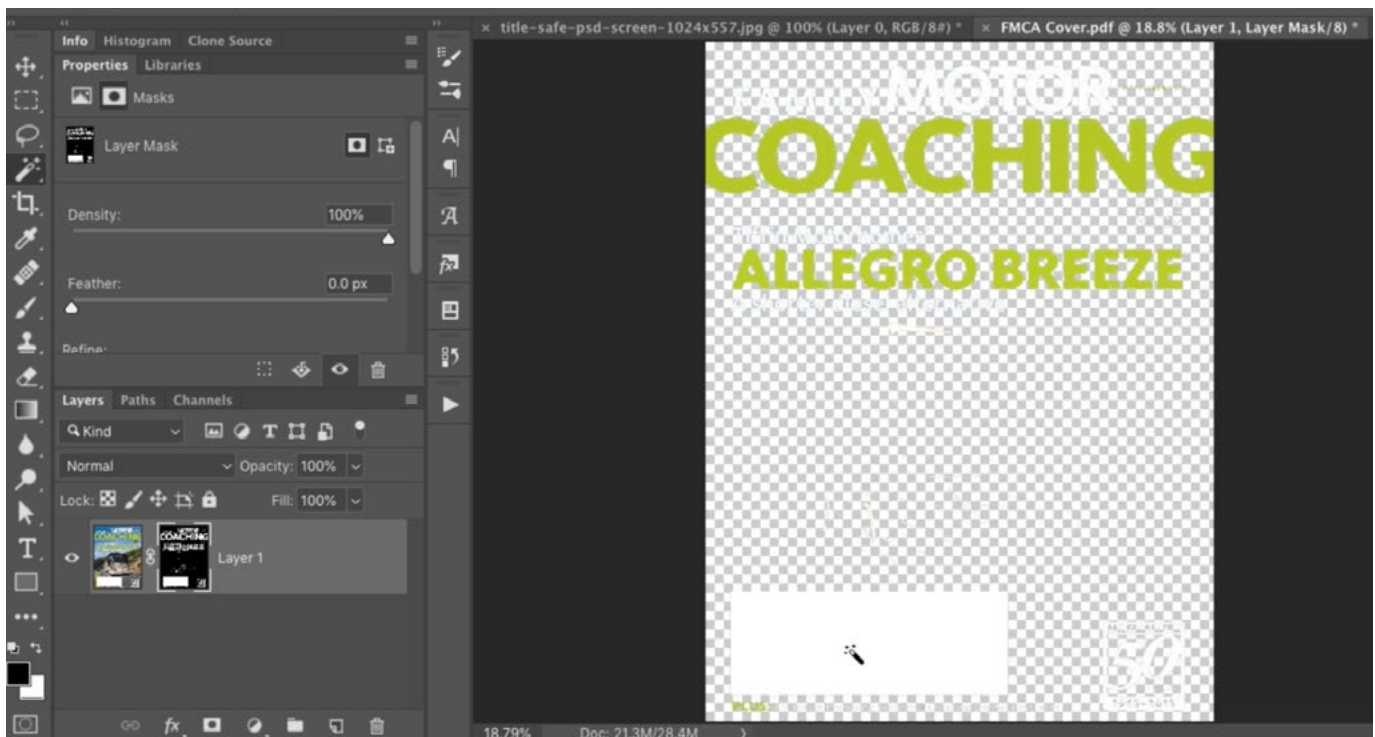
Now I need to remove the background image so that I can plug in my own image[s]. In the example image, I'm going to use the Magic Wand Tool, which is hidden beneath the Quick Selection Tool in the Toolbar on the left side of the interface. I want to use the Magic Wand to select the text, but there is a setting I'm going to change first. In the Options Bar, above the image window, there is a "Contiguous"



ABOVE: The Magic Wand Tool was used to create a selection of all the text and graphical elements on this magazine cover. **LEFT:** The Contiguous setting is turned off so the Magic Wand Tool can select multiple areas at once.

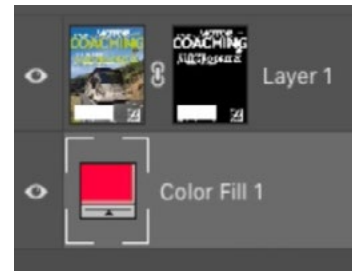
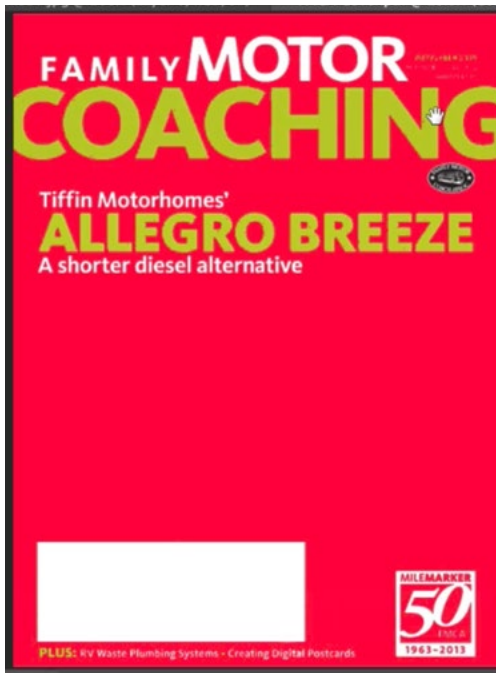
check box, which is turned on by default. When this setting is on, it means that the tool will make a selection of a single chunk of color when the mouse is clicked within the image. For example, if I clicked within the green letter C, it would select the entire letter C and nothing else. When the “Contiguous” setting is turned off, it means that it can select multiple areas of the same color and tone. For example, if I used the tool to click within the green C, it would select ALL the letters that are the same color and tone within the document. Because of this, I’ll turn this check box OFF.

