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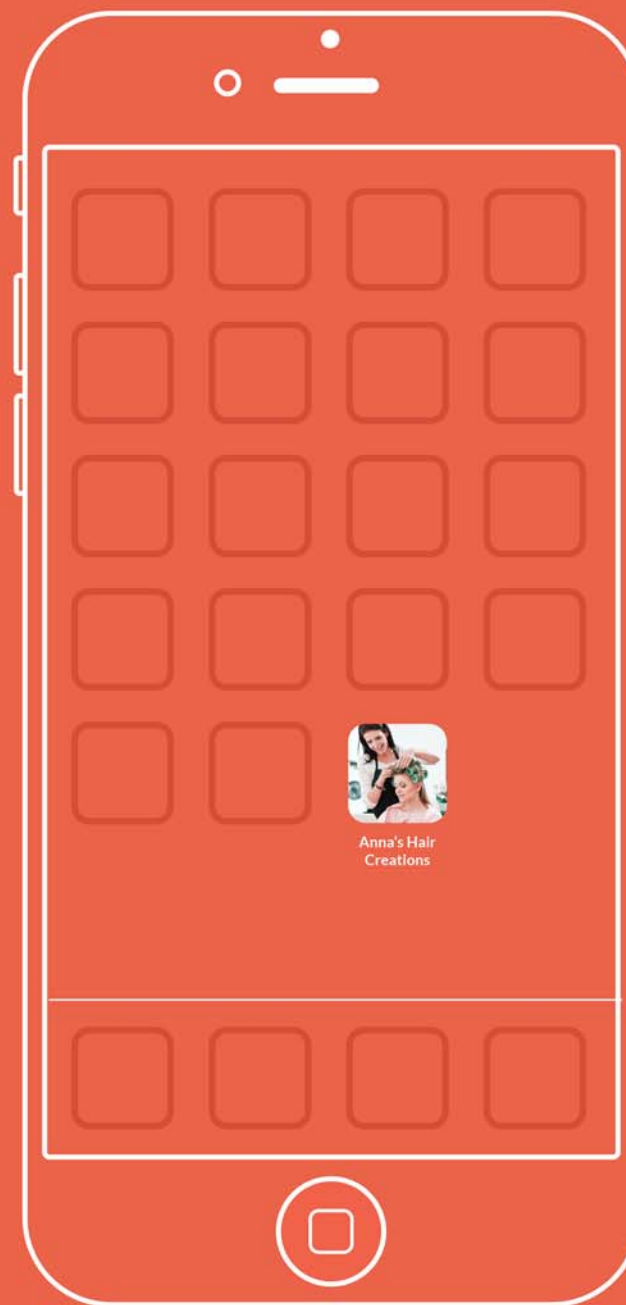
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Shutter Magazine is about photography education. Our goal is to provide current, insightful, and in-depth educational content for today's professional wedding and portrait photographer. Shutter Magazine uses the latest technologies to deliver information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

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LAUNCH POINT

A message from the editor-in-chief



Families *around the world* need portraits.
The question is...
Do you know how to connect with them?

- Sal Cincotta

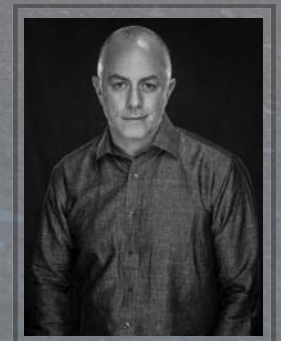


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FROM

THE HOBBY LEVEL TO
THE PRO LEVEL

with Craig LaMere

One of the coolest parts of photography is its huge variety of genres and disciplines. There's an endless supply of subject matter out in the world to fulfill your creative needs. It's actually a little overwhelming for people who want to take their shooting from the hobby level to the pro level. This month, I share three things to consider if you're thinking of taking the leap—or if you already have.



NEVER TOO LATE TO START

This coming January, I will have been shooting for six years. Before becoming a photographer, I had been a very unhappy commercial insurance agent for 10 years. I knew I wanted out of the business—it was the most unrewarding thing I had ever done. I had always been a creative person, and I was about as fulfilled doing insurance as a rocket scientist who only lights bottle rockets.

I needed a creative outlet from insurance. Because I had always liked photography, I decided a camera would be my outlet. So I went to Costco and bought a Canon Rebel kit that came with two lenses and a bag. And with that, at the age of 39, I began my incredibly amazing, badass photography journey.

I hear all the time from people who feel they are running out of time to make their mark or to really do well in our industry, and that just never rings true. Photography is one of the few industries that are age proof as long as you can produce sellable images. Some of the most respected shooters in the industry are well into their forties and beyond. Do not feel because you are a certain age that becoming a professional shooter is out of the realm of possibility. It's like anything else: If you start a little late, you just have to work a little harder to catch up. It can be done. I can attest to it.





FIND YOUR SUBJECT AS FAST AS YOU CAN

Since I had absolutely no formal training or knowledge, I put my new camera on the green “P” and I shot rocks. OK, I shot sagebrush, trees, and mountains as well. I didn’t have a clue about genres, so I just kept shooting what felt right at the time, hence the nature images. Then, after a while, I started shooting buildings and other things that had cool angles. I was happy with how things were going, but I knew neither subject really was totally for me. One day I got really brave and decided it was time to point my lens at a human. As soon as I started photographing people, I knew that was for me; I was totally bitten by the photography bug.

Portraiture was my genre. But I soon realized I did not have the skills set to shoot babies and kids. I couldn’t relate to them—or their parents. After shooting a few terrible sessions, I decided my time and energy were going to be better spent focusing on subjects I could do a good job with.

When you are a hobby shooter, you have the luxury of shooting anything and everything that strikes your fancy. When you make that move to shooting to pay your bills, the focus has to be much more precise because your recreation just became your occupation. Finding out what I was super bad at shooting was one of the best lessons I learned early on. It allowed me to excel at what I did well.

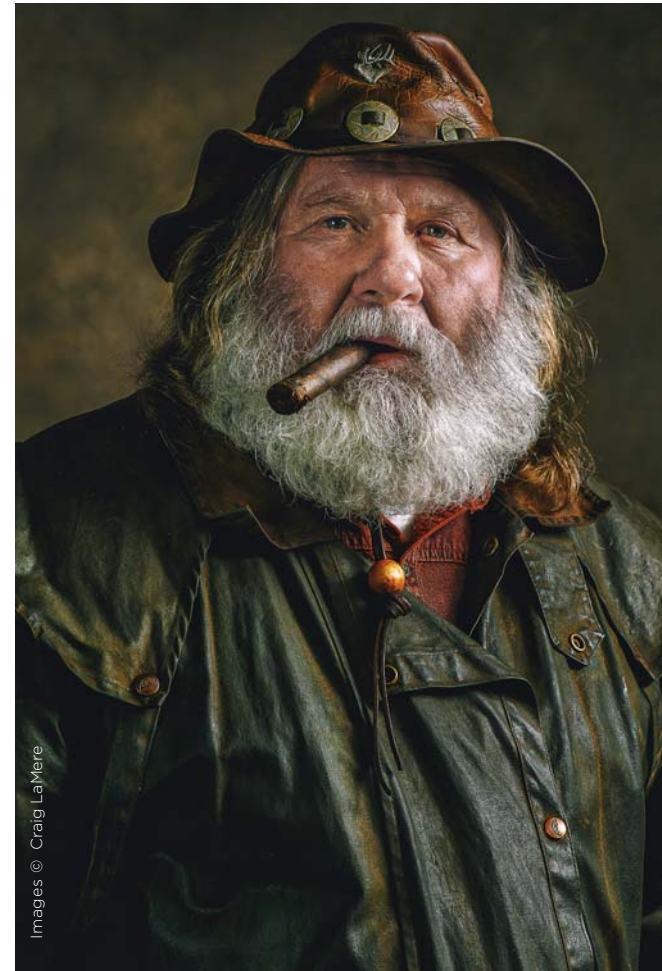




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Image © Craig LaMere

CHOSING THE RIGHT CLIENT FOR YOU

A lot of people think any and all business is good. Actually, any and all business can be the worst thing that can ever happen to you if it is the wrong client for you and your business. I know firsthand of the train wrecks that occur when you say yes to clients you know you should say no to.

Just like in regular life, you are drawn to certain kinds of people you want to spend time with. You're not a good match with every client. Maybe your client is way more conservative than you. Maybe you're too wild for them. Whatever the circumstances, trying to fit a square peg in a round hole can be the worst idea ever.

THE PREBOOKING CONSULTATION

The very best time to find out if a client is the right one for you is during the prebooking consultation. I have a few goals in mind with the consult. I go over locations and clothes, show them my product lines and, most importantly, find out if we are a good match.

When I meet my prospective clients, I wear what I typically wear on shoots, which means very casual—unless we are meeting about a wedding (believe it or not, I do wear long pants to shoot weddings). I'm dressed in my official Moz uniform, which is flip-flops, shorts and a Moz t-shirt—which means my prospective clients get to see both of my tattoo-covered arms.



Image © Craig LaMere

TURNING AWAY CLIENTS?!

Nine out of 10 of my consults go just fine, and we book and have the best time ever. But there is that rare 10 percent where I feel I will not be able to deliver what prospective clients are expecting, or I feel they are going to be far too demanding than I want to deal with, and I decide not to take them on. So I don't. When I turn clients down, I thank them for the opportunity to meet with them, then tell them I do not feel I can provide what they need. Because of the investment they're making, I want to make sure they get what they want. I offer to refer them to other shooters who might be a better fit.

The consult is not a one-way street, by any means. There are also those times afterward when I hear, "We will get back with you." Which means I just got fired.

The jump from hobby shooter to professional shooter can be a scary one. I knew it was for me when I decided I was going to be a professional portrait artist. I hope these tips help smooth your transition and give you some good food for thought as you start your professional journey. ■



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

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Creating and Marketing ●
a Stylized **Wedding Shoot**

with Michael Anthony





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Four years ago, as a new wedding photographer with a small portfolio and very little new clientele coming through the door, there were two things I was always insecure about when it came to connecting with my ideal clients. The first was how to get people to hire us for their wedding if we did not have images that show what we are able to do for them. The second was how to get vendors to refer us if we have no images of us working with them.

In order to sell it, you have to show it. But without a solid portfolio, how were we going to show clients what we could make for them? The answer was to create a stylized wedding shoot to showcase not only what we could do for potential clients, but also to help us connect with new vendors that could turn into a steady source of referrals.

Now, many people associate stylized shoots with lavish details, trendy poses and wide-open apertures. Our style of photography has never been focused on any of the current trend of glorified wedding detail shots. We have never booked a bride because of a cool shot we took of shoes, rings or a centerpiece. We do shoot these things for our clients, but we do not showcase them. Many photographers do have clientele who look for this style of photography, but it is important that you plan your shoot for your ideal clientele so that your marketing plan becomes more effective.

Now, before I go into how to organize a stylized wedding shoot, I want to clarify a question I know will be on some readers' minds. Is it a good idea to show potential clients a stylized wedding session as part of your portfolio?

Yes, it absolutely is. You are showcasing what you are able to do for them creatively. There has never been a photo that we have taken during a styled shoot that we were not able to take on a wedding day if given the same exact circumstances. Look at large brands. Do clothing companies show professional models in their ads in amazing locations, or nonmodels walking through the supermarket without professional hair and makeup? Huge brands put their products in the best light, and your brand should be no exception.

The purpose of a stylized wedding shoot is to show a bride and groom what you are able to do with your photographic skill. There is nothing wrong with telling them that the photos were from an inspiration shoot, but you don't need to feel obligated to.

Now, let's talk about the steps for creating the shoot. Keep in mind that there should always be running documentation to keep the shoot organized.

Step 1

Choose Your Theme

A stylized shoot needs to have a central theme. I am not talking about just the details. I am talking about the shoot overall. Is the shoot high fashion? Is it Hollywood glam? A theme can be driven by a shoot location, or even by the attire of the models. The trick is to have a starting point in mind so you can get inspired to create, which brings me to Step 2.

Step 2

Gather Inspiration

Inspiration for your shoot can come from anywhere, not just from other photographers. We recently did a Hollywood glam style shoot after seeing a wedding dress in a shop window that reminded us of attire worn in *The Great Gatsby*. That was the starting point. The motivation to carry that through to a shoot was what was important, and it should always be the same for you. Always ask yourself, "Will this theme spark interest in our marketing material and ultimately bring us more business?" Pull photos from the Internet and put together an inspiration board. My favorite place to find inspiration for wedding shoots is Pinterest because it's built entirely for the purpose of sparking inspiration for its users. This is also the step where you should set your budget for your shoot (some shoots can cost nothing, but I have found it to be a good idea to invest in your portfolio if the need arises).

Step 3

Gather Your Team

You are ready to get your team together. That includes other vendors. When we were just starting our photography business, we wanted to network with as many vendors as possible in order to get more referrals.

More vendors often means better photos, but it can also cause more difficulty in coordinating. That is why my first step in setting up my team for a large shoot is to reach out to a wedding coordinator. A wedding coordinator is a great source for referrals, and a talented one has a skill set that ensures a well-organized day. When we're shooting only for our portfolio, we keep the team as small as possible. Our typical team for a portfolio shoot is the dress vendor, models, and hair and makeup artist.

Check models' references before hiring them. You need to make sure they are going to show up on the shoot date. Feel free to reach out to past clients to model for you if they fit the look of your brand.



Image © Michael Anthony



Image © Michael Anthony

If you are having trouble securing a dress for a stylized wedding shoot, visit a bridal shop and look for a dress off the clearance rack that fits your model. We recently purchased a gorgeous wedding gown for a "trash the dress" shoot at a secondhand bridal store for less than \$200. Deals can be found, but it takes some effort to find them. Buy one a bit bigger if you have to, because it can always be clamped in the back.

If you are a seasoned shooter who understands the value in building relationships with vendors you haven't worked with, setting up a shoot with them is a great way to break the ice. Reach out to them, show them your portfolio and get them excited about the benefit of offering their services to you by explaining how you are going to affect their reach in your marketing efforts.

Show vendors a reason to give you their product or services. If you don't have a portfolio, then show them your inspiration boards and get them to participate in your marketing plan, which we will outline how to do below.

Step 4

Create a Contingency Plan

If you don't create a contingency plan, you leave yourself open to damaging your reputation with your vendors. Have a backup model in place just in case. You can make due without a rental company and even a hair and makeup artist if you have to, and you should already have the dress. If your model flakes, you are going to look bad if you don't have a backup plan in place. Contact a modeling agency to be sure you are getting someone professional.

Step 5

Shoot the Session

It's game day. Make sure that you are ready for your shoot. You are mainly shooting for your studio's portfolio and marketing material, but do not forget to shoot amazing photos of the products your team of vendors provided. When we do stylized shoots, my wife, Jennifer, first shoots for our vendors while I shoot for our portfolio, and then we switch. If you are shooting solo, leave enough time for both. Your shoot should showcase your style, and you should not be shooting solely in the hope of getting picked up by industry blogs. Those clients are not targeted, and your images will be lost with the hundreds of other images in the publication. Remember, you are going to use these images in your normal marketing plan, which will help you connect further with your targeted audience and ideal client. Use the same techniques that you feel make your style different. Staying true to your photographic style is the most certain way to benefit from this shoot in your marketing efforts. Trends come and go, so stay away from them.



Image © Michael Anthony

Marketing Your Shoot

Shooting the session was the first half. Now it's time to see the benefits.

Many photographers shoot stylized wedding shoots with the intention of getting published by blogs as the sole objective of their marketing efforts. In doing so, they adhere to the current trends in the wedding publication industry. You are doing this primarily for the growth of your business, and staying true and current to your style of photography is essential. Do not get wrapped up in shooting to match the style of publications. Doing so will result in your work getting lost in the crowd. We have been published many times, and I do not remember one client who ever told us they found us on a wedding blog. Our studio's photographic style is focused on creative lighting, artistic compositions and balancing our subjects with vast, beautiful scenery. Every time we set up a shoot, we balance two or three of those elements in every photo we publish from a shoot.

Your marketing efforts should be focused and targeted to your audience. If you worked with other vendors on this project, then start your marketing with them. Collaborate with any vendors who want to be involved, and use their reach to connect with new clientele.

Make Your Vendors Happy So They Will Refer You

The first step in your marketing plan is to keep your vendors happy. When we do a stylized wedding shoot, the first thing we do is make sure our turnaround time is quick. It's no secret that we outsource all of our editing to Evolve Edits, which was the best decision we made when our studio experienced quick growth. Doing so allows us to send off images after a styled shoot, and receive them completely edited and ready to go in five business days.

If you want happy vendors, turn their images around quickly and make sure they credit your studio in all social media usage. Provide the vendors with branded images (most vendors are happy to display your branding on digital images they receive) on a branded medium. Remember, they need to remember who you are. Drop off these images with a branded 20 x 30 mounted print. You are investing in your business, and this is essential for developing lasting relationships. We started off many of our relationships with our most favorite vendors by doing this years ago as an ice-breaker. Many labs offer a discount on branded prints, so check into your lab to see if they offer this service. Everything you are doing in your marketing efforts should be aimed at showing that you offer greater value than your competitors.



Images © Michael Anthony

Get Social

The world of social media has allowed us to reach more targeted clientele than ever before. Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram are powerful tools that can be essential to growing your business. Your shoot needs to be aimed at your target clientele as part of a larger marketing strategy. The goal is to get clients to identify with your style and individuality by associating your name with great imagery. Use Facebook's powerful advertising features to target your specific clients by creating a call-to-action ad featuring images from your shoot.

One of the reasons I love Pinterest and Instagram as advertising platforms is that both services are completely visual. Use Pinterest's new promoted-pins feature to showcase images from your shoot, and do the same on Instagram. Use the proper hashtags to help you get found. Credit the vendors that helped you accomplish your shoot.

The goal of posting your content in multiple sources is to create cohesion between your advertisements. Studies show that the greater frequency with which a potential client is exposed to your brand, the better the likelihood that client will identify it as an expert in its field. Your ad copy and headers should be tied directly to a blog post or a page on your website where your full portfolio and contact information are easy for them to access.

Get Published

I list getting your work published by industry blogs last because I think that you will benefit from marketing to your local vendors and to a targeted audience on social media much more than being featured on Sunday morning's wedding hair inspiration post by a local wedding blog. That does not mean being published does not have value. It does, but not in the same way you may think. The primary reason I like to submit to blogs is for the SEO benefits in the form of backlinks and traffic referrals. One of the factors Google uses to determine your website ranking in search engine results is how many websites are linking to your website, and, more specifically, how high of a rank that particular website scores. This means that a backlink from large, highly visited publications is worth more for your page rank than a smaller, less-visited website.

Be careful, because publications can use a "nofollow" tag in the coding of their website to tell Google to not give your website credit in search rankings, so do some research to see which publications do not use this tag on their contributors' website links before submitting your work to them. There are many other factors that influence SEO ranking, but these are some of the basics.

First, I recommend Two Bright Lights for submitting images for publication. This tool makes photographers' lives easier by allowing you to submit images to multiple platforms at once.

TBL gives you the option to submit to exclusive and nonexclusive publications. Both have their strengths and weaknesses. Exclusive publications do not allow your shoot to be featured in other publications, but sometimes have a much higher page rank than the many nonexclusive publications. Nonexclusives allow you to be featured elsewhere, but may have a much lower page rank.

Submit to those nonexclusive publications that are very well-known and see a lot of traffic. The TBL submission dashboard contains listings of them all.

If the way you shoot does not fit within the current trends of the wedding industry, your work may get featured less. Don't allow this to influence the way you shoot. Remember, your creativity is fueled by the way you see the world, so adhere to that, and your ideal clients will continue to find you. ■



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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Standing Out:

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Portrait Experience*

with Lori Nordstrom

Everyone's a photographer now. We all have a camera in our hands all day, every day. We've got creative apps that make our images look snazzy (and get the likes we all crave), and willing subjects everywhere we turn. I feel badly for those just getting into photography who want to go pro. It's scary out there. There is always someone willing to do the job for cheap or free, so how does the professional photographer survive? How does she quit her "real" job and take care of a family doing what she loves?

The number-one problem professional shooters face today is being the same as every other shooter. We check out what others are sharing and the products they're selling, and do what we can to be the same or even just a bit less expensive. So how do customers choose from among so many identical photographers?

The solution I've seen many successful photographers take is to offer a high-end portrait experience. Let's look at what that means and how you can achieve it.

The high-end experience starts with planning. Creating systems for your business allows you to be confident working with clients. You get to decide how you will do business, and I encourage you to think through the entire client experience and write down your processes, the language that you'll use with clients, answers to the questions they'll have, how you will conduct sales and more.

