



How-To Start A *Profitable* Home-Based Photography Business

By *Lennie Lenze*

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Introduction

Is this you? You enjoy taking pictures, lot's of pictures. It probable stated with a few snapshots here and there at social occasions, friendly get-togethers, etc.. These days, you find yourself snapping pictures from early in the day, and late into the night, sometimes for no real reason. Now your thinking of turning your new skill into a profession.

Most of us become serious photographers for the same reason that some people become anything, simply because *we like it*, and the knowledge that talented professional photographers are *always* in demand.

Of course, some people are content to remain casual shutterbugs, happy with taking occasional snapshots of friends and family or those dreaded pictures of summer vacations. Yet, most of those who get serious enough about photography, sooner or later become advanced amateurs or working professionals.

As for me, as a kid, I had no idea that photography would play a major role in my life and career. My first camera, a Brownie Box, was a gift from my mother and I began to photograph anything and everything. And I still want to!

Only you can determine if you really have the desire and self-confidence to follow a path to a money making photo venture, and to what end. Because people's objectives in life vary, there is no "correct" path into the photo business as the end goal may not always be the same.

While, one person may want to just have fun and pull in a few dollars to pay the costs, someone else might want to put his kids through college. Your objectives may vary, from the strength of your photography ambitions and skill down to the lifestyle you are willing to suffer.

One thing you should know, this eBook does not teach you how to take better pictures or the latest lighting techniques etc. There are other people who do that better than me and I'll make sure you know who they are. What I will teach you is how to make an income from photography. We focus on - setting up and running your photography business.

Many have done this without guidance and have failed, that's why it's imperative to know how to get business, and keep it!

But, don't fall into the trap of believing there is one path to success, or that there are strict rules for success, after all, if it were easy, *everyone would do it*.

Before closing, I'd like to thank my old friend T. B. Shattersbe DGP, without who's inspiration this book would not have been written, and who told me a long time ago, "*first, believe in yourself, and then follow your dreams.*"

Good fortune:

Lennie Lenze

Photography As A Business

Photography is certainly not a profession that someone just happens to stumble on. Again, most of us become photographers for the same reason that some people become whale watchers, because we like it.

Obviously, the principal problem that faces a photographer who wants to make money from their art is finding clients who were willing to pay.

Photography as a professional venture suffers from the fact that it does not cost very much money to own a camera, or purchase supplies, if needed. At the present time, the purchase of film has become *optional*, first because of the accessibility of disposable cameras and because of the wider use of digital cameras. This latest development has also all but eliminated the need to pay for developing photographs.

Yet, notwithstanding these obstacles, there does exist the potential to not only make photography a profession but more importantly, a successful business.

One way is to specialize in one or more fields where it may not practical for the client to produce his own pictures. Typically, for clients who themselves are in a business related to photography this will be due to the fact that they require a diversity or quantity of photos they cannot supply themselves.

However, for the run of the mill public, it will usually be because they cannot take the pictures themselves, for whatever reason.

There are three principal considerations you must deal with in concluding how to go about getting into the photography business.

First, discover whether you could or need to benefit from additional training to become more skilled. Then, decide the area of photography you would like to specialize in. Next, consider whether - you want to be more of an *amateur* photographer making a little money on the side, a professional photographer running your own business, or *something in between*.

Answering these questions will have influential financial and tax implications for you down the road.

The natural distinction that sets photography apart from many other art forms, such as painting or sculpting, is that just about *anybody* can take pictures. Fundamentally, all the knowledge that is required is *where to press the button* on the camera.

Of course, there are issues such as lighting that need to be taken into account to make the pictures appealing to the eye. On the other hand, automatic and digital cameras have made lighting less of a concern to the person holding the camera.

Where your education will be most helpful is in the artistic arena, that is, where you intent to take pictures meant to be used as art or décor. The quality and type of pictures intended for this field differs most noticeably from pictures taken to accompany or highlight a newspaper story or magazine article, as there the picture is meant to illustrate a point being made in the writing and not meant to stand alone as a statement.

If your intention for going into the photography world is strictly artistic, that is, to see your photographs gracing the walls of art galleries, you would probably benefit from taking some photography and art classes.

If this is not your objective, then you may be better off taking the money you may have to spent on photography school to purchase film and better equipment and learn to improve the quality of pictures that you take, simply by taking many pictures. If truth be told, most professionals became skilled in their craft as they went along, without the benefit of any formal training.

Another approach to some training is to *apprentice* with an established photographer as an internship or part-time job.

Still, if getting classroom education is important to you and just something you would be more comfortable doing before labeling yourself a pro, bear in mind, you're not required to spend thousands of dollars for an art degree.

