

# Protect and Serve

Why Protecting Your Customers from Loss Can Be Your Business' Gain

BY LAURA OLES



Tracy Laidlaw, president of Beyond Words Ltd., is a woman with a background in technology and parental lineage to match. Her father, Andy Marken, is the president of Marken Communications, a company that is extremely active in our industry and has clients including Verbatim, Optoma and ADS Tech. Tracy's pedigree and expertise still didn't protect her from losing three years of digital photographs as she worked on swapping out hard

drives. In the process of upgrading her computer, she offloaded her files to a CD-RW, installed the new hard drive and then accidentally wrote over all the data on the CD containing her photographs. Andy jokes that Tracy is "old enough to know better," but says it is a very common issue with today's digital camera users—these files are in a far more tenuous state than most people realize. Fortunately, Tracy's assistant had tucked away the original hard drive, putting to rest the knot in Tracy's stomach.

Many consumers are less lucky. Today's hard drives are bursting with digital photographs

and few of today's consumers pro-actively back up their files. In fact, IDC estimates that only 15 percent of home users are actively backing up their hard drives, a statistic that Andy Marken finds frustrating. "This issue is even more critical now that people

are happily shooting away with their digital cameras and dumping their images on their hard drives," he says, "because they think those images will be there forever. They won't."

The topic of preserving digital images has been hot this year. Regardless of the format—online albums, CD-RW, camera card or printed picture—one theme

remains the same. Loss.

No single solution is perfect. If we can understand and respect each medium's weak spots, we can help replace consumer angst with a sense of relief. While we can't completely control technology, we can better understand its

nuances, educate our customers and help them better utilize the tools they have in their personal digital darkroom.

#### Retailers to the Rescue

In this mix is a real opportunity for today's picture business retailers. It seems that today's digital camera models have a shelf life somewhere between strawberries and milk, and with the increasing pressure of selling current inventory so as not to get stuck with "older" models, those involved in selling digital cameras often focus their sales efforts on pixels and price. In the middle of the rush to cycle through these shiny silver gadgets, there is a crisis waiting to erupt and an opportunity for picture retailers to come to the rescue.

The digital photography maze is one that consumers often find themselves lost in because, while they have more power than ever before regarding their photographs, many are unsure how to best wield it. In fact, consumers are finding the responsibility of owning the entire lifecycle

■ **IN THIS STORY:** Image file management is becoming a big issue with consumers in the digital world. As their hard drives begin to max out, many people are unaware of how to properly and safely back-up and protect their precious memories. This article examines how this dilemma spells opportunity for retailers.

cle of pictures—from capturing to sharing to storing to printing—an overwhelming task. Countless photographs reside on hard drives across America, while today's busy families wait for the time to come when they can figure out what to do next.

That time, for many, will never come. Hidden behind that harsh reality is a chance for today's photo retailers to step in and create new revenue streams while helping to release digital shutterbugs from the burden of not knowing how to best manage, preserve and protect their memories.

### **STEP ONE: Addressing the (Image)**

#### **Management Issue**

"I have almost 125,000 digital images from the last three years, and I can find any one in under a minute." When Peter Krogh, a well-respected professional photographer and board member of the ASMP (American Society of Media Photographers), said this to me, I almost dropped the phone. If he uttered those words to today's average digital camera user, he'd likely be met with disbelief, jealousy or even a bit of hostility. Krogh does have a

few advantages, though, and he fully admits that those in the professional photography industry have some tools, including higher-end DAM (Digital Asset Management) software programs that have not yet been fully replicated on the consumer level. "It has to be a real hobby for consumers to figure it out," he concedes, "because there isn't a real comprehensive solution available for the general public."

Krogh has become an expert on DAM solutions for others in the professional photography industry and has even conducted seminars on creating a comprehensive process for managing digital images. He also has a new book for professionals scheduled to hit this summer titled *The DAM Book* (O'Reilly Media, 2005). While he believes that much needs to happen on both the hardware and software sides of digital photography for consumers to reap the benefits, he's optimistic that the industry will recognize the opportunities and step up to provide solutions. He insightfully articulates what many consumers feel when they transfer their digital camera images to their computers. "Am I doing this

right? How am I going to find these images? Are they really protected?"

Retailers may not be able to create the utopian software product Krogh imagines (and I, too, dream about), but they can become well-schooled on what the best-of-breed software products are in today's market and stock them or direct customers to their use. Having some practical experience to pass along to consumers about software suites is a great way to help them locate those favorite photographs so they can return to your store for prints.

Ross Rubin, analyst for NPD, released a white paper in January 2005 titled *Digital Imaging: The Developing Picture*. It is a topic that resonates in our industry and with consumers

**IN FACT,**  
IDC estimates  
that only  
**15 percent**  
of home users  
are actively  
backing up  
their hard  
drives...

because, as digital cameras and camera phones become more mainstream, today's hard drives are being overrun with digital photographs, and people simply can't easily retrieve them or even remember what shots they care most about because they're interwoven amidst the annual Christmas newsletter, some shareware and a video clip of last year's company picnic.

Rubin sees a market opportunity for those in the picture business.

