

How to convert Picasa Albums into Lightroom Collections

For sorting and classifying my pictures, I have been using [Picasa](#) for quite some time now. While I still believe that this is the fastest images manager that I have ever seen, it has some limitations and I have been thinking about using [Adobe Lightroom](#) instead. My only issue before switching to Lightroom was that I first had to make sure that I could import the numerous albums that I had created to sort my pictures in Picasa. With 40K+ pictures and several thousands sorted in albums, I could not afford to lose this information when switching to Lightroom. A related issue was that I had many star-rated pictures in Picasa that I also wanted to transfer. Neither Picasa nor Lightroom support this kind of transfer and I could not find any solution that suited me on the Internet. So I looked at the problem myself. Dissecting the required process into simple steps made it easier to find a solution. The rest of this post will describe how I did it.



What you can expect from this conversion:

- Get the contents of your Picasa albums in Lightroom collections.
- Convert the albums easily with just a little bit of file manipulation - don't worry: nothing complex !
- Transfer the list of star-rated pictures from Picasa to Lightroom.

What you should *not* expect from this conversion:

- Transfer of images edits. Picasa and Lightroom have different ways of storing this information and I don't think that this conversion would be possible.

So, what you will get is simply the transfer of the list of images from one software to the other. Compared to painstakingly looking at each album in Picasa and finding the same image again in Lightroom, this is already a huge improvement, especially if you have many albums and images.

There are two ways to do it.

The simplest one would involve selecting all the images of a Picasa album and attributing them a keyword related to the album (e.g. "album1"). You could then search for all pictures containing the keyword "album1" in Lightroom and create a collection accordingly. Easy ! There are problems with this approach however: this is only working for files where Picasa can save IPTC data: JPEG files. Picasa does not save the keywords that you have attributed to other formats such as RAW, PSD, PNG, TIFF, movies,...

in the files themselves, only in the `picasa.ini` file in their corresponding folder. Picasa also seems to be unreliable for saving keywords to files. Sometimes it works, sometimes it does not.

So I had to find another, more general, way to do it.

Let's look at the steps involved:

- First of all, where are the albums stored by Picasa ? Following the loss of all my Picasa albums after an update, I had already done some research to find [how to restore my Picasa albums](#) and I knew where they could be found.
- What is the content of these files ? Luckily, the content of the files is easy to understand, they are basically XML files where you will find the name and content (filenames complete with paths) of the albums.
- How could I import a list of files into Lightroom ? You will see that it is easy when you know how Lightroom smart collections work. The smart collections files are simply a set of instructions that can be used to automate the search of images within your Lightroom catalog.
- How will I convert one file into the other ? This could most probably be done by writing a script in Perl for example but I did not want to rely on my long forgotten Perl knowledge. So, I decided to use tools that almost everybody has at home: Excel and Word (I used Office 2007 for this tutorial). [OpenOffice](#) would also give you similar tools.

Here is the procedure to **convert Picasa Albums into Lightroom Collections**:

1. You will first need the Picasa albums definitions (.pal files). If you are using Windows Vista, they are stored in `C:\Users\your_user_name\AppData\Local\Google\Picasa2Albums`. In Windows XP, there are located in `C:\Documents and Settings\your_user_name\Local Settings\application data\google`. These .pal files have names that will not help you much so you will need to either copy them all (which is what you want if you need to convert all your albums) or open them one by one in a text editor and check the name of the album to find the one you are looking for. Copy all the .pal files to another folder where you will edit them.
2. In this new folder containing a copy of your Picasa albums definitions, change the .pal suffix to .xml. This will make them easily editable with Excel.
3. For each file, open it in Excel as an XML file. Except for the field "name" that is giving you the name of the album, the other fields are of no interest for the conversion. The most important part is the list of filenames.

First, save the file as an Excel file, under the name of the corresponding album. Then, delete the 5 first columns, leaving only the list of filenames (containing also the path). You should now have a single column with all the filenames. If it is not present, insert a line at the top and type a title there ("filename" would be a good choice).

