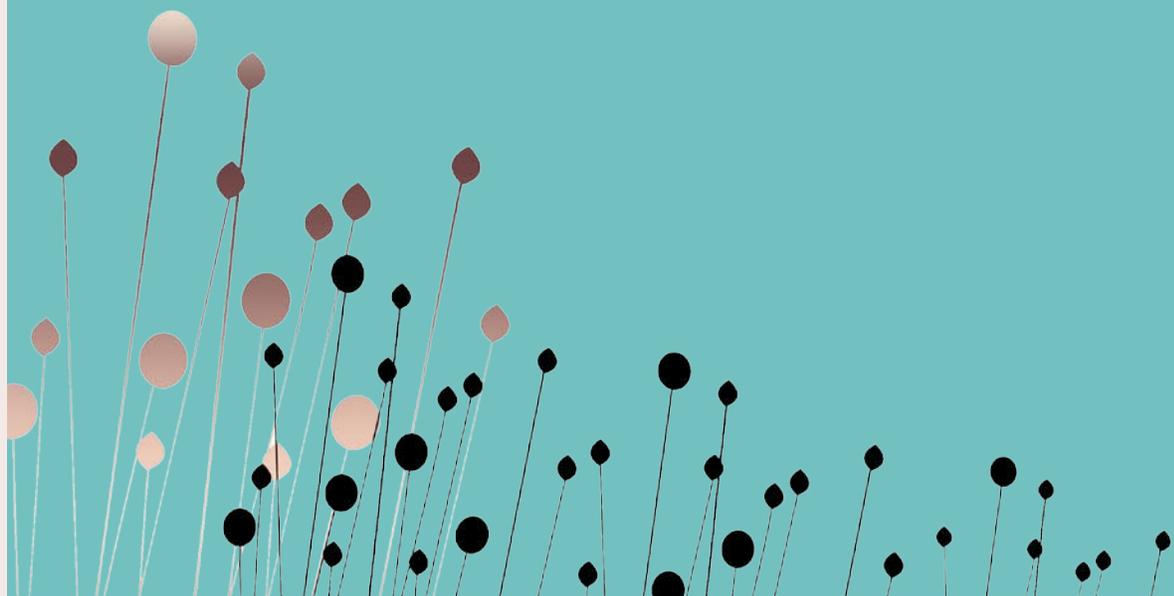


10

Proven Tips
to Grow Your Studio Business



Lenzart
Professional Lab
800-826-2624
www.lenzart.com

10 Proven Tips

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The photographic industry is more **exciting**, and also more **challenging** than ever before. The industry has changed in a very basic and profound way, and the speed of technological improvements is increasing every day!

What hasn't changed is the need to **market ourselves** uniquely and effectively. Our jobs not only include excelling at our craft, but also getting the word out **and** creating a market and an awareness for exactly what we provide.

As with all successful ventures, your marketing efforts will be effective and measurable when based on a solid plan. But, this plan doesn't have to be some "giant" that is continually put on the back burner awaiting a long uninterrupted block of time. The **secret** is to work on your plan one step at a time, and do those small things at a steady, even pace.

We hope you find this guideline of "10 Simple Steps" a great way to get started, or a great way to re-visit your plan.

Success:



**"Doing the right things, in small amounts,
over a long period of time"**

10 Proven Tips

to Grow Your Studio Business

Step

- ① Start With “Why”
- ② Begin With the End in Mind
- ③ Your Ideal Client
- ④ Goals Before Strategy
- ⑤ Strategy and Tactics
- ⑥ Words That Sell
- ⑦ “Online” isn’t Good Enough
- ⑧ What’s Inbound? What’s Outbound?
 - How About Social Media?
- ⑨ The “Gold” in Client Referrals
- ⑩ Thought Starters for Your Studio Goals

Start With Why

It may sound overly simplistic, but most companies don't start here. They plunge right in with marketing the

what - your products and services
or the

how - manufacturing, supply chain, turnaround
But the

WHY ... (??)

