

# 2

## Managing Your Files

**A**s you accumulate more and more digital photos and video clips, the proliferation of files can make it very difficult to find anything. Renaming photos to identify them and sorting photos into folders named by date or by subject are time-honored practices, and you can continue with this approach and just use Photoshop Elements' Editor. But I don't recommend it!

Elements' Organizer offers a better solution. You can manage all your photo and video files using an Elements' catalog, and let the program worry about keeping track of files. After importing files into your catalog, you (almost) never have to think about file or folder names or locations again.

Adopting the Organizer as the administrator of your photo activities may require you to reconsider your existing habits and learn new ones, but it is worth the effort. This chapter leads you through how to do so with the greatest efficiency.

### Setting Up Your Catalog

When you use the Organizer, you only have to deal with filenames and locations once, if at all: when you first import them into your catalog. After a photo is imported, the catalog remembers the photo file's location; so you only have to choose its thumbnail and Elements will find the file.

**Note** *The Organizer uses the term get, as in Get Photos. I use import instead because it seems less awkward. Both terms mean to add an entry to a catalog. When photos are imported into the Organizer, the photo itself is not imported; it remains in the file system, with the catalog including a pointer to it.*

**Caution** *Don't delete any photo files thinking that they've been "imported" into your catalog and that the individual files are no longer needed! The catalog contains only references to the files.*

Elements automatically creates an empty catalog, called My Catalog, for you when you first run the program. One catalog is sufficient for most people. However, you might want to create additional catalogs if, for example, you have distinct collections of photos, or your kids take their own digital photos and they each want to have their own catalog (and you'd rather they didn't mess with yours).

## Making New Catalogs

To make a new catalog, choose File > Catalog, and in the Catalog dialog (Figure 2.1) click New. In the New Catalog dialog, enter the name you want to give the catalog and click Save.



**Figure 2.1** In the Catalog dialog, you can make new catalogs, open or recover existing ones, or save the current catalog under a new name.

**Note** When you create a new catalog, Elements automatically imports into the catalog the standard background music files that come with the program. You don't see these files in the Photo Browser by default, but they appear in the pop-up list of background-music files when you create a slide show. If you don't plan to use any of this background music, you can delete it from your catalog later. Alternatively, you can deselect the box next to "Import free music into all new catalogs" in the Catalog dialog, and the music files will not be imported when you make a new catalog.

## Deleting and Renaming Catalogs

You can't rename or delete a catalog from within Elements. You can use File > Catalog > Save As to make a copy with a new name (and just abandon or delete the old one). To delete a catalog, you must first find it in the Windows file system. The default location is C:\Documents and Settings\All Users\Application Data\Adobe\Catalogs. (Application Data is a hidden folder, so you won't be able to see it unless you enable the setting in Windows that displays hidden files.)

## Using Multiple Catalogs

Don't divide your photos among multiple catalogs unless there's a very good reason to do so (such as to accommodate multiple users on a single PC). Although it's easy to switch from one catalog to another, you can work with only one at a time. For example, you can search within only a single catalog, and you can make a slide show from photos in only one catalog. You can't move or copy photos directly between catalogs; so they represent fairly rigid boundaries.

**Tip** *Users new to the catalog concept sometimes want to make a catalog for each type of photo, but this is usually counterproductive. Instead, put all the photos in one catalog, and use the Organizer's tools to organize them and to find the ones you want.*

You can place the same items in more than one catalog, but this can get confusing and can cause problems. For instance, if you import the same photo into two catalogs, and then edit the photo in one catalog, the other catalog won't have any link to the edited copy.

**Tip** *Elements always launches with the catalog you had open when you last closed the program. If you have more than one catalog, be sure the right catalog is open before you add photos or make changes. By holding down Shift while the Organizer is starting, you can choose which catalog you want to open.*

### Compacting and Repairing Catalogs

Under rare circumstances, such as when there's a power failure while you're updating the catalog, the catalog file can be damaged. In addition, with normal use, catalogs can accumulate blank space that causes them to occupy more room than necessary on your hard disk.

It's a good idea every month or two to open the Catalog dialog (File > Catalog) and click Recover. This will fix any errors in your catalog and compress it to eliminate wasted space.

If the catalog is badly damaged and you can't open it in Elements, hold down Ctrl while the Organizer is starting up; a dialog will appear, asking if you'd like to perform a recovery on the current catalog. If recovery fails, you'll have to restore your catalog from a backup file (see Chapter 10, "Keeping Your Photos Safe").

You can also trigger a catalog recovery when opening a catalog. In the Organizer, choose File > Catalog to open the Catalog dialog, and click the Open button. Choose the name of the catalog you want to recover, and then hold down Ctrl while clicking OK.