



the **2013**

PHOTO BUSINESS PLAN

WORKBOOK



TABLE of CONTENTS

5 Introduction

6 Getting Down to Business: 4 Major Questions to Address in 2013

10 Marketing Your Business on Facebook

11 Blogging Your Best in 2013

18 Improving Your SEO Traffic

21 Getting More Work From Your Old Clients

25 Creating a Real Brand for Your Photo Business

28 Managing Your Finances

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2013BIZPLAN

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Introduction

If you've ever wondered how to run your photo business like a smart business person, you're not alone. As a sole proprietor, it takes extra effort to step back from the role of artist to think of ways to reach more clients, build your brand, and grow your bottom line. The 2013 Photo Business Plan Workbook is designed to help you view the things you do every day as moving parts in your well-oiled photo business machine. Use this guide to learn where to add a little oil, where to wipe away a little grease, and how to make the time to do it.

Though this guide isn't meant to teach you everything you need to know about building your business, it can direct you to the concepts that are key to your workflow as a professional photographer running a business. Throughout the guide you'll find a broad range of resources to help you delve deeper into topics ranging from building your brand to filing taxes.

Beyond practical tips, to-do lists for the successful planner, and sidebars chock-full of online resources, you'll find in-depth interviews with photographers as well as business professionals, each offering insights into how to be business savvy in 2013 and reach more clients than ever before. For example:

- Jim Patterson, nature and underwater photographer based in California, shares tips to master Facebook and grow your brand through social media.
- Texas-based editorial and fine art photographer Allison Smith offers blogging best practices and lessons in consistency, style, and voice.
- Search Engine Optimization guru and outdoor photographer Jim Goldstein shares his bag of tricks to make your photo website rank higher on major search engines.
- Industrial and corporate photographer Martin Vargas of 33PHOTO provides insights to help you leverage your work to strengthen relationships and get jobs from old clients.
- Award-winning photojournalist Ben Lowy shares tips to build your brand and explains why building a niche, a smart social media presence, and a well-designed site and logo can make a huge impact.
- Arguably most importantly, Matthew T. Whatley, aka the "Tax Ninja," who has been helping photographers since 2004, offers tips to maneuver through write-offs and understand tax issues that photographers face.

To make this workbook effective, take a few minutes to think first about your goals: revenue, vacations, gear, dream clients, jobs. Be specific. Need a little structure? Check out [this worksheet by Ilise Benun of marketing mentor](#). This is the first step in your business plan. With goals to meet throughout the year you will be on your way to measuring your success. The tips in this guide are aimed to help you create a strategy for reaching your milestones.

Ready? Let's talk business.



Getting Down to Business:

4 MAJOR QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN 2013

We want to help you think through key areas to help grow your business and reach more clients this year. Building your photography business is a process, which means there is no one-stop-shop formula for success to “hit the jackpot.” But the good news is that if you plug away in a few major areas, you’ll start to solidify your brand, attract more eyeballs to your website, and be top-of-mind for potential buyers and clients. Here are four major questions you should address to help jumpstart your photo business this year:

1. Who is your audience?

Defining and understanding your audience is crucial to shaping your business, your products, your brand, and your marketing efforts as whole. Without clearly defining who you’re targeting, you can’t clearly define *why* you’re reaching out to certain folks over others. As a result, your business will lack focus (at best) and look sloppy and out of sync (at worst).

For example, if you’re a polar and environmental photographer, your audience isn’t women’s lifestyle and fashion editors. This may seem obvious, but being able to clearly articulate who you’re targeting (and not targeting) will help you strategically focus your services and marketing efforts to appeal to the right group.

What may not be as obvious is the case of the photographer who has multiple specialties, as many (if not most) do these days. You may do editorial work during the week but shoot weddings on the weekends for that extra bump in income. What then? Well, you’ll still want to clearly define each audience for each specialty you have—and you’ll want to have a marketing strategy suited for each as well. A one-size-fits-all approach may cause confusion or a feeling among prospective clients that you’re really not the “expert” at any one thing—or at least at the thing they care most about. In short, they won’t find you relevant for their needs.

Truly understanding your target market also gives you several advantages. Most importantly, you know what appeals to them.

If you plug away in a few major areas, you’ll start to solidify your brand, attract more eyeballs to your website, and be top-of-mind for potential buyers and clients.



DO THIS

- To define your target audience, write out answers to the following questions:

- What are their likes and dislikes?
- What are their buying habits and seasons?
- What kind of photography do they consume and why?
- How old are they?
- What is their income level?
- Where do they live?
- What are their hobbies?
- Where do they hang out? (online and off)
- What are their major needs and pain points?

The last one is especially key. If you're unaware of your target market's key pain points and needs, it's OK to ask directly. Find a handful of folks in this community—essentially an informal focus group—and ask about their buying habits, issues they encounter, and more.

- Think through the services and products you provide. Then brainstorm a list of ways in which those services and products are relevant to your target audience. How can your business satisfy a need of theirs? How do your competitors fail to meet them?
-

2. What is Your Unique Selling Point?

As you get a hold on your audience's needs, this will help you identify your unique selling point - or what your business offers that helps you stand out from the pack and to keep you top of mind. Differentiating your brand and your services from your competitors can be the ultimate key to getting new business through the door.

So, first you need to make a determination: What is it that you offer your target customers? Can you clearly state this? Is your unique offering based on a specialty (e.g. underwater photography) or certain access (e.g. US military) or skill (e.g. lighting)? Or, is your unique offering based on the service delivered or tangible product the customer will be purchasing (e.g. boudoir portrait sessions or photo-wrapped Mini Coopers)?

A good first step to determine your unique selling point is to survey your competition and determine whether they have service offerings that you could replicate and then improve upon. Next, if you sell products, analyze what has sold for you in the past year. Can you pinpoint why they sold well? What about those products was attractive to buyers? Also, think about the clients or projects that have been particularly successful. What about these projects made them so? Focus in on these factors or traits and make them known to your clients and prospects.