Most every city and town in the country has a community college where residents can take a photography or art class. You may also want to call your local photography studios, as they sometimes offer a variety of photography classes.

Are You Right For The Photography Business

How to start a home based photography business is something which many intermediate and professional photographers ask themselves sometime in their lives. You'd be surprised how few take the challenges. Before we go further, ask yourself if you are *right* for the business.

Naturally, no one but you, can determine whether or not you should start your own photography business, nevertheless there are some factors that might lead you toward making the right choice.

Needless to say, if you're not much good at photography and have no interest in getting better, you needn't go any further; quickly find yourself another business. If, on the other hand, you're a proficient photographer, even a good one, but have no patience for or interest in managing a business, then scan the help-wanted ads and go to work for someone else.

Even where the thought of being self-employed as a home-based photographer fascinates you, you still need to question yourself so as to identify your own strengths and weaknesses. This is a decisive part of the planning stage, a process that's never too early to start and one that should continue throughout the life of your business.

Below, are questions you need to satisfy before you start your photography business. Use a pencil and paper to list, honestly, your strength and weaknesses in these areas set out below..

- Your main reasons for starting your own home-based photography business. Here list as many reasons as you can, such as; being able to spend more time with your family, being your own boss, increasing your control over your career, getting yourself out of a dead-end job, avoiding the aggravation of commuting, and so forth.
- The photographic experience and management skills that you can bring to your new business. Start by listing the photographic jobs and management positions you've held, books you've read, courses you've taken, and how each has helped you.

Where you identify weaknesses in either photographic experience or management skills, outline how you plan to compensate for them. That is, if you've never held a management position, perhaps your plans to gain the necessary skills will include taking business courses at a local community college, going to seminars, etc..

- A critical consideration, and likely roadblock, might be the amount of cash you will need to start and run your business for *one year*, and where it will come from?

Be honest with yourself, and as accurate as possible. Estimate, what it will cost you to run the business for a year, and **include** *your own salary* as part of the cost. Then, determine where the operating capital will realistically come from: your savings, relatives, a bank loan, the business itself, spouse's income, or elsewhere.

- Establish your short-term financial and personal goals for your new business, in other words, the amount of income you expect to earn and accomplish during your first year. Again, be down-to-earth and honest with yourself..

- Just how much space will you need for your new venture. First, settle on what kind of space you will require for your office, any darkroom, studio, storage area, etc..

Keep in mind, every home-based business must have some kind of office. With the right computer and software, your office can do double duty as a digital darkroom.

While, not every photographer requires a studio - some do, so if you plan to become involved in certain kinds of photography, be aware. For instance, if you focus on portraits, you'll need not only a studio but probably some sort of waiting area.

And, when it comes down to it, no one ever has enough storage space. In your figuring, set aside space in your planning for furniture, equipment and storage.

- Determine your urgent and future equipment needs, and how you'll acquire them. Make a record of all the photographic equipment you will need to start and operate your business for one year. Such as; cameras, tripods, lenses, lights, stands, and so on.

Also, record all office and other equipment you will need such as; telephones, computer, fax machine, filing cabinets, office furniture, copy machine, calculator, and vehicles.

In the same way, list your expected equipment needs for five years. In each grouping, designate equipment you already own and how you expect to acquire what you don't have. Keep in mind, that in addition to acquiring equipment, you'll probably need to update and upgrade some during your first five years of business.

- Look into what licenses, laws and permits, are locally required to operate a business from your home? Laws vary from state to state, county to county, and city to city.

For instance, your state might require you to file your business name with a state agency or to apply for a business or vendor's license. Check your city's ordinances regulating home businesses, which may vary from one neighborhood to the next. You need to know about all these hurdles.

- Scan your area competitors, discover how are they doing financially, naturally, you'll want to overtake them in your market. If you have a particular area of expertise say, architectural, product, or industrial photography, in a small community you could be the only photographer to fill that niche. Make this your first step in your market analysis.
- Write down your long-term financial and personal goals and reflect on them. Don't go forward, unless you firmly believe your best path to achieve these goals is through your own home-based photography business.

Your Commitment

The division between a *professional* and an *amateur* used to be determined simply by the fact that *amateurs* don't get paid for their work, and the "*professionals*" do.

While most amateurs are content to consider photography as a hobby while creating images for their own enjoyment, and only selling some of their work only to defray costs.

Whether it's a hobby, a profession, or simply enjoyment, photography is expensive. Materials are costly and the equipment at times is shocking in price. As a hobbyist, you might be able to offset some of your expenses by selling your work, however, as a professional, you'd better be able to sell enough to pay all your expenses and make a sizeable profit.

