



By Patti Cone

## Software eases documenting, organizing, archiving and retrieving of job photos

**C**ontractors looking to document stages of construction, situations that resulted in change orders, accidents, or even simply progress have traditionally relied on handwritten notes and Polaroid pictures. But the paper clutter and reliability of the dates and times of the documentation have always presented an obstacle to documentation. So many contractors just did without, hoping the documentation wouldn't be necessary.

But current computer technology, such as the LYNX software system, takes project management and documentation a step further, visually documenting and managing any elements of a job a contractor wants to track.

Bob Adams, owner of LYNXPM, says the LYNX Photo Management System requires minimal hardware to receive and store photos in a secure database.

"The LYNXPM can eliminate unnecessary time and expense in documenting the progress of a job," Adams says.

Adams, who worked as an independent contractor consultant, says he heard many complaints from contractors who had to deal with claims from clients.

"Situations happen and someone might want to sue you for something that is wrong with the job," he says.

Adams says he realized companies were missing pictorial documentation that could support completed work, and at the same time, assist project managers in effectively managing all aspects of a job.

Allan Moyle, who as district consul-

tant CEI engineer for the Florida Department of Transportation manages a variety of construction projects throughout Florida, including interstate work and bridge repair and rehab, says the program is very user friendly.

"LYNX effectively and efficiently stores, catalogues and retrieves digital photographs on our construction projects in a uniform way," Moyle says.

### Managing the photos

The LYNX Project Solution (LPS), designed primarily for single project

software eliminates the need to figure out how to store an image or images in folders or subfolders and helps avoid losing or deleting the photos.

Under the system, downloaded digital photos are stored in an 'album' file for a project rather than simply in a computer's folders. These images are archived, and time and date are documented. LYNX also lets a contractor search for photos with the user fields that help identify, file, and understand the nature of the photo. An image can contain a 30-character caption, up to

10,000 characters of text, 10 user-defined search fields, and unlimited keywords. The user also can write any caption to identify the photograph.

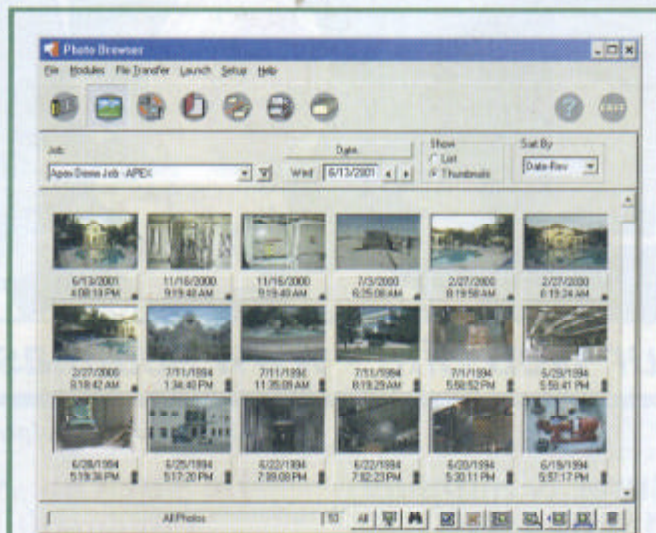
"Not only can you archive and identify the photo," Adams says, "but you can cross reference using several categories of multiple key words to identify a picture."

He says, for example, that the same pavement photo could be identified with the key words: crack and water and heat. Or a photo can be cross-referenced with, for example, the status of the project, the subcontractor, the building site, and the inspector.

"The user puts in his own field based on how he chooses to retrieve a photo," Adams says.

Moyle says LYNX also allows the Florida DOT to categorize photos.

"Unfortunately accidents do occur in construction zones," he says. "We can tie the digital photos to a specific date, time, and location of the accident and retain the photos in an 'accident/safety' file for future use."



