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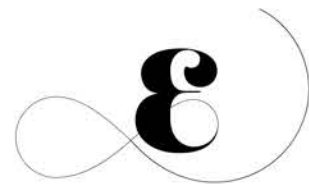
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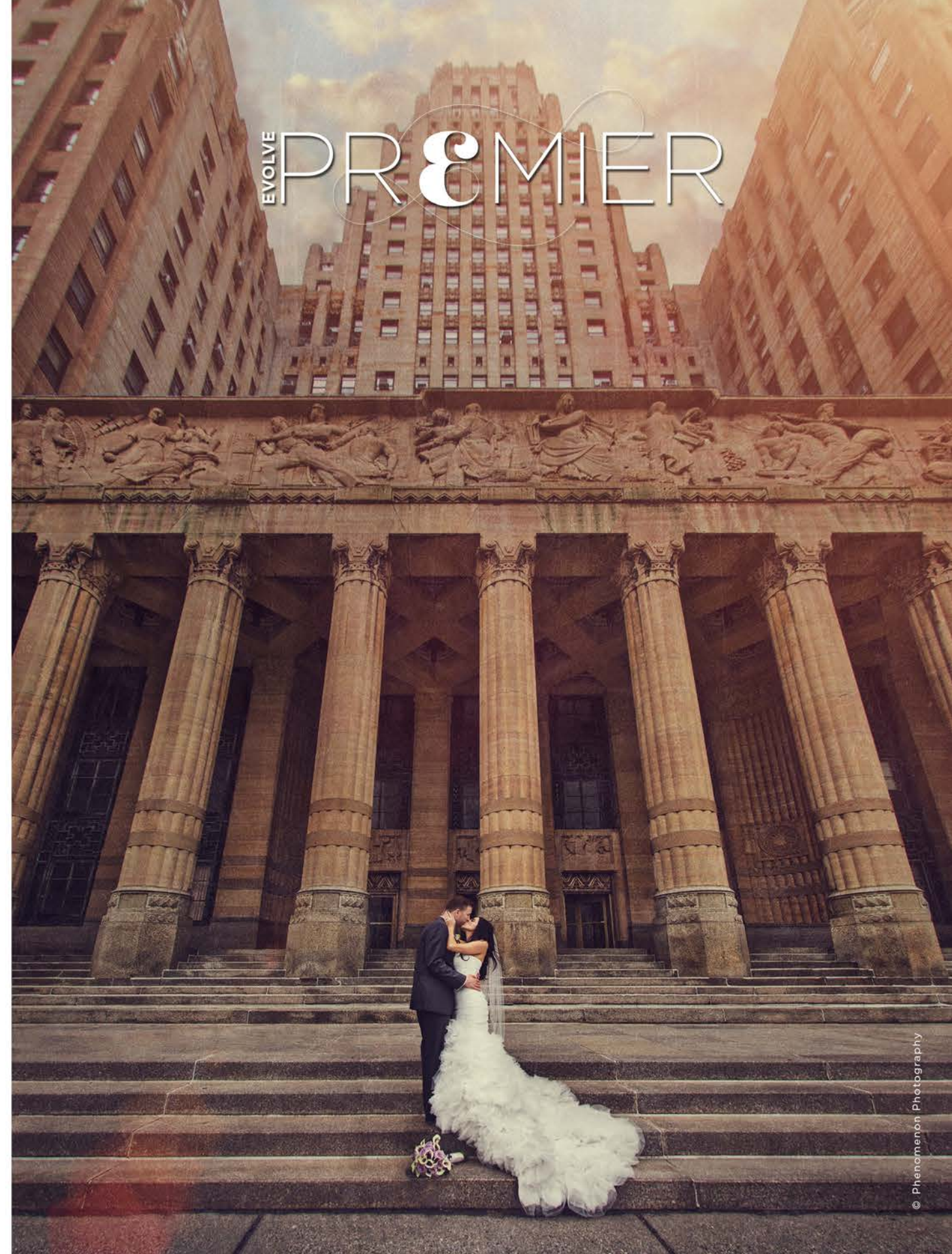
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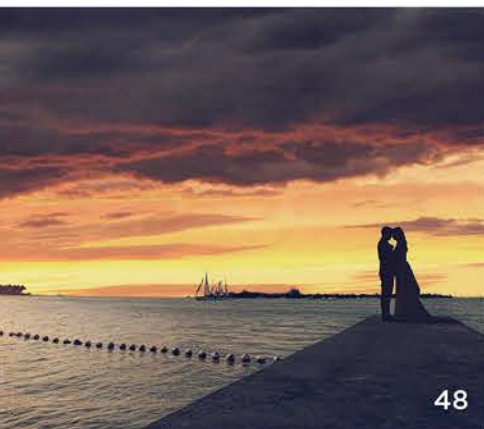
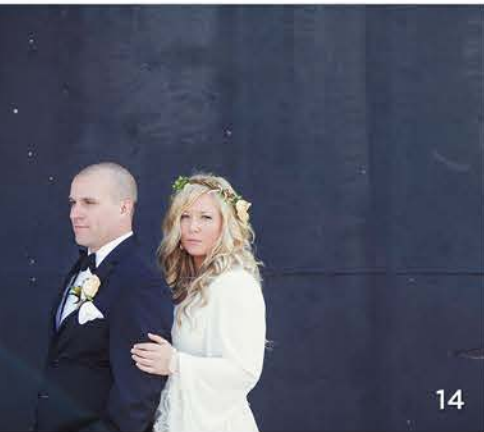
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Shutter Magazine is about photography education. Our goal is to provide current, insightful, and in-depth educational content for today's professional wedding and portrait photographer. Shutter Magazine uses the latest technologies to deliver information 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.

Shutter Magazine: By photographers, for photographers.

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THE COVER

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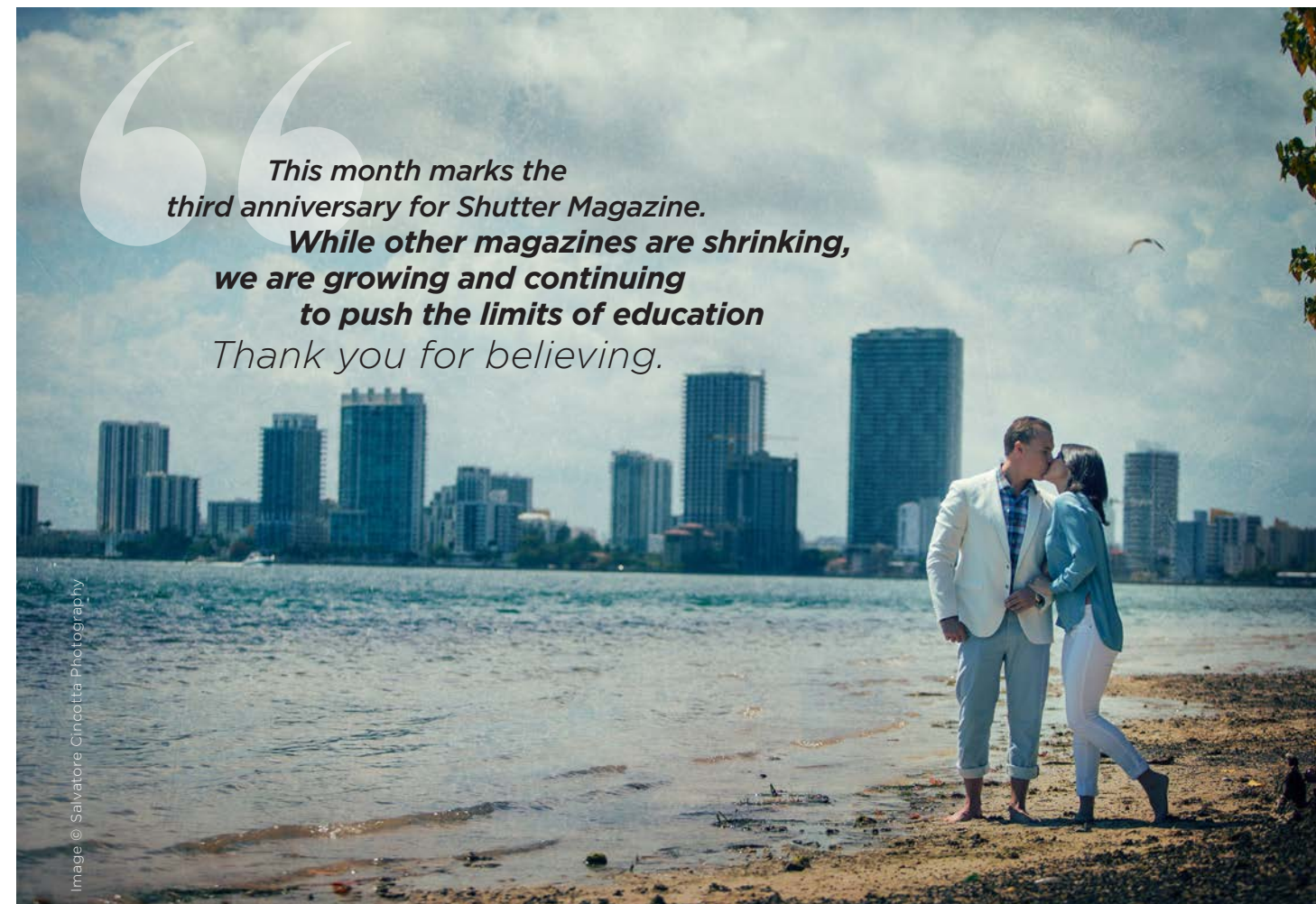


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This month marks the third anniversary for Shutter Magazine. While other magazines are shrinking, we are growing and continuing to push the limits of education. Thank you for believing.



LAUNCH POINT

— A MESSAGE —
FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
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A 'How-To' for _____

Freelance Photography

_____ with Vanessa Joy





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Owning your own business isn't the only way to make money in photography. In fact, it's not even necessarily the best way, depending on your goals. Until just a few years ago, owning your own photography business was more of a long-term goal, as opposed to now, when photography startups are easy to come by and normally one of the first steps photographers take. Traditionally, beginners worked for experienced photographers until they built up their own portfolio and experience enough to move up in the company and take it over, or start one of their own. Both paths have their place, but there's a lot to be said about the slowly dying position of freelance photographer.

Assisting and freelancing in the beginning of my career was one of the best things I did. I made money. I learned valuable lessons that still apply today. I made mistakes, but did them on someone else's dime. I built, and sometimes broke, relationships that taught me more than my photography degree ever did. Those five years molded me into what I am today.

Whether you're starting out or you're a veteran in this industry, freelancing and assisting can be the best things you do as a photographer. There's always something new to learn, someone new to learn from and money to be made on days when you didn't book jobs for yourself. However, working for someone else comes with a set of rules, and some are silent unknowns—until you accidentally break them. Here are my keys to success when working for another photographer.



Images © Vanessa Joy

It's Not Your Show

Naturally, if you're an established photographer, sometimes you get the itch to take the reins when watching another photographer work. This isn't the time for that. You're there for them, so do what they need, not what you think needs to be done. Some photographers—me, for example—actually get annoyed if you make photo suggestions or “ooh” and “aah” too much while they're working with the bride and groom (it makes me lose my focus). Find out how the photographer you're working for likes to communicate, and stick to it. If nothing else, it'll be an exercise in self-control and biting your tongue.

Don't Burn Bridges

There are some no-brainers when it comes to working for others, but you might not even be aware of some of these others. Here are some guidelines to make sure you're developing good industry peer relationships and not burning them to the ground.

Do not hand out your own business cards. Not to guests, not to the bridal party, not to other vendors, not even to your own mother if she happens to be there. In fact, don't even give out your last name, and if they hunt you down on Facebook anyway, ignore the request. A majority of the business that comes into photography studios comes by word of mouth, so the photographer you're working for will most likely be quite peeved if you end up getting the referrals from her gig.

Create clear do's and don'ts for the images you take. Back in the film days, this was a nonissue because studios had all the negatives, so photographers working for them wouldn't have access to the images they took anyway. Now it's a completely differently story. There are many schools of thought, ranging from not allowing any images to be used in your portfolio at all, to being able to use them only after the studio has posted its own.

I've allowed my photographers to use the pictures they take for me on their websites and blogs as long as they mention they shot the wedding for me. With continued emphasis on the importance of SEO, though, it could be detrimental for them to be blogging them at all; it ends up being confusing for vendors and guests as to who the main photographer is, which can cause problems. Make sure you and the photographer you're working for have a clear understanding of what can and cannot be done with the images you take *before* you take them.

Do not call in sick. If you're a wedding photographer, you know that sick days are completely nonexistent. You've photographed sick, practically comatose, and occasionally with a broken bone. Have the same respect for the photographer you're working for. Don't bail on the job with very little notice. If you absolutely are in a coma, then before you gracefully bow out of the job, make sure you've already found an adequate replacement for yourself. There's no stress like trying to find a good replacement photographer last minute, and nothing screams unprofessional like a photographer who doesn't get that, and rudely backs out of a commitment for any reason.

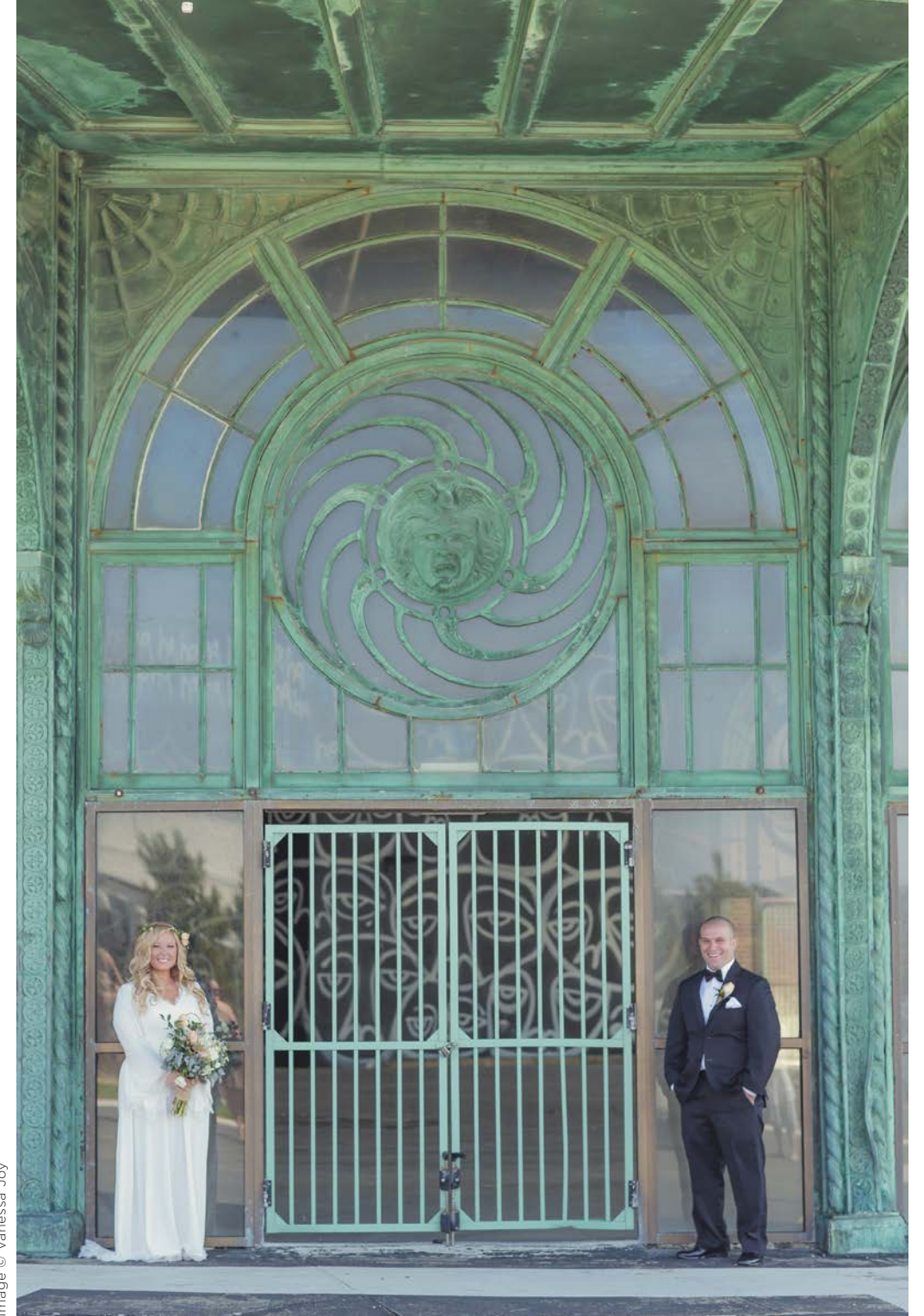


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Don't Give It All Away

Some people might disagree with me on this one, but I believe you shouldn't perform the same on hired gigs as you do on your own. That's not to say you're shooting intentionally poor, but if I charge a bride and groom \$10,000 for a wedding and bring out all the stops with off-camera-lighting and the works, I don't think I should be doing the same thing for a gig that's paying \$500. Why would anyone hire you if they can get the same thing cheaper from someone else? There are things you do that are exclusive to you and your brand, and they shouldn't be given away while working for someone else. You're getting paid hundreds, and your bag of tricks should be saved for when you're getting paid thousands.

Get Paid

When you're working for someone else, you're doing just that, working. And when you work, you should get paid (that's your freebie for today—remember it when you're writing your own package price list later). Getting paid doesn't necessarily always mean being paid monetarily. There are plenty of ways to get paid, especially if you're just starting out. Earning experience, learning new techniques

and portfolio building are all ways of getting paid that shouldn't be overlooked. Make sure you are getting paid in some way.

Represent Them Well

Photographers are one of the most-seen vendors on the day of the wedding. They're there the longest, communicate the most with the bride and groom, and are around more before and after a wedding than any other vendor—maybe a close tie with the event planner. What that means is that even though you're just the second photographer and will probably hug the walls and be in the background, you're the face of that company for the day. People are looking at you and judging the company you're working for based on your actions.

Pay extra-close attention to what your personality, punctuality and professionalism are giving off that day. If any of them are negative, you could be giving such a poor representation that you're losing referrals for the main photographer. Act in a way that says you care about the photographer and her business just as much as you care about your own.

If you want to hear more about the ups and downs of freelancing, both in studio and in the field, check out my video interview with my main 1099 contractor. ■

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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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At ShutterFest this year, all I kept hearing about was MagMod, MagMod, MagMod! Yeah, great, another light modifier, I thought at the time.

Last week, I got to try them on a commercial shoot for Hilton Hotel here in St. Louis. OMG—these things are like crack for your speedlights. I am not kidding you. It's that Captain Obvious moment when it hits you. Now I understand all the hoopla.

I have now officially emptied my bag of all other modifiers, and have converted everything over to MagMod. I am sure I will add new tools to my bag, but for the time being, MagMod has a monopoly over my bag. If you have not seen or tried any of MagMod's products, this is one tool you can add to your bag that you will never regret.

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product review

MAGMOD with *Salvatore Cincotta*



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EMOTIONAL **STORYTELLING**

Turning the Ordinary Into Extraordinary with Michael Anthony

Wedding photography is an art. Wedding photographers have to be talented at many different types of photography, but most importantly, we have to be skilled storytellers. There is something amazing about having the opportunity to document one of the most important days in the lives of our clients. I love creating amazing portraits, but capturing events throughout the day and using the images to create a cohesive story is something I look forward to with every wedding. When I started in wedding photography, my style was heavily focused on fashion-influenced portraiture. When we started creating albums, I began to learn the art of storytelling.

Wedding photojournalism is about connecting with the viewer in as few images as possible—or, for that matter, even a single image. Emotional stories are created through images using three things I refer to as the Trinity of Storytelling: light, composition and the moment.

Images © Michael Anthony



Image © Michael Anthony

While shooting a wedding in Italy recently, I visited a few museums in Florence, where I got to see the work of Michelangelo, Leonardo Di Vinci and many others. One thing I found in common in all of the amazing paintings, including those on the roof of the Sistine Chapel, is the ability to tell a story using the Trinity of Storytelling. Every single work of art I viewed in the museums had the ability to make me feel the emotion I felt the artist was trying to convey.

How does all this tie in to your wedding photography business? It's simple: Photography is subjective. Your editing style, lighting style and shooting style are all a matter of interpretation of the viewer. The one thing that is prevalent in all photographs is emotion. In order to connect with the individual tastes of the greatest possible number of potential clients, while rising above the competition in your local market, you need to make viewers of your portfolio feel emotion through storytelling. This is done by combining the composition and the light with the final element that we will be talking about in the rest of this article: the moment.

So what's a "moment"? According to Webster, it's "a very brief period of time." In photography, I would amend that to "a very brief period of time that should be remembered for the rest of the subject's life." In order to capture these moments, we have to find just the right expression during a photographic sequence that can sometimes be predicted, but can also be unexpected.

Branding Yourself as a Storyteller

I refer to our photographic style as creative documentary. While true photojournalists will not intervene in their imagery, wedding photographers do not often have the ability to simply wait for something to happen. Being a storyteller is not the same as being a photojournalist. Storytellers often have to evoke emotion from their clientele in order to best tell the story of the day.

Adopting a storytelling mindset is the first step in finding clients who appreciate your ability to capture their moments. Your website, gallery and sample albums should all be in sync in order to communicate to your potential client that you are going to be photographing their wedding to tell a story, and not just to take pictures. Much of storytelling involves carefully honed techniques. Here a few ways to make your work stand out.

Go Close While Staying Wide

Be fearless. Much of storytelling in photography is about perspective. You need to be in the right position to tell the story in the way you intend to. Photographers are too often afraid to get close enough to the action because they are nervous they will be disruptive or intrusive. If the clients hired you because of your ability to tell their story, then they will understand that in order to capture the images they see in your portfolio, you need to be in the right position. During your consultation, tell your clients that this is the way you work, and it's what you do that is different from the majority of photographers. They will welcome you to get close on their wedding day to create images using that interesting perspective that a wide angle creates.

I have seven different lenses for wedding day, but the two that stay on my cameras 90 percent of the time are my Canon 35mm F/1.4L and my Canon 85mm F/1.2L. I use a two-camera setup, and the majority of my photojournalism is shot with my 35mm. The 35mm is wide enough to allow me to give my story context. The F/1.4 aperture also allows me to isolate my subjects with its beautiful bokeh, or shoot in extremely low light, a common situation in wedding photography. Normal focal lengths are boring, and too many portfolios are filled with photojournalistic images shot with a 70–200 from across the room. Be different. Don't be afraid to get close (Figure 1).

The magic of the 35mm focal length happens at a two-arms-length distance from your subject. At this distance, you are able to capture context but still isolate your subject. This image of Lisa and her mother, Mimi, photographed with a 35mm lens, earned First Place in WPPI's 2014 Second Half Competition in the wedding photojournalism category (Figure 2). The image was photographed using a 35mm lens and was wide enough to incorporate Lisa, her mother, Mimi, and the reflection of Mimi, but not so wide as to decrease the significance of the subjects or capture unwanted elements. The 35mm F/1.4 is a focal length used by many wedding photojournalists because of its versatility and low-light capabilities.



Image © Michael Anthony

Figure 2

Back-Button Focus (BBF)

When I was told to use back-button focus for the first time to help capture PJ moments, my instructor could not give me a good reason why. I was just told that it was something all good photojournalists do. Having to push an additional button to get my focus was distracting and seemed counterintuitive. I still hadn't realized its potential. Back-button focus has a very specific purpose in PJ work.

All cameras have the ability to use back-button focus. On the back of your camera, there is an AF-on button. By pressing that button, you activate the electronic autofocus on your camera in the same manner that you would by pressing the shutter halfway down. Simply using this button instead of your shutter button won't show you the benefits. You have to disable the focusing function when you press your shutter button halfway. On the latest Canon cameras, navigate to your custom controls and select the first option (looks like a shutter button). Then, scroll to the option that says Metering Start and select it (Figures 3 & 4).

You have now disabled your shutter button autofocus. The benefit of BBF is that you separate your focusing mechanism from your shooting mechanism, allowing you to compose your shot and then wait for the moment to happen.

If you create the perfect composition without disabling the shutter button focusing mechanism, when you press the shutter button, your camera will refocus on whatever your focus point is hovering over in your viewfinder, causing an out-of-focus image. If you are shooting moving subjects, such as people dancing, a first look or grand entrance, your composition will likely change as you are shooting. BBF helps you avoid moving your focus point around to accommodate your changing scene, like I did in this photo of Nate crowd surfing at his wedding reception. This is crucial to storytelling (Figure 5).



