

How the Emerging Profession of Photo Organizing is Reconnecting People with their Photos

Cathi Nelson and Lisa Kurtz, Association of Personal Photo Organizers (USA)

Abstract

A new grassroots industry called personal photo organizing has been growing to meet the needs of consumers who are overwhelmed with their lifetime of photos. We live in an increasing, complex technical world, yet, as human beings, we have not changed in our need to tell a story. It is through stories that we connect and one of the ways we tell our stories is through our photos. With the introduction of digital cameras and mobile phones, people are now taking photos at a record pace and sharing them on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other photo sharing sites.

Yet, people are also finding they don't have time to sort through and organize the thousands upon thousands of photos they are accumulating, let alone print them. The result is a consumer who is overwhelmed and paralyzed. In addition to digital photos, hundreds of thousands of printed photos languish in shoeboxes and bins. Thus, the need for a solution has emerged and the photo organizers are stepping in to fill that need. There are now hundreds of small independent business owners offering their services in 48 states and six countries. By providing personal one-on-one assistance, the photo organizers are helping consumers reconnect with their photos and videos again.

At the conclusion of this presentation, the attendee will have learned why there is a need for photo organizers, who the target market is for photo organizers, how a photo organizer charges for their time, the five most common services a photo organizer provides, and how the Association of Personal Photo Organizers supports this growing industry.

The Need: The Statistics Are Staggering

The numbers of digital photos taken every day is staggering. A survey of 1,169 regular photo takers “reveals that Americans now take more than 10 billion photos every month, bolstered by the ever-present mobile phone, which nearly 60 percent of respondents say is their primary photo taking device.” [1.] Although the number of digital photos taken has exploded, there has been little effort to educate the consumer on best practices such as naming, collating, and protecting those precious images. In fact, the average person does not have a backup plan in place nor a system for easily finding their best and favorite photos. The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters estimates that each day, “seven million dollars worth of phones are lost or stolen”. [2.] As mobile phones have become the camera of choice for many families, a stolen phone can include a family’s entire photo collection. Finding, organizing, and protecting their digital photo collections are not the only issues consumers face. Many have a lifetime of printed photos that they consider priceless. We know the first thing many want to rescue from a burning building is their photo collection but they often languish in shoeboxes, basements, and attics. Why? That amount of time and effort to organize, sort,

and collate a collection is often overwhelming. Many people assume they will get to it *someday* but someday often never comes, until there is a trigger such as an illness, retirement, funeral, wedding, milestone anniversary, or birthday. Again, the numbers are impressive, 1000 Memories estimates that there are over 1.7 trillion paper photos stored in albums, attics, and shoeboxes while Scan Café estimates that Americans have taken 550 billion non-digital photos. [3.] All of these photos represent the heart and soul of a family’s story.

Today, people are able to connect with their family memories in multiple ways and video is an increasing focus. As photo organizers started working with individual clients, they quickly found families asking for assistance with their home movie collection. These numbers are also significant. “Video tapes, like VHS, have been one of the most successful consumer products ever fielded, and some 6 billion tapes have been sold in the US with an average length of 2 hours each. That’s 12 billion hours of footage of new babies, first steps, weddings, barbecues, and graduations. But video tapes were never meant to be a permanent medium, and irreparable signal loss strikes them in as soon as 20 years, even when stored under optimal conditions. Yet, less than 1% of these memories have been transferred to digital, a much more durable and lossless format. The remaining 99% are still very much at risk”. [4.] In addition, the ability to view these 6 billion tapes in not an option any longer because most devices have become obsolete.

These numbers barely scratch the surface of the overwhelming need in the marketplace. The members of APPO report back every day of one on one meetings with customers who have come to them for help. Many have become frozen with anxiety. Smart people are struggling with information overload. As a society, we went from having simple, proven ways to take and print photos to a full-scale Vegas all-you-can-eat buffet, all in the course of approximately 15 years. People are drowning in options, in technology, and in data. Here is the truth: Too many options cause indecision and the average consumer is having a tough time making decisions. This is where the photo organizer can step in and offer personal, one-on-one assistance.

The Photo Organizers: Who Are Our Clients?

The Photo Organizers work with an average of 4-6 clients per month, primarily women, who are considered the gatekeeper of their family photos, memorabilia, and video collection. Clients generally come from double income homes in the \$75,000+ income bracket. Often the main household photographer, but not exclusively, this group of women range in age and span three specific age demographics.

