

How to Become a Photographer Vol. 1

A guide for aspiring professionals



By Steve Evans

Blue Atom Studio

Introduction and Contents

We're going to take a look at what you need to do to start working as a photographer in any of six specific disciplines. This is the first volume in a series of PocketSuite eBooks covering the training, work and life of a professional photographer.

Whether your dream is to capture stunning images of wildlife in their natural habitat, work with models on a fashion shoot in the tropics, fly a drone camera for amazing aerial images, or enjoy the freedom of a freelance photographer, this book is packed with the information you need to succeed.

In this PocketSuite guide you'll also discover how much you can earn in various fields of photography, what's involved in getting started, the best professional organizations to join for advancing your career in a particular specialty, essential equipment, where to look for employment and how to attract more customers. There's even a section on helpful tips when you're just starting out as a professional photographer.

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Chapter 1. How to Become a Real Estate Photographer

Real estate photographers bring their professional eye for visuals to create images that show off a property in its most appealing light. Clients can be real estate agents and private individuals selling their own homes or commercial property.



Your images are displayed on websites and in printed brochures as selling tools. As a result, clients expect crisp, sharply focused images that are lighted properly and highlight the property details the seller most wants to promote, whether it's a newly remodeled kitchen or a stunningly landscaped backyard.

This means real estate photographers must be comfortable shooting indoors under artificial light conditions just as they can capture great photos outdoors, whether the sun is shining or it's a cloudy day.

In addition to the artistic creativity that comes with real estate photography, you can be your own boss and to a large degree set your own schedule. While beginners might have to wait outside a house for the realtor to show up and let them inside to start photographing, once you've developed a reputation for professionalism and reliability, many realtors may decide to give you access to the lockbox outside a home for sale. Then you'll be able to let yourself in, do your work and lock up again when finished.

Another benefit to work as a real estate photographer is you probably won't need to invest in as much equipment as, say, a wedding or portrait photographer whose work requires elaborate lighting setups.

Read on to learn how you can get started in the lucrative and rewarding career of real estate photography.

In this article you'll learn:

[How much money you can make as a real estate photographer](#)

[The required training and certifications](#)

[Professional groups to join](#)

[Employment opportunities for real estate photographers](#)

[Finding clients](#)

[Plus helpful tips](#)

How much money can you make?

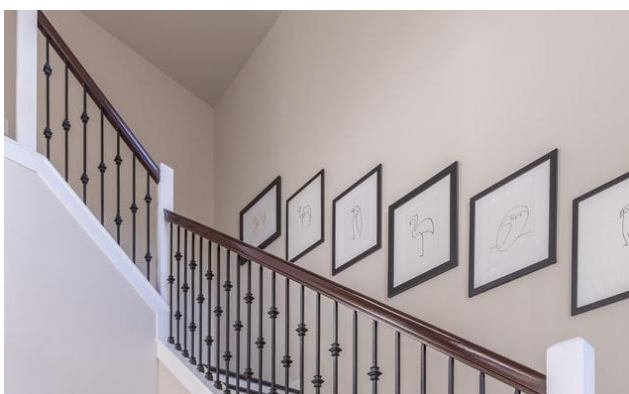
Real estate photographers on average make \$60,520 a year according to a recent ZipRecruiter survey of professionals in the field. Location and clientele play a role in how much you can make, just as drive and ambition determine how much work you can take on. Learn how to shoot 3D videos and you can double your income. A 3D video lets prospective homebuyers take a virtual tour of a property before committing to an actual walk-through with a realtor. Real estate agents love 3D videos because it saves them a huge amount of time. Only people seriously interested will make an appointment for a walk-through of a house. The videos help weed out the casual shoppers from the committed buyers.

Training and Certification

Realtors need a license to offer their services, but you don't. Photography is not licensed or regulated at the state level in the United States. There is a slight chance some regulations are in place at the city or county level. A quick call to your local government will confirm one way or another if there are any regulations governing photographers in your area. Chances are, there will be none.



It can still be extremely helpful to train specifically for work in real estate photography. This can save you a lot of time by learning common mistakes to avoid that you might otherwise endure through trial and error on the job. The difference is knowing mistakes to avoid in advance means you deliver images to the client faster and offer better customer service. Few realtors are likely to be happy if they



have to make a second trip to a house you were supposed to photograph, only you forgot to bring a spare memory card and couldn't take any more pictures.

Many training programs are available online to help you learn the basics of real estate photography. Most are highly affordable. [Here's one example.](#)

What you'll learn in a basic training course:

- Indoor and outdoor architectural photography techniques
- Use of a digital camera, lenses, tripods, shutter release systems or wireless camera triggers.
- Choosing and carrying the right gear for the job
- Intermediate Photoshop skills for editing images.
- Effective use of a camera flash, strobe or other lighting equipment.
- Basic business and marketing skills useful to a professional photographer, including tax withholding and setting up a small business legally.

With advanced courses you can learn how to shoot and edit high-definition video of property for sale. This gives you an extra service to sell to your clients.

Most online training programs give you lifetime access to the materials once you've paid for the course. You'll also probably be able to download and print a customized certificate of completion that you can frame and hang in your office as well as highlight on your marketing materials. Certifications go a long way toward inspiring client confidence.

Professional Groups to Join

[The Association of Real Estate Photographers](#) is an advocacy organization for the industry. Membership costs \$185 per year and comes with these benefits:



- Certification with the Association
- Use of AREP Logo on your website and print collateral
- Association-approved License for use with Agents/Brokers – downloadable

- Access to Legal Counsel
- Discounts on the National Conference
- Assistance with licensing disputes
- Relationship with your MLS. Work through the association for any issues with Agent/Broker/MLS image use
- Member listing in Association directory and individual member page for marketing

[The Real Estate Photographers of America & International](#) is an Internet-based trade association that advocates for the industry and promotes the professional success of certified real estate photographers. Membership is \$125 per year and includes up to 3 directory listings for you and your business. This helps new clients find you. The organization has specific requirements for photographers' websites as well as adherence to a code of ethics, which can be reviewed on [the application form here](#).

[Professional Photographers of America](#) is the premiere organization of photography pros in the United States. A full membership is open to anyone living in the United States or its territories and costs \$323 per year. Benefits include:

- \$15,000 equipment insurance policy
- Data loss protection
- Access to all online education course
- Online referral database listing
- Printed and digital monthly issues of Professional Photographer magazine
- One full registration to Imaging USA during the first year of membership
- Business Resources

- Contracts and Copyright Resources
- Access to Member Discount Program
- Weekly newsletter

Employment



Visit local realtor offices to drop off your marketing materials, brochures and business cards. Follow up with a phone call in a day or two. If a realtor says she's already working with a photographer, ask if she knows any realtors who need your services. Don't be discouraged by rejection when calling realtors. The very next call you make could be gold.

Use the networking power of your professional memberships to find jobs.

Attend local gatherings of real estate agents (they get together a lot to talk shop) so you can introduce yourself and distribute business cards.

Finding Clients

Business cards and a basic website should be the core of your marketing toolkit. The website need not be fancy or expensive. Just attractively designed, with photos of your best work, location and contact information. No need to include your pricing unless you know that your fees are less than what competitors are asking. Posting prices is a slippery slope. Before you know it, you're updating your website every other day to keep pace with the competition. It can turn out to be a fast race to the bottom.

