

How to Bid a Freelance Editorial Photography Job

1. Establish a Day Rate, an Hourly Rate (usually quoted as a half day) or Quote the Job as a whole depending on how much time and research you think you will be putting into it... This step will be determined by the client, your relationship with the client, the usage of the photographs and your experience as a photographer. **You will also need to establish usage rates determined by the circulation of the publication and use of the image (i.e. one time rights, rights for a year, Internet rights, CD rights, etc.).**

Editorial Day Rates average between \$450 and \$900 a day depending on the publication, the usage and circulation of the periodical (whether it is one-time usage rights deal or the pictures will be used several times, possibly on the Internet). Set your price and expect negotiations – Let the client know you want the job, but must do it at a rate that benefits both of you. Depending on the complexity of the shoot and how much extra work you have to do there may be a creative fee involved. Corporate Rates are generally higher than editorial rates. A Corporate Rate averages between \$1,200 and \$2,500 a day. Corporate days are usually long and stressful with Public Relations, Marketing or other escorts and corporate or advertising people planning out your day to the minute.

Image licensing models are preferable when they can be applied for expenses, creative fees and usage. However, you may not have the licensing option for editorial work.

2. Film and Developing Costs. Film costs should always include developing, contacts and negative or slide sleeves. It is the professionalism you need as a photographer and shows the client your seriousness to provide a polished final product. Most professional labs provide this service at no additional charge. This is the one place you may have a chance to mark-up your expenses to make a little more money. A normal charge is \$35 - \$50 per roll of 35mm or 120 film (which includes developing). I generally bid four rolls of film per shot so I know I'll have a choice of images to choose from and that I can safely bracket exposures to cover my rear. Large format film obviously costs more so I generally bid 4x5 out at \$6 - \$9 per sheet of film, developing and a cheap matt or film sleeve. 8x10 is a different entity all together and I have bid it out at \$16-\$20 per sheet of film.

Polaroid cost may either be included in the film cost or listed separately. I usually price a half box of Polaroid per shot, which is somewhere in the \$15 - \$20 range depending on the type and size of the Polaroid used. Polaroid is important on a shoot because it determines the final outcome. Polaroid or instant films have their advantages. Polaroid can be used to check exposure and/or lighting. An art director, advertising representative, corporate rep., etc. can sign off on a Polaroid which takes the pressure off the photographer. You no longer have to worry if the client likes the shot. The signature assures that you will get paid and shifts the pressure to whom ever signed off on the image. Polaroid is also a good way to check your camera and/or lighting equipment to make sure that it is working properly. If you shoot a Polaroid before you begin shooting and after you finish shooting then you have double checked the exposure, the lighting, the camera shutter and the lens aperture blades.

Scanning and Digital Delivery are additional costs. Scans are generally in the neighborhood of \$1 per megabyte. You will have to include some editing for cleaning up the file, color correction, manipulation, etc. or tell the client what to expect.

If you are shooting digital you will have to calculate your digital costs for the job and bill it accordingly. This may include overhead for the digital equipment you bought, archiving (CDs, DVDs, Hard Drives, etc.), digital file cleanup (commonly referred to as part of the post production costs), etc.

3. Set Costs. If you have to build a set then all costs associated with the set should be billed directly to the client. This includes materials, labor and miscellaneous expenses. This could mean contracting a company, association or an individual to build the set for you according to your specifications or the client's specifications.

4. Travel. If you are making any travel arrangements then you will have to quote the price up front. Use a travel agent. This way you can make your own arrangements and control costs, seating arrangements, use your favorite carrier, rack up airline mileage, etc. The client may place restrictions on you regarding travel (i.e. coach class), but that is part of the bargaining process. Travel may also include mileage on your car or car rental. If you rent don't forget to add gas and insurance costs.

5. Administrative Costs. Surprisingly enough the little costs of doing business add up. This includes phone calls (esp. long distance), faxing, shipping, parking, tolls, etc. These are the little things that take money out of your pocket and can be written off as legitimate business expenses that you do not have to pay tax on at the end of the year. It is important to keep good records of all the little things you do on a job so you can bill them back to the client as legitimate expenses.

