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*Salvatore Cincotta*  
BEHIND THE SHUTTER

## MISSION STATEMENT

*Shutter Magazine's* focus is on photography education. Our goal is to provide current, insightful and in-depth educational content for today's professional wedding and portrait photographer. *Shutter* uses the latest technologies to deliver information in a way that is relevant to our audience. Our experienced contributors help us create a sense of community, and have established the magazine as one of the leading photography publications in the world.

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## THE COVER

**PHOTOGRAPHER:** Sal Cincotta | [salcincotta.com](http://salcincotta.com)

**CAMERA:** Phase One IQ3

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**EXPOSURE:** f4.5 @ 1/160th, ISO 200

**LIGHTING:** Profoto B1 with Umbrella Softbox

**ABOUT THE IMAGE:** This image was taken in Kamakura, Japan in July 2016.

# LAUNCH POINT

A message from the editor-in-chief



**You are your brand.**  
**Always protect the brand.**

- Sal Cincotta



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

# TOP TEN

LIGHTING QUESTIONS  
**ANSWERED**

with **Michael Corsentino**



*Understanding foundation lighting patterns, the effects of different modifiers and how to use a flash meter will help you to craft sophisticated lighting, like this compelling three-light portrait.*



*Speedlights vs. Strobes: When considering speedlights versus larger strobes, keep in mind that for nearly the same money, you can get a much more powerful strobe, like this Elinchrom BRX500. It uses a battery-operated power inverter so you can use it on location.*

## 1 SPEEDLIGHTS OR STROBES?

Ah, the age-old question. Should I invest in speedlights or strobes? As we lighting geeks are fond of saying, light is light. However, speedlights and their larger strobe cousins are different tools that come with distinct capabilities that set them apart from handheld flash units. The choice between handheld flash and larger strobes, both battery-operated and studio versions, depends a lot on how you're planning to use them, what your budget is and what you already have in your kit.

One of the main differentiating factors between handheld flashguns and larger strobes is their power output. With additional power comes additional flexibility and creative options. With more power, you can do things like place your strobes farther away from your subjects, use larger modifiers and overpower the sun. Strobes also benefit from a much wider array of modifiers to choose from.

The recent introduction of lightweight TTL and high-speed sync-enabled strobes, many of which are 10 times more powerful than handheld flashgun units, make the strobe route appealing. Most flagship handheld flashguns from leading manufacturers are in the \$500 to \$600 price range, while larger battery-operated strobes fall somewhere in the range of \$1,800 to \$2,000. Good 500ws studio monolight heads can be had for as little as \$600 to \$1,200. Price can be a determining factor, but I'd rather have one powerful light that's capable in many scenarios than three underpowered small lights that leave me wanting.

For that reason, my recommendation for general use is one battery-operated strobe in the 400- to 500ws range, with or without TTL. This way you have a tool you can use on location as well as in the studio. Keep in mind you can accomplish a lot with just one light. Having the extra power provided by a larger strobe gives you considerably more options than you'll have with an underpowered small flash. That said, don't despair, my small-flash friends: I used only speedlights for years. You can do a lot with these tools; you'll just be more limited when additional power is needed.

## 2 HOW CAN I CREATE HARD, EDGY LIGHT?



*Modifiers play an essential role in the quality of light. The larger the modifier and the closer it is to your subject, the softer the light. This Elinchrom 74" Octa is my go-to tool for soft light. Place it close to your subject and feather it for the softest effect. Smaller silver-interior reflectors like this 15" Mola Rayo produce a much harder light with considerably more contrast. Heighten the effect by increasing the distance between your subject and the light source.*

Let's start by defining hard light. Hard light has rapid, crisp transitions between the shadows and highlights, creating a specular (contrasty) look. You'll want to create a roadmap to achieve it. As with any lighting effect, you will rely on a combination of tools and techniques. I suggest using smaller silver-interior reflectors. Alternatively, softboxes with interior and exterior diffusion panels removed can be used.

The absence of any diffusion material assures a harder light source, while a silver interior provides extra contrast and a cooler-toned light than is possible with a white-interior modifier. The distance between your subject and the light source also plays a vital role in creating hard or soft light. The farther away the light is from the subject, the smaller its perceived size in relationship to the subject, and the harder the resulting light.



*One silver-interior Mola Sollo Beauty Dish and a 1,000WS head provided the specular look for this edgy fashion test. Four additional heads are illuminating the background.*



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### ~~3~~ HOW CAN I CREATE SOFT LIGHT?

With soft light the opposite is true. Transitions between shadows and highlights are gradual and therefore lower in contrast. In fact, the bigger the modifier, the better. One of my favorites is Elinchrom's 74-inch indirect octa. This modifier not only gives you the ample size you need to create gorgeous soft light, but it also goes one important step further. By orienting the strobe so that it points inward, toward the back of the octa rather than out toward the subject, it further softens and broadens the lighting.

You could get away with a large white V-flat and a scrim for diffusion to get close to this effect. Feathering is another key technique you'll want to employ when you're creating soft light. Here you'll place your subject just behind the modifier so you're working with the edge of the light. This is the softest and most pleasing light possible. Regardless of the tools you're using, choose a modifier with a white interior and lots of diffusion. Get it as close as you can to your subject, and feather it.



High-powered pack and head systems, available in both 2400WS studio and 1,200WS battery-operated portable models, provide considerable options when it comes to modifier size and the distance from subject. On location, additional power makes it easy to overpower even the brightest sunlight.

### ~~4~~ HOW DO I BALANCE STROBE AND DAYLIGHT?

When it comes to creating the perfect balance between flash and ambient light, remember this simple guideline: Shutter speed controls the ambient light contributed to the exposure, aperture controls the strobe light contributed to the exposure and ISO controls the sensitivity of both aperture and shutter speed.

If you're using TTL for your flash exposure mode, you've got one additional variable in your bag of tricks: flash exposure compensation (FEC). You'll use this once you've selected the f/stop, but you still want to either increase or decrease the output of the flash without needing to change your aperture. This is very helpful in exterior portrait scenarios, where wider apertures are often preferred.

In addition to understanding exposure and strobe techniques, additional equipment plays a role. Do yourself a favor and incorporate a portable diffusion panel into your lighting kit. This allows you to cut harsh daylight and create a better balance using ambient and fill flash.



## 5 DO I NEED A LIGHT METER?

Asking if you need a light meter is kind of like asking if you need a car. You can absolutely get where you're going without one, but think how much faster you'll get there with a good set of wheels. With a light meter, the days of chimping to see whether you nailed the exposure are gone. You simply decide what your preferred aperture is, meter the output from your flash so it matches that aperture, and boom—you have a perfect exposure the first time you click the shutter.

Metering allows you to work fast, accurately, consistently and repeatably. Moreover, a light meter does things your camera's meter simply can't, like meter flash. Your camera's meter can't do that; that's why there's all that chimping going on. Plus, a handheld meter lets you take more accurate incident light readings rather than the reflective light readings your camera's meter takes. Incident light is the light falling on your subject rather than the light being reflected from it. Different surfaces and materials reflect light at different intensities, providing a less accurate reading. This is why your exposure is off sometimes.

A handheld meter also allows you to easily determine a ratio or the power relationship between different lights, like in a three-light setup. Again, that's impossible with a camera's built-in meter. Once you have these settings, you can easily and quickly recreate the same lighting setup with a meter.

*If you're working with strobes, you need a handheld flash meter. It allows you to work quickly, accurately and with predictable, duplicatable results. You can meter flash, which your camera's built-in meter cannot—so long, chimping.*

## 6 WHAT'S THE PERFECT MODIFIER TO USE ON LOCATION?

I get this question a lot, and I always answer it the same way. The perfect modifier is the one that produces the look you're after. I wish I could give you a simple one-tool answer, but there is no one-size-fits-all modifier. It's a myth. The trick is to figure out the effect you want to create, be it on location or in the studio, and then plug in the modifier and techniques that will create that effect. It's that simple.

There are important considerations where location work is concerned, chief among them modifier weight, size, portability and the effect of windy conditions. Large softboxes can be a significant challenge on location when the wind kicks up. You just need to plan accordingly and have enough assistants to wrangle the modifier so it doesn't take off like a sail.

## 7 WHAT POWER SETTING SHOULD I CHOOSE FOR MANUAL FLASH?

Many people find manual flash intimidating because, unlike TTL flash, the camera's meter isn't calling the shots for them. It's up to them to determine the amount of flash and ambient light contributed to the exposure. While this intimidation is understandable, it's actually unfounded because manual flash couldn't be more simple once you understand a few simple concepts.

The main thing people seem to struggle with is understanding where to set the power of their flash. The simple answer is "somewhere." I'm not being cheeky—you just need to start somewhere. Determining the right amount of power depends on variables such as the distance your strobe is from your subject, the maximum power output possible with your strobe and how it's being modified. The place I start is typically at 50 percent power. This gives me a solid starting point, with 50 percent flexibility either up or down.

I'm a big fan of handheld meters, but with manual, it is as simple as dialing it up or down for more or less light. Once you become more familiar with your strobes and modifiers, how they operate in various scenarios, choosing the right power setting will become second nature.



*Every strobe possesses different strengths and weaknesses that make them well-suited for certain tasks and less so for others. Choosing a strobe is about choosing the right tool for the job. Profoto's B1 is a great TTL-enabled battery-operated 500WS strobe for studio or location use. You may need more to overpower the sun, and its weight isn't ideal for extended run-and-gun handheld use. Elinchrom's ELC series heads offer specialty features like stroboscopic and time delay modes that extend creative options. The weight and portability of Elinchrom's ELB400 battery-operated pack and head system make it ideal for extended handheld use.*

## 8 I'M NEW TO LIGHTING. WHAT'S THE FIRST THING I SHOULD KNOW?

The most important piece of advice I can give anyone new to using artificial light is to get their light off-camera ASAP. Why? The minute you introduce angle and direction to your lighting is the minute you take your lighting to the next level. It doesn't matter whether you're using speedlights or strobes, creating beauty light or looking for a more dramatic effect. Directional light introduces shadows, and shadows create a sense of dimension, volume and drama. So...don't be afraid of shadows.

On a related note, you need to be familiar with the six classic lighting patterns: Paramount (also called butterfly), clamshell, Rembrandt, loop, split and rim (also called accent).

With these two simple things under your belt, your lighting game will be in a whole new league in no time.

## 9 WHAT LIGHTING ACCESSORIES DO I NEED?

You need reflectors, diffusion panels, subtraction panels, V-flats, flags, nets, grids (hard and soft) and triggers to get light right. These are some of the least expensive but most indispensable tools you'll invest in.

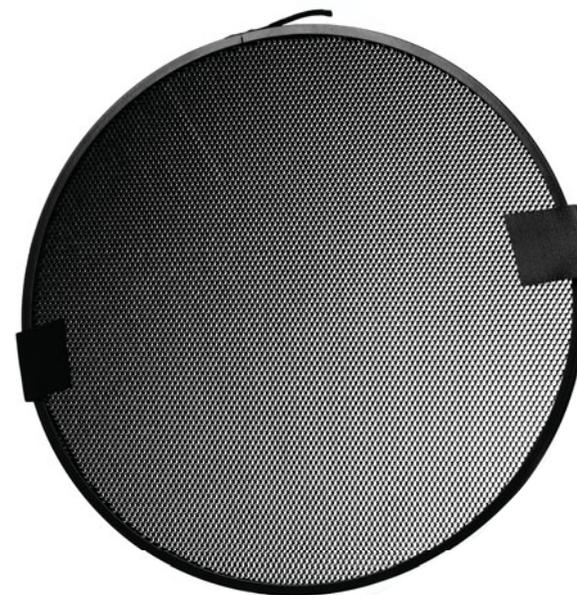
Let's start with reflectors, diffusers and subtraction panels. At a minimum, you'll want a portable multipurpose tool, such as Lastolite's TriFlip 8-in-1 Grip Reflector Kit 30" (LL LR3696). This one tool allows you to reflect, subtract and diffuse light. I always have at least two with me.

In the studio, you can't beat V-flats. These 4x8-foot reversible white- and black-faced pieces of foamcore are the omnipresent reflectors and subtraction panels in any studio. They're inexpensive must-have items, usually purchased as a pair.

Flags are another useful addition to any studio. These are frames with black fabric stretched over them that come in various shapes and sizes. They allow light to be blocked exactly where it's needed. The same is true with nets, except these tools, also available in a variety of shapes, sizes and strengths, allow some but not all light to pass through them, essentially knocking down the intensity of the light by a specific amount. Nets are very helpful for taming hotspots on skin and reflective surfaces.

You'll also want grids (also referred to as grid spots) and soft egg crate grids. These are used in conjunction with reflectors and softboxes to create a constrained and narrow pool of light. Grids are specified as 10, 20, 30 or 40 degrees. The smaller the number, the tighter the pool of light created. Once you start using grids, you'll wonder how you ever got along without them.

I won't spend a lot of time on them here, but wireless triggers are another must-have. Radio-based wireless triggers allow you to trigger and control your strobes/speedlights from the camera position with no line-of-sight limitations.



*There's a ton of accessories out there, some useful and others not so much. I always have two 30" Lastolite Tri-Flip Kits with me so I can diffuse the sun and bounce or subtract light as needed. The other must-have tools are grids, either rigid or soft, which allow you to confine the light from your speedlight or strobe to a very narrow beam. Last but not least—and the least expensive of the bunch—are V-flats. If you do any studio work, these 4x8 black-and-white reversible pieces of foamcore are indispensable.*



*If I had to recommend one modifier to someone just starting out, it would be a convertible umbrella. These multipurpose tools can be used as a shoot-through, bounce-back or makeshift octa. One of the most versatile in this category is the Lastolite 41" 8-in-1 umbrella.*

## ~~10~~ IF I CAN AFFORD ONLY ONE MODIFIER, WHAT SHOULD IT BE?

Build your stable of modifiers slowly and steadily. This way, you get to know them and what they're capable of. One of the least expensive and best modifiers to start with is a convertible umbrella, like Lastolite's 41" 8-in-1 Umbrella (LL LU4538F). This \$129 tool does a multitude of things. It can be used as a shoot-through umbrella, bounce-back umbrella or makeshift octabank. So when you're starting out or on a tight budget, look for tools that can do more than one thing.

Umbrellas are great general-purpose tools that provide a lot of flexibility. Just note that they lack the light-shaping control of modifiers, like softboxes, that have more edge to work with. In other words, umbrellas put light everywhere.

Let's talk about your lighting questions on the ShutterFest Facebook page. Post your questions and tag me. ■



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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BUILDING A PORTFOLIO IN 30 DAYS

with Jeff Rojas



Photographers can get in over their heads wanting to photograph everything, especially when they're trying to make ends meet. I understand it's hard to pass up the opportunity for a paid gig when you're a freelancer, but marketing yourself as a photographer who shoots everything is counterproductive. Developing your own brand, style and niche isn't difficult, and you can do it in as few as 30 days.

Let me be clear: When you're hungry for work, any job someone puts in front of you sounds like a great opportunity. There's nothing wrong with taking on those types of jobs, but I'd stray away from including it in your portfolio because it can impact the way clients perceive your body of work.

Think about it this way: If I asked you where the best place is to find a television, you'd recommend a store like Best Buy. Why? Because it specializes in electronics. Walmart has a ton of great deals on televisions, but it doesn't specialize in that niche market. If I were to ask you about stores that sell \$25,000 wedding rings, you'd probably say Tiffany & Co. Did you know Walmart sells wedding rings upwards of \$25,000? Yes, Walmart.

Think about that for a second. While Walmart has great deals on everything, that's also how clients perceive them. No one assumes Walmart would sell \$25,000 rings because that's not how it's marketed. That's the mindset that you need to have when you're developing your portfolio. Specialize in something memorable. If you're a wedding shooter, stick to weddings. If you're a portrait photographer, stick to portraits. You want potential clients to remember you for your body of work is, especially if most of your leads come from referrals.



Fig. 1.1



Fig. 1.2



Fig. 1.3



Images © Jeff Rojas

## MY STORY

Like most photographers these days, I stumbled into photography accidentally. I never planned to become a photographer. I picked up a camera one day and instantly fell in love with it. Around the age of 24, I was laid off from my last corporate job, as regional sales manager for an education company based in New York City. I decided to pursue photography as a career. I was hired as the studio manager/videographer/video editor for a fashion photographer who also taught photography. I was always on set for everything she shot. I saw her light her clients and fashion editorials dozens of times over the course of two years. Eventually, she trusted me enough to allow me to photograph clients in her place.

When I photographed a look book for a client of hers that was featured in *Elle*, I realized something: While I should have been proud of shooting that caliber of work, it wasn't my own. It was her style. It was her client. I was just replicating what I had seen dozens of times even though I did it all without her there. That was the day I decided to create my own body of work and carve my own niche.

## HOW I CREATED A NEW PORTFOLIO IN 72 HOURS

A week after my epiphany, I booked four male models and photographed them over the course of an eight-hour day with help from a wardrobe stylist. I shot two unique images with each model, and in about eight hours, I had enough work for a portfolio. (The images in Figures 1.1 through 1.3 are from those shoots.) After the images were retouched, I submitted them to a major men's fashion site called *Fashionisto*, and within a couple of days, I was contacted by several agencies in New York City that wanted to work with me. My total time invested was a day of shooting and a night of editing. I submitted those images the night I photographed them, so it was just 24 hours and two days of waiting for the images to be published on their site.

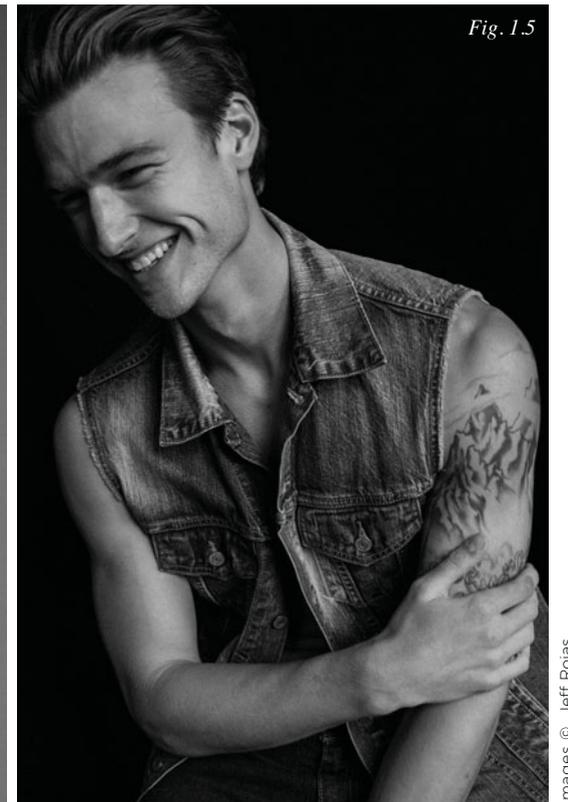
Can those results be replicated? Absolutely. Earlier this year, a makeup artist I worked with was scouted by an agency in New York. Together we created the images in Figures 1.4 and 1.5.

