

The **Spotlight** Is on...

Digital Photo Academy: Cool School for Photography Fanatics

By Jon Sienkiewicz

NO ONE REALLY KNOWS WHY SOME PEOPLE CATCH THE “BUG” AND RAPIDLY MORPH FROM BEING A CASUAL SNAPSHOTTER INTO A FULL-BLOWN, FANATIC PHOTOGRAPHY ENTHUSIAST. The availability of affordable, high-quality equipment is surely part of the equation. Having an artistic eye for composition and an appreciation of a properly made photo are key elements as well. Sadly, many people who have the photographic talent never catch fire because they can't get past the complexity of their cameras. Others stall on a lower rung of achievement for lack of mentoring and encouragement.

The good news is that technique can be taught, and motivated hobbyists can be transformed into bona fide photography mavens who, in turn, motivate others to enjoy their cameras more. And motivation is what the Digital Photo Academy is all about.



Richard Rabinowitz with wife, Jill Enfield, a well-respected professional photographer

Richard Rabinowitz, president of Rainmaker Marketing Services and parent of Digital Photo Academy, puts it this way: “We help people who enjoy digital photography become passionate. Our 60 instructors are all ardent professional photographers as well as knowledgeable teachers. They enjoy helping amateurs and aspiring pros get turned on and expand their abilities.”

DPA, as the Digital Photo Academy is more commonly called, is proud of the fact that during a tough economy they've found an efficient and effective

way to help manufacturers and retailers drive business, and at the same time keep 60 pros busy. “My biggest sense of satisfaction is working with Panasonic and a few staff members to build a program that brings education to the consumers who then patronize the retailers, and equally important, contributes to the income of 60 professional photographers who teach 1,200 classes around the country for us,” Rabinowitz said.

“Our instructors are all professional shooters who collectively have published dozens of how-to and coffee table photo books. They string for many major magazines, including titles like *Sports Illustrated*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Vanity Fair* and newspapers like the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today*. Plus they count many of the Fortune 500 companies as their clients.”

DPA sponsorship is strictly limited to six manufacturer partners. Panasonic is the anchor and has been a sponsor since the inception of DPA. Currently, three other manufacturers are in “test mode” with DPA. Rabinowitz encourages an extended evaluation period because tests allow sponsors to assess the results before making the final decision and long-term commitment. Test programs with Datacolor, Nik Software and Lensbaby are presently under way.

Datacolor is already experiencing the benefits of partnering with DPA. Together they have produced a series of short videos that feature professional photographer Frank Veronsky to aid in the introduction of new products.

“Richard and the Digital Photo Academy have organized a powerful group of 60 pro shooters around the country who teach classes, and who can spread the word about our Spyder products,” said Christoph Gamper, vice president of the con-



A Trek-Tech sponsored Digital Photo Academy event, held at Adorama in NYC in June, was a “huge success.”

DIGITAL
Photo Academy
BY **Panasonic LUMIX**

sumer business unit at Datacolor. “We have already produced some videos with him and he has worked an arrangement with Hunt's in Boston for our first demo in their Melrose location for 30 students this December. Digital Photo Academy is the perfect vehicle to educate end users and get them to stores to buy product.”

“From a business point of view,” Rabinowitz added, “one generalization rings true and applies to all educated consumers: they spend more on their hobby, both in terms of hardware and services. Additionally, we create cheerleaders. Our graduates become ‘recommenders’ and ‘specifiers’ to their peers. You hear it all the time: ‘Mary just took a photo class; let's ask her what kind of camera we should get for our vacation.’”

“It's not a matter of cameras being too complicated to use,” he went on. “We help people master the fundamentals and develop their talent, whether they are just starting out with a simple point-and-shoot model or a more complex digital SLR. There are constantly new cameras, software, lenses and so on coming into the market—so many that consumers simply cannot keep up. And the salespeople who work at even the best camera stores have a hard time staying ahead of the curve simply because of the nonstop flood of new and improved camera equipment that shows up in their stores everyday.”

That's why the Digital Photo Academy, which currently offers over 1,200 seminars in 21 cities covering every major market from coast to coast, is partnering with retail stores and providing seminars and other activities for their consumers.

Ritz Camera has been a positive influence on the development of the program. “I don't think anyone understands the importance of an educated consumer more than Ritz Camera,” Rabinowitz said. “David Ritz and Bob Devita have been great partners on a variety of programs over the years, with organized and creative ideas. They have been supporters of Digital Photo Academy since we started.”

Hunt's Photo & Video is enjoying successful promotions with DPA. The Datacolor event that's planned for later this year is part of a full promotional schedule that kicked off with a Nik Software demo.

“Digital Photo Academy has already held one consumer event, with free Nik Software demos, in our Melrose location,” said Gary Faber, vice president of Hunt's Photo & Video. “It was a huge success and very much appreciated by our customers, plus we were



Photo by Sara Cedar Miller, official Central Park photographer.

The first Digital Photo Academy gathering with instructors, DPA staff and Panasonic's team, April 2007. Each year, instructors fly in from around the country to spend a few days with the sponsors, learn their latest developments and discuss ways to promote DPA.

able to generate awareness among the 5,000 Digital Photo Academy students who may not have already visited our stores,” he continued. “In October, DPA is leading a Photo Walk in the area of our Boston/Cambridge location, and in December we will offer a free Datacolor Spyder color management seminar in our Melrose location. Everything—all of the details—can be found on our website and on the Digital Photo Academy site.”

Trek-Tech tripods sponsored a Digital Photo Academy event in June. It included an in-store demo at Adorama in Manhattan for 70 participants who appeared in staggered groups of 15. The results were a “huge success,” according to Trek-Tech sales manager Ken Ouder Kirk.

“We're very excited about the results of the DPA event at Adorama,” said Ouder Kirk. “We really packed the store. They set a new single day record—a mix of in-store and Web sales. Plus, there is an ‘afterglow’ as well, and the sales have continued at a higher level. The awareness of our products with the Adorama sales staff has definitely increased, too! In fact, a couple Adorama employees are purchasing TrekPod Go's of their own. And believe it or not, customers who saw the demo at the end of June were still coming in a month later and asking for it. The entire event was a huge success for everyone involved.”

What's next? “We've also begun a series of webinars,” said Rabinowitz. “Every other Tuesday evening. We're working with another division of Panasonic. They use our instructors and content for their website, LivingInHD.com. The webinars have been very well received and, again, when products are mentioned on the broadcasts, the participants follow up with questions and purchases.” digitalphotoacademy.com □