

Jeff Smith

PORTRAIT PRO

What you **MUST** know
to make photography
your career

AMHERST MEDIA, INC. ■ BUFFALO, NY

Jeff Smith is a professional photographer and the owner of two very successful studios in central California. His numerous articles have appeared in *Rangefinder*, *Professional Photographer*, and *Studio Photography and Design* magazines. Jeff has been a featured speaker at the Senior Photographers International Convention, as well as at numerous seminars for professional photographers. He has written seven books, including *Outdoor and Location Portrait Photography*; *Corrective Lighting, Posing, and Retouching Techniques for Portrait Photographers*; *Professional Digital Portrait Photography*; and *Success in Portrait Photography* (all from Amherst Media®). His common-sense approach to photography and business makes the information he presents both practical and very easy to understand.

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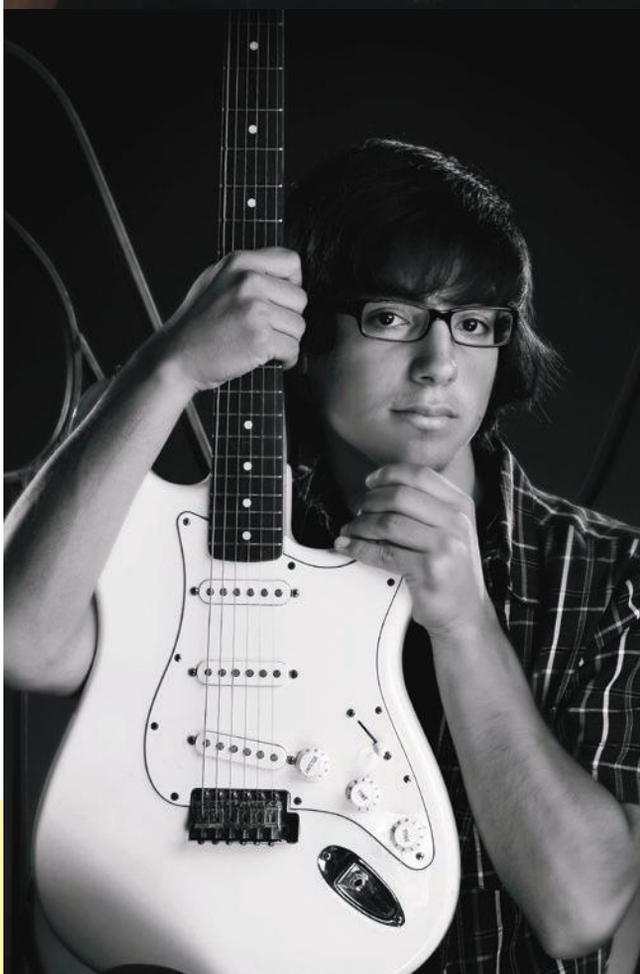


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The First Step

Digital photography has made it possible for the average person to go from camera owner to professional photographer more quickly than ever before. However, there are still many choices new photographers must make to ensure a successful career—and many skills that must be mastered to produce salable images. In this book, I will help you choose the path you wish to travel and arrive at your destination in the best position to succeed.

The How vs. The Why

I was a child of the '80s—when bigger and flashier were better and the faster you could get where you wanted to be, the better off you were. That thinking caused me some setbacks. Like many of you, I didn't go to college. Not only was it expensive, but I also saw it as a “slow way” to get where I wanted to be. Instead, I went directly to the source and learned from working professional photographers. This taught me *how* to handle the situations I was helping them with, which was useful, but it never taught me *why* the photographers made the decisions they did.

In this book, you will hear me talk quite a bit about *how* and *why*. You could watch me do an outdoor session—and, if you paid close attention, you'd be able to duplicate the process I used for that session. You would have learned the *how*. Unfortunately, learning the *how* is the easy part. What if you watched me photograph an

I went directly to the source and learned from working professional photographers.

outdoor session on a sunny day, but the day you went out was cloudy? What if I was photographing a thin model in a mini-skirt and your first client was an overweight senior citizen?

As a professional photographer, you have to know how to produce a salable portrait no matter what the circumstances are. When you are accepting money from a client (no matter how hideous their clothing, no matter how bad the natural lighting, and no matter how ugly the scene or background) you have to deal with the challenges and produce a salable portrait. This is why it's critical to learn not just the *how* but also the *why*—*why* the photographer did what he or she did. What was the thought process that led to the final portraits?

Being a Professional

Even for the hobbyist photographer there are plenty of *how/why* questions to address about what happens when you have a camera in your hands and a subject in front of your lens. For those of us who choose to make our livings in professional photography, there are also even more *how/why* questions to consider. You can have all the camera skills in the world, but if you don't spend just as much (or, frankly, even *more*) time addressing these variables, your business simply won't thrive. The line between what it means to love photography as a hobbyist and what it means to choose photography as your profession has become pretty blurry in recent years, so that's where we'll start in the next chapter.



1. Hobbyist or Professional?

Hobbyist or professional? For many younger photographers, the answer to this question seems like a no-brainer. “*Of course* I want to be a professional photographer!” they proclaim. That might be the case initially—but when you dig into what it really means to go pro, the right answer can be a lot harder to determine.

What’s the Difference?

When I first started in photography, there were two types of photographers: the professionals and the hobbyists. Both groups loved photography, but one group wanted to run a photography business, while the other group just wanted to enjoy photography.

As a professional photographer, I work with cameras every day. This is my job—so when I travel on vacation, I don’t take a bunch of camera equipment and create beautiful photos in beautiful places. When I visit relatives, they always wonder where my camera is to do their family photo. I ask them, “When you travel, do you bring your tools so you can fix the family toilets and plumbing problems?” I love photography, but I do it *every* day.

Another tough realization young photographers face is that being a professional photographer doesn’t mean you take photographs all the time. As a business owner, you will spend much more time marketing and advertising your business, dealing with clients, and handling behind-the-scenes work than you will spend actually making photographs. In fact, the average new photographer spends

Being a professional photographer doesn’t mean you take photographs all the time.

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A business owner must understand every facet of running a business or it isn't worth the time invested.

about 70 percent of their time doing business-related tasks and only about 20 to 30 percent of their time behind the camera. This is one reason that so many talented younger photographers get frustrated with the profession.

I'm not trying to talk you out of anything, but you should have a clear understanding of what being a professional photographer is—and what it's not.

Look at Your Bookshelf

A good example of the difference I'm talking about can be found in comparing the bookshelves of the two types of photographers.

When you look at the bookshelf of the professional photographer, you will obviously find books on photography, but there will also be books on marketing, advertising, selling, packaging, merchandising, psychology, customer service, budgeting, controlling cash flow—you get the picture. A business owner of any kind must understand every facet of running a business or it isn't worth the time invested.

The hobbyist has one type of book on his or her shelf: photography! Since photography is all they have to focus on, they don't have to stick to reading and practicing just the types of photography their business specializes in. They can follow

► As a business owner, your profession may be photography—you'll spend a lot more time on sales, marketing, and customer service than photography.



their interests to read about (and shoot) nature photography, wildlife, nudes—whatever they like.

As a professional photographer, you create your images to please your client, whoever that client may be. When you are a hobbyist, you take each image to please yourself. One isn't better than another. It's just different.

The Rush to Make Money

While we all enjoy receiving recognition for the photographs we create—and money *is* a great form of recognition—you have to ask yourself whether you want to create photographs for the love of photography, solely to fulfill your creative passions, or whether you want to create salable photography and accept the responsibilities of being a businessperson. You can't be both!

For example, you might love to have friends over and cook new dishes for them. You have fun as you watch them enjoy what you have cre-

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As a professional photographer, you create your images to please your client, whoever that client may be.

ated and then get the praise for an excellent meal. Everything about this is enjoyable because it is a hobby, not a profession. Your friends don't complain if they don't care for something because they are getting a free meal. They also don't care if it takes longer than expected; they are enjoying your wine and conversation. You are under no pressure to perform because they are your friends.

You love cooking so much, you decide to open a restaurant. Sounds logical, right? You

▼ The real test of your skill is when someone loves your images *and* pays you a lot of money for them.



find a little building that was a restaurant so all you have to do is hang out your sign and start paying rent. People start coming in—but these aren't your friends getting free food. These are people who are paying for food and who demand it be exactly the way they want it. If they want you to pour ketchup over the perfect hollandaise sauce with your Eggs Benedict, that is what you do—because they are giving you money for what they want. All of sudden, you are spending a lot of time shopping, marketing, bookkeeping, dealing with health inspectors—far more time than you spend cooking. At this point, it is no longer about fun and passion; it is about running a business and turning a profit for the many hours of work you invest. When you start counting up the hours you've invested and realize you make less per hour than a fast-food worker or the bag boy at your local market, it can get a little humbling.

As a hobbyist, you can create anything, any way you want to, with only your own tastes guiding you. You are only responsible for yourself—as long as you don't break any laws or trespass on anyone's land, you are all set. You can photograph a person one day and a sunset the next day. You have the ultimate creative freedom without any responsibility. When you photograph someone and give them free photos, they tell you what an amazing artist you are—a real gifted genius. As a professional, you are only considered a gifted genius when someone says you are an amazing artist *and then pays you a large sum of money* for your work!

The Business of Service

Years ago, I had my eyes opened to how professional photography (just like the restaurant business we discussed in the previous section) is more



▲ Photography seems like it's about art—but as a business, it's more about service.

about service than art. I had been in business for a few years, and I had a client call me for a family portrait. I prided myself on my creative family photography. I would go to special locations, select specific scenes because of their posing options, coordinate the family's clothing, and design the portrait for the area in the home where it was to hang. Family portraits were the most challenging type of photography I did—but I loved the challenge and my clients seemed to love the work I created.

This particular client was very sweet, but she didn't want to do anything that I normally do before a family session. I usually look at the clothing



▲ You can only create what the client wants if you ask them what they want.

so there are no surprises. I look at the location to see if it will work. This lady said she knew what they were wearing and had a spot selected for the photograph. Needing the work, I took her credit card number to reserve her appointment time for the session at her home. I showed up on the day of the session, ready to create a beautiful family portrait for this lady and her family. But when my subjects appeared to meet me, they were all dressed in the clothing they wear to church—which for them meant traditional Russian outfits, not suits or dresses.

She took me to the spot she had selected. It was a large white wall off of her kitchen. She had

a white bench sitting in front of the white wall. I thought to myself, “Oh no!” Then she gave me a photograph that was taken of some of their family members years ago—in the same religious outfits, sitting on a white bench, in front of a white wall. I reluctantly set up my lighting. The entire time, I was thinking that a monkey with a camera could have taken this photo—what a waste of my immense talent! (Okay, I might have been a little full of myself back then.) I did the photos to match the old photo and thanked them before leaving. I knew when the lady saw my prices and these plain photos she was going to simply say, “No thanks.” However, she came in, saw the photos, and proclaimed them *perfect*. She then proceeded to buy a wall portrait for her home—and gift-size portraits for her family and friends. The result was a sizable order. It was nice actually being able to pay my rent that month! From this experience, I learned two valuable lessons.

1. Art Is Determined by the Buyer, Not the Creator

As professionals, we don’t create what *we* think clients should have; we find out what they want and create it for them—that is our job. I have seen more photographers come and go in this profession because they never accepted the fact that art is in the eye of the buyer. You will have a short career if your approach is to talk clients into buying what you decided to create. You’ll go a lot farther if you produce what they want to buy and then concentrate on selling them *more!*

2. We Serve Those Who Pay Us

To be a successful professional photographer you have to like business as much as you like photography, because no one’s photography will sell it-

self. You have to market it, book it, plan it, sell it, photograph it, edit it, package it, and deliver it. You notice that the “photograph it” entry on that list is just one of *many* steps that a professional must undertake in the photographic process. And don’t think you can skip on the other steps; if you put any less effort into those facets of your operation than you do on the “photograph it” step, you won’t be in business long.

Evaluate Your Readiness

Far too many people buy a camera and, three weeks later, try to photograph a wedding. That is a difficult assignment with huge importance to the bride and groom. You can’t re-create a wedding day and there are no do-overs. In my book, it’s criminal to mislead a client in this way about your ability or experience. So if you’ve decided that you *do* want to make the leap from hobbyist to pro, how do you know when you’re really *ready*? How do you know when you can make the transition in a responsible way that sets the stage for continued success?

1. Don’t Trust Your Friends and Family

Lots of new photographers do photos for friends and relatives, then give away the photographs for free and get a big head when their sister or brother says, “You are really good, you should open a studio.” When asked to evaluate a product, even strangers tend to want to please the person asking; unless the product is terrible, they will almost always respond positively. With people you *know*, you’re getting even more skewed evaluations. The only way you get a *true idea* of the product’s worth is by asking strangers to buy it. When they decide to shell out their own money (or not), you have an honest response.

2. Be Honest About Your Willingness to Take Responsibility

The minute you accept money for your services, you have accepted responsibility for producing exactly what the person who paid you wants. If they want a white wall and bench in their family photo, that is what they get. Responsibility goes beyond simply listening to what your client wants, though. It also means having the needed skills to provide a professional quality product, *no matter what challenges come up*. Would you want *you* documenting your once-in-a-lifetime wedding or creating portraits of an elderly grandparent who might not be around for a retake?

▼ Professionals have to be prepared to get great images with every client and in any setting.



3. Don't Expect to Learn on the Job

As an author, I have had many conversations with younger photographers who are learning photography. They argue that they *have to* accept clients—basically to pay for their education in photography. They have to make money while they learn the skills required to become a professional photographer. All I can say is—wow! I am certainly glad that *doctors and lawyers* don't look at the learning process that way. (“Hi, I'm Docketor Smith—I put in an extra ‘k’ there because, like the ‘krab’ with a ‘k,’ I am not a real doctor. Medical school and living expenses are high, so I deliver some babies and do a few open-heart surgeries on the side to get by. I mean, you don't expect me to learn this stuff without getting paid, right? Who can afford that?”)

4. Decide if You Can Be an Asset to the Profession

If you want to have a life-long career in photography, it's important to acknowledge that you—and every other young photographer—are actively creating the professional climate you will have to work in. You can be part of a profession that is

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There are acceptable ways to earn extra money in photography without deceiving the buying public.

trusted and well paid, or you can be part of one that earns little respect in the eyes of the buying public. It's up to you. While you can't control others, conducting *yourself* in a responsible manner is the best way to ensure you're working toward establishing a fulfilling and profitable career in a respected industry.

While you shouldn't do any paying job (especially one that can't be retaken) that you are not professionally trained for, there *are* acceptable ways to earn extra money in photography without deceiving the buying public. This is the topic of chapter 3. First, however, let's look at how you can begin to acquire the skills and experience you need to take on professional assignments.

▼ With every client, and every image, you are part of building the professional climate we all work in.



2. Learn How to Learn

With so many new photographers wanting to become professionals, lots of “teachers” have popped up and many companies are getting into the business of educating aspiring pros. Remember this: your education in photography—and eventually your *career*—will only be as good as the people you learn from.

Do you really want to be learning from some guy who’s just thirty pages ahead of you in the text book?

Learn From Masters

In today’s professional climate, many photographers are looking to learn as quickly as possible. As a result, they take direction from people who aren’t that much more knowledgeable than they are. Too often, I go to the park on a Saturday afternoon and see photography *students* teaching “classes” on photography. That isn’t good. Do you really want to be learning from some guy who’s just thirty pages ahead of you in the text book? I do realize when you first start, even a student can look like a wizard because they seem to know much more than you, but who you learn from will affect how long it takes you to get where you want to be. So if you are currently being taught by a student, I can’t say this strongly enough: *STOP!* The bad habits you learn will take you longer to break than just learning to do things properly in the first place.

If you want to be a master of your craft, you need to learn from masters! It’s that simple. Look at the credentials of those who you learn from and never take advice from anyone who hasn’t achieved what it is that you wish to achieve. Unless they have *succeeded* in do-

The High Cost of “Free”

Sometimes it is the “free” things in life that cost you the most. YouTube is free—and some of the photography videos on YouTube are very interesting because they are produced by qualified educators who promote their educational programs through short instructional videos. In fact, you will see some videos that I have done on YouTube. Unfortunately, the majority of instructional YouTube videos for photographers are produced by people who lack the skills and experience to be educating others.



ing what you want to learn, “teachers” are passing along theories that may or may not work.

Who’s Your Teacher?

On that note, I’m going to tell you what you should know about *me*—and why I’m qualified to teach you about this business.

I started learning photography as a high-school sophomore. Up to that point in my life, I had never taken any photos—but two weeks into the class, I knew that this was the career I wanted. I got a full-time job (weekends and evenings) and started putting together a simple studio and dark-room. I studied, read, and worked with as many professional photographers as would let me assist them for free.

When I was sixteen, I photographed my first wedding. By the time I was twenty-one, I opened the studio I still own today—a few decades later. That journey has seen many changes, and I’ve made many adjustments to my approach and to my business in order to remain relevant in the changing marketplace.

I have made millions of dollars over the years in this profession. I have written sixteen books on professional photography. I have been the featured speaker at national conventions and have given many seminars to professional photographers. That said, I don’t have all the answers—but I do have many of them. Basically, I have lived the life you want to have if you want to be a professional photographer.

Formal Instruction vs. Self-Education and Mentoring

It would be great if all aspiring professional photographers could go to Brooks Institute in Santa Barbara, California—it’s one of the premier pho-

tography programs in the country. I considered studying there, but the reality was that my parents and I just couldn't afford it. I also looked at all my other options—everything from enlisting in the Navy (which, at that time, had a terrific photography program) to studying at the local colleges. Finally I considered the alternative of self-education. Like many of you, I wanted to get to the good stuff as quickly as possible. I made some good choices and some poor ones—but such is life when you are young.

When I was learning photography, I saw the difference between the photographers who went to college to learn photography and those who assembled their schooling piece by piece. The photographers who studied photography at college had a deep understanding of photography. They not only understood the *how*, but also (and more importantly) the *why*. They were able to come up with a plan B during those “oh no!” moments. While the structured learning offered a better understanding of the nuts and bolts of photography, however, it seemed that some these photographers lacked the vision to learn *everything else* that a professional photographer must master to run a successful business.

Knowing myself well, I couldn't see spending a lot of time studying the history of photography. I appreciate the work of Ansel Adams, but it doesn't have a lot to do with the practice of photographing a bride, child, senior, or family. I loved the work of some of the classic portrait photographers, but I also knew that I could learn from them simply by purchasing a book—a book that didn't take a whole semester to read. I wanted a practical approach to learning the skills I needed to succeed as a professional photographer. (On that note, I see some of the photog-



▲ Whatever learning method your prefer, your study must include both photography *and* business.

raphy programs today teaching students how to process film . . . really? There are a few semesters of your life you will never get back!)

Once I knew I wasn't going to Brooks, I wanted to get my training as quickly as possible. I bought every book and video I could find by photographers who were successfully doing what I wanted to do. I went to live seminars and conventions. Half the time, I didn't know what they were talking about—but I went, I took notes, and tried as hard as possible to learn the concepts (not just the *how* but the *why*).

*I made some good choices
and some poor ones—but such is life
when you are young.*



I also assisted as many photographers as would let me drag their equipment around for them. For example, my neighbor was a horse photographer. He had a travel trailer converted into a darkroom and he would travel from horse show to horse show photographing the winners, selling the images, and printing them out right after the orders were taken. What did I learn from a horse photographer? First, people buy the most during whatever event they are at. Because he understood that, he sold an 8x10-inch horse portrait for *twice* the price most studio photographers were charging for baby portraits. Second, I learned exactly how to design an image that would make the horse owner happy. (They are very fussy about the way the horse's legs are positioned—and don't even get me started on the ears!)

From a very successful school photographer in southern California I learned a lot about run-

▲ Learning from professional photographers helped me develop the skills I needed to succeed when I opened my own portrait studio.

ning a photography *business* rather than a photography *studio*. This man didn't even have the kids sit down—he photographed them standing up for their ID cards and underclassmen photos. He told me that every student he photographed put \$5.00 in his pocket; the faster he got through them, the more money he earned!

During this time, I also assisted wedding photographers; some were good and some weren't as good, but they *all* taught me something. I wasn't a genius, but I was determined and I practiced what I learned. When people would tell me the average income for a photographer and urge me to consider another profession, I would just say, "Well, then I'd better not be average!"

That said, I do think that learning photography the way I did was harder than if I had gone to college and received a structured education. There were gaps in my education that took me years to fill—and I learned the *wrong* way to do many things, developing bad habits that took years to unlearn. If I were doing it all again, I would start at a local college photography program. I would learn the basics and then study everything I could to accelerate my learning. The one thing I'm happy I did was that I never studied or learned from anyone who wasn't successfully doing something I wanted to do, even if it was just one aspect of the business I wanted to build.

I am not here to tell you the “right” way to achieve success, but I do urge you to consider your choices very carefully as you build the foundation of your career. I am not saying you should *not* go to college, but I'm also not saying that you *should*. You have to decide the best path for *you*.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Learning photography is more about trial and error than about theory. But even in devising your trials, you have to be careful to direct your learning. Here are some key things to remember:

1. Implementation Enhances Retention

I can talk to you all day long about how I take photos and you will probably retain about 3 to 5 percent of my instruction. If you take aggressive notes, you may even double that! But if you really want to learn, as you read this book you need to put into practice the things you learn—not when you finish the book but *as you read it*. When you

► If you really want to learn, you have to put each new skill to use right away.

get to a section on lighting, posing, or outdoor photography, schedule a test session immediately to practice and retain what you have learned.

2. Perfect Practice Makes Perfect

Practice doesn't make perfect—*perfect* practice makes perfect. If you practice the wrong way of doing things, you are teaching yourself bad habits that will take you years to overcome. This is the reason I caution against learning from fellow students, newbie professionals, and most of the people on YouTube. They are not the people you want to learn from; following them can leave you frustrated and saddled with bad habits.



3. Practice with Real Subjects in Real Situations

When you photograph perfect people, you're not exactly using your skills to make them look great, you're just using your camera to record reality.

A Few Great Images

Right now, go to your camera and put it on the single shot mode. The key to success in photography isn't taking a lot of photos, it's planning so well that you can take as few as possible—just enough so the client has a variety of expressions in each pose and scene. It's a mistake to get excited at the sound of the camera clicking off six or eight frames per second. No person can change anything—they can't even blink or not blink—in that short amount of time. Can you imagine having to edit out two to four photographs every time your client *blinks*? The key is to slow down and think. Plan the photograph and use the only thing that can set you apart from any other photographer: your mind!



That's something a teenager with an iPhone can do. Instead, you need to practice on people who look like your average clients. For most of us, that means people who are a little overweight, shorter, and a bit awkward in front of the camera. If you can make these real people look like models, you've really learned something. I will tell you right now, it's not easy—that's why more people don't do it. In fact, it's why most photographers fail in business; they never practice photographing the people they will make a living from. If you want to sell portraits to real people, you need to know how to make a less-than-photogenic person look beautiful, how to make a heavier person look slimmer, how to make a short person look taller, and much more. You also need to learn how to photograph them using your equipment, in your shooting area(s), and with the lighting that's available to you for real sessions. If you do all your test sessions at sunset but your clients only book mid-afternoon appointments, you're going to struggle.

