

6. Image is Everything

An Easy Choice

I want to take you on a journey to a place where everything is perfect, where there is no stress or worry, and the streets are made of cheese! It's a place where you can buy anything, do anything, and be anything you want to be. This place is called your mind, and it's the most powerful tool we have.

Imagine it's a beautiful, warm Sunday afternoon in the fall, and you decide to go for a drive in the country. With all the hustle and bustle of everyday life, you don't get this opportunity as often as you'd like, but today is your day. As you drive along, you decide to head over to a nearby lake that is known for its vibrant fall colors and tranquil silence. Driving along the hillside, you notice that the leaves on the trees are beginning to fall softly to the ground. They create a bed of color on the pavement in front of you. With the window down, you can feel the wind tickle your face and smell the familiar scent of autumn.

Clients judge us long before we expose a single frame in our cameras.

The sun is directly in front of you, and as it hits your face, you feel the warmth of its rays. It's a feeling you crave and relish, and you want to soak up as much of this feeling as possible before the season passes and winter digs in. You come to the road that will take you to the lake, and you take notice of the fact there are no other cars coming or going. The road is yours. You begin to feel the excitement of being at the lake by yourself and taking in all it has to offer.

As you approach your destination, you find a place to park your car, and you begin the short walk down to the

lake. You are about a hundred yards or so from the bank, and you notice two little stores next to the road—one on the left and one on the right. Your eyes are first attracted to the rustic brown building on the right. There is a bike laying in front of the store, and you can tell it has seen better days—the handlebars are covered with rust and several of the spokes are missing from the rear tire. You notice that the shop itself has a broken rain gutter that is filled with rotting leaves from last season, and the grass hasn't been cut for quite some time. The aged, painted dark-brown trim around the windows and door is beginning to chip, and there are a couple of spiders that have made their home in the upper right corner of the front window. The sign above the door reads Lakeside Quick Mart. The smaller sign in the window below the spider web reads Lemonade 50¢ and Cookies 10 for a \$1.00.

Your eyes then meander to the little white building on the other side of the road. There are bright red geraniums neatly planted in oak barrels that are placed along a cobblestone walkway leading up to the front entrance. The pristine line of white picket fence that surrounds the entire building is punctuated with tulips, and a mailbox in the shape of a trout sits atop a cast-iron stake. On top of the building rests a sign, freshly painted in blues and yellows, and greens. It reads “Heaven on Earth Country Store.” On a smaller sign below, the words “Where Friends Meet” appear. It almost makes you feel like you did as a little kid at your Grandma's house—it seems to be a safe, kind, and friendly place. You notice a small sign in the window that says “Hand-Squeezed, Country-Style Lemonade—Made Fresh this Morning—Only \$2.00 a Glass.” Your mouth begins to water as you imagine drinking that glass of hand-squeezed, country-style fresh lemonade. The side windows are open just a crack, and you can smell fresh chocolate chip cookies, which must have been pulled out of the oven only ten seconds ago.

You would pay just about anything to have a bite of one of those cookies right now.

You pause for a moment, glance at the brown building on the right side of the road, and then you turn your gaze again to the white building on the left side. You have to make a choice as to where to go. In a split second, your mind is made up! Was there really any doubt? It didn't matter that the lemonade was \$1.50 more at the store on the left, did it? It came down to the image that each business created in your mind. And once that impression is made on our minds, it's virtually impossible to change how we feel. The Quick Mart may have had the best cookies in the world, but the business owners sure didn't do much to convince us to give them a try—no matter the price!

Prepare to be Judged

Clients judge us long before we expose a single frame in our cameras. As a matter of fact, humans make judgments

about people, businesses, food, and other products within five seconds. That sure doesn't give us much time to form a favorable impression and to instill the value of our products.

As business owners, we must always be prepared to be judged. After all, every business decision we make—from marketing, to positioning, to image creation—expresses to clients who we are and what we do. When a prospective client enters your business, they evaluate what you wear, how you look, the way you walk and talk, and the general way in which you communicate with the rest of the world. It's as much about essence as it is substance.

Don't Overlook Simple Solutions

Most of us have been working for years to figure out the magic of marketing, yet we are met with a great deal of frustration. We are constantly trying to reinvent the wheel instead of looking outside the box for the answers. We earn our degrees from the school of hard knocks.

