

The page features a decorative design with three blue circles of varying sizes, each composed of concentric circles in different shades of blue. These circles are positioned in the upper right and lower right areas. Two thin blue lines intersect at the top left, forming a large 'V' shape that frames the central text area.

UNDERSTAND THE ISSUES

ORGANIZEPICTURES.COM TUTORIALS - PART I

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WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH ORGANIZING DIGITAL PICTURES?

In order to properly learn how to organize your digital pictures you must understand what the problem is. I would like to explain this problem by using my own story as an example. Even though I could easily state the problem, I chose to go a little bit into details so that the root of the problem is exposed. Many people get frustrated with organizing their pictures and either create an inefficient system or just give up. The goal of learning how to organize your digital pictures is to be free to enjoy them. But in order to achieve this freedom, you need to put some thought into understanding the problem and then understanding and practicing the solution. So, let's start with the problem.

Do you know how to organize your pictures?



HERE IS MY EXAMPLE...THIS MAYBE YOU AS WELL, SO READ ON.

I bought my first digital camera in 2002 and I was so excited about the new possibilities digital cameras offered. I loved the fact that I could take lots of pictures and then later I could delete the bad ones and keep the good ones.

So, I started taking my camera everywhere I went: hiking, backpacking and the beach. The pictures started coming fast and in large quantities. I loved the whole experience until one day I couldn't find some pictures I wanted to show to a friend. I was frustrated, but eventually I did find them and I quickly forgotten about the incident.

However, more and more incidents like that kept happening and I soon realized what every new digital photographer realizes at some point: I have to learn how to organize my pictures. If I don't, I will be overwhelmed by so many pictures sitting on my computer.

I realized that my memory will only serve me for a limited time! My brain can only cope with a limited number of pictures. Once I go past that, I will be overwhelmed and frustrated unless I start organizing my pictures in an efficient way.

WHAT IS THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM?

The problem with organizing digital pictures is simple to explain but hard to solve. The problem is quantity...there are just too many pictures that we can take with a digital camera. It's not bad that we can take many pictures...it is actually great...as a matter of fact this is the greatest thing about digital cameras. The only problem is that we have to learn how to organize them. If we don't, then we will show all the symptoms that come with this problem: frustration and disappointment.

Organizing your digital pictures is hard because you can take lots of pictures. All the problems with organizing your pictures boil down to one single issue: **there are too many pictures you have to deal with**. Your memory, no matter how smart you are, cannot deal with this large quantity of pictures!

LET'S LOOK AT MY INITIAL PROBLEM IN DETAIL

The problem I had when I first bought my digital camera was very simple in essence, but hard to solve. Simply put: there are too many pictures to deal with. Like most new digital camera users, I was not prepared to deal with this avalanche of pictures. In the past, I used to finish one roll of film in two or three months unless I had an important event when I would should one roll of film, maybe two at the most.

But now, with my new digital camera I could easily shoot 200 pictures on one day hike...this is almost 10 rolls of film! Take a look at some of my mistakes and see if are making any of these.

MY FIRST MISTAKES...ARE YOU MAKING THE SAME MISTAKES?

This is a simple list where most people, me included, go wrong when considering how to organize their digital pictures. This list does not contain anything about tags or image metadata because these are advanced concepts. We have to start with the beginning because it is here that most people stumble.

- Essentially I was not putting any thought into how I was dumping my pictures on the computer.
- I had no consistency in naming the folders – you should always start with your folders. This will get you a long way towards building an efficient photo collection.
- Folder names do not provide enough information about their content.
- Folder names do not include a specific date for their contents.
- Many pictures are just “floating” having no parent folder.

The take home lesson is that you must think about organizing your pictures if you want to be free to enjoy your growing collection of digital pictures. If you don't use an efficient and consistent method for organizing your pictures, you will become frustrated very quickly. Trust me...I was frustrated too!

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION FOR ORGANIZING YOUR PICTURES?

