

How to
Find and Keep Commercial Photography Clients

Discover Your Channels

Our Four Point Plan



Introduction: Our Work

Knowing what we do best is critically important



The Portfolio
What We Do



Building a List of "Channels"

Who Needs What We Do



Getting Personal
From Channels to Specifics... the Nitty Gritty



Staying Connected

Build trust and credibility



Get in touch
We want to hear from you



Building the “Channels” List

Who needs the work we do?

What is a Channel, anyway?

Knowing who would use the work you do will help to identify if and where they are in your area.

I say “if” because sometimes that is a consideration. For instance, if you want to shoot fashion, real hard-core fashion, you have some decisions to make about where you live. I would suggest New York, The Big Apple, NYC, or suburbs there of. It is where fashion is – and where the clients are. At least for a few years, NYC should be your home so you can build a book of images that are truly fashionable.

If you choose to live in Phoenix, or Albuquerque, or Natchez, you are going to find yourself in a challenging arena for fashion photography.

Why? Because there is little to no “fashion” in those areas. There may be some catalogue, and for sure there will be a small bit of real fashion for boutiques and such. But even if you got every gig that was “fashion”, it may be difficult to really build on it, or even pay your bills.

And – BTW, no – we are not talking about OTR stuff, t-shirts, accessories, model portfolio, or Model Mayhem stuff.

FIRST: LET'S CLARIFY A FEW THINGS

Commercial is not necessarily "Art"

Commercial photography is imagery created for commerce. Our clients depend on us bringing the highest level of technical proficiency, creative imagination, and organizational skills to play... and we tie that all together with the eye of an artist and the temperament of a craftsman.

Prima donna's can exist in this business, but they are few and far between.

Our clients expect a certain level of skills, and when those are met, the deciding factor can be who we are, what we are like, and how enjoyable it is to work with us.

Part of that skillset is to market with a sense of who the client is, and respect both their time and their work.

Being sure of what they do helps you

It is very important to begin to think as a commercial photographer – not a consumer photographer or a hobbyist. Commercial means you are doing work for B2B. Your business works with a designer, PR firm, or Ad Agency to create images for THEIR clients.

Their clients may be consumers, but you are working for the people who make the images that the consumers see. And it is a lot different than shooting for neighbors, family or friends.

To further segment things out, the term “editorial” is, while a subset of commercial, still enough of its own entity that it can be treated a bit differently. And the work you do for editorial can help you land the advertising clients with bigger budgets and larger fees.

Commercial / Editorial; the difference

Commercial photographers work to create a few images that are used to promote goods and services. These are the images used in advertisements, brochures, TV, music packaging, consumer packaging, billboards and other places where images are used to promote a brand, a service or a product.

Editorial photographers are hired by magazines (usually) to illustrate stories and articles with photography. In fashion, the editorial shooters work with fashion editors to do stories reflecting the opinions of the magazine toward fashion trends.

Both commercial and editorial work for B2B clients, but the work commercial photographers do usually ends up as a catalog image, advertising, brochure or product packaging. The editorial photographers work ends up in magazines and online publications – usually accompanied by explanatory or contextual text.