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

Images © Michael Anthony



Figure 6



Images © Michael Anthony

Evoking Emotion

As photojournalists, our job is to capture emotion. As storytellers, our job is to evoke emotion to complement the story. When posing family members or the bridal party together, you need to develop techniques to get them to show emotion for one another. Sometimes, evoking that emotion is easy. For this image of Melanie and her bridal party, we posed them together with Mel's long veil, and all we did to get this reaction is ask them to look at each other and laugh. Sounds simple, right? It really is that simple. What happens is the group will look at each other and laugh, but when they hear themselves forcing a laugh, real laughter takes over, and you get images like this. Be ready to shoot multiple frames of the sequence to get the best one. I use this technique all the time, and it consistently provides excellent results (Figure 6).

As storytellers, our goal has to be this: When a client views her wedding album, she needs to feel exactly how she was feeling when the image was taken. We use raw emotion to accomplish this. So how do we capture intimate emotion? Sometimes it helps to remind your subjects about the significance of the moment. Try saying this to a mother or father of a bride when they see their daughter in her dress for the first time: "Look at your daughter—do you remember when she was a little girl? Did you ever imagine she would look this beautiful on her wedding day?" Then encourage physical interaction such as a hug—and be ready to capture the emotion.



Figure 7



Figure 8

Images © Michael Anthony

Look Beyond the Obvious

Very often, the emotion in an image can be captured in the faces of onlookers at an event. Look at the background to make sure you do not miss any important moments.

Patience and Shooting Through Moments

As a storyteller, you need to be patient and wait for a moment. Over time, you learn to anticipate moments throughout a wedding day. Once you see that your light is right, you must set your composition in-camera and then wait. You may feel in the beginning that your efforts are not paying off, but over time, you will realize that by being patient, you are giving yourself the best opportunity to capture your moment. This sequence of Nate watching his bride, Monica, walking down the aisle is an example of anticipation and patience (Figure 7 & 8). I was able to capture her expression by being patient and waiting for the right moment.

Once I had the moment, I turned and focused on Nate and waited for the right moment. When the moment happens, be ready to shoot through it and take multiple frames. If you try to capture a moment by timing it perfectly, chances are you will miss it. Sports photographers use cameras with a high frame-per-second rate in order to capture the best image during an action sequence; wedding photographers can do the same without using cameras that shoot at 14 FPS.

Creating and Selling Storybooks

Telling a story requires a medium. In my opinion, it is impossible to tell an emotional story through a DVD or flash drive of 700-plus images. You need to have a physical, tangible album that includes only the images that tell the best story. The album creation process does not start when you open your design software or send your images to your designer. It starts when you are shooting the wedding. You should be designing your story's spreads in your mind as you shoot. If you're shooting bridal details, shoot all of your details on the same background vertically for the left page, and maybe one beautiful photo of the bride wearing these details on the right page. Take what appears to be emotionally insignificant images separately, and then combine them with a single impact image to tell a powerful story.

Your album is also the key to your success as a business. Album sales are so important to your revenue, and allow you to be different from your competitors. Choose albums that blow your client away. The difference between your competitor's albums and yours should be obvious to any nonphotographer. Look at cover choices, paper types and overall build quality. Our studio uses Signature Collection Albums in our Renaissance lines, which are our most expensive products. We have used many different albums over the years, and SC albums are by far the highest-quality book we've used. Our first consultation showing this album resulted in a contract worth over \$12,000 for us, which instantly made me a believer. Order a sample, and you will see exactly what I am talking about.

Remember, after seeing your books, your client will visit other photographers. Clients know the difference between bad photography and good photography, but they do not often know the difference between *good* photography and *great* photography. Your photos alone are not enough to distinguish your brand as a leader in your market. Your books, studio and personality must be better than what your competitors offer.

If you are having problems selling albums, make sure you are marketing the books as the main product in your collections. Digital negatives should be an afterthought in a storytelling studio, and you need to make your clients understand that the book is the final product you are working together to create. This starts from the client's first interaction with your website. You should have actual album designs on your website, right next to your galleries, and then physical samples in your studio. Once you adopt a storytelling mindset, your clients will too. You will see changes in the kind of people who seek your services, and you will be fulfilled as an artist—and, more importantly, as a business owner. ■



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.

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Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

This month in How I Got the Shot, I talk about the nightmares of a photo shoot gone bad. Sure, the purpose of this column is to talk about how we got this perfectly amazing cover shot. The reality is, things don't always go as planned. Shit happens. How do we react to it? What do we do when things go horribly wrong? Most importantly, what are the lessons learned? Failure, to me, is the unfortunate side effect of creation. If you are a creator of any sort, failure is part of the process. You don't have to accept or even enjoy it, but you should learn to see it for what it is—and grow from it.

|| The July Cover Shoot

Every month, we aim to put together a gorgeous cover shoot for the magazine. July is our three-year anniversary and also the anniversary of the founding of this country, so we wanted to do something patriotic. Part of the initial conversations included the American flag and a model with long, dirty blonde hair, denim jeans and boots in an open field. Sounds amazing, right? If only it had worked out.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



|| Challenge #1 Flaky Models

It is so frustrating to work with “models” who don't take their reputation or craft seriously. (I'm sure it's equally as frustrating for models who are responsible to read something like this.) We have had more issues with flaky models over the years than any other part of a shoot. And these are models who are being paid well and given great industry exposure.

We went through several models who fit the look and style we were going for, and were met with either no response or a cancellation two days before the shoot. Something came up, apparently.

Taylor Cincotta to the rescue. Working with your spouse is never easy, especially one who is a photographer—but she's also a model, and there's nothing worse than a model who now wants to art direct. Perfect, so now we had a model—let's rock and roll. Twenty-four hours until deadline.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

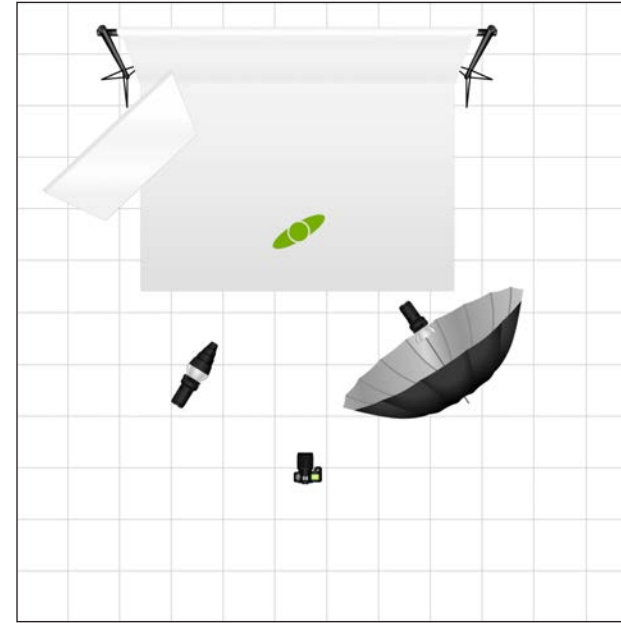
Challenge #2

Location

When it comes to the cover or any other involved shoot, we are very diligent about getting permits or permission before shooting anywhere. There is no “running and gunning” on these types of shoots. They just move too slowly. My right hand, Alissa Zimmerman, happens to have a friend who lives about 10 minutes outside Shutter’s home base of O’Fallon, Illinois, whose family has farmland. Perfect spot for this all-American shoot. Alissa calls the friend’s father and explains the shoot to him and asks for permission to shoot there. “Sure, no problem,” he says. It’s on!

We show up around 6 p.m. and start setting up lighting, test shots, etc. We’re waiting for the light to be perfect when, all of a sudden, a beat-up pickup truck pulls up and the woman behind the wheel starts screaming at us to get off her land: “I ain’t puttin’ up with this here nonsense anymore.” Of course, we are all shocked since we have permission already from the father. Alissa calmly walks up to the lady and tries to explain that we called and got permission, to which the irate lady starts screaming, “I don’t care who you spoke to—I want you off my land now.” Alissa, again looking for clarity, explains that we already did this and are not trying to trespass.

That’s when it all became clear. Apparently, there was a huge family falling out. The father had given us permission to shoot on property that was in dispute, and the family was no longer talking to him.



Perfect. We didn’t get the shot, we just got chased off the land and we lost about three hours. It was 8:30 p.m. when we got back to the studio. The sun was gone and we had no Plan B.

#Pivot

If you have been following me at all, you know my motto: As business owners, we have to be able to #pivot. Plan B was born as the team sat and collaborated on ideas. Krystal, part of my team, came up with an idea for an in-studio shoot. It wasn’t our original idea, but it was a great Plan B.

We wanted something sexy—something red, white and blue. ’Merica.

The image you see was the final edit of the shot.

Lighting

We lit this shot very differently than we normally do. I wanted something moody. We used two Profoto B1’s. The main light had a Para 88 from Broncolor on it. Just gorgeous light. And the fill had a snoot with a 5-degree grid on it. She just needed a little pop of light on the shadows on her face from the main light.

Gear

- Camera // Hasselblad H5D-50c
- Lens // Hasselblad 100mm
- Settings // 1/250th @ f4.8, ISO 100
- Lights // 2- Profoto B1’s
- Modifiers // Profoto Snoot with 5-degree grid and a Broncolor Para 88

Final editing was done in Photoshop CC and Alien Skin 7.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Closing

This was one of the toughest shoots of my career. Not from a lighting or posing perspective, but from a morale perspective. It is tough to be creative when so many things keep going wrong. "Keep your head up" sounds amazing in theory, but in practice it can be extremely challenging. You just want to walk off and scream, you are so frustrated, but you have to not only remain cool, but continue to be creative.

I love the final shot. Is it my original vision? No, not even close. But under the circumstances, we still created a gorgeous image of Taylor.

Team Cincotta is a brutal bunch. This image didn't pass the team's sniff test. Everyone rejected it for the cover. No one felt it was strong enough. It's so important to have people around that you can trust. You may not always like what you hear, but at least you know they are being honest and looking out for you and your brand.

The image we decided to go with for the cover is one we took of Sophia on a trip last year to London. Obviously contrary to what we were aiming at for our big Fourth of July cover. We just gotta learn to laugh sometimes. Tomorrow will always be better. ■

Want to see how we edited the shot?

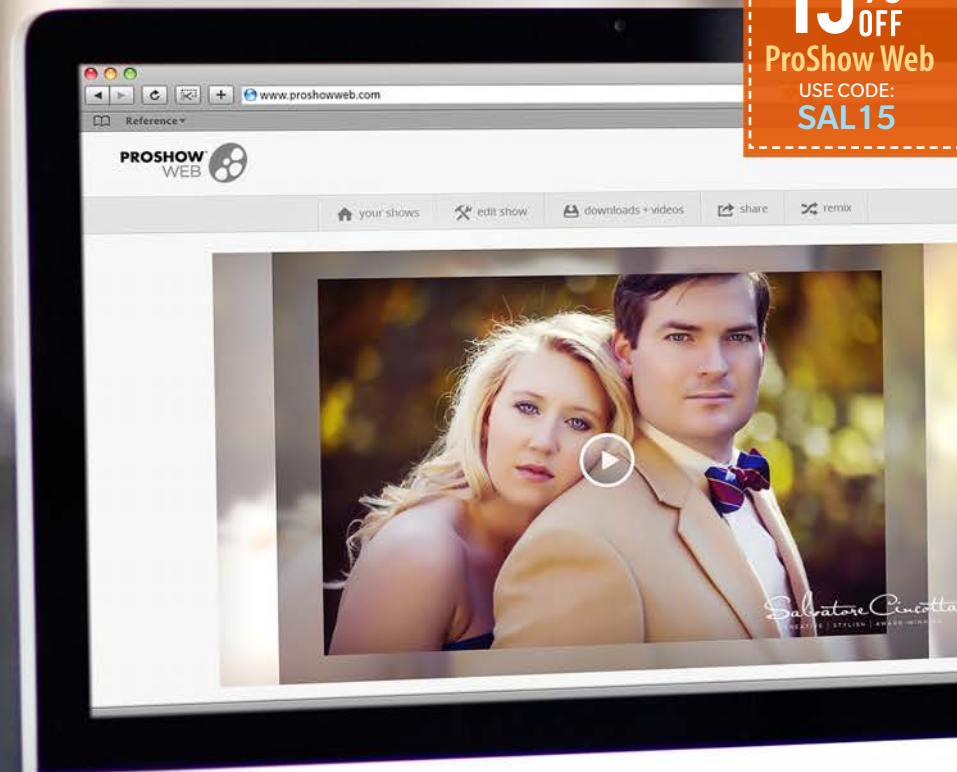
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Sal Cincotta is an international award-winning photographer, educator, author and the Publisher of *Shutter Magazine*. Sal's success is directly tied to the education he received in business school. He graduated from Binghamton University, a Top 20 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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CUSTOMER
SERVICE



Customer Service

Customer service is one of the most important aspects of your business. So often, like a doctor with no bedside manner, photographers forget the importance of dealing with the challenges of keeping clients happy.

Because of social media, one angry client can influence thousands of potential customers. The reach of today's consumers is as big as that enjoyed by magazines and newspapers 10 to 20 years ago. Think about the possible impact of ignoring an unhappy client, who, right or wrong, decides to go public and position you as the bad guy. His reach can easily affect your business.

So, let's come up with some things you can do to build a strong customer service program. We want your images to be the best, but the experience of each client is just as important. As the leader of your business, you need to hone your ability to empathize, resolve problems and communicate with every customer.

Anticipate Challenges

Think about everything you sell, from your products to your services. Whenever you work directly with the public, there's always the chance that something is going to go wrong and not meet client expectations. Think through the nature of your business.

Think about the things that can go wrong in any client relationship. All we're doing here is making a list of potential challenges and how you'd resolve them.

Be Accessible

It starts with making it easy for customers to find you. Your phone number and email address need to be easily found on your website. Many of you don't have a formal studio, so it's understandable if you don't want to list your home address, but give people other ways to contact you.

Develop a Stash of Solutions

As a "one-man operation," think through the potential solutions. With staff involved, talk about the list together and how you might solve any given situation. There are no such things as problems, only challenges that can be resolved.

Have a Chain of Command

Establish some definite chains of command, giving every person involved in your business the authority to resolve certain types of challenges. There's nothing worse than an upset client who can't get an answer and keeps being passed along to another person.

The Two-Person Rule

I'm a huge fan of WalkTheTalk.com and some of its books on customer service, leadership, communication, etc. I ran across the Two-Person Rule from the site's 1999 publication, *180 Ways to Walk the Customer Service Talk*:

"Adopt the Two-Person Rule. Never make a customer talk to more than two people to resolve a problem. If you're the second person to deal with the customer, you "own" them. Either solve the problem immediately or get a phone number and a convenient time to call back."

Develop a Positive Attitude with Every Client

It's a lot more fun playing offense than defense, and so many problems can be completely avoided just by building trust with your clients.

Play Offense

There are some easy ingredients to playing offense in customer service, starting with your attitude. Every customer needs to feel like they're your first and most important client. You're building trust with every meeting, conversation and email.

Keep Smiling

When on the phone with any client, smile as you talk. Believe it or not, a smile changes the tone of your voice and people on the other end of the line will hear it.

Exceed Expectations

In every aspect of your business, you've got one bottom-line goal: exceed expectations.

Your Reaction Time

When you do get an upset customer, your reaction time is critical. There are few things that impress an unhappy client more than a fast response, even if you don't have an answer. Whether you get an angry email or phone call, your key is being accessible immediately.

Empathize, Empathize, Empathize

You don't have to agree, just empathize with what a client is telling you. An upset client needs to know you're listening. One easy response to an upset customer is to say simply, "I can't blame you for being upset (or 'I'm sorry you're upset'), but the buck stops here. Let's see how I can help."

Solve Problems Quickly

The faster you find a solution, the smoother the challenge and the less likely for any peripheral damage to your reputation.

Be a Resource

Always give customers more information than what they're asking for. Disney is the best at this. I know I've written before about it. If you ask any Disney staff member, "When is the electric light parade?" they'll not only answer you, but they'll give you a great suggestion on where to watch it. Be engaging!

Listen, Listen, Listen

All the answers are out there—as long as you listen. Learn to listen to your clients. Know the demographics of your audience. Pay attention to what's going on in your market as well as with your competitors.

Find Solutions of Value

So often, as a consumer myself, I've been given a solution from a company that failed to match my complaint. Here's a prime example.

After an airline delay due to servicing the aircraft—and obviously not the fault of the weather—we were significantly delayed. To get home, we had to fly to a different airport and then find ground transportation to get home. American Airlines refused to cover the additional expense, offering a \$50 voucher for approximately \$300 in expenses.

You can't offer a customer who is upset with her album a free 8x10. You can't give away the store, either. So it's important to empathize and then look at all the possibilities you have to resolve things to their satisfaction.

Be Active in Social Media

Just having a website isn't enough today. You need to maintain a consistent presence with a blog, Twitter, Pinterest, Facebook and Google+. Because that's where your customers are looking. Social media is also a terrific foundation for building trust and your reputation.

There's so much more I could write about this one topic, but let's wrap it up with one more great series of tips. Author Steve Ventura, in the WalktheTalk.com book, hit on five assumptions every business owner should avoid like the plague when it comes to serving customers.

Stay Clear of...

- Assuming you know what customers want—or what's best for them.
- Assuming customers know what they need.
- Assuming customers understand everything you have explained.
- Assuming customers are OK with whatever you do in the course of servicing them.
- Assuming customers are happy and satisfied.

I love his closing comment on the last one:

"You'll never really know unless they tell you...or unless you check. So, if they don't say anything, ask! ('My goal is to make sure you're happy and satisfied with the service you received. How did I do?')"

All of you are working to create the finest images of your career, but that's not enough. Customer service is all about putting together your attitude and your aptitude. We're a word-of-mouth business, and the best way to build a strong brand is to build a reputation as a listener and then solve each challenge as it comes up—quickly and fairly.

One last thought: Not every client will always be satisfied. There will always be that one you just couldn't help, no matter what you tried. Just don't let it eat away at you. Instead, focus on how many great relationships you continue to build. ■



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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William Innes. Changing Photography with 4K Video.

With the new Lumix GH4, William Innes is discovering how easily 4K cinematic in-camera memory video recording with Fast Tracking Full Area AF, plus simultaneous 8.8-megapixel HD photo frame capture adds value to his portfolio. You can too. At under \$1700* it's the ideal solution for quickly integrating hybrid photography into any photographer's sales kit. The LUMIX GH4 delivers in-camera creativity across video and stills through an innovative touch-LCD. And with 22 lens options and growing, your creative possibilities are endless. See William Innes's GH4 wedding stills and 4K video at www.LumixLounge.com. *Body only

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image © Leonardo Volturo

THE 5 SENSES

How They Impact Sales
with **Leonardo Volturo**

Are you struggling with in-person sales? Is your client experience lacking? In this month's article, I walk you through the experience we've created for our studio by focusing on the five senses, and go over the key elements needed when creating a sales room that's built for profit.



Images © Leonardo Volturo



Images © Leonardo Volturo

1. SIGHT

Coffee Table

When our couples come in, the very first thing they see after sitting down is what is in front of them on our coffee table. Here we feature our top-of-the-line albums along with our handmade wood album boxes. The idea behind this is to allow them to visualize how they could display their wedding album in their home.

Here, our goal is to show exactly what it could look like for them in their home. It's something they've never seen before that creates that "gotta have it" mentality.

Large Images on the Walls

It's hard for people to visualize how a certain size picture will look in their home. They may think they don't have enough space or that a smaller size is much larger than it is until they actually see it in person. Conversely, they may think a certain size will be too large for their space, which is why we've set up clusters of common large sizes, such as a 20x30 acrylic over a 15x30 acrylic with a 24x36 metal on either side, showing what can be showcased over a standard size couch. Since we set up this display, it's become the most popular way our couples choose to

showcase their artwork. This offers a great balance to showcase both their engagement and wedding imagery. This setup also opens the door to planning for their wedding sale during their engagement sale.

Lighting

We lit our sales area with the Hue Wi-Fi LED system from Philips. This allows you to control brightness, mix colors and create a custom lighting setup that can all be controlled from the Hue app on your mobile device. Being able to create your own colors and control color temperature helps when showcasing your products and dialing in the perfect lighting for your space.

When clients sit down to view their slideshow from their engagement session or wedding, we remotely turn off the lights to create a more immersive experience. This very simple touch easily impresses our clients. They perceive us as high-tech and ultramodern, which helps convey the message of our overall brand. We learned very early that it's all about the experience, so we feel it's our job to always have something unique and interesting to separate ourselves from the pack.



Image © Leonardo Volturo

2. SMELL

What does your sales room smell like? Have you even thought about it? This is one very important element that is often overlooked. Maybe you had something funky for lunch or you work from home and just finished cooking a fish dinner for your family. Having clients come into your space and immediately be hit with a terrible smell is a sure way to sales that stink.

So avoid eating or cooking close to any meeting—unless it’s fresh-baked cookies, of course! Our studio uses a Scentsy wax scent warmer with Vanilla Cookie Crunch made by Better Homes and Gardens, available at Walmart. After greeting our clients, one of the first things they comment on is the aroma. Our clients enjoy it so much that we’ve started giving them as gifts as part of our client experience.

3. SOUND

Music plays a major role in setting the mood. Having a family in to view their wedding images? Heavy metal may not be the way to go. Know your audience, and program your music accordingly. One playlist most likely won’t work for all genres of photography. For our wedding couples, we’ve curated Spotify playlists with artists like Jack Johnson, John Mayer, Train and Goo Goo Dolls to set the mood for a relaxing and emotionally connected meeting. We play the commercial-free music wirelessly via Bluetooth speakers.



Images © Leonardo Volturo



4. TOUCH

Some photographers may think it’s not worth the investment to have samples of everything you offer for your business. But there really is no substitute for putting a product in the hands of your clients. Let them feel the weight, texture and quality, and immediately everything becomes real and more valuable. The sense of touch comes across most significantly when we show couples our wedding albums. They’re able to feel the weight, the textures of the Italian leathers, the velvet liners and the quality of the pages. Immediately they see the worth and know our books are built to last.

Something else we did recently was relocate our acrylic blocks. Originally we had them next to our TV, which was about 8 feet away from where our clients sit. Our block sales weren’t very good, so we decided to move them to the coffee table right in front of them. Now, every person who sits down picks up the blocks and comments on how great they are, and we sell one in nearly every sales session.



Image © Leonardo Volturo

5. TASTE

Are you offering your clients anything beyond water? Are you offering them anything at all? Think of a high-end boutique or salon that serves customers wine and champagne. We are trying to create a similar experience, and want to be perceived as a luxury brand. So when our clients come in for an initial meeting or engagement preview, we offer them beer, wine, soda and water. For our wedding previews, we have champagne poured and ready to go before our clients arrive.

Beyond the literal taste you're leaving in their mouths, this is really about the figurative taste you are leaving with the experience you've created for your brand. Remember that you need to show it to sell it. Stimulate the senses. What taste are you leaving, and are your clients coming back for more? ■



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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Image © Lori Nordstrom

Top 10 Ways to Plan for a *Successful Business*

We've all heard it said that "if you fail to plan, you plan to fail," and I believe it—not only in business, but in our personal lives as well. I want to share with you the top 10 planning techniques I use to ensure success. I learned to plan the hard way. It was at a time when I felt I'd hit rock bottom in both my personal life and in my business. I made a decision to get up, dust off and start over. I sometimes say that I didn't have a choice, I had to make it work. But the reality is, we all have a choice. Instead of letting things happen as they may, build a plan for success.

with **Lori Nordstrom**

1. Plan to Plan

Make a decision to plan. I set aside time to plan for several days at the end of each year to review the year and put projections on paper for the coming year. I also go over my business plan at this time and make any changes needed. Each month, I designate time to plan for the coming month, and break it into weekly and even daily priorities.

Put blocks of time on your calendar for planning. I spend the first 15 minutes of each workday prioritizing and planning my day, and ask the same of my employees. This has made a big difference in productivity. Having a daily road map helps us stay on track and get things done. Clear-cut goals for the week, month and year allow us to put action steps in place to make sure we reach those goals. Having time carved out for this is essential to making it happen.

2. Plan for Work-Life Balance

As small-business owners, we often get so caught up in running our business that it takes over everything else. Learn to plan for your personal goals and dreams first, and then build your business to support those dreams. When planning your schedule, plan for personal and family time first, and then plan your business time around those things to keep them your number-one priority.

3. Plan Your Income

Planning your income may sound foreign to you—the idea that we actually get to decide how much money we will bring in, and how much we will put into our pockets. But as business owners, we do get to decide. The thought of what you make shouldn't feel like a roller coaster ride with its ups and downs and loop-de-loops, never knowing what's coming next. I realized years ago that if I was going to be responsible for taking care of my family, I really needed to know what to expect. The only way to know what to expect is to plan for it.

First, decide how much you need to profit each month. Second, decide how many sessions you can do each month. Third, decide how much you need to average for each of those sessions to meet your profit goal.

4. Plan Your Workflow

Most photographers get bogged down with their workflow at some point, which leads to burnout. A workflow that isn't planned out will keep you up all night working on images, or scheduling sessions at times when you should be with family. How can you streamline your process? What should you be outsourcing? We wear a lot of hats in our businesses, and I've found that if I don't plan out each job, I get behind and end up pulling those dreaded all-nighters. I don't know about you, but I like my sleep. So, don't just plan your sessions on your calendar—plan for all of the other jobs you do as well.