I'll use the Magic Wand Tool to click within the text, and I'll hold the Shift key to add to the selection, clicking in other areas of text until I have everything selected. This also selected the white logo in the bottom and the open address area, which is good. These are all elements that should be in the template overlay. I'm going to now add a layer mask, which will hide everything that is not currently selected. To add the mask, I'll click on the Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the Layers panel.



After a selection was made around the text and graphics, a layer mask was added. The mask is hiding all areas of the layer that were not selected.

After the mask is added, I can see that I need to clean it up a bit, because there are some remaining areas of the underlying photograph that I want to hide. To make it easier to see what areas need to be cleaned up, I'll view the mask directly in the image window. You can get this view by holding down the Option key (Alt on Win) and clicking on the mask thumbnail in the Layers panel. The black and white view of the mask will fill the image window and, in this view, I can paint with black and white to adjust the mask. I'll paint with black in any places where I can see leftover white from the photograph.



FAR LEFT: I am viewing the mask in the image window and painting with black to clean it up. **DIRECTLY LEFT & ABOVE:** I placed a solid color layer beneath the image layer to better inspect the mask.

Now that I have the mask the way I want it, I'll hide the mask view by holding down the Option key (Alt on Win) and clicking on the mask thumbnail in the Layers panel.

At this point, there is a lot of transparency in the document so it's hard to tell how accurate the mask is because I'm seeing that checkerboard view. If I really wanted to inspect the layer to see how good the mask is, I could create a solid color layer and place it beneath the image layer in the Layers panel. You can create a solid color layer by clicking on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choosing Solid Color from the pop-up menu. I'll be sure to choose a color that really contrasts with the image layer so it's easy to see the difference. This view shows me that the layer mask is accurate, so I can now discard the solid color adjustment layer.

I need to save this image in a file format that supports transparency so that I can overlay it on top of other images. I'll choose the Save As command (from the File menu) and use the Format menu to choose PNG. I'll then click the Save button. A small dialog box will appear with some saving options. I like to choose the top option that will save the document with the largest file size.

Overlaying the image in Lightroom Now it's time to move this image into Lightroom so that I can overlay it on top of my other images. I will open Lightroom's Library Module and find the image that I would like to use as the underlying image. It's important that I open the image in the Loupe View, which is the view that shows a single large image in the main image window. Click on the Loupe View icon below the image window in order to move the active image into Loupe View.



Click this icon to move the selected photo[s] into the Loupe view.

I'll now click on the View menu at the top of the screen and choose Loupe Overlay > Layout Image. A dialog will pop up, asking me to navigate to the hard drive location where I saved the PNG file. I'll navigate to the file and then click the Choose button. This will place that PNG file over the picture I have open in the Loupe View.



The Command key (Ctrl on Win) is held down in order to access the scale handles and Opacity/Matte settings while viewing the image overlay.

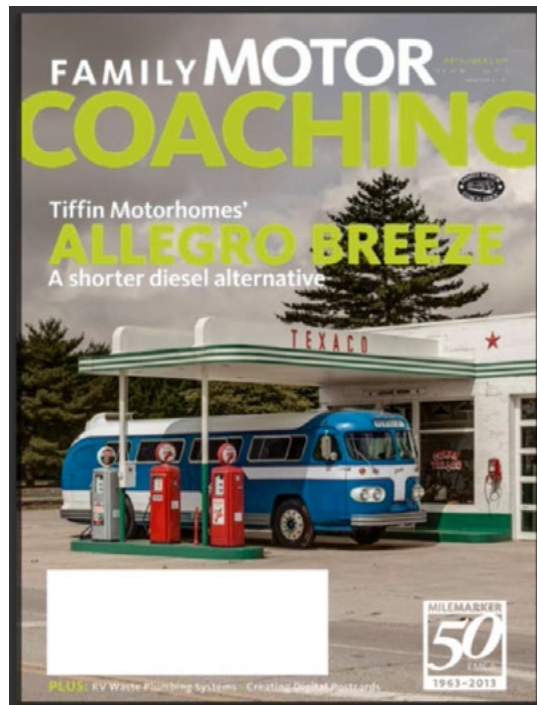
If I hold down the Command key (Ctrl on Win), some handles will appear around the corners so that I can scale the overlying image, and some settings will appear at the bottom of the document. We'll discuss those shortly.

The purpose of creating this magazine cover layout was to see what image looked best as the background. To do this, I'll need to view it with different background images. I can easily do this by using the left and right arrow keys on the keyboard in order to cycle through the images in the selected folder, or the active selection of images. In the video example,

I had selected a series of bus photos and then moved into Loupe View. When I use my left and right arrow keys, it cycles me through all of the images I had selected.