- Working moms of school age children
- Working moms of adult children, new grandparents
- Newly retired moms and young seniors

Although diverse in age, this group of women share common similarities. They have a strong desire to capture and document their children's lives and pass on a legacy of photos and stories. They recognize the emotional impact that photos have and how positive memories and experiences contribute to the self-esteem and emotional health of their family. [5.] They have a keen desire to connect generations through stories, photos and shared memories. They do not need to be persuaded about the importance, and are often plagued with guilt, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy about not being able to manage their photos.

The working moms within this demographic have many challenges, despite their overwhelming desire to *do something* about their photo mess. Their time constraints are significant, often involving the demands of work and caring for school age kids and college age adults while meeting the physical and emotional needs of aging parents. Their photo collections include printed photos and memorabilia and out-dated home movie formats. Besides their own collection, they may also be in possession of their parent's collections, which include heritage photos, slides, and 35mm and 16mm film movies. They also have a growing digital collection spread across multiple devices. Their comfort level with technology varies, depending on whether they adopted early, on trend or post trend. Regardless of their comfort, most feel overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of digital options for organizing and sharing and tend to rely on recommendations from people they trust. This group of women are more likely to hire out most aspects of their photo organizing work, or take on the least time consuming tasks while working with their photo organizer. Their desire to work with a photo organizer is often triggered by a sense of urgency as a result of a significant life event like an upcoming graduation, anniversary, special birthday, new baby, marriage, or death of a loved one.

Retirees and young senior clients are downsizing, or planning to downsize and struggle with the complexities of duplicating and dividing their photo collections to pass down to multiple children. Their technology comfort level is significantly less than younger female clients but their desire, sense of urgency, and opportunity to move forward is much higher. This group of women have put off organizing their photos and view this task as a 'retirement project'. They are more likely to be involved in the process by working alongside the photo organizer and/or learning through the organizer.

Clients from all age groups have a tendency to bond quickly and early in the client/organizer relationship. Photo Organizers learn family members names, birth dates, and other important details to organize timelines and photo groupings. During the process, clients share numerous family stories and insights that often result in a level of intimacy that we feel is unique to photo organizers and critical to their ongoing, long term relationship. Clients develop a high level of trust very quickly and easily, through the natural process of sharing photos. Once that bond is established, clients rely almost exclusively on the organizer for ongoing work, support, education, and product/service recommendations.

Emerging Opportunities:

Secondary markets are beginning to surface and gain traction within our member base.

- *Businesses, Associations, and Organizations:* These companies and organizations often have photo collections and archives that need to be digitized and documented.
- *Genealogists:* There is a growing interest in family history and research where the focus is often on collecting information, photographs, and artefacts. Photo Organizers help organize, display, and archive their findings.
- *Attorneys:* Divorce and Estate Attorneys encounter photo collections that need to be duplicated and divided, often amidst emotional family circumstances. Photo Organizers offer a neutral option for completing the work efficiently, and quickly.
- *Single Working Fathers:* In most cases, this client surfaces as a result of divorce, separation, or loss of spouse who was the family archivist and keeper of photos.

The History of APPO

Cathi Nelson founded APPO in 2009 after spending 17 years as a leader in the direct sales company, Creative Memories. She introduced the hobby of scrapbooking to hundreds of clients in the Northeast while recruiting other professionals to do the same. By 2002, Cathi had a team of over 1,000 members whose annual sales were 1.7 million. Cathi was always an innovative leader who saw the value in hosting large *Crop 'til You Drop Events*, where as many as 1,800 women would come and spend 12 hours working on their photo albums. By 2005, Cathi began to notice a shift in the marketplace. Her team sales were dropping as more and more people shifted to digital photography and began to stop printing their photos.

In 2005, Creative Memories introduced two digital software applications to their sales force. One product helped organize photos and the other used digital artwork to create digital scrapbook albums (Over half a million were sold before CM declared bankruptcy). The focus of Cathi's business shifted from selling a product to training her sales force and customers on how to use the software. The direct sales business model does not endorse charging a fee for services but is built on sales volume; thus, Cathi found herself spending hours offering training on a product with a retail value of \$39.95. The commission she earned was minimal while the time investment was considerable. She also noticed a trend in abandoned shopping carts; her customers would start to create digital photo albums but rarely completed the project.

