

Starting a Photography Business An Overview



Table of Contents

introduction.....	3
six keys to success.....	4
technical knowledge.....	5
customer service.....	7
what are you selling?.....	8
analyzing your market.....	9
your identity.....	10
getting the word out.....	11
income taxes.....	12
sales taxes 1.....	13
sales taxes 2.....	15
business insurance.....	17
what they might not teach in photo school.....	19
join a professional organization.....	20
the bottom line.....	21

introduction

Whether you're a photo student, amateur photographer with aspirations or a seasoned professional, I hope this booklet and accompanying blog, www.prophotolife.com, hold value. The first fourteen entries from the website, all dealing with starting a small photography business, have been reprinted here in an easy to read booklet form.

The information provided gives a general overview of the photography business startup process. My goal in providing this information is to help newcomers elevate their business standards and level of professionalism from the very start. I feel it is now more important than ever that we work together, as professional photographers, in order to maintain the value and integrity of the images that we create for the world. This approach will benefit us all.

My name is Jim Talkington and I've made my living as a professional photographer for 20+ years. Currently the co-owner of Daylight Photo (a commercial / advertising photography studio, www.daylight-photo.com) in Cincinnati, OH, my career has wound its way through many facets of the profession: advertising, photojournalism, editorial, catalog, darkroom technician, retail photo sales, writer & you name it, I've probably tried it. Through both ups and downs, I've enjoyed the journey.

Please visit www.prophotolife.com for frequent updates. Suggesting topics of interest and commenting on posts is sincerely appreciated.

Sincerely,

Jim Talkington

Cincinnati, OH

six keys to success

February 22nd, 2008 | by admin |

How does a photographer make the transition from enthusiastic amateur to professional? Well, it starts with the sale of that first photograph. Then, hopefully, there will be another sale, another assignment, another job to follow. And then one day you'll stop and look back at years that have gone by. That's pretty much my vantage point as I write this.

If I were starting all over today it would be in a very different photographic world than in the early '80s. My teeth were cut on Tri-X and D76. If that means nothing to you then no worries. The short version is that you missed some analog fun from before the digital revolution. But time is moving so fast there's not much sense in waxing poetic about silver-coated film and toxic chemicals, at least not right now. I'm sure that will come in later posts, though, because I just can't help myself.

Regardless of the area of photography you are entering (advertising, editorial, wedding, portraits, etc.), certain skills are necessary. Some photographers are stronger in one area than another and they play to those strengths. Maybe it's possible to partner with someone else that is strong in areas where you could use some improvement. My studio, [Daylight Photo](#), is a business partnership and we compliment each other very well. But usually, when you hang out that shingle for the first time, it's you against the world. You have a camera and you want to make some money with it, simple and pure.

At the beginning of any career one usually has no idea of the actual skills and work necessary to succeed. That's a good thing because, hopefully, it is pure passion fueling your interest in a photographic career & a simple, exciting, unadulterated love for photography. If you can keep that passion burning despite highs and lows you will most likely find yourself in possession of a satisfying career in photography. Live to shoot, shoot to live.

In following posts I'll break down my thoughts on professional photography in a six installment (or so) outline, each addressing things I feel are key to success:

1. technical knowledge
2. customer service skills
3. marketing
4. business requirements
5. what they might not teach you in photo school (or what you should have paid more attention to, if they did)
6. the bottom line

technical knowledge

February 29th, 2008 | by admin |

How much technical knowledge do you need to become a professional photographer? It varies.

I have [a friend who is a great photographer](#) but hates Photoshop and post-production. He shoots primarily public relations and corporate photography with a small bag of photo equipment. After an assignment he burns a disk of high-res jpegs and hands them to his client. The clients are perfectly happy with this. His greatest strength is the way he interacts with people, eliciting responses and capturing them. Keeping the technical aspects simple helps him concentrate fully on his living, breathing subjects.

