Turn Your Pictures Into Cash

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For many people, photography is simply a means to record events, places or people in their lives as reminders of happy experiences. And as long as the photos are sharp and clear, they’re satisfied to leave it at that.

In my mind, however, there are few things in life as exciting as trekking over mountains, deserts, or tundra ... scouring cities, small towns or rural countryside ... absorbing the sights, sounds and smells of new places ... and capturing their essence in a way that communicates something of their majesty, mystery, and drama to others.

It’s a life I wouldn’t trade for the world — it is a life filled with adventure, whether I’m hauling my camera across the country, or just around the corner.

Photography is a way to share the excitement and beauty of the world around me, and express my unique view of it. It’s an art, and a powerful communicator. Photography has changed the way I look at the world every day.
No matter where I go, I notice the scenery and people around me. I’m always looking for another photographic opportunity. I never ignore a sunrise, nor miss a sunset. I confess to carrying a camera with me every day. Sometimes it’s my full kit, sometimes just a pocket point and shoot, but I always have a camera at hand.

I have friends who drive the same route to work every day and can’t tell you what it looks like. I try to go a different way whenever I can. I appreciate some special spot or the light at a certain time of day. I notice the effects of the changing of the seasons, and I love rainstorms and fog.

“People watching” takes on a whole new meaning when you have a camera in your hand — or on your mind.

**Step #1 — Get to Know Your Instrument**

Photography has a lot in common with other forms of art. Let’s suppose you were planning to become a musician. Among the many things you’d need to learn is how to care for and operate your instrument.

For photographers, the camera is our violin, our piano. We need to know, almost instinctively, what each button press and setting change will do for us, and how to do them quickly. That comes with practice and with spending some time going through the camera manual so you understand what it can do.

As we go through the chapters ahead, you’ll learn your camera can do things you never realized were possible. But just like a violin doesn’t operate like a piano, even though they can both play the same musical score, you’ll need to understand how your particular camera operates.

I suggest making the manual a part of your camera bag. I have several cameras, and I have a manual on my laptop in pdf format
for each of them. Since they’re on my laptop rather than in printed form, they don’t take up space in my bag. And whenever I have a question about something I can do a search by keyword to find the section I’m looking for.

In the beginning, you may not understand what everything means, or understand why you’d want to use this control or that. But take the time to look through the manual with your camera in hand. You don’t need to understand it all. This program will help you do that in the weeks ahead. Just get a feel for things.

By the time you’ve finished, you’ll not only understand perfectly how to use all those different automatic modes available on most cameras, you’ll know how to do even the most complex settings with ease.

Now, having said all that, obviously there is more to taking winning pictures than just knowing the mechanics of your camera. You’ll have to know more than just how to “point and shoot.” But capturing beautiful, unique images is not nearly as difficult as some would have you believe.

You’ve probably heard people say that successful photographers have natural born talent. Well, not quite. While the mystical aura this creates for guys like me is fun, it’s not really accurate. I suspect photographers who were afraid of

QUICK TIP:
You can usually download a copy of your camera manual online (for free) on your camera manufacturer’s website. For instance, if you own a Nikon, go to www.nikon.com. If you own a Canon, go to www.canon.com. If you can’t find your manual there, try searching Google.com. Go to www.google.com and type in “online camera manuals”.

competition coined these phrases. They didn’t want other people to find out that composing effective pictures is a skill almost anyone can learn. It just takes practice — and a little guidance.

And that’s what this program is all about — demonstrating the “insider” tips, tricks and techniques that make top-notch photos, then showing you how to put them into practice for yourself. Once you do, in no time at all, you could find yourself being counted among the “natural born talents.” But more important, you’ll be composing photographs that sell.

**Step #2 — Skip the Cheesy Posed Shots and Start Thinking about the Story**

You’re going to learn a great deal about the art of composition throughout this program. But there’s one thing you can do today to start your career off on the right foot. My advice is to start putting more thought into each and every picture you take. Don’t just point and click. Think about the story...

Have you ever been to a relative’s or friend’s house when they break out the slides or photo album from their most recent family reunion? You groan inwardly because you know you’re about to look at picture after picture of little tiny people smushed together in great groups, meaningless candid shots, and dull pictures of the local scenery.

How often have you seen a picture of a mountain range that was really just a small jagged line smack in the middle of the photograph, and heard someone explain, “Gee! It’s really much prettier than that; this picture doesn’t do it justice. You should have been there!”