Master Previsualization

Another important part of learning is really understanding that a portrait has to be created *in your mind* before you can capture it *in your camera*. The best photographers use their minds; the weakest use their cameras like machine guns—shooting countless images until something happens to look passable. Machine-gunning (just shooting away and hoping for the best) is the easiest way to ensure you never learn photography. When you are new to photography, this planning process takes time, but unless you start using and developing these skills, you will never improve.

My photographic process is as follows with each client. First, I look at the client as I greet



him or her. I look for problems like weight gain, thinning hair, uneven eyes, sagging skin, etc.—things that need to be minimized or softened. I then help the client select the clothing that will work best to conceal any area they will not want to see in the photograph (things that, if visible, will keep them from buying the photographs). As they are changing into the clothing I selected, I begin visualizing how to pose them to look their best and hide as many problem areas as possible while still creating the look or style they desire. From there, I choose the lighting, background, and camera height that best suits the client’s individual needs. At this point, the portrait is created in my mind. I then tell my assistant where everything goes and what background or scene to use. When the client comes out of the changing room, I show him or her the pose, help them into

▲ Before you pick up your camera, the image should exist in your mind.

it, and adjust the lighting to them (in the pose). I then take a second to look for any problems with things showing that shouldn’t (bra straps, zippers being down, bulges that shouldn’t show, large arms, hair showing on a woman’s forearms, etc.). After addressing these issues, it’s finally time to pick up my camera and photograph the client.

I use my mind and my skill to *create* an image; too many photographers today only seem to finally engage their minds when it comes time to edit through hundreds of crappy images to find the few (accidentally) good ones. As a professional photographer, you can’t do photography by guessing or rely on “art by accident.”

3. Earning While Learning

Here's the first rule: never accept a job that is once-in-a-lifetime (one that can't be re-shot) until you are fully trained and have the proper equipment to deliver a professional product—no matter what challenges might come up during the assignment.

Know When to Say No

Weddings are the first area some young photographers try to get into, but they should really be the *last*. Weddings are one of the most challenging and meaningful jobs in professional photography, and they require the most equipment to capture professional-quality images. To photograph a wedding, you must not only be very skilled, you must be very organized and able to work very quickly under pressure.

Like most photographers, I did weddings for years, so let me assure you of this: the first time you have to tell a bride that her wedding photographs didn't come out is an experience you will never forget. You will see a sweet, almost angelic face turn instantly demonic. Every photographer who shot weddings in the film era has his or her story about this experience. Mine happened when an entire packet of film rolls was lost. I had shipped my film to the lab for years in prepaid envelopes. Everyone back then did the same thing and I never really thought about it. However, I was dating a woman who was a supervisor for an overnight shipping company and she gave me a bad time about trusting the post office with wedding film. I saw her point, so I started using overnight shipping

The first time you have to tell a bride that her wedding photographs didn't come out is an experience you will never forget.

with a tracking number. A month later, her company lost a wedding—and even with a tracking number, the film could never be located.

I contacted the bride and groom and explained what had happened. The shipping company had lost the film, but *I* was the evil man who ruined their wedding by not delivering the photos as promised. The bride turned evil. She was going to sue, then she wanted all her money back and for me to pay for tuxes, flowers, and airline tickets for the wedding party to re-create those photos. It got crazy. She even wanted a limo to pick everyone up. It was one of the most stressful experiences of my life. Finally, it got so ridiculous that I told her I would return all the money she paid

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A month later, her company lost a wedding—and even with a tracking number, the film could never be located.

(which is what the wedding contract guaranteed) and give them a 16x20-inch print of the two of them that I did during a bridal session before the wedding. The husband threatened to beat me up; the woman said I was going to hell for what I had done to her.

I've shared this story in such detail because I want you to understand how important weddings

▼ Professional assignments should only be accepted once you have the training to complete them.





▲ If you sign on to work as an assistant to a professional photographer, be prepared to sign a letter of non-competition.

are to those who hire us. In this case, the disaster was caused by a shipping company and not by anything I had done. Can you imagine what the reaction would have been if I had lied about my abilities and it was clearly *my* fault that this bride didn't have her wedding photos?

Fortunately, there are better ways to make money early in your career without putting people's milestone events or your own reputation in jeopardy! This is the time to use your imagination. Any business, organization, non-profit, publication, school, and/or professional photog-

rapher who uses photos or needs help taking photographs, can provide an excellent money-making opportunity.

Become an Assistant

The first place new photographers should look for employment is with established photographers. However, it's not uncommon for professional photographers, most of whom are desperately trying to make a living, to be resistant to hiring up-and-comers. After all, they know that everything they teach you will be rewarded by you becoming another competitor . . . and likely one who has a very similar style. I was faced with the same dilemma but in reverse; I needed to *hire* photographers but I wasn't going to train my own competitors.

A Letter of Non-Competition

A simple solution to this problem is a letter of non-competition. This is a binding agreement stating that you will not actively market to the one or two main types of clients the employing photographer works with. Notice I said “actively market.” If a photographer hires you, you are being both paid *and* trained in your profession at the same time. You owe this photographer the respect of not harming his business. On the other hand, you shouldn’t have to move to another state once you are trained to make a living.

I specialize in senior photography. Therefore, my letter of non-competition states that the photographer cannot actively market to seniors or approach high schools to contract them for senior portraits or dances. The photographer *could* photograph seniors who came to them through passive marketing, but not market to seniors directly.

If you sign such an agreement, be prepared to honor it. The first photographer I trained quit due to issues with scheduling, then promptly approached two of the schools that I was working with. Luckily, I had good relationship with both high schools and they knew of my agreement with our photographers. They were very disappointed in the lack of character the photographer showed by violating our terms. With high school contracts, such violations are a bit easier to prove than with weddings, children, and any other type of portrait photography. When you’re hired, the photographer is really trusting you will be a person of character; don’t jeopardize your reputation by acting otherwise.

Support Work Is How You Start

If you are hired by a photographer, realize that (unless the studio is very large) you will not be

Don’t Be a Poacher

When shooting on spec, don’t try to poach jobs from photographers who have already been contracted. Photographers used to do this with local dances and proms, hosting “prom photo sessions” in their studio—or in a rented conference room at the same hotel as the dance. There are two problems with this approach. First, you are again photographing a once-in-a-lifetime event; unless you have the experience, you shouldn’t be doing it at all. Second, even if you do have the skills to do prom photos well, you are encroaching on another photographer’s event. Typically, you *both* end up both spending the evening working to break even; it really does no one any good. Finally, let me mention a little thing called karma. You might be the poacher and make a few extra bucks this time, but next time you will be the “poachee,” losing all the money you made and then some.



photographing. You will be doing support work around the studio. The opportunity to learn is still huge because you are working in the type of business you eventually want to run. You have also gained access to a mentor; once you are a proven employee, he or she will usually be willing to share ideas and give you honest feedback on your images and skills. The one problem you may have is focusing on your job and not trying to find every reason in the world to get into the camera room and watch the photographer work!

Speculative Shooting

Speculative shooting (also called shooting “on spec”) is when you create images first, without a client hiring you, and then try and find a buyer. In this digital age, the opportunity and ease of

▼ Professional portrait photographers are called to shoot images indoors and out.



distribution for this type of work has never been greater. Working on speculation is a good way to hone your skills while making a little money—and without getting in over your head.

Many new photographers take sports photos for local school teams. They then post these action photos on a photo-hosting site so parents can purchase them online. In many cases, these sites are linked up with photos labs so the order is immediately forwarded to the lab for printing and then shipped to the buyer.

This same idea can be used for large parties, dances, and celebrations—any event where the attendees will be looking their best. Nothing adds more to the life of a party than the red-carpet, Hollywood feel of flashes popping as the guests arrive, and that’s the way you should sell it to whoever is putting on the party. Explain that you won’t charge them for doing this (each couple or group only buys photos if they want them) and you will add to the excitement of the party with this red carpet treatment. At this kind of event, it’s a good idea to give each person a ticket with a link to *their* photos. Be careful not to allow people to look at *all* the photos; they should only be able to order their own images, not photos of local celebrities or the woman they are stalking.

Shoot for Publications and Businesses

There are many publications and businesses that require photography but don’t have the budget for a professional. How about this? Put an ad on Craigslist offering to photograph the items someone wants to sell on Craigslist; for a set price, you can take the photos and set up the listing.

Once you start looking, you will see opportunity all around you. For example, small newspa-



pers or newsletters need a steady flow of simple images to highlight their stories. Go to the supermarket and look around near the front door; you'll probably see a stand with a whole bunch of neighborhood publications as well as shopping booklets for car and motorcycle sales, apartment rentals, home sales, etc. These publications require a *huge* number of photos and don't have the budget for professional photography. Best of all, if you mess up the photos, they can be retaken. The worst thing that can happen is you are not asked to work for them again. That's much better than having an angry bride threatening to sue you and sticking pins into your voodoo doll!

Here's a tip. If you want to get into the real estate market, don't go to an office and ask about doing all the photography for agents. Each office usually suggests a few photographers, but each agent decides on who to use for their own listings. Find an agent and volunteer to shoot some properties for free, then dress professionally, be

▲ Professional portrait photographers are called to photograph single subjects as well as groups.

on time, and do a great job. If you do those three things, the agent will be so happy with you that referrals are almost guaranteed. (Since these types of jobs are at the lowest end of the pay scale, agents and publishers often have to work with people who are not responsible and/or don't present themselves professionally.)

While this may not be the kind of photography you want to do professionally, it gets you into the game without ruining your reputation or giving a black-eye to the reputation of the profession as a whole.

Volunteer to shoot some properties for free, then dress professionally, be on time, and do a great job.

4. Gear: Think Like a Pro

The success of your photography is based on what you know, not what you photograph with. Many young photographers make the mistake of thinking that a certain camera, bigger lens, or better lighting gear will improve their images and be a factor in their success. However, equipment won't make you a better (or, for that matter, worse) photographer; only practice and careful decision-making will do that.

Control Imaging Costs

I clearly remember the first time I saw a person demonstrating digital retouching. The image was a full-length bridal portrait, with the woman shown holding her veil in each hand. The hands were exactly the same on each side of the body—perfectly symmetrical. The person doing the demonstration explained that the image would be better if the one arm was bent with the hand coming upward, while the other arm stayed extended down.

The fact that digital made this correction feasible is all fine and good, but shouldn't the photographer have posed the bride properly in the first place? Also, who *paid* for the time to remove the bride's arm and reposition it? As one of the characters in *Jurassic Park* said, "You got so caught up in what *could* be done that you didn't think if it *should* be done!"

Today's imaging technologies have given us amazing options, but each one of them takes *time*—time that has to be paid for. If you can't get your images the way you want them in your cam-

Shouldn't the photographer have posed the bride properly in the first place?

era (aside from simple retouching for acne and other blemishes), you need to quit spending so much time fiddling on the computer and work on developing your lighting, posing, and shooting skills.

Cameras: Tools, Not Status Symbols

Many photographers make the mistake of looking at their cameras as toys, not tools. Is your photograph shot with a Hasselblad any better than my photograph shot with a Canon? When I buy a camera (and, for that matter, any equipment), I look for the cheapest camera that will hold up to the heavy workload in my studios and allow me to produce images of the size that I sell to my clients. As digital cameras have evolved, file sizes have actually become larger than we need to create the biggest prints we sell in my studio (for seniors, that's a 20x24-inch print). Still, I know photographers who photograph seniors using a digital back that can produce images that are vastly larger than they would ever sell to a client. To me, that is throwing money away on toys, not wisely investing in tools. You can get emotional when you buy a car—that's a personal thing. A camera, on the other hand, is a piece of business equipment that will wear out, drop dramatically in value, and eventually be discarded when the newer models come out.

Lenses

Now that I've kept you from maxing out your credit cards on the latest and greatest camera, let's talk about lenses. Rather than brand name,

► The focal length of the lenses you choose is far more important than the brand name.





what you should be thinking about is focal length. Some photographers select a lens based on the working distance they want between the camera and the subject (for example, I see photographers working outdoors with a normal lens because it allows them to work closer to the client). Some photographers, on the other hand, use a huge a telephoto for no other reason than it looks cool.

The proper way to select a lens is to decide how you want the photograph to look and then select the lens that will achieve that look. As a result, I almost never use a “normal” lens (50mm for a camera with a full-frame sensor). Using a normal focal-length lens gives you the same look that people are used to seeing in the candid photos they take at home—and people won’t pay (or at least won’t pay as much) for portraits that look normal

▲► Longer lenses provide the best perspective for creating a professional portrait.

in any way. Normal lenses also affect a person’s appearance in ways that aren’t pretty. Typically, the nose appears larger and the person’s head looks slightly distorted.

A better choice for almost all portrait photographers is a lens in the 100mm to 135mm range (be sure to take into account the focal-length factor for your camera model). This gives you the best perspective for creating a salable portrait. It isolates the subject, putting the foreground and background out of focus for more impact on the subject and a greater feeling of depth.

Large telephotos (250mm–400mm) are useful when you have a very distracting background

you want to throw completely out of focus. But keep this in mind: *you* are in control of the background you use. A beautiful background adds to the overall look of the portrait, so if you find you have to use a long telephoto to throw an ugly background completely out of focus, you're probably better off moving to a more attractive spot to create your portrait.

Lights and Modifiers

Will a more expensive brand of lighting make your subject look better? I think not. That said, certain lighting equipment *can* make your life easier. Especially for digital, life is easier if you work with a single brand of lighting in each camera area. Each brand of lighting produces a unique color of light; they may all be close, but they're never exactly the same. White balancing your digital camera is much easier when all the lights produce the same color. I have twelve shooting areas and just about every light known to man. To make my life easier (and avoid having to purchase more light-

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Especially for digital, life is easier if you work with a single brand of lighting in each camera area.

ing), I grouped the same brand of lights together in each camera area, creating a consistent color within that area. This can also work with smaller studios; simply group the same brand of lighting for your main and fill, then use the other brands of light as your hair and background lights. This way, all the lights that determine skin tone will produce the same color temperature.

Make Purchases Based on Results

Equipment should be selected to achieve the desired results. Don't select a lens (or a light, or a camera, etc.) because it looks cool or because it's the one used by another photographer. Select the equipment you need to achieve the results *you* are





▲ Buy only the gear you need to create the images your clients like and purchase.

looking for. This type of thinking is what separates the creators (who control everything in their images) from the copiers—and the photographers who just don't care.

Once you've decided what equipment you need to do what you want to do, you can go on to consider how much you want to spend and how durable the equipment is. When you look at equipment purchasing, remember that you will only make so much money this year in your business—so how much you *spend* will determine how much is left over to live on.

Finally, you don't need seventeen backup pieces of equipment. You need one camera and one backup camera for each camera area (or photographer) you have. You need one backup light for every camera area—and that's it! If you do weddings, you may need an additional backup—but you still don't need six or seven camera bodies “just in case.” If you have more equipment than you truly need, sell it and invest in learning how to use the equipment that's left.

Learn to Use What You Have

I am not trying to put equipment manufacturers out of business here. I am just trying to get you over the thinking that equipment in some way makes you a better photographer—because it doesn't. It's knowledge, not equipment or gadgetry, that will make your images beautiful. The point here is simple: shoot with what you have and get better at using it.

Buy new equipment when your old equipment no longer works properly (or your repair bills are too high) and only buy what you need. If you shoot beautiful portraits with an old 35mm camera and your clients don't order sizes larger than 11x14 inches, you're all set! If you find that your clients want larger sizes than you can produce with your current equipment, then you have a reason to upgrade your equipment and a way to pay for the upgrades.

Many photographers struggle financially, and often it's not from a lack of opportunity to make money but because they squander money on things they really don't need in the first place.

5. A Salable Style

Building a successful portrait photography business means developing a salable style. Unless you plan on giving your work away, you have to know what paying clients are looking for in a photograph—and then you have to be able to create it in the camera.

With a well-conceived style, you can create images that sell themselves.

Understand What *All* Clients Want

With an off-target style, you can struggle for each sale; with a well-conceived one, you can create images that sell themselves. Many photographers spend their careers trying to convince clients to buy images that were created to suit the photographer's tastes, not to fulfill the client's expectations. Successful photographers determine what sells, then learn to enjoy and improve on that style.

Beautiful Eyes

In photography class, we are all taught that the first thing people look at in portraits is the subject's eyes. The eyes are the windows to the soul—but if they aren't lit and posed properly, the windows are closed.

Somehow, many photographers forget this important concept, lighting their images to create contour-defining shadows on the face without considering the eyes. Other photographers get so set in their ways that they actually forget to lower or raise the main light to ensure the eyes are lit properly in each pose (we'll look at exactly how to do this in chapter 10).

Direct the Eye with Contrast

Understanding contrast can also help you to emphasize assets and conceal problems. For example, consider boudoir photography. In traditional portraiture, you draw the viewer's eye to the face; in boudoir photography, you can selectively increase the contrast to direct the viewer's attention to a part of the body that the subject's romantic partner thinks is attractive. If the client has beautiful legs, an ample bust, or a washboard stomach, that is the focal point. If, on the other hand, your portrait subject has figure problems you know he or she won't want to see in the final portraits, you can reduce contrast to conceal them. Shooting an overweight subject in dark clothes against a dark background, for example, makes the outline of their body less apparent. By paying attention to all of these elements, you can begin to create portraits that direct the viewers' attention where you want it and keep them from noticing what you don't want them to see. This gives you total control over your images, and it's the essence of great portraiture: understanding what you are creating and using it to control the viewer's response.



Shape-Defining Shadows

The next characteristic paying clients are looking for is shadows. We are all taught that light is our photographic paintbrush, but that isn't quite true. Painters and photographers have always struggled to give their canvas a third dimension—a sense of depth. When the illusion of a third dimension is achieved, the artist has taken a flat surface and given it life. If you study fine paintings or photographs, though, you will notice the illusion of depth is not produced by the *lightest* areas of the portrait but by the *darkest*. It is darkness that draws our eye to the light. It is darkness that gives a lifeless canvas the illusion of depth.

We've all seen work by mall photographers or national photo companies, and they tend to look flat. There's usually very little or no apparent shadowing. Controlling shadows is difficult for the inexperienced photographers who tend to staff these studios, so most companies reduce the lighting ratio to provide little or no shadowing. If light were *really* our paintbrush, these portraits would be award-winners, because they have nothing but light in them, right?

Contrast

Another common misconception is that our eyes are drawn to the lightest area of a portrait first. In



▲ Look at these images and notice where your eye goes first in each one. In portraits, that should be the face. In the image on the right, however, it's the shirt.

fact, our eyes are drawn to *contrast*. To illustrate this point, look at the two images above, taken against a pure-white background. In the first photograph, everything (including the young lady's hair) is white or nearly white, so her tan skin is the darkest area in the portrait, and that's where your eye is drawn to first. In the second photo, the same subject has a black shirt on. In this sea of white, the black shirt becomes the darkest area in the photograph—and that's where your eye is drawn.

Now, knowing that our eyes are drawn to contrast, where should the area of highest contrast be? Where do you want the viewer of an image to look first? The answer is the face (with those beautifully lit eyes we just discussed). Whether the portrait is head-and-shoulders, three-quarter-length, or full-length, the face should be the focal point. This is so important that it bears repeating: no matter what your portrait style is, your first goal is to direct the viewer's attention to the subject's face. Everything in a portrait should be selected to help achieve that end—and this includes the lighting and shadowing, the clothing, the posing, and the background.

Expert Retouching and Printing

Retouching and printing are important components of your success. Clients expect images to be free from blemishes, with the obvious lines and under-eye circles reduced to make the subject more attractive. Clients also expect the skin tone to resemble the actual skin tone of the subject (slight darkening for fairer-skinned subjects and slight lightening for darker-skinned subjects

▼ A white background and white top provide nice contrast with darker skin tones—keeping the emphasis on the face.





is usually acceptable, however). If you let unretouched images out of your studio—and I say this from both an artistic and a business standpoint—you’re making a big mistake. Neither you nor the client will be completely satisfied with unretouched photos. Additionally, these subpar images will go out into your community as representative of your work—and you don’t want potential clients to see them and think, “Oh, so that’s the best they can do.” This reaction isn’t going to make them pick up the phone and book a session.

Therefore, clients shouldn’t have the choice to skip retouching. Either increase the price of your portraits to cover retouching or make retouching a separate fee the client *must* pay for each pose they order (they pay the fee only once per image, regardless of how many prints of that image

▲ Only retouched images should be released from your studio and go out into the world as representative of you and your business.

they order). To avoid having unretouched images leave our studio, we added what we call an “image fee” to most of our packages. This is a charge for retouching the first portrait ordered from any pose. If you decide to charge an image fee, be sure to note the amount (and give a brief explanation) in all your information; you don’t want clients to be surprised when they order. Even clients who know about the charge will sometimes ask why they must pay it. We explain that this is the only fair way to charge for this service—after all, we have clients who order an entire package from one pose, while other clients will order from ten

► A sexy image for the subject's romantic interest (*top*) requires a different approach than a casual portrait for the family (*bottom*).

different poses. If we included the charge in the print price, we would be overcharging the clients who ordered from a single pose. We also have inclusive plans that have this fee built into the cost.

When it comes to printing, some photographers prefer a natural skin tone, with no additional colors or saturation added; other photographers like a rich, colorful skin tone. There is no right or wrong, just personal preference, but you had better make sure that your clients have the same taste as your own. With film, labs developed their unique style of printing skin tones and were very consistent in achieving the same quality of skin tone from client to client. Digital photographers, however, often have to take personal control of this aspect of their work. Whether you print in your studio or continue to work with a lab, how you adjust your files and deal with color management issues will greatly affect the skin tones in your final prints.

Understand Your Client's Individual Needs

To succeed in portraiture, you need to do the things all clients want—but you also have to identify what your *specific* client expects from the session. This includes understanding both the intended audience for the images and the subject's expectations for how they will be presented in their portraits.

The Purpose of the Portrait

Imagine that a young woman comes to your studio for a session. All you know is she wants a por-





trait of herself. Without finding out the purpose of the portrait, you are shooting in the dark. She might want a business portrait, a portrait for her husband, or an image for her grandparents.

Even when the client defines the purpose of the portrait, you should ensure you're both on the same page. Imagine a woman calls to have a “sexy” portrait taken for her husband. I want you to envision what poses, clothing (or lack of it), and backgrounds you would use to photograph this woman. Do you have the images in your mind? Good. Now, when she gets to the studio, you find out her husband is a minister. Are there any images in your mind that might be appropriate for Pastor Bob? Adjectives like sexy, happy, natural, and wholesome represent different things to different people. Before you decide how to

▶ ▲ You should always be looking for ways to hide your clients' problem areas and emphasize their assets. That's one of the keys to creating professional portraits that sell.



photograph someone, you had better understand what these things mean to them.

