



We live in a digital age, where in-person proofing has become less common and buying directly online has become mainstream. That's why it's crucial to sell digital files. Equestrian and Wedding photographer Shelley Paulson explains the importance of selling digital files and how she makes it work for her business.

I don't believe in a one-size-fits-all approach to your photography business. However, I do believe most clients want digital files, even if it's just for their personal archives. Most of my clients use their files for sharing online and making smaller prints to share with family and friends. I would estimate that close to 90 percent of my clients include digital files in their order, and almost all of those clients also order large prints to hang on their wall. For a part-time photographer with another job or other life responsibilities, it may be simpler and more time-effective to sell the files and let clients take care of ordering prints online.

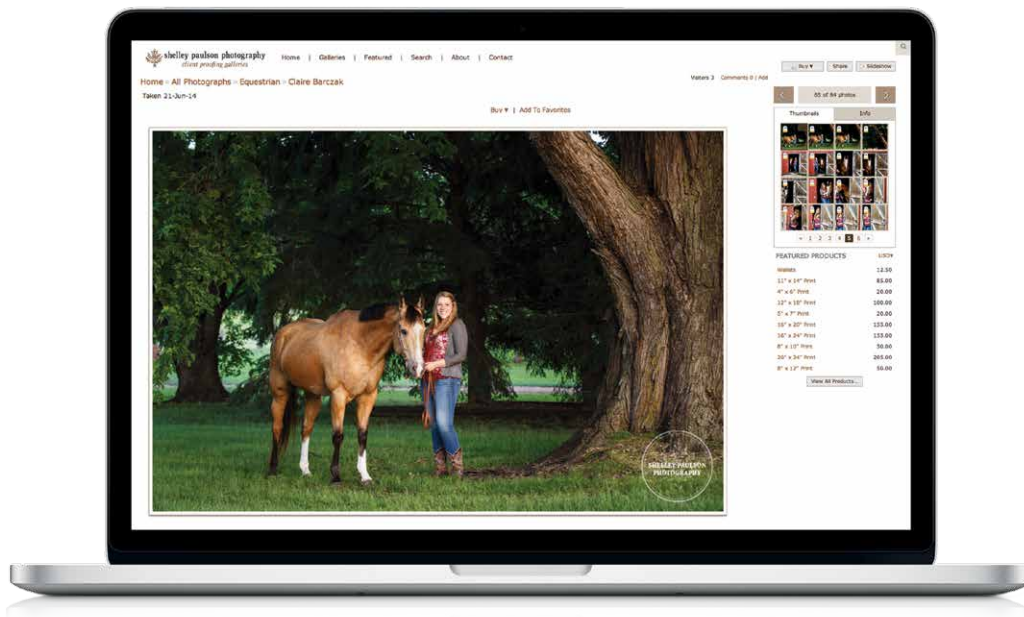
Before putting digital files on your price lists, read these helpful tips so you can keep your photos safe, ensure quality printing and make a decent profit.

Tip #1: Limit the files you offer for sale

I have three digital collections I offer for sale: one with 10 files, another with 22, and another with 45. I used to include ALL the files for sessions, and over time learned I was putting in way too much time retouching and editing all of those files. I now only show clients cropped and color-corrected proofs online, and then whenever they order a file, print or album, I do full retouching. This has shortened my workflow a great deal, and therefore increased my profitability.

Tip #2: Set up a preview gallery

Once the files are ready, I set up a gallery I call a “preview gallery.” I notify clients to review the photos, and they choose their favorites with my website’s Favorites function. Once that’s done, I retouch their selected photos so they’re ready by the time they come in for an ordering session. This method is also great for photographers who are unable to fit ordering sessions into their lifestyle, so you can make a sale while at work or on the go (clients can download and purchase directly from your website). That way, clients can have files instantly, and not wait on a flash drive.



Tip #3: Protect your images

Because digital files are much easier to access than prints, they’re also that much easier to steal. I make sure my photos are safe by implementing a few different tactics. I use a watermark for all of my galleries, and also have the right-click disabled, so viewers are unable to right-click and save the image without buying it. To ensure the client won’t show the world their photos before purchasing, I include the following text when emailing them a link to their gallery:

“I invite you to share this gallery with family and friends, but please keep in mind that it is for preview purposes only. You may not save any images from the gallery to your computer, take screen shots or mobile photos of them, post them to a website (such as Facebook), or print in any way until they have been purchased in digital form.”

Since adding this to my email, I have not seen an image posted online that wasn’t first purchased.

Tip #4: Ensure clients print with a reputable lab

And for the final step—printing. Many clients want digital and print versions of their images, so it's important to guide them in the right direction. I am very concerned about how people are printing their images, so one way I encourage high quality printing is to include a 5x7 print of each file, or a printed album of their images, so they can see how the photo should look printed. I strongly suggest they use Mpix lab for their small prints. In addition, I set up a special gallery with the digital files they purchased that have been retouched. From this gallery they can order their small prints at just a hair over cost. I add in a small markup because I personally check each order before it gets sent to the lab to ensure cropping is optimal. If a photo isn't going to crop well at a certain size, I suggest another size, or modify the photo so it fits better.

Selling prints gives you the comfort of knowing clients must pay before receiving the final product. But with digital, it's much easier for clients to take advantage of you. That's why it's important to educate your clients on the ordering process, your expectations for digital file use, and how to make the best possible prints so they can enjoy their photographs.



Shelley has been using Zenfolio for years and loves the elegant interface and ease of use, as well as how simple it is to sell digital files online. "As a former graphic and web designer, my personal values were clean, usable design," she says. "The Zenfolio layout made it easy for me to set up my galleries, and I don't ever have questions from clients on how to use theirs." Shelley utilizes the various online selling functions through Zenfolio, such as client galleries, digital downloads and the Favorites function so buying online is just as good as in person. In addition to client photos, she also relies on the award-winning service to support stock image sales with the digital product feature. The easy-to-use search function within her site allows art buyers and editors to search for images on using keywords.

To learn more about how you can elegantly display, share and sell your photos and videos online, visit www.zenfolio.com and sign up for a free, two-week trial today.