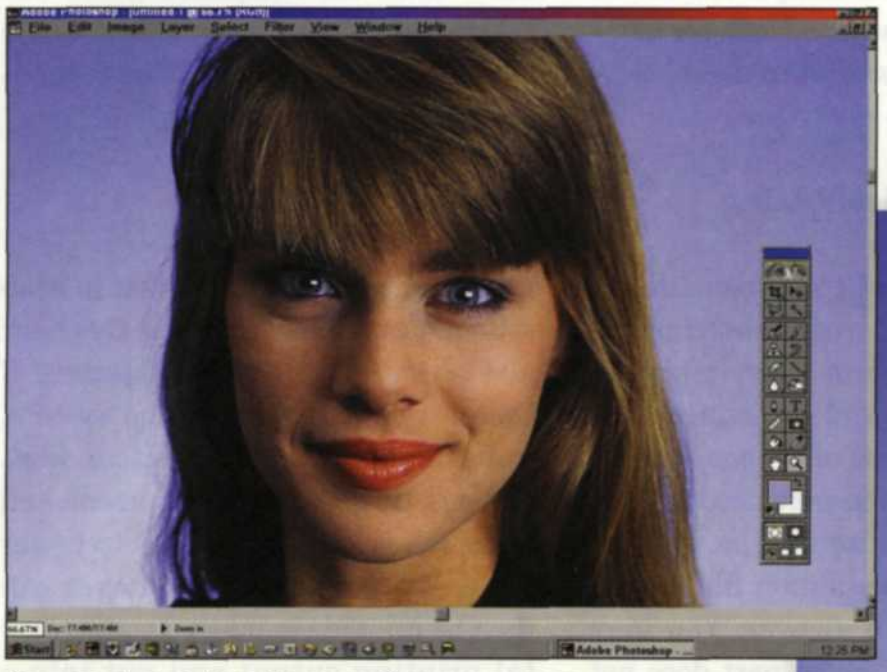


Screen shot of dupe from medium res camera

Back of DCS 560 shot with medium res camera

A Mamiya 645 was used to shoot this image. We used the cyan, magenta, and yellow in the duplicator to get a close color balance, and then used the auto balance in Photoshop 5.0 to complete the image.

IF YOU LOOK around, you'll see that the digital camera has many useful applications in your lab that will save you both time and money.

Our first experience with digital cameras came when the low resolution varieties first appeared on the market. At that time, the quality was poor and the price tag high. About a year ago, we were given the assignment to review an Agfa, a Fuji and a Kodak digital camera, so we gave them another try. We were very impressed with the improved quality and reasonable pricing.

This month we decided to take yet another look at what was available in the digital camera market. Kodak was kind enough to loan us a DC 265 and a DCS 620 digital camera for our research. The DC 265 is an intermediate level camera with a resolution of 1536 x 1024 and a price tag less than $1000. The DCS 560 has a resolution of 3040 x 2008 and a price tag between $25,000 and $30,000. That's a price too steep for many, but as technologies improve, time tends to bring prices down.

The next step was to put these guys to work and see if these cameras had any business being in the photo lab. We analyzed each of the tasks in our digital lab to see just what jobs we could assign to the digital camera.

We quickly discovered that many housekeeping tasks normally done with traditional cameras could be done faster and cheaper using digital. We also discovered that the digital camera

made an excellent companion to the traditional film camera. Here are a few ways you can incorporate a digital camera into the photo workplace.

Troubleshooting

When a piece of equipment in the lab breaks down, troubleshooting the problem may require a serviceman to make the repairs. Most equipment manufacturers now offer tech support via the Web. All you may need to do is shoot a digital picture of the problem and send a low resolution file to tech support to get an answer. You may also find that a broken part does not have a part number. A quick digital shot, and it's off to the parts department via email.

New Construction

Twice in the last two of years we have made modifications to our building to add additional lab space. As the walls went up, we used a shooting trick we had used on our personal home some years before. Then we used film, now we use digital. In order to keep track of all the wiring and plumbing in the building, we would photograph all interior walls before they were closed up with insulation and sheet rock.

Later, when we wanted to make any modifications, we could print out these construction pictures and save ourselves a lot of potential problems. The digital pictures enabled us to preview each shot before moving on, whereas with film, we had to process to see the results

Equipment Inventory

Over the years, we have made it a policy in our lab to keep a photo inventory of all our equipment and supplies. With film, it was expensive, time consuming for the processing and created storage problems for the images. Using the digital camera, we shoot, verify each shot is good, then let the camera batch download the images onto a CD. Each file is dated, so we know when the equipment photo was taken and where it was located in the lab. We then store the CD at a different location for safekeeping.

Work Flow

Analyzing kinks in work flow in a lab sometimes requires that you step back and take a look at the overall picture. If there are bottlenecks in the system, you can photograph the various work stations, traditional lab equipment, and other lab related operations to better study the problem. The images can then be printed via inkjet or other digital printing output and put into a report. Lab managers can then go over the images to find ways to improve the work flow situation.

