



The High-Volume Photographer's Guide to Tethering:

How Tethering Can Help Take
Your High-Volume Photography
Business to the Next Level

Photography: Matthew Kemmetmueller

Introduction

High-volume photography can be a demanding yet competitive area of photography in which to start a business. Although it can be rewarding in itself for a photographer to be solely responsible for capturing those special once-in-a-lifetime moments and creating tangible memories for subjects and their families, high-volume photography can also provide sustainable business income for a photographer when conducted the right way.

All types of events can represent a great book of business for high-volume photographers. Examples include military and charity galas, graduation celebrations and proms among others. Headshot photography at trade shows can also be an effective source of revenue. It involves getting hired by a particular company that has a booth at the show and providing headshots to anyone who visits the booth.

What Is High-Volume Photography?

High-volume photography is the step-and-repeat process of photographing hundreds to thousands of subjects in one day or in one session. A stationary photography workstation is set up, and then comes the repetitive process of having a subject step into the frame, capturing a set number of images of the subject, and then having the subject step out of the frame. This is usually conducted within a short time frame for each subject in an organized manner.

High-Volume Photography Situations

There are several types of high-volume photography that can be lucrative when these methods are implemented.



SCHOOL PHOTOGRAPHY

High-volume school photography consists of annual school photos as well as high school senior photos. It can also include photography for special events such as prom and other school events.



SPORTS PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY

Individual and team sports portrait photography can be school- or district-related and usually includes capturing individual player, team, and green screen photos, which can later be composited together onto a variety of backgrounds.



SEASONAL/HOLIDAY EVENT PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY

From cruise ship and tourist attraction portraits to annual Santa and Easter Bunny portraits, seasonal and holiday portrait photography can be profitable with a good business practice and an effective workflow in place. This type of high-volume photography requires quick, high-quality print turnaround to be profitable because there usually isn't much time between shooting the image and providing the tangible print to the customer.



STEP-AND-REPEAT & HEADSHOT EVENT PHOTOGRAPHY

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Matthew Kemmetmueller is the owner and lead photographer at Kemmetmueller Photography Inc., one of the largest and fastest-growing high-volume studios in the Midwest since 1972. He has achieved continued success where other high-volume photography businesses have faltered, through his creative, organized workflow and smart business ideas.



"Some of the things that we do that are a little bit different are that ... we push a 'view first' option where we take 3-7 photos of each kid," Kemmetmueller says. "All of those photos get emailed in a password-protected gallery to the parents, where they can view and pick the images that they want. Where it's been an industry changer for us is that we now offer multiple poses that we're selling to parents, and so our price per order has gone up like crazy because parents are able to buy more stuff."

Benefits of Shooting Tethered for High-Volume Photography

High-volume photography can demand a great deal of work from a photographer on any given photoshoot. There are several benefits to shooting tethered when working in high-volume situations that will alleviate some of those demands.

✓ Better-Quality Captures

Shooting tethered in a high-volume situation ensures that you capture the images you need for your clients quickly and accurately because you are able to review your captured images in full resolution on a larger display. This allows you to check with more accuracy for details such as focus, color, composition, and exposure as well as general details about your subject. By doing this, you can avoid trying to review all of these details on a small camera LCD screen.

It is especially important in high-volume sports and seasonal/holiday event portrait photography to capture images as flawlessly and efficiently as possible during a session because there's usually not much time for editing images between capturing and selling the images on the spot. In addition, in these types of situations, clients are more likely to make an impulsive decision to purchase the images on the spot based on whether they like the image whereas, with school photography, parents are typically collecting annual photos of their children whether or not they get that perfect pose or facial expression in the image.

✓ Faster Workflow

You automatically speed up your workflow when you shoot tethered because your images transmit directly to your computer. This bypasses the time-consuming step of transferring images from a memory card to a computer. When you omit uploading from the memory card, you also avoid the potential problem of a corrupted memory card, which can result in the total loss of all images on the card. Another benefit of shooting directly to your computer versus, or in addition to, a memory card is that you can concurrently back up your images to a separate hard drive while you are shooting, which serves as an added safety measure.

Shooting tethered also contributes to a faster workflow by providing a means for you to process your images faster because you are able to shoot directly into a watch folder, which can then be imported into a software program such as [Flow by PhotoLynx](#), [Darkroom](#), or [Next Generation Photography Solutions](#) for editing before being forwarded to an editing service or to the lab of your choice for printing.

Perfect Your Process

Tethering simplifies workflows so you can place focus on your subject.



✓ Better Organization

Meticulous organization is mandatory when you're dealing with high-volume photography to ensure that images are matched up with the correct subjects. Manual data management can make this process a bit more difficult and time-consuming for the non-tethered shooter who's photographing children while complying with federal privacy laws under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Generally, with school photography, student information such as the classroom, teacher, grade, and student ID of each student is provided to the photographer prior to the shoot. The photographer uploads this information into high-volume workflow software such as [Flow by PhotoLynx](#) or [GotPhoto](#), generates a barcode or QR code sheet as an identifier for each student that is associated with the student's ID, and sends the sheets to each student's teacher, who then hands them out to the students.



