Image management workflow outline

This is a rough outline of a good professional studio workflow. You should adapt and adjust it to your preferences, purposes, needs, and style so that it will work best for you.

To set up for your workflow, start by creating a folder (Name it whatever you like, I chose "Copy Me.") Inside that folder create three folders: RAW (if you shoot RAW), or MASTERS (If you shoot JPG), PRINT, and WEB. The "COPY ME" folder is kept on the desktop or drive/folder where images will be stored long-term. A copy of that folder is made and renamed to receive new images from the camera. When the folder is copied, you will have a folder named "Copy Me copy" or "Copy Me(1)." To rename the folder, right click it and select "Rename," or highlight it and press F2; then key in the new name.

1. Before you copy your images from your camera or card to your computer, copy the prefab folder as described above.

2. Upload or copy new images to the RAW or MASTERS folder in the newly copied and renamed folder. Remove the card from the reader, or disconnect the camera from the computer.

3. Edit images for printing (or whatever you plan for them)
	a. RAW files can be edited in your camera manufacturer's RAW editing program, or in Adobe Bridge, Lightroom, or a similar program.
	b. If you shoot JPEG's, they can still be edited the same non-destructive way.
	c. Do not delete any files. Crop every image you plan to keep, even if you just set the crop to cover the entire image, do not crop images you do not want to keep. This will come in handy later.

4. Time to rename the files that you plan to show off.

    a. Most image browsers (Bridge, DPP, View NX) allow you to select to view only cropped or un-cropped images. Select all of the un-cropped images and review them to make sure you don't want them and you didn't just forget to crop a keeper.

    b. Once you have made sure that all of the good pics are cropped, select all of the cropped images.

    c. Most image browsers and image management programs have a "Batch Rename" function. Rename all of the cropped images in whatever fashion works best for you. There are usually several parameters that can be set such as date, alpha-numeric serial, custom text, meta-data, etc… I rename them based on the event or subject matter, and a sequential number, such as Manteo-Sunrise_001. Where the option exists, be sure to have the program save the original file name in EXIF data in case a later reference is needed. It is important to rename any files you plan to use at this point; renaming them later can lead to confusion.

5. Most RAW editing programs are also converters, so re-open the renamed files in that program and have it convert them to whatever file type is appropriate to your planned use of them. This is usually listed as a "SAVE" option.

6. Most Raw editing programs use a "non-destructive" method of storing edits to images using XMP files, which tell your computer how to "display" and save edited files. This means you should then save the newly edited files into your PRINT folder as TIF's if you take disks to a lab for printing or as JPG's if you upload for printing. It is a good idea to find out what your lab's preference is. If you save them as TIF's, select the "No Compression" option or "LZW Compression" option when it is offered. If you are saving them as JPEG's, select an image quality of 12 (or whatever is highest) when that option is offered.

7. You now have a MASTERS or RAW folder containing the original images from your camera, and images ready for use in your PRINT folder.

8. If you use an on-line sharing or display service, (or plan to email loads to Grandma or upload to your Facebook Page) you may want to reduce the size of your images before uploading them. If you use an on line printing service that prints from what you upload, don't resize them unless it is required by the service, just upload them.

9. Adobe Photoshop and Photoshop Elements both offer a batch resizing function called the "Image Processor." It is accessed under the "File" menu of each program. Most camera manufacturers have built a similar function into their image management programs. Consult your camera's software owner's manual for that info. The image processor will offer many options for your images, you will want to select the "Resize to fit" option and choose a size, usually about 1000 pixels on each side (width and height) will work great for on line viewing. This will not make your images square, it will simply resize the largest side to the chosen dimension and the other side will be resized to whatever is correct for that aspect ratio. It will also make all of the images the same size regardless of whether they are vertical or horizontal. Select "Save as jpeg" at a quality level of about 8 and you'll end up with a set of images just about right for online viewing. You will be asked to select a folder. Select the "WEB" folder for the newly resized images.

10. Now that you have all of the permutations of your images complete, you should write a CD or DVD of the folders you just made and label and file that disk away for safekeeping. If you want to lessen the load on your hard drive, an external hard drive is a comparatively inexpensive, and very efficient way to store image files and have them readily accessible without filling up your "C" Drive; but it is no substitute for a CD or DVD.

11. After verifying that your back up disk is good and all of your images are protected, you can clear the flash card by either deleting the images or just reformatting the card. If you reformat the card, do so in the camera, not on the computer. This will insure optimal communication between your card and camera.

12. The names you use for the "COPY ME" folder and all of the sub-folders are for you to choose. Name them whatever makes sense to you. You may find that you don't really need one of the sub-folders or that you need another not mentioned in this document; set it up to suit your purposes.

Using this method is great for keeping your images organized and backed up for later. It should be adjusted to whatever works best for your organizational needs and style.

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