



Welcome to our first Infoto Digital Roundtable. This article introduces a seven-part series where nationally known panelists will discuss the nuts and bolts issues of digital technology in plain language that you can use. You'll get insider views on the latest equipment, tips on how to improve your technique, and most important, ideas on how to make Digital a solid profit center for your photography business.

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How would you describe the state of digital technology relative to professional portrait and wedding photographers today?

Rick Billings

Digital technology has been proven in every segment of the portrait and wedding markets. Proven, I mean in image quality and unique products. It's no longer, "Is digital good enough?"—it's turnaround time and creativity. With the ability to capture, pre-

Let's face it, we are living in an instant society... Why not benefit from it?

view, and print images in minutes, to creating the "master image" through replacing faces and retouching the image...digital is here.

Larry Peters

Absolutely. The "state of digital" is where the professional photographer wants it to be. By that I mean if you can afford it, you can be fully digital today and receive incredible images as good, or in many cases better, than film.

Gary Alan Strain

Many factors go in to making the plunge to "Get Digital" — greatest among these is your degree of computer literacy or illiteracy. If you are already the type that is comfortable with Photoshop, Illustrator or

Quark, then you may be more ready to make the plunge (big camera- big computer)!! But most people are not Photoshop-savvy and will need to master this program first. Photoshop is at the HEART of digital whether you own a big camera, have the lab high-resolution scan your negatives or simply flatbed scan your own negatives. Mastery of Photoshop is the hurdle which must be crossed FIRST!!

Larry Peters

Digital does come with a price, though.

Rick Billings

It certainly does. One of the most important things to remember is that in order to transition into digital technology with the investment needed, you will have to make more money from your existing clients and add additional clients and services.

Larry Peters

You really have to ask yourself if you can justify the expense of digital capture. The answer to that question depends on what you are going to do with the finished product. Web pages and 3 1/2 x 5 snap shots can easily be made on low-end consumer cameras in the \$800 to \$1,000 range. Sports photography and wedding photography may require more of an investment, roughly in the \$3,000 to \$5,000 range (for digital files from the Phase One camera back system.) Portrait photography, where there are chances of large print orders, may require an investment at the present in the \$20,000 and up range. We have successfully made 40 x 60 digital prints from the Phase One camera back system.

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What do you see as the most useful digital/high tech product on the market?

Rick Billings

In my opinion "digital capture devices" such as a Kodak DCS cameras, a Phase One back, a Mega Vision back or Foveon camera are must-have for high-end portraiture. By digitally capturing images you're getting a first

Gary Alan Strain,
M. Photog., Cr.



Larry Peters,
M. Photog., Cr., MEI

Rick Billings,
M. Photog., CPP



generation set of pixels that allows you to preview images immediately. For example, with family and children's photography we preview images following the session, which enables us to control the selling cycle. We help our clients make the decision on where they will display their portraits and what size portrait they should purchase. Selling the ability to replace faces and offering three levels of enhancement has increased our average orders significantly.

Larry Peters

Learning the digital process would be my advice to someone starting to think of digital imaging. That's essential to making the right equipment investment because there is a learning curve and many, many ways of doing the same job. For example, everyone you talk to will have a different opinion on how to prepare a file for printing. The crazy part is they may all be right. Learning how to save files, manipulate them and basically set up a computer so you can start your own printing is never going to get easier. If you keep waiting for someone to make it easier or better, you may never get involved. I am feeling more confident daily as to what I can and cannot do in the digital arena and I am so glad I started when and how I did, because I understand so much more of the process. The quality is here and if someone thinks it's not they are not looking in the right direction. The advantages of new products and services are here and you should start to capitalize on them.

Gary Alan Strain

I agree. And learning Photoshop is Step One for photographers going digital.

Larry Peters

When a small studio decides to go digital, a printing system is probably the first consideration for purchase. This system requires less of an investment and provides a major learning experience for future growth. We

started with a film scanner Kodak 3570 Plus and a dye sublimation printer. Still a big investment, but much less than going digital-capture from the beginning.

Gary Alan Strain

Most products from the basic mom and pop type studio such as children, family, wedding and senior portraits are not very large; they lend themselves well to flatbed scanning of negatives and outputting to a dye

Learning the digital process... is essential to making the right equipment investment...

sub printer. Alternatively, these portraits can be sent to the lab on CD or even printed on the new generation ink jet printers that have life spans greater than the current RA 4 paper in use by most labs. Digital makes it possible for the small, independent studio to create its own products such as baseball trading cards, fancy senior wallets, note cards, magazine covers and calendars. It also allows a studio to have COMPLETE CONTROL of its own literature production—from price lists to direct mail cards. In short, digital can be made profitable and affordable — even if the studio starts off with relatively low-end equipment. By using

a computer, flatbed and dye sub printer, a studio's investment in equipment can be kept fairly small. So while you wait for the price of cameras to fall to earth, you can master Photoshop, pump your creative juices and create products which in the eyes of your customer make you "DIGITAL." For digital to be worth the investment it really has to do more than just replace film!

