

2013 SURVEY

WHAT

# BUYERS

WANT FROM

PHOTOGRAPHERS

an educational guide by:



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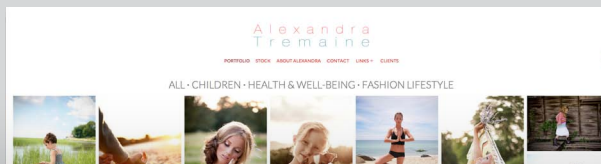
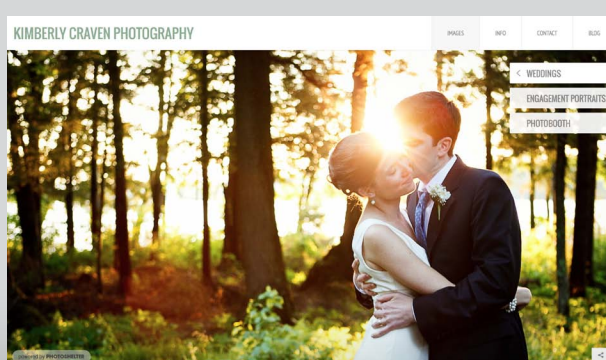
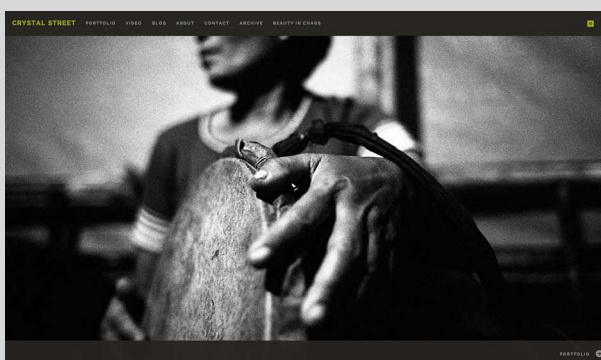
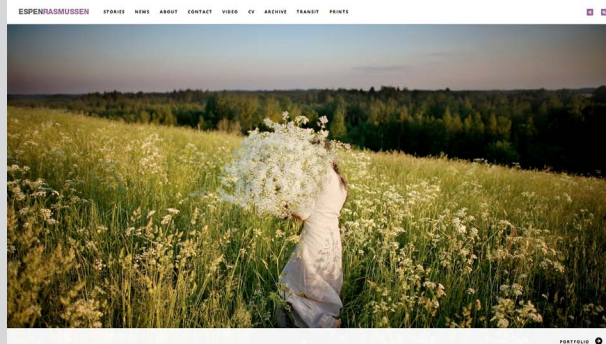
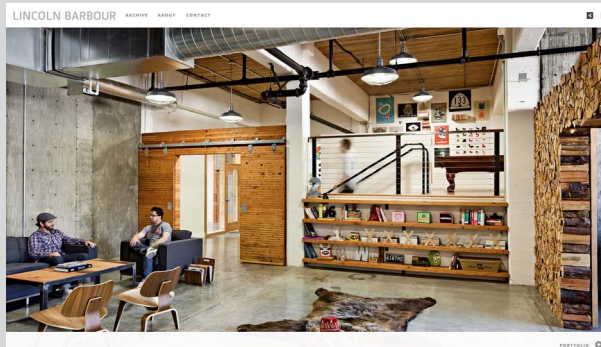
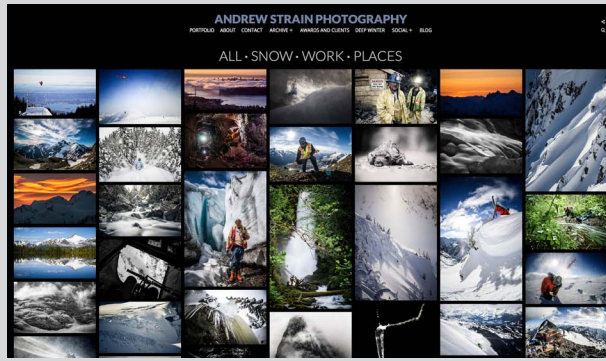
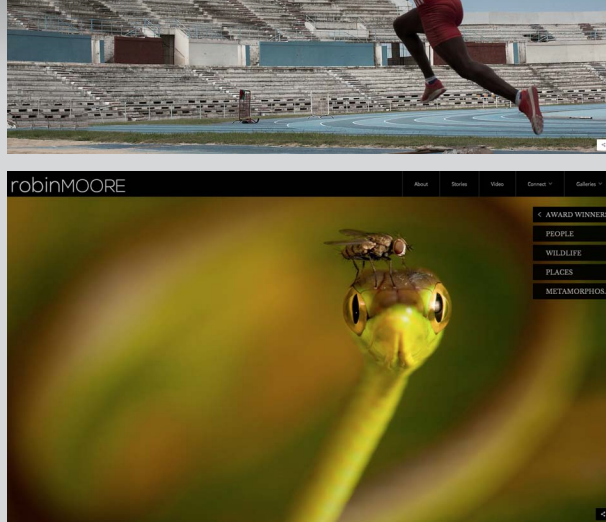
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# Introduction

PhotoShelter and Agency Access have joined forces for the third consecutive year to bring you the *2013 Survey: What Buyers Want From Photographers*. This year, we surveyed hundreds of photo buyers worldwide to help educate photographers on how to improve their marketing efforts, web presence and overall business workflow to attract attention from those who hire.

In this year's survey, we asked 34 questions ranging from buyers' preferences on what type of marketing grabs their attention, photo website likes and dislikes, how they search for photographers and photography, plus budget challenges and industry trends they've noticed. Buyers also told us again this year that a photographer's personality can make a huge impact on their chances of getting hired, so we picked their brains on what makes working with a photographer a pleasant or negative experience. It should be no surprise that a great attitude and clear passion for what you do can go very far in business.

We've packaged up the survey results, plus major business tips and interviews with buyers who offer insights to help you get hired. Use this guide as a resource to understand how buyers think so you can target your marketing efforts, improve your website, and continue to grow your business.

# Before You Keep Reading: Who is Your Target Audience?

Your goal is to be the go-to photographer that your target market turns to, right? But if you can't even pinpoint your ideal client and niche market, convincing potential customers that you are the best photographer for the job can be a real challenge. Your pitches will be unconvincing and fall flat, and if you do get a buyer's attention, they will perceive your work as scattered and unfocused.

So, before reaching out to any potential client or buyer, you first need to develop a clear vision about your brand and identity. Are you a high-end fashion photographer known for your impeccable client service? Are you a commercial and lifestyle photographer who is known for capturing real, authentic moments? Are you an edgy wedding photographer who shoots only alternative couples? The more focused your specialty is, the better you can communicate your product, services, and values—in essence, your brand—to potential clients and improve your chances of getting hired.

Here are 5 tips to help you think this through:

- ❶ Ask yourself, who is your ideal client? Write down the characteristics that define your target audience including: age, demographics, socioeconomic status, and even common shared hobbies among that community. Also consider your market focus such as advertising agencies, magazines, book publishers, design agencies, etc—and think through which specialities are more geared toward your work and style.
- ❷ List out your clients' needs and problems they often face. Do your research and understand how your services will address those needs.
- ❸ Look at your website. Do the photos in your online portfolios show off strong work in a specific field, or are your images all over the map? Edit your imagery to show only the type of work you want to help you get hired to shoot.

❹ Think about the hierarchy of information you are delivering to the viewer on your site, and make sure the first category shows the primary work you're going after. Remember that user behavior goes to the first category when arriving on your homepage, so you will want to adjust accordingly and set the tone for potential buyers.

❺ If you want to shoot for a specific magazine, for example, find their media kit online. It will not only break down what the magazine is all about (from subjects to describing their audience), but there is also an editorial calendar that shows you what they need for future issues. And if you want to work for a specific brand like Nike, you can do a Google search to find the brand's strategy, which will be full of information about what they are trying to accomplish through their advertising. Finding these resources will help you think through how your own work can address their needs.

Answering these questions will also help you read through this guide in a way that's targeted for your own business's needs. And for more tips on defining your target market, check out PhotoShelter's [2013 Photo Business Plan Workbook](#).

Now that we've got that covered, let's dive into the survey results.

# Survey Methodology

In July 2013, we sent out a survey of 34 questions via [Agency Access](#)'s global database of 90,000 creative contacts. Agency Access is a full service marketing resource helping freelance artists find work.

340 buyers responded, all of whom self-identified as someone who either hires photographers for commission or assignment work, or licenses still photography. We've broken down their responses to provide insights to help you gain the attention of a buyer and ultimately, win work in this field.

## What to Expect

We've packaged responses from the *2013 Survey: What Buyers Want From Photographers* into four major categories including:

- 1 Hiring Photographers
- 2 Marketing to Photo Buyers
- 3 Websites and File Delivery
- 4 Working with Photographers

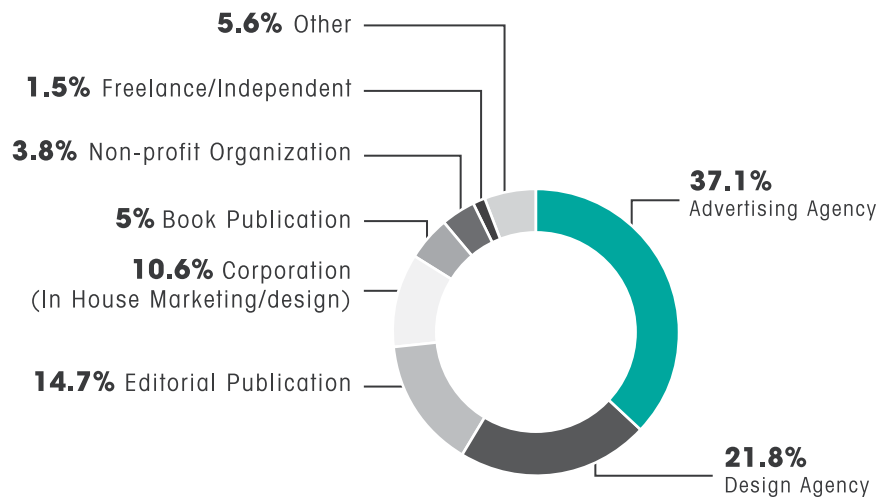
We asked a number of open ended questions, so you'll also read tips and feedback straight from the buyers surveyed. They speak directly to how they like to be pitched, where they find photographers to hire, plus the most important elements of a photographer's website. We've also interviewed several individual photo buyers to get their insights and tips about what they want from photographers.



# Who Are the 2013 Participants?

The photo buyers surveyed this year are from advertising agencies, design agencies, non-profit organizations, editorial publications, book publications, and corporations worldwide. Buyers surveyed also hold a range of job titles including Art Producer, Creative Director, Director of Photography, Photo Editor, Designer, Copywriter and more.

