

The background features three horizontal wavy bands. The top and bottom bands are green with vertical stripes, while the middle band is solid blue. These bands are separated by white and grey areas, creating a layered, paper-like effect.

The professional
photographer's

GUIDE TO
marketing
success

Helping you succeed in the business of
portrait/wedding photography

by Ann K. Monteith

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GUIDE TO *marketing* *success*

T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

Introduction to Marketing	07
Creating a Focused Business Concept.....	13
Selecting and Understanding Your Target Market	17
Establishing Your Marketing Advantage	21
Clarifying Your Marketing Focus	27
Building Strong Business Identities	33
Crafting Your Marketing Design Style.....	39
Essential Marketing Materials and Strategies.....	45
Client-Acquisition Marketing Strategies and Products.....	51
Client Education Strategies and Materials	59
Image-Enhancing Packaging Products.....	65
Relationship Marketing Materials and Strategies.....	69
Internet Marketing.....	77
Creating Marketing Campaigns.....	91
Brand-Building Marketing Strategies.....	103



chapter one

Introduction to Marketing

one Introduction to Marketing

Determining the needs and wants of prospective and existing clients is critical to the well-being of a photographic business. This task is a function of marketing, which is essential for the success of a business because it can:

- Open the door to new clients
- Increase word-of-mouth referrals
- Add value to products and services
- Make sales to clients much easier
- Foster customer loyalty to the business

Because it is an ongoing process, marketing requires a plan that involves identifying prospective customers; determining their needs and wants; creating a demand for the products the business sells to fulfill those needs and wants; then selling and servicing the client so that satisfaction and referrals are ensured.

Understanding the Marketing Mix

The components that influence the success of a marketing plan are often referred to as

the “Marketing Mix”—which involves the key factors that typically affect consumer purchasing decisions: Product, Promotion, Place and Price. Also referred to as “The 4 P’s of Marketing,” these variables, which change from one target market to another, must work together to satisfy consumers within the specific target market. In the portrait/wedding photography industry, the 4 P’s function as follows:

Product is defined as a combination of benefits, features, and services designed to satisfy the needs of a specific market. Consumers of photography typically react to benefits, not features. Features are facts about the product, while benefits are what the product does for the customer. It is benefits that the customer buys—not features. Following is a comparison of how features and benefits differ:

Product: A professional portrait

Features: A beautiful background, outstanding lighting techniques

Benefits: The subject looks great!

Product: A wedding album

Features: Contains 40 pages of images

Benefits: Captures the beauty of the most romantic day of your life and preserves that priceless memory forever

Product: Senior portrait session

Features: 60 poses, including 3 clothing changes

Benefits: You get to express your fantasy in the latest fashion poses that will make you look and feel like a fashion model.

Effective marketing, then, stresses the benefits of a product and not its features, and smart marketers

know their products and the benefits they bring to clients inside and out.

Promotion is that aspect of marketing in which a seller actually reaches out to potential buyers. It directly relates to how efficiently the business communicates with its target consumers, as the types and numbers of consumers attracted and the time and money spent in attracting them ultimately will judge the success or failure of promotional efforts. Promotion informs prospective customers that the company has the right product, available in the right place, at the right time, and at the right price. The promotional message is intended to tell potential clients just how your products and services meet their needs and wants, and, in the process, it performs the critical function of creating a desire on their part to patronize your business.

Place typically involves the means of getting the product to targeted clients. In marketing photography, however, this has less to do with distribution than with the comfort and enjoyment that clients experience in doing business with the studio. The location of your place of business influences both the kind of customers you attract and the perceived value of your product. Location also affects the prices you must charge, so good management dictates that a balance be struck between operating in the ideal location and how much overhead the business can assume before its products become overpriced for the market.

Price factors take into account profit margins, the studio's place in the market, and the effectiveness of the studio's marketing and selling plans. Price is the single component in the Marketing Mix that directly affects the company's ability to generate sales and create profits. Because many consumers consider price to be an indicator of value, it is both a communication device and a competitive technique.

As you might expect, the central elements of the Marketing Mix—Product, Promotion, Place, and

Price—are intertwined to the extent that a change in one nearly always affects and/or necessitates changes in the others.

Listed below are some of the key Marketing Mix considerations that consumers will take into account when they make purchasing decisions involving portrait/wedding photography.

Product	Promotion	Place	Price
Quality	Marketing Budget	Location	Price List
Style	Public Relations	Accessibility	Special Offers
Brand Awareness	Media	Ambience	Sales Incentives
Reputation	Message	Comfort	Perceived Value
Satisfaction Guarantee	Community Buzz	Client Experience	Satisfaction Guarantee
Packaging	Personal Selling	Service Levels	Selling Plan
Service	Testimonials		
Uniqueness			

The better you know the market you intend to serve, the better able you will be to develop appropriate Marketing Mix strategies for designing appealing products, providing an engaging experience in a pleasing environment, adopting appropriate pricing structures, and creating promotions that result in profitable sales.

Recognizing the 5 Steps to Making a Sale

While marketing is not selling as such, sales and marketing greatly affect one another, as marketing creates the conditions under which sales can be made. This relationship is best explained in the

steps shown below. They illustrate how prospective clients must move through a step-by-step process that leads to the ultimate sale and beyond to client loyalty. This process is profoundly affected by the success of your marketing.



Step One—Awareness: Clients will deal with you only if they know you exist—if they become “aware” of you. In order to achieve awareness, then, your marketing must spell out as clearly as possible, and without any confusion, who you are and what you do.

Step Two—Comprehension: Prospective clients also must “comprehend” what you do. If you advertise that you make the finest Giclée prints in town, you probably won’t sell many portraits to those who don’t comprehend what a Giclée print is all about. So your marketing effort must convey a message that is easy to comprehend, such as: “This is a photography studio that does romantic wedding photography, and they are located in the next town over.”

Step Three—Conviction: This is a critical step in “convincing” prospects to use your services. They will experience conviction only if they believe that what you offer might have some relevance for them. Conviction is built in many ways, including word-of-mouth advertising. Clients who receive top-notch products and services from your studio will tell their friends about you. This facilitates conviction better than any advertisement can. So don’t overlook the power of testimonials, whether they are delivered in person or presented as part of your marketing.

Step Four—Trial: Once conviction is established, your next task is to induce prospective clients to “try” your services. Trial is greatly facilitated by an appealing offer or compelling marketing message, coupled with a “risk reducer” (such as a satisfaction guarantee) and a “payment facilitator” (such as a payment plan or acceptance of credit cards).

Step Five—Loyalty: The trial stage allows the photographer to do what he or she does best. When all goes well—when the product, the pricing, the promotion, and the place meet or exceed the expectations of the client—then it is possible for that client to develop loyalty: the ultimate achievement in the client-studio relationship.

Product Branding Versus Call-to-Action Marketing

Small businesses shoulder a very heavy marketing burden. Because independent studios lack the resources of large companies that spend millions polishing their image and promoting their brand, photographers historically have tended to spend most of their promotional time and money on action marketing that is designed to create short-term profits rather than build a long-term brand. Increasingly, however, financially successful photographers are demonstrating the value of both “image marketing” and “action marketing.”

Image Marketing is designed to promote the value of your photography. Often referred to as institutional advertising or product branding, image marketing tells the world that your products and services are the very best and why, specifying what is unique about your business. Although these ads do not use these exact words, the implication is: If money were no object, all consumers would buy from you.

Action Marketing is designed to stimulate business, usually during a specific time frame. Industry experience shows that action marketing is most effective prior to gift-giving occasions, especially Christmas and Hanukkah. Action marketing also can be effective during times of seasonal change (such as spring and fall) or for limited-time events that feature a specific product

and/or involve special offers. Action marketing typically involves campaigns, which will be discussed in Chapter 14.

Smart marketers recognize a link between image marketing and action marketing: Studios that excel at image marketing enjoy better action-marketing results than those that stick to action marketing alone. Why? Image marketing builds brand identity and helps to create a demand in the marketplace; this brand equity carries over to action-marketing activities, typically increasing their profitability.

The Link Between Image Marketing And “Want Photography”

Portrait/wedding photography can be broken into two categories: Need Photography and Want Photography.

Need Photography products refer to those that satisfy the requirements of lifestyle situations such as weddings, graduations, and even school activities and sports. You *need* a wedding photographer in order to document and relive the grand occasion; and you *need* to purchase pictures of your child’s team so that he or she is not the only child left out when the picture-day photos arrive.

Want Photography comprises those types and styles of photography that budget-minded consumers might consider to be luxury products. Even though photographers might argue that all families need to have pictures of their children and of the family itself, these needs can be fulfilled by mass-market studios and low-price school picture packages. For families to be persuaded to pay much more for portraits of their family and children requires more intensive marketing—marketing that presents a compelling message about why they should give you their business. This is the mission of image marketing. While action marketing can be very effective in promoting need photography, industry experience shows that it takes much more image-building promotion to be successful in creating a demand for want-photography products.

Establishing a Marketing Budget

A marketing plan is meaningless without a budget to make its execution possible. Well-established studios expect to spend between five and ten percent of their anticipated gross sales on marketing. Newer studios, however, should budget at least 10 percent of anticipated gross sales, while start-up photography businesses, or those in a re-branding phase, can expect to spend considerably more on their marketing efforts.

Before You Begin to Market . . .

So what type of marketing is best for your photography business? In the photography industry one size definitely does not fit all, and marketing plans, strategies and materials are as individual as the studios they represent. Therefore, marketing decisions rest squarely on the shoulders of the studio owner or manager. The purpose of this Marketing Guide is to help photographers make intelligent decisions about the resources they spend marketing their photography.

The content of this Guide is based on the premise that most successful marketing efforts—whether image marketing or action marketing—are those that help to establish or reinforce a meaningful business or product brand. If consumers are to respond positively to a marketplace brand, an important groundwork must be in place before marketing strategies and products are developed. These fundamental elements are:

- A focused business concept
- An understanding of appropriate target markets
- A clearly defined marketing advantage
- An established market focus
- A strong business identity

These are the first topics that will be explored in the chapters that follow.



chapter two

Creating a Focused Business Concept

two

Creating a Focused Business Concept

How do you assure that your business concept is compelling enough to attract the clients that you desire? Here are some fundamental branding principles to consider:

Your business concept should be instantly understood by consumers, so keep it simple don't try to be all things to all people.

- Your business concept should be instantly understood by consumers, so keep it simple.
- Don't try to be all things to all people. Today's consumers are looking for experts or specialists in specific fields. While most businesses will have to offer more than one product line, consider marketing each independently, so that you don't confuse your marketing message.
- When you market yourself as an expert in a given field, you will be easier to find by consumers who are looking for that expertise. When you are known as an expert,

it is easier to create community buzz, and it's a fact that consumers are willing to pay more for the work of experts!

- Smart marketers know that it's better to do a good job of marketing one single product line than a sloppy job of marketing several. So if you are new in business, consider marketing only one product line at a time. First; get that segment up and running, then move on to the next. If you have an established business that needs to refresh its marketing, consider restructuring one market segment at a time so that you can do a proper job of each. Start with the product line that you enjoy most, providing that it is—or can be—a good profit center for your business.
- Keep in mind that even if you market only one product line, you will still do business in others. When you achieve market recognition through a successful marketing effort that promotes a single area of expertise, consumers will assume that you have expertise in others. So don't underestimate the value of a single successful marketing project.
- One of the big advantages of limiting the number of product lines you offer to the public is that your business will be much more focused, therefore much easier to manage. When you offer too many product lines, the marketing alone can be exhausting.





The two collections of promotional post cards shown on the previous page are excellent examples of how to present a clearly articulated business concept. In marketing both family and senior portraiture, Cedar Creek Photography, located just outside of Kansas City, Kansas, makes it very clear that its primary business is creating “lifestyle portraiture.” The studio’s blog reinforces this with the following statement: Cedar Creek is a lifestyle studio that believes in capturing people as they are: beautiful, unique and true to themselves.” That is precisely the concept that these marketing materials portray, which makes it very likely that their message will connect with consumers looking for this style of photography.

Targeting a Niche Market

If the size of a photographer’s market area is large enough, it is possible to create a specialty business that targets one specific market segment or “niche.” A niche is defined as a market population that has common interests and/or buying habits. Given sufficient population density, a photographer could create a niche business, such as wedding photography or children’s portraiture; or the studio could emphasize a single artistic style—black-and-white photography, for example—which applies to all types of subjects.

The marketing cards shown below, created by Tot Shots Photography, in Simi Valley, California, illustrate how a niche-market business can have such a strong appeal to a specified market. Parents in search of children’s portraiture are very likely to be attracted to these marketing cards because they focus exclusively on children’s photography. For photographers who work within a limited population base, a niche business usually is not practical; although some small-town studios that offer a variety of product lines do emphasize one specific niche area as a means of focusing special attention on their business.



Selecting and Understanding Your Target Market

three

Selecting and Understanding Your Target Market

Different types of photography attract vastly different types of consumers. The interests of a bridal couple looking for a wedding photographer are poles apart from what is appealing to parents who wish to have their new baby photographed. Marketing experts group consumers into “market segments” according to specific personal, behavioral and purchasing characteristics. Market segmentation allows businesses to target ideal consumers by varying their approach to the Marketing Mix (Product, Promotion, Place and Price) to more nearly address the needs and desires of these specific consumer segments.

Marketing to Women

Market research suggests that businesses get a higher return per customer when they invest their marketing dollars in promotions directed specifically to women. Even though women make up 51 percent of the population, financial experts suppose that they represent roughly 80 percent of the country’s purchasing power because they strongly influence decisions that affect household spending.

A 2006 survey conducted by Professional Photographers of America echoed what most savvy portrait/wedding studio owners have always maintained: Women represent at least 80 percent of the market for portrait and wedding photography. Usually they are the initiators of the decision to

purchase photography; more often than not, they also are involved in the final purchase.

Since women represent the largest segment of consumer-driven photography purchasers, it is important to understand that women react to marketing messages differently from their male counterparts. In her 2001 landmark book, *You Don’t Understand*, Dr. Deborah Tannen brought gender differences in communication style to the forefront of public awareness. Two of Dr. Tanner’s key findings are that “Seventy percent of women learned about a product from someone who owns one,” and “Women consumers speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy, rather than a competitive language of status and independence.” Obviously, this understanding must play an important role in how you market to women. Your first task, however, is to identify important characteristics of your ideal consumer—male or female—within the market segment(s) with which you wish to do business.

Defining Market Segments

The practical implication of identifying and understanding specific market segments ultimately is expressed through the marketing strategies a business adopts and the style of marketing materials it uses to execute those strategies. In the marketing materials shown below, created by Jeff and Julia Woods of Washington, Illinois, you can see clearly the stylistic difference between the mailer they use to attract prospective wedding clients and the one they direct to high school seniors.



Targeting an Appropriate Market

No matter where a business is located, it will succeed only if it has access to suitable clients. Prospective clients of an appropriate market population must have the following characteristics:

- Possess a need or want that you can satisfy efficiently
- Be willing to consider your products or services
- Have the financial means to purchase what you sell

When considering a target market, you should ask these key questions about it:

- Is it large enough for you to do a satisfactory volume of business?
- Is it reachable, and how?
- Is the market segment measurable in terms of the sales results achieved?

If the answer is yes to these questions, then it is a reasonable market to consider.

Defining “Ideal Client” Characteristics

Once you have decided what type of clients are likely to benefit from your business concept, learn all you can about the characteristics of so-called “ideal clients” within each market you wish to attract. For example, if you are targeting upscale parents of young children for a family and children’s portraiture business, the mother is likely to be your ideal client, so you’ll want to know the answer to these questions about her life and behavior:

- Where does she live?
- Does she work outside the home?
- What are her favorite personal activities?
- Where does she shop?

- What professionals, such as the obstetrician and pediatrician, does she use?
- What does her husband do?
- Where do her children go to school?
- What are her favorite family activities?
- Does she belong to community organizations?
- Is she active in her church, synagogue or other religious institution?
- How would you describe her personal style?
- What does she value in terms of emotional, physical, social, and material needs and wants?

The more of these characteristics you can identify, the more clues you will have to begin structuring marketing strategies to attract her to your business. The more you know about your ideal client, the easier it will be to put yourself in her position. That way you can recognize what type, of products and services she expects and what marketing strategies are likely to connect with her. The more you can see through her eyes, the easier it is to assure that your business concept is relevant to her life and that your marketing strategies and materials will succeed.

Establishing Your Marketing Advantage

Establishing Your Marketing Advantage

four

Establishing Your Marketing Advantage

Whether your business has operated for many years or is just starting up, the place that it occupies in the market is based on how well you have positioned the business through your marketing activities and the word-of-mouth reputation generated by your clients. Achieving a favorable market position begins with a general understanding of your competition's strengths and weaknesses, where you stand in the market today, and three key elements that will form the basis of your market-positioning efforts:

- Your artistic style
- Your product focus
- Your approach to hospitality branding

Assessing Your Competition

For each product line that you offer, begin by determining how important competition is in that specific market segment. Several key questions to answer are:

- Who are your competitors?
- Do your competitors do a good job of marketing?
- Given the competition, is this a market that you can dominate?
- If you cannot dominate the market, how do you wish to compete?

