

Ken Duncan: A futuristic journey into artistic freedom

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CASE STUDY



Challenge

- ◆ Determine the quality and standard of photos while on site
- ◆ Achieve direct-from-camera/card storage of large numbers of photos while on site
- ◆ Gain greater freedom of workflow during the photo creation process
- ◆ Provide photographic prints that have industry-leading archivability
- ◆ Obtain high quality proofs that delivered totally accurate colours

Solution

- ◆ Epson P-4500 Multimedia Viewer
- ◆ Epson Large Format Printers

Benefits

- ◆ In-built 80GB hard drive delivers Ken with massive on-hand photo storage capabilities
- ◆ The ability to see almost immediately if the desired nuances and features have been captured in the photograph
- ◆ Large format printers that deliver proofs with no discernable difference in colours when compared to the final print
- ◆ A saving of approximately \$15,000 per published fine art book on colour proofs through use of Epson large format printers and CTP

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Ken Duncan - Managing Director, Ken Duncan Panographics

Since the early 1980s, Ken Duncan has held firmly to the mantle of being Australia's foremost pioneer of Limited Edition Photographic Printers. While he claims to be little more than “...an average photographer, with a great God – merely an interpreter of God's creation” Duncan is in fact recognised globally as one of the world's most innovative, inspirational and artistically gifted photographers. Based on the NSW Central Coast, Duncan is more often than not overseas on photography shoots, while his wife takes on much of the work involved in managing the day-to-day affairs of the diverse Duncan Group of Companies.

Epson – contributing to artistic excellence

As a man committed to nothing less than absolute excellence in all areas of his work, Duncan has long maintained a deep interest in technology and its effective application. “Quite a number of years ago,” he says, “I recognised that technology in a number of areas was going to have a major impact in the photography and fine art worlds – in spite of other professionals being somewhat less optimistic.

“But when Epson first released its range of Large Format Printers [LFPs], it was obvious to even many of the sceptics that the time had come. Then, with the introduction of the Epson P-series multimedia viewers, the digital imaging workflow became an absolute reality.”

Imagery on the move

Try to put through a call to Ken Duncan at his office and it's pretty much a game of chance as to whether he'll even be there. He's a man continually on the move, whether it's between offices or – more likely – overseas or in Outback Australia on yet one more of his seemingly endless number of photo shoots.

It's on these photo shoots that Duncan strives to create imagery as one of a growing number of professional photographers taking full advantage of one of Epson's most innovative products – the P-4500 Multimedia Storage Viewer. Almost a personal fixture on Duncan's belt when on a shoot, the P-4500 is regarded by him as one of the essential pieces of equipment.

“One of the worst situations that photographers can be confronted with is returning from a photo shoot only to find that of all the photos they took, not one is up to the standard they wanted or needed,” Duncan says. “Even though



digital cameras provide a preview capability, the quality is generally not nearly high enough to give an accurate view of the captured images.

"This is where the P-4500 comes to the fore," he continues. "The display has the brightness, contrast and definition qualities that enable me to see almost immediately whether or not I've captured precisely the nuances and features I was looking for. That in itself is one of the key benefits of digital photography, but it's the P-4500 that makes it a reality."

Gaining greater freedom

Complementing the P-4500's quality display and adding even further to the unit's value for photographers is the combination of its 80 GB hard drive and multi-format file and memory card

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support. It's this combination that Duncan believes delivers a level of on-hand flexibility that is crucial in meeting the demands of the modern digital photography workflow.

"It's important to bear in mind that while the digital photography workflow affords enormous steps forward in quality, it's also about greater freedom for the photographer," Duncan explains. "With the introduction of high performance photo quality printers, we have freedom *and control* when it comes to the finished product. And now, by virtue of portable multimedia storage devices, such as the Epson P-4500, we have more freedom and flexibility during the photography *creation* process."

"With an 80 GB hard drive literally in your pocket, we're no longer limited to the

amount of photos that can be taken on a shoot; and the unit's ability to take multi-format memory cards means there's no restriction on the make and model of digital camera. It's freedom – and that's what I expect in my work."

Epson inkjet – presenting opportunities

Back in his studio, Epson once again becomes an integral part of Duncan's digital workflow. As an early adopter of Epson LFPs in the professional photography and fine art sector, Duncan is a strong advocate of the new opportunities now opening as a direct result of the Epson LFP solutions. "What we now have is a solution that presents a broad range of opportunities – many of which didn't exist before Epson came out with these [large format] printers."