Make a list of all of the different jobs performed in your business—things like bookkeeping, marketing and playing receptionist, all the details in the client process and more. Make a list, and start prioritizing parts of your day for specific tasks. Put each part of your workflow on your calendar. By getting it all on paper, you can see the things that are consuming too much time and the things you should be outsourcing.



Images © Lori Nordstrom

5. Plan Your Pricing

When we determine how many sessions we can do each month, and go through our workflow process, thinking about how much time we invest in each client, it's much easier to start thinking about pricing appropriately. So many times photographers look at what the competition is charging and try to price similarly instead of looking at their own costs, overhead and time value. The planning of pricing is an important step to profitability. The PPA Benchmark says that we should shoot for a 25 percent COS (cost of sale) for the rock bottom that we are willing to charge. That means we need to take all the costs associated with each product we're creating and then multiply them by four. The step most photographers leave out is to consider their time in this cost-based analysis. Remember, cost-based pricing is the lowest that you can charge for profitability. You'll raise your prices from there based on experience and demand.

Once you've determined your base prices, you need to decide if you are going to offer your products à la carte, in packages or in a build-your-own package. Each one of these methods has benefits, and there is no right or wrong. You need to decide which is best for your clientele and the products you're offering. Next, you need to plan how and when you're going to present your pricing to clients.

6. Plan Your Sales

A problem I see over and over is that a photographer makes the right decision to meet with clients and show them their images in person, but they aren't closing the sale. Even though their clients love the images and get superexcited about them, they leave frustrated and upset, unable to make a final decision. I hear it almost daily.

The key to changing this is to realize the sales process doesn't start in the sales room. It begins with your marketing and your website and everything that your potential client sees before calling your business to begin with. Once that phone rings, it's our job to get to know our client and then start leading and suggesting. Ask questions. Find out as much about your clients as possible. Start making suggestions based on their lifestyle and the things that are most important to them.

A "first phone call" question that has changed my business is this: "Have you thought about where you will hang your portraits?" The answer is always a big fat "No." They don't have any idea what they will buy or where they will display it until we make the suggestion to them. This is the number-one missing ingredient for photographers who are frustrated with their sales. If you wait until the sale to ask, "What would you like?" it's often just too much for the client to deal with. Start the process on the first phone call. Plan a consultation call or meeting with each client to start working through the products that you suggest before the session. (Download my "first phone call" script at PhotoTalk.biz/script.)



Images © Lori Nordstrom



Images © Lori Nordstrom

7. Plan Your Marketing and Networking

We all get to a place in our business where we need to gather more clients or get in front of a whole new audience. This might come at a time when you're starting to feel comfortable with the workflow and the process and are ready to take on more work, or it might come when you've got to raise prices and you really just need a whole new market to speak to.

Usually when we start in the photography business, and even for the first couple of years, our marketing consists of dragging people in to be photographed. From there, it spreads to word of mouth—and usually because we are pretty cheap. That's where marketing and networking come in. You have to have a plan for it.

Networking is really important to a marketing plan these days, and when you're building your business, you should have time set aside every week to get in front of your target client. That might mean attending events or functions where they are, belonging to the same gym or church, or partnering with other businesses or well-connected people who work with the same people you want to work with.

8. Plan for Client Communication

That leads us to another thing I've found I have to plan for. How will you go through the first phone call? What should you be covering and what questions should you be asking? We also need to know how we're going to answer questions, how we'll tell them about our process, how it benefits them and how we'll be showing them their images and helping them through their order. Next is a consultation call or meeting. Plan what you will be communicating during this appointment so that your sale runs smoothly. Plan for when you will send handwritten notes and other correspondence, how you will follow up with clients, how you will thank them and how you will stay in touch.

9. Plan to Give

If you haven't experienced the spirit of giving through your business, you're really missing out. I don't necessarily mean giving away your work, although there might be times when that's appropriate, like for a terminally ill child or mother, or for a family that's lost everything in a fire. You also might consider giving away your work when you travel, especially to families in need. Giving generously is so important.

Making a plan to give allows you to be a businessperson in that planning. You can set up events and donate all of the session fees, but you still get to be a businessperson and make money by profiting from the sale of all packages or portraits sold. You can have a presence at high-end auctions and other charitable events. If you have a storefront, you can be a drop-off location for a toy drive, pet-food drive or shoe drive (check out Shoes4Love.org).

One of the things to think about as you are planning charitable marketing and events is that you need to make a lot so you can give a lot. The law of reciprocity basically says, "What goes around comes around." Give and you will get—it just works out that way. Anne Frank said, "No one has ever become poor by giving." So true.



Images © Lori Nordstrom



Images © Lori Nordstrom

10. Plan to Increase

In all of our planning, we should always set goals to stretch, grow and become more abundant in all areas of our lives. Your goals aren't meant to be a stop sign in the road. When you cross an item off your list, replace it with another. When you reach a goal, set one that's a little bit higher. I mentioned that every year I go back through my business plan and adjust. I look at areas I can improve. This doesn't always mean increasing my income, although that was a goal for many years. Now, the goal is to increase my time for family, friends and travel. I also find great fulfillment in helping other photographers increase their success. Life continues to change and evolve for all of us, so make a plan for it.

There are many checkpoints in your business where you should look back and ask yourself some questions. What went well? What can I do better? These are two of my favorites. Ask these questions after phone calls, sessions and sales. Plan for growth in every area of your business.

When you hit certain checkpoints, ask, "What comes next?" Do you have a plan for going even farther? I hope so. This will keep you motivated and reaching for the next level. ■

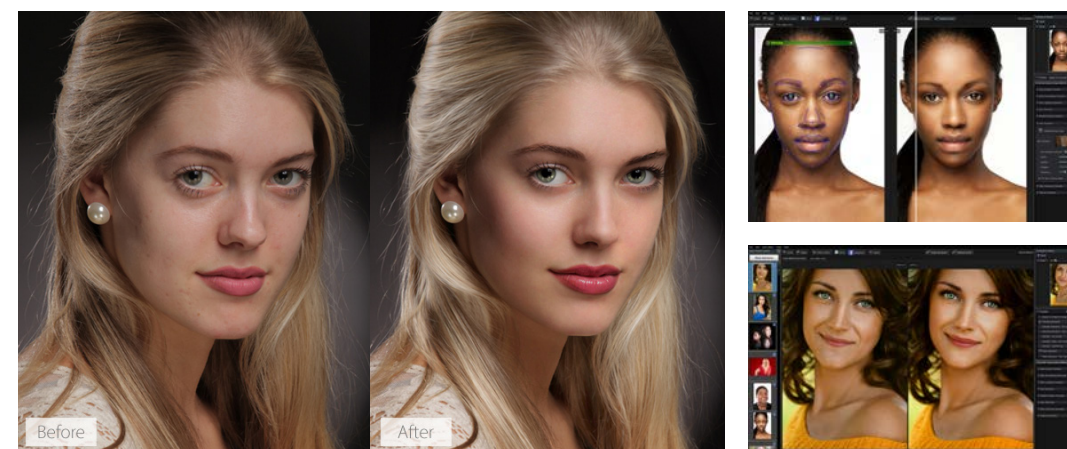


Lori Nordstrom (M.Photog.Cr., CPP, ABI) owns a boutique studio (NordstromPhoto.com) specializing in children and family portraits located in the tiny, picturesque town of Winterset, Iowa. Lori began her career photographing her own kids in her backyard almost 20 years ago, and is now known not only for 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.

nordstromphoto.com



PortraitPro



Why PortraitPro?

Post-production is the bane of most photographers' existence. We love making great images, but sitting for hours at a time working in Photoshop is just not what we were cut out to do in life. PortraitPro has one goal: to make your life easier. The tool makes beauty edits simple and painless. With presets for males, females, children and more, PortraitPro has complete control over almost all facial features. Within a few clicks, you are well on your way to shaping a face, cleaning up skin, enhancing the eyes, whitening teeth and more. Literally, just a few clicks, and you are ready to go.

Prior to the review, I had never worked with the tool before, so I opened it with fresh eyes. No idea how to use the tool, no instructions or help, and I was editing in under 60 seconds after installing it. It's addicting. I spent the next 20 minutes editing a single image—not because of the learning curve, but because I just wanted to play with all the options and controls.

But as with any editing tool, less is more. You have complete control over your image, but if you overdue it, it will look fake. The key to beauty editing is that it has to be unnoticeable. PortraitPro gives you the control to dial into your look quickly and easily, saving you time and, ultimately, money.

Give the free trial a shot and see if you think it can help you and your workflow.

 PortraitPro with *Salvatore Cincotta*



For More Information, Visit portraitprofessional.com

5 Common Problems of Growing a Small Business

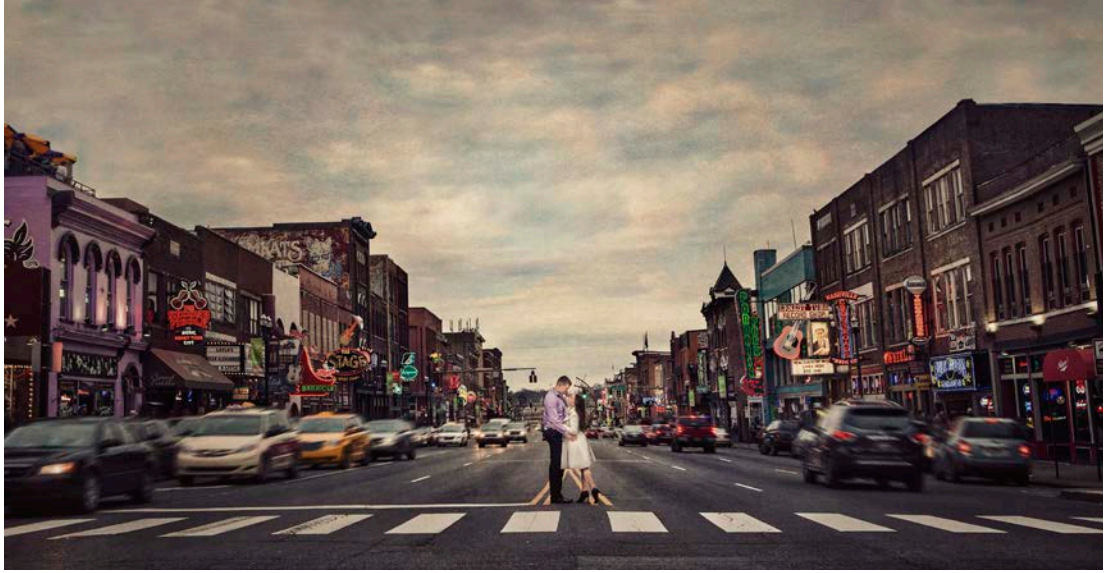
with Laurin Thienes

It is easy to be excited and overjoyed at the growth of your business. The story rings true over and over: Business is booming, the phone is ringing, shoots being scheduled, sales made. But you just aren't a businessperson. You didn't realize the chaos that growth would have on your business. Do not panic. Learn from other people's mistakes and make adjustments before it is too late.

Process

Having a rock solid process for every aspect of your business does not come overnight. For us at Evolve, process is something that has been developed, trashed, redeveloped, tweaked and ultimately beaten until it has the most efficiency rung out of it. Process is there to help keep you from being overwhelmed when the wheels are coming off. Believe it or not, just because you don't have a book that outlines step by step how to do different tasks in your business, you already likely have process in place. Process for storing image files. Process for responding to inquiries. Process for putting appointments and notes on a calendar. Process for booking jobs and signing contracts. Process for completing client orders and albums.

The list could go on forever, but identifying these areas is step 1. Wringing efficiency out of them is step 2. This can be difficult if you do not like change, but it's integral to growing your business. Look at each area of what you are doing and ask yourself if there is a better way to do it. What used to make sense when you weren't as busy might not work anymore. For example, when someone emails and asks if you are available on a specific date, do you respond with, "Yup, I'm available, let's meet," or do you have a carefully calculated response that covers the next logical questions they will ask? By just tweaking this small process, you can save yourself from having to respond to a handful of emails, or better, save yourself the time of having a meeting with someone who is never going to be your client.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

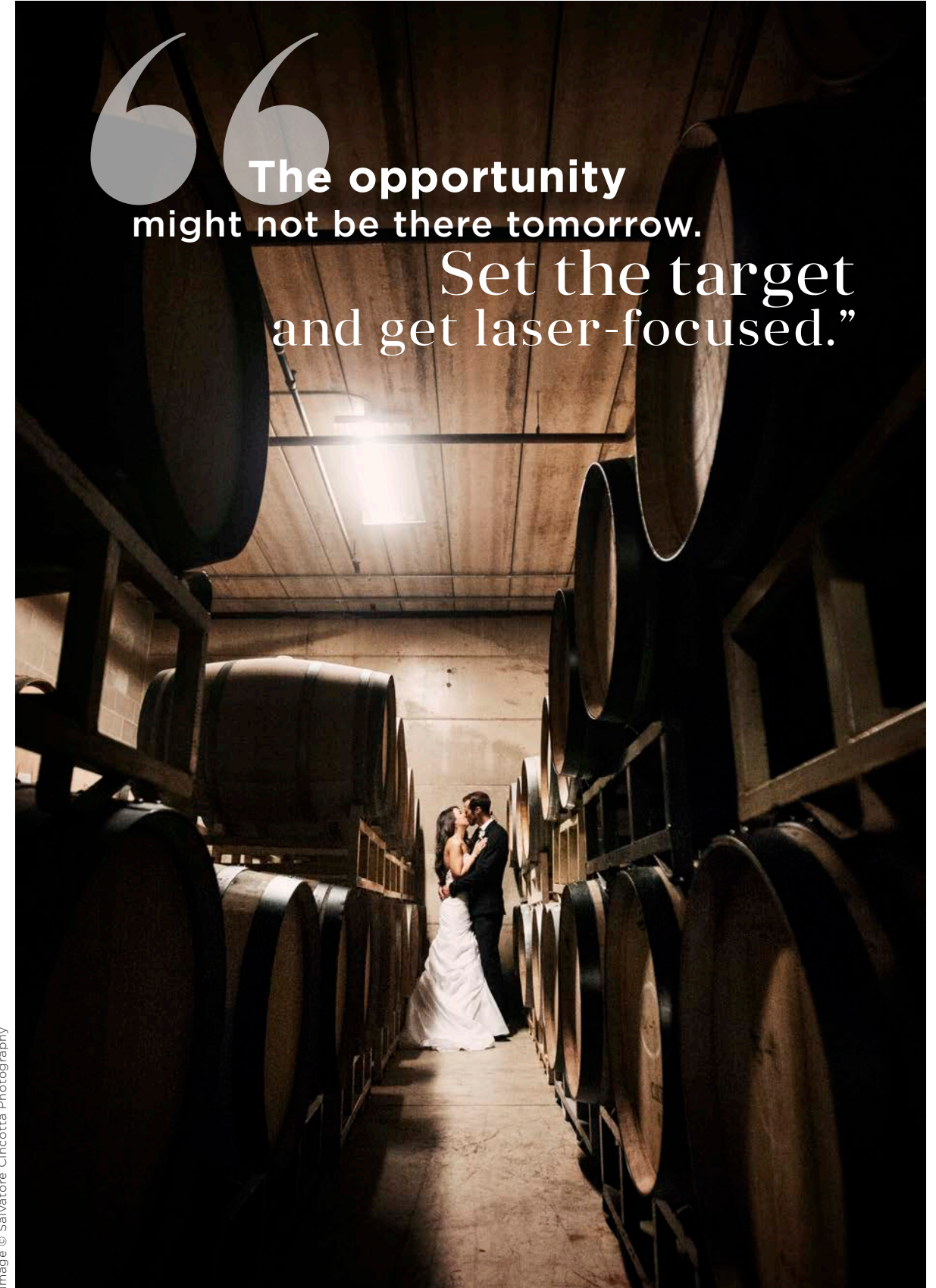


Balance

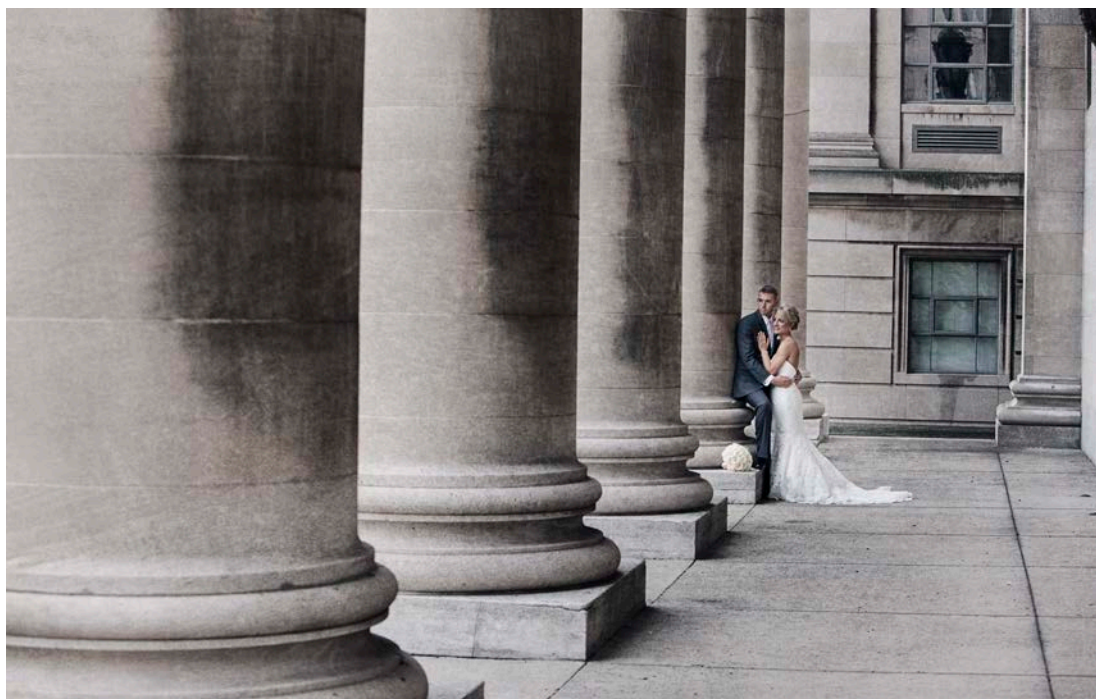
Without a doubt, I will have dissenters on this topic, but I'll shout this loud and clear: Work-life balance is a myth when you are the owner of a growing small business. There are too many businesses out there struggling to get from point A to point B, but you want to talk about balancing your personal life? Sorry, friends, you are living in La-La Land. Ride the wave of success you are finding, and ride it now. The opportunity might not be there tomorrow. Set the target and get laser-focused. The latter can be difficult when outside influences (husband/wife, children, friends, etc.) are pulling you and creating chaos for you on a personal level because your business has become front and center.

Look for the little things you can do to alleviate issues caused by the monster that is consuming your life—things like coffee dates, an hour at dinner not constantly checking email, creative ways to spend time with loved ones. Just do not lose sight of the fact that you have been given a wave to ride when the odds are overwhelmingly against every small business.

Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



“The opportunity might not be there tomorrow. Set the target and get laser-focused.”



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Outsourcing

While I believe to my core that outsourcing your post-production is one of the best areas in which to start scaling your business, I won't bore you with an elevator pitch. I hope that if your business is exploding, you already outsource. My concern is that the Business 101 term *opportunity cost* may not be even remotely on your radar.

Opportunity cost should be part of your general thought process. The vast majority of photographers are one-man shows, and it doesn't make sense to hire full-time staff that you need to pay 40-plus hours per week, 52 weeks a year. But you can't do it all yourself, can you? A few years back, *outsourcing* was a dirty word that implied shipping jobs to India or China. I remember reading a forum thread that made fun of the movement toward outsourcing aspects of your business. But you likely already outsource aspects that you don't realize. Do you print your own prints? You likely outsource them to a lab. Do you do your own accounting? You likely have an accountant.

Looking at areas where you can outsource doesn't stop at just the business. How much would it cost to have a yard service cut your grass at your home to save you a few hours per week? Getting back that time would likely be worth it to your business (and maybe your sanity). This is just one area. Look internally at what you do in a given day, week and month. If you value your time, I suspect you will find many areas where you can regain some of it.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Metrics

How many jobs did you do last year? What is the percentage of inquiries versus meetings versus bookings? Do you know these numbers? Or do you work from what you "think" they are? When your business is growing, it can become easy to operate off of a gut instinct of what you think is right. However, digging into these numbers—and, more importantly, understanding what they mean—can give you insight you might not realize.

Could removing a certain product from your middle package increase your profit? In many conversations I've had with studios, one area they struggle with is in realizing that sometimes there is more profit in their smaller packages because of the cost of goods of what they've built into their bigger packages. Another area to look at might be what happens to overall profit if you can increase your portrait sales average by 10 percent. What if you increased all your wedding packages by \$500?

What metrics do you track currently? Can you track other useful areas of your business? You will be surprised by the outcome when you really start digging into these numbers. It is also a good way to see how you spend your time. Are you spending 80 percent of your time on something that generates 20 percent of your profit?

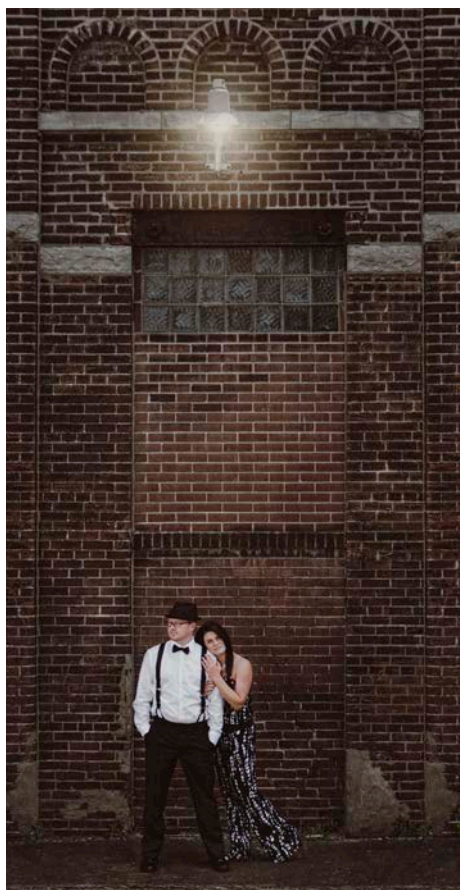




Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Growth

Last but not least is the biggest problem for a growing small business: growth. It might sound funny, but a business that is growing will find that its biggest nemesis is itself. I've touched on different ways to mitigate and ease the pain of growing, but uncontrolled growth is mentally and physically taxing—and expensive. Look to local business organizations, networking, banking partnerships and education.

Whenever it feels like the walls are closing in because of growth, we have a conversation about how to prioritize tasks (when everything is a priority). Most of the time, it goes back to the time-tested “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.” Take the time to look for areas of inefficiency, and figure out whether or not you have the time to spend on them.

In working with hundreds of growing studios around the world, I've found that sometimes the smallest solution can be the most enlightening—removing the smallest task can be the most beneficial. Almost every photographer starts as a photographer first, businessperson a distant second. Getting better at business has to be on par with any goal to improve your photography. Just remember, there is no glamour in being a starving artist, and the best photographers in the world will fail if they are horrible at the art of business. ■



Laurin Thienes is the cofounder and director of operations at Evolve Edits, the leading post-production house for wedding and portrait photographers in the United States. He attended 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 their 4-year-old redhead daughter, Sophia.

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Overcoming Obstacles

How I Got Started in Photography

with **Blair Phillips**

The only person who truly wants to hear excuses is the person giving them. Taking the easy road is most likely not going to bring you true happiness in the long run. Anyone can buy a camera and call himself a photographer, but only a few are able to be persistent enough to make a living with that camera. Fear of failure is the biggest thing that can keep you from accomplishing goals. There is a huge misconception that you have to have a huge studio, tons of equipment and a huge client base in order to start making money as a photographer. The other misconception is that once you are past the five-year mark in business, you are here to stay. But being a full-time photographer and business owner is a struggle that never ends.

One of the cardinal sins I see new photographers make is what I call “betting the farm.” This is when you put everything you have on the line and hope it works out. That puts so much pressure on you that you will never be able to enjoy photography.

I began my business by asking friends and coworkers if they knew of anyone in need of a session by a beginner. A few of them did, and I somehow struggled through those early sessions. I made enough to buy my first studio light. I went back to those people who believed in me, and asked them to reach out to more friends and family who might be interested in a session. Before I knew it, my phone began to ring. With each session, I would save all that I could and put it into my equipment fund. That was nearly 11 years ago.





Images © Blair Phillips

Getting the Ball Rolling

Walking away from a full-time job to start a career as a photography studio owner is not something you wake up and spontaneously decide to do. Once you have an influx of business, it is so tough to determine when to go full time on your own.

