

PHOTOGRAPHERS + AI: INDUSTRY REPORT

Insights on AI adoption, evolving perspectives, and real-world applications



ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

The conversation around photographers and AI has lacked meaningful data on how photographers across the industry actually think and work. VSCO conducted this research to ground the discussion in lived experience rather than speculation.

This quantitative study of 401 photographers, independent of VSCO's user base, examines how AI is perceived, adopted, and applied across creative and business workflows.

To enable deeper analysis, respondents were segmented into two groups:

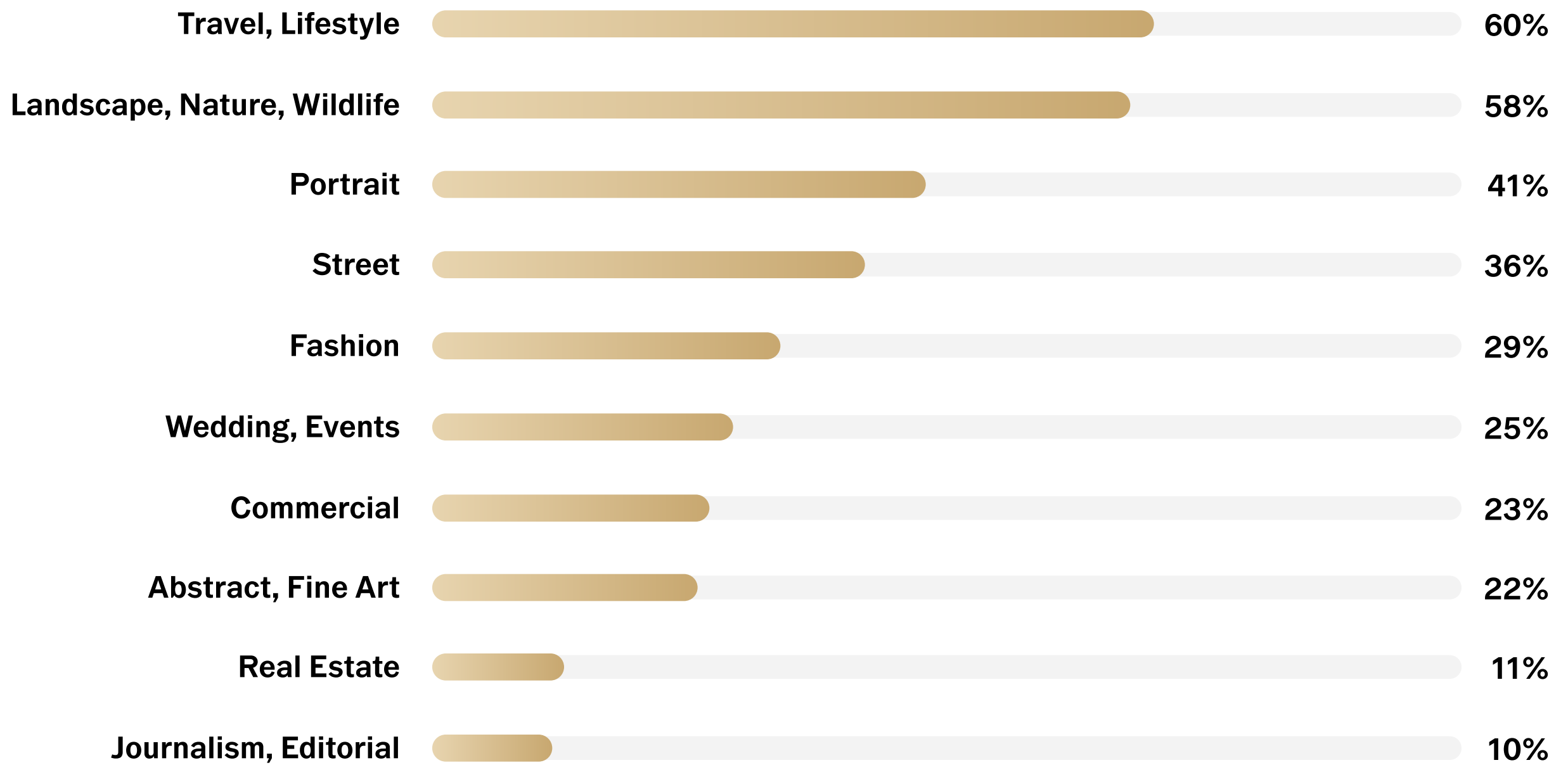
Working Photographers (56%) — Those who are currently generating all or part of their income from photography, including professionals who rely on it as a primary livelihood and those supplementing their income.

