

Many photographers improve their products and services by collaborating with other imaging professionals. Three teams show what photographers can achieve when they include others in the creative process.

## COLLABORATORS

By Jeff Kent

# Creative partners

Tapping the wealth of artistic collaboration

### PHOTOGRAPHER + COLOR EXPERT AND PRINTING CONSULTANT

About a year ago, David Goldman decided to redo his portfolio. He'd been a successful

photographer in the music industry, shooting album covers, concert images and celebrity portraits, but after moving from L.A. to New York, he wanted to change his focus

to portraiture and travel photography. He wanted a knock-out presentation to draw high-end commercial and advertising clients.

Goldman had been presenting his images in acetate sleeves in a standard leather portfolio. Now he needed something with more class. Researching his options, he came across a color management and printing specialist in Brooklyn named Andrew Mitchell.

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©Sterling Cecil Hoffman

At right is the digital painting Bob Nolin created from Sterling Cecil Hoffman's original image (above).

Mitchell made a name for himself with his exemplary color management skills and fine-art printing acumen. He works with a variety of photographers, from retail to commercial to fine art. Much of his work begins with color management. He does customized sessions with photographers, traveling to their studios to color manage their entire workflow for their specific output needs.

Mitchell is also a photographer, which helps him talk the talk with his clients, and help them avert potential print problems before they happen. "Most of the problems people are having these days are print related. That's where I come in. I can spot things that many photographers may not see, like the proportions are off, or there's an imperfection in the image, or a color shift, or if the cropping will cause problems. I can see the things that will be magnified once images are blown up. It's a matter of having a trained eye that sees differently from someone who photographs but doesn't work on prints," he says.

Mitchell began by color calibrating Goldman's computer and setting up effective color profiles. He counseled Goldman on paper selection, ink, reproduction of color and other presentation variables. Goldman produced his portfolio page layouts with the help of his girlfriend, an art director. He chose a sophisticated duplex Moab paper, then turned over the printing and assembly to Mitchell.

"The final product has been awesome,"



©Sterling Cecil Hoffman

says Goldman. "It looks like a fine-art book. With my old portfolio, people would flip through casually, not caring about the pages, and not always focusing their attention on the images. These new books have a gentle essence to them, a fine-art feel that commands attention. People turn the pages carefully and really look at the images. They tend to take more time with the book. Everyone comments on how beautiful it is. I like to think that reflects back on my overall work."

*To check out more from David Goldman, go to [www.davidgoldmanphoto.com](http://www.davidgoldmanphoto.com).*

#### PHOTOGRAPHER + DIGITAL PAINTER

Portrait photographer Sterling Cecil Hoffman and digital painter Bob Nolin work together to create high-end photographic paintings. Hoffman offers paintings as specialty products in addition to normal photographic prints. Available in watercolors or as

"Masterworks," the paintings represent valuable product diversity for Hoffman's very upscale clientele.

Catering to the Washington, D.C., area, Hoffman has been selling paintings for more than a decade. He had grown dissatisfied with his original painter and was looking for a fresher, more painterly style. When approached by Nolin, Hoffman ordered a couple of sample portrait paintings. Nolin excelled at the artistry and the photographer-painter relationship began.

For a typical job, Hoffman sends images on CD to Nolin's studio, A Work of Art, near Pittsburgh, Pa. In addition to digital painting, which he applies with Corel Painter, Nolin does a wide range of retouching work in Photoshop. Hoffman may ask him to retouch certain areas of a portrait, eliminate background objects, or perform more sophisticated image enhancements. From

there, he specifies the style for the painting, then lets Nolin work his magic.

Upon completion of the painting, Nolin e-mails a preview for approval. Hoffman sends back fine-tuned adjustments before Nolin ships him a CD of the finished work. Hoffman has all the paintings printed at his lab, H&H Color. Masterworks go on stretcher-framed canvas while the watercolors are produced on watercolor paper. The portraits are then framed and delivered to the client's home.

Nolin's work also helps Hoffman up-sell to larger portraits, often in sizes his clients wouldn't have considered for a standard photograph.

"It is our goal to position ourselves for the big sale. So, we need to have options available for the clients who want to make significant investments in their portraiture. The watercolor and Masterworks paintings give us those options," says Hoffman.