DO THIS

- After you've thought through the identity of your target market and how your business can address their needs, write out a statement that clearly defines your services, products, and audience. Fill in the blanks here:

“For **(your target market)** who wants / needs **(reason to buy your product/service)**, **(your name, business, product or service)** is a **(specialty)** photographer that provides **(your key benefit)**. Unlike other photographers in this space, my key differentiator is **(how you uniquely address the client's needs)**.”

This is your positioning statement—it can also be considered your “elevator pitch”—or what you can say when you get just a few moments to convince a prospect they should hire you for their next project.

3. What's your marketing plan?

Your potential clients are just as busy as you are, which means you need a strategy this year to make it easier for them to find and work with you. Creating a full-scale marketing plan may sound daunting, but sitting down to flesh out a strategy to reach your target market is key to making marketing a business-as-usual activity instead of an intimidating task you'd prefer to put off.

We recommend you think about each marketing category (see below) and consider activities you can do within each and the return that each activity may produce. When you think about these activities, consider how people in different parts of the “sales cycle” would react. For example, you might send a postcard to photo buyers and editors you've causally connected with this past year, but put together a photo book to send your “top 10” contacts to make a longer lasting impression.



DO THIS

- Make a list of major marketing categories that you think you can reasonably address and your budget will allow. Some categories we recommend considering are:
 - Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)
 - Direct mail (postcards, books)
 - Events (trade shows, portfolio reviews)
 - Email marketing (email newsletters, promotions)
 - Local advertising (ads in local newspapers, magazines, etc)
 - In-person visits
 - With the categories you address, create a spreadsheet with some activities you'll do in each, rough estimates of the time you think you may spend on them per week, and the associated costs. How can you begin to integrate these marketing efforts into your weekly and daily routines? Prioritize them according to the response they are likely to produce.
-



4. Is your website as great as you are?

When it comes to your photography business, your website is everything. It's your greatest marketing tool. It's your virtual business card, a reflection of your professionalism, and (should be) a way to easily connect with you or transact with clients who want to license your work or buy your prints and products.

So as a first step, if you don't consider your website as the pinnacle tool of your business, then it's time to start. Think about your own experience online. As soon as you come to a site that feels stale and out of date, you're inclined to click out. To keep your own site fresh, you want to plan out a series of regular updates—refreshing a portfolio or gallery, a new blog post on your latest shoot, etc. Regularly updating your website can also help improve your ranking on major search engines, which rank sites with fresh content favorably.

To have a competitive and highly functional website this year, here are a few items your site should have:

- Clear contact information and “about” page
- Well organized portfolio sections or galleries
- E-commerce capabilities (if you sell prints or stock)
- File delivery (so you can send files to clients with your brand)
- Blog that is updated regularly (we recommend at least once a week)



DO THIS

- To help inform what part of your site to tackle first, use a tool like [Google Analytics](#) to track which content is most compelling to new visitors and which content people rarely click on.
- Approach your website from the point of view of a potential buyer. In 2012, we surveyed over 1,000 photo buyers worldwide who told us features of websites they prefer to see. See page 26 of the [2012 Survey: What Buyers Want from Photographers](#) and determine if your site hits the mark. If you're unsure, consider hiring a website consultant to determine how you can improve your site from a functional and aesthetic standpoint.

Determining the needs of your audience, articulating your unique selling point, flushing out a marketing plan, and optimizing your website are the pillars of great photography business. The most important thing to remember though is that a thriving business doesn't happen overnight. As you'll read from the seasoned photographers in this workbook, smart planning and research can be just as important as smart execution.

PHOTOSHELTER'S CERTIFIED CONSULTANTS

PhotoShelter works with a cadre of qualified [website consultants who specialize in photographers' sites](#).

Most are photographers themselves, so they understand the needs of your clients. And we've done our homework so we can vouch for their services. Certified Consultants can help you with anything from working with our SEO tools to customizing a streamlined, professional PhotoShelter website, and everything in between.



Marketing

YOUR BUSINESS ON FACEBOOK

Featuring Landscape, Nature, and Underwater Photographer Jim Patterson

Jim Patterson is a landscape, nature, and underwater photographer based in Santa Cruz, California. His work has been published in the likes of *National Geographic*, *Popular Photography*, and *American Photo*. Jim also leads “Sea to Summit” workshops year round in locations like Death Valley, Yosemite, and Big Sur, where he teaches high-quality nature and landscape photography to help photographers take their technical skills to the next level.

Jim uses his Facebook page, [Jim Patterson Photography](https://www.facebook.com/JimPatterson-Photography), to market his photography business, get his name out there, and connect with more people through his brand. His page has almost 5,000 likes, and any given post receives hundreds of likes, 15 to 20 comments, plus a sizeable number of shares. But how does he do it? For one, Jim embraces Facebook for one of its most powerful features: a social media platform conducive to photo sharing. And to those worried about the safety of their work, Jim says, “If you worry about image theft, you’ll never post anything online.” Given Facebook’s reputation for inconsistency in terms of service policy, you must of course weigh your personal tolerance for the potential risks vs. Facebook’s very powerful marketing features.

Jim told us how he grew his Facebook following this year, took advantage of key features, interacted with his followers, and more. Here are some concrete tips on what you can do in 2013 to make the platform work for your photo business.

1. Post Your Photos Directly to Facebook

Ninety percent of Jim’s Facebook posts are of his images. And although he struggles at times to pick the best ones to share, there is always a strategy behind his choice. “I like to choose a photo that is directly connected to my business,” he says. “For example, if I have a workshop coming up in Death Valley, I’ll post a photo I took there recently and direct people to my website to learn more.” Jim also likes to share photos he takes on the way to shoots, as well as during to give people a sense of his day.



Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/JimPatterson-Photography>



Jim's Facebook likes increased significantly this year because he abandoned sharing links to photos on his website. "If you upload an actual photo to your Facebook page, it's much more appealing," he says. "Think of your own News Feed. You're drawn first to the photos, the links you see are secondary, you might even ignore them completely." With this strategy, Jim typically drives 1,000 visitors to his website per month and has even received print inquiries directly on his page.