It is easier to dominate a market when there is little or no competition or if existing competition is not doing a good job of marketing. However, if your market includes one or more good photographers who do a competent job of marketing, then you must decide on the best method of competition to engage in based on the market position you wish to achieve and the time and money you are willing to spend.

Creating a viable brand today is as much about the courtesy you provide and the appreciation you express to clients as it is about providing them with compelling products.

Defining Your Place in the Market

Self-assessment is vital in creating a successful marketing plan; but for most business owners, self-assessment is very difficult. Just as in life, we rarely see ourselves as others do, and we often underestimate our strengths and hold ourselves back because of our self-perceived weaknesses. Nonetheless, it is vital to identify and understand your business strengths and weaknesses. If necessary, invite several clients or friends to help you look at your business objectively, making sure that you do so in a way that prevents them from telling you what they think you want to hear.

Once your strengths and weaknesses are enumerated, make a list of them, then write sentences or bullet points that turn your strengths and weaknesses into selling features. These selling features will become key elements of your

marketing plan, and ultimately they will be used for copywriting. You might expect that strengths would be easier to develop as selling features than weaknesses, but it might not be as hard as you think to create great copy from a weakness turned into a strength. Following are some examples of both:

Strength: Excellent posing and lighting skills.

Selling feature: We make you look great!

Strength: Great reputation.

Selling feature: We are proud that our business has grown through the referral of satisfied clients.

Strength: Ability to make people feel at ease.

Selling feature: You'll love the relaxed, homey environment of our studio. We guarantee that you'll feel at ease in front of our camera.

Weakness: We don't have an easy-to-find retail location.

Selling feature: Our picturesque environment offers countless settings for relaxed portraiture.

Weakness: We are brand new to the market.

Selling feature: We're not your grandma's portrait studio!

Weakness: No one knows us.

Selling feature: Have you heard the buzz about Smithville's hip new portrait studio?

Defining Your Artistic Style

It is easier for consumers to recognize photography when it has an identifiable artistic style. Style is often the reason why buyers are attracted to a given art form, and that includes photography. A style usually does not develop overnight, and sometimes it's not easy for a photographer to describe his or her style so that it can be put into words for marketing purposes. A good place to start the process is to select a collection of your favorite images, or those that clients admire, doing so by product line. Look at those images and begin jotting down words or phrases that describe what you see. If you hit a roadblock, ask clients or friends to help you complete this task. Here's an example of the process based on the following pet portrait images created by Persnickety Pet Portraits, a division of Countryhouse Studios in Annville, Pennsylvania. Words and phrases:

- Painterly
- Heartwarming
- Pleasing as wall portraiture
- Well composed
- Well-regulated, dimensional lighting
- Backgrounds/settings appropriate for the pet

Next, turn these words and phrases into sentence form to describe your artistic style, as is done below in portraying the style of the Persnickety Pet Portrait images shown on the bottom of this page.



We approach pet portraiture in the same artful manner in which photograph people: selecting settings, compositional elements and lighting that are appropriate for the subjects being portrayed in order to achieve dimensional art pieces that serve as heartwarming decorative focal points for the home.

The Purpose of Defining Your Product Focus

As important as style is in attracting consumers, you have nothing to sell to them until you create products for them to purchase. One way to look at the difference between style and product focus is this: Style is your wings. Products are your landing gear! Your style can attract attention, but it takes products to get your style into the hands of clients in the form of something they can identify as useful or desirable. Many brilliantly artistic photographers fail in business because they don't understand this important principle. A good way to assure that your product line has an appropriate product focus is to begin by writing down your key product categories, indicating how those products are used. Following is an example of this exercise for Persnickety Pet Portrait products:

- Individual portraits or collections of portraits that serve as decorative focal points for the home
- Composites that serve as decorative wall accents
- Black-and-white fine-art panels available in a variety of sizes and framing options, including canvas wraps
- "Fun Week" specialty sessions and products for wall display and calendar collections
- Virtual paintings for featured wall decor
- Specialty products and accessories to carry, wear, mail and display

You will find that a similar listing for your major product lines will serve as a helpful reminder when performing numerous marketing tasks ranging

from creating studio displays to preparing content for marketing materials.



The Importance of Defining Your Approach to Hospitality Branding

The term "hospitality branding" has evolved from the recognition of smart marketers that quality products and competent customer service are no longer sufficient to attract and retain clients. When today's savvy consumers purchase custom products, they expect to do so within the context of an interesting, pleasant or exciting experience. Creating a viable brand today is as much about the courtesy you provide and the appreciation you express to clients as it is about providing them with compelling products. To assure that you

are doing your best in this vital service area, list specific ways that you intend to extend hospitality to clients and the ways in which you expect to create a memorable client experience through all aspects of your dealings with them. Following is an example of Persnickety Pet Portraits hospitality branding activities:

- At each session provide for the needs and comfort of the pet by offering water and providing a place to groom and exercise the pet.
- Surprise dog owners with a Persnickety pet bandanna, then create a few extra images with the bandanna to post on the studio's website or blog.
- After the session, present a goodie bag for the pet.
- Make the preview session an event by serving appropriate refreshments.
- When the order is completed, provide the client with the studio's choice of a 4x5 portrait attached to a "Preview" note card to take home and enjoy until the finished portraits are ready.



- When clients come to pick up their finished images, present them with an unexpected gift such as wallet images, a collection of note cards, or a mini-calendar featuring the pet.

Clarifying Your Marketing Focus

Clarifying Your Marketing Focus

five

Clarifying Your Marketing Focus

Once you have done the hard work necessary to craft your business concept, select your target market, and establish your marketing advantage, you are ready to clarify your marketing focus. The most straightforward way to do this is through the creation of three Key Identity Elements for each product line:

- A Mission Statement
- A Sustainable Competitive Advantage
- A Unique Selling Proposition

Because the market segments that a single studio serves can be so different, it is wise to create these statements for each market segment. Doing so is difficult work, but it will pay off in terms of the quality of the marketing that flows from them.

Creating a Mission Statement

The purpose of a Mission Statement is to help the business stay on course. Well-managed organizations look to the company's Mission Statement when approaching strategic decisions by asking: Will this action be consistent with our Mission?

Most Mission Statements take the form of a brief paragraph that directly addresses three elements (in any order):

- The Purpose: The opportunities you address

- The Business: What you do to address these needs
- The Values: Principles or beliefs that guide your business

The best Mission Statements are those that are:

- Easy to understand
- Free of jargon or wordiness
- Appealing and convincing
- Brief enough to be easily repeated by employees of this market segment

Once you have done the hard work necessary to craft your business concept, select your target market, and establish your marketing advantage, you are ready to clarify your marketing focus.

Bear in mind that it is far easier to craft a Mission Statement for each of your major product lines if you have done a thorough job of completing the activities suggested in the first three chapters of this Guide.

Following is a Mission Statement for Persnickety Pet Portraits that includes a parenthetical explanation of each of its components:

Mission Statement

Our mission is to reflect the joy pets bring to the lives of our clients (the purpose) through personalized, decorative art and accessories (the business) that honor the compelling bond between pets and the people who love them (the values).

Many studios choose to place a framed copy of their well-crafted mission statement in the studio as an expression of their thoughtfulness and professionalism.

Establishing a Sustainable Competitive Advantage

The purpose of creating a Sustainable Competitive Advantage is to summarize how the business intends to survive against competition over time. A Sustainable Competitive Advantage is derived from an organization's Core Competencies—those areas of specialized expertise that:

- Provide specific consumer benefits.
- Are difficult for competitors to imitate.
- Are capable of developing new products and services.

Core Competencies are expressed as proficiencies your company can perform better than your competitors. Because a company's Sustainable Competitive Advantage is distilled from Core Competencies, it pinpoints the *reasons* why a business is likely to survive against its competition over time. These reasons should be easy to understand, as they often form the basis of key selling points in promotional copy. Core Competencies typically are expressed as a list of bullet points.

Following is the Sustainable Competitive Advantage statement for Persnickety Pet Portraits and the Core Competencies from which it was derived:

Sustainable Competitive Advantage

- *Our photographers are nationally known for their skill and artistry in creating exceptionally*

pleasing, heartwarming portraits of pets and the people who love them.

- *We understand why pets are so important to the lives of our clients because we are pet lovers too.*
- *We are experienced dog handlers, and we understand cat psychology.*
- *We create custom heirloom-quality portrait art rather than cutesy calendar-style photos.*
- *The studio and grounds are totally pet-friendly.*
- *Our business has grown through the referral of satisfied clients.*
- *Something WONDERFUL is always happening at Persnickety!*

Core Competencies:

- We enjoy a national reputation, having displayed at AKC's Westminster Kennel Club show and having created the 100th anniversary cover for the AKC magazine.
- We are experienced dog handlers.
- We possess classic posing and lighting skills.
- We have the ability to empathize with pet lovers.
- We have an unusually deep knowledge base of dog breeds and cat psychology.
- We are well versed in the history of animals in art and relevant compositional styles.
- Our location and grounds are unusually pet-friendly.
- We have a long-standing reputation for pleasing clients.
- We have a demonstrated ability to run a profitable business.

- We possess a strong desire to create “fun” activities for pet lovers.

Developing a Unique Selling Proposition (USP)

The purpose of a Unique Selling Proposition is to sum up why consumers should purchase from you rather than others. Written in sentence form, it should be brief, succinct, and compelling enough to persuade consumers to give you a try. Much of the content of your USP is likely to be derived from your Mission Statement and Sustainable Competitive Advantage; but this statement must contain strong marketing content. In today’s competitive environment, your business will thrive only if your marketing succeeds in cutting through the clutter and noise that bombards consumers daily, so that you can position your studio as the best choice . . . the only choice. This is where your USP comes in.

Compelling ads put forward a simple proposition to the consumer that says: “Buy this product and you will receive these specific benefits.” Your marketing will be more effective if you develop a clearly articulated USP for each product line you promote—one that sums up the benefits that consumers can get from you. This summation should be set within a context that stresses:

- **Uniqueness:** When your benefits are not easily obtained from other providers in your market, then your USP will position you as the most logical choice.
- **Selling:** Your benefits should be stated in a way that persuades consumers that your products and services are highly desirable.
- **Proposition:** Remember that your USP is a proposal for clients to use your services.

The following steps will help you to create a compelling USP:

Step 1

List every advantage the consumer can receive from your overall business or individual product line.

Step 2

Narrow down this list by applying the following questions to each benefit:

- Will my prospects perceive this benefit as a true advantage?
- Is this benefit strongly differentiated from what my competitors are offering?
- Have I adequately described the benefit in terms of its value?
- Does this benefit solve a problem for the consumer or fill a “performance gap” in the market?
- Will my prospects believe in the validity of this benefit?
- Will my description of this benefit create a desire on the part of my prospects to actually purchase from me?

Step 3

Narrow your list again to the three strongest benefits of owning your products—especially those that from the consumer’s point of view will solve a problem, fill a need, or represent emotional or financial value. Each benefit should be stated in terms compelling enough that it could be used as an advertising headline. Remember to look at these benefits from the consumer’s point of view so they perceive your products as “must-have” items—especially as compared to what is sold by your competitor! If you have trouble determining what consumers value or what makes them buy from you instead of a competitor, turn to your best source of information: your clients! They will provide you with priceless information if you just ask.

Step 4

When possible, create a sense of urgency in your USP and relieve the natural skepticism of consumers by offering proof of satisfaction or offering a satisfaction guarantee as part of your statement.

Step 5

Write your USP as a short paragraph that includes your three strongest benefits and any

other brief, compelling statements that might persuade prospects to give your business a try. Ruthlessly edit out any jargon or generalities. Use unambiguous, crisp nouns and adjectives and expressive verbs to create statements that will hold meaning for the prospective clients you are targeting.

Step 6

Condense your USP into a single compelling sentence. This will be hard to do, but the exercise is likely to help you determine what words and thoughts are most useful in your marketing or in creating a tag line or slogan for your product line or studio identity.

Step 7

Make sure you can deliver on any promises made in your USP!

Step 8

Integrate your USP into all levels of your marketing—from printed materials and Internet text to conversations with clients and promotional campaigns.

Step 9

Review the list of benefits identified in steps 2 and 3, as these might be useful as the basis for future marketing campaigns.

Following is an example of a Unique Selling Proposition for Persnickety Pet Portraits:

Unique Selling Proposition

Through our unmistakable expertise in photography, our comprehensive knowledge of pet behavior, and our proven ability to earn the respect of our clients, it is our pleasure to honor the compelling bond between pets and the people who love them by creating personalized decorative artworks designed to touch the heart and warm the home.

Once you have completed the Key Identity Elements described in this chapter, you should have achieved a strong marketing focus for each major segment of your business. You can see how this exercise paid off for Persnickety Pet Portraits, which used their Unique Selling Proposition as the

introduction of their most important marketing piece: the studio's Portfolio Booklet.





chapter six

Building Strong Business Identities

six

Building Strong Business Identities

If you have completed the work laid out for you in the first five chapters of this Guide, you should have no difficulty in establishing a strong business identity, which is the first step in creating a compelling business brand. Your business name and how you express its identity in the form of a slogan, tag line, logo and marketing design style are critical recognition factors for clients, and they help to establish a foundation upon which to build your business image and subsequent marketing messages.

Studio Business Identity Elements

Studio Name

Once you have a compelling business concept in place, it is vital to select a business name that accurately reflects your concept or, at the very least, does not interfere with it.

Good business names are designed to create awareness on the part of prospective clients in some or all of these important areas:

- What you do
- Where you are located
- Your position in the market

Whether you are deciding on a name for a new business or re-branding an existing one, begin by determining the market segment or segments that the identity will encompass. Make sure the name is broad enough to apply to your entire business.

Following are a few important tips for choosing a name that will serve you well:

- Keep it simple. Long complicated names are hard for consumers to grasp, and they will frustrate your ability to create an eye-catching logo and/or an easy-to-remember Web address.
- Choose a name that clients can understand. Avoid bizarre spellings as well as words that are not easily understood by the masses.
- Choose a name that readily communicates what you do.
- Don't get too cute! The photographic industry is full of names dreamed up by photographers who, in misguided attempts to be creative, have come up with names that succeed only in confusing consumers.

The following names facilitate consumer awareness by telling prospects precisely what the business offers:

- Jones Wedding Photography
- Portraits by Smith & Jones
- Williams Portrait Studio

If you are well known in the community, tying your name to the business can foster immediate awareness of your business. But what if you are new to the community? A better strategy might be to link your identity to the town, or region, or a well-known address. This approach will foster an image of credibility or *belonging* in the community. For example:

- Main Street Photography
- Pleasantville Photography Studio
- Carriage Square Portrait Studio
- Rocky Mountain Family Portraits

What if you wish to reflect the essence of your photography through your firm's identity? Sometimes it's possible to accomplish this through the business name itself, but more often than not, a tag line is required to help consumers readily understand what you do. A name like "Creative Images" really doesn't help your business achieve recognition in today's crowded marketplace. But these examples work well:

- Seniors Unlimited
- Tiny Tots Portraits
- Wedding-Art Photography

Your business name and how you express its identity in the form of a slogan, tag line, logo and marketing design style are critical recognition factors for clients, and they help to establish a foundation upon which to build your business image and subsequent marketing messages.

Studio Tag Lines and Slogans

No matter how carefully a business name is crafted, most can benefit from the addition of a descriptive tag line that facilitates consumer awareness and comprehension by locating, defining or positioning the business. Some examples:

Smith Photography Studio
On the square in historic Centerville

Elegance Photography
Exclusive wedding coverage

Jones Photography Studio
Exceptional portraiture

Jones Portraiture
Classic and Lifestyle Photography

John Smith
Artist In Photography

John Smith
Photographic Artist

Romance Images
... the art of wedding photography

Lifetime Portraiture
... your life as art

Also considered to be an identity element, a slogan is a short, distinctive, often catchy phrase used to define a business or organization. A slogan should be memorable so that through repetition it becomes synonymous with its company's products or goals. Here are some examples:

An Heirloom Portrait . . . anything else is a compromise.

A fine portrait isn't expensive . . . It's priceless.
Your family is too precious for ordinary portraits.

To construct a slogan or tag line that is appropriate for your business, review your Mission Statement, Sustainable Competitive Advantage and/or Unique Selling Proposition. Chances are, you will find some pithy words from which to weave a phrase that will attract your ideal client. If not, continue the word-play process by writing down words or phrases that provide some additional insight.

Do this by answering these questions of yourself:

- What do I want people to **see** when they view my work?

- What do I want people to **feel** when they view my work?
- How do I want people to **feel** about the way they are treated during their time at my business?
- What do I want people to **say** about my photography to others?
- What do I want people to **say** about the experience of working with my studio?

If you are still stuck, then call on a few enthusiastic clients and ask their help in explaining what is so special about your business. They'll have plenty to say that will help you find just the right way to express your identity.

As you develop identity elements for your business—your business name, tag line and/or slogan—it is vital that they accomplish the following:

- Lend support to your business concept
- Be consistent with each other
- Be appropriate for your photographic style

Using Multiple Business Identities

Photographers who offer products to diverse market segments sometimes elect to use more than one logo, tag line, or slogan to create a variety of identity styles that appeal to the specific market populations they are targeting.

