

## **The Social Media Blackbook for Photographers**

Last revision: Jan 30, 2015

By [Eric Kim](#)

So why did I start to write this book? Well, I think I have been blessed with “skills” in social media– and I wanted to put together all the information I personally knew regarding social media (in order to help my fellow photographers).

Here is a brief outline of what topics I wish to cover in the book:

- Chapter 1: Why social media?
- Chapter 2: What is social media?
- Chapter 3: The importance of creating value in social media
- Chapter 4: How to gain more followers
- Chapter 5: The importance of engagement in social media
- Chapter 6: Common mistakes in social media
- Chapter 7: Social media strategies, tips, techniques
- Chapter 8: Conclusion

### ***Chapter 1: Why social media?***

So the first question you might be thinking to yourself is this: why is social media relevant and how can it help me as a photographer?

Honestly at the end of the day– you don’t really “need” social media. Social media is just another way to publish your work, market yourself as a photographer, and to get your work out there, get recognized, and get people to follow you.

I have been fascinated with social media the last 10 years of my life– ever since I was 16 years old and started my first “blog” on Xanga. I was fascinated by the

idea that I could write down my thoughts and share it with (potentially) millions of people out there.

My thoughts have changed and evolved regarding social media over the years.

First of all, I think **“less is more” when it comes to social media for photographers**. I think the general problem is that photographers think that more social media is better. But I try to take the “via negativa approach” (from Nassim Taleb in his excellent philosophical book [‘Antifragile’](#)) – in which subtracting is often better than addition.

Secondly, I think that **social media can be destructive**. I personally have gone through the ups-and-downs of social media in the sense that my mood and emotions were dependent on how many “likes”, “favorites”, page views, and comments I would get on my photos (or blog). In my past experiences, I would crave this external recognition a lot– trying to participate in these mutual “circle-jerks” amongst photographers (if you comment/favorite/like my photo, I will comment/favorite/like your photo).

Thirdly, **I think the most important thing about social media is adding value**– rather than trying to become more “famous”, trying to get more followers, and trying to get more “fans.” One of the first questions I get from photographers regarding social media is “How do I get more followers?” It is a common question (that I once myself thought about a lot). While I will share some of my personal tips, tricks, and strategies in terms of getting more followers– I first challenge you, the viewer, to think to yourself: “Why does it matter that I have a lot of followers?” After all, the number of followers you have is useless. More important is the quality of followers you have. For example, if I had a Magnum photographer like Bruce Gilden following me on Twitter– that would be 100x more important than a million 13-year old kids who like to Instagram their cappuccinos following me on Twitter.

I think another common mistake or misconception people have about social media is that it is somehow “evil.” I know some photographers who purposefully try not to use social media– thinking that it will somehow corrupt their soul. While it is true that an over-obsession with social media can indeed

corrupt your soul, if used wisely– social media has far more benefits than disadvantages.

The dosage is the poison. If you have too much social media in your diet, it will be extremely unhealthy for you. If you have too little social media in your diet, you won't gain any benefits. This is kind of like medicine– too much medicine can kill you, but not taking medicine for the sake of it won't help that bacterial infection go away.

I think ultimately the best way to use social media is mindfully. I think social media can be a beautiful way to connect with hundreds of like-minded photographers from all around the world. Social media has helped me gain new friendships, gain new perspectives in photography, and to get my work out there (which allows me to teach street photography for a living). But then again there is a dark side– too much social media can cause depression (thinking that your work sucks compared to others), feeling of inadequacy (not having as many followers/likes/favorites as other photographers), or artistic degradation (creating photos to please your audience, rather than pleasing yourself).

So before we continue– let us go onto the next chapter, which is identifying the question: What exactly is social media?

## ***Chapter 2: What is social media?***

There are a bazillion definitions of “social media” online. For the purposes of this book, I will just make up my own definition:

**Social media is a platform that allows people to connect ideas with one another.**

Social media doesn't necessarily have to be Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Social media can be any platform– whether it be a website, blog, or forum– which connects people and ideas together.

The reason why they call it “social” media is that in a sense– it should be “social.” You cannot have “social media” with just one person. You need at least

several people in your network to make it useful. Would you want to be the only person on the Internet who used Instagram? Hell no– Instagram is only useful, helpful, interesting, or fun because there are many other users who use it.

Social media also is a way to connect people together. I have best utilized social media to bridge online connections to the offline. For example, I see one of the biggest advantages of Twitter to coordinate 1:1 meet-ups in “real life.” Twitter is almost like a public text-messaging service– in which you can contact anyone in the world (without knowing their actual phone number).

