

VANESSA JOY  
E D U C A T I O N

**BUILDING AND  
MARKETING  
YOUR WEDDING  
BUSINESS**

*By Vanessa Joy*

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PART

1

# Building Your Business



## STEP 01

# DON'T JUST QUIT! WORK AT BOTH AT FIRST

I won't lie, you'll probably be working nights and weekends during this stage, but that's the "side" part of having a side hustle. What is so valuable about keeping the security of your day job while you work your side hustle is that you get to test out your skills in the marketplace, but you aren't taking on as much risk as those who just quit their jobs and start from scratch.

Your side hustle will teach you a ton of things about what doesn't work and what does work, but the goal is to start growing your income in that side hustle until it is enough to replace all your income from your day job.

Many people are tempted to get the money from their side work and fold it into the monthly budget, but if you are serious about making the leap to full-time work, don't do it! Keep your expenses as close to the same as possible, using your day income. Put all the side hustle money aside. When they are roughly equal, you switch. Start living off the side hustle money and put your whole-day job paycheck into savings.

This sounds ambitious, but remember, you'll prove to yourself that you can make it when you switch to your side hustle full-time. Don't quit yet either, just because you hit a month that is equal to your day job pay. Instead, keep building that savings account until it equals 3-6 months of expenses. Include everything, too. If your current job has nice perks like insurance or a 401(K) match, you'll want to account for that in your savings.

When you've done that, though, it's time to get started!



# The Time to Change Things Up

## The Five Warning Signs

We all get in ruts — creatively and motivationally. We can just plain burn out. Sometimes these ruts are phases that pass or the result of spending far too much time comparing oneself to another colleague’s highlight reels on Facebook and Instagram. After all, as Theodore Roosevelt said, “Comparison is the thief of joy.” We know it’s pretty easy to get into a rut that way. But occasionally these ruts are trying to tell us something, and they shouldn’t just be ignored, swept under the rug, or hidden behind a smile. Sometimes a rut can turn into a pit if you’re not careful.

There are various types of ruts you can fall into that indicate you need a change of pace. Sometimes it’s a small change in your workflow or pricing structure that makes all the difference. Other times it’s a big change that may affect your career on a larger scale. The key is to identify what kind of rut you’re in so that you can work your way out to make a change. Here are five warning signs that you’re due for a change and some ways to figure out what your first steps to change should be.



# Warning Sign - 01

## You're Not Getting Any New Work

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This warning sign can most certainly be an indicator of a number of issues, but primarily this will be because, one, you're not marketing your business well, or two, your work needs improvement.

I admit that marketing in the wedding and event industry can be a tough nut to crack. There's a ton of different ways to market your business, and one marketing plan may work for one business and yet not for another. Regardless, marketing should be at the top of your to-do list. In fact, you should be reinvesting approximately 10% of your profits back into marketing dollars. Finding a marketing plan that works for you involves trial and error, but it's a perfect time when business is slow to try something new to help you get out of the rut.

If your work needs improvement, keep up the continuing education to master your craft, whatever it is in the event industry. Homing in on your specific skills must be an on-going effort, and this demands commitment. Technology keeps changing, and it will force you to adapt or die, but your craft in weddings and events is also an art form that requires constant reevaluation and reflection to continue improving.

If you're not getting new work, it may be because your craftwork simply isn't up to par by consumer standards, at least in terms of what constitutes professional services-grade work that is worth paying for. Be brave enough to ask your friends, clients and colleagues a simple question: "How can my work be improved?" The feedback may be painful to hear, but you and your business skills will grow because of it.



# Organizing for Efficiency

## 5 Apps to Save You Time and Organize Your Life

Work-life balance and managing your time are elemental in running a business. They are, in fact, aspects to master so that you can do more of what you became a business owner to do, shoot. Time-management can become very overwhelming as life continually throws new tasks at us. We must attend to the basic tasks of keeping our business sustainable. Social media requires our attention. And we must spend time cultivating relationships with our clients and potential clients. Finding shortcuts are crucial to managing it all. Below are five apps that I personally use and that I'm sure you will find useful.

### ■ Every Post

Every time I see a new social media site, I simply want to jump off the bridge (but don't have the time to drive to the nearest one!). There's another social media venue for me to keep up with?! As if Pinterest, Google+, Google Pages, Facebook, Facebook Pages, Twitter, and LinkedIn aren't enough. Who can keep up with all of them and still run a business? You can.





## Perfecting Your Workflow

*“It’s digital. You can’t even tell.”*

I remember the switch from film to digital like it was yesterday. We had to convince our clients that shooting with digital cameras wasn’t a quality dip. We’d have them look at wedding albums that had film and digital images in there and ask if they could pick out which was which. I recall being proud when they thought a digital image was a film one.

And look where we are now. I’m about to write an article about your workflow, and it’s all going to be a digital process. If I wrote this 15 years ago, a computer wouldn’t have even come into the equation.

But what does that mean for you? Has life gotten easier? Nope. It has gotten harder. You have more to do and more possible ways to do it (i.e. screw it up). Clients are more demanding than ever, and marketing is a constant effort. So how do you keep up and maintain your sanity too?



# Outsourcing

## 5 Ways to Take 5 Things off Your Plate

The biggest hindrance that I hear business owners say they have when it comes to improving their workflow is that they're too far behind. It seems faster for them to do everything themselves rather than implement new methods that'll completely take the work off their plates.

But what's faster, doing it yourself or having someone else do it for you? Sure there's a learning curve, which is why now is the perfect time to execute new methods of getting work done better and faster than you have in the past. Make the changes now while you're still sunbathing on the shore, so to speak, before the work comes in like a tidal wave, and you're fighting to keep your head above water.

The first step to taking five things off your plate is to sit down and actually think about your workflow. Most business owners don't take the time to do this until they're emotionally compromised by being so overwhelmed with work that they can't process or visualize what needs to be done to make their business



## Preparing Mentally for Outsourcing

Empowering your business to grow  
mentally and financially.



**Kill your darlings**, kill your darlings.

Kill your darlings, even when it breaks your egocentric little scribbler's heart, kill your darlings.

