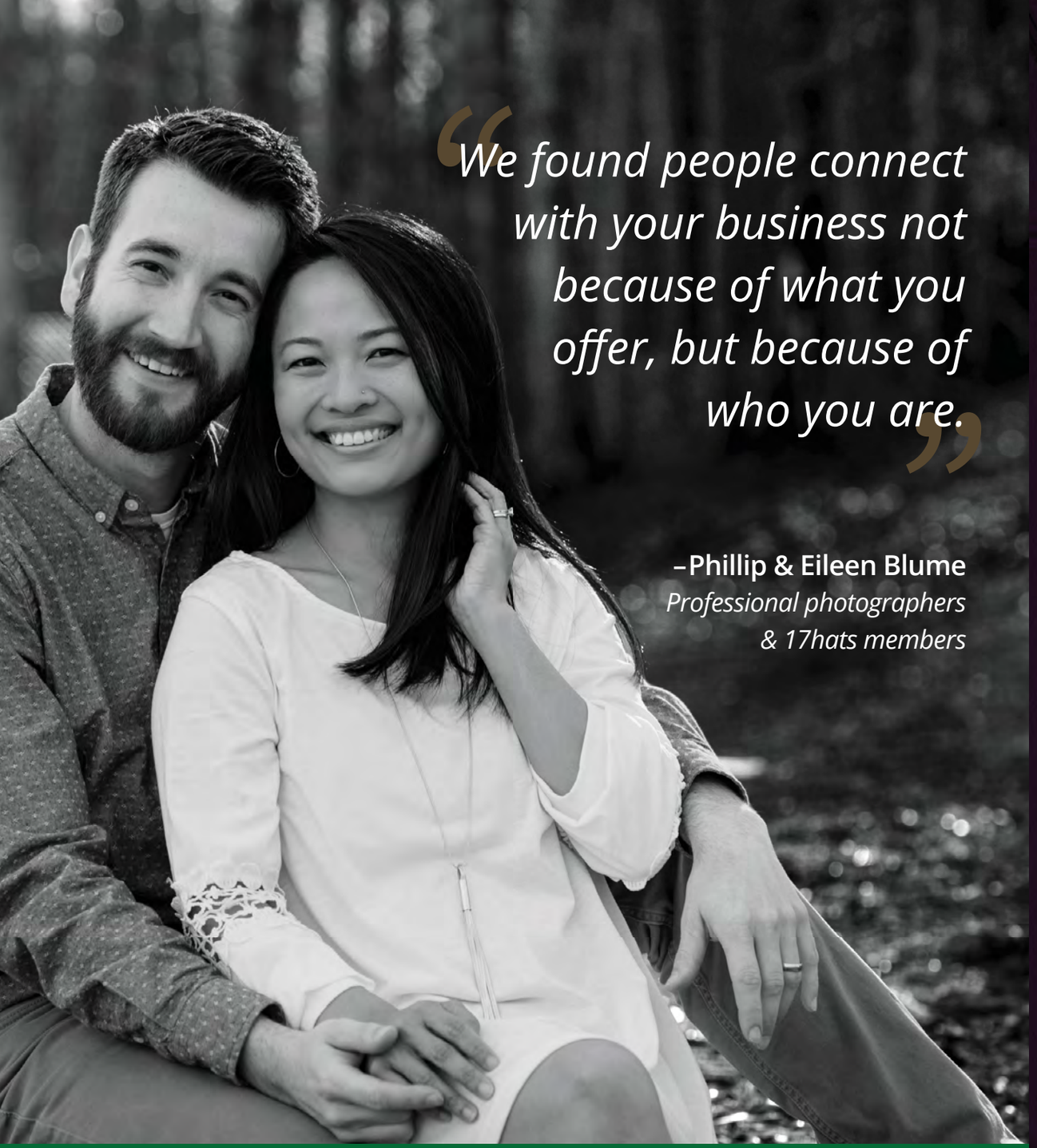


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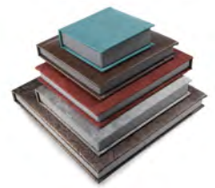
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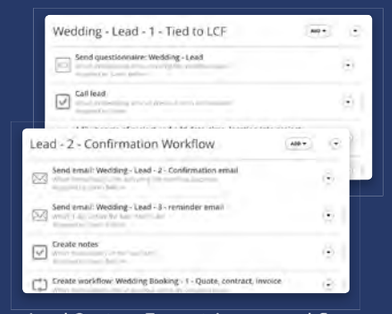
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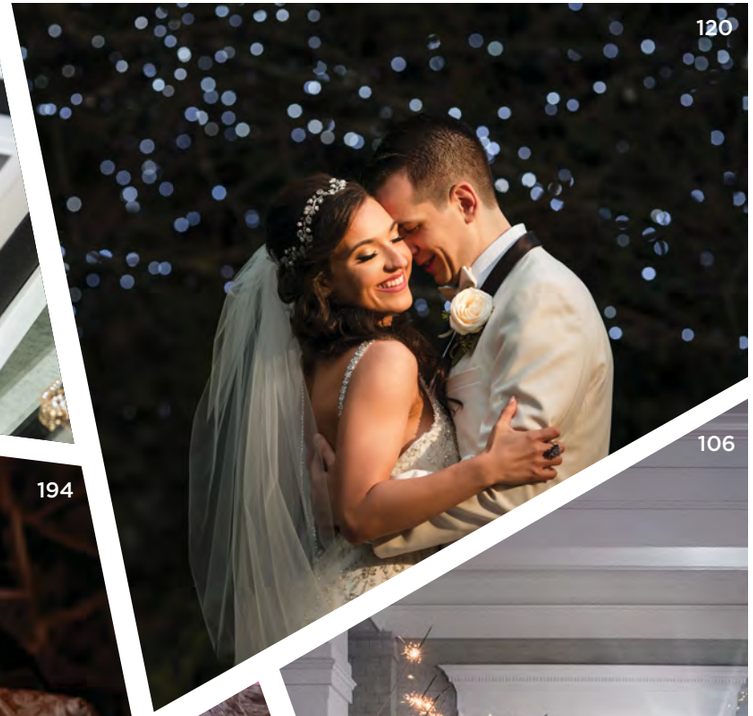
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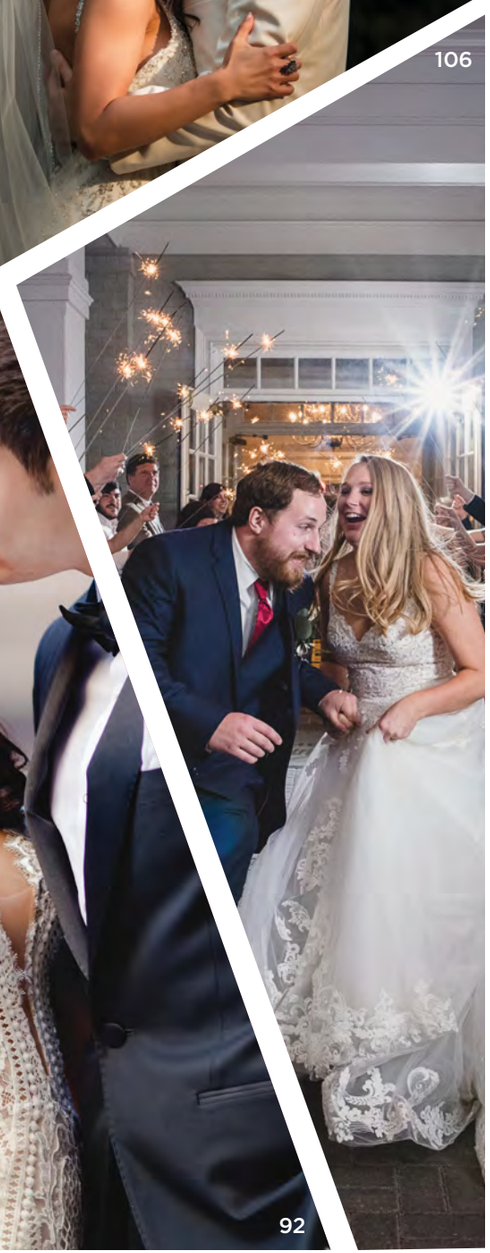












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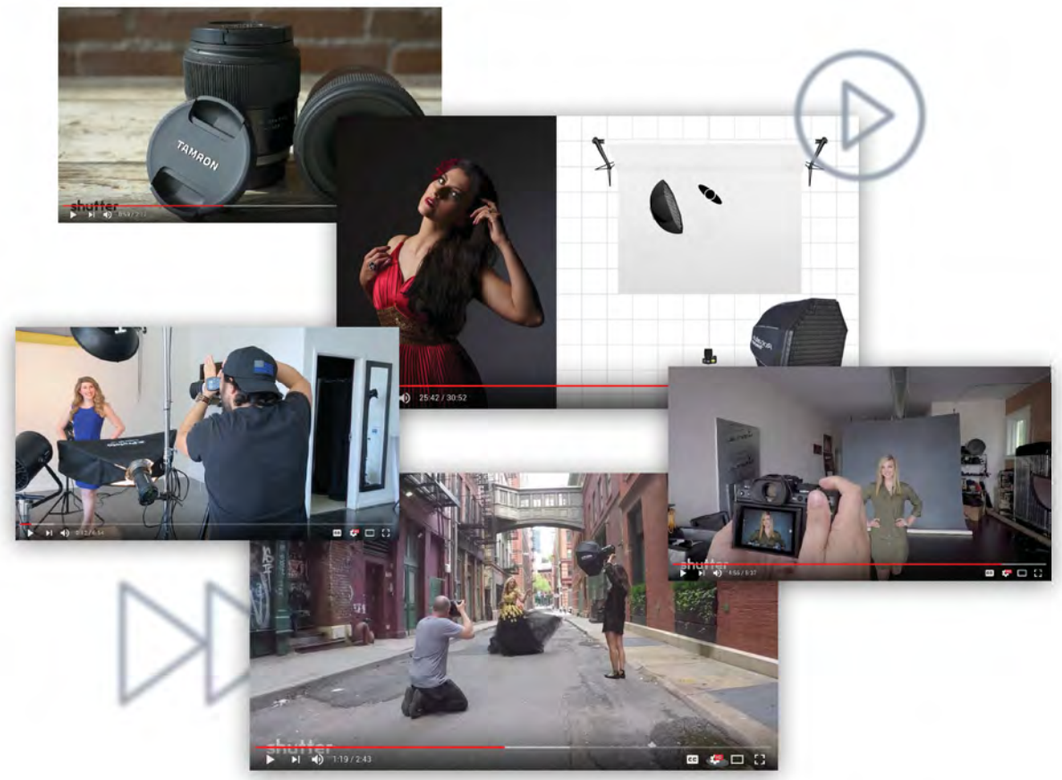
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Shutter Magazine's focus is on photography education. Our goal is to provide current, insightful and in-depth educational content for today's professional wedding and portrait photographer. *Shutter* uses the latest technologies to deliver information 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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PUBLISHER
Sal Cincotta

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Alissa Zimmerman

LEAD DESIGNER
Alicia Simpson

JR. DESIGNER
Ellie Plotkin

ACCOUNT SPECIALIST
Christine Gill

COPY EDITOR
Dylan Garity

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Vanessa Joy, Michael Anthony, Sal Cincotta, Skip Cohen, Jeff & Lori Poole, Christine Yodsukar, Alissa Zimmerman, Michael Corsentino, Susan Stripling, Dustin Lucas and Phillip Blume

In loving memory of Tom O'Connell, March 19, 2019.
Writer, adventure-seeker, and friend.
Thank you for the last six years on our team.
You will be forever missed.



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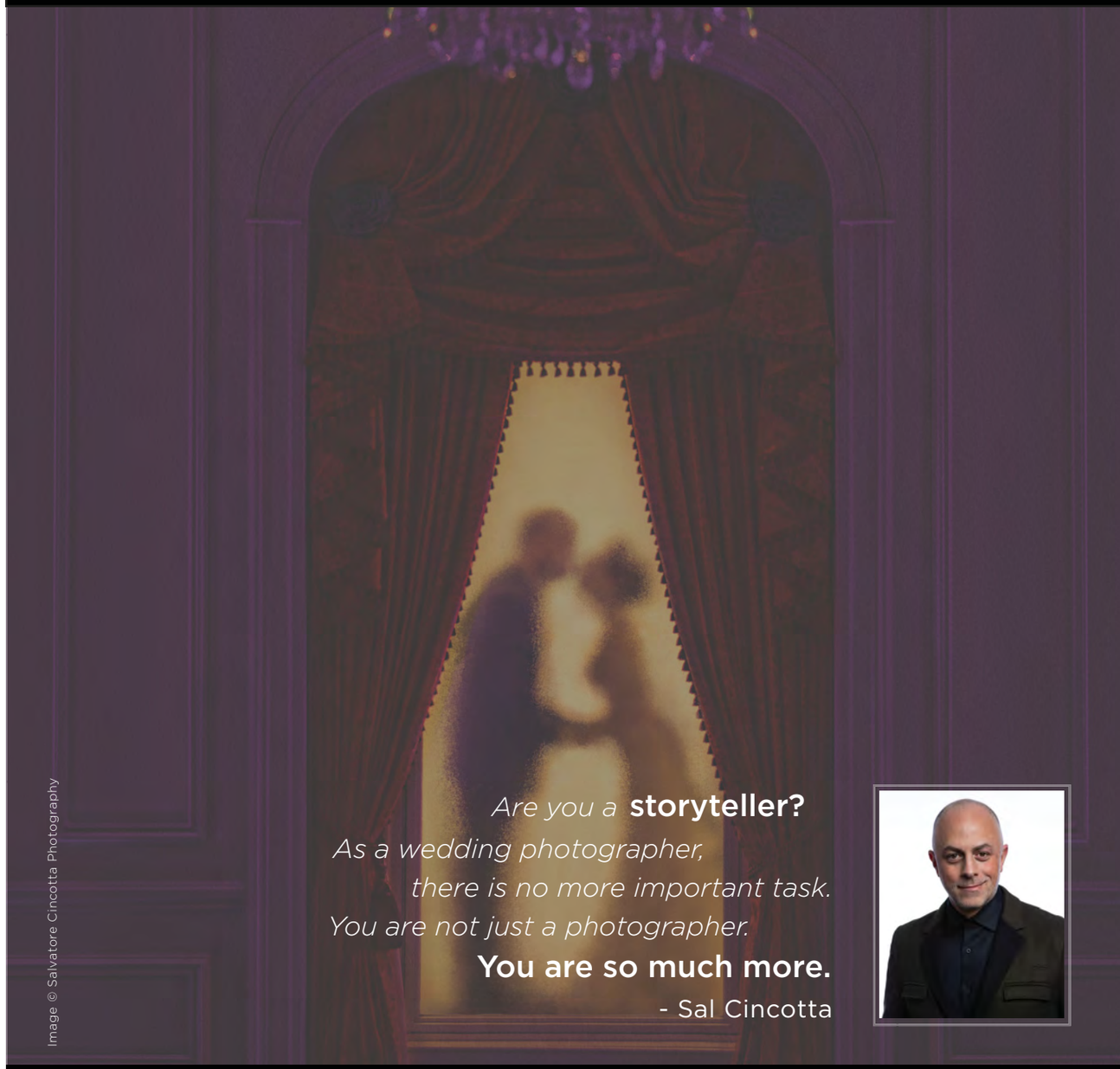
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LAUNCH **POINT**

A message from the publisher



THE $10,000 CHALLENGE

with **Christine Yodsukar**

Image © Christine Yodsukar

My friend and colleague Mike Allebach and I hosted a workshop together for a year and a half, during which we coached photographers through the wedding album in-person-sales process. Mike started a Facebook group alongside it in order to continue the conversations on everything we worked on in the workshop. Last January, we decided that it would be great to challenge everyone after one of the workshops to reach out to past wedding clients, use what we taught them, and get wedding albums into their clients' hands.

We called it the $10K Challenge: if you have ten clients from the past two years and sell each of them a $1,000 wedding album, you will have made an extra $10,000 that January. Or, if you have five past clients who never got albums, and you sell them each a $2,000 album, you'll have hit the $10K goal as well. Basically, the idea was to get resourceful during what can generally be a slow month in the wedding photography world, and show yourself that opportunity is everywhere. For the photographers that did it, they went on to be some of the most successful with wedding album IPS I've ever seen.

While May might not be a slow month for wedding photographers, and in fact it is probably one of the busier months, why not make an extra $10,000 this month?



Image © Christine Yodsukar



Image © Christine Yodsukar

STEP 1

The first thing you'll want to do with the $10K Challenge is to go back through your clients for the past two to three years. In my experience, the more recent they were, the more likely they'll be to want to purchase a wedding album; however, don't rule anyone out. Sometimes people surprise you with what they want and how much they are willing to invest into it. As you work back through your client list, pick out all of the clients who did not get a wedding album.

Once you have everyone's names pulled, you are then going to divide them into four groups and label them A through D. The A group is reserved for the couples you think will be the most excited to purchase a big, beautiful wedding album from you. In the B group, you will put names of couples who you think will be really excited to have a wedding album, but maybe the investment during the wedding was a difficult area for them, so purchasing a wedding album might be a little more difficult. Group C is for couples who you liked, but who were not very easy to work with or had some red flags that purchasing an album might not be on their to-do list. And lastly, group D are the couples who you don't think will purchase a wedding album because they don't value it at all, but you still like them and want the best for them.



Image © Christine Yodsukar

STEP 2

With your A group list ready to go, you are going to send an email letting them know that you would love to help them get their wedding album and that you've created a complimentary album design that you'd love to show them. You'll do this for each group, but the purpose of going group by group is so that if everyone does want an album (which could very well happen!), you don't end up overloading your workflow with a volume you're not used to, all in one week. Pace yourself so your customer service doesn't suffer.

In this email, it is helpful to acknowledge the fact that you are contacting them some time after their wedding, so that they are not left wondering, "Why now?" I suggest, at the beginning of the email, apologizing for not having helped them with their wedding album sooner. Explain to them that you now have the design skills and the systems to support providing them with the most amazing experience ever, and you'd love to guide them through this experience as well. Next, let them know that you've created a stunning complimentary wedding album design that you'd love to show them. Lastly, ask them if they have time for a quick phone call and give them two time-and-date options.

Send this email to the A group, wait a few days for responses, and then when your workflow has space, send the email to the B group, and so on.

STEP 3

You've just gotten some email replies—congratulations! This is the exciting part…and possibly the anxiety-inducing part, because now you have to sell. If they have responded with a time to have the phone call, you can move on to carrying out this step. Some people, though, will not want to talk on the phone, so they will ignore the part about the phone call and ask more questions via email or ask you to send them over the wedding album design. Remember, you are the one guiding them through this experience, so you do not have to say yes to every request. In fact, you should get very comfortable with saying no, so that you can give people the best experience possible.

When it comes time to have your call, the main purpose is two-fold. One, you want to re-establish their connection to their wedding. Talk about the things that happened on their wedding day. Bring those emotions back up, and ask them questions that help you understand what their favorite memories from the wedding are as well as what memories they wish were more vivid. Your second purpose of this call is to quote them on album pricing so that you can have a surprise-free design consultation later.

