

Get paid to take photographs!

FabJob Guide to
**Become a
Professional
Photographer**



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1. Introduction

1.1 Welcome

Are you intrigued by the idea of using photography to make time stand still, and **creating keepsakes** that will be treasured for generations? Maybe you love being a part of the excitement and magic that come with the glorious moments in human life: weddings, comings of age, and grand celebrations. You want to be there to record it forever.

Or perhaps you are simply **fascinated by people** — their unique expressions, their relationships, and their lives. You think every face tells a story, and that every story is worth listening to. A camera is a tool to record every person's life story; to give it dignity and beauty. Whatever your reason is for selecting this career and this guide, you have made a wise choice. Because really, what better way to make money than to work at something you love?



The **FabJob Guide to Become a Professional Photographer** is a one-of-a-kind resource for aspiring wedding and portrait photographers. This guide will take you step by step from wherever you are right now to earning money with your photography talent. Read on to discover how to start your fabulous new career as a professional photographer immediately, and **get paid** to share your vision and talent, one client at a time.

1.1.1 What is a Professional Photographer?

A photograph is an image created when light strikes a sensitive surface. Professional photographers are paid to record images or photographs, using a camera. In this guide the term “**professional photographer**” is used to mean someone who takes pictures of people (or pets), and sells those pictures back to the subjects and their loved ones.

There are many, many other ways to earn money selling or licensing your photos, since almost every business sector from entertainment to aerospace has a need for them. However, this guide is focused on starting and running your own portrait and/or wedding photography business, and **will not** deal with journalism, selling stock photos, or working for ad agencies.

When you think of “people photography,” you may be inspired by the work of modern celebrity photographers like **Annie Liebovitz**, or the heartwarming sleepy infants of **Anne Geddes**. Or perhaps you hope to emulate the groundbreaking photojournalism style of **Denis Reggie**, called the “greatest wedding photographer of our day.” Your unique style of photography will be your greatest asset in this business.

Professional photographers can work in an indoor studio they set up and maintain, or they can choose to shoot at peoples’ homes, event venues, or outdoors. They usually meet with clients in advance, and then schedule a time and place to take pictures. Once they have captured a number of images, they review the images with the client, and the client selects their favorites to be made into prints.

While photographers spend much of their day taking pictures, the work of running a photography business also requires the following activities. (Note that many photographers **hire assistants** so they can focus on the picture-taking!)

- Scheduling appointments with clients
- Digitally editing images
- Meeting with clients to discuss their needs
- Creating or purchasing studio props and sets
- Designing albums and reviewing proofs
- Keeping up to date with trends in the industry
- Marketing the business to new and existing clients
- Arranging to have prints prepared, or printing them yourself
- Bookkeeping and banking
- Cleaning and maintaining equipment
- Updating your website and blog

Photographs can be used to communicate ideas, to entertain, to preserve memories, or simply to brighten our lives. Wedding photographers record one of the most important days in a couple’s life, and portrait photographers create a legacy for families and

future generations. However you decide to specialize, your work as a professional photographer is **needed and important**.

1.1.2 The Market Today

Studio photography is a **growing industry**, and a great market to get into right now. In fact, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that the business sector of studio photography will grow much more quickly than the national average over the next ten years. The population is increasing, and therefore so is the customer base for your new business.

There has been a focus on family in recent years, especially in these times of war and terrorism. More and more people are seeing the value in getting portraits done to document the growth and closeness of their relationships. People like to feel special, and having a photographer to record their family's growth or a special event accomplishes that.

The wedding industry is still booming, according to the latest statistics. It is estimated that 2.1 million weddings took place in the United States in 2009, with an average cost of \$19,580. At a typical 12% of the total budget, we can estimate that each couple spends on average **more than \$2,000** on photography and videography services combined.

Portrait photographers now are finding that busy professional parents are willing to pay top-dollar for unique portraits of their children that bring out their personalities. Teens are looking for alternatives to the tired "cap and gown" graduation photo. And professionals of all ages are looking for impactful headshots for their websites and business cards. So there is no shortage of work for the aspiring professional photographer.

Technology has had a profound impact on the photography business in the last five years. In the past photos were recorded on film, but today the vast majority of cameras record images **digitally**. The term "image" is replacing the word "photo" in the industry, and within the last year most camera manufacturers have announced that they will halt production of new film camera models. (For these reasons, this guide assumes you are working with digital technology.)

The falling price of digital equipment and its increasing user-friendliness have led to another market trend: **increased competition** from other photographers, and even from your own clients who purchase digital cameras. Today's successful photographers are learning to carve out a niche so they can offer clients something **truly unique**. This guide will help you find innovative ways to attract clients, and build your business on your best talents.

