

Information Technology

Smile, and I'll Shoot Ya!

And Frame Ya and Hang Ya! (J.J. Donnelly, Pearl River 1-hr. Photo)

(Updated 2009) Does anybody still use film? Sales of digital cameras in 2003 exceeded 12 million units in the US. Are they toys for consumers or useful for business too?

Real estate agents, home inspectors, artists, sculptors, insurance adjusters and anyone needing a low to moderate quality image for a web site have used digital cameras for years. With image quality improving rapidly and prices falling, new models are suitable for a wide range of purposes. There's lots of advice on selecting cameras, so we'll focus on the computer side.

Nearly all computers made in the last 5-6 years can support a digital camera and imaging software. Most cameras come with software that does the basics: retrieving the pictures to the computer, cropping to eliminate extraneous elements, reducing red-eye, enhancing the image and organizing the pictures into albums. Included software may also do special effects like distortion and fun projects, but these products are designed more for ease of use than power.

For about \$100-125, MS Digital Image Suite, Jasc Paint Shop Pro Photo or Adobe Photoshop Elements will give more control over the image. You can cut out distracting backgrounds like power lines, change colors and much more. For these products your computer needs lots of memory (RAM), a capacious (160 GB or more) hard drive to store the pictures, and a CD writer to save them. Beyond these are professional tools like Adobe Photoshop, which needs lots of memory and processing power.

Need prints? Most color printers deliver respectable prints if you use photo paper. Some makers have printer docks, allowing you to make 4"x6" prints directly from the camera; some printers have readers for the camera media – check compatibility with the camera's media. For large prints, best quality or lots of prints, it's best to take a CD (or the storage media from the camera) to a photo processor or use an online service.

Here are a few applications: product catalogs, inventory, safety inspections, employee photo IDs, photos of business functions, records of office layouts, landscape design, architecture – anywhere a visual record is needed.

This column by Denis Williamson of MacLamor Computer Consulting aims to help readers maximize the value of information technology. You can e-mail Denis at denis@maclamor.com. Past columns are available on the MacLamor web site.