



# The Backgrounder

News and Information About Turning Backgrounds into Profits!

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## 300,000,000 Competitors! How do They Stack Up?

Not that long ago, photographers use to worry about what other competing photographers were going to do next in order to attract the most clients. Today, photographers don't worry that much about other photographers because every one of their customers or potential customers is a competitor and is taking pictures on their own. In the US, that's over 300 million competitors!

Now that the public is armed with their digital cameras that enable them to capture clear, sharp, well exposed photographs, they watch what the local professionals do and they copy it often doing a pretty good job. Picateers was a company that tried to use camera bug parents to do school pictures. It didn't work, but the fact that it was even attempted tells us a lot.

It can't be said enough: to survive in today's environment as a professional photographer, you have to be clearly and distinctively different in

## What Photographers can Learn from A Highway Potty Stop



There are tens of thousands of highway service stations and convenience stores across the country that serve as potty stops for the highway warrior. Nearly all of them are so similar that a visitor hardly notices a difference. They are a place to go to the bathroom and buy some gasoline. Buc-ee's is different. The Buc-ee's we noticed is in Giddings, Texas on route 290 half way between Austin and Houston. It has many gas islands, and there are usually vehicles at nearly every pump even though their prices are slightly higher than the neighboring stations. Inside is where you really notice the difference. The single most important factor in a Buc-ee's is the restrooms. They are unusually large facilities, well decorated and exceptionally clean. Buc-ee's also has some unusual products including homemade kolaches, fresh deli sandwiches, an actual jerky bar almost like a meat counter in a supermarket, a variety of other grocery products that you won't find anywhere else, and a large fountain drink area. There are always neat and friendly personnel who seem to be really glad that you are there. All of this results in a flood of shoppers. Although many come just to use the clean spacious restrooms, they almost always buy something.

Buc-ee's does some excellent but inexpensive advertising along the highways. They often emphasize their rest rooms with signs that may say, "You can hold it - only 40 more miles to Buc-ee's!"

There are other gas stations and convenience stores all around Buc-ee's, but they don't have the business even though their gas prices are lower. The formula is working. Buc-ee's now has 30 locations in Texas and may go national.

What can the professional photographer learn from Buc-ee's? It's a simple but very powerful business philosophy. Be really different, in desirable ways, of course. Give the customer a pleasant total experience, much more than they expected. Be friendly. Offer a variety of products they can't get anywhere else. A tool like Virtual Backgrounds can be to the photographer what the spacious clean restrooms are to Buc-ee's. Virtual Backgrounds is something that

desirable ways that catch the attention of the public and motivate them to go to you instead of doing it themselves.

You may think you have more talent and experience but that isn't enough. Many of these rank amateurs can sooner or later capture a great image and they will be darn proud of it.

To survive, let alone thrive, everything about what you do including the tools you use has to be special, producing results the public can't do on their own.

### Come to the May 2010 VB Workshop!

Is your studio challenged? Are you looking for a way to bring in more customers, close more contracts, be distinctively different, be more creative, and sell larger orders? You can learn the best way to accomplish all of this and more in our May 24-26,2010, Virtual Backgrounds workshop. Find out all the exciting news.

This three-day workshop features VB photographer Jim Wilson and Montana Master Photographer, Trevon Baker. Wilson and Baker will teach you how you can incorporate this dramatic concept to bring change to your studio operation. Whether you are a newbie or old timer, fixed based or on location, Virtual Backgrounds can change your career. Financing is available! Contact a VB consultant today to learn more!

### WPPI Draws Nearly 15,000 Attendees



All records were broken when nearly 15,000 photographers descended on Las Vegas for the annual WPPI convention and trade show. WPPI

helps the photographer be more creative and therefore different in ways that attracts customers.

Funny thing is, Buc-ee's probably doesn't have all that much more overhead, dollar for dollar, than their competitors. They simply do it right. We can all learn from Buc-ee's. Next time you are in Texas, ask most anyone who travels if they know about Buc-ee's and you'll be amazed how many people do know and even give you an approving smile for asking!