In addition to your business website, create an Instagram account to showcase your photography services. Instagram is the #1 online venue for creative professionals to display their work.

Other strategies for attracting new business:

- Create a referral program with discounts for returning customers who bring new clients to you.

- Ask clients to review your services online. According to a recent survey, 90% of people say their buying decisions are influenced by positive online reviews.

Good to know:

Here are tips and tricks used by professional real estate photographers to get great results and save time on the job.



- Examine the house before you start shooting the first image. Walk through the house, around the yard, and get a sense of the compositions you want to capture that will show off the property to maximum advantage. Plan on taking 2-3 photos of every room, as well as outdoor coverage on all sides of the house.

- Open the blinds and curtains. Natural light looks best. You can always supplement the available light with a flash.

- Be selective in turning on indoor lights. For example, you can create an inviting, even romantic mood for the dining room by dimming the lights.



- Make sure your prices are in line with the competition in your area. Not getting any calls? Maybe you're charging too much. Or not enough. Realtors may be wary of rock-bottom prices.

- Use a tripod and remote shutter as much as possible, but especially in low light. Clear, stable images free of blur are your most valuable commodity.

- Buy and use wide-angle lenses. These will give you

maximum coverage of large rooms and landscaping that you cannot achieve with a fixed lens.

- Use polarizing filters outdoors. These filters come in different strengths to block a certain amount of light – like additional f-stops for your camera. On bright, sunny days a polarizing filter can prevent your images from looking washed out.
- Carry spare batteries and memory cards. Better to have extra power and memory and not need it, than to run out of either and have no spares.
- Keep a two-step ladder in the trunk of your car. You can haul it out and use the ladder to gain a different perspective that can add depth and height to your compositions.
- Look for unusual angles that add greater visual interest.
- Use a wide-angle (24mm) lens for rooms and outdoor shots. Switch to a standard 50mm lens to capture details and features.
- Set your camera properly. As a rule of thumb, you'll get best results with an aperture from f/7.1 to f/9 combined with a shutter speed between 1/60 and 1/2 a second, depending on your lighting conditions. Use as low an ISO setting as possible to prevent image "noise."
- Learn the basics of Photoshop. The best photographers edit their images as part of post-production. [Photoshop](#) is not inexpensive and it has a steep learning curve to use with expertise, but it is the industry standard for editing digital photography. As an alternative, you can download and use the [image editing program GIMP](#) for free. GIMP is a powerful image editing solution with a user-friendly interface. It is compatible with Windows, Mac and Linux operating systems.
- For the best images shoot in the RAW format. This format provides the highest resolution your camera can capture and is particularly useful in editing digital photos. All the top pros shoot in the RAW format. On the downside, RAW images devour a lot of memory. Unless your clients are finicky and demand magazine-quality images, you may be able to get by shooting in the JPEG format, which requires significantly less storage space on your camera's memory card.

Chapter 2. How to Become a Fashion Photographer

Ah, the life of a fashion photographer – jetting around the world to exotic locales to take pictures of beautiful people. Sounds glorious. The reality is somewhat different for beginning fashion photographers. Only a very select few are shooting the swimsuit issue for Sports Illustrated, taking pictures of Victoria's Secret models or photographing the latest advertising campaign for L'Oréal. It takes experience, sometimes years, and a gifted eye for composition and lighting to rise into the top ranks of the world's fashion photographers.

Just remember: they all got their start somewhere.



Fashion photographers can work for clothing designers, retail companies that sell clothes and need images for their catalogs, as well as makers of cosmetics, perfumes and colognes, and luxury goods that can be shown off to best advantage when worn by a fashion model. This can include watches, jewelry, sunglasses, eyeglasses, headphones – really, any accessory you can think of.

In practical terms, this means the field is wide open with job opportunities for you to learn and gain experience as you work your way up to that tropical island beach assignment with supermodels frolicking in the sand.

Perhaps best of all, the cost of entry and training in this career field is low enough that practically anyone can get started in fashion photography with a minimal investment of time and money.

In this article you'll learn:

[How much money you can make as a fashion photographer](#)

[The required training and certifications](#)

[Professional groups to join](#)

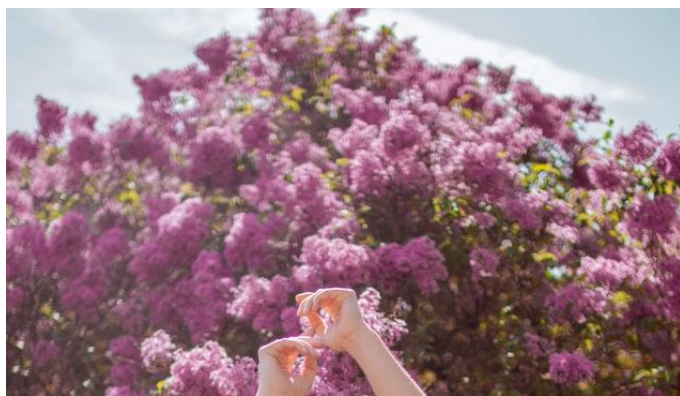
[Employment opportunities for fashion photographers](#)

[Finding clients](#)

[Plus helpful tips](#)

How much money can you make?

The average fashion photographer salary in the United States is [\\$42,967 of 2020](#), according to Salary.com. Self-employed professionals at the top of their game, working steadily,



[as](#)

can easily make more than six figures a year.

Training and Certification

Photography is not regulated in any significant way in the United States, although there may be some requirements in place at the local government level. Chances are, there won't be, but why take a chance? Just make two phone calls. One to your state licensing board and the other to your local city hall or county administration office.

You'll need a business license to operate legally and in some states you're also required to collect sales taxes from customers. Yes, you might think fashion photography is a service business, but if you hand over digital images on a USB storage drive or printed photographs to customers, the state may not see it the same way and decide you are selling a product.

Even though you won't need a license to take pictures, training in fashion photography is essential. This photography style is much more involved than simple point-and-shoot picture taking. You'll be working alongside makeup artists, possibly production designers who decorate the set, agents, representatives of the magazine, cosmetics company or other business sponsoring the shoot, as well as the models themselves.

No post-secondary education is required to be a fashion photographer, although employers may give preference to candidates with a college degree in photography and fashion photography specialization. As an alternative to a four-year college degree, there are a number of fashion photography training programs available throughout the country. Some are taught by fashion photographers as a sideline to their main photography business. Others are available online for you to complete at your own pace. The tradeoff with online training is you may not get as much feedback on your work.

Pricing for fashion photography training ranges from a low end of free online classes to \$100 or more for programs that cover 4-12 hours of lectures and practical exercises. Most come with a certification of completion that you can customize, download, frame and hang in your office so potential clients know you are the real deal.

Professional Groups to Join



Becoming part of a professional organization shows you are committed to the craft and art of photography, plus you enjoy networking opportunities with other pros in the field. Below are two popular organizations for professional fashion photographers.

