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june 2016

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magazine



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- 12 | **Building a Recognizable Brand With Your Portfolio** - Michael Anthony
- 24 | **Making Money in Any Market and Economy** - Sal Cincotta
- 36 | **How I Planned the Shot: The Stylized Engagement Shoot** - Alissa Zimmerman
- 48 | **Brand New: The Business of Newborn Portraits** - Lori Nordstrom
- 58 | **The First 28 Days: How to Pose Newborns** - Ana Brandt
- 70 | **Building a Baby Brand: Enter a New Genre by Sub-Branding** - Phillip Blume
- 82 | **How to Have a Baby When You're a Wedding Photographer** - Vanessa Joy
- 94 | **Top 10 Newborn Session Tips** - Lisa Rapp
- 106 | **Outdoor Newborns** - Blair Phillips
- 120 | **Baby Birthday Video** - Joe Switzer
- 134 | **Newborns & Neutrals in No Time: Retouching in Lightroom CC** - Dustin Lucas
- 150 | **Inspirations** - Our Readers
- 166 | **Working With Specialty Lights and Modifiers: Is There a Difference?** - Michael Corsentino
- 178 | **Building Blocks: Know Your Demographics: Who's Really Your Target?** - Skip Cohen
- 186 | **The Value of Relationships** - Melanie Anderson
- 200 | **Search Engine Ranking Factors Based on Analyzed Data** - Justen Hong



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*Sabratore Cincotta*  
BEHIND THE SHUTTER

## MISSION STATEMENT

*Shutter Magazine's* focus is on photography education. Our goal is to provide current, insightful and in-depth educational content for today's professional wedding and portrait photographer. *Shutter* 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 have established the magazine as one of the leading photography publications in the world.

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## THE COVER

**PHOTOGRAPHER:** Ana Brandt | [anabrandt.com](http://anabrandt.com)

**CAMERA:** Canon Mark III

**LENS:** Canon 24-70 USM II

**EXPOSURE:** f3.2 @ 1/160th, ISO 160

**LOCATION:** Tustin, California studio

**ABOUT THE IMAGE:** After flying in to LA at 11:30, I had just a few hours of sleep before this shoot at 1. Fortunately, at 8 days old, Evie was amazing.

# LAUNCH POINT

A message from the editor-in-chief



**Newborns and babies** are a great way  
for new photographers to start  
**making money.**

- Sal Cincotta

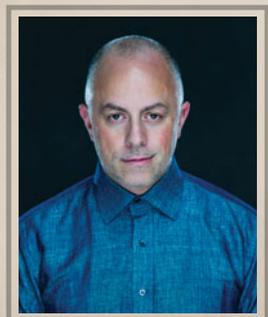


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BUILDING A  
RECOGNIZABLE BRAND  
WITH YOUR  
**PORTFOLIO**

with Michael Anthony

There are no second chances to make a first impression. Your portfolio is the first impression your clients have of your brand. When building your business, the quality of your branding is essential. Without a recognizable brand, your business will get lost in the endless sea of competitors coming into the market every single day. There are many parts that go into creating your brand, but the most important thing to remember is that all of those parts must work in sync. Your brand should be developed and revolve around your portfolio in order to attract clients who are a good fit for *you*.

So how do you develop a recognizable brand? It starts with consistency.

## STEP 1. HONE YOUR PHOTOGRAPHIC STYLE

This step may seem easy enough, but it's the hardest part to master. In the first five years of your career, you will likely be evolving your style at a rate that is quicker than your clientele can keep up. You will learn what works and what doesn't, and constantly look back on how your work has progressed. During this time, you have to look at what makes your work unique, and notice the consistent subtleties as your style evolves. From there, your individual style as an artist will begin to shine through, and you will be able to play to your strengths as an artist.



Image © Michael Anthony



Image © Michael Anthony



## STEP 2. DIFFERENTIATE

Differentiating your portfolio from your competition is the best thing you can do to book more business.

I have been a professional photographer since 2012. In that short period, we have created a brand that is synonymous with “different.” When I started out, though, my style fluctuated with whichever way the wind was blowing. I constantly adapted to trends, and failed every time. Once, I took out an advertisement with Style Me Pretty, a huge wedding blog site. It was one of the most expensive ads I ever invested in, and I didn’t get a single call. Mind you, SMP is one of the most visited websites for new brides in the world, and its aesthetics are very defined. Not a bad place to advertise, right? Wrong. I was not reaching my ideal client or demographic. Once you realize your style as an artist, your entire portfolio must convey it.

So how do you differentiate? You can do it in a variety of ways: lighting, composition, post-production, etc.

Here are some of the ways we differentiate our brand.



## Lighting

I have always loved photographic lighting. My first mentor was a very talented off-camera flash shooter, and it rubbed off on me very early in my career. Recently, I invested in the Profoto off-camera flash system. The B1 and B2 give me the ability to differentiate my work in a way that no other tool can (with the exception of my Canon 11-24; more on that in a minute).

The B1 and B2 give me the power to get my subjects out in the sun, and create a look that is unique in every way. You will often find me using the B1 or B2 to compete with the harsh California sun. The build quality is second to none, and I have dropped these tools in the field with no damage to them whatsoever.

Is the Profoto system expensive? Yes, it is. But the investment has paid for itself 15 times over. And, because it's exclusive, it has allowed me to separate my work from my competitors. Invest in your business if you want the rewards you dream about.

## Composition

Your composition is influenced by a variety of things: posing, lens choice, subject placement. I've learned through workshops that composition is one of the hardest photographic skills to conquer. Our studio is known for our use of ultrawide-angle shots. Sal convinced me during a recent visit to St. Louis to purchase the Canon 11-24mm lens.

It's one of the best tools I've invested in. You can take wide-angle shots with many different lenses, but there is something about 11mm that is special. The look is unique, and much of the work featured in our portfolio is shot at 11mm.



## Posing

Posing and lighting go hand in hand, and you need to know how to pose your subjects to create a believable image. I often use candid poses that are romantic, intimate and sometimes even sexy for my couples, and it has created a style for us. A potential client who isn't looking to be posed in this manner is likely not a fit for us.

To get better at posing, you need more than practice. You need solid instruction on the basic foundations of a pose. Take a look at my May and June articles in Shutter for our studio's posing principles.

## Post-production

We have been outsourcing all of our color correction and edits to Evolve Edits for a long time. Evolve has helped me grow our brand to where it is today. There are other companies that offer color correction, even some that do it for a subscription model. But none do it like Evolve. Some editing companies have seen the success of the Evolve's Signature Edits, and have tried to replicate it. The one thing that makes Evolve unique is that every single Signature Edit hits Sal's desk. Sal is a Master of WPPI, and a highly awarded photographic artist. No other post-production company offers this high-level service.

I recently had dinner with a client of Evolve who told me about how a Signature Edit that was delivered failed to meet his personal taste—but he saw the light when his client paid \$1,500 for it in a large acrylic. Sal usually knows best, which I've been reminded of many times.

### STEP 3. CREATE CONSISTENCY

One thing I see when doing portfolio reviews for newer photographers is a lack of consistency. This was the first thing that was mentioned to me years ago when I had my portfolio reviewed by Daniel Aguilar, an amazing photographer. Your style does not matter as much as how a collection of your images is viewed as a whole. Remember, you have to specialize, and by doing that, you will never be everything to everyone. The style of photography we display on our website actually turns off probably nine out of 10 brides. We have heard it all: “Your style is too dark.” “Your images are too dramatic.” “This doesn’t look very bridal.” And my favorite, often said by my own mother: “Why is everyone so small in the frame? I can’t see their faces.”

Not my client.

My client is the one bride out of 10 who is looking for something dark, dramatic, unconventional, and that will look good on their wall. Your client will not find that style anywhere else, and will be willing to pay you what you are worth to get it.

Another important thing to remember is that everything that goes into your portfolio on the main page of your website needs to be your best work. This goes for social media as well, and you should be updating both your portfolio and social media often. If you do not have enough client work right now, set up some model shoots until you do.

You cannot have images that you are only somewhat proud of. They are not an indication of what makes you different. You also need to keep it to less than two images of the same couple, because featuring too many images of a single set of people can indicate a lack of work or experience, neither of which is good for your brand.



Image © Michael Anthony



Image © Michael Anthony



Image © Michael Anthony

#### STEP 4. YOUR PORTFOLIO IS YOUR BRAND

Make sure that when clients look at your portfolio, they are enamored by your ability to tell a story. When they see your body of work, they should be thinking: "I have never seen anything like this before." Once you get your work to that level, you have built a portfolio that stands out.

But you're still not done. Portfolios always need to be updated. This year, we are planning shoots in some of the most exotic places in the world. We have to continue to evolve our portfolio because our competitors are always on our heels. Operate under the mindset that the more you continue to innovate, the more you will continue to succeed. ■

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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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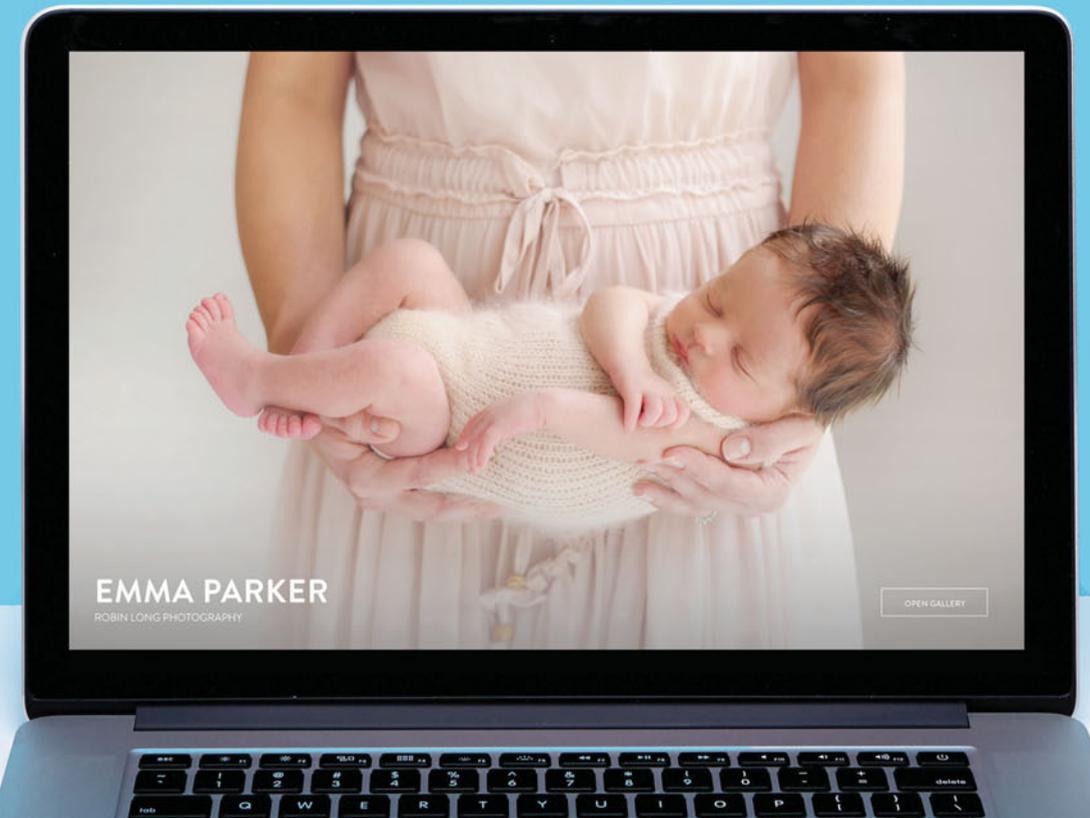
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MAKING MONEY IN  
**ANY MARKET**  
— *and* —  
**ANY ECONOMY**

with Sal Cincotta

My company excels at the business of photography. We get it. I'm not being condescending. Business savvy is key to the growth and success of your business. You have got to constantly take the temperature of your business and the landscape in which you operate.

If you don't take the time to do this, you run the risk of waking up one day to a business and economy that has passed you by. To make matters worse, you will find that your competitors have stolen market share right from under your nose while you were sleeping. Yes, sleeping at the wheel. Your business is your ship, and you have to navigate it through a minefield.

## The Basics

To craft a good business plan and build a successful business, you need to understand the competitive landscape. If you don't understand this, you will constantly feel like you are reacting to market changes. You can't run a successful business if you are always reacting to things. You need some vision and a plan of attack. That plan can't be a feather in the wind.

It drives me bonkers when I hear any business owner say, "It's the economy" or, "People in my area don't spend money." Let me get this right: Your success is based on the economy? Your success is based on the people in your area spending money? Actually, the problem is you. That's right. Time for some tough love. It is in fact you. You are the single biggest obstacle to the success of your business. Stop blaming everyone else. Control your own destiny.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



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Let's lay some ground rules.

First, everyone has money for what they want to have money for. It doesn't matter if we are talking about a welfare recipient or a multimillionaire. That's reality, my friends. When you walk into someone's home who says they have no money and you see a nice big flat-screen TV—well, they clearly have money for what's important to them.

This is a key piece of psychology you need to wrap your mind around. It will prevent you from "feeling bad" for people when you are trying to sell them your services. My philosophy is you came to me because you want great pictures. Well, guess what? I am in the business of selling great pictures. *Ding-ding-ding*, we have a match. Stop "feeling" anything. Run your business like a damn business.

Here is something else to consider. Wall Street makes money in a down economy and in an up economy. Wall Street doesn't complain. They keep making money. But you are thinking, Wait, we are not Wall Street. No, we're not, but consumer behavior is no different. Yes, when the economy pulls back and spending tightens up, people are still spending money on things they want. The key is convincing your market that they "need" your product or services. Do any of us need a \$4 cup of coffee? Probably not, but that hasn't stopped Starbucks from record earnings.

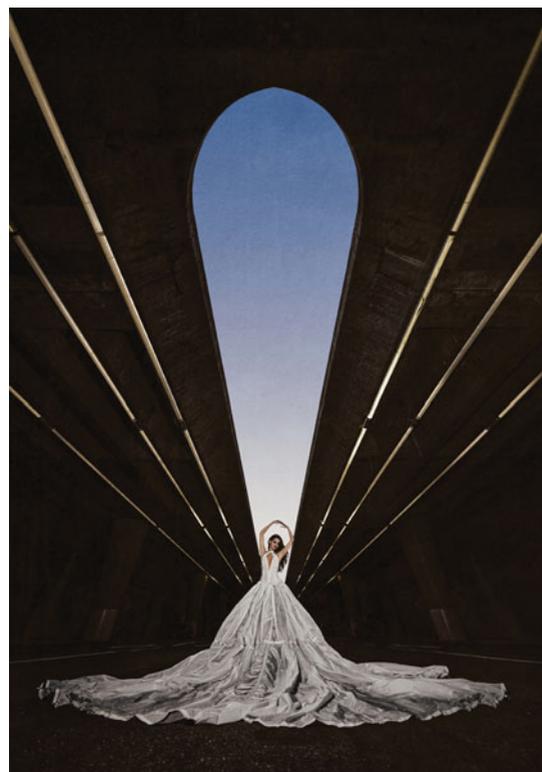
## Standing Out

We grew our studio during the middle of the recession. We hit record numbers in clients and sales. How? I can tell you we didn't worry about what everyone else was doing. We didn't say that people have no money. We took matters into our own hands. We knew that photographers were a dime a dozen. Pricing was all over the board, from the \$500 shoot-and-burner to the \$20,000 celebrity shoot. We had to carve out our own niche. So the question has to be: What can we do to stand out from the crowd? This applies to every business, not just photography.

Step back and ask yourself what you can do to stand out. Here are some things to consider.

1. Who is the market leader in your area?
2. What are they doing that makes them the market leader?
3. What can you do to leapfrog the market leader? Product? Service?
4. Where are you weak in your business compared to your competitors?
5. How is your brand viewed in the marketplace? Are you on the low end of the market, midmarket, upmarket?

Notice that I didn't tell you to copy your competitors or market leaders. That makes no sense. To be successful, you have to be forward leaning. Force your competitors to react to you rather than just copy everything they do. That's a complete waste of time and effort. What makes you unique? This is the only way you will be successful, regardless of the economy.



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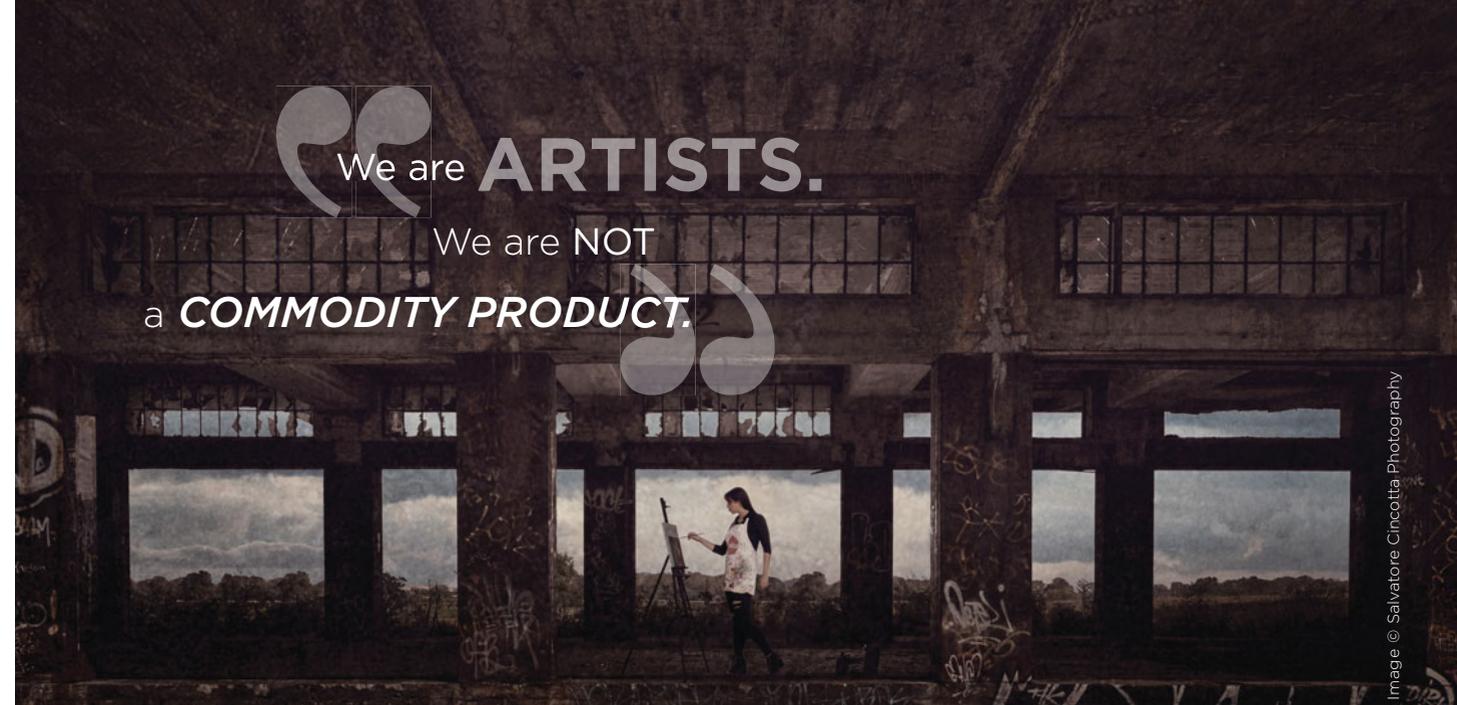


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## Competing on Price

Want a surefire way to end up broke and out of business? Compete on price. You will run your business into the ground. Guaranteed. We are artists. We are not a commodity product. You are not Wal-Mart. Competing on price is a race to the bottom that leads to bad decision after bad decision.

Instead, compete on your offerings. Compete on the uniqueness of your product or service. If you see yourself as just a photographer, that's the problem. Think about if a baker saw herself as just a baker. She would be, well, just a baker. But a world-renowned baker is operating with a different mindset, creating works of art, unique flavors and specialty designs. See the point here? Think like an artist, and you will never compete on price again. Why? Because what you offer is so unique, there is no need to.

