

Workflow for Digital Photography

Episode 3: Cataloging with Idimager

Are you still with me? Great! Now that we've transferred the photos to the PC and backed up our digital negatives, it's time to start having some fun. Really, I do think this part is fun and can get quite addicting. What am I referring to? Well, cataloging your images of course... So, here we go...

2. Cataloging

So, what is cataloging anyway? Well, in simple terms, it is a method to tag and locate your photos (or music, fonts, layouts, etc) on your system. It is also used to embed metadata into your photos that help you remember things about the photo and protect your photo from copywrite infringement. In other words, its about organization and is really the heart and sole of workflow management.

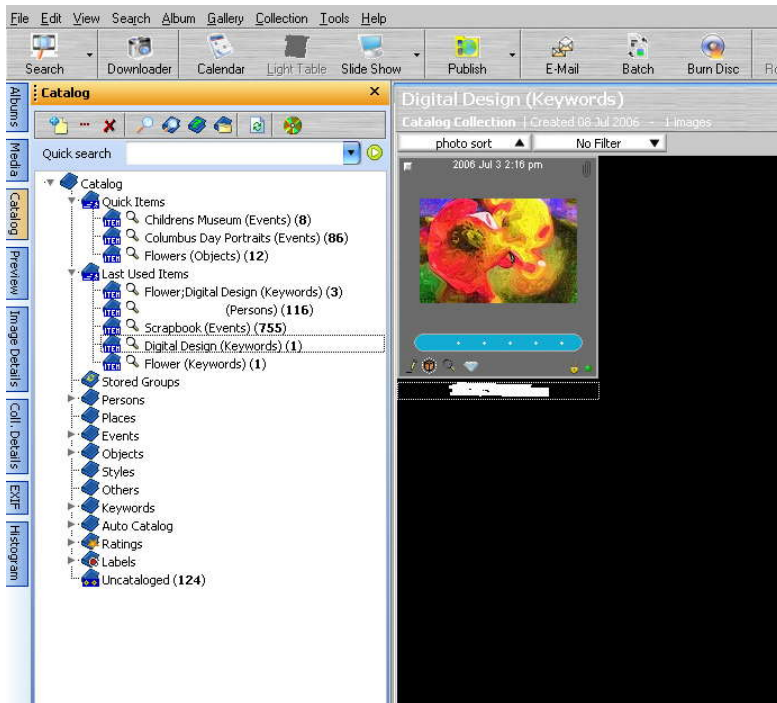
Let's start off by talking about the software options available to you. In general, there are a multitude of options to catalog your photos and many of your might even be using these products but not using them for workflow management purp oses. Here are a few of them with my notes about them:

1. Idimager (www.idimager.com) (Figure 1)

For me, this is my favorite and the one I'll be detailing my workflow with below. Idimager offers a very extensive suite of functions in a very affordable package. It includes a full featured download manager, a hierarchical catalog system, a very flexible web page designer, slideshow editor and much much more.

The biggest draw for me is the support – the developer (Hert) is always available via his site's forum and will respond to questions or product requests quickly and factually. In fact, he added functionality to a new release for me in a matter of hours.. that's what I call customer support!

