

TEN COMMANDMENTS OF PRO PHOTOGRAPHY

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHARLIE BORLAND

Our world is jam-packed with photographers! Many position themselves as professionals, a claim that is often made without any real definable criteria for qualification. But does it matter? While some see this as a problem in the world of professional photography, others view the low threshold as an opportunity to fulfill a dream.

While you might enjoy that debate, you may have already learned that titles, great equipment and even some beautiful photography means little when it comes to earning a decent living as a professional photographer. It's time to take a harder look at the business of photography. It's time to set up, build product and market your business. Here are 10 important considerations

Plan and Vision

To realize your vision you must have a realistic plan that guides you along the journey. If your vision is traveling the world and photographing anything you want with professionals, you might want to consider a professional might be better off becoming an international tour guide. While it can't be said that those dream jobs don't exist for photographers, they are, at the very least, elusive. Reality is different! You create a plan by asking: Where do you want your career to go? How do you plan to get there? When you get there, how do you stay there?

Products

Your plan should include clear goals on how you will generate income. Will stock photography, prints, e-books, workshops, classes or assignments be part of your product line? Each of these can easily be found among your competition. Will you do things differently? Pricing money from tightly clenched hands is not easy for any photographer these days, so creating product demand is important. Start by listening to what the product and services you are offering and how you will handle them to set yourself apart.

Markets

Who do you believe will pay for your products or services? Photography has evolved into a professional market, one has spent and one has grown. The first is the traditional (commercial) market, which includes editorial, advertising and corporate. The second is the photography enthusiast. Understanding each market is vital.

The commercial markets want your images, so you have to make them easy to find. Research continues to show that clients are attracted to photographers who show a specialty, either in style, subject matter or location. Clients are looking for a specialist, but you should market as a generalist. The photography enthusiast market has grown substantially. Some even suggest that photography has become the number one hobby in America.

The enthusiast will be interested in learning from your books. Here, a loud online voice and great imagery gets attention, but even more important is that your sales efforts demonstrate what the enthusiast experiences when purchasing something that will help sell and put them in a position, for example, through YouTube videos showing participants enjoying one, perhaps setting up to photograph a boat harbor in Oregon or taking part in a meet and greet prior to field work. You might help sell your new e-book through a video describing the knowledge you share in it.

Delivery

When you can't find a time I mailed slides to clients using the USPS. Today when I ask "what's your deadline," the answer might be "yesterday."

The answer depends on each product of course, but if you sell an e-book, it should be an instant download. Selling stock photography? It's best to have instant downloads for your images as well, unless you insist on negotiating each sale. While that might be good in some ways, are you missing out on new sales and new clients? If you're not an agency or a crew site like PhotoShelter, has the advantage of search, select, pay and hand the



This image of a boat harbor in Charleston, Oregon, is colorful and has an interesting composition, elements that could help draw photo enthusiasts to the photographer's workshops.

without you lifting a finger. More importantly, the instant availability makes it easy for clients to give you money.

Professionalism

Are you the world's greatest photographer? If so, how do you exact that confidence?

There are many ways of acting professionally and being in a profession. How you conduct yourself could make or break your business. If you act like an idiot, clients will think you are an idiot. Set high standards for yourself as the pool of photographers is very deep. Make it easy for clients to work with you while eyeing the bottom line of profitability. If you make promises, do what you promise. Meet deadlines. Do great work. Do what you can to earn the respect of your clients.

Marketing Tools
Successfully selling anything requires well-planned efforts at marketing and promotion and should include online promotion. Different products require different strategies, and even with the greatest marketing tool ever—the internet—critical and well-thought-out strategies should be employed.

Evaluate how extensive your reach is, as in the size of your existing client list, email list and online followers? Promoting to commercial markets can be a combination of direct mail and email promotion. Use teasers to get attention, such as a humorous or stunning image with "Read More" links taking buyers to your site. For your followers, consider networking with other photographers, offering workshops, and offer financial incentives to promote your

products. I recently released my new book, *Outdoor Gear Photography*, and I contacted many of my colleagues seeking help. I set up an affiliate program offering 40 percent commissions on sales leads. I wrote guest posts for numerous sites, others offered free book reviews, followed by a few mentions on blogs and social sites.

Pricing

How much should you charge? How should you price your products? You're probably getting a lot of questions about pricing for your products can command a higher price. We all want top dollar, but there are examples everywhere of price matching and cut-rate specials. Stock photography is no longer the product of an elite group of artists, and it shows all indications of being a commodity. Fine art prints are tough unless you are a noted exhibitor in a gallery handled by art professionals. When prompted, celebrities, people wanted signed books, and celebrities, people wanted signed books (perhaps) over-the-line experience of joining you on a workshop. We live in a Groupon world. The "too cheap to pass up" model works, and there is a reason why. Pricing should be realistic.

Clients Are Everywhere

You might think you know all the markets for your products, but have you really even scratched the surface? There are many ways to expand your sphere of influence among photographers, but it is the best way to approach business? I am talking about reaching out directly to businesses that are related to your niche or area of interest.

A wilderness lodge, a rafting company, a nature center or any outdoor-related business uses photography. Reach out and offer to volunteer for one or more of these businesses, or request an opportunity to photograph their next expedition or event. You can offer to photograph their next event, your work, I have worked this way for decades, and at some point the money usually comes. Bartering is another option, where you trade images you take for the business for a sample of its product. For example, the company's choice of

x number of images from your shoot in exchange for two nights lodging in a wilderness lodge class. Other examples: a river rafting trip for two or ten passes to the nature center. What's more, the images can later be sold as stock.

Altitude Outdoor Trade shows and hand out cards. Offer to shoot nature landscapes of the golf course without commitment and see what happens. All business is good business!

Don't Forget to Invest in Your Life

Business is a lifestyle, not a job. It can be thrilling but all-consuming and can lead to burnout.

A successful photography business these days requires extensive energy and time to simply maintain the status quo. Find a balance between work and the life you share with your family. Since you will likely be self-employed, don't forget that all good things come to an end. That means, invest wisely for the day you want to or can't climb that mountain for a sunrise picture.

Learn, Create and Share

Never stop learning and creating. You are in photography because you love the adventure, the need to create and the joy it brings into your life. Be a photographer for yourself first and your business second. Remember no matter how great your career, there is always someone you can learn from and someone who can learn from you. Stay curious and stay motivated. A professional is a pro at life and business.



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