

Scott Bourne, a pioneer of Internet information for photographers, uses his generous nature and knack for communicating to turn his online ventures into a profitable business with a massive following.

MARKETING

By Jeff Kent

Internet famous

How Scott Bourne harnessed the power of the World Wide Web

How does a wildlife photographer from Gig Harbor, Wash., population 6,500, develop an online following in the tens of thousands? How does he get more than 100,000 photographers to download his podcasts every 10 days? How does he get

more than one million page views on his blog every month?

Scott Bourne, photographer, educator and all-around Internet marketing wiz, does it by monitoring the pulse of the Internet and applying his communication skills. He started an Internet-only radio network, Netradio, before “podcast” was

even part of the lexicon. His subsequent podcast series, “This Week in Photography” (“TWIP”), became one of the most successful shows on iTunes. Bourne also pioneered online image sales, beginning with the launch of a Web gallery in 1995.

Today, his blog and website, www.photofocus.com, is one of the most popular photography sites around. Using what he calls “bounce-back marketing,” Bourne uses Twitter streams, podcasts and blog posts as multiple points of contact with his audience. The strategy has helped him sell photography, books and his presenta-



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GETTING STARTED

Scott Bourne's tips for establishing a robust online presence

1. Figure out who you are, and what your brand is.
2. Figure out who your audience is. Who do you want to attract?
3. Determine what value you bring to the table. What can you do for your audience? What parts of your knowledge, situation and experience have value?
4. Be transparent and generous. Credibility is earned, not bestowed.

tions to people all over the world.

Admittedly, Bourne has the gift of gab. He speaks and writes well, capturing the audience's attention with entertaining stories, and engendering loyalty through generous information sharing. But he insists that any dedicated photographer can achieve excellent results. *Professional Photographer* spoke with Bourne between tweets and blogs to find out exactly how.

Professional Photographer: *How can the average photographer take full advantage of the online marketplace?*

Scott Bourne: First, figure out your brand and figure out your audience. Then look at that audience and consider *what content can I produce that will interest them?* Think in terms of pure generosity without any commercial tags. Give information away and you will create loyalty.

As you get more and more traction, you work less and less to get a response. If you have 1,000 people in your audience, you don't need all 1,000 to respond to every offer you make. If you can get four or five percent to respond, you're doing great. You don't have to hit a home run every time, just get wood on the ball.

I have 40,000 followers on Twitter. I wanted



"CRANES IN THE FIRE MIST"

A 5-point case study of bounce-back marketing

Scott Bourne's primary source of income is sales of stock photography. His main subject is wildlife. This past year, Bourne leveraged his online network to bring in nearly \$40,000 from one image. Here's how he did it:

1. He got the shot, a very difficult image that combined multiple photographic and environmental factors.
2. He shared the story of the image—almost 13 years in the making—on his blog.
3. He created a podcast that talked about all the different photographic and environmental factors that went into the image.
4. He offered 100 limited-edition prints at \$400 apiece.

In a soft push, Bourne sent out an occasional tweet to his Twitter followers, alerting them that there were only 10 prints left, five prints left ...

5. He collected the money. Within the first six weeks, Bourne sold 50 prints. At press time, Bourne had sold 98 of the 100 prints, for gross sales of \$39,200.

"One thing seeds the other," explains Bourne. "Just one of these online marketing components would not have been sufficient. It's what I call bounce-back marketing; the blog pushes the podcast that pushes Twitter posts. Multiple points of contact push the prospect and create a growing buying urge."

to sell 600 books that I bought back from my publisher. All I needed was a 1.5 percent response rate. I sent out a tweet about it and sold them all within a few hours. I made more off that than one little promo than I got from the original royalties from the publisher.

What obstacles are preventing photographers from achieving this kind of success with online marketing?

It takes time. Everybody wants to be a rock star, but nobody wants to learn the chords. People get frustrated because they aren't an overnight online sensation. I started with just one Twitter follower. It took me a year to get 4,000. In my experience, it takes about nine months of serious devotion before you can decide if this is effective for you.



People complain that they can't come up with enough to say to their audience.

Developing your audience is a question of the kind of information you put out. Focus on the interests of your target audience. There's an old saying: All you need to be a teacher is to know one more thing than your students. Keep that in mind. One thing that really resonates is generosity. If you're willing to be genuinely generous and provide true, valuable information, you will be successful, and people will start following you. It doesn't hurt to mix in a few giveaways either!

So how exactly do you make money from all this? How does the marketing mix in with the free content?

The marketing is the content. And the content is the marketing. We used to

intersperse commercials in our podcasts. That's a yawn. Now we plug our sponsors with things like, "The Lensbaby Shooting Tip." There's a way to bring the content together with the marketing so that nobody notices, or at least so they don't turn off because they think you're trying to sell them something. The key is to establish a genuine connection with your audience. Provide something that's valuable. Do that and you will earn the right to occasionally say, "Oh, by the way, I have some books for sale, or my latest print is available."

How do photographers put it all together?

This is a fast-moving target. Rules change daily. Just remember that it takes a combination of forces to make it all work. You can't take a brick out of a wall and

guess that it's not the one supporting the wall. The same principle applies here. You can't just use Twitter. You can't just blog. You can't just be on Facebook. To be successful long term, you need a cogent plan that has three, maybe four, prongs in the online world, and each should bounce back to the other. Don't get hung up on particular tools. Instead, focus on the concepts. ■

To see more from Scott Bourne, visit www.photofocus.com.

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Scott Bourne presents "Social Media Will Expand Your Business" at Imaging USA 2010 in Nashville, Tenn., Jan. 10-12.