

Interview with Florian Fischer

by Peter Rowlands

Hi Florian.

Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed. I'm looking forward to reading your answers.

Your early career in the creative and IT industry, although potentially more lucrative, didn't seem to inspire you so how does working underwater rekindle that creativity? Is it the environment or the lack of surface interference?

I think coming from the advertising world and being a creative person at heart, I see a lot of similarities between what I used to do and what I do now with Behind the Mask.

Ultimately, both are about conveying a message or selling a 'product,' if you will. The big difference is that before, I was often selling fashion or consumer concepts that sometimes felt a bit superficial to me. I had to create stories to evoke emotions around products that didn't always have that inherent depth.

Now, with Behind the Mask, the 'product' I'm sharing is something profoundly meaningful: the love for the ocean. I'm bringing genuine emotions and real experiences to

people, and that makes the creative process feel so much more authentic and rewarding. I don't have to invent a narrative; I live it, and I'm privileged to share it through our videos and content.

It's also incredibly fulfilling to collaborate with a team of like-minded people who share that passion. We're all learning from each other and multiplying that joy and energy. In the end, it just feels like a much more balanced and real way to be creative, and it's exactly where I want to be.

Behind the Mask is groundbreaking in terms of its quality and creativity in a world where high def cameras, still and video, are readily available to all. How does your approach differ and make you stand out from the crowd?

So, the way I see it, Behind the Mask is doing something that's not necessarily new if you compare it to other lifestyle or adventure industries like skateboarding or surfing. In those worlds, people have really embraced the culture—they wear the fashion, they identify with the lifestyle, and there's a lot of emotional storytelling



that makes it 'cool' even for those who don't do the sport.

In the diving industry, that hasn't really been the case. People don't walk around in 'dive culture' fashion or see diving as this super relatable, emotional lifestyle in the same way. And that always struck me as a gap—because diving is incredibly cool and emotionally rich. It's just that the storytelling wasn't there to make it relatable to a wider audience.

So what makes us stand out is that we brought that emotional storytelling into diving. We're doing what surf or skate films did for their communities: making it feel alive, relatable, and cool. If we'd started in





a different industry, this might not have been groundbreaking—but in diving, it was a fresh approach. And honestly, it's also challenging because the industry mindset can be a bit old-fashioned. But by focusing on emotional storytelling and connecting people to the ocean in a new way, we've carved out a unique space.

A lot of underwater photographers operate individually but you seem to prefer being a team member and perhaps the leader. Is this how you operate at your most productive?

I think that really gets to the heart of what Behind the Mask is all

about and my own philosophy as well. Yes, there are times when creative people need to work alone and really dive into their own creative space. But in the end, I don't see creative projects as a democracy where you just compromise between two visions. Instead, it's about having a leader or a guiding vision and then letting each person on the team own their part of the process.

With Behind the Mask, it's all about that natural flow of understanding who's responsible for what, giving everyone the freedom to do their best work, and then coming together as a team to create something greater than any

one person could do alone. It's that synergy and that sense of everyone knowing their place and contributing to the bigger vision that makes it so rewarding.

So yes, we're definitely more of a creative community than just a production company led by one person. We value both the solo moments and the collaborative spirit, and that's really at the core of how we stay creative and productive.

How was the emergence of Behind the Mask affected by the Covid Pandemic and now, several years later, are things back on an even keel?

So this is a really interesting one for me personally because I struggled a lot with how COVID affected everything. It wasn't so much the pandemic itself, but the timing of it.

Right before COVID hit, we were ready to really launch Behind the Mask into this big network of travelers, creatives, clients, and brands. It felt like we had the rocket on the launchpad and then suddenly, the launchpad collapsed. That was COVID for us.

A lot of people pivoted really quickly to reinvent themselves online, but I didn't feel like rushing into that was the right move for us. I needed time to rethink and understand what

the future potential really was.

Now, a few years later, I feel like we've emerged more focused. We've transitioned into a community that's open for others to join, where we're sharing not just underwater filmmaking but the whole experience of freediving, performance, and storytelling. We've realized that everyone who goes underwater with a camera can be an ocean ambassador. And our role now is to guide and build a big community around that idea, to help people feel confident and collaborative rather than competitive.

