

The background image is a photograph of a modern, multi-story building with a curved facade and large windows. In the foreground, there is a courtyard area with a large, abstract sculpture that resembles a globe on a pedestal. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT COMMERCIAL PHOTOGRAPHER FOR YOUR NEEDS

THE FIVE STEPS YOU NEED TO FOLLOW, THE QUESTIONS TO ASK, AND HOW TO IDENTIFY A QUALITY IMAGE SO YOU CAN SELECT THE RIGHT PHOTOGRAPHER.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

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INTRODUCTION

As a photographer that helps builders, architects, real estate agents, accommodation and hospitality businesses with their photography and marketing, I meet a lot of business owners who know very little about photography or how to tell one photographer from another. If that sounds like you then I created this report to provide you with a framework that will help you select the right photographer for your business.

If you're looking for a photographer to create marketing images for the promotion of your business or you as a brand then this report will give you:

- three things to look for when assessing a photo of the interior or exterior of a building
- six questions to ask any photographer
- a list of things that you'll need to share with a photographer so that they can give you the best possible quote for what you need

To make the most of this report I would suggest that you read through it all now, and then keep it on file as you go through your photographer selection process. There is a lot here, and you may find it helpful to refer back to the specifics of each step as you move through the process.

Hopefully you will involve me and my company in your selection process, and whether we end up working together or not I hope you find this guide helpful, and that you are able to select a photographer that meets your needs. If there's anything else I can help you with then feel free to give me a call and I'd be happy to arrange a time to sit down with you and have a close look at your business and what photographer would be the best fit for your needs.



Shooting for your success -

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ASSESS EACH PHOTOGRAPHER

So you've found some photographers online, or maybe a friend or colleague has referred a photographer they know to you. Now you need to assess each photographer to make sure they are right for your company.

Make sure they can do what you need:

Each photographer does one field of photography better than others. Sure, you'll find photographers who will say they can do everything, but they are probably not the kind of photographer you want. A photographer who does a little bit of everything is not going to have the specialized skill in what you are after to deliver the best images and therefore the best results.

So if you're a builder looking for a photographer to shoot your latest project then hiring a photographer who normally does weddings, and who says that they've photographed the inside of a church so therefore they can shoot your construction project, is probably not the best option for you.

Assess the quality of their images:

The best thing you can do is look at their portfolio to make sure the quality of their work matches the quality of what you do. For example, if you are a low-cost service provider then it may be acceptable for you to use lower quality photography because that's what your clients and prospects might expect. Having said that, if you are low-cost but feature high-quality images in your marketing then that will increase the perceived value of your products and services, making your business even more attractive to potential customers.

However, if you're a high-cost, high-quality service provider then there would be a significant disconnect if you were to use low-quality photography in the marketing of your business. In that situation, the use of magazine-quality images is absolutely essential in order to maintain that consistency between your marketing and what you deliver to your clients.

What does good photography look like?

Most non-photographers don't know how to assess a photo of a building, so I'm going to briefly outline three things that make a great photo. They are:

Beautifully lit rooms:

The number one thing that a lot of businesses get wrong when using their own images is that their photos are not beautifully lit. For example, a great interior image will be light and bright, and everything will be clearly visible. It should look like the kind of images we see when flicking through a magazine like Architectural Digest or Condé Nast Traveller.

Of course, some images may clearly show everything in the room, but they can also be flat and lifeless. That's what happens when the photographer does not have full control of the light entering the scene. When a photographer carefully controls the light, often by bringing in their own flashes and various light modifiers, that's when an image really 'pops'.

Straight verticals:

You'll often see interior photos where the walls and doors are angling in at the top or the bottom like a giant letter V. This is called 'converging verticals' and it happens when the person taking the photo is either leaning the camera slightly up or down. The result is that the room looks wonky and unnatural.

When we look at a room with the naked eye our brain automatically compensates for this by saying, "Hey, those walls are leaning in, but that's because you've got your head tilted, so we're going to factor that in and actually perceive it as being perfectly vertical, which is how it should be."

Brains are clever – cameras are not.

