

zenfolio



**A PHOTOGRAPHER'S GUIDE TO  
CREATING A  
MARKETING PLAN**

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**C**reating a marketing plan that outlines your goals and determines a course of action for achieving them is essential if you want to have a successful photography business.

Even if you are already running an established company, you can benefit from organizing your efforts into a well-thought-out marketing strategy.

In this guide we'll give you the steps to put together an effective marketing plan.



## 01

# RESEARCH THE MARKET & IDENTIFY YOUR AREA OF EXPERTISE



## Choose a Specialty

The first step is to determine what makes your work unique and who you are competing against. That way, you'll be able to show customers why they should hire you over someone else.

While you may enjoy all genres of photography, choosing an area of focus is highly recommended. Trying to represent all genres of the industry in your portfolio can communicate a lack of focus and a failure to master any one area to potential clients. By choosing a specialty you can become a respected expert in your chosen genre.

Find a specialty that you enjoy, and trust that what makes you unique will make you successful. Wedding photographer Steve Bridgwood says, "Take inspiration from others, but stay true and have faith in your own creative vision and in developing your own style. This is ultimately what will make you different and stand out."

Whatever area you choose, be sure that it has room to grow. Choosing a focus is useful to help you refine your craft and gain skill in a specific area. But don't narrow your scope so much that you will not allow for opportunities to expand your business over time. The key to many successful businesses is their ability to grow and adapt to changes in the market.

## Determine What Sets You Apart

It is important to set yourself apart from your competition. For example, if you want to carve a place for yourself as a wedding photographer, decide what types of weddings you want to shoot. When considering this question, think about your strengths. If you love shooting with natural light the most, or you adore black and white images, think about whether you can build your business from this angle.

If you live in a rural area, but your passion is fashion, it may not be a good idea to choose fashion photography as a focus. Instead, consider shooting portraits and weddings using fashion lighting. Brainstorming what you love to shoot and how to make a practical choice for your business based on this is time well spent. Keep in mind that many photographers shoot more than one genre.

## Learn About Your Competition

It's always a good idea to see who you're up against. Some basic research of your local competition and their specialties can go a long way. However, you shouldn't be daunted by what others are doing. For example, if there are a lot of family portrait photographers in your area, this does not mean that you have to choose a different genre. Instead, think of ways to approach family portraits from an unexpected angle. This could be shooting in and around the families' homes where they are most comfortable, or at the beach with natural sunlight. The key is to combine areas you are comfortable and skilled in and turn them into your niche.

Looking at your competitors' pricing will help you determine your own pricing strategy. Is your goal to be competitive, premium, or have the lowest price in your geographical area? Do you have the experience, skill, or provide an added value that would warrant a premium price? It is helpful to do a thorough analysis before setting your prices.

## Get the Scoop on the Competition

- What market do they serve?
- What products do they offer?
- How are their services and products priced?
- How do they promote themselves?

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***Take inspiration from others, but stay true and have faith in your own creative vision and in developing your own style. This is ultimately what will make you different and stand out.***

Steve Bridgwood

# 02

## FIND YOUR TARGET MARKET



Start by asking yourself who your clients are. Are they male, female, or an equal percentage of each? What is the largest age group? Where do they hang out? What activities are they engaged in? What clubs or organizations do they belong to? What websites do they visit? This will give you a very good idea of where to start when you are ready to advertise and market to this demographic.

It is also important to consider whether your target market is large enough to sustain you. If your focus is shooting headshots for actors, you will need to determine how many working actors there are in your area and how often they need headshots. You also need to know how much revenue you'll generate from each headshot session and determine how many of these you will need to keep your expenses paid. Be conservative with these estimates, and don't count on repeat clients for your long-term planning. You should always be working to increase your client list.



## GET AN ALL-IN-ONE WEBSITE

# 03

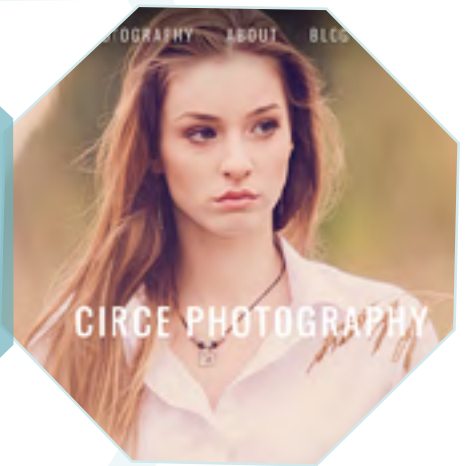


As a professional photographer, it is an absolute must that you have a well designed and easy-to-navigate website. Look for a full-service option that will enable you to display your portfolio and includes an e-commerce platform, marketing tools, and an easy-to-navigate client interface.

