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Salvatore Cincotta
BEHIND THE SHUTTER

MISSION STATEMENT

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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THE COVER

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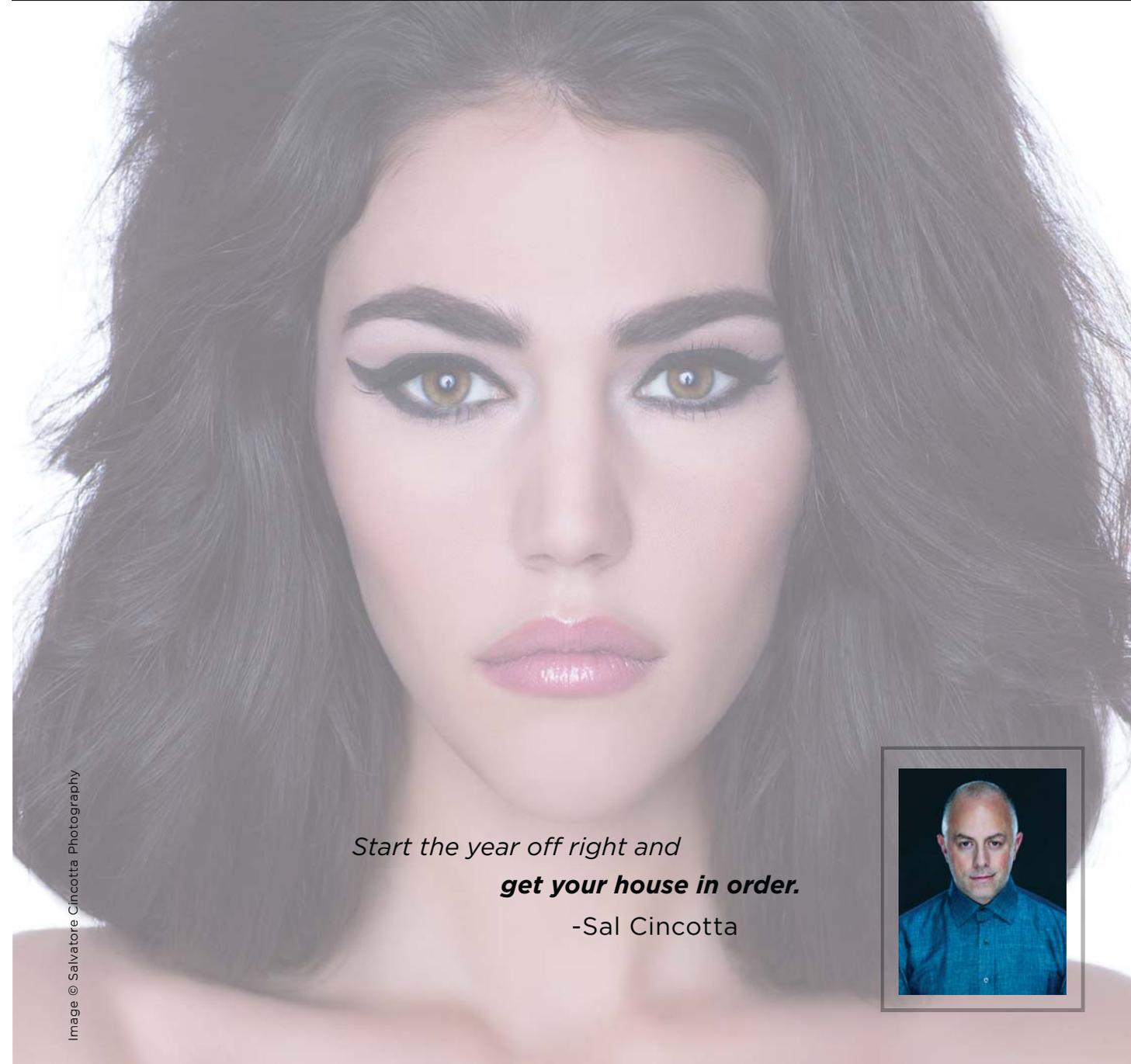
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ABOUT THE IMAGE: This image was taken in our studio in December 2015.

LAUNCH POINT

A message from the editor-in-chief



*Start the year off right and
get your house in order.*

-Sal Cincotta



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



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PLANNING FOR A PROFITABLE YEAR

with Lori Nordstrom

A new year means a new slate. Of course we want to look at the past year to gain information, to evolve and to grow, but don't dwell there. Celebrate your successes, and gain knowledge from the mistakes. Last year is over, and it's time to decide what 2016 looks like for you.

One of my favorite things about owning my own business is that I get to decide whom I work with, when I work, and how much money I will make. It's all in our hands as business owners. Take the time to plan for each of those things. As I put my plans in place, I want to share with you the top 10 things that I plan for in my photography business to ensure maximum profit. In the end, if we can't be profitable, we have to find another "job," so while some may say, "I do it for the art," in the end, if we're running a business, that business should be profitable. Getting to do what we love is a big bonus.



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PLANNING AND PROJECTIONS

Once your goals are set, you can start putting a plan in place to reach those goals. Your action steps can be put on your calendar, so that you set aside time to make each one happen. Plan for profitability. Your pricing, the presentation of your pricing and how you will conduct sales should all be a part of your plan. When we make a plan, we are taking control instead of letting our business control us.

We spend a large part of our life working. Hopefully you chose photography because you had a passion for it, but understand that building a strong business is essential to keeping the joy you started out with as a new photographer. Mark Till, who wrote *The Lucrative Photographer*, found in his research that studios with a written business plan gross an average of 50 percent more than those without a plan—so get your plan in place.

Projections for the year allow you to see your year at a glance. Plan and project how many sessions you can do this year and how much each needs to average to reach your financial goals. Once you know what your average should be, you can set up your products and pricing, and how you will educate and lead your clients so that average can be met.

GOAL SETTING

First on the list is goal setting. We all know that we should be setting goals and making plans to reach those goals, but statistics say that only 5 percent of people ever write down those goals. Digging further, those same statistics report that 80 percent of those who write down their goals actually succeed in accomplishing those goals. That's powerful stuff. When we write things down on paper, we give our goals a deeper level of commitment. Set aside some time to write out your immediate and long-term goals, both personally and professionally. Then write action steps—small things that you can do to get you closer to your goal.

MARKETING

We have to market our business in order to attract new clients. However you choose to do it, the first step is to identify your target client. How can we decide how we will market our products and services before we know whom we are marketing to? The clearer you can get on the clients you want to work with, the better.

We invest a lot of time with each of our clients, so we want them to be people we are excited and eager to spend that time with. There are three things to consider when determining your target client: personality, where she spends her time and where she spends her money. The last two tell us a lot about our target client's priorities. The first is just getting clear on whom we want to attract to our business. I want to work with people who are happy, positive and grateful, and those who put their family first.

Once we've determined the target client, we can begin to put our marketing campaigns into place. What are the best avenues to reach this client? If we know where she's spending time and money, we know where we need to have a presence.

NETWORKING

Networking is the most powerful form of marketing. Whether it's a word-of-mouth referral, hanging your work at a business you've partnered with or a collaboration on a newsletter, open house or marketing piece, networking with other well-connected people and businesses gets us in front of our target client.

Think through the businesses you already know that serve your target client. There are people you do business with. There are those who own their own business that you go to church with, go to the gym with or are parents from your kids' school. Make a list of these people and start connecting with them to see how you might partner up. As a photographer, you have a built-in resource to meet with anyone you'd like to meet with. Call and offer to take a few photos and tell their story. You won't be told no, and the connection begins.

SCHEDULING

Scheduling is so important to the success of your business and how your business affects the rest of your life. Whether you have a family or you're a single who enjoys free weekends and traveling with friends, your schedule can make or break you. When we start out in the photography business, we say yes to everything. We let clients decide when and where they'd like to be photographed, and plan our schedules around them. This leads to late nights and working weekends to get everything done, and eventually leads to burnout.

I encourage you to plan personal priorities on your calendar first and plan your business around those things. When you take control of your schedule, you can lead your clients to the times you have set aside to work with them. Plan not only sessions, but consultations, editing, ordering, packaging and all of the other business items that have nothing to do with photography. We have to clean, pay bills, return phone calls and so much more. Block time on your calendar for each of your "jobs"—as well as time for yourself and your family.



Image © Lori Nordstrom

CONSULTATIONS

If you haven't started incorporating consultations into your workflow, make 2016 your year. So many photographers book a session and never speak to the client again until the session. Often, these same photographers complain of no-shows or of clients who have sticker shock or can't make decisions during the sale. Anytime you have a consistent problem like this, you should do a clean sweep of your processes and look at what part is broken.

Many issues can be solved by simply adding consultations to your client plan. During a consultation, you can answer questions and make suggestions for the sale. A consultation is the time to talk about pricing, especially if a client is struggling at all with what you charge. You can continue the education process that was started on the first phone call. Keep building value, and let them know how what you do will enhance their lives. Go over suggestions for wall decor and albums. Suggest locations, background and clothing based on their home's style and colors.

What happens during a consultation, whether in person or over the phone, can greatly affect the outcome of the entire client experience—and, in the end, your sale.

IN-PERSON SALES

Taking your images offline and doing sales in person will change your bottom line, period. Every *Shutter Magazine* follower has read about the value of meeting with your clients in person and making suggestions for their order. If you're new to in-person sales, you'll want to have a few checkpoints in place, most of which I've gone over. The sale starts with your marketing, but begins on the first phone call. This is the time to begin to get to know your clients and then offer solutions based on their needs and lifestyle.

That conversation continues during the consultation call. You set the tone with the experience you deliver during the session. After the session, let your client know how much you love her images, and send a reminder about the ordering appointment. The ordering appointment or in-person sale should be an exciting time of selecting favorite images to fill the products that have already been suggested. If you do your job throughout the planning process, the hard decisions have been made. Your client will know where they will be hanging their wall portraits, and they are already considering add-ons such as albums and image boxes.



Image © Lori Nordstrom



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FOLLOW-UP

Put a plan in place for following up with each and every client you work with. Following up gives you a chance to find out how your clients are enjoying their portraits and how they feel about your business and customer service. Ask questions, and don't be afraid to take constructive feedback. Not only should you be following up after a session and sale, but plan to follow up six months later, at any birthdays or anniversaries, and again if you haven't heard from your clients in over a year.

CLIENT FOR LIFE

My goal is to photograph or touch base with my clients each and every year. I want a client for life. Your business may be more specialized by genre. Do you photograph only seniors? Only babies? Your plan may be different than mine. However, even if you photograph only babies right now, stay in touch with your clients as that baby grows. At some point, you might want to expand, even if it's with another photographer who works under you, or as a division of your company. If you photograph only seniors, you might someday want to photograph seniors' entire families.

Keeping in touch with past clients that you enjoyed working with will serve you in the future. Families with babies may have another baby. If you don't stay in touch, they might go somewhere else. Don't assume that a client who used you will always return.

If you are a portrait photographer like me who chooses the "client for life" path, having systems in place is even more important. Staying consistent year after year gains the trust of clients, who feel comfortable not only in choosing you again and again, but in referring their friends.

Making a plan can change the course of your business. Write scripts so that you're consistent and reliable. Educate your clients right from the first phone call. Create value at each step of the process. It's an honor to get to do what we love every day. It's even more of a blessing to be profitable while getting to do what we love. Plan for a business that you can run and manage instead of a business that runs you. Here's to a profitable 2016. ■

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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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1 MODIFIER 4 WAYS

Getting the Most out of Light Shapers

with Michael Corsentino

The prospect of adding a new modifier to your arsenal of light shaping tools is exciting. New modifiers carry with them the promise of new looks and techniques, broadened avenues of creative expression.

Top left: Litemotiv 190, bare bulb, no deflector, interior baffle, from the side feathered, placed close. Note shadow detail from wrapping light, Rembrandt lighting effect, softness from feathering, gradated spill on background left to right vertically, soft transitions between shadow and highlights, medium contrast, center brightness with gradual falloff, beautiful faceted catchlights.

Top right: Litemotiv 190, no deflector, interior and exterior baffle, shooting in front. Virtually no shadows behind subject, soft transitions between shadows and highlights, reduced contrast, head-to-toe coverage with minimal falloff.

Bottom left: Litemotiv 190, bare bulb, no diffusion, shooting through back, close. Note crisp shadows behind subject, high degree of contrast, strong edge detail, solid circular catchlights, specular highlights, head-to-toe coverage with minimal falloff.

Bottom right: Litemotiv 190, bare bulb, no deflector, interior and exterior baffle, from the side feathered, close, white fill reflector right. Note soft, broad quality of light due to maximum diffusion, increased/even spill on background, soft circular catchlights, details in shadows, softest transitions between shadows and highlights. White reflector provides soft fill for camera-right shadows, center brightness with gradual falloff.

As much as we all enjoy a good shopping spree, I suggest building your inventory of light shapers slowly, one at a time. Get to know each piece of equipment inside and out before moving on to the next. This way, you'll be able to squeeze every last bit of productivity, creativity and bang for the buck out of each new tool.

Lighting nerds like me are giddy with anticipation when a new modifier arrives. After the initial setup and a few shoots under your belt, it's easy to fall into a pattern of complacency. You can end up repeatedly using the modifier exactly the same way you did when you first set it up. When you do this, you're leaving a lot on the table. It's likely you've only scratched the surface. I know this all too well. I'm betting you do too. It's easy to understand why. Working this way keeps you in your comfort zone, the results are predictable, you've found something that works—so why not stick with a softbox at 3 feet, interior and exterior baffles, and repeat?

It's important to remember that even the most rudimentary light shapers can be exciting multifaceted tools. They're designed to be modified in numerous ways, and are able to produce myriad looks. Have you ever thoroughly tested your light modifiers and explored the full range of what's possible with each? The same softbox close, far, with and without the interior baffle, with the exterior diffusion panel only, with no interior or exterior diffusion panels, with both diffusion panels in place, aimed directly at the subject, feathered away from the subject, used in front, used from the side, used from above, used from below, used with a white reflector, used with a silver reflector, used with a subtraction panel, etc., etc., etc.... Each of these options can be combined in endless variations for different looks.

I'm using softboxes here as an example, but any modifier, from a beauty dish to a convertible umbrella, can produce a wide range of effects. The variations and modifications are large and small, depending on the modifier. A solid understanding of the breadth of each tool is guaranteed to dramatically increase your options.

When a new light modifier arrives at my studio, I've gotten into the habit of painstakingly documenting each of its many possible uses. First I do some research and look at how other people have used it. I investigate their experiences and results. Next I put together a list of every variation and combination I can think of for that modifier, and bring in a model to shoot each and every look.

Each step of the way, I take detailed notes to keep track of each combination, the results produced, and what worked and what didn't. This isn't the most exciting, heart-pounding thing you'll ever shoot. Quite the contrary. But investing the time and energy pays huge dividends in the long run. Though tedious at times, the process becomes one of discovery and does an incredible job of educating you about what you can achieve with a tool, in a very clinical and controlled environment. It's time well spent, and something that needs to be done once for each modifier. Once it's done, muscle memory has a way of kicking in, and you have reference files for each modifier when you need them.

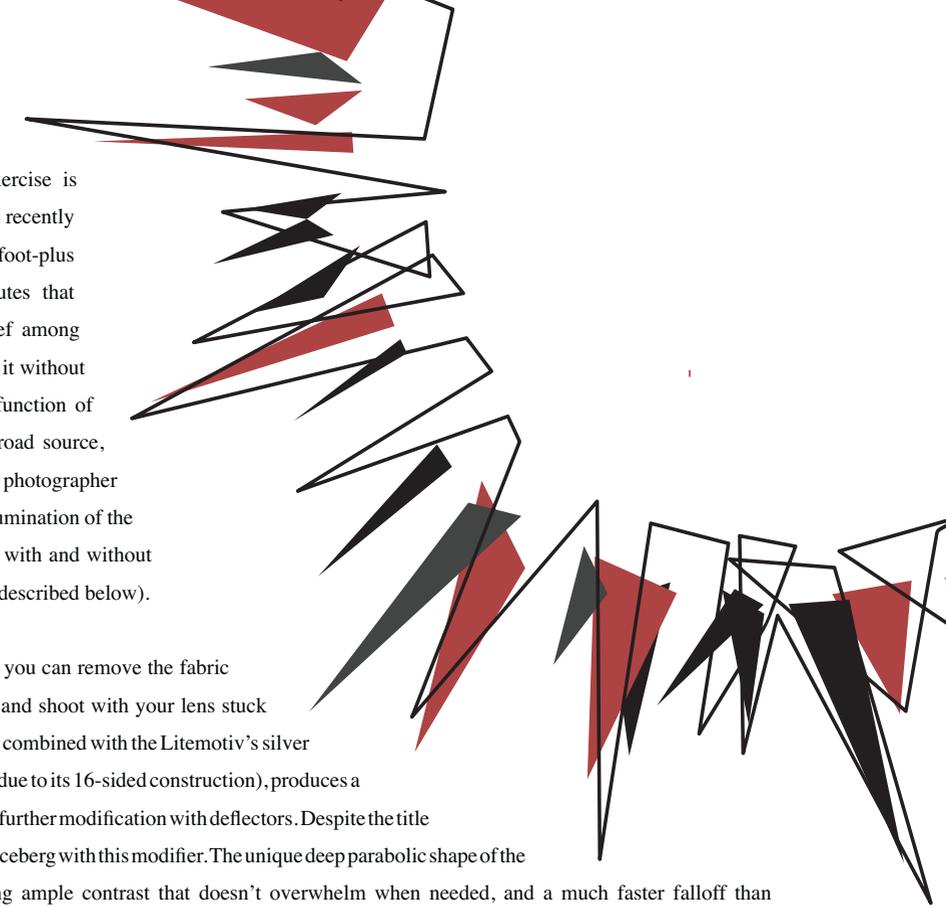
A perfect case in point for this exercise is the Elinchrom 190cm Litemotiv that I recently added to the studio. This giant 6-foot-plus parabolic has several unique attributes that add to its incredible versatility. Chief among them is the ability to shoot in front of it without blocking any of its light. This is a function of its size. Because it's such a large, broad source, its light simply wraps right around the photographer and provides gorgeous head-to-toe illumination of the subject in a variety of looks, such as with and without diffusion and the use of "deflectors" (described below).

The Litemotiv is also unique because you can remove the fabric skirt circling the flash head behind it and shoot with your lens stuck through the back of the parabolic. This, combined with the Litemotiv's silver interior and nearly perfect catchlights (due to its 16-sided construction), produces a variety of awesome looks, each open to further modification with deflectors. Despite the title of this article, four looks is the tip of the iceberg with this modifier. The unique deep parabolic shape of the Litemotiv also sets it apart, providing ample contrast that doesn't overwhelm when needed, and a much faster falloff than shallower modifiers of similar size.