I have an easy way to gauge when the timing is right for you to make that jump. When your job is consistently keeping you from making more money month after month, you know the time is right. I worked my full-time job and moonlighted as a photographer for two years before letting the job go. I worked the last six months of that job part time just to be sure of my decision. Creating a great foundation takes time and can't be rushed.

What to Shoot?

I am so glad I explored all types of sessions in the beginning. Everyone should shoot weddings early on in their career. They bring a certain type of stress and pressure that will either make or break you. With years of weddings under my belt, I feel I can handle anything. You will find that you enjoy photographing certain types of sessions way more than others. If you despise photographing certain things, mark them off your list. If you continue to do sessions that bring you no enjoyment, your work and life will suffer.

Be Nice

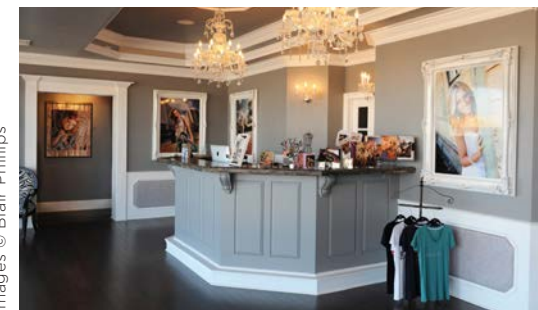
Let's shift gears and talk about maintaining the business you have worked so hard to get. Having a very outgoing personality is one of the best tools you can have. How you handle mistakes is key. Communication and kindness will often dissolve any problems you may have with a client. People are often very rude and disrespectful when there's a problem. Be the change you want to see in the world by killing people with kindness. Being able to create great images is essential, but the way you treat clients is sometimes even more important because of referrals and repeat business.

Bigger Isn't Always Better

More is not always better. I have had up to six employees at one time, and that turned into a business itself. In order to be very successful, you don't need a building full of employees. My wife and I live a very nice lifestyle with lots of freedom with just three of us working the business.

Keep Innovating

The photography industry is one of the quickest markets in which to become displaced. Just because what you are doing today is working very well does not mean it will carry the same success next year. If you put all of your focus on one thing, where will you be if it fails? We are constantly digging for new business. You have to consciously break your mindset. Change is inevitable, and you must change what you are doing every once in a while in order to retain your popularity with clients. If you produce the same thing day after day, it will become boring and lose client interest. You do not have to set out each day to reinvent the wheel, but be prepared to make adjustments to it every once in a while. Keep your eyes and mind open to what is going on in the world around you.



Images © Blair Phillips

The Blair Phillips Photography Studio before and after renovations as well as current in-house sets.

Network, Network, Network!

Another helpful asset to beginning and growing photography entrepreneurs is the ability to reach out to competitors. I have befriended several very successful photographers over the years. Most of those relationships were started at a photography convention. These are people I bounce ideas off and gain new ideas from.

Here is an example of just how helpful this can be. I recently attended a convention on school photography. I needed help with pricing and packages. Organizers asked the 40 studios in attendance to bring their current school order forms, so we left with 40 different pricing perspectives. Before the convention, I wrote down every question I could think of. Then I took advantage of any downtime and asked everyone I could to help answer my questions.

I seem to get more help by forming relationships way outside of my market. Cherish the relationships that you are able to make along the way, because you have no idea just how much you can help each other.

No matter the size you want to grow your company, we all have the same responsibilities as photographers. Those responsibilities include creating great images and relationships, and giving back to a beginning photographer. When life gives you reasons to gripe, just take the high road, because there is a lot less traffic up there. ■



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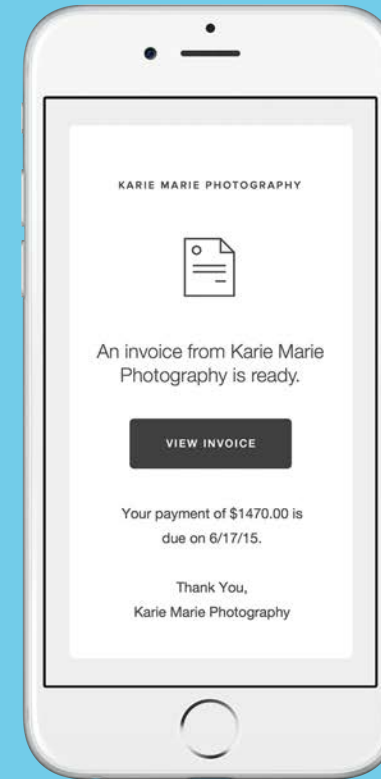


Blair Phillips launched his business nearly 10 years ago in a small town. Since then, Blair Phillips Photography has become a beloved household name to its many fans and clients. Each year, Blair Phillips photographs up to 30 weddings and over 600 high school senior, newborn and family studio sessions.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

blairphillipsphotography.com

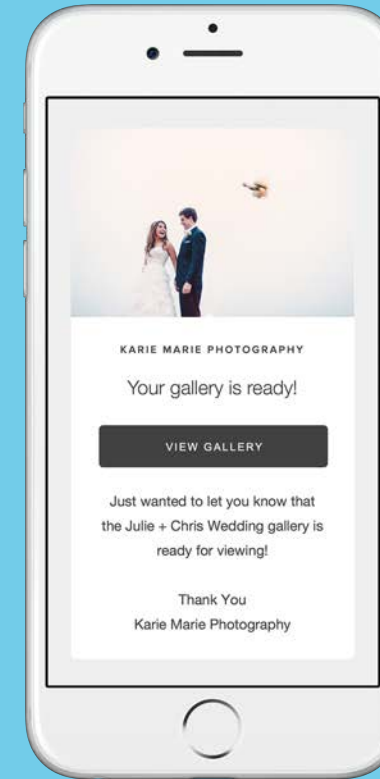
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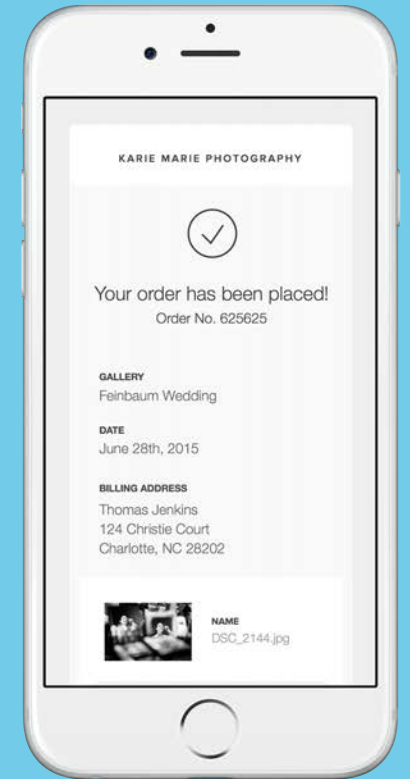
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— 4 Techniques for More —

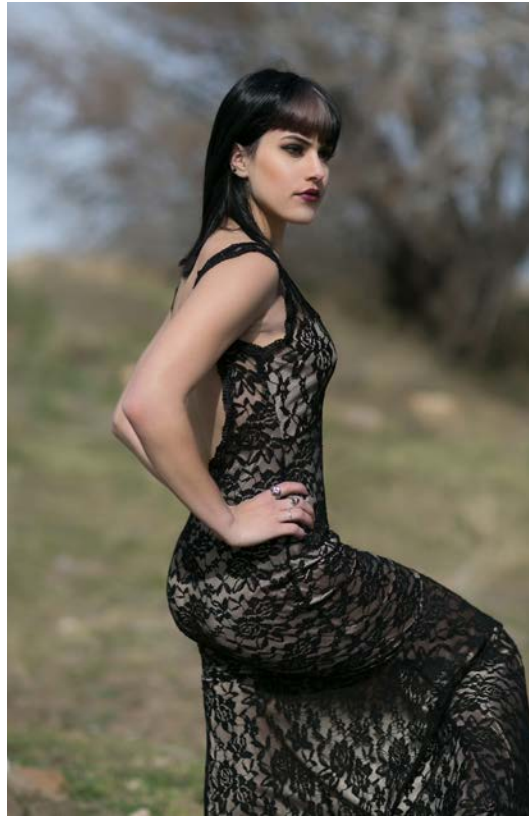
IMPACTFUL IMAGES

with Craig LaMere

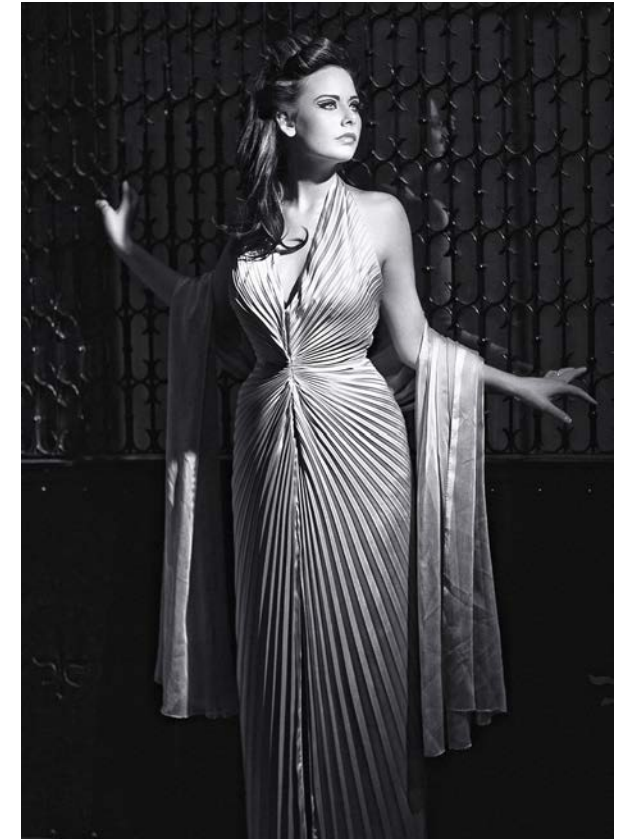
Because I shoot so many genres, other shooters sometimes ask how I describe my style. And because I'm the most immature human on the planet, my answer is usually: "My style is badass!"

When a person looks at my images, I want a strong reaction, regardless of genre. I'm not one to shoot with a lot of hidden meaning or with a message. I'm just not that smart. I shoot images that I think are going to be cool, strong and impactful. The reaction I want from every photo is: "Damn! That is a badass image!"

This month, I cover four techniques that can be combined or used independently to help you get that same reaction.



Images © Craig LaMere



Images © Craig LaMere

BLACK AND WHITE

When I first started shooting, before I had any clue what I was doing, I would pretty much point, hit the button and hope for the best. Then, after the session, I would look at my images and assess the damage I had caused. For the most part, of the thousand images I would take at a shoot, five were good, 20 were average and the other 975 were pretty much poop for one reason or another. In the bad images, the colors were off because I didn't know anything about white balance or color temperature. For these images, I would do the one thing that was almost guaranteed to save any image, as long as it was in focus: convert it to black and white.

At the time, black-and-white conversion meant going to the Image tab in Photoshop and hitting the desaturation button. As I got further into photography, I started to understand tonal range and channels in black-and-white images. Soon I started to love black and white, and

not look at it merely as a last resort or a fix. Nowadays, I often shoot specifically in black and white. I shoot with tones in mind, not with a color palate. I'm looking for very strong contrast between light and dark. You are still capturing images in color, but you should be envisioning them in black and white.

As I said before, the way I would create black and white was to merely take all the color information out of the image and call it good. While this will give you an image that is black and white, you are not maximizing your image's potential in the least.

There are many black-and-white converters out there. I use Nik Software's Silver Efex Pro 2. It lets me manipulate each of the specific channels and assign different depth of contrast to each. It's the contrast that gives your images impact.



Image © Craig LaMere

POSING

Of all the questions I get asked, the majority of them fall into two categories: lighting and posing. There's a reason the old tried and true methods for posing have survived for years and years. The three most basic things I advise people are:

1. Stick to your rules.
2. If it bends, then bend it.
3. Pose guys into C's and girls into S's.

If you stick to these three things, you will be fine 90 percent of the time. But when I want to pose for impact—especially with women—I pose for power, strength and confidence. There really is not a lot you have to do to pose women for power and strength, but the results of a few little tweaks are really amazing.

Tweak 1 — In standing poses, do not let clients bend their legs. When posing a woman, you can have the hips pointed away from

the camera and the knees slightly bent, which softens up the pose. Have your client take a slightly wider-than-shoulder-width stance, with the hips to one side. By keeping legs straight, you are creating hard lines that play very well for impact.

Tweak 2 — Create hard triangles with arms and legs. When you are posing women for power and strength, make sure the elbows and/or the knees are bent at a 90-degree angle—and even a little more if you have a client with very long arms or legs. You want to close the pose as much as possible to create a sense of rigidity.

Tweak 3 — When using an S curve, keep the head in a straight-on position, without a lean, creating a full S curve. This reveals the femininity of the curvature of your subject's body, while the head being straight gives your image strength—and impact.



Images © Craig LaMere



CROPPING

The way you crop can make or break an image's impact. Whether you crop in-camera or in post, your crop is the trail you lay down to lead your viewer to your point of interest.

There are two basic cropping philosophies. The first I call the competition print crop. This style best fits the standards for print WPPI, PPA or pretty much any other standard print competition. Probably the most prevalent crop rules for print competition is not chopping people at joints or the head, and using the rule of thirds.

Which brings us to the second philosophy of cropping: breaking those standard competition rules. It is very important to understand

all aspects of print competition, but once you do understand the rules, you can venture away and get more creative than the rules allow you to.

I'm such a nut for keeping my point of interest in one of the far thirds of an image. Because I'm a portrait shooter, the eyes of my subject are usually my point of interest. To get the eyes where I want them, I often chop the tops of heads. When I'm shooting full length or three-quarter, I chop off hands, feet, arms and legs in the final crop in order to get my point of interest where I want it. You might lose some of the image, but less is more, and to me it is worth losing some of an image to focus the attention on what is really powerful.



Images © Craig LaMere

LOCATION

If you come from a town like mine, where every field, alley and graffiti wall has been shot over and over again, you are faced with the task of making highly shot locations new all over again. When I shoot locations, I consider two lighting options: natural or strobe. Here's how I shoot both in hopes of making any location my own.

Natural-light locations are about colors and tones, and how I can use them to complement my subject. I like to shoot between 85mm and 135mm, and as wide open as I can with my f-stop. On my 85mm, that would be f1.2, and on my 135mm, it would be f2. I like to do this so I can compress the image, pretty much completely blur the background and create a lot of separation. When shooting like this, my goal is to make shallow depth of field shine the spotlight on my subject. With this technique, you can render any location almost unrecognizable.

Strobe-light locations are about making the environment as important as the subject. I pretty much shoot only my 24-70 L 2.8. I shoot at 24mm 99 percent of the time so I can take in as much of the location as possible. I shoot in the exact opposite way as I do in natural-light locations: I shoot closed down at f13 to f16; I do not want any compression of the image; and I want to be certain everything will be in focus. In strobe locations, I always underexpose to bring out all the colors and the grit of the location, and then bring my subject out with the strobe.

This is one of the most impactful setups you can pull off, and one that will set your work apart. ■



My name is Craig LaMere, I am a professional portrait photographer from Pocatello, Idaho. As well as running my full time studio here in Idaho I am also an international educator and speaker specializing in lighting and posing. I have two dogs named Logan and Steve and two cats named Emit and Martin.

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Take Your *Customer Service* to the Next Level

with Taylor Cincotta

As this is our third-anniversary issue, I thought it would be appropriate to touch on “taking customer service to the next level,” because that’s what we do here at *Shutter Magazine*.

Customer service has always been at the core of everything we do with each of our brands. As time has gone by, that customer-service experience has evolved. We are constantly striving to take it to the next level. And this is a struggle we as photographers and business owners constantly face: how to evolve and keep the pace.

After eight years in business (and teaching the industry our way of operating), many studios have started to resemble Salvatore Cincotta Photography. They follow our standards of customer service and often implement the exact programs and practices that we employ. We show up at bridal shows, and suddenly our booth no longer stands out—it looks like everyone else’s. Now we’re faced with how to address the situation. How do we stand out now? We have to change. We have to evolve, but what does that evolution look like? Our clients love what we currently provide—we don’t want to lose that, but at the same time, we cannot remain stagnant.

Dealing with this issue forced us to ramp up customer service and take it to an entirely new level.

Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Big and Small Changes

Some of the things we have implemented are small, easy changes. Others are more significant, while for others, we're changing everything. When a client booked us for a wedding in the past, we sent a contract. Now we send a handwritten thank-you note plus the contract. Simple change.

Now that we've cut down how many weddings we shoot in a year (due to Sal's entrepreneurial addiction), we're able to be more flexible with shoot dates for engagement sessions. We've become more accommodating to clients' needs.

For bridal shows, we are completely reworking our booth. We have always gone with a down-and-dirty, get-the-job-done, simple setup. Now that every other photographer's booth looks like ours, we are changing the game. We're building wooden walls, and incorporating acrylics and canvas. The wood wall speaks to our brand: industrial, raw, trendy. The acrylics and canvas are part of the fine-art products (including our albums) that set our studio apart. Metallic prints make images look great; acrylic makes images look amazing.

I know incorporating these changes will draw even more traffic to our booth and make us appeal to brides more than before. It will help our booth and studio stand out in brides' memories. While this may not be a customer-service change, it is an evolution in our marketing.

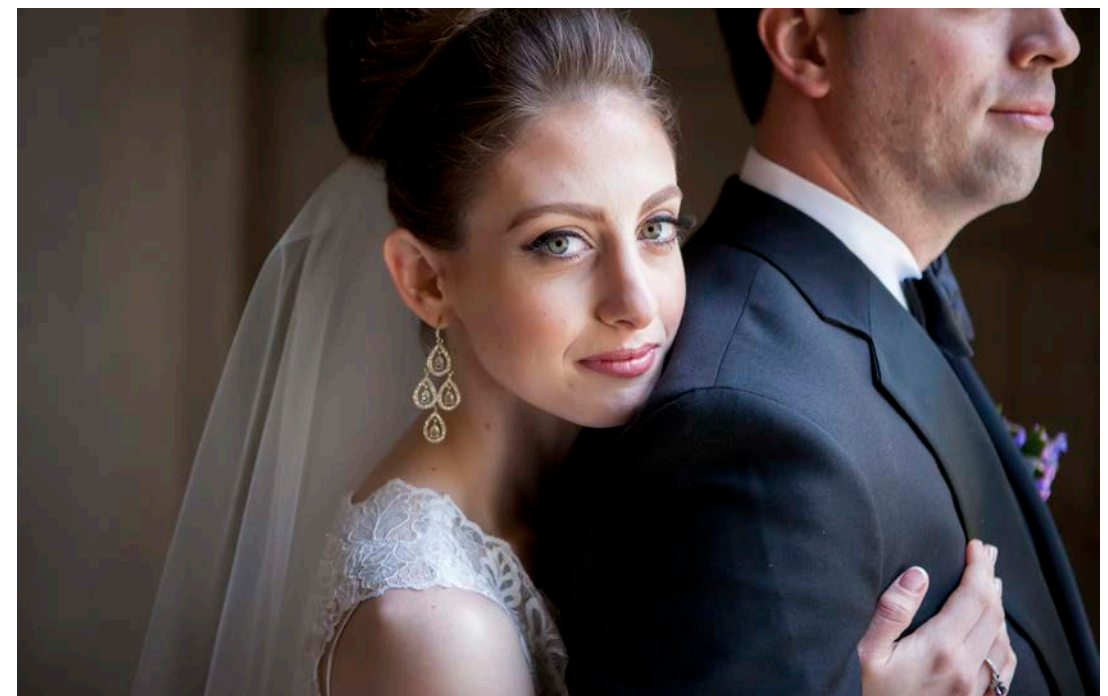
The SWOT Analysis

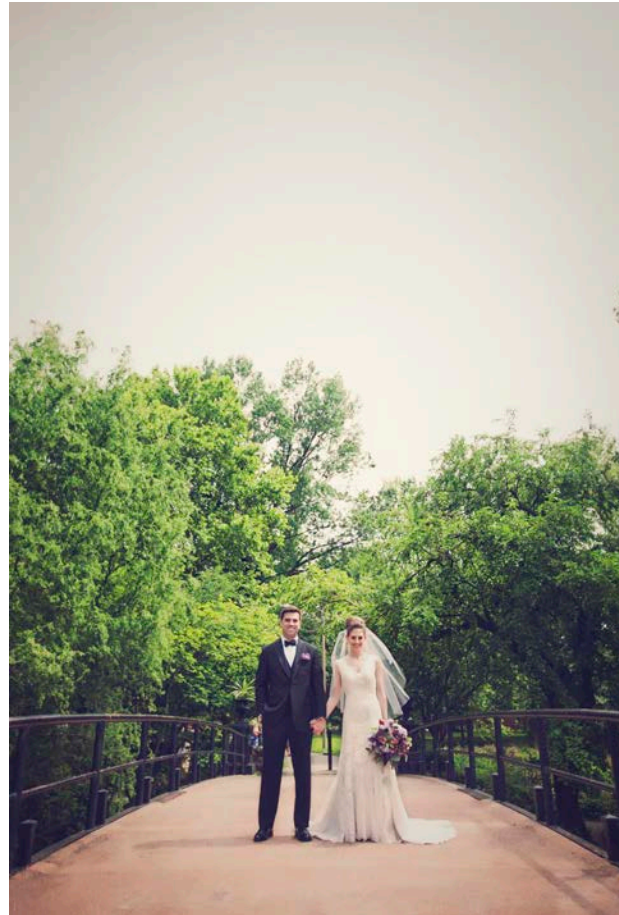
Owning a business is scary. Changing what we know for the unknown is even scarier. But change is necessary to survival. Everything has to adapt to make it in this world. You evolve as a shooter, perfecting your craft, so why wouldn't you evolve your business too?

Every year, our team performs a "SWOT" analysis on each of our businesses. That stands for "strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats." By analyzing what is working and what isn't, we're able to make our business stronger and healthier. We're able to increase profits by examining where clients are spending money, and cutting products or services that aren't catching on with clients or that are costing us money.

We're able to hone in on what people love about our studio and take it to the next level (customer service) by offering more gifts, being more accommodating, returning calls quickly. We can set goals for new ventures we want to pursue (offering headshots) by examining current and potential opportunities.

While we do this SWOT exercise annually, that doesn't stop us from adapting as needed throughout the year. If I see the same objection occurring in my sales sessions, I'm going to analyze the situation immediately and recommend a change.





Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Give a Little

Another customer-service change we've made is giving more gifts. Every now and then, an order shows up wrong—there are two 8x10s instead of one, or something got damaged in shipping—so a replacement is sent. In this case, if I don't need or want the product as a studio sample, I offer it to my clients as a gift. This builds a ton of good will, and costs me nothing.

We've also started sending editorial images to local magazines to be used for free. We'll send vendors images with our logo after the wedding for free use on their website and social media. This builds good will, but now with vendors and publishers, not just brides.

And now that we're retiring our old booth setup, I will sift through the used prints from our display and give those to vendors as gifts as well. This also evolves our marketing by building good will with vendors and by having our images and prints all over town for brides to see.

We're also reconnecting with reception halls, reestablishing relationships. We meet for lunches, do free headshots and hold free promotional shoots for their ballrooms.

Look to the Pros

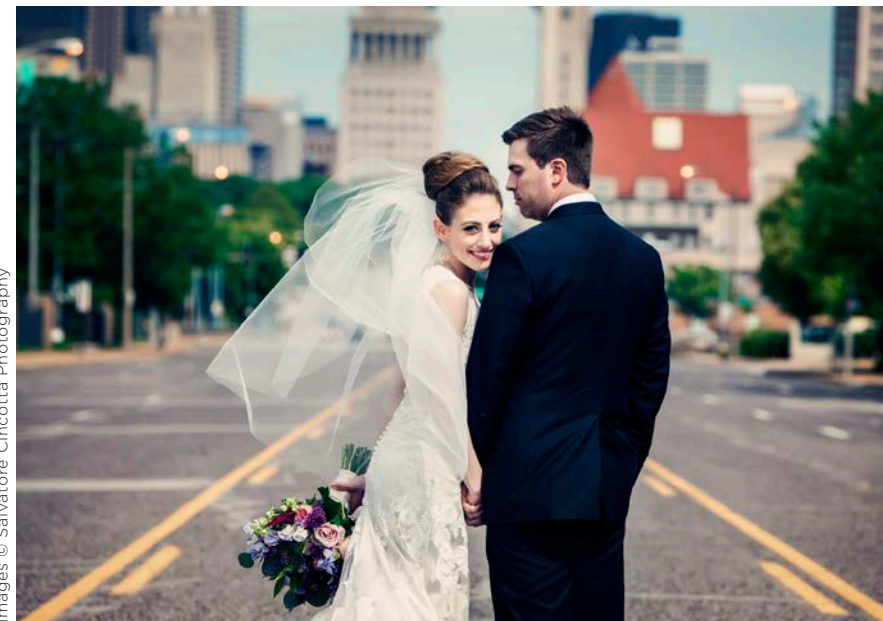
When searching for ideas regarding customer service, why not look to the professionals that have it figured out? Louis Vuitton and Starbucks have always been inspirations for our studio. While Louis Vuitton provides a very high-end experience that exudes luxury, Starbucks provides a comfortable and familiar experience.

