

“17hats sets me apart from my competitors by providing a client experience that’s unrivaled. I’m able to jump on a lead while it’s hot, and go from inquiry to booked in less than 15 minutes!”



Hannah Marie  
Professional photographer  
& 17hats member

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november 2018

# shutter

magazine



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# Excel In Client Experience

## TOP 10 WAYS TO WOW CLIENTS



There are any number of ways to improve your client experience. Business experts Amanda and Donovan share their Top 10. Remember, a great client experience can be your most effective marketing tool!

*Amanda Rae, COO, 17hats*  
*Donovan Janus, CEO, 17hats*

- 1 Reply immediately & always follow up.** With 17hats, anyone who contacts you about your services receives an immediate response, expressing your enthusiasm for the opportunity. But don't leave it at that. Follow up if you don't hear back. A lack of responsiveness on their part may not reflect a lack of interest – maybe life just got in the way. Touching base again never hurts.
- 2 Establish yourself as an expert.** Professionalism matters, especially at the beginning of a relationship. Carry yourself with confidence, and you'll instill confidence in your clients.
- 3 Make your brand relatable.** Meeting a senior portrait client? Have contemporary music on in the background. Get away from the hard-angled desk and chat on a comfy couch.

- 4 Activate the five senses.** Make consultations a sensory experience. Greet moms-to-be with relaxing music and a soft baby scent in the air. Offer celebratory champagne to engaged couples. Have them feel the textures of your products. Help them envision where they might display your photographs in their home.
- 5 Eliminate confusion & stress with one go-to place.** Convey professionalism with the 17hats Client Portal. This gives your clients a single, secure place where they can effortlessly confirm their booking, find event details, and even make online payments.
- 6 Automate your raving client experience.** Don't impress one client while neglecting another. With 17hats, you put your best foot forward every time, with professional and consistent communications. When you systemize your approach, every client has the same outstanding client experience, every time.
- 7 Set the mood for the shoot.** Adjust your approach (even your personality) to complement your subject. Shooting an excited high-schooler? Match her energy. Is your groom-to-be camera-shy? Draw him out with a calm, comforting demeanor.
- 8 Anticipate questions.** Consider a nervous bride: She is going to have questions as the wedding nears. You can have 17hats automatically send status emails, so your client knows that you have all the details handled. These automated updates are effortless for you, but they make you shine in your client's eyes!
- 9 Present your work proudly.** Don't just email photos to clients – instead, celebrate your work. Present your photos in person, and offer your professional opinion about each of your selects.
- 10 Send a final thank you.** With the Contacts feature in 17hats, one of the first things you solicit is a mailing address. That comes in handy months later when you send your client a handwritten thank you note.

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NOVEMBER 2018 | ISSUE 074

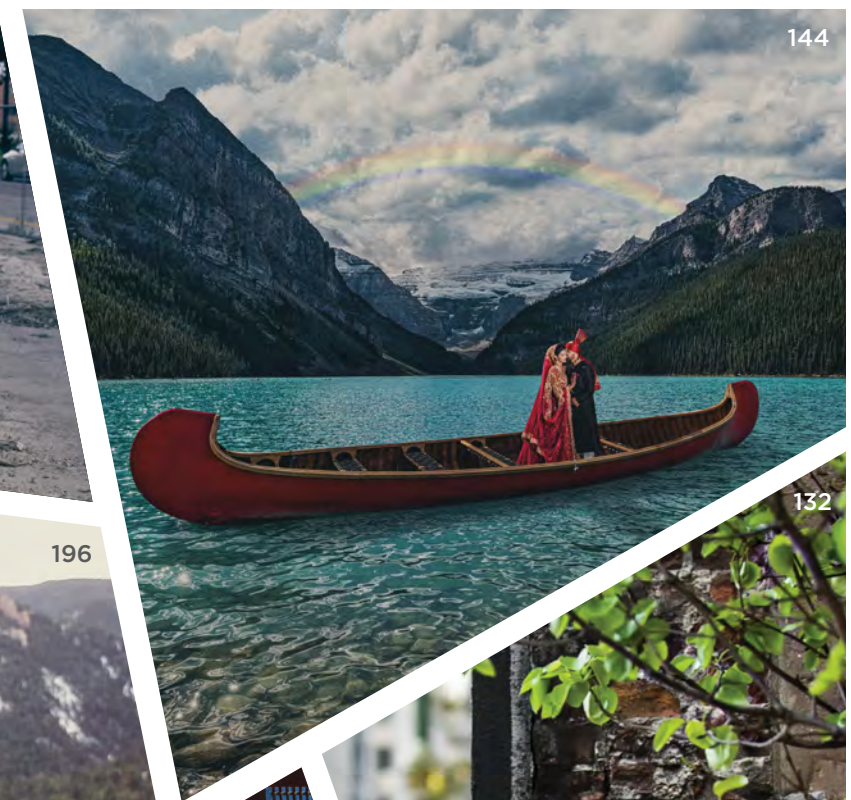
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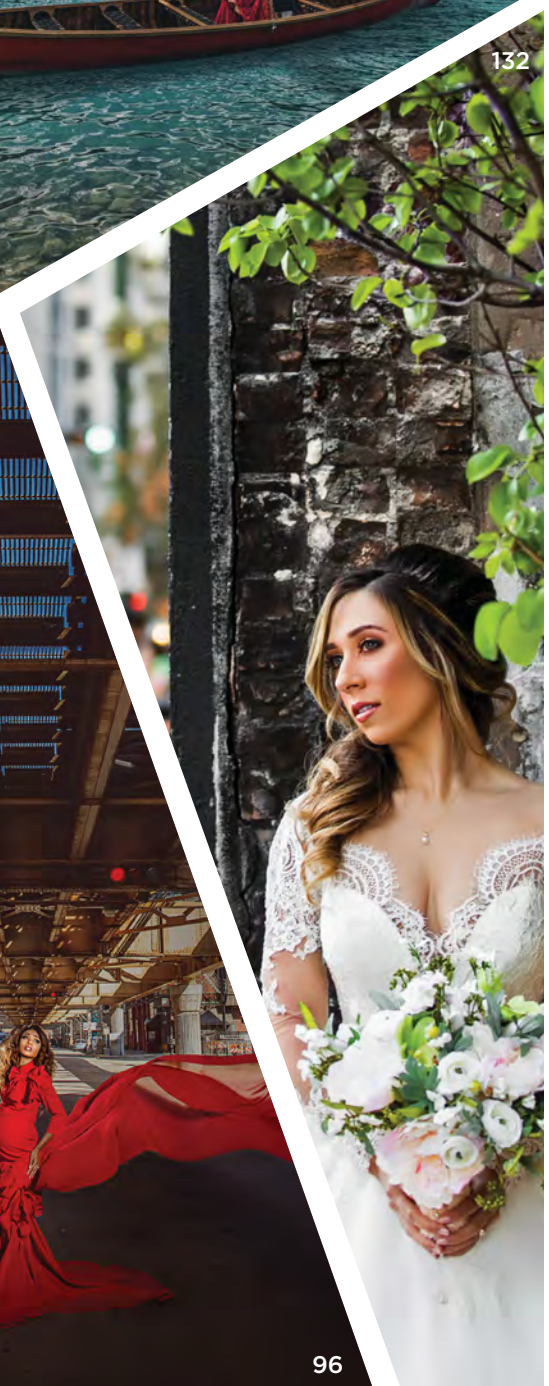
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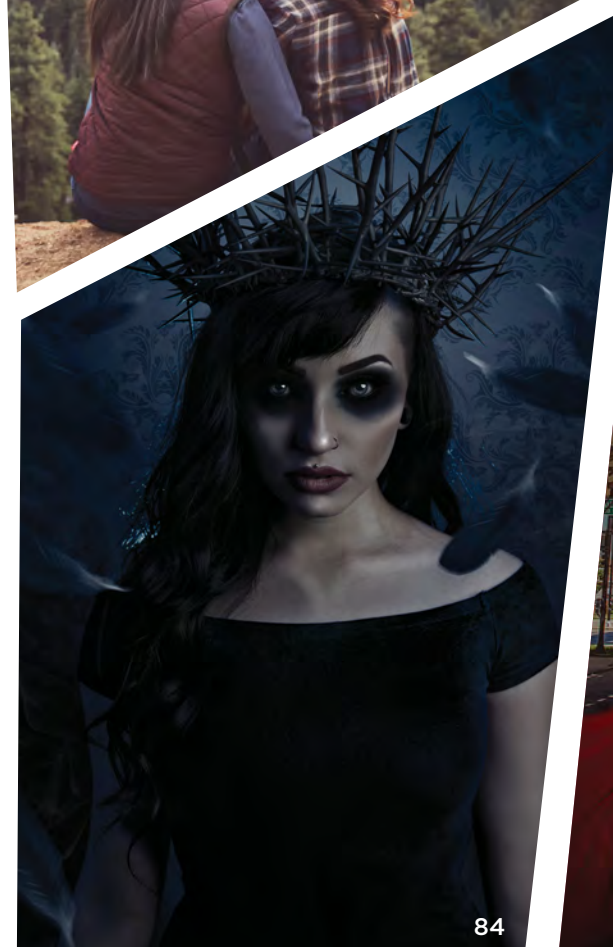
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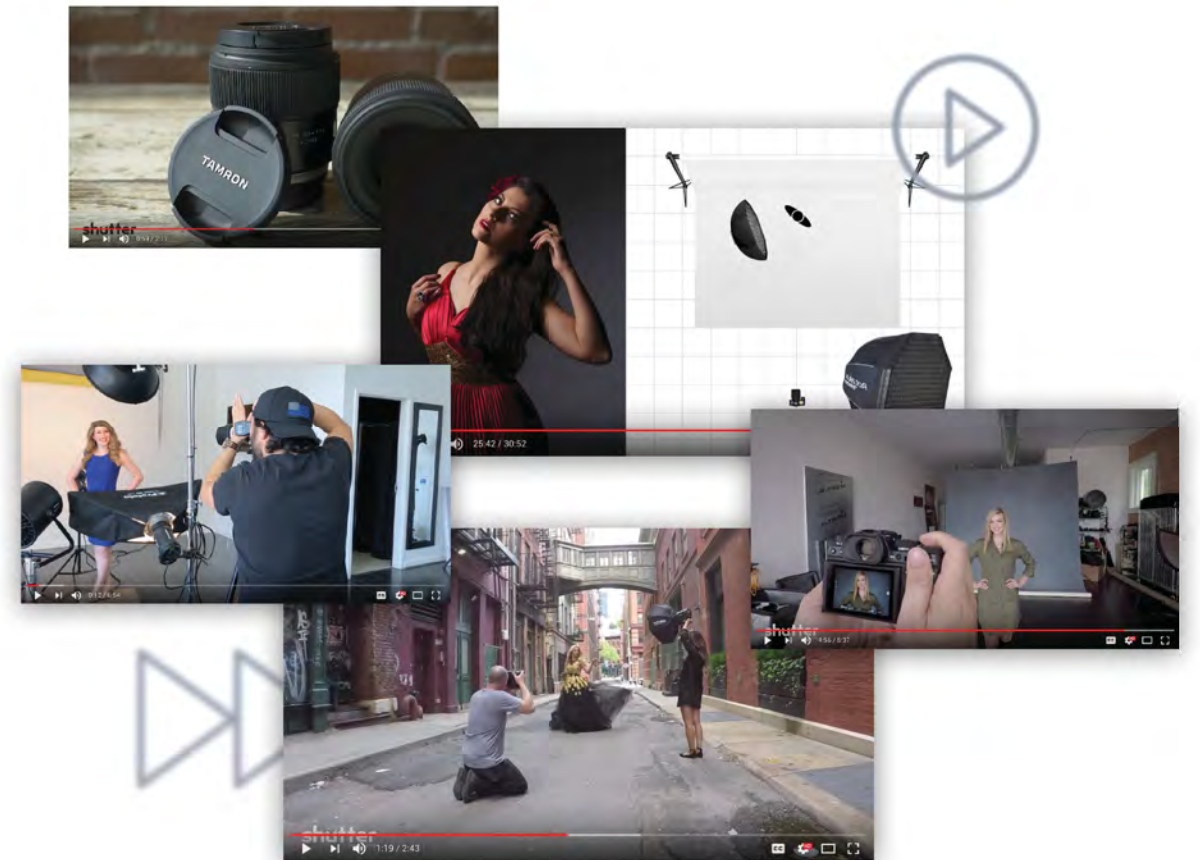
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# MISSION STATEMENT

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.

Shutter Magazine: By photographers, for photographers.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>EDITOR-IN-CHIEF / PUBLISHER</b><br>Sal Cincotta  | <b>CREATIVE DIRECTOR</b><br>Alissa Zimmerman |
| <b>LEAD DESIGNER</b><br>Alicia Simpson  | <b>JR. DESIGNER</b><br>Ellie Plotkin         |
| <b>ACCOUNT SPECIALIST</b><br>Christine Gill   | <b>COPY EDITOR</b><br>Tom O'Connell          |
| <b>CONTRIBUTING WRITERS</b><br>Vanessa Joy, Michael Anthony, Sal Cincotta, Skip Cohen, Jeff & Lori Poole, Christine Yodsukar, Justin Yoder, Casey Dittmer, Michael Corsentino, Joey Thomas, Scott Vo, Jess Hess, Dustin Lucas and Phillip Blume |  |



# THE COVER

**PHOTOGRAPHER:** Sal Cincotta | [salcincotta.com](http://salcincotta.com)  
**CAMERA:** Canon 5D Mark IV  
**LENS:** Canon 100mm 2.8 Macro  
**EXPOSURE:** f2.8 @ 1/80, ISO 1600  
**LIGHTING:** Natural light  
**ABOUT THE IMAGE:** This image was taken at Union Station in St. Louis, Missouri, during ShutterFest 2018.  
**MODEL:** Brynn Hershey  
**HAIR & MAKEUP:** Makeup Artistry by A&C

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# LAUNCH POINT

A message from the editor-in-chief



*You are your brand.*  
*Don't ever forget that.*  
- Sal Cincotta



Image © Salvatore Cincotta Photography

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# THE BENEFITS OF **PARTNERSHIPS**

with **Skip Cohen**





Over the years writing for *Shutter Magazine* and my blog, I’ve talked a lot about the importance of partnerships, but almost always about the same benefit: sharing the cost of direct-mail pieces. Developing relationships with potential partners can be even more beneficial to your business. It’s time to expand the concept and go beyond just sharing the cost of production and mailing for a brochure or postcard.

During my Hasselblad days, 1987 to 1999, our advertising and promotional offers reduced our costs while giving the Hasselblad brand exposure.

**HASSELBLAD, KODAK AND POLAROID**

We pulled together an ad campaign with both of these then top-shelf companies featuring the work of Nick Vedros. The image we used was shot with Hasselblad on Kodak film, but there was no digital technology then. A Polaroid back was an essential component to check exposure and composition for many commercial and portrait artists. The costs for the complete campaign, including production and media placement, was split three ways between us.

There were other programs over the years, each similar in structure, and including Kodak, L.L. Bean and Bogen (today known as Manfrotto). Each time the companies involved not only reduced their costs, but each company became an ambassador for the others.

Here are a few ideas to start thinking about.

**DIRECT MAIL**

Think about partnerships with other vendors in the community. It’s easiest to use wedding photographers as an example because there are so many potential partners. A wedding photographer might develop a program with a florist and a venue. An oversize postcard designed to highlight all three partners reduces everybody’s cost to a third of what it would cost if you were solo.

**REFERRALS**

The goal of referrals is to never say no to a client. Say you’re a wedding photographer and the bride contacts you a few years after the wedding to photograph her new baby. It’s not something you enjoy doing, but you’ve got a relationship with another photographer who specializes in maternity and newborns. It’s the perfect opportunity to refer business back and forth to each other.

**SHARING STUDIO SPACE**

At ShutterFest two years ago, a photographer told me she was sharing office space with several other photographers. That’s a great way to reduce expenses and get a bigger and better space than you normally would be able to afford, especially if you’re just starting out.



EVENTS AND FUNDRAISERS

This is one of my favorites because it’s open to so many different types of business owners. Many years ago, Vicki Taufer established an event that led to her becoming one of the leading pet photographers in her area. Her Dog Day Afternoon program offered pet owners a free 5x7 print in exchange for a donation to the local animal shelter. She worked with the shelter, a local business called the Dog Barkery and a dog biscuit manufacturer. Each helped promote the event. Bambi Cantrell did a wine and cheese fundraiser with a salon. Together they raised funds and awareness for a community need.

GALLERY SHOWINGS

Los Angeles photographer Kevin A. Gilligan, a member of the Hermosa Beach Artist’s Collective, cited five benefits of this approach in a guest post on SkipCohenUniversity.com called “Sharing the Burden of Building a Photography Business”: creativity, shared expenses with permanent space, increased exposure, motivation and networking. With each benefit, he gained the support of his partnership with other artists. The common denominator is they all share the same target audience.

Kevin’s closing paragraph about his group’s community events says it all: “What makes it work? All have to pitch in. At least one person has to take the lead to make sure the flag does not touch the ground and coordinate efforts. Many artists have multiple gigs; it’s best if you have several full-time artists in the group who can devote more time.”



