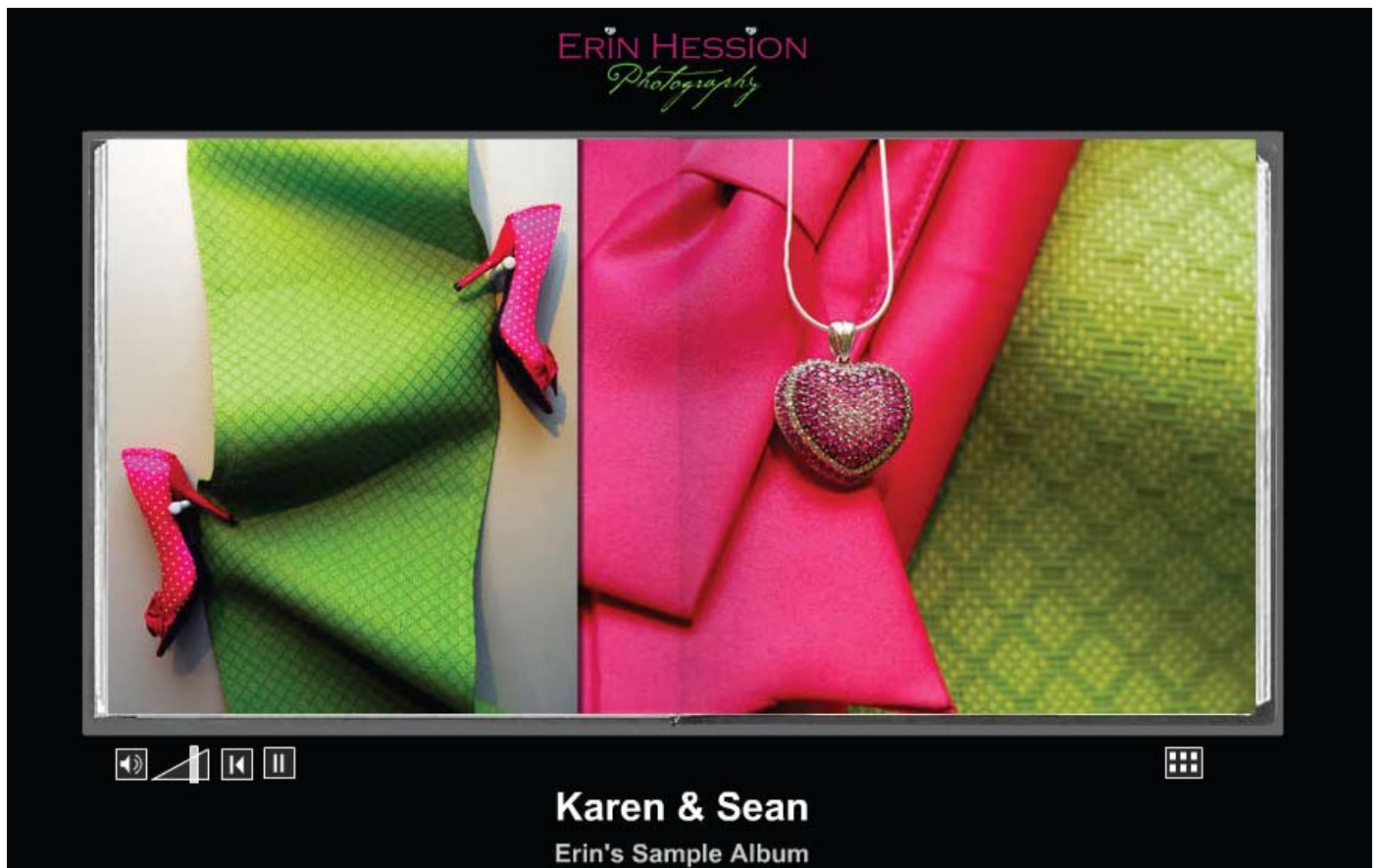


9 Tips to Grow Your Business With Your Website or Blog



You've just moved to a new city, introduced a new service, written a book or started selling fine art prints. How will you spread the news to clients, prospective clients, the photo imaging community and the rest of your universe? Chances are your website will play a pivotal role in getting the word out.

