THE FIVE ESSENTIAL STEPS

TO STARTING YOUR OWN PHOTOGRAPHY BUSINESS

A COMPLETE GUIDE

BY EMILY SUPIOT, M. ED.

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Your Own Photography Business

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So you want to start a photography business?

The internet and social media have opened up a wide door for small business owners and entrepreneurs. It seems like anything is now in your reach and starting, creating and keeping the business of your dreams seems attainable. Guess what? It is!! Along with the internet, the popularity and accessibility of DSLR cameras makes it easy to create professional photos. Because of all the effortlessness, it may even seem like everyone and their brother thinks they are a photographer. You may feel that the area you live in is oversaturated with photographers and you could never make it with so much competition. The fact is, you are probably right. Well, at least about the oversaturated part. The **good news** is that many of those photographers have not set themselves up for success and quickly burn out and close their doors. This leaves room for you! It is not difficult to set up a successful portrait photography business, but it does take time and some effort.

A successful photography business is NOT:

- Created Overnight
- A way to get rich quick
- An hour or so of taking pictures and loading them on to a disc
- Formed without much thought

If you are reading this on a whim that taking pictures will bring in some quick cash for you, you may as well stop reading, because it's just not going to happen. If you are ready to put in some effort, keep on reading these **5 essential steps** to the creation of your dream business and if you follow them you too can make a photography career reality. How do I know? Because I did it with my own successful portrait photography business. My business continues to grow exponentially each year. My most recent photo order was more than 40 times what I was charging when I first started. I'm not going to lie to you, I'm not a multi-million

dollar photography business, but I do keep learning and my success continues to grow. I am sharing with you what I did, or wish I knew earlier on, so you can be successful too. There are no gimmicks, nothing secret here, just laid out straight for you. There is one catch though, you are the only one that can make it happen. **YOU** have to take action. You don't have to be great to start-BUT you have to start to be great!

Step ONE: Know Your Stuff

What I mean by this is simply that. Make sure you know photography before you offer a service to someone for money. I know that it is common nowadays for someone to purchase their first camera, take great pictures and think they are ready to set up shop. If this is the step you are on, that is OK! Everyone starts somewhere. But before you create a business, **make sure that you know the camera** and it's functions well. You should have a clear understanding of exposure, composition, color and how to use the cameras settings. Ideally, you should be efficient in shooting in manual. If this is not you, stop reading here and start practicing.

If you feel comfortable and knowledgeable already with the camera, now is the time to start thinking about your niche. Know clearly what type of photography business you want to create. Do you want to shoot weddings, babies, families, pets, events? The list really goes on. Think about **what type of photography you are the best at and what you enjoy shooting the most.** This will give you a great start to figuring out your niche. I have seen many people try to offer photography services for every type of job out there. It seems like a great idea in the beginning because, hey, it's a paying customer! That is a quick way to get burnt out and produce unhappy clients. Customers like and search out the businesses that are experts in their field.

Think about it like this, let's say you wanted to go out for a real , authentic Italian dinner. You have a choice of two businesses to try out. One restaurant is specifically known for that type of cuisine, has an Italian chef , a reputation for the best lasagna in town and

only serves Italian food. The other restaurant is the local diner that serves spaghetti, but also burgers, tacos, pulled pork sandwiches, cherry pie and the kitchen sink. Where would you go to get that authentic Italian meal? I know what I'd pick.

It's the same with photography. If a client is looking for a family photographer, they are going to choose someone that is specifically known for that field, not someone that showcases weddings and sporting events simultaneously on their site. Understand what you specialize in. Know your niche. Know your stuff. The clients will come.

Step TWO: Create a Digital Portfolio

You need a way to showcase what you can produce. I highly recommend starting up your own website. First you will need a host for your site. I use ipage.com, but there are many others out there. Next you should find a template and design for your site. I started out by trying to find free templates and building it myself, but it didn't look very professional. After trying other platforms, Pro Photo Blog along with WordPress is what I use and recommend for the ease and professional look. It is also highly customizable. There are others out there similar (And by the way, I'm not getting paid or receiving anything free from these companies I'm endorsing. They are just ones I use personally and recommend)

You are limiting yourself if you only show your work on social media. While it is very important to have social media presence, you must remember that you are losing any potential clients that are not on social

media. Other than referrals, 90% of my clients find me by seeing my **website and blog** come up on google. Not my Facebook, not my Instagram page, not my Pinterest, they find my **website**. From there, they might check out my Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and other platforms. Spend your time developing your site more than your social media. You do not have control whether Facebook will even be up and running tomorrow, but you do have control over your own website.

Keep your portfolio **consistent with your niche** and style. Think quality over quantity.

So you might be thinking, where do you get these people to be a part of your portfolio?!? This can be a little tricky. Definitely use your family or children if they are willing. From there you can reach out to neighbors, friends, friends of friends. Remember *quality over quantity*. You do not have to have a huge portfolio. Start there and see how many subjects you can get to model for you.

Make sure you are very clear with your models , even friends and family, what you intend to do with the photos. Do not assume that they want them posted online. Having a written model release and having them sign it beforehand is best practice. This doesn't have to be a super formal release drawn up by a lawyer, though it could be. You can find many examples of model releases just by searching online. Read those and create a release to fit your business model. This will stop any confusion later on. Again, be very clear-even with friends and family- exactly what they will get and exactly what you will be doing with these photos. Some common questions models will ask are:

- Where exactly will you post the pictures?
- Will I get to keep the photos?
- How many will I get?
- Will you give me all the pictures?
- Can I edit them?

- Will my name be posted with any of them?
- How long before I can see them?

Answer all these before they even have the chance to ask.

