

WORTH EVERY PENNY *joycast*[™]

On a scale of one to 10, how true do you think this is? To be a boutique and for clients to value what you do, you have to have an amazing photography studio. You've thought it right. We've all thought it. We're convinced our clients will have sticker shock when they see our prices, and then see our studio or lack of studio. Today, I'm going to show you how you can be a boutique photographer without a studio. And if you've had a studio on your vision board, but haven't taken the plunge yet, I'll share how to know if you're ready to take one.

So the real question is how are portrait photographers like us able to run a profitable business, and still put our families first without selling digital files for cheap and working all the time. I'm Sarah Petty, your host of the Worth Every Penny Joycast. And I went from a stressed out overworked mama with three babies to being named one of America's most profitable photographers without working my kids' lives away. Each week I'll show you how to find and serve boutique portrait photography clients in a world where we compete with free, thanks to everyone having a digital camera in their pocket. Take the first step to adding more joy and profit to your life by downloading your free photography business tools at joyofmarketing.com/podcast.

I totally get how you're feeling right now about wanting a studio. I was the same way. I was a mom. I was shooting outside mostly. It was my hobby. I was having fun with it. I was meeting people at the park. I was using only natural light, but I live in the Midwest and I started to realize quickly, "Well, most of the winter, I can't make any money because everything's dead and there's snow. And it's really difficult to shoot outside when it's freezing cold." Not realizing what I know now that I could have easily shot at my client's homes, using a window in natural light without hauling a bunch of equipment. But I didn't know that yet. And so I really convinced myself that I need a studio. I started by creating a little studio in my basement. I got a light kit for, I don't even know, 150 bucks maybe.

It came in a little briefcase and I'd unpack it, and I set it up in my basement. I think it had two or three umbrellas and little lights on wobbly little poles, which again, I feel like do what you got to do. And you probably could even pick one of those up pretty inexpensively. The

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problem was in the house I lived in, it had low ceilings, so I couldn't put the background up very high. And if I had a tall human, they had to sit on a chair or on the ground. And it was pretty awkward. Luckily I specialized in kids, but it was so bad. I'm bringing people to my gross basement, full of broken pieces of furniture and random strollers and different things like that. So I just really didn't like it. I didn't feel professional. This little flimsy light kit, I knew wasn't going to last very long.

It was a little temporary thing, but I really, I had these newborn babies and I just thought, "Oh my gosh, I really don't want to keep shooting in my basement." And I pictured them, having two two-year-olds hanging on me, little did I know I would have a third baby when they were two. But I just really wanted to have a studio. So went to my CPA, who had been my dad's CPA for years. And I really trusted him. I'm big into getting both legal and accounting advice from people who know what they're doing. And he said, "Sarah, will this bring you more business? When you get a studio? Will people drive by and say, 'Oh my gosh, she's amazing. I need to come to her.'" And I said, "You know what? Not really." Does it give you credibility? Absolutely. And create awareness. Absolutely. But it's not going to stop people from driving down the street to come to you.

That's what marketing does. Sure. It justifies our artwork that the higher prices are worth what we're charging right. But it's not the only thing that justifies higher prices. And I'll talk about that in a moment. It gives us a better way to serve our clients. If we have a dedicated studio because we have that space, we can leave more samples there. We have a place to store our backgrounds. It's not in the trunk of our car, or in our dirty dingy basements. But also what I really wanted was I wanted to separate work and home. I wanted to have somewhere I could go where I leave home and I go and I do my work. And then I come home and I can be fully present, which as I realized later, as an entrepreneur, I don't know, we think about our businesses all the time.

And so being fully, fully present has always been a little bit of a challenge for me because I love thinking about my business, even when I shouldn't be. But I knew that having

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this separation would really help me. So my accountant really had said, "Now's not the time." But I came upon an opportunity that I couldn't pass up. It was to rent a little studio that had been next door to a photo lab. And the photo lab got grief from all of their pro clients because they were renting out a photo studio and competing with their clients. And there aren't a lot of local photo labs anymore. It just is what happened after digital. But remember these were in the days of film, and he was very happy to rent it to me. So he said, Sarah, "I will rent this place to you for 300 bucks a month. No lease. Try it out. See if you like it, if you don't just let me know."