EQUIPMENT

New-gear fever is prevalent this time of year, and in 2018, it’s likely to have an impact on more of you than last year. That’s because at Photokina, one of the industry’s largest imaging shows, held at the end of September in Germany, hundreds of manufacturers introduced new products. As these products become available, they will create a push to clear older inventory and sell the latest and greatest.

Cash flow is a challenge for every business, but before you stretch your wallet a little too thin, consider partners for the purchase of some of those high-ticket items. Exotic lenses and large-format printers are two good examples of equipment whose cost should be shared. Depending on what you’re about to purchase, it’s not that big of a challenge to share usage and maintenance.

ADVERTISING

Earlier I mentioned the shared cost of advertising back in my Hasselblad days. There’s no reason not to share the cost with other vendors. Direct mail is only one vehicle, but an ad in a local paper or magazine or on a website saves money and expands your reach.

A full-page ad in an upscale bridal magazine with a caterer, bridal salon and photographer could roll out under a headline like “The Best of Three Worlds,” and feature each entity in a third of the ad—again, all hitting the same target audience.

BOOK PROJECTS

I’ve coauthored six books on photography with Don Blair, Bambi Cantrell, Joe Buissink and Scott Bourne. With each book, the common denominator was our target audience—professional photographers—and we pooled our skills to create educational material in imaging. We shared all expenses and revenues, as well as a few spinoff workshops tied to the books.

CONTESTS

This is one of my favorites, which I first heard about from Bruce Berg, a photographer in Oregon. He wrote an incredible guest post several years ago on my blog titled “A Promotion Worth Having,” in which he talked about the marketing concept behind the Lane County Children’s Contest, founded 30 years ago in Oregon and still thriving. Each year it brings together three competing photography studios that are able to bring in income during seasonal slowdowns with the help of the contest. Bruce had been working with the contest for 15 years, he wrote, though he was hesitant at first because he “didn’t want to do formulaic portraits or attempt to be a high-volume business.” “But,” he continued, “I’ve been able to tweak the approach and do the creative work I love, and the contest has been great for business.”



“**I love creating partnerships;** I love not having to bear the entire burden of the creative storytelling, and when I have unions like with George Lucas and Peter Jackson, it’s really great; not only do I benefit, but the project is better for it!”

–Steven Spielberg

Year after year, the Lane County Children’s Contest has been successful in not only raising awareness for professional photography but revenue during the first quarter of the year, typically when photography income is at its lowest.

Here’s what Bruce wrote about revenue in that post: “Last year, with 12 percent unemployment in our area, we drew 55 clients for 70 entries and took in \$17,000. (Pre-recession, we averaged \$23,000.) My advertising cost was just \$1,100.”

And that brings me full circle to the importance of building relationships and creating great partnerships. You don’t have to go it alone. Bringing in strategic partners for any project helps expand your reach, creativity and brand awareness. ■



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[youtube.com/btsShutterMagazine](https://youtube.com/btsShutterMagazine)



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

With Adobe Camera Raw

with **Dustin Lucas**



R: --- f/5.6 1/160 s  
G: --- ISO 100 50 mm  
B: ---

Basic

Treatment: ☒ Color ☐ Black & White

Profile: Color

White Balance: As Shot

Temperature 0

Tint 0

Auto Default

Exposure 0.00

Contrast 0

Highlights 0

Shadows 0

Whites 0

Blacks 0

Clarity 0

Dehaze 0

Vibrance 0

Saturation 0

vintage-camera-HQYE2DM.jpg

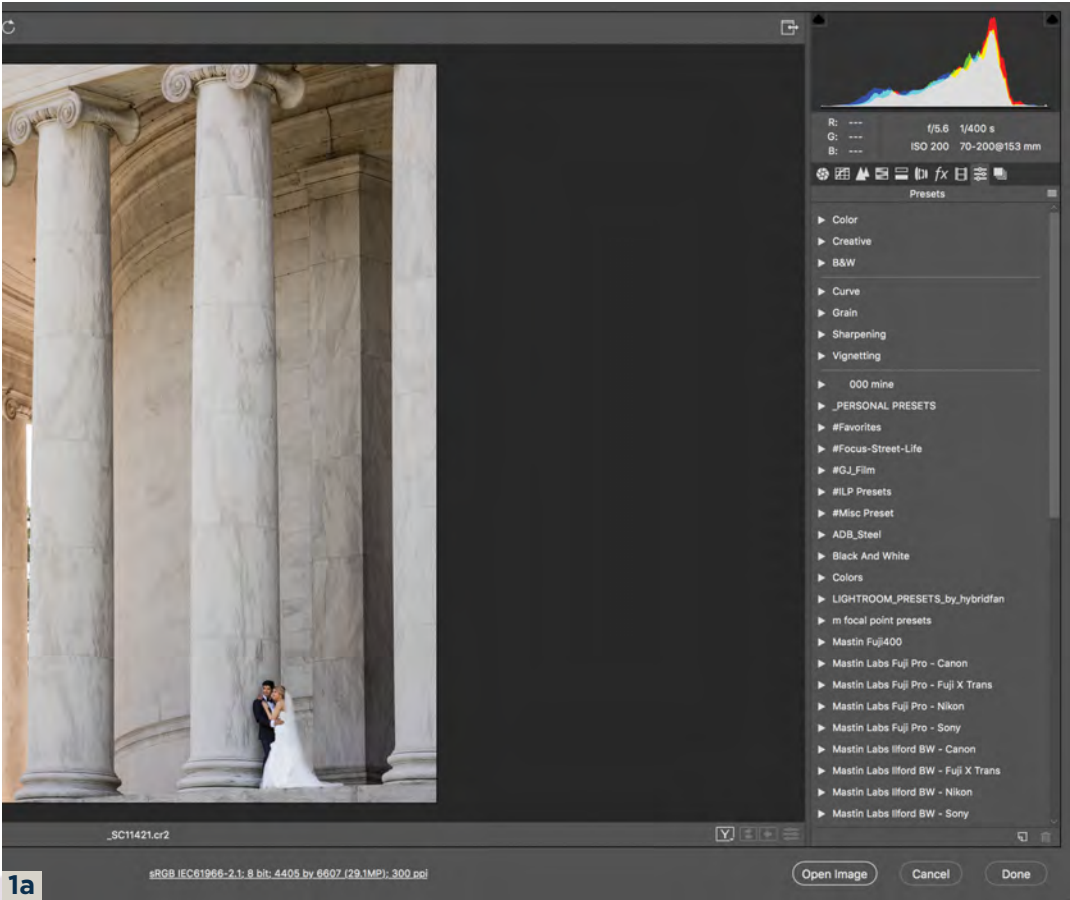
Adobe RGB (1998); 8 bit; 5796 by 3919 (22.7MP); 300 ppi

Open Image

Cancel

Done





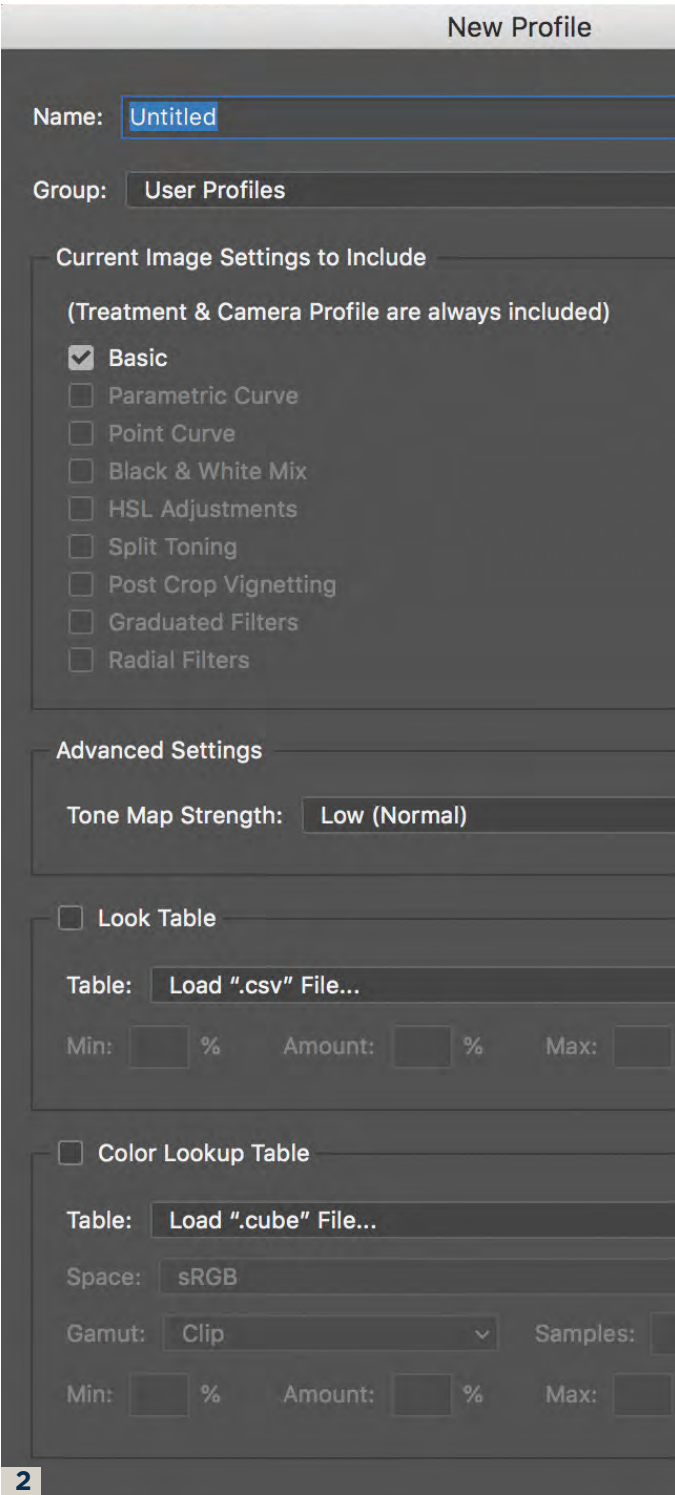
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- ▶ Mastin Labs Fuji Pro - Sony
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- ▶ Mastin Labs Ilford BW - Fuji X Trans
- ▶ Mastin Labs Ilford BW - Nikon
- ▶ Mastin Labs Ilford BW - Sony

I continually try to push creative image editing to its limits. There are so many ways to tweak an image, to get that dialed-in look and feel that you envisioned when you photographed it. Since the change from Camera to Color Profiles in Adobe Camera Raw and Lightroom, the creative possibilities expanded and became so simple to use, adding them to the Basic panel and allowing users to adjust the amount it's applied.

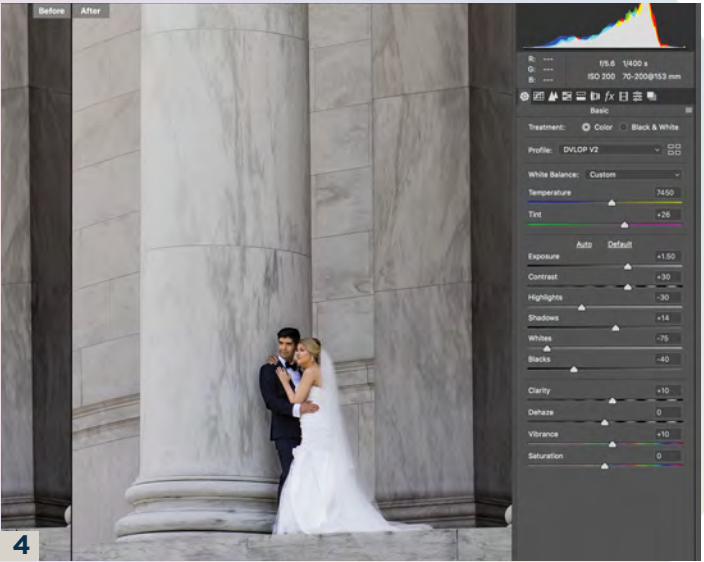
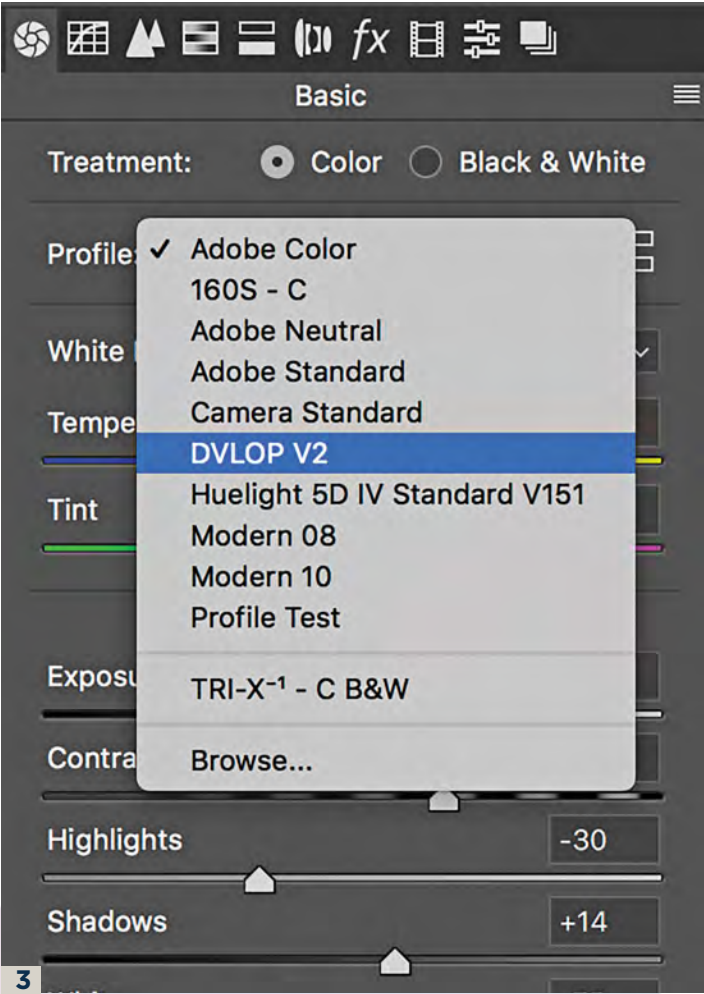
We all know this limits standard and third-party Camera Profiles because they are applied as an all-or-nothing type of adjustment. There is no Amount slider or any way to customize these profiles. In Adobe Camera Raw, you can create Color Profiles and load them into Lightroom. It doesn't just end with applying Camera Profiles—you can apply develop settings as well to customize the profile. This opens endless creative possibilities.

CREATE IN ADOBE CAMERA RAW

We start by opening a Raw file into Photoshop, which opens it in Camera Raw. To save a Color Profile, click on the Presets tab, hold Option and, in the lower right corner, click the Save Preset icon. (1) A New Profile dialog box will open allowing you to choose several settings, which we will circle back to. (2) Let's apply some settings in the Basic panel we'd like to use to enhance the image.