You may have read or heard someone tell you, that you should always charge something even when portfolio building. This is not the case (you'll see why when we get to step 3). Think of it as your internship. You are practicing for the real thing. This is the time to get comfortable. It really should be a win win. They get photos and you get pictures for your portfolio.

Once you have your portfolio online step back and look at it. Try and see it from an outsider's perspective. Reach out to friends, family, clients and peers and ask for constructive criticism. Be prepared for some negative feedback at first, and welcome it. That feedback is what is going to make your portfolio stronger.

Step THREE: Paperwork

This is probably the most boring and tedious process of setting up your business. I'm not going to sugar coat it. It takes a little time and legwork. However, if you are accepting money for a service, you are a business and must apply to be a business and of course, will have to pay taxes. All cities and states are slightly different, so unfortunately, I can't help you with the detailed contact information you will need. You will need to research to find out what steps to take in your city, state or country. Lucky us, the internet makes it super easy to google and find what we need for our particular state. Don't be afraid to pick up the phone and call to make sure you have all the correct paperwork.

Here are the three top pieces of paperwork to complete now:

1. **Business License**

   Most likely you will need to file a business license. Decide if you want to register your business as a sole proprietor or LLC. This is not difficult to do, once you connect to the right department.

2. **Tax Forms**

   You will also have to pay taxes. In some cities and states you pay monthly, others quarterly and others yearly. Make sure to check what you need to do in your state. Starting by contacting your states **department of revenue** is a great start.

3. **Client Portrait Contracts**

   Once you have that paperwork together it is extremely important to create a client portrait contract. Once again, it does not have to start out super complex, but should clearly state what is expected of the client and what the client should expect from you. This way there

are never any surprises. Be as specific as possible. Here are some clauses in my contract that should also be in yours:

- Total payment and when payment is due
- Exactly how many images the client will receive
- How many images will be included in a gallery
- Provisions for weather or illness (you and the client)
- Cancellation policy

This contract will change and grow over time as you learn more about yourself as a business and the questions clients most often have. That is Ok. Start simple and grow from there, but ALWAYS have a signed contract. Digital contracts make it super simple. Mach forms is a program I use for my digital contracts, but there are others out there.

Step FOUR: Network

We can all learn from each other. That is why networking with other photographers is so important. Steer clear of the mindset that all photographers are competing against each other. They are not. All photography businesses have different specialties, locations, pricing, products offered, styles, the list goes on. By making connections with other photographers you are allowing yourself access to a wealth of information. Network both locally and across the country. Now, they may not always share with you their undisclosed marketing plans, or Photoshop secrets, but by networking, some of the simplest questions you have might be answered instantly.

You may need to know things like:

- Am I allowed to shoot in a certain location?
- Where do you go to clean your camera?
- Can I see some pictures taken with this type of lens?

The easiest place to find others to network with is looking online at groups or forums. Some are free and others may cost money, search around and find the community you feel most comfortable in. Facebook groups make it easy to search locally for others in your area. If you are still not sure what group to join you can always start here→ https://www.facebook.com/groups/1042368599151180/ and get FREE access to my learn, support and inspire group for photographers of all levels.

Step FIVE: Learn

Photography is an art that requires constant learning. There is so much to know and learn that you will never know it all. If you try, you will end up burning yourself out and becoming so overwhelmed you give up. Don't fall into that trap.

DON'T

Think you know it all

Try to master every concept you can all at once

Stop reading, researching and learning more

DO

Pace yourself

Make weekly, daily or monthly goals

Learn from a variety of sources

Practice

I started learning by networking in photography forums on free sites (See step #4 above!). Surprisingly, babycenter.com had a great free forum for photographers that I learned a lot from. From there, I branched out and found more support groups, both free and paid subscriptions and found value in many of them. I went to my local library and found books. Not all of them where what I was looking for, but there were many with great information. I spent hours on YouTube searching for good Photoshop tutorials. There were so many places to gain information. And guess what? I haven't stopping trying to learn and gain knowledge. I am constantly trying to learn and grow.

Here are some great examples of places to start learning more:

Books

YouTube

Photography Articles

Forums

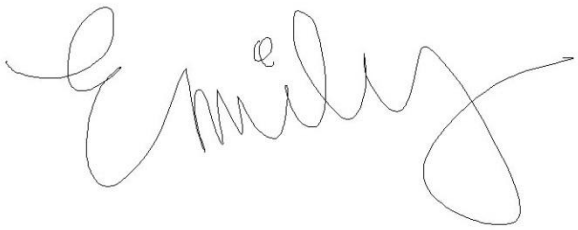
Find a Mentor

E-courses

Workshops

This list really goes on. I encourage you to learn from a variety of these sources. If you are not sure where to start, I do offer Photoshop mentoring as well as a selection of e-courses. You can check some of what I have to offer here: http://www.cozyclicks.com/for-photographers/

Awesome! You made it to the end! That means that you are ready to go to start creating your successful portrait photography business. But wait…that's it, that's all there is to it? Well, yes and no. These 5 steps will get you off to a great start but there is always more to learn (remember step #5?) Start with these 5 steps, don't skip any or try to cut corners, and everything else will fall in to place successfully for you. Now you know where to start, the rest is up to you. Have fun! You can do it!



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About the Author

Emily Supiot is a family and child photographer based in Phoenix, Arizona. She own and operates Cozy Clicks Photography. She has four young children and also works as a college professor. Emily has an extensive art background beginning as early as 1989. She was selected to participate in numerous art programs and private art schools in Michigan. She also attended Michigan State University and Northern Arizona University.

Emily was named as the best family photographer in Arizona by Bored Panda Digital Magazine and one of the top 50 photographers in the United States by BP4U Photography Resources. Her work has been featured in The Huffington Post, Digital Photography School, GCPro Prints and numerous other publications.