So a professional photographer should try and correct any converging verticals so that they are vertical in the photo. Granted, there may be times when it's not appropriate to correct verticals, such as when we are looking down to an entry foyer from the top of the stairs, but in most cases vertical walls are essential.

Accurate colors:

One of the most important features of a good photo is accurate colors. A photographer has not got it right if there are images that are very yellow due to the lighting in the room, or their images feature areas that look excessively blue or green. Color issues occur when the major light source in the photo is something like the halogen lights on the ceiling, which emit a very yellow and orange light. This 'warms up' the entire room, and without some good editing it can create images where the white things in the room actually look yellow.

A good photographer knows that if there is a ceiling, door or wall in a room that is white, then it should look white in the photos, and they'll be able to replicate that accurately.

Assess their website

A photographer's website will also give you a lot of clues as to their suitability to work with you, and should be assessed for more than the quality of photography.

For example, a low-quality photographer will often put a quick website together without much thought, and it may look somewhat amateurish. That first impression you have of those businesses is not positive, and quite often that first response is a valid one.

A great photographer, and the type you would want to be working with, will have a website that matches the quality of their business and the quality of their photography. It will look amazing, it will have great photos, and it will be informative in terms of what you need to know about that photographer before hiring them.

When we come across these sites it says to us that this photographer values professionalism, they are well organized, and they are thorough with their business and their service.

Summary:

Once you've been through a photographer's images and assessed their website, it's time to decide if that particular photographer has shown you enough positive signs that it is worth keeping them on your list for Step 2. Some photographers will make the list, but some may not, and that's all part of this process of helping you to find the right photographer for what you need.

These are the things we look for when assessing an individual photographer:

With regard to their photos are the rooms beautifully lit?

Are all of the walls and doors straight (that is, are they parallel with the sides of the photo)?

Are the colors accurate, or are they excessively yellow / orange?

Is their website professional, and does it give you confidence in their abilities?

If a photographer gets a pass for each of those questions then it's time to move that photographer onto the next stage.

**MORE THAN 50% OF
CONSUMERS THINK A
HIGH-QUALITY PHOTO OF
A PRODUCT IS MORE
IMPORTANT THAN
PRODUCT INFORMATION,
LONG DESCRIPTION, OR
RATING AND REVIEWS.**

- NATIONAL RETAIL FEDERATION



SEND THEM A **MESSAGE**

The next step in evaluating a photographer is to either send them a message via email, or call them on the phone. A lot of businesses at this stage are simply making an inquiry with regard to price or availability, but what I would recommend you do is to use this as part of your assessment of that photographer.

Here's how you can assess each individual photographer:

Do they get back to you quickly?

You will be looking for a professional response, and one that is prompt and helpful. I can't tell you how many times I've reached out to a business and either never received a response, or it's taken a week or more for them to get back to me.

A photographer that responds to you promptly is a good sign that they are going to be prompt with their communication, and that's a big plus for you. There's nothing more frustrating than working with a business that doesn't tell you what's going on, so look for those warning signs from your very first enquiry to each photographer you speak with.

Ask them these six questions, and see if you are happy with their reply

When you first speak with a photographer, or when you send them a message, it can be helpful to ask them a few simple questions to provide you with as much information about them as you can. It's much better to get to a quick 'no' as far as their suitability goes, rather than to get a long way through talking about what you need, or the planning of a shoot, and then suddenly find out something that, if you had known from the beginning, would have disqualified them there and then.

Here is a list of questions that you're welcome to copy and paste into any communication you use with an architectural or interiors photographer:

1. Tell me about your experience with architectural photography and the types of clients you've worked with.
2. How would you typically photograph an interior space for a business like mine? Would you use multiple flashes, or just ambient light?
3. With regard to your pricing and licensing, what does your image licensing cover?
4. Are you fully covered by liability insurance in the case of an accident?
5. Do you prefer to work alone, or in partnership with your client?
6. Do you have a coach or mentor to help you develop your skills?

Let's have a quick look at the things to watch out for when reviewing the responses you receive:

1. "Tell me about your experience with architectural photography and the types of clients you've worked with."

