

the business behind the shutter | DECEMBER 2014

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with *Michael Corsentino*
- + **Make Sh*t Happen**
with *Sal Cincotta*

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MISSION STATEMENT

Shutter Magazine is about photography education. Our goal is to provide current, insightful, and in-depth educational content for today's professional wedding and portrait photographer. *Shutter Magazine* uses the latest technologies to deliver information in a way that is relevant to our audience. Our experienced contributors help us create a sense of community and establish the magazine as one of the leading photography publications in the world.

Shutter Magazine: By photographers, for photographers.

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WITH SAL CINCOTTA

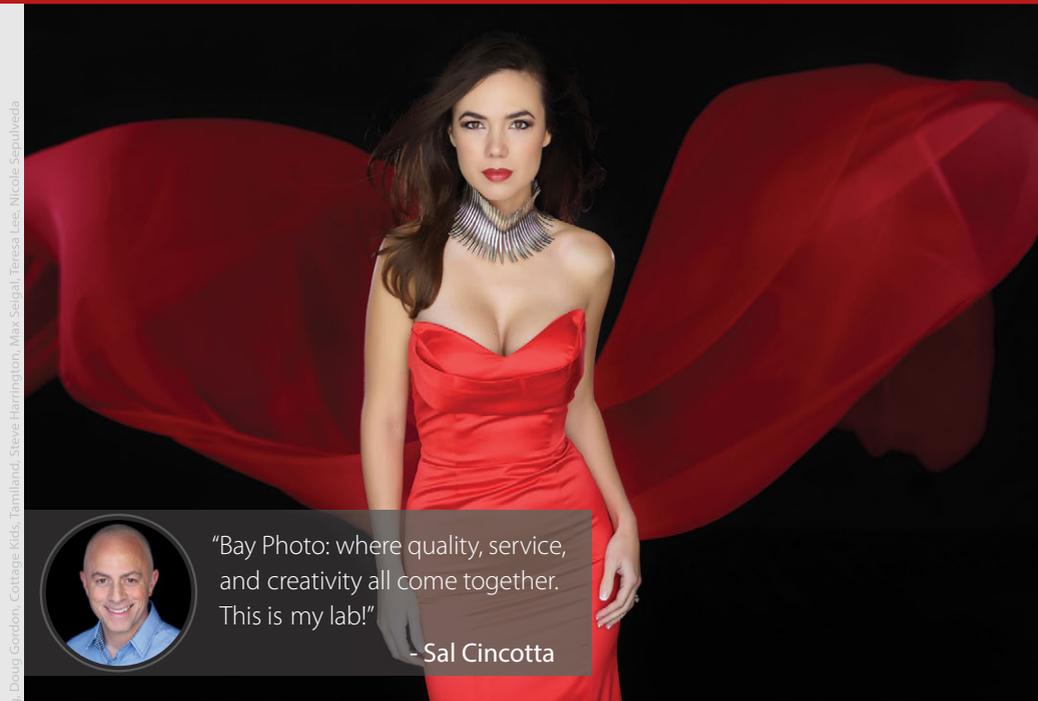


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MODELING AGENCIES GETTING THEM TO SAY YES

— | WITH MICHAEL CORSENTINO | —



by **Michael Corsentino**

— TEST WITH PROFESSIONAL MODELS

This month, I'll explain how to connect with top modeling agencies and lay the groundwork for lasting relationships. I'll also take you behind the scenes of one of my recent test shoots for Images NYC with top model Makaila Nichols.

Test, and test often. One of the most important things you can do as an aspiring fashion/advertising shooter is to test with professional models. Even seasoned pros benefit from the access to fresh faces that agency testing allows. So whether you're just starting out and trying to build a great fashion portfolio or you're an established pro looking to keep your visual muscles flexed, testing is key.

The big mystery is how to gain access to the Holy Grail of beautiful people: the modeling agency. It's kind of a chicken-and-egg predicament. You need quality models to create a quality portfolio, and you need a quality portfolio to attract a quality agency. In addition to being the gatekeepers for an amazing pool of beautiful people, agencies know the art buyers, editors and art directors whom you as a fashion/advertising photographer want to get in front of. A good relationship with the right agency can go a long, long way. You can bet that if they find a talented new photographer, one who goes the extra mile for them and knows how to schmooze, they'll make the introductions you're after.



© Michael Corsentino

— THE AMATEUR VS. PROFESSIONAL MODEL

The differences between amateur and professional models don't just stop at stunning looks, rail-thin bodies (better for clothing) and towering height. Professional models are just that: professionals. They take it very seriously. They show up on time, act professionally, know how to move and require very little direction. Working with a model who knows how to move is a dream. It makes your job much easier because you're working with another pro who more or else knows what you're after at the outset.

So any potential excuses about the pictures not working out because the model wasn't up to snuff are gone. Time to bring your A game, kids—this is the big leagues. These girls and guys command \$5–10k a day at a minimum, work with the best photographers out there and book clients like Levi's, Lancôme, Abercrombie, you name it. If you're lucky enough to test with them, you're getting to shoot with the cream of the crop for free, and, in some cases, even get paid by their agency. More on that later.

— STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD

My relationship with Images NYC developed organically, and the same rules apply to any agency. Your images are everything. They're your most important calling card. They'll either get you in the door or tossed out on your ear. I'd shot with Makaila before she signed with Images NYC, so I had work to show that gave the agency a good idea of what I could accomplish with one of its existing models.

Your work needs to be strong, professional and commercially viable, and it has to be what they're looking for. Do your homework. Each agency is different, with different clients in different segments. Caution is the word here. Don't even think about approaching an agency before you're ready. Remember, you're dealing with professionals who are used to working with other professionals. They're not here to be your teachers, and the agency isn't a venue for learning to shoot fashion and advertising. If they smell a rube, if you're not ready or if your attitude isn't right, they'll shut you down in a New York minute. Then it becomes twice as hard to get back on their radar when you're really ready.

Photographers are a dime a dozen from the agency perspective. They're constantly bombarded by photographers asking for access to their girls/guys. So you need to stand out from the crowd. One way to do this is by not making it about you. Make it about them. The less ego, the better. If you're good, they'll notice, so play it humble. Convey a willingness to partner, and ask how you can help, ask what they need. Clearly you're looking for access and asking to test, but your approach and attitude will make or break the relationship.



“ ALWAYS PROVIDE
SOMETHING OF A BLANK CANVAS
OR JUMPING-OFF POINT
FOR POTENTIAL CLIENTS. ”

— SUPPORT THE CLOTHING YOU'RE SHOOTING

Remember, editorial fashion and advertising are all about the clothing. They're your hero, they're your product. Your concepts and images need to revolve around and support the clothing you're shooting. This is one of the main things agencies and potential clients want to see.

Which brings me to my next big reveal: access to clothing. There are several ways to pull clothing inexpensively for tests. For this shoot, we took advantage of H&M's liberal 30-day, full-refund return policy, and put together five killer looks. I hesitate to give up this gem for fear of people taking advantage and screwing it up for the rest of us. So please, keep it on the down-low and don't broadcast what you're doing. Have different members of your team purchase and return each time, especially if you're repeatedly pulling from the same store. If questions arise about why I'm returning perfectly good clothing, I explain that I purchased it as a gift for my girlfriend, and she hit the reject button. Works every time. One very important thing to remember is never remove any labels from the clothing, which can void the return policy. And it goes without saying to respect the clothing you're working with—take good care of it and return it in great shape.

The concept for our two-day shoot was simple: a fashion editorial called “City Girl Fashion.” This was broad enough in scope that it could be accomplished using what I had on hand: a beautiful model, NYC's urban backdrop and cool clothes from a forward-thinking retailer. I'd spent the previous day scouting locations and thinking about signature images. Keep in mind that the goal of tests is to show potential clients what's possible with a given model. For this reason, you want to keep things fairly middle of the road, at least some of it. You want to create cool, compelling images, but always provide something of a blank canvas or jumping-off point for potential clients. Hair and makeup artist Annie Radigan created a beautiful, contemporary look for Makaila consistent with this goal.



—| KEEPING IT SIMPLE IS THE KEY

When you're working on location, keeping it simple is key. For this shoot, I brought two Profoto B1 strobes and captured the images using my Phase One DF+ and IQ250 digital back, perfect for this kind of on-the-go, low-light shooting. I ended up using only one of the B1s, modified with an Elinchrom 27.5-inch Deep Octa. This is an awesome and very portable modifier with beautiful, crisp, yet soft light, and rapid falloff.

We shot for two days under the FDR and around South Street Seaport in Manhattan, and in DUMBO in Brooklyn. For this kind of permitless guerrilla shooting, putting your lights on extension poles rather than light stands avoids problems with the police, and that's always a good thing. Even with the most portable lights, using extension poles takes effort, so make sure your assistants have eaten their Wheaties. Building lasting relationships is largely the result of two things: follow-through and follow-up. Little gestures make all the difference. After our shoot, I sent Makaila's booking agent an email thanking him. I attached two finals of the strongest images from our shoot to provide a taste of what we'd shot the same day we wrapped. The next day, I dropped by the agency to give a nice bottle of wine to Mak's booking agent, and to introduce myself in person as we'd only communicated by email and phone. This gave me the opportunity to meet all the booking agents, talk shop, hand out and collect business cards, and create a much more personalized relationship.

Based on the work they saw, my attitude and actions, they offered me paid tests on the spot. In other words, they were now willing to pay me to test with their girls/guys. I call that a win-win. A few days later, I followed up with an edited Web gallery so the agency could choose the images it wanted to promote Makaila with. Next, I printed out the strongest image from our shoot on gift-card stock and sent a handwritten thank-you note to each booking agent. Now that's how you do it! ■



Check out Michael Corsentino's video here!

PHASEONE

"The Phase One IQ280 system has so many advantages - such as touch screen, Capture One Pro, WiFi... all the little things that make you forget about the technical part and focus more on your work."

- David Benoliel

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PRESENTS

JUSTEN HONG

SHUTTERFEST EDUCATOR FROM

VISUAL LURE®





with
Justen Hong

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR STUDIO.

I own and operate Visual Lure, a St. Louis-based logo-, graphic- and Web-design company that specializes in branding, marketing and search-engine optimization. I worked for a small marketing and design firm right out of college, and I founded Visual Lure in 2001. I grew up with an entrepreneurial father who owned his own company, and I learned from an early age how to run a successful business. To this day, I enjoy working mostly with other entrepreneurs and building a relationship with them so that we become mutually invested in the success of their business. My work is consistently being published in some of the most prestigious design publications, including internationally distributed *Logo Talks II*, *The Big Book of Packaging* and in five different LogoLounge books.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO DESIGN?

I have always been artistic. When I was a small child, I would build entire cities from blocks that would cover the entire living room floor. I was a pretty rambunctious kid, so my mother would always carry a box of crayons and paper in her purse to keep me occupied when I got restless. I would disappear into a piece of paper as I would color and draw. My mom also placed me in tons of art classes growing up, and she always supported and nurtured my artistic side. My first paying job was painting a Harley-Davidson sign that was cut out of metal. By the end of high school, I was drawing ad layouts for a small Chicago advertising firm. I've always known what I wanted to do. I graduated with a graphic-design and studio-art degree.



FEATURED ARTIST



MICHEL
PHOTOGRAPHIE *et* FILM



COLORS:



TYPEFACES:

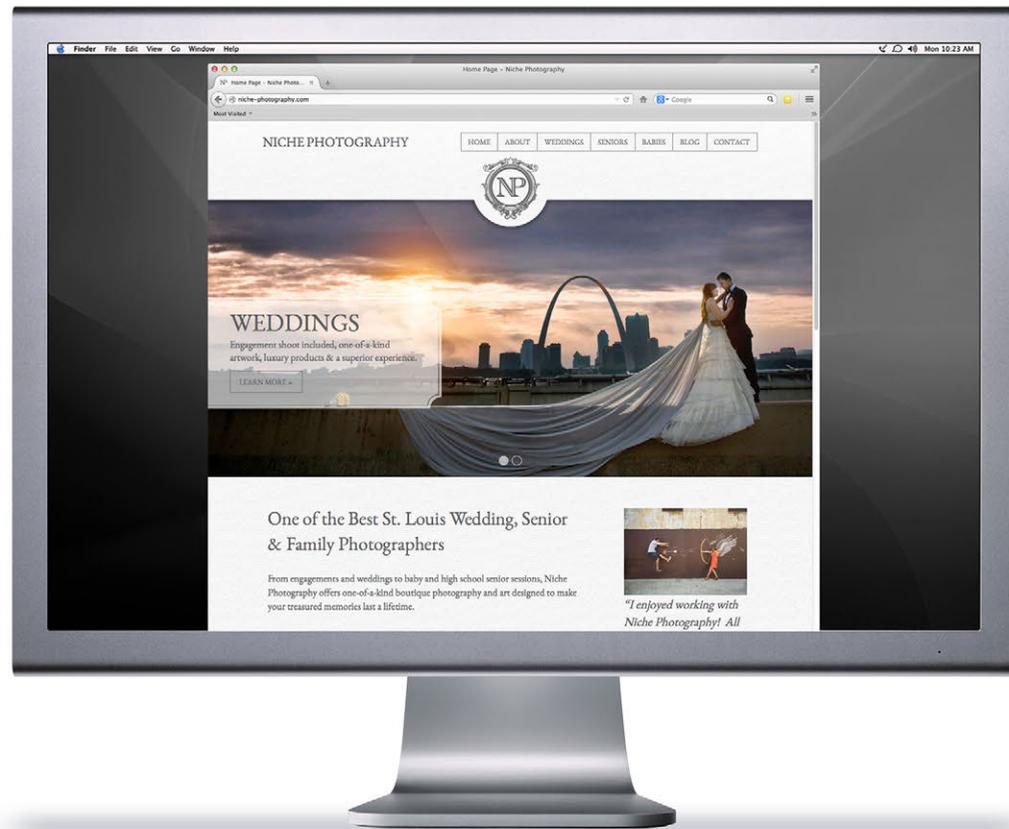
Adobe Garamond
Vast Shadow

BRANDING DESCRIPTION

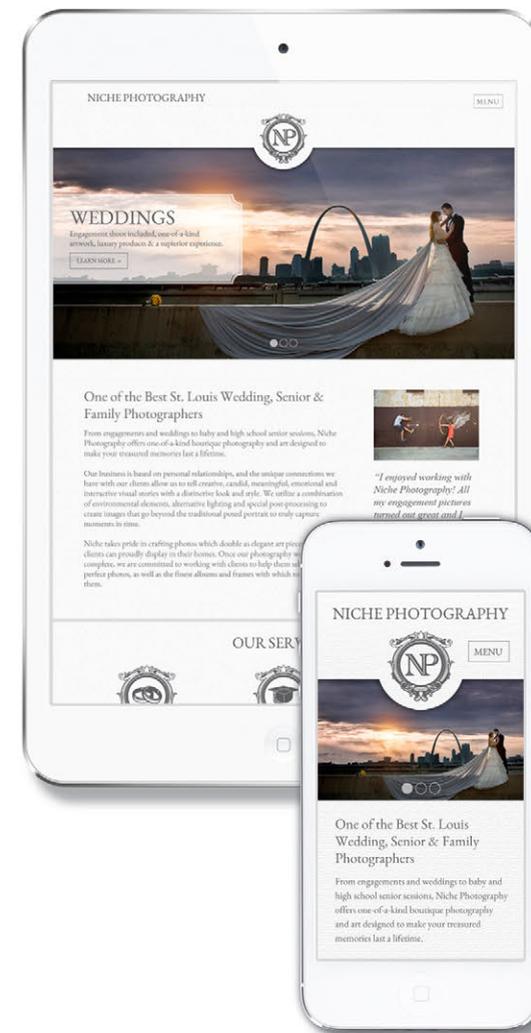
MICHEL PHOTOGRAPHIE ET FILM
QUEBEC, CANADA
WEDDING, PORTRAIT, & EVENT
PHOTOGRAPHER

Michel Ferland was looking for his new brand to feel classy, personal and upscale. We accomplished this by using an ornate "M" icon and a black and gold color palette.