[American Photographic Artists](#)

Benefits include a photographer photo ID card, discounts on Apple electronics,

a listing in the association's directory to help new clients find you, and more. Membership tiers range from \$50 to \$500 per year.

[Professional Photographers of America](#)

A full membership is open to anyone living in the United States or its territories and costs \$323 per year. Benefits include:

- \$15,000 equipment insurance policy
- Data loss protection
- Access to all online education course
- Online referral database listing
- Printed and digital monthly issues of Professional Photographer magazine
- One full registration to Imaging USA during the first year of membership
- Business Resources
- Contracts and Copyright Resources
- Access to Member Discount Program
- Weekly newsletter

Employment

If you live in a major city or state that's home to fashion magazines, clothing designers and retailer headquarters, these should be your first destinations on the quest for a new job. Drop off business cards and crisply printed copies of your portfolio of professional work.



- Contact local modeling agencies and ask permission to send or drop off a copy of your portfolio.
- Follow up with a phone call in a day or two. If the agent says she's already working with a photographer, ask if she knows any modeling agents who need your services.
- Use the networking power of your professional memberships to find jobs.

Finding Clients



Business cards and a basic website should be the core of your marketing toolkit. The website need not be fancy or expensive. Just attractively designed, with photos of your best work, location and contact information. No need to include your pricing unless you know that your fees are less than what competitors are asking. Posting prices is a slippery slope. Before you know it, you're updating your website every other day to keep pace with the competition. It can turn out to be a fast race to the bottom.

In addition to your business website, create an Instagram account to showcase your fashion photography services. Instagram is the #1 online venue for creative professionals to display their work. You can also use Instagram to find local fashion brands that might be in need of a great photographer for their next ad

campaign.

Other strategies for attracting new business:

- Create a referral program with discounts for returning customers who bring new clients to you.

- Ask modeling clients to review your services online. According to a recent survey, 90% of people say their buying decisions are influenced by positive online reviews.

Good to know:

- Take basic courses in photography so you are comfortable with all functions and features on your camera.
- Take pictures of models. You'll find them all over the Internet. While you're just starting out, when money is likely a major consideration, try to find models who are new to their field, as well. You might be able to barter your images in exchange for the model's time during a fashion shoot.

- Set up your contracts and keep copies. You can download [a free sample contract here](#).

- Get business liability insurance.

- As you acquire more lenses and photography equipment, consider buying a personal property insurance policy to safeguard your camera gear. It's not uncommon for professional photographers to have well over \$10,000 worth of equipment in their kit. If you're traveling or shooting on location, then you are at risk of theft, foul weather, accidental damage and anything else that could potentially go wrong. Few things are more sickening to a professional photographer than a \$5,000 camera lens with a hairline crack.

- Research fashion magazines that you like and study the photography styles.

- Develop your own style. Once you are proficient at taking great fashion pictures, start working on your own visual style. This is what will set you apart.

- Add to your equipment bag gradually, buying only what you need. The fastest way for a photographer to go broke is to go on a shopping spree for a lot of gear, especially lenses, which are expensive. A quality camera body and two lenses – a 24mm wide-angle and standard 50mm – should be enough to get started. As you start taking on assignments, you'll want extra



battery packs and memory cards, followed by a lighting kit that can break down for storage in a trunk or footlocker.

- As you break into major markets, consider hiring an agent to help you find work. That way, you can concentrate on shooting. An agent gets a cut of your earnings, typically around 10 percent, but agents are also skilled in securing higher-paying, more prestigious jobs for their clients.

Chapter 3. How to Become a Landscape Photographer

If you love communing with nature and don't feel fully dressed unless a camera is slung over your neck, a career in landscape photography might be tremendously satisfying. It can also be quite rewarding, financially.



Landscape photographers use their artistic skills to capture beautiful images of the natural world. Mountains and valleys. Wildflower meadows and waterfalls. Canyons, deserts, Antarctic ice sheets. All offer a breathtaking reminder of the world's beauty. And the sights you capture with your camera are free for the taking. You need to pay a supermodel to take her picture. You don't need permission from the Grand Canyon.

Your clients will skew toward more affluent individuals who want gorgeous prints of landscape photography to decorate their homes and offices. Property owners, such as a company that manages a ski resort, need landscape photographs to show off their assets to maximum advantage, helping them attract new customers. You'll also find eager clients at outdoor-themed magazines, both printed and online.

Some landscape photographers load their images to a stock photo website where consumers buy and download the pictures they like. In this way, a photographer can sell the same image over and over, reaping all the profits that demand for the image can create.

You'll also enjoy tremendous flexibility in working when and wherever you wish.

Read on to discover what it takes to become a landscape photographer.

In this article you'll learn:

[How much money you can make as a landscape photographer](#)

[The required training and certifications](#)

[Professional groups to join](#)

[Employment opportunities for landscape photographers](#)

[Finding clients](#)

[Plus helpful tips](#)

How much money can you make?

The annual salary of landscape photographers working in the United States ranges from \$10,714 to \$288,163. The average is \$51,931 per year, [according to a recent survey by Comparably](#). About 86% of these photographers make more than \$288,000 a year. Landscape photographers are usually self-employed, set their own schedules and work when they want.

There are 3 main ways to earn money with landscape photography::

- Sell images as stock shots through online websites such as Alamy or Getty. You can also contact magazines and newspapers directly with your offer. Websites will take a portion of your earnings as a commission for using their platforms to promote your work.

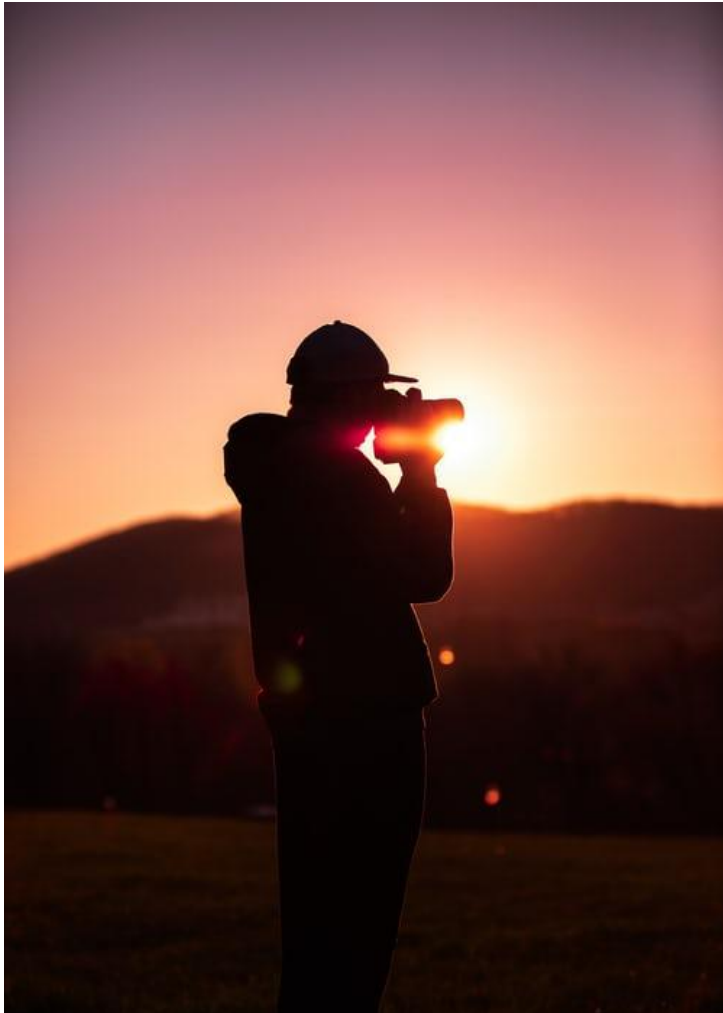
- Make prints from your landscape images to sell to customers for décor in their homes and offices.