Contrast that to my studio, [Daylight Photo](#), where we may be using multiple studio strobes to light a 60 foot long printing press on location. We most always shoot tethered to the computer, constantly checking focus, histograms, highlights, shadows and critical color balance as we shoot. Afterward the RAW files will be processed and every detail will be tended to in Photoshop so that the perfect image for an ad or brochure may be supplied to client specifications.

Both ways of working are equally valid and suit the strengths of the individual photographers. One just happens to require more technical knowledge than the other. The important thing is that we all keep learning and improving as our careers progress.

Where does all technical knowledge begin?

This may sound obvious but the place to start, in my opinion, is by reading your camera manual from cover to cover. It's amazing the number of young photographers that ask questions easily answered by their camera manual. Want to control the look of your images? Want to know when the exposure is perfect? Whether you're holding a first digital SLR in your hand or you're a seasoned veteran, fully understanding your camera's controls is necessary to truly control the image.

Is photo school a necessity to become a professional?

Photographic education should be ongoing, maybe through a photo school, maybe through self-taught methods. I started out in my high school photo class, learning to develop black and white film. From there I jumped straight into photo assisting and photo lab jobs. I never went to college or trade school to learn my craft, it was all done through on the job experience and my insatiable appetite for learning all things photographic.

So do I tout the learning on the job method? Yes& and no. I think photo schools are now more important than ever. With all of the hardware and software knowledge necessary to be a photographer

today, it's nice to attend a school with the latest of everything. Plus schools provide networking and job opportunities. My path probably would have been easier had I gone to photo school& and I think the journey now might be more crowded and demanding than it was then.

Regardless of which path you choose it ultimately comes down to how bad you want it and how hard you're willing to work to achieve your goals. Sorry if that last statement spoils the fantasy of professional photography as a freewheeling, fun career without no responsibilities or pressures. Yes, photography can be real work. The really good news is that even the worst day of being a photographer is probably better than 95% of the other jobs out there. That's my opinion.

Continuing education:

Without a doubt you will find abundant technical information on a number of photo websites. One of my favorites is [Digital Photography Review \(www.dpreview.com\)](http://www.dpreview.com). Spend a few hours searching their forums and you'll surely find whatever technical answer it is you're looking for. And though I love my local library, it's kind of hard to find the very latest technical information on their shelves. The technology surrounding photo hardware and software changes by the minute. For technical info the internet reigns supreme.

I enjoy the technical aspects of photography and look forward to diving into specific issues on this blog in the future.

customer service

March 1st, 2008 | by admin |

Maybe I point to the past too often sometimes, pulling references from a time that no longer exists. But like Popeye used to say (where has Popeye gone?), I yam what I yam and that s all that I yam .

There was time before ATM machines, email and online ordering. In those days it was necessary to speak to people face to face (or over the phone) in order to get things done, working together to solve problems. That s a large part of most photography jobs, working with people to solve problems (I don t really like the word problems & let s start using the word challenges). Whether you re hired by a bride and groom or an in-house corporate marketing department, communication is necessary. If you re a nature photographer maybe these communication skills aren t as vital. Unless, of course, you want to sell your images eventually. Okay, so communication does eventually come into the picture, regardless of your chosen photographic path.

We, as photographers, as creatives, might instinctively like to go off on our own flights of fancy during a photo job, pursuing our own ideas of visual nirvana for a given subject. A very few clients let us do this, completely and totally. Very often (okay, here comes the real world) those jobs with total freedom are at one end or the other of the income scale. If you re getting paid little then clients realize you should be given bunches of freedom. Or, if you re being paid a whole, whole lot, as in you re-absolutely-without-doubt-the-only-photographer-for-the-job, then you re probably going to be given tons of freedom. When you re making a living as a photographer most jobs fall somewhere in between. You have been hired because you are really good at what you do, no question, but you must remember that you re being paid by someone who needs a job done to meet certain expectations.

Before any photo shoot begins you have to ask questions. Do you clearly understand your clients needs and expectations? Do they clearly understand what they will receive and what it will cost? Good customer service makes for happy clients. Happy clients tell their friends and keep coming back. That s how you grow a business.

