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Hero of the Lab – Jeff Heads

Every professional print lab has its own hero, this hero ensures the highest possible quality to be delivered to the customer. They are photo enthusiasts and experts in their field. In our opinion these heroes deserve a spotlight, therefore we will ask every month one Hero to tell his or her story.

This time we have interviewed Jeff Heads, Lab Manager at Digitalab (digitalab.co.uk). It is always an inspiration talking to Jeff about the photo imaging business. He is one of those Originals who can show and share his passion for photography and is a true advocate for creating prints.

Who is/are Digitalab?

Digitalab are a forward-thinking professional photo lab based in Newcastle, UK. Now currently in it's 70th year of business, Digitalab is a family business now owned by Jill Roe, whose grandfather started the business, then known as Mobile Photo Services, back in 1949. Back then Jill's Grandad used to go around the local churches and collect the films from the wedding photographers on his motor bike and take them back to the Lab. Originally combining a Lab with a camera shop, a



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move to new premises in 2007 saw the business change its name to Digitalab and concentrate on providing the highest quality Lab services (printing, mounting and framing are all done in-house) for Professional Photographers, Galleries, Designers and Museums. We were proud to win 4 awards at this year's SWPP Convention in January with the award of Best Professional Lab being the most satisfying to me personally.



Who is Jeff Heads?

I am the Lab Manager at Digitalab and have been with company for the last 19 years. My main responsibility is to look after quality control of the Lab and ensure consistent print quality across the range of printers that we use within the lab. With a recent increase in demand, I now also personally oversee all the Qualification Panels and Photographic Competition prints that we produce. Landscape photography is a personal passion and about 10 years ago I had a book of panoramic images of our region published... my photography is purely a hobby and a way of relaxation, as anybody who follows me on Instagram will know.

Tell us about your professional background

I originally trained as a Commercial and Industrial Photographer for a leading studio in the North of England. I soon found that I had an aptitude for the darkroom side of the business, in particular in the art of printing. Having become Lab Manager there, I then moved on to become the Hand Printing Supervisor at a leading Pro Lab in the North East of England that specialized more in the Wedding and Social Photography. With the experience of working in a commercial photographic studio and also printing for Wedding and Portrait photographers, I think I have quite a unique understanding of not only what our photographic clients require, but also what their customers require.

What has inspired you to enter into photographic printing business?

I had always had an interest in Art at school and went on to do a Foundation Course in Art and Design, with the initial intention of becoming a Graphic Designer. Part of that course was photography and I think it was something about seeing a printed image gradually appear in the Developer tray that really inspired me. It was like some sort of Black magic... or should that be Black and White magic?

Can you tell us about your Passion within the Imaging business?

That's easy, it is definitely working on an image and seeing the end results as a physical photographic print. It's something real, something that you can touch and not just a collection of pixels on a monitor... a stage that far too many images don't get beyond these days. Seeing a series of prints that I have personally printed and worked on with a photographer, displayed as an exhibition, is one of the most satisfying experiences.



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How do you think digitization has influenced photographic printing business?

Digitization of the printing process has enabled us to do things to an image in a much shorter space of time than previously possible and also improve and edit images in a manner that could never be achieved when printing from negatives or transparencies. The ease of workflow of digital exposure of images onto photographic paper means that images can be produced much faster, more accurately and more consistently than could be previously achieved with analogue printing. The combination of digital control and the continuous tone print quality of c-type prints simply gives the best prints possible. The ease of transfer of digital images and our user-friendly online ordering system has also allowed Digitalab to provide customers with prints not just in other parts of the UK but also to other parts of the world.

What do you like most about Fujifilm Original Photo Papers?

Fujifilm photographic papers have the most accurate colour reproduction and the quality and consistency between batches of paper make them a pleasure to work with. The technical back up and expertise from the Fujifilm team is also something that we know we can rely on whenever needed.

Do you have any favourite types of Fujifilm Original Photo Papers?

I personally love the new Maxima paper that Fujifilm have recently released. The increase in the D-max (better blacks), the improvements in shadow detail and a wider colour gamut, along with an HD sharpness has already made it very popular with our customers. My other favourite is Fujiflex, ideal for commercial and fashion photography where the superb colour vibrancy comes into its own.

How do you see the future of professional printing business?

At Digitalab we are seeing a turnaround from the early days of digital, when printing declined for the Professional Labs and many photographers printed their own work. The complicated world of Colour Management and the time and cost of printing their own work means that using a Professional Lab not only saves money but they can spend their time being more productive in taking photographs and leaving the printing to the experts. Just like vinyl is making a revival in the music industry "the print" is also seeing a resurgence. This along with a growing interest in shooting on film again, which we still process despite our name, means that the prospects for the Professional Labs are bright.



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What advice would you give to upcoming photographers?

I would advise them to print more of their work. Apart from the personal satisfaction they will get from seeing their images in print, they will also enhance their photography skills from getting their images printed. Many of the best photographers I know have been printers in the early part of their careers. Many new photographers who only supply digital files are also missing out on business opportunities by not selling prints or Wall Art. So print more, learn more and earn more is my advice.



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