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## Photos Lost? Some Ways to Find Them

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THE memory cards that are used by today's digital cameras provide an unseen benefit to photographers. Not only are the cards less vulnerable than conventional film to exposure and other environmental pitfalls, but they also recover more easily from mishaps.

But they are not foolproof.

There are still many ways to damage card data. For example, if the camera is on and a card removed, or if the camera is turned off too soon, the data on the card can be corrupted. Likewise, photographers can accidentally reformat memory cards or mistakenly delete photographs before backing them up on a computer.

Faced with such problems, digital photographers can turn to image recovery programs, which try to reconstruct data that is hidden or missing from memory cards. Much like recovery programs built for computer hard-drive failures (and sometimes created by the same companies), these utilities use a combination of mathematical algorithms to stitch remaining information into material that can be read once more.

There are many such programs that can be downloaded from the Internet. Last month, [Sony](#) introduced free image recovery software for Memory Stick users, on the product's support site ([www.sonydigital-link.com/memstick/downloads](http://www.sonydigital-link.com/memstick/downloads)).

After registering the card's model name and serial number, owners can download a simple recovery tool that restores lost JPEG, MPEG-1 or MPEG-4 files.

Other programs work with a broader range of memory cards and file types.

Eimage Recovery, a Windows-based recovery program online at [eimagerecovery.com](http://eimagerecovery.com), recognizes numerous card types, including SmartMedia, Compact Flash and Secure Digital cards, as well as hand-held computers and CD's.

The free software will search your memory card and provide a thumbnail of any image it finds, but to save images to disk, users must buy a full version of the software for \$27.

Data Recovery Systems' Media Investigator, at [digitalfilerecovery.com](http://digitalfilerecovery.com), is a more affordable option. The PC-based program is free to download, but users are charged \$10 to save images to disk. So far, the program only offers a deep-search version, which retrieves data slowly in contiguous disk sectors, but yields a thorough card scan.

An updated version, available this month, will add an alternative scanning algorithm to restore deleted files and file names more quickly, and will add the ability to scan hard drives as well.

MediaRecover, at [mediarecover.com](http://mediarecover.com), a \$30 download for Windows and Macintosh users, provides other possibilities for information rescue. Besides two-speed card searching for media files and other perks like a secure card-delete function, MediaRecover offers a mail-in recovery service for the hardest-luck cases. The company has a professional lab that will fix failed cards for an additional cost — starting at \$75 for a 256-megabyte memory card.

But no software program can promise to restore all lost information — especially when missing or damaged files have been written over.

That's why experts recommend that users stop shooting and start recovering as soon as problems occur, and back up media files early and often.

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