

## *Managing the Flow of Information*

The field of photography has seen many changes in recent years. Digital photography has come of age, and is now recognized as the wave of the future. In addition to the developments that can be readily seen in this field, we have also seen the rapid development of literally hundreds of online resources. As we try to master the digital revolution, and keep pace with the rapid changes in technology, we are increasingly turning to online resources to get up-to-date information on industry changes and developments. It is no longer considered acceptable to use the technology of last year, or even 6 months ago. In order to stay current in our field, we must monitor the constant flow of information.

This is problematic though because with this onslaught of information, we find ourselves spending more and more time learning, reading, and gathering information, and spending less and less time actually out in the field, using the information we have learned, and putting it into effective practice. Thus, it becomes helpful to formulate a strategy for managing the flow of information. This essay shall discuss some of the basic components of an information management system. Getting a system in place can minimize the amount of time you spend on the computer, and maximize your efficiency in keeping up to date.

In order to implement any information management system, it is always a good idea to determine the types of information you want to manage. For me, I can categorize my information needs into three categories: Technical news, Creative Development, and Peer Networking. I'll discuss each of these separately.

### **Technical News**

As in any field that relies on technology - things change regularly that we need to be aware of to be able to use the tools of the trade effectively. Things like software and firmware updates and releases, hardware problems and glitches, and new product reviews are just a few examples of technical developments. To cover these effectively, I've limited myself to the vendors for products I already own. As for new products and reviews, there are websites that conduct reviews of a wide variety of components, including software, hardware, and photo gear that are great resources. These sites go on my daily checklist. I try to limit the technical web resources to no more than 5, primarily because after that many, a lot of the information becomes redundant, and it's really not worth the time spent to glean the little bits of additional information that can be gained from spending more time on technical resources. The ones that I visit regularly are listed at the end of this article.

## Creative Development

With any field that requires creativity in order to produce, it can be challenging to continue to bring new and fresh creative ideas into play. The classic catchphrase of “writers block” can also apply to other fields, and photography is no different. I have found that interaction with others is a great way to spark innovation and creativity. By talking to others, and hearing the thoughts of others, you can consistently be motivated and encouraged to think of new ideas, directions, and approaches to photography. So, make it a regular habit to peruse creative corners. Look at your friends websites, stop in one of the many community forums and see what others are doing, and don’t be afraid to ask others what they use for inspiration. Above all, keep an open mind and welcome opportunities to try something new! Just as vendor and gear websites will vary from one individual to the next, your creative avenues for exploration will vary as well. Generally I look at creative development in three key areas: *composition*, *style*, and *lighting*. (In case you couldn’t tell, I like multiples of 3!) The ones I visit are listed at the end of this article.

## Peer Networking

One of the most gratifying things about photography is sharing your results with others. Through sharing with others, many things can be accomplished. First and foremost, we can get feedback on our visions, approaches, techniques, and styles. Another article that looks at various methods of critique and image review looks at the value of feedback can be found here and is also recommended reading: [Image Review Guidelines](#).

Second, our work can be distributed to a wider audience than we could ever hope to accomplish through localized approaches. As members of the photographic community, one of the best ways to become known for your work is by sharing your visions with your peers. By sharing our visions with our peers, the wider distribution of our imagery and ideas allows each and every one of us more opportunities for growth and recognition.

Third, by extending our vision to others, and by creating a wider distribution and creating opportunities for growth and recognition, we can open doors for advancement in our field, whether by vocation or avocation. A friend or peer may hear of an opportunity that they don’t have time or experience in...**but**, they know someone who may be interested. By networking and sharing our visions, experiences, and imagery with peers, we open ourselves up for these types of referrals, which are a large part of the field.

By and large, peer networking is done through online forum communities, and web logs (or blogs). Here again, personal preferences and subjective measures are always at

play in looking at online communities. With the wide variety of communities that are available online to choose from, this can become overwhelming too, so I try to limit my participation here to some where between 3-5 as well. As before, the ones I visit regularly are listed at the end of this article too. A caveat should also be mentioned here that I am the Site Administrator for one of these, so my personal preferences are definitely biased on this aspect of useful resources.

