The History of Photographic Image Fading, with a Suggested Strategy for the New Hard Copy Media

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Abstract

Image fading has impacted the technology and the commercial development of the photographic industry from its beginning. As the color hard copy industry brings photographic quality printing to the desktop, the context for the hard copy fading issue will change dramatically. History teaches that rapid fading can be a business disaster, but that, once "moderate" light and dark stability is achieved, the market will not choose a high-cost or inconvenient product just because it is permanent. Kodak's experiences included a "honeymoon" in the 1950s and 1960s where stability was poor, but runaway growth and fascination with color made the stability issue unimportant. In the 1970s, however, public outcry, suits by professional photographers, an FTC complaint, and claims of deceptive advertis-
ing by vocal critics all added up to a major problem. Kodak built a formidable testing operation to inform management and the public of the facts on stability and invested heavily in improved dye technology.

Some of today's hard copy prints have quite poor light stability (much poorer than current color photos) and largely untested dark stability, and the industry has not had 25 years' experience in managing the stability issue. While lightfastness occupies the attention of the public now, fading in a drawer or album is equally important when color hard copy prints become "photographs." All this would strongly suggest that a detailed review of the issue, creation of a corporate oversight group, and anticipatory planning would help the color hard copy industry avoid the unpleasant experiences of the past.