

The Essential Guide to FREE Photo Marketing

by Click-IT

www.photographers-portfolio.co.uk

Introduction

Every photographer, whether new or established, full-time or freelance, needs to consider all possible marketing ideas to help increase turnover and profitability. Advertising is very expensive, and it needs to be very regular before it is effective; so this is a long term high cost investment that few starters can afford. Since few banks these days are prepared to lend money to new enterprises, alternative 'free' marketing solutions are needed.

This guide is designed to inspire and ignite your imagination to the alternative FREE marketing solutions that are available to those with a desire to succeed. Nothing will come from thinking about it, action is needed. You must take the proverbial bull by the nuts and spread the word about your fantastic photographic services. Even in this economic climate, people are still in need of photographers for all kinds of assignments, so if you don't get the work, your competitors will.

Your Closest Allies

Every business will say that your friends and family are the first step to infamy, and this is no different. Everyone knows someone, and that someone may know a friend or colleague that needs a photographer. It's called *networking*. We would all like to have a friend who knows a plumber, especially when your radiators spring a leak. It's just the same when someone gets engaged, or when they have a baby, or any occasion where they need a photographer. They first ask their friends... "Do you know a photographer?"

Free Advertising

Recommendation is the best form of free advertising (and flattery), but you must first have lots of people who know you as a photographer. You have to start the networking ball rolling by telling everyone you know that you are a photographer, and that you are available for hire. Talk is cheap, so be chatty.

Monkey See Monkey Do

Telling people you are a photographer is one thing, but they won't be convinced until they see your work, which is fine if they live on the next street, or nearby. You can take them your portfolio and show them. However, it is much better (and more convenient) if you can simply tell them to look at your website. This instantly gives you added credibility, and a means of providing all the information your potential customers will need. Only serious photographers have a website, so if you have one then you must be serious about your work. This is the impression that a good website will give to your potential customers, so get your portfolio exhibited on a good quality website.

Getting your Portfolio On-Line

Getting a website is easy, but getting a good one is the primary key. You need a website that is inexpensive but comprehensive, so it can grow with your business. You don't want a cheap website that has limited capacity, limited pages or limited features. This will only stunt the growth of your business as you build it up, forcing you to start all over again when you have 'outgrown' your website.

The website system supplied by Click-IT at www.photographers-portfolio.co.uk will give you a professional website with all the facilities you will ever need for as little as £49 per year, or with unlimited web space (and features) for only £149 per year.

Remember, your website is your 'shop-window' and your 'exhibition gallery'. A cheap or shabby looking website will suggest a cheap and shabby photographer, and win you few friends and fewer customers. Remember, the three most important considerations when choosing and creating your website are, presentation, presentation and presentation!

Expand your Horizons

Once you have exhausted your friends and family contacts, you need to expand your horizons to attract more business. Marketing is all about quantity. The more people that see your work, the more chance you will have of getting regular new business. Since television advertising is out of the question, we need to look at alternative (and much cheaper, ie: free) forms of advertising.

SEO – Web Marketing

It goes without saying that if you have a website, then you have the potential to generate free advertising by getting it registered on page one of the major search engines. If you don't know someone who is a photographer then your first step will often be to search for one on Google (they have over 80% of the search engine market, so Google is the king).

You could do this yourself if you know how to optimise your website, or if your web agency will do this for you. This is such a specialised subject that many web agencies will charge you good money to optimise your website, and it is rarely included in the standard web hosting fee. Click-IT are the exception, and they will help you optimise your website to get the very best chance of being listed on page one of Google, all included in the annual web hosting fee. That is worth much more than their hosting fee alone, so consider this a massive bonus.

Negotiate & Appreciate

Once you have acquired good search results on Google you should soon start to generate enquiries from your visitors, so make sure you follow them up promptly, and be prepared to negotiate on your prices and rates. Everyone likes to get a good deal, especially more so these days. Many retailers would never sell a sausage unless they have a sale. Can you imagine anyone buying a sofa at full price from certain establishments advertised on TV?

It is always a good idea to offer a discount if they spend over a certain amount on print orders. This encourages them to collect more orders from family and friends to make sure they qualify for your discount. If you just offer them a free 10x8 print with every order, then that's exactly what you will get. A basic low value order with a request for that free print.

