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A C A D E M Y

# TOP TIPS FOR NEWBORN PHOTOGRAPHERS THAT ARE STARTING OUT

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## DO THE SUMS

When I started my own business, I had NO IDEA of how much money I needed to make to run a successful business, pay my bills and look after my family. I took the 'suck it and see' approach and man that was not a good idea! It almost broke me and put my family under an awful amount of pressure, emotionally and financially.

Remember when you become self-employed you become the employee as well as the employer. Think about it; if you were to go for a job interview, you would definitely discuss your expected salary before you accepted the position. Likewise, when you decide to work for yourself, you need to consider your expected annual salary which will cover, or help to cover your household expenses, debts, holidays, school fees etc... Don't forget that you will also have to pay your national insurance and taxes as well as the costs of your studio rent, not to mention insurances, subscriptions and a myriad of other business expenses.

When you do these sums and then work out how many sessions you can realistically undertake in a year you soon realise that you need to charge

much more than you think in order run your business and pay yourself a decent wage.

Far too many of us creatives don't pay enough attention to the numbers, and it is the most common cause for start-up photography businesses to fail within their first year.

Draw up a business plan and do the sums at the beginning and your chances of success will be much higher!

## ATTEND A WORKSHOP OR 1:1 MENTORING

When I started my newborn photography business in 2010, there were very few newborn photographers in the UK and precious few that offered any training. After two years, I realised that I needed help to get my images to where I wanted them to be.

After my first 1:1 mentoring session, my images and my confidence improved massively, and I immediately regretted not attending a workshop or mentoring session sooner. I now offer [workshops](#) and [mentoring](#), but I still love learning from other photographers when I get the chance, we never stop learning!



If you are starting out, definitely look at attending a workshop as soon as you can. Learning those basics at the beginning of your journey will speed up your progress massively.

There is also a huge amount of [online learning](#) these days, much more than when I started out.

## GET CERTIFIED IN PAEDIATRIC FIRST AID

As parents, we should all do this anyway, but as a newborn photographer, it is essential. There are many organisations, such as the British Red Cross who [offer paediatric first aid courses](#). Do a quick Google search to find a certified course near you. It will be high up on your client's tick list when it comes to choosing a photographer and it goes without saying that you would never want to be in a situation where you simply do not know what to do in an emergency.

## SET REALISTIC TARGETS

We have all been on Instagram and Facebook admiring our idol photographer's images feeling that we will NEVER be able to take pictures like that!

I did too, as well as all of the other top photographers. We were in the same boat at the beginning of our careers. Remember, we all start somewhere, and some of the more experienced photographers have photographed hundreds if not thousands of babies.

Practice makes perfect, and it does take time! Rome was not built in a day.

When starting out, rather than trying to create the perfect session of 30 perfect poses concentrate on taking just one or two images per session that you are truly proud of. That is a realistic and achievable goal that will

maintain your enthusiasm and provide you with a beautiful image to add to your website gallery.

I still have not managed to photograph the perfect gallery! Babies are just like that; there will always be one pose within a session that does not go to plan. That is OK; our expectations are usually much higher than our customers, so don't stress.

## **SLOW DOWN**

I remember being so nervous and anxious in the first year or two. I used to panic my way through sessions and to be honest, it was all a blur!

What if that baby wakes?

What pose should I do next?

Why won't the baby go to sleep?

Mum does not like that pose, what am I going to do now!?

I would be exhausted at the end of a session, and later when I reviewed my images, I would be devastated to see all of the mistakes.

Newborn babies tap into our anxiety, so try to stay calm and SLOW DOWN. If you are calm and collected, mum will also be less anxious, and that is the environment that you need for a successful newborn session.

Plan your session in advance and discuss with mum beforehand what poses and colours she prefers. Learn how to photograph newborn babies awake and don't worry about how long the session is taking.

