

# Apple's iLife takes home photo albums to a new level

July 9 2009, By John Boudreau

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It's the amateur photographer's management tool for digital pictures. But Apple's iLife multimedia software suite has some A-list users as well.

Rick Smolan, who created the best-selling "Day in the Life" photography series, is one. So is Steve Jobs, who told Smolan a few years back he specifically made iLife's iPhoto application so he could more easily sort pictures of his family.

"I said, 'You must use Aperture' (Apple's professional-level digital photo software). He said, 'I'm still using iPhoto.' He said he basically made it for himself," said Smolan, the CEO of Sausalito, Calif.,-based Against All Odds Productions.

Smolan, despite ribbing from his professional photographer friends, also uses iPhoto most of the time, a love affair that began a few years ago when he was still working with film and bought his first digital camera, meant for his wife. "I made a slide show and I thought, 'This is so seductive.' I went from analog to digital overnight with no looking back," Smolan said.

Earlier this year, Apple released its latest version of the software suite, iLife 09, which comes bundled with every Macintosh computer. The update includes iPhoto innovations such as "geotagging" and a [face recognition](#) feature.

Apple's multimedia software is one of many on the market, including

Windows-based Paint, Picture Manager and Movie Maker, and Google's Web-based Picasa. Apple's pioneering software, though, consistently gets thumbs up from reviewers and analysts, who note the company's ability to seamlessly connect its various applications, which makes it easy to mix music, photos and video. In addition to image management, iLife includes iMovie for making home videos, GarageBand, for music making, and iWeb for designing Web pages.

The dawn of the digital era has profoundly changed the relationship between human and camera. Without costly film to buy, shooters have virtually endless opportunities for snapshots. And the idea of single prints is almost anachronistic as mobile devices like the iPhone become mobile photo albums.

"For my nephews and nieces, all of their pictures are on their computers or Facebook pages," Smolan said. "I never see printed pictures."

I recently used iPhoto to sort, edit and create a photo book from recent trips to Asia.

One of the new features of iPhoto that I really liked is Faces, which allows you to organize photos by individuals. You identify the image of one person. Then the software searches hundreds or thousands of photos for similar faces. You confirm the images that are correct. Then every time you click on the person's image in the Faces category, you have access to every photo you have taken of that person.

Most of the time, the software is spot on. A few misses occurred. When searching for photos of my girlfriend, for example, the software mistakenly pulled up a few images of her sisters and mother.

Another added feature is geotagging, which helps users organize photos in the Places category. This function works seamlessly for those with a

GPS-enabled camera or GPS-enabled smart-phone, such as the iPhone, or those using an Eye-Fi SD memory card with GPS-like capabilities built in.

But you don't need a GPS device to take advantage of this. That's because iPhoto enables users to type in a location simply by clicking on the "i" symbol on each image. You type in the location -- say, Taipei -- in a search bar. Then on the back of each image you have a pin marking the location on a map.

Another new feature is upload buttons for Flickr, Facebook and MobileMe, which have been added to the one-click function that allows you to e-mail photos.

And while individual prints are going out of fashion for many amateur shutterbugs, Apple's photo-book option gives people another easy way to display memories from, say, a summer vacation.

iPhoto allows you to create customized professional-looking hard- and soft-covered photo-books that are reasonably priced. A large softcover book starts at \$19.99 and the large hardcover iPhoto book with a customized dust jacket starts at \$29.99 plus tax and shipping. Apple provides different books for different occasions, such as travel or weddings.

Each page comes with a number of templates to choose from -- such as photos with a map, a large borderless picture that fills the whole page or a collage of smaller images. You design the layout on every page. For those wanting help, Apple provides step-by-step online tutorials.

The software's intuitive nature makes building a photo-book a breeze, which I discovered while creating my Asia travels photo-book.

You can drag individual images to the book file or, using the flag feature, mark a group of photos, then switch to the "Flagged" view to grab all the chosen photos and drag them at once into the book project. The program allows you to easily swap pictures in and out of the pages. And more pages can be added. The hardest part, frankly, is deciding which photos to use.

When the book is completed, you use your Apple account to order and buy the book. It arrives via FedEx in typical Apple fashion -- carefully packed in an elegantly minimalist box with a simple [Apple](#) logo.

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