PhotoDataBase Software

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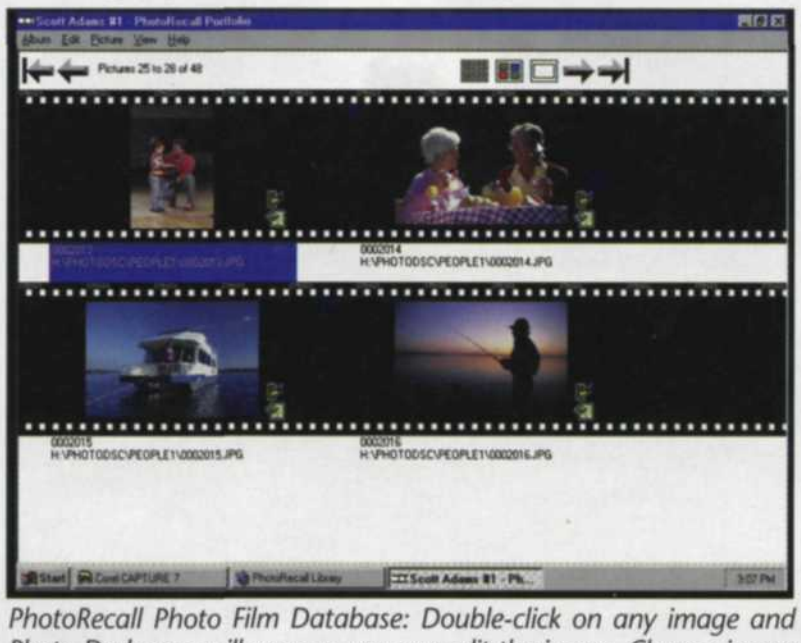
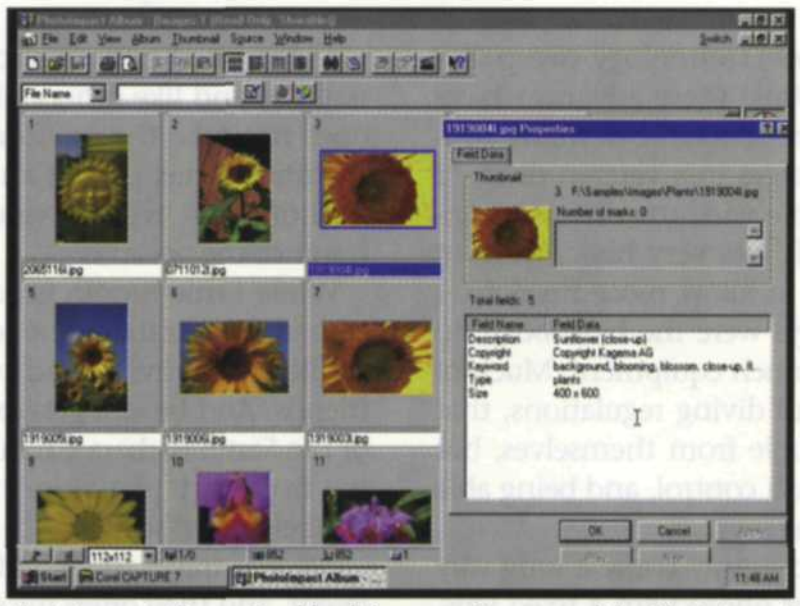
When I first started in photography, my filing system was far from perfect. I used index cards, logbooks, and if I waved my wet finger in the air long enough, I usually found what I was looking for. Then computers came to save the day. I'm not one to quickly accept change, so at first I stuck with my old mechanical systems. As computers improved, I noticed that photo filing software (that's what they were calling it back then) was getting better and better. I tried some of the programs, but found most were slower than my mechanical methods. The biggest problem was that the data input was very labor intensive and all I usually ended up with was an image name and number on a list. If I actually wanted to see what the picture looked like, I still had to go to the files and retrieve the image.

