

Create Computer Lab Forms

PAPERWORK IS probably rated as the least exciting task in operating a photo lab, but it is probably the most important. The more your lab paperwork is organized, the less you have to shuffle papers.

Since the introduction of computers in the lab, handling paperwork has become even more efficient. In most labs today, computers help with the billing, inventory control, and most of the financial reporting. But, in order to take full advantage of these computer systems, lab owners should consider using the computer to help solve the paper shuffling crisis. Many software programs not only speed up operations, but can be directly responsible for cost cutting in day-to-day operations.

Form Generator

The first type of software we label as "form generators." When you start one of these programs on your computer, you will find a library of pre-made forms which you can modify to fit your specific business needs. These forms may include inventory sheets, billing, shipping, time sheets, labels, parts lists, to-do lists, and dozens of other forms related to business operation. Select the form closest to your needs, load it into your computer, add your business name, add or subtract boxes or text and save it as a custom form for your business.

In our lab operation, our pay period for part-time employees starts on Wednesday and ends the following Tuesday, with payday on Friday. We took the standard time sheet from a program called "Instant Pages" and changed the days of the week to reflect our schedule, added our business name, and printed out our own custom time sheets.

We find ourselves reviewing a considerable amount of consignment equipment from different manufacturers, so we pulled up a packing receipt form and modified it so that it had our company name, equipment type, serial number, value, and UPS or Federal Express shipping number

on the bottom of the form. We printed out a few dozen forms and saved the file to disk. This method for making forms allows you to personalize your business forms and yet print only as many as you need.

Chart Programs

"Chart Programs" make up the second group of software that can be very useful for technical applications in the photo lab. These programs usually have line, bar, pie and text functions. Chart programs are useful for plotting data from your densitometer, manufacturer technical sheets and test results from the various processors in your lab. They can also help you analyze the cost vs. profit aspects of your business.

We ran a test to see just how using a "chart" program simplified densitometry data recording. We took several gray scale test strips and plotted the densitometry values on the sheets according to normal procedure. Then, we entered the same data in a line chart section of the "Harvard Graphics" program. We found that it took only one third the time to enter the data into the computer: the results were cleaner and all the data could be retained on a diskette. This eliminated a considerable amount of paperwork and allowed us faster access to densitometry plots.

One unusual photo lab application of "chart" software is to use it to extract unknown data about a lab process. For example: We reviewed the processing times for T-MAX film in T-MAX developer for 68-75 degrees from a Kodak data sheet, and entered the data into a line chart

program. Then we took the results of our testing the film processed at 100 degrees and entered that data into a line chart program. When the results were displayed, we found the chart gave us any time or temperature combination for processing that film—from 68 degrees to 100 in two-degree increments.

This worked so well, we decided to apply the same concept to push times for T-MAX film. We needed to know all the push times in one-half stop increments from one stop push to four stops. Using the Kodak values, we plotted the information for a one, two, and three stop push in the line chart program. When we displayed the time temperature curve, it stopped at three stops. Looking at the slope of the curve, we estimated the new value of four stops and inserted it into the program. We then fine-tuned that number until the curve was perfect. We not only had our new push time for four stops, but we were also able to compute half-stop times from this same chart. (Continued on page 44)

LAB PROCEDURES COLOR COPY

NIKON 8008S CAMERA

60MM MACRO LENS

80A FILTER

EKTACHROME 100X

AUTO EXPOSURE F/11

+ 1/3 STOP COMPENSATION

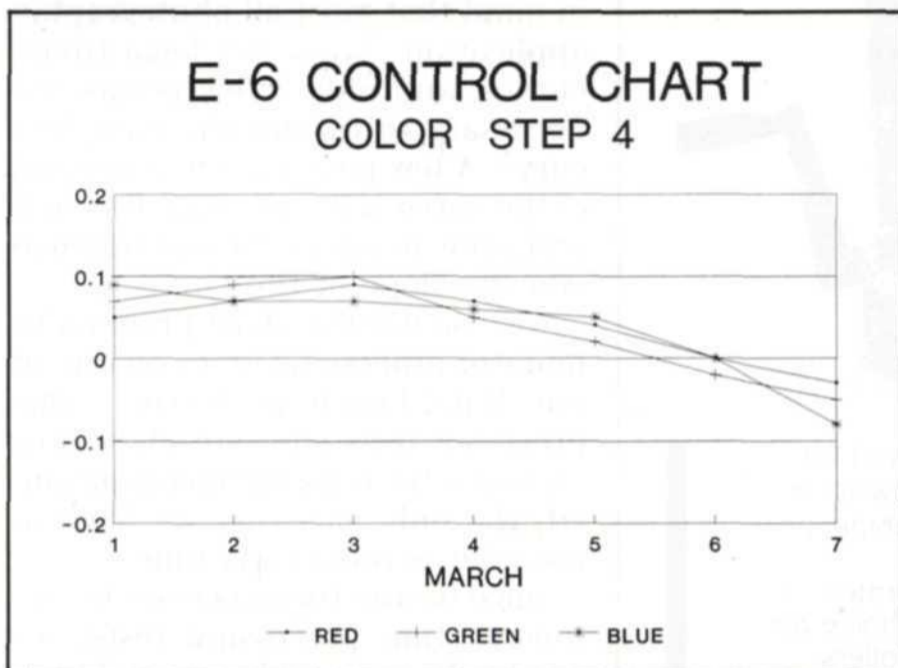
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45 DEGREE LIGHTING