As I mentioned before, holding down the Command key (Ctrl on Win) will bring up some settings at the bottom of the document. One of these settings is Opacity, and this can be useful for making the overlying image more or less transparent in order to see what's behind it. The Matte setting controls how light or dark the area outside of the image overlay is.

To remove the overlay, go back to the View menu, choose Loupe Overlay and then turn off the "Show" setting.

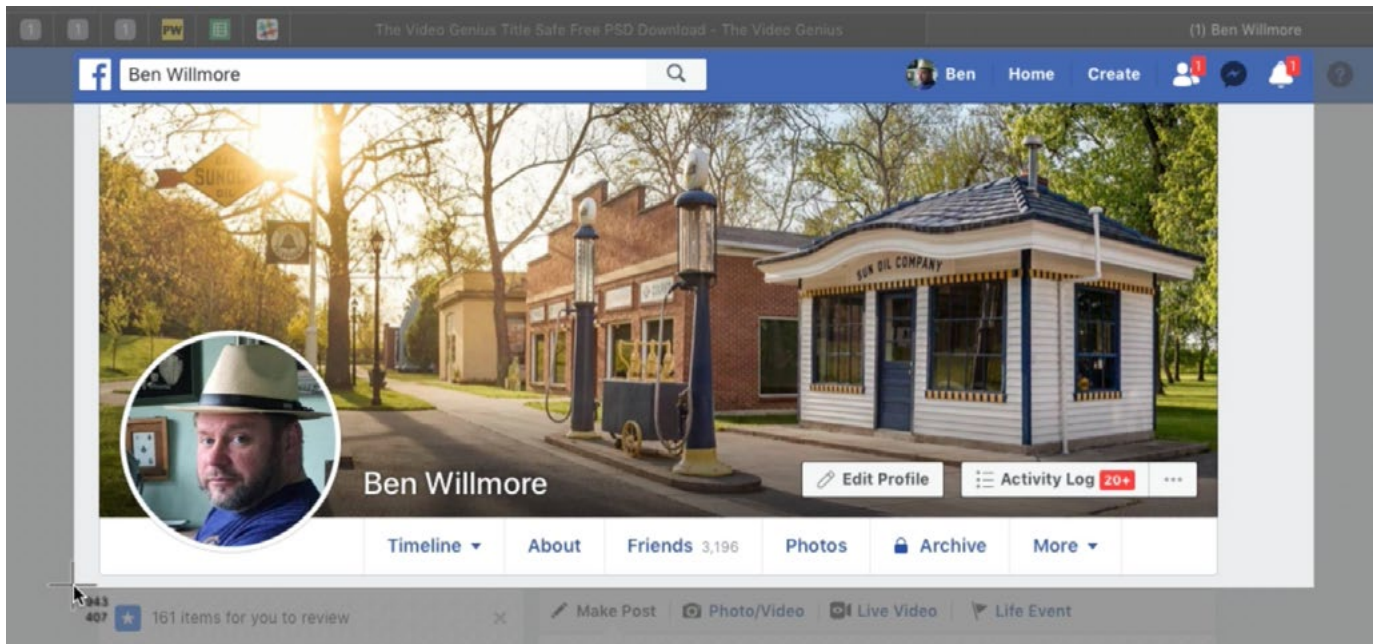


The left and right arrow keys can be used to cycle through a folder of images (or a selection of images) while keeping the same image overlay. Here, I found the best photo to use on this magazine cover.

Facebook Cover Photo Example

Another example of when the image overlay feature might be useful is when you need to prepare an image to be used in some kind of online template. In the video example, I'm going to use the image overlay to find the best image for my Facebook cover photo. When placing a Facebook cover photo, there will be some elements overlaid on the image, including the profile picture, some text and some buttons. I want to make sure that I choose a photo where important subject matter will not be covered up by these elements.

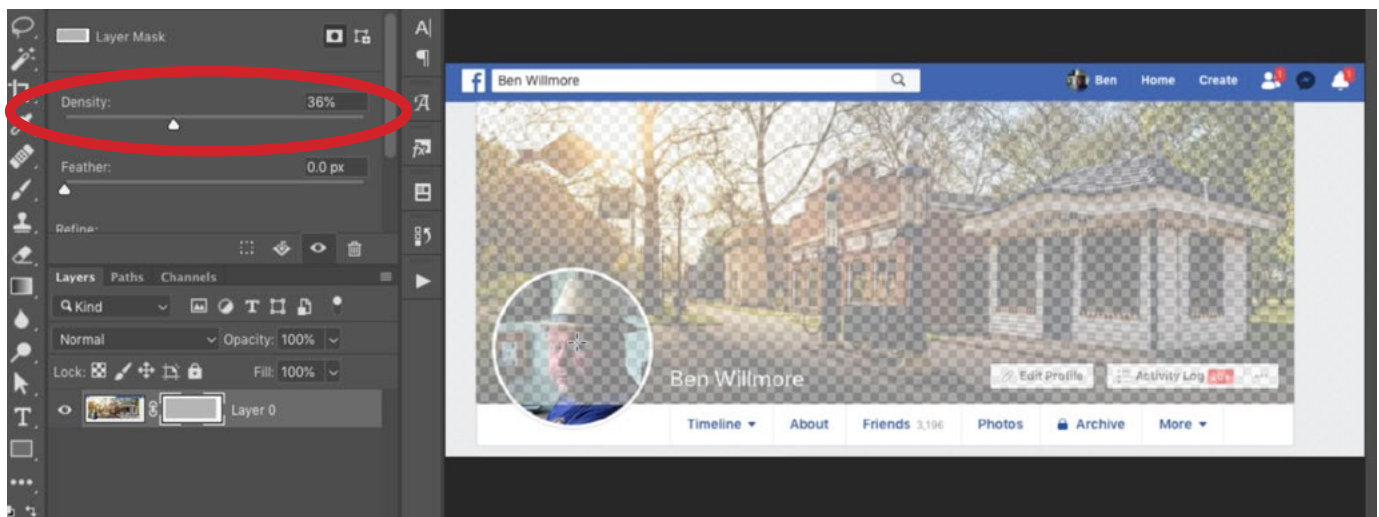
Removing the background image from the cover photo screen shot To start, I will take a screen shot of the Facebook cover image as it appears in my browser. The keyboard shortcut for capturing a screen shot differs between operating systems, so you'll want to do a Google search for your particular OS. I'll capture the upper portion of the interface, which includes my cover photo and profile picture.



