Easy as Pie

PERFECTLY SIMPLE PRICING FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS • Alicia Caine
Hey there, lovely! Welcome to the superty-duperty sneak peek chapter of *Easy as Pie*, the common sense pricing guide for modern portrait photographers. I’m Alicia. This is my book. And this... this is your life!

It’s happened. You were smack-dab in the middle of a heap of Photoshop work, you’d just answered a few client calls, the phone was still ringing, the e-mails were piling up, and the latest barrage of prints and canvases and photo books and goodies had just arrived from the lab, the UPS guy commented on your morning breath, you realized you hadn’t moved from the computer in the last nine hours and fourteen minutes...and you thought, “I’M NOT GETTING PAID ENOUGH FOR THIS.”

Being overwhelmed and crazy-busy often means your products and services are underpriced. But how do you raise pricing, and when? And by how much? And...and...and...

Relax. Pricing, we can handle. *For morning breath, you’re on your own.*

We’ll discover the perfect pricing fit for YOUR business, as there is no one-size-fits-all strategy that will achieve spectacular results. Some photographers prefer the slow-and-steady approach, while others rocket their prices to what-seems-like-the-moon and experience success. There’s a right way for you, and we’ll find it—together.

Stick with me, and your photography business will double its current level of awesome in no time.

xoxo, Alicia
Before we begin to conquer pricing, you need to meet that most reviled of creatures: The Cheapie.

WHAT IS A CHEAPIE?

In every retail market, you encounter people with budgets. And that’s totally cool. Celebrities holding $12,000,000 weddings still have a budget—it just happens to have six zeroes attached to it.

When it comes to photography, don’t hesitate to work with people who have a reasonable budget. They will pay a fair price for your work, respect your time, and be grateful for your willingness to respect their means.

You should, however, avoid working with a cheapie at all costs.

*A cheapie is someone who wants it all but isn’t willing to pay for it.*

Cheapies typically expect better treatment than your already-awesome client treatment. They act like they’re doing you a huge favor by being willing to spend $200 on $1,000 worth of merchandise. They protest the extra fee for demanding extra retouching and rush shipping in time for so-and-so’s birthday next Tuesday.

This is a far cry from the individual who hires you with a budget of $800 and expects only $800 worth of artwork in return. I have had clients purchase my minimum order that I would never consider cheap! It was all they could afford and it was worth it to them to spend more and not get as much, instead of hiring someone else for a lot less and getting a lot more.

LEARN TO SPOT THE CHEAPIE!

The average cheapie isn’t easy to spot. They can drive a 1984 Hyundai or a 2011 Lexus. They can live in a tiiiiiny house or be rocking 8,000 square feet of tricked-out living space. You’ll have to be diligent in your quest to spot and then avoid the cheapie wherever you find him or her.

Look for a clear sense of entitlement. A constant need to wheel and deal. An unrealistic sense of what their budget should be able to buy. (What? Prada isn’t sold at Payless?) A refusal to value your artwork. A deal-seeker who lives for the thrill of thrift—the product is irrelevant.

When you have a client that wants the very best quality of work and all the highest-quality products your business has to offer, but wants to pay low-end prices, you’ve found yourself a cheapie. I’ve had a client spend over $3,000 but tell me I was expensive the entire time, trying to talk me down on the price of canvases because he could get them at Costco. (Yes, Costco.)

WHEN YOU FIND THE CHEAPIE

Don’t let the cheapie devalue your time.

They’ll come up with all sorts of ways to explain why your prints should be cheaper, your custom-designed albums should be buy one, get one free—or your session just wasn’t quite right, so they should get some free stuff.

Be firm. *Again, the price is the price.*
Don’t let the cheapie give you business advice. Since the cheapie doesn’t value your artwork ($5 8x10’s or $350 8x10’s—doesn’t matter), he or she will find ways to ‘help’ you see how expensive your work happens to be.

There’s no magic formula for getting people to value your photography. Where before you might have discounted your work, made a bargain, or come up with a custom package for the cheapie—recognize that altering your business practice is letting the cheapie win.

Refuse to wheel and deal. The price is the price is the price.

Recognize that you can’t MAKE a cheapie value what you do. I value photography, but handbags? No value to me. If Louis Vuitton himself gave me a 90% off coupon to his store, I’d thank him, buy up some goods, and sell them for handsome profit on eBay. I simply don’t value designer handbags, and nothing will get me to do so.

Same thing goes for photography. There’s no magic formula for getting people to value it!

Do business with the person, discount nothing, bite your tongue, and move on. Instead of trying to convince people of your artwork’s value, make it your mission to find those who already value what you do. And then treat them like gold.

