

Walking Away:

Leaving newspapers and building
your own photography business

Lane Hickenbottom

www.laneweddings.com

lane@laneweddings.com

<http://laneweddings.com/downloads/nnpa.pdf>

Overview

- Why I chose to walk away.
- The present situation.
- Goals.
- Starting business.
- Getting business.
 - Build your web presence
- Keeping business.
- Review

Disclaimer

- My presentation is based on what works for me. It may not be consistent with “best practices”.
- If you prefer a “foolproof system” then you learn awesome skills at richphotographer.com



Why did I chose to walk away?



The Present Situation

- Newspapers are closing doors and reducing staff at a historic rate.
- Staff positions poorly paid; unsecure
- Editorial freelance rates are even worse.

The Present Situation

- JournalismJobs.com has 4 PJ jobs listed
 - Merced, Cal.; Rocky Mount, N.C.; Emporia, Kan.; Sulphur Springs, Tex.
 - 145 newspaper jobs listed nationwide (reporters, editors, etc)
- Monster.com has 330 “photojournalist” jobs posted!!!!
 - The employer for every single one: U.S. Navy
- 'J' schools pumped out 49,930 students with bachelor's degrees and 3,780 with master's degrees in the spring of 2007. Admissions are growing. -Pointer

Goals

(they really are important)

Short term goal:

- Not to move back in with parents

Long term goal:

- Not to move back in with children.

Goals expanded

- **Make fist-fulls of MAD CASH!!!**
 - Actually only wanted a modest living
 - Be able to support & provide for my family
- **Have flexibility in my schedule**
- **Control my own destiny**
- **Shoot less, shoot better, enjoy photography**
- **Create a body of work I can be proud of.**

Starting a photography business.

Starting Business: first step

- Define yourself.

- What do you want to offer? What do you want to shoot? Who do you want to sell to? What do you call yourself? What is practical? What is achievable?

- Redefine yourself.

- Old you: photographer
- New you: Owner, CEO, CFO, sales manager, marketing manager, advertising manager, equipment manager, book keeper, designer, public relations manager, copy writer, receptionist, custodian, etc., etc., etc.
- Oh yeah, and sometimes you'll be a photographer, too.

- Write a business plan.

- Can be quite simple, can be quite complex. Goal is to focus your efforts.
- If you need financing, needs to be more formal
 - Details include summary; market analysis; company description; organization and management, marketing and sales management, service or product line, funding request, financials, etc. <http://www.sba.gov> Is a great resource.

Starting Business: get legal.

- Need a business name
 - Use your name for sole proprietorship
 - S-corp or LLC have higher start-up costs/more complicated but protect assets
 - Other names can be DBAs (i.e. Lane Hickenbottom DBA Lane Weddings)
- File for Employer ID Number (EIN) with IRS
 - <https://sa2.www4.irs.gov/modiein/individual/index.jsp>
- Use EIN to register with state dept. of revenue
 - http://www.revenue.state.ne.us/business/bus_regist.html
 - Use and sales tax guide for photographers:
<http://www.revenue.state.ne.us/info/6-298.pdf>
- That's it!

Starting Business: next steps.

- Find a mentor
- Get a business bank account
 - All revenues and expenses should go through your biz account(s)
- Start good record-keeping practices right away.
 - Okay, so this presentation isn't completely based on “what works for me.”
 - Industry standard: Quickbooks software by Intuit.
 - Hire an accountant to set it up. Seriously.

Starting Business: next steps.

- **Get insured!**

- Health Insurance tip: Become a member of Farm Bureau of your state <http://www.nefb.org/>, which qualifies you to purchase reasonable Blue Cross/Blue Shield plans. Annual membership is \$50. Deduct it.
- Homeowners/renters insurance does NOT protect professional equipment; need a separate business policy.
- Business policies do NOT protect your equipment when off your property; need separate inland-marine policy.
- Most insurance companies do NOT cover “errors and omissions”. This is the number one reason people join PPA (<http://www.ppa.com/>).

- **Get legal documents in order.**

- Contracts, Model releases, Licensing statements for your clients if you give files.
- Contract law is governed by state laws. That book of contracts you purchased might not work in Nebraska. Do you need a lawyer to look your contract over?

Starting Business: next steps.

- Get Geared!