Marketing and Networking

How will you get the word out about your business? The quickest way to reach the clients you want is to partner with other business owners who are already in front of the people that I want to work with. Do some planning. Think about who your target client is. Who do you want to spend time with? Who do you want talking about working with you? Once you've determined these things, start researching other local businesses and well-connected people who are already working with your perfect clients. Make a list of 10 of these businesses/people with dates on your calendar to contact them to ask for a meeting. Start building relationships and brainstorm ways to partner together to reach out to potential clients. When people learn about your business through a trusted vendor, they are much more likely to remember your name and keep you in mind.

"Since there are so many different platforms for people to market themselves these days, you have to find ways to cut through the white noise and get noticed," says Ivan Misner, Ph.D., author of *Networking Like a Pro*. "If you can find it, a third-party endorsement will give you a powerful edge. It makes you stand out and lends you credibility."



Image © Lori Nordstrom



Image © Lori Nordstrom

The First Phone Call

Once you've gotten the word out about your business, your phone will start to ring. The conversation that you have during that first phone call will set the tone for the rest of your relationship with that potential client. During this call, ask a lot of questions and get to know your client. The more you know, the better you'll be able to assess her needs, answer her questions and solve her problems.

You'll also want to let her know what she can expect in terms that are beneficial to her. Tell her you'll be customizing her experience by personally designing wall concepts, albums or any other products you specialize in. I want to sell wall groupings, so I ask the client during this initial call to walk through her home and take snapshots of any wall she would consider hanging her portraits on. I ask her to text these over as quickly as possible, while it's still fresh on her mind. I tell her I'll be showing her my ideas for her home during our consultation call. After scheduling the portrait session, I tell her a little about the consultation call, the session itself and how she will view and order her final portraits.

In each of these steps, build up the experience and expectations for the beautiful home decor that she will enjoy every day.



The Consultation

I upload my client's wall snapshots into PreeVu and create some wall concept ideas. (The session hasn't happened yet, so these are going to be blank frames or canvases on her wall.) I then text my client something like: "Hi, Amy. I'm so excited to show you what I've designed for your home. How quickly could you be on Skype for our consultation?" Clients are excited to get on the call and see what I've created. If they can't do Skype but want to meet quickly, I email over the designs and go through them over the phone. During the consultation, we discuss the wall designs as well as pricing for each. I share my vision for the grouping, which helps shape our plan for the session.

At this time, I answer any pricing questions and help them narrow down their selections to the walls and groupings I'll be shooting for. This process is a game changer for when it's time for the sales appointment. Big decisions have already been made, and clients are excited to choose the images in their groupings.



Image © Lori Nordstrom



The Session

During the session, talk about things that are important to your subjects. You've asked a lot of questions and gotten to know them better through the first phone call and consultation. You can even do a bit of research on social media. Write everything down, or log it in your management software so that you can review before the session and again before the sale. The portrait session should be an experience in itself. Always be thinking about the memories your clients are making during the session. I want families to tell silly stories and talk about the things they love about each other. I ask parents to tell me their favorite character trait of each kid. They will tell you stories about each child that will lead to more stories, laughter and sometimes happy tears. All of these things will be remembered when they see their portraits, and the value has just been raised.

Another thing that keeps your sales in forward momentum is to chat about what you're creating and why: "You all look so amazing. This is going to be perfect for that focal-point piece in your living room." "This is going to make such a great conversation piece in your office." You've already determined where the portraits will hang, so reminding them as you work together helps solidify those decisions.

The Sale

The order appointment is the funnest part of my job. I get so excited for my clients to make their selections, and that attitude is infectious. By being excited and positive throughout the sale, and making suggestions, my clients stay positive as well. Even when they say, "Oh, how will we choose?" I can answer, "This is the most fun for me. I loved creating your wall designs, and I'll definitely give you my input on the images that will work best."

The very best part about planning through the consultation and selecting their wall groupings in advance is that the sale then becomes all about the images. They have already made all of those difficult choices about where their portraits will go and even how much they are going to spend. After having followed this process for many years, I can't imagine getting to the order appointment and expecting clients to make decisions without my help along the way. By the time they narrow down their images, it's just too much. By making those decisions in advance, the sale stays upbeat and fun, and it goes quickly. I like to have my client's orders completed in under an hour, and that includes chatting and snacks.

By putting a plan and system in place, you can ensure a high-end experience for your clients that they won't get from most photographers. This allows you to attract the right clients, charge and profit more, and get those clients talking about you to still more clients. ■



Image © Lori Nordstrom



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

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Start Your Video Business
— Today

with Joe Switzer



Image © Joe Switzer

You know you need to get started with video and you passionately want to, but you don't. You can't use the excuse of not having the correct camera and lens. Almost all camera bodies record video, and they do it well. It's a matter of pushing the record button instead of the photo click. Many of you don't use video because you're afraid. Fear of capturing interesting video and then editing it keeps you from trying. Fear should not trump the benefit of being a standout in your market by offering a combination of services that virtually no company is doing. It's time to offer both photo and video to your clients.

Keep an open mind. Today is the day. Adding video to your business can double your revenue.

You don't start at the top by filming a Hollywood movie. You can dream big, but you'll have to pay your dues along the way. You will have to work your way up before you can be picky about what productions you want to shoot. Keep it simple. Our company started with slideshows, followed by transferring VHS to DVDs, and eventually recording video and syncing it with music. Even today, the bulk of our business is pairing video content with music. Maybe your style will be using audio with video to tell a story. Our approach has always been to produce short videos, two to three minutes in length. People don't want to spend more than a few minutes watching videos online, so why spend a day or two editing 20-minute videos?

Keep it simple and say yes to everything in the beginning. You will develop a style and attract the right clients in a short period of time.

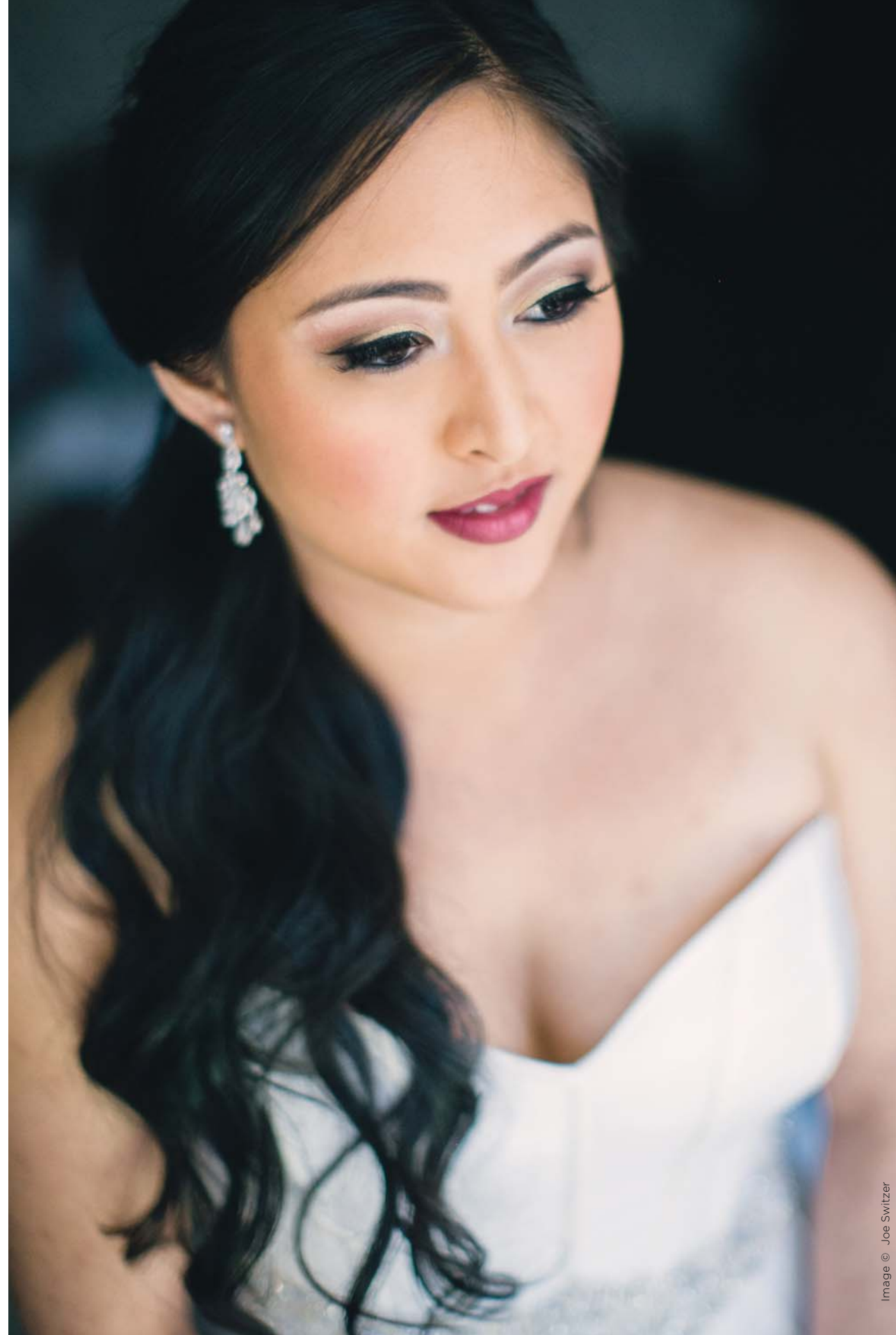


Image © Joe Switzer

Where should your videos live? Facebook. This network is on its way to becoming the biggest company in the world. Video is a big part of its success and future growth. In Facebook's most recent earnings release, video continues to be some of the richest and most engaging content for people and publishers. Facebook is focusing on getting more video in your news feed. The average Facebook user spends 46 minutes a day on the Facebook/Messenger/Instagram platforms. That doesn't mean you shouldn't upload videos to YouTube, Vimeo and your website, but if you had to choose one for now, Facebook is simple and gets excellent results.

Companies you work with are not going to be advertising on television and radio like they have in the past. Here is your chance to get into the video content producing game and help your clients maximize brand exposure. It's not complicated to upload and promote posts. Facebook's Pages app makes it simple to upload and promote content with your phone.

Basic Photo + Video Process

Let's walk through a past job. We had two photographers and two filmmakers for a wedding. Our goal was to produce a compelling three-minute music video.

Your clients trust you, and know you have their best interests in mind. We consider ourselves only as good as our latest project. Because we film only about 20 weddings a year, we are very excited on these wedding days to create something special.

The journey I'm taking you on is our same-day-edit wedding video that we filmed over two days, edited and presented in San Francisco. We did a photo/video bridal shoot two days before their wedding, and then filmed on the wedding day. The video shoots were captured with a monopod, tripod, track and Glidecam. On the bridal shoot (which we call "Rock the Dress"), we began with a monopod to capture close-ups of faces.



Time and Money

How much time and money is this going to cost you? You can spend no time at all by hiring a video person, or you can take video yourself and hire a photographer to take your place. Give video a try, and if you don't have the passion for it, then be the best photographer you can be and hire someone who does have the enthusiasm for filmmaking. Our Switzerfilm business is roughly 40 percent weddings and 60 percent corporate. On almost all of our shoots, we capture both photos and video, which saves us time.

How? Instead of photographing 50 weddings, you could do 25 and bring in the same amount of money. You will find that both wedding and corporate clients prefer working with one company that is in charge of both photo and video.

Don't worry about spending a ton of money to get your video business started. It doesn't cost a fortune to acquire the tools for filmmaking. You can get started with the basics for under \$1,000. Start with a small video track, monopod and a tripod from eBay.

We usually try to get the close-ups done while the bride has perfect hair/makeup, and we want her groom to be sweat free and fresh. After a few monopod shots, we got the tripod and track out to give us some variety. We use foreground to add motion when we can. For the track shots, we put the camera on the ground and on objects we were surrounded by, allowing us to move more quickly instead of using the tripod with the track for each shot, which takes a few minutes to set up.

We were able to go to two more breathtaking locations where we spent all our remaining time capturing our couple having fun. For both of these locations, we focused on getting wide, super-wide and mid-shots. Our goal is to always capture variety and make sure we all get our photo and video shots before we move to the next scene. We have photos go first, and then track shots, followed by motion with the Glidecam. It's always easier to take the wide motion shots last. We don't have a formula for the number of locations to film and photograph, but if a spot looks good, we capture all the footage we can.



Image © Joe Switzer

Know Your Locations and Schedule —

Have a clear plan for where you want to take your clients. We had scouted long before the day of this shoot. We gave ourselves about eight hours for this Rock the Dress session. This allows time for driving, breaks for the couple and unexpected traffic or weather issues. Video takes more time for setup than photo. You have more tools to carry, so always give yourself extra time.

For the wedding day, we start as early as we can. We offer unlimited hours, and our couples know that we are in charge of our hours. We arrive and leave when we feel it's time. On average, we spend an hour on groom prep and about three hours on bride prep. For this wedding, all the bride and groom prep was filmed with a monopod and track. We had a dedicated filmmaker for the guys and another for the ladies. We started with wide shots in the room and worked our way closer. We're constantly trying to find all the interesting angles in a room. If we can, we turn the lights off and move our subjects into natural light. We were limited with this bride prep shoot because we had about 40 people in the room who all wanted to see each other and not just sit in darkness. For the bride's prep, we get extremely close to her as they put on the finishing touches with 50mm and 100mm macro lenses.

Next up is the wedding ceremony. Other than the unmanned safety camera on a tripod in the back of the church, we use two other cameras and filmmakers. One filmmaker spends all his time roaming the church with a track and Glidecam/motion stabilizer focused on mid and wide shots, while the other filmmaker uses a monopod and tripod and remains in the front of the church to focus on close-ups. The roaming filmmaker covers all the angles. Always think ahead and position yourself for the exchange of vows and other key parts of the ceremony. For this wedding, we were able to make it look like we had a dozen cameras documenting all the angles because we moved around. Don't get lazy and think you have nothing exciting to film. There is always something to capture or prepare for.

The reception was very easy for us because we didn't film highlights with tracks or a stabilizer. It's difficult to fit reception moments in the video when it just happened only a few minutes ago, so we are always up front with brides and grooms by letting them know the same-day edit does not include any highlights from the reception. Couples are OK with this if you're straight with them from the beginning. We did film full coverage, with two manned cameras on tripods capturing the speeches and some dancing. Most of our couples purchase our full-coverage add-on, which is about an hour or two, and shows the ceremony and reception virtually unedited. This way, the wedding couple can go back and see any speech or watch the vows in their entirety.



Image © Joe Switzer

Toward the end of this reception, we announced that we were about to present the video. Guests surrounded the couple and watched the three-minute video with tears of joy and a standing ovation.

Maybe producing a same-day-edit wedding video is not your style. Maybe documentaries, corporate production or video self-promotion excites you. Remember that you already have the camera and mindset for this. You know what composition and lighting do for photos. The same rules apply to video. Your clients will have new reasons to follow and engage with your company. Start today and have fun with video while doubling your revenue along the way. ■



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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THE FAMILY & PORTRAIT EDITION

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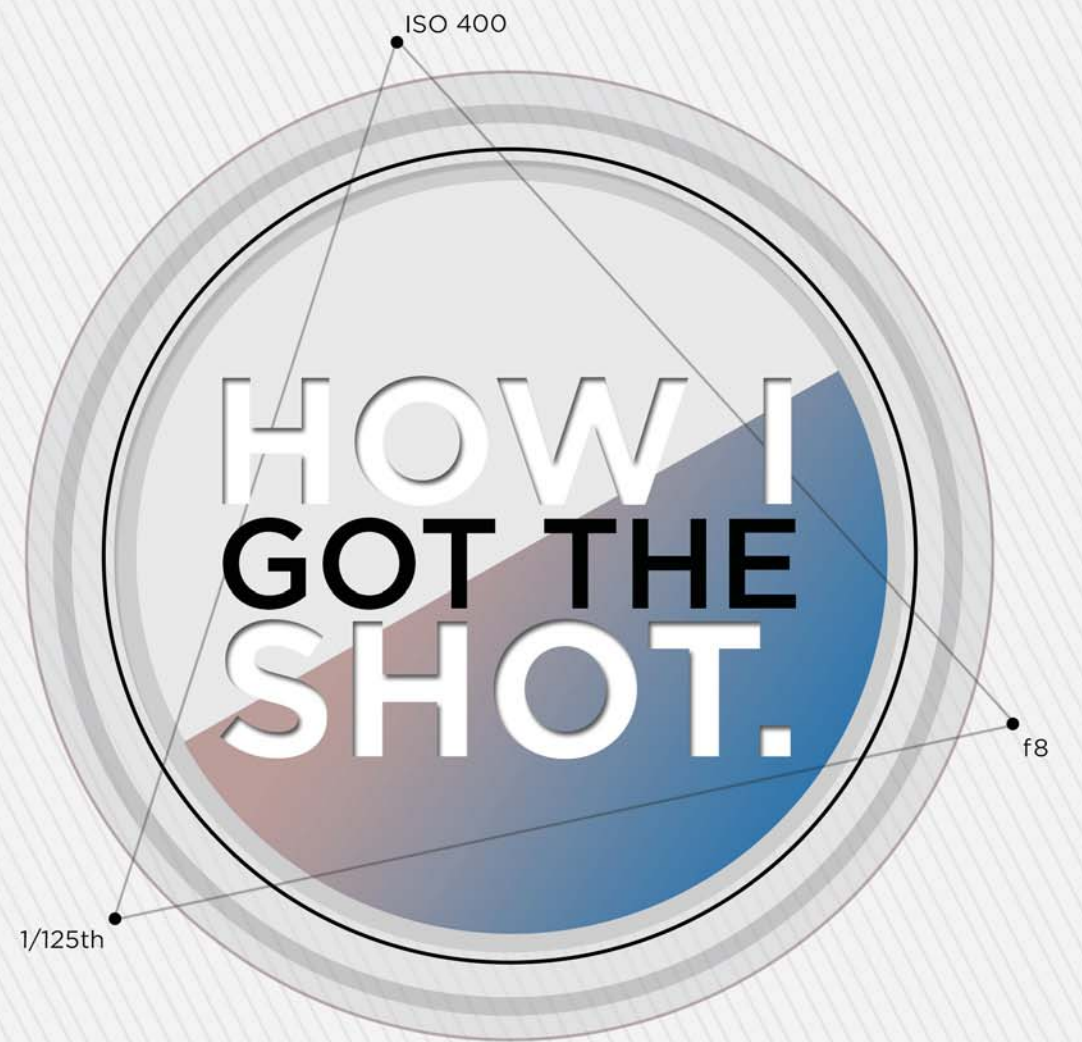
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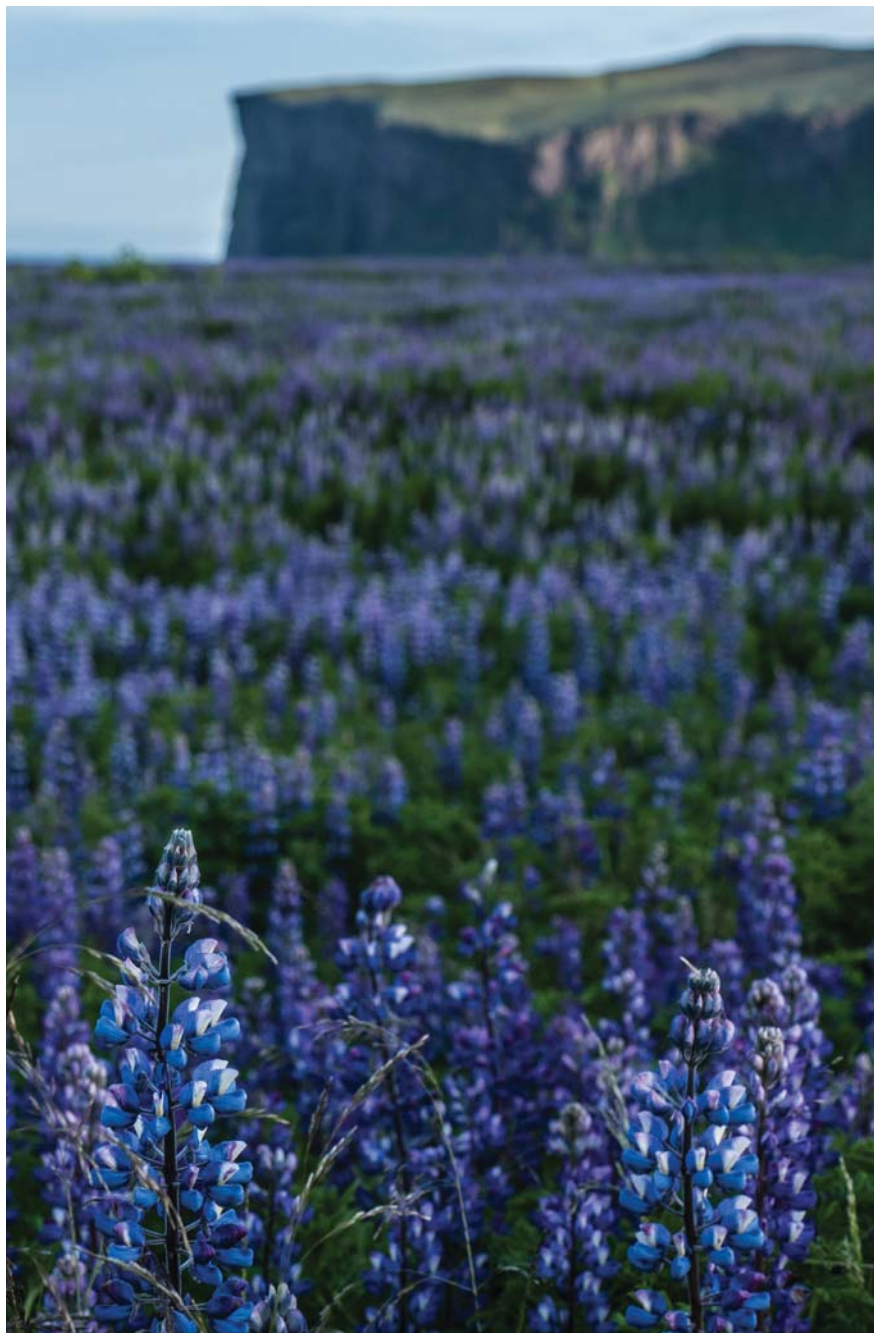


Image © Sal Cincotta

October is family portrait month across the country. Not officially, but it might as well be. The colors are changing on the trees, the weather is cooling off, kids are back in school. It's the perfect time for portraits. The thing is, you have to advertise and market it, or no one will know you exist. The best way to market and create something that people want is to get out there and just start shooting.