CHEAPIE-DEFEATING COPY

The common cheapie (cheapieus-painintheputticus) hates being told how much they can expect to spend when entering a retail environment. They sense a feeling of clarity and confidence that does not bode well for them. To ward them off, I recommend the following...

Get your clients thinking big. I know this is going to be scary and you’re worried about scaring off your clients, but it’s for a good cause! Tell your clients the average amount they can expect to spend. They don’t HAVE to spend this amount, of course. You just need them to understand that when they place their HUGE $500 order—it’s well below your average.

I’ve noticed a huge change in the demands my clients place on me for the smaller orders. I often hear, “Well, I don’t have a very big order—wish I could buy more!” and it’ll be a $900 order.

$900 is fabulous and you won’t see me turn it down or turn my nose up at it, but they expect less when they know there are clients who are spending much more. This illustrates how my clients’ expectation of me is so much better when I give them my expectation of them first.

Outline your expectations of clients. Filling clients in on how much your artwork costs and how much they can expect to spend means that they’ll have a clear budget in mind when they hire you. Clear boundaries make everyone’s experience with your business better.
SAMPLE ANTI-CHEAPIE, PRO-EXPECTATIONS WEB COPY:

____________ Photography offers 8x10” gift prints starting at $XX and portrait collections beginning at $XXX. The average _________________ Photography client invests $XXXX-$XXXXX in their photography. There is a minimum order requirement of $XXX for all sessions.

Just watch and see! Once that little paragraph (or some variation of it) is on your website, your days of dealing with the common cheapie will be drawing to a close.

ANOTHER TOOL IN YOUR CHEAPIE-DEFEATING ARSENAL: THE MINIMUM ORDER REQUIREMENT

One of the best decisions I have ever made for my business was putting a Minimum Order Requirement (or MOR) in place. Early in my business, I was averaging $125 per session and my largest order was for $250. I was exhausted, overworked, and underpaid. I had to take charge or else I would lose both my business and my sanity.

I sat down and started crunching numbers. I started working backwards. I figured out how much money my family needed to make per month. Then, I took the max number of sessions I was physically capable of doing (at the time, it was four per week) and calculated how much I needed to make per session. My calculations told me I had to walk away with at least $400 from every session to make it worth my while. This was the basis for my Minimum Order Requirement (MOR). Once the MOR was in place, I didn’t have a single order of less than $400!

Simple changes can make a huge impact.

After I started seeing a growth in my average sale, I raised my session fee and then bumped my Minimum Order Requirement to $500. Between the session fee and the MOR, I was bringing in at least $650 per client. This was about four times what I had been selling only five months prior. (MOR for the win!)

I’ve kept the $500 MOR since then because it was no longer an issue of people hiring me and not meeting my MOR. Because my collection sales are 95% of what my clients purchase, I secure the MOR and much MORE.

Heh.

So, what is the purpose of the MOR now? It is simply a deterrent for someone who doesn’t have the budget to spend that much with me. They know immediately that I’m not the photographer for them.

Most importantly, it tells potential clients that although clients typically spend over $2,000 with me, I’m more than happy to be hired for just $500. $300 session fee + $500 MOR = still a good sale, still a good client!

What’s that math again?

\[
\text{needed monthly income} / \text{number of sessions per month} = \text{MOR}
\]

My MOR was created from the place of feeding my family and keeping our household afloat. Consider implementing your own MOR by dividing your needed monthly income by the number of clients you can shoot per month. Desired monthly income is a whole different ball game—if you want–but–don’t–need to earn $6,000 a month from your photography business while shooting three sessions per month, I don’t recommend implementing a $2,000 MOR.
 THAT’S IT. THAT’S THE FIRST CHAPTER!

I’ll bet you’ve encountered quite a few cheapies during your first months / years / decades in business, and you’re ready to move past ‘em forever.

That's where the rest of Easy as Pie comes in…from here, the book helps you price gift prints, wall prints, albums and collections!

Sounds easy, right? You can totally Google cost of goods sold and then buy a Seth Godin book and attend a WPPI Masterclass and figure it all out…

Of course you can!

But the mindset that lies behind pricing—the WHY of pricing, the WHY of the collections, the WHY of the products you choose, the services you offer, the business you create—THAT’S where Easy as Pie shines.

Without the WHY, the HOW doesn’t make a whole lot of sense. And understanding the WHY? Well, it makes the HOW a lot less intimidating. (Dare I say fun, even?)

You’ll find the full version of Easy as Pie right here.

If you need help with business planning—well, really, it’s life planning masquerading as business planning—I’ve served up something for you there, too. It’s called Happy Place, and you’ll find it right here.

And I’d love to see you over at the Easy as Pie Facebook page. We’re a fun group, I promise!

xoxo, Alicia