

The Federal Lawyer in Cyberia

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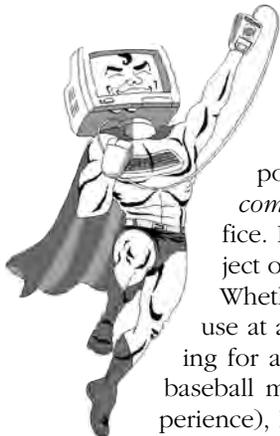
It's Summertime: Do You Know Where Your Digital Photos Are?

Each summer, I usually write a column on a topic related to vacations. Before you read this, I, as a fairly serious fan of baseball, will be on a week's vacation with my adult son, on the baseball journey of a lifetime. Being from Oakland, Calif., and having grown up in Southern California, my allegiances switched many years ago from the Los Angeles Dodgers (Sandy Koufax was my Dodger-blue hero) to the Oakland Athletics. Yes, Catfish Hunter (now deceased) and Dave Stewart were my guys. Two towns, three pitchers.



In late July, I will fly to New York, rendezvous with my son, and take in a game between the Oakland Athletics and the New York Yankees at the new Yankee Stadium in the Bronx. Then it's on to Cooperstown, in upstate New York, for the induction of a guy who grew up in Oakland and had his greatest years in Oakland, Rickey Henderson. Henderson was not a pitcher, but one has to admire his skill and tenacity as, without a doubt, the quintessential leadoff hitter. Rickey will share

the stage with Jim Rice, one of the greats who played with the Boston Red Sox. Following "induction weekend" (and a tenacious effort on my part to meet up with Mr. Koufax), my son and I will drive to Boston, where the current A's will play the Red Sox at historic Fenway Park. Then, it's home again, with a delirious week of father-and-son baseball memories behind us. I expect to capture many of those memories on my digital camera, which brings me to the point of this column.



I have written many times about the importance of having a backup plan for your *computer* system—both at home and at the office. However, I have never addressed the subject of a backup system for your *digital camera*. Whether it is capturing crucial visual evidence to use at a hearing or a trial, or whether it is capturing for all time a delirious week of father-and-son baseball memories (or your equivalent vacation experience), I urge you to have a backup plan in place in advance.

It goes without saying that no backup plan is of any value if your camera is lost or stolen, or if it malfunctions. You should take those possibilities into account as you develop your plan. For a trip like mine,



I plan to have a warranty check and malfunction plan in place well before my departure date as well as insurance to cover full instant replacement, should that prove necessary.

It is not enough to back up your priceless digital photos onto your laptop computer. Images on film have a certain reality to them that digital images lack. After all, digital images are actually nothing more than millions of ones and zeroes stored on media—media subject to damage and failure. CDs and DVDs can become unreadable. Immunizing yourself from the effects of digital calamities requires resourcefulness and, sometimes, improvisation.

Backing up your photos is conceptually quite simple. Make copies of everything. If your pictures are on your laptop, transfer copies to your desktop. If the photos are on both, transfer them to an external hard drive—or even two. It is only when you have created redundant backups that you should feel secure in erasing your digital memory card—the one that slides into your camera.

You might also want to consider uploading pictures from your computer (for varying fees) to an online storage system. Among the most popular are Flickr (www.flickr.com), Snapfish (www.snapfish.com), and Google's Picasa Web Albums Web site (www.picasa.com). (Yahoo Photos closed in 2007 as part of Yahoo's takeover of Flickr.) Each of these sites has its partisans, and each site has its pluses and minuses.

Before we leave this topic, let's examine two, for comparison purposes.

Flickr has become synonymous with online photo sharing. The site offers 100 megabytes of free storage each calendar month; however, the storage counter is reset every month. But you must read the fine print! Flickr will display only your 200 most recent photos if you have a free account. And if your account is inactive for 90 days, it will be deleted in its entirety. Yikes! Some backup system! On the other hand, Flickr offers a "Pro" account for an annual fee of \$25, for which you receive unlimited high-resolution photo storage and unlimited viewing. Pictures can be uploaded to Flickr from mobile phone cameras, desktop software, and e-mail attachments, or through a Web-based interface available on Flickr's Web site. Pictures can then be grouped in sets (like "Baseball Vacation in Cooperstown") as well as tags (like "vacation").

Visitors to Flickr albums that you create can download individual pictures in various sizes or even order photo prints and other novelties (like T-shirts, mugs, calendars, and so forth) directly from the Flickr Web site, and they can do so even before you have concluded your trip! A unique feature of Flickr is that others can interact with the photographs you have uploaded. Flickr turns your images into "virtual whiteboards" on which others can jot text notes. For instance, if my son is smiling while watching Rickey Henderson's induction speech and I shoot a close-up of my son's beaming face, I can add a note that explains why Mike Jr. is smiling. Or you can attach text notes to the photos, enabling Mike's mother back home to just hover her mouse over the photo to read a description of what's going on.

Even though Flickr makes it quite easy to upload pictures, it is not so easy to download them again from Flickr onto your hard drive, and this is one place where Google's Picasa Web Albums feature beats Flickr. The site comes equipped with modest photo editing software that seamlessly integrates with Picasa Web Albums, enabling you to do basic image editing (like cropping, rotating, and so forth). You can then upload the edited pictures online. The software also enables the user to download photos from the online Picasa albums to a hard drive without any effort at all. The downside of Picasa Web Albums? Google, which owns the Picasa brand, offers a meager one gigabyte of storage space to users at no cost. If you want additional storage, it starts at \$20 per year for an additional 10 gigabytes.

Snapfish, on the other hand, allows *unlimited* storage, with the requirement that users make at least one purchase from the site each year. (Users can purchase a print for nine cents and have it shipped for 99 cents, bringing the total to \$1.08 for unlimited storage per year—a real bargain.) However, photos uploaded to Snapfish must use the "jpeg" format.

As you might expect in this online age, there are bloggers who keep track of which online storage

options have which advantages and disadvantages. One such service can be found at www.my-photo-video.com/free-unlimited-photo-storage-comparison-services-sites/. Photo sharing Web sites not only make it easy for others to view your content as you create it, they also act as fairly reliable backup services in the event of a system crash. However, each service has its unique qualities and its unique limitations. You may decide to use another form of backup, but folks who live in earthquake country (like I do) can see the advantages of off-site storage very readily.

Conclusion

Have a great summer vacation, and keep your seasonal Cyberian memories alive. See you again in the next issue. Meanwhile, excuse me. I'm off to Cooperstown. Has anyone seen Sandy Koufax lately? I've got a baseball that needs autographing. **TFL**

Michael J. Tonsing practices law in San Francisco. He is a member of the FBA editorial board and has served on the Executive Committee of Law Practice Management and Technology Section of the State Bar of California. He also mentors less-experienced litigators by serving as a "second chair" to their trials (www.Your-Second-Chair.com). He can be reached at mtonsing@lawyer.com.



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