The new logo and identity package feels rich—and, by using just his first name, the brand now feels more personable.



NICHE
PHOTOGRAPHY



“
WE LEARN
ALL WE CAN
ABOUT THE COMPANIES
AND THEN
CREATE A STYLE
THAT REFLECTS THEM.
”

IF NOT DESIGN,
WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING?

If I wasn't a designer, I would still be doing something creative and artistic, possibly an architect, chef, carpenter, painter or photographer. I love to build and create things.

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR
WORK AND STYLE.

One of my design strengths is that I am very versatile. I don't have one particular style. I believe each of my clients is unique, and I create a look and feel that reflects them and their products and services. Some brands should look corporate, others should look artistic. We learn all we can about the companies we work with, and then create a style that reflects them. I think the other advantages I have over most designers is that I understand business and I have the ability to use both sides of my brain. I can draw and I can also write code. Many designers are great artists but have little business acumen, and have a hard time being analytical.

BRANDING DESCRIPTION

NICHE PHOTOGRAPHY
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, USA
WEDDING, HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR,
& BABY PHOTOGRAPHER

Chad Keffer, the owner of Niche, wanted his new image and brand to feel very high-end. The new brand is applied very simply and elegantly with the use of just white and gray, allowing his imagery to stand out and make the statement for his brand.

Niche also came to us to design his new website, which was built using a fully custom, responsive WordPress theme.



WHAT ADVICE CAN YOU OFFER PHOTOGRAPHERS?

>> Master the camera so that you can create the type of images that you want. You don't want to be limited by having to use only techniques you know.

>> Once you have mastered the camera, define your style. Find a look and feel that reflects your perspective, and then stay true to it (but constantly evolve it).

>> Once you have your photography dialed in, work on creating a visual brand that complements it, starting with a logo.

>> Once you have a strong logo, make sure your visual brand matches it and that you have a cohesive look. If you place all your business collaterals on the ground (logo, business cards, packaging, website, signage, etc.), it should all work together.

>> Have a well-designed, user-friendly, responsive search-engine-optimized website that generates real leads. As a photographer, your website is your *most* important marketing tool.

>> *Always* stay true to your brand, while at the same time continuing to evolve it.

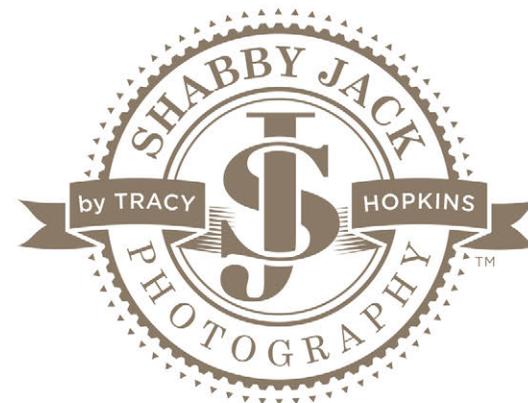
TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR COURSES AT SHUTTERFEST.

I will be teaching a course on how to build a strong cohesive visual brand and a couple courses on Search Engine Optimization (SEO). One on the basics and the other more in-depth.

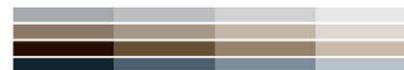
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Color Palette



Typefaces

CENTURY SCHOOLBOOK
GOTHAN MEDIUM



BRANDING DESCRIPTION

SHABBY JACK PHOTOGRAPHY
SPRING, TEXAS, USA
PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHER

We came up with two complementary logo options to match Tracy Hopkins's natural and artistic shooting style. The color palette is natural, with both warm and cool colors, which matches the style of Shabby Jack Photography.

Her packaging feels very high-end, with custom die-cut tags and laser- engraved and cut metal tags.



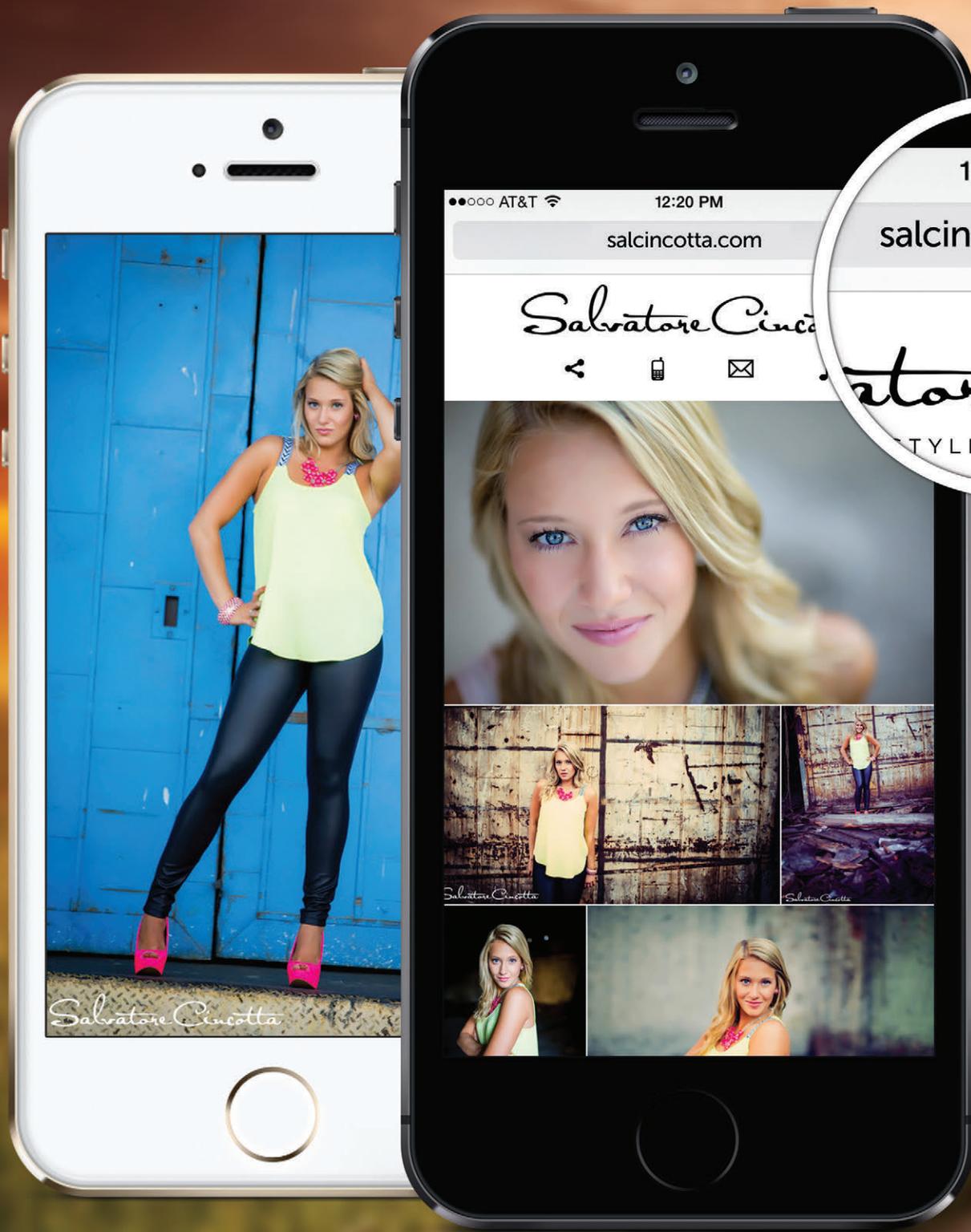
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MAKE

SH*T

HAPPEN

WITH SAL CINCOTTA





BY **SAL CINCOTTA**

We are all guilty of it. We make excuses. We make excuses for everything that goes wrong, and it doesn't matter if it's a wedding or a portrait shoot. "The bride was a bitch." "They didn't want their picture taken." "The groomsmen were unruly." "We didn't have enough time." "The kids wouldn't listen." Excuse after excuse after excuse.

Are you OK with that? I mean, it's not really a rhetorical question. Seriously, are you OK accepting and blaming everyone else for why things went wrong? I, for one, am not. I want to control my own destiny. And you can too. It's easier than you think. You just have to change the way you think.

Controlling your own path is not always easy. End of day, when things go wrong, you have no one to blame but yourself. On the flip side, you know that when things go right, you can be proud of your accomplishments. Growth comes from dealing with the adversity and challenges in every shoot.

Here are some tips for ensuring you control your own path. Like always, the only way I know how to teach this is through a real-world example.

Just recently, we visited Hong Kong on business. While there, I wanted to ensure I got a photo shoot in for my portfolio. The challenges were

endless: cultural differences, language barriers, dealing with models who were in no rush, wardrobe and locations.

First, my goal was to produce something unique for my portfolio and just get out there and shoot. We all need that once in a while. I was already there on business, and what better place than Hong Kong? Before leaving the States, we tried to coordinate with models, locations and wardrobe. All three bombed. No luck whatsoever. After we were on the ground, I was relying on both my wife, Taylor, and my assistant Alissa to help bring the details together. We were all getting frustrated at the lack of things coming together. Seemed like the shoot was never going to happen.

CHALLENGE #1 - MODELS

I feel like every time we talk about a shoot, models are reflected in a negative light. You know what they say about the shoe fitting. I don't know. Seems like if I were a model—and trust me, there is no demand for me to be a high-fashion model—I would respond to emails and casting calls offering me money. Just my opinion. First, no one would respond. Then, the ones who did respond went completely dark on us two days before the shoot. Incredible.





BEHIND THE SCENES

CHALLENGE #2 - TRANSPORTATION & LOCATION

Hong Kong is a cool city, but we wanted something that didn't look like a cityscape. We have plenty of that in our portfolio. I wanted something more exotic. The outskirts of Hong Kong offer plenty of that, but it would be at least an hour ride in a cab—for five people, making it somewhat cost-prohibitive. We needed a location closer to the city.

CHALLENGE #3 -WARDROBE

My team and I had faced the first two challenges before. I felt confident we could overcome them. This challenge, though, was trickier. Wardrobe is such an important part of any shoot. At the moment, we had nothing. No concept. No wardrobe. No ideas. We left the United States thinking we would find something in Hong Kong. Seemed like a reasonable enough idea.

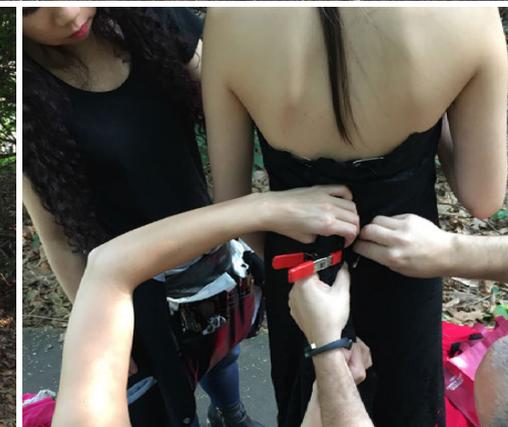
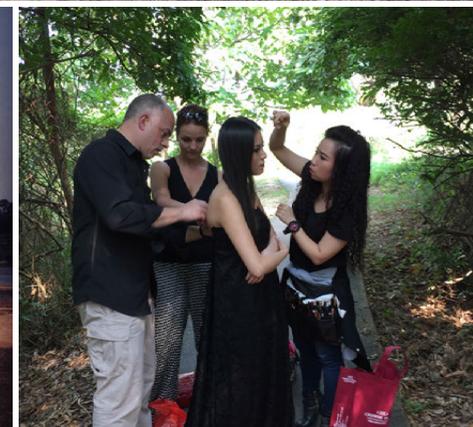
After a full day of Internet searching and walking the streets from dress shop to dress shop,

it became clear we were not going to get anything unique for less than about US\$800. And even then, it was cheap both in look and feel. This was just unacceptable. The team looked defeated. This shoot was not going to happen.

Maybe you are reading this and thinking these things are not really challenges. Suck it up, Sal. I can certainly agree with that, but the point is still valid. We all face challenges. How you deal with those challenges is what defines you and your business.

So how do you address challenges in a productive way? Divide and conquer.

If I have learned one thing in life, it's to surround myself with good people. People who are as passionate as I am. Do you have these people in your life? If not, this is going to be a struggle for you. Business is hard enough as it is, but you can't do it alone. You need a team of people you can trust. Taylor and Alissa worked on the locations, transportation and models.



BEHIND THE SCENES - HONG KONG'S GARMENT DISTRICT & ON-LOCATION

MAKING SH*T HAPPEN

Within a few hours, the girls had gotten ahold of a makeup artist who knew a model really willing to work. Boom! Done. Finally, a small win for us, less than 24 hours before the shoot. Because of our travel schedule, we had just one day to shoot.

Next, the location. This proved to be trickier still, but Alissa nailed it. She searched for hours on Google. Finding beautiful pictures online is easy. Finding the actual location, not so much. Teamwork, baby! I love it.

However, the last challenge was on me. Wardrobe. Yeah, that pain-in-the-ass thing you need for a shoot. I thought to myself, screw it. Let's make something on our own. How tough could it be? I have watched photographer after photographer come up with his own custom-made pieces. Surely, we could figure something out.

We headed off to Hong Kong's garment district, which is five times larger than the one in NYC. There, we should have been able to find any and all fabric we could ever want. The market did not disappoint.

It was incredible. I have never been so overwhelmed in my life. Fabric as far as the eye could see.

We had a vision. We wanted black and red. We wanted lace for the body of the dress and big, flowy chiffon. We went from store to store looking at and feeling fabric, and discussing how it would look on camera. It was probably one of the most therapeutic exercises I have ever been part of as a photographer. It was incredible. I felt like a true artist on so many levels. I was involved in something from inception. I highly encourage you to try something like this; it will change your perspective on things—and, no matter the outcome, it will give you a sense of accomplishment that words can't describe.