Whenever we personally have a good or bad customer-service experience, we take note. I repeatedly have a poor customer-service experience with Quickbooks. It takes forever to get a person on the phone, and email takes 10 times longer. I never want our clients to have that experience with us.

On a positive note, I was recently invited to sign up for a Visa Black card. A few months after I did, a gift arrived in the mail: a Cross pen with my name engraved on it and a thank-you note that also described the pen. The gift was completely unexpected and very much appreciated. I was blown away to have been sent such a lovely, unprompted gift, for no reason other than I was appreciated as a customer.

After receiving the gift from Visa, I started thinking about how we could incorporate a customer appreciation gift of our own for our studio clients.

Innovations like these keep our business healthy and nimble in an ever-changing and competitive market.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography





Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Recap

The key to evolving is to constantly be aware and open to change. Look for better ways of doing things. Draw inspiration from your own experiences and surroundings, and think about how you can incorporate those experiences into your own business. If you're not evolving, you're probably dying. Put practices into place that enable you to evaluate your business and take it to the next level. ■



Taylor Cincotta, born and raised in Houston, is an international award-winning photographer, speaker and co-owner of Salvatore Cincotta Photography with her husband, Sal Cincotta, based in O'Fallon, Illinois. Taylor is the vice president of sales for the Salvatore Cincotta brand, and an active wedding and high school senior photographer. Taylor's passion is for the romantic and photojournalistic styles of photography, bringing a softer side to the images of the Salvatore Cincotta brand.

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Image © Michael Correntino

Less Is More

High-End Fashion
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Michael Correntino

Hi, my name is Michael and I'm a gear addict. There, I said it. I love sexy gear. I've drooled over my fair share of stratospherically priced Broncolor Paras, Profoto Giant Parabolics and Brieze lights. What kind of gibberish am I speaking? These are the big boys, the go-to tools that high-end rental houses stock and that productions use to create the gorgeous light you see on magazine covers and in ad campaigns day in and day out. They're incredible tools with incredible prices to match, easily reaching into the thousands and tens of thousands of dollars.

This month, I wanted to see how close I could get to these results using gear that costs a fraction as much. As the saying goes, "Light is light," so all things being equal, could I approximate the big-production look I love using just one light and a \$100 umbrella? Keep in mind this look is typically created using four lights for the background, one keylight with an out-of-this-world modifier and numerous fill and accent lights. Stick around, and you'll learn how I got pretty close.

Achieving the Look

Half the battle is figuring out the tools you need to create the look you want. Since I was planning on shooting full-figure, three-quarter and tighter images, I knew I was going to need a source large enough to cover this range. Additionally, with the one-light setup, I knew I'd be standing directly in front of my light and potentially blocking it. So I'd need a source large enough to completely wrap around me and illuminate the model without any issues.

There were other important factors to consider. I wanted a punchy, contrasty light that approximated the look popular in fashion magazines and advertising images. I also needed maximum coverage, with enough spill to light both my model and the white background behind her. With these things in mind, an extralarge umbrella with a silver interior was the obvious choice. Westcott's \$100 7-inch Silver Parabolic was the perfect fit. Silver would not only give me the specular quality of light I wanted, but also increase the effective output or efficiency of my light. With an indirect light source like an umbrella, this was important. In order to shoot full-figure images at my desired $f/14$ – 16 , I'd need to place my light at least 16 feet from my model, and I'd need all the power I could muster.

Anatomy of an Umbrella

So why use an umbrella? Each light modifier has its own unique set of characteristics that make it the right or wrong choice for the job. Umbrellas spread light everywhere, so if you're looking for a modifier that's going to allow you to control exactly where you're placing your light, an umbrella isn't the right tool. If, on the other hand, you're looking for a modifier that's going to deliver as much overall light as possible, an umbrella is just the thing.

Umbrellas are often scoffed at because they are such basic tools, but don't be fooled: Under the right circumstances, umbrellas rock. They come in shoot-through and bounce-back versions, providing myriad effects, from soft to specular, based on their size and interior fabric. The silver bounce-back style I'm using here is known as an indirect light source. This is because the strobe faces away from the model and into the curved, concave part of the umbrella that faces the subject. Because of this, you'll need a strobe with sufficient power and/or sufficient f-stop.



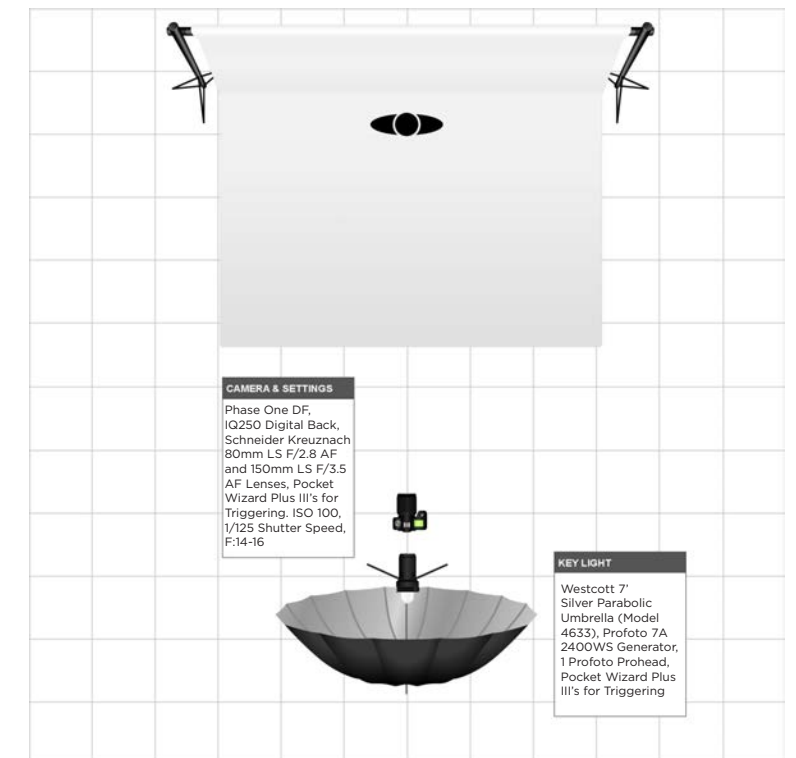
Image 1



Image 2

Images © Michael Correntino

This lighting setup was used to create the first look, as seen in images 1 and 2. A 7-foot silver parabolic umbrella delivers specular light and ample coverage to illuminate both the subject and background.



2 Looks, 3 Sets

This shoot was all about keeping it simple—simple tools and simple techniques. I started off with one light and white seamless for the first look. I always have props on hand, things like interesting chairs, antique ladders and wooden boxes. The red stool worked perfectly as an accent note to Chelsea’s red blouse, and helped create compositional balance. A fast flash duration freezes the action as Chelsea flips her hair, creating an energetic series of images. Image 3 from this series uses a slightly different technique. Here I used two foamcore V-flats to build a three-sided white box behind and around Chelsea left and right, essentially bathing her in white light. This added an extra all-over wash of light to the image. It’s a great way to go if you like the high key look or don’t have a roll of background paper.

For the second look, I decided to go all DIY and use the silver insulation panels I had in studio serving as large reflector panels for background. I taped them together and created a cove to shoot in. Insulation panels are inexpensive and work perfectly as backgrounds, reflectors and black blocking panels. The point is, you don’t need to spend a king’s ransom to create really cool-looking images.



This lighting setup was used to create a variation of the first look, as seen in image 3. Here, two 4x8-foot sheets of white foamcore wrap the entire subject with lots of reflected white light from the keylight, and provide a white background.

Images © Michael Correntino



Images © Michael Correntino

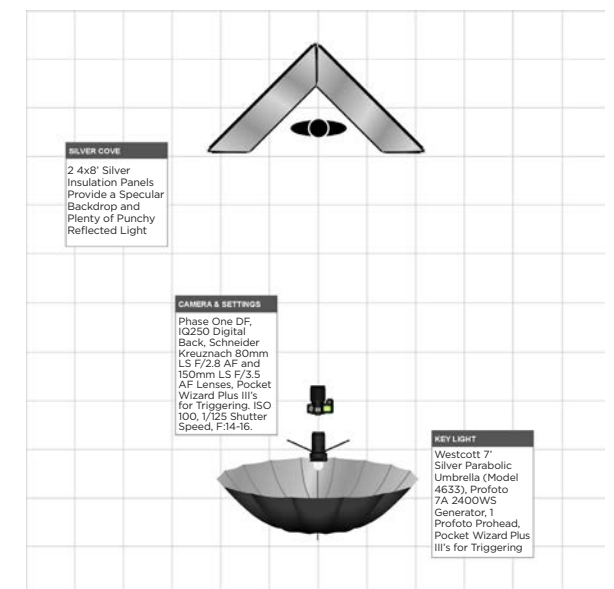
This lighting setup was used to create the second look, as seen in images 4 through 6. Four-by-eight-foot silver insulation panels provide a cool specular backdrop and plenty of punchy reflected light.

Post-Processing

I kept the post simple and straightforward, focusing on the skin, color and contrast. For retouching, I used frequency separation, a fantastic method for removing blemishes, adjusting tones and maintaining realistic skin detail. Frequency separation separates the detail and tone in an image, allowing you to work on them independently. It sounds complicated, but it’s not. If you search YouTube, you’ll find a ton of videos explaining this technique in excruciating detail. (I recently came across a great Photoshop retouching panel that has it, among other super-useful scripts, built in. It’s called the “Beauty Retouch Panel,” and you can find it over at RetouchingAcademy.com.)

What's Your Angle?

Choosing the right angle when photographing models makes a big difference. As usual, there are no rules here, and of course it will depend on the model and your vision for the images. In this case, shooting slightly up at Chelsea produced more winners than losers, by a wide margin. A lower angle helps elongate and slim the body, and adds a larger-than-life, heroic feeling.



Gear and Camera Settings

This series of images was shot with medium-format digital, a Phase One DF+ with an IQ250 digital back; Schneider Kreuznach 80mm LS f/2.8 AF and 150mm LS f/3.5 AF lenses; a Profoto 7A 2400WS Generator and one Prohead; Pocket Wizard Plus IIIs for triggering the lights; a Sekonic L-758DR light meter; and one Westcott 7' Silver Parabolic Umbrella (Model 4633). Given their size, build quality and versatility, these umbrellas are an amazing value at only \$100. They're available in four flavors: Silver, White Front Diffusion Cover, White Diffusion and White/Black. I'll definitely be doing more with these in future articles. Camera settings were as follows: ISO 100, 1/125 shutter speed, f:14-16.

Fashion for Less

The experiment was a success. Clearly, you're not going to get the exact same quality of light delivered by the big-league über-expensive modifiers listed above—there's no arguing they produce insanely beautiful light. The important takeaway here is that I've achieved the look I was after using a single \$100 umbrella. You can do a lot with a little. If you have access to drool-worthy professional tools and tons of lights, by all means, use them. But if you don't, don't be held back—if you know what you're trying to achieve, there's a lot you can do with simple, inexpensive tools. ■



Image © Michael Corsetino



Michael Corsetino 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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How to

Demand Premium Pricing

Through Visual Branding

— with Justen Hong —

In order to demand higher pricing for your photography, your branding has to be in order. A critical part of this is your visual identity. This includes your imagery, logo, website, print collaterals, packaging, etc. It is extremely important that you define your brand from the start and always stay true to it. Don't get me wrong, it can and should evolve, but it should always stay true to its core.

DEFINING YOUR STYLE

Many people confuse branding with simply a logo. A logo does not make a brand; it is simply one tiny piece of it. As a photographer, I wouldn't say your logo is the most important part of your brand. Your imagery is. That is why it is so important to define your photography style so it stands out from your competition.

I see so many good photographers that don't do this. By not having a defined, signature look, your work becomes a commodity. I can do a search for local photographers and find 10 good ones, but all their photography looks very similar and I would never be able to tell them apart.

Now if I am a consumer choosing between these photographers, what is going to be the deciding factor? Price. Since I can't see the difference, I am going to select the cheapest one. But when you have a defined and unique style, potential customers who like your style will say, "That is what I want." And if they want it, they will pay a premium to get it.

Here are some examples of what I am talking about. I would describe Salvatore Cincotta's style as dramatic, edgy and high-end with a luxury/fashion feel, and all his branding backs that up. Everything he uses in his branding materials looks and feels high-end. He uses quality papers with specialty printing techniques like embossing and letterpress, crystal flash drives and expensive leathers. Brands with similar visual identities are companies like Ferragamo and Mercedes-Benz. I can even envision Sal doing an ad shoot for Mercedes. More importantly, I can spot a signature Sal image from a mile away.

On the opposite side of the spectrum would be a photographer like Sue Bryce. I can instantly spot her work too. A big name brand that reminds me of Sue's visual identity would be a store like Anthropologie. Words I would use to describe both of these brands would be *warm*, *feminine*, *inviting* and *soft*. Colors would be creams, light browns and other toned-down, slightly desaturated colors.

The work of Michael Anthony, out of L.A., is another good example of a defined look. All his signature shots use lighting in a unique way, making his images magical and fairy tale-like. When I see one of his shots in my Instagram feed, like Sal's and Sue's, I instantly know whose it is without even looking at his name.

FINDING INSPIRATION FROM OTHER BRANDS

When I talk about brand, I'm not talking about a company's products, I am strictly taking about its visual branding—the look and feel of its advertising, the style of its store interiors and its packaging. For instance, if you're an outdoor photographer in Utah and your photography is all outdoors with a rustic, natural, earth-tone feel, I would imagine your branding would look similar to the interior of a Timberland boot store, with weathered wood, aged metals and muted colors. Your packaging would use natural organic textured papers, maybe canvas ribbon to wrap large prints, and natural wood flash drives.

If your imagery is bright, crisp and extremely colorful, I imagine your branding would look similar to a store like Vineyard Vines. You could use an assortment of bright color and patterned bags for your packaging. Select multicolored flash drives and switch the caps so they are mismatched. What is important is that your photography and your branding matches and creates a cohesive feel.

LOGO DESIGN & BRANDING

Next comes your logo. Your logo is not your brand, but it is the symbol, or flag, that represents it. It is typically the first visual most people see, so you want to make sure it represents your brand and makes a good first impression. A good logo is memorable, usable, timeless and appropriate to its market and targeted audience.

What makes a logo memorable? Typically the most memorable logos are unique, clever in some way, have a hidden element or have a design element that creates multiple objects. When viewers discover a hidden element, it stays with them longer.

Having a usable logo is also key. If it is extremely ornate and detailed or uses things like a painted feel, you will have problems getting it embroidered, engraved or replicated. It also needs to easily scale down to a small size.

You don't want to have to rebrand every couple of years, so having a timeless logo will save you tons of money. Stay away from the latest design trends or hottest fonts, since these can become dated really quickly.

Finally, you want the design of your logo to be appropriate for your targeted market and audience. I wouldn't use a high-tech NASA-style typeface for a baby photography studio. I would use something more whimsical or childish.

One of my most frequent questions is, "What if I specialize in a bunch of different markets, like babies, sports and weddings?" If this is the case, I would give the same advice a real estate agent gives you when you are trying to sell a home. In order to appeal to the largest group of people, the best thing to do is keep it neutral. Go with a type-based or monogram logo that is upscale but doesn't pigeonhole you into one segment of the market.

My last bit of advice on logos is to invest in getting it done right the first time, because rebranding is expensive. Having to repurchase new business cards and print collaterals, flash drives, signage, etc. can really add up.

COLORS, TYPEFACES AND PATTERNS

Colors, typefaces/fonts and patterns also make up your visual brand, so choose them wisely and make sure they complement the look and feel of the rest of your identity. Every color and typeface says something, so make sure the ones you select to represent your brand are saying what you want them to.

WEBSITE

Without a doubt, your website is the most important branding and marketing tool you have. This is where everything needs to come together: the logo, colors, font selections, your imagery, the text/copy and your overall messaging.

The most common visual branding mistakes I see with photographers' websites is that they haven't defined their photography style and have no consistency in their gallery image selections. Your website should showcase only your very best work, your signature images, the ones that define what kind of photographer you are. That is why it is so important to define your style.

Another common mistake is when a website looks like a template. Even if you are using a template, it needs to be customized so that it doesn't look like one. Imagine if one of your competitors used the same exact template as you. Don't think that matters? Wrong. Remember, if you want to charge premium prices, your brand needs to be unique and stand out. Do you think any luxury brand would ever just purchase an existing theme online? Of course not. They want their brand's website to be completely custom, original and unique.

Another big one I see is when a blog doesn't match the website. Your blog should be seamlessly integrated and have the same navigation as your website. By not having this, you create a disconnect between the two. Delivering one cohesive experience online is critical.

MAKE YOUR PACKAGING SPECIAL

When people pay a premium for a product or service, they expect more. And if you want to charge more for your photography, you need to provide your customers with more than just products. You need to provide an experience, and an important aspect of that is how you deliver your final products.

When you buy a handbag from Louis Vuitton, it's placed in a soft fabric pouch and then into a well-constructed custom-branded box. Everything feels rich; even the receipt is printed on a résumé-style stock paper and placed in a small card-stock folder. Why? Because LV knows its products are expensive, so it wants to make the purchase feel special in order to charge a premium. This is part of what transforms a simple purchase into a special experience. That is how you want your customers to feel when they buy something from you. It should feel like you are giving them a special luxury gift.

LOOK AT IT ALL TOGETHER

If you were to place your signature images and all your branding on the floor, everything together should create one visually cohesive look. If something looks out of place—or worse, if it all just looks like a hodgepodge—you really need to get some help. If you are just starting out and can't afford an experienced designer or branding specialist, find a friend or someone with a good eye for design to help. ■



Justen Hong is an award-winning, internationally published graphic designer in the St. Louis area. His work has been featured in *The Big Book of Packaging*. Justen's driving passion is creating logos. A dozen of his logos appeared in *Logos Talk II*, by Hong Kong publisher Artpower International, and many more of his logos appeared in several LogoLounge books. He is the owner and head designer at Visual Lure, which specializes in logo design, graphic design, web design, search engine optimization (SEO) and packaging design. Justen has a studio art background with a degree in graphic design, and a printmaking minor. He also loves art, photography and architecture.

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SONY vs. CANON
PART 1
with Joe Switzer



The battle is on! This friendly lens competition pits the prime and zoom lenses of two multibillion-dollar brands. For seven years, we exclusively used Canon lenses for our video productions. Last year, we switched cameras, and are now using Canon MKIIIs for stills and Sony A7s camera bodies with Canon lenses for video. Today our new lenses from Sony arrived, so now it's time to put these two brands to the test—against one another.

We will not be comparing camera bodies. All the video for this article was filmed on Sony A7s cameras. Our goal is to find out what lenses we need to use for our future projects that allow us to deliver higher-quality productions with the least amount of effort. Maybe you're in transition like us, and don't know what lenses to buy next. This two-part article will help you figure out your options. This month, we will be testing the lenses side by side with the same compositions, lighting, environment and angles. Next month, we will test the lenses against one another on actual productions on the West Coast and in the Midwest.

THE LENSES

The Canon lenses we will be using are the 50mm EF 1.2, 14mm EF 2.8 and 135mm EF 2.0. The Sony lenses are the FE PZ 28–145mm f/4 OSS, Vario-Tessar T* FE 16–35mm ZA OSS and Sonnar T* FE 55mm f/1.8.

The three lenses from each company are the most common ones we use in most of our film situations. We wanted to keep the testing simple, and felt this is the most fair lineup comparison from Canon and Sony.

We will be judging the lenses on the most important qualities that myself and the Switzerfilm team feel make a lens great. The categories are depth of field, color, sharpness, focusing, lens flare and overall performance (Part 2). Did you notice that price isn't something we will be judging on? Buying lenses is one of the best ways to reinvest in your business. Quality used lenses hold more of their value than just about anything else you will purchase. Depreciation is much faster and greater with computers, cameras and other technology. So don't be afraid to invest in these good-quality lenses.

Let's look at each of these qualities more closely.



Images © Joe Switzer



SONY

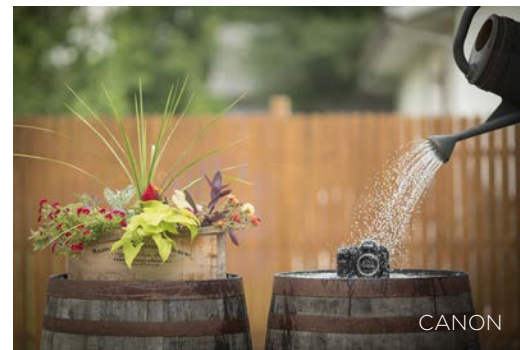
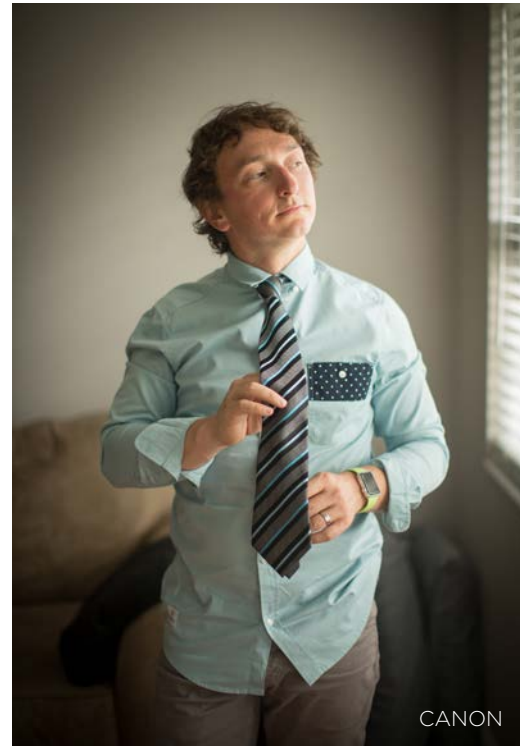
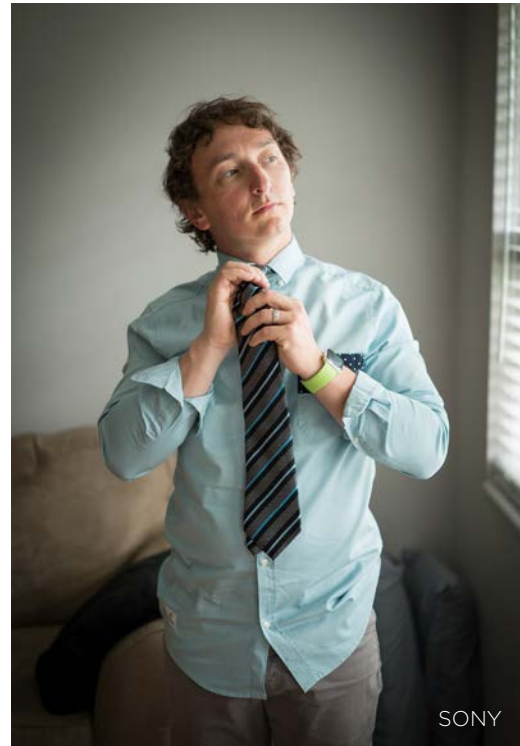


CANON

Images © Joe Switzer

DEPTH OF FIELD

Having a shallow depth of field allows you as the filmmaker to blur out unimportant backgrounds and focus on the important subject. Looking at the f-stop/aperture numbers, you will see that the Canon lenses provide us with a shallower depth of field. All the Canon lenses can produce a more blurry background and better depth of field. I've always thought that the most blurred-out background is the look we should go for on all shots to better bring our subject to life. When you review all the footage, you'll notice that even though the Canon lenses had the better depth of field, it didn't mean that your eyes favored it. We prefer to have super-low-aperture options on all our cameras. Canon wins the depth-of-field contest.



Images © Joe Switzer

COLOR

We had identical picture profile settings on both cameras. Our eyes were drawn to the color of the Sony lenses over Canon. As you're watching the video, you can see the difference when I'm putting the tie on. The blue and black really stand out, and are more rich compared to the faded color of the Canon. None of the video clips was color corrected. You'll notice you can't tell the color differences as much on the wider shots. Sony wins on better lens color.



SHARPNESS

The majority of the time, you probably want your subjects as sharp as possible. The Sony lenses were sharper than the Canon lenses. Once again, the most noticeable difference was with the 50mm versus the 55mm for the close-ups. The subject pops more and looks crisp. This is good for videos because you can draw more attention where you want it. Sony easily wins the sharpness contest.

