SELF-PROMOTION FOR
PROFESSIONAL
PHOTOGRAPHERS

Focal Press
Taylor & Francis Group

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

As Focal Press author Grant Scott notes in *Professional Photography*, "the digital revolution of the past seven years has...increased creative opportunities but, perhaps [more] importantly, it has created new ways to show the world our work and our personality". The Internet is home to a variety of networks and resources that professional photographers of all levels of experience can use to get their work in front of a new audience, engage with other photographers, and promote their latest projects. Of course, none of this is possible if you don't know how to use the tools that are available to you. Getting the most out of the Internet can be a daunting task, which is why we've created *Self-Promotion for Professional Photographers*, a quick and dirty guide to sharing and promoting your work online.

Consisting of tips and tricks from established professional photographers who are already using the Internet to their advantage, this FreeBook walks you through the different steps involved in successfully promoting and increasing exposure of your work. You will learn about how to create an attractive website that will appeal to potential clients, generate engaging content for your blog, and use social media to connect with your followers and the larger photographic community.

We've designed this book to give you a logically-ordered overview of the essential steps involved in promoting your work online, but you can also jump around from section to section and use what you need most. And in the spirit of self-promotion, we'll also add that you can always refer to the excerpted books for more information on any of these topics.

CHAPTER 1 – DEFINING YOUR STYLE

Articulating your own personal aesthetic is an essential first step in promoting your work; being able to describe your work to others not only gives you a better understanding of what you want to accomplish, but it also puts you in a position to attract an engaged and enthusiastic audience. In this opening chapter, professional fine art photographer Brooke Shaden shares tips that will get you thinking about your artistic style and how to make sure that your perspective comes across in your photography and the promotional work you do around it. Shaden's own distinctive, other-worldly photographic style has not only established her as a celebrated artist, but it has also served as inspiration for a short film by director Ron Howard.

INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THIS FREEBOOK

CHAPTER 2 – THE BASICS OF BEING ONLINE

There are numerous factors involved in building your online presence, from websites to blogs to social media accounts. In this section, long-time professional photographer Grant Scott draws on his extensive background in publishing and photography to give you an honest overview of what you will and won't need in order to start building your online presence. You will learn about the essential elements of a photography website, become familiar with the best uses for different social media platforms, and get a realistic sense of what it takes to make the most of your online presence.

### CHAPTER 3 – CREATING CONTENT

Of course building an online presence for your work requires more than a theoretical understanding of the tools at your disposal—you need to create interesting and exciting content in order to attract and keep followers. Jolie O'Dell's status as a veteran blogger as well as her roles at sites like Mashable and VentureBeat inform her perspective as she shares ideas for getting started, gives you strategies for generating content, and provides helpful tips for bloggers of all levels. You will also learn about the ways in which online content is different from content on other platforms, what makes it unique, and how to use that to your advantage.

CHAPTER 4 – BUILDING A COMMUNITY

This final chapter, also from Jolie O'Dell, walks you through different ways to build and nurture your online community. Here you'll find tips for how to interact with blog commenters, reach out to other bloggers with interests that are similar to yours, and use your social networks to expand your audience. A strong community is a key factor in self-promotion, so make sure you don't neglect this essential step in the process!

As you read through this FreeBook, you'll notice that a couple chapters cover similar territory but offer slightly different viewpoints. We hope you'll see the value in getting different perspectives on the same topic, and use the information provided here to decide what works best for you and your personal style.

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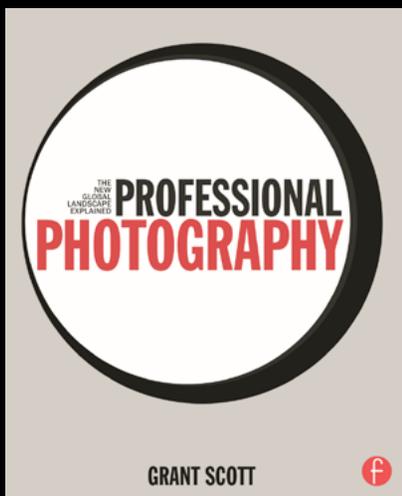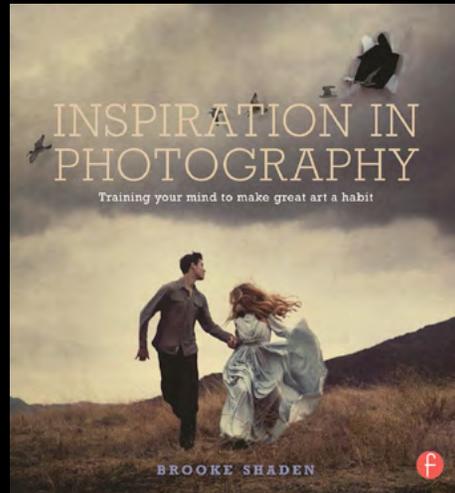
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CHAPTER **1** DEFINING YOUR STYLE
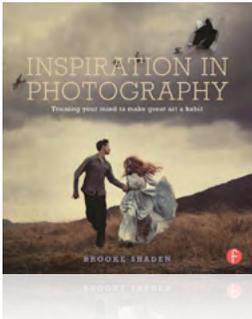
1 :: DEFINING YOUR STYLE

I believe that figuring out your personal style of photography, or art in general, is the number one thing that will not only set you apart from the crowd, but will set you on a path to being personally fulfilled. Style can be a very daunting thing to define, because we are diverse people as well as artists. Whether you shoot fine art, portraits, fashion, or street, having a recognizable style is essential for understanding how you need to visually interpret your inspiration.

I like to define my own style using a series of five to ten words. These keywords are the same ones that I describe my work with when I'm asked, both online and in person. The more I use these keywords, the more people believe in them. I am, essentially, indicating to people what to think about my art. If you don't define your style, someone else will define it for you, and when this happens, it's very difficult to break free from those associations as they're already in place. If you shoot weddings, but your passion is for fine art, your customers will continue to recognize you only as a wedding photographer until shown otherwise, because wedding photographs are what you "put out" to the public first. The only way to make this transition is to shoot what you are passionate about, and put that out to the world, with your own definition.

I use ten keywords to define my style: dark, mysterious, timeless, whimsical, surreal, fairy-tale, creepy, texture, square format, haunting. These words are not only how I see my photography, but how I want other people to see it. I stay true to these keywords, at least in part, for every picture I create.

If I find myself deviating in a drastic way, I ask myself what the reason for that is. Either I am naturally moving in a different direction with my art and I should embrace it, or I have deviated from my style and need to reposition myself to stay true to my core. As a result, when I ask people to define my style of photography, the ten descriptors that I mentioned previously are the words that I hear most often. In short, my style is distinct and consistent. This is what you want.

It is important to know who you are as an artist. Even if you create many different types of images, there should still be a coherent style that runs through them. From landscapes to fashion, you might have similar color schemes throughout your work, or perhaps the connection is not so much aesthetic as conceptual. Style does not necessarily have to be a consistent visual representation, but can include the ideas and motivation behind the work. You might shoot strangers and street photography, and have images that look drastically different from one to the other, moving from high-contrast black and white to bright color. If for example the end goal is to consistently tell the stories of people at work in their daily lives, then your style

should emerge in the concept of the shoot and the treatment of the subject rather than necessarily in the visual style of the piece.

So how does style relate to inspiration? A coherent style will follow naturally from knowing what your inspiration is and letting it guide your decisions in what to shoot. I love any imagery where the time period is unknown. It is future, or past—anything but the time we live in. I love any piece of art, be it visual or narrative, which deals with mystery, intrigue, and whimsy. Fairy tales are endlessly inspiring to me. So by following my inspiration and passion to shoot what they dictate, inspiration has informed my style and vice versa.

I noticed early on that I loved using the square format, and that has come to define my style. The square format almost reminds me of a window, allowing the viewer to see past a photograph and into a new world. This realization made me want to create imagery that is less like static art and more like a portal into a new world.

Practical Pointers ::

If you had to choose five words that describe your photography right now, what five words would you choose? If you had to choose five words to describe how you would like your photography to be, what five words would you choose? Chances are something about your second list of words will be different to the first, unless you are 100% satisfied with your photography. As artists, we need something to work toward a goal, and the list that you have just written showing how you want your photography to be is a good blueprint to follow. Work toward incorporating those words into your new imagery and you will begin to grow as an artist. Being able to define your own style is very important, because if you do not define your style, as soon as your work starts getting attention, someone else will define it for you.

1 :: DEFINING YOUR STYLE

Defining your style does not have to be a difficult process. Ask yourself again what you would like to shoot, if you could shoot anything. What colors would you use? What locations? What wardrobe? These answers will help to lay out very clearly what you enjoy photographing and what you dislike. I would never write that I want to photograph a brand new car, because that is in direct contrast to my style and simply does not motivate me. I would, however, love to photograph a very old and abandoned car, and that does fit with my style. Once you know what you want to photograph, ask yourself why. That is the most important question, because once you know the reason behind doing something, you know the core of your inspiration and style, and can make a conscious decision to focus on this in your work.

If you love photographing children, ask yourself why. Is it their natural innocence? Once you've ascertained that this is what attracts you, ask yourself what you can do with your style, aesthetically and conceptually, to expand the idea of innocence. You might try making your images softer with colors that traditionally reflect innocence, such as whites and creams. Or you could give the child props to interact with, like a balloon or a kite to further that atmosphere of innocent play. There are always ways to adapt your style to enhance what makes you happiest about creating.
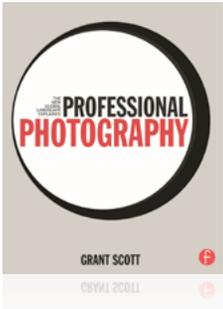
2 THE BASICS OF BEING ONLINE

2 :: THE BASICS OF BEING ONLINE

The digital revolution of the past seven years has changed the way in which we capture images, the equipment we use, how we process and produce our images, how we store our images, how our clients communicate with us, and how our images are used. It has increased creative opportunities but, perhaps most importantly, it has created new ways to show the world our work and our personality. I use the word "personality" deliberately as it is the understanding of the importance of an online personality that is the most misunderstood secret to online success. When I refer to online I am referring to every form of interaction it is possible to have via digital platforms. It is vital to understand these basic concepts to understand how and why it is so important to use all of the appropriate online platforms available to you, to create a successful photographic practice. Whichever platforms you decide to use, the moment you begin to post information you become a publisher— someone who curates information for a defined audience and who distributes that information to that audience. This is a role that the twenty-first century photographer has to both understand and embrace.

YOUR WEBSITE IS YOUR SHOP WINDOW

I am going to begin the discussion about how to build an online presence successfully by talking about the most important of all the platforms a photographer needs to construct: their website. But before I start divulging how to begin this, I'd like to give some personal online historical context. I first started engaging in conversations concerning websites in 1999. I knew nothing about what was possible, why a website was a good thing to have, or how anybody would find my website even if I had one. I was a photographer website virgin, who did not have enough budget, broadband width, or knowledge—although I did buy my URL. Then, while working in Seattle, I heard the term "web architecture" for the first time and suddenly building websites made sense to me. I was still unable to write the code required to build a site in those days of well-paid web builders, but I did understand the concept: build a structure with solid foundations that can function quickly and that is easy to navigate. That understanding remains the cornerstone of successful websites today.

The early days of photography website construction saw big name photographers with large amounts of money to spend engage in a battle of "who has the most expensive, most technically advanced, most creative website." The more features they had the better; the more glamorous the better; or at least that is what photographers seemed to believe. The reality was that these sites were often slow to load, overly complicated to navigate, with small images and unnecessary music. Today they look

exactly like what they were—overly ambitious concepts based on crude technology—and yes, some are still in use. Many of these early sites relied upon flash plug-ins that clients had not installed on their computers, and as the photographers' sites became more and more sophisticated the client was asking for the exact opposite, a simple, quick to download, HTML-based site. Again this basic requirement of a site remains the same today. Keep it simple, that's what clients want.

As well as the high costs that were incurred to build these early sites one of the major problems with them was the additional expense every time it was necessary to update the site with new images or information. The builders owned the build and the code and they were not happy to share either of them. The photographer was totally dependent on the builder: the builder would decide when they would do the work, and they could charge whatever they wanted. This was obviously a situation that was going to have to change for the web to grow; as more people mastered the dark arts of the web-building package Dreamweaver, the cost of sites dropped and they became increasingly easy to build. However, the era of the one man in a bedroom web designer/builder was short lived as entrepreneurs soon saw the commercial possibilities of creating easy to adapt templates with open source code.

When beginning to create your own website from a template offering, look for a well-designed and easy to use CMS (Content Management System).

Today the personalized website is available to all, however small your budget and however limited your digital or design expertise. There is no shortage of possibilities for you to choose from. So what should you be looking for when choosing a software platform for your site and how should you construct it?

First let me suggest a metaphor for you to consider. A photographer's website is their shop window, and as with any store it is important that their shop window clearly shows what they sell and that they define their area of specialization. It should also entice potential clients into the store to see more of the products they are selling. A well-laid out shop is easy to enter and allows a client to get to see what they want quickly and easily. The environment of that shop should be appropriate to the products on sale and have clear signage to allow visitors to navigate their way to the departments they are interested in. The departments should integrate well and give a confident expression of the store as a whole. The photographer needs to have a clear understanding of what their website needs to look like before they start to build it. It needs to be a well-defined and successful store.

I'd like to extend that retail metaphor just a little further. Go online now and imagine that you are in a shopping mall and you are looking for a particular item. Obviously you will want to buy from someone who specializes in that item and is going to give you a pleasurable shopping experience. Say you are looking to buy a pair of sneakers, would you choose to buy them from somebody who also sold sausages, lawnmowers, and rubbish sacks? Of course not, unless you wanted to buy them from a large department store offering a wide selection of goods without any area of expertise.

You do not want your website to be a department store, so do not create a photographic equivalent by including every image you have ever shot from confusing and conflicting areas of practice. "Less is more," was the creed of the great French architect Le Corbusier, and "Less but better," said the German product designer Dieter Rams. Both statements are fundamental to a successful website.

Whenever I am asked to review a photographer's website and I see that the photographer has failed to understand the fundamentals of what a website needs to be I am invariably met with the same responses: "I thought it would be a good idea to give a choice"; "I wanted to show that I've taken lots of pictures"; "I'm giving my potential clients lots of reasons to use me"; and perhaps the most ill-informed, "I can do lots of things and want to show them all." I hope that these comments make as little sense to you as they do to me each time I hear them. What these photographers are doing is exactly the opposite of their proclaimed intentions. They are actually creating a negative retail experience.

