



Shooting the marching band during a football game or at competitions can increase profits when selling online.  
All photos by Joe Ratterman, [www.inthezoneimages.com](http://www.inthezoneimages.com).

# Shoot to sell

*By Larry Thall*

FotoStudio offers a venue for pros to sell online



Joe Ratterman of In The Zone Images shoots a variety of sports and events.

Selling photos online may seem like a good idea to photographers, but getting into the market may be more complicated.

Launched in 1999, **FotoTime Inc.**, Dallas, Texas ([www.fototime.com](http://www.fototime.com)), offered two major products, FotoShare and Foto Album.

“FotoAlbum is a Window-based multimedia application to help photographers organize their digital pictures and video,” says FotoTime CTO **Jeff Kelling**.

“FotoShare is a Web-based online service that allows customers to share online pictures taken at family events – such as birthday parties, graduations and vacations – with families and friends.”

## Online options

FotoTime launched its third major product in July 2006, called FotoStudio, which is targeted at photographers who want to make money selling their work online.



Ratterman's biggest-selling sport is football, but he shoots all major team sports at youth and high-school levels, including water skiing.

“So far, about 70 percent of the pros who use FotoStudio are selling photos online for the first time,” Kelling says. “Most of the remaining 30 percent have migrated from similar online services for various reasons. Some try us because our print prices, commissions, and membership fees are lower than the sites with instant name recognition.”

The standard 4-by-6-inch print is 10 cents, and photographers are free to set their own pricing for their work. As an example, if a photographer sells a 4-by-6 print for \$5, his profit would be \$4.90, minus a 13 percent order processing fee from FotoTime.

“Being able to study the competition and their pricing structure is one advantage of being a relative latecomer to the game,” Kelling notes.

Then, too, FotoStudio is what Kelling refers to as a “fire and forget” service. Photographers take the pictures, upload them to their FotoStudio account, and are done. FotoTime completes the order and handles all the necessary fulfillment functions, not only for prints but also the photo novelty items they sell.

Each month FotoTime sends a check and a transaction printout to each photographer.

## Sport and event market

Youth sports photographers represent the

biggest category of professionals using FotoStudio. Photographer **Joe Ratterman**, **In The Zone Images**, Stilwell, Kan., is among them.

A corporate executive during the week, Ratterman shoots corporate events, family portraits, senior portraits, and youth sports team photos. Ratterman got his start in the business with action sports photography.

Ratterman doesn't fit into the old “weekend warrior” stereotype, though he is hopeful about turning his part-time photography pursuits into a full-time business when he retires from the corporate world.

He's both business and technology savvy, having invested roughly \$20,000 thus far in a high-end **Canon** DSLR camera system, fast sports lenses and studio lighting equipment.

“I don't have a formal background in photography, but I typically study quite thoroughly before starting anything new. I learned everything I could from those around me, and then poured through several books on photography.”

## Customer value

Ratterman was among the first photographers to use FotoStudio, after previously being a FotoShare member. He credits Kelling with having fantastic skills in website design and functionality.

Ratterman himself has been able to contribute to the FotoStudio site in an informal advisory capacity, “Jeff and I have had many productive discussions about what features professional photographers require to grow their businesses and offer maximum added value to our customers.”

One such feature is his ability to track hits on his website. Not only total hits, but also hits broken down by each game or event, and each photo from that shoot, regardless of whether the photo was sold.

“I pay close attention to traffic on my website and try to learn as much as I can about my customers – not only about which types of photos sell, but also which ones don't and why,” he explains.

Team picture sales started off quite slow, in part because he would assemble and pose players for the photograph, and parents would stand behind him and take the same shot.

“The only reason I was needed was to line up the kids,” he says. “Image quality alone wasn't enough for parents to buy my team picture, despite my ability to deliver a near-perfect exposure on every shot. I had to find a way to make my team pictures different, exciting, and better, to such a degree parents couldn't match them.”

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He accomplished this by incorporating Memory Mate elements in his team photos, adding features such as text and visual graphics, and then combining the team photo with the individual photos into a single easy-to-frame image. Sales improved.

Ratterman shoots all the major team sports at the youth and high-school levels, as well as waterskiing. His biggest seller by far is football. In terms of straight print sales, 4-by-6s sell best; but he's happy to report, since starting last summer with FotoStudio, he's also beginning to sell a fair number of 8-by-10s, as well as larger prints, such as 11-by-14s and 16-by-20s.

### Entrepreneurial spirit

FotoStudio members differ from the competition in many ways. They don't

have a sales tent, on-site printing, or a lab in each city or town.

Kelling also takes pleasure in seeing small-business people who once used FotoShare are now upgrading to FotoStudio and are finding creative ways to turn those same photos into new profit centers.

"I've been amazed at what some of them have done. One client operates a pedestrian rickshaw-type carriage service. During the ride, a photographer takes photos of his customers at predetermined scenic spots. Pictures he once posted for customers to view free, he now sells through FotoStudio."

Though FotoStudio shares the FotoTime home page with FotoAlbum and FotoShare, each pro client is given a custom domain through which their

customers view and purchase images, as well as other photo novelty products.

"The small FotoTime logo in the upper corner of their website is the only thing that might tip off a customer there's an outside company involved with my business," Ratterman notes.

Branded envelopes are the only fulfillment feature that also indicates third-party involvement, and it occupies a high-ranking spot on Kelling's small list of imminent upgrades.

Additional support services are offered to FotoStudio users, including such functions as online reports on who bought what from which domains, and a marketing section.

The ICC profiles from the lab can be used for proofing profiles. This allows for a preview of how each print from the Fujifilm Frontier will look, and simply requires a calibrated monitor and Adobe Photoshop use. It gives photographers the tool they need to see how an image will look before committing to having it printed.

Kelling markets FotoTime mostly online through ads on Google, various computer and photography magazines, and blogs.

Ratterman's philosophy may be different from other sports photographers. "I like to shoot where the action is, and that means I won't always get a shot of everybody on the field. I look for the action and emotion when it happens, and try to get moments worthy of publishing in a magazine. I will also try to capture some sideline action, which often includes the officials, cheerleaders, and other nonathletes.

"Parents buy images they can't get themselves. Even if I don't get the athlete's face, as long as the parents can tell it's their kid in the photo and the action is good, then I have a pretty good chance at selling the photo. More than selling photos, however, my goal is to capture those brief moments in time when athletes are at their best!" ■



Ratterman likes to capture the action and emotion.