Deflectors

Elinchrom heads allow the use of optional translucent, white, silver and gold diffusion discs known as deflectors, which are placed in front of the flash tube. This option increases the number of possible looks by a factor of four for each iteration: no diffusion, interior baffle only, exterior baffle only, etc. It also allows the Litemotiv to be used as a giant beauty dish when no diffusion material is employed. This was something very appealing to me for fashion and beauty shoots.

With respect to interior baffles and exterior diffusion panels, keep in mind that they each create a progressively more diffuse light with a lower degree of contrast and texture. They reduce output, broaden the light and create an increasingly softer quality of light. Elinchrom deflectors can also be used to heighten and subtly modify these effects.





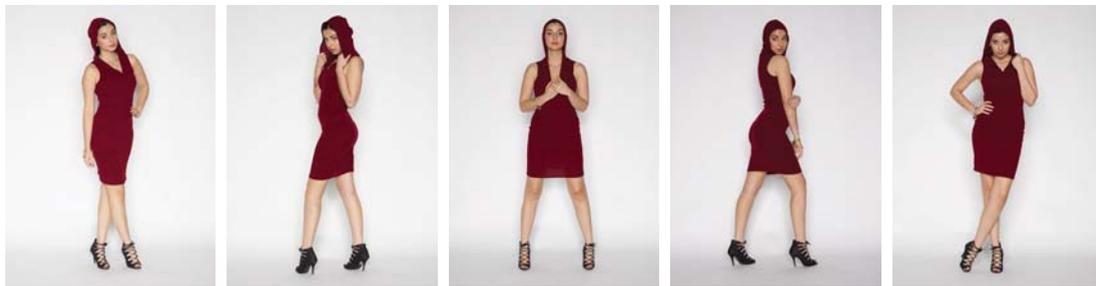
1. Litemotiv 190, bare bulb, no diffusion, shooting in front. 2. Litemotiv 190, silver deflector, no diffusion, shooting in front. 3. Litemotiv 190, frost deflector, no diffusion, shooting in front. 4. Litemotiv 190, translucent deflector, no diffusion, shooting in front. 5. Litemotiv 190, gold deflector, no diffusion, shooting in front.



6. Litemotiv 190, gold deflector, no diffusion, shooting through back. 7. Litemotiv 190, silver deflector, no diffusion, shooting through back. 8. Litemotiv 190, translucent deflector, no diffusion, shooting through back. 9. Litemotiv 190, frost deflector, no diffusion, shooting through back. 10. Litemotiv 190, bare bulb, no diffusion, shooting through back.



11. Litemotiv 190, bare bulb, no diffusion, shooting through back, close. 12. Litemotiv 190, frost deflector, no diffusion, shooting through back, close. 13. Litemotiv 190, silver deflector, no diffusion, shooting through back, close. 14. Litemotiv 190, translucent deflector, no diffusion, shooting through back, close. 15. Litemotiv 190, gold deflector, no diffusion, shooting through back, close.



16. Litemotiv 190, no deflector, interior baffle, shooting in front. 17. Litemotiv 190, frost deflector, interior baffle, shooting in front. 18. Litemotiv 190, silver deflector, interior baffle, shooting in front. 19. Litemotiv 190, gold deflector, interior baffle, shooting in front. 20. Litemotiv 190, translucent deflector, interior baffle, shooting in front.

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21. Litemotiv 190, translucent deflector, interior and external baffle, shooting in front. 22. Litemotiv 190, frost deflector, interior and external baffle, shooting in front. 23. Litemotiv 190, silver deflector, interior and external baffle, shooting in front. 24. Litemotiv 190, gold deflector, interior and external baffle, shooting in front. 25. Litemotiv 190, no deflector, interior and external baffle, shooting in front.



26. Litemotiv 190, no deflector, external baffle, shooting in front. 27. Litemotiv 190, translucent deflector, external baffle, shooting in front. 28. Litemotiv 190, white deflector, external baffle, shooting in front. 29. Litemotiv 190, silver deflector, external baffle, shooting in front. 30. Litemotiv 190, gold deflector, external baffle, shooting in front.

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31. Litemotiv 190, bare bulb, no deflector, no baffles, from side direct. 32. Litemotiv 190, bare bulb, no deflector, no baffles, from side feathered. 33. Litemotiv 190, bare bulb, no deflector, interior baffle, from side feathered. 34. Litemotiv 190, bare bulb, no deflector, interior and external baffle, from side feathered, fill reflector right.



Looks & Test Results

No baffles, bare bulb Hard shadows, direct punchy light, bright center with falloff, specular light, high degree of texture. Ideal for high-key head-to-toe fashion and portrait light.

No baffles, with silver, gold, translucent and frost deflectors Hard shadows, direct punchy light, bright center with falloff, specular light, high degree of texture modified with deflectors. Ideal high-key head-to-toe fashion and portrait light. See deflector list on page 30 for individual properties.

Shoot direct through the back, next to the head, bare bulb Direct, specular, hard and punchy, near-perfect catchlight shape, high degree of contrast, high degree of texture, strong center illumination with falloff. Ideal high-key head-to-toe fashion and portrait light. Use a lens hood to kill flare, or create a flared look without one.

Shoot direct through the back beside the head with silver, gold, translucent and frost deflectors Direct, specular, hard and punchy, near-perfect catchlight shape, high degree of contrast, high degree of texture, strong center illumination with falloff. Ideal high-key head-to-toe fashion and portrait light. Use a lens hood to kill flare, or try a flared look. See deflector list on page 30 for individual properties.

Inner baffle only Reduces output, broadens the source by 50%, diffuses the light, lessens contrast and texture, softens the shadows and overall quality of light.

Inner baffle only, with silver, gold, translucent and frost deflectors Reduces output, broadens the source by about 50%, diffuses the light, lessens contrast and texture, softens shadows and the overall quality of light. See deflector list on page 30 for individual properties.

Inner and outer baffle Maximum reduction of output via fabrics, broadens the source to 100%, maximum diffusion of light (use deflectors for even more), maximum reduction of contrast and texture, maximum softness in the shadows and overall quality of light (use deflectors for even more).

Inner and outer baffle, with silver, gold, translucent and frost deflectors Maximum reduction of output via fabrics, broadens the source to 100%, maximum diffusion of light (use deflectors for even more), maximum reduction of contrast and texture, maximum softness in the shadows and overall quality of light (use deflectors for even more). See deflector list on page 30 for individual properties.

Outer baffle only 100% broad source, increased center illumination with falloff compared to use with interior baffle, midlevel contrast, midlevel softness in the shadows.

Outer baffle only, with silver, gold, translucent and frost deflectors 100% broad source, increased center illumination with falloff compared to use with interior baffle, midlevel contrast, midlevel softness in the shadows. See deflector list on page 30 for individual properties.

Close to subject Soft, specular light, beautiful catchlights. Variety of possible effects based on modifications employed. Even light with lovely, gradual falloff. Great for beauty, portraits.

Far from the subject Harder light, increased contrast, still a relatively soft light due to size. Great head-to-toe fashion and portrait light. Variety of possible effects based on modifications employed.

From the side, bare bulb, no diffusion, directly at the subject Hard light, rapid shadow and highlight transitions, lots of contrast and texture, bright center with falloff.

From the side, interior baffle, exterior diffusion panel, feathered Amazing soft light, one of my favorite ways to use this modifier. Even coverage, very gradual falloff, broad source. Close to the subject provides soft, slow transitions between shadow and highlight; large size creates lovely quality of light that wraps around the subject, providing subtle shadow details.

Deflector Properties

Translucent Removes one stop of direct light, less direct light, softens shadow/highlight transitions, creates a more reflected light, reduced contrast and texture.

Frost Reduces half a stop of direct light, boosts character of light reflected from the interior surface of parabolic, increased softness in shadow/highlight transitions, further reduction of contrast and texture.

Silver Removes all direct light, uses only light reflected from the interior surface of the parabolic.

Gold Removes all direct light, creates a subtle bronze color cast by warming up the color temperature by 200 to 300 degrees Kelvin.

As you can see, there is a dizzying number of combinations and looks possible using just one modifier. I'm using an Elinchrom modifier here, but the same is true for any brand and virtually any type. The key is to experiment. Don't be a one-trick pony. Investigate the full range of possibilities with each of your modifiers. You'll be glad you did. ■



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

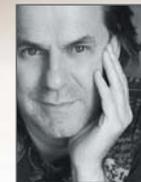
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HOW TO MAKE MORE MONEY—AND KEEP MORE OF IT

with Vanessa Joy



It's one of the great mysteries. Somehow, no matter how much money we make, there doesn't seem to be any in the bank, and the majority of us live paycheck to paycheck. Money has a way of slipping through our fingers more quickly than a handful of sand.

As business owners, we see this happening more so than nine-to-fivers because a lot more money comes in and out of our bank accounts than we're responsible for handling. We collect sales tax, have to save up for income tax, hold money for product fulfillment and much more. We're stewards of most of the money that's handed to us, not owners of it. This can be very tricky sometimes, leading a lot of photographers into pretty deep holes they can't get themselves out of. I've known photographers who didn't know how to handle money, so they couldn't pay their income tax or sales tax, or print albums for clients, because they already spent the money they technically never had. But I digress....

What we really want to address in this article is how to make more money that *is* yours, and how to make sure you keep the money that is coming your way instead of watch it disappear. There are really only two ways to make this happen: Earn more or spend less. Seems simple enough, but it's incredible how hard it can be. Here are some tips for doing both in your business and life.

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EARN MORE

Most people think that money solves money problems and the way to do that is to make more money. This couldn't be farther from the truth, which is why you'll notice I have fewer tips for earning more money than for saving more.

1. DO AFTER-SESSION SALES

Here's the thing: I hate selling. I mean *hate it*. I live in New Jersey, which adopts the New York attitude, and we pick up on being sold anything and loathe anyone who is trying to do it. When I first decided to start doing after-session sales, I was petrified. I didn't think I'd be good at it and I didn't think it'd work. Guess what? It worked. It worked despite my lack of experience and knowledge on sales because when it comes down to it, just offering products for sale will lead to people buying them. If you don't offer it, they can't buy it. My first year of doing after-session sales, mostly in person, led to a \$20,000 increase in sales. Not too shabby.

2. OFFER PACKAGES THAT PROFIT

If you feel like you're not making enough to sustain your business and lifestyle, then it may be time to take a hard look at your packages to make sure you're making a profit on each of them. Too often I see photographers create packages from thin air and hope that they'll make money off them. The math behind creating packages can be a bit complicated, but here's a quick way to figure things out from a wedding photographer's point of view.

- Figure out how much it costs to run your business and then divide that by how many weddings you shoot per year. Things like insurance, studio space, subscriptions of any kind, etc. We'll call that number X.
- Figure out how much it costs you to produce a wedding. This includes what you pay your second photographer and assistant, the cost of printing an album, etc. We'll call this number Y.
- Decide how much you'd like to make per hour and multiply that by 40 since you probably spend about 40 hours working per wedding from initial contact to final product delivery. We'll call this number Z.
- Add up X, Y and Z, and that's how much your basic package should cost.

That's grossly oversimplified, but you get the picture. If you want to simplify it even more, you should be charging roughly three to five times the cost of X + Y. However you figure it out, just make sure you're getting paid to photograph weddings and not the other way around.



Images © Vanessa Joy

SPEND LESS

Here's where the real secrets lie. Americans are known around the world for being materialistic consumers. And you know what? The world is right. We consume and spend more than anyone else, and most of what we buy is complete garbage. Half the time we can't even remember the things we spent money on when we look at our credit card and bank statements at the end of the month, if we even do that. To top it off, a lot of us just aren't good at keeping track of our books or finding loopholes in the system, and that causes us to lose money on the back end as well.

1. NEVER FINANCE ANYTHING. EVER.

Some may disagree with me on this one, but the way I see it is if I buy a new lens for \$2,000, I intend on spending \$2,000 on it, not \$3,000 after interest, late fees and penalties. Before you even think about investing in anything new for your business to begin with, you first have to ask yourself, "Will this purchase make me more money?" If the answer is no, then maybe it's not a purchase you should be making. Sometimes we get caught up in buying equipment we don't need or spending on marketing that isn't working, and if we take a step back from that, we'll notice we're not getting the return on investment that we need to justify the purchase. If you can, use cash. Cold, hard, physical cash. As Dave Ramsey suggests, spending cash hurts more than using plastic, and spending money you can't see will make you spend money differently.

2. TRACK YOUR SPENDING

It's amazing how much you'll spend on things like coffee each month. Though you may need it to run your business well, seeing the numbers may inspire you to change some expensive habits. Do yourself a favor and categorize your spending for just one month. You'll be surprised where you throw your money, and, better yet, it'll make you realize your priorities in life. Like the Bible says, "Where your money goes, there your heart is also."

Instead, try to tell your money where to go each month instead of it sprouting wings and flying where it pleases. Even if you're not super strict with budgets, create one anyway so you can at least guide yourself toward good spending habits and have an overall view of your income versus expenses.

3. BEAT THE SYSTEM

The United States is, unfortunately, not so kind to small business owners. There are, however, some ways we can take advantage of things that do help us not pay as much in taxes every year. Why pay more to the government if we can find ways to keep the money instead?



Image © Vanessa Joy



Image © Vanessa Joy

First, know how tax deductions work in your state and federally. This is where a good accountant comes in. I constantly email my accountant (if you're in New Jersey, I highly recommend Chris Cowan, at CCowan@cgteam.com) asking whether or not items are tax deductible—work clothes are not, but the dry-cleaning bill for them is, for example. Make sure you're keeping track of your tax-deductible purchases once you know what they are. It's one of the easiest ways to lower your tax liability at the end of every year.

Secondly, look into investing. This always sounded scary to me, but if you sit down with a financial adviser, they'll usually be able to recommend things you can do to start saving money for retirement or college. While doing that, you can take advantage of some investments that will be tax-deferred or benefit you come April in other ways. For some investments, like an SEP IRA, you can actually contribute through March the following tax year and still get a tax break from them for the previous year.

Looking at our finances isn't the most glamorous thing to do, but it is one of the smartest. Everyone has their own tips and tricks for pinching pennies and stretching a dollar. Check out this video to hear a few of my favorites. ■

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

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TOP 5 VIDEO TRENDS FOR 2016

with Joe Switzer



▶ 1. Less Is More

Fewer tools, shorter edits, simpler concepts, smaller crews and outsourcing. Last year, we got rid of jibs, time-lapse tools (intervalometer), extra lenses and bags, and downsized lighting. For years, we have outsourced accounting and taxes. This less-is-more approach makes it easier on us with higher company margins—but most importantly, it's what clients want.

Your customers want to have fewer people involved on the shoots and a streamlined process. They like that you can move faster and more quickly with less red tape in the way. Smaller, less, faster and better. For us, this means filming with Sony A7s cameras, a Ronin M handheld stabilizer, and a track, tripod and monopod.

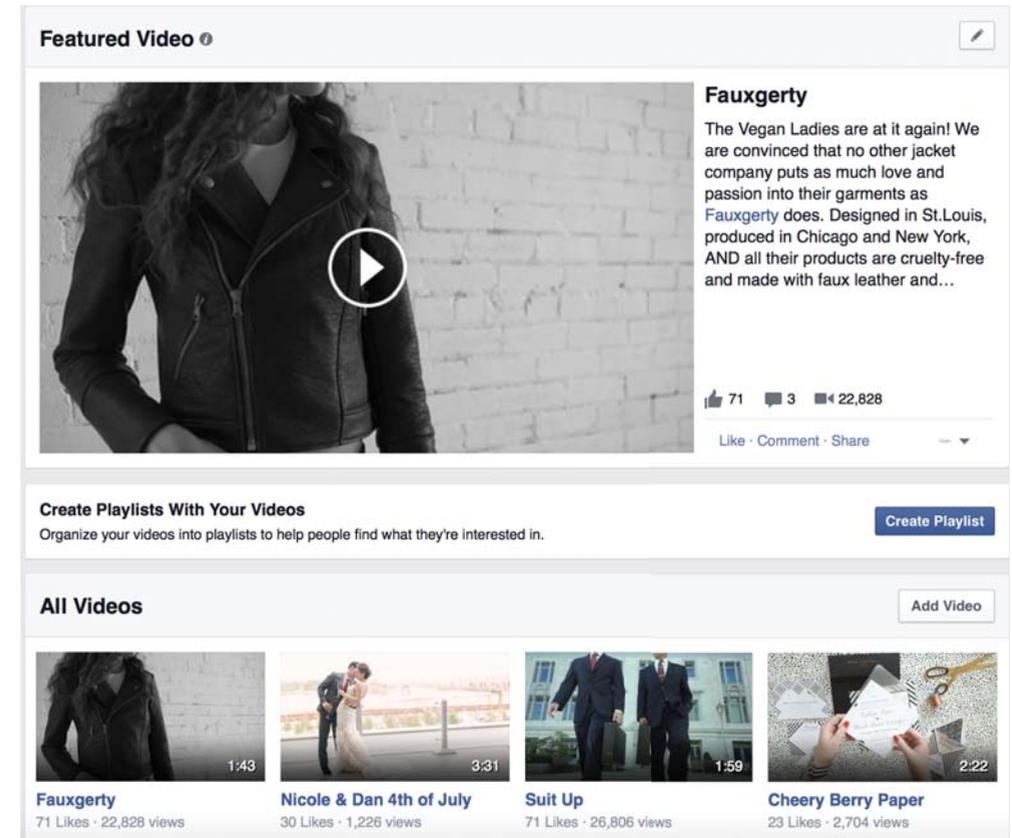
This also means that most of the time we film with only one or two cinematographers. Letting go and outsourcing is some of the best advice I've ever gotten. I went to my dad's boss years ago for advice on running a successful business. His best tip was to outsource accounting and taxes. Taking his advice has been one of the biggest factors behind the growing revenue of our small business. It gave us more time to focus on video rather than stress over new tax codes or why numbers don't add up.

Making shorter edits this year will help you with your engagement. Are people watching your videos? If they're 10 minutes or longer, audiences won't watch. Fifteen-second Instagram videos, one- to three-minute wedding highlights and 30- to 60-second company trailers are more fun and take less time to edit—and people will actually watch the videos, which is why your customers are investing the money in you.

Ask yourself this year what you can let go of and how you can consolidate your tools and edits to make your life easier.