In the examples below you can see how Walden's Photography, in Lexington, Kentucky, have created sub-brands for different aspects of their business, doing so in a way that clearly differentiates their business divisions through the use of graphic design styles that are appropriate for the market audiences they are seeking to attract.

The home page of the studio's website, WaldensPhotography.com presents "The Places of Walden's," allowing visitors to choose whether to go directly to Walden's, the studio's long-standing brand as well as Beau Visage, their up-market division that caters specifically to women; to Senior 17, the studio's high school senior portrait division; or Studio B, which features baby photography and photojournalistic-style portraits, which is managed by an associate photographer.



The Importance of Continuity In Brand Building

Profit-producing marketing requires repetition and continuity. Your studio name, tag lines and/or slogans, when combined with your logo and marketing design style, will bring focus to your advertising and promotional materials. When they appear in all of your marketing efforts, these vital elements also create the kind of continuity that is the first step toward building a brand: Establishing an identity that consumers readily recognize.

Likewise, certain “recurring elements,” when used as part of your advertising copy, can help to establish important continuity to your marketing message. Because they contain vital information for consumers to know about your business, consider including all, or at least most, of the items listed below in your advertising. While their inclusion cuts down on the amount of space available for your marketing copy, their presence forces you to get straight to the point of your advertising message. The recurring elements include:



photographer: Visit our website at www.SmithPortraits.com

- Business hours, abbreviating to save space: *Office Hours: M-F 10-5 / Sat. 10-Noon. Other hours by appointment.*
- Consider including a satisfaction guarantee: *Your satisfaction with our work is fully guaranteed. Do so only if the type of photography you do can be recreated or if a refund can be granted.*
- Mention credit card acceptance: *We accept Visa (logo) and MasterCard (logo).*
- Also consider mentioning display locations: *Visit our displays at Center City Mall, Suburban Commons, and Born-To-Shop Clothing.*
- Professional association logo: If you are a Certified Professional Photographer, use the “Certified” logo, as this kind of credential is important to consumers.

- Studio Name/Logo
- Business tag line or slogan
- Address
- Area Code and phone number
- Website address: The ideal Web address includes the name of the studio or

Crafting Your Marketing Design Style

seven

Crafting Your Marketing Design Style

Once you are satisfied that you have built a strong business identity that lends support to your business concept, you are ready to give shape to that identity by crafting your marketing design style, which includes the creation of your logo as well as other key identity and marketing-design elements.

Designing Your Studio Identity

Studio Logo

A well-designed business logo is the first step in creating a marketing style that is capable of attracting the attention of your ideal client. Unless you possess a strong graphic design background, turn this job over to a qualified design professional—one who understands the intricacies of creating an effective logo that can be modified for a variety of uses.

In order to work with a designer successfully, you must communicate your needs and desires as clearly as possible. Following are some topics to consider and then discuss with your designer:

- Your logo should reflect your business concept, and its design should appeal to the type of clientele you are seeking to impress.
- Your goal should be to create a logo that will last over time, so be very careful about using the latest trendy font, as it doesn't take long for most trends to be considered old-fashioned.

A well-designed business logo is the first step in creating a marketing style that is capable of attracting the attention of your ideal client. Unless you possess a strong graphic design background, turn this job over to a qualified design professional—one who understands the intricacies of creating an effective logo that can be modified for a variety of uses.

- Identify any unique features about your business or its name that might be translated into a graphic presentation of your logo, then explain these to the designer.
- Because photography is what you sell, ask your designer to resist the temptation to over-design your logo with so many extraneous elements that it calls attention to itself and away from your photography.
- Make sure that all logo elements can be read or understood when reduced in size.
- The most flexible logo is one that can fit into both horizontal and vertical spaces without having to be reduced beyond legibility.

- A good test of a logo's readability is whether or not it could be used as signage. If passersby can read your sign, then your logo will be easy to read when placed in marketing materials.
- Make sure your logo looks good when it is rendered in black and white before you move on to adding color. There will be times when your logo will appear in a publication or ad that uses only one color of ink.

RJ WEDDINGS

Ruddells
art in photography

BR
BRUCE ROBINSON
P H O T O G R A P H Y

dp JIVIDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY

Presenting Additional Studio Information

The logo design process should take into account more than just your business name, since it typically will appear with some or all of the following informational elements: business address, area code and phone number, and website address.

Persnickety
PET PORTRAITS

Persnickety is a warm fuzzy division
of Monteith's Countryhouse Studios

4505 Hill Church Road • Annville, PA 17003

(717) 867-2135

PersnicketyPetPortraits.com

Decide if you intend for a slogan or tag line to be part of your logo or merely presented with it. This will allow your designer to suggest an appropriate font for the slogan or tag line.

Persnickety
PET PORTRAITS

***Heartwarming Portraits
of Pets and Their People***

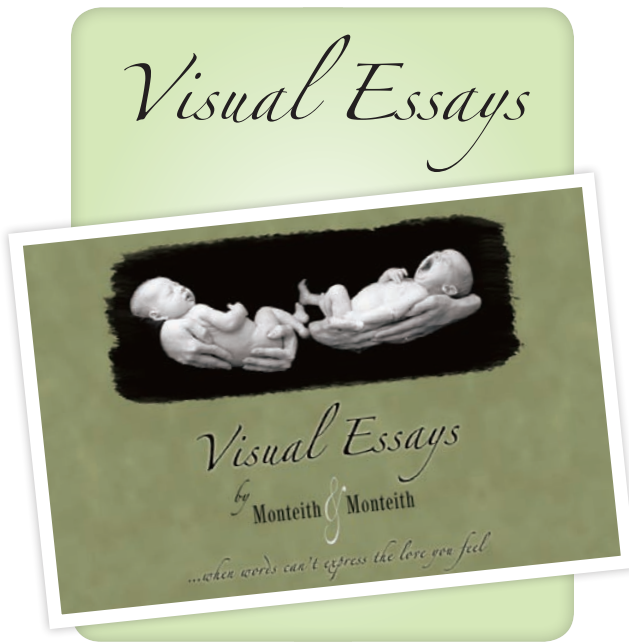
Using Wordmarks

A wordmark is a subset of a logo and refers to the use of type to identify a business brand or sub-brand, a business campaign, or a business product or service.

wordmark™

As with a logo, make sure that the type style and color scheme chosen for the wordmark is appropriate for the style of photography and its target market audience. Don't overuse wordmarks, or you'll risk diluting the strength of your brand by confusing clients about your identity. In the example below, a wordmark is used to introduce

and brand the studio's new black-and-white line of photography.



plus black and white, as you can see from the examples below, created by Lori Nordstrom Studio in Waterloo, Iowa

If your studio offers several product lines directed toward decidedly different market segments, consider using color and design variations that are appropriate for the specific markets. For example, the presentation folder on the left below is used for clients of Tim and Beverly Walden's more classically styled portraiture, while the folder on the right is designed for its senior portrait clients.



Marketing Design Style

Once you are satisfied with your black-and-white logo design, the next step is to decide how to express it in color. It's important for your designer to see the style of your photography before he or she suggests colors that are appropriate for expressing your studio identity. Start with two colors—one darker and one lighter—to achieve sufficient visual contrast. You can create a great deal of design variety through the use of two colors



Working With a Designer

Communication is the key to working effectively with a graphic designer. When creating a logo or other design elements, most graphics professionals will provide several options for you to evaluate. It's fairly common not to like everything about the initial designs you receive. Should this be the case, remember that the only thing that counts is that you like the finished product! Zeroing in on a design is a process, and that process is most efficient when you can explain to the designer, as clearly as possible, what you liked about the designs, and what you didn't like. This will help the designer to come up with a logo and design style that is perfect for your business.

Don't Get Bored With Your Design Style

As your business grows and changes, it's possible to outgrow your logo, tag lines, slogan, and sometimes even your business name. Before you start to tinker with any of these elements, however, determine exactly what's going wrong with your identity. Is the logo out-of-date? Has your business concept changed? Is there a lack of design unity among different aspects of your business identity? When you find these types of problems, then it probably is time to re-brand your business. Just make sure that you don't fall into the trap of getting bored with a perfectly good logo and design style. Because photographers are creative people, they sometimes get bored easily and want to move on to something new. So it's important not to let boredom cancel out the brand equity and market recognition that a still-effective logo and design style have achieved.

Essential Marketing Materials and Strategies

eight

Essential Marketing Materials and Strategies

One of the most difficult tasks for any business owner to undertake is determining exactly what marketing materials and products are needed to effectively promote the business. What do I buy first? What can I afford? What will give me the best return on my investment? How do I assure that my marketing will outshine that of my competitors? These are just a few of the questions that photographers should answer before they purchase marketing materials or products.

A logical way to decide how to spend precious marketing dollars sensibly is to review your marketing needs according to marketing strategies. Begin by surveying the materials and strategies that typically are used by portrait/wedding photographers. These include:

- Studio Identity Materials
- Product Line Identity Materials
- Opportunity Marketing Materials
- Client-Acquisition Strategies and Marketing Products
- Client Education Strategies and Materials
- Image-Enhancing Packaging Products
- Relationship Marketing Strategies and Materials

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-
-
- Internet Marketing Strategies and Products Marketing Campaigns
 - Brand-Building Marketing Strategies and Materials

Each of these topics will be discussed, starting with this chapter, and in the chapters that follow.

Studio Identity Marketing Materials

Studio identity marketing is the most basic form of promotion, as it is where you begin to build your business image with your new logo and design style. Most studios will need to create some or all of these basic communications products:

- Studio Business Cards
- Studio Letterheads/Envelopes
- Studio Note Cards or Postcards

Studio Business Cards

At least for photography studios, the era of formal, boring business cards is over. For knowledgeable studio marketers, it's all about how design can make a business card so interesting that those who receive it don't want to let go of it. A well-designed business card is likely to earn a place of honor on an office bulletin board or the home refrigerator. So consider an unusually shaped card or even a fold-over design that will allow you to showcase a few examples of your photography. With a little creativity, your business card can turn into an effective image-marketing piece.



Studio Stationery: Letterhead, Envelopes and Note Cards

While it is true that email has overtaken traditional letters and cards, businesses still have occasion to post traditional mail, so it's important to have professional-looking letterhead and envelopes that elevate the image of your business. Furthermore, hand-written notes are always appreciated by

studio clients. In the examples below, you'll see how creative stationery design allows a long, slim fold-over note card to share the same envelope as the coordinating letterhead.



Designed as a self-mailer, the note card below not only echoes the design of the studio's business card and other marketing materials, it also features the studio's slogan and tagline.



Product Line Identity

Marketing Materials

When a business places special emphasis on a specific product line, such as weddings or seniors, it is often appropriate to create product line identity materials that are designed to appeal to the specific market. Some cases even require the product line to be represented by an identity, logo and design style that is completely different from the overall studio identity. This is the case with the

senior division of Tot Shots Photography. By using the separate TS Seniors Photography identity and design, which is an appealing brand for high school seniors, the studio identity retains its brand equity with parents of young children.



Whether you are creating studio or product line stationery, make sure that the design is in keeping with other printed pieces, so that all of your materials have a unified look that sets a graphic theme for your marketing materials. Note how nicely this letterhead, note card and postcard, which are designed for communicating with high school seniors, complements the packaging used for finished senior portraits.



The following examples illustrate how the identities of two distinctly different product lines can be expressed through beautifully coordinated communications pieces, first for the studio's baby portrait division, then for its high school senior portraiture department.



Opportunity Marketing Materials

At any stage of the business lifecycle, studio owners or managers will encounter unexpected opportunities to promote the business, so it is important to be prepared with essential marketing materials to make the most of these opportunities. Here are some suggestions:

Teeny-Tiny Brochures

During countless everyday activities away from the studio, you are bound to be asked what kind of business you are in. You could easily hand over a business card, but it would be much more effective to familiarize the person who inquires with exactly what you do by handing them a Teeny-Tiny Brochure. This three- or four-panel marketing device, which folds down to the size of a business card, has enough room to present thumbnail-size images of your work along with some essential text. Because of their tiny size, it's possible to carry a quantity of them in a pocket or a purse so that you are always prepared to capitalize on an on-the-spot marketing opportunity.



Be My Guest Cards

When out and about in public, photographers often come in contact with subjects they would like to photograph for any number of uses including studio samples, competition prints, or simply to practice new techniques.



Offering a "Be My Guest" card is an excellent way to break the ice and establish your credibility and motivation in offering a free session to someone whom you have just met. Be My Guest Cards also can be handed out more liberally—perhaps by a marketing partner—to stimulate business during slower times of the year.

Inquiry Fulfillment Materials

Every business needs a strategy for handling telephone inquiries or other requests for information about studio offerings. At the very least a photographer needs a marketing postcard or mini-brochure to fulfill information requests. However, if your financial planning allows an adequate budget for information fulfillment purposes, an impressive and eye-catching studio information packet, such as that shown below, is ideal. Designed as a self-mailer when folded and sealed with a sticker, this piece is extremely flexible, as its tri-fold jacket design allows the studio to insert information cards that are specific to the prospect's interests. And if desired, a DVD in a slip case can be inserted into the mailer.



Client-Acquisition Marketing Strategies and Products

nine

Client-Acquisition Marketing Strategies and Products

Because the most immediate need for nearly any business is attracting new or returning clients, a fundamental marketing task is creating compelling client-acquisition strategies and materials. There are virtually no limits to the variety of products that can be used for the purpose of client acquisition or for the strategies that put them into motion. What they all have in common, however, is their purpose: to expand your marketing reach, get your business noticed by qualified consumers, and get those prospects in the door.

Client-acquisition strategies and products typically are directed toward marketing the specific product lines for which you wish to increase session numbers or attract clients within a desired demographic. This requires as much creativity on your part as you use in producing client-pleasing images.

Key Client-Acquisition Strategies

Among the most often-used marketing strategies for gaining and retaining clients are:

- Direct marketing, which can include mailing or handouts of your materials
- Public displays of your images
- Public relations activities such as media placement or special events

- Partnerships with local retailers, professionals or charities

You will learn more about these strategies in chapters 14 and 15.

Direct mail continues to be the number-one direct marketing strategy used by professional photographers. But even if you plan to do no bulk mailings at all, you will use printed materials to facilitate many other aspects of your marketing plan. In addition to information fulfillment purposes, you will need a marketing card or brochure to leave behind at display locations and a client information folder to introduce your business to potential marketing partners or media contacts. That same client information folder can serve double duty as a client consultation handout.

Client-Acquisition Marketing Products

All of the promotional products listed below can be used to attract new or existing clients:

- **Marketing Cards:** For direct marketing or as display handouts.
- **Marketing Brochures and Mini-Brochures:** For direct marketing or as handouts at partnership marketing locations. You will learn more about partnership marketing in Chapter 15.
- **Marketing Mailers/Handouts:** For direct marketing.
- **Portfolio Booklets/Product Catalogs:** For direct marketing and handouts.
- **Gift Certificates:** For sales to clients for their gifting purposes.
- **Gift Cards and Gift Card Promotional Mailers:** For direct marketing and client rewards.

Whatever materials you decide to use, remember that your goal is to create marketing pieces that are so compelling they will make your prospective

client sit up and take notice. Your headline or title must be attention-getting, but keep your text to a minimum, letting your photographs tell the story. If writing and/or design present a problem for you, then hire professionals to do this important work. It will be worth the money you spend if your marketing materials get noticed!

Marketing Cards

The low cost of marketing post cards make them an excellent choice for newer photographers whose budgets might be limited or for those who wish to create a series of cards to represent each of their major product lines. Their versatility also can be appealing to more experienced studios because they are available in so many different sizes and paper options.



Marketing Brochures or Mini-Brochures

Marketing brochures can be created in a variety of sizes and used for multiple purposes ranging

from direct mail to takeaways at display locations. Mini-brochures make excellent mailers or handouts because they are small enough to be tucked into a purse or jacket pocket.



Portfolio Booklets / Product Catalogs

Although they are more costly than marketing cards or brochures, few marketing materials provide as much punch as multi-page booklets that can be used by photographers as portfolio brochures or product catalogs. In a graphic medium, there simply is no substitute for showing examples of your work, and that's exactly what booklets let you do: They are the next best thing to providing your prospective client with a private showing of your photography. Furthermore, booklets are more likely to make a positive impression and less likely to be tossed aside.

In the following example, you can see just how impressively photography can be presented in

marketing booklets designed to attract your ideal client.



Marketing Mailers/Handouts

Today's direct marketing mailers and handouts are a far cry from the boring fliers and postcards that dominated advertising in previous years. In a competitive marketplace, the most effective direct marketing materials contain crisp copy and eye-catching graphics that drive the message home.



Marketing Materials for Upscale Consumers

As consumers of luxury products have become more informed about advertising, smart marketers of boutique photography have responded by creating direct marketing mailers and handouts with special construction features such as unusual shapes, die cuts, and embellishments. One such marketer is Springfield, Illinois, studio owner Sarah Petty, whose previous ad agency experience and strong branding training at Coca-Cola, gave her plenty of insight into marketing to prospective clients of her upscale photography business. Petty, who is a recurrent winner of the coveted AN-NE Award for excellence in marketing, presented by Professional Photographers of America, describes the three unusual marketing products shown that follow:

1. *This fold-out mailer, which is sent to parents with a new baby in the house, literally built my business. It's so different from the typical postcard that new parents receive. Because of the interactive fold-out pages and inserts, they spend more time with it, and the types of clients who respond are not looking for cheap photography.*



2. *Our 24-month CD-case calendar is one of our favorite promotional items. We feature 24 clients on this two-year calendar, printing around 1500 copies so that we*

can give it out at events and at local businesses. We also hand a stack to the family of each child featured. It's a product that really creates a lot of buzz.



