

# Windows 7 / Vista RAW CODEC

Ian Whiting - 28 July 2011

Microsoft has released a RAW CODEC for Windows 7 and Vista (32 and 64 bit versions)

<http://www.microsoft.com/download/en/details.aspx?id=26829>

*Before installing this check you download the correct version (32 or 64 bit), your camera is listed, ask yourself "Do I really need it?" and perhaps wait a while for other users to install it to discover any bugs it may have.*

## What Is It?

A CODEC is a piece of operating system software that understands the format of one set of file types, e.g. JPG or TIF, allowing other applications to open and make sense of the data.

You will already have many CODECs installed for different file type, e.g. PNG, WAV, various videos formats like Quicktime. When you need to support a new file format you may need to install the appropriate CODEC.

Most serious digital photographers work in RAW formats, but there are a great many different RAW formats. Taking Canon as an example, the Canon 650D and 5DMkII cameras both create RAW files with the .CR2 extension but internally they are different file formats. To open, view and convert these RAW files we need the manufacturer's software, e.g. Canon's DPP, or a third party application like Adobe Canon Raw (ACR) used by Photoshop and Lightroom. When a new camera model is released ACR users have to wait for ACR to be updated to support this new camera's revised RAW format.

Canon also supply a Canon CODEC which is usually installed automatically when you install the Canon software. Then other applications, e.g. Windows Browser and Windows Live Viewer, will use it to display RAW thumbnails and the larger image. This is very useful.

However the Canon user would have been able unlikely to see Nikon, Sony, Olympus, Minolta, Leica, Epson, Panasonic or Pentax RAW images in a browser. To view these RAW images we need to install their CODECs or view image files in something like ACR, Adobe Bridge, Lightroom or PS Elements.

With this Microsoft CODEC is installed more applications will automatically support more RAW types without needing to install a plethora of other CODECs

NB A CODEC only permits the RAW file to be seen by another application as an image, it does not allow the image to be manipulated, e.g. white balance or exposure adjustment. Image manipulation is done by the application, e.g. DPP or ACR, once the file has been opened.

### **Is it a Good Idea to Install?**

There is a counter argument that the manufacturer's own software will always create the best conversion as only they fully understand the data content of their own RAW image file.

I do not know if installing this Microsoft CODEC will replace, for example, the Canon CODEC used by DPP or whether DPP bypasses the CODEC and always uses its own routines.

However I suspect this CODEC is only used by simple viewing applications, like Explorer and Live, and is not used by DPP, ACR et al.

If this concerns you then you should avoid non-manufacturers' CODECs and do not use third party applications like ACR.

### **More Information**

If anyone wants to know more about CODECs this page has a simple FAQ

<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows7/Codecs-frequently-asked-questions>

### **But I Don't Use Canon!**

*In the above piece I have used Canon only as an example. The same considerations apply to Nikon and other manufacturers RAW files and applications.*

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