Mosr working days on assignment for Gavin Jowitt, a leading Sydney-based commercial photographer, begin early. When he’s working on location, quite often he’s out on the road by 4.30am, preferring to be on site before sunrise. If the work is further afield, way out west in NSW or interstate, he will travel the day before. Jowitt quips that he could take it easy and laze about in the mornings, but that would not put food on the family table. “Like many creatives, I constantly beat myself up about my work and how I can do things better. I guess that’s what gets me out of bed in the morning, my drive to create compelling images that tell a story. When it comes to making a living as a commercial photographer, I suspect I’m very similar to my peers. Absolutely, you’ve got to be good at your craft, at the fundamentals of being a photographer. But in addition to that, to make it work, you have to be a great communicator, you have to be highly organised, and manage the business side of things. You have to approach every job with a heap of enthusiasm.”

Jowitt offers a likely schedule for an assignment that includes a local half-day shoot:

5.30am: I’m an early riser and if I don’t have a dawn shoot, I head out for a 50km bike ride.
7.30am: Usually I’m in front of my laptop at home, having some breakfast and catching up on emails and quotes.
8.00am: I travel to the ‘shoot’ location, always allowing 30 minutes extra travel time. I organise all my gear the day before a shoot so there’s no panic before I head off.
9.00am: Start the shoot.
1.00pm: Once the shoot is completed, I head to the studio, grabbing some lunch on the way.
2.00pm: The first thing I’ll do when I get back is download and back up my RAW files. I’ll have a quick look through the shots, but I prefer to leave the editing and post-production for at least 24 hours so I can view the images with fresh eyes.
2.30pm: Catch-up on emails and return any calls.
3.00pm: Sort out my gear, re-charge batteries and pack for the next shoot.
Momentarily lost, a dementia patient receives a guiding hand from a fellow resident at an aged-care home. This shot was not set up, just an observed moment while documenting life in an aged-care facility. This shot won a Silver award for documentary at the 2013 APPA National Print Awards. Nikon D3s, 35mm f/1.4 lens 1/160s @ f/2.5, ISO 800. Available light.
3.30pm: The rest of the afternoon is usually spent preparing quotes and invoices and planning for future shoots (for instance, travel arrangements, shot lists, logistics, business administration, editing and post-production.)

6.00pm: Head home.

8.00pm: After dinner with my family I spend a couple of hours on my laptop. During this time I’ll work on business development, read articles and blogs, respond to emails, and find inspiration.

No typical days
Taking a peek at a day’s diary of a professional, or spending the day with them, will reveal what they do on a particular day. But Gavin Jowitt explains that opening his diary, or any professional shooter’s daily record, on any one day will not offer much insight into their overall practice and business. For a professional photographer, says Jowitt, there’s no such thing as a ‘typical’ day, because every day ends up being different. On the other hand, it will belie the popular myth of a professional photographer’s work based on what you might see on television, where a bevy of assistants prepare everything for the master shooter, who conjures best-selling images with a word to the model and the snap of the motorised shutter.

Jowitt reflects on his psychological approach. “It’s really interesting because when I start working, it’s almost like flicking a switch where
I turn off from everything else such as planning, logistics, business management, all those sorts of things buzzing around my head all the time. I focus on the task at hand – photography – and that can be at any time of the day or night. There’s never any real structure to the day. You get used to it, pushing yourself, responding to a client, working on a client’s timetable.”

Often Jowitt turns up at a location he has not worked in before and he has to pull into the shoot people who may not want to be involved, or else he finds himself getting in the way of a worker trying to do their job. For a shoot at a goldmine in far west NSW Jowitt travelled to the site the previous day. After negotiating access, he reconnoitred the site so that later he had the evening to plan different shots, and how and where to take them on the shoot the next day. The client, a medical insurance fund, had a very clear view of what they wanted to achieve using creative concepts featuring people to showcase topics about well-being. The shoot called for real people set against the mining landscape, mines and heavy equipment. He had to employ the various techniques of different genres from portrait to landscape. The challenge was managing people at different times, and logistics, to be at the right place at the right time, or avoiding a situation, for instance, when a dump truck was tipping its load out. Sometimes, an opportunity for an interesting shot will emerge, and he needs to either negotiate with a site manager, the safety manager, or with a worker whom he wants in the shot. “It’s all about striking that balance between having to work creatively, but on the flipside having to negotiate and be very diplomatic around people to make things happen,” he adds.

Planning the shoot
Planning is critical, though it’s sometimes a luxury. Jowitt ideally likes to plan every shoot, to know roughly its time and duration. But it all depends, he says, on the job and the client. Sometimes the client will give him a specific shot list. Other times, he makes the decisions. For instance, he talked about an upcoming assignment for a long-standing client.