YOUR WEBSITE IS YOUR FOUNDATION

Your website is the foundation of your business and it needs to be kept simple. You need to edit your work tightly—no more than fifteen images in any particular section—with a sense of narrative when considering which images to include and in which order. This may be a painful process, but it is essential that your decisions are not betrayed by financial or emotional attachment—the background to an image is not an adequate reason for inclusion.

It is always the case that you will be judged on your worst image, as in "I really like those but it's a shame about that one," so ensure that all of the included images are strong— you are only as strong as your weakest image. You need to ensure that your home page features your strongest image, as many commissioners will not go further than this when looking at sites—I know this sounds harsh but it is the reality of our business. You need to make sure that your site is quick to upload even on the oldest PC on the slowest broad-band width, so test it in exactly these conditions, across all the commonly used web browsers including Safari, Firefox, and Internet Explorer. The final consideration to bear in mind is how many sections you create within your site and how you name them. Keep this simple and clear. Later in this chapter I will write about the different reasons you should include different sectors but at this point you should include only these: Home, Portfolio, About, and Contact. These should be the sector titles that provide the foundation for your site.

Having established what titles you are going to use, edited the material tightly, and decided on the order of presentation, you are ready to build the website. It is at this point that you will need to consider your URL, building system, and website host. The answer to getting the right URL is: keep it simple. You need a URL that is not gimmicky, supposedly funny, overly long, or difficult to spell. Always try to purchase both the .com and your national online moniker such as .ca, .nl, .hk, or .co.uk to ensure that you can control any future possible use of the URL that may cause you embarrassment, even if you are only aiming to use the dot com. If you wish to promote yourself as a regional photographer, then you should buy both but use the national domain as your main site URL.
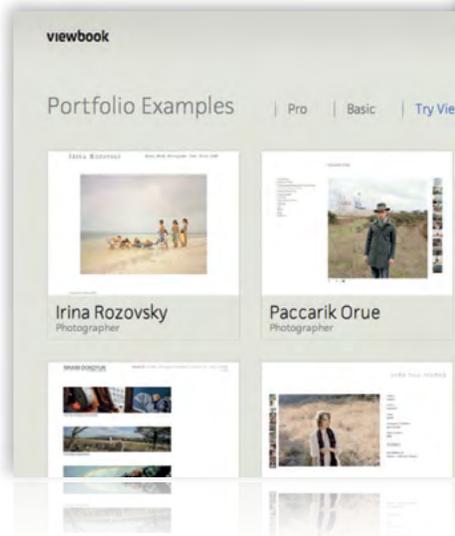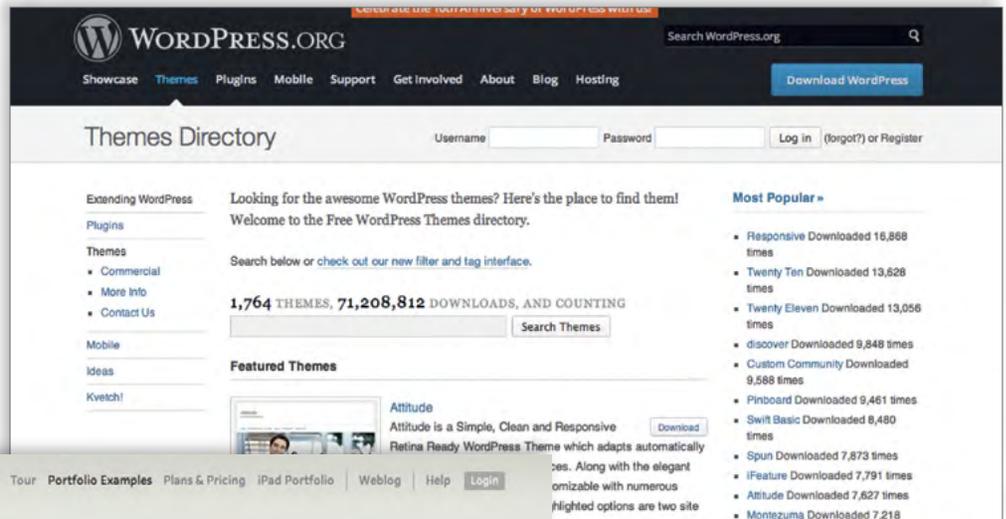
A selection of home pages of companies that supply easy-to-manipulate downloadable website templates to a standard appropriate for a professional. When choosing your template ensure that the company providing it offers all of the functionality you require for your site. You should also be aware of their range of packages and ensure that you have what you require in the package you can afford. In general, it is always best to consider the package you choose as an investment in your future.

You then need to decide on a host for your site. This is a very competitive market and there are many companies offering this service with a multitude of prices and services. My advice, based on personal experience and a number of mistakes, is to choose a company with a package at a competitive price that gives you a number of e-mail POP accounts as part of the package—this will allow you to set up an e-mail such as info@yourdomain.com—and a helpline for when things go wrong as they have a tendency to do. It also pays to choose a host on the basis of word-of-mouth recommendation.

Once you have decided on the host you will need to decide on how you are going to build your site and who with. At this point you need to have a clear understanding of the purpose of your website. Do you want to promote your work for commissions? Do you want to sell your work or associated products? Do you want to showcase your moving image? Do you want your site to be easily accessible on tablet and smartphone? Or do you want to use it as a platform for ongoing projects? The chances are that you will want to use your site for many, if not all, of these functions, so it is essential that you research the functionality of the options open to you.

Today, a wide range of easy-to-download templates that can be adapted to your needs are available from a variety of companies and a number of blogging platforms such as WordPress. (Although Tumblr is a good blogging site, it is not appropriate for a professional photographer; neither is Flickr.) Any of these companies may be suitable but a good way of checking that you are making the right choice is to see how many photographers whose work you admire are using that company's services. Word of mouth is also a good form of recommendation, but make sure that you ask people who are already working as professional photographers. If you are a student, asking fellow students is not necessarily going to supply you with the best professional advice.

My recommendation to all photographers starting out or working with small budgets is to use these website template-based companies for a number of reasons. First, doing so puts you in control of the build, design, and build schedule. It allows you to get some basic knowledge of Content Management Systems (CMS). You get a set price for your website, preventing any nasty financial shocks at a later stage. You control the images you post and the order in which they appear, without relying on someone else's work schedule. And, most importantly, you get a sense of awareness of what is involved in creating a successful site and gain confidence so that you can move on to developing a total online presence. You may choose to employ a website designer; but before you do, be aware of the advantages of creating a site for yourself and ensure that you have access to the CMS to make changes to the website at a later date.

2 :: THE BASICS OF BEING ONLINE

This is not a guidebook on how to build a website, but I have tried to contextualize the importance of a good website as part of your overall presentation. This will help you to understand its basic functions and requirements. Below is a short summary of the points I have made.

The Essential Considerations when Building a Website ::

1. Clean and simple design.
2. Easy to understand navigation.
3. Strong compelling home page image.
4. Quick to download.
5. No more than fifteen images in any one section.
6. Easy to remember and type URL.
7. Only use new images when they are better than the images you already have on site; never update just because the images are your latest work.
8. No background music.
9. Functionality for future growth.
10. Appropriate for your client market.

TO BLOG OR NOT TO BLOG, THAT IS THE QUESTION

Ok, so if your website is the foundation and shop window of your photographic practice, the blog can provide the added online personality. I say "can" because not everyone can create a personality through a blog; therefore when photographers ask me whether they should have a blog or not I am always careful how I answer the question. The creation and upkeep of a blog requires the skills of a journalist, the patience of a subeditor, and the storytelling capabilities of a seasoned raconteur. Oh! And a lot of hard work! Blogging, therefore, is not for everyone and yet "the blog" has taken on almost mythical status in its power to help you grow web traffic. Quite simply, not everyone can create a blog and not everyone should try.
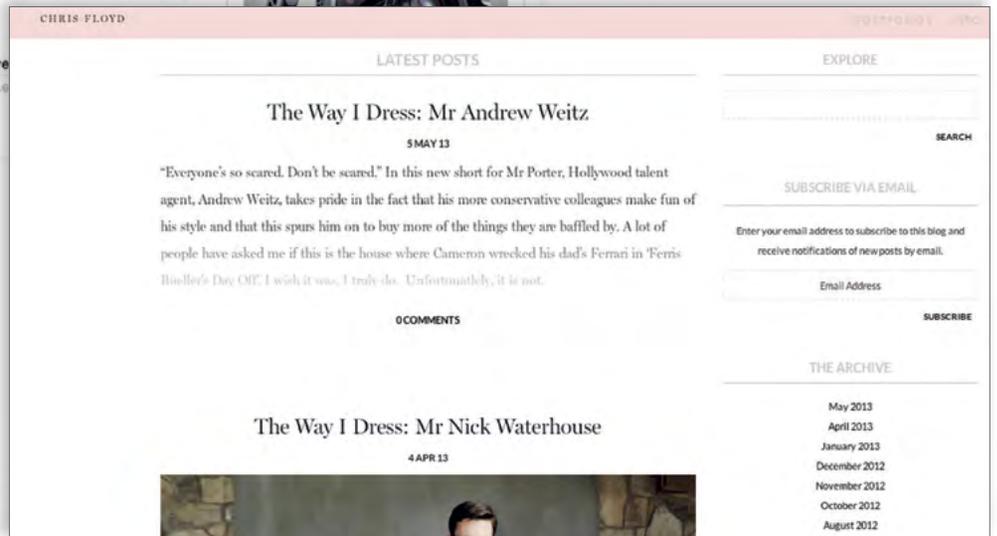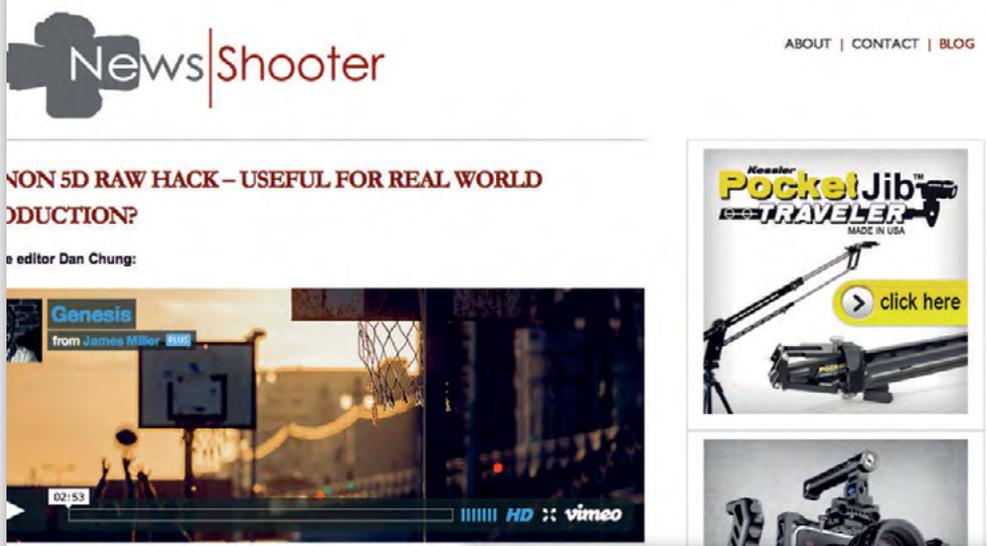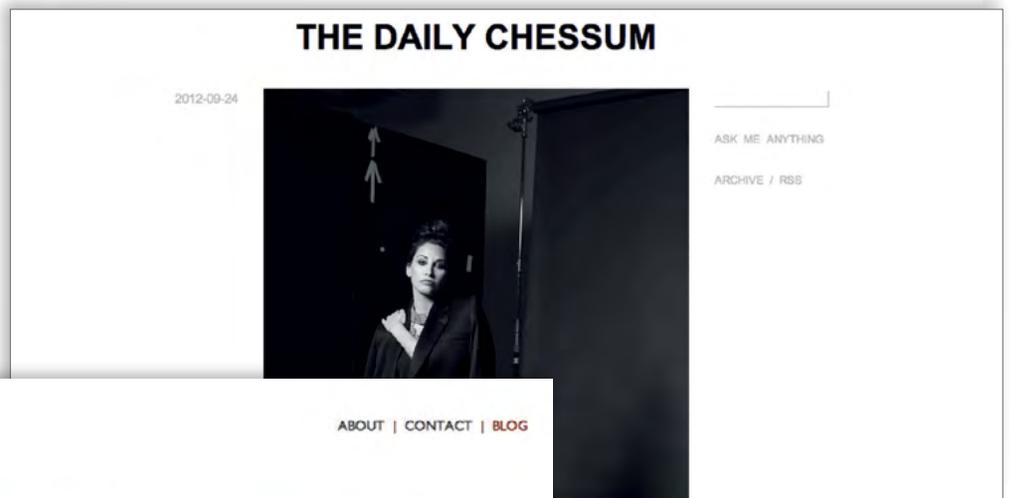
So what is the purpose of the blog apart from driving web traffic? Well, it can provide background to your work, it can provide context for your work, and it can showcase who you are, what you like, where you go, what you do, and, most importantly, what and how you see. For all of these reasons, a blog can be a very important element in creating your online personality. These days clients rarely meet new photographers in person; they meet you online via your website. Although you will want to be judged on your work, clients will also want to know what kind of person you are and how you approach photography. You may well win the commission over a fellow photographer on the basis of these aspects.

There are three distinct forms of blogs. The first is what I will refer to as a "general photo" blog. This is the kind of blog that takes the most time to create and that will require the most input of content. It requires awareness of what's going on in the world of photography and features comments, reviews, and statements written about your personal work, as well as your technique and equipment. This type of blog is created to build web traffic and therefore a community. The second type of blog is a "work blog," which records the work you are doing and the images you are taking with photographs and text. This kind of blog provides the context for your work and does not involve a huge amount of journalistic input. However, it does require regular updating and a reasonably robust commissioning schedule to ensure that you appear both busy and successful to clients and potential clients. The third, and perhaps the easiest blog to control and keep fresh, is the "photo diary blog." This blog is image led and consists of the pictures you take that interest you. This type of blog works well on two levels. First it demonstrates how you see and your visual language, and second it encourages you to take images wherever you are and thereby develop your visual language. On this platform, you can display images covering a wider selection of photographic genres without weakening the main area of specialization demonstrated on your website. If you have never created a blog before, this is where I would recommend you start. Once you have created a blog you should then link it to your website with a simple button on the home page titled: Journal.

