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❖ New At Aplus.Net

- Aplus.Net President and CEO Gabriel Murphy is spotted in the Kansas City Business Journal! See the full article [here](#).
- Aplus.Net has been named Netcraft's Most Reliable Web Hosting Site for June 2008! Netcraft is one of the world's leading uptime monitoring services, and we're proud to be at the top of their list. Read more about it [here](#).
- Kansas City Small Business Magazine profiles Aplus.Net President and CEO, Gabriel Murphy; click [here](#) to go to the article.
- There is a lot going on at Aplus.Net. The biggest change will be coming soon. If you want in on the secret, check out the clues [here](#).

❖ Expert Opinion: Inexpensive Digital Photography

by: Kendell Warner



You have a million-dollar idea. You have a new site. You have a new shopping cart. You're ready to spruce them up with new, vibrant photos.

So ... what next?

Nowadays, digital photography is more inexpensive and accessible than ever. Whether you're a budding amateur or a die-hard pro, your options are almost limitless. Advancements in digital photography have allowed manufacturers and enthusiasts to push for affordable and higher quality digital photography for every budget.

But there are so many options, it can be hard to tell where to begin. So, here are few guidelines to help you take advantage of all the new technology ... your own digital photos.

The Camera

Many electronics stores and websites have good quality digital cameras that range from \$100 to \$250. The key is finding a camera that fits your needs. What are some basic decision points to keep in mind when purchasing a camera?

Resolution. When deciding on quality you should take into consideration the *megapixels* of the camera. The megapixel count for a standard, consumer-grade digital camera depicts the quality of the photo and how much it can be enlarged before it begins to distort. This is usually the biggest factor in the camera's price — the more megapixels it has, the more it will generally cost.

Zoom. There are two types of zoom: Digital zoom is the zoom level generated by the camera and its internal chip system, and optical zoom is based on the mechanical lens. Optical zoom is much clearer and gives you a better resolution. When you've exhausted your optical zoom, the digital zoom kicks, but at that point you begin to trade in the extended distance for a loss in quality. A 1:1 or 1:2 ratio (e.g., 4X digital zoom / 8X optical zoom) is a good place to start when selecting a digital camera.

Functionality. Many cameras have dials that let you select preset settings for your photo shoot. These presets are displayed as simple icons on the dial for added convenience to the consumer, making it easier to understand what you're getting when you decide between potential cameras to purchase or to upgrade to. An important function to look for is *auto stabilization*, which helps you take a clear and steady shot in wobbly situations. Auto stabilization helps to steady the shot if you have shaky hands or if you're taking the picture on unstable ground, like action shots or in the wind.

Getting the Shot

Now that you have your camera, there are some good techniques to achieve a professional-quality photo shoot for a fraction of the cost.

Lighting. Improve the quality of your photos by using a good light source. Natural light (sunlight) is the best and cheapest light. If sunlight isn't available, companies like AIM and Sakar International have created small, inexpensive lighting sets for photographers on the go. They're equipped with small bulbs and a light box to place your product in (if it fits). This small, portable kit usually ranges from \$30 to \$50 and can be a great asset for good, amateur photography. Even if your products don't fit into the light box, you can still use the lights provided in the kit to help create an optimal situation for the best images possible.

Edit. Even if you purchased the right camera and used the right technique, there are some instances that can sabotage a photo, like rogue shadows, digital blips, or glares. Fortunately, there are tools on the market to help you clean up these minor glitches. Right now, you can find a few good, free photo editing programs online (e.g., Picasa, Picnik, Photoscape, GIMP, etc.), or you can choose some inexpensive software packages (e.g., Adobe Elements, Corel Paint Shop Pro and Ulead PhotoImpact). These programs help you get the professional style you're looking for with very little time and energy.

More Help

While digital photography is becoming more accessible, sometimes there are decisions of quality that need to be addressed. Remember, it's important that your website communicate a highly professional look, so don't be afraid to seek out a professional photographer to help you for an hourly or daily rate, if necessary. If you're looking for a balance between quality and cost, seek out students or newly graduated photographers who can do a great job for a fraction of the price.

Through a little bit of research, innovative problem solving, and attention to detail, you can create the stellar photos that will make your site sparkle. Keep these tips and tricks in mind and remember: Quality and price may come hand in hand when it comes to photography, but you can certainly make your budget work for you.

Kendell Warner is an Aplus.Net WebImage Designer.

❖ Is the Internet Running Out of Bandwidth?



Back in April of this year, CNET ran an article by Andrew Donoghue about AT&T and bandwidth issues: "[U.S. telecommunications giant AT&T has claimed that, without investment, the Internet's current network architecture will reach the limits of its capacity by 2010](#)". You may have read about it in the [Aplus.Net Blog](#) at the time. Lately, we've been answering a lot of questions about whether or not the Internet is really running out of bandwidth. Here's some background info on the subject:

In the article, Jim Cicconi of AT&T¹ is talking about the Internet's *backbones*. All of the data passed back and forth on the Internet travels through these backbones², the first of which was created by the National Science Foundation in 1987. This first backbone was a T1 line called NSFNET³. Since then, a handful of major telecommunications companies have been investing in and operating the fiberoptic backbones. You can see the backbones and other elements of the Internet's connectivity on a .pdf map created by Ben Worthen and Bill Cheswick through CIO.com⁴. The map includes the primary players in internet communications; for example, in North America, the owners of the backbones include MCI WorldCom's UUNet division, AT&T, GTE's Internetworking, Global Crossing Qwest Communications International, and PSINet⁵.

