

A close-up photograph of a bride's hands holding a bouquet of flowers. The bouquet is composed of white and light pink roses, white hydrangeas, and greenery. A large, elegant white ribbon bow is tied around the bouquet. The bride is wearing a white lace wedding dress and a blue gemstone ring on her finger. The background is a solid blue color.

Presentation Counts

Make
it count
for you



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Mind Your P's: Packaging, Presentation, Professionalism

When you buy an expensive piece of jewelry at Tiffany & Co., does it come in a nondescript paper sack? Does the sales person just hand it over like he's passing you a dime-store trinket? No. It comes nicely enclosed in the turquoise Tiffany box, wrapped in the trademark Tiffany bow. It's presented with some flair. It's treated like an item of great value. The piece of jewelry is the focal point, but everything surrounding it says, "This is a high-end item."

Elegant displays suggest value. People expect to pay more for products that are well presented. This principle applies just as much to photography as it does to jewelry. If you want to make more money as a photographer, you have to offer people more than just images.

Smart business people don't consider packaging a business expense; they consider it an investment. An investment in professional presentation is an investment in your business image. As a photographer, that image is the most valuable intangible you possess. With a high-end image, you can command high-end prices. You can court a better clientele. You can work less, make more. That's everyone's dream, right?

Image is important, but professional packaging can also produce real financial benefits. Photographers who have incorporated customized, professional packaging have added thousands to their bottom line. Individual sales averages skyrocket. The amount of revenue that can be generated from one customer increases significantly.

Even better, while they're increasing their profits, these photographers are also building customer loyalty. At its core, professional photography is a service industry. So, make yourself a full-service business. Offer your customers everything they need, rather than pushing them out the door with an incomplete package. In many cases, customers don't even know what's available to them until you offer it. Show them their options—albums, folios, mounting choices, frames, display boxes, novelty items and other presentation devices. It's not just about additional sales; it's about providing your customers with a complete solution to their image needs.

In the pages of this publication, we explore some deeper issues related to the professional packaging of photography. From traditional photo albums to customized shopping bags, photographers have found ways to augment sales and increase the value of their images. Take a look and find out how you, too, can build a more robust business with professional presentation. □

—Jeff Kent
Special Project Editor
PPA Publications

Dispelling the Myth

Why professional packaging and presentation are more relevant now than ever before.

By Jeff Kent

Ever since the digital revolution swept over professional photography, photographers have been struggling to adjust. They've changed the way they shoot, the way they think and the way they present their images. They've tried new business models and new products. In these tumultuous times, many photographers have strayed away from the professional presentation methods that defined their work for so many years.

With a wealth of digitized options, it's not difficult for photographers to work around the presentation side of

their businesses. They can shoot jobs, hand over CDs, and be done. They can make quick stacks of prints on inkjet printers, pop them in envelopes, and walk away. Or maybe they post some images to an online gallery and let automation take over from there.

Is it really that simple? Are photographers better off abandoning professional packaging and presentation products? Is the "shoot-and-dump" method really the best route to financial success?

If you look at most successful studios, the answer is no. A widespread myth of the digital age is that photographers have to generate all their income by charging for their time. This is partially true; photographers do need to charge for their valuable time. However, photography is a visual medium. Presentation has a big impact on whether or not your clients buy anything at all.

Many photographers don't

realize that digital imaging and online order fulfillment can work hand-in-hand with today's packaging products. We're not just talking about digitally created magazine-style albums. Lovers of traditional matted albums can take advantage of digital workflow and online order fulfillment to quickly and easily produce prints for their handmade books. They can then assemble these albums with their own artistic touches, and charge their clients accordingly.

Consider Chicago's Artisan Events, a multi-photographer studio that specializes in weddings and other events. Artisan Events makes a 50 percent margin on shooting a day-long event. By contrast, they make a 400 percent margin on their custom albums.

"Sure, we still charge for our time, but why just charge for your time when



Images by Amanda Sudimack



you can charge for all these other things?” asks Amanda Sudimack, president of Artisan Events. “As a business person, I don’t even consider album and frame sales an added bonus; it’s part of the business. If we break down our total business, it’s about 50 percent event photography and 50 percent products.”

The question, says Sudimack, is how much of your business do you want to control? If you just shoot an event and then hand over your images, you lose your competitive edge.

Kamran Zohoori couldn’t agree more. A San Jose, Calif.-based wedding photographer who specializes in custom album design, Zohoori has found that offering a tangible product is the key to diversifying revenue streams.

“It’s a better business model to offer an actual product, as opposed to just selling yourself,” says Zohoori. “If you’re selling yourself, you’re the only product. How many places can you be on a Saturday? How many shoots can you do at once? It limits your income

significantly when all you’re selling is your time.”