A Low Sitting Position

There are many well known portrait studios that offer very cheap sittings (circa £25) to attract new business, and then charge fantastic prices for the prints and use credit payment options (and hard sell) to get them to buy the most expensive print options available. The logic is sound common sense. If you charge an expensive sitting fee then there is always a perceived risk that the photos may not be as good as the client was expecting, and they will not be too pleased after spending so much and getting a poor result. But, if they only have to pay £25 for the sitting then it's no big loss if they are not happy with the shots. There are never any guarantees with photography, so people can be nervous if you charge an expensive sitting fee.

Snob Appeal

If you are a well known photographer with a very big national reputation, then the opposite is often true. They can charge phenomenal prices and still get the work. This is because high value is always associated with high price, and some people would even be put off if their rates were reduced. Weird, but true.

If Aston Martin ever reduced their car prices to the price of an average family car, no celebrity (or footballer) would buy them any more. It's a nice position to be in, but if you are a relatively unknown photographer, then you have to be prepared to negotiate on price.

Building your Relationships

Remember when I said at the beginning '*..its all about networking*'? Well now is the time to do some *more* networking with other businesses that have a 'related' service to yours. Everyone in business is doing the same as you, looking for more business. So, if you can help them, they will be glad to help you.

For example, when a couple decide to get married they will approach many different services and suppliers (in addition to you as the photographer)...

- **Wedding Dress hire**
- **Hotels & Restaurants – for the reception**
- **Limousine hire**
- **Wedding Cake specialists**
- **Caterers**
- **Stationers – for invitation cards**
- **Flower shops – for bouquets**
- **Videographers**
- **Hair dressers**
- **Beauticians**
- **Etc etc**

If you have a portfolio of wedding photographs (in your book as well as on your website) then contact all your local suppliers and services that deal with weddings and arrange to visit them to show them your work.

The deal that you offer to them is double sided. You say that you will pass their contact details to your clients in return for them passing your contact details on to their clients. They will, of course, want to be confident that your work is of a sufficient high quality before they will offer to recommend you.

Ask for Back Links

Before you visit them check if they have a website, and if they have included any links to other suppliers. If they do then remember to ask them if they will add a link to your website. This is called a 'back link', and it is *very valuable* for you in building your 'page rank' on Google. This is the level of importance your site achieves based on the number of other websites (of a related service) that link to you. If they are prepared to do this, even if nothing else, then it will be well worth the visit.

Reciprocating

They may ask you to reciprocate and add a link to their website on yours. This is called a 'reciprocal link' (a two way link). These are not as valuable as back links, but do accept their offer and make sure you do add a link to their website (honour the agreement).

Once you have established a relationship with these suppliers make sure that you actually pass their details to anyone who may be interested, and then (very important) send the supplier an email with the contact's details. This establishes that it was you that made the referral in case the client forgets to mention your name. It also gives the supplier a qualified lead that they can follow up. They will soon thank you for it by making sure they pass your details on to their clients.

'Take One' Leaflets

If you can afford to have some 100 x 210mm double sided leaflets printed, then these are an essential low cost tool that can help you spread the word through your newly established trade relationships. Just add a couple of your stunning photos to the front, and your contact details and sample rates on the back. Then get a few cheap Perspex 'take-one' boxes (available from any shop fitters) and set them up on the counters and in the waiting rooms of the suppliers. Their visitors can then 'take one' home to show their partner. This method generates better results than sending junk mail because only people who show an interest will 'take one'.

Relationships Revisited

This works on two levels. It gives their customers something to take away with them with all your details, plus it gives you an excuse to return to the supplier on a regular basis to 'refill' the boxes, which keeps you fresh in their memory. Otherwise they may forget about you and subsequently forget to recommend your services. Don't expect (or ask) them to refill the boxes for you. This is something you must do yourself so that you can ensure the boxes are correctly and prominently displayed. Leave it to them and you can guarantee that the boxes will end up under the counter or tossed in the back.

This is called 'merchandising'. All of the chocolate manufacturers do it this way when they visit the retailers regularly to make sure their chocolate displays are topped up and tidy.

Special Offers vs. Vouchers

Everyone loves a special offer, and photography is no different. However, you have to be careful not to make yourself look too desperate, which can suggest that your business is not doing too well. Make your offer genuine and creative, rather than offer a blanket 50% off print prices etc.

Vouchers

A voucher is like printing money. It has a value that can be used to purchase your services, but only if you possess the voucher. This gives the owner a sense of privilege. If you were to advertise that you are currently offering portrait sittings for only £10 (when they were normally £25) then you may generate some business. However, if you were to give a few people a special limited edition voucher that entitled them to a photo session for only £10, and it had an expiry date, then they are more likely to take you up on the offer, or even pass it to a friend.