If your studio is comfortable, clean and warm, it is likely that the parents are only too happy to be out of the house and have you look after their little one for a few hours. For this reason, only ever book in one newborn session in a day.

## BUILD A PORTFOLIO

I still do FREE model calls from time to time. I love trying out new lighting techniques where I can concentrate on what I WANT to achieve without having the pressure of satisfying a paying client.

When there is an exchange of money, there is an expectation, and when there is an expectation, there is pressure. In the beginning, when you are building a portfolio, try to photograph as many models as you have time for. On each portfolio building session, all you are looking to achieve is one beautiful picture of that baby in a pose of YOUR choice.

Have an example of that pose printed out (use one of mine if you want) and spend as much time as YOU need to get that picture just right.



CONCENTRATE on how the baby is posed, study the composition and the camera angle. Observe the direction of light. You will be AMAZED at how much you will learn from this process. Then take a few more shots, five beautiful pictures (for free) will be more than enough to keep Mum happy.

On each model call concentrate on a different pose and very soon you will have a beautiful gallery of 15-20 amazing pictures for your website gallery.

This process will speed up your photography skills faster than you can imagine and give you the confidence in your ability to charge what you need to.

## **OUTSOURCE**

I wish I had followed this advice at the beginning of my journey!

If you have no experience with Tax returns and accounting, hire an accountant.

If you have no experience in web design, hire a web designer.

If you have no experience in marketing, get someone to help you with your social media marketing.

You get the idea...

I know that this costs money but let me assure you, you WILL save money in the long run and you will get the job done properly the first time around.

I have spent hours, days and weeks trying to learn something and then given up and hired a professional anyway. I could have spent all that time photographing (which is what I am good at), and with the profits that I made from those sessions, I could have paid for the specialist three times over!

## **PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT**

Whenever you get the chance, study your new profession. That includes practising with a fake baby.

I use an inexpensive reborn doll to practice my wrapping, lighting, camera angles and image composition. A fake baby is never going to teach you how to settle a fussy real baby or how to pose a baby safely and comfortably. Still, it will help you fine-tune your lighting, master camera angles and perfect your image composition.

Your camera should also become an extension of your hand, you should know, without having to think, how to change your aperture, exposure and iso.

You should also be able to quickly shift your focus-point to achieve sharp focus within seconds. This only comes with repetition, so get your kids into the studio if you dare! Also, take your camera out with you and photograph everything that moves!

## **INVEST IN WHAT YOU NEED, NOT WHAT YOU WANT**

Do not break the bank in your first month! Photography is notoriously expensive, and with newborn photography, there is always going to be the trendy ‘must-have’ prop that everyone thinks is great! Usually, it gets used once or twice and then spends most of the time on the top shelf in the studio!

When getting started, just buy what you need and remember that you do not need the latest top of the range camera to take beautiful pictures.

The camera I had when I started was not what would be considered a high-end professional model. But it did what it needed to do, and I upgraded when I could afford to do so. Once you have the essentials, then set yourself a monthly budget for the pretty things (props and accessories) and try to stick to it.

## **NETWORK**

Starting your own business is full of ups and downs. At the start of this exciting journey, it might feel like the downs far outweigh the ups, and that is normal. There are hundreds of newborn photographers in the same boat and others that have already established successful and profitable businesses.

Most of these photographers are members of various Facebook groups where they compare notes, vent frustrations or offer advice and support. Remember with most things in life the more you put in, the more you get

out so look for a supportive group and engage, you will be amazed at how much you can offer and how much you can learn from others.

If you know of a photographer nearby, why not invite them for coffee and cake? Have a chat and see how you can help and support each other. I promise you; there are more than enough babies being born each day to keep you both busy!

There is a lovely saying:

*'SUPPORTING SOMEONE ELSE'S SUCCESS WILL NEVER DAMPEN YOUR OWN'.*

I live by that motto so all the best with your new business, DON'T GIVE UP and dream big!

Russ