- Accept a commission from a client for a specific assignment. For example, a property owner might want attractive images to use with a real estate advertisement for selling the land, or the management of a golf course might want some fresh images of the facilities and course to attract new members to the club.



Training and Certification

Landscape photography is not licensed or regulated at the state level in the United States. There is a chance some regulations are in place at the city or county level. A quick call to your local government will confirm one way or another if there are any regulations governing photographers in your area. Chances are, there will be none.



It can still be extremely helpful to train specifically for work in landscape photography. This can save you a lot of time by learning common mistakes to avoid that you might otherwise make through trial and error on the job. The difference is knowing mistakes to avoid in advance means you deliver images to the client faster and offer better customer service.

Many training programs are available online to help you learn the basics of landscape photography. Most are highly affordable. You can buy an online class to complete at your own pace for under \$100. Courses that come with textbooks and instructional DVDs sell for around \$300. It pays to shop around online to find the right training materials for you, based on your experience level with photography. No reason to buy more training than you need.

Here are some popular landscape photography courses:

[Landscape Photography with Marc Muench](#)

Professional outdoor photographer Marc Muench teaches the skills to create incredible landscape images.

[The Outdoor Photography Experience Course with Chris Burkard](#)

Pro photographer Chris Burkard shares his unique style and techniques in a course that also covers gear, camera setup and process, and post-production/digital editing.

[Photographing America's National Parks](#)

Professional outdoor photographer Ian Shive guides you through scenic locations in America's national parks, demonstrating how to capture images that are aesthetically appealing by using the right camera settings and techniques.

[Night Photography Week - 5 Days of Tips and Techniques for Epic Night Photos](#)

Expand your repertoire by learning how to take stunning nighttime images. Learn how to photograph the Milky Way in the night sky, capture star trails with long exposures and how to use your camera to paint with light.

[Landscape Photography: Start to Finish with Matt Kloskowski](#)

In this beginner course pro photographer Matt Kloskowski shows you how to take amazing landscape photos. The course covers gear, developing an eye for great compositions, using the correct camera settings and the basics of post-processing your images in Photoshop or another digital-imaging tool.

[Photoshop and Lightroom for Landscape Photographers Course](#)

Photoshop is the #1 software tool for editing digital images. This course walks you through the basics of the software and the tools you'll use most often when editing your landscape photos. Because Photoshop is an immensely powerful software package with a fairly steep learning curve, it can be helpful to take a course that covers the core features you need to know right away, helping you save time during post-production.



Professional Groups to Join

[The International Landscape Photographers Association](#) is a group of landscape photographers wanting to learn from each other, share with each other, and grow professionally. Members who join at the professional level receive their own web page with links to their portfolio – a useful tool in attracting clients. Visit the association's website for current pricing details.

The [North American Nature Photography Association](#) offers networking with other professionals, continuing education, exclusive events and seminars, and more. Annual membership is \$100.

[Professional Photographers of America](#) is the premiere organization of photography pros in the United States. A full membership is open to anyone living in the United States or its territories and costs \$323 per year. Benefits include:

- \$15,000 equipment insurance policy
- Data loss protection
- Access to all online education courses
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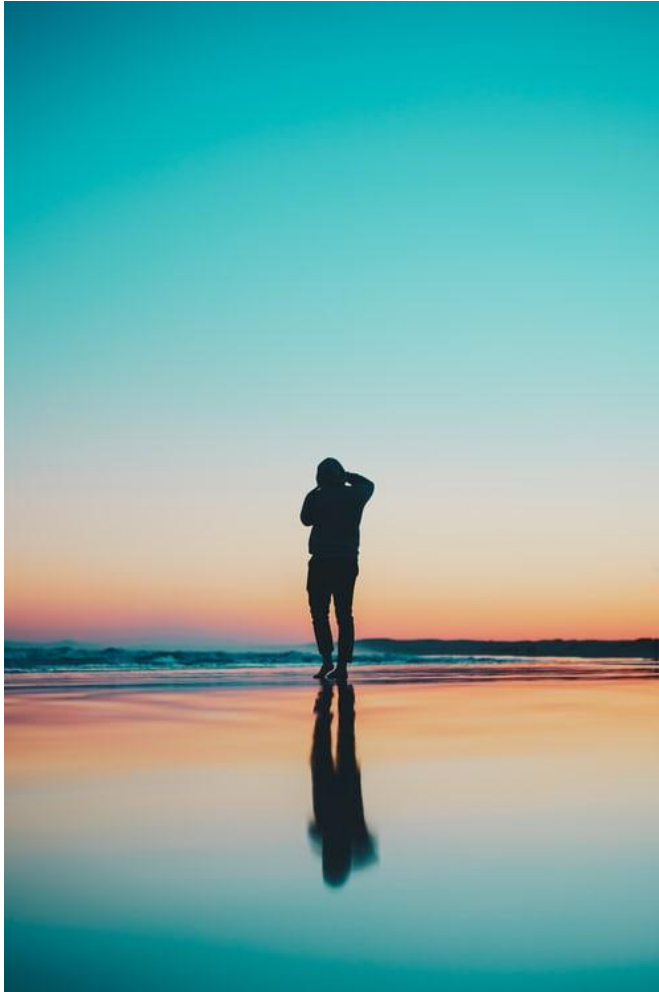
Employment

Contact resorts, ski lodges, camping facilities and other venues targeting outdoor enthusiasts. Send them your marketing materials, brochures and business cards. Follow up with a phone call in a day or two. If your contact says she's already working with a photographer, ask if she knows

anyone who needs your services. Don't be discouraged by rejection when calling potential clients. The very next call you make could be gold.

Use the networking power of your professional memberships to find assignments.

Finding Clients



Business cards and a basic website should be the core of your marketing toolkit. The website need not be fancy or expensive, just attractively designed, with photos of your best landscape photography work, your business location and contact information. No need to include your pricing. You can discuss that directly with clients. Posting prices online is a slippery slope. Before you know it, you're updating your website every other day to keep pace with the competition. It can turn out to be a fast race to the bottom.

In addition to your business website, create an Instagram account to showcase your landscape photography services. Instagram is the #1 online venue for creative professionals to display their work.

Other strategies for attracting new business:

- Create a referral program with discounts for returning customers who bring new clients to you.

- Ask clients to review your services online. According to a recent survey, 90% of people say their buying decisions are influenced by positive online reviews.

Good to know:

Beginners starting out in landscape photography will usually want to learn all they can, and that includes thumbing through the many photography magazines available at bookstores, newsstands and online. In those publications you'll encounter page after page of advertising for cameras, equipment and accessories. Much of it, particularly lenses, will be extremely expensive.