Once you have connected them back to their emotions of the wedding, start to talk about the album itself. Talk about how stunning it is, how substantial it is, and how every other couple loves it so much. Mention your pricing, and let them know that you're going to design a big album that includes all of their wedding day memories.

Bonus Tip: Make sure to ask them at the beginning of the call what they did with their wedding photos. Most of the time, couples have not done anything more than printing a few 4x6 prints. Your reaction to that should be along the lines of, "Oh my goodness! I can't believe I left you to try to figure that out on your own. You're going to love your album when you get it now!"





Images © Christine Yodsukar





Images © Christine Yodsukar



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STEP 4

Now that you have connected them back to their emotions from the wedding and quoted them over the phone, it's time to set a date for their wedding album design consultation. It is important to pick a date and have everyone put it into their calendars while you're still on that initial phone call. After the call, I like to follow up with an email that confirms their design consultation appointment and gives them exciting information about how wonderful and helpful the consultation will be. I set their expectations about what to expect and what the meeting will be like, briefly revisit the base album pricing I mentioned on the phone, and let them know that at the end of the meeting, they will be paying in full for the album they are ordering.



Image © Christine Yodsukar

STEP 5

Now, you get to host your wedding album design consultation, showing them a big, beautiful album design, and helping them edit it to be perfect for their needs. Quote them the price for the final design they have created, and take their payment. Don't forget to have them sign an artwork agreement before leaving the design consultation approving the design and payment terms. This workflow works for both in-person and virtual wedding album sales.

Last but not least, celebrate how much fun it was to serve your clients, get a stunning wedding album into their hands, and get money you did not expect this month into your business bank account! ■

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Christine hails from Boston and currently splits her live/work/play time between Los Angeles, Portland, Oregon, and the rest of the world. Along with her husband and business partner, she took her wedding business from $100 weddings to a six-figure income in three years. She's passionate about sharing her knowledge and can be seen frequently on WeTV as a wedding photography expert.

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HIP-HOP PORTRAITS

with **Michael Corsentino**



Image © Michael Corsentino

Whether in the studio or on location, creating great portraits starts with your vision for the images. This is known as pre-visualization—"pre" because no images have been captured at that point, and "visualization" because whatever concept you have in mind is what you hope to produce. This all takes planning and creating a road map to realize your pre-visualized ideas.

Once your pre-visualized concept is locked in, the next step is choosing the right tools, techniques and props necessary to get there. That means the lighting, location and background, wardrobe, and hair and makeup. All these elements need to be consistent with and in support of the pre-visualized concept.

For this series of hip-hop-inspired black-and-white portraits, I wanted a dramatic, moody, high contrast look. In the studio, nothing says drama like a black background. My concept was all about black on black—black skin, black wardrobe, on a black background. Lit properly, this monochromatic palette would isolate, elevate and highlight the subject in a punchy, dramatic way. Lit poorly, everything would merge into a flat, black blob. To keep this from happening, to separate the subject from the background and maintain detail in the wardrobe, the lighting design needed to be just right. With black skin, black hair, and black clothing on a black background, the lighting is all about separating the subject from the background and holding detail in the clothing and shadows.

Some people just look the part, and Vlad is definitely one of them. Despite the fact that he isn't a hip-hop star, he easily could be! So we set out to create a series of rap- and hip-hop-inspired portraits. Naturally, we had a killer hip-hip playlist accompanying the shoot to set the mood in the studio. I always shoot with music; many subjects bring their own or select their favorites on the studio iPad. Wardrobe and styling direction were communicated prior to the shoot, and Vlad showed up with a range of options. I knew that I wanted all black for the black-on-black effect and that I wanted smoke to play a role—Vlad always has a cigarette hanging off his lip, and I wanted the white of the smoke as a counterpoint to all the black happening in the images. I also requested eyeglasses, sunglasses, jewelry, and any hats Vlad liked.



Image © Michael Corsentino



Image © Michael Corsentino

My preferred method is building lighting one light or lighting zone at a time. In this capture, taken as I was setting up and refining the lighting, you see only the light being contributed by the key light, a Mola Demi silver interior beauty dish. The key light is the foundation that any additional lights will build on. While the result is pleasing, it's also rather flat and one-dimensional. To remedy this for the next step, I'll add kicker lights behind the subject on the left- and right-hand sides.



Image © Michael Corsentino

Here you see the result of adding two kicker lights behind the subject, one on the left and one on the right. These two accent lights separate the subject from the background, adding depth and dimension absent with only the key light. Note Vlad's beard, cheeks and shoulders. They now pop off the background rather than blending into it



Image © Michael Corsentino

For me, lighting is always a problem-solving exercise. Even with a solid plan in place, issues and curveballs often crop up. The expected result from your plan may need tweaking—mine often does! Good lighting requires an open, inquisitive mind and the ability to adapt on the fly. I'm continuously refining as I work toward the final lighting solution. Solving these issues is kind of like solving puzzles—if you like one you'll like the other.

My plan for the key light was a strobe with a Mola Demi silver interior beauty dish. The highly polished interior of this reflector does something really special to black skin by imparting a beautiful specular quality and beauty-dish sizzle, perfect for these portraits. To create the separation I wanted from the background and add highlights to the left and right side of Vlad's face, I added a strip box with a 30-degree egg-crate grid. These were placed behind where Vlad would be standing, on the left and right side, both opposite the key light. The reason I used grids on these "kicker" lights was two-fold. First, both lights would be facing the camera, and grids help keep light on the subject and out of the camera's lens. Second, grids confine the light into a narrow, defined beam, allowing you to light more precisely. In this case, they allowed me to throw a narrow, vertical shaft of light onto the left and right sides of the subject.

I chose f/16 for my aperture setting (my usual suspect in the studio), 100 ISO, and 1/125-second shutter speed. Remember, in the studio with flash, shutter speed is essentially immaterial. In most cases, you set your shutter speed at your camera's max sync speed and leave it there for the entirely of the shoot. In the studio, it's all about f-stop and flash power. This is why a flash meter is such a useful tool. With a handheld flash meter, you dial in the same setting you have on your camera and measure the strobe output until it matches those settings. If the meter reads f/22, you dial down the power of the strobe until it meters, in this case, f/16. What's cool about this is once that's done, your first exposure is spot on, zero guesswork. Then you can noodle and season to taste. So my first step is always metering! I start with the key light only and then add in additional zones. I meter the kicker lights to match the key light at f/16. This is higher than I typically meter accent lights, but I started there and I liked the look for these portraits.



Image © Michael Corsentino

To reduce light coming into the camera's lens and causing flare, I employed a 30-degree egg-crate grid on each strip box being used as a kicker light. This worked well on tight shots, but as you can see here, wider captures were plagued by flare from the kicker lights. To fix this issue, I simply added a black-faced 4'x8' v-flat on each side of the subject to block the light from the kickers from entering the camera's lens.

With lights dialed in, we began shooting. I started with tight portraits and really liked the result. You can see from the step-by-step images included here what a dramatic difference adding the kicker lights made over using the key light alone. Without the kicker lights, everything blends together and there's virtually no separation between the subject and the background or the subject's beard and clothing.



14"x35" Elinchrom strip boxes were used as kicker lights on the left and right of the subject to create separation and dimension. Each was outfitted with a 30-degree egg-crate grid to create a narrow shaft of light and keep light out of the camera lens. For wider captures, v-flats were used to block the light from the kickers from the camera.



Images © Michael Corsentino



Images © Michael Corsentino

In this BTS image, you see the camera, key light and reflector position. Note the large black panels to the left and right—these are known as v-flats and were used to block the kicker lights from contaminating the exposure.

Color grading is an important element in my work. I typically create a color grade at the beginning of each shoot once all the lighting is dialed in. In this way, I can assess the results as I shoot. Color grading is the finishing touch—it adds mood and drama, and elevates images to the next level. In this image you see the color straight out of the camera with no color grading applied.



When I switched lenses for wider head-and-shoulders shots, that curveball I mentioned above reared its ugly head, as it always does. In this case, the kicker lights were now contaminating the exposure, creating unwanted lens flare. This was because now, with the wider field of view, the lights were pointed into the lens. To remedy this, I added two 4'x8' black-faced v-flats, one on either side of Vlad to block the kicker lights from the camera's lens. This way, they were still able to create the lighting effect I wanted without contaminating the exposure. You can see their position relative to the kicker lights in the step-by-step images.





Images © Michael Corsentino

Creating a black-and-white conversion was the first step in the color-grading process. Despite its name, for me the term color grading also applies to black-and-white conversions, which are based on tone rather than color. In this instance, I did add a color overlay as well in the next and final step in creating the color grade for these portraits.

For the next and final step in creating the color grade for these portraits, I added a cool blue-tone color overlay. This color grade was created using a combination of Capture One Styles (like Lightroom Presets) from Phase One's new Editorial Style Packs.

Once the lighting is dialed in, I also create a color grade for the shoot. In this case, I started with a black-and-white conversion and then added a cool blue-tone overlay to give the color grade its finishing touch. I created the color grade using one of Phase One's Editorial Style Packs for Capture One Pro. The styles are akin to Lightroom Presets. I like to create a color grade at the beginning of the shoot so I can better assess its effect on the lighting in real time and make any adjustments necessary. Check out the three before-and-after color grading images to see the progression. ■

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

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If you aren't already feeling the heat of wedding season, it's time to wake up and get ready! Before you know it, you'll be up all night editing in October, wondering why all the issues you had last year are now hitting you in the face. There's no better time than now to revitalize your workflow and prepare for the worst, because it's coming. If you aren't using Lightroom to battle your wedding volume and deadlines, this is the time to jump ship. You can learn this program quite quickly, and with these tips you can build a foundation around a sound workflow.

Once you wrap up your wedding and start your post-shoot ritual of some wine, some crying and a little sleep, it's time to get on the computer and get to work.

It starts with importing from your memory card(s). Luckily, you can do everything in one place. I recommend one catalog for your 2019 work to keep everything organized. Don't worry about speed, because we're building Smart Previews, and this is just a catalog for archiving completed work, so we'll get into that later.

Setting performance-based preferences is essential, as well as prepping previews for culling. When culling images in Lightroom it helps to remove visual distractions and go completely lights-out. Then we can custom sort and fix the capture time sync. If you aren't using Develop presets, the time is now! Presets aren't the end-all, be-all solution—you have to adjust the sliders per image, and it helps to shoot in manual mode. Three-step editing involves making samples, using the Match Total Exposure tool, and syncing your Develop settings to sequences of images for that consistent look and feel.

Moving on to the more attention-to-details aspect of Lightroom, I use Target Adjustment Tools for Color. Photoshop is required on some images you'll want to show off creatively, and the "Edit In" feature makes this seamless to toggle between. Cropping and straightening can be tedious, of course, so it helps to shoot straight in camera.

Fortunately, I have a quick and painless way to fly through your images. And last but not least is exporting the easy way, using presets! OK, enough talking about it—let's dive into our 4,000+-image wedding.

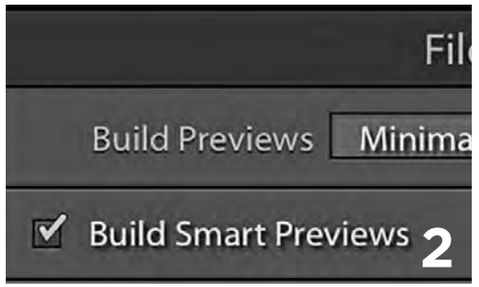
TIP #1: INGEST, IMPORT AND BUILD SMART PREVIEWS IN LIGHTROOM

First things first, you need to create a 2019 Master Lightroom catalog to import into. I recommend starting in a single catalog for archiving closed sessions, and then working in individual ones for open clients. This will make more sense later. Once you have Lightroom open, go to the import module to ingest raw files from your memory cards into the program. Now, many of you might be importing from multiple memory cards and get annoyed to have to repeat this process with each card. Well, there is a trick to selecting multiple cards at once if you have a multi-card reader. Instead of selecting one card at a time under Devices, expand each card under Files and be sure to check the Include Subfolders option at the top. Boom, now you can import all your images at once. (1)

Doing this requires setting a backup and destination location as well as a folder-naming structure. I recommend creating these folders outside Lightroom so the folder names can be identical for the backup and destination drives. This is important for when you end up needing to relink files due to hard-drive failure. Renaming your files is especially key if you are importing duplicate file names from different cards, so you can keep things organized from the start. It helps to set this up in camera with file naming and syncing capture time to avoid extra work in your post-production process.

Moving on to setting previews at import can be a tricky decision. Here is what I recommend: set Build Previews to Minimal, and check the Build Smart Previews box. (2) I want the copying, importing and building of previews to be as fast as possible. I don't want to wait 12 hours for 1:1 previews to build, despite them being recommended by many. This workflow is simple: Import into a master catalog for archiving, and export individual catalogs to work in.


1

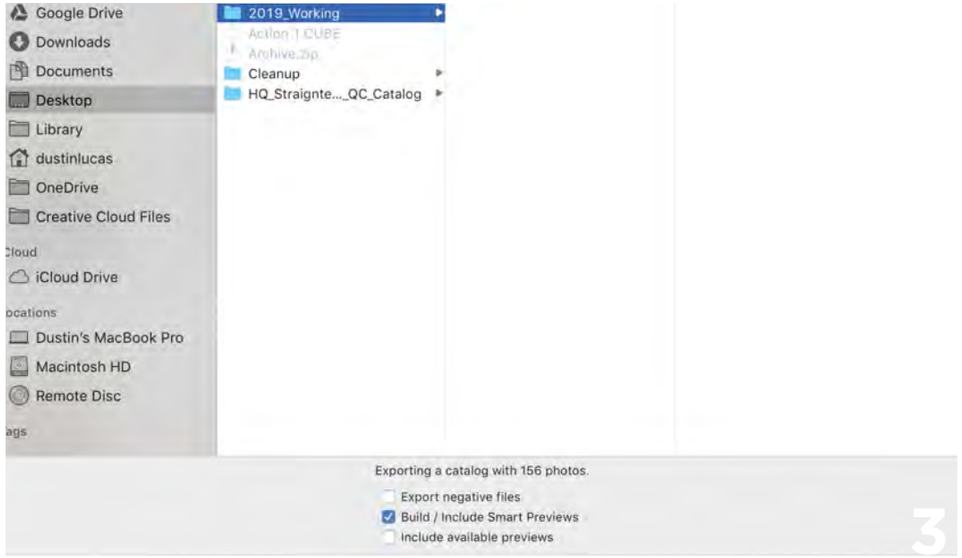


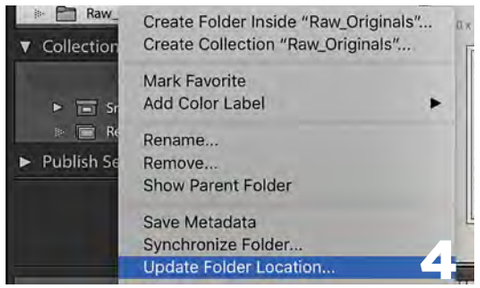
2

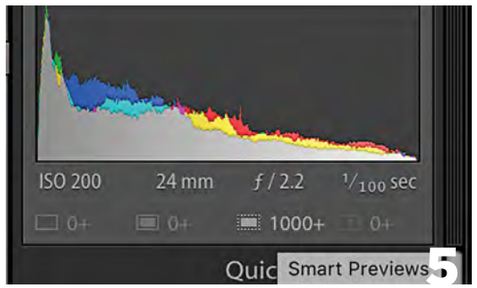
TIP #2: EXPORT A NEW CATALOG, SET PREFERENCES AND BUILD STANDARD PREVIEWS BEFORE YOU CULL

Now that the files are imported and Smart Previews are built, we can export these files as a new catalog. The best place for the catalogs to be loaded is on your local hard drive, while you keep your raw files on external drives. To do this, select all files in Library/Grid mode, go to the top menu bar, and click File > Export as catalog. The Save As name should be the event date/name. Then, make a folder on your desktop called "2019_Working" and select this folder as the destination. Next, and most importantly, only check the Build/Include Smart Previews option to ensure you package all the necessary files for culling. Once you click Export Catalog, this process is quite quick to finish, since we built the Smart Previews at import. (3)

Next, we need to open the newly exported catalog, disconnect the raw files and set preferences. To disconnect your raw files, you can either eject your external hard drive or simply update the folder location. To update the folder location in Lightroom, you must be in Library. You can then drop down the Folders panel on the left side, right click on the listed folder, and choose Update Folder Location. (4) From the pop-up box, select the desktop and click Choose to quickly disconnect the raw files from the catalog. You will know this was done effectively once all the images populate under the histogram, showing Smart Previews only. Now, let's check out our Lightroom & Catalog Preferences. (5)





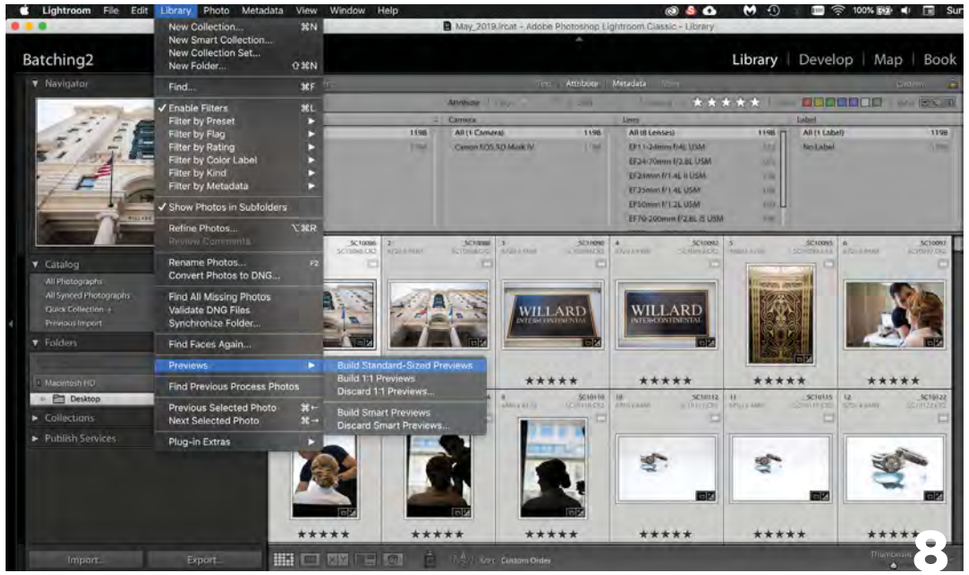


In general preferences, we can go to the Performance tab and copy the settings shown here. (6) Then click the Go to Catalog Settings button and go to the File Handling tab. When culling, it is important to think about how often you'll be zooming into 1:1 or 100%. If this is important to you, then skip this altogether and build 1:1 previews from the start (and be ready to wait a long time to start working). That's not what I want to do, so instead, let's choose the setting shown here for a fast rendering. (7) In Library, select all files and go to the top menu bar to choose Library > Previews > Build Standard-Sized Previews. This process is quick and will save you time when you start culling image by image. (8)

Prepping in this manner is essential to saving time when working in Lightroom.







