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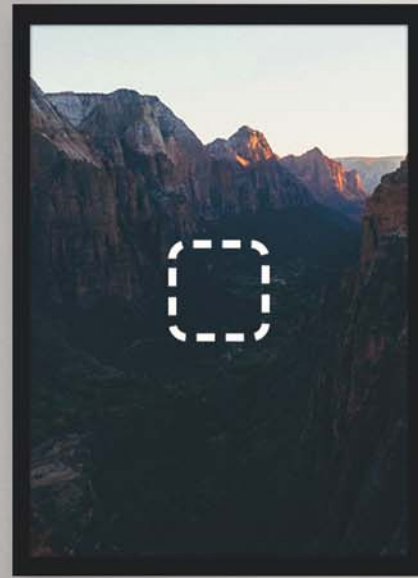
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Shutter Magazine is about photography education. Our goal is to provide current, insightful, and in-depth educational content for today's professional wedding and portrait photographer. Shutter Magazine uses the latest technologies to deliver information in a way that is relevant to our audience. Our experienced contributors help us create a sense of community and establish the magazine as one of the leading photography publications in the world.

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LAUNCH POINT

A message from the editor-in-chief

It's time to plan for
the *year ahead*.
CONTROL YOUR DESTINY.
- Sal Cincotta



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

4 TIPS FOR ENSURING A Great Wedding Experience

with Leonardo Volturo

Are you looking to improve your client experience? This month, I share some of the ways we ensure a smooth and effective high-level wedding experience for our clients. Use these tips, and your own clients will be raving about you to their friends and family.



Images © Leonardo Volturo



Constant Contact & Maintaining Great Service From Start to Finish

Melissa and I are very hands-on. We want our clients to have that high-end luxury boutique experience. And when you're talking about those things, besides having a superior product, service is the most important aspect.

You all know the magnitude of a wedding. We want to make the entire time spent with us from initial consult through final delivery a great experience for everyone. That is why we are on top of everything, walking our clients through every step of the process. We build their timeline, help them select locations and outfits for their engagement session, and always let them know what to expect. And we aren't afraid to give our opinion. We have clients texting us photos from dressing rooms, and we have no problem vetoing outfits and locations. They clearly see that we are heavily invested in the success of their images and event.

We are always sending emails and having meetings either in person, on Skype or phone, always letting them know what we need from them and what's next. The other major part of this is responding quickly. Don't leave your clients hanging or wondering what's going on.

It's this higher level of service and attention to detail that will separate you from the pack and have everyone singing your praises.

Control the Timeline: Getting the Time You Need

A lot of photographers like to just go with the flow or work off a schedule created by someone else. Our studio doesn't leave our fate in the hands of someone else. No one else knows how we work, what we need to deliver or what our clients are expecting. Because we want to control our own destiny, we establish our timeline with our clients from the very beginning, and stress its importance in allowing us to deliver what they've seen and what they've hired us to produce.

You're going to run into situations where a planner will want to control the day, or maybe a bride wants to jack with your schedule so she doesn't have to add more time. This is when you need to reinforce the importance of getting the time you need on the wedding day. Does your client want what she's seen you do? Of course she does. So drive that point across when planning the schedule of the day, and if you ever need to push back.

We've had to deal with this several times recently, and the end result is we got the time we needed, the client understood why and we delivered on what we promised.

Setting the Tone for Engagement Sessions

Most photographers tell their clients that the engagement session is important because “we use it to get to know each other.” While that’s all well and good, we use the initial consult and planning/constant contact to get to know our clients and their story. “Getting to know each other,” if we mentioned that at all, would be one of the last things we said.

We have three goals for the engagement session. We want to give our clients diversity in their images and the art for their home so that everything isn’t only from the wedding day.

Secondly, we want them to get comfortable being in front of our cameras. From the very beginning and throughout the engagement session, we’re coaching our clients, directing them, setting all of us up for success and a great experience. We’re giving them tips and tricks along with the typical posing, stressing all the small details and ensuring everything is perfect with their positioning, hair, clothing, etc. This shows them that we know what we’re doing and that we have control, and it allows them to relax and just enjoy each other and the session.

Lastly, after the engagement session, everyone knows what to expect when the wedding day arrives. You have established a relationship. You’re not just some random person showing up on their wedding day. You’ve “gotten to know each other.” They are excited to see you, they’ve told everyone about you. Their family has most likely heard about you and the experience they’ve had with you so far. They’ve seen the pictures. So on the wedding day, we’ll hear, “I feel like I already know you” or, “Can’t wait to see the amazing images from today.” We’ve had clients push for a longer cocktail hour because they want more time for pictures.



Day Of

Whether you realize it or not, you’re actually on display during a wedding, and often the center of attention. Here are a couple of comments we overheard recently: “I love how they know everyone’s names” and, “There’s so much attention to detail.” At a wedding, you’re making a continuous impression on many people throughout the day.

When you walk in the room, introduce yourself. Find some of the key people and get their names. When we arrive for groom and bride prep, we go up to everyone in the room and introduce ourselves and get their names one by one. Remember that the more personable you are, the more relaxed those around you will be; the day will be easier and you’ll be on your way to great images.



Quick Tips for the Rest of the Day

During the ceremony

Be invisible. Don't distract the guests with your movements, and don't be noisy. Here it's also best to shoot with longer lenses so you can keep your distance from the couple and officiant.

Family photos

Here it's best to have your second shooter or assistant running the family list and getting everyone organized so you can shoot and get through this part quickly. Establish yourself early on, which helps when you're trying to corral everyone for the group shots. Usually a couple of people will volunteer to help gather everyone for photos.

Creatives

This part should be a breeze if you've spent the engagement session prepping your clients. They know what to expect and you've coached them already.

Reception

When working the timeline with our clients, we let them know that we typically do not stay for the entire reception unless they're planning some grand exit that has to happen at the end of the night. The photos you take of the guests dancing at 9 p.m. will be the exact same photos you take at 10 p.m., except they're more drunk and their dance moves are worse. Get all of the formalities out of the way, and you should be good to go.

If you're one of the many photographers out there having a tougher time with service, communication or getting the time you need on a wedding day, these simple tips will definitely get you on the right track. ■



Leonardo Volturo is an international award-winning wedding and portrait photographer, writer and educator. He and his his wife, Melissa, operate Leonardo Volturo Photography, a boutique South Florida studio. Together they cater to discerning brides around the world with their signature blend of modern, stylistic and dramatic imagery.

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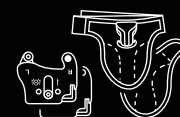
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What to Do When You Feel Like a Failure

with Vanessa Joy

When I first came to *Shutter Magazine* with this topic, I was ready for Sal to hit me over the head. Not sure why, though, because Sal is one of the most supportive people I know—and, let’s face it, he isn’t scared to ruffle some feathers if it benefits someone. Maybe it was because secretly I didn’t want to talk about this. I didn’t want to admit it and step down off the pedestal that some put me on. That pedestal is pretty; it makes me look pretty. But it’s nothing if it’s not open and honest, so here we go.

Almost every wedding, engagement and photo session I do, I come back home feeling like I failed. Most of the time I say to myself, “Why did they hire me?” or, “They’re going to hate these and sue me.” Sometimes when I look at other people’s incredible work, I degrade my own and think I should just throw in the towel.

Why admit this? Because I know a lot of you are thinking it too. I recently saw a friend’s status update admitting that she’d been up all night, anxiety-ridden and having a panic attack, after a tricky wedding, feeling depressed because her photography is nowhere near where she wanted it to be. The ironic part? I had looked at a photo of hers three days before that made me think this newbie was going places and I’d better step up my game.

Toward the end of the year, burnout really comes in to play, knocking most of us on our ass. It’s normal. Most of us get into a creative rut and comparison frenzy—even those that you think have it all together. But we’re not going to sit and have a pity party, not here, not now. Put the ice cream back in the freezer, save the glass of wine for a happy occasion and let’s find a way to get back in gear.

Step 1: Look at the Facts

Hey, you emotional train wreck, let's not go jumping off the track just yet. What do you know is true? Often, things aren't as bad as we feel they are, and it just takes a step back and a reality check to get us back on track. For example, what I perceived as my worst engagement session I did in 2014 turned out to be my most profitable session all year. When we think our photos are horrible, they're actually the best photos our clients have of themselves. So if you think things aren't going so great, look at the situation realistically, and make any necessary changes.



Image © Vanessa Joy



Images © Vanessa Joy

Step 2: Stop Comparing

The only person you should be comparing yourself to is you. Take a look at your work from two or three years ago. If it's the same, guess what? It's time to move your ass and make a change to better yourself. If it has improved, then pat yourself on the back. Continue to look at other photographers for inspiration, but don't overfeed yourself other people's work so much that you start putting down your own. After all, "Comparison is the thief of joy," as Theodore Roosevelt once said.

Step 3: Surround Yourself With People Who Are Better Than You

The late motivational speaker Jim Rohn said that we are the average of the five people we hang around with the most. Are your friends the kind of people you want to be? Are they motivating you to hone in on your strengths, or are they enabling your weaknesses?

I'm not telling you to ditch your lifelong friends, but don't be afraid to add new ones to the mix. Having a mentor or someone who's doing bigger and better things than you can be extremely inspiring, and if that person is good at getting you into high gear, then keep them around at all costs.

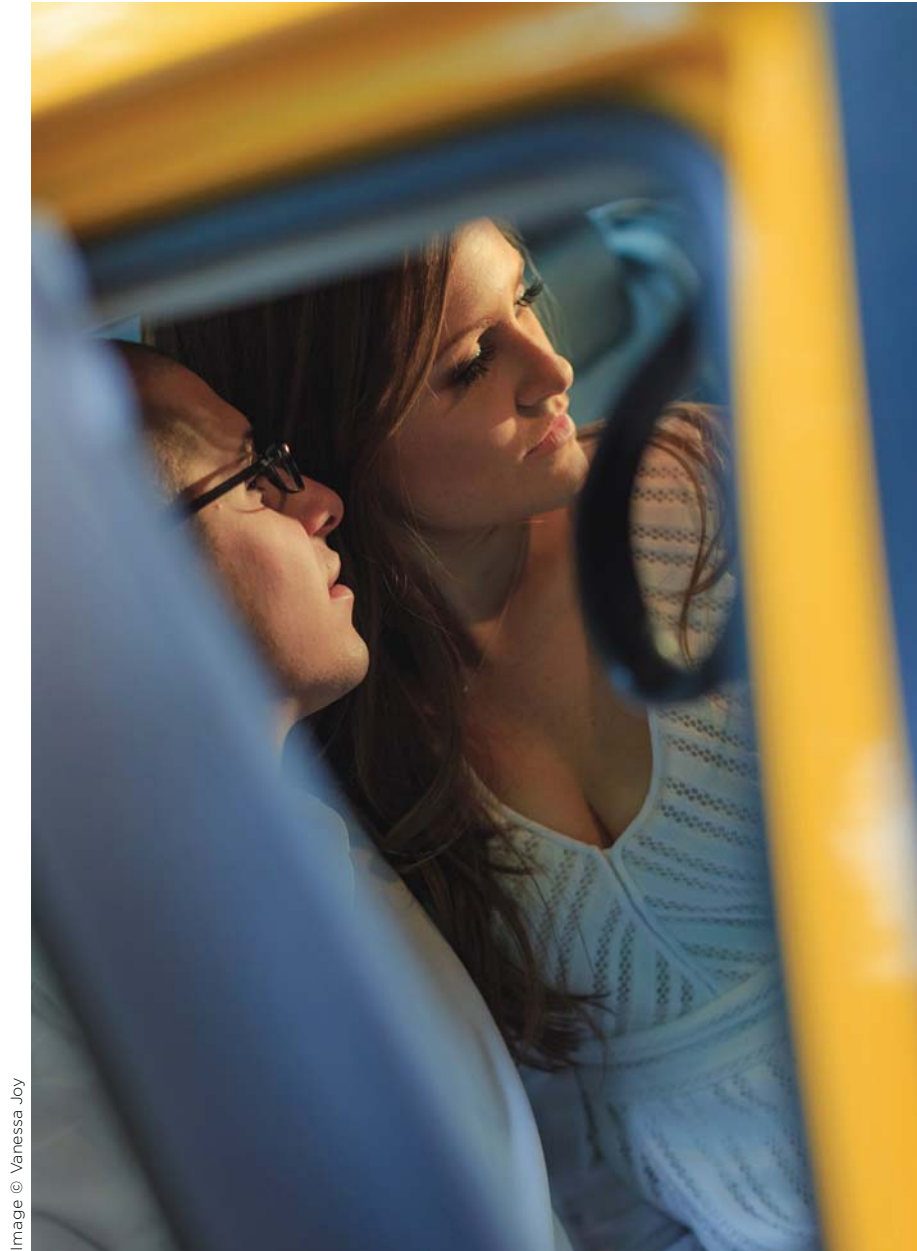


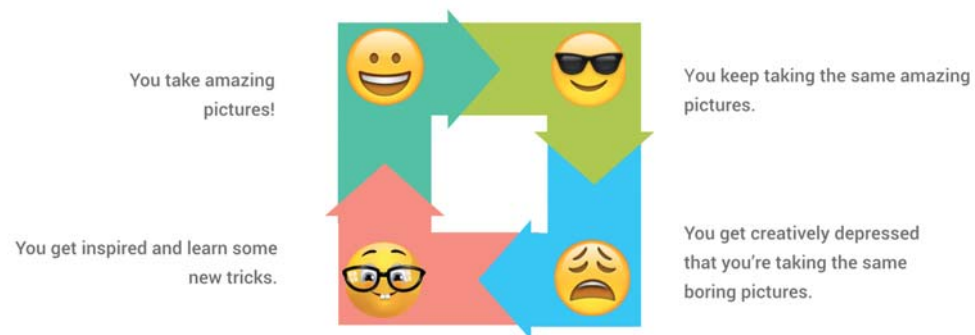
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Step 4: Stop the Vicious Cycle

Are you a victim of this typical creative cycle?



The key is making sure you're staying on top of enhancing your photography instead of waiting for your work to become stale. Here are some tricks I like to try when I'm feeling creatively stumped:

- Off-camera flash
- Double exposure
- New posing
- New props
- Long exposures
- Night photography
- Personal projects
- Get published
- Styled shoots
- Workshops/conferences

Step 5: Refocus Your Energy

Here's the thing about feelings: You don't have to let them control you. Instead of letting yourself get buried by the onslaught of emotions, use them as motivation to kick it up a notch. You don't have to give in to every emotion and whim. You have the power to decide what to do despite how you feel.

A few months ago, I told Sal that looking at his latest travel-photography masterpiece made me recognize the creative rut I was in. He told me to keep pushing it, and you know what? I took two of my favorite pictures that month that I'd ever taken, while messing around with double exposure and Profoto B1's.





Image © Vanessa Joy

All of this also applies to when you've seriously failed. I have failed. I've hit rock bottom, smacked my face on the pavement, never wanted to get up again, failed. Truth is, you need to be failing or at least feeling like you are. Failure and pain can push us ahead and be our best teachers. Deal with failure however you want—just make sure you can get back up again.

Maybe you can't relate to all of this and you're on top of the world. If that's you, you probably have a different problem. And that reminds me of a quote by Nobel laureate Frank Wilczek: "If you don't make mistakes, you're not working on hard-enough problems. And that's a big mistake." ■



Vanessa Joy has been a professional wedding photographer in New Jersey since 2002, and an influencer in the photographic community for years. Since starting VanessaJoy.com in 2008, she has taught photographers around the globe at almost every major platform in the industry (LearnPhotoVideo.com). Vanessa has been recognized for her talent and business sense at the renowned industry events CreativeLIVE, Clickin' Moms, WPPI and ShutterFest. Her peers love her informative, open-book style of teaching.

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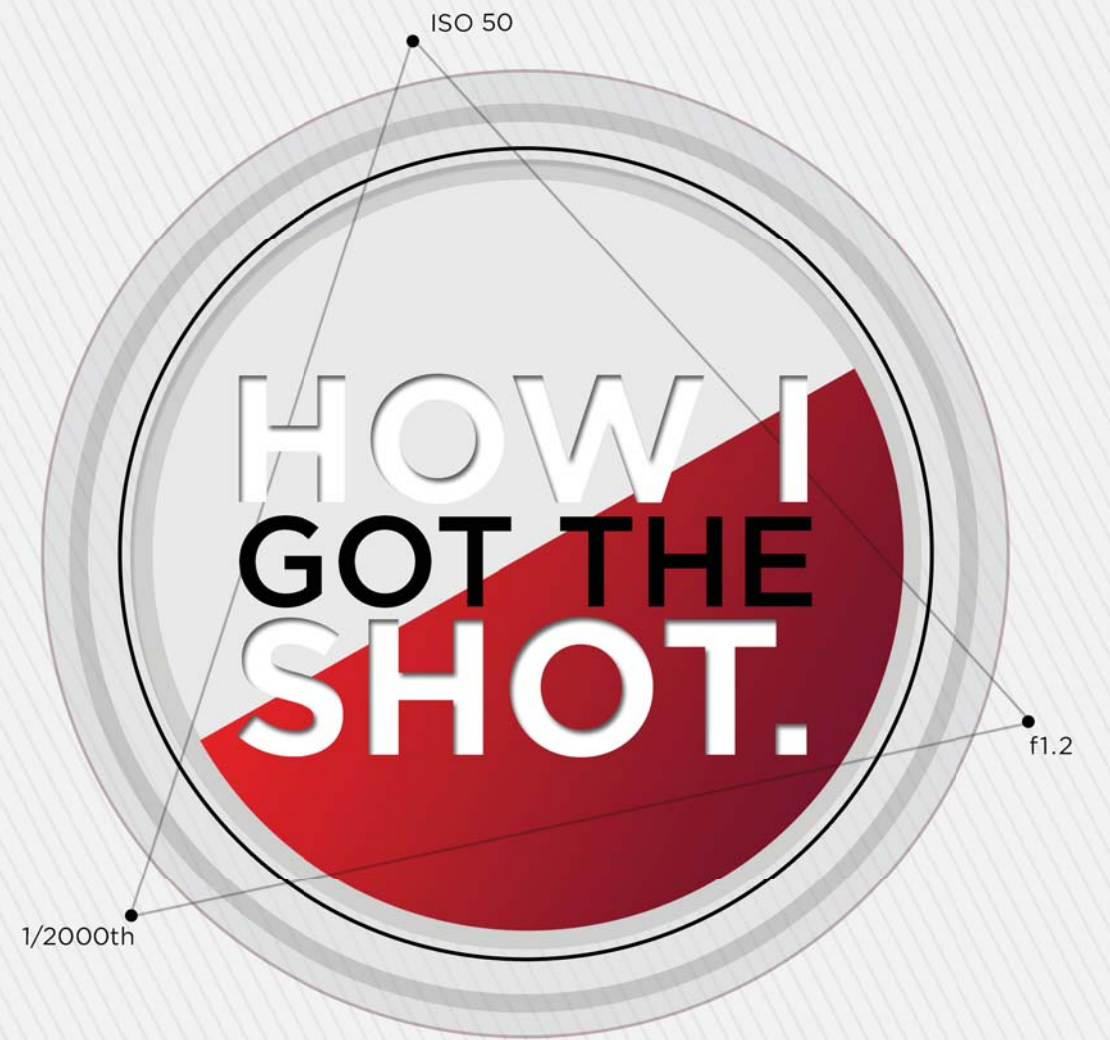
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with **Sal Cincotta**

Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



I am constantly talking to photographers around the world about building their portfolio. How else do you attract the right clients? The funny thing is, photographers are hired to help businesses create a vision and a brand. What do they need for this? Great photography. So, here we are, camera in hand and in complete control of our brand, yet when we look at our website, are the images on it representative of our brand? Most of the time, no. For some odd reason, photographers have a hard time figuring this out. There is a massive disconnect with the images we like versus the images our clients may want or like. We have to bridge this gap. I do it by spending a lot of my time every year building my portfolio.

Who am I? An artist? Businessman? Creative director? This is a question I am constantly asking myself. I have to know who I am, and embrace it. Stop running from it. Stop trying to make every single client happy. It's impossible. It's not even a goal of mine. Not everyone who walks through our doors is our client. This is something we all have control over. We can say no—which of course is a very difficult thing to do for any of us. In the end, trust me, you will be much happier. And, of course, we can ensure our marketing and our imagery are targeted at our clients, the clients we want to work with. We have to be zeroed in.

This month, I had an incredible opportunity to shoot in Brooklyn, New York—my hometown—and do something epic. Not to mention, build my portfolio.

Concept.

The concept for this shoot was to have something dramatic in the way of fashion. Of course, as a wedding photographer, showing a bride in a wedding dress is par for the course, but for this shoot, we wanted something a little more dramatic and outside the box of standard dresses.

Enter Enception Rentals, a new rental company created for photographers. For this shoot, we created a custom red dress with incredible details. It was just the piece we needed to really pop off this gorgeous carousel.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Location.