But I am no dressmaker. I am a faker, for sure. As much as I would love to teach you step by step how to make a dress, it's not my thing. All I can tell you is to get in there and figure it out. It's not that complicated. It's for a photo shoot, not something you would ever sell, so it has to just shoot well. With plenty of safety pins and material, anything is possible.

We made the body of the dress using black lace and black satin. For the belt, we picked up 4-inch

red satin ribbon and 4-inch black lace, and tied it behind her. Then, for the big dramatic shot, we tied red chiffon behind her back to the belt. That's all there was to it: a little imagination, some ingenuity and lots of safety pins.

When it's all said and done, don't let anyone else or any circumstances control your destiny. As cliché as it sounds, it's a reality for many. There are always going to be obstacles. That should be expected. It's how we overcome those obstacles that ultimately defines us. No matter how frustrated or overwhelmed you get, just realize that you are not in this alone. Others have gone through the same thing. Never give up. Find a way to get the shot! ■



Check out Sal Cincotta's video here!



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It's ironic that one word, exposure, can be so critical to every aspect of your career as a professional photographer. With your photographs, a decent exposure is critical to creating a beautiful image. Today, thanks to technology, if you screw up the exposure, you have the ability to fix it. Even though you're burning time, your most valuable commodity, the image, isn't lost. In the old film days, if you screwed up, you had to pray the lab could clean up your mess. And, if you were shooting chrome, there was absolutely no room for error. That was it: What you saw was what you got, with no forgiveness in sight.

Let's take a look at the other side of "exposure"—the one most of you ignore. What good is working so hard to create the greatest images of your life if nobody knows who you are?

Even tougher to think about is what happens when you don't get exposure—there's no lab to bail you out. There's no Keebler elf who's going to sneak into your studio in the middle of the night and help build your brand (let alone bake cookies). It's December, and you're about to head into the slowest part of the year, the first quarter. So let's hit a few ideas to help you start building a little momentum for your brand.

ADVERTISING

ADVERTISING SAYS TO PEOPLE "HERE'S WHAT WE'VE GOT. HERE'S WHAT IT WILL DO FOR YOU. HERE'S HOW TO GET IT." —LEO BURNETT I started here because it's one of the biggest areas so many of you don't understand. Every year I hear horror stories from disappointed photographers who spent money on local magazines and saw little or no return. It's the most expensive thing you can invest in, and, done right, it can be one of your most successful marketing practices. Let's take a look at the most important factors to keep in mind when shopping for advertising.

••• Before you decide to advertise in any magazine, ask to see a readership statement. You're looking to see how well the demographics of their readership match up with yours.

••• Look at the last two to three issues, and pay attention to who's advertising and who's not. Don't let the sales rep suck you into being in the book just because your competitor is.

••• Know your budget. The saddest thing in advertising is when somebody says to me, "We ran one ad and got nothing!" Well, you can't run just one time in any publication. They should have just saved their money and not run at all. You need to run a minimum of three publications in a row to start to build brand awareness.

••• Consider repetitive fractional ads. You don't need to run full-page ads in any publication, but three quarter-page ads in a row, all right-page, can be even more powerful if designed with impact.

••• Look for partnerships so you can share the cost. For example, a florist, venue and photographer could do a great job complimenting each other in an ad, and then splitting the cost.

••• Print vs. online: You want both. Remember to check the readership numbers for both the magazine's online presence as well as print.

••• Negotiate, negotiate, negotiate! Don't assume the open page rate is necessarily what you're going to be paying. Every publication has different ways to help you get more bang for your buck. The more you advertise, the more you'll save.

••• Push for editorial support. For example, don't run an ad without first requesting some editorial support. Along with your advertising, you're looking for an article that might be a profile story on your business.

••• Press releases: If you've been sending out a press release now and then but the magazine has never published anything, then it's really time to squeeze the sales rep. Support is a two-way street, and they shouldn't get your help if you're not getting theirs.

••• What are they offering you for placement within the magazine? There are a lot of different opinions on this one. A lot of people believe you always want to be in the forward third of the magazine and right-page read. But there are often some great positions to run an ad opposite a particularly popular feature column. Just remember you want to run in the same place for all three of the issues you're going to invest in.

••• And last but not least, but really the most important: What's the content/message of your ad? Show the ad to a few people in your network who aren't worried about telling you the truth. Your mother will always love everything you do, but she's not paying the bill or buying your services. You need a great image and a solid message. If it's a promotional ad, then you need to make sure the promo is strong enough to get people excited. Again, this is where the inner core of your network comes into play.

PUBLICITY ...

PUBLICITY CAN BE TERRIBLE. BUT ONLY IF YOU DON'T HAVE ANY. -JANE RUSSELL

Here's where you get to toot your own horn. (Of course, if you don't, nobody else will.) Your two basic strategies:

... Send out press releases. Last year at one of my workshops at ShutterFest, I gave out a template for anybody who wanted it. It was a short press release that only needed to be customized and a photograph added, and then sent to every publication, companies in the community, opinion leaders, chambers of commerce, etc.

HERE'S THE TEMPLATE I SHARED:

For Immediate Release: (Your city, today's date)

Area Photographer Attends (Event name)

In (his/her) continued efforts to expand the broad selection of cutting-edge photographic services offered by (your studio name), (your name) recently attended the (name of workshop) held in (location) on (date).

"There's never been a more exciting time to be a professional photographer, or to have images created by a professional," said (your name), owner of (your studio). "Digital technology is changing all the time, and I want to make sure I'm offering my clients the very best!"

(Your name) is the founder of (your studio), located at (address). The studio offers a full range of (your specialties) services.

For more information, contact: Your name, phone and email address.

Include a photograph of yourself interacting with someone at the convention.

... Build relationships! This isn't just about the local paper, but about anybody or any company that publishes anything in your community. Get to know the editors at the local paper, local magazines, and websites and blogs of popular companies in your community. This should be a routine part of building your network.

People are always telling me there's nothing to write about. Actually, there's something going on every day in your business that, presented the right way, is newsworthy. Examples include expanding your services to a new specialty, attending a workshop to expand your skills, adding another shooter, buying a new printer and offering instant onsite service, participating in various community and charity events...get the idea?

Last point on the topic of publicity: Look into online publicity companies that can help you get your press releases published. Working with an online company can help you expand your exposure dramatically. I use Vocus, which ties into PRWeb. It's worth checking out.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ...

Nothing will get your name out there faster or better than being involved in your community. Whether it's a full-scale fund-raiser or just the day-in/day-out support of a particular event or association, you need to be involved. People like buying products from companies they perceive as giving back to the community.

PHYSICAL DISPLAYS ...

Coffee shops, doctor's offices, restaurants, etc. are all fair game, and they all need decorating. For example, Helen Yancy, in Detroit, started out years ago with her images on display in a local diner. Bob Coates is doing some stunning fine-art work with his images of jazz musicians on display in a jazz bar and restaurant in Sedona, AZ, right now.

GET YOUR WORK OUT THERE

Again, it's about exposure and getting your work out there and in front of people. There's only so much I can talk about here. There are opportunities for direct-mail programs, images for company calendars in your community, partnership marketing with other companies, promotional events and teaching adult education programs, just to name a few.

Let's go right back to the beginning: You're the only one who can build exposure for your business, but the first building block is your skill set. If you have the skill set and get clean images right out of the can, then you've got the time to focus on marketing instead of cleaning up everything you do on the computer.

Build your skill set, and then don't be shy about letting the world know you're out there. Only you can create exposure. ■



Check out Skip Cohen's video here!

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DIGITAL FILES

TO SELL
— OR —
NOT TO SELL

WITH LORI NORDSTROM



by **Lori Nordstrom**

We are living in a digital world. Let's face it. If you would have asked me 10 years ago if I would be selling digital files, I would have said, "Never!" I converted from film to a digital studio in 2000. I've learned over the years to never say never. Times change and the needs and wants of our clients change.

Ten years ago, my reasons for not selling digital files were very different than they are today. Back then, it was primarily the fact (or fear) that clients would take their files to be printed at some crappy discount store, or even print them at home on their even crappier home printer. We were all afraid of losing that control—that our work would be diminished because of how it was presented to the world. And while those are valid points, 10 years later, we know that printers are getting better and clients have many resources for printing their images, but research and statistics show that people are not printing their images anymore.

Yes, we live in a digital world. We live in a world of instant gratification. The average consumer has at minimum a decent camera, and many have the same or better cameras than we are using in our businesses. The average consumer (over two-thirds of Americans) owns a smartphone and has access to a digital camera 24/7, not to mention photo editing programs like Photoshop.

So, if we agree that digital is now a commodity, and we decide to sell digital files as our main product, can we agree that our business will become a commodity as well? Selling digital files is not a profitable solution. Not only will there always be someone else who will shoot and hand over the digital files cheaper than you will, but people can do this on their own. They don't need a pro if all we are selling is digital files. It actually shocks me that people hire the average pro Joe portrait photographer for digital files anymore. Why pay anyone when I can do it myself for free, or have my sister, neighbor or child's soccer coach do it for free?





If you are selling digital files and you haven't heard this argument already from a client, it's coming. If all you sell is digital files, you are guaranteed to hear price objections no matter what you charge. Our clients know what a digital file "costs." It's free. They are not considering the time you've spent educating yourself, the time you've spent editing and retouching their files to make them perfect before delivering them. They don't even give much value to the custom USB drive or the beautiful DVD cover you've designed, because it still contains "free" digital files. You can't get cheap enough to make it seem "fair" in the mind of the average consumer today.

I truly believe that if I were only selling my photography in the form of digital files, I would be out of business. It is just not a sustainable business model. Not only could I not charge enough, but my time is eaten away behind the computer. There are great outsourcing options now, but if I'm going to outsource, I have to consider that in my cost of sale. And, again, there is no way to get my price cheap enough to compete and stay profitable at the same time.

What is the solution? To be profitable in our digital world, we have to offer and suggest products that are not digital. Whether you are shooting all on location, in a home studio or you have a retail location, the solution is to offer a "full service" opportunity for our clients. Making suggestions right from the first phone call is key. Help your clients to envision and start taking ownership from the beginning—from beautiful wall decor for their home to an heirloom album that shows off their family relationships and personality. We are creating and capturing memories and moments for our clients. Handing over digital files that will live and die on their computers is not the solution.

A key question for you to start asking any client who inquires about digital files is: "Do you mind telling me what you plan on doing with your digital files?" Start asking each of your clients this question. You will typically get one of these answers:

1. I want to be able to share them/send them/post them/use them on our family blog/use them as a screensaver/have them on my phone to show off.
2. I want to make some prints for scrapbooking/for our huge family/for tabletop frames.
3. I archive all of our family's digital files, and would like to be able to archive these as well (for the smarties).
4. I don't really know...

So, let's look at replies to each of these. Remember, the client is calling and asking about price or about digital files. I've asked her:

"Do you mind telling me what you plan on doing with your digital files?"

Response No. 1: "I want to be able to share them on Facebook. A lot of my family lives far away." **My answer:** "No problem. I'm not going to ask you to purchase your digital files. I want to give them to you! Sharing your images with your family is so important. With every image that you order, you'll get a complimentary Web-sized file to share however you'd like. Sound fair?"

I want my clients to share their files. That's called free marketing. I also want them to order products first, and I want those digital files that they share to have my URL on them.

Response No. 2: "My husband and I each have big families, and we like to be able to send them all 4x6s of our pictures." **My answer:** "I'll tell you what: Let's concentrate on what's going to be best for your family. I want to make sure you enjoy your images every single day. And then, once we've got your favorites selected and ordered, I'm happy to throw in 4x6s for your family of any of the poses you chose for yourself. I'll even throw in Web-sized files for you to share in an email or on social media."

Yes, I will give away free small prints once a wall portrait or album has been ordered, especially if this is a hang-up for a client. I want to take that concern away from them and concentrate on creating product for their home.

Response No. 3: The really technically savvy client—or the client who has already had a hard drive crash and knows the importance of archiving—will answer something like this: "We archive all of our digital files now, and I get really into tagging and cataloging them so that I can find them easily later." **My answer:** First, I'm going to ask if she wants a job. (Just kidding, but it sounds like she's doing a better job than I am!) I will answer, "I know how important archiving is to some of our clients, especially those who have already lost digital files from a crashed computer or hard drive. Digital files are so fragile, aren't they? [Wait for a yes response. They may tell you their own story about why archiving is important to you—tools you can use to knock home your point!] We do have some collections available for those who want to archive their images, but I'll also be showing you a way that you can get those at a discount or even free."





Yes, the “f” word again. I want them to concentrate on what I want them to concentrate on, not on the digital files.

Response No. 4: “I don’t really know, we’ve gotten digital files from the last photographer we used, and she’s out of business now, so I’m just looking around.” **My answer:** “Well, you’re in for a real treat! We don’t sell a lot of digital files; instead, I like to concentrate on what’s most important to you, and that’s your family and your relationship with one another. I want to really focus on each of your kids’ personalities and what makes them special. Can you tell me about each of your children?” This answer gets her talking again. I want to find out about who I’m going to be photographing, while at the same time learning more about my client and what makes her tick.

After any of these answers, my next question is going to be exactly that: “Tell me about who we’re going to be photographing.” Or: “I’m so glad that you found me! Can you tell me how you heard about me?” I want to continue the conversation, start building our relationship and redirect to what’s important. Eventually, I will be asking every caller, “Have you thought about where you’re going to hang your portraits?” She will answer, “No, I haven’t thought about that.” She might even answer, “No, we were just thinking we’d get the digital files, or maybe just a few small ones.” Now is my time to start making suggestions and start planting seeds. I will continue the conversation with this: “One of my favorite parts of my job is that I get to play interior designer. I want to create something really special for your home—something that you’ll enjoy every single day. Along with beautiful wall portraits, most of our clients end up with an album or image box, something to really showcase their family’s story.”

My No. 1 rule for my business is that I always want a “yes” answer for my clients, but first it must be a “yes” for my business and my family. I always want to answer my clients positively, and give them a “what’s in it for them” answer, but it’s going to be well thought out on my end first.

This has been the answer to the digital dilemma for me, and I believe it’s what’s kept me in business. By offering products that our clients aren’t being introduced to anywhere else, we are not only avoiding the digital bullets, but we can be more profitable while setting ourselves apart. Ten years later, when you ask me the question “Do you sell digital files?” my answer has changed. I do want that “yes” for my client, but it will always—always—be a “yes” for my business and my family first.

WAYS TO USE (AND SELL) DIGITAL FILES AS INCENTIVES TO BUY

- Give a complimentary “web-sized” file with logo with each purchased pose as an incentive for purchase.
- When an album is purchased, give the client a complimentary digital copy from StickyAlbums or an Animoto slide show.
- Sell digital collections at a premium and offer deeper discounts as the client spends more with you on physical products.

WHEN TO SELL DIGITAL FILES

- Business Headshots
- Model Portfolios
- For commercial use: publications, products, bands, etc.
- Wedding collections (Sell time + talent + product first. Add digital files.)



