
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 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 zero cost as no film and processing was required.

- 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. Kodak, at one-time the world's biggest film company, had 170,000 employees in 1998. In 2012 it went bankrupt because it didn't believe in digital cameras, even though they were the early leader in digital camera technology. This story illustrates how quickly the photography world changes and how easy it is to get stuck thinking it won't change.
- 2010's: Inexpensive "stock" photography which can be purchased on the Internet becomes available. Professional photography is just as popular and needed but at the same time professional photographers now must know how to market themselves well. New areas of growth include professional real estate photography, event videos, and company videos. The digital editing of photos is now commonplace and professional photographers must also become expert editors to make their photos stand out from amateur photographers.
- 2020's: Smart phone cameras can now produce photos and videos of such high quality that even amateurs can take photographs that can be used for professional purposes. This has pushed professional photographers to even further develop their photo taking and editing skills and their marketing. Most photographers now do at least some videography as well in order to satisfy the needs of clients.

What is clear from these changes is that the role of a professional photographer has evolved. In earlier decades professional photographers controlled all high quality photography due to the cost of film and equipment and expertise they 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 so low now and the taking of a digital photo while learning how to become a professional 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 photography, videography, and editing.



And professional photography and videography is the result of:

- Being able to use all the advanced features of professional cameras.
- Understanding lighting and sound theory and techniques and being able to quickly set up and use professional lighting and sound 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. Editing videos, called “post-production”, is another skill that takes time to learn.
- 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 a person is the subject. The person being photographed or filmed must feel safe to express themselves naturally. A professional photographer is a trusted partner in capturing a rich and beautiful expression of their subject. They help the subject feel safe in front of the camera. And building this partnership and trust requires special people skills and interpersonal abilities, both of which Ahmed has.

Professional photographers & videographers for weddings - and particularly higher cost weddings - are still very popular. The cost of hiring a professional 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 when capturing both photos and video. There can be no mistakes or photographic gaps during the wedding. Every key milestone in the day must be photographed professionally, as it 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, video editing, and the delivery of digital and physical prints and video 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 now commonplace and becoming even more important than photographs. Even as far back as 100 years ago people could take photos of events and

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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 would be 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 and videoing 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 one. What would starting a professional photography and videography 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 become a professional photographer and videographer.

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?