You now need to get rid of the file path. You can easily do that with a bit of Excel magic and the help of the following formula:

```
=MID(A2,FIND(CHAR(1),SUBSTITUTE(A2,"\",CHAR(1),LEN(A2)-LEN(SUBSTITUTE(A2,"\", ""))))+1,LEN(A2))
```

Copy it from above and paste it in the second column (from the second line to the bottom of the file). Now, your second column will contain the filenames only. Copy the content (not the title) of this new column and paste it in the first column, overwriting the original file paths list (make sure to *Paste Values*). Delete the now obsolete second column. Finally, save your Excel file that is now ready for converting into a Lightroom smart collection.

- In Lightroom, go to *Smart Collections » Create new Smart Collection* and choose *filename* as the condition that you want to check. Fill in the filename of one of your images (e.g. IMG_0001.JPG, any will do) and click OK.

A new Smart Collection should appear with just that image.

Now, go to *Smart Collections » Export Settings* and save your new Smart Collection (e.g. temp.lrsmcol).

- If you now open this file in a text editor, you will see that it is simply a set of instructions for Lightroom to find the image that you have asked for.

So your file should contain the following search criteria:

```
{
    criteria = "filename",
    operation = "all",
    value = "IMG_0001.JPG",
    value2 = "",
},
```

We will take advantage of this simple structure to import the list of filenames.

For this, we will need to copy the whole filename list as a separate criteria in this file. Not something that you would want to do by hand if you have hundreds of pictures in each album... So, the next step is the integration of the Excel list of filenames in a Lightroom Smart Collection file in an automatic manner. This is where Word becomes useful as we will use its mail merge function to do that.

- In Word, open the temp.lrsmcol file that you have created in the previous step. Select the part shown above from the file and paste it in a new Word document.

Delete the current filename (IMG_0001.JPG) and leave the cursor between the quotes.

Go to the menu *Word » Mailings » Start Mail Merge... » Step by Step Mail Merge Wizard...*

And follow the instructions of the wizard, selecting the following options:

- *Select Document Type » Directory*
- *Select Starting Document » Use the current document*
- *Select recipients » Use an existing list » Select recipient list file...* and select the Excel file that you have created and that contains the list of filenames of your album. Click OK. *Select table* should be fine as it is (*First row of data contains column headers must be ON*), just click OK. *Mail merge recipients* shows the full list of filenames, just click OK.
- *Arrange you directory » Address block...* Do not change anything, only click on *Match fields* and select "filename" as the First Name (You should see the first record of the list appearing in the preview). Click OK. *Address Block* should now have appeared where your cursor was placed.
- *Preview your directory* shows the result for each record (you don't need to check them all, just go to the next step).

- *Complete the merge* » *To new document...* » **Merge records: All**. Click OK and a new window opens with the full list of records merged with the Lightroom Smart Collection conditions.
 - Select All and Copy.
7. Back in temp.lrsmcol, select the criteria and paste the whole list.
Everything between

```
value = {
```

```
and
```

```
combine = "union",
```

should be replaced.

Change the name field in the file to "album1" for example. This is the name that will appear in Lightroom. Save as a text file under the name of your album (e.g. album1.lrsmcol).

8. If you have several albums to import, simply go back through the Mail Merge steps (*Previous*) and, in *Select recipients*, choose *Select a different list...* and select the next Excel file to import. The rest does not need to be changed, simply click through the different steps until you have created your next file.
9. Now, time to import the collections into Lightroom.
Start Lightroom and go to *Smart Collections* » *Import Collections Settings* and select your file album1.lrsmcol
A new smart collection appears with the contents of your Picasa album !

One issue: if you, like me, have been several times round the counter of your camera and you have not renamed your files (lazy bad habit...), you will find several images with the same filename (e.g. several IMG_0001.JPG with different images). It means that you have to check the collection and deselect the images that do not belong there and leave only the right ones selected. But I am sure that you were better organized than I was and this should not be a problem for you ;-)

10. Finally, when you are satisfied with the correct transfer of the content of the album, create a new collection from the selected images in the temporary Smart Collection and give it the name of the corresponding album. Your Picasa Album has now been converted to a Lightroom Collection !

I have also used the same procedure to **transfer my star-rated pictures from Picasa to Lightroom**. Simply select all your star-rated pictures in Picasa and create an album containing them. Follow the procedure shown above to convert the album to a smart collection, import it in Lightroom and give a rating of your choice to all the pictures from this smart collection. Done !

I hope that you found this tutorial useful !

If you want to share improvements to this, please do not hesitate to comment :-)