Take a look for yourself around your place and ask yourself what is special about you and your operation that will attract customers like Buc-ee's attracts them. Are you just another potty stop or are you much more than that? To learn more about Buc-ee's. Go to [www.bucees.com](http://www.bucees.com) and click on *About Us* to see two You Tube videos, one that made national TV. Then take an objective look at your studio operation and see how you can make it really special. Being a customer at Buc-ee's is an experience. What kind of experience do your customer's get?

### Diane Wilson Enchanted & Theme Workhop

#### New Format - Lower Price



was packed with programs and a trade show that covered two convention halls. The enthusiasm level of the attendees seemed higher than ever as they rushed from event to event trying to figure out how the whole system operates and how they can grow within it. Most attendees were young in both age and experience. For many it was one of their first conventions.

The show seemed to have less focus on weddings and more focus on other aspects of photography. Digital has severely hurt the wedding candid business, so photographers are seeking to learn how to move into other specialties.

There were those who felt that it would be difficult for WPPI to surpass last year's high attendance figures, but they were clearly wrong. For better or worse, the influx of new photographers who work part or full time continues to grow. There is no end in growth in sight. Growth is good but phenomenal growth means greatly increased competition. Only those who offer distinctively different and superior work will do well.

### Sturdevant Wins Big at WPPI

Richard Sturdevant certainly made a mark at WPPI. Out of 3,500 print entries for the print competition coming from 35 countries, Richard scored 1<sup>st</sup> place in Portraits of an Individual titled *Legend of the Brazos Texas Ranger*, 2<sup>nd</sup> place in High School Senior with *Majestic Illumination*, and 2<sup>nd</sup> place with Illustrative Editorial with *Valley of the Dammed*. Richard is an ardent user of the Scene Machine Virtual Backgrounds system and teaches his portrait art composite workshop at Virtual Backgrounds. Watch for an announcement for his next workshop



There is a new format and lower price for the Diane Wilson *Enchanted Photography* workshop. The next workshop is scheduled for June 28-30, 2010, with an optional two extra days on July 1-2, 2010. The first three days of the class cover aspects of how to set up, operate, and promote an enchanted or fantasy photography business. The price for the first three days has been reduced to \$295. An optional fourth and fifth day features costume making and a more extensive post production experience. The price for the extra two days is an additional \$199. Diane will teach both how the use of pictorial canvas backgrounds as well as how projected Virtual Backgrounds significantly increases customer enthusiasm and sales averages.



## Big Winner at Sturdevant Workshop



Tess Mason of Johannesburg South Africa receives a door prize gift from Richard Sturdevant at the conclusion of his workshop at Virtual Backgrounds this month. This was Richard Sturdevant's first workshop at Virtual Backgrounds where he taught his methods of creating collage art portraits, an exciting new concept for professional photographers.



## Webinars vs Workshops – Which is Better?



Diane is widely known for her highly creative enchanted photography and for her unique studio which was started in a Toronto, Canada area flea market. Her entire operation occupied an area of only 15 x 18 feet and operated only two days a week. Diane recently moved to a new location that enables her to operate on a regular full week schedule. She now caters to a higher end client.



Enchanted and theme photography is a unique niche market that has proven to be highly successful. It is a style of photography that

In our ever increasing hurry up slap bang world, professional photographers today are moving to thinking that everything they need to learn can come from a webinar lasting an hour or less costing less than \$50 with no need to leave their office or home. As a result, webinars are growing in popularity and many day long and longer workshops are suffering from lower attendance. A 60 minute webinar without the travel may seem like the way to go, but is it really? If photography were that simple to learn, then any amateur could watch the same webinar and be as good as you!

Becoming a real professional is more than watching a few webinars. If that were all there was to running your photography business, then anyone could do it. While some simple things can be taught with a webinar, other things require that the student get really involved. Hands-on, supervised experience is critical. You need to be fully immersed. You don't get that with a webinar. For many things, attending a real workshop, even with the travel costs, can be well worth the expense in dollars and time.

Virtual Backgrounds has always emphasized customer education. That is why we include a very intensive three-day workshop with every VB system we sell. While the fundamentals of Virtual Backgrounds can be learned very quickly, it takes some effort to learn to fully implement the concept. VB also sponsors a variety of other workshops including Joseph and Louise Simone, Richard Sturdevant, Deborah and Rick Ferro, Chris Wunder, Greg Stangl, Diane Wilson, and others. The cost of attending a well done multi-day workshop is a small price to pay for the rewards it can bring in success and profits!