I am capturing a screen shot of my Facebook cover photo in the browser.

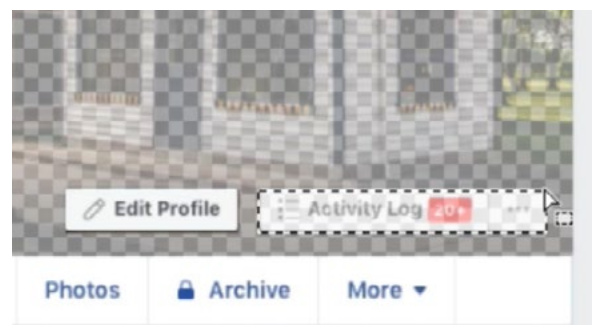
Next, I will take this screen shot image and open it in Photoshop so that I can remove the background image. I'll use the Rectangular Marquee Tool to start by creating a selection around the cover photo. I want to turn this selection into a layer mask, but by default, a layer mask will look at the active selection and hide everything ELSE. I want the opposite, where the layer mask hides the contents of the selection. To get this, I'll hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) while clicking the Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. Now the area inside the selection will be hidden, and I can see the transparent background behind it.

I need to refine the mask so that I can see the buttons, profile picture etc. Whenever you have a mask active in the Layers panel, the Properties panel will display some settings relating to that mask. Here, you will find the Density slider, which controls how much of the mask you can see through. By default, this slider is set to 100, which means that you can't see through the mask at all. I will drag this slider down, just until I can start to see some of the underlying image. This will allow me to refine the mask based on the underlying content.



With the layer mask active, the Density slider (circled) is being used to lower the visibility of the mask so that I can see through the mask to the layer it's hiding.

I can now see the two buttons that appear in the bottom right corner of the cover image. I'll use the Rectangular Marquee Tool to make a selection around one of the buttons. Because the mask is active, I will use the keyboard shortcut Command+I (Ctrl+I on Win) to invert the contents of the selection, making the mask white instead of black and therefore revealing the underlying image in that area. I will do the same thing for the other button.



The Rectangular Marquee Tool is being used to select elements in this layout that I don't want to be masked.

I will use the Elliptical Marquee Tool to create a selection around the circular profile picture. I want the entirety of the profile picture to be visible, so I will use the Fill command (Edit > Fill) to fill the selection with white. Remember, adding white to a layer mask will reveal the layer in that area. The reason I did not use the Invert command is that part of the profile picture was already visible (not hidden by the mask). Had I inverted the selection, the part that was previously visible would have become invisible.



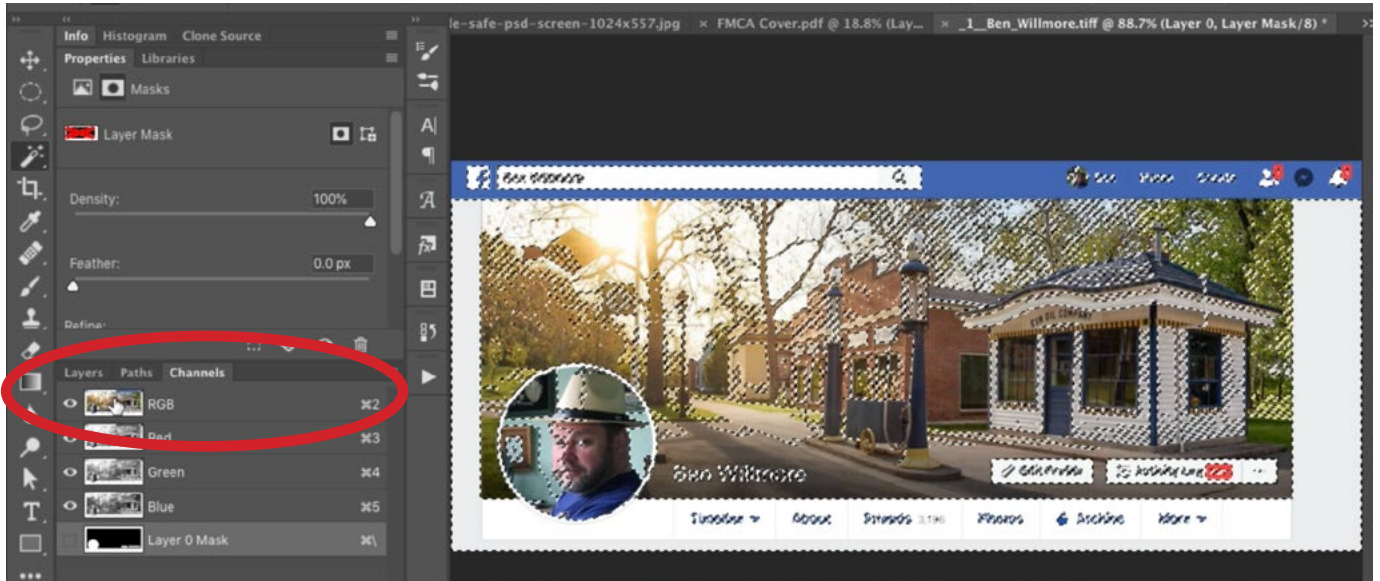
The Elliptical Marquee tool is being used to make a selection around the profile picture. I'll then fill the selection with white in order to remove the layer mask in that area and make the picture visible.