## WHERE THEY WORK



Sample companies:

### ADVERTISING AGENCIES:

- Ogilvy & Mather
- Saatchi & Saatchi
- SBC Advertising
- Progressive Marketing Group
- Barefoot Creative

### EDITORIAL PUBLICATIONS:

- Condé Nast
- Haymarket Media Group
- Modern Luxury
- IPC Media
- Sinauer Associates, Inc

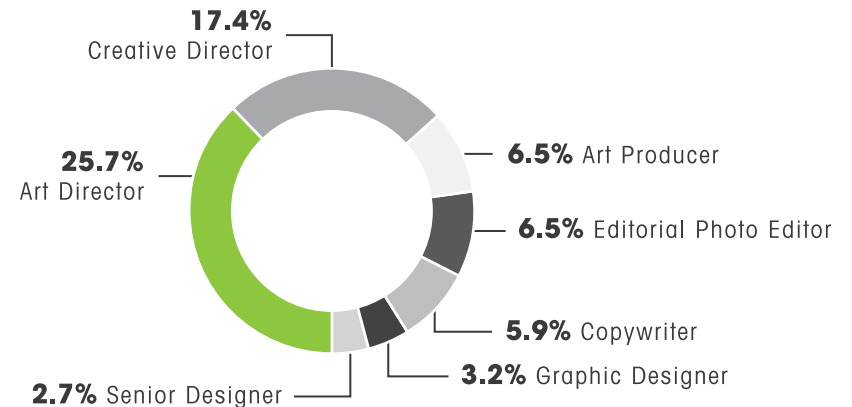
### BOOK PUBLICATIONS:

- Harper Collins
- Simon & Schuster
- Scholastic
- McGraw-Hill Education
- Bloomsbury Publishing

### IN-HOUSE DESIGN:

- Texas Creative
- Catapult Marketing
- Amsterdam Worldwide
- Urban Design Group
- Creative Crossroads

## MOST COMMON JOB TITLES



# 2013 Industry Trends

Photo buyers spend hours each week looking at photography. They consume photos all day long on websites, tablets, smartphones, in print and through their inboxes. For this reason, buyers have their finger on the pulse of creative shifts and growing trends in the industry.

So we asked: **What are the new trends in the photography industry that excite you?** Here were a few responses that stood out. A major theme: Buyers see a shift toward more “natural” and unstaged photography.

## 1 “GRITTY” PHOTOS:

“I like the influx of young photographers whose images have a gritty, raw, and unpolished look. It's a direct contrast to the highly polished, perfectly lit, composited trend of the last few years.”

– *Creative Director, Advertising Agency*

## 2 PERSONAL PROJECTS:

“I've been taking note of when a photographer's personal project creates a new style or new trend in the industry. Great examples of this are from photographers like [Ryan McGinley](#), [Winkler Noah](#), and [Chris Jordan](#).”

– *Art Producer, Advertising Agency*

## 3 FILTERING & OLD CAMERAS:

“Obviously we see the filtered effects like Instagram taking a major role in the industry these days. But we're also seeing the use of older, more vintage cameras, which are inspiring creatives to do some great things.”

– *Art Director, Design Agency*

## 4 LESS STAGING:

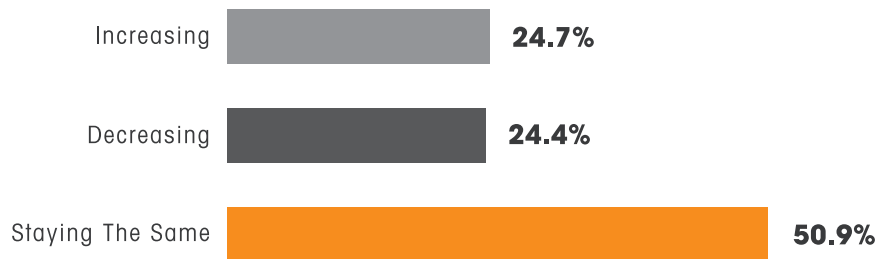
“I like the reportage approach to photography we're seeing, even in advertising. There's a trend in capturing people in their natural state, without being too staged.”

– *Art Buyer, Advertising Agency*

# Budget Trends

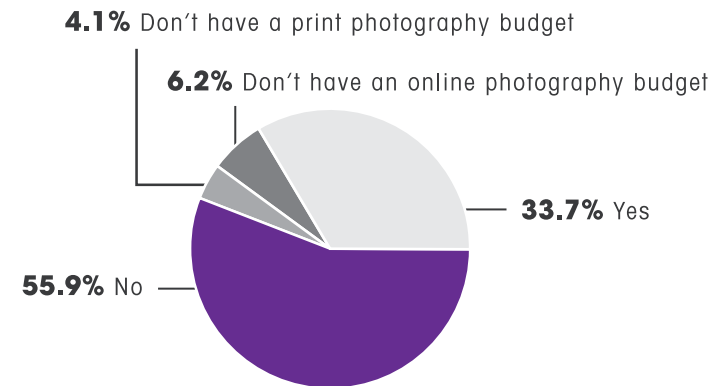
We asked photo buyers to tell us about the trends they see when it comes to their own photography budgets. 75.6% said that compared to 2012, their budgets were staying the same or increasing. This may be contrary to what most might think, especially as some notable publications like the Chicago Sun-Times made news when they [laid off their entire photography department](#) this year. Here's the exact breakdown of buyers' budget trends.

## BUDGET TRENDS



Of the 24.7% who said their budgets were increasing, the majority were from advertising agencies (47.2%), design agencies (18.1%), and corporations (14.5%). 25.3% of buyers from editorial publications also said that their budgets were decreasing.

We also asked: **Do you have separate photography budgets for online and print needs?**



Although 55.9% of those surveyed said “No,” they don't have separate photography budgets for online and print needs, 54.5% of editorial photo buyers said they do. This means that if an editorial buyer does want to license your work, you must know how and in what format they plan to publish your photos. These days, most magazines will also want to use the pictures on their website and in the tablet version of their publication, in addition to a print version.

But there may be other things editorial clients want as well. For example, do they want to be able to reuse the pictures in future editions of their magazine? How about foreign edition use? Promotional use? Article reprint use? Other third-party usage? Some photographers will naively give away these additional rights without knowing that they're often worth more than the original shoot, and without knowing that buyers have separate budgets for print and online needs.

If you want magazine and editorial photography to be a significant part of your business, you'd be well served to make yourself aware of all these factors in order to get full value for your efforts during negotiation.

# Attracting Buyers With Increasing Photo Budgets

Want to attract buyers with rising photo budgets? Here are four tips that may not have occurred to you, direct from buyers who cited an influx of money coming their way.

## 1 GET REFERRALS FROM ESTABLISHED PHOTOGRAPHERS

“Work with other established photographers who are willing to make referrals. We’ll work with unknown photographers if a reputable photographer makes a good recommendation.”

– *Senior Designer, Corporation*

## 2 DON'T PITCH ON CLOSING DAY

“Know the ins and outs of the magazine, book, website, or agency you want to work for and be sure to note the photography and photographers that they use in your outreach. If you’re pitching an editorial client, be sure to know their closing schedule, and never call or email on that day. Your message will get lost.”

– *Photo Editor, Editorial Publication*

## 3 IMPROVE YOUR SEO

“Many photographers don’t realize how important Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is. If I want to hire a photographer, it means I’m looking for something pretty obscure and will always turn first to Google to see if there’s someone who specializes in that niche.”

– *Editorial Photo Editor, Textbook Publication*

## 4 NETWORK

“Go to all photo events. That may seem like an outdated idea, but industry events are where I try to go to find fresh new photographers to hire.”

– *Art Producer, Advertising Agency*

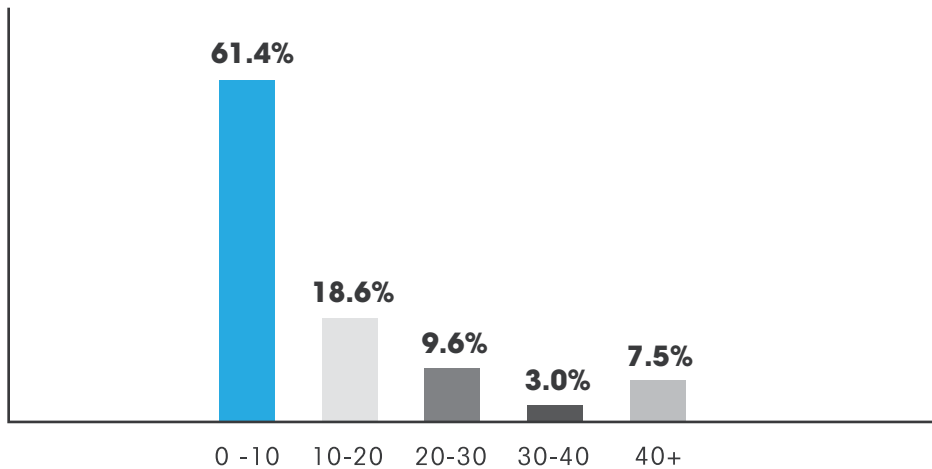
**PART I:**

*Hiring Photographers*

# Hiring Photographers

What are the major factors that influence a buyer's decision to hire a photographer or license his or her work? Because getting a gig is more competitive than ever, this year we targeted our questions to ask buyers more in-depth questions about their hiring habits, including when they're most inclined to bring on new talent for a job.

We asked: **About how many shoots do you hire photographers for per year?**



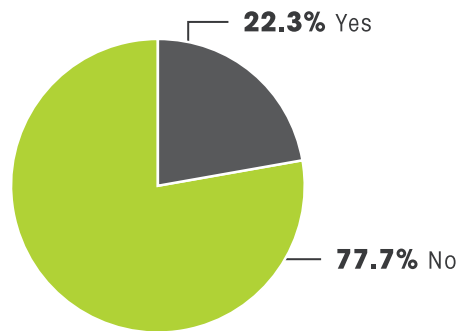
## EDITORIAL BUYERS HIRE THE MOST, FOLLOWED BY BUYERS FROM ADVERTISING AGENCIES

36.4% of buyers from editorial publications hire photographers for 40+ shoots a year. Of this group, 95.4% also said that hiring a photographer based on his or her location is very or somewhat important to their decision. According to one photo editor, "A photographer's location is crucial to his or her chances of getting hired, so please put your location in the subject line of your emails and on your website."

34.4% of buyers from advertising agencies need photographers for about 20 - 30 shoots a year. This same percentage of buyers also reported increasing photography budgets, as compared to 2012. Says one art director from an advertising agency, "The best way to get hired is to present a strong website that shows you have a clear focus that fits my needs."