Because of FERPA privacy laws, instead of providing their name or other identifier details, the student will then bring the barcode or QR code sheet to be photographed during their photo session, which is then associated with their images. This is where tethered shooting can be invaluable, because when the photographer shoots that barcode or QR code using capture software such as [Smart Shooter 4 PRO](#), the software reads the code through the lens, and any images shot thereafter are automatically grouped together until another code is scanned. When [Smart Shooter 4 PRO](#) is set up to export images to a watch folder, which is then imported into software such as [Flow by PhotoLynx](#) or [GotPhoto](#), barcodes or QR codes are then matched up automatically to the student's previously imported information.

When a photographer opts to import images into [Flow by PhotoLynx](#), the package has typically already been purchased by the parent or customer prior to the shoot. [Flow](#)

allows the photographer to make any post-processing adjustments, send the image(s) to the printer with any purchased package details, fulfill the order, and deliver it to the student at the school. [GotPhoto](#), meanwhile, allows parents to log in to the platform to view the images first, select particular poses and backgrounds, and put together their own packages to purchase on the website.

When you have a highly efficient and organized tethered workflow, this can also help reduce the number of staff needed in high-volume photography situations because some of the time-consuming manual tasks associated with a non-tethered workflow, such as image transfers and information matching, are eliminated from the process.



✓ A Tight, Flexible Setup

Preplanning is an important step for high-volume photography because it can help ensure a smooth workflow on the day of the shoot. No matter what curveballs might come your way, be it a location change or a setup in a location with inconvenient power options, having plans and backup plans in place can make all the difference.

Imagine being set up to shoot in a smaller space or in a space with few to no power outlets, such as a library, locker room, or gym. Luckily, tethering is flexible, and there are multiple solutions, such as [battery-powered workstations](#), for when power outlets are unavailable.

In the past, many high-volume photographers dismissed tethering for reasons such as the need for AC power, tethering cables being a potential tripping hazard, or that tethering involved too much extra equipment to carry around. Technological advancements in wireless image transfer to a tablet and new battery power options have eliminated these hurdles, providing more flexibility. Whether you desire a more elaborate setup with a laptop and backup drive or a more portable setup to shoot tethered wirelessly to a tablet, there's a tethering solution tailor-made for your needs.



The Tethered High-Volume Photography Scene

Dealing with high-volume numbers on shoot day can be a hectic situation, leading to the production of poor, inconsistent image results if not properly planned out in advance. This can tank any high-volume photography business.

Consistency Is Key

For school photography, it is important to have a consistent look in the student images from year to year. Documenting how things will be set up on the day of the shoot and using that plan for each shoot ensures continuity with each shoot.



"One of the biggest strides for us was how to create consistent images every year for every kid," Kemmetmueller says. "How do we cut down the setup time, and how do we reduce the friction to sell that image?"

One of the biggest things we did: We call them magic carpets. Part of our process when we go in to set up at a school shoot or sports shoot—whatever it is—is that we have printed vinyl banners similar to what sports teams have hanging on the wall.

"What we've actually done is that we have our lighting setup mapped out on that. We measure everything, and we tape it down. It shows the light that we use, the modifier that we use, and the power that it's at. It also shows where your camera goes, how high your light should be, and where the background goes. This is so that when we show up to set up ... setup time [is] crazy quick because even if you've never worked for me, you can just follow the road map. Then, every year, it's exactly the same."

Tethering Takes Your High-Volume Business to the Next Level

“Getting into the business of high-volume photography can already be difficult,” Kemmetmueller says. “There are many requirements to be met—especially for schools—and you are often competing against many other photographers in the bidding process.

“To get into this industry, the hardest thing for me to wrap my head around was, depending on what region you’re in, you have to get on an approved vendor list, and then any school in that county can pick a photographer from that approved list. Up in Minnesota, where I’m from, all the schools are on district-wide contracts, so for me to get a big public school district, I have to pick up 8,000-15,000 kids to do 10 schools. A lot of places, like down in New Orleans, every school can do whatever they want, whenever they want, wherever they want—so it’s a principal decision.”



**APPROVED
VENDOR**

IT’S IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND HOW YOUR REGION IS SET UP IN REGARD TO GETTING ON AN APPROVED VENDOR LIST, AND WHAT FACTORS RELATED TO A PHOTOGRAPHER’S BUSINESS AND BID ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO A SCHOOL. THIS IS WHERE NETWORKING IN THIS SPECIFIC FIELD CAN BECOME KEY, AND HAVING A MENTOR TO HELP GUIDE AND ADVISE YOU IS A BIG PLUS.

