

# AKVIS Photo Enhancer version 10

Robert Thompson

Despite some great features, *Enhancer* fails to enhance my photo editing skills.

AKVIS' *Photo Enhancer* version 10 provides lots of great tools to improve photo appearance over the product I'm currently using as my photo editor. Although it has some great features, a few downsides I have seen challenge usability of this digital photo enhancement tool.

Akvis Enhancer is designed to improve photographic details to create a more realistic-looking digital photo. When we humans review a scene, our minds automatically adjust for factors such as brightness, darkness and shadow detail, color sharpness and clarity, and so on. Akvis Enhancer helps to correct these issues that digital cameras typically are not designed to adjust.

*Enhancer* is available in three versions and prices ranging from \$69 (Home Standard version) to \$99 (Home Deluxe) and \$170 (Business Professional), depending on how many PC's it is to be run on, and whether a stand-alone or plug-in application is required. The Business/Professional version is for those who use it professionally. The version I reviewed is the Home Deluxe, which can be used on 2 PC's in stand-alone and plug-in modes.

Many Tucson Computer Society members know I am visually impaired and depend on screen magnification and text-to-speech screen reading software to access my computer; I would not be using a computer without these tools. I also enjoy taking digital photographs and want to edit them or display them larger – even significantly magnify them – on my PC to see additional details. I use Corel's *PaintShop Pro Photo XI* software, which does a beautiful job of showing photo detail and allowing screen image manipulation with magnification. *PaintShop Pro's* interface is easier for me to use than that of *Enhancer*.

Most photo-editing applications sport a series of commands such as File, Edit, View, Tools, and so on, with additional commands accessed with pull-down menus. This menu style is absent with *Enhancer*, replaced with tiny action icons. Users might need to refer to the instruction manual to see what they mean.

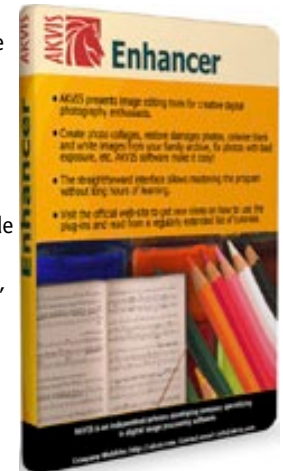
When I turn on my magnification software and open an image, the on-screen photos displayed in both the original and modified image panes completely disappear. All I see is a blank white space where the image should be while the user interface of slider bars, text, and other commands appears normally. Needless to say, the process of making a slider adjustment with the magnification software turned on, turning it off to see the image, and turning on the magnifier again to continue editing would be cumbersome at best.

Using Microsoft's *Magnify* program doesn't do much better, as those who have experimented with this little Windows application know. I have no work-around for being able to see the display adequately. I suspect that the problem lies in how the software interacts with the video card inside the pc. The *Enhancer* software is not written for on-screen accessibility for those who use magnification software. It would be a good idea for them to consider re-writing the application for accessibility so it will conform with accessibility design guidelines.

The user interface shows many small icons at the top of the screen. There seems to be no task bar to show such actions as File, Edit, View, and so on, with drop-down actions. Check the documentation for icons and their actions. The interface shows the source image on a main panel of the screen, with a resulting, smaller view of the edited image at the upper right. I learned a neat trick: Left-click the mouse on the "before" image to see the edited image.

AKVIS products are directed toward a worldwide market. Material is written in Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, and Russian. Click the language box at the upper right of the screen to switch to another language.

Documentation is available as a separate *Acrobat* .pdf file. Although its 56-page presentation includes many photos to



demonstrate product features and some screen-shots, the English language version needs to be re-written by having a native English-speaking author re-write the manual completely for clarity and language usage. By re-writing the document, users will be able to better focus on concepts and product features.

Despite my concerns of the downloadable *Acrobat* .pdf file, however, online tutorial files I have seen are better-written and provide a greater in-depth presentation of information. I suspect that this difference in documentation quality could be due to a wide base of online reviewers.

With these issues in mind, I cannot tell you by experience how to use the product, but I can describe many of them and tell you how they are used to enhance photos. Let's start off with editing modes. Access program tools through one of these modes.

Akvis *Enhancer* is one of many photo enhancement software packages. Most *Enhancer* features work the same, whether the program is run in a stand-alone mode by itself, or if it is running from within another photo-editing application. These modes include:

**Enhancer mode** handles such issues as color correction, focus, and color definition. It identifies color gradient differences between adjacent pixels to correct focus issues. This technique helps to reveal details in both shadowed areas, mid-tone and brightly overexposed areas.

**Focus mode** identifies out-of-focus areas and enables their correction. Correct the out-of-focus areas in an entire photo or within specific areas.

**Smart Correction mode** enables color correction in light or dark areas and in the whole photo or just certain areas. A typical photo that uses this correction has been over-exposed for skylight and underexposed in shadow areas. *Enhancer* is designed to correct both areas simultaneously.

These features can be performed from within the plug-in application. HDR mode, however, can be done only in a stand-alone application of *Enhancer*.

High Dynamic Range Imaging (HDRI) mode is the only *Enhancer* mode that cannot be run from within another photo application; it must be run in the

stand-alone version. Examples of images on which HDRI techniques work best are those with extremely bright and dark areas where detail is lost.

HDRI uses exposure values of a series of four (or more) pictures of a scene photographed at a range of exposure values. The software compares bright and dark areas in each photograph to create a single image that will display shadow, mid-tone, and bright details in their correct exposure values.

Additional tools can be used to further define and correct color, contrast, and tonal values and define image quality beyond that which most video monitors are capable of displaying. A link to a comprehensive tutorial and explanation of the HDRI feature and application is located at <http://akvis.com/en/enhancer-tutorial/application/hdr-mode.php>. It's a great read and follow-up as you read this review.

Another powerful *Enhancer* feature is its ability to save pre-sets. Like a macro in a word processing program, a pre-set is used to apply the same corrections to individual photos or a series of images that require the same correction technique. While focus, color correction, and various forms of enhancement modes are available in many photo editing packages, I think that *Enhancer's* HDRI mode and the ability to save presets are among its most powerful features available.

Chances are very good that most current photo-editing packages sport many, if not most of the features available in *Enhancer* version 10. If you are a serious photo-editor, it might be worthwhile to consider either the Home Premium or Business/Professional version. In either case, however, I suspect that the HDRI technology is available in other photo packages and I would not overwhelmingly recommend buying this piece.

**About:** AKVIS *Photo Enhancer* version 10

**Vendor:** Akvis  
[www.akvis.com](http://www.akvis.com)

**Price:** \$69 Home plug-in; \$89 Home stand-alone

**Requires:** <http://akvis.com/en/enhancer/system-requirements.php>