At Salvatore Cincotta Photography, we do not compete on price. We are one of the most expensive wedding photographers at our bridal show every single year. And every single year, we book a shit-ton of business. I refuse to compete on price. If I did, we would cut prices in half. Instead, I offer high-end albums and service. Service starts the minute they contact us, the second they walk in the booth. Then I let my imagery speak for itself.

Instead of trying to be everything to everyone, I embrace my dramatic style of shooting and editing. This ensures my clients are crystal clear on what we do and why we are the best fit for them.

Price? That becomes a secondary or tertiary issue for them. They love our work and know they want to work with us. That's all that matters to everyone. The sooner you realize this, the better. A typical wedding costs \$30,000 and up. If they want to work with you, they will reallocate money from another vendor.

Stop competing on price and start competing on talent, quality, products and service. It will change your business and your life.

## Investing in the Business

This is truly a vicious circle. You don't charge enough, so you have no money to invest in the business. Marketing, advertising and subsequently sales all suffer. This leads to more issues. Now you don't have time money to invest in training or the proper equipment, and so your images aren't up to par. You don't have money to invest in the right sample products to show the clients you don't have what they should be spending money on or what makes your business better than your competitors.

Sound familiar?

You have got to break the vicious circle. Take control of your destiny and make the right investments. Smart investments. My thought process is anything that helps me increase sales is something I will invest in. I do this without even batting an eye. I know that an investment like this will have a tenfold payback over the course of a year.

Want a new product to show your client? Ninety-nine percent of the time, making that investment in a sample product will immediately pay off when your client buys it. For me, proof was in my upgrade to displaying a 30x40 canvas in my studio. We'd never sold one even though it had been on our price list for two years. We made the investment, made it a centerpiece in our studio, and the first client to come in after that purchased one.

Now we sell 30x40s pretty regularly. Why? Because we are showing this high-end product in our studio. If I'd kept telling myself I didn't have the money to do it, I would still be scratching my head wondering why no one was spending money. I guess I would be one of those photographers saying, "My clients don't want large prints—all they want are digital files."

Lack of training is another thing that boggles my mind. We have an annual training conference called ShutterFest (ShutterFest.com). (Tickets are \$99 if you register early, and up to \$299 for a two-day event of shooting and learning.) The number of people I see on public forums saying they don't have the money to go is truly laughable. Let me get this right: You don't have \$1,000 (travel included) to learn how to make \$100,000? Do you realize how ridiculous that sounds?

If you want to have a successful career and business, you need to invest in it. Every successful business owner in the world knows this. It takes money to make money.

Success is not an accident. Success is not easy. Success is a result of hard work, an investment of time and money, and laser focus. I promise you, it can be done. Whatever your area of expertise, success can be had regardless of the economy or what your competitors are doing. Take some time to make smart logical decisions, not fear-based decisions, and you too will become the 800-pound guerilla in your market.

Go get 'em! ■



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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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# product review

bayphoto.com with *Salvatore Cincotta*



## Why Bay Photo Lab?

If you read my article this month, you know the importance of standing out. This month, we take a look at some cool and unique products from Bay Photo. If you want to make money in this industry, you have got to sell product. The life of a shoot-and-burner is a short-lived one. Here is the reality: Clients want prints on their walls, not a wall of digital media.

Bay Photo consistently puts out new, unique products that help photographers grow their business. You have to change your mindset and invest in innovative products to add to your lineup. At a minimum, buy a sample and see for yourself. Check out these killer options from Bay Photo.

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Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

# HOW I PLANNED THE SHOT

THE STYLIZED ENGAGEMENT SHOOT

with Alissa Zimmerman

I really hit the jackpot when I found this job. It is fast-paced and ever-changing, so I never have to worry about not being challenged or getting bored. It is full of never-ending opportunities to take an idea and bring it to life in the blink of an eye. It is a place where I can learn something new every single day.

Most importantly, I found a boss who trusts and believes in me, and the team we have built between the two of us is exactly what a team should be: balanced. I love nothing more than planning everything around a photo shoot, and Sal loves nothing more than approving items here and there, but mostly having the ability to walk onto a shoot and have the confidence that everything will go as smoothly as possible.

There are two key parts of my job that I love more than anything else: providing incredible experiences for our clients that build lifelong relationships, and planning creative photo shoots. When we get the right kind of client in our studio, we are able to change the routine a bit. Pitching a destination engagement shoot to a client is actually really simple. I mean, who doesn't want their engagement pictures taken in a one-of-a-kind location?

Now, take that a step further. Pitch the idea of a stylized portion of their shoot. The right client will go crazy for this kind of concept. What do I mean by "right kind of client"? The client who sees photography as art. Last month we had the privilege of meeting a wedding couple of ours in Las Vegas for their engagement shoot. Las Vegas offers an endless supply of unique shooting locations and opportunities, so we blocked off an entire day to make the most of our time with the couple. That's the sort of thing our clients expect.

Here are my Top 10 tips for planning a stylized engagement shoot.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

## 1. Paint a colorful picture.

You never want to downplay a pitch to your client, especially when it's something creative that can provide an unforgettable experience and an opportunity to build your portfolio with unique locations. It's all about the initial pitch and getting your clients excited. Paint the picture for them. Send them screen shots of the location and wardrobe/accessories you're envisioning. Make it so exciting, they won't be able to say no.

## 2. Travel for free.

This is something we offer that really stands out. We are constantly traveling all around the world for work, so when a client expresses interest in a destination shoot, we send them our list of booked travel dates and locations. If they want to meet us in one of the cities, we don't charge them anything extra. The only time we charge our clients for travel is if they want to do a destination shoot on a date we don't have plans to be in the city they want to shoot in (or if we can't make it work with our schedule, we sometimes are able to schedule a layover in a city we are flying through).

### 3. Communicate clearly and frequently.

For most of your wedding clients, an engagement shoot is their first time being in front of a professional camera as a couple. There's a lot of pressure tied to getting the best engagement pictures possible, and added pressure in hoping they made the right decision to do a stylized session. Take these people under your wing and make sure they feel comfortable and confident throughout the process. How can you ensure this? Consistent, quick and clear communication. Respond in a timely manner. Explain yourself thoroughly. Set expectations from the beginning, and make sure they understand your studio's process fully. Leaving any gray area only creates an uneasiness with your client and unnecessary tension—ultimately leading to a subpar experience.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

### 4. Build a relationship.

This is my favorite part of stylized and destination engagement sessions. Typically when we shoot in our city, we book five to six sessions in one day, just cranking them out from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. It's exhausting, and doesn't allow any time to talk to our clients and really get to know them. With stylized and destination engagement shoots, we block off more time and book only one shoot for the day so we aren't rushed, and can actually hang out and build friendships with our clients.

We like to go out for dinner and drinks with our clients after the shoot (if we're not dead tired). We also try to document behind-the-scenes shots and goofy selfies throughout the shoot to post on social media so their friends and families can follow.

### 5. Be realistic.

You are the trusted advisor—when it comes to stylized shoots and collaborating with your clients, most will have enough unique ideas and locations and outfits to fill an entire week of shooting. You have to be the voice of reason, but you can't be this until you've done your research and can speak with factual information.

**Locations:** Have them narrow down to their top three picks, and then drop each into Google Maps to put together an itinerary with the order of locations: Where will they meet you? Where will you end the shoot? You'll need to factor in travel time, traffic, walking, etc. into this itinerary so they don't expect any kind of time traveling from location to location.

**Transportation:** We encourage our clients too hire an SUV or limo that can drive us around so they are able to leave their extra outfits, makeup, etc. in the car while we hop out to shoot. This is also extremely helpful because we don't have to worry about wasting time (and money) to find parking, especially in big cities packed full of tourists.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

### 6. Listen to your clients.

Don't get so hung up on your vision of the stylized session that you stop listening to what your clients want. Bounce ideas off of each other, and make sure you get a read on what they are reacting positively to and what isn't getting them excited. You have to be willing to adapt your vision to accommodate their interests and make sure they love the idea and the images. Do they seem to be into the idea, or are you strong-arming them into thinking it's cool? If there is any hesitation in the response after the initial pitch, I back off.

### 7. Invest plenty of time into the location research.

The worst feeling in the world is scheduling an entire session around a location and pulling up only to find out you needed a permit and they won't allow you to shoot there. Trust me, I've done this, and it wasn't pretty. A situation like this ensures your clients will look at you and your studio as sloppy, unprepared and unprofessional. As much as they fake-smile and say things like, "Oh, it's no big deal," trust me...it's a big deal. Take the time to make sure you have your locations 100 percent solid.

## 8. The devil is in the details.

Anyone can put on a pretty dress and call it a stylized shoot. There is so much more that goes into the vision for a true stylized shoot. You're taking a part of your clients' personalities and telling a story—not only of the day, but of their relationship. Add accessories, rent vintage cars, dress up a gown with unique jewelry. And don't take your first shot until every detail is perfect, down to the little piece of hair across your bride-to-be's forehead. It makes all the difference when you client sees how closely you pay attention to these details, and puts them at ease knowing they will have you to take care of these things on their actual wedding day.





Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

### 9. The experience is everything.

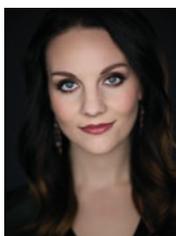
I can't stress this enough. Sure, these shoots are a great opportunity for you to travel to cool parts of the world and build your portfolio, but don't lose sight of the fact that you're there for your client. Making sure they have the experience of a lifetime should be your number-one priority. Joke around, compliment them, get them to relax in front of the camera—they will remember this day for the rest of their lives.

### 10. See the bigger picture.

Like I mentioned earlier: It takes a special kind of client to pitch a stylized engagement shoot and get a positive response without hesitation. This client understands the opportunity at hand for one-of-a-kind artwork, and you should too.

That means you need to pay attention to your surroundings. Take advantage of the incredible locations you spent so much time scouting, and make sure you're capturing the scenes in a way that lends to big artwork for your clients' homes. Imagine that 30x40 acrylic or metal that will be a centerpiece in their home for years to come.

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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 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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THE  
**BABY**  
EDITION

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Featuring

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- 48 | **Brand New: The Business of Newborn Portraits** with Lori Nordstrom
- 58 | **The First 28 Days: How to Pose Newborns** with Ana Brandt
- 70 | **Building a Baby Brand** with Phillip Blume
- 82 | **How to Have a Baby When You're a Wedding Photographer** with Vanessa Joy
- 94 | **Top 10 Newborn Session Tips** with Lisa Rapp
- 106 | **Outdoor Newborns** with Blair Phillips
- 120 | **Baby Birthday Video** with Joe Switzer
- 134 | **Newborns & Neutrals in No Time** with Dustin Lucas
- 150 | **Inspirations** from Our Readers

# *brand new:*

The Business of Newborn Portraits  
with Lori Nordstrom

Whether you are currently a newborn photographer, have considered photographing newborns, or the thought of photographing a baby freaks you out—you have more than likely been asked to photograph a newborn session at one point or another. Even if you never want to specialize in photographing newborns, if you are a portrait photographer, it is a great skill to add to your bag.

When you photograph a brand-new baby, you have the opportunity to create a client for life. For many portrait photographers, this is the goal. We want to be thought of any time our clients think about photography, whether it's of their little ones, their whole family as they grow, senior portraits, or engagement portraits and weddings, and it begins again.



My first choice of subject is always kids. But many years ago, I realized that if I didn't get babies into the studio, I may miss the opportunity to photograph them as they grow. If a mom chose another photographer for her new baby, she may very well get tied into a first-year plan with them and then continue to use them for year two, three and so on. The answer for me at the time was to create a new division of my company that specialized in newborns. I suggest this to anyone who is looking to add a new product line into their marketing mix.

By creating different divisions for newborns, portrait parties and events, high school seniors and weddings, I can be very specific in our marketing and communication with each of those clients and their interests. It allowed me to bring on additional photographers and plug them into one division, giving them their own specialty. Because my studio name is my own name, it would be difficult to have other photographers comfortably shooting under the Lori Nordstrom brand. By creating divisions for different product lines, I am able to give them that division's name and niche. Our newborn division is simply called Brand New. We communicate the brand to our clients by focusing on all of those brand-new moments and milestones that their babies will go through during the first year. By asking questions and engaging parents in telling their baby's story, we are able to talk about and capture those memories for them.

Once you've decided that you want to photograph newborns, you need to make a few decisions. What products will you sell to the parents? How will you set up and present your pricing? How will you market and get in front of parents to be? Videos and tutorials on how to photograph newborns abound on the Internet, so we will stick to the business side of your newborn division.



Images © Lori Nordstrom

## What Products Will You Sell?

Most photographers ask themselves the question: "What are parents buying these days from their newborn sessions?" Your clients don't know what they want to buy until you tell them. You get to decide what it is you want your clients to own, what products will best show off your work and what products they will most enjoy for years to come. The products that I want to sell are wall portraits and albums. Parents buy gift prints for family, and they buy birth announcements and thank-you cards. Those are add-ons, things that I don't need to get them excited about. But I do need to communicate with them the value of a beautiful wall portrait for their baby's nursery as well as an heirloom album that will be a treasured keepsake.

During baby's first year, I recommend ages and stages to be photographed while talking about all of the milestones we'll be capturing during the session and how they'll want to remember those stages. I recommend a full-length sleeping baby portrait from the newborn session. My most popular size is a 20x30 because it looks really nice above the changing table. From the four-month session, I recommend our Expressions Collection, which is a 20x20 or 30x30 with nine images in it.

Babies are very expressive at four months, and I can quickly get many looks. At eight months, babies are on all fours and sitting up well. I suggest a 10x30 storyboard of three images that show off exactly what the baby is doing at this stage. At the one-year session, I photograph a formal first-birthday portrait to be hung in a living area of the home, and then we do a birthday cake session. I suggest a collage of images from the birthday cake smash, with 20x24 being the most popular size. By recommending these different pieces from each stage of the baby's first year, I can ensure good sales throughout each of the sessions from the first year. I also suggest a four-volume album collection, one album from each session. That makes the full-year album look that much more affordable. I don't sell the four-volume set often, but I do sell the first-year album almost every time.



Image © Lori Nordstrom

### How Will You Set Up and Present Your Pricing?

Once you've determined what products you'd like to offer, you'll want to set up your pricing for those products. Take into account all of the costs included in each product. You'll want to add the costs to print, mount and texture your portraits, frame costs, packaging, credit card fees and anything else it takes to create those products. You also need to consider the time needed to create the product, and add that value to each one. I normally suggest taking yourself out of the equation when thinking about a time value. After you add up the costs, multiply that figure by four for a 25 percent cost of sale (COS), and multiply by five for a 20 percent COS. The lower you can get your COS, the higher your profit will be on that product.

Now you need to decide how you will set up your pricing and how you present it to your clients. You can set up your pricing with an à la carte menu, with packages or with a build-your-own-collection model. I prefer the last, especially if you are new to in-person sales. A build-your-own menu gives you the opportunity to walk your client through the pricing, telling them exactly what you want them to buy. They will be rewarded with a discount or with a complimentary additional product for purchasing something from each step of your build-your-own menu.

I also highly recommend creating a PDF of your pricing that you can email to your clients once a session is booked and you've talked through some of the details. By working with a PDF, you'll never have unwanted pricing pieces stacked up or laying around. It also won't end up in the hands of someone you haven't been able to communicate with. Another thing that I like about working with a PDF instead of printed pricing is that I can change it anytime. I haven't printed hundreds of menus that I feel tied to.



Image © Lori Nordstrom

### How Will You Market to New Clients?

There are many ways to market to new mommies and moms to be, but over the years, networking has remained the best way to get in front of targeted, qualified clients. Networking with and through past clients is always my go-to place to begin. If I am starting something new, I make personal phone calls to a select number of clients. I tell them what's new and ask them to keep me in mind when they hear of a friend, neighbor or coworker who might be interested in our studio experience.

I make up gift cards and enclose them in a nice card that can be personalized, and give each of my interested clients five to 10 of these cards to give to anyone they feel would be a good fit.

I work with other business owners in much the same way. Once a relationship has been established, I offer gift cards to the business owner to hand out to their best clients. Again, I supply the gift cards and stationery, and ask that they gift the cards to anyone they feel would enjoy my style of photography, wall portraits and albums. Partnering up with other businesses and well-connected people takes time and effort, but I've found that it brings me the most qualified new clients.



Image © Lori Nordstrom



Images © Lori Nordstrom



Images © Lori Nordstrom

Enjoy your tiny clients. Be patient, and ask a lot of questions—moms love to talk about all the new experiences, whether it's her first child or her fifth. This is a great way to not only bond and show you care, but to refer to those memories and milestones as things you'll be capturing. They'll be able to experience each stage only once. What better way to remember it all than with beautiful portraits? ■



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

[nordstromphoto.com](http://nordstromphoto.com)



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1/100sec

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THE FIRST 28 DAYS:

# HOW TO POSE NEWBORNS

with Ana Brandt



The newborn stage is defined as the first 28 days of life, after which humans are referred to as infants for up to three months. In our studio, we consider newborns to be as old as six weeks, as most babies are born earlier than the 40-week cycle. A baby is considered premature when it is born at least three weeks before the due date—in other words, before the start of the 37th week.

When I started shooting newborns in 1999, it was common to photograph a newborn anywhere from four to six weeks. Now, most photographers want to shoot them at under two weeks.

Newborns can be photographed during any part of the newborn stages if the photographer is prepared and knows the methods of soothing and caring for the baby. With that being said, there are times where a newborn is not having a very good day and is so fussy that capturing a single image is impossible. A number of factors can explain why, and I do not believe in forcing a session. If a baby cannot be properly soothed and cared for, it's okay to reschedule with parents.

Parents and photographers always ask me when the perfect time is to photograph a newborn. I find it easiest to shoot babies between 10 and 14 days. I've also photographed babies between 15 and 20 days with no issues at all. It is important to find out if Mom wants sleepy-baby photos or awake photos. As they move along in their progression, they will be more awake and alert, but photographing them in this stage is often harder. Keeping a baby wrapped, warm, settled and well fed can reveal some amazing wide-awake images.

Note that brand-new babies may have peely, flaky skin as they shed their first layer. Around two to three weeks, they can develop acne. Trying to create the perfect session between peely skin and acne is a big guessing game, but just the right amount of retouching can cure either.

We suggest that our clients call or leave us a message within 24 to 48 hours of giving birth. If they are scheduled for a C-section, we preschedule their session and then follow up to make sure everything went as planned.

Other factors besides the age of the baby are very important, such as weight. If a client calls me to photograph her baby at one week and her baby is less than six pounds, I often suggest she wait a little longer to make sure the baby is gaining weight and eating well. Whereas if a mother calls me with a 9-pound baby, I may suggest we get that baby in sooner—perhaps around the eighth or ninth day.



Aria, 9 days.



Devin, 12 days.

Images © Ana Brandt

## DELIVERY

Was delivery on time and as planned? Was there any trauma to the baby? Injuries? Difficulties with breathing? Jaundice? Circumcision?

Over the years, I have heard about and seen just about everything. From bruised heads, to heart conditions, to painful circumcisions—the list goes on and on. This is an extremely sensitive time for family and baby. Make sure delivery went as planned, and that baby is healthy and Momma is recovering well. If anything has gone wrong and requires home rest or more doctor visits, the newborn session will just have to wait.

I have received too many calls from stressed-out parents who have been told their one-month newborn is too old for a photography session. Who is telling them this? Photographers. Will it be more of a challenge? Maybe. This depends on the expectations of the client and the skill of the photographer. It gets harder and harder to achieve a curled-up newborn in a sleepy womb position each week as the baby grows and the bones develop.

While newborns are very sleepy during the first 14 days of life, they are often wide-awake and alert for longer at 28 or 34 days. Before the session, set parents' expectations of what poses can be achieved. Photographers should also never “guarantee” any poses at any age. Newborns are human beings—and, while they're tiny and are unable to say how they are feeling, they will let you know pretty quickly if a pose is uncomfortable. Never force poses, and always make safety your first priority.



