

The Digital Column by *Dwain Cox*

1. Why Digital instead of film you ask. Why an SUV instead of a sedan? Why a computer instead of a typewriter?

First, you need to answer a few questions for yourself. What am I not getting from my film photography that I can get from digital? How many pictures do I take a year? Is Cost a factor? Do I want more control over my photos? Do I want to learn about editing and special effects? So many questions, so many answers, where do you start?

For me, those were the main questions and the answers said go digital. I take a lot of photos, maybe 10,000 a year since going digital. With film I could only afford about 1000 a year. At about .30 per shot, that is a big chunk-a-change.

Everything was printed, my test shots, experiments, shots with slightly different angles, focal lengths and exposures. I didn't want prints, I just wanted to see the results to learn what worked best. Contact sheets were too small and most processing places charged about as much for an 8x10 contact sheet as for a set of 4x6 prints.

This was a big drawback to learning new techniques and enjoying photography by experimenting. I take as many photos as I want now. Money is no longer an issue. I'm learning what works and what doesn't as soon as I shoot and don't have to wait for processing. Photography for me is more fun now than it has ever been.

2. Digital, as good as film?

It's so close. For some, no, never. Only the most demanding jobs requiring large crisp sharp, maximum color resolution will still use film but those numbers are falling every day as image quality increases and the workflow processes are learned and embraced. Digital is rapidly becoming the standard for most professional and amateur photographers.

My first digital camera was an 1996 Apple QuickTake. It was a black and white with very small and grainy computer images. From then to now the improvement has been incredible. It took film over 70 years to make those advances. In the past 3 years, the advances have been so much and so fast, it's both scary and exciting to try and imagine where we will be in 3 more years. But, back to our original question. My list of complaints about digital are few but very important. If you have a 4 mega pixel or less point and shoot type digital camera, you may have noticed some of these problems. If you are using an SLR type digital camera, these are probably non issues for you.

1. Wash out in the bright areas. It is surprising, even amazing sometimes how much detail is in the dark areas, but not the bright areas. It's just gone, nothing. This is a big problem for weddings. Black tuxes and bright white wedding gowns in the same frame. I find myself metering for the wedding dress and lightning the darker areas on the computer.
2. Auto focus in low light is very difficult. Manual focus almost impossible on some cameras.
3. Shutter lag, even when shooting in full manual mode, is too long. It's very difficult to shoot sporting events or candid.

There are other issues but most are due to the camera. Am I sorry I went digital? No. Will I be selling all of my film cameras? No, at least not for about 3 years.

3. White Balance

When you shoot indoors without a flash, you get yellow/brown pictures. If you shoot under fluorescent lights, the results are greenish. What was that filter number , 80A, 85B and was it an extra 2 f/stops or 2.5?

Wouldn't it be great if the camera had the filters built in and didn't require more light. Welcome to one of the many benefits of digital photography.

On my camera, the white balance settings are Bright Sun, Cloudy, Tungsten, Fluorescent, Flash, Custom and Auto WB. It's pretty easy to figure out. Whatever your primary light source is, just switch to the correct WB filter.

You don't have to beg the processor to take out the yellow on frames 2-8 and take out the green on frames 10-15 and do normal corrections to the rest of them.

Built in color correction, this sounds great doesn't it? It can be, as long as you remember to reset the white balance when you change your light source.

I can't remember how many times I forgot. There is really no excuse, the indicator is right there in the view finder. But so are many other indicators that I don't notice initially. Sometimes...when the right combination of things go wrong, I get lucky and get a pretty cool shot. (Don't tell anyone, some of them think I know what I'm doing).

4.

From Shoeboxes to CD's

Now that you are digital and probably shooting 2 to 5 times as many photos as you normally do, where do you put them all? For me, digital came along just in time. I have shoeboxes of photos under my bed, in the closet, and in various larger boxes around the house.

Most of my shoeboxes are labeled to identify major subjects and have index cards to identify minor groups of photos. On the backs of most of the

photos is a date and roll number so I can find the negatives in another index system. Sometimes this system actually works but it is very time consuming to maintain. At least in my slide trays I don't have to look for the negatives.

Electronic files are much easier to keep up with and don't take near as much room. You can keep them on your Hard drive, move them to lots of floppies, upload them to a web server (\$\$) or archive them to CDs and keep thousands of photos in a small CD album. By the way, what happens to your vast and treasured photo collection if your house is damaged? CDs can be duplicated and distributed very cheaply. Now that's good insurance.

Once you have copied the family Christmas gathering to CD, you can make copies for the family and mail them out. This makes them very happy and gets copies of your photos in several places, good photo insurance.

One shoebox holds about 400 photos, one CD holds from 450 to 1400 photos. A 3 ring CD album, about the size of a good dictionary, can hold over 14,000 hi resolution photos. If you have to evacuate your house in an emergency, you can grab your CD album instead of all of those shoeboxes or shelves of photo albums.

You will need to develop a directory hierarchy to organize your digital photo collection. What are the main subjects you shoot? Family, Places, Events, Weddings, Portraits and any other subjects you like can be your main directories. I have other directories such as To be Printed, Slideshows and Portfolios.