You don't want a response like this:

"I'm a very skilled photographer in all fields, so I do weddings, pets, cars, and I've photographed a few buildings as well. I'm very good at it."

The photographer that does a bit of everything, but doesn't specialize in what you need, won't be well placed to handle all of the potential issues that can come up during a photo shoot. You would probably want to scratch them off your list immediately after getting a response that says that they are a generalist photographer.

You do want a response like this:

"I specialize in photographing buildings and structures for architects, builders, designers and real estate agents. It's my focus, I love it, and I immerse myself in those industries and that field of photography."

This photographer is clearly dedicated to the type of photography you need, and so they meet this particular criteria perfectly.

2. “How would you typically photograph an interior space for a business like mine? Would you use flashes, or just ambient light?”

Each space is different, but a photographer should have the skills and the equipment to use flash photography when it’s appropriate to do so. If they try and avoid the issue by saying that they’re very good at using ambient light then that may be a sign of inexperience when it comes to shooting interiors. However, if a photographer says that they often use multiple flashes for their interior photography then that’s a really good sign.

3. “With regard to your pricing and licensing, what does your image licensing cover?”

If you pay a photographer to take a photo then you can’t use that same photo forever, unless the photographer gives you permission to do that. The terms that a photographer sets regarding the use of their images is called image licensing, and some photographers will provide unlimited use and some won’t.

You see, photography is a lot like other media such as movies, music, and television shows. So let’s say you buy a copy of a recent movie on DVD, or download a file from the iTunes store. You can’t then go and make copies of that movie and sell it to kids in your neighborhood, nor can you upload the movie to YouTube.

Being ‘personal use only’ means you can invite a few friends and family members over and sit down and watch it, but you can’t buy a movie for \$12, then setup your own TV network and broadcast that movie to the general public. If you want to broadcast a movie then you have to pay more for it in the first place because you’re going to make more from it through advertising and promotion of your TV network.

In other words, that movie has more value to a TV network owner than it does to a family in the suburbs, so it’s only fair and reasonable that the TV network pays more for it.

How does image licensing work with photography?

If you want to use a photo for six months, then you’ll be paying the cheapest possible rate, but if you want to use a photo for five years, then the time frame for which you will use the photo increases, and therefore the fee that most photographers will charge increases as well.

Does the business hiring the photographer own the images?

All ownership of the photos remains with the photographer unless the photographer agrees to release the ownership, which would usually require an additional fee.

What this means is that if you hire a photographer to shoot a project then you can use those photos in the promotion of your business, but you can't give them away to another party.

If another party loves the images and wants to use them, then suggest that they approach the photographer directly. Pass on the photographer's details, and they can work out an appropriate fee between them. That way you'll know that you're doing the right thing and not risking court proceedings with the photographer, the other party is also doing the right thing, and the photographer will think you're fantastic (and maybe even present you with a little thank you gift)!

4. “Are you fully covered by liability insurance in the case of an accident?”

Accidents happen on a shoot, and you want to be sure that the people you are inviting to work at your business, or more importantly a location that belongs to a client of yours, are fully covered should anything go wrong.

For example, if you're at a site and the photographer is flying a drone, and it should happen to crash into a building or individual, then you could be held liable for any damages if that photographer is not fully insured. So make sure that they are covered, for your sake, for their sake, and for any clients or customers of yours. If they aren't covered, then they are taking too many risks and you shouldn't be hiring them.

5. “Do you prefer to work alone, or in partnership with your client?”

Unless you have a strong preference one way or the other, you'll find that either situation can work well for you. However, you want to make sure the photographer is able to accommodate your needs and preferences, and if they are unwilling to listen to your input then that's not a good sign.

Having said that, make sure that you are willing to listen to their suggestions as a photographic professional as well, and be flexible in your approach. If an experienced photographer says that such and such a situation is not going to work then either listen and go along with their plan, or ask that they create an image as per your request, and also using their preferred suggestion.

6. “Do you have a coach or mentor to help you develop your skills?”

This might seem like a strange question, but it’s a good way of sorting the pros from the rest. A photographer that works with a coach or mentor is taking their business very seriously, and they are clearly dedicated to improving their skills for the sake of their clients.

