

# Enter the Blogosphere

Blogs offer photographers an innovative and powerful outlet for marketing and creative expression

By Ethan G. Salwen

“I blog, therefore I am,” jokes international corporate/industrial location photographer Suzanne Salvo, who maintains a blog to promote the business she runs with her husband, Chris. There is wisdom in Suzanne’s joke, as blogging is quickly proving to be a truly important development in the ever-evolving way in which the Web affects personal lifestyles, information sharing and business practices. As creative professionals with archives of stunning images at their fingertips, photographers are in a unique position to benefit economically and creatively from blogs.

## The Power of Blogging

Fuse the words “Web” and “log” and you get “blog,” a powerful Web commu-

nication tool that can easily be mastered by all professional photographers. Using incredibly simple (often free) online blogging applications, photographers can join the blogging craze and publish any combination of text and photographs for a worldwide audience—far more easily than updating a traditional website. These customizable, dynamic, journal-styled logs often focus on the blogger’s personal experiences. However, blogs can also be used to promote business, directly and indirectly.

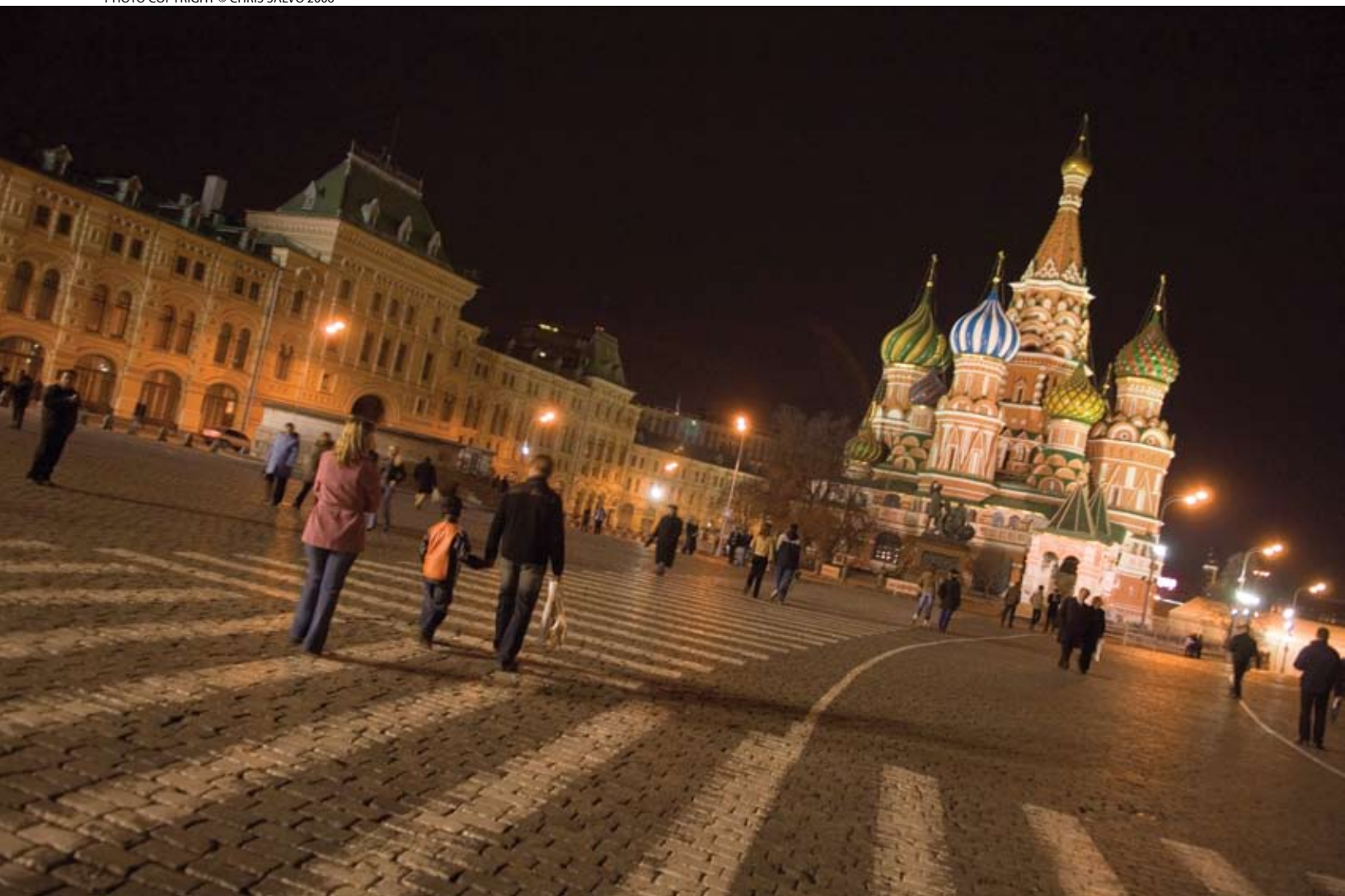
“At first I didn’t see any business benefit from a blog,” says Suzanne, who had been regularly updating her company website with new photos and content. “But blogging is different. It’s fast, quick and easy. It’s personal, intimate and casual. It’s creatively

satisfying and fun. And to my surprise, our clients love it.” As Suzanne indicates, by their nature, blogs are very personal. And the key to successfully marketing with blogs is to share engaging and relevant personal information with both established clients and future business prospects in mind—even in blogs that are primarily geared toward friends and family.

