Lynne and I thank all of you who came out for our digital photography evening last month. Steve Durnin from the Photo Summit was our speaker, and I compliment the job done. We are planning an ongoing series of similar evenings, and we would like your input on subject matter. The next program will be basic picture taking, and we are planning sports photography for September. Please send us input. Thanks!

Recently we've encountered several customers who'd dug out old color negatives and wanted reprints. These negs were from the 50s and 60s, and look different from today's films. These were from a process called C-22 family of films, and were processed in chemistry now banned by the EPA. Another customer had some stereo mounted slide pairs and wanted color prints. In the automated and computerized world of photo processing, these services were only available on a custom priced and hand made basis. Even though the originals had held up beautifully through the years, they are no more useful today than a car requiring leaded gasoline.

Today we have accessibility to a method of storing our images, which avoids these problems in the future – recording on compact discs. This might sound very complicated to some of you, but it's actually quite easy and has some advantages over storing your images as we have been doing for years. Yes, it costs some money, but the value of the images decades from now more than justify the expense. Here's what you need (assuming you have access to a computer): a film scanner, a print scanner, and CD-ROM writer, and the software normally packed with the above items.

Most computers today have at least one USB (Universal Serial Bus) port, and this can be expanded to several ports inexpensively. What will be described below are items being added to a computer without opening the case. These are what is know as Plug and Play devices, requiring very little expertise by the user. Let's start with the film scanner. This is a device that takes pictures of pictures. It is similar in use and appearance to a document scanner, and works just like a photocopy machine. The difference in fact, is that it is capable of discerning the different assortment of tones, and the contrast of a photograph; a document scanner is too contrasty and can't read the shadow and highlight areas like film can. The ability to work with photographs is measured using the terms "dynamic range", or "dynamic resolution". In order for a copier to read photos properly, the dynamic range should be a number no lower than 3.0, on a scale where the higher the value the better. For professional use, the range should exceed 3.2; for acceptable results, 2.8 is necessary. If a scanner does not give its range on the box or in its specifications, it's a safe bet that it is only a document scanner.

To attach the device to the computer, merely plug it into a vacant USB port, turn it on, and wait for Windows or Apple OS to recognize it. Not too rough. In fact, all the devices described here attach exactly the same way.

The scanner will come with more software than you need, but you have to install the basic photo software and "TWAIN" driver for the scanner. After the installation, restart the computer and open the software you just installed. Click on FILE in the upper left and select IMPORT or SCANNER from the drop down menu. This will activate the scanner, and you're ready to go. After you scan the image in, close the scanner program. Your picture is still on the screen, and again click on FILE, then on SAVE AS. A dialog box will open, asking you where to save the file (picture), and what the file's name is. Save the file as a .JPG (JPEG). The software will ask you to enter a quality or compression level. Tell it you want the maximum quality. Click SAVE. That's it. You're done. You've digitized your first image! Simpler than you thought, wasn't it?

If you are installing a slide/negative scanner, the operations are exactly the same as above. Most of these scanners come with different holders, so use the one for negs or slides depending on the type film you are scanning. (All film scanners have a range of 2.8 or higher – the higher the better. These scanners are also rated by optical resolution - get one that is 1200 dpi [dots per inch] or better.) Most of these scanners are limited to 35mm film only. Some will also read Advanced Photo System; some will also read medium format film.

Some flatbed scanners also come with a backlight attachment to read slides and negatives. These scanners do not do as good a job on film as a film scanner does on smaller, 35mm negatives and slides. They are good, however, for older larger film, like 120, 620, 127 and sheet film. These scanners are compromises in quality while offering you the opportunity to buy one scanner instead of two.

The CD writer is also a USB external unit (if there isn't one in your computer already). It attaches just like the scanners. There are CD writers and CD writers/rewriters. For posterity you only need a writer. After the name of the writer, it will give numbers like 2X/12X/10X. These are speed ratings of how fast they write. You can use ANY of them. The faster the writer, the more expensive the unit. The writer will also come with software, such as Roxio CD Creator or Ahead Nero Burning. When you install a blank CD, open the software and tell it what you want to copy to the CD. Click on WRITE, and wait till the screen tells you its done. Remove the CD and LABEL IT!

Congratulations! You have now stored your images in the most permanent way yet. You can copy the CD as often as you like with no damage to the original files. You can usually fit a hundred or so high resolution images on a CD. With the slow economy film companies are running great sales. These should end by the summer, when all film prices should increase. Now is the time to stock up on film for the next several months. Fuji is almost giving their films away. For example, a 4-pack of 35mm 400 speed, 24 exposure film sells for $14.95, but after on package coupons and mail in rebates (which we will send in for you) the price comes down to $3.95 for the pack, 99.25 cents per roll. If that's not low enough, they also throw in a T-120 VHS tape. Kodak and Agfa aren't

quite as low, but get the film you like and shove it in your freezer. At O°F, film does not age, and you can thaw and shoot as you like.

We turned up an informative website that has a good section on things photographic. Some of you may have visited the site before, but we all discover these places at different times. Try it when you have a few extra minutes: http://photography.about.com

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In conjunction with Microsoft, we will be having a Windows XP Digital Photography Day on May 15 in both stores. Programs will take place at 11am (Madison only), noon (Summit only), 2pm and 4pm (at both locations) for about 25-40 minutes. This will be free and informative for us all. More information is available at http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/digitalphotography/. The final item on the page links to the workshops page. We hope to see you there!

Our websites (www.photosummit.com and www.madisonphoto.com) are going under construction again, and will feature more information and easier navigation.

Jerry & Lynne