Here are some tips you can use to find your own success.

Fig. 1.4



Fig. 1.5



Images © Jeff Rojas

## BALANCE WHAT YOU LIKE TO PHOTOGRAPH WITH WHAT YOU'RE GOOD AT

Society has become overly romantic and less practical. Just because you love to do something doesn't make you good at it. For example, if you're an introvert who hates people but you love wedding photography, don't expect miracles. You're probably not going to become a multimillionaire unless you find a business partner who balances out your shortcomings.

Obviously that's an extreme, but it's important to be self-aware. Fashion photography isn't for everyone. I'm constantly managing creatives and egos on set, but I enjoy managing. If you have more of a laid-back attitude, you probably won't enjoy it unless you hire a self-sufficient crew.

On that same note, think about what you're actually good at, and find a niche that meshes with your skillset. If you're amazing with children, why not try that niche? If you have an eye for details, then shoot weddings. Incorporate what you're good at (aside from the aesthetics), and you'll outshine the competition.

## DO MARKET RESEARCH

Found what you like to do? Here's a reality check: Just because you like doing something and you're good at it doesn't mean there's a market for it. Maybe there's little competition because there's no market. The easiest way to become a starving artist is when there's no potential sales leads coming through the door. The most critical aspect of carving out your own niche is analyzing the market. To be clear, your potential market is everyone you are capable of reaching and selling your photography services to. That includes personal relationships, networking opportunities and sales leads. Find a market that exists; if you don't, it'll take you years to develop a niche instead of days. And finally, if you're not seeing any sales leads coming through the door, start back at square one.



Image © Jeff Rojas

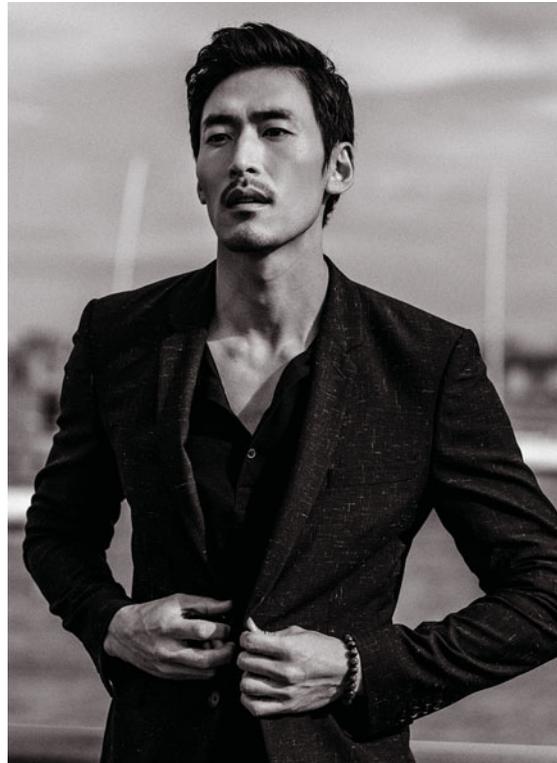


Image © Jeff Rojas

### OWN IT

Don't jump in halfway. If you're going to commit to something, fully commit or don't try at all. I see it all the time, photographers who spend so much time analyzing the market and assessing the pros and cons that they never get anything done. Whether it's because you don't want to pigeonhole yourself or because you're scared, you need to get over it ASAP. The longer you wait to do something, the steeper the learning curve is and the more opportunity you're giving potential competitors to take your idea or surpass you. Once you've decided what you want to do, tell everyone who'll listen—friends, family, previous clients.

This does two positive things: It holds you accountable for what you committed yourself to, and it makes you an established go-to person for that specific person. Take ownership of your endeavors and make them known. ■

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Jeff Rojas is an American photographer and author based in New York City. His primary body of work is his portrait and fashion photography that has been published in both *Elle* and *Esquire*. Jeff is a heralded photography instructor at platforms like CreativeLive, WPPI, the Photo Plus Expo, Imaging USA and APA.

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© Thomas Kethner Focal length: 85mm Exposure: F/1.8 1/640 sec

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# THE BRANDING EDITION

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Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

# BUILDING A BRAND

THAT BOOKS MORE BUSINESS

with Sal Cincotta

Want to book more business and make more money? We all do. But success is about more than just your photography. It's about your brand. This is one of the most misunderstood realities most photographers and small business owners miss.

I make the best cupcakes. People will come and we will be rich! Nope. Sorry. That's not how it works. Have you ever watched a TV show about a restaurant and then visited the actual place only to be let down? This happens every day. It doesn't mean that a powerful or high-profile brand is going to let you down, but it should drive the point home on the power of branding.

So, how do we translate that to photography? It can be as simple or as complex as you choose to make it. In a nutshell, it's all about the brand. You could be the best photographer in the world, win awards and accolades, and be dead broke. I have seen it over and over, all these amazing photographers in our industry with breathtaking imagery, and they have nothing to show for it. No retirement plan. No savings. Just their art. Well, congratulations. But I want more than just my art. I want to know I can live the life I want. I want to know I can retire someday, to buy the gear and toys I want. I want to know that I am working toward a secure future, not working to live day to day.

These are big and lofty dreams, and they require an understanding of what makes for a successful, powerful brand.

### You Are the Brand

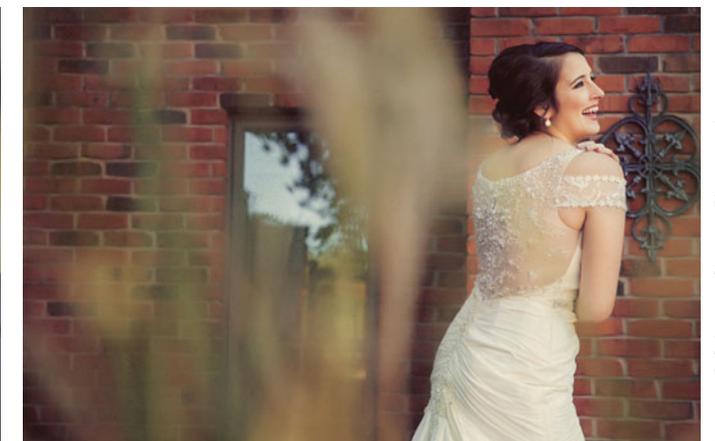
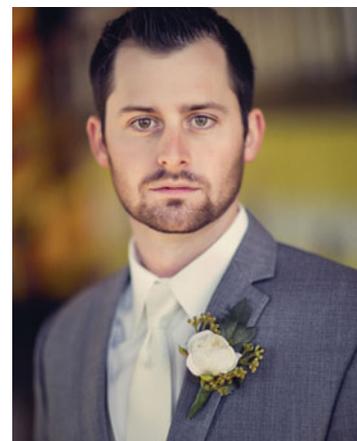
The minute you accept this and make the adjustments, your business will thrive. We are not a commodity product or service. We are artists. Our view of the world is unique. There is more to it than just the photography. It's about you and the way you carry yourself, the way you dress, the car you drive, your studio and many other personal traits.

This is what people buy into when they book you. You can deny it or not give it the weight it deserves, but that would be at your own demise.

I never understood photographers who show up to meetings or shoots with wrinkled clothes or looking like they haven't showered or brushed their teeth in a week. Yep. I just went there. Welcome to reality.

Oh, and the shitty, condescending attitude we can have as photographers and artists—also incredibly bad for business. No one cares that you went to art school or that you are the master of light. They want great family and portrait and wedding photos. They can get something on Groupon for \$69, so they don't want to deal with any of your nonsense.

Be your brand. Be an ambassador of good will for your brand. And at all times, protect the brand. Think about the things you say and do and how they impact you, your business and the perception of your brand. There is always room for improvement for all of us.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

## Build a Luxury Brand

It used to be that in order to be a photographer, you needed a mathematics degree. This is why the industry was dominated by males for so long. That's not the case today. Anyone can slap that bad boy into P and take pretty damn good photos. Now, before you start losing your mind, see the point here. It's more than just the photography.

Think about your own life and spending habits. Are you not willing to spend more for something you see as a luxury item, something that is considered to be the best? Of course you are. Then you have to realize your customers see the world the same way. They spend money on something they see as best of breed.

In order for that to happen, you have to build that brand as a luxury brand. Do you know what that means? No Groupon specials. No shoot-and-burn. Instead, offer your clients a full-service experience. Offering them high-quality products, high-quality albums and a host of other products will create lust in your clients that leads to bigger sales and more profit. I guarantee it!

Everything you do and everything you deliver to your clients should be completely branded.

## Stand Out

What are you doing to stand out from your competition? I have news for all of you. Competition is not going to end anytime soon. Photography had been shielded way too long because it was complicated. Well, not so anymore. Everyone is a photographer now. Perception is reality. Don't forget, I am an active photographer, I face the same fierce competition you do. Day in and day out, my team and I work on ways for us to stand out from the crowd.

There is no silver bullet here.

Coming up with ways to be original includes your photography, albums, products, client experience and everything else you do for your clients. Every day, look for new and unique ways to stand out in a sea of photographers. Not everything you do has to be expensive. It can as simple as not taking three months to show your clients their pictures. We show our clients their images in two weeks.

There are many ways for you to stand out. Now go implement them, and you will see those results in your bookings and sales.





Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

#### **Turn time.**

Clients see their images two weeks after their wedding. We highlight this during the initial consultation. Why? Because I know they either know someone or have read horror stories online about couples not seeing their wedding pictures for more than six months after the wedding. This is our strength, and we show it off.

#### **Big dramatic portraits.**

This is our signature style. I am not trying to be a photojournalist. I suck at it. There are photographers out there who are incredible at it. When clients come to us, I know they were drawn in by our portfolio, which is filled with nothing but these dramatic portraits. Again, I embrace our strength and showcase it.

#### **Personality.**

I have a very outgoing personality. Many photographers are introverts, and there is nothing wrong with that. Rather than trying to be something I am not, I am me. When I meet with clients, I bring all my energy and passion into that meeting, and they either love it or they don't. If they don't, they usually don't book. The ones that do tell us the one thing they love is how much energy I have and how vocal I am about things.

Figure out what you are good at. Market that and use it to your advantage. Embrace and exploit your strengths. Stop worrying about what your competitors are doing, and do you.

### **Embrace Your Strengths**

Stop trying to be everything to everyone. It is setting up yourself and your business for failure. Instead, figure out what you are damn good at and embrace it. Show it off. Let the world know.

Here are some of the strengths we exploit in our business.

## Create an Experience

Think like a consumer. When you spend money, a lot of money, don't you want something more? Your clients do too. We offer so much more than photography. You will often hear me say that we don't sell photography, we sell an experience.

Most of our clients are with us for up to two years when it's all said and done. There is a lot of time here to make an impression. When they book with us, we send them a bottle of wine and a thank-you note. After their wedding, we send them a handwritten thank-you card. When they receive their prints, they are wrapped like a high-end gift.

During every step of the process, we want to make a better impression on our clients and leave them with an incredible experience. This experience is one they talk about to everyone they know. This has ensured that we are one of the top wedding brands in our market. As a result, we charge a premium.

What can you do to create a better client experience? It doesn't have to be expensive. A thank-you card is not expensive. It just says you care. Stop taking from your clients and start asking how you can give back.

Here is a perfect real-world example. Recently we had a client go an hour and a half over the agreed-upon time. I could have walked out at the scheduled time, told them they would have to pay me for the extra time or absorbed the time and let them know in a classy way that we did this for them at no additional cost.

The result of choosing option three is a client who appreciated that we were probably the only vendor around that was cool enough to not charge them for staying later. The post-wedding sale was \$3,000. Did I know this when I made the decision? No, of course not. I did it because it seemed petty and I knew it would not be good service. Would they have spent that money had we charged them for the extra time? We will never know, but I suspect the bad taste in their mouth would have probably impacted that sale.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

### The Bottom Line

While your skill as a photographer does matter, it is not the only thing that matters. There is so much more to running a successful studio and business. I encourage you to think a little differently about what you are doing and why you are doing it. Invest time in these other areas to create a powerful brand and experience for your clients.

The result will be a business that is constantly growing and generating better profits than you ever thought possible. ■

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Sal Cincotta is an international award-winning photographer, educator, author and the publisher of *Shutter Magazine*. Sal's success is directly tied to the education he received in business school. He graduated from Binghamton University, a Top 20 business school, and has worked for Fortune 50 companies like Procter & Gamble and Microsoft. After spending 10 years in corporate America, Sal left to pursue a career in photography and has never looked back.

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



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## Why Photo Flash Drive's Classic Line?

Presentation matters. It's that simple. You spend all this time and energy perfecting your images for your clients, and then you deliver them in a way that is unbranded. In the past, you would have to pay expensive setup fees or order high quantity for minimum orders. Well, no more. Photo Flash Drive makes it easy and cost-effective for you to offer your clients a truly branded experience.

### No minimum orders. No setup fees.

The Classic Slide product line appeals to shoot-and-burners who are looking for a stylish way to present "just a flash drive," but also to full-service studios looking for a comprehensive line to build out packages and create remarkable products for in-person selling.

In our studio, we use custom boxes and thumb drives to deliver digital products, and our clients and love it.

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# product review



with *Salvatore Cincotta*



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Defining photographic style is the most important aspect of a photographer's brand. It is more important than the logo and everything else. Here's why. If I do a search for local wedding photographers, I will find a bunch of really good photographers who do not have a defined style. I could pull images from all their galleries and put them into one, and you would not be able to tell they were from a bunch of different photographers. If I'm a potential client looking for a photographer and I can't tell the difference between your photography and someone else's, your work becomes a commodity.

And when a consumer determines that two products are the same, the factor that decides who they select boils down to price. On the flip side, if during that same search I find a photographer who has a style that looks different from all the rest and I totally love it, that's what I'll choose. When consumers really want something, they'll pay a premium price to get it.

Here are a couple examples from some photographers who write for this magazine. Without even looking at their work, I can define their styles. Salvatore Cincotta's signature shots incorporate architecture or stunning scenery. His images are highly dramatic and artistic. Michael Anthony's signature shots play with light in a magical way. What he does with lighting is mind-blowing. Vanessa Joy's signature shots are feminine and airy, with soft pastels. How do you describe your imagery and brand?

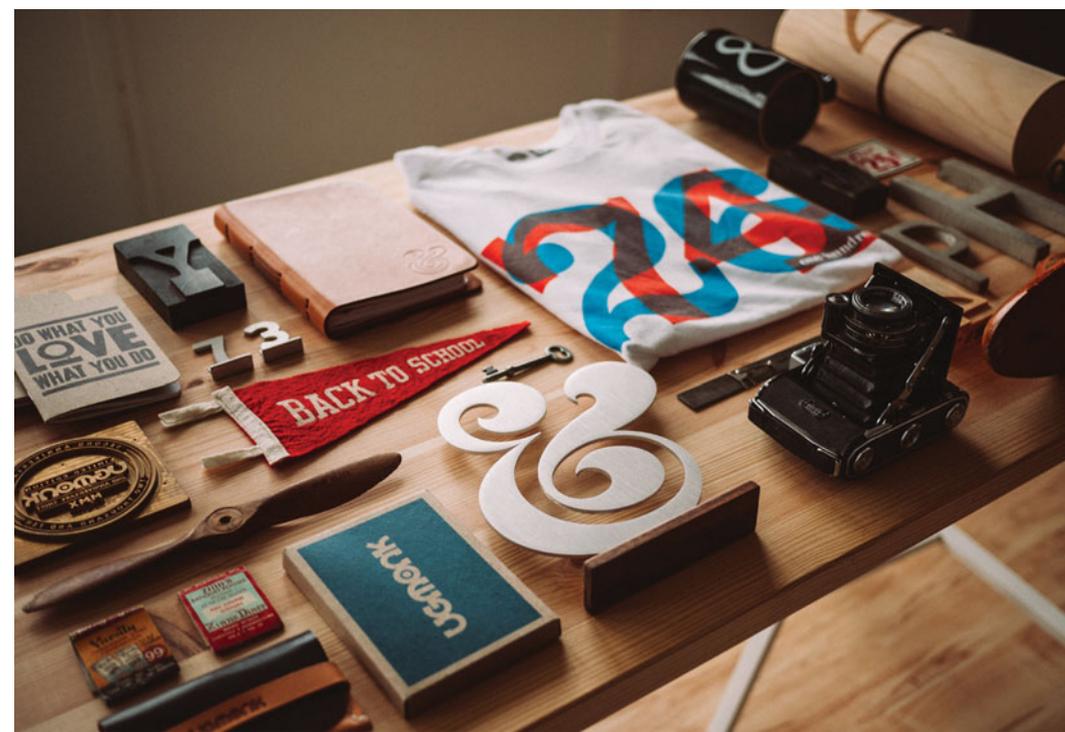
## A HODGEPODGE OF MARKETING MATERIALS

I review photographers' brands all the time, and one of the most common mistakes I find is that their branding materials are all over the place: noncomplementary colors, different themes or templates, different fonts, a complete mess. One of the worst offenses is using multiple mismatched logos throughout a brand. You're doing your brand a huge disservice by not having a consistent look and feel.

If you were to place all your branding and marketing materials on a floor and spread them out, there should be a uniform look to everything. So if your website doesn't complement your business card and your packaging and deliverables do not work with your promotional pieces, your brand is disjointed. This dilutes your brand value, making it less memorable.

## THEIR BRANDING DOES NOT MATCH THEIR STYLE

Another issue I see on a regular basis is branding that doesn't match the style of the photographer or their work. An example that comes to mind is a boudoir and wedding photographer I recently saw whose work is top notch. His imagery has a romantic feel, but his logo is this really masculine, heavy, ultramodern monogram that looks like an aggressive sports logo. The watermark on his photos looks like an accident.



## THEY DON'T PROPERLY PROMOTE THEIR BLOG POST

This is more of a marketing issue, but a huge pet peeve of mine. If a photographer's blog post showcasing a wedding has no likes or shares, what is going on? Are you trying to tell me the bride and groom didn't like or share their own wedding photos?

Not properly promoting your blog post is hurting your brand, marketing efforts and search engine rankings. Promoting blog posts should be a part of your regular workflow.

Here is the best way to do it: Before you upload and share your clients' photos on Facebook or another platform, do a blog post on your website. Showcase the best photos, spend a little time writing a couple paragraphs about the couple, the venues, other vendors, etc. Then promote that post via your social media accounts and share it with your couple. They in turn will share the post with their friends and family. The next thing you know, you are driving traffic to your site and getting tons of likes and shares, which will help with your SEO social signals.