Okay, so now we ve touched upon the technical aspects of photography and customer service skills and the role they play in professional photography. At some point in your career you will lose a job to another photographer with lesser technical skills that knows how to relate to the client better. And at some point you may find yourself losing a job to a photographer who can simply out shoot you (for the given subject). The best way to guarantee growth in your business is to work on improving both skills. If you re strong in both areas then new opportunities begin to open up.

what are you selling?

March 3rd, 2008 | by admin |

How do you market yourself as a professional photographer? Thanks to the internet the answer to this question evolves continually (and there are lots of great answers to the marketing question available on the net). But, at the core, marketing photography (or anything else) will always have its constants.

In the most simple terms, I think there are four basic steps to forming a marketing plan, whether you are approaching ad clients (ad agencies, client direct) or consumers (portrait, wedding, etc.):

1. deciding what services you want to sell
2. analyzing the market for those services
3. developing your identity
4. getting the word out

What professional photography services do you want to sell?

Okay, so you want to create large productions using the hottest fashion models of the day ([like David LaChapelle](#)). I can appreciate that. It might not be realistic at this point in your career, though. Maybe you only have a camera, lens and flash and that's it. In that case you might want to concentrate on using natural light and shooting portraits on location. You might also find opportunities shooting for the local newspaper or zines in your area. Try to find things that are within your capabilities just starting out.

Most importantly, pursue the kinds of photography you like and are good at. If you hate the thought of shooting weddings then don't decide to do that just for money, at least when you're first starting out. You may find yourself shooting weddings eventually for various reasons, but try to keep your focus as sincere and pure as possible in the very beginning. Enjoy being a beginner. Either you will find success that way or you will find it necessary to go outside your favorite realm in order to earn the income you desire. Just my thoughts.

Also be honest with yourself about any constraints you may have (lack of equipment, inability to travel, other obligations, etc.).

[analyzing your market](#)

March 5th, 2008 | by admin |

Analyzing the local professional photography market

Now that you know what type of photography you want to pursue, let's do some research. So you want to be a pet photographer and live in Peoria. Start looking around to find your competition. Do a Google search on phrases like Peoria pet photographer and see what you come up with. Look in the yellow pages and call a few photographers, asking them if they shoot pets.

How many competitors do you have? Are you able to find out what they are charging? That's analyzing the competition.

Back to Google and the yellow pages. Are there pet stores and kennels in your area? Can you think of ways to partner with them to advertise your services? That's analyzing the market. How many pet owners are out there and how can you reach them cost-effectively?

After doing the above you should have some idea of whether or not your photo niche is worth pursuing. There are some things that may give you pause. If there are already a bunch of pet photographers in your area then maybe the market is already saturated. If photographers are not able to charge very much for their pet services then it might not be worth investing your time and money. Or if your potential business partners (pet stores, kennels, etc.) already have agreements with other photographers then it might be tough to reach your market effectively. You might want to think about shooting something other than (or in addition to) pets.

But, hey, you know you're a kickass photographer and even if the odds are stacked against making pet photography work you're still going to pursue it because you love it, right? Even if you're the one hundredth pet photographer in the Peoria market, you're gonna make it happen. That means you better have a great identity that shows why you're the best out of all the many choices.

your identity

March 6th, 2008 | by admin |

Developing your identity

A photographer should create their own unique identity to show why they are different than the competition. In recent years the word branding has pretty much been beaten to death but it's a valuable word to understand. Branding means creating a unique identity (in look and message) and then projecting it consistently across multiple marketing platforms (whew, that was my sentence of the year!).

Let's go back to the Peoria pet photographer reference and start developing an identity. What is the stronger message?

1. I take pictures of a whole bunch of things but like to photograph pets, too.
2. I really like animals so I decided to become a pet photographer.
3. I was raised on a farm and have been surrounded by animals my entire life. I breed show dogs and have 2 horses that my family cares for. Large or small, when it comes to pets, I photograph them all.