Clearly, harnessing the Web's marketing and communication capabilities can prove to be an incredible competitive advantage. In fact, it's not uncommon for photographers who expand their websites' capabilities and functionality to see a corresponding growth in their business.

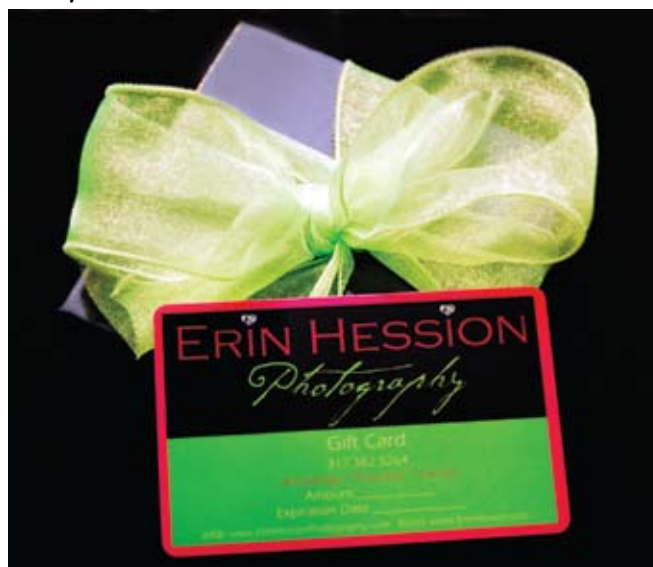
I recently caught up with Indianapolis wedding photographer Erin Hession-Wooton (www.erinhession.com), whose studio has experienced steady

growth as a direct result of her well orchestrated, diversified online marketing/communications strategy. A long-

Below: Erin's 2008 gift cards, complete with a black box and coordinated lime green bow.

time member of WPPI, Erin was recently voted one of IndyChannel.com's Best Wedding Photographers and featured on the "A-List" of best local businesses on WRTV, a local affiliate of ABC. In early March, she and her husband, John—a search engine expert and website developer (www.iminspired.net)—were putting the finishing touches on her latest website offering, www.sessionwithhession.com.

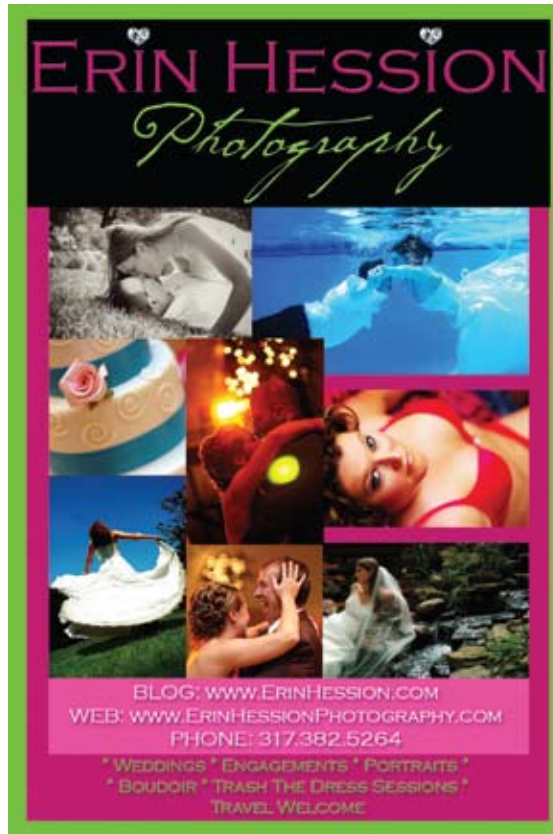
Curious to find out what's driving her success, I asked which of her online initiatives have been most effective in helping to grow her client base and her business—and would she be willing to discuss them with others? Erin was happy to oblige. What follows is a quick look at her top nine strategies for "exploding your client base" and growing your business.



