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Preserve and Protect: Got a Backup Plan for Your Photos?

That's pretty much a rhetorical question, right? After all, you're here at Learn & Explore at NikonUSA.com, where you've probably been reading about photo techniques, picking up tips from the pros and checking out the latest Nikon gear. If it's one thing you've got nailed, it's protecting the photos you've stored on your computer.

So let's talk briefly about some of the ways you might improve your backup system....

Wait. What? You don't have a backup system? Well, okay, but you've got a plan, right? Not that either. Okay, how about a scheme? A hope?

Actually, we're not surprised.

It was in mid-2009 that the Consumer Electronics Association reported that "nearly one in three consumers don't see the need to back up their files, while nearly a quarter (22 percent) say they aren't backing up files because it's too time consuming." Well, you're thinking that "files" mean every sort of document, not just photos. You're right, but research also reveals that photos account for 85 percent of stored digital files—and the average American adult has 1,800 digital files. So, let's see, 85 percent of 1,800...well, we can all do the math and see the problem.

Here's the scary part: hard drives will fail. It's not a question of if, it's when. They come with an expiration date. They have a life expectancy. They will go down; and very often, it'll be suddenly.

The truth is that it's easy to preserve and protect the precious moments you've captured in pictures.

The easiest way is to simply return to the thrilling days of yesteryear by making prints. Chances are you're already doing that, but if not, it's an easy, secure way of

backing up your photos. Prints in albums, prints in frames, prints magnet-clipped to the 'fridge—it's as easy as autofocus.

You can also easily back up your images to CDs or DVDs. Research shows that some 75 percent of folks who back up their files back them up to these disks. It's quick and convenient, and photo retailers do it all the time for their customers. If you want to do it yourself, you can simply use your computer's operating system to burn a CD of your images at the same time you transfer them to your hard drive. Also, software that will back up only new and changed photos is readily available.

Nikon's got a pretty neat piece of software for photo backup. It's called [Nikon Transfer](#) and it's a free download from the download section of NikonUSA, plus it comes free with every Nikon digital camera. With it you can set a camera preference that will automatically download your pictures from the camera to a designated picture folder on your hard drive—and at the same time transfer those pictures to a secondary location, like a backup hard drive.

You just need to get into the habit of writing disks whenever you've got a batch of keepers. And remember to keep the keepers "original" files on your hard drive, or write 'em to a second disk. Transferring your photos to a disk and then deleting them from the hard drive isn't backup.

An ideal choice—and the method preferred by many pro shooters—is to back up photos to dedicated external hard drives. Just connect the backup drive to your computer via USB or FireWire cable and you're pretty much ready to transfer. Almost all external drives comes with free software that'll do the job.

If you're thinking of going the external hard drive route, you'll have to make a size choice. A 500 gigabyte drive will provide plenty of storage, but if you're storing RAW files, or if you do after-capture photo manipulation and end up keeping several versions of the same photo, think bigger. These days, terabyte drives are fairly common (a terabyte is 1,000 gigabytes). Remember, if your external drive is the computer's backup, that's fine, but if it's your only photo storage, that's not backup. You'll need two of them.

The key is to back up regularly, back up with a plan, back up as a routine part of uploading new photos to your computer. There are hard drives that make the job a snap; they pretty much do everything for you automatically or do it at one click, backing up new or changed files or folders from your computer's internal hard drive.

Then there's cyberspace. Storing your images to an Internet server is easy, quick and inexpensive. For example, Nikon offers Image Space, which provides up to two gigabytes of free storage for your photos (or movies, if you wish) and the option of upgrading to 20 gigs storage.

The decision on what to do and what to use is yours. A few choice words in the

Google search window will get you started—words like "photo backup systems," "digital file backup" or backing up hard drives." If you want some real fun, Google "professional photo backup systems"—now there's some serious stuff.

But be sure to do something about backing up your photos.

We don't know what you shoot, and we don't know anything about your level of interest in photography. But neither of those matter. We do know your photos are important to you. And you know that too.

Tips for Making the Most of Your Memory Cards

Memory cards aren't strictly storage, though they do, of course store captured images. For some folks they're long term storage solutions, but for most, they serve to briefly hold the files until they can be transferred to a computer. Considering that they are the first repositories of your images, here are three quick tips for getting the best performance from them:

- Delete photos from your computer after downloading, not from the card, one at a time. When you want to empty the entire card, reformat it in the camera.
- Don't fill the card to the brim with images, stop short of the full measure of pictures. If you're close to filling the card completely, you may not have room for the next couple of photos you're planning to take.
- Carry several media cards and split the images from an important shoot, just in case. It is what a lot of the pros do.