DO THIS

- When you upload one of your photos (instead of linking), you should still give your followers the opportunity to visit your site. After you upload the photo, include a short URL with your text (see Jim's example [here](#)). This link becomes live as soon as you post. You can sign up for a free service like [bitly](#), or use the [Google URL Shortener](#), that lets you easily shorten URLs and track clicks.
- Map out a schedule for posting. When you post regularly, people are more inclined to interact with you through comments, likes, and shares. As a general rule of thumb, try to post in the morning and afternoon during natural breaks in your day. Also be mindful of break times (breakfast, lunch, dinner) in other time zones you want to impact.
- Every Sunday, skim over your Facebook Insights, which you can find in the "Admin" panel of your page. In the section labeled, "Overview," make a note of your most popular posts and any themes among them (i.e. time of day, news worthiness, etc.). This will better inform you of when and what to share, and also the types of posts that tend to flop.

2. Embrace Facebook's Page Features

It's no secret that Facebook is always changing its layout and features, as well as how it ranks your posts in your followers' News Feeds. First, do your best to welcome these changes. Embracing the new features as they come will ultimately help you reach more people and build your brand.

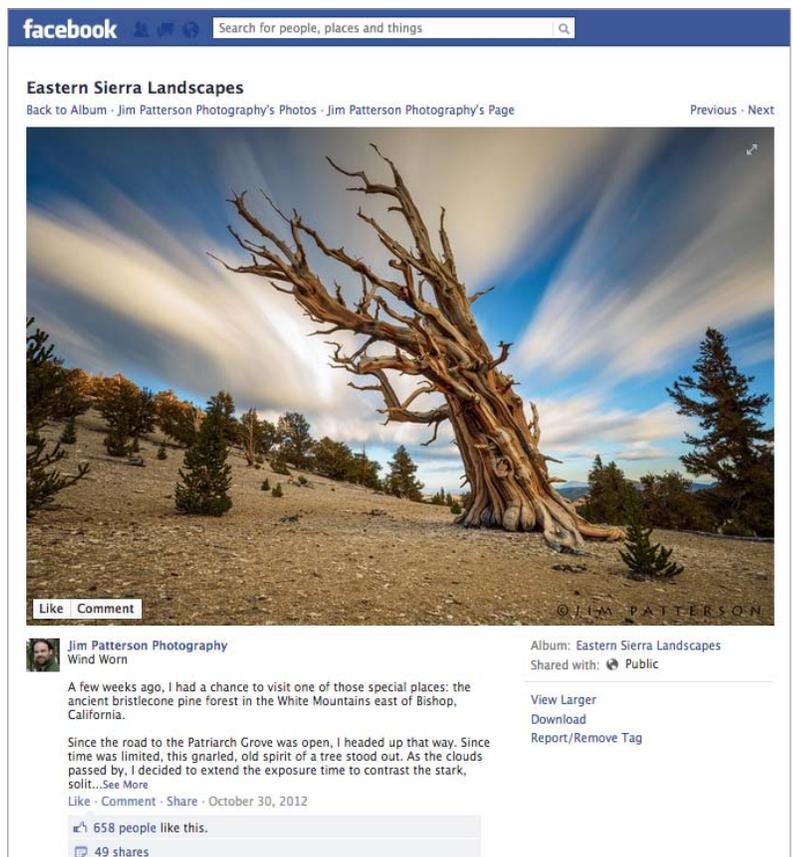
Jim takes full advantage of features on his page, including the cover image, tabs, promoted posts, and the ability to highlight posts (see below).





DO THIS

- Your cover image is a powerful first impression for those who visit your page, so it should look great. Check out this blog post, “[How to Create a Cover Photo for your Facebook Timeline](#),” to determine where the elements of a photo you choose will line up on your Facebook cover. Jim used this blog for guidance and chose an image he thought had a “wow” factor and also represented his business as a nature photographer well. He subtly added his logo to re-emphasize his brand.
- For your page’s profile picture, choose a professional photo of yourself (one where you look friendly!). “People like to know they’re interacting with an actual person,” Jim says. “You want to be approachable, and having a logo or symbol for your profile image can feel impersonal.”
- Experiment with promoted posts. When Jim spent \$5 to promote this post (see right), it received 658 likes—the most he got all year. Also note that in mid- November 2012, Facebook rolled out a “Pages Feed” found in your left sidebar, which features only promoted posts. So, if you promote a post, it will appear there whereas it might be missed, buried or not shown at all in many of your followers’ regular News Feeds.



3. Encourage Dialogue

When you post, you want to be approachable and encourage interaction. Jim likes to pair his business-focused photos with a question to get people talking. See this example:



In each post, Jim wants to convey that he's a reputable nature photographer who shares quality work and is down to earth. "Remember, most people who like your page are not potential clients and may not even know a lot about photography—but they do know people who do," he says. "This means you need to be very inviting. This encourages word-of-mouth referrals and that can lead to a sale."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Blog: "Facebook Timeline: 5 New tools for Your Photo Brand"](#)
- [Photo Guide: The Photographer's Social Media Handbook](#)
- [Blog: "The Future of Social Media & Your Photo Business"](#)
- [Marketing basics from Lynda: "Social media marketing with Facebook and Twitter"](#)
- [Blog: "No One is Going to Your Facebook Fan Page"](#)
- [Blog: "Why You Need to Ditch Your Personal Facebook Page"](#)
- [Blog: "How The New York Times Does Social Media"](#)



Blogging

YOUR BEST IN 2013

Featuring Editorial and Fine Art Photographer Allison Smith

Texas-based freelance photographer Allison Smith's work has appeared in several glossy publications including *The New York Times Magazine*, *Elle*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Her work also hangs in the permanent collection of the Dallas Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, and many private collections.

[Allison's blog](#), launched in 2005, is a little window onto her work ethic and personality. It showcases her workflow, her inspirations, and the images she wants to share (though not necessarily exhibit on her main site). Allison's blog is a lesson in the classic tenets of the blogosphere: be active, have a voice, and self-promote.

We talked to Allison about why she blogs, what she blogs, and how she promotes her blog. For those of us who get a little overwhelmed by the well-calculated web presence of the modern business person, take comfort in Allison's overall blogging strategy. "I try to keep it from the heart," she says.

