THE CHILTERNS ASSOCIATION OF CAMERA CLUBS

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How to run Projected Digital Image competitions

Nearly all club members now use digital cameras, and clubs run projected digital image competitions.

This advice assumes you will be projecting at the club venue. It does not cover any extra requirements for managing on-line competitions eg, via Zoom.

You will need a projector and a computer (see separate advice), and you will also need software to display the images and perhaps manage the competitions. You can project the images with one of the many album-type programs, lots of them free, and record results manually. Or, there are competition-specific software packages available to take much of the effort out of organising projected digital image competitions. Whatever way you choose, there are three steps to successful projected digital image competitions:

Step 1: Gather the entries

You need to publish some rules and guidelines for your members - you may want to make these as simple and unrestrictive as possible to encourage entrants who are new to digital processing and for whom image sizing, data compression and colour spaces are arcane mysteries. How restrictive your rules are will depend to some extent on the facilities of your chosen software.

At a minimum, you need to specify the image file type(s) that your competition software can accept. It should always accept jpeg: tiff is rarely used.

You should state the image size of the projector that you will be using (e.g. 1400 pixels wide x 1050 high or 1600 pixels wide x 1200 high). Most imaging software will automatically resize images that are larger than the screen size, but this loses image quality and should be seen only as a fail safe. Entrants should size their images correctly before sending them in. Images that are smaller than the screen size should be projected with a black background.

Your projection software may dictate how image files are named, and you need to tell your members what is required. The file name is often used to put images into a suitable order, and may help to aggregate scores in a league table.

You may want to specify a medium for transmission. Electronic submission is usual (see separate advice) and on-line entry is feasible.

You need to set a deadline for entries that gives you enough time to include them in the competition, and also clear up any queries.

When your members select their images and send them to you, you need to record who has sent which file and any title. If you want to send an acknowledgement or the results, you will also need to record the member's e-mail address. Try and make sure the member's name is recorded exactly the same for each competition - for example, always "Phil Jones" and never "Philip Jones". Otherwise, you will have problems when you try and aggregate scores.

Step 2: Run the competition

The software should allow you to:

- Sequence the images into a suitable order
- Run though the images as a preview
- Step through the images for judging, and allowing you to hold some images back
- Show the image titles, if required, although you can also announce them
- Show only the images that have been held back
- When the scoring is complete, show the winning images
- Competition-specific software records the scores, but album software requires manual recording

Competition-specific software might also be able to:

- Print score sheets for pen-and-paper scoring, which is always a desirable backup
- Handle more than one category in a competition
- Allocate 1st, 2nd, 3rd and Highly Commended positions
- Accept scores from multiple judges
- Accept competition data from other clubs for inter-club competitions
- Package the competition so that it can be sent to an external judge or reviewer

Step 3: Publish the results

If you have recorded the scores on your computer, the software may well be able to manage the results for you. At a minimum it should print the results (for the club notice board), but it may also produce an HTML file for the club website, or send each entrant their results by e-mail.

The software may also be able to maintain a league table by bringing together the results from all the competitions that have happened so far in the year. It may also store the results, or export them, in a format that can be read by programs such as Microsoft Excel, so you can manipulate them as you wish.

Getting started

It is worth spending some time thinking how your club runs competitions and imagine how this could be improved. Also think how you manage competition results and imagine how this could be improved if the scores were already on the computer.

Next look at, and preferably trial, the available software and find a package that does (most) of the tasks you have identified. Talk to other clubs, and see how they manage.

Competition Structure

In addition to existing competition categories such as set subject, pictorial, portrait, classes of author, etc there is the possibility of dividing entries by degree of digital manipulation. This has been used successfully by some clubs, but be prepared for lively discussion - quite extreme manipulations may be undetectable in the finished image.

There is a steep learning curve in getting optimal quality when preparing and presenting digital images. The same image may look very different on the monitor at home and projected at the club. It might be advisable to make opportunities available for club members to preview their images on the club projector under the same conditions that will be used for the competitions.