

Chapter 1

A Bird's-Eye View of the Digital Scrapbooking Scene

In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering what's great about digital scrapbooking
 - ▶ Figuring out what you need
 - ▶ Taking a look at some styles
 - ▶ Making sure your work stays with you
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Digital scrapbooking is a fantastic fit for today's fast-paced society — and its tools and techniques are easier, quicker, and more economical to use than ever. Plus, as busy scrapbookers take advantage of the latest generations of printers, computers, and software programs, they're *completing* many more of their projects in record time!

This chapter includes a brief introduction to some of digital scrapbooking's most important features — features we explore more specifically in other chapters: navigating the equipment and program minefields, digitizing scrapbook page elements, choosing a scrapbook style or styles, and saving and sharing pages digitally.

Considering the Advantages of Going Digital

The new equipment and programs adopted by digital scrapbookers have transformed many former skeptics into believers (and users). Even the most technology-shy scrappers are overcoming their hesitations and trying various aspects of digital scrapbooking — especially after they tune in to the Internet and see the spectacular Web pages digital scrapbookers are producing.



Of the many reasons for the increasing popularity of digital scrapbooking, the following are *a few* you may want to remember when people ask you why you've decided to go digital:

- ✓ Digital scrapbooking's strongest selling point is that it saves you time — you can produce and distribute multiple copies of your work quickly and easily.
- ✓ You can also produce easy-to-read text very quickly — and get those stories that have been left untold for too long into digital format. The upshot is that much more of an important story gets recorded than otherwise would have been the case. (For specific info on creating well-designed text to tell the stories that support a scrapbook's images, see Chapters 9 and 12.)
- ✓ Not many can resist these great conveniences and options for sharing their scrapbook pages: printing out digital scrapbooks, e-mailing them as attachments, posting them on the Web, or burning them to CDs and DVDs.
- ✓ Correcting mistakes, editing, moving things around, and revising are much easier and quicker to do digitally than they are by hand. For example, you can size and resize your backgrounds with a few simple mouse clicks.
- ✓ Digital scrapbook pages can include and take advantage of a mix of materials including audio and even video clips (see Chapter 13).
- ✓ Just because you decide to go digital doesn't mean you have to give up the social aspects of traditional scrapbooking (which, like the old quilting bees, have provided a communal creative outlet for thousands of women — and men!). In fact, digital scrapbooking broadens social circles. Many digital scrapbookers get together to share their digital sources and resources — as well as info about how they use their editing programs. They attend scrapbook conventions, go to crop parties, and powwow with all of the other scrappers (digital and traditional). *And*, they talk up a storm in online digital scrapbooking chat rooms (see the appendix for the addresses of Web sites that offer these features).



You don't have to choose between traditional and digital scrapbooking. Digital artists still make traditional (sometimes called *paper-and-scissors*) albums and/or they print hard copies of their digital work. And, conversely, traditional scrappers experiment with digital scrapbooking. In fact, they've been adding digital techniques to their repertoires at ever-increasing rates, especially as it's become obvious that incorporating these techniques can do so much to enhance handmade projects (scanning images, home-printing photos and pages, making original digital background papers, and so forth).

Finding the Tools You Want and Need



Starting a new venture that involves expensive equipment usually calls for caution and restraint — and digital scrapbooking is such a venture. If you want to try it, be sure to look both left and right before crossing “the digital divide.”

We offer you a conservative set of guidelines to start you on your way — guidelines based on *experience*. We think that beginning your travels at a reasonable pace ensures that you get the most for your time, effort, and money. The digital extras you decide to purchase (or not) will largely depend on how elaborate you want your digital scrapbooks to be and how digitally “savvy” you are (or become).



To begin a journey into the world of digital scrapbooking using outdated equipment may actually not be such a bad idea when you're “just looking.” Do remember, though, to make allowances for your finished products should you opt to go this route. The results you can achieve with today's best hardware and software far surpass those you get with older equipment and programs.

Handling the hardware issues

Things in the digital world move so rapidly that what's impossible to accomplish digitally today may be easy-as-pie tomorrow. That's one reason you don't want to spend too much money before you know more about the digital direction you want to take.

Explore the digital scrapbooking hardware scene one step at a time. If you evaluate the benefits of digital scrapbooking as you test drive new equipment and try new techniques, you can gain enough skill and confidence to make decisions that are right for you.

Taking a realistic look at your computer

The most expensive piece of equipment you'll *eventually* purchase is a new computer. If your computer isn't the newest or best on the market, *don't* give it away just yet. Look first at some of the detailed considerations for using the computer you currently own — as well as those that may prompt you to look for a newer model (see Chapter 2).

