



Tamron Fotovix next to computer: Micro lens attached.

Tamron Fotovix

Jack and Sue Drafahl

ONE OF THE most important challenges of running a photo lab is matching the correct equipment to the job. Many times equipment overkill results in smaller profits. When a customer comes in and wants a 20x30 print from a color slide, you would most likely use 4x5 internegative film to capture the maximum sharpness and detail. When the next customer tells you he wants 4x6 prints from slides, you could change to 35mm internegative film to cut the customer's costs, thus making your lab more competitively priced.

This ongoing campaign for efficiency is also needed in the digital photo lab, and the key word here is *resolution*. In the digital lab, resolution can be controlled in three areas: input, edit, and output. Since processing time for a job can make the difference between profit and loss, the most logical spot to control resolution is in the

beginning—with the input of the image.

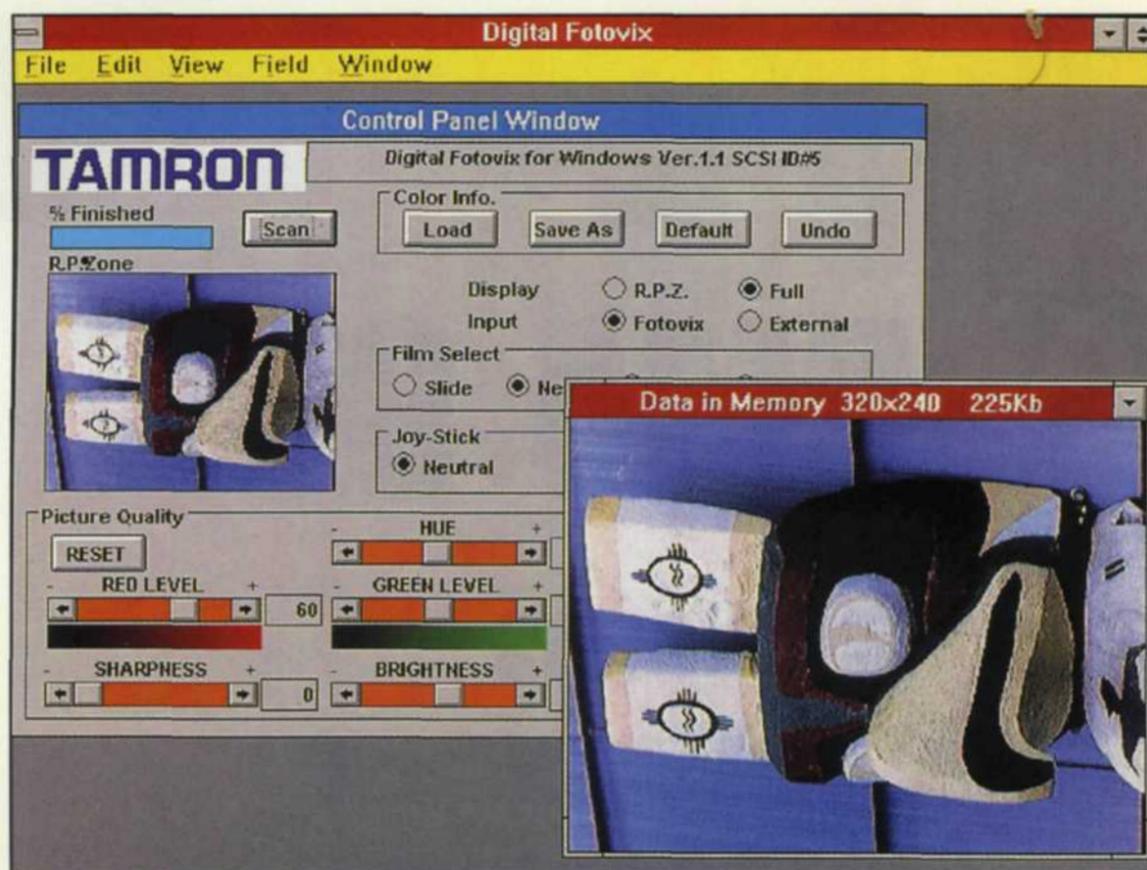
Image input is performed via a film scanner, digital camera or video capture device, such as Tamron's digital Fotovix IIIS-D. Each of these pieces of equipment has a specific purpose, so let's review which would be your choice in a given situation.

If we look at film scanners, we find that they cover a wide variety of scanning situations, but it takes considerable time to set up each image and scan it into the system. High resolution scans are most cost-effective for a scanner because the setup time is only a small percentage of the actual scan time. Low resolution scans on a film scanner usually take longer to set up than the actual scan itself. This makes the film scanner the perfect candidate for high resolution scans, but not necessarily for low res scans.

The second type of digital input device, the digital camera, takes a very short time to bring an image into the system. The problem is that the cameras only shoot at one resolution, which then must be converted for low resolution applications. The digital cameras are still expensive and may not be cost justifiable for use as low resolution input devices. Digital cameras only bring in positive images, thus eliminating direct access to color negatives—the cornerstone of many labs today.

