



# The Backgrounder

News and Information About Turning Backgrounds into Profits!

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January 2008 Issue

## In this issue:

- [Imaging USA in Tampa - A Huge Success!](#)
- [Virtual Backgrounds to Sponsor Business and Marketing Programs by Greg Stangl](#)
- [Simone Workshop in March - Only a Few Seats are Available](#)
- [Virtual Backgrounds Monthly Workshops](#)
- [Look for Virtual Backgrounds at PMA and WPPI in Las Vegas](#)
- [Featured Photographer: Don Hileman](#)

## It's a New Year - Plan to Make it the Best Ever!

A new year is a perfect time to think about the past and plan to make the future better than ever. Professional photographers face a lot of challenges, especially those which come from digital cameras that make every amateur think they are a professional and no longer need to hire a professional.

It's time to look at every aspect of your business from your perspective and especially from your customers' perspectives. What can you do to significantly enhance your operation? What can you do to put more "WOW" and variety in your everyday photography? What new ventures can you consider? How can you demonstrate to your customers that you are indeed a professional who can create products that they cannot possibly produce on their own? What new investments can you make in equipment that will surely pay for themselves and enable you to earn significantly higher profits?

From your customers' viewpoint, how can you change your display and your advertising/marketing to make your products more attractive? What can you do to make your entire operation more enticing to the customer? What can you offer that will really excite the customer enough to pay you for your products? What do your customers really want in

## PPA's Imaging USA in Tampa: *A Huge Success!*



PPA put on another phenomenal convention in Tampa, Florida at the very beginning of the year. It was a great way for professional photographers to kick off the year. Over 9000 photographers attended the show. Everything was perfect including the beautiful Florida weather.

The trade show was the major attraction for most attendees. Virtual Backgrounds had a large booth, featuring a full working studio operated by Montana photographer Trevon Baker. Virtual Backgrounds also displayed a wide variety of large new sample images created by Joseph & Louise Simone and Rick & Deborah Ferro. The Simones continue producing phenomenal work in what can only be called "The Simone Tradition" - images that in so many ways represent the work of the greatest master artists of all time. Rick and Deborah Ferro have started using painting-like fantasy backgrounds to create delightful images of children. The Ferros will be doing a 24 city tour later this year, and Virtual

professional photography that you can offer? Do you even really know what your customers want?

This 2008 and years beyond will be difficult ones. At this moment, the economy is faltering. People are afraid to spend. Your clients may own a better digital camera than you do. Your sales are probably down. You fear for the future. The future can be bright if and only if you enhance your offering to the customer in terms of variety, creativity, and efficiency. This is where Virtual Backgrounds plays such an important role. Read this month's Featured Photographer story. Like all of our featured photographers, Don Hileman of New Visions Photography is definitely not traditional. He is charting a new course in portraiture in the Youngstown, Ohio area and it's working. Traditional doesn't work any more. Each and every professional photographer must have a new vision!

Make this the year that you fully investigate the Virtual Backgrounds process. If you already own a system that has not become a key component in your studio, do whatever is necessary to change that. Workshops and tech support/customer service are available to you from Virtual Backgrounds. A Virtual Backgrounds system can be a phenomenal cash generator. If you don't have one, you need to get one and put it to use. If you have one that you are not using at all or only minimally, it's really tragic. Make a resolution to learn to use it. Come to class. Get help! WE are here to help you to be successful!

This year can be your year ever, but it won't happen on its own. It's up to you! We know you can do it!

## A Fool Takes No Pleasure in Understanding but Delights in Expressing His Opinion

Sometimes, you have to dig for the facts on your own. Take a few minutes to try to get opinions from other photographers about Virtual Backgrounds and you'll soon hear everything from "It's a phenomenal tool that paid for itself in just a couple of weeks," all the way to "It doesn't work." What is the truth?

Backgrounds will be very much a part of their presentations.

Many show visitors were amazed at the quality of the images Virtual Backgrounds had on display. They had no idea that Virtual Backgrounds could be so versatile and so easy to use and produce such phenomenal results. The key theme of our booth was "Imagine the Possibilities," and that is exactly what many show attendees were doing.

