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PhotoPlus Expo 2002 Report

by Larry Manire

Hello all. As I promised Jim, here is my report from the PhotoPlus Expo held at the Javitts Convention Center in New York City last week.

Sprinkled throughout this report are a few shots of the show and one from inside the Javitts atrium (which is impressive in itself).



Javitts Center
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The focus of the show can be summed up in three words: **digital, digital, digital!**

I attended:

- Three seminars on stock photography,
- A keynote by [David Pogue](#), the New York Times electronics "gadgets" writer,
- A session on selling and buying photographic equipment on eBay, presentations by pro photographers [Stephen Wilkes](#) and [Douglas Kirkland](#).

And, of course, I toured the well appointed exhibit booths, the small, the large and the gigantic like Canon, Nikon, Kodak, Calumet, Epson, Fuji, Sigma, etc. Also there was a fine exhibit of the World Press Photo Awards prints.

I talked to photographers, stock agencies, vendors and wannabees like myself. The consensus? The rush to digital isn't happening - it has *already happened* for professional photographers (i.e. it is now an adequate replacement for film), and large numbers of people are getting left in the

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dust because they are intimidated by the technology, can't stomach the learning curve, or are just plain happy with their craft using film. By several shows of hands in the seminars I took, I saw that about 40% of photographers are shooting all digital, about 40% all film, and the rest both, depending on the shoot.

Douglas Kirkland and the Canon D60

Douglas Kirkland, who has been shooting for 50 years, now shoots all digital with a 6 megapixel Canon EOS D60 unless film is requested by the client. He recently did an assignment with the client requesting both. But, even to his surprise, all the final selects were the digital ones, one of them being blown up to 10 feet high!

Every pro I heard that has switched to digital says they will never go back, all citing the same reasons: immediacy, low cost (no film/processing), increased capability, etc. There were two things I was especially glad to hear Kirkland say:

- A 6 megapixel camera has been perfectly adequate for all his work including high end commercial shoots, and
- Shooting in low light at high ISOs with the D60, he gets no noise at all.

The World of Stock Photography

In the stock photography world, the old models have changed or are rapidly changing. Virtually all stock image fulfillment now is digital; print catalogs are a thing of the past and everyone has a web site.

The rights-managed people were saying we must protect this model at all costs, and 400 photographers have formed an organization to do it (StockArtistsAlliance.org).

And yet everybody, and I mean everybody, said that their revenues were dropping dramatically beginning in 2001 and that after 9/11, they really fell. A show of hands in an audience of 200 showed about 80 people getting some income from stock part-time, and only 4 surviving doing it full-time. Every person raised their hand when asked if their income has dropped substantially in the past year, one said by 50%.



The Very Large Format
Polaroid

Most agreed that the best way to make serious money at it is to shoot lifestyle - shooting the "current" styles that (advertising) clients are buying - and to shoot constantly for fresh material. The really big market now is for ethnic lifestyles shots - Hispanic, Asian and African American, in that order. The travel and wildlife markets, especially, are very saturated (for rights managed distribution),

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and one pro told me even the greatest pros of all time usually only get 5 images from a shoot accepted by the big rights-managed

agencies.

The big controversy, of course, is royalty free (RF) distribution. Since most of the seminars were organized by the traditional agencies, the RF sites were mostly ignored. But they were in the audience and several I talked to said they are doing very well and expect to gain much larger market shares very rapidly. The traditional agencies have massive overhead which is much smaller in the RF scenario when a photographer does their own digital file preparation, captions and keywording. The RF agencies' job then is to market and deliver the images, and the result is lower cost to the client.

From the clients point of view, service is very important and from what I could see, the RF agencies are trying to provide service equal to the traditional agencies. When I asked why a price-sensitive client would stick with a traditional agency (other than because they are used to working with the agency), the main answer was "when the client needs the exclusive use of an image" that rights management can give. That must be a relatively small part of the market.

It seemed to me that the traditional agencies that I heard are spending their time rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic! I think we will find a less saturated market for travel and wildlife, and many other areas, in RF. (Full disclosure: I have 100 images on istockphoto.com and 40 on rebelartist.com, both RF sites.)

I learned that photos.com (successor to www.arttoday.com) will be going online by the end of the year and will be a high-end site, with high res images, to compete head-to-head with the traditional agencies. Agencies like <http://www.alamy.com/> already do both.

One final stock note, everyone (did I say everyone?), agreed that in this litigious world you MUST get model AND property releases. Even for editorial uses most agencies and photographers are protecting themselves with releases. One pro had to pay \$60,000 out of his pocket last year when he did a shoot, got 40 model releases, but missed one for a model whose photo was used in a brain surgery recovery ad. The subject turned out to be the former mayor of the city, sued for several million and won the case.