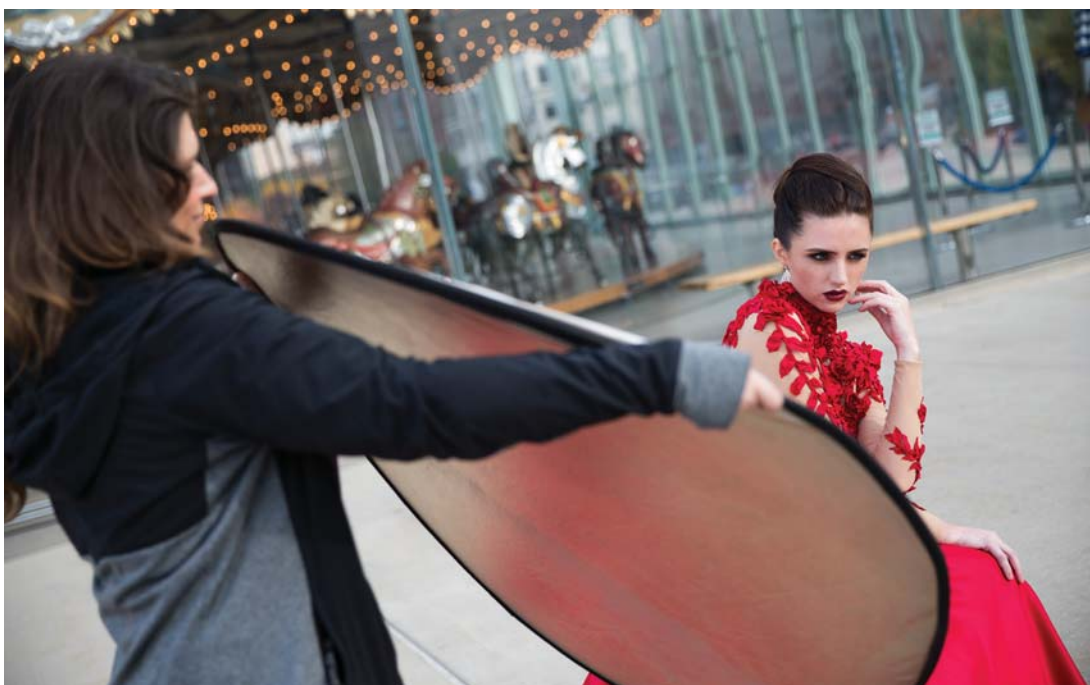
Brooklyn is home to Jane's Carousel, a historic ride built in 1922 and meticulously restored to its original glory by artist Jane Valentas. Part of the shoot was to create something dramatic, and that required a gorgeous dress created by Enception Rentals.

Brooklyn is an incredible place to shoot. Sure, I am a little biased, but there is so much in the way of architecture and character that the city has to offer. In this case, we wanted something different from what you would typically expect to shoot in a city. The backdrop should be part of the shot, but not dominate it. And with something as grandiose as a carousel, that's not easy.

The most obvious shot would be to place your subject on the carousel. Trust me, we took plenty of those shots. We took the cliché shots and then we started to move away from those. The reason should be obvious: Having your subject on the carousel makes it very difficult to get to the subject. In fact, it creates some confusion. Is the subject the carousel or is it your couple, model, etc.? I don't think there is a right or wrong answer here. It's about what your goal and messaging is.

The challenge here was how to balance the two. We shot in and around the carousel all day, but the final image that stood out the most was the final one we selected. It seemed to strike a good balance between the two by bringing the carousel in as a secondary element and allowing our real subject here to jump out.

Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



Lighting.

Having the right equipment with you is paramount. I get asked all the time what I use for lighting. Well, the short answer is everything. When I travel, I have speedlights, a Profoto B1, Profoto B2 and a reflector. How can you possibly know what you will need until you need it? It's imperative that we build our toolbox accordingly. Think about a carpenter. What kind of tools do they have in their toolbox? Do you think they run around with one hammer and one screwdriver? That's almost laughable. The same is true for photographers. Right tool for the job.

For the final shot here, we used a reflector. The light at the time was gorgeous, and we just needed a little pop of light to fill some of the shadows under her eyes. Other shots in and on the carousel used the Profoto B2—I will show these in a future blog post because they are equally as gorgeous.

I can't stress enough that lighting is probably one of the most powerful tools we have. In many ways, it's more important than your camera and lens. A \$60K camera with no light is useless. What you do with the light, how you shape the light, is critical to creating something above average.

Gear.

- Profoto Silver Reflector
- Canon 1Dx
- Canon 85mm 1.2
- 1/2000th of a sec @ f1.2, ISO 50

Closing Thoughts.

As we wrap up 2015, you have to ask yourself, what do you want 2016 to look like for you and your studio? This is no small task. The truth is, you are running out of time. The more you procrastinate, the more likely you are to repeat the mistakes of the past. Take control of your business and your career. This is how you do it. You have to get out there and make it happen. No one is going to hand it to you.

Shoots like this require preproduction work, and you can't do it alone. Without my team back home, none of this is possible. Alissa handles all the preproduction work, including concepts. Krystal worked on wardrobe, models, locations and permits. Heather worked tirelessly on actually making the dress. Together, we can accomplish things no other single entity can. You can't do this alone. None of us can.

I'm proud of my ability to create a high-performing team. Without them, nothing is possible. Creating a beautiful image is always the end goal, but how you create it and get to that final result is usually an effort of a team of people all marching to the same beat. Sure, I get to be the one who finally clicks the button, but I have learned to check my ego at the door while building a business. I want to surround myself with great people.

So, the question you should be asking yourself is: Do I want to be a rock star and an egomaniac, or do I want to be a successful photographer and business owner? One is riddled with loneliness and emptiness, and the other is filled with laughs, challenges, highs and lows, and a sense of family. One is short-term with a constant search for the next fix, and the other is long-term, building something bigger than you and something that will give you a sense of lasting accomplishment.

Which do you choose? Control your future and control your destiny. Build a team and support network that's geared toward accomplishing amazing goals and objectives, and your life will change forever. ■

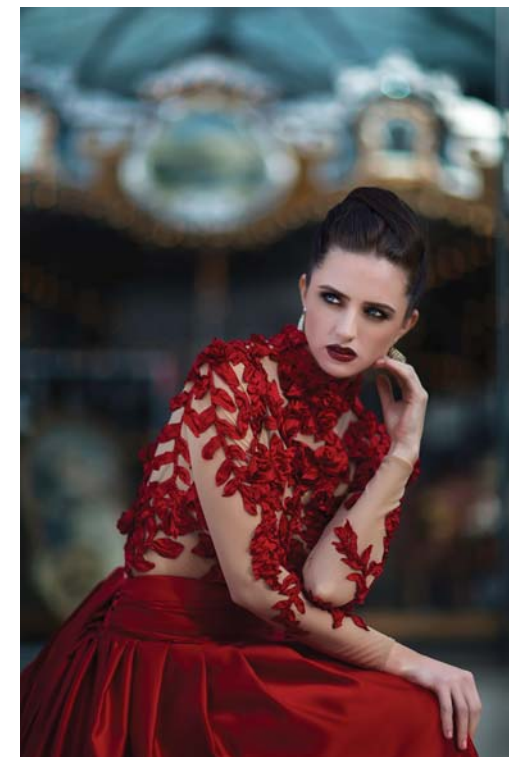
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Sal Cincotta is an international award-winning photographer, educator, author and the publisher of *Shutter Magazine*. Sal's success is directly tied to the education he received in business school. He graduated from Binghamton University, a Top 20 business school, and has worked for Fortune 50 companies like Procter & Gamble and Microsoft. After spending 10 years in corporate America, Sal left to pursue a career in photography and has never looked back.

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What It Means
to Be a
**“Full Service”
PHOTOGRAPHER**
with Lori Nordstrom

Today’s professional portrait photographer falls into one of two categories, or a hybrid of the two. The first is the “shoot-and-burner,” the photographer who charges one price that includes the session fee and the digital files from the session. The second is a “full service” photographer who offers contact with the client throughout the process and offers finished products that capture the experience. There are, of course, full-service photographers who now offer digital files in addition to the wall portraits, albums and other products that they sell, bringing the two categories together. Some might even say that this hybrid of both offerings, with both physical products and digital files, is truly a “full service” for the client.



Images © Lori Nordstrom

The term *shoot-and-burn* came about with the emergence of digital and the ease of taking photos and then burning to a DVD to give to the client. Now there are thumb drives, living picture frames, iPads and direct digital download from an online proofing site, but the concept is the same. Typically the photographer who adapts this way of doing business is someone who doesn't want to have much contact with the client, other than the session. This photographer wishes to deliver the final images and not hear from that client again until it's time for their next session, as this is what fits her schedule and business.

Smart shoot-and-burners charge not only for the session time, the images themselves and the medium the files are delivered on, but also for the time they spend editing and preparing the images. This model has gotten a bad rap in the industry because the majority of photographers who are shooting and then handing off digital files are not charging appropriately for their time and talent.

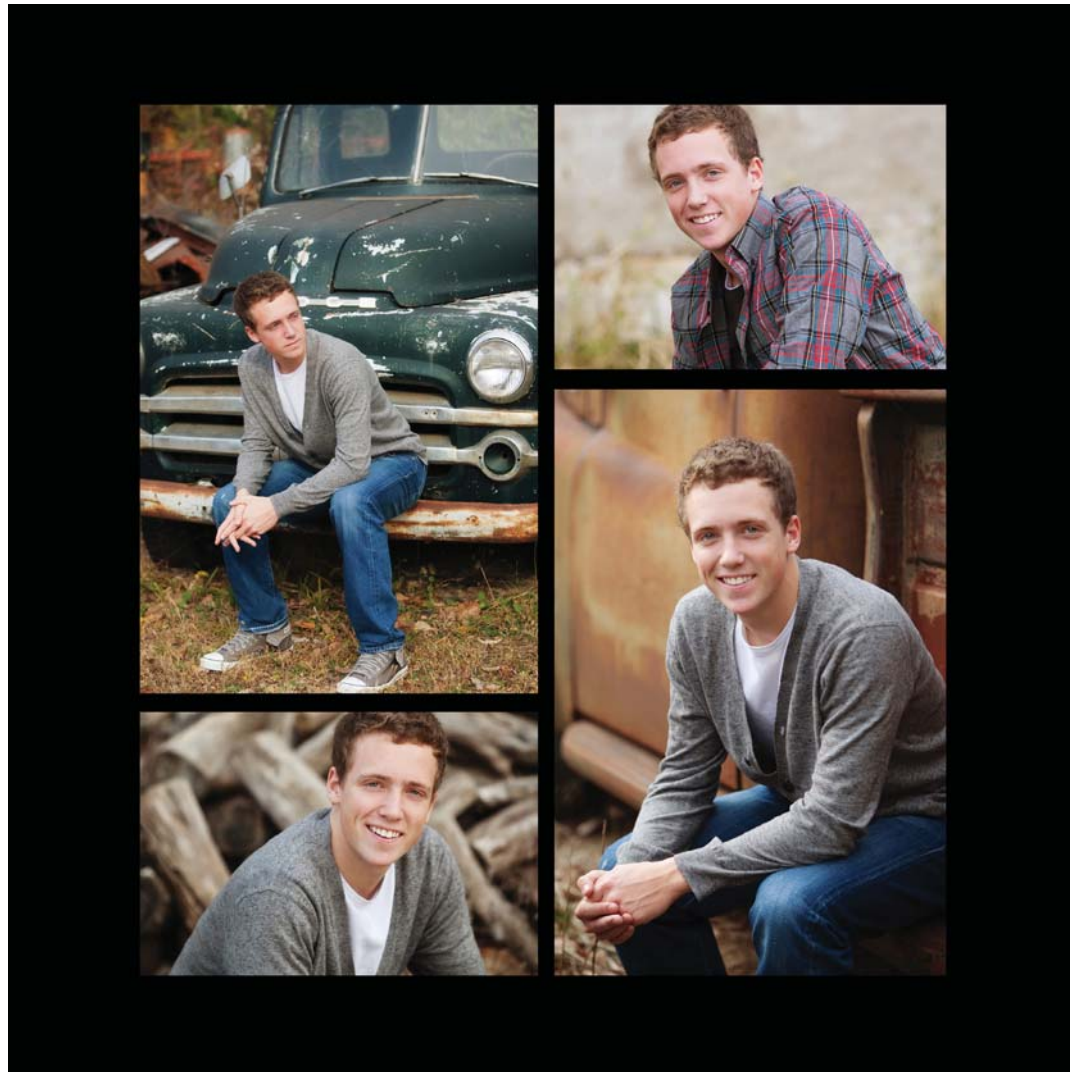
The full-service photographer takes a different approach and believes in excellent customer service, educating clients on their options and helping with their selections, and creates beautiful finished products. Finished products may include prints, wall decor, albums, image boxes and more. Many full-service photographers have been in the industry for many years and don't want to see clients end up without products in their hands or on their walls to enjoy for years to come. There are also many new photographers who see the value in creating something tangible for their clients and the excitement of seeing their work in print. There is something very satisfying about creating products that clients love and enjoy beyond the fleeting five minutes of social media fame.

Photographer Joy Vertz (www.stmphoto.com) owns two profitable portrait studios in Wisconsin. Joy's definition of a full-service photographer is this: "A full-service photographer not only meets but exceeds her clients expectations, and fulfills services for them before they even know they are an option. The full-service photographer handles all aspects from start to finish, and lets her clients enjoy the process." Joy's studios create wall groupings based on snapshots of her clients' own walls for them to see at their ordering appointment. These groupings allow the client to visualize what their wall will look like finished, which helps them with their final choices. A little extra time designing for the client ensures much higher sales.



Image © Lori Nordstrom

Another portrait photographer who believes in the full-service studio is Teri Fode (www.terifode.com). “I’m a professional photographer specializing in beautifully designed modern portrait art,” she says when asked to define herself. This answer goes beyond “I’m a photographer” and opens up a dialogue about creating something really special. She believes in personalized service that begins with a consultation. Getting to know the client and customizing the experience has been important to staying profitable in our ever-changing industry: “I offer beautifully designed portrait products that I suggest during our ordering appointment, which is always in person.” Much like Joy, Teri believes it is important to design display options for clients’ homes and present those ideas in person to each client in order to customize the experience.



In my own business, being full-service means that my clients come expecting to be taken care of. They expect suggestions from me on where they will hang their portraits and how they will be displayed. I always joke that I get to play interior designer, and my clients love that I will be working with them and getting to know their decor style, colors and even their lifestyle so that I can design something specifically for them and the way they live. The experience is continued throughout the entire client interaction, from first phone call to final delivery and even into the follow-up. Creating a high-end experience and product keeps clients who value those things coming back again and again.

In a nutshell, full-service portrait photographers offer a personalized experience and customized products for their clients. Many full-service photography businesses, even those with a retail location, offer digital files alongside their portrait products. Some don't, and there is a good argument for both sides. Photographers who choose not to offer digital files are fully focused on custom prints and products for their clients. I believe that if we don't get products in our clients' hands, the professional photography industry will begin to die.

There is an argument that without these products to enjoy every day in the home and to hand down to the next generation, our imagery will be forgotten. Let's face it, most digital files will live and die on the computer. They may enjoy a few days of "likes" via social media, or even get stored away on a hard drive. But digital files are not forever, at least not at this point in history. All computers, all hard drives, all digital media will fail at some point. We now have computers being made without a DVD drive, as well as DVDs that were burned years ago that can no longer be read by some machines.

If we do choose to add digital files to our product mix as a full-service business, it's our responsibility to educate our clients about digital files, how to care for them and even where to get them printed. Some photographers offer the digital file free with any wall portrait purchase. This allows the client to archive the image instead of it being the responsibility of the photographer. The client is also able to make smaller prints if desired.

However you decide to proceed with digital files, remember that it is your job to put a plan in place to educate your client. If you are offering digital files, be sure your clients know that their files should be backed up. Recommend printing their images, or offer a set of proofs along with the digital files. If you don't offer digital files, be prepared to answer your clients' questions as well as educate them on the value of wall portraits and heirloom albums. Offer watermarked web-sized files for sharing.

Your clients will want to share your work—and it allows them to advertise for you!



Image © Lori Nordstrom

The Full-Service Portrait Photographer:

- Actively networks with other well-connected people and businesses that are in front of her target client.
- Schedules sessions over the phone, asks questions and gets to know the client.
- Offers a consultation appointment to discuss options and make suggestions.
- Personalizes the portrait session and makes each client feel special.
- Creates customized products.
- Meets with the client in person at the order appointment.
- Beautifully packages products and adds a small gift.
- Follows up with each client and stays in touch.
- Recommends the next session time. ■



Lori Nordstrom (M.Photog.Cr., CPP, ABI) owns a boutique studio (NordstromPhoto.com) specializing in children and family portraits located in the tiny, picturesque town of Winterset, Iowa. Lori began her career photographing her own kids in her backyard almost 20 years ago, and is now known not only for her simple and sweet portraits of children, but as a leader in the photography industry in the areas of business, marketing and sales. Lori is a PPA-approved business instructor, and is passionate about sharing her knowledge with other photographers and small business owners.

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USING BACKDROPS TO CREATE IMPACT IMAGES

with **Craig LaMere**

Photography is interesting in that you can make your work as simple or as complicated as you want. I have friends who are very artsy and who are true storytellers with every image. They think about every part of the image, and are meticulous in the placement of the subject as well as everything else in the frame. I also have friends who are not worried in the least about telling a story or being artistic. All they care about is producing an image in the fastest time with the least cost to the consumer.

There really are so many factors that go into the execution of an image. I pretty much fall in the middle of the two extremes. I put a lot of thought and preplanning into my shoots, but I don't really shoot to make a statement, and there's no hidden meaning in my work. I shoot to make cool, badass images. I break my images into two parts. One is the subject and the second is the background my subject is going to be on. This month, I talk about the different types of backgrounds I've used.



SHEETS AND FABRIC

When I first started shooting, my “studio” was a room in my basement, which I used for about a year before I made the move to my first proper studio. The room was my theater and video game room. It was the biggest room I could use in my house. It was about 12 by 16 feet, and the ceiling 8 feet. I bought a simple two stand and bar backdrop stand. Back in those days, I had no idea about the different kinds of backdrops that were out there, so I did the only thing I could think to do, which was to go buy some sheets.

Some of the things I found out shooting my sheets was they are very thin and you can see what is behind them very easily. Also, they wrinkle super easy. You really have to wash them a few times on hot and use a ton of fabric softener if you want to be close to wrinkle-free. One of the not-so-cool parts of shooting sheets is it is kind of hard to find just a cool top sheet. Most of the time you have to buy the whole set to get cool ones, and you end up with a million fitted sheets and pillowcases. My mountains of pillowcases led me to a fabric store for my next backdrop.

I actually liked the fabric store a lot. There are so many options to choose from. You can get any color and texture of fabric you can dream of. Most fabric is much thicker than the sheets I was using. A lot of the fabric I used had a certain texture to it that really played well in my images. The fabric I liked best was the pillow-top type because of the stitching.

Although I really loved using fabric at the time, there were two things about getting fabric for drops that was not cool. One, you are super limited on width. Most fabric is pretty narrow. The bolts on average are 45 to 60 inches wide, so you are pretty much limited to shooting individuals. The second thing that mega sucks about using fabric for your drops is...holy shit, fabric is expensive! Don't buy fabric at the retail price, or you will go broke. Most stores have some kind of coupon, whether it is paper or electronic, that gives you up to 60 percent off.



Image © Craig LaMere



Image © Craig LaMere



SEAMLESS **PAPER**

After that first year in my basement, I moved into my first studio. It was a sweet older building that had 12-foot ceilings and two shooting bays that had pretty good depth. I was introduced to a lot of new things in the photography world. One was seamless paper. Now that I had the room to put up a real drop, I started shooting the paper. I really liked it. It is a clean, flat surface that comes in a ton of colors. One of the great things with paper is how it responds to every light source. It takes natural, strobe and constant light very well. You can hit it with unmodified light straight on, and it still looks great. Seamless paper comes in about every color under the sun and in a variety of lengths and widths. It comes on rolls from 4 feet to 10 feet wide, and from 12 to 50 yards in length. Get the widest roll your shooting area can hold. Start with 20 yards or so to see if you like it. A roll costs as little as \$75.

While I really liked seamless, there were a couple issues that made me quit shooting it in my studio. Because I'm a one-man show, I have to put the paper up and take it down on my own. A lot of the time I would accidentally rip and crease the paper. Then I'd have to cut it and start over. The second issue I had with the paper was storage. At one point, I had 10 different colors, and it was a pain to store because the rolls took up too much space. The paper also became too plain for my shooting style.



HAND-PAINTED MUSLINS

When I was having my issues with seamless paper, I was introduced to hand-painted muslins by my good friends Travis and Paula Gadsby of Silverlake Photo Accessories. Muslin drops are painted cotton muslin fabric. Muslin is heavier and more durable than seamless paper, and lighter and more maneuverable than painted canvas drops. They gave me a sweet deal on a couple to try. I picked out an earth tone and a gray one.

I liked them, but also hated them because of all the wrinkles and fold marks. I shot them a couple of times the way they were, and then decided I would try to steam out the wrinkles and folds. After two long attempts trying to steam, I asked Travis for advice. I followed his advice, and suddenly felt like the caveman who discovered fire.