Okay, a little corny but you get the idea. I hope you agree that number three is more compelling and communicates trustworthy knowledge and experience. Figure out why you are the best photographer for a particular job and let people know about it. That's your identity.

Your visual style is also a huge part of your identity. Are your photos appreciably different than the competition? Will the average consumer be able to see the difference? When it comes to visual style, do you have to explain why your style is different or do people see it and get it right away?

You'll also need to come up with a logo because this will represent you on all of your marketing materials. An effective logo communicates something about you or your services, something that is distinctive and relevant to what you do. Just because it looks cool doesn't necessarily mean it communicates your message. A lot of photographers use a clip art camera as part of their logo. While this loses points for originality and style I guess it does show what you do (in the very broadest, most general sense). Hopefully you can come up with something better that ties photography and pets together. When in doubt hire a designer (I am definitely not a designer) or use the KISS method (keep it simple, stupid). I recommend getting help with logo design. That's what I do.

Now that you know who you are it's time to let other people know who you are.

getting the word out

March 7th, 2008 | by admin |

This is a blog about marketing photography and we're just now talking about websites? Gathering up your best images and putting them on a website is a challenging but really fun part of marketing. It's also a step that people want to put ahead of too many other important details. A website is now an essential part of marketing but it's not the beginning and end of the process, it's just one of the important steps.

In the past few marketing installments we've looked at what you want to sell, what your competition is doing, who you are going to sell to and what makes you and your photographs unique and special. Hopefully you can see that, by thinking through the previous steps, you will be able to create, across the board, more effective, targeted marketing materials. Speaking of targeted, that's an important word, especially in this conversation.

I think of marketing as two basic approaches, blanket and targeted. Blanket means you throw a big blanket of marketing over a bunch of prospects and hope there are some takers for your product or service. An example of this would be printing up a flier for your pet photo business and putting them on the windshield of every car at the local market (make sure it's okay to do this first). You will hand out hundreds of fliers but only a portion of those recipients may be pet owners (potential customers).

Targeted marketing means you've done your homework and identified a smaller number of prospects that you will direct your marketing to. Now take that same flier and venture inside a veterinarian's office. You may only hand out a dozen fliers but it's a good bet that every one will go to a potential (pet owner) customer.

Both methods can be effective and both take time and energy. You use a lot more energy and paper when distributing the blanketed materials at the market and so the targeted approach seems more efficient (and I agree with that thought). But the targeted method did require your time to research prospects like the vet's office. I say concentrate on targeting marketing first. Identify your prospects and go where they are.

Whew, this is supposed to be the overview on marketing so I better start generalizing a bit and get on with other business. Details can follow in future posts. Here are the basics of getting the word out:

Put together a business card, website and printed materials that show your shiny new logo and that express who you are and what you do. Tell anybody and everybody about your new business, from friends and family to the marketing prospects you identified earlier. When you do get a job, work really hard to please the customer. Then they will tell their friends and family about you. Word of mouth

marketing is where it is at.

income taxes

March 8th, 2008 | by admin |

Photographers are creative people and customarily hate structure and dealing with the legalities of running a business. Well, if you're going to earn income from your photography then you're running a business and, as such, need to understand the legal requirements. In prior installments we talked about fun things like cameras, business cards, websites and cooking up marketing ideas. Those are all fun things because we can see how they directly benefit us. Now that photography is becoming your business and not just a hobby it's time to recognize that you are accepting important obligations to others, also. These obligations include licenses, taxes and insurance.

* I want to remind you that this is an overview, I'm not a legal or financial expert. Below is a basic outline of things to consider when creating a business that sells photography. Check with local trade schools or libraries to see if they offer classes on setting up a business for your specific state or municipality. The Small Business Administration (SBA) also offers help and mentoring through SCORE (Counselors to America's Small Business). There's lots of help out there, don't hesitate to utilize it.

