

Building A Successful Photography Business

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Introduction

Dear Photographer,

Welcome to your Building A Successful Photography Business Manual!

Wouldn't it be great if you knew exactly what it takes to create a successful photography business? And wouldn't it be great if you had a professional – who'd already created a successful business – hand you a detailed plan of the steps it takes to create that successful business?

The good news is you are about to be handed such a plan. A successful businessperson always has a guide he or she uses to follow, and creates a business that mimics the direction he or she has laid out in their planning.

There is nothing theoretical in this manual. Every one of these methods has been used by either one of my clients or myself. These are things that you can implement very easily into your business.

I hope to teach you all you need to know about a very prosperous opportunity: opening up and operating a very profitable photography business using technology readily available to you today!

I certainly have profited from these ideas. Over 18 years ago, my husband and I opened a small photography studio out of our home. Over the years we grew and changed. We moved into a commercial location, hired employees, created a dynamic website, began photographing all over the country, closed down our commercial location and operated once again as a home based business. We doubled, even tripled our profits several years in a row. As the years went by, we focused all of our energy into **learning and thriving online**. The Internet has exploded into a multi-billion dollar industry, and we knew we wanted to go along for the ride!

One of the things we discovered with photography is there is always an opportunity to create a thriving, six figure business. You just have to know where to look for clients, how to position yourself in the marketplace, and continue producing high quality products and services year after year. In other words, you need a plan to carry you through from one year to the next.

How to get the most out of this manual

This manual is written like a course. In fact, I use portions of this manual with my coaching clients. It's important to understand the basics, and apply what you learn every day your work on your business. I provide facts, examples, tips and strategies throughout this manual.

Work one chapter at a time, and apply what you learn to your business. Also remember that the words in each chapter will mean a different thing each time you read it. For example, as a start up business, you may read an action step from a very basic standpoint. But if you read the same chapter after being in business for a year, you will get a completely different understanding. That's the beauty of a training manual like this; it will grow with you.

If you read this book like you read most books, you'll get very little out of it. It isn't meant to be read. It's meant to be worked.

Instead, work one chapter at a time. Think about the ideas, and find ways of applying them to your business. Keep a journal of your thoughts along side this manual. Put your ideas into action. Always test and refine each step you take.

If you continue to do this, I guarantee you will find the same success I found with my business. I've made this manual easy to read and easy to implement. I've been in your shoes. I started my business over 18 years ago, without any other knowledge than the fact I knew I wanted my own business.

I learned everything one day at a time. And what I learned is now a part of this manual.

I want to show you how to build up a successful photography studio that will allow you the freedom to work when you choose. More importantly, I will share with you the secrets of staying ahead of your competitors, and building an income that will allow you to work when you choose!

I want to share shortcuts to achieving success in a short period of time. All of the information and tools listed in this manual have been tried and perfected. If you follow it from beginning to end, and really apply each of the techniques, you **will be successful** and create the business of your dreams! And save thousands of dollars from costly advertising mistakes.

I want to teach you to "make it" big in this business! I want you to feel the satisfaction of helping to create wonderful and creative products and services for clients located anywhere in the world. I want you to feel the satisfaction of developing a company that doesn't require your hands on attention every single day of the week. And I want you to feel satisfaction by putting healthy checks into your account week after week!

I'm looking forward to **being your guide** on this incredible journey!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lori Osterberg', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lori Osterberg

P.S.

Give me feedback. Is there something in here that you feel needs clarification? Let me know. Is there a section that helped you out immensely, and turned your business into a success? I want to know that too. My goal is to keep in touch with as many photographers as possible – to make sure you are creating a successful photography business.

Again congratulations on purchasing Building A Successful Photography Business. May it serve to help you grow your business for years to come.

Why today is the best time to start your own business

A recent survey showed that up to 73 percent of all Americans hope to run their own business at some point during their life.

If you are reading this manual, you are firmly planted in that 73 percent. Whether you've already made the leap to entrepreneurship, or you're still dreaming of the day you can head out on your own – congratulations!

Now is the best time to branch out on your own. Working for a company for long periods of time is no longer of benefit to retirement. In fact, in many ways it can hurt your chances of advancement, and could put your risk of a healthy pension at risk.

Social security may be bankrupt in just a short 30 years. Which will leave an entire generation unable to live life the way they choose.

By learning the skills now to build your own successful business, you're ensuring a comfortable way of life for decades to come. It's more than the art of photography. It's also about learning the skills necessary to create the life you choose.

What type of photography?

Chances are you already have a certain style. Do you love taking landscapes on vacation? Do you love taking photographs of your kids?

That's probably your best place to start. With photography, you can make money in a variety of different fields. Let's look at some of the possibilities:

- Advertising Photography
- Aerial Photography
- Baby Portrait Studio
- Business Portrait Photography
- Children Photography
- Commercial Photography
- Corporate Photography
- Editorial Photography
- Event Photography
- Family Portraits

- Fine Art Photography
- Grandparent Photography
- High School Seniors
- Landscape Photography
- Modeling/Fashion Photography
- Nature Photography
- Panoramic Photography
- Pet Photography
- Real Estate Photography
- School Photography
- Sports Photography
- Stock Photography
- Travel Photography
- Underwater Photography
- Wedding Photography
- Wildlife Photography

Many photographers choose one area to specialize in. Others take a variety of related fields and combine them into one successful studio.

The choice is yours. Above all, don't choose too many fields, and not be able to make a name for yourself in any one. Instead, choose fields you are interested in, and combine them to where they make your studio successful.

What skills do you need?

To be a successful photographer, it takes more than photography skills to make you successful. You have to be good at both the photography side and the business side to run a successful business.

If you love photography, that's where you probably have focused the majority of your time. If you read magazines or books, it's probably been on becoming better at photography. After all, you do have to know how to use your camera, know how to light your subject, and structure the photograph in a professional way.

But photographing will only take you so far. I know a lot of incredible photographers that are working full time positions outside of photography because they couldn't run a business. They didn't understand the intricacies of operating and marketing their business.

The focus of this book is to help you become better at the business side. This book will provide you with basic information on your

business, and get you started on the right track. But keep in mind running a business is a full time responsibility. As long as you are in business, you must keep working at refining your business skills. Make a commitment now to perfecting your business skills.

Make it legal

To start a business, you first need to decide if you are going to form a sole proprietorship or a partnership, or incorporate your business.

When you set up your business, you have one of three choices for creating a new business.

Sole Proprietor

As a single business owner, setting up a sole proprietor is the easiest method. With just a couple of documents filed with the Secretary of State in your home location, you'll be ready to do business in no time.

Most Secretary of State departments have an online resource to help you download the necessary documents. Head to your favorite search engine and type in:

secretary of state 'your state'

Partnership

A partnership is similar to a sole proprietor, except more than one person is operating the business. You will fill out the same documentation as in the sole proprietorship, except you will use each individual's name.

Corporation

A corporation provides you with a variety of benefits that are not available to a sole proprietor or a partnership. There are many benefits, including:

- Protection of your assets. The primary reason many people form corporations is it protects your personal assets in the event of a problem with your business.
- Save money on taxes. If you are a sole proprietor, you will be required to pay self-employment tax on your profit. If you set up a corporation for your business, you are only taxed on the salary you provide yourself.

- Provide a more professional appearance. This shows you understand business, and are creating a business for success, not just a little extra income.
- Reduce your chance of a tax audit. Statistics show a sole proprietor is more likely to be audited than a corporation.

For a sole proprietor or partnership, you will need to fill out:

- A statement of trade name with the Secretary of State
- State tax and state sales tax licensing paperwork through your state's Department of Revenue
- Federal tax and an employer identification number (EIN) with the Internal Revenue Service

Most of these forms can be downloaded from your appropriate office, and can often be filed directly online.

If you choose to incorporate, there is additional paperwork to fill out. Contact a business lawyer or your accountant for more information.