Bryce, 14 days.

Image © Ana Brandt

## **TIME OF DAY**

Newborns are generally best photographed in the morning. They are often up most of the night and then fall into a deep sleep in the early morning. Midday usually works well as long as the baby is fed right before the session. Late afternoon is not ideal, especially for newborns with toddler siblings. An afternoon session can head into the dinner hour, which is often a cranky time for everyone involved. We tell parents that we understand they are exhausted, but if they can come to us first thing in the morning and feed their baby before their session, they can relax for the first hour as we focus on baby. By focusing on the baby first, parents have time to get dressed and have coffee before family pictures begin.

## **BABY FEEDING**

Newborns generally eat every two to three hours, depending on how well they are latching or handling a bottle. Ask the parents how long their feeding schedule is. The length of their feeding schedule determines how much time I have to work.

If the baby feeds every two to three hours, I suggest that Mom feed baby a full feeding right before the scheduled session. If the session starts at 10:00, then I am hoping for a 9:30 feeding, which means the baby probably has not fed since 7:00 or 7:30. In this example, Mom comes with a baby ready to feed. The baby feeds and then often lets gas out and will have bathroom time, all while being wrapped up and secured.

If I can work well in my newborn session workflow, then I can get through an entire newborn session before the next feeding. This often makes the difference between a two-hour and a four-hour newborn session. Once you go into the next feeding cycle, it delays the session for another 30 to 45 minutes of feeding and soothing, and often extends through the length of time set aside.

Each baby is different. We tell our parents—especially those traveling a long distance—that if their baby is hungry, feed her. Most babies feed on demand and have no real schedule in the first few days of life. Some babies latch really well, and others need to be fed with a syringe. Discuss feeding habits before the session to ensure a smooth shoot.



*Evelyn, 12 days.*

## HEAT

Most newborns are swaddled for the first two weeks of life, if not longer. They are kept very warm since the womb in which they were raised was about 99.86 degrees, which is the same as a woman's body temperature. A baby's temperature averages around 96.8 degrees. Babies cannot regulate their own temperature since they can't shiver or sweat. Newborns' body temperature is regulated by their body fat. This is why a 9-pound baby often does very well naked, while a 6-pound baby won't settle well if not properly wrapped.

I don't use heating pads because I can't regulate how much heat is hitting the baby's body. Instead, we use portable heaters at a safe distance from the baby to warm the room. We start most newborn sessions with the baby wrapped well, and slowly unwrap her as she adjusts to the room temperature. We then slowly work with various poses as the baby allows. Heavier babies (9 or 10 pounds) often feel very warm, and we don't keep the wraps on as long for them.

## A NOTE ON TWINS

Twins often arrive early and are smaller. Learn their weight and prematurity stage before scheduling. We photograph twins around two to three weeks.

So what are the best poses for each week of those 28 days? See the following images below for some ideas.



Ryan, 25 days.



Lana, 8 days.



Jax, 9 days.



Twins, 11 days.

**NEWBORN PHOTOGRAPHER'S CHECKLIST:**

- Baby shusher/white noise
- Hand sanitizer
- Baby posing beanbags
- Posing beanbag
- Cloth diapers
- Chucks
- Spare diapers
- Spare pacifiers
- Aquaphor
- Wipes
- Heating source
- Weights for props ■



Ariya, 6 days.



Alyssa, 23 days.

Images © Ana Brandt



Ana Brandt is an award-winning California-based photographer, author and teacher. The mother of three has specialized in pregnancy and newborn imagery since 2000. Ana's classic images for her growing A-list clientele have appeared in numerous publications, books, websites and physicians' offices. She has made the lists of Top 50 Family Photographers in the U.S., Top 10 Maternity Photographers in the World, Top 10 Photographers in California and 50 Most Inspiring Photographers.

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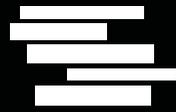
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BUILDING A  
**BABY BRAND**

ENTER A NEW GENRE BY SUB-BRANDING

with Phillip Blume





Image © Phillip Blume

## GIVE IT A LOVING HOME.

Step one should be clear, but in the exciting anticipation of all that's to come, it's easy to forget: Create a nurturing environment for your brand—online. Don't announce your new arrival to the whole world the moment you conceive the idea. Instead, prepare quietly. Your sub-brand needs this time to gestate and turn into what it's going to be, before the pressure of the world's expectations are placed on it. So find and purchase that perfect domain name before anyone else does.

Next, create an email account for your sub-brand. You can always forward email to one inbox if you wish. But a unique email furthers the separation between your brand identities, creating a more focused feel for each. You need that unique email for all the social media accounts you're about to open up. Save your sub-brand as a username everywhere you can get it, even if you don't plan to use a particular account right away. Blume Babies has its own Instagram account, even though Eileen strategically posts her newborn work on her personal Instagram account, @eileen\_blume, instead.

Heck, I even create accounts for ideas that may never fly. The important thing is that no one else "borrows" your brand names and ideas, potentially watering them down or, worse, misrepresenting them. Sometimes it is this small first step that gives your baby brand the confidence it needs to start walking—then running as it gets its legs under it.

*The world doesn't need my next brand or small business.* I feel almost guilty entertaining such a pessimistic thought. But it's an honest concern. Standing on the edge of an ocean can make anyone feel small. Today, though, I'm looking across the endless black water and broken sea ice of Russia's Sea of Okhotsk. The first glow of dawn is just beginning to reveal the vast bleakness of this landscape.

I'm at 40,000 feet, my wife and our two young daughters asleep beside me on the airplane. We're embarking on the biggest challenge we've ever faced as a family: on our way to China for the culmination of our adoption process. My wife, Eileen, and I can no longer travel and shoot exotic weddings together as often as we're used to. We need to be home more to give our kids some sense of stability. The elephant in the room is a simple question: Can our business survive this drastic change?

The answer, we believe, lies in "sub-branding." We're building a newborn business we can run from home.

Ultimately, a good sub-brand is a powerful illusion. Similar to a magical illusion, a well-crafted brand inspires wonder in your target audience—something exciting for them to believe in. As a branding magician, then, you'll want to consider pulling a sub-brand out of your hat whenever you need to conjure a more specific "feeling" for a new client base. The feeling is crucial. After all, no matter what some of us would rather believe about our cold and rational intellects, the neurological fact remains: Our purchasing decisions are made not in our rational brains, but rather in our emotional brains. Feelings sell.

Are you ready to do the legwork? Be warned: You'll have to push. Upstart success means mastering the tricks of marketing every time you launch a new brand. As the saying goes, perception is reality. Yes, like a baby, your new sub-brand will continue to change and grow for as long as it lives. You don't have to plan out its entire life. But before you deliver your new sub-brand to the world, you want it to be as well developed as possible.

Here are five tips to help birth your first sub-brand, while strengthening your parent brand.



Image © Phillip Blume

## CHOOSE YOUR STYLE.

What will your “parenting style” be? Everyone has an opinion about how you should do your job, including you. The same is true in steering your business. You’ve been influenced by your history, and it feels all too easy to imitate what you’ve seen before, to apply the style of your parent brand to the subject matter of your sub-brand. Resist this knee-jerk reaction.

As the parent of a darling new sub-brand, give serious thought to the artistic message you want to convey through it. A sub-brand is an exciting opportunity to stretch your creative muscles and try new things that suit the sub-genre. For years, Eileen has photographed weddings and portraits using natural light almost exclusively. Without the burden of accessory lighting, she felt better able to capture candid moments and honest environments that complemented Blume Photography’s photojournalistic style.

But for Blume Babies, she wanted to create a polished, luxury studio feeling. Decision one was to use a “you come to us” studio model, instead of offering on-location portraits at families’ homes. She traveled for newborn portraits on the side for years. But now our priority is to stay home with our kids, especially now that we have our newly adopted son.

With that decided, she set her focus on mastering studio light for the first time. Now she’s able to deliver consistently shaped lighting and an uncluttered aesthetic to her newborn portraits, which stands apart from the environment-driven energy of our wedding work. Not coincidentally, the new style perfectly suits our studio’s minimalistic vibe and construction from reclaimed materials. Eileen could have gone in another direction using colorful baby props, humorous headpieces, elaborate studio setups—but that wasn’t the niche she chose to fill. To prevent her sub-brand from being all over the place, she limited herself to a consistent style that her clients experience when they visit the website, and on through their first visit to the studio.



Images © Phillip Blume



Image © Phillip Blume



Image © Phillip Blume

## PROVE YOUR COMPETENCE.

Now you've got your baby brand home and have settled into the routines of feeding (marketing) and diaper-changing (day-to-day business). So why does your mother-in-law keep popping in to offer unsolicited advice?

You don't want to remain in a place where your clients are constantly asking for customizations or wondering, "Why doesn't she offer the same products and services as the photographer across the street?" You've thought carefully about how you do things, and you know you can't please everybody. So kindly ask your mother-in-law to take a hike. Your goal should be to find the right clients who value what you do, not to cater to just anyone.

Young brands are often tempted to make exceptions in order to boost business early on. But doing so undermines the brand in the long-term. The best way to set healthy boundaries and attract the right clients is by building credibility. Prove to the world you're competent at what you do, that you're an expert. You can gift newborn sessions to friends or friends of friends who fit your preferred demographic. Reel them in with a gorgeous gift certificate, then give them the best experience possible so they become your ambassadors to friends who can afford you.

On the public relations front, ask yourself: How can I project myself as an expert in my market? Perhaps offer a small workshop for mothers interested in learning photography, or partner with a baby boutique to photograph their clothes on their favorite "model" clients. In these scenarios, everyone wins. You are marketing by serving your market as an expert, which is infinitely different than putting your business cards out, essentially begging for business.



Image © Phillip Blume



Image © Phillip Blume

## SCHEDULE DOCTOR APPOINTMENTS.

I've been using the term *baby brand* generically to refer to any young sub-brand, no matter the genre. (You could be starting a senior brand, glamour, headshots, whatever.) But let me speak now about a literal baby brand, which is what Eileen set up when she created Blume Babies as a sub-brand of Blume Photography. When it comes to newborns, the typical vendor relationships that are the bedrock of our wedding brand don't exist. There aren't many event planners who specialize in newborn showers.

So what professional gets closest to an expectant mother before she delivers your next newborn subject? Of course the answer is her OB/GYN, as well as the mother-baby unit at the hospital where she delivers.

This is where legwork is critical. An email or phone call won't cut it. For Blume Babies, I scheduled a day and made the rounds. I drove to a few OB/GYN offices, where I asked to speak with the person in charge of marketing and public relations. Not every office was receptive. So we created a program and promoted it to just one OB/GYN and one hospital mother-baby unit as exclusive to them. We created luxurious gift certificates for our newborn sessions that the offices can use to improve patients' experience.

You see, photographers aren't the only businesses looking to give their customers an "experience." It's important to all businesses, and you're making it easy for them.

Additionally, we did a promotion for Blume Babies' launch in which we smartly combined a newborn workshop for photographers with the opportunity for patients to get a free newborn session at our studio. Because the babies had to be born at the right time for the workshop, we needed to print a lot of promotional pieces, which the hospital gladly provided to all its patients due near those dates in return for offering our photo to the hospital's marketing department.

## WELCOME COMMUNITY.

The promotional plan above can be used by anyone. But I didn't mention an additional layer of excitement we used to create buzz. Thanks to real friendships and the community we've fostered in the industry over the years, the one and only Julia Kelleher of California, one of the top names in newborn photography, called looking for a place to host a workshop in Atlanta.

We ended up hosting an official Julia Kelleher workshop at Blume Photography Studios. Partnering with such a strong name made it easy to create buzz, build our studio's reputation for newborn photography and earn confidence in the eyes of hospitals and clients. Plus, it was a wonderful experience getting to know and learning from Julia. You're never done learning. We continue to learn and look up to photographers like her, even as we market ourselves as experts. In the end, it all comes down to community.



Images © Phillip Blume



Image © Phillip Blume

Change is why many businesses buckle. Not us. We adapt. We grow. Through the power of sub-branding, Eileen and I have created a newborn business she can run from home, which serves our values and goals. To customers, huge changes to your business structure can look like panic, an attempt to survive when your winning formula runs out. Through sub-branding, you can create just the opposite impression.

“Are we close to Santa’s workshop?” asks a tiny voice beside me in the airplane. My older daughter, five years old, is awake from her nap. She rests her baby-soft cheek against mine, and together we press our noses against the cold oval window. We watch spellbound as the rising sun sparkles across the endless ice 40,000 feet below us. I can almost imagine spying that white and red striped pole in the distant snow. But we aren’t stopping off at the North Pole to spend a holiday. Soon we’ll be in China, and we’ll return home as a family of five.

The outlook is brighter now. In the light, it’s easier to remember where my work and I fit into the world. Our brands put food on the table for our kids. Our businesses allowed us to bring home an orphaned boy to his forever family. Maybe our brands do matter to the world after all. ■

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Phillip Blume is an international award-winning photographer and, with his wife, Eileen, cofounder of Blume Photography Studios and ComeUnity Workshops. In addition to photographing weddings and portraits worldwide, the Blumes focus their efforts on personal projects to help those suffering extreme poverty. As educators, the two have appeared on CreativeLIVE, and speak to thousands of photographers every year. They live with their children in rural Georgia.  
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# HOW TO HAVE A BABY WHEN YOU'RE A WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER

with Vanessa Joy

It's impossible. At least that's what most of us women think. After all, we know that we can't miss a wedding we're booked for no matter what happens, short of a terrorist attack (and even that is covered in my contract). There are no sick days, no calling out and, as far as a lot of people are concerned, no birthing days either.

I have witnessed horrible behavior not only toward me, but also wedding colleagues who dared to start a family. It wasn't anything I wanted to experience for myself. Like so many others, I thought pregnancy would ruin my life. I once had a mother of the bride call me a month before the wedding, and the first thing she said to me was, "You're not pregnant, are you? Because the hair lady and florist both are, and it's ruining everything."

It gets better. I once had a potential bride sit down for a consultation with me who said, "We love your work and would love to hire you, but we're a little concerned that you'll be starting a family soon." Wow. I tried to convince her that I wasn't, but she still didn't hire me.

So where does that leave us working woman wedding photographers? Childless? No. It means we have to be more informed and ready than most women who are thinking about having a child. Countless women have asked me about this topic ever since I wrote "6 Reasons Why I Hid My Pregnancy for 8 Months" on my blog (<http://vanessajoyphotographyblog.com/2014/04/6-reasons-why-i-hid-my-pregnancy-for-8-months>). Here's the best advice I can give to anyone looking to have a family and a career.

## Think More About What Comes After

A lot of couples make the mistake of thinking about and planning for the wedding more than they do the marriage. It's the same thing with babies. So many women think more about the pregnancy and delivery more than bringing the baby home and caring for it. It's only natural, because what it takes to care for a child is beyond a nonparent's imagination. Think of it this way: There are no sick days—you have responsibilities all day, every day.

You might not have the luxury to plan your childbirth around your wedding schedule, but at the very least, you need to plan for one to two months away from work after the birth. Sure, you may hear about the hero moms who shoot a wedding two days after giving birth, but they are the exception, not the rule.

Even if everything goes swimmingly, you will need at least one month, preferably two, in order to get to your new definition of normal. You'll need an extraordinary amount of help for the first two months. If you're not already outsourcing everything you possibly can, now's the time to start putting that into practice. Get a family member or friend to start a [TakeThemAMeal.com](http://TakeThemAMeal.com) account for you so you can get help at home too. If people want to come see the baby, let them, but have them help you out while they're there.

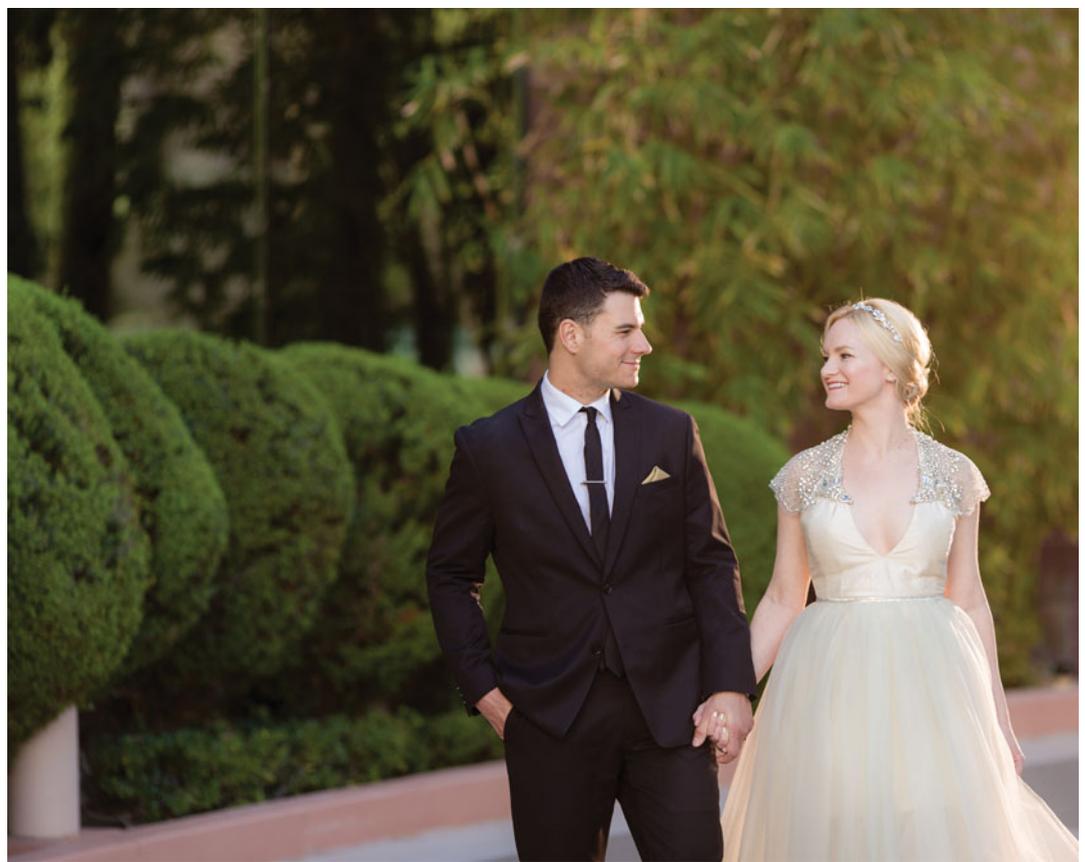


Image © Vanessa Joy



Image © Vanessa Joy

## Have a Plan

After the craziness of the first two months, you'll get into what your normal routine should look like. Even nonroutine people are going to develop some sort of routine. Your routine might not look like a color-coded calendar, but a child needs to eat and sleep on a regular schedule.

Now think about what you want that routine to look like. Don't think about the daily routine yet—that'll come once you learn how your kid operates and how you operate with them. How many days a week do you plan on working for five or so consecutive hours a day? You'll need to figure out childcare for those days and times. Do you plan to work only during your child's naps and bedtimes? Learn all about sleep training now so you can get them sleeping on a predictable schedule. You will be too tired and busy to read a book on the subject after the baby arrives. I used *Twelve Hours' Sleep by Twelve Weeks Old*, and it worked like a charm.

