

# **A Crash Course in Marketing**

## **How to Get Started in the Wedding Photography Business**

**by John Mireles**

When getting started in the photography business, the process of marketing can seem overwhelming. With each passing week, there is a new magazine, web site or bridal bazaar out there insisting that they can get brides to beat a path to your door. What's a photographer to do?

### **The Business Plan**

To help you cut through the clutter, I recommend that first thing you do is create a marketing plan. Actually, I'll even take one step back. First comes the business plan then the marketing plan follows. The business plan is important because that's where you tell yourself, "This is what I want my business to look like. This is my definition of success." The key is that you create a destination for your efforts, since, if you don't where you're going, you're not likely to ever get there.

A business plan doesn't have to be a big formal thing. The best business plan is one that's well-thought out and meaningful to you. The idea is to get your thoughts on paper because just the process of doing so will force you to think through and address key issues to your success.

### **Uniqueness**

One key issue is to determine what is unique about your business. Why should someone hire you? What do you do better than anybody else? On a more esoteric level, what is the soul of your business? From that, you'll be better able to focus on the marketing path that will take you to where you want to go.

For example, if the thing you do better than anybody else (your "Unique Selling Proposition" or USP for short) is that you are the least expensive photographer, your plan is likely to include advertising in the penny saver and yellow pages since that's where budget brides would look. Conversely, if you decide that your USP is that you are the most expensive photographer in the world, then the yellow pages really isn't going to be an option. (Hope you have the budget for Martha Stewart Weddings and Grace Ormonde.) Since the soul of your business is hopefully unique, the mix of marketing options that works for you will be similarly unique.

### **Your Marketing Channels**

With any marketing plan for wedding photographers, it's important to understand the marketing channels that feed your business as a wedding photographer. Your business is like a table that rests on three legs:

- 1) Marketing directly to the consumer. This includes magazine ads, theknot.com listings, search engine placements, bridal shows etc.
- 2) Marketing to the wedding trade. Here you are marketing to wedding professionals such as coordinators, event managers at wedding locations, florists and others who are able to refer clients to you. Referrals are often referred to as "word of mouth" and it is possible to create that word of mouth with some help from your marketing efforts.

3) Marketing to "customer advocates." These are non-trade people, either previous clients or others who are in a position to refer business. Since you won't likely have much repeat business, it's important to get clients and others to recommend your business to others.

Obviously, word of mouth improves once you've been in business for a while. Still, there are ways to kick-start that word of mouth. Consider the creation of "viral marketing" tools that will encourage people to pass along your message on their own. Blogs are an excellent way to stay in touch with your current and past clients. It keeps them talking about you and allows them an easy opportunity to forward your marketing messages to their network of friends and associates.

These three "legs" as it were all function to reinforce each other. Creating a beautiful full page ad in a magazine will not only attract consumers directly, but it will also attract the attention of the wedding trade as well. In fact, every aspect of your business works to establish your brand. If you want people to pay attention to your "brand" it must be unique and it must be darn good.

To succeed, you need to stand out from the crowd. Better to start small, but be consistent and different. Remember, it's better to be different than better.

### **No Silver Bullet**

So what works? Bridal shows, magazine ads, direct mail, portfolio showings with coordinators, web site, Google Adwords, theknot.com, blogs, networking with other photographers, postcards, and brochures will all work especially if your efforts support one another. No one thing is likely to be your silver bullet, however.

Back to the idea of the marketing plan. Keep it simple. Just list the things you'll do to market your business and attach a cost to each item. Once you start to see numbers, you can make better decisions about what you can afford to do when. Also, examine your list to see whether you're hitting all three legs that your business needs to stand on.

### **Be Consistent**

More than anything else, the keys are consistency and determination. Don't be disappointed if your first efforts don't achieve the results that you'd expected. Photography can be a tough business so it takes patience. Map out your course and then keep setting one foot in front of the other as you as you move ever forward towards success.

John Mireles

*Author John Mireles has is a long-time photographer residing in San Diego. Although he's a frequently lecturer on the business of photography, he's also received many awards for his commercial and wedding images. When he's not shooting high-end weddings or portraits, he's putting his marketing skills to work on his new photography gallery in Julian, CA.*