Tip 1: Direct traffic to your site through online ads, print brochures, etc. “Make sure all of your online and print marketing pieces work together so they continually support your brand, attract new clients and generate repeat clients,” she suggests. But just having a website won’t make your phone ring. To generate new clients, use a variety of marketing pieces and strategies to direct the reader to your website or blog.

Tip 2: Feature every client on your website or blog. “Don’t just select a few beautiful weddings to showcase online. Post them all and clients will feel special that their events are online,” she says. When brides show your photos to their friends and family, you’ll create more traffic and more clients through referrals.

Tip 3: Capture email addresses. “We capture the email addresses of guests who visit our event websites through an online proofing system, which exports the addresses into Constant Contact [www.constantcontact.com], for a series of marketing emails,” says Erin. These emails direct guests back to Erin’s website for order reminders, specials and seasonal e-newsletters, which cover her upcoming events and new products, and



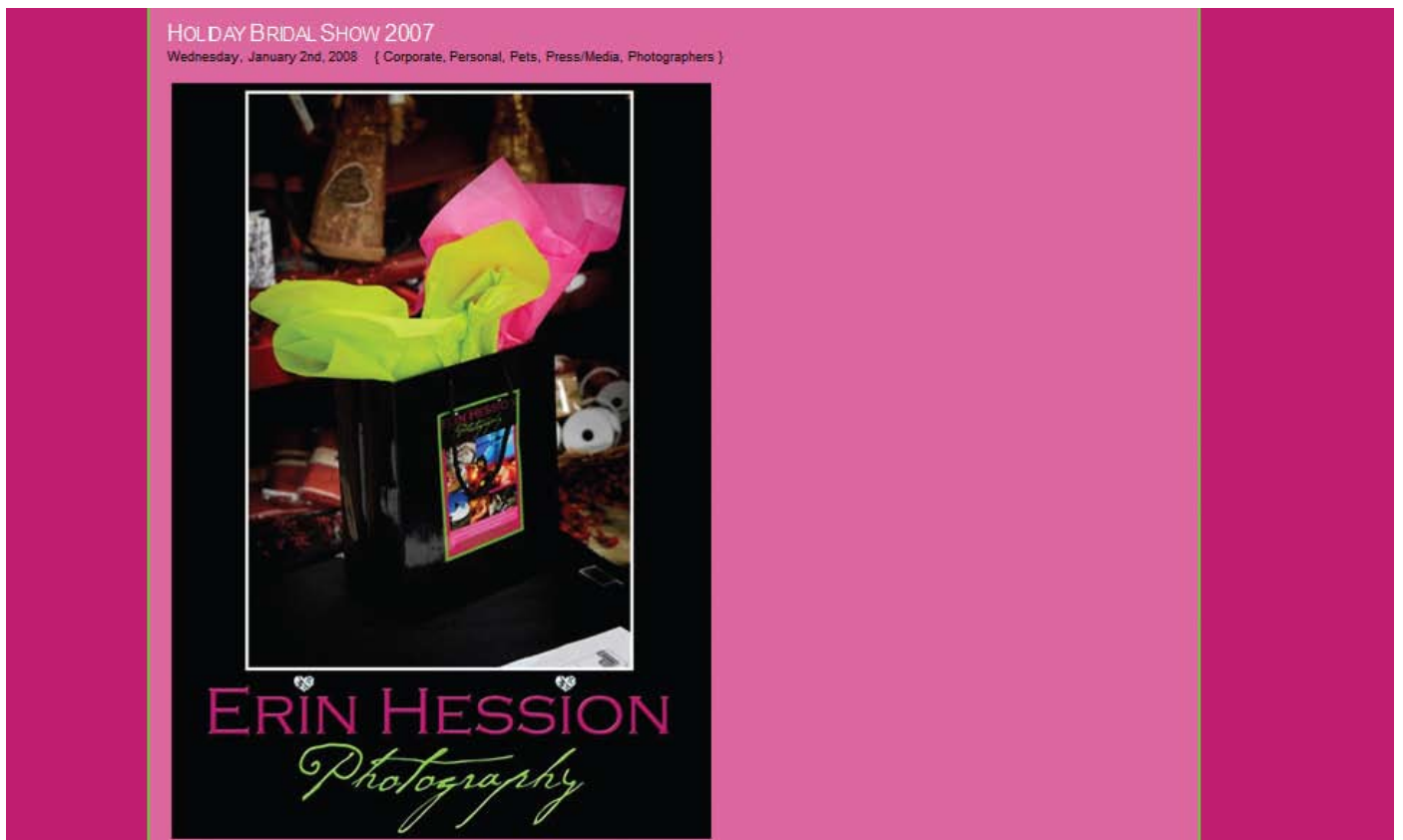
Above: Erin Hession's 2008 business card.
Below: Holiday Bridal Show blog post including Erin's custom gift bags. Her business card is a sticker on the front of the bag with matching tissue paper, which enhances the presentation.