3. *This amazing senior image piece is designed to attract the kids who want more creative images and products and who value the additional time we spend with them. These are sophisticated young people who have been marketed to for their entire lives by some of the most creative marketers in the world—Abecrombie, Gap, Coke, etc. The theme of the interactive piece is "Shine On." Its tone is nostalgic, and it includes a "shine seeker" and a 48-page image catalog housed in a die-cut carrier. We send it to a highly targeted list of high school juniors who are likely to respond to a piece that sends a strong message that we are willing to cater to them.*



Because the most immediate need for nearly any business is attracting new or returning clients, a fundamental marketing task is creating compelling client-acquisition strategies and materials. There are virtually no limits to the variety of products that can be used for the purpose of client acquisition or for the strategies that put them into motion.

According to Sarah, the use of such high-concept pieces represents a different deployment of marketing resources with a specific marketing objective: "When we create these dynamic, custom direct marketing pieces, our goal is to strengthen beneficial client relationships or build new ones. So we mail to our database, but we also prospect for new clients within a highly targeted market. We can tie in with a retail store and mail to their database; or we might mail to a country club list or simply rent a mailing list to a tightly targeted geographic area. These custom pieces are a larger investment per piece, but we use fewer of them, and they attract clients who are less price sensitive. This results in higher sales that come through

cultivating clients at the top of our rate structure and allowing the more price-sensitive clients to drop away. It's a strategy that allows us to add strength to our brand."

Gift Certificates

Gift certificates are an excellent source of year-round income when properly promoted to existing and prospective clients. Offering a Gift Certificate Sale in time for the year-end holidays is an especially effective way to promote them. Instead of advertising that the sale is 20 percent off, spell out the value clients will receive in a postcard mailing or an email blast. For example:

— Gift Certificate Sale —

\$100 Gift Certificate only \$80

\$200 Gift Certificate only \$160

\$300 Gift Certificate only \$240

\$400 Gift Certificate only \$320

\$500 Gift Certificate only \$400

During the rest of the year, feature Gift Certificates on your website or blog, and mention them often in printed newsletters, email blasts or in social networking media in which you participate.

If your studio photographs newborns, advertise Gift Certificates as the perfect shower gift for expectant mothers.

As you can see from the examples at right, above, the design of a Gift Certificate can greatly increase the perceived value of a gift of your photography, so it's well worth spending some marketing dollars to create a Gift Certificate that is consistent with your business image.

Gift Card Promotions

Retailers of all kinds report that their sales of Gift Cards are increasing every year. Gift Cards have, in fact, become a cultural phenomenon because gift-givers love the fact that the cards are easy to give, and those who receive them are thrilled that they can purchase anything they choose with a Gift Card in their hand. That's exactly why Gift Cards are so great for marketing to prospective clients! When you send

a Gift Card—one that has the same look and feel as a credit card—consumers feel as though they are holding on to real money, and they are far less likely to toss out a "real money" promotion than they are a coupon from a newspaper or one received in the mail.



Send individual Gift Cards as part of a sales letter targeting prospective clients or create a promotional mailer that focuses directly on the Gift Card and what you can buy with it. The latter approach is illustrated in the examples below, in which the Gift Card is housed in a carrier that can be designed with your studio's marketing identity elements and/or examples of your photography.





- Send a holiday greeting card to your valued clients and enclose a Gift Card they can spend in the new year.
- Send high school senior prospects a Gift Card to spend on their senior portraits.
- Include a Gift Card with an announcement of a studio promotion to your current client list.
- Design a Bridal Registry program for wedding clients, offering Gift Cards in \$50 and \$100 denominations.



There simply are no limits to the promotional opportunities that Gift Cards make possible. Here are a few suggestions:

- Send a \$100 Gift Card to new parents to spend on the “first chapter” of their child’s portrait history.
- Send birthday or anniversary greetings and enclose a Gift Card.



chapter ten

Client Education Strategies and Materials

ten

Client Education Strategies and Materials

Acquiring clients is only the first step of marketing and selling professional photography. Selling photography requires very different strategies from selling most retail products. Unlike retail items whose features might vary only slightly from one manufacturer to the other, the work of professional photographers varies in both style and quality and also in the areas of price, process, and service. As a result, a vital part of your marketing mission, for both portrait and wedding photography, is establishing face-to-face opportunities to educate clients about your work as well as how you do business. When thoughtfully conducted, these meetings benefit your profitability by adding value to your product, and you benefit personally by turning what could be routine assignments into enjoyable experiences for both you and your clients.

Conducting Portrait Consultations

A pre-portrait consultation session (also referred to as a design session or planning session) provides a vital opportunity for prospects to see firsthand the artistry of your photography and experience the quality of your service. These meetings provide an extremely important context in which clients can gain a proper understanding of the value of your work, and you benefit considerably by gaining insight into the wants and needs of each client. When you skip this vital marketing step, you do so at your peril: Successful salespeople know that the best sales, including those in which the client expresses the highest degree of satisfaction, come about

when he or she is well prepared for the portrait session. Among the clearly defined benefits that the consultation provides for photographers are:

- Considerable photography time and workflow savings because the photographer understands the client's needs, which reduces overshooting.
- The information imparted at a planning session greatly increases the client's perception of value received for the money she is spending.
- A properly prepared client results in better session images.
- Better images lead to better sales.
- A well-informed client who is pleased with her photographs tells others, which often results in referrals.
- Every aspect of the studio-client relationship works together to raise profits.

The Purpose of a Client Information Folder

It is helpful to clients to present a Client Information Folder at the conclusion of the wedding photography consultation or portrait planning session. Any photography business will benefit from having a presentation-quality folder of client information materials, which also can be used to fulfill requests for information from prospective clients or to use as a media information package. From the client's perspective, a well-thought-out information presentation elevates a studio's image and adds value to its products.

An attractive folder containing useful information and marketing materials also presents one more opportunity to impress clients with your professionalism. The folder allows you to provide clients with more in-depth information than could be communicated in a promotional brochure. It can hold imprinted stationery-sheet inserts that reinforce topics covered at the client consultation,

as well as helpful hints and studio policies. Possible insert-sheet subjects include:

- An artist's statement or information about what makes your photography so special
- Portrait concept information
- Clothing tips
- Information on preparing for portraits of an infant or child
- Children's portrait-club information
- Testimonials from satisfied clients
- Information about the preview presentation
- Price list
- Payment policies

The folder presented at the consultation session also can hold information on other studio services; promotional materials such as brochures and newsletters; and preproduced client education materials. The same folder can be used at the eventual sales session to present your purchasing suggestions, which once again underscores the professionalism of your business.



Designing Your Client Information Folder

When deciding on a design for your business identity products, develop a design theme that can

be carried through or harmonize with your Client Information Folder. This is precisely what Olive Branch, Mississippi, photographer Allison Rodgers did when she designed her client information presentation pieces.



In the examples below note how the stationery inserts and accompanying marketing pieces either blend with or match the graphic design of the Client Information Folder. This kind of presentation helps to elevate the image of the business and adds value to the photographer's work.



Client Educational Materials

As you make decisions about what to include in your Client Information Folder, remember that the purpose of presenting it to clients that you are about to photograph is to make them well-informed and enthusiastic—not only about the session you will be photographing, but also about the possibilities open to them for future sessions. That's what Beverly and Tim Walden accomplish when they present their *Your Life in Portraits*™ membership booklet, which educates clients on important times that portraits should be made throughout the life of a family. Starting at the birth of the baby, it lays out a comprehensive plan for scheduling portraits, along with suggestions of what products would be appropriate for each session. The program is divided into five stages, and under each stage are recommended ages for

portraits. Products that support the entire program, which also includes a Membership Card and Bag Tags that serve as a reminder of the child's next sessions appointment, is available from Marathon; it is part of the BellaGrafica line of products designed especially for boutique studios.



Appointment Information Reminders

An important part of the client education process is informing them about important appointments that are part of your process. A session appointment reminder card, such as the one shown here, will help to ensure that the client schedules the correct appointment date and time.



The next important appointment reminder is for the portrait purchase session, often referred to as the "View-and-Choose Appointment." In the two examples you see below, each studio has provided space to write in the appointment date and time, along with an explanation of what will take place and who should attend this important sales appointment.



Price Lists

Photographers sometimes include a price list in the Client Information Folder; they can take many forms, as you can see from the examples below. Some photographers prefer a very simple pricing presentation, while others like to include client information and product illustrations.

Before you begin to design your price list, consider the two important steps that you must take before you do so: Ensure that the prices you are presenting are profitable for your business model, then structure your price list to support a well-developed sales system.



Before you begin to design your price list, consider the two important steps that you must take before you do so: Ensure that the prices you are presenting are profitable for your business operation, then determine that the structure of your price list is supported by a well-developed sales system.



chapter eleven

Image-Enhancing Packaging Products

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Image-Enhancing Packaging Products

Elegant packaging is now the hallmark of many successful studios whose owners understand that artful packaging plays an important role in enhancing their business image as well as the perceived value of their products.

In the world of high-end retail, elegant packaging has become a veritable art form. Sophisticated retailers have recognized the attraction of beautiful packaging to their female clients. Elegant packaging is now the hallmark of many successful studios whose owners understand that artful packaging plays an important role in enhancing their business image as well as the perceived value of their products. Jed and Vicki Taufer, from Morton, Illinois, developed the collection of packaging materials shown below. Through

their clever use of box and folder designs, belly bands and stickers, the Taufers have created client-pleasing packaging that is in keeping with the eclectic boutique image of their V Gallery.



Creating Personalized Packaging

Springfield, Illinois, photographer Sarah Petty is another advocate of creative packaging. She has found a way to personalize packaging for each client, doing so by printing a session portrait and attaching it to the belly band around the client's portrait delivery box. Another big hit with clients is the way in which she personalizes the studio's shopping bag: She slips a session portrait into a pocket on the front of the bag so that moms will carry it around and show it off to their friends! When purchasing packaging materials for your business, keep in mind that these costs should not be charged to your marketing budget. According to widely accepted accounting principles, packaging is categorized as a Cost of Sales expense.



In it they include a Certificate of Authenticity, guaranteeing that the print is an original Limited Edition, which was created, custom printed, and signed by the artist. The holder also includes promotional information about the studio and instructions on how to care for the portrait. Much of the information is handwritten to re-emphasize the custom nature of the work the client is receiving. As a final finishing touch to their wall portraits, the Waldens shrink wrap each one and add a belly band closed by a studio sticker.



Other Finishing Touches

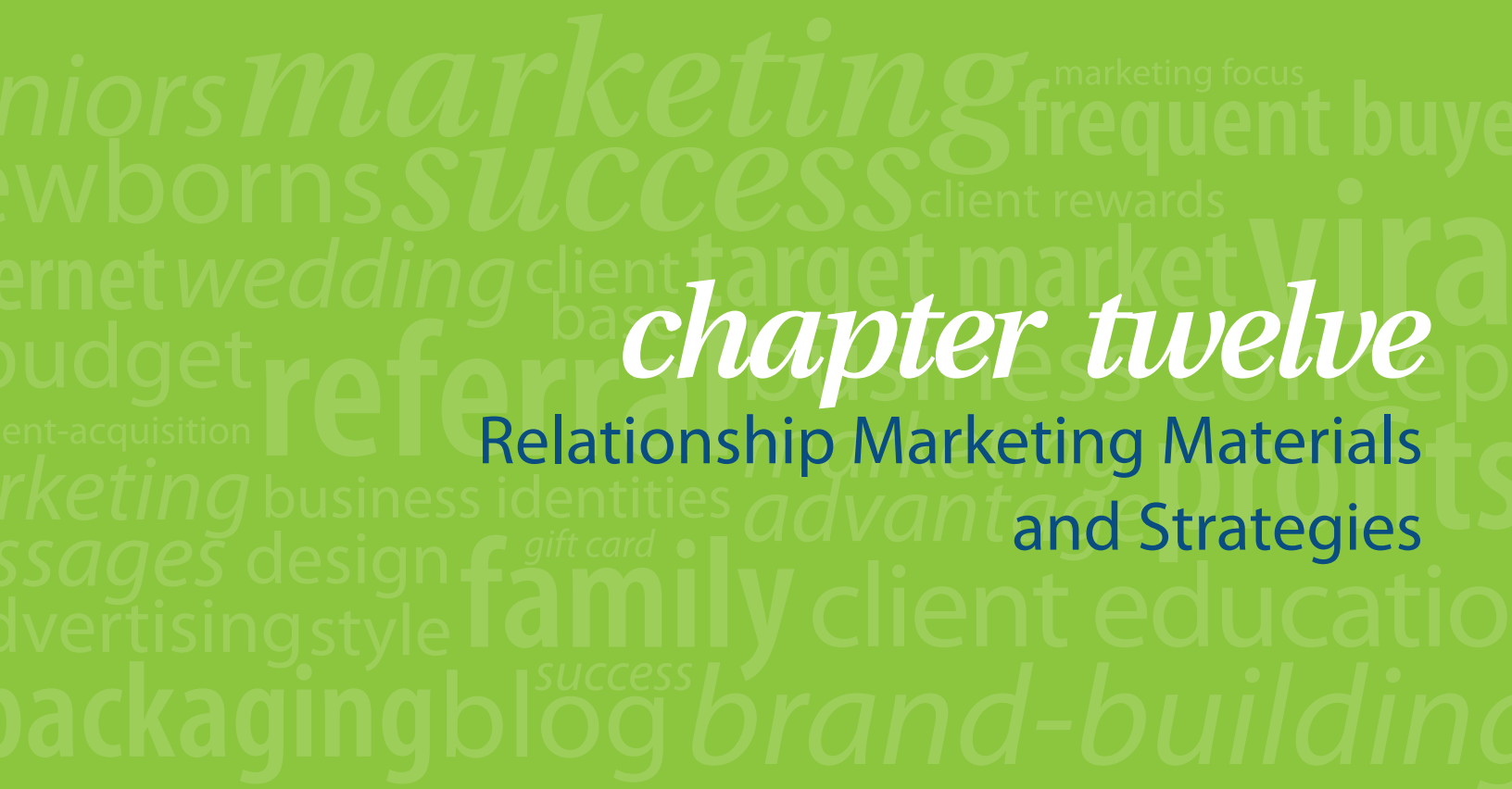
Something as simple as a well-designed sticker, affixed to the back of a finished portrait and to a plain black shopping bag, adds a touch of class and professionalism to studio packaging.



Marathon Press offers an ever-expanding line of packaging materials through its Bellagrafica line of products designed especially for boutique studio photographers. These include a complete collection of off-the-shelf items ranging from portrait boxes and folders to wallet boxes, belly bands and imprintable stickers. Several shopping bag designs can be customized for each client by inserting an image from the session or adding a personal thank-you note.

Lexington, Kentucky, photographers Tim and Beverly Walden consider the portrait pickup appointment to be another important opportunity to impress clients with their professionalism and add value to their finished portraits. A device that they use to accomplish this is a document holder that is affixed to the back of each wall portrait.





chapter twelve

Relationship Marketing Materials and Strategies

twelve

Relationship Marketing Materials and Strategies

Well-established studio owners know that the difference between mediocre financial performance and long-term business success lies in the ability to generate repeat customers. They understand the importance of “relationship marketing,” a view of clients that appreciates them not only for the purchase they make today, but more importantly, for the purchases they will make

Elegant packaging is now the hallmark of many successful studios whose owners understand that artful packaging plays an important role in enhancing their business image as well as the perceived value of their products.

in the future. They understand how essential it is to approach marketing activities in the knowledge that the best client is the one you already have, because it costs much less to market back to an existing client than it does to acquire a new one. What’s more, satisfied clients—ones who return to the studio again and again—are likely to refer their friends, and the next best thing to a repeat client is one who is referred. Because the foundation of relationship marketing rests on providing clients with an outstanding product, delivered in the context of an enjoyable experience, what it ultimately achieves for a business is long-term marketplace advantage based on client loyalty.

To build relationships in today’s crowded marketplace, it is vital to connect with clients on an emotional level. This will happen only if both owners and employees make a commitment to provide each client their undivided attention as well as implement ways and means of expressing sincere appreciation for each client’s business. This is done through the development of relationship marketing strategies such as:

- Practicing hospitality branding
- Providing client rewards
- Establishing a frequent buyers program
- Establishing a referral program
- Marketing back to your client base

Hospitality Branding

The most beneficial transactions for your business are those in which the time that a client spends with you results in their emotional satisfaction. The pace of life in an electronically connected world has become so hectic that few consumers have time to do things that are emotionally satisfying to them. So whenever clients visit your studio, it’s just good business to help them enjoy every aspect of the experience. Typically it’s the little things you do to show courtesy and appreciation that clients remember, because

these are the things that touch them on an emotional level.

