

**MB COMMERCIAL  
PHOTOGRAPHY**

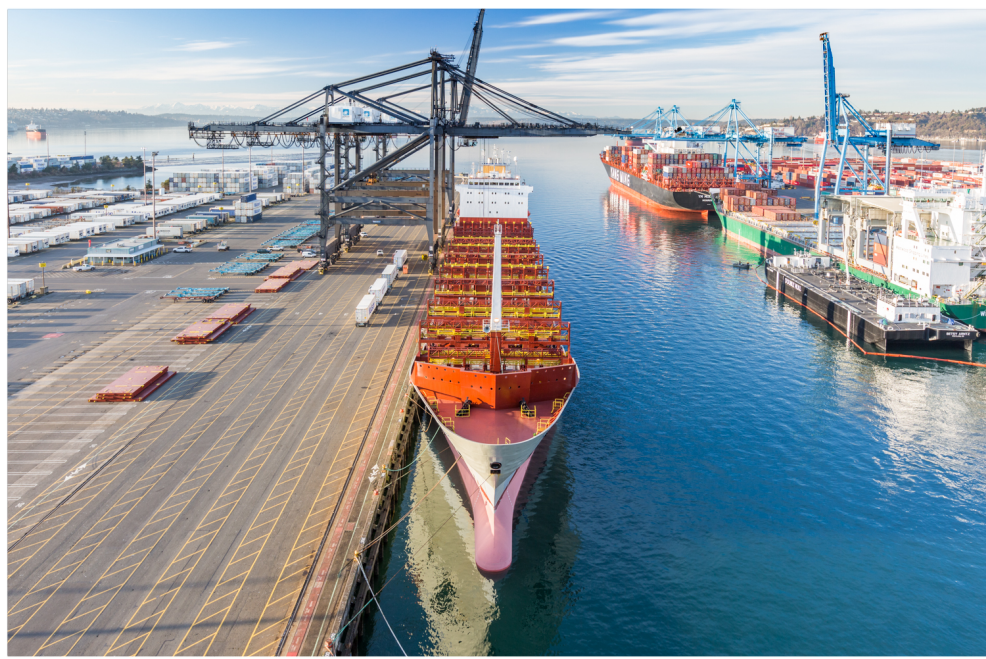
# How to Brief a Photographer

Your guide to getting the  
photos **you want** with the  
photographer who  
**will deliver**



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## what is a photography brief?

### get the photos you want

A good photography brief is a crucial step in getting the photos you want. No matter how good the photographer is, if they don't know what you want, they can't deliver what you need.

This brief is a guide to the style and content of your project. It will help the photographer understand your brand and the target market, and make the photos and videos fit them.

## find the best photographer

A good brief will also help you select the best photographer for your needs. You need to have your brief - at least a draft of it - before starting to look for a photographer. A brief to a shoot is what a business plan is to a business.

By using the same brief to request proposals from photographers, you can compare photographers' deliverables and cost. Without clear understanding of a job, each photographer will provide a quote based on their assumptions. You will then be comparing apples to oranges - different photography costs based on varying deliverables.

## use this worksheet

Use this guide as a worksheet. I left blank spaces for you to fill in your answers to the questions you should consider when thinking about your photography needs. They will guide you in getting the photos you want and help you choose the right photographer.



# why: know what you want

You should have a good understanding of why you're hiring a photographer. Start with the big picture. Why do you want the photos? What story do you want to tell? Make sure you can clearly and succinctly answer this.

*A brief to a shoot is what a business plan is to a business.*

The photographer needs to understand your goals and what you want to achieve. This will shape the shoot and the deliverables - what kind of

photos will need to be made, when and where the shoot will take place, how will it be executed and how the final images should be edited.

A press release, a website mock-up, an ad copy or a campaign copy is also an excellent way to

give context. Any background information you can provide to the photographer will help them understand the deliverables.

## what story do you want to tell?

A well-done photo shoot tells a story. Whether the photos are meant to showcase a product, a newly built building or give an overview of the services your company offers, the final photos should be a cohesive body of work in style and content. A visual story takes the audience along on a journey and leaves a lasting impression.

*What is your story?*

## who is your audience?

You need to know your audience and craft a visual story that resonates with them. If you want the photos for your website and your website's audience is mostly teenagers, for example, you want the photos to speak to younger people immersed in the latest technology and fashion and style and trends.

It's unlikely that the same set of photos will universally speak to everyone. Defining your target audience will go a long way in making a successful campaign or an ad or a website. Each audience needs to be specific and a visual communication style chosen specifically for them.

*Who is your audience?*



## do you have any examples?

Do you have examples of the photos similar to the ones you'd like to be made? Examples of websites or ads that use the photos you like would give the photographer an idea of what you want and expect. Have you worked with other photographers whose work you liked? These examples would be another way to show what is expected from a new photographer.

- I don't have any examples*
- I will look for examples later*
- My examples are:*

## how will the photos be used?

What will be the **primary** use of the photos? Are they for your company's website, a printed ad in a magazine, a mobile marketing campaign or a billboard?

Usage dictates context - photo composition, lighting, subject matter, level of detail, post-production editing. If you need photos for your website, for example, and most of your website visitors use mobile devices, you want even tiny photos to have an impact. They need to feature a single subject on an uncluttered background. Website visitors won't be able to see much detail of a busy photo on a small screen.