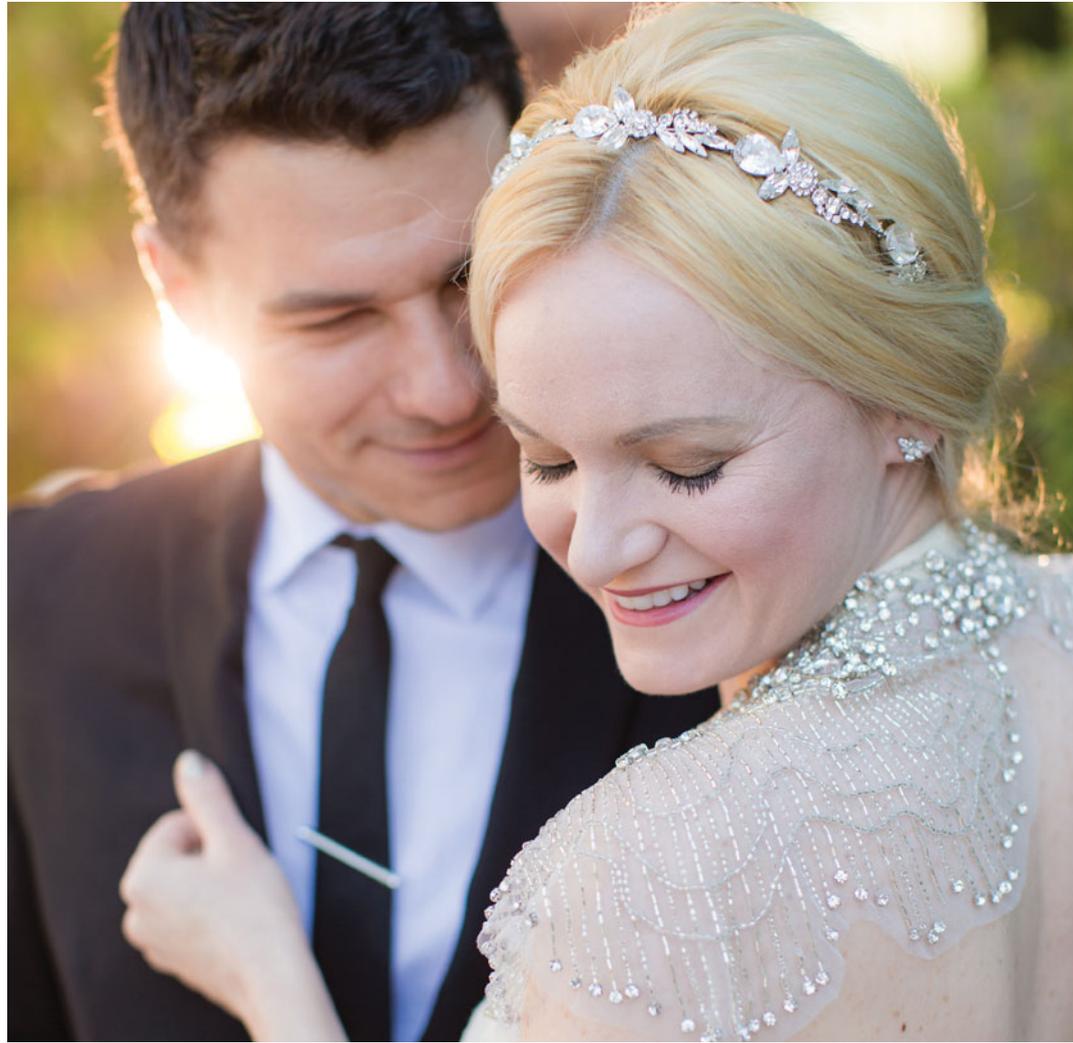
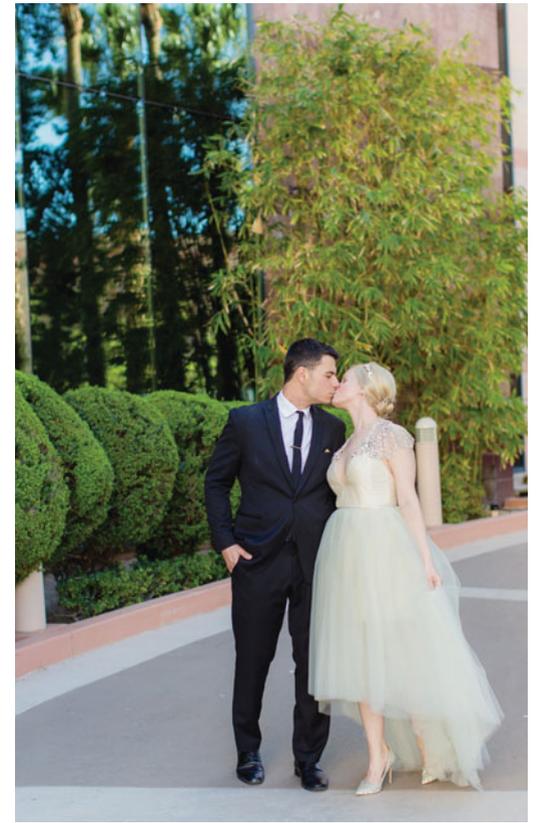
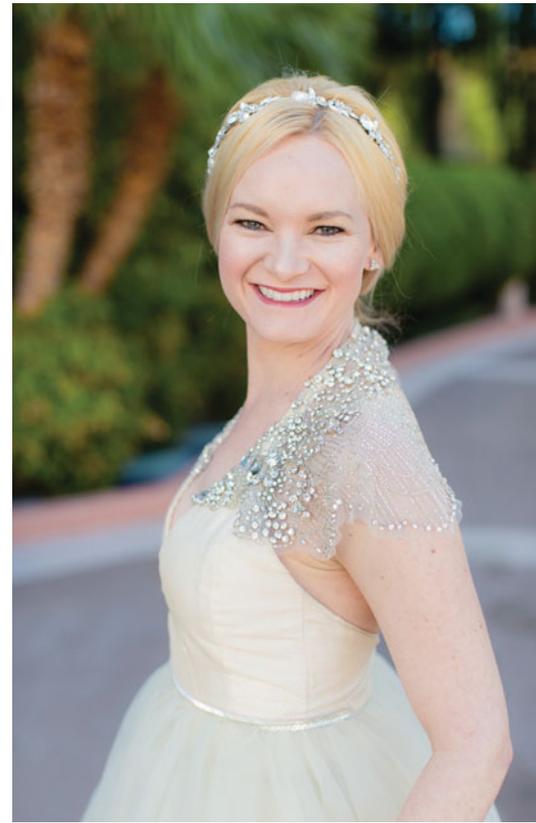


Image © Vanessa Joy



Images © Vanessa Joy



## { Stay in Shape

There are some circumstances in pregnancy that you cannot avoid, and others that you can. Do your best to eat healthy and exercise while pregnant within your doctor's guidelines. Though you'll want to, being pregnant is not an excuse to let it all go. Being pregnant is training for a marathon.

You're about to do the most difficult and miraculous thing a human being can do, and typically it's not a sprint to the finish. Labor lasts hours and hours, so being in good shape is a really nice way to help that along as well as help you shoot weddings late into your pregnancy. Stay within your pregnancy capabilities and your doctor's limitations, but be active through your pregnancy as much as possible.

Image © Vanessa Joy



Images © Vanessa Joy



Image © Vanessa Joy

## Family First

I saved this for last because it's probably the biggest thing on your mind right now: How can I make sure I don't miss a wedding?

As hard as you try, life happens. If your precious event happens at an inconvenient time, if you need more bed rest than you expected, if your postpartum recovery is harder than you'd reckoned, you just might miss a wedding. That's okay.

Your contract should specify what will happen if you can't be at a wedding and need a replacement. Your clients will have signed off on it, so, although they will be disappointed, you'll save yourself with that contract. But you'll still be there handholding your clients before and after the wedding. But most importantly, it's okay because you already know in your heart that no wedding will ever be as important as the incredible gift of your beautiful child.

Watch this video for the life-saving baby tools I used with my daughter Felicity. ■

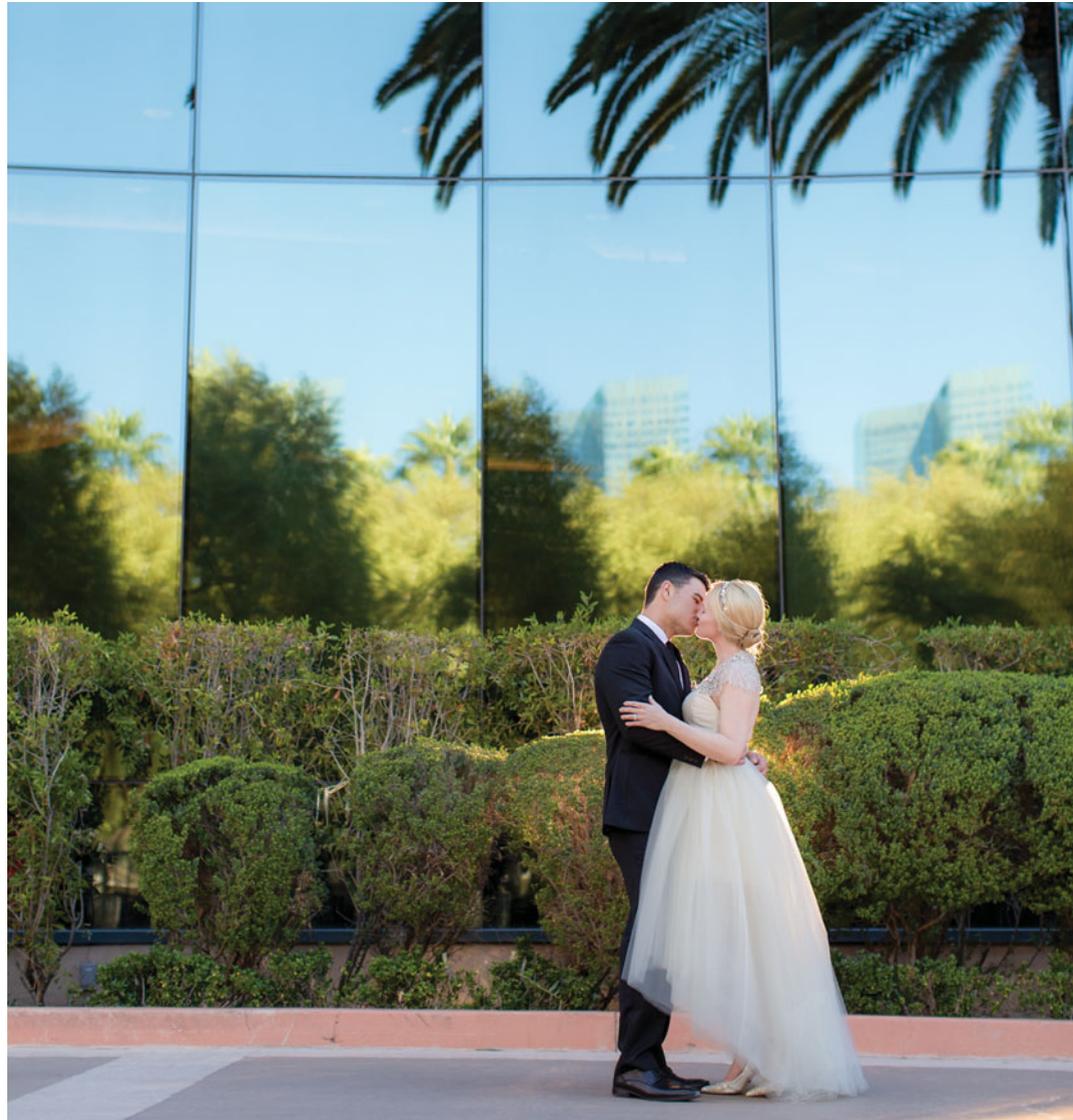


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Vanessa Joy has been a professional wedding photographer in New Jersey since 2002, and an influencer in the photographic community for years. Since starting VanessaJoy.com in 2008, she has taught photographers around the globe at almost every major 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 10 NEWBORN SESSION TIPS

with Lisa Rapp

When people ask me what I do for a living, I say, “I shoot babies!”—which sounds a little harsh, but it’s what I do. Newborn photographers are a rare breed. I am one of the few professionals who literally gets shit on at my job, and I love every second of it. We are given the purest form of human life, entrusted to keep it content and safe, all the while trying to keep calm, cool and collected ourselves. Here are a few things I have picked up over the years during my newborn sessions.



## 1. Know that you are not in control of the session—baby is!

You can't force babies to do anything they don't want to do. If a baby isn't comfortable doing a certain pose, they just won't do it. Persistently trying to force a baby into position will only make them cry, which in turn will make Mom uncomfortable and stressed, and make you look clueless. Content babies sleep. Comfortable babies hold positions and poses, and then you look like a baby whisperer. A warm environment, full belly and some white noise may also help keep a baby happy.

I try to get the baby into a pose a few times, and if it isn't working, I move on. I may try again later if I feel they are more relaxed or sleeping better. Just go with the flow.



Images © Lisa Rapp

## 2. Get it right in camera—wrinkles are bad, bad, bad.

For the love of your sanity, don't say, "I can get rid of that in post." Straighten out the wrinkles before you even press the shutter. Post-processing is a time suck. You don't have to fix it if it isn't there in the first place. Take a few extra minutes on these details to save you a lot of editing time. Smooth, nontextured blankets are easy to fix in post. Textured blankets are a nightmare.

## 3. Let's talk newborn safety—don't drop the baby!

Baby's safety and well-being are priority one.

I'm not going to rant or preach here. Use common sense. These babies are not toys. They need to be handled with care. Remember, you have someone's precious little bundle of joy in your hands.

Babies' heads are very heavy, and they have no muscle control. Always support the neck and head when handling a baby.

I prefer to do composites. While some photographers don't do composites, I have to trust that they know how to handle babies safely and responsibly.

I always have someone sitting next to the bag or prop within arm's reach. I tell whoever is helping me, whether it be Mom, Dad or my studio wife, "Your only job is to watch the baby. Don't watch me, don't turn to look at your spouse, keep your eyes on the baby. If baby stretches her legs out, she can jump like a frog and startle everyone." I explain that the baby is on a huge beanbag that isn't going anywhere, but that we just don't need that kind of excitement during the session.

I don't put a baby in/on a prop unless he is sound asleep and out cold. Fidgety babies move, and nobody's got time for that.



Images © Lisa Rapp



Image © Lisa Rapp

#### 4. Check on Mom—she just had a baby, for heaven’s sake.

Childbirth is stressful on the body, and Mom is a hothouse of female emotions. Her body is sore and tired, even though she might not realize it. If she comes alone and my studio wife isn’t there, Mom will be the one assisting me. I ask her several times during the session if she needs a break, snack or drink.

If Mom is assisting, I help her up if she is sitting on the floor next to the bag. I never let her get up unassisted or while holding the baby. The question “Are you doing okay?” is short but sweet, and right to the point. This should be a pleasant experience. They will remember your genuine concern. Mommies have mommy friends—i.e., potential new clients.

For breastfeeding moms, I have a trifold screen for privacy. So if the mailman pops in, she feels secure.

#### 5. Patience, patience and more patience.

Every newborn is as unique as a diamond. Every newborn photographer knows that some babies are more tolerant to being handled than others. There are no “bad” babies; there are just some who are less tolerant to being handled.

This is where your inner Zen master comes into play. I don’t give up easily, and I tell my parents this up front. I take my time and don’t rush. I know when a baby isn’t going to cooperate, and I move on. Not every baby will do every pose, and that is okay. This is something I have difficulty with. I want every single pose to happen, and I want it to be perfect. This is when I have to revisit Tip No. 1 and remember that I am not in control here.



Image © Lisa Rapp



Images © Lisa Rapp

## 6. All tied up.

Wrapping newborns is not easy when they are awake. We all have met that one newborn we call the Master Escape Artist. This is the baby that can kick, punch and squirm out of every wrap possible. My best advice is to wrap that little burrito tight. (Not too tight!)

Don't be scared to experiment with different wrapping methods. Most babies like to be swaddled, and this is also a good way to settle some of them down.

When wrapping babies, keep a close eye on them, because you don't want them to get too warm.

When unwrapping, don't just yank it off. Unwrap with care so you don't catch the umbilical stump and accidentally pull it off. Some boys who have been circumcised have a "bell," and you need to use extra caution in this area. I have had them fall off during a session, and it isn't a big deal, but be careful not to accidentally get it caught in the wrap.

## 7. Shit happens.

Reassure parents that babies will pee and poop on everything, including you. They will stress and apologize repeatedly—just remind them that everything comes out in the wash.

I keep puppy training pads handy. These are a staple in the studio. When babies aren't on the posing bag, they are wrapped up in a puppy pad. They have saved me so many times from being soiled.

It doesn't hurt to keep a few extra t-shirts handy in case the baby has a huge explosion on Mom or Dad. That way, they don't have to sit there covered in poo during the session.

## 8. Know your limitations.

If you are just starting out, keep it simple. Get comfortable posing newborns before you dive into the harder poses. Discuss what the parents are expecting in the session. If they want poses that are beyond your experience level, you need to be honest with them and discuss their expectations. Honesty is always the best policy with newborns. The baby's safety is more important than any shot, especially any shot that you don't know how to accomplish safely.

Invest in your education. Continue to learn and grow. Learn something new with every session.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. If you don't know, ask. There are many photographers out there who are not willing to help, but there are just as many who are willing to give you advice and encouragement. Go find them.



Image © Lisa Rapp

## 9. Pre-session tips.

I ask Mom to loosen the diaper a couple of hours before the session. This is to help eliminate marks on the baby for editing purposes. This is a purely selfish request—I hate editing.

I keep the studio at 80 degrees, and warn parents so they can dress accordingly. I am a hot sweaty mess during a session, and it isn't pretty.

I ask Mom to dress the baby in a sleeper, with no onesie. The sleeper should either zip or snap up the front. This prevents me from having to pull anything over the baby's head when they arrive.

I ask Mom to either feed the baby right before they head to the studio (if they live within a half an hour from me) or to hold off feeding the baby until they get here (for those who travel more than an hour for their session). This is not set in stone. It's just to ensure the baby has a full belly. If it doesn't work out this way, I tell Mom it's okay, and explain why I am making this suggestion. Babies' needs come first, obviously.

I photograph just one baby a day. This ensures I am not rushed in case the baby needs a little extra time, if parents are a smidge late due to poop explosions or anything else that may pop up.

I tell parents that I have everything that is needed for the session. This prevents them from bringing outfits that are not my style. But if they have something special that someone made them, I am more than happy to photograph it. I do tell them if they have a lot of things they want to bring, they should choose one or two of their favorites for me to shoot.



Images © Lisa Rapp



Image © Lisa Rapp

## 10. Appreciate this honor.

Always remember what a blessing and honor you are being given. These parents are handing you their world. Treat the experience with the respect it deserves. You are capturing this newborn at its most vulnerable and purest, and you shouldn't take that lightly.

What isn't a perfect pose in your eyes will be the most perfect shot in the eyes of the parents. This family is now your extended family, and will remember the wonderful experience they had with you. You are being given access to the beginning of a wonderful relationship with this family. Don't underestimate the power in this new connection. ■



Lisa Rapp is the "head chic" in charge at Little Chics Pics Photography. She has specialized in newborn portraiture since 2011. Lisa shares a studio in McLeansboro, Illinois, with her amazing studio wife, Laura, and has a very costly prop addiction.

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# OUTDOOR NEWBORNS

with Blair Phillips

I can only imagine the amount of pain and emotional stress involved in giving birth. We should cater to new mothers any chance we can. It is a lot to ask of a woman who just gave birth to traipse around outdoors for a two-hour newborn session. Keeping Mom comfortable and stress-free during the session is just as important as creating great images.

I always have cool bottled water, light snacks and something sweet on hand for the new mother. Standing around in the bright sun is not generally exciting to someone who just gave birth. Keep an umbrella around to shade her. You want her to have a memorable experience so she will share it with friends. She is likely to remember the many comforts you provided during the session.



Women experience a sea of emotions throughout a pregnancy. Somewhere in all those thoughts, unique newborn images come into play. Bringing a child into this world begins the biggest responsibility of one's life. A newborn photographer should pull out all the stops. This happens only one time.

I've enjoyed creating newborn images for nearly 12 years. While each shoot is similar, the approach is different for each. I spent a large portion of my career photographing newborns indoors. They're so delicate. They must remain indoors in a controlled environment, goes the common wisdom. One afternoon several years ago, I decided to stop listening to that and created a whole new style for my newborn clients. I ventured outdoors with a newborn and discovered a new world.

A 4-foot by 6-foot scrim is my favorite tool for these images. I use different layers of diffusion panels, depending on the sun. The more direct the sun, the stronger my diffusion panel. The scrim attaches to a light stand, and is easily adjustable. A sandbag holds everything in place, allowing me to work without an assistant.