TIP #3: LIGHTS OUT CULLING

Finally, it's time to cull out the bad shots and keep the good ones. We need to be in Loupe View to see each image in full view to start. To enlarge an image without zooming in, you can hold Shift while striking the Tab key to make all the panels go away.

Now, we are ready to go into Lights Out mode. To do this, you can strike the L key twice to darken your screen. This allows us to focus on the best-of-the-best shots. (9) Along with this tip, I recommend using the Auto Advance option—just press Caps Lock to initiate it. What this does is, when you apply an attribute like a flag, a star rating, a color label, etc., it advances to the next image automatically. This is a massive time saver when having to go through over 4,000 images, because very second counts.

A few keyboard shortcuts for applying flags are X (rejected flag), U (unflag) and P (flag). Another tip is to use the ~ key to toggle flag and unflag. Star ratings are great if you want to create a multi-layered system for selection for specific edits. These can be applied simply by striking the 1-5 number keys. The number of stars correlates to the number used. You can hit 0 to reset the star ratings. Numbers 6-9 are for color labels, which can add another dimension to sorting. Let's move onto Custom Sorting with Tip #4. (10)

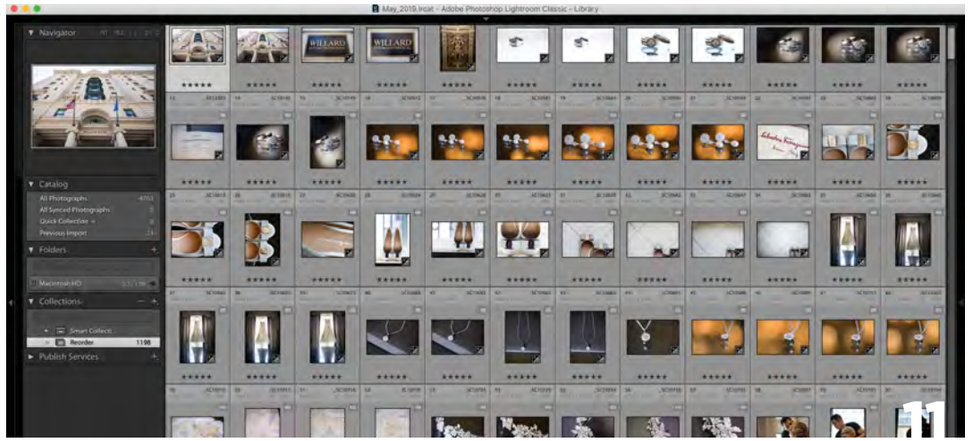


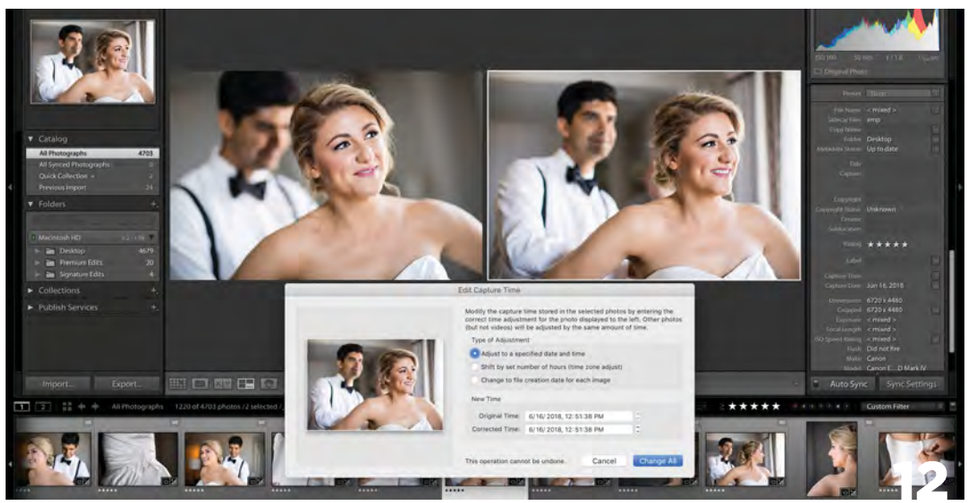


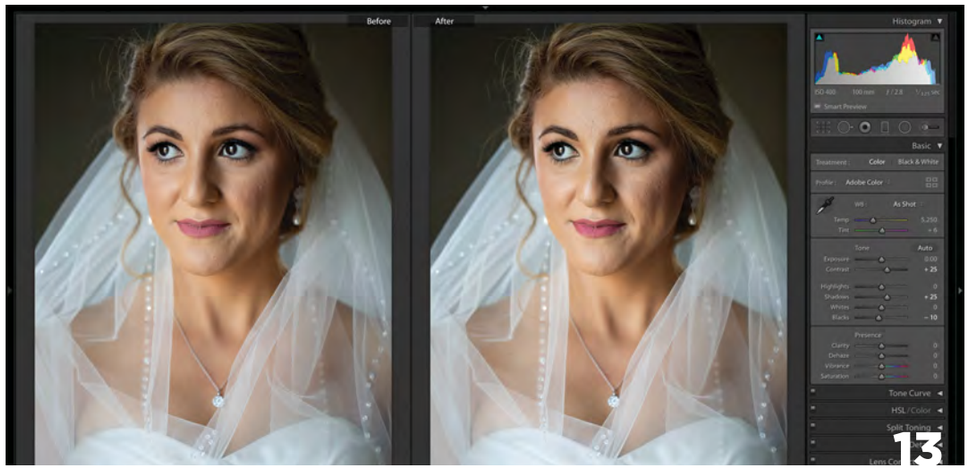
TIP #4: CUSTOM SORT AND SYNC CAPTURE TIME

Custom sorting can really help tell the story of the day when you're using multiple cameras and not shooting at the same time. In order to change the order of your images, select all in Library and create a Collection. Once your images are in a collection, you can click and move them as you see fit. I like to start with details for the bride, getting ready, then groom details, getting ready, and then first look and the rest of the day fall into place. Hotel venue shots and rings together are a nice touch to start off with as well. (11)

Syncing Capture Time should be done in camera at the start of the day; however, this doesn't always happen. As a workaround, you can simply take a photo of your cell phone with the date and time showing, which makes syncing in Lightroom super simple. Without this, you have to find a unique moment like the first look or kiss at the altar between all cameras. Typically, you would want to do this before culling as well. Choose a camera for the date and time, and sync the others to it. To do this, filter to the specific serial number of a camera, select all the images, go to Library in the Metadata panel to the right, and click Change Time. (12)





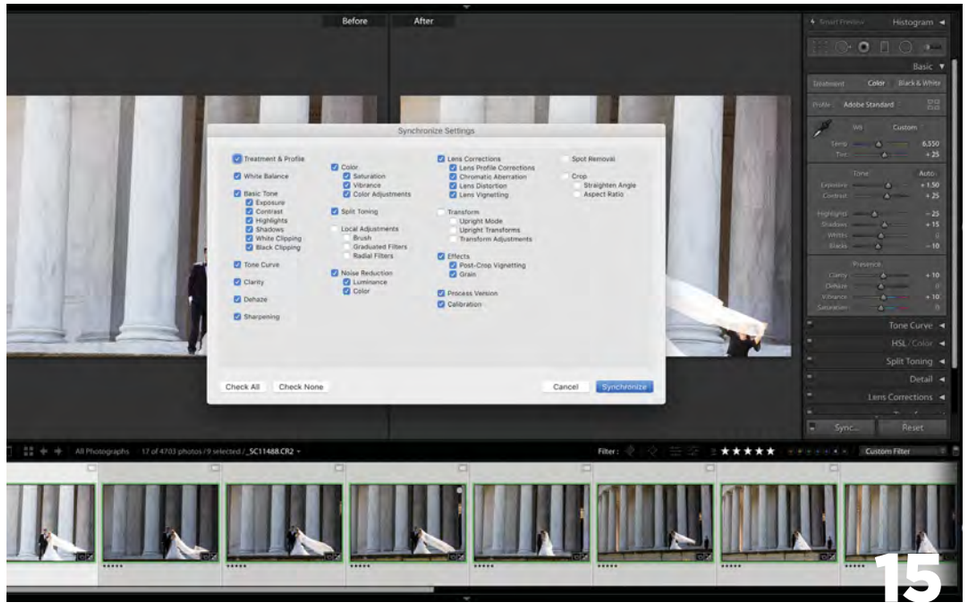




TIP #5: PRESETS, PRESETS, PRESETS

I cannot stress how much time I save using presets in Lightroom. You can create a preset easily by applying a few Develop slider adjustments like these here, then hold Shift and Command, and strike the N key. This is the starting point for all my images, and I'll make little tweaks to exposure and white balance as I go through the catalog. (13) This is how I am able to move through 1,200 images in less than three hours. I also apply additional corrective and creative presets to make editing fast and accurate—things like boosting the color in the sky with an HSL shift in blues, or desaturating the greens for outdoor portraits and applying Color Profiles for some cool effects. (14)

What makes my editing really efficient is I can apply presets at import or in Library after I am done culling. I even make them for lens corrections when I want to fix distortion but keep the vignettes, which requires you to apply the fix on a per-lens basis. Of course, this is very interpretive, but it's something I like to control. Moving on to editing sequences of images, let's look at the Match Total Exposure tool and the Sync settings in Develop.

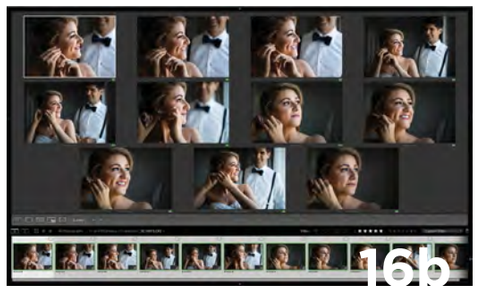


TIP #6: MATCH TOTAL EXPOSURE AND SYNC DEVELOP SETTINGS

Shooting in manual mode and controlling exposure compensation allows me to fix a single image in Develop, select the entire sequence, and sync settings across all of them to maintain consistency. This is great if you shoot this way, and ideally you want to, but we all know priority shooting is popular and helps get the shots 90% of the time. (15) Aperture priority is popular, as well as shooting manual with auto ISO, and we know how images vary in the same light depending on exposure metering in camera. This brings Match Total Exposure into play to quickly dial in brightness.

Instead of blanketing the same slider exposure setting to multiple frames that are brighter and darker, the Match Total Exposure tool auto adjusts based on the histogram. This is a really accurate tool when you are shooting the same composition and the lighting starts to change, causing variance in your exposures. This works really well for formal portraits as well as for window portraits where the sunlight shifts ever so slightly. (16ab) Both of these really help keep my per-image time down as I work image to image. Let's get dialed in with color on this next tip.

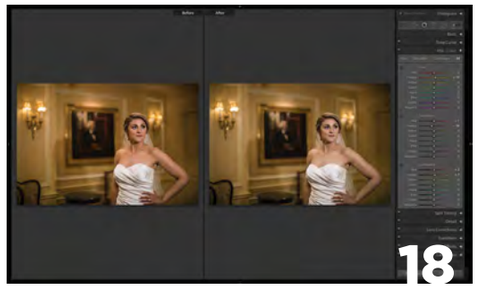




TIP #7: TARGET ADJUSTMENT TOOL FOR DIALING IN COLOR

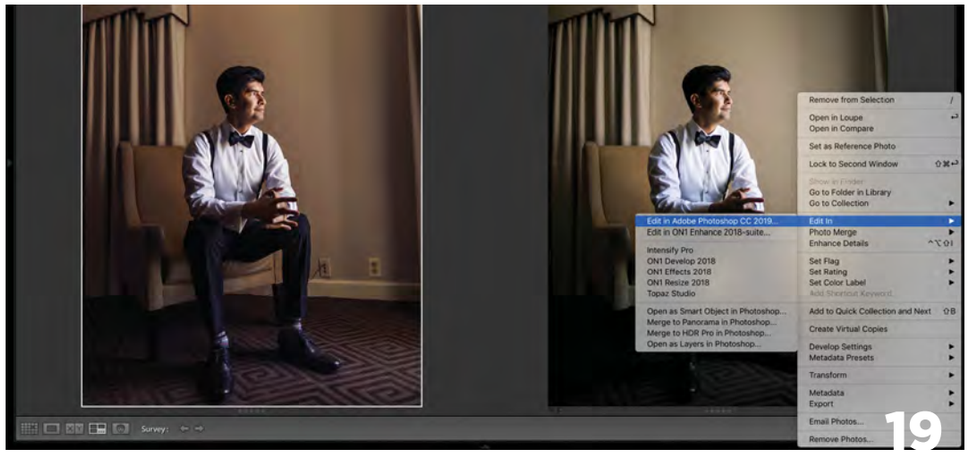
Using the Target Adjustment Tool really makes removing color casts simple, and that's exactly what I need. It's easy to identify the blues in the dress and suit, and then we can hold Shift, Option, and Command, and strike the S key to open the Saturation tool. Once you click and drag down, the saturation is dropped in the sample color. (17) Boom, this is too easy. Keep in mind that this is a slider tool and it will affect these colors throughout the entire image, so watch for turning blue suits to dark grey. This is great for cooling down skin and reducing redness quite quickly, and you can then sync color adjustments across multiple images. I recommend adding this to the starting point if a bride is overly orange to start. (18)

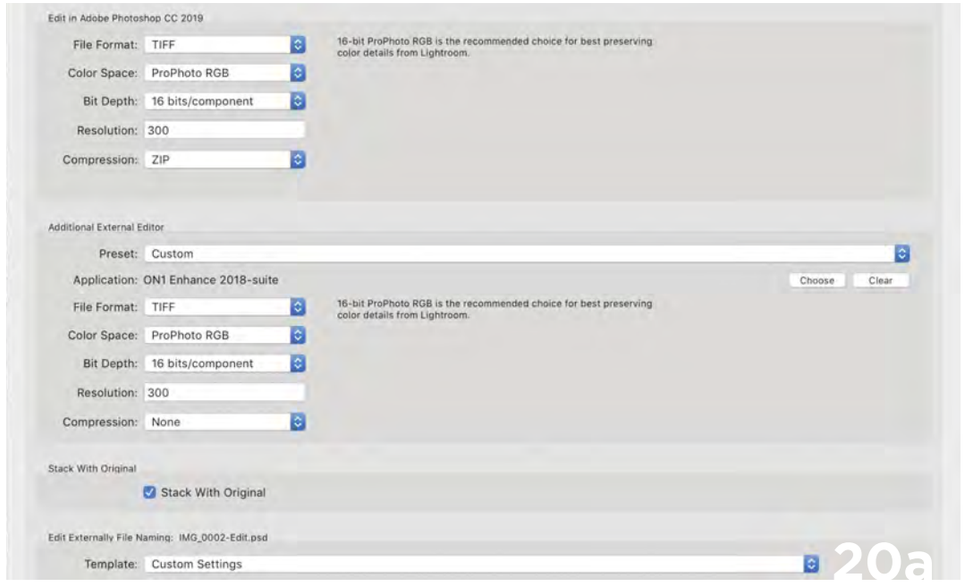




TIP #8: CREATE & ORGANIZE CREATIVE EDITS

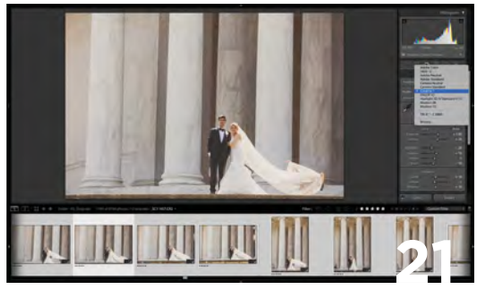
You can seamlessly open images in Photoshop, apply your adjustments, and save them back into your catalog in one fell swoop. In Develop, you can select an image or even a few, hold the Command key while striking the E key to save a copy of the image(s), and start working in Photoshop. Once you finish, you can save and close the images, and they'll automatically save in front of your original raw file. (19) This makes it simple to then collapse all stacks so the creative edit is the only one visible in the catalog. You can also select a preference to stack with the original so that this happens automatically when using the External Editor feature. (20ab)







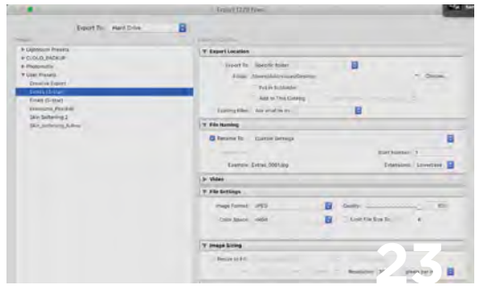
This makes organizing your creative edits simple as well. If you want to stay in Lightroom, of course you can export LUTs from Photoshop and create a Custom Color Profile in Lightroom. I highly recommend exploring these, since you can quickly apply profiles to multiple images just as fast as with a preset. (21) This would take too much time to do in Photoshop image by image. In this case, you can choose to create a virtual copy for the color image and keep the creative as the master photo. Cropping and straightening can be such a pain, but it's simple to move image-to-image in Develop.





TIP #9: QUICK CROPS AND STRAIGHTEN YOUR HORIZON

From the Library or Develop modes, you can strike the R key to open the cropping tool. Then, it's all about holding the Command key to click, draw a line for straightening, and then arrow right to the next image. (22) This is a simple technique, but important to allow you to fly through 1,000+ images in no time. Of course, shooting straight in camera will save you the most time, but we all know that's easier said than done.





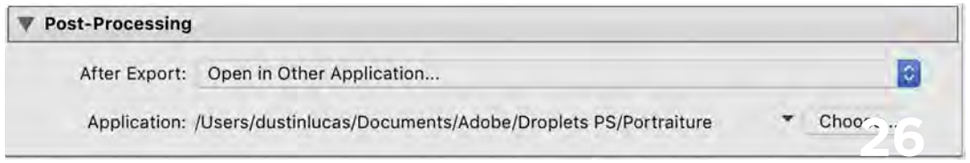
TIP #10: EASY EXPORTING

The first step to quickly exporting your files is to create export presets to keep things consistent for rendering. You can create dimension-based ones for online proofing, like restricting resolution and assigning color space. (23) I even create naming conventions so the files are renamed for the clients with the event date tied in. (24) Beyond this, we can run Portraiture in Photoshop along with adding an output sharpening layer to all our images after export as well.

We will need to create a droplet in Photoshop that will call a specific action to play and save it to each image exported. (25) Then we can set up our export preset to apply Post-Processing. After export, open in Other Applications, and choose the droplet you made. This will make applying skin softening and sharpening to your proofs simple. You can set it to export and walk away while it runs on all your images. (26)

Once we close out the client, we need to import this catalog back into the master archive catalog we made at the beginning. Just open the master catalog in Library mode and drag and drop the working catalog you just completed. (27) Boom, we're ready for our client preview!