Enthusiasts (44%) — Those who are not yet earning from photography, though many are interested in pursuing paid work. These are serious, committed photographers whose relationship with AI differs from those running a business.

Fielded Dec. 2025 | Confidence level: 95% | Margin of error: $\pm 5\%$

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

Photographers surveyed reflect a diverse audience that specializes in a variety of genres:



THE CONVERSATION AROUND AI IN PHOTOGRAPHY HAS SHIFTED

Photographers aren't debating whether AI belongs in their workflow any longer—**83% are already using it**. Over half use it weekly or daily. Among working photographers, that number doubles compared to enthusiasts—68% use AI weekly or daily compared to 34% of enthusiasts.

Photographers are thoughtful and discerning. They have legitimate concerns about creative control, ethics, and professionalism. However, less than 5% feel threatened; optimism and openness are the dominant reactions across the board. This points toward a considered, practical relationship with technology, shaped by experience, not hype.

The deeper issue this research surfaces is the competition for their time. Nearly half of photographers spend between a quarter and half of their working hours on tasks that bring little creative satisfaction—file organization, planning, communication, promotion. For working photographers, time spent in this drudgery is even higher.

These findings point to a future where AI plays a supportive, human-centered role. The most meaningful advances will come from giving photographers back time, focus, and creative agency so they can experience more joy and spend energy on what drew them to photography in the first place.

At VSCO, that belief continues to guide how we think about technology: not as an end in itself, but as a way to more deeply support photographers' business and craft.

Eric Wittman
CEO, VSCO

- 01 **AI adoption is mainstream**
AI is now widely adopted with 83% of all photographers using it in their workflows.
- 02 **Working photographers are moving first**
68% of working photographers use AI weekly or daily, double the rate of enthusiasts.
- 03 **Curiosity supersedes fear**
Only 5% of photographers feel threatened. Most approach AI with curiosity and cautious optimism.
- 04 **Mundane tasks thwart creative joy**
AI can take on the busywork, giving photographers more time to focus on high-value creative work.
- 05 **AI works best in a support role**
The strongest demand is for AI that handles repetitive tasks. Efficiency is the priority.
- 06 **Business is the big opportunity**
Photographers are not asking AI to replace their vision. They want help growing their businesses.
- 07 **General AI tools are popular, but insufficient**
Photographers are adapting existing tools to their needs, but they want tools specifically designed for their workflows and style.
- 08 **Time saved is time reinvested**
Reclaimed time doesn't go to one place. Enthusiasts put it toward balance and personal work, while many pros also see it as an opportunity to grow their business.

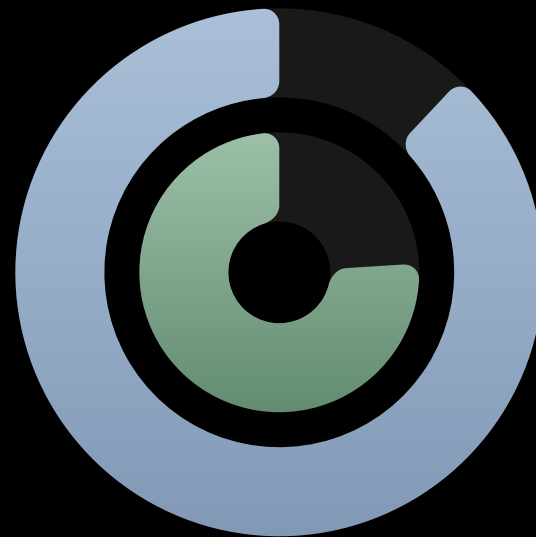
AI ADOPTION IS MAINSTREAM

The shift happened fast. A year ago, AI drew sharp backlash from artists expressing concerns. Times have changed.

