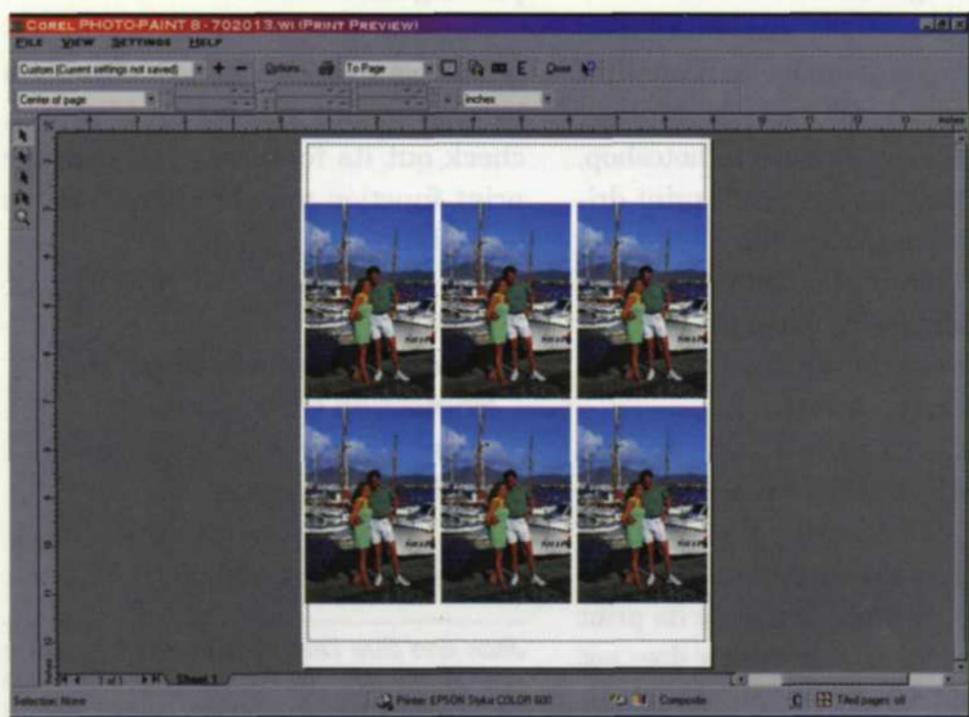
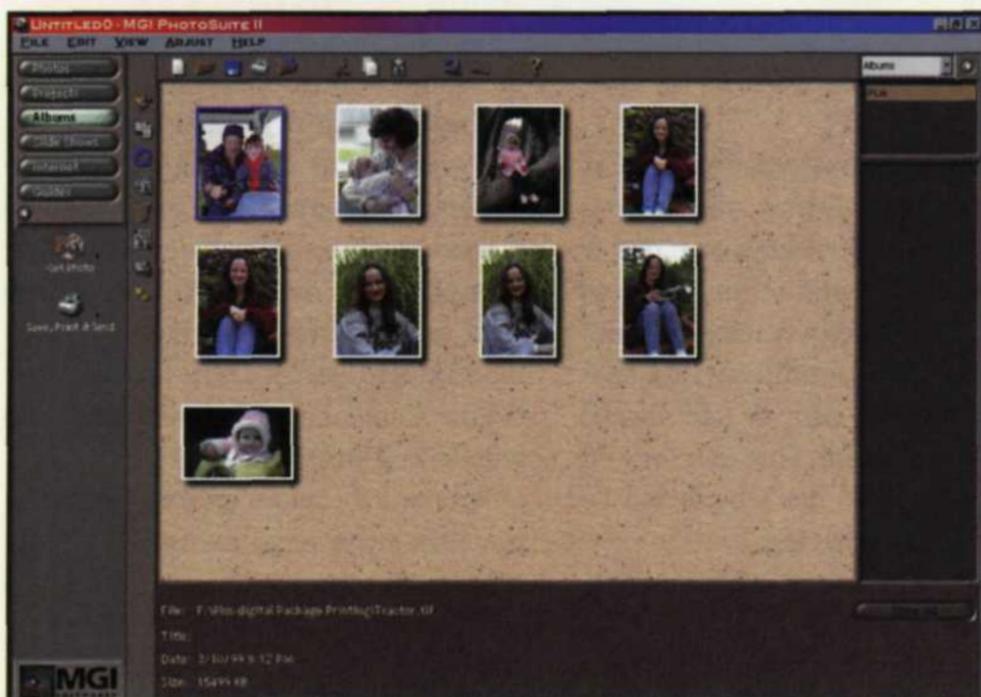


Inkjet printing has now become an accepted output media in most digital labs. It is no longer considered a passing phase like the 8 tracks, laser disks or the disk camera. Inkjet is here to stay, so expanded capabilities are being added to help it fall in line with traditional printing services. Thanks to new papers, higher resolution printers, faster printers and digital printing packages the gap between traditional and digital has become even smaller.





