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for engagement sessions

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PLUS



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ENHANCE YOUR MARKETING PLAN FOR ENGAGEMENT SEASON

WITH VANESSA JOY



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FROM **macphun** AND *Salvatore Cincotta*

GET 'ER DONE

FASHION PORTRAITS
Michael Corentino

**PHOTOSHOP:
CREATING A CINEMATIC LOOK**
Damian Battinelli

DAILY GRIND



CHALLENGE YOURSELF
Sal Cincotta

A MATTER OF LIFE & DEATH
Phillip Blume

CHANGE UP YOUR GAME
Lori Nordstrom

**BOOSTING PRODUCTIVITY
FROM HOME**
Kristy Dickerson

VISUALLY PLEASING THE SENIOR
Blair Phillips

CLEANING HOUSE
Skip Cohen

SURVIVE THE MADNESS
Laurin Thienes

IN EVERY ISSUE

PICTURE PERFECT
Roberto Valenzuela

Q&A
Sal Cincotta

INSPIRATIONS
From Readers



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LAUNCH POINT



“ FAILING

Failing is a good thing. It helps you grow.

It helps you find your boundaries.

It helps you realize you can do more
than you ever thought you could.

as long as you learn from it,
there is nothing wrong with failing.



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FASHION PORTRAITS

the secrets to creating dramatic headshots.

WITH MICHAEL CORSENTINO



BY Michael Corsentino

You Got the Assignment. Now What?

If you don't know your past, you can't know your future. That's why research is my first task after I'm hired to shoot a commercial job. Once briefed by the client on expectations, needs, usage, concept, etc., I set about seeing what's already been done in that arena. Research is an important part of the process because it's one of the ways I can see what the established norms are for what I'm being asked to create. I don't want to fly blind and risk making images that stick out like a sore thumb from the company's brand. Conversely, I may want to strike out and take things in a completely different direction—the only way I can be sure is to see what's come before.

Readers of this column will likely be familiar with Makaila Nichols, featured in this month's article. We work together often, and she's graced the cover and pages of *Behind the Shutter* several times. This time, Makaila (or Mak, as she's known) and her dad were my clients. They hired me to shoot fashion headshots of her for her modeling agency, The Lions. They were preparing to send Mak to Los Angeles for meetings with modeling and fashion-industry decision-makers, and they needed killer headshots.

My research began with a visit to the Lions website to see what its existing model headshots looked like, how they were styled, lit, finished, etc. I knew that whatever I created, it had to fit with the existing images. In a way, the modeling agency's site served as my art director and informed my plan for the look and feel of the shoot.

Happily, the images on the site were consistent with my style, so I was on solid footing from the start. One of the things I noticed, in addition to there being a mix of color and black-and-white images, was how simple and straightforward the styling was. Images were simply lit, and the models weren't wearing a ton of makeup. They were presented naturally, with a few stylistic variations. More on this in the next section on hair and makeup.

By carefully analyzing the images, I was able to decode the lighting used and come up with a rough lighting plan for Mak's shoot. You can learn a lot about how an image was lit by noting where the shadows are falling, the number and shape of the catchlights in the subject's eyes, and how quickly highlights transition into shadows.

I was surprised—and relieved—by how much the overall style of lighting embraced shadows. I was expecting a much flatter lighting approach typically associated with the classic but somewhat boring headshot look. Shadows equal drama, and crafting light with plenty of shadows is the way I prefer to work, so it was a welcome surprise. A Google image search for “fashion portraits” also provided valuable reference for my game plan. I decided to go with a gray seamless for my background. This is a tried-and-true classic fashion look, so it was an easy pick, and ended up working well for both color and black-and-white treatments.

“SHADOWS EQUAL DRAMA,
and crafting light with plenty of shadows
is the way I prefer to work”

Hair and Makeup

The HMU style for this shoot needed to serve two simple but important purposes. It needed to show beauty and possibility. The agency planned to print the images on “comp cards.” These are large postcards with up to four images that agencies send to booking agents. From the briefing and my research, it was clear that the goal here was to highlight the model’s natural beauty, demonstrate a few different looks, show color and black and white, and create a bit of eye-catching drama—all without taking things too far in any one direction.

These images are meant to demonstrate to a booking agent what’s possible with a particular model. So the images need to show a model’s beauty but also her range. The images also need to be open-ended enough in terms of look and concept so that they’re essentially a blank canvas for the booking agent, helping to determine if the model fits its needs.

The last thing you want to do is pigeonhole the model with a look that’s too extreme one way or the other. That said, HMUA Annie Radigan and I opted for a soft, glowing makeup look that would accentuate Mak’s inherent beauty, bone structure and eyebrows, and that would work well in both color and black and white. We chose two looks for Mak’s hair: the first a soft, loose curl, and the second a more modern pulled-back style.



Gear and Settings

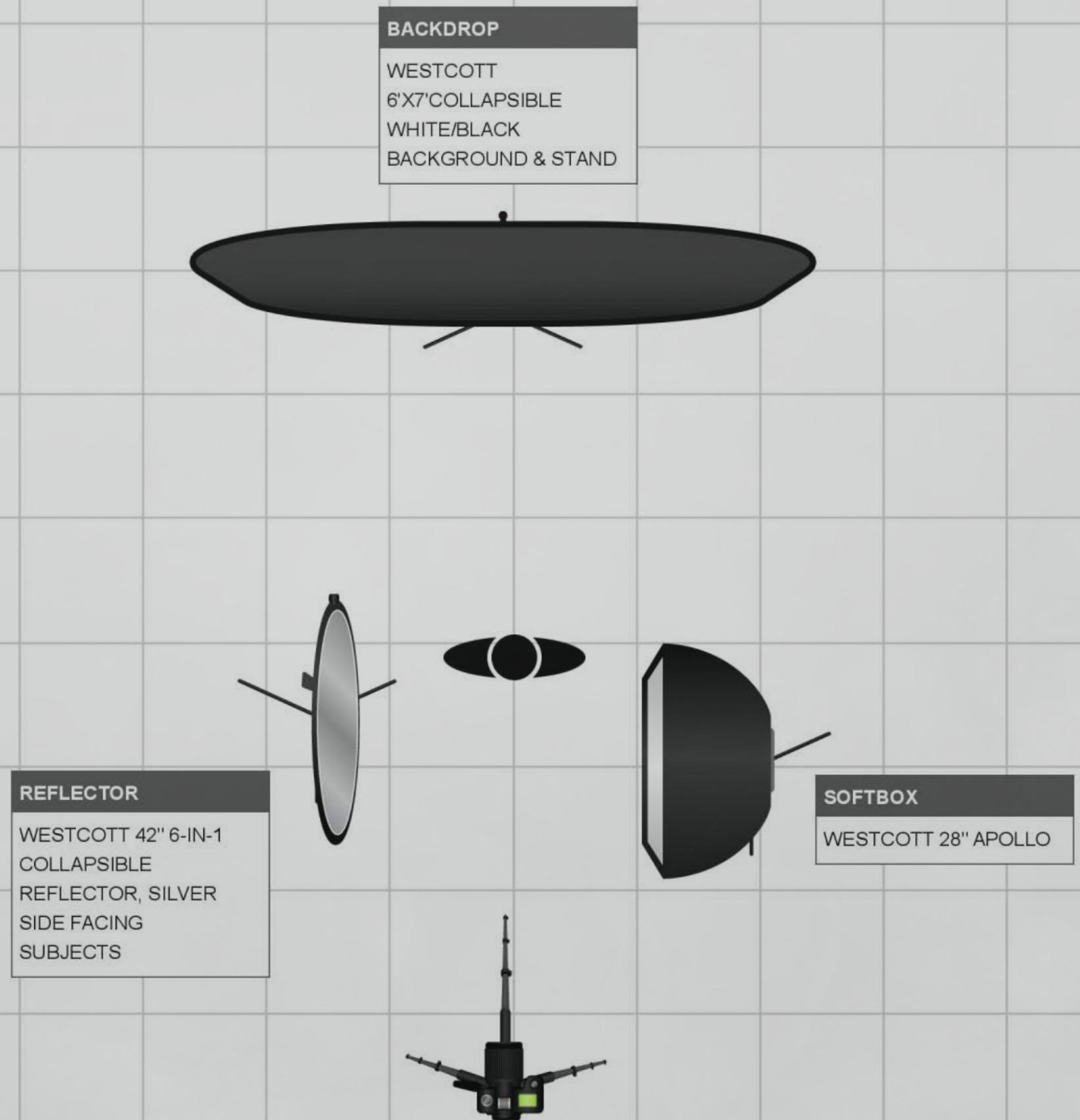
The lighting setup for this shoot proves you don't need a ton of lights to create beautiful, dramatic look. It's really more about how the lights are modified and positioned.

I like to build my lighting as I go, using only what I need. I started with one light and a reflector, and finished with a three-light setup for added flexibility. Using three lights allowed me more individual control over each zone of light. I created a zone for the key light, which varied between f:11 and f:14; a zone for the accent light set one stop below the key; and finally a zone for the background light, which was also set one stop below the key.

The key light, a 500 WS Profoto D1 AIR, was modified using a Mola Demi Beauty Dish with a diffusion sock for added softness. I knew I wanted a snappy quality of light for these images, and the Mola Demi is the perfect tool for that. With the D1's modeling light in proportional mode, I raised and lowered the beauty dish until I could see the desired catchlights in Mak's eyes. I placed the key light camera-left.

After a few tests, I could see that, as much as I like deep shadows, the right side of Mak's face was too dark. So I positioned a white 4-by-6 Sunbounce panel camera to the right to bounce light from the key back into the scene to open up the shadows. The use of the panel instead of another light source kept the quality of the fill light soft and broad. The accent light and background light were each 500WS Profoto D1 Air heads fitted with 10-degree grids to constrain their spread. I used the accent light to create a highlight on Mak's hair, while the background light created a subtle circle of light on the gray seamless behind her. This helped create an added sense of dimension and separation from the background.

Another key tool was a modifier known as a "net." These are rectangular mesh frames that help reduce but not entirely block light when they're placed in front of a light source. I used a negative-1 stop net in front of the lower portion of the key light to help reduce the light falling on Mak's chest and shoulders during the faux nude shots. Final exposure settings were f:11-f:14, 100 ISO and a 1/100 sec. shutter speed. The variation in exposure was due to shifting body position relative to the key light.



No Bones About It!

As I mentioned, this was the first time I've tackled this kind of project. With every new challenge comes new opportunities, new chances to step up your game, and sometimes a few surprises along the way. I definitely learned a few things about aesthetics for this market throughout the process.

Case in point: At the end of post processing, after retouching all the selects and sending finals to Mak, I did a double-take and noticed how the bones in her back seemed to be jumping out at me, screaming, "Hey, look at me!" How did I not see that?! I quickly dug back in and remedied the boney-ness, smoothing things out while making sure to keep it natural-looking. I then sent the updated images, sans bones, off to Mak.

The funny thing is, I found out later that her agency preferred the boney pictures! They said it showed how tiny Mak was, and in the modeling world, that's a great thing.

Live and learn: Bones are in!

Keep It Simple!

Remember, simplicity wins every time. You don't need complicated lighting setups to create sophisticated, beautiful results. As we've seen this month, with anywhere from one to three lights, a reflector, a bit of planning, technique and thoughtful analysis, you can get stunning results. As much as I'm a lighting geek, gear lover and owner of way too many lights, I'm continually reminded of the old maximum "Keep it simple, stupid."

So challenge yourself! Create a few one-, two- and three-light setups. And document your results: I'd love to see what you come up with. See you next month. ■



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THE SIGNATURE
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BY Salvatore Cinotta

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A couple is embracing in a rural field. In the background, there is a dilapidated wooden house with a stone chimney and a large, leafless tree. The scene is set during sunset or sunrise, with a warm glow on the left side. The ground is covered in grass and fallen branches.

5 TIPS

FOR BOOSTING

PRODUCTIVITY

FROM HOME

with Kristy Dickerson

by Kristy Dickerson



The ultimate goal for parents who work from home is to be able to do what they love for a living and still be a parent first. I am going to give you five tips that will help you and your business stay on track so you can still be Mommy/Daddy. Your kids are only young once. I admit I worked way too much when my son Roman was born almost six years ago. I didn't have balance. I was still figuring out the whole parenting thing, all while starting a business, and I tried to do it all myself. I would do anything to be able to go back and tell myself these tips. Don't make the same mistakes I did. Enjoy your babies, do what you love and still be present for your spouse, significant other and family.

EARLY BIRD GETS THE WORM.

Kids or no kids, the earlier you start your day, the more productive you can be. If you have young kids and work from home, this is a must. This is your knock-out-today's-list time, social media/blog post scheduling time. This is how you set yourself up for the day to be there for your kids and still get your work done.

Getting up at 5 a.m. might not sound appealing, but as weird as it sounds, I love it. I know this is one of the only ways I can have balance and work from home without putting him in daycare or hiring extra help. And I don't want that. By the time my family gets up, I have already done so much, and I start my day feeling accomplished.