If you do any type of consumer photography you will want the option to sell online as well as use online proofing tools. In-person proofing is a great way to make and close print sales, but that method doesn't allow you to reach all of your client's friends and relatives. By offering an online proofing gallery to your clients, they can share it with friends and family, opening up new revenue streams for you. Your site should also be mobile-optimized so that it looks great on any device.

If your website has built-in marketing and selling tools, it will save you valuable time and help boost your sales. Look for a platform that offers SEO tools, a blog, visitor sign-in, a shopping cart, and customizable price lists.

Zenfolio offers everything you need to create a dynamic and beautiful website with a built-in e-commerce platform to showcase and sell your photography.



## 04

## WEBSITE MARKETING STRATEGIES

## Utilize SEO

Once your website has the look and setup you want, the next step is to make sure that potential clients are able to find it. When a person is searching online, they usually use a search engine such as Google, Bing, or Yahoo. Search engines crawl the internet for the keywords entered, and provide results based on that search.

Search engines look for keywords that are found in the text on your website. In order for your site to appear in search results for potential customers, you need to make sure that you include the information you'd like your customers to be know about you on your website pages, such as your location, your genre of photography, pricing, etc. This process is known as search engine optimization (SEO).

How can you improve your SEO? As a photographer, your website might heavily feature images, with less focus on text. That's not a problem—as long as your site allows you to tag each of your images with some text-based information like titles, captions, geographical locations, and keywords. The more detail you can attach to these images, the better. Remember that if there isn't any text data attached to your images, your site might be virtually invisible to search engines. A small amount of effort adding tags can provide a big payoff.

TOP PHOTOGRAPHY  
SEARCH WORDS

1. Photography
2. Portrait
3. Boudoir Photography
4. Wedding Photography
5. Newborn Photography
6. Landscape Photography
7. Photojournalism
8. Street Photography
9. Food Photography
10. Candid Photography

## SEO TIP

"Photography" is searched five times more frequently than "photographer" worldwide. Use photography in your business name and About page info to optimize your SEO.

US Google Trends

Zenfolio offers built-in tools and additional help with SEO to make this process as easy as possible. You can use the browser-based drag-and-drop uploader to upload images directly from your computer, or you can use a variety of third-party upload tools such as a Lightroom plug-in. However you decide to upload, your SEO-friendly metadata such as keywords will also be imported. You can also add or edit keywords as a batch using in your Zenfolio account.

Even if you have all of your images tagged with information, it's wise to include pages that feature more detail about you and your business, like Pricing and Packages, About Me, and Contact pages. The more information you can provide for search engines to comb through, the better. It's also a good idea to do keyword research on your local market using Google Trends.

MAXIMIZE  
YOUR SEO  
READ  
50 Shades of SEO

## Link Up

The more times a link to your website is clicked, the better your site ranking will be and you'll appear higher in search results. How do you get more people to click on your link? Share it everywhere. We recommend that you add links to your site in your email signatures, on photo forums, on social media, websites, and anywhere else you can think of.

You'll also want to have other services link to your website as much as possible. If you belong to any photo clubs or professional organizations, make sure you have a profile listed with a link to your site. This can really help to boost your search ranking.

## Blog Your Heart Out

Most photographers use an integrated blog to show off their newest images and let visitors know what they are currently working on. These blog posts help show off your recent work, which is one of the best ways to increase business. When clients see you as a prolific professional in your field they'll want to work with you. What's more, a [blog](#) is a free, effective marketing tool that can boost your SEO. Make sure you share your blog posts on social media and tag your clients so that they can share it too.

## 05

## SELLING STRATEGIES

## Services and Pricing

Make sure your website has a built-in shopping cart, whether you plan to offer products from integrated labs, self-fulfilled products, or digital downloads. Although photography is a creative pursuit, you will need to put on your business hat when determining pricing. Shari Warren has a great [article](#) on pricing strategies to get you started. Your pricing should give you enough profit to be able to thrive as a business while also keeping you competitive. Zenfolio provides a [pre-filled price list](#) to make it easy to get started. The pre-filled price list features the top-selling photo products and includes suggested pricing that you can easily customize and refine for your market and business needs.