📍 ALL PHOTOGRAPHERS

83%

use AI



📍 WORKING PHOTOGRAPHERS

88%

use AI

📍 ENTHUSIASTS

76%

use AI

USAGE IS ACCELERATING

↑38%

using AI more than in 2024

↑29%

started using AI for the first time in 2025

↓2%

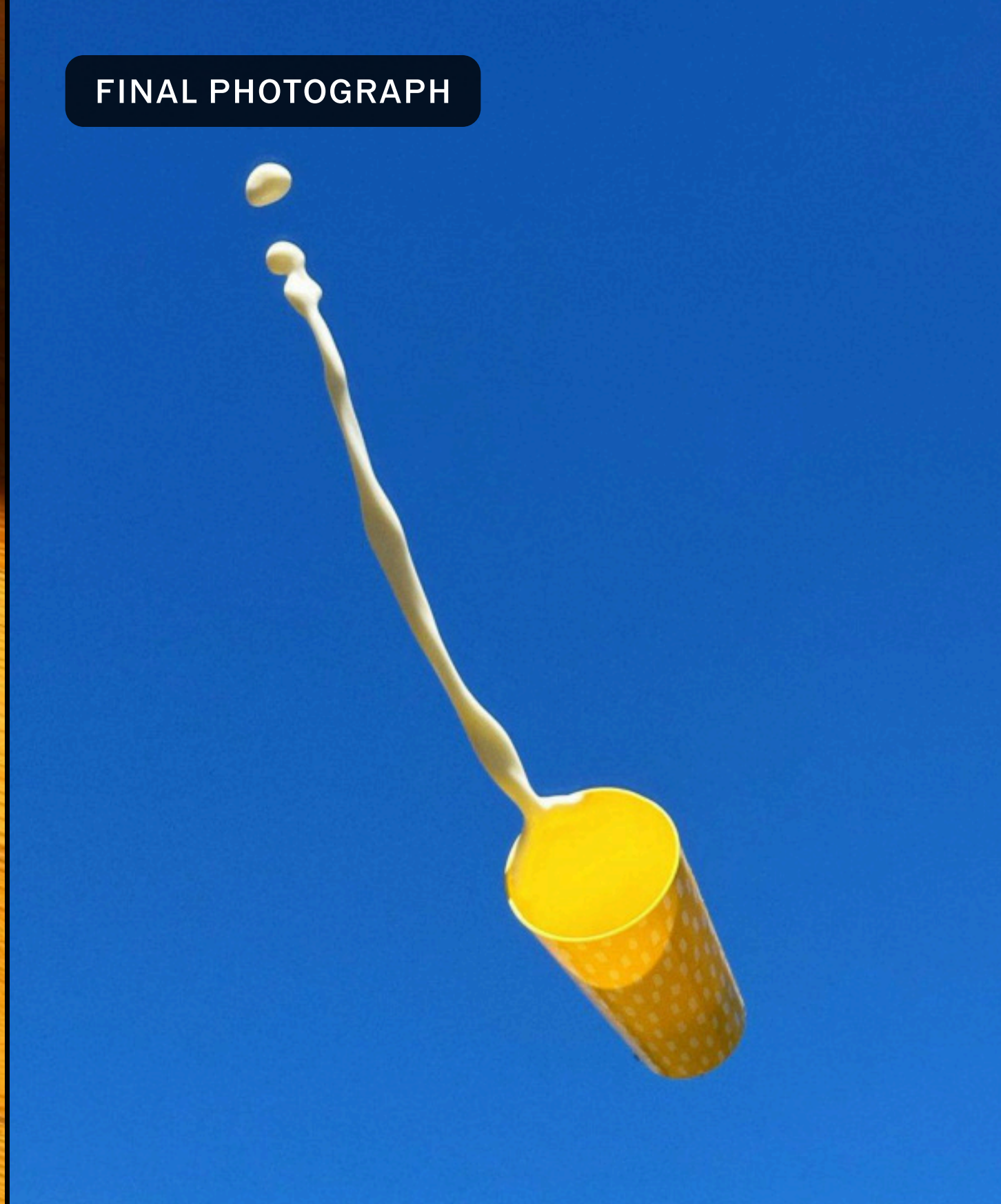
have pulled back

This isn't a trend driven by a handful of early adopters. It's a broad, cross-genre shift—from wedding photographers automating culling to landscape specialists experimenting with batch edits to portrait studios using AI to help with client communications.

AI CONCEPT



FINAL PHOTOGRAPH



“I believe AI is an unavoidable and exciting opportunity for us photographers. It allows us to bring a project that ‘doesn’t even exist yet’ to life in a matter of minutes.”



Burak Boylu
vSCO.co/burakboylu

WORKING PHOTOGRAPHERS ARE MOVING FIRST

For photographers who earn from their craft, AI has become part of the daily rhythm.