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MASTERING DIGITAL FILES

IMPORT AND BACKUP

WITH DUSTIN LUCAS





BY DUSTIN LUCAS

In this industry, we struggle on a daily basis to maintain a fail-safe digital workflow. This is a crucial point in your business, and you need to consider a few of these guidelines when storing your images.

Whether or not you shoot weddings, you are collecting thousands of images that need to be accessible and stored long-term. First, how are you getting these images onto your computer? Are you using any software at all, or just dragging and dropping images from your card reader to a folder on the desktop? If you do import with software, is there a primary and secondary option for backup? If you are thinking that backup is for after you import and edit, you have to reconsider that as a viable option. If you are thinking about these things but haven't put in place a practical workflow, this article will give you the tools to do so.

1 MEMORY CARDS

So you are sitting at your desk with a pile of SD or CF cards and wondering what to do. For Mac users, if you have been using iPhoto to import your images and want to continue working in the photography business without data errors, you need to make a change. Stop using this Apple default software, and get serious about your workflow. Starting with hardware, I suggest getting a multibay card reader like the Lexar Professional Workflow HR1, which is for USB 3.0 connection, or wait for the HR2, which has Thunderbolt 2. The key to a successful multicard import is the software you are running.

2 IMPORT SOFTWARE

Native software from companies like Canon and Nikon can be useful for purely importing and backing up images (See 2.1). But beefier programs like Adobe Lightroom give you the ability to ingest multiple cards by selecting multiple sources (just hold CTRL when clicking on the sources [See 2.2]).

The downside to Lightroom is it has to render previews from large files in order to quickly cull and/or edit (See 2.3). The solution is called Photo Mechanic. This popular software by Camera Bits has created an industry standard for import, backup and culling thousands of images at the fastest pace. The last thing you need it to do after a 100GB import is to wait longer for the software to process previews.

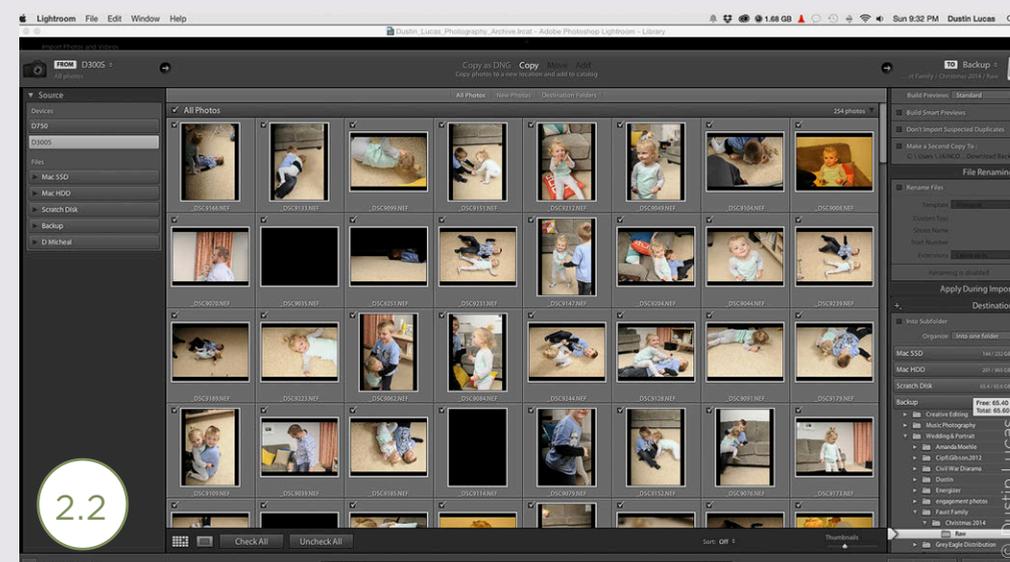
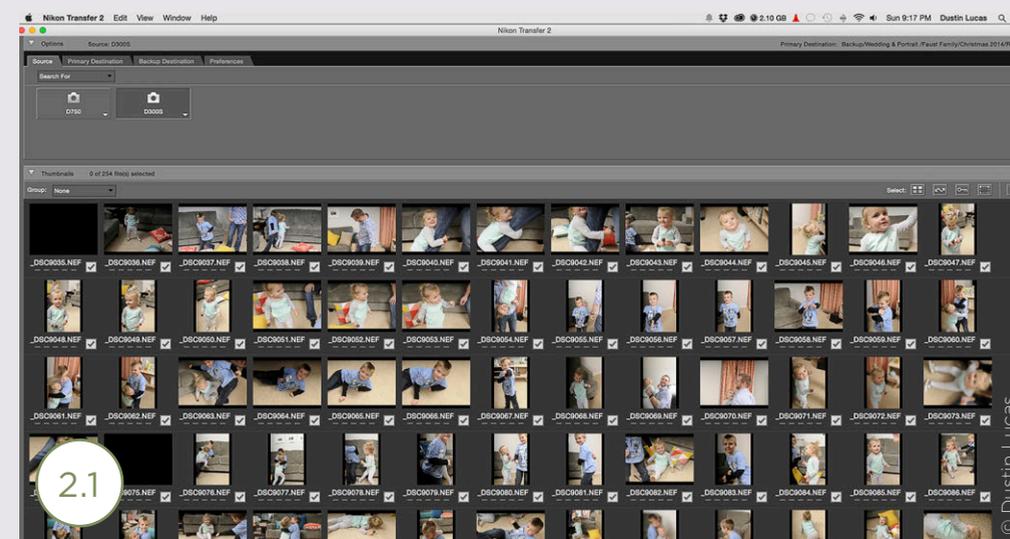
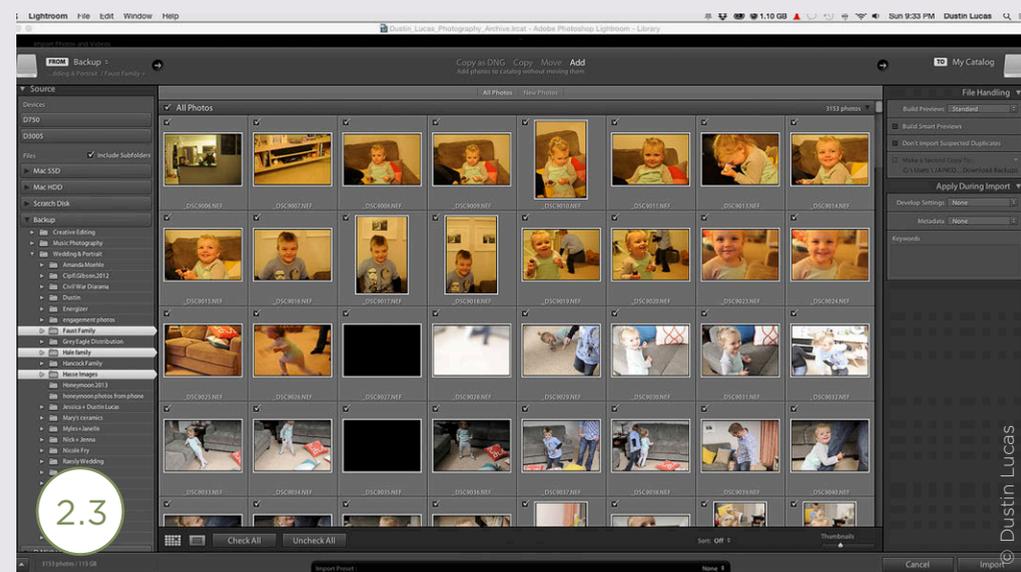


Photo Mechanic provides a great solution for your digital workflow during import and backup. The current v5 software has an incredible interface allowing multiple cards to be selected. So does Lightroom, but Photo Mechanic's engine is faster and streamlined to increase ease of use. Now, the three most important options while importing software is adding IPTS metadata, sorting images and backing up data (See 2.4).



3 — METADATA

IPTS metadata includes copyright, studio name, URL (website), job name, keywords, location, date, etc. This is such an overlooked process when ingesting photos into your computer. Copyright, for instance, is a widespread topic for those of us who work in this digital industry. Adding copyright information after capture saves your contact information for permissions and usage.

Keeping your guard up with digital images becomes difficult when you post them online and or deliver thumb drives to your clients. You should get into the habit of adding this information at import.

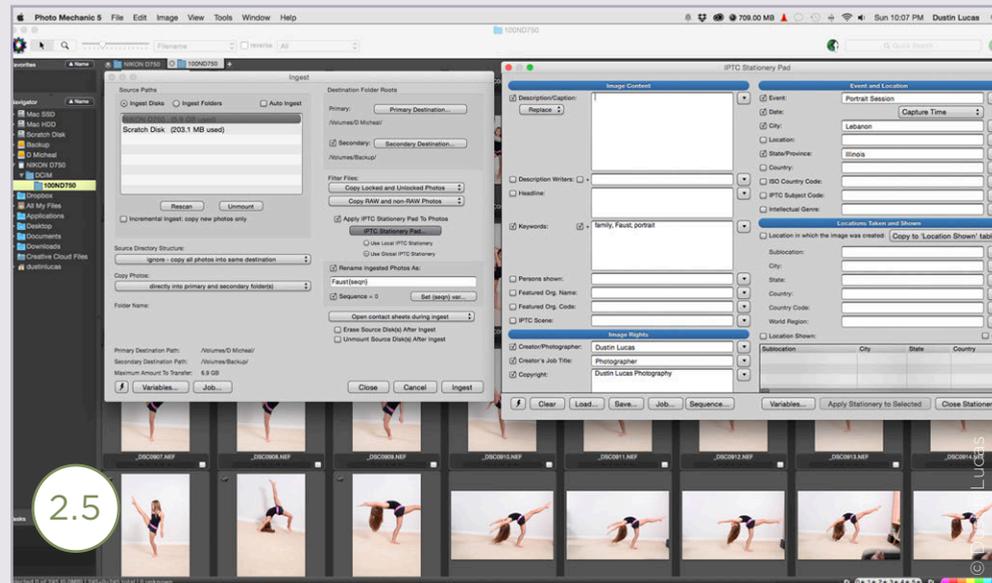
4 — SORTING

Photo Mechanic can also capture time and sync multiple cameras. Trust me, editing weddings where batches of images are scattered throughout the catalog is a huge pain. Renaming can be a great tool to reorder you entire collection of images as well as a quicker method for finding images in the future. Now on to the process of culling and tagging images.

This software provides a small preview of the larger RAW file, and instantaneously allows the user to scroll through the thousands of images. This is such a bonus after all the time it takes to import the hundreds of gigabytes of data.

As a reminder, when using multiple pieces of software to import, cull and edit, you need to make sure the .xmp file setting are readable by other software you currently utilize in your workflow. Those may include Adobe Bridge, Lightroom and Photoshop, as well as Phase One's Capture One. Compatibility becomes very important when saving sidecar .xmp files.

From experience, color tagging seems to be the most frustrating form of selection, and star rating is more universal between programs. Whichever method you choose does not affect efficiency—it’s a matter of preference (See 2.5).



5 BACKUP

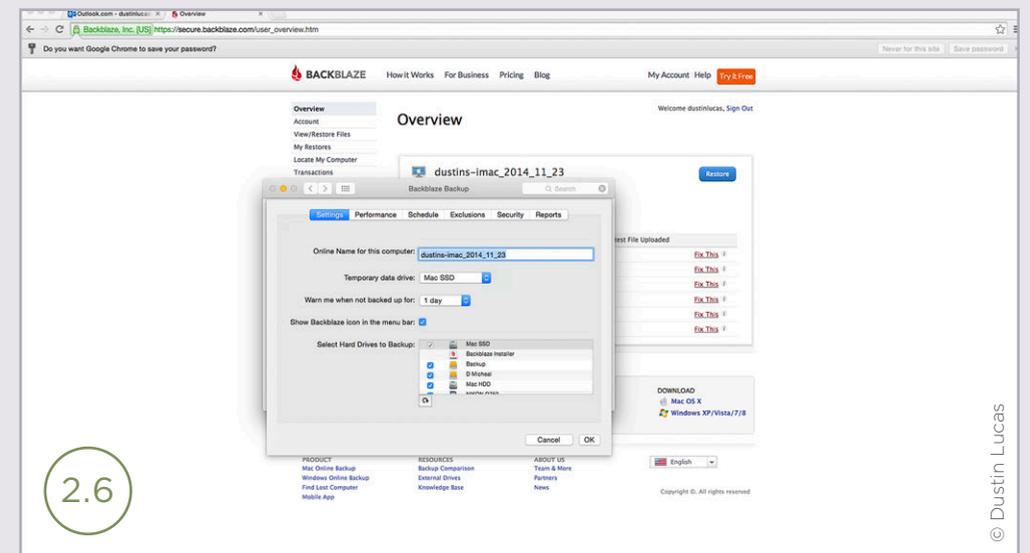
Backup begins at import and continues through your digital workflow. Meaning that you need to stick to a repetitive process for securing all your files. Now, backing up your files can be done with so many programs, but you need an understanding of different types of backup. These include tangible and intangible forms of backup. Tangible relates to memory cards, hard drives, CDs, etc., while intangible—or online backups—allows Internet access to your archived files. Either of these is good to have, and you should definitely consider both.

Internal and external HDDs are the typical devices for backup. Since the fall in prices for multiple terabytes of data, this can be a cheaper solution if purchasing consumer-grade hardware. Business-level hardware, like the popular Drobo multibay HDD system, supports up to 20TB and incorporates a BeyondRAID trademarked technology that has redundancy bays requiring no user setup.

This means that if a HDD fails in this device, your data is not compromised. The LaCie 5big Thunderbolt, similar in expandability, requires the user to configure a RAID 0 or 1 redundancy file system. You should have one live device (one you work off of) and one backup device (continually updating files you change) for local storage. These are great tools for local backup, but what if these get damaged?

Online, or cloud, backup has been revered by digital artists due to the cost, and, more importantly, the hackability of server farms. Put away your hacking concerns. Some of the consumer-grade programs, like iCloud, GoogleDrive, OneDrive and Dropbox, allow users with less than a terabyte of data to back up in a costly manner. Think about how much data you shoot for a wedding, and consider unlimited storage and the yearly cost.

Programs like GoogleDrive and Dropbox Pro allow terabytes of data to be stored, but their ability to back up external HDDs is burdened by their clunky sync features. Programs like BackBlaze, CrashPlan and Zoolz are great solutions for multiple HDD backups, and they are the most competitive in pricing. I recommend finding a total solution for backup, including local and online (See 2.6).



Getting back to the process of backup at import: You need to set a primary and secondary backup location. This will record your RAW images straight from your memory card and store everything on your live and backup HDD. I suggest getting at least USB 3.0 and Thunderbolt interfaces for your live drive to work off of for the most performance.

You should never check the option Delete Images After Import, because you never know if the software will freeze during this process and corrupt the memory cards. Once you have ingested and backed up the images, depending on your online storage program, it will back up in real time.

Hopefully after digesting all of this material, you are thinking about your digital workflow and figuring out where the gaps are. I am confident in this practice of import and backup, as I use it in my own workflow. Implement a reliable practice of your own, and stick to it. ■



Check out Dustin Lucas's video here!