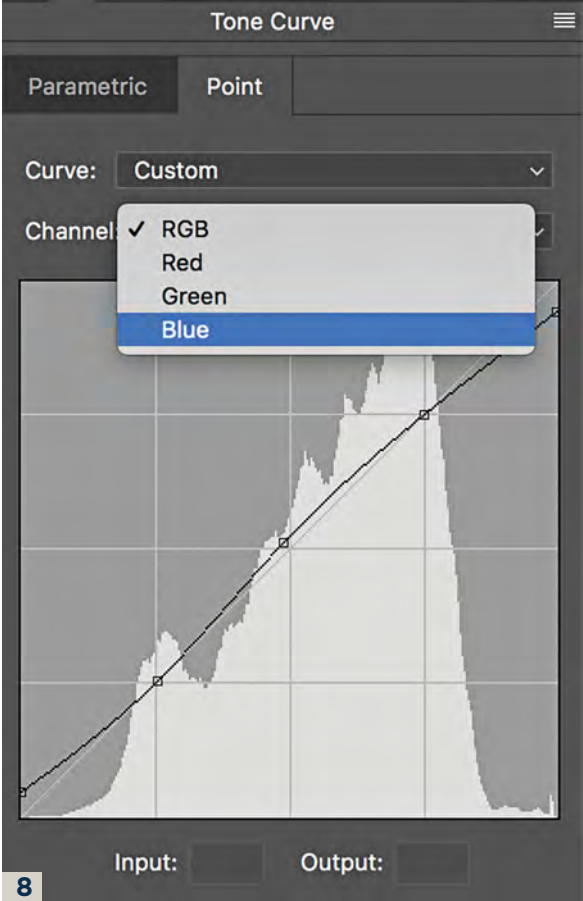
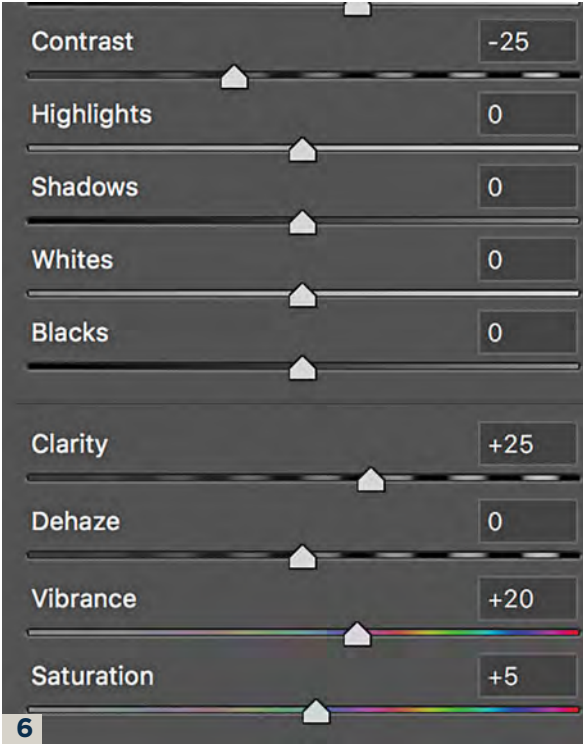
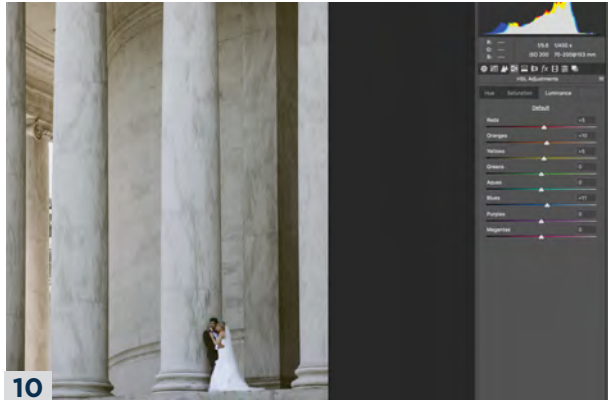






So our first decision is to apply a Color Profile other than Adobe Color to our image. (3) This is where applying a third-party profile and saving a custom Color Profile gives you the flexibility of an amount slider. That is just one way to utilize this tool. I can apply DVLOP II to the image and begin adjusting other tools to customize the look and feel. (4) I want to stay away from white balance and exposure because these settings would be custom per image. Remember, we will not have the slider adjustments for this profile later; this is not like a preset. (5)

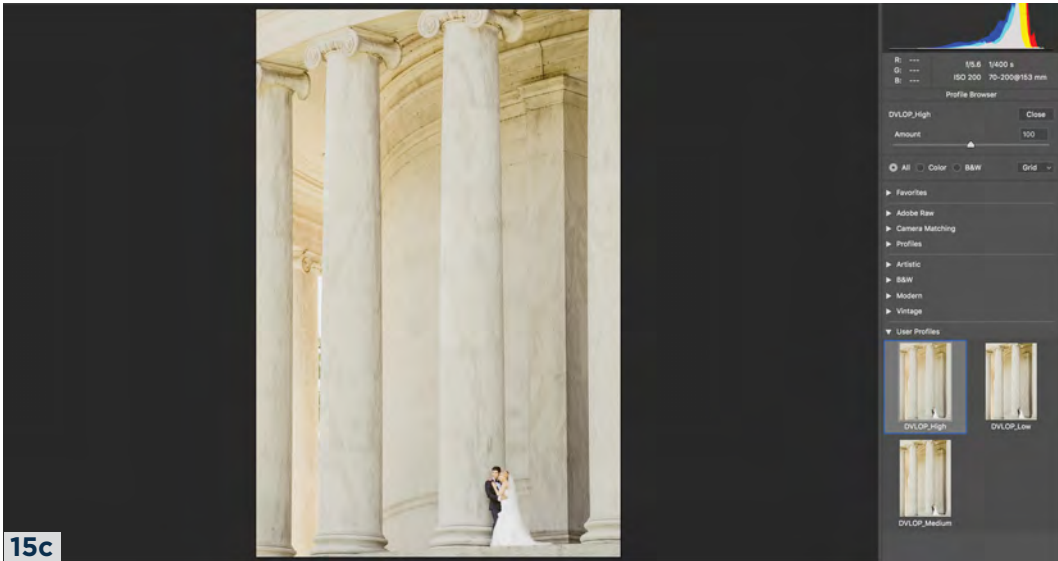
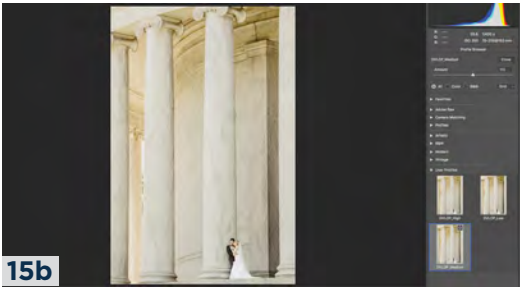
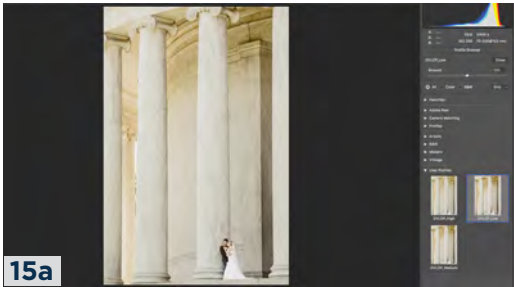
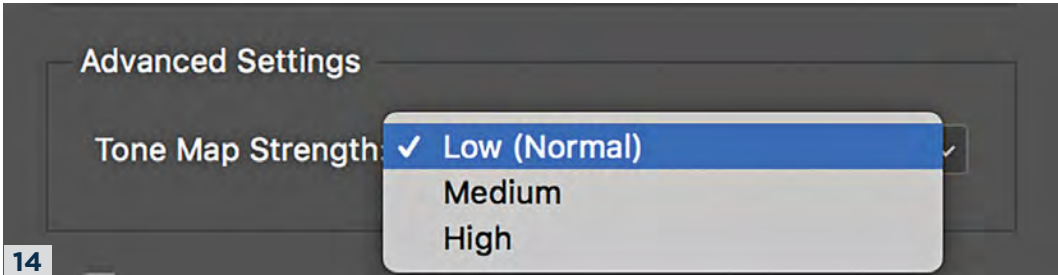
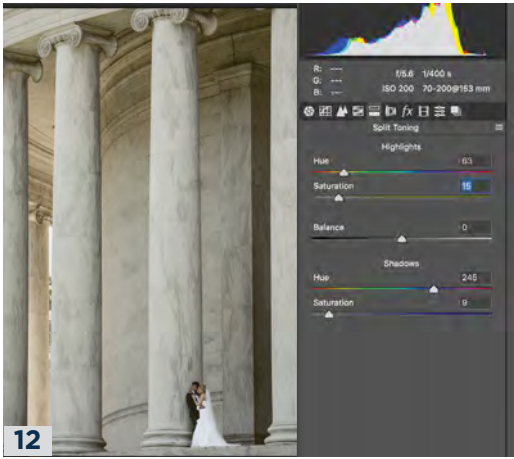
I want to create a more cinematic look with this profile, so let's drop the contrast and lift the clarity, vibrance and saturation. (6) I use Tone Curve to flatten the black and white points with an S-curve to add tonality. (7) To add a color grade to this image, we can simply choose a specific RGB channel and start to apply color shifts to tonal ranges. (8) You can create a subtle warming look to the highlights and cooler tones in the shadows. (9) Moving into the HSL panel, we can get rid of any colorcasts or shift the image further for a more creative look. (10)





I like to lift the orange and red luminance to brighten the faces and drop saturation to reduce unflattering skin tones. (11) To take this a step further, we can add Split Toning to isolate the highlights from the shadows. (12) Keep in mind that for Color Profiles, things like Lens Profiles, Sharpening and Noise Reduction are not included, so we are ready to create our profile. Go back into the Presets tab, hold Option and click on the Create a Preset icon.

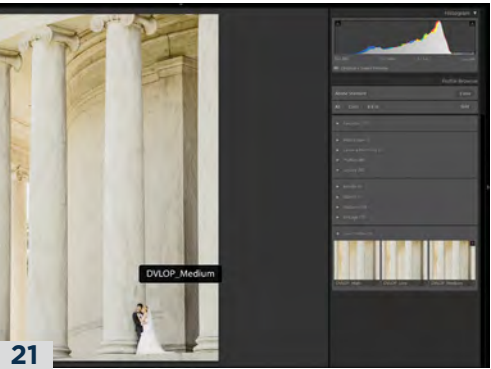
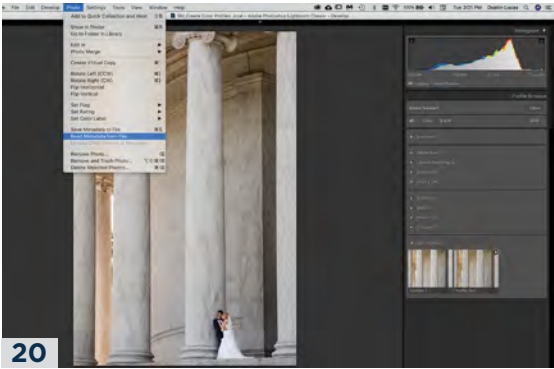
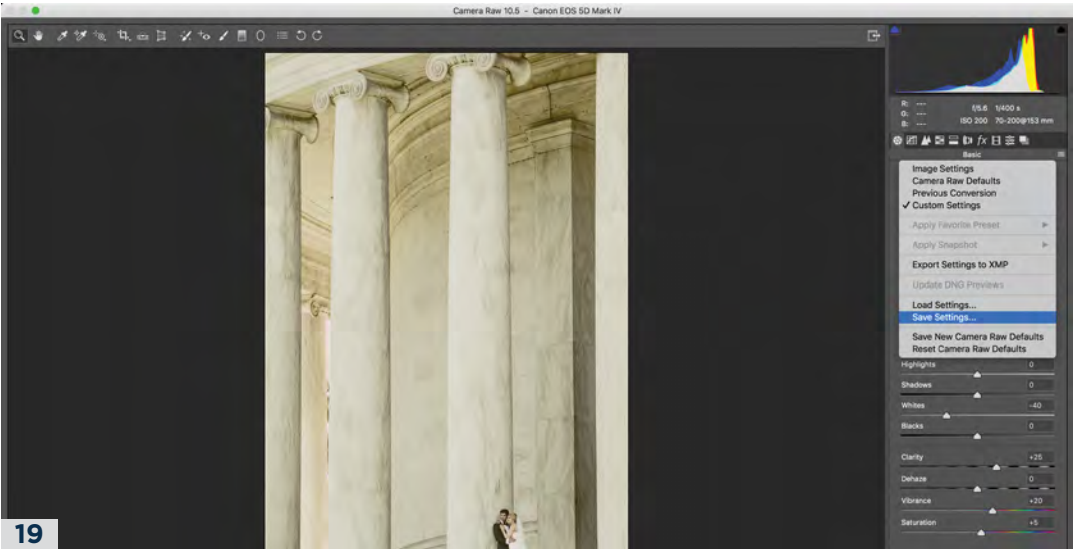
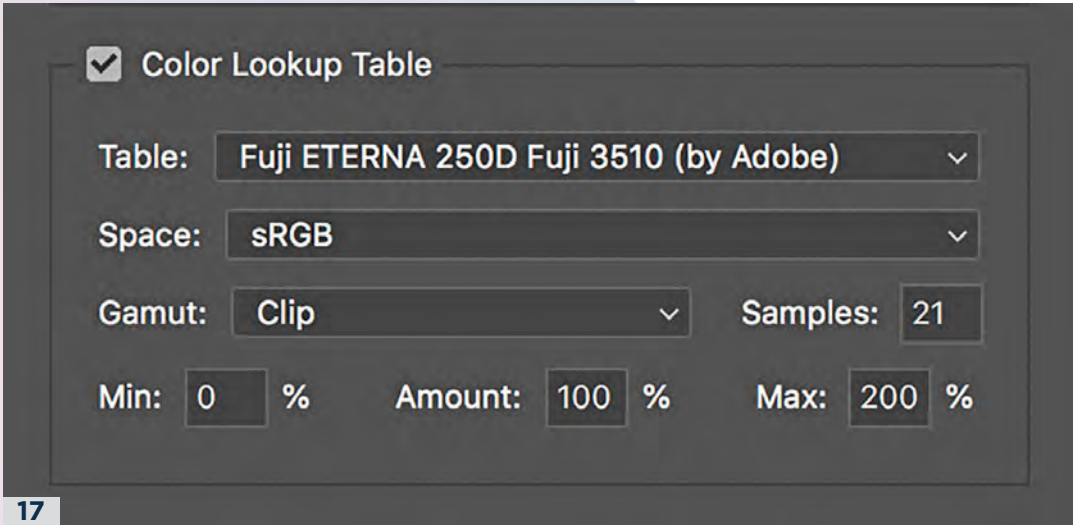
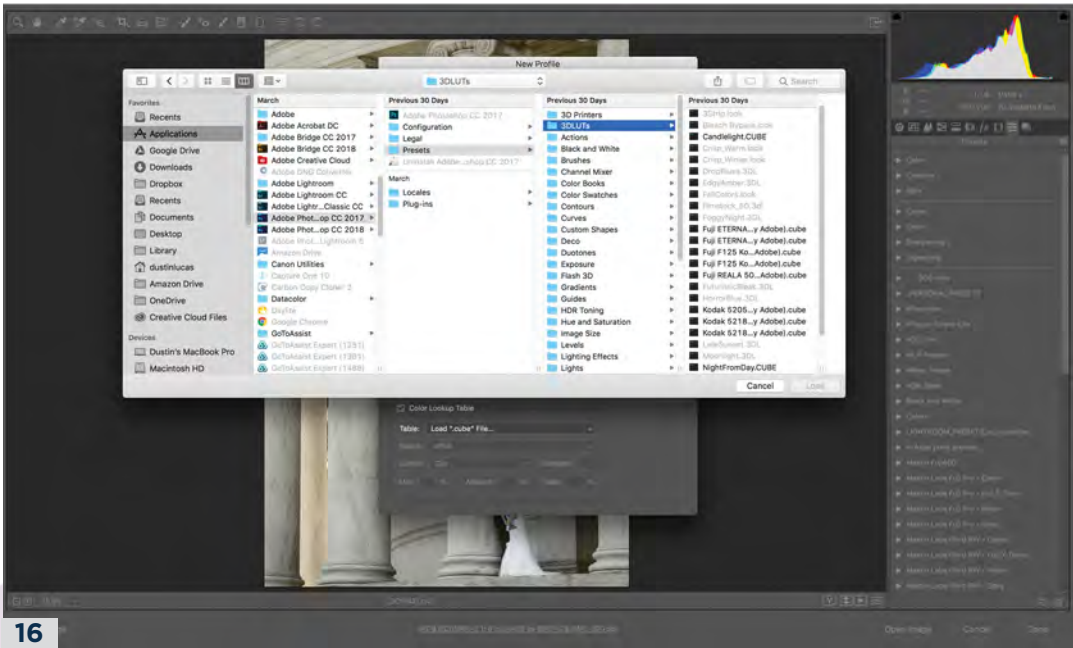
Now we see the Develop settings that are applied automatically, and we can uncheck them as we see fit. (13) Under Advanced Settings, there is a setting for tone map strength we can toggle between low (normal), medium and high. (14) These will be important settings down the road when we're editing the tonal sliders in the Basic panel. If we choose the high setting, this makes the highlights and shadows sensitive, which allows us to increase the dynamic range. (15abc) Pushing this too far creates an unrealistic look, not something we want for this edit.





The next sections are dependent on whether you applied a Camera Profile already, which we did for the DVLOP II profile and a Color LUT, or lookup table. (16) This becomes important if you have a LUT to load to apply a video color grade to your image. Photoshop comes with a few, and this is where we could load any .cube files. (17) We can circle back to this in a later article for cinematic color grading. The last thing you need to do is name and choose which profile set this will save to.