WORKING PHOTOGRAPHERS

68% 2× the rate of enthusiasts

use AI weekly or daily

44%[↑]

increased their AI usage over the past year

4%

haven't used AI tools yet

ENTHUSIASTS

34%

use AI weekly or daily

31%[↑]

increased their AI usage over the past year

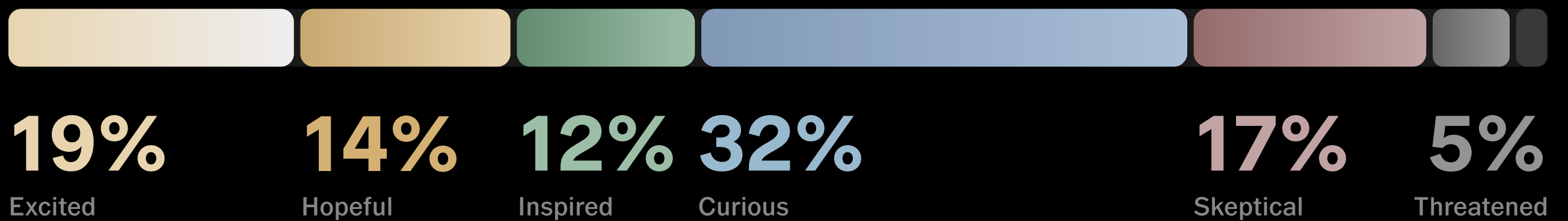
17%

haven't used AI tools yet

Working photographers face compounding pressures that make efficiency tools not just appealing, but necessary. When your livelihood depends on your productivity, **every reclaimed hour matters.**

CURIOSITY SUPERSEDES FEAR

When asked to describe their first reaction to AI in photography, over 75% express positive or open responses.



WORKING PHOTOGRAPHERS

49%

report **positive** emotions toward AI

ENTHUSIASTS

37%

report **positive** emotions toward AI

Concerns haven't vanished. Loss of creative control (42%), ethics (39%), and fears of looking unprofessional (34%) are real. Working photographers hold more concerns in this regard than enthusiasts.

ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPH



AI COMPOSITE



“I always remind other photographers that AI isn’t here to replace you. If anything, it gives you more room to imagine, expand, and finally create the work you’ve always seen in your head.”



Sherman Trotz
vSCO.co/shermantrotz

MUNDANE TASKS THWART CREATIVE JOY

The gap between why photographers create and how they spend their days is wide.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHERS

49%

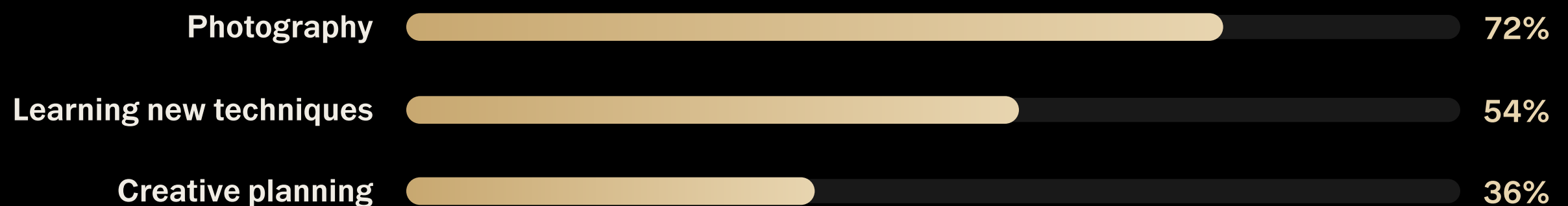
spend a **quarter to half** of their photography time on mundane tasks

WORKING PHOTOGRAPHERS

52%

spend a **quarter to half** of their photography time on mundane tasks

WHAT BRINGS THEM JOY



The opportunity for AI and technology isn't replacing creative decisions. It's **clearing the path** so photographers can make more of them.

“A SIGNIFICANT PART OF MY WORKFLOW INVOLVES REPETITIVE OR TECHNICAL TASKS LIKE ORGANIZING FILES AND PARTS OF THE EDITING PROCESS.

