

POST-PRODUCTION HANDBOOK



THE WEDDING SCHOOL TEXTBOOK SERIES



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THE
WEDDING SCHOOL

POST-PRODUCTION HANDBOOK

TEACHER'S NOTE

When I first began as a wedding photographer back in 2002, there were not many educational opportunities for me. We had conventions and local camera clubs, but not many books or private workshops. The photography community now has so many extraordinary ways to learn. There are private mentorships, group workshops, online classes, conventions, and books galore. This is a wonderful thing because everyone learns in different ways. I have had the distinct pleasure of teaching photographers with my books, convention seminars, private workshops, and online courses.

I am thankful to everyone who has given me a platform to speak, listened to my words, and trusted me as an educator. I am more full of gratitude to you than you will ever know. Above all, I am thankful for my family and friends. In the wise words of Lin-Manuel Miranda, “How lucky we are to be alive right now.”

I love you all.

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EXTRA CREDIT

To Cliff.
Because of everything.

POST- PRODUCTION HANDBOOK

"Photography, as a powerful medium of expression and communications, offers an infinite variety of perception, interpretation and execution."

Ansel Adams







POST PRODUCTION BASICS

The post-production stage of a wedding is a critical one. You have to ensure safe downloads, meticulous backups, and precise handling of all the files. You have to turn the images around in the time that your contract specifies. You have to keep your clients happy. How do you do it all efficiently?

The key to a seamless, smooth-running workflow is consistency. You have to tweak and refine your workflow repeatedly, finding the weak parts and strengthening them. A slow workflow can drag down your entire season. I've been refining my workflow yearly since I began, and will continue to refine it as technology changes in the future.

I begin my workflow process the same way after every wedding. I have two studios, one in New Jersey and one in Brooklyn. I have two main computers, one in each studio. I also have a laptop. No matter where I am, my workflow begins the same way. I start by adding a client folder to my main "Work" folder. Inside "Work", I have a folder labeled by year. For example, one might be called "2016 weddings." Inside the "2016 weddings" folder, there are individual folders for each client. A wedding that takes place on April 23, 2016, for a bride named Mary Smith, would be in a folder called "042316_Smith". Inside that "042316_Smith" folder would be a series of subfolders. Those subfolders are : raws/outtakes, raw keepers, raws to blog, blogged jpegs, small blogged jpegs, post-sidecar, and final jpegs.

Why does this matter? All of those subfolders live in a main folder on my computer entitled "workflow." When I create a new wedding folder, I copy all of those "workflow" folders into it. This ensures that the folder structure is the same for every wedding.

I download all of my RAW files into the "raws/outtakes" folder. After I cull the wedding, I move my images in two sets. The images that I've marked for blogging get transferred to the "raws to blog" folder. The rest of my keepers get moved to my "raw keepers" folder. The keepers folder gets transferred to my post-production team at Sidecar Post, but if I had an employee or I was editing them myself, this is still where they'd reside. Once blogged images are done, the jpegs hang out in the "blogged jpegs" folder, and the small online versions are in "small blogged." Once I get my images back from Sidecar Post, the JPEGs get moved into "post-sidecar." I look at them, tweak anything that I want, and then they go live in the "final jpegs" folder.

Obsessive? Too many steps? Perhaps. However, this folder structure ensures that no images get lost. Nothing gets written over, or forgotten.

SUSAN'S WORKFLOW

WORK FOLDER



"YEAR" WEDDINGS



CLIENT FOLDER

Labeled by date and Client
Name (i.e. 01012016_Name)



SUBFOLDERS

RAWS Outtakes, RAW
Keepers, RAW to Blog, Blog
JPG, Small Blog JPG, Post-
Sidecar, Final JPG



As said, I download into this specific folder structure. Then the entire folder gets copied to a small portable hard drive with a sizable storage capacity. That hard drive goes with me wherever I go. It's always in my purse, because I'm always transferring images back and forth. I use Log Me In on all of my computers, which allows me to get files no matter where I am. I also use Dropbox. Those are great for moving a few files, or a small folder of JPEGs, but not for moving an entire wedding of RAW files!

I move through all of these steps using the Workflow feature of 17 Hats, my studio management software. I am constantly reminded to download, back up in New Jersey, back in Brooklyn, and continue moving through the workflow for each wedding. If I didn't have a studio management system, I'd use a white board, iPhone app, or even pen and paper to stay on track.

