

A smiling woman with curly hair, wearing a light blue sweater, holding a professional camera with a large lens. She is looking towards the camera with a friendly expression. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

Marketing 101 for Photographers



Professional
Photographers
of America

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INTRODUCTION

As photographers, your specialty is beautiful imagery. Your time and energy is spent with your clients. Your focus is the final product. Unfortunately, none of that matters if you don't have the clients lined up in the first place.

So, how do you track down the people out there who are looking for a photographer, and how do you get them to choose you? Through marketing. Here's a brief rundown on the basics.

Target Audience

Are you a wedding photographer? Then you will need newlyweds to see you. Are you a family photographer? Then you will need parents to see you. First things first, you will need to identify your target demographic. Once you've determined who your target demographic is, create a persona of your perfect client.

A buyer persona is a representation of your ideal client based on their presumed demographics, cultural identity, motivations, and behaviors. For example, meet Jane. Jane just got engaged, she's between 24-32 years of age, she has just finished grad school, started a new career, and is completely overwhelmed with planning a wedding. Now that you know who you're marketing to, what can you offer her to make her life better?

Marketing Strategy

Before you get on Facebook or start snatching up ads in the local paper, create a plan. This will help you to prepare, establish goals, and measure your success. Tracking your efforts is key, otherwise, you won't be able to measure the effectiveness of your marketing strategy.

- I. Define Your Goal.** Do you want more clients? Are you looking to increase your average sale? Will you be promoting a special product or service or perhaps working with a charity? Decide what is most important to your business at this time and then you can focus your message.

2. Decide which outlets your potential clients focus on the most.

This will likely take some testing. You may think it's Facebook, but maybe it's Instagram. Either way, make sure you put time into developing these platforms so that they look professional and approachable. Go with your gut, and then see how they're performing.

3. Content strategy. Once you've decided where you're going to market your photography services, you'll need to start creating content that is visible, credible, and triggers leads. Make an outline of a strategy that can help you create relevant content you need for those platforms.

4. Set a marketing budget. Rather than throwing money at an issue, you need to carefully plan out how you'll be investing every penny. Set a budget to keep your financial contributions within an affordable range.

5. Measure your success. By testing and analyzing, you can figure out what is giving you the best results. Check in on your original goal, and see how close or far you are from success.

SEO—Search Engine Optimization

SEO is the process of affecting the visibility of a website or a web page in a web search engine. So, basically getting your website as close to the top of a Google search as you can. You will attract more online visitors by making sure your SEO ranks higher than other photographers in your area. **Better SEO equals more clients.**

Most photographers try optimizing for the highest Google results in general, but they forget that most potential clients do local searches, meaning that you will get a bigger bang for your SEO bucks if you optimize for local searches.

Overall, ensure that your site is easy to use, works on mobile devices, and contains content that is relatable and engaging.

Content Creation

You need to create content for your site and your marketing outlets. Whether it's writing, an image, or even video, you'll need to create content that is engaging and attracts your target audience. Many photographers find that including a blog on their site is a great way to engage potential clients. You have an advantage because you have a professional camera that can take high-res videos and a mastery of lighting!

Having regular content updates can encourage more site traffic and great nuggets of info. For social posts, depending on your choice of outlets, you'll want to create a schedule so that you are regularly producing content that will catch the eye of your buyer persona.

ROI—Website Analytics

Once you've started putting your business out there, you'll want to see what's working so that you can maximize your ROI (return on investment.) A great free tool for viewing the reports of your website's traffic is Google Analytics. With Google Analytics you can see where the traffic is coming from, demographics of your visitors, how long users spend on your site, and more. Another free tool for viewing insights into your marketing and advertising across social media platforms is Meta Business Suite. With the help of these tools, you can view what platforms and social media channels are performing best and focus your efforts on marketing strategies that actually work.

Marketing is about using a panoramic application to find your potential clients and convert them into actual clients. There's so much more in-depth information out there that can help you create a manage a marketing plan. With this overview, you can take a big step toward putting that marketing plan into action.