The level of digital scrapbooking you can achieve with your current computer depends on the computer's processor, its operating system (OS), and the amount of random access memory (RAM) it has. For instance, say you have an older computer with a 200 Megahertz processor, a Windows 98 operating system, and 64 megabytes of RAM. This isn't a "bad" computer, but it limits the programs you can run (most of the newer programs aren't made for this type of system). Still, you *can* use this computer to get a feel for digital scrapbooking and what it can offer.



When and if you feel the time is right for a computer upgrade, you may want to spend a little extra for a laptop model. Laptops have become the convenient choice for many of today's on-the-go scrapbookers.

Deciding about printers

Improvements in color printers (especially inkjet printers) have had a primary role in ratcheting up the importance of digital scrapbooking. And that happens to be one decision you *can* make at the get-go — *do, yes for sure, do* purchase a good, quality printer! Here's why:

- ✓ Not only do you need a good quality printer to print out digital photographs for your scrapbooks, you also need it when you want to digitize and print out an occasional traditional scrapbook and of course to print out your digital albums.
- ✓ You need your home printer for "proofing" your work — even when you intend to have it printed at a high-quality photography store later on.
- ✓ You or someone else will always want copies of digital pages for one reason or another — and it's great to have a printer handy when you need one on short notice.



Digital scrapbooking in Microsoft Word

You can use Word (Microsoft's basic word processing program) to make scrapbook pages. If you want to try this before buying special scrapbook software, just do the following:

1. Under File choose Page Setup and set all margins to 0 inches.
2. Go to Insert and choose Text Box, then draw the box to fit your page.
3. Add colors, lines, textures, and/or images to create a background.

4. Then go to View, choose Toolbars, and select the Drawing Toolbar to find the drawing tools to create fun scrapbook pages.

You can send your pages as e-mail attachments (see Chapter 18) or print them. To print a page, simply go to File and select Print then Properties and click on the Paper tab. Find the Document Size menu and choose the Custom Paper Size or User Defined option to set your paper size for the printer. Piece of cake!

Before you buy a new printer, consider these shopping tips:

- ✔ If your printer is more than two years old, take a few of your files to a discount printing service and have a page printed out to judge printout quality. This will give you a good idea of what kind of quality you can expect from today's digital printers. Comparing these pages with pages printed on your old printer will help you decide how soon you want to handle your printing needs.
- ✔ When you're ready to purchase a new model printer, make sure you choose one that comes with quality papers and pigment-based inks — and check out our information on printers in Chapter 2.



Many digital scrapbooking converts keep their old printers to use as an inexpensive way to print and proof pages.

Making up your mind about digital cameras

Some digital scrapbookers still like to use film for certain occasions. When they get their prints processed, they scan them and then use them as digital images. If you don't have a digital camera, and want to approach digital scrapbooking in small steps, you can do the same thing. If you have your film images put on a CD, you can slip the CD into your computer and save yourself the hassle of having to scan your pictures to get them into digital format.

In the meantime, borrow a digital camera to see how you like it. If you decide to buy a digital camera, *don't* get a super-high-quality model at first. Find a regular digital camera (3 to 5 megapixel model) instead. As is true with many pieces of equipment, it's best not to purchase an expensive version if you've never owned one before. For more on what to look for in a digital camera, see Chapter 2.



Even if you have a wonderful film camera that you love, we encourage you to give digital cameras a try. After you start using that small, easy-to-carry little picture taker, capturing those unexpected and priceless shots, and saving all the money you once spent on film processing, you may wonder why you didn't buy this newfangled gadget sooner.

Sizing up the scanner situation

If you don't have a scanner, have a friend show you how to use one or go to a store that sells scanners to find out what's out there (refer to Chapter 2 for tips on evaluating scanners).

Scanners are available in a wide range of styles and prices. Pick one that fits your budget, but remember to look at the power of the scanning software that comes with the equipment. You want the scanner/software combination that gives you the most features — one that has descreening and easy *scaling* (sizing) of finished scans, for example.



A good quality scanner doesn't have to be pricey. It *does* need the right software. Many people don't tap a scanner's potential because they've previously used a poor scanner/software combination, were disappointed by the results, and don't realize what a quality scanner can do.

Choosing beginning-level software

There are several types of software created specifically for scrapbooking (see Chapter 3 for more information on the options). Some software programs work better on low-end equipment than others, so keep in mind that your choices in software are usually determined by the kind of hardware you're using.

In general, Mac users have an easier time getting their computers to work with scrapbooking software than PC users (this is because Macs are made for graphic applications); *however*, fewer scrapbooking programs are available for the Mac.



