

ORGANIZING

How to organize your digital photos

It's amazing to consider all of the changes over the years in the way we take and view photos. Although the ability to create photos has only existed for around 200 years, the evolution of the devices to take them and the processes by which they are created is truly astounding.

Photography has progressed from a laborious process involving clunky, impractical gadgets and corrosive chemicals to a simple process using a device that fits in our palm and instantly creates a photo that can be shared across the globe. These remarkable changes have made taking and viewing photos remarkably easier, and as a result, we are taking more pictures than ever.

Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Well, that depends upon your perspective. Today's smartphones take great quality pictures, and the convenience of not having to carry a camera around is no doubt a plus. It's certainly wonderful to be able to easily share our pictures with friends and family. But there are also added challenges.

Our printed photos take up physical space in our home, reminding us that we need to organize them. Digital photos don't take up any literal space, so we may not see a need to get them in order (unless we're running out of storage space for them on our devices). We snap pictures freely, often with no thought as to where they are being stored or what we will do with them long term. I have heard many people lament that this generation of children is the most photographed one ever, but that those photos may not ever be seen by future generations.

Do you know where your digital photos are stored? Are they in multiple locations on multiple devices? Do you know how to find a specific picture when you need it? Do you have a plan for organizing your photos? Read on for some practical ideas and inspiration. Some of these ideas were gleaned from the Association of Personal Photo Organizers 2018 Summit, and some are from my own experience. Warning: This is a complicated topic, and these articles will only touch the surface.

We can use some of the same steps for organizing digital photos as we do for printed photos. The first thing you need to do is to gather all of your photos into one



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place. Photo organizers call this "place" the Digital Photo Hub (DPH). It's the home location for all of your digital photos and videos.

APPO preaches the necessity of a 3-2-1 backup system, meaning that you have three copies of your photo (one primary and two backups) in two different media formats, with one being stored offsite (outside your home or business). A sample APPO recommendation of 3-2-1 would be using your computer hard drive as your primary storage, two external hard drives with different manufacturers as your backups, one of them stored in an alternate location, and a cloud-based service as a bonus.

After doing my own research and consulting my tech-savvy husband, Eric, I have a different opinion. External hard drives are wonderful and necessary for general computer backups. When it comes to photo storage, however, we are both completely comfortable using a cloud service as our only photo storage.

I realize this is contrary to APPO recommendations. When it comes to reliability, cloud storage is infinitely more reliable than a computer hard drive or an external hard drive. Cloud services utilize multiple servers in multiple locations around the world. As long as you have internet service, you can access all of your photos. In addition, many of these services are free, which is an added bonus!

If you are comfortable using a cloud service for photo storage (either as primary storage or backup), how do you choose one? The three biggest players in this game for basic photo storage needs are iCloud Photos (Apple), Google Photos, and Amazon Prime Photos. All three are great options, but each has its own strengths and weaknesses. If you are completely in the Apple ecosystem (you have an iPhone, iPad and a Mac), then iCloud Photos makes the most sense for you. If you are an Amazon Prime member and probably always will be but use other devices besides Apple products, then Amazon

Prime Photos is your best choice. If neither of these situations applies to you, Google probably makes the most sense for you. Google offers free unlimited photo storage, but only for a compressed version of your photos. You'll want to do more research on your own before choosing. My next article will go into more detail about cloud-based photo services and will walk you through a few common photo tasks using the features these services offer.

Many people approach organizing their digital photos the same way as their printed photos. They like to create albums arranged chronologically, by person, or by event. That technique certainly works, but depending on how you want to use your photos, it may not be necessary.

One of the best features of digital photos is that they are embedded with information (metadata) that make searching incredibly easy. You can search by date, facial recognition, geographical location, keywords, etc. It's truly amazing and sometimes a little spooky. I can search my photos using the keyword "bridge," and iCloud will pull up pictures from all over the world with a bridge in them. I can type "California" to see any pictures I have taken in that state. If I want to find a picture of my younger daughter in third grade, I simply need to figure out what year that is because iCloud (all of the cloud photo services) sorts the pictures by date. No more digging through boxes of photos the night before a school project is due.

You may have more ambitious organizing goals in mind. You may want to create digital albums, printed photo books, or video montages that you can enjoy yourself and share with family and friends. Figure out what you want and what you have time to accomplish. You might choose to complete that first step (getting all of your photos into your DPH) now so that you can easily find what you need, and then think about other possible projects later.

Regardless of your ultimate goal, the time spent organizing your photos is worth it. Your efforts will not only benefit you now, but can also help your family preserve and pass along your photos for generations to come.

Happy organizing!

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