The eye-catching colors, unique design, and vibrant imagery in this marketing piece for Sarah Petty Photography all make a great first impression. Immediately, you know that visiting her studio is going to be a lot of fun.



While there is usually a simple solution for overcoming most obstacles, we don't always see it. History is filled with such examples. For instance, though man's discovery of fire was huge, it took us over a million years to figure out how to utilize it. While ice cream was invented around 2000BC, the ice cream cone came about around a hundred years ago. In 1775, the flush toilet was invented. In 1857—eighty-two years later!—toilet paper followed.

We are surrounded with simple solutions to help us succeed, but we don't always see them. Some of the simplest solutions are right in front of our noses, yet we can't see the forest for the trees. Creating a positive image can often be accomplished by first addressing the little things; it doesn't always require a huge change.

Don't Become Paralyzed by a Fear Mistakes

P. T. Barnum used to say he knew that half of all the money he spent on advertising was wasted—he just had to figure out which half. As photographers and businesspeople, we make mistakes every day, but the most successful people in our industry are the ones who learn quickly from those mistakes and then make the necessary changes to ensure that they don't make them twice.

We are surrounded with simple solutions to help us succeed, but we don't always see them.

I want to share a story about the vice president of marketing of a Fortune 500 company who had an innovative idea for a new product. The rest of the board had their reservations, but he believed so firmly in his idea that he convinced the other members to grant him permission to proceed with the project. A few months later, when the project had completely and utterly failed to the tune of about \$3,000,000, the VP began clearing out his office. When the president of the company walked in, he asked the VP, "Where are you going?" The VP responded, "I'm clearing out all my personal things and going home. I just made a huge mistake that cost your company \$3,000,000. I assumed I was fired!" "Are you crazy?" the president said, "I just invested \$3,000,000 in your education!"

Every idea you come up with isn't going to be a home run, and many will probably end up being strikeouts. But there is nothing worse in this world than never even swinging the bat! Risk is part of success, and those who are willing to stick their necks out each and every day—like you do—are the true heroes of our industry. You cannot experience the joy of discovering new lands if you never risk losing sight of the shore. After all, when you do things the same old way, you should expect the same old results.

You can, however, reduce costly mistakes by learning from other people's errors and by borrowing valuable lessons from other industries; there is nothing wrong with that. You should make it a point to study the leaders in our industry, and in others fields, and learn what it is that gives them their competitive edge. (You'll take a step-by-step approach to this process with the Five-Second Image Challenge a little bit later.)

The Five Biggest Mistakes Photographers Make

When it comes down to our marketing efforts, most of our mistakes lie within five distinct areas.

1. Failure to Have a Well-Thought-Out Marketing Plan. Anyone can captain the ship when the seas are calm; however, a good marketing plan does its best work when the seas are anything but calm. Eighty percent of all businesses do not have any form of marketing plan at all, and 80 percent of all businesses aren't around in five years. Do you think this is just a coincidence? We have two jobs: to photograph and to market; everything else is secondary.

2. Failure to Have a Clearly Defined Hook or Message. Without it, you are just a "me too," an also-ran, another run-of-the-mill business. You will not become successful simply because you are the best. Da Vinci was dead for over two hundred years before he became famous. I don't want to wait that long!

You need to know what it is that makes you special and unique in your marketplace. What is it that customers can't get from anyone but you? What is the compelling reason that customers should come to your studio instead of any of the others in your area? Again, the numbers speak for themselves: 80 percent of all photographers couldn't tell you what their hook is if asked. Are you one of the 80 percent, or are you among the 20 percent?



Professional-looking marketing pieces, like these from Christa Hoffarth, are well designed and have a cohesive feel that helps build brand recognition.

3. Failure to Have Professional-Looking Marketing Pieces. It's all about first impressions. Everything you do must match your image. If you want to be known for Cadillac quality, then everything you do should be consistent with that goal.

4. Failure to Project Your Sales and Goals into the Future. Let me ask you a question. If a bride calls you today to find out more about what you have to offer, when is she more than likely getting married? Maybe six, twelve, or eighteen months from now? Then why do we give her today's prices? Shouldn't we be charging prices that are based on and reflect where we want our studio to be at that later date?