Zohoori has a lot of new clients come to him with wedding images that are five or six years old. These are people who just got a box of prints or an image CD from their wedding photographer. They want him to make them an album because, years after their wedding, they realize that they never look at their photographs. It’s a visual legacy that’s hidden from view.

Neglected photography vexes Sudimack greatly. “The reason people buy photography is to display it,” she says. “If you don’t offer your customers an opportunity to view their

images, you are getting away from the customer service element of this business, which is critical.”

Like Zohoori, Sudimack’s studio gets a lot of work from people whose original photographer just handed them a CD of images. “They come to us and say, ‘Help! What do we do with these?’” she says. “We make them a custom album and then guess what? They end up becoming our clients, not just for album creation but future photography services. If you want to retain clients, it’s important to offer that extra level of customer service.”

Remember this: An image delivered in a plain box ends up in a drawer.

Images on a CD end up hidden in a disc drive. You don’t want that. As a photographer, you want your images displayed. Every well-displayed image is a little advertisement for your studio. It’s a referral waiting to happen. So, it pays to help your clients display their images. Deliver that presentation to them, and they will deliver to you the publicity your business needs. □

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—Kamran Zohoori



Image by Kamran Zohoori



Rethinking the Album

Albums still have a lot to offer both your client and your pocketbook.

By Stephanie Boozer

There's no question that digital imaging has completely revolutionized the photography industry. Though slideshow DVDs have taken the place of the traditional wedding album for some photographers, the truth is that there are still many good reasons to keep albums in your product line.

"In this digital era of instant gratification, it is tempting as a photographer to reduce overhead and production time by offering discounted packages that result in slideshows or digital files," says Curt Littlecott, of Nu Visions in Photography in Orlando. "In doing so, I believe we are de-valuing our profession and ending a tradition that has been around since the beginning of wedding photography."

Bob Coates, of Bob Coates Photography in Sedona, Ariz., shares this opinion. "People who don't want to sell albums are people who don't want to make money," he says. "You're leaving

half of your money on the table. You might as well shoot and give away your negatives."

Don't be fooled into thinking that an album's only purpose is for weddings. While albums are traditionally associated with wedding photography, they can be easily worked into other areas of your business. For example, rather than offering a package of prints after an engagement session, try putting together a small album.

"I find out the couple's story, like where they met and what they did on their first date," says Coates. "Then we recreate their story photographically. It makes a nice engagement album, or a good side album to accompany the larger wedding album."

Along similar lines, Pete and Liliana Wright of PW Photography in Richmond, Va., offer an album they call "The Love Story." Inspired by his sister, a writer for popular wedding magazines, Wright

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designed a series of albums that tell couples' stories in a magazine-style layout. The albums incorporate engagement and wedding photos for the full effect. "It's been a great item for

parents, because who loves your story more than your parents?” says Wright. “It’s an ideal way to have images from the wedding presented along with a romantic, professionally written story.”

Outside of weddings, Wright finds a multitude of uses for albums. One of his best sellers is the maternity album, which not only adds a sale, but also leads to future bookings. “We position it by using magazine-style, self-mount albums that we can add to over time,” he explains. At the maternity session, Wright pitches the album, explaining that after the baby is born, the mother can add more images to the book to tell the whole story. “I look at it as an opportunity to create a life-long client,” says Wright, who usually winds up booking at least two more sessions for newborn and three- or six-month portraits. “I also offer the opportunity for us to come by the hospital after the delivery and do a little photojournalism of the baby’s first day.”

After he captures all of the portraits, Wright lays out a 20-page album that documents the event from the maternity session all the way through the birth and newborn photos. It’s a great way to upsell to the framed “hands and feet” portraits of the infant. “What mother doesn’t want to have a complete volume devoted to her baby?” Wright asks.

A similar concept also works for senior portraits. After the session, and in addition to the print order, Wright

encourages the senior to pick out 10 favorites to put in a small album to share with friends. “You have to look at albums as a way to document a moment,” says Wright. “The senior portrait celebrates a huge moment in life, and an album is great way to display that.”

In the corporate arena, albums can be billed as a unique way to display a corporation’s identity. “I had a friend who did aerial work for Boeing,” says Coates. “He built an album to use as his portfolio, and by chance he ended up selling 50 of them to the company.” Coates also suggests offering albums for other events such as charity functions or golf tournaments. “At one job, instead of just handing over the images at the end of the tournament, I put together an album and made sure that it featured all of the pro golfers who had participated,” says Coates. “I ended

up selling about a hundred of them.”

