Photoshop: Social media icon set

This is an exercise to create a customized and consistently styled social media icon set. It illustrates how a Photoshop document can be set up and organised to create images for a specific purpose as well as how to employ a few rendering techniques and effects.

About the icon
Generally, icons are created for use at these pixel sizes:

<div align="center">

16 x 16
24 x 24
32 x 32
48 x 48
64 x 64
96 x 96
128 x 128

</div>

These sizes are used for creating icons for use with computer operating systems. For icons for used in a web page it is not necessary to follow this convention. As most social media icons are square, for the purposes of this exercise, this convention will be adopted. Also, to create a *favicon* it needs to be 16 x 16.

The key to creating an icon that works successfully is simplicity of design. It needs to be readable when reproduced at a small size. At small sizes detail becomes lost.

Our icon will look like a square 3D tablet with rounded corners. It will be created at 128 x 128 and then output to 32 x 32. It will then be optimised as a 24bit png file to preserve transparency at the rounded corners.

These icons will be based on the original logos (where available). You will find some examples in the folder *social media icons/original icons*. When looking for originals, always choose as large an image size as possible in order to maintain image quality. Another alternative would be to re-create the icon logos using the Pen tool in either Photoshop or Illustrator.

Creating an icon

Create a new document
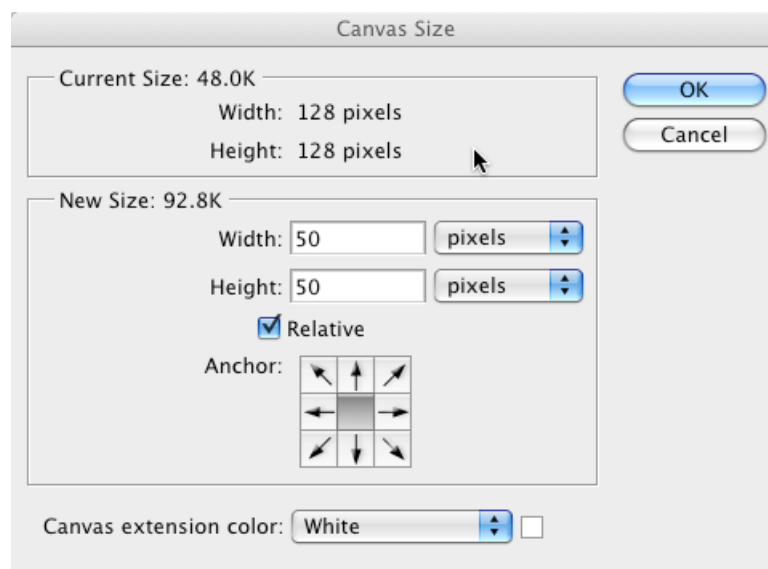Size: 128 x 128 pixels
Resolution: 72 ppi
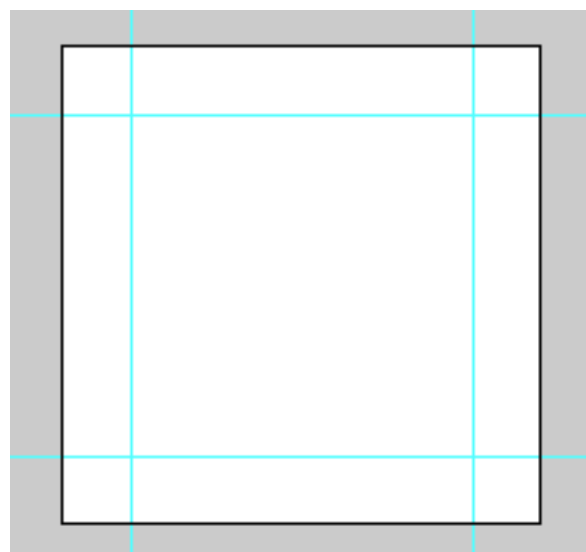Colour Mode: RGB

Guides
Position a guide on each of the four sides. These will help when using the Shape tool and also for cropping.

