

Create a great blog

A photo blog connoisseur tells you how to perk up your site

After reviewing hundreds of photography blogs for the project, Blogs of Photogs, I'm a bit of an authority on the subject (blogsophotogs.com). With more than 5,000 monthly readers, the site was launched to post reviews of brilliant blogs written by photographers, whether they're virtual unknowns or the biggest names in the industry. I choose which blogs to feature from the sites I've discovered or ones submitted by other photographers. You're welcome to submit your own blog.

My rule is to not criticize or advise in my posts. I focus on what's working and what's

enjoyable to view. I won't review blogs that have broken links, lousy photos, excessive profanity or graphic, gratuitous nudity. If this sounds subjective, it is—but it *is* my blog.

STARTING A BLOG

Decide whether your blog will be hosted in your own domain, as in myphotowebsite.com/blog, or by a service like Blogger, Wordpress, Typepad or Tumblr. For effective search engine optimization (SEO), brand continuity and exposure, I recommend using your own site (see "Help them find you," p. 54).

I like having an all-encompassing website that includes my blog, so there's just one place clients need visit for recent posts, photos, and info about my studio. If you buy a professionally designed blog template, or theme, it's easy to look great from the start. I use the ProPhoto theme, a feature-rich site design for Wordpress. Easy to use, it has an attractive flash header, large images, nearly unlimited customizations, and a clean style. There are also free themes available, and companies that do custom-designing.

I offer some suggestions for using your blog to its greatest advantage:

1. Consistent look. The design and color palette will mirror your studio and brand. Use your logo to tie-in your website and blog. Tag or categorize each post with keywords for SEO.

TOP 10

My 10 favorite photo blogs in no particular order

1. lightheaded.cynthiagraham.com

This one's touched me the most, hands down. She shares so much of herself in each breathtaking photo and each meaningful tidbit that you'll want to return to again and again for inspiration.

2. hofferphotography.com/blog

Mark Hoffer makes you feel the love and joy of each wedding he posts about. His other kinds of photography are super, too. Be sure to check out his posing and setup shots.

3. jasminestarblogger.com

Her frequent updates keep clients and photographers alike coming back for more.

4. mattnicolosiblog.com.

Here's where I got the idea to feature assorted funny bio photos. His are inspiring and entertaining.

5. cowbellyblog.com

Jamie Pflughoeft writes the ideal blog about pet photography. It's interesting to clients,



Jamie Pflughoeft's blog about pet photography, cowbellyblog.com, finds success in its charming appeal to clients, photographers and pet enthusiasts alike, anyone who needs a daily dose of cute.

Use descriptive titles for each post and photo. Use a client-friendly naming convention, such as Minneapolis_family_photographer.jpg (as opposed to DSC_1234). Have an easy to find RSS feed or e-mail signup for FeedBurner to make it easy for readers to get updates.

2. Use a bio portrait. It's an opportunity to show your personality. I use a variety of self-portraits and have fun with them on my bio page. If *you* won't get in front of a camera, how can you convince clients to?

3. Photography is the point. Showcase your photography. Visitors are looking to be wowed by your recent work. Make it easy to view the images. Do watermark them with your name and copyright info. (Right-click disables scripts to thwart copying, but anyone can do a screen capture.)

other photographers, pet enthusiasts, anyone who needs a daily dose of cute.

6. jeanetteblanc.com/blog

Jeanette Blanc's witty and prolific writing alongside her images gives readers a real sense of who she is. I feel like I've come to know her through her blog alone, and I'd love for her to photograph my family.

7. whiteboxblog.com

Fresh, vibrant and just plain lovely. On both blog and website, the well-integrated images support the brand.

8. josevillablog.com

A sumptuous visual feast. Go there!

9. jeffascough.typepad.com

This photographer documents weddings all over Europe, mostly in natural light, and in a journalistic style. His art shines on his blog.

10. pattischmidtblog.com

The clean, simple layout keeps the focus on the gorgeous photography. Easy to navigate and lovely to look at.

—M.H.



Matt Nicolosi posts frequently on a variety of topics and includes an abundance of lush, attractive images. His playful use of bio photos inspired me to be adventurous with my own.

“Keeping a consistent voice throughout your blog helps to spotlight another significant benefit you offer your clients by hiring a professional photography studio—your distinctive service and your personal touch.”

PURLS OF WISDOM

Using personalized URLs to attract clients | Betsy Finn, Cr.Photog., CPP

Personalized URLs (pURLs) are part of a new cross-media technique that funnels your promotional e-mail recipients directly to your website. Everyone who receives the mailing gets his own personalized URL, and a low-pressure yet compelling call to action. It's effective—when I opened a mailing from Blossom Publishing, I couldn't resist visiting the URL with my name in it.

A number of companies provide pURL services, but Blossom is the only one I know of in the photographic industry. I asked Cody Zwiefelhofer, Blossom's cross-media marketing specialist, to explain how pURLs work.

Let's say high school senior Daniel Smith opens a promo you've addressed to him by name. He's more likely to open a message with his name on it than one addressed to, say, Senior, Class of 2011. Your message directs him to a pURL—DanielSmith.ABCPhotography.com—on your website. Highly interested now, he logs on and goes directly to your dynamic senior portrait splash page, without having to navigate through your recent bridal and family portraits. You will be able to track how many times he visits the page, and capture some more personalized data, as well, like his e-mail address, that he goes

by “Dan” rather than Daniel, and that he's interested in your outdoor portraits. The personalization that drew Dan to the site in the first place is the means for tracking his individual activity on your site.

The tracking and reporting features Blossom Publishing provides in its pURL campaigns includes who visited the website and how many times, who responded to the message and entered their e-mail, and who did not respond.

PURLs increase the trackability of your direct mail pieces, and use cross-media promotion to draw the interest of those who aren't at the point of booking a session. A prospect who has put off calling because he's wary of high-pressure sales situations, might feel more comfortable getting the info he needs online.

You might find the cost of a pURL campaign a drawback—Blossom's online campaigns typically cost \$600 to \$700. In the long run, though, having accurate, up-to-date mailing lists could save you time and money.

Betsy Finn's studio, Betsy's Photography, is in Dexter, Mich. (betsysphotography.com). She shares tips and ideas for photographers at learnwithbetsy.com.

4. Update often. So important. Show that your business is thriving. You'll want readers to keep coming for your current photos and interesting comments. You can integrate your Twitter account with your blog to provide up-to-the minute blurbs. Have a link to your Facebook fan page, too.

5. Share a bit of yourself. A blog is a fine way to share pertinent bits of information about your life and your business, which will help build relationships with clients. Say something about what you do in your free time and your family, occasionally featuring pictures of your children. If you're a wedding photographer, include fun details about each wedding and reception you cover, alongside sneak peek photos (assuming you have the subjects' permission and a model release).

Embed links to other blogs you like for your readers' entertainment or enlightenment. It also encourages trackbacks and links to your site, furthering your SEO. Keep a consistent voice throughout a mix of business and personal information. Your distinctive service and personal touch will speak to potential clients.

6. Functionality matters. Nothing ruins a great blog quicker than broken links. Test drive your blog on different browsers and screen sizes. If you have music, have an easy-to-find mute switch for viewers in quiet environments. Scale your image files down to speed loading for viewers.

7. Track your visitors. Use some kind of analytics on your blog, such as Statecounter or Google Analytics (read about Google Analytics on p. 54). You'll see what leads each viewer to your site, how long he stays, and what he's looking at. Check the search engine keywords to see what people are looking for when they arrive, and use tags and categories appropriately. ■

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