Resort Photography Keys for Print and Social: Dan Carr Interview
June 30th, 2011

One of my personal favorite perks of blogging is having the excuses to get in touch with talented people and pick their brains. My latest victim was Dan Carr, an ultra-saturated ski photographer whose first came up in my radar after I followed the awesome print out on that Whistler put out last winter. With so much photography floating around the marketing world—print, in social, you name it—I wanted to get a professional’s view on what TO DO TO NOT to do when it comes to your resort’s photographic needs. If you want more proof of Dan’s awesomeness, swing by his website and view some of his recent commercial assignment work. Awesome. If you ever need photo work, I’d highly recommend him.

SlopesVis: Dan, give me the 30 second version of how you got to where you are today some of the people you’ve worked for and what you are best at.

Dan: Getting here was a weird journey, I’m actually from the UK and I studied aerospace engineering at university with an art in-working in the automotive industry. When I finished the degree I looked some cost to ski in winter and fell in love with the place. While I was there I was a a graphics student to take photos of my friends skiing layout. Some of them got published in a local magazine and when I saw them printed I thought to myself, you know what…that’s something I could get used to! I set about getting my Canadian residency so I could stay and my wife’s plan didn’t go a tum. Winter is a great place to start something like that though as there is huge talent pool of local skiers.

That was 5 years ago and since then I have worked for people like 5airon/Galaxy, Ronc, RideXtreme, Whitbread Blokxtreme, Grin Mountain, Scott, Peak Performance, Ohone in regions such as Alaska, Japan, Europe, new Zealand and the USA and Canada of course.

I primarily concentrate on shooting for freestyle, big mountain backcountry stuff or urban skiing and big park shoots.

SlopesVis: The first time I noticed your work was the Whitbread Blokxtreme print-up. We found it you pout it in your resume, but more importantly in high-quality photography when it comes to print ads?

Dan: Ski magazines these days are very picture heavy, and we have all been into the grocery store and flipped through magazine pages just looking at the photos….I think the ski resort advertising imagery needs to be as strong as the rest of the magazines photographic content otherwise people will just pass it by without a second look. Once you have the readers attention then the design agency and copy writers come into play but getting people to stop turning the page and take a second look is the first step in my opinion. The imagery should be tailored to the readers too. Sometimes a photo of someone carving a pristine powd ertip is not going to get second look in a freestyle magazine so you have to know where the ad is destined to go.

SlopesVis: You mentioned that rarely a picture of “turning a pristine powdertip” doesn’t cut it in a freestyle magazine. What other mistakes do you see made with ski photography?

Dan: My personal pet hate is people who use photos of skiers or snowboarders in the air during turning and missing their pow. You see it all the time. To the designer of the ad, and seemingly the resort marketing team they don’t see the difference. But if you put that ad in a magazine with photos of the worlds best skiers, and show it to a young audience they’ll drop it straight away and be in it makes it looks like the photo was the last thing. You wouldn’t hand a picture of a guy making a move in his turn on that pristine powdertip so it shouldn’t be done with freestyle photos either.

More than likely it’s a simple case of the designer not being familiar enough with the subject matter but has to show that some consultation with someone who is more familiar with the subject matter is a good idea.

SlopesVis: Leaving print ads for a moment, resorts are constantly taking photos and sharing them via Twitter, Facebook etc. They probably couldn’t afford to deliver your level of photos at this day and age, but is an iPhone photos good enough or should they push the money to someone with a little more skill and better equipment provide higher quality pictures?

Dan: I know that can work because you’re trying to attract people’s attention from a sea of other amazing ski photos. Or twitter for example all you would see is a link, and people would either click is if they weren’t based on their desire to learn more, or ignored more with that user. At that point you can’t make a difference how good the photo is because they haven’t seen it and by the time they do see if the resorts name is already registerd in their memory. They obviously should be terrible photos, but for dirty remnants of how awesome the powder is in some place they think it’s not such a bad thing to try.

Some places striking the best balance and don’t use iPhone photos but photos from local photographers which whilst they aren’t... are still better than a phone.

SlopesVis: What advice do you have for a resort that needs to get some high quality photos of their resort? What should they look for in a photographer, how can they make sure the photos don’t end up looking like stock photos purchased online, are there certain photos that you think a resort should always have a few of on hand, etc.

Dan: The thing you can do to enjoy your professional photographer with an image needs lot early on in the winter, before Christmas. If you get to the end of the season and budgets are running low then there is a shot you really wanted and don’t yet have then the only options are relatively expensive specific shoots or having someone who’s not a photographer know what you are looking for throughout the winter then you’d stand a much better chance of getting it when it comes to submission time in the spring. If you want a wide range of certainly rental shoots then a specific shoot will be the way to go, but if it’s just a single shoot you need not that something or something like that then you don’t want to have to go to the stock site.

Another thing that I think is important is to use someone that specializes in what sports photography. Commercial photographers who do not necessarily know all the time inevitably come up with some of the most cheesy looking stock images because it’s what they are unfortanely typically used to seeing. Talk to the photographer about any necessary models too because most will have people they work with and ahave already formed a good working relationship with. Some models look good but don’t always wear well or look directional as well as you’d want them to so ask the photographer first if he can recommend someone he’ll be comfortable with. If the resort has an online database of available images then refresh that post a regular basis. Ski and snowboard fashion comes and goes at a blinding rate and you can spot an old shot pretty quickly. At ski shots will look like a stock shot.

In terms of stock to always on hand, that really depends on the specific resort. It is a family resort or a place with more extreme terror. Does it have a famous bluebird day or is it in an area in the world. The image pool should contain shots that depict the nature of that resort and should ideally be human photos that can only be found that location. Keeping general as well as fresh photos in the image pool for people to see will again just end up like stock photos when they are republished. Get that unique feature or unique view in there for those shots because if they are being handed out to media you have no control over the location or content of their printing.

SlopesVis: Thanks again, Dan. Any thoughts on marketing and photography?

Dan: The least that this experience is worth a lot when it comes to this stuff. Immunity on a shoot there will be some hurdles to overcome because when you’re dealing with mother nature and so many variables (clouds, snow, wind, sun, etc.) it’s impossible to get them to perform perfectly simultaneously. Hire someone with experiences who is a professional in that field. Lots of people have fancy looking resumes these days but the gus out there who do it do it day in and day out and make a living out of it so because they can deliver on a wide range of experiences. People often ask me what makes someone a professional photographer these days. For me it is someone who always delivers.

Get your daily dose of resort marketing inspiration:
Facebook | Twitter | RSS