

Managing Your Digital Negatives

I refer to the files I provide after your wedding, event, or session as your Digital Negatives. Since I don't always provide printed photographs, you should be aware of considerations and precautions related to viewing, retouching, printing, and storing these digital photographs. It's extremely important that you read this entire document if you wish to make the most from the Digital Negatives that I'll provide.

Your Disk

I'll provide you with one or more DVD-ROM disks containing your Digital Negatives. If you wish to view these photos on your own computer, you'll need a DVD-ROM drive on your computer. If you require CD-ROM disks instead of DVD-ROM disks, I'll need to burn five (5) CD-ROM disks for every single DVD-ROM worth of data. An additional charge will apply if you require the Digital Negatives on CD-ROM.

When you browse your DVD, you'll find three (3) directories. The directories are labeled "Web," "4x6," and "Large." The "Web" directory contains images suitable for viewing in your web browser, posting to Facebook, or sending via e-mail. You should not try to print the photographs in the "Web" directory. The "4x6" directory contains images with smaller file sizes and are typically acceptable for viewing on most modern computers. The files in the "4x6" directory are also suitable for printing at sizes up to 4" x 6" without an apparent loss in quality. If you'd like to significantly crop, manipulate, or enlarge a photograph beyond 4" x 6" sizes, you should use the images stored in the "Large" directory. Images found in the "Large" directory are full size, full resolution images. The actual pixel dimensions of these images vary as I often crop images after they're captured.

Viewing Your Photographs

When viewing your Digital Negatives, you'll probably use your home or work computer. However, it's likely that your computer won't have a color corrected monitor. This means that when you're viewing the photographs, the photograph seen on your screen won't usually match what you'd see on a printed photograph. The image on your computer may appear lighter or darker, exhibit more or less contrast, or have inaccurate hues or saturation levels that wouldn't appear on your printed photographs. The quality of the image you're seeing on your computer can also be affected by monitor quality, a computer's video card, and the type of software used to view photographs. Therefore, when you're viewing Digital Negatives, you should remember that what you see on your computer monitor could quite possibly grossly misrepresent what you'll see when you print the photographs.

Cropping Concerns

When you print my photographs in 5" x 7", 8" x 10", or 11" x 14" format, cropping will be required. Photographs taken with a 35mm equivalent camera (like mine) create photographs with a 2:3

aspect ratio. Since 5" x 7", 8" x 10", or 11" x 14" photographs do not follow that ratio, cropping is required when you print images at those sizes. If you don't want to crop your photos, printed photographs that won't require cropping include 4" x 6", 8" x 12", and 12" x 18". It's important to remember that if you allow your photo lab to automatically crop your photos, then an equal portion of the top and bottom or the left and right of your images (depending on whether the image was taken in landscape or portrait orientation) will be cropped automatically. This can mean that the tops of subjects' heads are unintentionally cut off. Or it can mean that people on the left or right side of the frame are cut in half. If this happens when you print your photographs, this is happening because you chose a size that required cropping. This problem does not lie with an error in the photograph itself.

Printing Your Photographs

There are many factors to consider when you're printing your own photographs. Although I can't cover all of them within the limited scope of this article, there are several hints and tips that might prove find useful.

The first thing you should consider is the selection of your service bureau or photo lab. Photographic labs include retailers like Wal-mart or Walgreens, online photo processing services like Snapfish, Shutterfly, and Kodak EasyShare Gallery, local big box stores like Sam's Club and Costco, and of course service bureaus that cater only to professional photographers. Each one of those labs offers advantages and disadvantages in relation to their services. Online retailers often offer the best prices but do not often offer the best quality. Local retailers often offer fast turnarounds but the quality of the photographs is often atrocious. Professional labs like the ones I use offer the best quality, but are substantially more expensive than printing with these other labs.

The Costco Solution

Based on my experience, the consumer lab that typically provides the best balance of convenience, value, and quality is Costco. Although the quality of prints from Costco may not be the best possible print, the quality is "good enough" for many of my clients. Please note that I never use Costco for my own printing. I use a professional lab that isn't available to consumers.

When you're printing your photographs at Costco, it's important to remember that the quality and your customer service experience may differ from location to location. This is because the Costco Photo Center location you choose may have differing levels of quality control and expertise. You might even want to submit a few test prints to two of your local stores and see which one creates the best print.

If you're too busy to visit a Costco location, you can also access the Photo Center section of the Costco web site and upload your photos anytime, day or night. When you go check out, you'll be provided with the choice of having the photos delivered via postal service or you can pick the photos up at your local Costco location, usually after 4:00 p.m. the next business day.

Costco Alternatives

If you're not a Costco member and you need to print your photos, the only other alternative I can comfortably recommend is to order your photographs through Mpix (<http://www.mpix.com/>). Just

like Costco, I believe Mpix prints are inferior to those produced by many professional labs. But as I mentioned with Costco, they may be "good enough" to meet your needs.

Photo Finishes

When selecting your prints, you'll probably be asked to select a photo finish. Your choices are typically glossy and lustre. I prefer a lustre (sometimes called pearl) finish over a glossy finish. One advantage of a lustre finish is that fingerprints and other defects are not as easily detected on a lustre print. Subjectively, I also prefer the look of a luster print over a glossy print. All photographic prints that I provide my clients are provided with lustre finish unless otherwise requested.

Storing Your Digital Negatives and Photographs

Contrary to common belief, a DVD-ROM is not ideal for long-term archival storage. Generally speaking, today's consumer-grade recordable DVDs may become unusable after only a short period of time. In extreme cases, your recordable media may start to show defects after only a few months. However, there are several precautions you can take to help ensure safe long-term storage for your photographs. First of all, I strongly recommend that you immediately create multiple copies of your Digital Negatives. You should first make a copy of your DVD originals. You should also copy your images from the DVD(s) to your personal computer's hard drive. If you have more than one computer, I recommend that you copy the images to each computer.

In addition to electronic backup copies, I also recommend that you print every photograph from our session or event. The costs associated with creating these physical copies are minimal. Once your photographs are printed, you should store the printed images in a dark, dry, and cool location. Although a shoe box isn't the ideal storage location, you may find that method convenient and effective. If you're interested in a more reliable long-term storage solution, you might want to take a look at investing in archival and acid free products. That being said, although many photo albums and boxes are labeled "acid free" or "archival," those marketing claims are often false. If you're interested in purchasing acid free archival products, I'd recommend that you take a look at products from trustworthy retailers like Light Impressions and Archival Methods.

One Final Note

Although I've provided you with these Digital Negatives, my photos are still are protected by Federal Copyright Law. I provide you with limited copyright ownership of the photographs under the condition that you will not sell photographic prints or make them available for sale at cost or for profit. In other words, you may not post these images to a site like Kodak EasyShare Gallery and then share that gallery with your friends and family. If you have any questions about my Copyright policy, please give me a call!