



**Isaac Johnston**

# How to Become a Freelance Photographer

Meet Isaac Johnston —

**“Four years ago I quit my job and became a full time freelance creator. It was scary, I made so many mistakes, but I learned more than I ever thought I could and now I want to share the strategies I used to keep making my art and get paid to do it.”**

Isaac Johnston



Whether he is in front or behind the camera, Isaac loves working with photography and video. Heritage, a dash of irreverence, and a strong desire to live a life that is as contagious as it is authentic. That is where it started for Isaac and that is what shapes his work today.

Isaac grew up on a farm near Glacier National Park in Montana and from a young age worked as a stock hand and guide in the Great Bear Wilderness. He didn't know at the time that his life was different, just that he loved the excitement of showing people the wild spaces of the world. Starting in the creative world as a Fixer, he went on to produce large scale multi-year campaigns for Land Rover and Canon. Isaac became a veteran of making compelling stories and making magic consistently.

Now he works behind the lens creating stories with video and photos, sharing his infectious enthusiasm for adventure.

Some of his clients include: BMW Motorrad, Marriott Hotels, Abercrombie and Fitch, Asics Shoes, Land Rover, Canon, Anheuser-Busch, TINCUP Whiskey.

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# THE PROBLEMS WITH BECOMING A FULL TIME FREELANCER

In this episode Isaac names the problems that you will encounter on your transition from an employee to a freelancer. Without naming and learning what problems we will encounter we can't learn the techniques to avoid them.



**Problem #01**

Money.

**Problem #02**

How Do I know if my work is good enough.

**Problem #03**

I don't know enough about business.

**Problem #04**

Self motivation.

**Problem #05**

What if I fail?

Take a moment to write down the problems you are scared of, and as we go through this course write down strategies for dealing with them underneath each problem.



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## HOW TO CHOOSE GEAR THAT GETS OUT OF THE WAY

Having gear that doesn't work well or prevents you from making quality work is a problem. You need a camera that takes professional grade images and a computer that can edit those images.

### ISAAC'S TIPS:

- Good gear builds a positive feedback loop.
- Don't buy a cheap starter camera.
- Buy the best camera you can afford.
- Buy the best lens you can afford.
- Used professional grade camera gear works just as well as new. Buy factory refurbished if possible.





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## TOOLS I USE TO CREATE [AND WHY YOU NEED LESS THAN YOU THINK]

### ISAAC'S CURRENT GEAR SETUP:

- Canon EOS R camera body
- Canon 24-70mm series ii f2.8
- Canon 16-35mm series ii
- Sigma 150-600mm
- DJI Mavic 2 pro
- GoPro hero 7
- Dolica tripod
- Peak Design everyday bag 30L
- 2017 27 inch iMac (I purchased used)
- Macbook pro 13 inch
- Adobe Lightroom for photo editing
- Adobe Photoshop for photo editing
- Apple Final Cut Pro X for video editing

You can view and purchase Isaac's recommended gear on [Amazon](#)

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# HOW TO KNOW IF YOUR HOBBY SHOULD BE YOUR PROFESSION

Isaac shares his checklist on how to know if you are ready to take the leap to full time freelance work.



01

Get a **paid job**.

02

**Reflection:** Did you enjoy the process?

03

**Money Management:** Save up for a 3 month financial runway.

04

**Living Cost:** Practice living on as little as possible.

05

**Sales Path:** Find freelance jobs while you have a job.

06

**Send It:** Plan a big trip or series of creative projects.

07

**Start a business:** Set up your business structure.

08

**Test It Out:** Commit to 3 months of trying your hardest to get and create work.

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## SHOWING YOUR WORK DAILY AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT



Second guessing your art is normal, but it can make you hesitant to share your work. It's important to share your work, and here is why:

Encouragement - Use the natural dopamine hit you get when you share your work to push you to create more often.

Reputation - Share your work for the momentum it will build with the people who see it, and also with yourself. You will become known as a creator.

It's not by one giant premiere that people become known as artists. No one who is going to discover you if you don't discover yourself daily. Isaac suggests you do two things - create as much and as often as you can, and find the platform of your choice to share the work you created.

