

SALES & MARKETING HANDBOOK



THE WEDDING SCHOOL TEXTBOOK SERIES

SUSAN STRIPLING

A woman in a white wedding dress is kneeling on a patterned rug, holding a small, fluffy dog. She is looking up at the dog with a gentle expression. The scene is set in a room with large windows and lace curtains, with a white wedding dress hanging on a rack in the background. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent white text box.

Editorial Director and Photographer: Susan Stripling

© 2016 by Susan Stripling for The Wedding School.

All images © Susan Stripling .

All Rights Reserved.

Reproduction or translation of any part of this work beyond that permitted by Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act without permission of the copyright owner is unlawful. Requests for permission or further information should be addressed to Susan Stripling and The Wedding School.

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting or other professional services. The publisher is not liable for errors and omissions.

Advertising of products does not imply endorsement.

Publication design by Squared Studios Design: www.squared-studios.com



THE
WEDDING SCHOOL

SALES & MARKETING HANDBOOK

TEACHER'S NOTE

When I first began as a wedding photographer back in 2002, there were not many educational opportunities for me. We had conventions and local camera clubs, but not many books or private workshops. The photography community now has so many extraordinary ways to learn. There are private mentorships, group workshops, online classes, conventions, and books galore. This is a wonderful thing because everyone learns in different ways. I have had the distinct pleasure of teaching photographers with my books, convention seminars, private workshops, and online courses.

I am thankful to everyone who has given me a platform to speak, listened to my words, and trusted me as an educator. I am more full of gratitude to you than you will ever know. Above all, I am thankful for my family and friends. In the wise words of Lin-Manuel Miranda, “How lucky we are to be alive right now.”

I love you all.

ROLL CALL

BRANDING

What Is Your Mission Statement.....	12
Determining Who Your Target Market Is.....	15
Does My Target Market Match My Geographic Location?.....	18
Determining Your Brand and Marketing Message.....	22
How To Make Your Brand A Reality.....	23
Setting Up Your Website For SEO Success.....	29

SOCIAL MEDIA

Marketing Your Business Through Social Media.....	31
Analyzing the Data.....	33
Create a Calendar.....	34
Facebook.....	36
Twitter.....	38
Google +.....	40
Pinterest.....	41
Instagram.....	42
What Else Are the Kids Using These Days?.....	44
Finding Your Unique Voice of Social Media.....	45
How Social Media Leads to Inquiries.....	46

MARKETING

Assessing the Competition.....	51
Cultivating Relationships with Other Vendors.....	52
Do I Need a Large Marketing Budget?.....	54
Word of Mouth.....	56
Is Any Paid Advertising Worth It?	58
Handling the Inquiries.....	60
Presenting Your Pricing.....	63
Handing the In-Person Meeting.....	63
Why Meeting In Person Can Be Difficult	66
What Do You Do If The Client Isn't Willing To Book Right Away?.....	69
Why are Inquiries Not Turning Into Meetings?.....	71
Marketing to the Millennial Customer.....	75

SALES

Pre-Wedding Sales.....	79
Post-Wedding Sales.....	79

A young girl in a white, ruffled dress stands in a doorway, looking down. The legs of two adults are visible on either side of her. The scene is brightly lit from the doorway, creating a soft glow. The floor is highly reflective, showing the girl and the adults' legs. A dark, semi-transparent banner is overlaid on the image, containing the text 'EXTRA CREDIT'.

EXTRA CREDIT

To Emma and Olivia.
Double infinity.

SALES & MARKETING HANDBOOK

"People are in such a hurry to launch their product or business that they seldom look at marketing from a bird's eye view and they don't create a systematic plan."

Dave Ramsey



WHAT IS YOUR MISSION STATEMENT?

Your mission statement should be short, but it should not be a quickly written hodgepodge of words. It takes time, thought, and insight to write one single statement that sums up the entire being of your business. This mission statement will be the standard by which you make your decisions. It will lead your actions and help you craft your unique path. It is, quite frankly, your purpose. The heart of your business. The soul of your business. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of having a concise, decisive mission statement.

Many mission statements are vague, generic, and soulless. They're a string of modern buzzwords and catchphrases. They are aspiring more to sounding cool and hip than providing an honest insight into your business. I wrote my mission statement in 2003. While I've tweaked it throughout the years, the core of the statement remains the same.

"Susan Stripling Photography is dedicated to creating timeless, exceptional images to a discerning clientele. We promise extraordinary image-making and unparalleled customer service."

Simple, to the point, and very specific. I am dedicated to creating images that are timeless and exceptional - not just any images, at any skill level, but timeless and exceptional. My two goals are great images, and great customer service. What could be more precise and direct than that? I have answered exactly what my business does, who I do it for, and with what values.



What do you do? How do you do it? What market/client do you do it for? What are the values that you hold high while doing it? How are you providing value to your clients?

To determine your own mission statement, you'll need to answer some questions.

Take the answers to all of your questions, and write your specific mission statement! Take your time. Don't rush. This is a very important statement!

- What does your business do? Be very specific.
- How do you do what you do better than anyone else in your market?
- What clients are you doing business for?
- What are the values that you hold near and dear to the heart of your business?
- How are you providing specific value to your clients?



NOTES





DETERMINING WHO YOUR TARGET CLIENT IS AND HOW TO FIND THEM

I never used to think that I had a target client. I spent a lot of time trying to figure out where my clients shopped, what they ate, and what they liked to spend time doing. I was caught in a never-ending cycle of speculation. Did my target market determine my brand, or did my brand determine my target market?

I started with the facts first. I went back to the basics and looked at my spreadsheets. I looked at how many weddings I wanted to shoot per year, and what the average package from each wedding had to be in order for me to remain profitable. I then started looking for potential clients who could afford to spend that amount on wedding photography.

Let's say that all I wanted to shoot were backyard, at-home, do-it-yourself-decor weddings with low budgets for awesome people. Let's say that most of those weddings had a photography budget of \$1,500. Let's also say that I knew that I needed to average \$3,500 per wedding in order to stay profitable. That doesn't mean that sometimes those at-home weddings wouldn't up their budget to hire me, but it does mean that it's unlikely I could fill a season with them. I could not target a section of clients who could not afford my services, much as I might like working with them!

Many photographers say that their target client is "anyone who will pay for my services." This is too generic. Being specific about your target client does not mean that you are excluding potential clients who do not match your criteria. Targeting your marketing lets you focus your brand's message on a specific clientele that is more likely to buy from you. You will always have clients who don't meet your predefined "target client." That's okay, and it's perfectly normal. You're not trying to exclude potential customers, simply to keep your message focused towards those who are more likely to hire you.

You also want to avoid saying "I am my target market." Your experiences and photography know-how can lead you to think that you understand your target client more than you actually do. You absolutely cannot assume that your needs and values will exactly match your target client, even if you are very, very close to them. You know too much about photography, and it will be hard to separate that. You cannot use yourself as a research subject! It's crucial that you have your mission statement in place. This is going to help you define your target market. First, how do your services as a wedding photographer fulfill a need or solve a problem for your potential customers? Modern customers love having their problems solved. You're positioned well, because potential wedding clients are going to come looking for you because they already know what their "problem" is : they need a wedding photographer.



Who specifically will benefit from hiring you? It's easy to go about this backwards and think about who you want your audience to be. It is beyond crucial that you know who is looking for your services, not the other way around.

Now that you know who is looking for you, you have to figure out how to reach them. What do you need to know about these potential clients? You're trying to develop a customer profile. This needs to be a well thought-out description of who your potential wedding clients are.

You're looking for basic information first. How old are they? Are they women or men, or both? Where do they live? What is their income level? After that, you're trying to learn more about them personally. This knowledge will help determine why they will hire you. What are their interests? What are their hobbies? What is their lifestyle like?



It's easy to say these things, but how do you start when you want to find clients who will pay, for example, \$3,000 for wedding photography? Let's break it down. Standard budget lists for weddings suggest that brides and grooms pay 10% of their budget towards photography. For a \$3,000 wedding package, their wedding budget would be \$30,000. Who is paying for a \$30,000 wedding? Based on my own research, most wedding clients are willing to spend up to 15% of their yearly income on their own wedding. Therefore, I'd need to find a couple who makes a combined income of \$200,000. That means that my target client makes approx. \$100,000 per year.

Is that logic a little skewed? Possibly. It's close to true, though, when I analyze what my clients do for a living and look through fifteen years of data to back that up.

If you're having trouble determining your own target clientele, look at your competitors. Look at their Facebook pages, their blogs, their websites. Who are their clients?



Research your market. What venues will be most in line with your clients? You can do a simple search for what venues cost, and determine which would be most in line with clients who can spend what you need to make for wedding photography. It's going to take time, it's going to be frustrating, and you're going to have to do a decent amount of math. I promise you it will be worth it.

Be as specific as you can, but don't stress over being super specific. My target client is very simple. They make over \$100,000 a year, are both men and women (though it skews towards women), they have at least a college degree, are between 25-32 years old, and they live in Manhattan or Philadelphia. That is where I started, and that is what my core clientele has been since 2008. Over time, I've been able to drill down further into it and understand what they like and don't, how they shop, what they value. Some of the analysis of the target client will take time and experience. You just have to start somewhere! I let my target client dictate how my brand is defined. I want to make sure that I am reaching these clients, and how better to do that than align your brand with what they're attracted to?

NOTES



DOES MY TARGET MARKET MATCH MY GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION?

It might be easy to choose your geographic area, but it might also be a tricky decision. Just because you have a home studio or a studio/office in one city, doesn't mean that you only have to work in that small area. You can choose to find your target client in any city, county, or state as long as you're legally prepared to pay the proper taxes and file the requisite licenses to do so!

I choose to serve New York and it's boroughs, Long Island, the Hamptons, New Jersey, and Philadelphia. I am semi-regularly hired to shoot weddings in DC, Maryland, Connecticut, and the areas surrounding my chosen market. I don't consider those locations when figuring out my marketing plan, because I want to focus on the areas that I want to work the most. If I book weddings elsewhere that's great, but I don't want to cast a marketing net that's too wide and too generic. This is the same as establishing your target client. You want a place to start, understanding that some clients and locations might fall out of that chosen area. It's not being exclusionary, it's narrowing your field of view to locations that are more likely to hire you.