All of our future goals for our business (and our lives) must be reflected in our price lists. If your goal for next year is to shoot half the number of weddings at double the price, then next year's prices should be in effect today! Or, on the other hand, if your goal is to shoot twice as many weddings at half the price, you should take all of

that into consideration when designing your current wedding collections. Wedding photography is one of the only industries where we are hired and retained for a job we will perform at some point in the distant future. And we should be charging those future prices today. Doesn't that make sense?

5. Failure to Price Your Packages to Allow for Costs, Overhead, and That Four-Letter Word: Profit. The average photographer makes less than \$25,000 per year. Do you have a thorough understanding of your cost breakdown on your products? Do you know how much profit is generated from each sale? How many weddings do you need to book (or seniors or families) in order to achieve your financial and personal goals? What do you want to make this year, next year, and the year after that?

The biggest problem in our industry isn't that we are priced too cheaply, it's that we are afraid to charge what we are worth. Understanding what it costs to produce each of your products can give you the basic tools to make

sure you are making a profit each and every day. There are some wonderful resources available that will walk you through the process of figuring out what your costs are—and what your profit is. I encourage you to investigate this topic as part of your brainstorming and planning sessions. Ask yourself, Do you want to be average? Or do you want to be successful? It's up to you! (The subject of pricing will also be covered in detail later in this book.)

Target Your Efforts

In order to truly focus, you have to do less. You can practice hand-grenade marketing—just throw a bunch of stuff out there and hope it hits the target—or you can use laser beam marketing and hit only what you want. If you would like to eliminate a certain segment of the business you currently do (let's say, for example, the low-end children's market), then devise a game plan today that allows you to smoothly exit that market and replace it with sales from your more lucrative demographic.

If you want to be viewed as a professional, you must look and behave like one.

If you want to attract a \$50 client, photograph a \$50 client. If they like you, they will tell their \$50-client friends about your work—which means you will be photographing \$50 clients. If you want to photograph brides and grooms who want to invest \$199 in their portraits, photograph one, and you are bound to get more. If you do a professional job and remember the value of the all-mighty referral, your clients will come to you informed about your quality, process, and pricing. Thanks to winning testimony from previous clients, a new batch of clients will arrive at your door already sold on your abilities.

As was mentioned earlier, though, once a client forms an impression, it's awfully difficult to change their mind. If you went after \$199 clients and word got out about your good work and unbeatable products, how could you then convince those same clients that they should invest \$5,000? The truth is, you'd have quite a battle on your hands to substantially increase the level of their invest-

ment. Now, there is profit in the \$199 customer, but you need to photograph a lot more of them than you do the \$500, \$1,000, or \$5,000 customer.

It all comes down to what your goals are in life. Sometimes you are better off going fishing than taking a job that doesn't help you achieve your ultimate objectives and professional goals. It's difficult to turn down business at first, but in the long run it will be healthier for you and your studio to do so. Let's face it: some customers are just not worth having. You have the ultimate say in how you spend your time.

So . . . what do clients experience when they pick up your literature, pull into your driveway, and enter your studio? You're about to find out.

The Five-Second Image Challenge

Do you remember what it was that triggered your dislike of snakes, or spiders, or flying, or seafood, or asparagus? You may not remember a specific incident, but I'll bet you are acutely aware of your likes and dislikes. Most of those precepts were embedded deep in our psyche from experiences that lasted five, ten, or maybe fifteen seconds.

When we are exposed to people and businesses, we quickly form an opinion of them in the same way. We make mental judgments about things in our world within five seconds of seeing, feeling, hearing, smelling, or tasting something. That judgment is filed away in our subconscious, and it colors our experiences and can affect future decisions. In business, those judgments can spell future success or ultimate failure.

In today's challenging world of professional photography, the old saying "first impressions make lasting impressions" is more important than ever. Our first perceptions are always the strongest and tend to stick with us the longest. Perception is reality. If you want to be viewed as a professional, you must look and behave like one. If you meet with clients for a wedding consultation or a portrait viewing, then hand them a 25¢ pen to fill out paperwork and expect them to spend \$5,000, you've got another thing coming. Something as simple as a pen will influence your client's perceptions of your business. If you are the \$199-type of wedding photographer, a 25¢ pen will be sufficient; if you have bigger fish to fry, you need to make sure that every last detail spells quality.