So yes, we're doing social media work, we have the travel side of the company, but the Academy is really my main focus now. That's where my heart is: sharing our passion and making sure people can join us, learn, and become part of this underwater storytelling movement.

Your early work came from within the dive industry but you soon managed to attract significant clients from outside. Was this the original intention and how did you go about promoting your services in such a wide world?

Originally, Behind the Mask wasn't set up like a traditional business at all. It was more of a passion project—something we poured our own time and money into because we wanted full creative control. You know, in the creative industry, they say that the less you're driven by money upfront, the more truly creative you can be. That was our philosophy: to build an identity first and let people associate our work with quality, emotion, and inspiration. And as more people got to know us and connected with us, including professionals and potential clients from outside the dive industry, it all grew very naturally.



So yes, while it was always in the back of my mind to expand our reach beyond just the dive world, our main focus was on creating meaningful work that we fully owned and believed in. Now we do all sorts of things—collaborating with museums, working with TV and documentary productions, and reaching a much wider audience. It's all about sending these little satellites—these pieces of our work—out into the world and seeing the reactions and connections that come back. It's magical and really rewarding.

Your videos are extremely well edited with great soundtracks. Is that part of the post processing something you get heavily involved in?

Oh, absolutely. I think post-production is one of the most underrated parts of underwater filmmaking. A lot of people think it's all about capturing the footage, but for me, the real creative magic starts after you've filmed everything. You come back with all this raw material, and now you get to puzzle it together into something that expresses exactly what you want.



It doesn't even matter if everything went as planned when you were shooting. Nature is unpredictable, and the ocean's always going to throw surprises at you. So I love going with the flow and then, in the editing room, looking at what we have and turning it into something unique. The editing is where you control the emotional value, the pacing, the music, the narrative—everything comes together there. It's honestly the part I love most, because you get to shape the final story in a way that really moves people.

So yes, I'm very heavily involved in that part of the process myself, and it's where I feel like we really bring the heart of our work to life.

I would imagine that you have used a wide range of underwater imaging equipment based on the job in hand but is there one system which caters for most of your requirements?

I think this topic can get a little over-discussed because sometimes people think having the latest and greatest gear is what makes a great video. That's really a misconception. For me, it's less about the specific piece of equipment and more about how comfortable you are with it. The gear should feel like an extension of yourself so you can focus on capturing those creative ideas rather than fighting with the camera.

That said, I do use a wide range of tools. I'll shoot with everything from small action cameras or 360 cameras to mirrorless or big cinema cameras, even drones. My personal go-to for most underwater work is the RED Monstro full-frame camera. It's not the newest model out there, but it shoots in 8K RAW and gives me a ton of flexibility in post-production. I love that I can handle things like white balance afterward and really focus on the creative side when I'm actually underwater.

Of course, it's a heavy camera and not something I'd use solo without a team to help manage it, but I've gotten used to it and it's my tool of choice. It's not always about having the latest gear; it's about having the gear that lets you bring your vision to life in the most seamless way. So that's the "weapon of choice" I rely on.

Is there a long term plan for Behind the Mask and how far ahead do some of your projects take to come to fruition?

Essentially, my main focus for the future

of Behind the Mask is to build a strong, thriving community of underwater filmmakers and photographers who really identify with the spirit of what we do. We're launching the Behind the Mask Academy and starting with our first big trip to the Maldives. That's just the beginning. We're talking to everyone who applies, figuring out their goals, and helping them find the path that suits them best. It's really about guiding people to the next level, whatever their individual challenges are.

In the long run, I want to create a physical hub right here in the Azores. That means people can come, spend time in our environment, and really learn everything from underwater filming and storytelling to editing and conservation storytelling. It's all about reducing a bit of my own travel, having a stable place where we can welcome people, and cultivating a community that really makes a difference in how people perceive and love the ocean.

So that's the future I'm excited about—building that strong, supportive, and powerful community that brings the love for the ocean into everyone's heart.

Thank you Florian for such informed and insightful answers. I am sure they will be inspirational to many underwater photography readers.

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