Canvas size
Increase the canvas size by another 50 or so pixels in height and width. This will place some space around the icon and make it easier to see rather than having the edges up against the edges of the document.
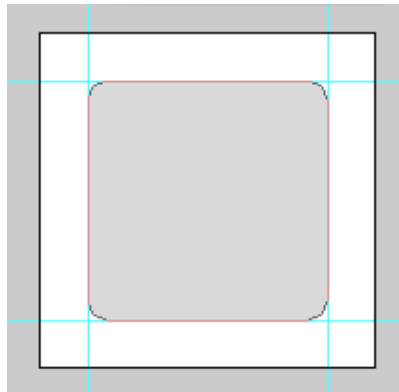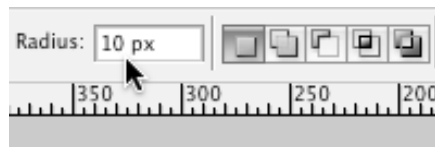

The document should now look like this:

Draw shape

Draw a shape with the Rounded Rectangle tool. Before drawing, set the corner radius from the tool Options panel above the document window.

Colour the shape

Set the predominant colour for the shape by sampling it from the original icon. Use the *Colour Picker* or *Eyedropper* tool to do this. The colour saturation or shade to suit your design can be adjusted in the Colour Picker.
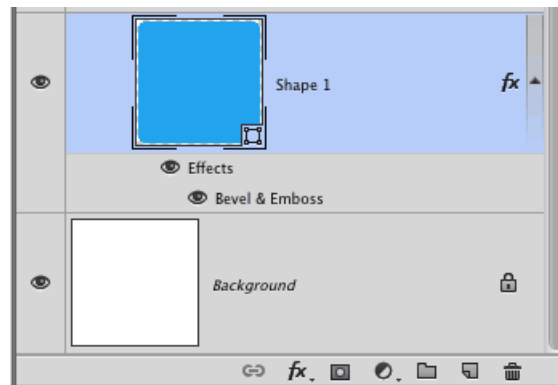
Copy the icon symbol onto the shape

Select the icon symbol on the original. Work to amend the selection or use *Refine Edge* to ensure the selection is accurate. Copy and paste into your document and resize and position as necessary. Colour the symbol as required from Colour Overlay via the *Layer Style* menu.
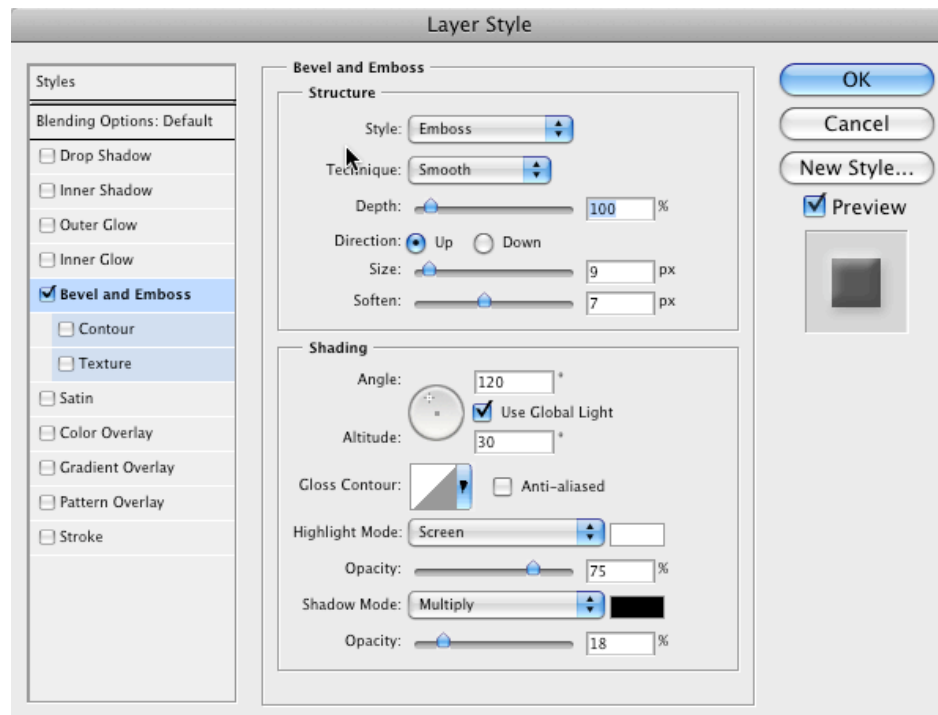
Create a 3D appearance

