



March, 2009

Photographic Current Events

Film was mortally wounded February 28th. The divorce became final. The Eastman Kodak Company closed any and all film processing facilities worldwide. Yes, you can still get film processed, but let's examine the situation just a little closer ...

A few years ago, Kodak sold all remaining Kodachrome processing machinery to Dwayne's Photo Lab in Kansas, who only accepts Kodachrome film in prepaid mailers. Kodak ceased selling the mailers almost 3 years ago. During the past several decades, Kodak either bought up local photofinishers, or forced them out of business (especially if they were Fuji or Konica labs). All this leaves very few places to get film processed. Where does that leave us?

There are still a few thousand minilabs spread around the country that have survived the wave of digital photography. Many thousands more have gone out of business. Their processing machines are designed for continuous processing and printing, and there aren't enough film shooters to keep them that busy. Once the machinery is turned on, brought to temperature and recalibrated, it must be used to keep its calibration. It is not economically feasible to process 2 rolls in the morning, 15 rolls in the early afternoon, and make reprints and enlargements at 4:00.

The way to solve this problem is to wait until there are enough rolls to process to justify starting up the machines (this is called batch processing). The problem is, how many hours or days it takes to amass such a batch. One hour processing will become just another memory.

As less and less film is processed, the cost of rolls processed will increase along with delivery time.

As fewer and fewer rolls are processed, the machine manufacturers will slow and eventually stop making spare parts. Photo lab equipment is temperamental at best, and this problem will cause many labs to close. Forever.

During the recent PMA (USA national photography convention) Show, this writer asked Kodak how they are going to handle the hundreds of thousands of prepaid print processing mailers that are still in customers' hands. The answer was a blank stare (except for one Kodak representative who said he would try to find out and get back to me).

Four months ago Kodak introduced its newest professional market print film. In another announcement, it was said that Kodak had licensed Sakar International to make and sell Kodak branded 35mm film cameras. If this doesn't entirely make sense to you, welcome to the club!

In late February Ritz Camera (and Boaters World) filed for bankruptcy protection. Ritz had become the world's largest chain of camera stores in the world, with over 1400 storefronts. During the 1990s Ritz started a new corporation - Ritz Interactive - bringing their business to the internet (which is not part of the bankruptcy proceedings).

Below are some of the creditors involved in the bankruptcy:

Nikon - \$26,607,162.84

UPS - \$924,754.14

C.R.I.S. Camera Services - \$560,576.00

LifePics - \$423,626.66

Datavantage Corp. - \$255,636.81



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Let's take a look at a couple of these creditors.

C.R.I.S. Camera Repair Service is one of the largest and best independent repair services in the U.S. They repair cameras both under warranty (as representatives of the manufacturers/importers) as well as out of warranty. They also have ALL the repair parts for any of Ritz's private label brands, such as Quantaray and Dakota. Considering the debt involved, an educated guess is that there are about 300,000 equipment owners who will never get to see their photo gear again.

LifePics is a major player in online photo storage (with a very good reputation). If Ritz owes Life-Pics so much money, why should LifePics continue to archive Ritz's customers? They probably won't. If you feel secure that your pictures are safe, **you shouldn't be.**

Bret's PMA 2009 Report

We survived another PMA show! Mid-week this time around, that was a new one! For the purpose of this newsletter, we focused more on the smaller vendors and "out-of-the-way" items – things you wouldn't find as readily on a thousand other web sites (sure, we could show you a picture of the new Nikon Coolpix P90, but there's already plenty of coverage of that). Not to say we won't mention bigger items though ... and if you were keeping up with our blog feed from the show (and shame on you if you weren't!), some of this will be a bit familiar. Please note – if there is something here that you feel is excellent, that we must stock, let us know! Alternately, if you think something that we are showing is the dumbest thing ever, let us know! We want your feedback to help us decide on some of these pieces!

There was no "huge" item at this show – Canon, Nikon, Pentax, and Sony combined introduced a grand total of ZERO new DSLRs. Most of the point-and-shoots were "me too" cameras, similar to the last version, but now with one more megapixel! There were a few exceptions, and we'll get to those... A lot of companies seemed content to hold off their big announcements for later in the year when the economy will (hopefully!) be leveled off, if not improving.

Canon showed their new PowerShot cameras, and in person they look very nice. Excellent styling. Look for them to start rolling in mid-April or so. A couple new printers, and some new camcorders that looked nice, and very small.



Olympus has their now-annual "SW cameras in a block of ice" demonstration to show off their new 'Tough' line. Olympus now has a lot more company in this field, as Panasonic and Canon both showed droppable waterproof models, and Fuji showed a waterproof piece.

Olympus also showed their recently introduced E-620 SLR, which looks like a real winner. It takes the already excellent E-520, adds more megapixels, more in camera edits, and a larger, fully rotating screen!



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Nikon had no new SLRs (unless you count the gold-trimmed D60, and even that we did not see out on the floor). Their new Coolpix line had a few nice pieces – my favorite was the Coolpix 230 – slim with a 3" touch screen, for a bit over \$200! The color choices will be very popular in the spring / Mother's day corridor. We've been told that red and purple are the 'hot' colors for this year. Not sure who decides this, but as a result there were a LOT of red and purple cameras about.

Panasonic introduced their new point and shoot line – the replacement for the fantastic TZ4 and TZ5 adds a bit more zoom, and "HD" quality video – for another \$160 in price! All it seemed to do was make the TZ5 look like an even better value for the dollar. They also had the TS1 (their version of the Olympus Tough) on display, but when we got there all the batteries were dead and no one could find a working battery. Boo. We'll have to wait to get our hands on a live one, I guess!