During this time, I also have a notebook and pen, and I write down my tasks for the week/day. I scratch out what I was able to accomplish, and what is left I tackle during naptime or roll over to the next day. This helps you stay focused. It also shows you that despite how your living room might look, with toys everywhere, you are being productive. So, if nothing else, it is a good reminder that you are accomplishing something.



SET YOUR HOURS.

“I work from home, and you are saying to set my hours?”
Yes! If you are a parent, set your in-office work hours. It also helps to plan personal and family time. 5:00 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. Monday through Friday is my office time. This can help you stay on task, and also limit others from pulling you out of your routine. With kids, routines are a necessity. Monday and Wednesday morning are my times to meet clients or grab coffee with a vendor, because I have help on those mornings. I live by my calendar. One of the hardest things to do is learn to say no to appointments that fall outside your normal schedule. Of course there are always exceptions, but the more you sway from your routine, the harder it is to stay on task and efficient.

SET DAYS FOR CERTAIN TASKS.

Some things need to be done on a daily basis, like checking email, social media, etc. But most things don't have to be done every day. Setting goals and planning for the next month can be done on the last Wednesday of every month. Keeping up with the bookkeeping and numbers can be done every other Monday. If you meet a client for lunch and immediately when you get back you apply it to QuickBooks, you are wasting time. Create a folder that allows you to compile projects so you can knock it all out at once. Not only is it more efficient, but it allows you to be more focused on that project. So after you enter your expenses for the month, you can assess where profit is, what expenses are expected, etc. Setting days for certain tasks leaves you more productive and effective.

A couple embracing in a field and walking together in a field. The man is wearing a red and blue plaid shirt and blue jeans. The woman is wearing a white top and blue jeans. They are standing in a grassy field with a large tree in the background.

Setting days for certain tasks leaves you
more **productive**
and **effective**

“HELP!” YES, YOU HEARD ME: GET YOURSELF SOME HELP.

This is something I did not do with my first child. I thought I could do it all myself by just shuffling all the hours in the day. So what ended up happening was me working all the time instead of just certain times. I have two boys. My oldest is in school, so he's out of the house until roughly 2:30. But in August, my two-year-old is a handful, and stays home with me. One of the best things I have done is to get help. With the second child, I realized I'm not Superwoman. I just have an amazing support system. On Mondays and Wednesdays, I have help from 9 to 1 with my youngest. Yes, that's a mere eight hours out of my week, but it's everything to me. These are also my “meeting days,” when if I need to jump on a phone call or meet with a bride, I can do so without a toddler being loud in the background, and me giving him a treat in exchange for one minute of silence. Sound familiar?

“YOU” TIME.

This may sound odd, but I happen to believe this is one of the most important things. I work out typically four days a week. This is my “me” time. I do classes, which allows me to have that adult time with other women. The younger one gets to stay in the childcare for an hour, so it is a win-win! Having this time is a great stress release. It keeps me focused when I'm back in my home environment. Your “you” time might look different than mine, but if you don't have this, I encourage you to incorporate it in 2014.

What you are hearing over and over is to establish routines. When you have a family, it helps to set expectations and to plan ahead. This article taught you nothing about the technicality of photography, but what it can do is save your marriage and your business, and allow you to be not just physically there with your kids but “present.” ■



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CHALLENGE YOURSELF



with Sal Cincotta



BY Sal Cincotta

Seems like we all get a little antsy this time of year. Most photographers I know experience a slow season around this time. What you do with this down time can dramatically impact you and your business in the year ahead. And by impact, I am talking financials.

As I have grown my business over the years, my down time has grown ever more productive. For the past six years, I have devoted my down time to marketing strategies. (That has paid off tenfold. Today, we have a new 12,000-square-foot building, shoot 40 to 50 weddings per year, and do around 100 seniors and portraits.)

This year, I wanted to focus less on “business” and more on the craft. You know, that thing we do that keeps the lights on.

I have to admit, figuring out how to challenge myself was no easy task. Not because I know it all. Far from it—I am a lifer! I love learning. It’s my passion. It was a challenge because I am comfortable. I have my rhythm, my way of doing things, and it works. The success of our studio is proof it works. You have to know what I mean. Are you comfortable? Do you hate change? I think we all do. And hell, if it ain’t broke, well, you know the saying.

But I had to find a way to really challenge myself to get out of my comfort zone this off-season. So I thought, what do I hate doing, what makes me uncomfortable?

I hate shooting indoors with studio lights.

I hate using alternate light sources outdoors—slows me down.

I don’t experiment enough.

Now, this is not an exhaustive list, but it was a great start. Here is the thing. You have to use your down time productively. Once you get in-season, it’s over. There’s not going to be time to fail or experiment. Your paying clients want perfection. They want what they paid for. Maybe you are looking to get better at off-camera flash or try new posing techniques. Whatever it is, now is the time to get out there and do it. If you fail now, no one cares. Fail during a paid shoot, and you have some bigger problems.

This winter, I made a concerted effort to shoot indoors more. As you can see from the pictures, I worked with models and families in my studio. Nothing over the top. But it got me out of my comfort zone.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

group shots

Alissa, my studio manager, was nice enough to coordinate the women of her family for a generational portrait session. And let me tell you, chaos ensued. Problem No. 1, we didn't have a backdrop wide enough. Why? Because this is not what I do. Then, getting everyone to pay attention was like herding livestock. And the jury is still out, but I think the kids listened better than the adults on this one. All in all, there were about 10 different groupings. Below are a few from the shoot.

I was happy with what I got, but I knew I had to get better at working with larger groups. This year, I am going to invest more time offering family sessions and learning to pose these larger groups in a more fluid manner.



alternate outdoor light source

Next up: using an alternate light source outdoors. I know how to use off-camera flash, but I don't do it that much. When I do, I am usually in ETTL, meaning I am using the camera and its built-in metering system to light the subject. There's nothing wrong with this, but I wanted to push myself and use studio strobes in manual mode so I was 100 percent in control of the light I was putting out.

Below are some recent pics from my work with models and workshops where I was using my light meter and either studio strobes or speedlights to light the subject. Yes, it slowed me down, but not as much as I thought. Sure, the very first time was a mess. It took me twice as long as I thought it would. But once I understood what I was doing and what the equipment was doing, my confidence began to grow. It has become somewhat second nature.

Using these lighting setups allowed me to get a much more unique look in my images. On the Red Riding Hood image, we are using a beauty dish with AlienBees studio strobes. On the lake shot, I am using three Canon 580 Speedlights and the Westcott Apollo Orb, both in manual mode.

experiment

Next up, experiment! I'd like to spend more time doing this. Like many photographers, I get comfortable, keep meaning to do it, but keep finding a reason not to.

Well, this winter, we got 14 to 16 inches of snow one day. Now, this may not be an event where you live, but here, we don't see that kind of snow. All sorts of records were broken, and the temps were just insane: minus-18 degrees on this particular day.

That's the day Alissa came up to me as we sat in our nice cozy studio and said, "Hey, we never get snow like this! We need to get out and shoot something!" I asked her to pitch me an idea. An hour later, we were outside in the madness. We wanted to try something new, something different, something we would not normally try. We had a gorgeous backdrop with snow everywhere and a willing model in Alissa. The challenge: shoot a long exposure of 10 to 15 seconds, and use a studio strobe to "freeze" the action (no pun intended).

It took us three hours to get one shot. I am not exaggerating. Three hours we were out in minus-18-degree temps jacking around with lighting, power, light spill, posing, wardrobe—all to get one shot.

Love or hate the shot, there is no disputing the level of difficulty. If you don't think so, I challenge you to go try it one night. Forget the obvious challenge of working in negative-18 degrees. The road we were on was pitch black. To even get the camera to focus, we would light her up with a flashlight, focus, fire with a timer, wait 15 seconds, check the results, try again. The real difficulty was in controlling the light and balancing it with the rest of the scene.

The biggest challenge for a shot like this is light spill. When it's dark, your flash spills everywhere—especially a beauty dish. Notice the ground. No real light spill. The light on the ground, the shadows in the back, etc., are all tied to the long exposure of the scene. We were really able to control the light to ensure that just our subject was getting the light from the beauty dish and not the ground around her, which would make the light extremely obvious.



CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Again, love or hate the picture, the level of difficulty was high, and that was the entire point of the exercise. Get out there and try something different. Push yourself. It took me three hours to figure this out, but we had a blast doing it. I felt like a little kid trying to solve a puzzle. I think we all need that feeling from time to time to keep the creative juices flowing.

If nothing else, I hope this article motivates and inspires you to get out there and challenge yourself to experiment, try something new, possibly even fail, and try again. You should do this all while in pursuit of mastering your craft and bettering your business.

Good luck! 🍀



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>> 5 WAYS <<

TO **ENHANCE**

YOUR MARKETING PLAN

— *for Engagement Season* —

WITH VANESSA JOY

VENDOR NETWORKING

If you're an introvert like I am, the thought of vendor networking isn't what wakes you up and gets you excited for work in the morning. As a photographer, you already have something that all the other wedding vendors want: photos of their work. That's something you most likely already knew, so let's take it a step further.

Networking with vendors can be so much more than just taking them out to lunch, schmoozing or handing them an album or brochure with your photos of their work and both your logos. Those are all great, but both of those things rely on the vendor to turn around afterward and talk about you to their clients. Instead, think of ways you can make sure that vendor talks about you—and in a more permanent, SEO-friendly kind of way.

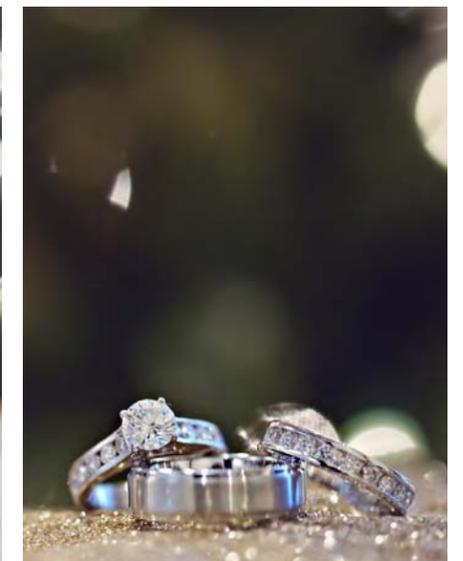
You can do this in a few ways. One way I do it is to write a feature blog on a certain venue or vendor. Use photos from their facility, and talk about how great working there is. Post it on your blog (linking to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Google+, of course). You can collaborate with the vendor either before or after you publish it, but the idea is that they spread the positive review that you wrote to all of their fans and followers, and hopefully blog it as well.

Collaborating with vendors online as a form of networking and marketing helps boost your SEO with link-backs and keywords. It builds the relationship between you and the vendor, and guarantees that they're talking about you to their clients. At the same time, you're sharing your photos with them. You can even follow it up by offering to make them a sample album or brochure. It boosts credibility and trust from your clients for both of you when they know that you're working closely with another vendor to make their wedding perfect.

BY VANESSA JOY



An estimated 40 percent of engagements happen between November and February. If there's an ideal time to try new marketing ideas, it's now. Here are five ways that you can give your marketing plan a boost and breath of fresh air this engagement season.





FACEBOOK ADVERTISING

Have you noticed recently that only about 1 percent of your fans see your posts organically? Facebook has continually been changing its algorithms to lessen the amount of exposure your posts get without paid advertising. Why? Because they're a business, and businesses try to make as much money as they can. Will this strategy come back to bite them? Probably. In the meantime, however, Facebook is still a lead-driving source for photography businesses, and a means to create word of mouth.

If you haven't tried Facebook's paid advertising, give it a whirl. For a few bucks, you can tailor a sponsored post or ad to the audience that you want to see it (like engaged women in your state between the ages of 24 and 32), and see how it performs. Those few bucks are worth it just for the advertising education you get.

Whether or not you sponsor your posts, you need to give your audience something likeable, commentable and shareable. That's how posts reach wider audiences without paid advertising. One way to do this is to provide informational content that your clients want to know about. Recently I experimented with creating a drip email campaign giving sign-ups a wedding-related tip every three weeks.

However you decide to deliver the information, keep it short, sweet and to the point. Our culture has gone from the Information Age to the Too Much Information Age. More and more people prefer one-liners over full blog posts. If your Facebook posts are too long, you'll find most people will react with "tl;dr" ("too long; didn't read"). And that won't get you any interest, no matter how good the content.



PINNING

Pinterest is a photographer's best friend—when it's used correctly. I'm no expert on it, but I'm learning what works and what doesn't through experimentation and continuing my own education. What I do know is that brides use Pinterest to find and store inspiration and ideas for their weddings. If you want to have a pin reach a wider audience, it needs to be that inspiration.

Don't overthink it too much. It can be as simple as creating boards that are informational for people to follow, like my Engagement Session Outfits board. Almost every single bride of mine asks me what to wear for her engagement session, so I know this is something that brides think about and want ideas for. Encourage your brides to follow your Pinterest boards for ideas like these that they can repin and organize on their boards for later use. Not only is this great customer service, but the more people who repin your work, the better.