“Here I’ve got a client who has the confidence in me that I’m going to deliver a selection of shots that tells the story of the location, the people working there and their safety. The job will be to communicate their core values using that site. There’s no planning I can do for that. I can only run through my head some ideas of what I might be able to try. The reality is that I need to get there early, look around, and while I’m working on one shot, be thinking, ‘OK, what can I do next?’ That’s completely an unplanned shoot.”

When he works with an assistant Jowitt always tells them to tap him on the shoulder if he gets stressed and cranky. With so many things to handle and the potential for things to go
wrong, you can get frustrated. He says he ‘compartmentalises’ his thinking. When a professional with a busy practice is working, he is single-mindedly focusing on the immediate assignment, and for that moment he has to dismiss from his mind other worries about business. “I run a business. I don’t have the luxury of having some administrators, or managers, or producers. Like most professional photographers, I’m self-contained. There’s always something to be done. It’s never quite as straight forward as you’d like it to be, but it’s a fact of life, and it has to be done, like taxes, insurance, and paying the rent.” He does his own day-to-day book-keeping, but an accountant handles the big picture work.

Handling the paperwork

“The quoting and invoicing process I’ve very much stream-lined now because I’ve moved that onto a cloud based accounting system, which allows me to put together a quote very quickly. Then I can invoice very easily from it, and it’s all in my system. I can do that anywhere, when I’m on the road, or sitting in an airport. I can put together quite a complex quote with all my terms and conditions tied into it. That’s an area that was very time consuming.”

He stresses that it’s critical for any professional to quote properly with the full terms and conditions, so that there is total clarity about what they are providing to the client. Jowitt says there is always a risk of quoting quickly and not understanding the brief. You should do a quote promptly as well, because quite often you can win a job while a client is waiting for other quotes to come in.

Marketing is important and, Jowitt says, the hardest thing of all. “It takes the lowest priority, but it’s crucial. Even when I’m working flat out, I’m spending time on marketing. You’ve got to make sure you’re in front of the right people, and the right people are seeing your work. These days a lot of my work comes direct from a client, as opposed to an agency. In earlier years it was more that a design agency would commission you. Now clients manage their own content far more.”

Today he works at being visible by ensuring he has a presence in social media with a website www.gavinjowitt.com and also inviting people to follow him on FaceBook facebook.com/gavinjowitt
On average, Jowitt spends a few hours a day on the business side of his practice, sometimes fitting it in between other work. Sometimes you get a clear day and you can catch up on this or that, he says.

‘Belt and braces’
Jowitt usually takes a lot of equipment on an assignment, and his core camera bag includes two bodies. “When I started art school at the age of 16, my very first photography lecturer had a mantra, ‘belt and braces’. It basically means, if you wear your trousers with a belt, and braces, they’re never going to fall down. If one thing fails, you’ve always got the other as a backup. And that’s always stuck with me. You can never afford to be in a situation where for a couple of batteries, or something breaking down, you can’t do the job.” Security is a priority and the golden rule is never leave anything in the car.

If you’re thinking about throwing in your ‘9 to 5’ job to become a professional, Jowitt cautions that you should make it a gradual transition. “You’ll probably need to have another part-time job to fund you whilst you build up enough photographic work. Without a doubt the biggest mistake emerging photographers make is to not charge enough. Not only is it unsustainable for yourself, it has a detrimental effect on the industry as a whole. ACMP and AIPP offer workshops and information to help. ACMP’s Better Business Bible 2.0 is a great place to start.”

Workflow & post-production
In order to be effective in the diverse and challenging conditions he has to work in, Jowitt has spent a lot of time fine tuning his work-flow and post-production. “Adobe Lightroom is my tool of choice. I keep my catalogue file, plus the images I’m working on, on an external LaCie Thunderbolt SSD drive. This allows me to be mobile with my work in progress. Once I’ve completed the job, the images are transferred to a LaCie Thunderbolt hard drive RAID which usually stays in the studio. I currently have over 200,000 images in my Lightroom catalogue and I don’t experience any performance issues working this way. I also keep a separate catalogue archive for each year, backed up in two locations.”
ABOVE
An engineer at work in a substation. Jowitt says, “Here’s another example of working with someone who is doing their job in a messy environment. Shooting upwards allowed me to achieve a clean background using the sky, creating a simple and graphic shot. Not sure why I had the ISO so high!” Nikon D3s, 70-200mm f/2.8 lens @ 95mm, 1/1000s @ f/16, ISO 1600. Available light.

RIGHT
Photographer Gavin Jowitt going through paperwork at his desk. He tries to devote at least part of each day to updating business matters.
"It’s always rewarding to have an idea for a shot come to fruition after solving a tricky lighting situation.”