*Stephen King*



There comes a point in our businesses when we simply can't do it all ourselves. For me, that came about three years into my business. Even though I was already outsourcing my post-production work to Evolve Edits (now I'm with Shoot Dot Edit) and my house cleaning to Molly Maids, I still had too much to do and too little time to do it. I needed help to keep my customers happy and, more importantly, keep me happy and less stressed.

Even if you're a control freak, like most creatives are, there are certain things that you're doing that others could do better and faster or that you simply don't want to spend your day doing.

In this chapter, you're going to make a list of the things that stress you out when you do them, things you're not good at, things that you procrastinate doing, or simply things you dread having to do. It could be anything from marketing and accounting to album designing and post-processing. This list will be individual to you.

But this can get tricky mentally. You have to start thinking like a CEO by hiring, training and trusting vendors or employees. This will take time. Good communication and patience are key to any new hire. There is a learning curve on both sides. But stick to it, and you'll watch your business start flowing like a well-oiled machine.



# Wowing Your Clients

In this article you'll learn how to:

- Do less work after a wedding
- Do more marketing that takes less time
- How to make your clients go gaga over you

## “How did you DO this?!”

I remember watching her exclaim with her jaw on the floor shortly before turning to her bridesmaid standing next to her, saying, “Can you believe this?!” She was holding her wedding pictures in her hand before the wedding had even finished. I was her hero, even if for just that moment.

You've probably heard the term “same-day edit” before. Typically, it refers to wedding business owners presenting a slide show of images from the wedding day during the reception. It is that, but it can be so much more.





# Boosting Your Income

## 4 Ways to Make More Money

I've always said the best way to make more money is to work more with the clients you already have. Work with the ones who love your work, trust your judgment and have already given you their business. It's also much less work than going out there and finding new clients. Sometimes just by offering more to existing clients and not even doing full-blown sales sessions, you can make tons. It made me about \$20,000 the first year I gave it a try.

Here are four ways you can make more money without spending any money at all.

### ■ After Sales

Just do them. No excuses. No nothing. The first year I attempted this, I did nothing more than make some price lists and email them to my clients with a little note saying, "Hey, you can add this stuff on if you want." Boom! I had an extra \$20,000 in my bank account after the first year.



# Running Your Studio

## Get Out There: How to Set Up Your Studio for Success When You're Not There

So you own your own business. Congratulations! Owning your own photography studio is just one of the best things out there. You get to make your own hours, be your own boss, live life the way you want. Right? Then why do so many of us have trouble leaving the studio? Why does our chest tighten up at the thought of not checking email every hour? What makes it so impossible to think of ever having a real vacation again?

Many business owners struggle to get outside the studio, whether for a vacation, staycation, or a long weekend. Heck, even to do something for work, like attend ShutterFest or photograph a destination wedding, can be a logistical nightmare.

It doesn't have to be. I recently spent six weeks in Brazil completely away from my studio, and aside from the typical readjustment back into life in the





# Cultivating Your Support Network

## Make Friends, Friends: The Networking Secrets of Business

It's amazing to me that the wedding and event industry continually develops and adapts. I'm so proud to be a part of such an incredible community and to have the privilege of watching it grow. In 2020, I would even say it was a privilege being a part of the event industry as it fell and suffered due to COVID-19, because so much good came from that when you look at the ways we all built each other up during such a trying time.

The secret to all business is this: It's about relationships. The good ones and, yes, even the bad ones. The bad ones drive and motivate us to do things like start a magazine. The good ones encourage and support us like friends who help us start literally from the ground up (like the hotel ballroom floor Sal and I sat on when he told me his idea and I pledged my support).



# Long-Term Plans

## ■ How Will You Be Better This Year?

At the end of every year we reflect on our goals for the upcoming year. We have tons of hope for the coming year and lots of forgiveness for the past year's failures. We wonder if we will really change this year. Will this year actually be the year that we see our business double? Or will this be another year where, in the end, you forgive yourself for not really crushing it the way you know you should have, but you'll promise to do better next year?

Friends (and I mean that because only friends tell each other the truth), it is very likely that you will fail miserably at all of the "goals" that you've just set for yourself. Why? Because they're not actually goals, they're dreams. And dreams are nice, but they're not actionable. Dreams are precursors to goals, and goals only happen when you have the balls to make them happen. Make no mistake, success does not fall in your lap.

Success IS NOT a result of the perfect New Year's Resolution. Success comes from hard f-ing work. It's the kind of work that throws a wrench in your personal





PART

2

# Branding Your Business



## **Social vs. Market Norms: How Treating Your Clients and Employees Defines Your Business**

Gift-giving is a great opportunity for wedding and event professionals to show their appreciation and build their business. So what do you get everybody? And what does your gift say to those receiving it? Is there a difference between giving them a monetary bonus or a gift of the same value? Does either set a precedent for how you run your business?

Dan Ariely, author of *Predictably Irrational*, would say it does, and I agree. Think about it. We all know the Starbucks effect, right? Homey atmosphere and okay coffee make a multi-million-dollar company. What's the key there? Or better yet, why is Dunkin' Donuts, whose atmosphere feels a little like a cafeteria (and which thrives on speedy service, especially now with their drive-through), also a wildly successful coffee business?

The truth behind this is found by seeing how a business is run by social or market norms. Social norms are behaviors and practices learned and executed in social environments with friends, family and community. For example, social norm expectations occur when a friend asks you for a reasonable favor, and you, of course, oblige without expecting anything in return. In fact, you're happy to do it. It makes you feel good to help out.





# Getting Back on Track

Everyone knows that it takes hard work to get to the top of your industry. Building a business is no joke, and the amount of work you have to do to get to your desired level of success is often overwhelming. What most people don't talk about is the fact that once you "make it," you have to work just as hard to stay where you are.

So what happens when you've realized just a little too late that you've been falling behind? Whether intentionally or not, slacking off has serious consequences. Making up for lost time can result in double the effort needed to bring things back to life. So what can you do to double-back and get things back on track?

## **Boost Your Social Media Efforts**

Social media is a great tool, but in a way it relies on momentum, and if you've halted that for whatever reason, it takes a lot of energy to get it going again. Go back to the basics with your social media, concentrating on the platform where your audience is primarily. Do you shoot weddings? Then focus on Instagram.