This month's image is a testament to that. On my recent trip to Iceland, I was able to capture this family portrait of Laurin, his wife, Melissa, and his daughter, Sophia.

Concept.

We were in Iceland. That is the concept. I mean, it's a once-in-a-lifetime trip, so what family wouldn't want something unique? Our mission on this trip was simply to capture a unique family portrait. Sounds easy enough, right? With all this beautiful scenery, how could we go wrong? Well, welcome to family portraits with a 4-year-old. We wanted to showcase the beautiful and vast landscape along with the family. In addition, it was going to be a formal portrait. Everyone dressed in their Sunday best. With a pretty solid concept, we were ready to rock and roll.

In Iceland in the fall, the sun never really sets. This portrait was made at about 11:30 p.m. local time. Crazy, I know. However, once the sun goes down, it gets cold fast.

Location.

This shoot took place in Vik, Iceland. I am not sure my images are enough to capture the beauty of this gorgeous location. Driving just a short distance, you see everything from fields of bonnets to huge mountain ranges at sea level to, finally, a Martian landscape of black lava rock. It was incredible.

So, as always seems to be the case on my shoots, something inherently goes wrong. I swear, it's like a bad movie where you know the plot but are somehow still surprised. Our first location is a wash. The location we think we want turns out to be inaccessible in a normal car. There is a lot of that in Iceland. If you ever go, rent a true four-wheel-drive all-terrain vehicle.

We are losing light fast. We scramble to a backup location where we think we can still get enough light, but I watch the sun get lower and lower as my ISO gets higher and higher. Even though the sun never really sets this time of year, it gets really low on the horizon. We get to our second location and love it—the color of the sky, the leading lines behind my subjects, everything is perfect. I get dialed in and frame up the shot when, suddenly, Sophia decides she is too cold and no longer wants to take pictures. "No! No more pictures!" her tiny lungs belt out. We are trying to joke with her, distract her, bribe her with candy, cookies, anything that will get her to give us one shot. Nothing. She is not having it.

What's a photographer to do? Improvise. We wrap Sophia in a blanket, and Taylor, who is assisting me, starts playing peek-a-boo behind the light with Sophia while I shoot away. We manage to get her to smile for just a few shots. The first frame was taken at 11:43 and the last frame at 11:45. Two minutes. Two bloody minutes she gave us.

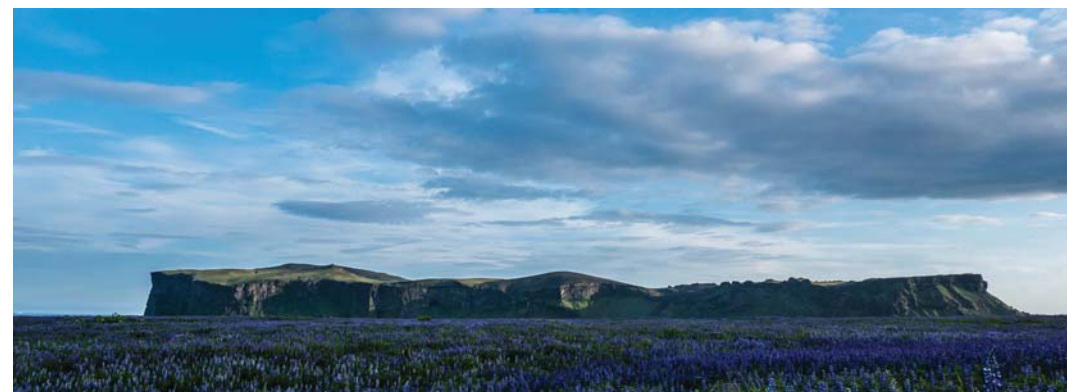


Image © Sal Cincotta



Images © Sal Cincotta

Lighting.

Natural light during sunset hours disappears fast. If you don't understand your camera, your exposure settings and how to use artificial light sources, you are going to be in a world of hurt in a situation like this. I thought I had plenty of light, and at first I did, but shit happens in the world of photography, and you have to be able to #pivot on a moment's notice.

This image was lit using the Profoto B1 and the Umbrella Diffuser Kit, my new favorite light-shaping tool. Normally I shoot without any modifiers, but I felt this method would be too harsh. I am glad I switched it up. We are all very happy with the result.

Gear.

- Profoto B1
- Profoto Umbrella
- Profoto Umbrella Diffuser
- Hasselblad H5D 1/125th @f8 ISO 400
- Hasselblad 50mm
- Gitzo Monopod to hold light



Images © Sal Cincotta

Closing Thoughts.

If it were easy, everyone would do it. As crazy as that sounds, it's so true. It was cold. Light was all but gone. I had two minutes to make a family portrait with a screaming 4-year-old. We have the best jobs in the world, and there is no more rewarding feeling than creating an image that was difficult to pull off. I love this image. I love it because of the final result. I love it because my client loves it. I love it because it challenged me to be a better photographer.

I hope this month's issue challenges you to get out there and push the limits of your own skills.

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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From *Weddings* *to* *Maternity*
with
Vanessa Joy

Among the list of irritating comments that I got while pregnant, one was “Oh, you’re going to start photographing babies now!” Um, no. Why? Maybe it was the hormones, but I still don’t see why just because something is present in my life I will have the immediate passion to photograph it in other people’s lives. I mean, I don’t photograph dogs or birthday parties, and I have plenty of those around me. Or maybe it was the photographer in me trying to teach others that different genres of photography are different art forms that need additional skills and time to master. Whatever it is, I’m not photographing babies—I even have someone else photograph mine.

But there has been a slight expansion in my business, and I’ve grown to enjoy it. Over the years, I have photographed a maternity session here and there for a former bride, but I’ve normally referred clients who ask for portrait sessions to other photographers. It may be because I was pregnant, so now I see more of the beauty in pregnant women and understand how to photograph them better. I think it’s more about convenience, though. I found a few factors that made it easy for me to add maternity sessions to my repertoire, which has been beneficial in more ways than one.

Here’s a quick how-to from my thought process and how I started getting my maternity work off the ground.





— Take Baby Steps —

Maternity photography isn't a far stretch from weddings because the focus of the shoot is still a woman. I could do without the groom and have a field day just photographing the bride in all her bridal beauty. Photographing women has always been something I love. I love making women feel beautiful, and out of all women who need to feel beautiful, it's the ones who are creating another human being (but more on that later). So it wasn't a far stretch from photographing brides to photographing that next stage in their lives.

Moving from weddings to maternity photography is only natural, and makes marketing easy because I already have the clientele. It's akin to starting a wedding photography business when all of your friends are getting married. Weddings are happening all around you, so word of mouth is easy to spark. One of the first things I did was send a short email to my past clients letting them know about my new venture. That task alone brought in quite a few leads immediately. I started booking gigs, built up my relationship with current clients and expanded my brand. All the hard work that you've done marketing your wedding business is going to pay off double if you target that same group of people for maternity photography.



— **Be Conscious of Your Lifestyle** —

Here's the kicker: I can do my maternity photography during the week so that I can continue to focus on weddings on the weekends—or (gasp) take a weekend off. Having a new baby in the house, I can't help but wonder what it will be like when she is five or six and wants me to come to her soccer games on the weekends, but I can't because I have to work. It's not that I have any plans to stop wedding photography at this point, but if I did, I'd want to know that I ready have one foot in the door. It's smart to have an exit strategy or backup plan.



Image © Vanessa Joy



Image © Vanessa Joy

Price Yourself Right

Portrait pricing isn't something that I'm wildly experienced in, but since I began after-sales a couple of years ago, I definitely have a better idea where to start. I took a look at my engagement session packages (you're welcome to view them at www.vanessajoy.com/engagement-collections), and based my portrait packages off of that. I also did my due diligence in talking with different portrait photographers in the area to make sure my pricing was comparable. I didn't want to be that photographer who was undercutting the industry. At the same time, because I have a higher-end brand and price point for weddings, my portrait offerings needed to reflect that.

I had to decide whether to give away or sell the digital files. While I do give away digital files in my higher packages or à la carte for my weddings, I knew that it wasn't something I wanted to do for portraits. Portraits are supposed to be hung, put in a book or given out as gifts. If I just offered my clients digital files alone as an option, they would choose that and the photos would never see the light of day.

Just like with wedding photography, it can be very hard to compare apples to apples, and it seems everyone simply does whatever suits them—which is great. But the same concepts apply to portrait pricing as they do to any other kind of pricing. You have to first figure out your sales figures and how much you want to make per hour. Do the math to figure out what you need to charge to make what you need to sustain your business and your lifestyle. (If you want to learn more about that, there's a short video that explains the math behind it here: <http://www.learnphotovideo.com/all-products/pricing-and-packaging-video>.)

Seek advice from other photographers in your area. There are also so many groups on Facebook and other amazing online photography communities (like this one) where you can go for advice from experienced portrait photographers. Construct your packages similarly to your wedding packages. This will be an added benefit for your past clients since they are already familiar with your package structure.





Image © Vanessa Joy

I'm excited to dive into the world of portrait photography. I know so many photographers who make a beautiful living photographing portraits and nothing else. It is a lucrative way to apply your skill set and photography in many ways to ensure a continual flow of business. And if you're already photographing weddings, it's that much easier.

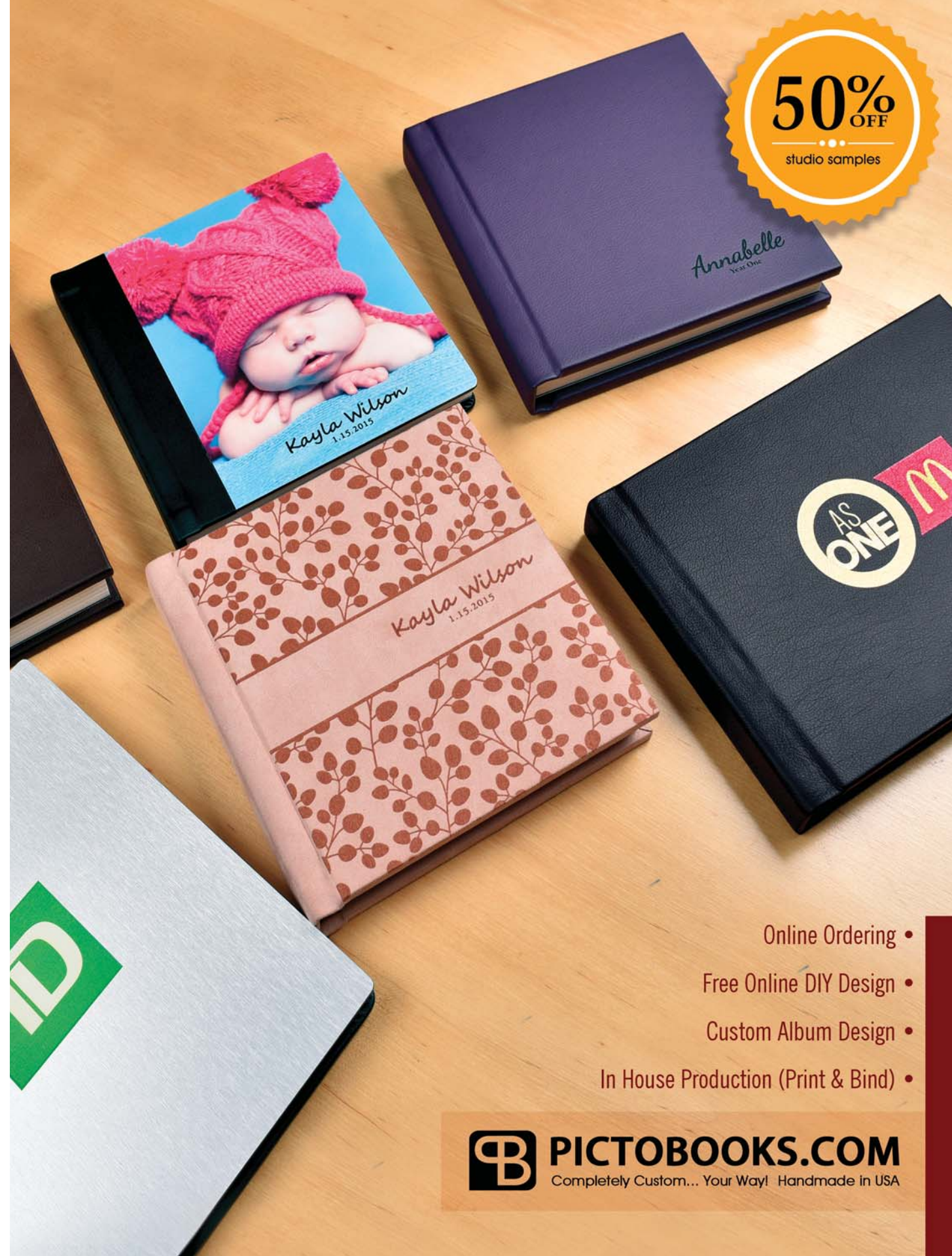
Not a girl or never been pregnant? Then you may not know that women, especially pregnant women, can have a completely disillusioned self-image that photographers get to bear the brunt of (i.e., "Can you Photoshop that double chin?" "Um, what double chin?").

Check out this video, in which I give you a few tips on the body parts typical pregnant women like you to discreetly hide, plus a quick how-to to ensure that your clients look at the pictures you take of them and love the way they look. ■



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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There's More to Growing Your Family Business Than Great Images

with Blair Phillips

A few of my most prized possessions are my family photo albums from childhood. One of the few things my family was diligent about was having our photos printed. It is really frustrating to see a monumental event in kids' lives being recorded with a cell phone. It's better than nothing at all, but not many parents get those images printed. They just spend their life embedded in a phone's memory. Fewer and fewer children will be able to reflect on physical photo albums of their lives. This has begun to drastically lower the importance of professional family portraits.

There are several things you can do as a professional to continue to grow your family portrait business.

The Session Begins at the Front Door

Parents don't often look forward to going to a studio for a session. There's the stress of uncooperative children and unenthused family members. I've been able to diminish this stress by allowing extra time before the session. I sit in the front of my studio and watch for my clients to pull into the parking lot. I greet them at their vehicle and offer a hand with children and clothing. This gives them the feeling that I am here to help with more than just taking pictures. When we get inside and get settled, we come back to the lobby. Then I take 10 to 15 minutes making small talk with each individual. My goal is to make everyone feel like a valuable part of the process.

By showing patience, parents are put at ease, and that's good for when they share their experiences with friends. Most business transactions are very rushed and lack genuine customer service. If you provide comfort during your family sessions, your business will grow by word of mouth alone.

Family portrait sessions and images have become very creative in the past few years. It is very easy to get caught up in the race to reinvent the family portrait, but I stick to a few basics.



Image © Blair Phillips



Images © Blair Phillips

My Family Portrait Formula

I have three different styles I shoot for in a family session. This helps ensure that I capture something to please almost everyone.

I begin with very casual posing to loosen everyone up. Families that may not be very emotionally close prefer this look.

Then I take the family outdoors for some environmental portraits. I style these similarly to a high school senior session, which means an edgy look. Many of my families never knew they could look so amazing. They love the results.

The last look I provide is one that has stood the test of time. That is the formal family portrait. This is often the one they choose as the main wall portrait. Everyone thinks you have to do everything so different in order to succeed, but formal will always be a great seller.



Image © Blair Phillips

Clothes Can Make—or Break—the Portrait

Nothing can deplete your photographic mood and ability more than terrible outfit choices. You can create an amazing image only to see it completely ruined with the wrong clothing.

It has been a long-standing tradition that everyone should match for family portraits. Some families have a tendency to match too much by wearing the exact same thing. That looked really good in the 1980s. I tell clients to bring way more outfits than they will need. If they bring a couple of suitcases full, I have a better chance of helping them find something that works.

I always send them examples of the kinds of outfits that work. That acts as a style guide. If your families are showing up with uninspiring outfits, you are not educating them properly. Educating your clients secures huge dividends during the sales appointment. You get out of it what you put into it.

The Importance of the Family Portrait

I hear families say all of the time that they cannot remember the last time they had pictures made. We seem to be getting busier and less emotionally connected. We have a duty as photographers to raise awareness of the importance of family portraiture. I feel like a politician in a constant campaign to encourage families to preserve moments they will never be able to create again.

When I meet potential clients for the first time, I ask questions about them and their family. This helps pave a road of opportunity that will lead them to my business. The more I remind people that I am here, the more business I create for myself. If you do nothing to promote yourself, you will most likely end up with nothing. One of our responsibilities is to keep the dream alive for future photographers. Think of it as paying it forward to them.



Images © Blair Phillips



Image © Blair Phillips



Image © Blair Phillips

Parents are so busy that they have less time to enjoy their day-to-day lives. Use the time you have with them to remind them why they started a family in the first place. You may be the only person who can bring them close together for at least an hour or so. During that hour, they are disconnected from the outside world and can really focus on being a family. Maybe they are a little dysfunctional, but they are still together. Encourage them to put aside their differences and remember that time together is invaluable. When family members put down their guards, they help you create images that tug at their heartstrings.

Family portrait work can also lead to growth in other avenues of your business. Family members will become high school seniors, get married, have babies and build families of their own one day. Through the experiences you help build, you will become a household name that families attach to some of their most cherished times together. ■



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

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Photoshop Actions

Work Smarter,
Not Harder

with Kristina Sherk

Working in Photoshop can easily lead you down the rabbit hole. It's often a time-sucking vortex. "I'm just going to fix this one last thing, and then I'll move on to retouching the next headshot." Uh-huh. Then you look at the clock, and somehow 45 minutes has just disappeared into thin air. *Poof.*

We want to make our clients happy by giving them an image in which they look their absolute best. This can be a slippery slope since it's so hard to know when you're truly done retouching a shot. The longer it takes you to retouch images, the more your hourly rate plummets.

That's why learning to use Photoshop efficiently is so important. The software's automation features are extremely powerful, and can save you tons of time. This translates into a higher hourly rate and less time in front of your computer. That's a win-win.

Actions are a series of steps that you record to an image, and once you've captured all of the steps on one image, you can apply (or run) the same steps to any other image. Kind of like running your image through a Photoshop assembly line, where it gets prepped with all the different layers that you might need during your retouch. Instead of doing all of the steps yourself (like creating adjustment layers or adding masks), you allow Photoshop to do it for you. Then, when you sit down to actually edit your image, you're not wasting time creating all of those layers on every image.

There are a few things that actions won't record, like freehand brush strokes and some drag and drop commands. A good rule of thumb is to make sure every step you add to your action has a menu command that coincides with it. One way I protect myself from this is to have my History window open while creating actions. Each command that you add to your action (when recording it for the first time) should have a coinciding item that shows up in your History list.