THE DAILY CHESSUM

2012-09-24

ASK ME ANYTHING

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NON 5D RAW HACK – USEFUL FOR REAL WORLD PRODUCTION?

editor Dan Chung:

Genesis
from James Miller PLUS

02:53

HD :: vimeo

from James Miller on Vimeo.

– so I am officially impressed. A week after the Magic Lantern team unve

CHRIS·FLOYD

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EXPLORE

The Way I Dress: Mr Andrew Weitz

5 MAY 13

SEARCH

"Everyone's so scared. Don't be scared." In this new short for Mr Porter, Hollywood talent agent, Andrew Weitz, takes pride in the fact that his more conservative colleagues make fun of his style and that this spurs him on to buy more of the things they are baffled by. A lot of people have asked me if this is the house where Cameron wrecked his dad's Ferrari in 'Ferris Bueller's Day Off'. I wish it was, I truly do. Unfortunately, it is not.

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THE ARCHIVE

The Way I Dress: Mr Nick Waterhouse

4 APR 13

May 2013
April 2013
January 2013
December 2012
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A sampling of photographer-created blogs that demonstrate three different approaches that can be adopted. The Daily Chessum is created by New York-based portrait photographer and filmmaker Jake Chessum and is a purely visual blog. News Shooter is created by Beijing-based photojournalist and filmmaker Dan Chung and is a news, review, and comment-based blog. London-based portrait photographer and filmmaker Chris Floyd's blog is based on his commissions and features his written analysis and thoughts on his images, experiences, and photographic practice.

2 :: THE BASICS OF BEING ONLINE

I have described the positive reasons for having a blog and the positive impact a well-constructed blog can have on your career; but there is also a dark and negative side to blogs that you need to avoid at all costs. These are some of the absolute "no-nos" when creating and maintaining a blog, all of which I have seen on photographers' blogs at one time or another.

The Blogging No-Nos ::

1. Beware of making political statements.
2. Do not say what you had for breakfast or mention the weather, unless either or both are of importance to others.
3. Do not make jokes. Humor is subjective.
4. Do not post sexually explicit content.
5. Do not bad-mouth other photographers or clients.

TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA YOU NEED TO BE A SOCIAL BEING

Before we start to discuss how to use social media successfully, let's all agree on what social media is. If we strip away all the people who engage with social media and all the activity on it, social media platforms are nothing more than software packages. They are products created from digital code; nothing more and nothing less. What makes them anything more than this is the global population that uses them. We provide the content, we dictate how we use them, and for what purpose.

If you accept this proposition, then you have the basic understanding required to use social media successfully, both socially and professionally; but only if you also understand that these two approaches must co-exist as part of your extended online personality. Imagine that you are at a party and you meet somebody for the first time. They introduce themselves as a used car dealer and you engage in conversation. You mention that you might be looking for a car and they say that they have just the car for you and ask when you can come and see the one they have in mind, and of course they'll negotiate on price. You are at a social event and don't appreciate such a hard sell and move away to speak to another guest. The next person you meet is entertaining and engaging, so conversation flows. After some time you ask what they do only to
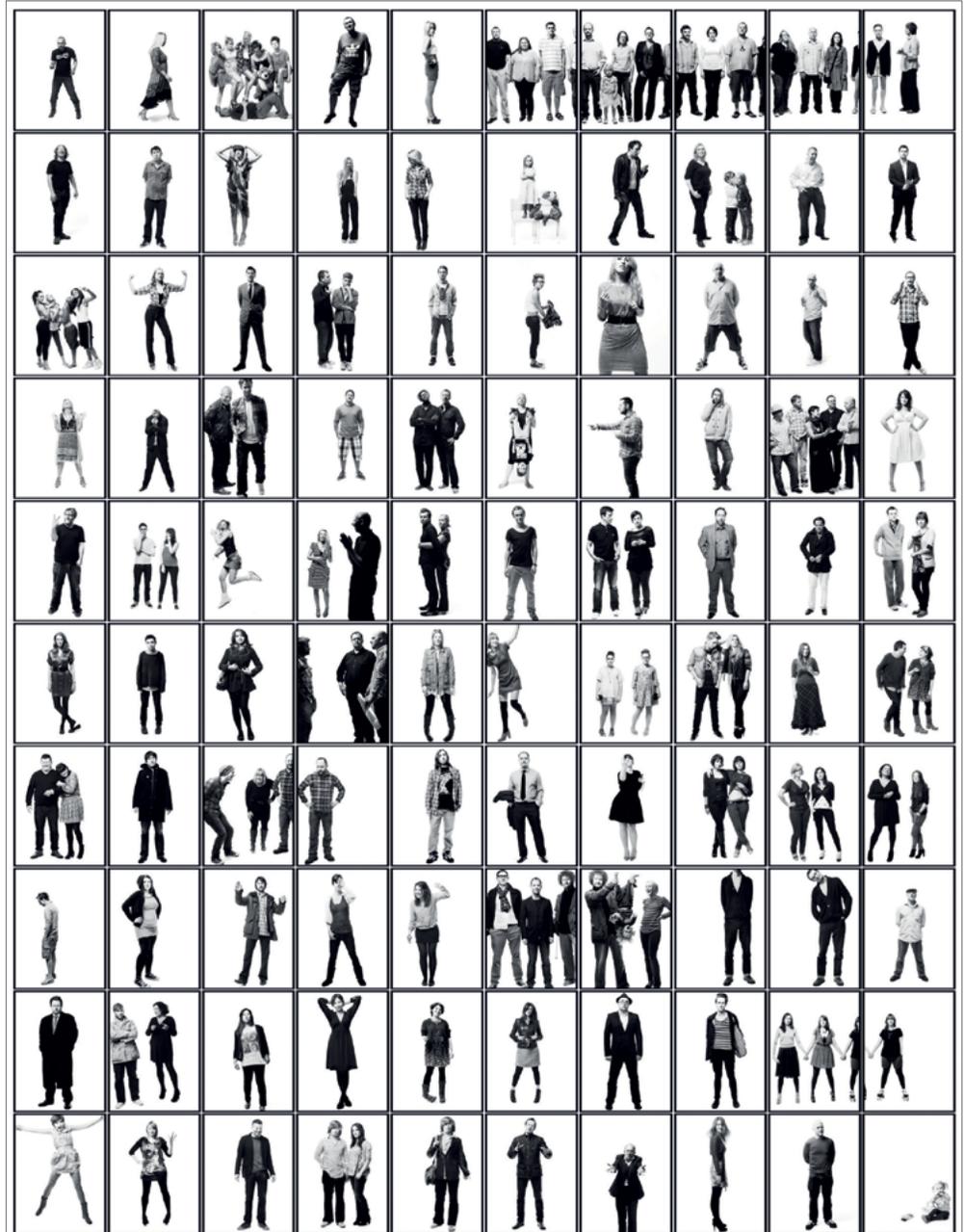
discover that they also sell used cars. You mention once again that you might be looking for a car. They say that they would happily help you out if you want them to, anytime you're ready to look at a car just ring. You appreciate the offer and respond positively. They have been professional and social within a social environment. That is how to make social media work for you. Avoid the hard sell and never be overly aggressive or inappropriate. Keep your personal life outside of your professional activity and do not confuse a social situation with a professional one. Photos of you at a drunken party posted on Facebook are not going to enamor you to a potential client, so make sure you keep your private life private.

Facebook is a slow social media platform that retains information on show and allows others to comment at their leisure. In this respect it is an excellent platform to create a community that you can then direct toward your website. On every commercial website I have established, Facebook has been the second most successful driver of traffic after Google. Twitter is the opposite of this: it is a super-fast media platform that is constantly refreshing itself with new information. It therefore takes more effort to convey messages, as you may have to constantly tweet the same message to reach as much of your Twitter community as possible. Even so, Twitter is an extremely effective global message board and an effective driver of traffic to your website. It is also a great way of interacting with fellow photographers and members of the global photographic community, via re-tweeting and following. The mutually supportive nature of Twitter is demonstrated on a weekly basis through Follow Friday, where people suggest other people to follow to their own following via the hashtag #FF.

The UK based photographer and filmmaker, Chris Floyd, is a keen exponent of Twitter. He recognized that the interaction he was having on Twitter with people he had never met had replaced the in-person conversations he had previously had with fellow photographers at the darkroom, where as an analog photographer he would drop off film and pick up prints. This realization led him in 2010 to create the photographic project *One Hundred and Forty Characters*, in which he photographed the people he regularly communicated with on Twitter but had never met. The project took a year to complete and then went on to be published as a book, exhibited in a traveling solo show, and become an excellent catalyst for future commissions. What Chris realized was not only Twitter's place in the twenty-first century photographer's social interaction but also its power to bring together people on both a social and professional level.

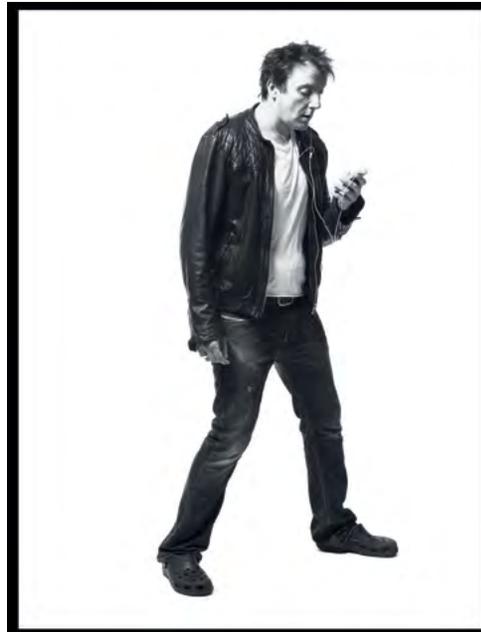The poster created by photographer Chris Floyd to promote the exhibition of his work inspired by his Twitter interactions, *One Hundred and Forty Characters*.

These images are part of a larger body of work titled *One Hundred and Forty Characters*, created by photographer and filmmaker Chris Floyd. Floyd recognized the power of the Twitter community in his professional practice and the death of the social aspect of the traditional darkroom. His response to this realization was to photograph and meet the people he regularly connected with on the social media platform.

BEYOND FACEBOOK AND TWITTER

Facebook and Twitter are the two main platforms that professional photographers use to build their online communities, promote their work, and develop online personalities. However, there are others that need to be considered and understood.

LinkedIn is a professional business network, which, when used as a basic free networking platform, can be an effective way to research client backgrounds. It also offers a job service that can be useful if you are looking to work for a company on a full-time basis. Unfortunately, although you can join open groups, many people are very protective of their connections, and are unlikely to connect with you if they do not know you. LinkedIn therefore works well if you already have a client base or are actively networking within the industry, but is less useful for photographers who are just starting out.

Another way of building a community and marketing yourself and work online is through podcasting and vodcasting. A podcast is an audio broadcast and a vodcast is a filmed broadcast.

LinkedIn is primarily used as a business connection. It is an information and community-building platform.
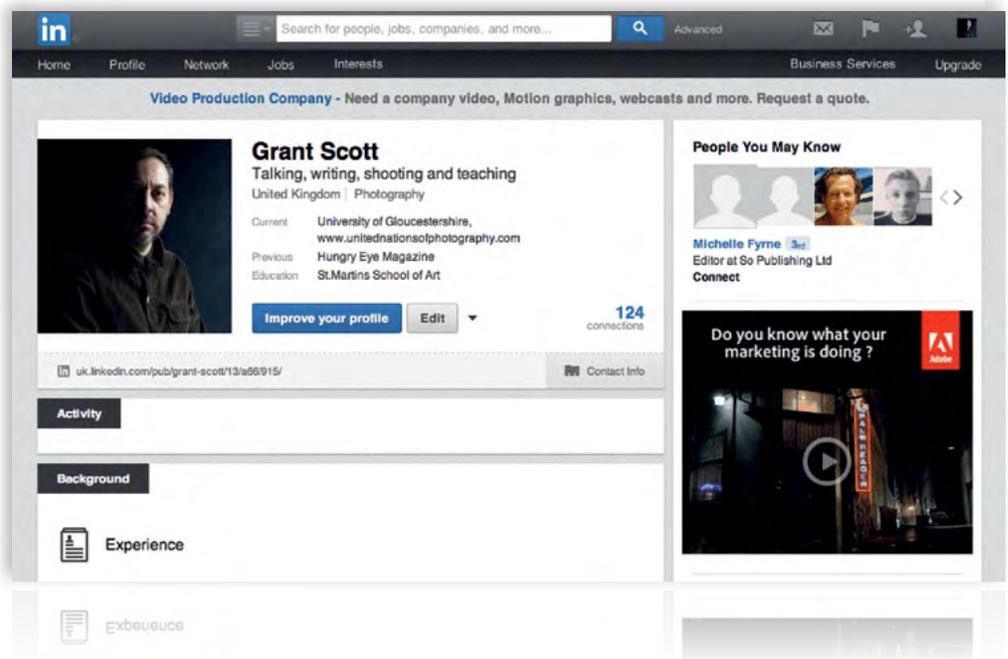
A series of screen captures created from the appropriate multiple platforms upon which my project, "The United Nations of Photography" exists. These demonstrate the importance for our community of both existing across a number of potential interaction points and of creating a consistent visual identity across all platforms.
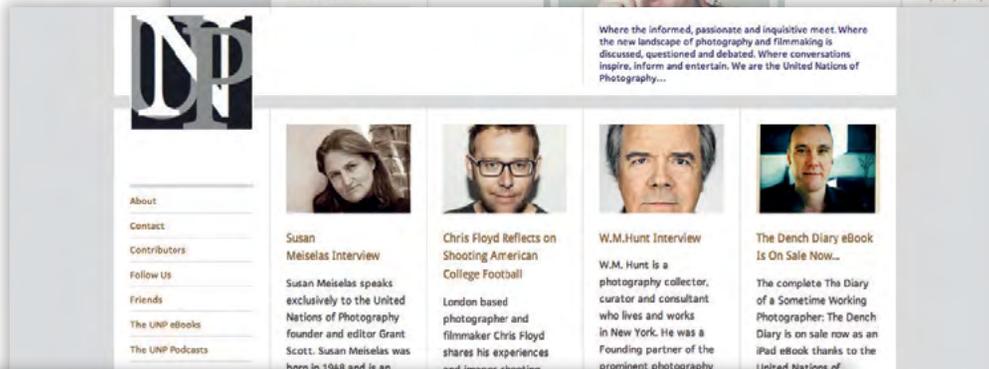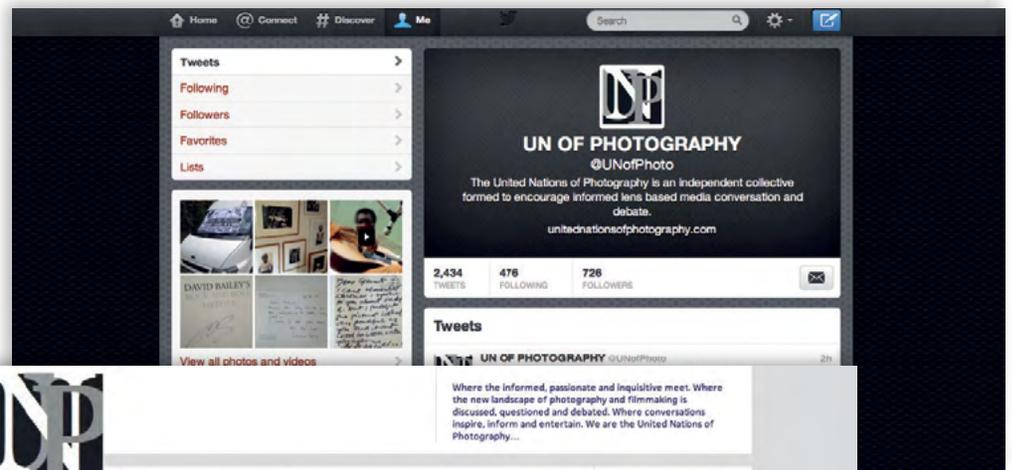
Both require you to compile and present interesting content related directly to your work or to other photographers' work toward which you feel empathy. Once created, you can easily post podcasts or vodcasts onto a blog and onto iTunes via your own iTunes page for free. Both of these require only basic recording equipment to get started and are excellent additions to a photographer's network of digital marketing platforms. However, as with the creation of a blog, both of these need to be entertaining and informative. If they are neither, they will not do you any favors and can have a negative effect on your career—so beware of rushing into creating or launching either.