## 4 Steps to Updating Your Social Media Strategy

*“This is SO exciting!!!!”*

That’s what I thought when I first heard about Instagram’s release of Instagram TV, or IGTV. But then I thought of what this really meant. More work. More algorithm changes. More hours of me trying to figure out what the heck I should be doing on Social Media now.

As a wedding professional, social media is one of the strongest marketing and branding tools we have at our disposal. It’s also the most time-consuming task that takes us away from our true passion of running our own creative business. Right now, Instagram is the top priority for wedding businesses in the social media world because that’s where most engaged couples are hanging out digitally these days. So how can you make sure that you’re doing it right when everything keeps changing?



## About The Author



**VANESSA JOY**

Vanessa Joy is a Canon Explorer of Light that has been an influential speaker in the community for over a decade. Starting her photographic journey in 1998, she has since branched into public speaking, earned five college degrees, received a PPA Photographic Craftsman degree, been named a WeddingWire Education Expert, sponsored by Canon, Profoto and Animoto, to name a few. Vanessa has spoken at almost every major convention and platform in the event industry such as CreativeLIVE, The Wedding School, Clickin' Moms, WPPI, ShutterFest, Imaging USA, Wedding MBA, WeddingWire World, MobileBeat, in addition to hosting personal workshops and numerous small business and photography conventions around the globe. Recognized for her talent and more so her business sense, her clients love working with her and industry peers love to learn from her tangible, informative and open-book style of teaching. Find her at [www.VanessaJoy.com](http://www.VanessaJoy.com).

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E D U C A T I O N

**THE ART OF  
WEDDING  
PHOTOGRAPHY**

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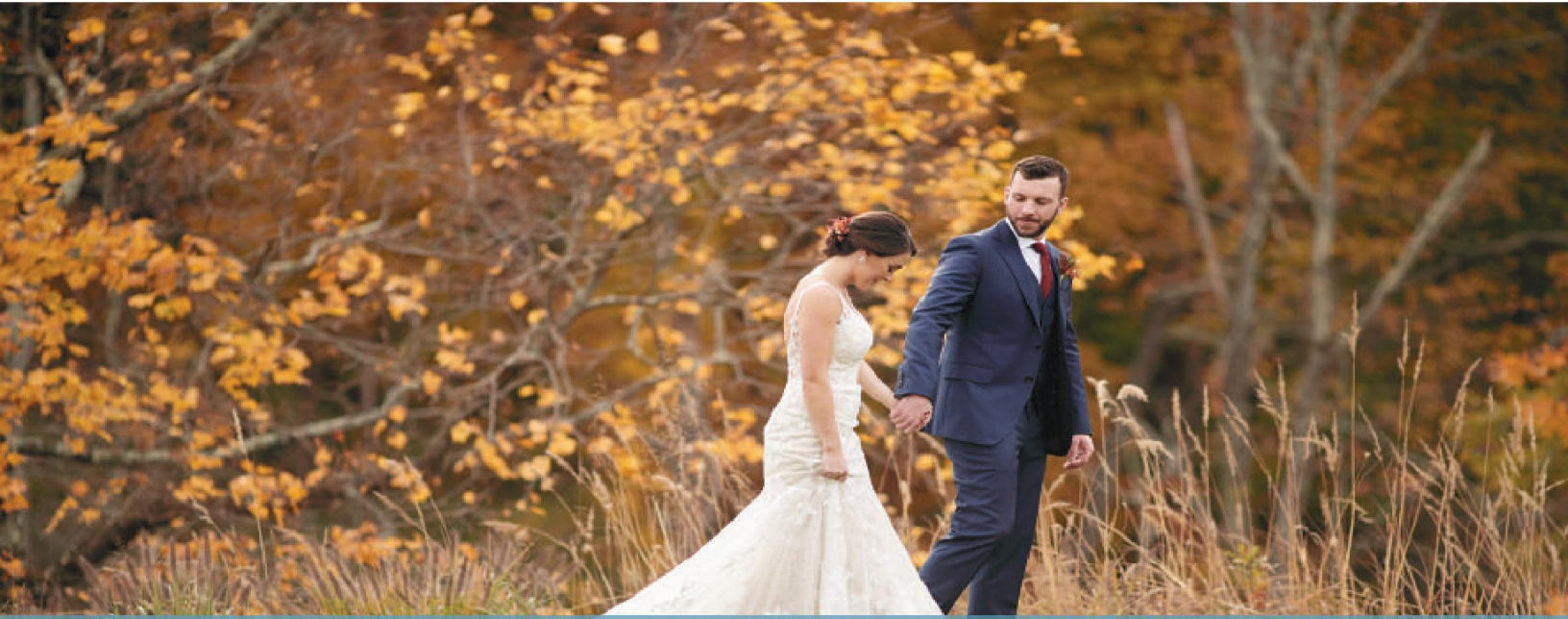


CHAPTER

1

# First Things





# Creative Subjectivity: Rules to Know Before You Break Them

“Art is subjective” is one of the most irritating clichés I know. It doesn’t help anyone. It doesn’t help beginner artists grow. It can be an excuse for artists refusing to take creative criticism. Art is formed through a finely-tuned combination of rules and broken rules that come together in perfect harmony to create something beautiful. In order to break the rules, you need to know them first.

## Rules of Composition:

The Rule of Thirds is probably the first composition rule that a photographer learns. It comes out when their teacher or mentor is trying to get them to stop putting the subject in the middle of the frame, on every frame. The rule of thirds tells us that placing the subject of our photo in one of the thirds (right, left, upper or lower) of the picture is more pleasing to the eye rather than having it go straight through the middle. This picture follows the rule of thirds because the rings are placed in the lower right third of the image.





Sometimes you can break this rule, like in the photo below, and place the subject in the center. This usually works nicely with square images, which we see so much of now, thanks to Instagram.

When you do this, it helps to have leading lines, which tell the viewer where their eyes should travel. In this case the pews make for a good leading line up into the Chuppah.







CHAPTER

2

Posing



# Ten Great Pose Ideas for a Bride and Groom

We've all seen that one pose from wedding photography: the typical bride and groom looking at each other with some natural or architectural backdrop. Half of what we're doing as photographers in a picture like this is just photographing the pretty background scenery. There should be more than just these two people looking at each other in our wedding photography portfolios.

