

**PHOTOGRAPHY WEBSITES:
WHAT BUYERS
WANT NOW**

PhotoShelter Research
Feb 2009

PHOTOSHELTER



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INTRODUCTION

At PhotoShelter, we've been working with pro photographers and their websites since 2005. We've helped thousands of photographers to link beautifully designed websites into our back-end archiving, gallery and e-commerce functionality. One constant we've observed is that almost all working photographers are caught between two sometimes conflicting roles: the artist, and the businessperson. Regarding websites, we've noted that too often the artistic impulses become dominant. Even though the website is a marketing tool for a business, design tends to outweigh business practicality.

We're certain there's a way to marry the two notions, and it starts with a basic understanding of what the customer prefers. Unfortunately, most web designers don't do this. They set out to develop the most unique look, navigation, and functionality that will help the photographer "stand out". Well, the survey results show that if you've neglected some of the basic functionality that helps make a photo buyer's job easier – then unique designs and features may actually frustrate them.

WHY WE DID THE SURVEY

Last fall, PhotoShelter introduced our own suite of instant portfolio templates. We looked around the web for 'best practices' and found zero consistency. We

realized that photographers, designers, and even portfolio solution vendors everywhere are building these critical brand and sales vehicles without any solid input from the end customers – the professional image buying community. We resolved to approach our extensive list of 30k+ commercial and editorial image buyers, seeking firsthand guidance on how to build a website that they'll love.

Thankfully, the buyers were not shy with their opinions, and a strong consensus emerged on most of the design points. So not only did we incorporate the results into our own templates, but we're extremely pleased to share these findings with you - the

international community of working and aspiring photographers, designers, and website vendors everywhere. Although the results may mean that you too will want to change some (or all!) fundamental aspects of your current site, the good news here is that there certainly is a way to build a website that both gets you sales and assignment gigs, and looks smokin' hot.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was emailed to 32,000 image buyers worldwide in December 2008. Respondents completed the survey online. (By the way, about 50 photographers filled out the survey too – nice try guys! We limited the reported

results to what we learned from strictly the 550+ verified commercial and editorial image buyers – this stuff is pure buyer concentrate!)

USING THE DATA

There are plenty of surprises inside. Some are very clear, indisputable, and easy to implement. Other areas, there are varying degrees of right and wrong. Our suggestion is to review the data with an open mind, be willing to take the insight as guidance, and implement selectively as you feel is most relevant in your specific market.



WHO RESPONDED

581 CREATIVE PROFESSIONALS WORLDWIDE

- They license stock photography
- They hire photographers for studio shoots and assignments
- They work at publications, advertising agencies, graphic design firms, corporate marketing departments, book publishers & non-profit organizations

MAGAZINE/EDITORIAL

Gourmet Magazine
Business Week
Travel & Leisure
Time Magazine
Discover Magazine
USA Today
National Geographic

BOOK/TEXTBOOK PUBLISHING

Benchmark Education
Publishing
Avanti Press
Addison
McGraw Hill
Rand McNally
Scholastic
Penguin

ADVERTISING

JWT
TBWA Chiat Day
Ogilvy
Momentum Worldwide
Euro RSCG
McCann Erickson
Draft FCB

IN-HOUSE CORPORATE DESIGN

Diesel Jeans
Starwood Hotels
REI
Bloomingdales
Bose
VH1
Walmart

Director of Photography

Designer

Creative Director

Design Director

Art Buyer

Marketing Manager

Editorial Photo Editor

Picture Researcher

Commercial Photo Editor

Web Designer

Editor-in-Chief

Licensing Agent

Project Manager

Art Director

Art Producer

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PART 1: DESIGN PREFERENCES: BUYER COMMENTS

Always keep navigation tool visible. I don't want to search for it.

Show samples of photos used in context...i.e. ads, campaigns, packaging, brochures, etc.

Keep it simple! Categorize images logically.

Use galleries to group together similar concepts.

I like to scan a wide variety of images to see what I like, so showing lots of thumbnails are my favorite.