Because he really wasn't using it. And he was trying not to use it. I was stoked because I had the money to pay my bills. And my dad was always like, "You've got to be the first to pay your bills. People treat you better. You'll have better relationships, it will build trust." And I really was good about that. But after weeks were going on, I'm realizing, all right, I'm paying bills, which is awesome, but there's no money left for me. And gosh, I just felt like I was working for other people again. I don't know if you ever feel like that, but I'd left a good job. I'd left benefits and vacation. So here in my mind, I was thinking, "Well, this is a safe risk because it's only \$300 a month." But it was \$300 a month that I was investing. But that wasn't giving me a return on my investment.

I felt like I was in that scarcity mindset where I was just making enough. Just making enough to get by, just making enough to pay the bills. And I remember thinking, "I'm worth more than just enough. I can't drive this old junky car forever. I want to be able to give my kids things, and opportunities and just enough doesn't do that." So while I had the flexibility to do what I wanted, when I wanted, and I could run home and hug my babies at the end of the day, I wasn't making money. So for those of you who are wanting a studio, let me talk to you about "When can I afford a studio?" And then I'm going to talk about how you don't need a studio to get going. And then I'm going to talk about how you can build your business the right way without having that studio.

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Here's the thing, it's a catch 22, isn't it. You can't afford a studio until you have clients, but you need clients to help pay for the studio. Well, here's the rule of thumb and you might want to write these notes down and I'm hoping in all of these episodes you're taking notes, even a handful of nuggets that you can refer to as you grow in your journey. And maybe you're not ready for this information, but one day you might be and you'll think, "Oh my gosh, let me go back to my Joycast journal where I can look at the notes because I know Sarah talked about this." It's always hard to find things when you're looking for them, isn't it? So a well-run retail, photography business. I'm talking about a retail business, not necessarily one in your home. Home-based option is a great if you can manage it and that's what you want.

Check with your lawyer and accountant about tax implications, and what you can write off based on your city and based on your usage. But I'm talking about a retail location. So something not connected to your home. That is at a completely different location. The rule of thumb is that you can allocate about 10% of your overall sales toward overhead. So for example, if in the next year, you're projecting to do about a \$100,000 in total sales. Now keep in mind that doesn't include sales tax because that's not your money. You're just passing it on. So don't ever count that in revenue because it's not your money. You would have \$10,000 to spread out over the 12 months for your overhead. And that comes out to about \$833 a month. So that's your rent, your plumbing, your heat, your air conditioning, whatever expenses you have that go into that has to come out of that \$833 a month.

Now, how do you know what you're going to do in business the next year? That's the question, that's the game. And just feeling confident in yourself or your skills. I don't know. It's just not quite enough. But look, if you're brand new, it's not probably realistic to project, no matter how good you are that you're going to do a \$100,000 in your first year. But you can get out there and hustle and get some money and you can grow each year. Typically, a fast growing company grows 20% a year. If you grow four years in a row at 20%, that makes you what's called a gazelle. Like you are on fire. You're a fast growing company that is really hard to do. In

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all of my years of massive growth. I've only done 20%, three years in a row, but I've done it two times.

So I did three years and then I didn't the fourth year. And then maybe it was another year. And then I did three more years over 20%. So I was growing quickly, but still not even to qualify as being called a gazelle. And there are growing pains. If you grow too fast, you don't know necessarily how to manage the workflow, how to manage the clients, how to get it all done. And so sometimes growing too fast can hurt you too. So when I see people jumping in and committing to a studio before they're ready, all I know is it's going to put so much pressure on your family, on yourself, and then you panic because you can't pay the mortgage. And so you go and you discount and you say, "Okay, I'm just going to do this this month to get a bunch of cashflow to pay the bills."

And then you're devaluing your business. You're teaching your best clients to wait for a sale. And you're attracting cheap price sensitive buyers. And it starts that whole cycle of self-doubt and head trash. And then you start to erode all of the progress you've made and it affects your family life. And it affects everything happening all because you jumped in too soon. Now, if you did 60, 70, \$80,000 last year, and you've been growing consistently for a couple years, and maybe you were having babies or moving houses and you know, "Oh my gosh, if I could apply myself full time to this, I know I could make that mark." Then maybe it's your time. And again, maybe you can find a place for \$300 a month like I did, or you could be more creative and you can go out and be scrappy and hustle.