Finding ways to provide small courtesies is typical of the marketing emphasis referred to as “hospitality branding,” mentioned in Chapter 4 as a key factor in a studio’s ability to establish its marketing advantage. Marketing experts point out that referrals from satisfied clients are a primary reason why women consumers choose one studio over another, and emotional satisfaction plays a big part in their willingness to make those referrals.

To help determine what types of courtesies or hospitality you wish to extend to your clients, look at each opportunity you have to interact with them, then decide on something you can do that is likely to be appreciated by the client and feasible for the studio to provide over time. Extending hospitality to clients effectively requires structured procedures that will make these courtesies a normal part of your studio routine. Following are some examples of small courtesies that clients will appreciate:

- After booking the session, send directions to your studio along with a handwritten note stating that you look forward to meeting with the client. Then tuck in an appointment card and studio magnet so that the card can be easily posted.



- At the consultation appointment offer appropriate refreshments.

- At the portrait session have a “welcome tray” in place in the client’s dressing room. The tray can contain a handwritten welcome note, a bottle of water, and a fresh flower in a bud vase.



- At the sales session again offer appropriate refreshments. When clients are ready to leave, take a moment to sincerely express how much you appreciate the confidence they have placed in your business. If you want to assure that your clients will spread the word about how pleased they are with their portraits, present them with a “sneak peek” image in a note card similar to the one shown below. The printed card has room inside to affix your selection of a pose from the session. Even if it is not an image that the client ultimately selected, they’ll enjoy showing it off to friends or co-workers, and your business will benefit from the exposure.



Client Rewards

Another aspect of hospitality branding is creating a well-thought-out strategy for client rewards. Rewards can range from sales incentives, in which clients receive additional products when they achieve sales target levels, to a completely unexpected gift that is presented at the pickup appointment.

Smart retailers, especially those who deal with custom products, recognize the value of surprising and delighting clients with something totally unexpected. This type of marketing strategy has several important business benefits: No matter how happy clients might be with their portraits, it's always possible for some to feel unease over a large purchase. An unexpected gift of a specialty product, such as note cards, greeting cards, a miniature album, or an inexpensive piece of photo jewelry, is likely to ward off any possible feelings of buyer's remorse. Such a gesture also benefits the studio because the goodwill it achieves frequently translates into positive word-of-mouth comments to friends and family, and it strengthens the emotional bond the client feels toward the studio.

If you have formed partnerships with other retailers, create a "goodie bag" with their product samples or special offers, along with studio handouts, such as magnets and bookmarks, to present as an additional parting gift.

Because their business caters to families that often include small children, Kentucky Photographers Tim and Beverly Walden go out of their way to make each child feel special when they visit the studio. Connecting with youngsters not only makes the session go well, it also helps to establish an emotional bond with parents who appreciate doing business with those who make their children feel at home. Kids who visit the Walden's studio are definitely in for a treat, as each receives a special "Serendipity" kit: a colorful bag that includes a specially branded water bottle and lip balm, a note card, stickers, crayons, and a Serendipity coloring and game book that depicts experiences at a photography studio.



Offering a Frequent Buyer Program

A popular business strategy aimed at gaining repeat clients is a “frequent buyer” program. Typically these plans provide additional products or services that can be earned through repeat participation with the business, such as frequent-flyer miles offered by airlines. This type of strategy is a good fit for photographers, who can easily offer membership advantages to repeat clients by providing them with a laminated program card. Membership benefits can be as simple as waived session fees, shown in the VIP membership program illustrated below. The laminated membership card is glue-dotted to the inside of a fold-over note card to create an attractive presentation. When a valued client has a membership card in his or her wallet, it serves as a constant reminder of the studio.



In the next example, a Premiere membership card is affixed to a beautifully designed membership brochure that spells out the many benefits available to repeat clients.



Establishing a Referral Program

Referrals help your studio to prosper. Once you have established a positive relationship with a client who is enthusiastic about your work, it is both natural and appropriate to ask for referrals. Many clients will freely give you names to contact if you just ask, but you may prefer to devise a more formal program for rewarding referrals. In the examples that follow, you will see four different approaches to referral programs. In the first example, clients receive six fold-over cards with a wallet-size image affixed to the front and a message of appreciation inside. Clients enjoy handing them out to their friends and family, so they serve as a low-key means of creating buzz-generated referrals.



This referral program also uses a fold-over card, with the wallet image taped inside. Clients can hand them to their friends, who may then present the card for a free session. When the studio receives a referral card, a thank-you note containing a \$50 gift card is sent to the original client.



In this referral program, clients receive an attractive folder containing circular cards that explain how they can earn \$50 in portrait credits for each client they refer.



The device below serves two purposes: The folder includes information on how to care for portraits, and one pocket contains a Certificate of Authenticity and a valuation for insurance purposes. The second pocket holds complimentary session gift certificates that clients can pass on to their friends.



Marketing Back to Your Client Base

For a photography business to become profitable and to stay that way over time, it must strike a delicate balance between attracting new clients, encouraging repeat visits from existing clients, and gaining referrals from the repeaters. No business can afford to neglect any one of these strategies. Your clients, of course, are the easiest group to reach because they are already in your database. Good management of this database is vital for successful marketing to them, so be sure to capture important information about clients and their family members so that it can be mined for future marketing campaigns and contacts.

Building a database is not complicated; the challenge is to know how to use the information to increase sales. So build your client list by storing only the information you are likely to use. Following are some suggestions about the kind of information that can be extremely valuable in executing future marketing activities.

- Name
- Address
- Telephone
- Records of orders place by product line and amount of each purchase
- Names of family members
- Birth dates of children
- Lifestyle information such as hobbies and pets
- Date of parents' anniversary

One of the best ways to stay in contact with your valued clients is through a studio newsletter. The experience of photographers who create attractively designed newsletters shows that content which keeps readers up to date on new products and special studio activities can be very successful in promoting return visits.



A Final Word About Relationship Marketing . . .

It takes time, planning and commitment to execute successful relationship marketing strategies, but the impact they have on a studio business is well worth the effort. Ultimately they form the foundation upon which long-term profitability is built, doing so in an environment that makes dealing with clients as much a pleasure as it is a business.

chapter thirteen

Internet Marketing

Internet Marketing

thirteen

Internet Marketing

The Internet has literally revolutionized the way photographers market themselves. With the arrival of websites in the latter half of the 1990s, photographers finally possessed a tool with which they could do the next best thing to providing prospective clients with a personal portfolio presentation. Since that time, the growth of Internet-based tools has provided photographers with a host of opportunities to expand their marketing reach to consumers through the phenomenon of “viral marketing.” This marketing phenomenon allows studios to connect with qualified prospective clients that they might miss through other more traditional marketing efforts. The potential of this marketing reach is so strong that today most vibrant studio marketing plans include a comprehensive Internet marketing strategy.

Viral Marketing and How It Works

Viral marketing is the modern-day equivalent of word-of-mouth marketing, which historically has served as a backbone of effective studio promotion. Marketing experts have long recognized that the personal nature of portrait/wedding photography has made word-of-mouth referrals an invaluable means of growing a studio business. This is true largely because women, who drive so much of the commerce that is generated in the studio photography industry, are greatly influenced by word-of-mouth advertising.

The ability of the Internet to spread the word about products and services so fast and so far has greatly expanded the potential reach of an independent studio. Like word-of-mouth advertising, however, viral marketing does have a double-edged sword

aspect to it: Now that consumers can comment about your business so quickly and so freely, it's more important than ever that the information being generated is positive.

Planning an Internet Marketing Strategy

Creating an effective Internet marketing strategy requires a plan that includes all of the following elements:

- Studio and product line websites
- A studio and/or product line blog
- Social network media
- Email newsletters and email blasts

To maximize the potential of these various elements, you must understand their function and then assure that each element is working with and supporting the others toward the end of encouraging consumers to pass along positive marketing messages about your business. These messages take the form of text comments, photographs, and video or audio clips. As you develop plans to facilitate viral marketing, keep this in mind: Just as you must identify your ideal clients before you launch a marketing campaign, you must identify individuals who have what is referred to as high “Social Networking Potential” (SNP) as part of your Internet marketing strategy. Individuals with high SNP are those who are likely to pass along your marketing message. These are the types of clients or prospects who are happy to spread the word about your business, products or special offers to their social or business circles, provided that you are prepared to connect with them.

Studio and Product Line Websites

As compared to other marketing media, websites have been available to photographers as a marketing tool for only a short time; however, it's not easy to conceive of the world

of photography before the arrival of websites. Their presence has allowed photographers to communicate directly with consumers in a manner that lets them control, shape, and change their marketing messages and the images they create contemporaneous to the changes in their business. For those breaking into the photography business, websites have provided a rare means for establishing market presence and credibility in a matter of months rather than years. For consumers, websites provide a means of informing themselves about the product offerings and business philosophies of a range of studios by making only a small investment of their time and energy.

What Can You Expect From a Website?

In addition to serving as a key identity-marketing and image-building tool, websites can help studios to do the following:

- Introduce your business to the public
- Establish your business legitimacy
- Provide prospective clients with a sense of the “personality” of your business
- Feature special products
- Display galleries of each studio product line
- Show backgrounds and/or outdoor settings
- Advertise seasonal offerings
- Provide up-to-the-minute information on promotions
- Offer important client information such as how to prepare for the session
- Educate clients on the decorative uses of photography in their homes and offices
- Facilitate e-commerce and online viewing opportunities



Defining Your Website Purpose

Sometimes a website is the first and/or only opportunity a studio has to make an impression on a prospective client, therefore the image, professionalism and personality that it manifests is vitally important. For a website or websites to fulfill their ultimate marketing potential for your studio, you should formulate answers to the following questions:

- What is the purpose of this website?
- To what market group is the content of the website targeted?
- What are the major points of information that this website must communicate?
- How do you intend to drive traffic to the website?
- Will you need to update image galleries frequently?
- Will you need to update text frequently?
- If the content of this website is directed to more than one market target audience, would it be better to create separate websites directed to each?

As the buying habits of photography consumers have moved toward specialists and away from generalists, many studios with multiple product lines, such as those shown below, have responded by creating specific websites for their major market segments such as weddings, portraits and seniors.



What Type of Website is Right for Your Business?

For an established studio with well-defined marketing needs, a custom-built website allows the utmost artistic and technical control. Key to the success of a custom site is to start with a well-thought-out plan that clearly communicates your expectations for the purpose, design and functionality of the entire site, as well as a clear understanding of its costs and production time.



Website packages are an excellent option for creating an eye-catching presence on the Internet. Package sites range from low-cost templates to which you add your photographs and copy, to more complex packages that are completed by an Internet design service, such as the Marathon Designer Website shown below. The advantage of this type of package is that you can achieve an impressive, fully functioning Flash or HTML site at a moderate cost, within a very short time frame.



Tips for Creating an Effective Website

- **Grab the reader's attention!** Web surfers are looking for instant gratification, so give it to them! Create a homepage or splash page that loads quickly and pulls you in. The image(s), logo and design elements on this page will determine whether or not the visitor stays to view the rest of your site.
- **Don't talk too much.** Obviously you must provide information on your site. However, photography is what site visitors are preparing to purchase, so let them see your images in a design context that shows off your photography to its best advantage.
- **Use client testimonials.** When enthusiastic clients talk, people listen!
- **Make the design style of your site consistent with the style of your photography.** Classical photography does not mix well with psychedelic graphics, and high school senior photography begs to be presented in a modern design context. So consider the style of your photography as well as your studio's marketing design style before choosing a website design.
- **Keep your design consistent.** Maintain the same design theme throughout your site. It's fine to vary the shape and placement of content elements from page to page, but readers need the comfort of consistency to assure them that they are still on your site and haven't fallen back into the Internet-at-large.
- **Don't confuse cluttered, disorganized design with cutting-edge graphics.** As important as design elements are, don't let them overpower what visitors have come to see: your photography.
- **Optimize your graphics.** When heavy graphics take too long to load, visitors will give up and move on.

- **Use an easy-to-understand navigational system.** Make sure visitors can find their way around your site easily and don't get stuck in a corner where they can't move forward. Every page should have a Home link so that you don't risk losing a prospect.
- **Choose the proper gallery format.** If you plan to swap out your gallery images frequently, make sure you select a gallery format that makes it easy to do.
- **Pay attention to your window width.** Vertical scrolling is fine, but visitors should not have to scroll horizontally in order to read or view your content.
- **Use readable fonts.** Stick to Web-safe fonts, and choose a text font that is large enough to be easily read but not so large that it clutters your page. Avoid huge headlines, as they tend to jar readers. A few point sizes larger than your text is ideal, and consider adding color to your headlines to help differentiate them from the text. When you must use more than a few paragraphs of text, break up the copy with subheads.
- **Proofread your copy!** Nothing tells the world how unprofessional you are more profoundly than bad grammar and sloppy spelling. If copywriting is not your forte, hire a professional to do this work. At the very least, find a literate friend to review your copy before your website is published.
- **Choose your domain name carefully.** In a crowded Internet, you can't always get the ideal domain name, but stay away from names that are difficult for visitors to input.
- **Promote your website address.** Include your address on all marketing materials and advertising. Don't assume that Google searches will deliver all prospects to your website.
- **Visit your website once a month.** Why? To make sure that your content is up to date.

It's not cool to be advertising last spring's bunny sessions in November.

Creating a Studio Blog

Photography studio blogs have become one of the fastest-growing segments in the entire blogosphere, which itself is growing at a breathtaking rate. The appeal of studio blogs is easy to understand, as their structure allows them to serve multiple marketing purposes for photographers.

Because they are so easy to update, a studio blog is the perfect complement to websites; information and images that require updating only infrequently can be assigned to websites, whereas the blog can keep readers informed about the latest studio news. More importantly, blogs are the perfect showcase for the studio's latest sessions, and they provide a compelling reason for interested clients and prospects to return to the studio website on a regular basis.

Blogs have caught on so quickly with consumers that many expect to find a blog on every studio website. This is good news for photographers, as blogs are a natural agent of viral marketing. With the click of a mouse, a studio client can link your content—including text, images, or video—to his or her friends, placing your business on their retail radar. By adding subject matter and image tags to a blog's content, a photographer's blog has the potential of being read by an Internet surfer on the opposite side of the globe. The marketing objective of a studio is, of course, to spread the word about the business to appropriate markets, and that is one of the great benefits of blogs to smart managers who do the planning necessary to maximize their Internet marketing potential.

The subject matter contained in some of the most successful studio blogs is as varied as the studio owners who produce them. Some take the form of personal online diaries, focusing on the interests, activities and thoughts of the photographer; others are written and illustrated as more of an ongoing studio newsletter; many are devoted primarily

to displaying client images; but most present a combination of all of these elements.



To Blog or Not to Blog?

The biggest challenge for any blogger is to find time to create postings. Fortunately blogging doesn't require great writing skill, but it helps if you are comfortable in putting a few simple sentences together. If writing doesn't come easily to you or to someone on your staff, make your blog long on photographs and short on text. Fortunately the learning curve for blogging software is not steep, so this should not be an obstacle.

Before you dive headlong into blogging, ask yourself this: Will the blog take too much time away from vital marketing, sales, or workflow functions? Also consider that a successful blog typically increases the amount of email the writer receives. Further, you should be aware that anything you write should be sufficiently professional so as not to invite contentiousness on the part of readers.

A critical challenge to any new blog writer is not to overreach or overcomplicate initial blog postings. Start slowly, don't blog everyday, and keep your first posts short and/or filled with photographs. Better yet, spend several months "blogging to yourself." Create regular blog posts, but don't publish them until you are convinced that you can handle the process without jeopardizing other aspects of your business.

If you decide to start a blog, you are likely to discover that its greatest advantage reminds you of the benefits of word-of-mouth referrals: It breaks down barriers between the prospect and the studio. A person who is referred already knows about your business strengths because he or she has heard about you from someone with whom you have done business. In other words, your client has helped the prospect get to know you. This is precisely the strength that a blog brings to your marketing effort: A vibrant blog gives readers a sense of your personality and the personality of the business. By the time a reader of your blog books a session, he or she thinks of you as an old friend.

Most studio bloggers invite clients to post comments as a means of creating buzz about images being displayed and to encourage satisfied clients to write about their experiences. When comments are enabled, it's important to monitor them and quickly remove anything that might be objectionable, including stealth posts by opportunistic advertisers.

Social Network Media Marketing

While it took a few years for adults to catch up with social networks, such as MySpace and Facebook, which were popularized by teenagers, when adults—and eventually businesses—caught on, a major Internet media shift began to occur. When Facebook opened its doors to anyone with an email address in the first quarter of 2008, the shift became a stampede in which Facebook sped by its MySpace rival. By mid 2008, Facebook had 123.9 million unique visitors and 50.6 billion page views worldwide, according to the research firm ComScore. Today, tens of millions of impressions are being delivered through social media sites each month, and Facebook alone has 500 million active users. Twitter now has over 106 million registered users, who tweet an average of 55 million tweets a day, and new users are signing up at a rate of 300,000 per day.

The implication of this shift to social media is that it allows consumers to assume some control over where they access their desired content and, to a certain degree, they can customize how they connect with content and with whom they choose to communicate.