## Virtual Backgrounds Used Again to Capture Images of PPA Degree Recipients

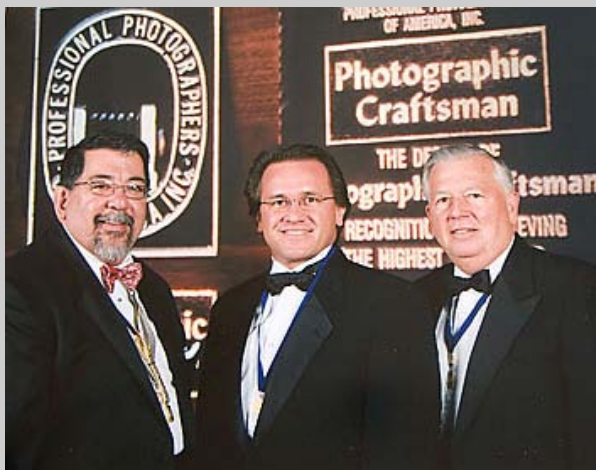


Image captured at 2007 PPA Convention

For the fourth year in a row, Virtual Backgrounds was used to photograph all of the degree recipients at the PPA national convention in Tampa. Each degree recipient was photographed with the PPA President and their sponsor as they were handed their diploma. The backgrounds chosen were images of bronze plaques representing each of the degrees offered. The appropriate background was used for each of the 168 degree recipients who were photographed, and it only took seconds to change backgrounds.

Montana photographer, Trevon Baker operated the camera, combined with a Scene Machine Digital projector and an 8 x 8 background screen. The entire system was set up in minutes and clearly represented how Virtual Backgrounds can be used on location to enhance the final product.

The answer is simple. Judge for yourself. The facts are there. The proof is in the photographs. There have always been photographers who never even tried a Virtual Backgrounds system for themselves who will complain about the process based upon unsubstantiated hearsay. They claim to know someone who knew someone who didn't get good results.

How do you get the correct information about Virtual Backgrounds? Look at the sample images that are available. Study the company website. Look at the internationally acclaimed photographers who are using it. Look at their results. Visit the VB booth at a trade show and examine the system for yourself. Come to a workshop. Ask a photographer who uses it. However, beware if that photographer is in your immediate area, he or she may not want to say good things about the process just to keep you away from using it and creating competition they don't want. A fundamental problem Virtual Backgrounds has always had is that system owners who are building their business with Virtual Backgrounds do not want anyone else in their area to use it - so they deliberately discourage others from getting into using the process. Virtual Backgrounds is that powerful a tool.

If you are looking for a way to significantly enhance the products you create, and have more fun doing it, take a serious look at the Virtual Backgrounds. See it in action with your own eyes - you'll be glad that you did!

### True or False

Being skeptical isn't bad. After all, we are surrounded by outright lies and huge stretches of the truth. Therefore, it is natural for readers of *The Backgrounder* to question the truthfulness of what they read here. Are our articles about Virtual Backgrounds really factual? The answer is a resounding "yes," and we invite you to check out their authenticity.

We publish *The Backgrounder* for two reasons. First, it is published for those who already own a Virtual Backgrounds system to share with them ideas and methods of other Virtual Backgrounds

## Joseph and Louise Simone Presented Yet Another Phenomenal PPA Program



Approximately 1000 photographers filled the auditorium for the program entitled "The Secret is in the Sauce," presented by Montreal professional photographers Joseph and Louise Simone. The Simones talked about their career in professional photography and how they developed their unique style which is patterned after the "old masters." The Simones presented two different slide shows representing their current work as well as work from the past. The audience was "awe struck" as they watched. A comment often heard was, "If only I could just do one portrait like they do."

The Simones talked about their use of the Scene Machine Virtual Backgrounds system which is used for approximately 75% of their work. Because the Simones want every image to be totally and completely their own unique creation, they even created their own background slides for the Scene Machine. These slides clearly reflect their rich style.

The Simones brought 24 print examples of their recent work. Each print was a 40 x 60 printed by Spiro Nichols of Nichols Photo Lab in Salt Lake City, Utah. The quality of the art gallery size prints was absolutely stunning.

The Simones presented a strong case for the importance of professional photographers to rise above current standards to present the public with timeless images of unparalleled quality. This is the key to success of the portrait studio. All photographers must rise to a new level of perfection and creativity. That is "the secret sauce" that makes the professional distinctively different from the amateur.

