

Your portfolio is an important tool for making a big impression with potential clients. This series explores the process of updating it.

BY ELLIS VENER

# Remaking PART I your portfolio

In every professional photographer's career, there comes a time when it is necessary to remake your portfolio, no matter how successful you are. It is universally acknowledged in commerce:

Fast-moving times and evolving client expectations impel you to make changes.

The purpose of a portfolio is to make a favorable impression on potential clients. It tells them who you are and illustrates

your strengths as a photographer. It indicates the kind of work and the level of clientele you seek. Today's portfolios take two forms: a collection of no more than 20 to 30 printed images, and a Web site where you can display more images in combination with text and other elements.

While Web presence is now considered the primary way of reaching clients, the printed portfolio still can be your most important sales tool. Your "book" is easy to pass around and easy to use as the center of a presentation. The images can be printed larger and at higher resolution than on your Web site, and make a bigger impact on your prospective clients. Many people still like things they can hold and examine directly when deciding how to spend money.

You should budget as much time as you can to assemble your portfolio, but also give yourself a reasonable deadline. Each step deserves your full consideration, but working without a goal is a recipe for never getting it done.

The first step is to decide where you want to go. Beyond financial awards and ego stroke, consider what turns on your creative juices. What do you want to photograph? Define your goals as a working artist, consider who will need your services, and think about how you can reach them.

Looking back at what you've done can be invaluable in defining your goals. Whether you create all new images or mine your archives, really looking at the subject matter, techniques and styles you have experimented with can reawaken ideas you set aside in the crush of getting the next project out the door. Look beyond

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Left, a portion of the controls available in the Nikon Scan 4 user interface.

your greatest hits and seek out ideas that resonate, even if the execution wasn't up to your present standards. How do these concepts from the past connect with what you want to be doing today or a year or two from now? How does your more recent work fit in?

This editing process has other advantages. By putting together work you created at different times, you might discover repetitive "tics" you unconsciously fall back on. For example, when you pose people, how often do you use the same limited set of gestures and poses? Have you been making the same photograph over and over again? It can help to have someone whose critical vision you trust to look at the images with you.

As you begin to make a new portfolio, you quickly realize that the road forks three ways. You can do it all yourself, you can hire a professional to do the entire project, or you can use a hybrid of both. Doing everything yourself can save money and teach you a few useful skills, but at the expense of lots of time.

There are professionals who can guide you in defining your direction, determining your target market and selecting the appropriate images, as well as handling such digital grunt work as scanning and optimizing, outputting prints, building a Web site, and designing, making or choosing the appropriate packaging for the portfolio. By hiring professionals you'll have more time to concentrate on current business, and you'll benefit from their expertise, but it will take a greater investment of cash.

The third route, hybridizing, is the route we'll explore in this series.

The process of editing is like hard exercise. It hurts while you're doing it but the agony is forgotten when you see



Making high-quality scans of various film formats starts with careful editing. Each scan represents an investment of time, so choose wisely.

the results. The pain is in discarding the ones that could have been great but failed in some way. The joy is in seeing the strength in the body of work that remains. Keep a notebook handy to jot

down the ideas you discover in the images that don't make the cut. Don't do this in lengthy sessions, as your eyes and brain will tire and you'll start getting sloppy. Break up the work into stages to give

## THE GOODS: PORTFOLIO PROJECT



Nikon Super Coolscan 5000

your psyche a chance to refresh. But again, this shouldn't be an open-ended project; you need the discipline of deadlines to get it finished.

After collecting the survivors, sort them into general categories: portraits, travel, weddings, photojournalism, sports, events, products, studio. Do it with your digital images as well—digital captures, existing high-end scans and images that have been retouched digitally.

If you started your career back when film was king, you'll have a lot of film to scan. If you've had some scanned in the past, you might need to do it again. Look at the colorspace they were scanned into and the bit depth. You want a reasonably large colorspace like Adobe RGB (1998) or preferably something larger, like Ekta Space or Pro Photo. The latter two spaces are large enough to contain every color you will see in any E-6, C-41 or Kodachrome image.