What blogs and social networks have in common is they are about connecting with other people. When this connection is used to spread the word about a product or service, it can be as powerful as advertising, particularly when money is tight. It's important for prospective clients to hear about a product or service in an ad that catches their attention, but when they have budget worries, the message that might ultimately push them through the studio door is the persuasion of a friend who is a raving fan of the business.

Integrating Social Network Media

Studios that wish to maximize Internet marketing are wise to integrate social networks into their Internet strategy. This is exactly what Jeff Rodgers, of Allison Rodgers Photography in Olive Branch, Mississippi, has done. Like his wife, Allison, Jeff is a graphic designer, but he is the one who thrives on technology. By keeping up with the marketing opportunities made possible through the Internet, Jeff's strategies are one of the reasons behind the studio's rapid growth. He has, in fact, created a seamless strategy that includes the studio's website, blog and external social networks.

The website's design reflects the strong, vibrant colors that are a hallmark of Allison's photography.

Because the blog is so important to the studio's marketing plan, it shares equal billing with the website on the studio's home page. Following are a few tips from Jeff on how to build readership and trigger repeat visits:

- The more often you post, the more repeat visitors you attract.
- Add a "search" feature so that readers can find specific posts in your archives.
- By far the best way to get feedback from readers is through posting really good photographs.
- When you have a blog, you don't have to change your website photos as often because visitors will come to the blog to

see your newest work. Don't disappoint them with small photos. Pictures on your blog can be BIG.



- When you post a session, send a link to the client, and suggest that they let their family and friends know about it. And encourage them to respond with comments.
- The dynamics of a blog are about getting to know you and your business. Don't be afraid to show your personality. Allison is out front as the photographer, but clients have gotten to know me through the blog.
- Offer a special on your blog—something that only the first 10 people who respond can get. Change it often, and people will want to come back and see what the new special is.
- Encourage readers to contribute by starting a topic, such as the "Christmas Traditions!" piece (on the following page). Readers will learn something about you or your studio, and if the topic is something close to their hearts, they just might contribute.
- Asking questions—about almost anything—will increase participation. I once asked if anyone knew where I could get a specific American Girl doll, and it stirred up a lot of interest from moms who read the blog—and I found the doll!



- Be sure to add tags to all pictures, so search engines can recognize them.

With the opening of Facebook to adult audiences, Jeff and Allison quickly signed up for individual Facebook accounts then announced on the blog that they had created an Allison Rodgers Facebook Group (see left center). Then they set up separate accounts on Twitter, the free micro-blogging service that allows its users to send and read brief updates, or “tweets” from other members, who through designators on their profile pages have signed up to read them. The sender can restrict delivery to those in his or her circle of friends.

Because Twitter followers can receive updates via numerous channels, including Facebook, Jeff linked their two Twitter accounts and their Facebook pages to the studio blog, where he has established two Twitter blocks in the top left

margin of the blog, cleverly labeling them HE SAID and SHE SAID. Thus anyone who visits the blog or Facebook will instantly know what’s going on in each of their business or personal lives, and they’ll learn they can track the activities of Allison and Jeff on mobile devices or online via Twitter. These touches add one extra layer of personality to their online presence.

Jeff finds Facebook to be especially useful in marketing to high school seniors, so he provides a few session images for seniors to post on their pages, making sure that the studio credit line appears. To keep track of how much traffic these networks and the studio blog are generating, Jeff says the most important statistic he looks at is unique visits, not hits, as sometimes the same person will return several times in a single day to view the same item.

Even though he is clearly an enthusiastic advocate of blogs and social network media, Jeff is quick to point out that there is no magic bullet for growing a business. It takes time and hard work, and in the end, he says, "Nothing will take the place of making good photographs and being nice to clients."

e-Newsletter Marketing and Your Internet Marketing Strategy

Marketing experts consider email to be the most important advancement in communications since the telephone, which today it rivals as a means of person-to-person communication. Not surprisingly, e-newsletters have become one of the photography industry's primary means of marketing communication because:

- They are inexpensive for a business to produce.
- Consumers react strongly to email newsletters.
- They easily create bonds with a target audience and help to drive them to the studio's website and/or blog.
- Their flexibility allows them to be used for a variety of purposes.

Studies show that the key success factors for e-newsletters include:

- Fresh content that appeals to the target market, making it clear that the time readers spend with the newsletter adds value to their lives.
- Content that is easy to read and to take action upon if action is required.
- A well-thought-out publishing timetable that doesn't overload recipients.

While email newsletters are not a substitute for other marketing strategies or means of communication, such as print media and face-to-face meetings, they can be extremely helpful in

driving an effective online marketing strategy and the viral marketing it can create. Using them in combination with other marketing tools is essential to their success.

What to Expect From an e-Newsletter

Like any marketing medium, to be successful eNewsletters require goals to be set and plans to be made. Following are some outcomes that eNewsletters can accomplish:

- Drive clients and prospects to the studio website and/or blog.
- Enhance the studio's business image.
- Create additional sessions when session counts are down.
- Introduce new products to clients and prospects.
- Serve as one element of a specific marketing campaign such as holiday portraits, senior portraits, children's portraits, etc.
- Announce special studio events such as an open house or new-product launch party.
- Communicate the availability of additional products and services to brides and grooms who have booked your wedding service.
- Use as a means of educating existing clients prior to their portrait sessions.
- Create buzz with existing clients and prospects by creating interactive opportunities such as contests.
- Test market new products or test the effectiveness of advertising ideas you are considering for direct mail.

Effective e-newsletter marketing requires that you answer some important questions as you plan your email marketing strategies:

- Whom do I want to receive my e-newsletter, and how will I get their email addresses?
- What product lines, events or activities will I promote through the e-newsletter?
- How many e-newsletter issues must I produce to accomplish the goals I set for each email marketing campaign?
- What content should I address, making sure it is both timely and relevant to my target audience?
- Are the time and resources I have available to me adequate to accomplish copy production, layout completion, list management and interaction with readers who respond to my email marketing? If not, can I outsource any of these functions?
- How do I integrate my e-newsletters with other marketing tools to achieve a cohesive campaign?

Choosing an e-Newsletter Identity

The studio's business name and logo can be appropriate for an e-newsletter masthead, as they will serve to reinforce the studio's identity. However, some eNewsletters benefit from embracing an identity that appeals specifically to the target market, such as "Just for Seniors," or "Your Wedding Update." Whatever identity you choose, create a masthead design that ties in with your specific marketing design style.



Giving Your Newsletter a "Personality"

An appealing personality is a hard thing to define, but you know when a person has it, when a business has it, and you want your email marketing to have a personality as well, because this is what attracts readers. Part of this intangible involves having an appealing design, interesting graphics, and sprightly headlines and illustrations that draw you in and grab your attention. The tone and text of your newsletter should be appropriate for the audience you wish to impress. When you combine these elements well, the result will be a personable newsletter that helps to convince prospects that you are a professional who deserves their business.

Capturing Email Addresses

If you are not doing so already, begin collecting email addresses from your clients and prospects, always asking permission to include them on your list. Most will grant your request if you simply promise not to share their information with third parties. Even if you start with only a handful of email addresses, your list will grow rapidly if you involve your clients and make creative use of viral marketing to spread the word about your newsletter. Consider using any or all of these strategies to do so:

- **Start with a newsletter subscription window.** Place this sign-up device on your website and/or blog to allow clients and prospects to quickly and easily subscribe to your electronic newsletter. Create a link to it so that readers can forward it to their friends and encourage them to sign up.
- **Ask for signups with every client contact you make!** This will take discipline for you and your staff, but it is important to ask for an email address at every new or returning client portrait session or whenever you contact a client in your database.
- **Create a sample e-newsletter for each market segment or marketing campaign for which you intend to send e-newsletters.** Have a "welcome issue"

- ready so that you can email it to clients as soon as you capture their email addresses (through personal contact or signups) and for use if a consumer wants to know more about your newsletter before he or she grants permission to send future issues.
- **Place calls to existing clients in your database.** Resolve to contact five existing clients by phone each day. Ask them how they and their family are doing, then tell them about your newsletter and ask for their email address. You are likely to find that some of the clients you call will have portrait needs, so you may book some sessions as well. Consider rewarding the clients you reach by sending a \$50-\$100 gift card, which will act as a strong incentive for them to visit your studio again.
 - **Send a post card to existing clients.** If you cannot afford the time to call clients personally, send a postcard letting them know what your newsletter is all about and where they can subscribe on your website or blog. Provide a special offer to those who sign up, such as a gift card, free session or portrait greeting cards. Do not expect as good a response rate from this mailing as you will get from personal telephone calls, but it can be effective in gaining some email addresses.
 - **Ask for email addresses at wedding receptions.** Wedding photographers can easily capture email addresses by leaving a tent card at each place setting, telling guests that you will notify them by email when they can view photographs from the wedding if they fill out the card.
 - **Offer a free session on your website.** Tell website visitors about your eNewsletter, and offer a free session to those who respond to you with their email addresses.
 - **Offer a fun incentive in a printed studio newsletter or other marketing piece.** Offer an incentive, such as a drawing for a \$100 restaurant gift certificate for anyone who sends an email address or updates an existing address.
 - **Offer a prize for seniors.** On your senior website, promote an iPod drawing, which visitors enter by completing your email signup screen.
 - **Establish advisory boards for your major product lines.** Creating buzz about your business is one of the most important things you can do to boost your marketing profile and help expand your e-newsletter readership. When you have a parent, a senior, or a bride who just LOVES your work, ask them to serve in an advisory capacity to your studio. Use these advisors as a sounding board when you are planning new products or marketing campaigns. Take them to lunch from time to time or ask them in for tea or coffee. Reward those who are really helpful to you with portraits or a restaurant gift certificate. Ask them to spread the word through their Internet buddies when you are launching something new. This will help to build your mailing list.
 - **Use blog comments to attract email addresses.** When you post a session preview image on your blog, email the link to your client and tell her that you will leave the image on the blog for an extended time if her friends or family leave comments about the image. Make sure your comments device requires submission of at least the first name and email address of the person leaving the comment.

Understanding eList Management

Your e-newsletter software should be easy to navigate and feature intuitive design tools. Equally important is its list management capability, because it is your responsibility to assure that your mailing lists comply with legal requirements and ethical considerations. Among the most important list-management features are these:

- **Make it easy to unsubscribe to your newsletter.** As important as it is to have a good sign-up device, your clients and prospects will be impressed with your integrity when they know you are willing to help them opt out of future mailings: They will be more likely to give your newsletter a read, knowing they can opt out at any time.
- **Help you understand why you are receiving bounces.** Bounce management lets you know when your newsletters are not being delivered and why. Good list management software should tell you why a bounce occurred and allow you to take action to either delete the email account or to reintegrate it into the list.
- **Provide you with reader identity.** Professional e-newsletter software allows you to know exactly who opened your eNewsletter, whether they clicked through it, and what links they clicked on. This will help you to craft future newsletter content, and you can identify and save groups of clients who respond to specific topics in case you wish to design a newsletter specifically for them.

Marathon's Email Marketing Service, designed especially for photographers, makes all aspects of design, editing and list management easy for photographers. For information log onto marathonpress.com.

Your Internet Marketing Strategy: Making Everything Come Together

In the website, blog, and email newsletter examples from Phil Hyman Studio of Greenville, South Carolina, shown at right, you can see how planning the details of a thoughtful Internet strategy can pay off in terms of brand recognition and repetition of marketing message.

Now that youngsters who were born into the Internet age are old enough to be adult consumers, and given the widespread growth of computer literacy among most of their elders, a

well-planned and managed Internet marketing strategy that exploits viral marketing is essential for achieving success in the modern-day business of photography. This imperative stems from an unavoidable fact of life in a computer-driven universe: There are certain groups of clients whom you will not connect with through any other medium than Internet marketing.



chapter fourteen

Creating Marketing Campaigns

fourteen

Creating Marketing Campaigns

The hallmark of successful marketing is continuity. A one-time promotion or a single ad placement is not a fair test of whether a marketing strategy is working: Sporadic and reactive attempts at marketing typically are a waste of time and money. Marketing efforts must be frequent and consistent if you are to maintain a solid relationship with your existing clients and let new prospects learn about your business.

Marketing experts agree that the most effective way to achieve market penetration, when you wish to promote a specific outcome, is through a campaign. A campaign typically involves multiple marketing resources directed toward achieving a specific marketing and/or financial objective.

The Difference Between Advertising and Promotion

The terms “advertising” and “promotion” often are used interchangeably, but there is a difference: Advertising delivers your message to target groups to inform, influence, and motivate them to buy; it attracts new clients, helps to retain existing clients, and encourages them to increase their activity with you. The ultimate purpose of advertising is to make sales. Advertising is, in effect, salesmanship in print, via electronics or through conversation. Promotion is best thought of in terms of campaigns—the combination of several activities such as the creation of a special offer, advertising, and public displays of your work—all of which combine to encourage and motivate prospective clients to buy. Advertising messages involve long-term strategies

that create a positive brand attitude, while promotion typically focuses on immediate sales.

As you plan your promotional campaigns, remember these three cardinal rules of advertising:

- Advertising takes planning.
- Advertising takes time and patience.
- Advertising takes repetition.

Types of Promotional Campaigns

Most promotional campaigns offer access to a specific product, at a special price, during a limited time period. Such campaigns often are referred to as “action marketing,” because their goal is to drive business according to a schedule. In professional photography, however, image-marketing campaigns also are employed to help businesses achieve their desired place in the market and strengthen their brand over time.

The following types of campaigns have a track record of effectiveness for portrait/wedding studios:

- Image-marketing campaigns
- Product line campaigns
- Seasonal campaigns
- Business-building campaigns
- Charitable marketing campaigns

Image-Marketing Campaigns

Nothing helps to establish a brand better than an image-awareness campaign that focuses strictly on the value of the product being offered. While it takes longer to bear fruit, this type of campaign does pay off over time, and is an excellent choice for spreading the word about your “want photography” products and services such as portraits of families, children, adults, and even pets. This does not mean that a brand-conscious



studio should stay away from offering promotional incentives when they are called for, just that value-driven marketing should be a consideration.

The series of 6"x9" post cards, shown above, are printed in color on both sides; they do an outstanding job of communicating the value of photography provided by Jacob Portraiture of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. The continuity of design is a strong brand-building device, and the clarity of each card's message easily holds the reader's attention. Without taking away from the strong value message, a call-to-action line invites readers to contact the studio to learn about a current special. The prominent placement of the website address also encourages readers to learn more about the studio than is possible on a single card. As you can see in the website illustration above, a visit to the website adds strength to the studio's brand by echoing the same design style used for the cards.

Product Line Campaigns

Product line campaigns are designed to produce sales from market segments that are easily recognized because of their specific life cycle or special interests, such as high school seniors, bridal couples, parents with new babies, and pet owners. Because their demographics are so easy for mailing list brokers to capture, these markets make excellent targets for direct marketing.

High School Seniors

A good example of a product line campaign that uses multiple marketing resources and strategies to attract high school seniors is illustrated in the following examples from Pro Studio, located in McDonough, Georgia. In the early spring, owner/photographer Ronnie Owings recruits current juniors to serve as "Senior Models." These

students will represent the studio during the upcoming senior season in return for specified benefits provided by the studio. As the summer approaches, seniors throughout the area receive promotional mailings along with an image catalog that includes special offers for seniors who reserve their session appointments early in the summer. The campaign also is supported by the studio's dedicated senior website.



Newborns

Parents with a new baby in the household are one of the most sought-after market segments for direct marketing because of their potential for long-term business relationships. As a result, newborn marketing materials and strategies must be especially compelling if they are to succeed. Marketing efforts that have proved to be effective in attracting the attention of new parents are as different as the studios that use them. Following are two different campaign approaches with especially good track records:

Sandy Puc' of Sandy Puc' Portrait Design in Littleton, Colorado, earned her reputation as a

specialist in photographing new babies by creating a multiple-session program that documents the baby's first year. She communicates the program's benefits to new parents through compelling direct mail materials and handouts, newsletter items, and Internet marketing, along with special events throughout the year that appeal to parents. After the first year, the baby "graduates" to opportunities for additional parent-pleasing portraits.



Vicki and Jed Taufer's V Gallery in Morton, Illinois, surprises and delights their new-parent clients with a baby gift presented in the miniature hatbox shown below, which also contains an eye-catching 10-sided round brochure that explains their Bebe

Collection options. In addition to marketing their baby portraiture via the Internet, the studio uses large quantities of a less expensive two-sided card as handouts at local children's boutiques and for the community hospital's maternity floor.



Pet Portraiture

Pet portraiture is a product line that responds well to promotions, which is something that Jed and Vicki Taufer learned after hosting a V Gallery charity event to benefit their local animal shelter. Due to the success of their first promotion, which was largely driven by Internet marketing, they decided to create a promotional piece and price list just for pet portraiture. They also spread the word by handing out their innovative die-cut bone-shaped gift certificates to dog bakeries, boutiques, and vet offices as well as to other locations that agree to put their pet portraiture on display.



Wedding Photography

Consistent promotion is especially important for wedding photographers, and image marketing is vital for those who wish to distinguish themselves in this crowded specialty, which attracts more than its share of unqualified amateurs.