There is nothing wrong with that photograph—honestly, it is usually super popular with the couple themselves. But it gets kinda boring for you and your clients. Show off your abilities as a photographer and get the best shots possible: here are some options for how to offer more and distinctive options to your customers. Switch it up!

## **Open-Shut Shoulders:**

Like the sides of a book, the shoulders of the couple open up in this pose. You can remember the “open-shut” because one set of shoulders is together, the other set is on the outside, apart from each other. This pose keeps things





## Five Second – Shooter Musts

Every year I make it a point to be a second shooter for other photographer's weddings. It helps improve my photography by seeing how other photographers run a wedding, and it gives me a chance to be more creative as well, since I don't have to worry about the staple wedding photos. I love taking the chance not to direct anything and simply be a fly on the wall, free to roam around, find different angles, play with composition and just shoot.

I could go on about the different types of pictures to take, as I do in my e-book *A Photographer's Guide to Second Shooting* which you can get at [bit.ly/joysecondphotog](https://bit.ly/joysecondphotog), but a lot of that comes with experience, and it varies per photographer. We're going to talk about the things you must know and do so that your reputation as a second shooter doesn't become tarnished. Some of these things people only learn after making irreversible mistakes. So let's get these straight before that happens.





CHAPTER

5

**Strategies of Wedding  
Photography**





# Six Ways to Make Your Bride a Knockout

Unless you are in a different business than I am, most of your bridal photography clients aren't going to be supermodels. They won't have years of experience giving the camera what it wants. However, every single one of them wants to look like the best version of herself on her wedding day and in all those gorgeous photos you are taking of her. Here are some of the best ways I've found to help your bride look like a total knockout in her wedding pictures.

## 1. Get her to breathe during serious poses:

Working through facial expressions with brides is hard. There are only so many ways to say "smile" or "look serious," and sometimes this isn't enough. Through trial and error, I've discovered that there is an excellent, super simple way to get a bride to make their best, most angelic or seductive or most them non-smiling face.

Get them to breathe.

To start off, you can ask the bride and bridesmaids to stand in line, with the bride at the center, and face the camera. This is, of course, the “traditional” bridesmaid group shot.



Tip #1:

One way to shoot the bridesmaids from the most flattering angle is to have them turn toward the bride and then lean on their back hip, facing the camera throughout.

This positioning will put their bodies in a slightly softer, “S”-shaped curve, and will also “slim them down,” since they are turned sideways toward the camera lens. No doubt they’ll appreciate the femininity of this pose afterward, as they peruse the wedding album!

Once you’ve taken some photos of the bridesmaids in a traditional line pose, it’s usually a good idea to mix things up a bit. Have the bridesmaids engage with one another so that they are conversing, joking, and laughing. Alternate bridesmaids by pairs so that half of them are facing left, and the other half are facing right. Or have just one or two girls face a different direction from the others.

Finally, mix things up completely! For example, while keeping the bridesmaids in line, have them each take a different pose. If they have flower arrangements, alternate the heights at which they are holding them (top, middle, bottom). This will add some real dynamism to your group photos.



Tip #2:

If the bridesmaids are a little shy in front of the camera, you may need to lighten things up with a joke or two, or you can mimic what you’re looking for in the picture by acting it out yourself, even to ridiculous levels. The bottom line is, do whatever you can to coax a genuine smile out of your subjects.





# Five Tips on How to Photograph Bridesmaids

One of the most crucial aspects of a wedding photoshoot is depicting the bridesmaids in the best possible light. Not only do you want to fill up your client's wedding album with high-quality pictures, but you also want to capture the joy shared between the bride and her close friends on that special day. In fact, the bride and groom are counting on you to capture as many of those special little moments that pass between the bridesmaids and their friends as you can.

There are a number of techniques that you can employ to make sure that your photos of the bridesmaids turn out the way you (and, more importantly, the bride and groom) want them. Let's dive into some tips that will help you to really add to the joy of the occasion, both in the moment and for years to come!

## Group Photos:

Probably the first thing you'll want to do is snap some shots of the bridesmaids as a group. While you'll no doubt get some pictures of them during the actual ceremony, it's always important to stage these group shots in the photo session beforehand (or afterwards, depending on the bride's preference).





# How to Effectively Bounce Flash at an Event

When I first started out in wedding photography, I was not very keen on using off-camera flashes during a reception. In fact, I was crazy against it. I hated the way it looked and didn't like how it weighed me down gear-wise. Even with experience under my belt, I still prefer not to use it. The reason is simple, as a wedding photographer, you need to be mobile. A client may call me into different rooms, or they may ask me to shoot something outside. Moving to these new locations means moving my light with me or grabbing a different flash to use on-camera. Although it may seem like a small thing, this can greatly limit your mobility and freedom as a photographer to quickly go where the shots are.

I began bouncing my flash when shooting receptions and found that the technique works brilliantly if you know how to do it correctly. In this chapter I am going to share with you some of my tips so that you too can begin to use bounced flash for your lighting solution.





CHAPTER

6

Lighting





## Wedding Lighting – It’s Not About the Light

At a wedding it can be an extreme challenge to light everything correctly. You have every kind of possible scenario from a shoot in the noon-day sun to under the stars at night to indoors in a windowless ballroom or a hotel with ugly tungsten lighting. For this reason, among many others, being a wedding photographer can be one of the most difficult types of photography. You are not working in any type of structured scenario, and you have to work fast and under pressure all the time.

There are many ways to light things correctly, and for weddings, even things that are incorrectly lit can still be client-pleasing. You’ve got one heck of a conundrum when you are deciding how to light photos throughout a wedding day. What a lot of people don’t realize until later on in their photography careers is that wedding lighting isn’t necessarily about the photograph itself or about capturing the moment as it is. It’s about the photography as a whole collective work. It’s about how you mold the light.





# Three Easy Lighting Setups for the Natural Light Photographer

“Lighting, lighting, lighting” for photography is a lot like “location, location, location” for real estate. When it comes down to it, it’s almost all that matters. Lighting controls the mood of the photograph and the way the subject is depicted. And as a whole, lighting helps photographers create a consistent brand they offer to their clients.

For me and many other photographers out there, the naturally lit photograph is a popular look that our clients want, which is great because natural light is easy to work with and learn, as opposed to an off-camera flash (OFC), especially for the budding photographer. However, there comes the point when the natural light photographer, me included, wants to experiment with OFC to bring a competitive edge to their work or just to try something new.

