

Thrive & Survive Online:

An Insider's View

By Larry Brownstein

Jason Sandifer, Sales Consultant for liveBooks, speaks with many photographers every day and, so, has a unique window into what is working for photographers. Beyond that, his wife's wedding photography website has been a testing ground for much of what he has learned when it comes to getting listed high on Google searches.

When I searched for Maine wedding photography, his wife's site, www.emilie-inc.com, shows up on the first page of Google's listings. So, how did they do it? Jason pointed out that their strategy is specific. They don't expect to be ranked high in searches for wedding photography, but they do intend to be ranked high in a search for Maine wedding photography and beyond that, they intend to target specific wedding venues in Maine. Jason points out that most brides find their venue first. This provides an opportunity for a photog-

rapher's work to be found when the bride searches for her local venue.

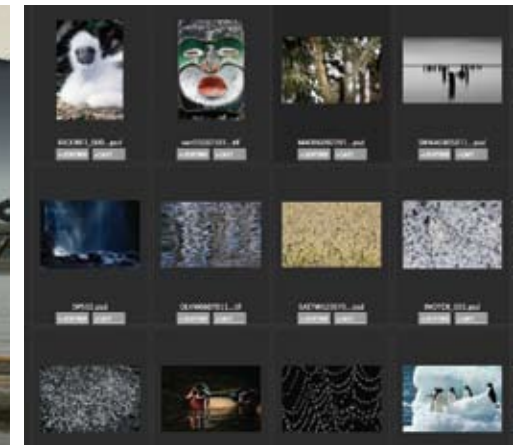
The key to such a strategy is actually quite simple, according to Sandifer: Add appropriate metadata to images that will go on the Web, in particular the Title and Description fields. Sandifer also recom-

liveBooks Implements a New Marketing Paradigm on the Web

mends renaming images that are to be put on the Web with more descriptive file names that are Google-friendly. For instance, rather than naming a file Smith-Jones1234.jpg, a better name might be Ritz_Carlton_Pasadena1234. Then it could show up in Google searches for Pasadena or for the hotel.

Sandifer points out that some websites are implemented with Flash and most search engines are unable to index the content of such sites. liveBooks sites address this issue by implementing the site in Flash, thus maintaining the desired Flash functionality, but also having a mirrored html site that the search engines can easily digest and index.

Sandifer pointed me to four photographers who are successfully using liveBooks websites and new strategies to fill in the gaps and even thrive during the current business downturn.



Art Wolfe

Art Wolfe is well known for his wildlife and nature photography, as well as his coverage of remote cultures. Wolfe says he started seeing his stock image sales take a definitive downturn about five years ago and quickly stopped submitting to the large stock photo agency he had been working with. Not only did he see his revenue per image drastically decrease but he also saw fewer and fewer images being accepted. So, he reorganized and developed other revenue opportunities. Among those endeavors was the TV show *Travels to the Edge with Art Wolfe* on PBS.

Even though he hasn't been specifically shooting for stock, he considers his work from the last five years to be among his best. So it was inevitable that he would have the desire to put his stock archive to use again. Early in 2009, he rolled out his new site that includes integration with PhotoShelter, which hosts his images (he plans to have from 25,000 to 30,000 images in the archive). Users can get to his image archive via a link on his own website, www.artwolfe.com or directly via a search with his name at PhotoShelter, www.photoshelter.com.

The CEO of Wolfe's company, Jim Martin, explains that the challenge is to drive

traffic to his images on PhotoShelter without spending a fortune. He and Wolfe were excited to tell me about a capability of PhotoShelter's that they have begun to use that will create a synergy between Wolfe and a select few other photographers that will address this problem. (Wolfe was not willing to divulge their names but he assured me that they are world-class nature and wildlife photographers.) They are creating a "virtual agency" called Wild One can visit www.wildphotography.com and be taken to a homepage for this virtual agency that will represent this select set of shooters. This targeted mini-agency, as Martin describes it, makes for a superior experience for photo buyers who will waste less time wading through second rate images, as they often have to do on large sites, yet have broader coverage than that available from a single photographer. The resulting word-of-mouth is expected to generate healthy traffic to the site.

Wolfe also shares that their tracking efforts have revealed that affiliations are even more important for generating good website traffic than the usual Search Engine Optimization tactics of including proper metadata for Google and other Web spiders to index. So, he makes it a point

to contribute to appropriate online publications and blogs and is happy to be interviewed in publications such as this one. The published links back to his site are what make all the difference. (When Google sees many references to a site it thinks that the site is important and thus deserving of a higher ranking. At least, this is what many intelligent people have deduced. Of course, only Google knows the details of how it actually works.)

"We look forward to showing a much wider range of work than anyone has seen before," says Martin, highlighting another one of the attractions of selling stock directly. "And because our overhead is so low, we'll be able to offer Rights Managed images at a considerable discount."

"The future looks good," says Wolfe. "I'm very enthusiastic. The technology and the timing couldn't be more perfect. Many people would argue that the downturn in the economy is putting a crimp in their style. But I think there are opportunities during lean times and they are there for people who are creative and have a vision."

