

## Transcript

Jacy

Okay, so let's get the clap. Let's get started. So this is Jacy, and I'm interviewing John today, and we're in your studio. So really, I just want to start out with asking you, what have you been working on? You started them.

John

Both. Thanks for being here, Jacy. Yeah. I'm John Saenz's lifestyle photography SAIC student. While they've been here on campus, it's just been for myself has been just kind of getting a feel for having studio space and setting it up here on campus. And my goal was to come in and at the very least, photograph my cohorts with my colleagues with a good headshot.

And so I finally have gotten my studio space set up that allows me to do so in a way to get a good head shot, but also make sure it doesn't look or feel like just a common simple and has the look and feel and maybe window wide without being in a window. Because for what? Three floors. Below ground.

And but also still there's something that's professional and interesting for them to go, Wow, that's really cool. And that's something that, you know, I can look at that they can use currently right now, but also look back on fondly and say, Wow, that I looked so young at that when I was in school, you know, So.

Jacy

I was getting sleep when I.

John

Was that I was sleep was in Chicago. So we are indeed sleepless in Chicago, aren't we?

Jacy

So, yes. So I'm noticing being in your studio right now and even in your video blog, obviously as a photographer, have a really good eye for composition. And like we're sitting here, here and you have the shower curtain up and you showed me all these different ways you're doing lighting and bringing in almost, it looks like natural light or sunlight into your studio.

But I also saw this in your video blog, and along with your video blog, you had like along with great lighting, you had things like great sound and it was this all around, a great video. So would you ever consider bringing video into your practice?

John

Yeah, absolutely. Video I think is kind of like an uncharted area of the visual arts. Of course, it's doing video is different than cinematography. Cinematography is kind of you have the premise of what a viewer is going to see of a particular story and they go like, Yeah, I'm going to go watch something else. We're going to go look at that.

But but video, a lot of times, at least today is about telling really quick stories in a way that captures somebody's attention, at least in the commercial sense. And I guess that's really where the context that an art sense of saying enough telling enough of your story to get somebody interested, to make them curious enough to say, hey, I want to know more.

And so part not only is it doing so visually in a compelling way, maybe it's something interesting. Maybe it's having a presence in front of the camera that's compelling and engaging, but also from a sound standpoint is what do you sound like you know, do you sound an easily LC or or are you big booming or, you know, audio plays a really important part of not only what people see, but what people hear in oftentimes the you I'm sure you you have may have been directed to a YouTube video where the topic sounded really interesting and the video was kind of showing you what was going on.

But the audio just left you wanting to you, you know, for your pull your hair out or like, oh, my God, why are they wasting our time? Because the audio is terrible or they feel like they're talking a little bit harder when you're underwater. Yeah, exactly. It's just terrible audio. So important. Such an underrated portion of a message.

At least when you're doing a film on a video, on a blog or a video that if you don't get it right in the first 30 seconds, you're going to lose your audience. To go on to something else.

Jacy

Definitely a great. So you and a lot of your work. I see you. I mean, you've been this commercial photographer for a long time. For how long? So how long have you been doing photography, first of all?

John

First, I started doing photography as a hobbyist back in the eighties. And so back when Canon introduced the very first eco system, I actually had the opportunity to purchase that camera. And I did. I thought this would be the only camera I'll need for my entire life.

Jacy

Oh, but you just bought a camera, right, recently. Or you're thinking...

John

Actually, I owed way too many cameras and yes, I did buy one recently. I just looked at my statement. I was still owed four grand on it. And that's just the body. So, yeah, cameras. Funny story behind cameras. Cameras. I got it. I got well, see, I started in film back in the eighties and then I came back in the digital in 2013 when a buddy of mine at this financial institution, because I was in financial services, was selling his older digital camera upgrades into something new.

And I said, Well, hey, what are you doing with the old one? I mean, I saw that it was opportunity being a business owner. Hey, you know, maybe I can get into this on the cheap and look like, you know, I hadn't thought about it. I'll. I'll sell it to you for \$300. And of course, for a digital camera, you know, Canon rebel ex te ex, what was it, SSI.

Yeah. Type thing. It would have easily been, you know, \$700,000. You let me have it for 350. Damn. Here. Right. Call me drug dealer now because it was a slippery slope into this world of photography and camera and lenses. And suddenly I realized, you know, shortly thereafter I realized, oh, so that's why he's upgrading. He's going from this type of camera to this type of camera.

He's going to have this much more advantage from like, oh, now it makes sense. Well, I want I try to do that, too. And of course, you get you get into this trap and I tell you, it is a trap. It's called gas. It's called gear acquisition syndrome. In new gear. Better gear does not mean better images. So just stop it right now.

Jacy

You're going to hear it here first.

