

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

skills °

ADMIT IT, YOU WANT YOUR NAME UP IN LIGHTS. WELL, MAYBE MORE LIKE EMBLAZONED ACROSS A GLOSSY COFFEE TABLE BOOK. LIKE MOST FANTASIES, THE REALITY IS ALWAYS MUCH LESS SATISFYING THAN YOU HOPED AND FAR MORE EXPENSIVE THAN YOU INTENDED.

There are a lot of garages out there stuffed with unsold expensive books that were going to 'take the world by storm'. I bet they all have a photo of a fish's eye, a goby photo and a cute anemonefish plus a few shots that, in retrospect, should have been relegated to the cutting room floor. But fear not. Your fantasy can come true without forking out A\$20k, losing most of your hair and all of your friends.

Short run books are now a reality for the general masses. Yes, that means us. Short run books have been around for a few years now but were rather expensive and you were still obliged to purchase a lot more books than you were likely to sell. In the real world of book publishing, selling 5,000 copies will almost cover your costs of printing and shipping. You might even break even on distribution and advertising if you have your price set right. But the reality is that unless you appeal to the lowest common denominator (shark attack stories, celebrity-endorsed cutesy dolphin picture books, etc) and have a big company behind you to push it, you will most probably end up with a debt and 40 boxes of unwanted books.

The solution to your publishing fantasy is to print just one book. Or two. Or five if you're feeling generous. In the world of book publishing it costs just as much to print one book as to print 5,000. The costs of set-up, colour separations and artwork make up the lion's share of publishing costs. Paper is cheap. Your price per book won't drop significantly until you print 10,000 copies or more. Hence the stacks of books secreted away in garages.

Modern technology to the rescue! Skip the press set-up, colour separations and fancy artwork. Using online printing services that



Kelvin Aitken is a Melbourne-based professional photographer and diver passionate about the big blue and the big sea creatures to be found out there. He's dived from the Arctic to the extremes of the South Pacific and if there's a new marine dive adventure to be experienced or invented, he's always the first to put up his hand. He's also dived the southeastern Australian continental shelf and photographed shark species nobody knew would be found out there. Kelvin is a BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year marine category winner and his unique work is on www.marinethemes.com

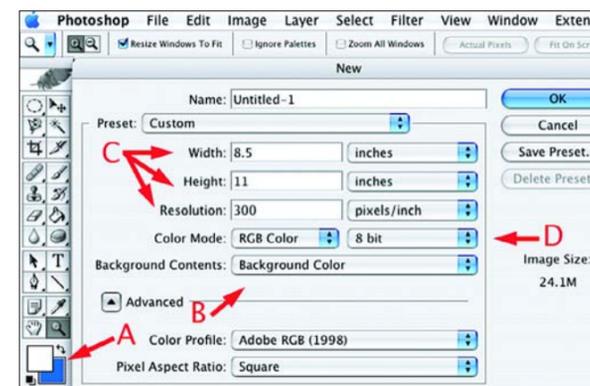
specialise in book production you can have just one book printed for half the price of a boat dive. Sure, A\$40 is a lot to part with for one book with 20 pages but it's a lot cheaper than A\$20k for a lot of boxes in your garage. And if you were to buy a book from a book store as a gift you'd probably pay that much anyway. Thinking of a gift for your significant other? How about a book made up of images from your last dive vacation? Or a book of images from their dive course? You'll earn a whole lot more brownie points than if you give a music voucher, especially when you pair the book up with a box of chocolates.

Depending on your computer platform, Windows or Mac, you can use a service such as blurb.com or the new Mac service using iPhoto. Like any book production, or any photographic endeavour, editing is your most important and powerful weapon. If you are going to all the effort of producing a 'gold medal' book, you may as well make sure your images are impressive, with a healthy dose of the 'wow' factor. Since your book is going to be around for a long time, you should think seriously about which images you want to include. If some shots are tempting but not quite right, go out and shoot them again or replace them with something with a longer life span. That said, waiting for perfection is a journey with no end, so use sound judgement when editing or include a friend to help with sorting.

