

WEDDINGS

Quality

Why it takes more time in a digital age, and why it's disappearing



Many comments have inspired this article, from customers, (how long?) junior peers, from hotel G M's, wedding planners & co-ordinators and hosts of other 'Wedding Professionals', some of whom should know better, but often sadly, simply don't. So let's try and explain what is really required to give something worthwhile.

Wedding and Portrait Photography involving natural light is quite, quite different from other types of photography. Despite being able to upload 'snaps' from mobile phones onto sites such as Facebook almost instantly, and events prints being quickly produced on location when shot correctly with controlled lighting of high quality, you cannot produce a professional print, nor corrected file without considerable post production work when shot involving natural or mixed lighting, which is every wedding you'll ever see.

This is very time consuming, and there are simply no automatic programs that do the job correctly, nor will there ever be. It is a Professional Photographer's domain to produce Professional results, not a camera, nor computer, nor software - all must be used correctly together, with experience, assuming you have captured a good image in the first place. Photoshop doesn't make poor images good, period.

The old adage "rubbish in, rubbish out" has never been truer than it is today. That said, let's look at the minimum tools required for working professionally.

The kit: A full chip digital camera (I know of no professional photographers using half chip cameras anymore - so if you hire a semi professional using one, make sure you are paying semi professional rates) You can pick one up for under a couple of thousand now, as little as around £1700. Add a couple of zoom lenses (I prefer sharper prime lenses often - but you can make do with a pair of zooms on a full chip camera), so that will be about a thousand a piece. You'll need a flashgun - around £350, and you'll still need a tripod too at some point (anyone who says they never use one, not a pro for sure).

Add a bag, a spare flashgun, and of course a spare camera (only the insane arrive at a Wedding with one camera) a hundred pounds worth of memory cards, and then the computer side of things.

I'm not big on PCs, so like most photographers that's a MAC with a colour corrected screen, calibration device, a proper licensed copy of Photoshop (don't fancy the extreme penalties and dangers of dodgy software - which is also as morally wrong as the folk that think it's OK to cheat photographers & HMRC, and scan copyright prints). Add some other bits of software, photo quality printer for the odd display print, contact sheets etc. Four thousand should cover it. Maybe three for a PC based system.

The workflow: Editing a small digital Wedding can take six hours. That's right, nearly a full working day for most office dwellers, and that's for a small Wedding. Every hour spent photographing, is double the time afterwards. That's not correcting files, that's just running through them, zooming in and out, checking expressions, cross referencing with customers lists of posed shots, getting rid of bloopers etc, etc. The work on the remaining files depends on whether they are to be used for selection purposes or as print ready files.

The large professional lab I use, who are infinitely more skilled at retouching than any photographer I know (including me) reckon that a medium level enhancement, i.e. making someones' skin look good who is suffering from bad acne, reckon about 10 files an hour. Consider that when asking how much for a disc of 350 - 500 images.

The Poor Result - And how Photography is being dumbed down by imposters.

Well by now you can probably see why quality has dropped, but then again is the photographer you are hiring really a professional? My particular 'pet hates' are burned out Wedding dresses that have no detail in them, lack of basic composition & use of light, inability to understand fill flash in daylight with digital. I wouldn't pay for some of the stuff around at the moment. You get what you pay for in life same as always.

"Just pop the pics on a disc please" - and that's what some 'people with cameras' do, literally, just that. Not a finished product, and not worth buying in the first place.

To organize your wedding photography contact Jon Firth on 07932 787 930 or visit www.jonfirth.co.uk