Travis told me to hang the muslin and spray water on it from a spray bottle, front and back, and then wait for the wrinkles to disappear. I sprayed the drop and prepared myself for a long wait, but to my surprise, it didn't take long, about five minutes. It was amazing. One of the universal reasons people avoid shooting muslins is the wrinkles. You cannot believe the reaction I get when I tell people how to get rid of them. (Travis made a video showing just how easy it is to get rid of them: bit.ly/1SAfl4e)



Images © Craig LaMere



Now that I had the solution to my biggest issue with muslins, I was able to really give them a whirl. Of all the backdrops I have used, hand-painted muslins have had the biggest impact on my style of shooting. In my studio, I shoot at least 90 percent of all my work on them.

There are three main reasons muslins have been a game changer for me. One of my big issues with paper was its durability under the conditions I had to shoot in; I would rip and fold it all the time. That's not a factor with muslin. One person can easily put it up and take it down without having to worry about it tearing or folding.

Another issue I had with seamless paper was the character of the paper. Seamless, just like muslin, comes in a million different colors. Because I shoot almost everything in my studio monochromatic, having a wide range of colors in my drops is very important. Seamless is plain, and that is what you get when you shoot it. For a lot of people, that's a good thing, but for me, it was just too plain.

The way I shoot, I like my background in most cases to be part of the image. Because muslins have such a wide tonal range due to how they are painted, they give my images a depth that plain paper cannot. It's the added depth that is so appealing, and the main reason I use them almost exclusively.

The last reason I prefer muslins to paper is how they can be stored. I just fold them up when I'm done and put them on a shelf till I need them—versus having giant tubes all over the studio.

I hope this helps you if you are trying to figure out the best drop options for shooting either in your studio or, like me in the beginning, in your cramped man cave. ■



Craig LaMere is an award-winning professional portrait photographer from Pocatello, Idaho. As well as running his full-time studio in Idaho, Craig is also an international educator and speaker specializing in lighting and posing. He has two dogs named Logan and Steve and two cats named Emit and Martin.
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Image © Kristina Sherk

3/Top Tips for Better Photos Online

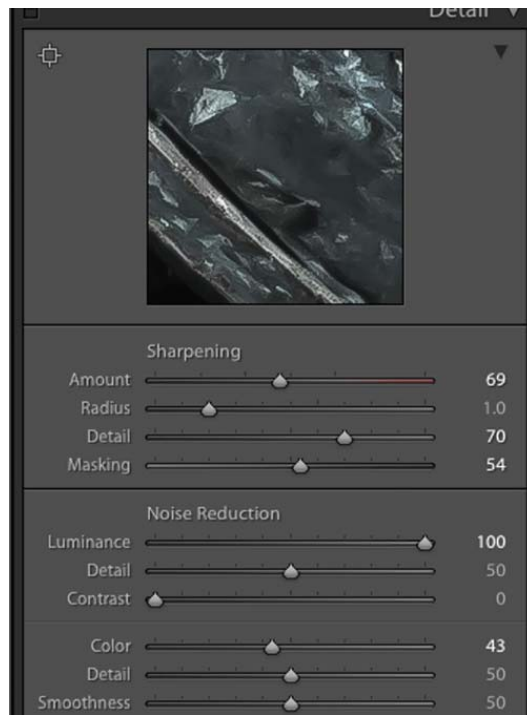
with Kristina Sherk

As a professional photographer, your website is not only your résumé but your calling card to any potential client looking to hire someone like you. It is imperative that the images that represent your business on your website look the best they can. Here are my top three tips to make your web images appear in a league of their own. If you apply these tips, you're bound to notice a difference in the number of calls and inquiries coming through the door.

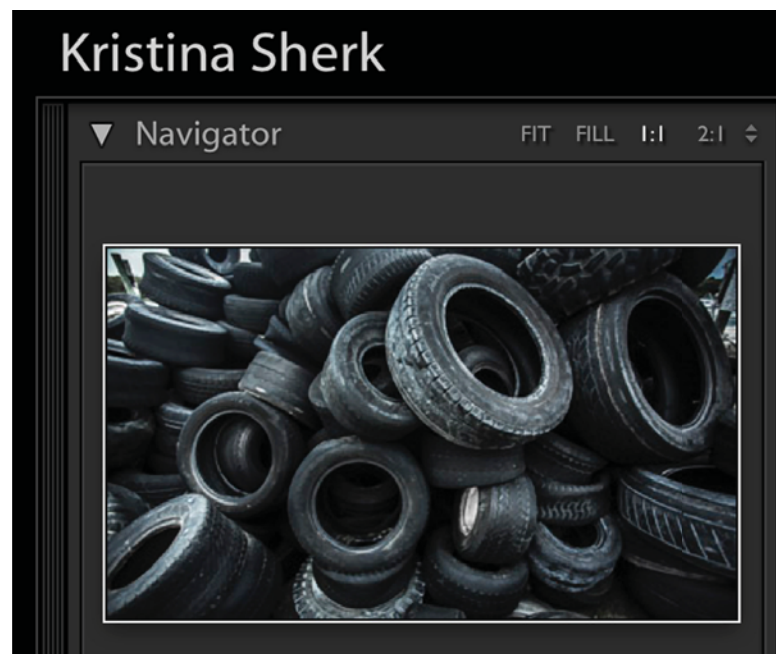
Tip 1

It's quite a turbulent time in the world of computer screen resolution. Since the debut of the Apple Retina screen and the more recent 4K monitors, the race to more pixels is well on its way. That's why it's important for you as a photographer to be well-versed in your website provider's default image settings when uploading your images to your website. Make sure that you are manually sizing and cropping your images to your website's specifications and not checking the box, which resizes your images automatically upon upload.

After sizing your images in Adobe Photoshop or Lightroom to the correct dimensions and dpi (dots per inch), it's time to sharpen. Here's your dinner party factoid: The Unsharp Mask tool in Photoshop has not been updated since Photoshop version one! Needless to say, while I do use Photoshop to selectively sharpen certain areas of my images, for your overall web image sharpening, I'd rely on the much newer algorithm behind Lightroom's sharpen sliders in the Detail dialog box.



Since your images have already been resized to web dimensions, I would tap your "Z" key to zoom your entire image into 100% zoom, rather than using your detail preview box located in the detail side panel. Make sure your zoom setting is set to 1-1, which ensures you're looking at a true 100% zoom.



The first slider in the details box is the amount slider. This is the overall sharpening slider. Use this slider to find a point of sharpening that looks best for your image. The radius slider determines how far away Lightroom should look for a contrasting pixel to decide whether or not to add more sharpening to that area. My suggestion would be to leave the slider at 1.0 for the majority of your images.

Think of the details slider as the protection mechanism shielding you from oversharpening. As you increase the amount to the slider, you should also increase the details slider to protect your image against sharpening artifacting and the dreaded halo effect.

Here are two images side by side. Image A is unsharpened, and image B is sharpened. These images definitely show you how sharpening, when done right, can really make your image pop off the page!

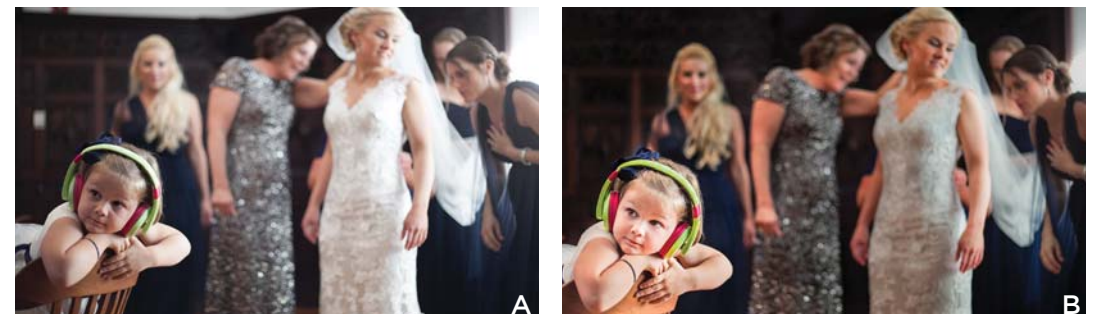


Images © Kristina Sherk

Tip 2

This tip is applied to every single image in my photography and retouching businesses. You have to sort of think of your viewer as an ADD child. Put yourself in their shoes for a moment; they're frantically looking for a photographer while trying to juggle everything else that comes along with real life—kids, groceries, jobs, projects, etc. So it's important that the moment your viewer looks at your image, their eye takes them immediately to the section of the image that you've chosen as the most important spot. Because if you don't lock in their interest, you'll lose them and they'll move on to the next photographer. I achieve this by toning my images. Another term for this is *dodge and burn*. (This skill has so many uses and is not just for skin retouching!)

Take a look at this image. The first version is untuned. It's straight out of camera—and, even though the little girl is in focus, you pass over her because the lightness of the bride's dress takes your eye away. In the second image, I brightened the girl and toned down the bride's dress, which immediately leads the viewer's eye to the intended subject of the image.



Images © Kristina Sherk

Here's one more example from the same wedding. In the untuned image A, your eye bounces around from the white column on the right side of the frame to the white veil to the bridesmaid in the background, and then finally sees the sharp, in-focus face in the middle. By toning down those three things and brightening and adding contrast to the face in the mirror, you've created a stunning image B in which the viewer's eye goes immediately to the place of intended interest.



Images © Kristina Sherk

Tip 3/

The last tip here is definitely the most important but also the most elusive to understand. I'm going to divide it into two parts since it's so complicated.

Part A: Understanding Gamma and White Point

You can think of gamma as your computer screen's black-and-white clipping points. There are two widely used gamma settings: 1.8 (more contrasty and what Macs used prior to 2009) and 2.2 (less contrasty and what PCs use). In 2009, Mac computers switched their default gamma from 1.8 to 2.2 in order for all images to look similar whether viewing them on Macs or PCs. This is good news for photographers because it means your clients will see images closer to what you wanted them to see on your website, whether they're looking at your site on a Mac or a PC.

So when you're calibrating your computer screen, it's best to use a gamma of 2.2 so that the images you retouch and put on your website look as similar as possible to what your viewers are seeing on their screens. If you don't calibrate your screen and want to know how to make your images look more appealing to the general public who are viewing your website images through their crappy computer screens, make your web images a tad more contrasty than you might think looks good. This will counterbalance the less contrasty gamma setting that most computer screens are set to.

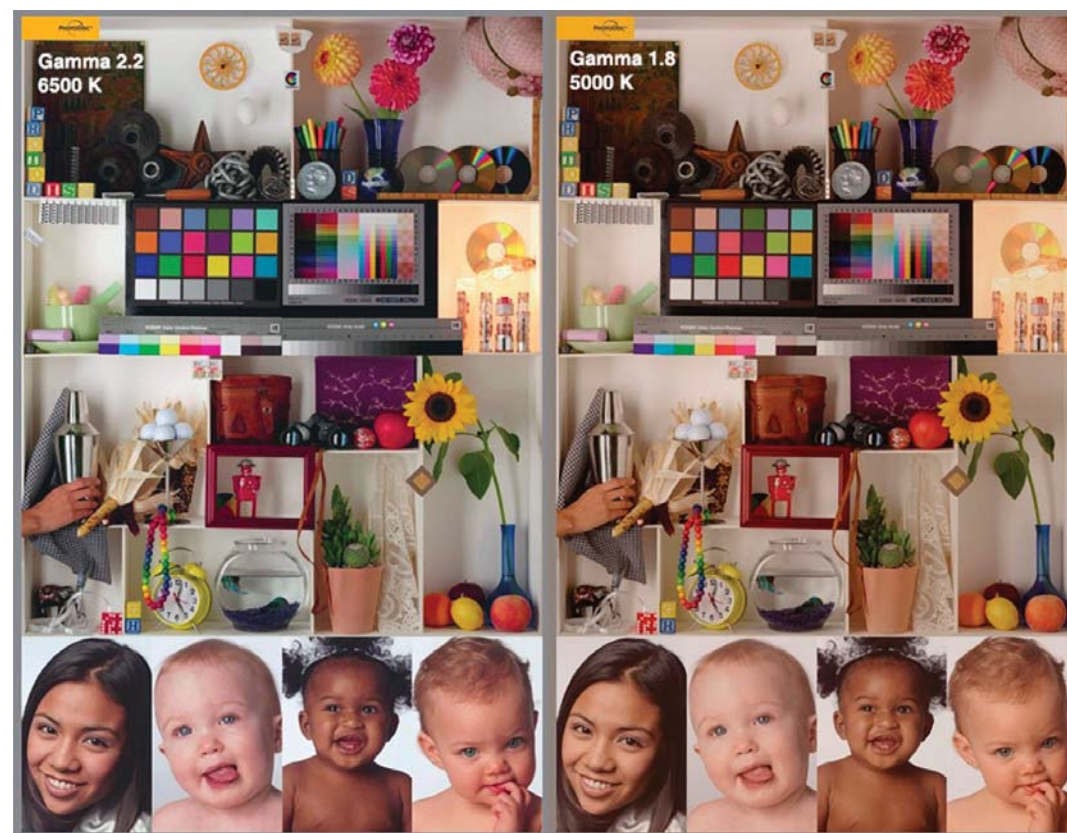
White point is a little bit easier to understand. If you've ever used Kelvin as your white balance on your camera, you're already somewhat familiar with the fact that different light sources have different colorcasts. Computer screens have two different color temperatures that they can be set to:

D50: This translates to a Kelvin color temperature of 5000. This white balance has a yellow tinge and is used by people who do primarily print photography.

D65: This translates to a Kelvin color temperature of 6500. This white balance has a blue tinge. Most computer screens are set to this color balance.

Check out this picture that I found in a really wonderful article in *Scientific American* called "Gamma and White Point Explained" by Jim Perkins. He is a medical illustration professor at RIT who uses layman's terms that can help anyone understand these quite advanced concepts. I highly, highly recommend reading this article if you calibrate your monitor (which all of you should be doing on a regular basis).

Here you can see the difference between the two gamma values and also the difference between the two color balance settings.



Simulated comparison of an image with monitor set to 2.2 gamma/6500K (left) and 1.8 gamma/5000K (right). The image on the left has more contrast, darker shadows, and a noticeable blue cast. The image on the right has less contrast, more shadow detail, and a warmer color cast.

So what does all this mean to you? If some of this went over your head, that's perfectly fine, but just remember these two things: Make the images that you put on your website a little bit more contrasty, and also a little bit warmer than you would normally. These two tips will help your images look really nice on the mass-market computer screens that most people own.

So is your brain mush yet? Sorry. I know this stuff isn't the most exhilarating, but it's super important that you understand these things to make sure your images look the best they possibly can.

Part B: Understanding Color Profiles

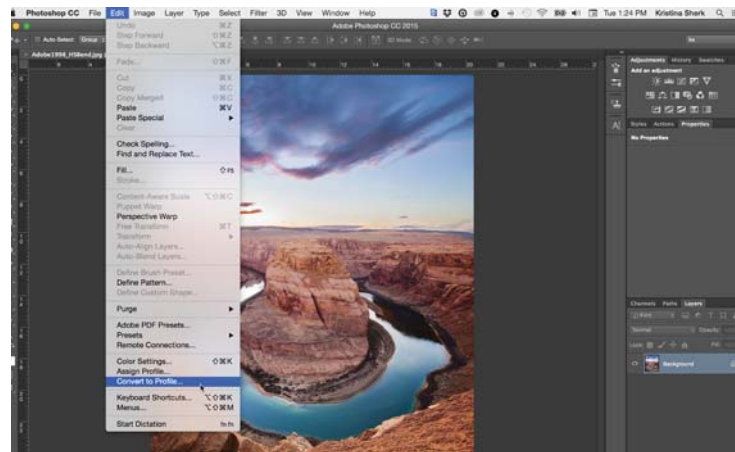
There are three main color profiles used in photography. The biggest is ProPhoto. The second biggest is AdobeRGB (Adobe1998), and the smallest is sRGB. When it comes to showing your images on a screen, you want your image to have the color profile that is specifically created to keep the truest version of the colors in your image—and for any images being viewed on a screen, that’s sRGB.

Have you ever been working on an image in Photoshop that looks absolutely beautiful, but the moment you upload it to your website, it looks muddy and the colors look muted and wacked out? That’s probably because the image color profile applied to the image is not meant for a computer screen, and more likely meant for printing the file.

As an example, I uploaded the same image with three different color profiles to my website. Which one matches the colors best to the image I have up in my Photoshop window?



I hope you chose B, and if you did, then bravo! The exact same image with three different color profiles applied to it looks like three different images once uploaded to a website. Crazy, right?



Your color profiles can be found in your Photoshop Edit menu. Choose the option Convert to Profile.



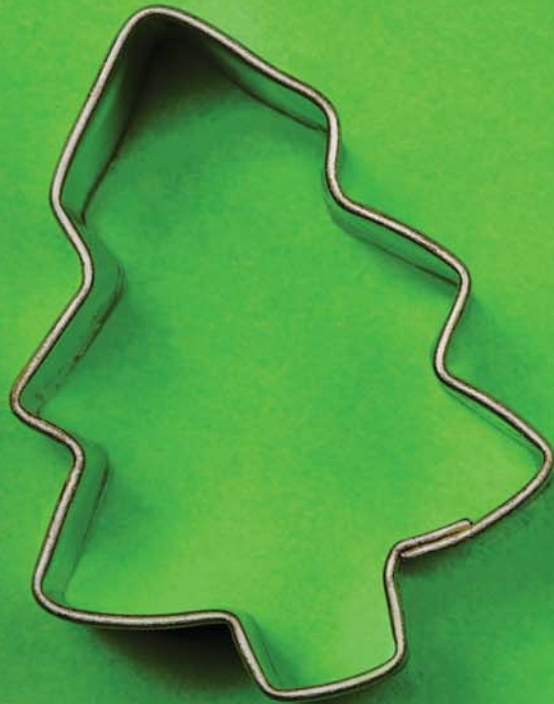
With your Convert to Profile box open, change the color profile to sRGB.

While I know this topic isn’t the most enthralling, this information is paramount to presenting yourself as a professional photographer. If you show your images on your website using the tips above, you’re bound to get an uptick in photography inquiries. ■



Kristina Sherk studied digital art and photography at Elon University in North Carolina. She then interned and assisted for D.C.-based photographer John Harrington, where she learned the business behind the art. Starting as a photographer before transitioning into photo retouching nine years ago has helped her to not only understand her role as a retoucher, but also understand the aim and vision of the photographers she works with, enabling her to stay within their photography styles (in other words, “she speaks camera”). Her clients hail from all over the world and include National Public Radio, *Sports Illustrated*, *Time, Inc.*, XM Satellite Radio, onOne Software, Cotton Inc. and Hasselblad USA.
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THE Assistant's Manual

BEHIND THE SCENES
WITH SOCIAL MEDIA



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WITH
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The best camera
is the one you
have with you.

-Unknown

Ah, the world of social media. Facebook, blog posts, Instagram—the list goes on and on. We are trained to shoot, shoot, shoot, then share, share, share. Our first instinct as professional photographers is to post the final polished images from a shoot so our clients and followers can see the incredible work we do. Now take that a step further: What if your clients had the ability to see the story behind the image? The “how to” of what went into making a breathtaking image you post, the story behind the image, is actually just as powerful in creating an engaged audience and loyal following.

Part of being an assistant to Sal is capturing these moments behind the scenes, and 99.9 percent of the time, Sal doesn't even realize I'm doing it.

These four tips will help you capture your talents in the right light. Just remember that you still have to protect your brand at all times.

Entertain, but don't forget to educate as well.

Showing behind-the-scenes images or video from a shoot or wedding still has to have some kind of purpose. Who are you posting these for? We post behind-the-scenes images for both our photography clients as well as other professionals in the industry. There are typically three different perspectives when it comes to photographing people as your subjects: the photographer (behind the camera), the subject (in front of the lens) and the assistant (on the outside looking in at the magic happening).

These images and videos give clients an insider view. First and foremost, they get the full experience of working with our team—from painting the vision for their wedding day or photo shoot, to actually experiencing being photographed the day of their event, then finally the experience of seeing their final images. This is where the behind-the-scenes images can take that experience to the next level for those clients. They can see what was going on while they were wrapped up in the moment of being photographed. They have these images to spark the stories and memories that went into their awesome experience with our studio.

Other professional photographers who follow us gain ideas and education from these images. Whenever we post an image from any type of shoot, the questions we get always start with “How...” This is a perfect time to showcase your lighting setup or your disaster of a room that you were able to turn into gold in the final image. It is always nice to have these behind-the-scenes shots to show that it's not really about what type of gear you have, but how you adapt to challenges.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Show the lighter side of being a photographer.

A big part of why people hire you is your personality. I take full advantage of social media to showcase the lighter side of our team dynamic on the job. Of course it's a grind, of course we kill ourselves every day, but more than anything, we love what we do and we are constantly having a blast with each other and our clients. I think it's important to show your clients the dynamic of your team. It gives them insight into what it would be like to work with you.

I always try to see things from other people's perspectives, so when I post certain things to social media, I always ask myself: “Would I want to see something like this from someone I follow?” If the answer is no, I don't waste my time taking the shot. I tend to follow and engage with people who showcase the fun side of what they do for a living, with a nice balance of the reality behind the work (for example, showing how exhausted your team is after a 14-hour wedding, or showing behind-the-scenes images of the amount of prep work that goes into some of our creative shoots).