Solution?

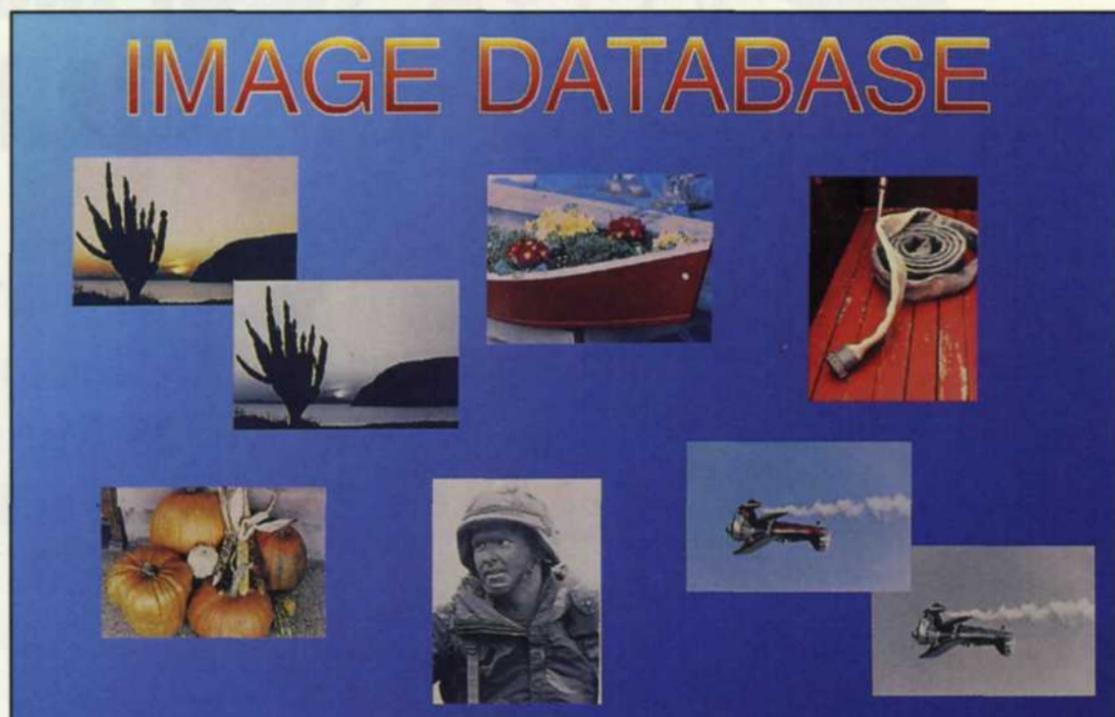
The ideal input device for bringing in low resolution images is a video capture system. With this modified system, black and white negatives, color negatives and slides can be imported into a computer



Capture of color negative.

IIIS-D

Images captured from Fotovix.



system as low resolution images in less than 10 seconds. With this fairly inexpensive system, a lab can bring in dozens of images in minutes and apply them to a variety of digital applications.

Just what kind of applications are appropriate in a digital lab for low resolution images? If you have digital services as part of your lab now, you are probably already doing some low res jobs. You are also probably charging more for them because of the setup time and the cost of equipment required to do the job. In our lab we have requests for low res images for brochure placement, company newsletters, lecture slides, image database systems and color negative previews.

So that you can better understand how a video capture device works and interfaces with other systems, we will take you through setup and use of one of the best

video capture systems on the market: Tamron's Fotovix IIIS-D.

The Fotovix looks very much like a miniature slide duplicator and in effect is a digital slide/negative capture device. The unit consists of an upper stage that contains the camera, lens and controls for focus and image size. The base of the unit houses the light source and device for holding slide/negative carriers. The side of the unit has controls for film type, color balance, and output jacks. The back of the unit has electrical connections for computer communication.

The compact size of the unit allows it to be placed close to your computer system without occupying a lot of space. Unlike other video capture systems on the market that use a video capture board, the Fotovix is directly linked to the computer via SCSI interface. If you have a Mac, you

simply attach the SCSI cable from the back of the unit to the back of your computer.

PC users will have to have a SCSI board installed in their computer in order to communicate with the Fotovix. This is usually not a problem, as most PC users already have a SCSI board for scanners, film recorders, hard disks, or digital camera systems. The Fotovix comes with several cables and SCSI terminators, so that the system can be quickly incorporated into your system.

Simple Software

A single diskette holds the installation software, and is installed in only a few minutes. When you install the software it becomes a plug-in for Adobe Photoshop software. The unit we tested was in-

stalled and operating in less than 10 minutes—from opening the box, to capturing slides and negatives into our system.

To operate the system, merely turn on the unit, start your computer, select the film type and slide in the images via the carrier at the base of the unit. Start the Fotovix software on your computer and in a few seconds the first image is on your screen. Exposure and cropping is accomplished using the focus and zoom controls on the lens stage above the images. As you adjust each of the controls, a visual representation of the final image appears on the edit screen. Additional software controls include contrast, color balance, brightness, sharpness and hue.