You don't need a footlocker full of camera equipment to start working as a landscape photographer. In fact, building up your equipment kit gradually makes the most sense because you'll only be buying what you need when you realize you need it. So resist the temptation to purchase every gadget on the market.



Here's what landscape photographers need for their basic kit:

- DSLR (digital single-lens reflex) camera
- A quality lens with a focal length of 24-70mm
- A sturdy and dependable tripod with a carrying case and strap to sling it over your shoulder
- Graduated neutral density filters
- A polarizing filter
- A water-proof (or at minimum water-resistant) camera bag with shoulder strap to haul everything.

Over time, you can add more lenses when you feel you need them to expand your creative options. A remote shutter release is also a handy piece of gear when working with a tripod. Some attach directly to the camera. Many modern cameras now feature a shutter-release app that you can download to your smartphone. The phone connects wirelessly to the camera via Bluetooth and you simply press the button on the phone screen to capture an image. Some of

these apps also allow you to download images from the camera directly to your phone so you can quickly share them with clients and friends by attaching pictures to text messages or emails.

Chapter 4. How to Become a Wildlife Photographer

Whether capturing images of Bengal tigers roaming the jungles of the Indian subcontinent, or taking close-up shots of a rare bird species in a National Park an hour's drive from home, the life of a wildlife photographer is one of adventure. And patience.



Whales do not breach on cue. Squirrels will vanish at the slightest perception of a threat. Herbivores are skittish creatures, prone to flight. Carnivores, particularly apex predators at the top of their food chain, will stand their ground. But they're still going to show up at their own leisure. And nocturnal creatures? Well, you could be up all night hoping to get the shot. That, too, can be an adventure.

If you love the natural world and being outdoors, if the art and craft of photography get your creative juices flowing, wildlife photography can combine both passions into a rewarding and financially lucrative career.

Beyond an investment in photography equipment, you won't need expensive training to start work as a wildlife photographer. Practice and experience will lead to greater skill, although there are plenty of photography courses you can take that will help you reach your goals faster. We'll cover all that and much more as you explore what it takes to become a wildlife photographer.

In this article you'll learn:

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[Plus helpful tips](#)

How much money can you make?

The average salary for a wildlife photographer in the United States is \$40,676 annually, [according to a recent survey of job openings in this field](#) by ZipRecruiter. On the high end, wildlife photographers with an established business and years of experience are making more than \$81,000 per year.



Wildlife photographers may work for magazines or organizations such as National Geographic, or they may work on a freelance basis. Freelance wildlife photographers can write their own paychecks, depending on how much work they can get. One challenge of being a freelancer, though, is it's up to you to find the work.

Training and Certification

Wildlife photography is not licensed or regulated at the state level in the United States. There is a chance some regulations are in place at the city or county level. A quick call to your local government will confirm one way or another if there are any regulations governing photographers in your area. Chances are, there will be none.

You can pursue a college degree in photography as part of a fine arts program, but a college education is not essential to be a wildlife photographer. There are many online training programs available that you can buy and work through at your own pace. You might also find the local community college or the continuing education program at a nearby university offers individual courses in photography. One benefit of going this route is you get regular feedback from an instructor. That may not always be possible with online courses, where you're essentially on your own.



In terms of fundamental skills, you'll need to be a competent photographer, familiar with all the camera settings and how to use them to take great pictures. You'll also need to study animal behavior so you can track and locate your subjects in their habitat.

Patience is also important. Unlike other types of photography, such as shooting portraits or sporting events, with wildlife photography your subjects won't necessarily show up on your schedule.

Experience in being outdoors under sometimes rugged conditions and for long periods of time is an essential skill. Likewise, physical fitness is important. You must be able to reach the places where your wildlife subjects can be found. This also means you'll also be carrying more equipment. Besides a camera bag with photography gear, at minimum you'll need sunglasses, a good sunscreen lotion, a compact poncho or some

other foul weather protection when it rains (because it will), and a water bottle or canteen as well as protein snacks. Your exact needs on any assignment will depend on your preferences, the weather and shooting conditions (mountainous terrain versus sandy beaches or a desert), and how long you expect to be on location. You can't concentrate on your art if you're miserable about the weather.

As you're developing your talents, don't feel the need to buy every piece of camera equipment that catches your eye. That's a fast way to go deep in debt if you start pulling out the credit card every time you see a new lens advertised in a photography magazine. A standard 50mm lens will get you started. A telephoto lens is also essential. Buying one with a focal length of at least

300mm – 600mm is even better if you can afford it. All the in-between and specialty lenses, such as for extreme macro photography, can wait until you can either afford them or get an assignment that demands a specialty lens, in which case it becomes essential. Regardless, you'll have plenty of gear to lug around without packing more into your camera bag. When going into the field, take only what you're sure to need. At 600mm, the telephoto lens alone might weigh 15-20 pounds.

Professional Groups to Join



There are many professional photographers' organizations you can join to network with other pros and advance your career. Here are three of the most relevant to wildlife photographers:

[Professional Photographers of America](#) is the premiere organization of photography pros in the United States. A full membership is open to anyone living in the United States or its territories and costs \$323 per year. Benefits include:

- \$15,000 equipment insurance policy
- Data loss protection

- Access to all online education courses
- Online referral database listing
- Printed and digital monthly issues of Professional Photographer magazine
- One full registration to Imaging USA during the first year of membership
- Business Resources
- Contracts and Copyright Resources
- Access to Member Discount Program
- Weekly newsletter

[The Society of International Nature and Wildlife Photographers](#) offers three membership tiers for pros and enthusiasts. Pros receive a full business listing on the society's website. Other membership benefits include weekly newsletters, regular educational programs, photography competitions and forums for sharing tips and techniques with other members. The society offers a free 2-month trial of the professional membership; after that it's \$11.25 per month.

The [North American Nature Photography Association](#) offers networking with other professionals, continuing education, exclusive events and seminars, and more. Annual membership is \$100.



Employment

Contact newspapers, magazines and the editors of online sites devoted to photography, the natural world or both. Send them your marketing materials, brochures and business cards. Follow up with a phone call in a day or two. If your contact says she's already working with a photographer, ask if she knows anyone who needs your services. Don't be discouraged by rejection when calling potential clients. The very next call you make could be gold.

Use the networking power of your professional memberships to find assignments.

Develop and maintain working relationships with publications in your area. If you capture a stunning image of a bald eagle in flight, you'll already have contacts who may want to buy your images as a local-interest item for their publications.

Finding Clients



Business cards and a basic website should be the core of your marketing toolkit as a wildlife photographer. The website need not be fancy or expensive, just attractively designed, with photos of your best wildlife photography work, your business location and contact information. No need to include your pricing. You can discuss that directly with clients.

In addition to your business website, the next thing to do is create an Instagram account to showcase your wildlife photography. Instagram is the #1 online venue for creative professionals to display their work. It's a free promotional tool that's always working on your behalf.

Other strategies for attracting new business:

- Create a referral program with discounts for returning customers who bring new clients to you.

