

Marketing Travel Photography

Getting Started by [Lou Jones](#)

There are many people who can climb to the top of the mountain but only those who return with evidence get to brag about it. It is the responsibility of the swashbuckling, world weary travel photographer to bring back proof. Discovering new cultures, angles, rhythms and documenting them is sentient beings' most exciting experience. However, we can go there, we can return but eventually all of us need an audience. Finding, building, and nurturing that audience is almost as hard as taking the photographs. So what do you do with the pictures when you get home? In this inaugural article, we are going to broach the complicated subject of marketing travel photography. The complete photographer must learn to sell as well as savor.

I started out wearing bulletproof vests, photographing the wars in Central America, running with guerillas, interviewing Heads of State and US Congressmen. That episode of my life led directly to twenty five years shooting the Summer and Winter Olympics and for dozens of Fortune 500 corporations. All the time in between I traversed the globe. Many of these assignments had nothing in common but sometimes you find yourself in a different "neighborhood" than you intended. Faithfully following road maps and making all the right turns but still you end up uncovering uncharted territory. That meandering career path put me on all the continents and allowed me to find my true passion.



Tour Guide - Luxor, Egypt

Because I wrote a book on travel photography, [Travel and Photography: Off the Charts](#), the Photo.net editors asked me to discuss some of the major issues. Although it might be putting the cart before the horse, my first effort will be to start at the end, i.e. marketing travel photography.

It is imperative to put your images in front of interested parties to sustain your lifestyle.

Nearly everyone with more than a passing interest in photography sees themselves visiting distant latitudes & longitudes. We have all flipped through *National Geographic* magazines, read *The Bridges of Madison County* or watched the Travel Channel. Many of you reading this article have planned a trip around a photographic excursion. Some of our earliest visual history is by men with pith helmets and wool suits photographing, with gigantic view cameras, their female companions clothed in ankle length dresses and petticoats on the stones of the Egyptian pyramids. As inappropriate as they might have been, these pioneers are our direct ancestors and they were showing us how to bring back images most people had never imagined. We all have envisioned ourselves trekking with a couple of cameras *solving the problems and curing the ills* of the world.

If you have honed your skills and feel you make pretty pictures, the next logical step is how to support your habit. Commerce is what I mean to address here, i.e. the care and feeding of travel photography—the practical part. We will deal with the *Zen of Travel Photography Maintenance* in future articles.

Not everyone will win a Pulitzer Prize. Not everyone wants to. There are many decisions to wrestle with before choosing any direction in the vast spectrum of travel photography. Are you an “extreme” personality, motivated by exotic explorations or more comfortable as an “armchair” tourist that works better domestically or with a hot shower every day? Do you intend to pursue travel photography full time or just as avocation. Do you prefer to take or make photographs? Do you expect to rely on assignments or initiate your own personal projects? As in most professions, the more risks you take, the higher the likelihood of additional rewards, but not necessarily in marketing travel photography. Who is your audience? Not only age, gender, race and politics determine the readership but they define your clientele as well. You may not know the answers to all these questions in the beginning but each will impact your marketing eventually.

Self-Promotion



Japanese Umbrellas

For freelance photographers, marketing comes down to self-promotion. Actually everything is self-promotion. When you are ready to formulate a serious marketing strategy you can combine many of the methods outlined in this article. Every frame you expose has the potential of not only being published but also to advertise.

Coming back from a trip to Portugal I was informed by an account executive that of the 300 passengers on the plane as many as half of them had cameras. Like all other branches of photography you have to distinguish yourself. Have better pictures than everyone else, have access to something no one else does or more time to spend investigating it—in depth. Unlike many other types of photography, travel has prerequisites. You can be a still life photographer and decide you want to switch to portraiture with little consternation. With the right kind of talent a creative eye can focus on different subject matter. Taking your camera on the road means you have to know that you can perform under duress and when you are out of your element—sort of like learning how to swim before you attempt underwater photography. I was a dedicated [traveler](#) long before I knew how to take pictures. In an alien environment, there is no substitute for practice. Your proof is in the form of a portfolio.