When the image looks good on the computer screen, you can then save it as a BMP/TIFF (PC) or PICT/TIFF (MAC) file for use in the low resolution applications we discussed earlier. Once you have an image set up, similar images placed on the Fotovix need no adjustment and are quickly added to the saved files.

If you handle a large quantity of 35mm color negatives, you can also use the Fotovix as a screen viewer. Simply connect a video jack to the side of the unit and run it to a VCR or TV set. You can then direct-view the negatives on a TV set or choose to record video images on a VCR tape. Images captured in this way are almost instantaneous and can be a great way for you to discuss problem negatives with a customer or lab printers. You can also set up a VCR tape capture service where customers can look at their images on a TV—just like those images created and previewed from a photo CD.

If you have customers who want to make prints or slides from a video source, you can attach either the camera or VCR directly to the back of the Fotovix. This will allow you to capture still images from the video source and file them or send them out to an output device.

One accessory expands the capabilities of the Fotovix even more than standard video capture system. If you remove the film carrier and cover the light source with a special black substage cover, you can capture images of objects that are from 3–5mm thick. Stamps, coins and jewelry are just a few of the 3-D objects you can record to create a database.

Since you can capture images in less than 10 seconds, the Fotovix is the perfect tool for stock photography. You can digitally archive using a database—or modem images to clients, since the files are small. You can group images together and prepare a contact sheet on your desktop color printer. In the stock photo world today,

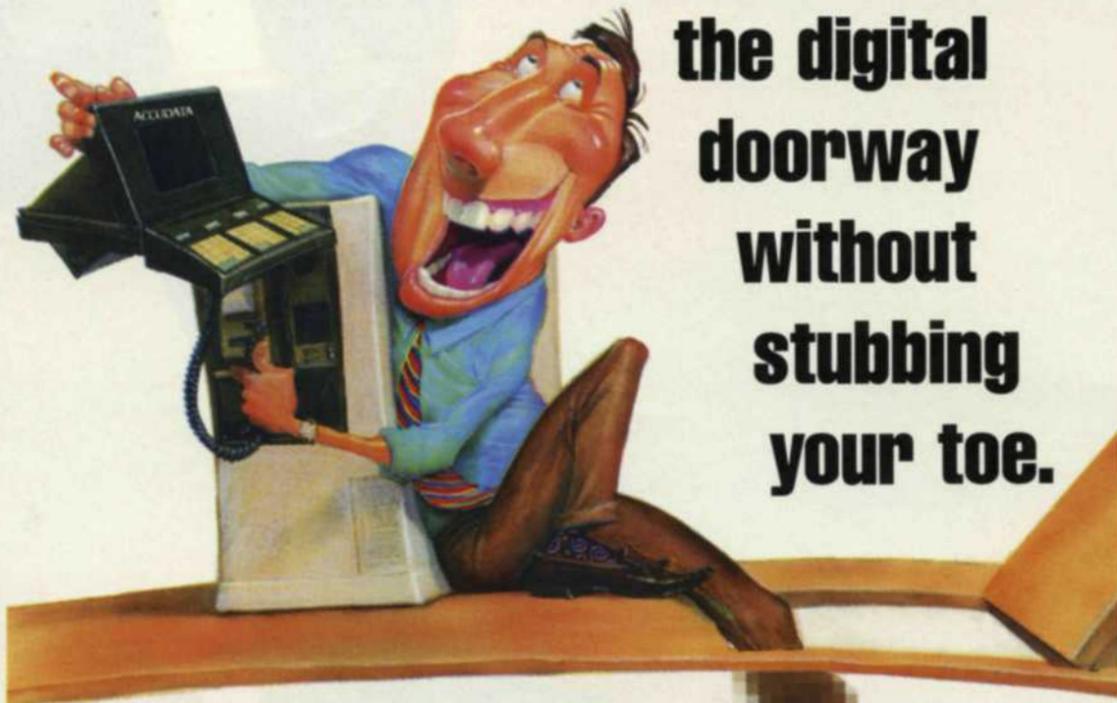
speed is a priority. If you can get your image to the editor before the next guy, you win. The Fotovix gives you an edge.

When you need the high quality, high resolution scans, then a film scanner or digital camera is your answer. Tamron's Fotovix IIIS-D is not meant to replace these products. Instead, it needs to be sitting on the desk right next to your higher resolution systems. The true craftsman knows how to choose and properly use his or her tools. Why use an expensive high resolution system to do a job that requires

a lower resolution system? Your profits will increase when you can correctly match the right equipment to the job. To become a photo lab craftsman, include the Tamron Fotovix IIIS-D as a tool in your digital lab.

Jack and Sue Drafahl own and operate a custom lab in Portland, OR. They are also professional photographers, specializing in underwater photography.

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