Of all of the online platforms, perhaps the two that are most directly related to the photographic world are Flickr and Instagram. Both have had an impact on the professional world of photography, but from very different aspects. It would also be true to say that the former's impact is fading, while the latter's is in the ascendency.

After its initial phenomenal growth and worldwide adoption by the global photographic community, Flickr has become overloaded with generic images and amateur/enthusiast users.
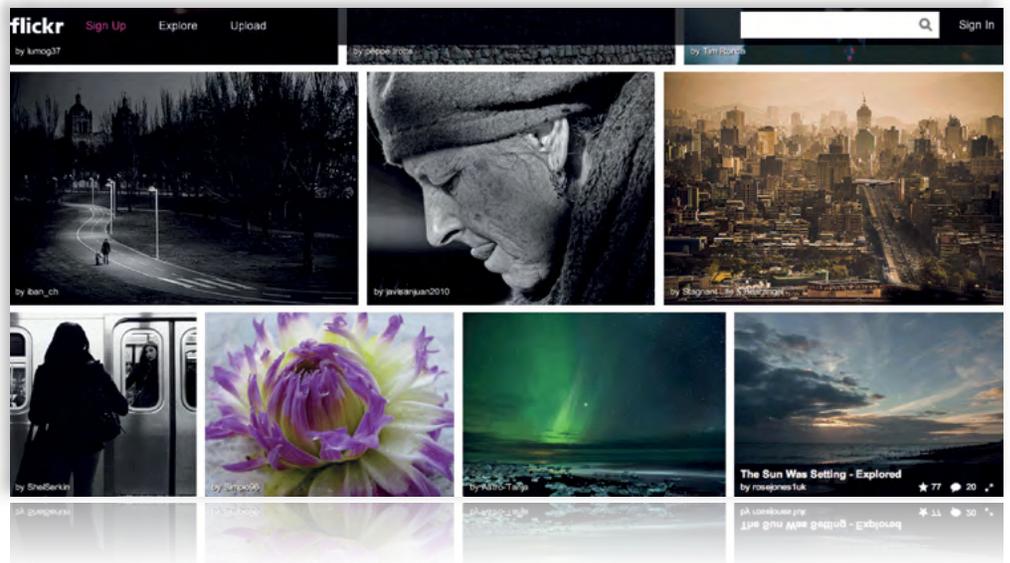
Flickr was never a platform that was universally adopted by the established world of professional photography, but it was one that presented a new audience and community to the enthusiast who wanted to progress their interest in photography, without the investment in a high-priced personal website build. Initially established as a social network photo sharing site before most people understood or even used the term social network, Flickr rapidly became a mutually supportive network of photographers looking for peer review and inspiration. The energy that these communities created in turn established Flickr as an innovative platform that was always developing and an impressive online library of images created by

non-professionals, while also becoming a safe space for professional photographers to post work outside of their recognized areas of specialization. The Flickr buzz soon spread to those looking for images to use within a commercial context and there are many stories of picture editors and stock agencies scouring Flickr pages for appropriate images to use, some honestly and some without the photographer's permission. As a result of these stories, and the fact that Flickr did help enthusiasts become professionals, its importance in the commercial photographic process became well known. However, as is inevitable with an open source platform such as Flickr, the amount of work that was not of a high standard soon swamped the work of quality. The resulting influx of images has made the site difficult to navigate from a professional perspective. As those early Flickr pioneers and early adopters moved into the professional world, the site has become home to a mass of images of indeterminate quality. This, combined with the company becoming part of the Yahoo! Portfolio, has seen Flickr become a shadow of its former self, lacking in both product innovation and funding resources. Flickr was an intrinsic part of the establishment of online photographic communities upon which much of the New Landscape is based. However, I do not believe that it maintains that influence today or will regain its status in the future in the eyes of the professional photographer.

News organizations and amateurs have adopted the Instagram app on smartphones to document everyday events and the minutiae of twenty-first century life.
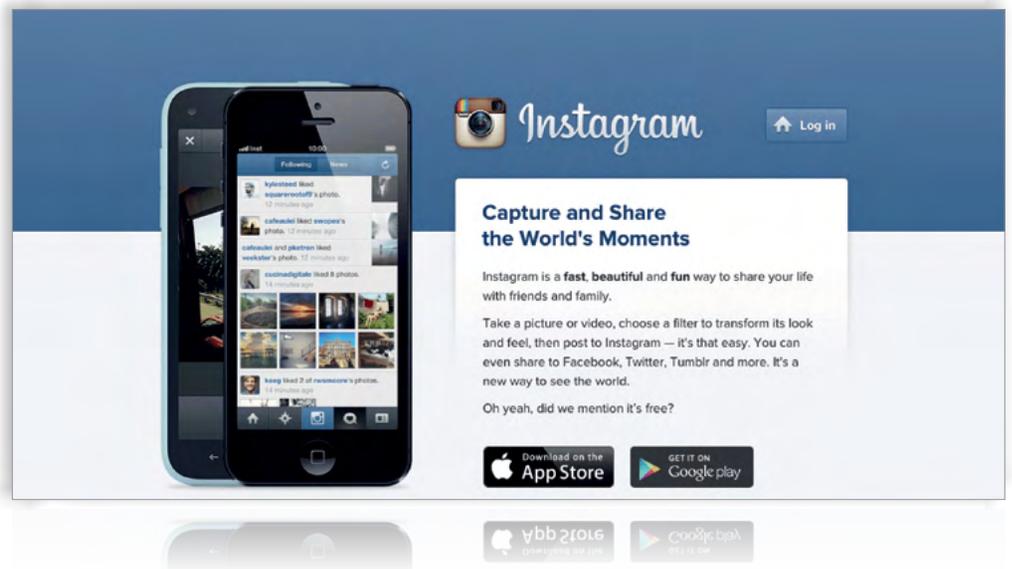
As Flickr continues to lose its initial impetus, Instagram seems to be in the ascendancy, though it is not yet an obvious or globally accepted professional platform and/or process of digital image capture. Instagram's filters and easy-to-download

free apps appeal to amateurs happy to use their phone or tablet to create images. It has not been considered by many professional photographers to be either "serious" or "professional." Instagram's official description shows little intent to change that perception by stating that it's "a fast, beautiful and fun way to share your photos with friends and family." However, its status among professional photojournalists changed dramatically thanks to one decision made by *Time* magazine in late October 2012. With Hurricane Sandy fast approaching the Eastern Sea Board, *Time* magazine's director of photography, Kira Pollack, rounded up five photographers and gave them access to the magazine's Instagram feed. He chose Michael Christopher Brown, Benjamin Lowy, Ed Kashi, Andrew Quilty, and Stephen Wilkes, all of whom were established heavy users of Instagram and award-winning photojournalists.

Pollack wanted to ensure that he had the fastest and most direct route to cover whatever events unfolded and get images to his readers. Instagram seemed to be the obvious answer and the fact that the chosen photographers would be covering those events with their smartphones and not professional cameras was not an issue. The resulting portfolio of images was posted on *Time*'s photography blog, and was responsible for 13 percent of all the site's traffic during a week when Time.com had its fourth-biggest day since its inception. The magazine's Instagram account attracted 12,000 new followers during a 48-hour period. Pollack's brave and creative decision had been validated and serious photojournalism had been created using camera phones. The very equipment and platforms that had been adopted by the citizen journalist had been accepted by the world of professional photography.

Instagram's ability to deliver news images is now recognized by the community, but how Instagram will impact the wider world of professional photographic practice is yet to be seen. Many photographers have embraced Instagram as a photographic sketching tool and process by which to document their daily observations, but as long as the file size is limited as it is at present, it is hard to see Instagram being widely used as a form of professional digital capture.

3 CREATING CONTENT FOR YOUR ONLINE ACTIVITY

3 :: CREATING CONTENT FOR YOUR ONLINE ACTIVITY

This is really the crux of the matter, isn't it? How do you create not just one interesting story or tutorial that you are confident enough to share with the world, but another one tomorrow, another one the day after that, and maintain this pace for the foreseeable future? It's intimidating, and it's okay to feel intimidated sometimes; everyone does. But once you get started and force yourself into a regular schedule, you'll be amazed at how quickly the words and images come to you. It's a matter of managing expectations, keeping organized, and confidence. What is intimidating today will be inspirational tomorrow, and eventually becomes an addictive drive to push yourself to post with skill and competency on any number of topics.

Fortunately, you're not alone—the entire internet is your support group, and also there are a number of straightforward techniques and habits you can build up to help you express yourself.

HOW TO WRITE A BLOG POST

So, you've got your software selected, your tech stuff set up, your design tweaked to perfection... and a big, empty page sitting in front of you. There's nothing more daunting and writer's-block-inducing than an empty page.

Fortunately, this is a blog post you'll be writing, not a book, magazine article, or manifesto, so the first words you write aren't a make-it-or-break-it endeavor. Unlike with any other kind of medium, relatively few people will read the first words you write on a new blog; your blog readership will pick up as you go along. With your first few posts, you can write comfortably and creatively without the pressure of a huge audience.

One caveat about composing blog posts: as one who blogs for a living, I highly recommend using a non-web-based text editor such as OpenOffice or Microsoft Word to compose any lengthy or in-depth blog posts, especially before you get fully acclimated to your CMS. Depending on the strength of your internet connection and myriad other factors, most CMSes will inexplicably "dump" your posts from time to time for no apparent reason. Ain't technology grand? In these cases, navigating back in the browser or refreshing the page may or may not recover your work, but to be on the safe side, it's almost always advisable to work offline first, then copy and paste the text into the CMS when you're ready for final editing. This precaution may not be necessary for shorter posts, especially when you've had a few weeks' worth of experience.

When blogging, you should always write in the first person; blogging is a uniquely personal sort of publishing. However, this isn't a diary or journal, so you'll still have
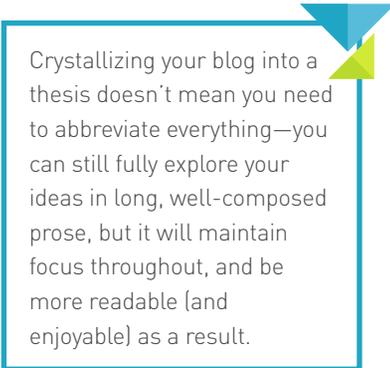
> In time you'll strike a tonal balance between keeping it casual enough that you aren't too intimidated to write your posts, and serious enough that your audience will find valuable insights in each post.

to adhere to rules and norms of grammar, spelling, and structure if you want a steady audience of readers.

Beyond that, there aren't too many boundaries for what can and can't be blogged about or how you should or shouldn't write for your blog. Self-publishing online was intended to be a liberating experience, so take the following guidelines as best practices and suggestions for starting your blog off with great content that your readers will find useful.

THESIS FIRST

Before you sit down at your computer with a cursor blinking in front of you and all that white space to fill, take a few moments to consider exactly what it is you want to blog about.

Each post has a thesis, and the best blog posts state that thesis clearly and quickly. If you realize you don't yet know what it is you want to say, it's best to put off writing until you have that crystal-clear thesis in mind. Plus, having your position firmly defined will make the writing much easier, faster, and better overall.

The thesis is a concept you probably learned about while composing your first essay in middle school. It's the main idea, a proposition, an angle, or a theory. Long before you start blogging, you'll want to be able to clearly express your thesis in twenty words or fewer; if it takes much more than that, your thesis isn't fully baked yet—or it might be too nuanced for most internet reading.

Let's illustrate with an example. Suppose you were walking around your town and happened upon a small protest. You captured a great, dynamic photo of a protester with your smartphone, and your local newspaper used the photo (with credit, of course) in a story about the event.

There are many theses that could come out of such an experience—a statement on intellectual property in the world of social media, the necessity of old-school journalists competing with gadget-happy over-sharers, etc. But if you begin with the main idea, "This thing happened to me, and it was pretty cool," it's not going to grab most readers' attention. Let's instead assume that the thesis would be our previous Chase Jarvis quotation: "The best camera is the one that's with you."

From that thesis, you know the point you're trying to convey: even though you have much better equipment at your disposal, a simple consumer device, a smidgen of technique, and perfect timing were all you needed to capture an amazing photograph.
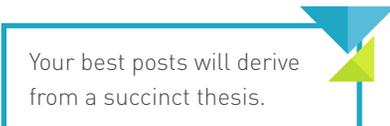
Crystallizing your blog into a thesis doesn't mean you need to abbreviate everything—you can still fully explore your ideas in long, well-composed prose, but it will maintain focus throughout, and be more readable (and enjoyable) as a result.

Your best posts will derive from a succinct thesis.