Even if you are primarily offering a digital end-product, try thinking of the album as a tangible heirloom that complements your digital offerings. While you’re at it, toss out any old notions about the hassle of putting together albums. Instead, embrace the ways that digital imaging can work for you, such as faster printing for your traditional matted albums and more flexible design for your magazine-style books. Digital processing also makes it easier to produce multiple albums for everything from little league teams to large family portrait sessions.

“Why would we deprive our clients of such a valuable heirloom?” inquires Littlecott. “And why would we deprive ourselves of an important revenue source and marketing tool, seen by so many prospective clients?” □



Image by Pete Wright



The Best Things Come in Beautiful Packages

Increase the value of your products by creating dynamic packaging.

By Sarah Petty

For professional photography studios to have a sustainable competitive advantage, we need to position ourselves as artists. We must deliver unparalleled customer service. Most of all, we should take advantage of every opportunity to make our customers say, "Wow!"

We have the perfect opportunity to impress our clients every time we deliver our images. Yes, we could put them in a plain white envelope and stick them in a mail crate outside our studio. More impressively, we could create packaging that stops clients in their tracks and, on occasion, brings tears to their eyes. By investing in custom, crowd-pleasing packaging, you reinforce your clients' belief that they chose the right studio. You also increase the perceived value of your products, which, in turn, will help you raise your prices.

At Sarah Petty Photography, our packaging is one of our strongest loyalty-building strategies. In addition to providing custom-designed coffee table books and framing combinations, we take the extra step and customize our image

delivery. Our trademark bags, photo boxes, cards and CDs feature images from our clients' sessions. We wrap everything in velum bands, special ribbon and tissue paper. Photo boxes are sealed with a second image from the session. When the client walks in and sees her child's face on our packaging, her reaction is priceless. Any buyer's remorse about the money she's spent at our studio is instantly swept away.

The idea behind all of these extra touches is to develop a strong, consistent business identity while assuring our clients that they have made the right decision coming to our studio. Identity is so important because individual photographers cannot hope to survive by competing on the basis of price. We need to differentiate ourselves from crowd. If a customer is going to spend a lot of money with a photographer, she wants something more than just a box of pictures. Creative custom packaging shows her that everything is about her. It shows her that we've gone the extra mile to produce

something she can't find elsewhere.

Creative custom packaging is also the first step in encouraging referrals. Back in the days of paper proofs, clients would spend the weeks after a session showing off their images to everyone they knew. This led to more referrals for us, because the more people who saw our images, the more business we got. Since paper proofs are a thing of the past, the customized packaging is our way of getting our clients to show off our images.

One of my favorite stories involves a client who carried her customized photo bag to her yacht club and walked around the pool showing everyone, even uninterested parties. You can't buy that kind of publicity!

Whether you use packaging like ours or create your own, you will be rewarded many times over when you invest some energy and a portion of your budget in the professional presentation of your images. ☐

We must deliver unparalleled customer service. Most of all, we should take advantage of every opportunity to make our customers say, "Wow!"

—Sarah Petty

Using packaging to create additional value for your products

- **Develop a strong brand through consistent identity.** Your identity is everything about your company, including logo, signage, studio décor, etc. Your brand is how people feel about you emotionally. You can't build a strong brand on a weak identity.
- **Make sure your studio design is consistent with your brand.** Use packaging and studio décor to create a trademark look for your business.
- **Create exceptional packaging that has impact.** Professional packaging has the most impact when it's personalized. Whether you're creating a special album or a presentation box, make it about the customer.
- **Study other products and companies for inspiration.** Create a design file and collect beautiful clothing tags, gift boxes, albums, packaging and bags. Draw from these when creating your own products.
- **The more interactive your packaging, the better.** You can engage your client by including them in the process. They love to open, twist, unwrap and pull off stickers. Embellish your packaging with bells and whistles. Incorporate more products with more creative packaging. Find ways to give your client something extra, and build loyalty with your presentation.
- **Think of each and every product that needs packaging.** From nicely framed images to the way your prints are delicately wrapped and sealed, every detail is an opportunity to impress your client and strengthen that relationship.



For a Few Dollars More

Increasing your cash flow isn't as complicated as you might think—just get a little creative.

By Stephanie Boozer

Every photographer knows that the nuts and bolts of his revenue come from the shoot and resulting print sales. However, if you're just handing over a stack of prints with a, "Have a nice day," you're letting potential dollars escape. With just a minimal investment, you can increase your profit while generating future sales, simply by offering small incentives and unexpected extras. And, depending on how you position yourself, your client may even think she's getting something for nothing.

