

Your online presence: an update on real-world products and services to help pro shooters reap the benefits of the Internet.

BY SHAWN BARNETT

backgrounds, JavaScript animation, even a selection of background music, complete with an onscreen VU meter. The photographer can enable the site to allow customers to select their own music and color surrounds for viewing,

Use the *Web*, catch more sales

HOW TO MAKE IT WORK FOR YOUR NEEDS

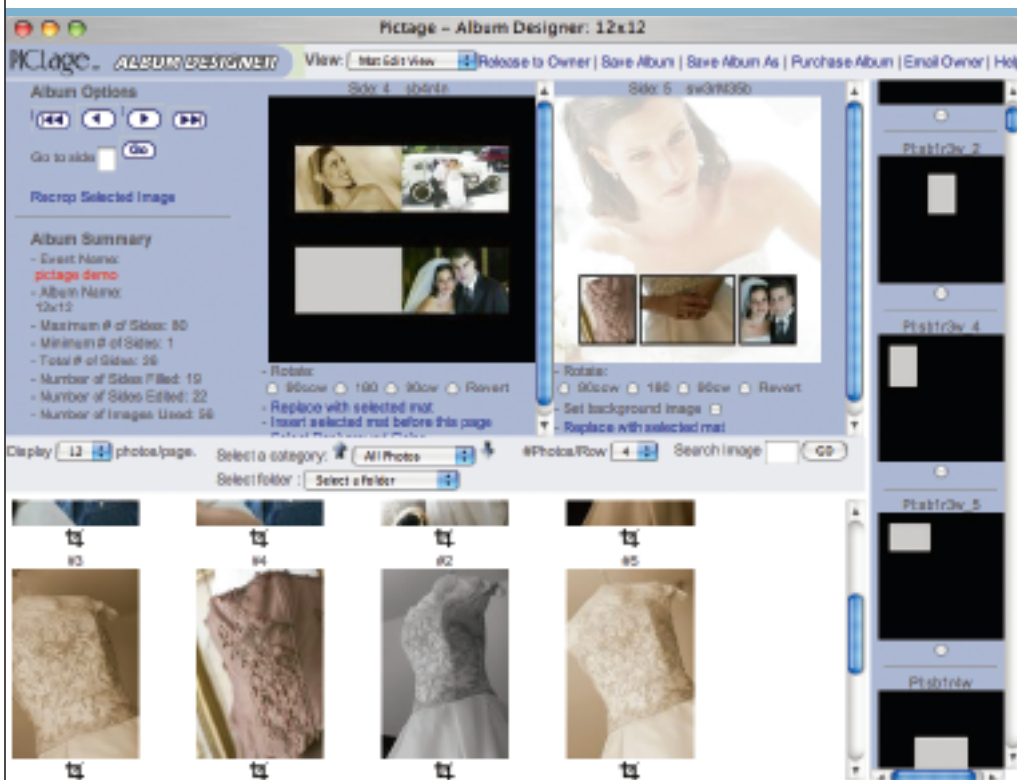
Since last May's article on online services for *Professional Photographer*, I've had the opportunity to thoroughly test the efficacy of posting and selling images from a series of local pageants online at Collages.net.

Last year I noted that the site had a good-looking, simple interface, and that its slideshow feature impressed me. The site has been significantly improved since then. Its dazzling cross-fade slideshow has been augmented with customizable

which only enhances their favorable impression of you and your work.

I wanted to evaluate the pageant prints myself instead of having them delivered directly to my customers. In last year's tests with six different print houses, American Color Imaging (ACI) was the most impressive for speed and quality, so I chose them to process my pageant images (www.acilab.com).