The Simones will be conducting a 5-day class at Virtual Backgrounds in San Marcos, Texas (March 3-7, 2008). [Contact us](#) for further information and to register. The class size is limited and it is one of very few week long courses the Simones will be teaching this year. The Simone workshop can be a turning point in your career. A number of attendees come back again and again.

users. There are so many different and creative ways to use Virtual Backgrounds to grow a photography business. The photographers in each story are willing to share their success with others.

The second reason to publish *The Backgrounder* is to share with all photographers the good news about how Virtual Backgrounds can help their business. The power of Virtual Backgrounds and backgrounds in general, are some of the best kept "secrets" in the photographic industry. Many photographers just don't "get it." So, we write about our individual Virtual Backgrounds system users such as today's feature story on Ohio photographer, Don Hileman. We don't exaggerate because we don't have to. Reality is enough.

Still skeptical about Virtual Backgrounds? You owe it to yourself to check out reality. Talk to photographers who use the system. Come to a workshop to learn how to use Virtual Backgrounds. Show the results to some of your customers and see how they respond. [Contact](#) a Virtual Backgrounds consultant to answer your questions.

The truth is this: Virtual Backgrounds is an extremely powerful concept that can greatly enhance your photography business. Of course, it isn't an automatic money generator. You have to do more than just plug it in. It's a tool that has to be properly used. When Virtual Backgrounds is properly used, the results can be phenomenal. It's nice to know that Virtual Backgrounds is a true professional tool. Amateur photographers do not buy it. We don't advertise to amateurs.

Make 2008 the year you check out what Virtual Backgrounds can do for you!

## Scene Machine Private Training in Amsterdam

## Virtual Backgrounds to Sponsor Business and Marketing Programs by Greg Stangl



Virtual Backgrounds is pleased to announce that beginning immediately, we are sponsoring presentations by Greg Stangl for local, state, and regional associations appearances.

Greg Stangl has been a professional photographer for 38 years. He has had a varied career as a photojournalist, Chief photographer for the Aurora Beacon News, and has been a portrait studio owner for the past 30 years.

Greg has been a featured speaker at both the Professional Photographers of America National Convention (PPA) and Wedding and Portrait Photographers International (WPPI). Greg has taught at a variety of PPA Affiliate schools and has presented business programs in 35 US states and 7 foreign countries.

He has been published in 10 photography business magazines and has had a portrait on the cover of the *Professional Photographer*. Greg was also on the faculty of two community colleges where he taught basic photography, basic portraiture, composition and photojournalism.

Greg is a Master Photographer, A Craftsman Photographer and is certified by the Professional Photographers of America. A polished platform speaker, Greg's programs combine his vast experience at running a successful portrait studio and extensive research into the business of professional portraiture. Greg's programs are guaranteed to help the studio owner grow their business, increase customer count and profits.

Virtual Background's president, Dr. Henry Oles, reports that he first met Greg Stangl years ago when they were both teaching at Winona. More recently, VB sponsored a series of Greg's 3 day workshop programs that were highly successful. "We are very pleased to have been able to make this arrangement to sponsor Greg's business and marketing programs. Especially at this time when professional photographers need to enhance their marketing to successfully fight what I have called, The Perfect Storm," people like Greg Stangl are a true asset to our business of photography.



When Esso Noordhoff of Photo Studio Heno in Amsterdam decided to purchase a Scene Machine Virtual Backgrounds system, he asked about providing installation and private training for his photography staff. We said, "No problem!" As soon as Imaging USA in Tampa came to a close, Trevon Baker of Kalispell, Montana boarded a flight to Amsterdam to get Photo Studio Heno started off on the right track.



If you are interested in having Greg present a program at one of your upcoming conventions, workshops or seminars, please contact VB Program Coordinator, Kim Newton at 1-800-831-0474.

## Simone Workshop in March *Only a Few Seats are Available!*



Two of the world's most renowned photographers and teachers are Joseph and Louise Simone of Montreal, Canada. The Simones are conducting a very limited number of week long workshops in 2008 and we are especially thrilled that one of those workshops will be held at our facility in San Marcos, Texas.