### **Tips and Suggestions**

Even with only 15 websites to visit regularly, it can still become overwhelming during the course of our day-to-day routines to try and keep up with these. Often times, there are tips and utilities available to track content on these sites for you. One of the best of these handy tricks is RSS (it stands for Really Simple Syndication) feeds. Basically, you set up these feeds that search the site you indicate for changes in content. By implementing these feeds, you can visit one page or check on RSS links embedded in your browser to see if content has changed or been updated with new information. For more information on RSS feeds, and how to get them set up, check out the Wikipedia here to get the details: [RSS Feeds Explained](#)

Another common method is to use a fairly new development called *Widgets*. These are small icons or displays that sit on your desktop and update automatically for you when new content arrives on the site you indicated. For more information on Widgets and how to find them, check out Wikipedia to get additional details here: [Widgets Explained](#).

Your browser is also a utility too that can be customized to work for you. Recent advances in browser technology allow for one browser session to display multiple tabs that display different types of content. This is called *tabbed browsing* and it has changed the way many people access information on the web. More detailed information on tabbed browsing and its implementation can be read here: [Tabbed Browsing Explained](#). Here, it's sufficient to say that if you are running Internet Explorer version 7, or any implementation of Firefox or Safari, you have the ability to take advantage of tabbed browsing.

On the subject of web browsing, it also bears mentioning that another helpful trick in information management is to customize the homepage that your browser goes to when you start up an internet session. Regardless of whether you use Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari, or any other web browser, you can customize your homepage to start anywhere, whether it be MSN, Google, Yahoo, or a custom-designed one of your making. Many of these companies will allow you to customize the page that displays on starting a session to look a certain way and display certain information. Your personal preferences for features and information displayed will vary so check out the

various search engines that are available on feature sets that you can set up and customize to your interests.

The final key tip is to find ways to enjoy your content **when you are not online!** Often times, you can download the content that interests you and output it to another media format for reading, viewing, or listening to at a time that is more convenient for you. For example, you can print out news articles to read while on the train during your commute. One method I use is to burn the podcasts I listen to onto a CD for playback later when I am at work or in my car. This way I can stay focused on the content and really get the most value I can from them by devoting all my attention to that information set.

The other two components of the above listing that I use occur within my web browser (I am a Firefox devotee). I set my homepage to Google, and on that homepage are three tabs: *Current Events*, *Email/Info*, and *Photo Feeds*. The current events tab shows me the latest content for 7 different news websites. The Email/Info tab shows me my inbox and has a dictionary and Wikipedia tool for quick spelling and encyclopedia checks in my daily discourses. The Photo Feeds tab includes all the RSS feeds that I find interesting. A quick check of that tab tells me of any content updates on 9 different sites. I have customized my start page to display RSS feeds from various sites, and I put all the photo feeds on one tab within that interface. That way I can read the news on one tab, click to the next tab and check email, and finally click to the photo feeds and check those sources for updated content. Within 20 seconds, I have checked seventeen different web sites for updated content! After that, I can devote my time to peer networking on the various forums I participate in. See the screenshots here of what my homepage looks like on each tab:

Current Events:

The screenshot shows the iGoogle 'Current Events' dashboard. At the top, there is the iGoogle logo, a search bar with 'Google Search' and 'I'm Feeling Lucky' buttons, and links for 'Advanced Search', 'Preferences', and 'Language Tools'. Below the search bar is a navigation bar with 'Current Events', 'Email/Info', and 'Photo Feeds' tabs, along with 'Add a tab' and 'Select theme | Add stuff' options. The main content area is divided into several widgets:

- Drudge Report:** Contains three news items: 'Sarkozy Lashes Out At American Photographers...', '6 Miners Trapped in Utah Coal Mine...', and 'Cave-In After Earthquake...'. Each item has a small expand/collapse icon.
- Google News:** Contains three news items: 'Utah miners trapped after coal mine collapses: media - Reuters', 'Bloomberg Reports for Jury Duty - New York Times', and 'Ark family welcomes 17th child, hopes for more - MSNBC'. Each item has a small expand/collapse icon.
- FOXNews.com:** Contains three news items: 'American Beauty Actress Mena Suvari Shaves Her Head', 'Bush Signs Bill Expanding Terror Surveillance Powers', and 'Report: Usher, Girlfriend Finally Marry'. Each item has a small expand/collapse icon.
- ESPN.com:** Contains three news items: 'Rogers won't return to reeling Tigers this week', 'Fan who caught A-Rod's 500th ponders options', and 'Escalator clauses holding up Quinn contract talks'. Each item has a small expand/collapse icon.
- Weather:** A widget for 'Summerville, SC' showing a current temperature of 92°F, 'Haze', and wind 'N at 7 mph'. It also includes a 3-day forecast: 'Today' (97° | 77°), 'Tue' (97° | 77°), and 'Wed' (97° | 77°), each with a weather icon.
- Slashdot:** Contains three news items: 'A 3-D View of the Brain', 'British Scientists Reverse Casimir Effect', and 'Internet Radio's 'Second Chance' Boggling Down in House'. Each item has a small expand/collapse icon.

