

The Academy of Plumbing 33

How To Spend Your Money

The Digital Plumber
By Paul Ellis

“What money is that, then?” you sneer. Understandably. The answer is “the money you’ll end up spending on other things if you decide to buy a new camera”. Here’s a list of probable additional expenditures that the camera salesman, anxious to get your money, might well not mention.

THE GOLDEN RULE

A new-generation camera will only function properly, if at all, when combined with current computer software and hardware. Here are a couple of examples:

- Don’t expect RAW files from your new Canon 5D Mk II to open in any version of Photoshop than CS4 because they just won’t. CS/CS2/CS3 will never be upgraded to support these files because they are obsolete products, no longer available for sale from Adobe and superseded by CS4, the only supported version.
- Don’t expect your new Phase One P65+, which requires Capture One 4.5, to work with your PowerPC Macintosh or any Mac running OSX 10.4 or 10.3. It won’t. Capture One 4.5 only runs on an Intel Macintosh running OS X 10.5 Leopard.

IT AIN’T BROKE BUT YOU’LL STILL HAVE TO FIX IT

I’ve written before about the problem of leaving a functioning system alone and not upgrading it as time passes. Essentially, no man or computer is

an island. There is no such thing as a functioning computer working in isolation, because the rest of the world travels on apace.

Here’s a metaphor: imagine the world of computers and software, the Internet, digital imaging and your clients’ expectations as a row of people, arms linked, trudging steadily across the savannah. You trudge along in step with them, but then suddenly decide, “I’m tired of this trudging. I like it here, where I am. It’s warm and sunny, I lack for nothing; I think I’ll have a little sit down.” And so you do. You save your energy (= money and disruption) and get on with enjoying the weather. You even take some photographs.

The line of people continues to trudge slowly away from you. At first you can still communicate with them by speaking loudly, and later, shouting. They can still hear you and shout back. You could easily catch up with them again by walking briskly for a minute or two, but decide not to. Everything is fine where you are; your gear works perfectly and you’re happy. Then you decide that you’d like to get that brand new camera because it takes acceptable snaps at ISO 6400 or captures 60 megapixels, which you think would be handy. The following is a true example of what can happen...

You have this fabulously reliable 400MHz G4 running OS 9.2.2, Quark Express 3.1 and Photoshop 7 that has

never let you down. Never crashed, ever. You go out and buy your new camera and want to shoot RAW. Ah. All of the RAW developers that understand your camera only run in OS X, and run best (or only) on an Intel Mac. You need a new Mac, which no longer runs OS 9 Classic so you can’t run Quark 3.1 and have to buy QuarkXpress 8 for nearly a thousand quid (ouch) or learn Adobe InDesign, which you’ve just bought as part of Adobe Creative Suite 4 Master Collection for another thousand quid because, of course, you can’t run Photoshop 7 on an Intel Mac either. And then you have this high-end SCSI scanner that doesn’t have driver software for OS X. Not even VueScan supports it. And even if it did you can’t get a compatible PCIe SCSI card. And your G4 had a built-in Zip drive...

Get the picture? When you sat down in that sunny place, everyone with whom you’d linked arms had similar gear to you. Now they all have Intel Macs running Leopard and have moved on from SCSI scanners. Furthermore, modern websites don’t display properly on your G4 because your ancient copy of Internet Explorer doesn’t interpret their Cascading Style Sheets. You can’t do online banking because IE on the Mac doesn’t support modern security certificates. The list is endless. Now you’re going to have to catch everyone up, quickly. They’re well out of earshot, so that involves running (= lots of money) and learning new things (= lots of disruption).

AND ON TOP OF ALL THAT...

...you do the maths and realise that every time you trip the shutter of your 60-megapixel monster it creates a 60MB RAW file. Process it as a 16-bit RGB TIFF for editing in Photoshop and the file balloons to 360MB! Your G4 has a 10GB internal hard drive: it can only store around 20 pictures! You need capacious external storage. Time to make a real shopping list. Here's what you might expect to spend if you haven't made any substantial equipment upgrades in the last three years.

SO WHAT IS THIS NEW CAMERA REALLY GOING TO COST ME?

MAC HARDWARE



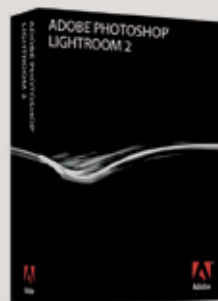
- £1300 for a new 15" MacBook Pro (£2000 for a 17" with a matte screen), or
- £1600 for a Mac Pro
- £30 MacBook Pro 4GB memory upgrade, or
- £100 4GB Mac Pro memory upgrade
- £400-£1000+ for a monitor (because your old LaCie Electron now looks so warm and fuzzy)

STORAGE



- £100 for a Time Machine backup disk (never neglect backup)
- £250-£450 for a professional Wiebetech or Sonnet hard disk enclosure in which to store your images, plus
- £65 each for bare 1TB hard disks, or better still, £100 each for bare 1.5TB disks to go into it
- £180 or thereabouts for three mobile hard disks if you shoot on location (1x bootable backup, 1x image storage, 1x image storage backup)

SOFTWARE



- The current version RAW developer provided with your new camera, or
- £200 for Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 2, or
- £100 for Apple Aperture, or
- £300 for Phase One Capture One 4 Pro, or

- £160 for Nikon Capture NX2 (er, on the other hand, perhaps not)
- £190 for Adobe Photoshop CS4 upgrade, if you want to view your RAWs in Bridge

TOTAL

If you choose the lowest-cost laptop route you'll end up spending a minimum of **£2,445** to bring your computer hardware and software up to par. If you go the lowest-cost Mac Pro route you'll spend **£2,835**.

PLUS...

...upgrades of all of your other productivity software and Photoshop plugins to their current versions for compatibility with Intel, Leopard and CS4. Only you can calculate that amount but it's likely to be at least a couple of hundred quid.

AND...

...many hours of time setting up, optimising, reading manuals, practicing, and generally climbing learning curves to get on top of this complex new system. Oh, and we haven't even considered new lenses, perhaps an entirely new camera platform, and all of the little bits of accessories that are no longer usable and require changing.

Such is the cost of having a little sit down. And they said the best things in life were free...

Links to everything mentioned here are at <http://tinyurl.com/9sx3y7>.

PDFs of this and all my other Image articles are available to download at www.thedigitalplumber.co.uk, each with live weblinks for your browsing pleasure. Go and get 'em.

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