In the Layers panel, select the shape layer and from the *Layer Style* menu choose *Bevel and Emboss*.

You can set the options similar to the following:

Create highlighting

Highlights can be painted in with a soft edged brush. To do this, create a new layer to paint on then, load a selection of the outline of the shape. This will prevent paint extending beyond the icon area.

To load a selection of the shape, place the cursor over the shape layer thumbnail and click whilst holding the Cmd/Ctrl key.
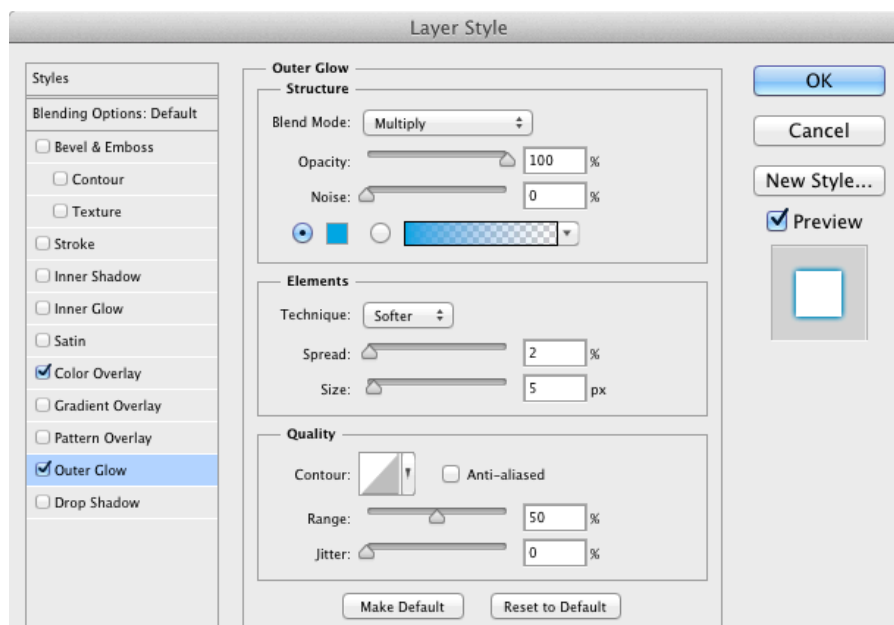
Select a colour that is slightly lighter than the main colour of the shape and paint within the selected area.

Shape outline

Creating an outline stroke for the shape helps to give definition to the edge of the icon. Duplicate the shape layer and move it to the top of the layer stack. Adjust the *Fill* for this layer to zero and remove the Layer Styles. Next, create a new Layer Style for Stroke. Make the size 1 or 2 pixels and set the *Position* to *Inside.* A darker version of the shape colour works well.
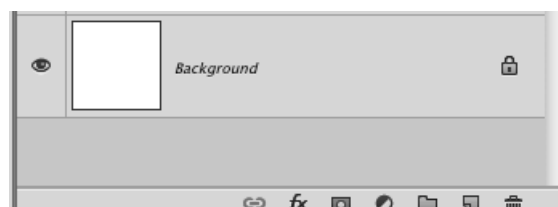
Icon symbol

Next step is to enhance the definition of the icon symbol. This can be achieved with an Outer Glow Layer Style using a colour slightly darker than the colour of the underlying shape.