This is not a deal breaker by any means, but my experience with working with a coach in my own photography business, and perhaps this is your experience as well, is that it has helped me to adopt a higher level of service and professionalism. It’s led me to create systems and processes within my business that best serve my clients and prospects, and I think a photographer that has invested in their company in this way is going to be a far more professional business, and probably much easier for you to deal with, than a photographer who has done everything by themselves with no third party guidance.

Cut your list of photographers

Now that you’ve asked your list of photographers about them and how they work, it’s time to cut your list and remove the names that don’t pass this second phase of your decision-making process.

Which ones pass, and which ones don’t?

You may find that your list is getting smaller, and that’s exactly what you want.

Write down your new list of photographers, and proceed to step 3 with the photographers that have passed this second stage. So far it’s been all about them, but in step 3 the focus will be on your company and the project that you would like photographed, and you’ll be asking the photographers on your list to listen to what you need.



**"USE VISUALS
EFFECTIVELY. THE HUMAN
BRAIN PROCESSES VISUALS
60,000 TIMES FASTER
THAN TEXT, AND
MILLENNIAL BUYERS
HIGHLY RESONATE WITH
PHOTO-DRIVEN
EXPERIENCES."**

**- EKATERINA WALTER, 'THE POWER OF
VISUAL STORYTELLING: HOW TO USE
VISUALS, VIDEOS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA
TO MARKET YOUR BRAND'.**

STEP 3.

REQUEST A MEETING TO DISCUSS THE PROJECT

Step 3 in this process is to request a meeting with each photographer, or have a lengthy conversation by phone, and this is important because it will tell you how committed the photographer is to the project or to working with your business long-term. Some photographers take a cookie-cutter approach to their work, and apply the same process to each business. Their business is a factory, and your business is seen as just another product on the assembly line of sameness, and so this kind of photographer will often try and avoid meetings, hoping for the easiest way to a photo shoot booking.

On the other hand, the photographer who agrees to meet with you, or to having a phone conversation to discuss your needs, is more focused on the details and the individual requirements of your business. They want to know what you are looking for and what outcomes you want to achieve, and they want to work with you and listen to you outline your thoughts so that they can create a custom approach to your photographic needs now, and into the future.

During the meeting you will want to provide the photographer with sufficient information so that they can put a detailed quote together for you. The photographer will want to know:

- Approximately how many photos you'll be needing. If you can provide the photographer with a specific shot list that would be great, so put some thought into that prior to meeting with the photographer.
- Whether you require daytime or twilight images (and if you're not sure what works best, ask the photographer and see if they can provide an informed opinion on this).
- Where will the images be used. For example, will they be on your website, or are they to be used in a nation-wide magazine campaign? This may impact upon the price of the photography, so be as clear as you can with the photographer. If you aren't quite sure on image use, let the photographer know and they can discuss

different options with you.

- The location of the photo shoot. If the location is some distance away then this may impact upon the price that a photographer charges.
- When the photo shoot needs to take place, and whether there are tight deadlines with regard to the delivery of the edited images.
- Who will be present for the shoot. Some photographers prefer to have a representative from the company at the shoot from start to finish, and others prefer to work solo. It is generally helpful to assist the photographer as much as possible, but if you have a preference one way or the other then make sure that is raised, and listen to what the photographer has to say with regard to the feasibility and appropriateness of your request.
- If you require a certain look for the images, or whether you are leaving that decision to the photographers. Some companies are very strict with regard to the style they require, and may have a Photographic Styling Guide. Feel free to contact me for details on how to create your own Guide so you have a consistent look to all of the images you use in print and online.
- Whether any staging of the photos will need to be done, or whether there will be other parties present to coordinate that.
- Whether you require models in the final images, either real or virtual. Virtual models are photos of real people that have been cut out of other images, and are digitally placed inside another photo so that it looks like there are people in the room. It's not quite as good as the real thing, but it is certainly a very cost-effective option if the inclusion of people in a space is important. However, you will need to talk with your photographer to find out if it's possible to do this in a given scene as there are times when this option is not a viable one.
- If there are special post-production editing requirements for the images, such as the inclusion or exclusion of certain items (such as adding furniture to a room, or removing excess items from a room or exterior).
- During this meeting or phone call you'll want to pay attention to the way the photographer communicates with you, and whether you feel comfortable with them and confident that they can deliver what you need. This is an important decision for your company, so you want to be thorough with your decision making.