GUEST POSTING

As photographers, writing doesn't usually come naturally to us, so it shouldn't be a surprise that it doesn't come naturally to other wedding artists either. Finding time to write blog content isn't easy. Putting concrete thoughts on paper isn't either, especially in a consistent and timely manner.

If writing is a strength, or if you at least have one or two topics you know you could write a blog post about, then this is for you. If writing is absolutely not your thing, and it pains you to think about, then focus on the other marketing ideas in this article. I bet that most of you, however, could do this.

Write an article that is informational (and supported by your amazing pictures) for brides. Whether it's "10 Tips for Looking Great in Your Engagement Photos" or "How to Keep Your Bridesmaids on Time," find a topic that's appropriate for any wedding vendor to post on its blog. Fill it with good SEO phrases so the article finds the right audience. Make it informational enough so that those who read it will love it and want to share the post. Then, exercise your vendor networks, and ask them if they'd like you to write a guest post for them, free of charge. It's like you're doing their blogging for them for free. All you'll ask for is a link back to your website and that they share their blog post around their social media sites (which I imagine they'd do anyway). It's great for SEO, building vendor relationships and creating exposure for your brand.

REFERRAL REWARDING

You may have heard about the success of Sal Cincotta's Ambassador program for his high school senior market. If you haven't, check it out in one of his workshops or online courses. That's where this idea stems from.

For weddings, we know that word of mouth is a big part of what brings in our next batch of clients. So why not maximize the effectiveness of that by creating a reward program to entice your brides to talk about you more? If you're like me, you go to great lengths to create a good customer experience that gets your brides talking about you. You may even throw them a Starbucks gift card if they do send a lead your way. That's great, but I think we can do better.

What's going to get you to talk about a business more—knowing you'll receive a reward for it, or not knowing if you'll receive anything for it? Obviously, the first option is going to be more motivating, even if you end up rewarding them afterward. The key is to create a system that gives your brides things they want as a reward for sending you clients who book with you. This system both informs them of this reward, and makes it easy for them to talk about you.

Because you don't want this program to come off like a ploy, put it into place after the wedding. Asking a bride who just booked you to start telling her friends about you isn't a good idea—you haven't proven to her yet that you're worth recommending. After the wedding, you can come up with ways for her to tell her friends about you using her wedding pictures.

I've conducted a survey of brides to see what they really want after their wedding to give you ideas of what rewards might work, and to hear what they say are ways they'd feel comfortable telling their friends about you. Check out this video for ideas about referral program rewards and how to make brides comfortable sharing with their friends. ■

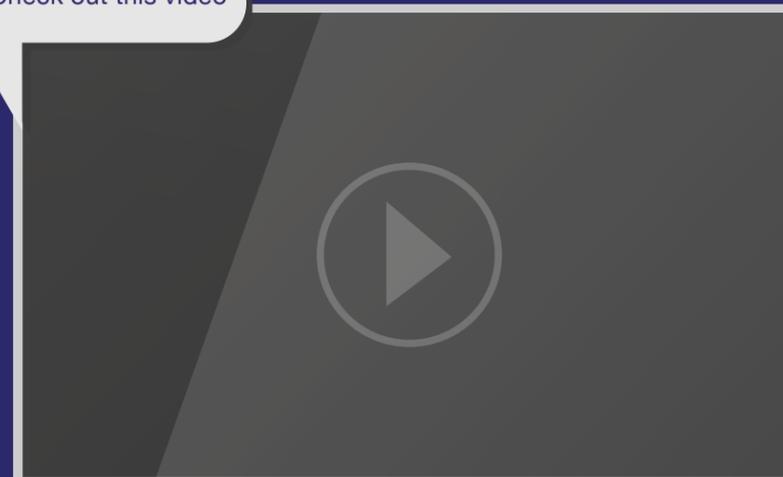


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A MATTER OF LIFE & DEATH

...serving your clients when they're hurting

WITH PHILLIP BLUME

“ In this past year,
 death has reminded me
 just how much
 we have to live for
 —and exactly why our profession
 as artists is such a **noble** one. ”



BY PHILLIP BLUME

Can we talk about something morbid? Death. Yeah, I know: I just lost half my audience, right? (Maybe with the exception of you photographers who specialize in Gothic weddings!) Well, for those of you curious enough to hang with me through that ghastly opener, let's be honest. As exciting and hopeful as the planning and production of a wedding can be, our clients' lives go on amidst it all. More often than we realize, many of them are dealing with tragedy at the same time, making for a dizzying mix of emotions. As wedding photographers, we have a unique opportunity to serve couples in a meaningful way when they're hurting.

Yes, there's a good reason the wedding industry employs more photographers than, say, the funeral industry. We'd rather not be reminded of death. Culturally, we think of death as defeat. We speak of "losing" a battle with cancer. We wear black when we mourn. Death represents a separation, and we sorely miss our loved ones when we realize we can no longer share life's joys with them here and now. But in this past year, death has reminded me just how much we have to live for—and exactly why our profession as artists is such a noble one.

IMAGES THAT BREATHE LIFE

I often hear photographers speak of how they aspire “to breathe life into images” through lighting techniques and so on. But I’m more interested in the power images possess to breathe life *into us*, especially personal photographs. Have you considered the immense value we project onto them? Whether or not a personal photo is technically good rarely matters. We can’t bear to throw one away! I have a faded 4-by-4 photo that breathes life into me. It’s a snapshot of my mom snuggling my wiry five-year-old frame in a red overstuffed chair. My mom has at times lived a hard life, full of illness and other adversity. But this photo is carefree. I would know if her smile were feigned, if it were the strong face she puts on. But this one radiates such sincere joy! If you look at it, you may notice just my boyish grin. But when I look, I feel that childlike sense of utter love and security all over again.

Eileen and I talk a lot about how our wedding photography serves as a “front” for our charitable projects—films and images we make to raise awareness for needy people in impoverished places. But I don’t want that message to take away from the real value your profit-making work also provides to people. To create a sustainable business that rewards the value of your time and talent, you need to believe confidently in the importance of the unique product you provide.

On October 19 of last year, I couldn’t have been more excited about the wedding I was shooting. I’d photographed couples in London before, but this was my sister’s wedding. What a celebration! She and my new brother-in-law made the picture-perfect pair. We loved his warm, welcoming family. The occasion was uniquely special for them, as his mother and aunts were able to reunite with an estranged sister after 10 years apart, finally mending some fences. We loved meeting her and her children, welcoming her into the family.

Just three days later—a complete shock to us all—the estranged sister passed away. Of course her children immediately requested the images I captured of her with the family. In a small but tangible way, my photographs became a healing reminder of what really matters in life.

RELATIONSHIPS.

FORGIVENESS.

TIME, *and what we have of it.*

for all of us, the images become

HARD PROOF THAT WE ARE LOVED.

SECURE.



GETTING BENEATH THE SURFACE

My sister's wedding wasn't the first time our photography took on new meaning through death. Over the years, we've grown accustomed to fulfilling requests for images of grandparents who have passed on. Last year, a groom's father unexpectedly died shortly after we shot the couple's New York engagement portraits. The couple wrote to us just to thank us again for the wonderful engagement images. Although the father wouldn't be at their wedding, they had felt his excitement and approval through his reaction to those images.

We hadn't met the father, and certainly had no images of him. But we did learn about a father-son project they had undertaken together to restore the groom's childhood bicycle. Like a photo, the half-finished bike took on tremendous sentimental value. Only the groom couldn't find replacements for the bike's missing decals. As photographers, we didn't know bike restoration; but we knew how to turn a small "Slingshot" logo into a vector-based graphic, large and authentic enough to complete the project! We were overwhelmed by the gratitude we received for such a small favor from this typically quiet and reserved groom.

What a difference it makes to be approachable to your clients. Opportunities to impact a couple's life depend mostly on whether they feel comfortable opening up to you. Even in small ways, through our limited interactions, we try to let couples know we care more about them than boasting of our own achievements. I hope that's why this groom felt comfortable sharing with us the story of his bicycle. When we made dinner for one of our newlywed couples (young exchange students from China), we discovered that, through four years of graduate school, they had never been invited into another American home.

I think most of us understand it intuitively, but I want to be clear about our approach: We believe in relationships. That's not the same as "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine." Tragedies that arise in our clients' lives are not moneymaking opportunities. They are opportunities to express our humanity, not to assert our copyright. I strongly encourage photographers to stick to their pricing, their packages and their rules of business in every other scenario. (After all, the work we produce isn't a commodity to be bargained over.) But these cases represent a rare exception. It's precisely because of the special value our work carries that we should feel honored to use it as a healing balm.

When your couples need photos for a funeral service, let the price for digital negatives fly out the window. Give them the best retouched image with your compliments. If an emergency prevents your clients from viewing their online gallery before it expires, extend it indefinitely. There is no reason to charge design time for a bicycle logo that's worth 100 times more as a show of sympathy. The comfort small kindnesses provide, like the appreciation they earn you, is inestimable.

Sadly, I've seen photographers abuse these situations, like price gouging for gasoline after a natural disaster. Not that we lose the right to charge for our work under extenuating circumstances. We don't. But I hope the lessons of death aren't lost on us. The biblical book Ecclesiastes, famous for its wisdom (and its rather pessimistic tone), puts it well: "As I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless – like chasing the wind." In lyrics made famous by the Byrds (in "Turn! Turn! Turn!"), the song concludes, "To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven." Yes, there's a time to turn a dollar. Then there's a time to invest in something else, something that will prove more meaningful and resonate in your own family's memory when they're holding photos of you close to their hearts.



EDUCATING OUR CLIENTS

We take so much for granted until it's too late. Haven't you observed this among your potential clients? How often do you hear, "We don't want an album. We're just looking to get the digital negatives"? In our downloadable world, even couples selecting something so permanent as their wedding artwork gravitate toward the most temporal options. They simply don't know better.

Don't wait for Google or Netflix to explain that the JPG is going the way of the eight-track, or to warn your couples their digital cloud is bound to burst. It's our job to educate clients about the unique value of physical artwork.

Our highest-paying wedding clients to date were not especially wealthy. The bride's father had recently lost his battle with cancer. During our initial consultation, her mother explained to us how valuable photography is, especially in light of her husband's passing. They would spare no expense in preserving those memories.

One hundred percent of our wedding clients now purchase wedding books. Like many, we offered books from the beginning, but sold none. What changed? First, we realized we were doing a disservice to our couples. (I don't need to tell you how rarely a shoot-and-burn wedding turns into a beautiful, lasting art piece.) Sure, our clients valued our friendship; but the value of our work for them was lost somewhere. One couple actually invited us to dinner at their apartment to celebrate their first anniversary. We brought them an 11-by-14 wedding portrait as a gift. Their response? "Oh, thank you! This is the first wedding photo we've gotten!" What?! Surely not. We had delivered a disc full of their wedding photos!

We now begin with a wedding book in every collection offered. Sure, couples technically could select wedding coverage a la carte and forego the book, but it wouldn't make sense due to the discounts of each collection. So everyone gets a book. However, many of our clients still come in with the impulse to cut corners on artwork. We want every couple to understand the value of what we create, not to feel pressured into making a purchase. To achieve that, we don't beat them over the head with any of the depressing stories I related above. But we do hit on a few key words and select illustrations during every initial consultation, just to plant the seeds of understanding.

As I carefully hand a wedding book to our potential couple, I describe how our page designs are "hand-mounted" and bound. I remark on the "old world" craftsmanship of our leather covers. I like to illustrate for our clients the sense of wonder Eileen and I felt upon finding her grandparents' beautiful wedding album from the Philippines. Eileen cried over the gorgeously produced images of our exceptionally sweet grandmother and the grandfather she never knew. Before anyone has the chance to ask how these pages hold up, I explain to the client: "It's hard for us even to wrap our minds around this now, but this is the art piece your grandchildren will discover in an attic chest someday. You know – 'Wow! Is that Grandma and Grandpa?!'"



SERVING YOUR CLIENTS

When we discuss something so mundane as family formals, I remind our couple that, while our style is not usually formal or “posed,” these portraits will be an important part of their family history one day.

I plant this seed, too: “You’ll definitely want a spread or two in your book to preserve your family tree this way.” People get that if you take the time to remind them. More importantly, they’ll thank you for it. Your couples will walk out of your studio with a pleasant taste in their mouths, a wonderful, lasting impression of your work. But in the long term, they will cherish the gift your talent has given them. Those will be the images that breathe life into them.

It informs the way I sign off every final thank-you note:

We hope

this artwork

grows even more

meaningful

to you and your family

as time goes by. ■



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PRODUCTS & PRODUCT LINES



“THERE IS **NEVER**
A WRONG TIME
TO **CHANGE UP YOUR GAME**”

BY Lori Nordstrom

There is never a wrong time to change up your game, but it seems that the first of the year always brings new ideas and a need for something fresh. I like to look at my year in advance, and think about the things I need to do to take care of my old clients, and bring in new ones. One way to do both is to offer something new.