Portfolio

When marketing travel photography your calling card is your portfolio. It is unique because it has to do triple duty. First, it is your resume. It has to be somewhat photojournalistic in nature: at least some of the

pictures have to show you can follow a “script,” have a story or narrative or point of view. Like an essay, picture stories have a beginning, middle and end. A good travel portfolio should illustrate the highlights of a new place or event in a poignant, cohesive way. And lastly, the same portfolio has to have single, stunning, stand-alone images that make the viewer want to be right there because of the content or mood.

Portfolios take on all sorts of configurations these days. The traditional portfolio has gone through many transformations in the last few years. They have evolved and gotten very elaborate. Rarely do we see the old black, fake leather, three-ring binders with loose prints stuffed between plastic glassine pages. Expensive packaging. Specialty printing. Hard bound books. Designs by clever producers.

Even the delivery systems have gone through radical change. Besides dropping off your “book” to a potential client, the Internet is finally accepted as a more convenient, more efficient method of showing work. Web sites, blogs and DVDs are acceptable, even preferable. They permit the serious practitioner to contact people who need to see artwork no matter where they are in the world.

Internet Marketing



Lobster Boat - Vinalhaven, Maine

Seen by some at first as an inconvenience, the computer has revolutionized our media in every way. More and more creative professionals are relying on the Internet to solve the ever widening divide. A photographer’s web site has become his/her main marketing tool. It is the point of first contact. Be sure it is not the last. No matter how you choose to present, ease is tantamount. Just like any web site, if a visitor has to register to gain entrance or the photographs take too long to load or the site is hard to navigate, you increase your chances of

disconnect. Low res images for the “soft” portfolio, high res for the “hard” portfolio.

In the business world a person is only as important as his/her rolodex. The computer not only showcases you to new, otherwise unattainable, markets but serves as the ultimate “rolodex” by housing your client lists, monitoring hits and being a virtual rep while you attend to the task of producing new content.

Many technology savvy shooters are exploiting the newer social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, video, blogging, online newsletters and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) as components in viral marketing. A few have been successful but the jury is still out for much of it.

Mailing Lists

You can buy mailing lists. These databases are so sophisticated that you can customize the exact type markets you want to approach. You can choose design studios, public relations firms, web design outlets, pick size of staff, annual billings, region, specialty, etc. Just remember mass, “shotgun” marketing only works if it is very unique. And if you send out one or a thousand mailings you have to follow up with a more direct, personal approach, i.e. a [phone](#) call or an email asking if they received the original promotional piece. Target those companies for whom you are most suited and then go after those you really want to work with. Take great care of your lists. Nurture them constantly. Add new names and personal details to old contacts. Birthdays, spouse’s names, kids ages make them more valuable. Continuously purge your records of outdated information.

Sources to buy mailing lists:

- [Agency Access](#)
- [AdBase](#)

Advertising Agencies



Billboard - Vienna, Austria

Who do you want to sign your paycheck? Are you mainly interested in the high end agencies where the assignments will be accompanied by substantial budgets? Where the pressure is mind numbing? One assignment in Alaska had my two assistants, the art director, two account executives, their assistant, the client had two representatives and an assistant, the union shop steward and the facility manager all looking over my shoulder. Five models, makeup and an engineer to keep my strobes from blowing fuses rounded out the entourage. I had to feed them too.

Ad campaigns carry the banner for companies or services and are seen by millions of eyes in consumer, trade or specialty magazines. Months may be spent on the concepts. And you may be working from layouts that are “carved in stone.” You are chosen because your personal style can be adapted to enhance the initial idea.

This is where you will produce a serious portfolio to be put in the hands of an art buyer who will showcase it to art directors who will present it to the skeptical final decision makers. A track record and tearsheets are obligatory to demonstrate you can handle those budgets. No one is going to risk their careers and tens of thousands of dollars on a neophyte.

Editorial

If you are interested in editorial assignments, the rules of engagement are completely different. Take a look at [Editorial Photographers](#), a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the health and profitability of editorial photography. The newsstands are littered with new specialty magazines. Adventure travel, ecotourism, executive travel, minority and gender biased destinations have fast growing affinity followings. The marketplace is tremendously segmented. Budgets are smaller, paychecks too; time is precious. You often travel alone or with a writer.

