

# Organizing Digital Content: Stage 1

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I sat down last night to begin the unpleasant job of organizing the images on my Network Attached Storage (NAS) device. I had originally consolidated the images from a number of sources, beginning with the Photoshop Master Files on my Pentium 4 desktop, which I use to create the prints of my optimized images. Then I began dumping my camera files onto this drive. Eventually, the directory structure became unwieldy, and illogical.

So I began to try to figure out from this big mess what was what, where things really should go, and how it all should be organized, so that I can finally begin to put my images into a catalog and start the process of keywording. My NAS is a 320 Gig unit. I think, after thinking it all through, I'm going to need some extra space very soon. Let's look at all the steps I need to do overall in order to get my images into some kind of workable collection so they can be found in the future.

- Figure out an organizational scheme that will remain intact as the collection grows (i.e., scalable) -- this is what this article is about.
- Bring in all previously-shot digital images that are still on CDs or DVDs from an earlier prosumer camera, which haven't been put onto the central repository drive (the NAS).
- Rename all the images on the drive to something other than the original camera file name.
- Make DVD backups of all image sets for offsite storage (i.e., my parents home, safe deposit box, etc.).
- Create a mirror of the entire drive to a second drive, which will be used only as a backup / archive (hard drives do go south).
- Begin using and testing Adobe Lightroom to keyword, edit, and star-value all images (a process in itself).
- Figure out a cost-effective way to digitize all the film I have (this is a doosey).

My directory structure looked like a public computer's hard drive before the clean up; the problem actually was that I had created a dichotomy of directories and subdirectories because of how and where I put the directories and how I named them. I won't get into exactly what it was before, it'll make your brain hurt.

Naming conventions have now been solidified in my head (for the moment anyway). It used to be that I thought naming things by date would be best. While that might seem logical, I created the names in a way that made finding anything impossible. For instance, a directory and file structure will work to find numbers and then letters, each in order. So, 0,1,2,3, etc. and then A, B, C, etc. Therefore naming something "03Jun2005\_Carshow" was extremely unhelpful and foolish, and I knew it to start with, but I didn't fix it then because I didn't know what would work. The second thing to note is that I go to many local carshows each summer when on Tuesday evenings they gather in the parking lot of the nearby McDonald's. So I'd have a lot of directories named with the formula "DDMMYYYY\_Carshow" in a few months. In fact, I already had a few and I didn't know what was what.

That method has been trashed as I said. In addition to deleting the proof JPGs I used to keep for portraiture clients (which I can reproduce from the PSDs), I've also reorganized everything into 4 top level directories, renaming them from their originals to something workable:

- Camera Original Files (JPG, RAW)
- Master Files (PSD)
- Print Finals (JPG)
- Scans

That is what you see when you go to my NAS. Camera Original Files are what I shoot. They are a dump of the images I come back with. Master Files are my Photoshop files which I use to optimize the images and create my fine art prints, and final portraiture images. Print Finals are the size- and lab-specific files I create and send to the labs with the ICC profile embedded. Scans are the original scans from film that I have scanned but haven't started doing anything with. Eventually images which begin their optimization process will move from Scans to Master Files.

All the images are now in subdirectories under Camera Original Files. Notice it says JPG and RAW in parentheses. Why would someone who is serious about their images want to produce JPG originals from the camera? Well, the first reason is not a great answer, but in the beginning, when memory cards weren't cheap, I went JPG. I also would shoot JPG at functions because they weren't portraits, but events which required more documentary-style shots. Therefore, workflow-wise, it was best to shoot JPG for me since I wouldn't be making prints larger than 11x14. And I think for events I will continue to shoot JPG for the same reason.

At some point I decided that memory was cheap enough, and I started shooting RAW + large JPGs. So I had a bunch of duplicates. What to do with the duplicates? That decision was easy. I deleted all the JPG duplicates. Don't need 'em, I've got the RAW files. I was shooting the RAW + JPGs for another reason: quick and easy slideshows. But now, as technology has progressed, I don't think I'll be shooting RAW + JPGs. Now the question is, should I be converting all my

RAW files to DNG as suggested by Peter Krogh, author of The DAM Book? I don't know yet, I'm still figuring all this out. It's good to get advice from book and professionals, but in the end, your workflow -- my workflow -- will be different and unique, because of the way I work, my equipment, and my limitations of space, time and money. I don't want to follow the way someone else does something. I want to know about it and adopt it with changes for my needs.

The naming convention for the subdirectories under Camera Original Files is purely descriptive by location. That's how my mind works, so for now, that's the way I'm doing it. I don't think, "Oh that was in 2004;" No, I think, "Oh yeah, that should be in the pictures of when we went to San Diego for the first time." So the naming convention is by place, like, "San Diego, CA" and "New York City" and "Robert Moses State Park." There are a couple of exceptions, and they are few but notable, like "Portraiture" for all my portraiture clients. Under portraiture is a subdirectory of each of my clients by last name, or organization name. Having done the portraiture this way, I may be refining my directory structure even further to include only the top level hierarchy, like "Cities," "Mammals," "Festivals" etc., moving the camera files for each specific shoot under each of these. But I'm not fully decided yet.

The next article is probably going to be about organizing my top level naming conventions and "controlled vocabulary" for keywording the images.