The Simones very openly teach their methods which have led to their great success. Even if you do not feel the Simone classical style is appropriate for your market, there is still much to be learned that applies to every genre of photography.

The Simone workshop begins with a special meet-and-greet reception with Joseph and Louise on Sunday evening, March 2nd. The workshop then officially starts on March 3rd and continues until noon, March 7th. The Simones will photograph a wide variety of subjects in their classical style. Most of their images will be captured with the Scene Machine Virtual Backgrounds system producing the backgrounds. However, the Simones will also use other kinds of backgrounds and depending on the weather, may demonstrate techniques for working outdoors.



As is the case for most businesses in Europe, space is at a premium. Mr. Noordhoff needed to get maximum usage out of the available space. That is the reason he purchased a Scene Machine Virtual Backgrounds system. He is now able to offer unlimited variety to his clients without the need for more space and more storage of traditional backgrounds. We are looking forward to seeing samples of Photo Studio Heno's work.



Images captured by Trevon Baker

### Can I Afford a Virtual Backgrounds System?

Can you afford to not have a Virtual Backgrounds system? There are many ways to buy a Virtual Backgrounds system such as our special leasing program that enables a qualifying photographer to acquire a system for just \$99 down and three months of payments of only \$25 before the regular payment stream begins. This provides photographers time to start generating new dollars with the system.

There are still a few seats available for this event. Call Virtual Backgrounds today at 1-800-831-0474 to learn more and reserve your seat in this workshop.

### Virtual Backgrounds Monthly Workshops



Every month, (with the exception of December), Virtual Backgrounds conducts a 3-day workshop in San Marcos, Texas for system users and for those who want to learn all about the Virtual Backgrounds process and how it can be used to enhance their studio business. The workshop is a powerful, hands-on learning experience.

Every class includes a featured speaker on the third day who is a working photographer who uses Virtual Backgrounds. The February feature speaker is Greg Stangl who will be discussing how to use Virtual Backgrounds as a key marketing tool to build the business, even in these difficult times.

[Click here](#) for more information or [contact us](#) to reserve your seat at a VB workshop.

### Look for Virtual Backgrounds at PMA and WPPI in Las Vegas



[PMA](#)



[WPPI](#)

We also offer a unique 50/50 financing plan. A Virtual Backgrounds system can be purchased for only 50% down followed by 12 equal monthly payments with 0% interest. With these two flexible payment plans, cost is not an issue!

## Failure is Optional – It is Not Mandatory

Just about every professional photographer recognizes that it's getting tougher and tougher to make a profit. The amateurs, armed with their new digital cameras, are taking a significant chunk of the business away from the professional. We professionals have to ask ourselves, "Why this is happening?" If we produce products that are very similar to what the amateur can capture, then perhaps we deserve to lose the business.

We can't run around the studio, hand holding a camera, chasing after a child, hoping we just might capture a good image the parents will buy. That is exactly what parents can do themselves with their new digital cameras. We can't just take clients to the park and take a bunch of snap shots, hoping we just might capture a good one. Here again, that's what the public can do on their own. The professional can "spray and pray," hoping to get a good shot but that isn't really the professional way to operate. It's amateurish. The professional photographer plans and executes planned methods. Many of the top photographers actually capture a very small number of photographs.

If we aren't doing as well as we would like in the business of photography, maybe it's time we took a serious objective look at exactly what we are doing and the products we create. We might be out of tune with society in 2008.

What Can a VB  
Photographer Create that  
Others Cannot?  
***Ultimate Variety - That's What!***

Virtual Backgrounds exhibits at many trade shows throughout the country as well as internationally. This week, we will be at [PMA](#) in Las Vegas. We will be in Vegas again with a large exhibit at [WPPI](#). Both trade shows will feature a fully functioning studio with a number of guest photographers in the booth to demonstrate and help answer your questions. We hope to see you there!

## Featured Photographer – Don Hileman ***Taking New Visions Photography to a New Level with His Scene Machine***



"I'm not traditional. I would not want to be traditional ever again, because when I was traditional, I was a starving photographer. Once I went to what I now do, I started to enjoy it more, I had more fun, and my studio doubled its business and continues to thrive even though so many other photographers are suffering."

