

ORGANIZING DIGITAL KITS AND ELEMENTS

By Hummie

One of the most asked questions in the digiworld is how to organize all of the paid kits and freebies downloads. The answer to this question is that there is no easy answer. I provide some ideas and suggestions of various methods below, but the choice is individual. There is no one right or wrong way to organize.

There are three basic methods to organize digital kits and elements: folders, software, and hard copy. Use one method, a combination, or all three.

FOLDERS

Creating folders

Naturally, the first method digiscrappers think of is to begin creating folders. I would suggest taking the time to first decide what system of organization for folders and subfolders to create. Take a moment to make a folder tree. Making a decision before you get started is much easier than reorganizing later, moving folders and renaming them.

Difficult decision arise when files might belong under more than one folder. You will need to decide which folders trump the other folders for your own personal system. This is why planning a system ahead in written form will help.

The categories of organization to consider when setting up a system of folders are:

- 1) Designer Name
- 2) Site/Shop Name
- 3) Theme
- 4) Color
- 5) Type of Element

It is important to note that often designers will move from one shop to another. Also, some designers will sell at more than one site. This should be taken into consideration when preparing a category tree of folders.

Also, if the “type of element” category is utilized, separating individual files away from the rest of the kit, it is difficult to give a designer credit. In addition, should you decide that you like a particular designer’s products and want to purchase more from that designer, it is difficult to recall who created which files. It is important that the file names of each individual element contain the designer’s name (and kit name, if applicable). New designers sometimes have not learned the importance of naming files yet. If you separate elements out by type of element, it is difficult to keep the TOU

(terms of use) file with each element. This is why this method is not preferable. Often the files will only have the designer's initials on the file name and it is difficult to determine who uses those initials.

How you will arrange your tree will depend on what is most used by you. For example, some people would place a designer name as priority over theme; some people would place color as a priority over designer name. When browsing for a kit to use, what is it that you most often search for? Consider this when creating your tree of categories.

The following are some examples of trees of categories:

Example 1

Main Folder: Digital Kits

- Name of designer
 - Kit Name
 - Freebies of designer
- Colors
 - Name of color (contains shortcuts to kits)
- Themes
 - Name of theme (contains shortcuts to kits)
- Shops
 - Name of shop (contains shortcuts to kits)

Example 2

Main Folder: Digital Kits

- Paid Kits
 - Theme Name
 - Kit name
- Freebies
 - Name of designer
 - Kit name
 - Name of shop
 - Kit name
- Colors
 - Name of color (contains shortcuts to kits)
- Themes
 - Designer name (contains shortcuts to kits)
- Shops
 - Name of shop (contains shortcuts to kits)

Example 3

Main Folder: Digital Kits

- Name of Store#1
 - Name of designer
 - Kit name
 - Freebies
- Name of Store#2
 - Name of designer
 - Kit name
 - Freebies
- Colors
 - Name of color (contains shortcuts to kits)
- Themes
 - Name of theme (contains shortcuts to kits)

Example 4

Main Folder: Digital Kits

- Paid Kits
 - Theme Name
 - Kit name
- Freebies
 - Type of element (ie. paper)
 - category of type of element (ie. striped paper)
- Colors
 - Name of color (contains shortcuts to kits)
- Themes
 - Designer name (contains shortcuts to kits)
- Shops
 - Name of shop (contains shortcuts to kits)

I have found that I utilize the first example because I relate the kits to the designer's name. Certain designers are my favorite designers and I look for their kits. I have not created the shortcut folders, but wish I had from the beginning. By the time I choose a system, the organizing was a bit overwhelming and I could never find the time to go back and organize them more. This is why it is so important to choose a system from the beginning.

Creating shortcuts

A solution to files belonging in multiple files is to make use of shortcuts. Right click on any folder and choose "create shortcut." It will create a new folder beginning with "shortcut to" followed by the name of the original folder. Move the shortcut to the appropriate folder.

Backing up Considerations

I would also suggest that considering how you will back up your files. For me, using Windows, I put all of my folders under My Documents and then I backup My Documents onto an external hard drive. As long as I have everything I want backed up as a folder under My Documents, I know I will not miss backing up anything.

If backing up to CD's or DVD's, consider adding the kits to disks immediately. Another option would be to create a temporary folder until it is full enough to write those kits to disk and, thereafter, move the kits to organized folders.

Keeping Kits Together and Terms of Use

Most digiscrappers would agree that it is best to keep kits together. It is also important to keep the TOU (terms of use) that are provided by the designers with the kits. Often designers neglect to name their folders and elements correctly and it is difficult to determine who the designer is and which store the items are located. This information can be found in the TOU as long as it is kept with the kit. If the designer does not provide a kit preview in the download, it is a good idea to right click and save a copy of the preview at the site where you purchased the kit.