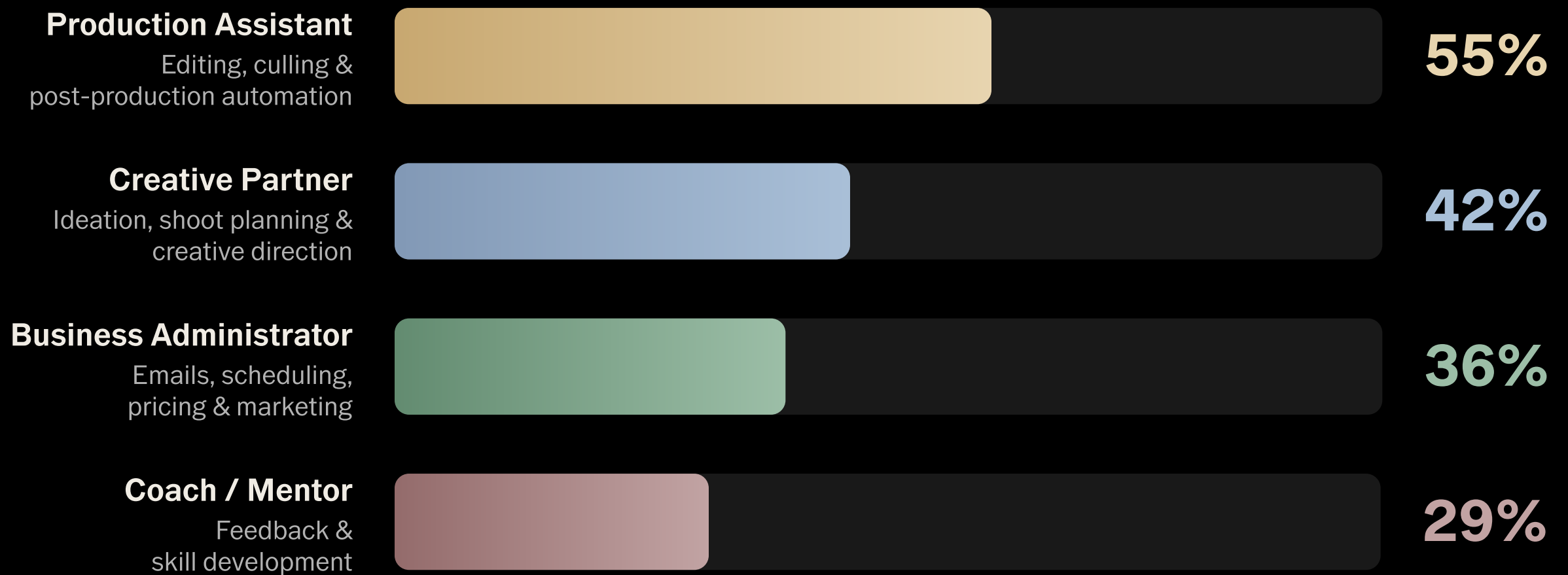
USING AI HELPS STREAMLINE THOSE STEPS SO I CAN FOCUS MORE ON THE CREATIVE SIDE OF THE WORK”



Kenna Hartman
vsco.co/capturedbykenna

AI WORKS BEST IN A SUPPORT ROLE

Photographers want help with production, creative exploration, or business tasks, while keeping creative authorship firmly human.



The signal is consistent. Photographers primarily want AI handling the work around the image—automating production, reducing email fatigue, and guidance around planning and pricing. At the same time, the 42% who want a creative partner challenge the notion that photographers want AI completely removed from the creative process. Even so, authorship remains human and the final creative decisions stay with them.

ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPH



AI COMPOSITE



“AI hasn't really changed what I do, but it's changed the pace of it. A lot of things that used to take hours now happen much faster. I spend less time stuck in the technical side and more time testing different ideas, iterating, refining. It just makes the whole workflow more fluid and direct, without breaking the original intention behind the work.”



Riddle Song
vsco.co/afilmcosmos

BUSINESS IS THE BIG OPPORTUNITY

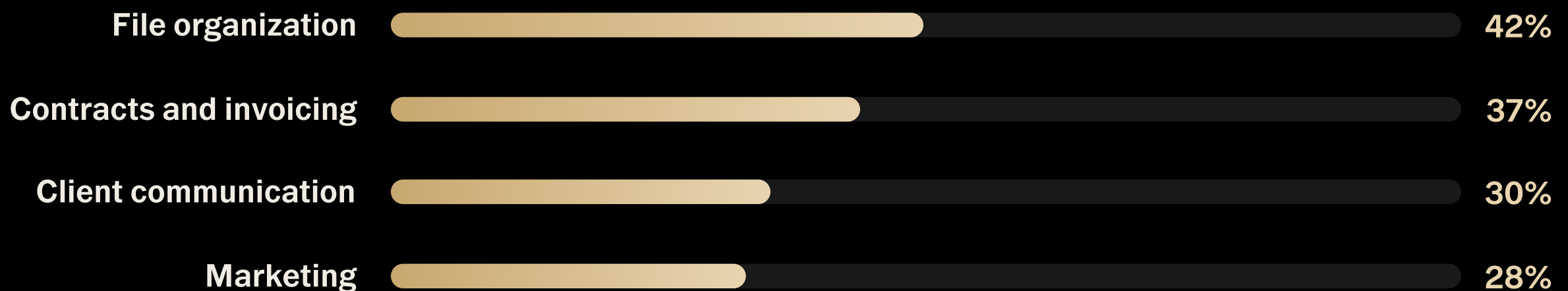
When photographers describe the tasks they most want relief from, the list reads less like a creative brief and more like a small-business operations manual.