### Old Technology - New Technology

In today's world, many people think that if a method wasn't just recently invented and if it did not somehow use

parents and families love and also a kind of photography that amateurs cannot do on their own. In her workshops, Diane provides all the information a photographer needs to open and operate a fixed location or portable operation. Her unique teaching includes how to start on a shoe string budget and work your way up, just as she has done in her own business.



The class will be held at the Learn and Earn Center at Virtual Backgrounds in San Marcos, Texas which is just 30 miles south of Austin. Virtual Backgrounds has a hotel special rate for participants at the nearby Comfort Inn of \$45 per night. Lunches are included

the computer, it isn't worth anything. That's at least how kids look at things. Funny thing: as we grow older, we also come to learn that some older methods are far more effective than anything brand new. Virtual Backgrounds is a perfect example. The concept is not brand new. It even uses old fashion transparencies to create the backgrounds and no computers. How could such a method be worth anything in 2010?

The answer is simple. The method works so well and it is so simple. Many photographers suggest converting Virtual Backgrounds to a digital projector. It can be done but the benefits are so costly. It means a much larger and more expensive and more complicated system that is harder to use. A transparency is so simple and effective. Did you know that a transparency holds about 100 megabytes of photographic information? This is much more than a typical digital file

The Virtual Backgrounds system that is sold today is much advanced over anything sold in the past. At Virtual Backgrounds we are continually at work making further refinements and improvements to the projected background process.

### What Would Magicians do if they Lost Their Magic?



Imagine being a magician and having the public learn exactly how you do all your tricks. Even worse, imagine that your audience can now do your tricks on their own without any assistance from you. Your job as a magician would vaporize unless you came out with new magic tricks that would again impress the public.

each day. Class size is limited. Participants usually start early and stay late. There is much to learn and do.

Reserve your seat now! [Contact](#) a friendly VB consultant for more information and to get registered.

Props for the Diane Wilson workshop are provided by Denny Manufacturing.

\$\$\$ SAVE \$\$\$



### Ask about our Refurbished VB Systems!

Virtual Backgrounds accepts trade-ins and that means we often have previously owned refurbished projection systems available for sale at a considerable savings without the risks of buying off the Internet. When we get a system, we first go over the projector from top to bottom, bringing it up to today's standards. Screens are carefully cleaned when necessary and checked for damage. Screens with serious damage are not sold. Minor damage is noted and the buyer is told in advance exactly what to expect. This is what we define as refurbish. All refurbished systems are sold with a warranty and with a guaranteed trade in within 6 months if the customer wants to move to a new system. The refurbished system also includes technical support and the VB workshop. Refurbished also can be gotten on our 50/50 finance plan. Refurbished is an

This is exactly what is happening to professional photographers. Nearly all of our magic from before is now a commodity. We used to be full of magic and mystery. Everything about photography was magic including our special cameras, lights, darkrooms, chemicals, and especially the knowledge we had to have to operate all that equipment.

Today, our customers can take their own pictures, get really good ones, and either print them themselves or get them printed while they wait at thousands of locations like Walmart or Walgreens. For professional photographers it's a catastrophe unless the professional can come up with new magic. People will come back if you have new magic. Virtual Backgrounds is a clear example of new magic. Amateurs don't have it. They cannot create all the variety nor the experience that is possible with the magic of Virtual Backgrounds. Many professional photographers don't have it. It is a tool that makes you really special. To the public, it is magic.

Now is the time to analyze your studio and implement all the magic you can come up with! Use it on a regular basis along with your talent to create really special and desirable products for your clients. Otherwise, be prepared to see your customer count continue to fall.

**"Prosperity Belongs to those who Learn New Things the Fastest"**

**Paul Zane Pilzer**

How true! The photographers who are failing are primarily those who are not changing with the times; who are not learning; who are not producing new and different things; and who are not using technology like Virtual Backgrounds to enhance their offering to the public. To be successful today, you must offer exciting new looks that the public cannot create on their own.

excellent way to get started in Virtual Backgrounds, especially now while funds are tight. Call a VB consultant for further information.