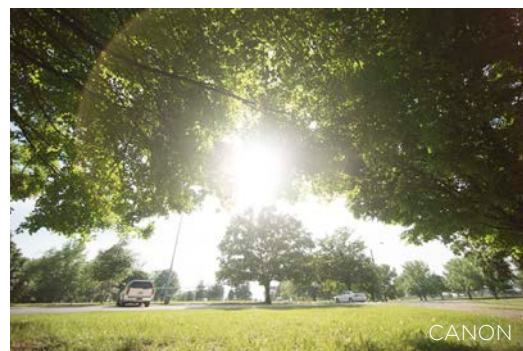
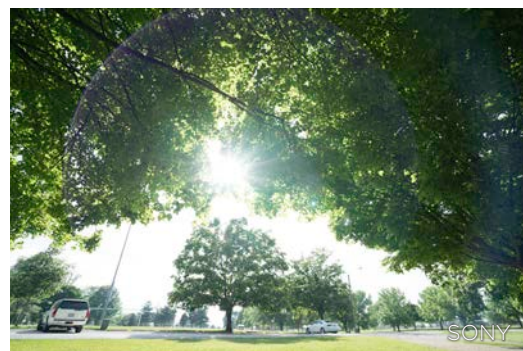
MANUAL FOCUSING

Most advanced filmmakers use manual focus so they can easily keep the subject in focus while shooting at low apertures. When I first started filming, I used automatic focus. For the past seven years, Switzerfilm has used only manual. Why? Because with auto, you lose control of what you want to focus on. With the Sony A7s, we now have four focus options (which we will cover more in depth next month in Part 2). A typical example of when you would use autofocus is while tracking a bride walking to the groom. The manual focus on the Canon is simple: You just turn it, and it focuses. The Sony is more sensitive to the speed at which you turn the focus ring. Sony lenses have a reaction to your focus speed that can get your subject in focus faster. We were a little clumsy with Sony's manual focus. Speed of focusing is important because you don't want to miss out on any moments, but we have so much experience with the Canon focus ring that we still like it better.

We choose Canon focus just because it's a more predictable manual focus even if it is slower. I have a feeling our opinion on this might change next week after we get some experience focusing with Sony. But let's pick Canon as the winner for now.



Images © Joe Switzer



Images © Joe Switzer

LENS FLARE

When we film with our handheld stabilizers, we usually shoot into the sun or light source. Lens flare adds an interesting look, and we want to capture big lens flare anytime it's available. These shots are filmed with a wide-angle lens. The camera used can make a difference in the size and shape of the lens flare. What about the lens itself? Canon's wide-angle lens had much bigger lens flares. The Sony lens had a sharper lens flare. It's Canon for the win because of the bigger, bolder and more noticeable lens flares.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The jury is still out on what lenses will be in our bag the rest of year. We can spend all day messing around in a park with these lenses, but we need to put them through the ultimate test. So we tried them out on a corporate shoot and a wedding shoot, involving superwide time lapses, ocean sunrises, stabilization, focusing on the fly, details of wedding rings, different skin tones, darkness, and both natural and artificial light.

This is like buying a car. It might look great on paper or feel good on a test drive, but perform terrible in the rain, snow or off road. For now, the Switzerfilm team will shoot with both Canon and Sony. If you had to choose today and you kept a tally, you too would know that Canon wins over Sony, with a score of 3 to 2. ■



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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**Processing Your
Raw Files in Capture One,
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Photographers work in an industry where technology and software are evolving so rapidly it's hard to keep up. Who hasn't had the kind of experience where you're ready to convert and process files, and you find out Adobe just launched a new version of Photoshop? "Adapt or die" is the motto we use at SCP when you are staring into the abyss. You have to be ready for change, embrace it. Working with Evolve Edits forces me to constantly research options for wedding workflows and post-production. I speak with studios on a daily basis that are stuck in Adobe Camera Raw, Adobe Lightroom, etc., and they don't want to budge. Can't say I disagree with using Adobe Lightroom—it's our bread and butter. But there are other options out there, like DxO OpticsPro 10 and Capture One Pro 8.



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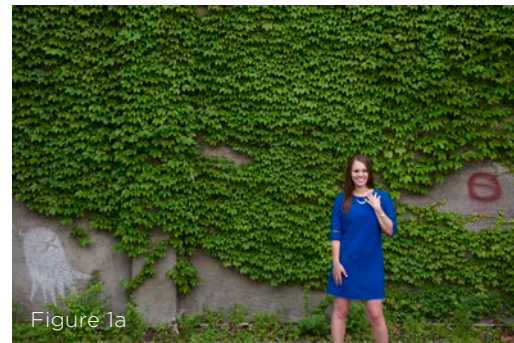


Figure 1a



Figure 1b



Figure 1c



Figure 2

Images © Dustin Lucas

If you aren't familiar with these Raw processing programs, you can download free trials of both. In this article, I dig into Raw processing specifically, not just converting Raw files. I want to be clear in stating that. I shoot with a Nikon d750, and the typical software used with it is Capture NX-D. I am looking for a total workflow solution for the possibility of hundreds of Raw files in a nondestructive program. What I am bringing to the table is a quality versus quantity comparison of Capture One Pro 8, DxO OpticsPro 10 and Lightroom CC.

Color and Tonality

After importing the image into each program and selecting a file, I am ready to compare. My first task is to increase the exposure a little more than a stop in order to compensate for my underexposed image. Noise reduction and shadow recovery will be interesting with this image. White balance is as-shot throughout all of these images and set to be neutral in the overcast lighting. No other settings are taking effect other than the ICC profile generated from the camera's manufacturer. I did my best to match these images between programs.

The rendering of the Capture One version has a nice range of color and tonality (Figures 1a-1c). Greens and blues in this image are quite nice overall. Saturation isn't too high, and the gradients across the ivy backdrop are rendered well (Figure 2). Compared to the others, the dynamic range is slightly wider. Shadow detail is smooth from capture, without adding any recovering effects into the equation (Figure 3).

DxO and Lightroom do a good job with the color, but they lack the dynamic range of the Capture One file (Figures 4 & 5). Contrast seems to be heavier, especially with the crushed black point. I have to raise the exposure past two stops to relieve the black clipping (Figure 6). I understand that the capabilities of the DxO software at an automation level are fantastic, but at a simple Raw conversion level, it falls short. The same goes for Lightroom. Compared to Capture One, you are getting a good enough rendering of the Raw file. For single-image rendering, I suggest using Capture One for the quality (Figure 7).

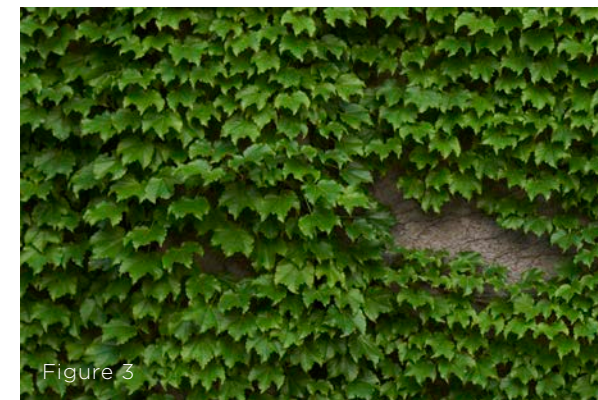


Figure 3

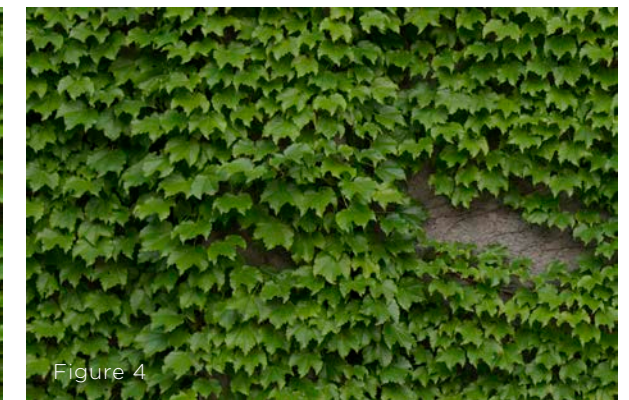


Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

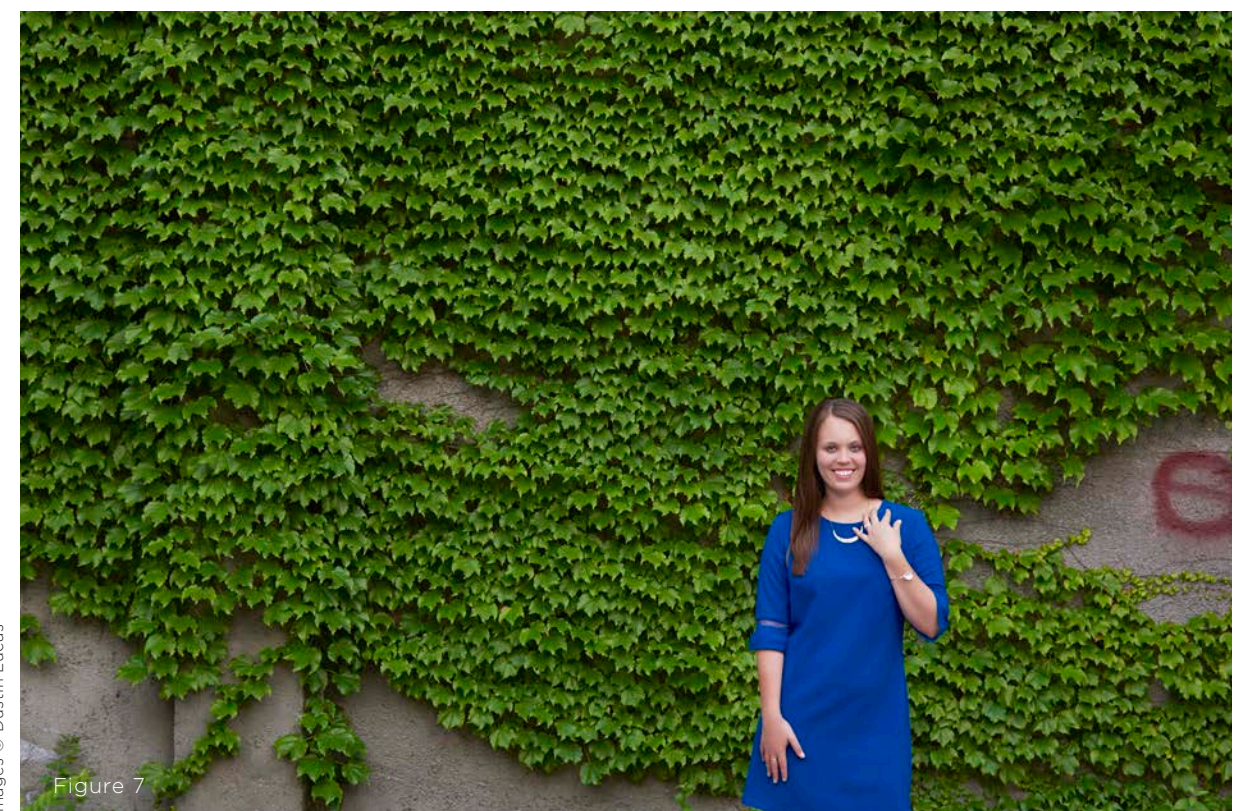


Figure 7

Images © Dustin Lucas



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

Images © Dustin Lucas

Sharpness & Noise

Before making comparisons, I made sure to turn off the Detail enhancements on all three images. The edge detail looks really good in the Capture One image (Figure 8). Noise levels are low since the image was a stop underexposed and shot at ISO 400. However, the strands of hair get a little smoothed over. In the Lightroom and DxO renderings, it's the details in the hair that sets them apart. Noise levels on the images are higher, which might cause the sharper effect in comparison to the Capture One image (Figure 9-11).



Figure 12



Figure 13

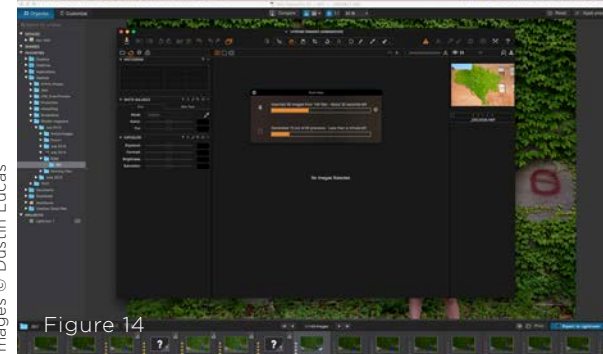


Figure 14

Images © Dustin Lucas

User Interface and Speed

Having been a Lightroom user, I will say that the Capture One and DxO interfaces are a lot different, and that is normal with any software change. This brings up a great question in regards to workflow and handling a lot of images at once. Capture One is the slowest of the three; having to go through thousands of images to edit it was a nightmare. (A great tip for wedding workflow is to use a culling software first, then import the desired images into a processing program) (Figure 12).

DxO handles hundreds of images as well as Lightroom does. The biggest difference is with DxO, the files don't have to process through importing; they seem to point directly to the folder with the Raw files without having to build a running catalog. Of course, you have the capability to create multiple projects (individual catalogs). I would not suggest using this software to store many jobs or to organize your files (Figure 13).

With Capture One, you have catalogs and sessions. Sessions were designed to meet the needs of a tethering shoot. Ideally, you would create a new document for every shoot. Catalogs work as an option to organize and access multiple shoots in one document. This is a great program for tethering and editing smaller jobs. They haven't developed quite the performance boost needed for wedding workflows just yet (Figure 14).

Lightroom to the rescue!

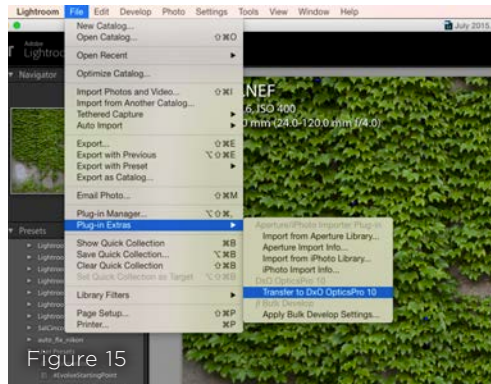


Figure 15

New Workflow Capability

DxO OpticsPro 5 and Lightroom have integrated an export plugin to transfer DNG files back and forth in a nondestructive process. (For more information, check out www.dxo.com.) An ideal workflow would be to use Lightroom to categorize and store the images, and process Raw files through the DxO software. In Lightroom, select a number of images you wish to process, go to the menu bar and select File > Plug-In Extras > Transfer to DxO OpticsPro 10 (Figure 15). From there, you can process files through the DXO software, and it saves a side-by-side copy back into Lightroom (Figure 16). All you need to do is select the option Export to Lightroom (Figures 17a & 17b). Saving time is everything, and this plugin definitely does that.



Figure 16

Closing Results

With the results, I have determined that image quality ranks highest with Capture One 8. I wasn't too surprised considering it's been the leading Raw processing software for a while. Lightroom is still my choice for editing efficiently for an entire wedding—I can't seem to shake it at this point. Moving forward, I suggest downloading trials for both Capture One and DxO, and see what you think. ■

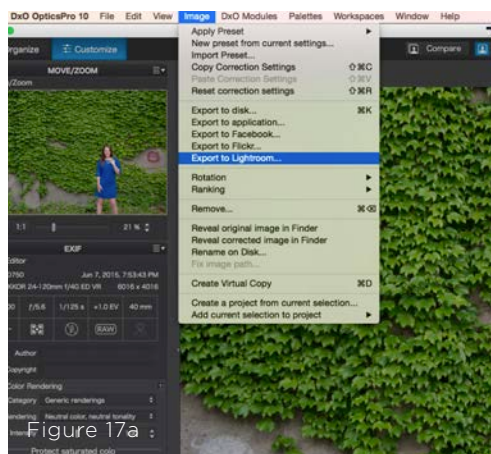


Figure 17a

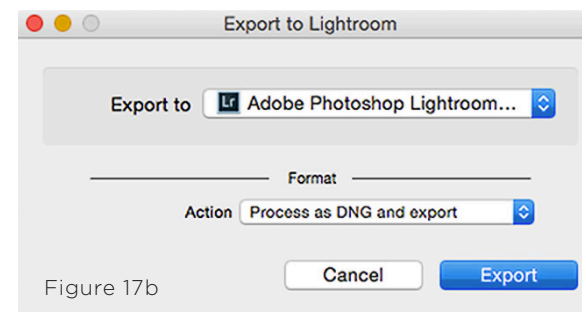


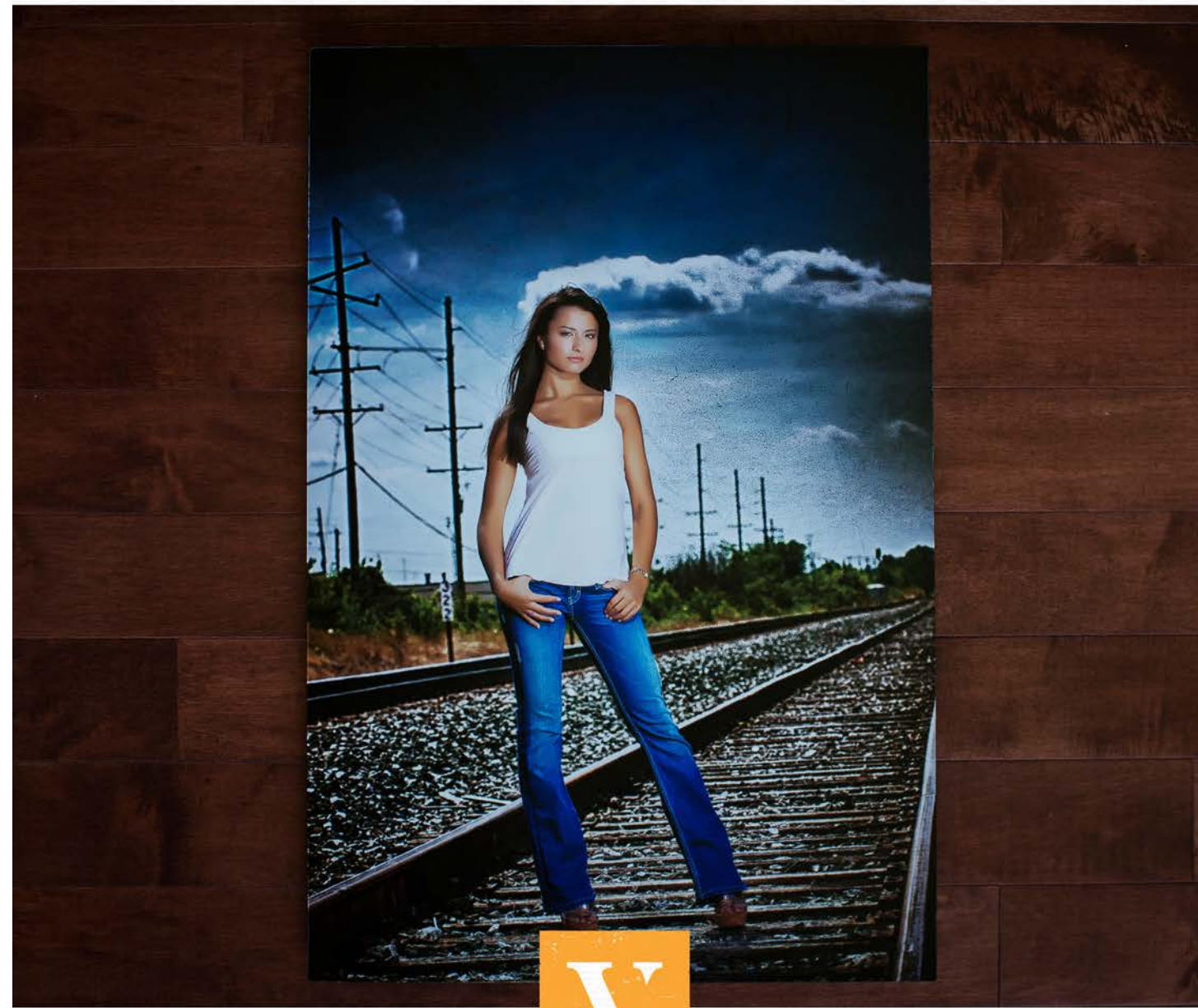
Figure 17b

Images © Dustin Lucas



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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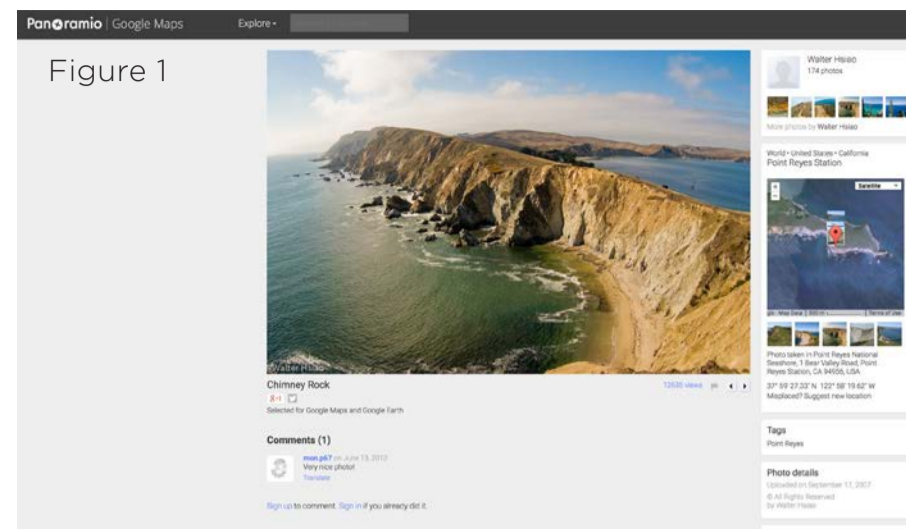
with
Alissa Zimmerman

The process for ensuring a photo shoot goes according to plan involves three key ingredients: concept, wardrobe and location. In this article, I dive into locations and the tricky business of planning properly so there are no surprises the day of.

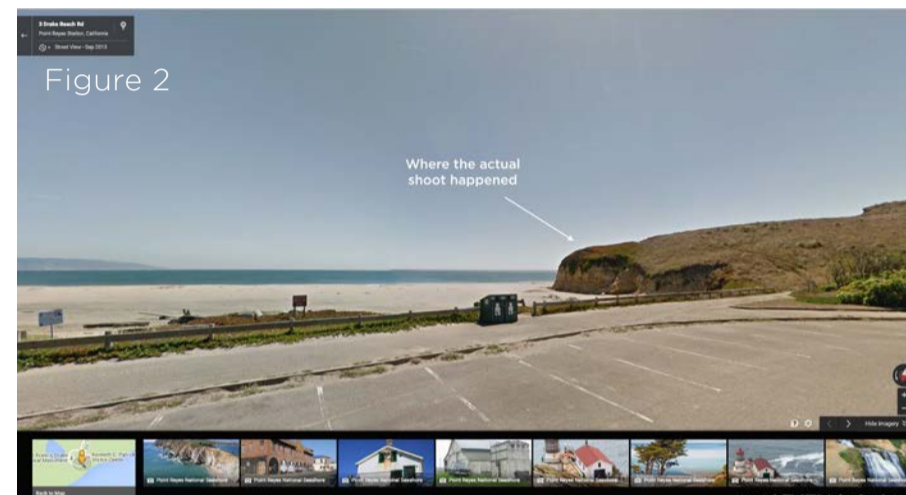
Last August, we flew out to San Francisco to shoot Lenny and Melissa Volturo's wedding. This was a two-day event for us—we decided to keep the first day dedicated to their ceremony and creatives in San Francisco so we wouldn't have to rush before their reception that night. We knew we wanted to spend day two focusing on epic images. We had an entire day to shoot, so I started my research with Google, using phrases such as "San Francisco unique architecture," "San Francisco nature," "abandoned San Francisco"—the list goes on.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



Once I found something that looked interesting, I checked the tags on the image or original post to find the actual location. If tags were not available, I took a screen shot and dropped it into Google Images. Give it a try; it's amazing how easily you can find the exact location from an image. I also use the site Panoramio.com (Figure 1), which gives exact coordinates of locations, and shows the perspective from where images were shot and even technical details like camera/lenses/lighting.



At this point, I had my top five spots selected and mapped out so I could pitch the ideas to Sal in a way that would enable him to make an intelligent decision (with info like drive time, time of day, etc.). Once he narrowed our locations down to his top three, I was able to run with everything to make sure he didn't have to worry about any of the details on the day of the shoot. After all, his job is to create incredible images; my job is to make sure nothing gets in the way of that.