THE RESULTS

Now keep in mind, you may want to retouch a few images and showcase a few epic creatives to drive some sales in your war room. This is normal to do before the preview, as the clients have to see an example of a high-end edit to entice them to buy wall art. In the end, you need to shave off as much time as possible to get the images back to your client as quickly as possible. You want to book their previews no more than two weeks from the wedding—this makes a huge difference. Take these tips and make the change this year. You won't regret it. There is no reason to fear October, you've got this! ■





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.

evolveedits.com



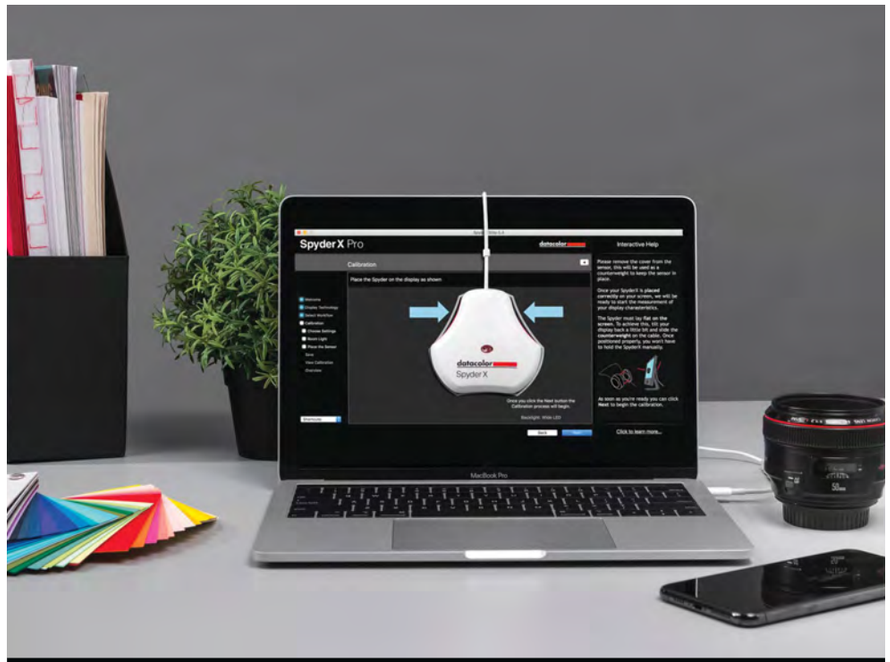
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product spotlight

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Why the Datacolor SpyderX Elite?

If you are not calibrating your monitor, how can you possibly expect accurate color? The number of photographers I see who don't do this simple thing is mind-boggling to me. This is a simple thing to do, and it will have immediate results on the color of your images.



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4. SEE THE DIFFERENCE INSTANTLY: The SpyderProof feature provides before-and-after evaluation of your display with full-screen images including your own. SoftProof and Device Simulation allow you to preview how images will print on different printers or appear on different mobile or tablet devices.

5. MONITOR TECHNOLOGIES CHANGE AND IMPROVE OVER TIME: Your calibrator should be at least as new as your displays to ensure support of the screen technologies involved. SpyderX Elite assures you of support for recent resolutions, gamuts and screen types.

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THE WEDDING EDITION

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Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

STOP BEING *Average*

with **Sal Cincotta**



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

Are you an average photographer? Offering average service? Average pictures? Average response times? Average products?

Regardless of what you might think, the math might not agree with you on this. Most importantly, your clients might not agree either. Take a look at your bank account. Sorry to break it to you, but above average and superior businesses are rarely lacking sales.

It is always laughable to me how many photographers, and business owners for that matter, will bitch and complain about how broke they are. These are the same people who are half-assing their way through life. Look, I'm sorry you needed to stop by this article to have the news broken to you, but if you want success, it is 100 percent out there for you to go and grab by the balls. You have to want it. It will not be handed to you. It is not owed to you. Every day, consumers vote with their dollars. They have a choice. You, we, as business owners, have to give them a reason to spend those dollars with us.

And average? That just ain't gonna cut it.

The saying has never been more true than it is today. "Everyone is a photographer." I have been hearing that since I entered the industry over 12 years ago. It was true then and it's still true today. "So what!" I say. Makes my job easier. You might be wondering why I would feel or think this way. Well, because the more average crap out there, the easier it is for me and my business to stand out.

You have a decision to make right now as you are reading this. Are you tired of being average? Do you want to make more money? Do you want more clients? Do you want something more? There is only one way there, my friends. Keep reading.

EVERYONE HAS MONEY FOR WHAT THEY WANT.

Don't ever forget this. People lose sight of this all the time. They forget that consumers have choices. And when you're a photographer, it is really easy to think your shitty service, late turnaround times, and "artist" mindset are going to charm people, but guess what? They're a huge turnoff. People will take their money elsewhere.

Every time you engage with a client, you have another opportunity to win their $$$. Again, you must give them a reason.

So, ask yourself, what is that reason? Why should they spend with you? "Good service" is not a reason. Every business in the world claims to offer good service. Great, you just checked a checkbox. By the way, do you know any businesses advertising, "We offer crappy service you will love"? I didn't think so.

WHAT IS YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION?

First of all, if you are scratching your head right now because you don't know what foreign language I'm speaking, that's probably a sign you either don't know the answer, or worse, you don't know how to articulate it.

Your value proposition is that thing you do that makes you different, special, and worth spending money with versus your competitors.

Things that might fall into this include your turnaround time, your imagery, awards you have won, high-profile clients you have shot, the products your studio offers, etc.

The more of these that you have and can articulate to a client in a way that doesn't sound like you're reading from a checklist, the better your chances of closing more business and charging more for it.

If you asked me how we are different, I would answer, "At Salvatore Cincotta Photography we believe in providing our clients with a superior experience that begins at first contact. We respond to all client requests within four hours. In addition, once a wedding client books, we send them a personal gift from one of our favorite wineries. When it comes to product, we believe there is no more important deliverable than that of the wedding album. Our wedding albums are made by some of the top suppliers in the world, allowing our customers to create something truly high-end and hand-crafted to be enjoyed for generations to come. On the wedding day, we will document your day as it unfolds, but our promise to our clients is to create a truly cinematic image meant to be displayed large on the wall. Our goal is to make all your friends and family jealous."

So, where does this leave you? How can you stop being average?



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

RESPONSE TIMES MATTER.

When a bride is looking to book a photographer, you are not the only one she has reached out to. She has more than likely reached out to five or more others. Remember how this conversation started? Everyone is a photographer.

So, if you take three or more days to respond, someone else is guaranteed to have done so. You have already lost the job and proven that you are in fact, average.

Phone calls, emails, texts, however you operate—respond quickly. It shows you are hungry and puts the client at ease. After all, if you are slow to respond when they are offering you money, how long will it take once they book you?

SEND A GIFT.

No matter your price point, the client who booked you paid money. Say thank you with something personal. Could be as simple as a handwritten note or as pricey as a bottle of wine. The price should be in balance with the money they have spent on your services. You are not expected to send them a $400 gift certificate to a restaurant when they paid $1,000 for your services.

The point here is the gesture. Most wedding vendors send nothing. So, you will immediately stand out.

TURNAROUND TIME.

Oh man, this is the stuff nightmares are made of. Every year, we hear horror stories from couples about how long it takes them to see their images after the wedding. All too common is to hear three months or longer. Are you serious? You took their money, and it takes you three months to deliver? We use this to our advantage. We tell our clients, "You will see your images within two weeks of your wedding. If we miss that deadline, we will give you a free 11x16 print on us for the inconvenience."

It's not about the print. It's about the commitment to deliver on time. People know things happen, but if your standard business practice is to be months late, you have a service problem. You are not only not average, you are now below average.

Again, we use this in a proactive way to get our clients excited. When they come in for the initial consultation, we hype this point up. Something to think about: if you are my competitor and I am telling clients to expect images in two weeks, what happens when they sit with you and you can't commit to two weeks? I immediately stand out. See where this is going?

ATTITUDE.

Tell you what, we see this over and over again: small business owners who don't quite understand they are being hired to do a job. So, do it. No one cares about your car breaking down or your kids being sick. On a wedding day, it is all about the couple and their family. Nothing else matters. And by the way, everyone is watching you. The family, friends, all the random guests are watching how you conduct your business, even if you think no one is watching.

I have watched photographers taking pictures of the dessert bar grab themselves a quick snack. Really? You know people saw you, right? What do you think their takeaway will be? How great your pictures were, or how that photographer took food from the guests? Think. Use your head and let common sense prevail. If you are hungry, bring snacks.

You have to have a servant's mind if you are going to be a wedding photographer. On a wedding day, I am carrying things for my couples and helping anywhere I can. Wallets, drinks, veil, opening doors, etc. You name it. They are the obvious ones. I am doing the same thing for the guests. It is not uncommon for guests to be shocked to learn I am the photographer and not one of the guests.

If I am shooting and I see someone standing next to me with a cell phone taking pictures, I don't get all huffy about it. I take their phone and take the perfect picture from my vantage point. They are often shocked at the gesture and thank me for doing that, and they move on. That is the right attitude to have.

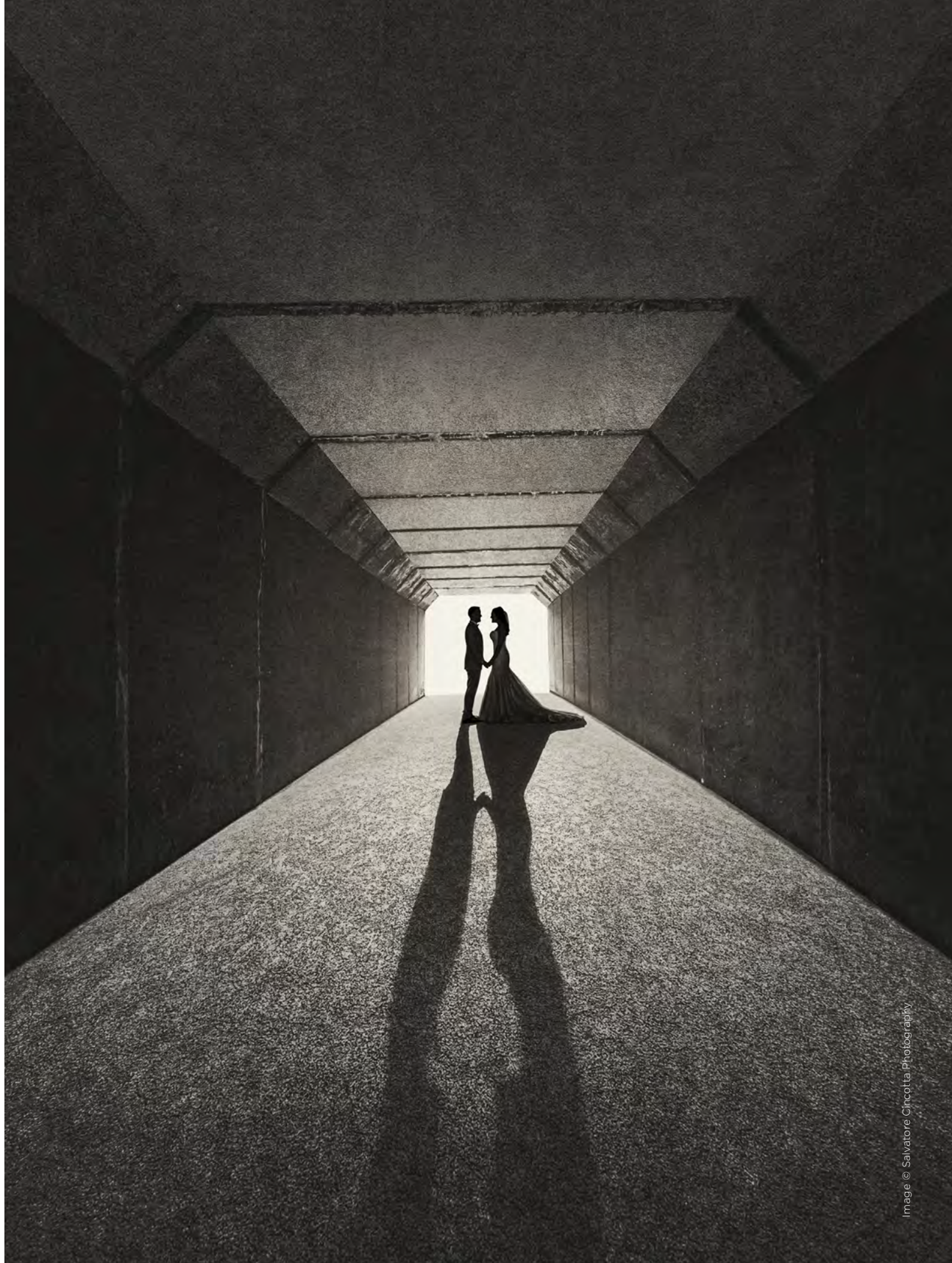


Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

PRODUCTS.

So far, we have really been talking about low-hanging fruit in terms of ways to stand out. Another way to stand out is to offer superior products versus being a cheap ass. Yep, said it. Calling you out. You are shocked that people don't want to spend money on your services, but you offer inferior albums and canvas, and the same crappy products they can get online. And you're shocked they're not willing to overpay you?

Instead, work with professional labs and check out their unique products. Canvas, metals, prints—they are all about the same in my book. Sure, there are subtle differences from lab to lab, but that's not where you want to live.

I want to offer my clients products that they look at and are in awe. Products that make them say, "I have never seen anything like that." You do that and you will have no problem booking more clients for more money.

Real leather albums in unique sizes (sorry, 10x10 is not unique). Framed acrylic prints. Framed canvas. Deep matte prints. These are just some of the products that will get your clients' attention and allow you to stop being average.

PRICING.

This is always a good one. So, you are priced the same as every other photographer in your area offering the same products they offer, and again, you are somehow shocked that people see you as average?

Raise your prices! Yes, raise them. I don't care what you raise them to. Just raise them to something more than what everyone else is charging. Get more money per job and spend it on new and exciting products and services for your clients.

Let's play a game. If I were to have a car to sell you for $500, would you guess it's a good car or a shitty car? What if I told you I had a car to sell you for $100,000? What would your guess be then? Again, this is human behavior. I didn't make this up, I am merely telling you how this all works.

The future is yours, my friends. Stop being average! Let the journey begin today. ■



Sal Cincotta is an international award-winning photographer, educator, and 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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DOMINATING YOUR WEDDING SALES

with **Alissa Zimmerman**



Salvatore Cincotta Photography is a studio that focuses on in-person sales and a luxury client experience. We believe that photos are best in print, specifically as large artwork for your home.

Jumping into an in-person sales model is difficult for so many people who have built their business on handing over digital files to their clients. It takes a lot of money, perseverance, and time upfront to build a solid in-person sales business. We have spent the past four years perfecting our sales strategies to be in line with ever-changing wedding trends, and have come up with a model that serves our clients from beginning to end while still bringing in high-dollar sales.

Below are a few tips to help you dominate your wedding and engagement sales sessions. These are tips based on trials and errors over the past few years that have led us to where we are today—a studio that focuses on a smaller quantity of weddings with higher-end brides who see the value in what we do. We have homed in on our ability to seek out our ideal clients and provide the best possible experience throughout their lifetime at our studio, which makes selling product to my clients a breeze.

IT'S OKAY TO BE PICKY.

With wedding clients, we have the initial consult as a feeler for both parties. Meaning, the couple is interviewing and judging us just as much as we are them. This is your time to acknowledge any red flags and decide if these people are really *your client*. So what does that mean exactly? Well, you should be able to see the major red flags right off the bat, but sometimes it takes more of an understanding of key words to make the hair on the back of your neck stand up. We've been doing this long enough to smell when someone just isn't our ideal client, and we are fortunate enough to be in a place with our business where we can comfortably walk away from booking the wedding.

Here are a few red flags to look out for in the initial wedding consultation:

- *They just aren't into you*. We've had potential clients come in and act completely disinterested throughout the entire meeting. We get really excited when we meet with couples to talk about their wedding day, as we paint a picture of the types of images we want to create for them. If they aren't vibing with you from that initial meeting, you won't be able to force it later down the road. And you'll stress yourself out trying to find a way to connect with that client.

- *They have a very specific look they want for their wedding*… and it doesn't match your style of photography. Walk away. You cannot be everything to everyone, and you'll kill yourself and confuse your future clients if you can't dial into your style and stick with it. One of the first questions we ask at the initial consult is, "What drew you into our studio?" If the answer from there is not something along the lines of, "Your dramatic images," we know immediately they are not *our client*.

- *They keep getting hung up on the digital files*. This usually happens when we walk them through our wedding packages, in which an engagement session is included for the middle and top packages. We don't have this very often, but if the couple keeps getting stuck on why they do not get the digital files from the engagement session as well, we know the entire engagement sales process is going to be next to impossible. We do our best to explain that digitals are available to purchase after the session, but it's just the session fee that's included in the initial contracted wedding package. If that couple leaves without the light bulb going off for them, we know they are probably not a right fit for our studio.



BUILD YOUR SALES ROOM CORRECTLY.

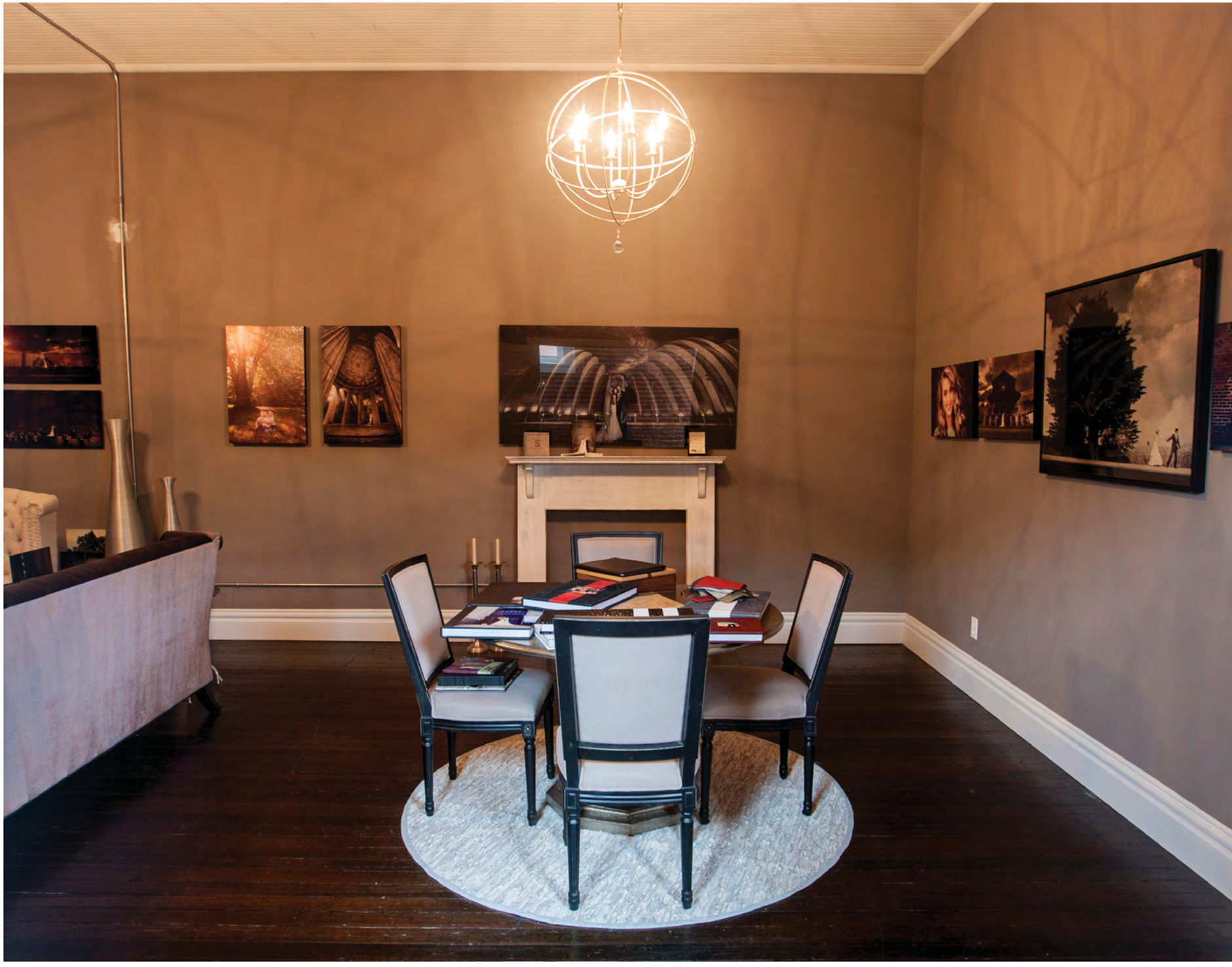
This is your war room, where all the magic happens. Sure, taking pretty pictures is great, but it's not going to keep the lights on in your studio. You need to invest the money and get studio samples of the product you want to sell to your clients. You have to *show it to sell it*. It really is that simple.