Image © Joe Switzer



▶ 2. Social Media Marketing

Facebook and Twitter are the two dominant companies in the social media space. Twitter owns Periscope and Vine. Facebook has Instagram, Messenger, WhatsApp and Oculus. If I had to pick one social media company to focus all my energy into, it would be Facebook. The book of faces has a Wall Street valuation of over \$300 billion, and Twitter stands at \$18 billion.

Why does Facebook have all the investor money and company momentum? I like to compare it to the Google versus Yahoo search engines. If you're going to invest your time and money in a search platform, you'd be crazy to think that Yahoo is the best. I'm not saying you should delete your Twitter accounts or not use Yahoo for search. If Twitter makes you happy, then tweet away.

I'm all about saving time and having fun—and engagement—on social media. Mobile users spend 20 percent of their phone time on Facebook and Instagram. That's where you want your videos to be. Facebook alone has 1 billion visits and 8 billion video views a day. You can post your company videos and promote them with this massive engaged audience. With interactive 360-degree videos now showing up on your feeds, it's going to be another year of amazing growth for Facebook.

We spend half our marketing budget on video adds, and I advise you to do the same. More and more of our clients are seeing our content, and they always tell us it's from Facebook. Stay focused on your company page. Stop spending so much time on other parts of Facebook when it's your company page and your content that will connect you with clients who are begging you to post and engage with them. Keep sharing and promoting videos in 2016.

▶ 3. Video Boom



Images © Joe Switzer

The demand for quality video continues to increase. Companies want more and more video. From our experience last year, we are surprised to see how many new clients of ours have never had a video produced. I'm talking big companies with revenues approaching \$100 million, with no history of video production. Corporate America is behind and needs content for its YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and website presence.

On the most recent Facebook earnings announcement, Mark Zuckerberg said, "Over the next few years, video is going to be some of the most engaging content online, and by continuing to innovate here, we have a chance to build the best place to watch and share video."

I couldn't agree more with Zuck. Video is interesting to mass audiences. How many times a day do you find yourself watching video on your mobile phone that happens to be in your newsfeed? Facebook says it's getting 500 million people a day watching video, and YouTube reaches more 18- to 34-year-olds than any cable network. Video has been underinvested in for many years, and will be playing catch-up for as long as I can see.

▶ 4. Drones



Images © Joe Switzer

All the big companies want a piece of the action. Walmart and Amazon have been very public about their intent to use drones. Some might argue that the mainstream has a problem with privacy issues of drones, but rules and regulations are minimal for personal use, which means filmmakers are having a ton of fun capturing beautiful aerial footage.

The drone company DJI had revenues of about \$500 million in 2014, and was on pace to double that in 2015, according to The Verge. 2016 will be even bigger.

Aerial footage gives the filmmaker so much more to work with. The angles a drone can get from the sky will take your videos over the top. It adds a professional cinematic feel. If you don't have a drone or can't fly one, don't worry. We always outsource our drone work. We can't do it all. We want to stay focused on producing and filming from the ground.

Drones are becoming standard in most of our productions now. They will continue to evolve and get smoother and more reliable. Every kid in America wanted a drone for Christmas this year. Aerial footage is going to be expected from your future clients, so find a good drone pilot or purchase one yourself, and learn to fly.





Image © Joe Switzer

▶ Interactive 360-Degree Videos

Mind blown. I encourage you to visit Walt Disney World’s Facebook page and view its 360-degree video that takes you through an adventure with Goofy. It makes you feel like you have entered another parallax. These are going to be in high demand this year. Figure out how to shoot and edit these to provide a cutting-edge experience your clients will never forget.

2016 is the perfect storm for filmmakers. Let go of gear and processes that are taking too much of your time. Outsource your accounting and anything else you can’t master. Facebook is the place to be for your content. Engage with your company page and your clients. The world can’t have enough video to consume. It wants more. Don’t forget to look into the interactive 360 videos that will be all the talk of 2016. Run a great business and produce compelling videos, and you will have a tremendous year. ■



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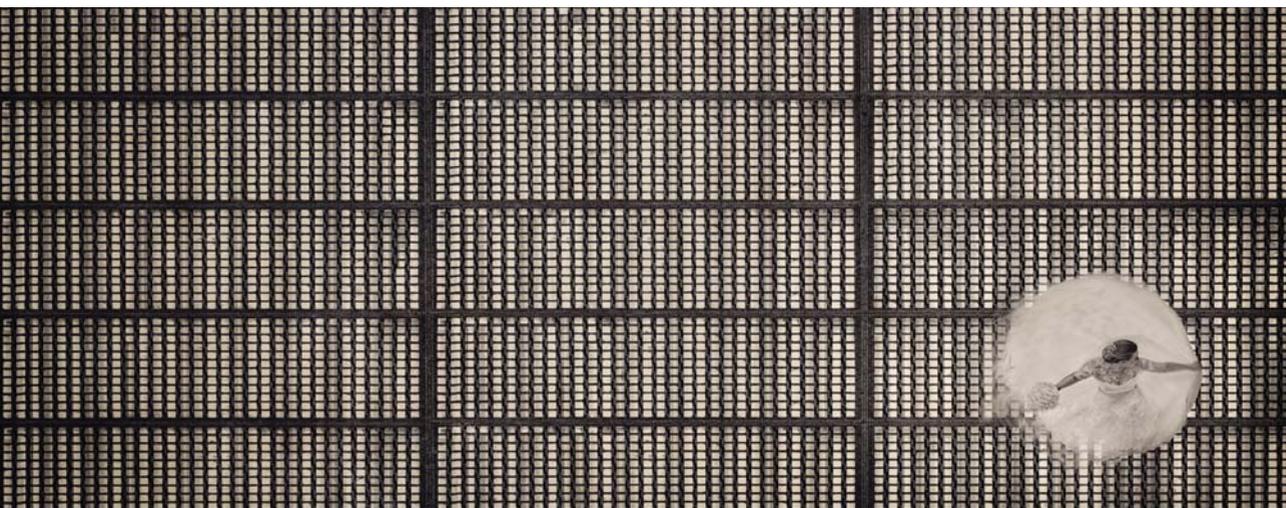
Joe Switzer founded the international award-winning photo-cinema business Switzerfilm. His team is made up of four young creative minds striving to take the world of wedding cinema and photography to the next level. The team travels the world for inspiration, going anywhere and everywhere to top their 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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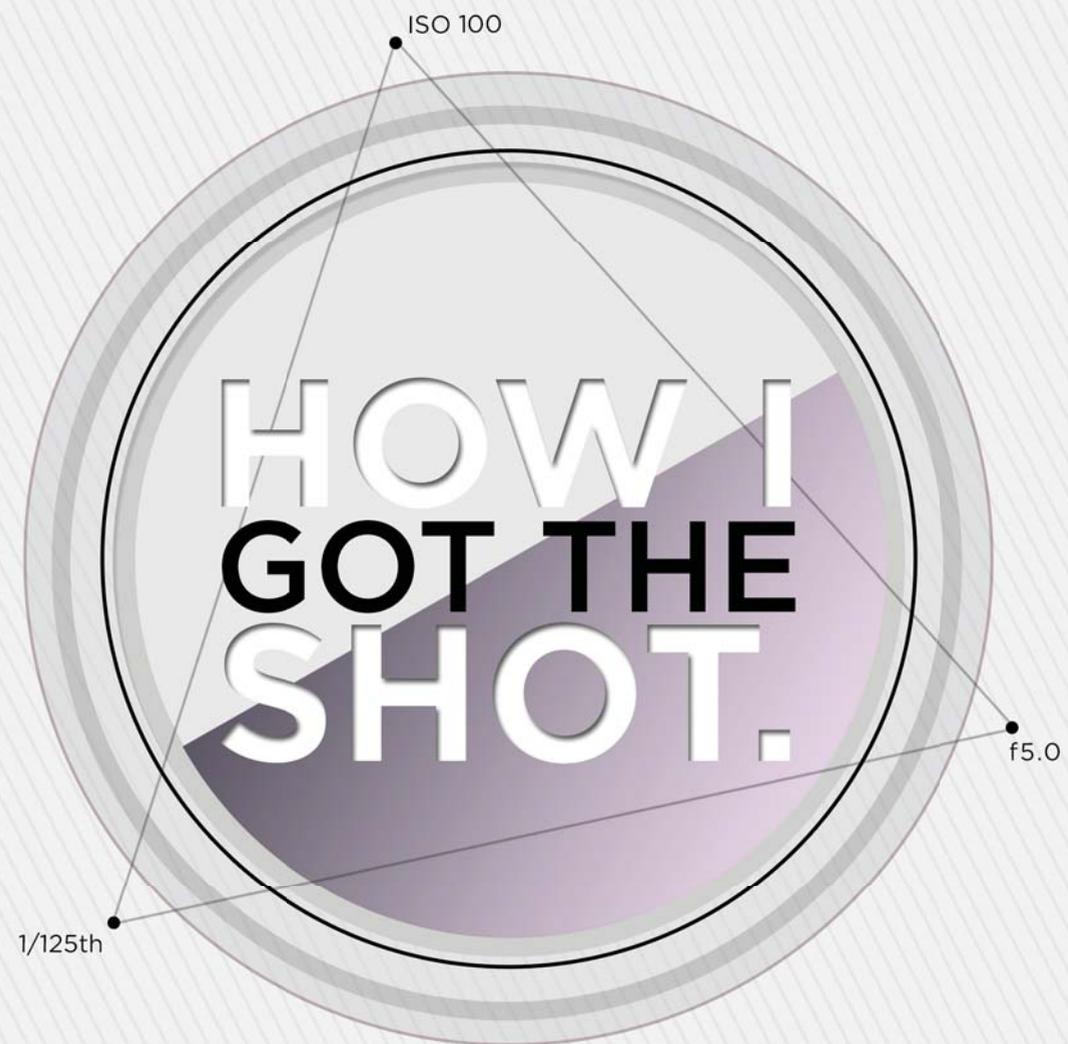
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with **Sal Cincotta**



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Can you believe it's 2016 already? Are you ready for another year of building your business, your portfolio, your bank account? Well, I am anxious to get started kicking ass this year.

This month, I was inspired by a recent *W* cover shoot with actress Kristen Stewart. I don't know about you, but I am constantly looking at images and trying to figure out how they were lit, where they were shot, the background, the pose, the wardrobe. It's like being a private detective.

Inspiration for what will come to be an iconic cover image for us is based on that *W* cover I couldn't stop staring at several months ago. As always, I encourage you to go out there this year and push yourself to become better at lighting, posing and all the moving parts that make us better photographers—while always seeking your own inspiration that drives you to capture gold.

Concept.

We are all inspired by art, cinema and other photographers. Inspiration is all around us. Obviously, I don't have access to Kristen Stewart, but I can certainly take a concept and try to recreate it for my clients, my portfolio and my own education. This month, that was the goal.

The fun part of it was working with my team to coordinate makeup, models and wardrobe. The creative process is one of the most exciting parts of what I do. I love seeing creative people get excited about new ideas or about doing something that we have never done before, working outside their comfort zone.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Location.

The original shoot was scheduled for Chicago. We had some amazing models lined up, but logistical issues forced us to make last-minute changes. That was probably one of the best things that could have happened. At the time, I thought it was going to be disastrous, but when you have a team around you that can #pivot, greatness can come from the ashes.

We photographed this at our home studio in O'Fallon, Illinois. It's a high-key shot, so it was on a simple white background.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Lighting.

Ah, yes, this is where the fun begins. I have had the Profoto Giant Silver 210 for a while now, but have not used it. I know, I know: Sal, how do you have gear like this and not use it? The truth is, I didn't understand the power of the 210 umbrella, but now I know. She is all-powerful. Yes, I just referred to my umbrella as all-powerful.

We had a four-light setup for this. In our studio, we have the B1, B2 and D1 strobes. I find myself using the D1 less and less. I am limited by cords, and it's an all-around pain in the ass. The B1's put out 500 watts of power, more than enough in most studio setups, and are battery-powered rather than 110v. The portability can't be beat.

We had two lights firing into the back to blow it out. We fired the center light at her back and upper body to create more separation. Granted, on a white background, she was going to have plenty of separation, but I wanted just a little more pop on the hair.

The main light was a Profoto B1 fired into a Profoto Giant Silver 210 umbrella. To soften the light even more, we used a one-stop diffusion sock.



Gear.

- Profoto B1
- Profoto Giant Silver 210 Umbrella
- Canon 1Dx
- Canon 85mm 1.2
- 1/125th of a sec @ f5, ISO 100



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Closing Thoughts.

Working on any photo shoot requires a team of people working together on a single goal. Over the years, I have been very open about the people behind the scenes who make what I do possible. I love how some of our industry "rock stars" would have you believe they are creative geniuses and we should feel blessed by their very existence. We all need creative backup.

Maybe it's just me. Maybe I just suck. And who knows, maybe you are just like me. I need my team, because without them, none of this is possible. It's that creative team process that I am addicted to. There is nothing better than collaborating with other professionals. The results are almost always better than going it alone.

For this shoot, I had an amazing model in Rachel, an amazing hair and makeup artist in Rory, and my personal team of Alissa and Krystal engaged in this shoot.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

My hair and makeup people are right there, front and center, engaged in the shoot, fixing things in real time. I am showing them what I see and what needs to be fixed. When working with my subject, I am giving clear direction on what I need. The entire team of creatives is working in concert to produce a great image.

This is why I do what I do. Building a team is no easy task. Collaborating is challenging, but it can be so rewarding when you accomplish the mission. Take time to build your own team, and the results will be greater than you ever imagined.

Want to see how we edited the shot? Sign up to be an Elite+ member today. Get the printed magazine and access to behind-the-scenes videos like this at www.behindtheshutter.com/shutter-magazine.

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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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4 TECHNIQUES FOR SHOOTING BOUDOIR

with Craig LaMere

Of all the photography genres, boudoir might have the most variations and the loosest definition. If you ask 10 shooters what boudoir is to them, you'll get 10 different perspectives, ideas and answers. To some, boudoir is about capturing a woman from a voyeuristic perspective, waiting for that one moment. For others, boudoir is all about showing as much skin as possible and using the nuttiest and least flattering poses. It can also be about empowering women. Some shooters create more of a glam product, like what you would see in *Maxim* or *Playboy*. Locations vary, from outdoors to the studio. Pinning down boudoir is like trying to play horseshoes with the horse still attached.

Because of the nature of the shoots and the variety in the wants and needs of the clients, you need an array of tools. This month, I discuss some of the most important components to creating killer boudoir.



Image © Craig LaMere



Image © Craig LaMere

1 SHOOTING HIGH APERTURE (“OPEN”)

One of the techniques I use in the studio to produce the mood I want is to shoot at a higher aperture, or more “open.” Shooting open means shooting at the highest aperture on your lens. For example, if you had a Canon 135 L 2.0, your highest aperture would be f2. If you had a Sigma Art 50 1.4, your highest aperture would be f1.4. When you are shooting “wide open,” the lens opening is at its widest, letting in the most light it can in the fastest amount of time and producing the greatest depth of field based on the focal distance of the subject. A lot of people think if you just put a lens at its biggest aperture, everything behind the subject will have the creamiest, dreamiest bokeh ever. That is not completely true, since the bokeh is dependent on a few other things.

There’s a big difference between shooting wide open and shooting with the correct depth of field. When I say shooting “more open,” I mean choosing an aperture that gives me the shallowest depth of field. This usually means shooting somewhere between f1.2 and f4, depending on the lens. Instead of picking an aperture that best fits the conditions, people often automatically default to the lens’s largest aperture. Defaulting to wide open anytime you want a shallower depth of field is like eating only with a fork. Sure, when you are eating spaghetti, it’s a pretty good tool, but the day you have to eat soup...not going to be as good a time.

2 SHOOTING LOWER APERTURE (“CLOSED”)

Shooting closed is the opposite of shooting open. Instead of choosing an aperture with the largest opening, you are choosing an aperture with the smallest. When you are stopping down, you are closing the opening for the light to get into the lens, so there's longer time to achieve proper exposure since less light is getting in at a much slower rate.

If you are shooting the Canon 135 L 2.0, your smallest aperture is f32. If you are shooting the Sigma 50 ART 1.4, your smallest aperture is f16. In general, stopping down your lens two stops from open produces a much sharper image than would be created by having your lens wide open. So, your 135 L 2.0 would be most sharp at f4 and your Sigma ART 50 1.4 would be sharpest at f2.8. The interesting thing about the default built into us when it comes to stopping down is that people almost always consider f11 to f13 as the top end. When we shoot closed, it is very rare that we push past those f-stops.

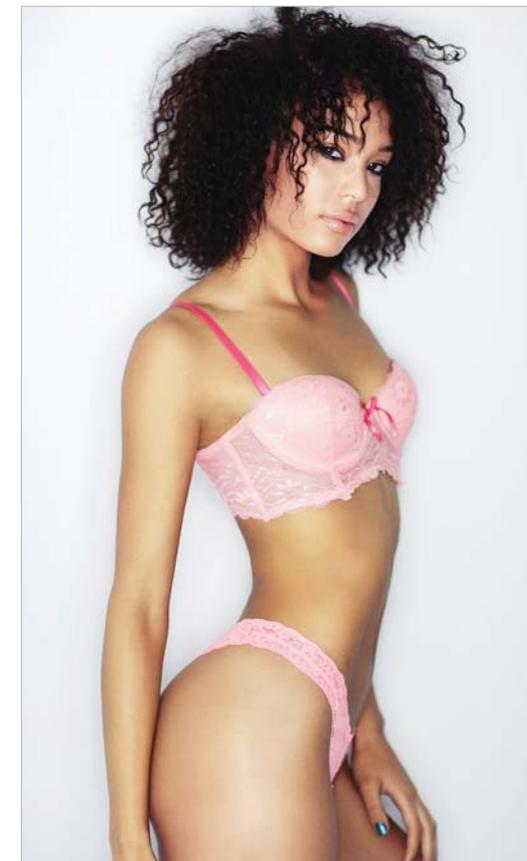




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3 DISTORTION: YOUR FRIEND

One of the most important things to understand when dealing with the depth of field is the focal distance and f-stop combination, and how they work together with different lenses. Understanding what each lens does when framed equally is one of the most important principles to grasp. A 24–70 2.8 at 24mm produces a much different image than a 70–200 2.8 at 200mm. A 50 1.2 is very different from an 85 1.2 if all are given the same framing and f-stop. The reason all these lenses shoot differently is most commonly called lens compression. Compression is the amount of distortion of a lens at a given distance. As a general rule, the wider the lens, the more it distorts as it gets closer to your subject and the more you fill the frame.