- that's all about you
- that's your story
- that's your differentiator

Take a look at this video for a great summary of the "Why" of your business:

http://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action.html

Begin with the **END** in mind

Here are some basic concepts that need to be considered in your studio image and direction. These foundational questions will save time and confusion down the road.

Our suggestion - take 30 - 60 minutes to build the framework of exactly what you intend to create. Consider these the foundation for your marketing decisions going forward. These values and qualities, once clearly defined, will make all subsequent decisions consistent and effective.

Your Studio Image

- What is it **now**?
- What do you want it to be in the **future**?
- Which **characteristics** are most important to you? - "Boil it down"

Your client's image of you

- What is your client's image of you? - **Do you know**?
- **Does it match** your image of yourself?
- When was the last time you **polled your clients**? - This is a terrific tool, consider phoning a few of your long term clients as part of this analysis.

Keep in mind, the more you know about **their perception of you**, the better you'll be able to capitalize on that information and neutralize any "disadvantages" they see in you.

Your expertise

- Where are you in relation to your **competitor's knowledge**?
- What **niche** do you fill?
- Are you **known for a niche** your competitors are not?
- In which areas are you most **expert**?

- continued -

Your competition

- **Who** do you believe is your competition?
- **Who** do your clients believe is your competition?
- Do your ideal clients often **choose** between you and your primary competition?
- Be careful - don't be **too narrow in focus**. Your "competitors" are any and all firms and merchandise that compete for today's consumer's "discretionary income".

Your service to your clients

- What services are you **known for**?
- What services do your clients **want**, and which are they **willing to pay for**?
- Have your products been **upgraded frequently** to "stay with the times" (for example, social networking as part of your service network)
- What **value** do you provide to your client? Value is more important than ever.

Part of your marketing responsibility is to **clearly define that value to your clients**. Make it clear that you will provide the best value for their dollars spent. Never underestimate special offers, special collections, and specific guidance on individual client needs.

You ARE the expert!

- Decide your **differentiating factors**. Be specific and educate your client base
- **Impress** those clients with your knowledge and service level. Deliver more than is expected
- **Listen** to everything those clients comment on and ask about
- **Demonstrate** why only you can fill this need perfectly

"... and how much is an 8x10?"

That, of course, is not the real question, but it's often the only question prospective clients know to ask. **Help them feel and appreciate the intangible side of your services**. You provide an incomparable family or personal experience - that's the service that needs to be communicated.

Your Ideal Client

Ok, this one is really **FUN!**

Describe your ideal client - not necessarily your top clients now (although that in itself will be interesting). Are your clients now also “ideal clients”?

Consider these specifics...

- Age
- Sex
- Geographic area
- Do both spouses work outside the home?
- Profession(s)
- Income level
- Number of children
- Ages of children
- Do they own pets?
- Type of home
- Multiple homes?
- Wall space available (or not?)
- Have they purchased from you before?
- Have they purchased from other professional photographers before?
- If so, do you know which photographer and why?
- Were they recommended to you by another client?
- Do they take photographs themselves
- If so, do they print those photos at home (or elsewhere?)
- Do they go on an annual family vacation?
- What are their holiday buying habits? - are they last minute shoppers?
- How do they make decisions?

Why this step is so important:



Your greatest success will be with your ideal clients - those who are “like-minded” to your own values and your own descriptive client list. They are the 20% from whom you will reap 80% of your business.

Now that you have profiled your ideal client, the next step is to determine their

pains & fears

A **Pain** is something that is a problem in their day to day life, something that can be addressed with commitment and attention.

A **Fear** is something that is in the future, may or may not happen, and the more they worry about it the bigger it gets.

Once you know your client's pains and fears, then you may talk to them about your

solutions

So why might your ideal client be postponing having a family portrait done?

Maybe their **pain** is that they don't have the time or ability to gather the family for a portrait during typical business hours.

