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Digital Photography - How Many Mega pixels Do We Need?

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The number of features that come with a digital camera can be overwhelming and knowing what these features really mean can be a task in itself. From ISO to exposure, how do you know what you need? Here we are going to take the guesswork out of knowing how many mega pixels your photography will require. First let's make sure we know what a megapixel actually is:

Megapixel is a technical term for "million pixels", where a single pixel is the smallest unit of color that a camera's sensor is able to capture. The more pixels in the sensor, the sharper the image a camera can reproduce. Note that some camera specifications abbreviate megapixel as "MP".

So how exactly do we know how many pixels we need? Knowing the purpose for your photos is the first step. Uses that require a high resolution digital photo will naturally require a camera with a higher number of pixels. Photos for viewing on a computer screen need only a low resolution image making any camera sufficient if this is the only intention for the photos. However, the most common goal of printing or developing pictures requires a high resolution photo for quality results. With this in mind, we will use printing a photo as our example in determining megapixel need.

The second task is to determine the largest print size we would like of our photo. Sure, it would look cool to have poster-size images all over the house of our sweetheart, but are we really going to go through that expense? I assume for most of us, poster size prints fall into the "rarely or never" category. Having ruled out extreme sizes, we have the three most common photo sizes to consider. According to online photo labs, the following minimum resolutions are sufficient to produce high quality prints:

4 x 6": 640 x 480 pixels (0.3 mega pixels) 5 x 7": 1024 x 768 pixels (0.8 mega pixels) 8 x 10": 1536 x 1024 pixels (1.6 mega pixels)

I have found through my own trial and error that my 3 megapixel camera serves as the bare megapixel minimum that I would use for an 8 x 10" print. Mega pixels any lower will begin to show pixilation under close inspection. To prevent this, double the above megapixel recommendations when buying a camera. The example shows that if your goal is only for 4 x 6" prints, a 0.6 megapixel camera is plenty. Most digital cameras start a 2 mega pixels, which would be enough for quality prints up to 5 x 7".

Once you know the minimum mega pixels required for your image needs, you can move forward to other aspects of your camera in order to be prepared to capture whatever moment comes your way.

About the Author:

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