The Client's “Problem Areas”

Almost every person has something in their appearance that they would change if they could. There are two general types of problems that you

will come across when working with your clients: imagined problems and real problems.

The “imagined” problems are normally found in attractive, photogenic clients. Sometimes, the person who has these problems is the only one who can actually see them. A typical imagined problem is something like, “One of my eyes is smaller than the other,” “One of my ears is lower than the other,” or “My smile seems crooked.”

The “real” problems are the issues that almost every one of us has. We are never as thin as we would like, we think our noses are too large, our ears stick out too much, and our eyes are too big or too small. These problems are easier for most photographers to address because they are more easily identified. We may sympathize with real problems more than imagined problems, but all of a client’s problems need to be softened if the session is to be profitable.

How to Talk with Clients

I have spent a great deal of time training my staff to obtain all of this information from clients and pass it along to me as seamlessly as possible.

We have an information sheet filled out for each client, listing the reason the portrait is being taken, who the portraits are being taken for, who will be in the portraits, and the basic tastes of all of the listed people. Our staff members then ask specific questions to get clients talking about their ideas and what their perfect portrait would look like. They also bring up the fact that many people have concerns about their appearance and that there are many ways to hide, correct, or soften problem areas if we know about them. One

► Client doesn’t love her arms? No problem. Choose an outfit with long sleeves.

We have each client look through sample books targeted at the types of images they are taking.

way to get people to open up is to ask questions that require only a yes/no response. For example, instead of asking them to list their least favorite features, you could say, “A lot of women worry about the size or shape of their nose. Is this something that concerns you?”

Additionally, we have each client look through sample books targeted at the types of images they are taking. They select the ideas they like the best and my assistant writes it all down.

The client sheet is put into the client envelope and, while the client is shown into a dressing room, one of my assistants relays that information



to me. At this point, I know the purpose of the portraits and who they are being taken for. I have a basic understanding of the tastes of the people involved and the ideas selected from the sample books. With all this information, I now have a clear idea of how to design images that are perfectly suited to the purposes of the client.

This is the missing step in most photography businesses. I am good, but I can only create what the clients wants if I know what it is. You are good—and you, too, can create what the client wants if you take the time to find out what it is. Neither you nor I are good enough to give the client what they want without first finding out what that is.

Other Factors in Salability

I've said it before, and I'm going to keep saying it throughout this book: it does little good for you to produce a product that no one wants to buy—or doesn't like enough to purchase at an adequate size for them to enjoy on the wall (and at an adequate profit for you to earn a good living). In addition to the aforementioned factors, here are some things to keep in mind when it comes to creating portraits that will sell.

Idealization and Self-Image

In today's world, most clients will not buy a portrait that simply records them as they are. We all live within a standard of beauty set for us by our culture—by the models and actors used in our fashion magazines, advertisements, television programs, and movies. That is the benchmark to which most of us compare ourselves. However, most of us don't look quite like the “ideal.”

Statistically, for example, we know that most Americans are overweight. Yet, a slim appearance

is part of today's standard. If you could make your clients' faces and bodies look thinner, more in keeping with the standard of beauty, don't you think you'd have a greater chance of selling your images? In my experience, 97 percent of portrait subjects (even ones who are already trim) would like to look slimmer. Therefore, my posing and lighting styles tend to focus on achieving that objective. You will notice that the neck/chin area is hidden in many of my portraits. This the first area to show signs of weight gain (and age), so it's an area of concern for both male and female portrait subjects. For clients with average to round faces, posing and lighting can be used in harmony to create a narrower, slimmer view of the face that makes subjects feel better about their appearance.



Basically, the portrait has to match how your subject would *like* to look—and how they probably *do* look in their own mind. Our subjects' self-images can work against us as photographers. This is especially true with a subject whose appearance has been transformed by the gradual effects of aging. How many men do you photograph who are nearly bald but act surprised when they see “some bald guy” in their family portrait? How many women have you photographed who now shop at the larger-size clothing stores but seem surprised when their portraits don't show them looking like they did in college? As we age, our minds protect our egos a bit, preventing us from having to deal with the real image of ourselves. You can't sell a portrait if the subject's depiction in it doesn't

match (or at least come close to) their self-image. Self-image makes your job as a photographer much harder, because it is not your perception of the client that matters, it is the client's—unless, of course, you don't care about money and profit!

Bigger Faces Mean Bigger Sales

Scenic portraits, those with a small subject against a large, beautiful background, have become more popular in the last few years—at least in terms of what photographers talk about and display. I can appreciate the beauty of a scenic portrait showing

▼ Photographers love posing longer viewers (*left*), but clients almost always buy closer shots (*below*). Be sure to create both looks.





◀▶ Each client is unique. They require (and deserve) a look that is customized to minimize problems and emphasize assets—like this young lady’s great legs (*left and facing page*).

Unfortunately, I have a sneaking suspicion that the proliferation of scenic portraits has less to do with satisfying clients than with making the photographer’s job easier. With a smaller face size, the quality of the lighting is less critical—in fact, with a sufficiently amazing skyline, people might not even notice that the lighting on the face is actually pretty bad! If you truly have all your clients plunking down their hard-earned money for large wall portraits (large enough to really see the faces), then I say keep doing what you are doing. However, if you are hiding the faces in the landscape to disguise the fact that you’re not in control of the lighting, you’re headed in a bad direction.

A Customized Look for Each Subject

Another obstacle photographers have to overcome is the average client’s unique ability to love a sample portrait but then hate that same portrait idea when they see themselves in it. While it’s important to listen to what the client wants, it’s also important to know when they are wrong. Clients are paying for your expertise, so when you see someone has made a choice that isn’t in their best interests, you need to guide them in a better direction. This could involve a new image concept, a wardrobe change, or a different composition—whatever results in a more flattering and salable portrait.

Often, clients love a sample portrait but then hate how they look in that same pose/setting. You can usually solve this problem before it starts. For

someone else’s family . . . but when it’s my loved one, I’m going to have the same complaint most clients do: “I can’t see their face!” (This is usually followed by “. . . and I’m not going to buy that.”)

I am not saying that you should ignore clients’ requests. My photography has always been and will always be directed by what my clients truly want and buy. To allow your photography to be directed by anything else is futile in a business structure. However, you must also realize the natural tendencies of your clients and take close-ups along with any scenic. Offering some shots with an increased face size will ultimately make the client happier and increase your final sale.

example, if a bride with short hair selects an inspiration image of a bride with long hair blowing in the wind, she will likely be unhappy with the results if you attempt to re-create the image directly. Instead, think of ways to modify the overall look to fit her unique situation and be honest about the changes. (“With your short hair, it would be hard to create exactly the same look—but I have some ideas to get a similar feeling . . .”).

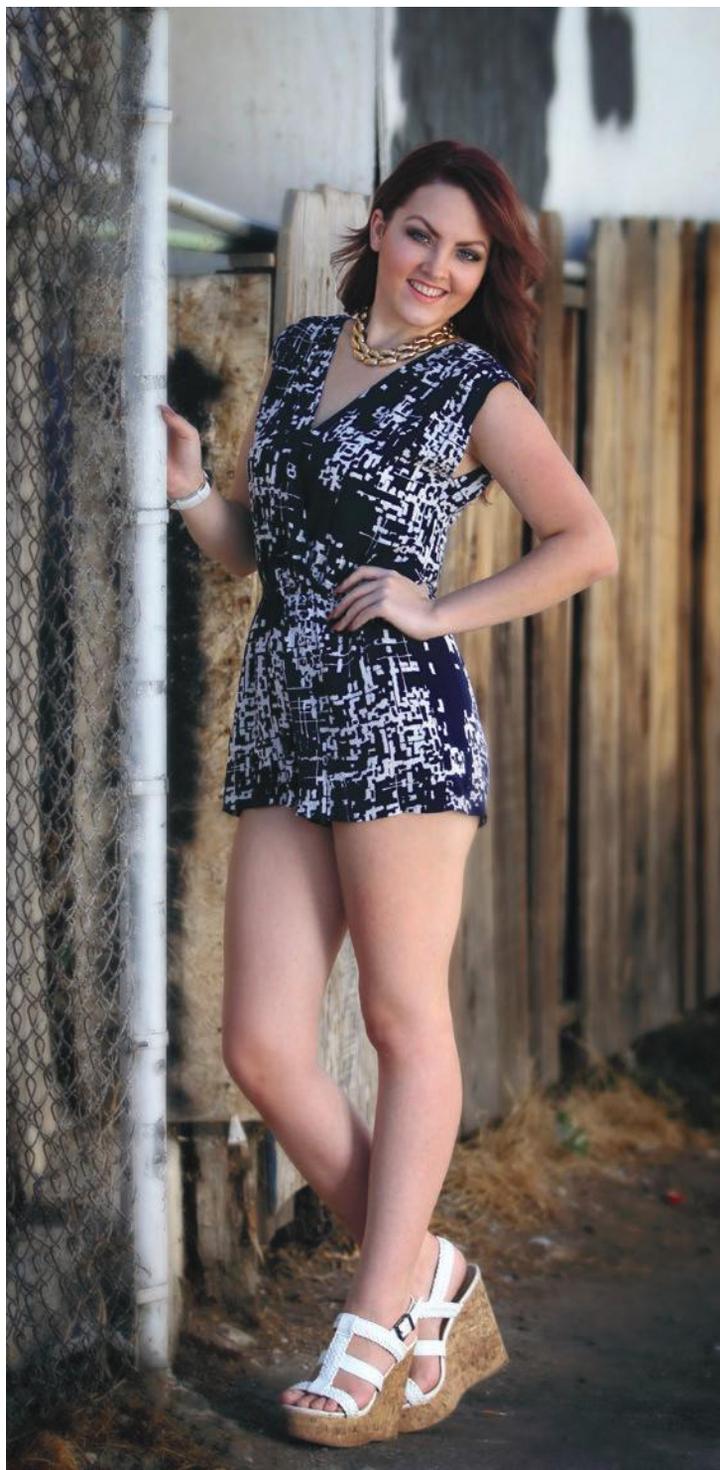
Be creative and choose your words carefully. For every problem and potentially embarrassing situation there is a way to handle it without making yourself look unprofessional or seeing your client turn red. Most importantly, handling it (rather than avoiding it) will put you on the path to creating portraits the client will thank you for—and buy!

Take Control

To summarize, there are common characteristics that paying clients look for in the images they intend to purchase. They want portraits that draw the viewer’s eyes to the subject’s face, and they want to see bright, sparkling eyes. They also want to see enough shadowing to give the image an appearance of depth. The portrait should be consistently retouched and printed to a determined style. These are the first steps in refining or defining your photographic style. This is the beginning of taking control of the images you produce rather than following the blueprint of another photographer without knowing why you are doing what you are doing.

This leads us to the next step in developing a successful photography business: consistency. Your style is part of your overall brand, so it must be visible in *all* your images, whether they are created in the studio or outdoors. If your images

don’t have a common look that identifies them as *your* images, you’ll have a hard time attracting clients to your work, generating referrals, and building a base of repeat clients.



6. Consistency and Lasting Appeal

All the creative marketing in the world won't help if you can't consistently produce images that suit your clients' tastes and purposes—portraits they want to buy. Even that isn't quite enough. You also need to ensure that these portraits are of such a quality that people will still be enjoying them for years to come. That's real customer satisfaction and it's what builds repeat business and great referrals.

Consistent ≠ Boring

Before we start talking about consistency, I need to clear up a misconception. Many young photographers have a hard time seeing the line between *consistent* and *boring*. As you start out into photography, the one thing you don't want to become is one of those “old guy” photographers. You know the ones I'm talking about—they've been shooting since the day after the camera was invented and they gave up on improving their photography years ago. Now they just want to keep cranking out photographs so they can make as much money as possible before they seize up and meet their maker. No young photographer wants to be that “old guy.” In fact, I don't think any photographer wants to become that “old guy!”

Being consistent doesn't mean you quit learning and evolving.

The Images Change, the Quality Stays the Same

Being consistent doesn't mean you quit learning and evolving. I have been photographing for a few decades now and my work changes each year. I try new ideas and concepts; I weed out the

ideas that have come and gone. Imagine that you are the chef in a fine restaurant. Naturally, you try out new recipes to keep your menu up to date and give people something new to sample. The dishes you serve day in and day out, however, will be crafted in such a way that they taste the same whether a patron orders them today or a year from now. Imagine a diner comes in on a business trip and orders your delicious venison in a cherry cream reduction. He loves it and can't wait until his schedule brings him back to town to enjoy it again! When he returns, you can bet he'll be disappointed if it doesn't taste like he remembers it. That kind of consistency is what diners expect from a premier chef. It is also what your clients expect from a premier photographer.

Understand *Your Clients' Tastes*

In the previous chapter, we looked at some of the things that portrait clients, across the board, look for in professional photography. However, what works well in one area doesn't necessarily work in another. There are differences in clients' tastes and beliefs, the population of the city or town, and countless other factors to consider. I have tried many ideas during different stages of my business—things that seemed like a great idea when I learned them at a seminar but then flopped when I tried them at home. You can't rely on photographers who know nothing about your business or your potential clients to guide and direct your studio. Take in new ideas wherever you may find them, but then filter those concepts through your own experience, judgment, and knowledge.

The Eyes: Classic or Contemporary?

Let's talk about the eyes. As we have already discussed, these are the most important part of an

image. That said, how do *your* clients want their eyes to appear in your work? Do they like a more contemporary look with catchlights visible in the lower part of the eye, or do they like the classic look of a single catchlight in the eye?

Shadows: Dramatic or Subtle?

What about shadowing? Do your clients want dark, heavy shadows for a very dramatic look, or do they enjoy a more subtle use of shadow—just enough to bring out the depth in your images?

Retouching: Glamorous or Natural?

What about your retouching? Do your clients want a glamorous look that eliminates all imperfections, enhances the eyes, and highlights the

Allow for Variety

Although consistency is important, it does not supersede the need to make every client look his or her best. For example, even if your clients usually like heavy shadowing, if you are photographing a young lady who is self-conscious about her large nose, dark shadows may not be the most attractive look for her. In this case, you'll want to turn her face toward the main light to reduce the shadow on the side of the nose. This will make the nose look smaller. Alternately, your style of retouching might be more glamorous, but if you retouch an elderly lady and remove all the wrinkles from her face, it will look completely unnatural.

Plan for Problems

On a related note, the reason I am always able to create a salable portrait is that, no matter what, I plan on having problems and I'm ready to adapt. I am shocked when everything works just as I planned. I know that something will usually happen to make every shoot more difficult, so I am not surprised when challenges arise. By looking at things in this way I can keep a cool head and figure out how to get my job done. Most people focus so much on a problem, they can't come up with a solution.



▲ Consistency builds your brand identity and client confidence.

lips? Or do they prefer a more subtle retouching style that only removes acne and subtly softens everything else? You'll need to develop your own style that matches your clients' tastes.

Consistency in Postproduction

However you decide the client will pay for retouching (see chapter 13), it is your job to develop a style of retouching that produces the style you want. Once you develop this process, use it

consistently and teach it to anyone who retouches images for you. Even when using them to make the same correction (say, removing a blemish), different Photoshop tools produce slightly different looks. In order to control the look of the image, you must be in control of the process.

Beyond retouching, many photographers add vignettes, diffusion, sharpening, and other effects to their images to enhance the overall look. If you add these enhancements, it's best to set up the process as an action. This not only saves you time, it also ensures a consistent look from image to image and session to session.

Consistency in Service

You must also develop consistency in the way you handle your clients. This begins by taking the time to completely prepare your clients for their session. If you don't adequately prepare the client and she selects the wrong clothing, puts her makeup on like a clown, and has bed-head, that's *your* fault not hers. Yes, there are occasions when a client doesn't listen to what you have told them, but this is more the exception than the rule. Ninety-five percent of the time when a client doesn't prepare properly, it is because of the photographer's lack of communication (or poor communication) about the importance of proper preparation for the success of the portraits.

Think about your own communication skills. If you have trouble communicating well with friends and family, you'll probably have trouble communicating with your clients, too. I think everyone has the right words inside them, but some people have a little trouble getting them out or choosing the right words and phrases to convey their message clearly to the listener. If you find that communication is difficult for you, reading

some books and learning how to communicate effectively will improve your photography more than any book on lighting and posing ever will.

To prepare my clients, I used to set up a one-on-one consultation to select the subject's clothing, explain about makeup and hair, as well as get ideas for the type of photograph they envisioned. As the volume of my business increased, this became impossible. Instead, I put all the information onto a video, combining photographs and video segments to illustrate each point. We used to send this on a DVD, but now we direct them to a secure web site. More people are watching it now—and it only costs us a small hosting fee each month. A video is a good tool, especially if you have a high-volume business or you find that you don't always communicate with your clients as effectively as you might like. At the very least, it ensures that the client knows how to prepare for their session and understand that if they don't prepare properly, they will have to pay to retake the images or pay to fix the problems digitally.

Design for Lasting Appeal

It's a sad fact: while wines and cheeses often become better with age, many portraits don't. For a photograph to age well, each aspect of the portrait must coordinate with all the others. This is achieved when the clothing a client is wearing is coordinated to the pose, the scene/background, and the lighting, as well as to the predominant lines and textures of the portrait. All of these things are selected to achieve the overall look that is appropriate for the intended use of the image.

Here's a common scenario. A client comes to a photographer to have a family portrait taken. After the session, she sees the proofs, gets excited, and places her order. The order comes in, the cli-

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Learning how to communicate effectively will improve your photography more than any book on lighting and posing ever will.

ent picks it up, and she hangs the wall portrait proudly in her living room. A month goes by and she changes where the portrait is hanging because it just doesn't look right. She tries many locations around the house and it still doesn't look quite as it should. At this point, she begins to realize that her prized portrait isn't such a prize after all. She starts to notice flaws. The background or scene that she hardly noticed before suddenly doesn't



Tips on Video Consultations

Over the years, many photographers have asked about our consultation video and sent me copies of what they produced. Some of these videos were excellent and some were a little rough. Here are my suggestions. First of all, show images, not you as the photographer talking to the camera. Use voice-overs, so stuttering and stumbles can be edited out. Second, don't do the voice-overs yourself unless you have a distinctive voice—and by distinctive, I don't mean unusual; a voice like a radio DJ or news anchor is what you are looking for.

The Impact of Emotions

We sell an emotional product, but many photographers take an approach that is strictly technical. Many of us get so wrapped up in looking at the lighting, posing, and background that we never think of the feelings that our images are going to capture. As you read through the following chapters, consider how the decisions you make come together to create the overall feeling of the image. As noted above, keep in mind that these decisions must not be made individually but in careful coordination with each other to produce an image that make sense visually.



seem to go with the people in the portrait. One subject's tie is really crooked, and another has bed-head. Soon, the client begins wondering why she made such a stupid mistake. Will she be back for more portraits or even extra prints for her family? Will she refer her friends? Doubtful.

Photographers do the same thing, of course. They see the images from a test session and get excited. They order a sample for their studio—but when it comes back from the lab, they aren't as excited. They start to notice things they didn't notice when they first saw the image.

This is a good lesson on the difference between momentary excitement and lasting appeal. It's easy to create momentary excitement. Even snapshots can do that! It's a different ball game altogether to make the conscious decisions that produce an enduring work of art. Think of the great portrait painters of the 19th century. These artists didn't just “happen” to create masterpieces; they carefully crafted every element of each image. They planned every aspect of the portrait to ensure it was just right. Even though the clothing and hairstyles are no longer in fashion, everything in these images works together so flawlessly that they are still a pleasure to view hundreds of years later. There's no reason not to strive for the same quality in your portraits!

◀ Portraits with lasting appeal will hang proudly in your clients' homes, year after year.



7. Clothing Selection

The subject's clothing sets the look and style for the entire portrait. It's also a simple reality that *people buy portraits they look good in*—and clothing is a big part of that. Unfortunately, it's also the one variable that you don't have complete control over.

*You will always
be limited by the
clothing your client
brings in.*

Don't Limit Your Choices

While you have a multitude of options for every other aspect of the image, you will always be limited by the clothing your client brings in. Therefore, probably the best advice I can give you in regard to your clients' clothing is to have them bring in *everything* for you to look at. I am not kidding. At our studio, the average girl brings in ten to twenty-five outfits, and the average guy brings five to ten. Again, this is all part of making a successful, salable portrait.

We also tell our subjects not to bring only formal clothes or only casual clothes. We want to see three distinct styles of clothing: casual, trendy, and elegant. Jeans, shorts, summer dresses, and t-shirts fall into the “casual” category. Leather and denim jackets, fashionable blouses and shirts, as well as dresses that the average young lady would wear out to a nightclub would be considered “trendy.” Suits, tuxedos, and gowns would be considered “elegant.”

Women tend to be very good about bringing in what you've asked them to bring. With guys, on the other hand, you have to be

The Story of the Angora Sweater

Sometimes clients just want what they want—regardless of your advice. Many years ago, I learned my lesson about how strange client expectations can be. Like most photographers, for classic portraiture I would select a low-key background to coordinate with darker colors of clothing. Then I would use background and accent lights to ensure separation of the subject. This worked well until I photographed my first senior whose mother went out and spent a fortune on an angora sweater. With a black sweater on a low-key background, you couldn't see the soft little hairs that would identify it as an angora sweater—and the mother threw a fit. She asked what kind of photographer I was that I didn't show the texture in the sweater!

After the lady vented for a while, I explained that the focus of the portrait was her daughter, not her daughter's sweater. I also explained that with fair-skinned subjects like her daughter, it is customary to print the portraits slightly darker to ensure a healthy skin tone. The mother said she didn't care about any of that, she wanted to see the little hairs of the angora sweater. Since she had returned the sweater to the store after using it, we couldn't reshoot it. Therefore, she insisted I print the photograph light enough so that she could see it was an angora sweater. When she picked up the 16x20-inch print, her daughter looked like a ghost—but you could see it was an angora sweater, and she was happy as could be.

It just goes to show that art is determined by the eye of the buyer not the creator.

very explicit. That way they can write it all down and give it to their mom, girlfriend, or wife so she'll know what to buy. For our purposes, we have gentlemen bring in at least one suit; a trendy jacket (leather, denim, or a letter jacket); and a variety of casual shirts, jeans, and pants. We remind guys at least three times to bring a pair of socks that will match the color of their pants. Young

men tend to wear white socks with everything—even a black suit and black loafers.

If you get your male subjects to follow these simple instructions, you are lucky! More often, you'll still have to do at least a little improvisation.

Guide Clients to the Right Look

Sometimes, clients feel very strongly about wearing clothes that you know don't make them look the way they'll want to in their portraits. Given that people only buy portraits they look good in, there's no point in proceeding with the shoot when you know the client isn't, ultimately, going to like the way he or she appears.