Taxes

You will be dealing with both income and sales taxes. Before you do anything else, set up a meeting with an accountant to discuss what you want to do. Seriously, even if you think you'll only make a thousand dollars your first year it's time to start thinking like a business person. Prepare yourself for success. If you don't have an accountant then set up a meeting with the local chain accountant store - H & R Block comes to mind (this is not an endorsement for H & R Block). Tell them what you are doing and they will set you up with the paperwork necessary to file estimated quarterly income tax payments to the federal, state and local governments. Together you will estimate your earnings for the coming year. It's then up to you to set aside the projected tax amounts and pay them in quarterly installments (estimated tax payments).

You see, the government wants you to keep sending them money each quarter that you're earning income. If you've estimated your yearly income perfectly (let's not worry about perfection, let's just concentrate on obeying the law) then, when your income taxes are filed the following year, you won't owe a penny. Good for you! Most budding young photographers just stick their earned income in a pocket and spend it quickly. There's nothing left to pay Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam doesn't like that.

sales taxes 1

March 9th, 2008 | by admin |

Sales taxes for photographers

Photographers find sales taxes particularly perplexing (and that's understandable). I can only hope to give an overview, please speak to a professional advisor or accountant to get specific answers for your state or locale because things are always changing. The short story is this: if you are going to sell photographs or photographic services to consumers then, with rare exceptions, you'll be charging and collecting sales taxes.

Last year I spent an hour on the phone with the Ohio State Department of Taxation to get clarification on when and how sales taxes should be collected and paid by photographers (there have been changes in recent years). I'd like to break this down into two parts: what is taxable and who pays the tax.

What is taxable?

All goods and services that contribute to the creation of a new, tangible product are taxable in Ohio. Photographs, no matter what form (print or digital) are considered new, tangible products. That means that if we create images that didn't exist before, then sales taxes need to be collected and paid on both our goods and services.

At one time only goods (and not services) were taxable. That was quite a few years ago but some photographers want to cling to that idea. It's simply not true (in Ohio) any more.

Using this old example, a portrait photographer would not charge sales taxes on their sitting fee or portrait session because it was a service. Sales taxes would be charged, though, on the sale of prints because they were tangible goods. With the present tax laws, all portrait and wedding photographers dealing directly with an end purchaser (their client) must charge and collect sales taxes (it's 6.5% here in Cincinnati).

* When would a service NOT be taxable? The way I understand it, if the service does not contribute to the creation of a new, tangible product. Take dance lessons, for example. No new product is created when someone receives dance lessons (unlike photographic services) so the service is not taxable.

After you have charged and collected the sales taxes from your customer, you must send them to the State on a schedule they provide. I believe that, in Ohio, they start new businesses out paying sales taxes quarterly, then adjust your schedule using other criteria. At one time my photo studio ([Daylight Photo](#)) was only required to pay sales taxes twice a year. That was tough because we had to store thousands of dollars in taxes for months on end. That can be hard to do when cash flow is tight and

other bills need to be paid. Now we are allowed to submit our sales taxes every month and it's much nicer since we're only storing the money for a short time.

The bottom line is that, in my locale, all photography goods and services are subject to sales tax. If you are providing the goods and services directly to the end user then you are required to collect and submit these taxes to the State. If you are shooting for an ad agency, or stock agency, though, then you are not selling to the end user, the agency is. So it is the agency's responsibility to charge and collect the sales taxes on what you've produced.

I told you this could be perplexing. Next we'll talk about whose responsibility it is to collect and pay the sales taxes.

sales taxes 2

March 10th, 2008 | by admin |

Who collects and pays the sales taxes?

Here's an important point: when something is subject to sales tax it is only taxed once and only the final person receiving the good or service pays the sales tax. I think of every sales transaction as a train and every step along the way is a car on the train. The end user is the caboose, the end of the line, and they pay sales tax to the car just in front of them.

Let's take photography out of the tax equation for a moment and pretend we're making mufflers. Here's the sales tax train:

- * the first step: a muffler company buys raw steel (no sales tax)
- * a distributor buys the muffler from the muffler maker (no sales tax)
- * an auto parts store buys the muffler from the distributor (no sales tax)
- * a local service station buys the muffler from the auto parts store (no sales tax)
- * the service station installs the muffler on your car. You are the end user of the muffler, the train stops with you, so you pay the sales tax on the new, tangible product. But it is the responsibility of the local service station to collect those sales taxes from you and to pay them to the state. Make sense?

