

## Making a List and Checking it a Gazillion Times

Checklists are important; vitally important.

Whether you are preparing an overnight on the side of a freezing mountain, taking a hot air balloon over the tops of Monument Valley, or getting ready for takeoff in a small plane, checklists are your friend.

In fact, in some endeavors, checklists are so important that they are considered mandatory. Commercial photography is one of those in my opinion.

A checklist prevents leaving the meter in the other bag; hell, it prevents leaving the other bag entirely. A checklist means you have all the bases covered.

A checklist will save you a ton of money in lost productivity, redundant purchases (like buying a couple of stands and a Polaroid back in another city because of a forgotten bag).

A checklist will help you sleep at night. Or on the plane. Or in the back of the taxi in the middle of the Spanish country side.

### **Because they work.**

One of the most important things a checklist can do is to keep you from leaving or forgetting or losing a vital, many times very expensive, must-have item. I have a checklist for each light, kit, stand, accessory bag, and a checklist for my camera bag as well. Lamination is cheap at Kinkos...trust me. I use them religiously.

And a checklist will help you in a very interesting way from a conceptual point of view. As you start down the mental checklist, checking off the physical checklist, ideas may flood in to your mind's eye, pre-visualizing the shot while collecting the gear to make it. Yes, it happens. I think it has a lot to do with focus and the mental commitment that working with a checklist forces on one. One last thing: The above two items lead to a third, which is simply is the most professional thing you can do: Be prepared both mentally and gear-wise.

### **Having a checklist is also a great way to deal with the most terrifying, challenging, and mind-melting situations -- the "out of the blue" client call.**

"Just give me a ballpark number," he says cheerfully.

I got three words for you. Don't do it!

Grab your checklist and make sure you go through each item with them. Grabbing your iPad, you can whip up a pretty fast estimate when all the list items are covered. Or, better yet, you can get back to him at a later date with all the pertinent info.

Have a calendar in front of you. I use Google Calendar; others may prefer iCal, or even paper calendars. Fine...just make sure you have one.

Have a pen, paper, input device ready for the specifications.

Then hit the checklist with them...before you trip up and start talking dollars. Here is my checklist:

Client Name (Company)  
Client Company (Agency)  
Client Name (Contact)  
Client Contact Position  
Client Contact Phone  
Client Contact Email

Description of the Assignment. (What will this project look like when finished?)  
Will you have a shot "List" or is it a more "Editorial" approach?

How many finished images are expected to be delivered?

When is the shoot tentatively scheduled for?

Is this a studio shoot?

If it is a studio shoot, what special materials may be needed to make the shot work? (A set, special background, and "extras," like scissor lifts and wind machines, etc.)

Location shoot?

Who will handle permits and special access?

Is there power on site, or will we need to bring our own?

Location address. (I then put it into Google Earth so I can see sunrise/sunset and trajectory for best light choices.)

What is the deadline for the project/assignment?

Will this be an art-directed shoot or will I be given free reign?

If it is art directed, who will be attending? (Believe me, you need to know this for lunch, water bottles, canapés, chairs -- even how much room is available.)

Format (Will there be any need to rent an MF digital camera?)

Film? (Hey, you have to ask.)

What is to be delivered? RAW, post processed, TIFF, or JPG; color corrected or straight from the camera?

How will files be delivered: electronically or on disc?

Will prints be necessary?

Will the studio do all the retouching? (Preferred, of course.)

Assistants? (This depends on the scope of the gig and what is in the description above. Remember: "It costs what it costs.")

**Usage:**

Advertising National  
Regional Local  
Consumer Publication Trade Publication Display  
Billboard Packaging POP  
Collateral Brochure  
Catalogs  
Sales Kit Editorial  
National Regional Local Consumer  
Trade Publication Additional.  
Billboard Television

**Location Specific:**

Exact location with phone numbers. Backup phone numbers.  
Contact person at the location. Contact phone number. Contact email.  
Backup contact. Backup contact phone.  
Backup contact email.  
Emergency contact Emergency contact phone

**Security concerns:**

Will any special paperwork be needed to access location?  
Who is in charge of getting that paperwork to me?  
Security person name?  
Security person email?  
Security person emergency contact information

**Studio Specific:**

What size requirements are there?  
Will props be needed?  
If so, who is responsible for getting them?  
Who will approve the props (name/phone/email)?  
When will props be delivered? How will they be arriving?  
If sets are to be built, who is in charge of the set?  
Who will approve the set design?  
Approver's name/phone/email?

Will any additional insurance be necessary? (Jewelry, antiques, art items.)

**Model / Talent Specifics:**

Will models/talent be needed?  
Who will be casting the models/talent?  
Who will approve the model selection?  
Approver's name/phone/email?  
Backup for approval, if needed.  
Backup approver's name/phone/email?  
Will the person who is approving actually have the authority to approve?  
If not, who will (name/phone/email)?

**Travel Specific:**

Will there be a need for travel?

Who will be handling those arrangements?

Will those arrangements include air fare and accommodations?

Are there any travel restrictions or special instructions for the destination of the assignment? (Be very thorough and do your own checking as well. You are a professional photographer, and that can mean a lot of things to a lot of different people all around the world.)

**Creative Specifics:**

Is there a layout or design specifications and have you seen them?

Is the creativity of the photographer foremost requested, or are there constraints that must be considered?

Is there a design aesthetic that has to be considered?

Any political or socio-political considerations (diversity, bias etc...)

Are there any other things you can think of?

Okay.

Now you can give them a bid...“off the top of your well-researched, checklisted, efficiently designed, professional head.”

You are of course free to take my list above, modify it, make it look all groovy and such, laminate it, bind it, staple it, modify it, add to it...whatever.

Just use it! And watch some of the stress of bidding a gig sort of melt off.

Not all of the stress of course, but a lot of the stress.

Share with me the ways you have used this checklist or how you have modified it for your business.