

A Quick Tip Guide to Mast Photography

Professional, impartial advice regarding mast photography and issues that you, as a customer, should be aware of and a few basic questions you should ask yourself when you are looking to hire a mast photographer.

Ask to look at an extensive portfolio?

It is the first point but probably the most important. The best way to decide on which mast photography company to engage is to view their portfolio of previous work. This will provide a sound basis of the quality and style of the images produced.

Important points to look at when assessing a portfolio.

- Ask to see a printed portfolio if possible, images need to be optimised for print or screen viewing. It is a good way to test the company's ability to print images or provide images suitable for print. However, please bear in mind that print quality will vary on the media and printer setup used.
- Check very closely the edges of the images. Look for any distortion, extra blacks/shadowing of objects in the corners. Check for chromatic abrasion, this is a red or coloured ghosting around the outer edges of the photograph, often attributed to using poor quality substandard lens and cameras.
- What resolution are the images CAPTURED AT, and what resolution are they received in? Resolution is the DPI (Dots per Inch). This affects the quality of the images and is particularly relevant when the images are going to be viewed or printed in large format or zoomed. The higher the resolution at which the images ARE TAKEN, the better the quality of the images; the industry standard is 240dpi to 300dpi. Make sure that a company shoots at these standards, some shoot at 72dpi then make the images larger using a software program, this is not acceptable, as it does not truly make the image a higher resolution, it just stretches out the smaller image.
- Check that the pictures are actually images taken by the company! This may sound odd, however there are "marketing packs" available and includes hundreds of images that can be used when the pack is purchased. When looking through various websites you will see the same images appear time and time again, or images that look very similar, just be wary, the quality you are seeing may not be what you are buying. It would be impractical, and to a degree unfair, to list all of these images, for guidance we have provided a small zip-file with some examples here: www.hub.icanseetheworld.co.uk/boughtimages.zip.

What locations they have worked at?

This will give you an idea of the challenges the company have faced and of the versatility of the systems that they use. Do these match your requirements?

On-Site Processing versus Image Collection?

Some companies' offer on-site processing, particularly the smaller ones, they often claim it is faster as they can give you the images there and then. This is true, they will be able to give you a CD with your images on when they are on-site, however the best quality images

should be post-processed, that is why you are paying for a professional photographer - to get professional looking images. It is best for images to be calibrated and accessed in a digital processing suite, using on colour-match screens, correctly light, smooth mouse surfaces and the ability to use graphics tablets. So you need to weigh up the pros and cons and decide which is best for you. If you decide to go with a company that post-processes off-site then make sure you ask them how you will receive the images; some can offer you to collect them online. If so, make sure the images come from the companies own domain e.g. icanseetheworld.co.uk, and not a third party hosting site. Also make sure the images are secure or can be password protected.

How high can you go?

In mast photography you can always make the mast lower, but never higher than its maximum height. We have heard of people being told by some companies that they will never need to go past 50ft in height and everything looks best from 40ft. We do not necessarily subscribe to this thought process. We have undertaken many commissions where it has proven better to, or indeed necessary, to capture the images at a height greater than 50ft to achieve the desired results. Chat with different companies and get their opinions on this, some will tell you completely different, this coupled with their portfolio should give you an idea of what they produce and if they are right for you. The maximum portable mast height available, without modification is 100ft (30m).

Who is the actual photographer you are hiring not just the company and are you able to meet or talk with them before hand?

Some companies may outsource their photographers or use a network of mast photographic providers. Make sure you chat to the actual photographer because everyone has a different style, taste and at the end of the day ability. Make sure what you see and hear is what you get.

Can you speak with their former clients for references?

Always an important point, take advantage of this if you can. Also have a look through the referee's websites and literature and see if they have used the images provided. Actions speak larger than words, by using the images they clearly will have been happy with them.

Do they offer the digital negatives?

You may want to be sure they are the high resolution images in digital format, not just print format. Check the copyrights too, make sure you have free license to use the images as you wish.

Do they have public liability insurance (PLI)?

It is imperative that the company has public liability insurance. Levels of public liability available do vary and so does the legal requirement for levels of insurance. For more information on the legal framework you need to consider you can consult the Highways Act of 1980. When erecting a temporary structure in the public domain, the amount of PLI required is £5 million. Working on private land the amount of PLI required is up to the client. You should feel free to ask for proof of insurance before booking a mast photographer and all companies will carry a copy of their PLI insurance with them.

What is included in the price?

Make sure there are no hidden costs. Sometimes there is a pricing method that is just a starting point and may not include certain things you may "expect" such as all day coverage, photo-editing, set-ups, print quality and or sizes. Do not be afraid to request an 'all inclusive' quotation.

This piece was produced by I Can See The World. However the information provided is impartial and has been produced in conjunction with consumers.

If you would like more impartial advise about mast photography, please feel free to give us a call on 01425 485412.

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