· Ask clients to review your services online. According to a recent survey, 90% of people say their buying decisions are influenced by positive online reviews.

Good to know:

While you're in-between assignments, which will happen with any type of freelance work, here are some ways to continue making money from your wildlife photography.

Sell photos at craft fairs

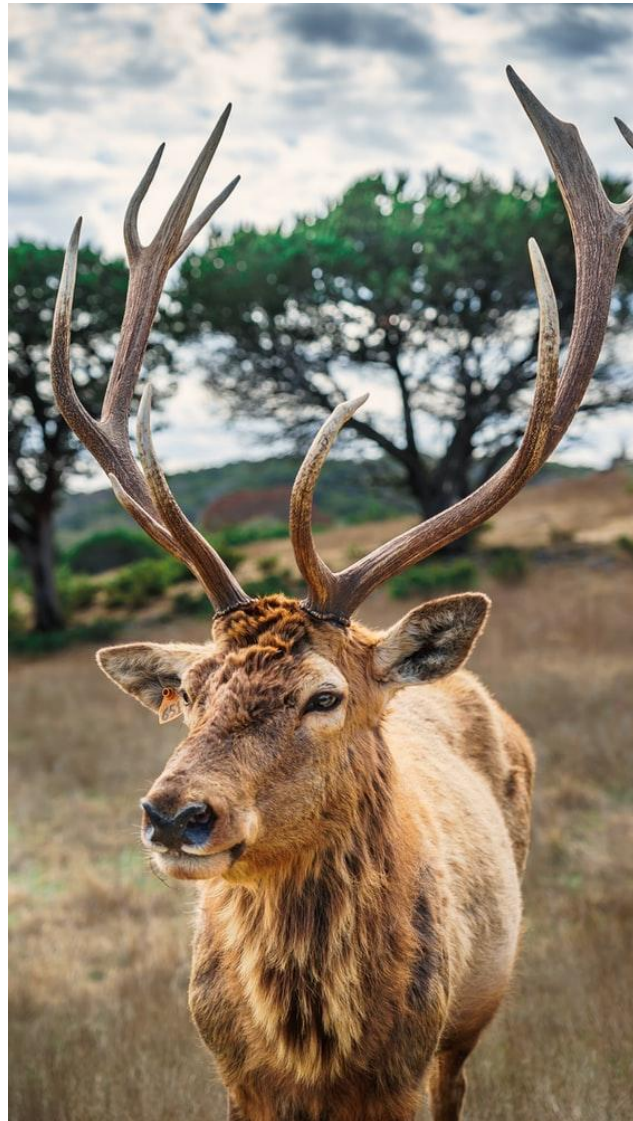
Set up a booth or table at local and regional fairs to sell prints of your wildlife photography. There is some risk involved in the sense that you must invest in quality print stock and clear, plastic sleeves to protect your images, with no assurance you'll sell all or any of the prints. But with a winning personality and great images to show off, a motivated wildlife photographer can use craft fairs to make good money on the side.

Offer workshops in wildlife photography

Many communities have photography clubs where enthusiasts get together to discuss their craft and art. Combine that with the popularity of birding, for example, and this is an opportunity to turn your knowledge into cash. One approach is to offer a field experience in wildlife photography so the entire class meets at some prearranged outdoor destination. You conduct the workshop and help students for an afternoon of polishing their photography skills. The beauty of this approach is it offers hands-on learning and you don't need a formal space to teach.

Sell images directly to magazines and newspapers

Magazine editors are always on the lookout for sharp content. Newspapers tend to be interested in more timely events, such as a bear sighting at the local YMCA swimming pool, but a great photo sells itself. If you can build a series of photos around a story or sequence of events, such



as a succession of images featuring a robin feeding her hatchlings, the likelihood of a sale goes up. Publications are looking for content that tells stories or shows their audience something rare and unusual.

Chapter 5. How to Become an Aerial/Drone Photographer

Aerial photographers skilled at piloting drones can produce absolutely stunning high-definition images and videos that earn top dollar from clients.

Part pilot, part photographer, these professionals learn the aeronautical skills necessary to fly a drone safely while recording aerial video and digital images.

Startup costs are similar to those of other photography specialties, although licensing and insurance fees will add to the expense of becoming an aerial /drone photographer.



As a licensed drone pilot you can offer aerial photography through your own business or work for a company that provides these drone services. Working independently you stand to make

more money, although all the costs of marketing and running a business – as well as finding clients – also fall on your shoulders.

The work itself is undeniably exciting as you photograph or shoot video from an aircraft under your control. The latest drones operate remotely through an app on a computer tablet. Many drone models allow you to see on the tablet what the drone is recording with an onboard camera far overhead, so you'll know at the shooting location whether you've captured all the coverage you need. No more heading home and loading the drone's memory card into your computer only to discover key shots did not turn out well – or at all.

Beyond the thrill of flight, drone photography also taps into your artistic creativity as you edit images and videos in post-production on a laptop or computer before delivery to the client.

If high-tech flying excitement combined with a photographer's eye for capturing beauty sounds appealing, read on to learn how you can become an aerial / drone photographer and make a good living.

In this article you'll learn:

[How much money you can make as an aerial/drone photographer](#)

[The required training and certifications](#)

[Professional groups to join](#)

[Employment opportunities for aerial/drone photographers](#)

[Finding clients](#)

[Plus helpful tips](#)

How much money can you make?

Aerial/Drone Photographers on average make \$43,930 per year, [according to a recent salary survey](#) of job openings by ZipRecruiter. Pros on the high end of the pay scale are making more than \$81,500 a year. Experience and skill produce great work samples, which can largely determine how much an aerial/drone photographer can charge. A motivated drone



photographer with a portfolio of quality work should have no trouble earning \$100,000 a year and up.

The average range for a single aerial photography shoot is \$250 - \$350 for about an hour of actual shooting on location. Keep in mind that there is post-production work to factor into the equation. This includes editing images in Photoshop or similar imaging software, or editing digital video and possibly adding a soundtrack with narration, depending on the client's requirements.

Training and Certification



You do not need a license or certification to be a photographer. You will absolutely need a license through the Federal Aviation Administration to fly a drone for any commercial purpose, which includes photography and videography in exchange for money.

To be eligible for licensing as a pilot under the FAA's small unmanned aircraft rule you must:

- Be at least 16 years old
- Be able to read, speak, write, and understand English
- Be in a physical and mental condition to safely fly a drone
- Pass the initial aeronautical knowledge exam

The process of becoming a licensed drone pilot is not terribly complex but it is lengthy. As you might expect, much of the focus is on flight safety. The full requirements and regulations [can be reviewed here](#). The

license itself costs \$150 and renews every two years.

The good news is, during the process of becoming licensed commercially to fly a drone, you'll also become skilled as a pilot. The only way anyone ever learned how to fly a drone safely is by practicing flying a drone.

Before you get started, come to terms with the fact that most people crash a drone at least once while learning to pilot these aircraft. All it takes is one serious crash to destroy a drone, so consider training on an inexpensive model. Toy drones cost less than \$100. Drones with cameras start at about \$300. A decent commercial drone with a high definition camera will sell for more than \$1,000. Multi-camera drones cost \$7,000 and up. As you can see, taking your maiden flight with a drone costing several thousand dollars represents a significant risk. Fly it into a tree, the side of a mountain, a building or straight into the ground and your entire business investment could collapse in a twisted pile of metal and plastic.