Request a quote

If you are confident with what the photographer presents to you during this time, ask them to put a quote together for you in writing, and let them know if you have any deadlines that they will need to meet with regard to the return of that quote.

STEP 4.

REVIEW THE **QUOTE**

After receiving the quote from the photographer, carefully review it for more than just the fee.

For example, did they send a short email giving just the price for the shoot, or did they add extra content to ensure you have a complete and thorough understanding of what they'll be delivering?

Their communication skills are an important factor to consider, and you will want to be working with a photographer that is thorough with their quote delivery because it suggests that they will probably also be thorough with their photography. A photographer that is careless with their communication can make for a very frustrating and time-consuming experience, so pay attention to these little clues and you'll be much better off later.

Don't automatically hire the cheapest photographer:

When considering the fee it can be tempting to select the photographer that presented the lowest price. However, this can have negative repercussions for your company in terms of the way it presents your brand, but the cheap photographer could also be more expensive for you once all costs are considered.

You see, choosing a photographer is a lot like choosing a service provider in any industry - you get what you pay for. And if you don't pay much, you don't get much.

For example, we've all been in those situations where you see a cheap deal online, such as Rolex watches for \$8 and Gucci handbags for \$25. You know immediately that there's a reason why they're so cheap, and it's because they're not the real deal.

It's the same thing when it comes to photography. You see one photographer who charges \$1,500, and then you see another photographer who will give you 30 images for \$300, and it's hard to ignore those cheap offers because they seem too good to be true. Well, they are too good to be true, and it comes down to the Total Cost of Payment.

What is the Total Cost of Payment for the photos created by different photographers?

The first thing we need to consider when selecting a photographer is the difference it makes to the presentation of your brand and your position in the market. Presenting yourself using the highest quality in photography should lead to more sales coming your way, based on the experience of many other businesses locally and nationally. So we look at the cost of hiring a photographer as an investment, and in this situation that means you want to be seeing more leads and more sales.

Let's do the numbers comparing a low-cost photographer with a high-cost photographer:

Let's suppose that:

Upfront fee for a low-cost photographer = \$300

Upfront fee for a high-cost photographer = \$1,500

The difference between a low-cost photographer and a high-cost photographer = \$1,200

So we know the total amount it will cost in extra fees, so now let's work on the benefits for you, and we'll start by considering the number of extra sales you'll pick up over 12 months, above what you would otherwise get. So let's see how these numbers might work out for you and your business:

Total value of sales over 12 months using low-cost photography = \$ _____

Total value of sales over 12 months using high-cost photography = \$ _____

Therefore, spending an extra \$1,200 on photography could potentially gain an extra \$ _____ in sales.

Would you spend an extra \$1,200 on each photo shoot if it meant even a 3% increase in sales for your business over the next 12 months?

There can be no doubt that better photography leads to more sales, since that's the main reason why the big corporations spend many thousands of dollars on photography for each and every advertising campaign. We know that they measure and track everything they do, so we can assume that quality photography is not something they would do if it didn't give them a competitive advantage.

Research in the field of online marketing backs this up, with studies finding that 67% of consumers say the quality of a product image is "very important" in selecting and purchasing a product. This compares with 54% who feel the same way about long product descriptions, and 53% who give ratings and reviews the same level of importance. [\[source\]](#)

In the Home Buyer and Seller General Trends Report for 2017, created by the National Association of Realtors in the US, photos were found to be the most important part of a real estate marketing campaign. In their survey 89% of respondents ranked photos as "very useful" when looking at homes for sale online, ahead of detailed information about properties for sale, and even ahead of real estate agent contact information and upcoming open homes. [\[source\]](#)

Furthermore, eye-tracking studies show internet viewers pay close attention to information-carrying images, and they will spend more time looking at the images than they do reading text on the page. And as we know, the photographs used in a marketing campaign are incredibly influential as information-carrying images. [\[source\]](#)

The takeaway, therefore, is that if the images you are using in your online marketing are not high quality, then you need to upgrade them now in order to appeal to today's image-focused customers.