Eventually, a customer insisted she pay Cathi for her time and cited the fee she paid a professional organizer as justification and an example. Upon arriving at her home, Cathi realized it would take months to accomplish all the goals her client had: back up and organizing digital photo collection, printed photo organizing of inherited family photos, and conversion of home media as well as album creation for family gifts. With a check in her pocket and ten more appointments, Cathi had a vision for a new business model.

In 2008, she started her own business called PhotoSimplified to test her idea and was amazed at the response from clients. Soon, professionals began to ask for assistance in starting their own photo organizing businesses. In response, she founded The Association of Personal Photo Organizers (APPO) to support the new and emerging profession of photo-life management. Since its

inception, APPO has grown to hundreds of members throughout the United States, Canada, Australia, and United Kingdom.

APPO is a growing membership organization comprised of professionals who specialize in helping their clients deal with their growing collection of printed and digital images, media, and memorabilia. Commonly referred to as the Photo Organizers, they are a community of people: professional organizers, photographers, graphic designers, storytellers, historians, direct sales professionals, and people who love photos and stories. Through training, education, networking, and collaboration, we strive to advance the new and growing profession of photo-life management.

APPO collaborates with various partners in the industry to provide products and services to the Photo Organizers, and to help drive awareness about the services Photo Organizers provide. APPO seeks out partners who understand the value of a mutually beneficial relationship, offer quality services and products, and who value and contribute to the ongoing education of Photo Organizers

APPO provides two levels of membership. A limited monthly membership called the Backstage Pass appeals to photo enthusiasts and other professionals who want access to quality product partners for personal and professional use. Professional membership appeals to individuals who want to offer personal photo organizing services. Available on a yearly or quarterly basis, professional membership benefits include: discounts and commissions through product partners, private member forums and Facebook groups, a custom web page, listing in APPO directory, discounts on specialized training, events, and certifications, New Member Training Series, monthly training and educational webinars including access to our webinar archive, 50% discount on APPO Certification, and access to business forms, marketing material, and resources.

APPO and its members abide by a *Code of Ethics*, which is a set of principles for Professional members, to provide guidelines in our professional conduct with clients, colleagues, and community. As a member of the Association of Personal Photo Organizers, our members agree to conduct business honestly and ethically. We constantly strive to improve the quality of services and maintain a reputation for honesty, fairness, respect, responsibility, and integrity, trust, and sound business judgment.

APPO created a Certification program to provide professionals and consumers with an assurance of competency and standards in this new emerging field. Certification involves basic instruction in core competencies like Client Management, Sales and Marketing, Photo Organizing basics, Business Management, and Project Management.

5 Common Services Offered and Revenue Model

The ultimate goal of the Photo Organizer is to bring memories back into people's lives in a tangible way that captures their story. Knowing each family has a story to tell through their pictures, videos, and other artefacts is often the driving mission behind the work a Photo Organizer does. The end goal for a Photo Organizer is to ensure that the family or individual has easy access to their most important photos, they are secured (backed up and archived),

there is a long term maintenance plan in place, and that their clients have several ways to enjoy and share them.

Photo Organizers provide assistance in three ways. They provide education and guidance for clients who want to perform their own hands on work. They work alongside clients who prefer the one-on-one support of a professional while being involved in the project. They perform all the hands-on work for the client or facilitate the subcontracting of this work like a general contractor. The most common services clients utilize are as follows:

Printed Photo Organization: Involves sorting and purging, cataloguing, and archiving for long term storage. Memorabilia and other important artefacts are included in this category. This service is conducted onsite or in the Photo Organizers home.

Digital Photo Organization: Involves curating images from multiple devices, sorting and tagging, finding duplicates, and creating an ongoing photo management workflow. Organizers install backup systems, cloud backups, and arrange online photo albums. This work can be done onsite, or remotely from the organizer's home.

Scanning: Organizers scan printed photos, slides, and scrapbook albums for clients. Some Photo Organizers own high-speed scanners like Kodak PS50 or PS80 and perform this task themselves. Many others work with local photo retailers and larger 'mail away' services that have been vetted by APPO.

Home Movie Conversion: Organizers identify, sort, and facilitate the conversion of old out-dated movie formats. Most Photo Organizers work with local Photo Retailers or larger mail away services that have been vetted by APPO.

