



Reflections on The Pursuit of Commercial Photography

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Lately, I have been thinking a lot about where I am going with my photograph, what my goals and dreams are. For the last few years, I had been trying to “make it” as an editorial photographer, but have had absolutely no luck.

Since graduating from the Columbus College of Art and Design with a Masters of Fine Arts, I have reached out to over 400 photo editors at different magazines, corporations and agencies, both large and small, to introduce my work. To some, I even mailed copies of my print portfolio. But I didn’t hear back from any of them.

Stumped for ideas, I reached out to other successful photographers producing exciting work, such as [Kelsey McLellan](#) and [Jake Stangel](#), and also wrote to a high school friend who is now a photo editor at National Geographic. They were all incredibly kind and echoed the following advice: email the editors introducing your work, mention what you like about what they do and why, include a low-res copy of an image from your portfolio, and ask to meet them for coffee. I have been following their instructions to a T, but even after a year’s worth of emails, still failed to get a single response.

Usually, I would chalk it up to my work being not good enough; but my work won 2nd place award in the [Sony World Photography Awards](#) In 2017, and more recently won the Best under 30 award at the juried exhibition [Wide Open: Excellence in Photography](#). Selections from my series are featured in [PetaPixel](#), [Der Spiegel](#), [C-41](#), [WIRED](#), [Aint-Bad](#), and several other reputable publications. My photographs have been exhibited in galleries across the world and have consistently resonated with people. If my work is good enough to be recognised by a jury of trained professionals, I think it is safe to say it is good enough to show to photo editors.

So if the work is not the problem, it may be that I don't have enough commercial experience; but that doesn't make sense either, because I do. [Click here](#), for example. Moreover, I professionally work as a graphic designer and have a history in finance; I know the importance of budgets, branding, deadlines, colour spaces, shot lists, print processes, negative space for text, print resolutions and all the nitty-gritty processes that realise a story. I also know what it is like to collaborate with creative directors, graphic designers, illustrators and photographers because I do that for a living at the largest design firm in the world.

It could be that my work is going stale, that I don't experiment as much as I should. But that's not true; My wife and I create a new work every month and publish it in our zine, [Dhaba](#). Dhaba recently [won a grant](#) awarded by the Artist Trust.

Perhaps editors fear that I lack the resources and equipment to be able to serve their needs. However, I have a studio with several backdrops, a 50MP camera, and high-quality lenses to go with all of it.

Perhaps it is the presentation of my work. But then again, I taught myself how to code and developed the website that you are viewing this post on.

Perhaps it's because I am an immigrant and don't have much of a network of people to rely upon or recommend me. But so many people, including strangers, have been very kind and supportive of me in my journey as an artist. If I have accomplished anything at all, it is because of their love and support.

So what's the problem? Why am I not hearing back, even when I am investing so much of my time, self, and love?

I honestly don't know. But I think it's because when editors look at my work, all they see is a lack of focus in a specific direction—I do a little bit of everything. While all my photographs explore the same content, they differ too much in style to and for editorial work, you have to prove you can consistently deliver results in a particular style. That's what branding is, after all.

If that truly is the problem, then perhaps I don't belong in the editorial world at all. Maybe there is a reason for all those non-rejections. I've decided to throw in the gloves and quit while I'm still behind. Instead, I am going to focus on refining my work as an artist. Hopefully, that's something more worthy of dreaming of. and wonder—how long will it be until it comes back?