There are also a variety of resources that can help a brand new business. Check out your local Small Business Association office, and ask them about their SCORE program, or visit them online at www.score.org

You can also check in with your local Chamber of Commerce. Many of them have special programs just for small business owners.

Setting up your business

In order to go into business for yourself, it takes more than just saying you have a business. You must comply with the laws, and set your business up legally. From there, you have to have the right equipment to photograph your clients, handle production, and finish every assignment in a timely manner. While your needs will change over time, try to choose items you can add to and build upon.

Photographic equipment

The basis for every photographers business is there camera equipment. Depending on what type of photography you choose, you will need a good quality camera to get you started. If you've been using a good camera, you may want to consider using that as your starting point.

You should have a basic body that accepts various lenses. The lenses you choose to use will be up to the type of photography you select for your business model. Do you need quick-action capabilities, or are your subject's still life? Do you need micro focusing, or do you need a good portrait lens?

It doesn't matter so much as to the brand you choose as it does the capabilities of the camera. We purchased a Canon body early in our career, so we chose to stick with Canon for the life of our business.

You can find good quality camera equipment at a variety of places. Check with your local camera store to see the different models, and actually have a chance to see what the bodies and lenses can do for you.

You may also wish to purchase your equipment online. There are a variety of online stores that can offer you quality products at a reduced cost. B & H defines itself as The Professional's Source, and can be found at <http://www.bhphotovideo.com/>

You may also wish to try eBay, and bid on camera equipment that can add to your stock at a fraction of the price. We've had great luck both buying and selling on eBay.

Another way of testing out a lens before you buy, or if you need a special lens in certain circumstances, is to rent. In many cities, you

should be able to find a photo company that rents lenses, or check online for a reputable company that will rent lenses. I've recently found <http://www.lensprotogo.com/> though I have no experience renting from them. Rent a lens several times to try it out before you make a commitment.

Lighting equipment depends on the type of photography you will be offering. If you will be doing in-studio shoots, you will need a variety of backdrops and lighting choices to make your portraits stand out. If you will be doing event or location photography, your lighting will have to be simpler and easy to move frequently.

In the beginning, invest in a quality on-camera flash unit, and a quality umbrella lighting unit. By having the two, you should be able to light any situation reasonably well. Then as you become more accustomed to your shooting style, add additional units as needed.

Having a good quality equipment case can also provide you with ease. There are many cases on the market today. Take a look at the type of photography you offer. Will you be moving to various locations throughout your day? A bag with wheels may make a world of difference to you. Will you be moving through parks and fields? Maybe a backpack would better suit your needs.

The great thing about using a quality case is the ability to have compartments for each piece of equipment. It's easy to see if you have all of your equipment with you, and you guarantee your equipment will remain in good quality working condition.

A good tripod and/or monopod can also help make your job easier. If you're in studio most of the time, your tripod can allow you to stay set up for quick photo opportunities. If you are at events, a monopod can give you added support for long shoots, without having the bulk of a tripod.

Start simple, and add as you have a need. Make sure you have backups on all you do, and be ready for any situation.

Computer equipment

In today's digital world, having a computer is just as important as having a camera. In many cases, you'll be using the two in every shoot.

I have found it's important to have both a desktop and a laptop computer (or simply use your laptop as your desk top).

As you photograph, having the ability to immediately download your digital images directly to your laptop can help you both in production and in sales.

For instance, if you are photographing a wedding, being able to download your images throughout the event will give you the assurance that you have captured all the images, and have a backup ready for use.

Or if you are photographing a portrait in studio, you can download your digital files as you shoot, and be able to take your client immediately into the sales room, and sell them on the images you just took.

A basic computer should get you started. However, keep in mind that you will be working with large amounts of images, and power and speed will become very important to you. The more processing power you can afford, the easier your job will be.

Outside of a computer, a photographer also needs a variety of other tools. The basic will be access to the Internet. This will provide you with access to a wide variety of professional labs that will have the ability for you to upload images directly to them for printing. You may also have access to put your images online for your clients to view and purchase online.

Other software packages will become necessary as you become more active in photography. Most photographers find Photoshop to be a necessary tool that's hard to do without. It allows you to do a variety of things for your clients, including manipulating your images, photo retouching, and providing custom work in house.

Finding the right suppliers

Throughout your career you'll find the need to work with a variety of different vendors/suppliers. While this section is designed to provide you with the basics, you'll find yourself discovering new sources as your business grows.

When ordering supplies, I've found it best to order lower quantities, and not have a stockpile of items on hand. As you grow and change,

you'll undoubtedly make changes, and it's easier to reprint items at a slightly higher cost, than to have a huge quantity on hand that just doesn't fit your needs anymore.

Start with finding a printer to help you print up your business cards, brochures, stationery, etc. You may have a resource that's easy to work with in your hometown, but also look online for good deals. I have a local printer that does my stationery and some of my brochures. But I've also used niche companies like <http://pressexprint.com/> and <http://postcardmania.com/> for quick run postcards.

While it is easy to create contracts and order forms online, if you desire having multiple copies, you may wish to order preprinted order forms. Check out NEBS <http://nebs.com/nebsEcat/SearchServlet> for a variety of photography products.

Depending on your products and services, you may wish to offer framing options to complement your photography. There are many professional framing companies, and you may have one in your area that can offer you a quality product at a reasonable price.

While I'll list a few frame companies here, be sure to check the supply section of <http://www.virtualphotographystudio.com/> for a complete list. Frame companies include:

Excel Picture frames <http://www.excelpictureframes.com/>,
GNP Frames <http://www.gnpframe.com/>,
Graphik Dimensions Ltd <http://www.pictureframes.com/>, and
Larson-Juhl <http://www.larsonjuhl.com/>.

You will also find a huge array of album companies ready to provide you with elegant and stylish albums. Again, I'll list a few album companies here, be sure to check the supply section of <http://www.virtualphotographystudio.com/> for a complete list. Album companies include:

Art Leather <http://www.artleather.com/>
Capri Albums <http://www.caprialbum.com/>, and
Zookbinders <http://www.zookbinders.com/>

Because a photographer can control a lot of photographic quality within the digital file, photo lab options are at an all time high. You can use discount places like Costco, local camera stores like Mike's

Camera, or online services of a variety of different printing locations. Discount places and places that cater to the general public won't offer you a lot of choices. If you go with professional labs, they will offer you retouching services, online ordering systems, production facilities, and professional quality.

Once you have the basics covered, let the fun begin. You can show off your quality by ordering customized boxes to deliver your images in <http://www.packagingsupplies.com/>, and finish off the look by dropping everything into a customized bag <http://www.bagsandbowsonline.com/>.

Specializing for greater profits

I once read an advertisement from a lady who was starting up a photography business, and she was specializing in:

- Portraits
- Babies
- Seniors
- Commercial
- Model portfolio
- Weddings
- Events
- Product
- Glamour
- And real estate

Is that specializing? Or is it simply offering whatever type of photography your customer happens to call you about?

The reason you specialize is to get known in a particular field. The more your name is associated with a particular field, the easier it will be to recommend you for that type of photography.

Specializing will allow you to connect easier with your clients, and will give you more focus as you begin to market your business. After all, if you're spending a little bit of money on a lot of different types of marketing, you'll never have an impact. Instead, concentrate on what's right for you, and become known in your area of choice.

Choosing the type of photography right for you

What do you like photographing?

What type of photography makes you happy?

Each person you meet will have a different answer to that question. Think about your own photography.

For many of you, it may be based on the way you live your life. Maybe you've always enjoyed photographing your children, and have decided to start with children's portraiture. Or maybe you've always enjoyed heading off to the mountains for a week, photographing landscapes and the wildlife.

That's the start of your business model. Do what you enjoy, and find a market that loves what you do.

In every field of photography, there are experts that have made a six and seven figure income doing what they love.

Look at Ansel Adams. Or Anne Geddes. Or Denis Reggie.

The list could go on and on.

The point is if you enjoy what you do, and become good at what you do, you'll be able to market your skills effectively.