A **solution** you may offer is to be available during evenings, weekends or around the holidays when families usually come together.

Could your ideal client's **fear** be that the economy will remain slow and they will not be able to afford your services?

Various **solutions** may be to offer a payment plan or an "Early Bird" sale.

Bottom line, when you focus on them, and understand what their pains and fears are, they will begin to trust **you** and will be more apt to call **you** when they are ready to buy.

Goals Before Strategy

It's simple to state that you want to "build business and increase revenue", but with just a bit more analysis of your goals, you can **tailor the marketing steps** to tune in with that goal. Be specific ...

For example -

- Are you trying to increase the number of **daily phone inquiries**?
- Are you trying to increase **studio traffic** for more face to face time?
- Are you trying to launch a **new line of work**, a new field of expertise?
- Are you trying to increase the **number of sessions** photographed in a specific time period?
- Are you trying to **add sessions** in a certain month or time slot?
- Are you trying to increase your **average session sale**? If so, **from** what \$ average **to** what \$ average?
- Are you trying to increase the **buying frequency** of existing accounts?
- Are you trying to **create a "Buzz"** around a special event?

Yes, we know it may be all of these, but your strategy may be different for each answer. Take it one step at a time and be sure to prioritize by your most important goal first. Set that goal and set a time line!

A wise man once said,

*"If you want to improve something,
you must measure it"*

Strategy & Tactics

Now that you have identified your primary goal, let's build your strategy and tactics surrounding that goal.

Your **strategy** will relate *specifically to a goal*, the **tactics** will be your *specific steps*. One step at a time, **doing the small steps every day**, will move you to your goal. Here are a few examples of other photographer's strategies and the special tactics implemented.

Studio Strategy

Sample Tactics

Upgrade / change my **studio image** from "old-fashioned" and boring to **cutting edge**

- new **logo**
- tie all **visual pieces** of image together (business cards, letterhead, newsletters)
- make **studio website** an information hub for clients (free information is the most frequently used value of websites)
- **social network** presence - add a blog, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube videos, etc.

Create more *"buzz"* about my work

- **open house** at the studio
- introduce my **referral plan** to clients
- create a **calendar of community events** of which I will be a participant and/or a sponsor
- pre-holiday **party** / gift certificates

More *visibility* in community

- **charity** auctions
- television **fund raisers** - donate generously
- sponsor **public events**
- **co-market** with other community businesses that share my goals
- **appear** in the places and "on the walls" where my ideal clients frequent (kid's clothing boutiques, country clubs, etc)

- continued -

Studio Strategy

Sample Tactics

Increase **AVERAGE SALE** session
of from \$_____ to \$_____

- **analyze** what product or service (or group of products) will **add up** to my target dollar amount
- **launch** new product with a chosen client focus group
- build **incentive level packages** that are designed for the best value at your target sale level
- promote that “Best value / wise choice” option **everywhere**
- create irresistible **timely offers**
- sell a new item **on speculation** (produce it at your expense, offer it after the sale as a special offer)

Increase ***Holiday Sales***

- **theme days** for easy gift giving
- **one day sales** - book NOW for discount
- **gift certificates** at awesome prices (with appropriate deadlines)
- plant the seed about **special portraiture** | specialize in: multi-generational, pet, milestone birthday, special location
- **Holiday cards** (huge opportunity for sales and advertising)
- **last minute sales**
- **open house** in mid-December to solve a dilemma for all my last minute shoppers with awesome gift options

Words that Sell

Language is everything. It sets the **tone**, states the **interest** and **BEGINS** the **relationship!** Since most small businesses don't have the funds to hire professional copywriters, we've done some research on some of the juiciest phrases to use.