It requires tact to raise these issues. You won't embarrass your subject if you stick to generalizations and ask yes/no questions. For example, although our consultation cautions against it, many ladies arrive with sleeveless tops and dresses. The minute I see them, I explain, "Sleeveless tops are fine." This doesn't make them feel stupid for not following the guidelines. Then I continue, "The only problem is that a lot of ladies worry about their upper arms looking large or hair showing on their forearms. Does that bother you?" Either she will smile and say "Yes" or she will say "No." With careful phrasing, you make it easy for them to voice any concerns without being embarrassed.

You can use the same approach when talking with a female client about the type of portrait she wants taken. For example, when I see a heavier girl arrive with a stack of shoe boxes, I know I am going to have a problem and I need to say something the minute I show her into the dressing room. I first explain, "Many ladies go shopping to buy a matching pair of shoes for every outfit. Since they bought them, they want them to show in their portraits. The problem is that when you

order your wallets for family and friends, the full-length poses make it very hard to really see your face that well.” (This gets the girl to accept that not all the poses should be done full-length.)

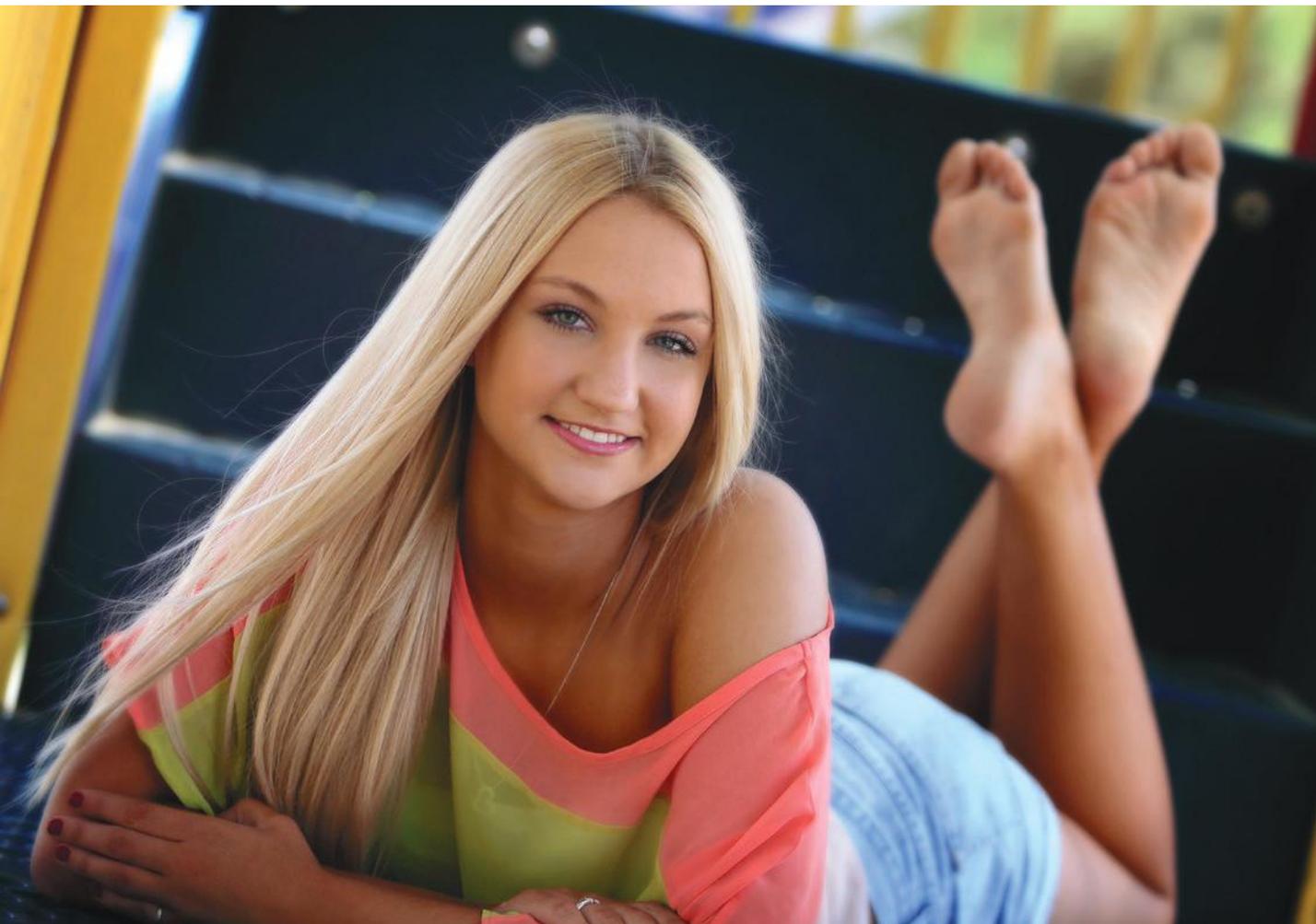
Then I continue, “Most women worry about looking as thin as possible. The areas that women worry about the most are their hips and thighs. This is why most of the portraits are done from the waist up, not to show this area.” Next I ask, “Now, are there any outfits that you want to take full-length, or do you want to do everything from the waist up?” She will usually say she wants ev-

▼ The subject’s fun, casual outfit called for relaxed posing in a playful environment.

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For every problem and potentially embarrassing situation there is a way to handle it without making yourself look unprofessional.

erything from the waist up. This avoids telling her she can’t take full-lengths, or being brutally honest and telling her she shouldn’t take them.

Fortunately, it is not so much what you say as the way you say it. For every problem and potentially embarrassing situation there is a way to handle it without making yourself look unprofessional or seeing your client turn red. Most impor-



tantly, handling it (rather than avoiding it) will put you on the path to creating portraits the client will thank you for—and buy!

For the Fashion-Impaired

To be absolutely honest, many male photographers are style-challenged—especially when it comes to women’s clothes. If this is you, don’t be afraid to ask your wife, girlfriend, or a female employee for some help. And the next time your wife asks you to go shopping with her—go! Look at the clothing that is in style. What are the hot colors? (How can you coordinate clothing colors to background colors you don’t even have?) If you’re not confident in your abilities to discuss fashion with female clients, work with a fashion-savvy woman to create a detailed list of the various styles and types of clothing your clients are to bring in. Then, if you have to explain this to a client, you will have something to work from.

Finishing Touches

To achieve a portrait that has a sense of style and lasting appeal, you need to think about every detail in the composition. This means taking the few extra seconds to really study the subject’s outfit and make it look its best. Double check to make sure that the clothes aren’t wrinkled, that the hem isn’t falling out, and that there are no stray threads or lint. Check that the subject doesn’t have a bra strap peeking out, that ties are knotted correctly, and that collars aren’t flipped up. If the subject’s clothes have unflattering folds or wrinkles, pull them out for a more better look. If you don’t already consider how these little details will affect the portrait you are creating, you should start doing so immediately.

▼ Matching the clothing to the background creates a cohesive look.



8. Background Selection

The style of clothing is what will determine the overall look of the photograph, but this is one of those, “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” topics. In a perfect world, you would ask client to bring in the three styles of clothing (elegant, trendy, and casual). They would come in with the proper clothing, and then you would select each element of the portrait to coordinate with those clothes.

There are two problems. First, clients aren’t always going to listen to what you have told them. Second, many clients are going to want backgrounds that they just don’t have the clothing for. This means you will have to improvise and make some decisions about how to coordinate the background with the clothing.

Analyze the Background

Creating a salable portrait means selecting a background that makes sense with the clothing and produces the desired overall look for the portrait. Whether in the studio or at an outdoor location, the lines, textures, and colors of a background communicate to the viewer. Just as a bathing suit will produce a different style of portrait than an evening dress, one background will actually provide a completely different style of portrait than another. The same is true for outdoor scenes. You can’t coordinate a scene to any other aspect of the portrait if you don’t understand how to interpret the scene/background visually.

The lines, textures, and colors of a background communicate to the viewer.

Background Selection

Your client, a fireman, shows up at an outdoor location. Without any prior discussion as to the purpose of the portrait, you'd have no direction to take the session. But let's say you have talked with the fireman about this. He has been working out for a year, has abs of steel, and wants an image of his amazing physique for his wife. Your outdoor scene has no predominant lines, only heavy textures. Does a background with heavy textures match the style of portrait you are trying to create? Yes it does—it's your lucky day!

Let's take the same situation, but instead of the fireman wanting to show his muscles, let's say you were told he is about to be a father and wants a portrait to someday give to his child. Again, all you have is heavy texture in the scene, and this will give a harder look to the portrait. That might not be what you want for this image of a new dad. To soften the texture and produce an image that shows the softer side of this fire-fighting father, you couple simply open up the lens and increase the distance between the subject and the background to throw it out of focus.

In the same two scenarios, if the background's predominant element was lines, then you would look for straight lines for the "he-man" portrait. To create a softer feeling for the portrait he would give to his child, you would look for the predominant lines to be curved in order to reflect the correct feeling.

Basic Analysis

How do you interpret a scene or background? You pay attention to the first thing that you notice. Did you notice strong lines, heavy textures, or contrasting elements? What you noticed first is what the viewer of the final portrait will notice first and that is the key element in the scene.

Let's start with some simple studio backdrops, since these are easier to analyze. First, look at the two painted backgrounds at the top of the facing page. If you had to photograph a man in a business suit, which one would you pick? What

about a senior in a denim jacket? This is an obvious choice, right? The business portrait would be done on the classic cloud background, and the senior on the blue crinkled background.

In the next set of examples, at the bottom of the facing page, which background would you select for a senior in a black and white prom dress? Which would you select for a senior in a gold sequined dress? Obviously, you would select the black satin background with the strong highlight for the black and white dress and the warmer background for the gold dress.

Lines

The lines of a scene can include the painted lines of a studio background or columns of a set. Outdoors, lines can be produced by trees, blades of grass, buildings, and paths or walkways. Interpreting the lines is fairly simple. Heavy, straight lines going vertically or horizontally through the frame produce a strong, structured environment. Dominant diagonal lines also produce a strong feeling but are less structured and rigid. Lines that are curved or bowed are softer, producing a feeling of romance or understated elegance.

Texture

Another element to consider when evaluating a background is texture. Texture is basically an arrangement of small lines—lines that can be interpreted according to the above criteria. For example, the leaves of a maple tree (with many curved and diagonal lines) create a softer texture than those of a pine tree (with mostly straight lines).

Contrast

If the first element you notice in a scene is contrast, it is the lighting and not the scene itself that



▲ Which of these two choices would be best for a teenager in a denim jacket? How about for a man in a suit?



▲ You have two subjects: one in a gold evening gown, one in a black and white gown. Which background do you choose for each?



is drawing your eye. Whether it is in the studio or outdoors, contrast is created by light. Controlling contrast in the studio is easy. To bring out an element in the background, you add an accent light. If a background element is receiving too much light and creating too much contrast for the desired look, you simply turn the power down—or you can use gobos to block the light from hitting that part of the background or scene.

Outdoors, you are dealing with a much larger area and a much bigger light source (the sun). You can't reduce the light in a particular area of a large scene, so you have two choices: use a different scene or use a different part of the scene. When I find that a beautiful background is unusable because of direct sunlight creating hot spots and blown-out highlights, I start rotating the camera position around the subject to see if another part of the same scene is usable. I may also change the position and height of the camera in order to isolate a usable portion of the background. (*Note:* You can also add light on the subject to make the background darker in comparison, but this darkens the whole scene and you will often lose the shadow areas completely by the time you've darkened the image enough to bring down the high-light areas to an acceptable brightness.)



Color

The last consideration in selecting a background is choosing a color that harmonizes with the color of the subject's clothing. One approach is to put a color gel on the background light, matching it to the clothing color. While this is a very simple way of ensuring your background coordinates with

◀ Neutral backgrounds match any clothing color (*top*). A colored gel on the background can make it a match for the subject's outfit (*bottom*).

•
•
•
I start rotating the camera position around the subject to see if another part of the same scene is usable.

the client's clothing, it is very limiting from a creative standpoint. When we design sets and paint backgrounds, we try to use neutral colors that will coordinate with many colors of clothing. Backgrounds and sets that are monotone (white, gray, or black) can be used with just about any color of clothing, and coordination won't be a problem.

Of course, the color coordination of a background or scene to the client's clothing is much easier in the studio than on location. Outdoors, you can't change colors, you only have control over how light or dark the color of any given background will record. If a client wears a white or lighter tone of clothing and you are photographing her in the average park scene, you can

let the background record as lighter than it actually is in order to better coordinate it with the lighter clothing. Should the client wear black (or near black) in a scene that has direct sunlight illuminating it, you will need to darken the scene by adding light to the subject or increasing the shutter speed to reduce the light on the background.

Learn to Manipulate Backgrounds

We only have a certain number of backgrounds and sets in our studio and only so many scenes at any given outdoor location, so learning how to modify backdrop and scenes is important. It lets you make the most of them, changing their appearance to coordinate with all the other aspects of the portrait you are creating.

Many photographers miss out on this opportunity and only use the scene literally. Vertical lines have to stay vertical, horizontal lines have

▼ One background can have multiple looks.



to stay horizontal, and heavy texture has to stay heavy texture. Well, no, it definitely doesn't. The camera is easily fooled—and something as simple as tilting the camera slightly can completely change a scene or background. If the background has a great deal of texture but you need a softer feeling, open up the lens and the background will soften to produce the look you want.

Remember, this isn't about what you have to work with, it's about what your imagination can create. My staff at the studio calls me MacGyver, because no matter what equipment goes out, no matter what is forgotten, and no matter what rotten surroundings we are situated in, I will devise a way to produce a salable image. That's my job!

Get the Client's Input

The key to selling portraits and building a successful career as a professional portrait photographer is creating images the client wants (as opposed to

the images you want to create and hope they'll happen to like). When it comes to backdrops and scenes, the best way to do this is to provide clients with a sample book that they can look through and pick out the types of backgrounds they want done in their session (we also do this with posing, which will be covered in chapter 9).

At this point, many photographers say, "Hey! I'm the photographer—I know what they should have." No, you don't. Clients are individuals. To keep them happy you have to treat them as such. Besides, allowing a client to pick her own backgrounds doesn't mean that those are always the exact ideas you're going to use. You'll usually see that clients select a set of similar ideas, and that gives you a starting point for the session. From there, you can take the basic ideas and make suggestions as to other backgrounds that might be better. Just make sure those suggestions are based on the client's preferences and not your own.

I've learned that it's best to take one or two ideas in a different style (just so they have something different to look at) and then focus on creating what they want. When you do this, you'll have accomplished two things. First, you'll improve your profits because your client will get exactly what she wants. Second, by handing over the choice of background to her, you'll also hand over part of the responsibility for the session. How many times a week do you hear, "I really don't like that pose," or "Why did you pick that background?" A photographer's ego can take a real beating hearing comments like these—but when the client has selected her own background, how can she complain?

◀ Don't assume you know best. Ask your clients what kinds of backgrounds they like best.



9. Posing Essentials

There is nothing simple about posing. Each client has a unique body, a unique sense of style and a unique set of problems that proper posing can hide. This challenge is what makes me love posing and work really hard at it. I have written more books on posing than on any other single subject—and they are always strong sellers, which leads me to think that most photographers are challenged by this subject, too.

Take the time to notice any problems and think about how to minimize them.

Analyze the Subject

The first step in posing should be to analyze the subject's face and body. Put yourself in their shoes and ask yourself, "If, I were them, what would I want to change?" or "If I were them, what would I think were my best attributes?" Take the time to notice any problems and think about how to minimize them. Many photographers never learn to stop, look, and *plan* before they pick up their camera.

Choose the Right Style

Assuming you have identified the purpose of the portrait, by this point you should have the client in a suitably styled outfit, know the style and feel of the background you should use, and have some ideas about what aspects of their appearance you should emphasize (or minimize). But what about the overall style of the posing? That's something that needs to work in harmony with the other choices you have already made.

Traditional

Traditional portraits reflect power, and to some degree wealth, respect, and a classic elegance. They are often used for business, yearbooks, people of power, and people of distinction. The posing is more linear, with only slight changes in the angles of the body. The expressions should be more subtle as well. Laughing smiles are definitely not appropriate. But at the same time, serious expressions need to be relaxed. Most people taking traditional portraits aren't comfortable doing so, and therefore have a tendency to scowl. This needs to be avoided.

Casual

Casual portraits are relaxed and look comfortable. This style is perfect for images being given

to a loved one, like a sibling or parent. Casual poses are resting poses. The arms rest on the legs, the chin rests on the hands. The back is posed at more of an angle. It is common to use the ground to pose on, lying back on the side or even on the stomach. Often, the hands or arms are used to support the face. In casual poses, the expression should be warm or at least pleasant. For most adults, a relaxed smile is perfect.

Glamorous

Glamorous portraits make the subject look as appealing and attractive as possible. I am not talking about boudoir or having the client in little or no clothing. You can pose a fully clothed human being in certain ways and make them look extremely glamorous and appealing. If you finish

▼ A traditional pose.



▼ A casual pose.



the pose with the right expression, often with the lips slightly parted, you will have made the client's romantic interest very happy.

The Face and Head

The face is the most important part of any portrait. However, the face has many parts—and sometimes it feels like some of the parts are working against each other to make your job as hard as possible. For example, imagine you are photographing a person with a large nose and a wide face. Turning the subject a little away from the main light will increase the shadowing and make the face appear thinner. Unfortunately, it will also deepen the shadow on the side of the nose, making it appear larger.

▼ A glamorous pose.

The Connection to Lighting

It's important to understand that the posing of the face is linked to lighting. Posing that will work with soft lighting and a low lighting ratio will look ridiculous with a harder light source or a high lighting ratio. For traditional portrait lighting styles or spot lighting, you would have the face turned more toward the main light for impact. Using butterfly or ring lighting, you would have the face looking directly at the camera. With most Americans being overweight, it's often a good thing to make the face appear thinner than it really is. For these subjects, the best view of the face is when the body is turned toward the shadow side of the frame and the face is turned back toward the main light source. This stretches out everything from the shoulder up and gives the face a leaner look.





▲ To frame her face, I had the subject lift her right hand to her neck and bring her left shoulder up to her chin. Her beautiful smile completed the look.

Control the Camera Height

The angle of the face relative to the camera is important. It used to be that every client was photographed sitting down and the camera on a camera stand was slightly higher. Why? So the photographer didn't have to bend over, of course! Then some forward-thinking photographers started to realize that by raising the camera (the angle Facebook made famous) or lowering it, you can create different looks for different clients. Unfortunately, some photographers don't realize that, in most cases, you have to raise or lower the face as you raise or lower the camera position in order

to avoid dramatically altering the appearance of the face.

Frame the Face

The face needs to be framed—especially as the camera is brought closer. There is nothing worse than the “floating head” look where only the face is showing without any framing/support from the shoulders, arms, and/or hands. When the shoulders are not going to be in the frame, or if the subject has an extremely long neck, the face needs to be supported to look its best. You can bring the hands to the neck or cheek to create a base for the face to visually rest on. (This correction can also help conceal a common problem area: the neck and chin.)

Tilting the Head

Just say no! Don't do it! Newer photographers always worry about tilting the head and they end up with subjects looking like they have either broken their neck or like they are incredibly passive. Keep it simple. If you pose the subject and ask them to turn their face toward the light and most of the time their head will have a perfect tilt for them. The only time you really need to correct a tilt is when you are photographing someone who is incredibly nervous. Anxiety can make subjects pose too rigidly straight or, conversely, to look awkward and beaten down because they tilt their heads too far toward their lower shoulder.

The Eyes

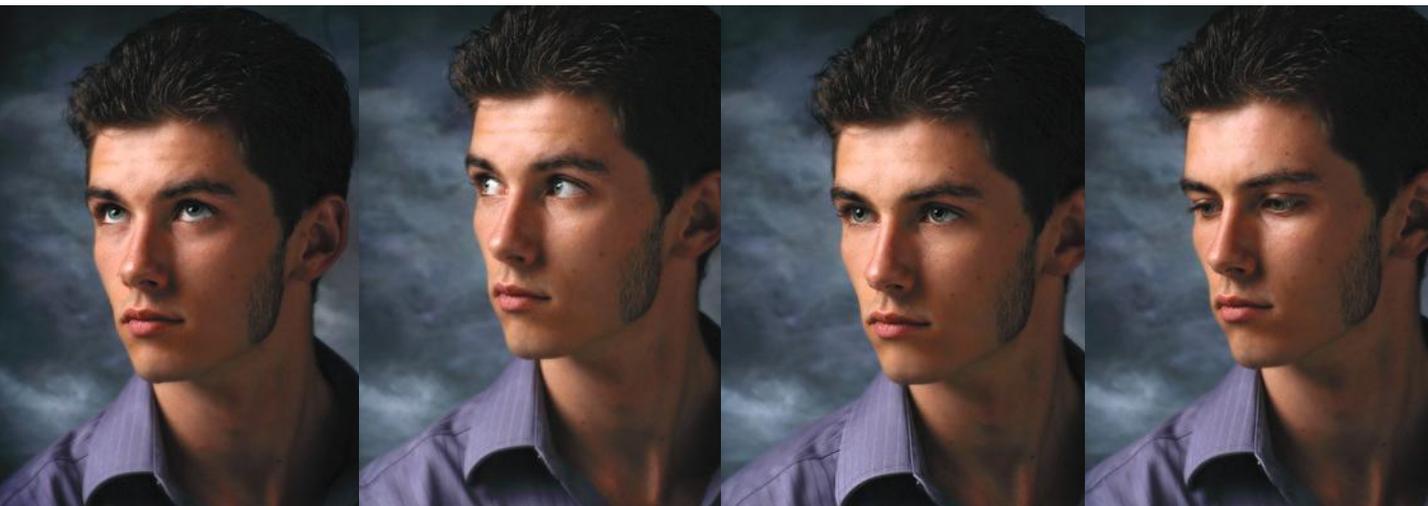
Even when you do everything else right, if you don't take the time to make sure the eyes are beautiful you reduce the beauty of your client, the appeal of the portraits to the viewer, and how salable the images will ultimately be. It is particularly the catchlights that give the eyes life—so whether you're working outdoors or in the studio, check the eyes with each and every portrait you take. If you don't see nice catchlights, a lighting (see chapter 10) or posing change is needed.

▼ Changing the direction of the subject's gaze dramatically alters the feel of a portrait—and sometimes not in flattering ways.



▲ Positioning the iris—the colored part of the eye—toward the corner of the eye opening (*left*) gives the eye more impact than showing it centered (*right*).

To control the position of the eyes, change the pose by turning the subject's face. Typically, the center of the eye is best positioned toward the corner of the eye opening. This enlarges the appearance of the eye and gives the eye more impact. This is achieved by turning the face toward the main light while the eyes come back to the camera. (*Note:* This works well for all eye shapes—except for people with bulging eyes. When this is done on bulging eyes, too much of the white will show and draw attention to the problem.)





