

Photolearn

www.photolearn.co.uk

Copyright: Garry Edwards & Commercial Photography. All rights reserved
Photolearn is a subsidiary of Commercial Photography, 1A Mill Street, Bradford
BD6 3BQ. Tel: 01274 60 88 22

A brief extract from

The Photolearn Professional Photography Manual

My approach to this Tutorial

There is real money to be earned from photography and this tutorial will tell you how to do it, and just as importantly, what to look out for and what to avoid.

This is not a technical manual in the sense that I have assumed that you have the knowledge you need to produce technically excellent images.

But if you do need technical support then it's available from <http://www.photolearn.co.uk> in the form of detailed tutorials on the following subjects:

- Studio still life photography
- Studio equipment and lighting
- Glamour photography
- Portrait photography
- Wedding photography
- Model Portfolio photography
- Artistic nude photography
- Cameras and camera accessories

Further support is available if required in the form of individual training in any aspect of studio photography, and my studio is also available for hire.

O.K., that's the advertising finished, now let's get on with this tutorial.

But before we get on to the nuts and bolts of professional photography, I'd like you to know why I have written this tutorial.

Well, partly it's to make money, and why not?

And partly because, like my tutorials on the technical aspects of photography, this is a unique product and you need it.

And you need this tutorial because, although photography is like any other business in many ways, it has unique characteristics too, and there are ways of doing things that virtually guarantee success, and there are other ways of doing things that virtually guarantee failure. My working life as a professional photographer has been successful but I've had my share of failures too, not because I'm stupid but because I've had to learn by making mistakes.

This tutorial will help you to avoid making the mistakes that I made!

Your approach to this tutorial

Your approach and your attitude is important because although I think the manual is the best thing since sliced bread, it is, after all, only a book. It will inform and educate you but it can't run your business for you and it can't get you out of bed in the morning!

In other words, it's a tool that you will have to use to help you to achieve what you want to achieve, it won't do it for you.

This book is a unique product because the other tutorials and manuals that I've seen simply don't do what they claim to do. They don't provide the information you need and it's pretty obvious to anyone who actually works as a professional photographer that they were written by people who don't know their subject. If you follow their advice, not only will you not know how to earn money from photography, you will also waste your time trying to make money in markets that simply aren't worth bothering with.

But one 'quality' that other books have and this one doesn't have is that they tell people what they want to hear. They tell them, for example, that school photography pays a fortune, that anyone can make good money from taking snapshots of holiday destinations and that people will form a queue to buy coffee mugs with their picture on it – all total nonsense of course, but this upbeat optimism can leave people with good feelings about their future.

This book, on the other hand, written from knowledge and experience, is less upbeat and I've left out all the 'money making opportunities' that don't really exist.

So I'm asking you to approach this book with an open mind. Read all of it, don't judge it on preconceptions or on stories of fame and fortune that you may have read elsewhere.

Then sit down and think about it, and think about yourself and your own, personal qualities. And talk to other people too, people you can trust to tell you the truth as they see it. Try to get an idea about how other people see you. This is important, because you will be running a business, and the way that you run your business and the way that other people see you will have far more effect on your success than your abilities with a camera!

This is **not** a 'dip and pick' tutorial – by all means read the bits that interest you the most first, but you should then study every word, because you need to have a **complete** understanding of how professional photography actually works to get the best from it.

Should you be in business for yourself?

If you sell your skills and services as a photographer then you're in business, and you have to operate as a business. Whether you just want to make a bit of extra on the side or whether you want to turn your skills and enthusiasm into a full-time, successful business, your attitude needs to be right.

And having the right attitude means that you have to be determined to succeed, you need to have a real belief in yourself, you need to be committed to providing your clients with the best possible service and the best possible quality, you need to be willing to work hard (and to sometimes work long hours).

You also need to be self-motivated, and you need to welcome the sound of the alarm clock in the morning because it means that you can get on with another day of opportunity!

A lot of people go into business for the wrong reasons, and if the reasons are wrong then failure is almost certain. Here are some of the wrong reasons, and if these are your reasons then you need to change either your attitude or your ambitions, because the life of a self-employed photographer is not for you!

