

How to Choose a Photographer

By Michael Moore

“Hey, Dude’s got this awesome digital camera and he can do your pictures for *FREE!*” This sentiment still makes me laugh, as well as cringe. It also reminds me of the old proverb, “You get what you pay for”, (sorry for the cliché, but it really holds true).

The concept that the camera makes the picture better is analogous to complimenting your Mom on her cooking because she has some expensive pots. And you know where *that* will get you! It also brings to my mind the TV commercial I saw recently where this guy is sitting at his kitchen table, holding a knife to his belly, talking to his surgeon on the phone and saying “uh, shouldn’t you be doing this?”

Don’t get me wrong, today’s cameras have some great features but cameras are simply tools. And just because the camera is digital doesn’t mean it is necessarily better. On the contrary, digital photography is more difficult, labor intensive for the photographer and can be very *unforgiving*. The process of obtaining an image has become simpler and faster but the digital image has far less latitude than film. What this means is the range of tones in the digital image file, even in the high end cameras, is far less as compared to the range of tones on film. Obtaining the image with perfectly balanced lighting, (not just perfectly exposed), is where experience plays a major role.

Yes, Dude may be handy with a camera and have a few great poses in his arsenal but do you really want to trust your most important pictures to this guy who’s just trying to augment his learning curve? He does mean well though, after all, he is your friend.

So now let’s consider the professional photographer. Simply put, this person has devoted a lot of time and effort to the study of how light strikes and reflects off of an object. While there are many technical aspects to this creation process, this is art, pure and simple. Art cannot be produced by a machine, there has to be a human quality to this means.

When choosing your professional photographer, here are 3 valuable points to consider:

Talent. What do the pictures look like? Is there a distinct, (or even subtle), variation in light and shadow or are the faces of the subjects merely bright? Light and shadow definition is what gives the subject in the image shape and form. Is the art and design of the images pleasing to you and is this the style that you are looking for?

Products and Services. How do you want your images presented, in albums, in slide shows, or loose prints? How are the final images treated? Is retouching included or is that charged extra? Capturing the images is only the first step. Enhancements can make a vast improvement on how each picture looks, (once again, this is where experience makes a difference). Be wary of the photographer that sells “pictures by the pound” and just hands you the images on a CD *unless you are prepared to do a lot of the work yourself*. It is well worth it to have your professional photographer do this type of work because your time is valuable too.

One other thing to bear in mind is when you opt for service based on price alone, you run the risk of getting substandard product. There are a lot of fixed costs involved in producing a professional quality set of images and sometimes lowering the photographers wage may be the only way to make

a package cheaper. Now, let's think about this for a moment, exactly how hard would *you* work at a job that paid less than minimum wage?

Character. This is crucial. How does this person relate to you as well as other people? How does this person interact with a crowd of people? Most importantly, do you feel comfortable with him/her? You are going to cherish your pictures much more if your encounter with the photographer is positive. Conversely, no matter how good your images are... well, you get the picture.

Professionalism is a fundamental part of character. A true professional is dedicated to his or her craft and is likely to hold association memberships. For example, the *Professional Photographers of America* is the foremost organization supporting professional photographers in many ways. The *PPA* also offers many services to consumers like referrals and resources or even recourse should you have the misfortune of an unpleasant experience.

So, what it all boils down to is this: Choose your photographer based on what he can do for you, and not on the gear that he has. A good photographer will know the proper equipment to use to get the job done right.

Now, enjoy your session because the focus is on you!