Getting a new product or product line to offer gives me an excuse to contact past clients. By adding something different to the mix, I also might attract a different segment of the market that I wasn't able to reach before, or open up a new networking opportunity.

Many years ago, I decided I wanted to sell wall groupings to each and every client I worked with. Wall groupings were my “thing”! But as time went on, I knew that I had to up my game again. It wasn't enough to just have wall groupings on my menu. I needed to start educating my clients about the possibilities for their homes, their decor style and their lifestyle.

I invested in a sales presentation and studio management software called PreeVu so I could easily show clients what a framed or canvas grouping would look like on their own walls at home. But I realized that having this available wasn't enough—I needed to talk about it and get clients excited about it! I began to call my favorite clients to tell them about this state-of-the-art design software that I was so excited about. I told them I'd love for them to take a few snapshots of their walls at home so I could show off my new thing. I also offered to design something from their last session, and send it over for their feedback.

I let my clients believe I needed their help in learning this new software, and I did! But what happened was, not only did I learn the software, I sold wall groupings to clients from sessions that had already taken place. (What a great thing to happen around the first of the year, when things are slower.) I also had clients who loved what I created for them, but wanted to book a new session so that they had new images for their wall grouping. Another win!

PRODUCTS & PRODUCT LINES

New products like frames, albums, images boxes or even a fusion video product can all be exciting things to talk to your clients about. For many years, my studio has offered a video session option for our high school seniors. We call this the Rock Star Session, and started selling it just by talking about it and being excited about our seniors feeling like rock stars with their own photographer and videographer. Last year we also started offering a video session called It's My Life for our kids and families. When clients call to schedule, we just tell them about this style of session—that they will love the memories and moments captured in both video and photography. Some choose this session based just on the description. Some want to see a sample, and I'll send them a link to a finished video product. (Images and video clips are added to Animoto, and a slide show is created there. I can send a link directly from Animoto.) Even if they aren't interested, they know that we are constantly evolving and offering new things.

Adding an entire new product line can spike your revenue. When I add something completely different to what I do on a day-to-day basis, I like to make it "A Division of Lori Nordstrom Studio," and give it a different name. This keeps the product lines separate, and alleviates confusion about different pricing.

Some ideas for new product lines might be themed events, location sessions, executive portraiture, boudoir or glamour, pet photography, daycares and schools, or sports photography. And the list goes on. Diversifying your business doesn't mean being all things to all people. Create different product lines with different price points to reach new segments of your market without diluting your main brand by calling it something new. This also allows you to reach out to individuals and businesses that might be interested in your new line.



PRODUCTS & PRODUCT LINES

If you are starting an executive-portraiture line, for example, make a list of 10 businesses in your area that need updated headshots. Call each of those businesses and let them know about the services you are offering, with introductory pricing. Remember that the 80/20 rule applies to all things, so if you call 10 businesses, you can expect to connect and do business with two. Don't be disappointed by rejections—instead, think of them each as a *no* on your way to the next *yes*.

When you hear no, ask if the company is already working with someone it likes. If yes, that's great, and no matter who it is, be positive about that person. If the answer is no, ask if you can check back with them in six months, and put that date on your calendar. You can also ask if they know of anyone else who might be interested in having their headshot portfolio updated.

When you bring something new into the mix, get excited about it and tell people about it. It's a great way to generate buzz and additional income. ■

Watch my video below to see one of the new products I added to my studio last year!



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- + Back button focusing
- + Building a client base from an existing family business
- + Working with vendors and your pricing
- + Lighting suggestions for small studio spaces
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CLEANING HOUSE

updating your website & blog

WITH SKIP COHEN

BY SKIP COHEN



Here's the challenge: It's February, and for most of you, that means one month of the slow season has already passed. I hate sounding like your mother when you were a kid—in my house, at least, I was constantly being yelled at to clean up my room. I'd do it as fast as possible, stuffing things into drawers, getting the bedspread on without really making the bed, and pushing stuff under the bed.

Well, a lot of us have never really grown up. In everyone's house, there's at least one drawer that's the universal junk drawer, and the same for your desk. You've probably got a closet or two that may get cleaned up under the umbrella of "spring cleaning," along with various corners of the garage, but what about your business?

Where are the key bottlenecks that rarely get the attention they need? What are the projects you meant to tackle in January, but the month simply got away from you? The first quarter of the year in just about every market tends to be relatively slow. Don't let this opportunity to strengthen your business a little with some overdue "house-cleaning" pass you by.

YOUR WEBSITE: WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU DID A FULL REVIEW?

In last month's article, I talked about paying attention to your website. Let's go in a different direction this month.

I'm often surprised by things people have on their website. And just as often I hear, "Oh, I don't really do those anymore!"

Here are some examples. A well-respected sports photographer had a gallery of a wedding he once shot. The thought at the time was maybe it would get him some wedding business now and then, but there was nothing else on the site to suggest he'd ever photograph a wedding.

A family-portrait artist had a few images of seniors, but they were all of the same girl. She told me she wanted to build a strong senior business, but she had nothing on the site to attract clients.

Here's the point: What you show is what people are going to think you sell, in the same way Nordstrom's wouldn't have a men's department with only shirts. Don't put up incomplete galleries. Don't put marketing ideas out there that are half-baked. Show your best work and position your galleries in the priority you want for that aspect of business.



POLICIES ON YOUR WEBSITE

I understand you want people to know about deposits, cancelation policies, etc., but many of you have too much information on your site that scares people away. You want to attract your clients first. Policy statements belong in your contract or in a follow-up email to a potential client, not on their first visit to your site.

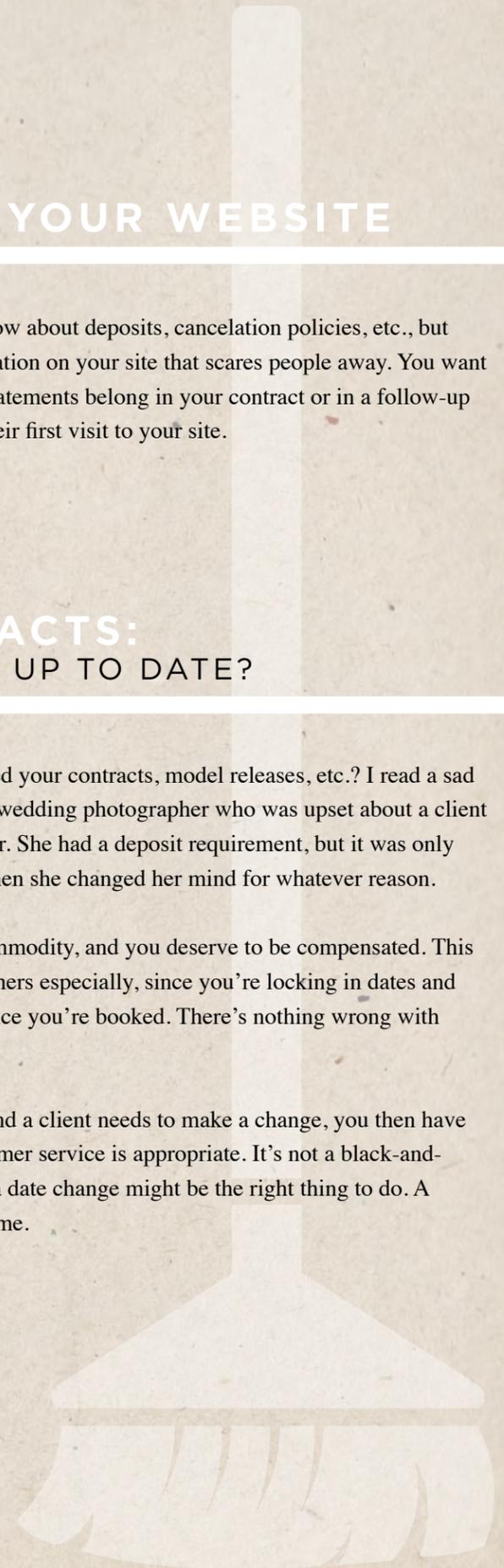


YOUR CONTRACTS: ARE THEY UP TO DATE?

When was the last time you reviewed your contracts, model releases, etc.? I read a sad story on Facebook recently about a wedding photographer who was upset about a client canceling a wedding later in the year. She had a deposit requirement, but it was only \$100—a no-brainer for the bride when she changed her mind for whatever reason.

Your time is your most valuable commodity, and you deserve to be compensated. This is important for wedding photographers especially, since you're locking in dates and turning people away for that date once you're booked. There's nothing wrong with attaching value to your time.

If you're holding a bigger deposit and a client needs to make a change, you then have the option of deciding if great customer service is appropriate. It's not a black-and-white world, and for a great client, a date change might be the right thing to do. A decent deposit keeps them in the game.



TEXT ON YOUR SITE: HOW LONG SINCE YOU WROTE THE COPY UNDER THE VARIOUS CATEGORIES?

I'm always seeing outdated information on websites. Go through every page of your site, and see if what you wrote still applies. Also pay attention to fonts, color combinations and font size. Is your site easy to read and understand?

I was on a site recently with black backgrounds and a purple 8-point font. It was almost impossible to read, and forget about trying to print it.

Most of your clients' home printers are inexpensive, and they're using the cheapest paper they can find. If they print out an information page from your site with reverse type on a black background, for example, they're going to get one soggy page of barely legible information. So, whatever is on your site that a client might want to print, do plain old black type on a white background.

YOUR GALLERIES: YOU DON'T NEED TO SHOW EVERYTHING YOU EVER PHOTOGRAPHED!

I've said this a bunch, and I'll keep saying it: You need only a dozen or so spectacular images. You don't need to show an entire wedding or a weekend family shoot.

Make your galleries mean something. Show only your best work. Do a little house-cleaning and dump images that compromise your image. Boil down those galleries to just a few select images.

And let's get rid of old images—seriously, styles change, and people recognize a hairstyle from 10 years ago! Stay contemporary, and let your images pave the way to demonstrate your creativity.

One variable in showing images makes a lot of sense. I love it when a wedding photographer, for example, shows an album online. In this case, a lot of images are fine, because what's being demonstrated is the ability of the artist to tell a story.

Don't assume albums on websites are only for wedding photographers. A children's photographer who can tell the story of a "day in the life" shoot with an online album has an almost guaranteed way to pull in a client. Few mothers and grandmothers don't melt at the idea of an on-location story of a day with one of their children.



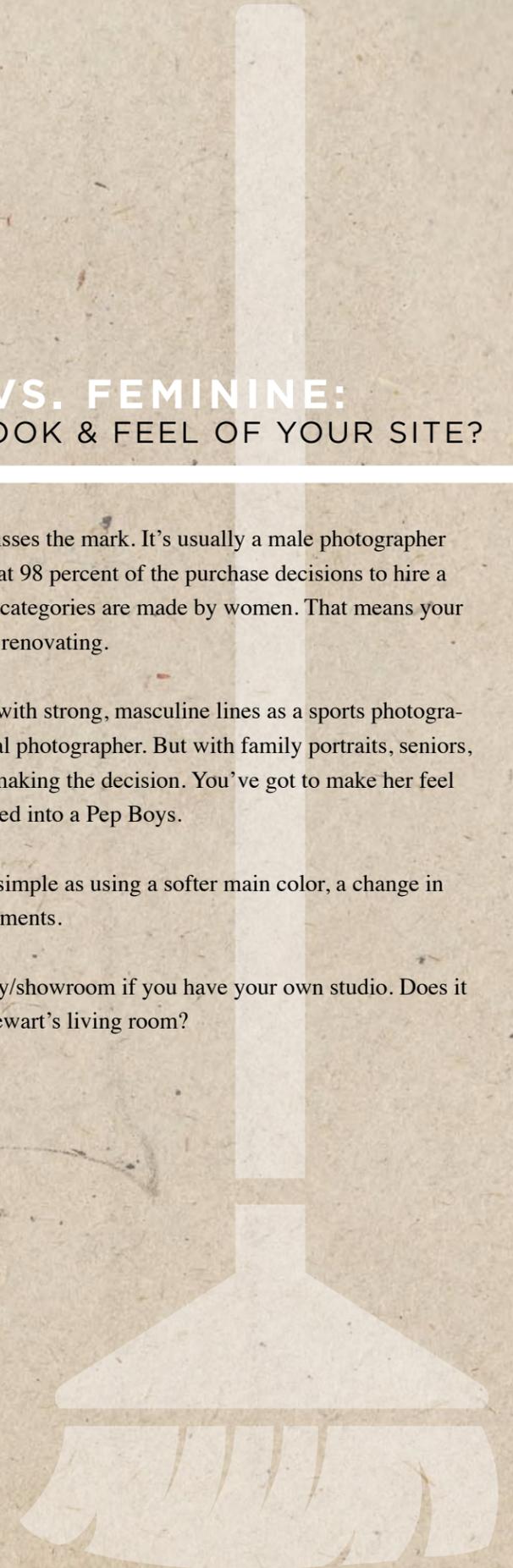
MASCULINE VS. FEMININE: HOW'S THE LOOK & FEEL OF YOUR SITE?