You can tell that this layer mask has been disabled because it has a red X over the thumbnail.

The last thing I need to make visible is my name, which appears directly to the right of the profile picture. For this, I will bring the mask's Density setting back to 100 and then I will temporarily disable the mask. Disable a layer mask by holding the Shift key and clicking on the layer mask thumbnail in the Layers panel. When a mask is disabled, a red X will appear over the mask thumbnail. The mask still exists. It's just temporarily hidden.

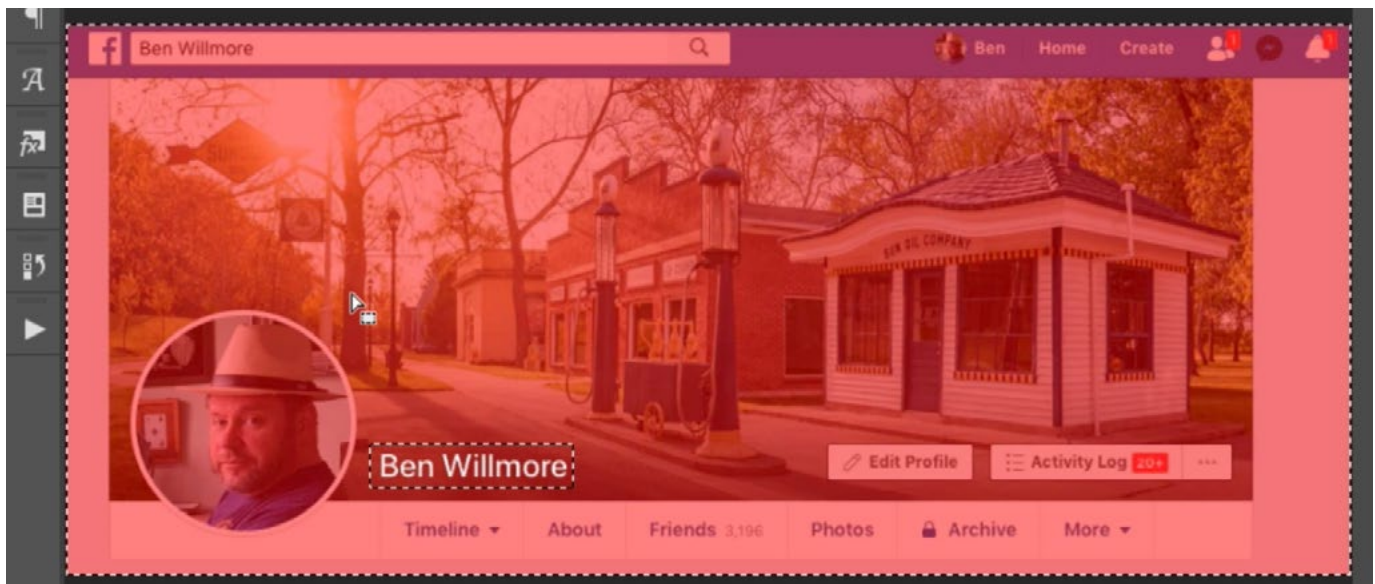
I need to make a selection of my name, and to do this, I'll use a trick that makes a selection based on the brightness of the image. I'll open the Channels panel (It's usually docked along with the Layers panel) and hold down the Command key (Ctrl on Win) while clicking on the thumbnail for the top-most channel, named RGB. This will give me a selection based on brightness. Everything that is completely white will be 100% selected. Anything that is completely black will not be selected at all. Everything in between will be partially selected.



I made a selection based on brightness by holding down the Command key (Ctrl on Win) and clicking on the thumbnail for the top-most channel, named “RGB.”

Now that I have that selected, I will return to the Layers panel and refine the selection. I will type the Q key to enter Quick Mask Mode, which gives me a red overlay in all areas that are not selected. I can adjust this overlay to control what areas are being selected. I'll go to the Image menu and choose Adjustments > Levels. In the Levels dialog, I will use the eyedropper tools to refine the selection. The black eyedropper will force areas to black, or in the case of a Quick Mask, to red. I will activate the black eyedropper and click somewhere right outside my name. This ensures that this area is not selected at all. I know that my name is completely selected because it was white. I'll click OK to exit the Levels dialog.