## EVERYTHING YOUR CLIENT SEES REFLECTS ON YOUR BRAND

There was recently a discussion on the ShutterFest Facebook page about whether the type of car you drive affects your brand. Some argued that you need a luxury car, while others argued that it didn't matter at all. The fact is, you don't need to drive a luxury car unless you have a luxury brand. What's most important is that your car matches your brand.

If you're a rustic wedding photographer who shoots weddings in nature, driving something like a Jeep would totally match your brand. If you are a baby photographer with a fun brand, a VW Bug would complement it. If you're a family photographer and a mother of five, a minivan would be appropriate. But to say it doesn't matter is 100 percent wrong (unless your clients never see it). If you have a high-end luxury brand, charge \$10,000 per wedding and roll up in a rusted-out Yugo to your first client meeting, your brand will be negatively impacted.

Everything your client comes in contact with affects their perception of your brand: the quality of paper you use, how you speak on the phone, the tone of your emails, how you present your work, your pricing. Everything. Even how you dress. Some of the top female photographers even have special outfits they wear with their brand colors. ■



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

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4

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**LIVING** *your* **BRAND**  
with Blair Phillips





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Branding has many different definitions, meanings and interpretations. In my several years in the photography industry, there have been two really important meanings in branding for me: It establishes a continuing significance in the marketplace and creates customer loyalty. The way you brand your company can sometimes be more important than your images. If you brand yourself and your company in a way that allows people to connect with you emotionally, they will fall in love with you and not just your work.

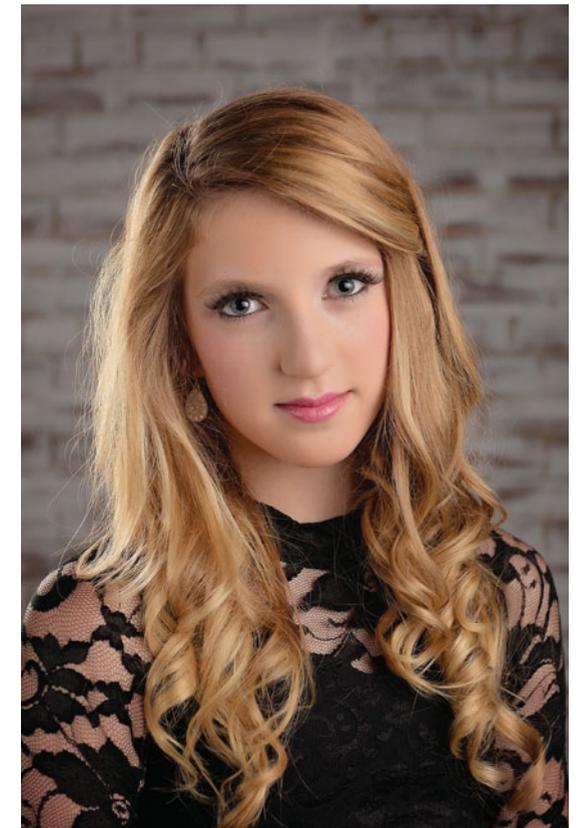
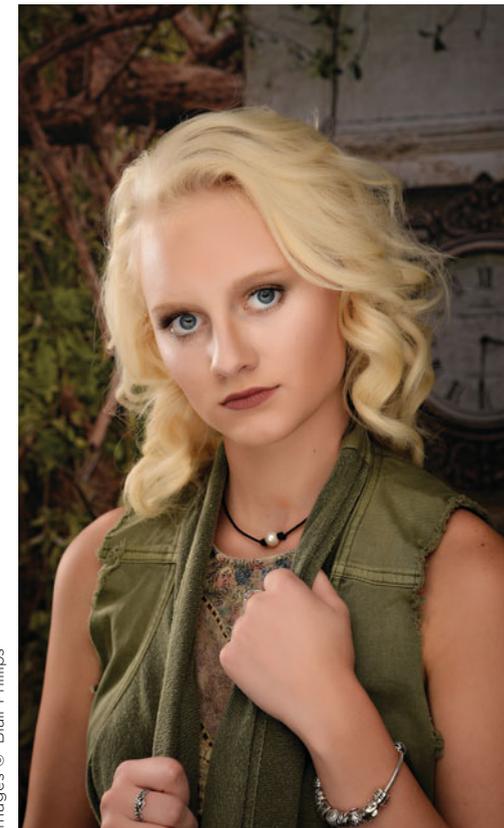


## FINDING YOUR BRAND

Finding your brand should come easily. Your brand is a reflection of who you are, your style, values, goals and outlook on life. Ask family, friends and even strangers to look at your portfolio. Ask them for words that come to mind that explain what they feel. The emotions they feel should inform your branding.

Once you establish your brand, the work has just begun. Take the direction that you want your branding to follow. Build a wall down both sides of the path that will help you maintain that direction. A business without consistency may be operating on borrowed time. Brand consistency is important all the way through your business. You have to be just as good delivering the final product as you do taking the first phone call.

Survey your business and personality. If you find weak areas, pass those tasks along to someone else. It may not seem you can afford it, but not doing so may actually cost you more in the long run. If you establish procedures and systems with the many aspects of your branding, consistency will follow. Brand identity crisis happens when you begin to create customer loyalty but push them away with inconsistencies.



## SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has made it so easy to gain new clients, as well as remain connected with existing ones. There are so many types of social media that it may feel impossible to keep everything updated. Many believe that your clients need to see only the business side of your life. I could not disagree more. People look at your page because they are curious about you and your life. Most photography pages are nothing but posts and images of and about their subject matter. That is all well and good for people to get a sense of your photography style, but falls short of the most important piece. That missing piece is a glimpse into your personal life.

You may be posting only what you want people to know. Share things about activities you do during your free time. If you are a family person, make occasional posts that show that. If you are an animal lover, music buff, hunter or car enthusiast, it helps people connect with you in a much deeper way when you share those things. I spend all my free time with my wife and children. When you view my social media pages, that becomes obvious.

A lack of comments or likes doesn't mean you have no audience. There are tons of people who look but never interact. I want people to thumb through all the images of things I do while not at work. That feeling in my images reflects my branding.



## MERCHANDISE

Put your company's name on stuff. The shirts we have printed fit our style. We go to a department store and look for blank shirts that have style, tailored to fit, and that we will actually wear. Once you find them, get them in bulk online. Find a screen printer that is willing to work with you in small quantities. We have had great success with the popular Dri-FIT shirts. I wear them on a daily basis, and everywhere I go, people ask if they can buy one. Obviously they cost me more than the bulky, uncomfortable basic t-shirt.

I am not concerned with making a profit on our shirts. I figure if I can at least cover my cost, we all win. We have our branding on newborn onesies that we give to our youngest clients. That helps make our brand recognizable as well as create customer loyalty. Sometimes I give away a handful of branded shirts. I had several requests from the waitstaff at a restaurant in my town. All of them were begging me for a shirt. I made a deal that if they promised to wear it to work at least once a week, I would fix them up. The servers are helping my brand. They love the material and the way they fit. When thinking of branding any product to sell or pass out in the community, spend a little extra to ensure everything is reflective of your brand.



Images © Blair Phillips



Image © Blair Phillips

Self-employment can be one of the most rewarding and toughest things you experience. When you are branding your business, you are outfitting your business, pouring a part of yourself and your lifestyle into it. Think of it as decorating a house. You will decorate and furnish that house with things that fit your style. Make your business a direct extension of your values, style, ethics and things you find appealing.

The more you allow your brand to find you and organically come together, the more successful your business will be. If you live your brand, it will come naturally. This way you will never be in pursuit of something that does not come naturally. The more natural something is, the easier it is to repeat and build on.

Once you establish your brand, the work isn't over. Maintaining your brand requires awareness of the needs and wants of consumers. Spend some time away from the camera and computer each month to survey any weaknesses in your branding. If you identify weakness, put an attainable goal together that allows you an opportunity for correction. In order to build your brand, you have to live your brand. ■

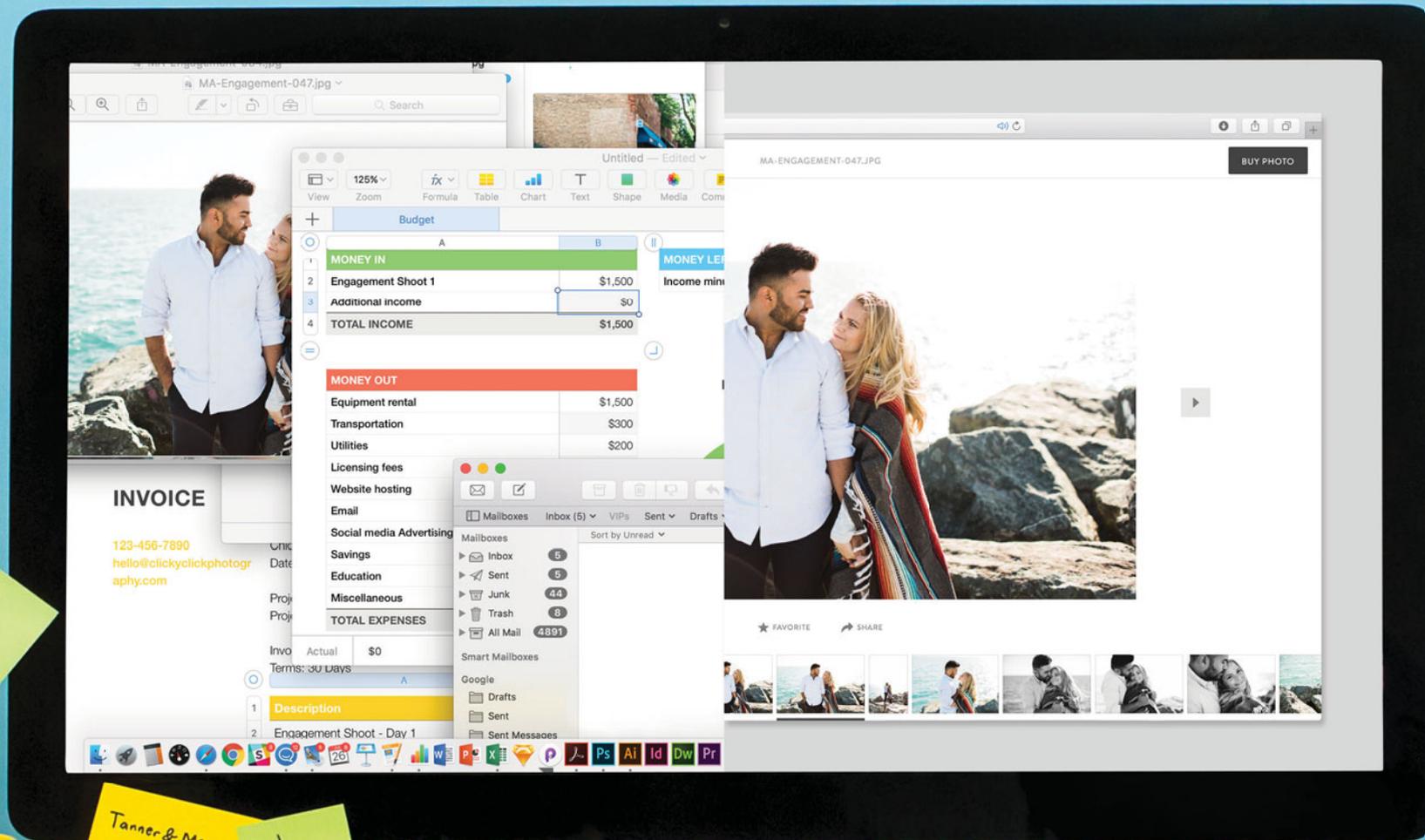
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Blair Phillips launched his business nearly 10 years ago in a small town. Since then, Blair Phillips Photography has become a beloved household name to its many fans and clients. Each year, Blair photographs up to 30 weddings and over 600 high school senior, newborn and family studio sessions. He has educated photographers all over the United States at events by WPPI, WPPI U, Imaging USA, SYNC Seniors and various state PPA groups.

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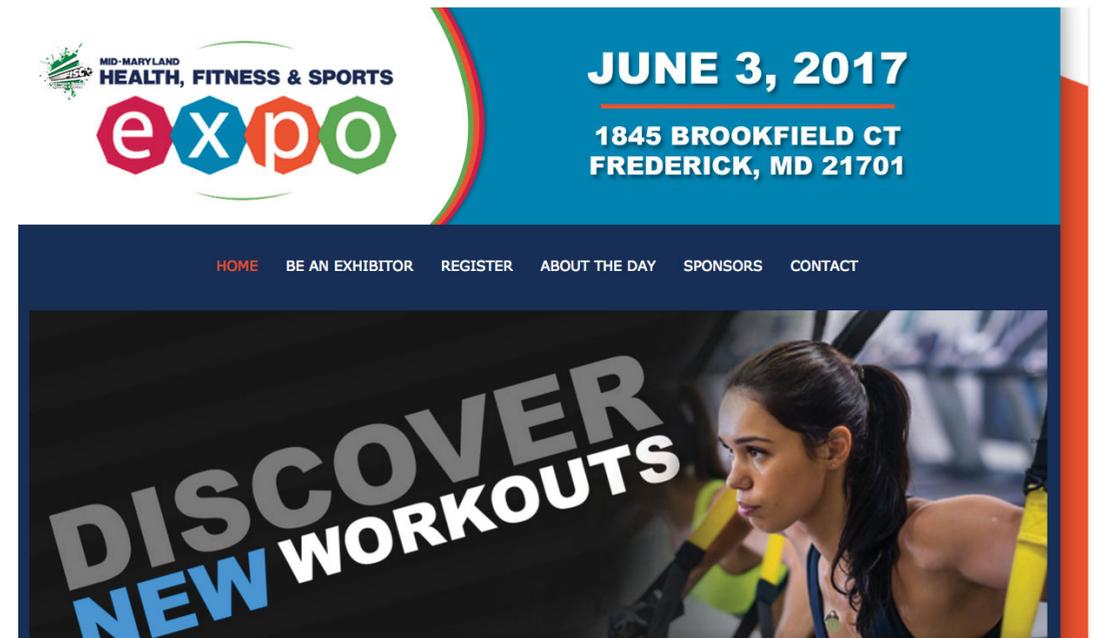
with **Melanie Anderson**

These last few months, our studio has been busy creating for several commercial clients. The work includes logos, website design, marketing materials and social media branding. In this issue, I share several of our projects and how we got them, along with a very special project that came about through a true vision.

In the beginning stages of working with our commercial clients, our goal is to identify their needs and wants, along with realistic expectations of timelines and budgets. This can be a challenge for small businesses—not only in their branding and vision, but financially as well. A way to work around budget concerns is to offer a monthly payment plan.

We've recently taken on several clients as their marketing partner. We provide the materials for their branding and consistency throughout their branding. For some, this includes redesigning of their logo. For others, it's taking an existing logo and incorporating it into new branding for a product and/or event.

One newer client is an indoor fitness company. We are updating their website and creating all the materials for a health and fitness expo scheduled for next summer. The designs began with their existing logo. We created a website from scratch with Zibster, a division of Photobiz. Zibster offers a template-based website tool that allows you to upload content easily, with incredible customer service, providing a branded design that is easy to use and streamlined. We also created a Facebook timeline cover, email signatures, letterhead and more. We secured their domain name through GoDaddy, and bought stock photos from iStock. We'll attend the expo and take photos and video for use at future expos.



Here are some tips for finding commercial clients in need of branding.

- Post on your social media mentioning that you are looking to take on new clients. List specifics that you offer: logo and website design, social media, promotional materials, etc. You would be surprised how many will respond to you. Be realistic and optimistic. Chances are you will secure around 5 percent of those who respond.
- Look through local magazines. These are a great resource for finding commercial clients in desperate need of branding. As you look through the ads, do you see a consistency, a clear message, quality imagery? Reach out to those companies in need of branding. Tell them you would love to help rebrand their company, to provide updated materials to help them find their desired clientele.
- Use your local Chamber of Commerce directory on its website. Browse through their sites. Do they need a new logo or an updated website? Is their website mobile-friendly? Is their message clear on the services they provide? If not, contact them and ask for a meeting. There are so many companies in need of these services, but they do not know where to start. Seek them out.

Be persistent and follow through. Set up meetings where you showcase what you can provide. Offer payment plans to keep your services affordable.

Always include photography and videography in your services. Visuals are a vital part of branding. Branding of a small business should feel personal; photography and videography have a way of bringing their services to clients in a relatable manner that stresses trust and loyalty.

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## Success Story

Over the past few years as an educator, I've seen an increasing need to motivate and inspire those attending my classes and mentorships. I found that so many photographers are feeling burned out and overwhelmed, have a lack of focus and don't have a clear understanding of their purpose in the industry. So many want to give up and not fight for a business that could provide not only the resources they desire, but a higher purpose in their life.

Several months ago, I had an idea that I took to 17hats owner Donovan Janus about creating a tour and content to help entrepreneurs stay motivated and inspired to create a vision for their future. With the help of Ryan Groves, education director at 17hats, and several other key members of their team and mine, we saw the fruits of our labor over five days in September. We traveled to Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco with several dear friends and influencers in the industry. We wanted to create a conversation, to gain a better understanding of the challenges others face and how they overcame those challenges.



Images © Melanie Anderson



Images © Melanie Anderson



The name “The Focus Tour” came about one afternoon while brainstorming. I sat down and started listing keywords that described what I wanted to say and do during this tour and beyond. It was therapeutic to write down all these ideas spinning in my head.

One word led to another, which led to another, which led to a message, which led to the tour name. It was an organic process. When you take the time to get the thoughts out of your head and put them on paper, there’s a better chance of them becoming reality. Our branding required a lot of back and forth between the two companies as we developed the logo, website, marketing materials, social media and more. It was a team effort.

We all have control of our own destiny. What is holding you back? For many of us it’s fear. Fear can destroy our dreams and opportunities. You never know what your potential is if you never try. It could take us 100 ideas to get to the one idea that changes our business and our lives. Without ever trying, how will we ever know?





**FOCUS: (NOUN) THE CENTER OF INSPIRATION & ACTION**



Images © Melanie Anderson

### Action Plans

- Post on social media your desire to brand local businesses.
- Look at local magazines and newspapers and the Chamber of Commerce website for leads. Seek out businesses that need new visual content and rebranding. Schedule meetings where you will discuss the company's logo, website, social media, etc.
- Take a look at your own branding. Is your message clear and consistent? If not, revise it immediately. ■

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Melanie Anderson is an award-winning photographer and wife to her husband of 20 years, Bill, and a mother to their four children, Sarah, Emily, Kayla and Billy. Anderson Photographs is located in the Arts & Entertainment District of downtown Hagerstown, Maryland. Melanie is a Certified Professional Photographer who received her Photographic Craftsman degree in February 2015. Melanie is passionate about one-on-one mentoring and works diligently to provide educational resources and workshops to fellow photographers through Anderson Education. Learn more at [AndersonPhotographs.com](http://AndersonPhotographs.com).