In Tokyo I once vied with an egotistical writer while interviewing the venerable Soichiro Honda, who masterminded the Japanese automobile manufacturer. We both wanted Mister Honda's attention: he for words, me to make an interesting portrait. I was ready to kill him at the end of the session and I am sure he thought the same thing about me.

Style may have a lot to do with your getting the job. Or you may have a specialty that is appropriate to the story being illustrated. Portraiture, photojournalism, humor, abstract, wildlife, sports are examples of what is fashionable. Usually you are expected to produce more pictures for less money than in advertising.

To get jobs you may have to drop off your portfolio along with several other competitors on specific days. Simplicity is much more important. A designer must be able to see the images immediately without adornment or fanfare. Books that are too precious or cumbersome or complicated are ignored.

Sitting in the foyer of an agency, waiting to show my work to an art director, I watched another designer go through a stack of portfolios in less than five minutes. She never paused or stopped turning pages. The life's accomplishments of those anonymous artists never made it out of the lobby.

In-flight Magazines



Eiffel Tower - Paris, France

A wonderful synergy is in-flight magazines. A few to check out are [Pace Communications](#) and [Ink Publishing](#). In-flight magazines are a cross between editorial and advertising. Airlines have an enormous self interest to get passengers aboard their air carriers and the best way to sell that service is to glamorize the ultimate destinations. Another aspect of the synergy is there are national carriers in most countries, many of

which have slick, glossy publications in the seat pockets, on every plane. In addition to being receptive to ideas about far away locations they host, you can also turn around and pitch ideas about your own region. You may live at the other end of one of their flights and a quixotic, personalized point-of-view is often welcome.

There are conglomerates that specialize in hospitality, in-flight and transportation magazines. This category is called custom publishing. The same company may manage the publications for more than one airline. I have had the good fortune of working for a few and the assignments have given me great freedom to exploit my unique style, do substantive work and collect a decent paycheck. I have photographed famous bars, baseball and football teams, personalities, tourist attractions, etc. without leaving home. Subjects I would rarely have sought otherwise.

One international airline, in particular, flew me first class between several cities on the itinerary (it did not cost them anything for transportation), put me up in great, centralized hotels (these accommodations were part of their chain), gave me assistants (sometimes graduate students who had their own cars) and translators in each location and utilized some of the best images I shot. Granted I never slept because I was always shooting. I wrestled with jet lag for months and never understood what they were saying on the hotel [television](#) but it was a seminal account.

Corporate



Postcard - Budapest, Hungary

Much of my own emphasis has been seeking assignments for corporate clients. I set out to attract business where I could be part of the decision making process. Annual reports, company magazines and online periodicals have allowed me to visit all parts of Asia, Europe and South

America. It is good strategy to pitch to the MarCom (marketing/communications) departments. Go direct.

NGOs have dropped me into trouble spots in Africa and Central America. Educational institutions have employed me to illustrate their field satellites. Publishers have sent me to jails and worse. I have acquired the skills of protocol, language and adaptability through trial and error and from continued repetition because there is no partial credit in assignment photography. Only A's and F's.

If you are lucky enough to get a face-to-face with an art director/designer, your personality will prove as important as your images. The person hiring you has to feel you are implacable under pressure, can solve international faux pas and be a good ambassador for the company. Your marketing approach needs to be periodically refilled with new images. It is naïve to think that just because you made a good impression on the art director once, you will get a call soon. There are only so many campaigns that may be suitable to your skill set and you have to have great timing when that happens.

Follow up with mailers or emails that contain recent, unseen work. It is a delicate balance between being persistent and being a pain. I always consider that my best marketing gambit is *reinforcement*. A busy contact will only recall me after multiple iterations, will remember my name after several reminders and phone with an assignment when I become a household word.

For years I diligently mailed tourist postcards while completing jobs all over the globe. They were sent to a select handful of past, present and potential clients. The upside: it was a much less aggressive form of self promotion. It became a "signature" and had the subtle implication that I was employed somewhere in an exciting, far off destination. The downside: it was never my pictures. I called it "tertiary marketing."

