

To Photoshop or not to Photoshop?

By [Bryan Traylor](#)

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Everyone knows that Adobe's Photoshop is a great tool that really helps make photos better. I believe this 100% BUT... And it's this BUT that is critical. We use Photoshop on a daily basis at Locker 14 to clean, crop, fix imperfections, and add elements to existing images. The one thing I don't use it for is to make my shot work.



I come from a film background, and learned on film cameras when Photoshop was still largely unknown. Everything was as perfect as possible at camera. We didn't ... couldn't... use that worn-out phrase: "We'll fix it in post."

A wise man taught me once that, "Film is forever, so make it count." Times have changed, this industry has changed, and the way in which we work and live has changed. But to create a great image the photographer should do everything in their experience to make that shot perfect at camera.

Indefinable

We're talking about the indefinable level of skill and perfectionism at every point in the image production that separates the top photographers from the rest. You have to be able to show your client that you know what you are doing. They have hired you because they think you are the best, so prove it to them. Yes, you can fix small mistakes in post, and you can make enhancements to the image - but clients usually want their highly-paid designer or retoucher to do this. The more there is to "fix", the more you as a photographer lose control of your image and its look and feel, and that's what you want to be known and valued for.

Remember: clients work with many photographers, so they are comparing you to everyone else. There is a reason some photographers work more than others. Need I say more?

More and more photographers today depend heavily on Photoshop to get their image -they are more of a retoucher than a photographer. They don't know what to do at the camera or how to fix it there, so they go and try change it in post.

Proving your skills is what sets you apart from all the others. That's the artistic reason. There's also a hard, cold, business reason: as a pro photographer I base all my work on hours - half day, full day. When you quote on a job you would have thought about all your cost centres and your time, and placed a final value on it. Many clients will not pay for retouching or the time you take improving their photos. This means you end up working for FREE. Not a smart business practice to make a habit of. Do it once, do it right.

Working 'for free'

If you get into the habit of "fixing it in post", you must, after working all day spend time processing all these images and retouching them. Then you have to back them up and burn a disk. All of this for free, usually (if your "retouching" is not a line item on your invoice, then stop fooling yourself that its "included"). If you get it right first time at camera, you don't have to spend all the extra time working on the images. You get paid the same, but instead of sitting late into the night, you can get home to the family or down to the bar. And the client goes home from the shoot with the CD in hand. Everyone is happy.

If the picture only needs retouching for final polish or for a particular reason driven by the creative, then you'll know you're seeing a true professional photographer, rather than someone with a camera and a computer who business card reads "JOE BLOW PHOTO".

Photoshop is there to help us as photographers. Not make us photographers.

Reasons why "fixing it in post" doesn't really fix it

1. Doesn't show off your camera skills, which is what you want to be known for
2. Can put doubt in your client's mind about your technical ability
3. Some things Photoshop just can't reproduce
4. Photoshop can only help to the extent that the operator has the skills
5. If you can't fix it yourself, then you will have to pay someone to bail you out. You look bad and lose money.

Top five habits to reduce your dependence on "fixing it later"

1. Understand your camera through and through and all its applications
2. Learn more about lighting and composition to help you set up better photos
3. Test yourself every time you pick up a camera to be better than the last time
4. Make it a habit to give your clients their work before they leave the set... it will have to be done right then
5. Shoot and show your clients what they are getting as you go. This will let them guide you to a better photo and makes less work later.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bryan Traylor is the founder and principle photographer of Locker 14 (www.locker14.co.za). His magic lies in his care in lighting, creating vivid, powerful images for advertising, magazine publishing and fine art. His greatest love is for automotive and product photography where difficult, reflective surfaces give him a chance to demonstrate his mastery of light and shadow. Contact Bryan on +27 (0)82 222 5623 or email him at bryan@locker14.co.za.

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