[Click here to view more of Don Hileman's Images](#)

**Cindy Cofer Creations**  
Call NOW! 859-823-4746

Do you want your Senior Portraits to  
**Rock Your World!**  
Unique, Creative, It's all about YOU!

**Cindy Cofer Creations**  
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Call today! 859-823-4746

[Click here to see more of Cindy Cofer's marketing ticklers.](#)

When clients think of Cindy Cofer Creations, they think of variety - variety they cannot possibly begin to capture with their own digital camera - variety they cannot get from most any other professional photographer. That is exactly what Kentucky photographer, Cindy Cofer, promotes about her studio. With her Scene Machine, she has infinite variety. That's why the public comes to her - to get something they cannot get anywhere else - and to get something they cannot do on their own.

Look at these examples of Cindy's direct



That's how Don Hileman of Boardman, Ohio, describes what happened to his business when he dared to be innovative by purchasing a Scene Machine Virtual Backgrounds system and completely changing his style of photography. His studio name, New Visions Photography, sums it up. Don Hileman has new vision - and he is applying that vision to propel himself above his competitors. His business is growing when so many other photographers are sinking.

Hileman states, "I got the Scene Machine for two reasons. First, I was bored with tradition. I'd buy a new muslin or canvas and become bored with it in days. My backgrounds were so limited. And I did not like working outdoors using the same scenes every other photographer could use. Secondly, I knew I wanted to be really truly different. I did not want to produce products like every other photographer - and we have a lot of them in my area. I had a vision, but I just wasn't sure what it was until I discovered the Scene Machine at the Triangle Institute in Pittsburgh. I read up on it and quickly realized that it was the tool for me to help me chase my dream of being really different. It was my New Vision!"

Don has been in photography for only 7 years, starting off working as an assistant in a studio and then in a color lab. He opened his own "living room" studio in Boardman, Ohio, about 50 miles south of Cleveland and soon graduated to a commercial



mail advertising. The proof is in the photographs. They tell the story very well.

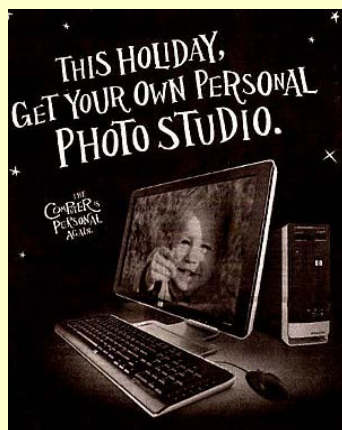
With today's sophisticated and automatic digital cameras, almost anyone can take snapshots or journalistic-type of shots and make enlargements. A professional photographer using Virtual Backgrounds can offer the public ultimate variety in minimal time as Cindy Cofer does in her studio. Amateurs cannot do that - and even traditional professionals can't do it either without Virtual Backgrounds. If you want to separate yourself, Virtual Backgrounds is the answer.

[Click here to see more of Cindy Cofer's marketing ticklers.](#)

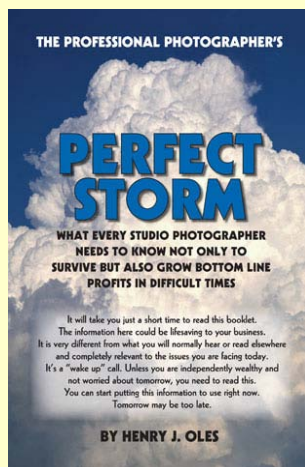
storefront location. At first he concentrated on weddings but that business has been drying up because of digital cameras. He moved his concentration to portraits, fashion and commercial. He got his Scene Machine just 2 years ago. About the same time, he realized that perhaps his high school seniors might like his high fashion look. He tested it on some seniors and the concept took off. "Moms are just as enthusiastic about his new visions as are the daughters. Even the guys like the new look. Seniors today hate the traditional studio look - they want so much more - and that is what I am able to give them."

"Traditionalistic photographers may complain about what I do. They may not like my close ups, the heads I crop off, the fan that blows the hair, or the way I light, or the backgrounds I use. That's perfectly OK with me because the people who pay me real money like it. That's what really counts. I am going to submit some of my work for PPA judging but the judges may not be ready for my new look. That's ok. I love it. My customers love it."

