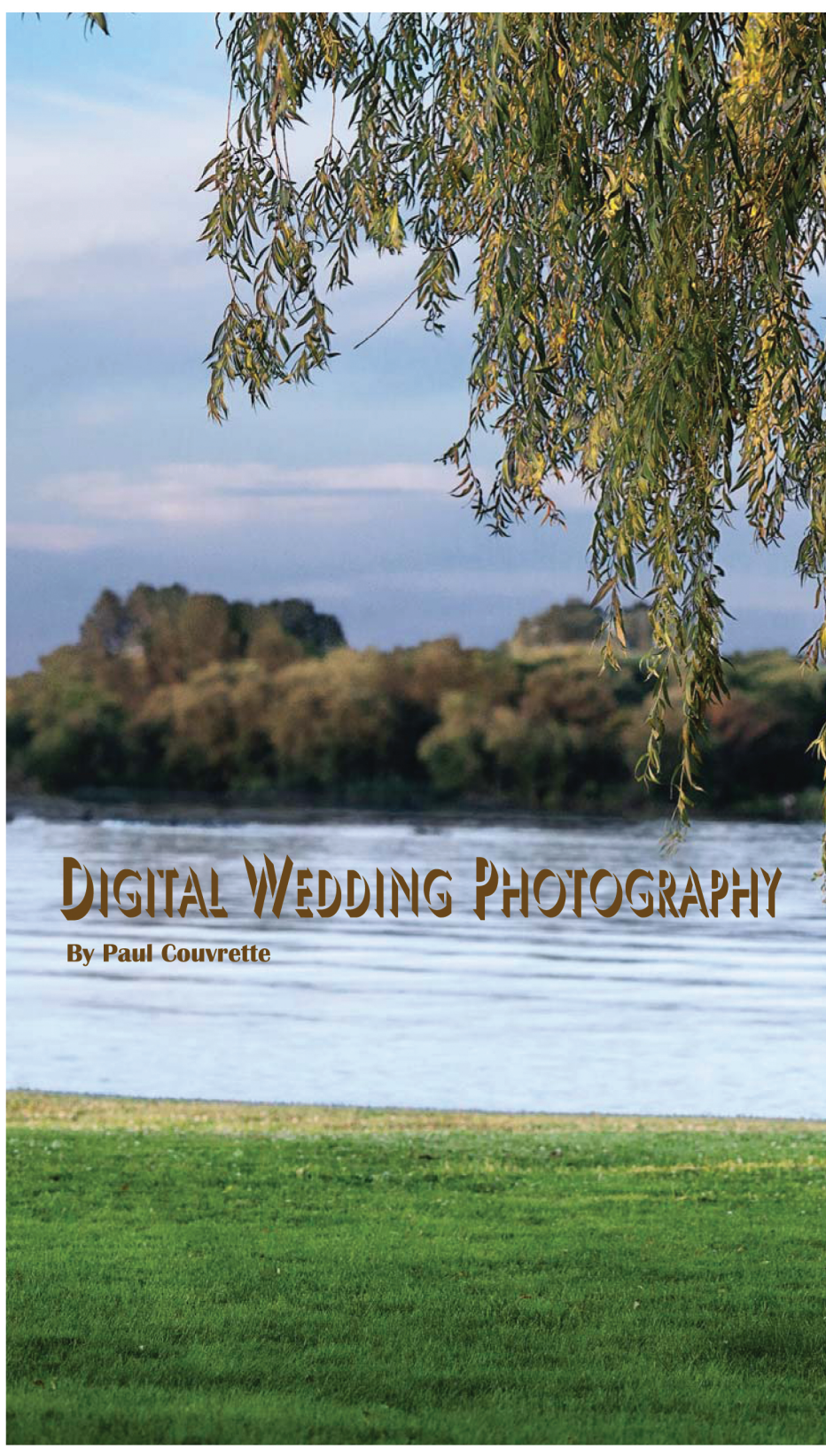


Digital imaging rocked wedding photography at the turn of the millennium, heralding a new age of creativity and delivery - but also a confusing array of memory storing choices, most of them inferior to their parent's old fashioned prints.

Much of what I read in online forums and see in our consultations indicates a lack of understanding about how the digital technology impacts the choice of photographer, as well as the decision about which end product the client chooses as a record of their day.

Today, a substantially higher percentage of males are involved in the research as it is perceived to be more about technology than art. Sadly, this has resulted in photography being looked at from a technical point of view, when in fact technology really should be a far second to style, talent and the personality of the photographer.

The key technical issues are rather simple. First, file size is irrelevant these days. Every major studio works with, at minimum, a three megapixel camera body which is capable of huge enlargements. Post processing is another topic of great confusion. No matter how talented a photographer, digital cameras present problems with dust, the ability to record colour precisely and the need for precise exposures. To optimize a digital file every photographer must spend at least 10 minutes on a fast computer with each raw file that is not perfectly exposed. If a photographer were to post process 400 files correctly it would take a solid week and a half. If one adds shooting and consultation time this would mean 100 hours invested in a wedding... impossible at the rates current in the marketplace. What is often done in fact is batch processing... highly destructive to detail and colour. A responsible pro will post process all files to be printed at



DIGITAL WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY

By Paul Couvrette

their lab and secondary files included in the clients' package should take less than a day's work, individually correcting minor exposure errors. These numbers are totally dependent however on whether the photographer has exposed the shots correctly. What this means is that hiring a

novice or part-time photographer is even more of a gamble now than in the days of film, since post processing is the first thing cut with a low price assignment.

