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Q: What do you need to make a Digital Photo ID Card?

A: Making digital photo ID cards typically requires several components all working together.

1. You need a computer on which you run the photo ID badge software. You cannot print the cards on a PVC card printer without a computer – the printer can't perform anything without the computer.

2. You need software and it must:

a) Offer a database to store the names and personal information of the people for whom you want to issue badges.

b) Provide a way to integrate image capture with the database – not only import images, but associate the images with specific database records.

c) Provide a way to design and edit badges.

d) Send badges from the computer to a card printer. Badging software, like other business applications, comes in a variety of "flavors" – from low-end to high-end. That is, in addition to performing the simple processes described above, the application may come with many other "features" which enhance the usability and functionality of the application. Features might include requiring a secure log-on, allowing the user to add, delete, or edit database fields and create or print reports, etc.

3. You need a PVC card printer to print the badges. PVC (polyvinylchloride) is the same material that your white plastic household plumbing pipes are made out of. It is porous enough to allow colored inks to be absorbed into the surface of the plastic using a "dye sublimation" process, yet durable enough to last years. The PVC printer allows you to print a photo ID badge directly to a plastic card. The non-digital process required cutting and pasting an instant photo and inserting it into a laminated pouch which must then be sealed by sending it through a heat laminator.

4. You need a digital camera or other "input" device. Your PC and software must allow you to:

a) Plug in a camera.

b) Capture the image through the software. More versatile systems will allow you to capture portraits through video cameras, digital cameras, scanners, or by importing from a file – an "import from file" feature allows someone to send a picture to you by email as a file attachment, which you can then import into the database.

5. Additional hardware may be required, such as a video capture board for certain video cameras, tape backup device, UPS (uninterrupted power supply), etc. Video capture boards, for example, are installed in a PCI or AGP expansion slot on your PC's motherboard. The camera usually plugs directly into these boards. Special lighting may need to be set up where you take portrait pictures. If you want to incorporate fingerprints and signatures in your database and badge, then additional image capture devices will be required for them.

6. Consumables are also part of the package. You will need blank or pre-printed PVC cards and printer ribbons (usually in rolls which print from 250-350 cards per).