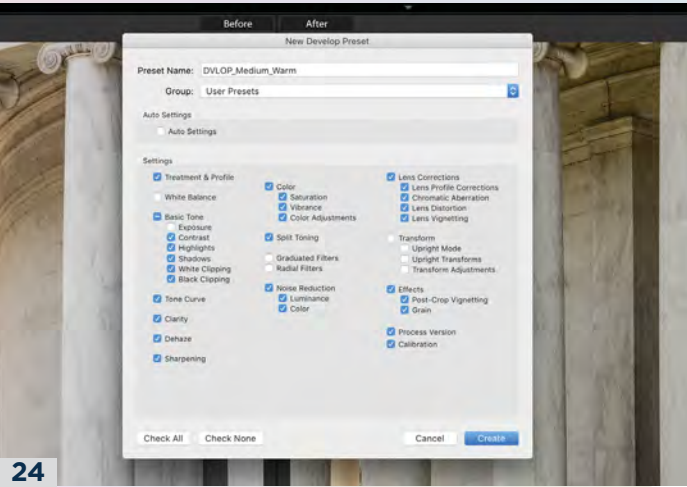
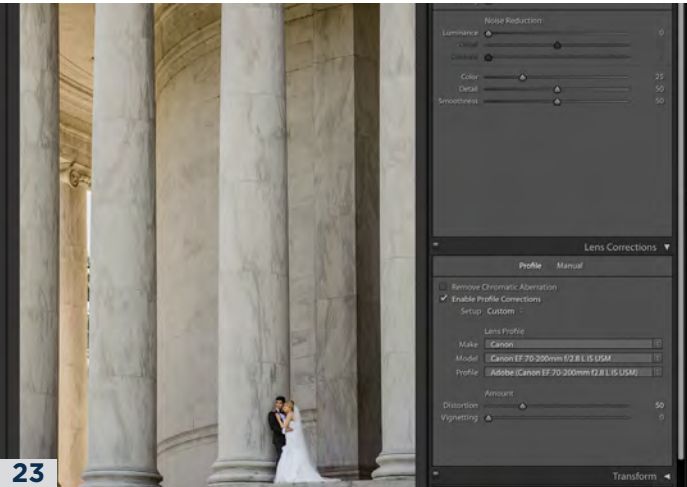
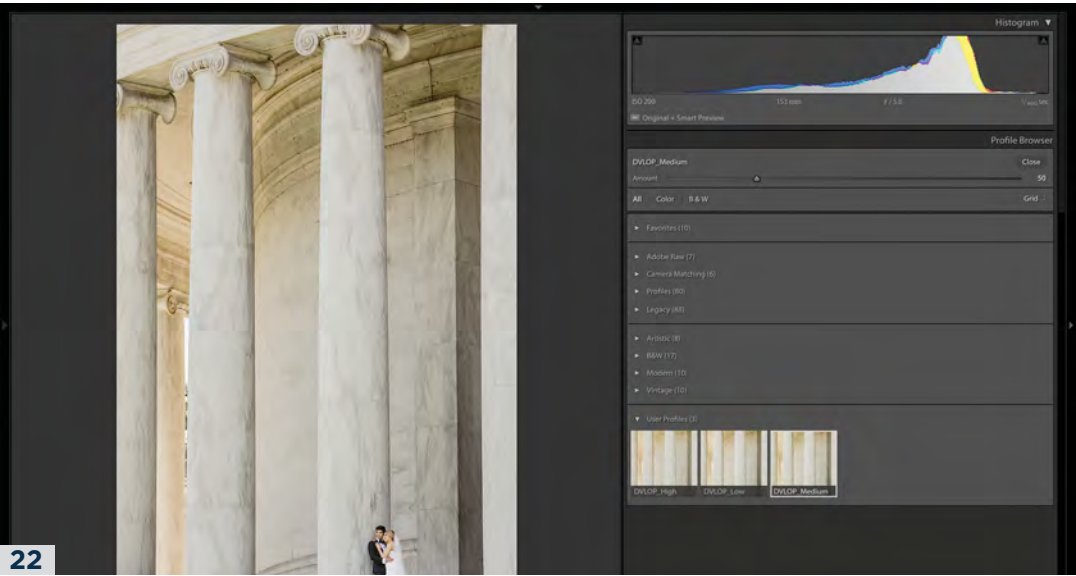
That's it for creating the Color Profile.



APPLY IN LIGHTROOM CLASSIC CC

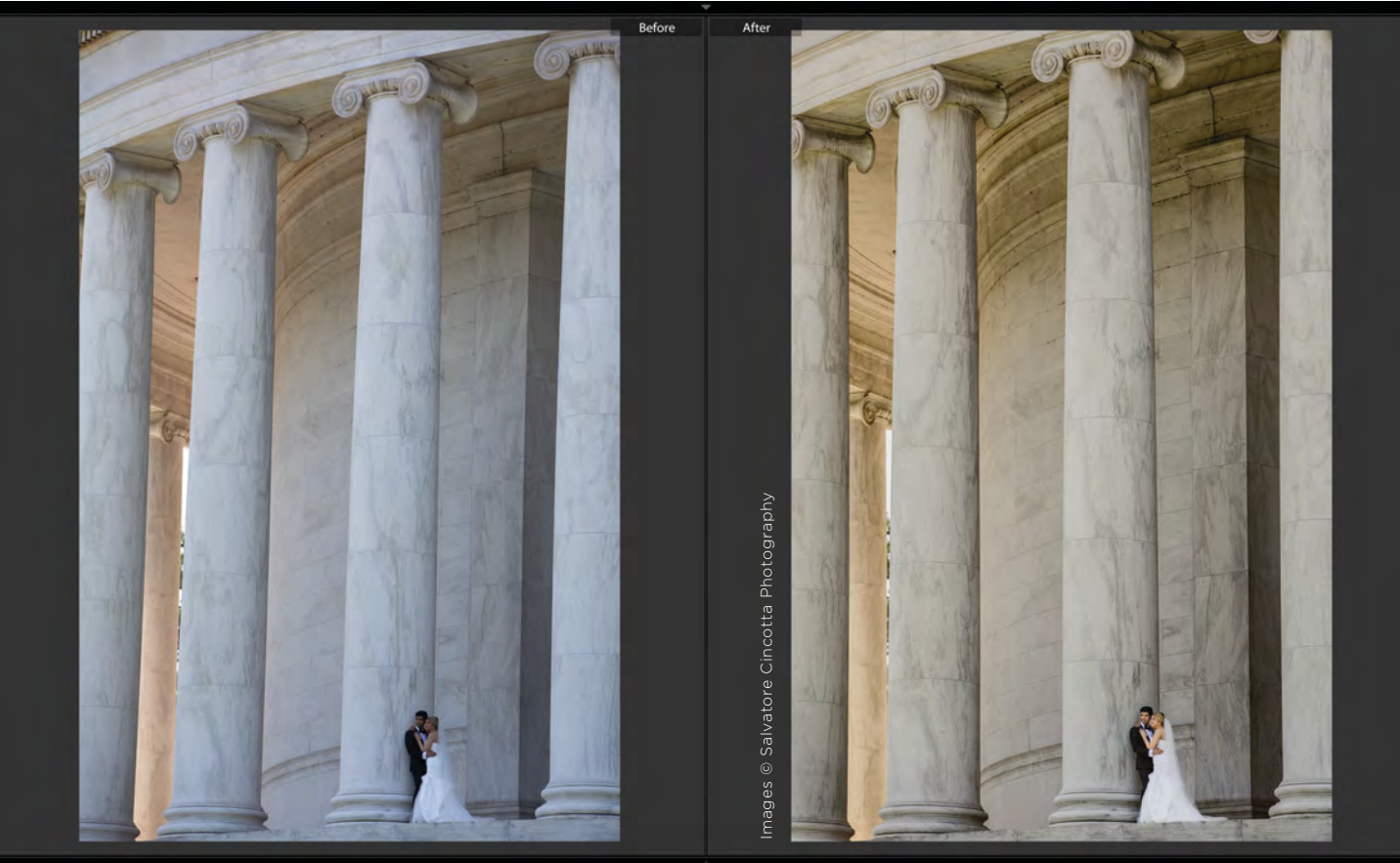
Depending on how you have Lightroom set up with third-party profiles, we should be able to open a catalog and apply the profile. If it is missing, there is a workaround to locate the new profile in the library Lightroom folders where your settings are stored. (18) I found this to be too cumbersome, so I forced Lightroom to find the profile. Once you reset an image and apply the newly created profile, you can save an .xmp file. (19) Then go into Lightroom where that same Raw file is, and choose Read Metadata From File. (20) This automatically applies the profile and loads it to the User folder. That was much easier than messing with system folders. (21)





Once you start applying Develop settings like white balance, exposure and tonal recovery, you can tweak the Amount slider for the profile as you see fit. This flexibility is important because you want to have as much control as you can with Color Profiles. (22) Then you can apply your lens correction, sharpening and noise reduction. (23) This profile can even become part of your routine workflow and added to a preset to save time and apply creative adjustments in Lightroom. (24)

Another interesting aspect of this newly created profile is the recovery capabilities of the tone map strength. You can push the image tone with much smaller adjustments to the highlights and shadows. Be careful not to make the image look too unrealistic. Once you find a happy medium with adjustments, you are done.



THE RESULTS

Color Profiles can add a quick creative touch to your images with one click. Take this a step further, and you can fully customize a Color Profile to dial the look and feel to your taste. Like presets, these are not an end-all, be-all adjustment. You will need to make some adjustments to the Develop module to ensure everything looks consistent. Take the time to build a Color Profile today. Push the limits of your Raw images and create something new. ■



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Dustin Lucas is a full-time photographer and educator focused on the wedding industry and the academic world. After achieving his master of fine arts degree, a career opportunity opened once he began working with Evolve Edits. Through teaching photography classes and writing about photography, Dustin continues to expand his influence on art and business throughout the industry.  
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THE  
**BUSINESS CORNER**

*Your Dream Studio*

STRATEGIES BEYOND COST-BASED PRICING

with Jeff & Lori Poole





USING COST-BASED PRICING AS A STARTING POINT

In last month’s Business Corner, we discussed the costs one should consider when setting prices for products. The markup over the wholesale cost of a product is called “cost-based pricing.” Cost-based pricing is an excellent starting point for price calculations. It removes emotion, demand, experience and what others are charging. Cost-based pricing yields a minimum price that should be charged based on a photographer’s costs, expenses and workflow.

To learn more on cost-based pricing calculations, see last month’s article, “Your Dream Studio: Understanding Cost of Sale and Markup.”



*Products and services with high demand can be priced at a premium, bringing you more profits.*

STRATEGIES BEYOND COST-BASED PRICING

Cost-based pricing is an excellent place to start when trying to determine what to charge for a product, but it doesn’t work for everything. This month, we examine additional factors that may break the cost-based mold. Some strategies allow you to charge more than what cost-based pricing suggests, while others force you to charge less (or get creative).

DEMAND-BASED PRICING

Demand-based pricing recognizes that people are sometimes willing to pay more than what cost-based pricing suggests. Last month, we ran the cost-based pricing calculation for a 10x10 portrait album. At 25% cost of sale, the suggested retail on the album was \$1,132. We know many photographers who charge as much as \$3,000 for a similar album. There are plenty of examples in the retail world where people are willing to pay a huge premium for name brands. The cost of these items isn’t usually much higher than a generic item, but people demand the brand. If your clients are willing to pay a higher price, let them.

Demand-based pricing does not suggest you charge less than cost-based pricing simply because you’re new or inexperienced. No matter how new you are, you still have to cover your costs.



OPPORTUNITY COST

Sometimes we must consider not just how much we will make from a session but how much we may lose by not shooting a more profitable session. In some ways, we know this instinctively. Jeff and I know that we are not going to commit to a headshot or portrait session on a Saturday during wedding season. The opportunity cost of turning away a wedding client is simply too high.

A bit less obvious is how our products may also cost us better sales. A photographer I recently mentored was struggling to sell portrait albums. An examination of this photographer’s price list revealed why: Another product she was offering was cannibalizing her album sales. The competing product was 10 mounted images with a wooden block easel. Because of the low cost of goods of the block product, cost-based pricing suggested a retail price of about a quarter the price of her albums. The albums were a better product, but clients were opting for the much cheaper block product that held the same number of images for a much lower price. By removing the block product, her album sales soared. Another option would have been to raise the price of the block so that it was more comparable to the album prices.



Additional copies of albums and prints can be sold at a discount, making an enticing upsell option for your clients.

CLONES/DUPLICATES

Clients often order more than one of a print or product. This gives you a bit of leeway to sweeten the deal for them. Referring back to our portrait album example, let’s say the client wants two copies. Remember that there were a number of costs involved in the calculation that would not apply to the second copy: Design, retouching and shipping do not need to be charged again. Therefore, additional copies of the same album can be sold at a discount, which may entice your client to buy more.

LOSS LEADERS

A loss leader is an item you’re willing to sell at an extreme discount (at a loss) but that will lead to further sales. An example of this strategy is retail stores that offer “door busters” on Black Friday in limited quantity. A big-box retailer may offer a flat-screen TV at an extremely reduced price for their Black Friday door buster. The retailer’s goal is not to make money off the TV itself. Instead, the retailer is using the TV to attract crowds to the store that will purchase other products when the TV inevitably sells out in the first few minutes. If you are considering a loss leader as a sales strategy, have a plan in place to limit loss and capitalize on upsales and additional purchases. This strategy is a gamble: The additional sales made by those attracted by the loss leader must outweigh the loss.



DIGITAL FILES = DEMAND + OPPORTUNITY COST

Digital files do not play by the cost-based pricing rules one bit. For one thing, there’s very little cost associated with them. Depending on your workflow and level of retouching, your cost of sale on a digital file may be next to nothing. Does that mean we can afford to sell digital files cheap? No.

Demand: Digital files are in high demand right now. Clients want to share files on social media. They want to make their own prints. It’s easier to email a file to a faraway loved one than to ship a print. Clients are used to owning their negatives (a phenomenon unheard of in the film era). Many simply feel they should have the files, even if they have no intention of doing anything with them. Demand-based pricing allows us to charge a premium for files.

Opportunity cost: Many clients don’t purchase printed products if digital files are included. A single digital file can negate the purchase of several prints. That means the opportunity cost of digital files is quite high. A common strategy is to price your digital files in a way that assumes the client will purchase nothing else. When you created your annual plan, what was your target sale? For a review of creating an annual plan, see the Business Corner article from August 2018, “Your Dream Studio: Creating an Annual Plan.”

Let’s say our target sale is \$1,000. If we offer a set of digital files to our clients and we assume they will not purchase other products, we might price the set of files at \$1,000 in order to reach our sales goal.





Image © Indigosilver studio

## COMMODITIES: SMALL PRINTS AND NOVELTY PRODUCTS

These are items for which clients have a set price they are willing to pay, and that price is lower than the retail price suggested by a cost-based calculation. Many of us know the going rate of a gallon of gasoline in our area within a nickel or so. We are unwilling to patronize a gas station that charges well above that.

In photography, the commodity is often prints sized 8x10 and smaller. Cost-based price calculations suggest a retail price of \$200 or more for small prints, yet many studios are forced to retail those prints for somewhere between \$50 and \$125. (As with all cost-based calculations, everyone's numbers vary.)



Image © Indigosilver studio

*Small prints and novelty products may be difficult to sell at full markup. Additional strategies are needed to sell these products profitably.*

Similarly, novelty products like ornaments, water bottles, mouse pads and photo jewelry often suffer the same fate as small prints: Clients compare the price of these custom products to that of similar products they can purchase at online retailers and photo kiosks. Pricing has been commoditized by these outside retailers, making it difficult for photographers to charge appropriately.

So do we just throw our hands up and accept the price the clients are willing to pay? Yes and no. It is crucial to understand that your studio will never be profitable selling these items at the commodity price. In that sense, all commoditized products are loss leaders. Additional strategies are required to absorb the losses. The simplest solution is to discontinue products that are not profitable. Your studio will survive if you don't offer ornaments and mouse pads. For the products you do offer, find ways to blend less-profitable items with more-profitable items. Sell small prints only as an add-on to a sizable package purchase or after a minimum purchase requirement is met, for example.

As a final note, it is important to understand that commoditization is not an excuse to undercharge. Photographers are fond of the "you can't charge that in my market" excuse when they are uncomfortable charging appropriate prices. More often than not, pricing is not the issue. Photographers who are struggling to be profitable may need to work on their branding message and marketing efforts to attract the right clients.





Image © Indigosilver studio

IS COST-BASED PRICING DEAD?

With all this talk about alternate pricing methods, does that mean cost-based pricing is obsolete? Not by a long shot. When I’m adding a new product to our price list, here’s my train of thought:

- 1. Run a cost-based calculation.
- 2. Can I charge more? (demand-based/opportunity-cost pricing)
- 3. Is there a commoditized price cap on this? If so, do I still want to offer it? If so, how can I curtail loss?

A majority of products on our price list are cost-based priced. A smaller chunk are priced above cost-based pricing due to high demand or opportunity cost. Only a very small number of items have reduced pricing due to commoditization. This means that overall, we are keeping our average cost of sale at or below 25% as planned, which means we keep more of what we make. ■



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

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Image © Scott Vo



LIGHTS & PROPS IN  
**UNDERWATER PORTRAIT**  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
with **Scott Vo**





Images © Scott Vo

Photographs are so easy to take. With just a push of a button, you capture a moment. That moment can be natural or something you created from your imagination. Your photographs should tell a story and draw in the viewer. The way gravity behaves underwater can help you create photographs you wouldn't be able to on the surface. For underwater photography, you can use natural light or bring in strobes. With strobes, you create a mood that conveys a message or theme. Give your subject some interesting props and light to deliver it.



Image © Scott Vo

## PREPARATION FAVORS THE PREPARED

Let's start with an idea or theme. Underwater photography can be unbelievably magical and graceful, with vast possibilities. Formulate an idea and think about the components that will bring that mental image to fruition.

Sketch your idea on paper. I keep a sketchbook and am always doodling ideas for photos. I come up with ideas by watching synchronized swimmers, ballet dancers and marine life. I study and sketch the movements of the subjects that inspire me. Next to that doodle, I list equipment and props I would need so I don't forget anything on the day of the shoot. Simple things like extra batteries or towels can be easily overlooked.

Take out that Rolodex and call your favorite makeup artist, set stylist and some friends to help out. The more, the merrier. Talk to your team about the idea, theme or message you want to convey in the photograph. Hear out your team about potential challenges you may face. A different prospective might be helpful. Cue up Wes Anderson's *The Life Aquatic With Steve Zissou* while you are planning.