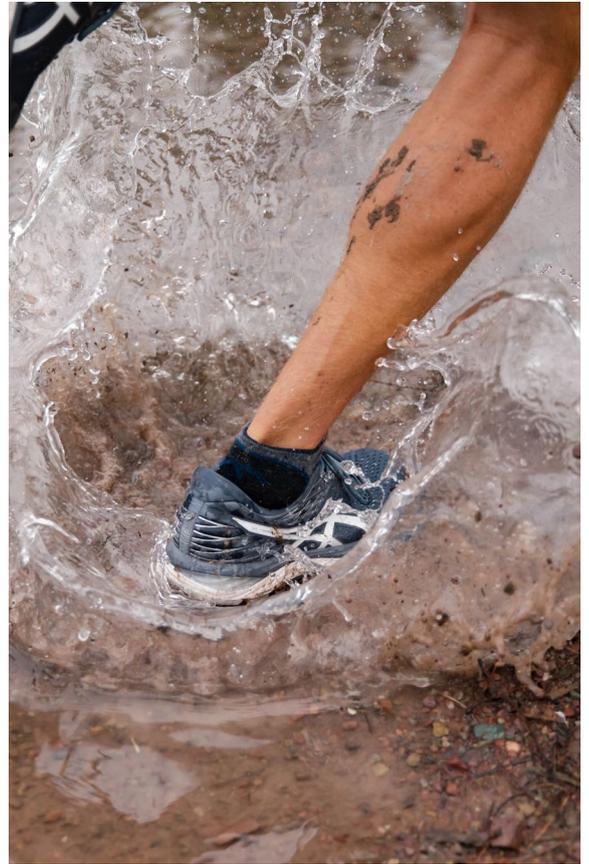
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## GETTING SUPPORT

Isaac shares how he asked for support from important people in his life and why it helped launch his freelance career. He talks about strategies for gaining trust and support for what might seem like a risky decision to your significant others.

### Some strategies to keep in mind:

- Talk to your partner or parents about your aspirations
- Explain why this important to you
- Set dates for trying out this new path
- Communicate your progress often



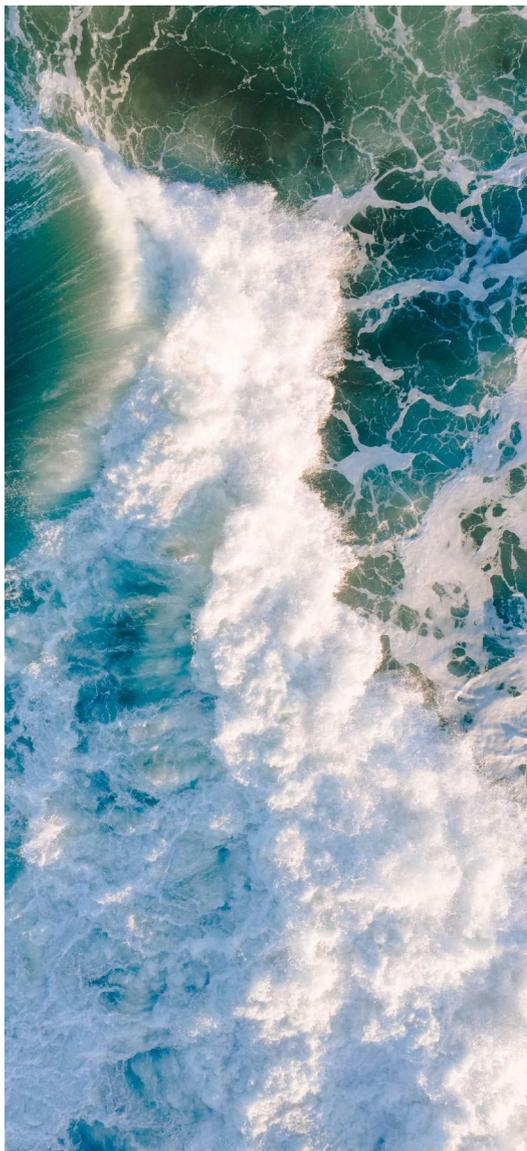
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## HANDLING FEAR OF FAILURE

In this episode Isaac lists his strategies for handling fear of failure.

1. Fail first - Failure is part of the process, keep creating and move on.
2. Pad your landing - Build up reserve finances to limit your exposure.
3. Fear setting - Tim Ferriss explains it best. [<https://tim.blog/2017/05/15/fear-setting/>]





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## FINDING YOUR OWN UNIQUE VALUE

Isaac talks about how he decided to use what he didn't have to shape the stories he would tell. By using limitations as a guide you can create more interesting stories. Finding your own unique value can help you refine your own voice and stories.

Isaac also shares two books that were impactful when he started his journey:

- *48 Days to the Work You Love* by Dan Miller
- *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield

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# MY WORK FLOW PROCESS

This episode covers Isaac's workflow process. He'll share why he leans towards simplicity and doing the process right the first time.

## IMPORTANT TOPICS COVERED:

1. Backing up your files + File Management
2. The photo import process.
3. The photo export process.

## ISAAC'S TIPS:

### Tip #01

Make sure you backup your photos. Twice.