No matter where you are photographing newborns, you are very limited on time, so I have all my props and locations put together and ready. This way, I can place the baby, make adjustments, capture the image and move on.



Image © Blair Phillips



Image © Blair Phillips



Image © Blair Phillips

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Generally, the more people you include in a newborn session, the more opportunities you have to sell images. When I photograph newborns solely indoors, I find it challenging to get the family interested in participating—mostly due to the chaos they just endured, I imagine. Offering a more casual outdoor opportunity seems to be a little more inviting for me these days. Casually adding groupings of children and families is much more inviting and less stressful when shooting outdoors. New parents are sometimes on edge when they have to bring their other children along when it is indoors. Being outdoors is less stressful to parents with rowdy children.



Image © Blair Phillips



Images © Blair Phillips

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Newborns are quick to let you know when they are uncomfortable or the least bit unhappy. A screaming, irritable baby makes for a tough sale. It is your job to bring whatever's needed to ensure their comfort. A portable battery pack is a very important tool for an outdoor newborn shoot. I plug in a heating pad and place it underneath the baby if it's cool or windy. On hot summer days, a portable fan can be a savior. Babies tolerate heat well, but they can also overheat easily.

Depending on your location, noise could be a factor. Consistent and constant noise is a must when photographing newborns. An old hairdryer set to blow cold air is one of the loudest, cheapest and most effective noise machines.



Image © Blair Phillips



Images © Blair Phillips

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Over the years, a lot of my newborn clients have been small business owners. Anytime you can incorporate a newborn with a business or profession, you have a guaranteed moneymaker. This is one of the many reasons you ask a series of questions when someone calls to book a session. It is all in the way you market these sessions. Show sample images of how you tie in professions with newborn images.

Half the battle is getting clients' minds wandering and imagining. People often don't know what they want until they see it. I always ask the families to bring heirlooms. Heirlooms are one of the best ways to add instant emotion to a newborn image. The more emotion you bring to the table, the more money you put into your account.

Hobbies are another way to tack on high numbers to an outdoor newborn session. For sports-loving dads, incorporate sports equipment into the session. It's best to use the items in a way that puts them in both the foreground and background of your images. It looks cheesy when you simply put them behind the baby.



Image © Blair Phillips

Newborn photography can be one of the most challenging and rewarding forms of photography. There will always be a market for indoor newborn images, but parents are going to continue to want more creativity than what's offered by studio images. Things are forever changing in our industry. You can make adjustments to remain current or do the same things year after year, and become a memory.

Photographing newborns outdoors is a guaranteed way to get people talking about your work. Bear in mind that not everyone is open to taking their new babe outdoors. Those clients who want my outdoor work are generally more open, creative and hungry for images that are less ordinary. ■

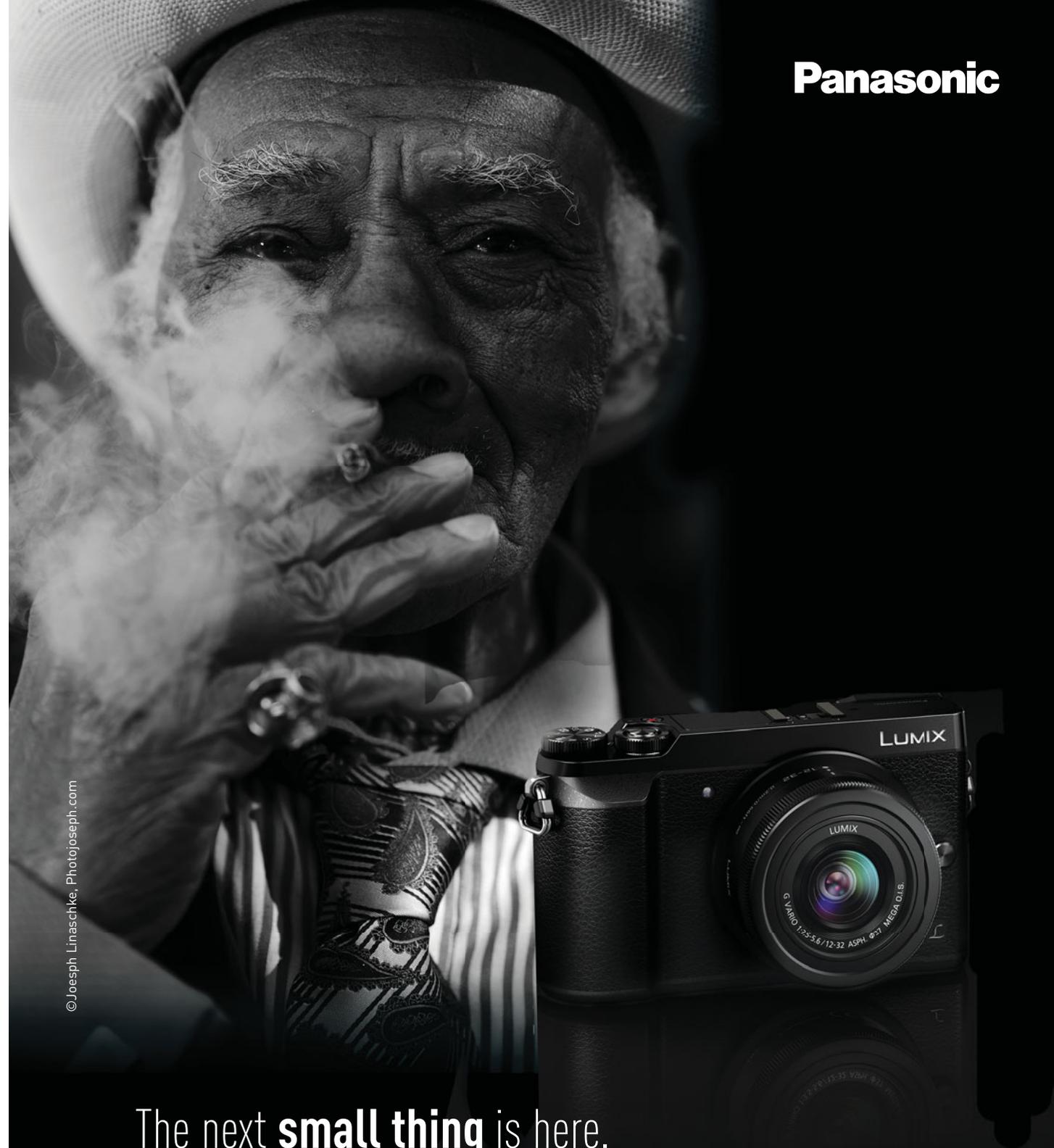
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Blair Phillips launched his business nearly 10 years ago in a small town. Since then, Blair Phillips Photography has become a beloved household name to its many fans and clients. Each year, Blair photographs up to 30 weddings and over 600 high school 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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## product review

**Panasonic** with *Salvatore Cincotta*

# Panasonic



## Why Panasonic?

It's a great time to be a photographer. The amount of innovation is at a record-setting pace, and these changes have allowed us to push the limits of our creativity. We can do more with less, and that's a great thing! Look, we all have our DSLRs, but what are you doing for everything else? Do you really take your DSLR everywhere you go? If you are like me, you don't. I have been reduced to iPhone photos. Well, if you are looking for an alternative to your bulky DSLR, Panasonic might have something for you. The new Lumix DMC-GX85 delivers impressive large-sensor performance in a compact camera system.

Here is what I love about the new camera.

- 1) Small, compact size allows you to travel light. This is the perfect alternative to your heavy DSLR.
- 2) Easy control and navigation system.
- 3) 16 megapixel Raw files are perfect for post-processing work, and enables you to enlarge these images for prints.
- 4) 49 focus points—more than some DSLRs.
- 5) 4K video with five-axis stabilization, perfect for handheld video.

This camera has a ton of new and innovative features that I think you are going to love. Below are some of the highlights. Check out the video for more of my thoughts on the new Lumix DMC-GX85.

### Features:

- New 5-axis in-body sensor stabilizer works with LUMIX 2-axis optically stabilized lenses in video and still capture modes using class-leading Dual Image Stabilization.
- Eliminates the need for low-pass sensor filters while boosting fine detail resolving power by nearly 10% over existing 16-Megapixel MFT sensors.
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BABY  
**BIRTHDAY**  
VIDEO  
with Joe Switzer



Not many photographers specialize in baby birthday sessions. This month we look at the five most important factors that go into shooting and editing a compelling birthday film.

We used my daughter Sloan's first birthday to show you our process. The photos and video you see are from two separate days. One was from baby Sloan's photo/video shoot, and the other was from the actual birthday party with family and friends. Photos were taken by Ashley Becker Photography and Leanna Rolla Photography. Switzerfilm (myself and Kristin) captured the video clips. The final video we created shows baby Sloan Switzer in a way that we will treasure forever.



**#1: OFFER VIDEO.**

Either press the record button yourself or find someone to work with you on your birthday shoots to capture these beautiful moments that don't last long. Some of the most precious years with your kids are when they are babies, and birthdays are a perfect time to capture them.

Photography and video go hand in hand, and it's time for you to start doing both. Your clients want both services, and if you make it easy for them, they will almost always buy both. Switzerfilm has about a 90 percent booking rate for both photo and video. It doesn't take any more planning or time for clients, and that makes it easy for them to say yes.

A great way to start offering your video services for baby birthday parties is to do it for your own child. Share a short clip on Instagram or Facebook, and before you know it, everyone is going to want it. I see photos in my social feeds all the time, but rarely do I ever see video. This is an untapped market. If parents have spent all the time and money planning a birthday party and photo shoot, they might as well add video. It's hard to offer this service if you don't have any demos or samples to share, so either film a baby video of your own family or give a friend a good deal. Once your followers and friends see the possibilities of video, they will want the same for their kids.



## #2: DON'T DO EVERYTHING ON YOUR OWN.

Props, baby, photos, locations, themes, schedule, video, editing — so many moving parts. Delegate responsibilities. Baby Sloan Switzer's birthday shoot was much easier with the divide-and-conquer approach. Sloan's mom, Ashley Switzer, was in charge of the props, theme and locations. Ashley Becker, the photographer, was responsible for a backdrop and a few props. Kristin, Leanna and I just showed up and filmed separately at each shoot. All of us creatives are in different situations, so take care of yourself and balance the workload. You can't do it all with one camera by yourself.



## #3: FILM THE IN-BETWEEN MOMENTS.

Keep that camera rolling. With photos, you're always trying to get the most perfect moment. With video, you're looking for the moving/motion/in-between moments. Examples are filming babies finishing getting dressed, cake being carried out to the party, props being set up and Mom picking up and comforting a crying baby.

A photo is all about the perfect shot. With video, our goal is to show the audience what's happening and what it took to get to this point in time. Your video edit will have a great flow when you not only film the posed shoot but also capture the in-between moments.





#### #4: KEEP THE EDIT SHORT.

Even though this is the cutest baby ever, you don't need a seven-minute video. Don't be worried about audio or telling a story. Maybe you just want to make a slideshow with a few iPhone video clips as a fusion video. Your final product should be no longer than three or four minutes. We broke ours up into a 15-second Instagram and a three-minute video to post on Facebook.

Let your video clips and music dictate the length of the video. Most of our videos are synced with music, and it's so important for the music to match the feeling of the birthday. The song is going to connect your video clips with your viewing audience, so take your time and choose wisely.

Photographers tell me they use the same song for slideshows all the time, and nobody is really watching them. Why? Maybe the photographer is using the same song over and over or just not choosing a fun song that matches the event. Remember, your social media fans want to see you being creative, always customizing and producing content that is unique and different. You should almost never use the same song in any video.

Ingrid Michaelson, One Republic and Colbie Caillat have amazing music I recommend for birthday videos. You are at a huge disadvantage if you're not using SongFreedom.com for your edits. It's the only music licensing company that has genres other than indie music. Keep your video clips short. Use a variety of wide, medium and close-up shots. Make sure your video clips are cut to the beat of the music. Your template for the edit you're using is the song. Let it tell you what clips to use and when.

#### #5: STREAMLINE YOUR WORKFLOW.

Babies are unpredictable. You might have two minutes or two hours with a birthday baby. You'll want a tripod and a track. A baby is so small, you'll need to get low angles, and a track allows you to do just that. For a cake smash, you can multitask and use both. Using two cameras, you can put one on a tripod and use a track for your other shots. Record with both of them so you don't miss any moments.

If you don't have two cameras, just use your iPhone for the wide shot, giving you more options with angles and moments. Keep your batteries fully charged and have formatted cards that can record for long periods of time. I found myself using a 90mm macro, an 85mm and a cropped 10–18mm. Those lenses give you all the variety you'll need to get plenty of usable shots for a fantastic film.

Chances are you will be working with another photographer on the shoot. For the staged shoot with props and the birthday cake smash, set up your tripod next to the photographer so you don't block their shot. Tell her she can go in front of the tripod if she has to because you're shooting two angles. Your other angle is great for a track, and the 90mm macro to focus on close-ups.

I'm always changing lenses because the goal is video variety. If you have an outdoor venue for the actual birthday party like we did, you can get motion video shots, party details, and friends and family having fun. It is all about the baby, but when the final video is being edited, you will have a more interesting video when you see everything that happened and not just a cake smash.



Image © Joe Switzer

Nothing can complement your photos better than video. Almost every shooter I meet offers only video or photography, but not both. If you don't want the stress of wedding filmmaking, offering video services for babies and kids could be a fun and rewarding way for you to create special experiences that nobody in your market is offering.

Remember that people buy emotionally, and when you connect photo and video and moments, you have all the right ingredients for final deliverables that parents, friends and family will want to share and have forever.

What a way to make a living, filming precious babies eating cake, crying, giggling, in the cutest outfits and settings with so much love. You have the greatest job in the world, and it's time to capitalize on it with video. ■

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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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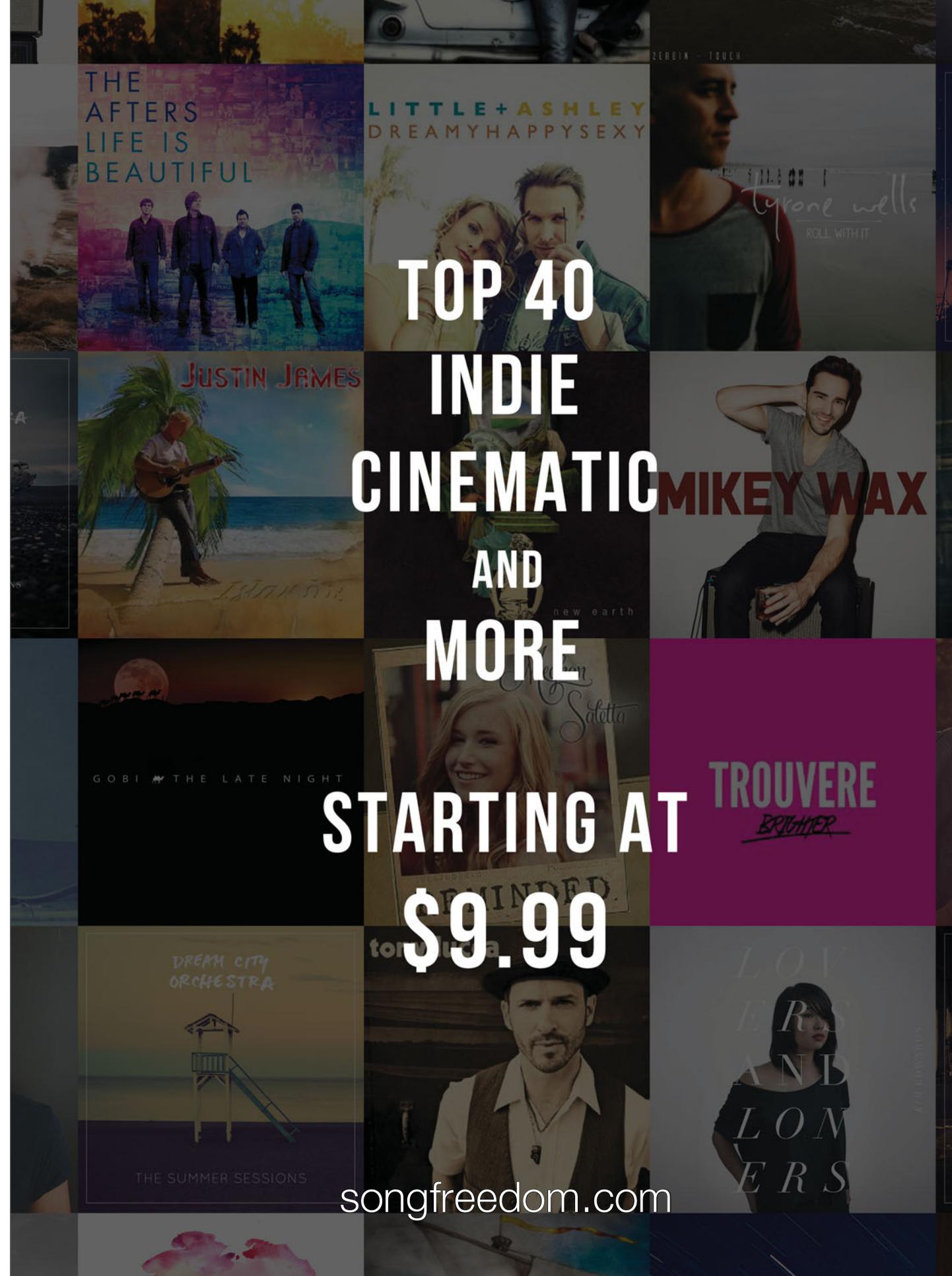
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# Newborns & Neutrals

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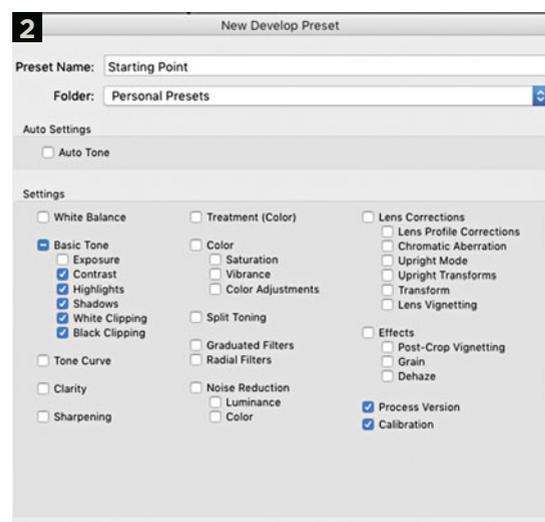
In No Time: Retouching in Lightroom CC  
with Dustin Lucas



Photographing newborns in an ideal setting can be difficult when you are working on location. We rush to the window light and make due with the nursery (for character) or living room (for that wide-open spacing). I try to find neutral tones and bare walls, and slightly overexpose in-camera to get the image close to how I want it delivered to the client.

Whether I am close or not in camera, it's Lightroom to the rescue. Why Lightroom and not Photoshop? Time is of the essence. Moms want those images practically same day. My wife wants them even sooner.

You can do heavy research and purchase presets for newborns in Lightroom. Do not let me stop you from using the click-and-go technique as a starting point. I happily encourage presets, and use them to shift my untouched Raw files before retouching. Let's build some together, and then move into adjustment brushes for the fine tuning of the image.