Let's create a short action step by step. Here's an image I recently shot of a good friend. (1)

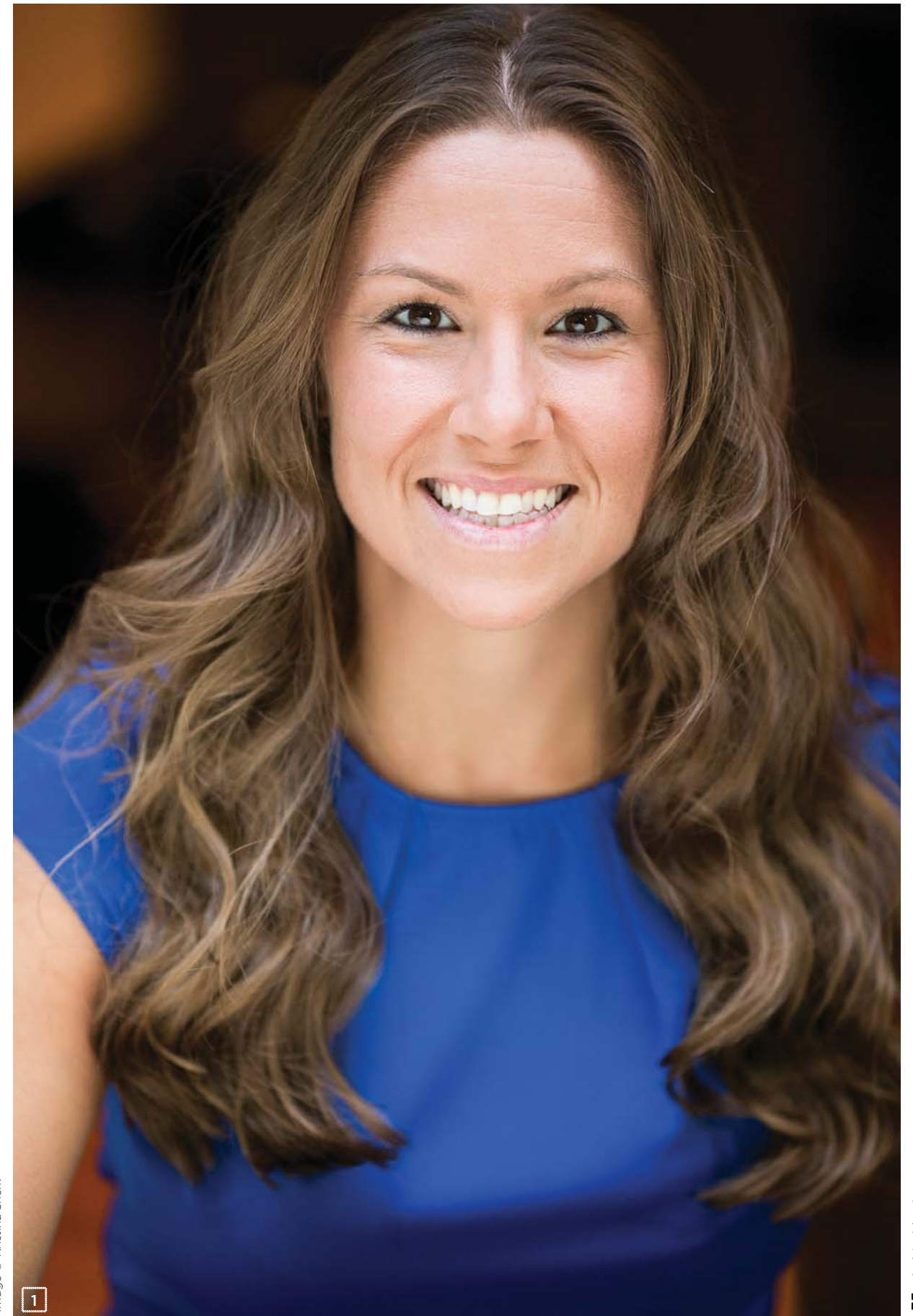
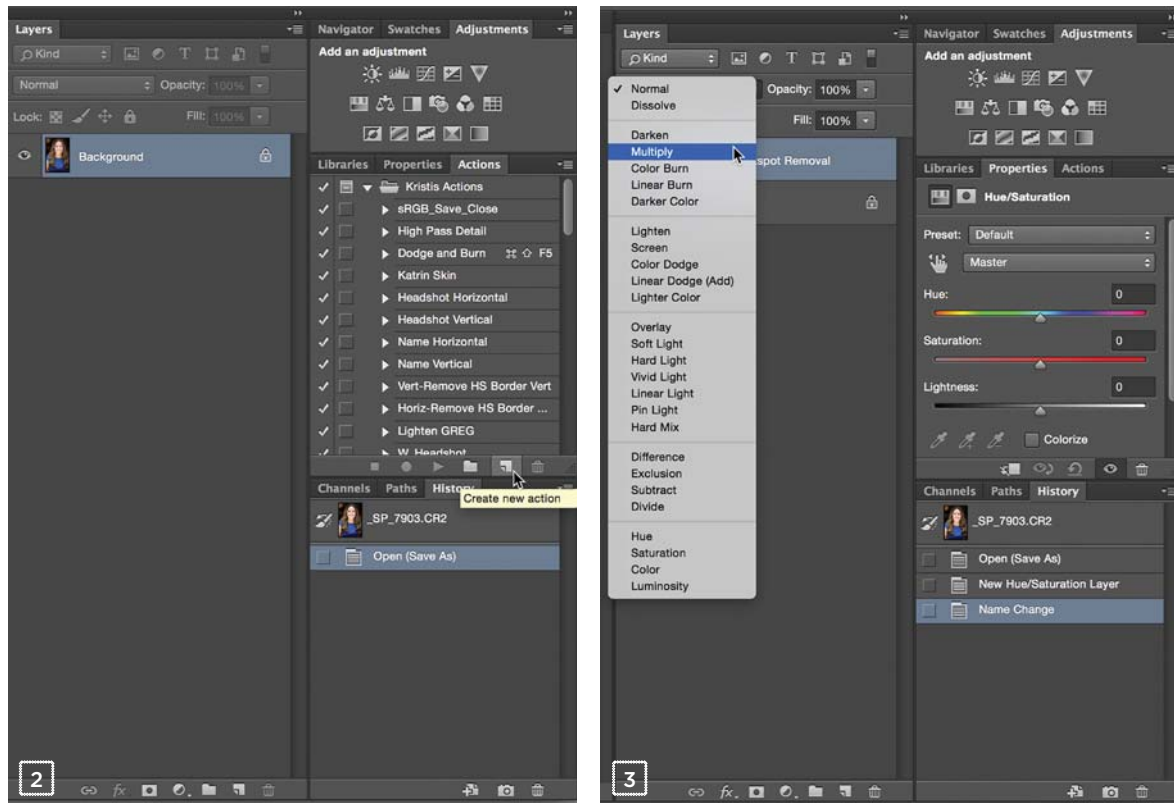


Image © Kristina Sherk



If you can't find your Actions palette, go to your Window dropdown menu and make sure Actions has a checkmark next to it.

I want to create an action that will tone down the highlights on her face, so the first thing I do is press the "new action" icon in the bottom of my Actions palette. (2)

Let's name it "Tone Down Highlights." Then hit the record button. From this moment on, anything you do in Photoshop will be recorded by the action, so be concise about your clicks.

Now I create an empty Hue/Saturation layer by clicking the Hue/Saturation icon in my Adjustments palette. I double-click the name of the layer and change it to "Hotspot Removal." Then I change the blend mode of my Hotspot Removal layer from normal to multiply in the upper left corner of my Layers palette. (3)

This should make your entire image turn slightly dark. Next, we need to tell Photoshop (and the action we're creating) which areas of the image we want this effect to shine through on (and thus darken those parts). Click on the white mask on your Hotspot Removal adjustment layer, and then click on your Select top menu and choose Color Range.

Inside the Color Range Dialog box, use the Select fly-out menu to choose Highlights. (4)

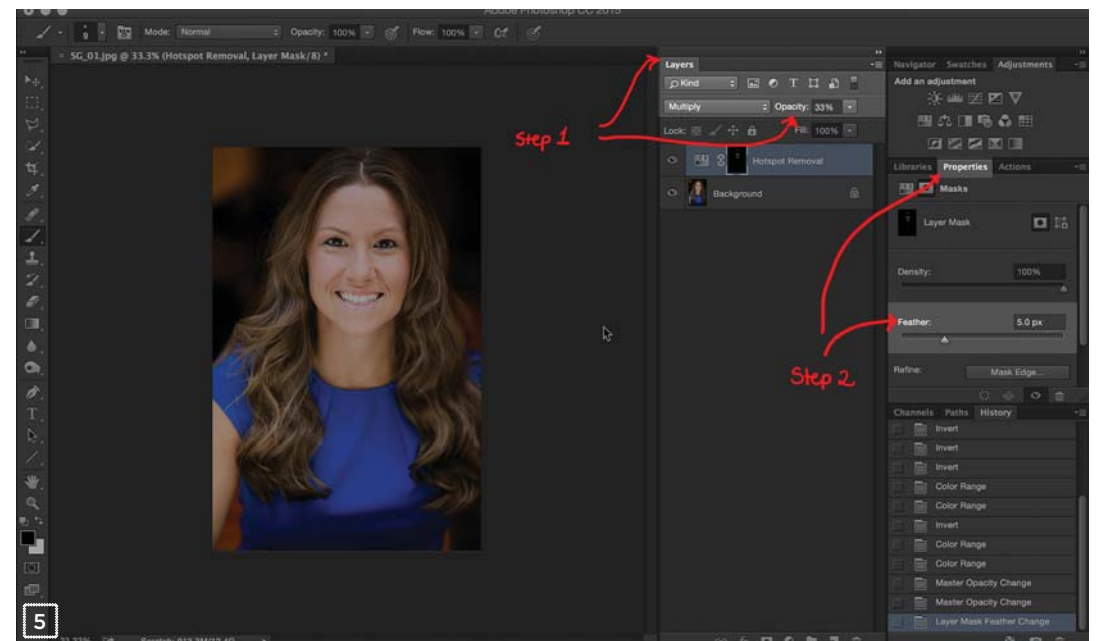
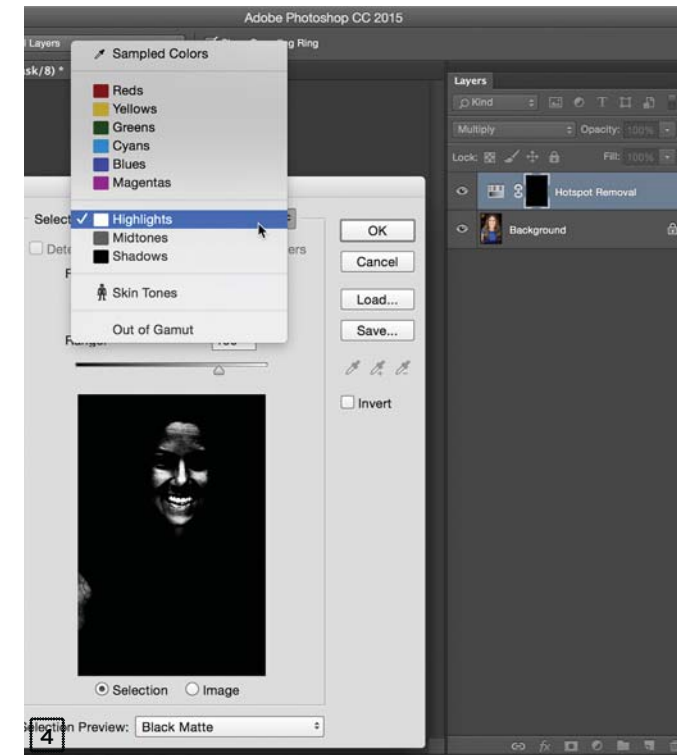
Make sure Detect Faces is unchecked, and set your fuzziness to 20%. Slide the Range arrow almost all the way to the right so it previews only the brightest highlights in her skin. For this image, my Range slider was set at 191. Press "Ok."



A note on skin tone: It may make sense to make two or three of these actions for different skin shades. The highlights on darker skin tones may not fall into the same value range as Theresa's. So if you created your action on a person with light skin and then ran the action on a person with dark skin, you may see no difference after the action is done running.

You'll notice that the mask on your Hotspot Removal layer has gone from all white to almost all black.

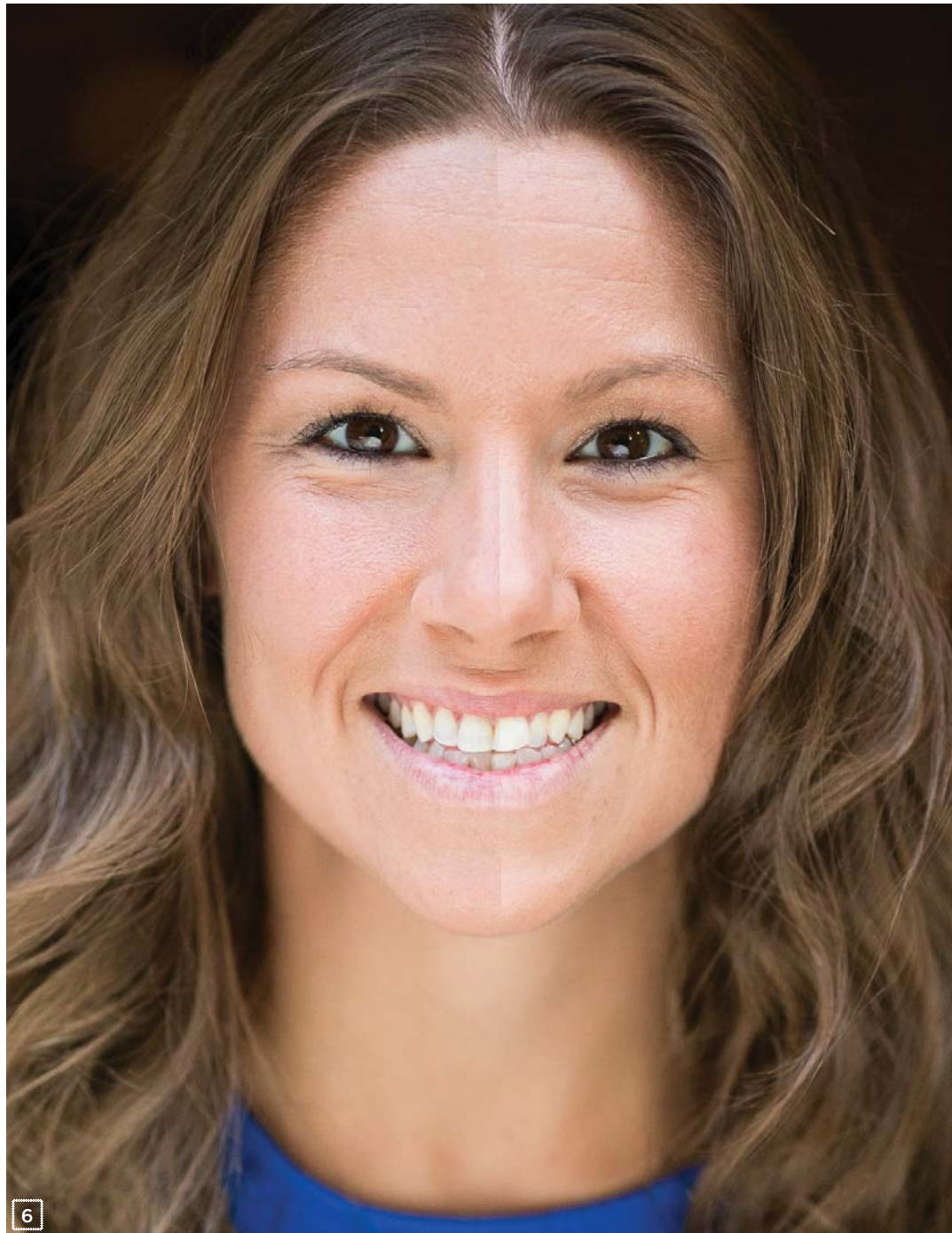
The last steps are to decrease the opacity of this Adjustment layer to about 30% in the top of your layer's window, and then feather the mask using the Feather slider in your Properties window. I gave my mask a 5-pixel feather. (5)



A note on file size: Unfortunately, the feather command is not a "smart" command, meaning it is not relative to the size of your file. This means Photoshop will still feather the selection the same amount, 5 pixels, whether you're feathering a selection on a 5-inch by 7-inch web image at 72 dpi, or a 20-inch by 30-inch Nikon D800 Raw file at 300 dpi. As you can probably guess, the feather amount on these two files would look completely different because of their different sizes.

You can now stop recording your action. In the bottom of your Actions window, click the gray square to the left of your red record button.

In this shot, you can see the left side of the face has far fewer bright highlights than the original (the right side of the face). (6)



To make sure your action works, delete the Hotspot Removal layer and run the action again. You should get the same result.

As you can see, we consolidated 10 steps into one button click that you can now use on any image in the future.

If you're looking to find an action you can use as a retouching "outline" to help keep you on task and not get distracted while retouching portraits, I've created a mega-action that does just that. You can download it free at my website (SharkPixel.com/store). My Portrait in a Pinch Action gives you everything you could possibly need to retouch a portrait without lifting a finger. There are over 250 commands in this one action. The only thing you have to do is brush in the effects wherever you like. (7)

Now that these folders have helped me retouch in hyper-speed, I can actually be productive and fly through my retouching. This edit took me four minutes and 30 seconds. Here's the before and after. (8-9)

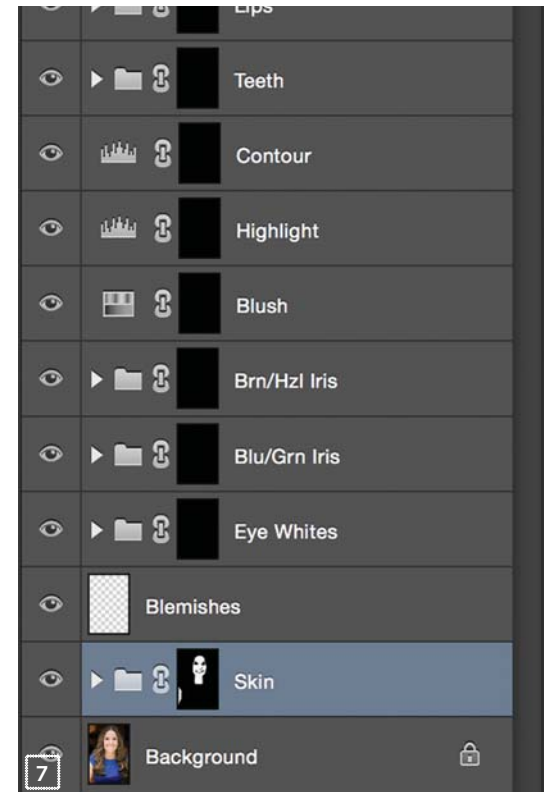




Image © Kristina Sherk

Here's a split view of the final retouched headshot. Not too bad. (10)

There are a million applications for speeding up your retouching using actions. I guarantee they'll help you become much more proficient and productive in your everyday retouching work. ■



Kristina Sherk studied digital art and photography at Elon University in North Carolina. She then interned and assisted for Washington, D.C.-based photographer John Harrington, where she learned the business behind the art. By starting as a photographer before transitioning into photo retouching nine years ago, she gained an understanding of her role as a retoucher, and also the aim and vision of the photographers she works with. She's able to consistently work within photographers' styles (in other words, she "speaks camera"). Her clients hail from all over the world, and include National Public Radio, *Sports Illustrated*, Time Inc., XM Satellite Radio, onOne Software, Cotton Inc. and Hasselblad USA.
sharkpixel.com

Focal length: 45mm Exposure: F/2.8 1/320sec



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“
When everything goes to hell,
the people who stand by you without flinching—
they are your family.

-Jim Butcher

Over the years with Team Cincotta, I have learned a lot of very important lessons—about business, life, working hard, and never forgetting to reflect on where you came from. I think the most important lesson I have learned on this journey is that when you set out to conquer the world, you can't do it alone. You need a team.

But it's so much more than just a team you need—you need *your people*. Your people are the ones who are there with you to celebrate the triumphs but, more importantly, never leave your side through the seemingly impossible times when the weight of the world is caving in on you. Your people will go to hell and back with you. These people are your family. And what better way to spend the rest of your foreseeable future than to wake up every morning and go to “work” with the people you love and trust the most? (I put *work* in quotations because, let's be honest, can we really call this life we live actual work?)

Finding the right people is, without a doubt, the number-one challenge we have faced (and continue to face) as a company growing at such a rapid pace. We have tried it all when it comes to the interviewing process—what to ask, what red flags to look for, etc. When we first started hiring for our design team, we sought perfection, people who could hack it for the long haul. We were very particular about the type of person we were looking for. In fact, we were *too* particular—we were in the pursuit of perfection right out of the gate.

It took us almost eight months to finally hire a junior graphic designer at one point, and that only happened because Sal got tired of wasting time. We were in a team meeting, and about two minutes before the candidate walked in for the interview, Sal turned to me and said, “I don't care anymore. Does she have a decent portfolio? No, never mind, it doesn't matter. If she has a pulse, hire her.” And with that, we finally had a second designer on staff—but she never quite made the turn.

Making the turn. What does that mean? What kind of employee was I during my first year? I was a worker bee. I took direction and did my job, but never really went outside of what was asked of me. I took initiative, sure, but was never able to see the bigger picture—to step outside of the bare minimum and start proactively proving myself and taking on tasks without having to be asked. It's a strange phenomenon around here with this team—you either get it or you don't. We like to refer to it as “taking the red pill,” to borrow the famous phrase from *The Matrix*. Once you take it, there's no going back—you're fully aware, you've seen the light and it's as if the world really *is* just a simple math problem.