# Do Video Skills Get You a Gig?

We asked: **Is it important to hire a photographer who can also shoot video?** Buyers said:



## Who's hiring for video?

Despite only 22.3% reporting 'Yes,' 46.6% (more than double) of buyers from advertising agencies said it's important to hire a photographer who can also shoot video. Note also that 30% of photo buyers who say video skills are important to their hiring process typically spend 5 minutes or more on a new photographer's website. So, if you have video skills to show off, a healthy percentage of buyers will take enough time on your website to really view both your still and motion work.

# Where Do Buyers Find Photographers and Photography?

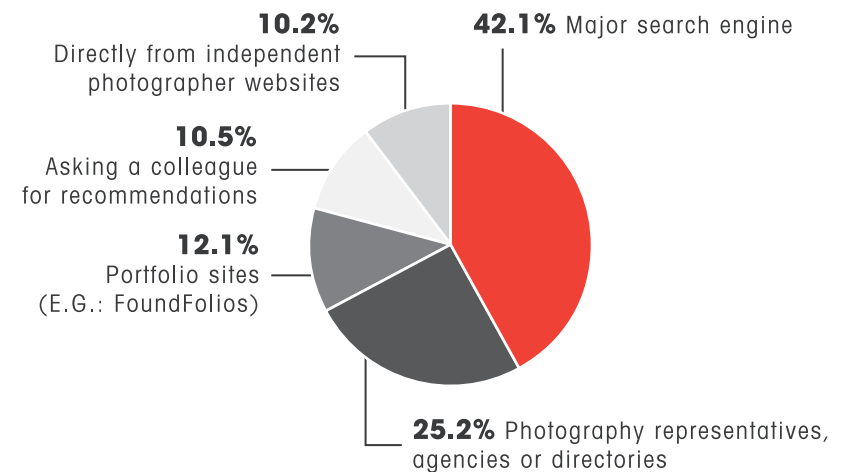
## Commissioning work

The majority of buyers (56.2%) hire photographers for assignment or commissioned shoots. We learned that the top places buyers go to find photographers to commission are photography representatives, agencies, or directories, directly from independent photographer websites, through a colleague's recommendations, major search engines, inspiration drawers, email or direct mail they've received, social media, and industry blogs.

### OF THOSE WHO TURN FIRST TO A PHOTOGRAPHER'S WEBSITE TO FIND PHOTOGRAPHERS, WE LEARNED:

- » 34.4% are from design agencies, and hold titles including Art Producer and Creative Director.
- » 35.2% spend 2-3 minutes looking at the photographer's website.
- » 82% view images on a desktop (vs. a laptop, iPad, smartphone, or printed book)
- » These same buyers ranked easy navigation, fast load time, and clear contact information as the most important elements of a photographer's website.

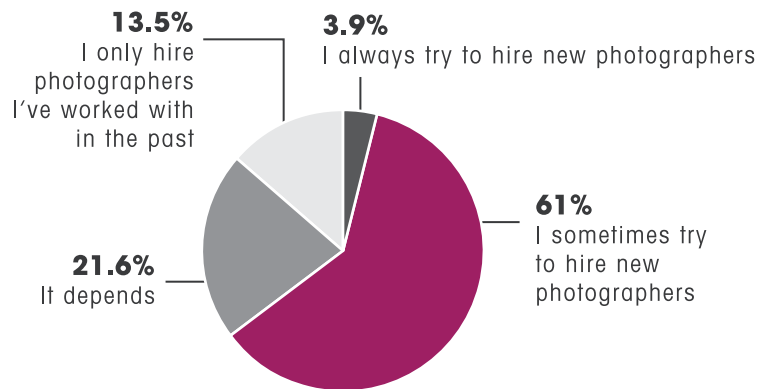
We also asked: **Outside of stock websites, please rank the places you turn to find images for licensing purposes.**





# Do Buyers Hire New Photographers?

Photographers want to break into the industry, but will buyers take a chance to hire someone new? We wanted to know, so we asked: **Do you typically hire new photographers to work with, or those you've worked with in the past?**



## A LOOK AT THOSE WHO HIRE NEW TALENT:

49.7% of buyers who try to hire new photographers spend 4 minutes or more looking at an independent photographer's website. 88.3% of this group also said they dedicate time to reviewing unsolicited marketing pitches, especially those that are relevant to their needs.

## A LOOK AT THOSE WHO SAY "IT DEPENDS":

From the 21.6% who said the choice to hire a new photographer often depends, we asked them to explain why. Here's what a few had to say:

"It depends on the project. Some photographers are right for a client because we use them time and time again. But sometimes, on a new project, we want a fresh new look, so we will actively seek out someone with a cool, new style that hasn't been seen a lot."

- *Copywriter, Advertising Agency*

"It really depends on where the photo subject is located. Photographers are hired due to their geographic location, so that's often the deciding factor."

- *Photo Editor, Editorial Publication*

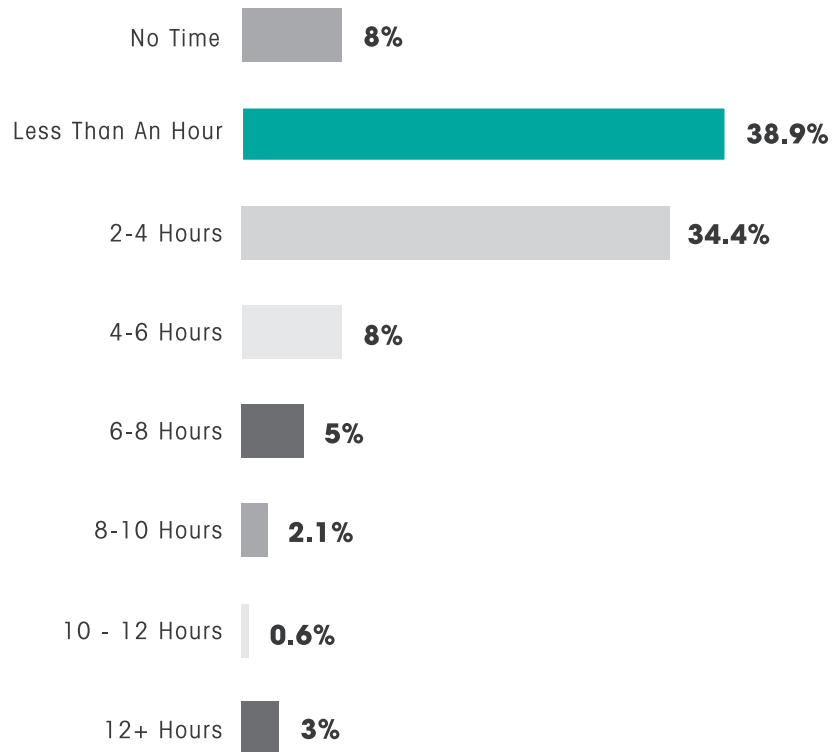
"If there's a new kind of need, I seek photographers who seem strongest in that category rather than sticking with one I've worked with before who doesn't happen to do that kind of work."

- *Freelance Graphic Designer*

# Do Buyers Search For New Talent?

Photo buyers are busy and pressed for time. Considering their tight schedules, we wanted to get a sense of how much time each week they spend actively searching for photographers.

So we asked: **On average, how much time do you spend in a week actively searching for talent?**



We learned that the largest percentage of buyers (38.9%) spend less than an hour actively looking for new talent. This means that you need to be highly targeted with your marketing, so that when they need someone like you, your work immediately comes to mind.

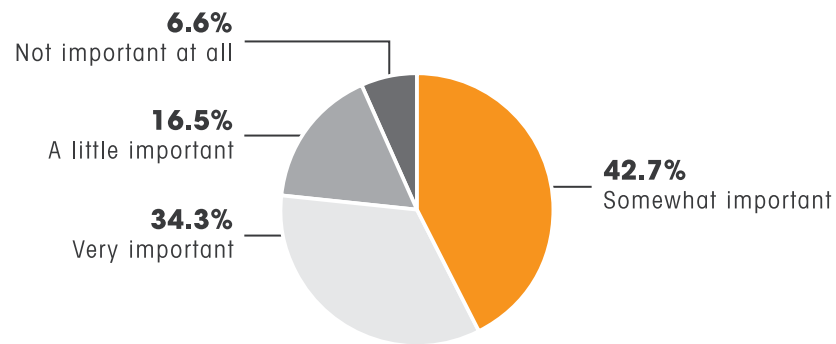
#### OF THOSE WHO SPEND 12+ HOURS A WEEK SEARCHING FOR TALENT, WE LEARNED:

- » 20% of this group is made up of editorial photo editors. These buyers hold titles including Art Producer, Art Director, and Photo Editor.
- » 60% have discovered new talent through social media.
- » 75% turn to photography representatives, agencies or directories first to find photographers for commissioned shoots.

For third-party help on getting found, check out an organization like Wonderful Machine, which helps photographers create a highly visible brand to a wide range of quality clients.

# Is a Photographer's Location Key to Getting Hired?

We asked: **When hiring a new photographer, how important is his or her location to your decision?**

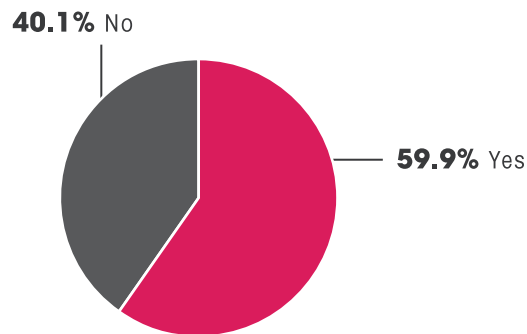


## FROM THOSE WHO SAY A PHOTOGRAPHER'S LOCATION IS VERY IMPORTANT TO GETTING HIRED:

- » Before anything else, these buyers turn first to colleagues for recommendations on who to hire.
- » Many described that a common marketing mistake photographers make is not mentioning his or her location on their website, email subject line, or anywhere within their email promo.
- » Many mentioned that location is also a huge obstacle in finding a photographer that fits their needs. They noted that location matters to their decision to hire because they often don't have the budget to pay for additional travel expenses. So, being in that small town in Montana may work to your advantage—just be sure to list it on your site!

# Do Buyers Take In-Person Meetings?

Photographers often use email to attract attention from potential clients. This is for good reason—email is the most direct and inexpensive way to a buyer's screen. With that being said, it's also no secret that only using email to get in touch can derail your chances for the powerful impression that comes with a face-to-face meeting. Meetings can inspire collaboration, great ideas, and new opportunities. So, with the power of an in-person conversation in mind, we asked buyers: **In general, do you take in-person meetings with photographers before you hire them for the first time?**



## Who takes the most in-person meetings?

- » 40% of buyers from advertising agencies and 27% of buyers from design agencies take in-person meetings before hiring photographers for the first time.
- » The majority of buyers who take meetings hire photographers for between 0-10 shoots a year. This may mean the shoots are larger, more important productions, so finding the right photographer is especially important.
- » Almost half of the participants said email was the best way for a new photographer to pitch themselves initially before sitting down in person.
- » These buyers also cited “easy navigation” as the most important element of a photographer’s website.