Martin concurs and concludes with a poignant pun that photographers can appreciate more than anyone. "These are the times when the landscape changes."

HOME ABOUT CONTACT US FACEBOOK ME! PORTRAITS WEDDINGS SUBSCRIBE

Alex Rodriguez Photography

Online Wedding of the "Miami" A-List



Juniet & Adolfo's Engagement Session

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ALEX RODRIGUEZ

This past week I had a blast with Juniet and Adolfo at the [Miami-Chick Canary Fair](#) photographing their engagement. After clearing "security" we headed into the fairgrounds and waited for an amazing sunset followed by the brilliant canopy of lights that you can only find at the fair! And then quickly get to work. I am really looking forward to their wedding next year but for now enjoy this preview.



THANKS TO!



APRIL 2009

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

• MAR






IMAGES COPYRIGHT © ALEX RODRIGUEZ

Alex Rodriguez

Alex Rodriguez is a wedding photographer in Miami, FL, who is using social networking technology in an efficient way to fill the gaps he began seeing toward the latter part of last year. What he noticed was that the phone still rang and he continued to get bookings but that his clients were suddenly far more cost-conscious. Before the financial crisis he was easily able to up-sell and add engagement sessions, parent and friend albums, etc., to his usual packages. But after the crisis, he began to see resistance to purchasing such options.

Fortunately, though, he has found himself filling up that gap with new clients that he is finding thanks to social networking. As I am writing this, Alex has 4345 Facebook friends. When he updates his blog, he sends a Twitter message pointing to the blog entry. Since Twitter only allows 140

characters, the message contains only a brief intro and the URL (website address) of the blog. Since the URL can be quite long, he takes it to the next step and uses the site [tinyurl.com](#) to take the long URL and create a shorter one, ensuring he can fit it all into his Twitter message. Alex also uses a Twitter capability to automatically send the identical post to his Facebook friends. He tracks the resulting website traffic and says he sees impressive spikes when he sends out posts. Above all, he is booking more clients.

I looked at Alex's blog post and noticed that he, too, is clued in to the need to make it easy for Web crawlers to index him. On his latest blog entry at [www.alexrodrigueznotebook.com](#), he shows photos and mentions the church name, hotel name and even the orchestra leader in his

comments. At the end of the entry he gets even more detailed, including a section with credits that almost beg to be indexed. Alex takes the trouble to provide links for the church, pastor, reception venue, orchestra, flowers and lighting vendor, hair and make-up person and even for transportation, both for the chauffeur and the luxury or vintage car service.

His liveBooks site is [www.alexrodriguezphotography.com](#). You'll find him high on the list when you search for Miami wedding photographers. He confirms that one of the strategies that make this possible requires including critical metadata in the images, specifically the venue, location and of course the word "wedding." While he continues to do print advertising Alex is clearly pleased to see his new marketing strategies begin to pay off so nicely.



IMAGES COPYRIGHT © ANN HAMILTON

Ann Hamilton

Ann Hamilton was interviewed by *U.S. News & World Report* about her experience as a recently laid-off public relations employee at a dotcom company in January 2000. The reporter asked what Hamilton planned to do next. She spontaneously said she would be a professional photographer, though she'd had little experience with photography. "I don't know why I blurted it out, but something inside was telling me I wanted to be an artist, I wanted to have my own business."

She began photographing weddings and has been extremely successful doing so. Ironically, though, it is her dog photography business that has been getting more and more traction since she took the first steps in this direction in 2005. She loves shooting weddings, but she loves dogs too. Ann developed a simple but appealing style of dog photography, initially working out of a 330-square foot boutique storefront in the Cow Hollow neighborhood of San Francisco. The space generated a lot of

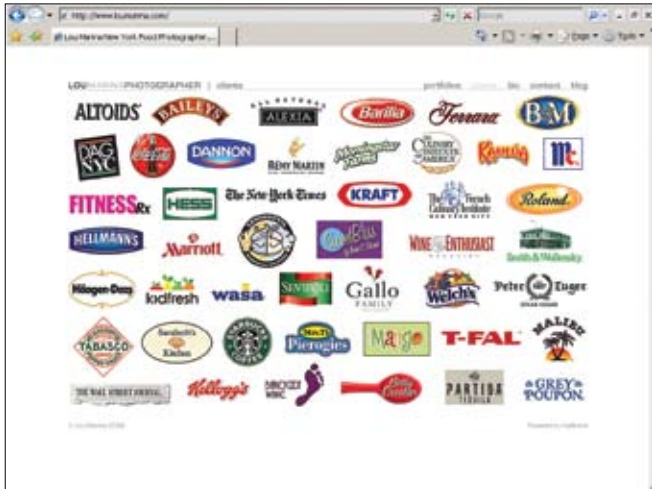
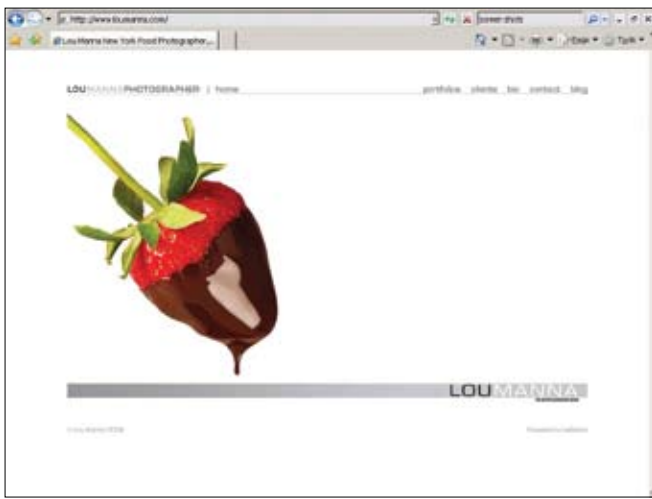
walk-in traffic and she managed to squeeze a shooting space into it. She says she commonly found people staring through the window as she was involved in a portrait session, which, as she points out, gives new meaning to the expression, "How much is that doggie in the window?"