Many photographers, work first and foremost for the fun of it, then eventually put that knowledge and experience to work earning money.

Just as there are amateur actors who are as talented as, or better, than professionals, many serious amateur photographers are every bit as good as most of the people making a living with cameras. The disparity has less to do with their ability than with what photographers choose to do with it.

Biting The Bullet

A photographer who works as a home-based professional - must cope with deciding between part-time and full-time work.

I suspect most of us started out working part-time and in due course steered our businesses into a full-time operation, as I did, and I recommend you seriously consider doing likewise. There are many distinct advantages to starting out part-time.

Some of your options are:

- Maintaining a steady income. That is, persist in your full time job retaining any benefits package your employer offers while establishing your homebased business. Or, take on a part-time job to cover your living expenses.
- By utilizing the above options, you can;

Create ample business facilities in your spare time without undue economic pressure on you or your family.

Acquire professional experience that will prove invaluable when you go full-time.

Slowly but surely, invest in photographic and business equipment along with needed furniture.

Set up files and establish customer accounts, etc..

Establish an excellent credit rating and professional reputation.

Build a cash reserve large enough to cover your first year of full-time operation.

Watch your business grow until it's making your essential full-time income.

You can accomplish all of this and more as a part-time home-based photographer, and who knows you may then consider to continue working part-time for the foreseeable future.

Developing Your Abilities

The Craft of Photography

Naturally, I take it for granted, that if you are planning on going into business as a home-based photographer, you *already* possess some photographic skills, and *at least* have some knowledge of basic photographic principles as well as, an unshakable interest in learning as much as possible about this profession.

One approach to learning is by reading books, however if you're new to photography you do not want to seek advice from photographic magazines, for unless you already have an advanced proficiency with a camera and know the jargon, specialty magazines will offer little help.

Quality Courses

My first suggestion is you take a college-level course in *basic photography* from a "good" teacher, let me stress that, by saying, *an excellent teacher*, as the same course can be offered by two individual teachers - and be as different as night and day.

When you uncover a course, first ascertain the quality and competency of the teacher, and don't be shy about it. You can do this by visiting them and asking for a summary of what the course will cover.

When you meet, inform the instructor respectfully, what you need and expect from the course and determine if their course will fulfill *all* your requirements.

Also, discover what texts are to be used, and in advance review them. Additionally, speak with the instructor's former students. You should be able to tell within one or two class meetings whether the course is right for and if it is not, drop it.

Reading

If you can't find a good basic course locally, I suggest visiting a bookstore or public library. Browse through the photographic titles until you find a book on basic photography that you understand and enjoy. At least, it should provide you with a firm grasp of the primary elements of photography, that is; cameras and lenses, shutter speed and aperture, filters and lens attachments, film, light and lighting, composition, and the language of photography.

Know also that, often one book will cover only a *single topic*, such as; lighting techniques, portraiture, composition, action, or shooting for stock.

Remember, books have a short shelf life and accessibility, sort of here today - gone tomorrow. For that reason, you might have some difficulty finding a good, basic general text. Like, "*The Photographer's Handbook*," by John Hedgecoe which I recommend, as this book not only contains a basic general text, but also, an in-depth work that embraces much that a beginning, intermediate, and even advanced photographer will find informative and useful.

Your area public and college libraries should provide lots of useful and instructive books. Also, visit bookstores in your locale to find out what's available. Don't ignore used-book sections and stores, where you might find great buys crammed with superb photographs and useful information that's as relevant today, as ever.

Further, you can scan the Internet, and browse around the virtual bookshelves of large outlets, such as barnesandnoble.com along with amazon.com.

Bear in mind, this is a never ending process, in order to learn not only what you don't yet know, but also to keep up with the ever-changing technology.

Another Good Recourse, Seminars And Workshops

Seek, and you'll stumble on excellent photographic workshops and seminars held in your part of the country. A number of traveling schools are excellent sources of information and education. For instance, "*The Nikon School*" is far and wide respected, with weekend courses offered in major population centers each year. (resource section)

Correspondence Courses

Another way to learn photography is through correspondence study. Although, this type of study requires a special kind of dedicated person, for it demands personal qualities, such as; self-discipline, constant motivation, plus a commitment to learning the exact same knowledge that anyone who intends to operate a home-based photography business requires.

Notably, the "*New York Institute of Photography*" offers a course of correspondence study that persistently gets high marks from those who have investigated or enrolled in it.