Social media is also a way to connect ideas– and for us photographers, I think an “idea” can be a photograph. Photographs by themselves aren’t interesting. It is always the concept, idea, or art behind the photograph which piques a viewer’s interest.

So social media can be best used to share your work on a large scale. I think this generation is the best time in the history of the world to be a photographer. Why? Although there is tons of competition (nowadays everyone can be a photographer with a smartphone), we have a platform (social media) that allows our images to (in theory) be seen by millions of viewers.

No longer are we restricted by physical boundaries. In the past, the number of people who could see your photography was restricted by the space of a gallery or exhibition space, by how many books you could publish, ship, and sell, and also whether you had access to a famous “gatekeeper” – who would promote your work in a magazine, newspaper, or store.

Now there are no more “gatekeepers” in the photography world. In a sense– we are all on an even playing ground. Now more than ever, our personal merit and skills and talents as photographers will determine how big our following will be and the reach of our social media platform. There are no more barriers that keep us from reaching a huge audience– the only barrier is the quality of our work, the value of our work, and the effort we put in.

Now not to say that just being a great photographer (without any marketing or social media) will help you gain millions of followers. At the end of the day, you

could be the best photographer in the world– but if you don’t know how to properly “market” your work and get it out there– nobody will ever know your work. Think about photographer Vivian Maier– who was a great photographer but never showed her work to anybody. Even though she made great images, she never gained attention or fame in her lifetime, because she didn’t properly share her work with others.

So ultimately I want for us all to broaden our definition of “social media”– I think social media is any sort of idea (manifested in words, pictures, videos, etc.) that have the potential to be social (to be shared, consumed, and re-mixed by others).

### ***Chapter 3: The importance of creating value in social media***

So before we get to the obvious topics like “how do I gain more followers” or “how do I get more likes/favorites?” – I want to talk about the importance of creating “value” as a photographer on social media.

I have a few heuristics (rules of thumb) when it comes to social media:

- Don’t Instagram photos of your food or coffee
- Don’t tweet things that you yourself wouldn’t retweet
- When in doubt, don’t share it
- Don’t share more than 1 image a day on social media
- Don’t spam people
- Don’t use too many hashtags

There are just a few that come to the top of my mind– essentially you want to *avoid* doing things that don’t add “value” to your viewer.

So what exactly is “value”?

Value is something that has worth to another person. Something of value can be inspirational, moving, interesting, funny, sad, and can perhaps change the person’s life.

Value includes things that we think are precious. Valuable things also tend to be scarce.

The enemy of value is “noise” (or spam). In social media one of the biggest problems is that people share way too much. They share boring shit. Honestly, nobody cares if you had a muffin and a cappuccino for breakfast. People are interested though if you share a relevant photography story, if you share a strong image that inspires, or if you ask questions that engage people or create debates.

So before you share anything on social media– whether it be Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram think to yourself the following questions:

- Will this inspire my viewer?
- If someone shared this with me, would I find it interesting?
- Is this information valuable to my viewer, or is it just to pump up my own ego?
- Will people find this interesting?
- Do they really need to see this or know this?
- Is this spammy?

I think one of the biggest things we should avoid in social media as photographers are things that boost our ego.

Why is that? Well– have you ever been to a party and met someone who had a huge ego? Someone who couldn’t stop talking about themselves, and didn’t give a damn about anybody else? Nobody likes that guy– don’t be that guy.

That guy on social media is the one who is only interested in broadcasting– and not interested in engaging with other people. They might share things about themselves that are narcissistic– or things that make them brag about themselves.

But rather, be a generous person on social media. Try to create and add value to your followers and to the Internet at large. Everyone always loves generous

people– as they are genuine, want to help, and love sharing things that are of value to others.

So rather than thinking the question: “How can I gain more followers on social media” – ask yourself, “How can I create more value and help out more people out there?” **The more value you create, the more followers you will gain.**

#### ***Chapter 4: How to gain more followers***

So I briefly mentioned this a second ago– “**The more value your create, the more followers you will gain**”.

So as a photographer, how can you create more “value”? Here are some ways you can create value:

##### **1. Start a blog**

I think one of the easiest ways a photographer can build value and gain a following in social media is to create a blog. A blog is a home base that is owned by you (assuming you self-host your server)– and is a place where other people can find you, interact with you, and a place where you can share photos, knowledge, or information (which is hopefully of value to others).