You should also consider offering promotional coupons, and sell packages and gift certificates through your site. Packages can be a great way to boost revenue. If you want to sell packages but don't want to spend time setting them up, Zenfolio offers customizable [prefilled packages](#).

## Channels to Reach Your Clients

When it comes to targeting your marketing and selling efforts, it is helpful to define the channels you'd like to implement such as email blasts or newsletters, direct mail, social media, events, and paid advertising.

## Start with Emails

Marketing your work through your website is easy if you have the right platform. If your site has visitor sign-in/ email capture, having that information automatically stored in a contact list will save you valuable time when you want to send marketing emails.

Promotional email blasts are efficient, cost effective to produce, and easy to target. Spread them throughout the year to your contact lists using seasonal promotions, reminders of prior purchases and products reviewed, and timely offers. To maximize efficiency you can set up [triggered emails](#), which are sent automatically using customizable email marketing templates. It's also a good idea to take advantage of free full-service email marketing campaigns, such as the ones [offered by Zenfolio](#).

Also, plan to send a certain number of regular newsletters that highlight your latest work, new available products, or anything else your current clients might find relevant or interesting. Don't forget to provide a way for people to unsubscribe if they choose.

## Spread the Word with Social Media

Social media is an effective way to increase your business. Allow your clients to share the images you have taken on their Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, Twitter, and Google+ pages. If they love your work they will likely share it with an ecstatic compliment and their entire network will see it. One thing to keep in mind if you go this route is to be sure that you brand your images with a logo or unobtrusive watermark so that potential clients know who you are and can easily find you. Logos and watermarks will also help protect against illegal reproduction of your work.

Don't be afraid to share some of your successes on your own social media pages. If you were recently featured in a publication, share this news on your social media outlets to help you get the word out. Or if you decide to run a promotion, announce it on Facebook as well as through newsletters, email blasts, etc. Your successes will more easily build on each other if people know about them. Think about using a service like HootSuite to automatically add social media posts so that you can schedule them in advance.

## Consider Paid Online Advertising and Direct Mail

You will need to take your budget into consideration when planning a direct mailer, so consider creating a few different strategies for different groups within your contacts. For example, consider creating a well-designed, but inexpensive, postcard to send to all clients while reserving more expensive promo pieces for your top 20 leads.

You may also want to consider paid advertising, which has become easier in recent years with companies like Google lowering the barrier to entry. Google AdWords can be a great way to try out online ads without spending a lot. However, if you do not have the budget for advertising like this, don't let it get you down. There are so many ways to reach clients these days that your other marketing efforts can more than make up for it.

**PRICING  
STRATEGIES**

**READ**  
**Pricing Strategies**  
**for Portrait**  
**Photographers**

## 05

SELLING STRATEGIES  
(CONT)

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*I know lots of great photographers who can't make a living doing photography because they don't know how to hustle and aren't smart in business. Likewise, I know several mediocre photographers who kill it because they have great business, social media and branding skills. You have to do be willing to do it all and all the time.*

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Ginny Dixon

**Network in Person**

Events in your area are great way to get in front of your target market. For example, if you shoot weddings, find out if there are any bridal fairs in your area and get involved. Also think about approaching bridal stores in your area and other vendors who may have events or promotions you can be a part of. Trade shows and other industry events are valuable as well. Having the opportunity to meet potential clients in person or through other companies can be a huge help in selling your services.

Whether it is done digitally or in person, networking and building relationships is a key component of success, according to documentary photographer and photojournalist [Ginny Dixon](#). “I know lots of great photographers who can't make a living doing photography because they don't know how to hustle and aren't smart in business. Likewise, I know several mediocre photographers who kill it because they have great business, social media and branding skills. You have to do be willing to do it all and all the time,” she said.

FINANCES AND  
EVALUATING  
YOUR RESULTS

## 06

Having your own business means you will also need to delve into the financial logistics of budgeting expenses (insurance, equipment, retail space, etc.), how to pay yourself, managing cash flow, and more. Plan for the short term and long term by determining your projected costs, sales and profits for the next month, the next year, and up to three years into the future.

As stated earlier, the purpose of a marketing plan is to set achievable goals for yourself and your business. But we know it is easy to get caught up in the day-to-day madness of keeping everything going. That's why we recommend updating, or at least evaluating, your marketing plan every year. By taking the time to carefully plan where you are going and how you will effectively get there, you'll be able to avoid bumps in the road and track the progress that you've made.

With all of this helpful information at your fingertips, you now have the foundation to create an effective marketing plan. So take the first step to put the wheels in motion and you are on your way to success!