Before choosing to target these areas, I researched them. I had a period of about four months between knowing I was moving to New York and actually moving there. I took that time to research everything that I could about weddings in Manhattan. I looked up venues, researched pricing information, read local wedding blogs, and truly familiarized myself with the area. I knew what the "high end" venues were, I knew where people spent their money, I knew what was popular - all before I even set foot on the island of Manhattan! How can you know where to target without knowing about that area?

I did my research in those stages:

I did a generic Google search for "New York City wedding venues." I also tweaked it for "Manhattan wedding venues." This gave me a HUGE list to start from. I looked through tons of generic listings, from The Knot to Wedding Wire, creating a list of dozens of venues. At this time I had no idea which ones I wanted to target. You simply have to start somewhere, and this was a good way to accumulate a lot of venue names.

I then looked at Wedding Wire ratings for the venues, working to determine what were the most respected venues in the geographical area. I looked at exclusive paid listings, such as Style Me Pretty's Little Black Book and the vendor listings on Junebug weddings. Once I had a huge list of venues, I did a Google search by the venue name itself. I wanted to see who was blogging about that venue the most. Was it a coordinator? A photographer? What photographers were most often showing up in a search for that venue? Was it published often? This helped me flesh out the details of that specific venue, and the





vendors often employed to work there. This also helped me figure out costs for each venue. I wanted to know what they charged per head to host a wedding, knowing that I'd want to target venues only in a certain price point.

I never, ever, ever emailed the venue pretending to be a bride. This is a pretty unethical move, so I never resort to it. You can easily find the information you need by searching. Why lie to the venue and waste their time, when you can find what you're looking for in other ways?

Whenever I found something about a venue that I didn't like, I crossed it off of my spreadsheet. Fifty unhappy reviews on Yelp or Wedding Wire? Move on. A super-cheap price point that I know wouldn't be able to support my rates? Move on. Why waste your time finding out more information about a location you know you either won't want to work at, or clients of that venue probably won't be able to afford your rates?

Eventually I came to a good, solid list of about fifty venues that seemed like good options to market to. I then redoubled my research, trying to find out even more information



about other vendors who worked often at those locations. I realized that a lot of the same coordinator names kept coming up. It was the same with photographers, florists, and bands. This helped me with my research for several reasons. Now I know what venues to target, as well as what other wedding professionals would be good targets, too!

You can't start marketing to an area without understanding it fully. It might be great to think "Hey, I want to start shooting beach weddings at that awesome beach two hours away!", but if you don't know that area, you don't know if there is a market for you there!

NOTES





DETERMINING YOUR BRAND AND MARKETING MESSAGE

Before you get out there and start marketing, it's crucial that you have a solid brand and marketing message. You need to do a bit of research before you start writing those messages.. It's important that you understand where you are in your chosen market, so that you can tailor your message accordingly.

You're already done a lot of the work to determine this message. You've written your mission statement. You've defined your target client. Now you need to know what the brand essence of your business is. What do you want your customers to feel when they interact with your company? How will an interaction with your business make your client's emotions change? What will they think, feel, and experience in an intangible way by interacting with your company? Distill that into one short, concise sentence. Mine is very simple: **Susan Stripling Photography is art.**

What is your brand position? This is what your value is, how it is applicable to your business and only your business, and how it helps your clients. You have to illustrate your potential client here. You need to know who you're talking to, who you're serving, what you're promising to them, and why you're better than your competition. For example, my brand positioning statement is **For discerning, beauty-loving brides and grooms, when you work with Susan Stripling Photography you will receive one of a kind, heartfelt artwork of your own wedding.**

Your brand message needs to articulate those four things. Once you know your mission statement, target client, brand essence, and brand position, write a short paragraph connecting them together. This is your brand and marketing message!

MAKE THE MOST OF THE MESSAGE

- 📌 Assess brand essence - what do you want clients to feel
- 📌 Determine your brand position - your value and how it helps clients
- 📌 Your brand message is comprised of mission, target client, brand essence, brand position

NOTES



HOW TO MAKE YOUR BRAND A REALITY

You want your clients to hire a professional when it comes to their wedding photography. Why would you not hire a professional when it comes to your brand? Your brand is such a crucial part of your business!

I hired professionals to create my logo and the look of my website, and I'd do it again. I knew that I was not a professional graphic designer, nor a logo expert. I needed a team that could take my inspiration and my words, and create something visual to represent my business.

Where do you start? The first thing you're going to need to do is gather your inspiration. I did this before reaching out to a single logo designer. I created a Pinterest board to keep everything in one place, and I just started surfing the web. I knew that I was targeting an educated, intelligent, ambitious group of city-dwellers as clients. I wanted a brand that reflected that aesthetic. I gathered logos of other businesses. I gathered colors that I liked. I included pictures that I just liked, for whatever reason, even if I didn't know that reason. I spent a month surfing, saving, and being inspired without pushing myself for the reasons. I ended up with a coherent board of inspiration that was clear and classic, full of clean lines, mixed metals, a little edge, and refined glamour. There were hundreds of images and logos gathered together. One by one, they meant nothing. All together, they pointed me in a clear direction.



I took that inspiration board and started calling potential designers. Finding my designers was hard, and it took time. I started by looking at websites that I liked, and hunting to see who designed them. Many sites had the site designer listed at the bottom. I looked at photography sites, fine art sites, and fashion sites. I also looked at editorial news sites, and fashion blogs. If you're not sure where to start, just make a list of websites that inspire you. Whether you like the layout or the navigation, write it down. Do you like how the images are displayed? Write it down. Do you like it, and you're not sure why? Write it down, too. Next, go looking for the site designer. Now you have a starter list of potential designers to collaborate with!

I wanted a design team that could do both my logo and my site design. I started inquiring with each site designer on my list. Did they do both logos and site designs? If they did not do logos, who did they recommend? What was their price list like? How long should I expect each part of the process to take? What did they need from me? How long was their wait list? I narrowed my list down, then down further. I finally ended up talking to a few designers on the phone before finding the team that I hired. I was very confident in my decision, and am still thrilled every time I continue to collaborate with those designers.

From there, work with your designer to establish your logo. From there, apply that logo to your business cards and printed materials. I worked with the designers on printed material, and purchased templates for further materials that I needed designed. Once we were done, I had a logo and brand that fit my target client. I knew that it was going to be a hit, since I had done so much research on that target client. I was right!

NOTES



THE WEDDING SCHOOL

NOTES









SETTING UP YOUR WEBSITE FOR SEO SUCCESS

When I set up my first website back in 2001, SEO wasn't something that I gave a second's thought to. I started hearing about it in the following years, but still wasn't sure how SEO applied to me. It wasn't until 2014 that I started getting serious about the serious business that is search engine optimization.

SEO is the business of getting your website seen through organic search engine results. This means that you haven't paid for your ranking online. There is a great deal of free SEO information available on the web, and many books to read about the subject.

I learned most of what I know about SEO from Rob Greer. Rob is a fantastic California-based wedding photographer. He is also the owner and creator of Good Gallery, the platform on which my website is built. Rob is a SEO genius, and his advice has completely transformed my business.



When someone enters a query into a search engine, the internet attempts to answer that question. It believes that if your site has more traffic, more links, and great popularity, then your site must be an expert in answering these questions. You cannot trick search engines into thinking you're more relevant than you are. Your traffic has to be organic, your information true.

So where do you start? First of all, I don't recommend hiring a SEO company to help you. If you're anything like me, you get spammed by these companies daily! Unless you really take the time to do your research, you don't even know if these companies will understand your business enough to be able to help you. SEO is time consuming, but you can accomplish the basics by yourself with ease.

You need a clean, simple site with a wealth of information. This is where many photographers fail. I used to have a website with a portfolio, an "About Me" page, a contact page, and that was about it. After all, I was a photographer! I didn't need a lot of words, I needed to show a lot of pictures! The result of that was a site rich with images, but weak on words. Search engines need words and information, and I was lacking in both.

Each page on my website has anywhere from a hundred and fifty to over a thousand words of text. Every image in my portfolio occupies its own place on the web, not in a Flash slideshow. Each image has a massive, keyword-rich caption. Each gallery has a huge description full of links back to other pages on my site. The pages clearly, simply, and



concisely describe the content in ways that will appeal to search engines.

The key here is understanding what your clients are searching for. They're not always just going to the web and typing "Find a New York wedding photographer." They're looking for venues. Venue pricing. Florists. They're searching for things such as "best New York wedding photographer" and "wedding photojournalist New York." Internet searches come from the need to go somewhere, do something, or learn something. Where are your potential clients trying to go? They're going to venues, popular wedding portrait locations, and to visit bands. They want to know about wedding photography, what it costs to get married at certain venues, and who the best florist in town is. They also want to HIRE the vendors for their wedding. What on your site will help lead those searches right to your door?

My site is the main source of my SEO juice, but my blog is equally important. The information on my website only changes when I add new images to my portfolio. My blog changes weekly with new posts and new information. It's crucial that you keep updating and adding to your content, so that your site appears active and in business! I host my blog on WordPress, and strive to make sure that each blog post is full of detailed information. This includes links back to the venue, links other vendors, descriptive captions for each image, and a good amount of text describing the day. I used to never write on my blog posts, believing that each image should tell the story for me. While that might visually be true, that didn't help with my SEO at all!

I am constantly reviewing the web for popular keywords , and working those keywords into my SEO. Go ahead and try this : go to Google, and start typing the name of a popular local venue. Let's call that venue "The Wedding Club." What happens? When you type "The Wedding Club..." Google tries to fill in the rest of what you're looking for with popular searches for this venue. You might see it suggest "The Wedding Club pricing" or "The Wedding Club venue." These are keywords that you can use! If people are searching for those terms, why not have those terms lead them directly to you? The more specific your keywords are, the slimmer the chance that competitors are using those precise keywords as well. Use your keywords naturally, in real text, and don't spam the blog posts or website pages with random lists of keywords. Search engines will see what you're trying to do, and it won't work!

You'll also want to set yourself up with some type of analytics for your site. I use Google Analytics to track my traffic. It also helps me see how clients are finding my site. What are they entering into Google that helps them find me?