For me, I wouldn’t be where I am if it wasn’t for my blog. Before anybody knew who I was– I first started my street photography blog because there weren’t any resources on the Internet that gave practical tips, advice, and information on “how to shoot street photography.” I remember when I was starting street photography, I couldn’t find any useful websites on the Internet– so I decided to make my own, learning as I went, and trying to help others and create “value.”

So how do you know what kind of blog to make? My rule of thumb is this: **think about creating a blog that you are so passionate about that even if you were never paid for it, you would update it everyday for at least 10 years.**

When I started my street photography blog, I had no intention of making a full-time living as a photographer. Rather, I just wanted to solve a problem (no

information on the internet on how to shoot street photography) while creating value for others. I did it for the pure joy and love of it. When I had a full-time job, I would wake up early in the morning, blog for an hour or two, go to work, brainstorm more ideas for my blog during work and lunch, interact and help people on social media during work, and write more articles and record more videos after work.

You want to start a blog that you are intrinsically motivated by (something deep within your soul which inspires you to do it). You don't want to start a blog that you are extrinsically motivated by (the hope of gaining more followers, making money, becoming famous).

A good way to figure out what kind of blog to start is by asking yourself the question: **“What kind of blog would I want to read?”** For me, I wanted to desperately read a blog on how to shoot street photography, how to overcome my fear of shooting street photography, and to learn how to make better street photos. Therefore I started my street photography blog this way.

Another way to think about what kind of blog to start is to **try to solve a problem**. If you notice that a lot of photographers have problems not getting good feedback and critique on their work, perhaps you can start a photo-critique blog that solves that problem. If you notice a lot of landscape photographers who have a hard time staying inspired when in their boring suburbs, perhaps you can start a blog on how to make interesting landscapes in the suburbs. If you notice a lot of portrait photographers who are nervous or awkward interacting with models, perhaps you can make a blog that is dedicated to helping people build their confidence interact with models.

At the end of the day– I would say just start a photoblog on any topic which interests you (and don't worry whether it has been done before or not). If you are insanely passionate about street photography, start it (don't be discouraged because I already have a street photography blog). If you are passionate about lighting, start a blog on photography lighting. If you are passionate about portraiture, go for that too.

The excuse “**but it has been done before**” is the biggest bullshit excuse you can have. Why? Because who cares if it has been done before. *You* haven’t done it before. Your voice is unique. Your voice is special. You have a perspective that nobody else in the world has (but you).

And honestly the most important thing about starting a blog is to just start. When I first started my street photography blog – I actually had no idea what I would do. If you see the first post I ever made on my blog, I just wrote a “hello world” post that said that I was starting a new blog, and I had no idea where it was going. A few posts in, you can see some random snapshots of me and Cindy exploring Wisconsin and eating food. It took me several years (1–2 years) before I was able to hone a “voice” and a style to my blog– which has been more focused on education.

So if you start a blog, what kind of “content” or posts do you make? Once again– try to create “value” and solve problems.

I personally have found it is good to write “how-to” posts. Why? How-to posts are generally aimed to be helpful and useful to others– as you can share your own perspective on how to do something. People use Google a lot to search how to do certain things. Therefore if you write a lot of how-to articles, you will naturally get picked up on Google– and people will find your blog and content.

Another good strategy is to feature the work of other photographers. I think most photographers want their work seen, appreciated, and published. A lot of photographers I know want to get their work seen in magazines, exhibitions, blogs, or other websites. Even if you are a small website or blog starting off– people still are flattered and honored to be asked to have their photos shared. If super-famous photographers don’t want to be featured on your blog– no worries, start small. Start off by asking photographers on Flickr or Instagram whose work inspires you (who might not have that many followers).

The benefit of publishing the work of others is that you create value in their life (giving them the happiness of having their work shared), and you also give the opportunity to build your blog. If you publish an interview or feature with a photographer, they will naturally share to their social networks about the post–

which will cause more people to land on your blog (and hopefully stay for a long time).

Another good way to run a blog is to share interesting news, information, or posts that you might find on the web. For example, I have a hard time following any street photography news on the Internet. However my good friend Karl Edwards has started a street photography news blog: <http://streetshootr.com>. He does the hard work of scouring the Internet for any interesting news or updates regarding street photography– and therefore adds value to the lives of street photographers.

In regards to starting a photography blog, I recommend <http://wordpress.org> and self-hosting your own photography blog. Why? There is a lot more flexibility and customization by hosting your own photography blog on your own server. If you sign up for <http://bluehost.com> there is an easy “1-click install” for Wordpress (if you aren’t technically savvy). If you don’t want to deal with that headache, you can always use free options like <http://blogger.com> or <http://Wordpress.com>.