These systems are what will need to be upgraded in order to keep up with the current demands for bandwidth. And, as the article had mentioned, that demand is skyrocketing, caused by massive web content such as large images, video/animations, audio, and gaming⁶. Just like any technological infrastructure, the backbones need to be upgraded and maintained over time. Although they currently seem to be supporting most of the load adequately, there may be a point in the future when all of the requested data *bottlenecks*, or clogs, like a traffic jam.

How will this affect you? If your site's web content consists of large images or video, your pages might load slower and less efficiently. If your homepage is streamlined and you have moved your animations, games, or video to a secondary page, your main page should be easily accessible. This is speculation at this point, and no cause for panic, but it does present an opportunity to resolve any potential performance your website may have at an early stage.

If you have any questions about the speed that your web page loads, or if you would like to learn tips and tricks to make your web page faster, please be sure to call your Aplus.Net representative about web optimization.

❖ Buzzword: MMORPG

MMORPG is an acronym that stands for *Massively Multi-player Online Role Playing Game*. (It's commonly shortened to simply *MMO*.) Game players choose or design their own avatars, or illustrations, to represent themselves as they interact with the game and the other players. Frequently, the environment of an MMORPG is created and hosted on a server, and the players maintain a monthly subscription for the software they need to play or for permission to participate through a browser. Some of the MMORPGs recently in the news include *Second Life*, *World of Warcraft*, and *Guild Wars*. Coincidentally, these MMOs may be playing a large role in the greater toll on the Internet cited above. Their popularity has exploded over the past few years, with World of Warcraft alone boasting more than 10 million subscribers.

❖ SEO and .swf Files from Adobe Flash™ and Flex™

Google™ recently developed a new algorithm to index and display .swf content, most commonly known as Flash files (read their webmaster's post about it [here](#)). This is a major step for interactive content developers; Flash and Flex users can finally optimize for search engines much more easily and with better results. Optimizing for web crawlers happens at every level of development, though, so here are five tips to boost your SEO while you're scripting:

Give your folders and files descriptive names. Not only do you get much better results from keywords within the names of the files, but you also encourage better documentation within your project. Good documentation includes links to and from your .swf files.

Good idea: joes-pizza-shop/build-your-own-pizza/pizza-order-form.swf

Not as good: jps/byop/pof.swf
slavedriver/viralgame/qprt2j3.swf

When your pages are labeled in this way, the whole site becomes easier to navigate. So, if you need to make changes later, it's much easier to quickly find what you're looking for.

Embed where you can. Embedding your interactive content into an .html file can help with indexing, especially if you include content that describes your .swf; e.g., "Here is a free movie that illustrates the best way to build layers onto a pizza." Even if you can't include descriptors, the .html file itself can show off the great documentation you've been using throughout your project. Using a JavaScript Flash detection script can also help — check out [Google's code on SWFObject](#) for more information.

Be clear and concise. Keep your textual content appropriate to your subject. Check spelling and grammar throughout your project — it doesn't have to be *Moby Dick*, but it really should be accurate. Spelling and grammar mistakes communicate unprofessionalism, and that will turn off some readers (who probably won't be coming back). A big step in the right direction is relevancy: Google looks for *relevant* keywords, so make your content match the purpose of your site.

Make your site accessible to people with disabilities. There are two major sets of guidelines that determine your web accessibility:

1. WCAG guidelines established by the World Wide Web Consortium ("W3C" <http://www.w3.org/Consortium/>) through the Web Accessibility Initiative (<http://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/wcag.php>)
2. Federal Section 508 of the Disabilities Act, for federally-funded websites (<http://www.section508.gov>)

By making your website accessible, you're increasing your audience and potential customers to include people with disabilities. Additionally, you're creating more content for the web crawlers to index.

Keep your text as text. Don't convert your text to images unless there's just no stylistic way around it. When you convert your copy into pictures, you're removing all doubt that web crawlers aren't indexing your content. The subject of an image isn't indexed — only the file names and other metadata are. And if you absolutely must convert the text to images, be sure to label the image with the text it contains.

SEO for Flash and Flex is more than just keywords. It's important to really get down to the base levels of coding and make every line count. The announcement from Google about .swf indexing is also raising more awareness about SEO in these mediums. Now is the best time to search industry blogs for more helpful hints from the pros.

❖ Help Links

At Aplus.Net, we are committed to providing you with great customer support, 24x7x365.
Knowledge Base -- <http://www.apluskb.com/>
Technical Support -- <http://www.aplus.net/support.html>
Control Panel -- <https://cp.aplus.net>

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¹ Donoghue, Andrew. ["AT&T: Internet to hit full capacity by 2010."](#) CNET.com. A CBS Company. April 18, 2008. Web.

² Tyson, Jeff. ["How Internet Infrastructure Works."](#) HowStuffWorks.com. Discovery Communications LLC. Date unknown. Web.

³ Ebid.

⁴ Map is located at [here](#).

⁵ Weil, Nancy. ["Who owns the Internet?"](#) Infoworld.com. InfoWorld. March 2, 2000. Web.

⁶ Donoghue, Andrew. ["AT&T: Internet to hit full capacity by 2010."](#) CNET.com. A CBS Company. April 18, 2008. Web.