The fundamental problem with organizing digital pictures is quantity...there are simply too many pictures we have to organize. Unless you use an efficient and consistent method for organizing your pictures you will very soon be overwhelmed by the large quantity of pictures you are taking. This is all great, but what is the solution to this picture organization problem? How do I organize my pictures? Well, let me give you a bird's eye view of the solution to organizing your digital pictures effectively.

WHY DO WE LOVE TAKING PICTURES?

We love taking pictures, and we love looking at pictures! We all love images better than words. Our lives are filled with events, some more important than others. From getting up in the morning, going to work, getting a hair cut to traveling, getting married and giving birth, the events in our lives vary in their impact to our lives. Those events that are most important to our lives become the subject of our pictures. Pictures help us remember these important events, they help us re-live feelings and sense the people and places that we see in pictures.

Is there any solution for organizing your digital pictures?



TWO COMPLEMENTARY METHODS FOR ORGANIZING YOUR PICTURES.

With the advent of digital photography, we can take thousands upon thousands of pictures. While this is all great, this large quantity of pictures creates the organization problem that we're all trying to solve. Over the years folder based methods of photo organization have proved to be the simplest for most

digital camera users who organize their pictures around events. However, the advances in software and image metadata standards have allowed digital photographers to organize their growing collections based on descriptive and efficient keywords. So, now you're no longer limited to organizing your pictures based on events but you can organize them according to...well pretty much anything you want. Let's analyze these two solutions to picture organization.

HOW DO YOU REMEMBER AN EVENT?

Now, let's think about this from a different perspective. What helps you remember an event? Sometimes an approximate date can be enough, while most of the times you need a date AND a description of the event. If you have these two pieces of information, then you can search in your memory and bring up that event in front of your mind's eye.

FIRSTLY, ORGANIZE YOUR PICTURES USING FOLDERS.

This is where picture organization should start. You might not stop at folders, but you should certainly start here.

The method I use for organizing pictures is based on the clues I need to remember events in my life: dates and descriptions. I use both pieces of information in creating precise names for picture folders. This way I can easily organize my pictures in a structure that easily extends in order to accommodate more and more pictures as more events happen in my life.

The key to my method is the way I name the folders. While most people use a combination of dates and descriptions of events, they don't do it consistently. Also, most people do not know how to take advantage of how their computer sorts files and folders. My method combines the precise folder naming and an understanding of computer file storage, resulting in simplicity and efficiency. Once you do it once you can keep doing it.

SECONDLY, ORGANIZE YOUR PICTURES USING EFFICIENT IMAGE TAGS.

Why are image tags important and when should you think about using them? Here is an example that illustrates the point.

Let's say you visit Paris and you take tons of pictures (you should do that for sure if you visit Paris). Then you come home and you create multiple folders with the date and Paris as the place. You will end up with something like this:

📁 2008_03_25-Paris

📁 2008_03_26-Paris

📁 2008_03_27-Paris

This is all cool. But then you realize you have too many pictures and you want to show your friends all the Eiffel Tower pictures. You realize then that you have those pictures in all of the three folders you created.

Right now you have only one solution: You can create another folder called Eiffel-Tower and copy all the Eiffel Tower pictures into this folder. This will work but you just created two copies of the same picture in two separate folders. Depending on how many times you have to do that you can fill up a hard drive very quickly.

THIS IS WHY IMAGE TAGS OR KEYWORDS ARE SO COOL.

What if you wouldn't have to copy the pictures into a new folder? If you could just add some keywords to your pictures it would be great. You could add Paris to all your pictures from Paris, but the ones that have the Eiffel Tower in them you can just label as Paris, Eiffel Tower. All would be complete if you could not search by Eiffel Tower and voila!...your Eiffel Tower pictures would come up without you having to create a special folder.

Yes, you know where I'm going...folders would not work for this! You need a special kind of software to enable you to do this tagging of images. These days, even though it adds quite a bit of technical complexity, image tagging seems easier and easier because of new programs that can help you do this. And, yes, adding tags to your pictures can add a lot of power to your image collection.

SO, WHAT IS THE SOLUTION TO ORGANIZING DIGITAL PICTURES?

Well, it's a solution consisting of two layers of organization: picture folders and picture tags.

