

Why Hire a Professional Photographer?

SUMMARY

Image quality relates to persuasion. You are not merely documenting your work or showing what you look like, but are actively trying to convince other people that you and/or your services or products are the best in their class. Photography, like any other custom service, is never a 'one size fits all' proposition, but a matter of finding the right person for the job.

EXCELLENCE IS ESSENTIAL

Photography is much more than the mechanics of composition and exposure. It requires an aesthetic aptitude for creating a unique and compelling presentation of a person or a physical construction. It requires craft: knowing how to choose lenses and position lights, caring for details of preparation and arrangement, understanding what colour adjustments create the most impact on a printed or electronic page and making sure permissions and releases are secured. It requires professionalism, ensuring that finished images are delivered reliably, on time, on budget and looking better than you expected. Photography requires a visual style that presents you or your work to its best advantage.

Because images play a determinant role in defining how we come to know people and their work, photography is pivotal in understanding a subject: that is why hiring a professional is crucial.

WHAT DEFINES A PROFESSIONAL

Today's market is saturated with large numbers of self-avowed 'professional photographers', whose services seem attractive due to the low fees they advertise. However, a low rate is in itself a warning that neither excellence nor professionalism should be expected –it is incontrovertible that whenever prices drop, so does the quality, service, and customer experience. Before falling for the temptation of hiring a cheap photographer over a professional, you should consider the following points thoroughly:

- Most of these photographers are not full time professionals, but amateurs or hobbyists.
- They price so low because either they have no idea of the costs and non-photography-related work required to run a business, or because they have a full time job elsewhere –and photography is only a side-line they are not completely devoted to.
- They photograph only in their spare time; this results



PROFESSIONALS, UNLIKE AMATEURS, are seriously concerned with the highest image quality. Towards that end, instead of guesswork and unreliable auto modes, they use specialised tools –such as this light meter and colour chart– to accurately determine exposure and colour.

in clients having to work around *their* schedule, instead of their adapting to their clients' needs.

- Some of them are in the 'photography business' because it gives them an excuse to buy more camera gear.
- Ironically, they may not own, know how to use, or have access to the state of the art equipment required to produce of images of the highest quality.
- They might not be registered as a business, and thus are unable to issue invoices.
- It's unlikely that they carry insurance.

Conversely, a true **professional** photographer...

- Is not just passionate about making photographs, but has made of photography his profession and is committed to it *full time*.
- Adheres to a strict code of ethics and standards.
- Constantly upgrades his skills through self-education, seminars, and conventions.
- Observes the highest standards of integrity in all transactions.
- Produces photographs of quality equal or superior to the samples he displays.
- Applies his best efforts towards providing the best possible photographic services.
- Maintains cooperation with fellow professional pho-

tographers by sharing knowledge to achieve and maintain the highest standard of quality.

- Last, but not least, because his photography business is registered, he can issue invoices and provide certificates of insurance.

In addition to these points, some professional photographers are *specialists* –i.e. they have honed their skills and focused their efforts in an specific genre of photography (e.g. architectural or commercial). These photographers are more knowledgeable and experienced in their chosen areas than generalists. Obviously, they also command higher fees, not only because of their deeper knowledge of a particular genre, but also because they often need equipment that is highly specialised and, therefore, more expensive.

Beyond the realm of gear and knowledge of the craft, one of the most important –if not the *most* important–trait to look for in a professional photographer is *humanity*: his compassion and capacity to empathise, to not only see, but to effectively make his client’s problems his own. This, the professional who aims to succeed by making others successful, is your photographer of choice. 📷



STATE OF THE ART tools, like this ‘tilt-shift’ lens (which allows precise control and correction of perspective and focus) enable specialist professionals to obtain images of the highest quality. Needless to say, this kind of equipment is not cheap. (See the ‘The Specialist’s Advantage’ box on the next page.)

THE PROFESSIONAL ADVANTAGE

There is much, much more to making photographs than merely pointing a camera, however sophisticated, at someone or something. Composition, exposure, lighting, and –in the case of portraiture–posing and expression, are all variables that must be thoughtfully integrated if one is to achieve a striking photograph.



THE INFAMOUS ‘SELFIE’ –photos taken with a cell phone’s camera are about the most unflattering portraits that can be made of someone. Not only are the facial features distorted, but the backgrounds tend to be cluttered, distracting, and to have parts of them blown out.

To make matters worse, these kinds of images lack the high resolution needed for printing, or even for the Web.



EVEN MORE SOPHISTICATED cameras can produce pedestrian photographs. If the on-camera flash is used, the subject’s facial features will be flattened. As if that were not enough, unsightly shadows will commonly be cast onto the background.

In spite of the subject’s attractiveness and warm smile, this photo is, essentially, an amateur snapshot.



MASTERFUL LIGHTING MAKES all the difference. Carefully positioned studio strobes produce the interplay of highlights and shadows that creates form and volume. In addition, accent lights add great depth to the portrait and enhance the pose and expression.

Furthermore, thoughtfully selecting the lens ensures that the subject’s features are not distorted, but pleasingly natural.

Last but not least, the image has more than enough resolution for printing at large sizes.

EYE-CATCHER OR EYE-BLASTER?

Deciding to produce your photographs in-house can be deleterious to your business if your 'designated photographer' possesses neither the skill nor the proper lighting equipment. In spite of camera manufacturers' disingenuous hype, more than just a higher-end camera loaded with features is needed to create winsome photographs.

Good lighting is always important for all photographic genres, but in the realm of product photography superb lighting is critical.



UNATTRACTIVE PRODUCT IMAGES such as this one might be sufficient for selling used items on auction or classified websites, but they do not belong on a business web page.

This photo was taken with a DSLR camera (in auto mode and with no supplemental lighting, but the on-camera flash only).



APPEALING IMAGES ARE the result of carefully planned design and a combination of superior cameras and flash equipment.

This image was made with a pro-grade DSLR and *four* flashes, each fitted with a different light modifier. None of the flashes was on the camera.

THE SPECIALIST'S ADVANTAGE

Access to the right equipment can make all the difference in the pursuit of photographic excellence and is well worth the premium cost, as can be seen in this sequence.



THE DISTORTED IMAGE a generalist photographer would obtain with his standard lens.



'FIXING' THE DISTORTION in post production crops out a large part of the photograph. Not only is this often unacceptable, but it can actually make the image look worse.



USING THE RIGHT tool—a special lens with perspective correction capabilities—yields a distortion-free image whose quality has not been degraded by excessive digital manipulation.