If your final prints have poor colour, contrast and detail, the explanation is that they were exposed badly to begin

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Photo: Paul Couvrette

with and then batch processed. The best analogy one can make for batch processing is having a stylist cut one woman's hair and create a masterpiece...but then do the same cut to the next 100 women!

Graphic design skills are also worth comparing and are evident when you look

at sample digital albums laid out by the photographer. A flashy canned website does not imply the photographer has lay-out skills... only a final album sample you hold in your hand is proof of these. As well, delivery time at a home studio will generally be substantially slower

than at a full time professional photographer's studio. A tip to spotting a newbie...check for an address on their web site. Would you even consider buying your wedding dress or renting a tux from an operation based in someone's garage?

There is an old maxim in business: "you

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"Clients need to balance the hidden cost of owning the files instead of using a photographer's services. It should be noted that only 25% of our clients surveyed a year after the wedding actually made prints for friends and family. Less than 10% actually posted them in an on-line gallery or even uploaded them to Facebook."

can have great service, a fantastic product and a low price... but you just cannot have all three in the same transaction". Photography, just like any other business, follows this rule.

Ownership of files and rights to printing are the current buzz in the field. All photo-

graphers charge some sort of premium in their packages for this service, but in general you will receive better prints from the photographer who has years of experience, is able to process the files, and has a longstanding relationship with a lab. That said clients need to balance the hidden cost of owning the files instead of

using a photographer's services. It should be noted that only 25% of our clients surveyed a year after the wedding actually made prints for friends and family. Less than 10% actually posted them in an online gallery or even uploaded them to Facebook. Life, as they say, has a way of taking over even the best of intentions.

Some professionals insist on not allowing customers to print files and this too is something that should be respected if you feel the photographer's talent, style and policies work together to create fantastic coverage at a price that fits your budget. A large amount of coverage and product at a great price by an untalented photographer is a bad bargain at best.

We actually do a fair amount of business with brides whose photographers either washed their hands of making prints or left the business. Make certain in your negotiations that your photographer will take the responsibility for making your final product.

When comparing wedding photographs the key thing to look for in a portfolio is whether that dress or agonized over has detail, texture and the correct tone. Next is good skin tone and exposures that record the grass as green and the sky as blue. This might seem obvious, but failure to record these key elements in a portfolio should sound the alarm, no matter how good a deal you believe you are negotiating.

How well the photographer exposes is key, for a poorly exposed 500 megabyte file will still not give you detail in a wedding dress. We have a 40 inch print on our studio wall created with my first two megapixel camera that consistently amazes clients with its sharpness and colour.

The web has made visual shopping easy, but what most people do not realize is that a template site can be purchased for a few hundred dollars. Even if you are running your business from your basement, throw your best dozen shots in and you look like a pro overnight.. A dead giveaway is if you see the word 'investment' used to describe packages because this is a sign of a mass produced template site. What should be displayed are a series of entire coverages, since the mark of an expert is more than just a few shots on a day when hundreds of images are created.

Booking an amateur or part-timer in the digital age is more dangerous than in the film era. Aside from the fact that digital requires better control of light, most amateurs have little or no backup camera or computer systems that should a hard drive fail;

delivering the final product averages 40 hours. Then compare what you are paying for a few hours in a limo or listening to a DJ... neither of whom is creating original art that will capture your special day for a lifetime.... and I think you will, as they say... get the picture.

In reality, choosing a wedding photographer has not really changed. Whether you look at colour quality, detail, style and expression in a sample album or on a monitor, technology should be second place to talent if you are selecting a professional photographer to capture your memories in the digital age. ☐

ABOUT PAUL COUVRETTE

Paul Couvrette is a master photographer of the Professional Photographers of Canada and an international judge of photography. An art critic for numerous periodicals, he helped introduce digital photography to Canada via his role as national spokesman for Agfa, the world's largest photographic company.

Couvrette's images have graced more than 400 magazine covers, including *Time* and *Capital Style*, and won more than a hundred awards, including *Canadian Photographer of the Year*.

"When comparing the wedding to look for in a portfolio is whether that dress you agonized over has detail, texture and the correct tone.

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on the 50 inch screen that will be commonplace in the not too distant future

The digital revolution has opened up a range of fantastic new ways to display images, whether it be in a magazine type layout, an online album or prints on a wide range of surfaces from canvases to metal. We became the first studio in Canada to sell digital albums on the iPad recently and this too will be part of how people keep and share their memories.

So how much should they receive professional photography? There is no simple answer. Perhaps it is best to start with the notion that an average wedding coverage with front end sales talks and consultations right through to post production and

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an all too common occurrence. A professional should have a main computer and a separate daily backup to another drive or the business is flirting with disaster. Peace of mind may cost a little more, but the spread between an average photographer and a top studio is actually quite small in today's competitive marketplace.

Digital images present a major problem as far as storage of memories long term. We are now approaching an era in which many original hard drives have failed, losing all data. Both hard drives and DVD's last roughly ten years. By the time your children want to see your wedding, DVD technology will have gone the way of eight tracks. Digital magazine albums have a slightly longer life; some say 75 to 100 years. Ironically, current practices say the oldest technology, photographic prints, will last the longest.

While the massive turnover in the photography marketplace for both practitioners and the technology will continue, I predict a return to a demand for quality as images are projected on large screen displays which are brutally clear in displaying poor quality images. That Facebook size image may look fine now, but your kids may be a little more critical when they pop it up

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