The next step is the design. You can have one image on a page, 'bleeding' off the edges or with a spacious border. Both have their own message. A full bleed image yells out, "here I am!" while a small image surrounded by white, black or other colour, is much more discreet and understated, like a fine jewel nestled on silk. A bold image such as a close up of a shark or tight diver portrait would suit a full bleed page while a delicate sea jelly or fragile shrimp could be viewed more along the lines of a jewel, something whose understatement demands closer inspection.

You don't have to limit yourself to one image. You can use your photo editing software to combine a number of images on one page, saving the combination as a single image file and nominating it as a full page in the layout. This is simple enough to do (Figure 1). In Photoshop, Elements or any other image editing software, create a new file (File>New). Make the page either black or white, depending on what colour pages you intend to have. In Photoshop you can choose, when creating your new file, either white or the background colour. The latter is referring to the foreground/background colour swatches in the Tool Bar. If you have a particular colour in mind besides black, you can set the background colour first then choose that in the New File dialogue box. If you're unsure about how to do that or if you don't have that option with your software version, just create a white file, then change it using the Paint Bucket tool. The other options

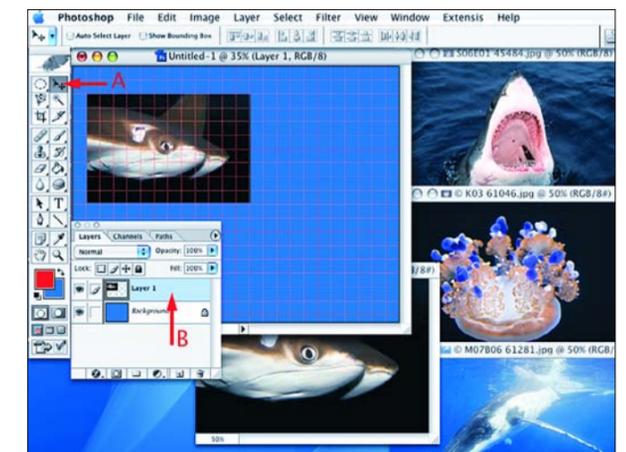
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Making a new document of a particular size and colour. From File>New you get this dialogue box. A: I previously chose a background colour to use and, B: chose the background colour option then C: put in the dpi or ppi at 300 and made the page size to match those available in iPhoto. If your other images are 16 bit you may want to change the bit depth as well using the drop down menu, D.

you have when creating a new file is the size and dpi. Set the dpi to 300, as that's what you'll need for your final output, then put in the page dimensions. Obviously you have to decide ahead of time what size book you want.

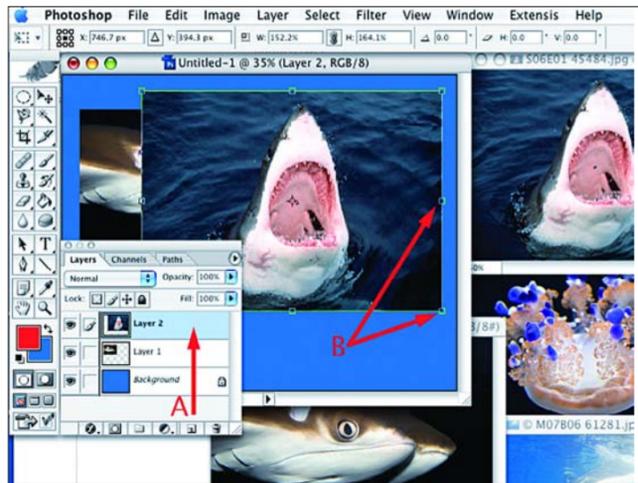
With your new blank canvas waiting for your creativity, open the images that you want on that page. Lets say you have four images that you want together. Open them all and check that each one is set to 300 dpi, so as to match your background file. Go to Image>Image Size, uncheck the Resize Image check box and set the Resolution to 300 dpi or pixels/inch. Click OK. You should be using either original files or master files that you made previously so they'll be larger than you need for your layout. Remember, you should avoid upsizing wherever possible. Since the images are going to be smallish, start with the full image files and we'll reduce them in the next few steps. Click on the newly created canvas or image file to make it active. Go to View>Show>Grid (Figure 2). You can change the way the grid is displayed in Photoshop Preferences, changing the size of the grid spacing, colour and subdivisions. It's best to make the grid fit your image exactly across the image so it's easier to line things up. To do that, just set the grid size to a denominator of the width. For example, a page 40mm wide could have the grid set at 4mm spacing. While not imperative, this step will help you line up your images.