Travel Industry



Reflection - Amsterdam, Netherlands

The list of users of travel imagery goes on. One very important outlet is the travel industry itself: travel agents, hospitality companies, hotel chains, cruise ships, packaged tour providers and equipment manufacturers. Depending on how big their constituency, they consume lots of images. They distribute brochures and travel guidebooks that go out to their customers. Again there is no better way to entice [travelers](#) who are interested in being adventurous than with pictures. Some tour groups are so prolific that besides the typical marketing methods, they try to publish their materials inhouse. That is good and bad for working photographers. It is good because it offers another source for our work but bad because they often expect to use photography for little or no compensation. In the not too distant past some companies would offer free accommodations and/or transportation for appropriate pictures. Amateurs are so anxious to be published that they give away their “birthright.” This practice has devalued travel photography and should be discouraged.

Press Trips

On the other hand, if you are an accredited photojournalist you can get on lists for junkets that will compensate writers and photographers. It may require letters of assignment from an established organization. Some are open to those that have a consistent track record and can get their stories disseminated. These press trips are organized by various segments of the tourism industry: chambers of commerce, tourist bureaus, resorts and conference planners. They often expect favorable reviews which may compromise your credibility. So carefully check the contracts. It is hard to retrieve your integrity.

Established organizations where you can obtain letters of assignment for press trips include:

- [Writers Marketplace](#)
- [International Travel Writers](#)
- [International Travel Writers and Photographers Alliance](#)

The initial steps into a travel photography career can be daunting. Landing the first job with a creative who appreciates your approach and will take a chance on someone trying to break in seems somehow impossible. But as is often said “look close to home.” Even though newspapers are in turmoil because of dwindling readership lost to online vehicles and television, regional daily and weekly papers are still hungry for travel related stories. Ideas that have a local interest get the best traction. Do not approach your town paper with a generic story about “Paris” because you visited on your last vacation. Do some research. Find an angle that resonates with the editors and readers and be ready with several “sidebars” that make it specific. The devil is in the details.

One concept I sold to a magazine because I was going on my annual trip to the Far East. Kyoto is Boston’s sister city. My assistant and I arranged to shoot the mayor, the royal gardener, an elementary school, a rock band, etc. in each city. I never liked the layout but the story ran with ample pictures.

Self-Initiated Projects



Petronas Towers - Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Some photographers produce work that transcends commercial restraints. What they do may fall under the heading of documentary, long term, social commentary, even fine art. These genres bring up a whole new set of issues. Not the least of which is funding. Although the

end results may seem to attract a more enlightened customer base, the decisions are just as mercenary. Everyone has to make a living.

Organizations that hire content providers for their message scrutinize applicants for assignments, grants, and funding differently but just as rigorously because there is so much oversight and accountability. Artists can make a substantial part of their income from grants. Proposals have to be submitted with budgets and samples of your work that are every bit as elaborate as commercial portfolios. Every state or municipality has its own grant giving organizations. Foundations that are affiliated with specific causes or interests solicit applications from legitimate sources.

Resources to look for grants include:

- [National Endowment for the Arts](#)
- [Andy Warhol Foundation](#)

A few years ago I sat on the committee that gave out money for a state arts council. Five or six of us reviewed dozens of artists' work. We argued over every detail. And in the end we dolled out tens of thousands of dollars in "free money" to a multitude of artists. The most significant thing I learned was many of the applicants submitted on a regular basis. You have to be tenacious.

Stock Photography

[Getty Images](#) boasted over \$200 million in gross revenue in the first quarter of 2006. [Shutterstock](#) recently claimed 60 million downloads from its stock subscription service. And depending upon who you are talking to the total revenues from stock worldwide is approximately \$2 billion. Consequently there is a lot of money in licensing photography. Almost all travel photographers in the field submit their outtakes into stock. It is nearly a necessity. For some it is their only outlet. Many "road warriors" shun the complexities and uncertainty of commercial photography and spend their time planning, shooting and editing new images. It is a way of avoiding the duplicities of business and sidestepping the questions of money, pricing, usage, etc. More importantly it is an important supplement to all assignments. For

prolific photographers it puts hundreds of pictures into play that might otherwise have been passed over by the limited space in magazines or brochures. Photographs can be “rented” and reused over and over for such diverse end products as textbooks, encyclopedias, as exponentially increasing online references, etc.