As for bit depth, you need more than 8-bits per channel to give you editing

“headroom,” which you need because virtually every editing step in Photoshop throws away image data (doing image modifications in layers is a way around much of this). Do several modifications or edits to your images and these losses can result in posterization—color banding—in your final images.

No doubt about it, scanning film is almost exciting as watching paint dry, especially high-res scans of medium- and large-format film. Image editing is a purely personal effort, but scanning is something you can either do yourself or hire someone else to do. High-quality scans are not cheap, and if you elect to do it yourself, there are decent desktop scanners available for reasonable prices.

You can choose a dedicated film scanner or a multi-format flatbed than scans film as well as prints. Some dedicated film scanners can handle multiple formats, some just 35mm. Any of them would make a lovely addition to your desktop decor. Hasselblad/Imacon Flextight film scanners are the high-end in desktop models, although any one of them pretty much needs a desktop all to itself.

Dedicated desktop film scanners are made by Nikon, Microtek and Konica Minolta. Reasonably priced flatbed scanners can do a good to fine job with medium- and large-format film, but not so great with 35mm film. Epson, Microtek and Canon make flatbed scanners with the capacity to scan film.

In choosing a scanner, look at the *real* optical resolution of the device and ignore the *interpolated* resolution settings. You also want to look for a D-max rating of 3.2 or higher; the higher the better. It is rare for a scanner to actually achieve the D-max range its

manufacturer claims, but it's an important factor to look for.

You also have to consider the software. For this article, I used a flatbed Epson Perfection 4990 PRO flatbed scanner for medium- and large-format negatives and transparencies, and a Nikon Super Coolscan 5000 for 35mm film. For software, I used Silverfast Ai6 Studio (an upgrade from the Version Ai6 software that's packaged with many scanners) with the Epson and Nikon Scan with the Coolscan.

Getting high-quality scans with any model is a subtle craft, perhaps even an art. But it isn't voodoo. It just takes time to learn how to do it right, and the old axiom garbage in, garbage out applies. As with monitors and printers, it's important to accurately profile and calibrate your scanner. This can be problematic.

I tried and failed three approaches with the Epson scanner using the included Monaco EZcolor software and 4x5-inch film IT-8 target with the recommended combinations of Epsomscan and the Silverfast Ai6 software. I finally got good results after upgrading to



Epson Perfection 4990 PRO

Silverfast Ai6 Studio, and profiling and calibrating using a Silverfast IT-8 target. For my the capture space, I chose Ekta Space PS5, which can be downloaded from its creator's Web site, [www.josephholmes.com/profiles.html](http://www.josephholmes.com/profiles.html). The beauty of Ekta Space is that it can contain virtually every possible tone and color any Agfa, Fuji or Kodak E-6 transparency film can record, but it isn't as large as the Pro Photo colorspace.

Nikon Scan 4 software allows you to choose one of eight preset colorspaces for output, but you cannot create a profile for an individual scanner, or use Choose a Different Colorspace. This can be addressed by choosing Scanner RGB or Wide Gamut RGB as the colorspace, and assigning Ekta Space PS5, J Holmes or Pro Photo as the colorspace

for the image. Make sure you Assign the colorspace, not Convert.

Other than this shortcoming, the Coolscan 5000 is proving to be an excellent scanner, as is the Epson 4990. The one problem I've seen crop up with the 4990 Photo is the appearance of Newton rings when a particular transparency is not held perfectly flat and the film touches the glass bed of the scanner. A solution is to flip the film over.

A good scan should initially look very flat with plenty of detail in the shadows and highlights. You want to wring out as much information from the original as possible without immediately trying to duplicate the look of a slide as viewed on a light box. Control the output tonal relationships in Photoshop. Making high-quality scans takes time, and beyond

having a service bureau do it, there's just no way around it. As with editing, don't try doing this in marathon sessions; you'll get bored and lose heart.

After getting all of the images into digital form, the next step is to see how they fit with one another in the context of the portfolio. For this step in the editing process, make 4x6 or 5x7 prints that you can layout next to each other in various sequences. You could do this on a monitor, but I find it easier to have prints to move around. At this point, consider calling in a professional or someone whose eye and judgment you trust. ■

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