Now, how do we get our people to finally make the turn from being an employee to become part of this insane family we have built? Like I said, the actual formula and science behind it is still a phenomenon to us. I believe the following key factors are what got the switch to flip for me.

Build a Family Structure

We all have fairly specific roles on our team: Sal, CEO, is the quarterback, and we, the employees/partners, are his teammates, providing support and/or defense for him as he runs toward the flag.

That's huge for us: setting a flag and everyone marching to the same beat in reaching that flag. Sal's flag last fall was to get *Shutter Magazine* on the shelves of Barnes & Noble. The team sat down and listed the steps we'd have to take. We had to first get the magazine to print, then market the crap out of it, then continue pushing to build our subscriber base—all of which had to be done before we could reach out to Barnes & Noble.

Your team leader, the head of the family, if you will, is the member of the team who designs your strategies and plays, a plan of attack to reach your flag. From there, tasks are delegated and executed until your unit has reached the end goal. For some, that means the end of one mission and time for relaxation. Those who are as insane as we are know there is a very short window for celebration before the next 10 flags have been recognized.

Strengths & Weaknesses

As an owner and/or CEO, you will find the most success from your team if you manage to the strengths of each employee. To help him find the strengths in each team member, Sal uses the Clifton StrengthsFinder personality test, which measures for 34 unique “talent themes.” Clifton defines these themes as “people's naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied.” Sal, our quarterback, has these top five themes: focus, achiever, command, strategic and communication. All of which play a large part in his leadership role within the family, as he is able to take control and make sure we all stay on the path to the flag. His bottom talent theme? Adaptability. Coincidentally, that theme is found in the top five of the remaining members of the family. We are able to quickly adapt when things go sideways to ensure we continue moving forward in execution of the family's plan.

Another point to the strengths and weaknesses of your team: Make sure to pinpoint each other's strengths. Build on them together; work together and encourage one another to be the best versions of yourselves. A team is only as strong as its weakest link. And when it comes to family, no one is ever left behind.

Honesty & Respect

What's worse than constantly being told no? For our team, it's having those around you always agree with you, no matter how bad your idea is. This is where Sal's second-generation Sicilian-by-way-of-Brooklyn personality really shines for our team dynamic. Outside of Sal and Laurin, the core team consists of a bunch of hormonal, emotionally driven females. Without brutal, raw, mostly pretty painful honesty, we would never be able to get out of our own way.

But how can you expect to grow as a person and together as a business without knowing right from wrong or a good idea from a bad one? It's simple: You can't. And you never will. During my first few weeks on the job, Sal told me something I'll never forget: "Suck it up, Zimmerman. Time to put on your big-kid pants—this is business. Nothing I say to you regarding the business will ever be personal."

With that honesty, however, comes the most crucial part of this whole family equation: respect. Respect for your boss, respect for your peers, your employees, your partners and coworkers. Most of all, respect for yourself. If you can't look yourself in the mirror and have respect for the person you are and the decisions you make that impact the success of the family, you'll never succeed. The same goes for the other side of things: If you can't look one of your teammates in the eye with respect, you'll never really be on the same team—so you'll never even be on the same playing field.

My team, my family—we're a fast-paced, well-oiled, borderline-insane machine. We each make up our own strategic part of that machine, and when one part stops functioning, the entire mission comes to a grinding halt.

As a family, you never give up on each other. And as long as you have a group of people that much in sync with one another, you'll forever be an unstoppable force. ■



Alissa 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 School of Photography. Alissa is also the creative director for *Shutter Magazine*. In addition, Alissa serves as Sal's right hand, managing daily operations within the family of Salvatore Cincotta brands.

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0:25:37 4K

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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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T^{op} Tips for Success
With Speedlights
with Michael Corsentino





The direction of your light adds shadow, which adds dimension and drama. This is one of the many benefits of off-camera flash. Note the warmth of the accent light on the model's hair from the full-cut CTO gel on the speedlight.

Image © Michael Corsentino

Take It Off

Achieving above-average results with handheld flash or larger strobes starts with getting them off your camera—otherwise known as OCF. I can't stress this enough. It's all about direction and distance. With your flash in the camera's hot shoe, you're locked into flat, one-dimensional lighting. This is because when it's fired, the beam of light from your speedlight travels along exactly the same axis as the camera's lens, mirror and sensor.

In other words, there's zero direction to the light. It's just flat, boring and typically results in a black tunnel behind whatever you're illuminating. I know you've experienced this, and it's not ideal. It may be what's called for during events, but in 99.9 percent of portrait situations, flash on camera is verboten. With your light off the camera, you have the flexibility not only to use a wide range of modifiers, which are impossible to use on camera, but even more importantly, you have the flexibility to control the amount of shadow introduced and the hardness/softness of the light based on its distance from your subject.

These are all significant factors that are simply out of your control with flash on camera.

No Sleeping on the Job

Nobody likes a slacker, especially when it comes to remote speedlights. Most handheld flashes have a built-in power-saving feature that temporarily puts them to sleep during periods of inactivity. On camera, this is no problem—a simple half-press of the camera's shutter release button sends a signal to the hot shoe, which wakes up the flash, and you're off to the races.

But things work very differently when your speedlight is used off the camera. In this situation, there is no wakeup signal communicated from the camera to the speedlight. Because of this, it's likely that your speedlight will suddenly and inexplicably just stop working. This gotcha can cause heart-pounding, head-scratching moments when you don't know what's happening or how to fix it. It's especially annoying when your speedlight is buried deep inside a softbox.

Making sure this never happens (again) is easy. You'll find the enable/disable auto sleep feature in the custom function settings of your flash. To avoid this nightmare, simply disable the auto sleep function, and everything will be smooth as silk. Keep in mind that you will consume more energy with auto sleep disabled, so have extra batteries on hand.

Living Large

For surefire works-every-time lighting, bigger is definitely better. A 7' octa bank makes up for a multitude of sins and is pretty much foolproof set-it-and-forget-it lighting. If you're looking for a sure thing with a lot of soft, broad coverage at a reasonable price point, the Photoflex 7' OctoDome with

two to four speedlights inside it is just the ticket. I used that very setup for the family portrait in this article. You won't be overpowering the sun with that many speedlights, but for those times when a sweet, supersoft kiss of light is called for, this setup works perfectly.



A kiss of light for this lovely family was provided via two speedlights placed inside a 7' Photoflex Octadome placed camera right.

Image © Michael Corsentino

Always Carry an Umbrella

Having a smaller, more portable, all-purpose modifier in your bag of tricks is equally important. That's where the Westcott 43" White Satin Collapsible Umbrella With Removable Black Cover comes in. This go-to tool works for a multitude of general-purpose needs. It's super compact, and it folds down to an impressive 14.5 inches, making it the ideal companion for backpacks and camera bags.

Convertible umbrellas deliver incredible value because they do multiple things. They can be used as bounce-backs, with silver or white interior fabric, or as shoot-throughs when a softer, more diffused look is called for. If you're currently building out your tools and in the market for your first light modifier, a convertible umbrella should be your first stop. Umbrellas provide broad coverage, producing light that goes everywhere. In the right circumstances, that's fine. You won't get the defined edge or control you get with other modifiers, but you just can't beat the utility, weight and portability of a convertible umbrella.



This simple two-point lighting setup makes use of a Westcott 43" convertible umbrella set up in a shoot-through configuration with two speedlights inside for extra power and recycle speed. A second zone comprising one speedlight with a 1/2 cut of CTO gel is used camera right to create a warm highlight on the subject's hair.

Image © Michael Corsentino

Who Is Zooming Whom?

On camera, your speedlight automatically matches the focal length of your lens. Off camera, you can manually dial in your desired zoom amount for your flash. For portraits, that's typically going to be a 200% zoom setting for my speedlights. Why? Zooming the flash reduces its coverage, producing a tighter beam of light and creating a natural fall-off. This is perfect for portraits, and beats relying on software-based vignettes in post every time. Keep in mind that different modifiers call for different zoom percentages. Two hundred percent is for use with bare flash. If I'm using an umbrella, I choose a much wider zoom number.

Let's Communicate

I've covered triggers in detail in other articles, so I'll keep this brief. For reliable communication between your camera and off-camera speedlights, you need to know only one word: *radio*. Radio-based triggers provide the most reliable form of communication, far eclipsing and sidestepping the shortcomings of older optical technology. There are no line-of-sight requirements. Which means the transmitter and receiver don't need to have an unobstructed view of each another. This is extremely useful because it gives you the freedom to place your lights anywhere you want. Radio systems also have far greater ranges than their optical counterparts.

My go-to TTL speedlight triggers are the Canon ST-E3-RT used in combination with 600EX-RT Speedlites, and the PocketWizard FlexTT5 system for Nikon and legacy model Canon Speedlites.



In addition to the direction of the light, zooming in the speedlight used for the keylight to its maximum percentage adds focus, drama and a natural fall-off of light. Grids placed on the speedlights used for the accent and background lights create pools of light exactly where they're desired.

Image © Michael Corsentino

A Leg to Stand On

For big lights, I'm all about big stands. They're the right tool for the job. Speedlights, on the other hand, are so light and portable that they afford us the opportunity to lighten our load in the stand department as well.

Remember, using stands on location can be a tricky business fraught with municipal regulations and the potential for legal exposure in the event of an accident. Once you put a light stand down, you may need a permit to be completely legal and free from worry about being shut down midshoot by the police. Check local requirements.

Have two to three great stands and a set of extension poles as a backup for those times when stands are a no go. I recommend the following two products: Manfrotto's Nanopole Stand MS0490A and Lastolite's Non-Rotating Extending Handle (29" to 91") LS2453. The Nanopole is shorter when fully extended, but in a pinch can be used as both a light stand or an extension due to its removable base. Don't forget sandbags. I know they're a total pain in the butt, but they'll save your butt, no buts about it.

Bridging the Gap

Just as important as good light stands and extension poles are the brackets used to bridge the gap between the two. It's easy to underestimate the important role brackets play in the success or failure of speedlight technique. Look for brackets that provide maximum articulation, allow for one to four speedlights and provide rock-solid stability. The following are brackets I'm never without: Manfrotto Snap Tilthead With Shoe Mount MLH1HS; Lovegrove Flash Bracket; Lovegrove Gemini Twin Speedlight Bracket; and the Lastolite Quad Bracket LL LS2535.

Don't skip on brackets. You'll end up missing essential features that are well worth the minimal extra expense.



The sky's the limit when it comes to the many ways gels can be used. In this fashion-inspired portrait, I'm using a red gel placed on a strobe in the room behind the model.

Image © Michael Corsentino

Gel It

Gels could easily fill an entire article. Gels rock. Mounted in front of your speedlight, they can be used correctively and creatively. The ways I typically use gels is to bring back the warmth that's missing on overcast days or to warm up the lighting falling on my subject's hair from an off-camera accent light. For this, I reach for a gel called a "CTO," or color temperature orange. These gels range in strength of 1/4, 1/2 and full density. Two standouts are the ExpoImaging system and the Lastolite Strobo Direct to Flashgun Mount Pro Kit LL LS2616. Accessories include grids, flags and more.



Large diffusion panels and portable softboxes help create a polished, well-balanced look. This image was created using two speedlights placed inside Lastolite EzyBox softboxes, one for each subject, fired from camera left. Large portable diffusion panels were used above to cut the harsh sunlight falling on the foreground.

Image © Michael Corsentino

The Mod Squad

In addition to a convertible umbrella and the large octa mentioned above, slowly adding a range of portable modifiers to your kit will open up a world of creative possibilities on location. In my speedlight kit, you'll find softboxes, octas, diffusion panels, reflectors and a beauty dish—each collapsible and highly portable. On top of that, I have grids and gels.

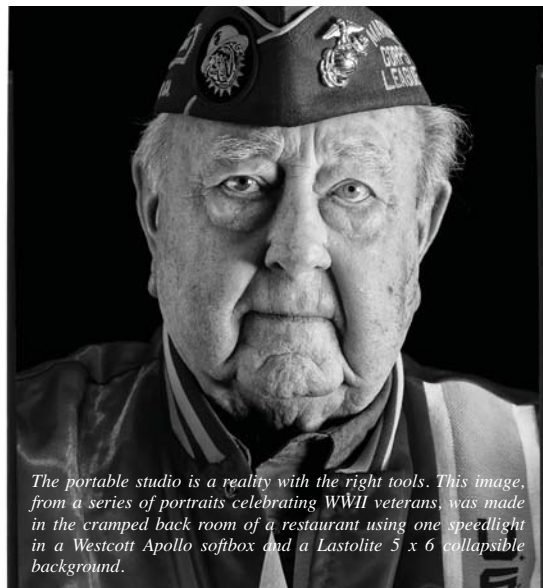
Here's all the nitty-gritty geekery in my bag:

- Lastolite Ezybox Hot Shoe Softbox Kit, 24" x 24", LL LS2462
- Lastolite Fabric Grid for 24" Ezybox Hotshoe, LL LS2962
- Lastolite Ezybox II Medium Octa 31.5" Softbox, LL LS2720
- Lastolite Fabric Grid for Ezybox II Octa Softbox, LL LS2953
- Chimera Octa 2 Collapsible Beauty Dish, 24", 6010

Build your collection slowly, getting to know each modifier inside and out, before moving on to the next. One supereasy, lightweight and inexpensive way to begin modifying your speedlight is by firing it through a popup diffusion panel like the Lastolite TriFlip 8-in-1 Grip Reflector Kit (30").

Studio on the Go

The small footprint and portability of speedlights, lightweight stands and collapsible high-quality softboxes and beauty dishes have turned the idea of the mobile, on-the-go studio into a reality. Collapsible backgrounds complete this picture, folding down to about a third of their fully extended size and easily fitting into the back of your car, leaving plenty of room to spare. Two of my favorites are the Lastolite Collapsible Reversible Background (5' x 6', white/mid-gray) LL LB56GW and the Lastolite Collapsible Reversible Background (5' x 6', white/mid-gray) LL LB56GB. I'm a monochrome guy. These are just the tip of the iceberg of the background styles available.



The portable studio is a reality with the right tools. This image, from a series of portraits celebrating WWII veterans, was made in the cramped back room of a restaurant using one speedlight in a Westcott Apollo softbox and a Lastolite 5 x 6 collapsible background.

Image © Michael Corsetino

Gang It Up!

The more speedlights you have, the more light you'll have at your disposal. This becomes especially useful when you need to overpower the sun or work in high-speed sync mode, covered next. Outside of those obvious applications, ganging up multiple strobes into one unified group or light source allows quicker recycle times, demands less from each speedlight and increases battery life. Smoke 'em if you got 'em.

Go Beyond!

My final tip is to start using high-speed sync. It's awesome. Learn how it works, learn its shortcomings and learn how to work around them. Refer back to my article on HSS. High-speed sync allows you to use speedlights at shutter speeds faster than your camera's maximum sync speed. This is a very powerful feature because it allows you to use flash and wide apertures in ambient light situations.

If it's dramatic, foreboding, moody skies you're looking for, HSS is for you. The downside is that HSS dramatically reduces the output of your speedlights. If there ever was a time for multiple speedlights, HSS is it. ■



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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*Family Values
& Portraiture*

WITH MELANIE ANDERSON

I'm writing this month's article at the beach. I took a few days with my oldest daughter, Sarah, to soak in the last few days of summer. I tell you this as a reminder to take time for you. Always take time to recharge. I find peace and clarity at the beach. It's a place to refocus and regroup, allowing me to be all things to all those who need me.

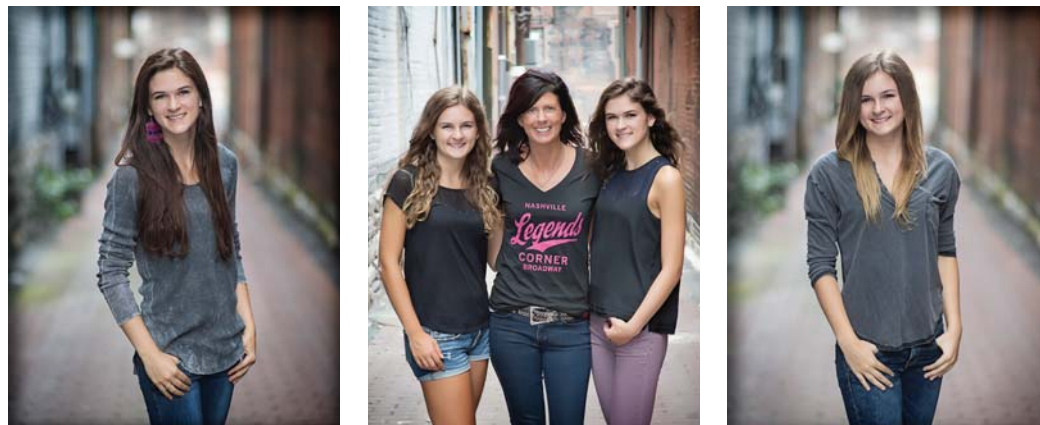
This month's issue is all about children and families. I am blessed to work with my two oldest daughters. In this article, I share my experiences working with them, as well as several tips on photographing children and families and the equipment I use. I hope you find this article inspiring and resourceful, and a reminder to keep family first.

SARAH AND EMILY

Sarah, 19, started assisting at the studio three or four years ago. Her role was to hold the reflector, greet clients and keep the studio clean. Last year, she took on more of a marketing role. Since she was the age of my senior clients, she was a valuable resource with her intimate knowledge of what seniors wanted in a photographer. This past summer, she took on the role of associate photographer. She shot 10 senior sessions, a family session, a few volume sports clients and anything else I needed.

Emily, 17, continues to assist at the studio. Over the next few years, she will be training as an associate photographer.

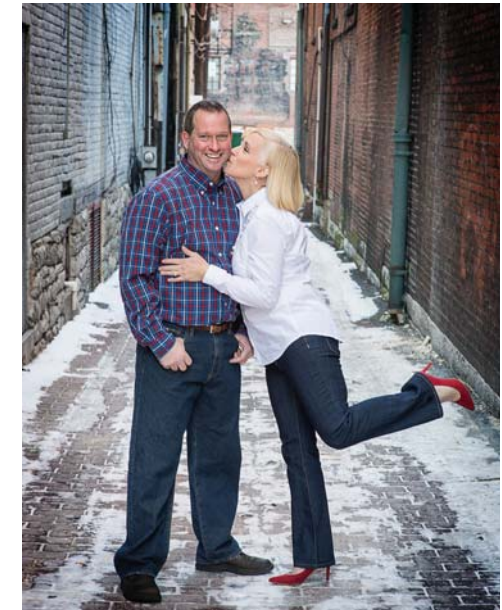
By encouraging my daughters to be a part of the studio and take ownership of their roles, I have given them skills above and beyond others their ages. I am challenged daily with clients, staff, marketing and finances. I include my children in the blessings and the burdens of running a full-time retail studio. It's important to me that they hear any conflicts and understand the resolutions. These are what I call teachable moments. They have prepared them with life skills that will carry them far.



FAMILY AND CHILDREN PORTRAITURE

Our studio here in Hagerstown, Maryland, is known for creating portraits of families and children. My favorite style is urban, either on location or in studio, and both modern and traditional. Our equipment includes reflectors, strobes and constant lights (ringlights and sweetlights).

There are a few reasons I like the urban style. First, my studio is located in the downtown arts and entertainment district. We are surrounded by alleyways, stairwells and brick walls. That's why I chose this location. I love the textures and colors.





Images © Melanie Anderson

My location enables me to complete an entire family session in 15 minutes. My process is as follows: I shoot the entire family, siblings, mom/dad and then the kids individually. I have a system and style in place so that I can move quickly and efficiently. The images included in this segment were shot with a reflector.

My next favorite style of portraiture is on location at a park or in a field. Here I will demonstrate two styles, one using a reflector, the other with a strobe.

When photographing on location, there are a few things we need to think about. The first is the environment: Are we on private or public property? Where's the sun? Because my choice of lighting is a reflector, I am always looking for open shade. But we need to be prepared for any circumstance. I haven't always scouted out the location ahead of time; in fact, most situations I walk into, I have no idea what it looks like. I'm OK with that. I like to fly by the seat of my pants. So with that mindset, I always bring a strobe too. This way I can overpower the sun as needed, or add a main light to the ambient light. As I stated in the video, sometimes this choice is dictated by whether or not my power supply is actually charged. I need to be able to improvise.

When photographing families, take the time to showcase the bonds between siblings, spouses and parent/daughter and parent/son. These are such precious times to capture, and will add to the experience for the client and to your sale with additional portraits. Get creative. Create collages and wall art with scripture or inspirational verses.

My least favorite style of photography is in-studio. Maybe because it seems so posed, maybe because I like fresh air and I feel more creative outside. Maybe it's that I'm just not a fan of studio photography. It's just not my strength. Regardless, as professionals we need to cater to our clients' needs and be able to create any style of image they want. For generational portraits, I do like studio lighting, which is traditional and timeless.