So, in commercial photography, say we shoot food photographs for an ad agency. If we send the bill for our services to the ad agency then they are going to resell our services to the restaurant (the end user). The ad agency will be collecting and charging the sales taxes and we don't mess with it. But if the agency tells us to bill the restaurant directly, cutting the agency out of the loop, then we are liable for collecting and submitting the sales taxes on the transaction. If we are doing commercial work and have any doubt about whether the client should be charged sales taxes or not then we simply ask their accounting department for the answer.

There you go, that's the primer. Now it's time to check with your state's department of taxation for more details (or start with a tax advisor or accountant familiar with local laws). The first thing they will have you do is file for a vendor's license with your county auditor so you can get everything set up. In our state we have to file a sales tax report even if we haven't had any taxable sales that quarter. There are penalties for not filing on time.

I'll stick this in here, also: I recommend registering your business name and distinctive logo with your state so it's protected. If you register as "Superstar Portraits" in your state then others will be prevented from stealing your name. You can also register nationally but do so in your state, at minimum. If the name of your business is "Your Name Photography" then having it stolen or duplicated is probably less

likely.

As I said in the beginning, see if local trade schools or the public library have classes on starting a small business. Getting everything set up when you start out will help prevent unwanted surprises down the road.

business insurance

March 11th, 2008 | by admin |

Everyone has an opinion on the value of insurance. Personally, I wouldn't work without business liability insurance. If you work in a studio it will be required. If you strictly work on location then you're taking chances without it. Take, for example, the wedding photographer:

- * Will the venue (church, reception hall) allow you to work there without a certificate of insurance?
- * If granny trips over your camera bag and gets injured are you liable?
- * What if (heaven forbid) your storage card goes bad and all the photos are lost. The couple threatens to sue. What do you do?

Any of these things can ruin a young business. Even if you aren't found liable you could go broke defending against the accusations. Wouldn't you rather have an insurance agency dealing with everything? Business liability insurance is relatively inexpensive for what it provides.

Let me give you a real life example of what could go unexpectedly wrong. A commercial photographer was shooting at a day care center in the basement of a large office building. Everything was great and working wonderfully but he failed to notice that one of his strobe lights was too near a ceiling sprinkler. The heat from the modeling lamp triggered the sprinkler system. And since it was in the basement, the whole floor and the floor above had their sprinklers go off, too. Many offices were water damaged because his light was in the wrong place. Imagine the insurance claim. It's just not worth taking a chance without it.

Check with professional photo organizations like PPA, WPPI, ASMP and others to see if they have any partnerships or deals with insurance companies.

Another good thing to do is to get a business rider on your auto insurance. This costs very little and covers you when using your automobile for work purposes.

I'm going to give a quick mention of business structures here, also, since they are related to liability. In the beginning of your company you will probably be a sole proprietor. That means you are solely responsible for your company and the resultant liabilities. By setting up a corporation of some sort you can gain protections for your personal property. In the case of a problem or dispute the corporate assets may be at risk but your personal assets are afforded more protection. In other words, if you're a corporation and get sued, you may lose your company but you won't lose your house.

The easiest and least expensive corporate-type structure to set up is an LLC (Limited Liability Company). This can be set up by just one person and provides some of the protections stated above. From there, you move up to an S Corp or a C Corp and these involve more expense and complication

starting a photo business overview www.prophotolife.com

(but provide even more protection). Here's where I hit the default button and suggest speaking with a lawyer in order to get more information on what works best for you. Just like any other type of protection, the more you have to lose, the more protection you need. If you have a house and family then there's more at risk than if you have nothing to lose. Do look and plan ahead, though.

what they might not teach in photo school

If you've read all of the business responsibilities sections and are still with me then it's obvious you really want to be a professional photographer. There's no way around it, if you're going to survive (and thrive) in business then you have to understand how business works, whether you're running a bakery or a photo studio.