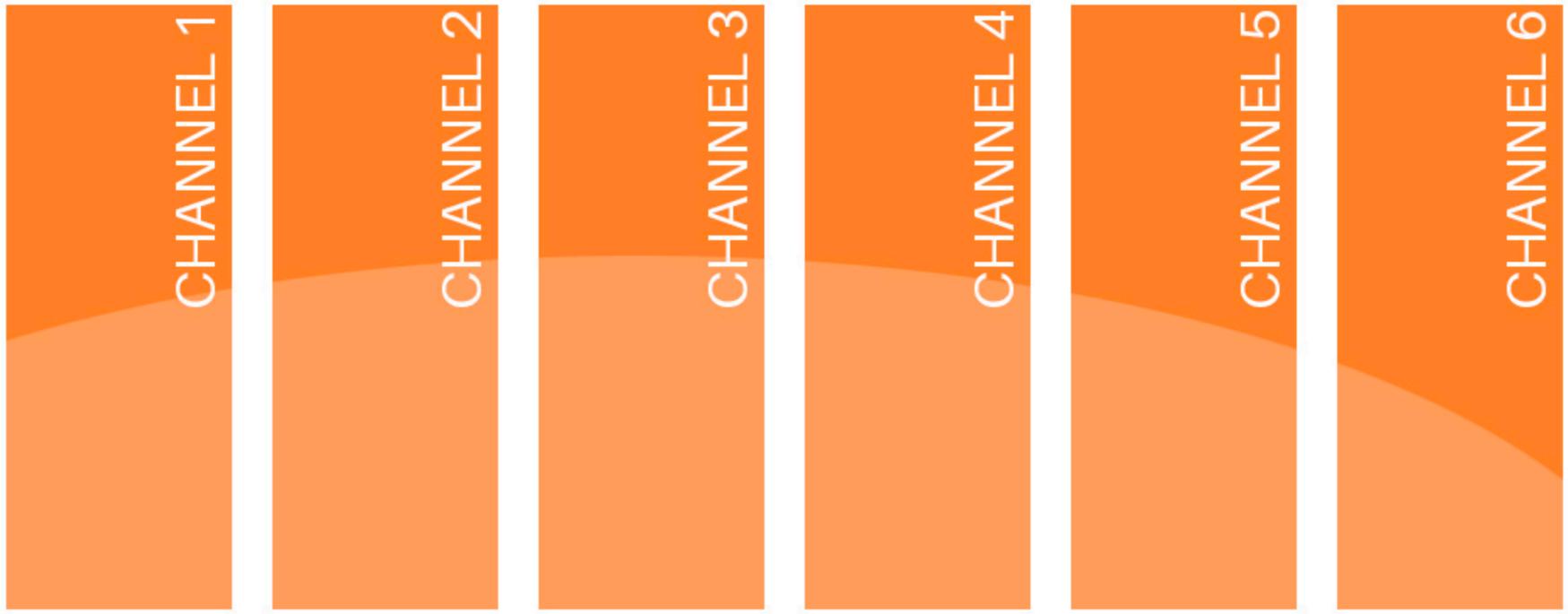
You must understand that they are similar but different, and that your portfolio must BOTH of these genres for working in the complex markets of today. Commercial AND editorial are a strong combination.

Understanding a Channel

A Channel is a type of industry or business that uses photography



THE KIND OF WORK WE DO



THE TYPES OF CLIENTS WHO NEED THE KIND OF WORK WE DO

Let's Discover a Few Channels

It is imperative that you understand who you work for...

... and who NEEDS the work you do.

CASE STUDY:

Our example photographer:

Lives in a small Midwestern town.

Likes to shoot landscapes and environmental interiors.

Shoots basic FF 35 digital gear.

Natural Light preference.

No Studio.



Your Portfolio is a roadmap

When discovering your channels, have your work
in front of you

The Faux Portfolio you created in lesson one...

... will also come in really handy

Building your channels is not a hard science. Remember, we don't want to second guess what people may want to see. We instead must put ourselves in the mind of a larger group to answer the question: "How will they use the work I do?"

And here we can use our imaginations a bit, and occasionally stretch the boundaries in order to make sure we have a deep and robust channel. Having our work in front of us, as well as the tear sheets of work we want to do will help guide us through the channel discovery method.

No points for wasted effort though. We must be able to be somewhat practical – although we can't let practicality dominate everything. Right?

Some channels may not be worth the work, or be so oversaturated as to make entry into it very difficult. Location can be a real problem as well. We spoke about fashion, but there are other difficult genres to explore depending on where you currently live and are establishing your business.

Alaska for summer sports? Tucson for fashion? Omaha for Mountain climbing.