You could trade with somebody who has available space like a developer, a realtor, or a builder. Maybe they have remnant space that they can't rent and maybe they need photos of all of their properties, and they would trade it for you either for a couple of months in the winter, or a couple months to get started, or just a pop up studio for a special promotion that you're doing. But there's always a way if you have tenacity. And I really believe that. The good news is you don't need that studio to get you there. It's not a magic bullet. And we all know build it and they will come. It happened in a movie with former dead baseball players coming

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out of a cornfield in Iowa to play baseball. That doesn't happen in business. And I'm thinking you might not want it to anyway.

So know your numbers before you jump into a studio, but let's go back to that. The good news is you don't need a studio to get you there. You just really don't because there are things you can do to build your brand, so that you can be boutique, so that you can command the high prices. You can serve your clients at a high level. I have a student named Sheila McAllister. She has five kiddos. She has a busy life and she said, "Sarah, I don't ever want a studio." She said, it's too much overhead, too much to worry about. She mostly shoots outside, but she can do indoor shoots in her downtown with other businesses. She has a few partners that she knows. If she needs an indoor session, she can hop in there and do it because she's built relationships. She mostly does families and seniors, and she doesn't have to haul a bunch of lighting around and a bunch of equipment.

She uses natural light and she loves it. She also said, "I don't want to waste the time driving there. And being away from my family." Her kids go off to school and she rocks. And then her kids come home from school and she can be hands on mom. She also said real estate's expensive. "So to get something that I really want, it's going to cost a lot of money." She does the in person consultation in the client's home. This is over-serving. This is where she bonds with them, where she looks for opportunities to create fantastic artwork for their walls, and really getting to know the flavor of the family, and how the client decorates. What's their style? What do they all do? What gets them excited? It's the best way to do a needs analysis. And you're really over-serving. Then she does in person sales presentations in her own home, she doesn't have a studio set up.

She just has one room where she brings her clients and she serves them. She even has a kitchen. Of course, in her house, couple rooms away. She can go get snacks or beverages or anything she wants. It's easy squeezey. And it makes it so easy for her. She told me in the first six months of this year during COVID, she did \$33,261 in sales. And she's on track to hit six figures this year, during COVID working part time, being a mom too taking care of five school aged kids

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and doing what she loves. Her averages are near \$3,000 because she's serving her clients. So she's not serving 500 clients with a hundred or \$200 orders. She's serving them at a high level. And it doesn't matter that she doesn't have a studio because she's knows what to do right.

So let's talk about that. What can you do if you don't have a studio to create value and still be boutique, even if you're brand new first. First let me talk about that word value, when we wrote the book *Worth Every Penny*, we were really careful not to use all these super marketing words that are so squishy, like value. And we really tried to explain them in a way that someone who doesn't want to go to business school, or read a starchy business book could really understand. And it made sense. So we wrote the book like we were writing to a friend using simple words, but value's a tough one because people always say, "Oh, you need to create more value." Well, what does that mean? It means in simple language that people will think you're worth more. Think about it. People will pay more to haul their families, to Disney and have all of the experiences that go with it. Then they'll pay at the local county fair.

Maybe they're riding the exact same ride in both places. Some people perceive a diamond from Tiffany's as an engagement ring is so much more valuable than a diamond of the exact same quality from anywhere else. And how do you as a photographer get people to believe you're worth more than the thousand other photographers that are in your town? Sure. A studio is one way, but there are a lot more ways to create value. So people say, "Oh my gosh, this photographer is worth more. They're worth every penny." Sure. They may say you're expensive, but as long as they're finishing that sentence with, "But you're worth every penny." You are a boutique photographer that is serving your client at the highest level. I want to share with you four important things that you can do if you don't have a studio to create that value. First, and this is super important. Everything you put into the world as a business owner is getting judged by your clients.

So all of your communications must be better. And really, I like to think of them as being gush worthy. You can't just be average and vanilla and check the box. We're like service marketers because people hire us before they see the images that they're going to buy. They're

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buying something that doesn't exist yet. So when I talk about service marketing, it's like the difference between product marketing, where you go into a store, you look at the sofa, you're like, "Oh honey, do you like this sofa? I like this sofa. Let's buy this sofa." Or you can go from store to store and compare this sofa to that sofa. But service marketing, how do you actually know when you hire a carpet cleaning company if they're going to clean your carpets and really actually get them clean?