If you are shooting a headshot with a 200mm and you are filling the frame with the subject's head, you physically will be a considerable distance away and there really will be no significant distortion. The subject will look just like herself. Now, if you shoot the same shot and frame it equally with a 24mm, you are going to be almost standing on top of your subject, and you will be in for quite a different experience. Your subject is not going to look quite like herself, especially in the area closest to the lens. You should always keep this idea in mind.

4 CREATING MOOD

To me, the mood of the image is everything. The mood is what conveys the feeling and creates the story. I tell my stories in boudoir by combining certain lenses and apertures to get very specific looks. I'm going to go over my thought process for a couple of different scenarios so you have a better understanding of how all of this ties together.



Images © Craig LaMere

SITUATION ONE: SHOOTING HIGH APERTURE

I have a client come in who is a romantic type, and all about being soft, pretty and dreamy. She has given me examples of what she likes, and all of it is very simple and clean. I know right away I want to shoot very open and give the image the softest feel and look that I can. I lay her on her side, facing the camera. I know I can push the focal point to get the most depth of field possible because her body will pretty much be all on the same plane, so I will shoot the 50 at f1.6 without worrying about part of her being in focus and part of her not. Shooting very open works just the same with standing clients, or anytime your subject is completely on the same focal plane.

SITUATION TWO: SHOOTING MEDIUM APERTURE

With the same client, we are shooting closer-up images. She has the brightest blue eyes, and I want to emphasize them. I pose her lying on her stomach facing the camera. I plan to fill the frame with her face and let the rest of her body fall off. Because of the distance between her face and the lens if I used the 50, and the distortion that would happen to her face, I go with the 85 L 1.2. I shot the last image at f1.6, and I could do the same with the 85. But because the focus is so narrow, unless she is looking totally straight into the camera, the eye I focus on will be sharp and the other will not be. I don't want to limit the movement of my client, so I move the aperture down to f4. I know at f4 my client will have the freedom of movement, and if the eyes get off plane, they will still both be in focus, or a lot more in focus, than at f1.6. Because I have framed so tightly, the rest of her is far enough from the focal point that the f4 depth of field is enough to make the rest of her fall off, so the eyes are the stars of the image.



Image © Craig LaMere

SITUATION THREE: SHOOTING LOW APERTURE

My client who wanted soft pretty images tells me she has these killer boots and a wild leather outfit she would love an image or two in. She comes out in 8-inch stilettos and a Catwoman leather body suit. The outfit is dramatic and powerful, so I want my images to match. I want to make her as powerful, sexy and badass as I can. I use my 24–70 L 2.8 for the job. Shooting down to up is a power angle, and I want to push that power angle to the edge, so I put my lens at 24mm. The reason I switched out the 50mm for the 85mm in Scenario 2 is the reason I switch out the 85mm for the 24mm here: distortion.



Image © Craig LaMere

When you shoot down to up at 24mm at a close enough distance to almost fill the frame with your standing subject, you get a very dramatic change in what is closest to the lens, which in this case is the legs. They can look a mile long depending on the tilt of your lens. The length you create from the distortion is seasoned to taste.

There are a couple of reasons for using f10 in this situation. One is that at f10 you get all the detail of the client and the outfit. The outfit in this situation is as important as my client. It is so dramatic that you lose the power or mood of the image if you do not show the details. The other reason I go with f10 is because of the angle and the focal distance. If you ever tried to focus and recompose wide open, you found out in a hurry that, unless you were very steady, you got a lot of soft images due to the focal plane changing when you recompose. At f10, that is no longer an issue. You are free to create as you please.

There are a million and one combinations for creating boudoir images. I hope this gives you some food for thought to help you become an ever better boudoir shooter. ■

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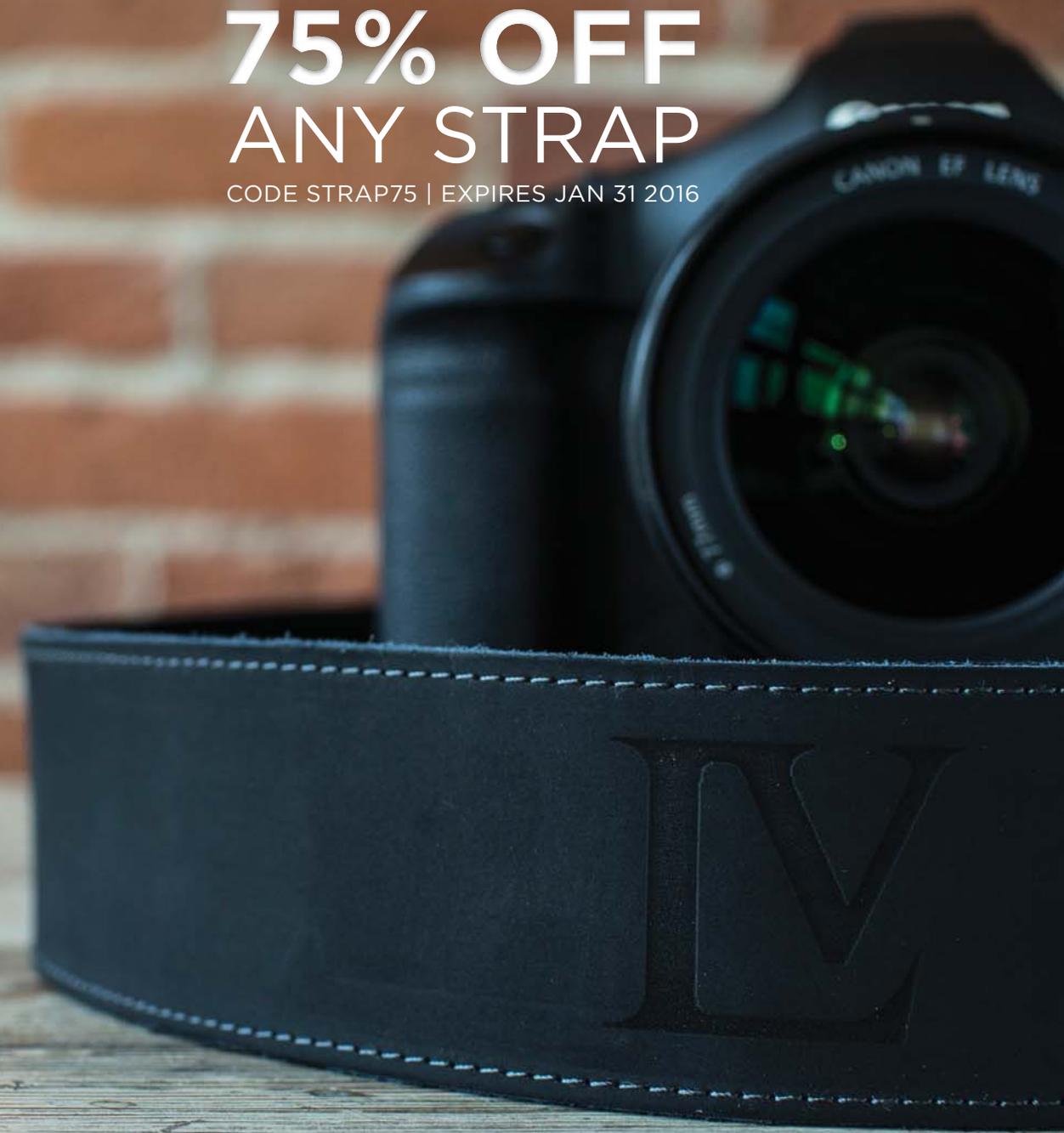
Craig LaMere is an award-winning professional portrait photographer from Pocatello, Idaho. As well as running his full-time studio in Idaho, Craig is an international educator and speaker specializing in lighting and posing. He has two dogs named Logan and Steve and two cats named Emit and Martin.

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NOT SO GLAMOROUS

with Melanie Anderson

I have wanted to write this article for several months now, and the glamour issue seemed to be a good place for it. It's a reminder of the importance of working "unglamorously." My work with nonprofits and community events requires this unglamorous role. We often start early in the morning, high on caffeine, and work tirelessly until the event is complete. By the time we pack up, unload and get home, all I want to do is veg out on the couch with a glass of wine. I've found that by giving back of my time and resources, we are often blessed tenfold.

Here are five ways I have been able to give back to my community, along with three actions plans to help you get started.



Convoy of Hope



Six years ago, I was asked to participate in Convoy of Hope, a faith-based nonprofit initiative that provides food, water, emergency supplies, agricultural know-how and opportunities that empower people to live independent lives free of poverty, disease and hunger. My portion was to provide free family portraits to several hundred families. We averaged about 900 families on a single Saturday each year. I enlisted a team of photographers, set up all the equipment, backdrops and printers, and we worked for about six hours nonstop to serve the “guests of honor.”

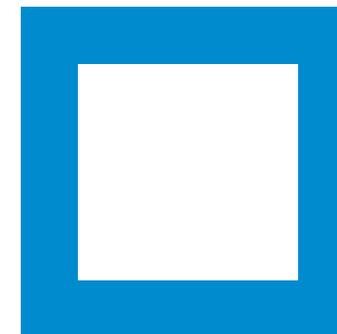
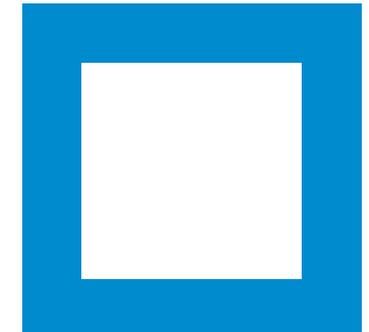
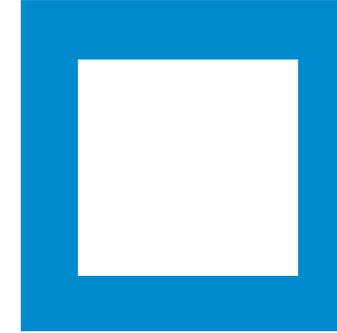
This day was so special not only because our community got involved, but it provided an opportunity for me to work with other photographers in our area. Families would line up hours before the event to ensure they would receive the services they so desperately needed (one year it was in the pouring rain).

I’m sure many of you may think of family photography as a want and not a need. But think about those families that cannot afford a family portrait, and don’t have the transportation to get to an appointment even if they could afford it. Convoy of Hope ensures each location is within the heart of the city, so all families in need are able to make it, even if they have to walk. We would see the same grateful families year after year, and each time, they told us how special it was to them, that it was the only family portrait they were able to get. We printed onsite, allowing them to leave with their family treasure.



Images © Melanie Anderson

Muddy Mamas



Images © Melanie Anderson

I worked with Muddy Mamas for a few years. We were pivotal in getting their event off the ground, a fun mud run benefiting Girls, Inc. and Girls on the Run. We provided event coverage and photo-booth-style images. As you can see from the photos, it was an incredible bonding experience for these women and children, who conquered obstacles they never thought they could. Being able to capture the excitement and pride afterward was a rewarding experience for my entire team. We set out three photographers along the route and two photo-booth stations at the end. I had an official golf cart driver, and captured fun moments throughout the event.

United Way Day of Caring

This past year, I was asked to participate in United Way Day of Caring. I had done other work for United Way, providing event coverage, but this was new to me. Another team member and I documented local business owners and employees donating their time and energies to several nonprofit companies. These volunteers painted, mulched, changed lightbulbs, washed windows and moved furniture. We originally set out to photograph all of this, but then decided that video would be useful as well. You can view the behind-the-scenes video in this month's edition.



Images © Melanie Anderson

Photo Booths

One of the many things I'm asked to provide for nonprofit events are photo booths. These are super fun and easy. Some events are more formal, with just couple and group photos. Others are more festive, with fun props. We usually post these photos on our Facebook fanpage, and attendees share from there. We collect contact information and email them a Dropbox link to the hi-res files with a print release.

Occasionally we are asked to print, but most just want these moments documented for social media. This is a great way to network with business owners and philanthropists in your community. Bring plenty of business cards (and, as you know, we hand out our branded lip balms too). If you are able, offer a few hundred dollars' worth of gift certificates for an auction or raffle.

The equipment we use: AlienBees light, softbox, backdrop and any props. I keep it pretty simple and talk with as many people as I can.



Images © Melanie Anderson

Boonsboro Police/Fire Academy



Image © Melanie Anderson

This past fall, we got to photograph for our local police department and the tech fire and rescue academy. We created posters for each, and took a behind-the-scenes video for social media. Remember, maximize your opportunities. Take plenty of behind-the-scenes photos and video. We have received such an outpouring of enthusiasm from both of these that we are now receiving phone calls from other organizations, so stay tuned for many more to come. You can view the fire and rescue video in this month's video article, and the police video on the Anderson Photographs YouTube channel.

Action Plans

Not everything you do as a photographer and business owner needs to be glamorous. I cannot tell you how much business, name recognition and praise comes back to my studio from these events. Seek the unglamour. You never know what opportunities may lie ahead. I challenge you to find a way to serve your community. Here are three possibilities. ■

- 1 Contact your local Convoy of Hope and offer to help at their next event.
- 2 Find out when United Way Day of Caring is in your community. Offer your photo/video services for the day.
- 3 Contact the tech school in your community. Offer to photograph the students to showcase their various trades.



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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**TURNING
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ORDINARY
INTO
EXTRAORDINARY**

**BUILDING
YOUR
PORTFOLIO
WITH
LOCATION
GLAMOUR
SHOOTS**

with Michael Anthony





Image © Michael Anthony

In a market saturated with photographers, you may often ask yourself: How do I compete with photographers who are charging less than a livable wage? The answer is simple: Do not compete with them. While it may sound cliché, the key to succeeding in this industry is to be different in everything you do. Your website must be better, your logo must communicate your brand more effectively, your business skills must be sharper, and your portfolio must be different.

Clients often don't know how to tell the difference between a good portfolio and a better portfolio, and often a good portfolio is "good enough." That means that when they look at your portfolio, the difference between your work and your competitors' has to be substantial in both technique and concept.

It is extremely trendy in today's industry to believe that your personality will set you apart from your competitors. You may think people visit your blog to read about your beliefs, your take on the meaning of life or what you had for breakfast. While that stuff is all great, your portfolio is what gets them to hit the contact button. I am not saying that your life isn't interesting enough to blog about, but you need to be in tune with what your clients are looking for when they visit your website.

So how do you differentiate? It's easy: You do everything your competitors are not doing. You have to showcase current trends in a way that makes people stop and say, "Wow."

In the photography industry, one trend we are seeing is a comeback of glamour. What is glamour? According to Webster's, it's "the attractive or exciting quality that makes certain people or things seem appealing or special."

Photography is a luxury, not a need. Glamour photography focuses on the great qualities about someone, and brings them over the top, whether it be in boudoir, wedding, fashion or fitness. Planning a glamour shoot for your portfolio can be one of the most strategically important things you do this off season.

As a wedding photographer, we are selling the dream. How far you are willing to take it depends on you. We have been planning portfolio shoots since late summer to fill our off season, and they have given us an edge in our portfolio moving into next year. That being said, like everything else, there are a few things you can do to make your shoot succeed.

CONCEPT

First, visualize your concept. It's glamour, which means it can be conceptual. This means there are no rules. I have wanted to photograph a red wedding dress for years. This isn't easy to come by, so in order to accomplish my vision, we reached out to a seamstress and had one made. I took my whole team out that day and paired up with a local salon called Perfect Day. Perfect Look that we work closely with during the wedding season. When you involve your team and vendors, everyone has an interest in success.



Image © Michael Anthony

LIGHTING

Glamour is about accentuating the best parts of your subject. Lighting always helps you influence the mood and bring attention to parts of a photograph you wish to showcase. Many photographers are intimidated by using off-camera flash, which makes it the best way for you to make your images different.

Fortunately, lighting is one of the easiest things to learn. There are many tutorials online on how to use off-camera flash, but be careful, because there is a lot of misinformation out there. Always work in manual when you can control the elements of a scene. You will get more reliable results and learn much more quickly how to control light.

With flash, you can make a scene look natural or surreal. Dial in your settings with a light meter to measure the ratio of ambient light to flash light. Check out my article in the July edition of *Shutter Magazine* on how to use a light meter in the digital age if you are unsure how to do this.

Your eyes will always be attracted to the brightest part of an image first, so you can use your ambient/flash ratio to influence where your eyes go. The more flash-to-ambient ratio, the more surreal a scene will look. When the two are balanced, you achieve a more natural look. If you want to see quickly where your eyes go in a photo, flip it upside down. The first thing you notice will be the most prominent part of the image.

For our shoot with the red dress, I wanted to create a surreal scene, so I underexposed my background slightly so I could further enhance the scenes in post-production.

Our planet has only one sun, so in a daylight scene there will likely be only one source of natural light. For a more surreal look, use a multiple-light setup.

When planning these portfolio shoots, again, we are trying to sell the dream, so for glamour sessions, I prefer multilight setups for a more surreal look. Here are some images using a multilight setup. I generally use one or two rim lights behind my subject with a key light at 45 degrees in front. I always turn my subject away from the light and bring her face back into it.

All modifiers can be useful (or no modifier), but make sure you don't overcomplicate your light setups. If you don't know where to start, here are some general rules.



Image © Michael Anthony

Match the hardness of your light with the ambient light in the scene.

If you are out in the sun using no modifiers, creating hard shadows allows for the most seamless transition in your lighting. If you are shooting at night or in an overcast scene, use a large modifier to soften your light.

Choose modifiers that match the environment.

If you are hiking to your shoot location, you can bring umbrellas rather than softboxes because they collapse and are easy to carry. You may not want to carry a beauty dish to your location, so plan ahead.

Control is important.

Carry a set of grids with you everywhere you shoot. By being careful with light placement, you can ensure good results. Placement of light is more important than the softness or hardness in many cases. MagMod makes amazing grids for speedlights, and Profoto has a great set for its B1/B2 system as well.

Don't forget about color!

Always carry at least CTO and CTB gels with you for your light sources. This helps with corrective and creative color balance. See my article in the lighting edition for more information on creative color balance using gels.



Image © Michael Anthony

ATTIRE & LOCATION

Glamour shoots have no rules for attire and location, except that they should be thought about together as opposed to independently. You can have your subjects wear as much or as little as you want. We are building our location boudoir portfolio for holiday season and Valentine's Day marketing. Most of our competitors will be shooting in a hotel room with window light, so it was important to me to get outside the studio to showcase something different.

Plan ahead.

When you shoot on location, you are putting a lot of wheels in motion. It would be terrible to get to a location with your models, gear and makeup team just to find out the location is closed, requires a permit or, if you are shooting at the beach, has high tides.

The latter of those is what happened to us when we planned this shoot. We were limited to shooting on a single strip of sand at noon, with no shade to hide under. When you do get surprised, find a way to turn a negative into a positive. We embraced the sun, and used a combination of reflectors and high-powered strobes to make this shoot a success.