What is our first channel?

We know what we do well – who wants it?



Let's Discover the First Channel

Remember our photographer's desires to shoot Landscapes and Environments

✓ **Magazines**

From outdoor focused magazines to interior design magazines, our first channel is editorial. Shooting for the magazines gives a photographer tear sheets, cash flow and visibility. A good place to start.

✓ **Calendars**

OK. Landscape calendars are popular. And some of them are lucrative for sure – but this is a very saturated market and depending on calendar sales is going to be difficult. Let's add it, but as a hopeful addition

✓ **Camping Gear Companies**

Ahhh... so now it gets real. There are thousands of camping gear manufacturers from tents to pocket knives, backpacks to GPS tools. This is a MAJOR channel for a landscape photographer.

✓ **Travel Related Advertising**

Places to go by plane or train or boat or canoe. Sometimes the location IS the draw for the ad. This can also be a lucrative channel for a landscape photographer

Discovering the First Channel

We have four down... two or three to go

✓ **Lifestyle Products**

Beautiful lake shot – add an older couple and we have an insurance, investment, pharmaceutical ad. Lovely waterfall – add a couple of teenagers and it is a destination for summer camp or an ad for flannel hiking shirts.

✓ **Adventure products**

Canoes, skis, jet skis, gliders, parasails... get the drift? Lots of adventure products that all advertise. This is an easy add for a landscape photographer... just add people having fun.

✓ **Can you think of more?**

Put your thinking cap on. Visit a bookstore magazine rack. What ads do you find there with landscape images being used to advertise a product or service?

OUR GOAL IS FOR SIX CHANNELS OR MORE.

If you are making images that have only one or two channels, it will be much more difficult to turn it into a lucrative commercial photography business. (Exception: Fashion or purely editorial focused photographers.)

Our Six Channels

Did you discover some we didn't? Add it in!



THE KIND OF WORK WE DO

LANDSCAPE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SPACES



THE TYPES OF CLIENTS WHO NEED THE KIND OF WORK WE DO

MAGAZINES, CALENDARS, CAMPING GEAR, TRAVEL RELATED, LIFESTYLE AND ADVENTURE PRODUCTS



THAT IS A LOT OF POSSIBILITY
AND WE STILL HAVE TO DO CHANNELS FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL WORK



Now, Let's Assess Our Viability

Can we work in those industries living where we live?

✓ **Location is always a consideration. Always.**

It is not a deathtrap though, and no matter where you live, you can find work to begin to build your business. If it is a very small town, you may have to look toward the closest big town, or start out thinking regionally. If it is any other medium to medium large city, you can begin locally and branch to regional.

✓ **Given the tools you have, do you feel comfortable in accepting assignments?**

This is a very tough area for a lot of photographers breaking in. First of all, gear envy is a particularly insidious disease that rots us from the inside out. If you have a modern DSLR, and a couple of good lenses, and can consistently produce the work that is in your portfolio, you can begin to build a business in commercial photography. If you need something special – rent. (And put a portion of your fees into an equipment fund... you will need it.)

✓ **Now that you have discovered a good set of channels for your work, are there any gaps in the portfolio?**

Going through this exercise helps you discover where gaps are in your book, and also helps you identify what to do about them. **Shoot** for them is the obvious answer. Got lots of lake shots, but none with canoes, boaters, fishermen, couples enjoying the lake? Yeah... there ya go.

