

Title: Kodak Announces End of Black & White Paper Production
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Kodak today quietly announced that as of 2006, it will no longer be producing black and white photographic paper. The surprise announcement was made to PDN via a phone conference on Monday.

“Kodak will discontinue the production and sale of B&W photographic papers as part of its worldwide digital growth strategy,” said a company statement. “As the imaging industry transitions from film to digital technologies, demand for B&W paper is declining by 25 percent per year and no longer represents an attractive market for Kodak.”

The company added that it will continue to produce both film and chemicals, in a move that’s bound to confuse the consumer at least a little bit. “Kodak is not exiting the B&W film or B&W chemical market. We are concentrating on growth areas and helping/enabling the professional imaging markets to innovate and grow through digital capture, digitization of film images and thermal output solutions.”

When asked if other companies might be allowed (or pursued, even) to produce the line of Kodak B&W paper, company representatives indicated that while they had investigated that option, it did not seem attractive, adding that other companies are still making B&W papers, which should still give the consumer plenty of options for B&W output.

This puts the professional B&W photographer who has relied on Kodak papers in a bit of an odd place, as they can continue to buy B&W film from Kodak as well as the chemicals to process that film, but will either have to turn to other manufacturers for their paper-based output or begin scanning their film and printing it digitally.

Iford has long produced a high-volume line of photographic B&W papers, and will likely see some customer turnover from the Kodak announcement, but one has to wonder what market pressures that company is facing in light of the declining sales Kodak experienced.

In a marketplace where photographers in some areas are decreasingly able to find E-6 processing facilities, forcing a move to digital for some and a move to C-41 workflow for others, this announcement comes as perhaps a final notice as to the decline of the roll of film in the professional photography world.

Kodak indicated that this move did not come lightly for the company, yet for years they’ve watched as profits from B&W papers declined sharply. For those who cut their teeth on Kodak papers in college darkrooms, this move signifies an end of an era, even as the company continues to produce B&W film and chemicals. And while the company indicates that they’ll continue to do so indefinitely, today’s announcement makes clear the fact that profitability and unit sales numbers will

be the yardstick by which the B&W products continue to be judged.

Kodak indicated that production of B&W papers will continue until the end of 2005 and will be discontinued in 2006.

The company issued no global press release for this announcement, relying instead on the photographic media to disseminate the information. While company representatives indicated that a release would be posted to the Kodak.com website, none is available that we can find as of this posting.