THE INVERTED PYRAMID

Hit your readers with the important stuff right from the get-go.

A trick of the news-writing trade is to give the reader as much information as possible as quickly as possible. This technique, known as the Inverted Pyramid, puts all the vital details of each story at the very beginning, leaving less vital details for later on in the story, and nonessential elements at the end. The Inverted Pyramid isn't a hard and fast rule about how one must structure every story one writes, but it's a helpful guideline based on how people read and absorb information.

Especially in the digital age, your readers are constantly being offered all kinds of online content: videos, pictures, friends' mini-stories via social media, news articles, and tons and tons of blog posts. Starting your own post with the best, most important information—and a clear expression of your thesis— will allow readers to make a quick decision about whether or not they want to read (or share) your post. The more informative your post's title and first sentence are, the better your chances of getting that blog post read by more people.
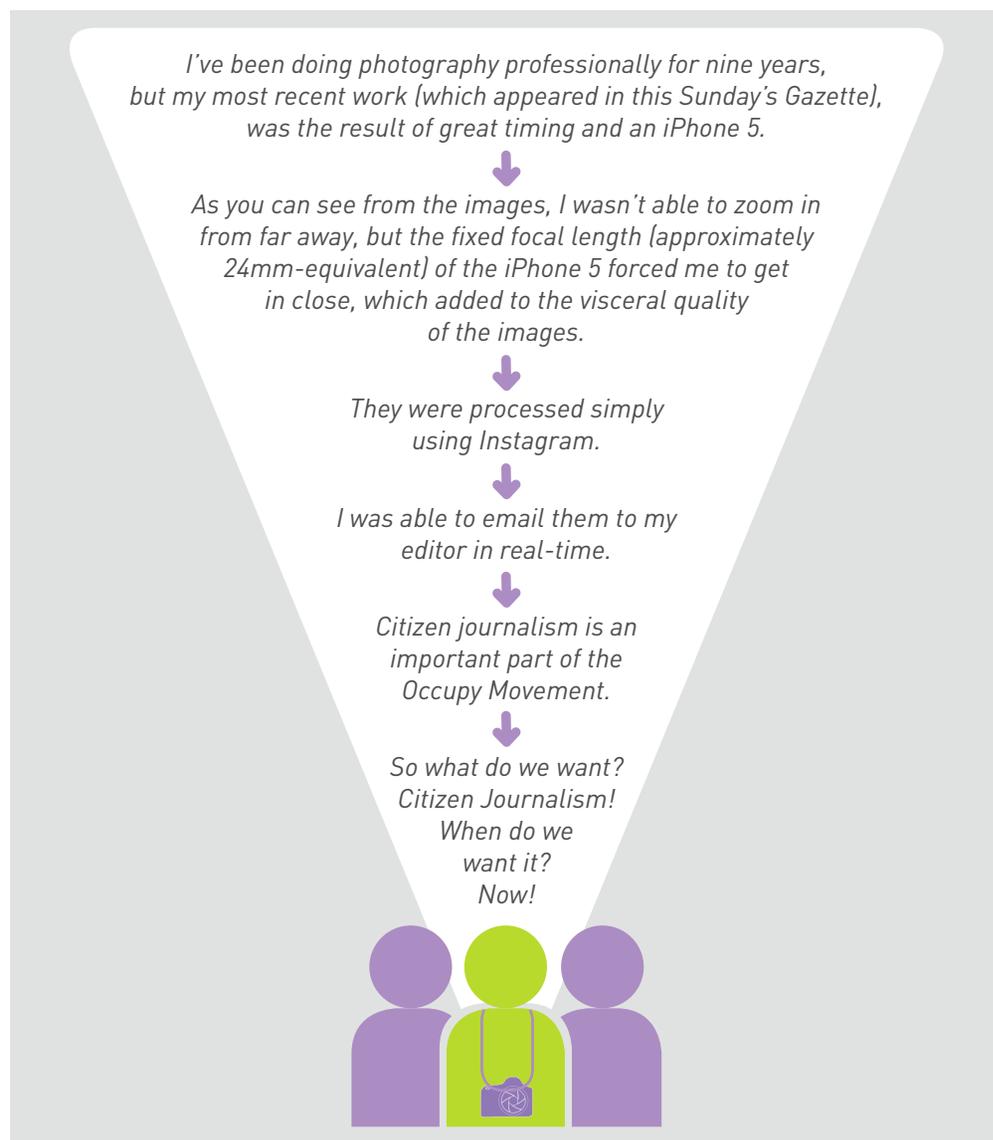
Let's continue with our previous example. If you were writing that particular blog post, you could begin your blog post with the title, "What do we want? Citizen journalism! When do we want it? Now!" and continue with the sentence, "I was walking through town last week and was surprised to see a rag-tag group of young people holding a protest in front of one of the city's larger banks."

While this is a colorful way to start writing, it doesn't make it immediately obvious to the casual reader what the post is about, what the reader can expect to learn, or why anyone would want to read such a post. In the online world, this kind of writing will almost always disappear beneath a sea of text, pictures, and digital ephemera.

Instead, imagine the same story told with the title, "How a professional photographer can—and should—be a citizen journalist," and continue with the first sentence, "I've been doing photography professionally for nine years, but my most recent work (which appeared in this Sunday's Gazette), was the result of great timing and an iPhone 4S."

In that case, the reader immediately knows what the story or thesis is about—a photography pro who seized the moment and her smartphone to achieve a successful and newsworthy image. After that brief and accurate introduction, the blogger can continue with the story about the rag-tag protesters and the email from the newspaper editor, but "hooking" your readers out of the online sea requires great bait at the very start.

I've been doing photography professionally for nine years, but my most recent work (which appeared in this Sunday's Gazette), was the result of great timing and an iPhone 5.

As you can see from the images, I wasn't able to zoom in from far away, but the fixed focal length (approximately 24mm-equivalent) of the iPhone 5 forced me to get in close, which added to the visceral quality of the images.

They were processed simply using Instagram.

I was able to email them to my editor in real-time.

Citizen journalism is an important part of the Occupy Movement.

*So what do we want?
Citizen Journalism!
When do we want it?
Now!*

Top it off with a headline like "How an amateur photographer can, and should, be a citizen journalist." ▶

WEB-SPECIFIC TIPS & TRICKS

You don't have to be a trailblazer—many tips & tricks exist to help you get your blog on its way.

Although it's helpful to start your blog posts with that journalist's trick in mind, the best part of the world of blogs is that it's full of voices—very real, diverse human voices with all kinds of vocabularies, accents, and quirks. Don't disguise the things

that make your own voice unique. If you're the kind of person who says "y'all" and "dang," go ahead and write your blog posts the same way. (Be aware, however, that using certain kinds of adult language might alienate some readers.)

As you're writing, if you mention a specific product, another photographer, or a post on another blog, be sure to create links to the relevant pages across the internet. Your CMS will have specific tools for creating links within the text of each post. When you add a link to your blog post, don't simply put the URL into your post. Instead, use your CMS or write HTML that uses the URL as well as relevant anchor text. For example, if I wanted to link to your blog post about how to shoot with infrared film, I would write, "Check out Diana's tutorial on shooting with infrared film," and the last four words of that sentence would be a link back to your blog post on the subject.

Linking out to other photographers' homepages or social media profiles, to other bloggers' posts, and to good information sources is good manners, and it's also a good way to get your own blog established as part of a larger network of online photographers and photo-blogs. As you create more content, others may start linking to you, as well, sending their own readers your way; so be generous with your links to other sites. Also, if you mention a blog post you've written before, be sure to link back to your own posts!

While linking back to others is good form, it does not excuse one of the cardinal sins of the internet: copying and pasting content without permission. It's acceptable to quote a few words here and there—with a link back to the original source and proper attribution in the text of your own post—but never take more than a sentence or two, and never post a quotation without linking back. It's also highly inadvisable to download and re-post another photographer's images, even for illustration purposes and even with a link back.

Another facet that separates your blog from any other kind of media is its built-in interactivity. Most CMSes have built-in commenting and even polling features wherein readers from around the world can leave you messages about your post. While you are writing first and foremost for yourself and to achieve your own goals, keep in mind that your readers may have interesting and unexpected feedback for you. Feel free to solicit that feedback in the body of your post. For example, you can ask your readers if they have found solutions to a problem you're experiencing, or if they have any constructive criticism about a photograph you struggled to capture.

Also unique to blogs and other digital media is tagging. Think of tags as part of your blog post's catalog card. They help you identify the post and find it again if you ever

What goes around comes around—a key concept in establishing yourself within your particular blogging community. But even if you are directing readers to another blog, you should always ask permission before reposting someone else's content.

You will build up your database of tags for each post as you grow your blog. Be sure to use them, but do so judiciously. Just checking every box defeats the purpose.

need it. Tags also help your readers navigate through all your content, and they can play a big role in helping search engines understand what your blog is about. Your CMS will give you a little text entry field for entering tags; each post should have at least two or three tags of one to two words each. For example, for a post on using off-camera flash lighting, you could use "lighting," "flash," and "off-camera flash" as tags.

Tags

✓ Portraiture	Gear - Video
✓ Landscape	✓ Multimedia
Street	Citizen Journalism
Photojournalism	✓ Review
✓ Theory	✓ Technique
History	✓ Light & Lighting
Anecdote	✓ In Studio
✓ Best of	✓ Copyright Law
Showcase	✓ Travel
✓ Around the web	Wedding
✓ Gear - Lenses	✓ iPhoneography
Gear - Cameras	✓ Instagram
✓ Gear - Accessories	Future Tech
✓ Video	

Your CMS may also give you the option of creating categories. These are broader than tags, but they can also help out a lot with reader navigation and search engines. For example, if you write more than a handful of posts about lighting equipment and techniques, you might want to create a "Lighting" category. Depending on your blog's focus, you might have a Portraiture 50 category, a Client Work category, a Gear category, etc.

One of the great aspects of blogging is the instant feedback you'll have on your posts, especially once your audience starts to grow and comment frequently. Be open to their feedback, and incorporate suggestions into future posts as you see fit.

Finally, once you've got a couple dozen posts under your belt, your tags and categories will start to fill out a bit. If you're blogging about a particular topic, you can link important mentions of that topic back to the relevant tag or category page on your blog. So for one example, in the sentence, "The intern and I took some time this weekend to shoot an outdoor wedding on the outskirts of Pittsburgh," you could make the word "wedding" a link to your blog's "wedding" tag, which might be JasonKramer.com/tag/wedding. Again, this linking back will be a big help with both reader navigation and search engines.

Once you've taken your time, done all of the necessary homework, composed your post, inserted your links, and added all the necessary tags, don't hesitate—hit that big, glowing "Publish" button. Don't sit on the post or allow it to become overly precious or over-worked. Quickly proofread the text, preview the post for HTML errors, and publish it at once.

Here's why you can publish your work with such abandon. Your blog is unlike a newspaper article, book, or other media in this one most blessed aspect: you can go back and edit it as much as you like after the fact. Typos? No problem. Wrong image? Fixed. Anything you can do is undoable, and you can address any issues after the fact if need be. This isn't an excuse for sloppy blogging—proofreading remains important for preserving your professional reputation—but it does take a lot of pressure off you, the blogger, to get everything absolutely perfect the first time around.

As you develop a stronger readership, you will want to ensure that your posts are being published at an optimal time of day—probably between 10AM and 1PM in your time zone—to ensure that they get seen by as many readers as possible. Use your CMS's post-scheduling feature, usually available in the part of the CMS where you'd normally find the Publish button and options.

BLOG ABOUT YOUR WORK

THE EXHIBIT

The image is at the center of any and all photography discussions, and showcasing your creativity will be an essential element of your blog.

As a photographer, one of the most natural types of posts to write is a simple show-and-tell about your work itself. Gallery posts may not need to contain a ton of text; rather, this is your moment to show off your best work to your online audience.

Try to treat each post as a showcase opportunity.

We'll call this type of post an exhibit. Much like a spot on an art gallery wall, this post is a quiet, well-lit space for you to display and explain a photograph—or a small collection of photographs, if you like.

This is a great opportunity to take advantage of your CMS's image-display features, such as lightboxing, sliders, or full-width image display, that truly let your photography shine.

Text for an exhibit can be minimal, with a simple explanation of the subject, location, technique, or any interesting notes about capturing that particular image. It is usually a good idea to include information about the type of equipment you used for that image and any settings you'd like to share with your audience, as well. If you leave this information out of your post, a commenter will usually request it.

In your image-editing software, resize the photograph to the largest size your CMS will display. Depending on the theme you're using this could range between 500 pixels and a full-screen width option. Save the image as a high-quality JPEG, but keep an eye on the file size.

If you like, you can crop a section of the original size photo and display it to show details the reader might otherwise miss. Post this enlarged-details picture under the main image and its accompanying text. Along with the secondary picture, include some text that explains why you chose to highlight this detail and any techniques used to achieve the given effect.

If you'd like to use more than one image for the post, the exhibit should contain at most a small handful of high-quality images, not more than five or seven, that are thematically linked but without redundancies (i.e., don't feature multiple portraits of the same person in the same setting or multiple snaps of the same landscape at the same time of day).

What you do not want to do in an exhibit post is a "photo dump" of dozens of pictures from a studio shoot, a portrait session, or an event. That's all good and fine for Flickr or Facebook, but on your blog, try to treat each post as a showcase opportunity. Pick a few gems from the session and display them with pride; you can always choose to link to a fuller set on Flickr or a similar, photo-specific site.

Your CMS may allow you to feature a "gallery" of image thumbnails in your post. If such a feature isn't available, you can resize the images and place them in rows and columns, making sure that each one links to a full-size or larger version of the photograph.

Alternatively, if you prefer to have more control over how the images are displayed, you can build your own gallery-type meta-image in Photoshop. This kind of advanced post formatting will allow you to design the layout of one large image that will hold all the smaller images for that post, kind of like a photo album page. While your readers won't be able to click through and see the separate images, it will allow you to display the exact spacing, text, colors, and other design elements you desire.

This type of formatting is more common among design bloggers, fashion bloggers, craft/DIY bloggers, etc., but if the overall aesthetic is consistent with the rest of your blog, it can be a visually engaging and appealing device to use on occasion.

BLOG ABOUT YOUR METHODS

THE TUTORIAL

Not every image needs a behind-the-scenes, do-it-yourself explanation. But if you ever have a lightbulb moment during your creative process as a photographer, especially if you had to struggle a bit before the lightbulb "lit up," it's probably worth sharing with the internet, as well.