Take care to select a stock agency where travel is an important subcategory. If a new agency takes you on just to fill their weakness you could be marginalized because their profit center is elsewhere. At the same time you do not want to one of dozens who have the same kind of images.

Some resources for stock photography include:

- [Picture Archive Council of America](#)
- [Stock Artists Alliance](#)

For questions on how to price your stock, refer to:

- [Seth Resnick pricing guide](#)

Book Publishing



Opera House - Sydney, Australia

Cradling a large hardback coffee table book in your hands is the singular, most delicious pleasures in a photographer’s career. It, of course, makes the ultimate calling card. Throw a book on anyone’s desk and you have instant credibility. Getting in bed with publishers should not be taken lightly. They know secrets that will take you a lifetime to understand and they will exploit them both to your benefit and against it.

I have always approached a potential publisher with my idea as fully formed as possible. I have hired designers to lay out an experimental “dummy” so acquisition editors do not have to think about anything. The potential for success with any new concept is slim and photography books rarely make money unless it appeals to popular culture. Books with pictures are very expensive to produce. Purveyors do not take many chances.

A more recent development in the field is Print [On Demand](#) (POD). You go through all the same motions of making a book: laying out the pictures, typesetting the text, designing the color scheme but you have a third party print each book, one at a time, when and if you have a sale. It can all be done online and some companies that handle POD will do fulfillment and distribution for a fee. They will even apply for an ISBN number. It has much of the cache of being an author without the same risk and expense.

Some resources for POD include:

- [Blurb](#)
- [Apple I-Life](#)
- [My Publisher](#)
- [Self Publishing Lu Lu](#)

Exhibiting

After decades being seen as the stepchild of real art, vintage and contemporary photography is being snatched up almost as fast as it is produced. From Shanghai to London to Paris to Los Angeles, new institutions are opening to handle the swell and old ones are finally adding whole wings to existing buildings to display their archives. Wall space dominates the art world. Exhibiting may seem attractive but galleries, museums and collecting institutions are a segregated club. There is no better affirmation to a lifetime than seeing a row of framed prints hanging on a wall with your signature on them. The right curators, collectors and directors can propel your image to dizzying heights. But it can be swimming with sharks. Besides the body of work, you worry about pedigree, curriculum vitae and artist’s statements. You

must pay attention to aesthetics, trends and constantly try and stay ahead of the pack. This is not about pretty pictures.

It is possible to start small and decorate a cafe or coffee house. Move up to local businesses. Many set aside space for showing local dilettantes. Banks and real estate offices are interested parties. Large corporations may even devote a part of their lobby to exhibitions with opening receptions and invitations. Invitations are an excellent marketing tool to send to your mailing list. Even though many on the list cannot attend, acknowledgement is as good as an RSVP.

A publicist once tipped me off about contacting my alma mater. The university was so excited to have me return to the campus and exhibit that I was eventually asked back to do a commencement address to the graduating student body. If your output engages an ever expanding audience you may evolve into the “big leagues.” This is good marketing travel photography.



In a similar vein, there are curators who handle corporate collections, admire photography and understand the cost benefit to acquiring it. They often establish themes reflecting the type of business, corporate culture or regions where their company has subdivisions or manufacturing plants. They think in series and make purchases that are more palatable to traditional tastes. The number of prints and the editions can affect the price point too. Corporate buyers fully expect the value to appreciate and the collection to become an asset in the corporation’s diversified financial portfolio. There is always an element of crass speculation. The display is usually for employees and shown in more public spaces, intended for general consumption.

A starter list for curators who handle corporate collections include:

- [Vision Light Gallery](#)
- [Boston Art](#)
- [Information on the Directory of Corporate Art Collections](#)

I have sold several collections to corporate art managers when their employers want to feature their global involvements. Having a huge archive of eclectic photography taken in major cities and rural locations available for purchase made many of the lonely, painful, isolated moments spent traipsing around the world more palatable.