Figure 1

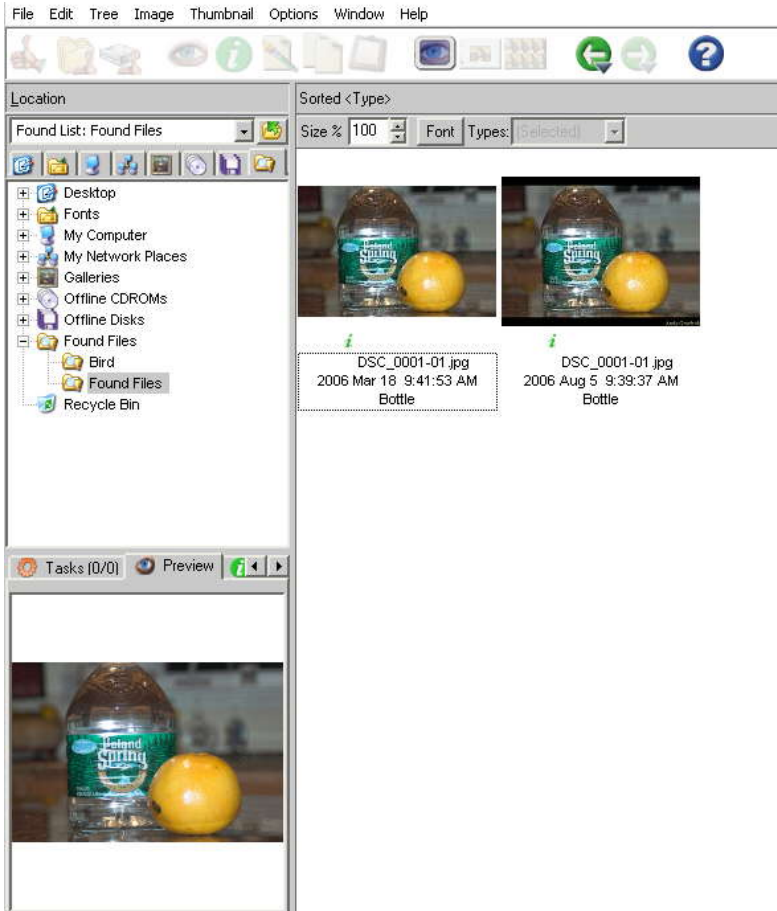


2. Thumbsplus (www.cerious.com) (Figure 2)

My original (and still used) favorite, Thumbsplus is a fine program. It lacks many features found in Idimager and hasn't been fully updated in awhile (the reason I switched to IDI), but is still one of my favorite catalog programs.

It has a great user interface with all the functions available via shortcut and right -click. My favorite function is the ability to quickly view and tag your photos right in a full screen slideshow.

Figure 2



3. Picasa (<http://picasa.google.com>) (Figure 3)

Well, what can I say, I do like it! Perhaps it is the nice user interface or the quick response of the program... although not even close to full featured as the first two above, picasa is still a great little program... oh – and it's FREE.

I used picasa before they were bought out by google... and I think it has only improved since then. Sure, you can't do certain things like the others, but it is still a great tool and warrants serious attention.

Figure 3



4. The rest of the pack....

Ok... and the rest of them. ACDSSee (<http://www.acdsee.com/products/acdsee/index>), Iview (www.iview.com), BreezeBrowser (www.breezesys.com), Photo Mechanic.

They are all very good in different ways... I've used them all and continue to try out new iterations since the perfect DAM just doesn't exist. Check them out for yourself and see what you think. It really is a matter of personal choice with these products!

Now that we've had an introduction to some workload management software, let's take a look at my cataloging workflow within my favorite, Idimager.

Workflow using Idimager

Let's pick up where we left off... your newly downloaded photos are located in a few subdirectories on your PC (and safely backed up!).

1. We now load up Idimager (IDI) and locate the new folders using the media manager. Once we choose the subdirectory, IDI will create thumbnails (and previews) of all our photos within that subdirectory.
2. Once all thumbnails have been created, I will rate and keyword each file.
3. I will then create a catalog of the images
4. I will then write the keyword, copywrite and rating data back into the metadata for each file.

Let's look at each step in detail...

1. IDI's Media Manager provides a treeview (figure 4) of all your hard drives. You can drill down into the specific folders until you locate the subfolder you would like.

Once you choose that subfolder, IDI will begin displaying thumbnails of your images in the main viewer panel.

Figure 4



2. Rating and applying keywords in IDI is very easy (figure 5). I usually do this via the Lightbox feature but it can also be done right from the main photo view pane. The ratings rank from 1 to 5 stars... I employ the following rating system:
 - 1 Star – Photo should be considered for deletion
 - 2 Stars – Photo is a keeper but perhaps it is not the best
 - 3 Stars – Photo is definitely good and should be considered for printing/client use
 - 4 Stars – Photo is outstanding... best of the best.
 - 5 Stars – I do not use this.. reserving for later usage.