Melbourne-based Yervant Zanazanian has earned his reputation as one of the top international wedding photographers through hard work, prodigious talent, and an understanding of the importance of comprehensive image marketing. Yervant's business targets fashion-savvy brides who appreciate individuality and novelty and a distinctive edge in their lifestyle choices. Working in tandem with wife Anie as business developer, his promotional materials are visually choreographed to reflect an avant-garde image in keeping with the designer-inspired studio space that is both impressive and welcoming to their upscale clients.



This flair for luxury and design is seen in everything from their business correspondence materials and order forms to their presentation folder, Bridal Gift Registry materials and their impressive product packaging, which is designed to keep on selling the Yervant experience once it goes home with the client.

Anie explains the underlying design principle that unifies these materials which are shown above: "Each of our pieces corresponds to the others, and they exude the same message that we have achieved in the design aspects of our studio and its decor. The Silver Dot theme is derived from our centre feature wall, where we have wallpapered a curved surface with one of Ulf Moritz' collection. Black and dark brown are the basic colors of our studio's furniture, which has a strong presence of bold chrome, mirror finish and one highlight color in a subdued, smoky blue hue. Our goal is to make that design theme identifiable in every one of our printed pieces."

Holiday and Seasonal Promotions

Just as any gift-giving time is an opportunity for portrait sales, there are certain times of the year, as well as special family occasions, for which portrait promotions can help to build business. Of all these opportunities Christmas, Hanukah and Kwanzaa hold the most potential for profitable sales through promotional campaigns. The final quarter of the calendar year is, in fact, prime time for portrait sales. Every market influence works in favor of increased studio activity: Gift-giving is on everyone's mind, seasonal greeting cards are exchanged, and families gather together. In many homes the holiday season represents that one time of the year when spending discretionary income on items of family value is a tradition, so portraiture often comes to mind during these periods. To assure that you receive maximum benefit from your fourth-quarter marketing activities, don't overlook opportunities to promote these seasonal portrait activities:

- Fall family portraits
- Holiday gift giving
- Home for the holidays
- Holiday gift certificates

Increased portrait activity also can be triggered through promotions that respond to seasonal change. The arrival of spring can target outdoor portraits; the Easter season is a natural for promoting bunny sessions; Mother's Day and Father's Day are perfect occasions for promoting the value of portraits of family members; and the changing landscape of fall sets the stage for especially appealing family portraits. A fall portrait promotion, when combined with a campaign that highlights gift-giving opportunities and year-end family celebrations, represents the perfect circumstance to create a sustained fourth quarter direct-mail campaign to a purchased mailing list of qualified prospects. A well-planned campaign of this kind is an outstanding opportunity to expand the studio's marketing reach.



Business-Building Promotions

Smart marketers look for opportunities throughout the year to build business through profit-producing promotions. Usually focusing

on children and families, these promotions are designed to create a sense of urgency that compels parents to respond to the studio's special event or special offer. These promotions can range from milestone celebrations, such as First Communions, to children's portrait contests, portrait events for children and their families, and mini-sessions or "quick take" opportunities.

Charitable Marketing Campaigns

Charitable marketing has become one of the most profitable strategies used by portrait photographers everywhere to generate income throughout the year. Because so many local



organizations, including schools, must raise funds to meet operating expenses or to support building projects, photographers are welcomed when they wish to contribute to live and silent auctions or to participate in other fundraising events.

One of the biggest benefits of partnering with a fund-raising organization is the positive image that accrues to the business when it supports local or national charities.

Raising Profits by Raising Funds

Some of the most profitable charitable marketing activities for photographers go beyond providing portrait packages for live or silent auctions. In the example shown below, the studio presents the organization with attractive promotional folders containing an insert that can be exchanged for a portrait session and gift-size portrait. During the fund-raising event, organization members walk through the room, selling the folders to their members at a price they designate. The price point should be one that encourages members to purchase the folders. (Don't worry if the price is lower than your normal session fee as long as attendees at the event are well-qualified consumers: What you are gaining is access to these consumers.) The charity keeps the funds raised from the certificate sales, and the photographer receives a list of the members who purchase them, which includes their mailing addresses, email addresses and phone numbers. The studio then contacts everyone on the list to set up their portrait appointments. This type of promotion can be a very profitable way to fill studio shooting schedules.



Each year Winterset, Iowa photographer Lori Nordstrom donates thousands of dollars to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society (LLS) through her "Little Angels" fundraiser that puts her business in the public eye and serves as a model of how charitable marketing can create the ultimate win-win situation for photographers and the organizations

they assist. During March and April, Lori offers Little Angels sessions on several weekends, donating each \$100 session fee to LLS. After the sessions are completed, family and friends can cast online votes for their favorite little angels. The top 12 vote-getters are featured in Lori's "Little Angels" calendar, the sales of which also benefit the Society.



Lori's philanthropy has garnered her considerable media attention, especially when she accepted a challenge to raise funds for LLS via the annual Iowa Man, Woman & Celebrity of the Year campaign. In running for Woman of the Year, Lori succeeded in raising an astounding \$30,000 for the Society, and in the process she created priceless community awareness for the charity as well as for her business.

PPA Charities

Each year members of Professional Photographers of America (PPA) participate in charitable opportunities sponsored by PPA Charities in support of Operation Smile, the highly regarded international charity whose volunteer medical professionals treat children who suffer with cleft lips, cleft palates and other facial deformities. PPA Charities fund-raising campaigns are a perfect match for photographers, as participants literally make it possible for children worldwide to smile. In doing so they have the satisfaction of knowing they have helped to change the lives of deserving children who otherwise would live lives of suffering, while at the same time attracting additional studio sessions and creating positive public awareness for their businesses.



Planning Your Campaign

The failure of a studio promotion almost always can be traced to lack of planning—planning in the areas of promotional concept, promotion

timing, media selection, marketing message, and identification of all of the steps necessary to implement the promotion. The following steps are essential to promotional planning and execution:

- Develop a promotional theme.
- Establish financial objectives, including an expense budget.
- Prepare advertising copy.
- Decide what advertising media will be used.
- Develop a schedule of steps to activate the media.
- Implement the steps to launch the promotion.
- Brief staff on all aspects of the promotion so they are prepared to assist clients.
- Measure the promotion's results.
- Make any additions or refinements that will enhance future campaigns.

Most marketing campaigns work best when multiple marketing strategies are used. Among the most effective are:

- Direct mail
- Displays
- Internet marketing
- Print-media advertising
- Public service announcements (for charitable campaigns)

Your Advertising/Promotion Budget

Promotional funding sometimes presents a dilemma for studios. The newer the company, the greater the need to spend money on promotion, yet there is less income to spend. This dilemma

is best solved by budgeting sufficient funds for start-up promotional costs, then establishing an operating budget for ongoing marketing activities. Because photography studios operate according to vastly differing business models, it is difficult to arrive at an ideal percentage-of-income guideline for promotional activities. Experience shows, however, that most successful studios spend between eight and ten percent of their anticipated gross sales on promotional activities. Other generalities about promotional funding are:

- Studios in less favorable locations require more promotion.
- New and expanding businesses spend more on promotion.
- Strong competition raises the size of the promotional budget required.
- Studios stressing price appeal usually promote more heavily.
- Special events require more intense promotional activities.

Creating Effective Marketing Messages

For prospects to buy what you have to sell, they must first know what you have to offer and what's in it for them. The story you tell through advertising copy must be compelling. Most compelling ads have the following attributes in common:

- **An attention-grabbing headline** that involves an appealing benefit, usually indicating to whom your message is directed.
- **Interesting copy** that is brief and to the point, expressed in terms of benefits to the reader.
- **An appealing offer** such as added value.
- **A "call-to-action"** so that the reader feels the need to act and knows what to do next and by what date the action must occur.

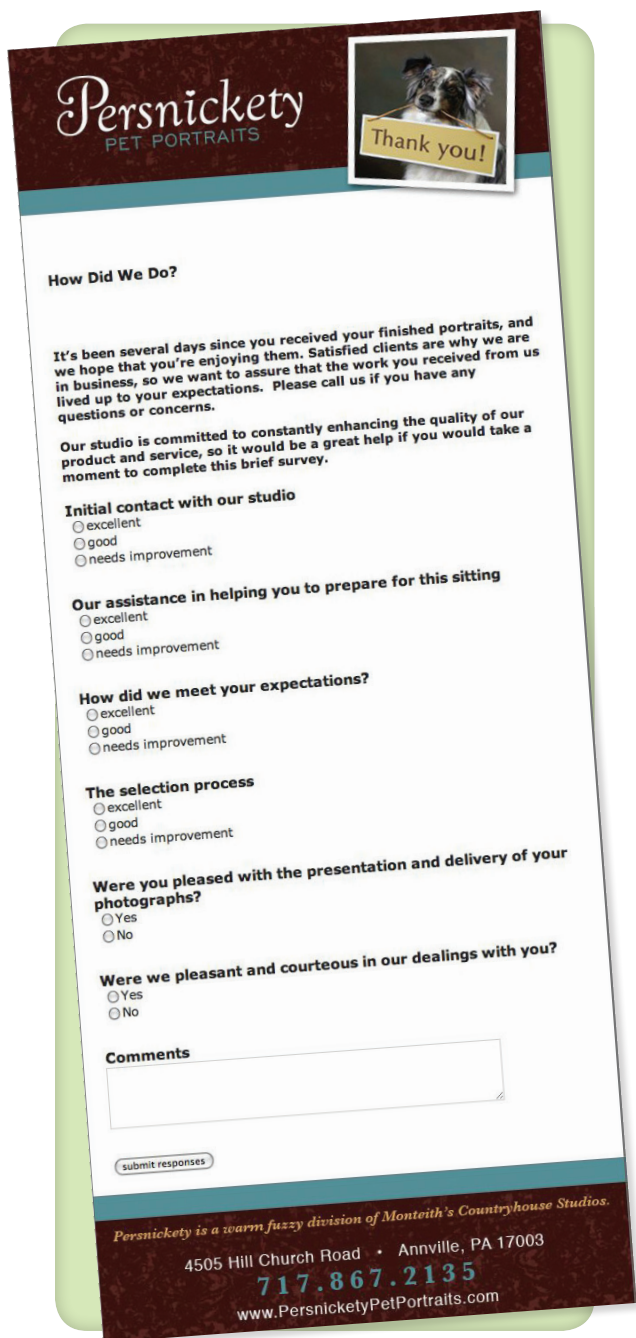
- **A satisfaction guarantee** that reduces any risk on the part of the reader.
- **Compelling photography** in every ad.
- **Testimonials** whenever possible or appropriate.

The Power of Testimonials

If you have a great product and enjoy a good reputation, you have an almost inexhaustible source of great copy—practically free—written by your own clients. Satisfied clients will come up with selling phrases that are straight from the heart that no copywriter, no matter how brilliant, would ever write for you. Happy clients will write with a depth of conviction that the best copywriters will find hard to equal. So when clients say nice things about your business in your presence, thank them sincerely then ask if they would be willing to let you use their words in your marketing. If they agree, tell them you will draft their comments in an email and send it to them for approval.

An effective way to solicit testimonials is to provide each client with a survey card when they come to pick up their finished portraits. Be sure to put a postage stamp on the survey, and take the time to hand it to the client with this explanation: "You know, Mrs. Smith, we are always looking for ways to improve the quality of our products and the level of our service, so we would be very grateful if you would take a few moments when you get home to answer the questions on this survey, then drop it in the mail." Since the survey has room for comments, this device will attract many testimonials for your marketing use. But before it you use a client's words in print or on the Internet, it's best to ask for their permission.

One of the benefits of Marathon's E-Mail Marketing Service is that it offers an optional feature that makes it easy to email surveys to your existing clients. The satisfaction survey shown at right benefits the studio in two ways: It provides management with important insight into how well clients are being served, and it also opens the door to testimonial opportunities through its "Comments" field.



5. Cheerleading description. (You can combine quick description and cheerleading into one. Just avoid getting too wordy. Keep it simple.)
6. Use your website to say more.
7. Keep your phone number large.
8. 30-day action deadline.
9. Added incentive through bonus.

And remember . . . Make sure that the design of the front of the card is eye-catching so that recipients will turn it over and read the back!



Writing Effective Direct Mail Card Back Copy

To avoid being disappointed with the results of a direct-mail campaign, follow these guidelines for creating effective back copy:

1. Use an attention-getting headline.
2. Announce your offer.
3. Show its value when appropriate.
4. Brief descriptive copy.

Brand-Building Marketing Strategies

fifteen

Brand-Building Marketing Strategies

Brand management involves the application of marketing techniques to a specific product, product line, or company. Brand management is so important in today's crowded marketplace that it is viewed by many organizations as a broader and more strategic activity than marketing alone. A business brand is directly affected by what the public thinks of the products, owner, employees, facilities, prices, service, marketing, public relations, community involvement, and the ethics of the business.

The preoccupation of businesses with branding is well-founded because an easily recognized and well-respected brand translates into these important business benefits:

- A respected brand provides consumers with a sense of safety and comfort when they purchase.
- Positive brand recognition carries with it an automatic perception of quality.
- Consumers typically are willing to spend a premium price for brands they recognize and appreciate.
- Consumers who become emotionally attached to a specific brand typically are eager to spread the word to others.

While small businesses, such as professional photography, must manage their brand-building activities on small budgets, there is much a studio can do to enhance its brand in the community. If

you think of your brand as representing what the public thinks about your business (for better or for worse), you'll recognize that many of the strategies already put forward in this Guide represent the kind of activities that can strengthen or add meaning to your business brand. There are, however, a few image-building strategies that deserve special mention for their ability to enhance the brand of photography studios. They are:

- Public displays of your photography.
- Partnership marketing with retailers, professionals, and charitable organizations.
- Buzz-marketing strategies.

No brand is built overnight, and this is especially true of small businesses that lack the luxury of a marketing department. Practically speaking, a photography business brand grows out of the creative vision of the business owner, especially as that vision affects the three branding elements mentioned in Chapter 4: artistic style, product focus, and client experience. Only when these elements are a true reflection of the passion of the owners and employees does this brand become an authentic representation of the business. Truly authentic brands are not merely counterfeit copies of other businesses; they represent the types of companies to which consumers can develop a strong sense of loyalty due to the positive emotions consumers experience when doing business with them.

Building Your Brand Through Displays of Your Photography

In the case of a visual medium, there is no substitute for showing what you do in locations that are frequented by the types of clients who represent your ideal target market.

Display Opportunities

Display location possibilities are almost limitless, but to get your work in places where the exposure will be beneficial, you must first identify who has

the authority to approve your proposal. Whenever possible, see the proprietor or chief executive of the business or organization. If it is part of a chain, ask to see the regional manager, as the local store manager usually cannot O.K. your request. Places most likely to accept photographic portraiture for display include:

- Restaurants
- Retail stores—Target display prints to the types of clients who patronize them. Show senior portraits in teenage clothing stores; children's work in children's stores; bridal candids and formals in bridal shops and florist shops; sportsmen in sporting goods stores; pet portraits in pet shops and veterinary clinics.
- Beauty salons—Display portraits of the various stylists. Salons are great places to facilitate word-of-mouth advertising.
- Banks
- Libraries
- Hospitals
- Art shows
- Professional offices such as pediatricians, children's dentists, and obstetricians.

Mall Displays

A temporary or permanent mall exhibit can expand your marketing reach and help to strengthen your brand, providing that a healthy percentage of the consumers who frequent it would be a good fit for your business. Management policies differ from mall to mall, but many will allow displays for a week at a time, sometimes as part of a special theme week that usually requires an entry fee.

Many mall managements are willing to rent permanent space to photographers. Typically this requires making arrangements with the leasing agent of the mall rather than the mall manager.

Rental fees vary widely, even within the same geographic area, so be prepared to negotiate a fee that is reasonable for your business. Occasionally, mall managements are willing to accept photography in exchange for lowering the monthly rental fee.



An effective, professional-looking display requires well-constructed display apparatus. Some malls provide their own purpose-built displays, while the photographer is expected to provide display equipment in others.

Following are some important factors to keep in mind when displaying photography in a mall:

- Most malls require that you have business liability insurance when you display photography on their premises.
- Have plenty of promotional handout material for visitors to take away from your display.
- It is helpful to make arrangements with a mall worker or store employee to replenish your handouts, dust your photographs, and even pick up and change out your images at appropriate intervals.
- Make sure that your photography changes with the seasons. Families photographed in the snow look a little silly when displayed in summer.
- You must have a signed model release on file before displaying anyone's image.
- When displaying a child's portrait, never identify the portrait with the name of the subject as a matter of protection for the child against criminals who prey on children whose photographs have caught their attention.

Digital Displays

The arrival of high-definition flat-screen televisions has presented another possibility for displaying photography in the offices or stores of marketing partners or others who are willing to rent display space to photographers who are prepared to take on the expense of purchasing and installing the necessary equipment.

A less expensive alternative is to offer marketing partners a digital frame that can present a slideshow of your work. A nice quality digital frame either can be mounted to the wall or placed on an office or store counter, where customers can enjoy the images while waiting to be served. Make sure that the studio name appears on every image, or place a plaque with your logo and additional studio information alongside your digital display. Don't forget to provide cards or brochures for viewers to take with them.

