



You need a photography business plan, not just a website

A common pattern I see in emails from beginner photographers: you want to build a new photography website, as cheaply as possible, so you can get more people to hire you or buy your images. And fast.

So many ways in which that's *naive*.

You're basically expecting to launch a website that works on its own, and that will magically bring you more money. The old "build it and they will come" mentality.

I'm here to tell you that, unless you stop thinking like a hobbyist, you won't be able to build a healthy photography business and get the results you want.

Start thinking like a business owner

Photography is a business. So besides shooting & editing photos, you have to learn many other skills: web-design, SEO, marketing, finances, contracts, copyright, etc.

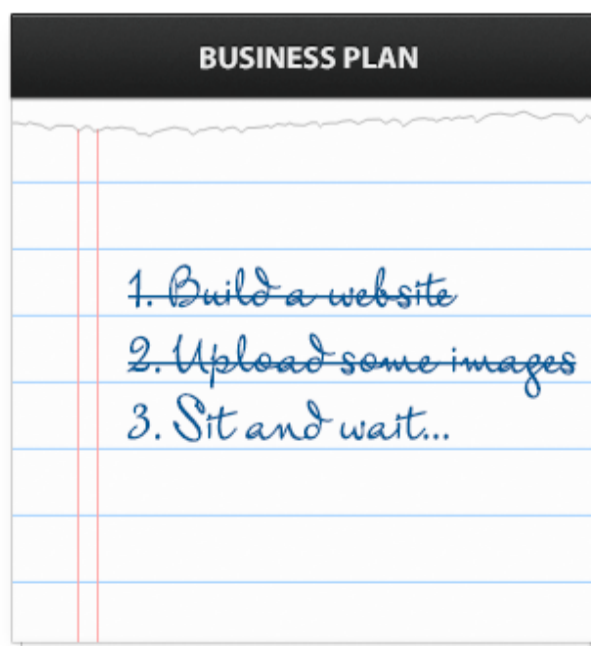
You don't need to be an expert, and you can surely outsource some of these aspects, but you still need to understand the basics in order to succeed.

Overall, you need to treat what you're doing as a business. This [change in mindset](#) will help you take better actions towards your goals:

- you define your target audience to make sure your website copy is aimed at your ideal clients
- you don't work for free. [Spec work is bad for you.](#)
- instead of just launching a site and waiting, you schedule a monthly review for your site, deciding what content could be updated/refreshed
- you take care of your finances, and you protect yourself using contracts for any assignment work

Otherwise, you're leaving it all up to the wind.

You might be afraid that all this business-related work will take something away from your creative flow. I get that. I become a photographer to do what you love, not some boring business stuff. But by thinking long term, you soon understand that growing your business will give you the freedom to do more of what you love in the future.



Build it, *continue working hard*, and they will come

When thinking of your photography work as a business, let's emphasize the role of your website: it's an investment. You spend some time and resources now to create a "marketing engine" that will help you get sales/clients over time.

The fallacy here is that it's not a one-time thing. You don't just put something up online, launch it, and then expect it to do all the work.

Everyone has a website these days. It's not enough.

Websites are not magic, they're just multipliers of the quality of your work.

Your photography website can indeed be a powerful tool in your career. Sometimes indispensable, but only a tool. It depends on how you use it.

It's OK if you just want to stick to a simple portfolio website (for people who find out about you from other means and just want to check you up online). But don't expect more work from it.

That only comes if you continue putting in the work over time:

- adding new featured galleries or rotating past work (to [make your site feel fresh](#))
- writing new blog posts (to increase your readership over time)
- understanding the industry and adapting to trends
- continually testing and improving the site

The grocery store analogy

If you were trying to build a grocery store in the real world, you wouldn't just need to rent out the space, fill it with produce and then open the gates. There would be many aspects to take care of in order to turn it into a flourishing business.

All aspects of running a physical store translate to your online photography business:

- store location -> business location, target audience
- branding -> online branding
- construction material -> hosting service, platforms, themes, plugins
- interior design -> web-design
- product quality -> the quality of your images (this is [the most important thing](#)), and [tightly editing your portfolio](#)
- product prices -> image licensing, assignment rates
- marketing -> online marketing
- etc.

Stop looking for shortcuts

When you build your first website, you can dream that the website will automatically bring in new sales & clients. But you'll soon realize that the process is lower than expected (but it requires hard work, if it were that simple, everybody would do it).