Batch Renaming

If you really do not want to mess with folders and folders, another option is to batch rename your files. In this way, a search of the files on your computer would point the way to folders. For example, if you have an orange and purple birthday kit, batch rename all of the files to begin with orange.purple.birthday. You may even add to that new name the designer's name and store name. There are many programs that will batch rename, including Picassa, Photoshop Elements, ACDSee, and others.

Another option would be to just rename the folder name, rather than each individual file, to appropriately contain all the information needed.

Giving Credit

One reason it is so important to organize kits is so that you will have the ability to properly give credit when sharing your layouts in galleries and e-mail lists. A good suggestion for keeping track of credits, especially if you mix and match from different kits, is to rename the name of the layer in your program to contain the information of each particular element. Another option would be to keep a text document with notes for every layout created or a separate text document for each layout to be saved in the same folder with the layout file.

Read my tutorial on internet shortcuts. Add internet shortcuts to designer's sites directly in the folders.

Thumbnail Previews

It is helpful to have folders and files set to thumbnail previews. To find a kit in a certain color, for instance, a browse through the thumbnails of folders would indicate which folder might contain what you are looking for.

To see the **individual files** within a folder as thumbnails 1) in Windows XP, open up the folder, click on the Edit drop down menu on the bar at the top of the page, and choose Thumbnails 2) in Windows Vista, open up the folder, click on the View drop down menu, and choose Small, Larger, or Extra Large icons.

To change the options for the **folder** thumbnails 1) in Windows XP, right click on the folder and choose “properties.” In the popup box, click on the “customize” tab. In the first box, choose “photo album.” This view will place four different random items from within the folder on the folder thumbnail. Another option is to click on “choose photo” to browse through the folder to choose a preview image of the kit. 2) in Windows Vista, right click on the folder and choose “properties” In the popup box, click on the “customize tab. Under “folder pictures,” click “choose file” to browse through the folder to choose a preview image of the kit.

A more often used alternative to choosing the folder thumbnail image is to simply copy the preview file and rename it “folder.” This only works for .jpg or .gif images. Many designers will include this file in their downloads for your convenience.

Zipped Folders

Another question that is asked often is whether or not the zipped folders need to be saved. Do not save the zipped folders. If you ever need to zip them up again, that is easy enough to do. Right click on a folder and choose “send to” and then “compressed (zipped) folder.”

SOFTWARE

The Basics

There are software programs in which you can assign tags, labels, or keywords onto each individual file. Thereafter, search tools are utilized to locate the files. For instance, if you would like a green tag for your layout, a search of green and tag would bring up every tag matching both criteria.

These programs require a lot of time to assign the tags. For a new scrapper, it is helpful to start this organization process from the beginning as it is less overwhelming.

For someone who already has a large collection, set a goal to work on the tagging; ie, a certain amount of time each day or week; a certain number of folders each day or week.

Many of the software programs that are used to make digital layouts also have accompanying programs for file organization. Rather than purchasing and running a separate program, you may want to utilize what you already have installed.

Picassa was initially the most popular program to use, especially since it is free. However, ACDSee, which is a program for a nominal cost, has become the most popular. Bridge is another top program. I also recommend the new Windows Photo Gallery which is free.

Programs and Databases

For me personally, I have never taken the time to tag. To understand my reasoning, a bit of knowledge of how the programs work is needed.

Most of the programs store the tags in a separate “database” file. This database must be linked to the location of the folders on your hard drive. Therefore, the program should be utilized as your main browser. In other words, rather than always viewing your files by just clicking on a windows folder to open them up, one would open up the folders from within the program. If a file is moved outside of the program, the program no longer knows where the file is located. The database will be pointing the tag to a certain file and the file will no longer be located in that location. If files are moved from within the program, the program associates the tag with the new location.

The database file must be backed up, just as your photos and kit files are backed up, in case of a hard drive failure. If this database file is lost, all of the time spent tagging will also be lost.

I have read time and time again where someone has lost all of the tagging, either due to a hard drive failure or a database no longer associating with the correct files. To lose all of the time spent tagging is not something I personally want to risk. Therefore, to this date of writing, I have not used the tagging method personally; however, many scrappers do. You must choose for yourself the weight of the risks.

Programs Write Tags into Files

It should be noted, however, that programs are beginning to move from a database system to writing tags directly into the properties of the files. Initially, this could only be done for .jpg images. With the every changing versions of software and technology, it is difficult to keep this tutorial up-to-date, so please do research the newer version capabilities before choosing software programs.

1. The Photoshop Elements Organizer has the capability to write tags into .jpg's, but it needs to be done manually by clicking the options to

write the tags into the file. This option is in addition to the database that is created automatically.