- My kit:

- (2) Canon EOS 5D camera bodies
 - Canon D40 camera body
 - 70-200 f/2.8 IS lens
 - 16-35 f/2.8 lens
 - 24-85 f/3.5-4.5 lens
 - 85 f/1.8 lens
 - (2) Canon 580 ex2 flashes
 - (2) Alien Bees 800 WS lights/stands/modifiers
 - (4) Pocket Wizard transceivers
 - Misc items

- If you are going to go pro, you need backup equipment.

Starting Business: next steps.

- **Get Geeked!**

- If you are shooting weddings, you'll need computer power and software to support your workflow. You'll also need color management soft/hardware.
- My list of software essentials:
 - Photoshop
 - Photoshop Lightroom
 - PhotoMechanic
 - Dreamweaver
 - InDesign
 - Quickbooks
 - MemoriesOnTV (for creating DVD slideshows—lots of alternatives out there.)
 - FTP client
 - OpenOffice
 - Itunes
 - Audacity
 - Firefox
- **CREATE COPIOUS, COMPREHENSIVE BACKUP METHODS!!!**

Starting Business: next steps.

- Set up shop.

- You'll probably start in true PJ-style: home office and do all your shooting on location.
- You can deduct up to 25% of your various home expenses on your home office...refer to your accountant.
- Get organized. Create systems.
 - I have a separate hanging file folder for each of my wedding clients
 - I have a dry-erase board charting my client jobs against my workflow
 - I have a redundant Google Calendar with all my upcoming weddings.
- Don't underestimate your annual spend here. Invest in OfficeMax stock.

Getting business

Getting business

Truth: There are more want-to-be-photographers than there are jobs to support us all.

Getting business

Truth: There are more want-to-be-photographers than there are jobs to support us all.

So sustainable business will not just fall into your lap!

Getting business: my humble beginnings

- 2006: Shot 1 wedding, 1 engagement session
- From those 2 shoots I created the following:
 - \$45 – (3) large prints
 - \$90 – (3) Shutterfly.com books
 - \$50 – (1) average looking website that showcased above-average looking galleries of a “featured” wedding and a “featured” engagement session.
- Jan 2007: Took these items and purchased a table (\$300) at a bridal show.
- Through Dec 2007: Shot six more weddings at \$2k each and secured \$1k retainers for eight 2008 weddings, generating ~\$19k to invest in my business.
- March 2008: quit job with 15 weddings lined up.
 - Equates to roughly \$7k in retainers and ~\$20k in contracted work lined up

Getting business: my humble beginnings

- 2007 typical daily ritual:
 - 7:30am Sarah went to work.
 - 8am I'd get up with Owen
 - 10:30am Owen would take 1st nap, I would work on business building
 - 12:30pm get Owen up, take him to daycare, get to work by 1pm
 - 5:00pm Sarah picks up Owen, goes home.
 - 9:30pm Sarah goes to bed
 - 10:00 I come home from work, start business building.
 - 1am go to bed
- Daily time spent:
 - With Owen: 3 hours
 - Working at newspaper: 8 hours
 - Working on business building: 5 hours
 - Eating: 1 hour
 - Sleeping: 7 hours
 - With Sarah: 0 hours

Getting business

- What do I mean by business building?
 - Creating work flows
 - Creating a logo
 - Researching Advertising
 - Creating marketing and advertising pieces
 - Brochures
 - Postcards
 - Stationary
 - ads
 - Submitting your name to online directories
 - SEO
 - Creating/maintaining web site
 - Educating yourself
 - Completing the “Starting business” steps you skipped
 - Networking
 - Designing sample albums
 - Choosing album printing vendor
 - Choosing a professional lab
 - Creating and choosing products

Getting business

EVERY decision takes an investment in time.

Getting business

- How do I get customers?
 - Good methods:
 - Advertising
 - Big surprise: newspaper advertising sucks.
 - Here's a shocker: so does Yellow Pages
 - Google adwords
 - Facebook ads
 - Local Bridal Magazines
 - Focus on the clients you want!
 - Marketing
 - Postcards
 - Email spams
 - Bridal Shows
 - Showing materials at Bridal stores
 - Create business cards. Hand 'em out!
 - Focus on the clients you want!

Getting business

- How do I get customers?
 - Better methods:
 - Online
 - Have a sexy website—sooo important!
 - If I search, will I find you? SEO.
 - Local vendor listings
 - Focus on the clients you want!
 - Networking
 - Building relationships is key to success
 - When somebody wants to book me for a date that I'm booked, I refer them to a friend. They return the favor.
 - Give photos to other vendors.
 - Encourage them to use them
 - Include your logo on photo or require a photo credit

Getting business

Priority number one:

Establish a bitchin' online presence.