Are you making the best possible first impression on your potential customers, or is there room for improvement? It has been said that the sales process ends when the client writes you a check. Well, everything that happens up to that point determines how big that check will be. That's where the quality of your image creation and marketing comes in. The better job you can do with building a strong image in the mind of your customers, the higher the value your products and services will have—and the bigger the checks will become.

Ready? Let's get to work!

Step 1: The Image Inventory. Before you can take a look into your business with an open and objective frame of mind, you'll want to determine how other top-notch businesses handle this issue. Take a couple of hours on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, and go to the local mall where the elite stores like Nordstrom, The Bon Marché, Pier 1 Imports, The Sharper Image, and Ralph Lauren are located. I want you to take a notepad along so you can write down anything that strikes your fancy. Notice their signage, the colors and fonts in their logo, the smells as you walk in the front door, the overhead music that's playing, the way they have their displays organized, etc. Colors and smells affect our emotions in a very big way, and all play a key role in the value we attached to the things we observe.

Once you have a good handle on your environment, take a look at the people who are shopping there. What type of clothes are they wearing? What style of shoes do they have on? How is their hair styled? What's the age range? Take note of the color of the women's purses and the brand of the men's jeans. What car models are parked in the lot, and what colors seem to be the most popular? Write down anything you can identify about these customers. If you see something in one of these businesses that will work for you, great—write it down! Stop by a nice art gallery or a fine furniture store, or maybe stop into one of the upscale photography studios in your area. Make the same mental notes about what you observe there. Plenty of great marketing ideas can be found if we take the time to look at the world around us.

After spending a couple of hours working your way through several of the top-notch stores, drive over to the local department store—whether it's Wal-Mart, Kmart, or

the local five-and-dime. Observe the variables that you noticed in the first stage of this experience. Examine the signage and the cars in the lot. What impressions do you get from looking at the outside of their buildings?

When you walk in the front door, do you get the same sense of quality and value? What about the people shopping there—do they have the same styles of shoes, purses, and jeans? Walk around the store a bit, and get a good sense of who it is they want to attract into their building. It won't take you long to grasp what the marketing plan is of the big discount stores—high volume, low price. Load 'em up, move 'em in, move 'em out, yee haw!

It has been said that the sales process ends when the client writes you a check.

What does your perfect client look like? Is it someone who shops at Ralph Lauren and pays with a Discover card? Someone who shops at the warehouse stores? A combination of the two? Remember there is a difference between the type of client you may have today and the client you want for tomorrow. It's all part of knowing what you want out of your life and business and having a clear vision of your future.

Once step 1 is complete, go back to your studio and spend a few minutes reviewing these observations. That sharp pain you feel in your brain will only be temporary! It will go away as you begin to view the world through the eyes of your ideal client and gain a fresh understanding of the way perceptions are created.

Once you've completed this exercise, you will undoubtedly have an enhanced sense of your surroundings and will begin to see the world just a little bit differently than you did before. This is a good thing! The goal of this entire process is to learn to see the world and your studio the way a prospective client sees it.

Step 2: The Physical Inventory. Now it's time to make the same observations about your own business. The question I want you to keep in the front of your mind through this entire process is this: Who is my perfect client? Determine whether you want to cater to old-



The exterior of Chatsworth Portrait Studio is up-to-date, well maintained, and beautifully designed. Everything about it makes you want to see more!

school, new-school, high-end, or low-end clients, or if you prefer to attract clients somewhere in between. You need to know who your perfect client is in order to critique the dynamics of your studio's image.

Through this process, try to see your studio through the eyes of your ideal client. Remember that everything a potential customer observes about your business in the first five seconds will affect what they are willing to pay for your products and services. We're talking about perceived value. The higher the perceived value you have to your clients, the more you can charge, the more referrals you'll get, the more sessions you can shoot, and the more time off you will have to do the things in life that are most important to you.

To begin the physical inventory, first consider the outside of your entire studio, whether you operate out of your home or have a retail location. As you go through this process, it's important that you write down everything you notice. I suggest you create two columns. In the first column, note issues that can be taken care of rather easily, like raking leaves or washing a window. In the second col-

umn, list those things that may require a financial investment or a large amount of time, like painting the fence or getting new furniture for your gallery.