The advert is seen once and soon forgotten, but a voucher is more personal and direct. Few people will throw away a voucher that has a value, and if they can't use it they will pass it on to someone who will. How many times have you received a money off voucher for something that you would not normally buy, and then gone out and bought it?

People just can't bear to think of wasting a voucher. It's just like throwing money away.

Distribution

So, how do you go about distributing your vouchers? Do you drop them in every door in your village or hand them out in the street? No, because that will only devalue the voucher. If you make the voucher readily available to everyone, then they will see no privilege in having it. You reduce its worth, the same as advertising it in the newspaper.

Limited Distribution

Consider the following example as a starting point. Contact your local hair dresser or beautician, and show them your portfolio (this establishes your credibility and experience as a photographer). Then show them a sample of your proposed printed voucher (which you can easily create on your home computer at 100 x 210mm). The voucher will entitle their customers to a special portrait photo session for only £10 (or whatever price you decide to offer). It should clearly display the value of the voucher, and what it includes, plus the name of the vendor (which makes it even more exclusive), and don't forget an expiry date. Make it attractive, and add a couple of your best photos. If the voucher is of high quality, then it adds even more value and prestige.

As an added bonus (ie: incentive) for the vendor, you can offer to give them 10% of any subsequent print sales from the photo session. This makes the offer a collaborative effort, rather than just you begging for more work.

You could take this to an extra level by creating an A4 or A3 poster announcing the special offer which is only available from this vendor. This should then be displayed in the shop window to attract passing trade. This generates new business for the vendor as well as you, which will be much appreciated by the owner.

Surrogate Shop Windows

If you don't have a main street photo studio with the advantage of constant 'passing trade' then you will be one of the vast majority of photographers that work from home or in a studio on a trading estate. You may have the advantage of lower overheads, but also the distinct disadvantage of zero passing trade. This means that you need to use some lateral thinking to get your photos seen by the buying public.

Creating a special offer like the voucher and poster scheme mentioned above gives you a means of getting your work exhibited in a public place for free. This is free advertising. Let me repeat that... FREE ADVERTISING.

Once you have established your first 'special deal' with a vendor, then go and repeat the process with another... and another. As long as the vendor is also seeing a benefit then you can't fail. If that vendor is on the main street in town, or if they have a high footfall (a high number of people passing through their doors), then you will have established not just one but *multiple* shop windows, all selling your work for FREE. Just make sure you revisit each vendor regularly to discuss any feedback and restock your 'take one' boxes.

Photo Exhibitions

People always like to see before they buy, so no one is going to hire you as a photographer unless they have seen (and liked) your work. Getting a website is the first objective, which allows web visitors to see your work, but what about all the people who may never search the web for a photographer?

We have already seen how you can get your work seen in certain vendors shop windows, and this is a very valuable form of free exhibition. But where else can you get your work exhibited for free?

Ooops, did I just leave that behind?

I remember once when I worked briefly as a distributor for a well known health food company, some of the more creative sales people were proud to explain how they had attracted some of their new business by 'carelessly' leaving behind one of their calling cards in the strangest of places.

In the frozen food compartment in a supermarket, on the chair of every café and restaurant they stopped in, inside every magazine or book they read while in the newsagents, on the doctors and dentist waiting room table, in reception rooms, trains and buses... etc, etc.

I am not advocating that you should drop your calling cards like confetti at every opportunity, but just to say that it can work if you choose the locations carefully, and don't keep repeating the 'accident' in the same venue. Otherwise you could get a few calls from angry managers asking you to stop it. However, the concept was original and amusing enough to be worth mentioning.

Freebies can be Worth a Fortune

Sometimes it's worth being very generous in order to gain free exhibition space. Consider any venue in your local town that enjoys a high footfall (or passing trade). Here are a few examples just to get you started...

- **Sports centres**
- **Health clubs**
- **Cafes and restaurants**
- **Banks and Building Societies**
- **Supermarkets**
- **Shopping centres**
- **Garden centres**
- **Business Receptions**

Asking any of these venues if you could hang a few of your photos on their walls for free will guarantee a laugh at best. Unless you are a famous photographer you might as well forget it. However, there is a way to turn them around.

Everyone likes something for nothing, even big companies and corporations. It's in everyone's nature not to turn away a freebie. If you approach the managers of any of these venues with an offer to provide them with free photographic services in return for free exhibition space, then you will be guaranteed to get a better response. They will at least ask you to visit them to show them your work. Once in their domain you can then discuss terms.