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### MANY OBSESSIVE DECISIONS GO INTO CREATING THE PERFECT PRINT. FOR YOU AND US BOTH.

To introduce the stunning printing power of the new family of Canon imagePROGRAF printers, we asked award-winning photographer Lindsay Adler to give us an inside look at the countless choices she obsesses over to create the perfect image. In the end, there's only one name in printing she trusts to take her obsession further. [usa.canon.com/proprinters](http://usa.canon.com/proprinters)



**THE PRINTER THAT'S EQUALLY OBSESSED**

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imagePROGRAF PRO SERIES **Canon** SEE IMPOSSIBLE



product  
review

FUJIFILM with *Salvatore Cincotta*

## Why Fuji X-Pro 2?

I love the X-Pro2. It's portable, lightweight and powerful. It's also inexpensive—all adjectives I would use to describe this incredible camera from Fujifilm.

We are always looking for gear that works just right for us, and the technology should never get in the way of the shot. It should work to enhance it and help make you a better photographer.

One of my favorite features of the X-Pro2 is the ISO dial on top of the camera. This seemingly little feature is huge in the real world. The three things we are constantly adjusting are aperture, shutter speed and ISO. Most cameras force you to dig through the menu system to adjust these. Not so for the X-Pro2—it's right up top where it should be.

Another one of my favorite features is the electronic viewfinder. The EVF displays what is coming through the lens and how the camera is exposing it. It's a very useful feature when getting exposure nailed in-camera is important.

And finally, another feature that I love is the focus stick on the rear of the camera. If you want tack-sharp images, you need to stop focusing and recomposing your shot to get your composition. Instead, you need to move the focus point to ensure your subject is sharp while getting the composition you are looking for.

Some of the other features worth highlighting:

- The Fujifilm X-Pro2 is the only interchangeable-lens camera in the world featuring the **Hybrid Viewfinder** system, which incorporates both optical and electric viewfinders. With key functions located on the right-hand side of the camera body, all main controls can be accessed without taking your eye from the viewfinder.
- The newly developed **24.3MP X-Trans CMOS III APS-C sensor** boasts the highest ever pixel count for an X Series camera. Combined with an XF lens, it delivers images with a perceived resolution far greater than the number of pixels used. In addition, the phase detection pixels have been positioned over a larger area for a faster, more precise phase detection AF performance. High-ISO sensitivity performance also has been improved to the point that the whole sensitivity range—up to a maximum ISO 12,800 (extended output sensitivity up to 51,200)—can now be used with confidence.
- Thanks to the new **X-Processor Pro Engine**, processing speeds are now approximately four times faster than that of a conventional model. This maximizes the capabilities of the X-Trans CMOS III sensor to ensure it delivers the highest image quality with superfast response times. In addition, thanks to the high-speed reading technology of the sensor, the conventional EVF's display speed of 54fps has been increased to a maximum of 85fps. This substantially reduces the image delay phenomenon when tracking a moving subject. Blackout time after release has been reduced by approximately half, and compressed Raw is supported, improving the ease-of-handling of Raw data. The Fujifilm X-Pro2 features a new CPU for high-speed processing. The Buffer memory has been increased for an even faster response.
- Using the knowledge gained from accurately reproducing color in film manufacturing, the company has included **Film Simulation**, which allows the user to change color and tone settings to match the subject, scene and creative intent, just as if shooting with a roll of film. There are a total of 15 modes, including Acros, Provia, Velvia and Astia.



For more information, visit [fujifilmusa.com.com](http://fujifilmusa.com.com)





FIRSTIMPRESSIONS

# ANATOMY OF A SUCCESSFUL — LOGO —

with  
Craig LaMere

Perception really is reality. Branding is one of the most commonly talked about and most preached concepts in photography. Branding is about image, personality and awareness. There are far too many parts to branding to cover in one article. This month, I look at one of the most important: your logo.

## WHAT IS A LOGO?

A logo is nothing more than a symbol, an iconic trigger for your business. It's a symbol for what your business stands for, what your business is recognized for and what your business is perceived to be by your customers and prospective clients. It really is that simple.

If you look up photography company logos on the Internet, a million and two logos will pop up, and a vast majority of them will have a camera, a shutter or some element to let the viewer know the business has something to do with photography. A smaller percent of the logos will be a combination of a camera element and the shooter's name. Another portion will be made of nothing more than the shooter's name. The very smallest percent of photography logos have zero to do with the artist or photography at all.

Thank carefully about the symbol you choose to represent you and your business.

Some logos are intricate. Some are simple. Some have many colors and some are black and white. Some logos have hidden meanings and some have no meaning at all. I know some shooters who have paid thousands of dollars to have a logo created, while others have sketched their logo on a napkin. Some have photography elements, some have multiple parts with varying color schemes, and some consist only of words. In the end, I do not think there is a right or wrong way to come up with your logo, but there are some elements you should be mindful of when deciding on a logo.



Image © Craig LaMere



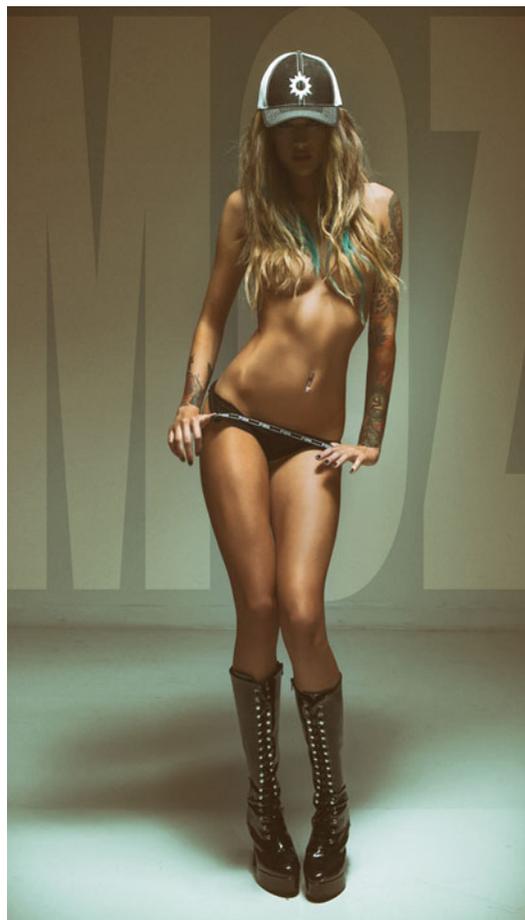
Image © Craig LaMere

## THE BLACK-AND-WHITE TEST

The very first test of your logo is what I call the black-and-white test. If your logo is already black and white, this does not apply. But if your logo has any color elements—and especially if your logo is super detailed, with lots of intricate elements—then I would try this test. All you do is turn your colored logo black and white. If there are elements of your logo that become muddy or blend into the rest of the logo, or if your logo becomes unassuming, then I would start to rethink your design. There will be times, in advertising and promotion, when you will not be able to use color. If you have a logo that does not work in those instances, you might want to reconsider your choice.

## PHOTOGRAPHY ELEMENT ICON

If you use an element of photography in your logo, like a camera body or shutter, the best benefit is instant recognition of your occupation. The downside is it's redundant, and you might get lost in a sea of similar logos.



Images © Craig LaMere



Image © Craig LaMere



Images © Craig LaMere

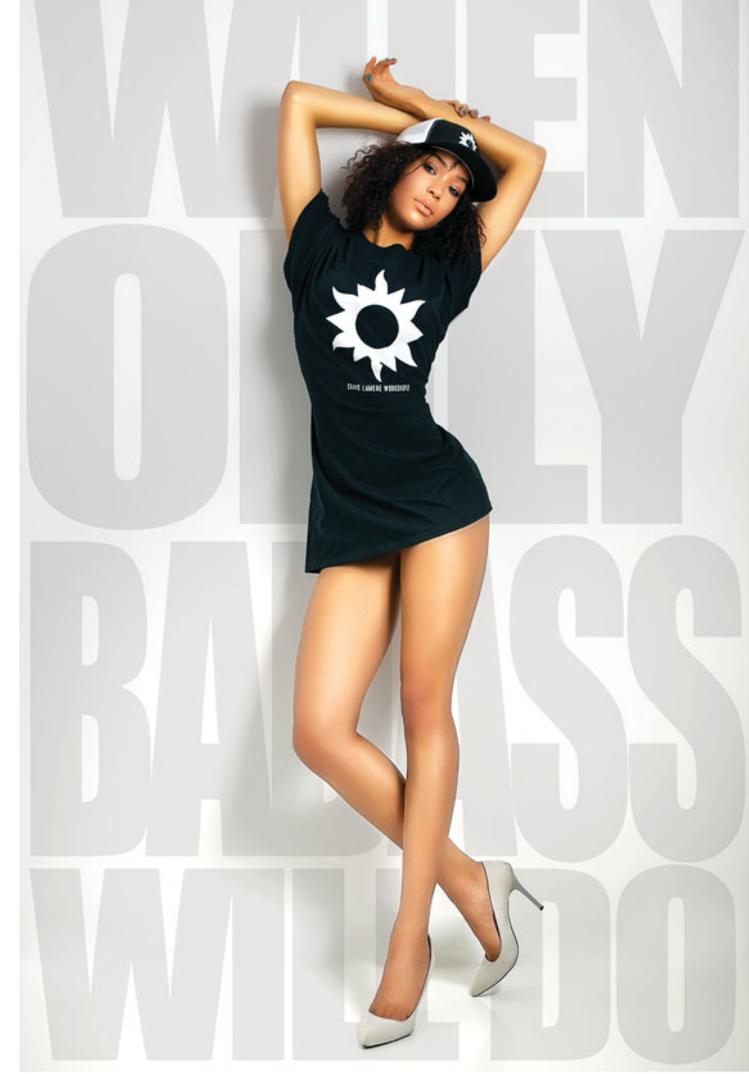


Image © Craig LaMere

### PHOTOGRAPHY ELEMENT ICON

There are a million ways to skin a cat in our business. Using only your name as your logo works for some. This type of logo is more fitting for an artist than a picture taker. What's the difference? A picture taker is a shooter whose work is cookie-cutter, who produces a mass product with no distinctive characteristics. An artist is an individual whose work has a recognizable visual signature that is associated with the creator.

A name-only logo is powerful. The challenge is that your name had better fit a very clear and distinct style or have some other proprietary quality associated with it, or your name might not have enough market recognition to stand alone. When you see the names Vera Wang, Annie Leibovitz or Martha Stewart, you automatically know them, what they do and their brand. They do not need icons of a dress, a camera or a chef's knife; their names are all they need. Name-only logos work far better as a rebrand once you have established yourself in your market.

## RANDOM-IMAGE LOGO

When I first started shooting, I didn't want my name associated with my business or use any photography elements in my logo. I felt it wasn't cool to use my name that way. And I did not want a photography element because I wanted to branch out into different genres.

The strategy I went with was to use a symbol that had nothing to do with photography or me. The advantage is latitude. You can diversify the scope of your business. You have the flexibility to decide to whom your brand will be speaking. The greatest advantage of this type of logo is the ability to be unique in a time of oversaturation of common elements.

The key to using this type of icon is to keep it simple. A simple symbol is recognizable and memorable. A complicated symbol can confuse consumers. ■





Image © Craig LaMere

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

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**PURPOSEFUL**

**BRANDING**

**FOR SENIORS**

with Jeff & Christine Tonkin



Branding does not have to be tedious. It should be done with purpose. We think of branding as an effective, memorable characteristic or behavior that will be talked about. This is our purpose. There is much more to branding than cute, trendy packaging, token gifts or stunning logos. While these things are important, we should really be asking ourselves: “What is it about our brand that makes clients choose us?”

Surely studio-branded pens or customized cookies are not the answer. Most likely the client does not even see any of those little gifts until after they have made a purchase. You may believe that if your work is good enough, it will sell itself. That is a misconception. In today’s market, with countless photographers, professional quality is not the only selling point.

## WHERE TO START

Our brand started with three simple words: *fun, original, you*. To this day, our clients tell us that when they hear DigiSmiles, they think “funny,” “creative” and “focus on personality.” This is exactly what we hope to portray. While these words now make up our slogan, our branding was no accident. Our goal is to make all our interactions with our client fun, humorous and authentic. It is important to keep our focus on who the client is, and to help them achieve the final images they want.

Brainstorm three words that define how you want your business to be remembered. If you specialize in edgy, dramatic, serious images, your branding should reflect that. If your photos are soft, mystical, flowery, then keep that your focus. Which words will tell potential clients what to expect from you? What kind of memories will your seniors experience during their interactions with you? Remember, if they don’t talk about it, your branding is not strong enough.



Image © DigiSmiles Photography

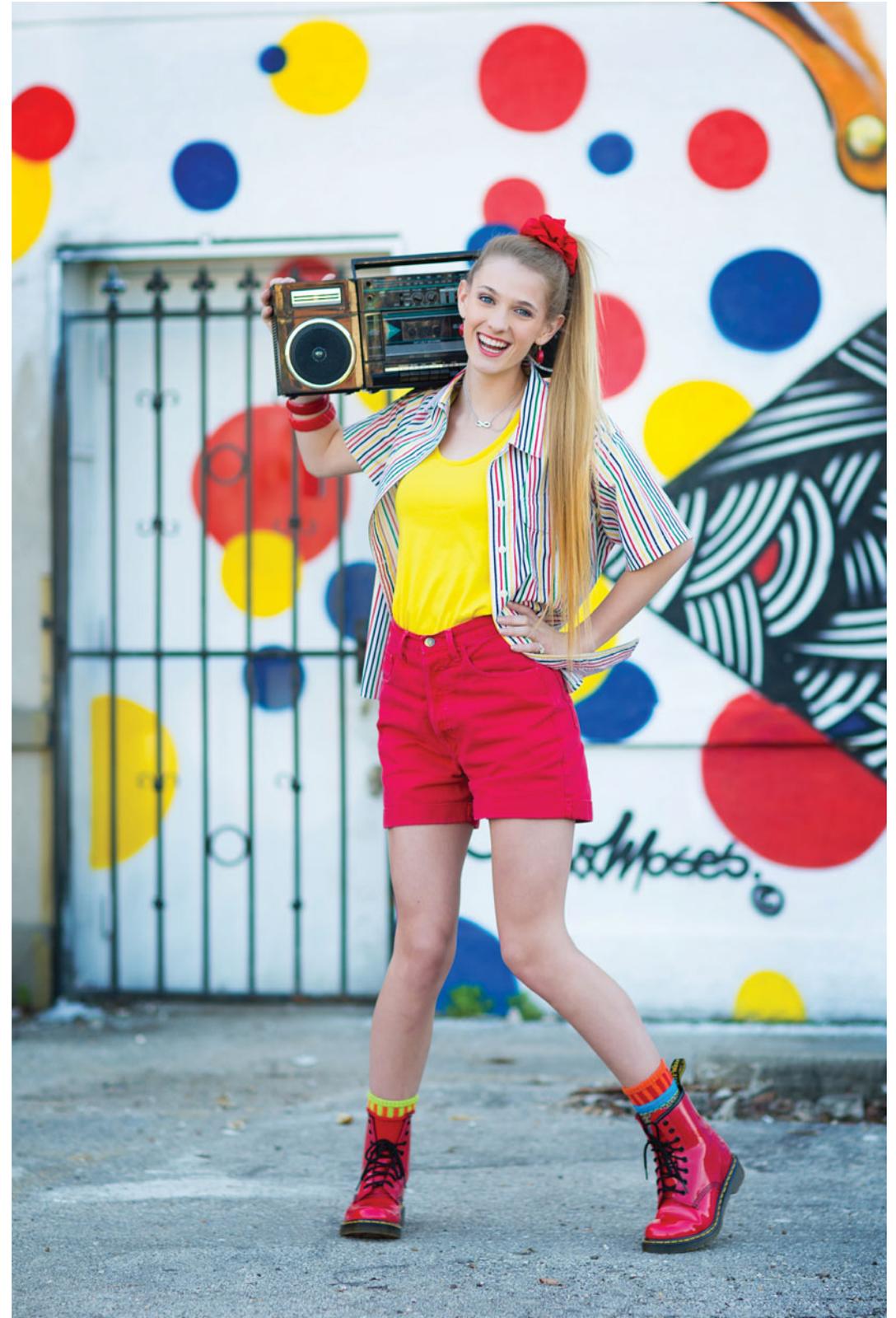


Image © DigiSmiles Photography

## DRIVE YOUR BRAND

What drives your brand? For our studio, it looks like this:

**Fun** – Be goofy, laugh a lot, make silly noises, know what tickles your senior’s funnybone and tease a little.

**Original** – Create concept/themed shoots, scout special locations, shoot underwater, offer unique props and always incorporate something that is special to your senior.

**You** – Get to know your senior. Recognize their personality first. Ask about their hobbies and interests, and style the shoot to fit exactly who they are.



Image © DigiSmiles Photography

## FUN

At DigiSmiles, we are known for breaking the ice at the beginning of the shoot so seniors don’t look like they are trying too hard. Using funny faces, noises, comments or whatever silliness comes to mind makes the senior feel at ease. With most of our seniors, we sneak in a photo bomb or a group selfie that demonstrates the fun we have and the connections we make with our clients. We link to a dedicated photo gallery on our homepage with these photos, which helps potential clients see the level of fun they can expect from a DigiSmiles experience. We have even had a senior or two remind us to take that all-important photo bomb picture because they were excited to get that special shot like so many of the examples posted on our website.

Part of our brand is also that we are a playful, upbeat and sometimes a bit sarcastic husband-and-wife team. Attitude is everything. No matter how sucky a day we might be having, our clients will never know it because we understand that part of our brand is the fun, crazy experience that they have come to expect.



Image © DigiSmiles Photography

## ORIGINAL

While our goal is to capture the personality of our client, we must set ourselves apart from our competitors. We offer unique props like a tire swing hanging from a tree, an antique piano in a field, and smoke bombs or fog. We’re always scouting new locations. We shoot underwater, rent iconic venues and create themed shoots that require lots of planning and collaboration.

## YOU

We start the process with an introduction questionnaire that tells us the interests of each senior. Next, we meet with each senior and their parents to make that vital first impression before the photo day. We customize the shoot to fit their style, wardrobe and preferences, which may or may not include their hobbies, pets or family members. We choose locations where they feel comfortable and that fit their style, not because it would make a great art piece.