> If your tutorial post gains enough popularity (and is linked to enough from other sites) it can become a standard reference for a particular technique, and rise to the top of search-engine results, which will then in turn pull up the ranking of the rest of your blog.

These posts are so perennially popular because photographers and designers of all stripes are constantly combing the web and search engines looking for ways to improve their skills and create better-quality work. Lighting tutorials, gear tutorials, image-editing tutorials and the like all rank high in the minds of your readers and the search engines they use to find your blog.

Also, tutorial posts, if they are well-written and on timely or interesting topics, are perfect "link bait." Link bait is a term for any post you write that just begs to be mentioned and linked back to from other blogs and websites. Well-written link bait with valuable information can help you grow your base of readers and increase your standing in the large community of online photographers, as well.

> If you have an area of expertise, share your knowledge!

For some tutorials, a step-by-step text guide with explanatory images for each step is ideal. For other types of tutorials, you may want or need to make a video to get the lesson across. If the action is taking place on your computer screen (for example, if you're doing a tutorial on image compositing), you'll want to use a high-quality microphone and screen-capture software—neither of which are great investments unless you plan on doing a lot of screencasting tutorials. Otherwise, you can use simple movie-making software such as iMovie or free or inexpensive versions of Sony Vegas (for Windows users) to quickly and efficiently edit together still images, video, and text.

Here are a few tips and some examples to get you started ::

- Be specific, but explain any jargon or technical terms —not every reader is a professional photographer!

- Be extremely to-the-point in your post's title, for example, "How to light a person in the midday sun" or "Five tips for lens flare photos."

- Use a how-to tag, or if you write a lot of tutorial content, create a how-to category or post series.

- Stick to your specialities. You can grow your audience by becoming known for your expertise in a few specific categories, such as landscapes, image editing, or event photography.

- If you're not a great expert, you can still write a tutorial post. Just be sure to note that your how-to is a beginner's guide or notes on how to get started with a particular technique (e.g., "How I lost my HDR virginity" or "Panoramic photography for first-timers").

- Show great example photography, including side-by-side before/after images if available.

- Err on the side of over-explaining. Go thoroughly and slowly through all your steps.

- If you're using specific equipment or software, be sure to mention any important details such as device models, operating systems, version numbers, etc.

- If your tutorial calls for specific equipment/software, be sure to tell your readers how and/or where they can obtain the exact thing you used. If an approximation will do, be sure to note that in your post.

- If you're an expert in a specific technique or with a specific device, consider writing a "beginner's guide" —the web is full of beginners who would benefit from your wisdom!

- The web is also full of folks who are short on resources but long on time and creativity, so your DIY posts on clever "hacks" or workarounds are also sure to be long-term successes.

- Nothing makes better "click bait"—those impossible-to-not-read posts—than lists. A numbered list of great tips will bring readers back over and over again for months and even years. For example, you could create a post of eight tips for smartphone photography or five ways to shoot better nighttime photos.

3 :: CREATING CONTENT FOR YOUR ONLINE ACTIVITY

> Narrative posts are an opportunity for bloggers to get to know your personality, so preserve your distinct writing style and try to come across as a genuine, real person on the other side of the blog. These will also be excellent posts in which to engage your readership in the comments section.
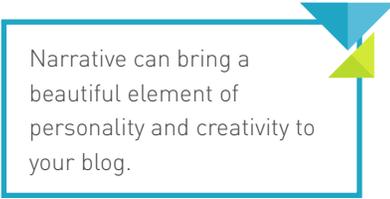
> Narrative can bring a beautiful element of personality and creativity to your blog.

BLOG ABOUT YOUR SUBJECTS

STORYTELLING

Not every photo blogger is a natural storyteller. After all, our pictures are supposed to be worth a thousand words and usually tell stories themselves.

However, every now and then, an image has a certain backstory that's too good not to share. Whether you had to overcome huge obstacles to get the perfect shot or your human subject's story made the image even more poignant, there can be times when you get to be the raconteur as well as the shutterbug.

Narrative can bring a beautiful element of personality and creativity to your blog. If you're not a natural storyteller, you can keep these kinds of posts brief. And not every photo blog needs to contain narrative posts. But the best ones often do, and they do so in a way that is unique to that photo blogger's style and voice.

Storytelling posts can break away from the Inverted Pyramid structure we discussed earlier. While it's still best to let your readers know early on what your post is about, most readers will accept that a good story has a beginning, a middle, and an end—and the patient readers will (hopefully) realize that the ending is worth the wait.

However, because the internet is such a public place, I caution you to obtain very specific permission if you plan on blogging about stories that are not yours alone. If you want to share a personal anecdote about a human subject or even your subject's name (whether a full name or a first name), it's best to give that person advance warning with a very accurate description of what you plan to share, then wait for that person to respond affirmatively.

And if you're writing a story about yourself, well, just remember, the internet's memory is long. Even if you delete your post, it's guaranteed to be cached or archived on some server somewhere. So carefully consider how personal you want your personal stories to be (we'll talk much more about personal blogging in just a bit).

In narrative posts, your photographs can act almost as illustrations. You may choose to feature just one big, beautiful image, like you would for an exhibit post. Or if the story you're telling has multiple parts that relate to photos you've captured, you can feel free to insert several images as you weave your tale.

Here are a few tips for telling great stories on your blog ::

- Start by thinking about what makes the story different or special, then think about how the story applies to the tone or subject of your blog. Keep both those elements in focus while you write.

- Be sure to use a "hook" in your headline or opening sentence; remind the readers why this story is so unique, why this one blog post is a must-read for them.

- Set the scenary very specifically, using the five W's (who, what, when, where, why) as a starting point.

- Use direct quotations if applicable, and preserve any quirks in the dialog of others.

- More than at any other time, use your own voice, and let your personality shine through. Write in a conversational tone, like you're talking to a friend.

- Give lots and lots of details, and try to "show" instead of "tell". For example, instead of writing, "It was hard to shoot in such windy conditions," write something like, "Every time I was about to press the shutter, the wind would shove another piece of debris in front of my lens."

- Express emotions—yours, your subjects'—honestly and directly, again showing rather than telling.

- Don't dwell on overly long descriptions, though. Use lots of verbs to move the story forward.

- The classics of storytelling— setting, conflict, and resolution— still apply in a blog post, even if the conflict is internal or subtle.

- If you're telling a story with more than one image and more than one location or subject, make it very clear how your images are linked through the theme of your story.

- End your story well. Don't let the narrative trail off, and don't try too hard to make a corny moral if there isn't one.

BLOG ABOUT YOURSELF

PERSONAL BLOGGING

Sometimes the story of what's going on behind the camera is even more interesting.

One of the most unique and endearing parts of the world of blogs is that it's personal—highly personal at times. The best bloggers are known for sharing bits of themselves and revealing their humanity and personality through their posts.

Personal blogging has its place in a photo blog, too. As you develop your voice and material, your regular readers will want to know more about who you are and what

makes you tick. The occasional and well thought-out personal blog post will create a special bond between you and your readers.

Your personal blog posts will usually be anchored with a leading photograph or a series of images that relate to the main point you're trying to convey. In some ways, a personal blog post can be quite similar to a narrative post. The key difference is that while it might tell a story, its real purpose is to reveal something about you to your readers. Hence, a personal blog post's tone will be that of a heart-to-heart chat between you and an intimate friend.

In order to reveal yourself to your audience, you must first know yourself. What makes you unique? More to the point, what parts of your personality are compatible with the larger goals of your blog? When you want to create a personal blog post, hone in on those points, and craft your sharing around them. Just because a post is personal in nature doesn't mean it should lose focus or detract from the rest of your content.

For example, you could tell your readers about why you took up photography in the first place, or about your journey to improve yourself as a photographer. You could share with your readers a photograph of yours that has a profound emotional impact on you or that tells a story about a turning point in your life. Personal posts are where you get to be your truest self, and where your readers get a satisfying answer to the question, "Who is this blogger, anyway?"

Just remember, for better or for worse, the internet is all about creating a personal brand. Particularly when you sit down to write a personal blog post, be aware of the brand you're building. You don't have to incessantly harp on your business, plug your products, or use your catchphrases—in fact, it's much better if you don't! But know that every post is one small piece of a larger puzzle, and readers are putting those pieces together each time they visit your blog. Make sure the picture they get is consistent; make sure all the puzzle pieces fit together.

If you're blogging for business reasons, personal blogging can be an awesome way to talk about the kind of business you're building and to define your character for prospective clients. If your primary goal in blogging is to build your business, just be especially careful to only share the kinds of anecdotes that you would be comfortable sharing in any other professional situation—for example, at a networking event or at a client's social gathering.

As I've mentioned briefly already, be very careful about how much of yourself you expose to the Internet. The word "oversharing" can mean different things to different

> The internet is all about creating a personal brand.

people. There are photographers and bloggers who love wearing their hearts on their sleeves and who thrive on absolute and brutal authenticity, even on the public web. For most of us, however, living life online requires a bit of balance. We need to give our readers enough personality to let them know we are human and to keep them interested and engaged, but we also need to protect our privacy and the privacy of our friends and families. From interpersonal dramas to residential locations, have a very clear understanding of your own blogging boundaries between what's shareable and what's not.

Finally, we artistic types can also tend at times toward narcissism or self-deprecation. While posting the occasional personally-oriented musing is practically de rigueur for every blogger, keep in mind that your blog is a blog about photography, not about you. Maintain a good balance of humility and healthy pride in your work when you refer to yourself, your travels, your lifestyle, and so on.

BLOG REGULARLY & CONSISTENTLY

The need for consistent content can be both intimidating and inspirational—and with steady planning it will be much more of the latter.

> The straightforward task of planning out a month of posts in advance can save you a lot of stress and headaches—and can even help spark your creativity. Consider parts of it flexible, but use it to pace yourself, and set regular goals to achieve so that you don't suddenly find yourself overwhelmed.

The very best thing you can do to grow your blog's readership is to post consistently. You don't have to post every day; in fact, posting more than once a day is probably overload. But make a point of posting three to five times a week.

Sometimes, you might not have time to post for a week or more, especially if you're traveling or shooting in a location where you don't have reliable internet access. In those cases, try to set aside a couple hours and schedule posts for while you're away or busy. Scheduled posts could be brief updates or single-photo exhibits of your work, present or past. But a steady stream of blog posts will keep your readers coming back consistently. The moment you stop posting a few times a week, your readers will drop off and forget to come back until you give them a reason to again.

Photo walks, personal challenges, posts from other bloggers, and even comments from your own community will give you ample fodder for posts. But as long as you are diligent and just a bit creative, you will be able to maintain your audience's interest.

august

29	30 Vivian Maier Gallery post	31	1	2 Vivian Maier Book Review	3	4
5 FLASH	6 WEEK! bounce flash tutorial	7 SB-900 review	8	9	10 best of strobist articles	11
12	13 Vacation photo gallery from Thailand	14	15	16 PhotoPlus Show Floor Reports	17	18
19	20 Nude Photography Overview	21	22 GUEST POST Frank Derouen	23	24	25
26 NEW CANON DSLR ANNOUNCEMENT	27	28 sometime this week - contact Canon for NDA	29	30 New Exhibit Announcement @ George Eastman House	31	1

Ten tips for successful blog content ::

1. Have a hook. An eye-catching photo, an attention-grabbing title, and a powerful first sentence are your best friends.

2. Be yourself. Write like you talk, and write about what is real and important to you.

3. Be bold. Readers love it when you take risks.

4. Give, give, and give again. Be generous with links, information, tutorials, and your personality.

5. Encourage interaction. Ask for and respond to comments from your readers.

6. Keep an eye on design. Emphasize your photography through great layouts.

7. Know how to tell a good story.

8. Be personal, but respect privacy.

9. You'll never go wrong by avoiding negativity and drama. Never call out another person or business.

10. If your photography or language are not safe for children or workplaces, let your readers know. Sometimes, your CMS will let them know in the form of a splash screen asking for acknowledgment of adult content ahead.

4 BUILDING AN ONLINE COMMUNITY

4 :: BUILDING AN ONLINE COMMUNITY

One of the great parts of being a blogger is the fact that you get to interact with your audience. We touched on this just a little bit in the previous chapter on content. But when you've done your part by creating great content, readers get to do their part by responding to it, sharing it, and getting more involved with you, your blog, and each other.

Building a community is an exciting and sometimes exhausting endeavor, but it brings you close to your audience and creates real connections between you and your readers. And when those connections start to form, you'll see some interesting "network effects" on your blog.

A thriving network can start to have a gravity-like effect on the surrounding areas of the internet. The stronger your community becomes, the more readers will get pulled into it. One regular reader will share a link in a tweet, another will email his friend about an insightful post you wrote. Little by little, your readership will grow; as you make connections on a personal level, your network will grow. And as your network grows, so does your personal brand, your business, and your overall ranking in the world of photo blogging.

CREATING A COMMUNITY IN COMMENTS

Don't be shy—if your readers were interested enough to leave a comment, you should meet them halfway and start a dialog whenever possible.

The first, easiest, and most obvious way to start building a community is by reading and responding to the comments on your blog.

Note, I did not say by obsessively checking and pondering the deeper meaning of the comments on your blog.

This can be hinky territory for even the most self-assured photo bloggers. Your snaps and scribbles will acquire a diverse crowd of readers, and not all of them will be supportive, pleasant, or sane. That's the gamble you take when you work in the public eye. Prepare yourself for some positivity, some neutrality, some negativity, and a healthy serving of spam, and try not to take it all too seriously.

If you're particularly concerned about angry, unpleasant, or profanity-laced comments, your CMS will likely give you an option for pre-screening comments before they are publicly published on your blog. If you choose to moderate all your comments this way, try to check for new comments at least once a day, more frequently if you get more than a handful of comments.

With that caveat in mind, know that the comments section on any post can be a lively salon for fascinating conversations between peers. Beginners can ask you questions; you can respond with specific tips. Old pros can offer you suggestions for new techniques to try. Avid fans can give you digital applause, and thoughtful connoisseurs can give you constructive critiques.

You don't have to respond to every comment you get. In fact, many of your commenters' thoughts may be along two well-worn lines: "That's great!" and "Me too!" While these kinds of responses can certainly enliven and flesh out your comments section, they don't really add much substance to the conversation you started when you published your blog post, and they don't necessarily require a response from you. If you'd like to respond, you may absolutely do so, but be advised that the blogger who responds to every comment creates a cluttered conversation stream and cultivates an overly eager image.