Our suggestions in this chapter are for the beginner who wants to conduct low-cost digital scrapbook trial sessions using older computer equipment. Before you spend the big bucks, try the free trial downloads that many of these programs offer. You have only 30 days to decide whether you like a program, but that's usually enough time to give it a try.

You may notice that we suggest different programs in Chapter 3 than the ones we suggest in this chapter. The programs we list in Chapter 3 require a properly configured computer with lots of RAM. You may want to upgrade to those programs later if you decide to work seriously with digital scrapbooking.

Beginning digital scrapbooking software for the PC

We recommend that PC users who want to check out digital scrapbooking get Perfect Scrapbook Maker by Cosmi. At a cost of about \$10 plus shipping, this is an inexpensive way to find out whether you like digital scrapbooking.

HP Creative Scrapbook Assistant — which costs about \$20 — is an additional possibility. Another good choice would be Scrapbook Factory Deluxe by Nova, although the cost of this program is closer to \$40. There are other software programs available, but most of them only work with newer computers that have more RAM (see Chapter 3).

Beginning digital scrapbooking software for Macs

Mac users can get their feet wet with HP Creative Scrapbook Assistant — which costs about \$20. If you decide you love digital scrapbooking, you may eventually want the pricier Adobe's Photoshop Elements. This program sells for \$90 to \$100.

Exploring Popular Digital Scrapbook Styles

When a certain way of scrapbooking gets used and emulated enough, it becomes a recognizable style with its own common conventions and techniques. We list some of the most popular styles and their characteristics in Chapter 5 — and show in Chapters 14, 15, and 16 how to make complete albums using the classic, heritage, and pop styles.



Scrapbook style categories are arbitrary — that is, scrapbookers have made them up or borrowed them from other disciplines and applied them to scrapbooking. You can follow the conventions of a style or mix-and-match as you please. You can also create your own unique styles.

The following bulleted list shows you where to go to get more information about scrapbooking styles — including the classic style, the heritage style, the crafty style, the pop style, and so on:

- ✓ You can discover a lot about scrapbooking styles from scrapbooking magazines. Most of these publications offer suggestions, include examples, give detailed instructions on how to make the digital pages illustrated in the articles, and provide the *URLs* (Internet addresses) of leading digital scrapbook artists — who sometimes respond to your e-mails personally.
- ✓ Many digital scrapbooking sites feature a gallery where you can look at examples of how scrapbookers have handled various styles. If you find something you like, you may decide to purchase a CD of digital resources — which gives you a place to start when you begin working with a particular design style.
- ✓ Online digital scrapbooking chat groups are another good resource (we recommend some groups in the appendix). Just take a gander at what topics are being discussed to see whether any of them interest you. When you find one that does, you may also discover a whole new group of helpful friends.
- ✓ You can also tap in to Web training programs, find out about classes that are being held in your area, and get book references. Many of these books give you step-by-step instructions for creating albums in your favorite scrapbooking styles.
- ✓ In the appendix of this book, you can find several Web sites that feature examples of various digital scrapbooking styles.



When you decide what style you want to use for a particular scrapbook project, you can pencil sketch or make a mock-up for your planned album. We describe the design process in Chapters 4 and 7, including how you decide what the focus of your project will be, how to choose a color palette, and how to create an overall design scheme (take a quick peek at the color insert section of this book to see what possibilities digital design holds in store for you).

In Chapters 6 and 8, we show the best methods for handling, gathering, digitizing, and manipulating your photos and embellishments. We also help you decide how you want to develop your stories and integrate the texts with your album design (see Chapter 9). If you plan to get fancy with some of your graphics and designs (and what scrapbooker doesn't?), we show you how to kick your digital scrapbooking up a notch in Part III (Chapters 10 through 13). You'll love the way these tricks and special effects put *you* and your digital pages in a class with the pros.

Saving Your Work

Although digital enthusiasts continue to argue that storing scrapbooks in digital form makes infinite sense because you can reprint them whenever you want, others counter that no one really knows just how long computer files will actually last on archival quality disks.



In the old days, we thought the information on floppy disks would last for as long as the disk did, but we soon found out that although some disks lasted for years, others went bad after a few weeks. Hard disks aren't totally secure either — especially when you're doing graphics work. Even laser written CDs can go bad and won't last forever. There was a general hope that this data storage system would last longer. It does, but not by as long as we'd hoped. The lesson is that you need to make several copies of your files.

One of the best reasons to take up digital scrapbooking is that it's so easy to *save your work in many different formats* (see Chapter 18 for more details about different formats). In the following sections, we give you valuable info about saving your work. We also give you tips on the following: organizing and storing photos as you take them; saving your work *while* you're working on it; and printing out your pages and projects.