42%

THE GAP

of **working photographers** want AI help specifically with business administration, yet there are few dedicated AI tools designed for the nuances of photographers' workflows.

TASKS THEY ALL WANT RELIEF FROM



Photographers are asking for help running the business side of their craft, the part that 22% of working photographers spend more than half their time on and almost none of them enjoy.

GENERAL AI TOOLS ARE POPULAR, BUT INSUFFICIENT

Photographers are adapting tools built for everyone because tools built for them barely exist, particularly for business workflows.

63%

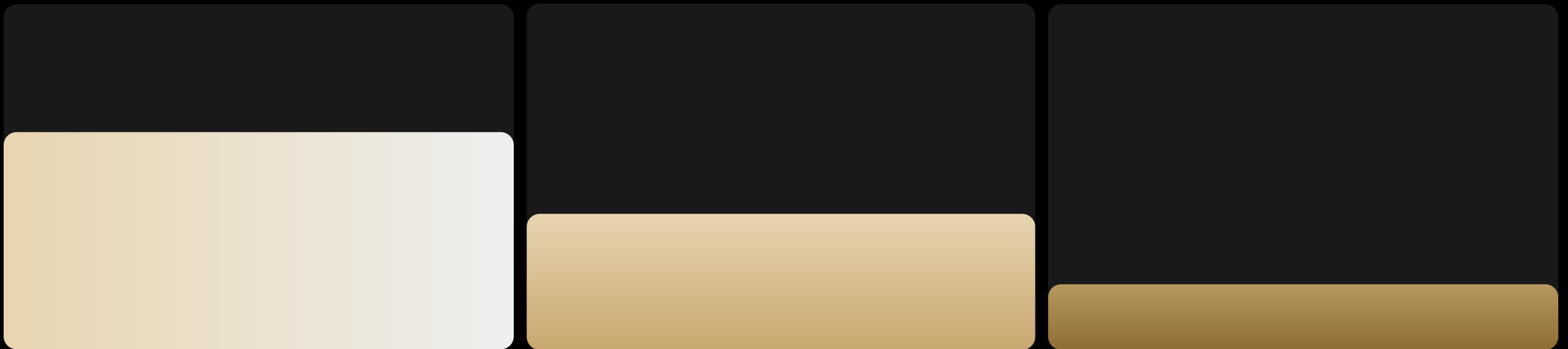
Using generic AI tools such as ChatGPT or Claude

26-39%

Using design-centric apps like Canva, Adobe, or Google Gemini

<20%

Using AI tools designed for photographers



This isn't a preference, it's a workaround. There is **demand for AI designed around the photographer's actual workflow**, both creative and business, that's not bolted on as a feature in a general productivity app.

“AI IS PUSHING PHOTOGRAPHERS TO GO DEEPER WITHIN THEMSELVES TO FIND THEIR VOICE.

THERE'S A TRANSITION HAPPENING. WE'RE PAUSING TO REFLECT ON WHAT TASTE LOOKS LIKE IN IMAGE MAKING AND HOW WE CAN DEVELOP OUR WORK TO HAVE MORE OF OUR HEARTS IN IT.”



Simrah Farrukh
vSCO.co/simrahfarrukh

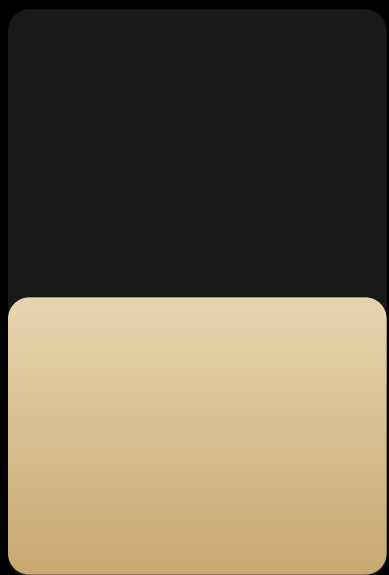
TIME SAVED IS TIME REINVESTED

If AI saved photographers 10 hours a week, the majority would pour it directly into creative and business growth.