Use your shoot as an opportunity to meet new vendors.

A few weeks after we posted images from our red-dress shoot, we were contacted by a local makeup artist who had seen the images, which led to a relationship with a PR agency in Beverly Hills. She had asked us if we would like to shoot a bridal glamour session at a venue in our suburb of Santa Clarita, California. The gowns she secured were worth well over \$15,000. The gown maker has over 50,000 followers on social media, and many of them are qualified brides. The gown maker posted behind-the-scenes images from our shoot that circulated online, resulting in inquiries the very next day. With careful planning and marketing, you can easily turn a location glam shoot into a booking opportunity.

To see our behind-the-scenes video from this shoot, check out our video attached to this article.

The off season is the perfect time to reevaluate your business. Even if you had a great year, failing to plan for next season can result in a year of subpar income. Investing in your portfolio is the single most important thing you can do to generate new clients who share your vision. With careful planning and a unique idea, your portfolio shoot can take you far. ■

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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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GLAM IT UP

with Blair Phillips

The general population may not agree on many things these days, but most of us agree that vanity sells. People are generally concerned with their appearance, especially when they're having their picture made. Most of our subjects spend a lot of time selecting just the right wardrobe and accessories for their photo session. It is a real letdown when your client has the most perfect outfit, she is nailing her poses, but her hair and makeup just don't make the cut. I have had this happen several times, so I decided to do something about it. We decided to make professional hair and makeup a step in our session flow. It's opened up many avenues for us.



The first step in adding hair and makeup services is to find the right professionals. You may go through several before you find the right fit for you and your clients. We began by asking our followers for recommendations. We sifted through all of them and set up some test shoots. This allowed us to see their work, and also to see how they interacted with our clients.

We went through four people to find the exact fit. Discuss pay and pricing before they ever step foot in the building. Ask them to bring examples of their work. Tell them before the test shoot exactly the look and style you're after. Take a look at all of their equipment and inventory while they are there.

Once you have the professional hair and makeup artist in place, you need to structure your pricing. We base our sessions around two simple options. Clients may choose one look or two looks. Most clients select two looks because of the way we structured the pricing. The first look takes their normal everyday beauty and simply enhances their makeup. Our goal is to never make someone look so different that they don't like the look. We call it "photo ready" makeup. Not too much, not too little, but just right. We save the second look for the last 25 percent of the session. This is where we go a little more on the drastic side. We try to create a feeling for them that resembles a near out-of-body experience. This is where communication between your client and the stylist must be on the same page. Two looks allows you the opportunity to increase your sales by adding much more variety.



Image © Blair Phillips

We built an entire summer full of high school seniors with hair and makeup. The key was to get a few girls in for some before-and-after photos. Not many of my seniors love the way they look with no makeup. We wanted to make a drastic difference in the before-and-after images. Once the three test shoots were done, we began hammering social media with the before-and-afters. This allowed the masses to see the drastic difference.

These images actually kick-started our high school senior rep program. The proof was in the images. We asked those three girls to share their experiences and images with all their friends. There were several incentives for the reps to refer their friends. This is what made us decide to include hair and makeup for our senior session pricing. Having clients who go the extra mile to make themselves look their best brings me added confidence while shooting. All of the images we posted during this time showed only clients who had their hair and makeup professionally done. This made it appear that there wasn't an option to be photographed without professional hair and makeup.



Image © Blair Phillips



Image © Blair Phillips

If you are looking to create buzz on your social media pages, you need to be bold. From time to time, we have our hair and makeup professional go a little overboard with a couple of test shoots. These shoots are solely for the purpose of getting people's attention. We go for a really exotic look that most people would never consider for themselves. Search for fantasy-styled hair and makeup online for examples. It is really like playing dress-up. We create these over-the-top images with the sole purpose of getting our name in other people's mouths. Shooting something drastic and outside your norm opens other avenues for your business. People see your diversity, and it paves a road that can lead to another level of clients.



Image © Blair Phillips

High school seniors are generally a little nervous before their session. Imagine how nervous they can be wondering how their hair and makeup are going to turn out being done by a complete stranger.

Once I book a senior, I put her and the stylist in touch with one another. They get to know one another starting with a phone conversation. The stylist is trained to say key things that make seniors comfortable and confident. The artist asks them to search the Internet for examples that best suit their style and desired look. This gives the artist some much-needed direction to ensure everyone is on the same page. There is nothing worse than giving someone complete freedom with no direction. I ask that the stylist first speak with the parent to ensure confidence and explain the nature of the call. It is very important to ask for a little direction from parents since they are the ones spending the money. Putting these phone calls together before a session makes for a much less awkward and uncomfortable environment.

Great hair and makeup should not have to stand alone. They should be complemented with the right outfits and accessories. If your senior clients are showing up to their sessions with clothing that is uninspiring, it is generally your own fault. It is a complete lack of communication on your part. After getting to know their personality, send them a style guide. This could be as simple as searching online for trendy outfits and sending them in an email. You could go the extra mile and put together a professionally designed and branded style guide from your studio.

When you make suggestions for what to bring to ensure great pictures, people will listen to you. You want customers to have freedom, but with limitations. Whatever you do, don't forget to ask Mom to bring her favorite outfit for her senior as well. Keeping Mom in your back pocket is a must for generating a great sale. Tell your clients to bring way more than they will ever need. Don't forget accessories like hats, scarves, necklaces and sunglasses. The more the merrier.

Accessories such as hats, scarves, necklaces, and sunglasses are just a few. The more the merrier.



Image © Blair Phillips



Image © Blair Phillips

Offering hair and makeup has worked really well for our maternity sessions. When women are expecting, most don't feel they look their best. Mother Nature is sometimes tough on our bodies. Nothing increases a pregnant woman's confidence like having her hair and makeup professionally done.

This is also highly effective during a family session. Again, make sure to compliment Mom a few times during the session. I generally step in before every shot to adjust hair for a subject. Even if it is perfect, I adjust the hair right back into the place it was. My clients are put at ease when they see that I really care.

Help your clients go the extra mile by putting some of these practices in place. People will automatically share with friends and family all of the details they encountered as a result of your added work. In years past, all you had to do was have a studio and take a decent picture. With each passing day, photographers are going to have to do more and more to ensure stability in today's marketplace. Hair and makeup may be the missing link for you.



Image © Blair Phillips

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Blair Phillips launched his business nearly 10 years ago in a small town. Since then, Blair Phillips Photography has become a beloved household name to its many fans and clients. Each year, Blair 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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WITH
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In the world of professional photography, the experience you provide your clients is sometimes just as important, if not more important, than the final images you produce. The client experience is something Sal has been teaching in the industry since day one. What is your x-factor? What is it that keeps your clients coming back?

For us, it's all about the full experience we provide—and every person who is a part of the process plays a very important role in the overall experience, including the assistant. In fact, a good assistant can make all the difference to the client experience.

I am a hands-on learner. I have to be in the action and gain the experience to ensure I am able to fully understand whatever it is I am learning. Well, how do you learn how to be the best assistant possible and provide the best experience for your clients? I wasn't able to shadow and observe during my training—that's not how we operate around here. Sal threw me in as his full-time assistant almost immediately. My training was very much a "figure it out" type of process—he and I both knew I would fail, but it was those mistakes that I learned from the most.

After about a year under Sal as his assistant, I realized that in order to be able to get inside the mind of an actual client, I needed to be one. Well, obviously, I had no intentions of being a bride anytime soon, so my next best option was to get in front of the camera for a portrait session.

I have always hated being in front of a camera, and am not a huge fan to this day. But I knew I needed to experience being a client before I could ever understand how to be the most helpful assistant to Sal. The first time I had my photo taken by Sal was on my one-year anniversary with the company, in Hawaii. This was not a scheduled shoot for me, but a day that was set aside for photo shoots for everyone on the trip, and I decided to get out of my own head and in front of the camera for once.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

I think we've been cursed from the very first shoot—if you follow our work, you'll know that almost 90 percent of the best shots we get from my shoots are taken at the very last minute left of available light, or there's some kind of chaos going on around us. Well, this first shoot had both: We were scrambling trying to find a location we had stumbled upon a few days before (no one took note of the actual location), and by the time we finally got the whole crew there, we had about three and a half minutes left to get this one shot I wanted.

Remember, this was a last-minute idea for me—I had been assisting on the three other previous shoots. Needless to say, after I saw the results from this shoot, I was hooked. I wanted to create more and more memories through creative shoots everywhere we traveled, and over the years with Team Cincotta, I've had every opportunity to do so.

So let's take a look at some of the most memorable shoots I've done, and what I learned from each.

The Shoot

A few months after we got back from Hawaii, we decided to launch a glamour line under the Salvatore Cincotta brand called Allure. I wanted to stand in as a model so I could give them feedback on how they could make the experience for the client better as we built the Allure brand.

I was nervous and self-conscious about doing a boudoir shoot with my bosses. I had high expectations of what kind of images I wanted to get from the shoot, but was still so new to being on this side of the camera that my expectations only led to disappointment and more insecurities during the shoot. At the time, I was envisioning myself actually looking like the models in the images I gathered for inspiration, and, as Sal was showing me the back of the camera, I wasn't liking what I was seeing.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

The Takeaway

Forget about the lights or the setup. Focus on assisting your client and building her confidence.

It's your job to be connected to your clients and understand their facial expressions and body language. You have to make sure your client is comfortable and confident, especially with such a vulnerable type of photography as boudoir.

There's no doubt in my mind that both Sal and Taylor (assisting Sal that day) knew I was uncomfortable and unhappy with what was coming off the camera, but I think they were both caught up in the chaos of not really knowing what they were doing to be able to gear their attention toward me—to make sure I felt good about myself and was having the best experience possible.

The Shoot

In Ireland this past July, we chose three northern locations to shoot for our portfolio. I'd called dibs on one of those locations, Giant's Causeway, for a personal shoot.

I spent months researching how to get to this place, best time of the day to go, best spots to shoot from to get the right angle. There was also a lot of planning that went into the design of the parachute dress for this shot.

This shoot was going to be epic. Until, of course, we arrive at the location to find *thousands* of tourists. We decided to wait it out, and noticed the majority of tourists clearing out by 5 p.m.

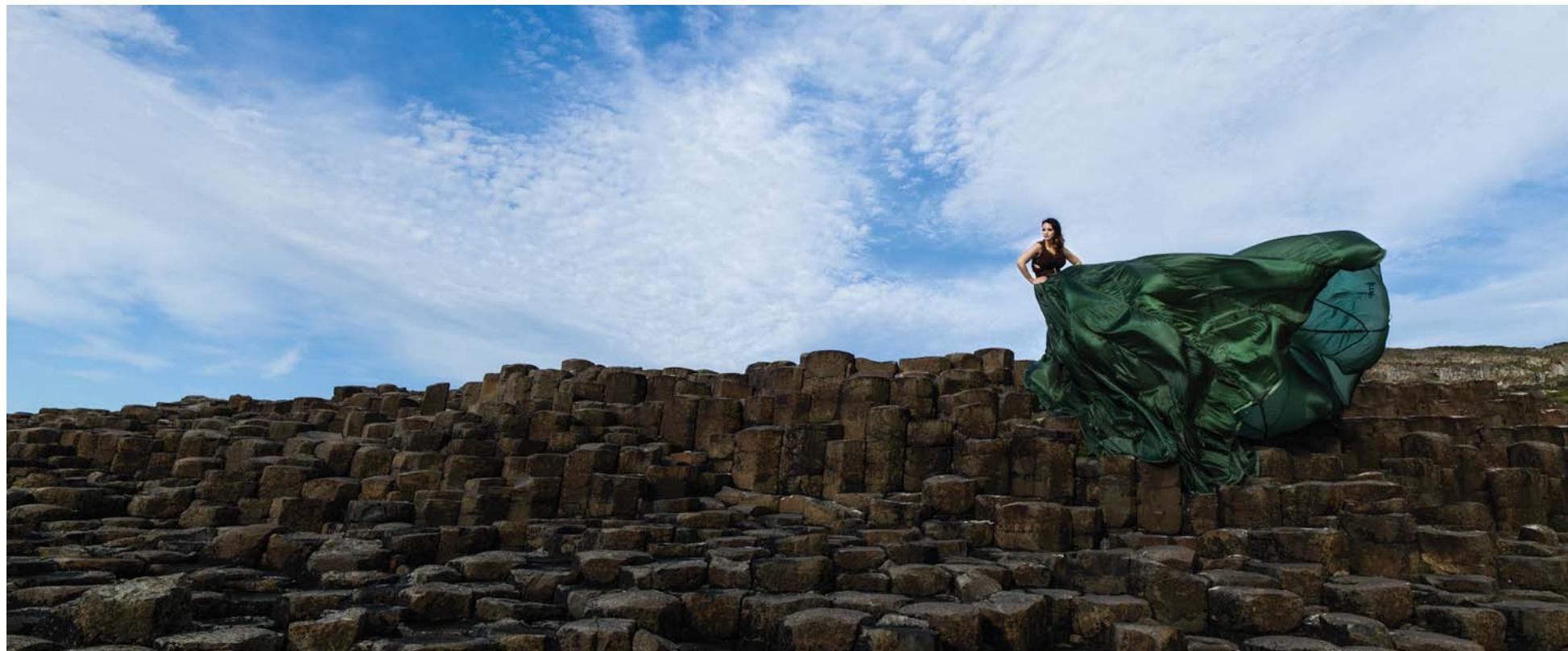


Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

The Takeaway

Always go the extra mile to make sure every detail is perfect.

On location shoots, it's not convenient to bring a giant mirror for touch-ups. We had a short window once the crowd cleared to get my makeup touched up and hair right, and to get the dress on and adjusted. Remember, this was a real parachute on a really windy day—there was actually genuine concern of the dress catching the wind and, next thing you know, I'm flying off into the sunset.

This is where Taylor, assistant for the day, really stepped up. She could have let me do everything on my own, but instead, she got me into the dress and made sure the top looked right and my hair wasn't all over the place—with no hesitation. That kind of support makes clients feel like they're a part of the team and the creation process, and that we're all in it together. Taylor was with me at the top of the rocks to fluff the dress (in all honesty, she was really up there holding the dress down so I didn't fly away), and was hopping back and forth between dress duty and fixing my hair and all of the other details. This allowed me to focus on getting the right expression without getting frustrated with the wind.

The Shoot

While we were in Scotland, we scheduled a photo shoot at Fairy Glen (which turned out to be the shoot for the cover of the August 2015 issue of *Shutter Magazine* once our plans fell through at the last minute for the originally planned cover). Let me paint the scene for you: cold, windy and rainy, and a team of people who would have much rather been cozied up next to the fire at our rental house.

We waited out the heavy rain, which luckily caused all the tourists to leave, so we practically had the place to ourselves. Once we got dialed in to the position we had originally envisioned, Sal took a step back and realized it just wouldn't work for the cover. Time to pivot. Same location, new concept.

At this point, the rain was coming down hard, and at an angle directly into my eyes, but I knew I had to push through it and keep them open to nail my expression for the shot.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

The Takeaway



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Be up for anything—especially a challenge.

Every photographer understands the reality of the saying “What can go wrong, will.” In the intensity of that moment, looking back, almost everything was going wrong—the wind blowing my hair into my face every time we reset it, the bottom of the chiffon dress getting destroyed by the muddy path when we still needed motion out of it . . . and the list goes on.

Through it all, however, I watched Sal, Taylor and Laurin work as a team to figure it out, seemingly unscathed by any of the chaos going on around them. Not only were they able to solve the problems, they were all excited about coming together as a team to create something magical out of a disastrous situation.



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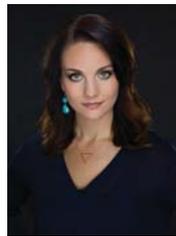
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It's so important to have these experiences, both as an assistant and a photographer. Knowing what it feels like to be a client pushes you to provide the best experience possible. And the experience you provide is what your clients will remember for the rest of their lives. ■

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

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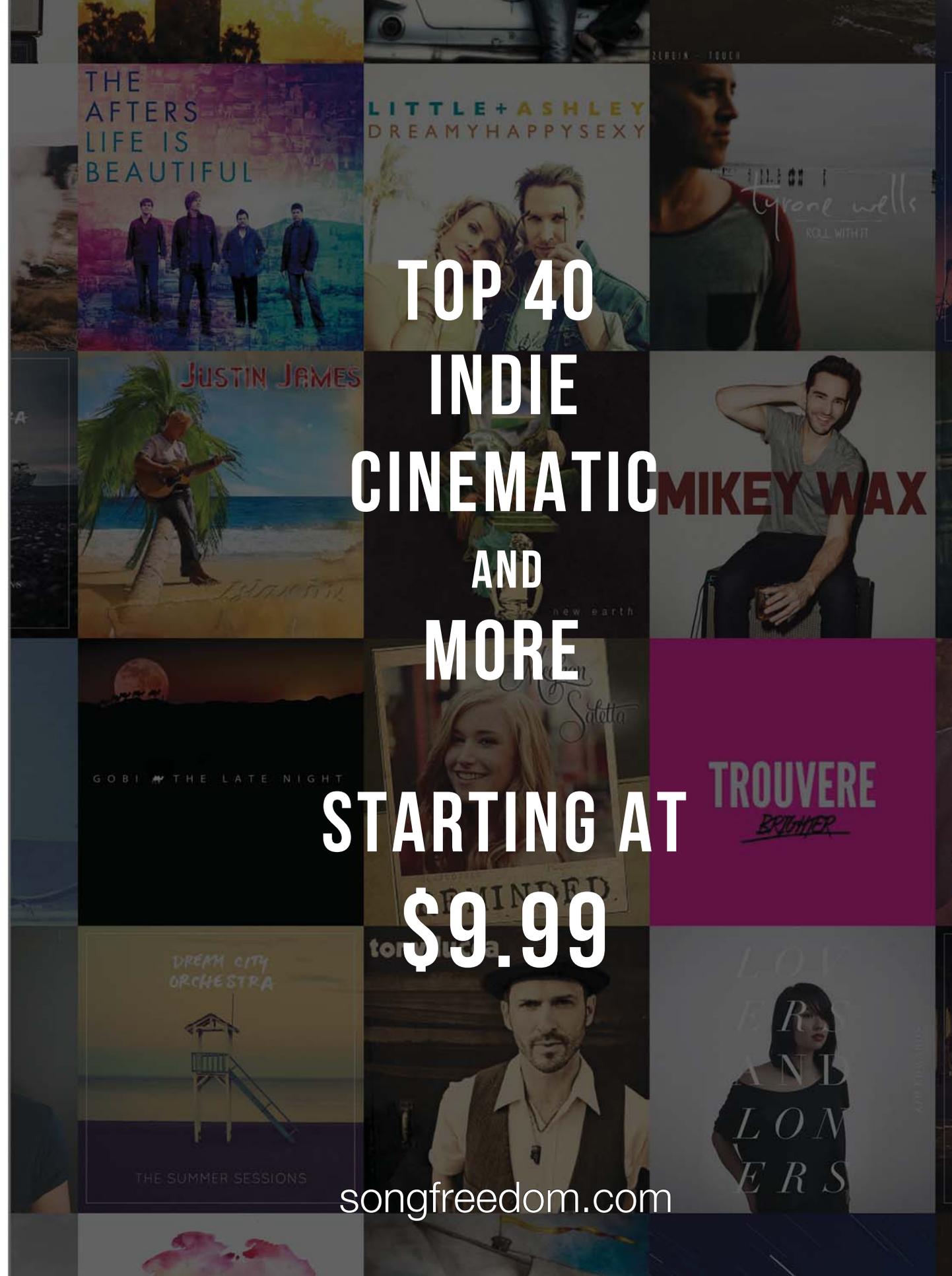
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 - + Tips on defining your ideal client.
 - + When to invest in a personal assistant.
 - + How to become your ideal client.
 - + Tips on finding a work-life balance.
 - + Post-production workflow tips and tricks.
 - + How to monetize your final images.
 - + How to get ahead and stay ahead in your market.
-

