

5 Ways to Build & Maintain Client Ties

By Alice B. Miller

Pleasing clients is a fine art. Whether in photography, carpentry or dentistry, business owners can take years developing an effective formula for delivering quality services that help build client ties. People-centered businesses, such as photo studios, flourish or perish based on their ability to make clients feel good, appreciated and satisfied with each and every interaction. This knack is the key to building enduring client ties.

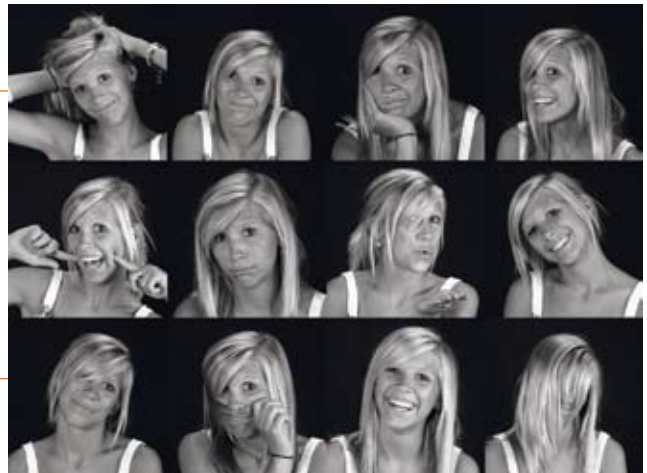
One photographer who has mastered the art of nurturing client ties is lifestyle portrait artist Kay Eskridge, of Images by Kay & Co. Photography (www.imagesbykay.com), in Phoenix, AZ. My first visit to her website and blog revealed an inviting menu of photographic programs and celebratory options—a delightful mix of portraiture, giving back, sheer fun and food

for the soul—that have helped her studio develop ties with clients while giving her a decided competitive advantage in the marketplace.

A past president of the Arizona Professional Photography Association and Phoenix Professional Photography Association, as well as a member of Eastman Kodak's ProTeam, Kay has delivered motivational programs across the United States and Japan, and currently offers programs that inform, motivate and entertain other pro photographers. I asked her to share a few of her most popular programs and she agreed. What follows are her "5 Ways to Build & Maintain Client Ties."

Says Kay, "It all starts with relationships, assuring attention to detail and a successful experience." For example:

Share Your Joy. If you're one of the lucky ones who really love what they do everyday, let it show. Your enthusiasm is contagious, so let clients see you have a great time creating images for them. "Being in business for over 23 years, I've watched newborns become school children, teenagers, then young adults, who begin their own families. I am grateful I've been able to combine my passion for photography with my love of people," says Kay.



I Am Me



Birthdays Rock

Make Your Clients Feel Welcome. The key to a successful portrait experience is making your clients feel comfortable in your studio. Kay creates an inviting environment with aromatic candles, soft music and portraits in the front lobby—decorated to reflect a comfortable living room—a gallery hallway with dressing suites brimming with grooming amenities and hospitality stations filled with snacks, treats and breath mints. Children receive an extra dose of special attention. "Before every children's portrait session, we give children time to play in the studio living room to warm up to our photography team," explains Kay. "As they play, we see what makes them tick and how to work with them, so their images will reflect happy, comfortable children." This warm-up time has become a studio trademark. She adds that staying in touch with clients on an ongoing basis is critical. "Our monthly e-newsletter has been the best thing we've ever done in terms of getting information to clients."



Girls Night In

Inspire with Creativity. Introducing new, novel services and portrait packages keeps things fresh and fun for clients. Kay is a natural at coming up with catchy promotions that appeal to the fun, carefree side of her clients. With her Faces of Me program, for little ones, and I Am Me (see pg. 114, top), for teens and 'tweens, Kay invites clients to “Be happy, be funny, be serious... be whatever you want to be! These portrait programs are the perfect way to capture the many faces of your child.” Come summer, Kay offers clients a location-shoot portrait experience. “We pack up our studio and head to California to give clients a different backdrop for their summer memories.” Her Girls Night In program (see left) offers female clients a novel photographic experience during an evening of pampering with professional hairstyling and makeup artists, great music and refreshments. A similar program, Glamour Girlz, for girls ages 5 to 12, lends itself to amazing birthday parties.

Give Back to the Community. Supporting worthy causes and helping those in need are nothing new for the photo industry. Now more than ever, lending a hand is not only virtuous, it's well appreciated by clients. Kay's pet cause is, well, pets. In support of the Phoenix Animal Care Coalition 911 (PACC911), Kay created a program called Paws for a Cause, during which she offers a free portrait session and 5x7 print in exchange for a small donation of food or clean blankets and towels. She also offers a Yappy Hour Lounge (see right), which benefits PACC911's emergency medical fund. Twenty-five percent of the proceeds from all YHL portrait print orders are donated to EMF. Responding to the program, Bari Mears, the president of PACC911—an umbrella organization working with over 90 rescue groups in the state of Arizona—says, “The photos are awesome. We thank you for giving back to the community, and for helping those most in need—the animals.”



Yappy Hour Lounge



When I Was One, Two, Three

Help Create Memories. Beyond documenting milestones in your clients' lives, capturing everyday moments that families treasure makes you an invaluable part of their living history. When I Was One, Two, Three (see left) is a portrait session that celebrates a child's favorite things and helps parents remember them at each age. “This session is designed to let children be themselves at every age,” says Kay. With her Kids Costume Couture program, parents can dress their young ones in theme costumes against different backdrops every year, Halloween or not. Her Birthdays Rock photo experiences (see pg. 114, bottom) help children and their families celebrate birthday milestones. “Children grow up so quickly. We offer this fun, playful session to commemorate this fleeting and special time,” says Kay. For high school seniors, she designs edgy, distinctive portraits, business cards, graduation announcements and invitations that make her a big hit with teen clients.

Whether she is making clients feel comfortable in her studio, inspiring them with innovative ideas, lending a hand to the community, or creating priceless family keepsakes, Kay Eskridge is strengthening client ties, one successful session at a time.

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Alice B. Miller is the owner of Plum Communications Inc. (www.plumcomm.com), a Long Island, NY, editorial services and marketing communications company that supports the photo industry. Previously the editor of Studio Photography magazine, Alice has a growing clientele that includes photographers, manufacturers, publications and associations. She is the director of public relations for the International Photographic Council and an advisory board member of NyghtFalcon photography studios.