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The Digital Workflow – What you need to know for success

Old fashioned, manual, foolproof, adaptable, guaranteed. Pretty strong words for this brand of digital workflow. With over 30 years working with and perfecting this system, I am confident in my bold assertions.

Old Fashioned

As an early adopter of digital photography, no one taught about workflow and keeping track of your files. After devising my system, I shared it with other photographers who were converting to the digital medium.

Manual

The system I developed was manual and very basic. Lightroom was not available at that time. As a take-off from Bridge (included in Adobe Photoshop), it's been expanded and is always updated. There are quite a few users who still only use Bridge. They are missing out on all the capabilities and automation found in Lightroom today.

The advantage of using my digital workflow system is that you know every photo's status in your process. For example, is it still only an original, is it in work, or has it been completed and is it ready to share with the world?

Remember – once it goes out of your computer electronically, it is lost to you forever. You can't get it back. People will know who the photographer is, whether it's good or bad imagery. Therefore, you must share only the best images in your collection.

Here's how to do it. See Diagram 1.

Set up your photo collection on an external hard drive dedicated to your photo files. Do not store any photos on the internal hard drive of your desktop or laptop. You will run out of space, and you run the risk of losing your photos when your computer crashes.

Use the _MASTERS FOLDERS Template to copy, paste and rename folders for each project. Store your Lightroom catalog on the same drive as your Photos for convenience. See Diagram 2.

Backup

Backup, backup, backup. Your computer should have an external hard drive attached with an automatic backup that will record ANY file changes. This backup is easy to do on a Mac with Time Machine. It's also easy to do on Windows with software that comes on the large capacity external hard drives. See Diagram 1.

Do not store any extra files on the external backup drive. This drive is dedicated to the automatic backup ONLY.

Create this automation so you don't have to remember to take specific actions at a particular time. If you forget, that might be when your computer crashes, and then it is too late.

It is a good idea to check your automatic backup periodically, just to be sure it's doing its job. External drives can crash, also.

Storage in the Cloud is also a good option. There is a subscription fee that depends on the amount of storage space required. The drawback, however, is if you don't have an Internet connection, you won't be able to access your files.

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Lightroom has a backup feature that you can employ when you import the images into the catalog. Making this part of your import process saves time. Be sure to direct the saving location to a separate drive or the Cloud.

Foolproof and Guaranteed

With discipline, this digital workflow becomes a foolproof system. It's user error (that would be you, if you aren't disciplined) that will trip you up. Once it becomes second nature, you will feel confident in the process.

Using ONE Lightroom catalog for ALL of your images makes searching and retrieving photos a breeze. See Keywording below.

Adaptable

Once you tame all of your photo (and video) files, you can apply this system to ALL of your data, with some modifications.

This digital workflow system works with Lightroom and Photoshop, but you can use it for any digital files needing a tracking system.

The Secrets – Dates, Descriptions, Keywords

Dates are important because the computer automatically sorts by date. You can change this, but it's not necessary. See Diagram 3.

Descriptions should be detailed enough to make it easy to scan the "directory" and locate your files.

Keywords are of the utmost importance when importing to Lightroom. You may not remember the date of a project when searching for photos. However, if you

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have keyworded your images correctly, you will find precisely the files you are looking for in short order.

Lightroom Automation

You can organize your files inside Lightroom in a similar manner, although it can be confusing. That is the reason I have maintained my old fashioned method. Like using a file cabinet and manila folders in your office, you have to set these up before you import your digital files.

Are you not using Adobe Lightroom and Adobe Photoshop? Are you using a free or low-cost program? No worries. Using this manual system remains the same.

Are you not using Photoshop? You won't need the WORK folder if you don't use Photoshop outside of the Lightroom process. See Diagram 4.

This process works using the Finder (Mac) and Explorer (Windows).

Set-Up Steps

1. Set up folders. Use the _MASTER FOLDERS template (See Diagram 2) and rename all folders. See Diagram 4.
2. Navigate to photos (card reader, camera, or cell phone)
3. Copy the files
4. Paste the files into the ORIGINALS folder (Photo originals will ALWAYS stay here, and you will make a copy to work on a file in Photoshop.)