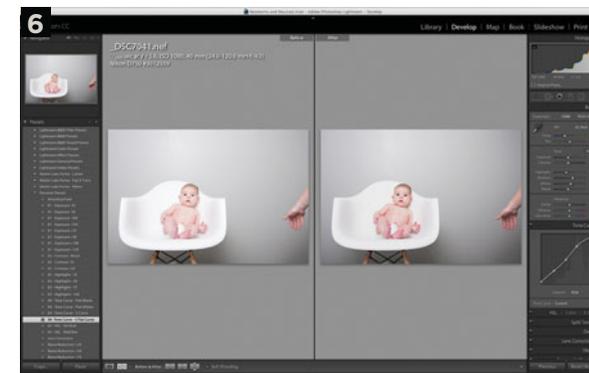
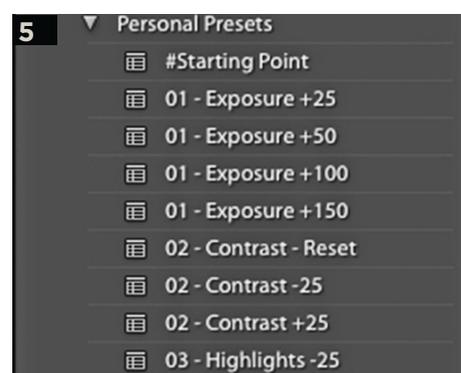
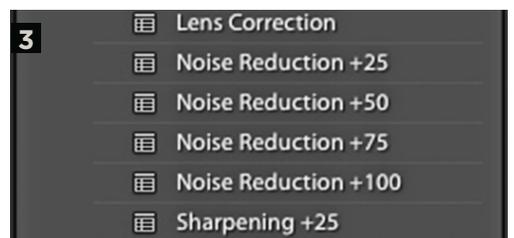


### Build Presets

The initial investment for purchasing or building presets pays off in the time you will save. To build some, let's review the Develop panels in Lightroom and begin dividing them into global versus specialized tools. Most commonly used is the Basic panel, a great starting point to apply globally. We can pull down some contrast for a softer look overall by lifting shadows, reducing highlights, making subtle adjustments to the black-and-white point sliders and lowering the contrast slider into the negatives. (1)

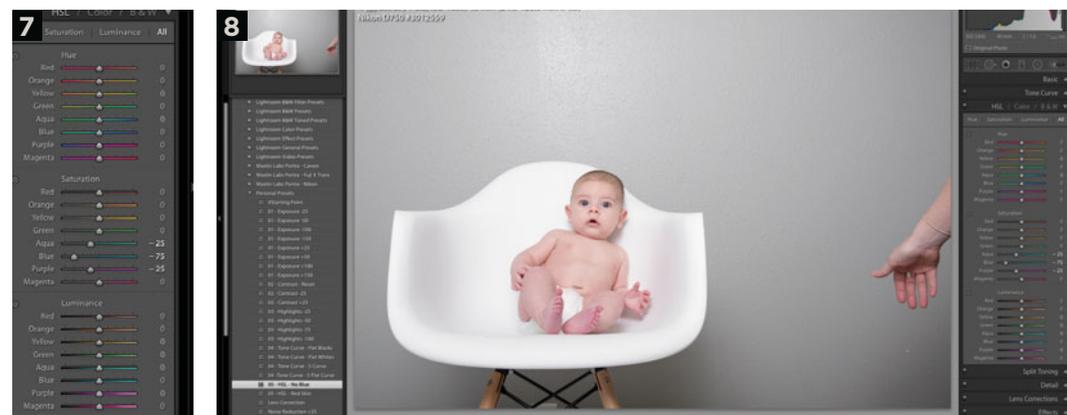
This is our starting preset. Save these settings by holding Shift + Command + N. Create a new folder to begin organizing the presets. Select all the sliders we adjusted, and click Create. (2)

If you like to globally apply Noise Reduction and Sharpening, these can also be added to the starting point preset. Use Lens Correction, and leave it at the default settings. We can make separate presets for these so you have a little more flexibility. (3)



Exposure, Tone Curve and HSL are additional presets for selective editing. I generally make a few for Exposure in 25% increments. (4) You can do the same for the other tone adjustments in the basic panel, but I like to move a little quicker. (5) Tone Curve can be used for a lot of selective tonal settings. I usually create a few midtones and flatten black tone presets. (6)

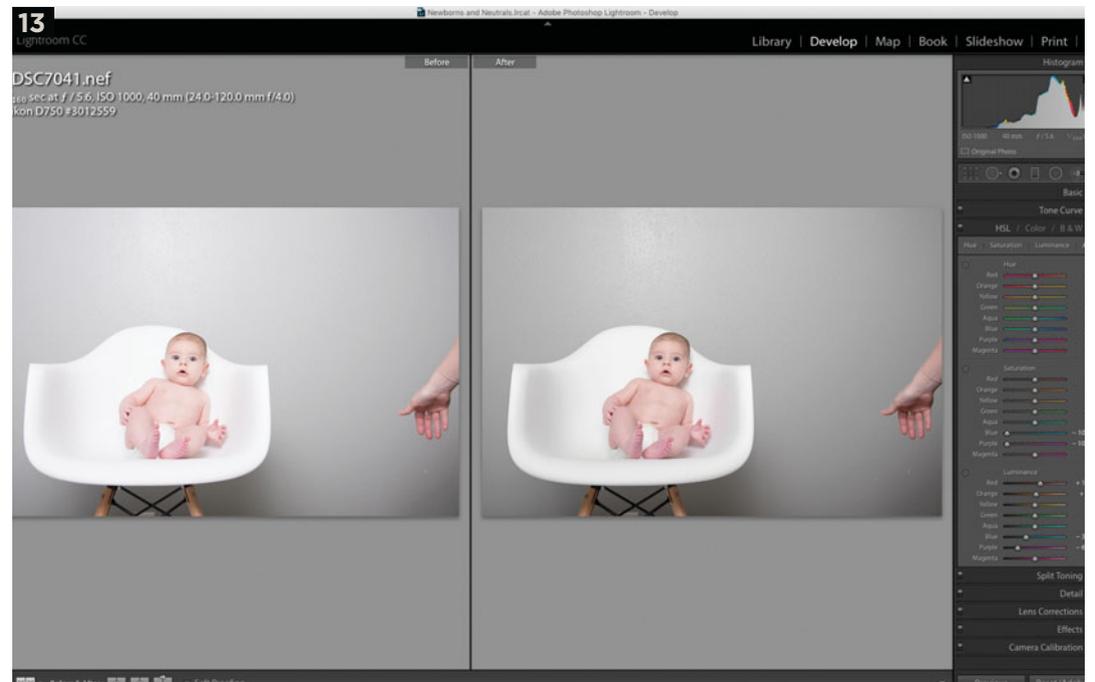
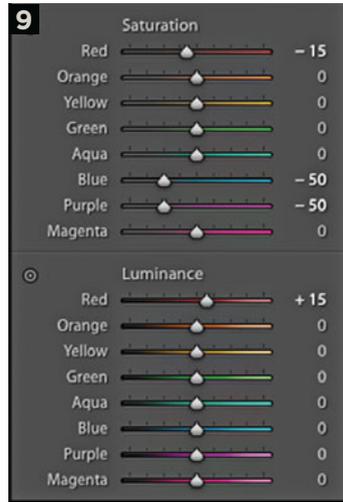
HSL works great for removing blue casts from white and neutral tones. (7) Pull down red and green saturation, and remember to lift red luminance to brighten skin color. These are great options for creating presets, but remember that HSL works globally—to be more selective, we need to use local brush adjustments. (8)



### Target Adjustment Tools

Once we've applied some presets and begun editing the subject, the background can start to look discolored and distracting. When working with white balance, I find it best to edit for the subject's skin tone and then remove the unwanted casts on their clothing and the surroundings. Making this image neutral overall with only white balance is not working. Target adjustment tools can help.

We can choose between Hue, Saturation and Luminance to target the colors that will be affected. I generally use Saturation the most, and occasionally mess with Luminance. (9) Hold Shift + Alt + Command + S to begin adjusting the saturation. Click and drag down to lower and up to raise the saturation. (10) Sliders move based on where you click. Notice that your subject may become affected when you drag out the yellow from the background. (11)

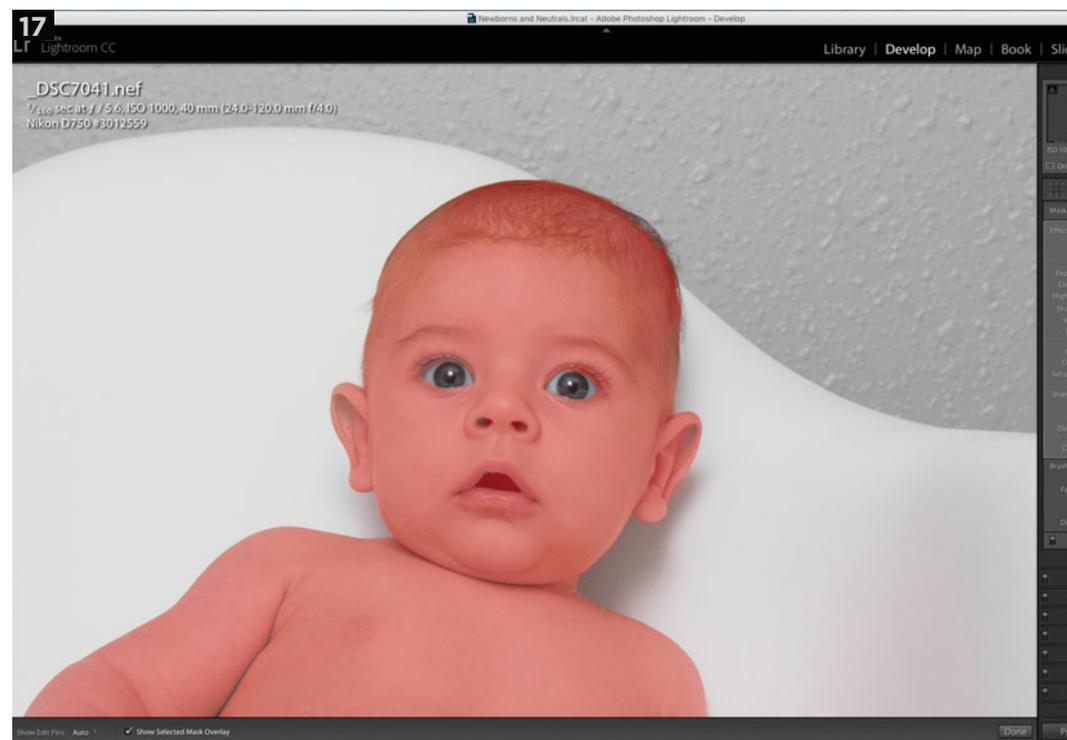
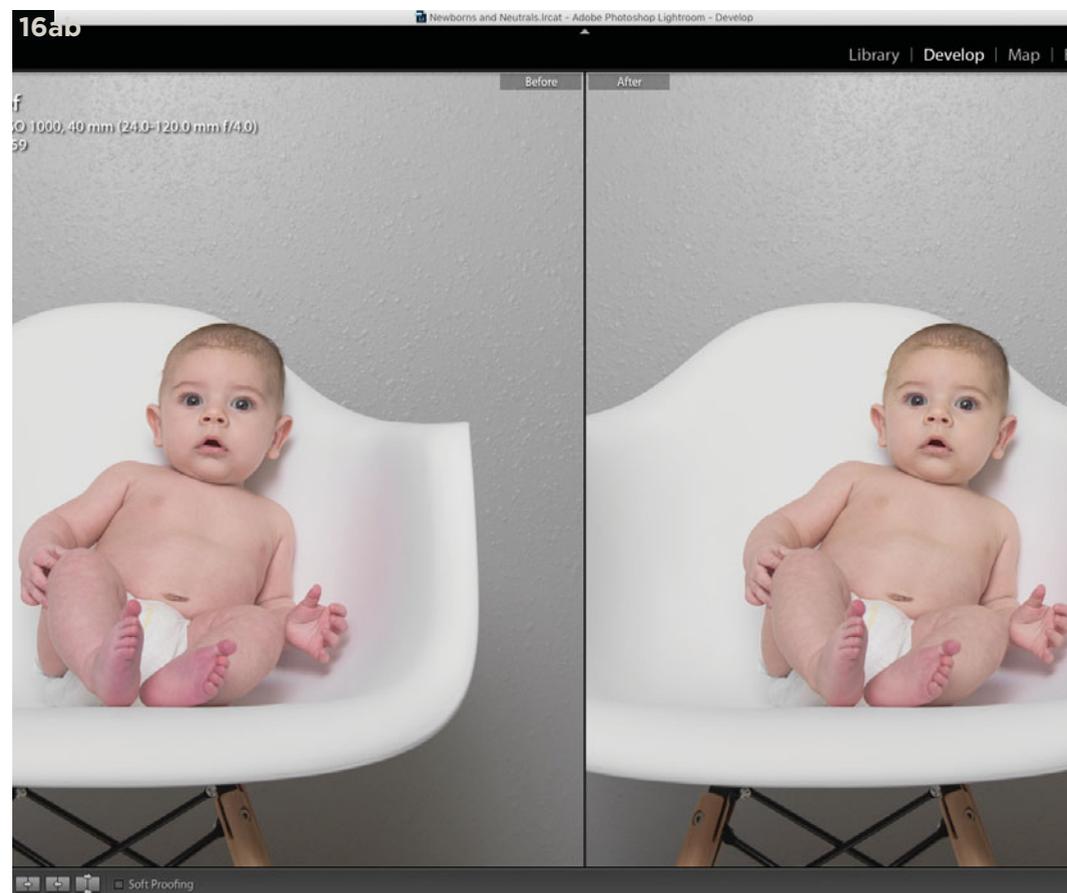
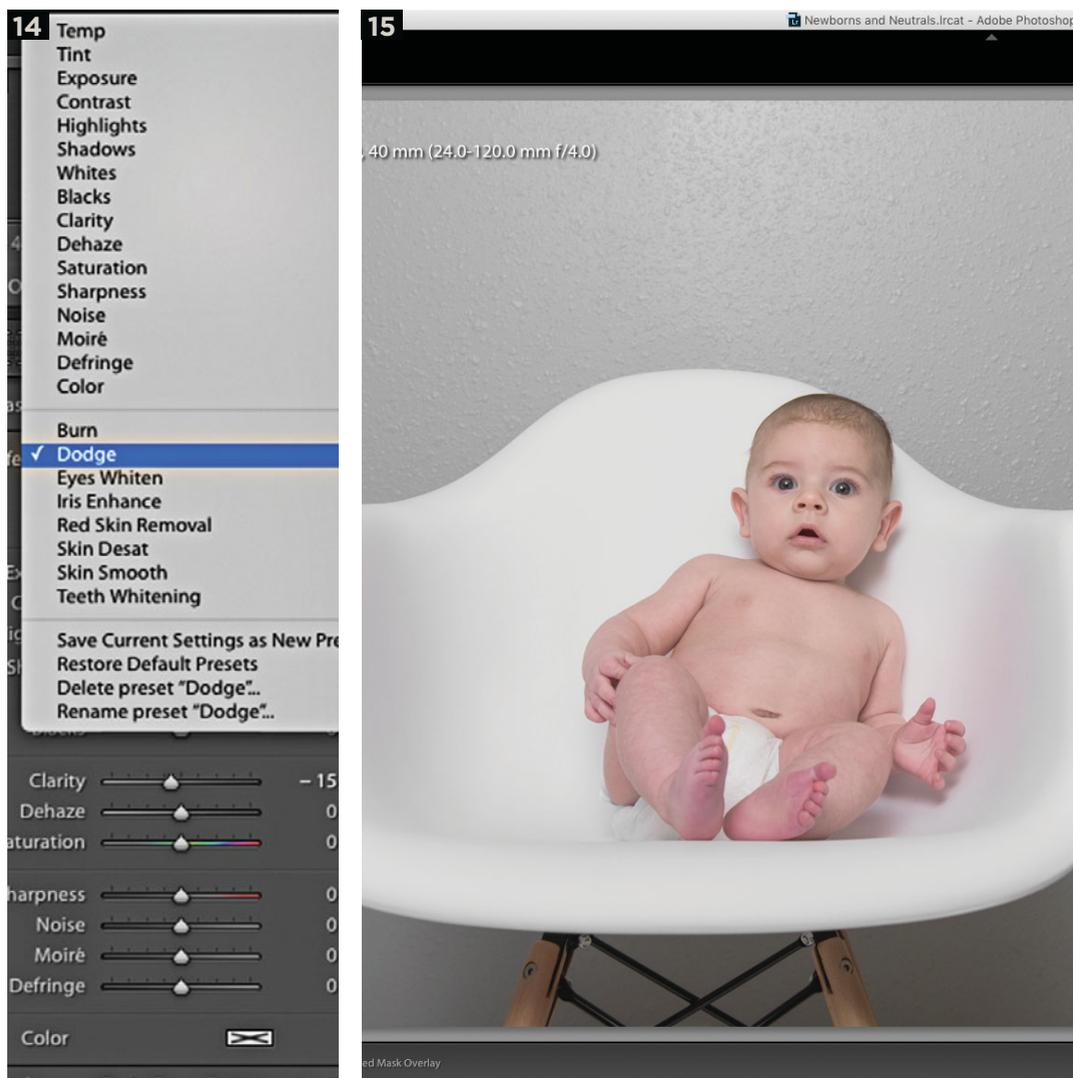


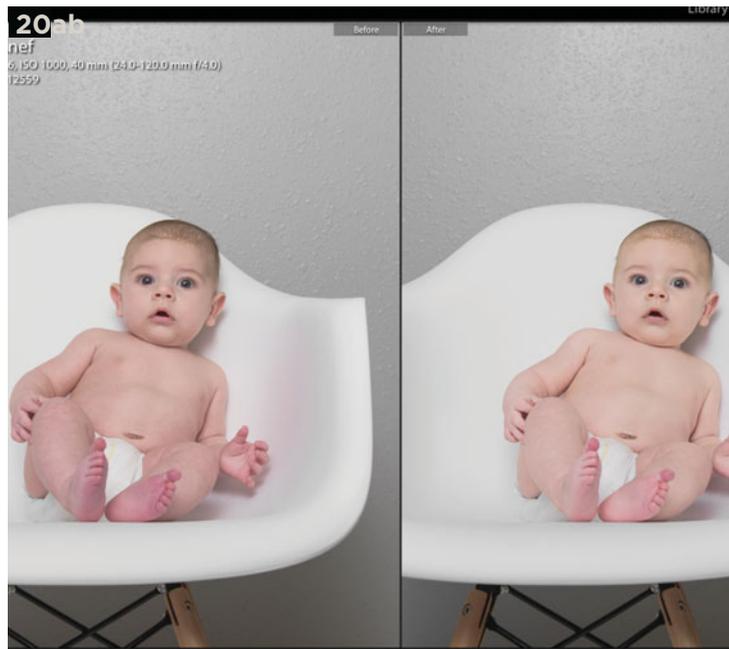
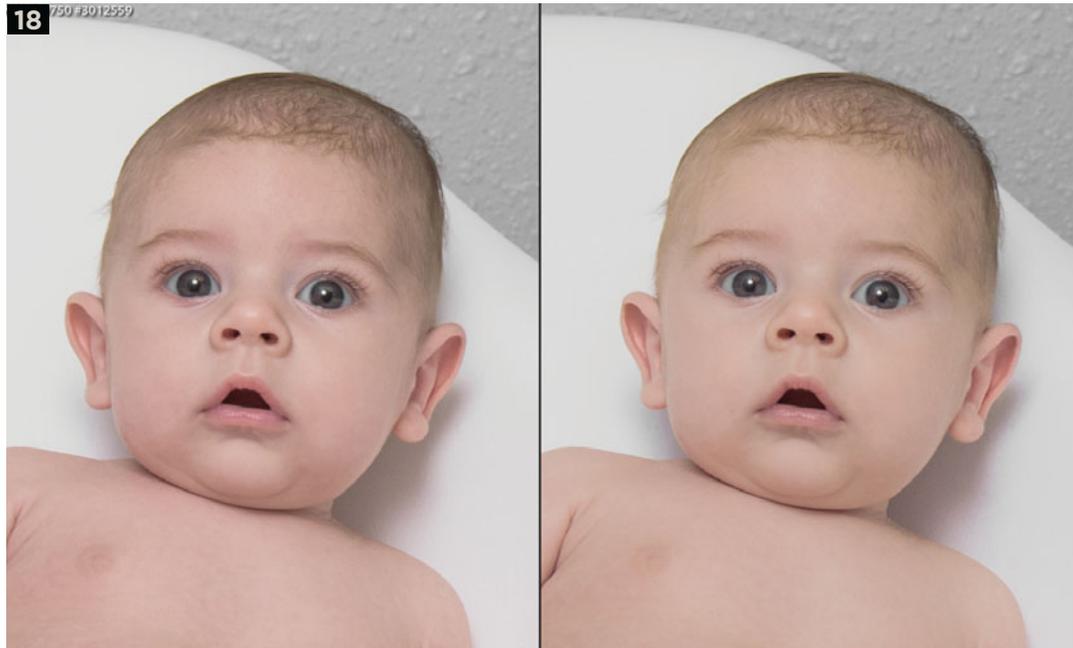
Using Luminance, you can brighten the red and orange skin tones and darken the background. (12) For neutral tones, you have to be mindful that adjusting the background can severely flatten the contrast when dragging Luminance down. (13) It is adjusting the white and light gray tones in my image. Not to mention that the color of the skin varies from warmer on the face to soft red tones on the arms and legs. We need to work more selectively in this case.