MARKETING YOUR BUSINESS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

If I liked a restaurant five years ago, I'd call up my friends and tell them about it. Maybe I'd email, or text a referral. But generally I wouldn't talk about the restaurant until the topic of "Hey, where should we go to dinner?" came up again. Now? I can like a restaurant online and thousands of people know about it. I can contribute to a huge field of reviews that can educate future customers about the restaurant experience. How powerful is that?

Social media can't make up for a bad product, bad service, or a bad company. It can't make you a success overnight. Despite what you might think of it, social media isn't free. However, it is the most important tool in my entire marketing bag. Using it correctly has been crucial to my success over the last few years and hopefully, my success in the future.

SELFIES OR SELF PROMOTION

📌 Take it seriously, social media is a proven invaluable marketing tool

📌 Don't focus on hard sales, but instead understand how to engage your target audience

📌 Be patient, building a following takes time - Rome wasn't build in a day

Do you go to social media to be sold to? Of course not. You go to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest to share with your friends, find out what's new in the lives of your family, to curate information you're interested in, and to interact with people you choose to. Selling your business via social media is a delicate balance between sharing, engaging, and actually selling. You don't want to turn off potential customers before they have a chance to get to know you and your business because you tried to "sell" them the second they hit your page!

Before you even begin putting together your social media message, identity, and content, you need to first understand what your audience needs and wants. How can you deliver those needs and wants through your social media presence? Instead of overtly selling to potential clients, try helping them first! The more you can engage customers via social

media, the more likely they are to come back and stay engaged.

I can hear some of you saying now, "Yeah, but I only have 50 Twitter followers and 100 Facebook fans and NO ONE knows that I'm even ON Pinterest, I need to get followers and fans and likes FIRST!" Some of you might even be considering buying fans, likes, clicks, and interest. I highly suggest that you not do that! You'll have a greater reach via social media if you have loyal, dedicated fans than if you buy anonymous names. The more your fans, clients, and potential clients interact with you via your social media channels, the more you're likely to gain true, trusting followers. That is much more important long term than a bunch of faceless, internet-bought "friends."

Another important note is that social media takes a lot of time. Can you do this yourself?



Do you even want to do this yourself? Does it make financial sense for you to be doing this yourself? Figure out how many hours per week you're spending on social media, and multiply that by the hourly cost of have an employee do this specific task for you. Can you make more money in that amount of time than you'd pay a person to helm your social media? If the answer is yes, it might be something worth considering. Bear in mind that if you hire someone to manage your social media, you will need to train that person with the utmost care. They'll need to understand your social media ethics, morals, and beliefs. You'll need to make sure that whatever they post will be 100% in line with the way you want your business shared with the world. That's a major undertaking!

Your social media accounts are here to enforce your brand. They are here to establish your mission statement to the world. Take them seriously!

NOTES





NOTES

ANALYZING THE DATA

I talked about the importance of Google Analytics back when we were discussing SEO, but it bears mentioning again! If you aren't set up to have Google Analytics monitor your site, you're missing out on the easiest way to track your social media conversions. Google Analytics has campaign tracking, which can tell you what traffic is coming to your site from what social media network. This is easily found by simply going to google.com/analytics and signing up. You'll create an account specific to your site, and you'll have to place a bit of code on your site so that Analytics can track you. Some of you might be able to do that yourself, but I had my web designer do it in order to ensure that the code got placed in the right spot!






I look at my Google Analytics at least once or twice per month, sometimes once a week. I can tell you today how many people have visited my site, how many have come from each social media network, how long they spend on my site, what pages they enter and exit from, and so forth. Google Analytics is extraordinarily robust, and also very easy to use. I highly suggest placing "Check Google Analytics" on your marketing calendar so that you can stay up to date with how your social media outreach is affecting your site traffic.





CREATE A CALENDAR

With so many types of social media platforms to manage, it can quickly become overwhelming. I see many businesses fail in social media because of two things : posting too much, or posting too little. No one wants to follow someone on Twitter who tweets fifty times per day! No one wants their Facebook News Feed clogged with repetitive status updates! I have created a basic social media calendar for you to adjust as necessary. This is the calendar that I try to work by, making sure that I stay active on social media without becoming annoying! Of course, as you build a following your numbers might change, just as these numbers might be too high if you're just starting out. I highly suggest adjusting this calendar as needed. The goal is to make a plan and stick to it!

BUSINESS TOOLS: SOCIAL MEDIA CALENDAR		MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
	Retweet 5 things from peers/industry professionals Tweet 3 business-related tweets Tweet 2 personal tweets Reply to at least 7 @ mentions Tweet at least one ? that invites a response							
	Respond to comments on your Facebook wall Post 3 business status updates on your Facebook wall Share 2 industry-related posts on your Facebook wall Comment on 6 Facebook statuses Leave A Message on 2 Facebook business pages Find and like 3 new industry peers or professionals							
	Pin 10 new pins of your own work Comment on 5 pins from industry professionals Find and follow 2 new industry peers/professionals Pin 5 new pins to other boards you curate							
	Post 2 new business-related images Post 2 new personal images Comment on 4 images (other than "Nice!") Find and follow 2 new industry peers/professionals							
	Blog one post of wedding/engagement/client images Blog one post of business updates							





THE WEDDING SCHOOL

NOTES



FACEBOOK

The ability to see what your friends, and friends of your friends, like on Facebook is what makes Facebook such an extraordinarily powerful tool. It is especially crucial, when using Facebook, to keep your clients and potential clients engaged with your page. When you do this, you'll ensure that your posts will keep showing up in their News Feed. Facebook has a really particular News Feed Algorithm, which (frustratingly) seems to change daily. One thing that does appear to stay constant is the more your viewers interact with your page, the more you'll stay in their News Feed.

I also use the Facebook business page insights to give me data about my page. The Insights show you growth per week, how many new fans you've acquired, what posts are receiving the most traffic, and so forth. This is not the same as Google Analytics, as it doesn't show how many people are accessing your actual website from Facebook, but it is giving you excellent tracking data about your business page. This is really valuable data to know, as it will help you shape your Facebook activity for the future.

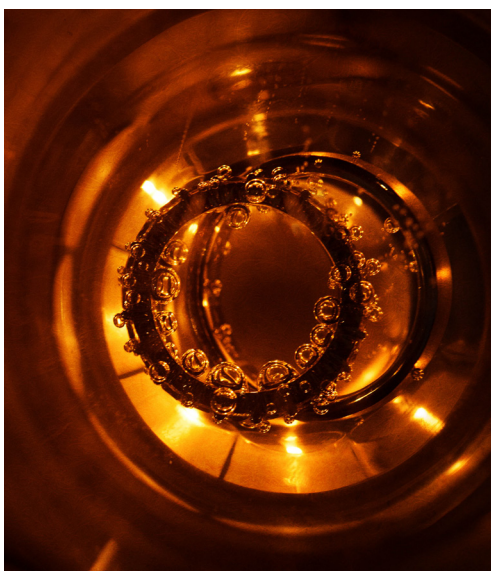
I do several things with Facebook, all of them equally important. First, I share the images that I blog. I also include a link back to my blog, hoping to drive traffic back to my site. I know this works because I use my Google Analytics to tell me that it does! I invite my clients to tag themselves, their family, and their friends in the album and to share it on their own walls. This drives more traffic to my page, and I see my Likes go up accordingly. The second thing I do is to try and create conversation. I do this by asking questions to clients, and I also ask questions to photographers. My Facebook business page is equally important to my wedding business and my education business, so I try to keep both sets of customers equally engaged. As you ask more questions, you'll get to know your audience better. You'll also be able to use Insights to see what posts are resonating more with your viewers. This will further enable you to decide what, when, and how to keep updating your page. What engages people? What types of posts have the most responses? I love analyzing my data, it gives me a clear roadmap for where I want to drive my Facebook interaction next.

I also try to use my Facebook business page to let clients know me a bit better. I have been paring down my personal Facebook page, trying to get to a much smaller group of actual friends so that it's more of a personal interaction. For example, I have 4,000+ "friends" on Facebook...but my business page has 34,000 fans. Which do you think I'd use to interact with people more? I try to sometimes post pictures of my family, share personal Instagrams, and share important personal milestones. I am very careful what and how I share my personal life online, but sharing just a bit on Facebook puts a real life person behind the business name, thus making the interaction more personal for everyone involved. I also share behind-the-scenes images of me at work, in order to increase curiosity as to what the final images will look like. I find this accomplishes two things : it makes me more human, and it makes people more eager to see the blog post from that specific wedding.





Lastly, I try to post tips, tricks, and hints to clients on Facebook. I want to be a valuable resource to both wedding clients and photographers alike, so sharing information keeps me a trusted source of knowledge. My goal is to increase the loyalty to my brand, and to freely share information helps do just that. Let's be real, we're all on social media to promote our businesses. All of the free information, cheerful chit-chat, helpful questions, and interactions are to move our businesses forward. Fans of your page aren't dumb, they know that you're there to market yourself. By keeping the marketing message subtle and the promotion not overt, you'll be a better salesperson in the long run.



I have Facebook “like” boxes on my site, as well as share links. I want to make it as easy as possible for clients to like me, share my images, and interact with me! The interaction is incredibly important. Respond to posts on your wall - and respond well. Not just a “Yes” or “No”, but a thought-out response. It will go a long way in increasing customer loyalty and also to show that you truly care about the people interacting with you on your page. The second clients and prospects know you're listening to them is the second that you've made your relationship with them stronger. Who would you rather buy something from? A company with a proven track record of listening to their customers, or one that actively ignores them or doesn't interact?

Don't be afraid to ask people to Like your business! Seek out brand advocates who have worked with you and love you. Ask them to spread the word and stay engaged.

Another way to keep people engaged with you on Facebook is to literally climb into their phones! Have you ever heard of the Text to Like feature on Facebook? I bet you haven't. I just heard of it myself! All you have to direct someone to do is text “Like SusanStrip-lingPhotography” to the number 32665 (FBOOK) and they will automatically like my Facebook page. It truly doesn't get any easier than that!