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Lightroom Process

1. Import (Add) from the ORIGINALS folder into your Lightroom catalog.
   During import, automatically embed this information:
   1. copyright notice
   2. keywords

Non-destructive work
Export finished files – See Diagram 5
Share with the world

Photoshop Process (Standalone – not through Lightroom)

1. Open the file in the ORIGINALS folder
2. Select the file, copy and save the copy into the WORK folder
3. Destructive work – always work in layers, always keep the layered file in the WORK folder
4. "Save as" the work file into the COMPLETED folder and flatten layers
5. Share with the world

Editing in Photoshop through Lightroom

1. Import files into your Lightroom catalog as above
2. Non-destructive work in Lightroom
3. "Edit in Photoshop" (under Photo menu)
4. Complete the manipulations in Photoshop
   1. Save
5. Return to Lightroom
   Find the file saved with "Edit" in the filename (next to the original in Lightroom thumbnails)
6. Finishing touches in Lightroom
7. Export finished files
8. Share with the world

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Destructive vs. Non-Destructive

Photoshop is destructive because when you make changes on the background (or any layer), it is permanent if you save the file, which you should often do. That is why we always work in layers in Photoshop. You can remove a layer without destroying the work you've already done. You can make countless layers that are only limited by your computer's memory.

Lightroom is non-destructive in that when you are making changes in Lightroom, a sidecar file (.xmp) is created that holds all the change instructions. The sidecar file rides along with the original, and the file should be saved to preserve this metadata. Don't delete this file.

Photoshop Rules

These general rules for working on files in Photoshop will serve you well. There are, of course, exceptions to the rules. You will learn these as you gain experience.

1. Only work on a copy in the WORK folder, never the original file
2. Never work on a .jpeg file, only RAW or .psd
3. Always work in layers, never on the background layer

Keywording

Include as many keywords as you can generate. General keywords should apply to every image in the batch you are importing. It is critical to make the photos searchable. You can go back after import to keyword individual photos.

Keywords also remain permanently in the metadata so that when you are uploading to stock agencies, it will shorten your image preparation time for publication on each site.

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Copyright

You, as the photographer, own the copyright the moment the image is created – whether or not the image is registered in the Washington DC Copyright Office. Protect your pictures and your income by doing this in one of two ways.