1. The benefits of keeping it from the heart

With the popularity and quick-hit short posts of Twitter and Facebook, blogging can seem like a daunting task, but the benefit is that you have the freedom to put your personality on display through the content, images, and format.

Allison has kept journals most of her life, so starting a blog came naturally. "My blog started as an extension of my journals," Allison says. Today, her blog is a mix of recent work, "self-assigned" work, her Hipstamatic shots, and images that inspire her. Though Allison doesn't literally treat her blog as a diary, she likes to keep the tone and frequency of her posts (with a two-post per week goal) casual. She says, "I see my blog as a conversation I am having with friends. I want it to be honest and fun."



Website:

<http://www.allisonvsmith.com>

Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/Avose>



DO THIS

- Follow blogs of other photographers, magazines, and industry professionals you admire. Interact by reblogging their work. Tag those reblogged posts as “inspiration.” Allison has a tagcloud on the right-hand column of her blog so clients or fans can easily peruse the categories Allison has blogged about. This not only shows what kind of person Allison is—her likes and dislikes—but can help a prospective client see that she is actively keeping tabs on their work as well as the industry as a whole. It can also attract new readers who appreciate the articles and items she essentially curates for them.
- Decide who it is you’re blogging for. Though you can track the analytics of your blog to see how many people are seeing your posts, interactions may be minimal. Therefore it’s a good idea to decide who it is you’re writing to—be it a group of friends, family, or clients. This will help you maintain a consistent tone, as well as the honest, direct writing style that is generally expected from a blog.

2. Knowing what to blog

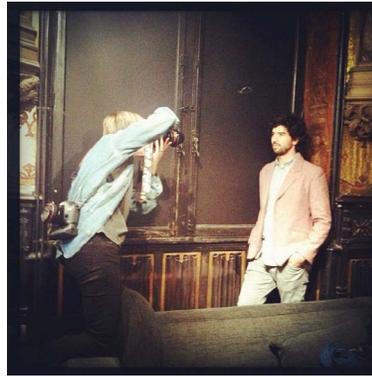
You might have just gotten back from a long assignment overseas and your client images can’t be made public yet, but you’re dying to share what you’ve seen. That’s where the blog comes in. Allison uses her blog to show off her Hipstamatic images that can be stand-ins for an assignment she’s just had. Her blog is a place for images that she wants to share but doesn’t necessarily want representing her body of work. “The blog has become a home for images that might not make it on my website, ever, but I still want to share and archive,” she says. “For example, photographs made with my iPhone using the Hipstamatic app. I am eager to share them on my blog and Instagram, but not so much on my website.”

Allison’s Hipstamatic series from the Dallas Art Fair:



“Because I am waiting for my images to be published before sharing on my blog or website, I share images taken of me ‘in action.’ It gives an editor who has never met me a sense of my simple editorial style,” says Allison about this post.

“Because I am waiting for my images to be published before sharing on my blog or website, I share images taken of me ‘in action.’ It gives an editor who has never met me a sense of my simple editorial style.”



And, of course, Allison uses her blog to promote whatever she is working on. “I [produce an online magazine once a year](#) which requires more time to produce. I use my blog to promote and sell it. The magazine posts are generally the most commented on in my blog.”



DO THIS

- Blog about recent assignments, and post your smartphone photos. Apps such as [Hipstamatic](#) and [Instagram](#) have become wildly popular, so even though they won't be as polished as your other work might be, you are still engaging in the industry while showing off your eye and passion for the work.
 - Post images that you've “self-assigned.” Sometimes it's necessary to give yourself the task of doing the work you'd like to be doing. And a blog is the perfect publishing platform for these kinds of “assignments.” Allison says, “In these lean assignment times I often self-assign, and it can pay off. I stay busy shooting things I am interested in. Recently [NPR Picture Show blog featured some my latest self-assigned blog posts](#) on their blog.”
 - Blog what's inspiring you. The possibilities are endless. Allison says her blog posts range from something, “as simple as [a song that's helping me through an edit](#)” to her “[passion for book collecting](#)” to “[an homage to one of my favorite photographers, William Eggleston](#).”
 - Consider how your images might be used. It's the age of the Internet, which means your images can be shared despite your best attempts at protecting them. Allison says, “It won't stop me from sharing. I size my images small and keep up with copyrights. As a reminder I add ©Allison V. Smith to all the photographs I post.”
-

3. Promoting your blog

A blog, like any publishing platform, needs an audience. Allison's audience may grow organically, but don't mistake that to mean she is passive with her marketing. After each post, Allison tweets and shares it on LinkedIn. She watches her analytics, which she can access through her blog's back end, to see how her posts are doing and which get more hits than others. And promotion works both ways. For example, Allison says



that after reading a blog she wrote, the [Daily Beast showcased her current photography show at the Marfa Contemporary](#) on their Tumblr page.



DO THIS

- Promote each blog post you write on your other social media platforms - and be engaging. Give a short teaser to your blog that will entice people to click through and read.
- Make note of which posts are most popular so that you can begin to focus your posts for optimal traffic.
- Determine what role your blog plays in your overall marketing so that you can best utilize using other social media platforms in tandem.



photo credit: Allison Smith

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Photo Guide: The Photography Blog Handbook](#)
- [Blog: “5 Reasons Blogging is Crucial for Good SEO”](#)
- [Blog: “Using Your Blog to Attract Your Ideal Client”](#)
- [Blog: “9 Ways To Blog More In Less Time”](#)
- [Wordpress PhotoShelter plugin](#)
- [Graph Paper Press PhotoShelter plugin](#)



Improving YOUR SEO TRAFFIC

Featuring *Outdoor and Nature Photographer Jim Goldstein*

Jim Goldstein, a California-based outdoor and nature photographer, has been a professional photographer for over a decade. Jim [teaches workshops](#), has an e-book on creating high-impact images, and writes about the ins and outs of photography.

By day a photographer, by night (or mid-afternoon) Jim is a web marketer and strategist. This is why we asked him to give us [some pointers for photographers to boost their SEO](#) (Search Engine Optimization) to help you get recognized by major search engines, and ultimately by potential clients.