Web presence: Get sexy.

Step 1: site design

It's not enough for your website to look good.

It has to look amazing

(in other words, don't design your own)

Web presence: Get sexy.

Here are some places to shop for web templates:

- <http://www.bigfolio.com>
- <http://creativemotiondesign.com/>
- <http://www.winkletwebdesign.com/>
- <http://www.flashpalette.com/>
- <http://www.pepfx.com/>
- <http://www.livebooks.com/>
- <http://www.evrium.com/>
- <http://www.3point7designs.com/>
- <http://www.recycledhuman.com>
- <http://www.icreations.com/>
- <http://www.photoidentities.com/>

Most of these companies create the site design and have a back end that allows you to easily add/maintain the content of your site.

Web presence: get found

- **Submit your site to wedding vendor sites**
 - Many are free, others cost only a little
 - Site submission improves your SERP placement (Search Engine Results Page)
- **Get found on Google**
 - Worthless: I place on top with search for: “Lane Hickenbottom”
 - Worthy: I place on top with search for: “Nebraska Wedding Photographer”

Web presence: get found

- SEO is a marathon, not a sprint.
- SEO tips
 - Pick what keywords you want to focus on
 - Use keywords in your title tag, everywhere else.
 - Content is king
 - Flash: sexy to humans, a mystery to Google
 - Consider creating a mirrored, HTML site with captions. This one can be ugly.
 - Create a splash page
 - Blog! Blog! Blog!

Web presence: get found

- SEO tips (cont.)
 - Get inbound links
 - Submit to directories
 - General business directories
 - Photography directories
 - Artist directories
 - Ask friends to blog about you or add you to their links page.
 - Comment on blogs
 - Anchor text is important
 - Bad: Click [here](#) to go to my home page
 - Good: Here is my [youth sports photography](#) page

Web presence: get found

- SEO tips (cont.)
 - Shameless plug:
 - If you benefit from this presentation, you might want to blog the following: “Saturday I heard an amazing presentation by [Omaha wedding photographer Lane Hickenbottom](#) about how to [build a photography business](#).”
 - First link to <http://laneweddings.com>
 - Second link to <http://laneweddings.com/downloads/nnpa.pdf>

Web presence: get found

- SEO tips (cont.)

- Blogging practices

- Blogs provide dynamic, changing content, which Google loves.
 - Use your target keywords whenever you get a chance.
 - Write for both human audience and Google bot.
 - Include proper names of places where you are shooting.
 - Include hyperlinks to other businesses you are writing about
 - Save images as Joslyn_Wedding.jpg, not IMG_52018.jpg.
 - Use alt tags on images.
 - Blog title names carry more weight than text (use keywords)
 - **Blog should be hosted on your site!**
 - Remember linking from directories? Also link blog from blog directories.

Web presence: get found

- SEO tips (cont.)
 - Setup Google Analytics Account
 - www.google.com/analytics/
 - Use Google Webmaster Tools
 - www.google.com/webmasters/tools/
- Many other great recourses on the web.

Keeping Business

Keeping Business

Two keys to staying in business:

1: be profitable

2: secure customer satisfaction

Keeping Business

- Keys to being profitable
 - Must understand your cost of doing business
 - NPPA Cost of Doing Business Calculator
http://www.nppa.org/professional_development/business_practices/cdb/index.html
 - Keep costs down
 - Stay focused on what you provide
 - Don't forget to pay yourself
 - Charge for things as if you outsourced them

Keeping Business

- Keys to customer satisfaction
 - Provide quality products
 - Build, maintain customer relations
 - Social networking
 - Quick tip:
 - Become Facebook friends with your clients
 - Upload their images, tag them with their names
 - All their friends will be able to see their photos (with your logo on them)
 - Great for wedding groups and senior photos
 - Try to loose the word, “no” from your vocabulary.
 - Instead use, “this is what it will cost:_____”

Keeping Business

What are quality products?

Keeping Business

First and foremost they are products your customers can not readily get themselves.

