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All Photographers Are Not Professional Photographers

What makes a professional photographer?



A professional photographer is a skilled photographer that has dedicated their professional working life to partnering with you to create beautiful images of you, your children, your family. Just make sure if your taking a baby to a photo shoot, dress them up in cute and comfortable [newborn baby clothes](#).

Professional photographers not only know their equipment and know it well, they are also legitimate business owners who:

- pay taxes
- pay for their equipment and software with money they earn by providing this service
- support their families with money they earn providing professional photography services

Professional photographers do not need to "portfolio build", they already have a portfolio.

Professional photographers do not work for free: they understand that they provide a valuable service. Professional photographers are much like professionals of other occupations, they have overhead and create photography not out of just love but out of a dedication to providing families with lifelong memories.

Some photographers participate in industry wide certification programs (i.e. Certified Professional Photographer), competition (competing nationally and internationally against other photographers), teaching/mentoring other photographers, writing about photography and reviewing equipment for trade publications, will mentor local photographers to achieve high quality photography as the norm within their area, work within the trade organizations to help maintain and/or create a sustainable profession where all learn and grow, etc. A true professional photographer will have a large display of work available to look through on their website, will have a client list and should be willing to provide references, should be able to provide you with consistent and beautiful images and will partner with you to create images that you will be happy with for years to come. A true professional photographer is not only a skilled artisan but also a business person like any other professional you may know.



images by Lauri Baker

Truly professional photographers are able to capture your child at play in any lighting situation and are equipped to deal with changing light situations.

I have a really good camera. Doesn't just having a camera create a photographer?



No. Having a camera, fancy dSLR (digital single lens reflex camera) or otherwise, does not a professional photographer make. It makes that photographer a camera owner. Professional photographers not only know how to press a button they know their equipment backwards, forwards and upside down, they spend a lot of time educating themselves about the craft of photography, they spend a lot of time behind the scenes running their business(es), and much much more.

Many of the best professional photographers take time to continue their education via other photographer run workshops, lectures and attending photography conventions as well as entering image competitions and such.

There is a HUGE difference between a pro and a hobbyist photographer. Hobbyist photographers enjoy shooting and may have a great handle on their equipment however photography as a hobby is VERY expensive and the expenses add up quickly, hobbyists quickly learn there is a big difference between maintaining a professional photography business vs. shooting from time to time.

How do you know if the photographer you're looking to hire is not a true professional?



Great question!!

By definition a professional is someone who is paid money to provide a service. However the topic of professional photography is muddled by the fact that dSLR cameras have become common place and there is an all too irresistible urge to call ones' self a *professional photographer*.

Muddying the waters even further: there is no board certification for photographers (like there is for other professional service providers such as hairdressers, aestheticians, etc). There is no one standard that dictates who is or who isn't a professional photographer.

In essence: it is all too easy to buy a camera, hang a shingle, open up a Facebook business page and start charging for photography services. In fact it is so common that it's become an issue amongst true professional photographers, many of whom are going out of business because of an onslaught of hobbyist photographers who think that turning into a wanna-be professional photographer is easy. They do so without understanding what being a professional photographer entails.

Many of those that hang their shingle do so without acquiring a whole lot of knowledge, knowledge that is both business &/or photographic. These new "pros" are often called "fauxtographers" or MWACs (mom with a camera), DWAC (dad with a camera), Debbie Digitals (a not so complimentary term), etc.

Truly my purpose isn't to bash/name call a particular group of non professionals because I do respect all business owners and we all start somewhere however there does need to be a distinction of uneducated photographers who have taken down the business of photography a notch or two. I will simply refer to those non professionals as **hobbyist-wannabe-pros**.



A hobbyist-wannabe-pro may have the following distinctive qualities within their work/within their business models:

- **lack of consistent work** (poor exposure, poor handle on contrast, lack of retouch work on photos, etc). In essence there is a lack of technical knowledge/proficiency with the equipment being used.
- **portfolio filled with many images of the same subject(s)**
- **all inclusive pricing for low cost** (i.e.: \$200 for a CD of all images)
- **poor customer skills**, lack of know how in dealing with clients of any age (especially with children). You can see this in a portfolio when you view the images and note that there is poor eye contact, lack of enthusiastic or engaging expressions
- **a noticeable lack of posing and/or awkward pose captures**: sometimes the photographer will state that they prefer "unposed captures" which can be code for "I don't know how to pose people". This isn't always the case, many photojournalistic style professional photographers also use this terminology but there is a distinctive difference when you view the portfolio of a pro who specializes in this style of photography vs. someone who lacks the proper knowledge. If you are a model, make sure you have great style too, you can't just show up however and let the photographer make you look good. Don't forget to get a hair cut and make sure the person who is cutting your hair has [Barber Capes](#) so you don't get hair all over your clothes.
- **may state on their site that other "professional photographers" charge too much**, that they aren't going to "gouge" you in their pricing. That's usually a sure sign of a photographer who doesn't understand business, why they are pricing in the manner that they are pricing and is quick to insult a true pro to make their work look more appealing (nevermind that they likely will not be in business in a year or two)
- **does not have access to professional level product offerings for their clients**: may use Shutterfly for albums, WalMart for canvas wraps, etc. These are not considered professional quality end products, some of these have a reputation for poor lab chemical calibration

resulting in images that can fade and often do not represent colors accurately to begin with

- **general overall lack of professionalism:** excuse making, whining about personal matter on their business page (Facebook) or blog, etc.. It's one thing to have a family emergency or trying personal times, we all have those moments, but there truly are examples of photographers out there that are distinctly unprofessional. Let's face it you're paying for a service well done, so while you may have to cut a business owner some slack because they have a death in the family, as you should, multiple excuses and exclamations of "I wasn't in the mood to edit your session today" won't hold a lot of water and are hallmarks of unprofessionalism.
- **a lot of stylized sessions featured on their site:** we all love a nicely stylized session but as a photographer I assure you it is rare and few and far between where a client wants me to drag out the picket fence, lemonade stand and dress the kids up in the latest shabby chic wear to pout and pretend they're pouring lemonade at sunset in a ravine covered in bluebell flowers. If you see more than several of these sessions on a photographer's site you need to ask questions about those specific blog or Facebook entries (i.e. were these images done for a client or for personal work, did a client request those sessions, did you trial a new set out that you'll be offering clients, etc). Stylized sessions CAN BE beautiful and well planned out but the truth is most hard working professionals work with clients to create images of their families as the best representation of who they really are and rarely, if ever, create these highly stylized sessions. I love a good stylized session for my personal work with my kids and I'll occasionally share those images publicly but the best policy is to be upfront about it. A lot of newer photographers like the look of these, because stylized sessions can hide a multitude of photographic flaws (you're too distracted by the prettiness of the set up to notice the poor focus and the even poorer exposure and color rendition). The rule is DON'T AVOID the photographer who showcases these sessions but ask questions about these sessions.

If you have any worries about the quality of your photographer in question then proceed to:
QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PHOTOGRAPHER



image by Marianne Drenthe

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