Even when creating our promo shoots, we use model background information to match them to specific shoots. Our baking shoot featured four girls who were interested in the culinary arts. Our circus shoot featured seniors who loved the acrobatic arts or circus animals. For the underwater shoots, we simply took an interest of theirs and offered to capture it underwater for a unique take.

The main point is to make every shoot reflect each senior’s personality, hobby, interest or future aspiration. This spotlight on the client’s interests motivates your clients to spread the word about you.

## REMEMBER ME?

Now let's talk about your branding message and the consistent visual presence your business must have in order to be easily recognized.

What do people remember? Think about some of the strongest brands: Walt Disney, Lego, Nike, Coca-Cola, Google. You may have instantly visualized logos as you read through the list. Yes, it will take time and consistency to develop your brand recognition, but once you have it down, you won't need to fiddle with it.



Several years ago, we redesigned our logo from a text-based format into a simple, bold, easy-to-see stamp design. We determined that a thick stamped background with our name and initials in a simple font would stand out in our market when a majority of other studios were using script logos. Our goal was to stand out, to be in your face.

There are many other areas to consider when marketing your brand. A big part of our brand recognition comes into play through the repeated visibility of our logo, which we have on our shirts, website, custom apps and watermarked sneak-peek images.

You might think you have all or most of those already covered in your marketing, but here's how we have connected them. We entice our clients to share BTS (behind-the-scenes) photos or videos that must have either one of us wearing our branded shirts in the shot, so our logo is shared among their social media community. After the senior posts a BTS with a short blurb about their experience, we put up a sneak-peek watermarked image for them to repost. When they repost the sneak peek, we post a second watermarked image for them to share. So their reward for sharing their experience with friends and family is getting up to two sneak-peeks.

Why do we encourage clients to take BTS photos and videos and share them? It helps demonstrate our branding slogan: "Fun, Original, YOU."

If our client's friends and family see only the finished product and not the experience, they do not see all the reasons a session with us is unique. All of these extras are what makes our brand trustworthy and memorable. When seniors and parents get to know you, they identify with you and your photography. And when clients feel they know and can trust you, they are more likely to purchase from you and recommend you to their friends.



**DigiSmiles Photography** with Heather N-Jeff and 9 others.  
Published by Christine Tonkin [?] · August 3 · 🌐

So excited about today's Sweet Treat baking shoot!!! Follow us on Snapchat and Instagram for "Behind the scenes" fun! Attention class of 2018 we are already accepting applications for our senior 2018 model/rep team. [www.DigiSmiles.com](http://www.DigiSmiles.com)



**Hilda Morales-Negrete** added 11 new photos — at Downtown Houston.  
October 2 at 10:50pm · Houston · 🌐

Great day with DigiSmiles Photography! I couldn't help but take some behind the scene shots of AnnaPaola's Senior Picture Session! Can't wait to see the finished product 📸 Amazing husband and wife team 🥰👍👏 thanks Christine and Jeff



Like Comment Share  
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Images © DigiSmiles Photography

## VIDEO CLIPS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Invest in a quick survey of your market's demographics to determine where your seniors are spending a majority of their social media time. We get great results sharing very short video clips on Snapchat, Instagram Stories and Facebook Live. These are great for showing glimpses of the energy and vibe our seniors experience with us on location. Don't post the same clips on all platforms; give your target audience a reason to watch and follow your studio on as many media outlets as possible.

Take a few extra seconds to record a clip for each social media account you manage. Even though you're posting for your own followers, ask your clients to post their own experience. This is effective for reaching your target audience. This works even when they repost video clips that you have already posted. That reinforces your brand in the eyes of your clients' friends. The combined reach of your business posts along with your clients' posts has a much stronger chance of attracting new clients.

So tidy up your social media accounts. Keep them consistently updated with fresh content, including strong ties to your brand and easy ways to contact your studio.



Image © DigiSmiles Photography



Images © DigiSmiles Photography

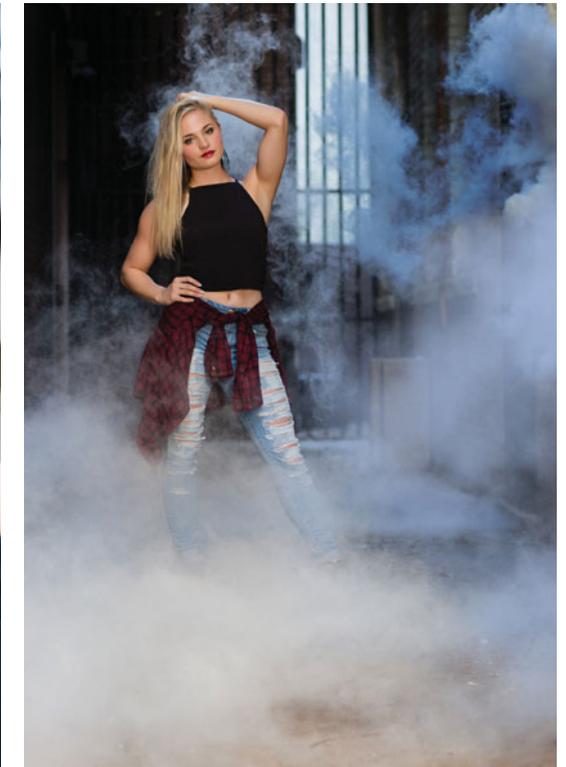




Image © DigiSmiles Photography

### COMPETITION

Branding is critical because there's so much competition. Look at your business and ask yourself: If all of us are selling quality portraits, how does a client choose one photographer over another? You hear it all the time: Photographers are selling the experience just as much as the product. If this is true, what can we do to stand out and connect with our clients so they are receiving an experience that will be talked about?

Be purposeful and provide an extraordinary experience that your seniors feel is worthy of promoting among their friends and family. ■



Jeff and Christine Tonkin own DigiSmiles Photography in Humble, Texas, specializing exclusively in high school senior photography. They followed their passion to shoot seniors only, and took their part-time hobby to a thriving full-time business. Their conceptual photo shoots have become the centerpiece of their senior business, attracting clients who often book with them up to a year in advance.

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

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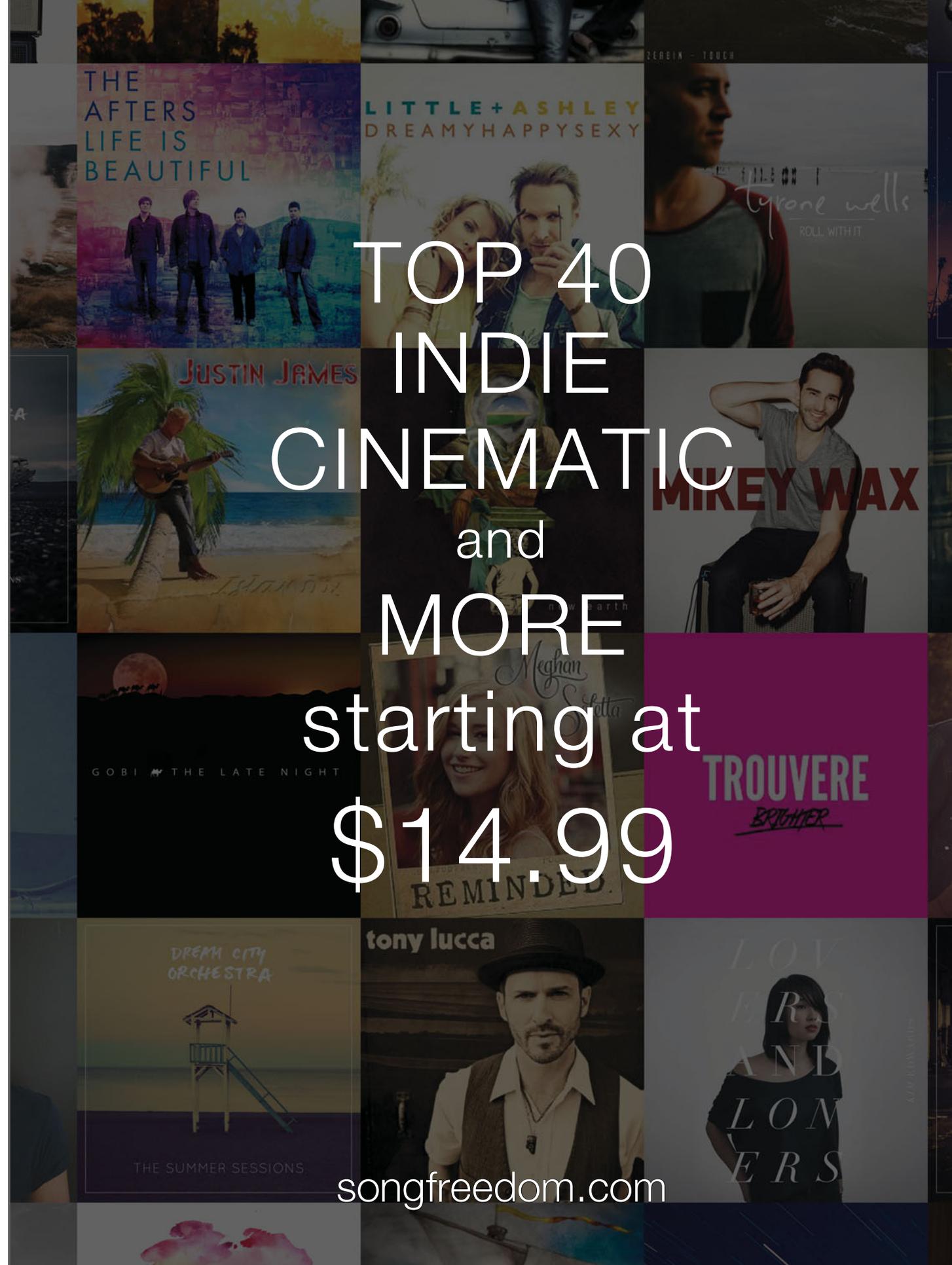
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# Branding

FOR HIGH-END WEDDINGS

3 THINGS YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

with Vanessa Joy



One of the biggest challenges photographers face is finding high-end clients. People expect me to have some sort of pat answer that tells them how to start charging \$10,000 per wedding or get that wedding that runs \$18,000 or \$19,000. There are no magical steps to reaching that kind of clientele. I can't give you a surefire method to promise that in one year you will grab that kind of income. A lot of it has to do with finding who you are rather than finding where they are.

The majority of photographers who ask me these questions don't have a stable business yet. The way our culture is, with social media and beautiful imagery constantly in front of our potential clients, we can't just fake it till we make it with branding. Consumers know what a good, solid brand looks like. So, when a potential client looks at a photography company, or any company, and it isn't up to par, the client feels wary of it, even if only subconsciously. If a company can't fulfill the high-end experience, there's a network of sites that will help that client rant and rave about that company until no one wants to work with it anymore. But there are things you can do right now to start building a high-end brand.



Image © Vanessa Joy



Images © Vanessa Joy





### Analyze Your Client Experience

Take a second to walk through the life cycle of your clients. Start with when they first contact you, when they meet with you and then when they book with you. Then take a look at the engagement session and wedding, and how the pictures and products are delivered. How often do you communicate with them, and what does that communication look like? Are you giving them high quality? Are you surprising them or finding ways to exceed all their expectations?

Here's the thing. Your clients expect to get the things you've taught them to expect, like good photography. Delivering that to them is nothing to write home about. It's only when you find ways to exceed those expectations and give them something that is wow-worthy that they feel they're getting more than their money's worth, and that they find a reason to talk about you with their friends and family in person and, hopefully, on social media.

I'm always looking to improve how I communicate with my clients. Just two weeks ago, I added a new point of contact. The day before the wedding, my brides get an email that says I'm looking forward to seeing them the next day, and if they need a Starbucks run, to just let me know what they'd like and I'll pick it up for them. I've never had anyone take me up on that, but most brides are worrying about all the details the day (and night) before their wedding. I like to jump in and give them a little bit of reassurance so they feel like, "Hey, the photographer's definitely showing up. She just emailed me." At some point, I'll add a link to a blog post that I plan on writing that talks about three ways to fall asleep when you can't sleep the night before your wedding, but that's in the future.

By the way, these kinds of emails that I send multiple times throughout my relationship with my clients are automated through my client management system, 17 Hats (which you can get for free, or use the code "vanessajoy" to get discounted paid services). I don't recommend trying to remember to email your brides manually the night before their wedding. That would not be very efficient.

Analyzing your client experience is an excellent way to build a high-end clientele. The unique experience you give your clients helps you shine through.





Images © Vanessa Joy

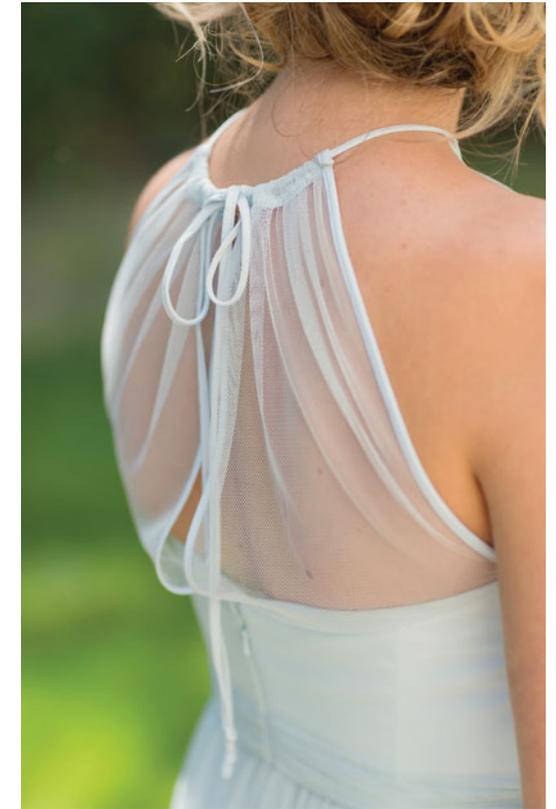
## Do Market Research

As small business owners, we can't spend \$100,000 on market research, but we can certainly spend a few minutes on Instagram or Pinterest. Think of the types of high-end companies you want your company to be like—think Free People or Anthropologie, Louis Vuitton or Gucci. These companies have \$100,000-plus to spend on research. If you spend a few minutes of your time looking at what they're doing on social media, you can reverse-engineer a little bit of it and find some things that could work for you.

In addition, you'll probably end up finding some things that are share-worthy on your social media. After all, when you're posting on social media, you don't want to post only about yourself and your pictures. You want to post some popular content that you know your audience is going to like. Share content on high-end sites like Buzzsumo that you know your clients like. It's a great way to reach those clients and appear more relatable to them.



Images © Vanessa Joy



## Network Up

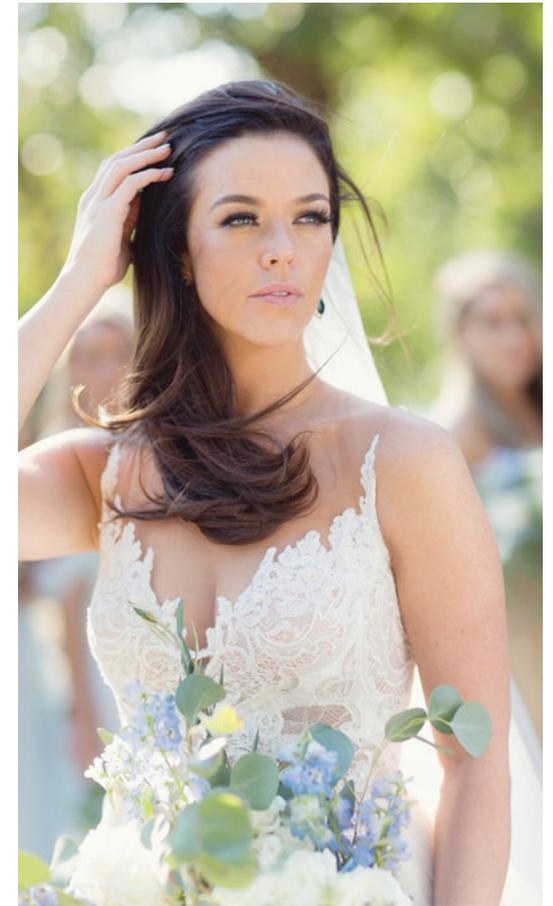
You'll notice that my suggestion for how to get upscale clients comes in last. That's intentional. Before you start taking on luxury weddings, you need to have the company, the product and the experience to support them. There is no point attracting clients that you won't be able to make happy.

When I first started my photography business, I wasn't attracting high-end clients right away. My brand didn't scream luxury to the people that were there. However, my clients had friends who got engaged and who were in the demographic I was trying to reach. I developed a same-day edit process (more on that at [www.breatheyourpassion.com/sde](http://www.breatheyourpassion.com/sde)). I got in front of all the guests at the wedding who either were potentially getting married or had kids getting married. At the same time, I was working on my brand image and raising my prices to slowly start attracting higher-end clientele.

Simultaneously, I worked like crazy developing relationships with wedding planners, going to industry events, getting published in magazines and making friends with other wedding vendors. I found unique ways to stand out. After the wedding, I contact the florist and say, "Would you like copies of the pictures of your floral arrangements? You can use them for your website or social media (just tag me, please), and on top of it, I'd love to make you brochures with your floral arrangements and your logo on one side." It's a perfect way to network.



Images © Vanessa Joy



Images © Vanessa Joy



Image © Vanessa Joy

To reach the luxury wedding clients, you have to cast a wide net and network as much as you possibly can.

When I first started my photography business, I didn't begin by charging \$10,000, instantly attracting upscale clients. I had to work hard over eight years, and now average \$10,000 per wedding. Wherever you are in building your business, I hope that you take the time to put the legwork behind it and create a product and client experience that attract the clients you want to work with.