## Lori Lens Gets Priceless Advertising that is Bringing in Unbelievable Results



Click on the above image to view it larger.

Lori De Rouen, aka Lori Lens, recently got a full page spread in her local Nederland Texas newspaper and it didn't cost her a penny. It was a human interest story featuring Lori's studio and her use of the Scene Machine Virtual Backgrounds system. The newspaper heard about her unique Virtual Backgrounds product and came over on their own to investigate.

No sooner did the newspaper appear that Lori began getting calls from everywhere, including friends she hadn't seen in years, offering her congratulations. Many long time clients called to ask about the Scene Machine and to offer their congratulations. One caller asked, "How much do you charge to use the Virtual Backgrounds system?"

This type of publicity is priceless. People don't notice ads, even full

Don't ever stop learning and implementing. If Plan A doesn't work, then be ready to go to Plans B, C, and D. Whatever it takes! There really is no other choice if you want to stay in business.

## Soon to be Announced Sturdevant Returns!

Richard Sturdevant will teach a two-day workshop at VB on how to use the combination of Virtual Backgrounds and Painter to create images far beyond what others can do. Watch for further information next month in The Backgrounder and on our Web site!

## Virtual Backgrounds at the NY NJ Show



New York photographer, Peter Budraitis, long time Scene Machine user, hosted a Virtual Backgrounds display at the NY NJ trade show last week. Peter showed examples of his work done with the Scene Machine virtual background system and talked with attendees about how virtual backgrounds has helped him grow his business.

## Send Us Your Thoughts!

If you have any experiences with

page ads but they do notice and remember human interest editorial about a local business, especially if it is really interesting. Lori will be getting response to this story for years to come. While the Scene Machine Virtual Backgrounds system is really a photographer's tool, it is also a very powerful marketing tool that catches people's attention because it can be used to create such wide ranging results. It is not unusual for a photographer to get newspaper recognition for their uniqueness.

Lori states, "I should have bought that Virtual Backgrounds system a long time ago. It should have been my first investment. I've been thinking about it for years - even dreaming about it. People just love it."

[Lori was recently a Featured Photographer in The Backgrounder. To read her story, click here.](#)

## Don Hileman Creates Amazing High Key Images with his Scene Machine!



Don Hileman

Youngstown, Ohio photographers, Don and Autumn Hileman have developed a new style of high key photography using their Virtual Backgrounds system resulting in images that would be difficult to create without Virtual Backgrounds. They call it White-on-White. They set their Spectravue 300 projector on ¼ power, their camera lens on f 5.6, and the shutter at 1/125 of a second. The ultra-reflective screen acts as if they were shooting straight into the front of a giant softbox. Depending on the intensity of light projected at the background, varying degrees of lens glare can be created and actually turned into a complementary light that delivers a unique end product. High key is commonly done with a plain white background that does not nearly provide the same effect and thus the high key images created by most photographers are very similar. Don and Autumn are always looking for new looks that please today's clients with something different. This is why their studio is named New Visions Photography.

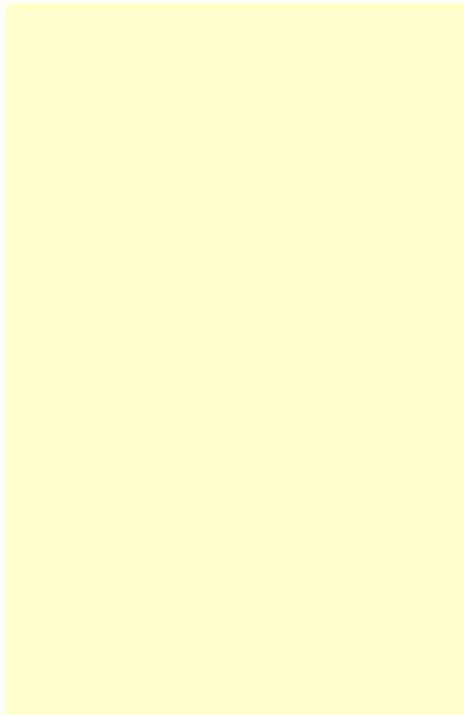
[Click here to read Don's featured photographer article.](#)



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*

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