Teasers to gain interest

- "You'll be the first"
- "Exclusive offer"
- "Valuable offer enclosed"
- "New this year!"
- "Bonus offer"
- "Free download"

Discounts

- "One day sale"
- "Preseason sale"
- "Private sale"
- "Price guaranteed thru _____ (date)"
- "Buy more, save much more"
- "Unbeatable value"
- "Book today & lock in savings"

Describe your studio expertise

- "Skilled"
- "Gifted"
- "Ingenious"
- "Award winning"
- "We're pros"
- "Pioneers in ..."
- "Artistry of ..."
- "Stamp of creativity"
- "Foremost authority on ..."

- continued -

Gift Market

- “Distinctive gifts”
- “Everyone loves this!”
- “Gift of beauty”
- “Gift of love”
- “Elegant”
- “Always tasteful”
- “Create a special bond”
- “Family heirloom”

Service

- “A personalized consultation”
- “The solution to ...”
- “Valuable tips”
- “We guide you at each step”
- “You can turn to us for ...”
- “A real lifesaver”
- “No more _____ to worry about”
- “Delivered to your door”
- “Let us pamper you”

Valuable

- “Treasured”
- “Integral”
- “Exquisite”
- “Precious”
- “Museum quality”
- “Rare beauty”
- “A valued addition”
- “A tremendous investment”

“Online” isn’t good enough

A proper on line presence is key to helping your image look tied together and very credible. Let’s review **5 key website elements ...**

1 Content and appearance

The content and overall look of your website gives the strongest first impression (and in **many cases**, the **only impression**) of your business’s professionalism, values and personality. Be sure all of those traits are properly represented on your site. Get a few outside opinions to gain a fresh perspective.

2 How to “take action”

Your website should easily guide your visitors on how to take action and what will happen when they do. There should never be any confusion as to what you want the customer to do during a visit to your website.

3 Functionality

When customers and potential customers visit your website, they should never experience “broken links”, under construction messages or other page and function errors. Plan any changes to your site carefully to avoid this annoyance to viewers.

4 Pulling in Traffic

You should be maximizing the potential of your website by utilizing “search engine rankings” to help pull in the right prospects (consider employing a firm that specializes in search engine optimization, or SEO). Utilizing mixed media and internet marketing can create traffic and “hits” to your website, but stay on top pf what’s working and what isn’t.

5 Know Your Visitors

You should be aware of how many visitors are coming to your site and what pages receive the most attention, as well as the source of those visitors. A frequent and routine analysis of these statistics will help you make changes as needed.

Don’t expect to be an expert on all this - it’s just not possible to do it all yourself! Outside help from professional sources may be worth the investment to your studio goals.

What's *Inbound*? What's *Outbound*?

The use of the internet has changed the dynamics of the business world. For decades marketers and “ad men” have used the interruption of “outbound marketing” to push out their message to as many people as possible. **These “out bound marketing” methods are becoming less and less effective for two main reasons:**

First - the consumer is becoming better at **blocking out** these interruption-based messages. The average person is saturated with thousands of these messages per day and they are finding more creative ways to block them with techniques like caller id, spam filtering and on-demand radio and television reception.

Second - the internet, as a source, provides a quick and easy way for consumers to **learn about and shop for the items they need**. They will often use this method as a starting point.

So, combine the best of both worlds. To stay competitive, consider utilizing at least some inbound marketing concepts to allow consumers to **find you**, on their schedule. This can be coupled with any outbound methods that have had good results for you in the past. For example, keep blog and facebook pages informative and current, then reinforce those news items with direct mail pieces.

- All Social media
- Search engine optimization of your website
- Search engine marketing messages or special offers
- Pay per click
- Blogging
- e-newsletter
- Referral plan

Examples of
inbound marketing



- telemarketing
- direct mail
- print ads
- TV / radio ads

Examples of
outbound marketing



about inbound ...

“How About Social Media?”

We all respect the power of social networking and what it means to the success of businesses. It's critical to “BE” where your clients and potential clients are spending time. To that end, **here are a few brief explanations and tips about social media.**

Social media is any website or mobile phone function that allows you to share content and ideas with other people. Not all social platforms are good at the same things, so it is important to identify which ones your desired clients are on. Here are the main social media sites you might want to consider:

Your Blog

A blog is probably the simplest platform for sharing and connecting with your clients. Some experts insist that a blog just may be your most important social media site. An added bonus, it will also fuel your SEO, since search engines love valuable, frequent content.

