

Navigating the New Google Photos

By Geoff Rasmussen

The new Google Photos takes organizing, sharing, synchronizing, backing up, and facial recognition to new levels. Below you will learn strategies and best practices for working with this cloud-based technology.

Get 'em Digitized

Pictures created from your digital camera are already digitized. They can easily be uploaded and integrated into Google photos. If you have old documents (wills, obituaries, marriage records) they will first need to be digitized using a scanner or a scanning app. Read recent scanner reviews at <http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2373832,00.asp>. Two important rules to remember when digitizing:

- The higher resolution the better. When scanning you should have the option to select the resolution (known as dots per inch – dpi or pixels per inch – ppi). Anywhere between 300 and 600 dpi is usually sufficient, but lean towards higher so you can digitize for future technologies.
- Save the digital original as an archival-quality file type such as .tif. OR, if you save as .jpg (uses lossy compression) just remember to only make editing changes to a copy of the digital original.

Get 'em Organized

How your digital files are stored on your hard drive is important, yet not as crucial as in the past. Photo organizers, such as Picasa, Photoshop Elements, and now the cloud-based solutions can overcome a little bit of sloppy digital file organization. Here's how I organize the actual files on my hard drive.

- My Pictures folder
 - I use this for my life's pictures (pictures I take with my digital camera, or family pictures I have scanned).
 - Digital camera and Photoshop Elements or Picasa make this simple. They automatically sort and store pictures by date.
- C:\Genealogy Photos Pictures
 - There's nothing special about this folder's name or location. The important part is there is a top-level folder, and then sub-folders within it.
 - I use this directory for all my genealogy-related digital images
 - My first two sub-folders are called Surnames and Locations. Within Surnames I store photographs of my ancestors. Within Locations I have subfolders for countries, states/provinces, counties, and towns. Digital images of location-based documents (like deeds, wills, obituaries) are stored within the corresponding location folders. This system matches the organizational structure of the FamilySearch catalog, which makes it simple for me to know what I have and where I have it.

A good photo organizer will provide the ability to:

- Visualize all digital images chronologically
- Filter digital images based on keywords, date, or people
- Group pictures in collections
- Edit the photos as well

I use a combination of Photoshop Elements (a great organizer and editor), Picasa (great for synchronizing between your computer and Google Photos) and Google Photos (for sharing and a good backup).

Get 'em to the Cloud (Google Photos)

Google Photos (<http://photos.google.com>) provides access to your digital images from any Internet-connected device. It is a terrific solution for sharing photos with family, backing up your originals, or searching for photos. Publishing your digital images to Google Photos can be done with Google's Picasa software, their Google Photos Backup app, or by manually uploading.

Picasa. It's been around for quite a while and still does a great job of organizing and making your digital images sparkle. Picasa displays your digital images all in one area, and provides functionality to Sync your photos with Google Photos. Within any folder of pictures, look for the Upload button, then click on the Enable Sync option. Personally, I select and add pictures to an album, and then synchronize the album with Google Photos. Each album will show up in the Collections part of Google Photos.

You can also use the Batch Upload option (Tools menu). This lets you select folders of pictures that have previously not been uploaded.

Download from <http://picasa.google.com>.

Google Photos Backup

This app, available at <http://photos.google.com/apps> makes it easy to automatically upload existing or new digital images to designated folders via your scanner or digital camera. You can select which folders to "watch" and sync in the apps' settings. The app is also available for your mobile devices so any pictures you snap with your phone will automatically appear in your Google Photos account.

Photos

Google Photos has three main sections – Assistant, Photos, and Collections. Photos is the chronological display of all pictures. From here you can view, edit, share, download, or even add photos to an album.

The Assistant creates collages, "rediscover this day" collages, animations, stories, and movies – automatically. Some of the creations are pretty cool, and makes you look like you know what you're doing!

Collections groups your photos into Albums, Movies, and Stories.

