

Good Morning!

I said good morning!

Anyway, for those of you who do not know me, my name is Marc Lester, I am the owner of Marc Lester Photography in Peoria, IL. My wife and I specialize in high-end wedding photography in a photojournalistic style, and we photograph around 20 weddings per year. Our work has graced the pages of magazines, both nationally and internationally, and have won us many awards.

I have been a photographer for as long as I can remember. With my dad, my grandpa and my uncle all photographers, it was just natural that I would want to photograph as well. I started out many years ago, about age 6, with a point and shoot 110mm camera. This camera went everywhere with me, and while the images were less than perfect, my parents actually stopped buying me film for a while, it taught me many things that I have used ever since. I have always loved photography. I actually photographed my first wedding at age 17, and I haven't stopped since.

I am very grateful that you all woke up so early this morning to come hear me speak. I'm sure many of you were at the party last night, and with as crazy as they can get, most of you are probably feeling it this morning.

This is my first time speaking at a photography convention, and as my wife will tell you, I have spent the better part of two months trying to decide what to say. By the way, this beautiful girl sitting here to my left, just so happens to be my wife, Jennifer.

When trying to decide what to say for my first speaking engagement, I finally decided that I would talk about what I would want to hear about if I came to hear me speak. The one thing that everyone always wants to know is, how do other photographers do it? How does someone else approach the same problems and issues I am having? So here goes:

Digital workflow.

Before I continue, I have a couple of questions for all of you. How many of you like to make money? How many of you enjoy working overtime for that money? Keep both of those questions in mind, and as I go through my presentation, take notes on things that you think will help your workflow. Donations will be accepted at the end of the program...

Digital workflow means different things to every photographer. Some find it easy, and others wish that they had kept their Mamiya RBs. I am here today to tell you how I have been able to take a workflow that used to take 10-12 hours per wedding, and turn it into a 2-3 hour process.

My digital workflow consists of a few simple, yet very important steps. These steps have kept my data safe, and my clients happy ever since my studio was founded. These steps are as follows:

- Shoot it.
- Download it.
- Store it.
- Edit it.
- Store it.
- Output it.

One of the most important decisions to make, and the decision that will have the most impact on your workflow, is whether you are going to shoot Raw or JPEG.

Let's start with our old friend, JPEG. Google defines JPEG as: A standardized format used by many digital cameras for storing images. This format is also commonly used for images on the web and images attached to e-mail messages. JPEG, which stands for Joint Photographic Experts Group, the group that established this file standard, is one of the most widely used formats today. JPEG is a standardized image compression mechanism designed for compressing full-color or gray scale images of natural, real-world scenes. JPEG uses lossy compression, which can damage image quality.

So having said that, why do we use JPEG?

JPEG is a very easy format to use. Most image editing software will read it, most cameras will photograph in it, the files are small in size and once you have shot a JPEG image, you are done. If shot properly, JPEG images require no post-production work. However, JPEGs do have some very big drawbacks as well.

JPEG images retain less information than the camera captured. This means that when your camera converts your images to JPEG, it throws out information that it feels is not important. Seems kind of important don't you think?

JPEG also has less latitude than a RAW file does. One of the biggest complaints that I have heard from people that have gone to shooting digital is the fact that they now are overexposing their images, or that the highlights are always blown out. Both of these problems are made worse by your camera's throwing out of "unimportant data" when converting to JPEG.

JPEG's can also be more time consuming to post produce. When I first went digital, I shot all of my weddings in JPEG with my Fuji S1 camera. I shot 800-1000 shots per wedding, and spent 10-12 hours color correcting, exposure correcting and cropping my images. That is 10-12 hours that I should have been making more money photographing something else. When I purchased my first Nikon, the Nikon D2H, I started photographing everything in RAW, and my post production went down to about 2-3 hours even though now I shoot almost twice as many images per wedding.

Let's review the last part of Google's definition of a JPEG for a second. "JPEG uses lossy compression, which can damage image quality." And while I am not here to tell you that JPEG is not a good thing to use in your studio's workflow, I would like to show you another way that may help you save time and money. It's called RAW.

When you think of JPEG files, think of them as your digital negatives. When you think of RAW files, think of them as film that has yet to be processed. RAW files can allow for up to two stops of exposure correction without adding noise to your files appearance.

(show an example)

(show another example)

As you can see from this example, the raw file looks much better, and because of what you see here, RAW has MANY benefits that should be discussed.

First, RAW files retain all of the data captured by the camera's image sensor. This means that you lose nothing. You keep all of the color, all of the sharpness, all of the latitude. Everything.

