Knock-outs, stick-outs, cut-outs
Clipping paths separate objects from background

Knock-outs are everywhere. But they're not new. One of the reasons they've come back is that **Photoshop** allows computer operators to precisely define the **path** that will serve to **separate** the object from the background. And unlike those cuts with an X-acto knife into a halftone negative of years ago, Photoshop paths can be saved and edited. • **BY BRADLEY WILSON**

ORIGINAL PHOTO

The key to creating knock-outs in Photoshop, as it turns out, is simple – working with paths. Illustrators have been working with paths for years, ever since drawing programs such as FreeHand and Illustrator hit the market.

Unlike everything else in Photoshop, or any other image-editing program, paths depend on working with Bezier curves (points and line segments) rather than pixels (picture elements). Think of a path as the cut made with an X-acto knife. The area behind where path will be cut out.

Unlike pixels which are independent of one another (one can be edited without affecting the other), points depend on one another to form a shape. The points that make up this shape can be edited. More points can be added. Points can be removed. Furthermore, points have handles which control the direction of the line. You can twist a handle to make a path conform to a curved shape.
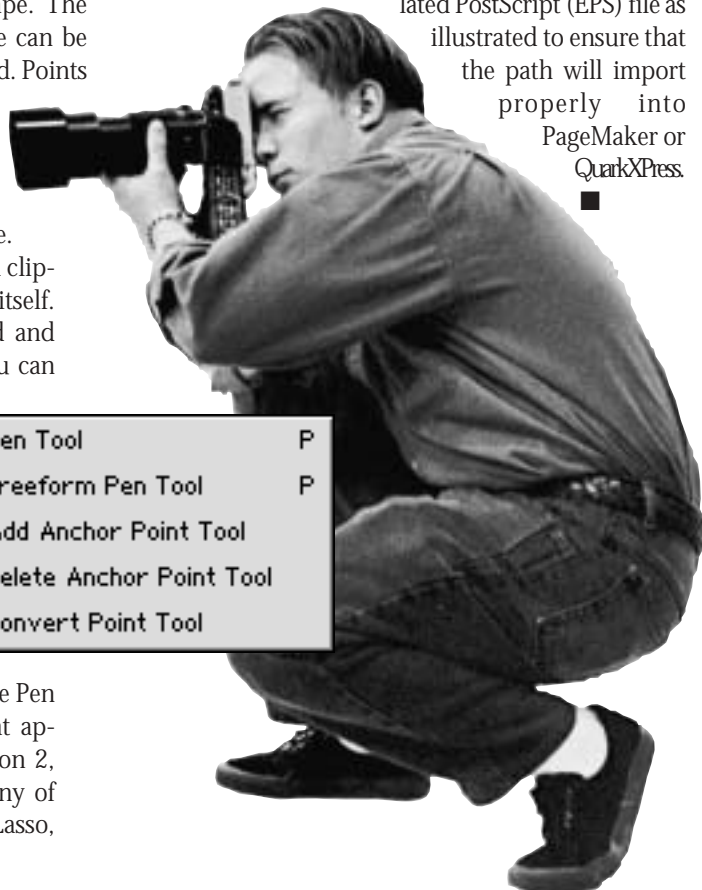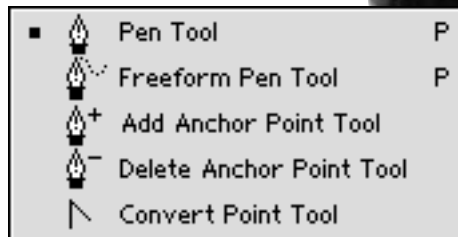
So, the first step in creating a clipping path is creating the path itself. Depending on the background and the complexity of the path, you can use one of two methods to create this path. The first option is to draw it using the tools in the Paths palette (or in the Toolbox in Photoshop 4). Click or click and drag using the Pen tool until you have a path that approximates the shape. Or, option 2, you can select an area using any of the selection tools (Marquee, Lasso,

Magic Wand or Mask) and then use the Make Path function from the Paths palette. You'll have to experiment to see which one works for you.