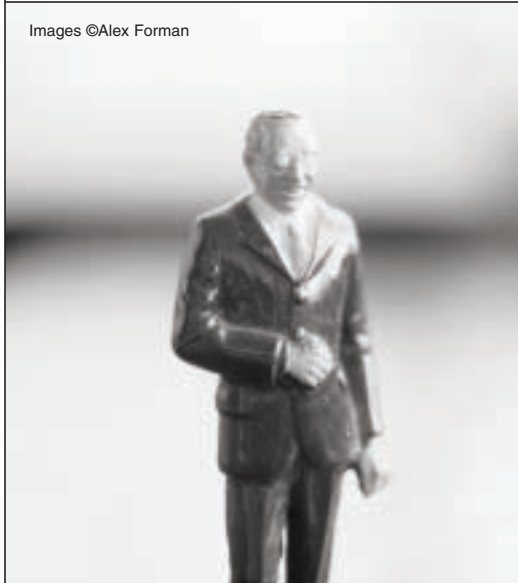
Selling the watercolor and Masterwork paintings has been a definite financial boon for Sterling Portraits. Paintings range in price from \$2,640 to \$22,000, depending on medium and size, and can cost as much as 66 percent (or \$8,800) more than unpainted photographs. Hoffman estimates that 10 percent of his total sales come from the paintings. For his studio,

which grosses more than \$1 million a year, that's roughly \$100,000 in painting sales.

With such big money at stake, Nolin's work needs to be consistently superlative. He takes that responsibility very seriously. "Outsourcing this type of work is a matter of trust," says Nolin. "I think it's a great honor that my clients want to include my work on their images, and still put their name on it and sell it as their own. I do my best to produce work that enhances what the photographer originally created. It's a true partnership where everyone wins."

*To see more of Sterling Hoffman's work, visit [www.sterlingportraits.com](http://www.sterlingportraits.com). Visit Bob Nolin's Web site at [www.bobnolin.com](http://www.bobnolin.com).*

Images ©Alex Forman



## PHOTOGRAPHER + PRODUCTION AND PRINTING EXPERT

Alex Forman is a fine art black-and-white photographer. She'd been working on a project called *Tall, Slim & Erect*, photographs of a series of plastic-cast figures of United States presidents, and realized she needed the prints to be large scale. Working with a medium-format camera, she produced 36 images that she wanted printed nearly 6 feet tall. The prints would be displayed in gallery shows and had to be of impeccable quality. "I needed printmaking that would allow these pictures to have depth, life and dimension," says Forman.

After sampling a few printers, Forman came across Amadou Diallo's studio in New York. Diallo is a digital printing and imaging specialist. His services start with editing and digital enhancement and extend through final output. He also helps photographers improve their editing skills and set up a digital workflow.

For the most intensive projects, Diallo begins with examining images with the photographer and discussing options for the reproduction. He shows the photographer how various kinds of prints look on different papers to educate him on choosing an appro-

priate medium for the image content. Diallo will even conduct supervised editing sessions. A photographer will describe a look, and Diallo will work with him to achieve that look through digital darkroom techniques.

An accomplished photographer himself, Diallo was the perfect creative partner for Forman. He understands how photographers think, the way they conceptualize and express themselves. "A lot of people can offer these services from a technical standpoint, but they can't relate to photographers. For example, photographers will say, 'I want the images richer,' or 'wetter,' or 'I want it to breathe.' I turn those aesthetic terms into ones and zeros."

For this first project, the printing needed to be as precise and artistic as the capture. "We worked really closely," recalls Forman. "I pushed Amadou in a lot of ways, and he pushed me to consider new things. We would sit at the computer and look at different elements to tweak certain things. We went back and forth on paper choices for a long time. He was really generous with his time and eager to push the limit of what he thought was possible. It was a real collaboration."

In the end, Forman and Diallo printed the series on Somerset Velvet Watercolor paper, each print measuring 67 inches tall. It wasn't until the final output that Forman saw her artistic vision fully realized. "Amadou is more than a technician. It is absolutely different when you are working with an artist. It can be complicated sometimes, but not with Amadou. He always understood my intent with the project, and he found a way to achieve what I was looking for. The image in my head of how these presidents should look was so clear to me, but other printers couldn't accomplish it. With Amadou I had that 'ah-ha!' moment of realizing the full potential of the images." ■

*To see more of Alex Forman's Tall, Slim & Erect project, visit [www.tallslimerec.com](http://www.tallslimerec.com). Visit Amadou Diallo at [www.diallophotography.com](http://www.diallophotography.com).*

## DIGITAL DELEGATION

Outsourcing production has never been easier BY JEFF KENT

©Bob Nolin



The size, style and resources of the business dictate how much delegation one can afford, but outsourcing any production task can free up a business owner's time, and his focus.

