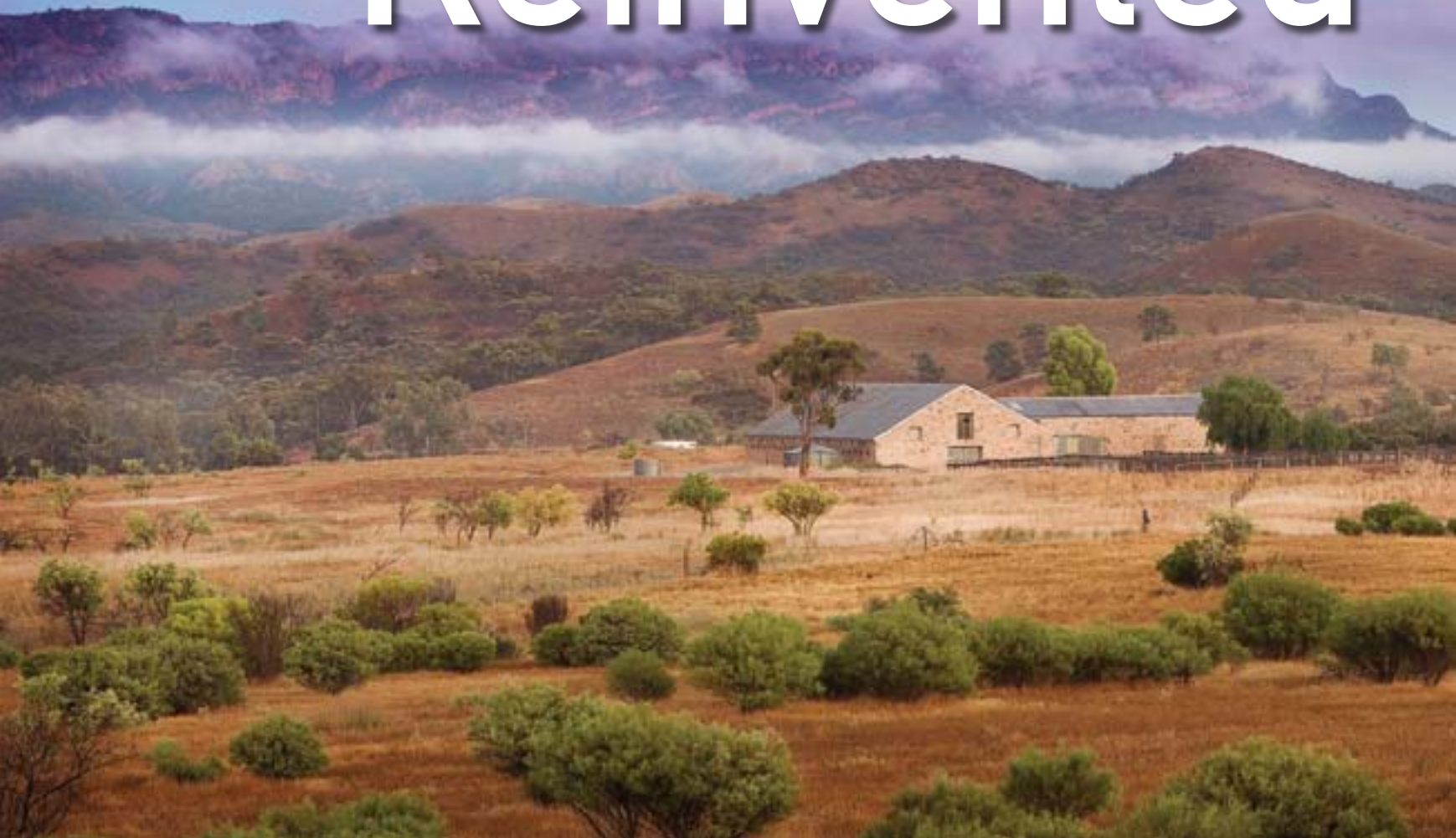


# The Photographer Reinvented



**Denis Glennon and Glenn Nicholas examine the role of photography in today's society and speculate on what the future might hold for photographers.**

## The Impressive Chronicle of Unrestrained Photography

Since cameras became plentiful, professional and amateur photographers have recorded almost every facet of human experience, from family snaps and videos to photographs of people alone and in gatherings, to sometimes blood chilling images of death, in peace times and at war. These photographers have bestowed a magnificent legacy to human history.