All of this learning doesn't happen overnight, it's a process. My particular process has involved a lot of mistakes, I readily admit. I've taken chances and made some bad decisions, things I'm lucky to have survived. And I'm still learning and taking chances and, occasionally, making bad decisions. But that means I'm learning and am in the game. You can't win if you're not actively in the game.

The full title of this entry is what they might not teach you in photo school (or what you should have paid more attention to, if they did). The title leaves this particular entry ripe for tips and tricks about Photoshop, establishing pricing or getting new clients. I can think of lots of beneficial tips but those will come shortly. Right now we're still in overview mode (tomorrow is the last entry for the six keys to success overview).

Instead, I want to talk about setting goals and expectations for your career. Realize that many people would like to make a living in photography. A surprising number seem to think it's going to be easy. Here's my official statement on the state of professional photography (you'll hear me say this often):

As a professional photographer with 20+ years of experience, I think it's easier than ever to make extra income with photography. There are tools available that make it pretty darn accessible for most anyone to start a part-time portrait or microstock photo business. But, truth be told, I also think (and this is my opinion) that it's more difficult than ever to make a truly good living in photography. There aren't a lot of full-time staff photographer positions and many photographers are competing for the ones that do exist. As a result, more and more photographers are deciding to start their own business, either part- or full-time.

If you are one of the entrepreneurs ready to start your own business, really look at where you want to go and diligently research the steps necessary to get there. Are you prepared for the fact that it might not be easy? Are you willing to study, learn and put in the work necessary to achieve your goals? I'm confident that you are. Why else would I spend my free time writing about this?

join a professional organization

This evening I was reminded of the importance of professional organizations. I have long been a member of [ASMP \(American Society of Media Photographers\)](#). Every other month [my local chapter](#) hosts an event called Pints n Pixels, an opportunity for members to share their recent work and a beverage or two. I always leave these gatherings with a renewed enthusiasm for sharing and learning.

Professional organizations like ASMP offer great benefits in addition to a fun night out. Members are instantly networked to others willing to help with questions and professional development. And, collectively, we work to keep each other informed about our ever-changing industry. The national and local organizations are also constantly working to protect our legal interests pertaining to intellectual property and copyright issues. If we don't work together to protect the value of what we produce and our rights as photographers then who will?

ASMP is comprised primarily of advertising and editorial photographers. Other professional photo groups have their own representative organizations. The ones that come to mind are:

[ASMP - advertising / editorial](#)

[APA - Advertising Photographers of America](#) - advertising / editorial

[PPA - Professional Photographers of America](#) - portrait / wedding / commercial

[WPPI - Wedding Photographers International](#) - wedding / portrait

[NPPA - National Press Photographers Association](#) - news

If you don't currently belong to a professional photography organization please take a look around the above websites that might interest you. See for yourself the benefits they offer. Need help with contracts or paperwork? Setting pricing or professional standards? Start finding the answers today.

the bottom line

This is the final entry in this overview section of the business of professional photography, entry number fourteen. I hope that you've learned something in prior entries that will compel you to keep checking back with www.prophotolife.com.

We share something in common: a love of photography. When you want to make a living with photography that means you seek to combine business and pleasure. What could be better? Or, at times, more difficult?

Early in a career, photographers are married to each image. We have a very personal relationship with what we produce and, as a result, it can be hard to attach prices to what we do. Creating a business out of our own imagery isn't particularly instinctual or easy for most of us.

That's why it's important to understand the business of photography. My studio ([Daylight Photo](#)) stresses proper communication and understanding with clients. In knowledge, there is power. When the day of a photo shoot arrives we know we've done the proper preparation, talked over expectations and now we are free to create photographs the client will enjoy. It's great to feel in control. That's really what being a professional is all about.

I hope you will take control of your professional photography career starting now. Set goals and learn each day. Hopefully this blog will provide a valuable resource in your own personal journey.

If you want to be a professional photographer, go be a professional photographer.