Quantity vs. Quality

In every business model, you must decide how you are going to make your money. Are you going to turn your photography into an art form? Or are you going to make your living on the sheer numbers that run through your business?

There isn't a right or wrong answer. But choosing one or the other will affect how you operate your business on the long term. Let's look at both types. I'll provide examples of each to help you see the difference between the two.

A \$250,000 wedding studio

Studio A chose to specialize in wedding photography, and photograph high-end clients. She photographed 30 weddings per year, charged a very high creation fee to photograph unlimited time at the event, and created unique albums to showcase her work. She was the focus of many articles in the high-end wedding magazines like Martha Stewart and Town & Country, and had wedding clients fly her all over the world to attend their events.

Studio B chose to specialize in wedding photography, and photograph small, average priced events. The owner chose to manage the business, and hire several photographers to photograph the events. His studio photographed over 200 weddings per year all within a 100-mile radius of the studio.

A \$125,000 Portrait Business

Studio A has become well known for his senior portraits. He has a studio on a 2-acre piece of land with many different types of scenery for his portraiture, including the ability to use cars and other large

items in his portraits. He is well known at the three local high schools, and photographs 50 seniors every summer. His business is operated strictly on referral, and his 50 spots disappear very early in the season. Every portrait he creates is unique to the individual, and he spends time discovering and showcasing each client's talents and interests.

Studio B is well known for their prices. The owner photographs over 350 clients per year, and takes quick portraits in predetermined areas. She offers two background choices in her home studio, and regularly meets her clients in one of two nearby parks. Her portraits tend to be similar in nature from one client to the next; yet her clients enjoy her low prices and the quality she provides.

A \$300,000 Commercial Studio

Studio A works for three big catalog companies, and provides on location photography four times per year for each company. They concentrate on finding locations to showcase the seasons and the products, and spend a great deal of time in production.

Studio B works for small to medium sized businesses, and creates images to help create brochures, websites, and other marketing and promotional materials. They charge by the hour, half and full day fees, and provide both in studio and on location work. They work for dozens of companies each year, and are constantly networking to find additional clients.

As you can see, both companies in each scenario make similar sales and profit levels. The difference is the way they are perceived by their clients, and the number of clients they must satisfy each year. Neither is right or wrong. The difference is in the way they operate their studio, and the type of client they enjoy working with.

While you may not immediately know which client is best for you, keep in mind there are different types of clients out there. As you work with a client, assess what you like/dislike about him/her. Is this your ideal client, or would you prefer something different?

After working with a few clients, you'll begin to see a pattern in your style and your interests. Use this to continue creating your marketing materials, and attracting new clients.

Developing Your Shooting Space

Every studio space needs a working environment. Depending on your field of interest, there are a variety of options open to you.

Home Studio

The majority of photographers operate out of their homes. They set up a small space either in an office or study, a separate bedroom, or in the basement.

A home studio is convenient for you as the photographer. You'll have a short trip to your office every morning. You'll be available at all times of the day to meet with clients or to chat on the phone. And you'll have family options by combining the two easily.

Yet having a home studio also means your clients will have access to your home. They will know where you live, and may drop by unannounced at any time. They may call you at their convenience (which may be at 6 in the morning or 9 at night) because they know you will probably be home. It's also difficult to start a project that leaves your house in disarray, or to cook some types of food when you know a client is coming over.

Look at the layout of your house. Does it have options to separate your family from your business? Can you build a side entrance that allows your clients to enter directly into your studio, closing off your personal residence from sight?

Making a home studio work is feasible if you work with your family, and learn to balance the two parts of your life.

Commercial Location

A commercial location provides you with the benefit of having a location separate from your home. It provides you with a professional appearance, which may be important if you are working with commercial accounts. It also allows you to have unlimited space.

If you will be taking photographs of large objects – cars, boats, motorcycles, etc – having a warehouse location with garage door access may help you gain clients.

If you need several shooting areas for a variety of sets, a commercial location can allow you to have as much space as necessary, plus you'll have the ability to reconfigure your location to suit your needs.

A commercial location may also offer you the ability to build outdoor design sets, perfect for outdoor portraits. You can build a variety of sets next to each other, and simply move your clients from set to set photographing different portrait series.

The main hold back of a commercial location is price. Can you afford the cost of a commercial location? Depending on the space, you may have a cost per square foot, plus maintenance fees. If this is something you would like to pursue, consider hiring a commercial real estate agent. They will work for you, and get a better price than you could get by contacting the building owner directly.

On-location

Having an on-location studio is a hybrid between the two, and the way I have operated for years.

This type of setup works well for people that photograph without the need for backdrops and heavy set material. Instead, you choose to use the surrounding areas as your background, and meet all of your clients away from your office.

Typically you have an office space located somewhere in your home. The size of your office depends on the amount of production you have. You may have a desk and computer set up in a spare bedroom, and have a production table in your basement. Or maybe you choose to have your entire office and production area set up in a spare wing in your home.

When your clients call, you choose to do a great deal of promotion by phone, email and through your website. If a client does have a desire to meet, you can set up meetings at your local coffee shop.

If you photograph weddings, special events, on-site commercial shoots, or even portraiture, you can adapt to this type of business easily. In many places, you can find a wonderland of locations that are perfect to photograph. Consider photographing in parks, at college campuses, in the mountains or at the beach. And the best thing about it is all of your work will take on a unique look – you can't reproduce something if it doesn't exist like that again.

Business Management

Is this your first business? Have you ever worked alone before?

Operating a photography studio can offer both challenges and rewards. Two of the most common complaints from first time studio owners is having to schedule the best use of their time, and how to work alone without any other staff members to depend upon.

When you decide to operate a studio, remember you are running a business. In order to succeed at the business, you must run and operate it like a business.

If you have children, you'll need to dedicate a certain amount of time to your business every day without interruption.

If you have other family commitments, you'll need to set up a time frame each day for each commitment.

If you have a full or part time position, finding a few hours every week to build up your studio will mean you can eventually have your studio become your full time position.

And that's when it becomes exciting.

But let's start out by creating a business that operates efficiently for you.

Organizing your time

If you're like most people, you've probably used the phrase "there's not enough hours in the day" more than once. I know I have.

The sad truth is there will always be 24 hours per day, no matter how you may wish it differently. Yet it doesn't matter how many hours you have in the day; what matters is how you use each of those hours. The better you become at planning out your day, the easier it will be to get everything done – and then some!

Set aside time to plan

A study was done a few years back on a group of college graduates. They asked a graduating class about their futures: did they have goals, what were their plans? As they followed this class, it soon

became apparent that the people with detailed plans became higher achievers. They made more money, achieved higher positions, and had more opportunities cross their paths.

Why is this? Because they didn't take the "wait and see" approach. They made things happen in their lives instead of waiting to see what would happen to them.

The same applies for your business. If you take the time to plan, you'll realize more of your goals.

Start by setting aside one day a week for planning. It can be Sunday evening to get you set for your week. Or maybe Friday afternoon in a quiet corner before your weekend begins. Pick a time that makes sense for you, and focus on what you wish to accomplish in the upcoming week. Prioritize your list, and review your lists constantly.

Plan your time 24/7

Planning your time every day, all day long may sound a bit complex. Why would you want to plan every moment of the day?

Your goal here is to remember you only have 7 days of the week, 24 hours per day. Cherish each of those hours, and make sure you are doing all you can do at each moment.

The last thing you want to do is become a workaholic. Just because your office is in your home doesn't mean you don't need some down time. In fact it's even more important when you live that closely to your work.

When you block off work time, make sure you are committed to working. Don't accept lunch invitations from friends during your work hours. Don't invite friends into your home if you are approaching a deadline. Instead, schedule these type of activities into the time you've dedicated for personal time.

My daughter is in school from 8 to 3:30 five days of the week. These are my core working hours. Occasionally she has an after school activity, and I'll end up with an extra working hour. Other nights I may work an hour or two after she is in bed. But I track my hours, and only work 40 hours a week. I don't schedule appointments in the evening if I can avoid it, and my weekends are spent with family and friends. Just because I work out of my home doesn't mean I don't dedicate my time to working.