In Camera

Some cameras have a custom function that allows you to embed your copyright when the image is recorded.
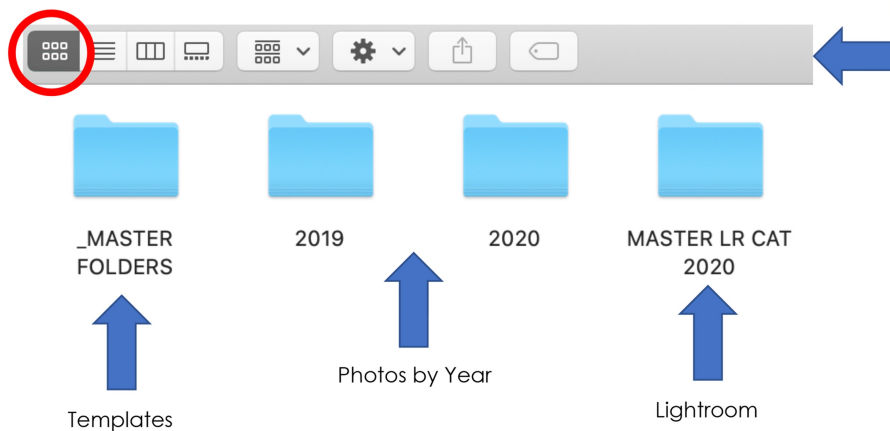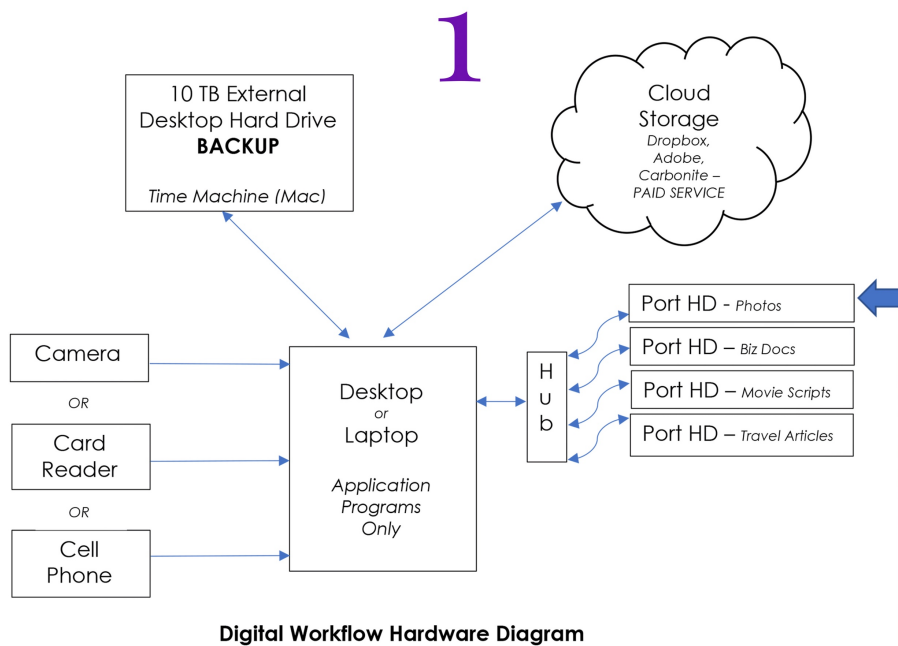
In Lightroom

When importing your files, set up Lightroom to automatically insert your copyright notice into every image.

Conclusion

With discipline implementing this digital workflow system, you will quickly realize the benefits of this organization. Now, share your images with the world!

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Digital Workflow Hardware Diagram

Templates   Photos by Year   Lightroom

Folders inside Portable Hard Drive - *Photos*

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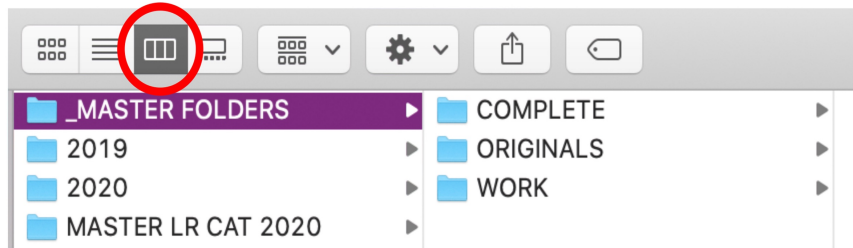714.403.0945

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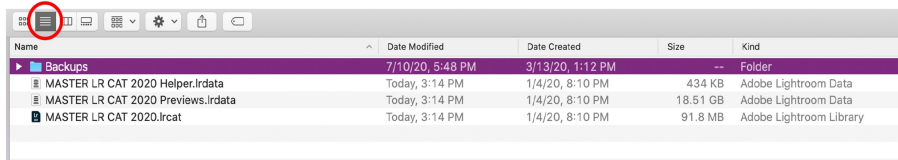MORE THAN JUST A SHOT IN THE DARK®

Figure 1Figure 1Seven-port hub with bread ties to identify connected drive

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Folders inside Portable Hard Drive – *Photos*
Different view

Lightroom Catalogue inside Portable Hard Drive – *Photos*
Different view

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Inside 2020 folder – Event folders become a directory sorted by date