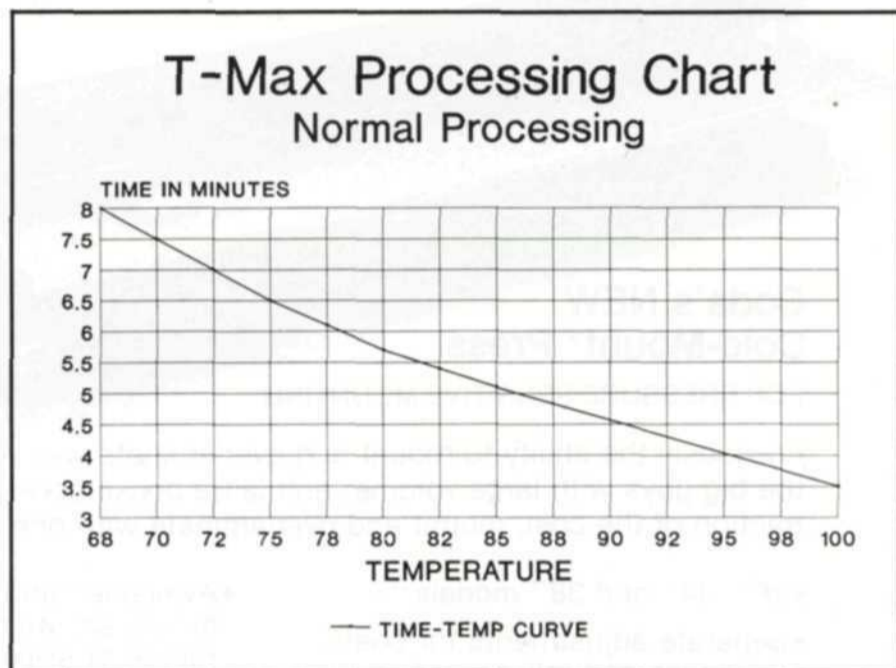
Single lab procedure printed on one page. Created on Windows "Arts and Letters." (IBM format)

That Work For You

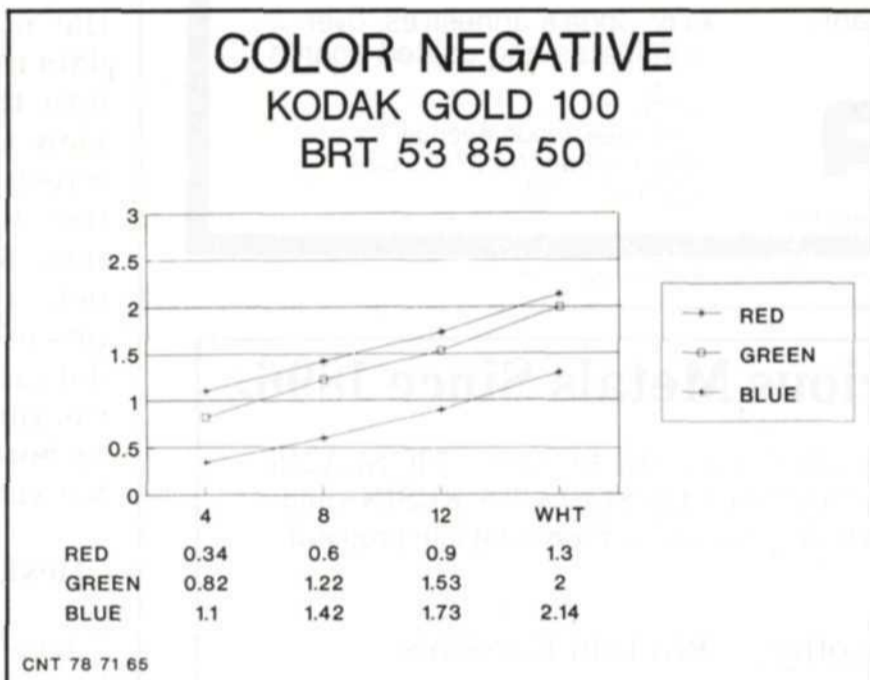
Jack and Sue Drafahl



▲ Custom designed E-6 process control sheet. Charts can be designed for 1 to 4 weeks and can include as many of the steps as required. Chart created on "Harvard Graphics."