One other thing I do with Facebook is utilize the Milestones feature. Whether it's winning an award, celebrating another year in business, or another special happening, I add those to my business page as Milestones. It gives my business a history, as well as a detailed map of my growth.

Sometimes I do pay for Facebook ads, and I target them as carefully as possible. You can really dig in deep to find your perfect audience on Facebook, if you try hard enough. It's easy to create an ad based on gender, age, and location. But if you want to get to a more targeted audience you're going to need the Interests category as well as potentially the Job Title. You can really nail down your targets there. What if you want to put out an ad to brides who like Weddings and Wedding Planning as their interest...but also that have high level jobs? When you take the Job Title and the Workplace together you can really go after someone specific.

For example, let's say that I wanted to shoot a specific wedding. I saw online, just to make up a situation, that my favorite buyer at my favorite high end fashion line was getting married. I know she's thirty-five years old and lives in Manhattan. So that's three search criteria right there - sex, age, and location. Now I drill deeper and create an ad that's ONLY going to go out to women who are thirty-five, live in Manhattan, are retail buyers, and who work for a specific company. How many thirty-five year olds who live in Manhattan, work at that specific company, and do that specific job, could there be? You could actually create an ad to target just one person if you wanted to! How's that for specific?

TWITTER

I love Twitter. I hate Twitter. It's exhausting, fascinating, and it's where I get all of my breaking news. I've been on Twitter for years, personally, but it's only been in the past few years that I've gotten skilled at utilizing it primarily for business.

Many social media "experts" will recommend having your Twitter feed post directly onto your Facebook business page. I don't do that. For one thing, I want to update Twitter and Facebook separately. I don't want someone to not follow me on Twitter because the content is the same as on Facebook, and I don't want someone to not Like me on Facebook because they can get the same information on Twitter. Make sense?

I do use Twitter similarly to Facebook. I try to keep people engaged, start up dialogue, share new things that are happening, and so forth. Where Twitter and Facebook differ, for me, is the amount of random "stuff" I share. I'm more apt to retweet a funny cat video on Twitter than I am to post it to my Facebook business page wall. I keep a more tongue-in-cheek and self-deprecating style on Twitter than I do on Facebook. It's still in my particular business voice, just a bit looser and funnier on Twitter.

I do use Twitter for social media research. I use a site called topsy.com to research specific



search terms. Want to know what people are saying about wedding photography right now? Try Topsy.

I use HootSuite to manage my Twitter account. I follow many, many industry professionals on Twitter but I don't want to see their feeds all the time. So in HootSuite I have a personal list that contains the people I'm most interested in, and I can see their feeds and only their feeds. Its' very easy interface shows you your messages, your retweets, and your @ replies in an easy-to-follow fashion. I also use HootSuite for Facebook, but it's main purpose for me is to manage Twitter. It will also let you schedule tweets, if staying on top of them in real time is too much for your day to day business.

Every once in awhile I will promote a tweet. If I have a blog post that's especially excellent, I'll tweet it and promote it. If I'm selling a new book, I'll tweet it and promote it. It does help drive traffic to my site and sell books, but not so much that I'm going to promote every single tweet that I put out there!

GOOGLE +

I know. You're probably saying "Who uses Google +, anyhow?" I'm not at all claiming that Google + has the same reach as the other social media marketing channels that I use, but it would be foolish to ignore it entirely. If you don't have a Google + page at all, it's really easy to set up.

First, you just need to set up your own personal Google + page at plus.google.com. Then simply click on Pages in the menu on the left-hand side. From there, you have to choose a category to place your business in. You can choose a maximum of five categories. Right now I've only chosen Portrait Studio and Wedding Photographer, which isn't great - I should choose more! Not sure what to choose? There is nothing wrong with checking out your competitors and seeing what categories they are listed under. Just make sure the first three categories that you choose are the most concise, as those are the ones that potential customers will see on your Places page.



WRANGLING AND MAXIMIZING YOUR SOCIAL POWER

- 📌 Facebook Insights
- 📌 Facebook "Text to Like"
- 📌 Topsy.com
- 📌 HootSuite
- 📌 Google Categories
- 📌 Pinterest Analytics
- 📌 Pinterest Boards specific to groups
- 📌 Latergramme
- 📌 Constant communication and engagement



When you enter your phone number, Google will be able to find your business on Google maps. Add the other information that the page requires and there you go - your own Google + business page. Take the time to add images, make it beautiful, and fill out ALL of your page details.

I also highly suggest getting your business placed on the map with Google.

The way to do that is to go to Places for Business on Google. This enabled me to add my business address into my Google + page. The key here is that Google has to verify your actual business location. I did this by requesting that they send me a postcard. About two weeks later I had a postcard in my mailbox with a security code that I then entered into Places for Business. Just like that, I was verified!

I use Google + in the same way that I use Facebook - in fact, I post the same content to both. To give you an idea of how well that works, I only have 26 people who engage with my business on Google +. On Facebook, I have 35,000. Many people will shake their head at that and say "Then why use Google + at all?" Well, why not? It takes almost no time at all to repost the same content from Facebook, and it absolutely helps my SEO.

PINTEREST

I always hated Pinterest. I dreaded it, thinking it was really only out there for wedding clients to pin pictures they'd later ask me to re-create. I dabbled in it a bit, for personal reasons, and never really felt called to curate a massive amount of information the way other Pinterest-ers seemed to do. Who cares about my favorite recipes? Who wants to see the next tattoo I'm considering getting?

My wise friend Melanie Duncan told me that Pinterest was a HUGE opportunity if I just reached out and took it, so take it I did. With little education or knowledge about Pinterest, I started pinning away and was shocked at how quickly it led to a huge stream of traffic to my site.



First, I created specialty boards. I have boards for Wedding Rings, Wedding Shoes, Wedding Flowers, Wedding Portraits, and so forth. Every time I blog, I take each image and see if it will fit into a specialty board.

Next, I created boards for specific venues. For example, I have a board entitled Weddings at the Bowery Hotel. Every time I shoot a wedding at the Bowery Hotel and blog it, I pin every one of those images to the Bowery Hotel board. Those images also go into specialty boards.

Another great idea is an education board. If you write posts for Facebook or your blog to educate your clients, pin those posts! You'll quickly establish yourself as a leader in your field. I am careful to only pin content that I created myself. I know that Pinterest will tell you to re-pin others' content, but I am really careful that if I do that it's not the content of another wedding photographer. The last thing I need is to send potential clients to my competitors' websites!

You can also use Group Boards to collaborate with other pinners. Want to get together with local vendors and pin content for local brides? A Group Board would be a great way to start!

Keep an eye on your Pinterest Analytics. Not sure where that is? Go to your Pinterest page and click the gear right next to your business name. You'll see a drop down for Analytics. This helps me track how many people are re-pinning my content. I can also see my impressions, reach, clicks, and visitors. This is all helpful information when driving what I'm going to pin next!

Pinterest is too huge to ignore, so why not leverage it to your advantage?

INSTAGRAM

In the past year, Instagram has become a huge part of my social media marketing plan. The rise of wedding-day hashtags has made this social media platform especially popular with brides and grooms. It's personally my favorite platform these days, and I don't see that changing any time soon!

I chose early on to split my personal Instagram account from my business Instagram account. If you follow my personal account, it's pictures of my dog, my life, and things I find interesting. Everything on my personal account is shot with my iPhone, not my "real camera." If you follow my business account, you'll see a picture per day from my portfolio. These images are professional images, not shot on my iPhone.

Since I target both photographers and clients on Instagram, I make sure that my captions appeal to both. I put the year and location in the caption. I tag my clients; and I already



know their Instagram names because I ask for them prior to the wedding date. I tag the venue, and any other vendors from the wedding day. I know all of this information before the wedding day even arrives, because I have gotten a vendor list from my clients via their wedding day worksheet. I take the time to look up each vendor and note their Instagram accounts for later! I also include exif information in my captions for the photographers who follow my account.

I make sure to add relevant hashtags in the comments of the picture, not the caption. I prefer to keep the hashtags limited, extremely applicable, and away from the caption itself. I am constantly searching hashtags, trying to see what brides and grooms are responding to.

I use a program called Latergramme to manage my Instagram account. There is no way that I can email myself a picture every day, copy and paste the captions from my email, and so forth. It's not efficient. Latergramme allows you to populate an online queue from your computer, which is then stored in an app on your phone or mobile device. You can choose what image you'd like to post, and it takes you directly to Instagram to post the image and caption!

From there, I make sure to always interact with the comments on my images. I respond to questions, and stay connected. It's the true back-and-forth of the relationships you build through the comments and your responses that will keep people loyal to your feed, and your company! Everyone loves to be heard on social media, and they need to be responded to. Make sure that you're staying on top of your responses!

NOTES



WHAT ELSE ARE THE KIDS USING THESE DAYS?

I realize that there has come a time when I don't know immediately what the newest social media trend is. I'm not in high school, and I don't really use social media in the way that my teenager daughter does. If I don't keep my eyes open, I won't know the next big thing until it's too late to implement it effectively. I am constantly researching, reading, and being open to new suggestions.

I haven't yet implemented Snapchat, although I can see how it could benefit my business. I have started dabbling in Periscope for the same reason. Don't be afraid to test new things, and discontinue their use if they don't work for you and your business!



FINDING YOUR UNIQUE VOICE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

It's not enough to set up a Facebook account and start Tweeting your feelings. What are you going to say? Are you going to talk about religion? Are you going to rant about politics around election time? Finding your voice on social media is so very, very crucial.

I am myself online. I don't pretend to like things that I don't. I don't paint a picture of a life that I don't really live. That said, I don't let people 100% into my whole life online. My personal life is just that : personal. It's private. I don't post pictures of my kids without their permission. I don't post pictures of my husband, or talk about him, without his permission. I don't feel the need to tell the world how much I love my family. When you look at me on social media, you can see that I love Hamilton the musical. You can see that I adore my dog. I read books. I like memes. Do you know what my religion is, or if I even have one? Do you know if I go to church? Volunteer? Donate? Am I a Democrat or a Republican? No one knows.

I feel very strongly that my personal life is private, and not part of my business. I'm careful with every single word I say online, knowing that once you put something on the internet, it's always there in some form. Keeping that separation between my life online and my life offline has helped enrich both my personal life and my business life.