DEFINE A BUYER PERSONA

You can't appeal to a target audience if you don't know who you're targeting.



You may have a general idea of who your customer is, but it is imperative to really understand what drives them. Once you know who you're talking to, then you'll know how to talk to them.

Your target audience can be whittled down to one or two specific people. These are the people you will consider when creating any content or collateral to promote your photography business. In theory, these are **generalizations of the ideal customer**.

Instead of working with a vague, open-ended demographic, you can now **focus on the wants and needs of the potential person** walking through your studio door, reading your content, or asking for recommendations. Once you really know this person, you can learn what will hook them and bring them directly to you.

If you don't currently have clients, then you'll need to do some research. Find out who is looking for photographers in your area and why. Once you do, see if you can meet with them and ask them a few questions. Also, as we know, the internet is a vast wonderland of information. Do some social listening on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Search key terms and hashtags to find out who's looking for photographers.

If you do have clients, you've got a leg up. Assess the clients you currently have and see if there's a common thread. Are these clients the same gender, same age, or have the same family size? As you look closely, you'll start to **notice what your clients have in common**.

More importantly, you can decipher the qualities an ideal client has rather than a less than ideal client. It's also important to identify a negative buyer persona! You can make the negative buyer persona up as you go, but you will generally want

to avoid the client that is looking for a cheap fix. Instead, look for the client who wants beautiful images that are produced by a professional.

PPA has created a buyer persona template just for you.

After a few simple questions, you'll be able to identify the best potential clients. Once you do that, you'll be able to offer creative solutions to fix their problem



Download: Buyer Persona Template

Once you've filled out your Buyer Persona Template, you'll have a real grasp on who your ideal client is and how you can reach them. It's time to start solving your clients' problems with your services

