

Instant self-serve film to files: science, fiction or both?

It's 2 a.m. sometime in the future, and you're on a deadline. The job has to be ready by 10 o'clock that morning and it's almost finished. All you need to do now is place the images in your page layout and go to bed.

Wait a second! Where *are* those pictures?

Oh, no! They're on that roll of film that you meant to take in to be scanned to Photo CD, but here they are, still sitting in your desk drawer—and now you're in big trouble.

Or maybe not. Quick, jump in the car and drive over to the mall—there's a Digital Pic kiosk there!

And half an hour later, armed with a CD full of TIFFs, your high res images are nestled into your pages and you're curled up in a warm bed in preparation for that meeting.

Sound too much like science fiction?

Well, maybe that's because it is—or more precisely, Applied Science Fiction (www.asf.com), an Austin, Texas company founded in 1995 that is planning to deliver exactly this kind of technology by next year.

ASF is a developer of proprietary imaging software and hardware. Digital ICE, Digital ROC and Digital GEM are used by film scanners to automatically eliminate surface defects on scanned film, perform automatic color correction, and clean up the graininess of film shots. But now ASF is working on combining its imaging technologies with a new digital dry film process into a 3' x 3' x 1' processing unit that uses no plumbing or hazardous chemistry. This unit can then be integrated by OEMs into a variety of photo kiosks, photo lab microlabs or even fullblown prepress workflows. Pricing on the processing unit only is around US\$30,000, with kiosk or microlab configurations running up to roughly twice that cost.

Digital Pic technology will enter beta testing later this year, with the first commercial units expected to be in the marketplace by Q1/2002. Self-serve kiosks will allow consumers to activate the machine with a credit card and feed a roll of regular 35mm or APS color film which is taken in by Digital Pic's proprietary loading mechanism. Pictures can be viewed one by one on a touch screen, cropped individually, and adjusted for redevy, before giving the okay to process. The Digital Pic machine records the film type, speed and other pertinent details before feeding each frame through its capture, cleanup and disc writing system. The first image appears on screen in about two and a half minutes; photo prints plus final files on CD (ASF calls it an Extended Range Digital Negative or XRDN) are ready in seven minutes. Three files are generated for each image: an uncropped original, a full 18MB RGB file, and a small JPEG reference file—all for about US\$10 per roll of 24 exposures.

Smile—you're about to be on "canned camera". 🌐

