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PRE-PRESS (2)

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Electronic Picture Desks

Today, although the story may remain the most important element, pictures, graphics and layout are now major considerations. While the general consensus has always been that newspapers need pictures wherever they can heighten the impact of the news and give it realism, even the most conservative papers are bowing to the market requirements for more colour and more visual impact.

There is a trend towards illustrating news stories with better pictures and the improvement in the relative significance of pictures has caused many newspapers to move towards a layout orientated product. Of the new generation of full-page newspaper pre-press systems, they all allow the integration of images and the image sizes and positions determine the space left where the text can flow. In subsequent stages of production, time is saved and quality usually enhanced by digital picture handling. Later deadlines and more time in which to leave the page open is compensation enough.

As an adjunct to a more visual and immediate world, picture capture is moving closer to the editorial department. The general aim is to make the two operations more complementary. Editors should be able to share their desk with a terminal that can show pages complete with current text and low resolution images. As part of this digital scenario, electronic picture desks and digital picture news services for newspapers have arrived.

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Research Engineer

February 1992

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The term "wirephoto" has been used to refer to a picture transmitted as an analogue signal from a news agency and "newsphoto" to refer to a photo transmitted digitally.

In using the term "proprietary" to describe certain types of computer, the intention is to distinguish between computers that have been designed for a single special purpose and "standard platforms" which are widely used general purpose computers. Sun SPARC and Apple Macintoshes workstations are considered "standard platforms", even though they are proprietary and are only obtainable from one manufacturer, as they exist in their hundreds of thousands or millions.

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Introduction

The development of picture desks started in the late 70's. Associated Press, AP, had an electronic darkroom in 1979 that gave them the ability to send pictures digitally and to computerise darkroom tasks. Some of the pioneering for digital transmissions lay within the IPTC's technical committees who, as early as 1979, started to study and specify digital telephoto transmission systems. Certainly, it would not have been possible to have as many digital services beginning so quickly within such a short time had it not been for the standardisation of digital newsphoto formats i.e. "**IPTC/ANPA Information Interchange Model**" and the "**IPTC/ANPA Newsphoto Parameter Record**". The German news agency dpa was the first to use an EPD in day-to-day operations in Europe, even though the network was analogue. 1990 saw the launch of AP's digital picture service, PhotoStream. AP have increased the quality and expectations of service from photo agencies considerably. The other agencies really have had to try and compete.

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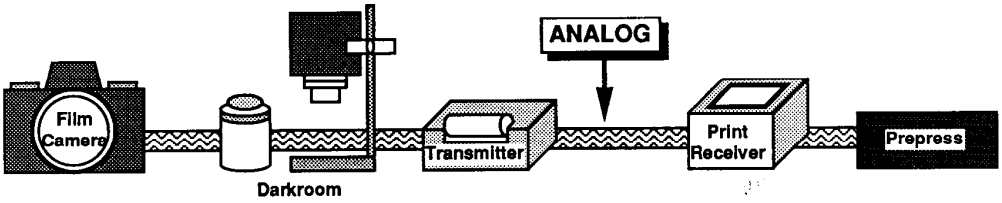
Since AP provided each of its US clients with a digital electronic picture desk (EPD), the numbers of such units and systems has increased steadily. At present AP has about 1200 EPDs installed — mostly in the USA, but extending worldwide. Crosfield has also won orders for the installation of several hundred — over 160 with the German press agency, dpa and over 100 for the Canadian Press press agency. Companies like AFP, Hasselblad, Reuters, Sinclair Imaging and Tecnavia have hundreds of EPDs installed and working continuously.

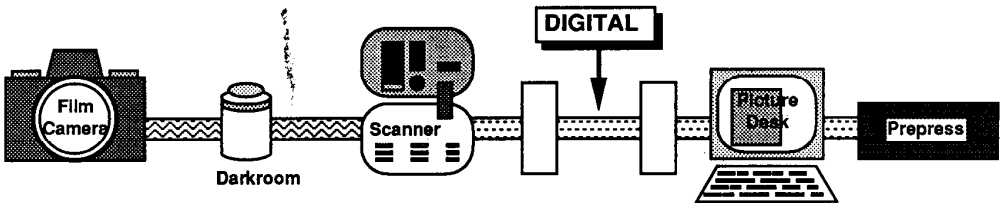
Advantages of Electronic Picture Desks

No doubt, there are many forces driving the newspaper industry towards using EPDs:

- the move by picture agencies to offer a better service via a digital satellite link. Once committed to using satellites for transmission, the agencies are also committed to encouraging newspapers to use the service to cover their extra investment.
- the desire of newspapers to receive colour pictures quickly and in greater quantity. The process is being urged on by photo bonanzas like the summer and winter Olympic games. The need for colour pictures, speed and complete coverage of the events mean digital transmission and EPDs are the best solution. These could be called predictable peaks in picture supply and demand and have a real influence on sales and installations of EPDs.
- the multiple economic and qualitative advantages for newspapers of receiving pictures digitally.



Negative scanners have replaced part of the darkroom work which has meant faster handling and better quality. Transmitters now compress and send the images in digital form over analog phone lines.



The advent of electronic picture desks replacing print receivers means that the image can be kept digital through to the prepress (some day, right to the press).

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