## RUN SOME EXPERIMENTS

Now that you have formulated a plan, let's go shopping. Find some unique local artists or a nice boutique. Thrift stores are useful for inexpensive props. After all the clothes and props are purchased, find out what they do in the water.

Testing the props for the theme beforehand saves a ton of time and headaches on set. See if a prop floats or sinks in a bathtub or bucket. Check if it sheds debris in the water or if there's discoloration. This simple experiment rules out any problems you may face. If the prop floats, add some weights discreetly. If the prop sinks, cut up some pool noodles to conceal in the prop to make it buoyant. If debris comes out in the water, it helps to rinse the item beforehand. Wash the clothes to help reduce color fading or running. This all reduces stress during the shoot.



## LIGHTING CHALLENGES

Let me say this first: Do not use studio strobes near a body of water. Water and electricity do not mix well.

Depending on your camera housing, you can sync your strobes via fiber optic, slave or hardwire cable. If your housing does not have sync capabilities, there are some great waterproof lights that emit constant light or that can be slaved as well. I use Lume Cubes to light our sets and small props. They are powerful, rechargeable and waterproof. They're great for camera housing that does not have sync ports. They can fit into your props to illuminate your subject.

Think about how you are going to shape the light. You can use white plastic to diffuse or to bounce the light. Free up some hands with light stands you are willing to sink into the water or have next to the water. Those friends you asked to help you are great at holding lights too. Separate the light from the camera with off-camera lighting. Daisy-chain your slaved strobes or extend the sync cable to give you distance from your light source. Shape the light to bring dimension to your subject or diffuse the light to bring an even light throughout your photo. Play with the amount of ambient light. Experiment and use the small waterproof lights to highlight props. Having control of your lights allows you to set the mood and tone of your photograph. Use a friend as a stand-in model as you prelight.



Image © Scott Vo



Image © Scott Vo

## DEEP BREATH

Bring your subject into the water so she can get acclimated with the environment. Don't let her tread water and wear out before you even start. Remember that safety is the priority. Know your subject's limitations. Have your model shake out the outfit or dress underwater to get rid of air bubbles while you set up. Take your time and experiment with your settings. Water is dense and, depending on the quality of the water, the light might not travel as far. Make adjustments and communicate with your subject how things are moving along.

During this time, get the props ready. Use the knowledge you gained during your experiments and presoak or place the props in the water. Placing props in the water a little early can get rid of air pockets.

Once you are all ready, take your time getting into position. With your whole team on the same page, every person will bring their own expertise to the table. Once everything is in place, you can start photographing. These photographs were taken without scuba equipment. We returned to the surface for air and went back down to continue photographing.



SPREAD THE MESSAGE

After everything is dried and everyone is fed, go through the photos and start editing. Think about supporting text to use with your photo. Some photographers might not be interested in adding text to a photograph, and that is perfectly fine. For these examples, we added text to support the theme.

Throughout the year, we have a few themes we work on. This year, we did a summer color series and an environmental awareness series.

The color series was more of an exercise in color theory and styling. We incorporated fun props that complemented the model and didn't take attention away from the main focus. We shot in digital and 35mm film.



Images © Scott Vo



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# Ocean Blue

What have I done to you  
*An Environmental Awareness Series*



Image © Scott Vo

Plastics are all around us, and they end up in landfills and the ocean. For the environmental awareness series, we wanted to bring attention to plastic pollutants and encourage people to reduce plastic waste in their daily lives.

## TAKE A BREATH

We sketched a concept and created a list of supplies. It was challenging to come up with creative ways to light our props. We did experiments ahead of time to reduce stress and wasting time on set. All the elements of your photograph will come together with a little luck and preparation. Bring plenty of drinks and snacks. Take breaks between dives. These underwater shoots take time to prepare and execute.

I spend weeks on an idea and hours doing research. I get inspired and get excited to bring this idea in front of the camera. The key is to slow down and do it right. If I rush to formulate and shoot an idea, I may make a mistake. At the end of the day, I might be disappointed because I missed something or came up with a better approach. Take your time and have fun with your imagination—and always play it safe in the water. ■



Fashion, beauty and lifestyle photographer Scott Vo brings unique portrait sessions to Oklahoma City. He created his photography business while studying zoology at the University of Oklahoma. Since graduating, he has taken his photography to new levels by taking over the underwater scene in landlocked Oklahoma and presenting his work at the 2018 Photo Plus Expo. Scott has published works locally and internationally, and hopes to expand his photographic adventures to new destinations this year.

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





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*Justin Aversano is an artist and curator working within the New York art scene. He organizes shows and public art exhibitions around the country. He is also the owner and operator of Brooklyn Lightroom, a printing, scanning, and photography studio.*

### On Twin Flames:

"I started a series of 100 twin portraits to pay respect to my fraternal twin, to understand who I am through other twins. A healthy obsession that keeps me motivated in finishing what I started and doing it for the right intention, to feel complete in my immersion into the story and to create a large body of work to share."

# OBSESSED

## "Twin Flames"

Justin Aversano, Photographer



### On Obsession:

"When you're an artist, you obsess over the minute details because you want the piece to be perfect to your own standards. When I'm printing 100 pictures, I want to make sure that I can print all 100 without any clogs, without any banding, without any problems. I want it to be perfect from 0 to 100."

### Why I Print:

"When you're holding the print, there is a great satisfaction in seeing something you made in your hands. I put the pieces in different order to see if there is a dialogue between images and where they should be displayed when I have editions of the prints. I believe in this project and I know that when I print and exhibit it, I will recoup all the money I spent, gain income and create new projects."



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# THE **BRANDING** EDITION

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YOUR

BRAND.

YOUR

WORTH

with Sal Cincotta



I hope you realize that your brand and the perception of your brand can directly influence how much money consumers are willing to spend with you. It's amazing how many photographers and business owners in general don't grasp this seemingly simple idea.

No one cares how good of a photographer you are. Process that for a second. Let that settle in. It just doesn't matter. Business is at the core of your success.

Here are some things you can do now to get your house in order so that you and your brand are seen as trusted and valued.

### Fix your website.

If your website looks like it was designed in the early 2000s, it's time for an overhaul. Fix your damn website. It's one of the easiest things you can do. If you don't know how to do it, there are a gazillion sites out there that require no technical experience at all to help you. This is mindboggling to me. Today's consumers are incredibly internet savvy, and when they see a site that doesn't look up to snuff, they know they are seeing a half-baked operation.

Not only does it send the wrong message to your clients, but Google and other search engines are going to penalize you and not list your site. This is basic stuff. If you invest just a little time, you can perfect it for sure.





### Improve your social media activity.

There is nothing worse than having a blog with no posts. It's like having the original "Hello World!" blog post. You created a blog, so use it. If not, take it down. When a client goes to your site and sees no activity, it sends the message you are not in business or not serious about your business. It's like inviting company over for dinner and having your dirty laundry all over the living room.

The same thing applies to any of your social channels. We live in a world of social media. People want to learn more about your brand and what you do—and, believe it or not, the personality of your brand. There is something to be said for social proof. This is one of the single most leading indicators to a potential client. If you have a page, use it. Find someone on your staff who can help or find a 12-year-old—they live for this.





## Stop trying to be everything to everyone.

If a client were to visit your site, would it be clear exactly who your target client is and exactly what you offer? More than likely, the answer is no. Pick a genre and specialize in it. If you have pictures of pets, babies, real estate, headshots, weddings and more on your site, I've got some bad news for you: You look like an amateur. You are making your site impossible for search engines to figure out what you do and what you are known for.

I am not saying you can't have multiple focus areas, but there comes a point where it's just too much. What do you love and what are you good at? Lead with that. Showcase your best work. Less is more, I promise you. Take a good hard look over your body of work and figure out what you want to be when you grow up.

Don't know? That's ok too. Every photographer struggles with it in the beginning. This is very important. It will shape the future of your company by sending the right message to your clients. Think about it. If your big wedding day were approaching, would you want to hire someone who specializes in weddings or someone who is dabbling in a little bit of everything? Whom would you spend more money with?

## Attract the right clients.

Your website is a person's first view into your business and portfolio. So why do we show images that make no sense? Are you a wedding photojournalist? Then show photojournalistic images. My style of photography is big and dramatic, heavily influenced by architecture. That is all you see on my site. This ensures I attract the right clients. Who are the right clients? People who are attracted to and inspired by my style. Those are the people who are willing to spend money on my art.

If you have every type of photography on your site but no specific style, whom are you really attracting? When you walk into a designer store, you see that it has a style for the current season and it all works in a cohesive way. If you walk into a Walmart clothing department, you'll find literally every kind of clothing style imaginable. Why? Because they are trying to appeal to every possible person. Customers are a commodity. So, do you want to shoot any kind of client or do you want to appeal to a specific client? If you want to appeal to a specific client, it begins with your images on your website.





Find your style.

Your style of photography is every bit a part of your overall brand identity. This is so important to building confidence and attracting the right types of clients. Everything has to work together, deliberately: your images, editing, lighting, posing, website, logo. It should all feel like one cohesive thought. This takes time and energy.

The “how” behind a solid brand is a little more complicated. Every photographer struggles with it. We are all trying to find our style. Once we do, we get bored and start to reinvent ourselves. Welcome to being an artist.

What companies or artists inspire you? Take inspiration from their branding. Don’t copy everything—put your own spin on it, make it yours. Refine your work and portfolio so it has a consistent look and feel. If you can create your own signature look, clients will be willing to pay a premium. If your work stands out, you will be able to raise your prices. Why? Because it’s different. And different sells for a premium.

Make those brand changes now, and you will see the positive outcomes sooner than you can imagine. ■



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

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# HOW TO CLEAN UP YOUR BRAND IN 4 EASY STEPS

with Vanessa Joy







Branding sucks. It's annoying. It pigeonholes us. And if we don't have a distinct brand, we may as well have started photographing yesterday. Or, more annoyingly, photographers who literally just started photographing yesterday can have better branding/presence/awareness than you, and you've been at this forever.

When I was finishing building my Speed Posing course ([www.speedposing.com](http://www.speedposing.com)), building the sales page and course page, what really bugged me was the fact that I needed to spend more time on branding it than actually creating it.

Don't worry. My rant wasn't without purpose. I want you to understand, above all, that while I'm going to teach you some branding tricks and cram all the knowledge I have down your throat, that I'm right here with you. I feel you. I know it's frustrating when all you want to do is photography but you wind up doing everything but photography.

Hopefully these tips will make the process a little less painful.





Image © Vanessa Joy

## 1 - DELETE, DELETE, DELETE

When referring to editing writing, Stephen King recommended that you should “kill your darlings, kill your darlings, even when it breaks your egocentric little scribbler’s heart, kill your darlings.”

If you want to make yourself look amazing, take out all of the less-than-amazing. Go through your Instagram and archive photos that don’t match your feed. Peruse your website and kick out a ton of images that aren’t making you look amazing. When you post a blog, don’t post 156 pictures of the day. Aim for 30.

Showing less means being more. It gives a more refined look to your overall brand and gives more wow to what you are showing. Just think of Will Smith in the original *Men in Black*: You want only the “best of the best of the best, sir!”

## 2 - CHECK YOURSELF

For a really long time, I thought that in order to be successful, I needed to be a carbon copy of my successful predecessors. Wrong. In fact, that’s the quickest way to make yourself totally boring and quickly irrelevant.

You can see the crazy change in my AdoramaTV series *Breathe Your Passion*. Compare the older episodes with the latest 12 or so, and you’ll notice the real Vanessa Joy finally come out to say hi.

Look at the things you’re writing on social media, the way you’ve written the About Me on your website and your mannerisms in front of clients. Are they wildly different from what you’re really like? If so, it’s time for a change.

I’m not saying you shouldn’t be more polite on jobs than you are any given morning scuttling about your kitchen, pre-coffee. Of course you should be. I’m simply saying if you’re finding it difficult and exhausting to keep up a persona, then drop that persona. You’ll have much more fun and end up with fun clients.



Image © Vanessa Joy





### 3 - HIRE YOU

Isn't that our biggest dream? To clone ourselves and let our clones scurry around while we sip martinis, and roll out of bed signing autographs and taking pictures? Sign me up!

What I'm getting at is that your brand isn't just about you. Whenever you hire another person, they represent your brand. Sure, it may only be that second photographer or assistant that you hire occasionally, but those people are being watched and judging you based on what they see.

Take it to an extreme level. Note the pictures in this article. I didn't take all of them. I happened to give birth just before this wedding (yes, I did tell my clients that it was a possibility), and I was only able to come for the first-look photo session. My clients were fine with the possibility that I wouldn't be there for their whole wedding, but can you tell what pictures I took and what pictures Jaye Kogut (my life manager/second shooter) took? Nope. That is killer brand consistency.

### 4 - DON'T FREAK OUT

I know you'll likely head over to your social media accounts right now and have a mini meltdown. Don't do that. I know we just finished complaining about other people who seem to brand themselves perfectly the minute they open their doors, but that's not the norm.

Branding, especially for a photographer, does not happen overnight. It takes years, and then, once you've got it nailed down, you'll likely change because you've advanced your photography skills and your photos show it.

Don't freak out.







Image © Vanessa Joy

If photography and being a business owner were all about making it, then you'd see a lot more of us retire. The truth is that we should love the climb more than we love the idea of success. Success is like the carrot in front of the horse. Everyone, no matter how successful they are, is always reaching for just a little bit more. Embrace that and keep climbing. ■



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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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# WHY CLIENTS HIRE CHEAP PHOTOGRAPHERS

with Jess Hess







You've heard these complaints time and again, and maybe you've made one of them yourself: Point-and-shoot photographers are ruining the market. People who charge very little for their work are taking work away from legitimate professionals. The photography market is flooded.

People who are willing to work for cheap are taking away jobs from the rest of us, goes the common wisdom. By offering their services for very little, they are hindering professional photographers from booking jobs. But are they really? The short answer is no, cheap photographers aren't cheapening the field. They aren't taking your job. Why? Because they don't know how to do your job.

Customers pay only for what they want. Cheap photographers take only those clients who wouldn't have hired you in the first place. Everyone's different. We all have different goals, ideas, likes, interests. The same goes with customers. Not everyone has the same priorities or values, and not everyone is willing to pay for professional photography, let alone good professional photography. One man's trash is another man's treasure, and just because a potential client treasures something doesn't mean they can afford it.

People can't be thought of in black and white. They come in a spectrum. Instead of thinking of them as yesses and no's or clients and nonclients, think of them on a different level. They may express interest in booking you, but are they going to be worth it? Are they haggling over your prices? Are they going to ask for a refund after the session? Are they being difficult early on? Not all clients are made equal. Some are easy to work with and others will try to save a few bucks at your expense.

As backward as it seems, part of getting better (and more) clients is saying no to clients who don't work for you. When you waste your time on hagglers, you miss the opportunity to work with people who value what you do. The key is understanding that you aren't missing out on anything, and it's okay to let those new photographers take one for the team. Do you know what 50 photos for \$75 is? A nightmare. Let them have it.

I recently had to replace a washing machine in my home. I researched machines for a week, and in the end, I went with the cheapest. It's not pretty, it doesn't have fancy bells and whistles, it doesn't have a pedestal and it's not a brand name. But what does it have? The ability to wash clothes. I had a need, and this machine met that need. I would never have paid more for another machine to do the same thing because it just wasn't within my priorities. My money was better suited elsewhere. Why opt for the see-through top so I could watch my clothes? I wasn't going to be in the laundry room while they were washing. I didn't need the extra features, and I certainly didn't want to pay for them.





I apply this mentality to everything I purchase. While we brand our products as captured memories and lifelong keepsakes, to many people, the blurry cellphone photo of their son's first steps is just as precious as the professional photo of him smiling in a suit. Memories are made and captured every single day.

So what makes someone pay money for something they can have for free? I purchased the cheapest washing machine, an inordinate number of people did not. How about the folks wanting a 20-minute wash cycle with an auto-sensing fill-up? They spent the extra money. And the couple wanting a set that fit the color scheme of their home? They paid the extra money. Whatever their reason, thousands of people have expensive fancy washing machines in their homes simply because they wanted them. Not everybody wants a 36-inch canvas print, but lots of people do. If you spend time moaning over lost clients who couldn't afford you anyway, you are missing the valuable ones.





Images © Jess Hess



Image © Jess Hess





Image © Jess Hess



Image © Jess Hess

A market can be flooded only if all the photographers are the same. But you aren't the same. Hundreds of new photographers pop up every day, people with no technical knowledge who are just in it for fun or passion or boredom, but have not developed skills. Some of these photographers may even start charging. What do a hundred unskilled photographers have against just one skilled photographer? In a room full of yellow roses, the red one sticks out.

You aren't losing jobs because people are cheaper. You are losing jobs because you aren't as good as you could be. When a client is looking for quality, prices aren't the first thing they search for. Those cheap but unskilled photographers will be passed right over, and photographers with more skill will be given priority. They look at your portfolio before your price sheet. If they check prices first, their top priority is not quality. Many marketing websites will tell you that with the right advertising, marketing is more important than actual skill in this industry. If you don't care about quality, why should consumers? If you aren't concerned with the quality of your work, you aren't set apart from these point-and-shoot photographers—you *are* one of them. You have to market well, but a product is easier to sell when it doesn't suck.