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PRICING

YOUR DIGITAL FILES

WITH BLAIR PHILLIPS





by **Blair Phillips**

The introduction of digital files to our industry was the elephant in the room for a while. It has brought a lot of positives for most of us. With any advancements, there are always several negatives. There are more and more customers who want only the digital files from their sessions these days. At first glance, it seems like a way to make great profit margins. Sell the digital files, and you don't have to purchase prints from the lab.

THE VALUE OF DIGITAL FILES

But there's a complex chain of events happening when you sell only the digital files. The general public really does not value digital files nearly as much as they do a framed portrait hanging in their living room. Nearly everyone you know has an iPhone or digital camera that is full of images that will never make it to a printer. Children of the seventies and eighties generally have at least one photo album of their childhood in the home. Children of today are going to grow up with hardly any hard-copy prints to remind them of their childhood vacations.

The general public is being educated by magazines and the Internet to ask for the digital files. When you ask them what they want them for, they have no idea. I researched a lot of mainstream photography printing labs, and they all agree that portrait printing sales continue to decline each year. This may not be solely due to the popularity of the sale of digital files, but it has to be a contributor. The majority of photographers don't realize how important printing labs are to our industry. I have never been to a photography conference or trade show where I did not see a major printing lab. Conferences and trade shows would not be possible if it were not for photo printing labs' generous sponsorships. So put a lot of thought into the importance of selling prints instead of going straight to the digital file sale. With all of that being said, there will come a time when selling the digital files may be your only option.





WORKING WITH POTENTIAL CLIENTS

When a potential client calls and has her mind set only on digital files, you need to have a plan of action. For years, I simply did not have very many options for offering digital files. I probably lost out on a lot of money. For the client who wants only digital files, we offer a different type of appointment. It is so simple and easily reproducible. We offer a digital file session that includes two outfit changes and 30 minutes of camera time. This session does not sound nearly as appealing compared to a normal portrait session with my studio. We charge \$1,500 and deliver around 25 images for a digital file session. Offering this session allows me the ability to never tell a client no. Figuring your pricing for a digital file only is really simple if you want it to be. I just look at my average sell across the board. I take that number and raise it by 20 percent. Raising the prices on the digital-file-only session has been a great way to keep my morale strong. There are always big changes on the horizon, so you just have to put plans in place that will allow you to be a couple of steps ahead of the change.

CHARGE SUCCESSFULLY

Photographers are normally very detail-oriented people. We always feel the need to be in control of what happens to our images after we create them. Most of us are always talking about not wanting clients to take our files to a drugstore lab. We do not want our work to be printed with equipment that is not calibrated and may not represent the correct color. For this reason, if you sell digital files, make sure you are charging the correct price. This is an area that you should not sell yourself short on. If you are charging a premium price, you will not likely care what they do with the images after you deliver them. If you are not pricing your digital images in a way that is making the same profit as if you were selling hard-copy prints, you are selling yourself short. You need to make your clients understand that the bulk of the price is a creation fee. Educate your clients on the amount of overhead it takes to create images for them. The general public just thinks that you buy a camera and start firing away. The more you are able to successfully charge and collect for your digital files, the more you will enjoy photography.



© Blair Phillips

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is rapidly becoming one of the first things humans reach for when they wake up. We are all so curious and nosy to see what is going on in everyone's life. Social media is another advantage we have in selling digital files. When a client buys either one or all of his digital files, the first thing he does is post them on all the social media sites. This is wonderful for me since all of his friends will want the same thing he has. If you have never found a good reason to sell your digital files, social media should help curb your decision. The more they are shared, the more opportunities you will have to gain new clients. An actual file from your camera looks better than a cell phone picture of a print.

Whether or not you sell digital files, I believe the future of photography will force us to do so. I still believe we have several years of portrait sell left. Selling digital files does not always have to be a negative thing. Find a common ground that is good for you and your client. In some cases, I make the digital files available for purchase only after a certain number of prints are purchased. This is an example of both parties getting what they want. Let's all make a pledge to continue to push the importance of portraits hanging in the home. But when you find yourself needing to sell the digital files, let them go. 📷



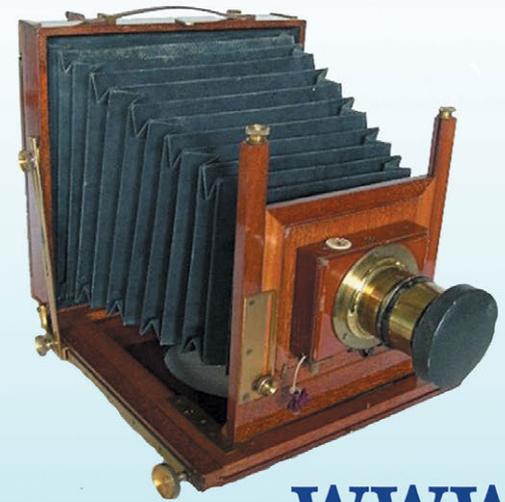
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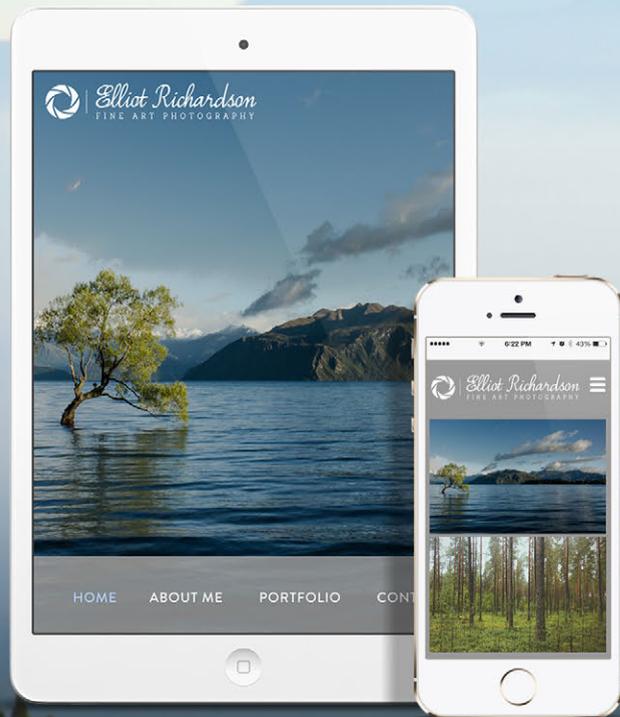
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THE ULTIMATE
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EXPERIENCE

WITH JOE SWITZER

MEDIAZILLA



by **Joe Switzer**

How are you delivering your video product? All the filmmakers and photographers I know deliver their videos and slideshows in one of three ways. They burn to standard DVD or Blu-ray; export to a hard drive or jump drive; or, probably the most popular video deliverable solution these days, upload to Vimeo or YouTube. All of these methods have issues and are not perfect. DVDs get scratched, causing them to start freezing and skipping. Hard drives and jump drives can fail, deleting their content.

Vimeo and YouTube have been popular solutions for most of us. The content is safe in the cloud, but with a caveat: You sacrifice the most important element of your business that Sal has been educating us on for years.

EXPERIENCE

What kind of experience does YouTube offer with all that video clutter? In the past, most filmmakers spent time making beautiful interactive menus that allowed the client to skip around and see the different parts of the video. Event filmmakers' final deliverable DVDs had the look and feel of a feature-film DVD. 2015 is right around the corner. As always, all of us are trying to save time and money, while providing a timeless video experience that is easy and memorable for our clients.

MEET MEDIAZILLA

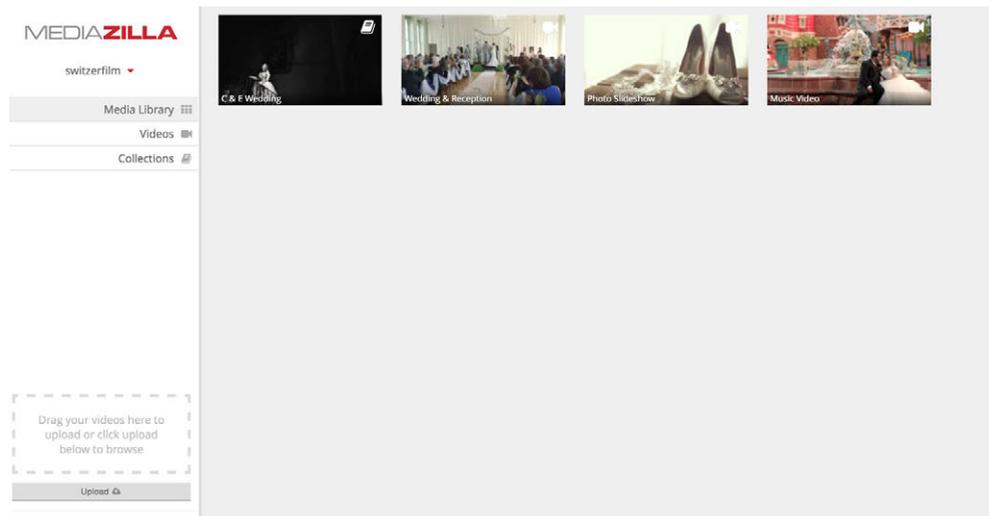
What service could do it all for you and your clients? It just might be MediaZilla. This company was launched a few months ago by the supertalented Jon Geddes and Michael Guastamacchio. It's a fast-growing specialized cloud-based solution for professional filmmakers that allows us to give our clients the ultimate final-product experience. There's really nothing comparable to MediaZilla out there right now.



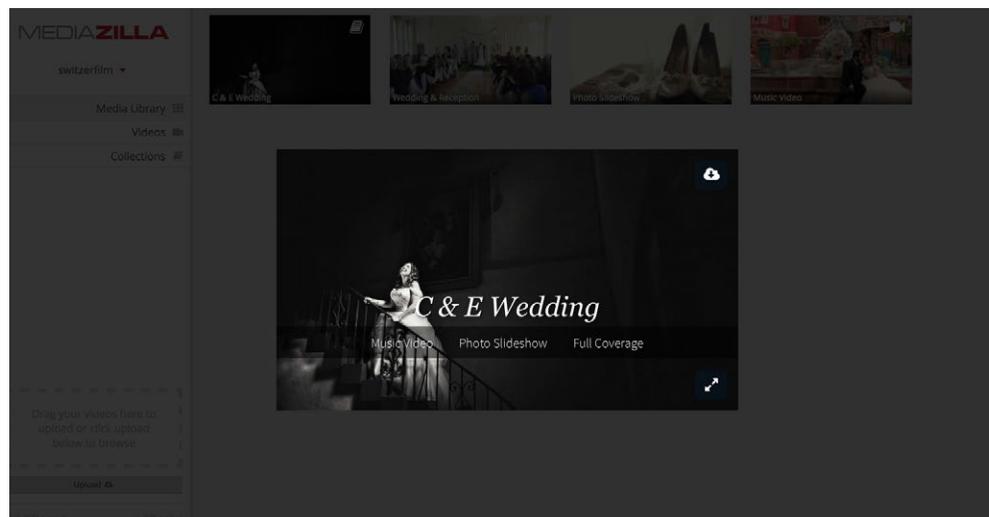
[[HOMEPAGE](#)]

I used MediaZilla for the first time just a few days ago. The learning curve was tiny. At my company, Switzerfilm, we have been delivering by disc for as long as I can remember. Over the last two years, delivery has been getting more and more difficult since we decided to produce only Blu-rays. All the discs we create and deliver are for our wedding clients, and it is getting difficult because parents, grandparents and wedding couples all have different ways they consume video. Just about everyone has a DVD player, and maybe the bride and groom have a Blu-ray player, but we don't want to compress and degrade the quality of our films by delivering standard DVDs.

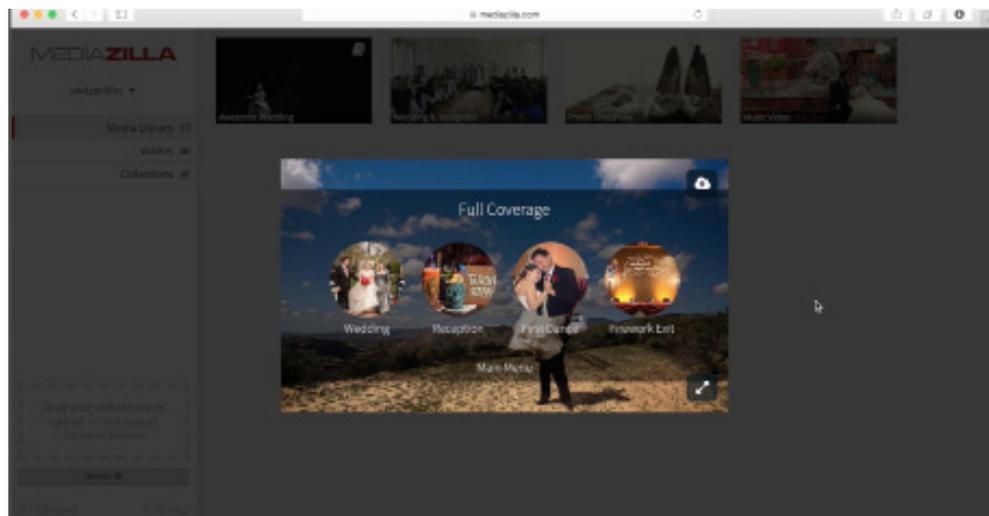
This is why we have urged our clients to get Blu-ray players. Switzerfilm has been burning Blu-rays for two years. So what are we going to do now? We're going to try MediaZilla and provide a physical copy on a jump drive in a customized box from White House Custom Colour. This makes clients feel like they got something for all that money. It's like unwrapping a birthday party or Christmas gift. It just feels good to have something tangible. Our editor Ashley has complained for years about using Adobe Encore, After Effects, and Drag and Burn, and all these programs have glitches. We have found ourselves redoing projects all the time, and Blu-ray discs are expensive. Making the move to MediaZilla will save us a ton of time because all we have to do is upload, drop some photos in and change the text to what we want it to say. The savings in time and money on the discs will help pay for the \$50 per month price tag of being a MediaZilla client.



[MEDIA LIBRARY]



[WEDDING COLLECTION]



[MAIN MENU]

[POTENTIAL PROBLEMS]

Now, before you stop making discs and go all in with MediaZilla, you need to know the only issue that they're working on that might be a problem for you and your clients. Then I'm going to go through my Top 5 reasons you need to start using MediaZilla today. (The video link at the end of the article gives you the walkthrough of how to use MediaZilla. If you are already sold on trying MediaZilla, feel free to jump right to the video.)

[POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS]

Let's get right to that problem: television. Many of your clients want to watch the movie you made them on their 5.1 surround sound home theater system with the extralarge projection screen. They want to be entertained, and they want the video to play when they want it to play. But people can barely turn on and work their own televisions, have little patience and don't want to put any thought or effort in getting their video to play. The MediaZilla team knows this, and is working on apps that will change the way your clients enjoy video content on their smart televisions.