They could be running over your carpets with a bunch of water going in and out a vacuum and charging you a bunch of money. How do you know when you go to a restaurant before you order that the food is going to be good, or the people who cook the food are going to be clean or the foods not out of date? You're judging these businesses by things you don't know yet because you haven't experienced what you're buying. Might be a referral, that's obviously the best way, but people are judging everything. Have you ever gone into a restaurant that was dirty? You reach for the door handle and it's nasty and stickers half pulled off and it looks like it hasn't been washed. What's the first thing you think? You think, "Oh gosh, I wonder what the kitchen's like." And then you go in and you see dirt in the corners and a roach trap by the wall, and the plates stacked up and it looks dirty.

And the menus you don't even want to touch them because they look sticky and yucky. And the people behind the counter, if they're not clean, they look like they just rolled out of bed and came there. All of those things reflect on your decision of what's this place worth. If it's a low end, fast food place, you might just go, "Okay, we're going to go down the street because there's another one. Doesn't matter. We just are looking for cheap food." But if you're looking for a quality meal, you're saying, "Okay, this is not what I want. I want to go get better quality food because this scares me." Or the carpet cleaner business the guy who answers the phone is a real jerk or they never call you back. Those are things that people judge you on. So the biggest thing that I want to address with the communication is your design. They judge your logo, your design of everything, your marketing pieces, your website, they look at your emails. If you reply to them, if you're using a Gmail address, stop it. You look like a hobbyist.

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If you have printed pieces and you're using cheap, poor designer, worse yet designing them yourself. You're really telling people, "I'm a low end photographer. I'm that restaurant that has dirty menus that I designed, the owner designed. And they're not paying attention to detail and they're not going to give me a good product." That's what you're communicating. Great design creates value. So important to have better marketing and design. And in my business, we create marketing pieces. We call them dog whistle pieces to attract the right clients. They're printed on gorgeous paper, professionally designed the copy's written by a professional copywriter that gives people goosebumps when they read it. And they're dye cut, and they twist, and they turn and they fold and they pop out of the envelope sometimes. And that's how I attract people who value photography. And it says, "Boy, she's not going to be cheap because this is gorgeous."

Even when I was starting out I did that because I was so insecure as a photographer and I wasn't a good photographer. And I knew how to market. I knew people would respect me as a business owner. If I had that better design, that's what we did at the ad agency for our clients. And I knew if I did it for myself too, it would change everything. And it did. So you can build your business faster. If you have money to invest in pieces like that. And if you don't, don't do them half way, don't do them 10%. Go out and learn how to talk to people and hustle and make partnerships. Because printing things poorly does more harm than it does good. So is it going to be expensive to have professional design? Absolutely. It sure can be, but can you trade with a designer in your market? Can you find some high quality templates and start there with them 80% done and then customize them to your business? Heck yeah. You can use those resources if you have those abilities. But the key is if you want to be boutique, you have to have professional design. That's number one, everything you put in the world is getting judged. So it has to be better.

Number two, what you say. Your ability to share your value when you talk to people is what creates value. As you've probably heard me talk about the seven Bs of the first phone call, that's what I teach my students how to engage and create value and book the right clients. The

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fourth step in those seven Bs is telling people what makes you different? You have to tell them what makes you different. This creates value. Does it mean you have to get your prices off your website?

Yes. Because you actually have to talk to people to tell them what you do. What makes you different? Why your prices are worth what they're worth. Is this uncomfortable? Of course, it is. Can it be learned? Yes. I have students, Jill and Jalane Tucker, they're a mother daughter team. And they love their business, but they said, "We are painfully shy. We don't even want to answer the phone when it rings." But they followed our system, learning those seven Bs of how to talk to their clients. Again, something that can be learned, their next sale was over \$9,000. They were overwhelmed. They said, "We're just sitting in our little farmhouse in rural Georgia, showing photos of people at our kitchen table on our laptop. How can this be?" Because they learned a skill. Learning to talk to people is a skill. It's not a talent. It's not something you are born with.

Because believe me, I was a terrible sales person as a kid, we had to do all those selling activities and I had to learn how to get good at it. So learning to talk to people and just telling them what's awesome about you, and why they want to do business with you is what you have to do if you're going to be boutique. And listen, if you're not good at it, just know it's worth getting good at. It's worth getting good at talking to people, and it's something you can learn. You're not born with it. You can learn it. That's the good news.

Number three, your system has to serve your clients better. Just like Sheila said, I don't want a studio, but it allows me to go to my client's home. I take appropriate samples. I measure, I take photos of their mantle and then I can show them their artwork to scale in their room, the right appropriate size.