Although the best blogs come across as casual and relaxed, it can take a lot of thought for them appear that way. It also takes careful consideration—with

**Red Square at Night:** *We felt totally safe in Red Square, Moscow, even at night, which in a strange way we found disappointing. My blog post from Russia poked fun at the iconic St. Basil’s Cathedral. Photograph by Chris Salvo.*

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*"Dancer with Garage Doors,"  
from Chase Jarvis's Urban  
Dance Series, 2006.*

clear marketing goals and sound blog-building strategies in mind—to ensure that blogging does not become a waste of time, or worse, a liability to a photographer's business image. Luckily, blogging strategies and concepts are easy to grasp, and there are innovative ways to successfully incorporate blogging into an overall marketing strategy with little effort and clear returns.

## Unconventional is the New Conventional

"For me, there is no line between personal life and professional life," says Suzanne, explaining that she and her husband have worked together for more than 20 years. It is for this reason that the life/work of the Salvos lends itself so well to blogging. Suzanne's blog postings read like informative and witty op-ed pieces on a wide range of topics—from running a successful photography business to experiences photographing in Iraq to Italian culinary delights. Excellent writing, quality photography, and interesting personal stories combine in a neatly formatted layout that has relevance for clients, friends, and family members alike.

More than 75 percent of the Salvos' blog traffic comes from viewers other than family and friends, and the content certainly builds a much broader picture of the sweat and passion the Salvos dedicate to each of their projects. "Clients feel they are getting an uncensored inside peek into what our lives are like and who we are," says Suzanne. "It's a way for them to get to know us personally. That builds trust. And trust is

