



From left to right: Julia Woods, M.Photog.Cr.; Bridget Jackson, manager of PPA Studio Management Services (SMS); Scott Kurkian, PPA chief financial officer and founder of SMS; Ann K. Monteith, M.Photog.Cr.Hon.M.Photog., CPP, ABI; Carol Andrews, M.Photog.Cr., ABI.

GURUS FROM PPA'S STUDIO MANAGEMENT SERVICES ANSWER YOUR BUSINESS, MARKETING AND SALES QUESTIONS. FOR INFO ON WORKSHOPS, GO TO PPA.COM

Ask the experts

Startups, sales tax and getting more wedding business

Q: We thought we didn't have to charge customers the state sales tax because we provide a service, but some sources say we do. Do you know for sure what the law is in Ohio? If we do need to collect sales tax, how do we remit it to the state? If someone out of state orders a book, prints or whatever, do I charge them sales tax? I need to know what to do!

A: Yes, you do have to charge sales tax on everything you sell. If you've just started your business, you need to apply for a sales tax registration identification number immediately. If you've been in business for awhile and have never collected sales tax, you need to talk to a local accountant right away.

Most states require you to collect sales tax on the sitting fee as well as the product; if a service ends in a product, both the service and the product are subject to sales tax. In contrast, when a service (like that of a car mechanic) fixes a product rather than producing a new one, the service is not subject to sales tax.

Out-of-state purchases are generally not subject to sales tax, although if a client comes to you from another state, states differ as to whether sales tax is charged. Check with your state's Department of Revenue.

Once you register for a sales tax number, your state will instruct you on how to remit the collected sales tax to the state. In a number of states, including Ohio, businesses recently have been required to pay their sales taxes online.

We encourage everyone to contact his or her state's Department of Revenue for specific answers on what is taxable, how to apply for a sales tax number, how to collect sales tax, and how to remit it to the state. (Google your state's name and "Department of Revenue.")

—Scott Kurkian & Bridget Jackson

Q: About three years ago, I switched from newspaper freelancing to the wedding photography business. I had marketing materials and a website designed, and my prices are reasonable. I've been to bridal shows and advertised with TheKnot.com. I give good customer service, yet I'm booking fewer than 10 weddings a year. Any ideas?

A: Weddings take a unique marketing endeavor. All those marketing strategies are effective, but there's one that's missing from your list—local wedding vendors. It's always been our best source of referrals. When a bride goes to a venue, a florist, a dress shop, and asks them to recommend a photographer, and they all say you, it's a home run.

It takes time to build relationships with vendors, but Lori Nordstrom, M.Photog.Cr., CPP, taught us a super jump-starter. After you photograph a wedding, use your favorite images that showcase the flowers to create a 5x7 referral card for the florist. Include your photo credit and your website address, and the florist's logo and contact info. Have 25 of these cards printed at your lab, then deliver them to the florist. They'll be more than delighted to hand them out! Now 25 brides-to-be have a referral to you and your website. Do the same thing for the venue, cake decorator, dress shop and all the other pertinent vendors, and I bet you'll see an increase in your bookings.

—Julia Woods (portraitlife.com)

Q: We just started a photography business. We're pretty clueless. What do we need to do to become legitimate?

A: I can't stress enough how important it is to

learn as much as you can about the *business* of photography before you get in too deep. Photography can be a great career when you go into it with your eyes wide open and the business skills required to be successful.

The very best thing you can do is to learn the fundamentals. Until a couple of years ago, there was no course on business management and marketing specifically designed for professional photographers—a lot of us tried to find one. That's why PPA Studio Management Services developed the "Business Basics Workshop" for professional photographers at any stage in their career.

As one of several instructors who teach this course, I can attest that the curriculum it provides could have cut two years off the learning curve I experienced when I started my own photography business.

The two-day workshop is offered several times a year at locations throughout the country. (Go to ppa.com for specifics.)

We cover a lot of ground, including legal and financial requirements for starting a photography business, personal skills and attributes needed to succeed, financial benchmarks, and marketing and pricing for profitability.

—Ann K. Monteith (annmonteith.com)

Got a business, sales or marketing concern? There are no stupid questions. The SMS team wants to hear from you. E-mail our panel of experts via PP editor Cameron Bishopp at cbishopp@ppa.com and include "experts" in the subject line.