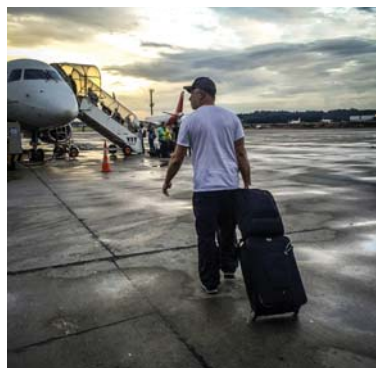
Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



Use the right camera.

This is something you may think is irrelevant to the topic, but the quality of your images actually does play a big part in the purpose of the behind-the-scenes. As the saying goes, the best camera is the one you have with you. It's important to always have a vision and a game plan going into a photo shoot so you're able to prepare certain gear in advance if necessary. You never know when you'll want the behind-the-scenes images for blog posts or articles.

iPhone. I use my iPhone for the behind-the-scenes shots of our day-to-day activities (traveling, selfies), and for quick snapshots to document where we were that can be immediately posted to social media.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Personal Camera. Sal and I attended Adobe MAX a few months ago, where we received a free Fujifilm X-T10 camera body with an 18–55mm lens as a gift (insane, right?). This camera has been a massive game changer for me. It's lightweight and reliable, and the image quality is to die for. Sure, it doesn't fit in my back pocket, but I have it with me in my purse at all times. My favorite part? Its wireless capabilities allow me to transfer images directly to my phone for immediate upload to social platforms.



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Professional Camera. We pack a second camera when we know we're doing a photo shoot that will be published online in a blog or in *Shutter Magazine* (for Sal's monthly "How I Got the Shot" article, for example). It's always better to have high-resolution and high-quality images when you're being published, especially for print. Sometimes, I don't even pack an additional camera—I just grab Sal's camera while he's taking a break from shooting to show him setting up lights and showing the model how to pose.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Make your people look good.

This is probably the most important piece of advice you'll take away from this article. You have to protect your brand at all times—and the main part of your brand is the people behind the name. Would you want someone to post an unflattering picture or video of you? No. So why would you do it to your people?

Flattering angles. We know how to pose people; hell, we do it for a living. So if you're taking behind-the-scenes pictures and your photographer has stink-face, looks like she has three chins, or looks like she has put on 50 pounds overnight, that is your time to adjust that person or your angle. Again, you're showcasing your brand, so put it in the best light.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Talking. If you know Sal, you know he rarely ever stops talking. I like to take behind-the-scenes pictures of him while we're filming for new projects or Shutter Network. It's a challenge to capture someone mid-sentence without making them look absolutely ridiculous. Don't ever post those pictures. Just don't. I give Sal a little nod while he's talking that lets him know I'm taking the shot; he'll slow down or take a pause from talking to make a more appealing face. That's when I have a three-second moment to capture the shot I want.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Eating. As a rule of thumb, don't be a photo ninja and take candid shots of people eating. It never works out in anyone's favor. If you want to show something tied to food, make an announcement and let everyone know you're taking a photo so no one is shot mid-face-stuffing. It's just common courtesy.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Behind-the-scenes shots on social media are such a powerful tool for your brand. It gives an unprecedented view into what most people never get to see, and has so much more impact when tied to a final polished image. There is an art to taking behind-the-scenes images and video—it's a photography skill just like any other. Take the time to perfect the craft, and watch what type of impact it brings to your social media presence. ■



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



Alissa Zimmerman graduated with a degree in television production and has been a part of the Salvatore Cincotta team since 2011. Today she is behind the camera regularly as Sal's second shooter and as the executive producer and camera operator for Salvatore Cincotta Films, Behind the Shutter, Shutter Network and Sal Cincotta's School of Photography. Alissa is the creative director for *Shutter Magazine* and serves as Sal's right hand, managing daily operations within the family of Salvatore Cincotta brands.

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Small Video Crews

Extraordinary Results

with Joe Switzer

Many of you starting out have no help and are all alone. You are the accountant, video editor, salesperson and filmmaker. You don't have the budget to hire more staff, but you want to produce compelling videos. This article is about overcoming your fear of taking on larger video projects and creating a game plan to achieve extraordinary results.

It's only a matter of time before you are in over your head in this business. After you produce a few films and post on Facebook, soon enough your friends and family will spread the word and eventually you will have chances to work with larger companies. The big challenge is being able to say yes and hold onto these opportunities without having to send them to a larger production house and lose those amazing clients forever. You can handle anything on your own with the right temporary team in place. You don't have to say you can't do something anymore. You can be in control of the entire process and let your ideas and vision drive you to become a tremendous success in the video industry. Let's discuss the three ways to make this happen for your business today.



#1 - Outsourcing

Hiring filmmakers for your production allows you to take on any size project. When you outsource help on a project, look for filmmakers who offer something you don't specialize in or who are better than you at your craft. It's like assembling a fantasy football team. If you can have Peyton Manning or Tom Brady on your team, why wouldn't you?

Drones, audio and lighting are tools that we have not mastered nor want to be the best at. You can't do it all on your own. Do you think you'll have the time to drone, get all motion shots, interview and capture all the time-lapses on a two-hour shoot? Outsourcing will help you achieve tremendous results if you hire the right people. Look for filmmakers you want to become or who offer something you don't specialize in.

Lastly, if you're doing your own taxes and accounting, it's time to let go to free up your time to focus on your customers and future productions. Outsourcing is hard to do and will cost you money in the short term, but in the long run, it will make you a bigger success and more money.

#2 - Filmmaking Techniques

Big crews can use techniques like green screens and giant jib arms, but it takes them so much time to get a shot. The advantages of a small crew are that it gives you more independence and allows your team to capture more. Our filmmaking mindset is to always be doing something. When we go to any environment, we want to capture all angles and multitask as much as possible.

Let your cameras work for you by setting up time-lapses during downtime or attaching a GoPro to different objects and letting it record while you're capturing something else. On tripods, you should consistently be using 200mm or whatever long lenses you own so you can capture stable shots. Usually we put the track on the ground with wider lenses, but sometimes we attach the track to the tripod and get track shots from a higher level. The monopod is the tool we use to work a room quickly and get close-up shots, usually with the 50mm.

To add motion to a scene, we use a Ronin-M with a 10-18mm. Our motion is usually just straight forward or backward, but we have also gotten good results moving the Ronin up or down to create a jib-like look. Following or tracking objects in motion works as a third technique for the Ronin. When you combine a rock-solid tripod with track shots on the ground, extreme close-ups with the monopod and some motion with the Ronin, you end up with great variety that gives you plenty of options for your edit.





#3 - Video Tools

Working with small crews makes it difficult to bring a ton of video gear. This is why we use equipment that is lighter and smaller. The thought process is always about what we could buy to make it easier and better. Carrying around the least amount of gear makes you a more efficient filmmaker and relieves a ton of stress. A crew of two is standard for us.

On a typical wedding or corporate production, our tools include:

- 2 Sony A7's
- 8 extra batteries
- Rhino slider
- Tripod
- 2 monopods
- DJI Ronin-M
- GoPro Hero 4
- 2 small light panels with a small stand

When we record audio, we use a Zoom H6 and Lectrosonic UCR100 wireless mics. We keep our lenses in a Think Tank belt with four lens pouches that stays with us wherever we go. The minimum lens variety includes a Canon 50mm, 14mm and 200mm, as well as a Sony 10–16mm and a 55mm. We use the Sony lenses on the DJI Ronin to make it lighter. The other camera has a Metabones adapter on it for the Canon lenses. Our slider and tripod fit nicely into two Manfrotto padded tripod cases.

With all the tools above, you can walk anywhere without carrying bags. You are hands-free to carry the monopods and DJI Ronin. The secret is to not be held down with too much technology. Extra-big lights, too many lenses or heavy tripods can get in the way, and you end up with fewer usable shots and missed moments. The tools I mentioned above give you the freedom to move faster.



Image © Kane Blaum with Midwest Technical Institute



Images © Kane Blaum with Midwest Technical Institute

Example of a Successful Small Crew

What better way to explain the process than with a recent NYC shoot? We were asked to film a fashion show at a theater. Instead of just filming the fashion show and rolling the credits, we wanted to do something bigger and better. We could've gotten the job done with just the two of us at Switzerfilm, but we wanted to produce the best video possible, so we outsourced two additional filmmakers. One was in charge of aerials, and that was filmed weeks before the event. The other filmmaker was responsible for close-up shots the day of the event.



Image © Kane Blaum with Midwest Technical Institute

This gave the Switzerfilm team the freedom to roam the day of the event and capture both behind-the-scenes and motion shots. This took so much stress off of us. We gave ourselves every chance to succeed. Time-lapses and all the establishing shots were all completed before the event. The day of the event, we already had plenty of beauty shots, so all we had to do was film the best of the best from the fashion show.

That night, we were able to finish the edit and the client posted the next day. In a matter of hours, the video had over 250,000 views and was a tremendous success. With a team of 10 that day, everyone would've been in each other's way. If we had not completed the aerials and establishing shots, we wouldn't have had time to finish the edit. All the great moments and angles were captured with the three-person crew.

How can you produce extraordinary films? I've witnessed countless filmmakers make countless excuses. If you're working by yourself or with a small crew, you can make decisions to film elsewhere, change the schedule and outsource talent so you have no areas of weakness.

Outsource while using the right techniques and gear, and there'll be no limits to what you can produce. The biggest trend in our industry is small teams creating together with extraordinary results. ■



Joe Switzer founded the international award-winning photo-cinema business Switzerfilm. His team is made up of four young creative minds striving to take the world of wedding cinema and photography to the next level. The team travels the world for inspiration, going anywhere and everywhere to top their latest work. Joe finds joy in teaching all over the world and helping up-and-coming "ographers" lay the groundwork for a solid future. Over the past 10 years, he has counted the majority of his clients as lifelong friends.

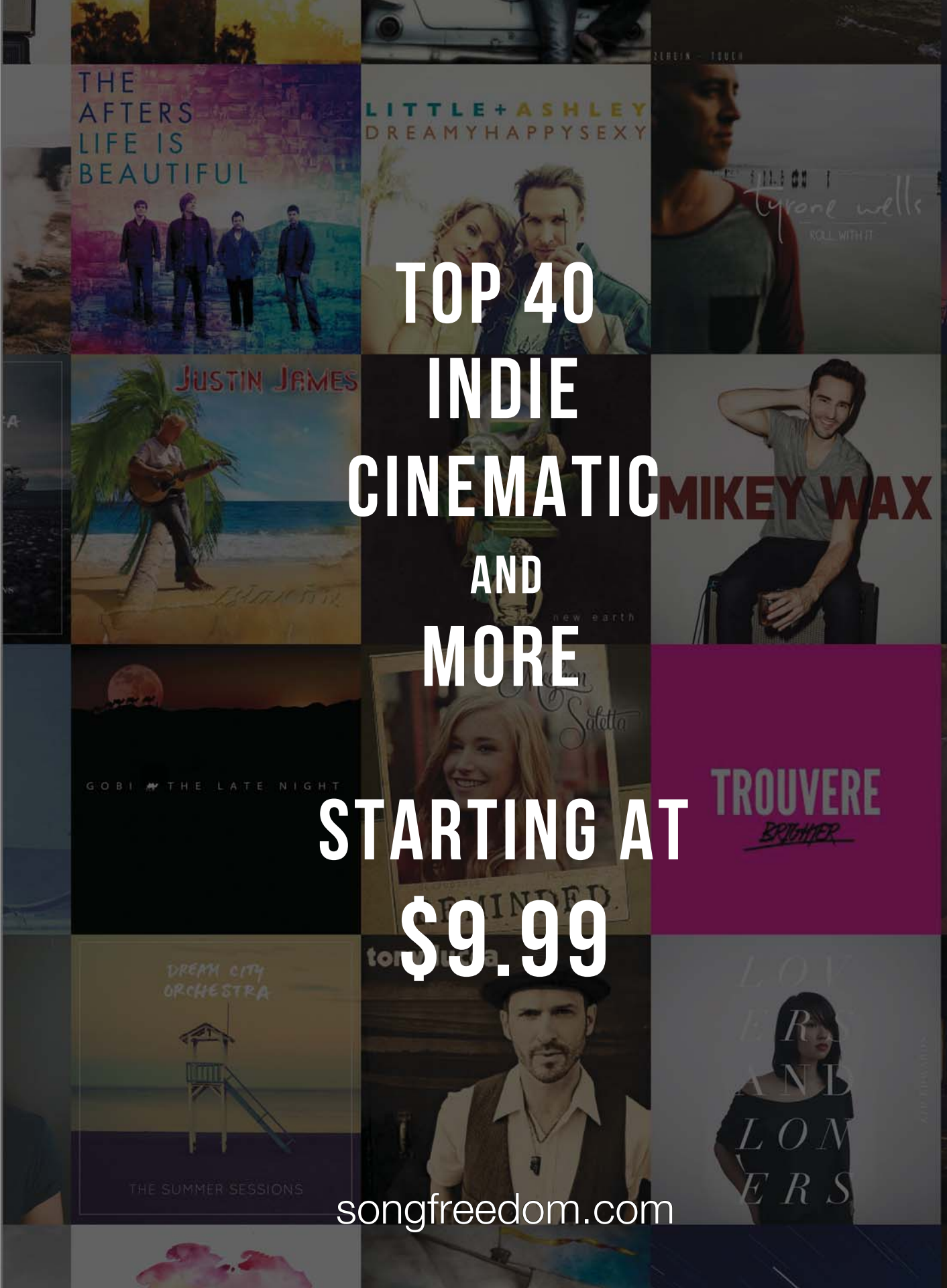
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Managing Customer Relationships:

Finding the Right System for Your Business

with Taylor Cincotta



Being a photographer is such a unique career. It's hands-on, emotional, fun and action packed. Who doesn't love that? But with all that fun comes the boring work behind the scenes that makes it all possible. It's what everyone needs but no one wants to spend time on: organization. Without organization, processes, workflow and tracking, we have no business. Photographers are primarily artists, and artists typically don't care for databases.

This is why I have fallen in love with 17hats.

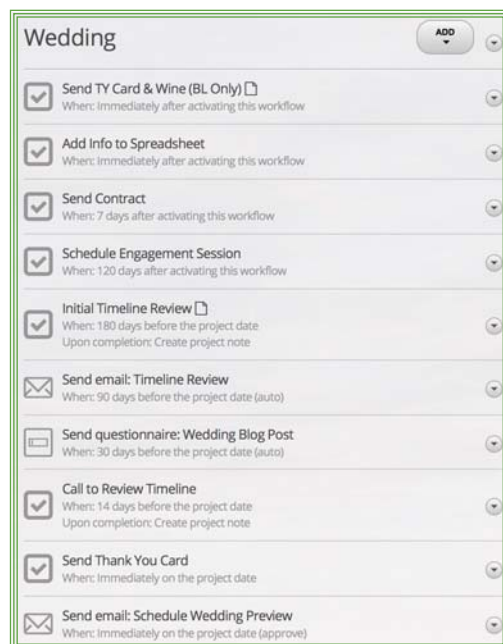
Why wouldn't you want to spend all your time shooting and having fun? 17hats has automated workflows and processes that get me away from behind the computer and back in the field—which is where we make money. We all need a customer relationship management system (CRM), and there are tons out there to choose from, so I'm going to tell you what is important to me and my studio, and why I chose 17hats.

Automated Emails

This is the number-one most important feature for me and my studio. Once a client books a session or a wedding, there is a ton of communication that has to happen at different times. Either I can remember or set up reminders to send out these emails, or I can have 17hats do it for me.

17hats has this amazing concept called "workflows" that allows you to create a template workflow for every type of client, job or scenario you can think of (yay templates!). I have a wedding workflow, a high school senior workflow and a portrait workflow.

These workflows include everything from scheduling a phone call to mailing a thank-you note. It consists of automated emails and reminder tasks set to occur on a specific date (such as 90 days before the wedding).

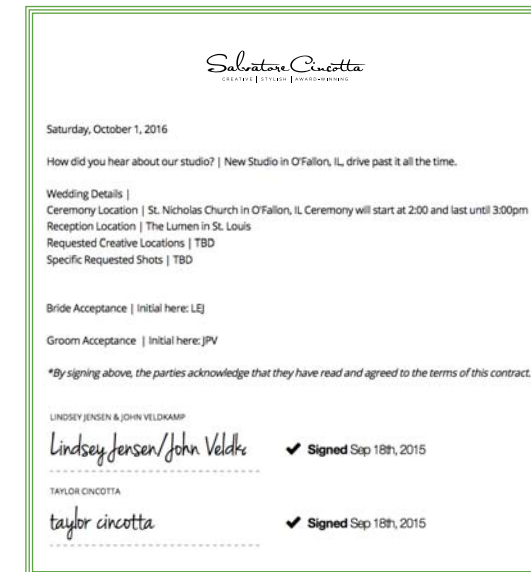
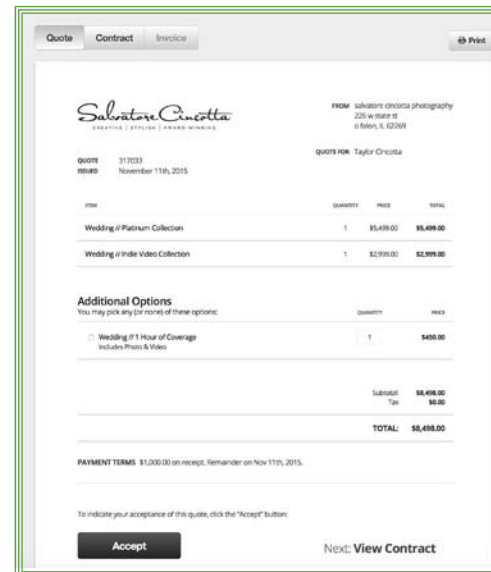


Contract Workflow

A robust studio management tool can save you time and money. 17hats's contract workflow allows me to close deals faster and easier.

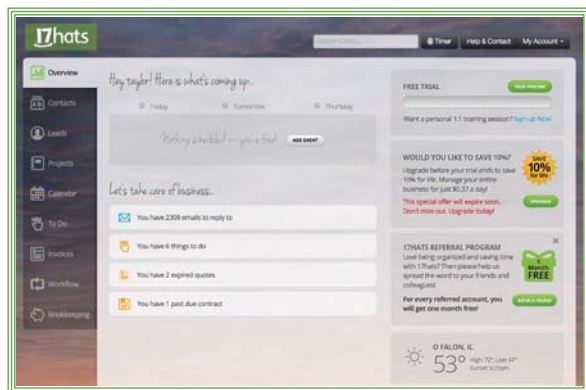
Sometimes we book weddings on the spot at our studio, and we often have to review budgets with the family before they make a decision. I have to collect a deposit and a signed contract as quickly as possible. Through 17hats, I am able to send my bride a quote for her wedding. If she accepts the quote via the 17hats interface, she is immediately taken to the contract. Once she signs the contract, she is shown her invoice page, where she pays the deposit—all done with just a few clicks!

Once my client completes this process, I print out her contract and invoice, and mail a copy on linen paper with the welcome packet.



Easy User Interface

This may be frivolous to you, but I believe that if an app is hard to understand or look at, clients won't use it. A user interface should be intuitive. For example, looking at the home view below, I can easily see where to go to create an event (calendar), add a contact (contacts), etc. Some programs require you to dig to get to where you need to go. It should take only a few clicks to do what you need to do. If you find yourself having to go through several screens and several clicks to accomplish a simple task, more than likely the program does not have a friendly user interface.

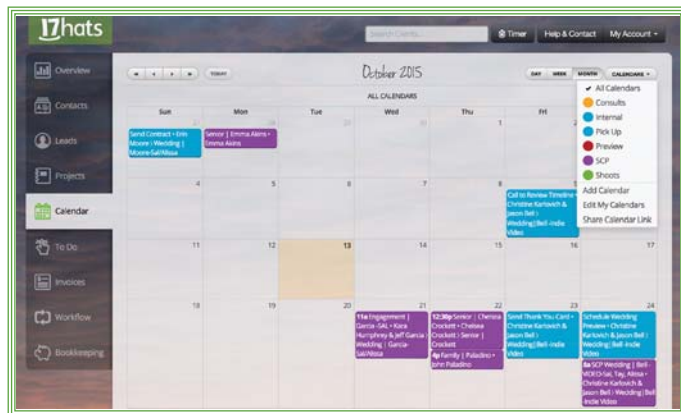


Multiple Calendars

There are many different parts to running a photography studio. There are several touch points in your clients' experience with you. A few categories we have are consults, pickups, previews and shoots. I keep different calendars for each of these so that I can create different colors and filter what I need to see.

For example, if I'm scheduling photo shoots, I really just need to see what shoots are already scheduled. I can select just the "Shoots" calendar so that I'm not distracted or confused by all the other items on the calendar.

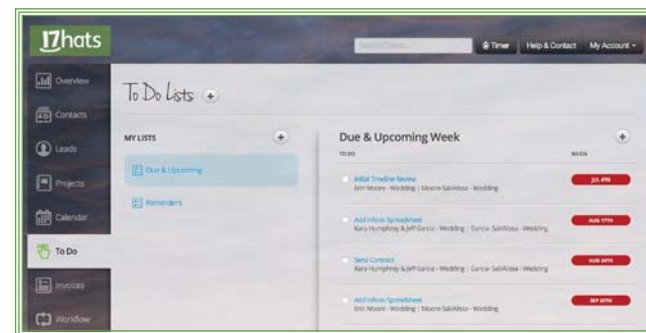
This also helps when you have staff. I personally do every consult and every preview at the studio, but Krystal handles every pickup. Because they are different colors, it is easy for us to see what our own personal schedule looks like.