Apprenticeship

You could learn from others, working as an apprentice. If you can tolerate the low pay and subordinate status, working as a photographer's assistant can offer one of your best learning experiences. Accordingly, such jobs with well known photographers are hard to get, and often requires you to relocate, especially if you live anywhere but in a major metropolitan area. That aside, this is also an excellent way to learning chemical and digital darkroom techniques.

I cannot overstate the value of a good photography course, in particular if you want to learn darkroom techniques. Any reasonably intelligent person should be able to find the right books to learn from.

Working From Home

During much of the last century, the trend for most people was to live in one place and work in another. However, increasing numbers of people have moved back to their homes to do company business, and there are about one million new home-based businesses started each year.

All this is due to advances in technology, including the Web, email, fax machines, modems, and voice mail. Yet, working out of your home can be a mixed blessing, so let's take a look at a few pros and cons of working from home.

The Pros;

You feel free to do as you please.

There is no commuting.

You can work in casual dress..

No one to look over your shoulder.

You can write off a part of your home office expenses on your taxes.

Your employer usually reimburses you for accompanying expenses.

If you are married or have children at home, this type of work situation could be especially convenient for you.

The Cons;

It takes a phenomenal amount of self-discipline to start work when you know you don't have to be at the office by 8 a.m.

You are the only person around all day, so there is no outside pressure to be busy.

You must be entirely self-motivated.

You miss out on the camaraderie that stems from working with others day after day.

You can never escape the office and go home, because you are already there.

Working from home can be messy and can take up an entire spare room in your home.

You don't get face time with your coworkers, so it is more difficult to find out about new projects you might be interested in.

The boss can't see that you are working hard or putting in extra hours, so you are judged more on the numbers than your work ethic and other intangible factors.

There is a danger of putting in too many hours or overworking. As improbable as this might sound, imagine that it's 11 p.m. and you suddenly have a panic attack about work. It's all too easy to go into your home office and work until 1 a.m.

The desirability of working at home persuaded many of us to go into business for ourselves, like working where you live allows you to avoid long, time-wasting commutes and reduces much wear on your vehicles.

Pros and Cons of Self-Employment

For many of us who have been at it awhile, the advantages of home-based self-employment far outstrip its drawbacks. You should know at the beginning, though, that some people just don't take to this kind of life. So approach your business ideas guardedly, and think about your options carefully.

For many, the greatest fear of working at home for themselves, is that they lack self-motivation and self-discipline. These two attributes work hand in hand and are essential to the success of any home-based business, but these are realities you simply must face, and should not hold you back needlessly.

Of course, when working from home you must be disciplined, but then so must you be in order to hold a steady job; to get to work on time, to take responsibility for projects, to show up for appointments, and to be a trustworthy person.

Occasionally, people ask me how I can get up every day and go to work without giving in to the enticement to take the day off and I tell them it's easy: I have a natural hatred of, hunger, and failure. Also, I love my work.

Naturally, all of us are tempted from time to time, it's simply human nature, and there's nothing wrong with that. What you can't afford to do, however, is make a habit of giving in to all the distractions and thereby endanger your promised deadlines, as well as other obligations, for to do so is to risk your reputation and your business.

Independence

Many who desire running their own home-based businesses dream of the day when they can get rid of the daily routine: that is, the Monday-through-Friday, nine-to-five grind.

And yet the reality is, your home-based photography business will still, in all probability, require a Monday-through-Saturday schedule, with plenty of Sundays thrown in. Instead of working away from nine to five at an office, you'll probably be hard at it from six to six and might have to work some evenings to keep up.

Also, those who think being their own boss is the greatest benefit of being self-employed are in for some surprises. The photography business is mainly a service, and when you operate a service business, *everybody's your boss*.

You'll take orders from art directors, creative directors, and an array of managers. You do what your clients want you to do. You constantly honoring your pledges to a myriad of people, and meeting their deadlines.

Curse or Blessing

Seclusion, is as well something every home-based photographer must learn to deal with. Mysteriously, the reality of this comes as a surprise to many people who elect to run businesses from their homes. Some are truly troubled by being removed from the daily interaction with others, while the rest of us enjoy the privacy and the high level of productivity it encourages.

Of course, where most of your business is local, you will come in contact with more people than if your work is for remote clients. Even so you'll need to stay in touch with these people by phone, mail, fax, and e-mail, and with an occasional business trip to trade shows, or meetings.



Thanks for reading these brief few pages, of one of the most successful and original career course manuals available on building your own home-based **Photography business.** Learning from an established professional is the best way to starting your own profitable home business.

If you'd like to consider the complete course, [click here...](#)

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Whatever, your decision may I talk this opportunity to wish you the best of good fortune, and remember, don't leave your future to *the whim of others.*

Your friend;

Joe Myna