Now, to make sure that my name is the only thing selected, I will use the Rectangular Marquee Tool to make a selection around my name and then I will go to the Select menu and choose Inverse in order to get the opposite (where the rest of the image is selected). I'll then use the Fill command (Edit > Fill) to fill the selection with black. This will ensure that no other areas are selected. I'll tap the Q key again to exit Quick Mask Mode and I can see that there is only a selection around my name.



In Quick Mask Mode, I used the Rectangular Marquee to make a selection around my name and next I will invert the selection so that everything EXCEPT my name is selected.

I'll reactivate the layer mask by holding the Shift key and clicking on the mask thumbnail again. I will make sure that the mask is active and not the layer. I want the contents of the selection to show up, so I will fill the selection with white. (White parts of the mask reveal the layer it's attached to.)

Now I have the document set up so that it can be overlaid on another image, so I will use the Save As command and save the file using the PNG file format. Remember, this is the format that supports transparency.

Overlaying the Facebook layout on an image in Lightroom It's now time to head back into Lightroom. I'll find a folder of images I might want to use for my cover photo. I'll select one and then enter the Loupe View. To get the image overlay, I'll go to the View menu, choose Loupe Overlay and turn on the "Show" setting. This will use the previous image I chose to overlay, so from that same menu, I will select the "Choose Layout Image" option. I'll be prompted to choose the PNG file from my hard drive. The image will be overlaid on the active image. I can hold down the Command key (Ctrl on Win) and drag on the overlay to reposition it on the image and I can also use the corner handles to scale the overlay if necessary.

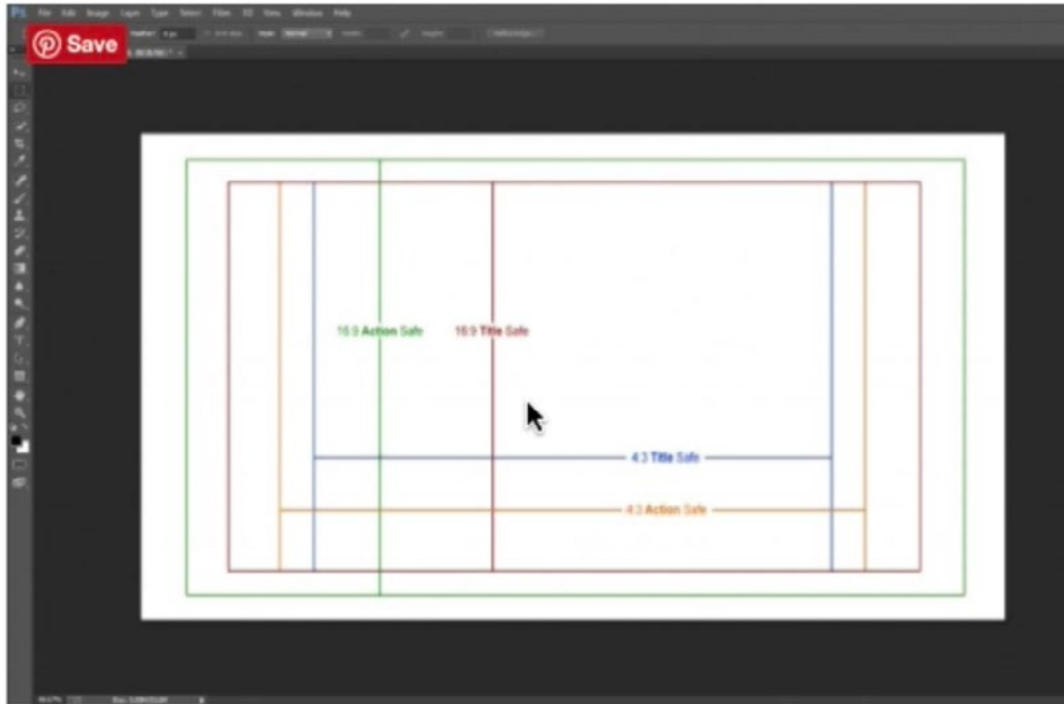
In the video example, the underlying image didn't work so I will use the left and right arrow keys to cycle through different images in the folder to see how they look with the same overlay. I found one that would work better, so I again held down the Command key to reposition and scale the image to the ideal size for the overlay. When I'm done, I'll go back to the View menu, choose Image Overlay and then turn off the "Show" setting. This will remove the overlay.



I used the Facebook layout as an image overlay in Lightroom and am cycling through my images to see which would work best.

Video Overlay example

In the next example, let's look at how to use overlays to save an image for use in video. I'm not as familiar with video requirements, but I've been asked to send an image to a video editor and I need to keep the content within the "title safe area." Not knowing what this was, I looked it up and found a series of guides for video purposes. I would love to get these guides into Lightroom so that I can choose the correct photo for use in the video. I will download the image file that contains the guides and I will open that image in Photoshop.



