

4 Costly Mistakes to Avoid When Choosing a Commercial Photographer

An educational service provided by:

Richard Quindry Photography

images that enhance your image™

Four costly misconceptions about hiring a photographer.

1. I'll get good photos just by hiring someone with a good camera.

Unfortunately it doesn't work that way. Cameras don't make great photos, any more than Steinway pianos make great music. Great photographers bring a mastery of lighting, a knowledge of design, color, psychology, body language and a lot of other problem solving skills to the table. That's all in addition to well over \$100,000 in equipment.

Photographers abilities vary immensely. Anyone who can borrow a camera can call himself or herself a professional photographer. If your images are important, make sure you hire someone with lots of experience and a great track record. Ask to see their client list and testimonials from happy clients.

2. Photographers who are good with nature or weddings will do a great job with my products, or company president.

Hardly. Different subjects demand different skills. Someone good at candid shots may be clueless about lighting products or solving technical problems. Full time commercial photographers with decades of experience can usually very quickly solve problems that will leave these photographers scratching their heads.

Even within commercial photography, there are subjects that require special expertise. They include products, fashion, food, lifestyle, headshots, jewelry, architecture, corporate, macro, medical devices and automotive.

3. Once I get my photos, I can do what I want with them.

Not always, it depends on the photographer. Under U.S. law, the photographer retains the copyright. Some will charge you royalties based on how, where and how long you use them for. Others will grant you the right to use your photos for as long as you want and wherever you want. *This is what most buyers want.*

Be sure to ask up front if the photographer charges royalties, and if so, find out how much extra it will cost you to re-use the images.

4. At least my competitors won't be able to use photos from my shoot.

If you're not careful about what rights you're buying, your photos could end up as stock photos. They could be used anywhere, even by one of your competitors. If they sell stock photos, be very careful.

Find out if the photographer sells stock photos, and if so, make sure yours won't be among them.

Why you want custom, digitally enhanced, royalty-free photos.

1. Quality custom photos communicate your message.

They tell your unique story. They have a "look" that telegraphs your brand. Their high quality communicates your standards. They can tie your marketing pieces together with a unified look and feel.

Stock photos lack believability. They make you look the same as every other competitor who uses stock, and if you look the same as everyone else, why should anybody buy from you unless you're the cheapest? They also undermine trust. People aren't fooled. They wonder what you're trying to hide. Their true cost skyrockets with every sale lost by using them.

When you invest in a library of royalty-free custom photos, you'll have powerful, unique images that will support your marketing for years.

2. Photos are more believable than illustrations or descriptions.

Would you book a resort that only had written descriptions of what the pool looked like? Would you trust a drawing of the beach? Seeing is believing and believing leads to buying.

3. You want images that create desire, communicate quality, and foster trust.

Customers believe photos. Great images of your products, facilities, personnel, and happy clients communicate what makes you different and how you can help your customers get what they want.

To be effective, they must be planned so that they don't look like stock photos (they don't "ring true"). They should be clearly identifiable as being uniquely yours. You *must* express some point of difference, some piece of evidence that at least suggests "We're different from our competitors. Take a look at us."

4. Great photos give you a competitive edge.

We buy with our eyes. Your prospects are comparing your website or brochure with your competitors. Unless you're competing on price, you'd better have photos at least as good as your competitors . . . and preferably better. People are busy, most will just thumb through a brochure quickly - forming opinions of you and the quality of your products or service through the photos. We know photos speak volumes. Many studies have shown that people remember images far better than they remember words.

5. Cheap photos can cost you a fortune.

Keep in mind, some uninformed individuals think that they're saving money by using cheap photography. They don't realize that every sale lost to a competitor loses them the profits from that sale and possibly even reorders and referrals. *You can't get more expensive than that.*

6. Photos are a small cost of marketing. If done well, they can provide a very high return on investment.

Brochures, ads, websites, sales sheets, and trade shows are a necessary part of business. Without sales, your business stops. Remember - the printing, the postage, the ad space, and the trade show you exhibit at, all cost the same whether they're effective or not. It's up to you to make the most of your investment and not cripple your marketing efforts with weak and ineffective images. Savvy marketers understand this.

If you purchase photography from an experienced and talented royalty-free commercial photographer, you'll be able to build your own library of images. You can get years of use out of images that will be uniquely yours.

7. What most photographers won't tell you.

It's one of professional photographer's dirty little secrets that almost all great images are digitally enhanced and often retouched. Make sure the photographer is highly skilled at Photoshop or has someone on staff who is and can do what's needed to make your subjects look their best.

The best Photoshop artists are capable of "stealth retouching" - retouching that's so good that even people whose own portraits have been retouched may not be able to tell; they just think "Wow, that's a great shot of me." Products, people, and places are never perfect, they can always use some improvement.

What you need to ask before hiring a commercial photographer.

1. Are their photos sold royalty-free?

If you choose a photographer who charges royalties, you'll have to pay extra each time you reuse your images. This can add up over the course of a campaign, or over years. You may also pay more based on the circulation of the publications you use them in and even depending on the size they appear.

2. Do they guarantee your satisfaction with their work?

Photographers confident in their ability to consistently deliver high quality photography should be willing to stand behind their work.

3. How skilled are they at retouching and enhancing the images?

It's a well-known secret in the industry that almost all great photos are digitally enhanced and/or retouched. Some of your photos are likely to benefit by this and you need to know whether the photographer will do it, how well they'll do it, and what it's likely to cost.

4. How much experience do they have?

How long have they been in business? Remember, the more experienced they are, the more likely they've come across and solved similar problems to those presented by your subjects. It's also important that the experience gained is relevant to your needs. Wedding photographers may have a lot of experience doing weddings but that doesn't mean they have a clue about how to solve many of lighting challenges presented in commercial work. An experienced commercial photographer will have successfully shot thousands of assignments of almost every type imaginable and brings great problem solving skills to the table.

5. Do they sell stock photos?

If they do, be very careful. It's tempting for them to set up your shots to look generic so they'll have resale value as stock photos. Many photographers use photos from assignments to sell as stock photos. If the shots are generic enough, they can be used this way. You could even see your photos used by a competitor at some point. Make sure that they won't re-sell your photos to anyone.

6. Is the style of their work appropriate for your needs?

While a talented photographer will know how to produce a range of "looks", there may be times when one particular photographers' style may be better suited to your audience. If you're marketing skateboards to teens in an urban environment you'll want an edgier look than if you're selling products or services to upscale buyers.

7. Who are their clients?

You can tell a lot by how extensive a photographer's client list is and the quality of the companies on their client list. When photographers start out, they do work for small businesses, and as they gain in experience and ability, larger and larger corporations find that they can be trusted to deliver the goods.

8. Can they provide client testimonials?

What do their clients say about working with them? Are they easy to work with? Good problem solvers? Dependable? Able to meet tight deadlines?

9. Do they respond quickly to your e-mails or phone messages?

While a photographer may not always be available or able to take your call, they should be responsive to any requests you have. If they're not responsive when they want to get your business, don't be surprised when they're not quick to react when you're in a crunch and need something from them in a hurry.

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