To-Do Lists

I am a list lover. I need to be able to look at one place to see everything that I need to do every day. With 17hats, you can create to-do items as part of a workflow. Now, with all our clients, I could have 40-plus workflows happening at the same time. Instead of going into each client to see what's due, I can go to my to-do list, which is organized by date, and see what items I need to complete. This helps me stay organized and on top of my tasks, and ensures that my client gets the complete experience. It also ensures I don't forget to complete a task, like send a thank-you card or call clients to review their timeline.

This checklist ensures that nothing is forgotten, which is great—when you have multiple people working with your customers, you want to be able to see if one person has already completed a task so that you don't repeat it, which allows your entire staff to be in sync at any given moment.



Questionnaires

I love how interactive 17hats is with our clients. Previously, we would send out an email with the questions we needed answered in order to do a blog post of the couple's post-wedding images. Now I can send a questionnaire for the client to complete online that notifies me once it's completed and stores it in the client's wedding project. When I'm ready to do my blog post, I grab the questionnaire and I'm ready to go. Anytime you are looking for information from your client that you want to store with that project/event, use the questionnaire feature.

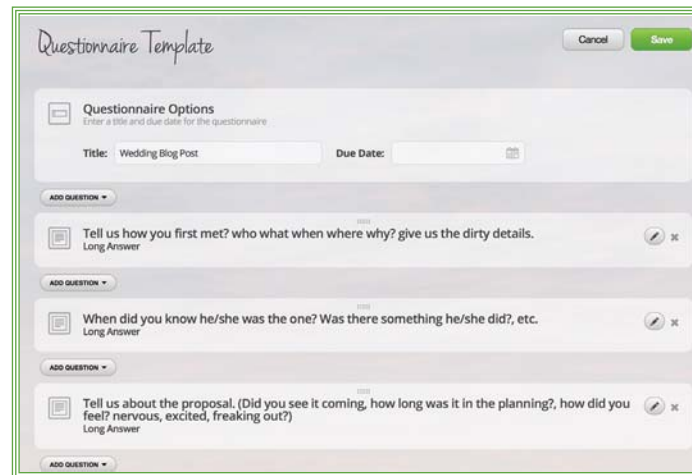


Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



There are several other features I could list off that I love about this software, but these are my must-haves and what set 17hats apart. It has made me way more efficient and knowledgeable. No more having to remember or dig through emails to see if I sent a client a form. It either will or won't be checked off in 17hats.

When looking for a CRM system, write down your must-haves and make sure the CRM has an easy-to-use interface; if it's difficult to navigate, it will never get used. There is no right or wrong program to choose; whatever works best for your studio is the right one. Choose one that is committed to customer service, updates and feedback.

In the end, the most important thing is that your program allows you to spend less time in the office and more time where you want to be: shooting. ■

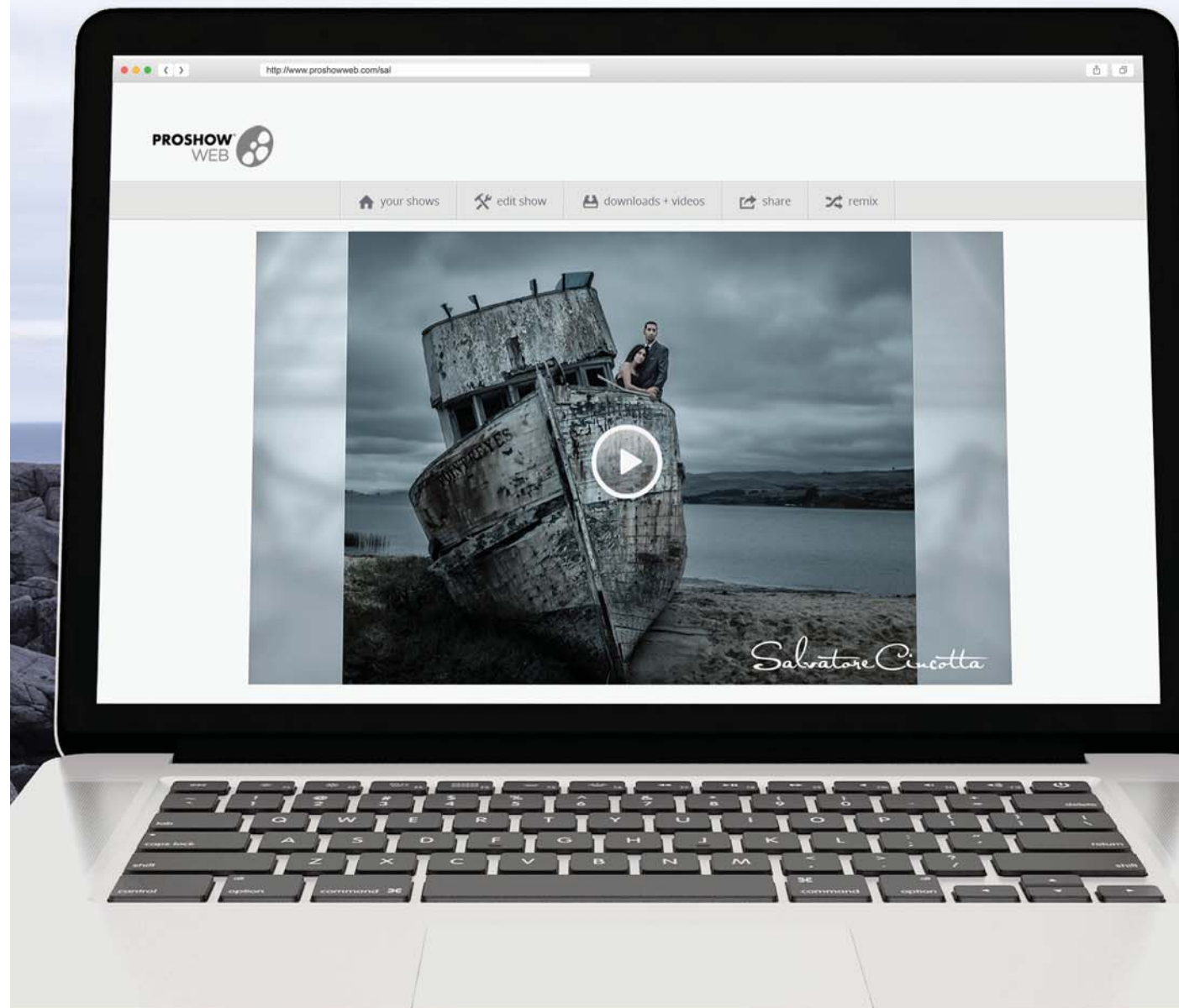


Taylor is an award-winning photographer and educator in the photography industry. She is a business school graduate who picked up a camera just five years ago. Taylor and her husband, Sal Cincotta, are the minds behind Salvatore Cincotta Photography, which they started in 2008. Together, they have built a million-dollar business focused on weddings and high school seniors. Taylor caught the creative bug from Sal. She has fallen in love with the romantic side of wedding photography, and brings her own style and calm to the wedding day.

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DIGITAL ASSET
for **LOW-** **WORKFLOWS**
to **high-volume**
STUDIOS

with Laurin Thienes

“Digital asset workflow” is just a fancy way of describing how your files are managed. Whether you shoot one session a year or hundreds, this term needs to be in your vocabulary. Just because you are the best photographer in the world does not mean you know what to do with your images after the shoot, during the editing process or upon final archive. This article takes you through some proven workflows for small, medium and large studios, and gives some overall tips on best practices.

The Photography Side Business

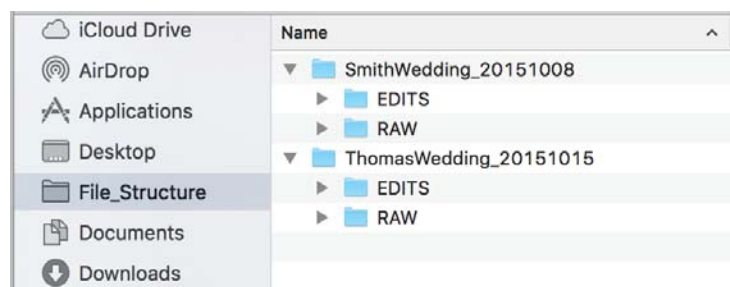
You have fallen into the world of professional photography, and, after some convincing, you now shoot Raw (like you should!). But now what? Each wedding is 60 to 100GB, each portrait session is 8 to 15 GB, and you have no clue where to store those files. Everyone wants to give you their two cents. Tune them out. Keep it simple with these steps:

Map out your plan to store files.

Bare internal hard drives are cheap. Don’t worry about RAID levels (more on this later) or power failure redundancy. Think along the lines of a linear structure: memory card to storage. While there are stories of one hard drive manufacturer failing more than another, the general consensus is that name-brand drives (Seagate, Western Digital, Hitachi) are the most reliable. Sans Digital makes great four- and eight-bay JBOD enclosures.

Map out your file structure.

This is the easiest item to put in place, but also the easiest to deviate from, causing massive chaos when you try to track down your files. Again, simple is best: Top-level folder: “JobName_ShootDate.” Inside that, have two folders: “RAWS” and “EDITS.” All original files end up in the “RAWS” folder. All edits, catalogs and web files go in “EDITS.” Yes, this can get a bit messy if you have blog images, web images, catalogs, XMP files, artistic edits separate from color-corrected proofs, etc.—but for simplicity’s sake, keep this as simple as possible in the beginning. If you can stick to it, you can make it more complex later. Looking back at my own weddings and portrait sessions, this is the thing I most regret not sticking with.



Determine your backup solution.

The running trend when starting out is to *keep it simple*. That goes for backing up too. The most important thing to back up is your Raw files. Keep a secondary drive that is used strictly to duplicate them to. When it fills up, archive it. A dry, cool shelf in a closet is a good solution.

Stick to the plan.

Make your process second nature. When chaos hits the fan, process will be your best friend. Without it, the chaos can go beyond your worst nightmare.

The Full-Time Studio

You graduated, took the plunge, leased a studio space, and now you are going full steam ahead. The chaos just mentioned above has reared its ugly head because you went into panic mode and started to plug the holes however you could. Luckily, all is not lost, and fixing your workflow will make your business so much more efficient.

Update your storage plan.

This step can get a bit complicated as your studio grows. Perhaps you have an assistant or a studio manager who needs access to the same images you do. I always recommend staying away from a NAS solution—especially a cheap NAS solution. The speed issues alone aren’t worth it. A more scalable and efficient method is to use a single computer as the “master” storage location. This can be easily configured to share the different storage volumes so other networked computers can access it. With a little manipulation, this master computer can be set up as a file server, allowing access from an outside network or for individual access.

Refine your file structure.

This is pretty self-explanatory. What is working? What is not? Are you able to find images when needed? Have you experienced any specific issues where data was lost? Answers to these questions will help fill the holes in your current file structure and make adjustments. Set the process and stick with it.

Maintain and expand your backup solution.

At this point, you should think about creating a level of redundancy that goes beyond storing the backup files in a closet. Maintain the discipline to back up systematically, which becomes much more critical to the business. Set up offsite backups of all files: “Raws,” “Edits,” “Catalogs.” Crashplan and Backblaze are both services trusted by many professionals.

Stick to the plan.

Be ready to pivot, and always be ready to make adjustments and changes as needed, but don’t abandon the plan because you run into some minor bumps in the road.

Multi-Shooter Volume Studios

You’ve finally made it. Multiple associates, a boatload of weddings annually and a monster issue of how to deal with terabytes of images coming in every weekend. You can talk with a computer consultant who will quickly draw you up a \$50,000-plus SAN system. Thanks, but no thanks. Save your money. Here are some possible solutions.

← Revamp your storage plan.

Having a central file server is imperative at this point. In addition, you have to determine the right RAID setup for your needs and your piece of mind. I could write thousands of words about the different pros and cons for RAID types—however, a quick trip to Wikipedia can be your best friend. In our business, we utilize RAID 10, RAID 5 and the newer RAID 6 for different purposes. Create the redundancy both internally and externally to make sure you do not miss any productivity due to down time. Never assume that things won't break. They will. Planning for the disaster scenarios ahead of time saves you from sleepless nights and high blood pressure.

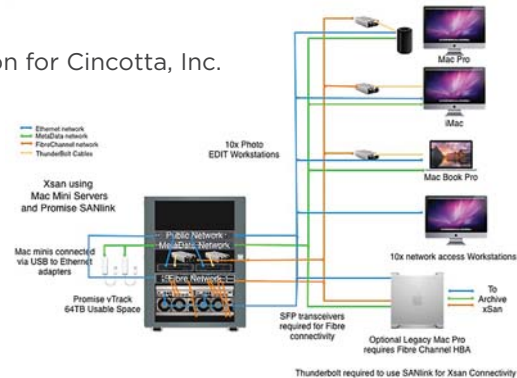
← Maximize efficiency.

Your file structure will have evolved to a point where it should experience minimal changes. Learning how to maintain and get the most efficiency out of staff, areas that you outsource and just overall workflow evaluation can enable you to make the most out of every second. One metric that's often missed is the value of workflow efficiency. Can you find ways to save 10 minutes a day managing files? Twenty minutes? The latter would save you over 120 hours a year. That is a staggering amount of time.

← Invest in catastrophic failure.

A photography empire can crumble in days with data loss. Or worse, intentional issues with someone on staff. Protecting what you have built has to be at the top of your list of priorities. This might mean stepping out of your comfort zone, perhaps hiring a consultant to help strategize what the next level looks like, or putting together the next level of a scalability plan. You will sleep better at night knowing you are protected and that you have a plan in place for what the next level is for the hundreds of thousands of images stored in your archives.

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Laurin Thienes is the co-founder and director of operations of Evolve, the leading post-production house for wedding & portrait photographers in the U.S. He studied photography at the Brooks Institute of Photography in California, and has been photographing weddings for 15 years. The native of Portland, Oregon, currently lives in O'Fallon, Illinois with his wife, Melissa and red-headed four-year-old daughter, Sophia.

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Focus on what matters most.

Endless Responsibilities of the Digital Era

with Blair Phillips

I sometimes wonder how we ever survived without some of the modern-day technologies that we take for granted today. How on earth did we ever survive without our cellphones? The birth of cellphones brought about another level of responsibilities. With every advancement in technology, there are consequences of some kind. This could not be more true for the photography industry. Photography was rather cut and dry in years passed. With advancements in technologies, photography will remain in a constant state of change. Remember that archaic thing called film? Think about the mountain of change and responsibility that digital brought us.



Way back in the film days, storage was quite simple. When you finished a job, you stored the negatives in a box. With digital, things are not quite that simple. It has added a tremendous cost to our everyday workflow. The photographer must properly manage and store each and every file. Our workflow is to burn two hard copies and store the images on our server. With the two copies that are burned, one is stored on site and one is stored off site.

Technology has once again changed when it comes to archiving images to a disc. We have found that an average DVD or CD can experience failure in maintaining images after a period of time. If you want to make sure your images will remain for a very long period of time, you should consider purchasing a Blu-ray or DVD writer that burns to an M-disc. An M-disc is a permanent storage solution. These discs are designed to last up to 1,000 years. If you have jobs requiring guaranteed archival of images, this is a great new solution. We have been asked to go back and reprint some wedding pictures from years ago and experienced disc failure. That is what prompted us to make the change to a more secure solution.

Most people are really quick to give their opinion on a product even if they have no experience with or knowledge of it. I can't tell you about the pros and cons of every on-site server on the market. I can only share with you why we use the one that we do. Being a Mac-based studio, we wanted to find a server that was one of the most compatible with a Mac. Every computer in the studio is networked to the server should anyone need access. Our server is set up with dual redundancy. This means that once something is stored on one of the drives inside the server, it is also automatically stored again on another drive within the server. This ensures the data will be made available should a drive experience failure. Think of it as a backup plan. G-RAID drive storage systems are ready right out of the box. They appear to the computer as a single large, fast disk drive. After several thousands of dollars wasted on other server systems, this one has finally solved all of our problems. It has been running strong with absolutely zero problems for over a year now.

With as much as some of us still like film, digital has become the new standard. Our society has been taught to believe that bigger is often much better. The first digital camera made weighed eight pounds and was a 0.01 megapixel that recorded to a cassette tape. We have advanced well beyond that. It is really easy to get caught up in the war of megapixels. The way you capture an image should be your first order of concern.





The Endless Responsibilities of the Digital Era

Photographers rely on high-megapixel cameras to help them with subpar exposures. If you learn to properly expose your images, an average-megapixel camera will do the job just fine. When you underexpose images and rely on Photoshop for damage repair, your images begin to suffer. Photoshop should be used as an enhancement software, and not a repair tool. You should evaluate your business model to determine your megapixel needs. With all of the added megapixels comes the need for more storage, bigger media cards and faster processors. Here at my studio, we do extremely high volume. For this reason, our files need to be around eight megs. If our files get much larger, it can really slow our production. One can always buy a camera with a high megapixel count and lower the file size in the camera's menu. This will allow you the extra space should you need it at some point. With pictures of people, just how much detail do we really need or want anyway?

Communication is generally where things go wrong in most situations. How long should you keep clients' digital files? There is no correct way to answer this. Each file that you store costs your business something. It makes for a really uncomfortable situation when a client calls you a couple of years later and wants to order more pictures, and you do not have them any longer.

We had a wedding client who was moving and accidentally threw her wedding album away. She called us in a panic and asked if she could order another one. Unfortunately, we never really discussed how long we would keep the files, so she assumed we had them some five years later. She was heartbroken and we were put in a really uncomfortable situation. Nowadays, we always express to clients that we archive their images for one year. This way, if they need something later, it takes the responsibility off of us.

There needs to be a nicer-sounding way to let clients know that you do not keep their images forever. Telling them that you are going to delete them sounds a little harsh. We tell clients that we will be "retiring" their images. Wording it that way generally keeps them from asking if they can have them since we are just going to trash the images. Storing files is a huge responsibility, but that responsibility should not have a very long duration.





Image © Blair Phillips

When it comes to making sure you are using the safest digital strategies you can, media cards are another one that comes to mind. Media cards have dramatically dropped in price over the past several years. Media cards are the lifeline of your images, so you should spare no expense. I have experienced media card failures due to buying media cards that were not really suitable for a high-pressure job. Speed is a really important aspect to consider when purchasing your cards. Should you ever experience a media card failure, there are numerous companies that may be able to recover the lost images. I have actually formatted a complete card and been able to recover nearly all of the images.

Digital strategies have opened so many doors for our industry that may have been closed for eternity. With so many continual advancements with digital strategies, we will all be constantly learning and evolving. We all must keep an open mind to new products, because those changes we revolt against may become the new standards.

Take ample time every now and then to keep up with new trends and products that may make our lives in this digital world a little more enjoyable. ■



Blair Phillips launched his business nearly 10 years ago in a small town. Since then, Blair Phillips Photography has become a beloved household name to its many fans and clients. Each year, Blair photographs up to 30 weddings and over 600 high school senior, newborn and family studio sessions. He has educated photographers all over the United States at events by WPPI, WPPI U, Imaging USA, SYNC Seniors and various state PPA groups.

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These are the 1,197 eye movements a photographer made while obsessing over the details.

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Editor-in-chief

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REFLECTORS on LOCATION

with Michael Anthony



A 5-in-1 reflector is probably one of the first lighting tools most of us purchase. It remains my most used lighting tool on portrait shoots because of its versatility, portability and ability to make beautiful images. Expensive equipment often means better images, but that doesn't hold for reflectors.

To get the best use out of this tool, we need to step outside the box and use it in ways that are not always conventional. As with most things in photography, technique matters more than gear.

Many photographers avoid them because of the need for an assistant to operate the reflector on location. The best money you will spend is in a good assistant to help you with lighting. With an extra set of hands and a reflector, you can create beautiful images that your clients will love.

Bouncing Light to Create Directionality

The most common way to use a reflector is to bounce light directly at your subject. I have never been a fan of using open shade as a form of lighting. In open shade, the light has no direction. Now, a general rule in photography is that your subject should be at least as bright as the brightest part of the image (in my work, I want to make the subject the brightest part of the photo). Therefore, I am always looking for dark backgrounds to place my subject in front of. Take a look at this set of images using open shade versus a reflector.



Images © Michael Anthony

When we photograph brides or grooms on the first floor of a building, there is rarely good light that comes into the room. This is the perfect time to send your assistant (or second shooter) outside with a reflector to put some light back into the room. In this image, my assistant Tiffany was outside of the bride's room reflecting light back in through the window. Just be careful not to spill too much light back onto the wall.



When positioning the reflector, find some light to bounce from high to low, like we do with strobes. It looks more natural because the sun lights us from high to low. I see photographers using the reflector down low, and reflecting light back up onto the subject. This can create shadows between the cheekbones and eyes; it generally emphasizes age, and is not flattering to your subject. The exception to this rule is when you use your reflector as fill light, which we will talk about later in this article.

Angle in = Angle Out

How you position your reflector with the sun can make all the difference in the light. When using the silver, gold or white side of a reflector, you are creating a "specular reflection" of light.

