

You've spent a lot of money on photographic equipment and you've become competent. You don't have to be an Ansel Adams or Annie Liebowitz to make interesting pictures that people may want to buy. So how do you go about it?

Shoot what you're passionate about

Develop a style of your own - don't try to be everything to everyone. That doesn't mean you need to create a brand-new style - you could base it on perhaps the impressionist work of Freeman Patterson, or create good 'record shots' of buildings. Just build a collection in whatever genre seems to work for you. Only shoot what you have a passion for and try to reflect this passion in your work. Stick with what you're good at you're far more likely to succeed.

Start at craft fairs

Think of the Fanfare show, Fall Fair and the various shows around the countryside during the summer - and in the run-up to Christmas. There's a definite move in Kingston to have, one day, a permanent under-cover, year-round art market - something to keep your eye on. Don't spend too much money 'up-front' on a stall - see what you can hire. It's a good idea to try art or craft fairs to assess people's reaction to your work.

Always think about the presentation

People will not buy your work if it's not presented well, and you need to spend a lot of time and effort on getting it right. People just won't buy your prints if the framing or matting is poor - even though people don't always want the frames. To keep costs down you can mount but not frame your prints. You can get mounts and clear poly-bags to protect them quite cheaply - unframed prints are also easier to carry around and the casual shopper is more likely to take a picture if it's light. Your choice of frame may not be to the clients taste anyway and the mark-up you can put on a frame does not justify the initial outlay or the extra time it can take. You also need to think about your pricing - you've got to cover all your costs and make a profit. Check out a few fairs and see what kinds of prices are being asked. But don't under-price yourself - if you don't think your pictures are worth much nobody will argue! If a potential customer asks if you've got a black and white version of a colour print (or vice-versa) the answer has to be either "Yes" or "No, but I can get one quickly".

Find a printer you can trust

Modern printing technologies produce superb archival prints on a variety of surfaces, such as fine-art papers and canvases, so give the public a choice. Never show work you're not happy with. You're only as good as your weakest link, so if you're not printing your own images, find a good printer and build a strong working relationship.

Other markets

In addition to the street stall, think of having a range of greeting cards to sell to shops - 'sale or return' may be the best you can expect.

Avoid large retail shows at the start

Large retail shows are great but not for beginners - the outlays are huge.

A Website

Online sales are also important but this area is very competitive - the web is rightly called 'world-wide' and there are some fine photographers out there and thousands of web galleries. But don't neglect this area - some people sell their work quite well and it's worthwhile just to have an 'online presence'. You may wish to avoid the big companies that 'host' for you - they nearly always do their printing in the USA and, for all kinds of reasons, this is not a good idea. Unfortunately, there seems to be no Canadian equivalent of 'Smugmug', who can print all kinds of sizes and will make albums and books. So have a 'gallery' online, but take your own orders and organise your own printing and delivery.

Stock Photography

While in this area, it's worth considering 'Stock Photography' sites - people buy pictures from them but they have to be top quality (some demand very large pictures in high resolution - some even dictate that the pictures have to be taken with a professional 'full-frame' camera or bigger. Don't expect to make a living from Stock Photography.

Give the public what they want

Keep a note of what sells.... you may want to stock up on ready-for-sale prints.

Be Realistic

Don't expect to make a fortune - but it could help cover some of the costs of your hobby. And don't expect to sell to photographers.... they would rather try to emulate the picture than have somebody else's on their living room wall! (or is that just me?)

PS - An Afterthought....

Archive your best work. You may not sell lots of pictures in your own lifetime but, when your grandchildren get that DVD out in fifty years' time, they'll have an instant market of people fascinated by what we got up to in the 2010s! (Think of 50s nostalgia - it sells like hotcakes!)