## Local Adjustment Brushes

Now we are ready to begin retouching this image and getting it ready to export. First, I remove the reddish, cool skin tone on the arms, legs, hands and feet. Activate the Adjustment Brush by striking the “K” key and then click the effects presets at the top of the drop-down menu. (14) I have previously made a red skin removal preset, so let’s select that and begin painting on the effect. You can see the difference immediately. We can now darken and warm the skin as well. (15)

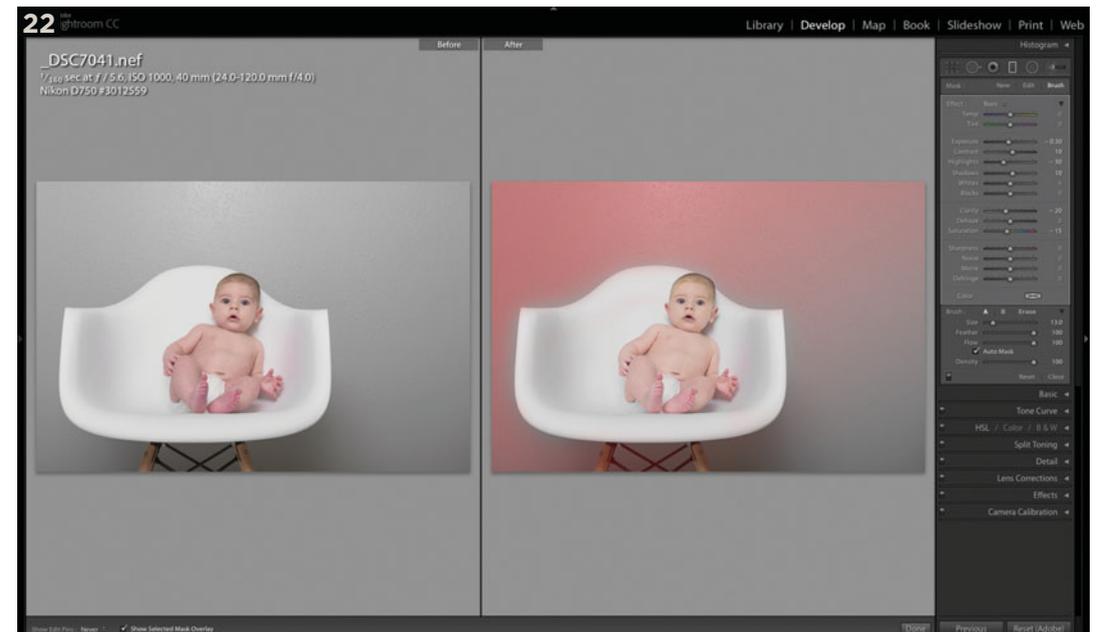
Once we have the mask made for the arms, legs, hands and feet, we can adjust the sliders accordingly for the color and brightness. This starts to make the image look much more consistent overall. (16ab) Next, we smooth the skin by subtly lowering the clarity and noise sliders. Since we have a good mask made, let’s duplicate this edit mask and paint over the face. To do this, right-click on the edit pin and choose Duplicate. Mask out the eyes and mouth by holding Option while painting. (17)





Since his eyes are open, we can enhance the iris and whiten the eyes. Normally we are stuck dealing with the reds in the eyelids, but this will be more of a general portrait enhancement. (18) Automask works well with these edge-specific areas; try this when there is a crisp edge you are masking out of an area. (19) We want to dodge some of these shadows as well, but remember that shadows give depth and are not always distractions from the subject. (20ab)

Burning down the background is executed with the Graduated Filter. Strike the “M” key to activate this tool, and choose Burn From the Effects Presets. (21) You can quickly mask out the subject by holding Shift + T, and then hold Option while masking out an area. (22) We can drop the saturation to neutralize the white balance. (23)



The Results



Image © Dustin Lucas

Once the groundwork is laid with presets, you can move a lot faster through an edit. Of course, with presets we can only shift an image globally and will need to do some local adjustments in the end.

Retouching has never been a click-and-go process, but in Lightroom you can do quite a lot of processing with these retouching-brush presets. Take some time to build your own workflow and stylized presets so you can retouch with no time wasted. When you're editing an entire newborn session, saving a minute per edit really adds up. ■

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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 of 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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## INSPIRATIONS

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

**Sal Cincotta**  
Editor-in-chief



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# WORKING WITH SPECIALTY LIGHTS & MODIFIERS:

## IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

with Michael Corsentino

When I'm considering investing in a specialty item and incorporating it into my workflow, it needs to do one of two things really well. It either needs to do something that none of the other tools in my studio can accomplish on their own, or it needs to be able to do the job of several tools at once.

Tools like the Fresnel, zoom spot and ring flash each fit the first category by doing something no other tool can. They add a lot of versatility to your lighting repertoire, but they have very specific, limited uses. You could say they're one-trick ponies. The tool that does both is a rare bird indeed.

I recently decided to take the plunge and invest in the Broncolor Para 133, a tool that actually manages to meet both my criteria and then some. This is a really exciting light modifier, and I want to share the results of my first shoot with it and talk about how we used it, in a field report of sorts.

This is a costly tool, on par with what you'd likely pay for a professional DSLR. But if beautiful lighting is as important to you as it is to me, the expense may be justified. Any studio/rental house worth its salt is likely to have Paras you can rent to try out. So if you love the quality of light you see here, don't let the price tag stop you.





Specialty modifiers do things standard modifiers can't. The Broncolor Para's parabolic shape, 24-facet silver interior and light-focusing tube allow you to create a wide variety of signature effects with one tool.

So what's the difference? It's an umbrella—what's all the fuss? Do these modifiers live up to all the hype? Are they worth the added expense? In my experience, the difference is similar to driving a Kia versus a Porsche, or drinking a \$10 bottle of wine versus one over \$100. With both, you need to try them before you truly appreciate that, yes, there is absolutely a big difference. The same is true with specialty lighting gear.

The legions of fashion, portrait and commercial photographers and rental studios that invest in one of every size must be onto something. So what is it exactly that makes the Broncolor Para so desirable for so many? It's the variety of light you're able to create with one. From super soft to specular and everything in between, this one tool has all the bases covered, which is why I found it so compelling. Another upshot is you need fewer tools to get the job done. As with most modifiers, you don't need to use the same manufacturer's lights. With the Broncolor Para, I can use my Profoto or Elinchrom strobes with an adapter.

So how does the Para achieve its lighting gymnastics? The magic happens via a sliding "focusing tube" in the center that allows the strobe in use to be positioned anywhere from the widest to narrowest part of its parabola shape. This takes the light from gorgeous and soft at the front, or widest, part of the Para all the way to hard and specular light at the back, or narrowest, part of its shape.

Along with the build quality you'd expect from a tool in this class, the Para has another unique attribute: its signature catchlight. You've probably seen this catchlight in countless fashion and commercial images and wondered what it was. Now you know. This is the result of its one-of-a-kind 24-faceted silver interior. (I've included a detail image of this catchlight, which I can achieve only with this tool.)

Let's dig in and look at each of the finals and how I created them.



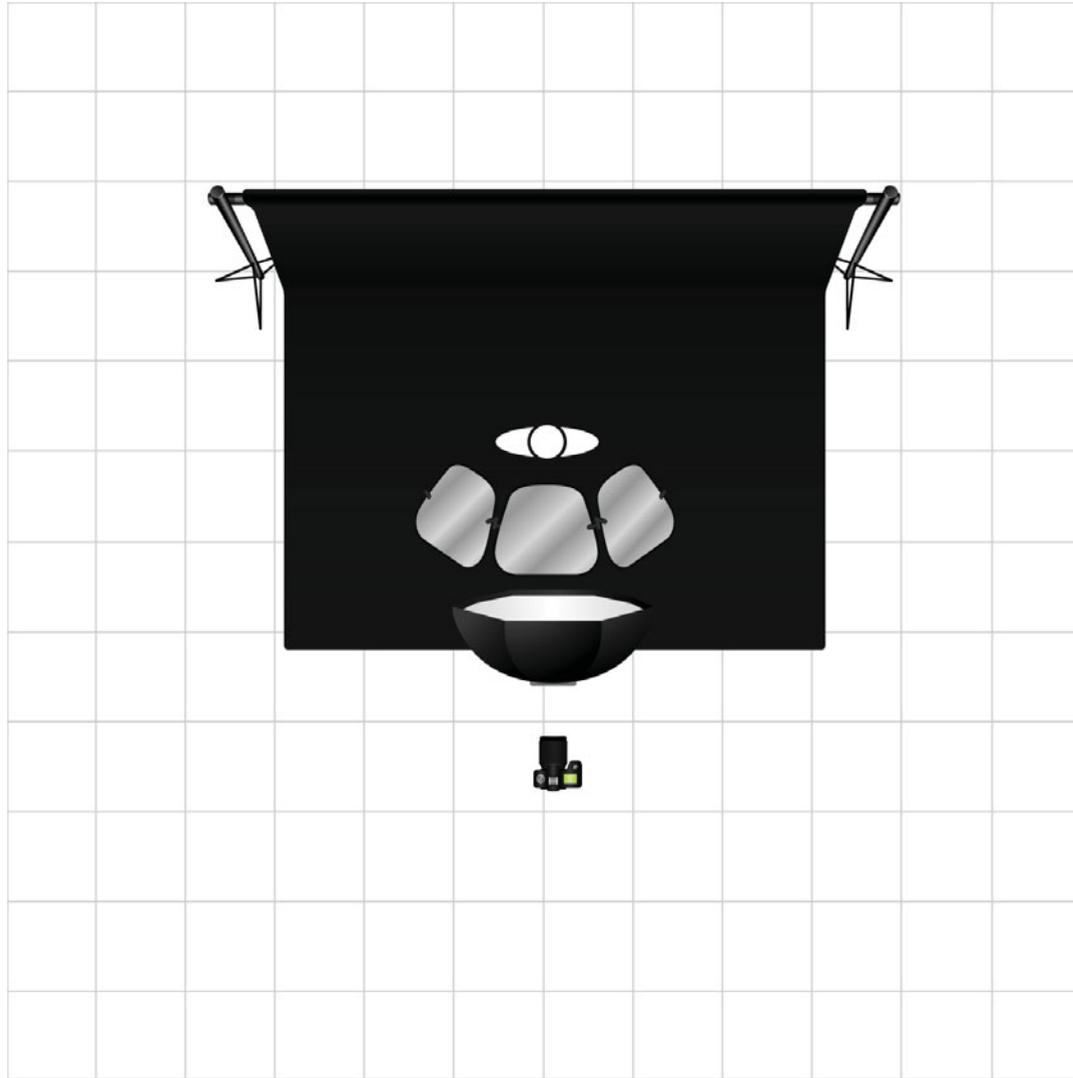


Image © Michael Corsentino

*Look 1 Lighting Diagram: A classic over-and-under clamshell lighting arrangement provides a clean fashion/beauty look with no side-to-side directional shadows. Below the keylight at approximately chest height, a silver-faced reflector provides fill light to open up downward shadows cast from the keylight. For this first fashion look, I've opted for hard light. I achieved this by sliding the Para's focusing tube and strobe to the rear of the parabola, creating a very focused, crisp, hard light.*

## FIRST LOOK

For the first image, I decided to start with a beauty setup using over and under clamshell lighting. I placed the Para above my model and positioned the strobe as far back as I could, at the narrowest part of its opening. This guaranteed me the hardest light possible. I placed a silver-faced reflector by my model's waist to fill in the shadows cast from above and to match the contrast created by the keylight. As you can see, the effect created is very dramatic, capturing the Para's signature catchlight, and screaming fashion.

Now that I'd nailed the hard-light look, it was time to move on to a softer fashion/beauty look.



Look 1, Hard Focused Light

Image © Michael Corsentino



Look 2, Soft Defocused Light

Image © Michael Corsentino

## SECOND LOOK

For the second, softer look, I kept the over-and-under Para and fill reflector arrangement, but this time moved them both camera right, giving the light direction and introducing shadow. I positioned the strobe at the widest part of the Para's opening. This guaranteed me the softest undiffused light possible. It amazes me that I'm able to create both the first and second lighting effects with the same modifier. And I'm not even finished. Positioning the strobe at the widest part of the Para created a soft, silky, luxurious quality of light.



Look 2 Catchlight Detail: The shape of a modifier, its interior finish and where the light is positioned inside it all play key roles in the characteristics of the light created. Here you see the signature catchlight created from the Para's 24-facet silver interior.

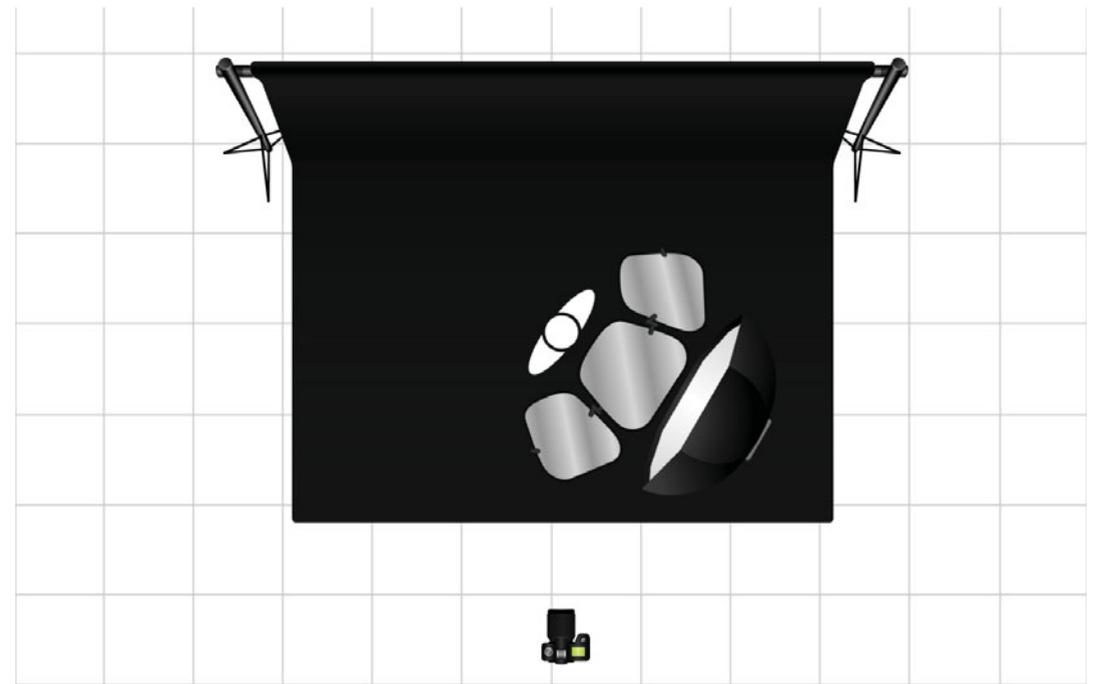


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Look 2 Lighting Diagram: To create this soft editorial fashion portrait, I first moved the Para and fill reflector to the camera right side of my model. This immediately changed the quality of light by introducing shadows. This is because the keylight was now directional versus the flat light effect used for the first look. I further changed the quality of light from hard to very soft by extending the Para's focusing tube so that the strobe was positioned at the widest part of the parabola. As you can see, this resulted in a soft "defocused" light.

### THIRD LOOK

For the third look, I wanted to see how soft I could take things with an editorial portrait. This modifier has a silver interior, so I was curious how it would behave with a diffusion panel. There are three diffusion panels to choose from with varying degrees of opaqueness. I wanted softer light, but I also didn't want to defeat the Para's unique characteristics and turn it into an everyday octabank. So I struck a middle ground and chose the No. 2 diffusion fabric. This softened the light, cutting it by about half a stop, while maintaining some of the crispness and the catchlight. To give the image a more polished effect and add more dimension to the model, I first added a reflector camera left to act as a kicker. Later, for the final image, I replaced this with a large Elinchrom strip box.

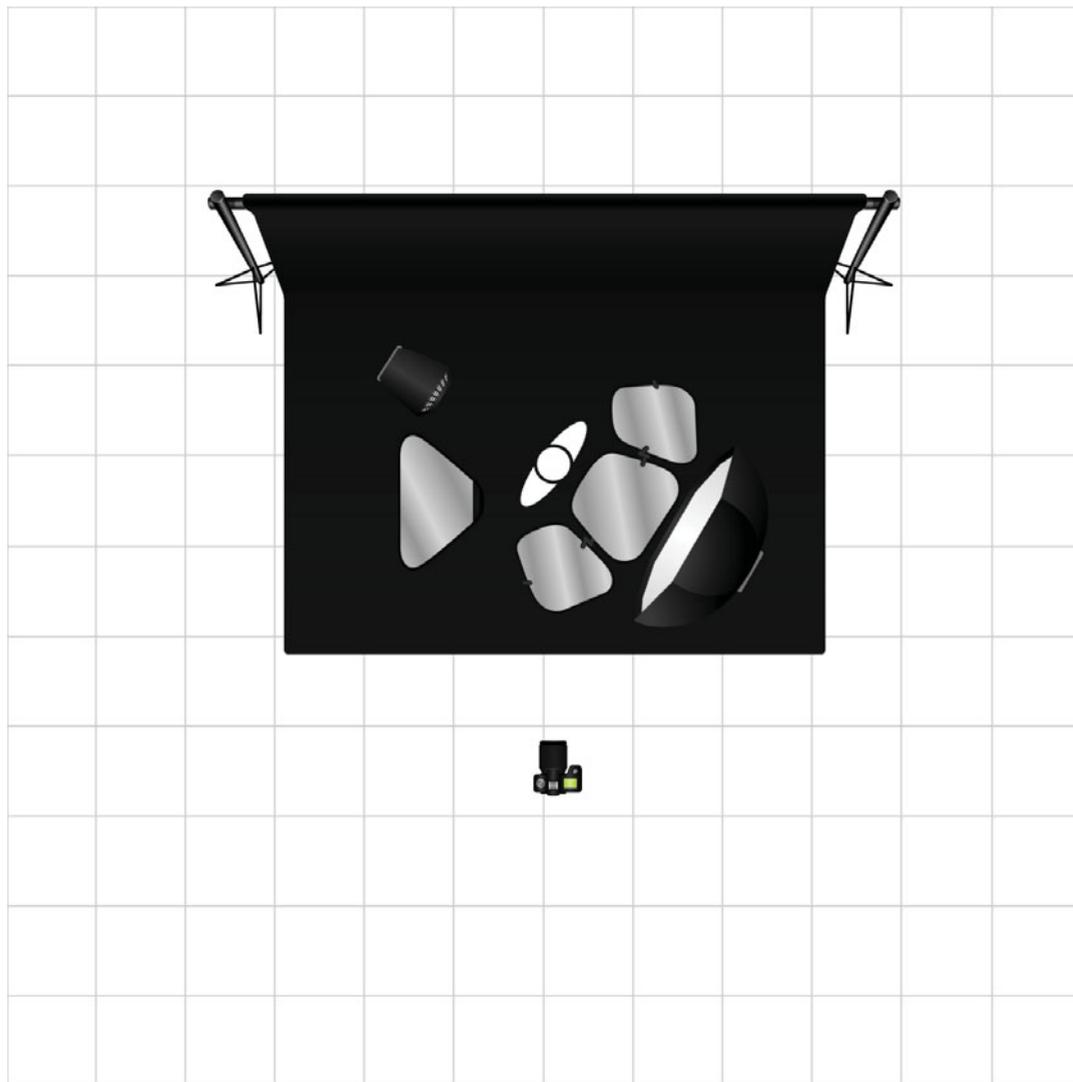


Image © Michael Corsentino

*Look 3 Lighting Diagram: Here I've maintained the light position and direction from Look 2. I've also kept the strobe at the widest part of the Para to assure the softest light possible, except I've added No. 2 diffusion fabric to further accentuate this effect. Additionally, I'm using a Sunbounce Micro Mini reflector with white fabric to fill in the shadows on the left side of the model's face. A large Elinchrom Strip Box with a Lighttools 30-degree soft egg crate grid is camera left behind the model as a kicker light to add dimension.*



Look 3, Soft Defocused and Diffused Light

Image © Michael Corsentino



Image © Michael Corentino

Behind the Scenes: Here you can see the beginnings of what became the final setup for Look 3. I replaced the Sunbounce reflector camera left behind the model with a large Elinchrom Strip Box and Lighttools 30-degree soft egg crate grid.