Rather, it might be best (especially when you start getting more than one or two comments on a given post) to chime into the comments only when you have a specific thought to add, a question to address, or a point to clarify. Think of yourself as the host or hostess at a reception. Your job is to welcome people in, set the tone for the event (both of which you've already done in your blog post), and then facilitate a natural and pleasant conversational flow. Too much chatter on your part is as destructive to said flow as stone silence.

When you chime into a conversation in the comments section underneath a post, you can reply to a group or to a specific commenter. Just avoid confusion by being specific about whom you're addressing, and be as clear as possible with whatever point you're trying to make or question you're trying to answer.

In general, your readers will be delighted to know that you're not only an engaging writer and terrific photographer but also an active participant with your fan and friends online. You'll probably build ongoing online relationships with at least a few folks who return frequently to read and comment; it's the very beginning of a community and can end up being one of the strongest parts of your blog if you choose to make it so.

When responding to comments from others, be as personable as you would if you were speaking to them in real life. After all, when you take away all the code and pixels, we're all flesh and blood, very real and distinct personalities that are quite connected through the internet. Even though we may be physically remote, we should strive to be as polite and respectful as if we were sitting next to one another in a public place.

Practicing such courtesy is easy when you're answering a simple question or responding to a positive remark from a fan or friend. However, when a reader has a critical comment, it can be difficult to rein yourself in. The web gives us all a powerful feeling of invulnerability, and too often we take this feeling as license to insult and shame others whom we perceive as insulting us.

DEALING WITH NEGATIVE COMMENTS

No matter how cheerful your posts are, you will invariably have to deal with some naysayers and nasties at some point.

Getting critical comments—be they constructive or otherwise—is absolutely unavoidable for any blogger. In fact, fear of such comments has held many a creative soul back from blogging. But you shouldn't let your apprehensions about this facet of online life intimidate you or detract your enthusiasm.

In fact, your policy on and reactions to negative comments can be a huge factor in establishing the ethos of your blog's community. How you respond to these kinds of comments will set you apart and define your character—and, if you're blogging as a business owner, will send strong signals to your potential commenters.

Different bloggers have different approaches. The thoughtful will carefully engage detractors in an intelligent and reasonable debate. The thick-skinned will poke fun at meanies. The Pollyannas of the internet will post a thorough section on their expectations of positive commenting and will delete anything with a hint of snideness or profanity.

But every seasoned blogger will have developed their own techniques for dealing with negative comments. Here are a few helpful tips and coping mechanisms for the bad/ugly spectrum of comments, from the ugliest insults to well-meant critiques:

Don't feed the trolls! This is Rule One of online communication. It simply means that while you will encounter "trolls," i.e., web-dwellers who exist online for the purpose of inflicting emotional pain on others, you are under no circumstances to "feed" them, i.e., show any sign that you notice or are affected in any way by their antics. If you get a "trollish" comment, delete it, do not respond to it, and move forward immediately without paying any further mind.

Take the high road. If someone leaves a nasty comment or one that's just critical of your work, you can always come out on top by being unflappably gracious. A simple, "I'm sorry you feel that way. Have a great day!" can quickly and successfully close the
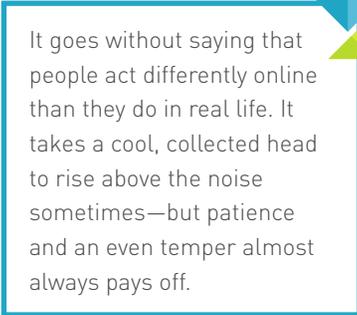
It goes without saying that people act differently online than they do in real life. It takes a cool, collected head to rise above the noise sometimes—but patience and an even temper almost always pays off.

matter, allowing you to save face, still remain in control of the situation, and not be dragged into a flame war (a heated back-and-forth that sucks everyone involved into a maelstrom of negativity and hyperbole).

Sometimes, you don't have to respond with a correction or rebuke to an obviously incorrect negative commenter. Your other readers will come to your rescue—a good sign of a healthy community.

Delete, delete, delete. You're in charge here; this is your playground. You are in no way obliged to publish every comment you get, and you can delete anything that doesn't fit in with the vibe you're trying to cultivate. Free speech certainly has its place, but your blog isn't a public or government-owned property. If detractors want to speak freely, they can darn well set up blogs of their own.

Don't fear the banhammer. The banhammer is your privilege as a blog owner; in most CMSes, you can permanently ban any commenter who you feel is dragging down the tone of the conversation with verbal abuse, threats, or profanity (if that's not okay on your blog).

Take a deep breath. If you get a particularly vitriolic comment that just sets your teeth on edge, walk away from your computer (or shut down your smartphone) and go blow off some steam before responding (or not responding, or just deleting the comment altogether).

Some low-blow comments will go straight for your emotional jugular. In those moments, you might need a mantra; I have a few of my own! "These people don't pay my bills" is a perspective-saving personal favorite that reminds me why I blog and reinforces the fact that a bad comment has no real-world impact on me.

Negative isn't always nasty. Some folks will leave comments that they didn't like your work or they didn't understand your story or they hate the lens you're using, and so on. Don't let it get to you emotionally, and assume that the commenter meant well. If you start by giving them the benefit of the doubt, you can decide for yourself whether the criticism does, in fact, have any merit; but if it was made without malice, there's no need to get upset.

Laugh! Sometimes, an overly negative commenter is so off-base that their words go from offensive to just plain bizarre, outlandish, and ludicrous. Feel free to shake your head and chuckle. One seasoned pro in the blogosphere tells me he likes to reply to these commenters with three simple words: "You fascinate me." It's a little wink-wink that lets other commenters know you're in on the joke and don't take the negativity to heart.

4 :: BUILDING AN ONLINE COMMUNITY

> It doesn't exactly require riot gear to moderate your comment threads, but thick skin and firm standards certainly help. You're basically there to keep the peace, and steer the discussion away from the flames and toward productive topics.

Just remember: Your commenters, positive and negative alike, don't really know you. Any comments they leave are more a reflection on them than on you. Dark people leave dark comments, and we have to pity them for not having better things to do with their lives.

Finally, there might sometimes be posts that stir up strong reactions or controversies in the community. Likewise, if you do any personal blogging, you might also find yourself delving into some very tender territory. In most blogging software, you can turn comments on and off for an individual post, and on my own blogs, I will very often flip the switch into no-comment mode if I feel that I've said all I have to say and I don't particularly need or want feedback from others.

This might strike some of your readers as a high-handed way of avoiding criticism, but look at all the facts: you took the time and effort to set up a blog, do all your photography, and craft a well-thought-out blog post on a perhaps sensitive subject. It's your work, and no one is entitled to any part of it. If you don't feel like subjecting yourself to commentary—positive or negative—you can simply close the comments section.

When I do this on my own blog, I run a brief disclaimer at the bottom of the post, where the comments section would normally be found:

> *Comments are closed for this post.*
> *You are encouraged to disagree, debate, or expand*
> *the conversation on your own blog;*
> *you will be linked to via trackbacks and pingbacks.*

It's a polite but firm way of telling your readers that while you appreciate them, this particular post is a one-way talk or speech or demonstration rather than a roundtable discussion.

A FOOTNOTE ON SPAM

They can be totally bizarre or eerily almost-human—spam comes in all shapes and sizes.

Spam is more than just a debatably delicious canned meat, and it's more than just the junk that clutters your email inbox. As a new blogger, you'll get to experience the joys of comment spam, as well. Hooray!

The good news is, most CMS makers are well aware that comment spam is a big problem and have whole teams of engineers devoted to rooting out spam comments.

Make sure that you're using whatever plugins your CMS recommends for spam-fighting (this may be automated).

To identify spam, check the name, email address, and website link provided by the commenter. If they seem like outlandish strings of unrelated letters and gobbledygook, chances are good that they're the work of a spambot.

Also, do a double-take at the content of the comment. Is it vaguely positive but totally generic? Could it be left on a blog post about any other topic? Does the language seem disjointed and riddled with poor spelling and grammar? Again, these are tip-offs that the comment is spam.

Don't just delete the comment, though. Be sure to mark it as spam so your CMS's spam-fighting software knows to be on the lookout for similar comments featuring the same text, from the same IP address, etc. And whatever you do, don't click on any links that look suspicious—that includes shortened URLs that disguise the actual website you're visiting.

BLOGGER NETWORKING

IT MIGHT BE A SMALLER WORLD THAN YOU THINK

What seems tough at first will become thrilling as soon as you receive your first reply from a blogger you've been enthusiastically following on your own.

Once you have built up your own stream of interesting, insightful posts with lively comments sections, it's time to start networking to establish yourself within your particular niche of photo bloggers. This is important for a few reasons:

• It builds your reputation and lends to your credibility when you are acknowledged by well-established photo bloggers.

• It builds links back to your blog, which help you out with the search engines.

• It can help to send traffic (i.e., new readers and prospective clients) back to your blog.

• It gives you a sense of belonging to a community; you're not just writing into a void.

• It's actually quite fun!

KNOW YOUR NETWORK

As a new blogger coming into an already crowded internet, networking is a bit like going to a huge party where you don't really know anyone yet. You might recognize a few faces, but no one recognizes you. It's hard to know how or where to start making conversation, and you're not quite certain how others will react to you.

The first step to building your network is reading— a lot of reading. This is the lurking phase, when you'll observe other blogs' content as well as their community interactions, taking notes on how to make friends and influence bloggers.

You'll want to become a regular reader of blogs that are somewhat similar to your own. For example, if you're a non-professional photographer who also blogs about family and cooking, you could take a cue from ThePioneerWoman.com, a blog chock-full of stunning photographs about family life and culinary arts as they unfold on a working ranch. Or, if photo lessons mixed with inspirational messaging and positive thinking is your bag, perhaps try reading Chookoolonks.com, which will bring you a steady stream of images showing inner beauty and stories about human diversity, love, and friendship. All across the web, you'll find photographers like you—mom photogs, LGBT photogs, travel-junkie photogs, foodie photogs, you name it—who have set up blogs to show the world what their lives and photos are like. You might be surprised at how much you have in common with these more established photo bloggers.

Also, it's a good idea to start reading photo blogs that match up with your own on a few other levels, not just content. If your location has any impact on your blog at all, check out other photo bloggers in your city or general geographical area. And if you're blogging to support your business, don't think of similar bloggers as competition; it's more productive to think of them as contacts and potential referrals.

While it's a great idea to read collaborative or professional blogs, such as Ben Trovato for fashion photography or the Bon Appetit blog for food photography, it's harder to network there. Going back to the party analogy, networking on these blogs would be like going to a trendy nightclub and trying to make time with the hottest bartender: everyone else is competing for a small group's attention, and unless you've got some major cachet, it ain't gonna happen. At least for now, it's best to read the big, professional photo blogs for instruction and inspiration, and leave your networking for single-author, non-professional photo blogs.

Finding blogs to read is one of the simpler tasks on your agenda. Use a search engine, and plug in the terms most relevant to your niche, e.g., "music photography

It might seem intimidating, but remember that you aren't exactly starting from scratch—you already have a common set of interests with your fellow photo bloggers, and they'll likely be just as excited to hear from you as you are to talk to them.

blogger" or "photojournalism blog." You can also check the blogrolls for the blogs you might already read, and try asking around among your friends on Facebook, Twitter, or other social networks.

Don't limit your internet stalking to just blog-reading, either. Find your favorite bloggers on Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Pinterest, Instagram, and Flickr, and follow them!

SAY HELLO

More than just "hello," but less than your life story. Make your first contact appear genuine.

Once you've got a good roster of blogs (and an RSS reader, Twitter feed, or other such mechanism to make sure you stay current and see new posts as they are published) and get into a rhythm of reading them regularly, make mental notes on how the photo bloggers themselves involve their own communities. Are they responsive in comments? Do they write posts containing questions for or references to their readers?

One good way to start networking is simply to leave a comment, especially if you have something more interesting to add than "Great post," or "I'm new here, but I like your blog." Again, going to the party metaphor, you wouldn't walk up to another person at the party and start a conversation with, "Hi! I'm new here. You look nice."

Your first comment should be something interesting—a question, a (brief) similar story you could share—and should not be threatening or critical. If (and only if) you've written a blog post on the same topic with a high degree of similarity to this blogger's post, you might note so with a link back to that specific post. In general, though, it's bad form to pepper your comments with links back to yourself; that kind of aggressive bid for attention will simply aggravate your fellow bloggers' nerves and just might get you marked as spam.

The best part about asking a question as your first comment is that it gives the other blogger a great reason to respond to you. This kind of dialog will eventually lead to her remembering your name and perhaps even clicking on your URL and discovering fantastic new photo blog. Make your questions specific, and always thank the blogger if you get a response.

When you go to someone else's blog, you'll likely need to log in to a commenting system. If the other blogger users the same web-based CMS you use, your profile might carry over into his or her commenting system. If this isn't the case, you can almost always use a social media profile as a login. If you connect through Facebook

or Twitter, you'll have the added benefit of bringing your profile picture along with you—always a plus when you're trying to make a human-to-human connection! Just make sure the Facebook/Twitter/ Google profile is the profile that's linked to your photo blog, and you're good to go.

You can also get the same results by commenting directly to the photo blogger via social media. Just be aware that the more "internet popular" a photo blogger is, the less likely your comment or tweet is to make a lasting impression.

MAKE AN INTRODUCTION

Don't expect links to your blog without giving a few out first!

When you've made the rounds as a reader and commenter, one surefire way into any photo blogger's heart is a link. Also known around the blogosphere as "link love," a simple text link from your blog to someone else's blog is like a warm plate of cookies offered to a new neighbor: no one doesn't like it!

To show another blogger some link love, simply create a new post (or, if the topics are sufficiently intertwined, use an existing post), and tell your readers they should go over to so-and-so's blog for a great post on techniques for shooting macros, making the words "techniques for shooting macros" a hyperlink back to old so-and-so's specific blog post. In all likelihood, your link will pop up as a trackback on so-and-so's blog post, and she will see your post and be quite flattered.

When you link back to someone else's post, it's okay to grab a sentence or two as a direct quotation, but never, ever use someone else's photograph on your blog unless you've been given explicit permission to do so, and then, include an obvious attribution to the photographer. Content-stealing is a bona fide problem all around the web, and nowhere more than in the circles of photo bloggers. Stealing content, even with the best of intentions, will get you quickly branded as a digital thief at worst or a hopeless noob with no understanding of intellectual property at best.

Link love is distinct from your blogroll, which is also a great way to acknowledge your network of similar bloggers. The blogroll is a distinct menu or sidebar on every page throughout your blog that acts as a recommendation engine for your readers, pointing them to the blogs that you consider on-topic and high-quality reading. The blogroll can be controlled through your CMS via a blogroll widget, and you can and should include any blogs you read on a regular basis that you would particularly recommend to your readers or with which you'd most like to align yourself.

