



Why choose a professional over a non-professional

I get asked this question all the time from people who have contacted inexpensive hobbyist photographers off of Craigslist or other inexpensive advertising mediums. The hobbyist maintain their camera can take just as good or almost as good pictures as anyone else and they only charge a fraction of the price. I will hopefully dispel that myth.

1: Most non-professionals use cheaper cameras that by all standards can take excellent photographs, but do not have the creative control of the higher end cameras. Some examples of important features lacking in lower end cameras are slow auto-focus causing missed shooting opportunities, lack of CLS commander flash support resulting in strange lighting, inability to use some lenses, long lag times or slow motor drives resulting in more missed shooting opportunities, etc. Professional photographers use these features all the time.

2: Most non-professionals use “kit” or inexpensive lenses (the kit lens is the one that came bundled with the camera) which can result in slow shutter speeds resulting in blurred pictures because the lens is not fast enough, excessively distracting backgrounds due to bad bokeh (the blurring of the background) or lack of ability to separate the subject from the background, lack of sharpness since professional lenses are almost always much sharper than inexpensive lenses, especially wide open where you need them most. Lastly, expensive lenses are better corrected to reduce or eliminate aberrations of light traveling through them making the photographs look more “real”. Interesting note, did you know that a picture taken with a 24mm lens framed exactly the same (framed the same means that the picture will have exactly the same areas in it, for example only the head and shoulders of a person) as a picture taken with a 100mm lens will look dramatically different? Do you know why? Professional photographers do.

3: Most non-professionals lack the experience to quickly scan the scene in the viewfinder, check for proper subject placement, check for proper subject direction, check for cut off extremities, check for distracting objects in the background, calculate desired depth of field, adjust aperture/shutter speed to get desired results, check for proper hair/jewelry/color/etc placement, all within about one second. Professional photographers do this instinctively and it take years to develop this skill, and even most pros are still perfecting it.

4: Most non-professionals lack the accessory equipment to cope with unusual situations which often arise. This equipment includes plenty of off camera lighting, various filters, light reflectors and/or modifiers, remote triggers, tripods, monopods, alternate lenses better suited to a specific situation, extremely fast lenses (can make the same shot in less light than ordinary lenses), on site backup devices just in case, and more. Professional photographers have cases of accessories just in case.

5: In many cases, hobbyists will charge roughly the same as the professional for inferior work taking more time with fewer good shots and more stress on the subject as the photographer tries to figure out what to do next. Unfortunately many people see a great price for the hobbyist and never bothers to ask a professional what they charge for the same work! Don't settle, get quotes from professional photographers *before* you pick a photographer.

Does this mean all hobbyists are bad and all professionals are good? No! Does this mean you should never use a hobbyist for anything? No! Just be sure you are not paying roughly the same for a hobbyist as a professional who could do a better job.



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So how do you tell a professional from a non-professional? Here are a few guidelines to help you.

1: Check their website. Professionals will have their own domain name such as www.allanhallphotography.com instead of one like allanhallphotography.SomeWhereElse.com or www.SomeWhereElse.com/allanhallphotography. In addition the quality of the website will tell you quite a bit. Professionals want their website to reflect their business and will spend the time and money for a nice one.

2: Look at their email address. A professional will have one at their own domain such as allan@allanhallphotography.com instead of allanhallphotography@hotmail.com, gmail.com, yahoo.com, etc.

3: Professionals will have a state sales tax certificate since they are really in business; this means they also charge tax, as is required by Texas law. If they do not have one, they are not a real business and are also breaking the law.

4: Professionals will have a good online portfolio, not just some snapshots on flickr, although there is nothing wrong with having a flickr account. The online portfolio should have more than just a couple of people in it.

5: Professionals will usually ask for specific information instead of just spouting out prices. Hobbyist will advertise something like "portrait sessions \$75, unlimited time, unlimited shots, only ten spots to fill until I finish my portfolio then my prices will go up!" So what happens when I want them to cover the next five years of my life, twenty four hours a day, seven days a week for my biography and they will only charge \$75? Next problem here is they flat tell you they have not "finished" their portfolio. Lastly, "only ten spots left"? Can you say high pressure sales tactics?

6: Professionals will insist on a contract, and you should too! Contracts protect both parties and ensure that everyone understands exactly what will happen and when. In the unlikely event that something goes horribly wrong having a contract means that you have some legal recourse that you may not without one.

7: Professional will usually belong to a professional organization such as the Professional Photographers of America, look for the PPA or other logo on the photographer's website.