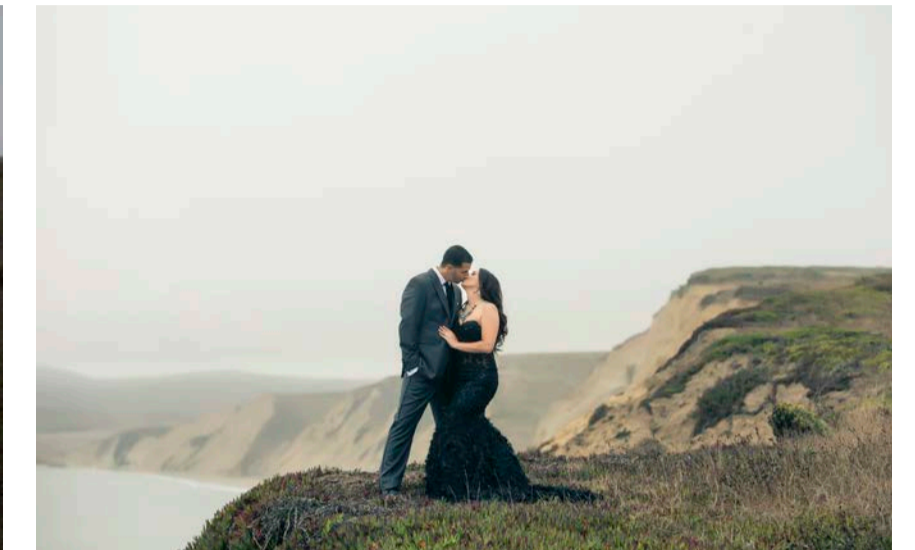
PLAN DILIGENTLY

Piss-poor planning from the beginning will inevitably result in complete disaster. Unfortunately for our team, it took a lot of resistance, too many last-minute canceled photo shoots and a lot of unnecessary tension for us to realize we needed to get better about having all our ducks in a row from the beginning. We simply don't have the time anymore to waste on shoots that aren't 100 percent solid and will fall apart the second one piece of the puzzle goes sideways.

Do your research. Sure, that exotic location you found on Google seems like the most magical place on earth—which is normally your first red flag. Something that seems too good to be true usually is. That's where the diligence and attention to detail comes into play as you're planning out the day. First step: Make sure the location *actually exists*. I know it sounds crazy, but I can't tell you how much time I have wasted trying to find a place that was created in Photoshop. (Google "purple trees Isle of Skye" and imagine my disappointment when I found out this place wasn't real while planning our trip next month.)

Blogs can be your best friend when you're figuring out how to *actually* get to these off-the-beaten-path spots you have your heart set on. If you find what appears to be a remote location, you had better read as many tips and reviews of said location to make sure you understand what you're getting yourself into. One of the three spots we chose for Lenny and Melissa was the edge of a cliff at Point Reyes. After tons of research, I found out that the specific scene we saw in images when searching "Point Reyes" in Google is a spot that would have taken us an additional hour to get to (hike time not included) (Figure 2).

Ah, hiking. This brings me to my next point: permits. Anytime you are planning a shoot in any kind of national park, always assume you will need a permit. These are not the types of locations to wing it and hope you don't get kicked out. As a rule of thumb, we do whatever it takes to get a permit. And don't be fooled: Nine out of 10 times, park employees will give you the run-around for months before granting you access to shoot in their beloved space. Don't let it discourage you. This is their process. Stay persistent if this is a location you're dying to shoot in.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

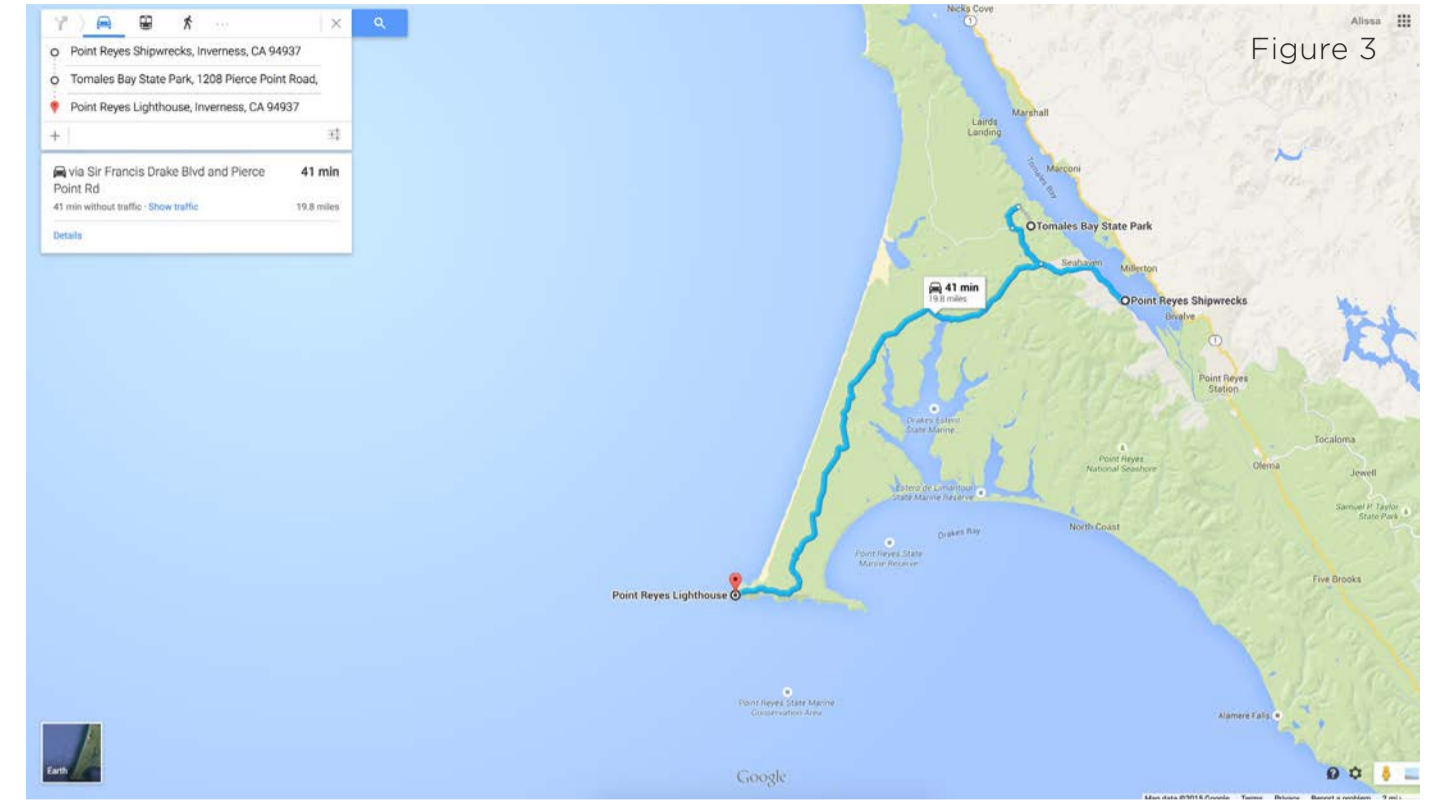
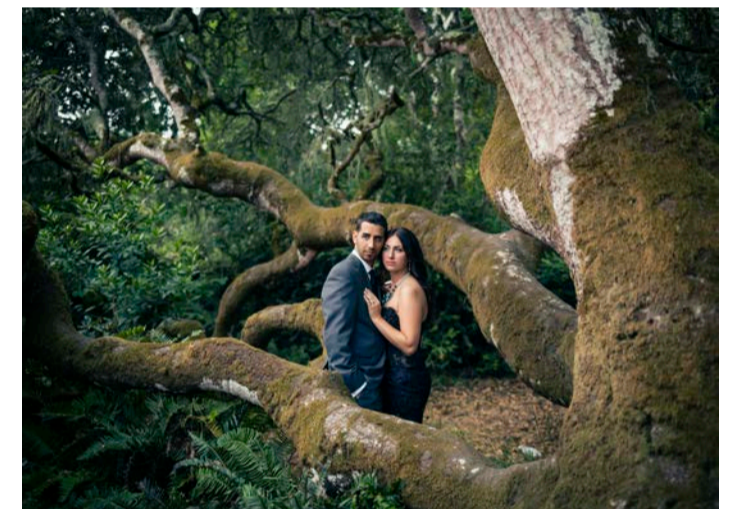


Figure 3

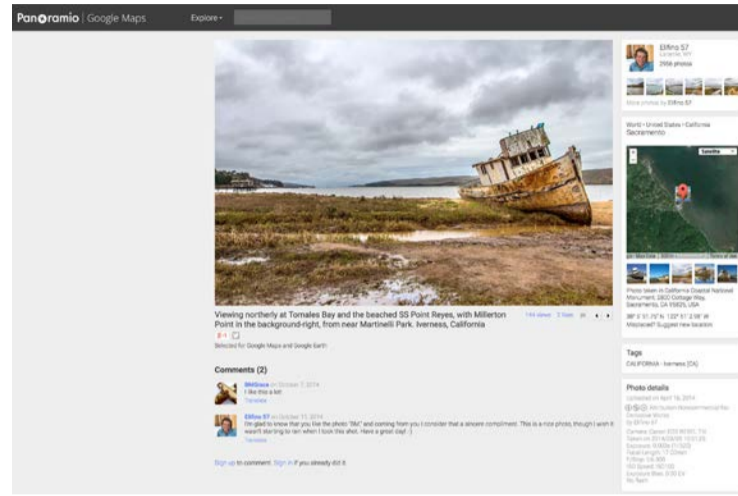
Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



BE REALISTIC

Once everything is in line and you have a solid concept, it's time to start mapping out the day and timeline of events. Do you want to shoot during the Golden Hour? Depending on the time of year and your location, that time of day could be anywhere from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. What's your plan if it's a gloomy day and there is no sunset? These are all things you need to think about when planning your location.

For Lenny and Melissa's shoot, Sal originally wanted to shoot the abandoned shipwreck in Inverness last so we could have a dramatic shot of the two of them on the boat at sunset. After showing him the map (showing where we were coming from and where we wanted to go), we agreed that it made sense to do that shot first, the Tomales Bay State Park tree shot next and then end on the edge of the cliff at Point Reyes (Figure 3). When putting together your timeline for the day, don't overlook the basics: drive time (actual and with traffic factored in), time to eat, hair and makeup (touch-ups and changes in looks), wardrobe changes, loading/unloading of gear and, most importantly, getting dialed in once you arrive at your location.



UNDERSTANDING ALL OF THE ELEMENTS

Everything mentioned above sounds great in theory—until something doesn't go according to plan and you're left scrambling, trying to make things work. For us, if we're ever in a situation where we are left trying to *make things work*, we know we will be focusing on all the wrong things instead of the only thing that should matter: getting the shot and getting it *right*. As nice as it would be to find remote locations with no one around, sometimes it's just not possible, like when the shot you're looking for is one with crowds of people surrounding you. You have to have a Plan B (and Plan C, D and E just to be safe). Can the random intruders in your shot be edited out? If not, change your perspective so they can be. Do you have time and/or the ability to get everyone in the crowd to sign a release so you can use that image legally in any kind of promotional work? If not, shoot the scene in a way those people can be blurred out in the background.

Understanding lighting in any given scene is crucial to the outcome of your shoot. Ideally, you should be looking for locations with plenty of open shade to work with. That's not always possible, which is why it's important to have the right gear to compensate when you run into lighting issues on location. For Lenny and Melissa's first two locations, we knew it was a gamble. Both spots were tourist destinations, so we ran the risk of showing up and not being able to shoot. Luckily, both spots were completely empty, but you should always be prepared to pivot when that isn't the case.

If there's one thing to take away from this article, it's that preparation is the key to success when finding and planning locations. Understanding the things that can go wrong and having a plan when they do is the only way to ensure you'll have a shoot where you can focus on the task at hand without any unnecessary distractions. ■



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



Image © 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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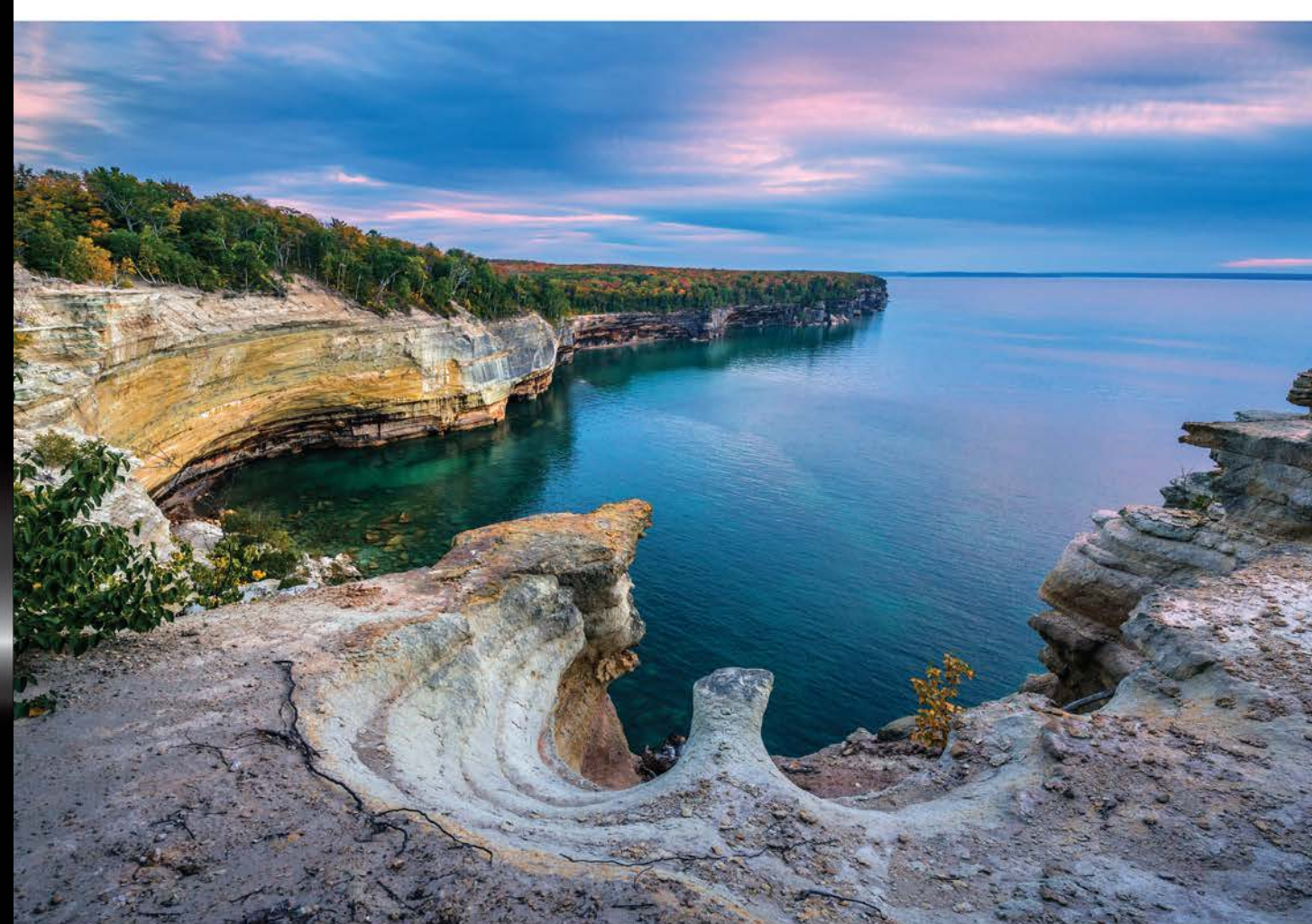
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It's an entire art form unto itself. Just as there are entire conferences devoted to image making (both still and video), there are whole multiday events just for audio technicians, sound designers, music mixers and engineers. If there's one thing that will bring down the overall quality of an otherwise good video or film, it's bad sound.

It's a common amateur mistake. Many aspiring filmmakers learn early on that neglecting to spend money on good audio equipment can lead to a costly disaster, and often costly ADR (additional dialogue recording) sessions. For wedding videographers, it can be especially disastrous. Screwing up someone's wedding-day audio can not only ruin your film but also your reputation. In extreme cases, it's enough to have your ass hauled into a courtroom.

So how can you avoid the common audio pitfalls and become proficient enough to handle basic audio acquisition that results in clean sound? Taking a class in audio production is a good place to start, but for now, let's talk about some of the basics of both technique and gear.

1. Don't skimp on audio.

It's easy when first starting out to say, "I'm going to concentrate on buying a nice camera, some quality glass and a computer that's completely overqualified to handle my video production projects." While those things are important, careful consideration should be used in making wise image-making decisions. Don't forego your sound needs. Spend at least 30 to 40 percent of your total operating equipment budget on good recorders, decent middle-of-the-road microphones and quality cables. The malfunctioning of any of these components can be disastrous, and malfunctions are all too common. Even good equipment gets damaged, and expensive cables go bad eventually. Don't exaggerate the problem by buying crappy stuff.

2. Study the different types of microphones and where, when and how to use them.

Dynamic microphones and condenser microphones tend to be the most popular for fieldwork, each with its own set of pros and cons. Handheld, shotgun (booming) and lavalier (lapel) mics are used most by video professionals. Each has different methods of "hearing" and channeling sound with their "polar patterns."

Here's a quick breakdown:

Unidirectional - A unidirectional microphone only picks up what's coming from one direction. Any sound that is off to the side (even just a tiny bit) or behind the mic receiver will not be heard with volume or clarity.

Omnidirectional - Omnidirectional microphones pick up sound in all directions in a circular pattern around the receiver. Most lavalier microphones are omnidirectional to aid in good placement.

Bidirectional (or Figure Eight) - Exactly what it sounds like. Imagine two circles pushed together in the shape of the pickup area.

Cardioid - These microphones are commonly used to record dialogue and music. The polar pattern is roughly shaped like a heart, hence the name. The pickup area balloons out in front and has a smaller balloon in the rear. This configuration helps to reduce noise on the sides of the mic, allowing you to cut through ambient noise.

Hyper/Super-Cardioid - This polar pattern is common in shotgun microphones that are tasked with capturing sound in a narrow pathway to isolate only the sound you want. A hyper-cardioid microphone is like a regular cardioid but with a slightly larger figure-eight pattern. This produces a smaller and more narrow, elongated frontal pickup area, and gathers less sound from the rear. A super-cardioid microphone is similar to a hypercardioid with even more frontal range and less in the back. These microphones take some degree of skill when used in roaming, or run-and-gun, shooting situations.

There are many other factors that influence a microphone's effectiveness and use-case, but these tips should help you make a much more informed decision when choosing an entry-level microphone.

Always position a microphone no more than 30 inches from your subject, and ensure it's pointed just below the mouth. It sounds obvious, but you'd be surprised how many newbie filmmakers place their mics too far away, and then wonder why the audio sounds far away.

Just because a microphone is expensive doesn't guarantee you results if it's used incorrectly. Most importantly, placing a single microphone on top of your camera and expecting quality dialogue is not smart. On-camera microphones should be used for ambient sound recording or reference sound only to help you sync up your video with your quality sound later on. You are always much better off using a boom pole to get a microphone closer to your subject, but just outside of the shot frame. Lavalier microphones are also good for dialogue capture, but concealing them without sacrificing sound quality can be tricky.

Many high-end cinema cameras offer direct-line XLR audio inputs that allow you to use your camera as an audio recorder. This is a great option if you are in a lock-down filming scenario or using a wireless system. When lining directly into your camera for sound, use high-quality cables to avoid interference noise or hum that may be picked up from the surrounding environment. DSLR shooters will likely need an XLR converter box to accomplish this.

Choosing a mic based on this knowledge can make a huge difference in the sound quality of your dialogue. The more expensive a microphone is, the more refined the sound will likely be. There are also some relatively inexpensive microphones out there that sound great, and I've heard high-end microphones produce a sound profile I wasn't thrilled with in a given situation. It all depends on the ambient room tone and the tonal range of your subject or sound. Sound engineering is sort of like wine tasting: It's subjective within boundaries of generally accepted quality. After all, people tend to hear somewhat different ranges of sound.

3. Pick a suitable recording device.

Depending on your needs and project type, the recorder you should choose can vary wildly. I know some wedding guys who use cheap recorders paired with decent lavalier microphones, and get great sound. I've listed several different types of portable and multichannel audio recorders at the end of this article as a guide.

The key thing to remember here is that your recorder should capture at 16- or 24-bit quality at a minimum, and should have basic features such as low-cut noise removal and a built-in limiter. These rudimentary features allow you to capture good sound when you have very little control over your environment, such as a loud hall or echo-y church, or in places where you have to mic someone up quickly and get back to filming. Additionally, a quality limiter can reduce the chance that the sound will overmodulate, or distort, because it's recorded too loudly. Think of it as keeping your image highlights exposed. With audio, once sound is distorted, it is done, absolutely unusable. Portable audio recorders can be placed on a person and then paired with a lavalier mic for simple dialogue capture such as a groom at a wedding or an interview subject. Multichannel mixers/recorders can be used for recording and controlling multiple input sources and for tapping into sound boards belonging to a band or a DJ at a wedding. I've also used them to get great-quality sound at corporate events and concerts. The advanced use of these devices requires educating yourself on all of the features they offer. The good news is many of those features aren't required for basic audio/dialogue capture.

4. Use microphone modifiers.

The windscreens included with your mic are designed to filter unwanted noise like wind, rustling and "pops" from people saying words that contain P's. A good shock mount ensures you don't get vibration noise from your boom pole or table stand. Research what you will need before you shoot.

Wedding filmmakers use wind-breaking "dead cats" (fuzzy windscreens) and blimps that filter large amounts of wind noise and insulate captured sounds from echo and "bounce."

5. Study how to "sweeten" audio in post-production.

There's more to mixing audio into your film than just laying it over music and then adjusting the volume. Most NLEs (nonlinear editors) like Final Cut Pro X and Adobe Premiere include effects and plug-ins that can help remove unwanted noise (but they can't fix everything). They can help blend dialogue with music without having to reduce the volume of the music and thereby ruining its natural emotional impact. Most importantly, they make your sound mix every bit as polished as your imagery. So many of my clients tell me, "Your sound is just so much louder, warmer and cleaner than other videographers." This is a result of applying the things listed above. Think of how your clients may be watching your film in their living room on their Dolby Digital 7.1 Surround Sound system. Your audio had better be up to the task for a system like that. Never underestimate or undervalue the importance of clean, quality sound. Your clients are listening and noticing.

6. Don't overuse your editing program's noise-removal feature.

Some NLEs have a feature that removes background noise. While it may sound good on your computer speakers, it often removes too much of the natural voice, making the affected dialogue sound garbled and tinny. This is because the effect pulls down all of the frequencies important to clear, distinct dialogue. It messes with deep male voices something awful.

It's better to learn how to use your NLE's manual 10- or 20-band equalizer so you have more control over which frequencies are affected, thereby keeping the integrity of the original voice intact.

A good plugin that deals with unwanted audio noise is SoundSoap 4 (Soundness Software, \$149). It uses an advanced algorithm that learns the “bad” noise, removes it and saves the good stuff. Bear in mind that these corrections work well only on audio that is not too far gone. That is why recording audio properly is so important. One final note before we delve into gear suggestions: Take the time to educate yourself in the art of audio and sound production. Learning simple skills like how to EQ dialogue to enhance (not only correct) voices and how to pull out unpleasing hums and buzzes can make crappy audio decent and decent audio sound much, much better. Rent and practice with different microphones and recorders. Train your ear to hear the subtle differences. Look up microphone and audio recorder comparison videos on YouTube. It’s a great way to hear the final recorded result of different devices, and get to know what would work for you and your shooting situation.

Gear suggestions

These picks are made with the beginning to advanced wedding or commercial filmmaker in mind. For larger, more-serious productions, consider hiring a dedicated audio technician with her own arsenal of gear and knowledge to bring your audio production to a new level and ensure success.

On-camera Reference and Guerrilla-Style Shooting

RODE VideoMic Pro | Approx. \$214

Transducer | Condenser

Polar-Pattern | Super-Cardioid

This is industry standard for DSLR video shooters. It is self-powered (9V battery required) and has great sound quality overall. It also offers a +20dB gain option to eliminate the telltale line noise that some DSLRs mic input jacks produce. It’s not meant for professional boom mic’ing, but is great for ambient sound situations. (Personal note: Avoid the Rode VideoMic Go. It is a passive—nonpowered—microphone that doesn’t produce great sound quality.)



RODE VideoMic Pro

Off-Camera Dialogue Recording and Booming

Sennheiser 8060 | Approx. \$1,250

Transducer | Symmetrical RF

Polar pattern | Super-Cardioid

This is my go-to shotgun mic for crisp, rich and full dialogue recording. It offers low distortion and is very sensitive, often allowing me to pick up voices clearly in busy environments while canceling out unwanted sounds. It may seem a bit pricy, but for a good-quality shotgun microphone, this is a great buy. (Just look at the prices on some of the really high-end shotguns, like the Schoeps SuperCMIT 2U, at \$5,000.)