1. Know your brand

The first step to tackling SEO is knowing your brand, or what the core focus of your business is going to be. “If you have a good grasp of your brand, then you’ll have a better idea of key terms and phrases you’re going to use for optimization going forward,” Jim says. Because SEO has to do with being found online, the more you know what you offer—your specialty, your services, and products—the more you will come to understand what keywords to associate with your business and what people will be typing in Google when they are looking for images like yours.

So if you haven’t been thinking about SEO, how do you know the terms or words someone is using when they search for images like yours? “It’s a learning process,” says Jim. “Few people are able to know right away. It’s like a five-year-old what they want to be when they grow up. It’s essentially, trial and error.



Website:

<http://www.jmg-galleries.com/>

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/jmggalleries>

Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/jimgoldstein>



DO THIS

- Write out a brand statement (who you are, what kind of work you do, and what your specialty is within the market). An important part of any business is its brand. If you haven’t done it yet, take a step back to your positioning statement (see the section in this guide called “4 major questions to address in 2013”) and then expand upon it making a list of key phrases that describe your brand.



- After you list keywords and phrases that you think someone would use when trying to find work like yours, expand the list to include synonyms of those words and phrases with a similar meaning. To help you with this, you can use [Google's useful keyword generator](#), which lets you type in a word and see other common alternatives. Type in a word or phrase, enter your website name and the market category, and the generator will give you a list of commonly searched phrases, how often they are searched for globally as well as locally, and how much “competition” that phrase has.

- Peruse other photo blogs or websites similar to yours, then Google them using phrases you think they would “pop” for. See where they rank (how high up on the search they appear). Check out how that photographer has labeled his or her images, what the blog titles say, and take note of patterns. Though Jim says this is by no means an exact science, there are a few tools you can use to get a handle on someone’s SEO strategy: [Com-pete.com](#) and [Seomoz.org](#) are two that show you how your competitors stack up.

2. Remember, everything you do is SEO

The good news is, everything you do online contributes to your SEO efforts, including blogging. Jim posts on his blog about once a week and has trained himself to write each post with SEO in mind.

“People are contributing to their search-engine rankings whether they think they are or not,” Jim says. “Inaction is essentially action, as backwards as that sounds.” By not posting often, and not adding keywords to images, you’re sending a message to Google that your content is old, which means that you will be hard to find online. This reflects poorly on your business and can even be a turnoff for clients.

When Jim posts images on his blog, creates his blog titles and descriptions, and promotes the links through social media, he reiterates the terms he identifies as core to describing his business. He says, “If you educate yourself, then almost every marketing effort can be connected to SEO. By adding metadata to your photos, publishing work online, and having text around it, or even just linking back to your site with the proper wording, that is helpful for SEO. If you have it on your mind it will appear in everything that you do. I think that’s the best practice.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Blog: “5 Reasons Blogging is Crucial for Good SEO”](#)
- [Blog: “What Is Anchor Text and Why Should You Care?”](#)
- [A Brand New SEO Workbook and Bootcamp](#)
- [SEO for Photographers Bootcamp & Guide](#)
- [Google's official blog](#)
- [Majesticseo.com](#)
- [www.reelseo.com](#)
- [Searchengineland](#)
- [Marketing Grader](#)
- [PhotoShelter SEO grader](#)
- [PhotoMetadata.org: “Meta 101”](#)



DO THIS

- Include as much [metadata](#) and description as you can to every image you publish online. Be consistent with your tagging. If you choose to forgo all image descriptions, metadata and smart blog titles, it can negatively impact your chances of being found. (Metadata is information – data – stored within a digital image file. If you want to learn more about [embedding metadata, check out these tutorials for different image software](#)). Not only does this help SEO, it can help protect your images from theft and misuse.
 - Remember that “inaction is action.” Be active with your blog and website updates so that Google sees your content as fresh. Regularly update your website and social media platforms. By ignoring them you’re telling the search engines you’re not relevant—the opposite effect you’re looking for to help improve where you rank on Google.
-

3. Update, update, update

Just when you think you’ve got the keywords and tagging down, it’s time to reevaluate. “SEO is a moving target, things are always changing, and no company stays the same. The market is always changing, too,” says Jim. “You might have to revolutionize your approach. Don’t become complacent; stay consistent.” That’s why Jim says that ideally you should be spending one hour a week on your SEO efforts. Jim spends most of this time on his blog, which is what he links everything back to.

DO THIS

- Google yourself and refine the keywords and phrases as your business and services or the language your specialty and industry uses changes.
 - Work on improving your search-engine rankings for at least one hour a week. Whether it’s updating code, blogging, or adding description to your image gallery.
-



photo credit: Jim Goldstein



Getting

MORE WORK FROM YOUR OLD CLIENTS

Featuring 33PHOTO's Industrial and Corporate Photographer, Martin Vargas

Martin Vargas is an industrial and corporate photographer who runs a visual communications company called [33PHOTO](http://33photo.com). He works throughout the year with some of Mexico's biggest corporations to document how they operate and innovate within their industries. Clients continue to work with 33PHOTO year after year because they know Martin's crew has the work ethic, equipment, and expertise to meet any and all environmental challenges they encounter.

In 2012, approximately 80 percent of Martin's clients were repeat clients, a handful of which he's worked with for over 15 years. So why do they keep coming back? We asked Martin what he does to get more work from old clients.

1. Do your research.

"Researching and keeping tabs on your old clients is essential for getting new work," Martin says. For example, this year, Martin signed up for every newsletter and promotion from his corporate clients. Skimming the emails every day, he read that a previous client had recently appointed a new CEO. A lightbulb went off. This new CEO would need headshots to hand off to the press—and that was a service Martin could deliver.

Martin was proactive and pitched the idea, and the client was happy to hire him for the job. Not only did Martin get more work, but he impressed the client with his initiative to closely follow their business and reach out.



Website:

<http://33photo.com/33/>

Twitter:

[@33photo](https://twitter.com/33photo)



DO THIS

- Sign up for your clients' newsletters or blog RSS feeds and carve out 15 minutes to skim the updates every day. Don't delete these without reading—you signed up for a reason!
- Create [Google Alerts](#) for your clients 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.

