

Digital Scrapbooking - A New Approach to Adoption Lifebooks

by [John Demar](#)

What is Digital Scrapbooking

Over the last four years, digital scrapbooking has gained significant momentum in the scrapbooking industry and among digital photographers who are looking for a fresh way to arrange and present their works. Today's inexpensive computing power, CD and DVD media, digital photography equipment, and high-quality color printers have made digital scrapbooking an affordable and versatile alternative to paper scrapbooking.

Digital scrapbooking is the use of digital photographs, scanned images, and text to create a scrapbook pages for storage, retrieval, viewing, and printing using computer software. Digital photographs may come from your own digital camera from software purchased from a vendor such as [scrapandtell.com](#). Scanned images are created by using a computer scanner and scanning software to create a digital copy of a paper page, actual photo, or other object that's stored as a file on a computer. Finally, text can be added, much like a traditional scrapbooker would, to provide journaling, page titles, and photo captions.

These three essential elements are then combined to create a digital scrapbook. There are many all-in-one packages available to help you get started with create basic, yet stylish, digital scrapbooks. Some titles include:

- [Nova Scrapbook Factory Deluxe 3.0](#)
- [Creating Keepsakes Scrapbook Designer Version 2 Platinum](#)
- [Hallmark Scrapbook Studio Deluxe 3.0](#)
- [Ulead My Scrapbook 2](#)
- [Ideasoft Scrapbooks Plus](#)

More advanced users may prefer a graphics design application that offers more layout, page sizes, special effects, and exporting features for sharing their books with others. Popular examples of this software are:

- [Nova Scrapbook Factory Deluxe 3.0](#)
- [Adobe Photoshop Elements 5.0](#)
- [Jasc Paint Shop Pro 9](#)
- [Corel Paint Shop Pro Photo XI](#)
- [Nova Photo Impact Pro 11](#)
- [Microsoft Digital Imaging Suite 2006](#)

Finally, for those who want the ultimate in layout and presentation capabilities, there are professional grade applications that offer eye-popping special effects, text layout, lighting effects and integration with 3D design, video editing, and web publishing software including:

- **Adobe Photoshop CS**
- **Macromedia (Adobe) Fireworks**
- **Corel Draw X3 Graphics Suite**

For more information about what to expect in a digital scrapbook, click [here](#).

The Benefits of Digital Scrapbooking

It all sounds great, right? Like most things in life, there are advantages and disadvantages to digital scrapbooks when compared to traditional paper scrapbooks.

First is the initial investment to get started. If you already have a computer, CD-ROM drive, graphics design or digital scrapbooking software, a digital image collection, and, ideally, a fast Internet connection, then you have all the basic tools needed to get started (I'll discuss on-line printing services a bit later). A traditional paper scrapbooker will need to invest in equipment such as special pens, a paper trimmer, and a glue stick to get started. Additionally, to create the paper scrapbook, an album, page protectors, and specialty paper are minimally required. The equipment listed above might run \$20 to \$30, and the supplies for a twenty page book, for example, might run \$60. Additional tools for edging, rounding corners and punching paper, as well as brads, die cuts, rubber stamps, and stickers are all available to further embellish paper pages. The materials for creating a typical paper scrapbook will typically run around \$2 to \$10 or more per page, with \$3 to \$5 as an average range.

Digital scrapbooks have another huge advantage: duplication! Back in the 15th century, a single monk would require 20 years' time to create a single transcribed Bible using pen and paper. So precious were these mammoth books that they would be chained to a wall to protect them from damage or thievery. With the invention of the Gutenberg printing press, complete Bibles could be duplicated in a fraction of the time, at a fraction of the cost, and were available to the general population. Now, fast-forward to the 21st century. You want to give your in-laws a copy of junior's scrapbook pages? No problem. Print it off on your color printer at home or e-mail them a copy. Duplicating digital scrapbooks is a piece of cake. What's more, the elements in a digital scrapbook kit can be reused among multiple books. Try that with an eyelet!

