10 common problems professional photographers face - and how to overcome them

The Institute of Professional Photography
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Nothing compares with being making a living by doing what your passion is, and that’s certainly true with professional photographers.

While taking photography is certainly enjoyable, some aspects of have a photography business can be frustrating.

Here are some common problems that professional photographers face and how to solve them:

1. With high resolution cameras and editing software available, why would clients want to use a professional photographer instead of doing it themselves?

It’s a misconception that someone can take a picture and no matter how bad it is, touch it up with a little photo editing software and have a great picture.

Yes, they are certainly better then the candid photos that our parents and grandparents took, but they are not professional quality.

There are features that only a professional photographer can master such as lighting, posing and something as simple (or rather complex) as creativity that they average person does not posses the knowledge to accomplish. It can take years of wedding photography experience for instance to know they right words that can illicit a certain look in a bride and groom. Or a special way of working with children to capture an effervescent childhood moment of joy.

Don’t be afraid to list out some of these common misconceptions that people have, and list the reasons why they SHOULD choose to have a professional photographer instead. Showing examples of the difference between an amateur and a professional photographer is a great to “put in to pictures’ what you are saying.

2. How can I market myself?

Quite simply, “a picture is worth a thousand words”. Nothing beats a strong portfolio of beautiful or striking pictures. If you are newer and trying to get the word out, offer coupons for discounted sitting or a free 8 X 10 picture.
Offer to do pictures for community events such as school football games, portraits of local government officials or parades and let the organizations have them at no cost with an agreement to use your company name in print. Find out if there are community fundraisers that need raffle prizes and offer your services as a prize.

Make sure you have business cards that feature a favorite photograph you’ve taken. Have a unique and compelling website that features a variety of your photographs. Make sure you have your site optimized for the local search engines. It does no good to have a great looking site if no one finds you when they type in “your town photographers”.

3. What happens if no one rings, and the work dries up?

Make sure you network. Attend local business events, such as the Chamber of Commerce. It will pay off eventually.

Make sure your website is attractive and welcoming, and encourages people to contact you.

Be active in the community – take photos free for charities and not-for-profit groups.

And send letters to local businesses.

The work will come if you persevere.

4. How do I decide what photography niche to specialize in?

Remember, this is what you are choosing for your profession, so make sure you are following your passion and not just out to “make a buck”.

If you love children, portrait and in particular child portraits may be a perfect way to spend your day. You could specialize in animal photography or nature if you prefer to spend your days outdoors.

Think about what would be your favorite thing to photograph if you could not photograph ANYTHING else. If it truly is everything, don’t limit yourself –stay generalized. Maybe a niche will touch you later in your career.
5. There is so much stock photography available online: is there still a market for unique photos?

Yes, there is a lot of stock photography online, but not everyone wants to use a picture they’ve seen in half a dozen websites or print ads.

If you are doing commercial photography, let businesses know that you pride yourself in letting only one person or business use your photos and they can be assured that the picture on the print ad they worked so hard to be unique with will not appear on their competitors ad six months down the road.

6. How can I protect myself from MY photographs being used on the internet without my permission?

The last thing you want to do is create a great website featuring you fabulous photography, and then have someone “lift” those pictures and use them elsewhere online. That takes away the integrity that you have promised your clients.

One way you can protect yourself is to include your URL or company name as part of the image. If someone were to copy the photograph, this would come with it. Yes, they could crop it, but it would be a time consuming process.

Another way is to watermark your images. The URL or company name is imbedded in to the picture itself. This is harder to crop out, especially if placed over a critical part of the image.

There are third party software plug-ins you can install such as CopySafe that will protect your images. You can easily find software by doing an online search.

7. If I take a great photo that has a random person in it, can I still use it for commercial purposes?

You can take a picture of anyone. Hence the word street photography. However, you cannot sell the picture for commercial purposes without the person’s consent.

It can be a part of your portfolio, but you would not be able to use it in a advertising campaign.

If you are taking some great shots that you think have wonderful potential and there is someone in them, have them sign a quick release form if possible, and for heaven’s sake, always have a few forms ready in your camera bag.
8. How can I stand out from the competition?

As with any business, adding your personal touch and flair is key. This is even more so in something as personal and creative as photography. Don’t be afraid to express who and what your vision is. Remember that not everyone will like it, and that’s ok. Find something that is your “signature” and go with it.

From the business side of things, exceptional customer service is key. If you take great photographs, but your customer service stinks, you may go out of business before you know it. Photographers can have a reputation as being moody. If this is you, have someone else do your customer service. Make sure the overall experience of doing business with you is a positive one.

Consider having a blog that documents your photography experiences. Whether it’s exciting nature photography, street photography or portrait photography, you have unique experiences in your job that can be fun for others to learn about.

9. I’m great at photographs, but not so good at the business side of things. Can I still have a successful business?

Absolutely. Not everyone is meant to be a business person. You got in to this profession to take great photos, not to keep the books and make appointments.

Outsource any part of your business that doesn’t “float your boat”. Keep your focus on your passion. It will reflect in your overall business.

10. How do I handle unhappy clients?

The fact of the matter is you can’t make everyone happy all of the time. Your photography is something that you probably feel pretty passionate about, and artistic criticism is not easy to take. Change your way of thinking.

Not everyone likes the same thing. The picture that has you jumping for joy may seem lackluster to someone else. Calmly listen to what your client has to say and try to think of a way to please them.

If you can “fix” something in the picture, do it. If it’s coming back for another sitting at no cost, consider it. Don’t argue with them about how great you think the picture is.
Just keep the picture for your portfolio, and make your client happy by delivering what they want...even if it’s not your vision.

Want to learn more about the exciting world of the professional photographer? Register on the course, and make your dream come true. [http://www.inst.org/photography-courses/become.htm](http://www.inst.org/photography-courses/become.htm)