2. Remember to actively market to old clients.

Even with clients you've known for years, you shouldn't be too casual or assumptive with your marketing efforts (e.g. think that they'll remember to reach out to you when they have a new job). Instead, implement a marketing strategy where you routinely (though no more than once a month) let old clients know about the things you're up to. In 2012, Martin made a deliberate decision to send old clients well-curated portfolios with updates on 33PHOTO's new work that was relevant to the clients' business needs.

Case in point: this year Martin decided to reach out to an older client—a luxury department store in Mexico—he hadn't heard from in over two years. Determined to reconnect, he put together a portfolio that included work from their previous project together, plus additional images which captured the look and feel they wanted to achieve for the client moving forward. He curated and delivered a portfolio online, and the client responded immediately saying, "This is perfect timing, this is exactly what we're looking for." Martin got the job.

Implement a marketing strategy where you routinely let old clients know about the things you're up to.



DO THIS

- Keep track of your interactions with clients. Use a spreadsheet of all clients you've worked with and add a column for the date of your last assignment with them. Also add a column for all the dates you've "checked-in" since working together.
- Before reconnecting with an old client, ask yourself critical questions like, "What new work would appeal to them today and why?"
- Get creative with how you follow up with old clients. Sending a portfolio is not the only way. Also consider postcards, social media messages, photo books, tear sheets, etc. What kind of marketing will highlight your services the best and why?
- Don't be discouraged if you haven't heard back from a client in years. As Martin will tell you, getting new work from old clients often comes down to good timing. Don't take a client's silence to mean they don't want to work with you or are uninterested in your services. Be politely persistent.
- When you reconnect, remind the client (if necessary) how you worked together in the past and even remind them where you're located. They might be juggling just as many moving pieces and working relationships as you are.



3. Find like-minded clients, because those are the ones who will come back for more.

Martin says a large reason he often gets new work from old clients is because his team works with folks who share their values. At 33PHOTO, they are passionate about what they do, are service-oriented, take pride in their work, and are determined to “take away the headache” from clients. Martin argues that finding clients who share your values is key to keeping clients in the future. “You don’t have friends who have different values than you, so why should you have clients who do?” Martin says the way to find these clients takes practice. “It’s a lot like dating,” he says. “Finding clients who share your values is more of an art form and requires a level of ‘feeling them out’ and asking yourself key questions after each interaction.”



DO THIS

- Make a list of value-based adjectives that describe your business (ie: honest, client-centered, creative, responsive, service-oriented, etc).

 - Make a similar list of adjectives that describe your ideal client (ie: honest, responsive, communicative, etc).

 - Think about questions to ask yourself when you meet a client for the first time to help you assess compatibility in work styles and values. Questions like:
 - Can they clearly communicate their needs?
 - Are they transparent and open about their timelines, expectations, and budget?
 - Do you they share potential pitfalls or challenges with the project?
 - Do they encourage in-person meetings?

 - Assess how clients answer those questions above. If you feel like a client is a good fit for your business and you click professionally, this will help your chances of getting work from that client again.
-



photo credit: Martin Vargas



BEATING THE COMPETITION:

In 2012, one of 33PHOTO's greatest challenges working with old clients was navigating the new wave of photographers charging \$100/day to do the "same work." "At times, old clients would call and ask why we're overcharging them, which was difficult because we've always prided ourselves on being a reasonably priced service," Martin says. "Regardless of the lower rates from competition, we've been able to keep our clients because we can clearly articulate the value we provide."

Here's a list of value-based items Martin asks clients to consider when they question his price (in addition to line items that add to the cost of doing business):

- Creativity, passion, commitment
- Expert guidance in technology and equipment usage
- A strong knowledge of the client's business and the industry it operates in
- Ability to tackle any problem and alleviate headaches instead of creating them
- Ability to take a project on and control it from day one
- Ability to problem solve and get results in little time
- Hard work and discipline
- Streamlined full Double Negative (DNG) workflow, digital delivery, and backup
- Video capabilities
- A fully bilingual team
- Up-to-date passports and visas for all photographers and their assistants
- Local and cultural knowledge
- A fun team to work with

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Calculate your cost of doing business: NPPA](#)
- [Webcast: Newsweek's Senior International Photo Editor Jamie Wellford: What photo editors want](#)
- [Photography Pricing: How To Find a Reasonable Rate](#)



Creating

A REAL BRAND FOR YOUR PHOTO BUSINESS

Featuring Photojournalist Ben Lowy

Ben Lowy is an award-winning conflict and feature photographer based in New York City. He's covered major stories worldwide, including the Iraq and Afghan wars. Several of his images were chosen by PDN as among the most iconic of the 21st century. Hipstamatic has also created the "Ben Lowy" lens after he used the app to document life in Afghanistan and was featured by *The New York Times*.

But alongside his award-winning photography is a distinct business brand that helps him reach more clients. What is Ben's brand and what characteristics define his business? Ben is considered a sophisticated photojournalist who takes advantage of social media and is highly mobile. He embraces iPhone photography and filters including Hipstamatic (not just his own lens!) and Instagram, where he currently has over 20,000 followers. The design of his site and his logo also fall in sync with his brand and his love for innovation and technology—it's sleek, clean, and modern.

Branding is a concept that can be elusive to many, but it's a key element that touches every aspect of your business. A brand is more than your logo or the color scheme you choose for your website. Your brand is evident through your niche, your technical style, your website, the way you interact with your clients, and much more. The good news is that, as an artist, you already have a distinct style and point of view—which are essentially what make up your brand. You just need to consciously identify the characteristics of that style and make sure they are apparent throughout your marketing.

Here are three tips to build your photo brand in 2013:

1. Focus on a niche.

When you develop your brand, you develop the identity of your business. Are you a high-end fashion photographer known for your impeccable client service? Are you an edgy wedding photographer who shoots only alternative couples? "The more focused your specialty is, the more effectively you can communicate your product, services, and values—in essence, your brand—to potential clients," Ben points out.