For more on ways to create a high-end brand, don't miss my talk at ShutterFest 2017. In the meantime, check out this video to see how pricing matches up with a high-end experience. ■

**sm** **LEARN MORE.**  
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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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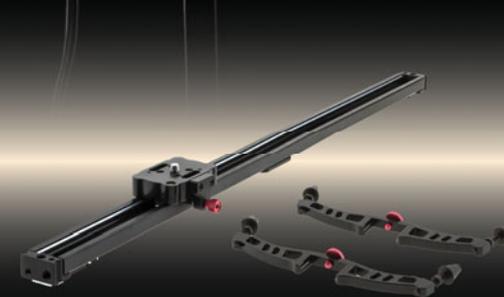
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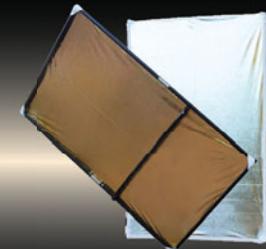
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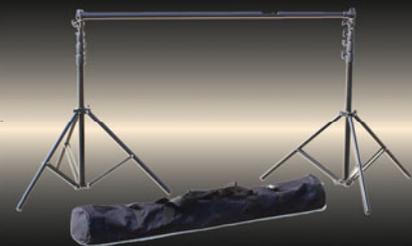
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# TRIBE BUILDING

TURNING  
YOUR CLIENTS  
INTO BRAND  
AMBASSADORS

with Phillip Blume

Image © Phillip Blume



How would you like your photography business to enjoy an almost unfair advantage in the marketplace? What if your clients swore by your brand? Sounds too good to be true, right? Now get ready for a shock. If that kind of brand advantage sounds like an unattainable dream to you, it's not. It may seem far away, but that's only because you've become accustomed to the dismal alternative: You're grasping wildly for every client, drowning in a sea of photographers whose bargain rates make it impossible to compete and still stay afloat financially. Sound familiar?

That's not your market's fault. It's your fault.

I realize that feels harsh. True, I don't know you or your market, and I apologize if I've bruised any egos. But I can tell you what I do know (and remember, I'm only here to help).

I know how my wife and I steered our rural home studio (which serves a small market with America's highest poverty rate) to national prominence and award-winning financial growth. I know the breakthroughs of many photographers we've coached over the course of our eight years in business, and I'm inspired by their successes in difficult markets all across the country, where they're using our same common-sense approach.

We aren't doing anything fancy or new. While there are many links in the "chain" of your business, you can sum up our approach and begin to strengthen all those links with one phrase: *tribe building*. Here's how it works.



Image © Phillip Blume



Images © Phillip Blume

## 1. YOUR TRIBE MUST BE EXCLUSIVE.

The biggest mistake we see photographers make all the time is trying to market to everyone. Be honest. Have you ever left a pile of business cards in a coffee shop? I have. In fact, my definition of “vendor relationships” once consisted of little more than asking to leave our cards in vendors’ shops all over town. One of those shops directed us to their bathroom, where they had a small table dedicated to this desperate marketing “strategy.” It was piled up high. Virtually everyone markets poorly. This is partly why your advantage grows exponentially when you begin to shift your brand’s focus.

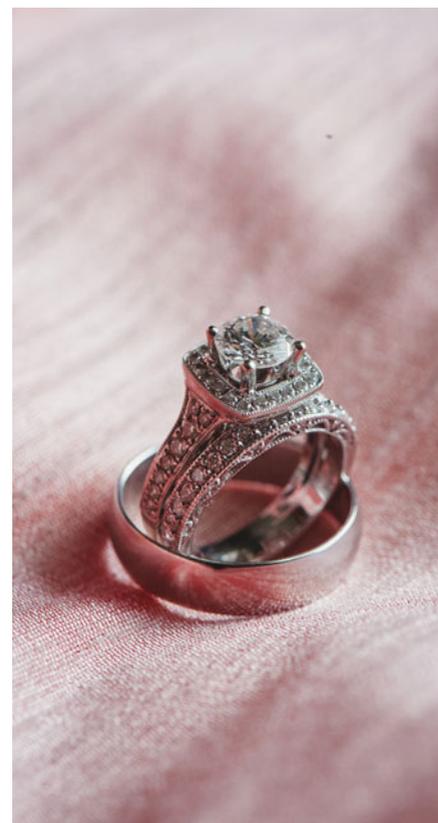
Looking back now, I wonder what I was thinking. Did I really want a potential client to fill out our contact form like this? “I found your logo and phone number on a soggy piece of paper beneath my foot while I was sitting on the toilet.” Very classy. As Simon Sinek concludes in his popular TED Talk, the goal of every extraordinarily successful business is not to do business with everyone: “The goal is to do business with people who believe what you believe.”

That idea alone is powerful enough to guide your new branding strategy. As I often say, your brand’s job is not to find just any client; your brand’s job is to find *your* client. So who is your client? Your client is someone you’re capable of connecting with on a human level, someone who believes what you believe. My friend Mike Allebach is a great example. He likes tattoos and loves people. He’s had huge success branding himself as the “tattooed bride photographer,” and hip, alternative clients flock to him from all over. He brands to *his* client. As a result, they connect over deeper issues than just photography. Mike actually enjoys his clients. Doesn’t that sound like a bonus?

When I encourage you to create an exclusive tribe, I’m not suggesting you create a social clique. You should still feel free to serve anyone who walks through your door. But prepare yourself. When you brand more intentionally, the majority of your inquiries will begin to pour in from a very exclusive market segment—people like you. These are highly qualified leads.

Take our company, Blume Photography, for example. We like to imagine clients choose us because we’re the best, most talented photographers in the world. But most of our clients don’t read photo magazines. They don’t know who we are and don’t care a smidgen about the stylistic differences between us and the next photographer. However, by the time they’ve visited our website and read our first email reply, they know without a doubt that we believe in two things: marriages (not just weddings) and giving back via personal projects to fight poverty. The clients who sign our contracts are signing on for something bigger. They tend to be people who give to charity. They understand their investment in us results in more than just pictures—it serves our shared values.

Photography is shallow. I can already hear the sound of panicked typing as some of us rush to change our website’s About pages. No more “Photography is my life” garbage. It’s time to replace that mumbo jumbo with something you *really* care about. It’s not your camera; it’s the human people in front of it that matter most.



Images © Phillip Blume

## 2. YOUR TRIBE MUST FEEL WELL SERVED.

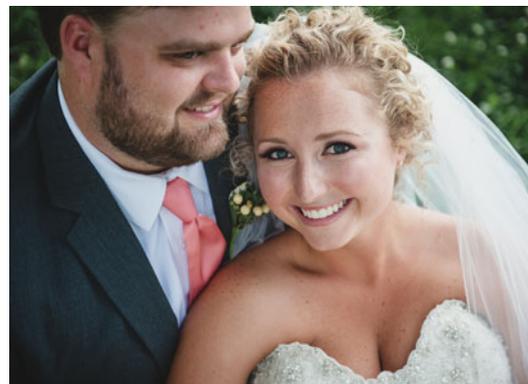
Once you start getting inquiries from your ideal clients, you'd better make good on your promises. They hired you because they believed in you, so the experience you provide better represent the same you that's portrayed online.

This is where sincerity becomes crucial to your brand. There's nowhere to hide. Most of us have heard the truism "You are your business." If you've chosen a brand message you think will be successful in your market but it isn't authentically you, good luck keeping up the charade. It will prove impossible.

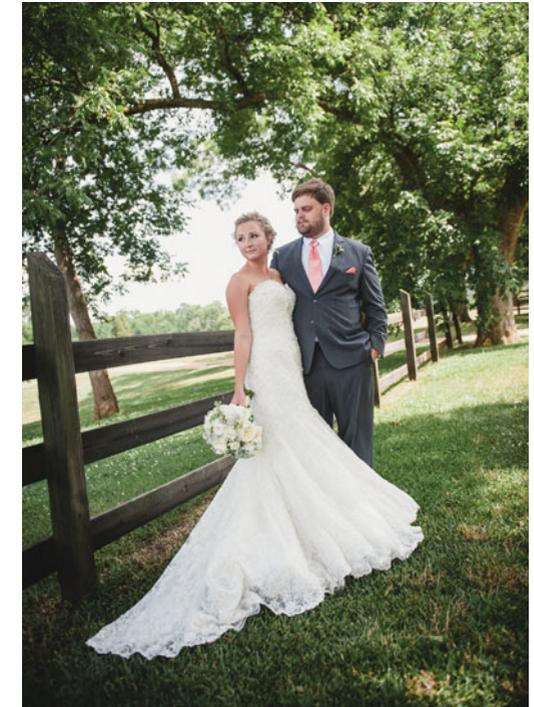
My wife and I have a great sense of humor. But we are not those wedding photographers who laugh at a joke about divorce being good for repeat business. You will likely feel awkward if you deliver that joke around us, because we won't crack a smile. Our passion for lasting marriages is authentic. As a result, we've received emotional letters and even dinner invitations from former brides whose marriages sadly did not work out. We've cried on the phone with another bride after her parents separated. No, we can't fix those tragedies. But we were there for our clients on a personal level that affirmed what we believe in. If we weren't passionate about this, it would become an emotionally exhausting part of our job—not worthwhile and, frankly, undoable.

More importantly, we encourage young couples to invest in their relationship, because we know that love needs to be nurtured to last. Within our brand, that shows up in everything from the meaningful gifts we give our clients to the words of wisdom we pepper throughout our communication and workflow. Maybe that is why our clients feel comfortable sharing not only the happiest, but also some of the most difficult moments in their lives with us. We've asked ourselves the obvious question: We love our clients, but why would they think to call us when they surely have closer friends in their lives? As Dale Carnegie wrote in his classic *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, "So many people are grasping and self-seeking, the person who seeks selflessly to serve others has an almost unfair advantage in the marketplace."

Here's how I like to illustrate it: Your personal destiny and business destiny are intertwined. Neither destiny is determined by the invisible winds of economic turmoil or changing markets. Instead, your destiny is decided internally by your own perspective—what will you value and be content with? It's also defined externally by your tribe. Your tribe will support you to the extent that you value and serve them.



Images © Phillip Blume



Images © Phillip Blume

Market research shows that consumers who support values-focused brands (termed "neos" in one study) are incredibly reliable even in the worst economic times. This phenomenon explains why values-focused brands like Apple (whose values are innovation, art and user experience, not just computing) consistently break sales records without offering discounts even in historically bad economies. Yet other companies with almost identical structures and products (whose brands, however, consist of little more than a famous logo and a catalogue of products) struggle or go out of business during the same periods. An ever-growing number of neo consumers, who represent the vast majority of all purchasing power, as it turns out, actually buy fewer things during hard times so they can continue buying the select luxuries they feel are more meaningful or unique, or that create an extraordinary experience. This is great news for artists.

These studies make perfect sense. Consumers aren't robots. They are people. Our lives are short, and yet we at least seem to be designed with some inherent (dare I say "spiritual") understanding that our lives are meaningful. Materialism be damned. Serve your tribe well, and even your mistakes and shortcomings will be forgiven by adoring brand evangelists.



Images © Phillip Blume

### 3. YOUR TRIBE MUST BE CONNECTED.

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I sat in the garage for 30 minutes listening to the car radio. The program was describing a simple concept known as “Dunbar’s number.” Its practical applications for business fascinated me. Dunbar’s number isn’t precise, but it floats around 150—the typical number of people in a literal “tribe” and, as it happens, the same limited number of people our human brains are capable of cataloguing as “intimate connections.” Dunbar’s number is a lot smaller than the number of our Facebook friends. We all know Facebook friends aren’t all real friends. We’re just now learning how few real friends we’re really capable of having. The number is limited by biology.

Keep this in mind as you brand and market yourself. Photography businesses are obsessed with SEO and social media, how many “likes” they can get. But what if numbers don’t matter as much as we think they do? My talented friends at Anna & Spencer Photography have maintained their status on Google’s first page under “Atlanta photographer” and other keywords for years. Yet, as Spencer told me, that prized position shockingly results in just a couple dozen clicks per day—nothing compared to the huge number of referrals their down-to-earth, human-driven word-of-mouth marketing creates. It is the human referrals, not the algorithmically generated promotion, that translates into more new clients.



Image © Phillip Blume

To hear more about the powerful ways we're connecting our clients together as a tribe and earning referrals at Blume Photography, watch our video. To join me and Eileen for a free 30-day marketing challenge that will change how you market, sign up now at [www.blumephotography.com/blog/30-days-to-different](http://www.blumephotography.com/blog/30-days-to-different). ■

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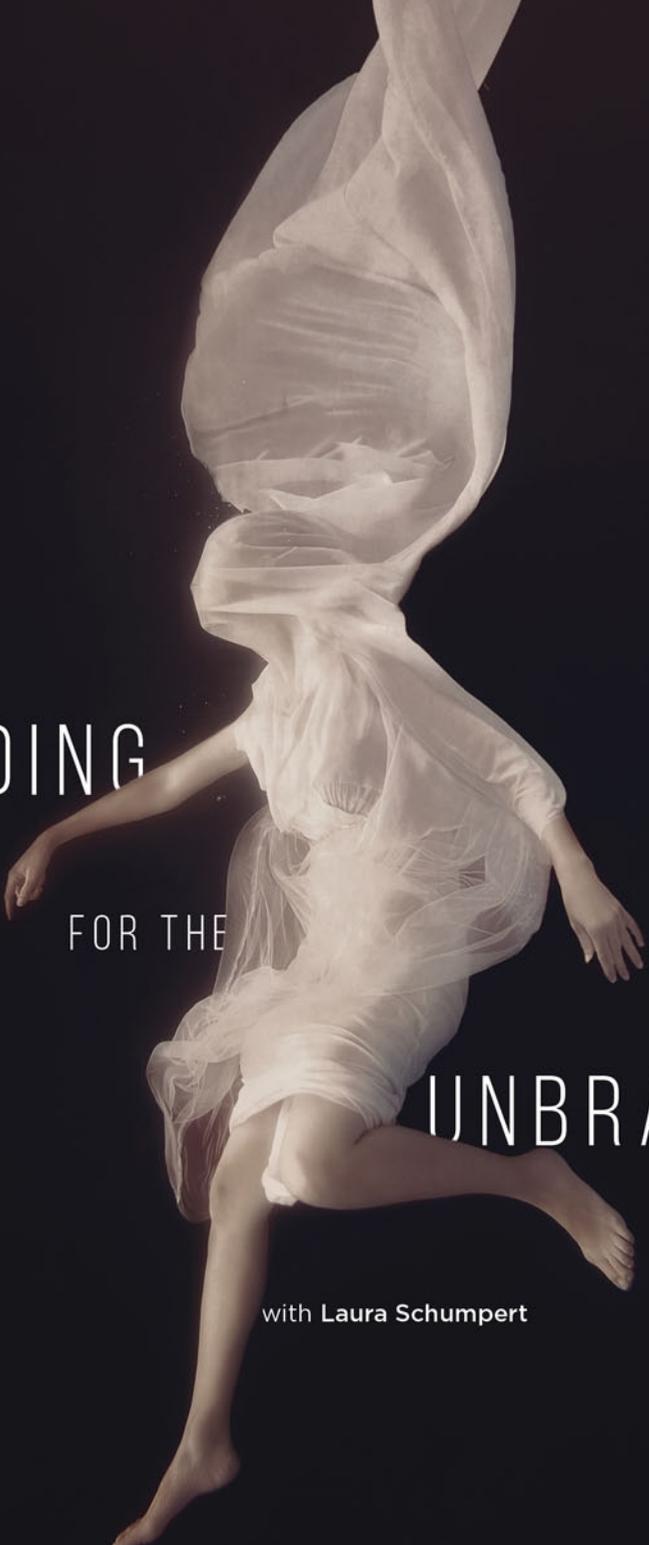
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BRANDING

FOR THE

UNBRANDABLE

with Laura Schumpert

It is 2014. I am running a successful wedding photography business. I have transitioned out of the “full time” job and am now supporting my family 100 percent with photography. It is what most of us dream of. When you make it, the serendipity is palpable. I followed all the rules from the masters and branded my business for success. I was in love with photographing people in love. Every bit of branding I put together was focused on my ideal bride looking for “her” photographer.

It all had paid off, and we were enjoying the rewards of our labor. I had never been happier or more fulfilled in every area of my life. My business is thriving, I am married to the man who completed my soul and I have a child who is my heartbeat. Every day, I think of how grateful I am for this delicately beautiful life we are living.

Then, on December 22, 2014, a distracted driver rear-ended our car as we were driving home from vacation. My husband and child were killed.



Image © Laura Schumpert

In the months that followed, the camera was the furthest thing from my mind. I could not comprehend the fact that I was still breathing, let alone that I had a business. I did not care about it anymore. Everything in my life was lost. Photography was just one more thing I could grieve and say good-bye to.

One night that was like so many others, I was drowning in survivor's guilt. I had this intrusive image in my mind I could not shake. I picked up my camera and created this image. After making it, oddly, I felt better being able to see something that was so visceral to me at the time. Something else happened: For the first time in months, I actually enjoyed something. I enjoyed creating these surrealistic depictions of my emotions, and felt a twinge of excitement. I kept creating until, soon, I realized I had created a full series. I knew I could never share it. It broke all of my previous branding rules—but I also could not pretend that I was the same photographer people used to know. It was dishonest to myself and also the memory of my husband and son. I could not hide the fact that my life was irrevocably changed the minute I survived that crash.

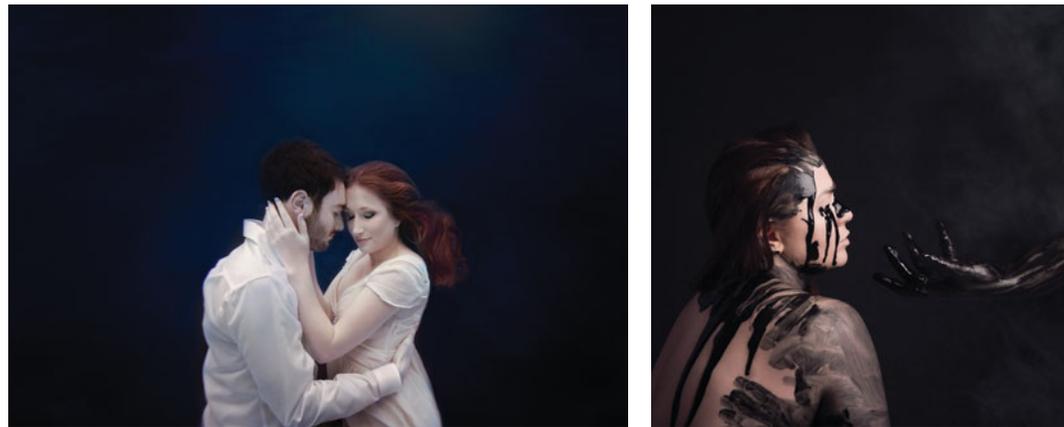


Image © Laura Schumpert



I wanted to see what my photography peers thought of the images. I felt they would look at them more in a photographic sense versus the emotional response I would get from social media. I shared them in a couple of groups and entered them into a contest. The response was positive, and I ended up winning an award. This felt like my exit from wedding photography, which was welcome, since being around happy, loving couples was painful. My fine art began to take off. It was picked up for shows, exhibits and awards. My previous clientele began to notice what I was creating.

Then I realized I was sending art directors, agents and gallery owners to a website that was branded for a wedding photographer. I immediately knew it had to go; it was no longer relevant, and was a painful reminder of a life I no longer lived. There was no way around it: I had to rebrand, but how? I was lost and confused, and there was no rulebook on this subject. No one could tell me how to start over, how to dramatically transform my business.