Organizing and saving individual photos as you take them

Once you start taking digital photographs, your computer will be filled with great photos almost overnight. Before this situation gets out of control, you need to develop an image file system. You also need to work out a way to put these images onto CDs or DVDs so you can find them again (see Chapter 4 for our suggestions).



A digital photo album program is a good option for organizing and saving your photos. These programs come in many different configurations, but they all allow you to easily view your images and select which ones you want to use. You can download a variety of photo album programs for little or no cost from the Internet on sites such as tucows.com. Or you can buy a program that is specifically designed to interface with your photo-editing software. Some photo-editing programs come packaged with a photo album program (yours may!).

Saving work in progress

Experienced computer operators know how important it is to save their work frequently. Power surges, program freezes, computer overheating, crashes — all of these sudden surprises can result in lost files. If you make a habit of saving often (or see if your program can be set to save changes automatically), you won't have to redo much if you happen to experience a computer problem.



Save your sometimes hard-won filtered images in a special file (see Chapter 11 for more info about filtering). Just because you know how you created the image doesn't mean you can do it exactly the same way again. If you like the result you achieved by applying one or more filters to an image, save it.

Storing your digital images



Store your images on your computer but *also* store them somewhere else as well. Computers break — and when you're working with graphics and graphics programs, they seem to crash more often than they do when you're using the computers just for word processing or other types of work. You don't want to lose your graphic images in a computer crash disaster.

Store your photographs and scrapbook files on a CD or DVD as a backup to your computer hard drive. When selecting a CD or DVD writer choose one that can *write in sessions*. That means you can keep adding to the CD or DVD disk until it's full.



There's a difference between a CD or DVD player unit and a combination CD or DVD player/writer. It's a good idea to have a professional install a CD or DVD player/writer unit because not all aftermarket CD/DVD player/writers are compatible with all types of computers. You need to buy one that's compatible with your system. CD/DVD drives write at different speeds: 8x, 16x, and so forth. If you purchase 16x for an 8x system, you won't be able to write

data to it using your computer. Also, be aware that just because your system has a CD/DVD installed doesn't mean that it's a drive that can burn disks. To verify that your specific drive has the ability to burn disks, look on your sales ticket for these letters: CD/W or CD/RW or DVD/W or DVD/RW.



Back up important information onto several distinct brands of CDs or DVDs and then store these various copies in different locations to protect them from fires or other disasters (keep one extra set of backups somewhere other than your house). Most experts say we should refresh or reburn our data disks about every seven years — onto the next generation of (better and/or *new and different*) digital storage media.

Preparing your printed images for storage

You may want to print images for storage or in order to use them more immediately in your traditional scrapbooks. Either way, you want to make sure that you create the best possible prints by keeping the following points in mind.

Flattening your image

It's important to flatten an image before you print it out. When you *flatten* an image onto one layer, you transfer all of the layers you used to make the image onto just one layer (see Chapter 4 for more info about layers). You can save the other layers in case you want to move things around separately again, but when you're going to print, make and save a flattened file for that purpose.

First of all, a flattened image prints faster — a lot faster. Secondly, you can't save the page in most file formats until it *is* flattened. If you think you may want to use the image in different ways in the future, save it in the *native format file* (the file format your program typically uses) of your photo-editing program, and then also save it (flattened) in a format that's easy for your printer or your friends to use.



Personal printers used to do a little better with TIF images than they did with JPEG images. Recently, however, most programs have upped the quality of the JPEG images they produce. Today, the high-quality JPEG images printed out from the new generation of photo-editing programs usually are every bit as good as the high-quality TIF images — which have long been the yardstick for image quality.

Setting the resolution of your image

In the past, most good home printers could only handle about 150 to 200 pixels per inch (ppi) resolution — even though the printer box text often claimed to be able to handle 600 to 1200 ppi. If you ran an image at 150 ppi and the same image at 200 ppi, you couldn't see a lot of difference. If you printed out an image at 300 ppi, the only difference you would notice is that it took longer to print. In some cases, the image may look a little darker, but not much.



Today, the story is a little different. The higher resolution images from the new photo printers really are better — providing you use the matching brand-name high-quality glossy photo paper (though the highest cost doesn't *always* equate exactly with highest quality). If you use regular plain paper, or even super white inkjet paper, the old 200 ppi rule still holds.

Archiving your printed pages

Saving and conserving a printed digital scrapbook page is the same as preserving a traditional scrapbook page. You need to protect the page from harsh light (especially sunlight), place the work in page protectors, and shield your scrapbook pages from excess heat and humidity — see *Scrapbooking For Dummies* (Wiley) for more on archival issues and concerns.