We have a sample of everything we offer in our studio, and we double or triple down on the products we offer in our top package. The whole process is psychological, and unfortunately, seemingly pretty shallow. Use your best-looking clients to fulfill products in your top package. When potential clients come in and see pictures of pretty people in pretty albums, they are naturally drawn to those items.

We decorate the walls with a minimalist style, while still showcasing the top-package products with our most beautiful clients. It's so important to make sure you don't clutter your wall with unnecessary products. Show the big stuff that you sell in your top package, and then add in some even larger stuff so that you can easily upgrade the sale. The largest size we offer inside of a package is a 30x40; however, we have a giant 30x60 acrylic hanging over a freestanding mantle so that our clients are visually drawn to the large piece. From there, I have the ability to give them perspective with a line as simple as, "That's a 30x60 and it fits perfectly over a fireplace."

For weddings, we have multi-collection albums using a real client who had an extravagant wedding. This allows us to showcase how, "Many of our clients find that narrowing down their images for their album is impossible and one giant album isn't always the best option. So we do a lot of these multi-volume albums so that our clients can split the day into two parts and not clutter their album."

It's all about language and when to have these conversations. We are planting this seed from the initial consult when we walk through our packages together.



KNOW WHEN TO SHUT UP.

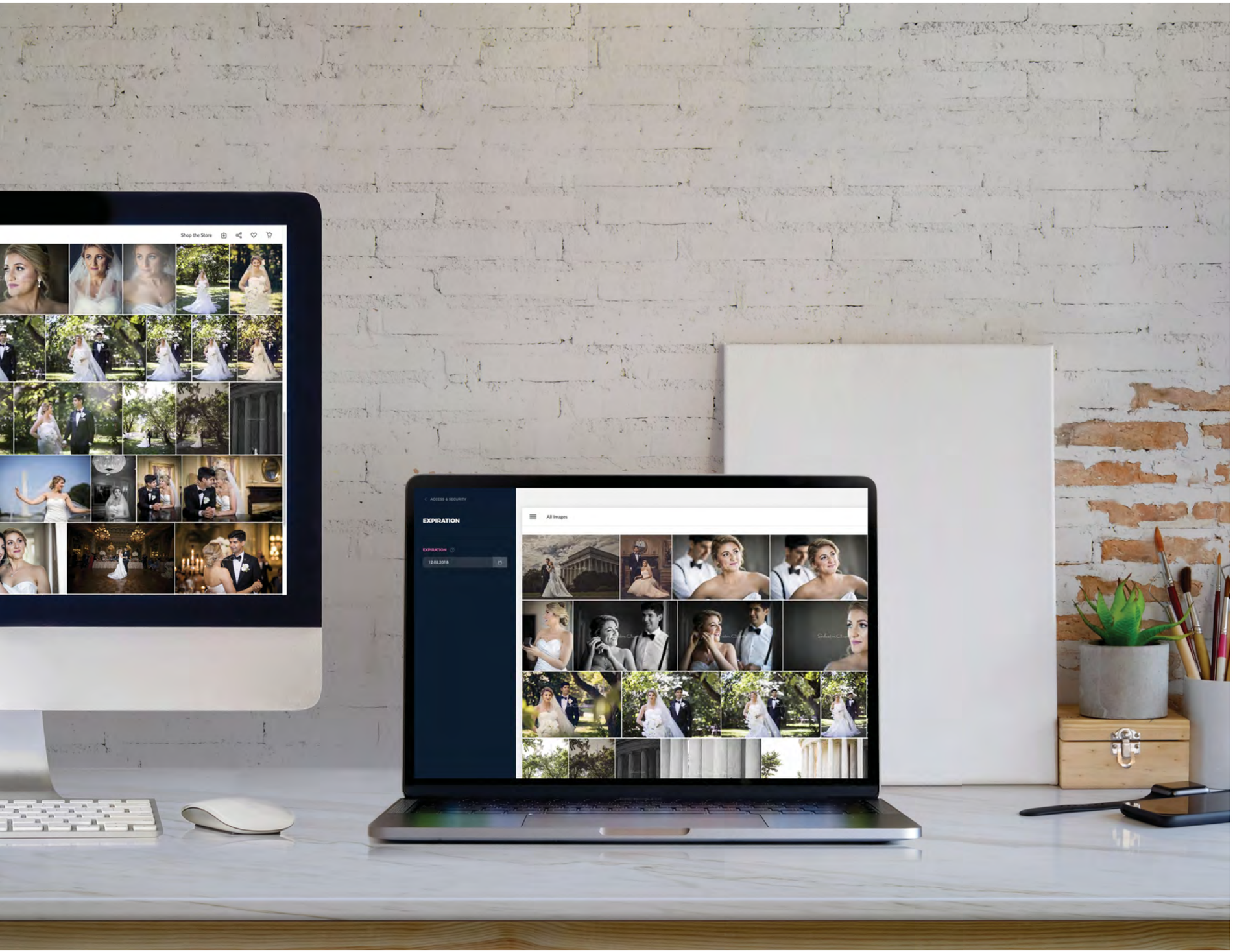
Excessive talking is a sign of nervous energy, and your clients will be able to pick up on that immediately. You may think you're just being friendly, but letting your nerves get in the way can stall a sale faster than you'd imagine.

Take a deep breath. You are the trusted advisor. These people came to you because they love your work and they truly have no idea what products they want or need. That is your job: to best direct them. Don't be a sleazy salesperson, either. The sales process should be calm, direct, and completely organic. Don't sell product you don't fully support. Don't push more and more items on your clients if you know they're already stretched.

Get a feel for what they are looking for, then present your products. This is the part that gets most photographers incredibly uncomfortable. Again, most photographers feel like they need to be everything to everyone—even when it comes to sales. Here's the reality: If you are in a sales session or initial consult, that means you have (hopefully) spent a good amount of time putting together your packages to make sure your cost of goods and price points are at an amount where you are a profitable studio. You have absolutely no reason to *not* stand tall with confidence in what services and products you provide to your clients. Do not negotiate—walk them through your price list and *shut your damn mouth*. Let it all sink in for them, as it's usually a lot of information to digest. Let them ask you questions and go from there.







HAVE SYSTEMS YOU CAN TRUST.

We live in an age of endless technologies available to photographers to help grow and manage their businesses—some great, some not so great. Do your due diligence and learn which programs or software work best for you, and then *actually use them*. I can't believe how many photographers I talk to who purchase all of the newest and greatest tools on the market, yet never take the time to figure out best practices or how to actually implement them into their businesses.

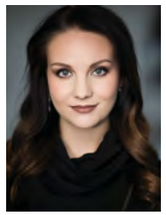
All software tools in our industry are designed to help make your life easier when the going gets tough. Having a solid back-of-house will make you look like a real business to your clients. And let's be honest, perception is reality.

The two main tools we use are 17hats and N-Vu IPS. These tools have completely changed our business for the better, and we could not do what we do today without these implemented into our workflow.

First, 17hats handles literally *everything* for us. From quotes to contracts, invoices, and automated emails, I don't have to do any thinking now that I have my workflows in place. Just a few clicks and I'm able to provide our clients with a seamless experience. It wasn't always this way, however. I came into my role just a few short years ago, and spent the better part of my first year scrambling every day trying to put Band-Aids on broken processes. My biggest piece of advice: learn the software, and do it right from the beginning. Understand the "why" behind their program and what a workflow *should* look like. Best practices are available in training guides on the 17hats website, and they have a team readily available to help if you ever get stuck along the way.

N-Vu IPS, on the other hand, has given us the freedom to run our entire in-person sales session inside of one extremely robust tool. With one single upload, I can run my sales session, create a client gallery, and so much more. This tool is worth every penny, and it was built based on the in-person sales process we created. I cannot recommend N-Vu enough for those people serious about taking their in-person sales to the next level.

There is no reason you should not be making money in the sales room. Take these tips and get to work! ■



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 editor-in-chief for *Shutter Magazine* and serves as Sal's right hand, managing daily operations within the family of Salvatore Cincotta brands.

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product review

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- PlayBook allows you to deliver your final images and/or films in a video player format: Simply drag and drop your slideshow or video you want to play from your computer to the Playbook, and it will automatically play the files.
- PlayBook is packed with features for being such a small device: It has a 7" screen, 1024x600 resolution, auto-play on open, tactile controls, 4GB of flash capacity, two hours of rechargeable playtime, and a built in speaker with volume control, and accepts all common video formats.
- You can customize/personalize the Playbook in multiple ways: The original black-and-white PlayBooks allow you to customize both the front and back cover. Newly launched, the Full Wrap Playbook will allow you to customize both covers and the spine.
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10

GREAT POSE IDEAS FOR A *Bride & Groom*

with **Vanessa Joy**

Image © Vanessa Joy



Image © Vanessa Joy

We've all seen that *one pose* from wedding photography: the typical bride and groom looking at each other with some natural or architectural backdrop. Half of what we're doing as photographers in a picture like this is just photographing the pretty background scenery. There should be more than just these two people looking at each other in our wedding photography portfolios.

There's nothing wrong with that photograph—honestly, it is usually super popular with the couple themselves—but it gets kinda boring for you and your clients. Show off your abilities as a photographer and get the best shots possible—here are some options for how to offer something more, something different to your customers, switching it up.



PRACTICE THAT FIRST DANCE

Yes, you can get wonderful first-dance shots at the actual first dance. During a photoshoot, you can loosen up a bride and groom while getting great photographs by having them dance! They get to look at each other, which feels more natural than looking at a camera, and those big ballgowns look so good when being whisked around a dance floor. You also avoid the perennial "what are they doing with their hands?" problem, since they have to hold hands, usually, to dance together. Find some of the impressive backdrops you have available and have them sway a little while you capture the moments.



DETAILS MATTER

You have the groom and bride posed anyway, why just take a full-body picture?

Try to get their hands with the rings, the bouquet, the lace on the dress, the funny socks in his dress shoes if they are peeking out! Make it your business to get the big picture and the small pictures—you never know what will show up during edits that you are excited to have captured. Zooming in can get you a photograph that you will be proud to showcase as distinct from the regular old portfolio of typical shots.



BRIDE BEHIND

Yes, this pose can be great for slimming down the bride in the photographs, but this also works well for flipping the typical bride-stands-in-front pairing. You can get stand-out photographs in this position. Beware though: do watch out for the groom craning his neck to look at her. Find a way that doesn't have him straining or looking awkward, even if that means he looks forward or right at the camera—grooms don't usually look very groom-like with their heads craned like that.



BRIDE'S BACK TO THE GROOM

This pose brings them close together and lets them hold hands, wrap arms around waists, all of that lovey-dovey stuff. Make this a pose and you'll help them calm down and feel less formal, even as you get both smiling faces at once. It doesn't have to be the exact same as a traditional prom pose, and it doesn't need to be awkward or stiff; to change it up, you can make her slightly off center, angle them in different ways toward the camera, etc. Experiment a little!

NOSE TO CHEEK

Whether you have the groom's nose in her hair or actually on her cheek, the profile of the guy and the smile of the girl really work. This pose is tender, conveying love from the groom and genuine feeling as well from the bride. Sometimes, this isn't a pose that the groom and bride naturally assume, so know what I do to get a genuine smile? I ask the groom to whisper something dirty in her ear. It's silly but it works, especially if your bride and groom have been smiling for a while and need something to prompt a little laughing.



Image © Vanessa Joy

BACK OF THE DRESS

Turn the bride fully away from the camera and really accent the dress, since there are often little details there that she wants to remember. I mean, everyone else gets to see the back of the dress, but the pictures let her see how good it looked too. Let her snuggle up facing toward the groom, and let the photo focus in on those details. Often, brides pick a dress based on some beautiful ribbon or lacework on the back. Make sure you get plenty of that lace-up back or flowing train—show it off!



Image © Vanessa Joy

OPEN-SHUT SHOULDERS

Like the sides of a book, the shoulders of the couple open up in this pose. You can remember the "open-shut" because one set of shoulders is together, while the other set is on the outside, apart from each other. This pose keeps things interesting while allowing the couple to lean back a little. This pose, like many others, can be rotated, so you have them partially in profile or straight-on.



Image © Vanessa Joy



Image © Vanessa Joy



Image © Vanessa Joy

GET A LITTLE KISS-CREATIVE

The traditional kiss on the lips...is usually a really smushed-face shot to some extent. You can't see the faces very well! Certainly, do try the kiss as usual, since they probably want one of those pictures, but also try some of these variations to make for unique and more face-flattering kiss poses:

- Forehead Kiss: Very romantic but also perfect for a big height difference in the couple.
- Cheek Kiss: You get the girl or the guy's full face, as well as the pucker-up face, which are both quite cute.
- Almost Kiss: When the couple is going in for the kiss, you get both an action-potential shot and still see the faces: very sultry without smashing the faces together before the shutter snaps.

WALKING PHOTOGRAPHS

Having the bride and groom walk together is a great starting point because they are accustomed to doing that. You can get great candid laughing and smiling shots when they walk, and holding hands makes for really beautiful pictures. These photographs may become some of their favorites, especially if you can get great atmospheric details around them as well. This is another great spot to get a back of the dress shot, as they walk off into the figurative (or literal) sunset together, hand in hand or arm in arm.



Image © Vanessa Joy

OVER-THE-SHOULDER BRIDE

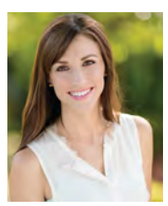
Much like the walking poses, having the bride look back while they are holding hands can be a really cute shot. Say something to her so she turns around, and snap that immediate smile. Again, you'll be happy that you tried something different, and the more different shots you try, the more likely you will find that magical look that makes this bride and groom look their best.

Ultimately, every bride and groom look their best and most at ease in a different pose. That's why you need a wide variety of poses so you get a chance to see the moment when it really clicks. You also need to figure out a way to go through these as fast as humanly possible. After all, we almost never get enough time to shoot on a wedding day! Check out www.SpeedPosing.com for more on that.

You can even tell them this from the beginning: You are going to take photos in a lot of different poses so that they get the absolute best options, based on your experiences. This might help if they have just a couple of ideas in their head about what wedding photos look like.

I hope that you find these poses helpful in making your clients look their very best while getting a variety of photographs and expressing your own creative energy; soon, you'll discover even more poses that become part of your own top 10! ■

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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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perfect reception lighting

with **Phillip Blume**

Image © Blume Photography



Image © Blume Photography

It's a photographer's house of horrors—a dark reception hall. Imagine yourself there. A warm ambiance fills the room, the bride and groom come together for a romantic first dance, and you're all dialed in for the perfect exposure. Everything's great. Then something happens!

Inexplicably, someone kills the lights. (*What?! Don't they know the difference between ambiance and a game of German Spotlight?*) You fumble to increase your exposure before the moment is lost, slowing your shutter to let in more light. Whew! Crisis averted. Or so you think. You check the images on your camera and stare in shock! Surely 1/60 second shouldn't have caused the blurred images you now see. Oh no, you forgot to account for the added shake of your 200mm lens. Frantic, you up the shutter speed to 1/320 along with ISO. Brilliant! You knew you could handle this. But wait!

Now the DJ starts up a rainbow disco ball and red laser lights…at the same time! (Has he no decency?!) The couple now look like unicorns with radioactive chicken pox. That's it. No more Mr. Nice Natural-Light Photographer. You reach for the nuclear option: your flash.

Blowing off a layer of dust, you thrust the flash into your camera's hot shoe, point it at the couple and…BAM! White light floods the room for a glorious fraction of a second. That must have done the trick! (That seemed easy. Why haven't I used flash before?) But the image preview makes no sense. The bottom half is a solid black band. In the top half, the reception hall looks like a cave, even darker than in reality and tinged with an eerie green color. Your couple, on the other hand, radiates like a glowing mass in the front of the image…still bathed in red laser lights.

Hey, don't beat yourself up. We've all been here. The good news is, there are countless tools and techniques photographers pile on top of these problems: studio strobes, gels, softboxes, light stands, LED panels, reflectors, tripods, meters, triggers and more. (OK, so that's actually just more bad news.)

Let me simplify everything for you. Below, I'll lay out the easy system we at The Blumes use to create crisp, color-balanced, commercial-quality reception images every time. You'll just need your camera, three cheap flashes, and a few rubber bands. Sound good?

PRO TIP

Leave heavy light stands at home! How many times has a drunken wedding guest tripped over your light at a reception? Our system will keep you from getting sued. Because a "line of light" calls for placing flashes far into the corners of the venue rather than on the dance floor, you can lose the light stands and mount flashes safely on solid walls instead. Just use strong yet temporary 3M strips like those I demonstrate in this month's video. Stand on a step stool to mount them above head-level. Boom! You're good to go all night long.