Facebook

Since Facebook is used by most of the world, it is an ideal way to get people interacting with your business. Clients can connect with, like, and share content on your site, and that engagement is the very definition of successful social media.

Twitter

Twitter is a simple and minimalist service, which allows you to share content but also allows engagement. It is particularly useful for conveying time-sensitive information about promotions and new products.

Instagram

The perfect platform to reach anyone passionate about images. Consider using Instagram not only to show off your best images, but also to share photos of interesting books, exhibitions and places that you recommend.

Pinterest

Another image platform, Pinterest is a relatively new networking site that is catching on like wildfire. Drive traffic to your website by creating online boards with images and videos of topics you and your clients may be interested in.

Some things to keep in mind regarding social media:

1. Be consistent

Which platform or platforms you use depends on you and your business, but once you start you can never stop. So choose how often you would like to post - once a day, once a week - then keep that schedule to keep people interested.

2. But don't become spammy

The experts recommend trying to **post once a day**. More than 3 times a day and you may be perceived as "spammy".

3. Be sensitive to conversation styles

You'll want to be perceived as **fun, interested, informative and knowledgeable**, NOT as self serving. Users that come on too strong with promotional messages are branded as such and it will have consequences.

4. Be prepared to be transparent

In your own networking you should **SHARE** - ideas, answers, questions and observations. A social network has to be continual give and take.

5. Jump In

Listen, learn and **participate** to start widening your horizons. This will be an ongoing learning experience that will continue to flourish once you immerse yourself.

6. Add Value

You will have opportunities to promote yourself, by giving back, by answering questions. Be yourself, share observations, **give freely**.

The “Gold” in Client Referrals

One of the greatest advantages of a business base from truly “ideal clients” is that those clients are your gateway to other “like-minded” consumers. They know one another, shop at the same stores, frequent the same restaurants, perhaps even share some of the same hobbies and vacation destinations! And this is great news for you!

Harnessing the potential of referrals is one of the most powerful and often neglected steps of building business. Here are 7 simple steps to get you started ...

- 1. Connect** - Choose your truly ideal clients and make a call to build rapport and make a current connection with them. Compliment them, inform them of any studio news, etc.
- 2. Set the stage** - Explain that you are looking for clients that are a great fit to the studio, just as they have been. Explain your preferences - “rather than mass mailing or advertising, you like to build business through clients recommending new clients”.
- 3. Describe the opportunity** - Use language that makes your client feel good about you and the studio. Perhaps you’re booking a week of destination photography. Describe how much you loved the experience with them ... could they perhaps recommend someone who might enjoy that same experience.
- 4. Describe your ideal client** - Be specific about the client you’re seeking.
- 5. Pop the question** - Ask them, “would you know of anyone who might be interested in ...”
- 6. Give a gift** - Let your client extend a studio gift to their friend. Let them be the networker, the activist.
- 7. Ask again** - Thank them, and immediately ask, “is there anyone else that you’d like to include in this gift offer?”.

Be generous, be genuine, be fair to all. This is a process that’s invaluable to growth.

Thought Starters for Your Studio Goals

- 
- Who are your **ideal clients** now?
 - What do they **buy**?
 - What do they **need**?
 - Who are **you**?
 - What are you **selling**?
 - Why should people **buy from you**?
 - How are you positioned in the **marketplace**?
 - How do people **find out** about you?
 - How can you increase your number of **referrals**?
 - How is your **pricing** compared to the competition's?
 - How can you improve your **closure rate**?
 - How can you improve your **repeat business**?
 - How can you generate **additional business** from existing clients?
 - Who can you **partner** with?
 - What are your **top 6 markets**?
 - How consistent is your **marketing image**?
 - How specific is your marketing to your **primary goal**?