

Seven Small Business uses for a digital camera

The marginal cost of taking a digital photo is essentially zero. There are very few such bargains to be had in today's business world, yet I wonder how many of us take advantage of this wonderful opportunity.

When I was in the corporate world, one item that stayed in my briefcase (or, when I was toting a laptop, my backpack) all of the time was a small 4MP digital camera. When I brought it, 4MP wasn't a bad size, but it turns out that it's plenty for most of the tasks I'm going to describe, because the print or screen size doesn't need to be that big. Just about every week I found a use for it, and once word got around (a tactical mistake on my part, perhaps!) it was often borrowed by fellow managers.

Here are some of the uses I put it to:

- Recording the state of something before a change. Take a picture *before* you pull all of the connecting wires out of that piece of equipment so you can put it back together later on.
- Evidence of shipping damage. A picture can be worth a thousand words, and can be e-mailed quickly, and save time in resolving a situation. You might also need it one day in your car if you get into an accident.
- Portable photocopier. A photo can be easier than arranging small receipts on the bed of a copier if you want a record of expense receipts just until they are approved, or need a quick document copy away from your office. Just be sure to preview the image and zoom in to make sure the focus was OK, while you have the chance to take another if necessary.
- Produce better documentation. I remember one time we had to arrange for every branch office to switch their old router out and connect a new one which had been shipped to them. A few close up photos of the back of the same models, before and after, with arrows and labels edited into the image made the instructions super simple.

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He is semi-retired but accepts contracts to help finance his expensive hobbies. David retired from a 33-year career in corporate IT and now specialises in developing database applications for Windows platforms, web-sites, and generally in improving business processes by simplifying, clarifying and beautifying all kinds of business documents.

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- **Staff photos.** When your staff talk daily on the phone to out-of-town clients (internal or external) and especially if they are in a support position where tempers can flare, it helps immensely when their clients know them as people, not just a voice on the phone. Another use is to stick photos on vinyl magnets and use them as signposts outside offices or cubicles. It might be corny, but my staff loved the surprise and recognition, and in an otherwise nameless organisation, it often proved useful for navigation.
- **In an emergency,** with the USB cord, a camera can often serve as a portable flash memory drive.
- **Inventory and record keeping.** A photo of someone's office can record the major items such as chairs, desk and filing cabinets. Digital photos have a built-in date as well. It's a lot easier to snap a close-up of a serial number and transcribe it from a zoomed-in, rotated image on your screen than to peer into dark corners and try to read numbers upside-down. You can also record product keys for your software in case the original packaging goes missing and you need to re-install.

So that's a flavour of the kinds of things you can do when a camera is readily available. Makes you think your cell phone camera might have some use after all, doesn't it?

Best of all, I came up with enough ideas for this article that I didn't have to mention the possibilities when you get candid snaps of your boss at the Christmas party!

Happy snapping!