

USING A DIGITAL CAMERA TO INVENTORY POSSESSIONS

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WHAT IS A DIGITAL INVENTORY?

With a digital camera it is feasible to create many pictures of your possessions and your home. These can be combined with computer files that have written descriptions of your possessions. These files can be easily “burned” in a CD which can, in turn, be easily copied and put in safe places (e.g. with relatives who live elsewhere or safe deposit boxes.) Perhaps best of all, given that you already have a digital camera and a relatively up-to-date computer, the cost of doing the digital inventory is virtually zero although it does require time.

WHY CREATE A DIGITAL INVENTORY?

In the event of a serious loss or outright disaster, having many detailed pictures of your possessions provides you with a valuable tool to deal with insurance claims. Pictures can back up appraisals or written descriptions you may have or support what you list from memory. They give your claims credibility.

In the event of near total destruction these pictures are invaluable reminders of what you had. A picture of the contents of a kitchen drawer will jog your memory on most of the equipment in that drawer. A picture of a linen closet can remind you--and the insurance company--of the linens, towels, etc that were a part of your life. And don't forget the investment you have in clothing; some pictures of that closet will help.

Unless you have a mansion with a vast number of rooms the finished digital inventory will very likely fit on a single CD. It will be a cinch to duplicate and store in safe places. And if you add possessions over a year or so the task of updating the inventory will be relatively easy.

ORGANIZING YOUR HOUSE FOR A DIGITAL INVENTORY

As preparation you need to organize your home into rooms or units (such as large closets or hallways). What these are will differ from house to house. The aim here is to divide the whole task into manageable parts. Each room or unit needs a short name that makes sense to

you and your home. (A sample is shown below.) It is recommended that you tackle the picture taking one room or unit at a time. This way pictures will be grouped in your camera by unit.

SOME GUIDELINES

*Use your flash at anytime where you can get greater clarity. Watch out for problems if you have a great deal of sunshine coming in through windows. A cloudy day is actually helpful.

*It pays to review your pictures often as you go along. If one didn't work you can delete and try again. If you wait until later it is often hard to go back and correct the problem.

*When you tackle a room or other unit start with some pictures that give an overview of the room. You might, for example, shoot four pictures, one from each corner. Then proceed systematically around the room with medium shots or close ups. In some rooms it helps to do the furniture first and then get the pictures on the walls.

*Open drawers and take close ups of the contents. Open cabinet doors to get close ups of content. Remember: There is really no cost for one more picture.

*If you have some especially valuable items such as art work or expensive equipment take a few extra views or special close-ups.

SETTING YOUR CAMERA

There are many kinds of cameras with many different features and resolutions. A suggested target is to have your settings produce a .JPG file that is somewhere between 400kb and 1 mb. (On my Kodak a setting of 1.8 megapixels works fine) Good resolution is helpful but if you create pictures that are as big as 2mb or more you will consume more space later on a CD. (As an example I took a picture of a page of a book that was four feet away and I used no zoom. I could easily enlarge that picture to make the finest print legible. That picture was only about 400kb in size.)

This needs to be put in perspective. If you use a CD you will have up to 700mb of space for files. This means you could include about 700 pictures each with 1mb of space. I had 259 pictures to inventory our house here in SLCCV. In other words it is not courting a disaster to have larger pictures.

ORGANIZING PICTURES ON YOUR COMPUTER

One workable plan is this: Set up a directory on your hard drive for the inventory. Set up subdirectories within that for each of the rooms or units you used in taking the pictures. Use

the short name you have for each of these rooms or units when you name these subdirectories. You then have a home for the pictures for each of those rooms or units.

It is not essential but it is very helpful to rename your pictures with the name you use for that unit. For example, Florida Room 001.jpg, Florida Room 002.jpg, etc. There are several tools available to help rename files in photo editing software programs.

TYING PICTURES TO WRITTEN MATERIAL

If you a written list of objects in the house or details on equipment or descriptions of valuable objects or appraisals (such as for jewelry) you can cross reference these to the picture(s) (by name) that portray them. These may already be in a computer file (e.g. .doc or .rtf). If not they could be scanned and converted into a file. The big advantage is that your one CD then has it all. It will be worth a bit of time to change the names of these files containing written materials so that they reflect what they are about.

BURNING YOUR CD

If you have organized the directories and subdirectories as suggested (or in a similar fashion) the easiest part of the whole venture is burning the CD. You literally copy these subdirectories to the CD.

AN EXAMPLE

<u>Room</u>	<u>Number of Pictures</u>
Dinning Area	35
Florida Room	80-- <i>Lots of pictures & knick-knacks</i>
Guest Bath	11
Guest Bedroom	24
Hallway	13
Kitchen	32
Living Room	62-- <i>Lots of pictures, books & knick-knacks</i>
Master Bath	12
Master Bedroom	34
Master Bedroom Closet	46
Porch	16
Tool And Laundry Room	60-- <i>Lots of tools and "stuff"</i>

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