The same applies for you. Find a schedule that works well for you and your lifestyle, and stick with it. Learn to turn away appointments that don't fit in with your lifestyle, and create a business that works for you.

Production

Production refers to the process it takes to have your studio in business. It's the systems that are in place to make everything run efficiently.

It starts with having a system designed to bring in leads for your business. How will you attract a potential customer? What type of information will you be supplying?

Once a prospect becomes a client, what will you supply them with information? How will you keep in contact with them?

As you complete the photography session, how will you perform the work? What systems are in place to accomplish the photo shoot?

Once the client has selected images, and made the final purchases, what process needs to be in place to make sure everything is completed in a timely manner?

How will you present your final product to your customer? Will you use specially branded packaging?

How will you keep in contact long after the sale and final production?

Each of these production items can be worked up into a production system. The best way to do that is to create a checklist, and include it in the file of each of your customers. When you hire on a new customer, you begin checking off items on the checklist.

The more of a system you can get in place, the easier it will be to run your business. And the easier it will be to hand off to an employee, when the time is right.

Hiring employees and assistants

For a photographer, there are really two types of people you may eventually hire for your business.

An employee may be needed to help you inside the studio. They may help with sales, marketing, bookkeeping, production and office duties. An employee is someone that works either part time or full time, and you control the majority of their time by paying them a regular hourly fee.

An assistant is hired to help you primarily with your photography. If you photograph commercially, they may help set up the shoot, get the models ready, and make sure you have all the set structures. If you photographing weddings or events, they may be there to cover the details that you miss by focusing on the main event.

An assistant is there to help you as a photographer, and help you become more effective in the way you cover your events. They can cover when you need to be in another location, and they can give you peace of mind when you have an important shoot.

Contracted labor versus hiring employees.

One of the toughest parts of operating a small business is determining when you need to let go of some daily routines, and bring a person on board to help. People usually go into business for themselves because they want the freedom that comes from being their own bosses. Unfortunately, being in business for yourself also involves wearing many hats; some of which you may never have thought of, or may not be experienced in wearing.

One of the best books on this subject is *The E-Myth Revisited: Why Most Small Businesses Don't Work and What to Do About It*, by Michael E. Gerber. In his book, Gerber talks about the fatal assumption that many small business owners make. "If you understand the technical work of a business, you understand a business that does that technical work." Gerber goes on to say, "The technical work of a business and a business that does that technical work are two totally different things. But the technician who starts a business fails to see this." And many businesses fail because the business owner continues to treat his business like a job, instead of as a growing, profitable business.

As you are building your business—even when you're just starting out—evaluate which tasks you enjoy doing, which tasks you will do just because they have to be done, and which tasks you would rather never do. For me, the top of my 'never' list was accounting and taxes. I constantly refer to my accounting reports, but the actual day-to-day process of inputting data is a chore for me. I decided early on in my business to contract that job out to a professional who enjoys working with the data, and can accomplish the task in a fraction of the time it would take me.

I make decisions in the same way about every other job in my business. I constantly evaluate what jobs are on my task list, how well I perform them, and how easy it would be to hire someone else to do them. Jobs like accounting or taxes are easy to contract out, but what about jobs like production, or marketing. Those jobs are a little harder to define and more difficult to separate from other business tasks. They may also be harder to fill with competent outside help.

The differences between contracted help and full or part time employees are huge. You hire contractors to do specific jobs, and pay them accordingly. Hiring an employee involves considerations beyond salary. You pay benefits and taxes. You have a person coming in to your location regularly—expecting leadership, a full workload, steady pay and continuity of employment.

Using contracted help is also easier than ever before. You can hire virtual assistants to perform almost any office task. You can allow your photo lab to handle most of your production work. You can have your album company mail directly to your client's address. You can contract with marketing consultants to help you create and implement campaigns. I have found every service I need in my business to be available in the form of a consultant or contractor. I can eliminate hiring and being responsible for employees. It's easier, it's more affordable, and I can guarantee the type of service I produce by hiring the best consultants I can find.

Marketing 101

According to Merriam Webster's Dictionary, the definition of marketing is:

the process or technique of promoting, selling, and distributing a product or service.

As a photographer, marketing will make up the primary role in your business. The great majority of your time will be focused on the key functions of marketing:

- Advertising
- Promotion
- Publicity
- Public relations
- Sales
- And Planning

Yet keep in mind that understanding marketing takes a lifetime to master. The important thing to keep in mind as a startup is to keep your marketing simple; perform some form of marketing all of the time, no matter how busy you are; and continue to grow and change your marketing as your business grows and changes with it.

Branding your business

Have you heard the term branding? Most people automatically go to the idea of the company's logo, coloring, tagline, and marketing message. Yet branding is really so much more.

Branding is the process of differentiating themselves from the competition, and in the process creating customer loyalty. The bigger your brand, the more loyal your customer becomes. And a loyal customer is much less likely to leave your business than just an average customer.

Take the products Coke and Pepsi for a moment. Both have developed incredible branding for their product. I'm sure you as a consumer have a preference. You may think Coke is too sweet. Or Pepsi is too bubbly. But whatever preference you have, you undoubtedly will always choose one over the other, given a choice.

Both of these companies spend all of their time developing that reputation, and managing it so you continue to have a positive image of their product. That's the whole idea of branding.

As a photographer, your brand is the relationship you create with your clients. The stronger they feel about your product; the more they can distinguish you from your competition; the more they will depend on your photography style. And the more they will share their opinions with family, friends and acquaintances.

Creating your marketing tools

As a new business owner, you will need to have a variety of marketing tools available to you to effectively promote your photography to potential clients. You need certain things to look professional, and to give your potential clients the feeling of trust.

Start with your website. Your website can be a variety of tools, all in one neat package.

- It can be a brochure, and provide information about your business.
- It can be a portfolio, and showcase your work.
- It can be a sales tool, and generate leads for your business.
- It can be an advertisement, announcing special promotions you offer within your business.

And so much more. The wonderful thing about your website is it can be all of this, and allow you to spend once while getting each of these key pieces to help your business. Thanks to the Internet, you no longer need a variety of printed tools. Just a few will get you the business you need.

Beyond your website, you should also have a quality business card. Because you are a photographer, I highly recommend investing in a photo business card. Showcase your work and show your prospects what you do. Make sure you put your phone number, email address and website address on your business card for people to have an easy way of connecting with you.

Depending on your field of focus, a quality brochure may also be appropriate. When someone calls to request more information, its easy to send them to your website for more information. But occasionally it's also nice to be able to send them a brochure. Or if you are out

networking, having a piece of information available to give away will benefit your business.

As you grow your business, you may eventually choose to advertise in different publications. Advertisements can be a wonderful way of bringing in leads. The important thing to remember is to make sure your advertisement is reaching the potential client you are trying to attract, and that you are giving them a reason to contact you.

Bringing in leads

Leads are what keep your business filled with prospects and clients. Lead generation is the process of finding people with a qualified interest in your products and services.

- If your goal is to photograph 30 weddings per year, you may only need to generate 100 or so leads to eventually contract with 30 clients.
- If your goal is to photograph 400 seniors, you may need to become a recommended photographer with three local high schools with 500 students each to reach your goals.
- If your goal is to photograph product catalogs for three companies, your goal may be to meet with twenty or so businesses that have openings for catalog placement.

Knowing how many leads you need makes it easier to understand how to generate the leads. In the previous examples, it wouldn't make sense to create 5000 postcards for a direct mail campaign if you only needed to chat with twenty or so businesses for catalog placement. A more direct and personal marketing method should be generated.

Bringing in leads should be done through your marketing methods. You can use things like:

- Your website, and using online marketing techniques
- Direct mail promotions, like postcards
- Advertising in magazines or other publications
- Talking and networking with the people you meet, including family and friends
- Referrals from past clients

The sole reason you are in business is to bring in customers, which generate sales and profits. No customers mean no business. But it goes beyond just finding leads. The more qualified lead you find, the easier chance you have of converting them into a paying customer.