Once you have your pilot's license to fly drones commercially, you can consider training in aerial photography. Many courses are available for download on the Internet for less than \$100. Depending on where you live, seasoned drone pilots may offer in-person training where you can develop your aerial photography skills under the mentorship of an experienced drone photographer. An Internet search will turn up these instructors. You can also call around to local camera shops asking about classes. [Here is an example of an online drone photography course.](#)

In addition, you'll want to learn the fundamental tools of Photoshop or similar image-editing software, as well as editing digital videos. Once you've learned how to edit video, you'll be able to add music, narration and effects to create cinematic productions that will thrill your clients.

Professional Groups to Join

[The Professional Aerial Photographers Association International](#) is the premiere organization for pro photographers in this field. Annual membership is \$195. Benefits include regional conferences and educational opportunities, networking with other pros in the field, newsletters and a listing of your business on the association's website. This helps potential clients find you.

[Professional Photographers of America](#) is the best-known organization of photography pros in the United States. A full membership is open to anyone living in the United States or its territories and costs \$323 per year. Benefits include:

- \$15,000 equipment insurance policy
- Data loss protection
- Access to all online education course
- Online referral database listing
- Printed and digital monthly issues of Professional Photographer magazine
- One full registration to Imaging USA during the first year of membership
- Business Resources
- Contracts and Copyright Resources
- Access to Member Discount Program
- Weekly newsletter



Many aerial photographers work in real estate photography. If this is one of your lines of business, consider joining [The Association of Real Estate Photographers](#). This is an advocacy organization for the industry. Membership costs \$185 per year and comes with these benefits:

- Certification with the Association
- Use of AREP Logo on your website and print collateral
- Association-approved License for use with Agents/Brokers – downloadable

- Access to Legal Counsel
- Discounts on the National Conference
- Assistance with licensing disputes
- Relationship with your MLS (multiple listing service used by realtors). Work through the association for any issues with Agent/Broker/MLS image use
- Member listing in Association directory and individual member page for marketing

Employment



Aerial/ drone photographers are in demand. From sporting events to real estate, civil engineering to architecture, you'll find clients in need of a skilled drone pilot who can deliver crisp images in high definition.

If you plan to market to realtors, concentrate on agents and firms that specialize in the sale of land, farms and estates. These properties can be shown to great advantage with aerial photography so prospective buyers can see the size, shape and terrain.

Visit local realtor offices to drop off your marketing materials, brochures and business cards. Follow up with a phone call in a day or two. If a realtor says she's already working with a photographer, ask if she knows any realtors who need your services. Don't be discouraged by rejection when calling realtors. The very next call you make could be gold.

Attend local gatherings of real estate agents (they get together a lot to talk shop)

so you can introduce yourself and distribute business cards. Bring along a laptop loaded with your best aerial images and videos to set up a quick live presentation and impress new clients.

Use the networking power of your professional memberships to find jobs.

Contact the athletic departments of local colleges, universities and high schools, offering your services.

Call engineering firms, land surveying companies and architects. Offer to send a copy of your portfolio.



Finding Clients

Business cards and a basic website should be the core of your marketing toolkit. The website doesn't need to be expensive, just attractively designed, with photos and videos of your best drone work, location and contact information. No need to include your pricing unless you know that your fees are less than what competitors are asking.

In addition to your business website, create an Instagram account to showcase your aerial photography services. Instagram is the #1 online venue for creative professionals to display their work.

Other strategies for attracting new business:

- Create a referral program with discounts for returning customers who bring new clients to you.
- Ask clients to review your services online. According to a recent survey, 90% of people say their buying decisions are influenced by positive online reviews.



Good to know:

Currently there are no federal requirements for insurance on a drone pilot. That could change at any time. Regardless, get liability coverage, anyway. As a small business owner, liability insurance protects you if your drone causes an accident in which someone is hurt or property damage is involved. And insuring the drone itself means that if you do crash and destroy the aircraft, you won't need to come up with a thousand dollars or potentially much more to replace your equipment so you can stay in business. A policy that costs about \$750 a year may provide up to \$1 million in liability coverage. [Here is a guide to commercial drone insurance coverage.](#)

Chapter 6. How to Become a Freelance Photographer

Visual artists with an independent streak and desire to run their own business may find the work of a freelance photographer to be immensely rewarding.



Freelance photographers work as much as they want or need. They almost always operate with little to no supervision, which gives them tremendous personal discretion in how to approach a project. Potential assignments are limited only by the photographer's imagination. Freelance photographers can find work shooting pictures at sporting events, weddings, fashion spreads in magazines, capturing images of wildlife, properties for sale by real estate firms, even taking pictures of food for use in restaurant menus and commercial advertising. This is by no means an exhaustive list.

Freelance photographers who develop their art and customer base can also make excellent money. Starting salaries tend to hover around the national average for all employment, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, but an ambitious freelance photographer who's willing to work hard and produce stunning images can make well over six figures a year.

If photography is your passion and self-employment your dream, a career as a freelance photographer may be just the ticket to personal satisfaction. Read on to learn how you can get started as a freelance photographer.

In this article you'll learn:

[How much money you can make as a freelance photographer](#)

[The required training and certifications](#)

[Professional groups to join](#)

[Employment opportunities for freelance photographers](#)

[Finding clients](#)

[Plus helpful tips](#)

How much money can you make?



The average freelance photographer hourly wage in the United States is currently \$25.26, [according to PayScale](#). That works out to about \$48,500 annually, which is on par with the national average for all employment. Freelance photographers in the top 10 percent of the pay range are making more than \$120 per hour. On a full-time basis that's more than \$230,000 per year. Because freelancers are by definition

self-employed, your talent, ambition and work ethic will determine how much you make. There is no salary cap if you're willing to put in the time and effort to grow your own business.

Training and Certification

There are no licensing requirements or formal certifications to become a freelance journalist. Clients for the most part will want to see a portfolio of your work and a track record of dependability (you'll want to cultivate good references who can give you a recommendation).

While formal education is not required, a college degree in photography (bachelor of fine arts) can give you an edge on the competition because it shows you have the discipline and training

to complete a 4-year educational program in your field. Lacking a college degree, you can take individual photography courses to improve your camera skills, composition techniques and even specific styles of photography, including sporting events, weddings, nature and wildlife, real estate, fashion and culture, food photography – really, any subject that can be enhanced with visual content.



Individual courses are available at community colleges, through the continuing education programs at universities and colleges, and are often taught by other photographers in the community. Check with camera shops to find out about upcoming local specialty courses in photography that might be off the radar for most people.

You can also find online photography courses covering every conceivable topic. Most of these courses are self-guided, meaning you complete them at your own pace. Some come with a certificate of completion that you can customize and download when you finish the course. It's a great idea to promote any certifications you earn this way by listing them on your website and printed marketing materials. These accomplishments enhance your credibility as a professional photographer and can impress potential clients.

