

How to hire a photographer

Why hire a professional?

- Professionals have the skill and equipment to do the job.
- Good photographers have “The Eye” for it and can just make better photos than the rest of us.
- A big part of what you are paying for is confidence. You want to know that it will be done right, the first time, with minimum hassles.
- Professionals have a system in place to not lose photos. If you don’t lose your photographer, he should be able to service your order for years to come.
- It frees other people up to do their jobs (and do them better). It’s a team effort, why play more parts than you need to?
- Professionals probably have better equipment than you do, and more importantly, have more support. They will have multiple cameras (in case one breaks), spare batteries, flash cards, etc., If the job requires it, they can light the photo to show your subject in it’s best light. The camera that John Q Public uses is often a \$200 point & shoot, and they are fine for holidays and vacations, but don’t capture spontaneity very well, and the files have problems that show up in printing.
- Pros match the equipment to the job. Some assignments can be done on mid-level DSLR cameras, some require high-end DSLRs, and some require specialized equipment—a digital Hasselblad can cost \$40,000 for a camera and one lens!

Pre-contact:

- Decide what pictures you *need* from the assignment and what type of photographer can produce it.
- Research the budget for the assignment
- Find out what media and other special requirements you have from the post-shoot production team.
- Decide what usage rights you need, and what rights you just want. Usage is closely linked to price.
 - Many companies request “all rights” even though they only need limited rights. If you don’t need billboard use in Singapore, why pay for it? On the other hand, if you are shooting a conference for your company newsletter and might want to use a photo in the Annual Report, it may be cheaper to negotiate that additional use up front.
- Sources for photographers:
 - Trade association directories (ASMP, APA, NPPA, PPA)
 - Sourcebooks (Blackbook, etc.)
 - Yellowpages (not used much for commercial photographers)
 - Referrals (Very useful)
 - Internet
 - Direct mail (you’ve received)
- If you’re young, don’t be afraid to hire an experienced photographer. Remember that if you hire a good photographer, you look good too.

Initial contact:

- Ask to see the photographer's portfolio ("book").
- Be sure he is someone you can work with, both stylistically and personally.
- Discuss the assignment requirements.
- Discuss budget and usage.
 - Don't ask, "what's your Day Rate," ask "what's this going to cost?" Production expenses often equal or exceed the photographer's fee, and are a significant part of the bill. They can also vary widely from one photographer to another.
 - Keep in mind that when the photographer quotes a Day Rate, you are hiring a company, not a person, and the Day Rate is NOT the photographer's take-home salary.
- Request an estimate or bid if you need one.
- Expect the photographer to fax an assignment confirmation and request your signature.
 - Expect to use the photographer's contract, not your company's. (This is a problem area.) Many companies are now using their own contracts, which are very biased against the photographer. Remember, if you rent a car, you use the car company's contract; if you hire a plumber, you use the plumber's contract; if you hire a photographer, you should use the photographer's contract.
- Be sure to get the photographer's terms & conditions—they should be on the confirmation.
 - This is the time to get them, so there are no surprises later.

Before the assignment:

- Give the photographer a way to reach you immediately before the assignment; i.e. a home or cell phone number, and get the same from your photographer.
- Be sure the photographer is clear about how he/she will deliver the final photos.

During the assignment (if you are there):

- Hopefully, everyone has a clear understanding of what should happen, let the photographer do his job.
- If this is an event, it is helpful if you can point out key people who must be photographed.

After the assignment:

- Call the photographer when you get the film (or prints, or CD) if they are not hand-delivered.
- Expect a delivery memo detailing what is in the package. Sign it and fax it back.
- Expect an invoice. Pay it promptly!
 - The photographer's invoice is enough receipt for the IRS on expenses—He does NOT need to provide you receipts for film, processing, etc.

After the photos are used:

- Return the photos in the manner agreed upon (Federal Express, courier, hand deliver, etc.)
- Send tear-sheets to the photographer.

The times they are a changin' ...

- *Once upon a time...*, photographers shot film and delivered prints and slides. Now we mostly shoot digital and deliver on CDs, flash drives and online. You will encounter both film archive images and old-school employees who prefer dealing with film. Virtually everything published will be processed digitally. No problem, film and prints can be scanned, and people can be educated.
- The issue of rights has not changed with the switch from film to pixels. **Absent a prior written agreement to the contrary, the photographer owns all rights to the images.** If you purchase one-time print use of a photo, you do not have the right to put it on the web. If you find a photo on the web you want, you can't download it. To repeat the point made earlier, it is very important to agree on what uses you will make of the photography and what rights you need before the assignment takes place. After the assignment is not a good time for surprises from either side.
- If the work is delivered on CD, it is important to keep track of the usage rights that go with the images on the CD so that somebody doesn't inadvertently infringe the copyright. If the photographer asks that the CD be returned, by all means return it.

Resources:

- American Society of Media Photographers (national site): www.asmp.org
- American Society of Picture Professionals: www.aspp.com
- National Press Photographers' Association: <http://www.nppa.org/>
- Advertising Photographers of America: <http://www.apanational.com/>
- Professional Photographers of America: <http://www.ppa.com/>
- Seth Resnick's site: www.sethresnick.com (slow site, expensive photographer, but LOTS of information and stock prices)
- 10 Myths about copyright explained: <http://www.templetons.com/brad/copymyths.html>

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