Does the prospect have a need for your service?
How soon will the prospect be making a decision?
What is the prospect's timing for purchase?
What is the prospect's budget?

The more information you have on a prospect, the greater chance you have of turning them into a paying customer.

Use your marketing to educate your prospects. Teach them about you and how you differ from your competition. The more information you supply up front, the easier it will be to sell them in the long run.

Advertising efficiently

While there are hundreds of different places you can put an advertisement, placing an ad isn't the important part. Creating an ad that helps bring you in clients, and ultimately money should be your ultimate goal.

1. Placing your ad in the best possible location.

You may create the best ad in the world, but if you place an ad for wedding photography in a retirement magazine, chances are you won't receive any leads.

Find out what the demographics are of the location you are considering. Do they match up with your ideal customer?

2. Focus on your outcome.

What do you want people to do when they read your ad? Concentrate on the objective you hope to accomplish with your ad, and make sure your ad communicates that outcome. Every ad should have a call-to-action, and motivate the reader to take that action: "call our toll-free number now!"

3. Create an offer.

I'm sure you've seen the simple ads with a photograph, a logo, and a phone number. In fact, a great majority of photographers place these types of ads trying to attract customers. Unfortunately, most of them are wasting their time.

Instead, concentrate on why your prospect should contact you, and make them an irresistible offer:

"Only 30 families will have the opportunity to be photographed in our limited edition holiday background series. Will you be one of them?"

4. Why you're different from your competition.

With competition on every corner, tell your prospect why they should choose you over your competition. Make it a part of your headline, bulleted copy, or your guarantee.

A sentence like:

"Love your portrait, or we will give you your money back – plus \$50 just for giving us a try!"

will have a huge impact over your competition that simply has an ad with a photo, logo and phone number.

5. Photographs and copy can create the story.

The phrase "a picture is worth a thousand words" is overused in the photo industry. Sometimes it takes a photograph and a story to convey your true meaning. Don't be afraid to put in copy to reach out to your prospects.

ADVICE: Don't use too much text for the size of ad you have chosen. If you need more space to effectively tell your story, increase the size of your ad.

6. Use a headline.

A headline motivates the reader to read further into your information. Headlines are a very important part of an advertisement. Spend time coming up with an effective headline that will reach out and motivate your reader.

7. Learn the difference between features and benefits.

Your prospects only care about one thing – themselves. They want to solve their problems, and they want to do it as effectively as possible. They don't care about you and your business; they only want to solve their immediate problem.

Ultimately, people buy for two reasons: to (1) gain pleasure, or (2) avoid pain. Your ad should sell the benefits of using your company to either gain pleasure or avoid pain. You can use things like:

"Are you tired of standing in long lines at the discount store, waiting for your turn to stand on the 'X', and have a minimum wage employee telling you to smile?"

Create the picture in your prospects minds, and tell them why you are the one to solve their problems, and provide them with the service they've been looking for.

8. Strong guarantees.

Have you defined your guarantee? As a business owner, you need to stand behind the work you do for your clients. If someone came in for a portrait and just wasn't happy, would you refund him or her the entire amount?

If your answer is yes, use that to help sell your business. People like buying from people where their risk is low. If they know your ethics, they're more likely to make the decision to buy. (And most people will never use your guarantee and ask for a refund; they just like knowing your policies.)

9. Make it easy.

Tell your prospects what you want them to do. The less thought they have to put into making a decision, the more likely they are to follow through. Using things like "call today" or "click here to fill out our form" makes it easy for your prospect to make the contact.

It's also important to provide multiple ways for your prospect to communicate with you. List things like your phone number, email address, and web address in your ad. Let them communicate with you in a way that is convenient for them.

Don't make them think!

10. Tracking makes it all worthwhile.

As a small business owner, you don't have a lot of cash to try dozens of marketing methods. You need to make sure what you are doing is working, and it's working at the highest level possible.

Keep track of your advertising methods, and find out which methods are working the best for you. Ask your prospects where they heard

about you, and determine which methods get the most action (and convert the most leads into clients).

While you should never quit an advertising method too quickly, before you learn if its beneficial, you should also never continue to throw money at a method that isn't bringing in leads. The only way you'll ever know results is if you carefully track the outcomes.

Generating a great referral

If you've ever marketed any other business or read any marketing books, you understand how the most inexpensive form of marketing is selling more frequently to your existing customer base. Because they have experience with you, they know you, they love your product, they value your service, and they will do business with you easily. Yet so many small businesses fall flat when it comes to follow up marketing.

Follow up marketing is the ability to keep in contact with your customer – before, during and after the sale. When a prospect makes contact with you, they should go into a database that will allow continual marketing to take place through the life of your business. Ultimately, once you make a contact, they should be with you for life.

The process starts when a prospect first contacts you. They evaluate a potential relationship with you by the way you handle your business. Do you contact them timely? Can they see themselves working with you? Do they want to use your photography?

If you provide them with enough positive reinforcements, their answers will turn into yeses, and you'll have a new client.

Next, the client evaluates how you run your business? Did they enjoy their photographic experience? Did the sales process go smoothly? Were orders placed and turned in timely fashion? Again, if you stay above their expectations, your customer will have more reason to refer you.

When a client is working with your company, you are on the forefront of their mind. If they have a reason to refer you, your name will be on the tip of their tongues. But as time goes by, their memories and importance level changes. Will they remember you with such fondness 6 months from now? How about a year from now?

Your referral program will be stronger if you build it to keep connecting with your customers long after the sale. You can continue to mail them new marketing promotions. Or send them out a quarterly newsletter. But the important thing is to keep your name on the tip of their tongue.

Tracking your business for ultimate success

I spoke of tracking in the previous section, but because of its importance, I would like to touch on it one more time.

As a small business owner, you will be spending a significant amount of money on advertising and marketing your business. You have a lot of options available to you. Instead of trying one or two methods, and continuing with them for the life of your business, it's more important to find methods that work well for you, and allow your business to grow at a pace you are comfortable with.

Every form of marketing can have greater potential if you discover a method that directly speaks to the audience. The key is finding what works the best.

It may be changing the type of ad. Or making a stronger call to action.

The only way to find out is by testing what you are using, and trying something new.

Marketing is not an exact science. Therefore the only way to find out what works best for you is to keep trying new things.

When you start out with a new method, remember it takes up to 12 views for a prospect to notice your ad, and decide to take action on it. So if you place an ad in a monthly magazine, you may not receive results for several months – up to one year. With this option, you may want to assess your results throughout the first year, and determine if this is a viable way of marketing your business.

Yet if you are sending postcards, you may be able to connect with a person after a few weeks – especially if you are mailing to them every week.

Remember, your marketing methods and timing determine your outcome. The more frequently you make contact, the sooner they will recognize you, the quicker they will take action. IF you are reaching the right audience.

Sales

Creating a sale means bringing in money for your business. The only way for your business to stay in business is to continue to bring in sales.

But sales don't always equal a successful business. In fact, it takes a thorough understanding of the sales process to ensure the success of a business.

For example, if you had monthly sales of \$5,000, but had monthly expenses of \$7,000, your business wouldn't be in business long.

Understanding how to price your services for profit is a lot different then understanding how to sell. You simply can't have one without the other.

Pricing your services for profit

How do you determine what to charge for your photography?

Maybe you have a few price lists from other studios in your local area, and charge a little bit less than they do. (They've been in business longer; therefore your prices should be lower).

Or maybe you've searched through a few sites online, and have surveyed their prices. Your prices are based on your results.

Or maybe you just picked numbers out of the air.

When choosing your pricing, there is a method that you should follow to ensure enough profit for your business to survive. In fact, this method alone will put you light years above your competition. It allowed my business to grow into a six figure success in under two years.

For a free copy of my report:

Pricing Guide: How To Price Your Photography To Make A Profit

http://www.virtualphotographystudio.com/members/203_pricing_guide.pdf

The sales process

For many photographers, the idea of selling can inject both fear and delight. It's great to close the deal and bring in the cash – but does it really take ASKING for the sale?