After I download to each of my computers, I back up to external hard drives. I have one external drive in Brooklyn, and one in New Jersey. When I lived in only one place, I still had an offsite backup in case anything were to happen to my main studio. Storage is cheap, and you can never be too careful!

How much equipment do you really need to run your workflow? My needs, with two studios and two homes, is different from other photographers. Shooters with huge studios and multiple employees might have different requirements. When I did everything at home by myself, all I needed was one computer, two external hard drives, and nothing else. I downloaded to the same computer each time. I backed up to two drives, keeping one offsite at all times. Don't feel like you need an abundance of equipment to run your workflow. In fact, keeping things as lean and simple as possible will keep you more efficient!

Create your workflow. Create your folder structure. Look at your workflow again. Are there any steps that seem repetitive? Are any steps taking longer than they should? Reduce, refine, and revisit. That's the only way to get faster!

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THE PROCESS OF CULLING

I know that the selection process can be very, very difficult for photographers. How do you choose which images to keep? How do you decide what to discard? How long does it take to get through all of those images?

At every wedding I shoot, I average about 2500 images without a second shooter and 3500 images with a second shooter. It takes me anywhere from sixty to ninety minutes to cull those weddings, choosing my keepers and blog images along the way. I'm fast at culling, and getting faster every year. Though I do outsource my raw processing, I do not outsource my culling. I don't ever plan to. Culling keeps me in touch with my work, and lets me see what I'm doing right and wrong. Looking through the whole RAW take can show me where I'm getting sloppy or complacent. It can also show me where I'm improving. It's important to me that I be the one that culls my own work, but I also know many photographers who outsource the culling process with great success.

I cull by first loading my images into Photo Mechanic. Some photographers like culling directly in Lightroom, but I find Photo Mechanic to be much, much faster and easier to use. Simply drop your RAW files into Photo Mechanic, sort by date, and start culling nearly immediately. I go through the entire wedding from start to finish by capture date



and time. I look at one image at a time. I either give it a one-star rating to keep it, a two-star rating because I really love it, or no stars at all. It's additive culling. I'm not choosing what to delete and removing it, I'm choosing what to keep.

When I'm done culling the whole wedding, I adjust Photo Mechanic to only view the images with one or two stars. I then go through and rearrange some of the pictures. If I've gone to shoot the bride getting ready, left her to go to the groom, and come back, I move the order of images so that all of the bridal prep images are together, and all of the groom prep images are together. If my assistant or second shooter is photographing cocktail hour while I'm shooting the reception room, I separate those images so that cocktail hour comes first, then the reception room.

Once everything is sorted properly, I rename the files. I keep close to the naming convention of the folder, for example, 001_042316_Smith, 002_042316_Smith, and so forth. If I have shot an engagement session for the couple, the engagement session images will be 001_042316_Smith_Engagement, and the wedding files will begin with 001_042316_Smith_Wedding. If every wedding is named similarly, it will be easy to find and identify the files later.

I move all of the one-star images to the "raw keepers" folder, and all of the two-star images to the "raws to blog" folder. I then send that "raw keepers" files to Sidecar Post, my post-production team, via a File Transporter. I save the "raws to blog" for myself, since I process all of my blog and social media images in-house. I also back up the keepers folder on my external hard drive. I understand that's doubling up some images, but I'm okay with that!

If you do sneak peeks for clients, you'll want to pull those at this point as well. Create a starring/tagging system that works for you. Be ruthless. If I have to deliberate over keeping an image for more than a second, I don't keep it. Culling is something that took a long time to speed up doing, but I'm so glad I did. Something that took four hours to cull my first few years in business would take me less than an hour now. Be patient. With experience comes more speed!

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THE EDITING PROCESS

It's no secret that I outsource my editing. For many years, I didn't. I edited my own weddings, season after season. I could do it again if I had to. I choose not to, for a huge variety of reasons, but I could. Even if you decide to outsource, it's important that you understand how the editing process works. What if you find yourself having to edit a wedding? Wouldn't you need to know how to do it?