After you've got the path created, save it. You only have to save the path once; subsequent changes are automatically added to the saved path. Save your document often as well.

With the path created and saved, you can edit it using any of the tools in the Paths palette, moving points, adding points, removing points or changing the direction of points. Use as few points as possible. It only take four points to create a circle; to use more points takes up memory and increases print time.

Finally, save the file as an Encapsulated PostScript (EPS) file as illustrated to ensure that the path will import properly into PageMaker or QuarkXPress. ∎

■	Pen Tool		P
	Freeform Pen Tool		P
	Add Anchor Point Tool		
	Delete Anchor Point Tool		
	Convert Point Tool		

1. NEW PATH

Choose New Path… from the Paths palette.

2. DRAW PATH

Using the pen tools in the Paths palette, draw your path with the Pen tool. Click to add a simple point. Click and drag to add a point on a curve. Use as few points as possible. The Freeform Pen Tool makes this easier, almost drawing the path for you.
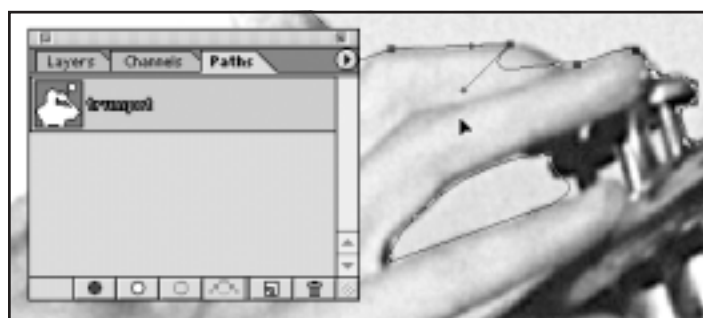
OR

1. SELECT AREA

Using any of the selection tools (Magic Wand, Lasso, Marquee, Mask), select the background. You may have to do this in pieces.

2. MAKE PATH

With the background selected, choose Make Path… from the Paths palette. The lower the tolerance, the more precisely the path will follow your selection.
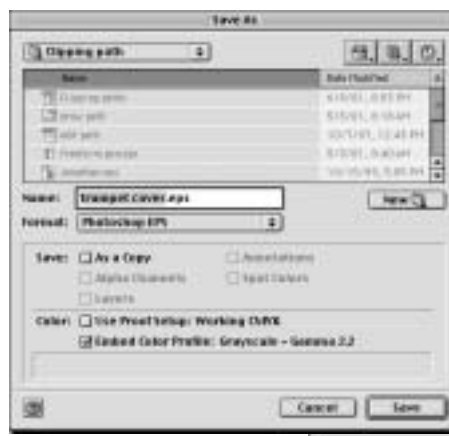
3. SAVE THE PATH

Before you save a created path, it will appear in italics in the Paths palette. It's active when the path is highlighted in gray in the palette. You can draw many paths but only one can be active at a time. And only one can be the designated clipping path. Select Save Path… from the Paths palette.

4. EDIT THE PATH

Your first attempt will probably not be perfect. In fact, getting used to drawing Bezier curves takes a while. Edit the path using the pen tools in the Paths palette. The white boxes indicate anchor points not selected for edit; they turn black when selected.

5. MAKE A CLIPPING PATH

With the path finely tuned, turn it into a clipping path by choosing Clipping Path… from the Paths palette. A path must be active. In the dialog box that comes up, choose the appropriate path from the drop menu. Notice that only *one* path can be selected as a clipping path regardless of how many paths are in the file. Once designated as a clipping path, the name of the path will appear in outline in the Paths palette.

6. SAVE AS EPS

For the file to import correctly into a pagination program and print correctly on high-resolution output devices, save it as an EPS (Encapsulated PostScript) file. Double check that the appropriate clipping path is selected in the dialog box.