TECH, EQ & FLOW: Digital Tool Chest
By Ryan Morris I Photo by Ryan Morris

The following article outlines many of the possible programs and additional hardware that can help you to obtain maximum proficiency out of your computer in order to assist your digital capture needs. Although more RAM and a more powerful processor will help you in the long run, choosing the right tools will optimize your time and workflow by allowing you to multitask faster and avoid loading lag and other system shortcomings.

Software to complete your Digital Kit

smcFanControl 2.2.2

This fan control allows you to monitor the temperature of your processor and the RPM (rounds per minute) that the internal fan is functioning at. It also allows you to regulate said speed to cool down the equipment and help it work at its maximum efficiency. A necessity when working with a Laptop!

ChronoSync

ChronoSync is the ideal backup program that allows you to set multiple destinations and frequency for your image archive without going over ground you have already covered. One of the most essential and time consuming practices is now done with ease during setup! Syncronization is a similar option with a push button backup that is as easy as going from point A to point B. What it lacks in service it makes up for in simplicity.

Eye-One Match 3.1 / Eizo ColorNavigator

When working with your color-calibration devices, these two programs for use with your color calibration devices allow you to take full advantage of your CRT, LCD, and now LCD Displays. The Color Navigator gives you more options when using an Eizo on the custom mode, taking full advantage of the contrast and RGB levels in the Display. When working with numbers and in various ambient lighting environments it might not be all that practical (due to flatness in image gamut), but if you are managing contact sheets and doing test prints it is mandatory for obvious reasons of medium parallels.

Capture One 3.7.9 + 4.6.3

This is the preferred program used by most Techs. Capture One offers ease of processing and the ability to batch exposure and color-correction without loading images in their entire proportion, but rather as a sample and preview of the original used as a base before processing.

Adobe Photoshop / Lightroom

If you are not familiar with Photoshop by this point maybe you should get a job at a Digital Firm or go back to school. Photoshop is the only program for all working

professionals that allows you to tweak a photo in as many ways as you can imagine possible, letting you take advantage of RAW capabilities in color, contrast, and saturation. Filters, Convergence, Sharpness, Quality, Size, and Depth are just some of the advantages of this amazing program; you are able to work on an image like a painter, and a technical science turns into an art. On most jobs you will not have the time to work with this, and Photoshop will be more adept for use with your personal proofing and post-production needs. Hence, Light Room is the ideal tool for any Tech since, like CaptureOne, it gives you the ability to batch-process multiple images without the detriment of large file loading time!

Genuine Fractals Plug-In
Used with Photoshop, this is a vector-based program that lets the user to sharpen an image and upsize it to a desired proportion, with less grain or distortion, by giving you the use of two additional controls. This little tool is a must for anyone working in reproduction or fine art.

Roxio Toast Titanium v.9-10
Keeping up with the trend, Toast is now not just for ripping your music, files, and movies to your disc media of choice. It now also handles all of your file format and online publishing needs. Perfect for when the assistant on set needs to put that movie on his iPhone or the Art Director wants a DVD of the selects with a soundtrack of his choice.

Automator: Batch Rename Workflow
Many programs have a batch rename built into them. The only problem is that when the rename takes place, the original meta-data is lost in the process and is often rendered useless if the number of characters exceeds a certain limit when importing into another program. With the Automator, one can keep the sequence congruent while only changing the suffix, date, or name.

Fetch
Before YouSendIt, one the only option for large file transfers was to ftp the file on an intermediary server using Fetch. This program will still help you out when your client is trying to send back proofs to home base for approval. All you need now is an Internet connection.

Aladdin Systems Stuffit
Now almost obsolete due to the latest OS systems offerings of a CTRL Archive command. This program, once the prince of the Web, allows files to be compressed into a more portable and manageable system, removing size and quantity issues and allowing easy transfer and storage. Zips, Bins, and Dmgs are all extensions of this form of compression software.

Hardware to complete your Digital Kit

X-Rite Eye-One Display / Spyder
Hook one of these little devices up to your computer using the USB, dim the light and get ready for the magic! The ColorNavigator and iMatch programs will allow your computer to output a wide range of its color spectrum, which is then retrieved by the device and transferred into an ICC profile. This profile represents a neutral base that you can build upon, providing seamless accurate color across all of your devices.

GreTag Macbeth ColorChecker Chart / QP Card
The base of any photograph is its color and contrast, which can be assigned with a simple test shoot and the help of this guide. After setting your whites with detail and your blacks with detail from the card via curve, you can be assured that the image and base of the shot are neutral.

Belkin USB / FireWire Hub Repeater
Often when working tethered, power can be lacking and cause communication problems between the camera and computer. This can easily be elevated with the use of a shorter cable or this handy repeater, which boosts the signal strength and allows you to extend the length of the USB / FW cable.

Tether Lock
Most of the latest generation of camera bodies already has this little feature built-in, but it's always good to have a tripod bracket for snags that occur along the way. Pins and ports can be bent and files can be lost in transit. It's always good to have a secure base that doesn't involve Gaffer's Tape.

Giotto Dust Bomb
Most dust that is visible dust can easily be cleared of a sensor with the use of a dust bomb. This is a quick fix whenever cleanliness becomes a problem due to zoom lens vacuums and changing. As for smoke film, streaks, and watermarks, a swab and solution is recommended.

Battery Geek Portable Power Station / APC Back-Up
When working on location, power is a major concern and you can never have too much. The latest models of the Battery Geeks have life of up to 9+ hours with few heating issues and a compact size. APC's Back-UPS are a huge save on any shoot as well. With so many plugs for lighting, it's only a second glance before you're in a heap of trouble that could threaten to shut a shoot down.

Wacom Tablet
The preferred utensil of all Retouchers, the Wacom Tablet lets you to use a stylus as opposed to the mouse when doing the small precise maneuvers that are expected of you. Newer models include built-in LCD panels that allow you to work directly on an image.

Canon / Epson Printers

Being able to proof a physical document for your client is vital and important to the flow of many shoots. This lets you work on layout while shooting, and gives t your clients something concrete to work from. Canon and Epson are the only options when working on location and with little time. The Die-Subs are my preference, being small and producing with speed and quality. CMYKs are the alternative, having better color-reproduction and options in use.

Glyph / LaCie / G-Tech / WeibeTech / Hard Drives
Of these four I prefer Glyphs the best; they keep cool and have the best options for space and compatibility. Many of the manufactures use plastic, which insulates the drive and makes it run hot. This is not good for the drive and can cause it to burn out. A good drive will be small, metal, breathe well, and have a variety of sizes in storage, speed, and ports. Space is always limited and you should always have at least one backup and one available for the client if he hasn't already procured one.

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