How about distribution? So, you just created junior's 12x12 paper album and have been wrestling with the 8 ½ by 11 color copier at the local Fedex/Kinko's for the last 90 minutes, barely eking out decent copies of three pages with over- or underexposed colors, clipped borders and other imperfections. Your in-laws are going coming over for dinner in 2 hours and you really wanted them to have copies of your son's album. How much did all those screwed up pages cost again – 39 or 49 cents apiece? Not with digital scrapbooks. How would they like it - printed, on CD-ROM, e-mailed, or published on a Web site? All of these possibilities are available from your own home. Don't want to waste your ink? Upload the lifebook to an on-line photo processing site like [Scrapbooks2Share](#) and let them print it out on their high-quality equipment and mail the results back to your home or theirs.

What about when Junior asks about his birthmother from Russia? In your eagerness to satisfy his curiosity, you bring out the paper lifebook you created, flip to the birthmother page, and watch as your excited son topples his freshly-poured glass fruit punch right across both open pages. And it was cherry flavored - you know, the kind with the same magic staining powers as a permanent marker? Think about how easy it would be to pop another one out on your computer, laminate the pages, and give him his very own? All the pages can be wiped off, and he can look at it himself or bring it to you whenever he has questions. You say Junior used his book as a pull toy with the dog? Never fear. The original is safe and sound in your computer.

Robust image editing software typically comes with loads of special effects like texture filters, lighting effects like drop shadows, embossing and engraving, warping, gradients, and blending, to name a few. Duplicating these effects on a paper using paints or inks would be difficult at best. These effects can add pizzazz to an otherwise bland photo or journaling, not to mention that a typical software application offers over 16 million colors if you decide to recolor text or image elements.

Finally, as with any artistic work, there's always going to be something you wish you had added during the creation of your lifebook. Maybe, long after adoption, you become acquainted with your child's biological sibling, also adopted, whose pictures and stories you'd like to make a part of the lifebook? With a paper scrapbook, your choices are to re-create pages, add journaling or images onto existing page, or add new pages (perhaps as an addendum). With digital, everything and anything on the creation can be deleted, revised, repositioned or reorganized as you see fit. Then, print off another copy.

Other Factors to Consider

Okay, so you're ready to jump into digital scrapbooking, right? Not so fast... if you lack any of the computer equipment listed above, have dated equipment or don't own a computer, it may be difficult to put together a digital scrapbook. That's a given. I'd like to share a few more ideas to keep in mind to help prepare you for working with the digital scrapbook medium.

Pop quiz... how many of you regularly back up the files on your computer or computer network at home? Have a DVD writer, portable USB drive, or a keychain fob that you use at least once a week? I can hear you saying "oh-oh" right now. Like any digital content, there's a good chance of your scrapbooking works succumbing to one of the many perils of electronics files. Take it from an IT pro with over 20 years under his belt - I've either suffered or been witness to just about every data loss disaster that could happen. Accidental erasure, hard drive crash, failed backup that's later relied upon for retrieval, excess humidity, old magnetic media, can't remember the name or location of the file among the billions of others on your computer, fire, theft, dropped laptop... you get the idea. The number one rule with any digital files that you hold near and dear is backup, backup, backup!

At the risk of sounding like I'm anti-technology, there will be times that your computer acts fickle, your software won't do what you want, or you have unexpected problems. Maybe you have numerous treasured photos that you captured ten years ago on a trip to China and now realize you'll be spending the next six hours scanning them all for inclusion in your digital scrapbook. Perhaps you've spent five hours working on a layout when your computer gives you an unexpected error that closes your application, and you realize that you hadn't been saving your as you went along. What if scanning and importing that awesome 8 X 10 photo gives you a "not enough memory to complete this operation" warning. Just remember that, despite all the hoopla surrounding digital media, these types of things will happen, and you need to plan for them.