## 2. Collaborate

Another good way to gain more followers on social media is to collaborate with people who already have a lot more followers than you.

One of the best ways to do this is by “guest posting” on other popular websites or blogs. For example, if you get a guest blog post on PetaPixel, Digital Photography School, f-stoppers, The Phoblographer, or any other popular photography site– you leverage their audience to gain more followers.

If you ever do a guest blog post for another site– you want to make sure to make that guest blog post as damn good as possible. You want to try to create as much value as possible– by making it as helpful, interesting, funny, or inspirational as you can. And at the end of the guest blog post, include links back to your own blog and social media channels.

If you specifically want more followers on a certain social media network (let's say Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram)– you want to get other people to tag you. So if you did a guest blog post for Digital Photography School, you would ask them to tag your Facebook fan page when they post your article to their Facebook fan page. The same goes with Twitter, Instagram, or any other social media network out there.

Also notice that I am not trying to give the nitty-gritty on the tactics for each social media network, because I want to focus on the fundamentals on social media. Who knows how long Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram will be before the next big thing comes along? Just think about how people thought MySpace was going to take over the world– and look at it now. Facebook took it over. But nowadays, people don't even like using Facebook that much– they prefer Instagram. And now a lot of people on Instagram are using Snapchat. The chain goes on and on.

Fundamentals of social media strategies are the most important.

Getting back to the point– no man is his own island. If you want to gain more followers and have more of an impact, think of other ways you can collaborate with other photographers or social media moguls. If you find something interesting on the Internet, you can email it or share it with someone with a lot of followers (and ask them to mention your name). Even better yet– don't ask them to mention you, if that person really thinks that piece of information is useful, they will mention you as a courtesy hat-tip.

If you don't have any interest on starting your own blog, perhaps offer to blog for free for another bigger photography blog. Perhaps offer to also run the social media accounts for a smaller social media blog, or for a famous photographer (who doesn't have time to manage social media) – this will give you a lot of great training in social media, and also give you the chance to “cross-promote” your own social media account).

What makes us human is our ability to cooperate and collaborate with one another. So let us leverage our own strengths, add value and help others, to ultimately help us gain more of an impact and following in the world.

### 3. Don't die

I think one of the best strategies in social media is the following: **Don't die.**

What do I mean by that? Well, the problem that most bloggers make is that 99.9% of blogs die after the first month. People are simply not committed or passionate enough to blog for that long of a time. I would say the biggest "success" of my blog is that I have blogged non-stop (usually at least 3 times a week) for the last ~4 years. I have at least 1,000+ blog posts on street photography, which have helped me make it to the first-page of Google for "street photography" (currently I am #3 on Google for "street photography", and #1 on Google for "street photography blog").

So in a nutshell: **you can never stop posting.**

Now I don't want you to confuse this by thinking that you have to be constantly posting multiple times a day. In theory, you can just post just once a day, once a week, or once a month– but you just need to be consistent.

Consistency is so important in social media– because once you fall out of the consciousness of your followers or the public, people will forget you– and stop following you.

Once you first start gaining a decent amount of followers, you want to ride the gravy train. You have to keep up the hustle, and continue to ride that wave– to gain more followers and to gain more influence.

Let's say that you publish a YouTube video that goes viral (and you want more YouTube followers)– if you want to continue to gain more followers, you really need to use that golden opportunity to continue producing videos, and so people will have an incentive to follow you.

Similarly, if you do a guest blog post that goes viral– you better keep updating your blog and social media networks, to have people continue to be interested in you.

Growth in social media is like building muscles. If you want to constantly build muscle, you have to consistently (over a long period of time) go to the gym, eat the right proteins, and get enough rest. You can't just sit on your ass and expect to get a 6-pack or bulging biceps.

Generally for social media, **I recommend trying to post at least once a day.** I find that posting more than 3 times a day has diminishing returns. **If you post more than 3 times a day, people just perceive you as spammy** (based on my personal experience).

**People are creatures of habits.** If you drink coffee (like I do) – can you imagine going at least one day without having coffee? To many, drinking a cup of coffee is like a morning ritual. So think about having your social media networks like that– **try to get people hooked to you by consistently showing up.**

#### 4. Create epic “content”

If you want to really gain a large following in social media and be recognized for your photography, you need to actually make great (or “epic”) content– which includes photos, articles, videos, etc.. No matter how savvy you are at social media or marketing, you will never gain a huge following without making and sharing great content.

So if you want people to know you as a great photographer– first focus on making great photographs. How can you become a better photographer? Study the work of the masters, buy a lot of great photography books, attend photography classes, seminars, or workshops, and get honest feedback and critique on your work.