Images © Laura Schumpert

First step, I knew I needed outside help. We are photographers, not designers. I strongly recommend not doing this on your own unless you are trained in graphic design. A skilled designer understands how every single element (font, color placement, etc.) affects another, and how to achieve your goal.

I found Tiffany Kelley, a photographer and graphic designer. Her work amazed me, and I knew I wanted her to be the designer for this project. I scheduled a consult and explained the difficult situation to her: My branding had to reflect my creative changes, and also distinguish me from the previous photography business I had built. This is where Tiffany shined. She had so little to go off of. On every questionnaire she sent me, I kept writing back, “I don’t know who I am or what I want anymore.” I was breaking the most basic branding rule—having a clear vision of what you want your business to represent—but I was lost in every avenue of my life. I was unbrandable.

Tiffany took charge. She had me complete some questionnaires and mood boards, and then started sending me samples. I started to see the new brand emerging, and was better able to help flesh out what I wanted it to represent. I was shocked by where it actually ended up. It emulates luxury and is clearly adaptable to any and all creative routes I choose. But at the same time, it is infused with emotion. We placed quotes and personalized messages from me to give the viewer a clear representation of me, the artist.



I was nervous about releasing my new branding on social media. Trying to brand what I felt was a hopeless, unbrandable situation, I had put my heart and authentic self into it, and there was no turning back. The response was phenomenal—from art directors, future brides, agents. My branding is now versatile. All of these people visit and inquire. My branding represents me as the new artist I have become.

I felt solid moving forward with my business once the rebranding was completed, and I pushed forward with my fine art. I began taking different projects in many creative fields. The joy of being a photographer blossomed once again. After immersing myself in these projects, I felt my love for wedding photography resurface, and began accepting clients. I now create wherever my heart leads me. I have dived into cinematography, fine art, writing and illustrating.

I continuously strive to provide the best wedding photography and service in my area. I have the freedom to be my truest self and let my business evolve. I know no matter what projects I choose, my brand represents me the artist, and not just one aspect of my work.

Branding is a unique and personal experience. No matter the situation or where your business is headed, there is hope, even when you feel lost in a sea of rules. Every now and then, rules should be challenged.



## THREE TIPS FOR CREATIVE BRANDING

### 1. Hire a professional.

There's no getting around this. Unless you are trained in design, don't attempt this on your own. A great designer's work, talent and vision are worth every cent.

### 2. Be 100 percent authentic.

Before, when I was only a wedding photographer, it was taboo to post anything sad or unhappy on social media, and definitely not on your About page. But as I transitioned into more of an artist, I found that authenticity is what people respond to the most. I hold nothing back—not my love for my husband and child, and also not my grief. It bleeds into my work, and people instantly respond because the emotion is pure. There are enough people out there trying to be like everyone else, but there is no one else like you. When you embrace yourself and life (whether positive or negative) and are transparent, your viewers appreciate the honesty and feel like they know you personally.

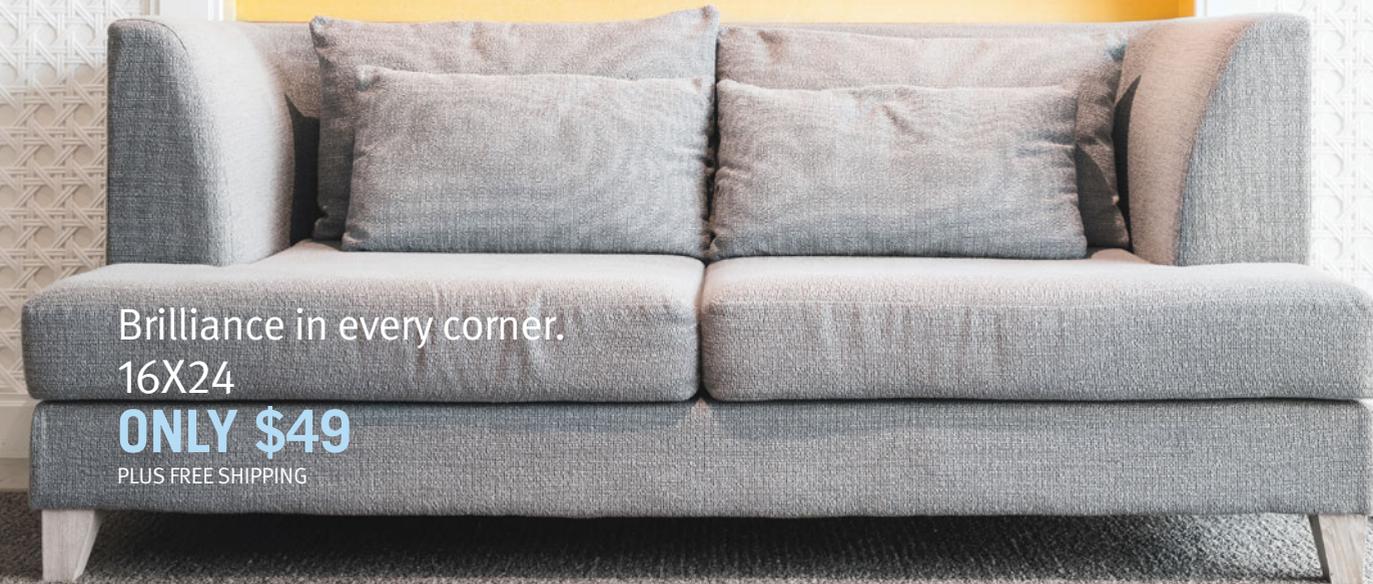
### 3. Create mood boards.

Make one for logos you like and one for logos you don't like, along with color palettes and typography. Make a generic board where you pin anything and everything that grabs your attention. This can consist of your own work, fashion, cars, etc. Step back and take a look at it as an overview. You will start to see themes, colors and your personality begin to pop out. ■



Laura realized after the birth of her son that she was meant to be a photographer, and quickly picked up wedding photography. The sudden death of her son and husband, however, was the catalyst for her journey into fine art work, through which she channels her grief and understanding of the fragility of life. Laura's award-winning images have been widely published and shown at galleries across the country.  
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- 
- + Using social media to drive brand awareness.
  - + Things to think about when translating your brand into a logo.
  - + Using a second brand to service a lower price range without tarnishing an existing luxury brand.
  - + When to use your logo on printed or digital products.
  - + Getting clients excited about and engaged with your brand.
  - + How to get back on the right track with your brand after a personal loss.
  - + When to separate your business into multiple brands.
  - + Using separate websites for different types of clients.
  - + How to target different cities using landing pages on your website.
- 

### GOT MORE QUESTIONS?

Every month we will have a call for questions on our Facebook page and Sal will answer them with real-world advice.



# 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*

BEST OF YOUR BRAND





Image © Beech Tree Photography



Image © Kim Ackerman



Image © Stacy Jacob



Image © Kate Mitchem



Image © Lorenzo Martinez



Image © A Marlow Photography



Image © Legacy Photography



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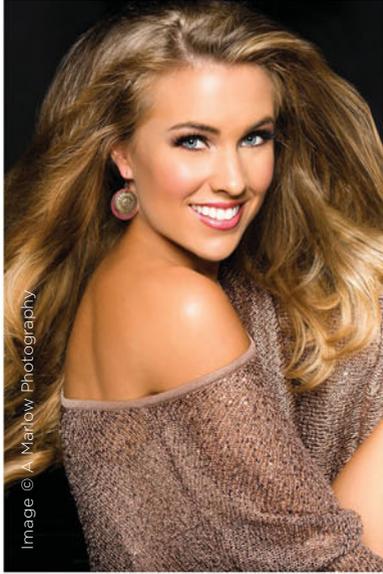




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**SO, YOU'RE READY TO GO FULL-TIME?**

with **Skip Cohen**

I heard a great line a few years back about knowing when you're ready to be a full-time photographer: "You're not ready to go full time until you can't afford not to!"

In other words, you've worked hard building your business, and there's a revenue stream. You're building a reputation. There's demand for your images, and you're making money. The time to go full time is when you're losing money by staying part time.

There's a lot to think about when making the decision to be a full-time professional photographer. Let's first define some of the key ingredients in making that decision a slam dunk. While the topic might seem to be for artists just starting out, I'm betting there are plenty of seasoned veterans who could use a little fine-tuning in their business.

## HOW'S YOUR SKILL SET?

Years ago I got into scuba diving. Diving is relatively easy, requiring very little skill except being comfortable in the water. It's not a requirement to even know how to swim. In fact, I have a friend whose wife can't swim, but she's an outstanding diver. What you learn when you get certified for diving is focused on what to do when something goes wrong.

There's an analogy here to becoming a professional photographer. Do you understand how to deal with the challenges that come your way? This isn't just about what to do when a piece of gear crashes, but understanding the results you get from different lenses, lighting and posing. Do you listen to your clients? When a client suddenly wants a more formal portrait, do you know how to pose and light your subjects? Are you creating images that tug at people's heartstrings, or just images that anybody's Uncle Harry could capture?

## WHAT KIND OF RELATIONSHIPS HAVE YOU BUILT?

Being a successful full-time photographer is heavily driven by relationships, and not just with other photographers, vendors or manufacturers—but also your clients and the community.

A few years ago, I did a podcast with Angela Carson as my guest. She's an outstanding family portrait artist in the Detroit area. Angela talked about knowing how many of her clients are repeat business. It was around 70 percent each year, but they don't come back to her by accident. She's built relationships with all of them. She tracks birthdays, anniversaries and special events in their lives. She keeps in touch with them all year long. She knows exactly how many sessions she needs to book each year to build her business.

Next comes the importance of being involved in your community. Are you involved? Have you worked to build brand awareness and a reputation as someone who gives back?

You want the community to be good to you, so you have to be good to your community. With or without a camera in your hands, you need to be perceived as somebody who cares about the people around you. Be active in community events.

I've written about Scott Stratten's books before, and here he is again. Pick up either of his two books. The subtitle of *UnMarketing* says it all: *Stop Marketing. Start Engaging.* It's an outstanding read and a great reminder that your strongest marketing tool is building relationships.

## IT'S NOT WHO YOU KNOW, BUT WHO KNOWS YOU

Do people know you're in business? Whether part time or full time, you've got to keep reminding people you're there to help them with all their photographic needs. I'm always amazed by people who decide to go full time without letting anybody know they're open for business. They hang out their shingle, and when nobody comes through the door, they're shocked.

This is where relationships, press releases, an effective blog and community involvement all come into play.

You wouldn't attempt to drive across the county without a game plan. So why would you launch a business without a timeline of events announcing your venture?

- **Your blog is a key ingredient.** Before going full time, post consistently, at least twice a week. The content of your posts needs to be helpful to your readers. When you announce your change to full-time status, you want people to already know you for your expertise.
- **Send a press release to your local paper.** Don't forget opinion leaders in your network, past clients and anybody in your email database.
- **Take a serious look at all your relationships with vendors in the community and past clients.** A personalized hand-signed letter to all of them is a great way to make an announcement.

## HOLD AN OPEN HOUSE

If you work out of your home, you can do an open house at a restaurant, hotel or coffee shop. The point is to create an environment much like a gallery opening, with wine, cheese and a sample of your images on display. Sending out a formal invitation, whether the recipient comes or not, plants the seed that you're creating something big in photography and your community.

## OWN YOUR ZIP CODE

It's the oldest technique in business: Start pounding the pavement and knocking on doors. It's time to introduce yourself to every business within a 2- to 5-mile radius. This is about meeting people, and it doesn't matter what your specialty is.

If you're a children's photographer and you're walking into a real estate office, your intro is going to be something like, "My specialty is children's photography, but I have a great background and just want you to know I'm here to help you with any of your photographic needs. And if I can't help you directly, I've got a great network of people who can help."

That's all you need to do. Leave a business card, shake their hand and thank them for their time. All you want to do is make sure they know you're there.

## NETWORKING LUNCHEONS

This couldn't be an easier concept. Invite everybody who has something in common with your target audience to lunch.

If you're a wedding photographer and you want to get to know the players in the bridal game, invite a few caterers, venue managers, florists, tux shops, bridal salons, travel agents, wedding planners, limo companies and entertainment managers to a networking luncheon.

All you need is an inexpensive place for lunch, ideally with a private room. Everyone pays for their own lunch. Work out a package in advance with the restaurant. The purpose is to meet each other and talk about the wedding business.

## INTRODUCTORY PROMOTIONAL OFFERS

I'm a big fan of special limited-time promotions when launching a new product or business. This is where a call to your lab is perfect. You're looking for a premium product that has value for your clients without going over the top and killing your profit margin.

Keep the window of participation relatively short. If it's too long, there's no sense of urgency to take advantage of the special offer. Again, this starts with a call to your lab for any new products.

## ADVERTISING

I'm lumping everything together: traditional print advertising, direct mail, email blasts, guest blogs and even podcasts. You need a little of everything because you want to essentially show up in multiple places your target audience visits, including what they read and their mailbox.

With traditional print advertising, leverage what you're spending with the ad rep you're talking to. In other words, you're willing to consider print advertising as well as online ads, if they offer them, but you also want editorial support for your launch, ideally a profile story.

The decision to go from a part-time to a full-time photographer is one of the most important decisions you'll make in your career. Don't make it a DIY project. Bring in a few people at the core of your network. Talk with an attorney and your accountant. Make sure you have everything needed to launch before you pull the plug on whatever you were doing previously.

I've often heard stories from photographers who had a tougher time than they needed to because they just weren't ready for the plunge. Consider what you need to make a living, especially cash flow, and then take the appropriate steps to build your business. ■



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

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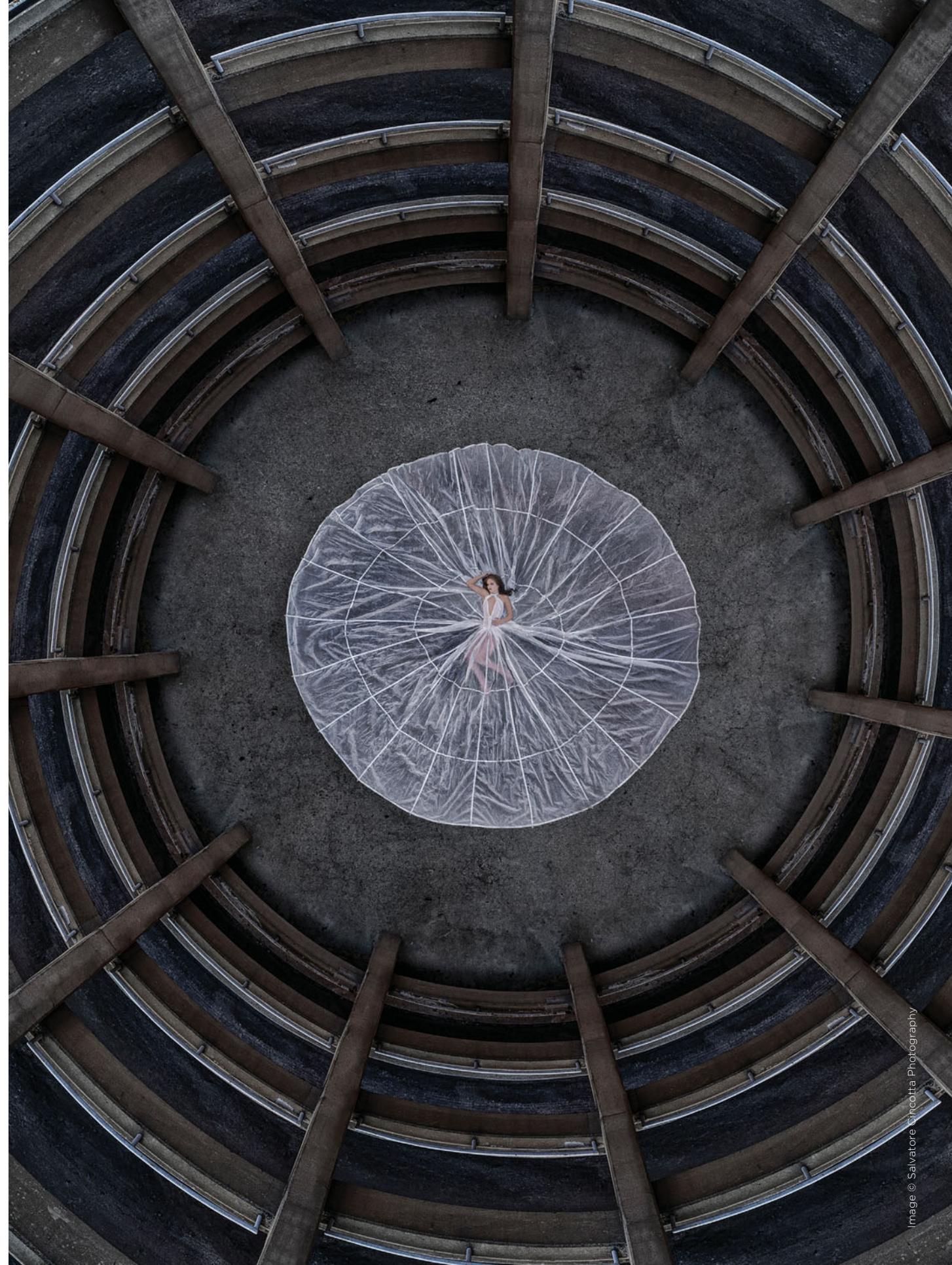


Image © Salvatore Sincotta Photography



**5**  
YEARS

A JOURNEY FROM  
**ENTITLEMENT**  
TO  
**LEADERSHIP**

with Alissa Zimmerman



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



The millennial mindset is a strange and ever-changing phenomenon, especially when it comes to finding and maintaining a career. Employers struggle to find the right person in this generation, and they struggle trying to keep millennials happy and occupied long enough for them to turn their new job into a lifelong career.

This idea of a lifelong career (or, hell, even a five-year career) is almost unheard of today. Why? Because my generation has lost perspective of what it means to establish and prove oneself early on in a career and build a life around hard work, dedication and commitment to grow within a organization.