As a scrapbooker, you may wonder if a printed scrapbook page is as achievable as a traditional scrapbook page. If you print your pages on your home inkjet printer and use the brand name paper that matches your printer and your printer ink, the page should be reasonably permanent. If you have your scrapbook page printed out at a quality photography store, the image should be as long lasting as any other photographic print.

Sharing Digital Files

Digital scrapbooking has this advantage over conventional scrapbooking: After a digital file is saved, it can be digitally duplicated countless times. If you print out your scrapbook and then spill coffee on it, you can print it out again. You can copy the file and send it to your sister in Detroit. If she loses it, you can easily send her a new copy. If you have 27 friends who want copies of your scrapbook, you can make 27 inexpensive copies in short order — one for each of them. For a more detailed explanation of digital sharing see Chapter 18.



Even traditional scrappers go digital when it comes to sharing their material with others — partly because there are so many ways to do it:

- ✓ The most basic way to share digitally is to scan and print out your pages at home or at a photo store — or, you can use both methods if your purposes call for that.
- ✓ Some people share their scrapbook creations via e-mail to be viewed on a computer monitor. You can use one of several computer file formats for this, but the PDF format is probably the most universal, the most flexible, and the most preferred.
- ✓ Another method for distributing your scrapbook pages is to save and share them on disk. A PDF file doesn't print out very well, so if printed copies are wanted, send a CD to accommodate the higher resolution files.
- ✓ You can also create and share your files on a Web site.

Get Ready, Get Set . . . Scrap!

A proper workspace is essential for digital scrapbooking. You may have all the right tools, but if you can't use them effectively and effortlessly, they don't do you any good.



You don't have to dedicate your working space exclusively to scrapbooking — but space does need to be available when you want to use it for your digital scrapbooking projects.

Look at the area you have in mind for setting up a designated scrapbooking “station” with these questions in mind:

- ✓ How can I maximize the space?
- ✓ How can I get the most out of my equipment?

Creating a comfortable and functional workstation

Scrapbooking takes space and this doesn't change just because you've chosen to do it digitally. You need a flat, level surface for your computer, printer, scanner, and computer supplies so you can effectively spread out your materials when you're working. Go through the motions of preparing a project to get an idea of how much space you need and how to place your equipment pieces strategically.

The following tips will help you buy equipment that meets your actual needs:

- ✓ Purchase a good computer stand. It won't matter what it looks like, but *what it does* is crucial. You need to know where everything is when you're working (and it has to be out of the way when you're not). The stand lets you store your equipment compactly, protect it from damage, and use it safely and easily).



One major purpose of your computer stand is to organize and contain the rat's nest of cords that lie in wait to trip you and break your connections, plugs, and receptacles.

- ✓ Consider getting a rolling computer platform. Its mobility adds some useful options to your working environment and can minimize the distances between individual pieces of equipment.

- ✓ Another important consideration is the chair(s) you have to sit on. No matter how comfortable a computer chair is, it will become uncomfortable after long hours of use. Plan periodical breaks, and swap chairs to give your back a rest.

Preparing for action

To create a great workspace, walk yourself through the following steps. Take them one-by-one until you've checked out each item on this activity list. When you're ready to go, you'll know you've done everything possible to make your digital scrapbooking experience a great one!

1. Identify what space you have available for digital scrapbooking.

You probably want to center this space around your Internet connection.

2. Decide what types of equipment you *eventually* want to have and determine how big (or small) a space you need for all of it.



Make a detailed sketch of how you want to connect your equipment. If you have new equipment, you can connect everything through USB connections: USB 2 connections are fast, expansion hubs are cheap, and it's simple to borrow cables or purchase more cables for new connections. Another popular connection system uses wireless connections — not quite as fast, but you eliminate most cord problems. Another plus: You can place your equipment throughout your house and it all still works together.

3. Plan your proposed work area to determine how and where you will perform various digital operations: scanning, printing, typing, and so forth.

4. Shop for appropriate computer furniture and compare prices.

This step can save you money. And you may find some new designs that can increase the usability and functionality of your scrapbooking workspace.

5. Find out what other digital scrapbookers like in terms of equipment and workspace.

Try to do this after you have already gathered some information on the topic so that you can recognize a great idea when you see one.

6. Purchase as much of your digital work station equipment at the same time (or close to the same time) as possible.



Include your computer and your peripherals (scanner, printer, digital camera, and so forth). If you buy these items years apart, they may not work well together — although you won't run into as many conflicts as we used to encounter with older equipment.