Remember that the angle of incidence (hitting the reflector) will equal the angle of reflection (bouncing off the reflector). Often we have to put light on a subject at an angle that is off center from the camera. Therefore, it's important to remember that in order to get the best light, you have to pick the position of your light source carefully to give yourself the best light power for your scene. For instance, if you want soft light on your subject, we all know that we need to have our light source (reflector) close to the subject. If the reflector is too close, and is being lit directly by the sun, then the contrast between your subject and background may be too much. Instead, find light diffused through trees, or bouncing off a bright surface such as a wall.

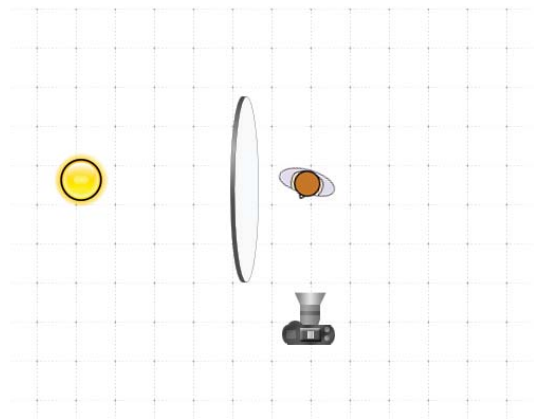
Using the Diffuser in Your Reflector

When light passes through a semitransparent source such as diffusion material found in the translucent part of your reflector, it creates a softer, broader form of light. This is my favorite way to use a reflector. It is essentially like bringing a window with you wherever you go.



Images © Michael Anthony

There is a technique for doing this just right. First, I find a background that is in shade, ensuring that my subject is the brightest part of the image. Next, I place my subject in direct sunlight and make sure that the composition with the shaded background makes sense. I place the diffuser above the subject, and move it around to shape the light exactly how I want it. This is sometimes trial and error, but ultimately I am trying to create a triangle of light on my subject's face. By turning the subject's body away from the light and the face back into it, I ensure that the light will shape the subject in the most flattering way possible. When done right, this technique almost always provides perfect lighting on your subject. Try using a diffuser through a window that has direct sunlight coming through for a very nice effect.



Images © Michael Anthony

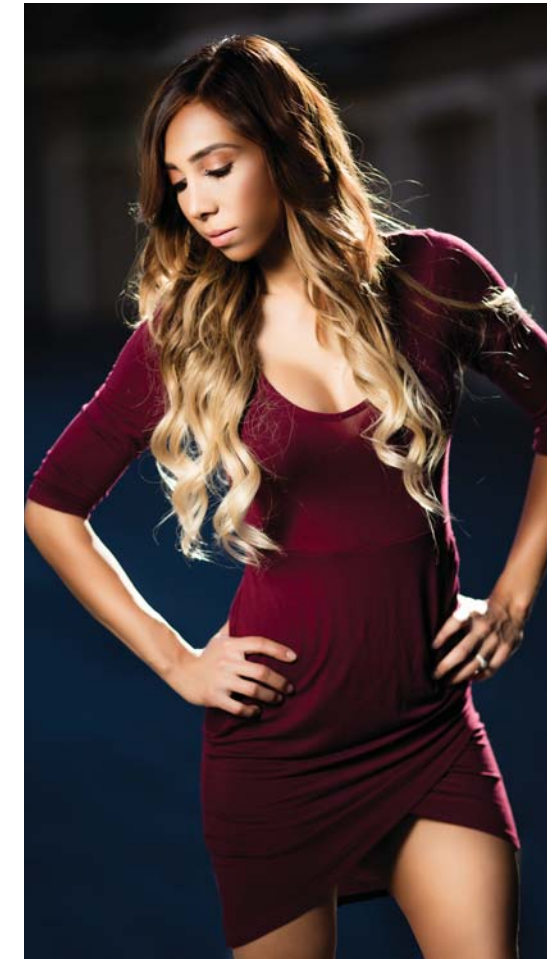


Using the Sun to Create a Perfect Two-Light Setup

One really gorgeous way to use a reflector is to use it to fill in the shadows on a backlit subject. Backlighting is a very popular technique among photographers who prefer natural light. A reflector offers the perfect way to take normal backlit photographs and turn them into beautiful portraits by sandwiching your subject between the backlit sun and the specular reflection from your reflector.

The trick to doing this is to make sure that your sun is diffused by something—tree branches work great. This way, flare won't enter your lens. Use your lens hood to help reduce flare even further and keep your image as clean as possible.

You can use your reflector to light your subject the same way that you would with studio lighting. Decide on the type of light that will best serve the mood of your image. If you have a second set of hands, experiment with two reflectors. I prefer to keep my light falling onto my subject at a 45-degree angle in most circumstances.



Images © Michael Anthony

Using Your Reflector as Fill Light

A reflector can be used to fill in shadows in your subject's eyes or to reduce contrast in a scene. I use a reflector directly underneath my subject's face for a close portrait to bring some light into the eyes. This gives the face a glowing appearance. You can do this by placing your subject in shade and then using the natural light coming from the sky with the silver side of the reflector. With the reflector this close to your subject, use the white side if needed to reduce contrast if your incident light source is bright. This is the same method used by many studio photographers. It will give you gorgeous results when used outdoors.

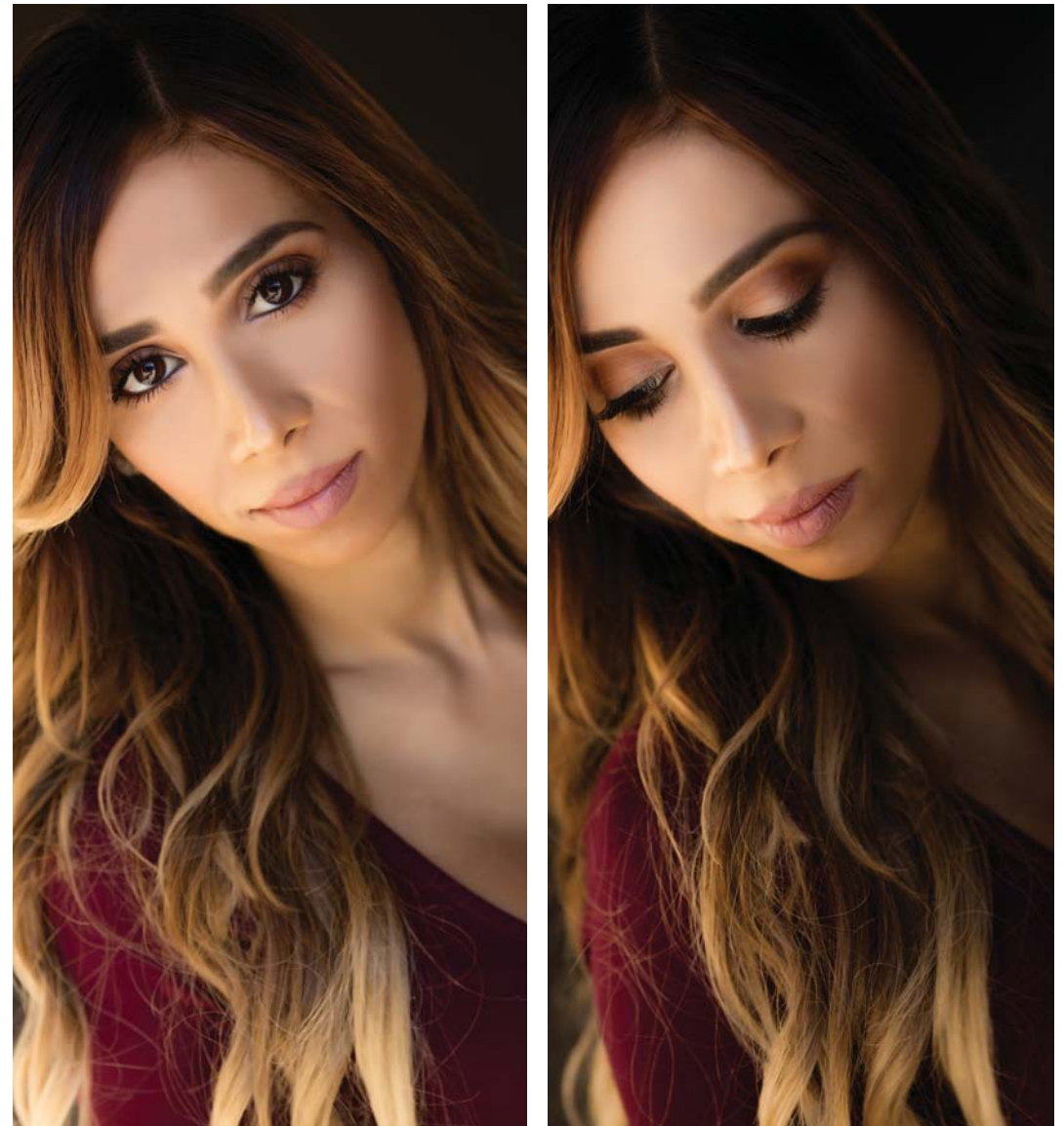
Another way to use your reflector is to fill light coming from the direct sun. If you turn your subject's body away from the sun, and the face back into it, you get a hard shadow around the jawline. Use your reflector to put some sunlight back on your subject, and you will get that three-dimensional glow that can only come from a well-placed reflector.



Images © Michael Anthony

Use Your Reflector to Remove Light

The fifth way to use your reflector is to use the black side to remove light. If you have a scene that is full of light, the black side can actually give shape to your light by removing it from a scene. You can use the reflector to either block light, or to reduce specular reflection that occurs from either a strobe or from naturally occurring sources. I use this in the studio to create moody, dramatic portraits. In these images, see how using the black side of the reflector can help you create shadow in an image.



Images © Michael Anthony

Use Your Reflector as a Flash Modifier

So you drive 45 minutes to your shoot, unpack your trunk and realize you left your umbrellas and softboxes at home. Bummer, right? Wrong: You have your reflector. Use it as a makeshift umbrella. When I am packing light, I use the translucent insert in my reflector to modify a speedlight. Keep in mind that your light will spill just about everywhere, so do this with plenty of space so the light doesn't bounce all over the room.

Another way to use your reflector as a flash modifier is to use the white side to bounce light back from your strobe. It creates a beautiful, soft light. This works best outdoors.



Images © Michael Anthony

Find Natural Reflectors

Most of our work is done using natural light. We do use a lot of off-camera flash, but the thing we look for most is large sources of light, usually buildings, to use as reflectors. We do around 200 photo shoots a year, and I prefer to stack as many shoots into the same day for time efficiency as possible. Therefore, we are likely not going to be able to shoot at the golden hour all the time. I pick locations that are more urban because there are more buildings to use as reflectors. This is the best type of natural light you can find, because the light source is often much larger than your subjects, creating a beautiful, soft light. For even more gorgeous light, find light reflecting off of a building, and place your subject into a darker environment, such as under an overpass or inside a tunnel. Experiment with buildings that are warmer-toned to get golden tones on your subject's skin.

This is an alley in an area close to our studio. The large white building inside the red box makes the perfect reflector. By placing the bride close to the building, we get a gorgeous, glowing light on her.

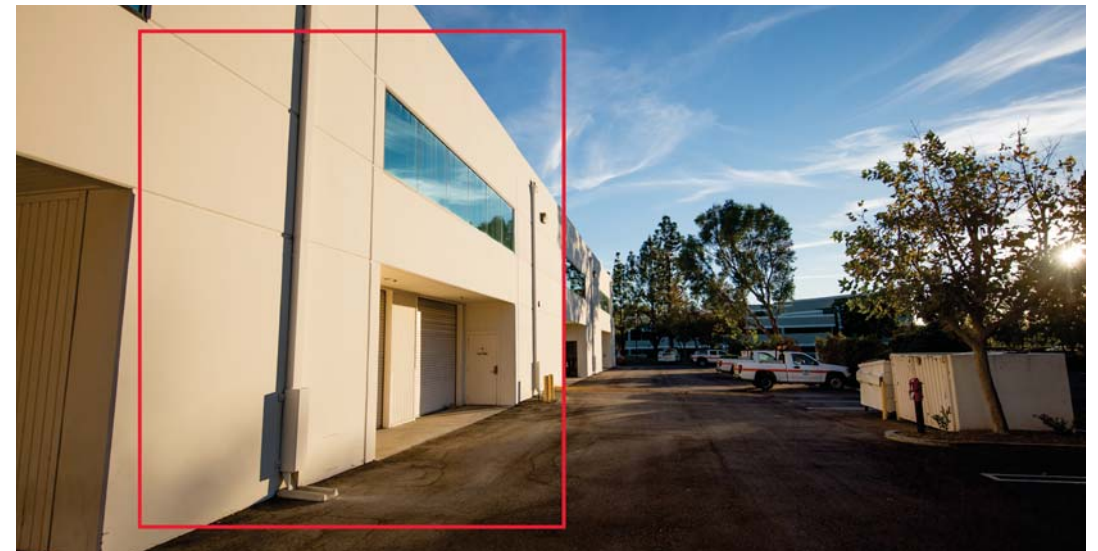


Image © Michael Anthony

Reflectors are an essential part of photography. You can find a use for them on every shoot. Once you learn to incorporate them into your work, you will find that the reflector is one of the most versatile tools in your camera bag. ■



Michael Anthony is the owner of Michael Anthony Studios, a wedding photography studio based in Los Angeles. He has won multiple awards in international image competition for his creative use of light, storytelling and environmental portraiture. The five-member team at Michael Anthony Studios photographs around 60 weddings and over 200 portrait sessions a year.

michaelanthonyphotography.com

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- Lindsay Adler



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5-Part Workflow With Lightroom CC

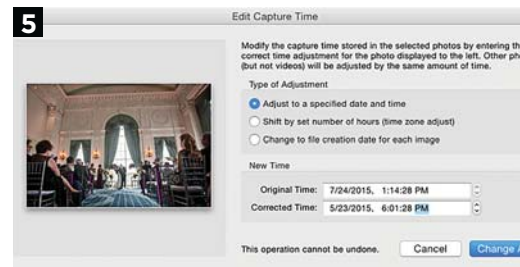
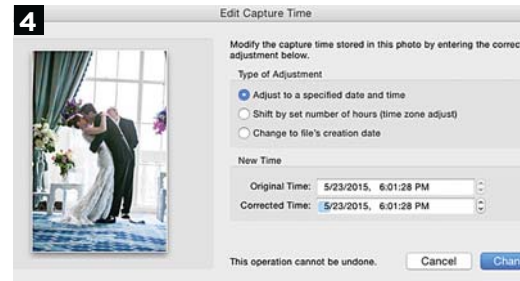
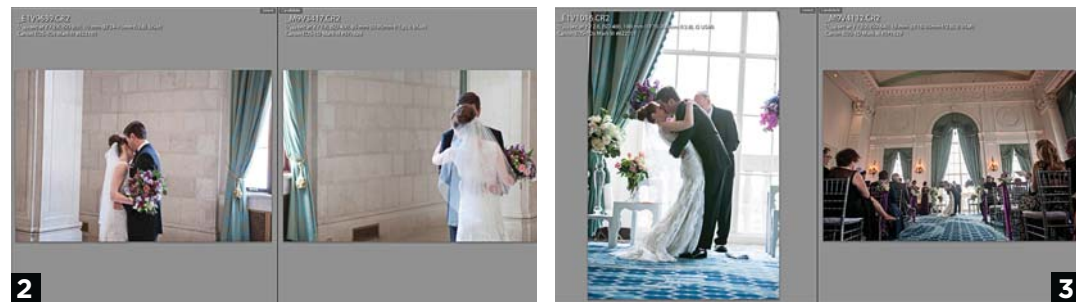
Part 5 Finalizing Your Files

with **Dustin Lucas**

Finally, we are ready to post the images for the client to see. For now, the editing is done! In the past four “Workflow With Lightroom CC” articles, I have stressed the importance of efficiency. User presets are the foundation for my efficiency in automating tasks and processes. In this final installment, I discuss output file management and the functionality of plugins for exporting and publishing images. If you are interested in slideshow publishing, printing and book design in Lightroom CC, keep an eye out for my upcoming articles.

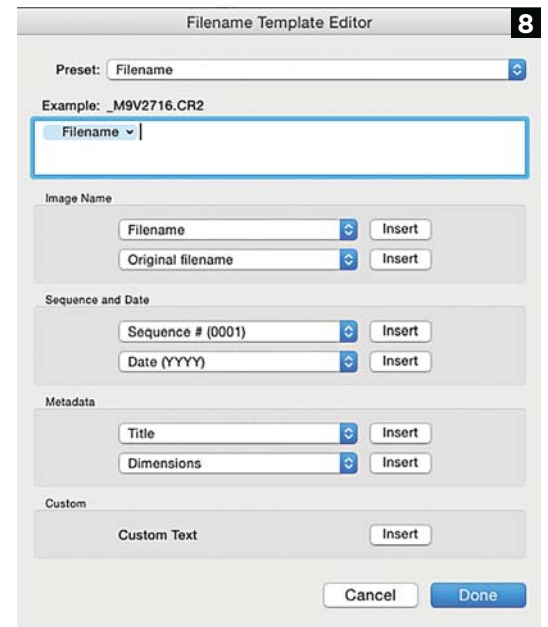
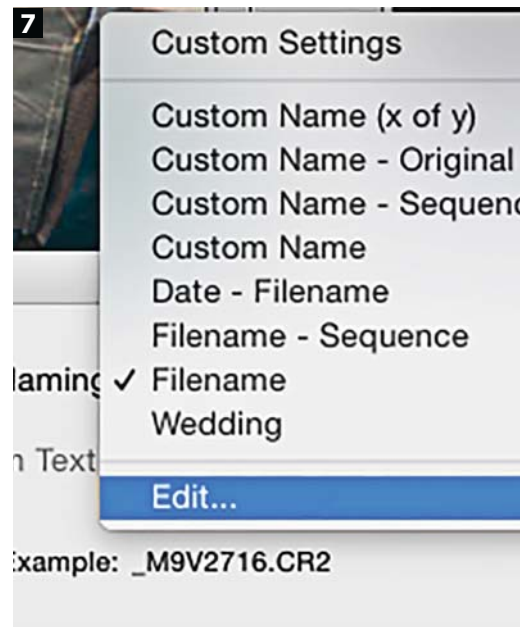
File Sorting

Before we jump into output and export techniques, we need to manage the order of our files. Sorting files in Lightroom is as easy as choosing capture time, added order, file name, custom order, etc. using the Sort By feature in the Library module. (Image 1) These four options seem to be the more popular choices for sorting images. I sort by capture time. This requires the capture or shot time of the files to be synced between cameras. Those of you who do this in-camera prior to shooting know how important this is. Start by locating a prominent moment when all the cameras were photographing at once. I suggest locating the first look or ceremonial kiss. It's easiest to use an image with both subjects present, and the same split-second pose is captured between cameras. Images like E1V9639.cr2 and M9V3417.cr2 are good, but the posing is difficult to match. (Image 2) A more suitable choice would be the first kiss, E1V1016.cr2 and M9V4132.cr2. This back bend is very specific to the moment, and luckily it was captured between both cameras. (Image 3)



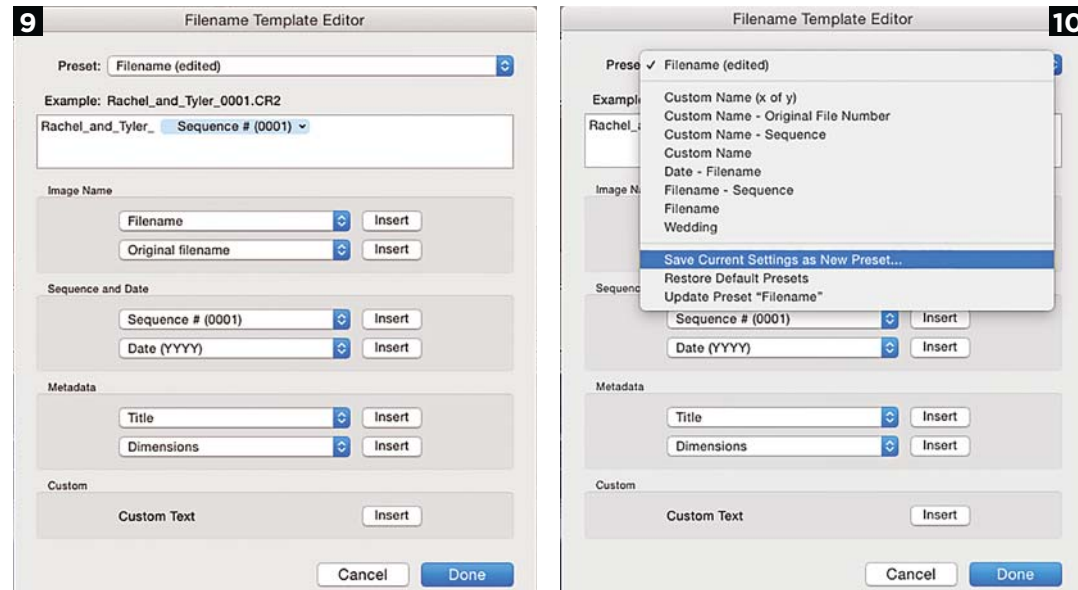
File Naming

Now we are ready to rename these images to organize them for the client. Select all the images, navigate to the Metadata panel and click the button next to File Name. Lightroom defaults to "Filename" for the file naming field. Click in the file naming field and select Edit from the drop-down options. (Image 7) You can now fully customize your file naming workflow. (Image 8)



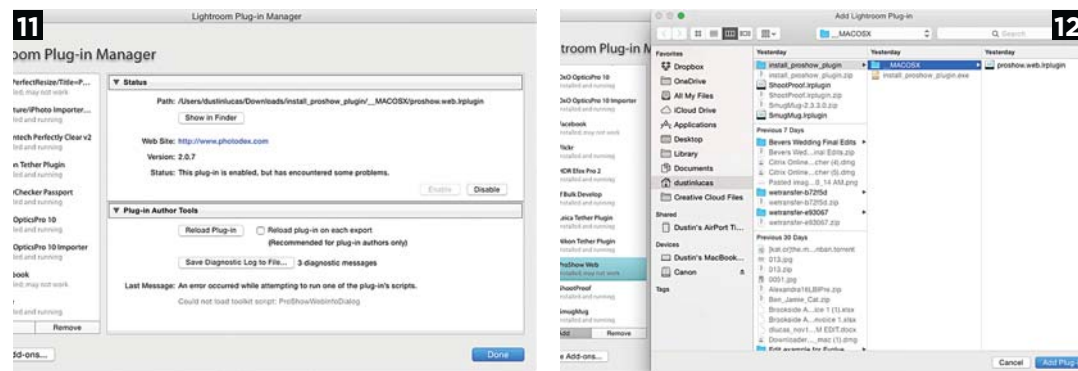
We need to select the main shooter's image first, E1V1016.cr2, and head to the Library module. Navigate to the panels on the right side and click the arrow next to Metadata. The 14th option down is Capture Time; click the metadata button to the right. You will need to remember the date and time, so write them down. (Image 4) Now go to the second shooter's image, M9V4132.cr2, and filter the images by their camera only. Select all images and follow the same steps to edit the capture time. (Image 5) Match the date and time you previously wrote down, and click Change. That's it. You have changed the capture time, and you can now sort by this category to order your images. (Image 6)

A popular choice is to insert the bride and groom's name with sequence numbers at the end. To change this, click in the white text field and delete the current file naming category. Type in the first names of the bride and groom, and leave a space at the end. Then, under Sequence and Date, click in the first category field and choose Sequence # (0001). You can view the file name example above the white text box to double-check. (Image 9) At the top, you will notice there is a preset category; click in this field. Select the option Save Current Settings as a New Preset and name it "wedding" or something to familiarize yourself with this naming structure. (Image 10) Of course, once you select this preset for another event, you must edit the names of the couple.