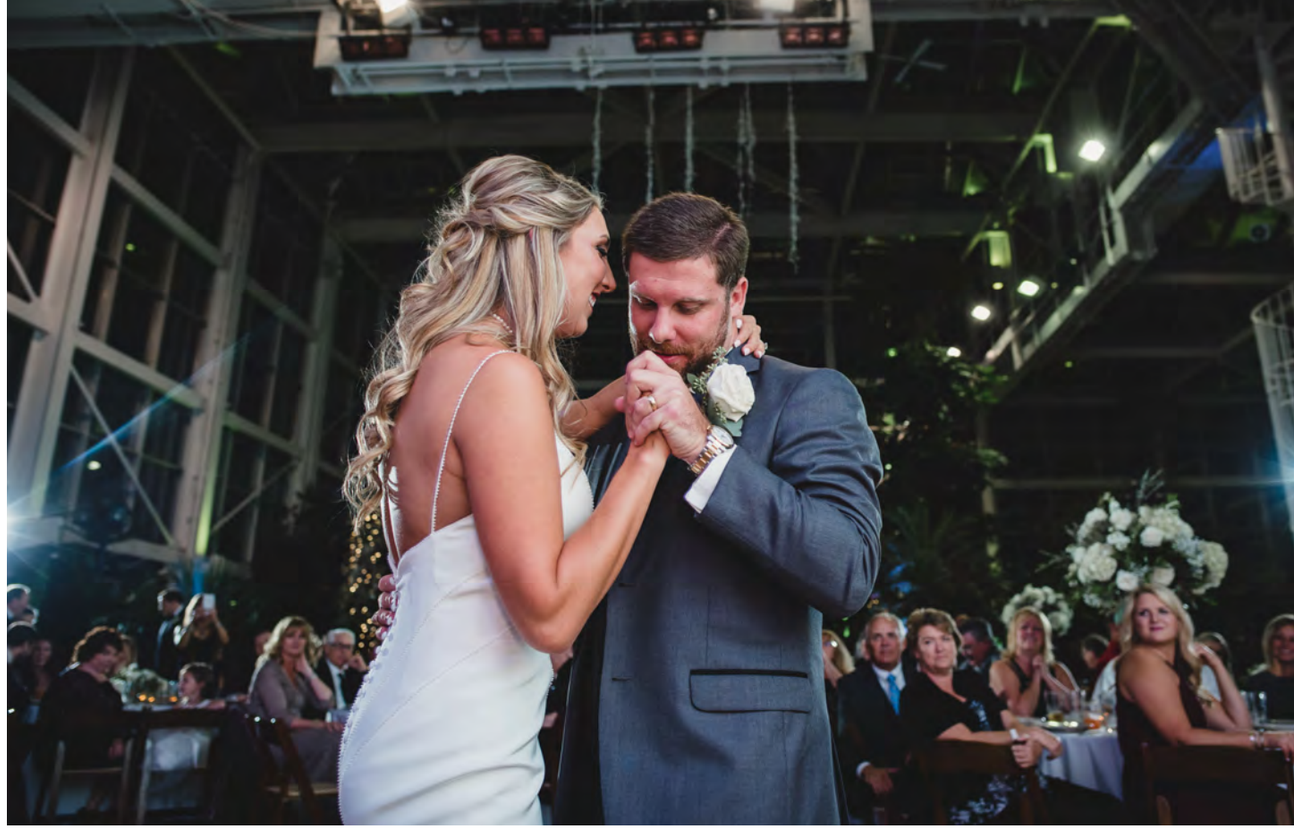
FLASH POSITION: DRAW A LINE (OF LIGHT)

We're going to address the "fix" to every issue outlined in the story above. So let's get straight to it. I'll give you our exact lighting setup for almost any dark reception, no matter what specific environment we find ourselves in.

Ever heard of the "Triangle of Light," a now classic technique our friend Bob Davis popularized for receptions? It's brilliant, and it inspired the setup we use. My personal problem with it though—since the Triangle of Light calls for several flashes set up on stands around the room—was struggling to finish setup in time before the first dance began. When I did get it all set up, I still got confused alternating between three groups (a way to control remote lights individually). I just made too many mistakes and missed shots.

Then I realized I could get the same effect with just two off-camera flashes! By placing one flash in each corner of the reception hall and facing them toward each other, I created a "line of light" that met in the center of the room. (A third flash goes on your camera.)

This new line had some very positive side-effects for me: 1) I now had only two groups to remember ("A," the first flash I set up, and "B" the second); 2) The strength of my flashes grew stronger where their light met in the room's center, helping outweigh their lost intensity as they traveled through space (this takes the Inverse Square Law into account, creating a more even brightness that fills the room!); 3) I needed fewer heavy light stands and eventually stopped using them altogether (see sidebar); and 4) I moved faster without the need to constantly change my settings (and even gained the option to forget "groupings" and just use the same settings all night).





Images © Blume Photography

Image © Blume Photography





Images © Blume Photography

CAMERA POSITION: DON'T CROSS THE LINE

You do have to remember one thing: Never shoot across the line of light. In other words, imagine a string connected between your two off-camera flashes, face the string perpendicularly, and try to photograph subjects only on *your side of that string*.

Basically, you're turning those off-camera flashes into dual backlights (or hair lights). If you've tried using off-camera flash at receptions before but gave up because it cast weird shadows over everybody's face, this is why—you were shooting across a "line of light." These flashes should not to be used as key lights to directly illuminate your subject. Instead, they remain behind to create a crisp rim illumination around dark objects. But, as an added bonus, a backlight also tends to reflect off any surface it finds; this softens the light quality and helps to subtly fill shadows on your subject's face, too.

Want to photograph someone on the other side of the line of light? No problem. Just walk to the other side of the room, turn around so you're facing the line of light from the other side, and now you can photograph subjects on that half of the room.

You may want to turn and shoot against the flash (so your camera is parallel to the line). You can create cool light flair, or keep the flash hidden behind your subject for a romantic glow. But remember, if you do this you will need to change one important part of the setup—turning off the off-camera flash that is now positioned behind your shoulder. I use fully featured Godox flashes so I can easily switch off either the Group-A flash or the Group-B flash, whichever is behind me, remotely.

With this method, you can shoot all night without changing camera or flash settings (which I'll cover below). That's because there is no "correct" exposure for a backlight—you can make it as bright or as subtle as you like without truly damaging your exposure. Just set to taste, then get to work! But what if you want more flexibility to move around the room and shoot new angles?

CAMERA SETTINGS: RETAIN AMBIANCE

With modern ISO capability and big marketing behind low f-stop lenses, it's very tempting to use these camera settings as a cure-all. Don't do it! As you know, dark receptions can mean slow and difficult focusing. If you shoot below f/2.8 at the reception, you probably find a lot of your images end up blurry. You're not a bad photographer—you're just asking too much of your equipment. Besides, it's not necessary.

Try shooting receptions at f/5.6 or higher. You'll hit focus even when your subject is dancing like crazy. And remember, depth of field is affected by focal distance too, not just aperture number. Since reception shots tend to be closer-up, you'll still get the bokeh you're looking for. But when you're at a distance, new stories will emerge—suddenly you'll see the emotional mother in the background as the bride dances with her father. These are images that mean more than "creamy dreamy" blurred backgrounds.

Next, choose an ISO setting that creates a darkened exposure, not a "perfect" exposure. Don't be afraid of high ISO if the environment demands it, but the point is not to expose the whole scene with this setting.

I take a test shot that barely allows candles and lights to show up; the rest of my scene is nearly pitch black. From here, you're okay with a somewhat slower shutter speed, though probably not below 1/60 of a second unless you're trying to get creative with light dragging.

The important thing is to keep this ambient exposure dark enough so ambient light (especially accessory DJ lights!) is hidden. It's okay if this light shows up, but it must not be blown out! Shoot with manual camera settings and check your histogram. Flash photography is all about ratios, so if you use flash to make the DJ lights a smaller ratio of the total light hitting your sensor, they will fade or disappear—almost miraculously! Hallelujah!

In general, I find my settings end up near f/5.6, 1/100, ISO 3200 pretty consistently.





Images © Blume Photography





Images © Blume Photography

FLASH SETTINGS: BRING THE WOW!

Here's the final ingredient to make this work. It sounds scary, but you have to put your flashes in *manual* mode. Get rid of TTL/automatic. Believe it or not, you'll find manual to be easier—and more consistent! I promise.

I begin by setting my two backlights (my "line of light") to a power of 1/32. Again, this is totally a matter of taste. You can tweak to go brighter or dimmer. But you're using small flashes, not studio strobes. So you're going to want lower settings that allow your battery to recycle quickly and last all night. Luckily, low settings and small flashes are all you need for already-dim receptions—strobes are totally overkill.

Finally, what about your on-camera flash? This is the cherry on top. If there's a white ceiling, turn the camera's flash toward it for a soft key light. But instead of shooting straight up, aim the flash slightly back over your shoulder at 45 degrees. Find a manual flash power that creates one beautiful exposure and stick with it! Is the ceiling black, or a high barn with rafters that don't reflect light?

You may find this crazy, but I will then shoot direct flash into my subject's face! I know, "direct flash" is a big no-no. But this is the perfect example of understanding the rules so you can break them. In this case only, set your on-camera flash to TTL with a flash compensation of -1.7 or -2.0. This compensation along with the combined power of your off-camera flashes can still create natural light that will WOW your clients. Enjoy the reception! ■

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Phillip and Eileen Blume are award-winning photographers just crazy enough to believe art can change the world. Having transformed their small-town home studio into a top brand, they now work with clients worldwide. The Blumes specialize in wedding and fashion photography, and continue to focus on what matters most to them: charitable projects that include adoption advocacy and documentary filmmaking to benefit children living in extreme poverty. Phillip is a monthly contributor to *Shutter Magazine*, and together the Blumes speak at numerous top industry events, have appeared on CreativeLIVE and have shared their inspiring vision of more meaningful photography from the TEDx stage. They are owners of three photography brands, including a newborn studio, and are the proud founders of ComeUnity Workshops for photographers who seek balance. They live with their children in rural Georgia.

theblumes.com

THE **DO'S** AND **DON'TS** OF OFF-CAMERA FLASH

with **Susan Stripling**



Image © Susan Stripling

Off-camera flash is crucial to my success as a wedding photographer. It has helped shape the "signature" look of my images, allowing me to create a portfolio that is solid in all kinds of lighting scenarios. Whether it's overpowering bad light on a dance floor or creating a sunset where there was none, mastering the techniques of flash allows me to make beautiful images for my clients in all types of situations.

That said, off-camera flash can be an intimidating thing to try to master. Where do you put the flash? What power should it be on? When do you need more than a simple Speedlite? What about modifiers? Where do you even start? Here are five tips to help you out!



Image © Susan Stripling



Image © Susan Stripling

1. KNOW WHEN THE NATURAL LIGHT IS ENOUGH—AND HOW TO USE IT!

Don't always go reaching for the flash. I'm seeing this more and more in photography groups online—photographers grab that Speedlite and seven modifiers and go crazy when there is gorgeous natural light to work with. Take a look around first and make sure that you aren't missing beautiful natural light that will do the job for you!

On top of that, master natural light before putting a single flash on (or off) of your camera. It's crucial that you start understanding how you like your light to look so that you can create it artificially later. Do you like a strong backlight? Do you like soft, gentle light coming from in front of your subjects? Do you like the look of golden hour?

Start noticing where the light source is when you create those images that you like. Is the sun high in the sky or low to the horizon? That will be important to remember later. Do you like the look of one light from a window, with the rest of the lights in a room turned off? Remember that. You'll be re-creating those situations with a flash later, so you want to know WHERE your main light source is coming from, as well as what the rest of the scenario looks like.



Images © Susan Stripling





Images © Susan Stripling

2. UNDERSTAND HOW FLASH AND AMBIENT LIGHT WORK TOGETHER TO CREATE THE LOOK YOU WANT.

Before I was able to master off-camera flash (or even ON-camera flash!) I had to understand how all of the technical elements come together to create an image when artificial light is involved.

So start practicing and experimenting. Go into a dark space with a willing subject—a child, a friend, your favorite teddy bear, a mannequin, whatever works for you! (Note: don't do this at a wedding. Practicing and experimenting should never be on a client's dime.)

Vary your ISO, shutter speeds, and f-stops. See what happens to the ambient light when using a flash. As your shutter speed lowers, look at how much ambient light is let into the image. As your shutter speed rises, look at how much ambient light is cut out of the image. Start varying your ISO and see what that does to the results. Same with your f-stop: what do you like best? So much about photography and image creation is marrying what *you like best* with *the technical stuff that makes that vision become a reality.*

Practice, and practice some more. Add moving subjects to the mix and vary your shutter speeds again. See when you get "ghosting" and when you're able to freeze your subject. Become super familiar with understanding how low your shutter speed can go in any given ambient light situation before you get that blurry/ghosty effect.

This practice-makes-perfect approach helped me understand what I liked in an image. I knew that outside, I liked dramatic rim light coming from behind my subjects, but to create that inside I'd need a faster shutter speed to cut out more ambient light. I knew that to create a portrait like that in darker conditions, I'd need to keep my ISO higher and my shutter speed faster. This took a long time to decide upon, so don't be afraid if your creative journey takes time. Mine has taken me 18 years so far, and I'm nowhere near done!

Take all of this technical knowledge and pack it away in your brain for future use—you're going to need it!

3. TAKE YOUR FLASH OFF CAMERA AND PUT IT WHERE YOU'D WANT YOUR LIGHT SOURCE COMING FROM.

If I like the look of sunset, but don't have golden hour on a wedding day, I can make it. But first, I need to position my light where the sun would be if it existed. If the sun is out and I love when it's low to the horizon, my light will need to be in that exact same place.

If I love the look of window light for a getting-ready session, but it's dark when the bride is putting on her dress, then I want the light to come from outside the window if possible—so I'll send my assistant outside into a flower bed!

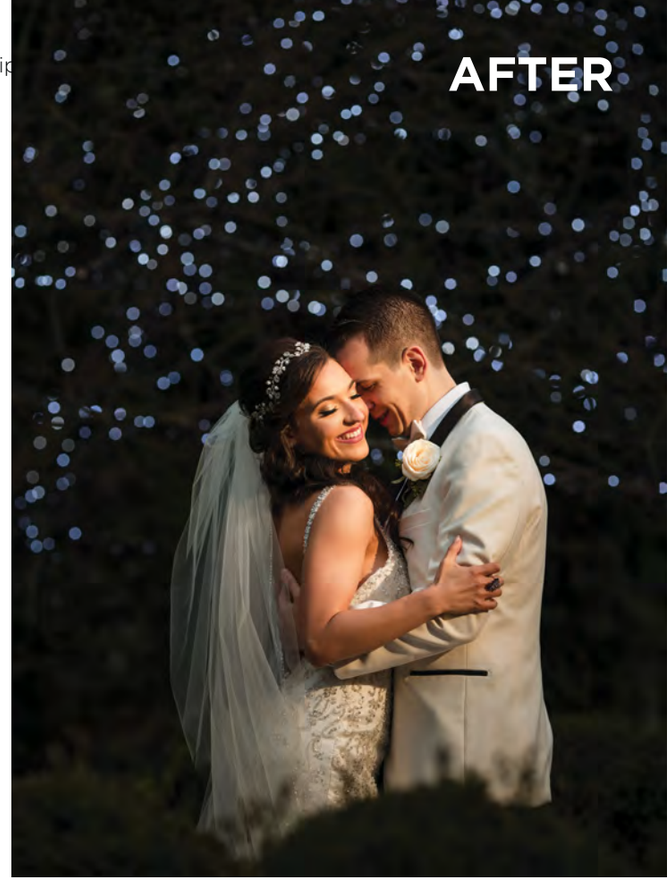
If you're creating a portrait indoors and thinking, "Gosh, I sure wish there was a huge window just to the left of the groom here"…well, make one! Put your light to the left of the groom, coming from the direction where you'd love that window light to be.





Images © Susan Stripling







Images © Susan Stripling

4. DIAL IN THOSE SETTINGS

This is where I see most photographers stall. They know where they want the light to be, but they struggle with where to start settings-wise.

Try this, if you're outside: 1/160 sec, ISO 400, f/4.0, with your flash on full power. If you're inside? 1/160 sec, ISO 800, f/4.0, flash on 1/4 power.

Will these settings work all the time? Of course not. But they're a good place to start, and then you can make changes.

Is the light overpowering your subject? Lower the flash power, back your assistant/light stand up and away from your subject, lower your ISO. Is there not enough light on your subjects? Raise your flash power, move your assistant closer to your subjects, raise your ISO. Is your ambient light gone? Lower your shutter speed. Is there too much ambient light? Raise your shutter speed.

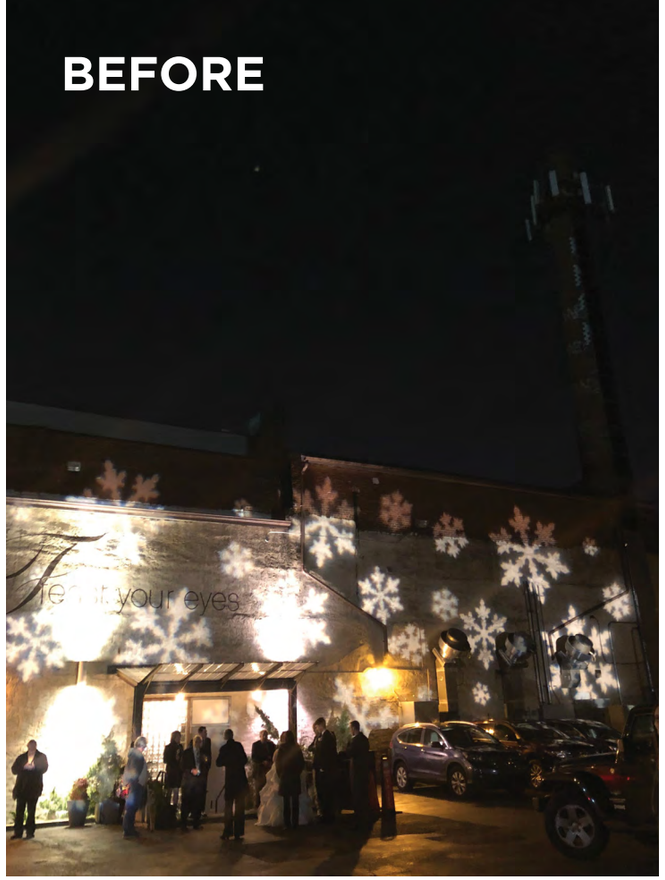
Remember everything we talked about in tip two? Put that into practice here. And if you don't know where to start, just start. Start with the settings above and fumble and make mistakes; try and try again until you can walk into a situation and sum up your settings without even thinking. I know it sounds daunting, but with experience, it will become second nature.

5. EXPERIMENT WITH MODIFIERS FOR YOUR LIGHT.

It's no secret that my favorite modifiers are made by MagMod. They're easy to use, easy to switch out on the fly, and easy to combine together. Need a sphere and a grid? Just layer them. A sphere, a grid, a gel? Layer, layer!

Once you get a bit more comfortable working with flash, start playing with different ways to modify the light. If I want a wash of soft, directional light, I'll reach for my MagSphere. Need to focus that light? Try a grid. Need more focus? Try two grids or a snoot. Want to use two lights at once to overpower the sun? Try the MagBox.

There are so many lighting modifiers out there that finding your favorites will take time. Then you have to find what situations you like using those favorites in. Once you've done the work and identified the best modifiers for you, it will take your already-excellent off-camera flash work up to a new level.