*A picture may be worth more than a thousand words, especially if the picture can settle claims, and help manage paving and construction projects. Contractors in the industry use a variety of methods and tools, including computer technology to carefully document and manage projects. LYNX is a software system that takes documentation a step further; LYNX visually documents and manages all elements of a job.*

use, is a good choice for smaller companies, and costs about \$500. The LYNX Master, which can handle an unlimited number of projects, costs roughly \$3000.

This management tool gives the user the capability to store photos in an organized system and manage huge volumes of photographs. Adams says the



He says LYNX can search for and retrieve any stored photo in seconds. These photos are protected from viruses that could destroy a company's image files. LYNX can also compress photos up to 30:1, which allows the user to store photo documentation without using an excessive amount of disk space. Photos are password protected, so they can't be accidentally deleted, and are also secured automatically, preventing any altering of the photo, making it invaluable in litigation issues.

#### Managing a project

With the images LYNX stores and files, contractors can more easily manage a project from beginning to end. Moyle likes the fact that the software enables them to tie construction progress photos to the individual project critical path method schedule activities.

## Some specs

**Description:** LYNX Windows-based project documentation software allows users to download, organize and manage digital photos. Available for single-use projects (LYNX Project Solution) or for multiple projects (LYNX Master).

**Features:** Software enables users to label, date and time stamp, and archive digital photos.

**System requirements:** IBM-compatible computer, 16 megabytes of RAM, Windows 95 or upgrade, free serial port for camera connection, digital camera.

**Technical assistance:** 60 days free telephone support and upgrades; unlimited free e-mail support.

"The software allows us to easily record and if necessary retrieve or depict events as they occurred," Moyle says.

Adam Pearlman, a senior product manager with Centex Rooney Construction company, says LYNX helps keep an accurate retrospective of a project.

"You can take as many pictures as you want, daily, weekly, monthly and

store these pictures for use as a project record or for use in resolving problems," Pearlman says. "It's a good management tool both while the work is in progress, and later."

Ryan J. Pierrot's design firm, Vanerweil, Process and Industrial Design-Construction, has been using a LYNX system for about three years.

"It's very important for our construction superintendent and manager to take daily photos of the job

sites, to track progress, and then be able to go back and see the job," Pierrot says. "This is an excellent tool when trying to convey a point to an architect, owner, or other subcontractor such as a paving company."

### **Annotating the photos**

LYNX not only stores and manages pictures; it also lets you annotate your photos — without disturbing the image. After the pictures are taken, they can be downloaded into the software and markers can be inserted on the image to identify particular issues, problems, or changes that might need to be highlighted.

"You can redline the original picture without changing its properties. The redline is attached as a layer to the drawing which can be viewed with or without the layers," Pearlman says. "This is an excellent tool when trying to convey a point to the architect, owner, or subcontractor."

Pierrot says the redlining feature benefits his company and the clients, particularly when there is long-distance communication.

"If your client or subcontractor is states or hours away, you can redline a problem, and e-mail your concern and the image to the subcontractor, with a quick letter, 'Please look at this crack, or this hole,'" Pierrot says. "The organized and annotated photo albums are a great tool when communicating with subcontractors or clients."

Moyle agrees that the LYNX software enhances communication.

"We use LYNX with our design consultants and others when we need an expeditious response to construction challenges in the field," Moyle says. "Field construction management representatives can send a digital photo, overlaid with redline notations to depict a particular problem or feature, to the particular individual or design team for review and response."

Moyle says the software also can generate photo "shows."

"We can utilize the construction progress photos on individual project web sites accessible to the general public," Moyle says.

He explains that businesses, property owners, and any individuals fol-

lowing the project can obtain current project status by viewing their web sites, or by using the LYNX monitor.

Pierrot says the automatic recording of time and date makes it easy to provide a documented history, which is invaluable with clients or subcontractors. "We are in a meeting, we can reference a picture, so we make sure we keep up to date and file the

pictures properly," Pierrot says.

That way, Pierrot says, the client can see where his money is going. ■

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**For more information on the LYNX Photo Management System indicate 79 on the inquiry card.**

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*Patricia Cone is a freelance writer based in Oak Park, IL.*