further direct readers back to her blog and website to book upcoming portrait or event photography sessions. “This system has had a tremendous impact on the number of referrals and the amount of Internet traffic we receive throughout the year,” she adds.

Tip 4: Update your blog frequently. “Clients and friends become familiar with our brand, services and style through our blog, so we strive to keep it timely. If you know you won’t be posting often, don’t create a blog or it will look as if you’re not busy,” she advises. “We’ve tried a few different blog platforms and found WordPress [www.wordpress.org] to be the most effective for our needs,” says Erin. Your blog helps get people to know your personality and shows the real person behind the company name.

Tip 5: Market projects and related websites on your blog/website. “Every year we coordinate and co-sponsor two bridal shows. They always have a huge turnout because of the way we promote them,” says Erin. “My husband places

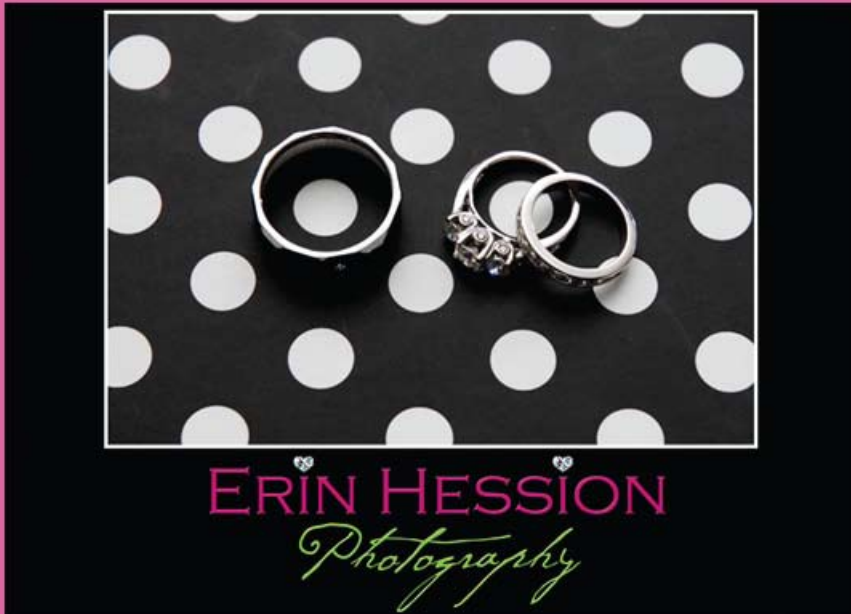
bridal show banner ads on my website for brides to see and click through. I post information about upcoming shows several times before they take place, use my email