Image Is Everything

When your setup looks professional and your workflow runs flawlessly, this reflects your expertise, and it can go a long way toward establishing and maintaining long-term client relationships. It's what can help you stand out from the crowd.

“One comment we've always gotten since we've been doing big numbers is that with the Tether Tools setup ... I get comments on how uniform and professional everything looks,” Kemmetmueller notes. “It's impressive to a school when they walk in and see a nice professional setup—that it doesn't look like it was slapped together—and then to have that duplicated six times is pretty awesome. I get a lot of positive feedback on that.”



Tools to Get Started

There are many different ways you can set yourself up to conduct a high-volume photography shoot; however, if you demand a professional, consistent, and efficient workflow to take your high-volume business to the next level, below are some flexible options to help you get started.

The High Volume Tethering Kit

A popular choice among high-volume professionals, the [High Volume Tethering Kit](#) provides a stable and secure stationary workstation for your laptop with an adjustable vertical bar for your camera, which allows you to continually adjust the camera to the height of your subject without disturbing your workstation. The kit includes:



TETHER TABLE AERO MASTER



STRAPMOORE

- ❑ A 15' TetherPro cable specific to your camera model for image transfer
- ❑ A JerkStopper Aero Clip-on Support to protect your laptop port from damage
- ❑ An Aero SecureStrap to secure your laptop to the workstation table
- ❑ Three Aero Clip-on Hooks to manage any cables
- ❑ A StrapMoore to secure objects such as mobile batteries to the workstation stand
- ❑ A Tether Table Aero Master for your laptop to sit on while you're shooting
- ❑ An Aero ProPad to prevent your laptop from sliding off the table



AERO CUP HOLDER



ROCK SOLID 2-HEAD TRIPOD CROSS BAR SIDE ARM

- ❑ An Aero XDC External Drive Compartment to store an external hard drive so that you can back up your images while tethering
- ❑ A Rock Solid 4-Head Tripod Cross Bar, which attaches to your tripod
- ❑ A Rock Solid 2-Head Tripod Cross Bar Side Arm for camera attachment
- ❑ An Aero Cup Holder for small accessories such as a smartphone

The [High Volume Tethering Kit](#) can be set up on a tripod with a removable ballhead or on a [Rock Solid Low Boy Roller](#) with a separate ballhead.

The High Volume Wireless Tethering Kit

If portability is needed for shooting on location, if you're in an environment where cables could present a tripping hazard, or if your camera is located more than 30 feet away from your computer, the [High Volume Wireless Tethering Kit](#) utilizing a tablet could be a better option for you. Some of the tools to include in this setup are:

- ❑ An AeroTab Universal Tablet Mount for mounting your Windows tablet
- ❑ A Rock Solid Master Articulating Arm to hold the tablet mount
- ❑ A Rock Solid Master Clamp that attaches the Articulating Arm to your tripod
- ❑ An Air Direct Wireless Tethering System for wireless tethering

When using the [High Volume Wireless Tethering Kit](#), you can consistently transmit JPEG files wirelessly at up to 200 feet away from the computer or tablet with only a minimal one- to two-second delay compared to using a tethering cable.

Power Management

High-volume photography scenarios, such as school photography, can mean a long day of shooting with little time to stop and change camera batteries. This is when a system such as the [Case Relay Coupler Bundle](#) comes in handy because it provides a means for you to power your camera through an external battery or a power outlet.

For ensuring that your laptop and other devices that you need on location stay powered, the [ONsite Versa V-Mount Complete Bundle 110V](#) will have you covered. The included battery mounts onto your light stand with its included clamp. Also in this bundle are a power supply, which has four fast-charging USB ports and two AC outlets for charging devices, and an AC power supply car adapter.

Software

When searching for tethering software for high-volume photography, [Smart Shooter 4](#) and [Smart Shooter 4 PRO](#) both include a variety of useful features. [Smart Shooter 4 PRO](#) allows you to connect and control up to eight cameras at the same time. It also includes a TTL Code Reader feature which applies barcode or QR code data as the image is being taken. Just capture, and the data will be applied immediately to the photo file and each file after, until a new barcode is photographed.



Find Your High-Volume Photography Solution

Tethered shooting is key to consistently capturing better-quality images in high-volume photography situations while speeding up your workflow. It also ensures more accuracy in data management, especially when dealing with barcodes and QR codes in lieu of personal identification information. There are a variety of scalable solutions available to meet your individual high-volume photography needs.

Create Your System

Configure a tethered workflow with the gear that's right for your high volume business.

TRANSFER



Air Direct

PROTECT



StrapMoore

COLLABORATE



Tablet Holder

POWER



ONsite Aero V-Mount

DIRECT



Smart Shooter 4

Need help building your high volume kit?

Call 888-854-6565, or email

customersupport@tethertools.com

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