"People are able to share images in so many ways now, and helping consumers manage their images can create opportunities for printing and other services." Rubin believes retailers can establish trust with their customers by educating customers on such topics as image management software suites and other tools that are available to help them reign in their piles of files. Even directing customers to products you may not directly sell or reputable free programs that can be downloaded from the Web can still generate business and loyalty because you are providing something of great value: expertise and a solution to their image management problem.

### **STEP TWO: Finding Photos Can Lead To Getting the (Printed) Picture**

Helping customers re-connect with their digital photographs and relive the memories that now reside on their hard drives and CDs can open the door to their coming through retailer doors. Not only will their frustration and guilt be replaced with enthusiasm and a bit of calm, it may also encourage them to take the next

## **THE RETAILER DIGITAL TOOLBOX**

**W**e've come up with a few simple tips you can pass along to your customers to help establish you and your store as the local experts on all things digital.

■ Create a brochure or simple sales piece that describes how to properly handle CDs and removable media. For example, discs should only be handled by the outer edge or center hole, should be stored upright (or book-style) in original jewel cases, and stored in a cool, dark, and dry environment. Andy Marken recommends using CD-R rather than CD-RW disks for digital photos and other important media to minimize the risk of overwriting those precious pictures.

■ If you partner with an online photo processing company, make sure you clearly understand their terms and conditions regarding use and possible deletion of pictures so that you can counsel customers on those same factors. Managing customer expectations can go a long way in protecting both the photos and the relationship.

■ Create a Saturday afternoon workshop to educate customers on the best resources and methods of managing and preserving their photographs. Ask trusted vendors or other partners to provide information, staff and even freebies.

■ Contact your local newspaper to discuss this issue and provide recommendations for readers. You can also discuss workshops and other resources (such as a special education section on your Web site) to provide more value to those in your community.

— *Laura Oles is the Vice President of Strategic Communications for Pixel Magic Imaging. She has been with the company since 1993 and has helped hundreds of independent businesses as well as national chains evaluate, implement, train, and market digital photography solutions to photo consumers. You can reach her at loles@pixelmagic.com.*

**“Consumers behavior is by far the leading contributor of whether or not today’s CDs will be viable down the road. CDs need to be treated with the same care as a roll of film.”**

—Andy Marken, President, Marken Communications



step—getting the photos into printed form.

Much has been written the last few months regarding the issue of digital print permanence, and there is an important debate taking place in our industry about the necessary standards needed to clearly define the term ‘archival’ when referring to digital photo paper and removable media.

While today’s retailers may not have the ability to solve the industry’s desperate need for image permanence standards, they can share their problem-solving skills and may find themselves rewarded through rising sales figures and customer loyalty as payment for their efforts.

It’s surprising to learn how few people really understand that all printing materials are not created equal. Great strides have been made, especially in the inkjet arena, but this issue touches all digital print forms. For example, consumers often times will use high quality inks but print on traditional paper instead of investing a bit more in the recommended long-life photo paper recommended by the manufacturer. There are so many choices available to today’s consumers that making an informed decision is more difficult than predicting the next teen fashion trend. A well-educated retailer can cut through the clutter and provide counsel on the

giving access to images entrusted to them (due to oxidation issues or corrupt files), it is actually how the CDs are treated that makes the most impact on their long-term viability.

For retailers and users, this is welcomed news. Counseling digital shutterbugs on the proper way to handle their CDs is an important service to provide to consumers and will further distinguish your business as more than simply a photo shop, drug store or consumer electronics superstore.

Why do so few people regularly back up their hard drives when they know that said computer is the only place holding the last three years of their favorite photos? The reasons are varied—lack of time, lack of knowledge about what to do next, lack of understanding the real risks—but the results can be the same. Backing up photographs is a bit like getting a physical—we only tend to do it after a crisis seizes our attention.

Retailers can provide that ‘gentle nagging’ and offer solutions to help consumers establish a regular schedule of backing up their photographs and create a redundancy plan to “back up their back ups.” Sometimes a little outside pressure is all we need to adopt a new habit or tackle a long-standing task.

For much of the issue regarding managing and protecting our growing libraries of digital memories, it comes down to tools and behavior. If retailers advise on today’s top technology tools and provide guidance on how consumers’ behavior can impact their ability to retrieve and preserve their pictures, they will find a welcome audience from those busy families who’d love to put some of their favorite photos back in picture frames.

If only they could find them.

**“This issue (image archiving) is even more critical now that people are happily shooting away with their digital cameras and dumping their images on their hard drives because they think those images will be there forever. They won’t.”**

— Andy Marken, President, Marken Communications

Communicating the fact that you use digital print paper with archival qualities (based upon testing information provided by your paper provider of choice), whether it’s from a digital minilab, digital photo kiosk or other printing method, will serve two purposes: 1) it will create awareness that this is actually an important consideration when choosing how to print digital pictures and 2) position your business as a trusted resource to meet those needs.

best solution.

**STEP THREE: Help Consumers Behave Better**

“Consumer behavior is by far the leading contributor of whether or not today’s CDs will be viable down the road. CDs need to be treated with the same care as a roll of film,” says Marken. While Marken concedes there have been a few instances in past years of CDs not