Becoming a great sales person is not a gift at birth. It's something that is learned over time. Start with these seven steps.

1. Understand your product and service. The more comfortable you are with what you sell, the more confident you will be selling to a potential customer. People can pick up on uncertainty. Make sure that you are selling products and services that you believe in, and learn as much as you can about them.

Let me share a story with you. Early in my photography business, I listened in on a sales presentation my husband made to a potential customer. He went over our three packages, and presented each of them to the client. On the third package, he started stammering and making excuses why the client should upgrade to one of the other packages. He wasn't comfortable with what the package had to offer, and it showed in his presentation. We redesigned that package after the prospect left our studio, and made it more acceptable to both of us.

The point is to create products and services you are proud to offer. If you find yourself apologizing for something, eliminate it. It will ultimately make you a better sales person.

2. Make initial contact with your prospects. In order to bring in customers, you have to market to them and capture attention. No matter what form of marketing you choose, your goal is to have them make contact with you.

In your initial contact, start supplying your prospect with the information they need to make an informed decision about you. The more information you provide upfront, the easier sale it will ultimately be

3. Exchange information. When a potential customer makes her first move, she asks you for more information. It may be a phone call, an email, filling out a form on your website, or talking to you in person.

This is your chance to uncover what your customer is in need of. Ask her questions. Determine what she wants. Provide her with appropriate information. Above all, show her that you have the answer to satisfy her needs.

4. Provide a solution. People don't buy a product just to have it. They buy it to provide a solution to their problems.

If she wants a portrait of her baby, her "problem" is creating a memory of her child at a particular moment in time. She may have additional "problems" as well, such as wanting a gift for a family member, or avoiding a bad experience in a local discount chain. Your goal is to provide her with reasons you will solve her problems.

5. Ask for the sale. This is one of the most obvious parts to the process; yet few people do it. When you've presented all of your material, and the questions are winding down, you have to ask the potential customer for the sale. The easiest way to do that is with a question.

"Shall I start filling out a contract?"

"What date is convenient for you?"

6. Deliver. Throughout your sales process you'll make promises to your client. You'll tell them how you photograph, what you'll photograph, and what you'll deliver to them at the end. These promises are a part of your business. Follow through on them no matter what the cost. The more you deliver above and beyond what you've promised, the better you'll look in the eye of your customer.

7. Follow up. When the sale is complete, you still have more opportunity to connect with your customer. Follow up with them to determine how they like their photographs. And connect with them again to offer additional products and services. No one makes a better client than a past client.

Closing the deal

In the previous section, I briefly mentioned asking for the sale. In every sales presentation, you need to bring the presentation to a close. You need to learn to ask for the sale, and actually close the deal.

Yet I know one of the most common fears for many small business owners is closing the deal. They have a fear that they will seem pushy or persuasive. They don't want to come off as a "used car salesman".

Remember, you are in business to make business. Your client has money, and is looking to spend that money in some fashion. The object of closing the deal is a matter of combining those two goals.

If you're passionate about what you do – if you love providing your photography to your clients – the sale allows you to do what you love. You have a gift; share that with other people AND build your business at the same time.

The closing process doesn't have to be difficult. In fact, the easiest way to close the deal is to ask a question. By asking a leading question, it allows your client to make the next move. It puts the ball back into their court, and gives your client the opportunity to sell himself or herself. Questions like:

"Now that you know about my services, how would you like to proceed?"

The reason I like closing the presentation with a question is it lets the client know you're at your stopping point, and they need to make the next move. Once you ask the question, stop your presentation and don't offer any more talk. Simply listen to your prospect, and answer his or her questions.

Building your portfolio

Building your portfolio can actually be accomplished in a variety of ways. The goal of your portfolio is to be able to use something to showcase your work to prospects and clients. The better your portfolio is, the better your chance of booking the client.

But building a portfolio takes time. Don't be intimidated because you don't have much to start with. It takes time. Add to your portfolio continuously; you'll be surprised at how quickly it builds.

Photo Gallery

Your photo gallery should be sample images of those you've taken in the past. If you're brand new, use photos that you've taken over the past few years. Use these to show your clients the quality of your work, and what you are capable of doing.

Be sure to have photographs available in albums and frames, ready to showcase when you meet with a client. But don't forget the importance of having an online portfolio. It's easier (and less expensive) to keep hundreds of samples on a laptop than it is to print and frame each of these images.

Client Testimonials

Showing your photographs and the quality of your work is important. But equally important is showing people how your customers like what you do.

When you photograph for a client, many times they will send you a thank you note or email. Ask if you may use these in your marketing, and create a book to show future prospects. Let them thumb through the praise you've received from past clients.

Online Portfolio

Your online portfolio allows you to share your images with the world. Think of your website as more than a gallery showcasing a few images. Instead, place a huge selection of images online, and continue adding on a regular basis.

Remember, it's easy to add images online. And people want to see your current work. By combining these two features, you'll create a portfolio that will help you get work many years into the future.

The Importance Of Being Online

Being online can help grow your business, and help create a marketing tool that makes it easier for you to reach people outside of your local community.

Imagine a bride researching online for a photographer for her wedding. She lives in Germany, but is planning an event in Dallas, Texas. She does her research, makes contact, and books each of her vendors by relying on websites and email.

Imagine a family planning a reunion in Orlando, Florida. They have a variety of events planned, with the most important being a dinner at an elegant restaurant. They want photographs of the entire event, and a large group photograph to help remember the event. They head online looking for the perfect photographer to help them remember that moment.

Imagine a large commercial business looking for a photographer to help them create images for their upcoming annual report. They need quality photographs of several of their holdings in Las Vegas, Nevada. They head online looking for a quality photographer that can provide them with the images they are looking for.

In just these few samples, you can begin to see how the Internet is used in sales. The better your image online, the better chance you'll have connecting with people just like these.

These connections happen every day. The important thing for you is to be ready as they happen.

Building a website

Start with a professional website. Whether you choose to do it yourself or hire a designer, make sure your site is done in a professional manner. It's easy to tell how much faith a person has in online sales just by looking at her website. If you want to reach a worldwide market, you have to invest in a professional site. Use these guides as you are designing your own site.

Design. Your first impression is made on the overall design: the graphics, the layout, the typeface and the images. Your customers will

likely make a decision to stay or leave based on the first few seconds on your site. Make sure it's a good impression.

Content. Are you providing quality information that's easy to get to? People recognize value, and move on quickly if they can't find a reason to stay.

Navigation. The movement through your site should be clear and simple. Have you ever been on a site where buttons disappear? And getting from one place to another is an impossibility? Nothing is a bigger turn off than unclear paths.

Change. What will keep your customers coming back? Adding new information on a routine basis will keep people interested. And keep them coming back to buy from you.

How Can I Write Copy On My Website That Is Professional, Meaningful, and Will Sell My Products and Services To My Prospective Customer?

Have you ever read through a website and thought, "What is this website all about?" Unfortunately, that's the case the majority of the time with small business owners. Because they are wearing all of the hats in the business, the owner may simply put together a few pages on his or her website, using simple text copy to describe their products and services. The copy often is weak because they don't have the time or the training to write copy that sells. Or worse, they hire a designer to design a professional website, yet the designer still comes back to the owner for the text. The company is a professional designer, not a professional writer.

The copy on your website is what sells you to potential customers not just in your local area, but around the world. Your website has the potential of being in front of million of people every day IF you market yourself properly. And it all begins with how motivating the copy is on each page, and how it motivates the reader to want to continue from page to page.

Your website needs professional copywriting to reach the most potential customers AND turn them into lucrative sales. I've started out with website content as your top priority because it simply doesn't matter how many people you bring in to your site if the content doesn't support turning them into good qualified prospective – and ultimately paying – clients.