▲ Our clients overwhelmingly prefer eye contact (*left*) to more reflective poses (*right*)—but you should discuss with *your* clients what’s right for them.

The point at which you ask the subject to focus their gaze in respect to the position of the camera’s lens also, in essence, poses the eye. First and foremost, the subject should always be looking at someone, not something. There is a certain spark that the eyes have when they look into someone else’s eyes; this is often absent when they are looking at a spot on the wall or a camera lens.

To do this, I put my face where I want their eyes to be—usually directly over the camera. This puts the eyes in a slightly upward position, increasing the appearance of the catchlights. If the camera position is too high to make this possible,

I position my face on the main-light side of the camera, never beneath it and never to the shadow side of it. Both would decrease the catchlights. A common mistake that my new photographers make is getting their face too far from the camera. This makes the eyes of the subject appear as if they are looking off-camera—which is fine, but only if that is the intention and not a mistake.

When the eyes of the subject look into the lens (or very close to it), the portrait seems to make eye contact with the viewer. An overwhelming majority of our senior clients prefer the intimate feeling of eye contact (as opposed to the more

reflective portraits where the eyes look off-camera), but this is *our* clients. You need to offer both styles of portraits and discuss with your clients what is right for them.

The Nose and Ears

When it comes to the nose, there is one simple rule: if it is large, hide it. To reduce the size of the nose, reduce the shadow on the side of the nose. For most clients, their ears are covered by hair; however, if the client has short hair and big ears, turn the face enough toward the main light to hide one ear and avoid showing the outline of the visible ear.

The Mouth and Lips

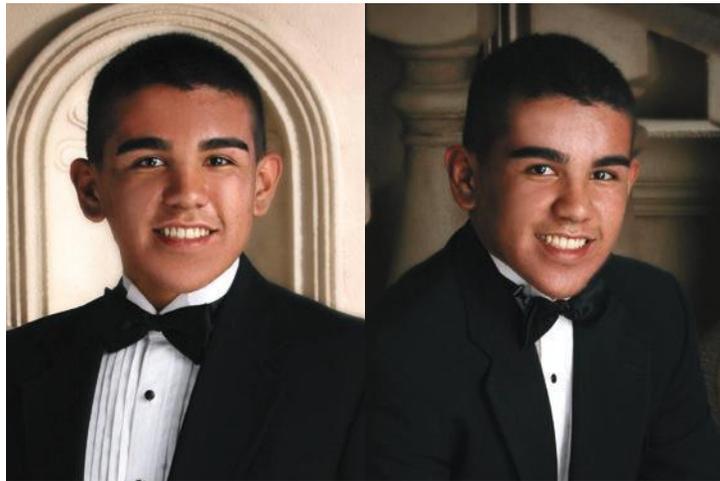
You can have the perfect pose and the perfect lighting, but if the expression doesn't meet the client's expectations, you won't sell the portrait. A smile reflects happiness; as a result, smiling photographs outsell non-smiling photographs at a rate of four or five to one (with the exception of glamour poses). Photographers often prefer to shoot non-smiling portraits—but since they aren't the ones buying the portraits, who cares what they prefer? I typically take ten shots of each pose; six to seven are smiling and the other the three to four are not.

To get the right, happy but relaxed, timing is important. When most people first start to smile, it is enormous. If you take the shot at this point, you end up with a laughing or almost-laughing smile. A moment later, the expression starts to relax. It isn't that big of a change, but it is the difference between a laughing smile and a smile that is pleasing to an adult client.

As a professional photographer, you must find your own way to create the expressions your cli-

Mirroring

When you smile at a person, they smile back; when you frown at a person, they frown back. People will instinctively mimic the expression that you, as the photographer, have on your face. Mirroring isn't just about visual cues, though, it also involves the way you speak. When you want a smile, speak with energy and excitement in your voice; when you want a relaxed expression, soften your voice.



▲ When the subject is looking directly at the camera, the ears are prominent (*left*). Turning the face to an angle and providing less tonal separation reduces the visibility of the ears (*right*).



▲ The broad expression when people first smile (*left*) isn't attractive when frozen in time; a moment later, the expression relaxes into a much more flattering smile (*right*).

ents prefer. Your approach will be different with small children, with seniors, and with adults. I know of a children’s photographer whom seniors say is goofy because his camera-room style is slapstick and animated. It appeals to children, but it annoys the more mature high school seniors. To get great expressions, you have to appeal to and connect with the client in front of you.



The Neck and Shoulders

The area from just under the chin to the shoulder is one of the first areas of the body to show signs of weight gain and aging. For most people, I think the neck is one of the least photogenic parts of the body. In many of my portraits, you’ll see that I hide or disguise this area—because no client really wants to see it, unless the pose is full length and the area can be softened in shadow.

The subject’s shoulders create an important line in most poses, and it shouldn’t be a horizontal line. Designing the pose so that the shoulders create a diagonal line makes the portrait more interesting and makes the subject look less rigid. In general, the shoulders of a man should appear broad and at less of an angle than the shoulders of a woman. For women, raising the shoulder closer to the camera and turning the body toward the shadow side of the frame narrows the shoulder for a more attractive view.

If the subject’s weight is at all an issue, cover the shoulders with clothing. Be aware, however, that clothing itself can create problems. For instance, large shoulder pads will make just about any kind of posing impossible—and make your client look like a football player. An even bigger problem is ladies’ clothing or undergarments that cut into the skin on the shoulders; the resulting indentations visually translate into “she’s fat.”

The Arms and Hands

Unless your client is super-athletic and wants to show it off, long sleeves are the key to nice-looking arms. Most people’s arms are not well-toned and many have visible hair. Even with young, trim

◀ Lifting the hands or resting the chin on the arms hides the often-problematic neck and chin area.

► Increased shadowing on the cleavage accentuates the bust (*top*); reduced shadowing minimizes it (*bottom*).

ladies, the choice to wear summery tops or dresses means you have to deal with the underarm area while posing—and no one has pretty underarms!

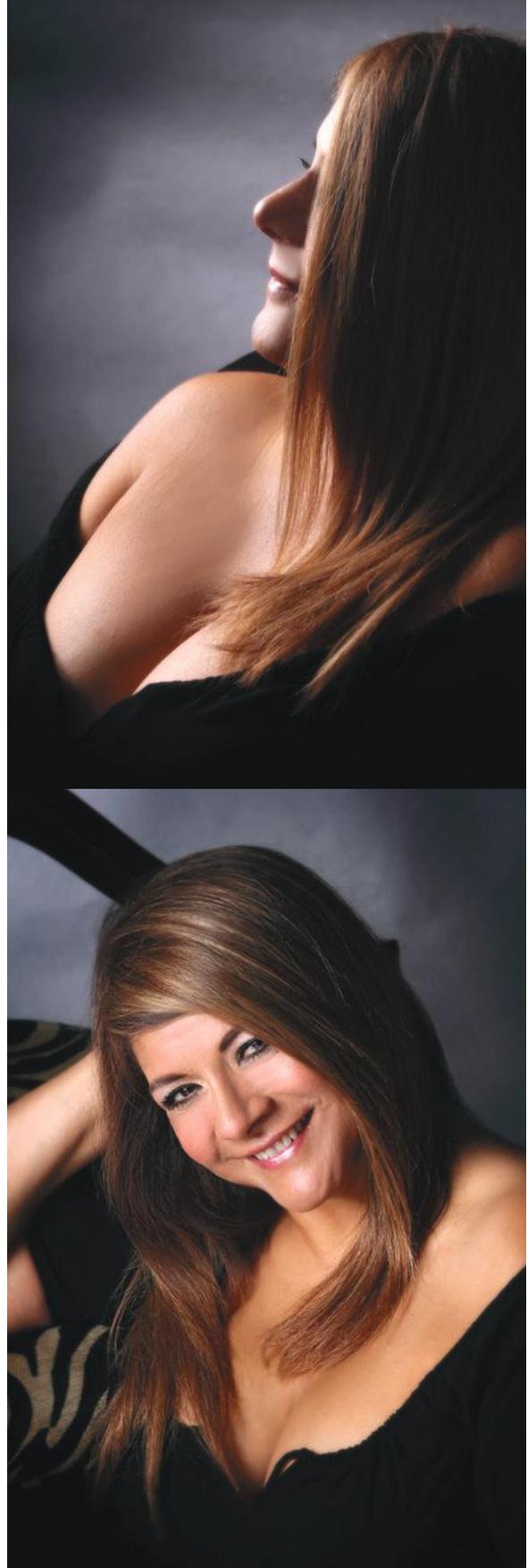
In most cases, the arms should be posed away from the body to define the space between the body and arms, so the upper body and arms don't look like one solid mass. Women have tendency either to smash their upper arms against their bodies or flex the muscle at the top of the arm where it joins the shoulder.

In casual poses, the arms will help support the upper body, but make sure any weight is applied to the elbow or wrist. This is a good rule for posing any part of the body: any pressure should be applied to bone, not flesh. Whether it is the forearms or the hips, the flesh spreads out and makes the compressed area look larger. That doesn't happen with bone.

In my opinion, new photographers often waste far too much time trying to pose the hands properly, especially in wedding photography. Here's a simple rule: give the hands something to hold or something to rest on. Whether it is a bouquet or the wrist of the other arm, hands look best when they are doing what comes naturally.

The Bust and Chest

The apparent size of a woman's breasts is determined by the shadow in the cleavage area. The larger the shadow, the larger the breasts appear. You can use this knowledge to make the breasts appear larger (which most women who select cleavage-revealing clothing will appreciate) or you can make them less prominent by reducing



the shadow. This could be useful if, for example, a busty young lady comes to you for a business portrait but brings only tops with lower necklines. Prominent cleavage isn't considered a professional look for most businesses, but reducing the shadow in the cleavage area will make it less noticeable.

Controlling the shadow is simply a matter of which direction you turn the subject in relationship to the main light source. To increase



▲ Women always want their waistlines to appear as thin as possible. Switching from a straight-on pose (*left*) to a pose with the body turned (*right*) helps to slim the waist.



▲ In a seated position, clothing and skin wrinkle (*left*), giving even fit people a roll. If the person is thin, simply have her straighten her back, almost to the point of arching it (*right*). Otherwise, block this area from view.

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-
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Darker clothing reduces body size and black is always the right color for a person who is heavy.

the shadow in the cleavage area you would turn the subject's body toward the shadow side of the frame. To reduce the shadow in the cleavage area you would pose her toward the main light source.

Unless you are photographing a body builder, Tom Jones, or a character from *The Sopranos*, you don't usually see a man's chest exposed in a portrait. If you do, though, the same rules apply.

The Waist

In a perfect world, everyone would have a tapered waistline and six-pack abs. In the real world, you are more like to be photographing a guy who looks he is nine months pregnant. Again, clothing is an excellent starting place. Darker clothing reduces body size and black is always the right color for a person who is heavy. Its reduces the visible body size and makes it very easy to hide problem areas using shadow and a lower key background.

In a standing pose, the widest view of the waist is with the torso squared off to the camera. The thinnest view is achieved by rotating the subject to show a side view of the body—unless the subject has a tummy bulge that becomes more visible as you turn toward the side. In that case, a sitting pose would be preferred.

In a seated pose, you can use the arms, crossed legs, and even parts of the chair to hide this problem area. In a seated pose, however, you almost always need to hide the stomach from view; even very fit people tend to have skin folding over the tops of their waistbands when seated.

The Hips and Thighs

Hips and thighs are an area of great concern to women, because this is usually the area where weight gain is first visible. As with the torso, choosing black clothing, turning the body to a side view, and adjusting the separation will all help control how much you notice or don't notice this area. There are some additional things to consider with posing images that will show this area of the body.

Standing Poses

In standing poses, the hips can look wide and the thighs thick. However, it's important to remember that the hips actually work *in conjunction with* the waistline to produce the classic hourglass figure. Without hips that are wider than the waistline, the waistline will appear thick. If a woman has a very small waistline, on the other hand, even average-size hips will appear larger in contrast. So ideally, you want the hips to look wide enough to define the waistline—and the waistline not to appear so small that it draws attention to the width of the hips. (At times like this, I am glad to be a man—it is so much easier!)

Seated Poses

In seated poses the bottom and thigh expand out as weight is put on them. If you are sitting in a chair right now, stand up. Now sit back down while watching the width of your upper leg and bottom. You'll see at least an inch or two added to the width of your thighs.

When a person sits flat on their bottom, both their legs *and* bottom are visible to the camera. Instead, I have the client roll over onto one hip. On the side of the hip is a bone, which doesn't expand. In this pose, a portion of the leg sup-

porting their weight is hidden behind them and there is no weight resting on the fleshy part of the bottom. (*Note:* The only time I have someone sit flat on their bottom is when one or both knees are raised; in this pose, the majority of weight is on the tail bone and not the behind.)

Reclining Poses

In poses that have the subject on their side, whether lying completely down or supported by one or both of their arms, the thighs need to be posed in such a way that they are either individually defined or shown to taper down to the knee. A very effective way to thin the hips and add im-

▼ In a seated pose, rolling the weight onto the hip hides one leg and prevents the hips from ballooning.



▼ In a reclining pose, dropping the top knee in front of the lower leg provides a slim, tapered look.



pact to the area is to have the leg closer to the ground extend straight out, while the upper leg bends at the knee and drops down in front of the lower leg to touch the ground. This causes the

The Booty

Ever since the media started making such a big deal about women with large, curvy butts, many women have decided they want to show their backside in their portraits—especially if they think they have a booty like J.Lo. If a woman wants to showcase her bottom, I suggest showing it in a profile view. This does two things: first, it shows the curves of the booty without showing the width of the hips; second, it makes it easier to capture the face at a workable angle.



hips to dramatically taper down to the knee and reduces the width of the thighs.

The Legs

The legs are actually easy to work with—because the first rule is that, unless the person has *amazing* legs, they should not show (or should at least be minimized) in the final portrait. To effectively pose the legs, you simply define a support leg and an accent leg. The support leg grounds the subject and supports the weight of the body. Even in a sitting pose, where there is really no support, one foot should touch the floor to ground the pose. The second leg is the accent leg; its sole purpose is add some style to the portrait. The accent leg can do anything—cross over, extend out, etc.—as long as it does not mirror the support leg. This same principle is used whether the subject is standing, sitting, or lying on the ground. For women, the legs should generally not show in a standing pose unless the subject is in high heels (at least 3 inches) or has her heels lifted to the same height; this flexes the calf muscles to give the legs and ankles their best shape.

The Feet and Toes

The feet and toes have become a new area of concern for women (as if they didn't already have enough pressure). They want their toes to look perfect and their feet to appear small, but not too small. For poses that show the feet, I personally photograph women only two ways: in high heels or barefoot. (Flat shoes are for comfort, not for fashion—sorry all you Birkenstock fans!)

If a woman is wearing elegant clothing, she wears high heels. These not only make her legs look great, but they also make her feet look smaller. Open-toed shoes are for those women with



▲ One leg supports the body, the other is the accent leg.

perfect toes and a tan. The “peek-a-boo” toe (which shows only two or three toes in a small opening) provides a nice option for women with less-than-perfect toes. Closed-toed shoes are ideal for those ladies who say they hate their feet.

Bare feet coordinate with more casual styles of clothing or can be used when you want to relax the look of formal clothing. If the bare feet are to show, the nails don’t have to be painted—but they can’t be unsightly either. If the feet are to touch the ground, I have the subject rest their

Why Show It?

With Americans worrying so much about their weight, why do photographers take so many full-length portraits? The best-selling images are those with a larger face size and the least number of problem areas showing. If a woman sees a tummy bulge, a thick hip, or a large calf muscle, she is *not* going to buy the photo. You should only show the entire body when there is a reason to do it. Otherwise, just show the parts of the body the client would want to see.



weight on the ball of the foot and toes then push up the heel on one or both feet. This duplicates the look of high heels and makes the legs and feet look their best.

In reclining poses, the bottom of the foot is much more attractive than the sole of a shoe, so we have the client take off their shoes. If they have worn older sandals or gone barefoot through an uncarpeted studio area, the bottoms of the feet will need to be washed off. This is a perfect job for Mom. (Many young photographers are thinking, “I’ll just clean them up in Photoshop!” But why would you make work for yourself and spend time doing something that doesn’t profit your business when you can hand the mother a moist wipe and eliminate the problem in ten seconds?)

Practice Building Poses

Achieving a perfect balance means customizing each pose to each subject. Therefore, I suggest building each pose individually rather than mem-

▲ Poses like this have a lot of benefits. They maintain a nice face size (which moms like) while showing the whole outfit (which girls like). At the same time, they conceal or minimize the tummy, hips, and thighs.

orizing and duplicating entire poses. Every subject’s body is slightly different and you will have to make subtle changes in everything mentioned above to make each one look their best.

To practice, select some of your favorite poses out of this book, magazines, or on-line. Recruit a few test subjects and build the poses with each one. As you work, use the suggestions that I have given you in this chapter to customize the pose for your subjects’ different physiques and achieve the best overall pose for each one.

You may also want to ask your subjects to bring in photos showing poses they like and use these as a guide. I do this to stay on top of what styles and looks my clients are currently favoring; it keeps me focused on what will sell, rather than what I might personally like.

10. Lighting Essentials

As we begin to delve into lighting, it's time to come back to the idea of previsualization—it's something I can't emphasize strongly enough. You might not expect it, but in his classic book *Alice in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll put forth some important advice for photographers. Here's the exchange I'm talking about:

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where—" said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

*You have to know
where you want to go
before you decide
how to get there.*

The same basic rule applies when creating portraits: you have to know where you want to go before you decide how to get there.

Light Sources

Speedlights are not adequate for consistently creating professional quality portraits, especially those with larger facial sizes. You can get attachments for these units that improve their characteristics, but they still don't offer the level of control required to achieve the best results at every session. If you were going to take a studio photo of the President of the United States and you had an unlimited budget for studio and equipment rental, would you show up with a few speedlights and shoot on automatic? No way. So why would you

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It's pretty tough to make critical lighting decisions for a specific face when you're shooting blind.

settle for that with the clients whose purchases you rely on for your livelihood?

Some of you are already drafting me e-mail messages about the beautiful portraits you've created with speedlights. I'm not saying it can't happen, just that it won't happen at every session, every day, with every client. Most speedlights have no modeling light, so your light placement is a shot in the dark; it's pretty tough to make critical lighting decisions for a specific face when you're shooting blind. No one is that good at light placement. Additionally, you have the limited access to attachments, substantially lower power, and a very small flash tube to contend with.

Most of my lights are Alien Bees; they are well-made lights that have stood up to all the abuse I have given them. I have tried many brands and found these lights to be the best value.

Portrait Light Functions

In any portrait lighting setup, there are one or more lights falling on the subject. It is up to you to control the characteristics, direction, and intensity of any light source you choose to use.

Main Light

The main light produces the pattern of light and shadow on the subject's face. It may be the only light in the scene or it may be one of many. Either way, it is critical to understand how this one light shapes the look of your image—and how it can be modified to create a variety of looks.

Fill Light

The fill light adds light on the shadow side of the subject, lightening (but not eliminating) the shadows so that the camera can capture the more subtle tonal variations you want to see in a professional image.

Background Light

When you turn on your main light, you raise the quantity of light on the subject. The area behind the subject, however, will then appear darker in comparison. To attain a balanced exposure, you can add a background light to increase the illumination on the background. This is important for separating subjects with dark hair/clothing from dark backgrounds.

Hair Light

A lack of separation between the subject and the background is one thing that clients hate. In addition to adding a background light, creating adequate separation may also require the addition of a hair light to produce highlights on the top of the subject's hair.

Accent Lights

Accent lights are used to direct the viewer's eye to a certain area and add luster. For most of my portraits, I use at least two accent lights (one on each side of the background and at a height slightly





▲▶ In broad lighting, the main light is placed on the side of the face that is more visible to the camera.



▲▶ In short lighting, the main light is placed on the side of the face that is less visible to the camera.



higher than the subject's head level) to accent the hair and side of the body.

Broad vs. Short Lighting

The shape of the subject's face will often suggest the best general placement for the main light (or, in the case of outdoor lighting, the best placement of the subject relative to the light). There are two basic scenarios for using directional light, which is good for revealing the contours of the face. These are broad lighting and short lighting.

To produce broad lighting, the subject's face is turned so that it is at an angle to the camera. The main light is then placed on the side of the subject's face that is more visible to the camera (the "broad" side of the face). Because this places highlights on a large part of the face, it's a good option for subjects with normal to narrow faces.

For short lighting, the subject's face is turned so that it is at an angle to the camera. The main light is then placed on the side of the subject's face that is less visible to the camera (the "short"

side of the face). Because this places highlights on a narrow part of the face, it's a good option for subjects with normal to wide faces.

The physical shape of the subject's face is only one consideration, of course. Short lighting tends to be popular for all face shapes and sizes, since almost everyone appreciates a slimmer look. Creatively, you may opt for broad lighting to communicate a more open, friendly look. Short lighting, on the other hand, tends to create a look that is more dramatic.

Light Characteristics

We have three areas of lighting that we must control. The highlights, the shadows, and the transition areas in between. Contrary to popular belief, the most important area to control is not

the highlight, nor is it the shadow. It's the transition area from one to another. The area where the highlight starts darkening to the darkest part of the shadow is what defines a professional portrait. This is the area that brings a flat piece of paper into the third dimension. When you conceptualize your portrait, you'll need to decide how that transition area should look. Then, you'll need to choose a main light source that produces light with the characteristic you want.

Soft/Diffused Light

Light is called "soft" or "diffuse" when there is a gradual transition from the highlight area of the image to the darkest shadow. In portraiture, soft light diminishes the appearance of lines and wrinkles. It also produces less shine on the subject's face than hard light. Most traditional portraits are made with soft light because it is flattering—and more forgiving of poorly placed light sources. When I was a new photographer, I thought I should use the softest light possible. I was wrong. With a main light source that is too soft, the light lacks directionality and contrast, and the final image looks flat. It lacks the "pop" that you want in professional images.

Hard/Directional Light

Hard light is characterized by hard, sharp shadows and high contrast. There is a quick transition

- ◀ When the transition between the highlight and shadow areas is broad and gradual (*top*), the light is described as soft. Soft light is created by sources that are large relative to the subject.
- ◀ When the transition between the highlight and shadow areas is abrupt and well-defined (*bottom*), the light is described as hard. Hard light is created by sources that are small relative to the subject.



from highlight to shadow. When controlled, hard light can yield dramatic looks. The Hollywood photographers used hard light for their classic, high-contrast black & white portraits.

Controlling Light Characteristics

So, what determines whether a given light source will produce hard light or soft light? Let's look at the basic tools we have for controlling this characteristic. We'll come back to this discussion in chapter 8 when we look at studio lighting.

Size Relative to Subject

The characteristic of the light is dictated by the size of the light relative to the subject. The larger the light is in relation to the subject, the softer the light will appear; the smaller the light source is in relation to the subject, the harder the light will appear. This means that, placed at equal distances from the subject, a large light source (like a softbox) will produce softer light, while a small light source (like a spotlight) will produce harder light.

