

studio photography & design

wedding tips

TEXT BY MARK ZUCKER
IMAGES AS SHOWN

Sharpening Your Competitive Edge *Market Your Experience, Skill & Value, Not Just Images*

The growing sophistication and popularity of digital photography in recent years has sprouted a cottage industry. Anyone with a decent digital camera and a computer can try to compete with established photographers in getting hired to shoot special events.

These wannabes may lack classical training in posing and lighting, but clients trying to stretch limited budgets often see them as a viable option. What these clients don't realize is that after the festivities are over, all they have to show for their extensive planning is a huge file of images.

The reality of the matter is that professional photography is still a service industry and clients are willing to pay for full service if they understand the benefits. It's the photographer's job to help clients reach this conclusion.

REVIEW YOUR BUSINESS PLAN

The first step in remaining competitive is to sit down and review your business plan. Does your sales and marketing strategy include talking points that help the prospective client grasp the benefits of using an experienced photographer or do you need to retool your approach? The key is to play up the breadth and quality of your services, and the value you offer.

Next, when meeting with prospective clients, help them see that the price you charge includes hours of preparation and planning designed to build a comfort level that inspires great photographs on the big day.

Murray Goldenberg, co-owner of



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To put clients at ease, Murray Goldenberg, co-owner of Classic Photography in Southfield, Michigan, spends as much time discussing the wedding with clients as shooting it. Here, one of his client couples relaxes during a pre-wedding casual photo session (above) then again during their wedding reception.

Classic Photography in Southfield, Michigan, tells clients that they spend as much time discussing the wedding as shooting the big day.

"We do a casual photo session in the studio or outdoors before the event to put the clients at ease and get to know them," says Goldenberg.

COMMUNICATE YOUR SKILLS

When meeting with prospective clients, be sure to emphasize that you have all the technical experience, creativity, business and people skills to

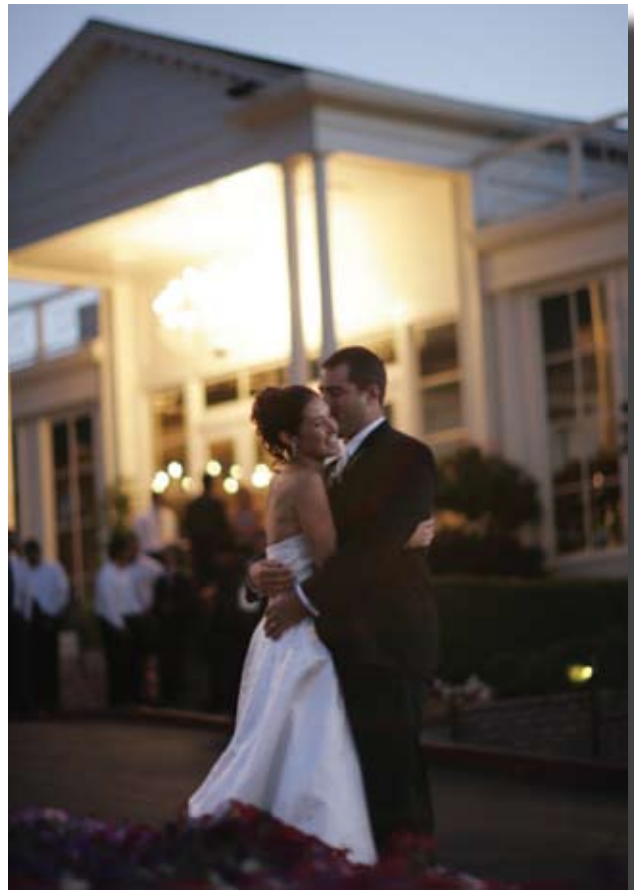


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Jim Fidelibus, owner of James Brian Studios in Walnut Creek, California, strikes a balance between photojournalistic coverage and portraiture. A Fidelibus wedding couple poses during their reception (left) and is captured in a candid private moment.

provide superior style, quality, and results. Offer prospects a reference list and remind them that the event is a one-shot deal that can never be recaptured.

As *Jim Fidelibus*, owner of *James Brian Studios in Walnut Creek, California*, explains, "There's a lot more competition, but newcomers may find they don't have the people skills to make it work." Fidelibus easily adapts to the client's needs and provides the desired level of service.

"I strike the appropriate balance between photojournalistic coverage and portraiture. We spend time on groupings, but I don't drag them around for poses. I'm there blending in and treating people courteously," says Fidelibus.

MARKET YOUR POST-EVENT SERVICES

It's equally important to promote your post-event services during early meetings with prospective clients.

Use sample albums to demonstrate your expertise in helping them select from hundreds of images, design creative layouts, and create a product that will showcase and preserve their wedding photos for generations.

Communicate the value of the time you invest in selecting and working with trusted vendors.

And let clients know that your technical experience always works to their advantage.

MAINTAIN YOUR PRICING

Finally, don't be seduced into lowering your pricing in order to get the job because this is usually not an arena in which you can compete. Your time is too valuable to spend accommodating the do-it-yourself bride and groom who believe they are capable of assembling their own album.

"We're in a bracket with clients who appreciate what we do," says Goldenberg. "Those who spend \$50,000 to \$100,000 on a wedding or party

know the quality they receive from an experienced professional. They hire us or another established outfit because they know we'll still be there when they return."

Low-cost, inexperienced event photography may be attractive for certain clients, especially during challenging economic times. To stand out from this competitor, be sure your marketing strategies broadcast the value of your creative, technical, business, and people skills; market your post-event services, such as album design; and avoid competing on price.

In everything you do, underscore the overall value of working with an experienced, knowledgeable professional photographer. ❖

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