Website:

<http://benlowy.com/>

Instagram:

<http://instagram.com/benlowy>

Tumblr:

<http://www.benlowy.com/#/tumblr-blog>



Ben also says that identifying your target audience—knowing who and where these clients are—is key to establishing a brand that resonates. “Know who you’re talking to and think through ways your business can appeal to them and why. You don’t want to offer what everyone else does; you want to offer a unique experience and service,” he says. Whatever “makes you special” is what defines your brand and ultimately your entire business.



DO THIS

- To help better identify your target audience, 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.
 - List out your clients’ needs and pain points one by one. Determine how your services will address those needs.
 - 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 to show only the work you want your target client to see.
-

2. Dedicate time to social media.

With over 20,000 followers on [Instagram](#) and a [Tumblr](#) blog he updates daily, Ben realized very early on that as he grew a steady following, he would need to think about how to present his work. This meant he would have to think carefully about the tone of his posts, the photos he chose, the frequency he would share content, and more. Consistency in these areas can often help define and strengthen a brand.

When sharing his work through social media, Ben makes an important distinction between his social media followers and potential clients: “The interesting thing about social media is that many of your followers are not future clients or even in the industry, they’re just fans. This means the work you should feature should be interesting, not necessarily always a photo that is technically your best shot.”



DO THIS

- Get a hold of who your social media followers are. Each day, click on a handful of followers’ profiles to get a better sense of these folks—their interests, their careers, where they live, etc. Keep a log of any trends you notice. An understanding of your followers will guide you on which content will be most engaging.
- Update regularly. We recommend posting on Facebook at least once a day and tweeting at least twice a day. If you rarely post, you don’t give followers a reason to come back and interact with your work, which defeats the purpose of social media altogether.



- If you plan to share many photos, think about which platforms (i.e.: Facebook, Instagram, Google+) are best for photo sharing and will display nicely on iPhones and iPads.
- If you choose to be present on multiple social media platforms, aim to have the same username on each. We recommend using your full name. The consistency will help reinforce your brand across your online presence.

3. Your logo isn't everything, but it does matter.

A well-designed logo is only part of your brand, but it can make an impact on potential clients. When visiting your website, it can be one of the first creative pieces someone sees. As the symbol of your brand, your logo will also touch all aspects of your business including your website, your Facebook page, your newsletter, your blog, and even your final invoice.

For example, Ben's logo is bold and modern and creatively joins the first letters of his first and last name. The design combines grey and orange in a standard Helvetica font that appears consistently across different browsers. The logo is sleek and clean, which complements his mobile-friendly workflow and forward-thinking photo business. Ben told us that his logo, which his wife helped design, came as inspiration from one of his favorite comic book series characters, Tony Stark from *Iron Man*.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Blog: "Special Offer: 10 Business Branding Secrets for Photographers"](#)
- [Blog: "Facebook Timeline: 5 New Tools For Your Photo Brand"](#)
- [Brand Designers: MyEmma blog](#)
- [Branding Firm: Seebrandgo](#)



DO THIS

- Make a list of the brands whose logos you like and list out the characteristics that appeal to you and why. Since there is often a fine line between you, your business, and your personality, find styles and designs you gravitate toward and think through how you can reflect certain elements into your own branding.
- Brainstorm the concept of your logo. Ask yourself questions like: Does it represent your business? Does it stand out? Can it work in black and white or on different colored backgrounds? Does it look too much like other logos? Can it still work in five years?
- Decide the budget for your logo design. If you can't hire a professional designer to do the job, is there a friend with basic design skills you can approach? Ask your social media networks if there's anyone they can recommend.



Managing YOUR FINANCES

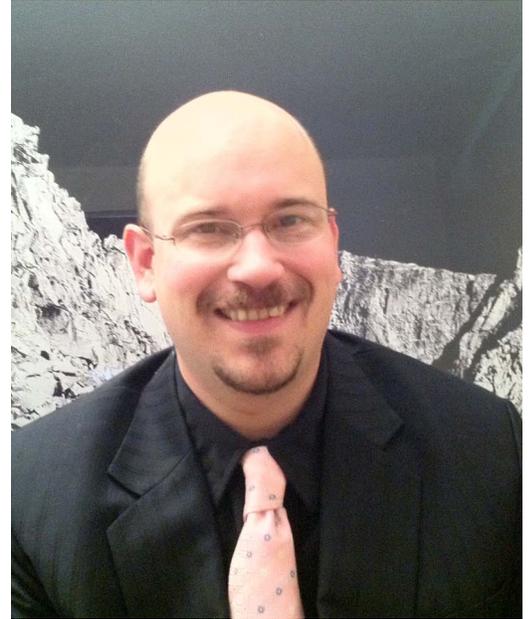
Featuring Matthew T. Whatley, aka the “Tax Ninja”

The Tax Ninja, aka Matthew T. Whatley, has been helping photographers and other small business owners in the arts manage their finances since 2004. The Tax Ninja is very well versed in the issues photographers encounter when it comes to write-offs and income declaration.

Matthew chatted with us about common tax mistakes professional photographers make, how they can prep now to save money later, and when to invest in new gear. According to Matthew, becoming a tax ninja isn't all that hard: “It's not a question of teaching somebody, it's a matter getting them to actually do it and change their habits. The more people participate in the organization of their own data and the preparation of their tax returns, the more they learn how things work.”

1. First, get organized.

The first step in becoming a tax ninja yourself is [getting organized](#). Save receipts and keep accurate records of your expenses (and above all, schedule time to do it). For those in the U.S., the easiest thing to do, says Matthew, is to open a separate business account. Use a credit card associated with that account for every expense. Now is the time to really assess your business. What are your expenses? What are your tools? What gear do you have, and what do you need? Where is your office (in the kitchen or local coffee shop), and how are you getting there?