And of course, share the posts you love with your own readers and fans via social networks. You may want to set up distinct social profiles for your photo blogger persona so as to avoid bombarding your non-photog buddies with links and chatter about photography.

A more advanced form of link love is the blog carnival. This is a specific post type that collects a selection of links often with a theme and on a regular, periodic basis. The links will direct your readers to blog posts from others. In most cases, a carnival is a regular feature with rotating hosting duties. In other words, the hypothetical monthly Carnival of Lights will round up the best photo-blog posts on lighting; this month, you'll write the post and curate the links, and next week, Bob of Bob's Amazing Photo blog will "host" the carnival, curate the links, and publish the post. Carnivals can be set up by any informal network of topical bloggers; you might also start writing a carnival for your topic of choice, then pass the baton to another blogger as you start to build your network.

NETWORKING UP, NETWORKING ACROSS

Ambition is a valuable asset—but so is patience and respect. It's best to play the long game and gradually work your way up the hierarchy.

> Get to know folks at your own level, then gradually work your way up.

Depending on your blog's goals, you might start out with the ambition of becoming the most popular photo blogger the internet has ever seen; but wherever you start, you'll be at the bottom or close to it. Whether you're building your business or simply building your audience, it's natural to want to "network up"—that is, to cultivate online friendships with more popular, important bloggers and eventually convey the impression that you are part of the same sphere.

When networking vertically, make a mental map of the photo-blog ecosystem, and know where you fall in the food chain. Get to know folks at your own level—people with parity to you in skill sets, online followings, and general temperament. Be friendly, reference each other's work online, and point your readers in these bloggers' direction every now and then.

Take the time to get familiar with folks at a more advanced level, as well—longtime photo bloggers whose work you admire and whose online followings far eclipse your own. It might be more difficult to become internet besties with these bloggers, since they get a lot of attention and a lot of time requests from a large audience, but be thoughtful and helpful in your outreach, including links and social mentions, and eventually your "betters" in the photo-blogging totem pole will start to take notice of your work, as well.

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As you start to establish your place in the great hierarchy of the blogosphere, guest posts can be another great way to offer help to others and derive mutual benefit. A guest post is simply a post on a blog written by someone other than the blog's main author. These kinds of posts can be a great way to send traffic back and forth between two related blogs with different audiences, thereby growing the audiences of both blogs. A guest post can be a great way to dispense some unique knowledge you possess, relate a unique anecdote, or share a unique image. Find a piece of content that is special and valuable, and offer to share it with another blogger's readers; all you need to benefit from the arrangement is a link back and a byline.

The Great Hierarchy
of the Blogosphere:

Tier 1: Internationally famous professional photographers, photoshop gurus, and industry spokespersons.

Tier 2: Professional photographers and other creatives, with big followings in specific fields.

Tier 3: Amateur photographers with small followings, but active in the photo-blogging community.

Tier 4: Readers & commenters.

TIER 1

TIER 2

TIER 3

TIER 4
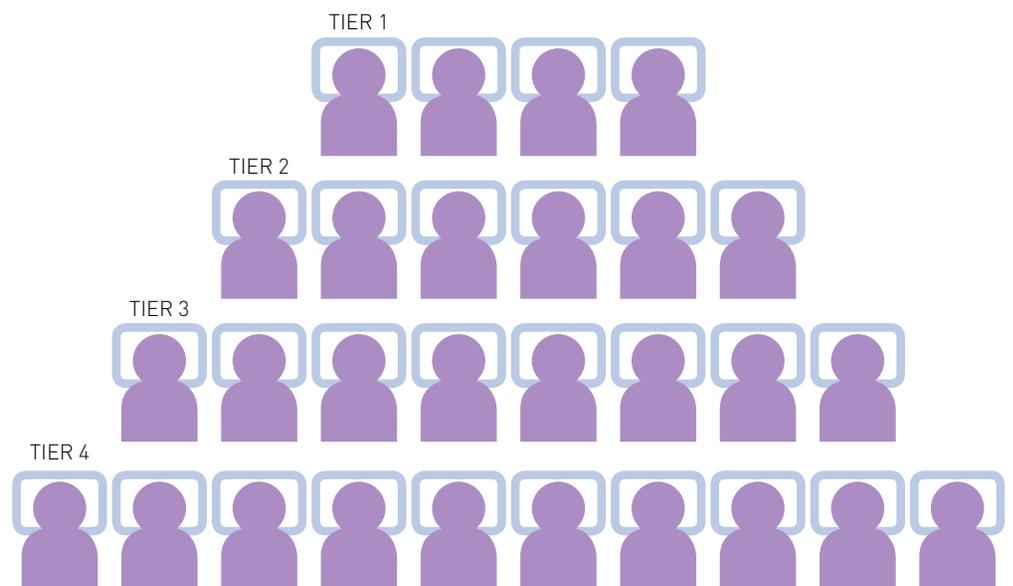
As you network, keep in mind the lyric: "The love you take is equal to the love you make." In other words, be sure you're giving as much value, respect, and time as you're getting from others. The more you give, the more likely you are to receive—that goes for simple things like backlinks, Twitter mentions, and blogrolls as well as more significant opportunities that may come your way as you continue to blog, such as podcast invitations or speaking engagements.

Wanting to "climb" the ranks of the web is only natural, but do so without using others and do so with a constant eye on how you can give back to other, even newer bloggers. It's good sense, good manners, and good karma.

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In addition to networking "up" within your own niche of photo blogging, it can also be useful to network "across" other niches. For example, if you write a blog on live music performance photography, get to know local music bloggers who frequent the same venues and shows. If your photography business and blog are all about weddings, get familiar with the scads of wedding bloggers out there. Food photography and food bloggers are another good matchup; ditto for fashion/editorial work and the gazillion fashion blogs online. The universal appeal of a beautiful image makes your work more cross-over worthy than most.

A great way to get in good with these bloggers is to simply forward them a few photos and sentences about the images, giving the blogger in question express permission to republish your content with a link back to your own blog. Bloggers are always on the lookout for good content, and great photography is a huge part of what gets these writers the traffic they need to stay in business.

SOCIAL NETWORKING FOR YOUR BLOG

In many ways your blog is just the beginning—a hub, of sorts, that connects all your other various online personae.

Before the social-media era, creating a community of readers used to take a lot more work. One had to pound the virtual pavement, network with more popular bloggers, and do a lot of rather complicated self-promotion to build up an audience that would consistently return to read and view one's work online.

These days, finding that community is a lot easier. And if you're creating great, useful content and speaking with an authentic voice, getting those existing communities interested in your blog can be as simple as training your personal megaphone in a couple new directions.

As we've already discussed briefly, the wonderful world of blogs is a very social place these days. Activity on your blog itself will actually represent but a small part of your audience's reactions and interactions with and around your content. Much more conversation will be occurring around the web at destinations such as Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, and Google+.

Of course, it helps if you've already built up a personal and/or professional audience on a few social networking sites. But even if you haven't, you should start using social networks to grow your audience and increase your stature in the larger online community of photography.

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You may already have personal profiles on a number of these services, but depending on the name and scope of your blog, you will likely want to set up new profiles and pages for your blog. Make sure your new profiles have names and URLs that match the name and URL you so carefully chose for your blog— you don't want readers getting confused!

While creating new profiles for yourself as a photographer and photo blogger might seem like extraneous work, it will help vastly with your personal/ public persona separation and work/life balance in the future. Think about it: you might already have a personal Facebook profile, where you connect with friends, family, and even co-workers. However, not all your acquaintances tied to this profile will necessarily want to read about your latest gear or a new technique you're trying out. Unless all your Facebook friends are also photo geeks, you would be well served to build a new Page that's all about you as a photographer. On these Pages, you accumulate "Likes" rather than developing mutual friendships, and you can feel free to toot your own horn as much as you like without annoying your too-cool-for-school nieces, who have no idea what you're blathering on about, anyhow.

The most important thing to remember is that insofar as you're using social media tools to get more readers for your blog, your online profiles should always, always link back to that blog—even to specific posts relevant to the topic of the day. In any profile you create, there may be space for you to add a link to your personal website. If your blog is a chief concern, let that link direct readers to your blog rather than a static website or even a portfolio. You can always allow your blog to direct interested parties back to your portfolio, but the blog will let your audience know what you're interested in and talking about right now—and when it comes to online content, there's certainly no time like the present.

Social media communities are very sensitive to timeliness, so whether you're interested in current events or other hot-button issues raised by photo bloggers or others in your online world, you should be tying your work to timely and relevant topics whenever possible. Keeping your content somewhat linked to what's going on in the world around you will boost your traffic and also ensure that others are linking back to you and sharing your posts within their own networks, as well.

Two of the most important tools you'll use for social networking are Twitter and Facebook. Which site ends up being most important for you will largely depend on your specific audience and your blog's analytics. That is, once you start promoting some of your pictures and posts on those networks, take a look under the hood of

Your blog: an infinite network whose center is everywhere (you always link back to it) and whose circumference is nowhere (it blends in with all your other social network identities).

your blog and see where your traffic is coming from. If you've got more traffic coming from one source or another, hypothesize and test for what factors might be making that network more profitable, and then optimize for those factors.

For example, if you find that lists of photography tips perform really well on Facebook, start cultivating a few ideas for similar posts, and promote the published posts on Facebook during high-traffic times of the day. If one-off gallery snaps get a lot of action on Twitter, be sure to promote those posts on Twitter and ask your audience to share and retweet them.

Each network has its own advantages. Twitter allows you to reach out to and be found by those with an explicit interest in the art of photography through its Lists feature and through user-driven follow recommendations. One meme in particular, called Follow Friday and abbreviated as #FF on the site, gives users a weekly opportunity to recognize and recommend Twitter users whose updates might be relevant to a specific group. Use #FF to shout out to influential photo bloggers you might want to know. If someone else mentions you in a #FF update, be sure to thank that person.

Facebook has tons of Groups and Pages devoted to photography. Here, you'll find a less decentralized but more easily distracted community. Use photo-focused Groups to your advantage, but take care to act as a helpful participant, not just a rabid self-promoter— this is a good rule for all social media interactions.

Both Twitter and Facebook have built-in photo-sharing tools that provide potential readers with a colorful and visual sneak peak at your content. Each time you create a Twitter or Facebook post, make sure that a preview of your photo is available with a link back to your original blog post.

At the time of this writing, Google+ is still a fairly new social network. However, by far one of the biggest groups using it frequently and successfully is—you guessed it— photographers and their fans. In fact, the phenomenon of shutterbugs taking over Google+ became such a big deal that an entire conference in 2012 was devoted to photography and photo blogging on Google+.

Flickr is another great way to showcase your work and direct readers back to your blog. The site allows you to add other users as contacts, friends, or family; it also has a built-in messaging system. For any serious photog, whether professional or amateur, it's highly advisable to spring for a Pro account, which costs around $25 annually. The expense allows you to host as many photos as you want; non-Pro accounts cap the number of pics at a paltry 300MB.

As with all other social networking tools, be sure to link your Flickr photos to any blog post that might be associated with those photos. In the caption for each pic, you'll have an opportunity to add text. While not every photo needs to be a blogged photo, you should be including relevant links back to your blog when the photo in question reveals a previously blogged technique, is part of an ongoing photo challenge, or has been used in your blog somehow.

If you use a smartphone, mobile photo-sharing tools such as Instagram are great ways to instantly give your online friends an idea of your eye and inspirations when you're out and about. While you might not be using your mobile photography consistently in your blog, your "moblogging" profiles should still serve as links back to your blog and should help to create more interest in your as a person and in your life as a photographer.

Pinterest is a fascinating tool for sharing and curating images. Each "board" on the site is a collection of thumbnails that link back to the image's original source. You can and should set up a Pinterest account of your own for highlighting fascinating shots and new techniques you find around the web. Also, you can search the site for your blog's URL to find out who's sharing your work around Pinterest.

When curating your Pinterest boards, focus each board on a specific subject: Inspiring landscapes, gorgeous portraits, lighting techniques, to-try tutorials, etc. And don't fill a pinboard with your own work, either; Pinterest is best used for building an audience through great curation, then slipping in your own shots, blog posts, and tutorials every once in a while when they deserve the extra traffic.

Finally, your LinkedIn profile can be a great, more professional social networking tool for not only increasing your blog readership but also boosting your business, if selling your work or booking paid gigs are things you'd like to do. The best thing about LinkedIn is that it allows you to bring an RSS feed for your blog directly into your profile.

Ten tips on social networking for your photo blog ::

1. Post your pics directly to the network in question rather than posting only links back to your blog. It's a great way to start conversations without having to type up a whole blog post.

2. Frequently mention and connect with other photographers, linking back to their profiles and their work, and well as commenting, sharing, and "liking" or upvoting their photos.

3. Share links from a variety of sources, not just your own blog. Pick content from other bloggers and other websites that you think will be educational, interesting, or entertaining for your audience. This will establish you as a source of great information rather than just a self-promotional bore.

4. Strike the right balance. Tweeting once every hour might work for some celeb-bloggers with huge audiences; tweeting just a few times a day might be right for you. Experiment and optimize for great conversations.

5. Be engaging! Respond to comments, reply to questions. The best part of social media is the rapid-fire, back-and-forth conversations you'll have with fans of your work and other photographers.

6. Do not duplicate. Unless you're sharing a link to one of your blog posts, try to not post the same images or text to all your networks at the same time. For example, share a mobile photo on Instagram, ask a thought-provoking question on Twitter, take a quick poll on Facebook, and share a high-quality photo on Google+.

7. When you're sharing an image, especially if a thumbnail won't be visible right away, be sure to write a great description or caption for your image. Readers will be likely to show interest in something like, "Amazing food from amazing locals at a Puerto Rico food stand [image]," rather than, "This is awesome! http://t.co/ul8e0."

8. Every now and then, remind your Twitter followers that you also have a Facebook page, or your Facebook fans that you have a Google+ page, et cetera. Just a gentle nudge every month or so should do the trick.

9. Even if you're just sharing a quickie mobile upload, share your best work, and make sure the quality is something you'll be proud of in the future. If high-quality, high-resolution upload options are available, use them always.

10. Understand that sometimes, your readers may download and repost socially shared images without your permission. Unfortunately, this is just a casualty of the internet in its current form. Don't try to get around it with watermarks or worse, ugly tirades and lashing out. Take the high road, and trust that your best work will usually be linked back to you.