When I edit, I edit in stages. The first thing that gets edited are my social media/sneak peek images. I usually choose about 5-30 images for this round of edits. I load everything into Lightroom, usually when I'm finishing my workday. I walk away, letting it build previews while I'm gone. This is a quick process when you're only working with a small handful of images, but a much longer process when bringing in the hundreds of images for the main edit.

I edit the blog images and any sneak peeks I want to create within a week of the wedding. This is continually difficult for me, as I shoot so many weddings per year. The turnaround is easy when you have a limited number of events, but difficult as your calendar fills. If you have two weddings on a weekend, you have two sets of previews to get out within the next week. You also have to prep for your next event. I'm also preparing to blog the wedding, which also happens in the weeks post-event. It's a lot to keep up with! This is why it's so crucial that you create a speedy, efficient workflow!

At this time, I will also be setting aside any images that I want to use for competitions or for my portfolio. I always save the RAW file in conjunction with any edited JPEGs that I have created. I might want to revisit those RAW files when finessing images for competitions, and it is helpful to have them handy.

Starting as soon as one day post-event, I begin uploading images to Instagram. I do the same with Facebook. I will detail precisely how this is done in a brief minute, but let's get back to editing for now!

- ↳ Edit in stages
- ↳ Lead with Social Media and/or Blog Images - the first impression
- ↳ Jump on it quickly, avoid backlog interfering with prep
- ↳ Earmark competition images
- ↳ Keep exposures clean, composition deliberate
- ↳ Get it right in camera - avoid overworking and excessive "trickery"
- ↳ Back up, back up, back up your files

After I have a finished folder of social media and blog images, I'll move on to editing the bulk of the event itself. I edit by file name, which is generally chronologically, if you remember the culling and renaming process mentioned earlier in this book. I go image by image, editing one at a time. While I will batch apply things such as white balance or exposure, I do touch each image to ensure proper exposure. Each image should take no more than a few seconds to prepare.

What don't I do when editing in Lightroom? I generally don't crop. I try to get it right in camera, so I crop less than 5% of the images during the editing process. When I do, it's usually to straighten a crooked horizon. I don't get overly involved in cloning or removing elements from images. That's something I save for the album phase, and not something that I do in the proof phase. I correct white balance, fix exposures, and sometimes add a quick vignette or exposure brush to draw the viewer's eye to the subject of the photograph. I don't rely on presets, other than a few black and white presets from Totally Rad.



I don't rely on any Lightroom trickery to edit my images. It's a simple, preset-free process, except for the presets that I use to convert images to black and white. If I'm not using presets to speed things up, what can I do to make the editing process quicker? The first thing you can do is become a better photographer. If you truly nail your exposures and your compositions, there won't be as much as to do in Lightroom! Stronger technical skills make for faster editing. The second thing to do is to do less. Don't feel like every image has to have three presets, a crop, and ten minutes with the exposure brush. Keep your exposures clean, and your compositions deliberate. Adjust exposure if needed, fix color balance, and move on. It can be so easy to get bogged down in the editing process, but it doesn't have to be so stressful!

Once every image has been edited, I export the JPEG images to a specific folder. Mine is called "post sidecar," because it's where my images go after they come back from being edited. If I've edited them myself, they go into a specifically named folder. From there, I



batch an action in Photoshop that runs a very light Portraiture effect on all images. This softens the skin slightly, giving all of the images a very gently airbrushed look. It softens blemishes and smooths skin, but only to a very small degree. The batched images end up in the “final jpegs” folder, and I take one last look at them before uploading to the proofing gallery. Be careful here, because it’s really easy to get overly involved in “fixing” images in Photoshop! Don’t get carried away, or else you’ll lose a lot of time editing images that don’t need it!

Before uploading to proofing, I combine my “blogged jpegs” folder with my “final jpegs” folder. Now I have all of my pre-edited social media and blog images combined with the rest of the images. I load the final folder into Photo Mechanic, and look through it one final time. I want to make sure I haven’t missed anything, and so forth. I remove all files from that particular wedding from my computer, except for the final files. The RAW files are gone from the main desktop now, as are all the other smaller folders. I back up the JPEG files to all computers and external hard drives. I keep the RAW files on the external drives. I move my RAW keepers for competitions and portfolio uses to a main portfolio folder, held elsewhere on my computer. Now the client folder only has final JPEG files in it.