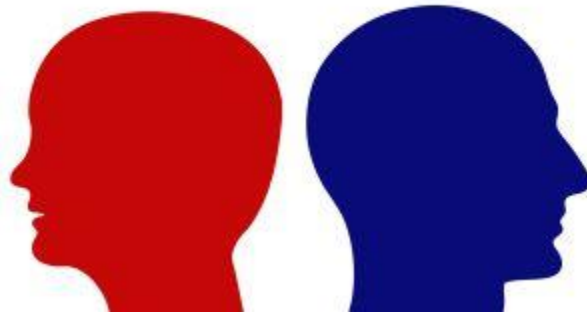
For most people, using image folders is sufficient, while for others more advanced photographers, adding image tags is a must. What should you do?

I always tell people to start with a carefully constructed folder structure . Then, later see if you need to worry about adding keywords to your pictures. If folders are not enough then adding image keywords would give you the flexibility you want

IMAGE TAGS VS. FOLDERS – THE GREAT DEBATE

If you have been taking digital pictures for a while you've probably been forced to deal with organizing your pictures. You have also probably been asking yourself if the method you're using is a good method. Currently there are two different approaches to picture organization: using tags and using folders. There are a number of software programs that support either or both methods. Which method should you choose? This article will analyze the tag and folder based methods for picture organization.

What do you use for organizing your digital pictures: tags or folders?



TAG METHOD DESCRIPTION

This method involves assigning one or more tags (or keywords) to each digital picture on the hard drive. For example: let's say that I take some pictures of my grandma's birthday this year in 2007. Let's also say that I'm taking 100 pictures. I download them to my computer into some folder (the name of the folder is irrelevant at this point) and bring up my organization software (you always need one if you're using tags). The software imports the folder and I see all my pictures that I have just taken. Then I assign some tags to all of them or a part of them...this is called bulk tagging (this feature is a must for any tagging software). So, I assign the following tags: birthday, grandma and 2007.

Next, let's say that I'm taking some pictures of my daughter Rachel at her own birthday in 2007. So, I go through the same process and I assign the following tags: birthday, Rachel and 2007. Now, the key is that the tags represent categories, your own categories. So, if you want pictures to fall within the same category then you have to use the same tag. In this case a tag called birthday is different than a tag

called birthdays. Software usually allows you to manage your tags and will help you choose the right tags.



The main purpose for creating and assigning tags is that you would be able to easily find your pictures. So, let's say you're looking for birthdays in 2007. Then you would open up your organization software and do a search on birthday and 2007. This will filter out all the other pictures and will show you only the birthdays in 2007...assuming you have tagged them correctly. If I want to see all of my daughter's pictures I would search for: Rachel. This would only show pictures that contain the tag Rachel.

The key advantage here is that one picture can belong to many keywords or tags. I can assign as many tags as I want to a picture. So every time I'm searching for one of the tags assigned to a particular picture, that picture would show up in my search.

There are two ways (with some variations) in which software programs apply tags (or keywords) to a picture. The most widely used method is to embed these keywords in the image file itself by adding a little bit of text containing the keywords. This way the tags stay with image and they "travel" with the image. There are two main standards used for embedding tags into images: IPTC and XMP, the latter being the newest and most popular standard created by Adobe. There are free software packages that can write tags to your images if you choose to do so (i.e. XnViewer).

Other software packages apply "labels" to pictures and rather than writing to the image files themselves, they create a database with the keywords for each picture. This database is usually a file that is saved and updated on your computer every time you apply one or more labels to your pictures. This "tagging" method will make you dependent on the particular software you're using and your labels will not "travel" with your pictures.

FOLDER METHOD DESCRIPTION

What do I mean by folders? I mean simple folders that you create on your computer hard drive. These folders contain groupings of files that you think share something in common. For example: a folder called My Pictures contains all your pictures taken during family trips, with your kids and at various events. In order to further organize your pictures you may choose to create sub-folders within the My

Pictures folder. You may create sub-folders like trips and kids and split your pictures accordingly. The whole purpose of creating folders and sub-folders is to divide the quantity of files present on your hard drive. This is a classic application of the divide and conquer principle. This principle states that one can manage complexity by dividing the quantity of objects into smaller and portions that are easier to manage. Now, this is pretty simple stuff, and if you know how to use the Internet you should be very familiar with creating folders and sub-folders.

