

Setting up a Photo Station

Using a digital camera or phone to take photos of your costumes and props is quite easy but to get professional looking results takes a little work, a little equipment and practice.

Digital Camera or phone/tablet:

Any digital camera or smartphone/tablet will take very good photos. Once your are finished taking the photos you must transfer the photos to the computer using a USB connection (cord from the camera or phone) or some computers/printers will take the SD card directly. You may also be able to upload your photos to Dropbox or other online file storage site from your phone or tablet.

There are professional grade cameras that will connect directly to your computer and store the photos on the computer as they are taken - but they are very expensive. Another option to taking photos is to use a Webcam that is connected to your computer. Please see the Resource Guide on Using a Webcam.

Equipment needed:

- Digital Camera or phone/tablet
- Backdrop to place behind the costume or prop
- Way to hang costumes (IV Pole, suspend a hook or ring from the ceiling)
- Lights - one or two lights will improve your results quite a bit
- If you are using a camera a tripod is recommended. There are tripod accessories to hold phones and tablets as well. (Check Amazon)
- Photo editing software - to resize the photos smaller, crop, adjust the brightness, or rotate. Look at FastStoneResizer, Photoshop, etc.

Backdrops: The backdrop will keep the clutter in the background out of the picture. It is good to have 2 backdrops - a light and dark one - for different color garments. (see Resource Guide on creating a photo backdrop)



Resizing Photos

The photos will come off the camera at a very large size - 3 - 6 MB each. While your computer can store thousands of 6 MB files the database will have a lot of trouble displaying more than a few of these large photos at a time. This is especially noticeable in the Photo Gallery displays and reports and any of the reports that display photos (Catalog, Search results with photos, Rental Receipts with photos).

It is best to make a copy of the large photos and then resize them with photo software like Fast Stone Photo Resizer (see the web) or Photoshop. MS Picture Manager is good too but no longer available for Office 2013, 2016 or 365. See the Resource Guide for Resizing Photos for more details.

Cropping and adjusting photos

It is a good idea to have a photo editing software to make minor adjustments to the photos. Remember that many people will be depending on these photos to make judgements about using or renting these costumes or props based on your photos. The better they are when they are loaded into the database the better.

Cropping - eliminate any background items that distract from the photo

Brightness - even if you have lights you may still need to adjust the brightness or contrast of the photos.

Rotation - you may find that the picture needs to be rotated to show up correctly. Sometimes it looks right in the Windows Explorer window but is rotated left or right in the database. You may need to adjust the rotation once or twice to get it right. All cameras record an 'orientation' but the computer sometimes ignores that or doesn't understand it.

Naming Photos

The photos come off your camera or phone with a system generated number. This isn't very helpful to identify the garment or prop. It is a good idea when you are moving the photos from the camera to the computer to rename them with a descriptive name or the Tag ID for the item.

Storing Photos on the Computer

The photos will need to be stored in a folder (maybe with subfolders) on the computer so they are accessible to the inventory database application. It is a good idea to have this folder setup before you start taking photos - so you know where to put them when you take the off the camera. If you are using a network then all photos need to be stored on the network so that all users can see them.

One suggestion is: C:\Costume Inventory Resources\Photos

Or - if the database will be stored on a network the Z: drive (or the drive letter assigned by the IT staff)\

Z: \Theater Inventory Database\Photos