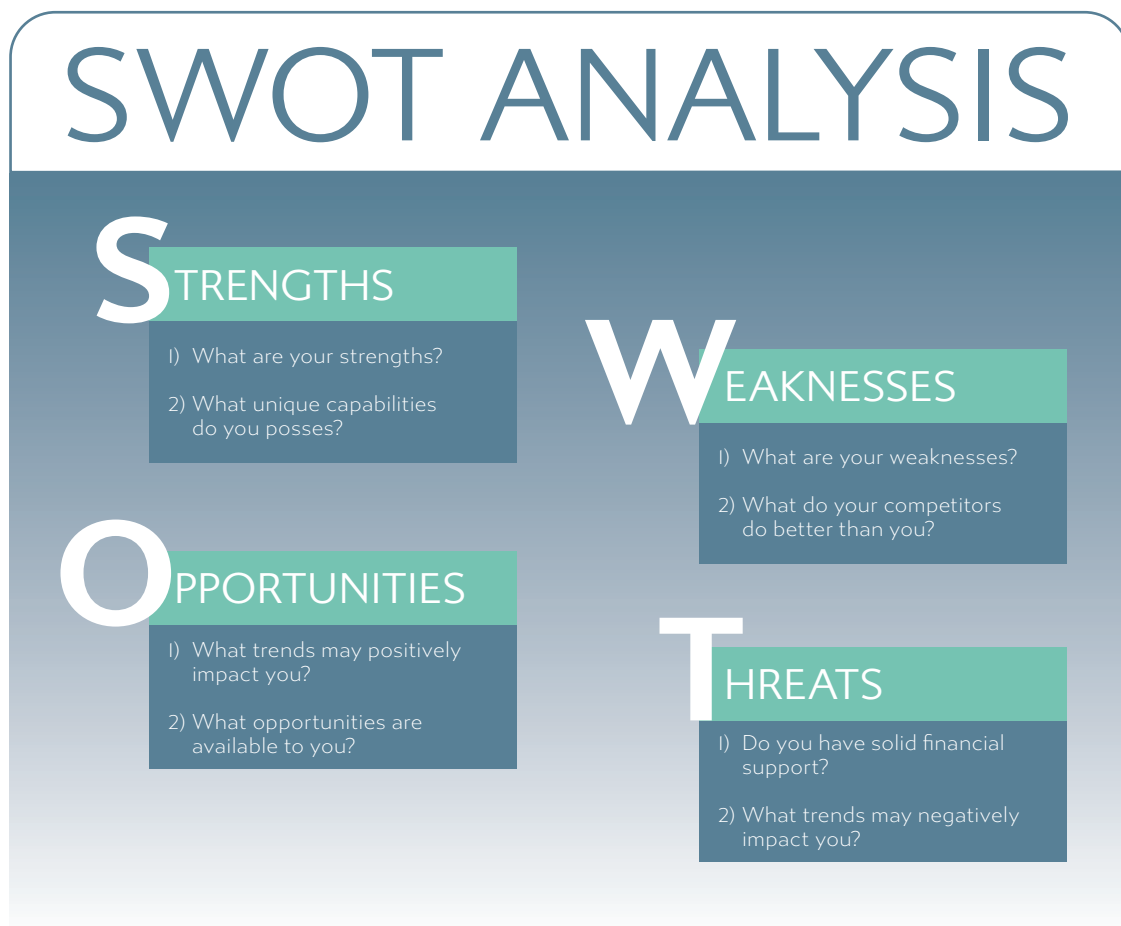
CREATE A MARKETING PLAN

You've learned the basics of Marketing and figured out how to recognize your target audience. Now, what do you do with this information?

Don't begin haphazardly putting ads out there or hitting the social media channels without a plan! The next step is to get organized and create your plan. Follow these instructions and you'll be well on your way to marketing your photography business.

Step 1: Situation Analysis

What's your current situation? Where are you and where do you want to be? Start with a **SWOT analysis**. Identify your **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats.



- **Strengths and Weaknesses** are qualities that currently exist within your business. Is your photography great, but your bookkeeping could use work? Do you work really hard, but for too many hours? Are you strong with event photography, but need more practice in the portrait discipline? If you take some time to reflect on your work, you will know where you excel and where you could use a little help. If you have outside mentors, friends, or even members of your business that you trust and respect, you can ask for their help in identifying your areas of growth.
- **Opportunities and Threats** are forces that are working outside of your business. Is there an opportunity to expand your market, but more competition in those markets? Can you include different types of photography, but maybe you aren't fully educated in that area? Think about what you want to accomplish as a business owner. What conditions in the market are favorable or will help you reach those goals? Opportunities are everywhere. They can be relationships you're building with influencers in your area, a new photographic niche that's becoming popular or even technology advancements. Finally, identify those outside forces that could hinder you. Threats could be an economic downturn, discontinued product items and again, lots of competition in your niche of photography.

Step 2: Describe Your Target Market

Lucky for you, you've probably already created an outline for this. If not, take some time to create your buyer persona. Once you've done that, you can write a short paragraph about your target market. Make sure to detail where (geographically) your audience resides, their age, gender, etc. Identify their wants and the challenges associated with providing solutions for said wants. Make it clear for yourself, and anyone else that might not be fully invested in your business (for example, a freelance marketing assistant).

Step 3: Identify Your Marketing Goals

When thinking about your marketing goals, remember that they need to fit into your overall business goals. Also, don't forget to create **S.M.A.R.T.** goals.

S.M.A.R.T. goals

Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely

Begin by defining your goals and making sure they are clear and unambiguous, i.e., set **S**pecific goals. Include specific criteria that allow you to measure your progress toward the accomplishment of your goal, thereby making your goals **M**easurable. Next, make sure your goals are **A**chievable. Your goals need to be attainable and not impossible to achieve. Work to set **R**ealistic goals that are within reach and relevant to your marketing strategy. And last but not least, make your goals **T**imely. Set out with a clearly defined timeline that includes a start date and a target date—instill urgency!

So, what are your studio's goals? Do you want to increase your bottom dollar? Expand the reach of your business? Inform clients about your new products and services? Make a list of your goals, from most important to least important, and attack each goal individually. Make sure you are clear about each goal, so you have a clear path on how to effectively reach it.