Microfiche

In past years, when we wanted to get a visual record of sheets of slides, we would lay the pages on a translucent copy stand, load film, and document each page. Again, the cost of supplies and the time to process made this task inefficient and time consuming. With the digital camera, your time and supply cost is greatly reduced. You will also know that you got the shot since most digital cameras have an instantaneous viewing screen. It is almost like having a digital Polaroid.

Slide Duplication

As we moved our lab further into digital, we thought some of our traditional equipment would fall by the wayside. The slide duplicator is a good example. As more presentations go digital, the need for slide duplicates drastically drops. The DCS 560 camera has the same resolution as most of the slide scanners on the market, so we thought, why not attach it to the duper and digitize images?

Instead of 30–60 seconds for each slide, it would only take a second. That is, if we could load them into the duper that fast. We had a holder for 120, and 4x5, so we saw no reason

why we could not make digital images from any film format.

We used the white balance on the camera, but found that tweaking the cyan, magenta, and yellow controls on the duper obtained better results. The best part was that we could run a ring around for color and exposure and see the results in minutes on the computer screen.

No Flicker Pictures

An interesting aspect of shooting digital images of computer screens is that the flicker you get with traditional cameras doesn't appear. We're not sure exactly what the difference is, but we do know that the balance between the screen and flash is better. So if you need a shot for advertising or your Web page, you might consider the digital camera as an option.

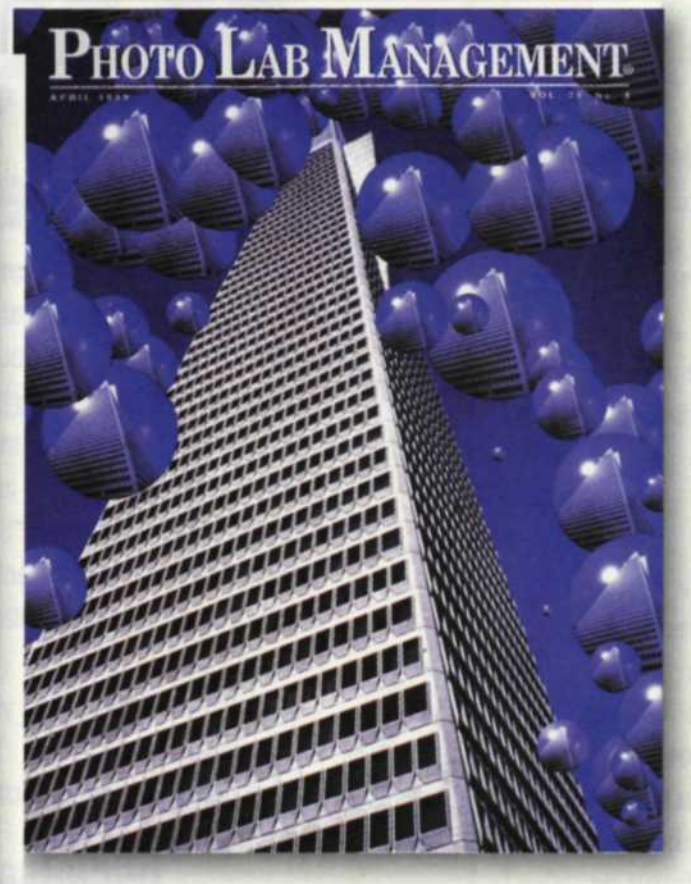
No More Moire

When you scan offset printing, the scanner software must go though a special process to remove the moire pattern caused by the scan lines intersecting with the original printing screens. When we tested the DCS 650 with some of the offset print copy, we found the moire problem did not exist. The best part was that we could shoot as fast as we could place pages on the copy stand. In the time it would have taken to scan a couple of pages, we had digitized more than 10 pages. If you have a large volume of offset printing to digitize, this is a very fast, efficient method.

We did find that the initial setup of the DCS 560 required exposure compensation for the white pages. Once that was done, we locked in the exposure which guaranteed they were all the same.

Damage to Orders

There have been a couple of times when a product was damaged in shipment to us. We simply grabbed the digital camera to quickly document the damage. A picture of the damage



Halftone printing copy samples to hi-res camera

DCS 560 on slide duper

DCS 560 & DCS 265 with med. res camera

was emailed so the client could decide on the next step. We kept the file as proof of the damage even after we returned the package to the shipper for evaluation. The old adage that "a picture is worth a thousand words" did not specify that it had to be made from film!

In-House Services

Many of the larger photo labs may have in-house newsletters, employee identification cards or displays showing the employee of the month. With the digital camera, the photo goes directly from the shooting location to the computer. This saves both time and money in putting the project together.

Final Words About Digital Cameras

We were very impressed with the improved quality of the two digital cameras Kodak sent us. Previously, we had seen a couple of samples from a DCS 560, but never realized just how good the camera was until we ran it through its paces.

It is really difficult to believe that you can shoot high quality 18 megabyte files as fast as this camera does. We would highly recommend logging onto the Net and taking a closer look at all the digital cameras on the market today.

We have been in traditional photography for more than 25 years, and seen a lot of new technology come and go. We don't worry much about the inevitable transition from traditional to digital. In fact, we are enjoying the ride. Get on board and put the digital camera to work in your photo lab.

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