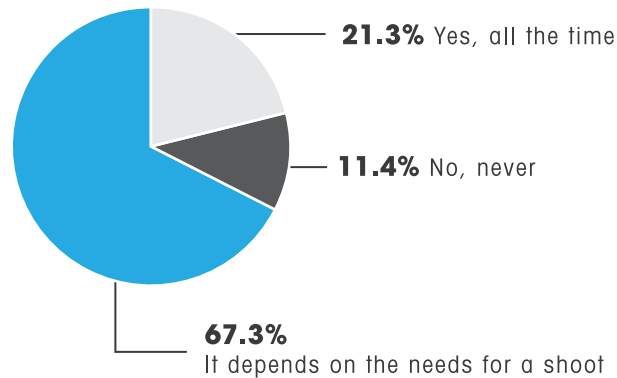


**TIP**

We caught up with commercial photography team [David Walter Banks](#) and [Kendrick Brinson](#) of Brinson Banks, who have worked with clients including Tiffany & Co., Vitamin Water, *TIME* Magazine, *The New York Times* Magazine, *GQ*, *The FADER*, *Mother Jones*, and *Forbes*. David and Kendrick shared how they prepare for in-person client meetings and tailor their portfolios to a client needs. Check out their tips in PhotoShelter’s recent guide, [Creating a Successful Photography Portfolio](#).

# How Important Are Personal Projects?

We asked: **Do photographers' personal projects weigh in on your decision to hire him or her?**



## FROM THOSE WHO SAID "NO, NEVER":

- » 50% hire primarily for still photography usage.
- » 40% spend less than an hour each week looking for new talent.
- » 36% hire only photographers they've worked with in the past.
- » Close to 30% of buyers from editorial publications specifically said personal projects don't weigh in their decision to hire a photographer.

## FROM THOSE WHO SAID "YES, ALL THE TIME":

- » These buyers ranked photographers' independent websites as the #1 place they turn to find photographers for commissioned shoots.
- » 60% said they sometimes try to hire new photographers, vs. those they've worked with in the past.

- » 0% ranked their iPhone, Android or iPad as the #1 way they view a photographer's images.
- » 45% said they've discovered new photographers through social media. This means that if you want to attract buyers with your personal projects, you should make sure you have a presence on social media networks like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Also use hashtags to tag your work so buyers can search and find you faster.

## TIPS

- Jennifer Kilberg, Creative Consultant at Agency Access encourages photographers to be prepared to show personal work during in-person meetings because it's a great icebreaker and conversation piece. Because it's so easy to show work on an iPad, it lets your potential clients learn more about your personality and creative process, separate from your assignment work.
- Saint Louis-based editorial photographer [Jonathan Gayman](#) turned his personal project on lunch trays into a paying gig by including shots in his portfolio. Learn how he did it in this guide [Creating a Successful Photography Portfolio](#).

# 5 Obstacles to Getting Hired

We asked: **What is the biggest obstacle you encounter in finding a photographer that fits your needs?** 39% of buyers cited price and budget as their biggest issue. But, other factors including personality, location, inability to collaborate, and scheduling were also major roadblocks to finding the best person for the job. Direct from buyers, here are the 6 obstacles that can get between a photographer and a buyer:

## 1 LACK OF DRIVE

“It’s an obstacle to find someone who is as passionate about the project as we are. I understand they’re doing a job, but I don’t want someone who is just checking off shots on the shot list, I want them to want to get it right.”

– *Creative Director, Marketing Agency*

## 2 LOCATION

“Geography is a big one. I don’t have budgets that will allow for travel in many cases, so I have to go with a local photographer or opt for stock.”

– *Creative Director, Marketing Agency*

## 3 FRESH IDEAS

“It’s a challenge to find someone who has a look that is cool and new and who stands out from the others. It’s really a dime a dozen.”

– *Copywriter, Advertising Agency*

## 4 SCHEDULING

“Scheduling can be a big deal breaker. Most of my clients are on very tight budgets and schedules with limited free time. If a photographer is not available on the date my client needs, I cannot hire him or her.”

– *Creative Director, Design Agency*

## 5 PERSONALITY

“Personality and a photographer’s lack of interest can be major obstacles, believe it or not. We have found artists based on their work, but once we have a call to get to know him or her better, their personality can sway our decision.”

– *Art Buyer, Marketing Agency*

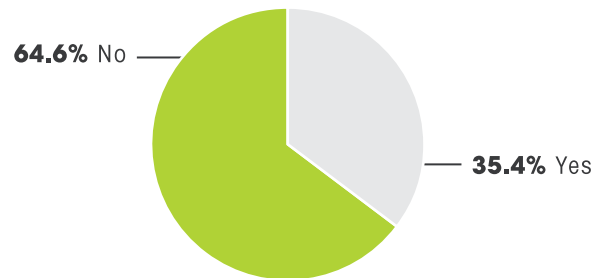
**PART II:**

*Marketing to Buyers*

# Finding Photographers on Social Media

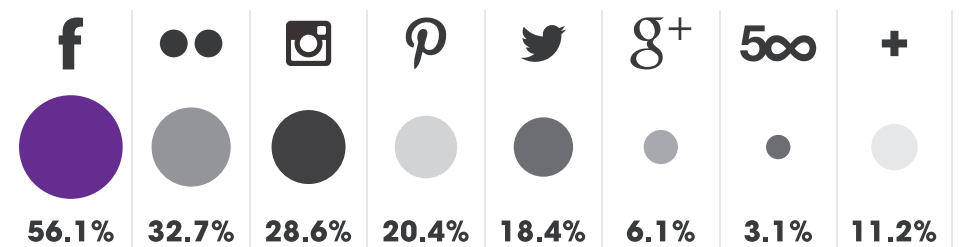
Targeted marketing can be tricky, especially when you're so pressed for time. But as you know, marketing is essential to your business success. If no one knows about your great work, how do you expect to bring in new business and make money?

Today, one of the fastest ways to reach a potential client can be through social media. So to find out if this strategy works, we asked buyers: **Have you ever discovered a new photographer through social media?**



Of those who answered no, 42.8% spend less than an hour a week actively searching for talent and 67.4% hire photographers for less than 10 shoots a year. Many of these buyers come from design agencies, book publications and corporations.

Of those who answered yes, we asked: **Through which social media platform did you find them?** (Buyers were encouraged to choose all that apply.)



## Who's on Instagram?

When we asked this same question in 2012, Instagram wasn't even on the list of platforms we listed for buyers to choose from. But today, it's a serious contender for helping photographers get found. We discovered, for example, that 55% of editorial buyers who said they find photographers through social media, discover them through Instagram.

## ! TIPS

- Map out a schedule for posting on social networks. When you post regularly, people are more inclined to interact with you through comments, likes, and shares. Want to know the best times of day to post? Check out [this article](#) from the Creative Freelancer Blog.
- When sharing links on sites like Facebook, Twitter and Google+, use a free service like [bitly](#) or the [Google URL Shortener](#) to shorten your URLs. These services let you track clicks so you can keep tabs on which links are gaining the most traction.



# Email Marketing: 7 Tips That Work

We asked: “Do you accept unsolicited marketing pieces, email, etc. from photographers, reps and stock libraries?” 71.7% of buyers said they look at any that seem relevant to their needs. Yet, in their open-ended responses, buyers also told us that photographers’ email pitches are often impersonal and fall flat because they don’t demonstrate a clear knowledge of their company and photography needs.

So we followed up and asked, “Please describe the qualities of photographers’ email promotions that capture your attention and elicit a positive response.” Direct from buyers, here are 7 factors that will help get their attention in an email:

## 1 PERSONALIZATION

“Make sure your email comes across as genuine. This means don’t act like a used car salesman with gimmicky phrases and subject lines. Make the email personal, we can smell a form letter in seconds.”

– Creative Director, Advertising Agency

## 2 IMAGES AT THE TOP

“Include exceptional images and make sure they’re placed at the top of the email. I will only scroll through your email if the visuals interest me. A giant headline at the top won’t reel me in, images will.”

– Art Director, Design Agency

## 3 CLEAN PRESENTATION

“Your email must have a clean presentation and avoid a cluttered look and feel. Don’t include too many images, be sure to mention my name in the salutation, and make sure your subject lines are short and descriptive.”

– Production Manager, Book Publication

## 4 SHORT AND CONDENSED COPY

“A small amount of copy is best, as we don’t have too much time to read through all newsletters and pitches we receive every day. Photography is a visual industry, so your photographs should speak for themselves. Also, don’t overload the recipient more than once a month.”

– Art Buyer, Advertising Agency

## 5 RELEVANT SUBJECT LINES

“The subject line is king. And whatever you do, please don’t be cheesy! Copywriters can’t handle a terrible pun, it will turn us off immediately. Just be short and sweet.”

– Copywriter, Design Agency

## 6 LINK TO YOUR SITE AND BLOG

“I prefer receiving an email with a direct link to the photographer’s website and blog. This may sound obvious, but sometimes photographers neglect to do so. With a direct link, I can then easily share your work with an art director or an editor.”

– Art Buyer, Book Publication

## 7 CONSISTENT BRANDING

“Be a good editor of your images. If you’re not, ask a visually oriented friend. It’s very important that you are consistent with the look and feel between your emails, promos, and your website. As much as I’m sick of the word ‘branding,’ it’s important to have a consistent tone across your platforms of communication.”

– Director of Photography, Editorial Publication

# Direct Mail Marketing: 3 Tips That Work

Direct mail marketing is an expensive undertaking, so photographers should have a plan in mind before getting started to avoid wasting time and money. So we asked: **Please describe the qualities of photographers' direct mail promotions that capture your attention and elicit a positive response.**

Here are the top 3 tips from buyers to get their attention:

## 1 IMAGES MATTER MOST

“It’s all about the imagery. Show me what you do and remember that one shot is never enough. If your direct mail piece can give me a very clear understanding of what you do without leaving me with questions, then I’m a happy camper.”

*- Art Producer, Design Agency*

“A direct mail piece doesn’t depend as much on the quality or size as it does on the image and typography. I don’t need fancy envelopes or multi-page glossy hard bound books. If the image is memorable, I will put it up on my wall or in my box of promos to keep.”

*- Photo Editor, Editorial Publication*

## 2 CREATE SOMETHING PEOPLE WANT TO KEEP

“Coffee table books that make me want to actually take it home and put on my own table are always great. I know they’re expensive, but I think there are unique ways to produce books these days that can really leave a lasting impression.”

*- VP, Production Director, Marketing Agency*

“Send anything handy like a stress ball. I will always keep something practical.”