Hidden thumbnails drive me crazy.

Pet peeve: Long intros before you get to images.

Be a good self editor.

No flash...it takes too long to load and the images tend to move around too much.

Its best to see the captions on thumbnails as well, so I don't have to open every image.

Over-designed sites are tiresome to figure out. Design is not why I'm there to look. I'm trying to find a particular type of image or subject matter.

Make price, RF or RM, and sizes of images easy to access. If I have to hunt down the info, I move on.

Sites that force you to view every single picture at full size are irritating.

If the watermark gets in the way, I won't use it for a client's comp

I have limited time for image search, I want to see many images with the option to enlarge whatever I think may be useful.

A watermark that doesn't identify the source is super annoying.

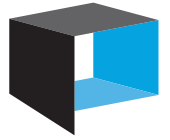
Plain background is best.

NO FLASH OPENING MOVIES. So tacky.

Ease and speed of use is the most vital...being able to see numerous images quickly.

Avoid too many colors / graphics that interfere with the images.

I hate the scrolling strip of thumbnails. It gives me a headache.



DESIGN PREFERENCES:

MIND YOUR FLASH SLIDESHOWS

77%

Buyers who **won't** often watch a flash slideshow in a photographer's website. And FYI 96% get livid when they need to watch a website intro before seeing your images.

50%

Buyers who will **give up** if your site takes longer than 10 seconds to load. Take 15 seconds and you'll lose 71% of your visitors.

Buyers emphasized the need for speed. They're busy people. Flash slideshows tend to eat up time loading. If you provide one, let the user control it, to start/stop/speed up as they choose.

Buyers usually know what they're looking for. They want a quick glance at as many thumbnails as possible, or the ability to search by keyword.

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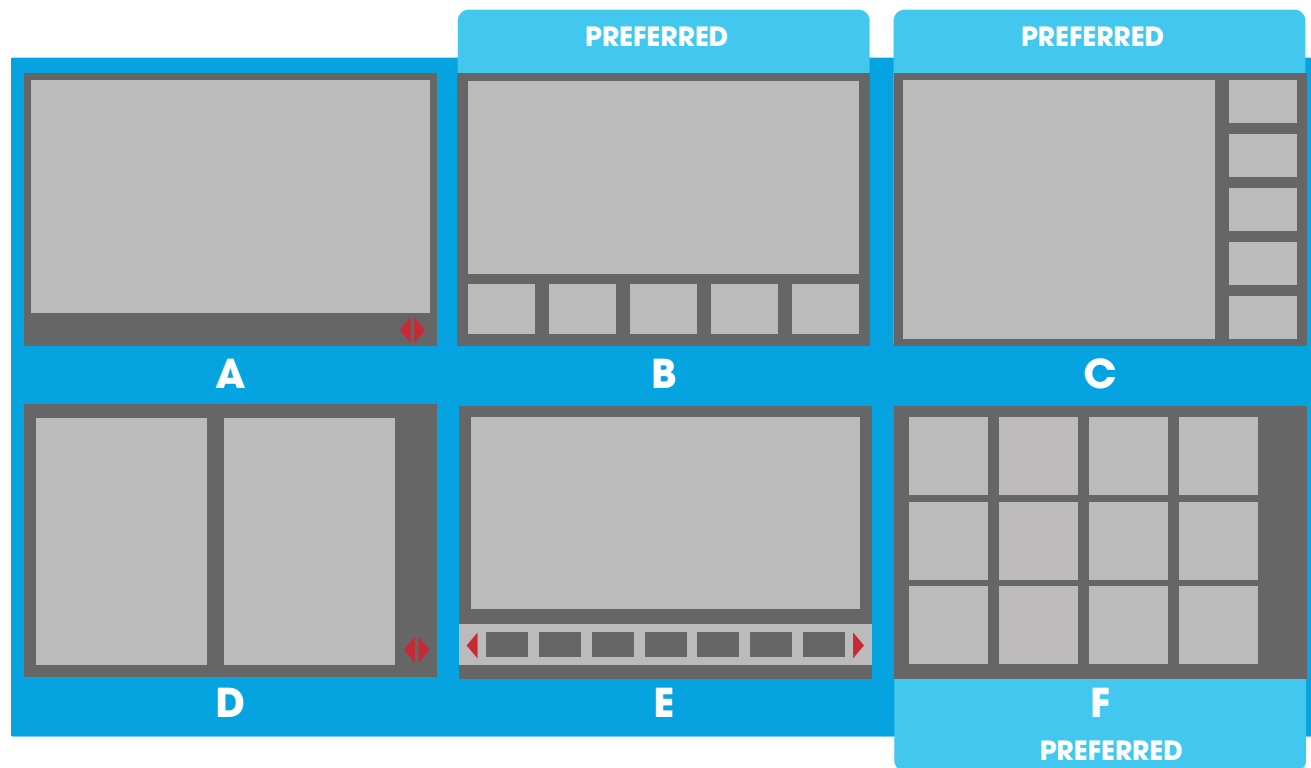