The purpose of a website

After looking over hundreds of websites over the past few years, the one thing I discovered was people are still unsure of what the Internet can do for them. People are generally under the impression that a website is used to do one of two things:

1. Create an online portfolio for people to browse through.
2. Take their business to the next level – expand from a local market to a global market.

Most people still don't realize the benefits of a website to a local market – and to a new, small and growing business. Your website is your online sales tool. It allows you to sell 24/7/365 without ever having to be available during those times. It gives you access to people from around the world; people you would otherwise never have access to.

Start by thinking of your website as you do your phone number. You can't start a business without the basics, and your website should be considered a basic part of doing business. Start by building your site using a simple format. Include your products, information about your business and general overviews and articles that pertain to your industry. Keep it simple, clean and well thought out and put together. Then expand as your business expands. But as you write each page, write directly from the heart, and speak to the people that are reading your information. A website is not a brochure. It is a sales promotional tool that should motivate someone to make contact with you or buy from you. If you aren't getting either on a consistent basis, you need to revamp your site.

Let's consider a wedding photography studio for a minute. Imagine the photographer photographs the wedding, and places the images online for every guest to browse through at their convenience, and to place orders as they see fit. By being online, you've accomplished two things. You now have access to potentially selling images to the entire guest list, not just the immediate family members. And you've also expanded your marketing potential to the entire guest list. If a guest sees your work online and is impressed with your photographic ability, she may decide to hire you for her wedding. Even if it's in a different state (or country!)

That is the power of a website. It can drive new clients to your site through referrals and through customer contact. Providing it is well

thought out and put together, and has the ability to create the sale, it will help your business tremendously. Don't worry that you only have a few pages to start. A few carefully crafted pages are much better than a lot of useless information that leaves the viewer lost as to what you do. Start small, and grow as your company does. Make it a goal to add spend a couple of hours every month adding new information to your site.

Using your website to generate sales

A website can offer you two types of sales.

First, your site can be a lead generator. It can bring a prospect into your site, supply them with information, and convert them into a client. The more you put into your site, the easier it will be to convert them from one stage to the next.

Second, your site can be a sales generator. Once you have booked a client, you can use your site to generate additional sales. You can direct them back to your site to look at their proofs online, and to share their images with family and friends. You can also continue to sell them by sending them to detailed pages on:

- Images
- Frames
- Albums
- Gift products
- Greeting cards
- Photo jewelry
- Business items
- CD's
- Additional shoots
- And more!

The great thing about having a website is you can create a promotion and announce it to your client base in just a few hours. No need to create brochures and postcards. You can just create a new page and email it to your clients.

Online marketing

The term online marketing, or Internet marketing, applies to the way of communicating with prospective and current customers using online methods instead of more traditional methods. Online methods offer a lot of potential to businesses, and include things like:

- Banner ads
- Email marketing
- Search engine optimization
- Pay per click
- Pay per call
- Natural optimization
- Social networking

Online methods continue to grow with new ideas and tools every day. One of the reasons online marketing has become successful is because of the cost; why traditional advertising can cost thousands, you can often find online methods for even just a few dollars.

Online marketing starts when you have a desire to grow online. Whether you start with a website, or start with something simpler like a blog, the important thing is to have information online about your company. From there, the growth begins.

In order to grow a business, marketing is a necessity. You have to hand out brochures and make contract with people to generate business. The same applies in the online world. You have to generate traffic back into your information in order to have a person take action, and make contact with you.

Just as with web design, you have different options when it comes to online marketing. You can choose to do the research and required work yourself. Or you can invest in a relationship with someone that knows and understands online marketing.

Keep in mind there is more to online marketing than submitting to the search engines. Most of the top search engines are highly sophisticated, and will eventually spider through your site fairly timely after you place it online. Resubmitting it month after month won't do a thing for your rankings – don't be fooled by companies that promise this type of marketing.

Instead, look for someone who can show you how to achieve significant results doing some of the work yourself:

- http://www.virtualphotographystudio.com/members/do_it_yours_elf_marketing.htm

Or work together with you to achieve the results you are looking for:

- http://www.virtualphotographystudio.com/members/website_marketing.htm

Online growth

In today's world, being online is a necessary part of doing business. In fact, developing a virtual plan, no matter if you choose to make your virtual portion 10%, 25% or 100% of your business, will help you grow significantly more than other studios that choose to ignore online sales.

At no other time in history will you be able to jump in to a way of doing business that will have such a dramatic effect on your business.

- \$100 billion was spent on US ecommerce in 2003.
- \$13.2 billion will be spent online during 2004 holiday season.
- \$22.34 billion in online sales in Q4 2004.
- \$7.5 billion of apparel and accessories will be sold online in 2004.
- 10 million Americans purchased digital content.
- 10% of all UK credit card payments are made online.
- 12.7% of all books in 2003 were sold over the Internet.
- 30% of catalog purchases took place on the Internet in 2003.
- 37% of offline retailers are using the Internet.
- 45% of consumers research offline and buy online.
- 56% of US companies buy online.
- 62% of online purchases in 2004 Q4 were made by women.
- 69% of online shoppers visit offline stores, then buy online.
- 98% of online retailers expect growth during this holiday season.

Take a few minutes and contemplate each of these sentences. Not only do they show an incredible amount of opportunity that has already taken place, they show a tremendous amount of growth potential!

One set of statistics that really sparked my attention was the number of people that perform research within their local area, and then turn to the Internet to make the purchase. Have you ever done that? You

go to a store to search out the best product. You look at the quality of the product. You find out what features satisfy what you're looking for. You may even find an exact make and model. Then you head home to price shop online. I know I've done that many times.

People that are prone to buying online are increasingly turning to the Internet for the best deal they can find. They head out to their local market to do their research. But when it comes time to buy, they buy in the convenience of their own home - online. What does that tell you if you're a local store? You better have your information online, and it better be accessible and appealing to all that shop your online location. As more people find the ease and beauty of shopping online, they will continue hunt for quality sites to do business with. If you can make the transition between storefront and Internet, all the better. But your goal as an Internet company should be to attract customers from any location at any time.

Being virtual doesn't mean switching from a 100% local business to a 100% virtual business overnight. Instead, it means realizing that to stay in business in the next 1, 5 or even 10 years, you have to become virtual. You have to learn how to convert your business to capture sales on the Internet. As your customers shop your location, then head to the Internet for final comparisons, they better be able to find you online to complete the sale. Or they will turn to someone else. Guaranteed.

Making a commitment today to start bringing your business online, and transforming the way you do business will help you keep up with the way businesses of the 21st century will operate from now on.

If you're just starting out in business, create a plan that will turn most of your business into a virtual environment. Growing and finding clients can be accomplished anywhere. By starting online, you will find success much easier than your brick and mortar counterparts.

If you are already operating a small business in your local area, start small. I've known many companies that try and convert from a local business to a virtual business within a few months. One portion (sometimes all of it) usually ends up failing. Switching to a virtual environment often times just doesn't work that quickly. Implement new techniques as you keep the old in place. As you gain online successes, phase out offline methods. Create a plan that will allow you to grow online over a one to three year period. Then move to implement each piece as you find your successes.

For us, we found online success within one year. But we spent the next year phasing out of our offline marketing methods, and verifying and testing each online method for its strength and solidity. We made sure we didn't let go of an important traditional marketing method without determining we had another virtual method to cover it.

Keeping It Legal

Running a business takes more than opening your doors and selling something to clients. It takes an entire operation to keep you legitimate, and operating on a legal level.

While many businesses start out simple, and add things as they run into issues and problems, the better way is to go into business prepared for anything.

Being prepared means having a contract for your clients to sign. It prepares you (and them) against unforeseen events. And it means having all of your business aspects covered and insured against unexpected items.

Below I'll offer you a few options, and give you a variety of things to think about. Keep in mind this is an important area for your business. Contact your lawyer, accountant, or insurance agent to better understand each of these items, and to get further information on how to apply these to you.

Contracts and written agreements

A contract is the foundation of which your business will be conducted. Properly drafted contracts can help you avoid unnecessary disputes.