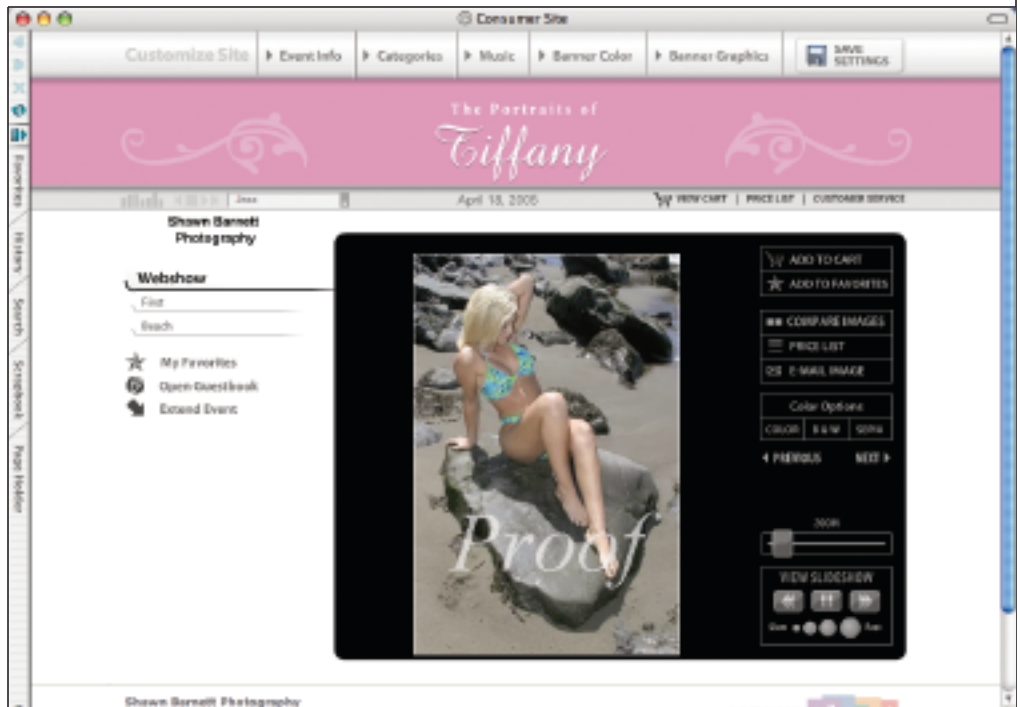
Both sites were good choices, each requiring a minimal outlay of capital and a modest investment of time for set up. My experiment with the pageant images showed me what a huge job it is to manage and process so many orders. For future large events, I'd again go with a site like Collages.net, but I'd take advantage of its direct fulfillment services. I'll still use ACI for my portrait work, but for a part-time shooter like me, automated processing of event photography works best.



The Pictage Album Designer feature is an attractive service for wedding photographers.

Photographer Howie McCormick uses Shutterfly for both online proofing and order fulfillment (www.shutterfly.com). “I don’t want to be bogged down with order fulfillment or pump a ton of energy into building a Web database for my images. Shutterfly does all of that for me.” Save for a cropping error now and then, McCormick’s customers have been “very pleased” with Shutterfly’s print quality and prompt delivery. And, adds McCormick, the company promptly replaces the mis-cropped prints.

There’s one area where I could have used some help—promoting package sales onsite during the events. In canvassing other photographers, I’ve learned that 50 to 80 percent of their event print sales take place at the event. For maximum profitability, instant onsite order fulfillment is the way to go. Of course, that would necessitate having a support crew and a mobile setup of printers, computers and WiFi transmission capability, which for many photographers is cost-prohibitive.