*Usage dictates context.*

*What will be the primary use of the photos?*

## do you need specific photos?

If you need specific shots - from a certain angle, of a certain feature, at a certain height, or have a certain number of photos - you want to be ready with a shot list. A shot list is a storyboard for the shoot. You can leave it up to the photographer to use their best judgement to make the photos based on your brief. However, this should be discussed and included in the contract, as you will be relying on their interpretation.

- We need specific photos*
  - We have a shot list*
  - We need to make a shot list (work with your photographer)*
  
- We will rely on photographer's interpretation*

## make it a conversation

Shoot development should be a conversation between you, the photographer and the other creatives and stakeholders. Don't be afraid to pick the photographer's brain. A good photographer doesn't just makes great photos but has a creative vision and can tell a story.

Is the person hiring the photographer different from the person who will be using the photos, like a layout designer or a marketing director or a web designer? Make sure the end-user of the photos can also provide guidance to the photographer during shoot development.

## how: shoot logistics - the other parts of the shoot

### will the photographer need assistant(s)?

Depending on the complexity of the shoot, a photographer might need to hire assistants to help set up and manage the shoot. Knowing the requirements and complexity of the shoot, the photographer will be able to let you know whether assistants would be needed, get vetted assistants for the shoot, and include their cost in the quote.



## will the shoot require models?

We can make a lasting connection to a place (like a hotel) or a product (like a car) in a photo by visualizing ourselves there. There is no better way to help your audience make that connection than by putting people in photos. Good models are often the key to successful visual communication.



Once you know what you want to say and how, you'll be able to decide whether models need to be brought in. A good photographer will help you answer that question, and if models are needed, quote their cost and get the right models for the shoot. You want to match the models to the audience you're targeting. If your target audience is senior citizens in a retirement community, 20-year-old models would not be your best choice.

Commercial use of photos with people in them requires special legal considerations. Every recognizable model needs to have a signed model



release form. This document explicitly states that he or she has given permission to the photographer and the photographer's client to be in the photos. The release form helps prevent potential misunderstandings and dismiss lawsuits if the model demands better compensation or objects to the use of the photos in the future. Don't ignore this important step.

When we work with models at Mihael Blikshteyn Photography, besides the model release form we also ask all models to sign a contract with us. The contract outlines our working relationship and sets the expectations.

- We need models specific to our target audience*
  - We will be casting and hiring the models*
  - Photographer will need to cast and hire the models*
- We will find volunteers or willing participants*
- We don't need people in our photos*

## will your product require styling?

If the emphasis of a photo is space or product - a hotel room, a new building, a ship propeller - properly styling or staging it to make it look its best and appealing is essential. There are specialized companies that can help with that. Discuss it with you photographer as you think about the shoot.

## will the shoot require props?

Think of the Coca-Cola and energy drink commercials - the actual product plays a small part in them. It's the expectation of what your life would look like if you drank



them that sells the product. Helping your customers imagine themselves using your space or product is the ultimate goal of a well-executed photo shoot. What kind of props in your photos might help your customers make that connection? Ask your photographer to brainstorm with you.

*Will you be needing any special props?*

## **will the photographer need specialized gear?**

A shoot might require specialized photography gear that the photographer doesn't own. Depending on the shoot, the photographer might rent special lighting equipment, lenses, stands, etc. Based on this brief, an experienced photographer will let you know if the shoot would require specialized equipment rental and quote you these expenses to avoid any surprises.

## **where will the shoot take place?**

If the shoot is location-specific, like the interior of a building your company has built, a preliminary walkthrough is highly recommended. A walkthrough allows you to show the photographer which aspects of the location are important and need to be showcased. The walkthrough also helps the photographer understand what will be needed to execute a shoot there - the gear they would need and the best time for natural light at that location. Our company often asks for walkthroughs before quoting an estimate for a complex job.



If you are unavailable for a walkthrough or don't know the perfect location for a shoot, a good photographer will be able to scout locations before the shoot and provide you with a list of options.

Part of planning the shoot is also understanding whether the photographer will need to have special access or permissions to be on the shoot location and whether the shoot location needs to be booked ahead of time.

*Do you have a specific location in mind for the shoot? Will the photographer need to suggest options?*

## when do you need the finished photos?

*Digital photography is not instant.*

Depending on the complexity of the photo shoot, putting it together can take time. For outdoor shoots, the weather, time of day and direction and availability of daylight can play an important part in deciding the timing of the shoot. Some shoots are time-specific and need to take place at a certain time no matter what.

Remember that post-production and editing of photos takes time as well. Digital photography is not instant.

*When will you need the photos by? Can the photographer choose the date and time of the shoot within a certain window, or does the shoot need to take place at a specific time?*

# how much: calculating costs

A photo shoot cost depends on 3 main factors:

- The time it takes the photographer to do the shoot and edit the photos - how many photos you want and the difficulty of making them will dictate photographer's time commitment
- Image usage - how the photos will be used and by how many different entities
- Shoot expenses - specialized gear rental, assistants, travel, etc.

However, remember that cost is just one factor you should consider in choosing a photographer for your project. Make sure you know their experience, reliability, responsiveness, creativity and how well they understand photography.





# MB COMMERCIAL PHOTOGRAPHY

**MB Commercial Photography** specializes in creative services for construction, maritime and industrial companies in the Pacific Northwest. Based in Seattle - Tacoma, Washington, we offer ground, aerial and drone photography and video services in Alaska, Washington, Oregon and California.



*Our passion in life is visual storytelling.  
We craft a life that is a story worth telling.*