OFC, for most natural light photographers, is a completely daunting task. Instead of working with existing light and manipulating it to create the image you’re envisioning, you have to bring in lights and learn to make them create the look you want. Top that off with potentially tricky equipment and you have most people putting down the flash the moment after they pick it up.





## How to Take Bright and Colorful Photos

I soooooo wanted to title this chapter “How to take light and airy photos,” but I realize there is a bit of negative connotation to that phrase these days. “Light and airy” tends to be equated with overexposed photos and blown-out wedding dresses. Side note, you do not have to blow out your whites to get a light and airy look. Just saying (and more on that later).

One of the hardest jobs we have as photographers is to determine a style of photography that we want associated with our brand and then replicate it for each client. Personally, some days I feel like creating dramatic photos, other days I feel like taking bright and chipper photos, and other days I’d love to go for the moody hipster feel that’s been trending as of late.

However, as a business owner I need to show my clients what to expect and then deliver what I’ve told them to expect. My clients come to me because they like “bright and vibrant colors” (that is a quote from an inquiry I had just today). If I want to add some moody or dramatic photos, I certainly can, but primarily I need to deliver what they’ve been told to expect. I tell them to expect bright and colorful photos. Here’s how I ensure that happens every single time.





# Challenges of a Natural Light Photographer

I can remember the first time I attempted using an off-camera flash. I was working for another company at the time and second shooting with another main photographer who was also fairly new to OCF. We get everything set up, test it, then bring in the bride and groom and BAM – nothing’s working. So embarrassing. There’s nothing that’ll make you look like a total idiot than being a photographer who visibly can’t get her equipment to work.

And so began my journey into OCF, and it was a painful one, I must say. Between Radio Poppers, Pocket Wizards and Canon Infrared Transmitters, I tried it all (and hated it all). My problem, and one that I think many photographers can relate to, was that something always went wrong. Whether it was line-of-sight being interrupted or it being too hot outside and having the padding on my transmitter slide down to cover the part that needed to transmit, I needed to have at least five different trouble-shooting techniques up my sleeve in order to be sure that my system worked properly. Then, I had to actually learn how OCF worked with exposure, ratios and all the rest of it. “I’m a natural light photographer,” was sounding like the best idea out there.





## Two Lights, One Easy Setup

Shooting with continuous lights can be the easiest thing in the world. Why? Because you can see exactly what the light is doing, where it's placed, its intensity and how it's affecting your subject. In a way, I like to think of shooting with constant lights as a baby step to off-camera flash photography. They help you start to see how manipulating lights forms the image you're creating without the added element of calculating the flash burst with the ambient light exposure.

Sure constant lights don't have the power that strobes do, but if you're in a controlled environment, like shooting studio photography portraits, they can be just what you need. In fact, grab yourself some Bicolor lights like the Westcott Bicolor Solix lights, and you have built-in white balance controls with the need for gels.

My favorite lighting setup for portrait photography with constant lights is a two-light studio setup. In my natural light photography as a Wedding Photographer, I love using a soft light with a warm feel, so I'm mimicking that style here.



## About The Author



**VANESSA JOY**

Vanessa Joy is a Canon Explorer of Light that has been an influential speaker in the community for over a decade. Starting her photographic journey in 1998, she has since branched into public speaking, earned five college degrees, received a PPA Photographic Craftsman degree, been named a WeddingWire Education Expert, sponsored by Canon, Profoto and Animoto, to name a few. Vanessa has spoken at almost every major convention and platform in the event industry such as CreativeLIVE, The Wedding School, Clickin' Moms, WPPI, ShutterFest, Imaging USA, Wedding MBA, WeddingWire World, MobileBeat, in addition to hosting personal workshops and numerous small business and photography conventions around the globe. Recognized for her talent and more so her business sense, her clients love working with her and industry peers love to learn from her tangible, informative and open-book style of teaching. Find her at [www.VanessaJoy.com](http://www.VanessaJoy.com).

VANESSA JOY  
E D U C A T I O N

# THE BUSINESS OF WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY

*By Vanessa Joy*



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# Mapping Your Success

Some people look at where I am today and think I simply roll out of bed and sign autographs. Others think that my life is super easy now that I've "made it," and that I don't have to work that hard-to-get clients. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Not only do I have to work to get clients continually, just like everybody else, but I think I have to work even harder and spend more time and money getting the right clients. The journey hasn't ended for me. I'm still on it. But it's been a hell of a road so far!

When I first started dabbling in photography, I was in high school and my photography teacher at the time shot weddings on the weekends. After I graduated, I worked for him while I went to school, thinking that I too would be a teacher, although a teacher of Spanish and not photography. I thought I could work weddings on the weekends. I had no concept that there was any other photographer lifestyle or that you could be a full-time photographer. It was sort of just a dream.



Now, you have to take that ultimate goal and break down the steps to get there. Here's what a simple version of my breakdown looks like.



for you:

**Success to me is :**

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**That means I need to**

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**Ways I can think of to getting there are**