I see a lot of photographers who have a mediocre body of work, and are confused why they have little to no followers. Think to yourself the following: **What incentive would you have to follow a photographer who has crappy photographs?** If you make truly great photos, people will take note and start following you.

When writing blog posts (or guest blog posts) – try to make your articles 10x better than anything else you have read on the topic before. Think how you can be 10x more helpful, 10x more inspirational, and perhaps 10x more in-depth than anything else on the web. Make it epic.

If you have a YouTube channel on photography– focus on making great interviews with other photographers, great equipment reviews, great photography lectures, and great presentations.

There is a saying in the social media marketing world which is: “**Content is king**”. Which means at the end of the day– the best way to “market” yourself is to just create great content (photos, articles, videos, tweets, etc.).

**Take away:**

To sum up, gaining more followers is a matter of adding value to other photographers, to write and create interesting things, and to do it consistently.

### ***Chapter 5: The importance of engagement in social media***

To be good at “social media” – you first off need to be “social.”

Think of the last time you were at a cocktail party or at a bar. Were you the person cowering in the corner and passively listening to others? Or were you the one leading the conversation, engaging others to share their opinions, and being interesting?

We can use the analogy in social media. **If you really want to gain a “follower” – you need to be a leader.**

So think of how you can better become a leader.

For me, I would like to try to be a “leader” in street photography. Therefore I try my best to share, create, and engage others when it comes to street photography. I ask a lot of questions regarding street photography to others, I

answer as many questions as I can, and I try to create articles, videos, and write books to create value to others.

In the past when the internet first started off (Web 1.0) it was very much like a broadcasting system. People on the internet would just share, announce, and broadcast how awesome and interesting they were. Think about Web 1.0 as commercials– you are being spoon-fed information, without having the chance to respond and engage with the person on the other side.

As time went on, Web 2.0 came along– in which social media gave us the chance to engage, critique, debate, and comment with one another. Now the internet was no longer just a 1-way broadcasting network, it was a 2-way conversation between the creators and the viewers.

Now we are now in a new age in which more and more people are becoming creators (not just consumers). We are bored just passively watching television– we want to create our own television channels (through YouTube). We no longer just want to look at pretty photos in National Geographic– we want to go out and create our own beautiful images. We no longer want to just listen to commentators talk on certain topics– we want to share our own voice and opinion.

So don't be that jerk at the party who is just interested in sharing his own opinion over a loudspeaker. Be the person at the party who is genuinely interested in hearing about the stories of others, who is a better listener than a speaker, who engages others, who draws other people toward them, and is interesting, riveting, fun, curious, and polite.

Think more of being a “giver” than a “taker” (for a great book on the topic I recommend the book: “[Give and take](#)”). The research has shown that the most successful people are the ones who are the biggest givers– who give more than they take, and are genuinely interested in helping the lives of others.

So how can you be more engaging when it comes to social media?

## **1. Ask questions**

Be the epicenter of debate. Start asking people questions. Other people love sharing their own opinion and thoughts. So rather than just cramming down your own opinion down the throats of others– give others the chance to share their own 2 cents.

So if a new camera comes out, ask people for their opinion. If you want a photography book recommendation, ask what books others like. If you want to provide value to others– tell others that they can ask you anything, and that you would like to respond and help them out.

## **2. Have a dialogue**

If you want to be more engaging, you want to create a dialogue with someone else. Don't just respond once and never speak to that person again. Build a connection– build a relationship, and have an on-going dialogue with that person. By creating this on-going dialogue, you will create a meaningful, lasting, and trusting relationship with that person.

## **3. Be a human being**

This might sound like the most obvious and nonsensical advice: to be a better engager on social media, try to be a good human being and be compassionate.

I think there is a shortage of compassionate people in the world (especially on social media). The world of social media tends to be overwhelmed with self-promoters and people just trying to make them more popular.

Rather– I think the best way to engage on social media is to be compassionate. Be a good listener, be loving towards others, be generous, and be a good human being.

Sometimes it is hard to be compassionate to others– because we are so self-centered. But the more we focus on others, the more we focus on listening to the problems of others– the more we can think of novel and interesting ways to be more helpful and to add value to the lives of our followers.

And going back to the point of being human– sometimes we take social media too seriously and treat it like we are a business or some “official” entity.

But nobody likes talking to a robot– use emotions. Show your heart, soul, and feelings in the way you interact with people and share interesting things with the world.