Larry Peters

The main reason for a small studio to get involved in digital imaging is creativity. There has never been a medium which allows us to enhance what we have already created the way digital does. Having your own line of creative products is another reason to consider digital. Basically, digital offers the small studio the option of having a mini-lab without the hassles of checking chemistry and dealing with a darkroom. Digital is here to stay.

Rick Billings

No question about it. Digital imaging can position you and your studio in your market place. It is a technology that is only going forward. Let's face it, we are living in an instant society. Why not benefit from it?

We here at Infoto would like to introduce to you our panel of guest speakers.

Larry Peters, M. Photog. Cr., MEI is a self taught, full time photographer. He began his working career as a high school business teacher after graduating from London High School, Bliss College and Xavier University. Larry holds a bachelor of Commerce degree in addition to a Masters degree in Secondary Education. He and his wife, Karen, launched Main Street Photography out of their home. The business has grown to 3 studios in Central Ohio with 24 employees and gross sales of over 2 million per year. The studio has branched out to offer unique childrens photography. Larry has authored two books on Senior Photography, speaks nationally and internationally and has produced two video series. He was part of the Portrait 2000 Broadcast and a Kodak Marketing Program Participant. The Peters staff conducts seminars for fellow photographers in the spring of each year, concentrating on Senior Photography. In 2000, Larry started using Digital capture for his Seniors. His many awards include the "2000 Senior Photographer of the Year" award from Senior Photographers International, receiving the highest scores in both the boys and girls competition.

Larry Peters, M. Photog., Cr., MEI
Main Street Photography
Box 587
London OH 43141
Email: kpeters314@aol.com

Rick Billings, M. Photog. Cr., PPA Certified is one of the industry's foremost authorities on digital imaging. Rick is married to April and has 3 boys, Alec 12, Nick 8 and Derrick 4. He is President of PhotoWave, a company pioneering the digital landscape for the portrait industry. Mr. Billings is the recipient of many honors including those from his home state of Nebraska such as "Top Ten Photographers" (1983-87), Master of the Year in 1988. He has also received Kodak's Gallery Award (1985, 1988, and 1997). A popular speaker, Rick Billings has lectured in over 30 states on behalf of industry trade associations and companies such as Kodak, Art Leather and Canon. Mr. Billings resides in Pittsburgh, PA, where he heads PhotoWave's development of their Internet Sports Photography division called ASPN.com. For more info on ASPN.com log on to www.aspn.com.

Rick Billings, M. Photog., Cr., CPP
PhotoWave, Inc. & ASPN.com
801 Commonwealth Dr.
Warrendale, PA 15086
Email: rick.billings@photowave.com

Gary Alan Strain, M. Photog. Cr., his wife, Nancy, and daughter, Brandy, also a Master Photographer at age 24, have operated a studio in Arkansas for over 30 years. With an in house Lab and 2 employees, they photograph 10,000 plus school kids and 500 plus seniors while maintaining an award winning tradition as Arkansas Photographer of the Year, 40 Kodak and Fuji Gallery Awards, many Loan Collection Prints and 3 Loan Collection Wedding Albums. Their studio is very "do it yourself" oriented, yet Gary is a member of the First Kodak Pro Team and has been Director of Photography for every Inaugural Ball since President Reagan. He is also a member of the Kodak Digital Advisory Board and has been a Winona instructor and National speaker and lecturer for 20 years.

Gary Alan Strain, M. Photog., Cr.
Gary Alan Strain Photography
PO Box 490
Conway, AR 72032
E-Mail: gas@arkansas.net

"A LITTLE HISTORY"

Three Ways To Get Digital

by Rick Billings, M. Photog., Cr., CPP
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The digital revolution, or evolution, got its start before "Toy Story" which made computer imaging famous by producing a full length movie completely digitally.

George Lucas, a digital pioneer, formed Industrial Light & Magic in 1975 to do special effects for Star Wars. His invention of the motion control camera recorded simulated flight and made it look realistic. His inventions didn't stop with that. Lucas envisioned a time when digital techniques would lower the cost of location shooting and costly sets and make it easier to put his thoughts into reality.

Spielberg makes his dinosaurs go crashing through Jurassic Park. Forest Gump got to shake hands with President Kennedy, and Casper's image was made completely digitally, using computers.

Computers work with images in a pixel environment. "Pixel" stands for picture element, and the environment is mathematical. The computer never sees an image. The changes are made through the keyboard and the pointing device. So technology has evolved from Hollywood to the consumer. Now software can be learned, with excellent results and without a Hollywood budget.

The January/February 2001 infoto Digital Roundtable will outline the steps that will take your studio into the Digital Age.

Would you like to join us?

Infoto will be pleased to consider your topic suggestions for the up-coming discussions by the infoto Digital Roundtable. You may e-mail them to us at:

infoto@dreamscape.com