

Can you locate that file immediately? Yes, MAM!

Digital Asset Management Extensis Portfolio 5

by Shane Steinman

Media Asset Management is merely a matter of putting things away so that you can find them later.

There. The secret's out.

The reasons for applying such a principle go directly to the bottom line, as stated in the 1999 Media Asset Management Market Report from GISTICS: "As many media-intensive businesses such as ad agencies, magazines, and entertainment studios have already discovered, companies can drastically reduce production cycle times by reusing existing media and eliminate the time and cost associated with creating new media for each and every product."

ME AND MY MEDIA

Now, if you have an excellent memory (or very few assets to manage) you may not need a software solution to help you find things. But, in this increasingly hectic digital world, having a searchable asset database at your disposal can certainly make life easier—and that's especially true if you don't work alone.

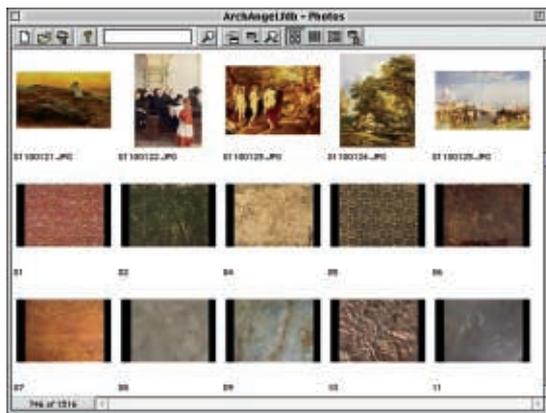
Take my office, for example, a veritable wilderness of CDs, Jaz cartridges and the paper (even napkins) that serves as clues to which disks contain the files I've stored away for future reference. Should someone walk in and ask me where a certain JPEG image is hiding, I could simply reach into one of my many stacks of paper and disks to retrieve those errant pixels—much to my guest's (and even my own) amazement.

However, if I were to ask someone else to wade through my digital swamp to find a file for me, they would be hopelessly lost. And if someone were to "tidy up" my work area, I would similarly perish.

So, realizing the precariousness of my own so-called organization, I set about to catalogue my files using the latest version (5.0) of *Extensis Portfolio*; a nifty utility which has grown up considerably since it first emerged some years ago as *Aldus Fetch*.

Portfolio comes in three levels of user interactivity; a standalone product (Desktop Edition), a local area network version with limited Web capabilities (Network Edition), and a full-blown LAN and Web version (Server Edition) that allows for increased scalability on a client-server basis. The Server Edition also offers an optional upgrade for larger implementations and database interoperability

Break your catalogue into as many GALLERIES as you need for easier visual reference of related files.



The default file PREVIEW SIZE is 112 x 112 pixels, but you can double the size in your Cataloguing Options settings.

through its SQL Connect extension.

Figuring that the Network Edition was just about right for my particular situation, I resolved to put it through its paces to see if it would help me with my file wrangling. But first, in order to gauge the sheer complexity of the problem, I set about trying to order these files manually.

After about an hour I gave up, having found a new appreciation for the phrase, "trying to herd cats." And now that I had disheveled my organized chaos, I had no choice but to make *Portfolio* work for me.

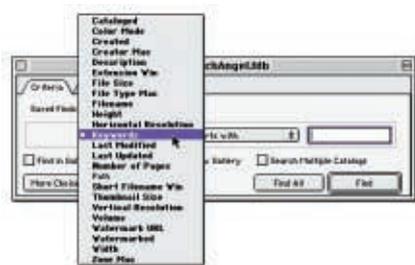
And, for the most part, it did.

THE STUFF I PUT AWAY

The one thing I noticed right off the bat, is that you have to be judicious about the types of files that you catalogue. In fact, after processing just a few CDs by dragging their volume icons into the main catalogue window, I decided to start all over again with new preference settings and a completely different mindset about what I wanted to achieve.

Portfolio does a great job with some of the more popular image file types, importing TIFF and JPEG files into its database at a rate of less than one second per image, but it seemed to take considerably longer with indexed color GIFs, *QuarkXPress* documents, *MS Word* files, as well as certain *Adobe Illustrator* files, some *Adobe Acrobat* PDFs, and even basic text files.

Since the application uses thumbnails provided by the target file when creating the preview for the *Portfolio* database, you'll get a default view of the application icon if there's no thumbnail available. Users of *QuarkXPress* versions earlier than 4.0 will have to remember to click the "Include Preview" option when saving their files,



Portfolio's comprehensive **SEARCH CAPABILITIES**, which allow you to indicate multiple criteria, are a real help when you have a lot of similar files that look the same.

and even then, only the first page of the document (which may sometimes be left blank intentionally) will be used for the thumbnail. In version 4.0 (or greater) the Preview option is the default.

So, equipped with my new 20/20 hindsight and resolving to make good use of *Portfolio's* Gallery option, which allows you to segment your media catalogue into user-definable genres (perhaps by client or by file usage characteristics), I proceeded to begin again.