Next, RAW files have a greater possible exposure latitude than JPEG images. If you remember, I told you that JPEG images throw out image data that the camera feels is not important. This information is typically in the highlights and in solid colors, like the ones found on the borders of highlights. (i.e. the ring around lights) RAW images are more able to retain the gradation from highlight to shadow.

Finally, RAW images are easier to post-process than JPEG images. With the ease of one-click batch processing, programs such as CaptureOne by PhaseOne make color correcting, cropping and exposure correcting an easy and painless process. This process will be discussed in a minute. However, first we must discuss the two main drawbacks of RAW files.

RAW files are big, very big. Depending on what camera you use, your RAW files can be 6MB, 12MB and even some are even over 24MB, PER FILE. This means that you will

need more CF cards, but that is a small price to pay for the extra information you will receive.

How many of you get the Professional Photographer Magazine? In this month's magazine, there is an article all about workflow. If you have not read it, trust me, it is worth the read. Here are a few tips that will help speed your workflow.

First tip is:

Prepare for your workflow. Do simple things like, if you use more than one camera at an event or during a shoot, make sure to sync the clocks in both of the cameras to match.

This will save an immense amount of post production time just in trying to keep all of the files in order.

Set up a filing system that will work for you. A good filing system will make your life so much easier. I have an example of my filing system here:

```
2007-  
  Money-  
    Weddings-  
      Client Name-  
        Wedding-  
          RAW  
          JPEG  
        Engagement-  
          RAW  
          JPEG
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As you can see, I start with the year, followed by a folder called Money. I started with this folder structure when I first got into digital, and it is what I am used to, and it is what I

find easy. Next you see a folder called weddings followed by client name, and wedding/engagement folders. This folder system is backed up on an external HD system that we will discuss in a minute, but having this system in place before you ever even take a picture will save you lots of time in your post production.

Now that you have chosen a file format that will work best for you, it is time to photograph something. No matter what you photograph, whether you shoot sports, weddings, seniors or kids just do it.

(Shoot a bunch of images. Use Jenny as the model.)

Now that you have captured your images, it is time to put them on the computer. There are many ways to do this, and with current technology, most all are very good options.

Depending on which computer I am using, I typically use a USB 2.0 card reader.

However, if I am still shooting, I use the Nikon Wireless file transfer system. This system allows me to download my images while I am still photographing. I use this mainly at weddings, but it can also be very useful in studio.

This system has actually saved my butt once. I once shot a wedding where I used the wireless system. At the end of the day, as I downloaded the cards to my workstation, one of the cards was not working properly. In fact, it wasn't working at all. Needless to say, I panicked. Fortunately, the files were already on the laptop I had with me at the wedding, and the files were all safe.

Once your images are on your computer, I highly recommended that you back up your images, and not just once but twice. Backing up of your images should be done at every major step in your image post-production.

I back up my images on both DVDs and hard drives. Probably the most popular form of backup media is the hard drive. They are very cheap, and are by far the largest media available. There are many external and internal options for storing images on hard drives, but let me caution you on this, if you purchase an external hard drive enclosure, make sure that is it fan cooled.

Just as an aside, as many of you may know, I used to work at Tallyn's Professional Photographic. While there, I saw and worked with more photographers than I can count who lost all of their data because they purchased 250 or 500GB HD enclosure kits that were not fan cooled. When hard drives work, they get hot. When they get hot, they don't work as well or as fast. In time, that heat WILL destroy your drive, and you WILL lose your information. Let me repeat that; your hard drive will overheat, and if you do not keep the drive cool enough, it will crash. Now I am not saying that if you purchase a fan cooled drive system that you will never have a problem, however, your chances of having problems with fan cooled drive systems are drastically less.

I brought with me today a fan cooled drive system. This is one of the systems that I use in my studio. This particular unit holds one drive, but they make units that can hold up to 4 or more.

But since we never want to put all of our eggs in one basket, I recommend you make multiple backups of your images. The best way that I have found is to burn a CD or DVD copy of your RAW images as soon as they are downloaded. Place this CD or DVD into your customer's file. Next, following the folder structure that we discussed a minute ago, place the RAW images in your customer folder on the HD. This gives you two copies of the same RAW files. Now, almost no matter what happens, your files are safe.

Before we continue, I know that you are all a little tired, as am I. Why don't we take a 15 minute break to get up and stretch a little before we really get going into the meat of digital workflow.

--Give a 15 minute break--

Now comes the part of digital workflow that people struggle with the most, dealing with the files on the computer. For this process, I will be using RAW files captured on my Nikon D2x camera and I will be processing them in CaptureOne by PhaseOne.