Here's where everyone so often misses the mark. It's usually a male photographer making the mistake. Remember that 98 percent of the purchase decisions to hire a photographer in the portrait/social categories are made by women. That means your website could probably use a little renovating.

It's great to have a high-tech look with strong, masculine lines as a sports photographer, commercial shooter and aerial photographer. But with family portraits, seniors, children and weddings, it's Mom making the decision. You've got to make her feel comfortable, not like she just walked into a Pep Boys.

Cleaning up your site might be as simple as using a softer main color, a change in fonts or a few different graphic elements.

The same thing goes for your lobby/showroom if you have your own studio. Does it look like a man cave or Martha Stewart's living room?





BRANDING ARE YOUR BOCHURES, FLYERS, BUSINESS CARDS & STATIONERY OUTDATED?

Look over every piece of printed material you have, and then ask yourself: "Does this represent the image I want to portray?" Look at the images, the design and the copy you wrote. Are they up to date? Do they represent an upscale artist, or look like one of your kids did the printing after taking a PhotoShop course?

This is all part of your brand. You're looking for continuity in the look and feel of any printed material. You also want an upscale look that fits your demographic target.

Lastly, there's this. I've said this a dozen times in posts over the past few years: Use your own images on your stationery. Even your thank-you notes should have one of your images, just like the holiday cards I wrote about a few months ago.

Everything you publish is a chance to plant the seed and remind people you're the best photographer in the area. If you snooze, you lose. Your goal is to make working with and looking at your images habit-forming!

Now's the perfect time to clean house and bring everything up to date. And it should become an annual event in your marketing efforts. ■



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VISUALLY PLEASING

THE SENIOR



WITH BLAIR PHILLIPS

BY BLAIR PHILLIPS



If you ever feel like you have this whole photography thing all figured out, it may be time to hang your camera in the closet and search for a new path.

With each passing year, our technology seems to be growing a little too quickly. Just as we get one thing figured out, it's often replaced by the next big thing.

This is exactly how I feel about my own photography career. This feeling goes beyond the obvious software and camera gear. It hits home with my style, how seniors portray me, and making sure my work is maintaining the edge that I know I am capable of. One task that all of us face is figuring out how to visually please our seniors and their parents. This task is one of the most important of the year, and I don't think that even David Copperfield could make this one go away. During this series, I will share with you several things I'm doing to make sure I keep my name in the mouths of my seniors.

WHAT YOU SEE IS NOT ALWAYS WHAT YOU CAN GET

One important thing you have to remember is this: Just because you can see it, that does not mean you can have it. This is an important message that would make our senior sessions so much easier if only they realized it. I am speaking of Pinterest, Instagram and the Internet in general.

Seniors spend an unbelievable amount of time online, and may fall in love with certain images they stumble upon. Something I have found to work in my favor is to never ask my clients to bring me ideas of what they have in mind. With seniors, I have found this to do more harm than good. When seniors fall in love with an image from Pinterest or any other form of online media, and you try to reproduce that image for them, it can come back to you missing the wow factor. The reason a senior fell in love with that particular image she found is generally the subject matter. Your subject may look completely different, not have the same style, not be able to pose as freely, and that can result in a flop. Ensure your clients that you do your best work when you shoot from the hip. Put your best work forward on your website and social media, and let that tell your style. It's a great feeling when your client gives you creative freedom to do what you want. You will create a shooting oasis, and your work will continue to grow when you are able to build that freedom.



That being said, it's a great idea for you to peruse the Internet for ideas that may spark your creativity. In my travels, I find so many people who are so scared of someone copying something they create. It's pretty comical when you really think about it. Some photographers focus way too much on the negative, and as a result it keeps them from experiencing the positives. I get ideas for my photography literally every time my eyes are open. Storefront displays, trending magazines, the Internet, billboards, literally everywhere you look may spark your next biggest idea for your seniors. You have to train yourself to always be a creative thinker. That is a huge goal of mine this new year. Take a day to yourself every now and then and turn it into an idea day. Get out and scour the earth for ideas that can help continue paving the way for visual success.

How a senior feels during the shoot can greatly affect the outcome of the session. It may also affect the way he describes the session to friends. It has the ability to also turn your senior into a cheerleader for your business.

DO SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

The way you dress can play a big part in your senior business. Are you putting your best foot forward in the morning and making sure your clothing is in line with the style of photography you are working so hard to produce? If you are really striving for a unique and edgy style, are you looking the part? Think about how weird you feel if you go out with friends and you are the only one of the group that didn't get the dress-code memo. You feel uncomfortable all night wishing you would have dressed differently.

I'm not saying that all of us should go out and start dressing like teenagers. Just make sure you are wearing clothes that match the style of images you are shooting for. Your seniors are going to show up looking great, with their most favorite outfits, so you need to put forth the effort and make sure you look your best also.

EQUIP FOR FREEDOM AND FINANCES

I really don't talk about equipment very much. Believe it or not, I am really big on having the best equipment within your means. Every day I search for ways to make every aspect of my life easier. Not because I'm lazy, but because the easier my life is, the more I enjoy it.

Have you ever found yourself shooting an image of a senior and thought to yourself how much better an image would look with more or less lighting? You could change the lighting, but that would require physically going to each of your lights and adjusting the output. Sometimes we are in a hurry and just keep shooting.

Another way I am working really hard to visually please my seniors is with some new equipment I just began using. I bought five new lights for the studio. The reason I bought them is that they allow me the ability to adjust the output from each one individually, straight from my camera. This has encouraged me to begin using even more lighting ratios with each session. You may look at this as petty, but add up all the steps you take in an average year going back and forth to your lights. The purchase of new equipment with freedom-producing technology is a great idea if it is a good fit with the financial side of your business.

The very first senior session I had this year brought on a whole new set of challenges for me. I wanted to start the year off in a big way that made me feel like I had a new sense of purpose. I approached my first session with the goal of being really proud of every single image. That is a really tough task that very few really think about.

VISUALLY PLEASING THE SENIOR

FRESH START

Too many times, you can get wrapped up in capture versus quality. One key thing I did on this session was setting up everything basically backward. If I would normally light from the left, I lit from the right. If I'd normally use two lights, I used one, maybe even four. If I would normally go left, I made a U-turn. Some of the best images I have shot in a long time came from this session.

Much of this is because I was not going through the motions and thinking about everything else going on in my life. Our spouses tell us we need to be able to turn work off when we get home, but what about turning everything else off when you are in a senior session and giving it every ounce of effort you have? You can approach this new year with the best business practices and systems in the world, but if one of your biggest goals is to visually please your seniors, you may be missing the mission. ■



SHUTTER

MAGAZINE

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Achieve Great Results with These 5 Sweet Deals

Today's photographers and videographers want working solutions when it comes to lighting and reducing time in post-production. That's why Photoflex has been making the most flexible, durable and cost-effective lighting equipment on the market for nearly 30 years. For each of the products below you can optimize the light which allows you to have the option to craft your creative vision.



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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!*



© Uncorked Studios



© Stephen Digital





© Salvatore Cincotta Photography



© Roberto Valenzuela







© Kurtis Hall



© Andrew Vernon





Thank you to everyone who submitted this month

>>WATCH FACEBOOK.COM/BTSHUTTER FOR OUR CALL TO SUBMIT IMAGES NEXT MONTH!<<

© Salvatore Cincotta Photography

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Barrie & Bev Downie are widely recognized amongst the most innovative wedding photographers working in the the UK today, their style of photography captures the glamour and passion of today's modern couples. Recently rated by professional photographer magazine as one of the top 10 winter wedding photographers in the UK..



Award winning photographers Barrie & Bev Downie inspired us to add a knockout Blue Color to our Custom Slide Boxes & to start offering a White Leather Strap Custom Flash, both make a superb addition to our product line! Barrie & Bev have urged us to enter into the UK Photographer space and we are grateful for their encouragement. Photoflashdrive.com helps pro photographers deliver their digital images in a way that makes the presentation to clients a memorable keepsake, while keeping an eye to studio branding,

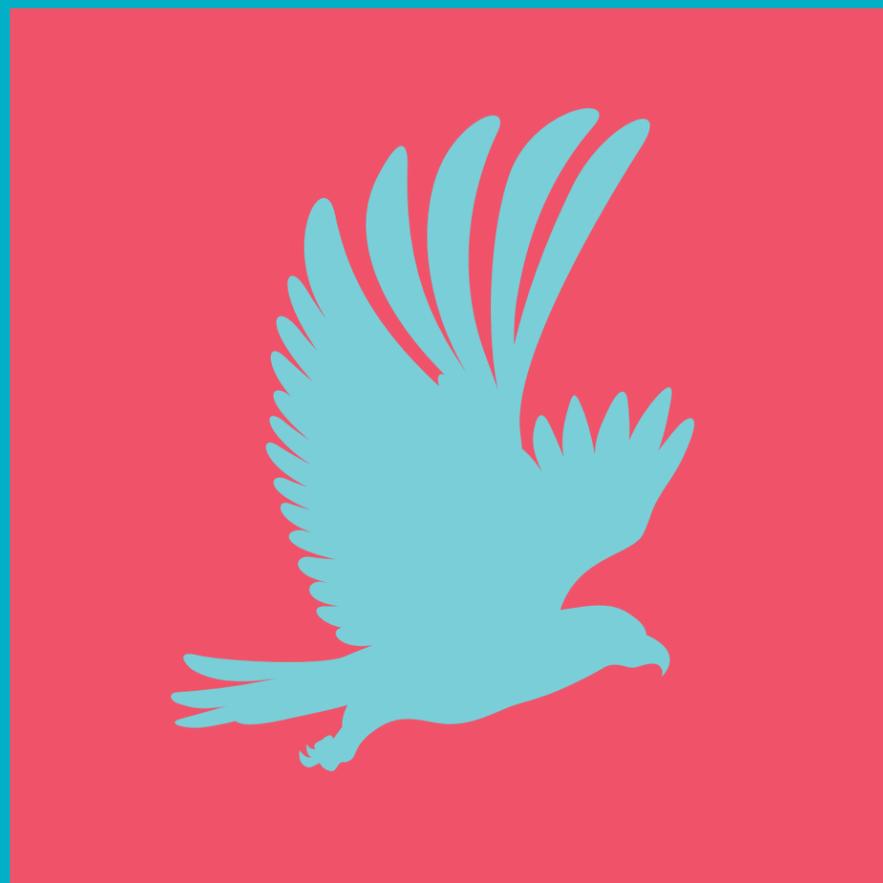
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WHAT'S IN YOUR BAG! WITH BLAIR PHILLIPS



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- 2 | Tamrac Memory Card Wallet for batteries
- 3 | Westcott 5-in-1 reflector
- 4 | Phillips screwdriver
- 5 | Adjustable Wrench
- 6 | Tamrac 5613 Shoulder Bag
- 7 | Nikon D4 (Primary Camera) w/ Nikon 24-70mm f/2.8
- 8 | Nikon 70-200mm f/2.8
- 9 | Nikon 16-24mm f/2.8
- 10 | Nikon 50mm f/1.4
- 11 | Nikon 85mm f/1.4
- 12 | Think Tank Memory Card Wallet
- 13 | Flashlight
- 14 | Nikon SB800
- 15 | Nikon SB800
- 16 | Pocket Wizard Plus III (x3)



PHOTOSHOP

CREATING A CINEMATIC LOOK

WITH DAMIAN BATTINELLI





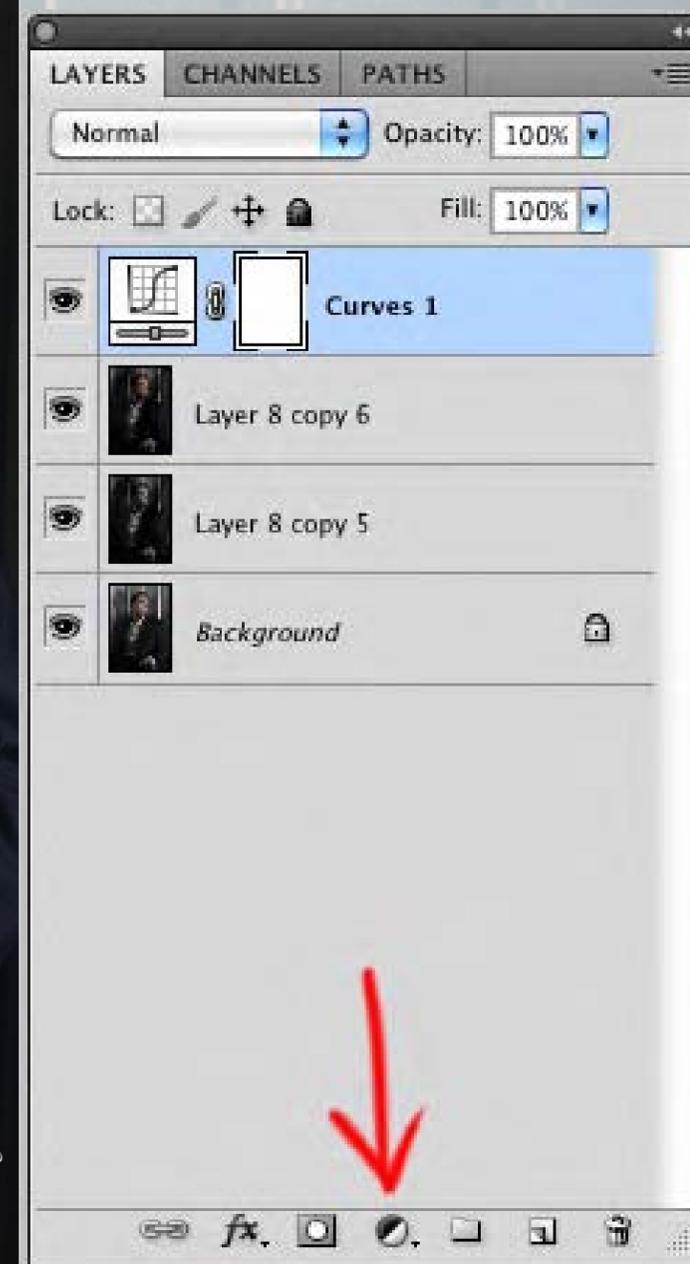
BY DAMIAN BATTINELLI

As artists, we draw inspiration from everything in our lives. I get tons from movies and music videos. Video editors have the ability to add all sorts of color tones to create certain moods. As photographers, we do the same, but with a difference. We have the sometimes tough job of conveying moods in a single frame. The advantage of film is it's constantly moving, and our brains take all that color in stride. So, how do we convey the same type of cinematic color tones in our single images? I'll show you how I do it with PhotoShop.