1.1.3 Benefits of the Career

The benefits of a career in photography are tremendous. Although each specialization carries its own sources of attraction (e.g., working with happy young couples, or working with children), here are some of the benefits that are most commonly thought of.

Flexibility

As a photographer, in many cases you can **work when you want**, scheduling your shooting (and certainly your editing) around family life or other commitments. Of course if you are shooting a scheduled event like a wedding, you'll need to show up on time and prepared to work. But a career as a professional photographer definitely offers more flexibility than most.

Being Your Own Boss

Working for yourself means doing your job with your own equipment, and by your own standards. You'll still have clients to answer to, but you won't have a boss breathing down your neck from 9 to 5. There are **other benefits** to being self-employed as well, such as tax savings.

“When I used to have a job — a real job, working as a boilermaker — there were times I used to dread Monday morning. Since I started working as a photographer, I never had another day like that. Working for yourself is scary at first, but when you step up and get it done, the gratification is unlike anything else in the world,”

— Mike Copeman, a professional photographer.

Work You Can Love

Nobody wants to enter data for a living or work on an assembly line — these are jobs that just pay the bills. As a professional photographer, you will be **doing what you love** most, and producing a body of work that you can be proud of. You will be considered an expert in something almost everyone dabbles in (taking photos of people), and your opinions will be sought after and valued.

You Can Start Right Now

The good news is that you don't need an expensive darkroom setup, certification, or even any formal training to succeed in this career. If you don't have the funds to equip a studio, you can shoot outside or on location to start. You can buy a professional-

quality camera with a basic lens for about \$1,500. And as soon as you **sell your first photo**, you can call yourself a professional photographer.

1.2 Inside this Guide

This FabJob guide is designed to introduce you to a career in professional photography, and teach you the steps to take to turn your image-capturing talent into a way to make money. The information, resources and advice offered on these pages will save you **hundreds of hours** of research, so that you can start earning money from your photography skills more quickly. You'll avoid the common pitfalls, and make decisions like an expert.

Following this brief introduction, **Chapter 2** (*What a Professional Photographer Does*) starts with an overview of the services you can offer, and then explains how to do the job working as a portrait or wedding photographer (many do both). You'll also learn how to edit and present your work to clients, how to fulfill orders, and how to set your rates.



Chapter 3 (*Getting Ready*) prepares you for the career with an explanation of the skills you'll need in this business, and how to develop them. This chapter is rich with resources. You'll get a wide variety of strategies to teach yourself photography, as well as recommendations on choosing a school or workshop.

Chapter 4 (*Starting a Photography Business*) gets into the nuts and bolts of running a photography business. Develop and refine your business idea, and then make it happen. This section includes a primer on equipment and supplies, an overview of the financial and legal matters involved in business start-up, and some key strategies for getting (and staying) organized.

Chapter 5 (*Getting Clients*) starts with ideas for developing your portfolio and promotional tools to reach clients effectively. Business-building strategies outlined include

print advertising, online directories, press releases and other publicity builders, referral incentives, strategic partnerships, past-client contact, and attending tradeshow/expos.

The guide concludes with some words of inspiration from working photographers, and a handy list of websites you can use to continue your research. Throughout the guide you will find **samples of forms** you can adapt for your business, as well as encouragement and ideas from a number of industry experts who have kindly shared their advice and experience with you. They include:

- Award-winning studio and wedding photographers **Anthony Cava** and **Frank Cava** of Photolux Studio. (<http://www.photoluxstudio.com>)
- **Mike Copeman**, whose 15 years of experience include being commissioned as an official photographer for part of the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics. (<http://www.mikecopeman.com>)
- **Michelle Valberg**, a celebrated photographer renowned for her soulful portraiture. She has published two collections of her work, which has also appeared in *Chatelaine* and *In Style*. (<http://www.valbergimaging.com>)
- **Chandra Price**, an award-winning photographer and journalist whose work has appeared in *Glamour* — her photos were displayed in the National Kodak Exhibition across Canada.
- Destination wedding/event photographer and videographer **Eric Richards** of Z Videography, Utah. (<http://www.ericdrichards.com>)
- Toronto-based wedding and portrait photographer **Nicole Donne**.

NOT Inside this Guide

It's important to note that **this is not** a book about taking better photos. The guide focuses on *using* your photography skills to earn a living. Information about taking great photos would fill an entire book, and in fact it has filled many. This doesn't mean the guide is not for beginners, though! Just look to Chapter 3 for tips and resources to get your skills up to speed before you apply the business principles you'll learn in the rest of the guide.