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[Anybody Needs Easy Photo Processing?](#)

Do it yourselves with Digital Image Starter Edition!

Yesterday we checked Adobe's answer to Microsoft's assault on the computer graphics software market, and now it's time for its opponent. Until now I reviewed two beta versions of applications from Microsoft's upcoming Expression software suite, but today we have a complete consumer-level graphics application waiting to be highlighted. Microsoft Digital Image Starter Edition is an application much lower priced than Adobe Photoshop Elements 4, but also different. No matter their individual features, they do have one thing in common, and that is the market they try to conquer: digital photography enthusiasts with low to medium budget. This program was previously known as PictureIt!; now it has a new name and also includes a part of Microsoft PhotoDraw, a discontinued vector drawing application.

Digital Image Starter Edition has three modules: the Library, the Editor and the Photo Story. The installation kit has 109MB, much smaller than Photoshop Elements, and the price is also smaller, only 34.99\$. Compared to most trial programs, Digital Image offers a real bargain - no less than 60 days for you to test this program completely free of any charge! These being said, let's move on and start today's trip! **The Library** Most programs that include a librarian module call it "library", "manager", "organizer" or "librarian", and Microsoft didn't break this rule. The Digital Image Library offers you the tools needed to organize your pictures and videos, using file properties, labels, captions and ratings to do this. Photos can be imported from your hard drives or devices such as scanners or digital cameras, but they are not separated into categories. You have only a menu item called Import Pictures and Videos inside the File menu, but it should be enough. I was surprised in a positive manner by the batch operations available in the Library. There are three batch operations which can be performed from the File menu: rename, convert and resize. The Digital Image Library interface is intuitive and easy to use, and has the following elements: the menu bar, the toolbar, the View By pane, Table of Contents, the Thumbnail and Preview panes. The View By pane allows you to see picture groups based on their residing folders, file date and label. Let's find out a bit more about the labels available for your photos. The labels can define more than just one term. You can add ratings to your pictures (from one to five stars), flags as reminders of the operations that need to be performed on certain photos, such as reviewing, touchup, share or print. Even more, you can assign your pictures to categories such as events, places or people. If you're not happy with the existing labels, you can create new ones that will suit your needs better. The Thumbnail pane allows you to show pictures grouped using even more filters. For example, you can group your images considering their date, file size, occasion taken, file type, label, flag, camera and more. A very nice feature of this pane will display an increased size thumbnail picture when you hover your mouse cursor over an image. When you double click a thumbnail, the image file that it leads to will be opened into a full screen built in viewer. Here, you can start a full screen slide show of your pictures or start the Editor to change the current image. I will get to the Editor right away, but first I want to tell you about image output available in the Library. You can send images through email or print them, create image panoramas and order professional prints online, but printing and panoramas are done in the Editor. The Digital Image Library is easy to use and can be really helpful, but unfortunately lacks CD/DVD burning, which is not available in this Starter Edition. Now, let's get to the next topic... *Here are a few steps through the Library:* **The Editor** The Editor does exactly what the name says and can be used easily by most beginners. Why? Its interface is easy to use and highly customizable, allowing quick access to the image editing and retouching tools available here. You can work using layers inside the Digital Image Editor, but you don't have

a Layer menu available here or any advanced options. Layers are used here when adding new objects like shapes, external images, text or lines to an existing image. The layers present in a document can be found inside the Stack pane, while the options available for them can be seen using the context menu for each one. The locked layers will have a yellow latch to the left of their thumbnail. You can't edit locked layers, so pay attention to them. The best way to get started quickly with the Editor is to open the Common Tasks pane and play with the options available there. If it's not obvious, then I will tell you there's one more thing you should do before that - you must open an image! Now let's point out the most useful options available here. The Quick Links tab has three options: Digital Image Library, Startup Window, and Create a Photo Collage. The last option is very easy to use, all your actions being guided by the program while you create a collage using your favorite images. Next area of the Common Tasks pane is called Auto Fixes and has five options. They allow you to automatically adjust color, exposure, contrast, levels and camera phone pictures (it works well with most low resolution pictures, enhancing and brightening them). Third stop is called Touchup and has seven options. You can manually adjust color and saturation, exposure and lighting, fix red eye effect, smart erase image elements, batch edit images, use the blending brush or the unsharp mask. The Format options can flip, resize, rotate and straighten the selected image, crop the canvas or rotate it. Following the progression from the last two areas, the Effects tab has eight filters available, starting with Antique and ending with Freehand Painting. The Filters option opens a browsing window with the same use as the Filter Browser from Adobe Photoshop and Photoshop Elements. There are two more areas left: Edges and Add Something. First one inserts soft or highlighted edges into your images, while the other allows you to place objects into your pictures. The objects are those mentioned earlier when talking about layers; they start with text and end with external pictures. This is the Digital Image Editor, but there's more than meets the eye about it, as always. I have only one more story to tell you now, so don't go away yet! *I'll let the images speak now: **The Photo Story*** "Once upon a time, there was a photo." Every story starts this way, but mine is a bit different. Digital Image Photo Story is a wizard-driven application that creates stories using the photos you choose. The work flow is easy for everybody; there are only a few steps to follow, and you're guided all the time. In order to create a movie based on your photos, first you have to import and arrange the desired images, next you have to add text and image effects to each of the imported pictures, and then prepare your voice for a speech. Third step when creating a movie is narrating your stories for each picture. But what's a movie without music and video effects? If you want to add music, then go ahead! You can choose your favorite audio track or create music based on the rich amount of existing built in presets. There are a lot of genres and styles to choose from, and I can only advise you to listen to them for yourselves. You can preview your movie anytime and anywhere you want, just look for the Preview button! There are a lot of image transitions available for you to choose from, but I'll leave those for you to discover. Last step is exporting your movie. All you have to do is choose from the existing export presets or set the options by yourselves. Oh, I forgot! You also have to press the Next button, of course! Now everything should be done! You can view your story or create a new one! *Here's a Photo Story in images: **The Good*** Digital Image Starter Edition is a dream for beginners, and the Photo Story is a great addition to the classic manager-editor couple. The program is well documented and provides a good range of features for its low price. At last, let's not forget about the speed, since this application moves faster than its competitor from Adobe Systems. ***The Bad*** The Starter Edition lacks an essential feature for this kind of programs, backup of your images to CD/DVD. It can't create VCDs or photo calendars and other goodies for photo enthusiasts, but it helps a lot when talking about image retouching and basic editing. Unfortunately, the Editor loses the features battle with the Adobe Elements Editor, but wins the struggle for lowest price. ***The Truth*** This fully functional trial version of Microsoft Digital Image Starter Edition 2006 is a good program that offers a lot for its price. Until you get to buy it, you have two months to test it and decide,

without any limitation - you can save pictures and movies without watermarks and have access to all the features of the full version. If you don't want to buy it, after the trial period ends some advanced features will be disabled, but you will still be able to use the program's basic functions! I think that 60 days should be more than enough for everybody to play with this nice toy, so don't wait any longer, get it now!