

# Targeted, One-on-One Marketing: Smart Strategies for Tough Times

By Alice B. Miller

With the United States enduring a series of economic shockwaves, businesses are getting walloped on all fronts. Photo studios have had to dig deep and come up with brand new strategies to offset lost business and revenue. Cutting costs to the bone, searching for new prospects, and doing whatever it takes to retain existing clients are key to any plan for success in a shrinking economy.

When award-winning wedding and portrait photographer Adrienne Maples, of Adrienne Maples Photography, Inc. ([www.amaples.com](http://www.amaples.com)) in Greater Kansas City, KS, received zero business inquiries during October—her calendar is usually booked solid for the coming year by this time—she realized the times demanded

bold action. Where would she find new prospects? How would she cut corners without diminishing the scope or quality of her services? After three months of rethinking her marketing approach, Adrienne decided to devote most of her energies to current clients and industry contacts and to compose a streamlined list of targeted contacts that would form the core of her new outreach.

“After all, when you do good business with clients or contacts, they are more likely to want to work with you again,” says Adrienne. Today, her marketing campaigns focus exclusively on influencing this set of targets. Here, she shares six practices that have helped her come out on top during the economic downturn.

**Facebook: the Best Social Media Tool.** For reaching her target audience, no social media tool compares to Facebook. “My clients use Facebook more than business-focused social sites such as LinkedIn, and youth-oriented sites like MySpace and Flickr, which are not appropriate for our purposes,” she says. “At every wedding I ask, ‘Are you on Facebook?’ and wind up going home with 10 to 15 new Facebook buddies. The site also allows me to upload a selection of images and ‘tag’ subjects almost immediately, which ultimately drives visitors to my site and my blog.” In addition, Adrienne twitters, but only when she has something meaningful to share, and has yet to track the business benefits.

**Right:** “As the flower girls ran to meet the bride before the ceremony, I waited for the right moment to catch the shadow,” says Adrienne.



**Above:** “I was above the bride as she walked to join her bridesmaids,” she says.

**Build a Better Blog with WordPress.** Switching to a WordPress blog template in April 2009 has improved her blog’s usability, usefulness and appeal. “While the old blog was a chronological log of images and copy, this template accommodates more information and lets the personality of the studio and staff come through. I’ve been able to add avatars, content tags for increased ranking and popularity, and more metadata,” says Adrienne. This template also allows her to manage the content, which is particularly helpful in case an outsourced server ever goes down or loses her content. The broader content increases return visitors and value.



**Promotional Products Extend Word-of-Mouth.** With a highly targeted mailing list, Adrienne initiated a very successful eco-conscious campaign. Along with a BPA-free CamelBak water bottle and reusable tote, she tucks in a promo card or mini CD that contains a promotional video the recipient has to return to claim the offer. Says Adrienne, “Along with the personal note, promo products and business card, I send a gentle reminder to everyone on my list: ‘I am still here. How may I help you?’ Mailed in early November, by the end of the month, inquiries started flooding in. I even received calls from people not associated with my targeted mailing list.” From this targeted outreach alone, 2009 was booked solid by early January. This has become Adrienne’s best marketing campaign to date. She duplicated the effort in February, sending a kit to editors with whom she had contact, or whom she wished to influence.

**Top left:** “My husband owns a promotional product company and suggested I send frames as my first promotion,” says Adrienne. “Easy to pack and ship, the frame is a great gift to mail to someone’s office!”

**Left:** “A CD is a great way to introduce myself to destination brides who are unable to meet with me,” she says.

### Go Green(er) Promos Reflect Earth-friendly Philosophy.

Adrienne made the most of her promotional-products mailer campaign by combining consistent branding and bride-friendly products with a go-green message. “In 2008, our studio made a conscious decision to become more eco-friendly,” she explains. “I don’t plan to go insane trying to be totally green, but if we, all of us, do even the smallest things, the benefits will be tremendous.” Adrienne used to buy bottled water by the case before she learned that the waste produced had a much bigger impact than the petroleum bottles clogging landfills: A great deal of energy is needlessly wasted to produce, refrigerate and transport bottles filled with water we can get from our kitchen faucets with the aid of filters. After much research, she found the CamelBak bottles. “The bottles are a big hit with brides,” she says. “Many brides start a health-and-exercise regimen before their weddings, so they are excited to carry the water bottle with them. The interesting bottle design stimulates conversation, which inevitably leads to conversation about their wedding photographer. Hopefully, they address the Go Green(er) concept and pass the word along!” In support of the Go Green(er) philosophy, Adrienne started adding blog posts with easy-to-follow tips about once a week.

**Above right:** “The Go Green(er) tote is a convenient size that’s perfect for a quick shopping trip,” says Adrienne.

**Right:** “Brides often carry their Go Green(er) CamelBak bottles on their wedding day,” she shares.



**Above:** “To make the twins more comfortable, I asked them to show me their room and favorite animals,” Adrienne says. “They did!”

**Favor Email Outreach Over Print Ads.** Adrienne plans and executes e-marketing outreach at one-third the cost of traditional print advertising. She finds this approach far more effective because the mailing list is targeted. “Every quarter, we send out a brief e-newsletter to recipients with a call to action, which may include a notice about specials, complimentary service, products or reprints. Providing ‘save the planet’ tips in each issue creates continuity and consistency. We also use the e-newsletter to cross-market,” says Adrienne. She entices viewers to add comments to her blog by offering a CamelBak water bottle for those who post most frequently. She encourages wedding guests to leave comments so the bride and groom receive free 4 x 6s. In the future, she may also reward blog posters for their eco-tips or practices.

**Maximize Your Resources.** Turning wedding clients into portrait clients is relatively easy with the right preparation. Weddings present a prime opportunity for business for Adrienne, in part because she asks clients to provide a list of family members and close friends prior to the wedding. Then she memorizes the names and relationships, which creates a comfortable, friendly working environment and really impresses family members. “We always have plenty of family members asking about our services, so we carry promotional cards that illustrate our portrait services,” says Adrienne. “My current portrait base is comprised mostly of prior wedding clients and their friends. Whenever I learn that a client is pregnant—usually through Facebook—I send a congratulatory note and a small gift. We also pull potential clients from wedding guest lists.”

In sum, “The cash outlay for our targeted campaign has been minimal, but we do spend many more hours on marketing now,” says Adrienne. “Still, by not pursuing ineffective tactics or channels we’ve saved time and money. The strategy has helped us attract new clients, stay competitive and maintain the quality and breadth of our services in the most demanding of circumstances.”



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**Above:** “I encourage children to play while I photograph them. Here, the twin daughters of my assistant, Linda, giggle while twirling their parasols.”