*- Copywriter, Advertising Agency*

## 3 BUT, POSTCARDS CAN WORK

“Subject matter and size are important. We get a lot of mail, so it’s easier to keep a postcard size promo or a magazine newsletter size promo. Oddly, the stuff in between doesn’t always work.”

*- Art Buyer, Advertising Agency*

“I know they’re overdone, but I really do like postcards. I like receiving direct mail with strong images, and not necessarily ones that feel too commercial. In terms of actual content, it’s good to mention a campaign but it’s also great to use images that are of high quality and show some personal work.”

*- Art Buyer, Advertising Agency*

# 6 Common Mistakes Photographers Make When Pitching Buyers

Photographers often have just one shot to impress those looking to hire, so it's important to make it count. Unfortunately, many photographers make mistakes when promoting themselves to buyers and spoil their chances of breaking in. To help you avoid some of these common pitfalls, we asked: **“Please describe the common mistakes photographers make when promoting themselves to you.”**

Here are the 6 major mistakes photographers typically make when promoting their work to buyers:

## ❶ POOR WEBSITE

“If you send me a link to your website and your site is slow to render, has poor navigation, and feels cluttered, you've lost the chance to impress me.”

– *Creative Director, Marketing Agency*

## ❷ IMPERSONAL OUTREACH

“Don't send me an email to the info@ email address listed on our company website. This tells me that you didn't take the time to research me or what we do. If you do some digging, you can find my email and address your note to me directly.”

– *Art Buyer, Marketing Agency*

## ❸ LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

“Photographers should have an idea of what we do and make a reference to that when reaching out. For example, they could write to me, ‘I know you're a niche agency specializing in Senior Living Communities and I have a lot of experience in that area that I would like to show you.’ An email like that will not be a waste of my time.”

– *Producer, Marketing Agency*

## ❹ TOO SALESY

“Photographers can be overly salesy, which is a big red flag about their personality. We often have to hire someone who we need to spend time with for days at a time. We don't want to hang out with someone who acts like a pushy salesman all the time.”

– *Creative Director, Advertising Agency*

## ❺ LACK OF POSITIONING

“Photographers make mistakes when they don't clearly position themselves in their outreach. I need to know what type of photographer they are and their style. If it looks like they are all over the place, I can't be confident that they can do my job well.”

– *Art Director, Advertising Agency*

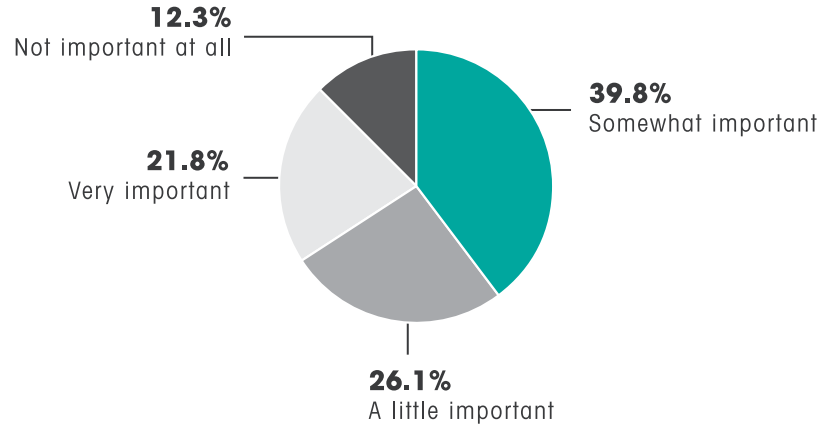
## ❻ PRICE

“Photographers with prices that are too high can be a mistake in the sense that it immediately eliminates their chances of getting hired. The reality is that we have restricting budgets. It's really the elephant in the room.”

– *Creative Director, Design Agency*

# Is a Photographer's Company Knowledge Important?

We asked: **How important is it that a photographer demonstrates knowledge about your company when they pitch their work to you?** 61.6% of buyers said a photographer's knowledge about what they do was somewhat or very important. Here's the breakdown:



We heard over and over, buyers do not like it when photographers pitch them blankly, with no clear understanding of who they are, what they do, and their needs for photography. As one Creative Supervisor from a Marketing Agency said, "In order to get hired, photographers must have a better understanding of our business needs and show work that complements or enhances what we do."

## TIPS

- Sign up for your clients' newsletters or blog RSS feeds and carve out 15 minutes to skim the updates every day or select a time you'll peruse them 2-3x a week. To make it easier, create a folder to file them all. Don't delete these without reading—you signed up for a reason!
- Create [Google Alerts](#) for your clients (or the clients you want) to keep track of when and where they're mentioned online.
- Do research on your clients' industries. As you learn more, ask yourself, "Is there an opportunity for my services to help improve the way they do business?" If the answer is yes, follow up and pitch your idea.
- Use information you find about a client, for example a new product they've launched or big hire they made, as an excuse to reconnect. Referencing these items lets the client know you are interested and invested in a long-term relationship.
- A database service like the one offered through Agency Access will have all the information you need about what brands and accounts a company has worked with in the past, so you can determine whether or not your work is a good fit. This eliminates lengthy legwork on your end.

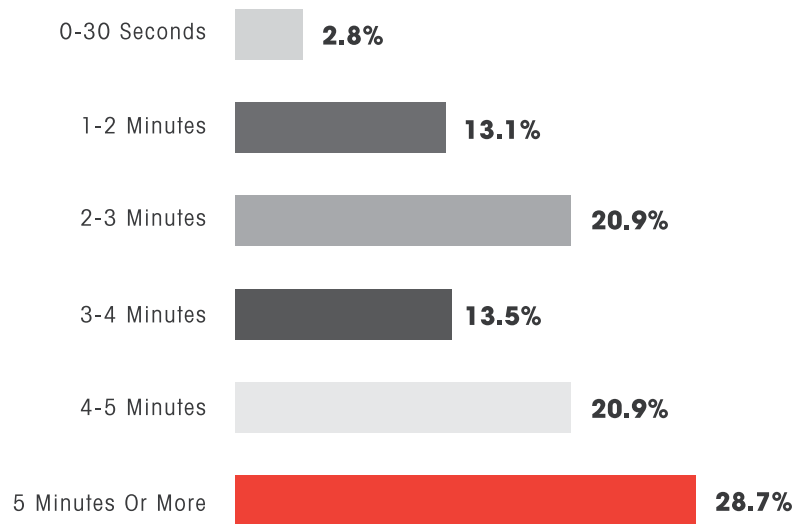
**PART III:**

*Websites & File Delivery*

# Websites & File Delivery

Your website is your most important business tool. In one click, potential clients can get a solid hold of what you do, including the products and services you provide, your specialty, your aesthetic, your brand, your personality, and more. In this year's survey, we were pleasantly surprised that many buyers spend a considerable amount of time on your site.

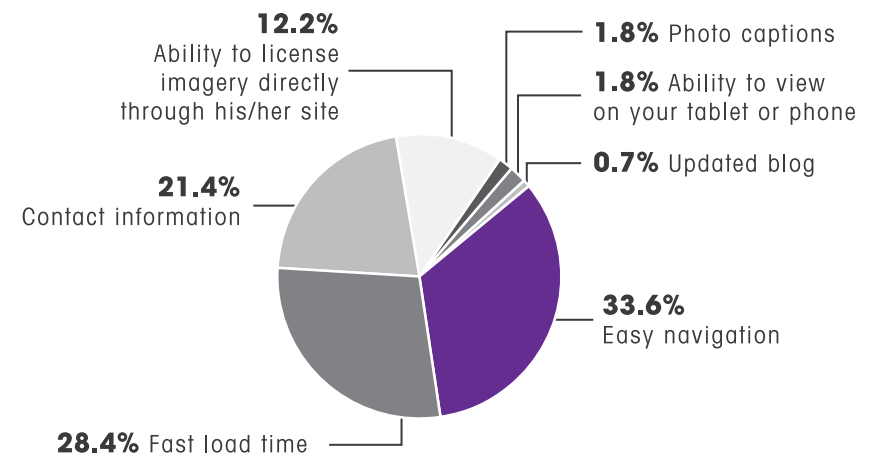
We asked: **In general, how much time do you spend looking at a photographer's website as you're searching to hire, license or commission work?**



## Who's taking their time on your site?

40.7% of buyers from advertising agencies and 25.9% of buyers from design agencies spend 5 minutes or more looking at a photographer's website as they search to hire. These buyers also ranked fast load time, easy navigation and clear contact information as the most important elements to a photographer's website.

We also asked: **Beyond the photographs, what are the most important elements of a photographer's website?**

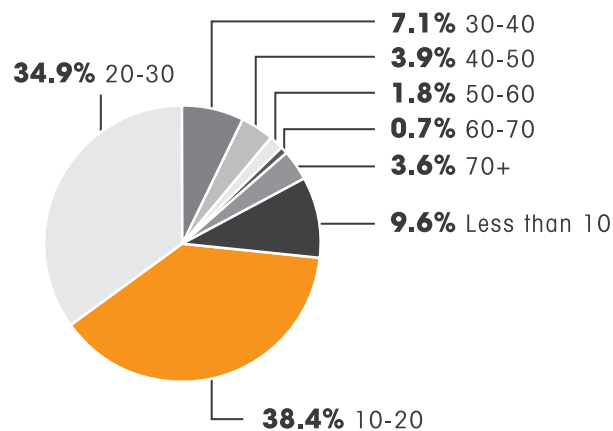


## TIPS

- To help inform what part of your site to tackle first, use a tool like [Google Analytics](#) to track which content is the most and least compelling to new visitors.
- Buyers are busy, which is why your site needs to load quickly. PhotoShelter's new [Beam portfolio websites](#) are designed to load quickly for optimal performance. They're engineered to present their rich visual presentations as quickly and efficiently as possible. Advanced techniques such as dynamic load optimization, pre-fetching, priority queuing and client device detection help deliver a responsive experience on both desktop computers and tablet devices.