By way of example, Duncan points to the ability to create faithful reproductions of paintings. "We are now finding ourselves doing more and more work for painters, simply because with the Epson printers we're able to match the original colours with absolute accuracy and, just as importantly, create the print on an Epson *canvas* media."

In citing other examples of the opportunities and artistic freedom now being afforded photographers, Duncan discusses how yet another Epson media – Textured Fine Art paper – actually *adds* to the power of his *Passion of Christ* prints. These powerful photographs, which Duncan took following an invitation from Mel Gibson to shoot a series of stills on the set of *The Passion of the Christ* are regarded by Duncan as some of his most inspiring work.

"I love being able to print the *Passion* stills on Texture Fine Art paper," Duncan says. "It gives them a strong Renaissance look, and this is what good – *really* good – inkjet printing is all about...adding new dimensions"

Committed to the media

Duncan's commitment to using *only* Epson inks and media with his Epson LFPs is based on a number of factors, not least of which is print archivability.

“This was one of the major initial drawbacks in the acceptance of large format printers in the professional photography and fine art areas,” he says. “But with the enormous amount of work that Epson has put into its papers and inks, print archivability is actually one of the most *appealing* aspects of inkjet printing.”

At a recent photography exhibition held in, Cologne, Germany, Duncan along with his associate Henry Wilhelm – one of the world’s foremost authorities on the preservation of digital colour photographs – were confronted by a representative of a third-party printer vendor, urging them to consider a new 11-colour printer.

“As soon as we started asking him questions about the quality of the ink, the media and the final product’s archivability, he was simply unable to commit to anything,” Duncan relates. “The fact is that you can always get a cheaper ink or a cheaper printer, but for professionals, saving a few dollars on media is simply false economy; and this is yet one more reason why I have kept with Epson.

“When someone purchases one of my prints, I’m supremely confident in stating that it’s a print made with an Epson printer, on Epson paper and using Epson inks. And this is something that people are starting to understand equates to the highest levels of quality.”

The answer’s in the proof

One of the interesting facts about the Duncan Group of companies is that in a number of instances, growth and expansion have resulted from Duncan’s unswerving commitment to quality, rather than a commitment to increasing profits.

Duncan explains: “I was becoming increasingly frustrated in dealing with pre-press houses and trying to get high quality proofs that gave me totally accurate colours. When I told them what I wanted, I was generally given some scientific guff about why it couldn’t be done – and that simply wasn’t good enough for me.”

Rather than accept second-best, Duncan established a small laboratory using an Epson LFP. The result was, according to Duncan, outstanding. In fact, the quality of Epson proofs is so high, that the laboratory, which was initially intended for Duncan Group-only work, is now the first port of call for many fine art publishers from around the world.

“With the Epson printer, we start off with the printing press’s standard, calibrate our printer with custom profiles then create proofs that are so accurate in their colour, there’s virtually no discernable difference when compared to the final print.”



Under Southern Skies by Ken Duncan

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In commenting further on the role the Epson proof is now having in the world of publishing, Duncan explains that high quality proofs with incredibly accurate colour capabilities are essential in gaining the financial benefits of Computer-to-Plate (CTP) printing.

"Traditionally, it can cost anywhere up to \$20,000 to get the film for a fine art book," he says. "With CTP and Epson proofs that comes down to around \$5-6,000."

that will open the way for even greater and more exciting avenues of photography and fine art. Among these is 3-Dimensional photography.

"3D art prints represent the new frontier and there is already a strong groundswell of support," Duncan says. "I'm currently working on a book that delivers a form of 3D photography – requiring glasses – featuring photographs taken with a camera I had specially made and photographs printed on Epson media. The critical thing about 3D photography is the printing quality, with any imperfections quickly picked up in the final print.

"While there is still an enormous amount of work to be done, there has actually been a degree of success with existing technologies. We have already been experimenting with Epson LFPs and 3D art prints, and thanks to the printer's incredibly precise ink drop placement capabilities, we're seeing some exciting results.

"Ultimately, though, what's needed is a printer that has multi-layer printing capabilities – and I'm fairly positive that it will be Epson that once again comes out on top."

In summing up his long-standing preference for Epson LFPs and the Epson P-4500 Multimedia Viewer, Duncan says: "Even though I'm in business, if another vendor was to offer me free products in the same categories, it simply wouldn't be worth my while.

"I'll only endorse and use things in which I truly believe are the very best!"



The future vision

As a self-confessed technology enthusiast, Duncan is constantly looking forward – investigating technologies and concepts

For more information on
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