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DELIVERING TO CLIENTS

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After all of the images are edited and ready, it's time to upload to the online gallery. I might be a bit unorthodox, but I have two online galleries that I use. I back up all of my images to Zenfolio, but I do not use it for my clients. I love the stability of Zenfolio, and how inexpensive a large amount of storage is. I also have all of my weddings since 2006 on Zenfolio, and love keeping the whole library together. I use Pixieset to deliver images to clients. I adore their interface, ease of use, and the clients adore it as well.

I promise a six week turnaround time in my client contracts. I have never delivered late. Culled images are delivered to my post-production team within two weeks of the wedding date, and they're returned within four or five weeks post-wedding. This gives us a little time in case something goes wrong. What if I get sick? What if my post-production person is out of town, on vacation, or also falls ill? I don't want to work up to a nervous deadline, and I always like to deliver early. I've been happy to have that week or two of padding at certain times, which ensures that I deliver on time. I prefer to deliver early, but on time works, too!

You have to be very clear with your clients the entire way about how long it takes to receive their images. This is something that clients tend to forget from the first meeting to the actual wedding day. I make sure to mention the delivery time repeatedly throughout the process, even going so far as to put it on the invoices! I've started sending out a post-wedding email, detailing how long it will take to see the images and how the process will go from that point. Despite that, I still get emails saying "When do we get to see our images?!" You have to understand that your clients are just super excited to see what you've created, and often forget delivery times!





DEALING WITH UNHAPPY CLIENTS

I know that we never want to think about unhappy clients. If we've communicated clearly, managed expectations, stayed calm, and delivered beautiful images on time, what do we have to worry about? I used to think that way, too.

I have had clients upset that I never took family formals that I didn't know about. I've had parents angry that I didn't shoot formals on "their list," which the bride and groom had culled down before giving it to me. I have had clients upset because the first look ran late, blaming me instead of their hairstylist, even though they were two hours late. I've even had a client upset because I didn't make the trees in her wedding pictures "more green", despite the fact that it was an overcast day in December. Not all client complaints are rational. Some you can fix, some you can't.

You have to separate complaints into two camps. The first are legitimate complaints. Did they ask for a family formal that you didn't take? Did you accidentally miss something during the day? These are difficult complaints, because you know you did something to affect the coverage. These mistakes are on you, not the client. If you've made a mistake



with the coverage, admit it. Ask the client what you can do to make it up to them. Determine if what they want is something you're willing to give. I'm not going to gift a huge album to a client because I forgot to take a picture of her rosary wrapped around her bouquet, but I might gift a print.

The second kind of complaint are not legitimate complaints. I had a client upset because I didn't retouch every speck of dust off of a table that I used to shoot a ring shot. I had a client upset because I didn't take a horizontal full-length picture of the bride and groom together, even though I took a vertical full-length picture of precisely what they wanted. I had a client upset because I didn't take many pictures of the two of them at their reception venue, even though they instructed me to take family formals instead. For me, the worst complaints are when the client is upset with me because another vendor made a mistake. When the first look runs late because of hair and makeup, the client never blames them, they always blame the photographer. When there is no wide-angle shot of the toasts because the videographer is right next to their table, what do you say? Do you throw those other vendors under the bus? Do you tell the client that the request they wanted (dust on tables, for example), is absurd?

You have to figure out where you are going to take a stand. In my first years of business, I would fall all over myself trying to make clients 100% happy, all the time. The client is not always right. I loathe the mantra that the client is always right! They're not. However, the client may not be right but they are still the client. You still have to continue your relationship. I use the same phrase that I use when the issue is my fault. I ask the client, "I'm sorry to hear that you're upset, what can I do to make it better for you?" Then I see what they want. Will giving a few 8x10's to an unhappy client, even if their reason is absurd, make them happy? I'd do it. If their requests are not something I'm willing to honor, I simply say no. At some point, I have to stand up for myself and for my business. I promise that this gets easier over time. Simply repeat to yourself that it's not personal, it's just business. A client is not upset with you personally, you have to remember that. They're upset with your business, and how you acted (or didn't) within that business. Do not take these upset clients home with you. Don't let them into your headspace. This is easier said than done, but it does get more manageable over time.

Then there is the ultimate of client complaints. I get this one multiple times per year, despite my attempts to manage expectations the entire way. "Why aren't there more images?" I will never understand the desire of the modern client to have quantity over quality. How do you respond when a client questions how many images you've delivered? What if they ask to see "the outtakes?"