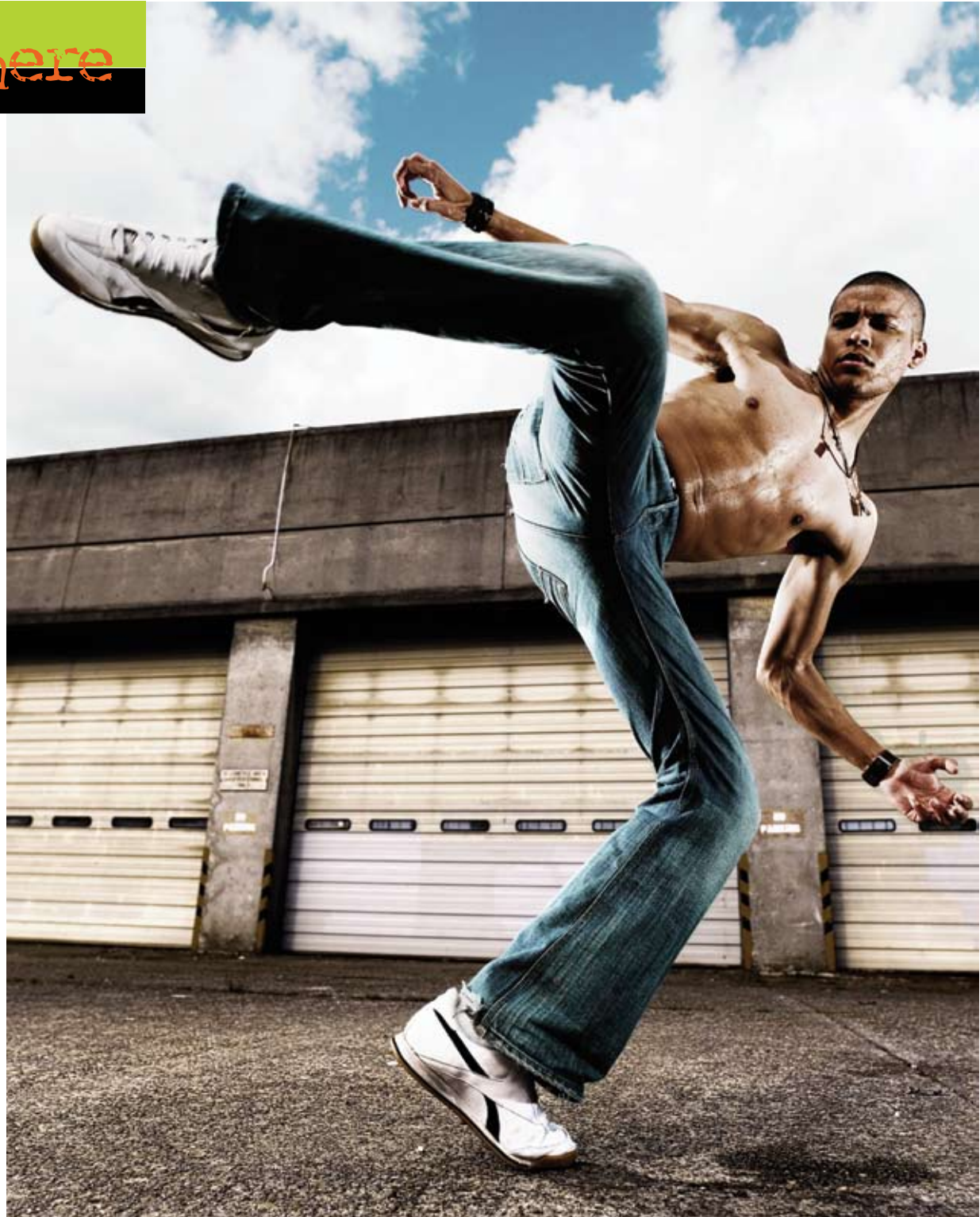


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really what makes a client choose one photographer over another."

Photographers who lack the time or skills to regularly update their websites are likely to be particularly excited about blogs. "We've always included storytelling content on our website because it fits well with our rather unconventional style of marketing," explains Suzanne. "Switching from working on our main website to working on my blog was like getting an upgrade from economy to first class. You essentially arrive at the same place with a website or a blog, but the blog is easier, faster and more

fun for me to work on, and it is more pleasurable for the audience as well."

## Web: The Next Generation

Blogs offer photographers an innovative and intriguing outlet for sharing images and ideas that would not fit into the scope of a more traditional website. "I've always been sort of dismayed at the general lack of openness and the amount of pretentiousness in the world of photography," says Chase Jarvis, a Seattle-based commercial photographer. "Starting a blog seemed like a great way to use the new media to

## Strategies for Successful Power Blogging

- **Start a blog NOW using Blogger.com...and then delete it.** All the articles, books, and research in the world cannot teach you as much about the potential of blogging as actually jumping in and experiencing blogging firsthand. Luckily, starting a blog is easier than signing up for email (literally). Go to [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com), and in less than 15 minutes, you'll be up and running. Play around, have some fun, then delete this test blog, unless you are happy with it and are sure that Blogger.com is the blogging service for you.

- **Review a wide range of blogs.** One of the joys of blogging is the pleasure of finding one's blogging voice over time. However, professionals need to carefully consider the goals of their blogs to ensure they will serve their overall marketing efforts. Take a couple weeks to investigate the blogosphere. What draws you in? What turns you off? Digesting a few dozen blogs will give you much better sense of what you want to emulate.

- **Write a short planning document.** Pre-planning might seem contrary to the nature of blogging. However, before you begin to allow your blog to grow organically, a little focused thinking is in order. Outline your objectives, audience, editorial focus, intended content and publishing schedule.

- **Focus on the text.** Ironically, professional photographers are probably the last people who should publish blogs that only feature photography, called photoblogs. Photographers already have main websites with stellar imagery, and quality writing is essential to power blogging. Nonetheless, you should be very realistic about your writing skills. If you are a weak writer, limit your text to a few sentences that describe your images or photographic process.

break that old mold of keeping secrets and to welcome in a new generation based on sharing.

"By 'new media' I am really talking about 'Web 2.0,'" Chase explains. "Web 2.0 is a buzzword coined by web guru Tim O'Reilly that refers to a second-generation of Internet-based communications that are not traditional and that emphasize online collaboration and sharing among users." Given the fast past of Internet evolution, "traditional" takes on a whole new meaning in terms of communication. But reviewing a broad range of photographers' blogs and how they relate to those photographers' main websites quickly reveals that

in Chase's life, work, and Web presence. "Admittedly, I'm somewhat sophisticated in my approach to business, and I take things seriously," says Chase. "But at the same time, I'm quite whimsical artistically in that I try to focus my creative energies on what grabs my attention organically. I also allow myself to explore a lot, and my blog has become a wonderful part of this organic exploration." Given this, it makes sense that Chase's main website is highly polished and presents a clear business message to a targeted audience. Chase's blog does not detract from this sophisticated professionalism, but it does give a clearer sense of his whimsical nature.