Images © Susan Stripling

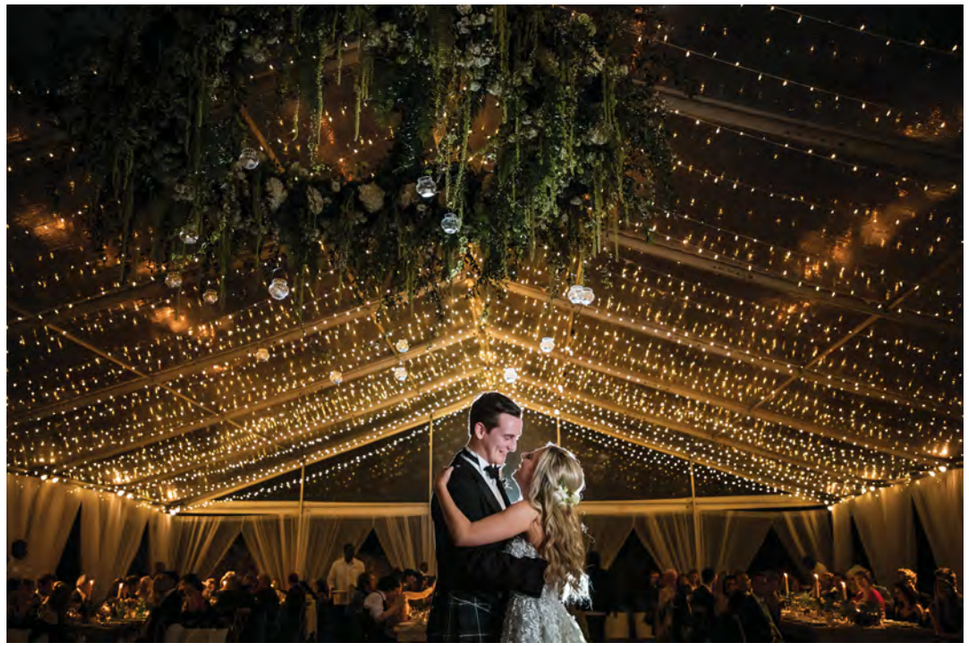
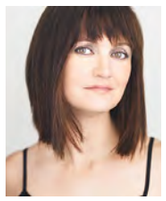


Image © Susan Stripling

And just one more… **Don't forget that this is fun**.

As wedding photographers, we get to create. And we get paid for it. It's a ridiculous joy, and an honor that I don't take lightly every time I make an image for a client—flash or no flash. Don't forget that you got into this because you LOVE the art of creation.

Don't be daunted or stressed by the technical side of off-camera flash. It's a joy to create with and experiment with, and once you find your precise style, it will elevate your portfolio by leaps and bounds. ■



Susan Stripling has been photographing weddings, portraits, and theater for almost eighteen years. Susan's work has been published in *Inside Weddings, Martha Stewart Weddings, Grace Ormonde Wedding Style, Modern Bride, Town and Country Weddings, the New York Times, New York Post, Rangerfinder, PDN, and in ads and advertorials for Nikon USA, Epson*, and *Canon USA*. She is also the founder of The Wedding School, which strives to bring real, honest education to wedding photographers worldwide.

susanstripling.com

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BEST WEDDING IMAGE

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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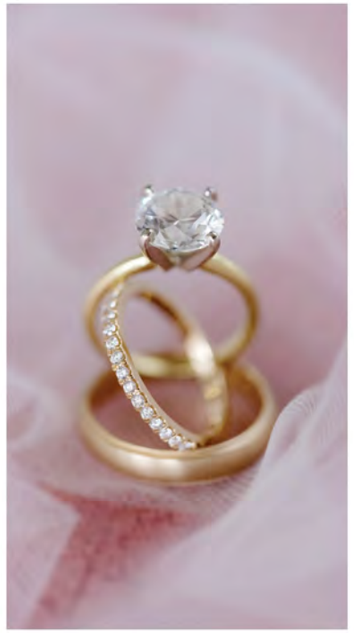


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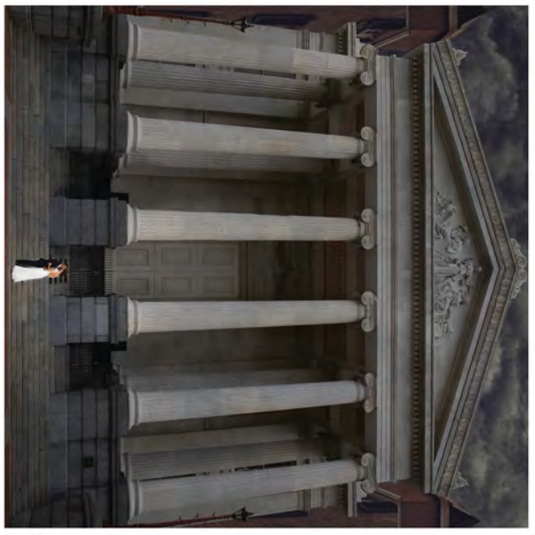




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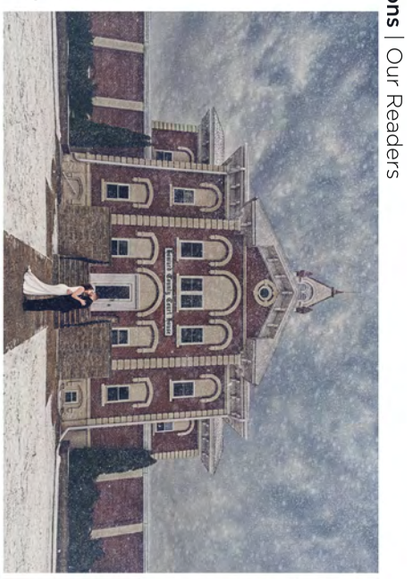




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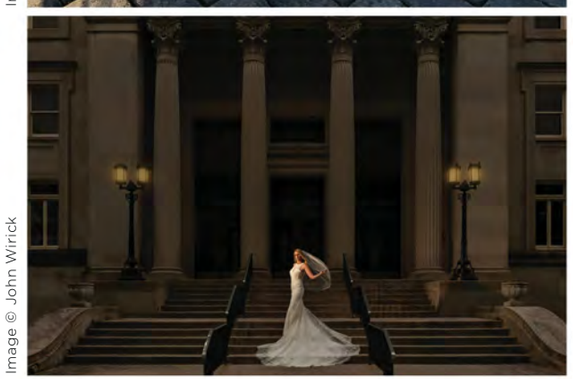


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EDUCATING YOUR CLIENTS IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

with **Skip Cohen**

Every month I sit down and start thinking about what's most important to help you build a stronger business. While you might think it's getting harder and harder, most of you are so new to hitting hard on marketing and building your business outside of your skill set, it's relatively easy.

Well, it's May, and we're back into the seasonality of the photography business. As I looked back through all the topics of my previous articles, I was struck by the fact that I've written very little about the importance of educating your clients.

Poof—Just like Harry Potter waving his wand, the importance of education landed on my laptop! Yes, sometimes it is that dramatic, but more importantly, it's a topic critical for you to thrive, rather than just survive.

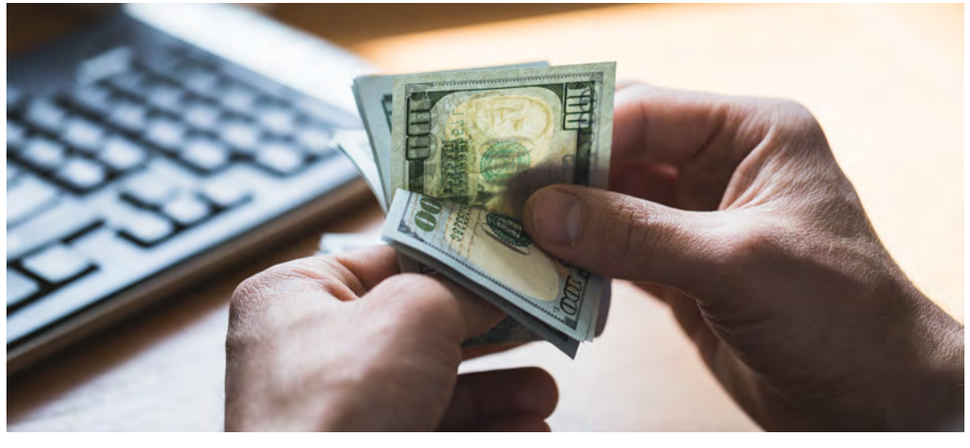
So many of you are excited and proud to be in business. That pride overshadows how you've ignored focusing on the education of your target audience. Whether you offer new services or new products, your success is about making sure each client understands why you're worth the money they're about to spend on you.

"A business without a path to profit isn't a business – it's a hobby!"
–Jason Fried

WHY ARE YOU IN BUSINESS?

Before you answer that, here's a hint. It's about earning a living! Sure, your ego and pride are involved, and positive feedback from your clients is essential, but in the end, you should be in business because you plan to make money.

It's time to put your ego aside. The success of your business starts with a solid skill set. Most of you run off the rails not because you captured an image that was less than stellar but because you assumed clients understood why your work was valuable. You've got to be the very best and stand out from your competitors. There's no room for mediocrity in the quality of what you're selling. It's a competitive market, and the only purpose mediocrity serves is to give you a goal to exceed, to top what's average in the marketplace.



VALUE

What's the value of the services you provide? I'm going to answer that for you—it's not measurable because, theoretically, it's so high you can't put a price on it. You're a highly trained magician with a time machine: your camera. You've developed a skill set to stop time and turn the intangible into memories people can hold in their hands for a lifetime!

Tim and Beverly Walden in Kentucky are two of the finest portrait artists in the industry. They don't create stunning portraits; they create customer experiences. The finished product isn't a portrait but a priceless family heirloom to be handed down to future generations. They even put a certificate of authenticity on the back of the print, which they number and sign.

Tim and Beverly aren't selling prints; they're selling fine art. They're selling memories and have created a product line that never compromises on quality and ALWAYS exceeds client expectations. (Check out WaldensPhotography.com and you'll see some of the most beautiful portraiture work in contemporary photography.)



EDUCATION

Building a successful business doesn't happen by accident. It happens because you pay attention to every detail in establishing your brand and reputation. Educating your clients is so often missed, but it's your responsibility to teach your target audience, and you've got so many different tools available—your website, your blog, your galleries and your personality. It all starts with believing in yourself and showing you're the best. You've got to give your audience the proof that you're the ONLY choice to hire in capturing their memories.

I want to share a piece written by Michele Celentano on the importance of printing your work. It's the best example I've ever read about educating your clients. She's given me permission and you the right to plagiarize and use it for your own business!

I BELIEVE

I believe in photography—but more than that, I believe in photographs. Printed photographs are tangible. We can hold on to them, pass them around, frame them and hang them on a wall. We can make albums to be treasured and looked through by children for years to come.

We can't touch a file, and the truth is we don't know the longevity of a file or if we will even be able to find it someday. A digital file is a bit of a mystery—if it's lost, where did it go? If a drive is damaged, what happens to the files? How many people truly back up all their images?

What happened to disc cameras, eight-track tapes, Walkmans, and other technology we thought would last forever? What will our children be looking at in 20 or 30 years? Photographs are special—files are not!

I believe in printing my work professionally. I believe my work is more than a screensaver. Years of studying and perfecting my craft come down to more than sending files via the internet.

The photographs I create for my clients are not only precious to my clients, they are also precious to me. It is my work, a lifetime of work that deserves to be printed.

Photographs are passed on to children and grandchildren. Can you imagine a floppy disk, a DVD or a flash drive sitting in a frame representing your family portraits?

Like many photographers I have struggled with bending to the needs or wants of a clientele that is looking for files. But this is what I discovered over the last year—it makes me uncomfortable in the center of my gut to hand over digital files, no matter the price. Clients have told me that the DVD is still sitting on a desk and they should have had me make the prints in the first place because they never have time to get to it.

I wonder about those files that were sold...How were they printed? Did the client crop it too tight? Is the color correct? Did they attempt to alter the image? It troubles me because I put so much of myself into my work. And, I have to wonder...am I really acting as a professional and serving my client the best way I know how to by simply selling intangible files that may never be printed?

For some, it's easy...take some photos, edit them, burn them on a disk or flash-drive, and make a few bucks. I don't and can't operate that way—I care too much about my work, about my clients and future generations that might have no photographs because I wanted to make fast and easy money selling files.

I'm taking a stand! I am a photographer! I am without a doubt passionate about creating photographs—real pictures, printed on professional paper—and beautiful albums. I want your children, their children, my children and future grandchildren looking at and holding onto photographs, not the latest greatest gadget.

It has taken deep soul searching, a lot of thought and time, to define the value of my work. I am taking a stand against selling files and taking a strong stand for printing my photographs.

If being a business owner and photographer today means the current market will force me to sell files not photographs and to compromise my work and my values—well then, I'm out.

But, that won't happen! I know it won't because I know there are people and clients who value my work, understand and respect the value I have placed on my work, and actually want photographs.

I am Michele Celentano, a professional photographer—I believe in and value photography and the images we leave for our children. My work and your portraits will be professionally printed to my standards, they will be available to frame and look at in albums...

The portraits I create for you will not become a part of your screensaver slideshow. I have worked too hard and taken too much pride in my work for that to happen. I will not take the risk that in 20 years we will be a generation of lost photographs.

There I stand!



YOUR WEBSITE AND BLOG

As part of the education process, you've got to plant the seeds for sales. You need to assume your clients have no idea what can be done with their photographs, and create visuals of all the possibilities.

For example, take a look at Lori Nordstrom's website, NordstromPhoto.com. Look at the way she's positioned everything on her site, and especially the section, "For Your Home." She's planting the seed for wall décor. She's making it a point to remind her clients their memories are meant to be shared and displayed.

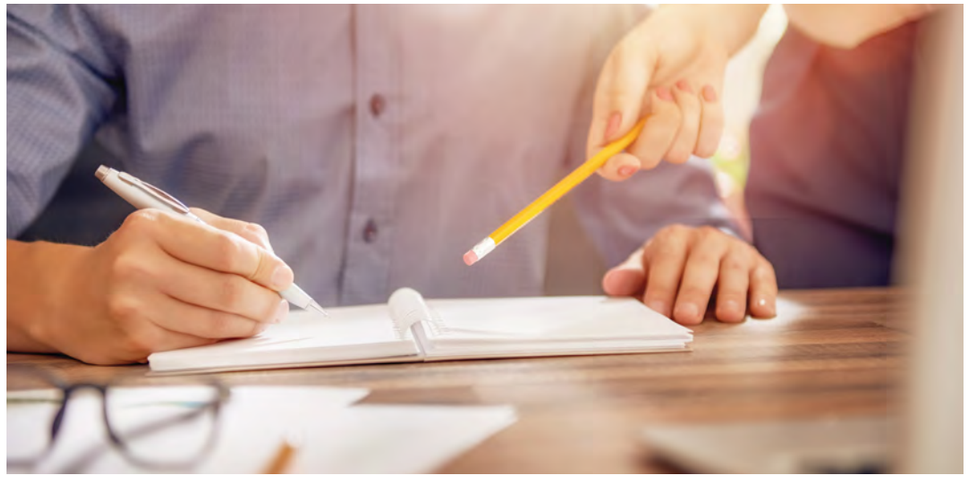
Your website is about what you sell, and your blog is about what's in your heart. Done right, the two work together to present your product line and services. Everything you share should be about educating your client and helping them understand who you are and the services you provide.

As another example, as a wedding photographer, you should be talking about being your client's eyes and heart during the event. As Bambi Cantrell has said numerous times, "A wedding is a time when logic doesn't reign as king."

This is where you come in as the artist and capture the moments the couple and their family are going to miss. They're trusting you to capture the event and create more than just an album: the first family heirloom of a new family.

This is why I love it when photographers show a complete album online as a demonstration of their storytelling skills. This is also an opportunity to show other products, like individually framed prints or, as Justin and Mary Marantz call it, shooting for the silver frame—an image so beautiful it's going into its own prominent display.

Use your blog and play "Subliminal Man" like the old SNL routine. Talk about ways to display your images. Show new products from your lab. Talk about great gift ideas using photographs. With each blog post, show the finished product. And don't forget, one call to your lab and they can provide you with the artwork to share. Essentially, your goal is be informative and so soft-sell that you're really hard-sell, without aggravating your readers.



"People do not buy goods and services. They buy relations, stories, and magic."
–Seth Godin

While Seth Godin's quote might seem like a contradiction to almost everything I'm sharing, it's right on point. Educate your clients in the magic you can create and help them share. Write your blog as stories about photography and the importance of capturing memories and stopping time.

Everything you share on your website and blog should be helping you establish the value of your role as a professional photographer. Never compromise on the quality of your images, your relationships with your clients, or your belief in yourself.

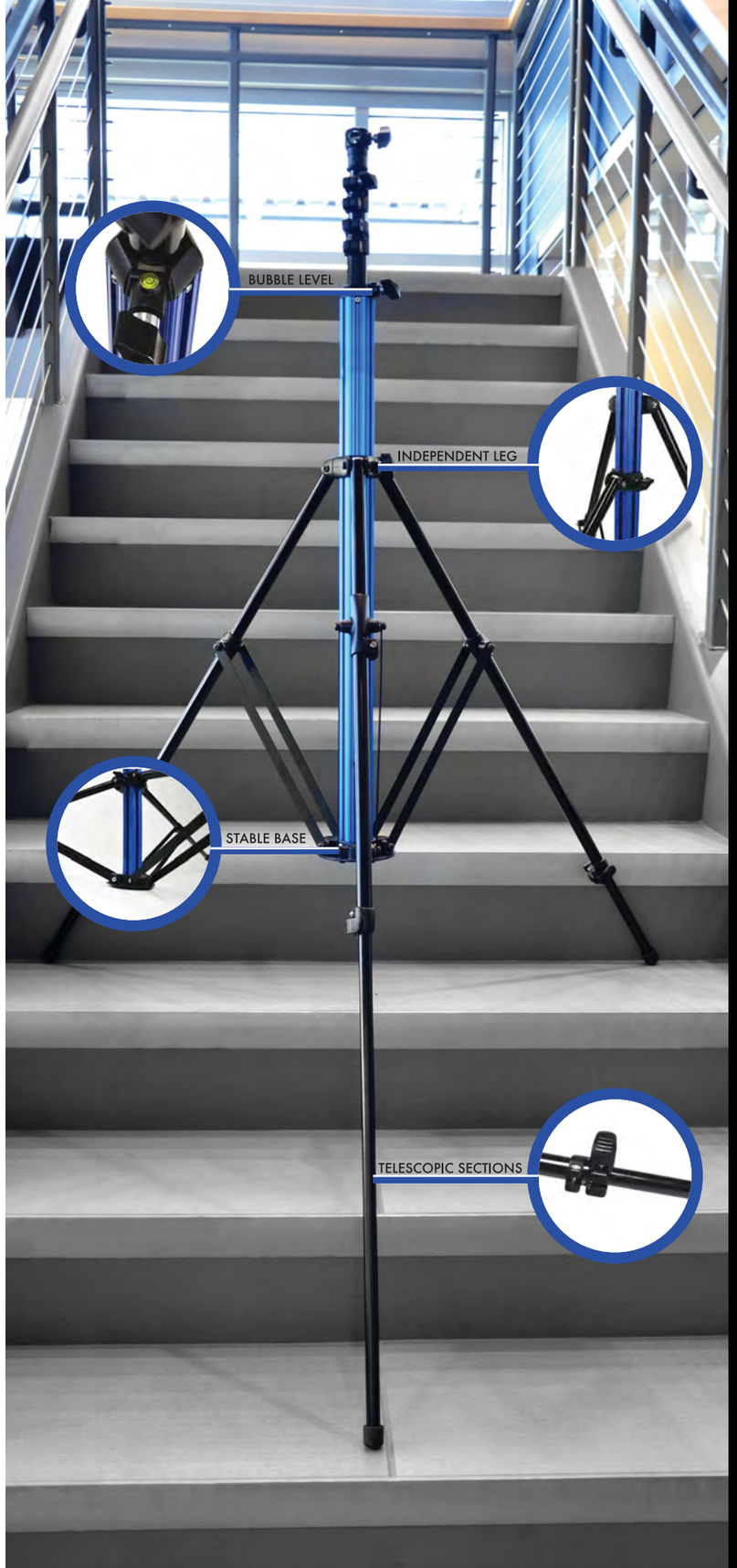
And, if you're stuck in how you position everything you're doing to build your brand and reputation, then you know where to find me. I'm here to help and your biggest cheerleader! ■

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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 photo 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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product spotlight

Panasonic with Salvatore Cincotta

LUMIX S1R





Why the Pansonic Lumix S1R?

