

No one wants to buy your amazing photos

The title is an exaggeration but it's not far from the truth.

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Tell me if this story sounds familiar: you buy a camera and gingerly start taking photos. After a while, you feel confident enough to tentatively share some of them with friends and family. “*They’re beautiful,*” they exclaim, “*You should get them framed! People will buy them!*”

Your heart grows three sizes larger, and you keep plugging away at your photography. You enter a few images into local camera club competitions. You do okay. Eventually, you get a few placements and ribbons.

Bolstered by this success, you enter a few other competitions. They do okay. You mount an exhibit, e.g. at an art gallery or café. Emboldened, you rent a spot at a craft show or art walk. You feel like a real photographer!

The journey from hobby to photo sales

Eventually, you realize that you’ve spent a lot of money printing and framing your images. You likely have sold a few pieces, but you’re not recouping your cost.

The stark reality is that while many people might admire your images, few will buy them. At least that’s my experience.

I’ve been in several exhibits in galleries, coffeeshops, including solo ones, and I’ve sold many prints and cards, but I’m not breaking even. Not even close to it. It’s a good thing I don’t depend on my photography to put bread on the table.



Vermilion Artwalk

And it’s not a reflection of their price, as I only mark my artwork up by 30% over my cost of making it. They’re relatively inexpensive but I think that many people perceive photos as not being original or unique artwork, i.e. you can make as many prints as you wish. And people don’t have the space in their homes, or already have so much artwork.

Some people do make a living of selling their images and you can see their storefronts in tourist destinations such as Banff and Canmore. I have immense respect for what they have done; they not only take beautiful photos but have worked hard over many years to promote them and build a business. They’ve reached the “Big Time.” I think that many people buy their work not just because it’s great but also because they can tell their friends that they spent a lot of money on a photo by “Joe Schmoe,” the famous photographer. It’s a status thing.

Why should we show our work?

- 1) It could simply be because **you enjoy sharing** and talking about your work and chatting with people about photography. Maybe your work will spur a project idea or inspire someone else. For example, I recently spoke with two young girls at an art walk and they both loved to draw so I gave them a couple of my art cards to practise on. Who knows, maybe I helped to stir their interest in art?
- 2) Maybe **you'll be "discovered"** and land a major deal. I dream of someone liking my work and purchasing images for their company's boardroom or to grace the front page of their annual report. It would be cool if they could be used for a record album or CD cover.
- 3) Maybe it's to **seek confirmation** that you are, in fact, making great images. Or maybe it's just part of your passion for photography and you do it simply because it **brings you joy**.



Upper Level Gallery, Vermilion

How to share your work

Do print and **share your images!** Hang them on your wall at home. You can give some to family and friends as more personal gifts. I've also presented prints to my longtime family doctor and hair stylist as a thank-you.

You can **volunteer** your time and photographic expertise in support of worthy efforts. Donating prints to fundraisers is always appreciated.

Art Walks are relatively cheap to be part of, and there is a lot of foot traffic with opportunities for great conversations. You can always start with smaller local ones before tackling the popular Whyte Ave Art Walk in Edmonton. <https://art-walk.ca/>

Look for **local county/town/city's call for additions** to their collection. I had one of my images selected for the Strathcona County Art Collection. <https://www.strathcona.ca/recreation-events/arts-and-culture/public-art/art-acquisition/>

Approach local cafés and restaurants because many are looking for artwork to hang on their walls. If one print sells, they'll take a small percentage of the sale.

Enter exhibits and art shows; the annual InFocus Photo Exhibit is a good one <https://www.infocusphoto.ca/>. *Be bold* as it never hurts to try.



Kaasa Gallery, Jubilee Auditorium

For example, I had a solo exhibit at the Kaasa Gallery in the Jubilee Auditorium. It cost me \$1300 to print and frame my images. Although I didn't sell a single one, my work was hanging in the freaking Jubilee Auditorium!

There are **galleries** that will host your work, usually for a small rental fee and/or a percentage of the sales. I have space in the Upper Level Gallery in Vermilion (a very nice gallery that's close to where I shoot many of my landscape images).

Sales tips

To reduce your cost and make your work more affordable, **don't frame your images**. Frames are expensive, subject to personal taste, and you're giving a significant percentage of your revenue to someone else.

I've learned that people are more interested in buying smaller and **less-expensive objects** such as matted (unframed) prints, metal prints, wooden blocks.

Try promoting **digital versions** of your images through a personal website. Just take care because I once sold someone an entire folder of some of my best images for \$2... long story!

Some final thoughts

Think about your main reason for doing photography, i.e. are you creating art to please yourself or to please others? Are you compromising yourself to make a sale? (There's nothing wrong with doing that; just know *why* you're doing it.)

And when you think about the cost of your photographic hobby (or are reminded about it by your spouse), keep in mind that it's cheaper than a golf membership, going to the bar every week or restoring an antique vehicle.

Have fun. And maybe you'll be delighted to discover that someone actually wants to buy your amazing photos!



Strathearn Artwalk (Steve Ricketts on right)