If someone wants to work with you, they will pay your price. They will travel for you. They will wait to book you if you are overbooked. They will hire you if it is you they want. You have to stop worrying about what other people are doing or charging, and instead focus on what you have to offer. Point-and-shoot photographers are cheaper because they haven't jumped through the bureaucratic hoops legal businesses are required to, and are not paying taxes on the work they are getting. In the end, that will come back to bite them—and it's another thing that sets you apart. You don't have to live in fear of the IRS like they do, only a moderate amount of fear like the rest of us.

But when a hundred people are charging \$30 for 100 photos, won't people expect that to be the average price? Maybe, but it is up to you to stand out. If your work is considerably better than everyone else's in that price range, it won't matter what they charge because what you have to offer is better. People still eat at steakhouses even though fast food restaurants exist. You can get a burger at either, and yet steakhouses aren't going out of business.





Image © Jess Hess

Clients hire a newbie if they see the value in their work. For every penny pincher, there is someone else willing to pay for quality. All too often, we fool ourselves into thinking the world is smaller than it is. Don't waste time on clients who aren't worth it. Put your energy into the necessary factors (mostly yourself), and you will see a big change in the number of jobs you snag. Placing the blame on others for poor performance won't get you anywhere, certainly not ahead. You can get there all by yourself—you just have to be dedicated to doing it.

The bottom line is this: No amount of undercharging can ruin the market for you if you work hard and set yourself apart from the competition. You can get steady bookings while charging 400% more than other local photographers if you are 400% better.

Charging less can't make someone better than you, and it won't take away clients looking for quality over value. Hone your craft, invest in marketing and destroy the competition by being the very best you can be at what you do. ■



Jess Hess is an internationally published fine art and conceptual portrait photographer in southern Ohio. At her Wurmwood Photography studio, she blends vibrant colors and unusual ideas with classic portraiture for her own unique take on portrait photography. She strives to do something fresh and different in every session, constantly experimenting and pushing the envelope to satisfy her love of art. In her spare time, she runs an underground art magazine dedicated to promoting other artists around the world.

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

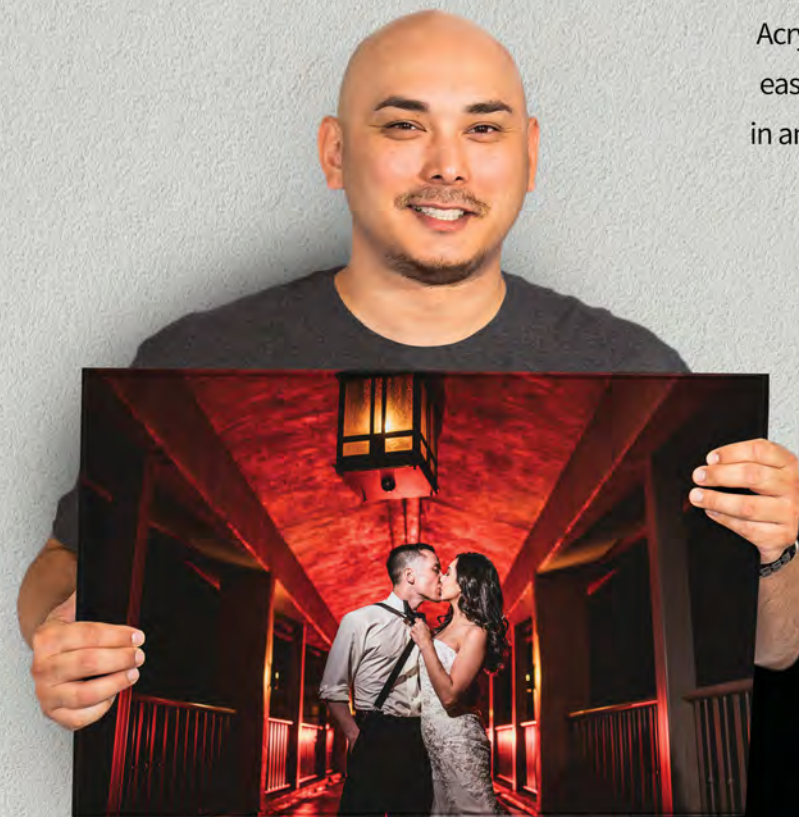
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# Go Big or Go Home

4 KEY ELEMENTS FOR PRODUCING A BRAND VIDEO  
with Casey Dittmer





We constantly preach the importance of your images, the value of spending the time and money to do it right, educating clients about what an image can say, the power it holds. And yet we ourselves skimp sometimes. We make excuses for why good enough is good enough. What the fuck is wrong with us? I want to be the best. I'm going big or going home.

I have a successful portrait business, with 12 years in business, two full-time employees and \$300K gross revenue per year. I am proud of what I built, but I know it can be better. I can be better. In May, I started a journey to improve and stabilize my portrait business, and to mark my territory as an industry leader. I set high goals. Some of these goals seem ridiculous, but that makes me push harder. I struggled to find a path by myself. I knew what I wanted, but just couldn't seem to take the right steps in that direction.

So my husband and I made the leap and invested in the best mentor we could find. We rebranded with a new name, logo, website and structure—a complete overhaul. I had 90 days to do the meat of it. It was a huge mountain of to-do lists, not to mention the biggest leap of faith I had ever taken.

I told myself if I completed the 90-day checklist and fully gave in to the process, I would reward myself by investing in the production of a branding video. This wouldn't be just any video, but one that would demand attention, one that would make our brand and statement clear, unlike what any other photographer has had. As the 90 days rushed by, it became more and more clear that this video could not be just my reward; it was an intricate piece of the puzzle of success. I would not be able to reach my goals without properly introducing myself to potential clients, but also to the photography world. So before the 90 days were finished, the shoot dates were booked.

Four key elements were necessary for organizing and shooting a project of this magnitude while keeping our studio operating during the busiest time of the year. I think these four things are necessary in everything we do.





Image © Casey Dittmer

FOCUS

We had to have a plan. What is the purpose of this video? What is our message? What do we want viewers to feel while they watch this? Who is our target audience? Message is everything. You can make a beautiful video, but without a clear and precise message, it will be a waste. It needs to invoke emotion, cause a reaction and clearly speak for your brand. And in today’s digital world, once you make a statement, it’s out there, no take-backs.

So don’t just throw shit against a wall and hope it sticks. I say it all the time in my classes and workshops: Be purposeful. Have a reason, down to every detail. I wanted something bold and edgy that showcased our amazing custom gowns, gorgeous locations, willingness to travel and our nontraditional way of shooting maternity. I wanted the audience to be compelled to watch it again and again. I wanted to ruffle a few feathers along the way, so I knew that working with Sal and his team would be the perfect match. He understands how I think and shoot, and what makes me different. He knows how to focus all my crazy ideas. He knows the importance of protecting one’s brand.

Once we had a game plan, we used style boards to coordinate gown designs, colors, shooting locations and models. Each element was chosen with purpose. For a big project like this, it’s easy to ignore details. Don’t get lazy. Don’t be afraid to have big ideas, to blaze your own trail, to do it differently. Going the extra mile makes you stand out from your competition.



Image © Casey Dittmer





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## BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS

This is where you decide how bad you really want it. Are you willing to push harder than you ever have before? When you think you can't possibly add one more thing to your day, add five. Don't be afraid to work. If it were easy, everyone would do it. If you get to a breaking point, cry it out and then start again. Just let it out. You will be more productive afterward. I get told a lot that I work too hard. What does that even mean? You mean I actually work toward something bigger than most people imagine is possible? You mean I believe that anything is possible if I work for it? You mean I control the legacy I leave my family by what I put toward today's goals? Then yes, I do work too hard.

Just make sure you always work with purpose. Be efficient. Busy doesn't mean you are making progress.

I made big sacrifices to make this change. There are days I question if I am making the right decision. There are days I ask if it's worth it. When we packed up and flew to Chicago for the first leg of our video production, we left our three kids with family. This was the first time we had left our 6-month-old overnight. We were gone for four days. It was tough. But I'm willing to give a little in order to reach the great things ahead. I know that without sacrificing, great things cannot be achieved. You will make it through easier as soon as you accept that you cannot do everything. Make peace with dropping a few balls. It's ok, it happens. Just dust yourself off and keep pushing forward. Take things one at a time and never be afraid to lean on your support team.

As I write this, we are getting ready to finish filming in the last two locations, which means another round of models, gowns and all the details. Mix that in with shooting over 25 sessions over two weeks (10 in the week after filming), IPS sessions, editing, ordering, marketing, the responsibilities of keeping three small humans alive and making sure my husband doesn't feel like I've abandoned him. All I want to do is eat cake and nap. I can do neither. Instead I get coffee, ibuprofen and late nights. I know it is worth it. I know it won't be like this forever. I know I am doing something special and the cake at the top is extra sweet.





## SUPPORT

You can't do this alone. Don't try. Going for broke will test you in every imaginable way. It is important to have key people in your life you can lean on when things get heavy. This is the most important piece to your puzzle.

Support can come in a few forms. You need a team of people who are there to help plan, organize and complete the tasks needed to reach your goals and complete a large project like this. Don't be afraid to lean on them. Delegating allows you to focus on the most important tasks and details. My staff have been great in helping confirm reservations, communicate with models, give clarity to our message and slap me when I start getting in my own head. That's when you know you have a great team—when they aren't afraid to set you straight.

Chicago required two custom gowns, two models, flights, hotels, scripts, wardrobe, accessories and equipment. My staff worked long days leading up to the trip. Some traveled with me, others stayed at the office to keep the business going. Both are equally important.

Besides the literal tasks that need to be done, you need people who give you strength. We all know who those people are in our lives. It could be a spouse, friend or colleague, someone who doesn't judge you at your lowest, but helps pick you back up. The climb to the top is not without bumps and flat tires. You will get past them, but having someone with you makes it a little less daunting. I took people with me to Chicago who I knew would do that. They calm me. They are honest with me. And just by having them there, I knew I could do this.

Stepping in front of the camera, shooting in a new city and being filmed by Sal was all a lot to process. Running low on sleep and feeling nervous and overwhelmed, I'm not ashamed to say I started to implode after we had a meeting with Sal and Alissa the night before filming. I questioned my ability to perform. I questioned our message. I doubted my decision to do the project. But I had my team there to talk with me, help finish last-minute gown alterations, discuss script direction, communicate with models and remind me why I wanted to do the video in the first place. I finished the night with stronger resolve and excitement for the project.

## INVESTMENT

So you want your client to invest in you. You want to be a high-end brand. You want higher averages but you are unwilling to invest in your own brand. What kind of message does that send? With our focus for this video, I had to do it right. Filming at one location would not cut it. Showing traditional clothing or even easily accessible gowns would not cut it. Doing the video production ourselves would not work. I wanted to look like the best. I wanted it to resemble an ad you would see from a corporation. I knew I had to put my money where my mouth was.

I hired the best video production team. I went all out on gown design and fabric. I hired models. I went over the top with concepts and design. I took my amazing team with me to help things go smoothly. If I skimped on just one element, it would show.

Risk equals reward. If you are unable or unwilling to take risk, you will never accomplish big things. I'm not saying to go all in willy nilly and be pissed when it falls apart. Be calculating and strategic, but also be willing to go outside your comfort zone. Risk makes you work harder. The fear of failure keeps you moving forward. Don't overthink it. Trust that with your support team, your focused plan and your hard work, the benefits will outweigh the risks.





Image © Casey Dittmer

So often, we make excuses and justify limiting our goals: I'm not at that level yet, I don't make enough to justify that, my market can't afford that. There is always an excuse to not do something or to do it halfway. That path may seem easier, safer, cheaper. So you want to be cheap and easy. Good for you. More for me.

This overhaul was brutal and letting go of my previous methods was painful. Adding this video project during my busiest time of year required even more time and sacrifice from me and my family. The investment stretched us. Every dime, minute and tear was worth the success. My business is already stronger. Averages are more than double last year's. Bookings are up. Our efficiency is way higher.

My personal achievements in competition went beyond the goals I had set. We're doing exactly what we wanted: getting the attention of sponsors, creating more speaking platforms and making an impression with potential clients worldwide. ■



Casey Dittmer is an award-winning published photographer from western Colorado. As a 17-year veteran of the photographic industry, Casey has seen trends, economies and businesses come and go. She loves traveling and sharing her knowledge in the hope that it will help other photographers build a strong base for their business and avoid some of the roadblocks she has encountered.  
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# BUSINESS IS PERSONAL:

HOW TO LEVERAGE YOUR  
PERSONALITY TO GET MORE BUSINESS

with **Christine Yodsukar**







This article is kind of about branding, but it's essentially about how to become the go-to photographer or videographer for companies that will keep you working and your cash flow flowing.

A few years ago, I thought that being a business owner meant I had to act like a business owner. Because my experience up until that point was as an artist, I didn't understand what a business owner actually did. I thought it meant hiding who I really was (because who is going to hire someone with glitter in their hair to photograph their next campaign?) and pretending I thought I was better than everyone else. I thought "professional" meant cleancut and boring. It turns out that "professional" actually means competent, experienced and skillful—not anything to do with my personality.

Over time, my path connected me with a few CEOs and business owners who taught me what it meant to be a business owner. I learned the art of negotiation and closing a deal, how to turn one job into a larger contract, how to strategize to grow my business. I uncovered the most valuable asset I have next to my skills: my personality, which I've learned how to use really well.





Image © Christine Yodsukar

I learned that if you can make a work relationship feel like a friendship, there's no reason you won't be the go-to photographer. If I can make a work call feel like a break from my workday, I've just left a lasting impression on someone. The key here is that all CEOs, business owners and marketing directors are all humans. Behind every professional is someone's best friend, next-door neighbor, son or daughter. Even if we all love the work we do, we still crave friendship and comradery, and when we can merge work and play in that way, it feels like we've hit the jackpot. This is how I leverage my personality to bring in work and create repeat clients who will send me referrals.

It all started with one CEO. We met when my company was hired to do a video project for his company. I was intimidated to meet him alone in his office. I did not know what to expect, and if I didn't know what to expect, how on earth could I prepare? After the most concise business meeting I had ever had, he moved straight into cracking jokes, asking about my son and finding points of common interest. From that meeting on, his emails had smiley faces, he always wanted my son to come to meetings and I even got the occasional jokey text message. I felt like I had a friend who I got to work with. It was amazing. Over time, I realized that I was reciprocating this awesome work relationship by being my silly and joyful self to the nth degree, and that this was the reason they continued to hire us over and over again. Instead of pretending to lack emotion and personality as a "professional," I got to be myself—and get more work because of it.

After I saw the magic of letting my personality shine, I decided to try this with any new business prospects. The scariest thing that happened was when I had a phone call with an executive who's well-known in the photography industry. Through the mega company she works with, she sponsors photographers who use her company's products.

Once again, I was very intimidated. I had no idea what to expect, but I knew I was going to let my Christine flag fly and see what happened. What resulted was a 20-minute conversation about kids, wine and dreams, followed by three minutes of business talk. It ended with a signed contract—and I was sold on leveraging my personality.

Several months later, after a handful of phone calls, this person told me it was always a highlight of her day to talk to me. That confirmed it: She could work with almost any photographer she wanted, most with bigger audiences than me and technically better work than mine, but she chose to continue to work with me because I allowed her to be human when we worked together. She could laugh, tell me about her family and tell me how things really were without worrying about offending me. We all need the chance to be human even when we need to be professional.

How can you leverage your personality? First, do not try to be like me. I can see your wheels turning right now: "I am going to smile big and laugh until my face hurts." Don't do that. What works for me is not what is going to work for you. This does not work for me because I am known for smiling and laughing so much. Not everyone likes that. Some people dislike that. Use your own sense of humor and life experiences to build business relationships. This is how you will find the people running the businesses that will jive with you.

But there are still professional boundaries. Jokes, alcohol and closeness can be taken too far, and while we want to create an atmosphere where work feels like play, we need to respect social conventions and propriety.

Don't be afraid to go the extra mile for a great work relationship. If you see something that your business contact might find funny, send it to them. It makes them laugh and keeps you in mind if they need to hire you again. If you know they are dealing with some personal issues and it seems appropriate to send them a card, send it. It lets them know that you don't care only about the checks they send you. And if you have the opportunity to send them a unique thank-you gift, do it. They will talk about it for a long time to come.





Image © Christine Yodsukar



Image © Christine Yodsukar

In addition to being a professional in your field—competent, experienced, skillful—you can leverage your personality simply by being human and allowing those you work with to show their personality as well. This creates much stronger relationships, and people and companies will want to hire you again and again because of how enjoyable it was to work with you. ■



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

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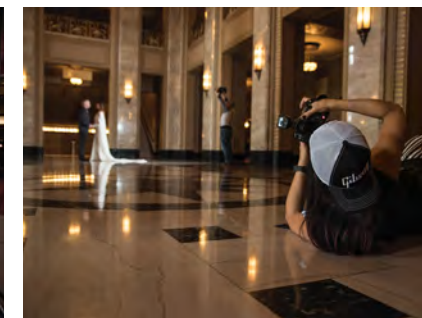
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The 42 is a beast, featuring a 42mm top leg and geared toward studio guys and those who love stability.