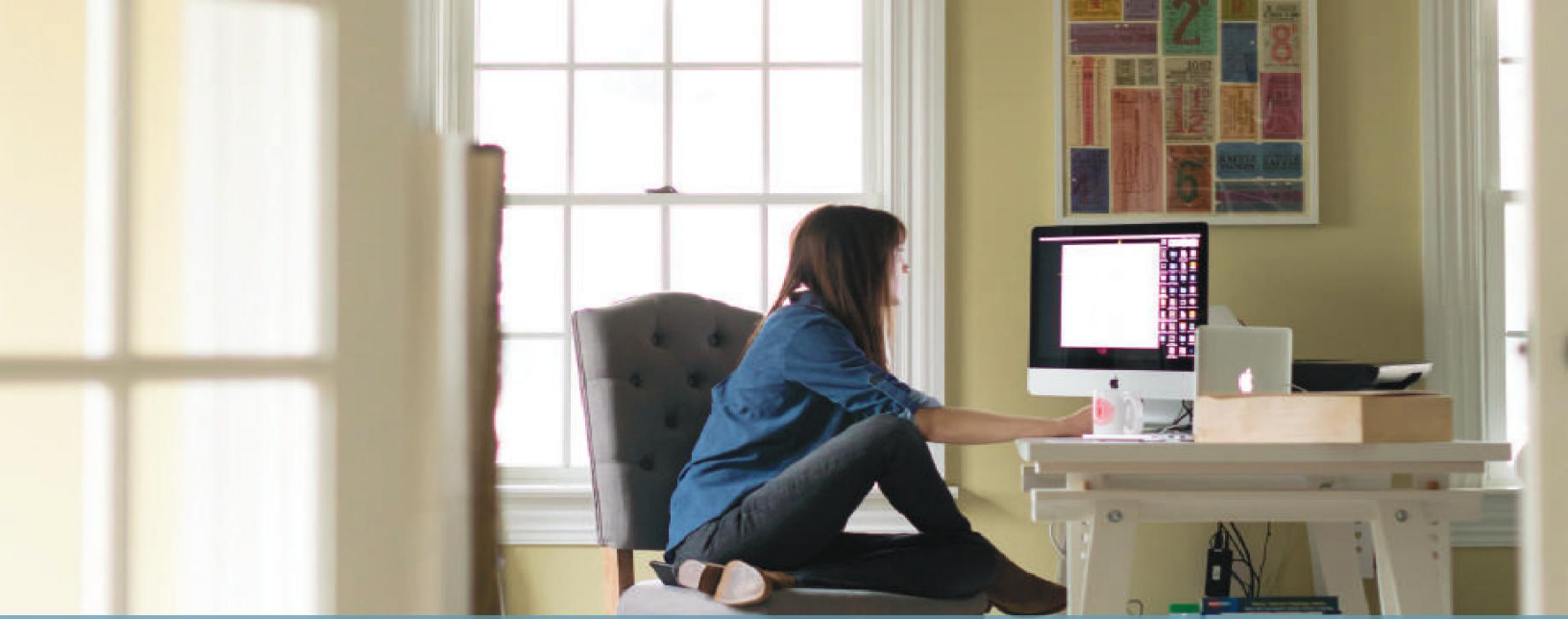
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**Things that will hinder my ability to get there are**

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## Doing What You Love

Like so many photographers, I started out as a weekend warrior. In fact, I took it one step further than that. When I started my wedding photography journey, I actually thought that no one did it full time. My high school photography teacher was a wedding photographer on the weekends, and I ended up working for him after I graduated as a second shooter. Since he was my only example of a wedding photographer, I subconsciously assumed that I had to get a “real job” in addition to my photography fun.

When it was time for me to choose a major in college, Photography was one of them, but I also pursued Education. I figured that being a teacher would be my real job, and photography would be on the weekends. I could still do what I loved that way, get good health insurance and feel like I had a socially acceptable career.

After I graduated, I started applying for jobs and naturally listed my current employer, who I was shooting weddings for, as a reference. It just so happened that I was sitting in his studio when the phone rang. We were talking about my



incredible brand recognition that will result in leads and bookings down the road. I can't tell you how many inquiries I receive that tell me that they, or their friend, or even their mom saw my pictures at a wedding. This method works.

If you're ready to read the rewards from the same day slideshow, you can give it a try in just five easy steps. It won't take time away from you doing your job, especially if you have a second shooter or assistant. It's not that hard to do at all. Take these ideas and implement them at your next wedding, and you'll never want to miss doing a slideshow again.

## **1. Take the Right Pictures**

There are three types of pictures you need to take for a successful same-day slideshow. The first is obvious: you need to take pictures of the couple to tell their story. It's their day and that's why you were hired, so at no point should you slack off on that end of things.

Secondly, take pictures of the guests. When you show pictures, trust me, everyone is secretly hoping to see himself or herself, especially the bridal party. Think about every time you've ever been in a group picture. Who do you look for when you see the image for the first time? Yourself. Don't worry; everyone else does the same thing. Try to grab a few candid shots of guests and include pictures of the bridal party, and you'll have them even more interested in your work than they would be if there were only pictures of the couple.

Third, make sure you take pictures of the details. Shoes, dress, rings, cake, invitation, centerpieces—everything. You might not put too many of these pictures in the actual slideshow, but they're a must-have for submitting to publications after the wedding and great for adding color and detail to the album design. It's also most likely an expectation of your clients to take a lot of detail photos. They worked hard on each and every one of those before the wedding and they'll want to remember them afterward.

## 2. Copy a Few Pictures From Your Memory Card

I shoot with the Canon EOS R5, so I have dual card slots. Ideally, you'd shoot RAW for the main pictures and jpgs for your same-day-edit pictures because the jpgs will be faster to work with on the spot, especially if you're just WiFi-ing them over to your phone and editing with Lightroom Mobile like I do. If you don't have that capability, it's not the end of the world. It'll just take a little bit more time for your laptop to handle the larger RAW files than the jpgs.

During the cocktail hour or the beginning of the reception, I used to sit down with my SD card plugged into my laptop and use [Photo Mechanic](#) to quickly select the pictures I'd like to use for the slideshow. I normally would end up using about 60-80 photos, but that's really not necessary for just the slideshow. Now, with the WiFi tech in my camera, throughout the day during lulls (hey, the Priest sometimes talks a *lot*) I transfer a few photos to my phone and start editing right then and there, usually finishing up sometime before main course. If this is your first time trying this, 10-20 pictures will do just fine. Knowing how fast you are at editing will also help you determine how many pictures you should use in your same-day edit. When you've chosen the images, just copy them onto your hard drive.

## 3. Edit Your Pictures - Quickly

The next step is a bit subjective depending on how you edit and your personal style. If you like editing in Photoshop, use Photoshop. If you like editing in Lightroom, use Lightroom. If I have the time, I like to use both: balance and retouch in Lightroom (*yes, I said retouch in LR, more on that later*) and then throw them to Photoshop if I need to really edit out something.

Before this past month, a lot of photographers commented to me that they were worried about not being able to spend enough time editing the photos for the same-day edit. It was a particular concern if the bride had rough skin or not so white teeth. Normally, you'd have to take extra time and more lengthy steps in Photoshop to edit, and rightfully so. Now, we can retouch our pictures right in LR, better and faster than the existing brushes have allowed in the



## Keys to a Beautiful Work-life Balance

One winter, I had the incredible experience of being able to spend six weeks in Brazil. It was the first of my [Tim Ferris style](#) mini-retirements, where I worked remotely and even learned a good bit of Portuguese.