The forty million plus readers of National Geographic show the deep interest people have in viewing and enjoying evocative and thought provoking photographs. Residing in every corner

of the planet these readers represent a true assemblage of languages, cultures and worldviews as well as an abiding appreciation of good photography.

We have moved from a word-based to an image-based society; from Gutenberg to Google.

Photographs speak eloquently to all and have chronicled an unparalleled record of our world over the last one hundred years – its horrifying wars and natural disasters, its remarkable changes to cultures, its enduring traditions, its achievements in science and technology, its rapidly disappearing biodiversity of species, its natural grandeur and more recently the astonishing colourful spectacle of distant planets and galaxies of the infinite space beyond earth itself, as man has learned to explore and photograph the heavens.

Some photographs can alter a person's course in life. But, for most of us, whilst photographs may not change our lives they can certainly transform our minds, opening them to the wider world and helping to stimulate greater understanding and appreciation.



*Imagery has always been a part of Western culture and the freedom to pursue image-based hobbies and businesses is priceless. Nick Rains: Canon EOS 60D, 15-85mm, 1/60 second @ f11 ISO100*

Each of us can no doubt recall a number of photographs whose power is undiminished long after the texts that accompanied them have grown dim.

Such photographs are the work of skilled and passionate photographers who are allowed to practice their craft free from many of today's regulatory encumbrances yet work to a code of unwritten obligations of integrity, and respect for their subjects. Skillful photographers are wanderers and produce enduring work when allowed to photograph as free spirited, sure footed wanderers, capturing our world through the prisms of nature, work, daily life, landscapes, cultures and traditions. This freedom to explore, capture and express is fundamental to the magnificently universal language of photography if it is to inspire future generations.

Yet, for many professional photographers, the increasing levels of regulatory controls, the exponential encroachments of "non-professional" photographers and the unprecedented

upheavals in the traditional stock photography world are seen as foreboding threats to their future business prospects. But need this be the only future world?

## Are Increasing Regulatory Constraints Affecting Professional Photography Businesses?

Until recently, photographers enjoyed essentially unrestricted rights to capture images of places and people in public spaces. In Australia whilst there is no overarching legislative or regulatory veto on photography in public spaces, there are ever-increasing controls on photographers whether they be capturing images of street life, beach life, foreshores, swimming carnivals, school sports, surf lifesaving events, police officers on duty, army barracks, government buildings, iconic buildings and

structures, transportation facilities, airports, local and national parks, protest marches, political demonstrations, to mention a few “no-go” subjects.

The explanations provided to photographers for these restrictions are lawfully dubious. They are frequently vague and conflicting, and are loosely linked to nonspecific justifications such as:

- “security”
- “terrorist threat”
- “privacy”
- “national interest”
- “photography is banned here”
- “for architectural reasons so that the design is not stolen”
- “to protect the safety of children”
- “a permit or licence is required”
- “culturally sensitivity.”

The wide choice of diminutive, high quality cameras and their image capturing ability for secretive surveillance has rightly placed some photography in the spot light of ethical and moral concerns. The public’s distaste for blackmailers, aggressive paparazzi, pornographers, pedophiles, and hoaxers remains unchanged no matter the sophistication of the technology.

However, for the vast majority of professional and amateur photographers, the taking and display of images, in private or in public have always been underpinned by high standards of civility, consideration, and respect and consent where required. These underpinning ethics of professional photography are poorly understood by many of those responsible for policy development related to “commercial photography”.

The increasing number of policies being introduced by local authorities, state agencies and the Commonwealth government, to regulate “commercial photography” is, for many professional photographers, emerging as an escalating threat to their livelihood as well as to the enjoyment of amateur photographers.