### ***Chapter 6: Common mistakes in social media***

In social media, there are lots of common mistakes that photographers make. Here are some common mistakes I see the most, and advice of things *not* to do in social media:

#### **1. Don't over-use #hashtags**

Whenever I see someone add too many hashtags to their posts (more than 1–2) I instantly un-follow them.

Why? It just puts a bad taste in my mouth. The person looks over-promotional, and only interested in getting more views/likes.

Now I know– using more hashtags is a good strategy to get more people to look at your stuff, right?

Wrong.

I give different advice: use fewer hashtags. Personally I think it is better to be really active within one hashtag than trying to spread you too thin.

For example, try to use one hashtag that is relevant to your photography topic– and engage and become part of the conversation. Don't just post a bunch of stuff to social media and expect everybody else to suddenly start following you. Rather, look at who else is posting in a certain hashtag, engage with them, ask them questions, offer them feedback, and naturally they will reciprocate by following you back (because you have added value to their life).

## **2. Don't spread yourself thin**

Honestly there are only so many hours in a day, so much mental bandwidth you have, and so much energy you have. It is limited– so I think it is a better strategy to be really good and focused in one social media platform (than trying to dominate all of them).

For example, the social media platforms that I try to focus on (in order) are Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. I find these 3 platforms the most active (in term of total users), that are the most engaging, and in which I have the most reach. I still post to other social networks (Flickr, Google+, Tumblr) – but don't dedicate too much of my time or effort on them (as I feel they aren't as active as the prior social networks I mentioned).

Another piece of advice I have is that when a new social network comes out– don't be the first one to jump on the bandwagon.

Why? It takes a few years before you find out if a certain social media platform is here to stay (or is going to be a fad and just die out).

For example, it took me a long time to join Instagram– because in the beginning I thought it was just a fad. Now it has been around for a while, and is one of the most active social networks. So I didn't have to take a risk getting super-active early on.

You might be wondering, “But Eric– if you joined Instagram early on, you could have become a ‘recommended user’ and gotten a million followers! While that might be true, a lot of these “early adopters” no longer use Instagram, and those followers also tended to be bots and non-active people. Furthermore, had Instagram been just a fad, I would have wasted a lot of time investing in the social network (before figuring out it actually was here to stay).

## **3. Don't always be on social media**

Honestly another problem I see a lot of photographers (And people in general) make on social media is being on it 24/7.

The problem of constantly being glued on your phone is that 99% of what is on social media is noise. What you are looking for is the signal– the few posts and pieces of content that actually help you.

If I check Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter every minute– there is a very low likelihood (lets say 1%) that a new post will actually be interesting, relevant, and helpful to me. But let's say I check social media once a day – then you might have a 75% chance of something relevant appearing in your feed. Let's take this further– let's say you check social media only once a week, then the chance of something interesting or relevant coming into your stream is up to 99%.

So as a takeaway: don't check your social media platforms obsessively. For most people I recommend just checking them once a day. Your time as a photographer is much better spent creating value by taking great photos, writing interesting blog posts, interviewing other photographers, recording YouTube lectures, editing your work into series or books, or educating yourself.

#### 4. Don't be obsessive about your numbers

Another common mistake a lot of photographers make on social media is that they check their numbers too often. They are obsessed if they have more followers, if they get more likes, more favorites, more comments, etc. But obsessing about your numbers isn't going to help you gain more followers. **The only way to gain more followers is to add more value to the lives of others.**

Personally, I only check my numbers once a month or so. Even on my blog, I have purposefully disabled my site traffic viewer on the frontpage of my Wordpress admin page. Why do I do this? It distracts me. Whenever my numbers go up in terms of pageviews, I feel fucking phenomenal and the kind of the world. But whenever my numbers go down, I wonder what I am doing wrong, and my calm and serenity is ruined for the day. I feel down and depressed.

You don't want your overall mood and well being dependent on numbers on a screen.

One of my favorite writers Ryan Holiday (author of “The Obstacle is the Course”) wrote the following quote: “You can only control the effort you put in, not the results.”

So realize that you don’t always have control over how many followers, likes, favorites, or comments you get. Sometimes a lot of your results come down to plain luck.

But what you can control is trying to create value everyday. Trying to make better photos everyday, trying to learn more about photography everyday, trying to be more critical when editing your shots, trying to write more articles that will be useful to other photographers.

I have also found something funny about tracking your numbers, followers, traffic, etc.– the more I check it, the less my numbers go up. However the less I check it (and the less I care about my numbers), the more my numbers go up.

I think the reason is this: the more you check your numbers, the more you become a slave to the numbers. Then you start to try to please your audience by not being authentic, and trying to just do things for the sake of increasing your numbers.