RODE NTG-4+ | Approx. \$433

Transducer | Condenser

Polar pattern | Super-Cardioid

Building on the success of its moderately priced NTG-2 and NTG-3, Rode just released this new model that boasts a top-range emphasized sound and elevated bottoms. It’s a great starter for those on a budget. I’ve owned the NTG-2 for years, and I still use it when I want a higher register in my dialogue and am trying to cut out low-end garble.



RODE NTG-4+

Handheld or Stationary Recording

Shure SM58 | Approx. \$99

Transducer | Dynamic

Polar pattern | Cardioid

This mic has been widely used in both music and dialogue recording for years. It’s cheap and is perfect for wedding filmmakers who need a microphone to prop near a DJ speaker or as a replacement for the crappy microphones many banquet venues use for ceremonies. Just pop this one on the mic stand, and then hand the crappy one back to the maître d’. Point it just between the tweeter and woofer of a speaker for the best backup sound.



Shure SM58

Wireless Applications

I generally don’t trust wireless microphone systems on weddings. In the busy New York City market, there’s too much interference, which often means having to scan for open frequencies and taking chances during a ceremony that you won’t get static and glitches in the audio transmission. For weddings, you only get one chance to get good sound. For corporate or documentary film work, they are perfect because they allow you to record your audio directly into your camera, eliminating the need to sync later. With the Canon C100, I have built-in audio XLR inputs that allow me to record two channels of external audio directly to my video files.

Audio Systems

Sennheiser EW G3 System | Approx. \$630

Includes | Sennheiser ME-2 Lavalier Microphone

Various incarnations of this system have been around awhile, and I’ve always liked their performance. You can control the output level of the transmitter and the receiver independently and scan for frequencies with the touch of a button. A handy screw-mount microphone jack keeps the lavalier mic from dislodging midshoot.

RODE Rodelink Wireless Filmmaker Kit | Approx. \$400

Includes | RODELav Microphone

This newcomer to the wireless world deserves a look. It’s designed for DSLR shooters who need to capture their audio directly to their cameras in a run-and-gun scenario. It boasts an impressive 100 meter transmission range and has the ability to scan for frequencies continuously and hop to the clearest channel on the fly. Pretty nifty.



RODE Rodelink Wireless Filmmaker Kit

Lavalier Microphones

Sanken COS-11D | Approx. \$379

Transducer | Condenser

Polar pattern | Omnidirectional

This major-league lav mic is widely used by the major news networks as a studio mic, and has a great sound profile. Bright and clean. For weddings, it's a must-have. It's sensitive enough to be hidden, but can handle strong proximity effects, meaning it can be placed close to a source and maintain even volume. To me, its cost is its only downside, but it's well worth it.

TRAM TR-50 | Approx. \$234

Transducer | Condenser

Polar pattern | Omnidirectional

The industry standard. The Tram has been used on everything from TV reality shows to major motion pictures. Its versatile sound range is easy to match with other audio sources, and it has a rich, warm sound in a robust, durable housing. I keep two of them in my bag at all times. The price point is about what you'd expect to pay for a decent-quality lav. (Be sure to replace the connector plug on these to something more sturdy, though. I've shorted out a few just from normal wear and tear.)

Sennheiser ME-2 | Approx. \$139

Transducer | Condenser

Polar pattern | Omnidirectional

I've been using the ME-2 since I got my first EW wireless system back in 2006. I still can't believe the sound quality that comes out of this very affordable lav. It's a touch tinny, and I wouldn't put it in the same class as the Tram or Sanken, but if you're on a budget, this is the only way to go. (Just be prepared to buy extra alligator clips. I've lost about a dozen in my career. Luckily, they are cheap.)

RODELav | Approx. \$249

Transducer | Condenser

Polar pattern | Omnidirectional

I bought one of these as a backup microphone last season. While the sound quality is OK, I had some connection issues with its proprietary MiCon interchangeable plug system. There were times it popped and crackled during use because of loose connections, and I couldn't seem to get a tight fit. That's a deal breaker for me. For the price, a Tram TR-50 is probably a better choice.



Sanken COS-11D Microphone



Sennheiser ME2 Microphone

Compact Digital Audio Recorders

These are some of the most affordable and common portable recorders. Remember, all of these recorders require you to sync your audio and video in post-production. The audio your camera records to your video files should be used for reference to help with syncing, so always make sure you are still recording some audio in-camera. Software like PluralEyes (Red Giant Software, \$149.99) or the built-in audio/video synchronization tool in Final Cut Pro X make this a snap.

Roland R-05 | Approx. \$199

Some would consider a cheaper recorder just as good, and they may be right. I've been using Roland recorders for some time, and I trust them. The only time they've ever failed me is when I've done something stupid like forget to change the batteries or not press Record. They are small and light, and have some nice pro-grade features like a good limiter and even built-in effects like reverb and a noise gate. The mic plugs into the top of the unit, which is good for sliding the whole thing into jacket pockets comfortably. This is a good choice for serious audiophiles.



Roland R-05

Tascam DR-05 | Approx. \$99

Like its predecessor the DR-07, the Tascam DR-05 records up to 24-bit WAV files, just in a slightly larger body. The mic plugs in on the top, but it eats up more real estate in a pocket. Consider using a belt clip with this one. Both of these recorders have built-in XY-patterned condenser microphones that are great for ambient sound capture or quick voice-over recording in the field. The price point makes it an attractive option for those who need more than one.



Tascam DR-05

Sony ICD-PX333 | Approx. \$52

The small size of these little buggers makes them a good choice for wedding filmmakers, and the price is a big plus. Just beware that they don't handle overload well, potentially subjecting your precious wedding-day audio to distortion if someone is too loud. You may have to set the input levels pretty low to get a clean signal depending on the sensitivity of the lav mic you are using, and it only records in MP3 format. A big plus is the built-in 4GB of flash memory. The Roland R0-5 and Tascam DR-05 recorders require an external SD card and MicroSD card, respectively.



Sony ICD-PX333

Multichannel Field Recorders

For shoots that require multiple audio channels recorded simultaneously, or if you're a wedding guy who wants to capture a strong feed from a band or DJ, you'll need one of these. I use a Roland R-44, but there are newer, less-expensive ones that do the same thing. Mine is still going strong, and I paid \$850 about four years ago for it, so I have no need to replace it. Here are my updated picks.

ZOOM H6 | Approx. \$400

Perfect for almost anything when audio remains the job of a one- or two-person team. The H6 can accept up to six simultaneous sources and has a built-in mic that can be used to mix with line-in inputs to boot. It has built-in effects, including a decent compressor and limiter, and the price is good for what it offers. Always use high-quality XLR cables to get the maximum quality.



ZOOM H6

TASCAM DR-40 | Approx. \$179

A trimmed-down but perfectly capable option for multichannel field recording. The DR-40 can accept up to four channels at a time (two XLR and two 1/4-inch inputs). It operates similar to the DR-05, so it's a nice pairing if you go that route. WAV with MP3 recording is inherent, but always record in WAV 16-bit at 48 kHz.



Tascam DR40 Recorder

There's just way too much technique and skill building involved with audio acquisition to squeeze it all into one article, but this is a good reference to get you going. Practice with different microphones to get a feel for how they sound. Try them in different places and compare the results. In time, you should be able to choose your weapon accordingly just by walking into a room and assessing the sound profile you need to achieve your desired result.

Whatever you do, never take audio for granted. It's every bit as important as the quality of your video images. The eye is far more forgiving than the ear. ■

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TO WATCH THIS FREE VIDEO!
SEE PAGE 8 FOR MORE INFO ON OCU TAG SNAP 



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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- + How to handle difficult clients in the initial consultation.
- + Tips and tricks for a formula for senior sessions.
- + How to close the sale with Skype sales sessions.
- + Getting your business started at home— a brief overview from start to finish.
- + How to build an Ambassador program with your brand and make your clients see the value.
- + Pricing and showcasing Signature Edits.
- + Finding balance between life and being a business owner.

GOT MORE QUESTIONS?

Every month we will have a call for questions on our Facebook page and Sal will answer them with real-world advice.



Image © Melanie Anderson

TURNING FEARS INTO...



Image © Melanie Anderson

POSSIBILITIES

with Melanie Anderson

As I look back on my professional photography journey that began over nine years ago, I can see all that I have overcome, all the fears and anxieties. I want to share with you four pivotal moments in my career that have truly changed my business—opening a retail space, in-person sales, extreme-volume sports and print competitions—and offer you action plans you can implement immediately.

Opening a Retail Space

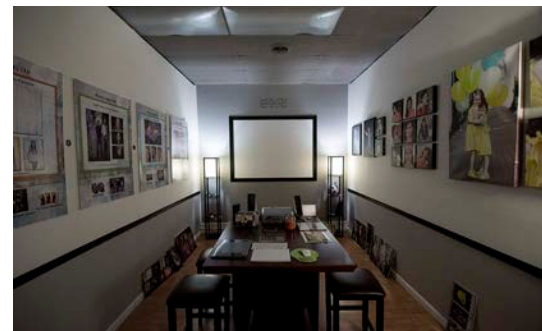
I will never forget how opposed my husband was to my opening a retail space. We had just moved into a larger home so that I could operate a business more efficiently out of the house. I did this for a year, all along feeling in my gut that something wasn't right, that there was more out there for me. If I continued working out of our home, I feared, I was limiting my creative ability and business possibilities.

Don't get me wrong, there are thousands upon thousands of very successful businesses operating out of their homes. I was lonely. I needed adult interaction. I needed to feel the energy around me, to be able to push the boundaries and create. I needed a retail space. It took several weeks of convincing my husband, who then was the primary breadwinner. But he knew not to stand in my way. We were going to give it one year, and if that didn't work, I would continue working out of the home. So with his blessing and my dad's support, I found a space in our arts and entertainment district that had been vacant for a few months. I explained to the owner my hopes for the property and negotiated the rent, and my retail studio venture began.

Having a financial responsibility above and beyond what I was used to pushed me outside my comfort zone. I began taking on family sessions as well as high school seniors. To build confidence, I went to every workshop offered and joined my state and national PPA. Over the next year, I was able to expand my retail space to over 3,000 square feet.

In-Person Sales

Yikes. I was putting all my images on a website and praying for orders. I had never heard of in-person sales. Then I attended a workshop, and my eyes were opened to the possibility. This was scary for me; although I have always been gifted in previous sales jobs, this was different: I was selling my work, not someone else's. I implemented this immediately. I knew I needed to make big changes so I could afford the new space. I did not invest a ton of money in new equipment or new software. I used resources that I already had, improvising when needed.



Images © Melanie Anderson

The week I came back from the workshop, I contacted my clients and said I wanted to try something new. I asked them to come to the studio to review their images in person, and then make a decision that day. I will never forget that first sales session. I was so nervous. I cleared off my desk, and I used my laptop and Photoshop bridge to show a slideshow from which they narrowed down their favorites. We sat side by side. I manually wrote up their orders, and they were double what my averages were at the time. Woohoo! I was hooked. From that moment on, I never looked back. With the increase in sales, I purchased a large TV and ProSelect software. Soon I upgraded to projection and created an actual sales room. I can't imagine not doing in-person sales. It's the completion of the service, ensuring all portraits created were to the expectation and satisfaction of my clients.

Extreme-Volume Sports

During my quest to continually push the boundaries not only within me, but within my studio, I tried something new in my area. Volume sports had been done for years, but about five years ago, I put a twist on it. I changed the posing, added textures and design elements, etc. Would anyone be interested? Our schools all had contracts. I continued to network and build relationships.

Due to those relationships, we were given a chance at a local high school. My team and I went in for photo day, and began what is now being called "extreme" volume. We had the players wear blue jeans, no shoes/socks and their jersey. I created 4x6-foot team banners and donated them to the school. I also preprinted 12x18-inch posters to sell at a parent/player night. I invested about \$1,000 in a gut feeling that I thought would truly put my studio in a league of its own, and boy, was I right. When clients tell me they see my work everywhere, they truly do, and our volume sports plays a huge part in that. We are currently located in several high schools, with our banners displayed in gymnasiums and on fields.



Images © Melanie Anderson

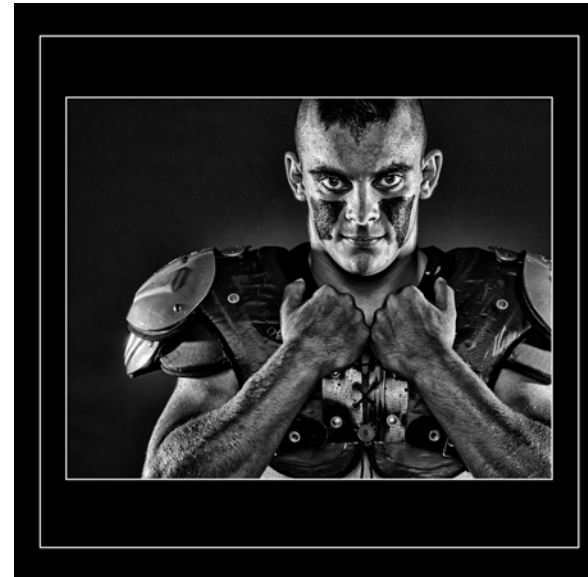


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Entering Print Competitions

When I entered my first print competition years ago, I did it all wrong. I didn't put a border around the image, I didn't size the actual image correctly and my lighting was horrible. I found all this out after receiving scores between 72 and 78.

I was so disappointed, but I learned so much. Print competitions are truly where I learned about posing, lighting and composition. Over the years, I have received several best-in-shows as well as Maryland Portrait Photographer of the Year, Maryland Illustrative Photographer of the Year and the overall Maryland Photographer of the Year. I would not have achieved these accolades had I not been persistent and entered each and every time. I've maximized these accomplishments by playing them up in my marketing. Clients continue to be impressed by the awards I receive. I still enter the competitions—not so much for the awards anymore, but to push myself creatively, try new ideas and provide myself opportunities to grow as an artist.



Images © Melanie Anderson

Action Plans

1. Join your state and national PPA. Your state should offer monthly educational opportunities for you to network and learn alongside other photographers. PPA members can take advantage of the enormous PhotoVision online learning library, where I have several segments that are free to watch. Start absorbing as much information as possible. Find like-minded mentors who are willing to share. Study their style and their business, and ask them questions—most educators are willing to share information and direct you to resources, which only better our industry. When you succeed, we succeed.
2. If you are interested in opening a retail studio space, study the surrounding area, as this is where I tend to photograph most. The environment and backdrops of an outside location are free; by choosing your retail space wisely, you open up many more photographic possibilities for your clients. Talk to the building owners, negotiate with them, ask for a sliding-scale rent to start if needed. Most owners simply want the building occupied, so make an offer.
3. As for in-person sales, I recommend using the resources you already have, including a computer and slideshow software. Talk to your clients. Explain that you want to complete their portrait experience by offering in-person sales, which is a service provided by professional photographers. You will be meeting in your studio, your home or their home, whatever works best for you and your business. Watch as many tutorials as you can to understand the verbiage you need to be using. Educate your clients from the moment the phone rings on what to expect during a sales sessions. Check out my video posted last month on BehindtheShutter.com in which I walk you through my sales room and how I communicate with clients.
4. To get started in extreme-volume sports, contact a team. Post on social media that you are looking for anyone involved in sports. Be specific. List all the high school sports played in your area. This is a call to action requesting comment from parents involved with youth sports. Contact posters privately, asking for specifics about teams, players and important contact people.
5. Enter as many print competitions as you can. ShutterFest is a great resource for information on print competitions as well as local guilds and state and national professional photographers associations. Study guidelines and previous entries for a firm understanding of how and what to enter. Learn as much as you can and attend competitions as often as you can. I have learned more about posing, lighting and composition from print competitions than any other source. If you truly want to improve, enter your work. Put yourself out there. Be open to criticism, and ask questions of the judges so you understand the scores.



Image © Melanie Anderson

I wouldn't be where I am today if I'd caved into fears and anxieties. I almost crave those feelings now: When I push through those thoughts, the other side is filled with possibilities and opportunities.

I encourage you to listen to your gut, that yearning you feel within when you are afraid and anxious. Ask yourself, "What's the worst that could happen?" You never know until you try. Don't fear failure. The more you fail, the more lessons you learn, the more possibilities you find. Continue to educate yourself and dream big. ■



Melanie Anderson is an award-winning photographer and wife to her husband of 20 years, Bill, and a mother to their four children, Sarah, Emily, Kayla and Billy. Anderson Photographs is located in the Arts & Entertainment District of downtown Hagerstown, Maryland.

Melanie is a Certified Professional Photographer who received her Photographic Craftsman degree in February 2015. Melanie is passionate about one-on-one mentoring and works diligently to provide educational resources and workshops to fellow photographers through Anderson Education. Learn more at AndersonPhotographs.com.

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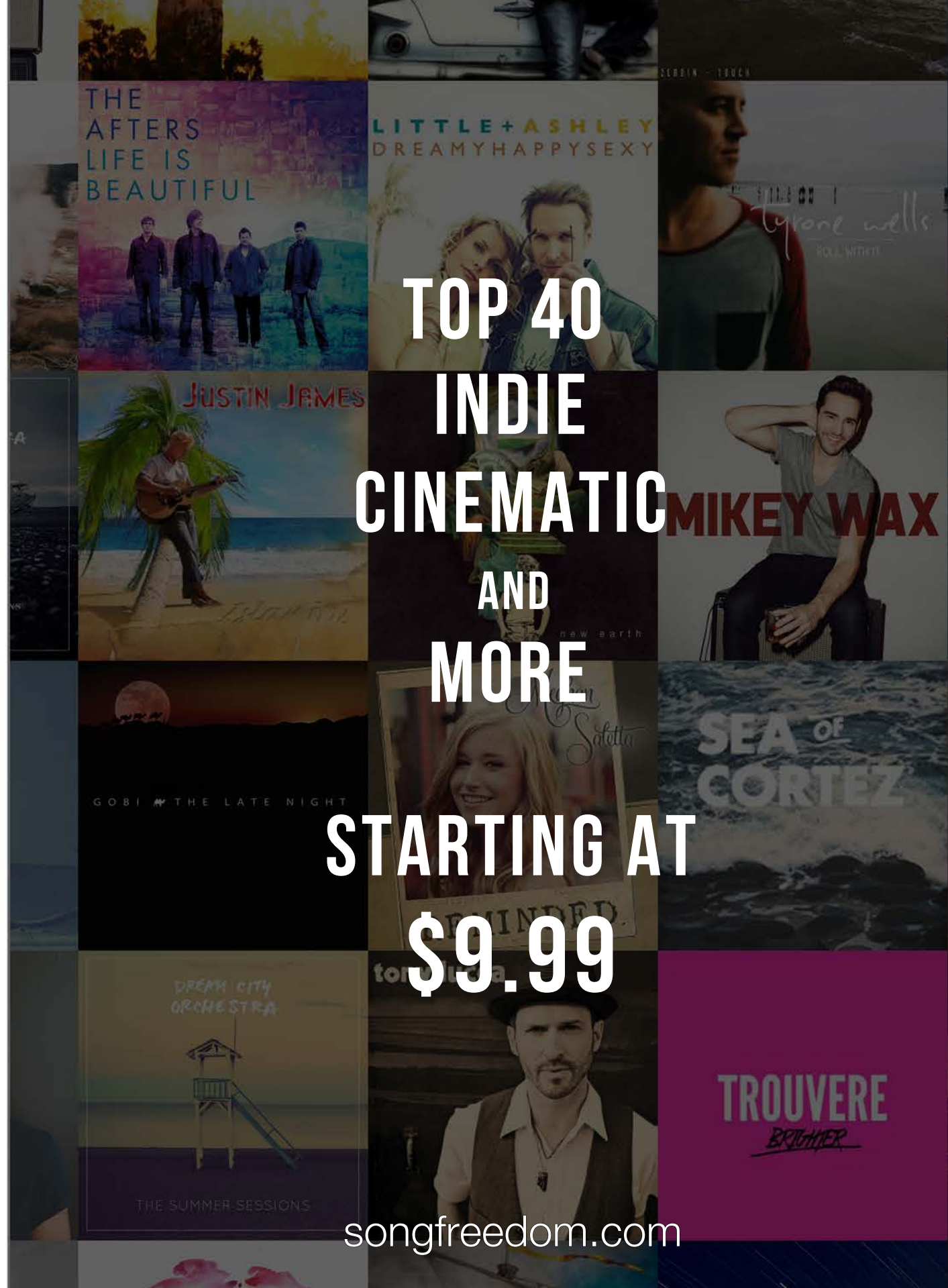




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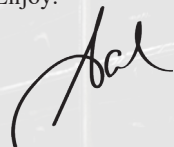
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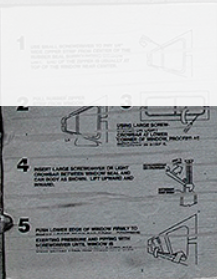
INSPIRATIONS

— your best shots —

Put 10 photographers in a room and ask them to shoot a paperclip, and there's no telling what will happen. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is why I love being a photographer. We all see the world in our own special way. Ultimately, though, nothing is truly new or unique. Everything is inspired by something that came before. In that spirit, this month we asked you, our readers, to submit some work you thought would inspire your peers. What you gave us was inspiring for sure. Enjoy.



— SAL CINCOTTA
Editor-In-Chief



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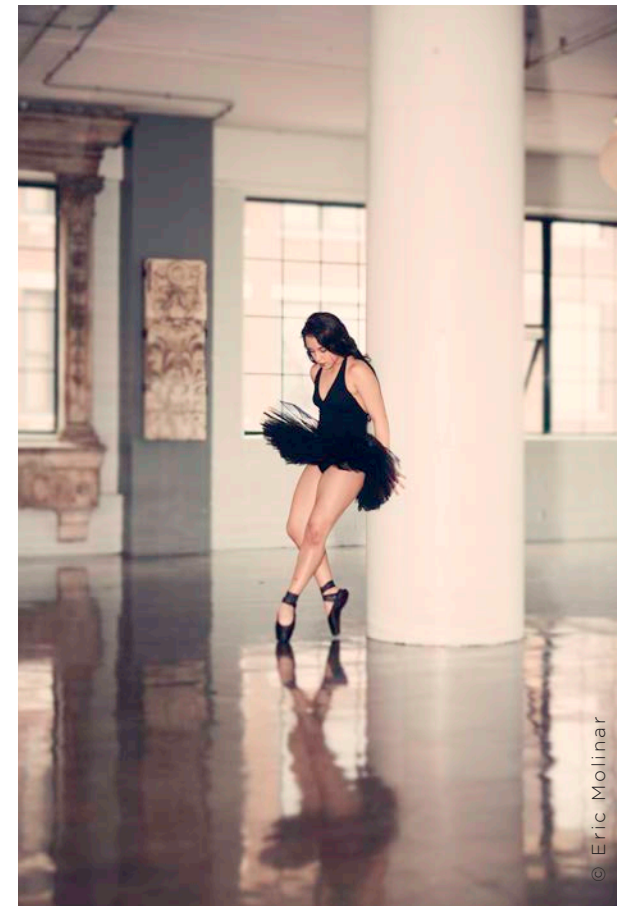
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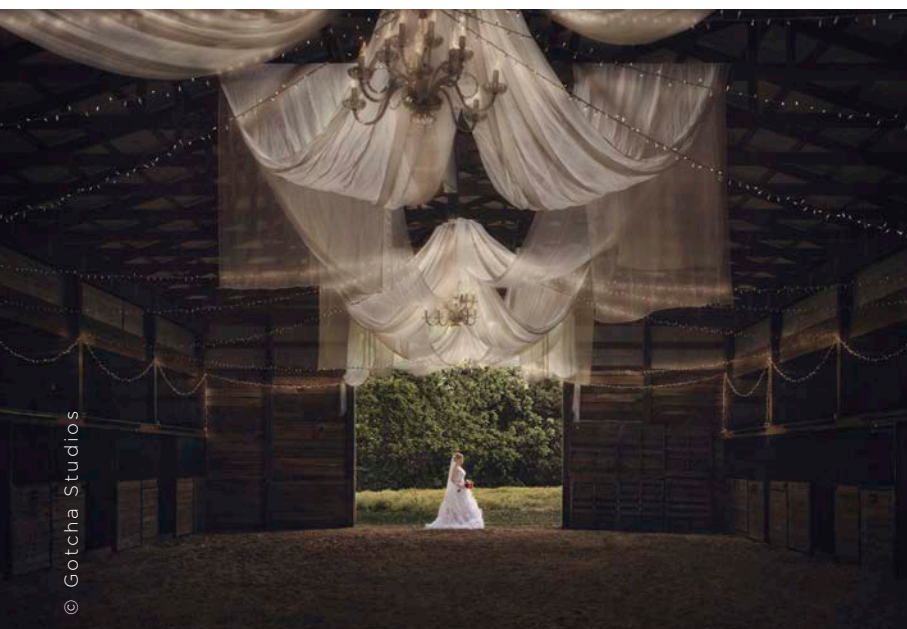
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