Every company and organisation needs photographs for publicity, promotion and internal use; and every company likes to get a discount on everything they buy, so if you approach them and offer your services for free, guess what? They will like you... very much!

At best, the deal you negotiate will be for an unlimited exhibition (for as long as you want it), or it could be for an agreed period, say 3 months. Any exhibition is better than no exhibition, so be prepared to compromise. If your work is of a high standard then it will be worth more to them.

Be Social & Commercial

If your portfolio only consists of portraits, then you can still offer to photograph portraits of their staff for publicity and promotion shots. You may even be given the opportunity to do some interior, press or product shots, which will open up an extra market for you, and give you valuable experience that is worth thousands to your business. Whatever your speciality, it can still be of value to the business, organisation or even their staff.

Guarantee Quality Assurance

Offering your services for free is a great way to get free exhibition space, but if your work is sub-standard then even free is too expensive. This is obvious but it has to be said. You would not want someone messing with your central heating boiler if they are not an experienced plumber, even if they offered their services for free. Make sure that your portfolio contains a high standard of work before approaching any venue with a freebie, otherwise they will not want you taking photographs for them at any price.

Position, Position, Position...

Once you have negotiated a deal, and you get your free exhibition space (and not forgetting the all important space for 'take one' boxes) then make sure that the space you are being given is the best possible space that will get your work noticed. There is no point having free exhibition space if the wall is in the back where only the staff will see it. If there is no suitable wall space available then consider buying or making a simple 3 panel exhibition stand that can be sited in a public area.

Dress to Impress

What should you choose to exhibit in your free exhibition space? Do you cram in as many pictures as possible? Do you frame them or just paste a few prints on the wall? This is your exhibition space, your shop window. How you exhibit your work will speak volumes about you the photographer.

Take a look at any shop window of any of the major high street brands and compare them to some of the cheaper independents offering cheap goods at knock off prices. Which window displays do you think will be the most impressive? Exactly. So, do you want to give the impression that what you have to offer is cheap and tacky? Of course not. So make sure your exhibition (your shop window) is presented with the highest quality.

Frame your photos and secure them to the wall with screws or fittings that guarantee that they can't be knocked out of alignment. Nothing looks worse than a display of framed pictures that are askew. They look untidy, and it also suggests that the artists does not care about presentation.

If you are going to add any titles or captions to your photos, then print them neatly on your printer and encapsulate them to prevent staining. It is this attention to detail that will add value to your services.

Don't try to display too many photos. It is often much more impressive to see one large impressive framed photo than a dozen small and random pictures. Be selective and make a big impression, and leave your audience wanting to see more. They will then be more inclined to take one of your leaflets and checkout your website to see more of your work.

Manage your Exhibition

I have said it before, and I will say it again. Revisit your exhibition space regularly to ensure that the 'take one' boxes are refilled. The venue will not do this for you. Use this time to re-establish contact with the venue manager and discuss any feedback, and potential new business.

Remember, every new contact you make in your growing network of associates will eventually generate new contacts and opportunities. This is the numbers game. The more people who know you and the work that you do, *the more work you will do...* Simple!

Photo Galleries

It's worth a mention about specialist photo galleries that exhibit selected photographers. This may be worth considering once you have built a solid reputation, and preferably an agent as well. It can be a useful spring-board into the elite ranks of published photographers, but expect to be snubbed if you don't have any 'letters' after your name.

This can be disheartening for those genuine talented photographers with no hope of being exhibited simply because they have not 'bothered' to become a member of some national organisation. It is understandable from the private gallery point of view. There are thousands of talented photographers out there, and very limited wall space to exhibit them, so they have to use some form of filtering to establish a rank and file of 'worthy' artists.

Be consoled by the fact that all of your regular profitable work will come via the trade associations and networks that you have established. These are the real exhibitions that are seen by people who actually pay for your photographs, rather than just write about them in some journal or blog.

Summary

I hope that I have encouraged you to look at the 'bigger picture' when considering how to market your photography. There are so many opportunities that can give you free advertising and exhibition space if you just spread your wings of influence around your immediate neighbourhood.

Networking is the oldest sales technique in existence. In its most basic form it simply involves speaking to people who then tell other people about you. It starts with your friends and family and expands to your local business associates. Before long, everyone in your area will know your name and the work that you do.

Some businesses will spend a fortune on advertising and junk mail to try and spread their name and services, like so many of their competition. But you will beat them all to the customer's door because you are the only photographer that was recommended by a friend of a friend who saw your photograph on the wall in a shop in the local shopping mall...