Step 4: Decide on the Marketing Strategies You'll Use

Your buyer persona will again help you in this area. Many of these strategies will be based solely off of age. Does your audience relate to Facebook, or are they more Instagram savvy? Would your target audience pick up a magazine, or would they be more likely to see a sign at the local coffee shop? By knowing the likes and recreation habits of your target audience, you can decide the best and most effective outlets for your message.

The most effective strategies will be multilevel. What do you mean multilevel? Multilevel refers to engaging your potential client at every moment of their buying journey. You have probably made a decision about a big purchase before. Did you dive in and buy, let's say, the first car you came across? No, you probably did your research, picked your favorite kind, and then shopped your options. That's exactly what your potential clients are doing.

For example, maybe a potential client does a Google search for photographers in their area. There's your first outreach opportunity. Maybe that potential client checks out your website, but then leaves to run an errand and forgets about their family portrait. Maybe the next thing they do is surf Facebook. Boom! There's your next opportunity to reach out. Maybe later that night your client goes to the local coffee shop to get a late night mochaccino. Did you remember to hang up a flyer there?

Think about all the paths that your buyer persona might take during their buying journey and plan accordingly.

Step 5: Set a Budget

It's time to set some money aside. If you run the finances, make sure that you are putting the appropriate amount aside to achieve your marketing goals. Also, make sure you aren't setting too much aside in order to protect your profits. If you're a little nervous about creating a budget, the [Square One tool](#) is a great resource to get you on the confident budgeting track.

If you're the creative, and you have a partner or a financial advisor, they may be a huge help in this area. Talk over your plan with that person, and let them know your intent and your ideas on how much you might need for running a marketing campaign.

If you're just starting out, this may mean that you'll need to incur some costs up front. In this case, you should monitor your spending and still try to keep to a budget. If you see that some things are proving to be expensive with not much **return on your investment** (ROI), that's when you start adjusting your plan. Don't worry about keeping a hard line on the original plan; it should always be flexible and serve your business needs.



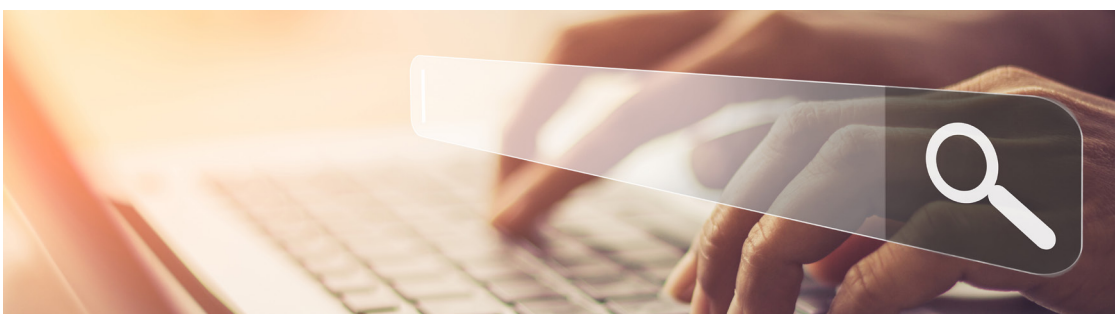
You may have a general idea of SEO (Search Engine Optimization). Let's break it down to exactly how it works and what you can do to optimize your websites for search engines—and ultimately get more clients from improved search results.

Top Level Search Engine Marketing Factors

You probably know of some widely used search engines like Google.com, Yahoo.com, and Bing.com. These sites decide what rank to give to your website amongst the other photography businesses out there in the world and this directly impacts how far up your studio's name appears in a search results page. How they do that ranking is a more involved process that you'll want to learn to help you improve your own SEO ranking.