But when you don’t really care about your numbers so much, you just focus on being authentic, helpful, and adding value to the lives of others. You use your own heart as an internal compass. This generally leads to things that have more value to others– which will lead you to organically gaining more followers.

**Take away:**

This is not a comprehensive list of things “not to do” in social media as a photographer– but a good starting point.

Of course this is all my opinion. So take it with a grain of salt. What works for me may (or may not) work for you.

But I think ultimately the best strategy in social media is this: **when you see someone do something on social media (let's say being overly promotional) which puts a sour taste in your mouth, do the exact opposite.** Learn from the mistakes of others. And imitate people on social media who you admire.

### ***Chapter 7: Social media strategies, tips, and techniques***

So this section will probably be the most “useful” in a practical sense– but I don’t know how long these certain strategies will be relevant (or how long these social media platforms will last). Below is a list of the social networks I personally find the most relevant for photographers – and give my personal take and advice on how to use them:

#### **1. Instagram**

Probably the most popular social media network for photographers now. I have found when I meet random people on the street, the first question they will ask me is, “What is your account on Instagram? Let me follow you.” Instagram is almost the new business card for photographers.

I think there are several reasons why Instagram is so popular:

First, everybody is on it– as it the best mobile platform for people to add filters and share their photographs. Nowadays almost everybody with a smartphone has an Instagram account (and are generally quite active).

Secondly, it gives you instant gratification. I see when a lot of people are bored, they love looking at streams of images. It is a good platform for people to keep in touch with friends through images, which is generally more intimate and interesting than just text (like on Facebook).

This is how I personally suggest you to use Instagram:

*a) Make it personal:*

I don't think the best way to use Instagram is to just show your best photos. People also want to see the "behind the scenes" of your life.

But rather than just instagramming photos of your food try to make it more photography-relevant. Share photos of photography books you are reading, of exhibitions you visited and recommend, and also interesting places you shoot that you recommend.

*b) Shoot on your phone:*

I think a mistake that a lot of photographers make is that they only shoot on their other more "professional" cameras and treat their Instagram accounts like just another portfolio website.

I recommend actually trying to shoot more on your phone. I know this shouldn't be the case– but I know a lot of people on Instagram who think that Instagram should be reserved for (mostly) photos actually shot on your phone.

Therefore I have enjoyed shooting a lot of urban landscapes on my phone in a square-format (in-camera). I enjoy using VSCO afterwards to post-process my photos, then sharing them on Instagram.

Using a phone will help you creatively as a photographer in a sense that you can no longer have any excuses that equipment is what is holding you back. In the past I made the excuse that my photos weren't good enough because my camera wasn't good enough. But now with smartphones – the image quality is pretty amazing. We no longer have any excuses, and smartphones are always on us (so we always have a camera with us).

*c) Make it a "visual diary"*

For me, one of the things that I love most about Instagram is going back to my old photos and re-living some of my experiences.

Don't just think of Instagram as a way to show off your best shots. Also make it personal– take photos that you would be happy to look back in a few weeks or a

few months.

I especially looking through my Instagram “visual diary” when it is a cold, dreary day– when I am feeling uninspired and just sulking at home. Seeing and reliving a lot of my positive memories through my Instagram feed is what helps lift my mood, and reinspires me to keep shooting.

## 2. Facebook

I think Facebook will be the last true “social network” in the sense that most of the people in the world are connected to it, and it is almost “too big to fail.”

I have noticed that there is less engagement on Facebook now (compared to other social networks like Instagram) – but it is still a huge player.

If you want to promote yourself as a photographer, I recommend starting a “Facebook fan page” – which allows anyone to publicly “like” you.

Here are some strategies I recommend for Facebook:

### *a) Start conversations*

The good thing about Facebook is that it is a great platform that allows you to have conversations with other people in the comments section.

Like we spoke earlier, engagement is the key to success in social media in general (and definitely on Facebook).

I personally like to ask my community a lot of questions. I like to ask them what kind of photography books they are currently enjoying, who currently are their favorite photographers, or what their favorite quotes for photography are.

The more you get people to speak up, the more engaged and intimate they feel.

The secret to leveraging Facebook well isn’t focusing on getting lots of likes, but to get lots of conversations and comments from users. And don’t just leave them

hanging– if they contribute something of value, “like” what they have to say, and respond to what they have to say.

### *b) Share single images*

I bemoan the fact that social media encourages single-images (rather than working on sets and series) but I have noticed on Facebook it is better to upload single images (than upload sets).

