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Designing Librarians: On the Web-Digital photography is where it's at

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Designing Librarians — On the Web

by Anna Belle Leiserson (Vanderbilt University Law School)
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This issue it's time to talk about digital photography. "Excuse me," you say? "What could this possibly have to do with our profession?" While even I wouldn't go so far as to claim a digital camera is an essential for every librarian's toolbox, nevertheless I would argue building attractive Web sites for libraries, departments, vendors and publishers is essential — and digital photography is one of the easiest ways to achieve this end. So with no further ado over its relevance, let's dive into a crash course on the subject.

First: a digital camera. One of the wonders of these gizmos is how little they can cost. While the cameras themselves run a full-gamut of prices (from under \$100 to in the thousands), there aren't film and developing expenses. You can take as many terrible pictures as you want and delete them all without a second thought.

I'm no expert on buying cameras, and even if I were there wouldn't be much point in discussing specific models, since the "best buy" changes in nano-seconds. So instead, let's talk about a few basics and the best resources for up-to-minute information. The special things to watch for in digital cameras are:

- **Resolution.** A resolution of 640x480 pixels (also called VGA) is low, but is usually fine for the Web. 1024x767 works for 3x5" prints, while 1600x1200 works for 8x10" prints. Of course the better the resolution, the more you shell out. In other words, this may be a good way to save money.



- **Storage, i.e. picture capacity.** The thing to check is how many pictures you can take before you have to transfer them to a PC. For example, I've heard of a camera that only lets you take two very high resolution photos and then tops out.

- **Battery life.** There's a good chance you'll want to get a model with rechargeable batteries and then purchase a spare battery or two.

- **Software.** Some come with image editing software, which we'll talk about more in a minute. If you don't have this kind of software, this is important to pay attention to. You're going to want decent photo software.

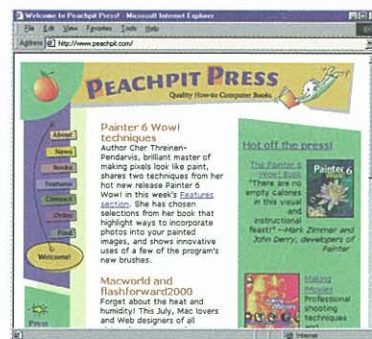
- **The zoom.** "Digital zoom" expands the image, not lens, and is less expensive. "Optical zoom" produces higher quality images.

Having understood these basics, plan on maybe an hour's worth of research — on the Web of course. The best starting places I know of are CNET's *Digital Photography Center* <http://photo.cnet.com/> and *ShortCourses* <http://www.shortcourses.com/>. You might also want to search "digital cameras" in *PC Magazine* <http://www.zdnet.com/pcmag/>, looking for their latest "Editor's choice" models.

I said I wouldn't go into specific models. But I lied. A little. I did want to mention the wonders of the one our law school owns, because I think it's particularly well suited to libraries. It's one of the lower-end Sony Mavicas. These cost around \$450 (street price). While it typically doesn't get as high ratings as some Kodak and Olympus models, the beauty of the Mavica is that it stores images on floppy disks. Thus you can "circulate" the camera and let people use their own floppies on their own computers. There are 1001 creative uses students and staff can find for the camera. Ours has been used for the student rag, a documentary of building construction, our "Face Book" and an equipment inventory — not to mention its intended purpose, which is (surprise) the Web.

Photography. Once you have the camera, you're past the biggest hurdle. Still, if you're like me, you will have no earthly idea how to take a decent photo. However, as has already been said, it doesn't matter how many photos you take. So that's my numero uno photography tip. Take lots and lots of pictures. Then axe the bad ones. Second most important — fill up the photo with your subject — cutting out unnecessary background. Also, pay attention to the light. When

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Chaos from page 87

Communication Standard — *The EDItEUR standard upon which ONIX International is based. EPICS is compliant with the framework developed by indecs.*

IDF — International DOI Foundation — *The governing body for the DOI.*

indecs — Interoperability of Data in Electronic Commerce Systems — *A framework for defining the metadata for ALL works of intellectual property that may be involved in electronic commerce. They completed the "discovery" aspect of their standard as their European Community funding expired; the rights metadata is still to be defined.*

ISAN — International Standard Audio/Visual Number — *Under development as an ISO standard, this "number" identifies the basic work in an audio/visual production — i.e. a movie. It actually identifies a few "min-*

utes" of both the audio and video that compose the full manifestation — a movie or video production. — ALSO See ISTC and ISWC.

ISTC — International Standard Text Code — *Under development as an ISO standard, this "code" identifies a basic work of text before it rears its head in a manifestation such as a manuscript. Think MOBY DICK and all of the varieties go books, magazines, audio, video and other products based on this "textual work." — ALSO See ISWC and ISAN.*

ISWC — International Standard Work Code — *The first of the "work" codes under development as an ISO standard, this "code number" identifies a basic work of MUSIC before it rears its head in a manifestation such as a recording or in a concert. Think Chopin's First Symphony. — ALSO See ISAN and ISTC*

OEBF — Open eBook Forum — *The OEBF developed the standard methods of "tagging" manuscripts, so that they can be transferred from the publisher to ALL e-book*

distributors. They are working with the EBX Working Group on standards for DRM.