PHOTO COPYRIGHT © JOSEPH POBERESKIN

**Statue of Liberty:** Statue Of Liberty and New York City skyline at dusk. This image by Joseph Pobereskin was taken on September 12, 2001, one day after the World Trade Center tragedy.

the websites of yesteryear (read: pre-2005) are indeed traditional. Even the most well conceived and well executed websites seem traditional in comparison to a regularly updated blog.

For professional photographers, the truly exciting potential of a Web 2.0 approach is the opportunity to create a main website and a blog site that combine for a depth of experience that was not possible on one site alone. Until recently, Web designers have focused on creating multiple pages to build one website. But for designers taking advantage of the Web 2.0 world, the new paradigm is to focus on creating multiple websites to build one online presence. The potential of this dynamic is seen

## Sell Yourself—Softly

"Blogging is worth my time because I get to stretch my wings a bit," says New Jersey-based commercial photographer Joseph Pobereskin. "On my blog, in the context of idiosyncratic ramblings, I get to step outside of my known specialties and show something completely different." While enjoying a new creative outlet, Joseph is also keenly aware of the marketing potential of blogs. "A blog gives photographers another sales platform," he says. "Though I think it has to be a very, very soft sell."

Joseph's blog writing is intelligent and wittily self-effacing, and he only posts quality images. However, reviewing his blog reveals no indication that his blog is a conscious part of his marketing efforts. "This is a low-key sales effort," Joseph explains. "I don't put any real planning into my blog entries. When I have an idea, I

# Blogosphere

- **Consider Image Selection Carefully.**

While blogs offer you a chance to relax and publish non-portfolio-caliber images, keep in mind that a blog will affect your reputation as an imagemaker. You should not stifle your creativity, but you should ask, "Is this an image that I want clients, potential clients, and fans to see?"

- **Keep your target audience in mind.**

As you blog, ask yourself, "For whom am I posting this picture and/or writing this text?" Keep your most critical clients in mind to ensure that the imagery and text you post—even on personal topics—represent you in the best professional light.

- **Get personal, but not too personal.**

Blog with sincerity and feel free to share personal musings, but don't turn off your clients. Think "business casual" and not "nudist colony."

- **Add new content regularly.** There is nothing worse in the blogosphere than encountering a dead blog. So before you begin to blog in earnest, make sure you are committed to adding content on a regular basis. And pace yourself. Don't start out too fast and then fall off. Take it easy and be consistent.

- **Promote your blog.** Your blog hosting service will likely include various automated blog-promoting options that you should investigate. However, the most effective form of blog promotion is to email an announcement to relevant clients when you post particularly interesting new content. Also be sure to add a link to your blog from your main website, as well as to your email signature and your business card.

- **Seek feedback.**

There are a number of tracking applications (often free) that allow you to monitor traffic to your blog. However, to best guide your adventures in the blogosphere, seek honest feedback from friends, clients and other readers. >>>

just sit down and spin it out. My blogging is more stream-of-consciousness than the traditional copywriting of my main site, which is seriously hard work."

But Joseph is always thinking about potential clients and image sales as he blogs. "For instance, I wrote a piece to inform my photographer readers about new copyright legislation," says Joseph. "I used a picture of the Capitol Building in that post. Now, even though I haven't stated it directly, all my readers know I've been to D.C. and that I have some pictures of D.C., even though I don't have any on my main website.

- **Principles for Blogging Success**

Suzanne Salvo wittily sums up her blogging advice to other photographers as follows: "The Salvo recipe for a full-flavored, richly rewarding blog posting: 'Take one home-grown, interesting thought; add fresh, attention-grabbing photos to taste; season with a generous sprinkling of humor. Post until done. For more satisfying results, repeat regularly.'"

This is an excellent recipe, but not everyone has Suzanne's

knack for writing, and many photography bloggers—in keeping with the potential of Web 2.0—will use this media in completely innovative ways. However, three critical principles apply to all photographers:

- **Know why you're blogging.** The most important factor for succeeding with your blogging efforts is to know exactly why you are doing it, both before you start and as your goals shift over time.

- **Do it well.** If you are going to blog, make sure you do it well, as your blog will influence how clients see you. Your blog

can be casual, and you can use this venue to present a different side of your professional identity. However, make sure to keep your blog more "business casual" than "beachwear."

- **Enjoy blogging!** Enjoyment of your blog experience is no small matter. If you don't enjoy blogging, you won't do it, and your blog could turn into a liability. If you



"Diver with Bubbles," from Chase Jarvis' Water Series 2006

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do enjoy blogging you will look forward to posting entries as a break from other responsibilities. In less than two hours a week, you can easily publish new work, express ideas and share stories with a wide readership—all while inexpensively and effectively marketing your services and your talents. CC

Ethan G. Salwen is a freelance photographer and writer based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He covers a wide variety of topics for professional photographers including digital technology, marketing techniques, and industry trends. Salwen received his training in photography at RIT and earned received English degrees from both New York University and Columbia University.