DESIGN PREFERENCES: LAYOUT

Layout preferences varied widely. Beauty is truly in the eye of the beholder.

B, C & F were most favorable. F was most loved by time strapped buyers doing photo research, but they want to then enlarge the images. **D & A** were least favorable. **D** was most hated.

The caution with **E** was the control of the thumbnail scrolling. High aggravation risk.





DESIGN PREFERENCES: IMAGE SIZE

Buyers in a hurry want to review many thumbnails on a single page, then want the option to enlarge images of interest.

Preferences for single image sizes vary widely, with 700 pixels emerging as the favorite. This totally surprised us – we thought everyone liked seeing images as large as possible!

5% prefer greater than 900 pixels

15% prefer 900 pixels

47% prefer 700 pixels

23% prefer 500 pixels

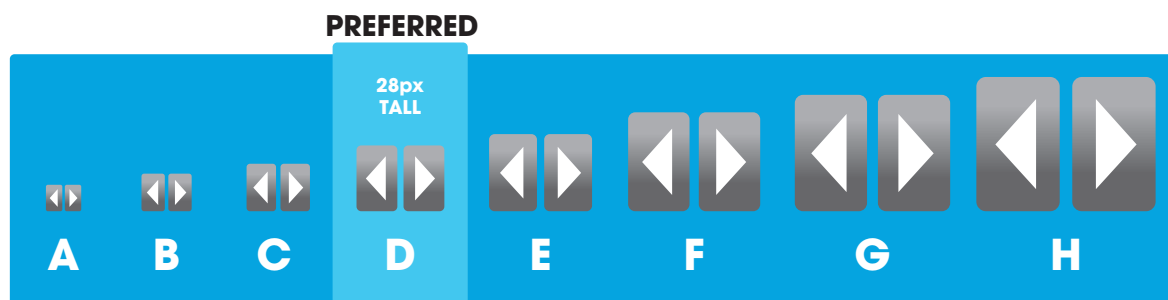
10% just don't care



DESIGN PREFERENCES: PAGINATION

We tried to pinpoint exactly how buyers like to navigate through a series of images. We were surprised at how unanimous the results were – not to mention the general aversion to the more hi-tech scrolling mechanisms.

ARROW SIZE:



(rank: DCEBFAGH) Option D was the optimal arrow size. C&E were acceptable too. AGH were **hated by more than 50% of respondents**.

DO:

- Fix the arrows in a visible, specific location on the page
- **Best:** Fix arrows at bottom of page
- **Next Best:** Fix arrows on the image,
- **Acceptable:** Fix arrows at top of screen. Or, provide image numbers below the image, to navigate from one to the next.
- Be mindful of arrow size. Too large or too small is a turn-off.

