

# hey there! I'M SO HAPPY YOU'RE HERE



When I started my journey as a wedding photographer, I had no idea what I was doing or how much I didn't know. It was completely overwhelming. I didn't know who my ideal client was, how they would find me, or what an "ideal client" even meant. But I did know I was passionate about photography, hungry for knowledge, and determined to make it in a highly competitive industry. I didn't have any past clients to vouch for my work (unless you count my mom), or really much work to speak of; I was where so many beginners start...at the bottom.

I didn't let any of those things stop me. By leveraging the resources around me, I began booking brides. Real brides! And let me tell you— most of the things I did to promote my business were 100% free. I have built a profitable Fine Art Wedding Photography business and I'm here to tell you that if I can do this, you can too!

I'm so excited you are here right now because it means you're ready to grow, learn, and take your photography business to the next level. Get ready to not only learn but also to take actionable steps that will launch your business forward!

Warmly,

### 1. PUT IT OUT THERE

Odds are, you already know some of your future clients. Friends are a valuable (and oftentimes overlooked) part of our network. My first real bride who booked me was a college friend who started seeing my wedding photography work on Facebook and had just recently become engaged. I had no idea she was following my early work or business. (Sometimes people will follow you and not engage, so keep sharing even if you don't get as many likes or comments as you might hope.)

This may seem obvious or basic to you, but I can't tell you how many times photographers delay sharing their work or tell themselves they are not ready yet. You know what I hear when I coach aspiring photographers? A whole lotta "someday" this and "someday" that. Let me tell you-- if I had waited until my portfolio was "ready" or "perfect," that day would never have come and I would have missed out on that bride.

Start today! Begin actively and regularly sharing your work with others. This goes beyond the internet- it's how you speak about yourself. Have you missed an opportunity to share that you are a photographer? Next time someone asks you what you do, tell them about your photography. Don't beat around the bush; it's time to own it! This is scary. Trust me I know. But it's so important because your friends need to see and hear you call yourself a photographer. Treat your business and your work the way you want others to treat it. When I began taking myself seriously as a photographer, I noticed others did too.

You can do this through a blog or social media platform but your most valuable interaction will be face-to-face.

You'll be amazed at the reach you can have when you simply share your work.

#### ACTION STEP

Write down how many times a week you plan to share your work and where you will share it. I keep my goals on sticky notes on my desk so I see them daily.

# 2. SOCIAL MEDIA

This one is a biggie! I think it was my second summer in business when I realized how powerful social media was for showcasing my work. Brides were finding me there, more so than through my website or referral. I was amazed! There are so many platforms out there. So before you start spinning your wheels for hours on end and become frustrated, I want to give you a few of my best ideas for approaching social media.

Play to your strengths. Rather than trying to be everywhere at once, stick to your top three platforms and rock those platforms. If you don't like Google+ or Twitter, don't use them. Make accounts for them (reserve your URL or @handle on all platforms) and leave a post directing followers to one of the accounts you are actively sharing on. It's better to have 3 strong platforms sharing a consistent message than to be everywhere online but lacking consistency and focus.

Know your "why" and the "what" before you start posting. That will naturally follow. Ask yourself what your mission on each platform will be. Your reason why you are on Instagram will be different from your reason why you might be on Facebook. If you hope to engage with others in your community, your content should reflect that. A common pitfall is to just do what others are doing. But do they have your goals and your "why?" Of course not!

**Testing and tweaking.** Now that you have your *why*, you can begin to create and share content to achieve it. Your *why* and your tactics will be ever-changing!

#### ACTION STEP

Be sure your name and/or business name is reserved on all social media platforms. Pick 3 platforms to focus on and determine your WHY for each one.

## 2. SOCIAL MEDIA CONTINUED

**Using Hash tags**. Whenever relevant and possible, I tag a vendor or person, use hash tags that relate to my image, and geotag the location of the image. This helps get that absolute most reach for each post and increases the odds of someone sharing my post or engaging with it through a comment or like.

When I use hash tags, I try to use words that relate to what the image is literally, and then to what I do for my clients. Something like #yourcityweddingphotographer is always a good start. If you click on a hash tag that is relevant to your industry, Instagram will sometimes suggest other relevant hast tags at the top. These are more great hash tags you can use!

**BONUS TIP!** A quick tip for using hash tags is to make a note in your notes app that contains your most used tags. You can quickly copy and paste your tags as needed instead of manually writing them in.

**BONUS TIP!** You know what gets old fast? The constant self-promoter. Of course you'll share what you do, but aim to provide useful content, and be helpful to your audience before you start selling.

#### ACTION STEP

Look at what hash tags are popular for your industry. Decide what some of your go-to hash tags will be and save them in your notes app.

# 3. STYLED SHOOTS

Raise your hand if you want to be insanely productive! I have two words for you: Styled Shoots. Three things happened with I photographed my first styled shoot. I made friends within the wedding industry in my area, I grew my professional portfolio, and I got published. Each of these elements became pillars within my business. Networking, Portfolio, and Features (free marketing!)