Website:

<http://www.taxninja.com/>



DO THIS

- Open a business account (separate bank account, separate credit card). Use the bank card or credit card for any and all business-related expenses. This way keeping track of your expenditures will be greatly simplified. “So that you can tell us,” says Matthew, “if you spent \$3.95 at Walgreens and whether you purchased paper clips for your business or a couple of sodas. You won't miss any of the minor details.”
- Keep a mileage log in your car (looking back through your calendar or email at the very least can help figure out where you went and why). “Unless you use a vehicle 100 percent for business, you're not going to be able to write off all the costs of the vehicle. You're going to have a personal versus business amount of write-off,” says Matthew. So when you're heading to a job, start counting.



- Keep track of the details: It sounds simple, but be aware of exactly how much you're making and how much you're spending—even if it's paper clips and envelopes. “The sum total of all the little things are usually what saves you,” says Matthew. “That's where you get 10 to 20 percent tax savings out of your preparation.”
-

2. Know your write-offs.

This is what stumps photographers the most. But figuring out what you can and can't write off can be as simple as reviewing an itemized tax form. If you want a little help, [check out the Tax Ninja's form](#). “The general rule is, if it's ordinary and necessary for your business and the generation of its income, it can become a write-off.”



DO THIS

- Write off all meals on a business trip when you travel over 50 miles from home.
 - Only write off meals that directly relate to business—schmoozing clients or taking a client to lunch.
 - Write off the correct percentage of your home for an at-home office. If you keep a room with no personal use items (your DVD collection or that NordicTrack you still need to offload) then you can write-off the proportion of your business use of your home. If it's a quarter of your living space then you can deduct a quarter of the rent...and the utilities, and the cleaning bills, and your Internet, trash collection, etc.
 - Combine work and play. Are you going on vacation but intend to build your portfolio of stock images by taking pictures each day? That could make it a write-offable trip. “An example of that is a food blog,” says Matthew. You photograph and blog about everything you eat and drink. Or, maybe you're learning cinematography by reading an industry magazine or watching an online tutorial you had to pay for. Yep, write that off. As Matthew says, as a general rule, “Think in advance how you're going to make it an expense.”
-

3. Educate yourself, and then get someone to do it for you.

Know how best to file—should you be an LLC or a sole proprietor? Most photographers, says Matthew, don't need to incorporate (become an S Corp or LLC). There's no requirement to incorporate to start writing things off. Matthew says that taking out business insurance for \$300 will be a more reasonable investment for most photographers than creating an LLC.

Know what sales tax you should be paying as well as what kind of license your city requires. If you're delivering “tangible goods” (a print, say), then you probably have to charge sales tax. Make sure you have a local license to collect tax, otherwise you could get slapped with a fine.



DO THIS

- If you're completely self-employed, file on a quarterly basis so that you can accurately pay your estimated taxes. "If you don't pay quarterly, you have to pay a penalty for failing to pay quarterly, which is two percent of the tax due."
 - Find an accountant. If this all sounds daunting, no need to fret. "If someone is afraid of doing something, they should have someone do it for them," says Matthew. Start by asking friends or searching online at peer-reviewed sites (Angie's List, Yelp.com). When you find someone who looks good, ask how long they've been in business, how much they know about the business of photography, and how much they charge. This can vary quite a bit.
 - Read and become familiar with a [Schedule C](#), which lists deductible items.
 - Invest in gear wisely. Matthew says that often photographers get "gear happy" and buy more than their business really needs. Sometimes, depending on the size and scope of your business, renting gear and writing it off at the end of the year is a far better strategy. "If you're making \$50k in year one but next year you plan on making \$100k, you should probably wait to purchase your gear until next year simply because you're going to be in a higher tax bracket," he says. Then when your business grows and suddenly you need to write off large ticket items, you can buy that \$10k lens knowing you're satisfying your business and tax needs at once. And you can invoice for the rental of the gear, mark it up, and make some money. Says Matthew, "Knowing when to spend your money is one crucial factor."
-

4. Build contracts.

"The most important thing to deal with in a contract is getting paid: who's supposed to pay, when they're supposed to pay you, and how much. And, having some kind of penalty associated with not paying you," says Matthew. So build "teeth" into your contracts. What does that mean? It can mean that when you deliver a contract to potential clients, somewhere in there it states the legal ramifications of nonpayment, including how legal fees will be reimbursed if you need to go down that road. It could also mean that you write into your contract how much the clients agree to pay in late fees if they don't pay on time. Make sure to define what services you're performing—and avoid "scope-creep," which is a client asking for more and more without paying extra.

"The most important thing to deal with in a contract is getting paid: who's supposed to pay, when they're supposed to pay you, and how much."

If you're doing the hiring and paying a subcontractor more than \$600 a year, know that you have to file a W-9. Make sure your subcontractors know this before they start working for you. They may think that they are working "under the table" and won't be taxed, but you could be left with a serious fine if you get audited by the IRS or state or local tax authority.



DO THIS

- Learn or have someone help you build a contract with “teeth.” Your best bet is to have a lawyer help create a “boilerplate” contract for you that you can then customize for each new client. If you’re interested in learning [industry standards for pricing, copyright, and licensing, the American Society of Media Photographers](#) has some great resources.
 - Ask for example contracts your photographer friends have used and highlight sections that are common among them. You can also find examples of contracts by searching online.
 - Find out from the start—i.e. before hiring—whether you’ll need to consider your assistants as subcontractors, independent contractors, or employees. If you have someone working for you every day, all day, and aren’t claiming them as an employee, you might be in for a nasty fine.
-

SPECIAL OFFER

Kick off 2013 with a free 30-day PhotoShelter trial and build a stronger photography website today. Just enter **2013BIZPLAN** when you visit photoshelter.com/signup. Our client services team is available M-F, 9-6pm ET if you have any questions. Call 212.206.0808 or shoot us an email at support@photoshelter.com

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Blog: “Should Photographers Incorporate? Here’s How To Tell.”](#)
- [Best Business Practices for Photographers by John Harrington](#)
- [American Photographic Artists: Resources](#)
- [Copyright Alliance Education Foundation curriculum](#)
- [Business and legal FAQs for photographers from the American Society of Media Photographers](#)
- [Pricing guides from ASMP](#)
- mint.com
- [Quickbooksonline](#)
- [Freshbooks](#)
- taxninja.com

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