

TIME

How 6 Pro Photographers Are Using Instagram Stories



By **OLIVIER LAURENT** May 25, 2017

With 200 million users, Instagram's Snapchat clone, Instagram Stories, has already surpassed its competition.

The ephemeral platform, launched last August, lets users post photos and videos that vanish after 24 hours. They can be adorned with text, stickers and drawings to create a narrative story.

While the new feature has found success among a third of all Instagram users, professional photographers have been slow to embrace Stories. These six photographers, though, tell us why they've jumped on the opportunity to share their work with that growing audience.

Stacy Kranitz (@stacykranitz)

In Stacy Kranitz's Instagram Stories, like the rest of her feed, the photographer purposely blurs the boundaries between her personal and professional lives. The result is a truer representation of the people she documents across Appalachia. Plus, Instagram Stories, with its disappearing quality, offers a new way to create memories. "I'm interested in how it becomes this strange sort of sketchbook," she says, "a collection of experiences that are bundled together and then disappear." Follow her on @stacykranitz.

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Cengiz Yar (@cengizyar)

Cengiz Yar was chatting with friends in Chicago when he realized the potential power of his Instagram. "One of the guys told me that he couldn't believe what politicians were telling him to think about refugees because of how sharply that image contrasted to what he was seeing in my short mobile video clips," he tells TIME. "He was concerned and empathetic about the suffering of the Iraqi and Syrian people, and encouraged me to keep shooting the videos so he could stay informed." So when he returned to Iraq, where he's been documenting the Mosul offensive for the last seven months, he made a conscious effort to integrate mobile video storytelling into his workflow, "empowered by the idea that I might be able to reach a new audience," he says. That's when Instagram rolled out Stories, offering him a new way to share what he was seeing on the ground.

"My main focus for Stories has been daily news updates on the battle for Mosul between U.S.-backed Iraqi forces and ISIS and the resulting mass displacement of the city's civilian population," he says. "I essentially visualize walk-throughs of my days in the field and use short lines of text to build a story. I also use it to show slices of daily life in northern Iraq and what it's like to live here as a Western journalist."

This approach has had great results. "Based on conversations I have through the app and in person, I think it's helping me reach an audience that might not otherwise seek out traditional news media or international news," he says. "It allows me to put the battle for Mosul in front of someone riding the bus to work in Texas or rocking their kid to bed in Indonesia. Stories allows me to put this crisis in their hands. That's powerful. As journalists struggle with ways to inform people about what's happening in the world, it seems foolish not to use it. It's clearly effective." Follow him @cengizyar.

Girma Berta (@gboxcreative)



Girma Berta is the mind behind *gboxcreative*, an Addis Ababa-based creative studio that brings together photography and graphic design. On Instagram Stories, the Ethiopian photographer shows the behind-the-scenes of his shoots and what he's up to. "It help me show a different side of my personality with freedom," he tells TIME. "And it gives me a chance to get creative and to try something new."

For Berta, Stories also offer a way to foster dialogue with his followers. "People engage me more than with the normal posts," he says. "Also I can measure and see who saw the stories." Plus, it helps him grow his audience further. Follow him @gboxcreative.

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Kendrick Brinson & David Walter Banks (@brinsonbanks)

Kendrick Brinson, one half of the Brinson+Banks duo, used to share behind-the-scenes images of their commercial and editorial shoots on her feed with the hashtag #BrinsonBanksBTS. While offering an insight into their lives, it also meant publishing images that might not fit the aesthetics of their carefully-curated grid of polished photographs. "Now I use Instagram's Stories for that specific purpose," she says.

The feature also offers a way for the duo to show what goes into their work. “I want young photographers to see the elbow grease that goes into a shoot,” she says. The hope is that they will realize that working with celebrities is not just about glamour. “Our actual shoots can sometimes take all of eight minutes, but there’s planning, and packing, and usually two or more hours of setting up a studio at these locations and then an hour of breakdown and I like to give a peek into that process,” she tells TIME. “If I was just discovering portraiture and followed a photographer whose work I liked, I’d love to see the lighting set-ups to get an idea of how that photographer pulled off a certain look. It has always been a priority for David and I as photographers to help other photographers and I see using Instagram Stories as another avenue to do that.”

Like other photographers, Brinson and Banks have found that their followers responded positively to their Stories. “We get lots of comments and cheers and questions in reply to our Stories,” says Brinson. “The conversations feel more one-on-one because they are, so it can be more of a conversation with a back and forth than an Instagram comment where someone is sharing an emoji and I’m replying with an emoji.” Follow them on @brinsonbanks.

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Matthieu Paley (@paleyphoto)

Matthieu Paley, a National Geographic photographer, can’t always share images on Instagram when he’s on assignment – not just because he has to be careful about what he reveals about an upcoming magazine story but also because, he says, he’s “wary of writing captions in the field because I might not yet have a full or clear understanding of what or who I am photographing,” he says.

That’s where Instagram Stories come in. “It’s a much more direct way to communicate and tease without cluttering my normal Instagram,” he tells TIME. “And the fact that it is online for 24 hours only, with no captions allows me to use it even while on assignment, to a certain extent.” And the results can be surprising. “In Iran last month, I must have had 30 offers of help or to stay at homes within a couple of hours of loading Stories,” he says. “In Costa Rica now I have lots of great suggestions and contacts that are helping me for a story I am working on.” Follow him @paleyphoto.

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Paolo Verzone (@paoloverzone)

It would be a mistake to think that Instagram Stories is a tool only for millennials. Paolo Verzone, an Italian photographer who's turning 50 this year, has embraced the platform. "I look at Stories as a new tool – so my approach is experimental, while keeping in mind that it must stay simple and effective," he says. That means embracing vertical imagery. "Not every single image works in a story, but verticality is mandatory," he says. "That format is magnificent, it makes you look at the world vertically."

While some of Verzone's Stories complement the images he shares on his regular feed, the photographer doesn't feel bound to that approach. "Stories is a different world in itself," he says. "I create my Stories thinking that it could be reaching a completely different audience."

And that seems to be the case. Verzone has found that his audience's responses tend to be more personal. "They are often passionate about these Stories," he says. "And they aren't always the people who are most active on my regular feed. So I definitely thinks it has its own audience." Follow him @paoloverzone.

Olivier Laurent is the editor of *TIME LightBox*. Follow him on Twitter and Instagram @olivierclaurent