ONIX — ONline Information eXchange — *The ONIX standards for book metadata was originally developed by the Association of American Publishers. Now a EDItEUR standard, ONIX International provides a standardized method of XML-tagging information about books, including the basic bibliographic data, but also enriched information such as author biographies, cover artwork, flap copy and reviews.*

SISAC — See BASIC

W3C — World Wide Web Consortium — *The standardization group for the Web. Their standards include HTML, XML and many more.*

XML — eXchange Mark-up Language — *A W3C standard that provides more "intelligence" than HTML, commonly used today to determine how text and illustrations "appear" on the World Wide Web.*

outdoors, get the sun more or less behind you. (Stop laughing, photography gurus. I told you I was no expert.) And if the light/dark contrast is really strong, it's okay to use the flash, even in broad daylight. Last, but not least, learn your photo editing software, which brings me to . . .

Layout. These days you don't have to be a darkroom expert to doctor your photos. It's absolutely amazing what you can do with graphics software. Adobe Photoshop is the *crème-de-la-crème* and costs accordingly, but there are many other good products, including Paint Shop Pro and CorelDraw. These packages make it a breeze to crop and resize, lighten and darken, and tint your photos. You can even get rid of red eye. If your software doesn't have this feature, check out Kodak Picture Playground <http://alts1.kodak.com/US/en/corp/playground/index.shtml>. As well as cleaning up red eye, it can change your photos into cartoons, tapestries and even puzzles to email.

For building a good Web site, the most critical enhancement of digital photos is developing a great frame style. This will not only add class to your site, it has the potential to unify the parts into a whole. The frame doesn't have to be in-your-face. In fact, the best frames are often transparent to most users. For example, if your site has a dark green logo, then perhaps two thin dark green lines about 10 pixels from the bottom and right side of every photo might be just what the site needs. Or you can play with filters on the edges of your photos, blurring or darkening them. In fact some software (including Photoshop) has special frames to choose from, including Drop Shadow, Vignette and even Triangle Corners, making your photo look like it's mounted in old-fashioned album. (I think the latter would just right for a Web photomontage of the next **Charleston Conference**, don't you?) For true e-photo aficionados, who just can't get enough of this stuff, check out a favorite Web column of mine: **Wendy Peck's** "Production Graphics" on *Webreference* <http://webreference.com/graphics/>. In particular, see the "Photo Edges" sections for both inspiration and tutorials.

Finally, for those of you saying – "Yes, yes, but what about scanners?" It's true. They too can greatly improve a Web site. However, I would classify them as a different, though overlapping, tool, and perhaps something to explore in a future column. For now, have fun with your cameras, and let me know if you have any great tips to pass along.

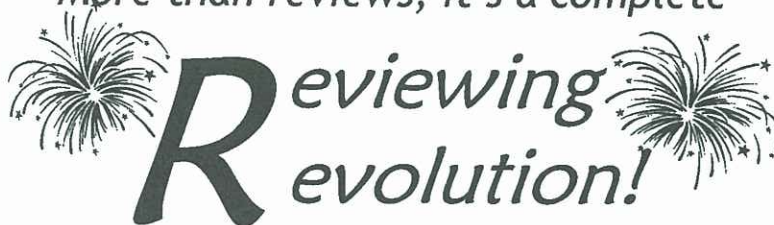
Thumbs Up

Peachpit Press. <http://www.peachpit.com/>

Speaking of **Wendy Peck**, congratulations to **Peachpit Press**, who made it into her *Graphic Greats!* <http://webreference.com/graphics/greats/4/2.html>. This is the first publisher I have ever seen cited for great Web design. She likes the creative color breaks,

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defining areas of the site, and the geometric shapes. I like the whimsical tone, coupled with the information-packed book descriptions. It even measures up to the many criteria we demand of a publisher site (see our column in the April 2000 *ATG*), only falling a little short on the usual, i.e. ISBN searching.

M.G. Gallagher Law Library, **University of Washington School of Law** <http://lib.law.washington.edu/>

This isn't a fancy site, but it's attractive and packs a lot of punch into a small space. It has substantive and clear links to all kinds of reference information, plus frequently updated news items. It also has what I've seen recently dubbed a "liquid" design – meaning you can make your browser smaller or larger and the site expands with it. This gives it a

pleasing elastic quality, and also makes it well prepared for the next phase of Web viewing – i.e. on hand-helds like Palm Pilots or even cell phones.

Web Design in a Nutshell, **Jennifer Niederst.** O'Reilly, 1998. ISBN 1-56592-515-7. \$24.95.

At 580 pages "Nutshell" is something of a misnomer for this fabulous book. It's more like several nutshells in one binding, with succinct and lucid tutorials on a wide variety of Web subjects. Thus you learn about not only HTML, but also servers, graphics, cascading style sheets, audio, XML and even scripting. If I had to recommend just one Web book . . . I couldn't do it. But this would come close. And maybe if a new edition comes out soon, it will become *the* one I name as a must-have.