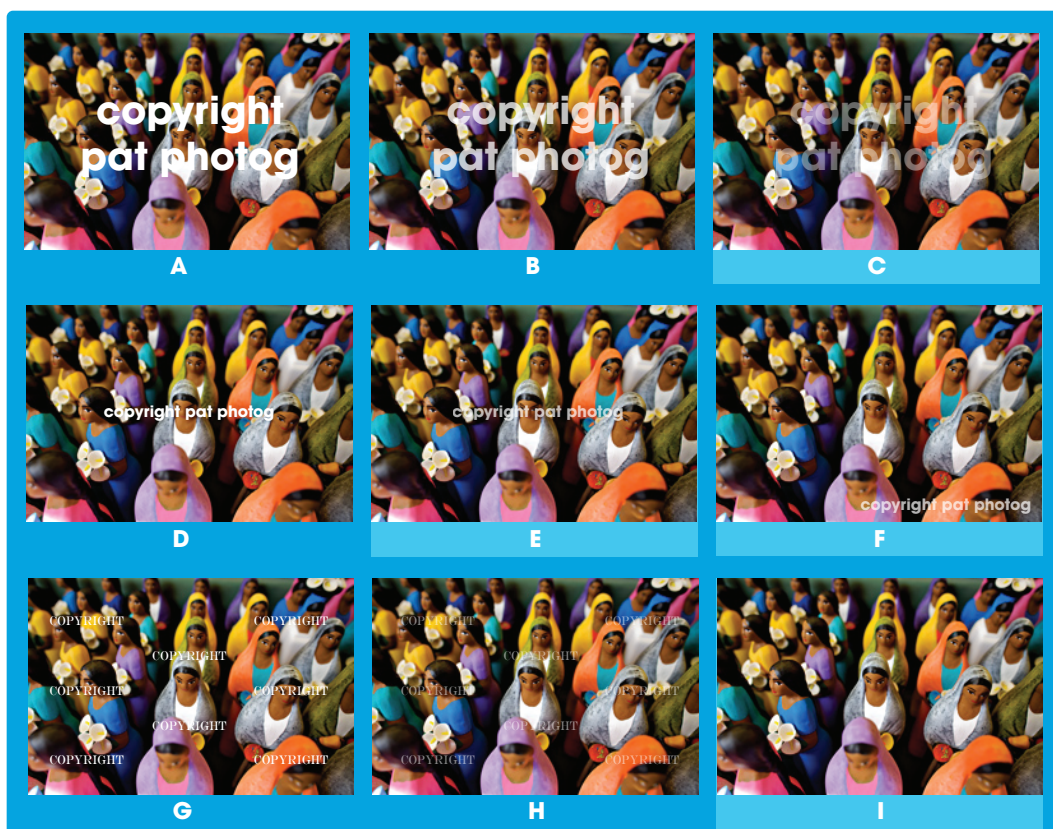
DON'T:

- Have arrows appear when you hover over a certain spot. Buyers hate playing hide and seek.



DESIGN PREFERENCES: WATERMARK

Watermarks are tricky. You want to protect yourself from image theft yet also provide buyers with the ability to create viable comps with your images. With a watermark that's too obtrusive, you might be losing opportunities!



PREFERRED:

(Listed in order of preference)

- I: No watermark
- F: Smaller text, bottom/side, white
- C: Large, very light watermark
- E: Smaller text, centered, transparent

HATED:

(Listed in order of preference)

- A: Large, bold watermark
- G: Small text, tiled across image, white
- D: Smaller text, centered, white
- B: Large semi-transparent watermark
- H: Smaller text, tiled across image, transparent

DESIGN PREFERENCES:

BACKGROUND COLOR

Buyers provided strong guidance on what NOT to do.

Black or white backgrounds emerged as most favored, in a near tie. (Grey and light grey won't bother too many buyers either.)

Textured and other colored themes were severely disliked. They interfere with viewing your images.

94%
OF BUYERS
HATE TEXTURED
BACKGROUNDS



PART 2: FEATURE PREFERENCES

BUYER COMMENTS

Don't try to be too unique with weird navigation.

I MUST be able to get a JPG of your work to create a comp.

Make it easy to navigate.

Pet peeves: I can't grab a low-res FPO. I can't print the image (low-res) easily.

