

# GETTING TRIGGER HAPPY

Rory Laubscher tells us what to look for in an off-camera flash

In the past few years I have become increasingly addicted to the versatility and creative power of off-camera flash (OCF).

OCF uses your camera's speedlight as a light source – a far more affordable and portable alternative to studio lights. My last article featured a technique that required OCF, and as I'm planning on doing similar articles in future issues, I thought it wise to start with the basics this year and make OCF triggers my focus.

### Why learn to use your flash off-camera?

Photography with impact depends hugely on the creative use of light and though there are exceptions, the light produced by a flash sitting on top of your camera is mostly flat and lifeless, and does nothing to flatter your subject.

Being able to move your light source relative to your subject creates magic. Most photographers already own a speedlight, the simple act of purchasing a means to trigger it off-camera will open up a range of new creative options. Couple that with any one

of the many light modifiers available for off-camera speedlights (umbrellas, softboxes, gels, grids, snoots) and you'll realise that OCF is a tool that can truly unleash your creativity and vision in a big way.

Learning to control light (and shadow) will do amazing things for your photography. However, it all starts with getting your camera and flash to communicate with each other.

### Considerations when purchasing triggers

Aside from your budget, there are generally only two major considerations when deciding on a trigger:

#### Wired vs Wireless

A physical connection between flash and camera can be created using cords/cables, or you can opt for the freedom of wireless triggers (infra-red/radio wave).


#### TTL (Automatic) vs Manual




TTL triggers take a lot of the guesswork out of flash photography and allow your camera

to determine what it feels is the correct flash output no matter where you place your flash. They also allow your flash to retain functions like high-speed sync and second curtain sync.

Triggers without TTL capability require a sound understanding of flash exposure and the variables that affect it. However, once mastered, they are exceedingly straightforward to use.

You may already be able to trigger your flash off-camera and not know about it; many DSLRs have the ability to use the camera's pop-up flash to trigger a slaved speedlight – check your manual.

Deciding on which trigger to buy can be a difficult decision and will be influenced by budget, the need for TTL capability and whether you require an option that will also work for studio strobes. The list below is far from comprehensive but provides both wired and wireless triggers with Manual and TTL options, all available from Apix Photographic, who have been kind enough to assist with formulating the list. 

	Points to consider	TTL	Price (excl GST)
<b>Cable triggers</b> PC Sync Cord  <hr/> ETTTL cord 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Tripping hazard and inferior range to IR/radio</li> <li>■ Camera-make specific</li> </ul>	No Yes	\$69 (5m) \$69 - \$125 (30cm)
<b>Infra-Red Triggers</b> IR Transmitter  <hr/> Master Flash 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ More expensive than lower end radio triggers</li> <li>■ Line of sight only</li> <li>■ Buying another flash is expensive</li> </ul>	No Yes	Not available at APIX +- \$250 Depends on unit
<b>Radio Triggers</b> Pixel Pawn (Transmitter and receiver)  <hr/> Pixel Opas transceiver (Need 1 for camera and 1 for flash)  <hr/> Pixel King (Transmitter and receiver)  <hr/> Radio Popper PX (Transmitter and Receiver) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Can be used as a wireless shutter release for your camera</li> <li>■ Canon, Nikon and Sony, Olympus and only</li> <li>■ Can be used as a wireless shutter release for your camera</li> <li>■ Canon and Nikon only</li> <li>■ Can trigger studio lights</li> <li>■ Canon only</li> <li>■ Canon and Nikon only</li> </ul>	No No Yes Yes	\$129 \$125 (Need to buy 2) \$275 \$740

OCF has done amazing things for my photography and my own understanding of light and lighting

### Keen to get started with off-camera flash?

We have the perfect OCF starter pack valued at over \$300 to give away, including a Pixel Pawn radio transmitter and receiver from Apix Photographic Supplies and admission to a one-day Flash Photography workshop with Firefly Photography. Visit: [dphoto.co.nz](http://dphoto.co.nz)

# STACKS OF PATIENCE

Bret Lucas explains how to hit the sweet spot using focus stacking

If you do a lot of macro photography, close up work on flowers, insects or other small subjects, you've probably already experienced the limitations of your lens with respect to depth of field and keeping your subject sharp from front to back. This is where focus stacking shines.

You can extend your depth of field by using a tight aperture but noticeable diffraction will start to work against rendering a sharp image at some point. Another option is to use a tilt-shift lens, which can greatly help achieve sufficient depth of field, but even this technique has limitations. With focus stacking however, you can not only use the sweet spot of your lens, let's say around f11, but you can also extend the apparent depth of field without limitation. So how is this done?

A couple of options are available. Each one involves taking numerous images and stacking them together using software that squeezes the sharpest element from each image, rendering a super sharp image from front to back without compromise. The best technique is to set your camera up so that the lens is focused on a point just in front of where your subject starts, just to make sure the very tip of your subject is sharp.

The watch in this article comprises thirty-two images. The camera was set up on a dedicated focus-stacking rail and moved 2mm forward between each shot. The aperture was set at the sweet spot for the lens, f11.

After testing various focus-stacking software I finally settled on Zerene Stacker, its advantages being ease of use, good retouching features and quality output.

Additionally, you have the option of linking this software with a focus-stacking rail that gives you full control over start and end points and the lineal distance between each capture.

Focus stacking is an amazingly powerful technique, but it has disadvantages:

- It can be very time-consuming.
- It usually requires the subject matter to be motionless.
- It may require a precision-focusing device (such as a focusing rail) when large numbers of photos need to be stacked (such as with extreme macro photography).
- It requires specialised software to align and merge/blend the photos. ▯

Watch kindly lent by Silks Jewellers in Howick, Auckland. Watch image was captured at Fstop Studios.

Bret Lucas runs Auckland's Fstop Studios, one of the largest for-hire photographic studios in New Zealand; visit [www.fstopstudios.co.nz](http://www.fstopstudios.co.nz) for more details.