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# EXPLAINING YOUR BRAND AS A *Story*

with Phillip Blume





Most photographers struggle to earn a living doing what they love. As business coaches, my wife and I guide them to build profitable, purposeful brands so they can enjoy financial freedom and meaningful lives.

One of the most important tools we equip business owners with, whether they're just starting out or growing their studios, is clarity.

Imagine this: clarity in your marketing and throughout the experience you provide clients, and clarity of vision among your employees. We entrepreneurs talk a lot about the importance of brand clarity, but the definition of this common phrase remains ironically unclear. If that is true for you, your businesses may struggle to stand out in the marketplace and eventually fail.

But there's good news. Allow me to guide you through some practical strategies that will help you clarify your brand message to increase your bookings and sales.





MAKE YOUR CLIENT THE HERO

In his book *StoryBrand*, Donald Miller identifies a fascinating similarity great companies share. In a nutshell, they all communicate like classic storytellers.

In other words, smart advertisers follow the same predictable storytelling formula Hollywood screenwriters use to churn out blockbusters, the same recipe humans have perfected around campfires over thousands of years.

Miller’s key ingredients of a great story require a hero, a conflict, a guide, a plan, a turning point and a happy ending. It may sound familiar, like something you wish you’d paid attention to in high school English class. As a former high school English teacher who has used this strategy to build successful brands, I assure you it works.

Here’s how to put it into action.

First, remember your client, not you, must always be the hero in your brand messaging. This works because it grabs your listener’s attention, holds it tight and makes him identify with your story’s main character.

Don’t ramble on about yourself. That’s not the story your client wants to hear. As Donald Miller puts it, every person sees herself as the protagonist in her own story. We all wake up in the morning thinking of ourselves as the hero of our story. And in every great story, the hero has a challenge to overcome.

That’s where you come in—not as the hero, but as the guide who can help the hero along in her quest. In the business world, you’ve probably heard this role described as the “trusted adviser.” You are Yoda and your client is Luke Skywalker. You are Mr. Miyagi and your client is Daniel-san.





BE A HUMBLE ADVISER

Many of us feel lost about what to write on our About page. So we focus the story on ourselves. We describe the day we got our first camera, how we fell in love with freezing moments in time, how passionate we are about our job. We describe our unique style and we list our awards and the publications we’ve appeared in.

Try this instead. Write about something your client is interested in: herself. Show that you understand her conflict, recalling the frustration you also felt during your search for a reliable wedding photographer. Explain the wisdom you gained that qualifies you as an adviser, whether your experience was positive or negative. Offer a clear plan she can follow to test her choice, whether it’s a “Top 10 Qualities of a Photographer” list or an easy path to a consultation. Call her to take action on the turning point by making it exceedingly easy to contact you. Describe the happy ending that will result if she takes action.

From consultation to final sale, being a trusted adviser is crucial. If you don’t want to be sales-y but would like to see your business double (or triple) through print sales, simply prove yourself trustworthy. Researchers have said trust is the number-one qualifier that determines sales. So just be honest—build a trust bank.

During an in-person sales meeting, we had a mother of the bride wavering over spending \$500 on a set of 8x10 prints. We didn’t try to push her into the sale. Instead we advised her, “You’re welcome to place that order. But did you know you can already print 8x10s from your daughter’s set of digital negatives? You’re welcome to use those for free. If you choose to invest anything with us, we’d love to help you prepare and display a large heirloom piece for your family.” She was so grateful, her \$500 budget suddenly became \$2,000 for a canvas.

Sure, honesty might cost a short-term sale. But stay honest. It pays off in the end. This client left more satisfied after saving \$500 on small prints.



SIMPLIFY YOUR MENU

Have you ever had a fantastic consultation with a seemingly ideal client, then never heard from them again? Or a sales session where the client obviously wanted to purchase something, but after an hour of considering the options, left with nothing?

Why does this happen? It’s nothing personal. It’s biology.

The human brain is designed for survival. It’s big and it burns through a ton of calories when it’s solving problems. Yet its primary biological function is to preserve those calories at all costs.

We tend to think “the more options, the better.” But when you put too many options in front of your client, it leads to consumer retreat. Whether it’s a complex create-your-own wedding package system or too many à la carte products offered after your portrait shoot, the client’s brain reaches a point where it shuts down its purchase-making region and walks away.

One solution is KISS: “Keep it stupid simple.” Ideal wedding packages include exactly three options—no more, no less. Every package should look identical to the others, except that the quantity, size or quality of items should increase. Your top package might include more coverage hours and a larger wedding book. If you set it up right (simply), most clients will choose your middle package.

In the sales room, you (the adviser) can help guide your client (the hero) to preserve her happy memories (the happy ending) by offering just three or four nearly identical packages (the plan). The plan tells her clearly what action (turning point) she must take. Luke Skywalker didn’t discover how to destroy the Death Star on his own — the plans told him where to plant that lucky shot.

For the past 10 years, our product menu has stayed mostly the same: print enlargements, canvases and coffee table books. We don’t offer every size our lab can create, just a few that we keep visible samples of in the studio. That provides all-important clarity.







## THE ELEVATOR PITCH

There's a lot more to learn about growing your brand as a story. How can you identify and talk about the deeper conflicts your clients feel—their real unspoken problems that you, their adviser, can provide a solution for? How do you create a clear brand message that matches your photographic style?

These are challenges every business faces, and we hope you'll connect with us so we can keep you working toward more clarity in your business. In the meantime, one tool I can provide to you quickly is the elevator pitch. How do you answer a person who asks, "So what do you do?" or, "What makes you different?"

I hope the answer isn't merely, "Well, I take pictures," or, "We like to think our quality is better than the next guy offering to take your pictures." You need a pitch that, like a good story, grabs their attention and confirms you have a plan about where you're leading them as a potential client.

Maybe you didn't realize it, but you've already read the elevator pitch for our photographer education brand. It was the very first paragraph of this article. And if you've read this far, I guess it did its job of capturing your attention.

Reread the first two sentences in this article. Do they have the ingredients of a good story? Your elevator pitch needs to be simple and straightforward, not flowery or poetic. It should simply explain what you have to offer.

Here's how to create your own elevator pitch. Part one: Identify your client's conflict. Part two: Describe exactly what you offer as an adviser (your product or service). Part three: Remind your hero about the outcome (happy ending) that your product leads to.





## CONCLUSION

It may take you an hour to write and refine a good elevator pitch. It may take a lot longer to decide what the larger mission of your studio should be. For us, it is strengthening our couples' marriages and saving lives through personal projects. For others, it might be building women's confidence or simply providing a status symbol.

After all is said and done, come through for your client. If you want to find lasting happiness and purpose in your business, you must stay focused on your larger mission. This is your story, and it's bigger than the products you offer. ■



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

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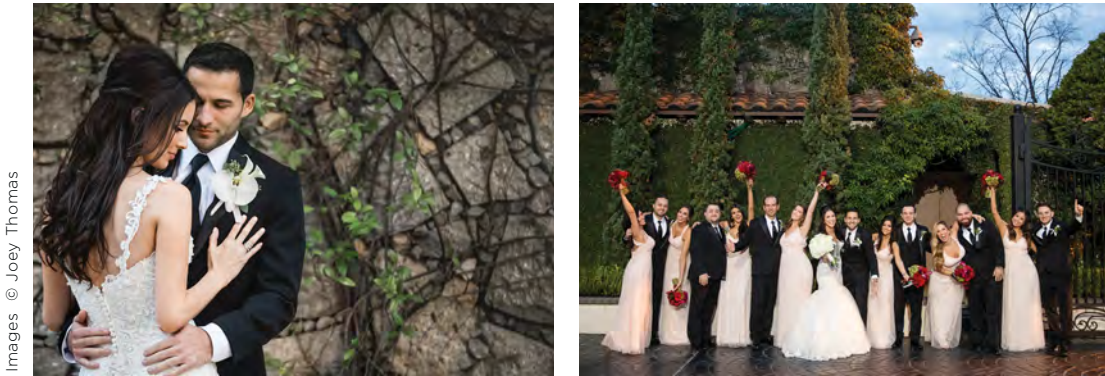


# QUESTIONS THAT **DEFINE** YOUR BRAND

with Joey Thomas







You have a wonderful personality, excellent work and years of experience, yet people don't seem to understand your value. For some reason, the world around you believes photographers should be cheap and should include free digital files. You feel like you are constantly sifting through tire kickers to get to a few good clients. Does this sound familiar?

With thousands of photographers in the market, there is mass confusion about what a professional is. Countless photographers give away the farm with every shoot hoping to make enough to stay afloat. How do you convey a message of value, professionalism and expertise amongst the masses? Seem daunting?

Competition is opportunity. It gives professionals the chance to differentiate ourselves and gives our potential clients something to compare to. Who doesn't like choices? If you want to take a loved one out somewhere special, are you comparing a Michelin five-star restaurant to Mickey D's? I can't begin to count the number of times my competition helped me book weddings at thousands of dollars above my competitors. While my competitors offer deals and promotions hoping to get a bite, I stick to my guns, won't discount a nickel and continue to drive home value through client experience. Why do they end up spending thousands more? Because of the power of branding.

Your brand is your identity. It defines your value proposition, the promise of value to be delivered. In other words, it sets the clients' expectations and gives them a sense of security, trust and hope. My clients are planning weddings. They don't need to take risks. They want to know they are investing in something that won't turn around and bite them in the tail for the purposes of saving money.

Your brand does not begin and end with just your logo and colors. It's all encompassing, from inquiry to delivery. The full experience justifies the cost and validates their expectations. This leads to returning clients and great referrals. Now your brand is communicated through word of mouth, leading to exponential growth. That is how branding transcends the visual and gives you an advantage over the competition.

Branding doesn't have to be confusing or convoluted. Let's keep it simple. Here are six questions to help you develop an intentional, cohesive brand identity that sets you apart.







## WHY DO YOU DO IT?

Know your purpose. Your “why” gives you the courage to take risks and motivation in slow seasons. It helps you find joy in the mundane. Clarify your “why” by evaluating your values, talent, expertise and passions. What are your strengths? As John Maxwell says, “Spend 80% of your time building your strengths and only 20% on your weaknesses.” Write down your values and what gets you excited. Write down what you want your legacy to be when it’s all done. Make this the core of your brand.



## WHAT DO YOU DO?

Have you taken the time to define what you do? Defining what you actually do helps you clarify your message to potential clients. Yes, we sell albums, prints and some digital images. This isn’t where real value lies. Real value comes when we understand the intangible and special nature of our work. I create heirlooms through which my clients’ great grandchildren can discover their legacy. My camera is a tool. The digital images are a vehicle. The heirloom is the destination.

## WHO DO YOU DO IT FOR?

Craft a brand message that speaks directly to your target client. None of us can afford to target everyone. I cannot stand hearing a photographer say, “I will photograph anything that pays.” It’s one of the quickest ways to water down and run your brand into the ground. Analyze what you offer and which demographics and psychographics your brand connects to. Demographics are concrete facts such as income level, age and location. Psychographics are the more personal characteristics such as personality, attitudes and values. If the visual and experiential elements of your brand do not represent those you are trying to speak to, research what they need, where they shop and how they think. This will help you redefine your brand to make a stronger connection.





## HOW ARE YOU DIFFERENT?

As a saying from a 1970s self-help book goes: “The person who follows the crowd will usually go no further than the crowd. The person who walks alone is likely to find himself in places no one has ever seen before.” Create a brand that is easily identifiable in a crowd. What do you do that is different? Do you have your own voice in your work and personality? I wanted to create a brand that evokes confidence, empowerment, security and joy. I also wanted to be sincere and personal in my approach. I considered both my work and my approach with clients. You have a monopoly on you. Have clarity on what makes you unique and weave it into your brand message. There is no competition.

## WHAT DOES YOUR CLIENT REALLY WANT?

My biggest breakthrough in business was the epiphany that products and services simply serve as a conduit to our clients’ real wants and needs. We must understand the heart behind the need. Although my clients think they need to know the price in their initial inquiry, what they really hope to figure out is if I’m worth their time and money. It isn’t just about budget. It’s value. I address value rather than specific costs. This puts them at ease and brings them into the studio to learn more.

My clients aren’t looking for thousands of digital files to store on their computer and forget about. They want their story to be told in a sincere and beautiful way. They want to know that I can handle the stresses of the day and be at all the places I need to be. They hope their kids can one day learn about the origin story of their parents and continue to pass it down to their kids. They want to know if a storm hits during their wedding and the lights go out, I’m still able to capture the story of their day.

Our clients have problems that need solving. Being a co-owner of Serendipity Albums, I also understand that photographers aren’t simply looking for products they can sell to their clients. They are looking for exceptional heirlooms that elevate their brand. That’s why our motto is “Handcrafted with your reputation in mind.” It’s our job to discover those problems and put clients at ease. A strong brand not only addresses overt needs but gets to the core of the innate ones as well. Like the great Vanilla Ice once so gracefully said, “If there was a problem, yo, I’ll solve it!”





## WHAT ARE YOU PROMISING?

When you execute a well-thought-out plan, you are also setting expectations for your clients. It's a brand promise, your value proposition. What promise are you making with your brand? A cohesive brand drives client expectations.

From a visual standpoint, the colors, logo design and cohesion of a well-thought-out website tells the viewer exactly how they should feel regarding your business and your work.

Let's talk color theory. The color red evokes boldness. It has energy and it stimulates your appetite. Think Coca-Cola, Target, Virgin Records, Canon, Lay's. The color green represents balance, freshness and harmony, and is associated with prestige. Consider the green jacket worn by winners of the Masters in golf. Brands like Whole Foods, Starbucks and Land Rover all sport the green. Blue signifies trustworthiness and dependability. It's both strong and secure. Facebook, Lowe's, Dell and American Express use blue. My logo is gold and black. Gold, just like yellow, is a color the eyes see first. It represents warmth and clarity, while black is classic and powerful. It's used by the high-end brands Prada, Audi and Chanel. These colors and their feelings are parallel with your values and with the values of your target audience.

Shapes, patterns, negative space and other visual elements also evoke a visceral response, a deep-rooted emotion or reaction that's associated with your brand. Businesses hope that they rarely have to "sell" anything to the client. Due to these effective visual elements, ultimately they reach out to clients to confirm how amazing they already believe your brand is. This makes selling easy.



Your social media, website, email communication, business processes, imagery, print products, sales sessions and follow-up are all elements of an amazing client experience. In my studio, once my potential clients are wooed by the elements of my website, the cohesiveness and quality of my images and the messages I share on social media by the content I post, I continue to confirm their perceptions by providing a stellar in-studio experience. Cleanly formatted questionnaires, quotes, contracts and personal client portals elevate their experience. I use 17hats for all of this. It's been a huge business upgrade and made my life much easier. My clients are amazed by the ease and simplicity of how I show images during their sales sessions. I use N-Vu during my IPS sessions, which shows my client exactly what I'm doing on their own screen. These are just a few elements I include in my client's journey that continually defines my brand.

Your brand allows for effective marketing. Your brand defines and engages your target clientele. As you deliver on what your brand promises, you create clients for life. Your brand is possibly the most important element in the success of your business. Start asking yourself the six questions above, and you'll be well on your way. ■



Joey Thomas is the owner of Joey T Photography, one of the top wedding photography studios in the Houston area. He is an award-winning nationally published photographer whose work is often featured on magazine covers and in blogs and editorials. Joey is the co-owner of Serendipity Albums and teaches photography workshops worldwide.

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# *Branding & Marketing*

TO FIND YOUR IDEAL CLIENT

with Michael Anthony







Image © Michael Anthony

I love November because it's branding month at *Shutter Magazine*. But November is also the time that many photography businesses start to go into their slow seasons, which means that it is the perfect time to take an objective look at your brand and see if it's time to update that six-year-old logo.

But before we get into evaluating your current brand, it's important to understand what a brand is. If you have heard me speak before, you know that I believe a brand is much more than a logo. Here are the five things that define your brand: logo, imagery, website, social media presence and totality of your past client experiences.

Let that sink in. These are all of the things you have to pay attention to when you are building your brand. Let's dive into each of them and figure out exactly how important they are to your success.





## LOGO

Your logo doesn't just say what the name of your company is. It is a communication tool that emphasizes the value you are conveying. Is your business about modernity and luxury? How about light and fun? What about dark and dramatic? Your logo is one of the first things your client sees when coming into contact with your brand.

That means the value your logo communicates sets expectations for the type of photography you deliver. Perception is reality. If you have amazing images bolstered by a logo that looks like your grandpa drew it on his Etch A Sketch when he was eight years old, your amazing images won't seem so great anymore. Many photographers would rather save a few bucks when starting out and make a generic signature logo or mock something up in Photoshop.

Hire a graphic designer to create that communication value. When we were branding my wife Jennifer's boudoir brand, we wanted a *Great Gatsby* theme tied in with the Michael Anthony Photography brand. We hired Justen Hong from Visual Lure to help create our brand. He named the brand in a way that communicated our vision, and designed a logo that looked perfect next to our style of imagery. Give your logo the attention it requires.

