

GUESS WHAT? I DON'T WANT TO TURN PRO!

Quick Guide
Written by Lisa Cannon



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I remember very well the day I received my first DSLR. It was a Christmas gift, and something I wasn't expecting. I was so excited! I had my first "real" camera and two lenses to play with. I wasted no time getting to work on the basics and trying out different genres of photography to figure out what I liked to shoot. I also joined the world of online photography, finding groups that not only allowed me to share my images but also offered further opportunities to meet other photographers, ask questions, and continue learning.

It wasn't long before I started encountering one topic on a regular basis: becoming a professional photographer. Discussions ranged from determining the best time to turn pro, to setting up websites, finding clientele, and the ever popular and always confusing subject of pricing. I was fortunate enough to know a few photographers at different points on the path to becoming professionals and was privy to some of their successes and struggles. It was a unique situation because these photographers specialized in different genres of photography, so I was able to see what parts of their journeys seemed more generalized, and what things were more specific to the different genres they practiced.


Before long, I started being asked what my goals for photography were. I quickly learned that what I was actually being asked about was my plan for

turning professional. To many people's surprise, and often disappointment, my answer was a simple and unpopular one: I don't plan on turning pro. And I didn't do myself any favors when I was asked why, because my answer was even more simple: I don't want to.

Have I lost you yet? Are you maybe a little confused? Or are you interested in finding out how and why I've made the choice I have? I hope you'll read on for a few points to consider when you start to think about how you want your own photographic future to look.

In this guide I will discuss the following:

- The value of the moment
- Following trends
- Owning your own business
- Content creation and selling extras
- Maintaining my passion

 **Recommended Reading:** Want a simple way to learn and master photography on the go? Grab our set of 44 printable Snap Cards for reference when you're out shooting. They cover camera settings, camera techniques, and so much more. [Check it out here.](#)



Photograph by Devon Hawkins

Typical Emerald Lake image

THE VALUE OF THE MOMENT


As I visit new places and experience new things, I find it's more important to me to capture the moment for the memory than for its possible retail value. I look to capture what I am feeling at that moment without worrying if I have the best possible angle or vantage point, and I trust my skill and my vision to lead me to good compositions. If I have time, I will continue to explore different set-ups and look for new views while I continue to enjoy the moment because I know I may be able to improve on my composition. What remains constant is that I continue to choose my shots based on what I feel best represents the moment and its personal meaning rather than what might make my image stand out on social media feeds or become a top seller on a website.



Photography by Lisa Cannon

My Emerald Lake image

An image can indeed do all of those things, and I have great respect for those that have figured out how to make that work. But I have also seen photographers choose to shoot the images that will sell over the images that will carry the memory and then express regret later that they didn't have an image that accurately reflects the experience as they remember it. Many of us have events in our lives that we wished we had better photos of—it happens. Personally, I don't want to add to that by choice.

 **Key Lesson:** Don't forget that the moment or experience you are capturing has value on its own, regardless of any potential retail value the images might have. In my opinion, both are worth considering.



Photograph by StockSnap

Man with headlamp image

FOLLOWING POPULAR TRENDS

When I scroll through any of the social media apps, I often start to notice definite trends within the different genres of photos. The trends seem to start when artists begin recreating a popular image they see posted by a more well-known photographer, partly in the hope of generating the amount of attention the original image enjoyed. Before long, there are so many versions of the same basic shot that it can be difficult to tell them all apart. For example, I remember this type of image of a person with a headlamp in the dark dominating my social media feeds several years ago after it was made popular, in part, by a well-known Canadian photographer.


The trends can even show up in the editing styles. I clearly remember the years when high dynamic range, or HDR, photography was so popular it seemed to be everywhere.



Photograph by Lisa Cannon

Popular view of Sheep River Falls – full falls image

Personally, I become less inspired and more uninterested as I scroll through so many similar-looking images in my feeds. I prefer to continue to create based on what I like and not on what many others are already offering. And I continue to create for the sake of creating and not to try to generate image attention and popularity.

 **Key Lesson:** By not worrying about following the latest image trends, you will continue to encourage your creativity, and develop and grow your own vision and style.



Photograph by Lisa Cannon

My favorite image from Sheep River Falls



Photograph by Lisa Cannon

Desk work

OWNING YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Unless you are hired by someone else, becoming a professional photographer will also require you to become a business owner. While there can be definite positives to owning your own business, it also requires a completely different set of skills than being a photographer does. To start with, you will need to understand the requirements for owning a small business in your area, including what licensing, registrations, and insurance are required. You will probably want to set up and maintain a website and separate business social media feeds that allow your potential clients to connect with you. There will be marketing and advertising strategies that will need to be developed and rolled out. And there are administrative tasks like communicating with and scheduling clients, accounting, and physical product pick-up and delivery that will all need to be looked after. If these are things you're not familiar with now, you'll need to decide if you want to put in the time, effort, and expense to learn, or if hiring out some or all of those tasks will be the way to go. The success and longevity of your business could depend on it.



Photograph by Lisa Cannon

Desk work close-up


Personally, I don't think I am well-suited to being a business owner. Part of that is the fact that I don't have some of the knowledge I just mentioned, and part of it is being aware that I'm not a leader—my personality is better suited to supporting and assisting than to being a team leader. I would need to invest the time and expense in learning the business skills I'm missing because without the ability to lead, I don't think I'd be a very good employer. And while I recognize that working outside of my comfort zone can lead to personal growth, I also think that it's important to recognize the difference between being in an uncomfortable situation and being in the wrong one. I don't want to put myself or anyone else in a situation that is likely to lead to more struggle than success.