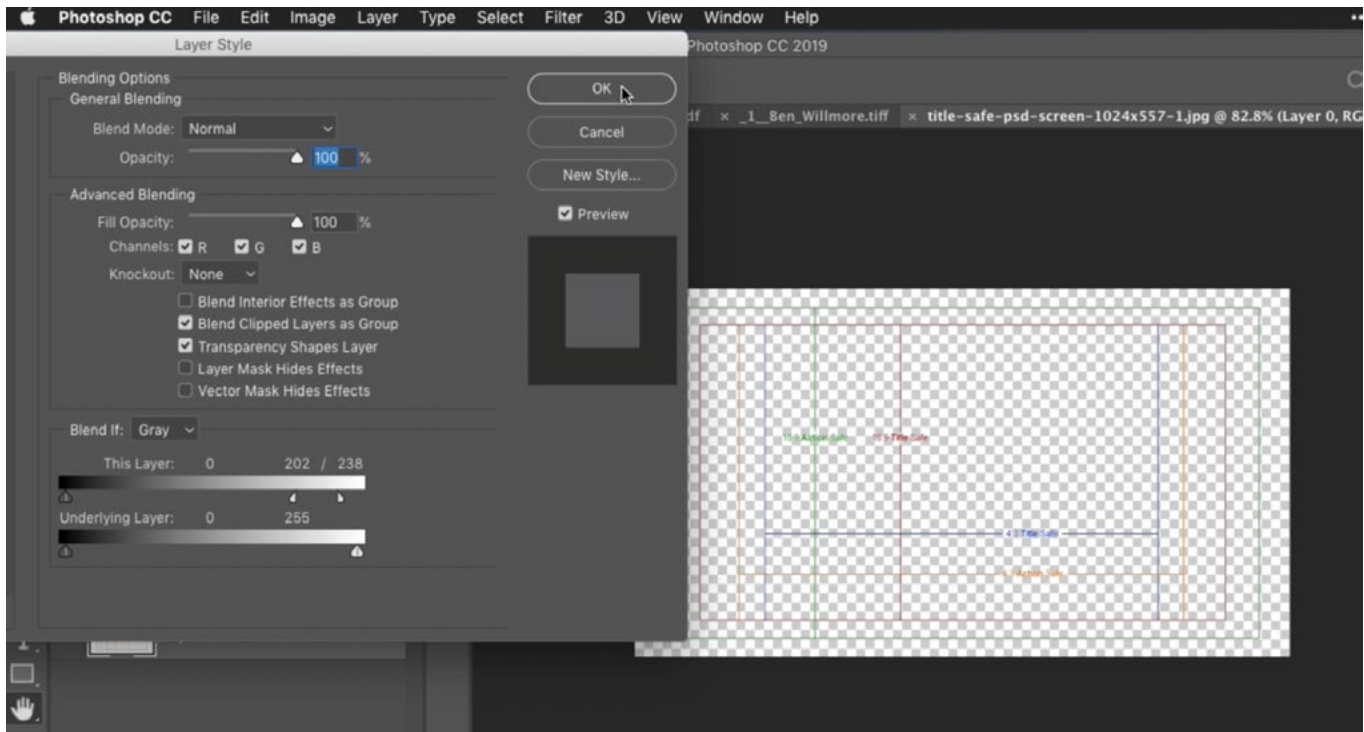
This is the guides image that I downloaded from the Internet. I'll need to remove the white background.

Using the blending sliders to remove a white background The image contains size guides, with each guide as a separate color. The background is white, and I want the background to be transparent so that I can overlay this image on top of my photographs in Lightroom. To achieve this, I'm going to use the blending sliders, located within the Layer Styles dialog.

In this video example, the FX icon (for adding layer styles) at the bottom of the Layers panel is grayed out, indicating it's not available. This will happen whenever the active layer is locked. The image layer is locked because it's also the Background layer, and the Background layer will always be locked. To unlock it, simply click on the Lock icon to the right of the layer thumbnail. I did that, and the FX icon became available.