▲ Processing times for 68 to 75 degrees were extracted from the Kodak data sheet and input into a line chart program. Created on "Harvard Graphics." (IBM format)



◀ 9-10 data values from Kodak C-41 control strip and test strip from Kodak Gold 100. Individual corrections can be made to each color, so that the curves are similar. Created on "Harvard Graphics." (IBM format)



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Computer Lab Forms

(Continued from page 42)

You could apply this plotting procedure to many lab processes. Keep in mind that most all photographic applications work on logarithmic curves, and only a few points are necessary to fill out the complete curve. A few points at the beginning of the curve will give you a direction and a few points at the end will give you the slope of the curve.

We also use the chart program to monitor processing times on one of our Wing-Lynch processors. This processor uses one-shot chemistry and once the color balance is attained, the only variation we have to consider is processing time.

Since we use this processor for extensive film processing tests, we need to have everything in tight tolerances. So, we enter the data from the master control strip and the data read from our processing tests into the line chart program, and view the results on the computer screen. If the density is lower on our test, we reduce the first developer time by a few seconds and run a new test. Once the control and the process test line up, we save that data into the computer memory of the film processor. We also use this technique for fine-tuning push times for various E-6 emulsions.

Desktop Publishing Programs

Some of the most flexible programs on the market are the desktop publishing programs. With these programs you can enter text, add pictures, symbols, and combine them with graphs, charts, and data base files. These programs are useful for creating your own special coupons, prices lists, cassette labels, model releases, or just about anything you would have printed for your lab operations.

We found one of the most valuable uses for this type of software is for documenting lab procedures. In some labs, the procedures are typed or hand written in a log book. Other labs have no written procedures at all. With instructions employees can correctly complete a lab operation, eliminating redos, wasted materials, and late delivery on jobs. By presenting all the necessary information one book, the employees can

refer to the information and not need to interrupt the lab manager, thus creating further employee confidence.

For our log book we use a desktop publishing program called "Arts and Letters." We print each procedure in a big, bold font with each lab procedure on a separate page. This accomplishes two things. First, the employee has no problem reading the instructions, and with each procedure on a separate page, they cannot mix up instructions. We leave space at the bottom of each procedure, so comments can be made about the procedure, especially if it needs any modification. We go through the lab book once a month to update changes where necessary.

Which Software Package Do You Use?

There are hundreds of programs that can be applied to photo lab applications. To find out which will work best for you, we recommend you make a list of the applications you need the program to accomplish. Take that list to your local computer store and see what programs they have that will fit those requirements. For example, you may want a program that plots lines, draws text, and prints labels. It's not impossible to find one program that can complete all these tasks. Per-

sonally, we use one form-generating program, one chart program, and one desktop program to generate all the forms we need for our business applications.

If you are tied into a local BBS system, (computer bulletin board) you can do a name search in the files directory for "forms" or "charts" and you should find several possible programs you can use in your business.

Conclusion

One of the most common comments we hear people say is, "I don't know anything about operating a computer." Unfortunately, you don't have much of a choice: You need to learn. As the future of photography moves more towards computerization, your competitors will not hesitate to use their computers, thus increasing their profit margins. This gives them a definite edge. Do not delay in becoming computer literate. The younger generation will soon become part of our work force, and they've been exposed to this technology for years. It's definitely time!

Sue and Jack Drafahl operate a full-service commercial photo lab just outside Portland, OR. Services include audio visual productions, computer graphics and stock photography. They are also contributing editors to Petersen's Photographic, and specialize in photo lab procedures.

FORM-GENERATING PROGRAMS

INSTANT PAGES (IBM)

SMARTFORM—Assistant/Designer (MAC)

Claris
5201 Patrick Henry Drive
Box 58168
Santa Clara, CA 95052

CHARTING PROGRAMS

HARVARD GRAPHICS (IBM)
SPC Software Publishing Company
1901 Landings Drive
Mountain View, CA 94039

POWERPOINT (IBM & MAC)
Microsoft Corp.
One Microsoft Way
Redmond, WA 98052

ALDUS PERSUASION (IBM & MAC)
Aldus Corporation
411 First Ave. South
Seattle, WA 98104

DESKTOP PROGRAMS

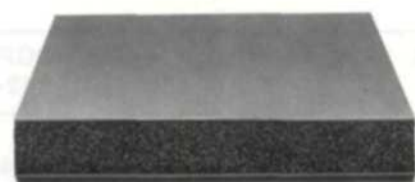
ARTS AND LETTERS (IBM)
Computer Support Corp.
15926 Midway Rd.
Dallas, TX 75244

COREL DRAW (IBM & MAC)
Corel Systems Corp.
Corel Building
1600 Carling Ave.
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1Z8R7

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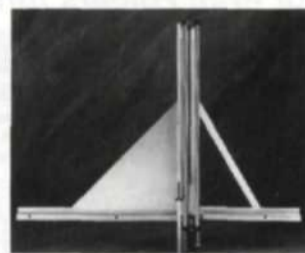


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