WHERE THEY'D REINVEST

ALL PHOTOGRAPHERS

32%



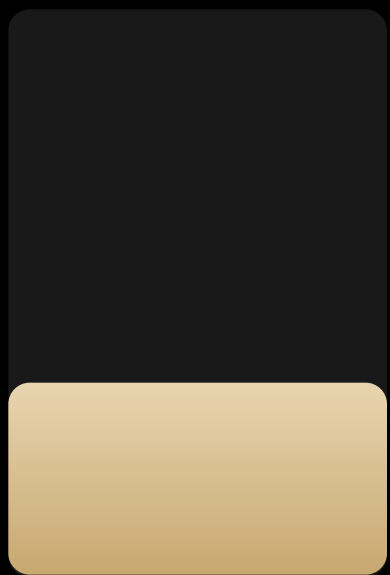
Work-life balance

23%



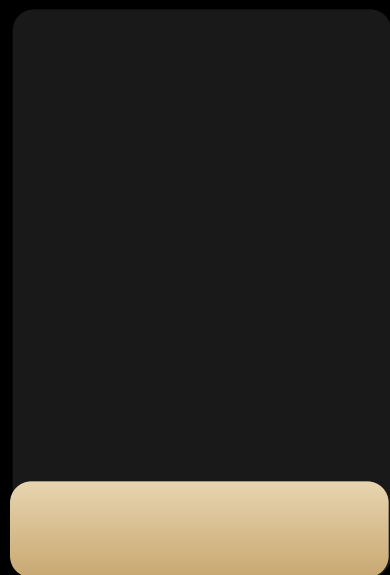
Learning new skills

22%



Personal projects

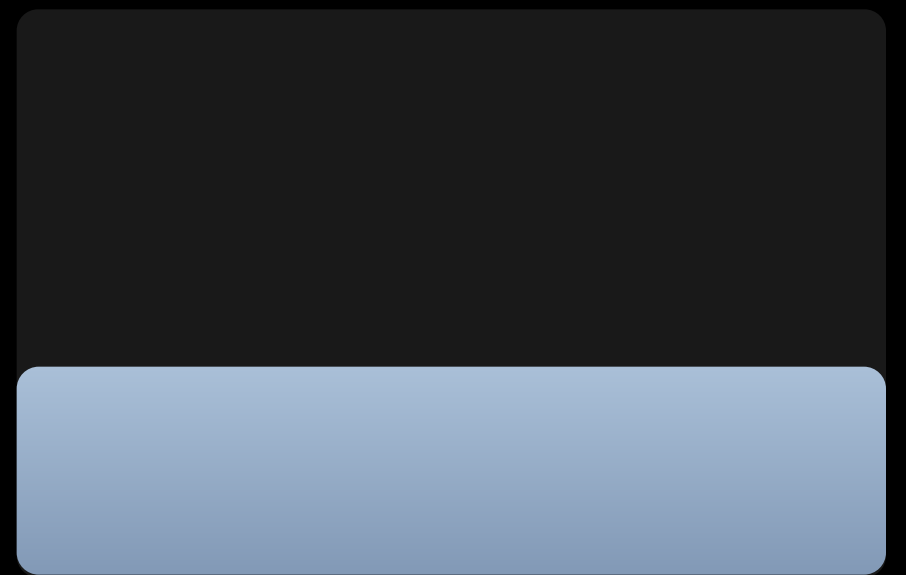
17%



Earning money

WORKING PHOTOGRAPHERS

23%



Getting more clients or earning more

AI's value extends beyond efficiency. For enthusiasts, it's a quality-of-life tool. They want space to breathe and create. For working photographers, it serves a dual purpose: reducing the pressures of running a business while supporting professional growth. Photographers want time for what matters to them, and right now, too much of it is spent on work that doesn't.

EFFICIENCY, LEARNING, AND PERSONALIZATION

When asked which AI tools they're most eager to try in 2026, photographers point to solutions that adapt to them, not the other way around.