Before you tweet your first tweet, or click your first Snapchat, think long and hard about what you want to share with the world. What will your voice be? Will you swear? Capitalize all of your words? Talk about religion? Share your views on politics? Stay quiet? Which resonates most with your brand? With you?

NOTES



HOW SOCIAL MEDIA LEADS TO INQUIRIES

Social media is fun, for sure. It's fun to post Instagram images and watch the likes roll in. It's fun to engage in a dialogue with your clients on Facebook. Social media is the best when it's actively bringing you inquiries from potential wedding clients.

Every social media platform has a different strategy. They each have a different app or website to help maximize my efficiency and time spent posting. You know as well as I do how easy it is to get immersed in Facebook! You can lose hours of your day there!

Every day, I post an image of the day to Facebook. It goes directly to my Facebook business page. It is not shared on Twitter or Instagram. If I cross-post all of my images, what would be the incentive for potential clients to follow me on multiple platforms? I use a program called Meet Edgar to post daily to my account. What I love about Edgar are the Libraries. You can create multiple posts in multiple libraries, choosing to post from whatever Library you'd like. I have a Library called Everyday Images, and each time I blog, I put each image in that Library. I choose what days of the week for it to post, and what times, and it automatically posts for me. The great thing about Edgar and the Library, is that when you run out of posts, it will start over again. It's wonderful to have a rotating group of images and know that you will never run out of content! It's also wonderful to have your daily image post without you having to do a thing! The only thing I do in Facebook is check the images every so often, responding to questions and chatting with commenters. The interaction with the comments will help your posts in the mysterious Facebook algorithm, ensuring that more people see your images.

I post an image to Instagram every day, using Latergramme (as mentioned before). I don't have a program that automatically posts to Instagram for me, because I want to choose my images every day. I check back in during the day, responding to questions and moderating comments. As I mentioned before, I make sure that each vendor is tagged and mentioned in each caption. It's been really helpful when it comes to building relationships with venues and other vendors!



I post to Pinterest every time I blog. I use a program called Tailwind to post for me. While it might be tempting to post every image that you blog to Pinterest the second that you blog, that might not be the best idea. It will flood your followers' feeds with your images, which is a huge turnoff to viewers. It will also ensure that all of your images are only seen for a brief amount of time, until new images populate the feeds. Tailwind allows me to schedule the pinning, as many times per day as I do or don't want. I tell Tailwind to pin sporadically throughout the day, four images per day. This spans out the pinning of a whole blog post to multiple days.

I post to Twitter whenever the mood strikes me. I mostly use Twitter for chit-chat, silly things I've seen, and random bits of information. My Twitter account posts to my personal Facebook page.

I set up my posts to Instagram and Facebook twice a month, at most. I take a few hours and hammer them out, stocking up my library for the coming weeks. This really helps me waste less time, thus becoming more efficient.

I make sure to stay on top of how my social media accounts are driving traffic to my site. I look at my Google Analytics to see how the interaction with each account is or isn't ending with a click to my site.

Most importantly, I post with the customer in mind. Remember working on your mission statement and your brand? What problems are you trying to solve for your customers? How can your social media activity help cement you as the perfect business to solve those problems? What questions can you ask and images can you post? How can you encourage your potential customers to begin a dialogue with you? Answering these questions will encourage your social media fans to reach out to you when they need a wedding photographer!

NOTES



CHAPTER NOTES







ASSESSING THE COMPETITION

As much as we photographers want to be hired based on our artistic eye, our talent, our skill, and our personalities, we all know that almost every client has price to consider. Even clients with healthy budgets still tend to be price-conscious. Price often is a factor, as much as we want to pretend that it's not. It's crucial to find a way to figure out where you stand in your market. As wise photographer Jennifer Cody once told me, "Competition is not a dirty word, it's part of every business. Companies always have competitors and this is a good thing. It offers variety and drives change and innovation."

In our case, we're not working at massive corporations and hiring secret shoppers to figure out what our competition is up to. Yet we do owe it to ourselves, and our businesses, to do the research. We have to be honest with ourselves about where our pricing and talent place us amongst our chosen competition.

How do you do the research to figure out where you stand? There are many ways. I am not advocating wasting other photographer's time by sending out endless emails masquerading as a bride. That's dishonest, and you don't need to do that.

I start by looking at online listings in my area. For example, WPJA lists the starting price of each photographer by state. While those listings aren't always up to the minute accurate, they are often good for giving you a starting point. They are good for helping you understand where you might fall in terms of skill, experience, and pricing for your geographical area. There are other regional or metropolitan bridal publications that often have such lists, including things like the photographer's style and starting price.

I start out with a loose search online by googling the venues that I want to work at and the word "photography." I go straight for the best-known, "high end" venues, and began working from there. Doing that search will lead me to several photographers who have worked there often. I look at their blogs to extrapolate other venues that were worth researching. After a decent amount of research, I come up with a core group of photographers that seem similar in style to my own. I also find the photographers who work at venues that I want to work at. From there, I Google those photographers until I find their starting rates. Some will have listings in sites where the prices are generic, say \$1500-\$2500, \$2500-\$4000, etc. This gives me a way to begin putting together a general price bracket for the market that I want to be in.

I do this almost every single year. I take a long, hard look around me to see who is still my competition, who is emerging competition, and who is falling by the wayside. I find this very important, because I want to keep an eagle eye on what my competition is doing. Are they upping their presence in magazine ads? Online listings? Blogging more? Facebooking less? Running specials? Shooting more weddings than last year? Shooting less? I don't obsess over what my competition is doing, but I absolutely want to keep an eye on them.



CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER VENDORS

One of the best things you can do to drive inquiries to your door is cultivate relationships with other vendors. I actively pursue working relationships with many vendors, venues, and wedding professionals. I want to make sure that I am the first person that they refer their clients to!

I know that the photographer is not the first person that most clients call when they get engaged. They set a date first. Then they shop for their venue. Knowing that they will likely secure their venue and their wedding coordinator before they start calling photographers is really important. I need these venues and coordinators to refer me, so what can I do to ensure that happens?

A SOLID RELATIONSHIP

- 📌 Pursue working relationships - be patient, this takes time
- 📌 Be authentic. Don't treat vendors like an acquisition - no one cultivates relationships being treated like a commodity
- 📌 Follow up and send thank you notes, refer them, but don't make asks until the foundation is built

You truly do need to actively pursue and cultivate relationships with vendors. This includes other photographers! I cannot stress this one enough. When I was living in Florida and doing destination weddings, I wasn't able to work at venues more than once or twice per year. Therefore it was nearly impossible to build a relationship with a venue that I wanted to refer me. The turnover with venue professionals was fast, and I would almost never work with a venue coordinator more than once. I really struggled with vendor relationships, so I worked hard on cultivating photographer relationships.

Be careful with how you approach the venues and coordinators. Vendors can see a "put me on your referral list" photographer a mile away! No one wants to be used just for business purposes. No one wants to enter into a business relationship with someone that they refer who can't help them back. You have to show the vendors that you can help them. Want a photographer to refer

you? Refer him! Want a venue to refer you? Make an album for them that really shows off their venue, then talk them up to prospective brides that might still be venue-searching. You have to prove that being in a referral relationship with them is a two-way street. This will take time. A lot of time. I've been in New York for seven years, and I am barely scratching the surface of some good relationships.

How do I cultivate relationships with venues and coordinators? I always follow up post-wedding. I handwrite notes to them saying how nice it was to work with them. I tag them in all social media posts. I offer files, prints, and albums to vendors that I want to work with again. I make it a priority to get these things to them. Every photographer promises files and images, but all I hear from vendors is that few actually follow through with it! I try to be a helpful resource to them, without asking for a thing in return. This



really has helped me get on a few great vendor lists. More importantly, it has made venues and vendors think of me kindly. I'm a nice person, offering images up to them, sharing them with my social media audience, and trying to help them out. Why wouldn't they want to help me in return? It works. I promise.

I also try to join local networking groups on Facebook and stay active with them. I comment and interact with venues and vendors on their Instagram feeds, Twitter accounts, and Facebook business pages. I try very hard to keep my name in front of them whenever and however I can! I stay on top of my research, always trying to get to know new people. I keep an eye on vendor directories. I read vendor blogs, and local wedding blogs. I follow Instagram hashtags. I stay informed.

As I mentioned before, it's also important to make friends with other photographers! I suggest joining a local Facebook group for photographers, and being active. Go to local and national conventions. Take workshops. Get to know your community of photographers. Make friends, real friends. I prefer to refer weddings to photographers that I know personally, over people that I've never met. I need to make sure that I'm referring someone who will not only create beautiful images for these referrals, but take great care of them as well. I know that my friends give great customer service, and that they're great photographers. Every time I refer them, I know the clients are in great hands. Making friends in your photography community will help get some referrals sent your way, and will also give you someone (sometimes multiple someones!) to refer to.

Making friends and cultivating relationships takes time. It won't happen overnight. Be patient, and let the relationships grow organically. Your business, and you, will be better for it!

NOTES



DO I NEED A LARGE MARKETING BUDGET? HOW CAN I GET MY NAME OUT THERE FOR FREE?

I have operated for many years with a limited marketing budget. There are a few listings and things that I pay for, but most of my marketing endeavors are done for free. There are so many things that you can do to get your name out there!

Actively seek publication on blogs. You need to see where other photographers in your market are getting published. Once you find those blogs, look at what sort of weddings each blog publishes. Some like do-it-yourself details, some like destination weddings, some prefer vintage themes, etc. Look on each blog for how to get featured, and follow their guidelines. Yes, you're providing content to a blog without getting paid for it. You're also getting advertising for your business without paying for that either!

Actively seek publication in magazines. The same criteria applies to doing your research before submitting. Once you submit, don't pester the publication for a response. Do follow up politely within a few weeks to make sure that they received your submission. I don't mind not getting paid for a publication. Sure, they're using my work to sell magazines but how much would four or five full page ads cost? Four or five pages of publication is worth a lot! I don't mind providing the content for the advertising.