Explain up front if your images are RM or RF.
Not having prices is my pet peeve.

I hate automatic music. If I want music I will go to iTunes or play my iPod.

FIXED navigation, regardless of image size/orientation (a MUST)
Hate buttons that flies around

Comps: I need to download pics to my desktop to show to other editors here

Don't resize my screen, I HATE it.

Auto-running slideshows should be controlled by clicking what you want to see and when you want a faster pace

Photographers spend WAY too much time making sites look cool rather than focusing on functionality.

Embed search terms into all pages and photos. It makes it so much easier to find you.

Be specific about what you are showing the viewer. Name and categorize your galleries.

Don't mix verticals and horizontals too much.

Caption and photographer info in IPTC is extremely helpful.

I like to place a cursor over image to expand the view.

Lightboxes should be intuitive, easy to add to and glance at from whatever gallery you're looking at.

Great keywording and great search capability.

I am usually looking for something specific, so I want to see a good search engine.

I must be able to see pricing, and contact you to negotiate.

Too often costs and restrictions are hard to find.
Make sure your metadata is complete!

Also, please make your contact info clear, easy to find, in a point size seven or higher.



FEATURE PREFERENCES

We asked buyers to rate a very specific set of features commonly found on photographers' websites. Once again, we were blown away at the consensus that emerged. We'd take this feedback pretty directly!

DO THIS:

(Listed in order of priority)

- Fast image loading
- Search by keyword
- Email always visible
- Ability to click to view all thumbnails
- Ability to purchase images right on the site
- Phone # always visible
- Ability to view at full screen
- Menus persistent on all pages
- Ability to create/send lightbox
- Ability to send or copy a link to a photo or gallery
- Captions below photos or on roll-over
- Ability to email a photo
- A 'newly added' section
- Ability to sign up for updates/new work

NOT THIS:

(Listed in order of priority)

- Not having phone number listed at all
- Music
- Ads (ie Google text ads)
- Slideshows as default/slideshow-only galleries
- Full-screen 'intro' that plays before you get to main menu
- Slideshow as intro
- Slideshows for every gallery
- Contact forms instead of listing email address

AND BUYERS FOUND THE FOLLOWING FEATURES UNIMPORTANT (I.E., DON'T HURT, DON'T HELP):

- Flash
- Blogs (not loved by buyers, but good for SEO!)
- Video
- Including your personal photo



PRICING PREFERENCES: **CLOSING THE DEAL**

48%

Buyers who expect to generate an instant price online before licensing a stock image from you.

39%

Buyers who expect to generate a price online and also want to negotiate over the phone.

9%

Buyers who strictly want to call you to negotiate.