John

And you heard it. Yeah, well, you may have heard it. This may be the first time you're hearing it, but I'm not the first one to say this. New gear does not mean better images. Buy what you can afford and learn your freaking camera, Find the limits, find its edges, figure out what you can't do with it. Then and only then.

And then, of course, if you have a spouse, get your spouse's permission. Happy House as a happy spouse. Happy spouse is a happy house. And then go buy what you only need to then be able to do what it is you want to create. But yeah, get camera gear, stupid, expensive. So with that. But don't do drugs. You got to.

Jacy

So with your if you make like I mean I can relate to this doing commercial work for a really long time. Would you ever consider or even do you consider yourself almost as your own client? Well, being here at SAIC, and if you do, what does that look like?

John

I always kind of consider myself my own client because I'm not going to deliver something that I personally wouldn't accept myself. It has to meet my small taste test, so to speak. If I'm not happy with it, I don't deliver. I mean, I think I even said my initial blog, and so do I. Hope it meets my client's expectations.

Absolutely. I you know, I know you want to meet or exceed so that way the static clients are probably the cheapest form of advertising that any artist could ever ask for, because then you have a group of probably call them raging raving lunatics. Oh my God, you have to go get work from this person. Or if you need this type of stuff done, you need to go to GC or you need to go see John or, you know, whatever, whoever your favorite artist is.

But you know, the goal is always raving, raging lunatic clients who just are ecstatic about your work and want to show you off to all their family and friends. Yeah, that's a good place to be.

Jacy

So your work here, your current work. So you know, you're talking about headshots and portraits. Can you talk a little bit about I mean, you've mentioned this to me before, the telling of a story. Can you talk a little bit more on how you're trying to tell a story in your your pictures and your photography?

John

Yeah, storytelling to me is a really big part of it. I think more importantly, it's telling a client story. Um, you know, at least when it comes to headshot, it's helping tell an individual story of where they're at. Um, the picture I take the day is not necessarily a picture that I would get from them two days from now, maybe two months previous to this, because they're in a different place or something has occurred or happening, and soon they got new opportunities just like, Hey, I found got a book deal and now I need a I need a good headshot for the back cover because now I'm being published and I think the energy that

they would bring behind that type of a situation is going to be completely different than, Oh, I need to get a haircut from my LinkedIn profile. You know, that's that's a little mundane or different. And so if I know a client's why, what's the story behind it? Potentially it's my job to

tease that out of them, get that expression, and more importantly, help them capture the way that they want to present themselves to the world.

And a lot of times they don't know that coming into it. They just think, Oh, he's here to take a picture, not realizing there's a method to the madness there. There is a process to teasing that out of it. And then all times when you get him in, you get someone in studio. If they're creative, suddenly you start kind of hope.

They may not have the opportunity to be creative in the professional space, but suddenly they they feel differently. So it's like, Hey, you want to play? I want to play. Okay, let's get what we need done. But then let's take another 30 minutes and your time's my time and see what else we get out of this. And so it turns into this really nice interactive.

Sometimes the latter stuff is more on point from the stuff that we thought was good enough to start with. And so oftentimes a lot of I sometimes get clients that say, Oh, I only need 10 minutes of your time. And I'm like, You know, if you really want the pictures in the first 10 minutes of the session. So it's kind of like, you know, let's let's warm you up a little bit and see where this goes.

Jacy

So I guess just my final question is to keep going on that. What are some of the more technical aspects that you do in the storytelling process or what you've been doing here in the past few weeks, like you mentioned the spray booth area and your lighting. So just some more the technical side.

John

Yeah, know the technical piece for me, it's always trying to figure out, um, um, keeping the backgrounds. It's, it's keeping the backgrounds interesting. Lighting is always important. And so I have a lighting system that is flexible enough to where if I am in my studio space, I've designed it in such a way to where if I need to be photographing someone on a certain type of wall, I have a I know this is an audio recording, but there is a really huge support brick pillar in my studio space that has great texture and so it could easily be used to someone leaning on it or as a backdrop potentially in a photograph of some of

my other walls are very clean and those could be fine for backdrops as well. It just really depends upon what the goal is. But the lighting system needs to be flexible enough to adjust to do those two situations. In my studio space, sometimes it's busting out of the studio space and we go running down the hall because truthfully on campus there's beautiful textured walls in back rooms all over the place.

Or maybe it's a street scene. Somebody wants to kind of show the context of, Hey, I'm I'm this artist in Chicago, and maybe we need to show, you know, were the street scenes of soft play. But they're in tack sharp focus on the foreground and that puts them in a completely different context than a simple background that I could create or do here in the studio space.

So it just really depends. But technically, it's just being adept to handle any lighting situation in any background. But ultimately it always comes down to what does the client want in there and having the skills and the gear to execute that in the right space.

Jacy

So well, thank you for talking with me today.

John

No, thank you for your interest. And again, I wish you well on your journey as well. And to.