This is why the Total Cost of Payment is so important. That TCP is not just the fee for the photography, but it should also factor in the costs of using different photographers. What this means is that the really cheap photo shoots can end up costing you more in the end in terms of lost sales, as well as a damaged reputation with your own clients and prospects.

On the other hand, if a high-cost photographer can even marginally improve the number of sales your business makes, and they should, then that will significantly lower the TCP for that photographer.

Why are some photographers cheaper than others?

Here are six reasons why some photographers might charge lower fees upfront:

Cheap photographers are often inexperienced photographers:

Often the low-cost photographer is inexperienced at photography and they're not yet ready to charge full-price. Photographers in that situation will often start out charging low prices, but the problem is that the client who hires them has to put up with a photographer who doesn't have the experience to know how to handle different situations, and so the photographer starts experimenting on the job.

The consequences of these cheap photo shoots can nullify any savings you see initially by leaving you with less appealing images, and that means fewer clients for your business. Over time those long-term costs can really add up, making those cheap photos very, very expensive.

Cheap photographers might not know how to create images that sell:

A cheap photographer will know how to fire the shutter on their camera, but they won't know how to create images that sell. So while it's all very well to have a photo, you need to ask if it communicates the message you want to share with your potential customers? Does it evoke a sense of wonder, or does it merely show a room?

Cheap photographers use low-quality equipment:

Some people move into photography because it's a passion of theirs and they got a camera for their birthday. However, they don't have the multiple flashes that are needed to make the interior of a home light and bright, they don't have the range of lenses to take the right shots, or perhaps they don't even have the right software to do the post-production that's needed to make a photo 'pop'. They think they can do things on the cheap without all of that gear, but what it means for you is that they are only doing half a job, and you get very little benefit out of it.

Cheap photographers often need to work too fast:

Another issue we see in the world of photography are the large photo companies who hire people with very little experience, and pay them a low wage to just go in and fire the camera in a cookie-cutter fashion.

When the photographer isn't being paid much they aren't really interested in doing what's best for you. They can't afford to commit much time to the job, and they aren't personally invested in the future of the company in the same way that a small business owner is passionate about every job that they do because their own business is on the line.

Summary:

Finding the right photographer for your business is not about finding the cheapest one out there – it's about finding a photographer who wants to work with you in building your business for years to come. The right photographer might cost a little more today, but they'll make you more money tomorrow.

**"IF YOU THINK IT'S
EXPENSIVE TO HIRE A
PROFESSIONAL, WAIT
UNTIL YOU HIRE AN
AMATEUR."**

- RED ADAIR



CHOOSE YOUR **PHOTOGRAPHER**

After reviewing each photographer and receiving their quote, it's now time to make a decision based on all of the information you have:

Are they experienced in shooting projects like yours, and are you confident in their abilities?

Do they communicate well, and did they come across as professional with their website and quote delivery?

Is their price reassuringly expensive, and not just the cheapest photographer you could find?

Can you see your company working with them long-term?

If you answered yes to each of these questions then you've probably got a photographer that should be on a shortlist of ideal photographers.

The decision as to which specific photographer you hire may come down to just one choice, or if there are multiple photographers then your decision may need to be based on your gut instinct and which photographic company or individual you felt most comfortable with.

CHARM CITY VIRTUAL TOURS **PHOTOGRAPHY**



Amanda Koehler specializes in building brands through photography and marketing. She helps architects, hotels and constructions businesses, and has been involved in thousands of marketing campaigns throughout the Baltimore Metro Area and beyond.

Amanda would love to be on your shortlist of photographers, and would be happy to talk on the phone, or meet somewhere for a chat if that would be helpful for you. You are invited to reach out to Amanda at any time by calling 410-707-3306.

She is also available for a free consultation to help businesses define their brand and the photography that will best share that brand message to clients local and international. To request a free, no-obligation consultation then please call or send an email, and Amanda will schedule a time that is convenient for you.



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