Email Info:

The screenshot shows the iGoogle 'Email Info' dashboard. It features the same top navigation and search bar as the 'Current Events' dashboard. The main content area is divided into three widgets:

- Dictionary:** A widget with a search bar and a 'Go' button.
- Gmail:** A widget showing an 'Inbox' with a 'Hide preview' and 'Compose Mail' link. It lists several emails with their senders, subjects, and times: 'Lisa, Jason (2) - wow - Thanks... glad yo' (9:10am), 'AddonInteractive - Your AddonChat accc' (2:15am), 'SCPG, postmaster, Mail Delivery (10) - t' (1:16am), 'PodcastAwards.System - PodcastAward' (Aug 5), and 'TPN :: The Digital - TPN :: The Digital Pt' (Aug 5).
- Wikipedia:** A widget with a search bar and 'Go' and 'Search' buttons.

Photo Feeds:

The screenshot shows the iGoogle 'Photo Feeds' dashboard. It features the same top navigation and search bar. The main content area is divided into several widgets, all related to digital photography:

- TPN:: The Digital Photography Show:** Contains three items: 'The Digital Photography Show #62: A Pop Photo Quiz and Our Favorite Non-Photography Programs', 'The Digital Photography Show #61: The Listener Appreciation Show with Michael Rather from The Digital Photography Connection', and 'We Were Nominated for TWO Podcast Awards'.
- Digital Photography Tips from the Top Floor (iPhone/AppleTV/Audio):** Contains three items: 'A week of regeneration and catching up', 'Free workshop participation', and 'tftf220 - Assignments - The Tech Guy'.
- News: Digital Photography Review (dpreview.com):** Contains three items: 'Ricoh GX100 firmware 1.1.6', 'Leica Summarit-M lenses, F2.5, a new range', and 'Digital camera market grows 27%, DSLRs up 75%'.
- Photojojo:** Contains three items: 'Upload your Photo and Try a New Hairstyle or Grow a Mustache, Virtually', 'Quick Tip: Use a PEZ Dispenser to Get Kids to Smile', and '4 Step DIY Wine Glass Photo Frames!'.
- Adobe Photoshop Lightroom Killer Tips:** Contains three items: 'Friday Tip - TAT Shortcut', 'Learn Lightroom, Save \$100, NAPP Membership', and 'Wednesday Inspiration - ShadowDetails.com'.
- Daily Photo Tips:** Contains one item: 'Light Diary Episode #5 - Lensbaby Portfolio'.
- Photoshop User TV:** Contains three items: 'Photoshop User TV Episode 92 (July 30, 2007)', 'Photoshop User TV Episode 91 (July 23, 2007)', and 'Photoshop User TV Episode 90 (July 16, 2007)'.
- Creative Solutions PR @ Adobe:** Contains one item: 'So what is the name of this video remixer thing anyway?'.

## Conclusion

With the never-ending flow of information that is available from so many sources, the importance of applying filters to that information becomes integral if we want to effectively manage our time and energy. We could spend our entire lives sitting at a computer and constantly reading and getting new information from the always increasing sprawl of the internet. The key lies in filtering out information and material you don't want while at the same time keeping up with what information you need and do want.

Whether you check your information and resources weekly, daily or hourly, implementing an information management system can return greater dividends across a shorter time, freeing up time for you to be out and shooting using all the information you've learned. As they say, knowing is only half the battle...

My Favorite Sites:

***Technical Resources***

[www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)

[www.canon.com](http://www.canon.com)

[www.slashdot.org](http://www.slashdot.org)

[www.dpreview.com](http://www.dpreview.com)

[www.strobist.com](http://www.strobist.com)

***Creative Development***

[Photoshop User TV](#) (weekly video casts)

[NAPP](#) (written and video tips and tricks)

[The Digital Photography Show](#) (podcast)

[Tips from the Top Floor](#) (podcast)

[The Online Photographer](#) (blog)

***Peer Networking***

[South Carolina Photography Guild](#)

[Fred Miranda](#)

[Your Photo Forum](#)

[The Radiant Vista](#)

[TFTTF Forums](#)

[Naturescapes](#)