2. ACDSee could write tags into jpg's, but only in the Pro version which was more costly.

3. Bridge automatically writes the tags into the files. It is the program I am most interested in exploring further. I believe it now also will write tags into .png files, but it utilizes a "sidecar" technology. However, you cannot purchase Bridge as a separate program. It is packaged with other programs. The program does come with Photoshop Elements in the Mac version (rather than the Organizer), as well as other Adobe programs, such as the full version of Photoshop.

4. Windows Vista comes with a program called "Windows Photo Gallery." This program also writes tags into the .jpg files. I feel this is a GREAT alternative as a free version.

One option to consider is to tag only the previews. Previews are .jpg files and, therefore, the tags can be written into these files.

Another consideration is whether or not a program can read tags from files on a CD, DVD, or external hard drive (removable storage). Due to storage issues, many scrappers do not keep all of the files on the hard drive, but rather work from removable storage options.

Another consideration to observe when choosing a program is whether or not tags (key words) can be batch assigned. For instance, can you select multiple files and assign a tag with one click? Can you search for a certain file name, select the multiple files, and assign a tag with one click? This speeds up the tagging process.

Remember that most programs come with a trial version so that you can test them before purchase.

Name	Price	Notes
PSE Organizer	included with PSE for Windows	This program utilizes a lot of RAM and that is the main reason I do not use it. Will write tags into files if done manually. http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshopelwin/
ACDSee Photo Manager	\$49.99	Pro version with more tools available. http://www.acdsee.com/

Adobe Bridge	(included with Adobe packages)	Writes tags into files, including .png files. Creates list of items as you do layout. http://www.adobe.com/products/creativesuite/bridge/
Windows Photo Gallery	Free (already on Vista computers)	Writes tags into .jpg files. Edits photos http://download.live.com/photogallery
<u>Picassa</u>	Free	Will not read pspimage files. Edits photos. Software created by Google. http://picasa.google.com/
Digital Image Library	\$49.95 - included with Digital Image Pro (DIP)	Program has been discontinued for sale.
<u>FXFoto</u>	\$49.95	http://www.fxfoto.com/
<u>IPhoto</u>	\$79	An Apple program. Mac users take note. http://www.apple.com/ilife/iphoto/
<u>Jasc's Photo Album</u>	\$29.99	Created by Corel who offers PSP program. http://www.corel.com
<u>Kodak EasyShare</u>	Free	http://www.kodak.com
<u>Photo Impact Album (aka Photo Explorer)</u>	\$29.99	http://www.ulead.com/pi/
<u>PreClick</u>	Free for limited time (\$18.95)	http://www.preclick.com/

As in the folder system, there is a wide variety of categories for tagging. You will need to create your own organization most workable for your own personal use. Here are some suggestions to get you started.

1) Color: Red, Blue, Green, Orange, Purple, Yellow, Brown, White, Black, neutrals, bright, pastel, primary, muted, monochromatic, etc.

2) Theme: holidays, seasons, baby, floral, masculine, heritage, travel, birthday, girl, outdoor, food, animals, pets, school, love, wedding, carnival, parade, denims, metals, vacation, sports, vintage, old-fashioned, etc.

- 3) Designer Name
- 4) Site/Shop Name
- 5) Type of Element: Alphabet (categories of fabric, glass, plastic, metal, stamped, stone, wood or by shape of square circle or stand alone), Beads, Bookplates, Bottle Caps, Bows, Brads, Buckles, Buttons, Charms, Corners, Doodles, Envelopes, Eyelets, Fabric, Flowers, Frames, Hinges, Journal Strips/Mats, Mats, Misc. elements, Mounts, Nails, Overlays, Paint Chip Strips, Paper/backgrounds (categories of brushed, circles, crumpled, diamonds, dots, grunge, metal, misc. patterned, scratched, striped, templates, stars, textured, words, numbers), Paper Clips, Prongs, Quick Pages, Ribbons (categories of gingham, dots, rickrack, stitched, plain, twill, grosgrain, patterned), Slides, Staples, Stitching, Tabs, Tacks, Tags, Tape, Templates, Vellum, Wax Seals, Wire, and Word Art

HARD COPY

The final way to organize and find items to use on scrapbook pages is to print out a hard copy of the files and place them in binders. This is especially a good idea for those items you put on CD's and DVD's. Some people just prefer to sit away from their computer and browse for papers and elements in a book on their lap. The books are also portable so that you can be viewing them while waiting at doctor's offices or on the sidelines of a sports field.

Utilize the "contact sheet" tools with your printing software. See my lesson on printing with the Windows Picture and Fax Viewer.

Contact sheets can be printed in duplicate or triplicate and placed under different categories in binders (ie, colors, themes, designer). A tab system to mark the categories is helpful.

Another option is to print out the kit previews and keep them in a binder.

The downside to this method is the use of printer ink.