(Don't use shutterfly.com or iPhoto books)

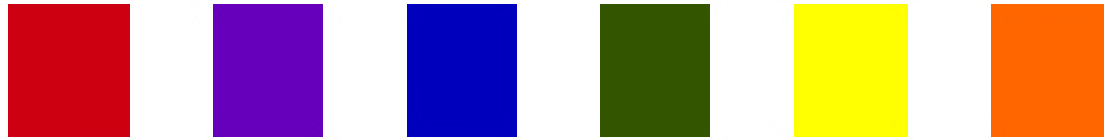
Keeping Business

Pick your favorite 3 favorite shades:



Keeping Business

Pick your favorite 3 favorite shades:



Keeping Business

The first color grid is what your customers see when you provide a shoot-and-burn.

If you shoot 2000 frames during your coverage, do you want them focusing on the 1900 outtakes?

Keeping Business

NO!

Show them the 100 kick-ass photos!

(Sure you can still provide the other 1900, and you might want to. Just draw the focus away from them and towards the winners. They hired you for your best photos, right?)

Keeping Business

Shoot-n-burns are great for quick, easy cash.

They do not generally result in referrals

Keeping Business

Quality Products, cont.

- Push amazing-looking products their friends and family will envy them for.
 - Albums on their coffee tables
 - Huge canvas prints over their fireplace
 - **You can't sell what you don't show.**

Q: “Oh my gosh, that photo is FABULOUS! Who was your photographer?”

A: “We hired Lane Weddings. He was a little higher-priced but worth it!”

Keeping Business

Build, maintain customer relations

- I try to have engagement sessions with every one of my wedding clients.
 - But still charge for them or it loses value.
 - Gives me a couple hours alone with them.
 - Builds trust, confidence before the wedding date.
 - After seeing e-photos, mothers “get it” and become your fans.
- Become Facebook friends.
- RSS their blog feeds.
- Celebrate their lives! Send cards in the mail:
 - New home? Here's a 16x20 for your walls!
 - Expecting a baby? Here's a free baby portrait session!
 - Happy anniversary!

Keeping Business

Build, maintain customer relations (cont.)

It's a lot easier (and more affordable) to get repeat business and referral business from your current customers than to try to find new customers.

Treat them well and they'll treat you well.

Snappy Overview

All of this takes a huge investment of time, (I haven't even talked about the amount of time spent actually DOING the job).

And money.

It's not just Saturdays, burn a disk and send it in the mail.

Goals revisited

- 2009 typical daily ritual:
 - 6:30am Sarah gets up
 - 7:30am Owen gets up
 - 8:00am I get up, enjoy breakfast with the family, get ready
 - 9:15ish I go to the office
 - 12:30pm I come home for family lunch time.
 - 2:00pm I go back to office
 - 6:00ish I come home and spend time with family.
 - 9:00 Owen goes to bed
 - 10:00 Sarah goes to sleep, I surf web, do SEO, watch SportsCenter, whatever
 - 12:30 I go to bed.
- Daily time spent:
 - With Owen: 5 hours
 - Working 8 hours, plus nighttime tinkering time
 - Sleeping: 7.5 hours
 - With Sarah: 6 hours

Goals revisited.

- Be able to support & provide for my family
 - Increased my income.
 - I'm physically there for them more of the time.
 - Created an opportunity for my wife to care for our children.

Goals revisited.

- Have flexibility in my schedule
 - About 20-25 Saturdays a year have rigid schedule
 - Work hours are long, but come with incredible flexibility.
 - Haven't missed a holiday, doctor's appointment since 2007.
 - Took 3 or 4 weeks of vacation in 2008

Goals revisited.

- Control my own destiny
 - The harder I work, the more money I can make
 - I can refuse work.
 - When I go into the office Monday there is a zero percent chance I get a pink slip.

Goals revisited.

- Shoot less, shoot better, enjoy photography
 - Was shooting 3-4 assignments daily
 - Frequently just “cranked it out”
 - Now I shoot between 0 and 4 assignments weekly.
 - Every shoot becomes important.
 - Every shoot I enjoy.

Goals revisited.

- Create a body of work I can be proud of.
 - More than ever!

Conclusion

It's well worth the effort!

Web resources

- Best \$129 I spend each year for educating myself. Great for wedding or portrait photographers:
 - <http://www.digitalweddingforum.com>
- Business resources:
 - <http://sba.gov/>
 - <http://www.score.org>
- You can find this document here:
 - <http://laneweddings.com/downloads/nnpa.pdf>
- A great place to link to (remember to use Omaha Wedding Photographer in your anchor text):
 - <http://laneweddings.com>