As in any business, but especially the wedding industry, one of the best things you can do is to build strong vendor relationships. Every time you work with another professional, there's a chance to expand your circle. Styled shoots can be the perfect way to be intentional about making connections, especially before you have many paying clients on the books.

Styled shoots are also great for growing your portfolio. Maybe you really need some fresh images for your website, or some new variety. The beauty of a styled shoot is that you can plan the theme, colors and overall feel of your shoot to reflect the types of clients you want to attract. Do you want to work with nautical brides? Consider putting together a styled shoot by the water.

After my first styled shoot, I submitted the images to a national wedding blog called Wedding Chicks and was accepted. Everyone involved in the shoot was credited and the vendors were thrilled! From that feature, I received wedding referrals and traffic to my blog and website. I was also able to display a badge on my website showcasing my published work which is great for building client

Shoot. est. States

#### ACTION STEP

Dream up a theme and color palette for a styled shoot. I like to use Pinterest. Start planning it! Put a date on your calendar.

### 4. SECOND SHOOT

I cannot stress enough how crucial it is to second shoot when you are in the process of finding your first clients and establishing your business. Weddings are fast-paced and each is a little different. Second shooting allows for the chance to see how other photographers navigate the wedding day. Each Photographer is unique in their style, approach, and gear; be a sponge and learn all that you can. You'll grow your skills behind the camera, and build portfolio material as well. The photographers I second shot for in my first year helped me navigate the waters of business and became some of my dearest friends in the industry.

Depending on your agreement, some photographers will let you use the images you take in your portfolio. I found second shooting opportunities through my local photography groups on Facebook. If you are not confident enough to shoot a wedding or are having trouble finding someone to let you second shoot, consider assisting instead. Offer your help and be forthright and honest about wanting to learn from them.

You can also check out http://secondshooters.com/ to find second shooting gigs!

#### ACTION STEP

Join a local photographer Facebook group and post that you are looking for second shooting gigs with a link to your work.

# 5. COLLECT REVIEWS

Brides LOVE reviews!! But don't just take my word for it. Research shows that 63% of customers are more likely to purchase from a site if it has product ratings and reviews. And over half of people consider a review to be a trusted research source when making their buying decisions.

There are lots of platforms available for you to begin collecting reviews. Facebook pages have this feature. If you haven't already, make a free Wedding Wire (or The Knot) account and request reviews from anyone and everyone you have ever photographed. On Wedding Wire, you can also receive industry vendor endorsements. Remember all those vendors you just collaborated with on that styled shoot? Leave them a great endorsement and they might return the favor.

If you don't have past wedding clients yet, ask portrait clients for a review. A review of your work and your character is still immensely valuable to brides as they decide on a wedding photographer.

Now that you have some reviews, it's time to show them off! Showcase your reivews where clients can easily find and read them. Wedding Wire provides its users with a badge to display how many reviews they have and how to see them. I swear I'm not an affiliate with Wedding Wire—they're just all kinds of awesome!

ACTION

Request reviews from your past clients. Share those reviews so they can easily be found on your website/blog.

# 6. MAKE YOUR BRAND CLEAR

Your website and your blog are essentially the digital equivalent to a physical storefront of your business. It's the first impression your client has of you. They're curious about who you are, what you do, and why you do it. They want to know your story and your message. It goes so far beyond your logo or tag line. This is your brand.

So while you're asking how you can find those wedding photography clients, also ask yourself how well your brand speaks to your message and vision. Have a friend or family member look at your website and tell you what they see and how they perceive your work. If you're not a designer or a website coder, that's ok! I highly recommend investing in a branding/design expert who can come alongside you and help bring to life your website and message. It's an investment to hire a designer, but I believe it's a wise one because it is the lifeblood of your business.

I was a graphic design major in college and learned all about how vital this step is for a business, so it's something I emphasized early on in Joy Michelle Photography. I thought about details like my logo, my business card paper thickness, and even the words I used on my website. I believe this, along with what we've discussed above, propelled my business forward.

#### **BONUS TIP!**

Mobile internet use is now bigger than desktop internet use.

Make sure your website and blog are mobile-friendly!

#### ACTION STEP

Look at your website and ask yourself, "Can my client find out WHO I am, WHAT I do it?" If it isn't clear— you have your homework.

### BE PATIENT

All of these things— your brand, your portfolio, and especially your relationships will take time to cultivate. Remember that a business is never "set" or "done" but rather a constant work in progress. There will be days when you don't see the progress but I can tell you that when you keep fighting for it, you will see results. There is no silver bullet to success, only hard work

## BONUS TIPS!

Attend a Photography Workshop or Webinar
One of my favorite FREE resources while I was starting out is a website called
http://www.CreativeLive.com
☐ Find a Mentor or business coach who can keep you on task and focused on your goals
☐ Set short and long term goals. Know your vision for <i>why</i> you want this business to thrive and
write those things down. Putting your words onto paper is a powerful thing. I use a goal setting
system called <u>Power Sheets</u> by Lara Casey.

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