Jowitt’s post-production workflow is as follows:

**Step 1:** Import the files to Lightroom, re-naming and adding base metadata (his details and copyright etc) in the process.

**Step 2:** Back-up RAW files to onsite back-up and offsite back-up drives. (“I don’t reformat any memory cards until RAW files are in three locations.”)

**Step 3:** Review and select images. “I use ‘Collections’ in Lightroom for this.”

**Step 4:** Make adjustments to selected images – white balance, exposure, colour balance, etc.

**Step 5:** Retouch in Photoshop if required.

**Step 6:** Add final metadata such as keywords, title, captions, geo-tagging.

**Step 7:** Export files.

**Step 8:** Upload to PhotoShelter. “PhotoShelter is how I distribute images to my clients,” says Jowitt.

**Lighting**

“Lighting is one of the more technical aspects of the job,” Jowitt says. “Often you have complete control of how you light a shot, but other times you’re trying to balance with available light and then there are occasions when you have no control at all. Some industrial locations can prove to be particularly challenging and you end up having to improvise a lot. It’s always rewarding to have an idea for a shot come to fruition after solving a tricky lighting situation. The Nikon D4 is a life saver in many situations. The sensor is unmatched for low-light sensitivity. It really does allow you to achieve shots that only a few years ago would have been impossible.”

**Essential gear**

Jowitt explains, “Other than the Nikon D4, gear that I’d struggle to live without is my ThinkTank bags, the Really Right Stuff mounting system and the Hoodman HoodLoupe. Most photographers have spent their entire careers trying to find the perfect bag. For many the ThinkTank bags come as close as you can get to the holy grail. The Really Right Stuff quick release system for mounting the camera to the tripod doesn’t come cheap, but that’s because they do not compromise any aspect of build quality or engineering. The BH55 ball head is a joy to use. And finally, when shooting outdoors the Hoodman HoodLoupe is a must for reviewing shots on the LCD screen. I’d be lost without it!”

**Gavin Jowitt’s kit**

Jowitt says, “As you can imagine, I have fine-tuned my location kit over a number of years. This is made up of three bags that I usually take on location. The key is to be able to move all bags single-handedly if needs be. The only time this changes is when I’m flying, as the ‘Airport Security’ ThinkTank bag I have is too big for carry-on luggage. I’m more selective with lenses and I split them and the bodies between a ThinkTank shoulder bag and backpack. I also always carry a smaller bag in case I need to walk some distance or climb somewhere when I’m on location. Obviously, if I’m off to do a corporate portrait then I’m far more selective with what I’ll take.”

Jowitt’s extensive professional kit includes the following:

- ThinkTank Airport Security v2.0 bag
- Nikon D4 SLR
- Nikon D3s or Nikon D800 SLRs
- AF-S NIKKOR 24mm f/1.4G ED
- AF-S NIKKOR 35mm f/1.4G
- AF-S NIKKOR 50mm f/1.4G
- AF-S NIKKOR 85mm f/1.4G
- AF-S VR Micro-Nikkor 105mm f/2.8G IF-ED
- PC-E NIKKOR 24mm f/3.5D ED
- AF-S NIKKOR 14-24mm f/2.8G ED
- AF-S NIKKOR 24-70mm f/2.8G ED
- AF-S NIKKOR 70-200mm f/2.8G ED VR II
- AF-S NIKKOR 28-300mm f/3.5-5.6G ED VR
- Remote cord, GPS unit, spare batteries, memory cards, Polariser & ND filters, gaffer tape, dust blower, Leatherman, LED torch, X-Rite ColorChecker Passport, sun-cream, Cliff Bars
- ThinkTank Logistics Manager
- 4 x Nikon Speedlights SB-900
- Nikon Speedlight Commander SU-800
- Nikon TTL Remote Cord SC-28/SC-29
- Nikon High Performance Battery Packs SD-9
- Westcott Rapid Box – 26in Octa softbox
- Profoto Softbox 1ft x3ft with grid
- 3 x Photoflex convertible umbrellas
- 2 x Rogue 3-in-1 honeycomb grids
- 64 x MAHA POWEREX AA rechargeable batteries
- 4 x Pocket Wizards
- Manfrotto Magic Arm kit
- 2 x Manfrotto Justin spring clamps
- Rosco Matt Black Cinefoil
- 4 x Impact umbrella brackets
- 4 x Frio Universal Locking Cold Shoes
- 3 x Manfrotto Alu mini stands
- Gitzo tripod bag
- Gitzo carbon fibre tripod
- Really Right Stuff ball head
- 2 x Manfrotto 1052BAC light stands