Professional Groups to Join



There are many professional photographers' organizations you can join to network with other pros and advance your freelance photography career. Here are some of the most

relevant to freelance photographers:

[Professional Photographers of America](#) is the premiere organization of photography pros in the United States. A full membership is open to anyone living in the United States or its territories and costs \$323 per year.

Benefits include:

- \$15,000 equipment insurance policy
- Data loss protection
- Access to all online education courses
- Online referral database listing
- Printed and digital monthly issues of Professional Photographer magazine
- One full registration to Imaging USA during the first year of membership
- Business Resources
- Contracts and Copyright Resources
- Access to Member Discount Program
- Weekly newsletter

[National Press Photographers Association](#)

This association offers professional memberships to photojournalists for \$145 per year. The association advocates for the profession, monitors and reports on international conditions for photojournalists and offers networking opportunities for members.

[American Photographic Artists](#)

Benefits include a photographer photo ID card, discounts on Apple electronics, a listing in the

association's directory to help new clients find you, and more. Membership tiers range from \$50 to \$500 per year.

Employment



Contact newspapers, magazines and the editors of online sites devoted to photography. Send them your marketing materials, brochures and business cards. Follow up with a phone call in a day or two. If your contact says she's already working with a photographer, ask if she knows anyone who needs your services. Don't be discouraged by rejection when calling potential clients. The very next call you make could be gold.

Use the networking power of your professional memberships to find assignments.

Develop and maintain working relationships with publications in your area. If you capture a stunning image, you'll already have contacts in the editorial department who may want to buy your photos as a local-interest item for their publications. You can also contact the advertising departments of those same publications as well as local ad agencies. These companies may need a photographer from time to time to help local business owners build an advertising campaign.

Finding Clients

Business cards and a basic website should be the core of your marketing toolkit as a freelance photographer. The website need not be fancy or expensive, just attractively designed, with photos of your best work, your business location and contact information. No need to include your pricing. You can discuss that directly with clients.

In addition to your business website, the next thing to do is create an

Instagram account to showcase your photography. Instagram is the #1 online venue for creative professionals to display their work. It's a free promotional tool that's always working on your behalf.

Other strategies for attracting new business:

- Create a referral program with discounts for returning customers who bring new clients to you.
- Ask clients to review your services online. According to a recent survey, 90% of people say their buying decisions are influenced by positive online reviews.



Good to know:



Freelancing in any field takes a strong disposition, determination and the self-confidence to succeed. It's not a life for everybody. As a freelance photographer you get to be your own boss, set your own hours and take time off when you wish. But to make this work as a career and lifestyle, you still have to pay the bills. Here are tips gathered from other photographers on what it takes not only to survive but thrive as a freelancer.

Always be looking for clients.

When you're not on an assignment you need to be hunting for more business. Once you build up a regular client base, use all your skills and talent to deliver images that keep them happy.

Read books on running a small business.

This will save you countless hours of wasted time and frustration by putting you on the road to profitability – and getting you faster to that destination.

Discover your photography niche.

Starting out, you may be tempted to accept every assignment offered to you. In fact, to maintain cash flow, that may be exactly what you'll need to do. But over time you may start to prefer some types of assignments over others, or discover that you have a knack for wildlife photography compared to the relentless cheerfulness required of a wedding photographer. When you find a niche that you love, everything falls into place. It no longer seems like work.

Keep calling clients, new and long-term.

Fill your calendar with reminder notices to call clients on a set schedule to ask about their photography needs. While you might think some people would find this annoying, in truth most

professionals are extremely busy people who appreciate a freelancer's initiative. After all, you're trying to help them.

Price higher at the beginning.

This may not seem to make sense for a beginner, but there's a reason to set your prices higher. If clients protest your pricing or turn you down, ask them why. If they say it's the expense, then you can negotiate and adjust. If you start out charging rock-bottom prices you risk working too hard for too little – and making yourself miserable as a result.

Buy the camera gear you need – and only what you need.

You probably already know that photography equipment is expensive, especially quality lenses. That doesn't mean you need to equip a camera backpack in your first month as a working freelancer. Most likely, you'll plunge yourself into debt. Instead, buy a good camera body and a couple of lenses. A standard 50mm and a telephoto lens are a good start. Add a set of inexpensive neutral density and polarizing filters, a flash attachment for the camera, and a couple of extra battery packs and spare memory cards. That's plenty to get you started.



Stay active in your professional groups.

The best way to get free continuing education is to keep up with your professional memberships. Visit the online forums and interact with other pros who share their tips and techniques.

Build up a cash savings fund for the slow times.

Financial advisors often recommend having savings for six months of expenses available in an emergency. That's a worthy goal, but any savings you can accumulate – and build on steadily – will be your salvation if you hit a couple of slow months with no work. Having a cash reserve means you're not having to sell off camera equipment or take a part-time job to buy food or pay the rent.

Keep track of all your business expenses.



This includes travel and mileage. Save the receipts. It will help a lot at tax time.

Follow the client's instructions.

If customers describe clearly what they want, don't try to deliver something different – even if you think it's better. Give clients the work product they asked for, and they'll keep coming back. Once you've established a relationship you can begin to suggest other creative ways of getting the client's images.

Practice.

Take your camera wherever you go and shoot lots of images. Hone your post-production skills in Photoshop or another image editing tool. Some photographers will tell you that Photoshop takes a lifetime to master. Not if you work with it an hour a day.

Final Thoughts

When you become a photographer in any of the 6 disciplines we've covered in this eBook, you've taken the first step on a career path that can provide you with a lifetime of artistic achievement, professional satisfaction and the opportunity to make a good living.

Joining one or more professional organizations will help you stay current in your photography discipline, network with other experts and enjoy a sense of community that can be vital to lifelong enjoyment of your career. Membership in any of the many different professional groups we've covered in this eBook is also an effective way to develop and advance your career because you are able to create relationships with other professionals who can recommend you for employment and refer clients to your photography business.

In addition to affiliations with professional organizations and networking with other photographers in your field, as with any business owner you'll need to carry liability insurance coverage for self-protection when you decide to open your own business and become self-employed.

As more and more clients come to you for photography you'll also need a way to bill and get paid. You'll need an app for scheduling appointments. If you try to do all these things yourself, it can eat up your time and soon become overwhelming.

The best use of your day ought to be spent working with clients and shooting pictures, not distributing bills and appointment reminders and trying to stay on top of a busy photography business.

We hope this eBook will give you a great start in preparing for your career as a professional photographer. Here's to your success!

About Author

Stephen Evans is an American investigative journalist, author, photographer, communications professional and film historian. A Poynter Institute for Media Studies Fellow, Evans has received first place awards for feature writing from the Virginia Press Association and Tennessee Press Association. He has also received numerous awards from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) for excellence in academic writing and publishing in higher education.

His writing and photography have appeared in more than 50 print publications, including The Wall Street Journal, The Los Angeles Times, The Richmond Times-Dispatch, The Miami Herald and The Washington Post, as well as scores of online publications.

He is a graduate of the University of Virginia master's degree program for studies in classical rhetoric and communication theory. During his time at UVA he received the departmental award for outstanding teaching in his work with undergraduates. Evans received a bachelor's degree with honors in journalism and political science from Virginia Commonwealth University.

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