CONGRATULATIONS HOLLY & ADRIAN! (NO COMMENTS)

Posted in Wedding by Erin on October 18th, 2007

We started the day at the Sheraton in their honeymoon suite where Holly was getting ready. Melissa remembered Holly's adorable polka dot shirt that she wore for their engagement session a few months back and when we found this cute black & white polka dot box in the dressing room, we knew we had to incorporate it into the wedding somehow.... 😊



database to announce each show's website and provide information to my clients, their friends and families." While not everyone who receives Erin's emails is engaged, most of them know someone who is and forward bridal show emails to them.

Tip 6: Show everything you do. "We became known for our wedding photography, so until we started posting more of our other work on our blog, clients didn't realize that we offer a range of photography services, including boudoir, portraiture, trash the dress sessions, and model-

Above: Holly & Adrian's wedding blog post.

Below: Sample online events and album showcases show how Erin's logo is linked to her website and is consistently used in everything clients see, from start to finish.

ing portfolio headshots," says Erin. "By showing other types of photography on the blog, the number of non-wedding-related photo shoots increased dramatically!" Lesson learned: If you don't show it, you won't sell it.

Tip 7: Link your website to online events and albums. "Most online event hosting companies allow you to upload

your logo, customize your event site to look like an extension of your own, and link to your website from the event site. Take advantage of this," advises Erin. "Most clients are happy to be on your website, plus it lets their friends and families click on your Web link at any time to check out your work—bringing in hundreds of potential clients on a weekly basis." She continues, "DigiLabs [www.digilabs.biz], an online image hosting and lab service, offers the most user-friendly experience in our workflow—front and back ends. It

Screenshot of Erin Hession Photography's online gallery interface. The header features the logo "ERIN HESSION Photography". Below the logo is a search bar and a "Go" button. The main content area is titled "Fashion Photo Shoot" and includes a promotional message: "10% discount on ALL orders placed within the first 2 weeks!" and "Category: 9-30-07PhotoShoot". Below this, there is a grid of image thumbnails, each with a small number (361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366) underneath. The left sidebar contains navigation links: "Categories: 9-30-07PhotoShoot (596)", "Folders: Favorites [0], Compare Images [0]", "Create New Folder", "Submit Favorites", "Begin SlideShow", and "Shopping Cart". The top right corner shows a page number "56789" and navigation arrows.



Karen & Sean
Erin's Sample Album

allows for custom branding on our event websites, which has helped increase our referral base." Erin suggests, "Gary Fong's Album Showcase software. It lets us customize online album previews with our logo and information. The link is sent to clients to preview their albums online and forward the link to friends and families." Album Showcase can be purchased at <http://store.garyfonginc.com>.

Tip 8: Offer gift cards of your work.

"We customize our wedding gift cards with our logo, website and blog information and package the cards in a matching gift box," she explains. "By enabling clients to purchase them with a click of a button, you'll see your referral base grow. A company called Online River [www.onlineriver.com] produced our gift cards this year and did a fantastic job for us." This strategy works because clients love sharing their favorite images with

family and friends—all potential clients. Selling gift cards can help your clients and your bottom line.

Tip 9: Offer fun online giveaways to encourage frequent visits. Excitement breeds business. Keep your website and blog fun and visitors will return. "People like being around other fun, happy people with interesting things going on in their lives. You'll be building a strong, loyal customer base at the same time!"

Whether you're revamping your website or creating a blog, Erin's online marketing strategies may be just the catalyst you need to power the growth of your client base and business. CC

Alice B. Miller, former editor of Studio Photography magazine, is a writer and editor based on Long Island, New York. The editor of award-winning corporate and association publications for over 25 years, Alice has a clientele that includes photographers, industry manufacturers, publications, and associations. She is a member of the International Photographic Council's board of directors and has served as a juror for the Black & White Spider Awards and the Center for Fine Art Photography. She may be reached at alice@photogator.com.