Australian photographers are not alone in this respect. Similar onerous regulatory controls in the UK led to the establishment of groups such as PHNAT Flashmob. The opposition by photographers in the UK became so strong that in July 2010 a decision by the British House of Commons put an end to the use of one of Britain’s most controversial piece of legislation, (Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000) which had been increasingly used by police officers to restrict photographers working in public places.

In the USA, photographers faced similar constraints contesting their right to photograph in public places. This led to the publication of the book “Legal Handbook for Photographers” – written from the perspective of a photographer who has actually confronted the legal issues that many photographers face. The book explains the fundamental legal principles that affect the rights to make images, how the law (in USA) affects photography, and it provides guidance on how to handle confrontations, and obtain remedies if wronged.

The necessity for such a book would have been inconceivable ten years ago.

Whilst the “regulatory threats” are real in Australia they should not be allowed to overshadow the new opportunities for professional photographers to grow their businesses. Positive signs are emerging whereby common sense is prevailing and reasonable arrangements are being negotiated between photographers and regulators that allow photographers to seek out and capture iconic images. We are confident that the constructive reviews of current “commercial photography” policies by some Australian States and local authorities will increase in both number and degree of freedom to photographers. We believe there can and will be a return to the more ethics-based practices that have served photographers and society well, for decades.

Professional photography work based on sound ethics need not be too concerned by the wave of regulatory change; tides will forever flow and ebb in life.

## Has the Collapse of the Traditional Stock Photography Affected Professional Photography Businesses?

Two of France’s most prestigious stock agencies, Gamma Presse Agence and Keystone-France have been synonymous with photojournalism of the highest calibre and together their collections include more than 10 million images in print, negative and glass plate form. These prestigious collections span more than 75 years of history, with unrepeatably images of key historical events. In mid-2010 this leading agency ran into financial difficulties and asked for protection from creditors as it looked at ways to revive, dismantle or sell the business. Getty Images has entered into an arrangement to gain access to the collections. This is symptomatic of how much the traditional stock agency market has changed.

The roots of stock photo agencies are found in the days when the demand for photographs exceeded the supply. Many medium-sized agencies around the world operated profitably for decades, but the arrival of the internet changed all that as it made it easier for photographers to find buyers directly, and to transfer images instantaneously. The financial hurt to all agencies was remarkable. At the same time, the advent of digital cameras resulted in the supply of images growing exponentially.

These two events made it virtually impossible for traditional agencies to compete against individual photographers. On face value this should have been a boon for professional photographers worldwide, but unfortunately it has not been the case.

It is now non-professional photographers, who provide the majority of images to the internet market. As these images get fast global distribution, they are viewed on an ever increasing

number of photo-sharing websites. This makes it easier for buyers to obtain images without being obliged to pay the higher fees charged by agencies and some professional photographers. As a result, the images now available from non-professional photographers greatly exceed those from stock agencies and professional photographers. To maintain cash flow and to revitalize sales, agencies introduced “royalty-free” and “microstock” images whereby several hundred images could be purchased for less than \$100, with little or no limitations on use.

As revenue levels dived so did the valuation of stock agencies. To eliminate competition and increase image assets, larger agencies acquired smaller ones, to the point where today there are only a handful of very large stock agencies in operation. Little ones start up now and then, but habitually don't survive long enough to compete with the small few major players.

One of the largest online stock agencies, iStockphoto claims it is a one-stop shop for millions of royalty-free photos, illustrations, video, audio and flash files starting at \$1.00, with more than 40,000 new files arriving every week!

Have these dramatic changes to stock agencies dealt a death blow to the ability of professional photographers to market their images? In our view, the answer is a resounding “No”. The regulatory controls and the disappearance of the stock agencies should be seen for what they are; minor distractions to the new business opportunities for professional photographers.

## Just as Tides Flow and Ebb, Doors Close, Doors Open

Yes, the business of professional photography has changed radically, but there are many opportunities for professional photographers arising directly from this change. Professional photographers now have to be good at photography and good at business. Adapting to change (and speed of adaptation) is what professional photography is now all about.