Producing other icons

The next step is to produce the other icons within the same document. To maintain consistency and reduce time, much of what is to follow can be based on what has already been done. To set up for doing this, create a Layer Group and move all the layers for the current icon into it (not including the *Background* layer).

Name the Layer Group. Then, right click on the Layer Group and go to *Duplicate Group…* and give this group a name. This will duplicate all the contents of the first layer group. Turn off the visibility of the first group and begin to work on the layers of the new group. For each successive icon, duplicate the Layer Group for the previous icon.
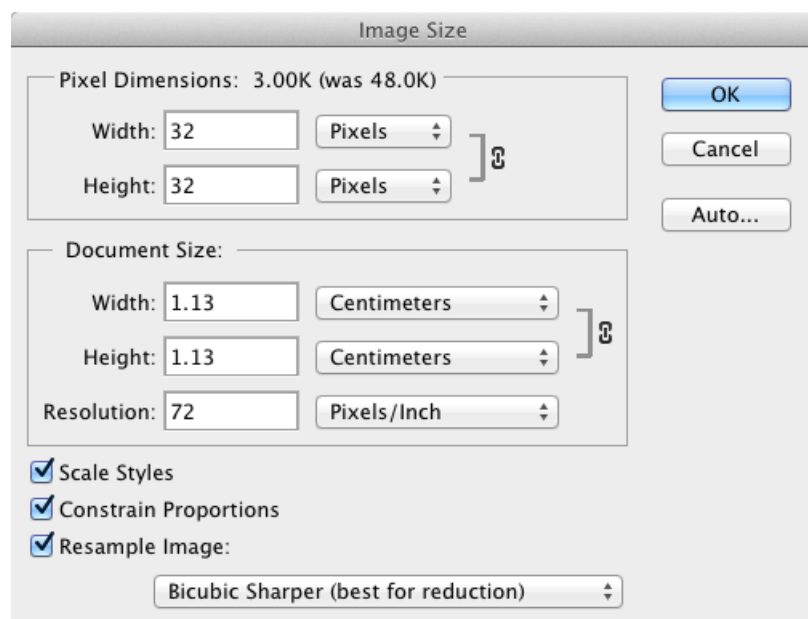
What remains now is largely to change colours of shapes and Layer Styles as required, copy in the new icon logo and remove the previous one. Copy the Layer Styles from the previous logo onto the layer for the new logo. Do this by right clicking on the layer and choose Copy Layer Style. On the new layer, right click and choose Paste Layer Style.

The colour of the layer with the highlights can be changed with Colour Overlay from the Layer Style options.

Resize process
Having completed the icons it is time to re-size the document to the required size for output so they can be used in visual layouts and optimised for use in web pages.

Keep the current document at the size it is and instead re-size a duplicate version. Create a duplicate by going Image > Duplicate… Next, crop the image to the area defined by the guides and finally re-size the document by going Image > Image Size. Enter the required size in *Pixel Dimensions* (32x32 pixels).

Make sure Scale Styles, Constrain Proportions, and Resample Image are selected. For the resampling method choose *Bicubic Sharper*.

At this point it is possible to see how the icons will appear at the smaller size. If there are any issues with visibility at the smaller size then go back to document where they were made originally and make appropriate changes there. Then go through the resizing process again.

Optimising
Optimise each icon in turn. Turn on the visibility of the Layer Group for the icon to be optimised and turn the others off. Also, turn off the visibility of the *Background* layer. This will enable the areas around the rounded corners to

be transparent when the icon is optimised. For best results use the PNG 24 option making sure Transparency is selected.

Using in a visual layout
To transfer an icon to another *open* PS document, right click on the layer group for that icon and choose Duplicate Group… In the dialogue that follows, the open document can be chosen from the drop menu under Destination.

Grouped Layers can be merged into one layer. It may be useful to do this in the target document (e.g. a visual layout) for ease of layer management and to reduce the overall file size. To merge the layers, right click on the layer group and choose Merge Group.