AI WISHLIST

ALL PHOTOGRAPHERS

46%



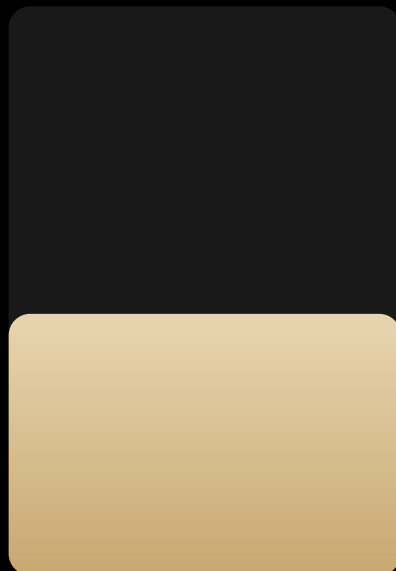
Smart editing that learns your style

35%



Batch processing

34%



Personalized learning

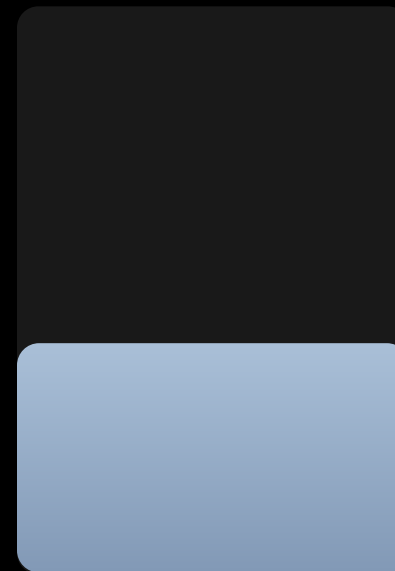
WORKING PHOTOGRAPHERS

36%



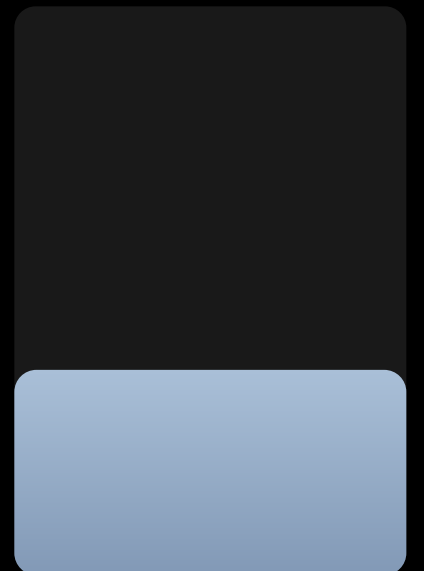
AI-powered marketing

30%



Pricing and proposals

27%



Client communication

Photographers want tools that connect style-aware editing, workflow automation, business support, and learning, all built around how they actually work. For working photographers, following the top three priorities for all photographers, they want marketing and business support.

THE CONVERSATION HAS SHIFTED, AND SO HAS THE OPPORTUNITY

Photographers aren't resisting AI. They're adopting it with intention, applying it where it matters, and holding the line where human judgment matters most. The fear narrative is fading, replaced by a more grounded reality: thoughtful, pragmatic adoption of tools that improve how photographers work and live.

What this research makes clear is that the next wave of AI in photography won't be about flashier creative effects or more powerful generators. It will be about reclaiming time for creativity and unlocking the business side of photography, **so that photographers can thrive doing what they love.**

The photographers who will benefit most are those who apply AI to the work that eats hours but doesn't feed the creative spirit. The best platforms will not build generic tools, but ones with real creative workflows in mind.

Photographers are ready. The question is who builds for them.

PUTTING AI TO WORK IN A PHOTOGRAPHY PRACTICE

It starts with a simple idea. The advantage isn't more tools, it's choosing the right ones, used with intention.

- 01 Replace what drains you, not what defines you**
Automate repetitive work like culling, batch editing, file organization, and admin.
- 02 Keep the final call yours**
Use AI for speed and efficiency. Reserve final touches and creative judgment for yourself.
- 03 Reinvest the time you save**
Put recovered time toward client experience, creative development, or learning new skills.
- 04 Try one thing at a time**
Introduce one new tool at a time. Reliability matters more than having the most tools.
- 05 Clients care about results, not tools**
Let AI work in the background while you focus on delivering your best work.

Vintage 35mm slide scanned, then upscaled and color corrected using AI



“Film photography has always felt like real magic to me. The chemistry, the light, the physical process. AI feels like a different kind of magic. That perspective might challenge some people, but I see it as another tool expanding what’s possible.”



Benjamin Oscar
vSCO.co/benjaminoscar

WHERE PHOTOGRAPHERS TURN PRO

VSCO is a complete photography platform that helps photographers hone their craft, grow their network, and build a photography business on their terms.

Whether they're landing their first paid gig or growing an established practice, VSCO champions photographers at every stage of the journey. Our mission is simple: to close the gap between the creative life photographers want and the confidence, tools, and community they need to make it real.

Human-Centered. AI-Assisted.™

At VSCO, we see AI as a way to serve photographers—giving them back time, focus, and creative agency so they can spend more energy on what drew them to photography in the first place.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Have questions, want an interview, or need more data?
Reach out to VSCO Media Relations.

press@vSCO.co