Mobile App

The mobile app, available from Google Play or iTunes provides cloud-based access to your photos and adds additional functionality that the browser-based app currently excludes. It lets you create movies, stories, animations, and collages of your digital images.

Searching

Searching for that one special photo from that long-ago vacation, or for all of the pictures of your oldest child, or even for your bowling photos is not only amazing, but it's pretty fun – and easy too.

To begin your search click in the Search box at the top. Type what you want to find and press Enter.

Google Photos does an amazing job of finding what you're looking for. Instead of performing this search, you could also search via the four categories that appear – people, places, things, and types.

People

Google Photos detects faces in pictures and displays them in the People section. Click on a face you recognize and its associated pictures will be displayed. To add a name to the face, click on the "Who's This" link in the upper left. The name is now linked to the face. If you add the same name to a different "face" Google Photos will ask if they are the same person, thus allowing the facial recognition to merge the two.

Since all faces in all photos are detected and shown in the Search section, you'll get lots of people who are just part of the crowd. To prevent them from showing up, click on their face, click on their pictures, then click on the Options button in the upper right (3 vertically-aligned dots) and select Remove Results.

Places

Some digital cameras and most smart phone cameras will embed the latitude/longitude information into the photos' metadata. This is one of the reasons why Google Photos is able to display your photos by location. It also recognizes landmarks (like Sydney's Opera House) and can geo-code pictures based on this. If you have a camera that does not have geo-coding abilities, purchasing and using an Eye-Fi card (www.eye.fi) is a good substitute.

Things

Want to find all of your pictures at the beach, or of waterfalls, or rafting, or even of birds? Just click on the category and you'll be amazed at how the memories come rushing back.

Types

Finally, you can locate videos, creations (collages, animations, etc.), or recently added photos in this section.

Editing and Sync

As long as you remember to only make editing changes to a copy of the original digital image then you will be safe. Personally, I use Google Photos as a backup of my originals so I don't do any editing online. Google Photos appears to understand the consequences of editing the original because it has a "Revert to original" option on the options menu of the edit screen.

To edit an image, click on the image and then click on the edit icon at the top. Here, you can adjust characteristics such as light, color, pop, vignette, rotation and other presets.

If you have the Sync option enabled in your Google Photos app, any changes you make to your photos, like editing and deleting, will happen on every device that syncs to your Google Photos library. This includes any phone or tablet that has the Google Photos app and backs up and syncs to the same Google Account AND any computer that signs in to photos.google.com with the same Google account. In other words, IF you understand this and you DO delete a photo in the online version of Google Photos, AND the photos on your tablet/phone are synced, then then photo will also be deleted from there as well.

My practice here is to always have a master copy of my photos on my computer, yet still haven't jumped in with both feet by synchronizing everything. Baby steps. Visit <https://support.google.com/photos/answer/6193313#sync> for more information.

Storage space and price

You can choose between two storage sizes to back up your photos and videos to Google Photos.

1. High Quality
 - a. Unlimited free storage
 - b. Recommended for phones or point-and-shoot cameras that produce photos of 16 megapixels or less.
 - c. Good for typical printing and sharing
 - d. Saves high-quality photos and videos while reducing size.
2. Original
 - a. Limited free storage: uses storage in your Google Account, regardless of photo or video size
 - b. DSLR cameras – recommended if you take photos with a DSLR camera and want to maintain the exact original quality
 - c. Recommended for printing large banners or to store original files
 - d. Stores your photos and videos exactly as you captured them

Visit <https://www.google.com/settings/storage> to see how much storage you have used and how much is left. You can also purchase more space.

Geoff's Strategy

1. I use Photoshop Elements to organize my family pictures (from digital camera and old pictures that I've scanned). I also use it to edit my photos.
2. I also use Picasa for its ability to easily share my pictures via the cloud. I don't have to manually import, sort, or tag anything. I only have to add photos to albums which are set up to be shared online.
3. I link the digitized genealogy photos to the appropriate people in my family tree software, Legacy Family Tree.