Property, also, is a huge, huge problem. Releases are very hard to get, so be very careful. An image of the Eiffel Tower at night, among many other properties, now cannot be used for commercial purposes. The most highly recommended book was Legal Handbook for Photographers.

The Products on Display

As for the vendors, all the camera manufacturers were there with big booths touting their latest digital achievements - 11

and 14 megapixels are the latest pro cameras. But after seeing what the pros are doing with the 6 megapixel cameras, I don't see any need for the higher res cameras except for some specialized photographers. (And, with up-res software you can produce commercially saleable images with just 2 and 3 megapixel cameras.)



Show Floor
© Larry Manire

You had to look very hard to even see any film cameras at all except at the Polaroid booth! The photo printers are spectacular and dirt cheap, Epson being far and away the leader. HP has a lunch box size, portable 4 X 6 photoprinter for \$179.

As for the consumers that don't have or want computers and printers, the 1-hour photo developers can now buy a \$100,000 digital minilab system I saw at the show that accepts all memory cards, undeveloped film, and negatives in strips and rolls and print film equivalent, high quality photos from them in minutes. These will be in most 1-hour shops very soon but they will probably have to change their name from "1-hour" to "10-minute" for digital.

It is clear the vendors are going after the lucrative consumer, prosumer market, predicting sales of 10 million units this coming year. Of course the professional cameras were the darlings of the show and there were lots of old timer pro photographer digital converts raving about them, and not just because they were being paid to. I have been in the computer industry for 37 years and find that older people have a tough time with computers nowadays, but old photographers seem to be a big exception in the rush to digital! (Full disclosure: I am a computer consultant and shoot only digital.)

As David Pogue said, quoting Steve Jobs, the "chain of pain" that has been the traditional digital workflow is now significantly eased with the latest cameras, systems, software and printers. I myself have certainly found it to be the case.

Here are some products I saw (and in some cases bought) that make digital life easier:

- Very nice camera monitor (LCD) hoods/magnifiers and laptop hoods for viewing in bright sunlight (<http://www.hoodmanusa.com/>). I find it easier to check focus using the magnifier
- Monitor and printer calibration (very, very important) - <http://www.monacosys.com/> and [Color Vision](#) (the one I bought). Color Vision showed samples to support their claim that their calibration is better on an Epson printer than Epson's own. I'll be checking that out soon.
- [RealViz Stitcher 3.5](#) to build spherical panorama movies. You take 30% overlapping pictures in all directions from one point; it stitches them seamlessly together and makes a movie file which pans the scene all-around. They have another product that extracts CAD drawings

from photos.

- Continuous flow ink systems for Epson printer; 8X savings on ink - mediastreet.com/n2
- printroom.com - "service partner for digital pro photographers"
- [SiteBuilder](http://SiteBuilder.com), web sites for working photographers
- <http://www.jampaper.com/> - specialty envelopes and paper; they have everything.
- <http://www.acdsystems.com/> - ACDC 5.0 and FotoSlate 2.0 digital image editing and management software (I already use it).
- <http://www.nancyscans.com/> - digital fulfillment for photographers
- <http://www.aspiredigital.com/> - record from dvd, camcorder, vhs, tv, satellite, mp3, cd or photod onto CDs playable on your computer; \$500; replaces the DVD player attached to your TV.
- <http://www.crumplerusa.com/> - very cool camera and other bags shaped like a bike courier's bag; from Australia.

Wedding Photography Seminars



Teaching Wedding
Photography
© Larry Manire

On the show floor, [Doug Gordon](#) conducted seminars on wedding photography that were amazing. Using a bride and groom model, he showed how to make people look good, hide their bad points, and make great shots that sell. He is one of the most fluent, dynamic and effective teachers I have ever seen and he is only 27! (His father was a wedding photographer.)

If you plan to shoot people at all, especially in formal situations, you will really enjoy his videos if they are as good as he is in person.

Help with Buying Cameras

For help in buying cameras David Pogue recommended <http://www.dpreview.com/> and <http://www.steves-digicams.com/>. To compare prices, he said to use <http://www.dealtime.com/>.

I saw iPhoto on his Apple notebook; he said it is coming out for Windows very soon; from what I saw, I will switch from ACDSsee to iPhoto when it comes out.

Summing Up

Of course the best thing about the show was getting to meet and talk with professional photographers who were in great abundance. (As you can tell, I went to help plan my future in photography.) It was clear from many conversations and seeing what pros do, that, unless you are a super hit, it is quite a scramble to make a good living at photography, especially recently.

Several photographers counseled me to shoot what I love and keep my day job! In all cases they said develop your craft to perfection - you have to be

first rate to sell your work today and you have to work hard to sell a lot of it.

Larry Manire is an independent computer consultant in Rhode Island and is a recent graduate of Bryan Peterson's Learning to See Creatively photo course.



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