💎 **Key Lesson:** It is important to recognize all that goes into owning your own business besides photography.

CONTENT CREATION AND SELLING EXTRAS

Do you follow popular photographers on social media? Have you noticed how many of them are not just selling their photography? It seems that running a successful photography business means not just creating images anymore. It means creating and selling other content as well. A large number of popular photographers are constantly creating video content for social media apps to help gain name recognition as well as to show off their work. Besides featuring their photos, they walk you through the shooting experience and offer tips and tricks for improving your work. But that's not all. You'll often see advertisements for print sales, books and presets, and sponsored links that you can follow to purchase third-party products that they receive a part of the sale proceeds for. Many of them also supplement their income by teaching and offering critiques, workshops, tours, and masterclasses.

I am absolutely not saying there is anything wrong with any of this. I admire the ability of those photographers to branch out, and I like that as a result I have the opportunity to learn from them through the programs they offer. But I also recognize that this is part of what it takes to earn a living through photography in today's market, and these are not things I either know how to do nor am interested in doing. My lifestyle does not lend itself to a schedule that includes multiple trips away from home throughout the year, nor am I in a position to deal with an income stream that may not be stable from month to month.

 **Key Lesson:** Look at all the extras offered by today's successful photographers and consider if you are prepared to create extra content and products to sell.



Photograph by zhanzhan

Photography group image



Photograph by Lisa Cannon

Example of the type of images I enjoy creating


MAINTAINING MY PASSION


As I mentioned at the beginning of this guide, I have watched other photographers attempt to turn their passion for photography into their business. No matter the genre of their work, they all had one thing in common: their goal was to open a full-time business that would provide them with a consistent income. All of them struggled to get their businesses up and running, which isn't uncommon with new small businesses. For some, they were never able to generate enough clientele to keep the business generating the income they needed and had to switch to a part-time schedule or close altogether. There were a few that did find success and ran their businesses for several years before finding themselves burnt out and no longer enjoying photography. In fact, at least one set his camera down for several years because he lost the joy he'd always found in photography when it became work.

Of course, it doesn't always go this way. There is nothing wrong with wanting to support yourself with your art, and many photographers are running successful businesses and doing just that. My purpose in sharing these examples is not to suggest it can't be done, but to offer some scenarios to consider if you are thinking of starting your own business. The last thing I want for any of us is to lose the joy we find in photography.

For me, choosing not to become a professional means my passion for photography isn't subject to the kind of pressure I watched others put on theirs. There is no need for my photography to reach certain levels of popularity because I am not hoping to attract clientele or to generate any sort of business with my images. Creating for myself means I get to move at my own pace, without schedules or deadlines to meet. I can choose what I shoot, and when I shoot it. I am happy to share my images simply for the sake of sharing them. By not tying

my photography to my livelihood, I can make the choices that best support my passion rather than ones that would support a business.

 **Key Lesson:** Be aware that the pressure to start and run a successful business can become a detriment to the passion that inspired the business in the first place.

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At the end of it all, my main reason for not turning pro is that I simply don't want to. My photography is a personal experience: I use it not only as a creative outlet but as a form of self-care.



Photograph by Lisa Cannon

CONCLUSION

Photography is a way that I center myself when my world starts to feel chaotic and hectic. It forces me to slow down and to live in the moment with the subject I put in front of my lens. It is often a solitary practice that forces me to deal with what may be going on in my head so that the creative process can start. I work without the pressure to create something that will hopefully please someone else, and instead I am free to simply get lost in the process of creation itself.

By no means do I want to discourage anyone from their dream of opening their own photography business. On the contrary, I wish you all the success. You deserve to realize your dreams as much as I do, and the fact that those dreams may be different doesn't change that. But for those of you that may need the reminder, know that it is perfectly valid to simply create photographs for the sake of creating them. Selling your work does not validate you as a photographer—the very act of creating that work already does that.



Hey there!

Let's get real for a minute... Learning photography can be super challenging! But we're here to help you every step of the way! Here are 3 of our most useful (*and FREE!*) photography resources:



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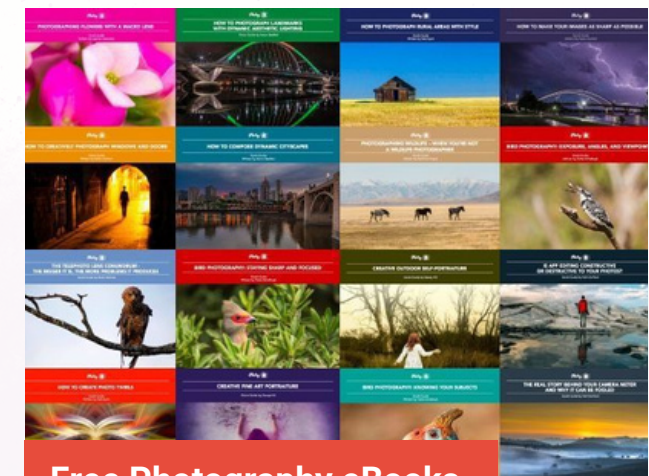
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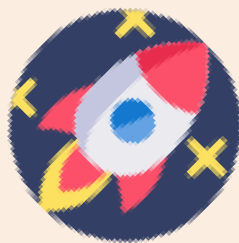
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lisa Cannon is a hobbyist photographer, living and photographing in the prairie provinces of western Canada. She started getting serious about photography in 2012 after receiving a Canon Rebel xTi as a gift. It didn't take long for Lisa to find her photographic passions--sports and action, macro, and nature--and she combines these with her love of the outdoors to create images she's proud of.

Follow at <https://www.instagram.com/leavemymark2016/>

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