✓ **You may have also discovered something else... and want to pursue that as well.**

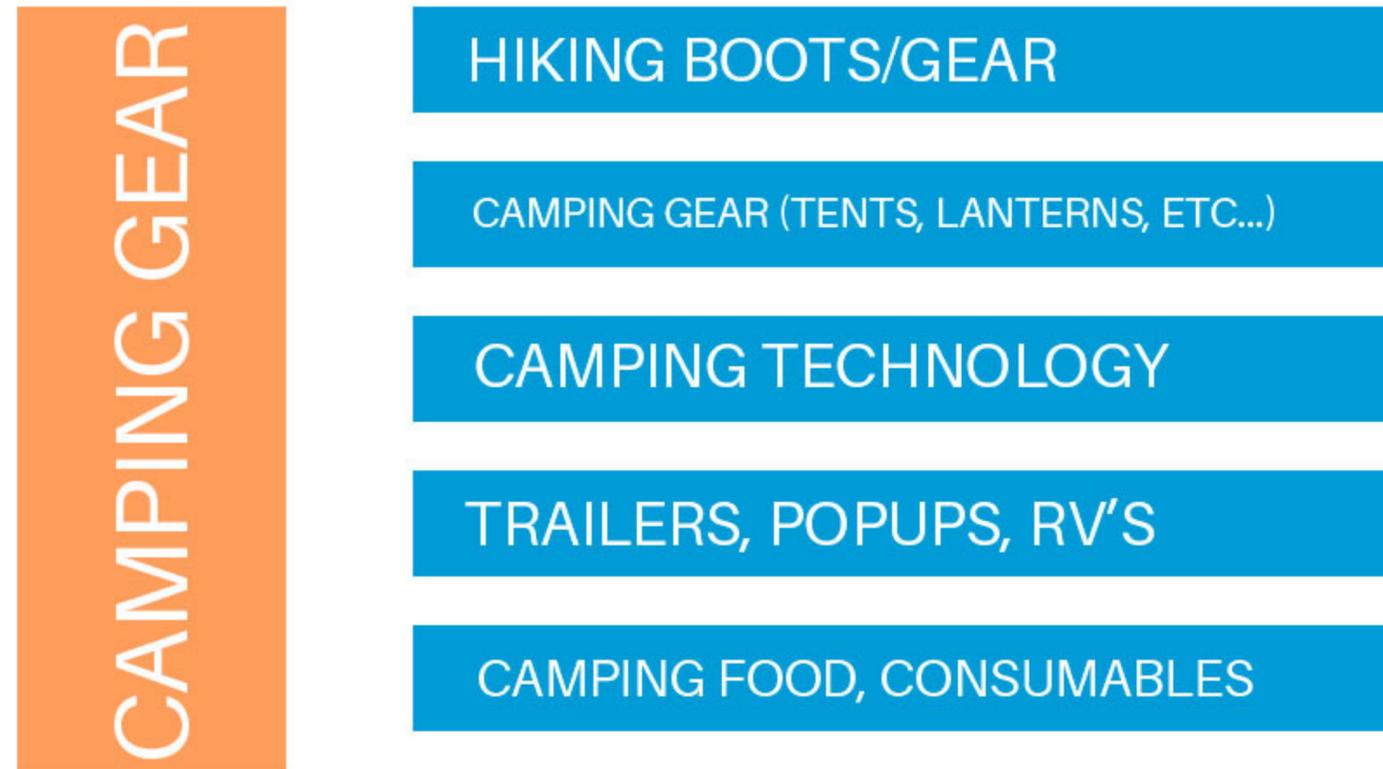
We find out a lot about what we want to do when we actively go looking for it. That is a good thing.

Building Your Main Channels can Lead to Subchannels

I hope you take the time to follow out the subchannels.



HOW TO THINK OF SUBCHANNELS



I am sure we can find a few more as well.



Are you seeing the power of this work?