But what about a solution now? I haven't tried this feature yet, but the company website says, "If you have Apple TV, you can access content from your synced device. You can also use Google Chromecast and other such devices to display content from your computer, laptop or other synced device."

This means they have a solution for your clients today, but it's not an app. Don't forget, you could always plug your computer or tablet into your television, but this is something that your average clients won't want to do because they can barely work their television remote.

TOP 5 REASONS TO USE MEDIAZILLA

1. Your video is safe and secure in the cloud. As soon as you upload your video, it's backed up for good until you delete it. You can even download the file. Just using the service for storage is a comforting feeling that will help me sleep better at night.
2. Cross-platform experience. Being able to have an interactive movie experience on portable devices allows clients to be entertained from virtually everywhere. The majority of your clients are connected to the world with mobile, and will be sharing with their friends and family on their phones and tablets. No more YouTube clutter, because with MediaZilla, the sharing experience is beautiful and memorable.
3. Save time. It takes us about an hour to create and burn a disc with a menu. We can make a menu with MediaZilla in a matter of minutes, and don't have to wait for exporting or compressing.
4. MediaZilla video links on your company website. It's a new way to interact online instead of just having a video link with clickable options for our clients. It's something different and unique that can help us stand out from our competitors.
5. Protect client investment. Do you really want your clients calling you and being upset that their DVDs are scratched and they can't watch their wedding anymore? Are you going to carry around and store all those extra hard drives and DVDs? More and more of our clients are viewing their video on tablets, phones, smart televisions, and computers. It's just so easy to click on a link and watch the video with MediaZilla. The video overview shows you how simple uploading, designing and sharing your videos is. Happy filmmaking. 🎬

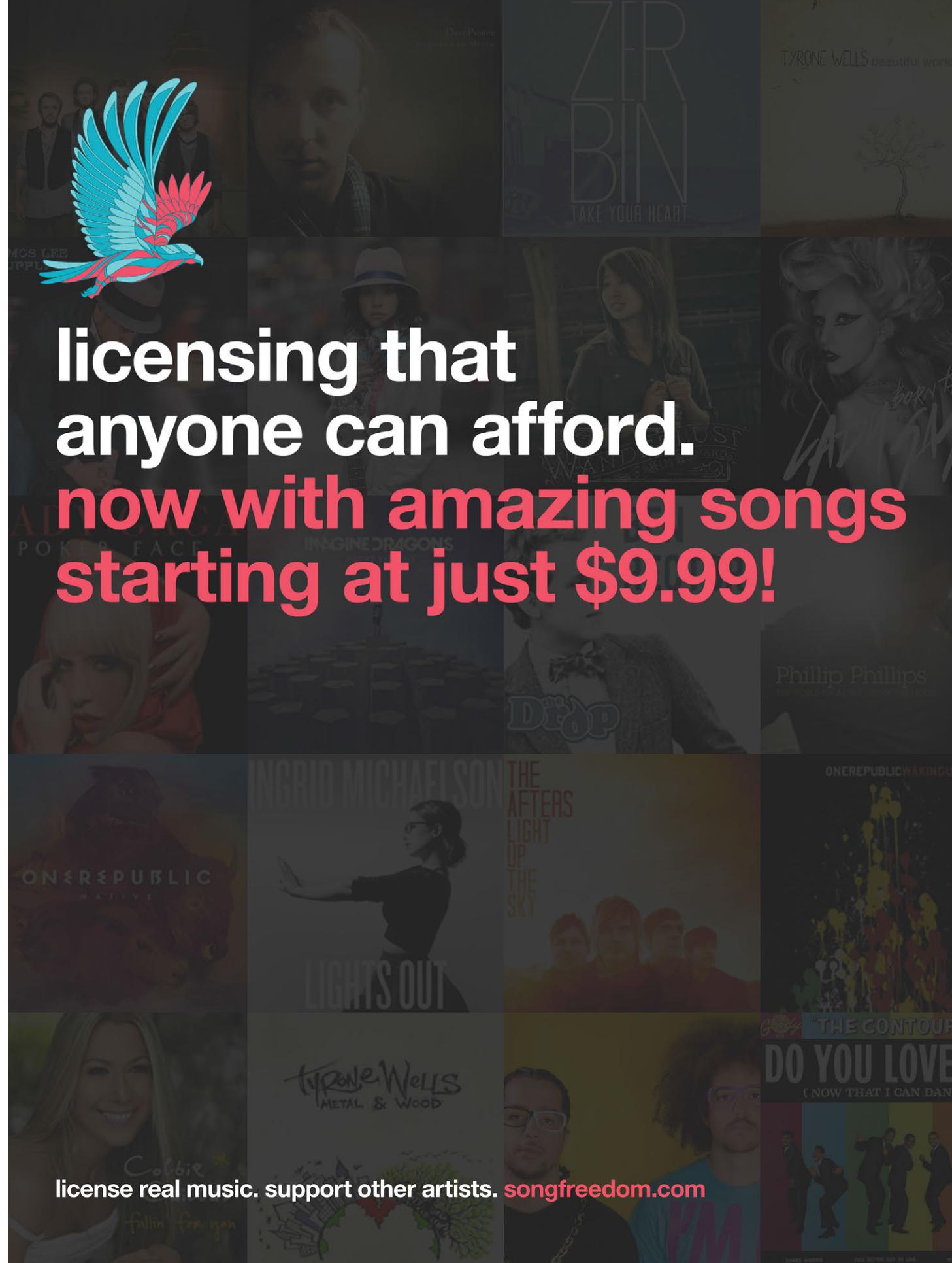


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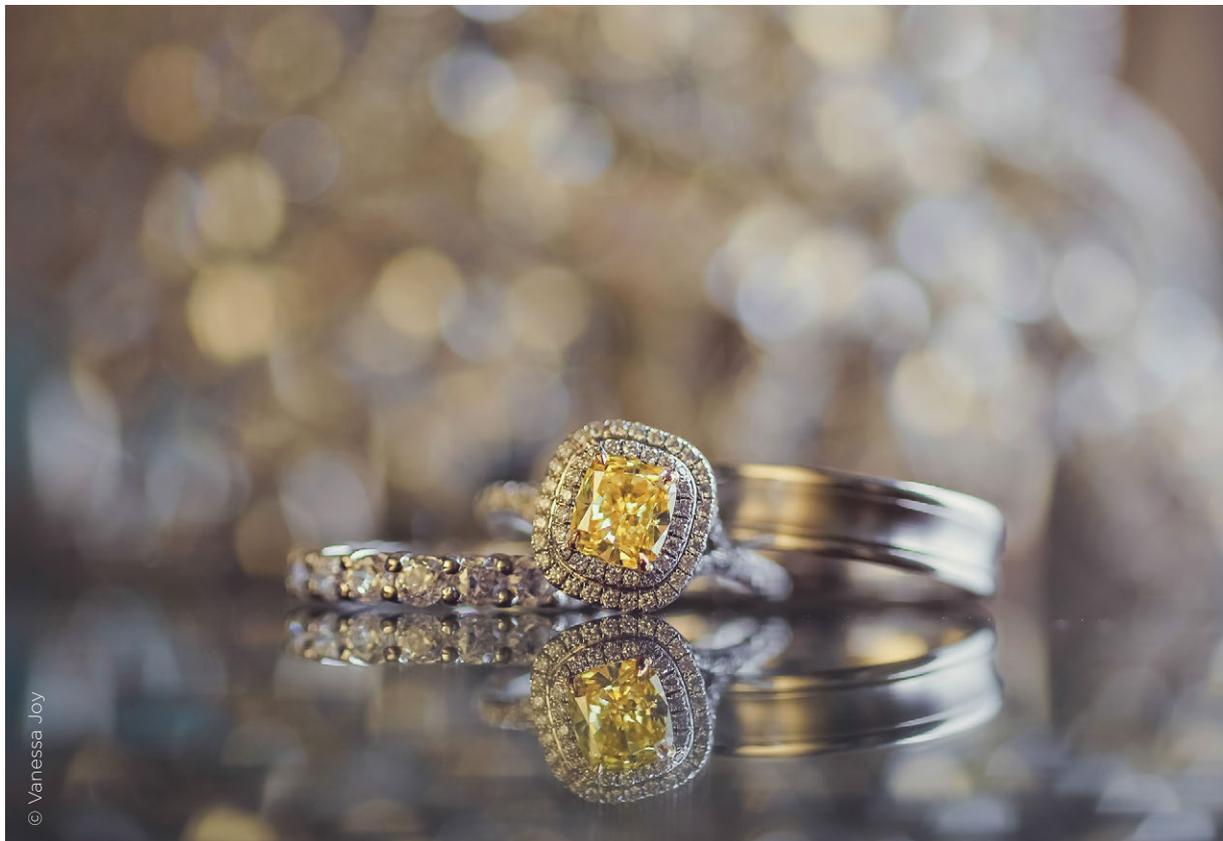
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DIGITAL DESKTOP EXPLOSION

WITH VANESSA JOY



© Vanessa Joy



» BY VANESSA JOY

Ever feel like your computer's desktop just had a bomb go off on it? Or maybe finding a file just isn't the easiest thing to do in your day? So much of what we do as photographers is sitting in front of the computer, and if that's in disarray, it can affect our productivity, state of mind and creativity.

There's nothing that'll get you overwhelmed faster than coming in to work and facing a messy environment. If you aren't shooting as much during the winter, allocate some time to organizing your digital workspace. You'll feel better and be more productive. Get ready for next year's workflow by following a few of the following steps to clean up the digital clutter.



» CLEAN DESK, CLEAN DESKTOP

I've come to notice that when my actual physical desk is clean, my digital desktop soon follows. Messy habits are simply messy habits, and they have the same outcome whether in the tangible world or the digital one.

One of the first things you can do to start cleaning up your digital life is to start cleaning up your physical one as well. This might mean that every morning before you start work, you spend five minutes just straightening your desk, or you do it during the last five minutes before you call it quits. Developing small, good habits like this one can have a compound effect on your life as a whole, but will most certainly help teach you to organize your business on the digital front as well. Once you have your organizational system worked out physically, you'll ideally transfer the same type of method to your desktop. After all, your desktop has all the same things, like papers (files) and folders, to organize them in. You can even create an Inbox folder on your desktop if you'd like to throw everything without a home there until you can address it. Sometimes just doing a clean sweep like this can really help. Just be sure to get to it...one day.

» SAVING TO DESKTOP

I'm guilty of this one. I like to take quick screen shots that end up on my digital desktop and stay there indefinitely. Or, if I don't know where to put a file, I'll leave it on my desktop. This habit (on both sides of the computer screen) leads to a messy work area that affects productivity. Think about it: If your desk or desktop is full of papers or files, it'll take you longer to find the one you're looking for.

Not to fret if you're like me and like using your desktop interactively. You can still create order in the chaos. Create folders on your desktop that you can easily slide your files into to organize them. Folders like "[Insert Business Name Here]," "Screen Shots" and "Inbox" on your desktop will give you a place to quickly throw those files so they're not cluttering your desktop and are easier to find when you need them.

» ORGANIZING YOUR DESKTOP

There's another level of organization that your computer's desktop can achieve that'll bring you from functioning to thriving on the digital front. Folders are great, but organized folders in pretty boxes with bows are even better.

If you're a Windows user, check out Fences (<http://www.stardock.com/products/fences/>). Fences allows you to create shaded areas to organize your desktop, double-click the desktop to hide or show icons, define rules to organize your desktop icons and a whole bunch more. If you're a Mac user, check out Desktop Groups (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/desktop-groups/id542912361?mt=12>), which is essentially Fences for Macs. If you don't want to splurge for a program that does this for you, think about using your graphic design skills instead, and create a backdrop that give you sections in which to place your files. This doesn't give you the functionality that the programs do, but it'll give you peace of mind when you look at your nice clean computer.

» ORGANIZING YOUR FOLDERS

Now that you have climbed out of the clutter that once filled your desktop, it's time to rein in how you sort the massive amounts of files that photographers have. It can be daunting, but once you have a concrete system in place, you'll have no trouble keeping it going and finding anything you're looking for.

For shoots, I like to organize my folders by date. For every job I work, the main folder is labeled "Year Month Day Client Name Event." For example, "2014 11 04 Juliana Cruz and Domenic Roselli Wedding" is a typical folder name you'd see on my computer. Having their names and the job type also helps me quickly search for their folder in the search function. Inside the folder, I have three separate folders: "Originals," where I keep the RAW files; "JPGs," where I keep the culled and edited JPG proofs; and "Slideshow," where I keep the JPGs from the same-day slideshow I do the night of the wedding. From there, as orders are placed and albums are created, I'll create separate folders for each of those things with names like "Album Design," "Proof Book" and "Retouched Images." Having your folders organized in a consistent manner not only helps you find what you're looking for quickly, but makes it easy for others (like studio assistants and interns) to find the same files without having to ask you where they are. It's a huge time-saver all around.



» KEEP UP WITH IT

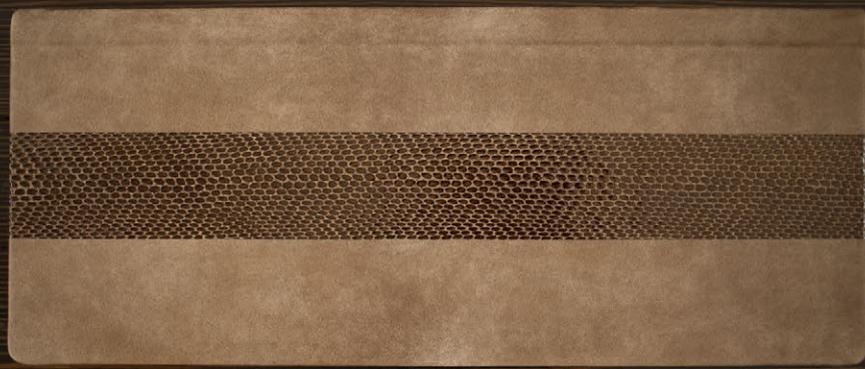
The worst thing you can do is spend the time creating a system and then not actually using it. On the other hand, the best thing you can do is create a system and spend just a few minutes a day keeping it going steadily. Those little habits that keep up a tidy digital workplace will pay off in spades when you don't have to initiate a major cleaning spree every few months because it's gotten out of order. You'll be happy you did.

Check out this video to see how I organize my laptop computer, which is slightly different because my laptop is used for running multiple companies, teaching on the road and making sure that my same-day edit process runs smoothly—all with a clean desktop. (If you want more info on my same-day edit process, go to www.vanessajoy.com/sde.) ■



Check out Vanessa Joy's video here!





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Q & A

WITH
Salvatore Cincotta

YOU'VE GOT
QUESTIONS?
WE'VE GOT
ANSWERS

GOT MORE QUESTIONS?