However this time, rather than dragging all my files (or the complete archive volume) into the default catalogue window, I created several Galleries and judiciously selected only the files I *really* wanted to find again, dragging them in groups (or by folders) into the waiting Gallery window of my choice.

Not only did this speed up the process,

It's easy to get the **DETAILS** (including file dates, keywords and custom field data) on any catalogued item.



but it also resulted in a much cleaner and more pertinent database of my more valuable assets. The exercise reminded me of something I already knew: that using software for a certain process doesn't mean that you can stop thinking for yourself. If anything, you have to think smarter at the beginning of the journey because it's widely accepted that automation will allow you to make more mistakes in a shorter period of time than doing something by less efficient means.

Note: I could have used *Portfolio's* Cataloging Options to exempt certain files from being included in this operation, thereby permitting me to be less "picky", but sometimes I actually want those pesky text files and *Word* docs to be catalogued—especially in the case of HTML files and finalized ad copy. However this option is very handy for excluding fonts and other items that I don't want in my database—unless I'm creating a font Gallery, for example.

FINDING THAT STUFF I PUT AWAY

This is the second part of the equation I mentioned right off the top.

There's little point in putting stuff away if you'll never be able to find it again. And this is exactly where having a logical and searchable database comes to your rescue.

Portfolio makes it easy to search for files by Keywords and other metadata associated with a particular file. At the top of any Gallery window, you can just type in a word or two, hit Enter, and BAM!, the results just flood the window—almost immediately. The obvious exception to this desired result is if you have really weird and highly forgettable file names and no Keywords associated with the resources you're looking for.

If you're like me, you probably don't bother filling in Keyword fields when they're provided in various applications. Luckily, I do exercise a certain amount of rigour in naming the folders in which I store these files, and *Portfolio* allows you to specify filenames, folder names, even complete file paths, as Keywords through

its Cataloging Options. Whew!

If you select "File and Folder Names" as Keywords, keep in mind that this only includes the immediate folder in which the file resides, and not the folders outside that. Consider selecting "Path" as Keywords if you use multiple subfolders (art, images, fonts, etc.) when organizing your files. For job files, you may also want to use Job Numbers or Docket Numbers when naming files or folders as this can



EXTENSIS PORTFOLIO 5

Minimum System Requirements

The Server Edition allows for much greater scalability of the database for both local area network use and for remote use via the Web.

MACINTOSH

Mac OS 8.1 and 32MB RAM
 Server Edition—Open Transport 1.1 or later
 Supported Web Servers:
 StarNine WebStar 4.x/3.0/2.0
 AppleShare IP 6.x Web Server

WINDOWS

WIN 95/98/NT 4.0 and 32MB RAM
 Server Edition—Pentium or better
 Supported Web Servers:
 MS Internet Information Server (NT 4.0/2000)
 MS Peer-to-Peer Web Services (NT 4.0/2000)
 MS Personal Web Server (95/98)

Pricing

Desktop Edition US\$99.95
 Network Edition US\$199.95
 Server Edition US\$2,500
 w/SQL Connect US\$7,500

Portfolio Browser Free

Extensis
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studio DIGITAL GRAPHIC DESIGN & TRAINING

make searching for files so much faster and easier.

One handy feature that adds time to the cataloguing process and additional size to the catalogue file itself, but which can be useful when searching for a specific document, is Indexing of document text. This works for *QuarkXPress* documents, *Illustrator* and other vector drawing applications, text files and *Word* documents among others, as well as PDF — provided that the PDF text is non-compressed.

Also, if you wish to add Keywords or Descriptions to documents after they've been catalogued, you can do this easily when the database is seen in Records View, or when viewing the Properties of any record.

Using the Find menu, the user can search by any of the twenty-four file attributes available, from Keywords, Horizontal or Vertical Image Resolution, Creation or Modification Dates, file Path, file Type, to Color Mode, etc. Although some of the results, particularly for Color Mode, can be a little unpredictable, the Find menu is pretty powerful. It can let you search multiple catalogues (Network Edition or higher) and display the found records in a new Gallery, which can then be re-saved with another name. The results of any Find operation can also be stored for later recall.

The previews of bi-level bitmaps are fairly poor because it doesn't convert them to grayscale and this sometimes makes it difficult to detect what's portrayed in the image, but overall the display quality is quite good for continuous tone files and vector objects. With a choice of 112 x 112 pixels or 256 x 256 pixels for the thumbnail previews, images are generally easy to distinguish.

Extended viewing functionality via Disk Previews can be set up when the user is in Administration mode, and although this takes up more disk space, it allows files to be previewed at resolutions up to 999 pixels without having the source file available. Also, translator functions allow the user to view certain file types without actually having the creator application available (PDF, *QuarkXPress*, etc.).

