

LIFE PHOTO ARCHIVE

JUST THE FACTS

CLIENT:

Time Inc.



PROJECT:

Digitization of The LIFE Photo Archive for Google hosting

STATISTICS:

10.5 million images (primarily negatives) dating from 1936 to 2000

SOLUTION:

- 300 dpi color/grayscale scanning
- Metadata collection
- High-volume daily deliveries
- Ultra Density Optical (UDO) and hard drives; Blu-Ray discs
- Dedicated staff resources

“Crowley was selected... because of their advanced photo-digitizing solutions, long corporate history of... quality workmanship in a high-volume scanning environment... and their staff’s expertise.”

~ Andy Blau, LIFE president

EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN:

The Life Photo Archive sees the light of day via Crowley Imaging

Imagine seeing 75 years of history scroll across your screen every day. For two years. And you can’t talk about it. Such has been life (pun intended) for approximately 20 Crowley Company employees tasked with digitizing over 10 million images from Time Inc.’s *LIFE* magazine archives. Working since December 2006 and led by project manager DeAnne Larsen, the Crowley staff has witnessed never-publicized photos of distinguished personalities and celebrities, world events, wars, scientific advances and the intimate drama of daily life. From rural towns to big cities to a dog with two heads, they’ve seen—and scanned—it all. The secret is now out and the entire world can participate at <http://images.google.com/hosted/life>.

The Collection

Known as LIFE’s Photo Archive, the project has been a digitization of the historic photographic images taken for *LIFE* magazine, which printed from 1936 to 1972 and again from 1978 to 2000. The collection includes color and black and white negatives, transparencies, reflective prints and other photographic material. The LIFE Photo Archive on Google, when complete, will be among the largest professional photography collections on the web and is one of the largest scanning projects ever undertaken. The archives contain photographs from over 50 world-renowned photo-journalists including Margaret Bourke-White, Ed Clark, Alfred Eisenstaedt, Nina Leen, Gordon Parks

and others. The collection is available online free for personal and research purposes. Copyright and ownership of all images remain with Time Inc. and high-quality photographic prints can be purchased at the site.

The Digitizing Process

Approximately every three months, representatives from Crowley drive climate-controlled trucks to warehouses in northern New Jersey and New York to collect file cabinets that store the images in bar-coded envelopes, primarily negatives. The entire file cabinet is loaded onto the truck and delivered to Crowley’s 18,000 SF service bureau in Frederick, MD, in the Washington, DC-Baltimore corridor. There, each envelope is scanned to ensure that the contents match Time Inc’s records. Next, the negatives are scanned at



The contents of approximately 1,100 file drawers, totaling millions of images, are scanned via a barcode system for security and customized job tracking.

the rate of nearly one every 30 seconds or approximately 14,000 a day, the only requirement being that the negatives are loaded emulsion-side down. From there, the quality control staff checks each image on computer screens for quality and alignment, attaches a Digimarc (an electronic watermark) and types in appropriate cataloguing information such as subject and photographer.

The final step is the return of the physical and digital images to the clients. Physically, the file cabinets

are driven back to the warehouse(s), where the next set is picked up. Digitally, images are sent via ultra density optical drives (UDO), Blu-ray discs or hard drive, as required by the client.

When asked about the challenges of such a large project, Larsen says, "At this point, it's down to a science, although the early months offered a lot of learning opportunities. Every time we'd open a negative drawer, there was a 'size surprise' and we became quickly adept at having stations for every type of image—35mm, 120 mm, 4x5's, 8x10's, prints, you name it." She continues, "It's impossible not to be awed by this collection. In the beginning there were a lot of 'Hey, check this out,' but we quickly realized that almost every photo in the collection had a 'wow' factor."

The Results

Andy Blau, LIFE's president, says, "Crowley was selected for the digitizing task because of their advanced photo-digitizing solutions, long corporate history of providing quality workmanship in a high-volume scanning environment and their staff's expertise with the handling of digital imagery and numerous types of analog photographic media."

With more than two million images already online for viewing in just the first month, the project is deemed a success. "Working on this project has been a privilege," notes Patrick Crowley, company vice president and Crowley service bureau chief. "Not only is it one of the most

socially interesting archives we've digitized, it has propelled us to develop some creative production approaches, such as the designing and engineering of a custom camera stand that allows for increased scanning volume and quality of 35 mm negatives. We've also invested in a workflow application that allows us to manage a project of this size in a way that is cost-efficient for both ourselves and the client."

About The Crowley Company

Similar Crowley scanning projects in scope and interest, if not in size, include those for The Library of Congress, The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, The Smithsonian and the ongoing archives of Small-TownNewspapers. Incorporated in 1981, The Crowley Company is a leading digital and analog film technologies company headquartered in Frederick, Maryland with manufacturing divisions (Mekel, Extek and HF Processor brands) in Compton and San Dimas, California. With over 100 employees, The Crowley Company provides an extensive number of digital document and film conversion services to the publishing, commercial, government and archive sectors and also manufactures, sells and services high-speed microfilm, microfiche and aperture card scanners, microfilm duplicators, film processors and micrographics equipment.

For more information:

www.thecrowleycompany.com

<http://images.google.com/hosted/life>



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