

# RESOURCE MAGAZINE

For the Professional Photo Productionist

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TRICKS OF THE TRADE:

# Digital Tech

By Sylvia Gyrion | Photo by Adam Cantor

**F**or some of us, the mere thought of dealing with computers is utterly daunting. Others possess inherent savvyness and are able to navigate their way around any operating system with great ease. It's no secret the advent of digital photography changed the industry, and technically proficient people became a high commodity. Thus, the Digital Tech was born. His function is to oversee the capture process during a shoot to ensure incoming images are optimized for the desired look and necessary output, to troubleshoot technical issues on set, and to properly manage files.

Travis Drennen is on top of his game; so far his work has taken him to New Orleans, Paris, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. He lets us in on his secrets:

## Learn Your Trade

"I have computer science and photography degrees so it was pretty easy for me to merge the two and work as a digital capture tech. In photo school, we had access to early Leaf backs that helped me learn the basics. After that, it was very easy to learn my way around the other capture programs such as Capture One Pro, Digital Photo Pro, Flexcolor and Phocus. I also take classes and attend seminars on the newest equipment and programs whenever possible. I offer to help friends or photographers who are testing. You can also get trial versions of most programs and read the help section to learn your way around a particular program."

## What You Need To Know

"For me, it goes beyond just knowing the capture programs. I've seen Art Directors and make-up artist navigate their way around Capture One. You should be able to troubleshoot computer problems on a Macintosh, have an advanced understanding of the technical side of analogue photography (f stops, shutter speeds, iso, etc), an in-depth knowledge of digital color correction from capture to output, basic Photoshop/retouching skills, and a working knowledge of capture programs, digital backs, and cameras. I think a tech should also be able to fill the role of a photo assistant. I take photo assisting gigs from time to time to keep my memory fresh. Little things like knowing how to work a Profoto 7B or how to split channels on a Profoto 7A can make a big difference. It's good to be versatile; it makes you more of an asset."

## Getting Work

"This is the hardest part because so many people have recently started to market themselves as digital technicians. If you're a photo assistant, let the photographers you work with know that you can also do digital and they might give you a shot. Another way to get in the business is to work full-time as an in-house tech for a studio or capture company. When you're starting out, you have to remember that this is a business and like any business, it takes time to build relationships with clients."

## Be Different

"For me, my job is more than knowing the capture programs. Always keep up with the latest technology to stay ahead of the game. I check blogs and forums regularly to learn about common software issues. This really pays off when problems come up. You might be able to get by until you have a real problem, and that's when a good tech will shine. You should be self-sufficient with anything that could go wrong with any part of the system. It's also helpful to have a network of techs you can call to troubleshoot with when things get above your head. Tell the crew to take five if you have to. You should be able to communicate well with the photographer and the rest of the people on set while keeping calm under pressure. In the world of technology, things go wrong; it's not a matter of if it will happen, but when it will happen."

## Leave Your Ego At Home

"Sometimes you will work for a photographer who is not digital savvy at all. I always relate everything back to film; it seems to be the best way to drive the concept home. Be respectful, and use common sense in regards to timing. If the photographer is out of focus, let them know, but be discreet. You certainly don't want to make him look inept in front of a client. Also, keep in mind, you're not running the show: at the end of the day you are there to help the photographer. And don't promote your work while you are on a job—that's totally unprofessional."

## Easy Money

"Five or six years ago, being a digital tech was very lucrative. I think it still can be if you decide you'd like to make it your career. Digital is expensive and is changing all of the time so it requires a large investment before it becomes lucrative. There are many people and companies to compete with so it's not as easy as it once was. I think there will always be a need to have someone watching the files come into the computer, but I'm not sure if people will be able to command the same day rates."

