

C-type prints from your Instagram images? Certainly, sir...

This is the most photographed age ever. Did you know that Justin Bieber has over twenty million followers on Instagram, the online photo-sharing service? Twenty million.

Kim Kardashian (she's billed as an American social media personality) languishes in the Canadian singer's slipstream with a mere eighteen million.

But despite the myriads of images now captured every minute of every day worldwide, some say the digital photo-industry picture isn't so rosy. A growing band of imaging pundits lament that photography itself is losing/ has lost, some of its allure. It's perhaps not quite so special anymore?

A while back even Adobe ran a discussion group asking the question: *Is digital all tech and no talent?*

So, is a knowledge of aperture, exposure and light settings still an art form to be cherished – or are auto-settings, quick fixes and 'total Photoshop' the only future?

Time for a rewind?

There's a recently launched app called *Zencam* – described by its makers as a 'mindful disposable camera'. It features digital rolls of film. Pictures captured on this 'film', on which users have just twenty 'exposure' opportunities, can't be seen until they're developed – you know, just like the good old days.

The idea is to get photographers – who these days are so used to capturing limitless numbers of shots digitally – to slow down and think a lot more about what they are taking.

But whether digital or analogue at the point of capture, the imaging industry is still proving that evolution can be a hybrid model.



'Fujifilm Crystal Archive is our most popular product line. Photographers love it' – Steve Macleod, creative director, Metro Imaging

Back in the glory days of film pro labs like East London-based **Metro Imaging** were processing 8,000-10,000 rolls every 24 hours – and needed a 300-strong staff to cope.

Today a workforce of just 30 experts – highly-trained operators and printers, enable this highly innovative and adaptive 35 year old imaging ship to cruise comfortably in the merged waters of both digital and analogue. And today Metro is a truly global brand.

Says Metro Imaging creative director Steve Macleod: "Just over a decade ago, when everyone went wholesale digital, businesses like ours had to adjust. There seemed to be less need for a photographic lab because fewer prints were being made."

"The bottom just dropped out of the commercial, advertising and editorial market – but we have

evolved and adapted. We have ended up with a smaller business but it's much more global. Our staff understands technology in terms of file transfers, email, social media – all imperative elements of our business today. The majority were formerly analogue printers but now they are Photoshop printers. They have exactly the same sensibility and mindset but now collaboration is the default position. Now we work more in conjunction with photographers as a service-based enterprise. It's very much a two-way sharing of ideas."

"We used to be so London-centric. You'd drop off a bag of film, get your clip test, hang around to pick up your film, get your contacts done – then off you skipped to your picture editor. Labs then were very physical entities. These days we are just as likely to be installing a photo-exhibition in Beijing or New York.

We work with many international photographers who need high quality prints for UK shows and galleries – but most of them will never even come to the lab front door. Our blossoming **MetroPrint** online option means our customers can access all the services available under the Metro Imaging pro lab banner – but facilitated wherever you happen to be in the world.

So you could have a 10ft by 6ft Lightjet print by going online with MetroPrint – at exactly the same quality levels as if you walked through our front door with a file. It's Metro Imaging – but from your own office – and available 24/7 across the globe."

Metro has a long history of working with A-List shooters – but now the demographic has widened.

Steve explains: "We don't believe knowledge should be exclusive, we are advisors and mentors – we've been running our own mentoring programme for the past nine years. We inform people about scanning and film processing and the different types of print media – and we demonstrate what the effect will be of mounting something in a particular way. And we do this for professionals and amateurs alike.

Analogue versus digital – a 'do or die' scenario?

Says Steve: "I believe there is continuing room for both. I don't think one will kill the other – it's now a marriage of convenience between the two. We are working now with a demographic that is much less formal photography based. Photography is seen differently and not restricted by what you see through a camera – thanks to digital. Today we are just as likely to be working with a sculptor who uses photography, as we are with a fine art shooter.

This is why we embrace direct media now – using slate, wood, glass etc to present photography in new ways – and of course 3D printing is already here."

He adds: "But we are seeing a huge willingness for people to make print and explore new avenues. **Fujifilm Crystal Archive** is our most popular product line. Photographers love it.

"The matte version is our No 1 standard stock paper – from Instagram to exhibition printing you will find Fujifilm silver halide papers on our **Lambda** or **Lightjet** printers on any given day. And we are one of very few outlets who do real photographic prints from Instagram – we have our own app. Recently we had a gang of Instagrammers in to discuss



how they could best convert their images to print as C-Types."

"These people just shoot on iPhone or Android – but they might have hundreds of thousands of followers. They might be dentists or architects or entrepreneurs – they just love shooting on their smartphones and printing on quality photographic paper."

Metro research shows that their photographer customers love Fujifilm Crystal Archive because it has a legacy. It has continuity.

Notes Steve: "They simply depend on it – and they know there will never be any deviation in quality from batch to batch. Additionally, its amazing archival quality is very important. Many of our clients are printing exhibition quality works that target museums, exhibitions, and private and public collections – so they need guaranteed consistency and stability. Crystal Archive is the backstop – it has the industry name and weight behind it."

London-based photographer Dan Holdsworth exhibits his work internationally and is world-acclaimed for his stunning

For more information on the Fujifilm professional paper range or to request a sample print call Peter Wigington on 01234 572138, or email: photoimaging@fuji.co.uk



Photograph of Dan at work courtesy of Audemars Piguet

'Fujifilm C-Type papers render very beautifully a powerful material sense of light and colour and as such are a component that I choose to make integral to my image production' – Dan Holdsworth

'otherworldly' imagery – exploiting eerie lighting effects, as in *Hyperborea 06* (featured on this page) a C-Type 152 x 122cm showing The Northern Lights, shot in Iceland.

Says Dan: "Fujifilm C-Type papers render very beautifully a powerful material sense of light

and colour and as such are a component that I choose to make integral to my image production."

Silver halide papers are big business at Metro – but the lab is more concerned about supply than demand. Says Steve, who has a Master's degree in photography and chemistry theory: "Of course

we have concerns about future supply – the global cost of the commodities involved, silver and gelatin. Whenever you make a commodity of a base material it will fluctuate with the markets – but we are delighted that Fujifilm are still backing silver halide papers 100%.

"It was great to see them at photokina coming forward and announcing plans for new silver halide solutions. It's a process that has been in the darkroom since the Year Dot and what we have done as a business is bring it out of the darkroom and merge it into the digital age. These are papers photographers can relate to.

"There will come a point where dry technologies will become cheaper than silver halide but we are not there yet. We are taking this provenance material and using it for contemporary methods of working. As long as it remains so will we."

www.metroimaging.co.uk
www.danholdsworth.com
Video interview with Dan created by Audemars Piguet:
<http://youtu.be/zxujTMcwebo>