

Developing Workflow and Archiving Standards for Digital Content

Request for Funding Under the Preserving Creative America: Digital Content in the Private Sector program, The Library of Congress

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I. Name of the organization or entity to lead the project, and contact information for the person submitting the information.

American Society of Media Photographers

ASMP Digital Standards Committee

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II. Brief description of how the potential project will address the Preserving Creative America objectives.

Background:

When professional photographers switched from film to digital cameras the hope was that an image created in digital form would eliminate the need for a trained professional in post-production to adjust the image before it could be used in reproduction. Photographers quickly learned that the fine jpegs produced using the internal camera controls were not of a high enough quality for most uses. Not only that, shooting in fine jpeg mode locked in decisions that were made on location, where lighting conditions were less than ideal to make such decisions and the internal camera controls were at best blunt instruments as opposed to the software tools available on the computer. Consequently, most professionals switched to shooting in RAW format, even though it is far more involved and requires a great deal more post production. RAW is the original information captured by the camera, before all the decisions about color balance and gamma are applied. The RAW file is, essentially, a "digital negative". All the changes that the photographer makes on location are contained within the file but they can be fine tuned at the studio after the fact. In this process, no original

information is thrown out as it would be with a jpeg. RAW images cannot be used in reproduction; the image has to be converted to an industry standard file format like jpeg or tiff before it can be placed in a document.

In addition to the advances in speed and image quality associated with digital photography, a new kind of information became available to photographers: metadata. Metadata is information about information. Prior to the development of digital photography, metadata existed only in the photographer's memory of the shoot (we call this "virtual metadata"), or in notes scribbled on the back of a contact sheet. With digital images, valuable information about the files that cannot otherwise be searched for or saved is created. Some metadata and file properties are automatically generated and embedded by cameras and software, such as camera exposure settings, document kind, size, resolution, creation dates, etc. Bulk metadata, such as copyright and contact information, universal keywords, etc., can be added by the creator by means of an automated batch process. Image-specific information, such as subjects and location, can also be added to each image manually. Having embedded metadata in a file also means that an image can be permanently associated with its creator. The ability to track images will become critically important if "Orphan Works" legislation passes and images without creator metadata become "orphans" in the eyes of potential users.

Problem:

Right now, digital photography has no accepted set of standard rules. Every organization that uses digital images has different procedures for how they handle their files, and every photographer, art director, retoucher, and assistant has a different idea of how files should be processed and stored. Some have sophisticated production workflows developed through a careful trial process, and a well managed, redundant backup system, while some change their methods with every shoot, burn their images to CDR's and throw them on a shelf, not realizing until too late that their images are decaying. Professional photographers are focused on meeting their deadlines, and, although managing and preserving their images are vital to their future revenue streams, there is no accepted consensus as to best practices.

Since 2001, the American Society of Media Photographers' (ASMP) Digital Standards Committee has taken a leading role in bringing industry organizations together to develop and promote best practices for digital photography. Through their contributions to the creation, promotion and endorsement of the Universal Photographic

Digital Imaging Guidelines (UPDIG) initiative over the past 4 years, Richard Anderson, chair of the ASMP Digital Standards Committee, and the rest of the ASMP/PDI team have established a proven track record in developing sound work product and coordinating widespread adoption of best practices for digital photographers.

While the UPDIG Guidelines represent a set of best practices for digital photography, they lack specific workflow recommendations. They are intended "...to illuminate options and possibilities rather than offer step-by-step guides." The ASMP Digital Standards Committee proposes to develop, produce and promote a set of complimentary workflow recommendations that will enable digital photographers to ensure the usability and accessibility of their images now and for the future.

Proposal:

The purpose of this project will be for ASMP/Preserving Digital Images (ASMP/PDI) to create standards with the goal of determining and developing refined production workflows, archiving methods, and recommended best practices for digital photography based on image usage and capture methods.

Included will be an examination of the following:

- Current methods of archiving digital photographs.
- The compatibility of various RAW and digital photographic software and their ability to read, write, and preserve digital photographs and their associated metadata.
- The advantages and disadvantages of various consumer and professional digital asset management applications.
- The advantages and disadvantages of different professional digital camera systems including capture formats, raw file processors and storage methods for digital photographic assets.
- The capacity of these workflows to work within studio and location photography environments.

These digital workflow recommendations will be published as an ASMP/PDI website open to the public. The workflow recommendations will be promoted to the public through programming at industry trade shows and a nationwide series of training events at ASMP chapters, trade shows, and educational institutions.

- *Names of potential partner institutions or entities (specific commitments need not have been concluded). Indicate the roles they will play and, if appropriate, describe their key participants.*

This project will be administered through the American Society of Media Photographers Preserving Digital Images (ASMP/PDI) group.

- *Describe any role to be played by the Library.*

One of the main goals of this project is to evaluate and refine current methods of digital photograph archiving and cataloging systems. The participation of the Library of Congress in evaluating current practices and suggesting improvements in these areas will be welcomed.

- *Project duration including anticipated start and end dates.*

This project will commence as soon as funding is finalized and will continue for 3 years. The first 9 months of the project will be devoted to researching software and camera systems and developing and refining workflows. Once the workflows have been developed, there will be a 9 month period of field testing and further refinement to determine the viability of the workflows in real photographing scenarios. Following field-testing, there will be a 1 year period in which a final report and website will be prepared. Finally, there will be a 6-month period of promotion and professional training at national imaging industry events, educational institutions, and ASMP chapters.