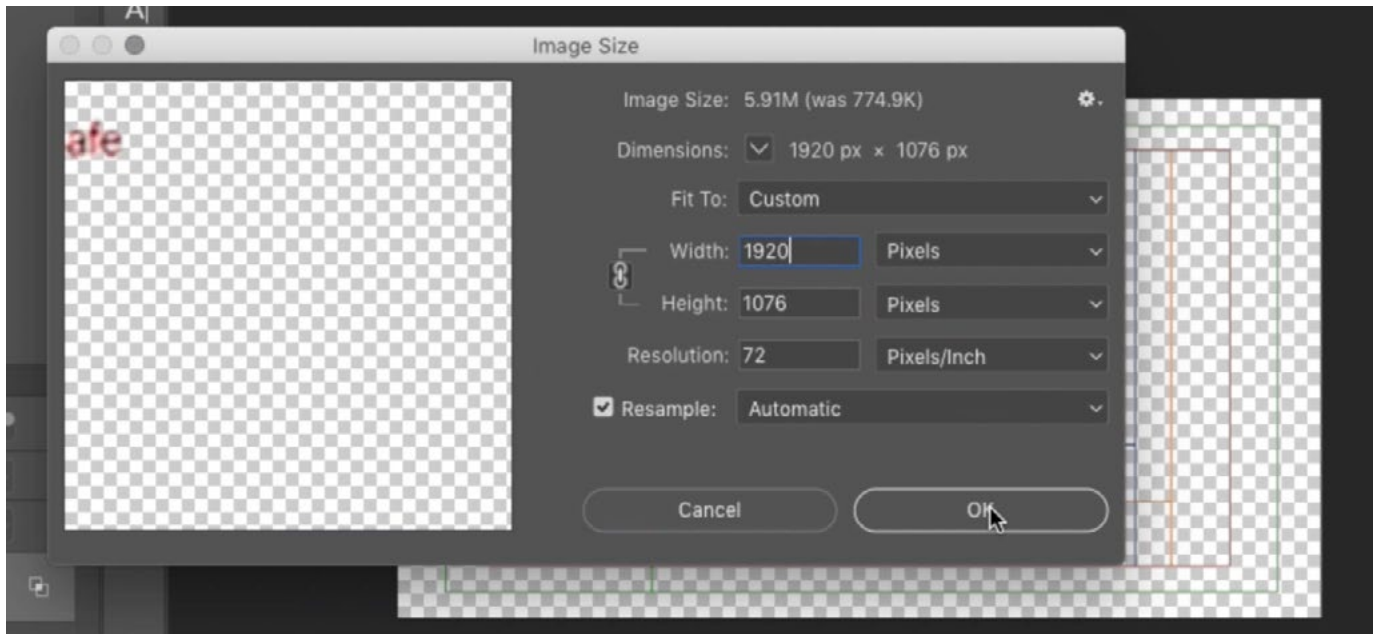
I'll click on the FX icon and choose Blending Options from the pop-up menu. This will bring up the Layer Style dialog and the blending sliders will be near the bottom. I'm going to use the sliders labeled "This Layer" because it's the active layer I want to affect. I will drag the white slider (the one on the right) to the left until all of the white background disappears. By moving this slider to the left, I'm hiding

more and more of the bright areas in the layer. To get a smooth transition between what parts of the layer are visible and the parts that are not visible, I can hold down the Option key and drag one side of the slider so that it splits in two. Splitting the slider will create a smoother transition. I'll click OK to close the Layer Style dialog.



The white blending slider under the “This Layer” gradient is being used to hide the white background from the active image.

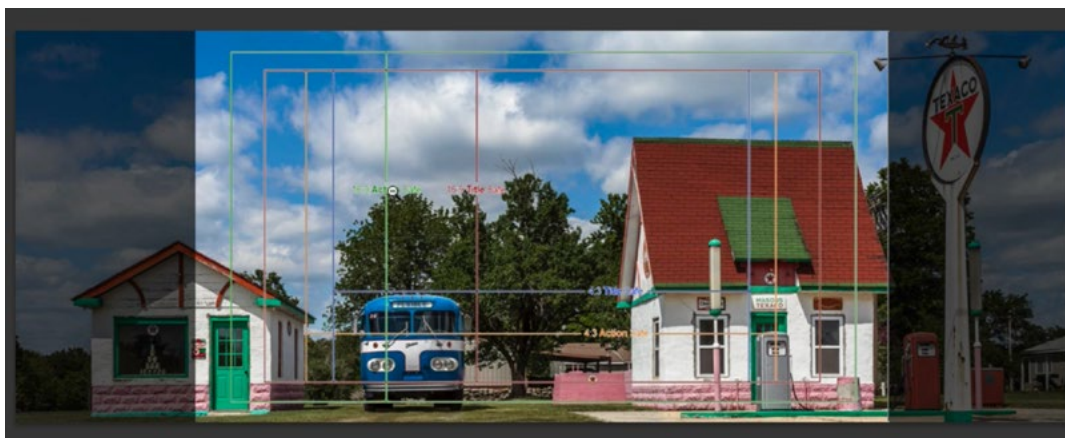
Now I have the white background removed, so I just need to make sure this image is the correct size for video, which is 1920 x 1080 pixels. I'll click on the Image menu and choose Image Size. When the Image Size dialog appears, I'll change the Width dimension to 1920. The Height dimension automatically scales, in proportion, to 1076, which is close enough to 1080, so I'll click OK to resize the image. Now, to make sure the image is EXACTLY 1920 x 1080, I'll click back on the Image menu and choose Canvas Size. In the Canvas Size dialog, I can use the Width and Height fields to scale the canvas size independently of the image size. The Width is already 1920, so I just need to change the Height field to 1080 and click OK.



The Image Size dialog (Found under the Image menu) is being used to set the size to closely match the size we'd want to use for video (1920 x 1080).

It's now time to save the image so I'll use the Save As command to save the document in the PNG format. Again, the PNG format is what I need for this purpose because it supports transparency.

I'll open Lightroom's Library Module, choose the photo I think I'll want to use in the video, and open that image in the Loupe View. I'll click on the View menu and choose Loupe Overlay > Choose Layout Image. I'll be prompted to select the image from my hard drive so I'll navigate to the location where I saved the guides image and click the Choose button.



The guides image is being overlaid in Lightroom so that I can see how my image needs to be cropped for video purposes.

The guides will now be positioned as an overlay on my image and I can move them around to see how much of the image is appropriate to use.

InDesign

If you create a layout using InDesign, you can use that layout as an image overlay in Lightroom. Simply export the layout by going to the main menu at the top of the interface and choosing File > Export. Make sure to choose PNG format because it supports transparency. Then, you can follow the same steps to overlay the layout image in Lightroom.