Photo Output Services: Organizers create photo books, scrapbooks, slideshows, wall displays, and photo gifts. Some Photo Organizers design and create these products, others subcontract this work out to others who specialize, or they use online design services. They use and recommend a variety of output services and base their decisions on cost and quality of product, ease of use, and client need.

The revenue model for Photo Organizing is established independently by the Organizer, and may include any or all of the following:

Hourly Rates: Organizer charges an hourly fee and invoice client based on time involved in the project.

Half day and full day, time packaging, or bundled hour packages: Many Organizers set a minimum standard for their services especially for long-term clients, and incentivize clients with savings through bundled hours.

Value Based Packages: Organizer includes a finite number of hours with some sort of completed project like a printed photo book, with additional value added bonuses.

Product/Service Commissions: Organizers leverage product commissions, discounts, referral fees, subcontracting fees, and affiliate revenue for an additional revenue stream.

Outlook to the Future

The long term prospect for those who are interested in providing service based solutions to clients overwhelmed with the changing technology is excellent. Forbes magazine writer, Eric Savitz, in his article, *Services, Not Manufacturing, Will Revive The U.S. Workforce*, elaborates, "when people think services, they may at first think of consumer services, as in the hospitality industry.

But look under the hood. Think about Apple and IBM as service companies. There's a much more interesting domestic phenomenon here: the rise of high growth and high value technicians who deliver a new world of advanced services for businesses and consumers alike. This important and strategic function has led to the creation of thousands of new jobs for Americans." [6.]

Essentially, the personal photo organizer is bringing the concept of the highly successful Apple genius bar into the homes of consumers, "it's high tech, high touch, a killer combination."

Client Testimonials:

"My family said, 'You hired a what?' 'Yes, a certified photo organizer'. They are thrilled with the results. We now have albums with photos and memorabilia dating from the 1800's from my family and my late husband's family. Nancy saved me from my photo paralysis of where to begin and how to organize everything. Her ability to listen, encourage, suggest, and assist is amazing. She also offers invaluable services for photo and negative reproduction and preservation and anything needed to successfully archive your valuable memorabilia. What a wonderful and ongoing experience." - Margaret

"When my mom and dad were watching the romantic DVD created by SoCal Photo Solutions - I could sense the emotion in the room. The way the pictures of their past love, melted right into the music. It was so touching to see my mom and dad falling in love back again; through images and music. I'm so grateful for what you created Nancy, thank you times a million!" - Kayvan

"Since our first child was born almost eight years ago, we have taken countless photos, which are saved on various formats like CDs, DVDs, and memory cards. Doris has organized our tens of thousands of photos of our three children onto a single device so that we can now view our years of memories easily. We love to view photos of our kids at various ages and photos of family events that are all arranged conveniently by date and in clearly labeled

folders. The photos can be shared online with friends and family members and are viewable on any device. All the photos are safely backed up in cloud storage so that we don't have to worry about losing any of our memories. We are grateful that we were introduced to Doris and highly recommend her service to anyone who wants to organize and preserve priceless family memories." - Tiffany and Daniel Cohen

References

- [1] November 13, 2014, Shutterfly Research Reveals Americans Are Taking More Photos but Failing to Share Memories
- [2] World Disasters Report 2012, International Federation of the Red Cross
- [3] Scan Cafe, San Francisco, CA, November 18, 2008
- [4] BURLINGAME, Calif., May 10, 2011 /PRNewswire
- [5] New York Times: The Stories That Bind Us, Bruce Feiler, March 2013
- [6] Forbes Magazine: Services, Not Manufacturing, Will Revive The U.S. Workforce, Eric Savit, April 2012

Author Biography

Cathi Nelson received her BS in Communications from the University of Connecticut (1981) and her MALS from Wesleyan University (1990). Prior to founding the Association of Personal Photo Organizers, she was in the top 1% of leadership with the direct sales company, Creative Memories. She has spoken on photo organizing at conferences throughout the U.S., including NAPO, NASMM, PMA, Roots Tech and Spark and Hustle and is a founding member of The Save Your Photos Alliance.

Lisa Kurtz is the Director of Operations and Training at APPO and a seventeen-year veteran in the photo industry. Prior to APPO, Lisa owned and operated her own Photo Organizing business. Formerly a top-level leader in the Canadian market for Creative Memories, Lisa provided sales training and leadership coaching for a large organization that reached 2.5 million dollars in annual sales and was a frequent speaker and trainer at numerous National and Regional Conferences.