Images © Melanie Anderson

IN-STUDIO MODERN

I like this style because it allows for more creativity. I use a space upstairs in my studio that is painted all white with huge windows and beautiful light. I have gorgeous hardwood floors that give a timeless feel and provide additional creativity. One of the action plans I want you to implement this month is to photograph your family. When is the last time you had professional portraits taken with you in them? I do this once or twice a year during family gatherings. I love looking back and seeing the changes in the children. Some of these images were taken with the camera on a tripod using a remote trigger. For others, we asked a random stranger to “click the button.” Do what you need to do to capture this time with your family. Don’t delay. Trade professional services with another photographer if you need to.



Image © Melanie Anderson



Image © Melanie Anderson

In closing, let’s discuss some ways to get the word out about your family portraiture business. In previous months, I have discussed becoming part of your chamber of commerce, setting up displays and networking as much as possible. Create \$100 portrait credits to pass out to anyone you feel would be a good fit for your studio. Think about people at church, friends, neighbors and marketing/networking groups.

As always, feel free to reach out to me with questions, and keep me posted on your action plans. Be sure to check out this month’s video segment, in which I walk you through my equipment and much more.

3 ACTION PLANS

1. Photograph your family. Trade services with another photographer if needed.
2. Photograph your pastor/minister/priest/rabbi, etc. Bless them with the gift of family portraiture.
3. Create and pass out 100 \$100 gift certificates, good for a portrait credit in your studio. ■



Image © Melanie Anderson



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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INSPIRATIONS

Inspiration can come when you least expect it. As photographers, we are visual artists. We express ourselves through our camera and the images we create. Inspirations represents a sampling of our industry and the vision of professional photographers from around the world. Congratulations to all our featured artists. Be inspired and create something that is you.

Sal Cincotta
Editor-in-chief

—best of families & portraits—



Image © DeAnna Arevalo



Image © Jill Grove



Image © Marianne Sabrier





Image © Kimberly Ebbets



Image © Sai Cincotta



Image © Mindi Corso Photography

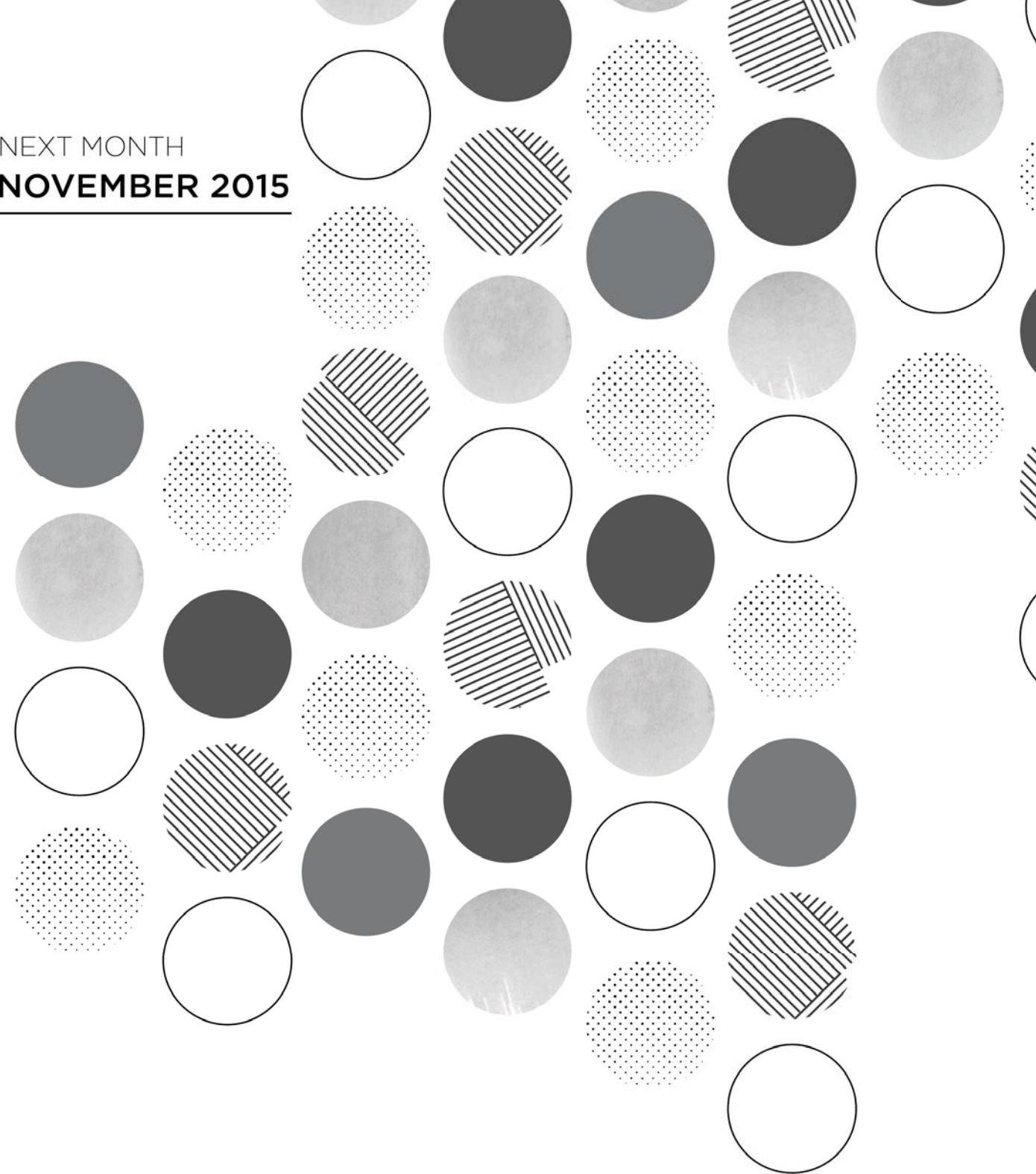


Image © Sal Cincotta



Image © Jill Grove

NEXT MONTH
NOVEMBER 2015



THE
BRANDING
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Q + A

WITH

Salvatore Cincotta

- + How to get started in the family portrait business.
- + How to get your family clients away from only wanting digital negatives.
- + Cross-promotion ideas for marketing to families.
- + How to generate the most money from the lucrative family portrait niche.
- + Using Facebook to get access to the right type of family client.
- + Maximizing your time with families to get the most from the sale.

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.





Studio Essentials

with Leonardo Volturo

Recently we set up our new studio. With so much gear and information out there, it can be daunting to figure out what tools you need to get started. Whether you're building out a shooting space in your garage, just got a studio of your own or already have a space you've been waiting to set up, this month we're going to cover the essential tools you'll need.

I'm not going to go overboard and shock you with a buyer's guide with over \$100K in studio gear (even though we could spend that and more in a New York minute). This practical guide is all about keeping it simple, and getting you on your way to creating great images in your new studio.



Image © Leonardo Volturo

Lighting

The range of lighting tools is vast and overwhelming. Let's break it down. Whether it's strobes that cost a few hundred dollars, or pack and head systems reaching upwards of \$10K, ideally you'll want to invest in the best multilight system you can afford. If you have a \$2,000 budget for lights, don't spend it all on just one. Since portability isn't a major concern here, options include an AC-powered head such as the Profoto D1, an AC-powered pack and head like the Profoto Acute, a battery-powered pack and head such as the Phottix Indra, or a strobe with a built-in battery, such as the Profoto B1.

When we began planning our studio, we were already invested in the Profoto B1 battery-powered strobe system, so we decided to simply add more Profoto lights and have everything seamlessly integrated and controlled via the Profoto Air remote. Currently we use three Profoto B1's and two Profoto B2's.

I recommended having at least 500 watts for your keylight. You're going to need at least that much power when you're using light modifiers, which can reduce output by as much

as one or two stops. Having strobes with enough available power also comes in handy when you're shooting at smaller apertures. Look into how low you can set the power with the lights you're considering. Some situations require a lower power output from your strobe. One example is when you're shooting with wider apertures or with modifiers that aren't reducing the light as much as when you're using a softbox.

What you'll need next is a way to communicate with your strobes so you can fire or trigger them remotely from your camera position. As you do your research, you'll likely come across lights with built-in radio-based triggers like the Profoto Air and Elinchrom Skyport systems. Having a receiver built directly into the strobe makes life very simple. It means that all you need to do in order to trigger the strobe is place the corresponding remote in your camera's hot shoe; now you're all set. Alternatively, lights lacking built-in receivers require the use of a separate set of transceivers to communicate, such as the PocketWizard Plus III's, one for the light and one for the camera's hot shoe. That's more gear to buy, break and have extra batteries on hand for.



Image © Leonardo Volturo



Image © Leonardo Volturo

Modifiers

Light modifiers come in a host of shapes and sizes: round ones, square ones, rectangles, octagons and more. They also range in size from 1' x 1' softboxes to well over 10' for some parabolic umbrellas. Beyond that, each produces a different look with different degrees of softness, contrast and distinct catchlights.

When you're choosing the right modifier size for the job, a good rule of thumb is to think about how much of your subject you are lighting. If you're shooting a headshot, a smaller modifier, such as a 20" beauty dish or a 2' x 2' softbox, might be a good choice. For full-length coverage, you'd likely want something larger, like a 5' octa or a 4 x 6 softbox. That's because larger modifiers are closer to the actual size of your subject. Using a smaller modifier causes much of the subject's lower body to fall into the shadow as the light from the strobe falls off.

If larger modifiers aren't an option for you due to height restrictions in your space, you'll need to back up your light to achieve a wider area of coverage. Moving your strobe back forces you to crank up the power. This may not be possible if you're already maxed out. In that case, you have a couple of other options. The first is to bring in a second light to provide fill; the most economical choice is to pop in a reflector.

In our studio, I typically modify my keylight with an octa. We do this because of the natural-looking catchlight an octa creates compared with a square or rectangular softbox. Once the keylight is determined, I add additional lights with different modifiers, depending on their purpose—fill, hair light, backlight. See my article in the September issue for lighting setups utilizing one to three strobes and a variety of modifiers.



Image © Leonardo Volturo



Image © Leonardo Volturo

Support

This section covers one of the most crucial categories: the gear you use to support your strobes. That means your light stands and their associated accessories, known collectively as “grip.” Don’t skimp here. The last thing you want is a light crashing down on somebody’s head or smashing into a million pieces as it hits the floor.

When shopping for stands, at a minimum you’ll want to invest in heavy-duty air-cushioned stands that support the weight of your strobe and a modifier combination that aids in smoothly and safely lowering equipment. Ideally you’ll want to purchase a few steel C-stands used the world over for their rock-solid stability. The Avenger C-stands we use support up to 22 pounds and have a “turtle base” that can be removed for easy transport. The individual legs can be set at any angle, and positioned in locations that are impossible with

light-duty stands. C-stands are also great for location work. Get at least one roller stand. These are worth their weight in gold when it comes to your keylight, and your back will thank you. A good roller stand allows you to quickly, easily and precisely position your keylight without all the heavy lifting.

You’re also going to need sandbags and counterweights. These help stabilize your stands and balance boom arms. You should be using these in studio and on location.

The final piece of the puzzle for your C-stands and roller stands are extension arms and grip heads. These tools give you both reach and articulation when positioning lights, flags or reflectors.



Images © Leonardo Volturo

Backgrounds & Backdrops

The two backdrops you’ll typically start out with are black and white. For white, you may have the option of painting your wall or building a cyclorama/infinity wall, which is a wall that curves at the base to meet the studio floor, creating the illusion that the studio floor is infinite. If that isn’t an option, you can pick up a fairly inexpensive kit that includes black and white seamless backdrops, and the hardware and stands necessary to raise and lower it.

White gives you the option of having a bright white background or different levels, from gray to black, depending on your camera settings and the distance of your subject and light from the background. Black is great for creating moody and more dramatic images. There’s a ton of other backdrop options out there. Check out sites like boxdropsbyjip.com and silverlakephoto.com for some really cool backgrounds and floors in a variety of sizes and custom designs.



Image © Leonardo Volturo

Tethered Shooting

This is the last and arguably one of the most important categories of essential studio gear. Shooting tethered will make your life so much easier. It allows you to get dialed in quickly and show your subject exactly what you're getting in real time as the images you shoot pop up on your laptop. I'm also able to work intuitively as I dial in my lights with or without a light meter. The process is simple: Connect the appropriate cable to your camera and your laptop, launch Lightroom or Capture One, and start shooting tethered. These programs allow you to create presets and other settings that apply to your images as you shoot.

When shooting tethered, a secure connection between your camera and computer is essential. You don't want to lose your connection or send your laptop flying across the room.

A good quality cable and a stable platform for your laptop are a must. We use the DigiPlate platform from Inovativ. It's made of aluminum and includes a built-in cable management system, laptop clamps and everything you need to keep your gear safe and secure. The DigiPlate is attached to one of my roller stands via the DigiBase connector. I have a DigiCameraPlate on my camera that keeps the cable securely connected. You'll want to shoot tethered whenever possible.

That sums up everything you need to get started with your new studio. Don't feel like you need to get everything at once. Build your kit slowly, and feel free to reach out with any questions. With these tools in place, you will be well on your way to creating great studio images. ■



Leonardo Volturo is an international award-winning wedding and portrait photographer, writer and educator. He and 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.

leonardovolturo.com

How do you use your Spider Holster?

See how other pro photographers have freed their upper bodies, reduced stress on their backs, and changed the way they shoot with Spider Holster.



Pictured (clockwise from top-left): Lou Freeman, Pete Collins, Melanie Anderson, Phillip Blume, Marianne Chua, Dan Salvo (bottom left and center)

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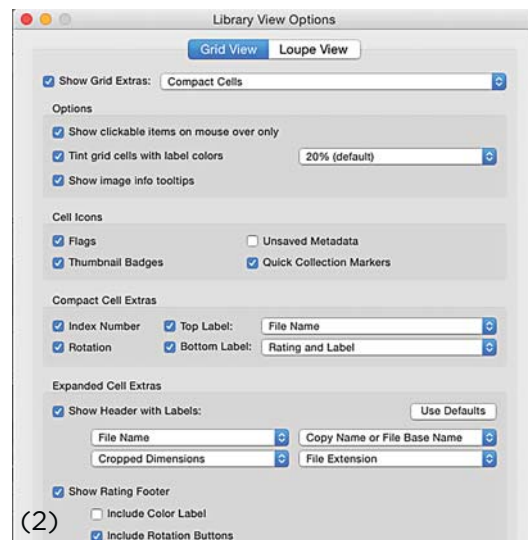
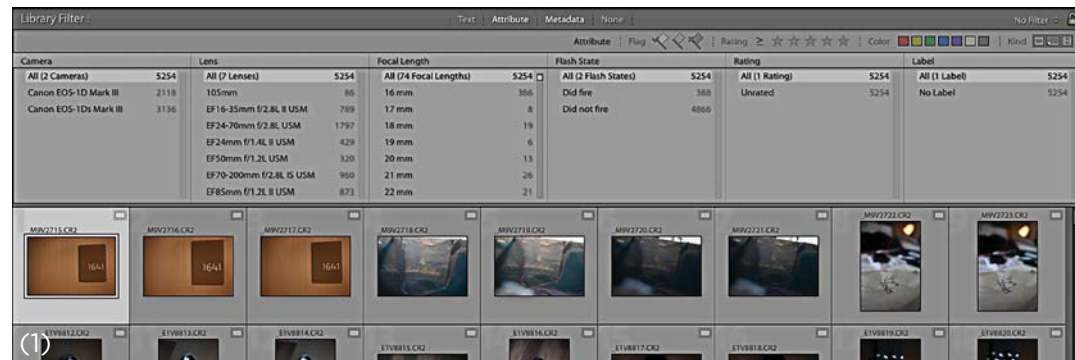
5-Part Workflow
With
Lightroom CC

Part 3
Processing Files

with Dustin Lucas

After the shoot is done, files are stored and backed up, catalog and previews rendered, it's finally time to process all those files. Get comfortable now. Lightroom CC has made many of our lives easier with the intuitive hotkeys, ease of cycling between images and syncing adjustments. I have to be honest, though: No matter how fast you are at culling and editing in Lightroom, getting 5,300 images down to under 1,000 is rough. I've done it five days a week for years, and I still push myself to increase efficiency and quality.

I don't want to compare culling in other programs or batched styles of editing in this article. I am a Lightroom guy, and I am sticking with it. Working with Evolve, I have seen various workflows and mechanics from hundreds of professional photographers. I learn as much from them as they do from me. You have to trade secrets in this industry. That's what I am here to do.



Library Module

This module can be accessed by striking the "G" key. I refer to it as the grid mode because I usually have the images displayed this way. In this view mode, you have the ability to filter the previews by text, attributes and metadata.(1) If these filters aren't visible, strike the backslash ("\\") key. These options become more useful for culling and editing

your images once we get there. From the menu bar, choose View > View Options, or hit CMD + J to adjust the details for each preview cell.(2) I prefer to see the file name, attributes and badges. To quickly remove this data, hit Shift + CMD + H.

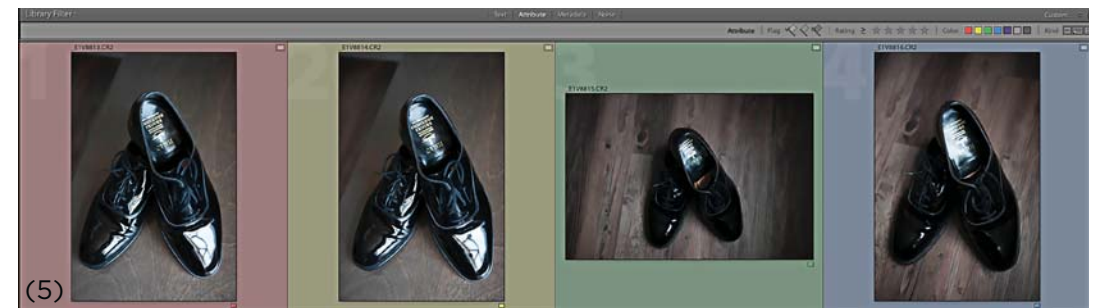
The more useful view mode for selection is loupe mode. These view options can be adjusted in the next tab within the View Options dialog box. I prefer to keep the camera info visible.(3) For viewing individual images, I find that leaving the side panels and film strip visible is very distracting; plus, the image needs to be larger. To drop the side panels, hit the

Tab key; to remove all three panels, hit Shift + Tab. You will notice when your cursor scrolls over these panels that they automatically appear. To keep this from happening, right-click next to the arrow and choose Manual. You have total control over the panels with the Shift and Tab keys.

Selection Process

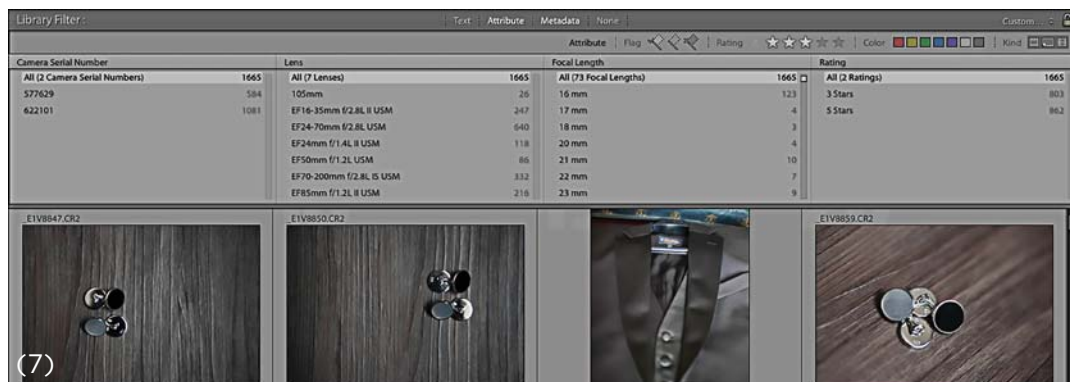
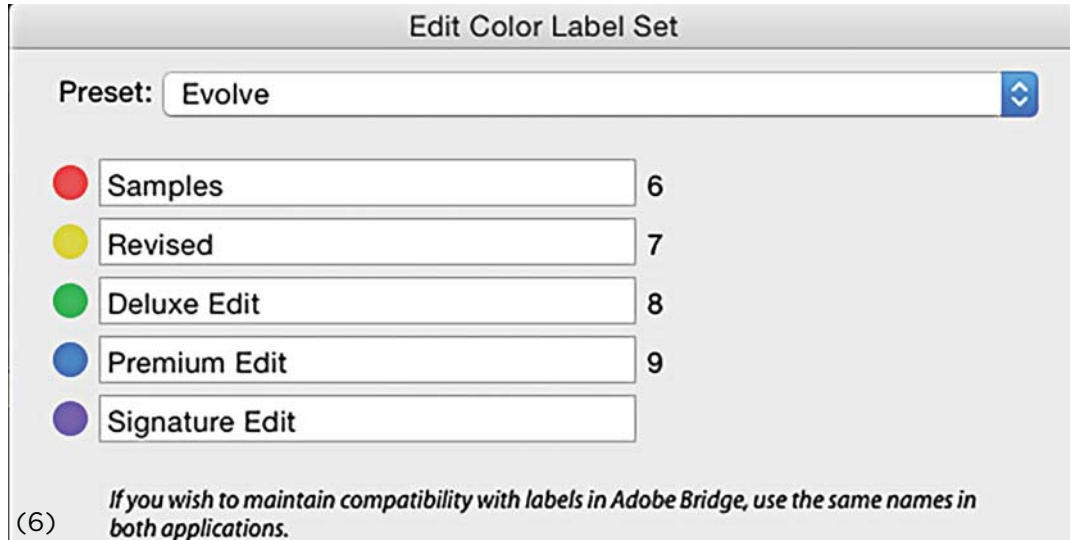
Using attributes is essential when selecting images. These attributes include flags, color labels and star ratings. Hotkeys bring a new level of efficiency for going through thousands of images. Add a flag to an image by selecting the "P" key. Reject images by selecting the "X" key. To unflag an image,

strike the "U" key to reset it.(4a,b) Color labels are much simpler to add by using the number keys 6 through 9. The color tags ascend by striking 6 for red, 7 for yellow, 8 for green and 9 for blue.(5)



Hitting these same keys again removes the attribute. Lightroom even allows you to customize this feature: From the menu bar, select Metadata > Color Label Set > Edit. You can rename what keyword the color labels are referred to as. For example, I changed the green label to Samples, yellow

to Revised, green to Deluxe edit, blue to Premium edit and purple to Signature edit.(6) Then click in the presets dropdown menu to save the current settings as a new preset. In order to see these keywords, make sure labels are a column for metadata filters.