Without treating it like a business and taking the time to do your research, any "tips & tricks" that you implement on your site won't help you get results. The obsession some photographers have with SEO or with Facebook Ads is proof of this; they're just unreliable shortcuts, instead of putting in the work.

If you lack clarity or you're working in a dead-end photography niche, all the SEO and advertising in the world won't help you reach your business goals. Even if you have a beautiful website. Bottom line: you need quality work.

“If you think your organization needs a bigger marketing budget, maybe you just need to be less average instead.” (Seth Godin)

Look around at [some successful photographers online](#). Many of them are using Flash, have crappy About page, poor navigation, SEO issues, you name it.

But they're still hugely successful because they focus on their images, and they think of their business as a whole. Their website and social media outposts are just tools they're using, poorly or not, to drive their business forward.

Work hard to differentiate yourself

It's a lot easier these days to build a quick portfolio website for yourself. Countless tools and templates to choose from, just waiting for you to upload your images.

But everybody is doing that.

Acting as a professional and strategically thinking how you'll be growing your business in the future, is what can set you apart (and rise above the sea of hobbyist photographers).

Photography website planning guide: find the clarity you need before building a strong online business

Whether you're just starting a new career in photography, or you're already an established photographer but are looking to build a new website, it's critical to take some time to properly plan things out first.

Otherwise, you risk ending up in the same "bucket" with countless other amateurs out there building mediocre sites for themselves.

“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” - Benjamin Franklin

If you're serious about it, dedicating some time to doing research and strategizing in the beginning will really pay dividends in the long run.

Professionals make a plan and then put it into action

As a photographer, you're [both an artist and a business owner](#).

So you should start acting as a business owner as well (learning to do marketing, web-design, SEO, invoicing, budgeting, etc. – at least to a good-enough level so that you can hire outside help).

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- Benjamin Franklin

Understand your target audience

Clearly defining what your ideal client is and what makes you unique as a photographer can help you build a more effective website.

There are no generic steps that you can follow to find this, it's all subjective and depends on your goals and personality. But there is a series of (hard) questions I've put together to help you describe your audience and form an “elevator pitch” (don't be off-put by the business terms, it's easier than you think, and it's something that you can later put to good use on your new site!)

This should be mandatory reading for all photographers starting a business: How to define your target audience & elevator pitch (and use them on your site)

Research the industry

Your website will not be built in a vacuum. You'll have to think hard about what products/services you'll offer and how you'll position them in the market. Doing some research and getting inspiration from other successful sites in your niche is therefore important.

Here are some questions to get you going:

- Are there other photographers/businesses already that are serving the niche you're after?
- What services & products are they offering (and how could you do things better)?
- In what interesting new ways could you serve your audience?
- What useful things do other photographers have on their websites that you haven't thought of before?

Think of the content you already have

Building a website around existing content is considerably easier than guessing what the content will eventually be. That's because the process is more streamlined and everything gets much simpler.

So make a list of all the bits of content you already have (from any old website, documents you might have sent to past clients, old social media posts, etc.)

Similarly, if you already have a visual identity established, gather everything in one folder on your computer (logo, graphics, fonts, etc.) *Also gather a list of all the services that your web designer might need access too (hosting, domain registrar, site admin, etc.)*

And, most importantly, start going through your image archive to find your best images, the ones that you'll want to showcase on your new site.

Decide on the content you still need to create

Where you're lacking in terms of content, you need to make a plan for creating it.

That might mean:

- shooting a few personal projects to use in your portfolio (remember that your website is just a multiplier of the quality of your images, they matter most)
- writing your bio
- preparing a few blog posts
- defining your services
- etc.

This is also the time to reserve your domain name, hosting service and social media accounts, if needed.

Writing new content (or preparing new images for your portfolio) is probably the most time-consuming part of it all, but it can't be overlooked. Everything else sits on top of the quality of your work. Estimate how long it will take you, and double it. (I've seen a lot of project delays because preparing content took a lot longer than initially expected).

Sketch an outline of your site structure

Now that you've made a list of all the content needed on the site, put it together in a coherent structure. No need to worry about design at this point, just focus on the hierarchy of your site's pages, on how the content will be organized.