Ann recently decided she needs more space to stretch out and has moved to the more appropriately named Dog Patch neighborhood where she is putting finishing touches on her new studio. Besides the fees she gets from shooting dog portraits—she also licenses the images as advertising for companies like Wag Hotel, a luxury pet hotel. She secured their business by first approaching them to shoot their store opening, which led to Wag Hotel to invite her to display her work gallery-style in their stores and eventually to licensing her images for their ads.

Ann also relies on social networking to market herself. To see her humorous twist on it visit twitter.com/bogiethepug where

her pug plays a starring role. "I promote Bogie," she says. "And he has quite a following. Seriously, he's huge in the industry." It would seem that she is not exaggerating as Bill Hurter, my editor, confirms that, "Bogie is the best. A cult hero!"

With the success of the doggie business and a bit of a downturn in the wedding industry, Ann began to entertain the idea that perhaps she was becoming more of a pet photographer than a wedding shooter. She reveals to me with great excitement the latest news: that *American Photo* has chosen her as one of its Top 10 Wedding Photographers of 2009. It was a welcomed acknowledgment that she could successfully be both a wedding and dog photographer. Hamilton says that one of the things she loves about liveBooks is how she is able to elegantly show both her wedding photography and her dog photography in two complementary sites, both accessible through a single entry page at www.annhamilton.com.



Lou Manna

THIS PAGE IMAGES COPYRIGHT © LOU MANNA

Lou Manna recently published *Digital Food Photography* and is soon to roll out his next book, *More Digital Food Photography*. His publisher found him via his website, www.loumanna.com, which he says receives 1.5 million hits per year. So how does he get such traffic? Excellent food photography is just the beginning.

Lou gives a lot of credit to his liveBooks site, saying he likes its clean look and the large images. Since liveBooks coached him to name his pictures so that the search engines would find them more easily (for example chocolate-dipped strawberries, rainbow cookies, chocolate pudding, prosciutto and figs, etc.) traffic to the site has gone up. Lou also has over 1000 Facebook friends, reconnecting him with college friends, old business contacts, etc. He also uses other social media networking sites like LinkedIn, Twitter, MySpace and Flickr. But he says there is nothing better than a face-to-face meeting and a handshake. Lou himself recommends perfecting the “elevator pitch.” “You’ve got to tell me your life story in half a minute and make it exciting for

me,” he says. He is also a strong believer in putting a beautiful image on your business card to make you stand out. And speaking of business cards, he says, “I’ve got boxes of business cards, I have thousands of people in my email database, I go to networking functions—it’s all just part of the package. You can’t just have a great website.”

Lou says he saw his photography business slowing down in November, due to the recession, which has only motivated him to continue reinventing himself as more than a photographer. He is increasingly positioning himself as a teacher, lecturer, writer and consultant. Lou teaches workshops and seminars, which people from all over the world attend. Visit his blog, www.digitalfoodphotos.com/blog/, and you’ll see him promoting his Photo Tips via Skype. Basically, he charges for photo consulting over the Internet so that shooters can “tap into my 35 years of experience on a wide range of topics.” He can do this in his own studio using a video camera or Web cam, so a photographer in Boise or Bulgaria can see what he is talking about.

Lou is an Olympus Visionary and speaks across the country.

No Doubt, the landscape has changed right in front of photographers’ eyes. But we have had to adapt to equally big challenges before, such as the shift to digital. While it took a few years that shift is now a thing of the past for most photographers. From that experience, it is clear that an ability to be flexible and leverage new technology is clearly one of the ways that photographers can stay competitive. For better or worse, it seems that technology and photography are closely intertwined. Often it is those who master the technical aspects of photography whose work excels artistically. So, it is not surprising that those who embrace the new high-tech marketing paradigms will be in the best position to succeed.

Writer/photographer Larry Brownstein is based in Los Angeles, CA. He has authored several photography books, is represented by Getty Images, Alamy and California Stock Photo and has a growing wedding and portrait photography business. His website is www.larrybrownstein.com. His blog is <http://larrybrownstein.bigfolioblog.com/>