6. Assistants. Assistants always have to be cleared with the client, but are a regular part of doing business. They are your help on the job and most of the time the one person you can depend on while you are working. As the photographer or employer you will be required to supply food, drink, shelter (hotel/motel) and any other related expenses that the assistant may need while working. These are legitimate expenses and should be billed out to the client. You will be paying the assistant anywhere from \$125 to \$250 a day for their work plus all other expenses so don't leave them out of the travel and food estimate. I recommend billing the assistant out to the client at \$125 - \$175 a day and charging extra \$25 to \$30 for your time finding, booking and working out arrangements. Many publications are starting to ask for assistant invoices, so it has become hard to mark them up for profit.

7. Models and Stylists. Models and stylists may either be arranged by the client (possibly through an agency) or chosen by the photographer (or someone he/she trusts). It is an additional charge to the client if you research and choose the model(s) or stylist(s). This can be done through a modeling agency, stylist union or at large through ads, etc. Remember that you are going to bill the client for the model and/or stylist either by the day or by the hour depending on how long that he/she is on the set. You will be required to provide food, drink and other comforts for the model and or stylist while he/she is on the set. You may even have to provide transportation. All of these items should be recorded with receipts to be billed out directly to your client.

Models and stylists may not show up, may be late for a shoot, have accidents, can be very temperamental and occasionally get sick so be prepared. If you have made all the energy, effort and arrangements to insure the shoot goes as planned, be sure to confirm the model or stylist the day before the shoot. Many times the client will schedule the model or stylist, but if you hire them make sure the client accepts the person/people you have chosen. The client(s) or the model(s) may request insurance for the set and you may need to provide insurance for the day of the shoot. Use reliable models, you may choose to work with professional models via modeling agencies.

8. Equipment Rental and/or Studio Rental. Think the shoot through carefully. If you think you might need to rent equipment for the shoot then speak to the client about it and be able to give firm rental prices. Be very up front with your clients and they will respect you for it. If a studio is needed then call and request the dates the studio is going to be open and get firm rental quotes. Make sure to find out what the studio provides and what you are expected to provide (you may have to rent lighting equipment or make special alterations to the studio for the shoot), what time they open and close, clean-up or repainting fees, etc. When billing for studio rental it is common to have a 10% to 20% profit markup. The markup can be explained as accounting for your time to make the arrangements, working with your staff to get everything ready, etc.

9. Location Fees and/or Photography Permits. Many places require you to pay location fees to make photographs. This may involve getting permits to set up in certain areas or for something as simple as using a tripod in a public venue. Permits may take several weeks to get so it is important that you know well in advance before scheduling a shoot in a public place (city parks, national parks/forests, in front of well known buildings, etc.). Building permits and fees are usual in New York where the Empire State building, the Statue of Liberty, the Chrysler building and various others require heavy fees to use their facades or facilities. Always ask (no matter where you are) before including a building in a picture you intend to use for commercial purposes.

Private locations also charge fees. The general rule is to ask the owner for permission to use his/her property or an image of their property in your picture(s). Recognizable roofs/walls that are painted with state flags, murals or advertisements are good examples of needing a signed release before taking the picture. When you get the owner to sign the release he/she may ask for some sort of compensation, most likely money, so prepare by researching the location and coming to the bargaining table with a figure in mind to ensure that negotiations go smoothly.

10. Location Scouting. Location scouting is a viable form of business. It requires that you scout the location in detail and show or explain it to the client. You have to photograph the location at various times of day, from every angle possible and label each picture properly with date, location, angle, direction, etc. Keeping up with the details is a tedious job, but necessary to eliminate questions. Carry a compass and make sure to get/give extremely good driving directions. Location scouting can be billed at rates of \$450 to \$750 a day depending on the product you produce. If you need to hire a location scout then you can bill it directly to the client, but the costs and location must be negotiated with the client and approved.