My rating system allows me to quickly weed out the bad from the good from the best and provide me with a nice way to ensure the best photos are chosen. The lightbox feature is well used in this process... especially when you might have 4 or 5 similar shots and you need to see which one is the best. The lightbox enables you to view all the photos on a single page and then determine which one is best.

Figure 5



3. Next, I take all the images and create a catalog of them (Figure 6) so I can find them all very easily in the future. Catalogs are like Albums or collections... a group of photos that belong together. For example, you might have a set of photos taken at the beach... you might create a catalog called Beach – Dec 2006. When I need to find all these photos next month, I just go to that catalog and they all appear... ve ry nice and quick!

Figure 6

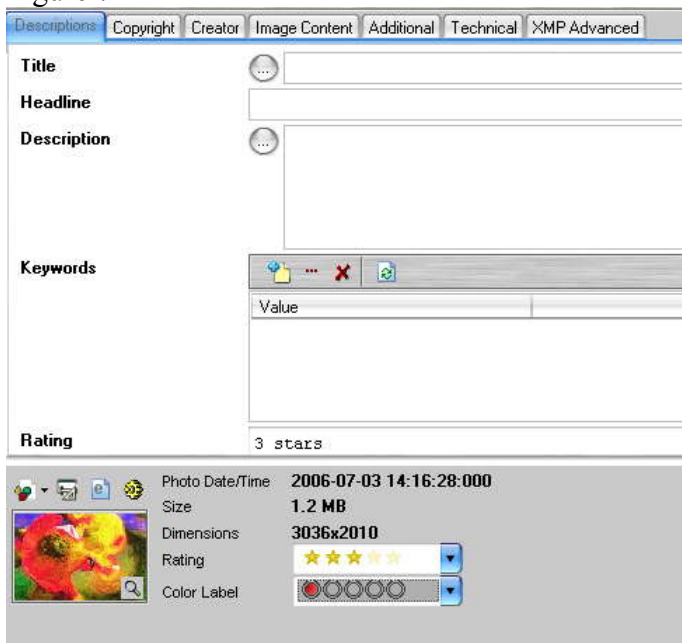


- Ok... now time for the fun part... adding keywords! (Figure 7) I add keywords depending on what I'm doing. If the photos are personal, I tend to really drill down and add a lot of photos. If the photos are for clients, I only keyword the ones that are 4 stars... ones I might use for personal use as well say a brides flowers or a landscape photo taken during a client beach shoot.

So... what do I keyword... well, like I said, I tend to go overboard but it makes finding my files a real snap. If the photo is say a pink Aster flower taken at a local nursery, I might add the following keywords: Flower, Pink, Aster, Windy -Lo, Nursery.

Given these keywords, if say in 3 months I'm asked to print some notecards with a pink flower, I can do a search on my database and locate all Pink Flowers from my photographs. I can narrow that search down further by saying only show Rating 3 or higher. It really is an amazingly useful tool once you start building a huge collection of photos... this is what workflow management is all about!

Figure 7



As you can see from Figure 7, there is a lot more data that you can store with the photo and I do include a number of other items in the metadata. I add my name, company name, copywrite info, photo location or shoot info, the client name and info, etc... All this data is then written back into the file as IPTC data... IDI also employs the better

XMP data and includes sidecar files that can then be used by other programs. By including this data within the files, you ensure that any future programs will be able to access this data thus enabling you to switch DAM products with ease. (As was the case when I moved all my photos to a new PC!)

And there we have it... Cataloging in a nutshell! There are so many other things that I also do depending on the project. For clients, I use IDI to create a proof website. Since I already created a number of online templates, it is just a matter of choosing a catalog and choosing the template... IDI will create the website, FTP the files to my server and create all the files securely for my clients to view.

Using this workflow, I was able to setup a 100 image website for a client 2 hours after I left the photo shoot... that time included the RAW conversion process which took almost an hour itself. Really fantastic stuff! Want to learn how? Well, stay tuned for the next tutorial – Episode 4: Output – online options.