# How Many Images Should Go in Your Portfolio?

We asked: **How many images do you like to see in a printed or online portfolio?**

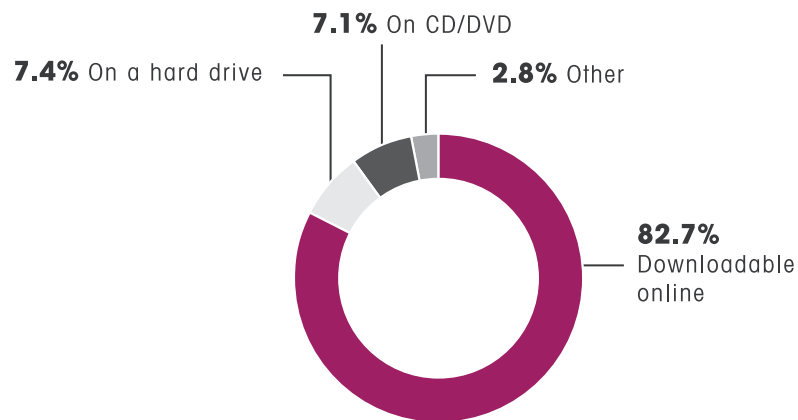


## ! TIPS

- 73.3% of buyers like to see between 10 - 30 images in a photographer's online or printed portfolio. This means that a focused niche and a tightly edited portfolio are key. Find out from visual storyteller Eduardo Angel how to develop a storyline and edit images down to a final portfolio, plus get tips to improve the overall quality of your images. [Watch the video.](#)
- Photographers are often too attached to their work to edit objectively, so consider outside consultants as a source for review. Consultant Neil Binkley has a [great multi-part series](#) on the Agency Access Lab on how to manage and maintain your portfolio across all mediums.
- Consultants can help you look at your portfolio with a critical eye and appeal to your target audience. For example, Jasmine DeFoore has 20+ years of experience in the industry as a photo editor, rep, art producer, and more. She breaks down how to get organized and build an inspiring portfolio that attracts those looking to hire. [Read more.](#)

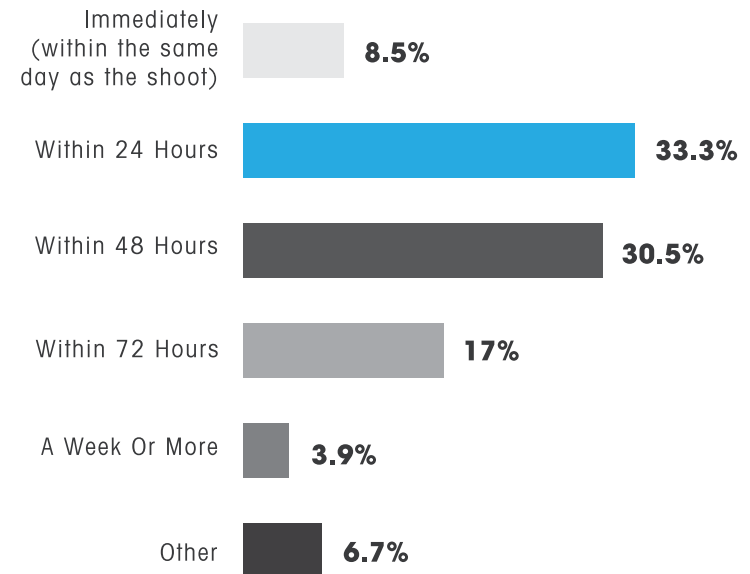
# How Do Buyers Like Images Delivered?

We asked: **How do you prefer photos you've licensed or commissioned to be delivered to you?**



**DOWNLOADING IMAGES ONLINE:** Photo buyers increasingly prefer images delivered via a downloadable link online. This year 82.7% of buyers noted this delivery as their preference, which is a 7% increase from 2012.

We asked: **In general, how quickly do you need photos delivered to you after a shoot?**



## OF THOSE WHO NEED PHOTOS DELIVERED IN 24 HOURS OR LESS:

- » Buyers ranked photographers' ability to deliver results on time and ability to go above and beyond as what they value most about a photographer's work ethic, post shoot.
- » 56% hire photographers for 10 or less shoots a year.
- » 83.1% like to have images they've licensed or commissioned delivered by downloading online.



**PART IV:**

*Working With Photographers*

# Working With Photographers

When it comes to a photographer's personality and working relationship, we asked two questions: **What makes working with a photographer a pleasant experience?** and **What makes working with a photographer a negative experience?** Buyers told us again and again that “attitude is everything” and can really make or a break their decision to hire (or re-hire) a photographer. Here's what else we learned:

## BUYERS LIKE PHOTOGRAPHERS WHO ARE:

- » Flexible
- » Receptive to criticism
- » Committed
- » Professional
- » Creative
- » Collaborative
- » Fast
- » Sharp and fully understand the brief
- » Experts
- » Open-minded
- » Humble
- » Attentive to detail
- » A problem solver
- » Able to stay within budget

“Attitude is king. Obviously their talent and ability to take picture is a necessity, but a photographer's attitude and personality goes a long way. He or she could take amazing images, but if they aren't fun to work with, I bet I could find someone to replace them.”

– *Photo Editor, Editorial Publication*

“The best photographers I've worked with are quick and sharp. They know to deliver projects beyond expectations, and bring a welcomed perspective to what we're working on. The most talented photographers can be that creative quickly, and still stay within time and budget.”

– *VP Production Director, Ad Agency*

## BUYERS DON'T LIKE PHOTOGRAPHERS WHO ARE:

- » Disrespectful
- » Late and miss deadlines
- » In a bad mood
- » “Divas”
- » Poor listeners
- » Unable to collaborate
- » Unprepared
- » Unprofessional
- » Unskilled in their art and technical ability
- » Unable to manage their time well
- » A “clock-watcher”

“If photographers are inefficient with set-up, unprepared, and don't present a professional attitude and demeanor in front of my business partners, this reflects poorly on me and my team. I can't have that.”

– *Creative Director, Corporation*

“Ego, poor time management, poor communication skills, lack of flexibility and resourcefulness, unkempt studio, a negative attitude and of course, poor photography skills, are the worst qualities a photographer can have.”

– *Creative Director, Editorial Publication*

# 6 Tips for Breaking Into the Industry

We couldn't let buyers get away without asking them their final thoughts on what photographers can do to get hired for the first time. So we asked: **What tips do you have for photographers trying to break in and get hired by you or have you license their work?** Here are 6 major takeaways:

## 1 HAVE A GREAT WEBSITE

“For me, it's all about the website. A photographer's site should be enjoyable to view, easy to navigate, provide contact information and showcase quality work.”

– *Program Assistant, Non-Profit*

## 2 BALANCE YOUR VISION WITH COLLABORATION

“Listen carefully to the brief and don't be afraid to bring your own style and make recommendations. After all, that's usually what you've been hired to do. But you also must know how to be collaborative when necessary. If you're not sure about what's required, ask, and don't stop asking until you are sure.”

– *Creative Director, Digital Agency*

## 3 SEND FRIENDLY REMINDERS

“Try and build a relationship, even if that means only emailing me every quarter so the details are 'fresh' in my mind and I think of you first when a project pops up.”

– *Account Manager, Design Agency*

## 4 BE A STORYTELLER

“Exhibit an ability to capture a narrative, not just the ability to technically shoot and post produce. Make your photos honest and thoughtful.”

– *Senior Design, Design Agency*

## 5 FIND A REP

“Get yourself introduced to the reps and take their advice on how to progress your career. Right now a photography rep is still the best advocate for an up and coming photographer. I rarely have time to get involved with a new photographer to train them, etc.”

– *VP, Production Director, Marketing Agency*

## 6 BE YOUR OWN BRAND ADVOCATE

“Spread the word! As a photographer, you are your brand, so you must make yourself seen and heard. This means you should share your work across social media platforms, try to lock down meetings with art editors and art buyers. You want people to recognize you for your work, but always remember that being a nice person is one of the best ways to be remembered.”

– *Art Buyer, Advertising Agency*



TIP

- Do your homework. Know who you are going after, research, and study them. If you're going after a sports magazine, for example, pick up a few of their recent issues, then write an email commenting on what you've seen. “Receiving emails like this went a long way for me when I worked at Runner's World Magazine,” says Andrea Maurio, Creative Consultant at Agency Access. “I was always grateful when a photographer noticed articles and images. The fact that they took the time to review what we did made me keep them on the top of my mind.”
- If you're just breaking in, finding representation can be a challenge. For tips on working with an agent and understanding what reps look for in a photographer, check out [this interview](#) with Agency Access consultant Amanda Sosa Stone.

**PART V:**  
*Profiles*

## Tips from Scholastic Inc.

Stephen Diamond is the Executive Director of Photography for [Scholastic Inc.](#), one of the world's largest children's media companies. Stephen, who has over twenty five years of experience working in publishing and media acquisition, manages a staff tasked with sourcing or licensing content from hundreds of sources.

"We are fairly voracious consumers of visual content, from motion to illustration, photography and fine art," which, according to Stephen, is procured by him and his staff for a client base of about 250 internal Scholastic holdings. This client base of designers and editors are the ones who create the myriad materials the media company puts out. Stephen chatted with us about the way he interacts with both individual photographers as well as agencies, and gave us some tips for any photographer looking to pitch a director of photography for a large media company such as Scholastic.

### *What makes a good hire for Scholastic?*

A great hire for Scholastic really starts with finding someone based in an ideal geographic location. If it's a photographer that we need in Missouri, we have to go to Missouri to get that photographer. Then it's an issue of portfolio—what is the quality of the work, can they deliver the shoot we need? And then it's about pricing and rights. There are so many parameters. Some photographers may not be affordable to us, some may not give us the rights we need.

We get a sense of the photographer by their flexibility too. If you're talking to someone on the phone who is rigid and not willing to accommodate the client at all—that's not a good business person. If someone is willing to be cordial, they're really on top of details and it's clear that they really want the business, those things speak very loudly about the photographer.

### *Once you've found a photographer in the right location, what do you look for in their portfolio?*

I'd like to say that we can see the quality of the photography in any portfolio, but the images really have to be related to the shoot that we need done. We'll send links from the portfolio to the client and if it's an editorial job we're going to send links to examples of editorial work in the portfolio. If the photographer does architecture but can do editorial reportage, well, unless they have a lot of proof of that we're not going to take the risk.



*Stephen Diamond, Executive Director of Photography, Scholastic Inc.*

[www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com)

*How do you brief a photographer before they go out on a job?*

I brief them heavily. The briefing entails going over basic parameters of the shoot—the day, date and time, and then the contact shifts to the designer or art director who will give specific guidance to the photographer. That can even be in the form of sketches; the designer might show them how a cover needs to be laid out, where the logo is going to, or what they would like to see on the cover. We usually give the photographer a little range in terms of what we're asking for and we like to see things all around that.

*After the shoot is over, do you hear feedback from clients about the photographer's performance?*

It depends on whether it's a local assignment and if we have an art director or designer on set. If so, we get a lot of feedback. Otherwise we might just hear about the quality of the work. The client will say 'the shoot was fantastic,' 'they got what we needed,' 'the photographer was a pleasure to work with.' Or, they'll say that the shoot didn't go well. That's bad news for us because we've led the client to a source that's not providing a good service.

At the end of the day, if we don't know a photographer we make it clear to the client that we're working at a bit of a disadvantage—and we're basing the hire on the photographer's portfolio alone.