I'm a huge fan of the back story of photographs. I want to be taken somewhere or, better yet, given the opportunity to interpret images in my own way. Recently I watched Eminem's new video for "The Monster." The color tones are primarily blues, with complementary orange. A beautiful combination. In the video, Eminem is in what seems to be a freight elevator with an accordion-style metal cage. I wanted to add this to my image, so I created my own shadows on top of my subject. These are the details I enjoy adding to my images to create thought and wonder. Afterward, I apply my color tone to every shadow, midtone and highlight. This creates a consistent look.



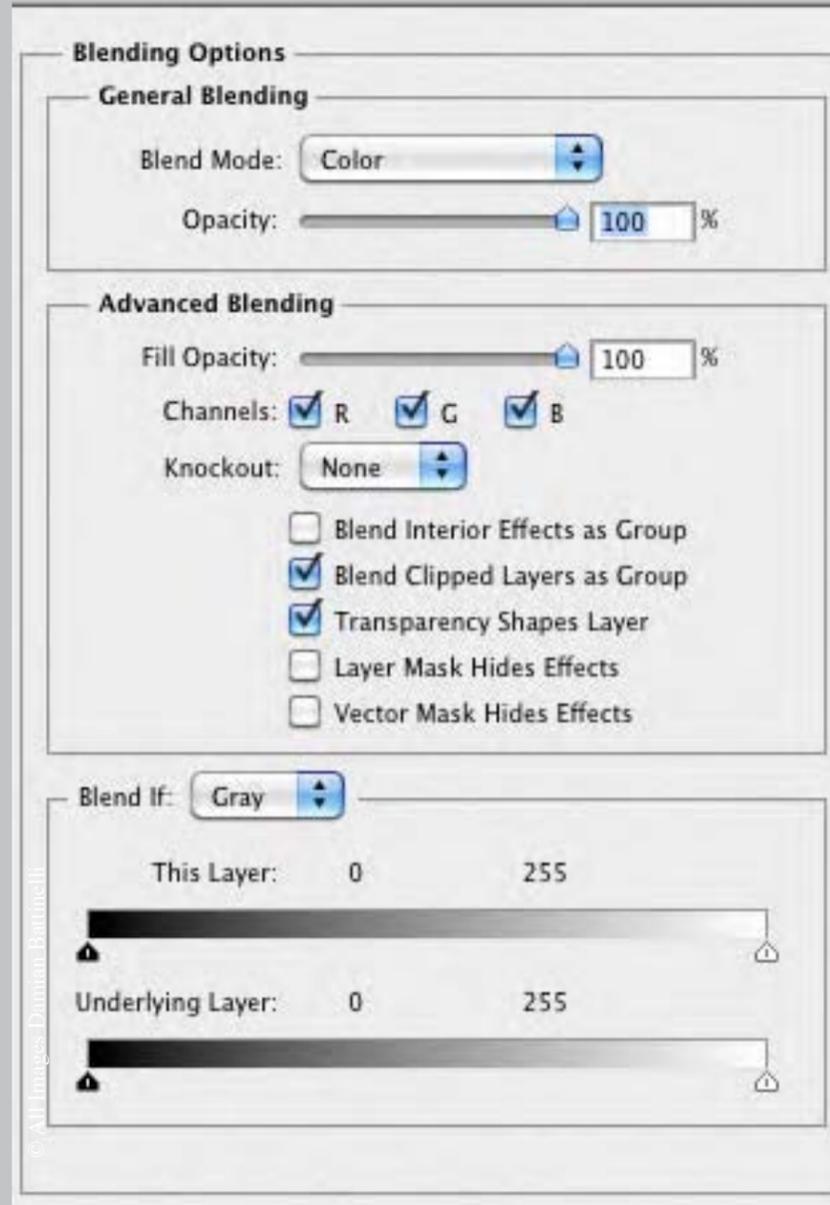
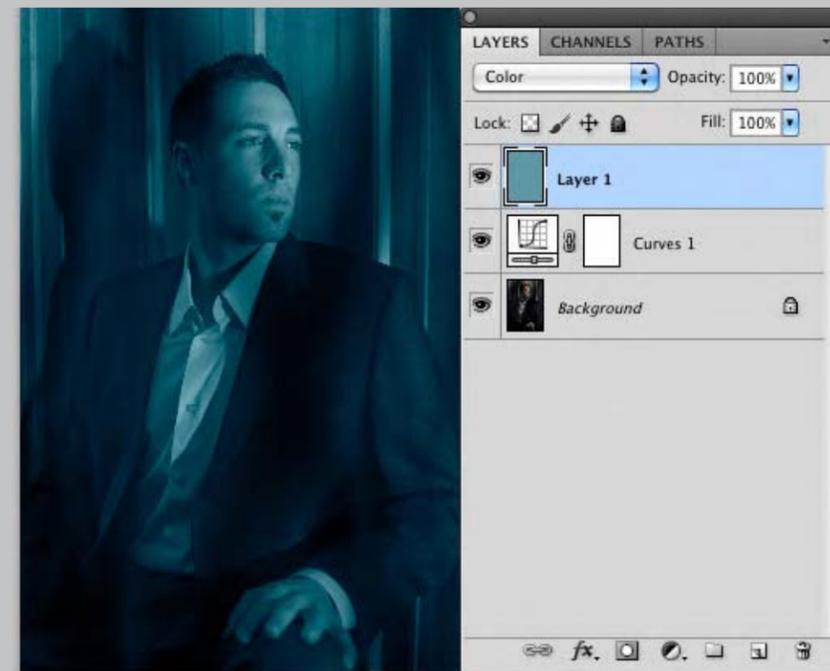
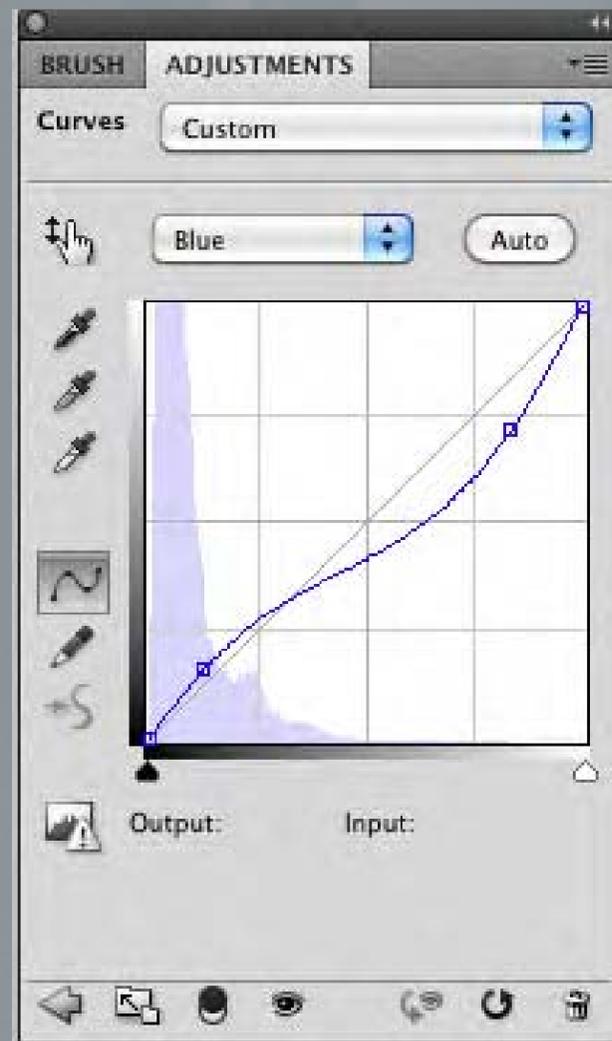
I begin by duplicating my background, since I always want something to revert to if all hell breaks loose. While my new background copy is selected, I click on the Adjustment layer icon at the bottom of my layers panel and choose Curves. I start choosing the color tones I want to adjust by selecting them from the drop-down menu, which begins with RGB. I tend to start with blue.



The lower left point of the Curves grid is the shadows, and the upper right is the highlights of the image, with all midtones in between. The goal is to bend the line within the grid. Starting in the shadows, I pull the line up, adding blue to my shadows. You'll be able to watch the image as it changes. On the highlights end of the line, I pull it down, adding yellow to my highlights. I know I want to add yellow because the complementary color to blue is orange.

Now that my blues and yellows are adjusted, I change the drop-down menu to Red. Adding red to my highlights blends with my yellow adjustment, creating an orange skin tone. Just be careful here so your subject doesn't appear to have a spray-on tan. Don't worry too much at this point, though; I'll talk later about how to combat the orange skin tone.

The last color adjustment is green. I add just a touch of it to my shadows, creating an almost teal color, but I don't want to add too much and ruin my nice blue tone. Sometimes I need to go back to my other colors and adjust accordingly. At this point, the image is already looking pretty awesome, but there are some subtle issues that can cause an unwanted tint. These tones are called color casts. You'll notice that there can be a slight tint of blue creeping into your skin tones, causing a muddy, greenish shadow. By all means, if this is your intention, stop. Create something you want, and be proud of it.

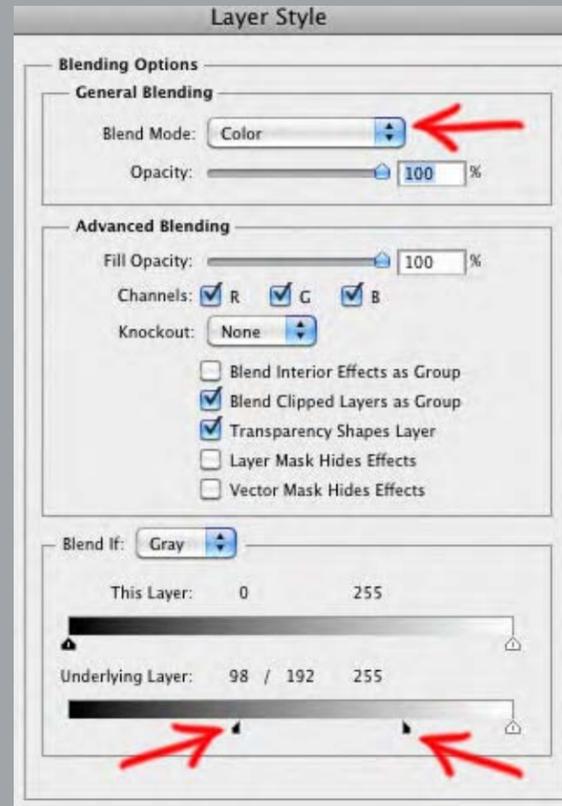


Let's work on fixing that orange skin tone from earlier. This technique is probably one of the most jaw-dropping adjustments that I've learned. It's so subtle but so powerful! The goal of this technique is to blend the complementary color blue with our orangey skin tone that we created in our Curves adjustment layer.

Start by adding a new blank layer above the image. Using the eyedropper, select an area in the highlights of the skin tone. Now you'll need to fill the layer with this color by pressing Alt or Option + Delete. At this point, we need to change this color to the complete opposite color. Press Command + I, which "inverts" the color to its complementary blue. Change the Blending Mode located at the top of your layers panel to Color. Double-click on the layer to open the Layer Style window. (Double-check that you did in fact change the Blending Mode under General Blending.)