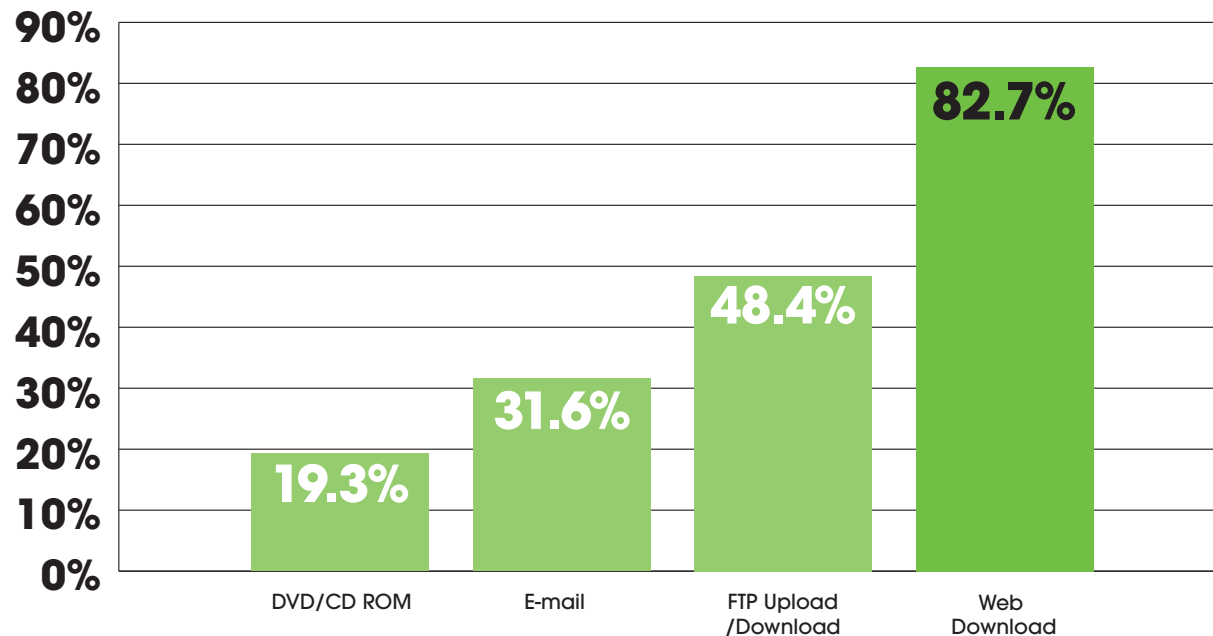


FEATURE PREFERENCES:

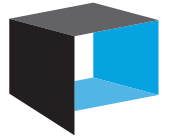
IMAGE ACCESS/DELIVERY

82%

Buyers who prefer to download the image from you directly online.



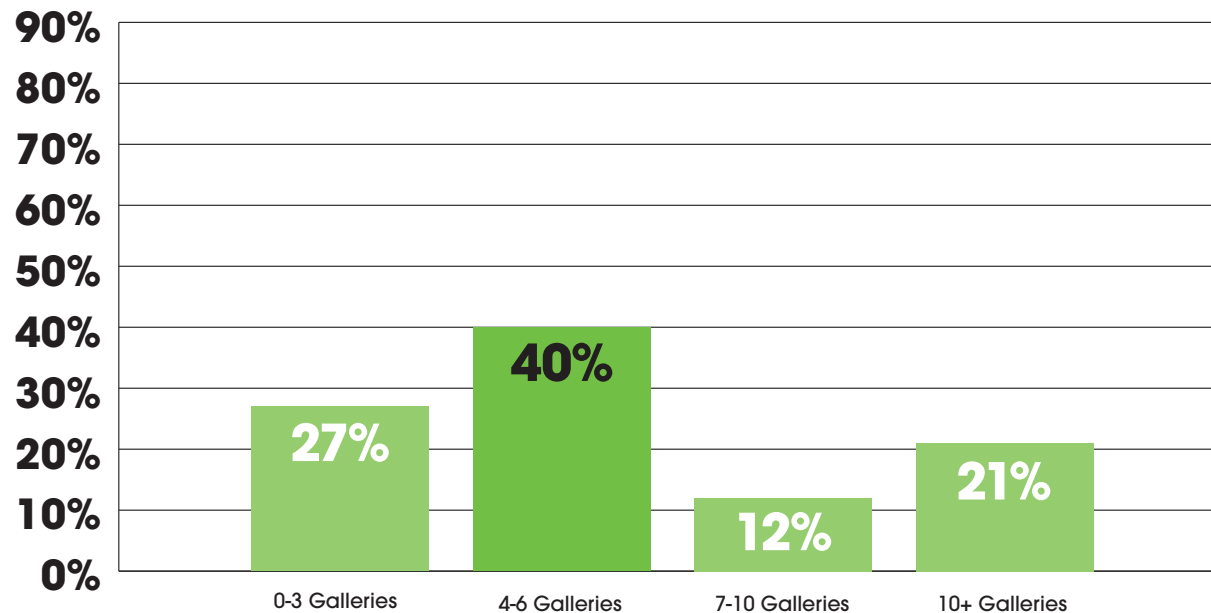
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FEATURE PREFERENCES: IMAGE GALLERIES

67%

Buyers who will realistically look at six or fewer galleries on your website.