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.

sm

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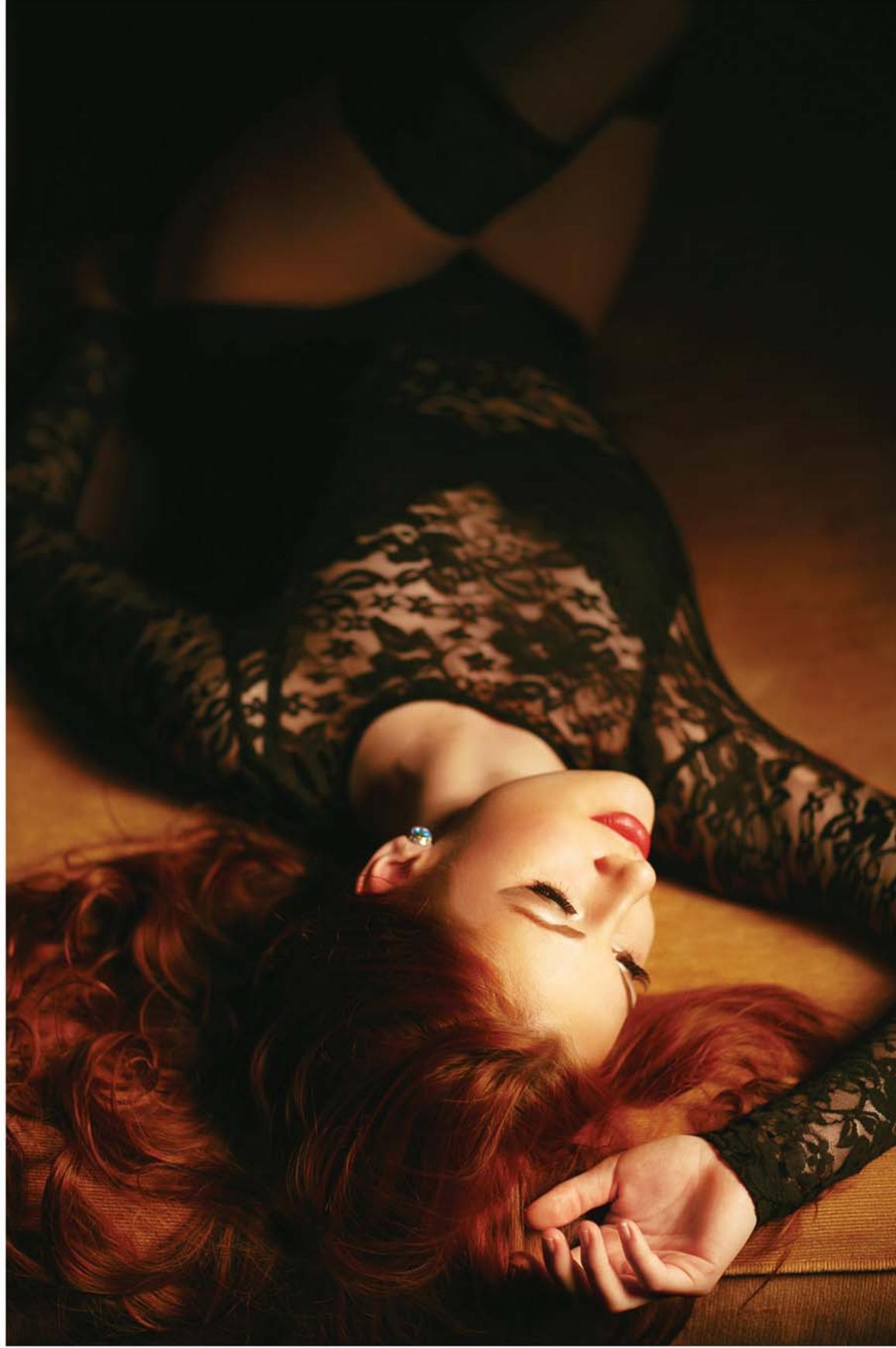
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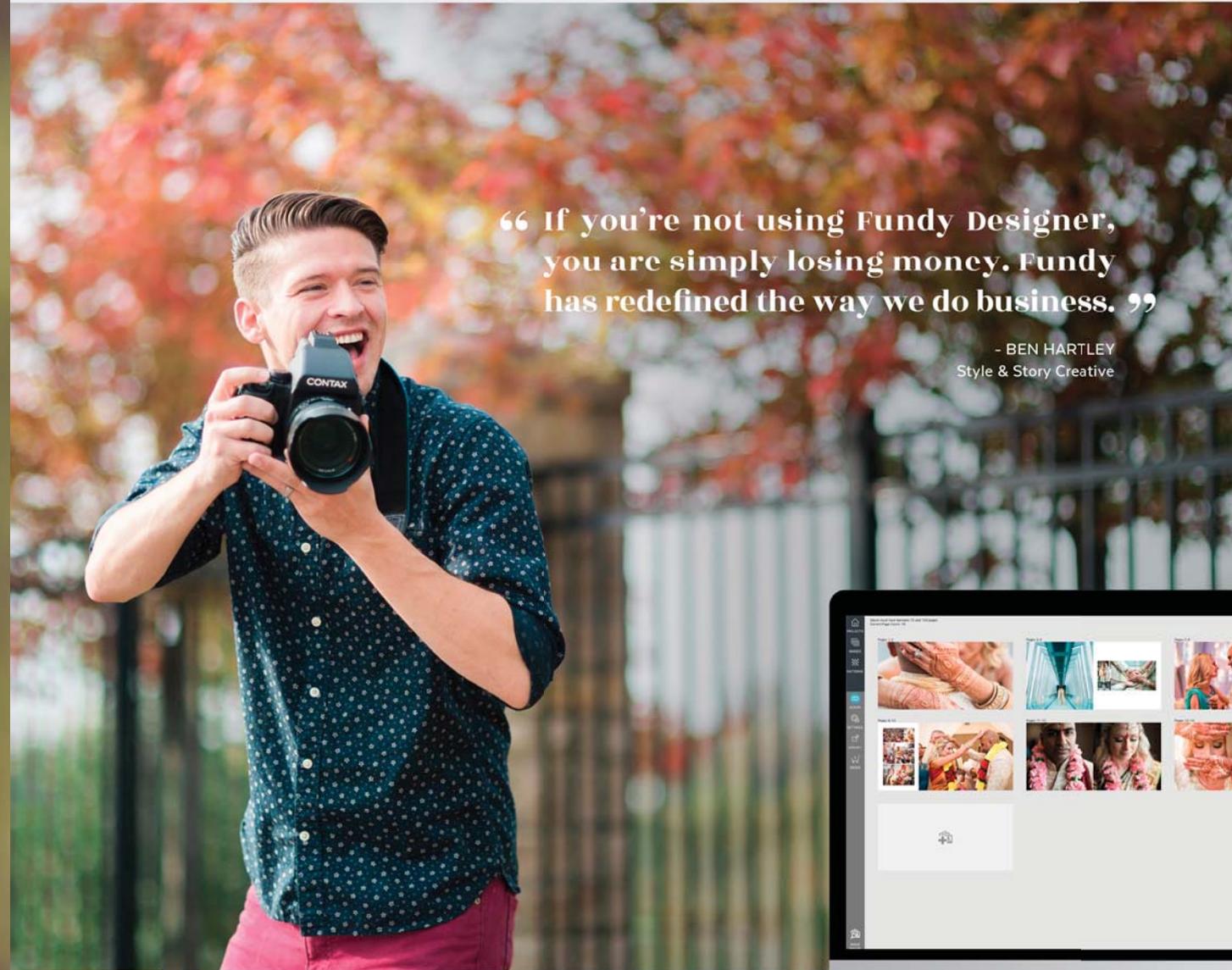


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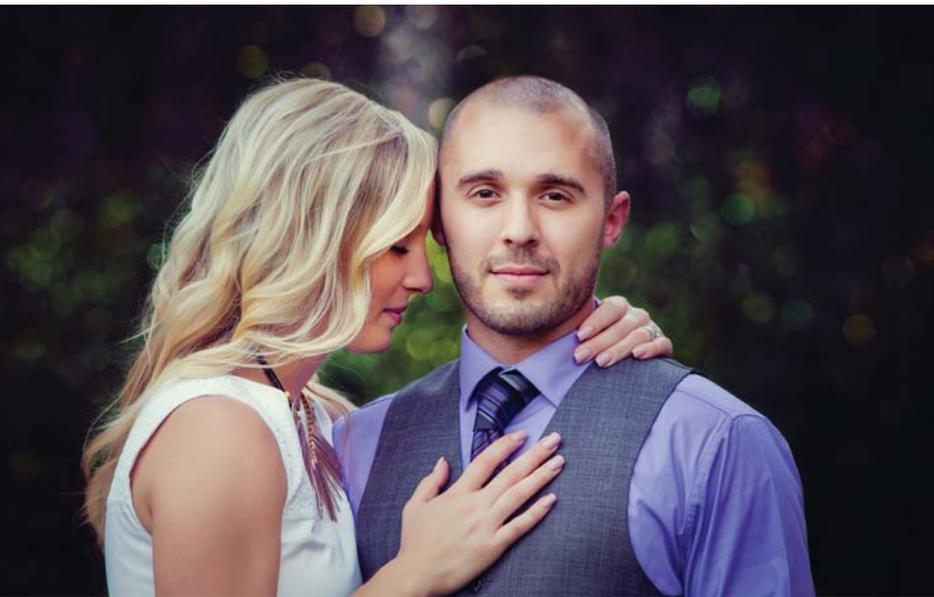
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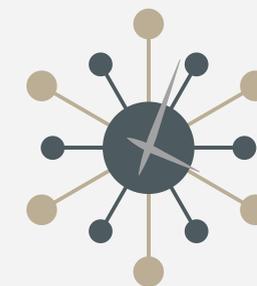
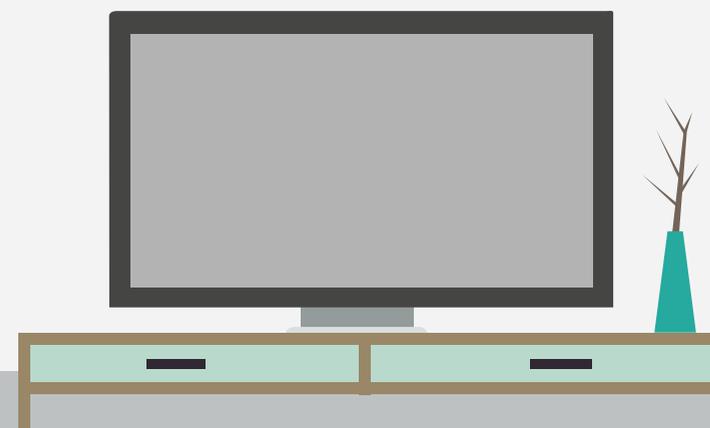
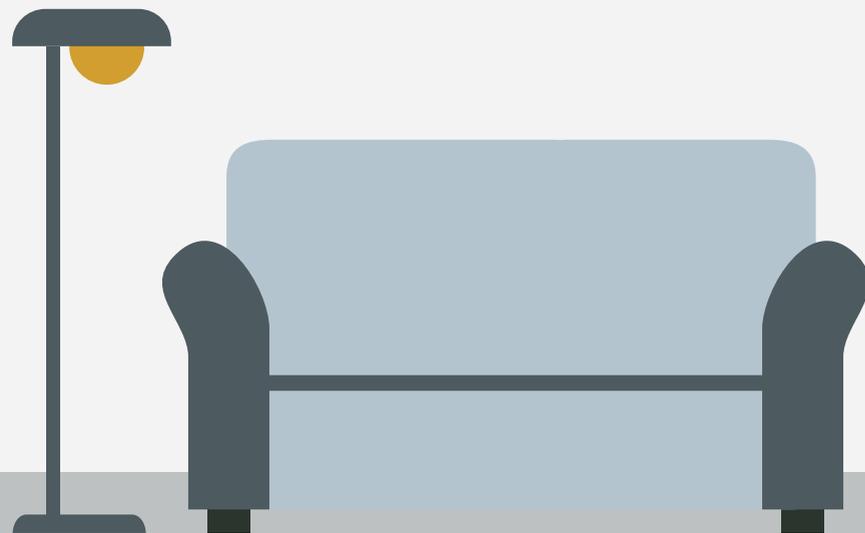
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BUILDING BLOCKS

HOUSE CLEANING

with Skip Cohen



When we started the “Building Blocks” series, the whole idea was to keep providing you with ideas to help you build a stronger business. We’ve covered a lot of the key components, but now it’s January, when business is typically slow.

Just because business is quiet this time of year doesn’t mean you have to be! January is the perfect time to do a little house cleaning for the new year and at the same time make a little noise in your community. Just like a farmer planting crops in early spring, you’ve got an opportunity to plant a few seeds of your own.

IT'S TIME TO CLEAN OUT THE GARAGE!

Every year, I spend at least one day cleaning out my garage. When I lived in Ohio, I always did this in the spring. It was an opportunity to get ready for better weather, hose the garage floor, get rid of all the winter dirt and reorganize everything for warmer weather.

You've got to do the same thing with your business, and that includes your office, paperwork and website.

MY GARAGE, YOUR WEBSITE.

Just like me cleaning out the garage, you need to do the same with your website. Here's the problem with my garage, which my wife claims is the same with my closet. I'm often in a hurry and can't find something I'm looking for. When I do find it, I rarely put it back in the same place. I create clutter, not intentionally, but simply because I'm multitasking and moving too fast. All of you have done the same with your website, starting with your galleries.

Too many images!

Seriously, how many photographs do you think you need on your site? My recommendation is no more than eight to 10 in any one category.

Show only your best

Don't fill your galleries with anything but "wow" images. A "wow" photo is so good you'd only have to show that one photograph to get hired. Your website galleries are about quality, not quantity. I'm betting that over and over again, many of you were rushed and dropped in images to your website without thinking about whether or not they were your best work, but you wanted to fill things up. It's time to do some pruning.

Update your About page

The two most valuable pieces of real estate on your website are your galleries and About page. So, why do you have an old headshot or, even worse, a bad selfie with your bio? And why does your bio talk about your past instead of your love for working with your clients, capturing memories or the passion you have for photography? Share your heart. Share why you love being a photographer. Share what your potential clients want most to know — can you be trusted to capture the kinds of images they want to see?

Take advantage of the down time to reflect and rewrite your bio. Include an image or two of you with a camera in your hands working with a client.

Tweaking your skill set

Are you the best you can be? Okay, so it sounds like a commercial for the U.S. Army, but nothing could be more on target. January is a great time for you to experiment and keep pushing the limits of your skill set. Think about where your weaknesses are, and then take the time to turn them into assets for building a stronger brand.

This is also the perfect time to review the workshops you're attending at upcoming conventions, and decide where you need the most help in expanding your skills.

Your blog

Great blogs don't happen by accident. They're about content and consistency. January is the perfect time to build up a stash of posts. Most important of all, remember your readers. You've got to share content they're interested in, and it's much more than just showing a few images from every family sitting or engagement session.

Help your readers better understand the value of professional photography. Help your readers to become better photographers. Help your readers get to know you. Remember, your website is about what you sell, but your blog is about what's in your heart.

*"If I can see the world through my client's eyes,
then I can sell my client what my client buys."*
- Ed Foreman

Ed Foreman is a motivational writer and speaker who I first saw in my Polaroid days 30 years ago. I never forgot that statement. It's not about putting yourself in their shoes, but about understanding what's important to them and how they see the world. As you're cleaning up your website and fine-tuning content for the new year, think about the demographics of your target audience. Give them what they want to see and read.

Self-discipline

Staying on course. I'm just like you. It's hard to stay on course with any project when you're being pulled in so many different directions. Right now, you've got time to be more creative. You've got time to stop procrastinating. You've got time to focus more than just your camera.

Create a timeline

What works best for me is sketching out a timeline. Because I'm old-fashioned, I love my whiteboard. I can keep updating it all the time, and it's always there in my office reminding me what's next on my list. So, whatever works to help you stay focused is what you need to turn January into a springboard — instead of a boat anchor.

I found this quote that perfectly makes my point:

*"Don't always say, 'There's still time' or
'Maybe next time' because there's also a concept of 'It's too late!'"*
- Unknown

Use January to analyze what you did right or could have done better last year. Then use the month to plan your year ahead. Don't wait until it's too late, and miss opportunities to grow your business and your art.



WHAT'S IN THAT STACK OF PAPERS ON YOUR DESK?

We're all hoarders to some degree. Usually, it's mail we put aside to read later on, but then we get busy. For many of you, it's magazines you've saved and wanted to read, but never got around to. Get rid of those stacks now while you've got the time to review what you've saved.

Handle each piece of paper once

It's advice a good buddy gave me back in the days before computers, the Internet and email. It's not just about doing some house cleaning now, but should be ongoing. Read your mail and email, take whatever action is required and then move on. This is also the perfect time to clean up files on your computer, especially email.

Dated material

In that stack of papers, you are going to find things you need to respond to ASAP. For example, if you're attending any of the 2016 conventions and trade shows, you'd better get moving on reservations, scheduling appointments, flights, etc. You snooze, you lose—so tackle things now before you miss out on some of the greatest programming in photography, especially with ShutterFest coming up.