Search engines sort the search results they serve based off a few different factors:

- **Your Content**
Does your content match the search of your potential client?
- **Site Structure and Internal Links**
Is it user friendly, and do all your links work?
- **Your Geographical Location**
Are you in or nearby the city where the client is looking for photography?
- **Your Mobile Optimization**
Is your site easy to use on a mobile device (phone, tablet, e-reader, etc.)?
- **Your Site Loading Time**
How long does it take for your site to load its content (photos, videos, etc.)?
- **Your Site's Social Signals**
Are you getting traffic from social media platforms?



Search engines have “bots” or “crawlers” that visit websites and check each of the items above. Once they have tested those items they then compare your website to other similar websites. Your ranking will depend on how you fare against those sites, which is why it’s imperative that you make sure each item is performing at its best.

Improve Your Ranking with Authority & Relevance

Google.com, Yahoo.com, and Bing.com all use two common criteria within the algorithm used to produce search results. And while they all evaluate them differently, there are two key factors for you to understand as they will help with your optimization:

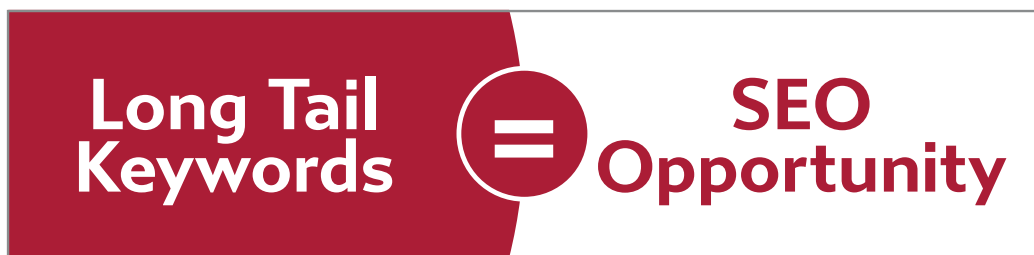
- **Authority**—A website shows its level of credibility based off how many links tie it to other websites. This is what search engines call the level of ‘online authority’ and this is where you look to other sites and influencers to help raise your site’s authority. When a search engine finds your site through an outside link, it’s showing it that you have enough authority that other people/sites trust your content. Beware though, it’s not the quantity of links that helps you but their quality. For example, a direct link from PPA.com would fare better than Janedoephotography.net.
- **Relevance**—The content on your site must be relevant to photography or some version of your expertise (portraiture, wedding, etc.) in order to rank higher. That means you’ll need to use keywords that speak directly to what your photography business offers to your prospective clients. It’s not just the words on your landing pages that you’ll need to keep an eye on, though. You’ll also want to make sure that your URLs and text formatting are shouting about your business. For example, when PPA wanted to tell you how insurance could help protect photographers, then we created the link [PPA.com/BeMoreProtected](https://www.ppa.com/BeMoreProtected). Likewise, to emphasize the content relevance of a blog post, it will earn you more SEO brownie points if you embed keywords in the headlines of your blog post, and it is even better yet if you **bold keyword-related phrases**. Make sure to keep those small things in mind when creating any kind of content, as they make a large difference to the search engines that crawl your site.

Keywords

When someone does a search, they generally type in a few keywords. For instance, photographer or family portraits in [location]. These **keywords are important to make sure you are attracting quality leads**. Of course, it would be amazing to rank #1 for photographer, but if you're not Wikipedia, that's not likely to happen. That's why long tail keywords have become more important than ever to your SEO strategy. You'll need keyword lists in order to run search ads, but it's also important to think about these keywords when creating content for your site.

Remember, those search engine results pages are looking for relevant and authoritative information to improve your ranking. So you will want to include information and keywords that are **specific to your specialty and locale**. Rather than just "portrait studio," maybe you'll want to include long tail keywords like "outdoor family photography in [city]" or "high school senior photography in [area]," etc.

Most photographers overlook the power and importance of long tail keywords. Getting by on the basic short tail keyword is fast and takes little to no research. So, of course, we want to get things done quick and easy. However, if you take that route you're missing out on a huge opportunity. Optimizing for long tail keywords will make your site stand out over the quick solution photographers.