CaptureOne is a very easy to use, very fast multi-platform software that makes processing RAW files a breeze. We will start by opening CaptureOne. Just to give you a little information about what you are seeing. Here on the left is where your thumbnails show up. Here in the middle, you have the full sized preview, and on the right you have all of your controls.

Demonstrate Loading files into C1

Demonstrate selecting files.

Demonstrate each of the tabs on the right. White Balance, Exposure, Focus, Process

Demonstrate batching.

Demonstrate processing of files.

Now that you have processed your final images, it is time once again to backup your images. Again, this is done twice, and again, I recommend backing up to both a hard drive and to a DVD or CD. Once your final images are backed up, place the CD/DVD in the customer's file next to their RAW files.

At this point, I make one final check of the images before I re-number and output the files. For the final check of images I use a program called Breeze Browser. There are many programs available that are similar to Breeze Browser. Some of you may have heard of ACDC. Any software that will allow you to process large batches of images at a time will work perfect.

I know that some of you may be wondering about retouching and image enhancement. Honestly, I don't do much if any of it. If I do, it is very minimal. I know that some people retouch every image that they shoot, however, to me this seems like a huge waste of time and money. Lets face it, most brides do not purchase every image that they you shoot. If your bride does, see me after class, we need to chat. But look at it this way. If you give 400 images to a couple after a wedding, even if you spend a minute per image, you are still spending almost 7 HOURS retouching images and most of those will never be purchased.

If a customer wants an image retouched, I have no problems doing it. I charge enough for my work that the amount of time it will take to retouch an image or two will not create a problem in my workflow.

Now comes my output, and depending on what type of output I need, I use one of several sources.

For my enlargements larger than 11x14, anything that requires special processing, such as canvas prints, gallery wraps and competition prints, I use White House Custom Color. WHCC also has great prices. Their 8x10s are \$2 and their 4x6 images are as low as \$.29. And on top of that, White House has a same or next day turn around on most products and free 2nd day air. I swear that I am not a paid advertisement for WHCC. I am just a happy customer that is happy to spread the word.

Another great offering of WHCC is their press printed products. They offer things like business cards, book marks, post cards, greeting cards, tri-folds and accordion cards.

Now, for orders that are in need of immediate turn around, or things such as proof sheets and headshots, I use an Epson R800 printer. This printer is capable of outputting images up to 8 x 10 with lab quality, and a 200 year lifespan. Epson offers a wide range of color printers that can meet almost anyone's needs, but make sure that the printer you buy uses pigment based archival inks. This will ensure that your images are going to last.

Ok, now I know that it is early, but I have a little quiz for you guys...

How many of you use your website to proof and/or sell your images?

Ok, now how many of you take the orders from your website and process them yourself?

How many of you that process your orders yourself use a shopping cart style ordering system?

Again, I must tell you that I am not a paid spokesman for them, but how many of you have ever heard of a lab called Pictage?

Pictage is a California based lab that provides online galleries for your customers and is capable of outputting your orders up to 11x14. Pictage is an amazing lab that offers many unique options like DVD slideshows, albums and proof books all in an easy to use online store that is available for both you and your customers. Pictage has also allowed me to offer a wider range of products. I now offer coffee table style proof books and customers can design their own albums online if they like.

Another reason I like Pictage is the fact that I am able to use them as another part of my images' security. When my images are uploaded to Pictage, they get backed up to their hard drives. So now, I have all of my copies, and Pictage has a copy that is 2000 miles away from anything that could happen to mine.

Now, before I move on to the last output option, I have to tell you, some of you are not going to like what I am about to say. Some of you will be a little upset. But trust me, I am trying to help you.

It is unfortunate that I have to mention this, but I have heard on more than one occasion from more than one photographer that they have used or do use the services of the “Wal-Mart Pro Lab”. For those of you who are wondering, Wal-Mart does not have a “Pro Lab”. If I am hitting a nerve with any of you right now, I am glad. I am doing it to try and help you. I would love to see all photographers that call themselves “professional” be brought up to a similar standard. This will make everyone who calls themselves professional look better. Also, by using a professional lab, you are guaranteeing professional results every time you have something printed.

As my program comes close to an end, I would like to leave you with a few key things to remember. First, one of the things that has helped me most in fine-tuning my workflow, was first defining all of the steps. One thing you can do is to write down all of the steps. Making a checklist of your steps will help make sure you don't forget anything.

Next, batch process everything you can. Batch processing will keep your image color more consistent as well as save a lot of time.

Finally, if you get nothing else out of this presentation, I want you to remember this; backup your images. No matter what you shoot, no matter how important you think it is, back it up twice.

That about does it for my presentation. I hope you leave here today with a better understanding of how a digital workflow can work for you.