## IMAGERY

If your logo isn't the first thing a potential client sees, the imagery is. Who is your ideal client? Where do they shop? What brands do they wear? Do they fit with the imagery you currently create?

Your art needs to be desirable to your ideal client. If I wanted to take photos of Eskimo weddings in the California desert, I would have a bit of a problem. Sometimes you have to modify your style of photography to match the look your target demographic desires.

Once you get the look you are going for, consistency is key. I have struggled with this because we love different styles of photography. Bright and airy? We do it. Film emulation? We do it. But people know our brand for our cinematic imagery, so on our website and social platforms, this is mostly what I show. When you look at our engagement on social platforms, bright and airy images, no matter how good they are, always perform half as well as images that are dark and dramatic. That's not by accident. It's because we have created a brand that is synonymous with that style of photography.



WEBSITE

Your website is your digital storefront that conveys a first impression of your business.

You never get a second chance to make a first impression, and every website visitor is judging your brand when they make it to your homepage. You need to give yourself the best chance to win over new clients.

Your website needs to be easy to navigate. Make it easy for clients to get the information they are looking for. It usually goes in the order of Images > Pricing > About Us > Contact. Focus on those pages for the best results. Reduce the number of clicks it takes to get what clients want.

Allow clients to book appointments with you directly from your website. We use an app called Acuity Scheduling that plugs into our studio manager’s Google Calendar. Clients can schedule their ordering sessions and consultations directly without a time-consuming email exchange. Efficiency is underrated in our business.

SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

I could write a whole book on this subject. Everyone’s on social media, so that’s where you need to be marketing. Go to Instagram right now and visit the page for your favorite bridal gown store in your area. See who has posted recently and DM them to congratulate them and give them something of value, like a blog article you wrote. Include a link to your portfolio. Do this a few times and see how easy it is to book a new wedding.

But if your Instagram account has just five followers—including your mom, your cousin Jimmy and the profile you made for your cat—then you are going to have a problem getting a response.

Social media is key. While traditional marketing is still more important, when you’re forming relationships with vendors, they will validate your business by your social media profiles. Social media is a high school popularity contest full of bullies, trolls and the cool popular kids. Be one of the cool people by interacting with your audience. Ask thoughtful questions. Respond when they ask questions. It’s a full-time job. If you don’t do that job, your business will be fighting an uphill battle.

TOTALITY OF YOUR PAST CLIENT EXPERIENCES

This is a big one that will have the biggest long-term effect on your brand. Collecting testimonials from past clients is one of the most effective things you can do to bring in more business. In a recent poll, 93% of millennials said a testimonial was just as good as a personal referral.

Reading reviews serves an even more important purpose. It allows you to look at your overall client experience to help ensure you are delivering an experience that exceeds your clients’ expectations.







Image © Michael Anthony

On the other hand, if your clientele is bashing you to other people, even if they don't take out their frustrations online, then you are going to notice a drop in your business that you never saw coming. Controlling the client experience is the most important factor for your brand. It is vital that your clients become your advocates to make future clients confident in their decision to hire you to document their memories. ■

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[youtube.com/btsShutterMagazine](https://youtube.com/btsShutterMagazine)



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



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# INSPIRATIONS

Inspiration can come when you least expect it. As photographers, we are visual artists. We express ourselves through our camera and the images we create. Inspirations represents a sampling of our industry and the vision of professional photographers from around the world.

Congratulations to all our featured artists. Be inspired and create something that is *you*.

**Sal Cincotta**, *Editor-in-chief*

BEST OF YOUR BRAND







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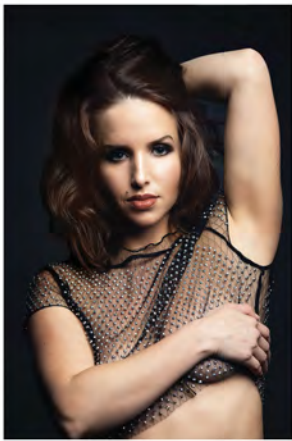


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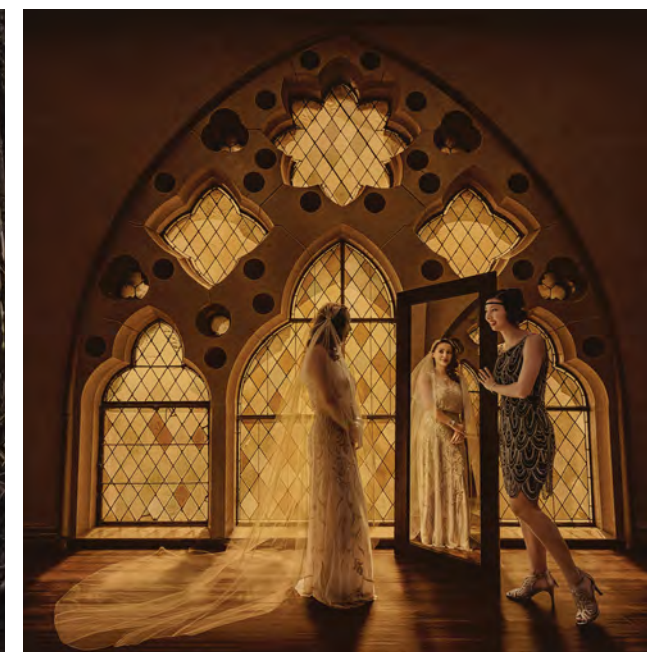


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# BALANCING AMBIENT LIGHT & FLASH

with Michael Corsentino





Image © Michael Corsentino

We need all the tools, techniques and creativity we can muster to tackle whatever situations we encounter when we're crafting killer images on location. Sometimes available light and a reflector, scrim or both get the job done. Other times, Mother Nature needs a helping hand from a flash.





## GET RID OF THE FEAR FACTOR

Flash can be intimidating. Fear of flash and especially flash paired with ambient light can keep people stuck shooting solely with available light. Once you understand how easy it is to balance ambient and flash, you can quickly and simply create myriad lighting effects and free yourself from the constraints of ambient conditions. The possible effects when you're mixing ambient and flash range from very soft and natural looking all the way to edgy, more dramatic looks.

Let's demystify flash and take away any of the fear or intimidation surrounding it so we can focus on its benefits. The easiest way to do this is to simplify the way you think about flash. I'm guessing that if it intimidates you, you probably feel overwhelmed technically. Keep it super simple—flash is just another light source, and you either need more or less of it. It really is that straightforward.

With ambient light alone, the only option at your disposal is the current lighting conditions. Ambient lighting can be anything from overcast to harsh midday sunlight. It can vary from one moment to the next without notice, impacting the flow of your shoot.

When you add flash to the ambient light, you gain control over the lighting. This is because you have two sources of light to work with. Each can be balanced separately to create virtually any look desired. With flash in the mix, you call the shots, not just Mother Nature. You can make up for shortcomings in the ambient lighting conditions, like overcast skies, harsh sun and dappled light. With a powerful enough flash, you can overpower the sun for dramatic lighting. You can create a subtle kiss of fill light to open up the shadows in an image and add sizzle. You can use the sun as a backlight and illuminate your subject in the foreground with flash. You can underexpose the ambient light to hold the detail in skies, shoot with wide apertures to lessen distracting background elements and properly expose your subject with strobe. None of these techniques can be done without using flash and ambient together. The secret sauce is learning to balance both.

Balancing ambient and flash doesn't mean each source contributes the same amount of light. In most cases, ambient light is the dominant source providing the majority of the illumination in a scene, while flash adds additional light where needed. You may need very little light from your flash to get the job done, while other more dramatic looks call for more flash and less ambient light. Having these creative options makes incorporating flash into your ambient shoots so compelling.





Image © Michael Corsentino

UNDERSTANDING FLASH AND AMBIENT LIGHT

Learning to control the amount each of these light sources contributes to your exposures is what balancing ambient and flash is all about. Ambient and flash do different things, have different properties and are controlled in different ways, independently of one another, to produce a variety of predictable and repeatable results.

With ambient and flash lighting scenarios, ambient light is generally the dominant light source unless you’re overpowering the sun with your flash. In either case, you’ll want to set your camera’s white balance to daylight. Strobes and flash guns are daylight balanced to match ambient light; with the daylight setting, the color temperature of both light sources will match.

Ambient light contributes the illumination for the overall scene, while strobe is used to illuminate specific areas of the image and can also be used to freeze motion. When mixing flash and ambient, there are two ways to work: manual exposure mode with manual flash or TTL metering with a compatible camera and flash system.



Image © Michael Corsentino





Image © Michael Consentino

## WORKING MANUALLY

Manual exposure mode is very straightforward. You simply set a desired aperture, shutter speed and flash power output. For many of the images in this article, I underexposed the ambient light to accentuate the sky and create a moody, dramatic look. This is easily done by increasing shutter speed. Follow this simple rule of thumb: Shutter speed controls the contribution of ambient light and aperture, and flash power controls the contribution of strobe light. The faster the shutter speed, the less ambient light appears in the exposure, and vice versa. That's balancing flash and ambient.

I lock in the ambient exposure first and then turn on my flash and dial in the power required to match the ambient light, seasoning to taste as I go. If I want more ambient light in the exposure, all I need to do is use a slower shutter speed. The more ambient light, the more open and airy the image appears, and vice-versa.

If you're working manually, a handheld flash meter is a very useful tool that can substantially speed up your workflow. Without a flash meter, you'll spend a good deal of time repeatedly adjusting and chimping to check exposures. With a flash meter, you take a few readings and start shooting with great exposures right out of the gate. I use the Sekonic L-758 and L-858, which allow me to get precisely 20% of the light from the flash and 80% from ambient light.

## WORKING WITH TTL

For a more automated method that still provides plenty of creative flexibility, use TTL flash. Compatible camera and flash systems are required for this. It's a great option for run-and-gun shooting or situations where the distance between your subject and your lights is rapidly changing. TTL does the heavy lifting for you by performing distance calculations and communicating exposure information between the camera and strobes to determine the proper exposure and balance between flash and ambient.

TTL provides a great starting point, but if you're like me, you'll probably want to season to taste and make the exposure your own. This is easy to do. The same rule of thumb applies here: Shutter speed controls the contribution of ambient light and aperture, and flash power control the contribution of strobe light. The faster the shutter speed, the less ambient light appears in the exposure, and vice versa. We use flash exposure compensation to adjust flash power, typically in +/- one- to three-stop increments. Where you make this adjustment depends on the camera and flash system, but look for flash exposure compensation.

TTL is useful in many situations, but there are situations where its metering system can be fooled by surfaces with dramatically different levels of reflectivity. This is because TTL metering measures the light reflected from whatever is being photographed. This is known as a reflective meter reading. The classic example of a scenario that can trip up TTL metering is a bride in a white dress and a groom in a black tux. Highly mirrored surfaces can also be tricky. If your exposures are inconsistent, overexposed or underexposed, TTL may be to blame. There's an easy fix: Switch to manual. This is why a handheld flash meter is such a useful tool. Its measurements are based on the light falling on what you're photographing. This is known as an incident reading, and it's always consistent and reliable, never fooled.





Image © Michael Corsentino

HIGH-SPEED SYNC

One of the other major benefits of working with TTL is high-speed sync. This is a game changer, allowing photographers to use flash in conjunction with very fast shutter speeds up to 1/8,000th of a second. Without high-speed sync shutter speeds above your camera’s top flash sync speed, images will be only partially exposed. This is because the flash and shutter curtain are out of sync. High-speed sync changes all that. With higher shutter speeds, your control over ambient light and the latitude you have to reduce or knock it down is greatly enhanced. This is essential to balancing ambient and flash in bright ambient conditions and with wider apertures, useful for controlling depth of field. You remove distracting background elements and focus on the subject matter in the foreground, which is perfect for portraits. ■



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

BEING A RELEVANT PHOTOGRAPHER  
IN A MODERN AGE

with **Justin Yoder**







There is no ignoring it. We wedding photographers are living in a different era. Traditions are being broken left and right, and I love it. At least 70% of the couples who hire me are doing first looks. Couples are waiting until they are older to get married. The groom's wedding party is no longer just for guys and the bride's party is no longer just for ladies. Elopements are on the rise. One of the biggest changes we are seeing is a rise in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender weddings. This community has been ignorantly overlooked, discriminated against and misunderstood, but times are changing.

On June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that same-sex couples have the right to marry in all 50 states. It was a monumental time for the LGBT community and our allies. A May 2018 Gallup poll revealed that two-thirds of Americans support same-sex marriage, and each year, the number increases. As it does, more and more LGBT couples are not only tying the knot, but doing so with the support of their friends and family on their wedding day. Photographers would be remiss if we didn't focus our efforts on learning about the LGBT community to build their trust and earn their business.





I am frequently asked if the LGBT market is big enough to make it worth pursuing. Absolutely. According to the 2010 U.S. census, there are more than 11 million adults who identify as LGBT. We just cleared the three-year mark of marriage equality. It was estimated that during the first three years, gay weddings would generate a total economic boost of \$2.6 billion nationwide and support up to 13,000 jobs in the U.S.

Tapping into this market is a whole new obstacle. The LGBT community has been hurt, discriminated against, kicked out of churches and businesses, and made to feel like a lower class. They are unlikely to contact a photographer simply because they like our work. Even today, same-sex couples must take the extra step of seeking the approval of their wedding vendors. They need to feel secure that your business is a safe place. This doesn't mean you have to know everything about LGBT couples or their history. It means only that they know you are someone who desires their business, free of judgment.

One way to achieve this is to include images of same-sex couples on your website and social media platforms. When a same-sex couple visits my website, Instagram or Facebook page, there is no doubt that I photograph same-sex couples and welcome them at my studio. If you want to encourage business from same-sex couples but don't have any represented on your website or social media, there is no better starting point. If you have never photographed a same-sex couple, it's time to get some images so you can gain their business and diversify your portfolio.

Offer a complimentary shoot to a same-sex couple. Be upfront and tell them your plan of building a portfolio to expand into that market, and that you want to post their images on your social media. Get the agreement in writing. Take this opportunity to learn from them. Be transparent. Explain that you want to learn more about the LGBT community, and ask if it's ok to ask questions that you may be ignorant about. Chances are, they will be happy to help you, enthused by your willingness to educate yourself.

Bridal shows offer another opportunity to diversify your clientele. Add a photo or two of a same-sex couple in your booth. Even grooms are now going to these shows to plan their weddings. Having just one or two images in your booth tells them you are a safe place.

And if you truly want to market to same-sex couples, be sure your website reflects that goal, even in your copy. Address everyone, not just brides. Make sure your contracts reflect it as well. Instead of stating only bride-and-groom combinations, ensure your contracts can accommodate multiple combinations of partners, or provide a generic option.

I know some of you are thinking, "If I post images of same-sex couples, I may lose business from more conservative couples." True. I know I have. But how do you know you won't gain more business than you lose? I have booked straight couples simply because they were strong allies with the LGBT community who liked knowing my business supports them.

One fear many photographers have about working with same-sex couples is how to pose them. Some photographers say it's totally different from posing straight couples. Some say there is no difference. I fall somewhere in the middle. The conventional understanding of gender roles does not always apply to same-sex couples. If you are unsure how to pose the couple, communicate openly and honestly, and make your posing decisions based on their dynamics like you would with any couple.





Image © Justin Yoder





Image © Justin Yoder

Another way to combat the trepidation of posing a same-sex couple (and feeling awkward about it) is to not pose them at all. I provide simple direction like asking them to sit on a bench, face one another and talk about their first date. Frequently, the couple will naturally pose for you with just this small direction. If you pose your couple and they just don't look comfortable, try something different. It is ok to ask them if they are uncomfortable.

Location is a key factor in the comfort of same-sex couples. Discuss locations with the couple before the shoot. Many same-sex couples are nervous about public displays of affection. Once when I was photographing a lesbian couple in a Dallas park, an old man called them a derogatory term as he walked by. Fortunately, the couple didn't hear him, but this is a reality. If they are not comfortable with public displays of affection, consult with the couple to find an alternate location where they are comfortable, such as their home or an LGBT-friendly area. The more you photograph same-sex couples, the more comfortable you will become.

One of the greatest things about photographing same-sex weddings is seeing the freedom these couples possess to do things their way. Not only do they rewrite traditions, they create something beautiful, individualized and dynamic in the process. Same-sex couples, especially grooms, often get ready in the same room. Take advantage of this opportunity to capture the sweet moments of them adding the final touches to their partner's attire. One of my couples had their guests sit in a circle, and they got married literally surrounded by family and friends. They almost always have both men and women in each of their wedding parties. And the day can be highly emotional since many of my couples have been together for 20 or 30 years before finally gaining the right to legally marry.



Image © Justin Yoder

If you have been wanting to start capturing same-sex couples, do it. You won't regret it. These couples are a blast to work with, and are eager to answer questions and calm your uneasiness. And the added revenue is a no-brainer. ■



Justin Yoder is a Dallas-based wedding photographer and cinematographer, educator and philanthropist. He has had a camera in his hand since age 12, and his charitable work has taken him as far as Africa. He has traveled extensively and loves shooting destination weddings and engagement shoots around the world.

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