Building Your Brand Through Partnership Marketing

Business-to-Business Partnerships

Sometimes referred to as cooperative marketing or joint-venture marketing, partnership marketing is a proven method of promoting sales. This marketing strategy involves reciprocal endorsements by retailers or professionals who share a similar client profile, and it is common for partners to make mutual endorsements or provide links to their partners on their websites or blogs. Partnerships also can involve joint promotional efforts in which the partners split the costs incurred for activities such as a promotional printing and mailing. These third-party referrals thrive on the fact of life that most people don't like to make decisions when they are uninformed, so they feel more comfortable when they follow the recommendation of someone whom they respect.

This form of marketing is used successfully by large and small businesses in a variety of fields, and it is especially well-suited for portrait/wedding photographers. Finding partners who can recommend you is, in fact, one of the most beneficial marketing strategies that you can adopt. For a newer business, a partnership with an established business capitalizes on the goodwill the veteran business enjoys. It builds a perception that "If you are associated with the best, then you must be the best." Whatever your length of business experience, when you partner with good people in your community, it creates valuable credibility with consumers who appreciate the referral of someone whom they respect. So open the door to partnerships whenever you can!

Appropriate partners for wedding photographers include:

- Hotels, restaurants and reception halls
- Bridal consultants
- Caterers
- Florists
- Bridal salons
- Tuxedo rental businesses
- Jewelry stores
- Hairdressers

Partnership opportunities for portrait photographers include:

- Clothing stores and boutiques
- Baby boutiques
- Maternity shops
- Furniture stores
- Restaurants
- Medical professionals such as pediatricians, pediatric dentists, and obstetricians
- Spas, hairdressers and other businesses that cater to women

An important aspect of successful partnership marketing is to be of service to your partners. Experts at this marketing strategy stress that if you take good care of your partner, your partner will take good care of you. If you can send business in the direction of your partner, or benefit a partner through your photographic expertise, you can bet that he or she will be happy to send business your way. By suggesting to a clothing boutique that you are willing to decorate its walls with photographs of its clients wearing the store's designs, you will soon have both your partner and her clients

bragging to their friends about your work. Such a result is well worth the time and money invested in your partner!

Photographers have a decided advantage in seeking marketing partners because they can bring a valuable commodity to the partnership table: Many established business people would be pleased to recommend a photographer in return for photographs of their products or for personal portraits of themselves and their families. Photographers should also consider the possibility of offering their help in photographing and designing marketing materials when they wish to attract a particularly desirable marketing partner.

When establishing partnerships, look for opportunities to display photographs in your partners' locations, and don't worry if the business doesn't have a lot of space to give you. It really doesn't take much space to accommodate a display that can capture the attention of visitors.



To realize the maximum benefit from your marketing partnerships, you must be prepared to nurture them. A good way to do this is to review each partnership as part of your annual financial and marketing plan. Here are some items to consider as part of this review:

- Evaluate the benefits of the partnership. If you have cultivated the good business habit of asking each prospect how they

- heard about you when they call, you'll know which partnerships are really paying off for your business.
- Determine whether it is time to update your image display or if other display possibilities might now exist. If the business doesn't have room for a wall display, perhaps you could place a display album, folio set, digital frame, or several press-printed books of your work in a waiting room.
- Make sure your partner has quantities of an up-to-date promotional card or brochure to hand out to interested prospects.
- Look for ways that your business can benefit each partner in the coming year. It's easy for a retailer or professional to lose interest in a partnership if your studio is the only one benefiting from it, so it pays to call your partners from time to time and thank them when you have received referrals to your business. Ask if there is anything you can do for them, such as create portraits of their families or photographs for their website.
- During the holidays, send each partner a gift certificate to a nice restaurant, or pay a Santa visit and pass out goodies at their locations.

Remember that every time you show appreciation to your partners, they will be even more eager to make referrals to your business.

Charitable Partnerships

As stated in Chapter 14, participating in charitable marketing campaigns is one of the most effective ways for photographers to gain introductions to qualified clients. So be on the lookout for charitable organizations that will provide you with exposure to clients who are well suited to your business profile—the kind of clients that attract donors and supporters that you would wish to have as clients. It is the nature of charitable organizations to attract leaders, and when leaders become your clients, many are naturally inclined to spread the word about your work.

Charitable partnerships also capitalize on two very human emotions: the desire of people to do business with those who have a reputation for doing good for others, and the willingness of consumers to spend more on themselves and their families when the expenditure is “for a good cause.” Look to establish partnerships with these types of organizations:

- Private and public schools
- Charities that seek cures for diseases
- Charities associated with local hospitals
- Charities that benefit needy families and children
- Shelters for needy or at-risk individuals
- Animal shelters
- Organizations that support the arts

These types of charities often have multiple fundraising activities each year, and photography nearly always is a good fit. Many of these activities have built-in public relations opportunities that can be relied upon to spread the word about your participation. Even without formal publicity opportunities, charitable marketing always pays off in terms of the relationships that you build through your association with charities.

Charitable marketing has helped Littleton, Colorado, photographer Sandy Puc´ turn her Expressions Photography into a household name throughout the Denver area. She has not only forged partnerships with a host of highly visible local and national charities, she co-founded the Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep Foundation, a worldwide organization involving thousands of volunteer photographers who offer free bereavement photography services to families that suffer the loss of a baby. Sandy knows well the power that charitable marketing possesses in helping a business to grow when it raises money or donates photographic talent. But she is quick to point out what those who participate in cause-related marketing ultimately learn: “Nothing is as

great as the satisfaction you receive in knowing that what you do for a living makes life better for others.”



Building Your Brand Through Buzz- Marketing Strategies

Most successful photographers agree that word-of-mouth marketing achieves the best possible results.

This is so because being photographed is a very personal experience, and consumers are inclined to trust the recommendations of their friends and neighbors who have experienced good results from a photographer whom they have patronized.

Today's smart marketers know that it takes time and money to create effective word-of-mouth marketing and that the entire process requires putting strategies in place that will get the buzz about your business moving throughout the community. Among these strategies are:

- Taking advantage of free publicity
- Making service club presentations
- Hosting special events
- Organizing a studio advisory board
- Offering buzz-building specialty products

Taking Advantage of Free Publicity

Media advertising can be expensive, but there are many opportunities for an enterprising business to provide content to media outlets. When you consider that newspapers, magazines, and television and radio talk shows must constantly develop content to print or to broadcast, then you can recognize opportunities that your studio might have to provide content for these outlets. Publicity that you receive through media placements helps to improve client recognition of your business and create a demand for your products and services. This type of public relations generally costs little and returns excellent dividends, but you must be willing to invest the time necessary to achieve results.

It doesn't take a college degree in journalism to learn to make use of media. What it does necessitate is understanding their requirements and, whenever possible, building relationships with those that are a good fit for your business. Get started by making a list of local media outlets that can include the following:

- Daily or weekly newspapers that publish hometown news

- Tabloids that focus on special-interest subjects such as children, families, teens, senior citizens, etc.
- Suburban newspapers or “shoppers”
- City or regional general-interest magazines
- Websites that publish local news or features
- Radio talk shows
- Television talk shows

Chamber of Commerce publications that feature local businesses and organizations. Contact each organization to learn about the following:

- The types of stories and illustrations they accept
- What department of the organization is most likely to be interested in information about your business
- Length restrictions for news releases and feature stories
- File requirements for written materials
- File requirements for illustrations
- Publication deadlines
- Any other guidelines specific to the publication

Typically these organizations are understaffed, so the closest you can come to providing a copywriter or editor with the information they need, in the form that they need it, the better your chances are of having your content published.

Press Releases vs. Features

Most media outlets accept press releases that supply the following news-writing essentials: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and sometimes How, all contained in a brief opening paragraph referred to as the “lead”

of the story. To be legitimate, a news release must be neither opinion nor a self-serving advertisement, so stick to the facts. There are numerous online resources that can help you to create and format a factual news story. Go to your browser and search for “how to write a press release,” and you’ll come up with dozens of helpful resources such as those found at www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Press-Release.

Among appropriate topics for news releases are:

- Awards received in state, local, or national photography competitions
- Community honors that you or your business have received
- Relocation or renovation of your business facilities
- Announcement of new staff members
- Seminars you are attending or presenting
- Public service or charitable activities your business has undertaken
- Announcement of new products
- Announcement of special events involving your business

Whenever possible, use photographs to illustrate your releases.

An even better media placement opportunity is a news feature about an interesting aspect of your business. Unlike the rigidity of press releases, feature stories allow the writer to dig much deeper into narratives about people, places, and events. There are essentially no rules for composing features, and the story can be conveyed with mood, color, and feeling. They can be much longer, contain a point of view, and be driven by quotations. In short, a news feature uses personality and emotion to gain the attention of readers.

Like news releases, you can find many resources on the Internet to help you to write news features. Simply ask your browser “how to write a news

feature” or “how to write a feature story.” Topics for appropriate features can include:

- A retrospective on the strangest or funniest things you’ve witnessed at weddings
- The strangest or most challenging session you’ve photographed
- Unusual aspects of your business or types of photography you do that the public might not know about, such as executive portraiture on location, glamour photography, and pet portraits
- Ways to use photography as decorative wall décor
- The decorative value of photographic restorations
- How to create a personal portrait history of your child
- How to create a family history in photographs
- The popularity of one-of-a-kind photographic greeting cards
- How to prepare your child for a photography session
- The value of photography in building children’s self-esteem
- A behind-the-scenes look or a human interest story about an organization for which you have helped to raise funds or supported through your donation of photography

Your chances for having news releases and feature stories accepted by the media depend on a number of factors including the editorial requirements of the outlet, the professionalism with which you prepare the material, and your skill in dealing with media personnel. If you or a public relations professional that you hire can write a feature story that has broad appeal and plenty of human interest, don’t mass mail it to every media organization on your list. Instead try “shopping” it

to a regional general-interest magazine or to the largest newspaper in the area as a “special” to that organization, including appropriate photographs. If they pass on it, then move it on to the next most influential media outlet on your list.

Another way to establish a working relationship with local newspaper personnel is to do them a favor every now and then. If you plan to attend a local public event that you know the paper will be covering, you can volunteer to take whatever pictures the paper might require. If only a few photos are involved, don’t ask for payment; just ask for a photo credit line. This ultimately will be more valuable to your business, and the news organization is more likely to feel indebted to you.

Making Service Club Presentations

Like media outlets, service clubs must constantly come up with ideas for presentations or speakers for their meetings, so they represent an excellent opportunity to promote your business. To make contact with civic groups that might wish to host a program, get a list of civic, service and social organizations from your local Chamber of Commerce. Then do a mailing to the groups of your choice that explains the types of programs you are willing to present. Tailor the presentation to the particular audience: for women’s groups, talk about glamour photography, children’s photography, or how to decorate your home with portraiture and restorations of old family photographs. For business groups, discuss the image-building importance of a professional PR photo or opportunities for creating executive portraits on location that can be used to create executive galleries in the business.

When addressing a group, bring several large, framed portraits to place on display, along with promotional material to hand out. A well-dressed and neatly groomed photographer who perfects public speaking techniques will elevate his or her professional image and build positive community buzz very quickly.

Hosting Special Events

An effective way to call attention to your business is through a public event that you host or sponsor in conjunction with other vendors. The value of such an occasion is that it brings people in direct contact with your business, and it's a wonderful way to create community buzz.

The type of event you decide to host will depend upon your goals for the event, budgetary considerations, and whether you have a facility that is large enough to accommodate the activity. If your studio is small, consider hosting the event in your home or at the location of a marketing partner. Involving other vendors will help draw a larger attendance and decrease your costs for publicity, refreshments, favors, and give-away items. Following is a list of event possibilities:

- Grand opening celebration
- Business anniversary celebration
- Holiday open house
- Fundraising event
- Senior open house
- New-product launch celebration
- Client-appreciation party
- Halloween open house

To achieve the maximum benefit from hosting a special event, think about activities you and/or your partners can provide that will help to build attendance. Use your creativity, and think about the special interests of the audience you intend to host. If children are involved, include activities especially for them. If your invitees are predominately women, think about give-away items that will appeal to them, and hold give-away drawings throughout the event.

Several times a year, Jed and Vicki Taufer create powerful community buzz in their Morton, Illinois, community by hosting events at their V Gallery. One of the most popular is Girl's Night Out, which benefits charities such as the Susan G. Koman Foundation. As many as 600 women have flocked

to the gallery to take part in fun activities and prize drawings and to receive goodie bags filled with samples from exhibitors who participate in the event. These participating vendors are businesses that supply products and services of special interest to women. In addition to providing samples for the goodie bags and pitching in with some of the refreshments, each vendor provides an item to be raffled off to raise money for the charity.





At Christmas time, Springfield, Illinois, photographer Sarah Petty hosts an open house fundraiser in her home, which is filled with examples of her photographic wall décor and beautifully decorated for the holiday season. In addition to selling a limited-edition Santa Claus print, visitors make donations to a fund that the Petty family supports to benefit families whose babies are patients of the local hospital's neonatal intensive care unit.



Jeff and Julia Woods devised a fun approach to announcing three new innovative products for displaying children's portraiture. To highlight the occasion, they hosted a "product launch" at their Washington, Illinois, studio and invited clients to attend. Not only did the attendees get the first look at the new products, the unusual event provided an opportunity to get some community buzz going about the new products.



What these three events have in common is that they position the studios in an active posture in the community. Rather than sitting back and just hoping that clients will decide to use their services, they have opened their doors and invited people to visit via an entirely different context from business as usual. In the process they have acquainted consumers with what's new and exciting at their studios and created community buzz about what those lucky visitors enjoyed.

Jeff and Julia Woods now have even more incentive to host interesting events for their clients, as they have remodeled a former rental space above their studio and converted it to "Venue," a multi-purpose facility billed as a "Wine Bar and Gallery." Of course they held a well-attended grand opening for the new facility: A great way to crank up the community buzz!



Organizing a Studio Advisory Board

Market research might seem out of the question for many studio owners, however it is possible to gain important market information by forming one or more Studio Advisory Boards consisting of clients or prospects who possess the demographic characteristics of your ideal clients in specific market segments. The time you spend organizing and interacting with such advisors can save hours of unproductive time you could spend wondering how clients might react to new products, trends, or marketing campaigns; instead, you can learn what ideal clients think and how they feel simply by asking them.

You might be amazed at how willing a Studio Advisory Board prospect can be to assist you in advancing your business, even if they currently are not your clients. Most people whose opinions could be valuable to you are actually flattered when they are asked for assistance. The most helpful advisors are likely to be fellow business owners, clients or prospects who are involved in community affairs or in leadership positions, and repeat clients who are vocal about how much they enjoy doing business with you. Also be on the lookout for clients who are stay-at-home moms that participate in mothers' support groups, as their networks can be a big help in spreading the word about your business.

Consider asking potential advisors to serve for a limited period, such as a year, so that the prospect of service does not seem daunting to them, and you have a graceful out in case one of your advisors is not active. Before you extend any invitations, determine exactly what you expect from these advisors. Following are some possibilities:

- Provide feedback on new products you are considering.
- Provide reaction to promotional materials in process.
- Ask them to email their friends about a promotion, new products, or a special event you might be hosting.

- Ask clients, particularly those who have used your services on numerous occasions, what aspects of your products and services are the most pleasing to them; this will help you to draft selling points for future marketing pieces.
- If you have asked a non-client to serve as an advisor, you will need to spend some one-on-one time familiarizing him or her with your business. Consider offering the prospect a complimentary session to provide first-hand knowledge of your product and service. Then ask for an honest critique of all aspects of the transaction.
- Ask advisors for suggestions about possible display locations; they might be able to provide you with an introduction to a business or professional who would consider accepting your photography.
- Don't be shy about asking advisors for direct referrals of their friends, especially from those who are active participants in social networking sites such as Facebook.

Meet with your advisors several times a year, either individually or as a group. Keep them up to date on what's happening in your business via email. Try to find a time when you can host the entire group for a luncheon at a nice restaurant or for a catered meal at your studio. Also, determine how to reward them for their participation according to what you believe would be of most value to them, such as portraits, a restaurant or spa gift certificate, or any other appropriate gesture of appreciation that shows how much you value their advice.

Offering Buzz-Building Products

The popularity of photographic specialty items with women clients has created an entire category of products that are doubly profitable for photographers: They provide opportunities for sales, and they also create a means of spreading awareness of the photographer to the family members and acquaintances who view these products. The buzz-marketing aspect of such

specialty products make them a valuable addition to any studio's offerings because in purchasing these desirable items, a client is actually financing an additional marketing opportunity for the studio, especially when the item is imprinted with studio-identity information. Buzz-building products include personalized greeting cards, note cards, bookmarks, and business card-size "mini-cards," along with "wearable" items such as photo jewelry and handbags.

A Final Word About Marketing and Branding

Enhancing a studio's image and strengthening its brand is the ongoing task of marketing. It encompasses the grand actions—from creating a compelling business concept and designing a studio space—to recognizing the importance of small courtesies, such as sending a hand-written thank-you note or going the extra mile by providing unexpected personalized service. It is the sum of all that a business is and all that its owners and employees do on a daily basis. Ultimately it is marketing and the brand that it builds, that form the foundation for long-term financial success and the personal reward of time well spent.



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