In professional photography, digital imaging brings an entirely new dimension to the workflow. Digital photography means spending time on image editing, processing, online proofing and other post-production work. Some photographers say they allocate as much as 90 percent of their time to tasks other than photographing. That's a problem—photographers make money by making photographs.

Many studio owners have hired full- or

part-time employees just to handle production. Hiring such a person is a good solution if you have the resources, but not all studios can justify the extra salary. Luckily, there's a variety of options for outsourcing much of the time-consuming post-production work.

Shoot.Edit ([www.shootdotedit.com](http://www.shootdotedit.com)), for example, is a full-service editing and processing house that does RAW conversions, rough edits, artistic edits, image sorting, renumbering and categorizing. When the work is done, the company uploads the edited files directly to an online proofing host or order fulfillment service. As its slogan says—"We deliver free time



©David Goldman

to clients all over the world”—Shoot.Edit claims to save wedding and other professional photographers 10 to 20 hours of post-production per week, depending on the size of the event.

Another option comes from Lavalu ([www.mylavalu.com](http://www.mylavalu.com)), a customizable, outsourced workflow solution for pro photographers. Lavalu offers rough and artistic editing, color correction and album design. They will also create and upload online galleries, prepare proof products, build DVDs for delivery to clients, and even customize reprint fulfillment with retouching. Lavalu's goal is to cater each job to the specific photographer, rather than offering an overly standardized process. Every photographer gets a dedicated technician who will get to know his brand, style and clientele,

then customize a menu of processing services and oversee the production.

Several companies perform post-production as part of a larger business model. At Laguna Albums ([www.lagunaalbums.com](http://www.lagunaalbums.com)), for example, everything revolves around album design. Staff designers will help photographers with density and color corrections, as well as retouching. Laguna designers then create a customized album layout, print the pictures and assemble the album, and ship it to the photographer. Several other companies offer similar services, and there are also numerous independent album designers.

For those seeking a close working relationship with their post-production provider, there are scores of individual specialists throughout the country. Most of these pros work with a specific studio or lab, but a growing group of independent practitioners are accepting multiple freelance contracts from different photographers. For an arrangement like this to work, photographers should understand enough about production work to provide substantive guidance to their digital tech. Many digital techs rightly consider themselves artists. With that in mind, the most productive arrangements between photographers and digital imaging specialists are those born out of a highly interactive, creative collaboration.

Independent digital techs are filling a growing need in the industry for dedicated post production professionals. Many of these experts bring a specific expertise, such as color management or actions-based Photoshop enhancements. These services work well with other service providers, such as online proofing hosts, order fulfillers, printers and specialty product makers. With the rise of Internet-based companies like Collages.net

([www.collages.net](http://www.collages.net)) and Pictage ([www.pictage.com](http://www.pictage.com)), photographers have some sophisticated options for outsourcing all of their proofing, online print sales and order fulfillment.

Users of both services still need to perform their own post-production—or hire a pro to do it for them—but then the online services handle everything else. Collages.net even has desktop software that allows photographers to manage their entire workflow in one system, including uploading images for order fulfillment.

Pictage counters by giving photographers an online album design tool for quick and easy album creation. Perhaps the biggest advantage is that both companies will take orders, print images, ship directly to customers, collect payment, and handle all customer service. The companies even offer marketing initiatives and sales incentives.

Several traditional labs have improved their online interface to compete in the Internet printing market. White House Custom Color ([www.whcc.com](http://www.whcc.com)) has stepped up its online printing presence, as have Buckeye Color Labs ([www.buckeyecolor.com](http://www.buckeyecolor.com)), Miller's Professional Imaging ([www.millerslab.com](http://www.millerslab.com)) and many others. All boast simplified ordering, diverse products, easy image organizing and posting, and optimum online interactivity. Now photographers can upload, click a few buttons, and place large-scale, customized orders on behalf of multiple clients.

Digital imaging has certainly created a busy world for the do-it-yourselfer, but it doesn't have to be that way. For those who want to break the mold and get back to the business of making photographs, the options abound. There's a little delegator in all of us—just let him out!