Well, that was then, and this is now. Times have changed and it is quickly becoming a digital world. The introduction of film scanners has brought photo database (that's a new buzz word) systems to a new level. Scanners allow you to scan in an image, save it to a hard disk, and then make small thumbnail images for a digital photo album. Instead of just having an image name and number, you now have a miniature thumbnail image so you see what it looks like. Photo database software is designed to catalog, locate, print, and store massive numbers of images from scanners, digital cameras, photo CDs, and the Internet. Some of the programs allow you to add additional camera data, location information and any additional personal notations. When you want to find a specific image, simply use the search function. By telling bits of information specific to that image: file name, date, size, directory, or any information you have entered about the image, you can find the image. I'm convinced that this works, so now all my index cards and log books are lining the bottom of the trash can.

Today, two methods are use to create a photo database. With the first method, software manufacturers create a separate program that collects images and compiles them in a visually pleasing photo album. With Windows software becoming the norm today, the photo database creators no longer have to provide graphics card and printer drivers for stand-alone software programs. By simply using the functions of Windows, they can create a very powerful photo database program. To show you how these programs work, I have selected two levels of stand-alone programs that I found to be excellent.



PhotoRecall Photo Film Database: Double-click on any image and Photo Darkroom will open so you can edit the image. Change image preview size with three icons that appear on the upper right. Move through the album with arrows in upper left or right. More info about picture is available by clicking on push-pin next to picture.



PhotoImpact Album: Double-click on any image and the PhotoImpact editor will open so you can edit the image. Right-click on the image and more information will appear. Search for images with the search commands at the top of the screen (file name, etc.).

PhotoRecall

PhotoRecall is an inexpensive and easy to use program that has the look of a real photo display. When images are collected and displayed, they are on film strips, in photo albums, or on cork boards. The screen display is very pleasing and adds to the excitement of looking through your images. To start a photo database, you open a new file, give it a name, and ask the program to start a search for specific images. It can look on your hard disk, download off the Internet, and copy images from several types of digital cameras. If you have a scanner that works in Windows, those images can be dropped into the photo album. When you are ready to preview the images, you double click on the album and it expands to full screen and the thumbnails increase in size to fill the image area. If you use the film strip, you advance the film with right or left arrows. The same right or left arrow turns the page in the photo album, and digital push pins are use to hold the picture up when you use the cork board. If you want to share your pictures with someone over the Net, you can save the album as a portable file and drop it in their e-mail. When they start the EXE file, a miniature slide show presents each image with a pre-determined delay between each. If you want to edit a specific image, you double click on the image to open the Photo Darkroom. With this program you can perform a variety of image enhancements or modifications, and then save it out as a new file or on top of the old one.

PhotoImpact

This program has been around for quite some time and was originally called

Image Pals when Windows 3.0 and 3.1. were in use. The Windows 95 version is much more powerful, but is still easy to use. Several programs are included with the PhotoImpact package: a photo database, image editor, screen capture, image explorer, GIF animator, Web extensions, and a CD browser. The database program is called "Album," and can recognize hundreds of different types of computer files, including just about every photo image file ever devised. Images are collected by file extension, directory, or hard disk. You can specify the type of image you want to collect, or grab all of them and sort things out later. When all the images are collected, they are displayed as thumbnails in a photo album. You can then select a specific image, or even a group of images, and add detailed information. Later, when you want to find a specific image, you can use the search mode to locate a file by using a specific file name, description, size, or even the time that it was logged into that album. Selected images can be saved to a new file type, copied to a new directory or output to a printer. If you want a hard copy of the album, you can setup the thumbnail size, page margins, and spacing before printing.