Identifying sub channels begins to clarify
our purpose

Now work on the Channels for Your Work



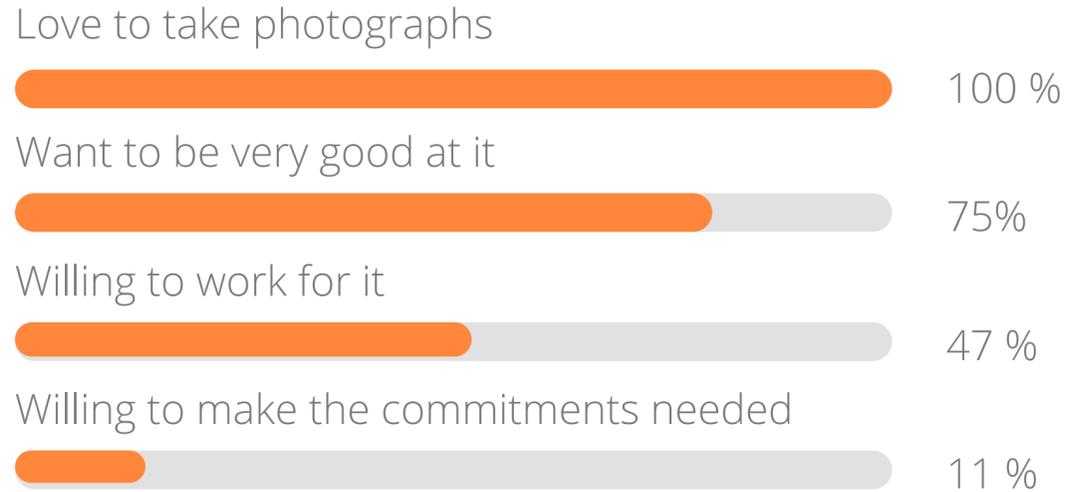
This will take time and commitment

Everything that is worth doing takes time and commitment...



And know this. IF you take the time, and IF you make the commitment, you will be far, FAR ahead of most of your competition. Most people simply wont do this much work. I think of it as a filter... heh.

Breakdown



NOTE: Stats made up from observation and not in any way based in science. 😊



And how many will make it through?

Less than 10% I am sure.

This IS where it gets real... and real tough

Now take this step by step and create your channels.

It will start out easy and then get harder... and that's good

✓ **When you start to build your channels and sub-channels a few of them will come easy.**

And that is fine of course. But the harder you dig, the more energy you expend on this process, the rarer the finds will be. MOST people can do three or four, hard workers can find six or seven... can you find nine? Ten? If you can, you can be assured few have gotten to that point.

✓ **Never hesitate to pull this list out and add to it.**

The mind is a peculiar type of computer. As we put in triggers and become sensitive to certain precepts and subjects, the mind can help us identify them when they are in our periphery.

✓ **An example: Have you ever noticed a car for what you think is the first time?**

You know... you're sitting at a light and a car pulls up next to you. You glance over and are amazed by it. "I've never seen one of those" you say to yourself. "I love the look of that car." And you know what happens next, right. You see them everywhere. Because you are now sensitive to that car and your brain is happy to trigger that sensitivity every time one of those cars is in your vision. You HAD seen them before, but they didn't 'register' before you set the trigger. Same with client possibilities. You will find them because your subconscious is on the lookout for them.

✓ **Be open to serendipity as well.**

Feel free to challenge what is being done by showing them how YOUR work can help portray a concept or a product.

THE UBIQUITOUS CHANNELS - FOR ALL PHOTOGRAPHERS

Ad Agencies, Designers, PR firms, and In-house MAR-COMS

✓ **These are the entry ways into the commercial photography assignment**

We have identified the channels of usage for our work, but in many cases we will have to go through one of these entities to get the assignments to shoot. So while you are building your portfolio out to make sure it is viable, chances are good that these are the people who will be hiring you to make your photographs.

Begin compiling a list of these folks in your region. You will need it when you begin to show your book.

✓ **Creating a powerful portfolio is step one.**

Identifying the channels for that portfolio is step two

Step two and a half would be filling in the gaps and step two and three quarters is identifying these entities in your area.

You Now Know How to Figure Out Who Wants Your Work

The next step is to get up close – and personal



Thank you!

How to Build a Solid Client List
Part Two: Channels