Conclusion

We have merely scratched the surface in this column. It is but an overview. The ways and places that photography is being used have increased exponentially in the last few years. The reach the Internet provides us alone is so much bigger than anything that has existed in the past. In future articles, we will outline more traditional case studies and contemporary examples of methods that have been successful in an increasingly competitive field.

Marketing travel photography is imagination—in the mind and on the road. To stand out is all about talent, persistence and relentlessness. As stated in the beginning it is all about self promotion. A long time ago my mentor told me that I had to telephone art directors, make small talk, ask for work and I had to learn to like it, otherwise they would detect my lack of commitment. There is no better way to make a living than through photography. I make sure my clients know that too.

More

- Lou's [member page](#)
- Lou's [gallery page](#)
- www.fotojones.com
- Photo.net [Travel Photography Forum](#)

About the Author



Lou Jones is one of Boston's most diverse and inspiring commercial and fine art photographers, known for his courage, creative skill and humanity. He specializes in photo-illustration and location photography for corporate, advertising, and editorial clients like: IBM, Major League Baseball, Federal Express, Peugeot, Museum of Fine Arts, Paris Match, KLM, National Geographic, People Magazine, Nike, Price Waterhouse, and Aetna. Jones' assignments have taken him often to Europe, South America, Africa, the Far East, and 47 of 50 of the United States. He has been on location at NASA, Boeing, Universal Studios, British Telecom, Mitsubishi, and Saab. Lou has two published books. His second book, *Travel + Photography: Off the Charts*, was published in 2006 and is now in its second printing. [More »](#)

Notes about Lou's Images



Internet Marketing: *Eiffel Tower*, Paris, France

Lou Jones



Mailing Lists: *Japanese umbrellas*. This detail has been published numerous times for magazine covers and calendars. The colors are saturated because they are backlit. I cropped the image to show only parts of the silk accessories, which are symbolic of an entire culture. The use of photographic metaphors is a useful technique in marketing travel photography.

Lou Jones



Mailing Lists: *Postcard*, Budapest, Hungary. I make a mailing list of targeted prospects before every trip near and far. I let friends and others know where I am and what I'm doing as I travel.

Lou Jones



Lou Jones

In-Flight Magazines: *Opera House*, Sydney, Australia. Both international and domestic air carriers have to attract tourists to destinations all over the world. After advertising, in-flight magazines are one of the most popular ways for airplane companies to do this.



Lou Jones

In-Flight Magazines: *Tour Guide*, Luxor, Egypt. We married this animated tour guide to his historical environment employing an 18mm wideangle lens. It is important to find new ways to approach familiar tourist attractions in order to fulfill an editor's preconceived notions of a location. We often have to revisit clichés.



Lou Jones

In-Flight Magazines: *Lobster Boat*, Vinalhaven, Maine. I shot this story for the Sunday supplement to a major daily newspaper. The lead times are long. It was done well after the tourist season was over and was for the following summer's travel section. Hence I was clothed in several layers of warm fleece with gloves and parka attempting to make it look like warm weather.



Lou Jones

Stock: *Petronas Towers*, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. At the time, the Petronas Towers were the tallest buildings in the world. I walked ever widening concentric circles around them for hours until I found the Islamic mosque for a foreground. The stock potential for this image is contingent upon knowing as many details as possible.



Book Publishing: *Surfboards*, Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. My assistant and I took the ferry to the island. We were doing a photo illustration for a book on women and the sea. Between sessions I couldn't resist photographing the author's son for stock. Book projects are usually long term and are based on a very well conceived theme. It is hard to get books published, funded and distributed but well worth

Lou Jones the effort.



Lou Jones

Exhibiting: *Billboard*, Vienna, Austria. This surreal image is part of an ever expanding exhibition shown in fine art, corporate and college galleries. Not only do I get the satisfaction and benefit of showing my accomplishments to a captive audience, sending invitations to clients is a powerful form of tertiary advertising.



Lou Jones

Advertising Agencies: *Reflection*, Amsterdam, Netherlands. The advertising agency asked me to photograph anything I wanted, in my style. I worked very hard in combining color in the world famous canals of Amsterdam. The agency had the courage to use such an abstract image.

Text ©2008 Lou Jones. Photos ©2008 Lou Jones.

Article revised December 2008.