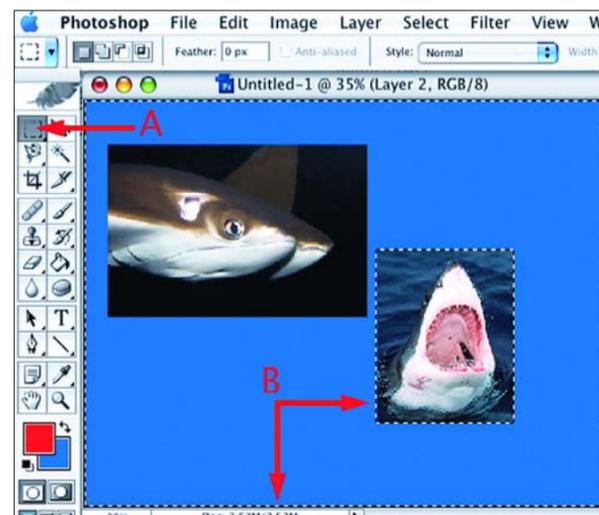
Using the move tool (A), I have dragged the eagle ray portrait across onto my new document which has the grid visible (View>Show>Grid). With the Move Tool active, I can use the arrow keys to nudge it into exact position. In real life, zooming to 100% view will make this much easier. While the book making software enables you to do all of this online, this process allows you a bit more creativity by combining effects into one image file and can also be used to make all sorts of combined image files such as flyers, club newsletters, educational posters and much more. Dragging my image across has automatically created a new layer (B).

Select the Move tool. Click on your first image file and drag it onto your new canvas. This automatically creates a new layer with your image on it. It will almost certainly be too big. With the new layer active (check that it is in the Layer palette) go to Edit>Transform>Scale. A dotted border will appear around your new image layer. Using the corner or side controls, hold down the shift key and drag to reduce the image size (Figure 3). The shift key forces the reduction to be in proportion so both sides of the image are changed in proportion together. Without the shift key, the resizing will occur unevenly or on one side only, something that you may or may not want. In most cases you'll want proportional resizing. You can stop downsizing and click in the middle of the layer to drag the image around, switching back and forth to resize and reposition. Hit Return when you're done.

If you decide that you want to crop one of the image layers (Figure 4), maybe making it into a panorama or other shape, make that



I have dragged my next image onto the new document using the Move Tool which has created another new layer (A). With that layer active I have opted to downsize it using one of the Transform Tools (Edit>Transform>Scale) which shows small box-like handles on the corners and sides (B). With the shift key held down, I can reduce the image size in proportion.



Using the Rectangular Marquee Tool (A) I have selected an area in the shark image that I want to keep. Then chose the area (B) I had excluded (Select>Inverse) and hit the Delete key. This has in effect cropped the image without touching the other layers or background file, something Crop tool will not do. I have temporarily turned off the grid to avoid confusing the dotted lines.

layer active by clicking on it in the Layers palette, then use the marquee tool to select the area you want to keep. Go to Select>Inverse, which will change the selection to all of the layer you don't want, and hit the Delete key then deselect the area by going to Select>Deselect. You can use rectangular or elliptical marquee tools to do this, holding down the shift key to make a perfect square or circle if that's your desire. If you're using Elements there's a Cookie Cutter tool (hit 'Q' on your keyboard) which does the same thing.