The first thing you can do is attempt to manage those expectations from the beginning of your relationship. At the very first meeting, I make it clear how many images that they can expect in their final take. Whether we meet in person or on the phone, it's one of the things I make sure to cover when talking about what the various collections entail. I try to bring it up at other points in our relationship as well. What happens when the best-laid



plans go awry? What happens when you realize that your clients totally glossed over every mention of a final number, and now they want them all?

I say no. I tell them that the images unused are not archived, and therefore not available. I cannot give them to clients if they don't exist. Now, I totally still have them; I back up and keep all of my unedited RAW images, and that includes the outtakes. This doesn't mean that they are available to the client! Then I explain again what the outtakes actually are. I explain that the only images not delivered are true outtakes where their eyes are closed, someone walks in front of the camera, someone turns their head, etc. I explain that if an entire series of images of them laughing, for example, are lovely images, then every one of them is delivered. I explain that I'm not shooting to meet some quota of final images and that no, I promise, there are no gems to be found in the outtakes.

I do make sure that I never cite technical issues or things that can be perceived as my fault as a reason I didn't deliver an image, or as a reason those outtakes exist. I never say that any of them are out of focus or the flash didn't fire, or anything that might make them question why the images weren't of deliverable quality.

I stand firm on this. I'm not delivering RAW files to clients for any reason. You are free to make the decisions that you'd like for your own RAW files, but don't let clients push you around. You have to learn to stand firm in your policies, which can be a very difficult thing to do.

KEEP IT IN CHECK

- 👉 Communication is key, be sure you are on same page before delivery
- 👉 Try not to take complaints personally and deal with from business perspective.
- 👉 Manage expectations
- 👉 If you've made a mistake, admit it, see what you can do to make it up to client

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SHOULD YOU OUTSOURCE YOUR POST-PRODUCTION?

If I had to list the top five questions I am most asked by other photographers, “How did you know when to outsource?” would be close to the top. Before you make this decision, there are several things to consider.

First of all, how much time do you currently spend editing? I estimated that it took about six hours to edit a wedding, sometimes more, sometimes less. I don't edit in a straight line, I take breaks and do other things while editing. Six hours seemed like a conservative time estimate. At six hours per wedding, and fifty weddings per year, I was looking at seven and a half business-hour weeks to edit my year's work. That's almost two months of nine-to-five editing! That is a lot of time.



The next thing to do is figure out the cost of outsourcing. Choosing a number at random, let's say that it costs \$500 to have a wedding edited. At fifty weddings per year, that's \$25,000 worth of outsourcing.

Finally, look at the cost and look at the time. Could I figure out a way to make \$25,000 (or more!) in two months? What could I do with that time? I could network, I could shoot portraits, I could write a new book, I could teach a workshop, I could do a lot of things to bring in money. I could do a lot of things to further my business. That is where I make my decision. Could I make more money in the time I'd spend editing than it would cost me to actually have someone else do the editing for me? If I couldn't, I'd keep editing on my own. If I could, I'd outsource.

You also have to consider your own well-being. How stressful is nearly two months of editing? For me, that would be unbearable. Editing for that much time would make me





miserable. Getting a much-disliked business task off of my plate is worth quite a lot to my personal happiness!

If you've decided that outsourcing is the best for you and your business, you then have to find somewhere to actually outsource to. Do you need a post-production company, or an employee? If you're going to work with a post-production company, do your research. I prefer to work with a company where I work with the same editor every time. This helps with continuity. If one editor knows my work and how I like it edited, it's much more consistent than a team of editors who don't all know my work well. I don't want to outsource to a company who will then outsource my images to another country to have them done. I want to know the person that will be editing my images!

I'd highly suggest doing your research. Ask other photographers. Find out who they outsource to, and if they're happy. Create a short list of possibilities, and contact each one. Most places will ask you to send some samples, but I don't put too much faith in the results of that process. Anyone can get a few samples correct, but what will a full wedding look like? Don't be afraid to try a few different places to see who understands your style best. It takes some back and forth to get things running smoothly, even with the best post-production teams. Make sure you have concrete turnaround times established, and agreed upon. Also find out what you can do if you're not happy. Will they re-edit? Assign you to a different editor?