Every month we will have a call for questions on our Facebook page and Sal will answer them with real-world advice

INSPIRATIONS



Inspiration comes to us in many shapes & sizes

Put 10 photographers in a room and ask them to shoot a paperclip, and there's no telling what will happen. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is why I love being a photographer. We all see the world in our own special way. Ultimately, though, nothing is truly new or unique. Everything is inspired by something that came before. In that spirit, this month we asked you, our readers, to submit some work you thought would inspire your peers. What you gave us blew away the staff here. Enjoy!



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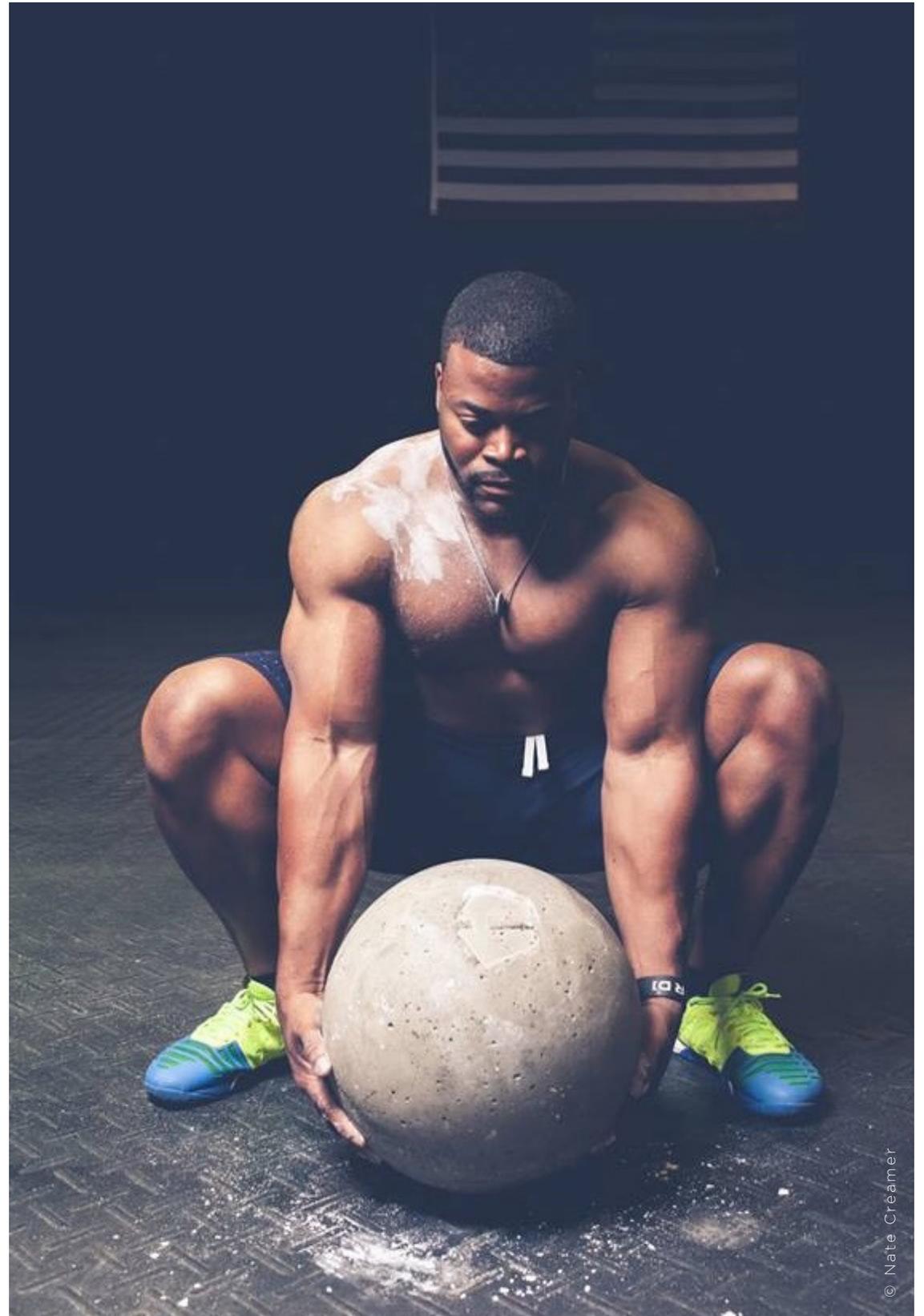
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LIGHTING BASICS

HOW TO CAPTURE

DRAMATIC IMAGES

WITH CRAIG LAMERE





by **Craig Lamere**

One of the most common statements I hear from shooters is: I can't get my images to look the way I want.

That statement can mean many things, but most of the time what I find it really means is the shooter was not able to tell her story or convey the mood she wanted to, and therefore the images were a let-down.

While there are a million and two factors that can go into getting your images to the place you want them to be, or to be able to tell a story, one of the main reasons shooters are not getting the images they want is due to their not understanding how to light their subjects, what lighting source to use and what modifiers to use to create the mood they are trying to achieve. Light is light, and no one light source is better than another. Every single light source, whether it's from the sun, a strobe, LED or a bank of constant fluorescents, has different properties, pros and cons, and uses.

This month, I will look at some lighting basics used to create dramatic images.

>> STROBES

Strobes come in many sizes and power outputs. The higher the watt seconds, the more power they push out and the more intense the flash of light will be. Strobes come with a modeling light that can be used to get a good idea of what the light is going to do when the strobe is fired. It is not as precise as the constants in the "you get what you see" department. What I really like about strobes is their versatility in the light you can produce. The light from a strobe can be made either buttery soft or hard as nails.



>> LIGHTING PATTERNS

When I think of edgy and dramatic images, I think of comic-book superheroes and villains. I think of images with lots of contrast. I think of over-the-top images. In my own work, I think of my two go-to over-the-top lighting patterns: split and Rembrandt.

Split lighting is when you pretty much cut your subject's face or body in half with light. You place your light source on a horizontal plane on the side you want to light, and feather the light just enough to allow one half to be lit, thus splitting the subject. The key is not to bring the light around so much that you get unwanted spill onto the eyes and nose of the shadowed side of the face or the body (if you are splitting the body).

Rembrandt lighting is when the light source is to the side of the subject and at a steep enough angle that there is light in both eyes and the shadow

from the nose connects with the chin to create a triangle of light on the cheek below the eye opposite the light source. Generally, a 45-degree angle will put you in the right place. This lighting pattern is dramatic, respectable and stoic, and should never be used for laughing or smiling shots. When I'm shooting dramatic images, I have a few modifiers I primarily use: strip lights with and without grids, beauty dishes and barn doors.

>> STRIP LIGHTS

Strip lights are basically narrow versions of a softbox of the same height, and thus put out a thinner light that is more directed. Even though strip lights have a narrower spread of light than a softbox of the same height, I find that for creating dramatic images, the light for the most part has too much spread and spill to use without a grid attached.





>> GRIDS

A grid is a piece of webbed fabric that goes on the front of the strip light, helping to contain the spread of the light coming out and allowing you to place the light more precisely where you want it to go. I use the strip light with a grid setup when I want full-length coverage, high contrast, and a less specular and darker over-all image. The reason the images are darker and have a lot of contrast is because the grid does not allow the light to travel as far or to wrap your subject as much. You are able to create a darker mood since you have the ability to light the background as little or as much as you would like, depending on the distance you place your subject to the drop.

One thing you have to be mindful of with this setup is the clipping that can occur in the shadows because of the light not wrapping. Clipping is a matter of creative choice. If you want to clip the backside or lose part of the image in the background, that's fine, but if you do want detail in the shadows, I would do one of two things.

The first is the easiest: Just add a V-flat and bounce what spilled light you can back into the shadows. The second way is to add a fill light. When I add fill, I put a 3x4 box behind me and just add enough fill to bring out some detail but not so much light that it affects the drop.

>> BARN DOORS

Barn doors are basically a unit with four flaps attached to a center bracket that attaches to your light. Each flap of the barn door can be moved up and down independently to control the spread of light. One reason I really like to use barn doors is that the light from them creates such a hard and distinct shadow, and I love to use the shadow as part of my image. Again, it's a completely creative choice. When you are creating drama, they add so much to your image. If there is any clipping that I want to fill, I use a V-flat since there is so much light coming from the head, and it is easy to direct some of it back without having to add a second light.

>> BEAUTY DISHES

Beauty dishes are pretty much in the middle of the strip light and barn doors as far as secularity goes. Most beauty dishes come in white or silver. The white ones spread light more like a softbox, and the silver ones are more like a spotlight. Beauty dishes come in many sizes, from 16 inches to 42 inches. The most common size is 22 inches. I recommend getting a 22-inch white to start. I would get a grid as well so you can contain the light from the white dish when you need to, the same way you would with the strip light. I use the beauty dish setup when I want more of a three-quarter or head/shoulder image. I use the white dish with a grid when I want a contained and more specular image, and the silver dish when I want a very specular and directional image with a darker overall background.

There are a million ways to light a subject and get the final image you are trying to achieve. These are just some of the ways I go about creating something edgy, dark or dramatic. ■



Check out Craig Lamere's video here!



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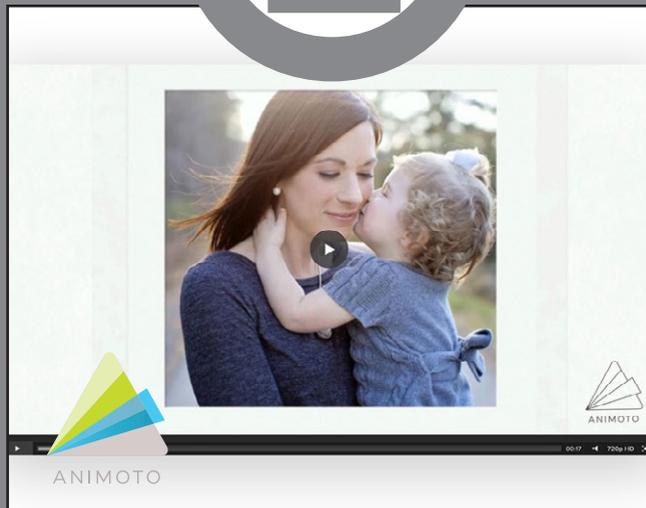
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QUICK TIPS TO BETTER

PORTRAIT RETOUCHING

WITH KRISTINA SHERK



BY KRISTINA SHERK

Nowadays, it seems like the most time-intensive retouching for professional photographers is portrait retouching. No matter how many plug-ins or programs there are to simplify the process, they just end up making it longer and more frustrating. You either have to specify where every single feature on the face is (which takes a lot of time), or the program literally mutates your client's face to the point where it's unrecognizable. I don't know about you, but I'm not in the business of delivering images that make my clients look like botched-digital-plastic-surgery victims.

I'm going to give you three tips for three programs that will hopefully help you streamline your portrait retouching.

LIGHTROOM

My No. 1 pet peeve is oversmoothed skin. Whenever possible, I like to overaccentuate the skin texture to compensate for the loss of detail that's inevitable when smoothing skin. The "frequency separation" method for skin smoothing in Photoshop is pretty common. To date, there really hasn't been anything to rival that in Lightroom.

So I started thinking about the differences between contrast, clarity and sharpness, and jimmy-rigged a process that seems to work somewhat well for preserving skin detail in Lightroom. Here's the image we'll be using for today's demonstration (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1

© All Images by Kristina Sherk

You'll first want to paint in the skin smoothing on your portrait. My settings for this first skin-smoothing brush are as follows:

Clarity: -80
 Sharpness: 70
 Noise: -100
 Brush Flow: 40

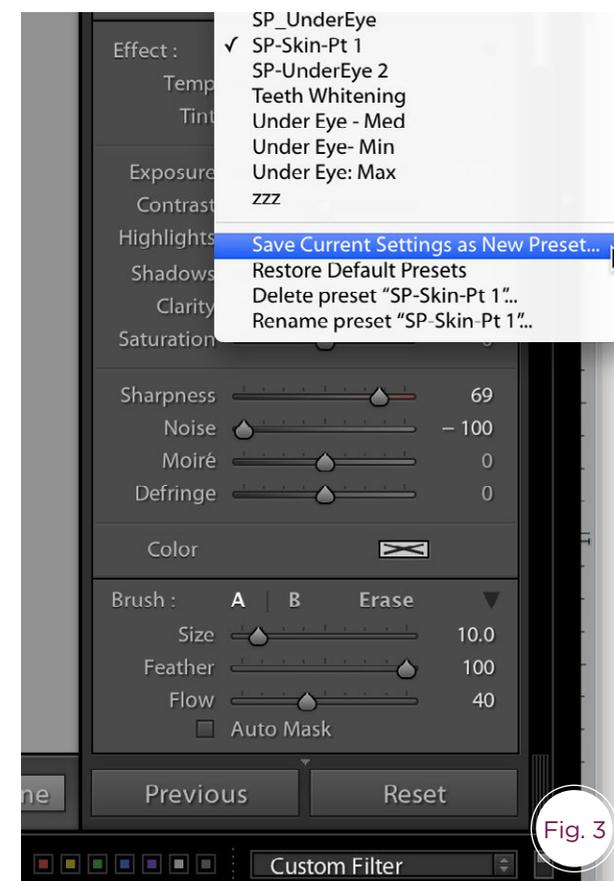
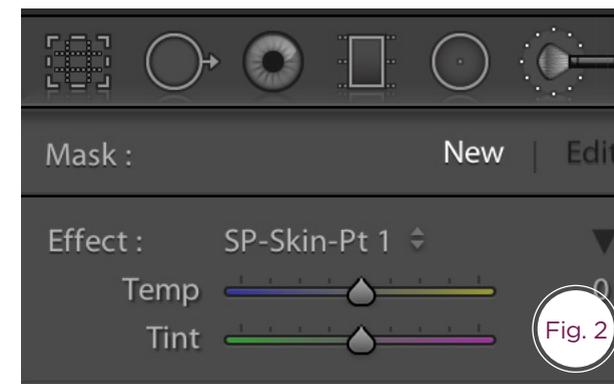
After I created the brush, I saved it as a preset for easy accessibility in the future by clicking to the right of the word "Effect" in the localized adjustment window. (Fig. 2).

Scroll down and choose Save Current Settings as a New Preset (Fig. 3).

Now you can start painting in the blur effect. It's standard to just decrease the clarity and stop at that, but by also increasing the sharpening, you're preserving skin detail as you smooth.