Content is King

If you know or have even met anyone in the online marketing world, we can guarantee they've said this at least a thousand times (and you've probably heard it at least once). Content is King. Gone are the days of dial up and Encyclopedia Britannica door-to-door salesmanship. People use the internet daily for work and for pleasure. Hungry minds are looking for education, news, social interactions, and of course, information gathering and shopping. A trusted website is going to capture those potential clients ahead of any bells and whistles that you can sound off.

This means you need more than your homepage and gallery. You need to **include content** on your website **that is engaging and valuable**. And that content has to be 'relevant' to the searches of your potential clients. So, how do you easily add this essential content to your site? Through blogging. Having a regular blog with new and continuing content will not only delight clients looking for an added value to a site visit, but it also helps improve your search ranking.

Even if writing isn't your strong suit, blogging is a good way to relate to your clients, make you a real human being, and again help with your rankings. We do recommend having someone proof read for you if the copy is more than a couple of paragraphs long, but you are in the visual business! Share day-in-the-life-content that gives your readers and viewers a look behind the scenes at the types of locations and clients you interact with.

Here are a few tips and ideas for blog content:

- **Added Value** - Don't just write a bunch of words because you can. Think about what would really add value for your clients and go nuts! (How to prepare for a session, organizing the family for the portrait, best grooming tips for your puppy's first photo, what not to wear and why, etc.)



- **Compare**—Look at the top 10 photography sites that you currently aspire to rank with. Take a look at how they used your keywords (frequency, position, etc.) and compare that to your current content.
- **Be Engaging**—A white page with black text is going to put most everyone to sleep. Make sure that you include photos, graphics or videos, if you can, but also remember to use bullet points and headlines (ahem, look at this eBook) to help organize the content and guide the reader through your content.
- **Get to the Point**—along with the age of super-fast internet, also comes people's super-short attention spans. Use enough detail to get your point across, but also get to the point quickly.
- **Have Fun**—If you're not having fun with your content, it will show. People enjoy a good personal, conversational tone, and they will read more if they feel that in your words. From Throwback Thursdays #TBT, behind the scenes, bloopers or plain fun shots, people will get to know you better, making them come to like you more each time you make them smile, so have fun with them!

Stay Ahead of the SEO Game

All search engines and their bots are getting more and more complex because they're trying to think more and more like humans would think by using artificial intelligence to help answer your online searches. So rather than changing your site and content constantly to try and improve your ranking, put your hard work into the relevance of the content you create. That's what artificial intelligence will be looking for as well.

As you learn more about optimization and search engines, you'll start reaching that perfect client because you will be more liked by social media platforms, you'll have more visitors on your website, and more followers on your blog. These are indicators that your online presence as a photographer is trustworthy (relating to your online authority) and likeable (relating to the relevance of the content you push online). Remember: people that like your brand will do business with you. When search engines like Google, Bing, and Yahoo see your website is trusted and relevant to photographers in your area, your position in the search ranking will improve.

CREATE CONTENT THAT STANDS OUT

A very important part of any marketing plan or strategy is content creation. Content creation is the basis of getting information about your photography brand out into the world.

It's also about creating educational, informational, or just plain fun pieces for your potential client base to read or view. When you engage people with your content, you are one step further in showing them how your photography services can be beneficial to them.

Now, content does not only refer to a blog on your website. It refers to the entirety of information that you are posting either on your website, your social media platforms and anywhere else you or your content might be featured. With that said, there is a multitude of options for you to choose from. If this is your first go at it, start simple.

Then decide what your business has the capacity for, and venture out with content that you feel comfortable testing.

If you've already created your marketing plan, then you've probably already created your buyer persona and set a goal for what you want your marketing to achieve (website visits, conversions, social shares, etc.). So we're going to skip directly to performing a content audit. A content audit is essentially research of the content you currently have (website, blog, social media, videos, etc.) and how it's performing for you. As in how many views, clicks, and shares you have seen for each item. There are plenty of tools out there that can help you take a deep dive, just find the one that works for you. Once you know what's working and what's not, you can focus on the content that really brings your target audience to your website.