Jack and Sue Drafahl

WHEN WE FIRST started to investigate digital package printing, we looked in the wrong place. We assumed that a package printer for professional photo lab applications would be found in the very expensive software section—but found very few high-end products. By chance, we recently had the opportunity to review some editing software programs targeted just for the general public. One of our “finds” was a photo printing program we just had to tell you about.

ArcSoft has a suite of programs that included a basic image editor, a photo database, OCR translation, and a stand-alone program called PhotoPrinter. PhotoPrinter’s sole purpose is to output package print formats to any type of digital printer hooked up to your system. This was just what we were looking for!

When this simple program starts, it asks you to collect all the images you want to print, and places them in a small photo database. You can then select one or all the images and move on as the package printing screen appears.

If you have more than one type of printer attached to your system, you can select one and set up the page format to match your paper size.

After that’s accomplished, you have the option of picking a type of package printing. You can print a single photo in landscape or portrait mode or mix photos in either format. There are more than a couple dozen package printing formats available, and a preview shows how each will look before you print.

If you want to know the actual print size for any of the displayed images, you can touch it with the mouse and the numbers appear. If those aren’t the numbers you had in mind, you can tweak the size with a slider next to the display screen.

If you want to mix and match different images on one package printing setup, you merely select all the images you want from the photo data-

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base, and the program will do the rest. Wait, there's more!

If you don't like the order and size of the images in the display, you can use the select and control keys to move or copy images from one cell to the next until you have exactly what you want.

There are additional controls that allow you to crop, edit, or add special effects to the images. This is a very efficient program, so don't be fooled by the inexpensive price tag.

We started looking at other inexpensive editing programs and found several that had package printing functions, but never under that name. The key was figuring out what the process was called and where it was located in the print functions.

In the MGI PhotoSuite II program, we found it located under a print function called "print multiples". From this sub-menu, you are given the choice of more than two dozen package print formats. You can select your printer, size the prints, and move the images on the print page before sending them to the printer.

Another new program we found at PMA '99, Presto-Mr.Photo, has a package printing function under the label "PrintFun". With this program, you select one or several images and drop them into one of 42 different package printing formats. You can print multiple pages with a variety of different images in one session.

We also looked at some of our main editing programs and found another possible solution for package printing. When we looked at Adobe Photoshop, we found that the postscript print drivers had a simple version of package printing. One of the final selections before sending the image to a printer allows you to print the image full, two up, or four up on a page.

Corel Paint has a section in its print menu called "N-up" which allows you to print up to 16 images on one piece of paper. There are no controls to make changes to each cell, but they do print multiple prints. If your printer does not use a postscript driver, you can check some of the third-party vendors to see if

they support your printer.

If you want to have it your way, you can create your own custom package printing templates. You have to have a good working knowledge of layers, channels, and masks, but you can do it. If you need help, we highly recommend the tutorial CD that comes with Adobe Photoshop. The invested time will be well worth it.

To create a custom package print format, set up a page using the aspect ratio used by your printer. Using the rectangular select tool, select all the areas that you want to have in the new template. Save this out as a master template. Make an individual mask of each selected area, and save them out as separate channels and layers.

Using the layer tools, you can paste images into each selected area, size, rotate, and make any other adjustment to the image before sending the composite image to the printer. The process for setting up this type of template is time consuming, and we would not recommend it unless none of the programs available give you the configuration you need.

Just seeing how many new programs in the last few months are incorporating this feature is encouraging. Since most editing programs output to printers, we think it is only time before all the main editing programs will incorporate the package printing function.

Until then, take a look at the programs we have mentioned. If you are looking to buy a new edit program, check out its features. The package print function may be there, but it's just a little hard to find.

Contacts:

PhotoPrinter www.arcssoft.com

Photoshop www.adobe.com

Corel Paint 8 www.corel.com

MGI II www.mgisoft.com

Mr. Photo www.newsoftinc.com

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