Pages sizes are another issue. Here in the United States, the scrapbooking industry has standardized on the 12" x 12" format for albums, although smaller version such at 8 1/2" x 11" and 8" x 8" are available. Unless you have a wide format, borderless printer, you may be limited to printing on 8 1/2" x 11" papers in your home. Many people feel that once a photo or two are placed on that size or smaller, there's little room left for significant journaling or embellishments, especially if your printer is borderless. One printing alternative is to use an on-line printing service, but remember that each page will cost a little over \$2 to create and ship.

Finally, despite what the most fervent digital scrapbooking proponents will say, one cannot fully reproduce the look or feel of a 12" x 12" paper scrapbook album with brads, beads, hidden journaling pockets, Guatemalan worry dolls, matte frames, Jolee's By You travel embellishments, eyelets, fabric, or any of the thousands of other items that add texture and depth to a scrapbook page. In fairness, I'll point out that textures, lighting effects, blurring/sharpening, distressing (antiquing), opacity, color blending and any of a zillion other techniques are available to digital scrapbookers in robust image editing software. To many, these palpable attributes are all part of the work of art, not to be stripped off or imitated in a digital "clean room". You'll need to decide how important these artistic qualities are to you and your scrapbook.

Getting Started in Digital Scrapbooking

Digital scrapbooking and image editing software typically demand pretty decent computing horsepower. If your computer is more than 3 to 4 years old, I would highly recommend either upgrading or replacing it. Following are some equipment guidelines I see as requirements for middle-of-the-road image editing in 2007:

Windows Platform

Windows XP or Vista operating system (for XP, be sure to have Service Pack 2 installed for add stability and security)

Pentium 4 2.8GHz processor or better

512MB RAM memory

2-10 GB of available hard disk space

16-bit color video card or better

17" or larger monitor capable of 1024 x 768 resolution or better

16X speed CD-ROM drive or faster

Internet connection

Macintosh Platform

Apple MacOS X 10.3 or later or PowerPC G4 or G5 or Intel Core Duo processor or higher

512MB RAM memory

2 GB of available hard disk space

16-bit color video card or better

17" or larger monitor capable of 1024 x 768 resolution or better

16X speed CD-ROM drive or faster

Internet connection

Additional Recommendations

Broadband internet connection (cable or DSL with 1.5 MB download / 384 KB upload speed or higher preferred)

DVD+/-RW or CD-RW drive capable of at least 24X on CD writing and 8X on DVD writing

80 GB or larger external USB drive for archiving and additional on-line storage

Optional Hardware

Epson borderless inkjet printer (consider a wide-format version)

Digital camera with 4 megapixel resolution or higher

Flatbed page scanner capable of 1200 x 1200 dpi optical scan resolution or higher and 24-bit color depth or higher (I prefer HP and Epson)

Wacom graphics tablet to convert your handwriting into digitized images

Links to Additional Resources

Listed below are a handful of Web sites and pages to help get you started with digital scrapbooking:

Software for Beginners

- [Nova Scrapbook Factory Deluxe 3.0](#)
- [Creating Keepsakes Scrapbook Designer Version 2 Platinum](#)
- [Hallmark Scrapbook Studio Deluxe 3.0](#)
- [Ulead My Scrapbook 2](#)
- [Ideasoft Scrapbooks Plus](#)

Software for Advanced Users

- [Nova Scrapbook Factory Deluxe 3.0](#)
- [Adobe Photoshop Elements 5.0](#)
- [Jasc Paint Shop Pro 9](#)
- [Corel Paint Shop Pro Photo XI](#)
- [Nova Photo Impact Pro 11](#)
- [Microsoft Digital Imaging Suite 2006](#)

Software for Professional Results

- [Adobe Photoshop CS](#)

- [Macromedia \(Adobe\) Fireworks](#)
- [Corel Draw X3 Graphics Suite](#)

Image Element Kits

- [Scrap and Tell Digital Image Gallery](#)

Tutorials to Help You Start

- [DigitalScrapbookPlace.com](#)

John Demar is an adoptive parent of two and the webmaster for www.scrapandtell.com, an online store specializing in adoption scrapbooking supplies and multi-cultural products perfect for lifebooks.