In Brazil, there's an expression. Like most foreign-language expressions, a lot gets lost in translation. But here it goes: Shall I make a coffee, or make a life?

The back-story is that a boy falls in love with a girl and wants to know their future. Should he plan just for her to come over for coffee and crumpets? Or, should he plan for her being there every day for the rest of his life?

It's a romantic notion, but I think it applies to more than just love. As business owners, so often I see us thinking with the kind of short-sightedness of only planning to make coffee rather than more. It's natural. In fact, I'd dare to go so far as to say it's human nature only to see what's in front of us rather than having the sight to imagine what is infinitely better.

How can we learn the discipline of making a life in our businesses?

### 1. Have a Plan

First, have a plan. I don't actually mean a wedding or event professional business plan because, to be honest, I think formal business plans can be a waste of time and effort. But if you get to the root of what a business plan is meant to do—guide and gauge progress—then we're talking.

### 2. Analyze Distractions

Secondly, analyze what in your business is pulling you away from your plan. For many of us, this boils down to time management and identifying the things that are wasting our time. Be sure to read my *free* eBook, [9 Secret Ways to Brand Your Business \(bit.ly/joybrand\)](#), to see some of the areas where your clients should see you. With a genuine heart, I'm going to tell you that outsourcing as much as you can is a huge leap toward getting your life back. In addition, walk

## Engagement Session How To's

Engagement sessions are your first photo contact with clients who have just entrusted their wedding day to you. Make no mistake. Even if they signed a contract with you, this is still a sort of interview. You can make them feel 100% confident in their decision to hire you or make them regret it and potentially break the contract to look elsewhere. This year alone, I had two clients book me when they previously booked another photographer, not even caring about losing the deposit. It happens.

So how can you make sure that your engagement sessions run smoothly? Check out these three tips.

### 1. Make It Special

Above all else your clients want to feel unique and special. I know it can be hard to do when you're photographing 100 couples that year, but do your very best. Take in all of their ideas, smile tons and be personable. A lot of times, that's what a client remembers and cares about the most, how they felt, not necessarily how the pictures came out.

If I can give you a "don't" for this section, it would be this: don't talk about other weddings with your couple. Sure, maybe mention past weddings if you think something will be inspirational for them. But, letting them know you have another engagement session five minutes after theirs, or worse, shooting two engagement sessions at the same time (yes, it's happened), just isn't cool.

### 2. Bring Light

We bring our own light for weddings, so why not do the same for engagement sessions? Until this past year, I was shooting engagement sessions alone without someone to hold a reflector or some OCF (Off-Camera Flash). Now, I bring assistants to every shoot possible, and my pictures are 100x better. Plus, my clients feel more special, and my photos have more credibility in their eyes, with more of a production made out of the session. If you'd like to learn



of the wedding. If it has to be done, go somewhere private. If you're using your phone to look at the wedding schedule or photo ideas and inspirations, consider bringing an iPad or tablet to hold the information instead. It looks more professional, and people won't assume that you're on your phone goofing around, even when you're really using it for work.

Overall, let's let common sense prevail and try to empathize with the clients, guests and other vendors on the wedding day to attempt to be considerate, professional and pleasant to everyone. It's a great business practice to evaluate your behavior on the wedding day both by reflecting on the day yourself and by once in a while asking the people you work with if there's anything that you can improve upon to have made their lives easier the day-of and to give a better product or service to the client.

I'll leave you with some first-hand quotes from couples and wedding vendors who had some great insight on the do's and don'ts of wedding etiquette.

## ■ What Couples Say

**Simmons** I have seen servers eat the food off the trays at cocktail hour!

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**Wright** A limo driver who doesn't know where they are going, refuses to listen to the GPS and gets lost making the bride 40 minutes late.

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**Goldschmidt** Asking to get a shot of the centerpieces you worked 15 hours to create and you get two pictures, but no close-ups or details. Not using the entire 2.5 hours between the ceremony and cocktail to get any group photos and then disappearing the entire cocktail hour--and not being available then either. Getting annoyed during family portraits because of poor location choice and everyone (family) snapping pictures.

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**Lenihan** Having to ask for nearly every shot... Obviously, we had no clue what we were doing and so we missed out on a lot of

you might be doing that's giving you a bad name and frustrating your clients.

## **en Play Nice**

Getting along with other vendors is not only key to doing a great job for your clients and not embarrassing yourself in front of your clients and their guests, but it's also vital to your marketing plan. A little says a lot, so if you're even a little bit rude, vendors won't want to work with you. But if you're a little bit nice, that'll go a long way and establish a great relationship with other vendors who could potentially refer couples to you later on. Here are three ways to play nice in the wedding sandbox.

### **Communicate Your Plan**

This one won't even take much time out of your day, but it will mean a better experience for all involved and a better product for your client. Take time to ask where the photographer or cinematographer plans on standing during the ceremony and ceremonial reception events. If it's hindering what you're doing, you'll know ahead of time and can compromise on something that's beneficial for the client and for you. It's much better than the alternate scenario where you're getting in each other's way when there's nothing you can do about it except complain and roll your eyes.

Don't forget to communicate to the other vendors as well. Reception hall staff, DJs and bands also have a schedule and special things they like to do for the couple, so be sure to coordinate with the maître' d when it's convenient to take the couple out for the sunset or twilight shot they want.

### **Help Each Other Out**

The "do unto others" rule really comes into play here when you're both trying to capture the moment. Photographers, consider the negative effect your shutter click or camera flash may have on the audio and visual for the videographer and try to be considerate by not over-shooting during important audio moments or flashing when it's not necessary. Videographers, consider the negative effect a mismatched video light (tungsten inside with window light) will have on the



A romantic couple is shown in profile, embracing on a beach. The man is wearing a light blue button-down shirt and khaki pants, while the woman is in a white sleeveless dress. They are standing on the sand, with the ocean and a sunset sky in the background. The sky is a mix of purple, pink, and blue, with soft clouds. The water is a deep blue with gentle waves.

