

Resort Photography Keys for Print and Social: Dan Carr Interview

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

SlopeFillers: 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 aim to working in the automotive industry. When I finished the degree I took some time out to ski in whistler and I fell in love with the place. While I was there for a winter I got a digital slr and started to take photos of my friends skiing crazy things. 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 whole life's plan did a u turn. Whistler is a great place to start something like that though as there is a huge talent pool of local skiers.

That was 5 years ago and since then I have worked for people like Salomon, Oakley, Atomic, Volk, Line Skis, Whistler Blackcomb, Grouse Mountain, Scott, Peak Performance, Orage in locations such as Alaska, Japan, Europe, New Zealand and the USA and Canada of course.

I primarily concentrate on shooting Freeskiing, be it big mountain backcountry stuff or urban skiing and big park shoots.

SlopeFillers: The first time I noticed your work was the Whistler Blackcomb print line-up. Be as biased as you'd like in your answer, but how important is 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 powder magazine just looking at the photos.... I think the ski resort advertising imagery needs to be just 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 piste is not going to get a second look in a Freeskiing magazine so you have to know where the ad is destined to run.

SlopeFillers: You mentioned that merely a picture of "carving a pristine piste" doesn't cut it in a freeskiing mag. 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 doing a trick but missing their grab. 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 run that ad in a magazine full of photos of the worlds best skiers, and show it to a young audience they'll spot it straight away and to me it makes it look like the photo was the last thought. You wouldn't run a photo of a guy making a mistake in his turn on that pristine piste so it shouldn't be done with Freeskiing photos either.

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

SlopeFillers: 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 day in and day out, but are iPhone photos good enough or should they put up the money to have someone with a bit more skill and better equipment provide higher quality pictures?

Dan: I think that can work because you aren't trying to attract people's attention from within a mass of other amazing ski photos. On twitter for example all you would see is a link, and people will either click it or they won't based on their desire to learn more, or interact more with that user. At that point it won't make a difference how good the photo is as they haven't seen it and by the time they do see it the resorts name is already reinforced in their memory. They obviously shouldn't be terrible photos, but for daily reminders of how awesome the powder is at some place I think it's not such a bad way to go.

Some places strike the best balance and don't use iPhone phone photos but photos from local photons who whilst they aren't pro, are still better than a phone.

SlopeFillers: 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 shots that you think a resort should always have a few of on hand, etc.?

Dan: The first thing you can do is to equip your favourite photographers with an image needs list early on in the winter, before Christmas. If you get to the end of the season and budgets are running low but there was a shot you really wanted and don't yet have then the only options are relatively expensive specific shoots or buying something stock. If all the photographers know what you are looking for throughout the winter then you'll stand a much better chance of finding it when it comes to submission time in the spring. If you want a whole range of similarly themed shots then a specific shoot will be the way to go, but if it's just a single shot you need for the website or something like that then you don't want to have to go the stock route.

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

In terms of shots to always have on hand, that really depends on the specific resort. Is it a family resort or a place with more extreme terrain. Does it have a famous backdrop or is it in an exotic part of the world. The image pool should contain shots that depict the nature of that resort and should ideally be unique shots that can only be from that location. Keeping generic powder face shot photos in the image pool for people to use will again just end up looking like stock photos when they are published. Get that unique feature or unique view in there for those shots because if they are being handed out to media you'll have no control over the location or context of their printing.

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

Dan: The final thing is that experience is worth a lot when it comes to this stuff. Invariably on a shoot there will be some hurdles to overcome because when you are dealing with mother nature and so many variables (clouds, snow, wind, ice, models) it's impossible to get them all perfect simultaneously. Hire someone with experience who is a professional in that field. Lots of people have fancy looking cameras these days but the guys out there who do it day in day out and make a living out of it do so because they can deliver in a wide range of scenarios. People often ask me what makes someone a professional photographer these days. For me it is someone who always delivers.

SlopeFillers is run by marketer, and resort marketing enthusiast, Gregg Blanchard. Have you seen some clever resort marketing worthy of a post?



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