*What form of marketing do you think is most effective for getting work at Scholastic—email, direct mail promos, calls or in person meetings?*

I get a little of all these things—direct mail, email, calls, you name it. Sometimes people will actually come in to present their work. Typically I don't look at portfolios when people come in because it can be such a hit or miss situation. It doesn't always work out that the person who comes in is the right person for that particular job, but I always keep in mind that they may be a good fit for a job in the future.

If a photographer really makes an impact, someone is going to remember them and will contact them for the next opportunity.

*Do you like it when a photographer keeps in touch and sends newsletters showcasing new work?*

I do. I keep a file with the cities of photographers that I've received emails from. If someone says they need a photographer in St. Louis, for example, I'll first check who is available in my file.

*How do you feel about direct mail promos?*

We used to keep a folder in the office of things that we got in the mail, but it just became too cumbersome. People just don't want to sift through cards as much as they used to. A really good card can still make an impact, however.

We get a lot of cards from people whose work really wouldn't be a fit for us. Their emphasis might be on something we don't have a need for—I get a surprising amount of promos from people who are food photographers or product or architecture photographers. We just don't need much of that and if we do we'll buy stock. I understand that these mailings are very broad and photographers are trying to hit as many clients as they can, but for us that's just not an area where we're especially active. I think it's important for photographers to research companies and understand who they're talking to and what their market is.

*I think it's important for photographers to research companies and understand who they're talking to and what their market is.*

*What is that you're primarily looking for?*

At Scholastic, we're looking for editorially oriented photographers. We need good portraiture. We need someone who can go into a school and take pictures of kids. Sometimes we'll need a photographer who can bring in a stylist and makeup artist to shoot kids all day for various ad campaigns.

*What should photographers know about working with a publisher like Scholastic?*

Be as flexible as you can because companies need broader rights than they used to. There are so many applications for photography now—if it's a shoot for a book and we need to make an e-book, we would need to have all rights granted up front, and we would want those rights for a long time. That means we might ask for a Work Made for Hire release, and some photographers are unwilling to sign that. It makes it hard for us to work with them. Others are tied to very high day rates or creative fees and that sometimes just doesn't work for us.

It's important for photographers to understand what publishers are trying to do. It's not as though we're trying to get something for nothing, but we need certain rights now. Sometimes our reasons for not being able to pay are not that we're being cheap. We're creating a lot of digital products that are not monetized the way print products are. We haven't mastered how to make money off this content like so many print publishers. Much goes to derivative, print sales. We just don't have a budget for a lot of what we're doing. We're experimenting to see what's going to make money—a lot of what we're doing is a gamble. We're throwing a lot against the wall to see what's sticking, and not everything is.

# What Sports Illustrated Wants From Photographers

Brad Smith knows his sports photography. He is Director of Photography at [Sports Illustrated](#) (SI) and served as the senior sports photography editor at The New York Times for 12 years. He talked to us about what he likes to see in a photographer's portfolio, the types of images (and photographers) he's looking for, and why.

## *What makes a good freelance hire for SI?*

I have three major needs. First, and most importantly, I look for somebody who has really good, unique and visually interesting content that shows they have a relationship with the subject. I want to know that a photographer has a knack for photography, that it's not all about technique and post-production. Photographers fall into that trap. They rely on certain technology, cameras, lighting or Photoshop, etc. That's all important, but you have to have some kind of a relationship with a subject to show something a little more organic.

Second, I look at a photographer's location. If you live in the middle of someplace where I have no photographers, suddenly you become much more interesting. I can't fly everybody around the world.

Third, and this is incredibly important, is someone's "maintenance value." By that I mean, are you the person who's going to call me 15 times because you can't find a bagel store and you wanted to bring bagels to the photo shoot? Or are you going to figure out how to find the bagel store on your own. As a photographer, you must be able to problem solve for everything from equipment issues to general logistics. I'm not interested in a photographer who needs a great deal of hand-holding. If you develop that kind of reputation as a photographer you're going to get pushed aside. I'm interested in people who work hard, who get the job done and are professional.

When I hire someone as a freelancer, they are representing both me and SI on that assignment. Because at the end of the day, if there's an athlete we're photographing and there's a problem on the set, no one ever points out the photographer who was a problem—they point out that Sports Illustrated was the problem. Then it puts our magazine in bad light.



*Brad Smith, Director of Photography,  
Sports Illustrated*

[www.sportsillustrated.cnn.com](http://www.sportsillustrated.cnn.com)



I put my reputation on the line every time when I call an athlete and ask them to take time out of their lives to be photographed. It's not easy to be photographed; it's time consuming. You want the experience to feel productive and somewhat enjoyable. A professional and efficient photographer is the key to making that happen.

#### *What kind of images are you looking for?*

What I'm not looking for are images of people standing against a white backdrop. I'm not interested in athletes being posed, throwing a ball in the air so you know that he's a football player. I'm not interested in that. Those pictures speak more to the technique of the photographer, which I truly appreciate for a lot of things, but what we're looking for at *SI* are images that can bring a little of the athlete's life into people's homes. I'm more interested in an environmental setting. For example, I'd much rather have a picture of a football player with jeans on in a pickup truck with his feet over the edge of the truck bed. I think those images are more telling, if not more interesting, than the actual game on Thursday.

I am exceptionally interested in a photographer with original story ideas. That's one thing you can't put a value on. Some ideas might be cliché and some have already been done, but I remind photographers that when you pitch an idea, the worst thing that can happen is somebody says no. Don't be shy about promoting story ideas. It could be something you'd like to do—like a story on how a hockey puck is made for example—or something you've already done but that can still be run. I ran plenty of feature photo essays at the Times when the event happened weeks or a month earlier.

#### *How do you handle emails from unknown photographers?*

I look at almost every email unless they go into my junk folder. If someone sends me an email that says, "This is new work from Bob Smith," I open it up and I look—it takes seconds. I don't spend a lot of time with unsolicited emails, but if it's something that captures my attention off the bat with a great subject line or photo, then I look up the photographer. I can tell from looking at a few of their pictures whether it's something I want to pursue. If I'm not interested then I delete it.

But you never know, there could be this one amazing picture that comes out of nowhere, from a person who lives someplace I have no photographers, and I think, 'thank you, God.'

#### *What do you want to see in a sports photographer's portfolio?*

When someone comes to show me a portfolio, they think they have to show me only sports imagery because I'm the sports editor. I'm all for seeing a lot of sports, and if that's all you want to shoot, then that's all you should be showing me. But today it's not beneficial to stick to just one area. The days of me sending someone out just to shoot a game are long gone.

At *SI* we're more interested in seeing someone spend quality time with an athlete—at home, at school, with his family. It's really important that you can have a relationship with people. And that's why it's important to me that someone can shoot a portrait and also shoot a feature-style photo; these require a different kind of relationship. It's one thing to stand with a 600 and shoot a football game; it's another to go into someone's home and have the sensitivity and understanding to make him comfortable enough to be photographed.

*I am exceptionally interested in a photographer with original story ideas. That's one thing you can't put a value on.*

That's not an easy thing to do, and the photographers who can do that are really valuable.

I'm all for artistic, quirky and funny; I'm not saying everyone has to conform or pigeonhole themselves. I've worked with some photographers who you'd think are really whacky, unpredictable people. I've worked with David LaChapelle, for example. I'd never met him in my life; I just knew about his work from books. Before he came in I thought he'd bring an entourage of people and someone from the circus. I didn't know. But I'm telling you, it was one of the best experiences I've ever had. He was easy to work with, a total pro. Incredibly creative, a total individual, yet when it comes time for meetings and getting to work, he knows exactly what he's doing. You can learn from that.

*What about a photographer's website will turn you off?*

My biggest website turnoff is when someone doesn't have contact information. When I have to click on a link that says 'contact me' and then I have to fill out a form in order for you to call me back, I've lost all interest in you. If it were a date it'd be over, I'd be asking for the check.

*What general advice would you give to any sports photographer?*

Be professional. You have to be true to yourself and who you are—don't pretend to be someone else—but this is a business so treat it as a business. If you have to photograph someone at 3:00, show up at 3:00, if not a little bit before. These little things make an impression on people, and it comes back around that it was a good experience for the subject.

Don't get discouraged because people aren't hiring you. Unless people are telling you that they won't ever hire you, keep following up. What you want is to be in dialogue with people. Go to lectures, navigate through the world and start to meet people. That's all part of the deal. You can't just sit by the phone and wait for it to happen.

# Attracting Attention From Ad Agencies

Michael Bilbrey is a Senior Production Consultant for [Leo Burnett](#), the ninth largest ad agency in the world, based in Chicago. Michael shared with us what it is that he looks for in a photographer's portfolio, as well as how he finds new talent. Though he's a consultant now, Michael was also an art buyer and producer for 20 years. Not only has he seen a lot of change in the way he's marketed to, but his perspective serves as a great example of how an established consultant at a big agency views email marketing and social media connections.

## *Who gets hired by Leo Burnett?*

We work with both individual photographers and those represented by agencies. At Leo Burnett, we look for the best talent, and we find it wherever we can. Being tied to an agency isn't a prerequisite.

We're always looking for people who have a creative vision, can understand our brands, and fully invest in the creative deliverable. A photographer needs to be a partner, and really understand our ideas in order to properly execute. We also look for experience, ideas, collaboration and professionalism.

## *What gets your attention in someone's online portfolio?*

I love online portfolios primarily because it's so easy to review them, rather than calling in a physical book. The site has to be easy to navigate and the work has to be fresh. One thing that will catch my eye is when I visit a photographer's site after a few months and the same work is still there—nothing new.

Photographers have to be updating their portfolios and getting their work out for people to see. That's how connections are made between photographers and creatives—seeing work that's relevant, fresh, new and on point.



*Michael Bilbrey, Senior Production Consultant, Leo Burnett*

[www.leoburnett.us/chicago](http://www.leoburnett.us/chicago)

*How do you handle emails from unknown, or unknown to you, photographers? Do you like it when people you haven't worked with reach out?*

I get hundreds of email blasts a month, and I look at almost every one. I make time to do this as I've found great work just because I took a second to open the email. Photographers should feel encouraged to send e-blasts.

*Will photographers hear back from you if you like their work? Or will they only hear when you happen to have a job that is right for them?*

I will, quite often actually, respond to a photographer if I really like their work, or if I have a question about their style, etc. I bookmark like crazy. It really helps to have an extensive file because I'm constantly making recommendations.

*Do you use social media or networking sites to find new photographers?*

Not to find them, but many have 'friended' me, and that's a good way for me to keep up on what they're doing. I don't use LinkedIn to find photographers as I think we have a really good group of resources we can tap, and I personally have a pretty extensive bookmark/file system for photographers' work.

*Do you still receive direct mailings?*

I hardly get any. I used to get 10 to 15 a day, but not any more. Email marketing is the new direct mail marketing, which is how I think it should be. Why waste postage and time when you can, for almost nothing, email thousands of people at once? My digital files are now even larger in number than what used to be housed in my cabinets.