The Distance to the Subject

Note the phrase "relative to the subject." Any light source can be made harder or softer by adjusting its position relative to the subject. A light source close to the subject will be large in relation to the subject and produce softer light. The same light source will be smaller relative to the subject (and produce harder light) when moved farther away. A good example is the sun; it's huge, but it's so far from us that its direct light is very hard.

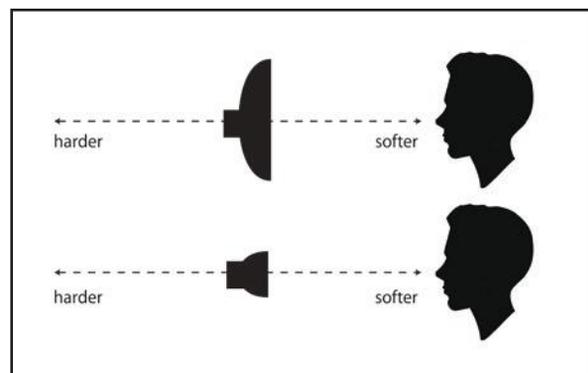
Light Modifiers

Given that we have limited space in most shooting environments, it is often most practical to change

the characteristic of the lighting by changing the physical size of the light, rather than the distance to the subject. This is where light modifiers come in. There are many modifiers available that will allow you to create the degree of softness or hardness you desire in your portrait. When picking a main-light modifier, you need to select the one that is right for your image. This has nothing to do with what I or another photographer might use. It's all about the style of light you want to offer your client.

There are many modifiers available that will allow you to create the degree of softness you desire in your portrait. The majority of traditional portraits are made with softboxes; these offer flattering light for portraiture and are more forgiving if your placement isn't perfect. Halos, stripboxes, and ring lights are also popular.

Like modifiers designed to diffuse light, light modifiers that create harder, more directional light have subtle variations in design and functionality, but all produce harder light than a softbox. These light sources include spotlights, parabolics, and beauty dishes. Accessories like barn doors, grids, and snoots can also be used to produce more directed light.



▲ Regardless of the size of the modifier, as the distance between it and the subject grows, the light on the subject becomes progressively harder.

Control the Light

When it comes to main light sources, bigger doesn't necessarily mean better—even if those large softboxes do seem pretty impressive. With a main light source that is too soft, however, the lighting lacks contrast and the final images can look flat. Very large boxes are great for lighting families or larger groups, but for single subjects they can put light where you don't want it; for a controlled effect when photographing single subjects, I sometimes use a small or medium softbox for full-length poses. This allows me to light only the areas of the subject to which I want to draw the viewer's eye.

There are other ways that you can manipulate your softbox to make its light a little softer or harder. If you are using a softbox with the flash head facing the subject, the light will be harder than it would be if you aimed the flash head at the back of the box (so it bounces off the back of the box before passing through the diffusion panel). Directing the light through just a single diffusion panel produces a less diffuse quality of light than you could create by adding the second diffusion panel supplied with most softboxes. With all else



▲ For portraits made with harder lighting, I opt for a pretty small light source: a flash unit fitted with a parabolic (metal) reflector or beauty dish. Adding barn doors lets me put the light only where I want it.

being equal, a softbox with a silver interior will produce harder light than a softbox with a white interior. If the light is too contrasty for your tastes, add inner diffusion material or replace the outer diffuser with a thicker fabric. I prefer a softbox with a silver lining and a thinner front diffusion panel. This fits my style of photography and the tastes of my clients—most of whom are high school seniors and like portraits with a bit more contrast and a higher color saturation.

For most of my traditional portraits made with harder lighting, I opt for a pretty small light source: a flash unit fitted with a parabolic (met-

Feather the Light

If the light from your softbox is too hard, you can create a softer effect by using just the light from the edge of the softbox, rather than the harder, more direct beam of light emitted by the full front panel of the modifier. This technique is called feathering. I tend to select softboxes that produce more contrast than I typically want and feather the light to soften it. Feathering is a great technique that allows you to create workable light from sources that would not otherwise be usable.

al) reflector. These reflectors come in a variety of shapes and sizes as well as different interior finishes, each of which will affect the light quality. Snoots, grids, barn doors, and other accessories can be attached to the parabolic reflector to allow for enhanced control over the light. You can even modify your parabolics by changing the finish of the interior or putting diffusion material over the end of the reflector. The best part of using a parabolic for your main light is the amount of control it offers. When you can add light precisely where you want it, you can create a dramatic portrait—something like the “old Hollywood” look.

Skin Tone and Light Characteristics

Before we dive further into lighting, I want you to envision something. Pretend you are still a portrait artist, but instead of a camera, you use oil paints and a canvas. Painters can use a white canvas or they can use a black canvas. Let's start with a white canvas—picture it in your mind and choose a few colors to start. Got it? Now, imagine starting with a black canvas. Would you use the same tones of paint you picked for the white canvas? Would you even use the same style of painting? On the white canvas, the canvas itself produces your highlights; with your paint, you'd mostly be creating shadows and transitions to white. On the black canvas, the canvas provides the shadow; with your paint, you'd be adding the highlights and transitions to black.

How does this apply to photography? Faces are our canvases—and, like the painter, we work with lighter canvases and darker canvases. In fact, my clients' skin tones range in tone from almost translucent to a very dark brown. Unfortunately, photography instructors too often teach por-

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Photography instructors too often teach portrait lighting as though we all have one canvas on which to paint.

trait lighting as though we all have one canvas on which to paint—as if canvases of all colors could be painted the same way. This leads to a great deal of confusion when photographers try to deal with all the different shades of canvases we encounter when running a portrait business. Just like the artist's canvases, dark skin tones require light to highlight the areas that we want to see; light skin tones require us to create darkness or shadowing to bring depth to the face.

What this means is that you must know how to adjust your lighting for every client who sits before you. We are not department store photogra-

What Works for Me

I don't receive free equipment or money from manufacturers. So here's the honest truth about lighting gear: learn to use what you have to achieve the look you want—and don't waste money trying to buy equipment to produce a look you don't understand. Knowledge, not equipment, is the key to great lighting. As long as there are no tears in the fabric to spill light on the subject or camera and your cat hasn't urinated on the front baffle turning it yellow, whatever light modifier you have is fine. My main lights for the more traditional portraits are Westcott Halos, similar to the Larson Starfish but less expensive. I use a medium Halo for my head-and-shoulder areas and a large one for my full-length areas (this larger size maintains a consistent look when the light is placed at greater distance to the subject in the full-length areas). Should you not have the budget for two modifiers, simply place the larger Halo (or whatever large light box you have) at the same distance whether you are shooting a full-length or a head-and-shoulders look.



▲ Most of my day-to-day portrait sales come from images with clean, classic lighting that doesn't call attention to itself.

phers with one super-homogenized lighting technique for every client. Remember: If you want to charge a professional price, you must create a professional product.

Some of you are now thinking that you bought the wrong book. You might be saying, “Hold on now—in that other guy’s book, he said all I needed was three speedlights and the camera would do most of the work!” If I were a young photographer today, I would be tremendously annoyed at how everyone wants to dumb-down our craft. If you want to have a long, profitable career in this business, you should be demanding instruction that’s not all about the “easy” way; you should be demanding techniques that will help you be part of moving this profession forward, not relegating all the important decisions to the camera!

Knowing that our canvases change with each new face we photograph, the idea that three au-

tomatic speedlights are all you need to create salable portraits of any subject is crazy. It won't happen—at least not consistently. If you want to take five-hundred shots during a bridal session, spend hours in Photoshop editing and retouching, and come away with a few salable images, it might work for you . . . but that's a business plan that will probably end up with you in another profession sooner than later. That approach uses up the one resource in the world you cannot buy more of: time. Sooner or later, you will run out of time—and I am willing to bet that will happen before you have enough money to pay your bills!

Lighting Style

Lighting has to be selected for the client's end use. If a woman running for political office comes to you and wants her portrait taken, you probably shouldn't use a glamorous style of lighting. That would be as inappropriate as suggesting she wear a low-cut top—it's not really the proper look for a political official. There are times, many times,

when a client's needs overshadow the beauty of the final image. Often, I create portraits that could have been much more creative and beautiful if it weren't for a client insisting on a certain style of portrait for a certain need. Art is in the eye of the buyer, and as professionals we create the portraits that the client wants us to create.

Many photographers get bored when it comes to discussing “traditional” lighting styles—but those who wish to remain in this profession for very long should get a little more excited. Overall, 90 percent of portrait sales come from these styles, so you should master traditional styles like Rembrandt lighting and loop lighting before ever thinking of other styles. Traditional lighting flatters the subject and is appropriate for a wide variety of end uses. This is lighting that looks great but doesn't call a lot of attention to itself.

Most of my studio's lighting falls into this category—but with a bit of a fashionable edge, since a majority of my clients are younger (high-school seniors). For each session, I create what I consider traditional portrait lighting, then work with some more creative styles to have some fun and offer my clients images that my competition can't.

Metering and Exposure

Whether you are using studio light, existing interior light, or natural light outdoors, metering is the best way to control the highlights, the shadows, and the transition area in between.

Why Meter?

Since digital photography, metering has become a little bit of a lost art. Too often, photographers now rely on their digital camera's built-in metering systems and the LCD preview on the back. In my opinion, the instant preview has done more to

set professional photography back than anything else. While it is a very convenient feature, many younger photographers have started using it instead of developing a reliable metering and testing system. The preview is not designed for that. It is not large enough for critical viewing nor does it have the same characteristics as the image you see when you output a print.

Metering and testing gives you the opportunity to produce refined results for each client and



Consistency and Efficiency

Young photographers don't always understand the importance of consistency in lighting. They like winging it, because they think it is in some way “artsy.” Unfortunately, this “artsy” approach is the very reason that so many photographers have such a hard time with studio lighting. They never take the time to properly set up and test their lighting to establish a standardized working environment. Trust me—I understand this. When I first started out, I would either focus on the client and position my lights where I thought they should be (which produced images that were all over the place in the terms of exposure) or I would drive my client crazy by metering each light for each shot. What seemed like a free and creative approach was actually making my life a lot harder. I soon realized an important fact: only when you have done away with the variables and are able to predict exactly what the outcome will be are you free to be creative and truly use light to enhance a subject.



◀ Metering and testing help you produce more creative and customized looks for your clients.

to create your own style of lighting. Measuring the quantity of light from each source and comparing it against the others allows you to visualize how the image will record on your camera. This is an opportunity to design something unique—to showcase your tastes, flatter each subject, and establish a lighting style that you own.

How to Meter

In any lighting situation (studio or outdoors) you have a main light source. Typically, this main light source is placed between 45 and 90 degrees off the camera position. In this position, the main light will illuminate the mask of the face from one side, while creating shadowing on the opposite side of the face. To meter the main light, turn all the other lights off and point the light meter (with the diffusion disk over the sensor) toward the main light. Take a reading. Then, adjust the power of the main light source to give you the f-stop you want to photograph with. (As a professional, you should not just place the light and say, “Oh well, what the heck? Looks like I’ll be shooting at f/11.”)

Once you get the main light adjusted to produce the correct f-stop, meter every other light you will be using and adjust them one by one relative to the main light reading to get the amount of light you want. If you want the background to appear the same as it does to your eye in room light, the background light should meter at the same f-stop as the main light. If you want it lighter or darker, adjust its output up or down relative to the main light. For the accent and hair lights, I usually opt for a setting that is $\frac{1}{2}$ stop less than



► Start with good shadowing, then add fill to control the contrast—without *eliminating* the shadows.

the main light for subjects with dark hair or skin; I set it at 1 stop less than the main for subjects with blond hair or fair complexions. The settings you choose are up to you as the artist.

Don't Overlight

New photographers tend to worry too much about lighting and not enough about shadowing. Shadowing is important because it creates dimension and reduces the width of our clients—which, as I've noted, is part of what paying clients want. One of the primary jobs of the photographer is to produce portraits that align with the client's self-image, and shadowing will do more to help you create attain that goal than any other tool.

If your main light is so soft that (without fill) the ear on the shadow side is only slightly darker than the mask of the face, you are working with flat lighting. The only way to produce a portrait with highlights, shadows, and a nice transition area is to start with enough shadow—you want to take an “overshadow and fill” approach, rather than an “overlight” strategy. While there is always a point where the shadowing is too extreme to be filled and produce a salable portrait, a much more common problem with the portraits in today's marketplace is overlighting and a lack of contrast.

Add Fill to Control Contrast

Not every shot will require fill. I never add fill automatically; I look at the subject posed in the scene. When I am shooting in a bright or high-key area with a fair-skinned person, the white surroundings all reflect so much light that they provide plenty of fill with no help from me. In other

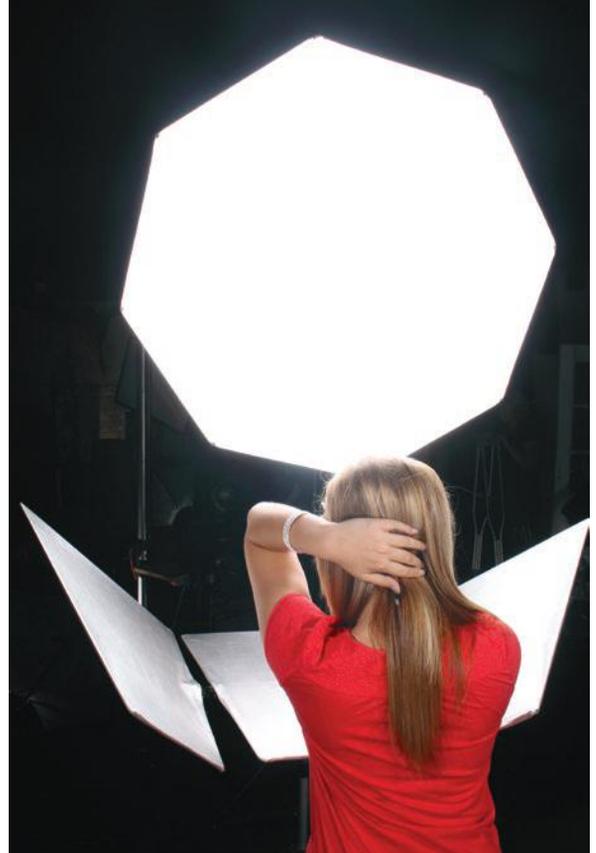


scenarios, when the shadows are too heavy, I add the appropriate fill.

So how much fill is “appropriate”? We all want the secret formula—a recipe that works with every client, every time. If all of our subjects had sun-kissed, Caucasian skin tones and none had a long nose, deep-set eyes, or any other such issues, we might be able to use one standard for all our setups. In the real world, our clients' features and colorations differ wildly, so we need a variety of



▲ Adding fill light with a softbox.



▲ Adding fill light with a trifold reflector.

different lighting approaches. Nothing works *every* time with *every* client.

Flash Fill

You could use flash to fill the shadow, but I find that’s actually overly complicated in a lot of cases. Because the amount of fill light needed for each person will vary depending on their skin color,

their facial structure, and the color of their hair and clothing, using flash for fill can become a bit of a guessing game. This is why I use a reflector for fill much of the time. I say “much of the time,” because with a group of twenty people, I need the power of flash to fill all that space—but, once again, in a group of twenty people the lighting is less critical than in a single-subject image

with a larger facial size. I also use flash fill for my more glamorous portrait setups, as seen above.

Reflected Fill

If you want to use a reflector panel to fill in the shadow areas, you have a few choices to make. Reflectors are available in white, silver, or gold. I suggest that you avoid using gold reflectors, because the color of the light on the subject will be altered. If you want to see a warmer glow on the skin, it's best to make that change in Photoshop.

In the studio, I often use a silver/white reflector. I use the white side when I want soft fill and the reflector can be placed close to the subject (as in a head-and-shoulders pose). The silver side is used when I need a higher volume of light to fill the shadows or when the reflector must be placed farther away from the subject (as in a full-length pose). I also use the silver side of the reflector for extra shimmer when photographing a subject with very dark skin and when a dark-haired subject is dressed in very dark clothing.

The size of the reflector is also important when you are creating precision lighting. Working with a 6-foot reflector is great when you want to fill the shadows over the length of a standing subject's body, but when you want to fill only the face, leaving the rest of the body in shadow, a small reflector is a better choice.

I control the amount of fill by adjusting the distance of the reflector from the subject and observing the results. This is where training your eyes becomes so important. You need to learn to see as the camera does. You need to be able to identify the subtle differences between the correct

► Don't limit yourself. I used two different reflectors for this couple's studio portrait.

I suggest that you avoid using gold reflectors, because the color of the light on the subject will be altered.

amount of fill, too much fill, or too little fill for the look you are trying to create.

Run Lighting Tests

If you really want to get a handle on your lighting, run some tests. Choose a main light and enlist a couple models with different skin tones and facial features. Then create a series of portraits as you move the main light around the subject going from 45 to 90 degrees. Keep exact notes—and if you are working in a permanent shooting area, mark the floor as you go.

When you have taken all the images, make a print of each one using the same printer or lab as





◀ To work efficiently (and profitably), you want to develop systems that you can tweak for each client without having to reinvent the wheel each time.

you do for your clients. Make a big enough print that you can really see the lighting. Terrible lighting might be overlooked in a wallet-size print, but with an 8x10-inch, 11x14-inch, or larger print (with a larger face size) you can easily make the distinction between good lighting and bad.

Once you've completed these tests with the main light only, you can proceed to make test prints that incorporate fill light—and all the other lights. For each test, study the lighting to see if the fill source, background light, hair light, and/or accent lights produced the look you wanted; if not, adjust and re-print.

Once your lights are metered and tested, you have a starting place for each session. You have created a constant from which you can grow—a reference point from which you can refine the light positions, heights, and power settings to tailor the effect to the individual client.

It sounds simple, but few photographers take the time to test their lighting completely. Testing, practicing, and training your eyes to see is an ongoing process that should never really end. Even though I have been at this for quite a while, I still test and refine my lighting. I learn new techniques and incorporate them into what I am already doing to take my lighting to a new level.

The Eyes Are Critical

The eyes, more than anything else, are the best indicator of proper lighting. Without distinct catchlights in each eye, catchlights in the proper position and of the proper size, the face is not lit properly. This is especially critical when the por-



▲ As the angle of the main light changes from nearly straight-on (*left*) to more of an angle (*right*), the contouring shadows on the face increase—including the shadow of the nose.

trait features a larger facial size. You might be able to get by with less-than-perfect lighting on the face in a full-length pose or a scenic portrait, but you can't hide it in a head shot. This is why you must always check the eyes before finalizing your lighting.

The Main Light Position

With studio light sources (either in the studio or on location), I adjust the height and angle of the light while looking into the subject's eyes. This sounds really confusing, but it isn't. Everyone's face is different and you will simply need to adjust your lighting for each client in each pose.

Once I have the subject posed, I adjust the angle of the main light. The greater the angle of the light, the more it contours the face. This also increases the shadowing on the side of the face and the size of the transition area. However, as the angle increases, the nose shadow will also grow, making it look larger. Slowly move the main light around the subject until the shadow of the nose becomes a problem, then gradually move it back until you have the best lighting for that person. Subjects with smaller noses can be photographed with the light at a greater angle to increase the transition area from highlight to shadow; for subjects with larger noses, use a shallower angle.



◀ *(top)* Mentally divide the pupil and iris into quarters. The catchlights should appear in the upper quarter of each iris. They should be of a medium size, not pinpoints of light, but also not so large that they overwhelm the eye or obscure its color.



◀ *(center)* Without distinct catchlights, the eyes are lifeless. This problem is caused by the absence of a main light source, or the use of one that is so large that it produces an even illumination across the entire eye. If you see this, look for for a more controlled main light source with better direction.



◀ *(bottom)* Using a small, intense main light (such as on-camera flash) produces a tiny catchlight. The result is a very harsh, unappealing look on the face. It's simply not a professional approach.

jects, the main light can be positioned higher to bring out more contouring of the face. For other subjects, a lower angle will provide the best results. I normally end up with the bottom of the main light modifier at about the shoulder height of the subject. The angle is between 60 to 70 degrees from the angle of the camera.

Catchlights

Eyes, just like faces, are completely different in how they reflect light—this is another reason you need to adjust the light for each client, rather than expecting one setup to work for everyone.

If you have observed that the subject's eyes are not evenly sized, this is the time to deal with that. Simply adjust the main light and the posing of the face so that the catchlights appear to be the same size. Much of the reason a portrait viewer notices eye-size difference is because the catchlights in one eye are less noticeable or smaller than the catchlights in the other eye. If the catchlights appear even, the eyes will appear more even.

Once you've placed the main light as described, you'll see the eyes start to come alive.

The higher the main light is placed, the more it contours the face from top to bottom, but the less it will illuminate the eyes. Once it reaches a certain height, you will lose the catchlights and dark circles will appear under the eyes. To adjust the height, I raise the main light to a point that is obviously too high, then slowly lower it until the catchlights are in the right position in both eyes. Some clients have no circles under their eyes and eyes that reflect light really well; for these sub-

But don't stop there! At this point, the eyes are only illuminated from one point: the main light. With just this light, the eye color will only be visible with light-blue eyes; any other eye color will be lost. I want to see the color in every subject's eyes, so I often bring in a second source of light from below the subject to light the lower part of the eye. This can be a reflector, a piece of foam-core board, or a softbox.

When you see catchlights in the correct position and secondary catchlights in the lower part of the eyes (with visible eye color showing in at least half the eye), you will know that you have created a salable portrait.

Develop Your “Camera Vision”

Training your eyes to see the way a camera sees is a bit of a lost art in this digital world (and, no, the

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I often bring in a second source of light from below the subject to light the lower part of the eye.

LCD preview isn't a replacement). Developing your “sight” is a learned process through which your mind basically converts the world you see into the world the way the camera sees it. It takes practice and patience but the rewards are huge.

Developing “camera vision” is a must for using reflectors or natural light in your portraits. In the studio, it makes the difference between the

▼ It is imperative that you train your eye to spot problems and correct them—your objective should be to create great images *in the camera*.



Get It Right—In the Camera

Photoshop cripples many young photographers. Jumping into the deep end is the best motivation to learn how to swim. You will never learn to light a portrait properly if you go into every session thinking that all the problems created by your ignorance or laziness can simply be fixed later.

If you want a true litmus test of the quality of your work, show it to a client right out of the camera. That's how we operate at my studio; we go right from the session to the viewing room—without any retouching or editing. Therefore, I strive to make each capture at least 90 percent as good as the final image will be. If clients buy your unedited images for a professional price, you are well on your way. If you show your clients unedited images and their reactions deflate your ego, you will be humble enough to learn how to become a real professional photographer and demand better quality from yourself.



right amount of fill and too much or too little. Outdoors, it saves you huge amounts of time re-touching out what you didn't notice before the shot was taken. The only way to develop “camera vision” is to constantly review what you photograph. Study your images and look for what you missed. What were the differences between what you thought you were photographing and what the camera actually captured?