Installing Lightroom Plugins

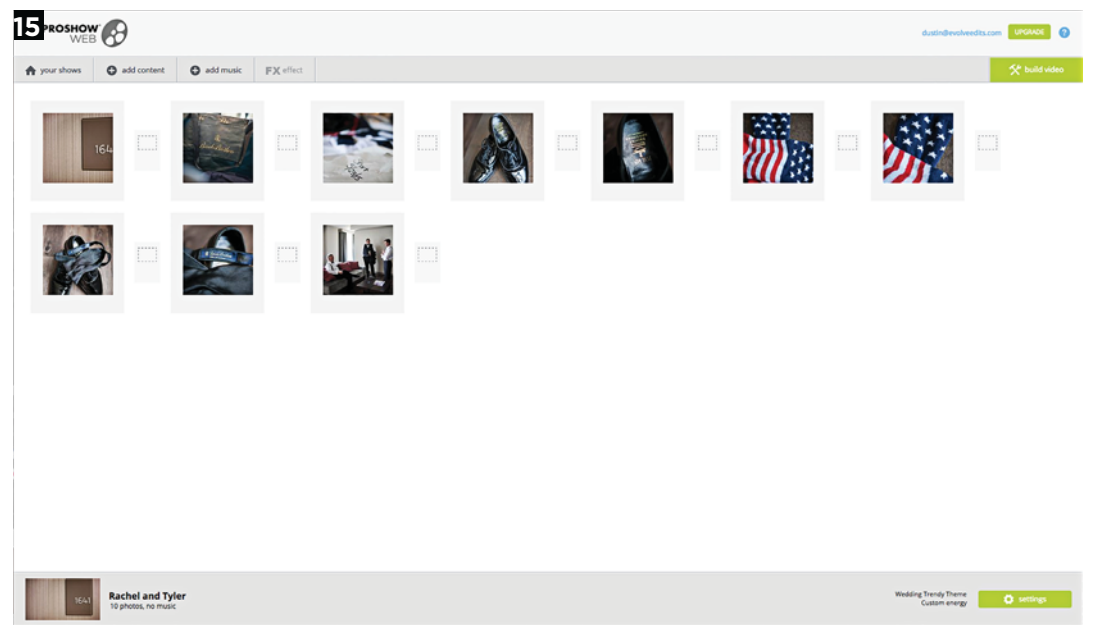
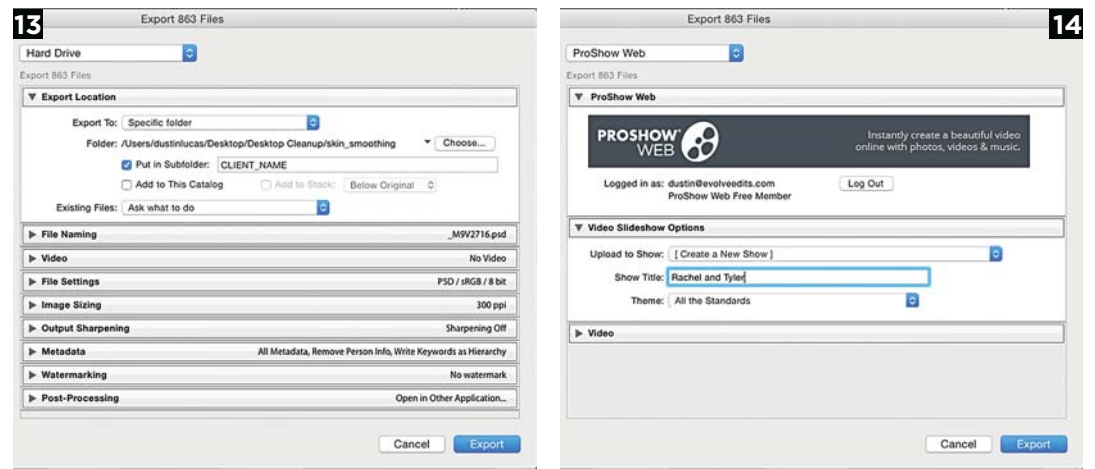
Jumping ahead to installing plugins for Lightroom will allow you to export and/or publish your images directly to your online proofing websites. First, download the plugin(s) you wish to use. Then, go back into Lightroom and click on File > Plug-in Manager in the menu bar. From this dialog window, you can search on Adobe for add-ons or add your manually downloaded plugin. (Image 11) Let's choose Add at the bottom of the plugin list and choose the newly downloaded file. I have downloaded plugins for SmugMug, ShootProof and ProShow Web. (Image 12)



Exporting Files

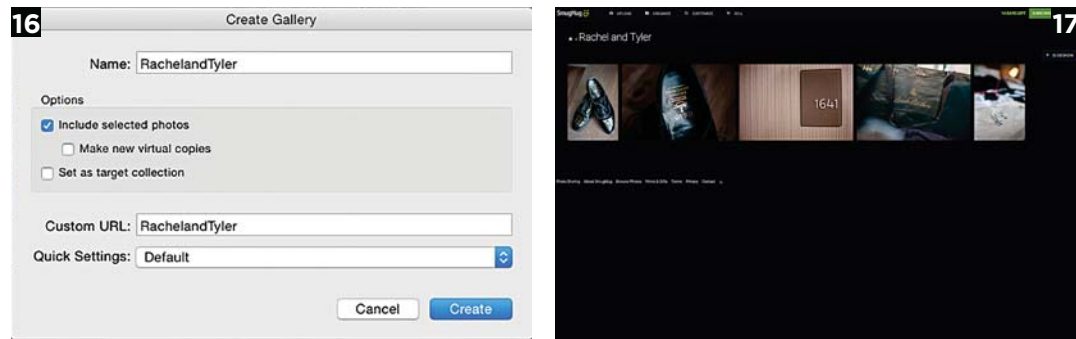
Exporting files from Lightroom is quick and easy. Select all the desired files and choose File > Export to begin choosing your settings. This is where user presets can be a huge timesaver in your workflow. I generally make export presets for many of my advanced edits for Photoshop. Things like skin smoothing in Portraiture and black-and-white edits in Nik Silver Efex Pro 2 are almost mechanical in how they work. (Image 13) Automate your mindless tasks like this by using droplets in your exports. For an in-depth breakdown of droplets, see the January 2015 issue for my article "Creating a Professional Workflow: Actions and Droplets." It's worth taking some time to get familiar with these; they are a part of my everyday workflow.

ProShow Web has a default preset built into the export module. (Image 14) This intuitive web-based slideshow interface has really given Animoto a run for its money. Even Sal has changed over. Once you are logged in through the export window, create a slideshow name and you are ready to export files directly into your account. It automatically resizes and saves the files in JPEG format for web-ready viewing and functionality. (Image 15) Doesn't get any easier than that.

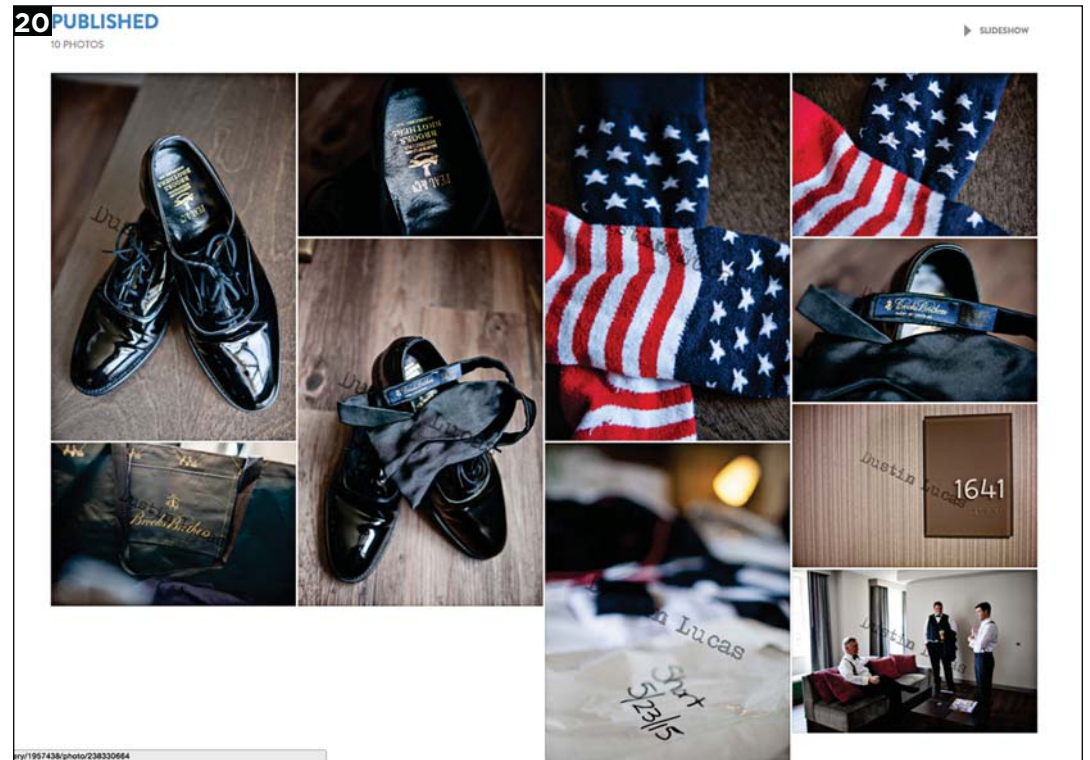
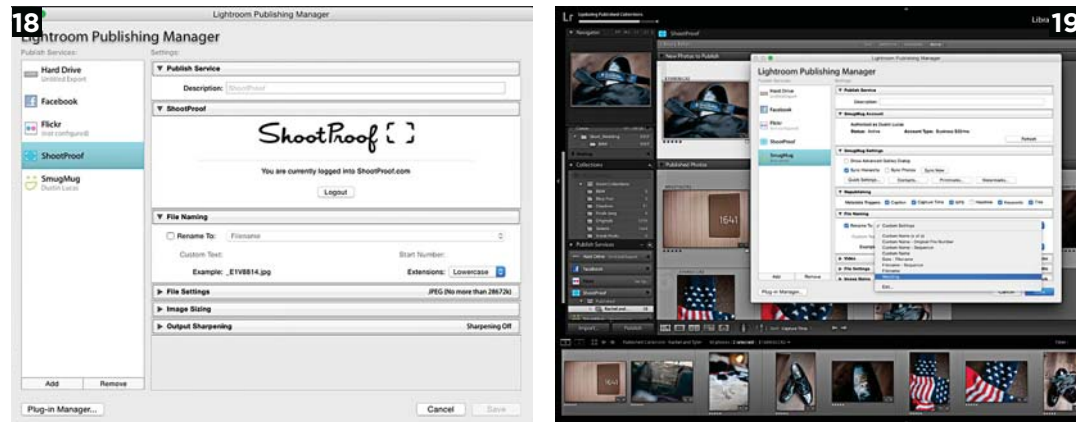


Publish Services

Lightroom is a bit lacking in terms of default publishing services like Facebook and Flickr, so I installed some more useful ones like SmugMug and ShootProof. Publishing services, which can be accessed in the Library module, allow you to filter your images for quick selection. When you publish images to the website, SmugMug’s plugin allows you to create galleries directly in Lightroom. These are set up very similar to Lightroom Collections in that the files do not move at all—they are virtually organized. Right-click on the specific publisher and choose Create a Gallery. Once you’ve named the gallery, the custom URL is generated for your SmugMug site. (Image 16) You can choose selected images or make virtual copies. Virtual copies work well when you want to apply different adjustment settings or individualized groupings for client-specific needs. Click Publish in the upper right-hand corner to finish the process, and your client images begin to load on the webpage. (Image 17)



ShootProof’s plugin has a similar interface that requires you to create a collection. Same basic principle: Choose the images you want to share and click Publish. It’s pretty simple. This is a streamlined process that negates having to export from Lightroom and then upload to the website. (Image 18) You do have the option to resize and rename files for both plugins. It’s sort of hidden in the Lightroom Publishing Manager. Click the “+” button next to Publish Services and choose Go to Publishing Manager. (Image 19) There are options for all the plugins installed in Lightroom. Many of the same export settings are included, as well as user presets. I wouldn’t suggest changing the image size, but it allows custom renaming for clients’ sites. (Image 20) I suggest renaming before exporting or publishing images, but there is a last-chance option as well.



Conclusion

You are now ready to start making some money on your images. Take your time sorting and renaming files. There’s nothing worse than having images out of order on your client site, which makes you look unprofessional. Many of these software developers work well together. Lightroom has plenty of efficient tasks at your disposal; you just have to take the time to learn them.

If time management is a rough area for you, get familiar with user presets and integrate them into your everyday workflow. ■



Dustin Lucas is a full-time photographer and educator focused on the wedding industry and the academic world. After achieving his master in fine arts degree, a career opportunity opened once he began working with Evolve Edits. Through teaching photography classes and writing about photography, Dustin continues to expand his influence on art and business throughout the industry.

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Conventions: Getting the Most Bang for Your Buck

I write the “Building Blocks” series to give you ideas on building a stronger business, brand and network of support. While most of the blocks are part of your infrastructure, this month I want to step outside the structure of your business to talk about education with a touch of networking.

Photography is an ever-changing art form. Technology combined with consumer trends makes it imperative for you to stay on top of what’s hot and what’s not. You’ve got to stay in tune with new gear and techniques, while constantly raising the bar on your skill set. You need to experiment, practice and keep your work unique.

To keep yourself growing, attend every workshop and convention you can put on your schedule. Conventions offer a wide variety of exposure to vendors, educators and other photographers. Plus, they recharge your creative battery.

Trade show season for 2016 kicks off in just a few weeks, and obviously at the top of the list of favorites for me is ShutterFest. It’s not the biggest in the country, but it’s become the very best. It offers an incredibly diverse series of educational opportunities and time to mix in some hands-on shooting.

It’s never too early to start planning ahead. Time is your most valuable commodity. Think through what you want to accomplish and where you need the most help. Here’s a list to get you started.

- **Why are you going to the convention?** I know that sounds incredibly basic, but some of you go to party, others to buy and more of you to learn and network. Figure out what the most important thing is that you want to get out of the show before you get there. Take a serious look at your skill set and, above all, be honest with yourself. You know better than anybody the things you struggle with in capturing great images, building your brand and running your business.

- **Take a few minutes to look around your office, studio or the trunk of your car.** Isolate every product you use and put the manufacturer on a list. Now look at every company whose services you use—your lab, frame company, web designer, album company, etc. should all be on the list. Your first goal before you get to the show is to isolate every company that’s involved in your business.

- **Last on the preshow vendor list are the products you need for your business or new services you require.** Every trade show has a variety of vendors, each with products and services to help improve how you run your business.

- **Now hit the convention’s website and get to know who’s going to be at the show from your vendor/supplier lists.** Your goal is to meet at least one staff member at every company on the list. This is a critical component to building an effective network. ShutterFest, because it’s such an attendee-centric show, gives you a lot of great opportunities for quality time with a number of different exhibitors.

- **You’re going to a convention to learn and raise the bar on your skill set.** Don’t just pick programs because you like the speaker or heard it’s a great program. Choose them based on your weak spots. Always pick at least one program completely outside your comfort zone. Every convention has its speakers listed, and many give you an opportunity to sign up in advance.

- **Don’t know a speaker? Check out YouTube.** Most of the major educators in photography can be found in the massive archives of YouTube. This is an opportunity to get to know them a little before you get to the convention. Also check out their websites and blogs, and start following them on social media.

- **Attend print competition.** Print competition is one of my favorite events because you can learn so much by listening to qualified artists critique the images. It’s one of the most valuable educational experiences you can have. Pick any judging or critique program, and just sit down for an hour at least. Listen to the comments from the judges and think about your own work.

• **If there's a print exhibit, walk through and look at the images.** This is a terrific time to get a feel for the trends in imaging. You'll see just about everything in the images submitted for competition.

• **Wear comfortable shoes!** No matter what convention you're attending, you're going to be on your feet all day.

• **Bring business cards and some images.** I've always liked being shown a 5x7 or 6x9 collage of a couple images with the photographer's address and contact information. Unless you've made an appointment in advance, most exhibitors won't have the time to look at a portfolio or an iPad chock-full of images. But you can leave a cardstock piece or brochure with a vendor, and contact them after the show. This is a perfect opportunity for you to check out promotional material from Marathon, an exhibitor at most of the major conventions, including ShutterFest.

• **Make plans for breakfast and dinner meetings before you get to the convention.** Reservations don't come easy when there's a big convention in town. Even if you don't know who's going with you to dinner, it's great to have something set up in advance.

• **Don't do lunch alone.** Lunch is the perfect time to interact with both new and old friends. It's also great because it can be so spontaneous. Plus, it gives you a chance to hear what everybody is doing and their opinions on the convention and special programming.

• **You snooze, you lose!** I was young and stupid once too, and there are few things as fun as going out with friends and barhopping at a convention. However, you're at the show for a reason, and if you need to sleep in late the following morning, your evening out with friends might become the most expensive investment you make in the show. Don't miss appointments or presentations you had planned to attend.

• **Bring a camera—a real camera.** Cellphones are fine, but you want to get some images to use later on for press releases, your blog, Facebook, etc. You don't need your regular gear, but a decent point-and-shoot produces better images than your phone. Look for opportunities for pictures with vendors and those speakers you admire. ShutterFest is unique in that it offers you an opportunity to shoot for the purpose of building your skill set and your portfolio, so don't be afraid to bring your gear.

• **Are you insured?** If you're just starting your career, your home insurance does not cover your gear if it's lost or stolen while you're on business. Check with your insurance agent, and make sure your gear is covered. It's not something that happens often, but it's so important to be properly insured.

• **Know your credit line.** If you think you're going to be purchasing some major gear at a trade show, get to know your credit line in advance. If you're going to lease a major piece of gear, contact the leasing company before the convention and know what you have to spend. I'm a big fan of leasing programs because they give you a chance to utilize somebody else's assets without depleting yours.

• **Talk to the speakers.** I'm always amazed by how many of you are intimidated by your favorite photographers. The truth is, they're there to teach and meet other photographers interested in their work. Just walk up and introduce yourself and thank them for whatever inspiration they've given you. They don't bite.

• **Talk to the people around you at programs.** Conventions are unique because you're all there for the same reasons. Get to know the people sitting on either side of you. It's amazing what you can learn by just talking with each other.

The one thing I find most frustrating with so many attendees at a big convention, especially first-timers, is they simply haven't planned their trip. They got their tickets and made it to the event, but then everything falls apart. Plan your convention experience so that you're not wasting time and, even more important, your money.