### Tip #02

Never delete or format a memory card or hard drive until it's backed up to two separate locations.

### Tip #03

For long term storage I use Carbon Copy Cloner, two larger but less expensive drives, and a USB hub.

### Tip #04

I work off of one catalog in Lightroom for all of my images, and use collections to sort them.

### Tip #05

I export full resolution JPEGs to my computer hard drive, which automatically backs up to Dropbox and the cloud.

### Tip #05

Plan for failure and you will never be caught off guard.



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# HOW I APPROACH A BRAND

Isaac walks over his process for approaching a brand and building a relationship with them. You can find a summary of that process below:

01

**Research:** Is this brand a good fit?

02

**Share the love:** Engage with their content.

03

**Direct Message:** Reach out with a personable DM, and ask who the right person is to talk to.

04

**Email:** Email them with a note about how you like their brand and products, and you would like to talk about working together.

05

**Credentials:** In the email, include a link with your media kit and past work in your signature.

06

**Set up a call:** Whatever the response, try to talk to them into a call. Get as much contact as possible to build a real relationship.

07

**Listen:** Always ask what they are working with and how you can help. You may already have an idea for a project you think might fit, but be flexible to make it work with their needs.

08

**Define the budget:** When they express interest in working together, ask what their budget is. It's a good idea to let them go first so you don't miss the mark.

09

**Send it:** Now that you have the details, ask if you can send over a proposal.

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## HOW TO BUILD A PROPOSAL OR PITCH DECK.

In this episode Isaac shares how he builds a proposal for a brand. He will walk you through the design and structure while giving tips on what to share and what to leave out.

For a closer look, you can download the Pitch Deck Isaac references below the episode.

For more templates and a deeper dive into building a pitch deck, visit Isaac's website [www.isaacjohnston.co/the-pitchdeck-kit](http://www.isaacjohnston.co/the-pitchdeck-kit)



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## 3 STRATEGIES ON INCREASING EXPOSURE FOR YOUR WORK WITHOUT SOCIAL MEDIA GROWTH

The days of growing to a million followers on Instagram alone are gone. Isaac shares how he grows + deepens his exposure and opportunities without hacks or relying on an algorithm.

1. Expand by using social as if it's social - network with people that you're genuinely interested in
2. Do more interesting work - Let agencies and companies know your capabilities and proactively pursue opportunities with them
3. Do more work you're proud of - focus on making good work and be sure to share it



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## HOW TO MEET ARTISTS YOU LOVE AND NETWORKING IN 2020

Isaac shares how he meets and brings value to creators he admires. Isaac's Tips on making a connection:

**Be Genuine:** Engage with their posts on social media

**Be Unique:** Invite them on an adventure that they couldn't do without you

**Follow Up:** Be persistent but not annoying

**Be flexible:** You may have to adjust the timing or locations

**Follow Through:** Put your money where your mouth is and make it happen

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## HOW TO FIND IDEAS WHEN YOU ARE STUCK

When Isaac is faced with no ideas or too many he uses a process he calls the “Idea Asset List”. Think of it as a pros/cons list for creatives.



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## MY STRATEGIES TO CREATE BETTER STORIES NO MATTER THE MEDIUM

Isaac shares a few strategies for creating better stories.

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## MY TECHNIQUES TO SHOOT PHOTOS

Follow Isaac out on a mock client shoot with Alex Strohl. He walks through some of his techniques for creating a client shoot in his signature style.



- Start with the basic structure in mind. A story always has a beginning, middle and end.
- If you want more interesting stories, do more interesting things.
- Make the story and share it.
- Keep going, publish the thing and make another.

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# HOW I WRITE VIDEOS FOR THE INTERNET

Translating a story to video is hard. Isaac shares his question form that he uses to craft a video before he ever shoots a clip.



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# HOW TO BE COMFORTABLE IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA AND IG STORIES:

How I make them and why you should too

Isaac talks about how you can become more engaging in front of the camera.

Look at the lens not the monitor of yourself.

- Think about and practice what you are going to say, then only say it once or twice.

- If what you are saying is positive, smile before you talk.
- Talking to the camera takes practice.

If you have been wanting to get started making but didn't feel like Youtube was for you, then start with IG stories. It's more accommodating.

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**A NOTE FROM  
ISAAC.**

How to Become  
**A FREELANCE  
PHOTOGRAPHER**

**“Hey Everyone, thank you for taking my workshop. I hope my experience has given you some valuable tips and the confidence to jump into your new career with confidence. I am excited to see you take the next steps towards your dreams. Good luck and keep at it!”**

-Isaac