The right specialty lights and modifiers have their place. In previous features, I've demonstrated that you can come close to what's possible with high-end gear using a variety of low-cost tools. But here you can really see the differences you get with the high-end stuff. ■

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Michael Corentino 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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At ShutterFest two months ago, I got to talk with dozens of photographers about their marketing efforts. Over and over, I found small business owners who were doing nothing to target their demographics. Instead, they just opened their business, hung out their shingle and hoped clients would be drawn in.

I've used this thought experiment more than once in workshops and articles: Pretend you're a children's photographer, and you just opened your studio in Sun City, Arizona. You found a great location and you're open for business. It's been a week, and nobody has walked through your door.

Why? Because Sun City is a retirement community, and there are almost no young children, except those who come to visit Grandma at Thanksgiving. There's no client base for you to build a business on.

That's an obvious example, but many creatives just aren't in a mindset of targeting clients. They've never really thought about their target audience. Let's put some things together to help you get in front of the right audience.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Start by figuring out the demographics of your community. Just hit Google and put in "Demographics for \_\_\_\_\_." Try by zip code or city and state. You'll find a wealth of information on gender, age, education, married versus single, income and race, just to name a few.

It's also important to check out the demographics around you. Geographic demographics are important. While many of you love doing work on location, especially destination weddings, the bulk of your business, until you become famous and in high demand, will still come from an area within a hundred-mile radius of where you're based.

You still shouldn't ignore going outside your geographical area, and that's where social media comes in. Maintaining a good blog and being active on Facebook and Pinterest can make your reach more global.

## IT'S ALL ABOUT MOM

Now think about your business. Most of you are in the portrait/social specialties, which include family and children portraiture, pets, seniors, weddings, engagements and events. As a result, your target audience is female.

For the most part, your ideal client is Mom or brides, because women make 98 percent of the purchase decisions to hire a professional photographer in these areas. (That's from an old Kodak survey from 25 years ago, but I don't believe it's moved one single percentage point.)

How often do you get a call from a man saying, "We're overdue for an updated family portrait"? Dad's a critical player in the decision process and often the key recipient of the final portrait, but he rarely makes the call to hire you.

## HIGH-PROFILE DEMOGRAPHICS

One key demographic everybody is always thinking about targeting is high-profile clients. Every community has at least one high-end zip code.

Let's look at Wellesley, Massachusetts, which has a higher average income than most of the communities around it. You can enter its zip code, 02482, into a search at [TheWeddingReport.com](http://TheWeddingReport.com). The site's loaded with great statistics, giving you data on what's being spent on every aspect of weddings in the area, as well as ideas for promotional and networking partners.

Wedding Report lists the average being spent on flowers, limo service, gowns, honeymoons, spas and caterers. Each group represents another partner with the potential to cross-promote your services.

Here's just a taste of what popped up for Wellesley's 2015 Wedding Market Summary: "With an average wedding cost of \$39,695, Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH is ranked no. 25 out of 977 Metropolitan Areas."

For me to dig deeper, I'd need to spend a little money and get the actual report, but if that were my target audience, it would be a low price to pay to understand the market better.

While things like average income and educational level in the community are important, don't assume that just because you're targeting a high-profile zip code, you're going to automatically qualify to charge more. A well-educated target audience also has more access to other resources, and is more focused on the value of your product and services.

With a high-profile audience, your work also has to hold up to their expectations. They know more about what they want and are more critical when looking at your galleries. Make sure you're showing only "wow" images. That's any photograph that's so good you'd only need to show one image to get hired.

Recognizing the educational and income demographics is also key to thinking through your value-added offers when you're putting your promotional calendar together. Look for add-on products that have value and are unique.

Look for ways to add value without discounting. You might be bored with canvas wraps, but your clients aren't. In fact, many of them have no idea the things you can offer with a printed image these days. When you just discount, you turn your products and services into commodity products.

It's important to always remember you're an artist. Each client and the coverage you provide is unique and essentially a work of art. Present them with ideas that fall under the art umbrella.



## SOCIAL MEDIA

Now, let's move over to social media. Think through your demographics as they relate to your specialty regardless of where they live. If you're a children's photographer, then you're looking for family-oriented readers. Your target reader is Mom.

That means your website and blog need to have a certain look and feel to match the demographic. Your content needs to be interesting for Mom to take the time to read and hopefully follow you. The information you provide needs to be helpful and engaging.

Your site needs to be less masculine and high-tech looking. It needs to be warm and friendly. Give your audience an experience. Your blog needs to be the same way. In fact, since your blog is about what's in your heart, it becomes even more important to match your demographic.

## DEMOGRAPHICS AND RIPTIDE MARKETING

Many of you, because you didn't think through your content versus your readership's needs, have locked yourself into what I call "riptide marketing."

For lack of anything better to share on your blog, you started featuring images from every engagement shoot. Your clients love being featured, and they tell their friends, who, because this is a word-of-mouth business, might also become your clients. If you don't show images from every client's engagement shoot, they're going to be hurt. After all, you shared their friends' images. This happens with engagements, weddings, family portraiture and children's sessions. Eventually you're stuck showing only images from shoots without any substance in your content.

So, let's break the trend. Instead of showing all the images from a shoot, show just one and use it as an educational feature to demonstrate posing technique, lighting technique, wardrobe changes, etc. Make yourself into the community's photography expert, and get yourself out of riptide content. Give your readers something that helps them take better pictures.



## WHAT NOT TO DO

You've got to pay attention to the demographics of your readership. Years ago, Agfa US ran an ad for APS film in the professional photographic magazines. Most of you probably don't remember APS, which was a purely consumer product that lasted only a few years. The problem was Agfa not paying attention to the readership of the magazines. It was like Revlon running an ad in *Guns & Ammo*.

With everything you post, think about who's going to read it. You need to give Mom topics of interest about how she can get better pictures of her family; gift ideas using photographs; family-oriented events in the community; locations for great family images; and tips on being a storyteller. And, one more great topic: Use Throwback Thursday to remind your readers of the value of older images and the importance of capturing memories.

Your blog and social media activity reinforce the products and services on your website. Be soft-sell and informative. Never be hard-sell when you're sharing experiences from the heart.

This brings us full circle to your target demographics. Just as you wouldn't take a trip without a roadmap or GPS, you can't get to your target if you don't figure out who it is first. Think through where you want your business to go before you get behind the camera. ■

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Skip Cohen is president and founder of Marketing Essentials International, a consulting firm specializing in projects dedicated to photographic education, marketing and social media support across a variety of marketing and business platforms. He founded SkipCohenUniversity.com in January 2013. He's been actively involved in the photographic industry his entire career, and previously served as president of Rangefinder/WPPI and Hasselblad USA. He has coauthored six books on photography and is involved in several popular podcasts, including *Weekend Wisdom*.

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THE VALUE OF ———  
**RELATIONSHIPS**

with Melanie Anderson

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Relationships are your most important business asset. In this article, I share with you the importance of intentional communication and planting seeds for future opportunities.

I started out my business photographing newborns out of my home 10 years ago. That business has grown beyond my expectations. The number-one reason my business is successful is that I understand the value of relationships.

Relationships are everything. Without them, positive word of mouth is difficult if not impossible. By engaging with my clients, I create an environment where they feel comfortable sharing their needs for their session as well as discussing opportunities for future business with me.

My studio is very diverse, and without the ability to photograph all things at anytime, I would not have grown as quickly as I did. I parlayed relationships with my newborn parents into children and family sessions. Those clients then turned into commercial clients for business headshots, corporate photography, senior photography, volume photography, etc. I could go on and on. My business is built on relationships.

Here are four tips for building lasting relationships within your business.



Image © Melanie Anderson



Image © Melanie Anderson

## PERSONAL REFERRAL

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When a prospective client contacts our studio, we always ask how they heard about us. The top response we get is, “You are everywhere!” I have mentioned in previous articles that we have displays at the mall, doctors’ offices, the hospital and high schools, and we’re all over social media. The importance of asking this question is to find out if they were given a personal referral. Personal referrals are important for several reasons. Based on the client who gave the referral, I know what they may have seen as well as the amount that was spent. This also gives us more to talk about during our session. I love hearing the “seven degrees of separation.” I live and work in a small community, and it’s so great to share stories of people we have in common. This conversation creates trust with our clients.



Images © Melanie Anderson

## ASK QUESTIONS

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Find out where they work, find out their interests. I cannot tell you how often by asking questions and then following up with additional interest that a new opportunity was presented. Just recently, by finding out that a client works for a commercial company that I have wanted to work with, I secured headshots and future corporate work, and even planted seeds of using my studio for their next big event and project. This happens a lot.



Image © Melanie Anderson

## BE PROACTIVE

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As you think about where you want to grow your business, think about the personal relationships you already have. Who do you know that will be able to introduce you to the person that makes the decisions within the company you are seeking to work with?

## SOCIAL MEDIA

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Social media is a great resource for building relationships. Engage in other people's posts. Show interest and that you care about what they are saying. Even though I have a business Facebook fan page, a personal Facebook page, Instagram and Twitter, I tend to mix my comments among all of the above. I believe I am the brand of my business and that, by sharing everything that myself, my family and my staff are doing, I am creating an environment where my clients know who we are and love following the interaction and feeling a part of all that we do. Our clients feel very connected to our studio, partly due to my personal posts.

Image © Melanie Anderson



Above all, be real. What do I mean by that? I mean be yourself—the best part of yourself. It’s important that we are always on our best behavior. Be positive and encouraging with others. No one wants to be around a Debbie Downer. Show interest in others, be kind, generous, honest. Create an environment where you are approachable, where others feel they can confide in you, and where they know that you have their best interests at heart.

By showing interest and planting seeds, your business is bound to flourish. Here are ways you can advance your referral base.

1. Simply ask your clients to share your work with their family and friends. Give them permission and suggest they share on social media from your Facebook fanpage and Instagram when you post behind the scenes and final products.
2. Encourage them to take their own behind-the-scenes photos of their sessions. Ask them to post on social media, tag you and encourage others to contact your studio for all their portrait needs.
3. Ask about their friends and family. Find out who they think would be a great fit for your studio, and ask them to contact those people for permission for you to reach out to them to discuss their needs.
4. Give each of your clients five referral cards. Provide an offer of a print credit toward their purchase. Keep track of these cards and offer a special bonus or discount to the original client for helping to grow your business.

Create an environment in which you are their photographer for life!



Images © Melanie Anderson



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Image © Melanie Anderson

## ACTION PLANS

1. Ask every client how they heard about you.
2. Be proactive in your questions and answers. Find out where they work and who they know, which could lead to future opportunities.
3. Plant seeds. Let your clients know that you photograph other genres (if you do). If you are photographing a newborn, offer a baby plan and family portraits too.
4. Post positively on social media so that others feel like they are part of the journey. ■

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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](http://AndersonPhotographs.com).

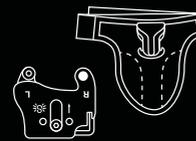
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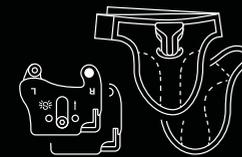


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Backlinko.com recently conducted a study that analyzed a million Google search results to find what factors correlated with first-page rankings. It looked at website content and back links, and calculated factors like site speed. (See the study at <http://backlinko.com/search-engine-ranking>.) Here is what the study concluded.

## 1. ---

The study confirmed that the number-one ranking factor was the number of domains (different websites) that linked to a page. This means the page with the most inbound links from different domains ranked the highest. Most natural inbound links are typically gained by creating quality content. Therefore, you could argue that creating quality content is the most important ranking factor.

## 2. ---

The data show that a website's overall link authority (as measured by Ahrefs.com) has a major effect on rankings. This means the links coming to your site need to be from quality websites (even better if their content is related to the same topic as yours). For instance, a site with 50 links from high-quality websites will rank better than a site with 500 links from low-quality websites. With that being said, be careful whom you acquire links from; a ton of links from poor websites can actually cause your site to drop in ranking. A good way to check this is to use a free domain name authority checker like <http://www.seoreviewtools.com/website-authority-checker/> to check the score of the site you are trying to get a link from. Make sure that websites linking to you have a page/domain authority score of at least 30 or more. Scores above 40 are good, and anything above 50 is excellent.

## 3. ---

Content rated as "topically relevant" ranked better than content that didn't cover a topic in depth. This means that webpages that focus on a single topic rank better than webpages that cover more broad subjects. For example, a webpage dedicated completely to panda bears with comprehensive, in-depth information would most likely rank higher for the search "panda bears" than a webpage dedicated to bears in general (even if the "general bear" article was on a higher domain authority site).

## 4. ---

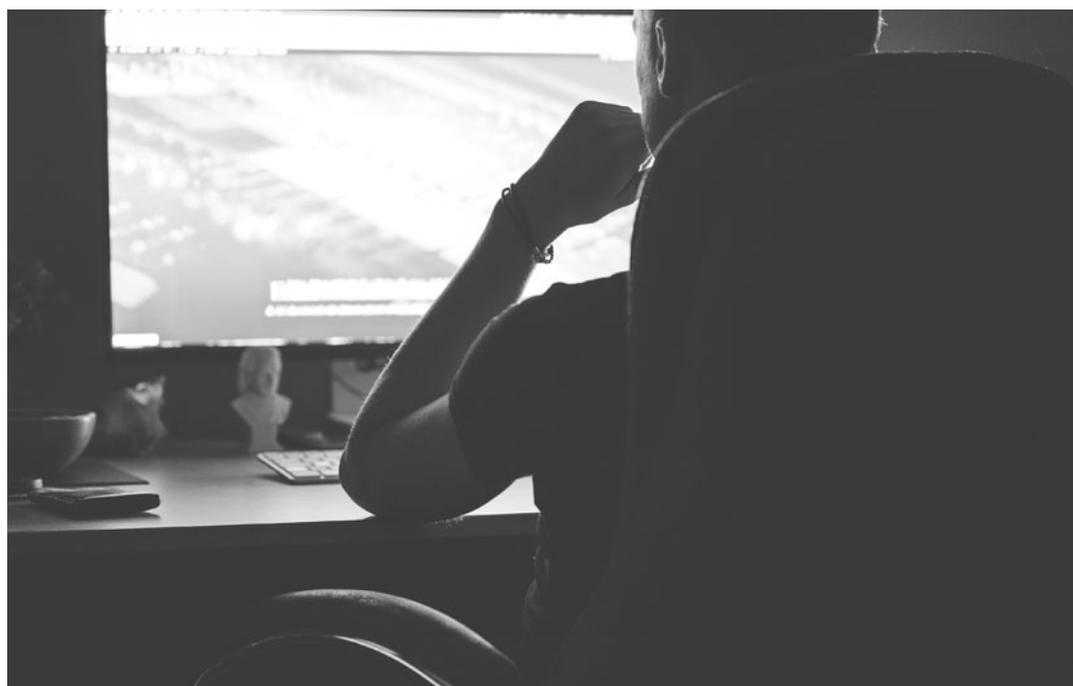
SERP data from SEMRush.com showed that longer content tends to rank higher. First-page results on Google had an average of 1,890 words. Keep in mind that this 1,890-word copy is most likely informative and not just filler or fluff.

## 5. ---

HTTPS gave websites a small boost in rankings. Google has been pushing for webmasters to make their site secure using https as opposed to just http. To do this, you have to purchase a SSL certificate, install it on your server and configure your website. It can be pretty labor intensive. Keep in mind that if you do this, all your URLs will change since Google sees <http://website.com> and <https://website.com> as two different pages. Therefore, you need to do proper permanent redirects to make the transition. Because it gives you only a minor boost in rankings, and because it takes time to transition it properly, don't make the switch unless your website is new or you are doing a complete redesign.

## 6. ---

SEO specialists have been pushing schema markup to make sites rank better for years, but this study proved it had no correlation with higher rankings. I wouldn't be surprised if Google doesn't add it to future algorithms. If you are interested in adding schema (also called structured data) to your website, you can use the Structured Data Markup Helper in Google's Search Console (previously called Webmaster Tools).



7.

Content with at least one image ranked significantly better than content with no images at all. Adding more than one image did not make any difference. This means any page or blog post you want to rank well needs at least one image in it. It is also a good SEO practice to name the photo properly and always add an alt tag. It also helps if the image is properly optimized for the web, and is the smallest file size possible.

8.

The study showed that “title tag keyword optimization” is starting to lose some of its strength. It is still extremely important to have well-written title tags using the proper length (50 to 60 characters), but it seems they are not as powerful as they used to be.

9.

Site speed matters. Based on data from Alexa.com, pages on fast-loading websites rank much better than pages on slow-loading sites. You can check your website speed at Google’s PageSpeed Insights inside Google’s Search Console and on other sites like <https://gtmetrix.com/>.

10.

“Exact match anchor text” still has a strong influence on rankings. Even though Google has warned website owners not to abuse exact match anchor text, with its multiple Penguin algorithm updates, it appears to still be an important ranking factor. Exact match anchor text means that an inbound link to your website is the exact targeted term you want for a search. For example, if you are a wedding photographer in Chicago and your number-one targeted search term is “Chicago wedding photographers,” then a link from another website to yours with the text “Chicago wedding photographers” is more powerful than something like “Click here to visit the website.” With all this being said, you don’t want all your inbound links to have the exact same anchor text, because Google will see this as spammy and will most likely penalize your site. More importantly, the exact match anchor text better be from very high-quality websites with strong domain authority and be used sparingly, or you would be messing with what Google tells users not to do. I would be very cautious and even reluctant to use exact match anchor text.

11.

Data from SimilarWeb.com showed that websites with low bounce rates ranked higher. This strongly suggests that Google is using user data to rank websites, which is a long-time theory among SEO specialists. A bounce rate is when someone does a search, visits your website and leaves without interacting with it at all—meaning they do not click anything on the page or visit any other pages on your site. Google does keep in mind that the user may have found what they were looking for on that one page and left. But an excessive bounce rate most likely signals that your website is subpar. Even worse than a high bounce rate is excessive pogo-sticking. Pogo-sticking is when someone does a search, visits a page, hits the Back button and continues searching. Too many pogo sticks, and Google will most likely start to demote your site’s ranking. ■



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

[visuallure.com](http://visuallure.com)



# final inspiration

photographer salvatore cincotta  
image title patience  
exposure f9.5 @ 1/640th, ISO 200  
lighting profoto b1, bare bulb  
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gear hasselblad h5d, hc50 II





# Mastering Portrait Lighting

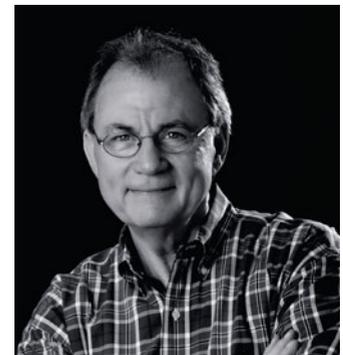
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