If you use temporary drives to archive digital images, this program will keep track of each disk media. For example, let's say that you write a CD with images taken on your trip to the Grand Canyon. You would open a new album with that CD name or number and allow the computer to catalog it. Later, when you are looking for a specific image, you can tell the program to search all CDs, even if they are not in the computer at the time. When it finds the file, it will tell you which CD, the directory, file name, and when the file was created. You would then put that CD in the drive, double click on the image and it will be opened for editing, printing, or copied to another location. Standard images, such as TIFF, TARGA, BMP, GIF, and JPEG will open directly in the PhotoImpact program, so you can do any necessary editing before saving it out as a new image.

The second approach to photo databases is to enhance a filing program already in use in Windows. In Windows 95, a program called "**Explorer**" is used to keep track of all the files it can access. When a photo file is found, a thumbnail representing the program that can edit it is displayed. In other words, all the thumbnails would have a Photoshop, Painter, and CorelPaint icons representing the file. When you start Explorer, you

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can tell it to make thumbnails of each file on the hard disk, or in a specific directory. The information can then be stored in a hard disk, and retrieved the next time the function is activated. Each time you make changes to your files, you can tell Explorer to update the files. If you want to find a specific file, you would use the enhanced functions of Explorer to look for file names, key words or extensions.

HiJaak Pro

When you install this program, it creates a stand-alone program and a software switch that enhances Windows 95 Explorer. The stand alone program is used to convert from one of 75 image file types to another. If you open the file into the HiJaak editor, you can perform a variety of image-editing tasks. The database function comes into play when you activate the HiJaak catalog setup. When you use this function, Windows Explorer becomes the database album and stores thumbnails of your storage disk into files. If you want to have separate database files for each storage media, you can indicate that in the setup function. Once the cataloging is done, thumbnails and file names will be displayed. Now you can look in a specific directory and actually see what each file represents. If you store photos on removable media, you can make a database for each and store the data on one hard disk. When you want to find an image, you can have the program look through all the database files and find your image. Since all images files are displayed as thumbnails in Explorer, it is easy to find, sort and print images from various storage devices.

Corel Multi-Media Manager 7

This database program is a very small portion of Corel Draw 7 and Corel Paint 7. Don't let size fool you because this powerful Media Manager was added to assist Corel users in finding files. When the Media Manager program is started, it duplicates Windows Explorer's functions and works in a similar fashion. When the Media Manager screen comes up, the program immediately starts to create thumbnails of all the photo images as well as graphics files. As you create the first database file, it becomes visible as it's own directory. You can drag images from all over and drop them into this directory. Once you have dropped all the files into this database, you can open, sort or print the files. The image files open directly into Corel Painter 7 where you can use some very high powered editing tools to manipulate the image. You can then use the extensive search tools to find image files in any part of your image storage systems. This program even recognizes the new Wavelet image-compression scheme now used for extreme image compression. The slide show function will display the contents of the database in a screen show. If you want to display only certain images in your slide show, you can make a separate database or show just selected images out of one large database.

Hijaak Editor: Double-click on thumbnail images in Explorer and they will open in the image editor. Images can then be converted to any other file format.

Corel 7 Multi-Media Manager: Double-click on any image and Corel Paint 7 will open so you can edit the image. Right-click on the image and more info will appear. Directory of other images also appears on left. Search for images with the Tools pull-down menu.

Putting it all Together

The secret to success in using a digital database is knowing how the tools work and keeping the database updated. For those who have vast quantities of non-digital images in slide and negative format, don't try to put all your images in the database right away. Scanning takes a lot of time away from your photo schedule, so add only those images that you know will be used in the database. If the primary purpose is to find images, you may only want to scan the images in at the lower thumbnail resolution. There are a couple bulk scanners out today, which allow you to scan, log, and quickly add a lot of images to your database. If you plan on digitizing your images at full resolution as well as including them in your database, you may consider more than one scanning system. As you build up your system, you can go back and add some of the images that don't have as high a priority.

Most importantly, backup your database system often and keep a copy in a different building or at least some distance away from the original source. You never know when there will be a power surge or you may be a victim of Murphy's law.

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