This is because many photographers — professionals and hobbyists alike — fail to think about the “stories” they want their pictures
to tell. Often the best way to tell the story is with smaller details instead of trying to get everything in the picture at once. Every picture you shoot should have a purpose. Even a candid shot can be effective if you think about the kind of story you want to tell with it.

How do you look for photo opportunities that tell a story? Here’s what I mean...

Photographer A is at a family reunion. He whips out his camera and walks around the room motioning for everyone on the couch to squish closer together so he can get them all in the picture. Then he moves to the other side of the room and catches Aunt Ethel eating cake. He asks her to put it down for a quick picture while Uncle Robert moves in closer and cousin Anna stands behind them and leans in. Then, on the other side of the room, his nephew is introducing his new girlfriend to his father, so he snaps a quick picture and voila!! Finally he’s accomplished his goal — he has successfully documented every person there.

What I’m suggesting, however, is that you think before you shoot... A good photographer, Photographer B, at that same family reunion might instead opt to show the five generations of women still living on mom’s side of the family, the age span between the oldest and youngest children, or the babies that were all born the same year.

“Every picture you shoot should have a purpose. Even a candid shot can be effective if you think about the kind of story you want to tell with it.”

He also won’t interrupt people to smile at the camera. Instead, he’ll try to grab shots that tell a story — Mom slaving away in the kitchen, the kids playing with the dog’s ears, or Grandpa making the little ones laugh with his magic.

We’ll talk a lot more about the act of actually setting up and taking shots like these as you move through the program. You’ll also learn
more about composition and how to build story elements and emotion into your photos. For now, think twice about taking cheesy posed shots.

Step #3 — Take the Time to Stop and Smell the Roses

Think back to when you were a kid and everything was new and exciting and beautiful. Remember climbing trees and feeling the rough bark under your hands... jumping into leaf piles in the fall just to hear them crunch... spending hours trying to catch grasshoppers or fireflies or bees in a jar... and lying on the lawn with your friends, picking out animal shapes in the clouds?

Unfortunately, as we grow older we seem to lose that sense of wonder and discovery, perhaps because we become too busy, or maybe a little jaded.

Can you remember the last time you really looked at the wildflowers carpeting a field or the patterns created by wind blowing through grass?
How often have you visited a new city and grown quickly bored, wondering only where to have lunch?

One of the great benefits of being a photographer is being able to rediscover the wonders of the world around us, both large and small — whether it’s finding a new way to capture the Eiffel Tower or the shimmering jewels of frost on a blade of grass.

Lay on the ground and take pictures of the sky... get down on your knees and get a cat’s eye view of the dog... and head out with your camera to capture the fall foliage one day.

Look around you at the natural beauty waiting to be captured in a photo. Think about how you might use your camera to make a work of art filled with creativity and interest.
Step #4 — Narrow Your Vision

Here’s a common scenario you’ll likely run into: You’re visiting a national park near a mountain lake, with a flower-filled meadow in front, a stand of pine trees to the side, a snow-capped mountain peak in the background. Your eyes flit from one thing to another, and your mind instantly records a thousand different impressions... ducks on the lake, wild rose bushes clumped here and there around the meadow, sun-struck trees and grass, deep blue sky and billowing clouds, colors spanning the spectrum, a myriad of shapes, lines, textures and forms... And then there are the scents coming to you on the breeze: the sweet potpourri of wild flowers and mountain grasses, the musty odor of wet ground, the hint of pine, the freshness of a passing rain storm.

Your mind records every impression, summing them all up in one image of awe-inspiring beauty. But how do you deal with it all as a photographer?

First, you need to understand the difference between your perception and the camera’s capabilities. This requires that you see beyond your initial excitement over a grand scene or a beautiful subject, and concentrate on the elements within the scene that will tell the story you want to tell. Remember the example of the family reunion? Instead of trying to cram everything you see into one sardine-packed picture, you begin stripping away much of the extraneous, and focus on only a certain number of elements.
Step #5 — Start Your Own Reference Library

Another way to develop your photographic eye is to study the work of great artists — painters, sculptors, and even movie cameramen — as well as photographers. There are hundreds of books and magazines for every type of photography genre out there — nature, commercial, portraiture, wedding, travel, editorial, advertising and more. Go to your local bookstore, or go to an online store (such as Amazon.com) to begin building a photography reference library. You’ll find resources later in this program with suggestions on a number of excellent books to get you started.