Your network

A great network isn't just about collecting business cards and names, it's about building relationships. January is the perfect time to think about people in your network with whom you might have lost touch. Give them a call and make the time to get together at the upcoming conventions.

What-if marketing

January is the perfect time to think about things you want to do in 2016. There's nothing wrong with daydreaming and coming up with ideas to create new business, market yourself and strengthen your brand. Kick back now and then, and just ask yourself, "What if?" ■



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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SPEED UP YOUR VIDEO WORKFLOW

with Rob Adams

As a child of the '80s, I recall a time when having 64KB of RAM was a huge deal. Not megabytes. I'm talking about kilobytes. That's about the size of a few text documents today. Having that much RAM was amazing at the time because it gave the user access to a more robust system with which to create, well, more lines of text, which equaled more lines of code and more complex actions. In that context, today's computers are nothing less than a technological miracle. The human mind of 1983 couldn't even articulate terabytes' worth of storage, quad-core processors and RAM upwards of 32 gigs. Even the Space Shuttle, which was outfitted with the most advanced computer tech on the planet in 1983, had less processing power than today's digital alarm clocks.

We should feel so fortunate as content creators that we are anointed with the ability to wield such awesome computing power. So why the hell are we so outraged when our computers lag? We're spoiled children. We know what we want because we've seen it a certain way and we want it like that. Now. It's the degradation of the human emotional position in a postmodern, fast-evolving world that can be described as a high-pressure digital water main in which we are all being gushed through as a society. Video production offers us the chance to act out our worst behaviors when technological limits or the size of our wallets prohibits us from having the fastest computing technology available. So how do we cope with the dreaded adage "Make the best of what you've got"?

Digital video workflows can be complex, but there are some simple things you can do to speed up whatever system you may be using to get the most processing and pipeline power for not only your buck but for what you're running under the hood right now. Let's take a look at a few things that will help your video editing move more fluidly and give you less trouble overall.

1. Assess your system and upgrade where you can.

This is simply a matter of money. If you can afford to upgrade your RAM or step up into a faster, newer computer, this will always help, and it's the most obvious way to keep pace with the increasing demands of today's new video tech.

Chances are the computer you are running right now is not maxed out with memory. Upgrading your RAM is a quick, simple way to speed up your system's video handling capability. It allows the processors to take larger chunks of binary information at one time, increasing read-write speeds and reducing lag time between process requests. In layman's terms, you'll see fewer spinning circles and beachballs. RAM is cheap, relatively speaking; for only a couple hundred dollars, you may be able to max out your hardware's available memory banks.

Today's most popular professional video editing applications and operating systems make use of as much RAM as you feed them, so this is always a good first step. If you are a PC-based user, another way to increase video handling performance is to upgrade your system's graphics processing unit (GPU). Purchase a new video card for about the same price for bigger muscles when playing back, rendering and manipulating video files. Coupled with a RAM upgrade, this is a surefire one-two punch that will kick your video editing power into another gear.

Always check your system's compatibility requirements when upgrading. Check the dealer's website to ensure you are buying the correct type of RAM or a video card that will work with your current configuration. A little bit of research or even a live chat with a dealer representative is a great way to ensure the right move. I buy RAM sticks from Crucial.com, OtherWorldComputing.com and Newegg.com. They all have RAM compatibility resources that ask you for your system model and then match you with a list of compatible products. Of course, you could always take your system into your local Apple Store or PC dealer to ensure success. Just be prepared to pay a premium.

2. Faster drives = faster editing.

Having a fast computer isn't the end all/be all of building a screaming video machine. A lot of it has to do with drive speed. Several years ago, the only types of drives that were available were internal eSATA or IDE hard drives that contained a spinning disc and moving needle. These were and still are finite in their read-write access speeds. This is because the read-write speed is based on how fast the disc can spin and how fast the little needle can move on top of it. Now we have flash storage, which is considerably faster and safer. They aren't as delicate and are lightning fast. We also have the added benefit of RAID-configured drives to make accessing and writing data turbo-fast, while at the same time protecting the data with redundancy.

Let's take a look at some of the most popular types of hard drives and how they correlate to video production.

Internal Physical Drive

These are the most common type of hard drives you find in stock store-bought computers. Drive spin speeds are commonly 5400rpm. Editing video off of a drive like this is possible but not optimal. In an older system, it would be a dreadful experience trying to push HD video. We will get to exactly why in just a moment. If you have no other choice but to use your computer's internal hard drive for video media storage and editing, and you can't afford to splurge on a solid-state drive, you should consider swapping out that stock 5400rpm drive for a 7200rpm hard drive.

This will offer marked improvement in read-write speeds and make the overall experience a bit less frustrating. Of course, this depends on how heavy your video files are and what exactly you are asking the computer to do with those files. There are 10,000rpm physical disc drives, but if you're going to spend that kind of money, you may want to consider a solid-state drive.

Solid State Drive (SSD)

These drives are boss. You also need to be the boss to afford them. Buying one with enough storage space to fit most video production storage and editing needs will make a nice dent in the bankroll. But if you are serious about your video workflow, this is the way to go.

Flash storage is not subject to physical disk limitations and operates solely on electrical current to read and write data. They are remarkably fast and reliable. Space versus cost tends to be the biggest issue.

It is worth noting at this point that keeping your video media on the same drive that houses your video editing application is not recommended. For example, if you have a 1TB internal hard drive or SSD, you will want to work with your video files on a separate drive, either internal or external. It doesn't matter which, just as long as it's a separate drive. This is so the data can be accessed much faster without the application itself competing with the read-write speed needs of the drive serving the media. Serious production houses use very fast servers to feed the editing computers the media to speed up editing. However, if you are going to use one drive for both application and media storage, an SSD is the right choice.

External RAID Server

RAID stands for "redundant array of independent disks." Simply put, a RAID system is two or more hard drives or SSDs linked together to offer more speed, security or both.





A RAID built for speed spreads your video media across multiple drives for faster handling and access. You are now using multiple drives to access the same amount of data.

The power and speed with which the video data can be accessed and then fed to the video editing application is increased exponentially with each new drive used in the RAID configuration. To illustrate this: A 6TB RAID-0 system uses two 3TB drives to create 6TB of total storage. Each 3TB drive contains part of the video data. It's like having two horses instead of one pulling the same carriage. Add more drives and you add more speed. A RAID-1

configuration is slightly different. It uses the additional drives to keep duplicate copies of your data for added safety. All of the hard drives in a RAID-1 are mirrored so if one goes down, the others still contain the media files in their entirety.

There is no speed benefit to a RAID-1 system, but if safety is more important to you, this is a smart choice. I edit using a RAID-0 setup of multiple drives built for speed. This is my “scratch disk,” meaning it's just a work drive. I copy the files I'm going to edit onto my LaCie 2BIG 6TB RAID server for editing, but I always have additional copies of those original files in other places for safekeeping.

There are a few other types of RAID configurations that offer both speed and security, so ask your dealer if this is best for you. RAID's are typically made up of physical spinning hot-swappable hard drives, but they can be built with SSDs if you've got tens of thousands of dollars to burn. Settle for nothing less than 7200rpm drives in your RAID—10,000rpm drives if you're a baller.

External Hard and SSD Drives

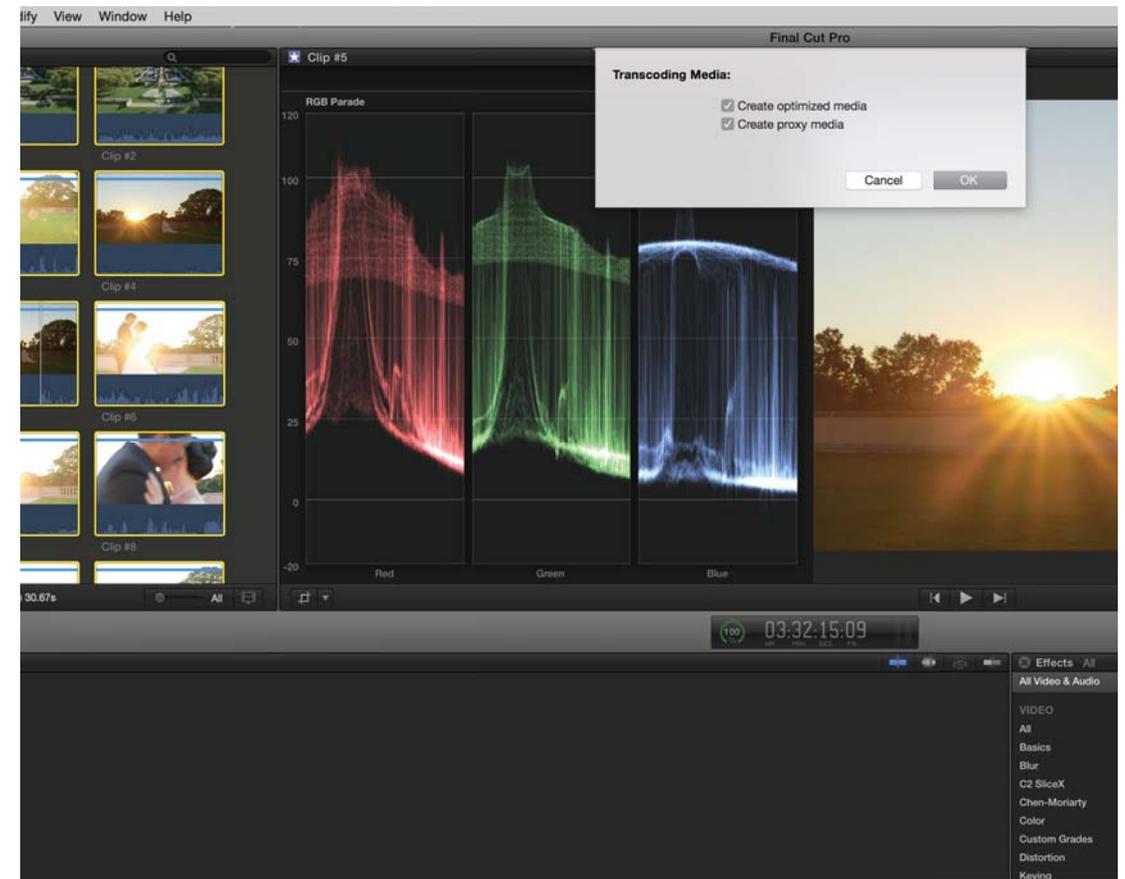
These are the most common types of external hard drives. They plug into your computer via USB or an Apple Thunderbolt connection, and offer the ability to store and edit video externally.

As with internal drives, physical hard drives are the slowest, and if you are trying to edit video off of a 5400rpm USB external spinning drive, you are probably going to run into some speed issues. Spend a little more and get an external SSD or a drive that offers a Thunderbolt connection (for Mac users only). These tend to be 7200rpm at a minimum and offer a good portable option. LaCie makes a palm-sized RAID drive called the LaCie Little Big Disc, which offers RAID-0 or RAID-1 with a Thunderbolt connection for data transfer speeds up to 10Gbit. That's fast for a portable external hard drive. Remember, keep your video media on this and your editing application on your computer's internal hard drive for the best results.

Fusion Drive

Fusion drives are a hybrid between a physical spinning disk drive and flash storage. The flash storage part is mainly used to feed the media data to the host system, increasing read-write speeds. They are a more affordable option than standard SSDs. They are far better than standard logical drives, and at half the cost of a pure SSD. Consider the connection to your computer also. Thunderbolt and Thunderbolt 2 are currently the fastest consumer and prosumer connection interface between external peripherals and the editing computer system. Next is USB 3.0. Then Firewire 800, which is all but extinct and not even being built into the latest computers. If you have an old iMac or MacBook Pro that has FireWire 800, you should definitely be using this over old USB 2.0. Better yet, just upgrade your internal hard drive to an SSD, and you'll be right as rain.

All of these upgraded hard drive options are a step up from what your stock system currently has, and having a faster drive coupled with more RAM internally will speed up your video processing power.



(1)

3. Proxy your media.

If you find your computer lagging constantly as you try to edit your HD video, and even a RAM upgrade and faster drive isn't helping that much, you should probably consider dropping the quality of your media for editing. This is called proxying or “offline” editing. You can easily create lower-resolution proxy media in Final Cut Pro X (1). If you're an Adobe Premiere Pro or Sony Vegas user, you can use Adobe Media Encoder or Apple Compressor to create proxy versions of all of your original video files, then edit using those.

Working with reduced-resolution video files makes cutting and manipulating your media much easier on your system. You can cut your entire video using the low-quality proxy media, and, with a few clicks (only one click if you are using FCPX), you can easily reconnect your high-quality original media once you are ready to finalize and export.

Keep in mind that if you plan on doing any sort of color grading or adding filters to your clips, you need to use the original media because you won't have access to the media's highest bitrate and color space when using proxied clips. I use proxy when editing 4K UHD media on my laptop when I'm on the road, and then reconnect the original media back at home in front of my monster editing system.

There's no shame in proxying, and it can save you thousands in hardware upgrades to boot. For more information, do a simple Google search and you'll get a crash course in seconds.



4. Save the filters for later.

One of the most common mistakes I see new video editors make is they pile on all sorts of effects and transitions and filters too soon. The more crap you add to your clips and your project timeline, the harder your system is going to have to work to process everything you are asking it to do.

The best editors build their story and make their primary cuts first. They lay out the entire video with no bells and whistles. They don't even make the audio sound any better. At the end, when you have what we call "picture lock," meaning that no major changes will be made to the overall final cut, we add video color correction, color grading, noise reduction, sharpening, effects filters, digital compositing, titles and a final audio mix with its own set of sound effects, manipulations and filters.

Saving all of that stuff for the final render will save you much of your system's performance power to do the real heavy lifting of making your video narrative awesome. If you find your system getting extremely bogged down when you apply filters, consider a hardware upgrade and faster drives.



5. Optimize your media and know your system settings.

Today's video editing applications can pretty much handle it all if your system is fast enough. You can dump all kinds of mixed video footage onto a project timeline. Different frame rates, large and small frame sizes, various aspect ratios and codecs—the program will likely handle it. It doesn't mean it will handle it well.

The best thing you can do is make sure that the video media you are working with is uniform and matches the project timeline settings for your particular application. There are some exceptions, but overall, you want to make sure your video editing application knows what to expect from the video files it's working with.

For example, video files that come out of a DSLR camera are not traditionally in an "editable" format. They can be edited natively or in their original state, but you will get much better system performance and application cooperation with footage that has been transcoded or rewrapped into a file format that is more industry standard. Converting your DSLR video files from their native h.264 to Apple ProRes 422 will help your system process the codec more smoothly, especially on older systems.

A maxed-out newer system may not even flinch at native h.264, but if you are having lagging issues and application crashes, consider optimizing your footage. Once again, FCPX has made this extremely easy by offering this service inside the application with just two or three strokes of the mouse. If you are mixing frame rates, consider conforming all of your footage to a uniform standard ahead of editing. This decreases the amount of required rendering while editing, and improves the overall speed of your system.

Lastly, ensure that your video project timeline is set for the frame rate and type of video file you are working with. If your video files are 1920 x 1080 at 23.98fps in Apple ProRes, your project timeline settings should be the same. Most video editing applications prompt you when you add footage for the first time to a timeline and confirm the timeline settings to the parameters of your footage. Check anyway.

I know the frustration that comes with every stage of video editing. If there's one thing I've learned over 20 years of creating videos, it's this: Having an optimized, organized workflow keeps you sane even when your computer is not.

Check out my video for a closer look at how Final Cut Pro X makes optimizing and proxying your video for editing a headache-free experience. ■



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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Rethink Your Retouching

3 Techniques for Fixing Hair

with Dustin Lucas

Some familiar tools, like the Clone Stamp and Healing Brush, are great for removing flyaway hairs. Removing these distractions is easy, but making it look realistic can be difficult. That's where a technique called "frequency separation" can be crucial. Adding hair seems odd but can keep your editing looking as natural as possible. As we all know, when using Photoshop, if something is off, it looks fake.

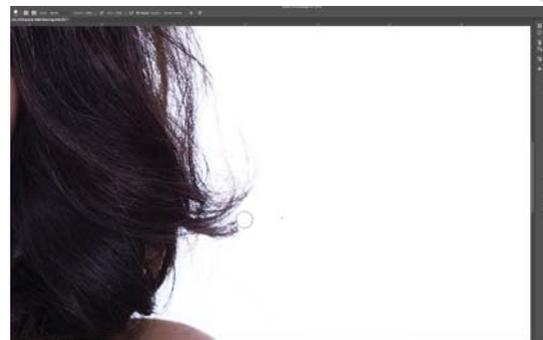
We will be working with layers so that the file remains nondestructive. Although creating layers increases the file size, I highly recommend it. Along with layers come masks and clipping masks. Masks allow specific areas of an image to be affected by increasing the transparency of the effect. With a black layer mask, none of the effect is applied, and white means it is 100% transparent. This is where brush opacity allows you to apply subtle amounts of the effect as well. Blending modes relate to how the effect is applied rather than the amount.

The Clone Stamp

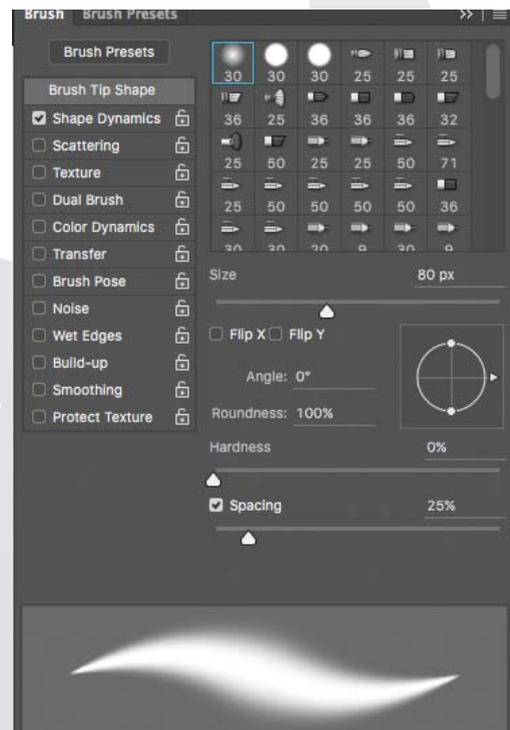
Now let's get working in Photoshop. Open your image and create a blank layer (1). It is best to do all your work on a separate layer so that your original image, or base layer, is not affected. Select the Clone Stamp tool to remove the flyaway hairs. Navigate to the sample setting and set to Current and Below. Adjust your brush to have a softer edge; hard edges make the cloned areas look patchy (2). Before you begin painting, you must select a sample source—I suggest making your brush smaller and choosing an area similar to where the hair you want to remove is. To do this quickly, hold down Option, click and then paint over the hair. To resample your source, repeat the previous step. Remove all the flyaway hair (3).