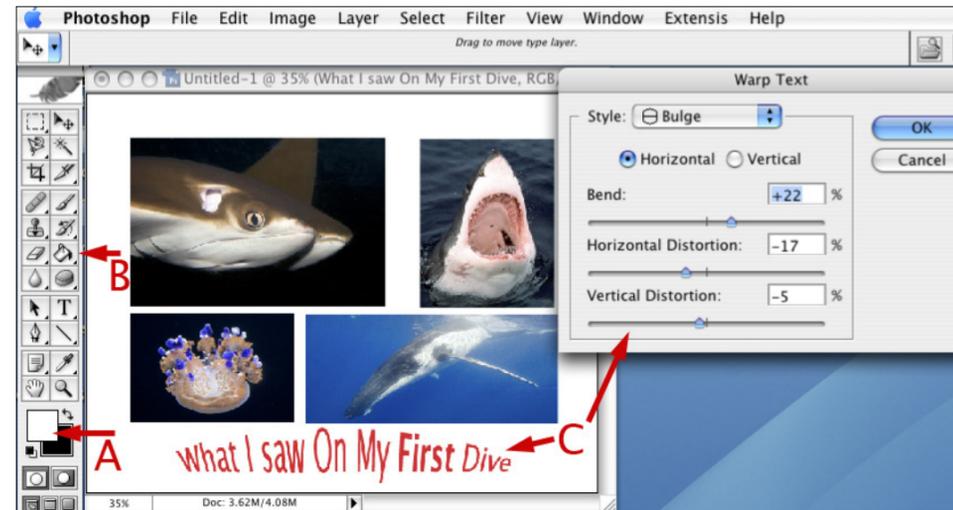
Repeat with the other images until you have a finished page. You can readjust each image, moving and resizing, using the layers palette to switch between image layers. When all is done, save as a Photoshop (.psd) file or as a tiff file with the Save Layers tick box checked. Flatten the image (Layers>Flatten Image), convert to 8 bit (if you started with 16 bit files, which I recommend) and save as a jpg at a minimum compression setting (10 or higher). If you want to make changes later, you can open the psd or tiff file with layers intact and make your changes, flattening and resaving as a new jpg.

You can include text on the pages, either in blank areas of your image documents or on the images or on a separate page without images. Your choices are only limited by your imagination and bank balance. If adding them to an image, select the Text tool. At the top of the screen you will be given a variety of options including text colour, size, font, font style and others. To get more options, open the Character and Paragraph palette (Window>Character or Window>Paragraph, opening one will open the other as well). Later versions of Photoshop have a huge variety of options, almost as many as a specialised graphics program. You can warp, wrap, distort or otherwise fiddle with text to your heart's content.

The Blurb and iPhoto systems allow you to customise the appearance of the book, including custom graphics. Let your creativity run wild. It is, after all, your AS\$40. If you're feeling generous you can go all for it and have up to 100 pages. But wait, there's more. You can also make postcards, greeting cards and calendars. Yes, your own calendar. You know those really cheap and nasty calendars that come out late in the year. The ones with either kittens, dolphins, botoxed and cosmetically enhanced bikini girls or some dweeby beefcake clenching his abs. Or all of the above. Well, you can make one even more tacky, or better still, a much classier version. Make one for your dive club, your mum or your boss. It all means brownie points. You might be elevated all the way to the top of the social tree, equivalent to the head chimp or alpha dolphin.