## HP is Pushing the Concept of Being Your Own Professional



What are you going to do to combat the Storm?



[Contact us](#) for your **free** copy today!



## An Example of What Amateurs Can Create on Their Own



Becky and Chris went to a professional photographer and did not like the results, so they decided to take their own holiday family photograph using their simple amateur digital camera. They used a white bed sheet, a couple of plants, and did a nice job of posing. The camera was set on self timer. While the professional might critique the results seen here, Becky and Chris felt that the results were "good enough" and indeed better than what they got from the professional studio. Think of what will happen when amateurs start to get some extra flash equipment!

Becky did her own touch up and cropping and took the finished file to Walgreen's to have the cards printed. This is a clear illustration of how today's amateurs are not far behind that of the professional. It also demonstrates how important it is for the professional studio photographer to rise above, offering services and products the amateurs cannot produce on their own.

## New Imagine the Possibilities DVD and New Training DVD Now Available

Virtual Backgrounds has developed a new promotional DVD under entitled *Imagine the Possibilities*. The DVD features the work of a number of incredibly talented and successful photographers including Cindy Cofer of Kentucky, Trevon Baker of Montana, Rick Harding of San Antonio, Nunila & Horacio Guzman of Mexico, and many, many other outstanding photographers. New segments are being added to the DVD which is available for free from Virtual Backgrounds. [Contact us](#) for your free copy today!

Don started getting great results with his Scene Machine almost immediately but it took him several months before he really felt comfortable with it. He uses his Scene Machine for 100% of his studio work. He even uses it to achieve perfectly black backgrounds and it is a great method to create perfect high key white backgrounds without the normal hassle of getting the background lights just right. Don states, "I was sloppy at first - now I have that under control. Now my muslins are just decoration, hanging on the wall and covering up props and other junk that collects."

For his seniors, he does a lot of high-fashion looks but Don also includes a few traditional backgrounds and poses. He can change from one to the other in seconds. On a typical senior sitting, he offers 50 to 60 exposures, changing backgrounds frequently. He wants to provide maximum variety. Many of the local yearbooks allow seniors to submit tasteful images of all kinds. Most of Don's subjects submit the fashion look. That's what they want.

"It doesn't matter how you shoot - traditional or modernistic. The Scene Machine fits all needs. When I want tradition, I project my muslins and canvas. I like to make my own background slides - I create them with my computer and turn them into slides. I really like being able to tell my clients that no other photographer in the world has the backgrounds that I have. I love to color harmonize every shot. Even if other photographers have a Scene Machine - I use mine differently from anyone else. That's why my customers come to me. They love what I do for them and they love the Scene Machine Virtual Backgrounds system.



Also, all new and refurbished Virtual Backgrounds systems shipped from our Texas facility will now include a new installation/training DVD specially created by Trevon Baker. While this DVD does not replace the detailed instructional manuals or the 3-day hands-on workshops that come with every system, it does provide viewers with many insights into how to set up and use their new system.

If you already have a system, simply contact your VB consultant and ask for your free copy. Our goal is for you to be maximally successful with your Virtual Backgrounds system!



Don's primary camera is a Canon 20D. He works with Photogenic lighting. He has great plans for 08, primarily in expanding his work with area high school seniors and he is also starting a new kids program.

In conclusion, Don says, "Professional photographers are going to have to step up our work and bring something new to the table if we want to survive. We have to do things the soccer moms and others cannot do, no matter how expensive a digital camera they buy. They don't have the Scene Machine and the professional's talent. Regardless of how I change my style in the future, the Scene Machine will change with me. I am limited only by my own imagination."

[Click here to view more of Don Hileman's Images](#)

[Click here to view the New Visions Photography website.](#)

## Send Us Your Thoughts!

If you have any experiences with Virtual Backgrounds that you would like to share with the readers of *The Backgrounder*, please write to us at [info@virtualbackgrounds.net](mailto:info@virtualbackgrounds.net).

Perhaps you have had an especially successful experience, or perhaps you solved an issue that would be helpful to others. Let us know and we'll share it with the readers of *The Backgrounder*!



Virtual Backgrounds

[info@virtualbackgrounds.net](mailto:info@virtualbackgrounds.net)

[www.virtualbackgrounds.net](http://www.virtualbackgrounds.net)

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