What if you decide that an employee is your best choice? There are pros and cons to hiring an employee, just like there are to hiring a post-production company. One great thing about having an employee is that they can complete other tasks for you beyond post-production. They can do album designs. Return client calls. Handle reprint orders. It's extraordinarily helpful to have someone there full time, picking up the slack and taking care of your studio. You don't have to worry about your images being handed off to a new production employee, since you'll have one person handling them every single time. That person will be in your studio, so you can talk immediately if there is anything that doesn't look right or needs revisions.

That said, there are downsides to having an employee. If you have someone employed full time, you still have to pay them even when you're not busy. If I had an employee, there wouldn't be much for him or her to do in January, February, and March! You also have to provide a place for them to work, or trust them to work at home. I don't mind a freelance employee working from home, but if I had a full time office manager I'd want them working on site.

If you're considering hiring an employee, you'll need to figure out how to legally hire them. What does your business structure enable you to do? How will you pay their payroll taxes? How will you cut their paycheck? Talk to your accountant to see what hiring an employee would entail.





THE WEDDING SCHOOL

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POST-WEDDING MARKETING WORKFLOW

A large part of my marketing plan involves the post-wedding phase of my workflow. Social media is a huge source of traffic, and also a wonderful way to network with the other wedding vendors.

Before the wedding even occurs, I make sure that I have a list of wedding vendors from the clients. The vendor list is part of my wedding day worksheet, so I know who I'll be working with before the event itself. I look up each of those vendors, finding their Facebook pages and locating their Instagram accounts.

Starting as soon as I can post-wedding, after culling the wedding and separating out my social media and blog images, I start the process. I upload one image per day to Instagram. I tag every single vendor that worked at the wedding, as well as writing their Instagram names in the caption of the image. I make sure to tag the bride and groom, since I know their Instagram names from their wedding day worksheet! I also make sure that I add any wedding-related hashtags that the couple has created.

Instagram can be very time-consuming. I use a program called Latergramme, which will let me set up my posts from my computer. If I have thirty images from one wedding, and choose to Instagram the best fifteen, I'll load them up into Latergramme right from my desktop. From my iPhone app, I'll choose which image to post each day. You can also use a program such as Schedugram to automatically post for you, but I prefer to choose my image every day. I make sure that I stay engaged with the comments, especially from other vendors.

I repeat the same process with Facebook. I choose anywhere from five to fifteen images for Instagram, and anywhere from ten to thirty images for Facebook. I repeat the same process, tagging all vendors' Facebook pages with my image of the day. I make sure that the images on Facebook are not the same as on Instagram, as I don't want both platforms to post the same image in a day. I am especially careful to stay engaged with comments on Facebook, since engagement drives the traffic of your Facebook posts. I use Meet

Edgar to schedule my Facebook posts, but there are many other programs to choose. I love Edgar, as it holds a library of posts that you can reuse and recycle. Not many other programs do that.

Within three weeks of the wedding, I blog the event. This is where I show the most images, since they all go together to tell a story. I cap it at forty images, however. I don't want the posts to be too long! I make sure that my blog posts are rich with keywords and searchable text, optimizing each post for SEO as best I can. When the blog post is live, I let every vendor know that it's ready for sharing. Getting the other vendors to share your posts gives you valuable backlinks and also helps with your traffic!

It's really important that you begin the social media sharing process immediately post-wedding. If you wait too long, the excitement will have dimmed down and the other vendors will have moved on to their next events. Despite that, don't be afraid to revisit your social media after the wedding. I will often find hidden gems while editing, and post those later. While it's very important to get the images online quickly, it's also important to always have a library of images to share.

Another time to reach out to the other vendors is when the full gallery is done. I share the gallery with them, and allow them to download the high-resolution files. I have a very open policy when it comes to sharing images with other vendors. In the email I send them, my terms are clearly stated. They can use the images for whatever they'd like. Ads, social media, Facebook, their website, and so forth. They cannot sell the images, but they can use them in-house for anything. They have to credit me wherever they share the im-



ages. That's it. I've been really fortunate that all vendors have understood this policy, and complied. If they didn't, or if it became a problem, I'd change my policy. For now, sharing the images has enabled my name to get out there a bit more. When they share them on their websites and link back to me, it just strengthens my SEO. It also makes me look like a super nice, super generous photographer that they'd love to work with again!