(1)



(3)

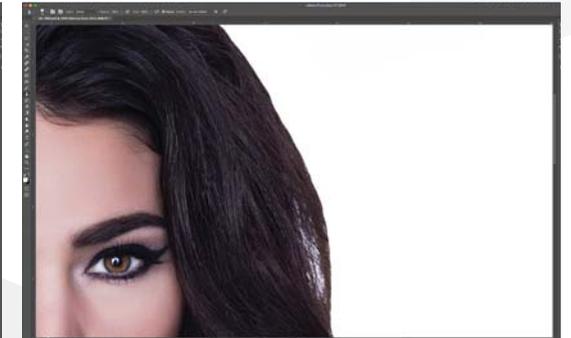


(2)

Create a layer mask by holding down Option and clicking the emblem at the bottom of the layers palette. This makes a black layer mask that hides all the work we just did. Select the paintbrush with a much harder edge and chose white as your foreground color (4). You can now paint back in the cloning work. Choose a lower-opacity brush to help blend everything together.

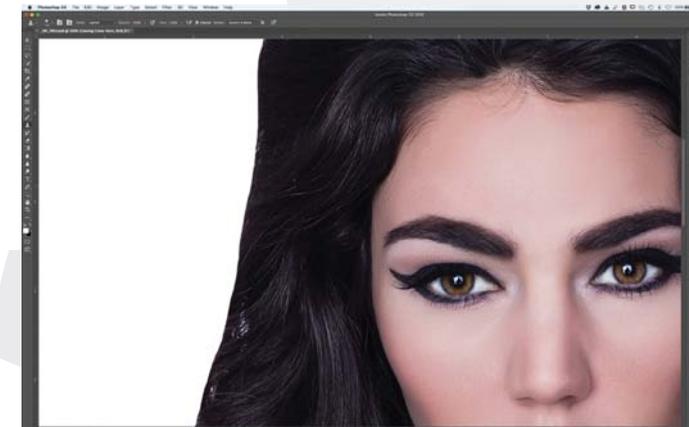


(4)

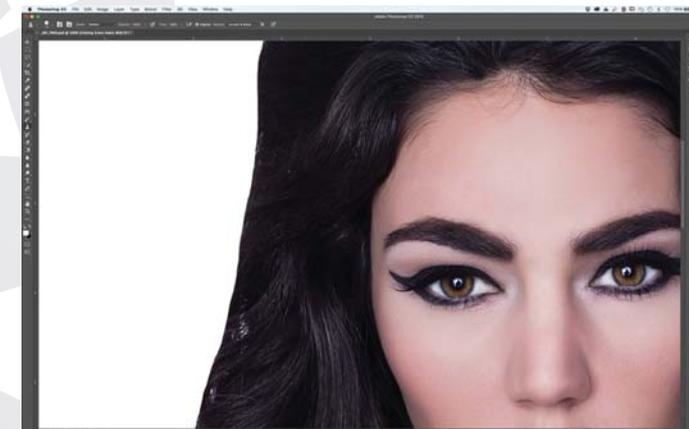


(5)

To remove crosshairs, select your sample source and begin painting. This is a very tedious and difficult process. There are a couple of blending modes that can help with lighter and darker hair. Set it to lighten for lighter hair in darker backgrounds, and darken for darker hair in lighter areas. It is hard to be precise with this tool, and this type of editing should be saved for a different technique (6a, 6b). I'll get into that later.



(6a)



(6b)

The Healing Brush

For seamless backdrops and continuous backgrounds, this works well, but I want to work a little more precisely. Create a new layer, grab the Healing Brush and set the samples setting to Current and Below. Select a soft-edge brush so that the blending is less noticeable. Choose a sample source and begin removing the flyaways (7). You will notice as soon as you get too close to the edge, the blending goes to crap (8). This is where you can use the Clone Tool to swap back and forth with the Healing Brush. Use hotkeys to do this quickly; the Clone Stamp is “s” and the healing brush is “j.”

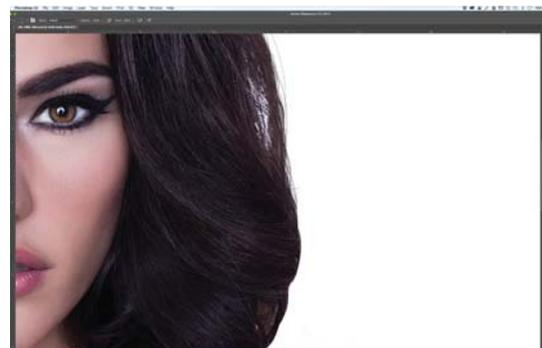
Once you remove the unwanted hair, it is a good idea to add some back in so the cleaned-up areas don’t look fake. Create a new layer and choose the paintbrush. Adjust the brush’s edge to 100% hardness, set the brush size to 1 to 3 pixels, and color-pick a section of the hair toward the edge. To quickly toggle colors, hit the “I” key and click in an area, then hit the “b” key to switch back to the brush. Begin drawing long strokes around any curves or to fill in gaps in the hair. Stay close to the edge and draw from inside outward. Repeat strands in an area to create some volume (9).



(7)

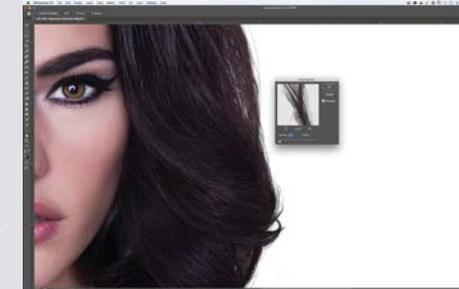


(8)



(9)

Now you need to blur these strokes to create depth. From the menu bar, choose Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur. Set the radius to match the sharpness of the surrounding hair—I used 2.4 for this example (10). Then add noise by going to Filter > Noise > Add Noise. I zoomed into the image at 100% to try to match the background, and settled with 9.5% noise (11). These two adjustments make all the difference in creating realistic strands of hair (12).



(10)



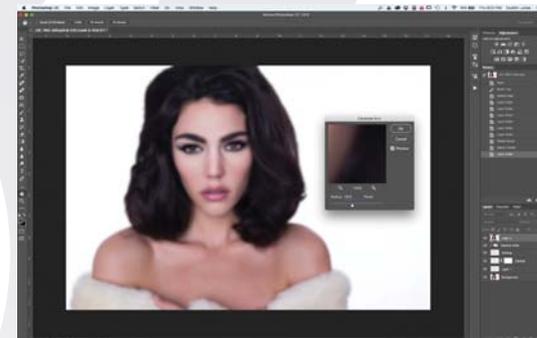
(11)



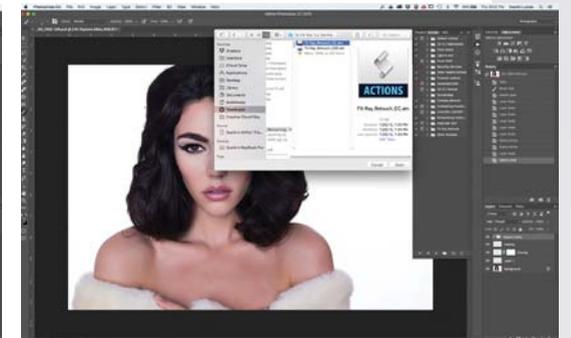
(12)

Frequency Separation

This technique is built around the same process for softening skin and image sharpening. Using the Gaussian Blur and High Pass filters, you can start to remove crosshairs much more accurately than our earlier technique with the Clone Stamp. First we need to duplicate our image layer. From the menu bar, choose Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur (13). Set the radius to 14 pixels and click OK. Then duplicate your image layer again and choose Filter > Other > High Pass. Set the radius to 10 pixels. Make an action for this. I downloaded a free one from FX-Ray.com. No need to make this step any harder—set an action to quickly create these layers (14).

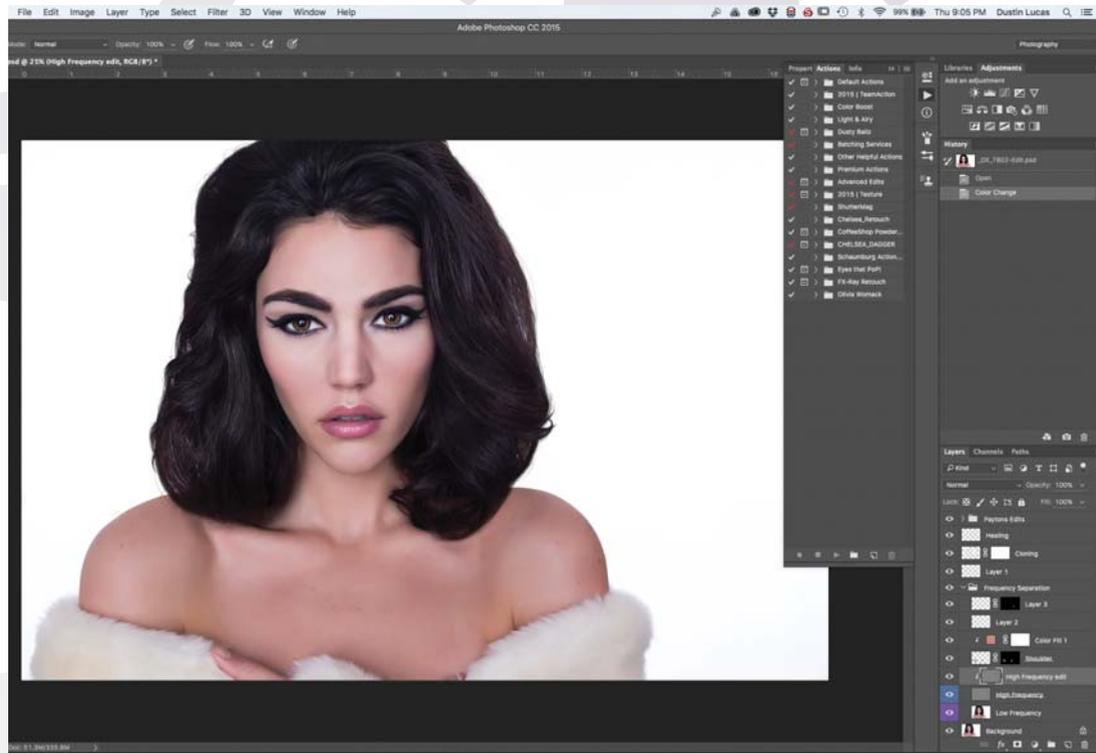


(13)

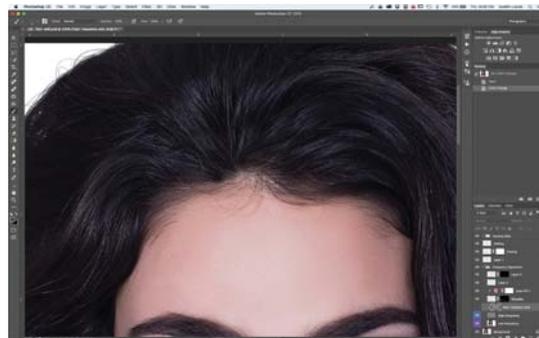


(14)

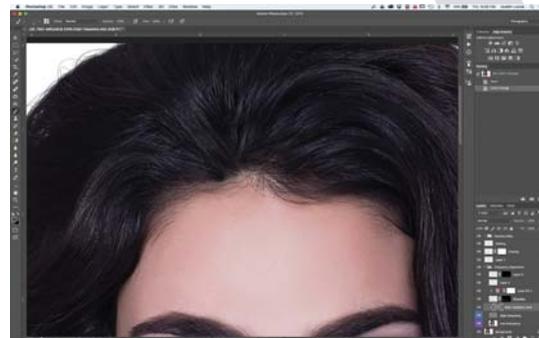
Once I have the layers built, I am ready to attack the crosshairs. These can be difficult to remove, as we saw when we used the Clone Stamp on an empty layer. That is why we created the frequency separation layers. Select the high-frequency layer and strike Command + J to immediately duplicate the layer. Then we need to convert it to a clipping mask by striking Shift, Command + G (15). This allows the Clone Stamp to affect only the layer below in specific areas. It's a much more precise technique for cloning crosshairs. Strike the "S" key, choose a sample source and begin painting in the direction of the hair strands. Resample and move the cursor to get the right look. You will need to change the blending mode to Normal for the layer and the Clone Stamp tool. You also need to change the sample setting to Current Layer.



(15)



(16a)



(16b)

Take your time and learn to sample. I like to remove a large piece of hair by sampling next to it and painting over it entirely. You do not have to be precise at first, because you can clean up by dragging the cursor the same direction as the rest of the hair afterward. Painting in the same direction is crucial to creating continuity with the cloned strands of hair (16a, 16b).

The Results

Retouching hair can be as stressful as you want to make it. Get used to the tools and the sampling technique to get more precise with your editing. A Wacom tablet is extremely helpful, but I completed this tutorial with a mouse.

Remember, when working in Photoshop, it's more about what looks right but also not spending days on end to perfect an image. These techniques will get you in a good place, and building on them can revamp your retouching abilities.



Before



After

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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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A wedding couple is shown in profile, kissing on a wooden pier. The bride is wearing a white lace wedding dress and holding a bouquet of white and yellow flowers. The groom is wearing a light-colored suit. They are standing on a wooden pier with a rope coiled on the ground. In the background, there is a long wooden pier extending into the water under a sky filled with soft, white clouds. A large, dark, downward-pointing triangle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the title and author information.

3 Tips for Better Wedding Images

with Leonardo Volturo

A wedding day is one of the most important days in a person's life, and being hired to document it is something we take very seriously. Your couple has hired you to be their eyes and tell the story of their day. For most couples, their wedding day is a whirlwind. They are so anxious to see their pictures because the day flew by. So many things happened, and they can relive the day through our photos. We often hear, "I didn't even notice that" and, "I didn't get to see that." Here are three tips to ensure you've got everything you need to deliver a great story.

It's All in the Details.



Image © Leonardo Volturo

Bride Prep

During bride prep, gather all of the details. These include jewelry the bride will be wearing. You will also want to grab the shoes, garter, bouquets, the invitation and, of course, the dress. Ask if she has anything that's special, like something that was passed down. Some brides pin a medal or have a piece of their mother's dress pinned to their dress, or something connected to a grandparent. Also look out for bridal party gifts, gifts for parents, gifts or a note from the groom, and anything else they have spent money on or have had personalized.

Groom Prep

For the guys, you need to grab the tie, jewelry, watch, look out for fancy socks, shoes, and don't forget to look inside the jacket to see if it's stitched with names or anything unique. Just like with the bride, you'll want to photograph any gifts, notes and anything else that is sentimental and significant.

Ceremony

We structure our timeline so we arrive 30 minutes before the guests. This enables us to photograph the entire ceremony space free of distracting elements like guests or vendors setting up. This is ideal when capturing images to use as backgrounds in the album. Aside from taking a wide shot of the entire ceremony space, you'll want to photograph key elements such as the flowers, altar area, unity candle or similar items, pictures or reserved seats of passed family members, programs and signage.

Reception

Here we're looking for place cards, guestbook, centerpieces, menus, favors, the cake and place settings. Other unique things we see at receptions are candy tables, cigar bars and personalized napkins. Your clients won't want these images large in their homes, but they're all important pieces of the wedding day because our clients sought and paid for those things to be there. They're also good for enhancing your album designs.



Image © Leonardo Volturo

Moments.

For bride and groom prep, my main focus is the bride and groom. Melissa is scanning for reactions from family and the bridal party, while I am leading and working the room. During prep, we are learning who is important to the bride and groom. This helps us anticipate moments throughout the day.

During the ceremony, Melissa is looking for the groom's reaction when he first sees the bride, the handoff from parent to groom, reactions from family—emotional reactions, laughter, etc. Typically the first row contains the parents and closest relatives. Key moments like personal vows and the ring ceremony spark a reaction. Paying attention and knowing what to look for is key to anticipating those moments.

For the first dance and parent dances (in our area they do all of the dances right after the grand entrance), we have the bridal party line up behind the couple, giving us a backdrop for our images and easy access to moments and reactions. Melissa is shooting the 70–200 lens looking for close-ups of the bride and groom and their hands, and scanning the room for moments, while I am shooting the 24–70 or 16–35 looking for more of a scenic shot.

For the toasts, we look around for where those important family members are seated. I stay up front with the 50 or the 24–70, while Melissa scans the room with the 70–200 looking for laughter, applause and tears.

When photographing the reception, you'll want to keep an eye on the key players of the day, but also be sure to capture images of as many guests as possible as a record of those who attended the event. The dance floor is also a great place for some candid moments.



Images © Leonardo Volturo



“The moments of happiness we enjoy take us by **surprise**.

It is not that we seize them, but that they **seize us**.

–Ashley Montagu



Image © Leonardo Volturo

“We do not remember days, we remember ***moments***.
–Cesare Pavese



Image © Leonardo Volturo

Think Big.

When thinking big, I want you to think about creating big landscape and architecturally based images, because you're going to be using these big images to lead your clients into large print products and albums, which means big sales.

When creating these images, we are looking for scene elements like a church or a unique building, architecture or even a field. This is not going to be your typical portrait. What you're focused on here is creating something that is more of an art piece. This is where we break out the ultrawide lens (16–35) and our off-camera lighting (either Profoto B1 or B2). The concept here is pretty simple. You want to first expose for your scene and then use your lighting to fill in your subject, which will have gone dark

since you're exposing for the typically brighter scene. Now that you've got a solid base image, you may choose to keep it as is, do some editing to it yourself or do what we do and send it over to Evolve Edits for a Signature Edit. We've partnered with Evolve to create one-of-a-kind images that have that wow factor, allowing us to provide our clients with awesome art for their home.

Now you're all set to showcase for your clients the impact images they will want to display prominently in their home. These images are designed to be displayed large, so make sure you've got samples. Direct your clients along the way to purchase these images, and set yourself up for success.





Image © Leonardo Volturo

Covering these three elements of the wedding day ensures you've got everything you need for a great story and album. Remember, it's their story. This is the only visual reminder they will have to look back on, and your couples are relying on you to preserve those moments. ■

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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.

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LINDSAY ADLER & THE PROFOTO D1

"My job is to create high impact images that grab your attention. Light is an essential tool to captivate and draw people in. When creating memorable photographs, I grab my Profoto D1s. They are extremely intuitive, powerful, reliable and let me focus on creating impact. The versatility of these strobes paired with Profoto light shapers provides me endless flexibility and control to bring my vision to life".

- Lindsay Adler



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