
Your Bottom Line

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Digital imaging explosion

Image-makers who haven't attended a major photography trade show recently are in for a big shock. At today's shows, they would hardly recognize many of the exhibitors and their innovative equipment. Welcome to the digital imaging explosion!

For many years, there has been talk of sweeping change in the photography industry due to electronic imaging technology. Numerous articles focusing on electronic imaging are constantly appearing in trade journals, including *Professional Photographer* and its sister publication, *PHOTO>Electronic Imaging*. But even this avalanche of information won't prepare photographers for the reality they will experience at their next trade show.

Earlier this year, I attended "Multimedia," a major trade show in Toronto. Just a few years ago, this was a traditional professional photography event, featuring conventional equipment and services. But now, within seconds of entering the exhibit area, it was obvious that the industry was going through an abrupt change. More than half of the trade show was devoted to electronic imaging products, and it was actually difficult to find traditional photography products among the glitzy technology.

Even the people attending this electronic imaging showcase were different, with professional studio photographers in the minority; instead, the event was dominated by a broad assortment of individuals engaged in various aspects of visual communications. Many of the educational programs also emphasized electronic imaging theory and application, further changing the scope of the entire trade show.

PPA '93, "Share the Vision," in Nashville, featured similar changes. In the past, only a few electronic imaging exhibitors could be found scattered around the trade show. But 1993 signaled a dramatic difference, as a whole section of the trade show was specifically devoted to electronic imaging technology. Many completely new exhibitors attended this event, displaying equipment that offers tremendous potential to entrepreneur-oriented photographers.

Other major trade shows—including

Photokina—are showing similar transformations. This whole effect can be frightening. Photographers have no choice but to start learning about the changes taking place in the industry and how electronic imaging can open opportunities for profitability. Electronic imaging enables small, hometown studios to offer innovative services and products that can decidedly distinguish their business from the competition.

How can professional image-makers learn about the new technology? First, realize that electronic imaging is a here-to-stay option that will greatly impact the industry. Nothing happens unless photographers commit themselves to learning. Then, attend major trade shows and conventions and look for the state-of-the-art services and products. Obtain as much information as possible from displays, literature, and company representatives. View trade shows as major educational opportunities, and think how new ideas can be integrated into a studio operation.

Also, attend programs, seminars, and workshops that emphasize the latest technology. It will be a few years before these programs reach the state and regional conventions, so it's important to attend large conventions such as the annual PPA event. Winona offers a variety of formal learning opportunities from experts in the field. And trade publications are now offering a multitude of digital imaging articles.

Professional photographers should not look at the new technology simply as an easier way to perform tasks such as retouching or print restoration. They must force themselves to search for innovative applications that could potentially alter the course of their studio. Who says the only way a professional photographer can earn money is by performing traditional studio photography?

At first, image-makers may not see any application for electronic imaging in their studio. But as they study the technological possibilities, they are bound to find specific functions which can enhance business. No matter what type or size a studio is, many applications are waiting to be discovered and implemented.

Does this signal the end for traditional photography? While electronic imaging is an exciting enhancement to image-making, I don't believe film is dead. When color film and paper were introduced to the industry, they didn't kill traditional photography, but enhanced it. Film is still the superior choice for capturing and storing visual information, and producing elegant prints in various sizes. Even if electronic imaging technology could produce a print equal to film—which it currently can't—film maintains the distinct advantage of being a simpler, less complex method.

Film will be around the industry for a long time. Electronic imaging is an important adjunct to film, enabling photographers to create images that were not possible or practical a few years ago. Image-makers must remember to practice their profession by the most efficient and economical means. Electronic imaging does not permit photographers to become careless. For example, if a subject's eyes are closed in a portrait, electronic imaging could superimpose a set of open eyes onto the original. However, it is still better to correctly photograph the portrait during the initial sitting.

Electronic imaging offers success-minded photographers a glorious opportunity to distinguish themselves and establish new levels of profitability. Now is the time to learn about this technology, to ensure that electronic imaging has a maximum positive effect on a studio's bottom line. 