Nothing beats the experience of a great trade show and convention, but it's up to you to get the most out of it. ■

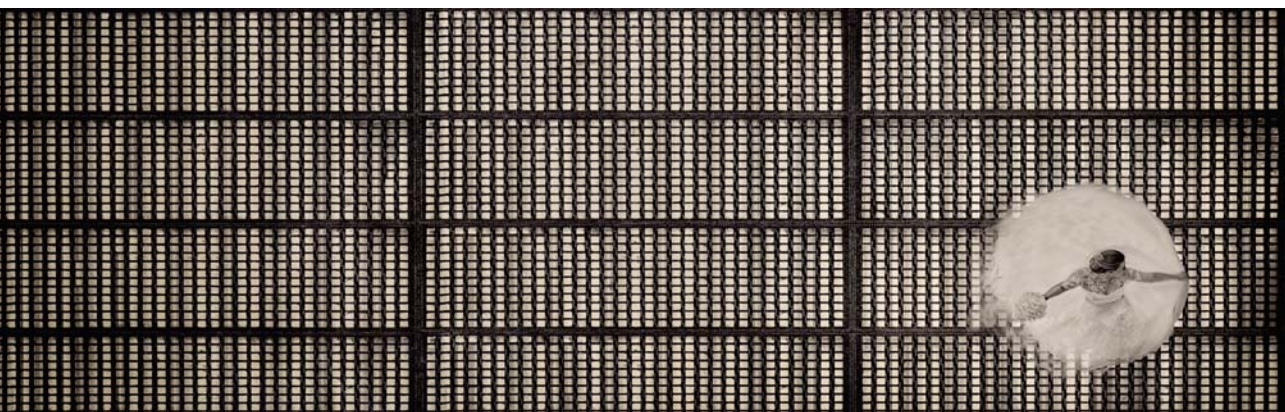


Skip Cohen is president and founder of Marketing Essentials International, a consulting firm specializing in projects dedicated to photographic education, marketing and social media support across a variety of marketing and business platforms. He founded SkipCohenUniversity.com in January 2013. He's been actively involved in the photographic industry his entire career, and previously served as president of Rangefinder/WPPI and Hasselblad USA. He has coauthored six books on photography and is involved in several popular podcasts, including *Weekend Wisdom*.

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Shooting
Natural-Light
Fashion:

How to
Shape and Control Light
on Location
with Michael Corsentino

A few months ago, the Sunbounce company commissioned me to produce a location shoot demonstrating how I use its gear in my fashion and portrait work. The brief from the client was simple enough: Do what you do, produce killer images, videotape the entire process and provide BTS commentary explaining my choices and methods. As a longtime Sunbounce user, I was excited to take on this project and explore the possibilities.

I'm continually reminded and surprised by how much high-end fashion work is done on location using only diffusers and reflectors. Simple tools in the right hands make all the difference. You don't need a million lights and complex setups to achieve polished, professional results for fashion images shot on location.

Quite the contrary. Most location fashion shoots are lean, mean, on-the-run operations where speed and flexibility are the premium. Until you're shooting campaigns and look books with budgets large enough to pull location permits, you'll likely be shooting guerrilla style. That means no light stands, tripods or anything else placed on the ground that passersby could trip on and potentially injure themselves. (I highly recommend an insurance policy with a \$1 million liability coverage option at a minimum.)

The other benefit of working with simple lightweight tools is speed and flexibility. It's much faster and easier to follow your model's movements with the light from a reflector than it is to continuously reposition a strobe and modifier on a light stand. Reflectors and diffusers allow you to work quickly, keep things moving and maintain the energy of the shoot. Maintaining the energy is super important. It's really easy for things to flat-line if you're spending more time adjusting lights than paying attention to your model. With too much down time, even the best model will get bored and lose energy, and your shoot will suffer.

The first step in any fashion or portrait project is to assemble a rock-solid creative team. Ideally you want a team that

works exceptionally well together, one unified around the common goal of producing the best cohesive series of images possible. While it's important to have an initial vision driving your creative, it's even more important to trust your team members and let them do what they do best. The whole is always greater than the sum of the parts. You'll always make better pictures with the input, expertise and additional eyeballs of a team than you will on your own. A team typically consists of your talent (models), hair and makeup artists or H/MUA (sometimes the same person), a stylist who pulls clothes and oversees styling on set, a creative director (generally the client or agency representative) and assistants.

For this shoot, I had the luxury of three assistants. This arrangement works best as follows: an experienced first assistant who knows your gear inside and out, and two additional assistants who are familiar with photo shoots and photography in general, but aren't necessarily experts. There's a lot you can get done with one assistant, but additional assistants can keep an eye on gear that's not being used. Equipment can quickly sprout legs and disappear forever at busy locations, so you're better safe than sorry. When you're working with a diffusion panel and a reflector at the same time, two assistants are indispensable. I prefer three assistants: two to hold the tools in use and one to watch and help lug gear.

The next and equally important piece of the puzzle is your location. Don't underestimate the important role your location plays in the overall success, feeling and messaging of your concept. For these images, I wanted an opulent, epic elegance, something with a *Great Gatsby* feel. I chose the dazzling Vizcaya museum in Miami. Typically the clothing is what leads the styling because the designer or brand is your client. In this case, we had a location first and I needed to source clothing that matched it second. Since I wasn't working with a stylist, I hired a rental house to pull the clothes. I chose Rent the Runway and selected three dresses for the shoot.



Once the sun is at a lower position in the sky, it can be used as a backlight, which I'm doing here. In this case, I've kept it undiffused to create a strong, hazy accent light on Ashleigh's right side. To complete the lighting setup, I added a Sunbounce 2x3 Micro-Mini reflector with silver fabric to bounce light back from the sun toward Ashleigh's face and the front of her body. Without this reflector, she would have been almost entirely in shadow.

Tools

Whether you're controlling and shaping natural light or the light from strobes, you have several important pieces of lightweight, relatively inexpensive equipment you should master and keep in your arsenal: the reflector, the diffusion

panel and the subtraction panel. These three tools provide a tremendous amount of control in either scenario. I used only reflectors and a diffusion panel to produce this entire series of images. Let's look at each.



A behind-the-scenes look at taming harsh midday sunlight: Here we're using a Sunbounce 4x6 Sun Swatter overhead to diffuse the sun, and a 2x3 Micro-Mini with silver fabric to provide fill light from below. This creates a classic clamshell lighting pattern.



Diffusing the harsh midday sun with an overhead scrim, in this case a Sunbounce 4x6-foot Sun Swatter, and creating fill light from below with a 2x3 silver-faced Micro-Mini reflector takes the light from unpalatable to awesome, and does it all without any strobes. This arrangement creates a classic clamshell lighting pattern.

The Diffusion Panel

Diffusion panels are key. They let you create open shade wherever and whenever you need it. This is essential because, without diffusion at your disposal, you're at the mercy of the bare sun. Aside from sunrise and sunset, overhead, undiffused sunlight creates deep, unflattering shadows and hard light that most often isn't the goal. A diffusion panel cuts the harsh light, creating a natural light softbox overhead. This gives you a soft, even light. I typically combine this with a white or silver reflector placed below the

model's face or torso to open up any deep shadows falling under the chin or in the eye sockets. Depending on where the sun is, I sometimes add a third or even fourth reflector to bounce in additional fill where needed, add catchlights, highlights, etc. I used the over and under diffusion panel and reflector arrangement for several of the images here (see the image captions). This is commonly referred to as clamshell lighting.

Undiffused sunlight.



Diffused sunlight.



The Reflector

Reflectors are essentially super-lightweight, low-cost lights. The sun typically provides the juice, but you can just as easily fire a strobe into a reflector and direct the light wherever you need it. Why would you do that? The larger the light source, the softer the light. By firing a bare flash onto a reflector and bouncing its light, you're creating a broader, softer, more diffused source.

Once you know how to control reflectors to shape and modulate light, they're indispensable tools on location and in the studio. For this shoot, I used only natural light, a diffusion panel and white- and silver-faced reflectors. While reflectors don't have knobs to control their output, you still have a lot of control over the intensity and quality of light produced. To control intensity or volume of light output from a reflector, you'll rely on two factors: the distance from the subject and the reflectivity of fabric on the reflector. If you want less light from a white or silver reflector, add more distance between the reflector and the subject. If it's more light you're after, move the reflector closer, or switch to silver fabric for even more efficiency.

The Subtraction Panel

While I didn't use a subtraction panel on this shoot, I always have at least one with me. Like reflectors, these come in various shapes and sizes, but take away light rather than add it. Subtraction panels are commonly used to introduce or

Strobes With Reflectors and Diffusers

Even when I'm planning to shoot only with reflectors and/or diffusion panels, I always have two battery-operated Profoto B1 strobes with me. If there's no sun, I need a backup plan.

Feathering is another key technique. When you aim a reflector at a subject, you need to move it around to find the sweet spot where the reflector hits the subject bang on. This is the spot where you'll have the most output and direct quality of light. I typically don't work with this light. I prefer to feather the light. For this, I slightly angle the reflector to left or right so that I'm using the softer part of the light from the reflector.

Tone and contrast are your next considerations. There are myriad fabric surfaces available for reflectors: neutral white, silver, gold and combinations of each. White is the softest and most neutral; silver boosts output and contrast; and gold adds warmth. A reflector with gold fabric makes a great warm hair light.

Another technique I use a lot is shooting into the sun. Using the sun as a backlight provides a kicker light behind or from the side of the subject, and allows me to bounce light from the sun back toward the front of the subject.

heighten the depth of shadows. Just as you'd use a reflector to add light and open the shadowed side of a face, subtraction panels conversely decrease light and add or deepen shadow.

You can bounce your strobe into a reflector as well as fire it through a diffusion panel for a wide range of awesome creative lighting effects.



Using a large 4x8 Sunbounce Pro reflector with white fabric, approximately 8 feet from the subject, creates soft bounce light from the sun over Ashleigh's right shoulder.



Image © Michael Corsentino

I bounced the sunlight over Ashleigh's left shoulder back toward her with a small silver-faced 2x3-inch Sunbounce Micro-Mini, allowing me to work in a very tight space and create the punchy, concentrated light I wanted.

Getting Started

Reflectors, diffusion panels and subtraction panels come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, some collapsible and some fixed, and from numerous manufacturers. I have collapsible as well as rigid frame versions, all valuable for different purposes. Collapsible ones are highly portable, while rigid frame versions are robust and stand up a lot better against the wind. Many reflectors are multipurpose, providing diffusion and multiple reflective fabric skins to choose from. If you're new to reflectors and diffusers, getting one of each is a great start.

I encourage you to try each of these techniques. Once you do, I'm confident you'll see that the possibilities with reflectors and diffusion panels are endless.

Creative Team:

Model: Ashleigh Arruda

H/MUA: Shelley Giard

1st Assistant: Kat Von W

Assistants: Deanna Hunt, Juan Carlos Citron

Video: Leonardo & Melissa Volturo



Michael Corsentino is an Orlando, Florida-based editorial fashion and portrait photographer. In addition to his busy shooting schedule, Michael is a passionate educator, teaching workshops domestically and internationally. He is an author of two books, writes a monthly lighting column for *Shutter Magazine* and is a regular contributor to *Photoshop User* magazine and *JointheBreed.com*.

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Dynamic *Moving* **VIDEO**

Do I Need a **3-Axis Gimble?**

with Rob Adams

They're all the rage right now. Walk through any photo/video trade show this year, and you're bound to see an excess of two things: camera-equipped drones and handheld brushless gimbal stabilizers.

Ever since this technology burst onto the scene, circa 2012, we've seen a mass migration from traditional handheld three-axis stabilizers like the wearable vest-and-arm Tiffen Steadicam to brushless stabilizers like those made by MoVI and drone maker DJI. More and more companies are stepping up to manufacture cheaper and cheaper brushless models targeting gearheads who will always buy the latest fad devices.

There are big differences between the two types of stabilizers, but the result (if utilized correctly) is essentially the same: a steady, floating camera shot that can instantly add production value to your motion images.

Cost-wise, you can find yourself breaking your budget for either type of stabilizer, depending on model and features. But I wanted to address the one factor that I see commonly overlooked while watching everyone jump on the brushless bandwagon: the use-case.

As a wedding cinematographer, portability and weight are two variables I'm always considering when adding new gear to my arsenal. In a stabilizer, I need something that can improve the steadiness of my shots but not produce other problems. I watched those awesome demonstration videos and drooled over the possibilities of creating jaw-dropping motion shots with the MoVI, but before dropping thousands on the newest gear, I wanted to take a hard look at each type of stabilizer and see which best fit my project and production logistics. Was it going to be the status quo, or was I about to own a new toy?

Steadicam and Glidecam: The Handheld and Wearable Camera Stabilizers

These two types of camera stabilizers have been the industry standard for the last 25 years. Most major television networks and broadcast outlets still use full-body wearable vest and arm combination Steadicam gimbal rigs to accommodate large television cameras that weigh upwards of 35 pounds. You see them commonly used during concert productions and live sporting events. There are no electronics involved, just good old-fashioned counterweights.

Wedding pros use these stabilizers as either a fully balanced counterweighted body-mounted rig or as a smaller, low-profile handheld sled-style stabilizer, which is perfect for small camera platforms like DSLRs and handheld camcorders.

The results, with proper training and practice, are stellar. The camera seems to float, and there's a wide range of motion on all three axes, allowing for some pretty complex moves. Once an operator has mastered the balancing and muscle memory needed to create dynamic movements, a handheld Glidecam stabilizer, like the HD-4000 or the Glidecam Devin Graham Series, can produce fantastic results.

There are, of course, pros and cons. A full body-mounted rig like the Steadicam Zephyr or the Steadicam Scout can run upwards of \$8,000 to \$13,000 fully featured. They're also not very portable. A large padded case is required to lug the stabilizer along on a shoot, and setup and breakdown can eat up valuable time if you're a run-and-gun shooter like I am. Then, you need to be able to operate the rig smoothly and precisely. This takes training and practice.

The more portable option of this type of stabilizer is the handheld sled models produced by Glidecam Industries. These have been the wedding filmmaker's go-to option ever since a cinema-style approach to weddings was made popular in the mid-2000s. They are lightweight, extremely portable (I've taken mine all over the world in just a small carry-on bag) and simple to set up. A few threaded twists, and it's ready for a camera.

Learning to balance the Glidecam handheld sled takes some time, but once you understand how the counterweighted gimbal is positioned for your camera's weight, including any accessories, it should take only a few minutes to lock in a dynamic balance. There are some great resources on YouTube on how to properly balance and use this stabilizer.

The downside here is that if you are using a slightly larger camera, like a Canon C100 or C300, RED Camera or similarly sized camcorder, you will find your arm getting tired quickly. For the amount of time that I use my Glidecam on a shoot, it is still a great option because I'm not operating it for extended periods of time or for capturing very long shots.

A big benefit of the sled-style stabilizer is the price. For less than \$800, you can have a great stabilizer that produces amazingly smooth and level shots, and that has the ability to do complex movements in a controlled environment. It's just a little limited if you are looking to perform more complicated movements.



Images © Rob Adams

3-Axis Brushless Electronic Gimbals

Brushless is a technical term for a type of motor that employs magnets to create motion; in this case, a counter-resistance force uses mechanical motors and precision electronics in a camera platform that is virtually immune to external motion and bodily interference. The active motors are always working to isolate the camera from external forces within set parameters and keep it level. It is the same technology that's been used for years on helicopter-mounted camera turrets that allow for smooth but expensive sweeping aerial footage.

The technology has been miniaturized to work on a handlebar-style rig that you carry or mount to some other motion-controlled device. It's hard to argue with results when seeing a well-balanced brushless gimbal used by a skilled operator. The possibility for complex motion shots is endless. You can sweep the camera from a worm's-eye-view to an overhead shot with just a few steps—and some strong deltoids. I've seen these things passed back and forth through windows and between motorcycles cruising at 60 miles an hour, and the camera looks like it's on a cable, weaving through and behind objects and actors. It's a very cool method of getting dynamic motion shots. With their explosive growth in popularity and affordability, I've seen these handheld gimbals used on all sorts of productions, from music videos to weddings and fashion shows, even some reality TV shows.

One big thing I've noticed with this hot new trend is that you definitely get what you pay for. Going cheap on a brushless stabilizer is not a wise move. Some of the lower-cost models have not impressed me with the quality of the stabilization versus how heavy they are.



A common misconception I see when filmmakers elect to go the three-axis brushless route is that they see how easy it can be to create smooth and versatile shots, but don't understand that it still takes a tremendous amount of skill and sometimes even two operators to pull off such complex movements. Some models include a separate control mechanism for camera pan and tilt, requiring a second person to focus on the point of interest while the physical operator concentrates on the position of the camera within the scene.

While this can be an awesome benefit on a controlled shoot with a large crew and ample setup time, it's not a great option for the run-and-gun shooter. Oddly, I see a lot of run-and-gun shooters try to adapt this method into their location shoots, only to be hampered by cumbersome setup and handling, with disappointing results. There are, however, proprietary and third-party camera control accessories that allow the camera's tilt and pan movement to be controlled by a free thumb. (Some users have told me that they were never able to get proficient with a Glidecam or Steadicam, and that the brushless was easy to just pick up and use in a very basic straight-line manner. Fair enough.)

Among the distinct benefits of a brushless gimbal are its versatility in creating complex movements, multiuser functionality and the ability to mount it to a crane or jib for even more camera control.

But for me and my shooting requirements, the cons are a few too many. Balancing a three-axis gimbal takes time and patience. Many manufacturers market their brushless models as self-balancing; to a point, that's true, provided you have the initial setup and camera placement correctly staged. On the models I've tested, the camera stays balanced after it's set up, even if it's turned off and on or set down. But if you have only one camera and it needs to be used in other ways during your shoot, you will find yourself balancing and rebalancing each time you remove the camera. The same goes for Glidecams and Steadicams, but I find it's much easier to remove a camera from a counterweighted stage than a brushless cage.

Weight is also a major issue for me. If you're using a small, mirrorless camera like a Sony a7Sii or Panasonic GH-4, a smaller brushless model like the DJI Ronin-M might be a good choice for manageability. But since I'm employing the Canon C100 on most of my jobs, I would need a larger model, such as the MoVi M5 or the DJI Ronin (larger model)—and the combined weight can get hard on the back muscles really quickly.

There's also the issue of setting them down. You can't just place a motorized brushless stabilizer on the ground to rest. It must be placed on a dedicated stand so as to not damage the delicate motors. This is a big issue for me since I'm always running around changing cameras and rigs during my wedding shoots. I would require a separate person just to follow me around with the support stand. I also find it difficult to adjust my camera's settings while it's mounted on a three-axis gimbal. Changing my exposure and focal length with a handheld sled stabilizer is simple due to the fact that I don't have to support the whole rig with one hand while bringing the camera to eye level to see my settings. I've tried using an external monitor mounted to the top of the handlebar to make this easier, but that just added more weight to the whole rig.

For my wedding work, I've found that in order to keep on schedule, get the most from all of my devices and to stay light on my feet, a brushless gimbal just isn't the way to go. I've been using a Glidecam three-axis handheld sled shooter for many years, and I still find that I can get amazing fly-shots that fit my style and client expectations wonderfully.

In fact, our drone uses a brushless gimbal that gives my film a unique perspective from the air, so I found the ground use of a gimbal to be unnecessary. I considered purchasing a brushless gimbal, and I really wanted it to fit into my workflow and be something that would bring my films to new heights. I had to ask myself: Will this purchase make me more money? The answer was no. The types of fly shots I can produce with my \$850 Glidecam are exactly what I'd likely end up producing with a \$4,000 brushless gimbal.

I use Glidecam Industries' recently released Devin Graham Signature Series. It allows for easy, precise balancing via a telescopic center post that also allows me to fly low to get very close to the ground for some dynamic shooting. For the price and what it does, plus my extensive use of this type of stabilizer in the past, it's the right tool for me. I'd certainly consider renting a brushless gimbal for a corporate or commercial film shoot that requires ultra-complex camera movement, but for now, I'm good.

This chart describes my experiences using stabilizers: ■

| Stabilizer | Type | Pros | Cons |
|---|--|--|---|
| Steadicam Zyphyr/ Scout | Counterweighted wearable vest and arm 3-axis | Handles heavy cameras. Can be used for long periods of filming. | Expensive. Large and time-consuming to set up. Overkill for a smaller camera. |
| Glidecam HD-4000 Glidecam Devin Graham Series | Counterweighted handheld 3-axis | Inexpensive. Small and compact. Easily portable. Lightweight and good for small cameras. Camera removes quickly. Easy to rebalance. Low Mode shooting without additional gear. | Takes practice to balance and operate. |
| MoVI (M5, M10) | Brushless 3-axis motorized | Single and dual operator modes. Can be mounted on jib/ crane/UAV. Bluetooth interface for program control. | Expensive. Heavy. Requires practice to operate correctly. Balancing can be challenging. Cannot be set down without stand. Requires external monitor to watch your frame easily. |
| DJI Ronin | Brushless 3-axis motorized | Keeps horizon level. Can handle heavier cameras for less cost than the MoVI. Can be mounted on jib/ crane/UAV. | Extremely heavy. Difficult to balance. Cannot be set down without stand. Requires external monitor to watch your frame easily. |
| DJI Ronin-M | Brushless 3-axis motorized | Lightweight. Good for small cameras. | Not impressed with stability. Cannot be set down without stand. Requires external monitor to watch your frame easily. |



Rob Adams is a New York City-based wedding cinematographer, commercial film producer and educator who has been producing wedding and corporate films for high-end clients for more than 17 years. Rob's visual storytelling style and knack for creating amazingly high production value under pressure is industry-leading. He films and speaks around the world.

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