Once you've done that, you can start your content marketing plan.

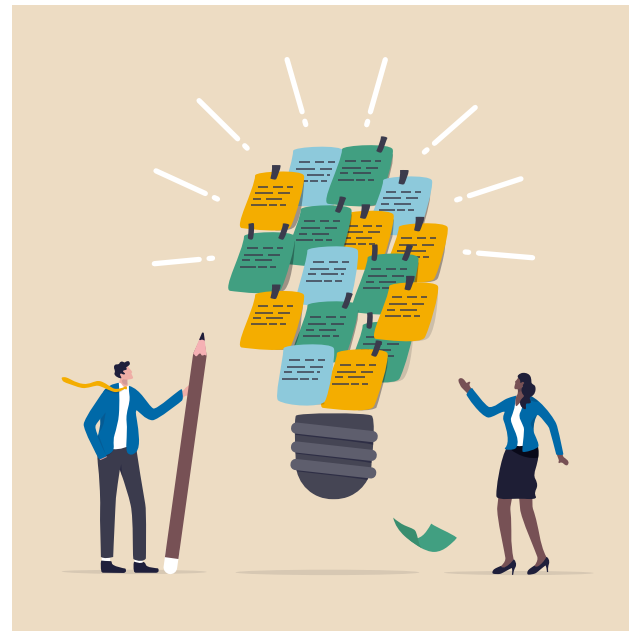


Determine the Content that You Want To Create

Ideally, you're going to choose the pieces that performed the best in your content audit. If you're just starting up, then decide what you have the capacity for, and what you think your target audience might best engage with. Again, you have so many options, so pick what works for you. Currently, video is trending above most other pieces of content, so if you have the equipment and the time, making videos can be a major help. If you're not entirely sure where to begin with video, try a simple tool to get you off the ground. Or research your own options for your level of skill in video production.

Brainstorm Content Ideas

You may want to get a few creative minds together to discuss topics that might be best suited for your photography business. Think of things that will contain keywords, and ideas that relate directly to what you do. For instance, wedding photography: a blog about best photo practices, a social media post about favorite bride looks you've photographed, a short video of you photographing a wedding, etc. Once you've exhausted your brain, there are also additional tools out there to help.



Create a Content Management System

This can be as simple as creating a calendar, a process, and a review, which can be done with spreadsheets. You can also purchase tools to help with this item, but we've found that it's just as easy to create a system on your own that works for you. Make sure you set up a calendar to not only keep yourself organized but to be able to get an overview of what you're putting out and how often. Your process can be customized to what works for you and your studio. Are you the one posting content? Do you have a studio manager that likes to post on social media for you? Figure out who will create what content, and who will post it to your platforms. And since you have a calendar, you can periodically go back to see what you posted, and then review how engaging that content was. So you're constantly doing check-ins or smaller content audits.

Publish Content and Test

You've done all the planning, and now it's time to publish. Keeping up with your calendar can ensure that you are creating content on a regular basis to keep potential clients engaged. If you let your content fizzle out, it's likely that they'll lose interest, or that Google won't be finding you to increase your ranking on its search platform. Publish what you can, when you can, and watch your marketing and branding efforts soar!

Any content marketing strategy is all about testing, adapting/editing, republishing, and testing again.

Now would be a good time to mention the value of A/B testing in your marketing. A/B testing essentially allows you to experiment with two or more variants of a page that are shown to users at random. These different versions of your content can be shown on a web page, app, email, and so on. Statistical analysis is used to determine which of the variations performed better for your given conversion goal. Actions that you want your customers to take are called conversion actions, and when grouped together, these related categories form conversion goals. Overall, A/B testing is an excellent way to compare the results of different variants to find the most successful version.

Keep an eye on your content, figure out what is really speaking to your potential client, and optimize that content to reach more people. Just like anything, practice makes perfect. So the more you post and test, the better you will become at creating just the right content for your clients.

