Ahmed Qassim, Photographer

Ahmed Qassim is studying at a major university in the United States of America. A Saudi Arabian citizen, Ahmed came to America to study engineering nearly 4 years ago. As his degree in engineering is almost complete, Ahmed has begun thinking about his future after university. It would be natural for him to consider a career doing engineering work, but recently, he remembered that he has a real interest and talent for photography.

When Ahmed was younger he had been able to find special ways to take photos of natural scenes, animals, and most importantly, people. He had been asked to take photos, and sometimes videos, at horse races, corporate events, parties, and weddings. Everyone loves his ability to capture something magic about a scene and to make the people Ahmed captures feel special when he takes a picture or video of them.

Ahmed wonders if he could start a photography and video business instead of getting a traditional engineering job. He expects to return to Saudi Arabia at some point, but he could also stay in America if he ran his own photography business, or travel around the world, too, doing photography for clients anywhere. But Ahmed is not sure if choosing to become a photographer is a good idea, compared to taking a traditional engineering job back home in Saudi Arabia.

"What should I do?" he wonders.

Professional Photography

The professional photography industry has gone through a number of changes in the last 40 years. These changes have included:

- 1960's-70's: The availability of higher quality film cameras at consumer prices and the ability of more people to afford them.

- 1970's-80's: A dramatic decrease in the cost of processing film and printing photos. The result was a democratization of photo taking and the rise of a new breed of

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photographers who are capable of taking excellent photographs through self-training and practice.

- 1990's: The advent of digital cameras, which further democratized photo taking, making the incremental cost of another photo almost zero as no film is used.

- 2000's: The advent of professional digital cameras which rapidly replaced professional film-based cameras, forever reducing the time and cost of developing photographic excellence.

- 2010's: The availability of inexpensive "stock" photography which can be purchased on the Internet.

What is clear from these changes is that the role of professional photographer has evolved. In earlier decades professional photographers controlled all high quality photography due to the cost of film and equipment and expertise the photographer gained through the costly taking of lots of photographs during their often years of "training" and building their skills. Now, amateurs and semi-professional photographers can do *most* of what professional photographers used to do because the cost of equipment is low now and so is the taking of a digital photo while learning, which is nearly zero cost.

But "most" is not "all". Professional photographers are still able to charge high prices for their services to clients who want truly professional work. And professional photography is the result of:

- Being able to use all the advanced features of professional cameras.

- Understanding lighting and the use of lighting equipment.

- Editing photographs using the software Photoshop, for example. Learning to professionally edit photographs is a skill that takes much time and practice to build.

- And the most important element, and one that has not changed in the history of photography, is the relationship between a photographer and their client. A professional photographer builds a bond of trust with their subject. Taking a

photograph is not a mechanical process when people are the subjects. The person being photographed must feel safe to express themselves naturally in their facial and body language. A professional photographer, then, is a trusted partner in capturing a rich and beautiful expression of their subject. They help the subject feel safe to be photographed. And building this partnership and trust requires special people skills and interpersonal abilities, both of which Ahmed has.

Professional photographers for weddings, and particularly higher cost weddings, are still very popular. The cost of hiring a professional photographer ranges from $2,000 to $10,000+. A wedding is a special event that creates memories for a lifetime and the trust required between the couple getting married and the photographer is very important. There can be no mistakes or photographic gaps during the wedding. Every key milestone in the day must be photographed professionally, as it is is a one-time event for that couple and their families. Just as the couple is in the spotlight that day, so is the photographer in their full professional mode, capturing emotional highlights of each crucial point in the ceremony and reception that follows. What follows after is careful and thorough photo editing of key shots and sequences of the wedding, and the delivery of digital and physical prints in the highest quality possible.

A large public, sporting, or corporate event has a similar context and photography needs as does a wedding. Media coverage, the use of professional photographs in public relations, and managing perceptions through visual imagery are all very important and sensitive aspects to a public, sporting, or corporate event.

The Video Business

Creating videos of special events is a relatively new activity. People could take photos of events and the processing and printing of the photos that followed was quite inexpensive, even as far back as 100 years ago. Filming events, however, cost more money. You had to buy the expensive blank film, process the film at high cost, and you needed more expensive equipment: A movie camera, a film projector, and a screen. Further, the quality of videos that were done from non-professional equipment was poor. Films were blurry, the movement was not smooth, and poor lighting dramatically affected the quality of the images in the film. Finally, much film was wasted because the subjects being filmed were constantly in motion and what was filmed was not necessary useful to the goal of capturing the important emotions of an event.

Ahmed is Confused

Ahmed knows that he would have a good chance of being a successful professional photographer and videographer. But he is confused and has many questions going around in his mind, including these key ones:

1. Why become a photographer when he just put 4 years of effort and money to be an engineer?

2. A good engineering job would pay a lot more money at first than being a photographer. How important is money?

3. What did he want to do:

   A. Be an engineer in a company, which was safe, honourable, and hard work back home and near family, or ...

   B. Have the freedom to work with people, travel, and have every day be a different one? If he did get married, would his wife want him travelling around the world photographing

events? A travelling lifestyle sounded exciting, but what might the non-monetary costs of this lifestyle be?

4. Ahmed had no business training or real experience running his own business. What would starting a professional photography business entail?

By every logical and normal criteria, Ahmed felt that he should simply go back to Saudi Arabia and get a good job. But something inside him was urging him to be a professional photographer.

Ahmed has asked you, his friend, to have coffee with him and help him understand what he should do after he graduates.

How can you help him make his decision?

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