

Why are Professional Photographers so expensive?

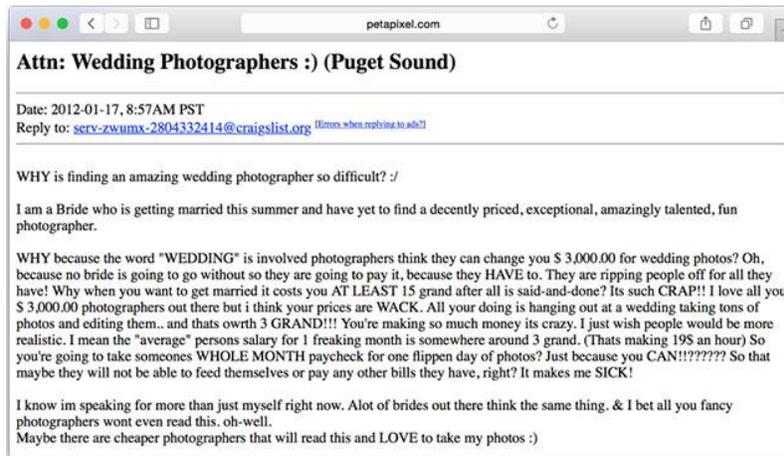
Here's a common complaint: "Why is wedding photography so expensive?"

One of the most common complaints about wedding photography is that it's too expensive. I've seen this sentiment uttered from all corners of the Web. I've also seen just as many photographers jump at the opportunity to defend their prices by writing articles that only an accountant could appreciate.

Unfortunately, this is a counterproductive and fruitless exercise that doesn't address the issue head on. Quite frankly, I'm surprised that someone hasn't yet included scans of their tax returns to make a point.

Prepare for some real talk.

Wedding Photography is Expensive because it's a Luxury



In the context of this article, I'm defining luxury as something that you want or would like to have but don't actually need. The Craigslist poster wrote, "They are ripping people off for all they have! Why when you want to get married it costs you AT LEAST 15 grand after all is said-and-done? Its such CRAP!! I love all you \$3000 photographers out there but i think your prices are WACK."

Immediately, I would like to point out that there's a distinction between getting married and holding a wedding. Getting married is something you may need; holding a wedding is something you want. The poster is wrong when she states that getting married is expensive: relative to the price of a wedding, *it's quite affordable*.

For instance, if you live in Toronto and wish to marry, your total expenses would come to under \$400, including the license and marriage officiant. I'm aware that the writer is from Puget Sound, but I doubt getting

married in Washington is much more expensive than in Ontario. In any case, despite her choice of words, the writer was referring to *holding a wedding*.

Weddings are expensive because having a large catered party is a luxury. When you remove the ceremony from the rest of the day's archetypical activities, you're left with the greater portion of that hypothetical \$15,000 bill. Your costs shouldn't rise by much even if religious obligations require the ceremony be held at your respective house of worship.

The major expenses are everything that isn't part of the official ceremony: the venue(s), liquor and multi-course meals for guests, a multi-tiered cake, flowers, decorations, entertainment, your wardrobe, makeup and hair, accommodations, and, given the nature of this article, your desire to have a wedding photographer document the entire affair and do so with exceptional artistry.

Luxury brands do not justify their prices with complex breakdowns of their costs. For example, when someone walks into a Chanel store and considers buying a handbag, the salesperson isn't going to relay the cost of materials, labour, freight, lease, marketing, etc., to justify the price. What they'll do is sell the brand and its story, its exclusivity and the status it imbues, the timeless design, impeccable craftsmanship, customer service, and its ability to retain value longer than other less exclusive brands.

All things considered, it would still be a frivolous purchase—because no one needs a Chanel anything, even among people who need a handbag—and most buyers of luxury goods know this. Unfortunately, when planning a wedding, some people, such as the Craigslist poster, never come to this understanding.

Consider the longevity of these expensive services. The alcohol, food, and cake get flushed down the drain (quite literally). The venue and accommodations will serve as faint backdrops to your memories. The flowers will wilt and decorations, tossed away. The entertainment will be a ringing in your ears the following morning. Your makeup will be washed away and the hair slept on. Your wedding dress will remain, but there will never again be a practical occasion to wear it (so donate your dress).

Of all these unnecessary, impractical, and conspicuous expenses, the photo and video documents hold the most utility. Their value *increases with time*, having an inverse relationship to your recollection of the day.

When wedding photographers choose to acknowledge the question with detailed cost breakdowns, they put themselves and the profession as a whole at a disadvantage. Defending your rates in such a manner is an implicit acknowledgement that they are indeed unreasonably high and, worse, that your abilities don't speak for themselves.

Wedding photography is a luxury service and there is absolutely no imperative for you to provide customers with an audit. Such an analysis may also put you at a disadvantage with customers who question your margins (since those who do only care about the bottom line anyway) and your perfectly legitimate reasons can be misinterpreted as excuses.

I would like to make a proposal to my fellow wedding photographers: Stop justifying your fees using cost breakdowns. It cheapens your work. Treat wedding photography as the desired luxury service that it is, not the basic necessity that budget hunting couples wish it to be.

Good wedding photography is a luxury service for a luxury occasion that commands luxury prices. As the saying goes, "You get what you pay for."