However, even though this is very basic, there is a common problem that most people face. Most people don't spend much time thinking about the names of their folders. Pretty much what comes to mind first, that's the name of the folder. While this may work for a short while, in the long run it doesn't solve the clutter problem. Actually, it may make it worse because we can create multiple folders with similar names and then forget we created them and create a new one.

Therefore, organizing your pictures using folders requires a little thinking and most of all it requires consistency. The thinking behind this method has to do with finding a naming convention for your folders and then sticking to it. This convention has to have a few particulars about it. Below I'm listing some of the characteristics of my folder naming convention:

- Example of a folder using a naming convention: 2007-11-Malibu_Adamson_House_visit
- Naming convention: [Date]-[Place]-[event description]
- Folder name includes a date for its content (2007-11 = November 2007)
- Folder name contain the place of the event.(Malibu)
- Folder name contains a brief description of the event (3 short words max). (Visit to the Adamson House museum)

What this folder naming convention accomplishes is very simple: you're actually embedding "tags" into the folder names rather than into the pictures themselves. Let's look at both methods side by side.

TAG METHOD ANALYSIS

ADVANTAGES:

- You can assign multiple tags to a single picture. This means that one picture can belong to multiple categories without having to copy the same image to multiple folders. This is the most important pro of the tag method.
- You don't have to spend anytime naming the physical folders on your hard drive. You can simply download your pictures into the default folders your camera creates and then just apply tags to the new pictures. (I recommend that you also put some time in creating a consistent folder structure and then apply tags to the images.).

DISADVANTAGES:

- You really have to be careful about what software you're using for applying tags. Some software doesn't use widely accepted standards (IPTC and XMP) but use their own proprietary way of recording image tags. If you decide to use such software then you are really tied to your software.
- You can't really share lots of picture folders with your friends...unless they're using the same software (or compatible). If they're not, then they have to figure out what is in the folders you're sending them (if you haven't named your folders appropriately).
- You have to be careful about developing tags (read this article to find out why you need to be careful). You have to make sure you don't develop duplicate tags like: birthday and birthdays. They will mess up your search capability.
- It is very time consuming because tags have to be applied to all pictures. It is true that you would never do it one by one, but rather in groups; however, it is very much time consuming.
- When should you use the "tag" method?

The only very important reason for using the tag method is if you must be able to assign the same image to multiple categories (tags). If you must be able to search your pictures based on more than one criterion (i.e. events), then you have to use the "tag" method. Remember that even when you choose to use tags a carefully constructed folder structure should be used as the foundation on which you construct your tags.

FOLDER METHOD ANALYSIS

ADVANTAGES:

- An organized folder structure is independent of any software used. In fact you don't need any software...you can simply use only the operating system to create and change the folder structure.
- Folders are automatically sorted by your operating system according to the date of the event. (NOTE: this is based on the folder naming convention I'm recommending on this site.)
- Folder structure is completely mobile. You can transfer entire folders to other computers or drives and the order and meaning of folders is maintained independent of operating system and software used.
- Carefully constructed folder names will help you find your pictures very quickly.
- You can use the "tag" method on top of the folder structure created using the folder structure. This way you can use both methods to their maximum potential.

DISADVANTAGES:

- Each picture is assigned only to one folder. (Unless you want to copy the image in multiple folders. This doesn't make much sense though). This is the only major drawback to this method...and it is indeed major.
- It takes some time and effort to develop a consistent naming convention for your folders. However, I believe that it takes a lot less time than creating and assigning tags to pictures. (NOTE: You can use the naming convention suggested on this site...and you don't have to create your own.)
- When should you use the folder method?

You should always create a consistent folder structure for your pictures based on your criterion. Most home users do not need the extra power of the “tag” method. However, if needed, one can easily (depending how much free time you have) build efficient tags on top of a folder structure.