We asked buyers how many galleries of images they would realistically look through on a photographer's website.



PART 3:

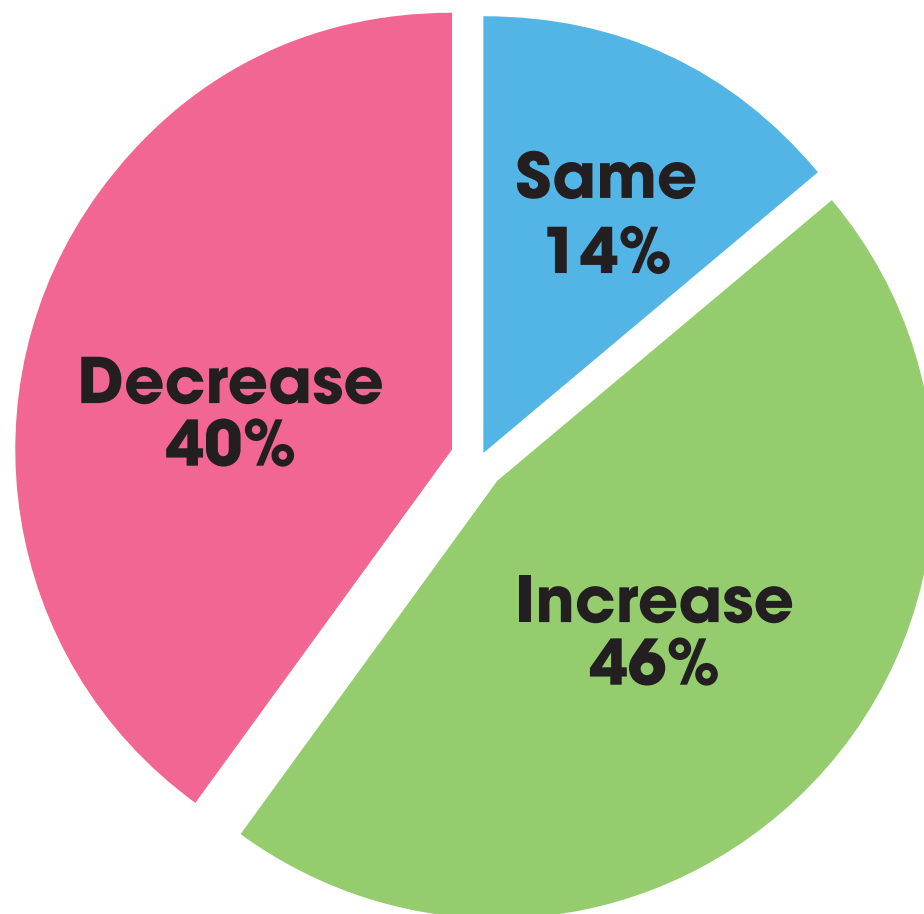
2009 BUDGETS & BUYING BEHAVIOR

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LOOKING AHEAD: **BUDGETS & BUYING '09**

The sky is not falling. 60% of respondents' photography budgets will remain the same or increase in 2009.





LOOKING AHEAD:

IMAGE LICENSING IN '09

81%

BUYERS WHO SEARCH FOR STOCK IMAGES
BEYOND THE BIG THREE - GETTY, CORBIS & AP.

61%

BUYERS WHO USE SEARCH ENGINES
TO FIND NEW IMAGES.

58%

BUYERS WHO SEARCH FOR IMAGES
ON PHOTOGRAPHERS' WEBSITES.

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LOOKING AHEAD:

IMAGE LICENSING IN '09

75%

Buyers who say their **rights-managed licensing will increase** or remain the same.

37%

Buyers who will increase use of royalty-free licensing.

22%

Buyers who say they'll **decrease use of microstock** in 2009.

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PHOTOSHELTER HOW CAN WE HELP?

PhotoShelter is the leader in online portfolio display and sales tools for photographers.

To browse our instant website templates and learn more about our product, please visit photoshelter.com/tour

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