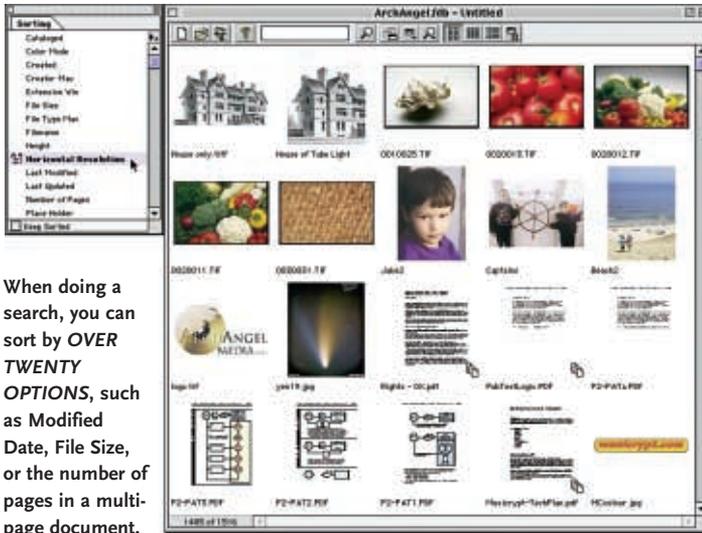
REVEALING RESULTS

One of the nicest things about *Portfolio* is the number of ways in which you can explore and publish the data stored in any of your catalogues.

The Slideshow utility is very handy for reviewing catalogued objects and the original source files can be renamed, moved, copied or deleted while in this mode. Artists will appreciate being able to easily generate slideshows of their work for client viewing. And read and write support for Digimarc digital watermarking is built into all Editions.

Images can be dragged directly out of any viewing window into a *QuarkXPress* picture box, leaving the XPress document with a proper file path to the source image wherever it's located.

Even if you only have the Desktop Edition, which doesn't include the PortWeb publishing extension, you can still export an entire catalogue for viewing on the Web (or just the Found Set



When doing a search, you can sort by **OVER TWENTY OPTIONS**, such as Modified Date, File Size, or the number of pages in a multi-page document.

WORKFLOW AUTOMATION WITH SCRIPTS

Using *AppleScript* (Mac) or *Visual Basic Script* (PC) you can further integrate Portfolio with your internal workflows. Although this is definitely a feature that will be accessed more often by accomplished users who already have experience with scripting, the attractiveness of being able to tie other database-driven processes or *QuarkXPress* layout functions into *Portfolio's* visual database system is undeniable.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

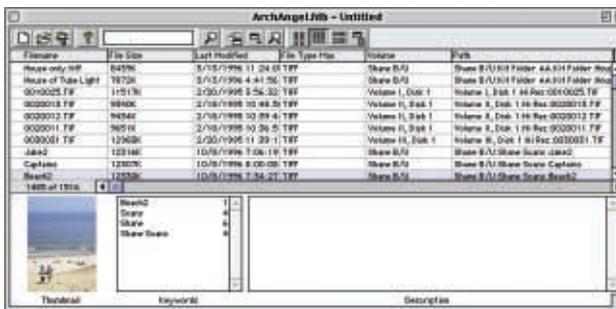
The application is very well thought out and is extremely comprehensive in its scope and capabilities, exhibiting simple functionality for novices and extensive depth for more advanced users.

Desktop Edition users do not need to upgrade their versions in order to access data from a Network or Server version of the application, making enterprise upgrades easier and less expensive than with some other Media Asset Management solutions. *Cumulus* database catalogues can be directly imported into *Portfolio*, making it quite clear that Extensiv views *Portfolio* as a serious contender in the Media Asset Management arena.

While it's not as robust as some other software offerings and tends to slow down when running short on memory or cataloguing large volumes with a variety of media types, *Portfolio* is certainly positioned competitively from the perspective of both price and functional flexibility. As such, it can be expected to build a strong user base in the novice to intermediate professional market, a segment that probably encompasses 80% of the available opportunity.

And can I now find that picture of my kids on the beach in Cape Cod in under five seconds?

The answer is, "Yes. Thanks, MAM." 🍌



If you want to view more selections at once, choose **LIST VIEW**. You can still see the thumbnail preview of any selected file.

from any records search) by using the HTML Export option. It's quick and easy.

With the Network Edition, you can publish information to Desktop clients on your local network, or to Internet users directly from the *Portfolio* application using PortWeb, which allows remote users to not only view selected portions of your catalogues or Galleries, but search them for specific images or layout files. However this requires you to run one of several common Web servers for Mac or PC.

Shane Steinman is President of ArchAngel Media Inc., a Toronto graphics consulting company. He is also Project Leader of the dMACS Initiative, a standards-based educational program for the magazine production industry, and a Director of The Tube, a Toronto-based Internet Service Provider with a focus on high-speed access for the graphic communications market.

Graphics Educators

Has your school sent in its course summary for a free listing in the August Graphic Exchange Directory of Graphics Courses in Canada?

E-mail to schools@gxo.com

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