This next chapter on how to improve marketing for your photography business will probably be the densest to digest. Get ready to learn how to improve marketing for your photography business so you can measure and perfect your marketing tactics.

Now, it's time to see how the results of your marketing campaign measure up against the goals you set for your business. What you learn from these steps will guide your marketing strategy.

You may be looking to dive right into SEO and ROI. In which case, let's get down to the brass tacks. Now, let's talk about measuring your marketing investments and what's next (i.e. Are you investing in the right tactics?).

To measure your ROI, you'll need some help with the whole measuring thing. There are a few platforms you can use for this, but the most comprehensive and totally FREE option is Google Analytics (or its competitors, but why not use a free tool that is the backbone of all these other paid solutions?!).

Analytics

In plain terms, your **website's analytics** give you metrics that help you determine how your site is performing. They show you how many visitors, to which pages, for how long, etc. They can give you detailed information about your visitors such as their geographic location (which is incredibly helpful if you're a local photographer looking to engage clients near you). This will ultimately lead to a strategy to help optimize your site for search engines (or SEO).

Google Analytics will also show you where visitors come from. This is the biggest indicator of how your ads are performing. Are they coming from a specific ad? Or are they coming organically through a search engine?

This all happens through something called the Google Analytics Tracking Code. In simple terms, this code is a snippet of JavaScript that sends data traffic related to your website visitor sessions back to Google Analytics. With this information, you can gauge ad performance (how many people are visiting the site from your ad), conversions (how many people are doing a specified task on your site), and it will add cookies to a visitor so that you can track how many times they visit your site.

Setting up analytics can be a little complicated, but that's why Google has created a step-by-step video to help you through the process. The good news is that once this is done, you're well on your way to getting incredibly valuable information to help market your business. Luckily the whole program is set up to help the business-focused and not the techies. So, if tech isn't your strong suit, have no fear! You can do this!

Return on Investment (ROI)

Now that you can track so many different things, it's time **to start measuring your ROI. First, decide what you consider a good return.** Is it a client booking? Is it someone visiting your site? Is it a client booking a second session? Because we're essentially starting from the beginning, let's assume that you are marketing your business for the first time. You can't expect people to just throw money at you upon first glance of your business on social media. However, you can measure whether you're engaging people enough to at least come have a look at your website.

So, let's call a website visit a good return (which is also referred to as your conversion). If you spent \$20 on an ad and got 100 website visits, do you think that's a decent ROI? It could be, but you won't really know until you repeat this process several times over. Because what is our favorite word in marketing? Testing, of course!

Test, Test, Test!

Over time, you'll be able to see if that number goes up or down. You can test to see if changing the ad copy makes a difference. Or perhaps changing the image makes a difference.

Also, don't forget that your time is very valuable. As a business owner, you may be reluctant to put a price tag on your time, but **time is value, value is cost, cost is a part of measuring ROI.** So, even if you're not spending money on an ad, writing a blog has an hourly cost; be sure to figure that in when evaluating your investment.

This is where you get to **use your creative side.** You get to try different things, make creative decisions on what you think would appeal to your target audience, even get creative with the images you use. As an artist and a business owner, this part of marketing strategy is left to your creative genius.

We've Got Your Back

If you really want to nerd out on the ROI investigation, there are some other sites that break it down with higher level terms. If you need help with the math this [Forbes article](#) walks you through the steps and even provides a useful ROI calculator.

In the end, it's all up to you. It's your business; it's what is important to you. Just like anything else in life, **set up a goal for yourself, and track how you're getting there.** And remember, if you need help along the way, PPA is here for you! So, if you're not a member yet, consider doing something good for your photography career and join!

Check out all the benefits you'd get if you were already a part of this 34,000+ member-strong non-profit photography association!



Want to dive deeper into marketing and content creation strategies?

PPA members have access to comprehensive curriculums, marketing eBooks, webinars, workshops, and more! Learn more about the benefits of PPA membership today.

[PPA.com](https://www.ppa.com)