- 200103 Kompanik Holiday
- 200104 Fashion Island
- 200107 Anaheim The Colony
- 200108 Ferreira
- 200109 Ferreira
- 200110 Ferreira presentation photos
- 200115 Dana Point
- 200118 Tustin Ranch GC
- 200120 Special Needs Sprouts Re-shoot
- 200123 Abby Carleson photo fix
- 200124 NorthCo Cities
- 200131 GlenIvyHotSprings
- 200202 SVM Yoga
- 200208 JOK 95th Birthday
- 200211 OC Mining Co
- 200215 Santa Ana Train Station
- 200215-16 LA TravAdv
- 200218 The Kneaded Massage-Sensory
- 200223-24 Joshua Tree+
- 200416 JDP Tutoring Barbara
- 200514 Knotts Berry Farm
- 200514 Old Town Tustin
- 200514 SoCoMix
- 200515 Oak Creek + Strawberry Farms
- 200517 South County Sites
- 200519 ACES Image Comp
- 200526 HB+SCP+Orange
- 200528 Hand Washing
- 200603 Huntington Beach
- 200607 Trabuco Bowers Courthouse Gus SA Zoo
- 200611 Hilton Hotel Photos
- 200611 Paséa Resort Photos
- 200612 Newport Dunes photos
- 200613 OC RV Parks
- 200620 WaterSystem 10381
- 200702 Paige St Johns Bridge
- 200706 Sara Paige SUP
- 200709 Portland
- 200722 Monarchs
- 200723 Tustin Rehab
- 200806 Gail's Training
- 200808 JOK
- 200809 JDP Vivi

All files from January 2020 to current date are sorted by:

Year
Month
Day

Detailed description of the event/topic/assignment make an easily readable directory to identify the subject (In case you don't remember the exact date of the event.)

Note three assignments in one day – sorted as above with additional alphabetical sort.

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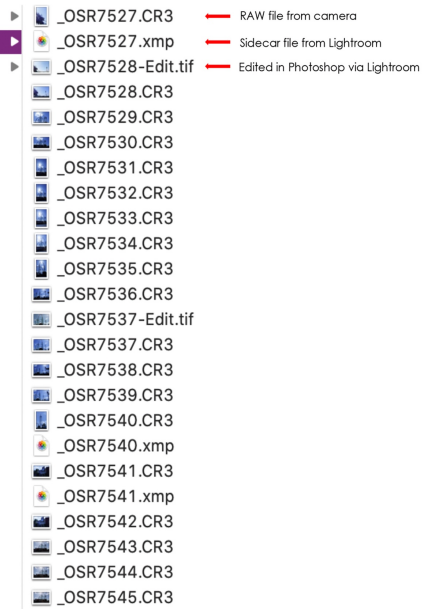Digital Workflow Success w diagrams-R1.docx

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Alpha sorted

📁 200514 Knotts DELIVERY	▶	📄 _OSR7527.CR3	━ RAW file from camera
📁 200514 Knotts ORIGINALS	▶	🔴 _OSR7527.xmp	━ Sidecar file from Lightroom
📁 200514 Knotts WORK	▶	🖼 _OSR7528-Edit.tif	━ Edited in Photoshop via Lightroom

_OSR7528.CR3
_OSR7529.CR3
_OSR7530.CR3
_OSR7531.CR3
_OSR7532.CR3
_OSR7533.CR3
_OSR7534.CR3
_OSR7535.CR3
_OSR7536.CR3
_OSR7537-Edit.tif
_OSR7537.CR3
_OSR7538.CR3
_OSR7539.CR3
_OSR7540.CR3
_OSR7540.xmp
_OSR7541.CR3
_OSR7541.xmp
_OSR7542.CR3
_OSR7543.CR3
_OSR7544.CR3
_OSR7545.CR3

Only use WORK folder if you are editing images in Photoshop without Lightroom connection

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High-resolution renamed jpeg files –
exported from Lightroom

📁 200514 Knotts DELIVERY ▶	🖼 KnottsBerryFarm-7527.jpg
📁 200514 Knotts ORIGINALS ▶	🖼 KnottsBerryFarm-7528.jpg
📁 200514 Knotts WORK ▶	🖼 KnottsBerryFarm-7537.jpg
	🖼 KnottsBerryFarm-7540.jpg
	🖼 KnottsBerryFarm-7541.jpg

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