I do not often create samples for vendors that cost me additional money. Physical albums don't get viewed during vendor visits the way they used to, and samples are expensive. If a venue requests one, I'll consider whether or not it would be worth it to have a physical book at their location. Most vendors want digital files to show via iPad over printed books. You'll have to create your own policy for vendor image. What will work best for you and your business?

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CHAPTER NOTES







THE DESIGN PROCESS

Many of my clients opt for a wedding album, something that thrills me. I love digital files, but there is something about holding a wedding album that makes the images even more powerful. Clients either choose to pre-purchase a wedding album in their wedding collection, or opt to purchase one post-wedding. Either way, the design process is the same.

When I deliver my clients' online gallery, they also receive a template email. The template changes based on what they've pre-purchased. If they only bought their digital files, the email will instruct them as to how to begin the download process. If they have purchased an album, their email will also contain instructions to begin the album selection process. I allow my clients to choose the images that they would like in their album. Many photographers prefer to do the first round of selections themselves. Pre-designing the album for your clients is a surefire way to upgrade their package. There are many photographers who pre-design the albums with more images than the client had originally purchased. Then the client has the option to either remove images, or pay to keep them. This is a wonderful way to upgrade albums. Unfortunately, I have never been able to make that way of selling work for myself and my business.

It is difficult to sell to your clients in a way that you do not like being sold to yourself. Even if the expectations have been managed during the entire relationship, I myself would be very disgruntled if my photographer designed my album with more images than I bought. I understand that there are many ways to accomplish this and also make your clients happy. If the client expects you to over-design the album, they won't be upset when you do just that. I have tried to make this method of album sales work for me many times, to no avail.



When I release the gallery to my clients, my instructions to them are simple. I tell them to look through their images, choosing the one that resonate with them the most. I instruct them to not count the number of images they are choosing. The reason for this is simple. If you are perusing your gallery with a final number in mind, you might inadvertently skip over images that you truly love in an effort to keep the number count down. After the client has chosen all of their favorites, they submit them to me online. I then count the number of images that they have submitted, and let them know what the cost would be to include all of those images in their album. Most clients will not want to omit any of their favorite images, and will opt to upgrade at this point.

We use Fundy Designer to create our album layouts. My assistant also works as my album designer, which helps keep the process efficient. The first design doesn't take much time. What do take up time are the revisions. Each client gets two complimentary rounds of revisions before a change fee is assessed. We proof our albums online, and the clients can request those revisions directly in the layout itself. We are very clear that a "round of revisions" occurs each time they click submit, so it's wise to make sure you're ready before submitting. This helps decrease those last-minute "just one more thing!" emails. I always found the revisions to be a tedious process. It took me forever to get them done. It wasn't because the process actually took a long time, but because I procrastinated so mightily. Having my assistant design the albums speeds up the process, and makes it well worth the money.

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LET ME UPGRADE YOU

- 📌 For more in-depth, refer back to SALES AND MARKETING HANDBOOK
- 📌 Create simple upgrades - add images or increase size of book
- 📌 Create double or triple-volume option - sell large numbers of images
- 📌 Ensure upgrade fee received before album ordered!

WHAT KIND OF ALBUM UPGRADES DO YOU OFFER?

There are several different ways to upgrade an album. It was covered in the Sales and Marketing section of this book, but touching on it again now is important. It can be difficult to get more money out of a client post-wedding, when funds are low! My upgrades are very simple. The client can opt to add more images to their existing album. The client can keep the same number of images, but upgrade the actual physical size of the book. Lastly, the client can both upgrade and add more images. I sell twenty-five additional images for \$500, but am also willing to do a custom quote for a specific number of images.

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Another option is a double or even triple-volume book. You do reach a point with an album where you cannot add more pages without weakening the binding. If you want more than a certain number of images, you have to get into adding a second book. Double and triple-volume upgrades are a wonderful way to sell a large number of images to your client, while increasing your profit. I don't charge full retail price for the second book. I give the client a discount to add another book, as long as it's used for their album set. Parent albums and albums for other family members are not eligible for that discount.