So if you have a series of images you want to share, I recommend to “drip feed them” – giving people a little bit of the project at a time.

This will allow your users to engage with each image more intimately, and also allow you to have more visibility.

Because most people are on mobile nowadays, it is easier to see single-images in your feed (than clicking through and having to dig through albums).

And if you’re sharing images and want more engagement– ask people to give critiques/feedback to your shots. Ask them to give their honest 2 cents, rather than just showing off your images.

### *c) Share links*

The majority of my traffic to my blog actually comes from Facebook. So realize that Facebook is a great way to drive traffic to your blog, or website in general.

When you share links, it is best to keep it short. You don’t need more than 1 sentence when sharing a description to a certain link.

If you want more engagement for the Facebook links you share, you might want to ask people to share their thoughts. For example, if you’re sharing a link about a new camera that just came out, perhaps ask people what they think about the camera (rather than just announcing that a new camera came out).

## **3. Twitter**

I would say the last most “important” social media network is Twitter.

Why Twitter?

Well– Twitter has been around quite a while now, and is one of the most convenient ways to keep updated with news from relevant people you follow. It is a simple and minimalist service, which allows you to share content (links, photos, videos) but also allows engagement (1:1 conversations with anyone from around the globe, or for you to engage in debates).

Here are some tips I would recommend for Twitter:

*a) Share emotional content*

Less is definitely more when it comes to social media. So before you share anything on Twitter you can ask yourself, “Is this really interesting, relevant, or inspiring? Is this something that will add value and interest into the lives of others, or is it just spam?”

Generally content that is popular or goes “viral” is generally emotional. In one study I read on social media “virality” – generally content that inspires “awe, anxiety, or anger” do well. That is because as human beings, we are emotional creatures– and what speaks to our heart is what influences us.

*b) Connect to like-minded folks*

One of the main benefits of Twitter is that it allows us to have a 1:1 text-messaging conversation with anyone in the world.

Rather than trying to get hundreds or thousands of followers, it is generally better to try to build a close relationship with a few individuals.

Through Twitter, I have connected with some incredible and interesting people– and made some real-life friendships out of them.

A good way to interact with others is to help promote them as well. Don't just selfishly try to push your own self-agenda, try to promote others. Be generous, interesting, and a loving human being.

### *c) Keep your feed tightly curated*

Another mistake a lot of people make on Twitter is to follow a lot of people for the sake of getting a lot of followers (hoping that following a lot of people will get a lot of people to follow you back).

However try to only follow people who you have a genuine interest in connecting with– or people who are passionate about following you.

Also regarding your own Twitter feed, either make “lists” or only follow people you really think give interesting and relevant news.

You want to reduce the amount of “noise” in your Twitter feed– and you always want to make sure you don't contribute to that noise by tweeting boring shit.

### **What about all the other social networks?**

There are a ton of other great social media networks out there. I personally don't spend too much time on them, so I can't really comment on them too much. But here is a quick overview of the other social networks out there, and some of my thoughts.

#### *Flickr*

A great way to share your photos online, and is probably the best place to share large and full-resolution images. I definitely recommend sharing photos on Flickr, and engaging in a lot of interesting communities via the forums on the “Groups” section.

#### *500px*

The more “artsy” version of Flickr– lots of beautiful images, but not as popular as Flickr. If you have never used it before, try giving it a go.

### *Tumblr*

Tumblr is definitely a thriving community for photographers and any other creative types. One of the biggest benefits of Tumblr is being able to create mini-series and the interface is beautifully minimalist. If you are a photographer who is interested in sharing sets than single-images, I highly recommend Tumblr.

### **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

Thank you very much for joining me on this journey on exploring social media for photographers. While I am not the most informed expert when it comes to social media– I hope this information I shared with you has value and is useful to you.

For me, social media has helped me make a living as a full-time photography teacher. Social media has allowed me to meet some phenomenal people from each corner of the globe, and social media is helped me bridge those online connections into the offline.

Social media also has a dark side– too much obsession with page views, followers, likes, comments, and popularity can be detrimental to your overall well-being and health.

But I think ultimately social media used has much more upside than downside. But only if you use it mindfully, and to help create value and help others.

As time goes on, I hope to continue to edit and contribute to this mini-book.

If I could sum up this book in a nutshell it would be this: **to succeed in social media you must be loving, caring, and add value to the lives of others.** The more you focus on others, the more you will succeed.

### ***Let's connect***

If you want to learn more about street photography, or just say hello you can follow and contact me on my social media networks below:

- [Blog](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Tumblr](#)