



Rangefinder Magazine Archives

June 2000

Digital PhotoDatabases by Jack and Sue Drafahl

Nobody likes disorganization or clutter. Keeping things in order is the name of the game, especially when it comes to organizing your negatives and slides. It's a never ending battle as there are always new images to file.

When we first started a filing system for our negatives and slides, we designed the "Drafahl Numbering System." It was a simple system that allowed us to identify a specific subject, followed by the number of images filed under that subject heading. We proudly set forth to individually number our vast collection of images. We quickly realized there was no way the two of us could catalog all the images before it was time for us to retire!

We quickly devised "Plan B" in which we would only number images as they were sent out for potential stock photo sales or to accompany an article. We wouldn't be able to number all the images in our lifetime, but at least the valuable ones would have a number and be sent out over and over. Best of all, we would now have some semblance of order and still have a life.

When computers became popular, everyone convinced us that our filing system was antiquated and we should re-enter all the data into a computer filing database. Being the open-minded folks that we are, we gave it try. We found the task labor-intensive and when we conducted an image search, all we ended up with was information specific to one particular image. If we actually wanted to see the image, we still had to open the file drawer and look for the image. That didn't seem to solve anything!

In time, computer programs became more sophisticated and a variety of photo database programs became available to help catalog digital image files. Inexpensive scanners made it easy to enter traditional slides and negatives into the digital world. As digital cameras increased in quality and dropped in price, many photographers made purchases.

The problem of compiling all photo files into one tracking system still existed for photographers. Enthusiastically many tackled the project of converting their entire collection of traditional negatives and slides into a digital photo database. Very quickly they realized that scanning a thumbnail image and entering the data was very time intensive. If they wanted it all in one system, they would have to dedicate extensive time and manpower to finish the project.

The key is to use a database program that makes your filing job easiest. When picking a suitable database for your filing system, look closely at the features it offers. Does it provide control over thumbnail size? Can you include additional information for each image to help in your image search? Does the program have a link to an editing program so you can go directly from the database to the editing program? Can you perform batch tasks to numerous images at once? Does the program allow you to output thumbnails to your favorite digital printer?

There are a lot of programs out there, so you can usually get the features you desire. We have include a list of several of the database programs we have found to be most effective. Many of the companies offer a demo download, to help in your selection. Software manufacturers often offer database programs as part of a larger suite of programs that include image editors, projects editors, and special printing functions. Don't assume that they are less efficient than the stand-alone database programs. Make your program selection based on your specific needs, cost and the versatility of

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the program.

So, now that you have a database program, how do you go about organizing the images? Putting digital photos into a database is easy as they are already in digital form. Simply allow the database program to catalog and generate thumbnail images and you are set.

You will have to decide the desired resolution for scanning slides and negatives into the system. A thumbnail version will scan faster, but you will always have to re- scan the image if you need a higher resolution for printing. Before you decide to catalog all the slides and negatives in your files, we suggest that you time yourself and see just how long it takes to scan and enter data for several images. If you have a large number of images, you may find that you will be spending more time filing than shooting!

We still like time to get out and photograph, so our solution is to screen down our scanning selections. We go through specific topic and pick out just our best images in that category to scan. After they are scanned, we put two small dots on the side of each slide mount to indicate they have been scanned. After we have made the first pass through all the categories, we then make a second pass, picking up additional images. We find this method is the least work-intensive and puts only our best images in the database. You are probably thinking that our system sounds feasible for digital images and slides, but what about negatives? You can't batch scan them as easily, so we have devised a strange solution-we mount all our negatives in slide mounts! We have found that images stored in negative pages have more damage than negatives mounted in slide mounts. We can add information about each image on the slide mount, such as film type, location, subject, date and photographer. It is easy to weed out all the bad images, group subjects just as we do with slides and batch scanning is a breeze. The downside to mounting negatives is the additional cost. We have our own slide mouter and slide imprinter, and find them an invaluable asset to keeping order in our image library. If you decide to convert, just find a cooperative photo lab to work with.

You will notice that included in the list of database programs is a lone non-photo database program. Advanced Disk Catalog, is a file name, non-thumbnail database and we included it because we feel it is a great companion program. After testing dozens of programs on the Internet, we found it to be one of the fastest file name database programs we have ever seen. When we catalog digital files into our system, we use both ADC and a standard photo database. If we have a clue to the file name, we use ADC to narrow down our search for the specific image CD, and then use the photo database to fine-tune our search. We have over 400 gigabytes worth of images, and ADC can find any file in less than 5 seconds. Not bad for a program that costs around \$20! One word of warning: Make sure that you back up your photo database often. We use write-once CDs and store them in a different location. If your program has an auto-backup function, make sure that saves onto a different drive than where you store your primary files. We set our backup to every 10 minutes when we are working with databases, and knock on wood, we have never lost a database file.

Microsoft Picture It! Express is a combination album, projects, and image editing program.

Check out these fine database programs and start getting your images organized.

More Information

...On The Web

ACDSee

Advanced Disk Catalog

Image Expert

ixla Explorer

PhotoImpact Album

Image AXS Pro

MGI PhotoSuite III

Ulead PhotoExpress

Media Browser

Picture It!

Arc Soft Media Browser 2000 lets you add images from a variety of sources and create a photo database. Images can be selected and placed in a digital slide show, or packaged and shipped via e- mail postcards. Images can be edited directly from photo database files.

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