When I started in photography, I practiced outdoors while waiting for sessions. I looked for a spot I thought had perfect lighting, then I would take a test shot to review. In the beginning, I missed everything—bad lighting, hot spots from direct sunlight, and even small pieces of trash in the scene! My awareness started changing. Soon, I could spot problems in a scene with a quick glance. The same was true for problems with my clients; stray hairs, wrinkles, bra straps, unbuttoned shirts, and unzipped pants instantly caught my eye. We are capable of amazing things when we challenge ourselves to learn them.

While this training isn't easy, it is necessary if you want a long-term career in professional photography. Practice while you are waiting for clients to show up, looking for scenes or spots you think are perfect. Here's a place where the LCD screen *is* very useful: take a photo and look at the preview on the back of the camera (make sure to enlarge it so you can see the details). You can also use the LCD preview to help spot problems with your client's appearance. Take a quick photo as the first shot, then enlarge it and check them for any posing, clothing, or hair problems. Remember: as professional photographers, we are responsible for *everything* in the final image.

11. Outdoor Lighting

Images taken outside of a studio are some of the most striking and personalized portraits that we can create. Contrary to what many photographers think, however, outdoor portraits can be both efficient and profitable.

If you use only available lighting for your photography outdoors, your business is facing one of two profit-robbing problems.

Problems with Available Light Only

If you use only available lighting for your photography outdoors, your business is facing one of two profit-robbing problems. How can I know all that? Because I have tried it all. Here are the two scenarios:

1. Insufficient Variety

First, if you work outdoors during business hours (when most clients want to book sessions) and use natural light only, you are stuck under your favorite tree or patio cover for the entire session. These are the only places where you're going to get nice, available light on your subjects. The problem? You can't create enough variety during the session to ensure a good sale.

2. Too Little Shooting Time

The second scenario is this: you are shooting only in the sweet light at sunrise and sunset. Not only do most clients prefer to be in bed or home eating dinner at these hours, your shooting windows are so limited that you can, at best, book two clients per day. Also, you have to factor in your driving for each of these single-client sessions.

Adding Light Makes It Work

There is a better, easier way: add light. Using this approach, I can shoot outdoor portraits all day long. To minimize drive time, I book multiple sessions back-to-back at the same location and adjust my lighting as the natural light changes over the course of the day. Here's how I do it.



Evaluate the Light

Go to a scene and look at the indicators of light direction. Look at the leaves on the tree, look at the highlight and shadow on a white column, or look at the eyes of your client.

Again, the catchlights in the eyes really tell you everything you need to know. If you see two intense catchlights of equal size in the eyes, you have more than one main light source. Even if you like light coming from below the subject (as I do), if the catchlight in the lower part of the eye is as intense as the main light in the upper eye, it is an additional main light source, not a secondary light source as it should be. The eyes will also tell if your main light source is too large or too soft. If you see a catchlight that looks like a line extending from one side of the eye to the other, you have flat, frontal lighting with little or no shadowing. If you choose this lighting for a reason, it's fine—however, this is typically not an appropriate outdoor main light source. To reduce the size of the main light and add some shadowing, use a gobo (black panel, etc.) to block some of the light from hitting the subject, or simply turn the subject away from the large main light source until the light is skimming across their face.

Add Reflected Light

To use reflected light as the main light, I select a location that has the sun at the subject's back. This means the sunlight is coming from behind, so all the foliage will be backlit to bring out more of its color. This also means that any direct sunlight striking the subject will act as a hair or separation light. Since both the main light and the fill light are from the same source, the color temperature

◀ Two reflectors illuminated my backlit subject.

► A reflector was used to feather light onto a subject in a relatively shaded area.

stays consistent throughout a session. The color of the reflected sunlight might change slightly in several hours, but not enough to adversely affect a single session.

After I select the specific spot and pose the client, I position my assistant in the same basic spot I would place the main light in the studio, with the reflector at the same height (relative to the subject) as the main light in the studio. Too often, I see young photographers resting the bottom of a large (6-foot) reflector on the ground; with a subject at a normal height, this means the main light is coming upward from the ground, producing a “horror lighting” look. The reflector should be at the same height as the main light would be placed in the studio relative to the height of the subject. (*Note:* For this approach, I use a white reflector for softer light when working close to the subject. I switch to a silver reflector when working at a greater distance.)

To soften the light on the face (and prevent squinting), I feather the main beam of light off the subject and use just the softer edge of the light. I have the assistant find the beam of light and angle it way above the subject’s head so no light is hitting the subject. I then have him slowly start to lower the beam of reflected sunlight down onto the subject. When, from the camera position, I first see distinct catchlights in both eyes, I ask him to stop. At that point I have achieved a main light source that has overpowered the ambient light and the portrait is ready to be taken.

I love this lighting system. It is foolproof, because you see exactly the light you create. You know exactly when the intensity of the light is



right by watching the eyes and it looks completely natural without any color casts. All I can say is try it. Once you get used to it, you will love it and you will create the best outdoor portraits you ever have!

Add Strobe Lighting

I tend to avoid strobe lighting outdoors for portraits with a larger face size, but it's very useful for full-length images and group portraits where

▼ An octobox produced enough soft light to balance the subject with the background.



the face size is reduced and critical lighting is, well, less critical. (And by “strobes,” I mean studio strobes—not speedlights. Speedlights are best reserved for event photography; they are not suitable for professional portrait photography.)

Using flash outdoors is kind of a guessing game, just like using it in the studio for fill. My approach is usually to use the strobe as a main light with the natural light as fill. To make the portraits look natural, the main light must come from the same direction as the natural light—not the top of the camera.

I set the main light no more than 1½ stops above the reading from the ambient fill-light source. If you exceed this, using natural fill, it will be obvious that the person was lit by something other than natural light. If the background is really bright and you have to get the shot, you can add a second studio light for fill. Then, you can darken the background by increasing the shutter speed as much as your camera's maximum flash sync speed will permit. Depending on your lighting setup, the increase in shutter speed might also darken the overall photo (if you are working at a larger aperture). This needs to be accounted for in your overall settings.

Try Dragging the Shutter

Strobe lighting can also be useful in lower light. Wedding photographers use this technique to produce some really beautiful scenic portraits by setting a flash to illuminate the bride and groom, then dragging the shutter to pick up the colors from a skyline after sunset. If it is dark enough, the bride and groom can actually walk off the scene while the shutter is open and not be recorded because the ambient light level is so low.

12. Composition Essentials

Many newer photographers have a hard time deciding where a photograph should end. I think that is why so many photographers today love scenic full-length photos. Composition, more than anything else, requires you to visualize the final portrait in your mind and then plan the photograph to achieve that end.

You have to go through the process with each series of images you create for a client.

What to Show

Are you photographing a model or high school senior who likes a striking close-up image? A real estate agent who wants a business portrait? A pregnant mother who wants to show her baby-belly? Or a lady with long, beautiful legs that wants to show them off in a portrait for her husband? In each of these scenarios, the composition is easy because most of us can instantly visualize how the shot should look. For the senior portrait, you'd show the face down to the top of shoulder. For the business portrait, the composition would probably be centered and composed to show the subject's face and shoulders/chest. For the mom-to-be's portrait, you'd crop a little below the baby bump. And for the leggy woman, you'd show her head to toe.

You have to go through the process with each series of images you create for a client. Imagine the real estate agent slipped in a piece of lingerie to do a photo for her husband. How would you compose that? If it were me, I would look at the woman and the lingerie to see how much of her I should show. If she were heavier,



I'd compose the portrait from the waist up. If she were fit and toned, I would compose the portrait to show her thighs. If she were fit and toned with particularly great legs, I would show all of her.

Finish Off the Frame

“Finishing off the frame” is a phrase I use when I am trying to teach composition to young photographers. In a head-and-shoulders pose, the composition of a portrait looks “finished” if the shoulders fill the bottom of the frame from one side to the other. If the portrait is composed showing more of the body, then the arms are used to fill in the void areas at the bottom of the frame. Basically, this is completing a triangular composition, with the shoulders and arms forming the base of the triangle and the head at its peak.

Even when you include more of the subject, the body should be used to form a roughly triangular base. This is a helpful concept for many photographers who are starting to learn the various poses, but have a hard time trying to decide where the bottom of the frame should be (waistline? thighs? knees?). I tell them to look for the bottom of the triangle and crop the portrait there. Whether the arms, hips, or knees are used to complete the bottom of the triangle, that should be the bottom of the frame or composition.

◀▼ In any portrait length, the frame looks finished when the bottom is the base of a triangle that supports the face.



As you see in most of the photographs in this book, using the body to fill the base of the composition ensures that the portrait appears finished. It looks as though the photographer put some thought into coordinating the pose with the final composition. In each type of pose (waist-up, thighs-up, knees-up, or full-length) the body is used to fill the bottom of the composition.

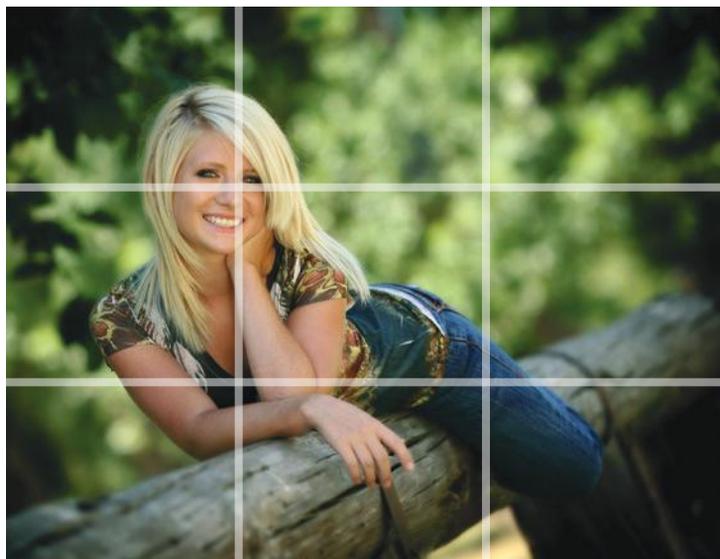
Many poses offer different ways to compose the portrait. Poses like these work very well in high-volume photography studios. Once the subject (in this case, let's say it's a senior) is in the pose, a full-length or three-quarter pose is done so she can see her entire outfit. Then a close-up is done to make Mom happy. Both are taken without having to re-pose the subject.

Position the Subject in the Frame

The next decision is how to position the subject in the frame. In some photographs, the subject should be centered, with the head in the center of the frame and a standard amount of head space.

You can also compose images according to the rule of thirds. According to this guideline, the frame is divided into three parts both vertically and horizontally—think of dropping a tic-tac-toe grid over the image. The points where the lines of the grid intersect are the most important focal points in the frame and good places to position a subject. This frequently works—but, like every rule, it is often broken to achieve a better image.

As a new photographer, making conscious choices about composition and learning to pose the subject as you have envisioned is a major accomplishment. It gets you out of the machine-gun mind-set and is the first big step toward creating professional-level portraiture.



▲ Positioning the main point of interest (the face) according to the rule of thirds.

▼ With no change in the pose, you can zoom in for a tighter view of the face—a Mom-pleasing look!





Camera Perspective

Composition is complicated even further when you start looking at the camera elevation and tilts—but you should never let them become a crutch. If you find you are trying to breathe life into an idea that is obviously dead, start over. Work on everything else first; when you have mastered lighting, posing, and expressions, *then* you can work on enhancing your near perfect images with altered perspectives.

High Angle, Low Angle

Recently, I have started doing many more elevated camera positions. I do this for the slimming quality, as well as the ability to maintain a large face size while showing the entire body. I also like shooting from a higher camera angle when I want to create a child-like feeling—suggesting the large world looking down on a small soul.

On location, changing the camera height is also useful for isolating certain areas of a background. This can also be effective in the studio. For example, some senior girls love the cool look of the black, leather, and chrome finishes on the Harley Davidson motorcycle we offer as a prop, but they didn't want to look like “biker chicks.” Elevating the camera above the Harley and shooting down captures the coolness of the materials without focusing too much on the motorcycle.

Just as you can raise the camera height for effect, you can also lower it. A lower camera height can make a shorter person look taller. Outdoors, you can lie on the grass and shoot upward to reduce the burnt-up grass in front of the subject.

◀ Shooting from a lower angle allowed me to use the roof of this porch area as the background for the portrait.

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On location, changing the camera height is also useful for isolating certain areas of a background.

What's most important is that you select the camera elevation because it produces the portrait you have created in your mind, not because you're grasping for some way to add excitement into a lifeless portrait.

Too often, I see young photographers doing what many of my high-school yearbook photographers do. They have to take a photo of the campus at lunchtime, but they are so bored with taking crowd shots that they lie down on the ground or climb up on the roof. From this perspective, they are basically just getting the top of everyone's head instead of their faces—but, hey, at least it's different! Don't change the camera elevation or use a strange composition because you think the portrait is boring and you hope this little trick will save it.

Camera Tilt

Much like tilting the head, it takes a lot of practice to become good at camera tilts—and even more to know when you should do it. Most people who buy photography like to see vertical lines presented vertically and horizontal lines presented horizontally. That means that 98 percent of

► *(top)* An extremely high camera angle kept the emphasis on this subject's face and bust—her favorite features.

► *(bottom)* Elevating the camera keeps the cool textures of the motorcycle in the background—but in a stylized way that doesn't make the subject look like a "biker chick."



the images I take every day have the camera either completely vertical or completely horizontal. Nothing drives me crazy like a photograph where the camera's position was slightly off, creating lines that are askew. Unless you are purposefully rendering them otherwise, straight lines should actually be straight.

Tilts are something I actually started doing out of necessity. If I had a very tall girl in a re-



clining pose on the floor of my high-key area, I couldn't back up far enough to get her into the cropping of an 8x10- or 5x7-inch print. I could have changed to a wider angle lens, but I like the look of the lens I was using, so I tilted the camera and put her head in the upper left corner with her body going diagonally through the frame to the lower right corner. I only hoped she and her mother would like my "cool" composition. Happily, they did—and so did many others. It added a unique perspective to an otherwise ordinary scene.

I personally love these corner-to-corner compositions. They work well for *me*—but that's because I have younger clients who like unique portraits; it isn't something I would do for a very traditional person or a business portrait.

◀▼ Tilting the camera turns vertical and horizontal lines into diagonals, which can be a powerful tool for composition.



13. Portrait Presentation

There are two parts of presentation. The first part of this is the way in which you present your images to your clients. The second is the way in which you prepare your product for delivery. How is it printed, how will it be displayed, and how is it packaged to give to your client?

Photographers sell their products this way because they doubt the value of what they have to sell.

Presenting Images to Clients

How you present your images to clients will have a direct impact on the profit in your pockets. I feel so strongly about it that I wrote an article on the topic for *Rangefinder* magazine. The article was called “Paper Proofs Are for Wimps”—and for good reason! Although so much has changed in photography, the majority of studios in this country still present their work to clients using paper proofs or on-line galleries. What has made these impersonal systems the chosen method of presentation? One word: fear—fear of presenting your work to your clients and actually hearing what they have to say; fear of learning to sell the product you produce (or having to hire a qualified salesperson to sell it for you).

Photographers sell their products this way because they doubt the value of what they have to sell. When you doubt your product, you avoid selling at all costs. You leave proofs on the counter and run the other way or you e-mail a link and wait to hear back.

How It Used to Work

At our high-volume studio, our senior counts aren't in the hundreds, they are in the thousands. With film, the only means of deal-



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I changed my presentation process to one that had worked well for me in the past.

ing with our volume was using paper proofs and a sales appointment in the studio. Clients could take the images home for a short time with a deposit. Using this system, only about 35 percent of the clients returned with their proofs on the original sales date. Approximately 45 percent ordered over the next six months of the school year, prompted by various reminders and deadlines for Christmas and graduation. Nearly 20 percent of the seniors/parents kept their proofs beyond their graduation day. After countless mailed reminders and notices, as well as several phone calls, they ended up in collections.

This meant that each year I could count on almost 20 percent of these families not returning to our studio for their other kids. Some photographers would think of this as a good thing: “They are stiff anyway—we don’t need clients like that!” Not being quite as negative, I realized that most of this 20 percent were not trying to get something for nothing or to rip me off. They simply realized they could put off the buying decision until later, and later never came. The money they had planned on using for portraits was used for something else or something changed in their financial lives, making it impossible to order senior pictures. Financially, nothing lasts forever. This family’s economic slump would probably be over by the time the next senior was of age. However, because of the unpleasant relationship with my studio (going to collections), that upcoming senior would go somewhere else.



Why Instant Ordering Is Better

When the studio went digital, I realized that the time involved would make shooting digital more expensive than shooting film. I needed to increase the size and number of my orders to cover the additional costs. To do this, I changed my presentation process to one that had worked well for me in the past.

Back when I first opened my studio, I built a sales room that looked like a little living room. I put a 40x60-inch frame over the sofa and projected each image into the frame so I could show clients what their images would look like in a wall-portrait size. Then, I started practicing how to sell what I had created. I hated it and it wasn't easy, but it was necessary. I heard all the complaints that photographers fear. "Why did

◀▲ In a matter of seconds, my sales staff can show the client what an image will look like in black & white or with other finishing touches.

you pick that background with that clothing?" "How come you charge so much?" "We need to have something to take home!" I heard them all. But hearing what my clients had to say made two things happen. First, realizing *I* would be the one to face my clients I started to put more effort into my sessions; I wanted to be able to show them that I was as good as I thought I was. Second, I learned that clients can come up with all kinds of little problems to put off spending money, even on something they really want. However, a good salesperson will make the sale *in spite of these objections*. Once I learned to sell, I consistently sold wall portraits, my orders were larger, and at least



half of the money was in my pocket as we concluded business. Clients were also better informed about studio procedures; if they weren't ready to order, they wouldn't make an appointment.

With digital, we now have sales rooms where clients view their images on large computer monitors immediately after the session is over. The sales process is the same as it was in the beginning. Once the images are narrowed down to their favorite poses, they go over the packages—and a trained salesperson guides them through each step of the process.

Learn How to Sell

Learning to sell your work is nothing more than learning how humans make decisions. As a professional, you simply help your client make the decision that is in their best interests—even if

◀▶ Having great images at the time of capture lets you sell right after the session and capitalize on your subjects' excitement about the shoot.

they don't realize it at the time. There are actually many benefits to clients when ordering portraits in this fashion.

A Skilled Salesperson

When preview images are considered at home, the buyer (typically the wife or mother) normally has the man in her life help her select the portraits—and we all know how helpful men are when making decisions about something they aren't that interested in. (“I don't care. They all look the same to me. And how much is this going to cost us anyway?” is usually all the help the client will receive.)

When they view their images immediately after the session, the client has a professional staff there to assist in every step of the buying process. My sales staff is trained to help clients by pointing out the subtle differences between poses that appear almost the same. In a matter of seconds, they can show the client what an image will look like in black & white or with other finishing touches. They can show a selection of frames that will coordinate with both their home and the portrait. This is a professional way of selling a professional product. This isn't your average "run and hide, then hope for the best" approach.

One Decision at a Time

People can make only one decision at a time. They can't decide on poses, a package, *and* framing all at once. It is a step-by-step process. First, have them select the image or images they





◀ Selling becomes easier when you learn to create images, right in the camera, that you feel confident about.

in which it will be displayed. It also lets them see the size of the faces in each print size. After the size of the wall portrait is selected, they decide on a package or number of portraits they need for themselves and their family. The final step is to discuss frames and other add-on items that increase the size of the total order without reducing the print sales, which are more profitable.

Selling Is Serious Business

Take selling seriously. Either learn to sell professionally or hire a good salesperson to sell for you. Make sure their sales experience is with a professional product (not cars, vacuums, or other “high-pressure” items). If you decide to do the sales presentation yourself, spend some time studying the psychology and language of professional selling—again, not high-pressure selling.

When I first attempted this type of selling, I was scared to death. My first sales appointment was a little rough. I stuttered and I said the wrong things at the wrong times—but I still sold a 20x24- and two 16x20-inch prints to the parents of two smaller children. Up to that point I had never sold anything larger than a 16x20, and I had never sold multiple wall portraits from the same session. Despite the bumps in the road, this made me an instant believer in selling my product rather than hoping for an order.

Printing and Delivery

Whether you print your own work or send it to a lab, you are ultimately responsible for the way in which your product is given to your client. This

will be ordering from. Then, have them select a wall-portrait size they feel the most comfortable with. Since the viewing screen is of a fixed size, we use sample photographs in the studio to show the options. This doesn't have quite the impact of seeing the actual portrait in the various sizes, but it helps educate the client about the importance of selecting the proper size portrait for the room

is critical to developing a successful photographic style. You must determine how you want your work to appear. Do your clients like a true skin tone or a rich skin tone? How much control do you have over the consistency of your work?

Printing

Until we put in our own digital lab, I never realized how inconsistent prints from an outside lab can be. Looking at some of the last printing we received from our old lab, I wonder what I was thinking delivering images that looked like that. (Of course, at the time, I thought it was good, because they produced a more consistent product than the lab before them did.)

There are a few things to think about before printing your own work. First of all, photographers are some frugal people. I know when I talk about printing out my own work, some photographers are thinking “I print out my own work, too. I have my inkjet running all the time!” If you use this type of printer for your clients, it’s working, and you’re happy with it—that’s fine. I prefer to offer my clients a permanent, durable photograph made on photographic paper, not inkjet paper. This is why we purchased a large photographic processor that uses a CRT to expose photographic paper.

I understand that an in-studio lab isn’t an option for some photographers. The startup costs can be high, you need a certain volume of work to make it profitable, and it takes up a considerable amount of space. If an in-studio lab isn’t in your future, work closely with your outside lab. The color correction and retouching of your clients’ work need to be very consistent. Should a print not be up to your standards, send it back and make sure it is perfect.

Print Finishing Options

Once your lab can produce the consistent look you desire, there are other considerations. Do you produce your final images on paper or canvas? Do you mount your wall-size portraits? Frame them? Your style is everything that happens from the time you create the image until the image ends up in the client’s home. This is where business, art, and customer service all have to merge to create a product that is enjoyed for years to come—as well as being salable at a profit.

▼ Consistent printing and finishing is critical to building your brand identity.



Packaging

Your product presentation also involves the way you package your product. Do you put loose prints into a manila envelope or do you have boxes, bags, and/or folders to enhance the presentation? Women tend to react more strongly to packaging—and, as noted previously, women tend to be the ones who buy portraits. Personally, I would be happy receiving portraits I purchased in a nice cardboard photo-mount inside a manila

envelope. My wife, however, believes in the Victoria's Secret way of presentation. You can buy the cheapest thing in the store and you still get it wrapped in tissue and put into a cute pink bag. You may be paying seventy-five cents for product and five bucks for the packaging, but women love it. Again, everything that is involved with your product affects the public opinion of your studio's style.