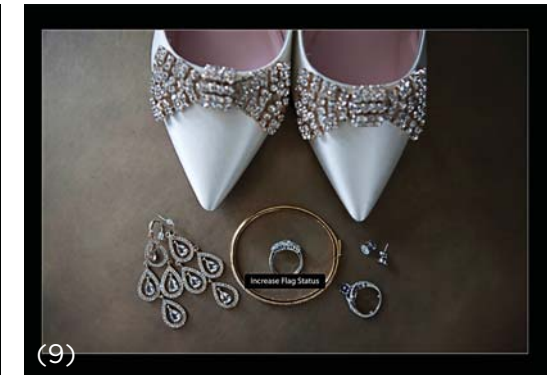


Star ratings are a great tool for adding levels of importance when selecting. Number keys 1 through 5 add stars, and 0 removes ratings. You can also use the “[” to increase and “]” option to decrease ratings. My normal process is to select images worth delivering to the client in 3 stars, then select impact images to edit with 5 stars. This averages a total delivery of 1,600 digital negatives, with 800 of those as color-corrected proofs.(7)

Moving into selection, mechanics can be the difference between culling through 2,000 images in an hour and taking way longer than needed. Following Sal’s workflow and developing some tricks along the way has gotten me to that one-hour mark for 2,000 images. I start in grid mode by filtering the images by camera serial number. Assuming most images taken are by the principal shooter, I begin there. Using different sort-by modes becomes important when viewing all the images together, but for a single camera, it

can remain on Capture time. Double-click the first image and remove the surrounding panels using Shift + Tab. Then hit the “I” key twice to isolate the image.(8) I want the least number of distractions in my selection process. I put my headphones on and go to town.

Once in the isolated loupe mode, I use the arrow pad to cycle through images quickly. Images load quickly because the Previews have already been rendered. Check out my previous article “5-Part Workflow With Lightroom CC Part 2: Catalog Management” for more on this. To apply a flag, strike CMD + Up Arrow; to remove it, hit CMD + Down Arrow.(9) To reject it as an unusable image, strike CMD + Down Arrow again. I recommend using the least complicated method to reduce thinking about how to select, and just hit the correct key. Flags are very simple, but so is hitting the 6 key to add or remove the red label. You just need to apply an attribute to create a selection.



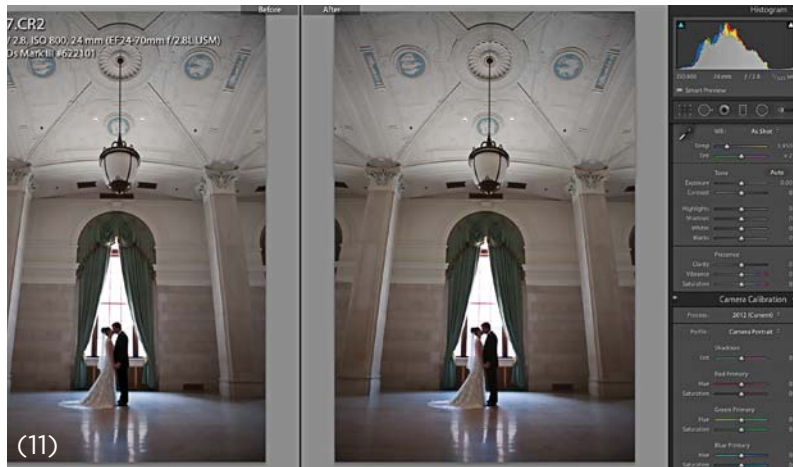
Develop Module

Once you’ve selected the images and applied the attribute filter, let’s start the editing process. Normally I apply a preset in grid mode to shift the images slightly from SOOC. This is my first step in editing. My article “Efficiency With Lightroom Presets” talks about creating and using these.

There are a couple of options for editing at this point. If you have adjusted capture times appropriately, we can edit all the images together. This is more time-consuming but ensures a once-over consistency. Another option is the “divide and conquer” method. There are many ways to divide or filter your images, but the popular way is based on camera serial number. You can go as far as filtering by lens as well. For now, I will filter by camera serial number.

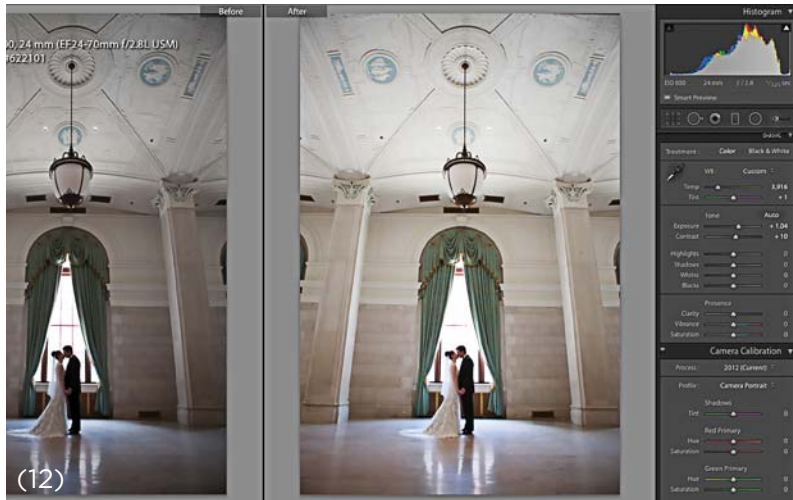
I move into the Develop module by striking the “D” key. I am only interested in the History panel on the left hand side. This is the only panel I have dropped down during the second step of the editing process. I also strike the “Y” key to bring up my before-and-after preview mode. It helps to edit side by side with your SOOC to see how far to process it.(10) At a second-step editing level, do not get stuck in the little details. You need to create consistency, not a stylistic or print-ready image. Think of second-step edits as proofs for a preview.



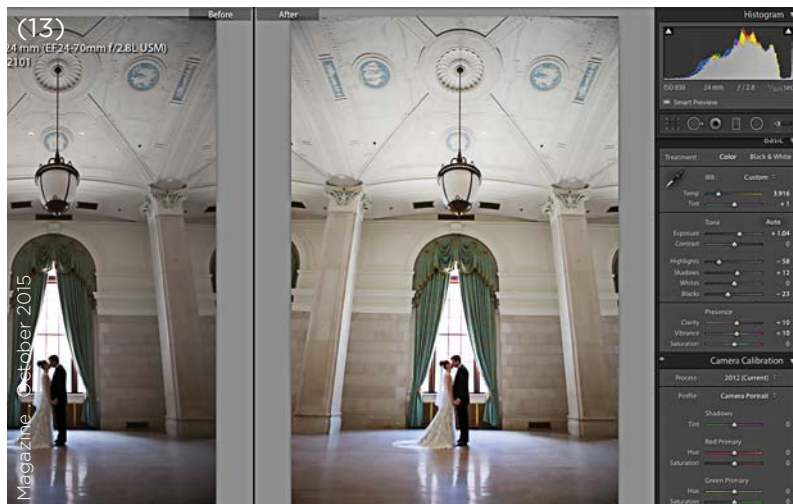


Editing Process

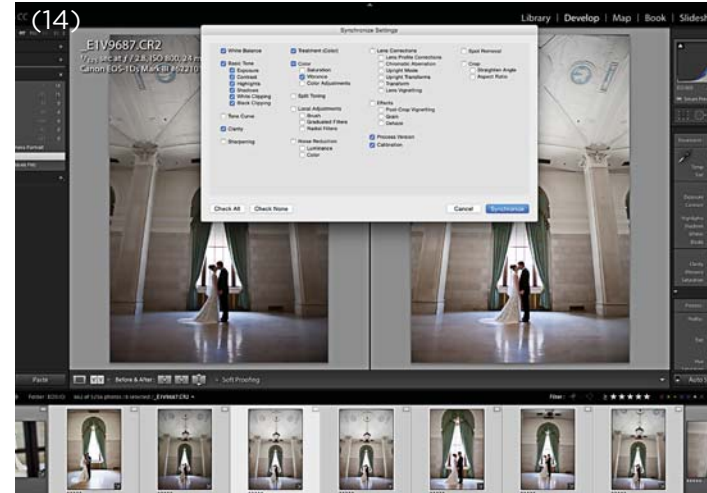
I begin by dropping down the Basic and Camera Calibration panels. Adjusting your camera profile is significant at this stage; if you don't have a clue as to what I am talking about, read my article "Color Space Part 2: Getting Control With Your Color." You need to change from Adobe Standard, especially if you have created a custom profile for your camera.(11) After you have adjusted this, let's move into the Basic panel and make adjustments to white balance, brightness and tonality.(12)



First, I adjust the exposure to balance the brightness on the skin. From here, I adjust the tone sliders and move to white balance.(13) I have a few options. The most basic way is to hover the cursor over the sliders and use the arrow pad to increase or decrease the effect. This works well on a laptop, and I find it to be the least mentally exhausting at a mechanical level. Good mechanics save you time.



You can purchase midi boards and expensive software to create a cinematic editing workspace. There is a cult following for this stuff—just Google it, and you will see. Along with this comes various keyboard shortcut customization software packages that can fine-tune your mechanics as well. Lightroom has default hotkeys for editing with the “,” and “.” keys to cycle between individual sliders in a panel. Increase and decrease the adjustment sliders with the “+” and “-” keys. To add or subtract half the adjustment value, hold down Option and “+” or “-,” respectively. Now toggle the right arrow to advance through the sequence.



Syncing images can be a huge time saver. Select the custom edited image and then select similarly shot images in a set. Strike Shift + CMD + S and choose the settings you wish to apply to the others.(14) The images can then be fine-tuned. This gives them a specific direction to shift toward. If syncing the images makes them worse, it's CMD + Z to the rescue.

After the entire job is edited, I walk away from the computer for a bit to reset my eyes. After returning to the catalog, I go to grid mode and proof the work. This is where Quick Develop settings can be applied to large sets of images that need global settings applied.(15) Using the Shift key with the arrows allows only half the effect to be applied. For example, when you click the 1/3 exposure boost with Shift held down, it adjusts it +.17 instead of +.33, making it a 1/6 stop exposure increase. The same can be done with contrast, highlights, shadows, etc.

Conclusion

When it comes to processing images, efficiency in your workflow bridges that gap between less time spent and maintaining quality. Following strict mechanics and learning to let go of tiny details in this stage is the difference between seven straight hours to process this job versus two days of frustration. Trust me, I've spent more time processing a job than the event lasted in real time. There is work on the front and back end not accounted for, but this seems to be where the majority of time is spent.

Build a music playlist, grab some headphones and isolate yourself for a few hours to see the difference. ■



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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Starting Over

*What to Do When
Your Partnership
Falls Apart*

with Jewels Gray



Image © Jewels Gray

Starting over—the thought of it sounds overwhelming. Imagine all the things you did to get your business going. Sometimes it can take years. Last year, I had no choice but to start over, and as daunting as it seemed, I’m here to tell you it can be done. You just have to be motivated to kick yourself into gear.

It sounded like a great idea at the time—famous last words. My husband was a photographer, but not necessarily good at the business side of things. I, on the other hand, had experience with business, marketing, and an office environment, and was also an artist through and through. So, after we got married, we decided to go into business for ourselves and start shooting weddings.

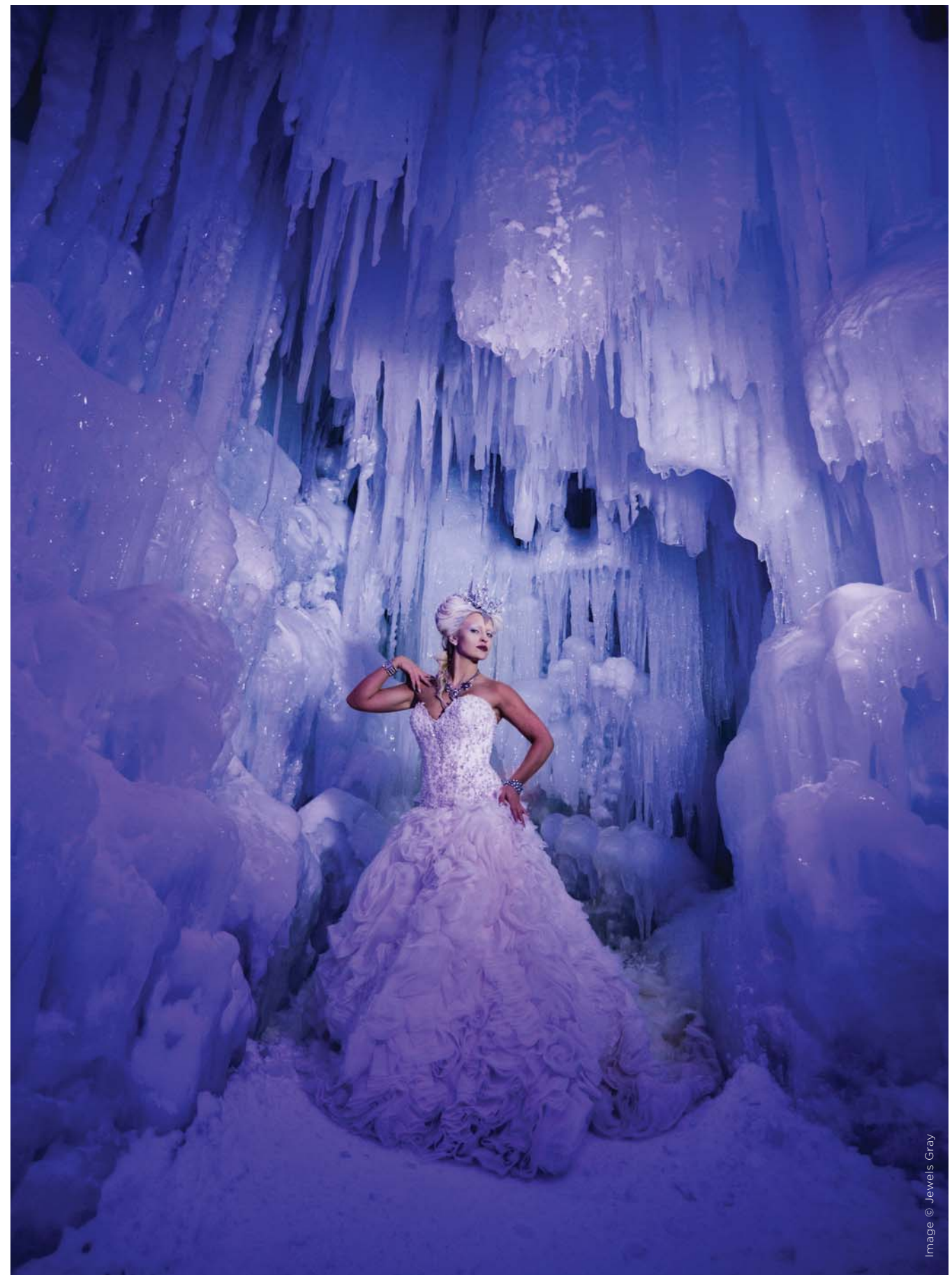


Image © Jewels Gray



Of course there was a lot to learn, a lot we didn't know, and a lot we didn't do right. After struggling for five or so years, I found Sal. He and Taylor came through Denver, and I took their seminar. I thought to myself, "Finally! Someone willing to show me the ins and outs of the business, and in a way that I want to do it." I was hooked immediately. Some of you out there know my story. After being on CreativeLive two years ago, my life has changed in so many ways.

My husband/partner and I had struggled since we started, continually wondering what we were doing wrong. I started implementing Sal's business model, and I was ecstatic with the results. Finally, our numbers were headed up. Unfortunately, my husband was not as thrilled. I won't go into the dirty details, but let's just say we weren't seeing eye to eye, and it created a big wedge between us. This is where things started to unravel. We tried balancing our work/life. We took classes on how to be in business with your spouse, and even went to counseling. It overlapped into our personal lives, and, after 13 years together, 11 years of marriage, eight years in business, and two beautiful children, we divorced last year.



Just because our marriage ended doesn't mean our business did. We had contracts for 2015 we still had to honor. Sure, we could have returned all the retainers, but we were both dependent on those funds. We decided to remain friends and work together until the last contract was fulfilled. No matter what, we couldn't risk tarnishing our brand. Our clients didn't deserve that, and we wanted to keep the energy positive. As far as they were concerned, nothing had changed. I was still the point of contact for everything, and to this day, I handle all sales, meetings, product orders, delivery, accounting, taxes, etc.

When we decided to end it, I had to get my personal affairs in order. That's when I started freaking out. How was I going to support myself and two kids? Where were we going to live? How would I be able to afford this break?

So. Many. Questions.

I sat down and went to work. I had no other choice. Even before I started packing, I started from zero on my new business, and hit the ground running. I didn't have time to throw a pity party and feel sorry for myself. Failure was not an option. It all was exciting and terrifying at the same time.

Sure, I have some skills and things to fall back on, but I decided that the best path for me was to continue in the wedding photography industry, because I love shooting weddings. I took a leap of faith.

Since I did all the business stuff, I already had a good handle on what to do. It started with the logo, then came the website, setting up my S corp., business cards, and it went from there. I made lists—big ones. First, I contacted my friends in the industry and let them know I was available to second-shoot, do hair and makeup, anything.

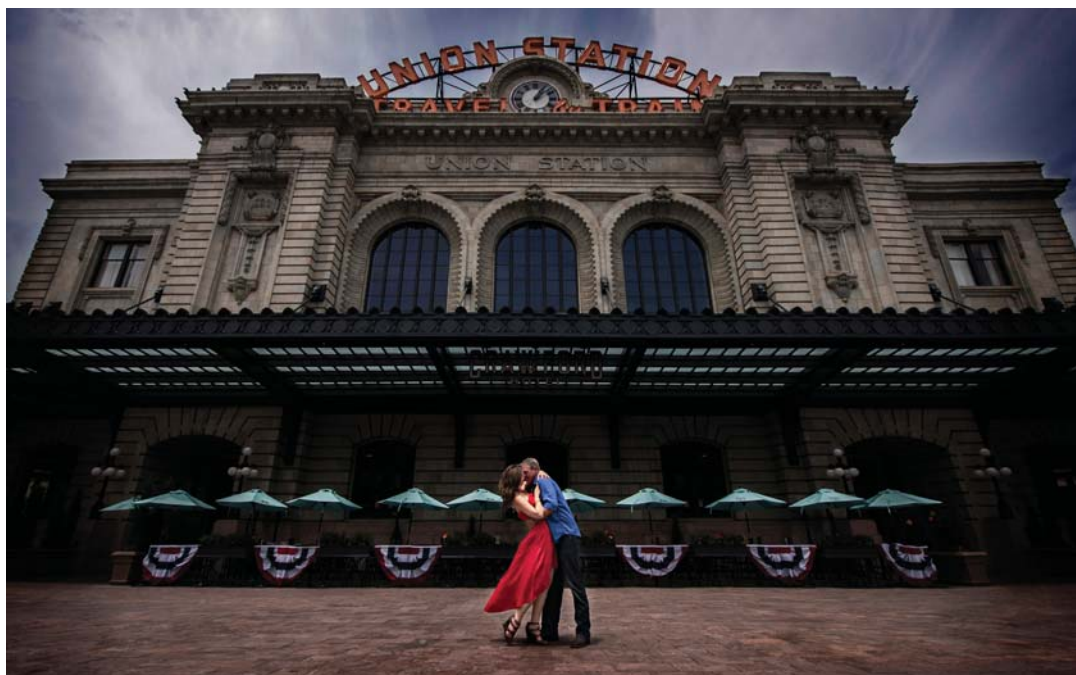
I took another leap of faith because I didn't want to meet clients at Starbucks, store my equipment in my tiny apartment, or have hair and makeup clients coming to my home. Of course, sometimes you have to do these things, and that's OK. I just wanted more. I found a space in an up-and-coming neighborhood in a co-op warehouse, and prayed I could afford it.