Using the same photoshop process, you can make your own wall poster as well. Remember the Bob Talbot series, very popular in the 1980's? If not, a search of your local dive shop or op-shop will reveal a Talbot poster or three. A single image with a broad black border, the word "Talbot" in huge letters followed underneath by a small caption or animal ID. OK, it may not work if your name is Krakawarowiskovichy, but you get the idea. Check with your print lab what large poster sizes they offer and at what dpi. Create a new document at that size with whatever background colour you want. Open your image file (you can use more than one but it's best to keep things simple) and resize it to allow for the right amount of border that will surround it. For example, if you want a 30 mm border on the sides and top, make the image 60 mm shorter than your background canvas. Drag and drop, as shown in the above procedure, your image onto the new background canvas or image file. Move it around until it is positioned correctly, using the grid to get it spot on. Usually you'll want a similar spacing at the top and sides with a larger space at the bottom to provide a visual 'foundation' and to allow room for your text.

When the layout is done, choose the Text tool, set the colour, size and other options and type in your text. You can have different sized text on a line or different fonts for each line, or various styles applied to all or part of the text. Again, the limits are only in your mind but it is best to keep it simple. You can apply any of those



I decided that I hated the blue background so I opted to change it to white. I chose the default colours in the Swatches Tool (A) then, with the Background layer selected in the Layers palette, used the Paint Bucket tool (B) to change it to white. Then I added text (C) and used one of the many Warp Text options to make it look "a bit different".

changes after you've finished by selecting the letters you want to change. When you're finished, save as a layered psd or tiff file, flatten and save as a tiff or (after converting down to 8 bit) jpg. Burn to disc and send off to your photo lab. You can frame your finished masterpiece, block mount it, pin it to the wall with blue tack or any other method that you prefer and your wallet allows.

Of course, you need to start with good quality images and image files. In the past I've stressed the need to save your files in RAW format, even if you do also have your camera save a jpg as well. Using the RAW file will enable you to get the most detail out of your images without the lost data from jpg compression or the loss of detail from over saturation or a restricted colour space. When you start pushing the limits of your files by enlarging to poster size, you'll see a difference, even if at first you can only see the difference by comparing printed results. It's like trying a high quality ice cream made with real cream without air pumped into it to fluff it up. You'll be introduced into the heady world of quality,

rejecting the mass produced bucket of slop for a smaller dish of ambrosial heaven.

We've also spoken about using your histogram as a means to get the ideal exposure. While it's good and recommended to check your histogram, spending a good portion of your dive squinting at your LCD screen is counter productive. Don't bother editing and deleting files while underwater, you can do that any time. Just quickly check your histogram and get on with capturing images. If you find ' you have to delete files underwater, it's either because you started the dive without a clean, empty card or your card is too small for your camera system. Either way, the solution is cheap and easy; buy a new card so you can drop in a 'blank slate' for every dive and/or buy a bigger card. With 8 gig cards readily available, even the full chip 15 megapixel or larger cameras can be accommodated.

While it's very satisfying to capture a great image, showing it to the world is also very fulfilling. Instilling the wonder of the oceans, indeed our amazing globe, to the

uninitiated is a worthwhile and laudable goal. Doing so at the expense of the space in your garage, not to mention your wallet, is debatable. Using the above methods and services is one way to achieve your goals without breaking the bank. And if your audience likes your book, you can always sell them one for \$90!

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MORE INFO

LINKS TO PHOTO BOOKS AND OTHER PRINT PRODUCTS:

- <http://www.apple.com/au/ilife/iphoto/#prints>
 - <http://www.blurb.com/home/3>
 - <http://www1.snapfish.co.nz/gifts/product=photo-books>
 - <http://www.clickonprint.com.au/photobooks/how.html>
 - <http://www.albumfrog.com.au/>
 - <http://www.photobookcreations.com.au/>
 - Video tutorial on text and type in Photoshop
 - <http://av.adobe.com/russellbrown/16TypeTipsSM.mov>
- PRINT YOUR OWN BOOK AT HOME:**
- 1/ <http://av.adobe.com/russellbrown/HandmadeBookIntro.mov>
 - 2/ <http://av.adobe.com/russellbrown/CreatingBooksSM.mov>