They did it! Panasonic has finally released a full-frame sensor camera. Make no mistake, Panasonic is not new to mirrorless. They have been in the game and doing it well for a long time. I was excited to get my hands on this, and I can tell you right out of the gate the ergonomics on this are amazing. I have large hands, and once I added the grip, it just felt right. The weight, the balance—it's made right.

More specs

- FULL-FRAME SENSOR – 47.3-megapixel full-frame MOS sensor that provides a wide dynamic range and excellent performance at high sensitivity (ISO 25600 Max sensitivity).
- LUMIX S CAMERA LENS – Easy-to-use 24-105mm standard focal macro zoom F4 L-Mount for LUMIX S Series Full-Frame L-Mount digital mirrorless cameras.
- 4K VIDEO – Up to 4K 60p recording plus 6K Photo functions and HLG Photo.
- 187MP HIGH-RESOLUTION MODE – A sensor shift technology suitable for taking very high-resolution landscapes and fine art photos via tripod with toggleable motion correction capabilities.

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THE BUSINESS CORNER

IMPLEMENTING YOUR SALES SYSTEM

WITH IN-PERSON SALES

with **Jeff & Lori Poole**

Image © Indigosilver studio



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PUTTING YOUR SALES SYSTEM INTO ACTION

For the past several months in The Business Corner, we've been building your sales system from the ground up in order to get you to your target sales average (see The Business Corner article, August 2018, for a discussion on determining your target average). We started with cost-based (October) and demand-based (November) pricing, and strategies for digital files (December). Next, we built your sales system using your a la carte list (January), your bundled options (February), and your upselling strategies (March). Last month, (April) we translated all that theory into your first encounter with your clients: the inquiry and consultation. This month represents the culmination of all this work—selling profitable products to your client at an in-person sales appointment after the shoot. It's time to cash in.



Image © Indigosilver studio

SUGGESTIVE SELLING DURING THE SHOOT

If your pre-session consultation has been done correctly, you should have an idea of the products your clients are interested in. With practice, you'll also begin to intuit upsales to offer your client (see March's column for upselling ideas and strategies.) During the shoot, you should be cementing these ideas and upsells, underscored by certain images you're shooting.

For example, if you've just captured a series of different expressions in the same pose, show the back of your client while exclaiming, "Check these out! These images would look great tiled across an album spread…almost like a filmstrip!"

Or, when you've gotten that one great scenic epic shot, show it to your client and suggest, "Man, this would look killer as a big metal over your fireplace mantel." Keep it conversational, and then get back to shooting. Plant the seeds.

LOCATION OF THE SALES APPOINTMENT

In-person sales are best performed in an environment you can control. The ideal location would be your private retail space, in a room set up specifically for sales. The following elements help your sale; the more of these elements you have, the better.

Branded space. Your sales location should be an extension of your brand. Décor, color scheme and "mood" all affect how your clients view your brand.

Walls displaying LARGE wall art. Show what you want to sell. If you want to sell 20- to 30-inch prints, do not show 8x10s and 11x14s on your wall.

Wall art arranged how you would like to sell it. Don't merely show random pictures all over your walls. You are not a gallery. Don't mix photos from different sessions into one grouping. It doesn't translate. Show your client exactly what you want them to buy.

A table for albums and other products that do not hang. Clients need to see, touch and hold these items. Keep them accessible.

A large-screen TV or projector screen. The larger you show the images digitally, the better they will translate to wall portrait sales. Using a tablet or laptop keeps the customer thinking small.

Comfortable seating. Controlled ambient noise, temperature, lighting and smells. This sounds obvious, but people are more willing to stay, think and buy when they are comfortable.

Refreshments. Hunger kills sales. Plus, there's a certain positive effect to clients feeling spoiled and well-cared for.

Should I meet with my clients in their homes? For the average client, I would suggest avoiding an in-home meeting. When clients are in their own homes, they have the home-field advantage. It's harder to control your brand message and position yourself as an authority when you're on their turf. Further, clients tend to be distracted by kids, dogs, phone calls, the laundry, etc. They have a hard time focusing 100% on the sales experience, and sales suffer. There are exceptions to this rule with extremely high-end clients, but they are the exception rather than the rule.

Does a successful sale require a retail location? Is that my only option? No. But again, the more elements you can control, the better. Think outside the coffee shop. A dedicated space in your home, a local community studio like The Shoot Space, a business incubator, and executive suites are all worth researching. Just remember your goal is to have a controlled environment in which you can establish your expertise and guide the sale to its intended outcome.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE SALES APPOINTMENT

Your sales appointments should have the same process and flow every time. Here is the flow I like best with my clients:

Greeting & Agenda. Greet your clients at the door. Make small talk. Seat them in the sales area, within arm's reach of your tabletop samples, and within sight of your wall samples and TV/projection screen. Offer refreshments. Give your clients an agenda for this meeting: that you'll start with a slideshow of the images for first impressions; then you'll review product options and pricing; and finally they will be choosing the images for their products and (yes) placing their order.

Slideshow. The slideshow allows the client to see all the images for the first time. Your slideshow can be the basic feature built into Lightroom or your sales software, or it can be an elaborate display with animations set to music. The elaborate slideshows don't seem to help my sales, so I keep mine simple to save time. Explain to the client whether images have been retouched already or will be retouched once the order has been placed. This circumvents concerns about minor flaws and helps them to focus on pose and expression. During the slideshow, take mental note of favorites or relevant commentary such as, "Ooh Grandma will love that one!" At the end of the slideshow, ask them in an excited tone, "So what did you think?" Allow them to gush.

Sales System Review. You will have already presented your products and pricing at the consultation. Tell them that you'd like to take a moment to refresh their memories on your product options. Then, explain the whole system as though they've forgotten all of it. Start with the a la carte products, and explain (again) how your bundled options provide the best value and are "what most clients get." Answer questions, then ask which option they are most interested in. At this point, many clients will be leaning toward one particular bundle, but they may want to review the images to see how many favorites they have. This is fine, and it makes a good segue to image selection.

Image Selection. During the selection process, the client chooses their favorite images for purchase. My preferred method of selection is to pull up between one and four images on the screen together to allow the client to compare them. Encourage the client to be liberal in their selections, only narrowing out the images they don't totally love in the first round. It takes the pressure off of a "final answer" for indecisive types.

Images you display for comparison should be from the same concept—perhaps subtle variations in pose or expression, wide/middle/tight framing, or angle. If there are more than four images from a given concept, I will split them into two groups. Clients keep more images and feel less overwhelmed if they are only shown a few at a time. As a general rule, we see the best sales and least decision fatigue when showing 40-70 images total.

As with the slideshow, there are many options and tools for the image selection process. If you're just starting out, Lightroom will work just fine. If you want something a little fancier, there are numerous IPS softwares available. You simply need something that will show the images side by side while allowing you to track yeses and no's (usually with flags, hearts or stars).

After the first round of culling, hide the rejected images. Clients will usually want to run through the images one more time to narrow further. They often end up realizing they kept images that were too similar, and they'll be more decisive in the second round. This is good—you want them to feel like they chose the best images and were not pressured to keep quantity for the sake of a higher sale. Clients must trust you to have their best interests in mind if you are to become the "trusted advisor" (as Sal calls it).

Your clients will begin to jump back and forth between the price list and the images they've chosen. This is good! They are translating desired images into a product purchase.

Product Selection. At this point in the sales process, certain products or bundles should naturally suggest themselves as a good fit, based on the client's inclinations and the number of images they've chosen. A good sales system will have a combination of quantity products (like albums and image boxes) and showpiece products (such as large wall art). Simply guide your client using your knowledge of the products, your attentiveness to their needs, and your opinions as an artist. Now is the time to remind them about that print that Grandma would love.

Notice that at this point, there shouldn't be a huge amount of decision-making effort about products. These questions and objections will have been handled primarily at the consultation, and secondarily after the slideshow. This is by design. Your client already has a lot of mental energy devoted to image selection. It's better to get the numbers questions out of the way early.

Take Their Payment. Review the products they have chosen so far. Check in as to whether they have forgotten any important family members to shop for, or if there are any favorite images they haven't yet put into a product. Once they have finalized their decisions, take their payment. Do not get awkward. Whatever that final number is, state it matter-of-factly and then simply ask how they would like to pay.

Confirm Their Decisions. When the client has chosen their favorite images and products and the sale is complete, validate their choices. Regardless of whether they chose your favorite images (I'm side-eyeing YOU, Jeff), tell them that they made a great choice. Emphasize how much they are going to love having these products. Use emotional storytelling, not jargon. Say, "You are going to love seeing this big portrait on your wall every day." Or, "Gosh, your album is going to be so beautiful. I love the cover option you chose. Can you imagine seeing this album years from now? So great." Remind them of the reason they chose to have portraits made in the first place. This affirmation is crucial to crushing any buyer's remorse they may experience when they leave. But also, it just plain feels good to be complimented on a decision well made.



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SEND THEM AWAY SMILING

If everything is done correctly, your clients will leave happy. The image selection process went smoothly, you guided them in making the best decisions, and they've chosen the products that fit their needs the best. You then reminded them of the long-term value of the products they'll be receiving soon. They've had a great experience with you and are excited to receive their products. If it fits your brand, hug them on the way out the door—and remind them how much you love referrals. ■



Just a few years after Jeff and Lori found themselves struggling to survive while living in the basement of their studio, back in 2012, they are the proud owners of a brand-new home on the coast of North Carolina. The owners of Wilmington's Indigosilver Studio offer boutique boudoir portraiture and wedding photography. They are also the founders of The Shoot Space, their educational resource for photographers. Their *Shutter Magazine* column, The Business Corner, is dedicated to helping you grow your photography business.

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5 TIPS FOR GETTING IT **RIGHT** IN CAMERA

with **Michael Anthony**

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Since I began teaching photographers back in 2014, the question that I've gotten asked most often on social media and in person is, "How do you edit your photos to look like that?" My answer is always the same, yet people never seem to believe me. My editing consists of curve layers and Lightroom RAW processing. Yes, there is a technique to editing, but I will be 100% honest with you—if you don't shoot things right in camera, you will never get the effects you are looking for.

Photographers seem to obsess over editing. They treat it like it's the special sauce that, once mastered, will bring you in new clientele. Nothing could be farther from the truth. I will let you guys in on a little secret. Our clients come to us for cinematic, dramatic environmental portraiture, yet the images that they love, and the ones that we choose for our portfolio, are typically the ones for which we diverge the least from the original file.

The reason for this is that, as photographers, we are not graphic artists. Therefore, most of the time when we spend time editing an image and manipulating its pixels, we are making it look less believable to the eye. About a year ago, I took a look at much of my work, and made the conscious decision to tone the Photoshop down a bit in favor of a more realistic scene, and to really focus on in-camera proficiency.

Does that mean we don't edit our images? Of course not, it just means that rather than run two layers of plugin x over an image, swap a sky, or HDR it to unrealistic levels, we are deciding to work using curves to dodge and burn selectively, and do basic RAW processing and conversion. Even when outsourcing our image competition prints or portfolio pieces, we are opting for dodging and burning, light sharpening, and more realistic tonal ranges on our images.

Our clients see their images almost straight out of camera. When we started outsourcing our edits, I stopped shooting for "fixing it in Photoshop" and switched to shooting for the final image. The reason for that is simple: workflow. There was only one way to give the clients the best balance between final imagery and efficiency, and that was to get it right in camera. I have even toyed with the idea of delivering my clients the JPEGs as their digital negatives.

The point I am trying to make with this long-winded intro is that, in order to progress in our work, it may be time to spend more time behind the camera and less in front of the computer. That's what we all tell ourselves is our goal anyway, right? Ok, so let's do it.



Image © Studio 23 Photography

TIP ONE

MAKE YOUR LIGHT SOURCE REALISTIC

It's time to stop underexposing your scenes three stops while your subject is in the shade and then blasting them with a hard flash source. It just doesn't look real. Good light means you will illuminate your subject, drawing your viewers' attention to them without it obviously looking like flash. The key to achieving this is balance. We typically operate our scenes in the one-stop underexposed background range, and if the scene has no natural contrast, then it's usually one-third to two-thirds of a stop. We don't need to make it look obvious that we are using flash.

Flash isn't a photography style, just like natural light isn't a style. They are both tools we use to accomplish an objective, which is to bring the viewer's eye to your subject.

TIP TWO

CONTROL YOUR LIGHT

This is another one that is often overlooked. If you are lighting your subjects from above, you will likely need to feather your light source if the floor is visible in your composition. We typically want to light our subjects with the edge of our light source, because that will give us the most gradual light fall off anyway. It's completely typical for us to be pointing our light source one to two feet over our subjects' heads to avoid spill on the floor.

Use grids when in small spaces to control your light spill and make your room look realistic. You can also bounce light off walls while using flags in order to get softer light, but make sure you are controlling your angles.



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TIP THREE

FOCUS ON YOUR STORY

Incorporating story into your posing or posing sequences can take an image from good to great. You should always ask yourself what the story you are trying to tell is. I will argue that a couple staring off into a light source is not a strong story on its own, but if combined with other images that supplement it, it can be a great set for a couple's wall.

More often, however, I think you will create a better emotional connection to your clients' imagery by asking them to interact with one another. It's one thing we have done with our work in 2019 that has not only helped increase our clients' satisfaction with their images, but also the amount of revenue we are able to generate. Pro tip: Happy clients spend more money.

So in order to create connection between your clients, I recommend giving them prompts when posing. Ask him to caress her cheek or kiss her shoulder. Ask her to jump on his back. All of these things will give you natural emotion and help them to have fun with their shoot.

If you read last month's article, you know that the correlation between their experience with you and their perception of their images are directly related, so use this as an opportunity to create something great for them.



Image © Studio 23 Photography

TIP FOUR

CHECK YOUR COMPOSITIONS

Ok, let's talk about a truth—photographers have issues shooting straight. When I made the switch back from mirrorless to DSLR, I noticed that right away, I have a built-in right lean on my vertical images. I was conscious of that and able to correct it by activating the grid display in my optical viewfinder. If you don't have this enabled, go do it now, because it will help you to line up your lines so much better.

When I first begin to train photographers in our style of photography, the main issues that I run into deal with composition. You simply can't fix bad composition in post-production. It has to be done in camera. So look in your frame for ways to fill negative space. Look for ways to find balance. Look for ways to eliminate distractions. Clean up the borders of your composition. All of these things are crucial to developing beautiful compositions for your clients.

TIP FIVE

BE METICULOUS ABOUT DETAILS

This will be the most important tip that I leave you with. It is incredibly important to be meticulous with your details. Commit yourself to one month of not using Photoshop to correct things in your images that could have been fixed in capture. Make sure you pay attention to your backgrounds, your highlights and shadows, and the distractions in your posing.

More importantly, be aware of your clients' insecurities, and work to fix them through light, shadow and posing. It's important to pay attention to attire as well; often, clothing can become a distraction if not managed properly.

And let's talk about something obvious, like camera settings. If you are shooting bridesmaids interacting with each other in a bridal room, you should not be shooting at F/1.8! Just because your lens is fast doesn't mean you need to use it. During bridal prep, we are often shooting at F/5.6-F/11. This means my ISO is often around 6,400-10,000, but truthfully, it doesn't matter with today's modern full-frame cameras, because they are so great at working with low light.

Conversely, you should not be shooting moving subjects at 1/125th of a second with a 70-200mm lens. I know this stuff sounds basic, but raise your hand if you make these mistakes during a wedding, when a DJ gives you no time to set up your stuff and all of a sudden the grand entrance is happening. All wedding photographers should be raising their hand reading this right now. It happens all the time. The way that we stay ready for that is through repetition and creating a repeatable set of starting points for different parts of the day.

There is a saying that some people would rather be lucky than good at something. The truth is, if you become good at something, you will get lucky much more often. So work to perfect your in-camera skill set and help yourself get work done faster on the backend, have happier clients, and save your sanity long-term by creating work that will not be dated in 10 years. ■

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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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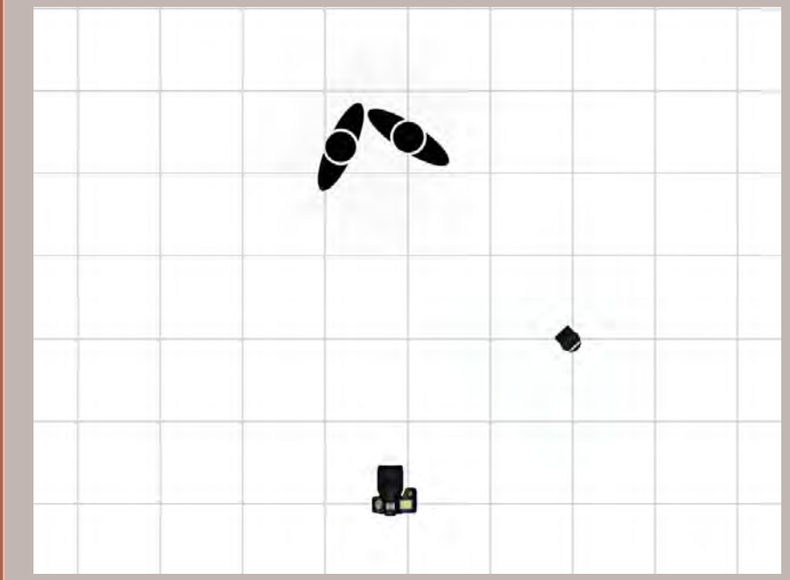
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