

The Key to Printing Good Quality from Digital Images

In our business, we deal with many customers who want to print or copy photos. Our equipment can and does produce professional quality results but in order to do so we need to start with high quality files.

Most of our work today is printing images from digital or electronic files. We can produce absolutely stunning results but results are dependent on the quality of the file that we are working from. In today's digital age, most cameras and smart phones are capable of taking high enough quality images BUT you must control this process to get quality prints. If all you will use your images for is to display them on a screen or monitor - this is not a factor. Your results will always depend on good photographic principles (lighting, backgrounds etc.) but that is another totally different discussion.

The technical explanation of this process is quite involved - there is lots of information available on the internet and from the manufacturer of your device on the how's and why's. Here are a couple of links to some very good articles on the subject:

<http://www.photoshopesentials.com/essentials/image-quality/>

http://www.photokaboom.com/photography/learn/printing/resolution/1_which_resolution_print_size_viewing_distance.htm

Digital cameras and smart phones are not equal in terms of the quality of the photo you will take. If they were - we wouldn't need digital cameras at all. Smart phones have progressed a long way since they appeared in the marketplace in their ability to take photos but their physical size limits them. A photo taken on a smart phone can be used for some purposes quite well but may limit what you can ultimately do with it when you decide to print that image.

The rule of thumb here is that we need a high quality image to produce a print that is going to accurately display what you saw when you took the picture. You need to set your device set to record the image at the highest possible quality it is capable of. Higher quality images can be reduced in file size but lower quality images cannot be manipulated to produce high quality results when printing. If you know the picture you're taking is going to be used for a calendar, greeting card or for use in a brochure or other printed items, then you need a higher quality image.

Once you have your image recorded, then you need to get it moved so it can be used. There are many ways of accomplishing this and they are not all equal. Sometimes you can move it directly to a mobile storage device like a memory card or flash drive - consult the manufacturer's instructions on how best to do this. Or you may have to move them to a computer first. Recently file sharing and transfer services on the internet have become popular. Be warned that many of these services will automatically reduce the size of your files in order to speed up the transfer process. This will not affect display on a screen but will negatively impact them for printing purposes. Using the email function directly from your smart phone may also see this happen. Some email software will reduce the file size and put the image in the body of the email - this will not work - you will need to actually attach the original file to the email message. However you accomplish the transfer, you will need to ensure that the file you are transferring is not being reduce in size "automatically" when you are working with it.

What about using images from the internet? Almost all images that you obtain from the internet will not be of sufficient quality to print well at anything but very small physical sizes - internet images are reduced in size. Also, most images on the web are copyrighted - meaning you do not have the right to use them without permission from the owner of the copyright.

What about copying images? In 1995 when we started this business, most photos were still being produced from film in photo finishing labs. You'd drop off your roll of film and later return and pick up printed copies of the photos. Many of us have boxes or albums full of these photos. The process was a chemical one - mysteriously carried out in dark rooms with special lights. Results varied widely depending on the skill of the technicians. We would take a printed photo and copy it on one of our colour copiers. As photo developing had been around for many years, the technology that we utilized did a pretty decent job of reproducing these "continuous tone" prints. Today, most photos are "developed" from digital images and if you decide to print them that would typically happen on an ink jet printer - either a home desk top or commercially using a dedicated photo printing machine. When this type of printed image comes to us to copy, our equipment will pick up the very minute individual dots that make up these images. The result is that copying printed photos today does not always result in as good an image as we used to be able to reproduce from the "old" style photos. Our staff will optimize our equipment when copying to produce the best results possible.

We are always available to help - please contact us.