A contract exists when two or more parties agree to exchange either property (including money) or a promise of future performance. Contracts can exist either verbally or in writing, with writing being more binding and providing actual proof. Contracts can be part of an invoice, or can be drafted as separate documents.

As a photographer, determine how much coverage you need to protect both yourself and your client. If a client comes in for a quick business portrait, a simple contract attached to your invoice may be sufficient. However, if you are a wedding photographer and book clients 12 months out, having a proper contract in place can cover you against many things, both on your part and your clients.

While I do highly recommend hiring a lawyer to create a contract for you, I do want to offer you several suggestions. Start by searching online for various photography contracts, and use them to create your

mock-up contract. It's a lot easier (and less expensive) to have a lawyer edit a contract than to create one. Consider these ideas:

- Create a model release that allows you access to the images for marketing purposes.
- Create a model release to use the image files on your website, and for online promotion.
- Define copyrights and how you own the image files and rights. State exactly what your client has access to, and what infringes upon these copyrights.
- State photographer rights. Do you allow other photographers shooting with you (either professional or amateur)?
- Cancellation policies.

Once you have a contract in place, monitor it on a yearly basis. Add things as you run into problems. Take the advice of clients and peers, and tweak things as you go. Remember, your business will grow constantly; make sure you're covered as you go.

Liability Insurance

Probably the most important thing you can do for your business is to make sure you are covered in the event of a lawsuit from a prospect or client. In today's world the threat of a lawsuit is high in all forms of businesses. You have potential of being sued for:

- Injury at your home studio
- Injury on a photo shoot
- Photograph loss
- Product loss
- Contract misrepresentation

This names just a few of the reasons a photography may be sued as a small business owner.

Before you open yourself up to a lawsuit, make sure you invest the time necessary to find a policy that best suits your businesses needs, and is at a rate affordable for you.

Consider these five tips when you're hunting for liability insurance.

1. Join an association. There are many different types of associations that may offer you reasonably priced insurance. Talk to a local Chamber of Commerce, and see what group rates they may offer.

You may also talk to a photography association in your area of specialty. Many associations offer discounts on premiums especially set up for the business of photography.

There are also associations for self employed, small businesses, and women or other minority owned businesses.

2. Find out common lawsuits within the photography industry.

Before you sign up for a policy, make sure you are covered for the type of business you run. A wedding business is different from a home portrait studio.

Ask the company you are considering doing business if they have experience with other photographers. What is the coverage, and what are the exclusions?

You may also connect with a photography association and ask what information they have about common lawsuits, and what coverage is needed for your business.

3. Compare coverage. When starting out, take a look at several companies, and understand what the policies mean. You'll soon see trends on inclusions and exclusions, and be able to distinguish a policy that is right for you.

4. Find a specialist. Like other industries, you can often find a broker who deals exclusively with photography and other creative art policies. This type of broker will work with your best interests at heart, and provide you with a policy that has the maximum coverage.

5. Get a package deal. Just like you can get a discount when you have your life, auto and home insurance in one place, the same applies to business insurance. Depending on your business situation, you may be able to buy a Business Owners Policy that covers your complete business and helps you save on rates.

Your over all goal is to make sure you, your business and your prospects/clients are covered at all costs. The more time you spend upfront guaranteeing your coverage, the less worry (and headache) you'll have down the road.

Workers Compensation Insurance

As a business owner and employer, you may be required to hold workers compensation insurance. The employer funds this insurance completely, with the purpose being to protect the employers from damages awarded in lawsuits that could conceivably put you out of business.

Workman's compensation insurance (workman's comp) is a form of state regulated, no fault liability insurance, which covers employee medical expenses, lost wages, rehabilitation services, and death resulting from work related injury or illness. Employees injured in the workplace are eligible for workman's comp benefits regardless of fault – employees do not have to prove employer negligence to claim benefit.

Each state has its own rules and policies. Some states allow you to purchase insurance through a private agency; others prohibit this. To learn more, start here <http://www.workerscompensation.com/> and contact your local government office for more information.

Appendix

Professional Associations and Organizations

[Advertising Photographers of America](#)
[American Society of Media Photographers](#)
[American Society of Picture Professionals](#)
[Association of Australian Commercial and Media Photographers](#)
[Association of Independent Architectural Photography](#)
[Association of International Photography Art Dealers](#)
[Association of Photographers](#)
[Association of Portrait Photographers International](#)
[Association of Professional Photographers of Spain](#)
[Association of Swedish Professional Photographers](#)
[Australian Institute of Professional Photography](#)
[British Association of Picture Libraries and Agency](#)
[Canadian Association of Photographers and Illustrators](#)
[Editorial Photographers](#)
[FreeLens](#)
[German National Association for Professional Photographers](#)
[German Professional Photographers Association](#)
[International Freelance Photographers Organization](#)
[International VR Photography Association](#)
[National Association of Photoshop Professionals](#)
[National Press Photographers Association](#)
[National Union of Journalists](#)
[Nikonians](#)
[Northern American Nature Photography Association](#)
[Photographic Society of America](#)
[Photographic Society of New Zealand](#)
[Picture Agency Council of America](#)
[Picture Research Association](#)
[Positive Focus](#)
[Pro Imaging UK](#)
[Professional Aerial Photographers Association](#)
[Professional Imagers Club](#)
[Professional Photographers of America](#)
[Professional Photographers of Canada](#)
[Professional Women Photographers](#)
[Society for Photographic Education](#)
[Society of Professional Journalists](#)
[Stock Artists Alliance](#)
[The Royal Photographic Society](#)
[Visual Resources Association](#)
[Wedding and Portrait Photographers International](#)
[White House Photographers Association](#)
[Women In Photography International](#)

Supply Resources

Business Help <http://www.score.org>
<http://www.workerscompensation.com/>

Camera Equipment
<http://www.bhphotovideo.com/>
<http://www.lensprotogo.com/>

Printing
<http://pressexprint.com/>
<http://postcardmania.com/>

Forms
<http://nebs.com/nebsEcat/SearchServlet>

Marketing Help
<http://www.virtualphotographystudio.com/>
<http://www.visionofsuccess.com>
<http://www.visionbusinessconcepts.com>

Website Development
[http://www.virtualphotographystudio.com/members/website_de
sign.htm](http://www.virtualphotographystudio.com/members/website_de_sign.htm)

Frames and Albums
Excel Picture frames <http://www.excelpictureframes.com/>
GNP Frames <http://www.gnpframe.com/>
Graphik Dimensions Ltd <http://www.pictureframes.com/>
Larson-Juhl <http://www.larsonjuhl.com/>
Art Leather <http://www.artleather.com/>
Capri Albums <http://www.caprialbum.com/>
Zookbinders <http://www.zookbinders.com/>

Packaging
<http://www.packagingsupplies.com/>
<http://www.bagsandbowsonline.com/>

Your \$50 Certificate

Now that you have your photography business started, what if you could become a ***Six Figure Photographer***? What would it mean to you and your family? Would it change your life – forever?

My personal goal is to help 1,000 photographers change their lives forever, and become a Six Figure success. Will you be one of them?

Because you've taken the first step, and invested in ***Building A Successful Photography Business***, I'm going to give you an added bonus.

Purchase my ***Six Figure Photographer*** with this special coupon reserved exclusively for purchasers of my ***Building A Successful Photography Business***, and save \$50 off the regular \$197 price. (Not only does that make your purchase of ***Building A Successful Photography Business*** free, but also you gain an additional \$10 off the price!)

Take the next step and invest in ***Six Figure Photographer*** today! Your future is waiting for \$147 + \$10 in shipping!

Yes! Let's get started. I authorize you to charge my
 Visa MasterCard Check Enclosed for \$157.

Card #: _____ Exp Date: _____

Company Name: _____

Name: _____ Email: _____

Billing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Signature: _____ Phone: _____

**Print Clearly and mail to
Lori Osterberg 4950 S Yosemite St F2 #306, Greenwood Village, CO 80111**

Want to get started faster? Email or call me and we can get started today!

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