As you stand outside and observe your business, do you see weeds on the side of the driveway that need to be pulled out? What about your fence? Is it in good shape, or could it use a couple of nails and a fresh coat of paint? How does the paint look around the building? Does it look fresh and crisp? Are the shrubs and bushes properly trimmed and groomed?

Are your flower baskets overflowing with weeds and dead flowers? Do you deadhead your flowers on a regular basis? Is your lawn mown on a particular day each week, and is any necessary maintenance performed? Are there weeds growing up in the cracks, and are there cigarette butts or bubble gum wrappers in visible sight? Are there dead leaves scattered all over the ground?

What about the windows? Are they consistently washed, or can you see fingerprints and dirt on them?

Note that having a top-quality image means that some things go unnoticed. If a window is clean, you don't no-

tice its lack of grime, do you? But you will definitely notice if the glass covered in finger prints and smudges. Or if the grass is neatly mowed, you don't notice that it doesn't need mowing. Keep an open mind as you go through this process.

Now, we are going to walk inside your studio for the first time. Is your entryway inviting? Have you hung high-quality signs that clearly list your business hours, or do you use a dry erase board?

As you walk in, how does the appearance of your studio make you feel? Does it give you that “wow” feeling? Does that feeling match the image you want to build? What smells do you notice? Are they fresh and clean or old and musty? What part of your studio do you see first? Does it look clean and organized? When people walk into your gallery, you should tell them everything you want them to know about you through the work displayed on the walls, the fragrance in the air, the style of the furniture, and the general overall feeling they get within that first five seconds. Not everybody has top-of-the-line designer leather furniture and turn-of-the-century Victorian artwork in their studio, but we each need to make sure that what we do have supports the image we want to convey and appeals to the type of client we want to do business with.

Now, head toward your sales area or projection room. Do you display large prints on the walls or 8x10-inch prints? People can only buy what they see, and if all you show them are 8x10s, how can you expect them to invest in a 30x40-inch canvas portrait? It's not likely to happen! When I first opened my studio, I didn't have much of a budget for large prints, so I went hog wild and displayed lots of 11x14s and 16x20s. I had them everywhere! Guess what I sold a lot of? If you want to sell big, you must show big!

What about your sample albums? Are the pages routinely dusted and wiped down? Are all the prints inside still correctly mounted, or are a couple of them in need of repositioning? Are your shelves and countertops wiped down on a regular basis? Do you have candles located around your studio that add fragrance to the air? When a client walks into your studio for the first time, all of their senses are on high alert, and you want to make sure you give them an enjoyable olfactory experience.

Let's continue the process as we head into the camera room. This is a difficult one; we all get a bit lazy when it comes to maintaining our camera rooms. I have a tendency to put all of my equipment, filters, and film on one shelf, so after a while it begins to look very cluttered and disorganized. At the end of each shooting day, I force myself to put everything back where it belongs. It only takes me a couple of minutes. How is your camera room organized? Are the backgrounds neatly folded, or are they thrown into a corner because you don't have time to fold them during a session? How about your miscellaneous equipment shelf? If it's in the line of sight of your customers, how does it look to them? Could it benefit from a little time spent in organization and rearranging?

Take the same steps with your dressing rooms, public bathrooms, and the hallways that lead to them. If you have a portrait park, or even a small outdoor shooting area, take notice of the same things you noticed about the front of your building—the grass, the shrubs, the bushes, the trees, the flowers. When a client walks outside of your studio for the very first time, are they in awe with how beautiful everything is, or could your property use a little TLC? The image of your entire business is like one big apple pie, and the things we have talked about are the vital ingredients we need to make the best apple pie we can!

How does the appearance of your studio make you feel? Does it give you that “wow” feeling?

When clients arrive at your studio, do you offer them some sort of beverage, like a soft drink, a glass of wine, or a cold beer? Do you have snacks available in case they want something to munch on? I know several photographers who bake a fresh batch of chocolate chip cookies every single day, and you can smell them as soon as you get out of your car. That kind of attention to detail makes a person feel good—and anything you can do to make clients enjoy themselves even just a little bit more is worth doing. If they enjoy themselves during their time with you, they will be happier with their portraits and will spend more money and send more referrals.