Investing most of my savings and maxing out my credit cards on new and replacement equipment, studio samples and furniture for my new little studio was extremely stressful. I worked and worked on every aspect of my new business like a busy little beaver, and the inquiries started coming in. I was elated and relieved.

It's now been a year since those leaps of faith. I am happy to report that not only did I match the goals that I had with my ex, but I exceeded them. In fact, as soon as I went out on my own, my business more than doubled. I have my theories as to why my business is doing well now, when before it was just maintaining, but I don't know if I will ever know for sure, or if it even matters. I am in love with my brand and happy with my work. My clients are excited to work with me, and have tears in their eyes when they see their photos—this makes it all worth it.

But I still had to learn the side of the business that I didn't do: editing, equipment, workflow, technical stuff. My partner was always in charge of these things. I have had my share of issues, but I'm working through them and learning how to streamline every little detail of my business. I have made some mistakes.



Images © Jewels Gray



Image © Jewels Gray

Thankfully, they weren't detrimental enough to shut me down, and I learned from them. I still struggle with workflow, but Evolve Edits (shameless plug, and no joke) has helped me out tremendously. In fact, I don't know how I could have done it without them.

A few of my colleagues tell me how amazed they are at how I've done it all. How I just charged full steam ahead. How I didn't look back. How I didn't waste any time. How they couldn't have done it. I just smile and say, "I just didn't have any other choice—and yes, you could too."

The bottom line is that if you're not happy doing what you're doing, do something else. If your partnership isn't as strong as it used to be, then try to fix it. After all, you went into business with this person for a reason—what was it? Has your perspective changed? How are you going to address the issues?

If you're unhappy, stop it right now—life is too short. If it seems as though the end is inevitable, figure out what to change. It's not easy. It's exhausting. It'll leave you doubting everything. But do not let that hold you back. Have faith in yourself. Be strong and don't let anything stand in your way. ■



Jewels Gray is an award-winning photographer, entrepreneur, licensed hair and makeup artist, educator and mother to two amazing kids, Johnny and Presley. Weddings are her specialty, and she is the founder and producer of the Eclectic Wedding & Event Showcase in Denver. Jewels loves Halloween, collecting oddities and almost anything spicy.

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ADVERTISING AND
COMMUNICATIONS



Advertising and Communications

Each article in this “Building Blocks” series has been about a specific component of building your business, but this month I want to hit on developing your style. I’m not talking about your photographic style, but the way you communicate.

So many of you insist on beating a dead horse. You’re too verbose or just plain wasting your money on ego trips via advertising. Whether you’re writing a blog post, policy statement, email or paying for advertising, this month I’m putting all of them under the overkill umbrella.

Stop wasting your time writing novels. Stop writing policy statements that you share on your website that would scare an IRS auditor. Stop wasting money on big ads when a smaller one would do just as well.

Let’s take a look at your business and how you can slay the overkill dragon.

POLICIES ON YOUR WEBSITE

Your website is about you, your products and your services. Your blog is about sharing what’s in your heart. The word *policy* should be forbidden on either one. Policy statements are for contract discussions.

Most of the time when I see a policy statement on a photographer’s website, it’s about deposits and cancelation fees. When I question the artist about the history of the statement, there’s always a story about getting “burned once.” I’m all in favor of policies, just not the minute a potential client walks through your door, and definitely not in long, tedious paragraphs.

Stop managing by the exception. Just because you had a problem in the past doesn’t mean you have to scare away new clients before they’re even in the “family.” Put your policy statements in your client’s contract, and discuss them when you’re negotiating your services.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Most of you see yourself as an artist, and that means you’re probably more right-brained than left. It’s hard for you to express your thoughts in writing. That also means you might need somebody to proofread what you write. You might need to read what you’re about to send or post out loud several times.

You need to work on being more direct and getting to the point. Stop writing like you did in high school when you were told to write a 500-word report. There’s no room or need for fillers in business communications.

I love Grammarly.com. It was suggested by a good friend, and it helps me find run-on sentences and other mistakes. Put that together with spell check, and you’re golden. But it’s even better to have somebody else read what you wrote; if that person has a flair for writing, even better.

ADVERTISING

Advertising might seem like a completely different topic, but it all falls under the overkill umbrella. Pay attention now—because my goal is to save you money. At some point, you’re going to consider advertising in some sort of printed material, usually a local magazine.

Now and then a photographer shows me an ad and says, “It got me absolutely no business. What did I do wrong?” While every situation is different, here are some things to think about the next time an ad rep chases you down.

- Ask about the demographics of the publication. Who’s the readership? Remember, 98 percent of the decisions to hire a photographer (in the portrait/social categories) are made by women.

- Never react to sales reps who want to tell you what your competitor is going to be running. It’s unethical, but more importantly, it’s a tactic to get you to run an even bigger ad. And bigger isn’t necessarily bigger.

- Stop thinking you need a full-page ad to have a presence. Bruce Landau, who I first got to know when he was VP of Bogen Photo (now Manfrotto), was the master of fractional ad space. He'd run two to three consecutive 1/3-page ads in the magazine, always right read (the right page when the magazine is open).

Fractionals can have an impact. I know your ego wants a big full-page ad, but you can request a fractional on a page with editorial content in most magazines. That assures there are no other ads on the same page if you're running a half-page ad or even a third.

- You need consistency. You've got to run a minimum of three times in print advertising. So when you're negotiating, keep that in your back pocket. Negotiate your best one-time run and then go for 2x and 3x. Whatever you decide to do, you're wasting money with a one-time hit.

Here's a quick story about how my ego got in my way back in my first few months as the new president of Hasselblad USA.

We had a new ad campaign that was reaching out to the serious hobbyist. I had inherited the campaign from the previous president, who had passed away. Even if I had thought it was a bad idea, I never would have been able to challenge it as the new guy.

But I thought it was incredible.

We had double-page ads in *National Geographic*, *Time* magazine's top zip code editions and the Sunday *New York Times Magazine*. When the ads came out, I was blown away. It was a complete and total ego trip, and here's how it failed miserably.

We had enough money only for those publications, and I think it was for just two issues of each of the two magazines and one *New York Times*. That meant all the photography magazines were off the schedule.

While the data all showed strong pass-along readership, we never really saw any extended results. The publications came out, the ads created a little noise and then just stopped. There was no consistency in our presence. We were the new kids on the advertising block, and then we were gone.

While most magazines want you to think editorial is always objective, it favors advertisers. When we pulled our ads from all the photography magazines, all our editorial support stopped as well. We had focused on the serious hobbyist, who back then was a third of our business, but we suddenly got no ink in front of the other two-thirds, the professionals.

Your budget and the importance of building a solid reputation and brand needs to always be ahead of your ego.

Let's look at a few additional things you can be doing to make any advertising, whether in print or on the Internet, more effective.

- As I mentioned already, editorial content isn't always objective, online or in print. Here's an idea to try, but it won't work with every magazine. Often as a new advertiser, especially with a commitment, you can negotiate for some additional ink in the form of editorial. Think business profile or a story about a fundraiser or community event.

- Get to know the staff at the publication. Knowing the sales rep is fine, but you want to get to know the editorial staff on a first-name basis. This is about relationship building, and you're not doing anything except developing friendships.

- Stop thinking you have to be a solo act. Overkill comes in all forms, including your ego getting in the way when it comes to any outgoing communications. Don't be afraid to look for partners to share the costs. A wedding photographer, for example, can work together with a noncompeting vendor like a florist, venue, caterer or wedding planner.

Overkill comes in all forms, and it's usually driven by ego or fear. Both are huge liabilities in building your business and brand.

Don't let your ego drive your spending. Don't let fear of "what if" create negative self-fulfilling prophecies about the outcome of any project or event. And, on sensitive written communications, whether letters, blog posts, website content or even a comment on Facebook, take the time to think through what you're about to publish. ■



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*.

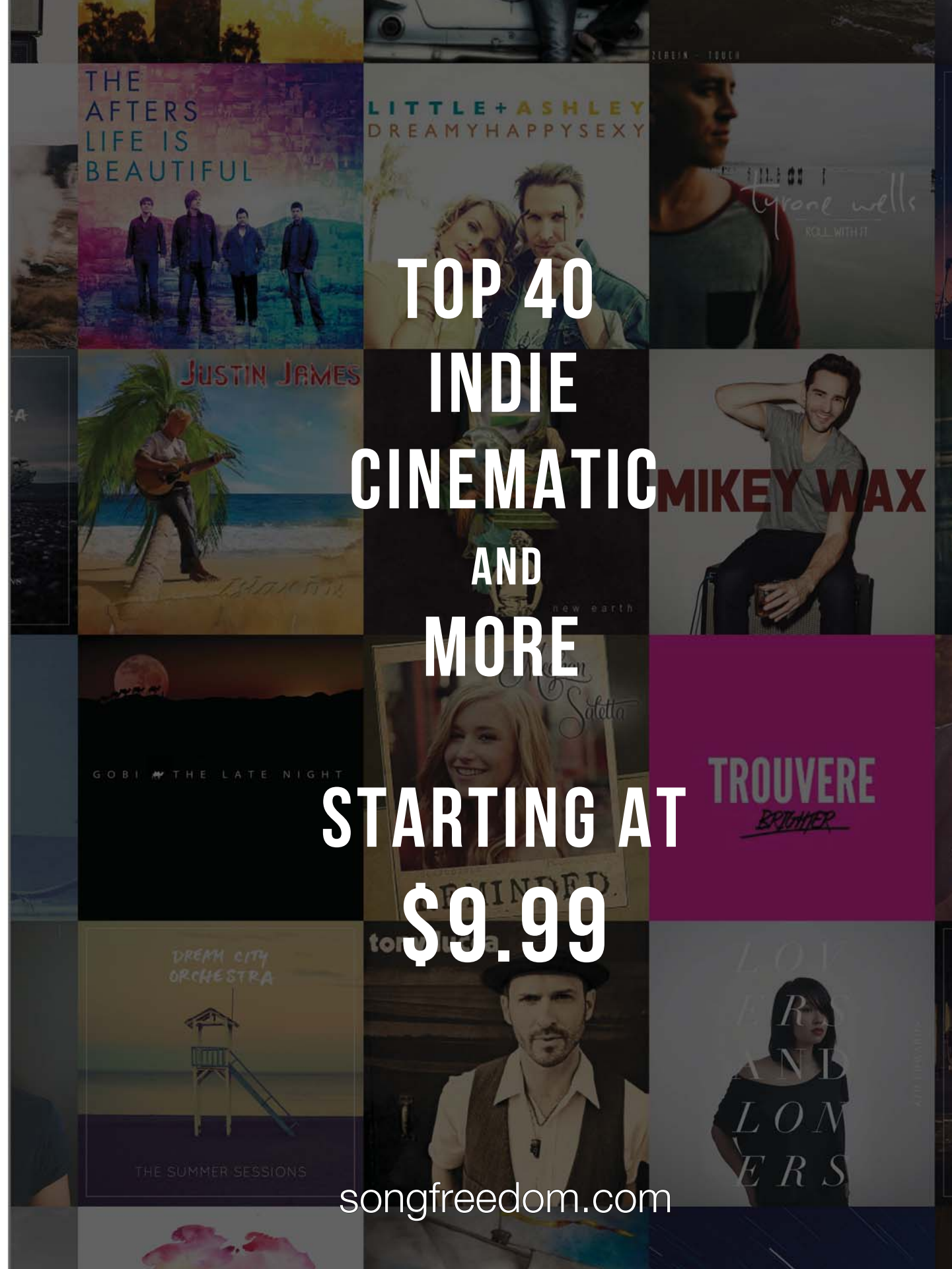
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The World of
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Filmmaking

with Rob Adams

I had just finished a 12-hour day filming a beauty reel inside of a Gordon Ramsay restaurant in New York City at The London NYC hotel. It was 5 p.m. I'd been up since 3:30 that morning, after having shot a wedding all day the day before and after sleeping a restless three hours. Then I'd driven into Manhattan from my comfortable New Jersey digs to meet my very demanding clients.

Poor planning. After I unload my gear and park my car, I realized I never booked hotel accommodations for the very long four-day shoot I'm about to begin. Usually, my corporate clients secure a room for me so I can remain on site during a location shoot, but I had failed to mention that traveling to and from New York City on a weekday basis is a very bad idea, and now I'm homeless in Manhattan.

I later find myself sitting in a Starbucks waiting out the afternoon rush-hour traffic and writing this article while lazily drinking a Grande Red-Eye and trying not to keel over. I imagine myself collapsing and coming to with green-aproned employees standing over me. One would be holding the defibrillator that was mounted near the washroom entrance. Alas, I've survived thus far and will make my way home later when traffic has died down. This is an example of the kind of challenges I face regularly in the non-video part of the corporate and commercial video world. This one is on me, but it's not uncommon to face similar challenges during a production.

As a freelance filmmaker, I get to travel to exciting and exotic locations, and use my skills behind the camera to help other people bring to life their ideas and visions for their brand. The world of commercial and corporate filmmaking varies wildly and is very competitive, but it's never not exciting. At least it hasn't been for this guy. With clients such as Toys R Us, L'Oréal, TVTrip and Animoto, expectations are high and jobs come with a fair amount of pressure. When a project is accomplished, the result is a rewarding and fulfilling side business to my regular wedding bread-and-butter.

I want to share with you what I've learned is required to establish yourself in the corporate and commercial video world, and how to thrive once you've arrived.

I know some filmmakers who do crazy-fun stuff like travel around the world with major corporate marketing departments, documenting their trips and interactions with customers. They film professional snowboarders as they attempt insane feats off the world's tallest mountains. They produce short videos and personality pieces for professional athletes, often traveling with teams. You can do this kind of work too.

My videos have ranged from simple talking-head interviews for in-house training to loss-prevention videos that teach employees how to detect and avoid theft. I've made personality promo videos that introduce a company or craftsperson to an Internet audience. I've flown around the world filming dignitaries and celebrities, and even found a love for filming hotel properties.

There's a huge world of corporate and commercial film work out there, and good small-crew filmmakers are not that easy to come by. Be one. Weddings don't have to be the only profitable entry-level video profession. I command a very respectable income with minimal overhead by positioning myself as a small-crew, affordable video producer.

Solo or Team Player?

There are several ways to get hooked into the world of corporate, commercial or creative filmmaking. The first thing you'll need to do is hone your fundamental skill set. This can be challenging. You have to get proficient in basic video production, and that takes practice—which often means working for free or for very little. Then you have to earn the trust that, as an artist, you'll be able to produce quality work consistently and satisfy multiple clients, often simultaneously.

Then you have to learn to run a freelance business, which is another beast itself. Flying solo can be insanely fun and enriching, but be prepared for very long hours, unpredictable clients and scenarios, and having to bend over backward on your lonesome to get a job done. Many times you will find yourself over budget and behind schedule. It's all part of it, and experiencing these pitfalls will make you wiser and more efficient on your shoots.

I like to shoot solo or with one or two assistants. I shoot promo videos for many hotel chains, which is a great way to network, spend nights in cool hotels and be wildly creative. I often have to light entire scenes and environments using my own creative vision, and then shoot spaces, food, staff and sometimes actors and models to convey a message of luxury, beauty and jubilant recreation. Other examples of solo or small-group filmmaking are crowdfunded projects, small indie films, small business promotional videos, website vignettes and anything that can be handled with a crew of fewer than three. Being somewhat of a loner, this is a perfect fit for me. I have also worked on larger-scale projects, but they aren't my favorite.

If you are more socially inclined or enjoy taking direction, you may prefer being part of a production team or an employee of a production house or ad agency. This is where the really big projects are handled, everything from reality shows to major television commercials. Budgets are big and crews are often union. You'll likely start off fetching coffee, logging shots and taping down wires for at least the first several months. There are great opportunities for learning on a big crew, and crew members often team up to work on independent micro-projects together. Jobs with film production companies are placed by film schools and recruiters. If you search hard enough, you may find someone willing to give you a shot.



Hotel Property Shoot



Restaurant

Landing your first corporate/commercial video job as a newbie can be challenging, but being new may just work in your favor. It did for me. Small businesses often seek someone for internal video work like basic interviews, interdepartmental communications and simple video coverage tasks, and they hunt for the lowest bidder. A personal recommendation or referral is helpful to getting you in the door, but networking among peers and rubbing elbows with anyone who works for a medium to large company is a great way to find yourself pulling your other foot through the door. Now is the perfect time to enter this field, because many companies need video and have no clue how to do it themselves.

Here are some basic skills you should be mastering. Have them ready to use on a moment's notice.

Interviewing, Lighting and Filming

It's not enough to just lock down a camera and press record. Executives of big companies (and anyone, for that matter) want to look good on camera. Knowing how to frame, light and create depth and interesting scenes is a must. Practice utilizing multiple cameras for your interviews so you have more options in editing. Corporate employees are rarely good speakers, and you'll spend a tremendous amount of time cutting out *ums*, *uhs* and *ahs*. People who rise to the top of larger video production firms can use light and make any environment or subject look good on screen. This is your most valuable tool.



Interview Screengrab

Profoto Corporate Product Shot

Hotel Property Shoot

Gear Rigging and Grip Work

Whether you're a solo act or the low man on the totem pole, you will have to know how to gaffe wires, rig supports and lights, and fetch coffee—lots of it. Get familiar with today's tools of the trade and study how they are used on a film set. Then make yourself invaluable by being Johnny or Janie-on-the-spot when gear needs to be moved from place to place. Sitting on your rear watching others do it will not land you a next-tier position.

Color Temperature and Gels

As a director in a small crew, I want one thing from my grips: Set my lights correctly the first time. Study how gels affect the lights you are using and how to light a scene just by estimating the color balance of a scene. Get things looking neutral white in-camera. It has a lot to do with the color temperature, or Kelvin measurement, of your lights. This saves a director a ton of time when trying to think about composition, direct talent and make movie magic. Judge light placement and color correctly and consistently on my set, and expect a raise in your near future.

Basic Sound and Dialogue Recording

Every corporate job I've ever worked on required some sort of sound recording. You must understand how microphones operate on an internal level and how recording is done right. The mic on your camera isn't good enough, and it never will be. Check out my article from the July issue. It's a great place to start.

Video Editing

If you aren't a proficient editor, it doesn't matter how great your footage looks. It has to be put together correctly and with the final vision of your client in mind. The only way to become a great editor is to edit for long hours with bloodshot eyes. If you don't have a sore ass or the threat of a blood clot shaking loose in your leg and making its way to your heart, you're not a video editor. Pick a program and master it. It doesn't matter which one. Learn to build a story and make visuals look great next to each other, and you'll be a far more well-rounded filmmaker.

Knowing how to edit can save you blood, sweat, tears and money. Start small. Turn down jobs that are too big for your britches. In the video world, you may learn valuable lessons from biting off more than you can show, but you may also end up unhirable and with a reputation of not being able to get a project done to satisfaction. That's a scarlet letter you do not want.

After completing a few small projects (Instagram and Kickstarter videos are a good place to start), you will build the confidence to take on more ambitious projects. Start by incorporating one element of production at a time. Perhaps start with a music-only project before including dialogue and sound recorded on set. Or shoot and edit a carefully scripted (and very short) indie film before trying to build something captured guerilla-style. Documentaries can be one of the most challenging types of film projects, so tread carefully. Work your way to larger and larger jobs. When you try to lock down your first corporate client, show them a body of work that you *know* you can produce—not what you *think* you can produce.

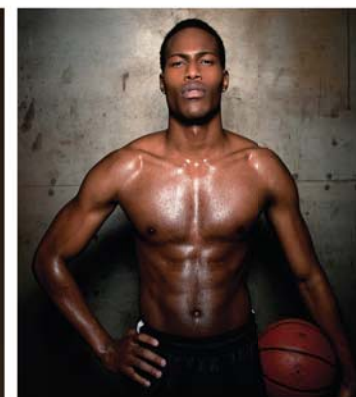
Finally, if you want to make yourself valuable to the filmmaking world in the years to come, take up drone operation. Today's filmmakers are all dabbling in aerial photography and filming, and so should you. Even while the federal government drafts regulations and laws to govern and rein in the Wild West of drone flying, there seems to be a high demand for qualified, proficient quadcopter pilots. In addition to being good at the controls, you'll need to understand how a camera behaves on a stabilizing gimbal and how exposure control works when your camera is hundreds of feet above your head. Study the latest tech and practice.

To see some examples of my corporate work, visit www.robadamfilms.com. ■



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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