Maintain your blog with every wedding that you shoot. I want to show how much I work. I want to show continuity in the strength of my images, be it at a million dollar wedding or a backyard picnic. I also want the SEO juice from each blog post. I make sure that each one I craft is well-written, proofread, and keyword rich.

Enter online competitions. There are many to choose from, from Fearless to ISPWP to WPJA.

Why is it so important to get your work all over the web? Part of it is to get your images in front of potential clients. The other part goes back to SEO. A huge part of your SEO ranking comes from your backlinks. What are backlinks? Very simply put, a backlink is any link from another webpage to your website. If you are featured on a wedding blog, and that blog includes a link to your site, that's a backlink. Improving my backlinks is a huge part of my SEO and marketing strategy.

I just mentioned online competitions as a way to get your images across the web. What else does that do? You've got it : provide backlinks. If you win a contest, changes are it will link to your website. Every time you pin something on Pinterest, it links back to your site. This is partly why I work to get my images in as many places as I can on the web! Another way to increase your backlinks, help your SEO, and get your name out there is to list your company on as many online list sites as you can. These are called citations. A



GET OUT THERE

- 📌 Submit for and seek features on blogs and in magazines
- 📌 Keep your own blog current and showcase your work
- 📌 Enter competitions; awards = press
- 📌 Revisit your SEO and improving backlinks

citation is any time your business is talked about on the internet. A citation can be a listing with your company name on it. A complete citation includes your address, phone number, and website. A partial citation includes just part of that information, such as just your business name alone. You can take the time to search out these listings and fill out your information, or you can hire an employee or a company to do it for you. Because I wanted a major presence on the web, I hired a citation specialist to create mine for me. Because I didn't have the time to fully dedicate to this endeavor, I needed someone who was very good at it to do it for me!



NOTES



WORD OF MOUTH

Nothing that you can do online will help you if the word of mouth about your business is bad. You need happy clients, and happy vendors, talking about you. How do you do that?

In short, be good at running your business. Deliver your deliverables to your clients on time. Keep clear, open channels of communication. Keep up with your workflow. Respond to emails and phone calls in a timely manner. Keep your clients happy, and the word of mouth will be positive. No paid marketing is as useful as a happy client!

I encourage my clients to leave reviews about my business online. It's great for your backlinks and SEO. It will also show potential clients that you're a real business, with really happy customers.

I also highly recommend getting involved with your local business community. Get to know your other wedding professionals outside of the photography world. Get to know other small business owners in your area. I understand that might be easier said than done. I live in Brooklyn, and networking here is a huge, difficult undertaking. It was much easier to network when I lived in Tallahassee, Florida! The more people you know, the bigger your business circle, and the more opportunities you have to be talked about!

NOTES





IS ANY PAID ADVERTISING WORTH IT?

I used to pay for online listings. They never brought me much work. I would get a handful of inquiries that would go nowhere. The traffic wasn't enough to justify the cost, so I let go of all my paid online listings. It did not negatively impact my business in any way.

I cannot speak for every country, state, and city. I can't speak for everyone everywhere. I can only speak for me and what I've had successes and failures with in the past. There might be a great online listing for your area that will bring you great success. I also find that it varies based on the price tag of the photographer. Paid online listings worked better for me when I was at a lower starting price, and less effectively as my starting price began to rise.

I can definitely say that I would rather spend my money on caring for the actual people that can refer me. When someone finds you on a blog, it's just pictures on a site. There isn't any person sitting in front of that potential client saying "Oh yes, you **MUST** work with this photographer, she/he is fantastic to work with!" I'd rather spend my money on albums for venues and prints for florists, than on a generic listing out there in cyber space that I hope works for me. I know that relationships work. I know that there is nothing like positive word of mouth.

Yes, people will find you on blogs and in magazines and hire you. Sure, they'll just randomly find you by googling, and hire you. However, building long-term relationships with photographers, venue, vendors, and others around you will be much more long-lasting and effective.



I have recently started experimenting with Facebook ads, targeting them very closely to the specific clients that I want to reach. I create ads and tailor them to the demographics that I want. For example, I might create an ad that is delivered to residents of Manhattan between the ages of 25-40 who list their relationship status as “engaged.” Or I might drill deeper, also specifying their income range and online buying behavior. If you’ve done the work and defined your target client, targeting your Facebook ads will be easier than you think!

I am also often asked about bridal fairs, and whether or not I participate in them. I do not. The cost of entry to bridal fairs in New York City is astronomical, and I cannot imagine being able to book enough weddings to make the cost worthwhile. I also found, when participating in bridal fairs in Florida, that most brides were there just to kick tires. They weren’t really serious about choosing a photographer then. If I lived in a smaller area where bridal fairs were the norm, I would probably participate. It might not be to attract clients, per say, but to solidify my place in the market. It would also be to show myself to other vendors.

If I had to choose one place to put my advertising dollars (that wasn’t Facebook), it would probably be with listings on local blogs. They’re going to reach my type of clients easier than a large national blog. Also, since national blogs update content many times daily and smaller blogs do not, I stand a greater chance of having my work stay at the top of that blog for longer. This will attract more views, and hopefully push more traffic to my site.

NOTES



HANDLING THE INQUIRIES

When you receive an inquiry, how are you going to respond? 95% of my inquiries come in via the contact form on my website. The other 5% are phone calls, but phone calls are rarer and rarer these days!

When I get an inquiry, I respond in one of two ways. If the email is really generic, or has no phone number, I send them an email with my pricing information. I then follow up a week later with another e-mail asking if they got the information, and if they have any questions. If I never hear back, I file the inquiry away and move on. I don't pester them to find out why they never got back to me, I just follow up once and then let it go. Maybe my prices were too high. Maybe my prices were too low. Maybe the potential clients didn't like the style of albums that I offer. Maybe they didn't like the galleries of work that I shared in the inquiry email. Perhaps they were too funky, or non-traditional, or not their style, or whatever. Occasionally I luck out and people write back and say, "No thanks, and this is why," but often if they aren't interested after those first emails, I'll just simply never hear back.

If they've given me a little more information, then I pick up the phone and give them a call. I really have a mental block against talking to clients on the phone; for some reason it makes me terribly nervous. I practically have a script that I follow when I call a potential client. First, I just ask them to tell me about their wedding. I want to hear about how they chose their venue, what other vendors they've picked, and so forth. Eventually the talk works around to "tell me about your rates and package information," and that's when I stop the call. I don't want someone scribbling down the collection information on a scrap of paper. I tell them that it would be easier if I just emailed them the pricing information. This way they could look at the pricing at their leisure. Now I can email them the rate information and the online galleries, so that I can get more information in front of their faces.

Many photographers don't share their prices in the initial response to inquiries. I do. It's not a secret what I charge. I don't want it to be a secret. If a potential client wants to know my rates, I'll tell them. If a potential client emails me and doesn't give me a phone number to call them, I'll just e-mail them my rates. If a potential client calls and is really just interested in hearing my rates, I share them.

Many photographers will make their prices readily available to potential clients. I don't include my rates on my website. Many sales and marketing specialists will tell you this is a mistake. Potential clients, especially millennials, want to know pricing immediately. If I include my rates on my website, it can be confusing to potential clients. I charge more to go to the Hamptons, which is a four hour drive away. I charge more if I have to fly to a wedding. There are so many variables with pricing, that I prefer to tell clients about them when they contact me. This may or not work for you! Perhaps putting a start price, or your whole rate sheet, on your website is the best choice for you. Only you can answer this question.



A lot of photographers get upset when clients inquire and aren't willing to pay the photographers' rates. Not every person that calls or e-mails can afford you. Some of them are merely price shopping. What's wrong with that? Why get offended if someone can't afford your rates? You can't convert every inquiry into a phone call, or a meeting. You can't beat yourselves up over not being able to turn every potential client into a paying client.



Some will advocate not sharing their pricing information at all until you meet with the potential clients in person. I truly feel that holding back your rate information until you meet someone is just asking for trouble. Why would I want to set up a meeting, drive across town, waste an hour of my time, and end up feeling awkward and embarrassed if the photographer's rates are so far out of my budget that I can't even consider hiring them?



A few years back, before I knew the guys at Infinet and then GoodGallery, I talked to another company about my branding and site design. They wouldn't even offer up a ballpark estimate until I talked to them so we spent an hour on the phone. I was thrilled with them. Then they gave me their rate for the project that was about four times what I could even conceive of budgeting for the project. No matter how much I wanted it, the price difference between what I'd budgeted and what the reality was would have been so vast that there was nothing I could do to be able to afford working with them. While it was good to see what working with a company of their caliber would have cost, it also wasted my time and theirs on a business relationship that simply could never be.

NOTES



PRESENTING YOUR PRICING

You've run your numbers, and priced your packages for profitability. You know what each package will hold, and what it will cost. You've got it all laid out. You're written your template emails, ready to respond to each new inquiry. We're missing one step before you start writing to potential clients. Have you made an actual price list?

CONSIDERATIONS

- Do you want to create a new look or use templates?
- How do you want to share it, flip book, web or PDF?
- Do you want to include more info, like FAQs, bio, awards, etc?

Running the numbers is one thing, making a price list is another. Where do you even get started with it? If you don't have access to a professional designer, there are several places you can turn to. I highly suggest the marketing templates from Design Aglow, as they're easy to navigate and fill out yourself. Canva.com is an extraordinary online resource for easy template design. However you go about doing it, make a price list that will be attractive as well as informative. Whether you choose to share it with clients as a flip book PDF, a regular web page, or a downloadable PDF, get that price list ready for prospective clients to see.

I have made sure to include other things on my price list other than just my rates. I have my bio on the first page, rates on the following pages, a portion of my Frequent Questions from my website, testimonials, and even pictures of what the albums would actually look like. It's a multi-page presentation that sells myself as well as my work.

HANDING THE IN-PERSON MEETING

I meet potential clients at my studio in Brooklyn, New York. I used to go out of my way to meet them at places near their offices, or at their homes, or anywhere they asked me to. Over time, that became more difficult. If my clients live in Manhattan, it could take me forty-five minutes or an hour to get to where they are. I don't do that anymore. Clients come to me. If they cannot come to me, we can Skype or FaceTime instead.

