

Elevate Your Business with Professional Photography

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Helping clients visualize our work is an important part of our job, especially since many have difficulty looking at bare windows or an empty room and seeing the finished product. Professional photography is a great way to showcase our experience with past jobs, as well as highlight custom details. I was once told by a well-known industry leader that clients should look at my photographs and want to live in those rooms. Some people have the talent to take great photos, however, there comes a time when it's necessary to hire a professional. There are a number of things to consider with professional photography so that you receive a quality product within a realistic budget.

Recruiting a Client

Before finding a photographer you must first approach your clients. Think about which homes would photograph beautifully and which clients will give you the flexibility to stage their rooms. Some clients are very

protective of their privacy and may not allow you to photograph their home, so even while you are working with clients, consider asking how they would feel about having their home photographed for use on your website, marketing materials, or social media once the job is complete. Protect your clients and their privacy by avoiding any identifiable information such as house numbers, addresses or names. More importantly, reassure them of their confidentiality. Consider having a simple contract stating how the photos will be used (e.g. website, Facebook, advertising, marketing materials, etc.). A contract should also grant you permission to use the photos. Remember to discuss that furniture might be moved for staging purposes. Assure them that everything moved will be returned to its place.

Hiring a Photographer

As a part of educating our clients we often mention the principle, "You get what you pay for." This saying holds true with professional photography. Just like sewing,



Some photo shoots require taking away and some require adding to — it depends on the room. The lighting in my original shot (top right) was off and cast an unflattering yellowish glow. My photographer, Sheena LePard, preferred to subtract the ceiling light and add her own lights and flash. Knowing there wasn't much color in this room, I brought in red roses, but almost reconsidered when I saw the gold in the artwork to the left (bottom right). It clashed with the roses, but also distracted from the window treatments. Fortunately, the photographer was able to deal with that issue at the editing stage (left).

photography is an art and the professionals deserve to get paid for their craft. It's not uncommon for experienced photographers who specialize in interior shots to quote a price of several thousand dollars to shoot one room. Depending on the size of your company and your marketing budget, that might not be doable. There is an option for small workrooms or design firms with just as proportionate budgets.

Consider calling local colleges or art institutes to hire a student or recent graduate. Hiring a student has several benefits. Although students and recent grads often charge less, they also have less experience. Nevertheless, they will be excited about the opportunity to improve their portfolio and will appreciate the work. Start by contacting the Career Services Advisor at the local college or institute. He will put together a job intake form detailing the work you want done and how much you are willing to pay. If you are unsure of what is a fair wage for the job then ask the advisor for some guidance. He will then post the opportunity for all students and graduates to see.

Interested photographers will contact you to discuss the job in greater detail. This will give you the opportunity to interview each photographer and look at his or her portfolio, which is usually posted on their individual website. If you are wondering about which questions to ask, talk with someone in the industry who has used a professional photographer and ask them for some pointers. As a part of the interview, you'll want to learn about the type of camera and equipment the photographer will use. Do they own lighting or will it need to be rented? Often students can borrow equipment from their school at little or no cost. Ensure that they have some experience with indoor shots and proper lighting for interior photography. Also, ask about their experience with editing photos and whether they know how to blow out windows to filter the outdoor scenery when necessary. Good photographers will use editing techniques without overdoing it. If you are still uncertain about their ability, request that they shoot test photos for your review prior to hiring them.

Once you find a photographer, you will need to agree upon the terms of the job and sign a contract. The contract needs to include payment terms as well as a breakdown of the scope. Like in our industry, it's recommended that the photographer collect a down payment of up to half, and the balance due after the editing is complete and all the photos have been delivered. One of the most important things is to ensure that the contract allows you unlimited use of the images. Although photographers most likely will not give you full

rights to the photos, as they will want to use them in their portfolio, you will need to have the freedom to use them as you wish. Some photographers may charge a per-use fee, meaning you pay each time you use the images. Others may not. There also needs to be clarification within the contract about how the photographer is allowed to use the images. It is recommended that the contract not allow the photos to be sold to any third parties, thereby allowing only you and the photographer to use the images. Be sure to discuss how the photographer expects the photos to be credited. Some photographers may want their name on each photo, which can become excessive if you're using the photos on your website.

Finally, the contract should also address editing and delivery. Will the images be sent via disk or uploaded to a cloud-sharing service like Dropbox? Is there a limit to the number of photos that can be selected for editing? How long will it take after the photo shoot to receive proofs? Once the proofs have been selected, how long will it take to receive the edited images? These are all questions that need to be asked while negotiating with the photographer. All issues must be ironed out before the day of the photo shoot.

Planning the Shoot

Now that you have selected the photographer and signed the contract, begin thinking about the logistics for the photo shoot. How long will it take? Some photographers are faster than others, so ask for an estimate of time to shoot an entire room. Prepare a list of all the shots you'll want within each room (e.g., entire room, particular window treatments, pillows, close-ups of specific details). The photographer cannot be held responsible for photos that are not taken if you have failed to request them. Also, consider the time of day and whether sunlight will be a factor. Your photographer can help with this decision.



While the photographer is the pro behind the lens, a photo shoot such as this is very much a team effort.

Think about the props you will need to bring to properly stage the rooms (books, greenery, decorative items, bowls, etc.). Remember that if you have not been to the client's house in a while, things might be different from when you finished the job. Be sure to plan some time to steam or straighten things and move furniture to stage the room.

A great addition to any professional photo is fresh flowers. Buy inexpensive vases that coordinate with the décor of each room and use them for staging, then leave the vase of flowers behind as a gift for the client. It is such a simple way for you to make your clients smile and say thank you for taking over their home for a few hours.

As you plan out the photo shoot day, think about how long it will take to gather your props, prepare the vases of flowers, and load the car so that you arrive at the client's house on schedule. If you are photographing multiple houses in the same day, leave adequate time to straighten each client's house before leaving. Just like on installation day, be sensitive to your clients and be sure to conduct yourself in a professional manner by disturbing their home as little as possible.

Thanking the Client

Once the job is complete, send the client a thank-you by finding creative ways to use some of the images. Shutterfly or Snapfish have some great options for print-



With this image we wanted to capture the entire room: the draperies, the window seat, the valances, the shades. Our biggest consideration was making sure nothing blocked the things we wanted to showcase. We brought in the flowers, decorative bowls and other props to stage.

ing photos. Send personalized thank-you cards to your clients with some of their images included, or make a small book documenting the photo shoot. However you decide to share the memories, make it so the client will show your photos proudly.

Whether your budget is large or small, you can have your work professionally photographed. Be resourceful when finding a good photographer and plan properly to ensure a successful photo shoot. Professional photography takes time and hard work, but results in a professional image and growth for your business. ✂



Photos by Sheena LePard Photography

If we want people to "want to live in the rooms," then we have to show them the entire room. Doing so allowed us to showcase the valances and shades. Since we wanted a more masculine feel to this room, we chose not to use flowers, instead using a large candleholder and artwork.