"If you're not doing supplemental sales after an event, you're missing out on a huge opportunity to tap into additional income," says Pete Wright of PW Photography in Richmond, Va.

A Simple "Thanks"

In Wright's experience, add-on items don't always mean pushing extra products on a customer. Instead, they can be used as bonus gifts to entice clients toward a higher price point. He suggests building the cost of

supplemental items like folios or small albums into the package price, which makes them attractive extras that don't come out of your pocket. For example, after a wedding, Wright sends a surprise folio of about 10 4x6-inch prints to the bride's work address, with copies to the parents as well.

"The bride is going to show that folio to all of her coworkers," says Wright,

who attributes a lot of success to this small gesture. "It's an instant referral. The same concept works for senior and family portraits."

Another subtle way to generate additional sales after a wedding or portrait session is to print one of the images on a watercolor note card and mail it to the client as a thank-you note.

"We get a lot of phone calls after we send these out, with brides asking if they can buy more," says Bob Coates, of Bob Coates Photography in Sedona, Ariz. "The same idea works for engagement sessions, baby portraits, family sessions, all the way across the board."



Image by Pete Wright

The secret, says Coates, is to have a template ready to go, so that when the client calls to order more cards, you just need to print them out, put them in a pretty box, tie it with a ribbon, and collect the cash.

At the Event

A popular item in recent years has been an engagement portrait with a signature mat for guests to autograph at the wedding reception. Wright suggests taking the idea further. Using the convenience and relatively small expense of self-mount or peel-and-stick albums, Wright creates a personalized guest book, featuring photos from the engagement and bridal sessions.

“It’s been one of our most popular add-on items,” says Wright. “Instead of getting a mass-produced, ordinary guest book, the couple has this truly customized option that’s much more meaningful.”

Another item that helps out tremendously at weddings is what Coates calls a favor card. Essentially, the card contains an image from the pre-wedding engagement or bridal session, laid out with the couple’s names and the wedding date. On the flip side is Coates’ contact information as well as the Web address and password for the online gallery. As Coates works the reception and captures images of all the guests, he can hand out the cards



and steer guests directly to the online gallery. From there, guests can order prints, and even full albums.

“Every guest at a wedding is a potential customer,” says Coates. “Give every potential customer the opportunity to purchase something.”

The Finishing Touches

Most clients are going to frame their prints, so why not offer a selection of frames? Popular, easy-to-sell frames include three- and nine-print arrangements for baby sessions. Coates offers a three-print shadow box, with deckle-edged watercolor prints floating inside

the frame. It’s an easy upsell for baby portraits, even kids and families. “By adding a little artistry, such as converting an image to watercolor and printing it on watercolor paper, you really add to the presentation,” he says.

Whatever additional products you’d like to add, keep in mind that presentation is everything. “If there’s an add-on item that’s not working for you, it means you’re just not positioning it right,” says Wright. “Always think outside of the box and find a new way to present things. If you’ve seen it a hundred times, chances are the client has too.” □

Design to Sell

Albums are a much more attractive product when they tell a unique story.

By Jeff Kent

There is a tremendous difference between selling clients a disparate collection of pictures and providing them with a customized story told by images. The reason: People want their stories told. They want something specific to them. They are much more likely to buy, and buy more, when they're presented with a coherent narrative.

The storytelling element is one of the greatest strengths of personalized photo albums. Whether you're putting together a traditional album or designing a magazine-style book, the key is to cater your design to your clients. Make it personal, and you'll make the sale.

Strong album design begins with the photography. To create a personalized album for your clients, you need to have all the pieces in place. That means capturing images that fit into your custom layout, before that custom layout has even been created. This is particularly true for wedding photographers, who have the difficult job of cov-



Image by Kamran Zohoori

ering a multitude of different elements during a few hours of hectic shooting.

"To be able to tell the story, we need to have a well-rounded portfolio that covers all the elements of the day," explains Amanda Sudimack, president of the bustling Chicago studio Artisan Events. In addition to dramatic images that help advance the visual narrative, Sudimack keeps an eye out for anything that seems important to the clients. "We need to have images that show the full story: where things are happening, the details, all the people involved. If it was important enough for the clients to include it in their event, it's important enough for us to photograph," she says.

For wedding albums, Sudimack usually book-ends her designs with high-

impact images that show the unique relationship of the couple. She then fills in the pages with images of family and friends, all loosely organized around a particular theme, such as the chronology of the day. Detail images often become design elements within the book.