I admit, I do miss mailers though, and when I get them, I really enjoy it.

*If you could give one bit of advice to photographers, given what you've seen, what would it be?*

Be honest, be passionate, use a really competent producer, and remember that when you get a gig, the process is collaborative, so always bring your ideas to the table.

I get hundreds of email blasts a month, and I look at almost every one.

# 12 Tips to Approach Buyers Successfully

Kristina Hicks is a Creative Consultant for [Agency Access](#), based in California. Previously an art buyer and producer for Saatchi & Saatchi, Kristina has worked on advertising campaigns for huge clients like Toyota, Volkswagen, Proctor and Gamble and many more. As a Creative Consultant, her role is to help primarily editorial and commercial photographer clients get to the next level in their work—whatever that next level may be.

“I’m here to be helpful” she says, and that can mean just being a set of fresh eyes on work or being a “sounding board” for a new idea. Kristina recently chatted with us for a [webinar](#) all about getting hired by ad agencies, and here we’ve selected some key takeaways:

## 1 PITCH TO THE PERSON WITHIN AN AGENCY WHO CAN HIRE YOU

You can’t produce an ad without navigating each department, but you want to connect with the people who can hire you. Those are the art buyers and producers. Get to know the people in those roles. They might not be able to hire you now, but when something comes up that your work is a fit for, they’ll remember.

## 2 APPROACH BUYERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

You can approach buyers via social media networks, but be sure to do your research. Know if your work applies to the brand or the person you’re contacting. Reach out and say hi. Sometimes a quick email or a connection on Twitter, for example, is easier than a phone call or a meeting—remember that art producers are very busy. You want to get to know these people in whatever way you can and then foster those relationships. People move around a lot from agency to agency and role to role. If you know someone on a more personal level, they will remember you and your work no matter where they’re working or what they are working on.



*Kristina Hicks, Creative Consultant,  
Agency Access*

[www.agencyaccess.com](http://www.agencyaccess.com)

### **3 IF YOU'RE FOLLOWING A BUYER'S WORK, LET THEM KNOW BY SENDING KUDOS OR CONGRATS ON A JOB.**

It can be a good idea to shoot a quick email to a buyer or creative to let him or her know that you just saw the work they did with a recent client and you thought it was well done. All of a sudden you've made an instant friend and you can introduce yourself and your work later. We all like to be complimented on the work that we do because we're all working hard too. Just the fact that someone out there is paying attention makes us feel good, believe it or not. It's a way to make contact and work towards that lasting relationship.

### **4 SEND PRINTED PROMOS**

The most important thing to do when approaching a buyer is selecting your best images for your portfolio and showcasing the type of work you want to be hired for. When it comes to choosing images, get a second set of eyes on your selections. The images you're using don't have to have been made for a paid job. What matters is that the images are consistent with the look and feel of your website, portfolio or printed book. The images you choose to send out should exemplify what it is that you do.

You can keep mailers simple. One hero image printed on one side of the card with your contact info on the front and the back is totally fine. However, pay attention to what the art lends itself to when it comes to printing—maybe matte works better than glossy, trifold versus a single page.

### **5 PUT YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION AND BRANDING ON THE FRONT AND BACK OF YOUR DIRECT MAIL PIECES**

If you make it to the 'creative wall,' once it gets stapled up there it doesn't come down easily. You want your promo to make it to the 'inspiration board' of creative directors, so make it easy for them to find your contact information without having to remove the card and flip it over.

### **6 SEND PROMOS TO MULTIPLE PEOPLE WITHIN ONE AGENCY, BUT DON'T SEND 50 PROMOS TO ONE PLACE**

Hit a handful of people who are in a position to hire you. We want to connect with you as much as you want to connect with us. But you don't need to send a promo to everyone. Let the promos walk themselves around the office. People often share. Everybody shares.

### **7 PAY ATTENTION TO PRINT QUALITY**

Probably the biggest mistake photographers make when sending a printed promo is not having nice quality printing. It says a lot about your brand. If you don't take the time to make sure the colors came out right, it reflects poorly on your attention to detail and what you'll bring to a job.

### **8 MAKE PRINTED LEAVE-BEHINDS SIMILAR TO MAILED PROMOS, AND HAVE A LITTLE FUN WITH THEM**

These can be simple cards like direct mail pieces. Make sure the images you're using are current. Have a little fun—make them memorable and something that people want to share.

### 9 WHEN IT COMES TO EMAIL PROMOS VERSUS MAILERS, MIX IT UP AND LET YOUR BUDGET AS WELL AS NEW WORK DECIDE WHAT'S BEST

I think it's always a good idea to do both. That said, email often is free. If your budget for that month is a little shy, out goes the email. When you have something that you're proud of, news to share, or a home run, and you can afford to send something tangible, do it.

### 10 DON'T SEND E-PROMOS AND MAILERS MORE THAN ONCE EVERY 2 TO 3 MONTHS

Any more frequently, and it can get a little annoying. People might start to unsubscribe from your e-newsletter list. Remember that buyers can get hundreds of emails every day, so be mindful of building that relationship.

### 11 PAY ATTENTION TO EMAIL SUBJECT LINES

Subject lines are really important. You want to break through the clutter. The way you can accomplish that is by being direct and to the point. I want to know what I'm going to be looking at. Will it be product photos, an illustration, celebrity portraiture; and are the images from a particular campaign? If it's a campaign for a brand or person that can be identified with, like Coca-Cola for example, put that in the subject line. It can be simple: "portrait of..." or "a fashion story..." or "Coca Cola's latest." I always recommends that a photographer include his or her name in the subject line, too.

### 12 PERSONALIZE E-BLASTS WHENEVER YOU CAN, BUT NOT IF YOU DON'T KNOW THE PERSON

Acting like you know a creative when you don't is a turnoff. It's important to be up front and say something like, "hey we've never met before and I wanted to introduce myself." It's a way of being personal without being presumptuous and creepy.

Resources for staying current on campaigns as well as who holds creative roles within an agency:

[LinkedIn](#)

[We love Ad](#)

[Ads of the World](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Adweek](#)

[AdAge](#)

[Agency Access database](#)

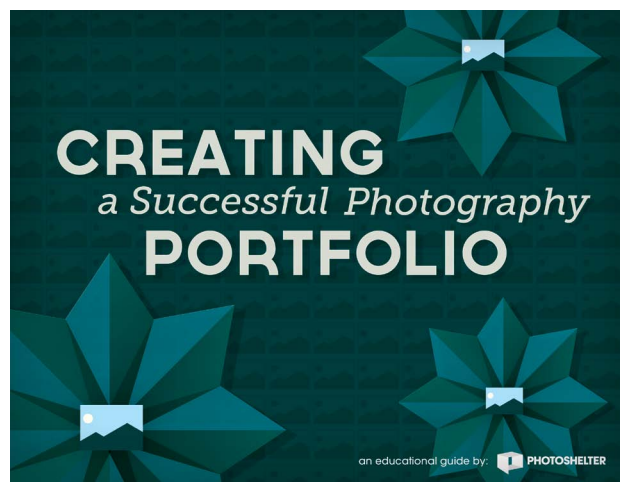
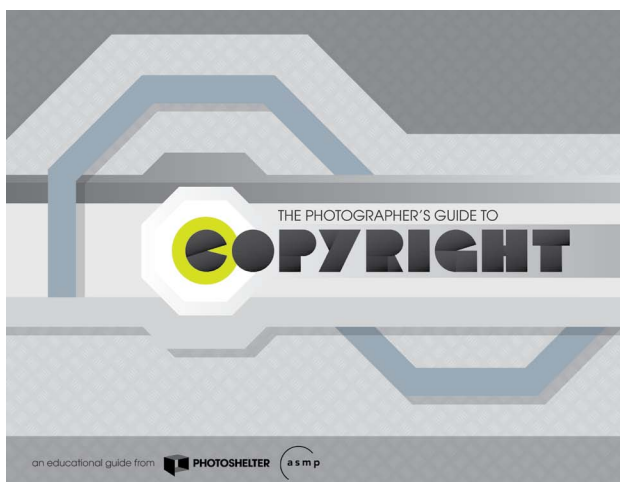
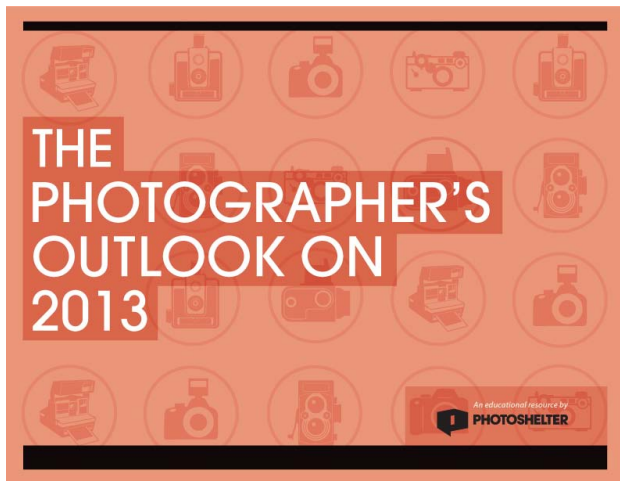
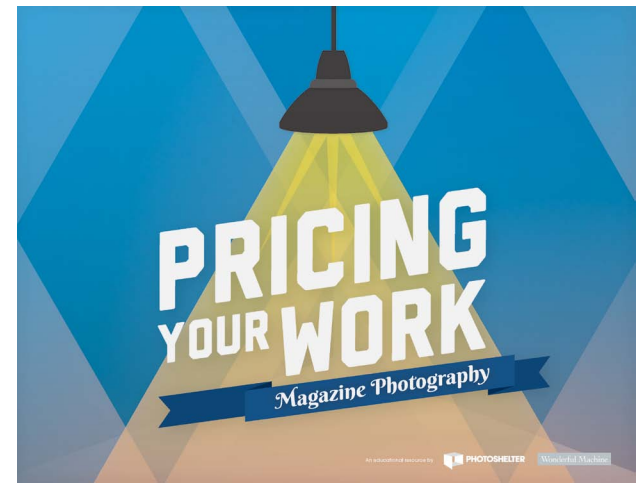
[Workbook](#)

[ASMP](#)

# Conclusion

*The 2013 Survey: What Buyers Want From Photographers* aims to break down barriers photographers face in getting hired and address their questions head on so that they can attract potential clients and bring in more business. The most important takeaway for any photographer is that without targeted marketing, you will struggle to get noticed. This means establishing a niche, and developing a consistent brand and identity between your website, social media networks, email campaigns, and more is key to establishing yourself as a go-to photographer within your specialty. Buyers are pressed for time and face constraining budgets, so if you catch their eye, you must be able to effectively communicate what your business offers and make it clear that you are the only person for the job.





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