# 5 Ways to Get More Out of Engagement Session Sales

For us wedding business owners, we know that late winter brings in the biggest influx of newly engaged couples. While I think it's great to think of ways to reign in those potential clients, it's also important not to ignore the fish we've already caught. Engagement sessions are always a good idea in my opinion because they let us connect with our couples before the wedding, putting them at ease in front of the camera before the big day. But let's not forget the bread and butter that engagement sales can also be for your business. Here are five quick ways to generate more income by working with clients who already love you.

## Shoot For The Sale

You've probably heard this one before, but it's such solid advice that it needs to be said again. If you want to sell canvases but only took a ton of close-up pictures of your couple that just won't look good being blown up larger than life, you can't expect the orders to come rolling in. You know that you want to sell certain items (more on that later) from the engagement session, so make sure you're providing your couple with images that will work for those products.



# Running an Efficient Business

## 5 Must Have Time Savers for Business and Life

It's one of my favorite oxymorons that technology is full of ways to make our lives better but somehow it ends up making them more complex. If the technological revolution was supposed to help us out, automate tasks and do what we couldn't do before, then why are so many of us more time deprived than ever?

As human beings I think we have the tendency to find ways to do things faster only to fill that newly found time with more to-do's and deadlines. While the point of this article is to give you some of the newest ways to make your life easier and save you time, I also want to challenge you to fill that saved time intentionally. Dare I say even, don't fill it with work, but fill it with life.

### 1. Blinkist

I pride myself on being a book nerd. And not the cool kind, rather the business





# The Monday Wedding Hangover

In this chapter we'll cover shooting wedding photography with four of my tips and tricks for photographing all those must-have moments on the wedding day. I'll discuss everything from how to take the right pictures to how to manage client expectations and avoid the dreaded humongous family shot list.



Tip 1

## TAKING THE RIGHT PICTURES

As a wedding business owner, we're expected to be a jack-of-all-trades, in a sense. We are expected to have the photographic skill of a fine artist that expertly takes still life, portrait, landscape, and lifestyle photographs all at the same time. With the continual integration of Pinterest in our couples' lives, those demands have only gotten higher.

There are three ways to capture key pictures to make sure you take to keep ahead of the curve. You can ensure that you're making both you and your

Try to create consistency in series of images so that they match when you put them side-by-side. To take this one step further, consider staging the consistent theme around the wedding theme. For example, if it's a rustic theme, maybe photograph the smaller details on a wooden floor rather than on a glass table to set the mood for the wedding.



Tip #3

### SCHEDULING

Six to eight weeks before a wedding, I'll contact my clients to go over final details, solidify the family member's names so I can create a shot list for them, and run through the timeline with them. I find this part of my interaction with my clients to be absolutely crucial for helping alleviate stress. I can find and change any hiccups before they happen, and it gives my clients a sense of trust and ease with me.

Here are examples of my typical timelines

Timeline without a First Look for a 2:30 pm ceremony:

12 PM	Business owners arrive (one with spouse A, one with spouse B) and capture details and getting-ready shots
1 PM	Everyone gets dressed for pictures of couple alone and with their sides of the bridal party and family
2 PM	Leave for the ceremony
2:30 PM	The ceremony begins
3:30 PM	Family pictures at the ceremony location
4 PM	Couple and bridal party pictures at a nearby park





# Improve Client Relationships

## Talk Ain't Cheap

I believe one of the hardest things for a photographer to learn is how to communicate with their clients. Aside from the fact that inherently a lot of photographers are wallflowers, proper client communication isn't typically something that is taught at tradeshow, in college or even in a mentorship. Learning what a photographer is supposed to say during things like consultations and sales sessions, or even in phone call meetings, is often overlooked.

Other than reading this chapter, one of the best ways to remedy this is to ask a fellow photographer if you can eavesdrop on one of their consultations or sales sessions. I usually offer this to my interns, and more often than not they respond with an "Oh yeah, I wouldn't have even thought of that!" Normally they're just sitting quietly in the next room, but I could also have them muted on my phone just as easily.



# Bringing in New Business

Marketing any type of business always has one essential goal, to bring in new clients. Photographers are no exception. It can be daunting since bringing in new business needs to be an on-going basis. Our efforts sometimes don't pay off immediately, but instead they give us a more long-term yield. But that can be disheartening when you need clients now. I've found the best way to make sure you have a consistent flow of inquiries is to make sure that you're combining both short- and long-term marketing plans. Here are six ideas to help you formulate your new client campaign broken down into both short- and long-term ventures.

## Long-term Marketing

Creating and sticking to long-term marketing efforts can be time-consuming and a bit tedious at first. However, they're crucial components to establishing a credible brand presence with your audience, and they will yield results over time.





# Pricing Best Practices

## 5 Photography Pricing Pitfalls

Running a photography business is a rewarding experience. However, many photographers, new and experienced, still face pricing pitfalls that lead to frustration and a failure to book clients. How you price your products and services plays a larger role in the sustainability of your business than you may think. Here are five photography pricing pitfalls that may be harming your photography business and what you should do to fix them.

### 1. Making Prices Too Complicated

Sometimes business owners feel that the best way to communicate with their customers is to lay everything out on the table. However, there is such a thing as making prices too difficult to navigate or annoying to access. I believe that pricing needs to continually evolve to adjust to changes in the culture and the evolution of your business. If you need to adjust pricing, you're not alone. Just yesterday I made adjustments to my pricing when I noticed couples not being receptive.

## About The Author



**VANESSA JOY**

Vanessa Joy is a Canon Explorer of Light that has been an influential speaker in the community for over a decade. Starting her photographic journey in 1998, she has since branched into public speaking, earned five college degrees, received a PPA Photographic Craftsman degree, been named a WeddingWire Education Expert, sponsored by Canon, Profoto and Animoto, to name a few. Vanessa has spoken at almost every major convention and platform in the event industry such as CreativeLIVE, The Wedding School, Clickin' Moms, WPPI, ShutterFest, Imaging USA, Wedding MBA, WeddingWire World, MobileBeat, in addition to hosting personal workshops and numerous small business and photography conventions around the globe. Recognized for her talent and more so her business sense, her clients love working with her and industry peers love to learn from her tangible, informative and open-book style of teaching. Find her at [www.VanessaJoy.com](http://www.VanessaJoy.com).