

Q&A with [Brian Smith](#), President of [Editorial Photographers](#)

Q: Years ago Greg Heisler was quoted in PDN as saying "I think you will find that most of the magazine assignments are given to friends of the photo editors". Is this still true? A better way to say it might be: How important are relationships?

I suppose that must mean that Gregory has friends in higher places than I do...but seriously...I think it's less a case of being buddies with your editors and more important that you're someone they know they can count on to produce a great photo without fail no matter *what* forces conspire against you.

Q: Does the magazine work lead to other more lucrative work?

A: Getting published in hipper well-art-directed publications can lead to ad work, but sometimes being in the "wrong" magazines can actually hurt. I try not to worry that much about it as long as the shoots interest me.

Q: How do we determine what the good magazines are and who we want to avoid, as far as contracts and art direction. How flexible do we need to be on the contract end of it?

A: Well, good art direction should be pretty obvious from just looking at it. Unfortunately there tends to often be an inverse relationship between great art direction and money. Meaning the really cool hip magazines will pay like a dollar (if they don't go bankrupt first, that is.) So there are always tradeoffs.

Contracts are another issue. Contracts that I've seen generally fall into the categories of "The Good, The Bad and The Ugly." But even some "ugly" contracts are very negotiable, so the best thing to do is discuss the points you need to change. [Editorial Photographers](#) has many of the major magazine contracts posted on the member side of the website.

Q: What are magazines paying these days? Is it flexible?

A: There's more flexibility than you'd think. Editorial dayrates range from \$500-1,000, full-page space usage rates range from \$500-1,250 and covers range from \$1,500-\$5,000. Even magazines that seem to have "Thou Shalt Not Pay More Than Five Hundred Dollars" carved in stone tablets, are often willing to offer larger guarantees based on usage on bigger stories.

Q: Is there money in the budgets for production?

A: Magazines are generally more willing to spend money on production than for creative fees. How much depends on the magazine and the shoot. Production budgets can range from a few hundred bucks to tens of thousands. Generally speaking, small front of the book assignments are generally tighter budgets, though that's a relative term. I have some editorial clients that consider \$3,000 in production barebones, but that isn't the norm.

Q: We have all seen the Annie Leibovitz. movie so we know what that end of the business is doing as far as scouting, production and makeup. What is "real world" for the good size magazines like Time, Newsweek, SI, ESPN?

A: Most of the time they want Annie *Light*...they want the same great taste, but with less filling of your pockets...

Production budgets are often dependent on what the shoot requires. Budgets tend to escalate when they involve travel or if you need hair, make-up and styling. Is one assistant enough or will two or three make it go more smoothly? Does the shoot require location scouting, a production van, catering, permits and insurance?

I think one of the biggest mistakes some photographers make is skimping on production when there's money in the budget for it. Good hair, make-up and styling can make all the difference in the world. I find it ironic that the fashion rags wouldn't dream of shooting 14-year-old girls with flawless skin without hair and make-up (and of course retouching) - yet it's an afterthought at business magazines filled with pictures of 70-year-old-bald-white-guys-with-liver-spots? The quickest way to add value to what you do is to work with people who can make the shoot look better by spending money on a good crew.

Q: What kind of luck are you having licensing magazine shoots as stock?

A: Some shoots do phenomenally well and others do nothing. I'd say that the top 10% of assignments generate 90% of my licensing and the top 1% probably accounts for 50% of that. In terms of celebrity stock, the more they're in the news and the less they agree to be photographed - the better.

Q: How are you handling model releases for your magazine work?

A: Ideally you'd get model releases of everyone you shoot, but since I shoot a lot of celebrities, athletes and CEOs, that's just not going to happen, so I try to get releases whenever I can. Even without releases, it's still possible to syndicate them for editorial

use and with celebrities even editorial can be licensed for decent money, I've also had a number of instances where celebrities have approved photos for commercial use just so they wouldn't have to sit for another shoot.

Q: Should we expect any of our magazine work to be used in video or TV shows when shooting for the big corporate type magazines?

A: It's fairly common on celebrity shoots for the magazine to send a video crew to shoot behind-the-scenes B-roll of shoot, so I suppose you can take it as a sign of success. Just make sure you dress nice if your backside is going to end up on "Entertainment Tonight."

Q: How are you marketing yourself to your clients and potential clients?

A: A lot of new clients find me through web portals, but "old school" still works. I still get good results from direct mail and drop-bys to show my book.

Q: How much art direction are you given on a normal magazine shoot?

A: It really varies. Most of the time it revolves around the layout like "we need a cover and a double-page spread" or "we need a full-bleed-right-hand-single-page opener." On covers there are always issues like leaving room for logos and cover lines. Since I shoot lots of celebrities, athletes and CEOs who I've photographed a number of times, often the direction revolves around giving me an idea what the story is about. Of course my favorite thing to hear is, "we thought this shoot would be perfect for *you*, so just go out and do your thing."

Q: What do we need to accept and what should we push back on as far as fees, art direction, contracts?

A: I think you need to feel comfortable with everything or else not do it. I never simply *assume* art direction is a bad thing. I'm not too proud to admit it when an art director, photo editor or even the subject comes up with a better idea than me.

Q: So, is it still possible to make a small fortune as a magazine photographer?

A: Absolutely. It's actually very easy to do. You simply start with a *large* fortune....