11. Software to manage your business is a necessary evil in the freelance world. This could be as simple as a spreadsheet you create yourself or a software package specifically designed to help you bid/quote jobs, maintain inventory, manage your studio, etc. There are several programs on the market that help freelance photographers – FotoBiz by the Cradoc Corporation and PhotoByte by Tom Zimberoff. Both of these programs help the photographer quote the job based on foreseeable expenses and the photographic usage of *your images* which is how to protect *your copyright*. There are several books on the market that will also help you price jobs and maintain a business sense, which at times needs to be more acute than your image making ability.

Photographers also need to keep a good set of books for accounting and business purposes. We recommend programs such as QuickBooks, Quicken, Peachtree Complete Accounting, Microsoft Small Business Accounting, etc. that are readily available on the market. We also recommend having an accountant or bookkeeper and a lawyer that you trust and feel comfortable calling on a regular basis.

Registering and Protecting Your Copyright

Library of Congress
Copyright Office
101 Independence Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20559-6000
Phone: (202) 707-3000
<http://www.copyright.gov>

If you call you have to ask for packet #107 for photographic copyright(s) or download and fill out a form VA to send in with your deposit and money.

Since September 11, 2001 and the Anthrax mailing incidents the copyright office has been steadily updating and changing registration procedures. It is best to call the copyright office, APA, ASMP or PPA for more information.

In order to protect your copyright you must have registered the image(s) or items in question prior to the copyright violation or within 90 days of the violation. Make it a point to register images regularly.

Overhead – Amount of money you spend in equipment, supplies, rent/mortgage and recurring costs before you can start making money.

Photo Equipment – cameras, lighting equipment, meter, stands, grips, flat bed scanner, film scanner, etc.

Office Equipment – Computer, Software, Furniture (chairs, desk, cabinets, book shelves, etc.), Printer (B&W laser for business), Color Inkjet Printer (for photographs)

Monthly Expenses – Rent or Mortgage on office space/studio, Electricity, Water/Sewage, Gas, Trash Pickup, Broadband Internet Connection, Telephone (Land Line), Telephone (Cell Phone), Web Site Hosting and Maintenance, Liability Insurance, Equipment Insurance, Health Insurance, CAR/SUV Lease or Payment, etc.

Add in your Salary (what you want/need to make during the year) and Retirement Plan

Divide the total overhead expenses by the number of jobs you realistically expect to get during the year to get an average cost of what you have to charge per job to break even.

Taxes

Many taxes on small business can be written off, but you may have to pay them up front. It is called paying estimated taxes and you have to pay them one a quarter (every three months – January, April, July and October).

Federal Tax: based on salary level of \$30,000 to \$70,000 per year – \$4,000 plus 25% of the amount over \$29,050

State Tax: currently Georgia State Tax is set at 6% of taxable income

Social Security: usually the employee pays 7.65% and the employer pays 7.65%, but since you are self-employed you are both the employee and employer so the rate doubles to **15.30%** -- out of this **12.4% is Social Security and 2.9% is Medicare**

Medicare: 2.9 % paid by employee, usually figured as part of the Social Security deduction/liability.

Retirement ? – IRAs, Savings Accounts and Investing. You need to have a retirement strategy and an account or accounts that you contribute to regularly.

Incorporating for protection. If you are incorporated in one of the following ways it generally helps protect you personally from most things the business may be liable. Corporations may be set up and taxed differently than a normal sole proprietorship and that will have to be noted and explained by an accountant and/or a lawyer.

LLC – Limited Liability Corporation

S-Corp – for partners that pay taxes separately based on their percentage of the business

C-Corp – for a corporation

Always keep your personal bank accounts separate from your business bank accounts!

Organizations that help with getting started in business (especially photography businesses).

APA – Advertising Photographers of America

<http://www.apanational.org/>

<http://www.apaatlanta.com/>

ASMP – American Society of Media Photographers

<http://www.asmp.org/>

<http://www.asmpatlanta.org/>

PPA – Professional Photographers of America

<http://www.ppa.com>

NPPA – National Press Photographers Association

<http://www.nppa.org/>

SBA – Small Business Administration

<http://www.sba.gov/>

Do not hesitate to contact an accountant, bookkeeper or lawyer as needed. They are professionals in their fields and photographers often need their help. Photographers are generally creative people, but we have to make a living. Without the business people we would not be able to stay in business (or at the very least be in a lot of debt and/or other trouble).