- I want to work for myself because I want to have more free time
- I'm only interested in the money, and professional photographers earn a fortune
- I'm an artist and I want to express my art as a photographer
- I want to get paid for photographing beautiful women
- I want to get paid for travelling to exotic places
- I can't find a job

No, I'm not joking, these are reasons that came up in a survey of wannabe photographers!

O.K., before we go on to the interesting bits, let's start with the boring 'business' bits. These are the essentials that you need to consider before you even start your business.

Write a business plan

This is the first step for anyone starting out. It is a statement of your plans, intentions and objectives both in the short and the long term.

It should include estimates of income and expenditure, the direction in which you see your business to be heading, details of the markets available to you, plans for future capital purchases, information about your competition and so on.

No bank or other financial institution will lend you money unless you have a viable business plan. Not that I advise you to borrow money anyway. Perhaps the most useful function of a business plan is that it will help you to analyse your own motivation and to define what you actually want to do with the rest of your life.

Books are available on how to write a business plan and on how to impress banks, my advice is to save your money and to ask your bank for help. Banks have useful booklets, they're free and they are tailored to the requirements of that particular bank, unlike books, which are very generalised. Some banks also provide free software, which is even better.

But don't write the business plan just yet, read this book first, think about its contents, talk to your friends about your own personality, strengths and weaknesses and think about the type of photography that suits your personality, skills and abilities. Then write your business plan.

Your trading name

You can trade under virtually any name you choose. Certain words are not allowed, for example British, Registered, Wales, Royal, Scottish, Group, Bank, Co-operative, Windsor, Trust. You can't use words likely to cause offence either, nor can you use trading names that are already registered to existing businesses. It is an offence to use names that are likely to lead customers (or suppliers) to believe that you are part of an existing business owned by someone else. This is called passing off, and if you do it you are very likely to find yourself in Court!

Go to <http://www.companies-house.gov.uk> for more info.

Subject to these exceptions, you can choose just about any trading name you wish, but the choice of name requires careful thought.

Let's assume that your name is John Smith, you can call yourself John Smith & Co, or John Smith & Sons, but this type of trading name won't tell your potential clients that you're a photographer, so you'll be wasting a marketing opportunity.

You could call yourself Smith's Wedding Photography, and that's fine, but it will be telling potential clients that you only photograph weddings.

One worthwhile tip: You'll need a website, so the first step, after choosing names that might be suitable, is to see whether or not the domain names of your choice can be registered – the chances are that most of your choices will have already been registered by someone else. If possible, your trading name and your website domain name should be the same, for example the website address for the British Broadcasting Corporation is www.bbc.co.uk

Some other legal requirements

If you are trading under a name other than your own you must display your own name on all business stationery (except for compliments slips and business cards).

Here's an example:

People Pics

1 Main Street,

Bradford

YO12 3BQ

Proprietor: John Smith

You must also display a declaration of ownership, giving the name of the owner and his/her private address, at your business premises. It must be displayed in a place where it is clearly visible to all visitors (not inside your private office).

Here's an example:

The owner of the business trading as
People Pics
Is John Smith
14 Acacia Avenue,
Surbiton, Surrey
KT14 1AB

You must also provide the name and address of the owner, in writing, to any business contact who requests it.

You can, if you wish, register your trading name, and any logo that you use in your business. This will stop other businesses from using the same or a very similar trading style. It is, however, expensive. More info: <http://www.patent.gov.uk>

Sole Trader or what?

Most small businesses operate as sole traders. This means that the person who owns the business works for himself and is responsible for all aspects of the business. The owner is personally entitled to all the profits, after payment of liabilities and debts. It also means that the person who owns the business is personally liable for all business debts.

Some businesses operate as partnerships. This sounds like a great arrangement, because there will be two or more people who share the work as well as the profits. In theory there can be up to 20 people in a partnership, but most people who have been involved in a business partnership will tell you that two people is one too many! The reason for this is that friction can and does arise when one partner contributes less effort or generates less income, or takes decisions without consulting the other partner(s)

Another potential problem with partnerships is that all partners are severally and jointly liable for all business debts. What this means, as an example, is that if your partner decides to spend £150,000 on a minilab for your business then you will have to pay for it! O.K., I've tried to put you off the idea of a partnership, but if you decide to ignore that advice please don't ignore the next bit – get your partnership agreement drawn up by a solicitor.