This article walks you through all the steps you need to cover, give it a try:

[Information architecture for photographers: how to structure your site for optimal user experience & conversions](#)

Define the intangibles

Here is a series of other questions I usually ask photographers at the beginning of a big web-design project. Some of them are optional, of course, but taking some time to answer them for yourself might help you get more insights:

Are you branding yourself as a solo photographer or as a company?

I wrote about the (dis)advantages of each on the newsletter [here](#).

Any words to describe the mood needed for the site?

People are coming to your new site for the first time. How do you want them to feel about your brand/company/site? (joyful, elegant, classic, serious, funny, dark, modern, minimalist etc.)

Any preferred colors or fonts for the site?

What do you imagine people using your site for?

What will they want to do there? Why will people choose your site over others?

In order of importance, what are your business objectives with this site, your major goals?

What is motivating you or enabling you to do this project now?

Will you be selling prints and/or image licenses on the site? Any other products?

Examples: Prints, Rights-Managed Licenses, Royalty-Free Licenses, Calendars, Workshops etc.

Who will be working on this project from your end?

Will any additional outside partners or agencies be involved and how? If there are other partners involved, have you synced your schedule with them? Do you have someone who will be responsible for ongoing website updates? Does that person have any experience with [website maintenance](#)?

How often do you want or will you need to make updates to your website?

What features do you anticipate adding to your website in the future?

How quickly would you like to start?

What kind of time frame are we looking at?

Is there a certain event or date that is dependent on this project? Does the project need to be done in phases or with specific milestones or dates? How is your availability for the project?

What is your budget range for this project?

Are you seeing your photography website as [an investment instead of an expense](#)? Everything you know about financial planning and budgeting is useful here, of course.

Can you list your top few competitors and their website URLs?

Please try to comment on their strength/weakness and what differentiates your site from them. (If there aren't clear "competitors", please list the top sites you would consider similar to you).

Are you worried about anything regarding the project?

What do you imagine going wrong? How can failure be avoided with this project?

What does success look like for this project?

What business metrics are you tracking? What will be the tangible/measurable results for this project? And how will we know if it's a home-run & we totally knocked it out of the park? What will it mean for you? Ex: 20% increase in site visitors, 5 extra monthly leads/bookings etc.

P.S. [Let go of the "build it and they will come" mentality](#)

What is your level of technical expertise? Have you done a project like this before?

Research the tools you need

An important part of your planning process might be to do some research on the tools/platforms you'll need to build your website.

I won't give any specific recommendations here (because it all depends on your specific needs), but I'll soon be compiling a huge list of recommended tools & resources for photographers looking to build their websites.

Till then, feel free to check out [my Q&A category](#) or [subscribe to my newsletter](#) to be able to ask me anything (via email or by recording an audio question).

Planning is important, but don't over-think it

Sure, you don't want to go into a new photography business blindly, but you should also put something out into the world before your internal [Resistance](#) takes over.

Spending too much time in the research phase will allow the "analysis-paralysis" mode to kick in. Over-planning is a form of procrastination.

“The reason that everybody likes planning is that nobody has to do anything.” - Jerry Brown

Instead, you should set a time limit for your research and planning work. Working with a deadline will force you to focus on the essential and get things done.

Plus, you don't need to define every single detail from the start, you'll also adapt as you go along.

Conclusion

Planning is what gives you clarity.

And when you're clear on what you need to do, you can put much more effort and courage into it.

Otherwise, you're just copying others and hoping for the best. A surefire way to become unremarkable (and therefore unsuccessful) in today's crowded market.

Follow the guidelines above to plan for a strong online presence for your photography business. Once the plan is set, start working on it with intention.

And if you already have a photography website, planning your future is important as well, but you might first [decide if it's time to redefine your photography business](#).



Your photography website is the “foreground” of your work. Make it amazing!

Differentiate yourself from the world of photo hobbyists with my unique design & development services and results-oriented articles. Don't get stuck in the “background”!

ForegroundWeb is a one-man cozy web-design studio, on a mission to improve photo sites out there.

If you run a photography website or blog, you're probably looking for more clients and better ways to professionally showcase and sell your photography work. You also know that a great website can help you find work and raise your prices over time, like a marketing engine.

But what's the purpose of it all?

You want the freedom to do what you love, to infuse your personality into more meaningful photo projects.

Splashing a coat of paint on a half-baked site theme won't cut it anymore, there are millions of hobbyists already doing just that.

ForegroundWeb wants to give you the clarity & tools to differentiate yourself.

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