Whether we're Skyping or meeting in person, the first thing I do is chat with them about their wedding day. I want to warm up to talking about wedding photography. When that part of the conversation starts to wind down, I ask them what they want for their wedding photography. I used to dance around this subject, but now I ask straight out, "So, tell me what you guys are looking for in terms of your wedding photography. What do you want?" Then I stop talking, and listen. I let them talk as long as they want to, speaking only if they ask me a question. I want them to be able to articulate what they need. I don't interrupt, or rush them along. From there, I find that there is going to be a natural point





where they either ask me about style, or put the ball back in my court. That is when I talk about my approach to the day. I don't brag, or talk about awards. I don't name-drop, or discuss anything other than their wedding.

I have my accolades and places I've been published on my site for them to find. I don't need to sit in our meeting and regale them with tales of magazine publications or print awards. They don't care about that, and they shouldn't. They care about how I will take care of them, not about the other clients I've worked with. The meeting isn't about anything but these clients and what they need.

After discussing style, I move the conversation over to the albums. Even if they don't choose to purchase one for themselves, I want them to see how they look. I briefly discuss the books, and then I leave them alone to look them over. They're not going to speak



candidly to each other if I'm sitting right there watching them page through the books. I make an excuse of some kind, either needing to check on something or take a bathroom break, and leave the clients to themselves in the studio for about five minutes.

After we have looked through albums and talked, I ask them if they have any additional questions. Then I thank them for their time, tell them to call me if they have any other questions, and tell them that I'd love to shoot their wedding. That's an important part to me. I actively tell them that I would love to work with them. I don't push them to book on the spot at all. I want them to go talk it over amongst themselves, instead of making a snap decision because I pushed them into it. Maybe that goes against all the sales advice you've ever heard, but it's actually worked very well for me. Have I lost clients because I didn't get them to sign on the spot? Maybe. However, I've also been told that they liked that I let them go think it over, thus make sure we were a perfect fit before truly committing.

After the meeting, I wait about three days to see if they reach back out to me. If I haven't heard from them, I e-mail or call them to tell them that I loved meeting them. I reiterate that I'd love to shoot their wedding. I ask if they have any other questions. From there, if they haven't already, they indicate that they want to move ahead with a booking or that they went elsewhere. If I have the chance, I always ask why they hired someone else. I do want to know if I lose a wedding because of price, style, or anything else. I've received helpful feedback post-meetings that have helped me improve my business in the future.

NOTES



WHY MEETING IN PERSON CAN BE DIFFICULT

I built my entire business on not being able to meet people prior to their wedding. This is why I have all of my information online, including actual pictures of what the albums look like. This is why I enable potential clients to see full wedding galleries from start to finish. I want clients to see the continuity from wedding to wedding. It's important to see that my work isn't just twenty good blog pictures, but solid coverage from the beginning to the end of the event.

I have lost weddings because I can't meet people in person, either due to my schedule or due to their geographical location. I won't drive five hours out to Washington DC on a Sunday to meet a potential client. That said, there was a time early on in my business, that I would absolutely do that, because in the early days you have to make concessions in order to book some weddings. I would meet anyone at anytime and anywhere they wanted. I even flew to other cities to meet clients in person. I was willing to do that nine years ago to get booking clients, but I won't do it now. There is nothing wrong with doing whatever it takes to book a wedding, even driving a long way to meet a potential client. There will come a time when you don't have to do that anymore, or you can make the decision to stop, but for many years I absolutely did that. You can't succeed without booking clients, and when you're brand new sometimes you have to do whatever it takes to get yourself in front of them.

Often, after seeing the wealth of information that I have online, a simple phone call is all it takes. Sometimes potential clients just want to hear your voice to make sure that you're a living, breathing person. Not all clients need to meet in person, but many prefer to. Deciding when and where you're willing to meet will be an important business decision for you. Are you willing to take meetings on weekends? At night? At your home? Somewhere else? Will you travel to meet with the clients on their turf? What will work best for you, and your business?

Sometimes potential clients want to speak to past clients as referrals. This is a hard line that I draw; I won't do it. I never would do it. If I've worked with any of their vendors, I recommend speaking about the vendor to me. I am very honest, telling potential clients that I can't violate my other clients' privacy by asking them to take phone calls and talk about me to others. I don't think that it's right to ask my clients to market for me so specifically. I refer potential clients to WeddingWire, where past clients can post reviews. I

I built my entire business on not being able to meet people prior to their wedding. This is why I have all of my information online.





also encourage them to google my name, and they can find where past brides have talked about me on chat boards and forums. I tell them that if there are any negative or positive reviews out there this search will find them. No, I'm not going to ask someone who has paid their hard-earned money for my services to give up their time and field phone calls from potential clients. I also explain that anyone that I hand-picked for them to talk to would be sure to only say good things about my work and my services!

There isn't a whole lot you can do about meeting them in person if you simply can't. A client who lives in California and is getting married in Manhattan is probably not someone I can meet, unless we can get together when they're in the city to plan the wedding. The only thing that I think you can do is put as much information as possible together for them to see online. Then you can offer up a video conference or a phone call if they want to talk further, or see/hear a real human being. This is also where building those vendor relationships will help you. If their vendors are people you have worked with in the past, you can tell them to talk to the vendors about you. This will help the client have trust in you, even if they never meet you in person before the actual day of the wedding!

NOTES





WHAT DO YOU DO IF THE CLIENT ISN'T WILLING TO BOOK RIGHT AWAY? DO YOU NEGOTIATE?

Technically, this is two separate questions. The first involves what to do if they won't book on the spot, and the second is about negotiation.

I actually don't want my clients to book on the spot if they're not ready. I know this goes against most "good business" sales advice, and I am aware of that. I don't even ask for the sale at the end of the meeting. What do I do instead?

I do a method of pre-closing that works for me. When the client first contacts me, one of the things in my initial emails is a line about "dates are reserved on a first-come, first-served basis." This establishes a bit of urgency, because I can only book one client for any given date. If someone mentions wanting to meet, I mention again that dates are taken by the first person to sign a contract and pay a retainer. I try to get the client in to meet me sooner rather than later, thus re-establishing the precariousness of the date being left open. I reiterate this one more time, and that's at the end of our meeting or phone call. I tell potential clients that if they do decide to book me, to let me know as soon as possible because dates are held only with a signed contract and a retainer. I don't push this on them, but they know when they leave that someone else could take that date at any minute.

Many potential clients will ask if I can hold the date, "pencil them in," or call them if anyone else is interested in their date. I don't do any of those things. I explain that keeping the booking process to a first-come-first-served method, it enables the process to be fair to everyone. I explain that the booking process is incredibly simple, and can be done online whenever they are ready. I'm not directly asking for the sale here, but there is urgency established. I also make sure to tell them that I would like to shoot their wedding. It's a small thing but so important, to tell a potential client that I'd like their business. Then I let them make their own decision.

I also know that some potential clients will be meeting with other photographers before making a decision. Perhaps I might be the first they meet with. I want potential clients to do their due diligence in researching all of their options to make sure that I am the best choice for them. If they make an impetuous decision to book at the meeting, I do not want them to leave wondering if another photographer might have been a better fit for them. What if they had only kept looking? I want potential clients to be 100% sure and confident, so that after booking me they are thrilled with their decision.

I've been told that my "close" is wrong and can't possibly be effective. I know that it has worked many times. I have had very few potential clients who reached the meeting



stage and never booked me. In that instance, that they told me why they didn't book, I knew that any "close" I did can't change the fact that they liked someone else's style better, wanted something more traditional, wanting something more funky, or wanted something cheaper. Had I pushed to close those clients, they might have regretted it. No one wants clients who regret hiring them!

Negotiating rates is another subject. Sometimes I will negotiate, and sometimes I won't. Let's say that a potential clients wants a \$5,500 collection, and they're getting married on a Sunday in January. What if those clients have a wedding photography budget of \$5,000? I would book that client at \$5,000 because seriously, what are the chances that I'll book a Sunday in January? Saturdays in January are hard enough to come by! What if a client is getting married in July, and they really need nine hours instead of eight? I might be willing to do that, as July isn't a very popular month either. There are small things I will concede on to get a booking, but some that I won't. What if that same client with a \$5,000 budget wants a \$5,500 collection, but their wedding is on a Saturday in September? I would not be willing to negotiate that date. Saturdays in September are such popular dates. I know they will book without having to budge on price. I can be slightly flexible for Friday and Sunday dates, whether it be to break up the payments a bit, or slightly reduce overtime. I'm not inflexible but some dates are sure to be so popular that I can't make any concessions to book the date.

You need to develop your strategy for negotiating. If you're willing to negotiate for certain dates, figure out what they are so that you'll be prepared. If you want to mark up certain collections so that you have room to reduce the rate, do just that and make note of it. Get your policies in place so that you won't be rattled during the negotiation process, or so that you won't make a snap decision that you'll regret later. Of course you'll fine tune this process throughout the years, but setting some firm guidelines from the outset will really help you out.

NOTES



WHY ARE INQUIRIES NOT TURNING INTO MEETINGS?

It's very hard to tell. Let me share with you my inquiries and bookings for part of 2013

JULY 84 leads, 8 bookings	SEPTEMBER 77 leads, 3 bookings	NOVEMBER 65 leads, 9 bookings
AUGUST 76 leads, 9 bookings	OCTOBER 84 leads, 4 bookings	DECEMBER 56 leads, 2 bookings

Of those nearly four hundred and fifty leads, I only booked thirty-five of them. That's not even 8% of those leads. Of those thirty-five bookings, I only met with eight of them in person. That's only 1.8% of the inquiries. I did have an additional six meetings in that time period that didn't result in bookings, and that's okay. You can't win them all! A few of those meetings ended with the clients opting to book another photographer because of a style difference. One booked another photographer because they liked the company they used for their albums. A few others ended up making their decision based on price. I don't have my start price on my website, so a lot of those inquiries are just tire-kickers. My inquiries per month have grown steadily over the years. It's taken nearly fifteen years to get to this place. I also can't speak to your area. For example, when I was a destination wedding photographer, I met almost none of my clients before the wedding day. When I moved to a major metro area, I was surprised at how many clients wanted to meet before the wedding day.