Many photography magazines and books can now be delivered right to your computer or other electronic device through the power of new technology. They allow you to travel anywhere and still have at your fingertips any of your magazine subscriptions or reading/reference material.

But before you sink hundreds of dollars into new books and magazines, visit your local library and see what they have available. If your library doesn’t carry a certain book, you can probably get it through an interlibrary loan (meaning they’ll have it shipped in from another library). Then, if you find you check out a book more than twice, you’ll probably want to go ahead and purchase a copy for yourself.

Most libraries provide a rack with a number of different magazines and newspapers. Look at any that use a lot of photography. (Scholarly and trade magazines don’t use as many photos as consumer publications, and their quality sometimes isn’t very good.) And don’t think the magazines have to be recent issues. You’re looking for photos to study — not hot-off-the-presses articles — so read the back issues and really look at what elements the photographers include in their photos. Do their photos always include
people? Do they lean more towards pictures of the outside of a restaurant when they run an article about it or do they want shots of the inside? Are most of their photographs horizontal or vertical?

If you can get your hands on magazines known for top-quality photography, such as those published by National Geographic, that is all the better!

A visit to a museum will show you how painters and other visual artists put the same techniques of composition and storytelling into their art thousands of years before the invention of the camera. And the next time you watch a movie on TV, pay attention to the way each shot is framed and composed. You’ll discover there is a common language at work — one which we’ll explore in more detail ahead.

**Step #6 — Join a Local Photography Club or Association**

Photography clubs are a great place to learn new ideas and skills, and they’re a lot of fun. Often they offer lectures on photo techniques, and arrange group outings for practice. You get to know other folks in your community who share your passion, and you have the opportunity to exchange experiences with different techniques and camera equipment. Contact camera stores and community centers to locate a camera club in your area.

Photography associations often have national affiliations. They can offer you a number of benefits, including opportunities to network with knowledgeable professionals, seminars and workshops to help you hone your skills, information on government and marketing issues, and more.

There are dozens of associations throughout the U.S. that cater to photographers of many different interests. You can find one that follows your interests on the internet. A few examples are:
• **Professional Photographers of America** (for studio and wedding photographers)

• **North American Nature Photography Association**

• **American Photographic Artists** (all types of photography)

• **American Society of Media Photographers**

And remember that Great Escape Publishing has many resources available to you in the form of reference materials, tutorials, current and archived articles, and much more.

You can access these online at www.greatescapepublishing.com.

**Step #7 — Be Persistent and Patient**

One of the greatest skills you can bring to your photography career is good old-fashioned stick-to-itiveness. It’s an asset that will serve you well both in capturing beautiful images, and in selling them. If you were born persistent, count yourself blessed. That quality can be a priceless advantage as you deal with the challenges of building your photo skills, and then selling your photos. If persistence wasn’t an inherent trait you were born with, take heart. You can develop a persistent personality — it just takes a little practice.

As with most creative endeavors, raw talent accounts for only about 1% of a photographer’s success. The other 99% comes from — you guessed it — persistence!

**So What Can You Do To Get Started?**

**Create a Clip File**

One of the best ways to develop an eye for good photography is to study great art. So the first thing you’ll want to do is start a clip file of pictures you like, so you have good images within easy reach.
Whenever you see a picture you like — drop it in your clip file. When you’re first starting out, it’s probably sufficient to collect your clips in one manila file folder. But before long, you’ll need to expand to a more organized system, so it’s easier for you to find clips when you need them.

The best way to organize large files is usually by category. These categories can include wilderness, national parks, flowering plants, non-flowering plants, weddings, portraits, industrial work, architecture, beaches and so on. You can customize your files according to the types of photography you’re interested in most.

Right now, spend a few minutes labeling folders, then spend about 20 minutes a week going through magazines and newspapers for clips. How do you know if a photo is good enough to find its way into your file? When you look at a photo ask yourself these three questions:

1. Does it grab your attention and pull you into the moment?
2. Is it just an interesting photo? Don’t settle for a photo that is merely “interesting.” Instead, look for the striking, the beautiful, or the unique.
3. Does it cause an emotional reaction in you? The reaction doesn’t necessarily have to be good — some photos are intended to spark a shocked, angry, or otherwise negative reaction — but it should impact you emotionally in some way.

That’s all there is to it. Now it’s time to pull out the scissors and magazines and start your clip file.

And continue through the sections of Turn Your Pictures Into Cash. I think you’ll be pleasantly pleased with what you learn.