◀ Everything that is involved with your product affects the public opinion of your studio's style.

14. Your Studio's Image

We've just talked about print delivery and how packaging affects your clients' impression of your style. Well, the way you "package" your studio—your marketing, the appearance of your studio, etc.—does precisely the same thing.

It will take some trial and error to determine which methods reach the most members of your demographic.

Marketing and Advertising

There are many ways to get your name in front of prospective clients. Obviously, time and energy are at one end of the spectrum and money is at the other when it comes to putting together a marketing plan. That means you need to make good, well-researched decisions about who you want to appeal to and how to reach them. It will take some trial and error to determine which methods (in your unique market) reach the most members of your demographic for the least amount of time, energy, and money invested.

Consider Your Demographic

In any advertising campaign, you have to study the demographics—the age, sex, and economic status of people that your message will reach. Then you have to look at the actual number of readers, listeners, or viewers each individual media outlet allows you to reach. This brings us to a golden rule of advertising (and life): never take advice from someone who's making a commission on what they're selling you. I've seen photographers spend hundreds of dollars on ads in a local weekly paper for their children's portrait services (which the paper has the right demographics for) and then

Repetition Is Critical

The first rule of marketing is repetition. No matter how well-designed the promotion, your business name must be received between four and six times for the average person to even remember it. Buying one ad, sending one mailer, or securing one radio spot won't fill your appointment book.

use the same paper for large ads about their high-school senior portraits. Teenagers don't read newspapers and, statistically speaking, the paper is for younger families, so the ads didn't even reach the parents of seniors. The most effective advertising exclusively targets your market. If you have

▼► Spending your advertising dollars effectively means targeting them at the clients you want.

mass appeal like McDonald's, you advertise in mass media. If your clientele is more specific, you must direct your advertising to a smaller group to get the most effective return on the money you invest.

Ask Your Best Clients

If you're going to do any kind of mass-media advertising, call the five best clients you've had in the last year (for whatever client type you want to attract). Ask them if they read the newspaper and what radio station they listen to. Also ask whether or not they read single-sheet ads (postcards, larger ads) that come in the mail, or if they'd be more likely to open an envelope and read the ad inside. The questions can go on and on depending on the type of advertising you want to do.





The same can be done for any marketing decisions. Create a focus group of past clients (although they don't have to meet in a group) and get the needed information from them. They can decide everything from the paint colors for your walls to your business card design, to the language you use in your ads. (Many of our employees happen to be past clients, so we run everything past them to make sure we aren't off the mark. Many times, we've written ads using what we considered trendy sayings, and our younger employees alerted us to the fact that we sounded like older people trying to be hip.) This way, you're sure that everything in your business is designed to the taste of the client you want to attract.

Another good idea is to ask first-time clients how they came upon your studio. This tells you what's working, although many times you have to use this information with a degree of common

sense. A client might say she came to your studio after a recent mailing, giving you an idea to increase your mailings, but what really sold her on your studio were some of your past clients, an exhibit you did last year, etc. The mailer just happens to be the last thing she received, and she held on to it to keep your number handy.

Giving Work Away

An effective way to get your work in front of your target audience is to give away a few free portraits. To do this, find a person who travels in the right circles and get a wall portrait into their home—it really generates sales. This saved me from bankruptcy in those early years. A few words of advice, though: be very careful whom you pick. Make sure you select the leader of whatever pack you're trying to reach. Social events are great places to see the pecking order in a group. You'll want to

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Include a clear statement that explains what makes your product unique in the marketplace.

give your work to someone who will show it off, someone who seems to thrive in a social situation and has many friends. Also, make sure your studio's name and phone number are on every print you give away—no matter the size.

Direct Mail

Direct mail is a top choice among photographers who buy advertising, so it's important to know how and why mailers work. What makes a client respond to one studio's mailing piece and over-

look another? What types of mailers produce phone calls and what types produce potential clients? In advertising, there are no sure things. Nothing *always* works. A famous advertising executive said that he figures about half of all of his advertising actually works. If he could only figure out *which* half it was, he would have something. Regardless, there are many things that can be done to greatly increase the odds of success.

The best way to understand how to produce a better mailer is to understand what each component of a mailer is and how it benefits the response rate of that mailer. (And, it should be noted, these are concepts that can be applied to any direct advertising materials you produce—not just mailers.) To begin, grab their attention with big, interesting portraits. Then, add a short, to-the-point headline; in a mailer that we've used in varying forms over the years, the headline reads, "No, they're not professional models!" The copy then explains that they look like models because they came to our studios.

Next, include a clear statement that explains what makes your product unique in the marketplace and how it can benefit the potential client. If your headline states that your studio provides lots of personal attention, you could go on to explain that your clients have more clothing changes, that you take time to find out what they really want out of the session, and that they won't feel rushed. The copy also needs to explain what the client needs to do to book a session.

Your logo is the most important part of your mailer. If every other part of your mailer is per-

◀▶ Showing the same scene and subject in back-to-back mailings can help build your brand recognition among recipients.



fect, but you forget your logo—or if your logo is hard to read—the phone won't ring. A logo doesn't have to be anything more than your studio's name set in a distinctive font. And remember—keep everything legible. If potential clients can't read your mailer easily, they won't read it all. Keep the type clean and crisp.

Your business hours should be listed everywhere you advertise. How many times have you gotten a piece of advertising with no hours listed on it? You have to keep calling back until you reach someone. A person might do this for a once-a-year sale, but they won't do it in an overcrowded market like portraiture.

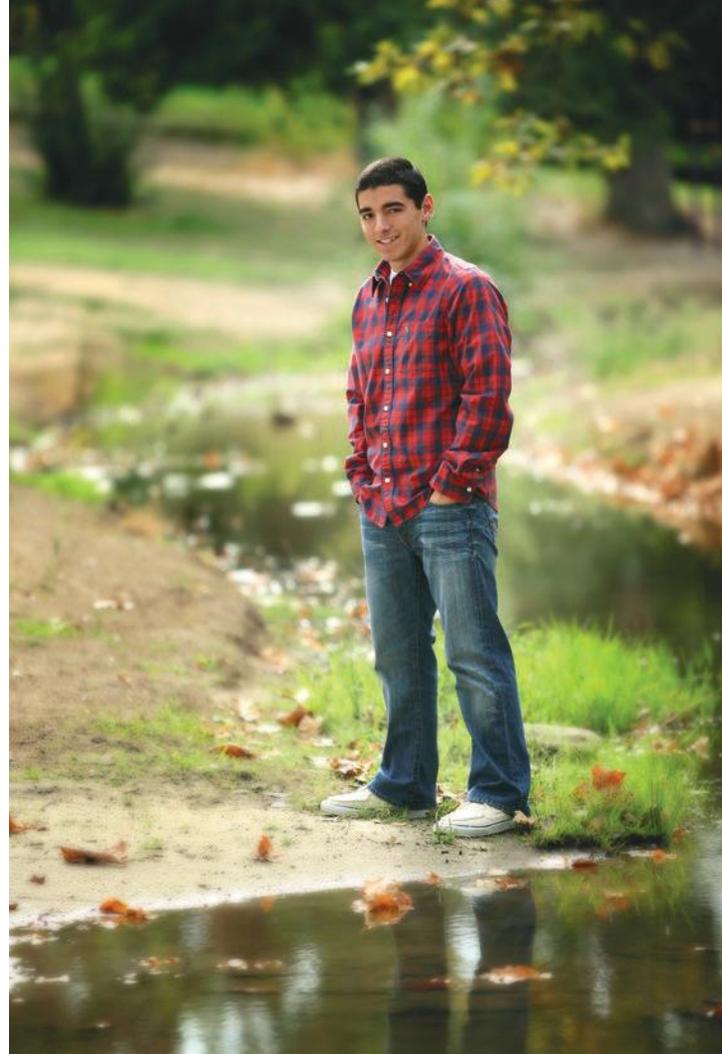
Create a Theme

Your name alone will not be remembered unless you have a common theme that ties all your messages together. (Remember how we covered the importance of consistency in your portraits back in chapter 6? This is the same concept.) Uneducated advertisers design their ads one piece at a time and do nothing to link those pieces together; savvy advertisers work on designing a campaign—many advertising messages tied together with a common theme. The flavor of the campaign will communicate your style to your target audience.

A common theme doesn't mean saying the exact same thing but linking the look and feel of each ad together so recipients will connect the current ad or mailer with the one they've already seen. One of the easiest ways to make a connection between your mailers is to use portraits of the same people in different poses.

Tailor Your Marketing to Your Image

Every part of your marketing plan should suit your business's image and be geared toward the



segment of the market you want to attract. Your greatest marketing efforts should be directed toward the market that gives you the highest return on your time and money invested. Whatever choices you make, base your decisions on where you want to be and the most effective means to get you there. You have to define what success is to you. You can't get where you want to be if you don't know the destination you want to reach.

Social Media

Social media sites all have their own way of operating and their own characteristics that make them more or less appealing to those that use them. Therefore, for social marketing to be ef-



fective, you need to select the right site for your target market and post information of interest to them.

I suggest that you do not mix your friends/colleagues with your potential clients. To keep these two groups separate, I have two Facebook pages set up under my name. If you look me up, you'll find Jeff Smith (owner and photographer of Smith & Co. Studios) as well as Jeff Smith (author/photographer). On the studio account, all of my "friends" are high school juniors and seniors from my area. You will not find photographers listed as my friends, nor will you find any of my actual friends or family on this account. On my second page (Jeff Smith, author/photographer) you will only find photographers. The reason that I have an account for each type of "friend" is that

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Select the right site for your target market and post information of interest to them.

the posts for one of these groups would totally bore the other. Seniors don't care about my tips for becoming a more successful photographer; photographers don't care about whose senior portrait I have just put up—and neither the photographers nor the seniors care if my auntie has a goiter the size of a baseball.

I often read photographers' status updates on their Facebook pages and see vague comments like, "Just posted some new pictures on my web site. Check them out!" What does that have to do with any of their potential readers? If you really want to interest your clients, you could post, "We just added a bunch of images to our web site. These are just a few!" Then add a few photos from recent sessions and tag the subject so they know you've posted their photo—and so all their friends will see the post, too. (*Note:* Since status-update posts usually allow only one image, we use Photoshop to create a single image file that includes multiple shots.) Add portraits to every post you make. If you post about preparing for your session, add some photos.

We have even started asking our Facebook friends to help pick out which of our senior models' images we should put up in the studio. To do this, we posted four of the best images of each girl—several days apart—and allowed everyone to

◀▶ Sharing photos to your Facebook site? Be sure to tag the subject so their friends will all see the new images.



vote. As *American Idol* and countless other television shows have proven, people love a chance to vote for their favorites.

Anything that will legitimately be of interest to clients (not just to you) is fair game for a post. Many photographers post top-ten lists—the top-ten mistakes clients make when planning their session, the top-ten locations to take your portraits, the top-ten portraits of the week, etc. These work because they are interesting to current *and* prospective clients (especially if they know—or are—one of the people in the week’s best images!).



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Anything that will legitimately be of interest to clients (not just to you) is fair game for a post.

Social networking sites also build a sense of familiarity. This can be good when it means a client feels like they know you before they walk through the door, but it can just as easily open up a can of worms. You should never say anything to your clients on Facebook that you wouldn’t say to them in your studio—even if it’s indirectly, such as by becoming a fan of a controversial cause. You are, first and foremost, a businessperson and you should keep your personal views to yourself. Don’t join causes, don’t play games, don’t send hugs and kisses, and don’t fill out surveys about what kind of lover you are. When you get an invitation, just hit the ignore button.

Here’s another thing to avoid: spending too much time on your networking sites. Social media marketing can consume your life if you let it. Each morning, I go on to each account and design a post that personally involves my target market. For my clients’ account, I select the best images from the previous day’s sessions (images with subjects who are my Facebook friends). For my photographers’ account, I write a paragraph or two for my industry friends that relates to one of my many books—and I add a link to the book on Amazon for their possible purchase. After this, I go to my Twitter account, which I direct at people interested in financial freedom. I repeat the same process each night.

In addition to the time it takes to actually design and prepare posts, you must also address the issue of increasing your circle of friends on these



◀▲ Sharing your favorite new work is a great way to keep past clients engaged—and attract new ones to your studio.

sites. You need to get them, keep them—and then get some more! The first few friends I made on Facebook were senior portrait clients from the previous year. Knowing how teenagers put things off, I offered them free wallets if they made me a friend on Facebook within twenty-four hours. The bribery worked; within a day, I had ten new friends. I then repeated the process using the same offer with our best clients—people I knew well. By the end of the week, I was up to fifty friends and past that creepy “new guy” stage of Facebook membership.

Note that I started out by recruiting people I already knew to be my Facebook friends. Some

photographers who are new to Facebook send friend requests to people they don’t know—and who don’t know them. This a surefire way to be perceived as shady (after all, there are a lot of people with bad intentions on the Internet). So start slow, with people you know, and build up. Once we reached five-hundred friends, I became very bold at sending out friend requests. Almost everyone accepted and our numbers grew. I was also careful not to request friendship from a student who was already a friend of another studio.

Blogs

Blogs are another means of marketing on the Internet. The word “blog” sounds a great deal like “blah”—which is what you think to yourself when you read the typical blog: blah, blah, blah. You

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Potential clients should quickly be able to gauge the type of portraits you offer.

give people with large egos a place to share their every thought . . . and you end up asking yourself *why?* I suppose there are some people out there who really care what Kim Kardashian is doing—but I hate to break the news to you: your wife and your mom (quite frankly, I don't even think your dad cares that much) are probably the only ones who care enough to read all the things you put into your blog. Unless you are truly consistent with your posts and gifted at making the everyday happenings of the average Joe (like you and me) sound riveting and relevant to your clients, you can probably put your time to better use.



Your Studio's Brand Identity

In any business, you must create an image that reflects the tastes of your target market. Everything from the color scheme of your print advertising to the decor of your studio must suit your clientele. The portraits you display in your studio and the music you have playing in the background must also appeal to them. A solid, well-conceived, and consistent image lets your target market identify with every part of your business.

Potential clients should quickly be able to gauge the type of portraits you offer and roughly what they can expect to pay. Walking into your business, they should know right away whether or not it is right for them. At our studio, they see nothing but senior portraits. A bride-to-be knows right away that she's in the wrong place. Often, photographers fail to think about their studios in these terms. They pick out everything according to their personal tastes—without thinking about their clients. I have gone into studios that photograph many seniors but have only wedding and children's portraits on display. This would be like going into a Chinese restaurant and seeing sombreros and Mexican blankets all around for decoration—it wouldn't make much sense.

You should also select your decor to match your desired pricing. Many photographers want to charge more for their work, but they have an old, torn sofa in front of their studio that's been there since the 1970s. Conversely, some studios select furnishings that are too nice—and this can also be a problem. If you walked into a restaurant for a casual, low-cost lunch and saw fine art on the walls and marble floors as far as the eye could see, you might turn and leave before ever looking at the menu. As a result, you'd never find out that they had good food at reasonable prices.

What to Know as You Go Pro

You have read this book. You have followed all the suggestions I have given you and you have decided that you want to be a professional photographer instead of a hobbyist. So what do you do now?

For the person who wants to be a success in photography and make it a lifelong career, this is the most important chapter of the book. That's why, knowing what I know about photographers, I put it at the end—so you might actually read it. These are my top tips for making a living in photography.

1. Don't Squander Money

It's your creativity and technical knowledge that will allow you to produce the portraits your clients want.

Most photographers are gadget freaks who spend any money they may make on the next model of camera or the newest lighting, thinking it will make the difference between their mediocre photography and the truly great photography they see others producing. Cameras, lights, reflectors, softboxes—they're just tools. It's your creativity and technical knowledge that will allow you to produce the portraits your clients want. If you gave me back my first 35mm film camera, a few white foam-core boards, and a couple light bulbs, I could create a salable studio portrait of any client—no matter how heavy or unattractive they might be. My lights and cameras get *used up* before I replace them, which is one of the reasons I have seen so many countries around the world and my sons have always lived in a nice home and attended private schools. While other photographers constantly reinvested in toys, I invested in knowledge—and not just about photography.

2. Understand Your Costs and Pricing

If you really want to be a professional photographer, you'd better know *why* you charge what you do for an 8x10-inch print—and it better not be because that's what another photographer charges. You have to know how much it *really* costs you to produce that print and how many times you must mark it up to turn a profit and make a living.

3. Build Value Every Step of the Way

You don't accidentally sell \$1000 worth of your photography. You plan and control everything the client is exposed to and you develop a sales

process that brings in money. From the moment they first see your ad, Facebook page, or web site, clients are forming an impression of your value. The experience of the session—the process of booking the appointment, the look and smell of the studio, the way you dress, how you act, how professional you are, how your samples look, how clearly the session-planning information is presented—will continue to add to (or subtract from) their valuation. When you've built a high value, clients will be more willing to spend. Remember: it takes no longer to plan or create a session that results in the sale of an 8x10 than one that results in the sale of a 30x40—so you can profit a lot more from the sale of that big print.

4. Create Opportunities

You can sit by the phone and wait for people to call on their own or you can create events and reasons for them to be photographed. As a business owner, salesperson, and photographer, what is the single biggest obstacle you have to overcome? Procrastination!

Anytime someone wants a product that costs a substantial amount of money they find every reason in the world to put it off. When I photographed weddings, I would run into people I knew and they would tell me, "We have to get in and have a family portrait taken soon, before the kids leave home." Did they? No, of course not. I would see them at another wedding three years later—and guess what they would say? "We need to get in and have family portrait taken before the last one leaves for college." Finally, I got tired of waiting by the phone. I started taking my schedule with me to weddings, along with cards that waived the sitting fee if they book it right then. I also started coming up with events to



remind people of the need for family and other types of photographs. I worked with organizations to photograph people and donate a portion of the proceeds. I wanted the phone ringing off the hook.

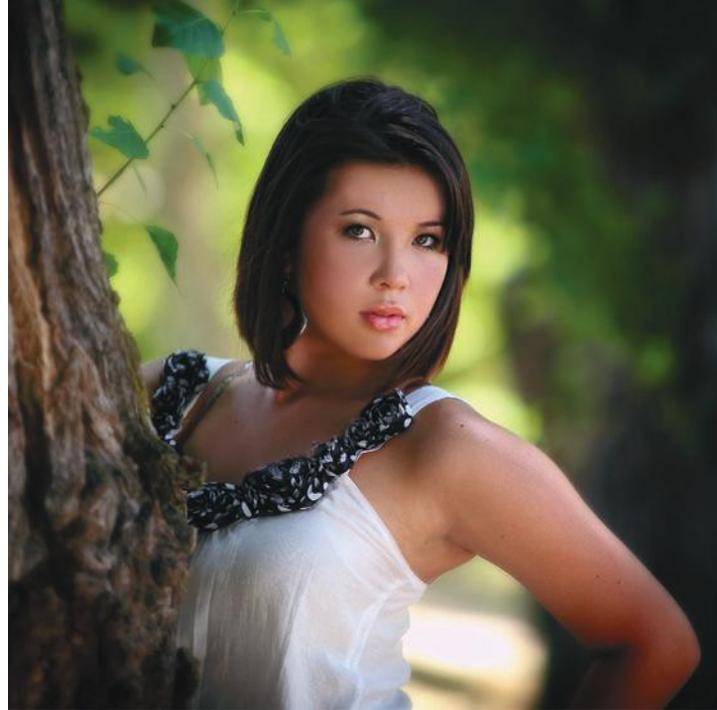
The moral to the story is that you are going to have to learn so much more than photography to make a living in this profession. You are going to have to know how to market your photography, control the client's experience with your business, sell your photography, and package it to ensure the correct perceived value.

5. Manage Your Time

If you are really serious about a career in professional photography, you must lay a solid groundwork from which to build. In any business, profit is king (if it isn't, you won't be in business long), but your most valuable asset is *time*. You only have a certain amount of it, so you have to be paid for every minute you are at work. This is why I urge my readers to learn to capture and create their images *in the camera*. When I put down my camera at the end of the day, I am done. My images need only slight retouching—something one of my employees or an outside lab can easily do.

6. Determine the Right Location

Another important decision that young photographers make is whether to work out of their homes or rent a storefront. Again, it comes back to profit. The overhead of a storefront studio is really high. The no-cost option of working from home makes it hard to beat—especially if a portion of your rent/mortgage may be tax-deductible. If you get to a point where you hate having people come to your home (or no longer have the space required), you can rent a small office



to meet clients or meet at a local coffee shop and shoot only on location so you never have to use your home at all.

7. Don't Get Overwhelmed

Starting a photography business may seem overwhelming, but it is the most exciting time in your professional life. All of us older guys look back and say, "I wish I would have done this or not done that." *You* are at the point where you can learn from our mistakes and achieve more in much less time—provided you take the time to learn, have the persistence to keep striving, and keep loving photography. I am never so at peace as when I am photographing someone. Each new school year, I am filled with excitement about all the new things I want to try and all the new faces I will get to photograph. I think I still love this profession because, from the beginning I knew what I wanted. I knew it was going to be hard and I did it.

I wish you great and lasting success as you start into one of the greatest professions in the world.

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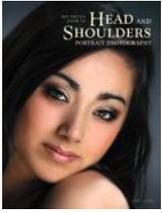
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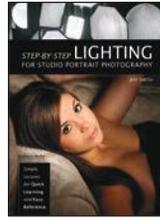
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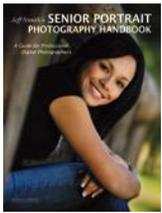
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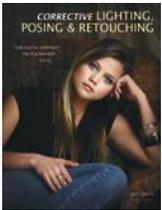
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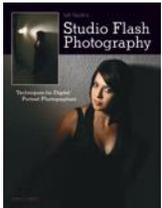
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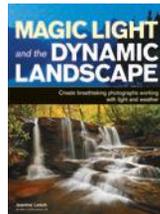
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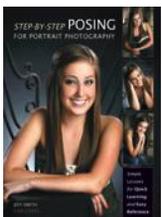
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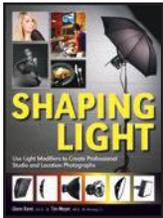
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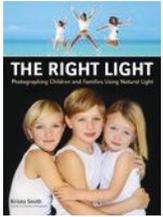
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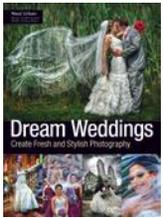
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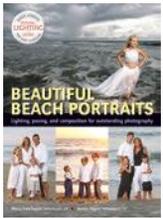
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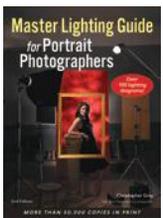
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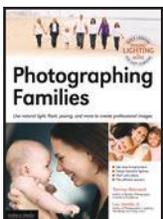
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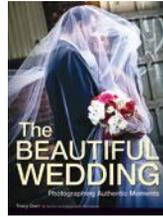
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