It's an online era right now, and I'm noticing more and more clients making their decisions without needing to meet in person. I want to make it as easy as possible for potential clients to obtain all of the information they need online. If they then want to meet, it's almost just a formality. I run my business entirely by myself, and I don't want to waste my time and my potential client's time by trying hard to get them in the door.

How are you handling your inquiries? Are you trying to withhold information until they can come in and meet you? Are you gunning for a meeting from the second the inquiry comes in? I find that pushing for a meeting too soon in the process really turns people off. I would advise you to give the information and let them look it over before then asking if they'd like to come in and meeting. I would also advise you to be open to changing your policies if you find something better that works in your area, and for your clientele.

I diligently track every single inquiry that I get. Every single one. While I do track them in 17 Hats, I also have a spreadsheet that I turn to for even more data. I highly suggest that you track your inquiries, too.



THE WEDDING SCHOOL

Once you've tracked your data for awhile, ask yourself some hard questions. First of all, how many inquiries are you receiving per month, on average?

Who or what is your main source of referrals? Past clients, other photographers, Facebook? If you're getting more referrals from the internet, examine your customer service to see if you can maximize referrals from previous and current clients. If you're getting no referrals from social media, examine your presence and see if you can engage your potential clients in a better, more effective way.

Go back to your vendor analysis - have you missed an important source of referrals? If you realize that you're being referred by someone new, add them to your spreadsheet so that you can continue to grow that relationship.

What package are people booking the most of? What package are they booking the least? Knowing this will help you tailor your rates better in the future. If a package is totally ineffective, consider dropping or changing it. If a package is incredibly popular, consider raising the rates for that package.

NOTES



MARKETING TO THE MILLENNIAL CUSTOMER

Marketing to the millennial generation is different than marketing to any other generation. Understanding how millennials shop has been huge crafting my marketing over the past few years.

The first thing I have learned about millennials is that emailing for information does not mean they are not interested in your services in a serious way. Millennials like to do their research, and it starts with looking online for as much information as they can find about you and your services. They desire quick response times, and easy to obtain information. Keep your price lists clear and concise, and your response times fast. Make each step to hiring you easy and quick. Obtaining your rates should be an efficient process, so should the actual booking process. Your site needs to be mobile friendly, clear, and relevant.

When talking about branding, we've already covered the need to solve problems for your clients. This is especially important to the millennial shopper. They want to feel that their problems are solved easily, and their needs are met with swift efficiency. They want to feel like you are actively courting them, and their business. It's crucial that your marketing message is authentic, because no one can see through a thinly veiled sales pitch better than a millennial!

You must sell a millennial client on why they need to hire you. Why will hiring you be the best choice for them? What will you do for them that no one else can do? Why will their wedding pictures be excellent if they hire you? The client needs to feel like a hero for finding you, hiring you, and working with you. How will you enable them to feel that way?

Word of mouth is beyond important when dealing with the millennial shopper. Yes, they will absolutely obtain their information on the internet. Yes, they will research you fully. They also trust their family and friends referrals more than anything. Family and friends are deeply important to the millennial client, and those personal referrals are gold.



MILLENNIAL POWER

- 📌 Savvy researchers
- 📌 Like quick responses
- 📌 Market to the point - quick, concise, clear.
- 📌 Be attentive to client, problem solving
- 📌 Have great references



CHAPTER NOTES







PRE-WEDDING SALES

Once a client decides to hire you for their wedding, the biggest part of the sales process is done! You've convinced them to retain your services, now all you have to do is work on getting them into a good collection for their wedding.

Oftentimes, clients know what they want. They have a rough idea of how many hours they need, what types of albums they're looking for, and what else they might want to add to their package. Before the client actually books, I discuss their day in great detail. Even if the wedding is a year away, we talk about the timeline a bit. I often end up suggesting overtime to get them the coverage they need. I talk about engagement sessions, and why they're a wonderful chance to get some pre-wedding portraits.

The biggest thing I do is talk about the albums as if clients are all going to end up with a book. Oftentimes, clients will book a more basic package before the wedding, despite talking about all the things they know they'll need. They're afraid to commit to too much before their entire wedding budget is solid. I'm fine with that.

Getting the clients in the mindset that they'll spend more has been the key to increasing my sales both before and after the wedding. Even if they book a files-only collection, I talk about putting together an album after the wedding. Every time we talk in the months leading up to the wedding, I am subtly selling to them by making it an assumption that they will need more hours and they will need a book. When I get their wedding day worksheet back, I almost always suggest extra hours to get the coverage they desire.

I'm never going to push too hard, too soon, when it comes to sales. I don't want to risk pushing so hard that I completely turn the client away. I'm just trying to get further sales into their minds. When the wedding is over, they'll be primed to create the books that I've been talking about for months!

POST-WEDDING SALES

When the wedding is over, this is when sales really kick into high gear. I have two types of clients : ones who choose to buy an album before the wedding, and ones who do not.

If a client has chosen to pre-purchase an album before their wedding date, the post-wedding period is the time to up sell those albums. Clients can choose a physically larger book, more images for their existing book, or both. When the clients' digital files are ready post-wedding, I send them an email with a link to their Pixieset gallery. We also send them instructions on how to begin choosing the images for their album. I tell them how many images they have in their book, but highly suggest that they choose images



without trying to hit any specific number. I tell them that we have many options to upgrade, and to choose all of the images they love and leave the rest to us!

This helps, because it frees clients from thinking that the number of images in their album is limited. If they have ninety images in their book, I don't want them to just pick ninety. I want them to choose the ones they love, whether it's ninety or a hundred and ninety! Once we receive their selections, we give them several quotes to include all of their albums.

For example, a client might have pre-purchased a 9x12 album with 50 images. When they deliver their image selections to us, there might be 75 images they want to include in the book. We would offer them the following:

Stay with a 9x12 album, upgrading to 75 images : \$500
Upgrade to a 10x15 album with 75 images : \$1,200

This way the client can choose if they simply want more images, or more images and a bigger book. More often than not, we'll tell them what their upgrade would charge, and then offer them a discount for committing then. This presentation would look a bit like this:

Stay with a 9x12 album, upgrading to 75 images :
Normally \$700, offer it at \$500
Upgrade to a 10x15 album with 75 images :
Normally \$1,600, offer it at \$1,200

This way the client knows what the full retail price would be, but also gets a discount for being a valued customer.

If the client has no album in their collection, we attempt to sell them one. We've talked multiple times about how great it would be to have an album before the wedding, already planting that seed in their heads from the start. When their images go online, I will email them and offer up a small discount for moving ahead with an album. Because they already have the thought that they'll want one - because I told them they would! - many people take us up on that offer.

We also sell parent albums, both pre and post-wedding. Parent albums are usually \$1,000, but we will offer a pre-purchase discount and sell them for \$800. If the clients have not committed to the parent albums before the wedding, we follow up afterwards and offer to extend that discount.



I have started uploading five or six portraits post-wedding as a sneak peek, sharing them with clients a few weeks after the event. I then upload these to Minted, and use their affiliate program to sell Thank You cards. Most clients are planning to order them anyhow, and this way I can receive a portion of those sales!

Print sales used to be a bigger moneymaker for my studio than they are now. I have recently been able to revive the print sale in two ways. First, I always email the clients with a 25% off discount code for any print order post-wedding. They have a one-time-use code that they can apply to a single print order. This has resulted in more print sales in one year than I have done in the past ten years! I also email everyone who has registered to view a wedding gallery around the holidays, offering up another small holiday discount code. This gets more eyes back on the galleries, and increases print sales.

I do not do in-person sales for weddings. I absolutely understand that I am leaving money on the table by not doing them. I know they would increase album and print sales. Many of my clients don't live in New York, and meeting them in person would be nearly impossible as they live a long car ride or a plane flight away. I compensate for this by making sure that my start price is profitable enough to not depend on post-wedding sales. I am very jealous of those in an areas where in-person sales are easier, because clients are local!


NOTES








CHAPTER NOTES





 BUSINESS TOOLS: SOCIAL MEDIA CALENDAR

WEEKLY TASK	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN			
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retweet 5 things from peers/industry professionals Tweet 3 business-related tweets Tweet 2 personal tweets Reply to at least 7 @ mentions Tweet at least one ? that invites a response 										
	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to comments on your Facebook wall Post 3 business status updates on your Facebook wall Share 2 industry-related posts on your Facebook wall Comment on 6 Facebook statuses Leave A Message on 2 Facebook business pages Find and like 3 new industry peers or professionals 									
		 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pin 10 new pins of your own work Comment on 5 pins from industry professionals Find and follow 2 new industry peers/professionals Pin 5 new pins to other boards you curate 								
			 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post 2 new business-related images Post 2 new personal images Comment on 4 images (other than "Nice!") Find and follow 2 new industry peers/professionals 							
				 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blog one post of wedding/engagement/client images Blog one post of business updates 						







THE
WEDDING SCHOOL



A GUIDE FOR WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHERS

We believe that wedding photography is important. We believe in the craft, the business, and the joy that wedding photography brings both photographer and client. Our long-term mission is to provide the education, community, support, and clarity of purpose that raises the standards of what it means to be a professional wedding photographer today. We want The Wedding School to become the industry benchmark for the type of honest, real-world education that the wedding industry needs.

We believe in real, honest wedding photography education. We believe in you.

“Susan is unlike any other instructor that I have learned from. Her teaching style is unique, and always down to earth. I have attended Susan’s seminars, purchased her courses, and the books she has written. It gives me the confidence to go out and do my best every single time.”

— BRIAN MOUNT PHOTO



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susan has been photographing weddings for almost fifteen years. She's won multiple awards at the WPPI 16x20 print competition including the Grand Award in Wedding Photojournalism. She's currently only a few points away from reaching Triple Master status, something she is quite proud of. Susan has been an educator for Photo Plus, WPPI, PPA, and Creative Live. Susan likes reading, annoying people by talking about crossfit, trying to persuade everyone in the world to listen to Hamilton, watching horror movies, sleeping with the lights on, and spending time with her husband, stepkids, daughters, and Chloe the dog.

Available online at www.theweddingschool.net
For more information, visit www.susanstripling.com



THE
WEDDING SCHOOL