And then there are Limited Companies. Limited Companies are actually recognised in law as a separate entity – a person in their own right. Therefore, if the company collapses under a load of debt it will be the company's debt and not yours! This system has been abused by dishonest directors for many years and the laws have been tightened recently, but there are still significant benefits in trading as a limited company if it all goes horribly wrong, provided that the directors have acted honestly.

If your photography business is successful you can expect to earn a lot of money - and there are major tax advantages in trading as a limited company.

There is however a downside – there is more paperwork to do, the accountancy costs are higher and more detailed records need to be kept.

Banks

Bank accounts are of course essential, and you should set up a bank account as soon as you have decided on your trading name. Banks love small businesses and will normally provide free banking for the first year. They will also try to help by offering advice on your business. This is fine, but bear in mind that the person offering the advice hasn't actually run a photography business – and come to that, probably hasn't actually run any kind of business!

Accountants

If you operate as a Limited Company then your Company must appoint a qualified accountant. If you operate either as a sole trader or as a partnership you can manage without an accountant, or you can give your accountancy work to a bookkeeper or to a part-qualified accountant instead. My advice is to place your business with a qualified accountant, who can be expected to save you far more than he charges.

Income tax

You are obliged by law to tell the Inland Revenue that you have started up in business. You have just 3 months in which to notify them, and if you forget then they will fine you £100 – so do it straight away. Register on line at <http://www.ir.gov.uk/startingup/register.htm>

National Insurance Contributions

The rules are fairly complex and depend on whether you operate as a sole trader/partnership or as a Limited Company. Get up to date advice from your accountant, or better still get free advice from the DSS

Data Protection

A few years ago, enforcement of The Data Protection Act was very patchy but today the laws are rigidly enforced, so if you need to register then you must do so. Basically, registration is a legal requirement if you keep computerised records of private individuals. For more info, contact <http://www.dataprotection.gov.uk>

By the way, a word of warning: Every now and again I get a very official-looking letter from someone who gives the impression that they are H.M. Government's Data Protection Agency and who threaten to prosecute me unless I send them a cheque by return. It's a scam, just bin the letters.

Getting outside help

There's a section on professional associations for photographers further on, and Chambers of Commerce also get a mention. Another agency well worth considering is

Business Link, which is funded by HM Government from the taxes we pay and which exists to help people like you and me.

They can advise and help with grant applications but they can do far more than this, they can provide free in-house help with marketing and general business advice, supply mailing lists at very competitive prices, source specialised help and so on.

I hesitate to actually recommend them, because from my own experience the quality of help depends very largely on the local representative - some of whom are dynamic and hardworking, whilst others seem to be counting the days to their own retirement...

But it's well worth contacting them, meeting your local representative and seeing what they have to offer.

=====0=====

O.K., that's the end of the necessary but boring bits. I believe that the advice I've given you so far is accurate and helpful but neither I nor my Company will be liable if it turns out to be incorrect or incomplete. Get up to date professional advice on these matters from accountants and solicitors, not from photographers!

Detailed info on many of the topics above can be found on the net - take a look at <http://www.shell-livewire.com/forums/showthread.php?s=558539e6eaa719aef2e52cdd5245a699&threadid=1655>

Let's start off by asking an obvious question:

What's the difference between amateur and professional photography?

Well, the obvious answer is that professional photographers get paid for their work, but there's far more to it than that!

1. Amateur photographers photograph what they find interesting, professional photographers interest themselves in whatever their clients want them to photograph. O.K., this is obvious but what I am trying to say is that, as a professional, you will need to become enthusiastic about the person or product that you're shooting. Otherwise you won't see the important features, and if you don't see them you won't show them at their best.
2. Professional photographers need to make every shot work, both artistically and on a technical level. Carelessness and relying on luck is simply not an option.
3. Professional photographers need to listen to their clients. It's the clients who pay the bills, and although the photographer has a responsibility to advise, he also

has a responsibility to find out exactly what the client wants and to then produce it.

And now a question about you:

Do you have the skills you need?