Step 3: The Marketing Inventory. You'll need to sit down to complete this challenge. Grab a good cup of coffee, then gather every piece of literature you have. This includes things like business cards, price lists, brochures, wedding information, reorder forms, clothing tip sheets, coupons, contracts, direct mail pieces, newspaper ads, yellow pages ads, bridal fair ads—anything you hand out, mail out, or stuff into something!

Your marketing literature has a significant impact on your clients. It factors heavily into the client's perception of the position you occupy in the market. The quality of the paper it's printed on, the font selection, the quality of the ink, the color of the paper stock, the way you present it to your customers—everything sends a message. Do you just hand your clients a piece of paper with your wedding or portrait prices on it, or do you package your price list in an elegant envelope with gold-foil lettering, finished with a gold seal? Perception, perception, perception!

I challenge you to invest some time and money to create a unique look for your business.

If you are not exactly sure how to improve on what you already have, take a look at some of your competitors' literature and at some marketing materials from other industries. Your life insurance policy, the Franklin Mint plate sales flyers, the welcome kit from your local chamber of commerce, sales flyers you get in the mail, and wedding invitations from your supply house may prove to be a good source of inspiration.

These are all things that can give you fresh ideas on how to improve your marketing literature and your image. You can do anything you want if you just open your mind up to new and innovative ideas from outside of the box. I challenge you to invest some time and money to create a unique look for your business that is unequalled in your market—one that separates you from the rest of the pack.

There are a few other simple ways to enhance your image and create greater value for your products and services. First, say thank you. Any opportunity you have to say those magic words should be treasured and taken advan-

tage of. We should never pass on a chance to make our clients feel special and appreciated. This alone can make all the difference in the world in your business this year. Say thank you, and mean it—say it a lot! Send thank-you notes within twenty-four hours of a client's visit, or call them within twenty-four hours after they pick up the final order to make sure everything is okay. Take advantage of other occasions to touch their lives during the year, too. Send a card on their birthday or anniversary, to congratulate them on a job promotion or an award they received, or to wish them a happy holiday. For that matter, there's no reason why you can't send a card for no particular reason whatsoever. You will be amazed how much goodwill you can create from simple gestures like this.

That's it for the image challenge! How did you do? You probably have a few pages of projects to do in and around the studio over the next several weeks and months. Don't feel overwhelmed by the amount of stuff you wrote down. It just shows you have lots of potential for future growth and improvement! To make your to-do list a bit more manageable, you can break it up into a weekly task list. Get your staff and your family involved, have a neighborhood work party, and throw everyone a barbeque, complete with beverages, as a thank-you for lending a hand. Have some fun with it, and get other people excited about getting involved. Life is meant to be enjoyed, whether we are playing or working!

The most difficult part of the wonderful world of marketing lies in learning to understand the way the world around us works. We need to look into the way perceptions are created about you and by you, how value and perceived value are ultimately controlled by you, and how the entire process begins with the creative juices only you can provide. Your brainstorming can lead to incredible breakthroughs for your studio—and your life.

Power Corner

Focus on . . .

Jeff and Kathleen Hawkins



What happens when you combine the talents of one of the best photographers in the country and one of the best marketing minds in the industry—then throw in a little love for good measure? You get the

dynamic duo of Jeff and Kathleen Hawkins! Jeff has been a professional photographer for over twenty years. He has photographed many celebrities, including Ed McMahon, Regis Philbin, Reba McEntyre, Billy Ray Cyrus, Mary Kay, Charlie Daniels, John Anderson, John Michael Montgomery, Marty Stuart, and Shaquille O'Neal. Kathleen holds a Masters in Business Administration and spent nearly a decade teaching marketing and business courses at a local university. Together, they are a very dynamic team who have become the epitome of success. They are also the team behind several successful books under their belts, including Professional Marketing and Selling Techniques for Wedding Photographers, 2nd ed. (from Amberst Media®). For more information on their educational materials and workshops, visit www.jeffhawkins.com or www.kathleenhawkins.com.

Mitche: What is the biggest challenge that you think the photography industry will be facing in the coming years?

Kathleen: I think one of the biggest will be workflow management, and learning how to control where you spend your time. There is also an influx of really new photographers popping up all over the place, so it's important that you understand who your market is so you can effectively compete with them.