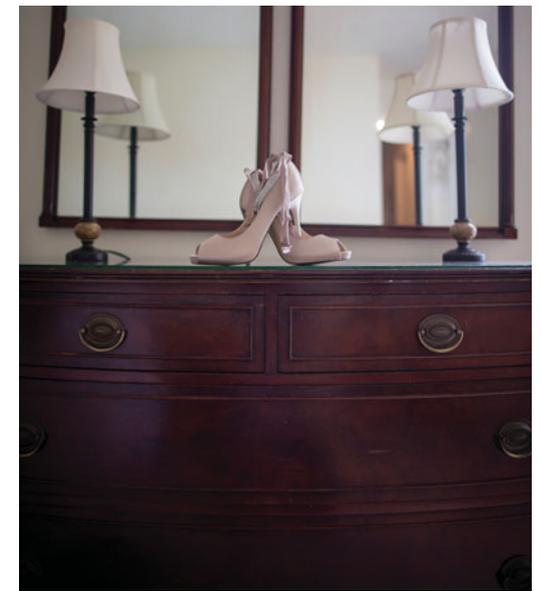
I have been with Cincotta & Co. for five years. Before this job, I was your typical millennial: Entitled and self-serving, I had myself convinced I deserved everything just for being me. Because, you know, I was special. The concept of earning my place within any of the four companies I worked at right out of college (over a two-year window) was completely foreign to me. I wanted everything in exchange for nothing, and never lasted more than six months in these jobs.

My first year with Cincotta & Co. was a challenge. I had finally met my match in a boss who refused to even acknowledge all of my “almost-accomplishments” that I believed made me so unique and valuable to any employer. It took me about a year to gain the right perspective in the role I started in. It was a year of ups and downs, public meltdowns, late nights, early mornings and a boss who pushed me so far that I almost quit (ironically, I found out I was going to be fired the same day I had planned to resign).

But that’s what it takes sometimes for the right people to gain the right perspective—you have to be pushed to your breaking point before you see the light. Sal’s managing technique is just that: He pushes you to the edge of the cliff, and when you think you can’t go any farther, he pushes you more. It’s up to you whether or not you choose to jump or turn around and fight to get back on solid ground.



Images © Salvatore Cincotta Photography



## PERSPECTIVE

Having the right perspective as an employee changes the outcome of your performance. It's that simple. Before I had any perspective, this was only a job to me. I came in at 9 a.m., completed the mundane tasks on my to-do list, and left at 7 p.m. I was a busy bee, nothing more, and certainly nothing of value to the company. Once I was able to shift my mindset, I understood that if I wanted a raise, a bonus or a day off, I actually had to do the work. I had to go above and beyond my daily task list and be proactive in proving myself within the organization.

I had to take a step back and completely change the way I viewed this job. It had to become my career, how I identified myself, so I would be able to take pride in and ownership of the projects I was a part of. Once I was able to shift my mindset, everything started falling into place. I was excited to come in every day, excited about playing a role in new opportunities, and, most of all, I was excited and proud to know that my opinion started to matter to my boss. I finally felt like I had purpose, which is the foundational desire of every millennial in the workforce.

## HARD WORK VS. SMART WORK

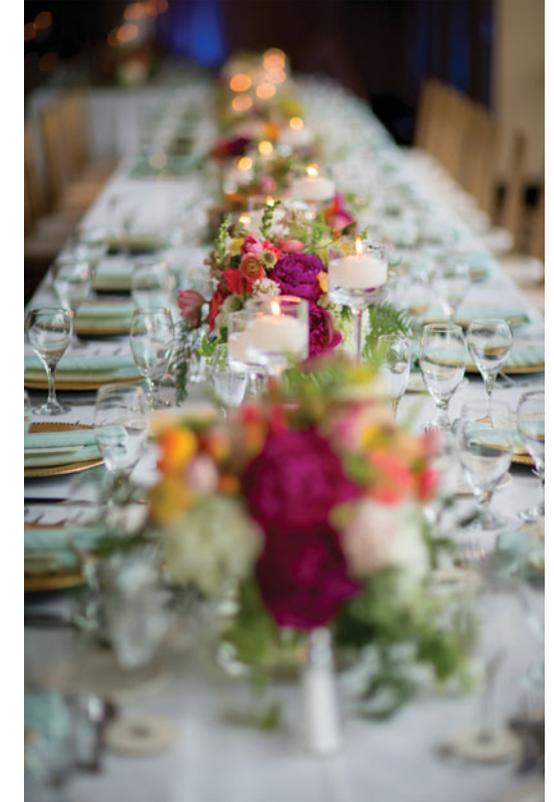
Hard work was something I had no problem with in my first year on the job. But hard work is not always smart work. As mentioned above, I was a worker bee. Sal gave me a list of things that needed to get done, usually basic tasks like shipping orders, cleaning the studio and other administrative tasks. Nothing I was working on was strategic to the company—so at any given moment, I could be fired without causing a hiccup in the company.

This is where hard work came into play. Employees who are strategic to the success of a company understand “work hard, play hard.” Working hard doesn't mean late nights, early mornings, and blood, sweat and tears just because. Working hard is working smart—not getting caught up in things that aren't important, things that pull you away from the tasks that actually need to get done. And when you can add that motivating factor of playing hard at the end of the work, the working hard never seems so bad. Especially when you're all in it together.





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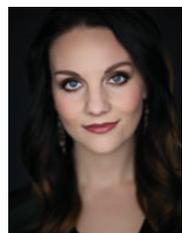
## BUILDING AN A-TEAM

Which brings me to my next point: your team. The thing I respect most about my boss is the team mentality he instills in all of us. He has always operated under the idea that your team is only as strong as your weakest link. He understands that his success is a direct result of the team he has built. We are the A-Team, constantly competing to be the best, both internally and externally. Sal is both our coach and quarterback. He's the one setting goals and leading us to victories while pushing us to be the best version of ourselves every day. This is so important in a boss. Leading by example is the best way to go, and encouraging your team is the only way to guarantee performance. A little recognition goes a long way.



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

How to find and maintain good employees is one of the top questions photographers ask Sal. I am proof that not every good employee starts out that way. It takes time and a lot of bumps in the road to get someone to the level where you need them. It's about whether or not you see the potential in that person, and if that person has the stamina to persevere through the first one or two years—past the entitlement. ■



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

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TURNING THE ORDINARY INTO EXTRAORDINARY:

# LIGHTING RECEPTIONS

with Michael Anthony



Lighting challenges are present in almost all aspects of the wedding day, but seldom do photographers face more problems than when they light receptions. There are many reasons for this. First, receptions often take place indoors or outdoors in the evening in very low-light environments. Second, we often encounter mixed lighting situations, or, at best, we may have a single dimly lit tungsten environment. Lastly, every aspect of the reception is going to be documentary-based, so having control of your environment is pretty much out of the question. Nonetheless, it is our job to ensure the client receives a professional, quality product, and that means we have to be at the top of our game even when circumstances are hard.

As with most things in photography, there is no “one size fits all” for every situation, but there are simple rules that will make your job easier.

Going into photographing my first wedding, the only area I wasn't comfortable with was reception lighting. I read Neil Van Niekerk's *Off-Camera Flash: Techniques for Digital Photographers* three times leading up to my first wedding. Unlike many photographers, I did not start in wedding photography by second shooting for other photographers, so everything I had set up, I had done so on my own without knowing what the outcome would be. Over time, my setups have evolved to account for some of the problems I ran into early on, but the foundation of how I shoot most receptions is still the same.

## EQUIPMENT FOR LIGHTING RECEPTIONS

I primarily rely on four Canon 600EX-RT's or three Profoto B2's plus one Canon 600EX-RT, depending on if I am working with a second shooter who is using my lights. (The B2 has a much faster recycle time, but requires you to use a third-party trigger like the PocketWizard with your on-camera flash.) The key is that your lights remain mobile. You have to continuously move your off-camera flashes around all night long, so don't be tied down to cords plugged into a wall. The other thing is that you don't want to be too top heavy. If a guest knocks over a stand, a monolight could do considerable damage to someone's head.

Use sturdy but light stands. I recommend the Manfrotto 1004BAC. You need at least three of them to cover most environments. Get Manfrotto umbrella adapters and a good hot-shoe adapter.

You can use any type of light source you want, but just make sure it is reliable and you can trigger it via radio. Do not rely on optical slaves for reception lighting.

Keep in mind that you will need to have flash on your camera at all times during the reception because you will not always be able to place subjects within the bounds of your off-camera flashes. Your trigger on-camera must be able to control your off-camera flashes remotely.

## LIGHT SETTINGS

Your settings will always vary, but you'll want to keep two things in mind. You need to balance the ambient light in the room with the flash power from your lights properly. This ensures less contrasty shadows and a better overall aesthetic. Shoot at  $f/4$ – $f/5.6$ , because in these fast-paced environments, you want your subjects in focus. This means you will likely need to bump up your ISO quite a bit, which helps keep a moderately quick shutter speed and conserve power on your flashes so you are not running out of power on your flash at inopportune times.

## LIGHT COLOR

One of the biggest problems I see with photographers lighting receptions is that their flash light is competing with the ambient light and creating a mixed-color situation. Ninety percent of the receptions we shoot are in an incandescent environment. This means you should be matching the color of your flash to the light in the room using CTO gels. If you retain even the slightest amount of ambient light and use an unbalanced flash color, you will run into problems with color. Have gels available for all your flashes, as opposed to just your on-camera flash.



Image © Michael Anthony

## LIGHTING THE FIRST DANCE & PARENT DANCES

Here you will see my basic lighting pattern for first dances and parent dances. You will notice that I use three lights positioned in a triangular format on the dance floor. I also turn off my on-camera flash because it's understood that the couple will likely be dancing in the center of the floor. If your couple is coordinating their dance and will be traveling throughout the dance floor, you may need to move your lights out a bit farther, but most of the time, my lights are positioned around the edges of the floor.

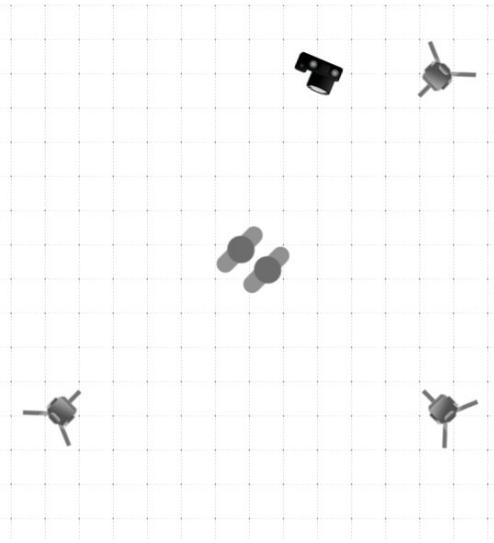


Image © Michael Anthony

There are two things you need to consider when choosing your shooting angle. The first thing is your background. Pick an angle that allows you to shoot into uplighting or into a darker environment. Using off-camera flash actually allows you to hide some of the clutter commonly found in a reception, but if you choose the wrong angle, you will just add to it. Avoid an angle that forces you to shoot into the spill area of your flash.

Typically, if a room is rectangular, you should shoot toward the part of the room that is farthest from your flash. If your couple chose uplighting, you will get great results with this technique.

The second thing you need to consider is the position of your couple in relation to your light. I always tell couples that did not coordinate a dance to do two things: Keep spinning when you are dancing, and stay at the center of the dance floor. I also instruct the bride not to bury her face in the groom's shoulder, which causes bad shadows on half of her face as the light comes across the groom's shoulder.

You need to time your shots to get the best possible light on the subject's face. This takes a lot of practice, and eventually you will find out the best time to shoot for your particular light pattern. Keep in mind you will need to adjust your light position if your angle and light are not lining up correctly. You can use one of your off-camera flashes as a backlight, but be careful of the fly-away hairs that the backlight can accentuate. I learned this from placing way too many retouching orders when designing a client's album.

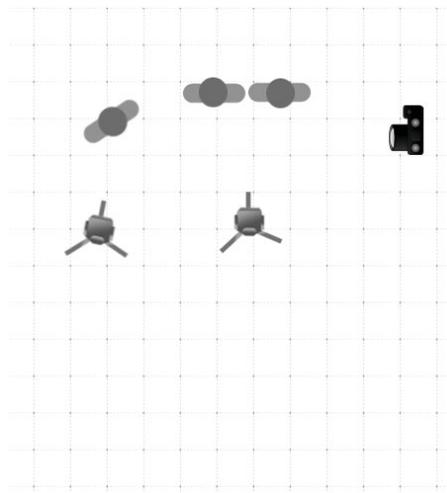


Image © Michael Anthony

## LIGHTING SPEECHES

Usually after the first dance or parent dance, the DJ will move right into speeches. This is why mobility of your lights is so important. For speeches, the couple has their backs to a wall somewhere, and the speaker will either be out on the dance floor or right next to them. Either way is good, but you have to light them both correctly. We use two lights off-camera, and no on-camera flash.

The trick to photographing speeches is to make proper use of angles. Position your lights at a 45-degree angle to the subjects. Avoid getting the light spill that hits the wall into your composition. This usually means you will have to get close to your subjects and shoot at a 90-degree angle from the light source.



When lighting speeches, it is important you are telling the story for your wedding album. Get photographs separately of both the speaker and the couple reacting to the speech. You could do this all in one shot, but I have found it to be less visually impactful on an album spread.

Time the subject's action/reaction in order to get the most emotional moments of the speech, and keep in mind that the couple will embrace the speaker at the end of the speech. Don't miss that moment.



## LIGHTING AND SHOOTING DANCING

I love shooting dancing shots for our clients. I will warn you that most of the dancing images don't make it into the client's album, but it's a great way to make sure you are covering all of the guests and the action at the wedding. I typically use the same lighting diagram you saw from the couple's dances, but instead of a triangular pattern, I remove one light and use cross lighting. This allows for better integration with my on-camera flash.

I also move the flashes into a less obstructive place farther back and higher up. This is when I activate my on-camera flash, because the tendency of drunk Uncle Joe flailing his arms about can create shadows on my subject's face.

I always point my on-camera flash over my shoulder in the same direction the subject is facing. This ensures that when the light bounces and comes back down, we have perfect short-side lighting on the subject's face.

Dancing shots take patience. Wait for the right moment, lock focus and take the shot when you can get the best reaction. If you miss, no big deal—shoot again, but when you lock in a subject, work to get the shot you want. Don't be afraid to interact with guests to get the moments you want.

Do not use a 70–200 from across the room. It's lazy, and you will never get the results you want. Your composition will be off and you will not show the action. Instead, grab a 24 or 35mm lens, and get a handshake's distance away from your subject. The wide angle emphasizes your subject while telling the story in the background.

Lastly, back-button focus is crucial to capturing the moment. The reason for it is that you can line up your composition and wait for the moment to happen. If you are using the shutter button for focus, and the subject moves when you line up your focus and press the button again, your camera will refocus and the moment will be over. I am a strong believer in using back-button focus because it allows you to create better compositions and wait for moments to happen.



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## SHOOTING DETAILS

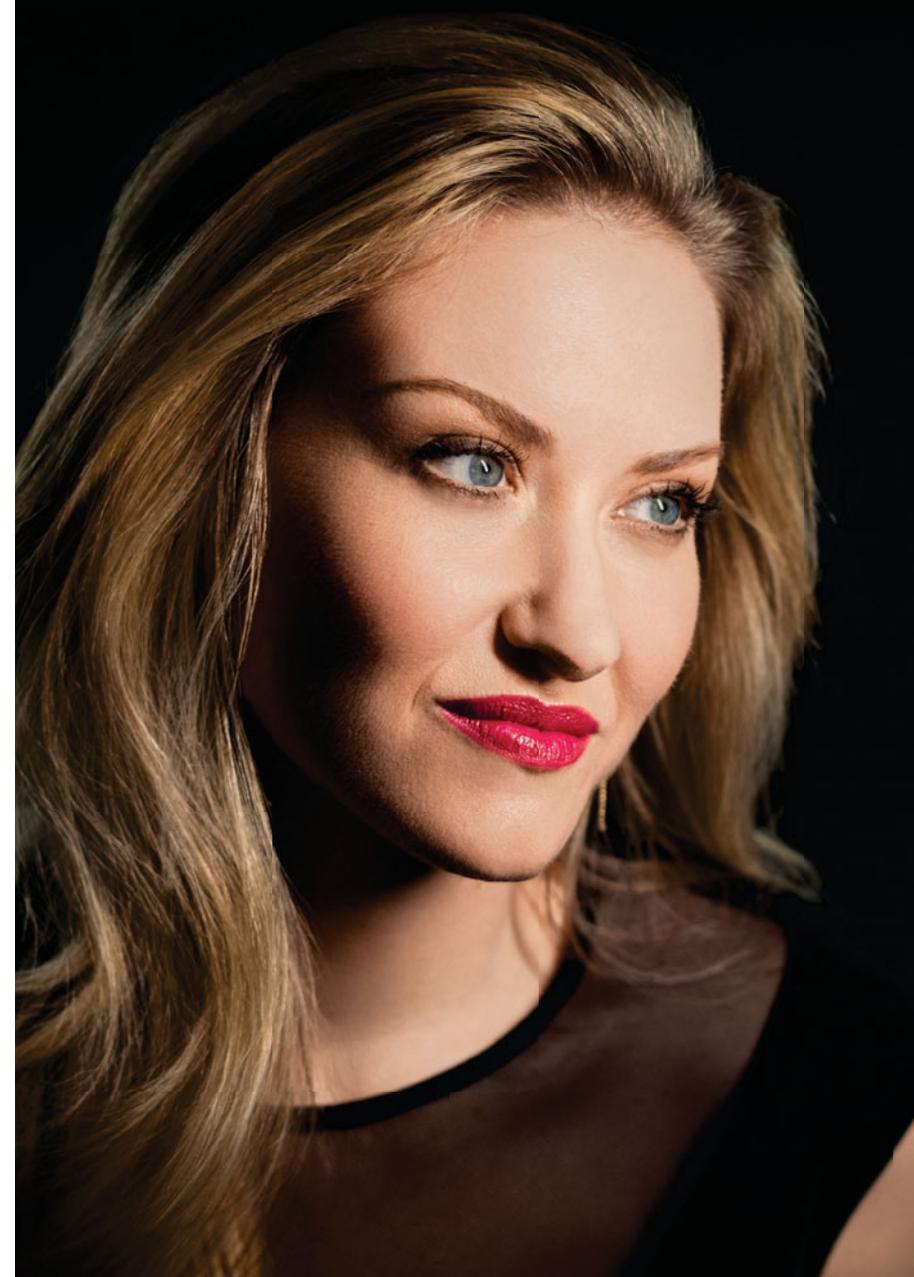
Shooting detail shots in low-light environments can be a challenge. When building relationships with vendors, you will be judged not on the shots of people you take but the quality of your detail shots. If natural light is not available, make the lighting on your details look as natural as possible. We use video lights and longer exposures on our details, but if we need to create dimension, we get out the speedlights. Use flash for a detail like a cake. Cross lighting looks great on a cake.

Being able to work in low-light environments is something every professional should be able to do. It shows potential clients that you have a well-rounded skillset. The reception images usually close out an album, so having good-quality reception shots is essential to delivering a professional final product. ■



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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