If a client agrees to an upgrade, the entire upgrade fee is due before the album is ordered. We will begin designing without being paid, but the client knows that removing additional images ordered will incur a design fee. They'll pay a small fee to choose the additional image but not use it. This discourages clients from choosing a large amount of images, having us design the book, and then removing all of the upgraded images. Once the book design is approved, we invoice the client. Once the invoice is paid in full, we order the album.





PARENT ALBUMS

We have a pre-order discount on parent albums, so many opt to add them to their collection before the event date. We also contact the clients post-wedding to re-offer that discount on the album, provided they choose it within a certain number of days.

Our parent albums are totally unique books, not duplicates of the couples' album. If that is what the parents want, we can quote to do that, but most parents want their own book. The design process is the same as with the couples' book in terms of submitting favorites. The actual design process for a parent album is very simple, as the layout is one 5x7 image per page in an 8x8 book.

Parents can choose to add more images, upgrade the size of the book, or even upgrade to a larger album with a more complex design. As with the couples' book, any upgrades must be paid in full before we order the album.

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PRINT SALES AND OTHER PRODUCTS

With the growing popularity of digital files as a final product, print sales are more difficult to procure. That's not to say that they're impossible!

I try to lay the ground for print sales early on in the process. I have pictures of my own wedding in small, personal frames around my studio. I want to show potential and current clients that printing and displaying your personal images is important! So important that it's something I even do myself. I need to show that I don't just talk the talk about physical prints, but that I actually have them myself.

After the wedding, I include instructions as to ordering prints in the post-wedding email that they receive when their gallery goes live. I offer a small discount code for their first print order, just to get the ball rolling. Every holiday season, I email everyone who has signed up to view the gallery and offer up another print discount.

I do not limit how long the gallery stays online. I have it written into my contract that the gallery stays online for a year, but that's just to protect myself in case I ever decide to remove galleries for whatever reason. I leave the gallery online so that I can use it to show to potential clients. I also leave it online for print sales. Lastly, I leave it online because it's also my backup for digital files. As long as the gallery is online, my files are backed up in yet another place.

It is absolutely true that I would sell more prints if I had in-person viewing sessions after each wedding. I don't do this. Should I? I would

What are avenues for you increase profit based on your skills?

How can you better engage clients to encourage or remind clients to add-on?

How can you maximize your post-wedding meetings





absolutely make more money if I did. I am well aware of this. It is problematic, since many of my clients are not local. They live elsewhere, and come to the city to get married. Coming back for a viewing session isn't always possible. If you have the capabilities to do post-wedding viewing sessions, I highly recommend them. They will absolutely increase your profit. It's also okay if you don't want to do this, or you can't do this. I figure what I could make in a post-wedding viewing session, and add that onto my wedding rates. This way I'm being compensated for the loss in sales.

There are many other products that you can offer up in the post-wedding phase of your sales. Showing sneak peeks to your clients is a great way to sell Thank You cards. If you upload a small series of portraits to a site such as Minted, you can make affiliate sales off of the Thank You cards that clients purchase. Once you find what lab you use, peruse their product offerings. What can you add to your price list to increase your post-wedding sales?

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THE
WEDDING SCHOOL



A GUIDE FOR WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHERS

We believe that wedding photography is important. We believe in the craft, the business, and the joy that wedding photography brings both photographer and client. Our long-term mission is to provide the education, community, support, and clarity of purpose that raises the standards of what it means to be a professional wedding photographer today. We want The Wedding School to become the industry benchmark for the type of honest, real-world education that the wedding industry needs.

We believe in real, honest wedding photography education. We believe in you.

"I truly believe that Susan has inspired me to be a better photographer and a more focused businesswoman, and since watching her videos my photography has turned a corner, after 15 years in the business!"

— CHANON DEVALOIS PHOTOGRAPHY



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susan has been photographing weddings for almost fifteen years. She's won multiple awards at the WPPI 16x20 print competition including the Grand Award in Wedding Photojournalism. She's currently only a few points away from reaching Triple Master status, something she is quite proud of. Susan has been an educator for Photo Plus, WPPI, PPA, and Creative Live. Susan likes reading, annoying people by talking about crossfit, trying to persuade everyone in the world to listen to Hamilton, watching horror movies, sleeping with the lights on, and spending time with her husband, stepkids, daughters, and Chloe the dog.

Available online at www.theweddingschool.net
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