At the bottom of the Layer Style panel, the two options under Blend If are This Layer and Underlying Layer. You'll make the adjustments to the Underlying Layer. On each side of the slider, there is a triangular marker. Using the left side marker, hold down Alt or Option and drag the marker to the right. This splits the triangular marker in half. Watching your image change, move the halves individually off each other. As you move the markers to the right, you'll notice that the blue layer you created starts to blend with the image. Play with the markers until you have a nice neutral skin tone. As you can see, the blue layer is combating the orangey skin tone, with a much more pleasing result. At this point, you can adjust the opacity of this new layer if you'd like to reintroduce a bit of the layer below.

You obviously don't have to use blue as your tone in your Curves adjustment. I'm just hoping that you not only learned some new techniques in this lesson, but will now think about watching more music videos and movies for color tone inspiration. If you don't like the music or dialog, just mute it! 🎧



SURVIVE | THE | MADNESS

with Laurin Thienes

SURVIVE THE MADNESS

by Laurin Thienes



As we relax in the typical calm of a new year, many of you are looking for a way to grow your business. But what happens when the time comes and you've grown your business too much? Do you cave and break down? Wish you never grew your business? Or put on a helmet and prepare for battle? If you've ever experienced a point where you felt like everything was crashing in because you were too busy, then you've likely answered yes to all of those questions. I know I have. And for those of you who wish you had these problems, I've laid out the top five ways I've managed to make it through the madness without imploding.

The idea that as a small business owner you have a 9-to-5 job, Monday through Friday, is laughable. For me, it is laughable to even have a conversation about work/life balance. There is only a how-much-can-you-work-before-your-life-falls-apart balance. No one wants to be at that point, but you know when you hit it. Astonishingly, what you can handle is usually much more than you initially thought. Sometimes you may feel like you're drowning. The tunnel vision for what is on your to-do list makes you feel you cannot come up for air. Is this temporary or permanent pain? It's probably temporary, and you can get through it by working hard. Pushing through the pain can be difficult. It can put strain on your personal relationships, and it can make you feel like the light at the end of a tunnel is a train. Keep telling yourself that the pain will indeed end, and focus on running your business at a sustainable pace. Do whatever it takes to get out of your hole. Make adjustments and create processes so you never find yourself back in that same situation.

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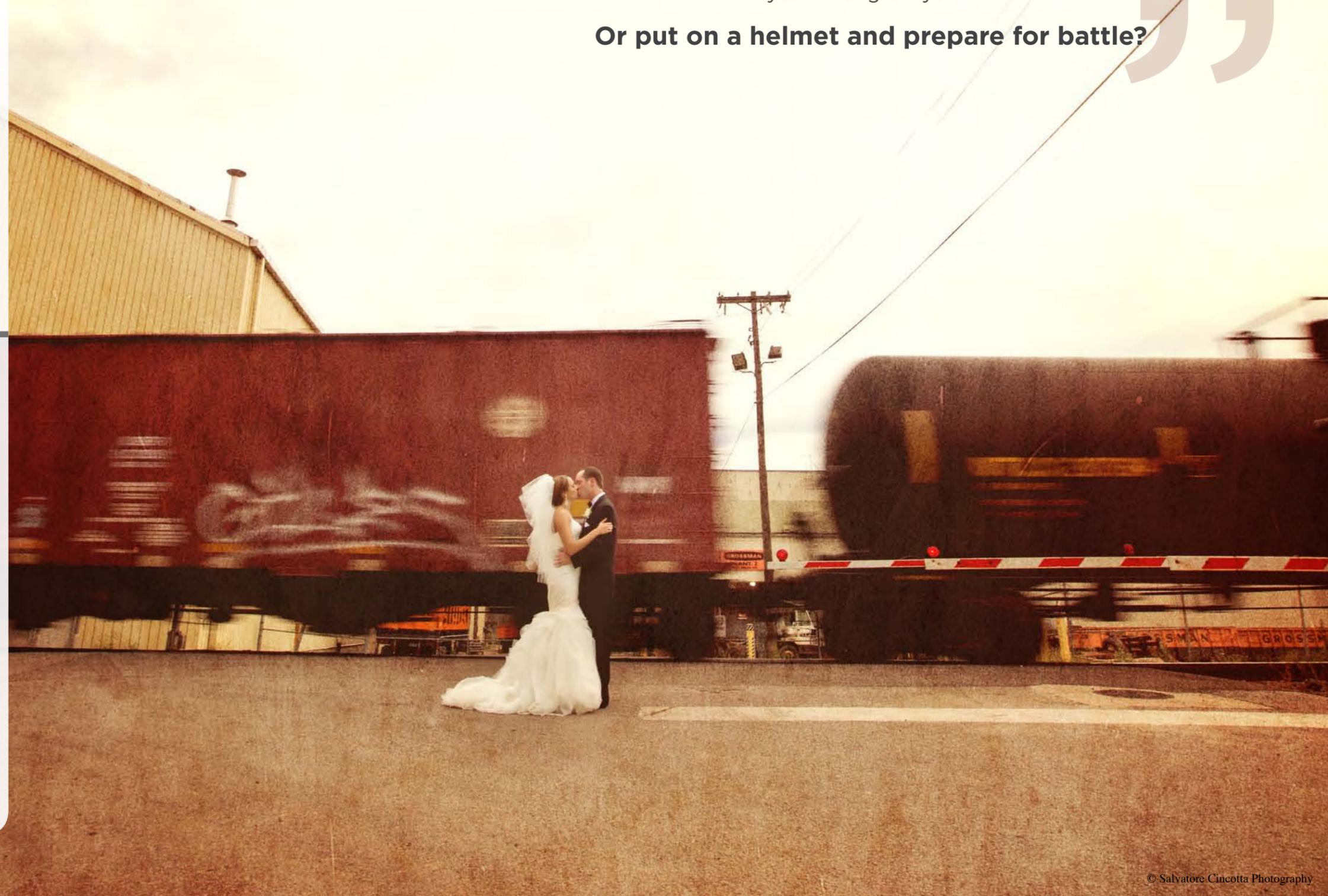
But what happens when the time comes
and you've grown your business too much?

Do you cave and break down?

Wish you never grew your business?

Or put on a helmet and prepare for battle?

”



SURVIVE THE MADNESS



OWNING YOUR MISTAKES

Mistakes are going to happen. It is a simple fact that when you are sleep-deprived or preoccupied, or life has just gotten in the way, you are going to send stupid emails, make avoidable errors and do things that negatively impact your brand. You're human. It happens. But when mistakes happen, the absolute worst thing you can do to your clients is hide, make up excuses or, worse, pretend like the walls are not closing in. The reality is, you are drowning—and you made a mistake. Own it! And, more importantly, make it right.

Let's face it, these mistakes inevitably cost you money, but you have to make it right. Get creative, but don't be afraid to have a "real talk" conversation with your clients—the overwhelming majority will understand. I cannot reiterate enough: Do not hide. Do not make lame excuses. Do not pass the blame. This is your business—own the mistake.

STAYING MOTIVATED

I do not really think of these as each level of hell, but they do in a way lead one from another. So far, you have drowned. You have made stupid mistakes. And you likely feel that the end is never going to come, and your idea of normal is a figment of your imagination. But you have to keep pushing. Set small goals for yourself. For me, it was creating a small daily checklist that I could physically check off. Sleep is off limits until that is checked off. The sense of accomplishment is worth the dark circles under your eyes. Set rewards for yourself as well. When you hit a milestone while digging yourself out of your hole, figure out a reward. These small rewards are nothing compared to your ultimate reward of staying sane. Not imploding on yourself. Push yourself, and know that the end result is success. The alternative to being busy is being slow. Which would you rather have?

SPREADING THE LOVE

If you have a group of people (employees or otherwise) around you working hard to help get you caught up, they have to have the same sense of accomplishment and reward you do. When the madness struck for us, one thing we did for our staff when working late was always to have dinner picked up or delivered. Spouses were always invited to come share in mealtime. The sense of community, even with the long hours, turned our team from coworkers to family. And the small rewards didn't hurt either, like bringing in massage therapists for a relaxing chair massage. These small things kept the inevitably tense working environment fun, relaxed and motivating. This also creates a sense of loyalty from the team you surround yourself with. It's healthy and breeds longevity.

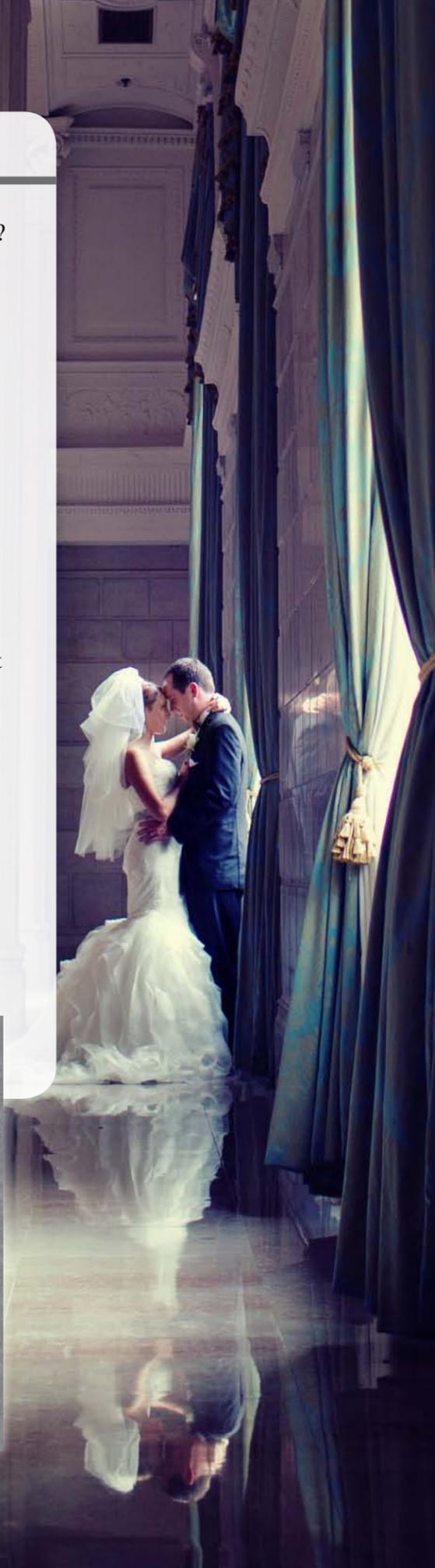
SURVIVE THE MADNESS

KNOWING WHAT WENT WRONG

So what happens when you finally see that the light at the end of the tunnel is indeed not a train, and you are now slowly coming up for air? Simply stated: Learn from the mistakes you made. Hopefully you've had the frame of mind to keep notes about what internal processes broke when it all hit the fan, or what could be improved upon so you are more effective. When you are drowning, it can be extremely difficult to be motivated enough to take notes, and ultimately to think clearly about what is next. But if you go through the pain of drowning and do not learn how to avoid it in the future, then motivation goes out the window. What is worse is for your clients to see you struggle through the same problems, just to receive the same broken promises. Shame on you, right? Keep a journal or digital notepad of things that will help you remember what went wrong so you can make sure you do not have selective amnesia and only remember what went right.

At the end of the day, as small business owners, we dream of being so busy that the business is bursting at the seams. To a certain extent, that is a great goal to have. But when things really do burst, knowing how to navigate it is equally as important as the overwhelming amount of business you are bringing in.

One thing that typically trumps all issues is process. Process is there not for when you are slow and everything can be done without risking a problem, but process is really there for when the madness strikes. Remember that as a small business owner, you should always be growing and innovating, both as a business and as an owner. When things are slow, be proactive: Lay out in the simplest terms ways you can keep from losing your mind when everything hits the fan. ■



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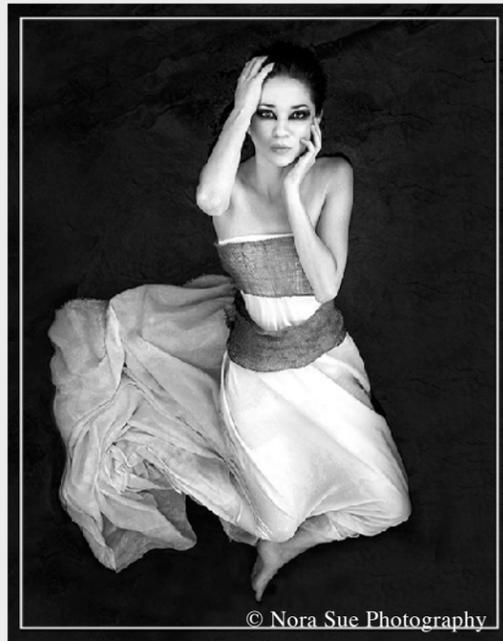
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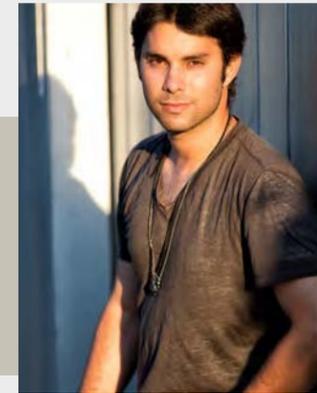
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BY ROBERTO VALENZUELA

I have always been an advocate for the invaluable educational opportunity that image critique can bring. **I think it's one of the very best ways to understand your work.** Having your photos critiqued can bring to the surface both weaknesses and strengths you might not even know are there. Equipped with this knowledge, you can work on those aspects that need fine-tuning. Most of the issues with images fall into four main categories: technical, location, background and pose/expression.