The new market is global. It is not dictated by the local council! The market for photography products is worldwide and “24/7”. Galleries and retail photography businesses no longer constrain access to customers ... who are buying more image based products than ever before. Digital images and technology means customers now buy their images as framed prints, hard covered coffee table books, canvas prints, posters, t-shirts, cards, calendars, posters, e-books... the list goes on and on.

People are discerning, and given a better choice will more frequently than not take it – the choice at even the largest stock images shops pales into insignificance compared to the specialisation of images online. Photographers can define their niche and market and sell their image-based products anywhere in the world and most importantly receive payment instantly. New photographers are thirsty for knowledge.

The massive popularity of digital photography has created a whole new market. Thousands upon thousands of budding



*The Cazneaux Tree in the Flinders Ranges is a landmark because a photograph of it called 'The Spirit of Endurance', taken in 1937, won the photographer prestigious prizes in Australia and overseas. Nick Rains: Lumix LX5, 1/500 second @ f4 ISO100*

photographers are seeking education and skills development in both face-to-face and online formats. Not just how to operate their cameras, but how to capture better photographs, how to work with them digitally. Photographers, who choose to be educators and have serviced this demand face to face, can now do so globally via the web.

Business needs photographers like never before. Smaller businesses are increasingly recognising they can offer their products and services to the world. But they have to communicate via the web. The good news is – good images really are worth a thousand words when they help businesses tell a story online. Thousands upon thousands of



*Where will the road take the photography industry? Hopefully into better weather! Nick Rains: Canon EOS 5D Mark II, 24mm TS-E, 1/60 @f11 ISO100*

small businesses can benefit when photographers help them tell their story better. The difference between a “great” website and one that attracts no attention (meaning no business) is easily spotted. The good ones will have outstanding images of professional quality that capture and hold attention long enough to elicit a response to purchase and pay for the product or service. Powerful images have tremendous ability to convert attention to a sale; plain text and/or boring imagery does not.

How can photographers service these new areas to grow their businesses? Our answer is to learn and fully understand the new rules of online marketing. Any computer literate professional photographer can take advantage of the opportunities continually opening up directly because of the availability of the internet. It is not really that difficult.

Here are seven concepts to help photographers assess their online photography business (or conceiving it):

- **Equity:** Are you investing to build online equity? Tip: Own your domain to build search engine equity. Own your email lists. Maintain them as you would a quality camera and lens, and harvest value for years to come.
- **Research:** Do you understand relative keyword popularity when it comes to Google search traffic? Tip: Google keeps a list of every keyword phrase used in every search, and you can access that list for free (try googling ‘keyword tool’). You can’t take photos with your eyes closed, and you can’t market a business online without doing your research.
- **Connect:** How do you connect with people online? Tip: This is about far more than just social media. The World Wide Web lets you reach out and connect with people all over the world. Who do you want to connect with? How can you do it?
- **Analytics:** Have you evaluated your web analytics? Tip: Understand what is going on under the hood so you can tell what online marketing initiatives are working for you (and what are not). What attracts attention, what converts

attention to a sale?

- **Brand:** What is your brand communicating about you? Tip: Powerful brands have never been more important. Stand for something, mean something. Capitalize the power of emotion in photographs for decision making, and how your brand can help you reach out.
- **Profit:** Do you have a profitable online business? Tip: If you are running a business online; you have to make a profit. It is not sufficient for it to be a mere portal to you. Good ideas and quality photographs are not enough. Analyze your products and your business model; know how you are going to make a profit.
- **Simplicity:** Do you make it easy for people to be your customers? Tip: This is easy to say but a little harder to do. Just because you think things should be simple doesn’t mean they are. Get real feedback from people you can trust. Deal with it if you hear things you don’t want to.

The opportunities to expand a professional photography business have never been better. The “tools” available to professional photographers have never been as good. The customer base for photography products has never been larger. The range of products that have good photography as the base ingredient has never grown as fast and there is no sign of it slowing down. The exponential increases in camera sales almost defy logic.

The future of has never been brighter for professional photographers and for those aspiring to be professional photographers.

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