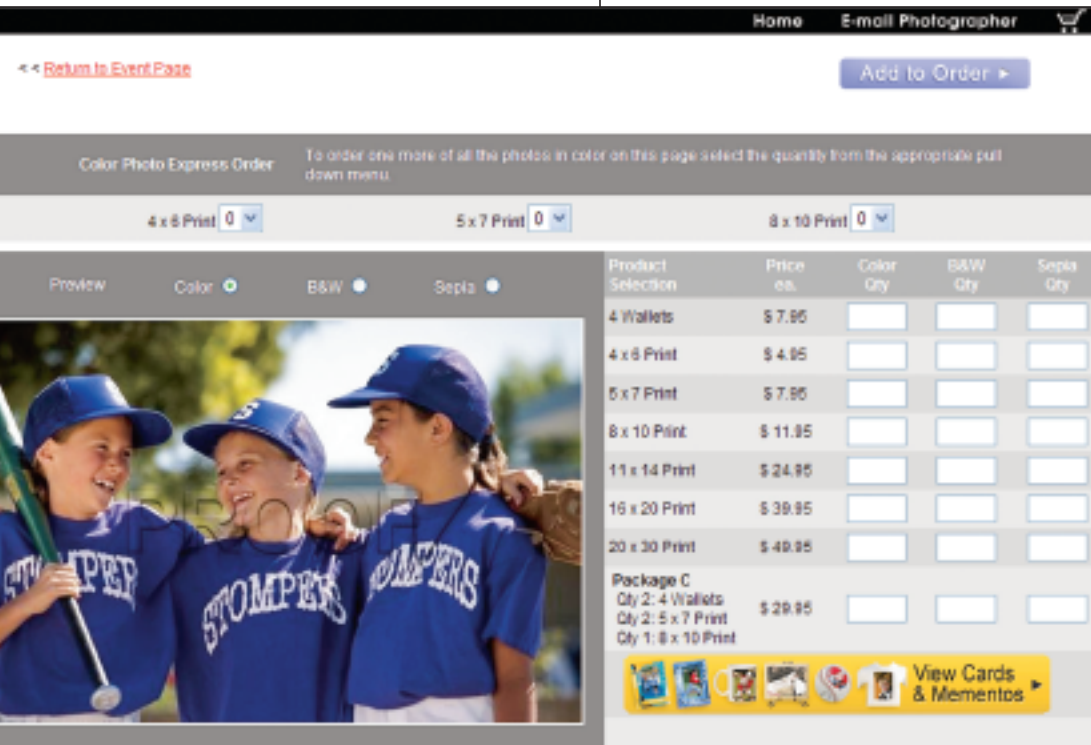
Collages.net now offers JavaScript animation, customizable backgrounds, and a selection of background music. You can even let your clients choose their own colors and music to go with the show.

For them, DigiProofs could be the solution (www.digiproofs.com). With the company’s E-Certificate online viewing, ordering, and print delivery directly to your customers, you just sell

the package onsite and forget about it. Not only are these sales you don’t have to process, they’re sales you wouldn’t have made at all without this program. With the variety of creative photo products DigiProofs offers, company representative Andrew Wei says he’s seen the average per-child sale of youth sports photography rise from \$18 to \$48.

There are also good online output services for wedding photographers. Pictage has an album design interface that can help you generate impressive panoramic-sized, bound wedding albums (www.pictage.com). Many sites offer several such products and features, while others, such as PictureMyWedding Online (www.picturemyweddingonline.com) specialize in a limited number of services.

The DigiProofs E-Certificate helps you sell packages at the event. Your clients choose their images and order prints online at their convenience (and yours).



THE GOODS: SERVICES

Kodak ProShots and ProShots Basics (www.kodak.com/proshots) have also been upgraded into new versions and with new pricing schemes. The former version cost users \$249 a year, but ProShots Studio 6.3 is available for a one-time fee of \$249. Studio is an impressive tool for up-selling products and building albums, among other things, and now you can use it to quickly organize and burn HTML slideshows to CD on your computer. That's an effective sales tool and a compelling product in its own right.

The free ProShots Basics service is an entrée to online proofing and order fulfillment with a quick download of the software. Like most of the services mentioned here, your print orders are handled through the ProShots member lab of your choice. Photographers pay only 10 cents per image upload and 10 percent of each retail sale. Not a bad way to start out.

Over the last 12 months, it appears that many digital proofing services have adopted the models of their rivals, adding a slideshow option, automatic watermarking, easy storefront creation, and integrated order fulfillment. Dozens of sites are competing for your business, each innovating and upgrading frequently to improve its features, value, and pricing to woo you into using its services. It's a shooter's market. The time is right to find out how online services could help pump up your sales. ■

There are many more worthwhile online resources for professional photographers, too many to describe here. For your convenience, we've posted the spillover to the July Bonus Content at www.ppmag.com.