Every month, I will critique five images chosen by Shutter from reader entries.

The best part is that I will critique them on video, and use PhotoShop to draw callouts to show you where the issues lie. It'll be as if we were sitting in the same room going over your images together. I love this industry, and I have dedicated many years to pushing my fellow photographer friends to invest in their education and prioritize their skills and mastery of the art. ■

>>WATCH FACEBOOK.COM/BTSHUTTER FOR OUR CALL TO SUBMIT IMAGES NEXT MONTH!<<





SALCINCOTTA

www.SalCincotta.com

LOCATION: O'Fallon, IL

PASSION: Weddings & Seniors

Sal was exposed to photography at a very early age and has been in love with our craft ever since. He can still recall the smell of the chemicals in his aunt's makeshift dark room in the basement. However, a career in photography would elude him for over 20 years.

Graduating from one of the top 25 business schools in the country, Sal pursued a corporate career with his photography becoming more of a hobby. In 2007, he left corporate to pursue his dream of a career in photography and has never looked back.

Today, Sal Cincotta and his wife Taylor own and operate a very successful studio in the St. Louis metro area. Salvatore Cincotta Photography, Salvatore Cincotta Films, and BehindtheShutter.com.

Focused on wedding and senior portraiture, Sal has had the opportunity to shoot for corporate clients like Nordstrom's and the St. Louis Cardinals to elite sports celebrities and the White House, photographing President Obama.

FEATURED ARTICLES

Challenge Yourself
Q&A with Sal Cincotta

© Salvatore Cincotta Photography





DAMIANBATTINELLI

www.damianbattinelli.com

LOCATION : Plattsburgh, NY

PASSION : Composites

In 1995, my father bought me a 35mm SLR. We drove down to NYC to pick up the camera and I will never forget walking past the twin towers and looking up. I remember almost falling over trying to look up! They were massive. I would have never, in my wildest dreams, known that those same towers would have such an impact on me one day.

I took photography all through high school in Peru, NY. Developing, enlarging, dodging, and burning. I was smitten. I also attended Champlain Valley Educational Services (CV-TEC) for graphic design in Plattsburgh, NY. This is where I would find another passion, design! I was introduced to Adobe Photoshop. I learned that if I scanned images into a computer, I could manipulate them.

I graduated from Peru in 1999 and entered the military one month later as a graphic designer at the 105thAW, Stewart ANG in Newburgh, NY. I attended Defense Information School (DINFOS) at Ft Meade, MD. Only a few short years later, I met up with those same towers from years earlier, no longer massive but scattered at my feet. I spent 2 weeks at ground zero days after the attacks. Fast forward several years, 13.5 years of service to be exact, I exited the military.

By this time, my knowledge of digital photography, design, and editing were strong. I was able to take my love of art and photography to a new level and launched my business. I am still learning and growing as a photographer/artist and embrace this rebirth with open arms.

I am an Associate and Mentor for Peter Hurley's PH2PRO

FEATURED ARTICLES

Photoshop: Creating A Cinematic Look





PHILLIPBLUME

www.BlumePhotography.com

LOCATION: Athens, GA

PASSION: Weddings

Phillip and Eileen Blume are international award-winning photographers who exemplify a new generation of socially conscious creatives. They not only push boundaries to create unforgettable imagery around the globe, but also innovate to address poverty and impact the world for real change. As owners of a high-demand boutique studio, they've worked with clients in New York, London, Manila, Antigua and beyond. In 2011, they released their first feature documentary film, *Lost Boys of Paradise*, which screened across the United States to raise awareness about children fighting to survive in Guatemala's post-civil war slums. By implementing sound business principles and catering to a select number of wedding clients, Phillip and Eileen strike a balance that affords them time and resources to invest in what they value most – parenting their two young daughters, adoption, involvement in their community, and personal projects. As educators, the duo accepts invitations to speak to students and photographers about the art and business of photography. They have appeared at WPPI in Las Vegas and on CreativeLIVE for Photographers Ignite. In 2014 they will premiere their new studio space in Athens, GA, as well as workshops for photographers.

FEATURED ARTICLES

A Matter Of Life & Death



© Phillip Blume

CONTRIBUTORS



SKIP COHEN

www.SkipsPhotoNetwork.com

LOCATION: Sarasota, Florida

Skip Cohen is President/Founder of Marketing Essentials International, a marketing consulting firm specializing in projects dedicated to photography, primarily photographic education. (www.mei500.com)

He is also the founder of Skip's Summer School (www.mei500.com), the founder of the Akron Photo Series (www.AkronPhotoSeries.com), and the co-founder of GhostRighters (www.GhostRighters.com), a content resource for professional photographers needing help with editorial content, web re-design and marketing. His blogs, SkipsPhotoNetwork.com and PhotoResourceHub.com, is read by thousands of professional and aspiring photographers. On May 21, MEI launched PhotoResourceHub.com a new content site for professional photographers with video, podcasts, blog posts and an ongoing calendar of industry events.

He has been a recipient of ADL's Torch of Liberty Award and Foto Imagen Magazine's Man of the Year Award and in 2001 he received PPA's Legacy Award for his work in support of PPA Charities. His images have been published in a long list of photographic trade magazines, including: *Rangefinder*, *Shutterbug*, *Foto Imagen*, *Studio Photography and Design*, *Petersen's Photographic* and *The Hasselblad Forum*. He's also competed in print completion in both WPPI and PPA's national conventions.

In addition, he has written six books on photography: *The Art of Wedding Photography*, *The Art of the Digital Wedding* and *The Art of People Photography with Bambi Cantrell: Don Blair's Guide to Posing and Lighting Body Parts: and Wedding Photography from the Heart*, co-authored with celebrity wedding photographer Joe Buissink. Book number six, *GoingPro*, co-authored with Scott Bourne, was released by Random House in October 2011 and remains on the photography book best seller list at Amazon..

FEATURED ARTICLES

Cleaning House



MICHAEL CORSENTINO

www.CorsentinoPhotography.com

LOCATION: Petaluma, California

PASSION: Lifestyle Photography

Michael Corsentino is an award-winning, contemporary wedding and portrait photographer. He is an American Photo 2013 Top 10 Wedding Photographers nominee, Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Lightroom expert, Capture One Pro Certified Professional, author, contributing writer for Photoshop User Magazine, Shutter Magazine and Resource Magazine, speaker and international workshop leader.

Based in Northern California, Michael has been shooting digitally since 1999. His love affair with the magic and science of photography is more passionate today than ever. Stylish, dramatic, edgy and modern images set Michael's photography apart. His award-winning photojournalism, fashion and editorial styles have made him an in-demand portrait and destination-wedding photographer. Passionate about education, Michael loves to share his lighting and posing secrets, post-processing techniques, time-saving workflow strategies and shooting philosophy at workshops and speaking engagements.

FEATURED ARTICLES

Fashion Portraits





KRISTY DICKERSON

www.KristyDickerson.com

LOCATION: Atlanta, Georgia

PASSION: Weddings & Engagements

Kristy Dickerson is the founder and CEO of Fisheye Connect (www.fisheyeconnect.com), professional laundry sorter, CFO of multitasking, wedding photographer, mom of two, and a wife who is never wrong... never. Upon earning her degree in finance and business management, she started her photography business after the birth her first son. As if she didn't already have enough on her plate, in June 2010, Kristy launched Fisheye Connect for other photographers, like herself, looking for quality education. Fisheye Connect allows aspiring photographers to connect with photography industry experts by location, instructor or interest. It is a searchable database for photography workshops/ events, along with services that help instructors manage the marketing and financial aspects of their businesses. Merging Kristy's business sense with her passion, Fisheye Connect has become a thriving community of photographers learning and growing together.

FEATURED ARTICLES

5 Tips For Boosting Productivity From Home





VANESSA JOY
www.VanessaJoy.com

LOCATION: Freehold, New Jersey

PASSION: Weddings

14 Years of photography, eight years of shooting weddings, three years of business ownership (not to mention five college degrees)

Vanessa is a trilingual (English, Spanish and a bit of French), award-winning photographer, living with her husband, Rob Adams, in the great state of New Jersey. She has studied photography since 1998 and has spent most of her life running a successful wedding photography studio that shoots 35 weddings a year (at a premium price). In her first three years of business, Vanessa achieved honors such as: 20+ publications in print magazines (including three cover photos and interviews in *PDN* and *Rangefinder*), a Grand Imaging Award from PPA and a second-place wedding Image Award from WPPI.

Vanessa enjoys speaking across the country at venues such as CreativeLIVE, Clickin Moms, WPPI, Imaging USA, PPA-related conventions and personal workshops. She is recognized for her talent and even more for her business sense. Vanessa's clients love working with her, and industry peers enjoy learning from her generous, informative and open-book style of teaching.

FEATURED ARTICLES

5 Ways To Enhance Your Marketing Plan For Engagement Season



LORINORDSTROM

www.NordstromPhoto.com

LOCATION: Winterset, Iowa

PASSION:

Babies, Families, Weddings & Seniors

Lori Nordstrom {M.Photog.Cr., CPP, ABI} owns a boutique studio specializing in children and family portraits located in the picturesque town of Winterset, Iowa. Lori is a PPA approved business instructor and marketing consultant for Studio Management Services. Sharing with other photographers and small business owners is one of the things she most enjoys. In 2009 Lori started Photo Talk Forum, an online community of photographers working together to grow their businesses.

Lori has always had a heart for children and believes in giving back. She has run a successful fundraising campaign for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society (LLS) for 10 years. In 2011 Lori began her own non-profit organization, Dando Amor which focuses on helping orphaned children in Ecuador. Lori and Travis Gugleman hit their goal of raising \$100,000 the first year of Dando Amor existence. You can find out more about going to Ecuador or making a donation at www.dandoamor.org

FEATURED ARTICLE

Change Up Your Game





BLAIR PHILLIPS

[wwwBlairPhillipsPhotography.com](http://www.BlairPhillipsPhotography.com)

LOCATION: Landis, North Carolina

PASSION:

Seniors, Babies, Families & Weddings

Blair's team includes four employees plus Blair, who photographs 20 to 30 weddings and 500 studio sessions per year. Blair has a passion to teach photographers how to express themselves in ways they can't find with traditional training. He speaks to and teaches thousands of photographers and digital artists each year at national conventions and expos including WPPI, Imaging USA, SYNC Seniors, and various PPA conventions.

Blair and Suzanne's "eclectic elegance" style and positive energy educate and inspire photographers, while allowing them to stay true to themselves. This young team pushes the envelope daily with creativity and positive inspiration. As a side note, after 10 years of marriage, Blair and Suzanne welcomed Ava Blair Phillips into the world on August 3, 2011.

FEATURED ARTICLE

Visually Pleasing The Senior





LAURIN THIENES

www.EvolveEdits.com

LOCATION: Portland, Oregon

PASSION:
Weddings & Engagements

Laurin Thienes was 17 when he photographed his first wedding – 20 rolls of Porta400VC. Never looking back he went on to study photography with some of the most well-known photography studios in Oregon as well as leaving the state to study still photography at Brooks Institute in Santa Barbara, CA. Upon returning to Portland, Laurin was the studio manager of Holland Studios, a high-end, high volume wedding photography studio photographing over 250 weddings per year. After his departure from Holland Studios, he has continued to work as a contract and freelance photographer, having work published in *Grace Ormond*, *Men's Style*, and *Rangefinder*. Most recently, Laurin is the co-founder of Evolve, a premier wedding and portrait post-production service in Portland, OR. Outside of photography, Laurin also likes to cook, travel, and spend time with his wife and young daughter.

FEATURED ARTICLE

[Survive The Madness](#)





ROBERTO VALENZUELA

www.robortovalenzuelaphotography.com

LOCATION: Beverly Hills, CA

Roberto Valenzuela is a wedding and fine art photographer based in Beverly Hills, CA. Roberto Valenzuela is a 70-time International award winning photographer and three-time International first place winner. He serves as a photography judge for the 16x20 WPPI (Wedding and Portrait Photographers International), PPA (Professional Photographers of America), and various European photography competitions. Roberto's private photography workshops and speaking engagements are held worldwide. His goal is to encourage and inspire professional photographers to practice their craft when not on the job, as any other artist must do so in order to perform. He is an active teacher and platform speaker at WPPI and has served as the keynote speaker at other International photography conventions.

FEATURED ARTICLES

Picture Perfect Critique



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