Kamran Zohoori, a San Jose, Calif.-based wedding photographer who specializes in album design, likes to break the wedding day into four distinct segments: preparation, portraits, ceremony and reception. As he's shooting, Zohoori imagines the pages he wants to create in the couple's book. He then photographs people and details at particular angles so they will fit into his design. "By working this way, I can actually create an album as I'm shooting," he

says. "Then I don't need thousands of images, which will take days to sort through. I can create a great story for my clients by shooting less and concentrating more on getting the images I need."

Zohoori likes to create stories within the story, photographing little subplots that fit within the overall tale of the day. These subplots could be the brides-

When the clients come in and see our design, they usually love it. Most of them buy the book on the spot, exactly as we've designed it.

—Amanda Sudimack



Image by Amanda Sudimack

maids getting ready, the groom waiting anxiously with his attendants, or the bride spending a tender moment with her mother before the ceremony. With six or seven images, Zohoori can create these subplots, which often appear as two-page spreads in the albums.

When it comes time to show images to the newlywed couple, Zohoori displays album pages, not individual photographs. "When I show the couple their images, they are looking at beautiful pieces of a story, not a thousand photos that aren't linked," he says. "They can go through the storied images much quicker, rather than trying to pick out favorites from a huge collection of pictures."

This approach helps enormously with sales. Like many photographers who work with flush-mount albums, Zohoori charges by the page. The more pages he designs, the more he's likely to sell. Also, showing a couple a set of designed pages helps them decide what should and shouldn't go into their book. It's easier for the client, easier for the photographer; everyone wins.

Sudimack agrees that providing a designed book, or pages from that book, is a workflow no-brainer. "We used to have clients pick images, and then we'd sit down and do a design around those images," she says. "However, I found that clients don't typically understand the design process, how much time is involved, and why they can't



Image by Kamran Zohoori

always do what's in their head. So we started doing the pre-design to speed up the process. When the clients come in and see our design, they usually love it. Most of them buy the book on the spot, exactly as we've designed it."

Showing a professionally designed album also means providing a service your clients can't get elsewhere. With so many amateur shutterbugs flittering around at weddings these days, the professional photographer has a lot of competition. Within a few weeks of the wedding, the couple will get hundreds of pictures e-mailed or uploaded to online galleries by their guests. Why should they order prints from their photographer if there are a zillion great shots available for free?

"I've been to weddings where some

of the guests have better cameras than I do!" says Zohoori. "There could be a lot of beautiful images floating around after that event. So it's very important that the first thing the couple sees is our album design. Everything is customized and unique, and it's put together with professional design. No one else can deliver that."

The basic principles of a custom album apply as much to traditional matted albums as they do to magazine-style books. Ultimately, the layout is about the images—and the narrative you produce with those images. Your clients hired you to document their day in a series of beautiful photographs. If you can assemble those photos into a unique, personalized story, then you're sitting on a sure sale. □

Tips for Effectively Employing Professional Packaging

The products are out there. The key is how you use them.

Be your clients' packaging source. People will purchase a frame or an album from somewhere. Why shouldn't they purchase it from you?

Sell more images by presenting them in an album or frame. By setting one price for several images in an album layout, or a multiple-image frame, you can sell more photographs. Each grouping becomes one product. Simplified that way, you reduce customer resistance because you're making one sale, not several.

Show what you want to sell. Create wall groupings of framed images on your studio walls. Have custom-made albums out for display. Place several table frames near the seating in your waiting area. When you display photography in an elegant presentation, it inspires home decorating ideas in your clients. They see how their photography should be displayed and are more likely to purchase it that way.

Group small products together rather than showing them individually. This technique tells your customers that you offer a nice selection while also suggesting that they should purchase several of these small items instead of just one.

Make the packaging a part of your pricing. Avoid the implication that you are nickel-and-diming or constantly upselling your clients. Make everything a package, and charge enough to allow for profit on the presentation items.

Deliver the complete product. Car dealerships don't throw a bunch of unassembled parts at their customers; they sell them the full car, often with fancy upgrades. Take the same approach. Sell the completed item with one price for the whole package. A nicely produced triptych with photos included is one product. A customized album with three dozen images is one product.

Capitalize on the impulse buys. Impulse buys are based on great presentation. Put your customers' images in beautiful packaging and let their emotions take over. The better you present your images, the more likely your customers are to buy them on the spot.

Advertise for future sales. Include a logo or signature on your customized display items. It builds your business identity and provides you with a little advertisement every time your images are displayed.

Present your image. Your clients have to love your image before they love your images. Make your business stand out by providing high-end, customized packaging that enhances the professional photography experience. □

Together with the Professional Photographers of America, these companies have teamed to produce this special project as a service to hard-working photographers. We are concerned about your success, and we want to give you every edge that's available. Just remember, when you're looking for an advantage, presentation counts!



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