A couple of suggestions for technique while you paint in the effect:

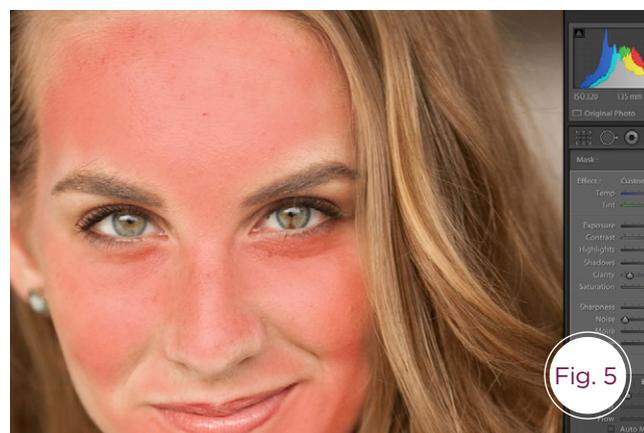
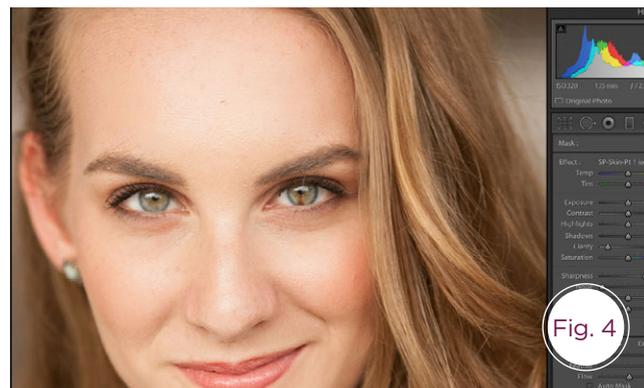
- Low flow is your friend. By keeping your hose (brush) on low pressure (low flow), there's much less of a chance that you'll oversmooth the skin.
- Stay away from face crevices. I know that sounds weird, but if you don't smooth areas where the skin creases, like naso-labial folds, your retouching will look more natural, and that's always good.



Here's what the image looks like after adding the first localized adjustment. I've also included a second photo with the mask overlay turned on (Fig. 4 & 5).

Now that you've started smoothing the skin, it's time for the next step. Right-click (PC) or Control-click (Mac) on your little gray dot for your localized adjustment mask, and choose Duplicate.

This creates a duplicate localized adjustment, kind of like creating a duplicate layer in Photoshop, but you'll need to tweak the settings of this second localized adjustment. Simply move the clarity back from -80 to 0, and you're done. I hope you like this tip. You can see in this split-screen that, at 100%, the skin, while smoothed, did retain more detail than your regular Lightroom skin smoothing. (Fig. 6).



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PHOTOSHOP

Photoshop is a seriously powerful, intimidating piece of software. It has a few tools that can help you tremendously. Let's talk about Select – Color Range.

I use this feature to do everything from sharpening and darkening lashes to smoothing and brightening eye whites. And as an added bonus, I do it all with almost no freehand masking. So that means this whole process is much less time-intensive than others out there.

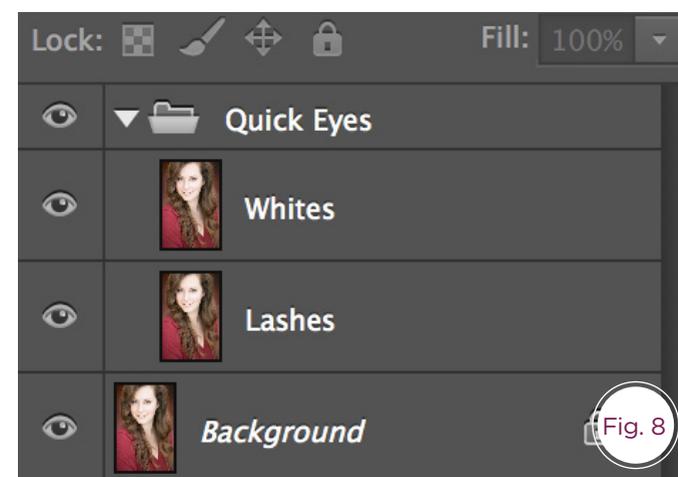
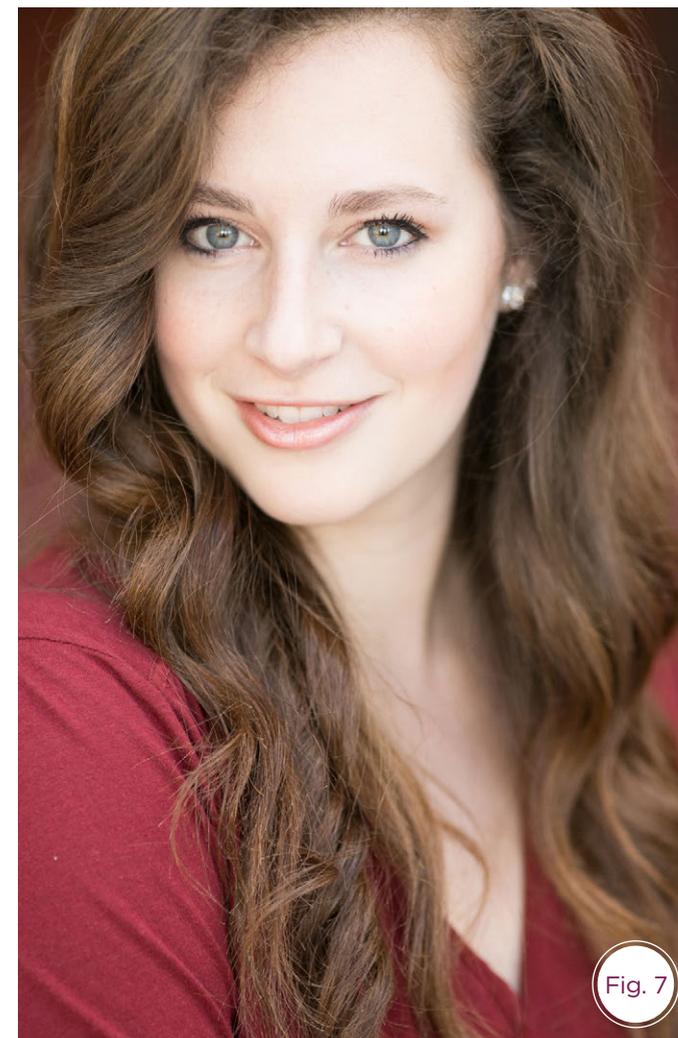
Here's our before image (Fig. 7).

I start by creating a folder or group for all of these tweak layers to live in. So let's do that by clicking on the Create a New Group button in the bottom of the layers palette (it looks like a little file folder).

I'll rename it "Quick Eyes." Once that's done, you'll want to create two duplicates of the background layer and place them inside the group you just created. Let's name them "Lashes" and "Whites."

Here's what my group and layers look like at this point (Fig. 8).

Now here's where the time-saving power of Select – Color Range comes in. I'll select the Lashes layer and go to my Select – Color Range dropdown menu.



Since I want the sharpening of the lashes to be applied only to the darker tones (i.e., her lashes), I'll choose Shadows from the Select dropdown menu inside the dialog box (Fig. 9). For this I used about 20% fuzziness and my shadows range was set at 108. Press OK, and you'll see the marching ants appear on your image. With the lashes layer selected, add a mask to the layer. With the snap of a finger, your mask is created. So there's now no need for you to sit there and draw in the mask by hand, when Photoshop can do it for you! Now that your mask has been created, you can select the layer itself and sharpen it using whatever means you'd like. For me: I'm going to use the high-pass technique.

Now, let's do kind-of the same thing for the "Whites" layer. Instead of selecting the shadows, and sharpening, we will select the highlights, and blur them in order to create a smooth, glassy look to the eye whites. Select your layer called Whites and go to Select-Color Range again. Since I only want to smooth the highlights (i.e. her eye whites) I'll choose highlights from the Select dropdown menu inside the dialog box. Press OK, and you'll see the marching ants appear on your image again. With the whites layer selected, add a mask to the layer.

Now that you've created your mask, you still need to change the layer to give the desired effect to the highlight areas. For this you can blur the layer using Filter-Blur-Gaussian Blur, or you can use Filter-Noise-Dust and Scratches at a radius of 3 and a threshold of 0. Okay, you're almost there. Your darks are sharpened, and your whites are smoothed. All that's left to do is put a black mask on your "Quick Eyes" group and paint in the effect on her eye area. Here's what my final layer window looks like (Fig. 10).

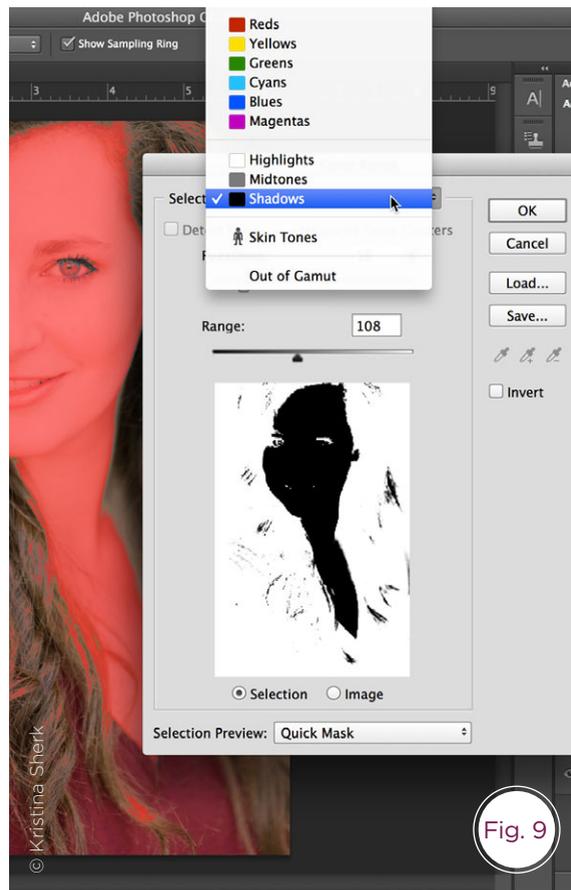


Fig. 9

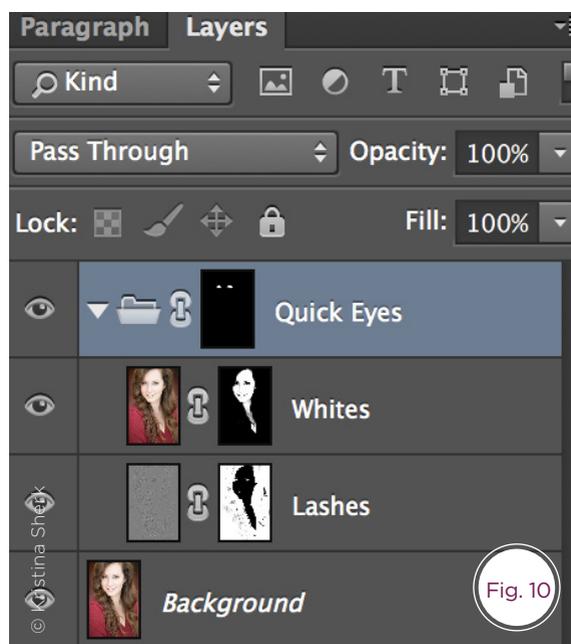


Fig. 10

Can you see the difference between the eyes before and after? I know the effects are subtle, but that's what good retouching is; subtle. Here are the eyes before and after up close (Fig. 11).

PERFECTLY CLEAR 2.0

Let me start off by saying that I'm just as jaded as the rest of you when it comes to plug-in's. They seem to promise the world and then never follow through. But I've finally found something that I'm incorporating into my every day workflow and I've been getting fantastic results from a program called Perfectly Clear 2.0. by Athentech Imaging.

This plug-in for Lightroom and Photoshop is so powerful, it can actually automate the facial retouching process. There are two presets called Beautify and Beautify+ that can retouch an entire face with one click. Crazy, right? The software uses "deep learning" to find the features on a face, and can then apply a facial retouching default preset (or one that you create) onto all of your images. The possibilities are endless, with customizable preset options like smoothing skin, facial slimming, light diffusion, dark-circle reduction and more. Here are all the options you have to choose from to create your perfect Beautify preset (Fig. 12).

Check out what the one-click default Beautify preset was able to achieve on this image (Fig. 13).



Fig. 11

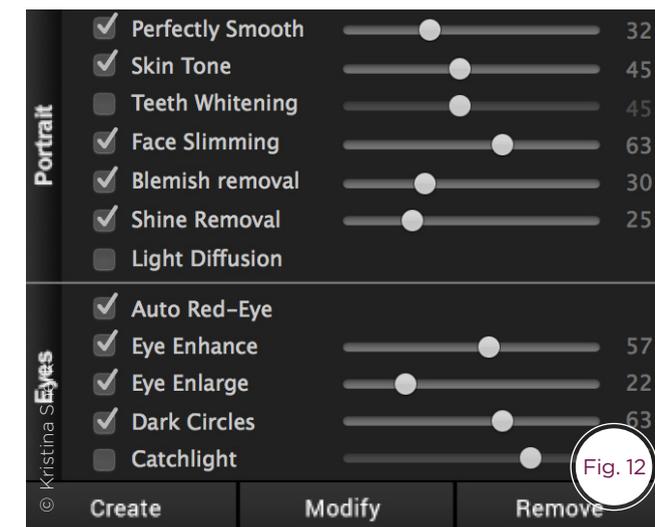


Fig. 12

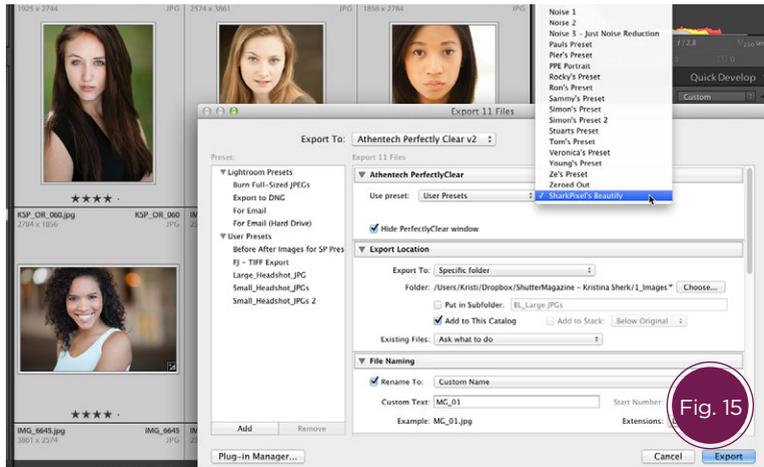


Fig. 13

It was able to smooth the skin *without losing skin detail*, get rid of blemishes, reduce redness, sharpen and brighten the eyes, and improve the look of the under-eyes, all by clicking just one button. That's some serious time-saving technology. Let's check out another image with my custom Beautify preset (Fig. 14).



Now that I've created my custom preset, it's easy as a snap to incorporate this Beautify preset into my Lightroom workflow by using its export dialog box, which processes your images through Perfectly Clear and creates a second retouched image for you. Take a group of 1,000-plus portraits in Lightroom, select them all, click Export and then choose Perfectly Clear in your "Export to" dropdown menu. I chose to apply my own user preset called SharkPixel's Beautify to all my images, and then I let Perfectly Clear do the rest (Fig. 15).



By becoming more proficient in whatever software you use, you cut down on the time you spend sitting behind your computer. You can then use that time to do much better things, like sit down and relax, go out and shoot another portrait or close the deal on that next gig. Just let the software do the work for you.

Happy shooting, everyone! 📷



Check out Kristina Sherk's video here!

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