Back in 'The good old days' most professional photographers started their professional life working for a large studio. We spent most of our time washing the floor, making tea, loading plates, developing film, moving lights and running errands. Those of us who wanted to improve our formal education went to University, and because we needed to have A levels in physics and chemistry to get accepted on a degree course we were able to cope with the technical education that we received. Those days have gone, and most people today are either self-taught or have received some kind of further or higher education at a local college.

In general, I believe that the changes to the way we learn our photography are a positive step, because the emphasis is now on the creative aspects of photography rather than the technical, but all too often the technical knowledge that professional photographers must have to turn out work of a consistent high quality across a wide range of subject matter are missing.

If you feel that you need further training then an obvious solution would seem to be enrollment on a course at your local college – but make sure, before you spend your time and money in this way, that the college can help you to gain the skills you need! Many of the courses are taught by art tutors who know very little about photography and many of your fellow students may have enrolled for very different reasons to yourself.

One qualification that might be worth considering is **City and Guilds**. It's a recognised qualification that may impress potential clients. There used to be two 'flavours' of City and Guilds in Photography - Professional (7474) and Leisure (9231), but these have now been discontinued. The situation is now too complicated to explain here – please go to http://www.city-and-guilds.co.uk/pls/cg2/pkg_cg_qualfind.prc keyword?p_keyword=photography&p_level=All+Levels&p_runmode=L for more info! Details of various courses can be found here <http://db.riskwaters.com/public/showPage.html?page=14179>

Perhaps the best method is to learn from other professionals. Work your way through your local Yellow Pages, tell the photographers that you want to improve your skills and ask them whether you can work alongside them. Some will give you a flat 'No', perhaps because they are afraid of competition, but if you stick at it you should find some who are willing to help – after all, they'll get a free assistant, someone to keep them supplied with coffee and, who knows, you might be able to make useful suggestions, simply because you have a fresh perspective.

The two areas in which you will learn the most from practicing professionals is studio lighting and wedding photography, neither of which can be easily learned from books, and you'll be amazed both at how much there is to learn and at how quickly it can be learned! Personally I find it strange that some people are prepared to pay very large

sums of money for courses on wedding photography – the skills required mainly involve dealing with people. These skills are important but it's not rocket science and anyone who's quick-thinking enough to actually be a wedding photographer will soon pick up the skills simply by watching and assisting a few different experienced pros.

Full time or part time?

Throughout this tutorial I've assumed that you are, or are aiming to be, a full-time professional photographer. The reasons for this are that

1. Professional photography is very well-paid and, for most people, it makes sense in financial terms for it to be a full-time occupation
2. The equipment and capital investment needs are similar for both full and part time professional photographers and it makes sense to use the equipment frequently rather than occasionally, to get the maximum return on the investment.
3. Professional photographers often need to work unsocial hours and to travel, and it can be difficult to meet the needs of clients and the obligations of employment at the same time.
4. It's fun – and it makes sense to do what we enjoy doing!

But of course, life isn't always simple and, especially for people who have family commitments and mortgages, making a leap from a secure income to the unknown is very risky. Because of this, it's probably true to say that most successful professional photographers started their careers on a part time basis and only made the switch either when their level of business justified it or their hand was forced by other circumstances, such as redundancy.

Where should you work from?

The main choices are home, home studio or business premises. Each has both advantages and disadvantages and the choice will be influenced by the type of photography you do and by the type of clients you attract.

Working from home

This has obvious cost advantages because you won't have to pay most of the business overheads associated with commercial premises. You will however be liable to pay business rates, and if your property is mortgaged you may need to obtain permission from your mortgage lender. If you work from home it makes sense for the business to have its own telephone line. The telephone can then be answered in the name of your business rather than an unprofessional 'Hello' and the telephone can also be diverted to your mobile when necessary, to avoid losing important calls (don't expect clients to leave messages on an answering service, most will simply ring someone else instead).

But there are disadvantages too:

Photolearn

www.photolearn.co.uk

Copyright: Garry Edwards & Commercial Photography. All rights reserved
Photolearn is a subsidiary of Commercial Photography, 1A Mill Street, Bradford
BD6 3BQ. Tel: 01274 60 88 22