It makes the decision making so easy. She holds their hands until everything is perfect. This creates value your system that's created to serve people creates value. Years ago, I sat down and I spent days creating a system that serves my clients from start to finish. I wrote down every detail from the second they called, or walked in until the final artwork is picked up.

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And then I've spent 17 years more than that, actually, refining this process. You can do this too. Sit down and create an amazing process from the consumer's standpoint. And then you can rock for them. Now, does it mean that might be a little painful? When you fail, you have to fix your system. Absolutely. Does it mean you might prefer to use your money, and invest in a proven system to shorten the learning curve? That's an option too, but the key is as boutique, you have to have a smooth system that keeps your clients thrilled. When you convert from shoot and burn to boutique, it's not simply charging more for the same thing. It's so much more. And that shows up in your service.

And fourth, how you show up in things in your community. Charitable auctions are huge. And being able to give to auctions, and build your business by building charities at the same time is one of my favorite things. We give to a ton of things because it builds my business. But one year New Year's Eve, a man came in, walked in. We'd already paid our sales tax for the month online. It was like three o'clock. We were giggling like we should go home. I think I had one or two employees at the time. And he walked in and he said, "I'd like to buy something for my wife for New Year's Eve." And we're thinking, "Well, he probably just walked in the wrong place. Because he doesn't know what we do. We're boutique. We're very different."

We started talking to him. And he said, "I see you at every charitable auction I go to, I see you there." And I wanted to buy from you. And so we were like, boom, this is our client. This is our ideal client. He loves what we do. He wants to be a part of the community. And so we were showing him prices and he said, "I have four boys. Let's do some of these, some of these. And it ended up being \$6,000." He gave Andrea the credit card and she's taking his credit card and I'm a little bit in shock. So I'm just making conversation and I knew charities were important. And I said, "I have a marketing company called Joy of Marketing, where we teach photographers, how to make money. And we're raising money this month for children with cleft palates, Operation Smile."

And I'm just literally making conversation. And he said, "Oh my gosh, my son had a cleft palate. And we were able to afford the surgery for him." And he pulls his checkbook. He already

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gave us his credit card. He pulled his checkbook out of his pocket and he said, "Can I give you a check and make a donation?" And I was like, "Oh, that's the nicest thing. Of course, you can. That means so much to me. I can't even believe you're doing that. Thank you." He writes a check out for \$1,000 and we raised \$25,000 twice. So we've donated \$50,000 to Operation Smile, but talk about just being in such a happy place. It was the best ending of that year. Here we were New Year's Eve getting ready to start with a fresh, clean slate and it couldn't have ended any better.

So when you work with charities, when you're raising money and you're a part of the community that creates value. Does it mean you have to go out and talk to people in your community, and build relationships, and grow your business and get outside your comfort zone? Yes, it does. But look, I have so many students who are introverts like Jill and Jalane that mother and daughter team and they learned to do it. And you can too. So take a friend who's a business owner who would like to go with you, start with a small group and work your way up. You have to do the hard things to get better. So start taking those baby steps. Now, look, I'm not telling you whether you should or shouldn't have a studio. What I want to make crystal clear is that you do not need to have a studio to be boutique. To have the life you want, where you make money. And you're able to put family first.

The things you have to do in my opinion are creating better marketing communications with professional design, ironing out your entire process so that you can serve your clients at the highest level. And becoming a huge part of your community. Then as you learn to consistently attract clients, and you thrill them and you keep your average order up and it's predictable for you. You will easily have the option for a studio if you want one.

Hey photographer, it's Sarah, again, with a quick question for you. Do you ever wonder why some photographers make \$300 a session and others make \$3,000? I know I did. So I dug deep into what's going on and I wrote a book for you called Worth Every Penny. You can get a free copy at joyofmarketing.com/freebook. Inside this book, you'll learn four ways to price your photography. And why there's just one pricing strategy that attracts the best clients. What to

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do when you need clients and why paying for ads doesn't work and what to do instead that's way cheaper. The do's and don'ts of social media. What most photographers are doing wrong that lowers their profits and what to do instead. I'm not sure there's a book on the planet that more photographers have read 23,124 photographers have it already. So I want you to have it too. Grab your copy of the hard cover book free here. Just pay a little for shipping and handling at joyofmarketing.com/freebook.