

QUALITY IMAGE: PHOTO PRODUCER SHANNON FAGAN

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Last year, I founded China's most prolific production unit for commercial lifestyle stock photography. We are creating one thousand new images per month for both the Chinese and global advertising market. Production, by nature, is a hurry up and wait scenario. We quite literally "make" pictures happen in a contemporary lifestyle sense, by planning all the wardrobe and prop, casting, and location elements to fit to shoot brief designs provided to us by our international distributors. It is a very detail oriented job drawing upon my ten years of experience as a lifestyle photographer in New York City.

The position of leadership with a dynamic self-taught team within a developing market on the back heels of a global economic downturn has been a major, and humbling, learning experience.

It's no secret to those that know me that I work quite long and committed hours. A late night jog through Beijing's Dongcheng District is my relaxation after an exhausting day. I also have what I call a "48 hour rule". No matter what happens, no matter how bad, I give it 48 hours to clear up and then make an informed decision. It's saved me on many an occasion, and I'm sure that many of us living and working locally would agree – what a difference two days make!

I was advised by veteran "China hands" that learning about China was more important than learning Chinese. And, after eighteen months on the ground, I would agree. I've grown my abilities to be a leader in my team. Whereas in New York, outsourcing was the general protocol for my business, internalizing an entirely vertical operation has been central to our success.

When I was a child, I dreamed of being an airline pilot. In turn, for a large portion of my career, traveling by airplane was a major component and a huge thrill. I'm operating my own business and in touch with top professionals globally in my chosen field. It's absolutely a dream job where "the sky is the limit" for where we might land next as a company and influencer in the Chinese advertising market.

In high school, I earned \$5.15 per hour at Ed's Camera Shop in Memphis, Tennessee.

Like many entrepreneurs in China, I was attracted to the challenge, excitement, and benefit to the local and global market. I found that China allowed me to put my best learned experiences and talent to work, together with my team of assistants, photographers, producers, and project managers.

My best boss I've had is my business consultant. Every individual needs a hierarchy to report to, and for me, I report to those to whom I deliver my products of images and production oriented services. Maintaining a veteran consultant with more experience than I have has been a crucial development in my learning curve here in China. To get better, everyone needs to play the game of business with people who are better than they are.

No two days are identical. It's been that way for twelve years.

The challenges are orchestrating a mix of cultures, mitigating differences in levels of comprehension, and managing foreign staffers in a country where teaching English pays more than long-term career oriented work in photography. This market is, despite appearances, fairly risk averse when it comes to what I call "stick-to-it-ness". My grapple with the 30% turnover rates that we see as business owners in China is to handle this challenge with a continual invigoration to the manners of hiring, incentives, and components of short-term trigger motivators seen here.

My workspace is a combination of life and work. The office is housed within a newly renovated three-storey residential building in a hutong. This creates wonderful meetings with other residents and a collective drawing upon their networks in Beijing. My favorite resident is the 94 year old grandfather, and owner of the building, living on the first floor. We wave to each other frequently.

The exponential growth my operation sees from the success story of just one hired individual energizes me. I encourage my team to be leaders of their own projects as producers and photographers, and when a member hits just one ball out of the park, it's amazing to witness their development as a team as a result.

Don't do it because you are passionate. Everyone is passionate. Do it because you are committed. Perseverance and reliability are critical components of any small business owner, and the commercial arts are, by default, an industry of entrepreneurial individuals.

Check out shannonfagan.com

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