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### Tech Tips: CBL Lens

*Answer to the white-balance dilemma*

Photography used to be easy. Put film in the camera, take a few images, send the film off to your lab, and receive back a gorgeous set of proofs looking, for all intents and purposes, like the scene you wanted to capture.

Along comes digital—the answer to all our prayers, or a potential nightmare for the busy photographer? Do you shoot RAW files? Do you sit in front of your computer color-correcting them for hours? Hours certainly better spent acquiring new business in these crazy economic times. I would rather be working on my business than in my business.

Well, I may have found the answer to all these problems. Walking around a trade show several months ago, I came across a small booth that had a white disk made out of plastic: the CBL lens. Looking at this approximately 5-inch-diameter disk, you see that the plastic has ridges and valleys cut into it: beneath this white plastic, you could see some sort of mirror or prism peeking through. I was told this was the latest and greatest in white balance for digital cameras. Reading the brochure, I find out that it addresses not just "white balance," but "full color balance." Maybe that's why we can't get perfect color right out of the box; maybe it's because we're only looking at the white instead of the entire spectrum of light falling on our subjects.

Now mind you, I've tried them all, and I mean all. Some work better than others; however, all have left me color-correcting those same images to get them just the way I want. After all, if the initial image your client sees is fabulous, they will tend to purchase it. They won't purchase images that make their skin look yellow, red, green, or blue.

First thing I like is that the CBL lens doesn't need to be attached to the camera. I read the simple instructions and set up my Dyna-Lites, held the disk in front of my subject, shooting with a Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III; keeping the CBL lens in the direct center, ever so slightly tilted toward the main light source. I filled the center circle in the viewfinder with the CBL lens and used that as the source of my custom white balance.

I then shot a portrait session. I didn't need to do a thing except tweak the brightness and contrast in the image. No more color temperature, no more hue and/or saturation settings. The color was perfect; the skin tones were perfect.

I then went outside, the light being on the blue side later in the day. I shot images using the camera's white balance first, then using the CBL lens. The images taken with the CBL weren't blue—they were perfect.

At a recent wedding, the bride's parents had spent a small fortune on lighting the room magenta. In a rush to capture a great room shot, I set the camera on a tripod and shot with the camera's white balance set to tungsten. The images looked horrible. The lighting being used by the party designer were these new LCD lights that wreak havoc on a digital sensor. Everything was blown out. As a last resort, I had my assistant grab the CBL and set the custom white balance. The image on the display looked exactly as my eye saw it. A 40x60 of that image is hanging in that venue's sales office and has brought me more business from those who have seen it.

Our studio shoots video as well, and my videographers are using the CBL lens to white-balance their video cameras.

Bottom line, the CBL disk works. It's a little like color-correction magic. If you want to save a lot of time that you could better use building your business, then run out and get one.

*Andy Marcus, of Fred Marcus Photography (www.fredmarcus.com) in New York, has been shooting weddings for more than 50 years. The studio established by his late father is in its third generation, with his son, Brian, joining several years ago. A Canon Explorer of Light, he's shot the weddings of Donald Trump, Eddie Murphy, and Mary Tyler Moore, as well as many large weddings in the New York area.*

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Image shot with the camera's white balance

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