Jeff: Also, the overwhelming influx of products, software, and equipment onto the market. It gets to be too much for photographers to absorb. You can easily get caught up in the trap of using all this stuff. You need to identify the products that are going to work for you and your business, and stick with that. There are always going to be new toys, but you need to focus.

Another challenge is that all of the consumers have access to the same types of technology that professionals do, and we have to have something that separates us from the amateurs. They have access to equipment that will do a phenomenal job. What we have to do as professionals is separate ourselves from those amateurs, and position ourselves as photographic artists.

Who is your perfect client?

Kathleen: Anybody who has a sign that reads "Make me feel special!"

What are the most important attributes of a Power Marketer?

Kathleen: The ability to apply critical thinking skills. If you understand that people want to be made to feel special, then learn to have interpersonal skills to work with them, you have just accomplished the first step in becoming a Power Marketer.

Jeff: I think you also need an ability to identify personality types, what type of person are you talking to, what are they interested in, and really listening to what they have to say. You can then provide them the product that will help them get what they are looking for. There are tons of different products that we can offer them, and it's our job as good marketers to educate them so they can make the right decision.

What is most important to you from a "life" standpoint, and how does that come into play in your business?

Kathleen: Keeping your priorities in perspective. Our faith first, then our family, then our career third. Making sure that we are working our business instead of letting our business work us.

Jeff: I think also, that when you own a photography company, it's not a job, it's a business. If you have a job, you work for somebody else. It may mean working a lot of extra hours, but I don't think it's really considered work when you are the owner. I think that's important for people to understand.

How do you balance your personal and your professional lives, with everything you have going on?

Kathleen: We believe in working less and getting paid for our talents, so that we can give our family the things they need and have the time needed to maintain our faith. We understand the importance of giving back to others and to the industry and take time for that, but also know how important it is to take time out for each other, our family,

I also think that the service we offer and the products we have are unique in our market.

and our education. These goals and proper prioritizing have helped us stay ahead of the changes in the industry and continues to provide us with the personal and professional growth we desire.

What is your hook?

Jeff: I think what separates us is our style. We are able to use our digital technology to create more artwork for our clients. I also think that the service we offer and the products we have are unique in our market.

Kathleen: Jeff created a phrase, and he calls himself a “photo-relationist.” It’s basically a PR concept, meaning that when we get a new customer, we look at them as customers for life. We want to photograph their wedding, their children, their family, all of it.

Jeff: In essence, we are documenting and capturing relationships, and that’s the way we approach our marketing.

Have you had a marketing campaign that has been an absolute home run?

Jeff: I would have to say the Lifetime Portrait Credit. It was started because we wanted to establish and develop relationships with our wedding clients, and to continue them for the rest of their lives. They basically get free portrait sessions for the rest of their life. They don’t have to pay a session fee, they only pay for what they purchase.

Kathleen: When a client hires us to photograph their wedding, they automatically become a member of the program. It has not only separated us from the industry, it’s done much more!

What about your least successful?

Kathleen: We did Halloween portraits one year. There was this park where businesses would set up a booth, and we thought it would be a great way to let people know that we did children’s and family portraits by offering them affordable Halloween photos. The little trick-or-treaters would come around to each booth, and I think we each had to have 50,000 pieces of candy. So, I went out and spent \$1000 on candy alone! Unfortunately, people just didn’t want to have photos of their kids in Halloween costumes. We did get one good client out of it, and if he comes back for a second session, maybe we will get back our initial investment!

Jeff: We went out and bought hay and all kinds of nice set items, but the interest just wasn’t there. Needless to say, we won’t be doing that again!

Favorite book?

Kathleen: Any type of motivational book. I’m a success book junkie! I love them!

Jeff: I’m not one to sit down and read much. I don’t have enough time for that.

Who are your biggest inspirations?

Kathleen: I would have to say Jackie Applebaum, the owner of EventPix. She has so much going on at any given moment that it used to make me second-guess whether or not I was focused enough, because I wasn’t as organized as she is. Every time we have any contact with her, we come back and we do something to improve our business.

Jeff: I would have to agree with Kathleen. She has really inspired us both!

Do you have a favorite saying?

Kathleen: Just because you can, doesn’t mean you should! Just because you can be a lab, doesn’t mean you should be a lab. Just because you can build a web site, doesn’t mean you should build a web site.