Panasonic did show off (and have batteries in) the new Micro 4/3 camera – the GH1. It's the current G1 with HD video built in. The sample videos on the screens looked great, but I want to be able to take one and shoot my own videos before fully hopping on board. They also introduced 2 new Micro 4/3 lenses, the one that was not behind glass (the 14-140 10x zoom) was very nice. No official word on pricing or release date.

A number of Panasonic's new camcorders looked quite nice, including a new entry level compact 70x zoom that should sell for somewhere in the \$300 to \$350 range. They also showed the 'updated' waterproof-droppable camcorders, the SW21 series. What's different from the SW20? New styling and new colors. That's about all I was able to discern. We should start getting in new models a bit later in the spring as they filter down into the marketplace.



Pentax had a few already-announced point-and-shoots, other than that we keep hearing rumors that there is big news coming later in the year from them.

The only terribly interesting thing at Samsung was their new 'NX' camera model – it's kind of like Micro 4/3, but a different mount. Thanks, guys. All the mock-ups were behind glass, so no hands-on time with it.



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Casio showed off new point-and-shoots, the only truly interesting ones are compacts with their super-high speed capture – up to 1000 frames per second!



Apparently, there is a real pent-up demand for stereo cameras, at least if the Holga and Fujifilm booth were any indicators. Holga showed 2 stereo models – one a stereo pinhole, the other with 2 'lenses'. Light leaks are of course part of the fun!



Fuji showed a prototype of a new 3D digital camera system. They had working cameras set up, and even though sadly you can't see in the pictures, the image on the back of the camera really does look 3D, no funny glasses required! They also had a 3D digital frame set up (sadly, not turned on). The sticky part of the whole system? Creating 3D effects on prints! Earliest we'd probably see this technology released here would be towards the end of the year. Still, it was very interesting! Fuji also showed new point and shoots, including the F200 EXR, which will actually change the sensor

layout in low light to reduce noise! If it works as advertised, we may now have the answer to taking all those low-light birthday party and school auditorium pictures!



Now, for a few of the "smaller" booths... where you often find some of the most interesting things!

Hahnemüle had what we considered to be the "best item at the show", if such a designation existed. They showed a simple, neat, and very professional looking way to mount canvas prints, especially inkjet prints. Best of all, it was quite affordable! We brought a sample back to NJ with us, and everyone loves it. We hope to be offering this service to you, our customers, very soon.





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A company called Goosie allows you to make your own flashcards for children – put Mom’s picture on a card that says “Mom”, Dad on “Dad”, etc. Was a very interesting looking concept, we’re looking into whether it can be offered as another option on our Photo Teller print kiosks.

Many of you have seen the Digital Foci name on digital photo frames and readers over the past few years – their products are top-notch. At the show, they were showing off their new Photo Book – it’s an electronic portfolio! It features an 8” LCD, 4 GB of internal storage, a 2.5 hour rechargeable battery, all wrapped in a nice leatherette case. It will even play back RAW files! We know of a few customers who will be drooling over this (you know who you are)...



Speaking of ways to transport your pictures, Itoya had a new “photo wallet” made of a gorgeous heavy paper stock. We told them “make it in a 4x6 size and we’ll take a case!” We will see if they take our advice!



Our crazy friends from down under, Crumpler, have tweaked their Million Dollar home line, including new colors. The purple bag in the image really doesn’t do the bag justice, it is PURPLE!



Pandigital, another maker of digital frames, had an all-in-one frame / TV designed to go in your kitchen. It’s a 15.6” digital photo frame, HDTV, and RSS feeder. It’s designed to display recipes, the weather, stock quotes, and more, and then fold up under the counter when not in use. They say they’re aiming for an under \$400 price point. We’ve already had some comments on this from the web site blog, and people seem to be interested!





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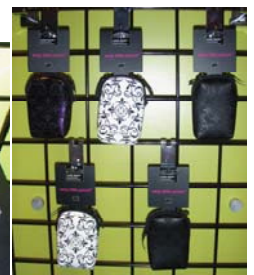
How would you like a picture frame with a night light that only lights up when you walk by? It will take any 4x6 picture, or anything that fits into its roughly 1/2" deep well, and will illuminate it, and your path, when it detects motion. We brought a sample back with us and are testing it out!



The frame and album company Dennis Daniels definitely wanted it to feel like spring had sprung and showed off some vivid new frames and albums...



Lowepro and its new sister company, Acme Made, had some new colors and styles. Lowepro is now offering their very popular SlingShot line in a nice burgundy tone. They also had new colors of compact magnetic clasp cases, very subtle pastels that will go very well with many of today's colored cameras. Acme Made is a new line of leather camera pouches and cases that looked nice, felt nice, and had great packaging. We're trying to judge how much of a market there might be for these in our shops.



And finally.... Who hasn't wanted their picture engraved on the bottom of a wooden bowl? An outfit from Alaska is hoping you do! They will carve a white birch bowl, etch your image onto it, shellac it up, and send it off to you on a nice wooden stand! All within 4 days (plus shipping). While you wouldn't want to eat your cereal out of it, it would be a nice conversation piece up on the mantle! Again, this is something we could easily offer here, and at low cost!



Well, that's about it for now! If you have any questions or comments on anything you saw here (or anything on another web site!) email us, call us, or just stop on in!



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Snap Shots

Wow! 6 pages! That's a lot of information this month. We'll be back next month with more with new topics and opportunities. Enjoy your photos, and remember that you can't take too many!



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