

Think *Outside the Box* to ROLL in MORE CASH from Weddings



BY DENNIS HODGES IFPO, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI



Gowns from the Renaissance Period are chosen most often by brides for theme or non-traditional weddings. ©2003 Dennis Hodges.

Photographers take note -- times and traditions are changing. These are the times that the ups and downs of the stock market make one dizzy. As citizens are pounded with negative information it affects how they spend their money -- and that ripples down to impact our income. Traditions change with the times, so we too must change if we expect to maintain or increase our profits.

Diversify, network and cut costs are terms we often hear. The catch phrase I like best is, 'think outside the box.' For me that means to look beyond shooting model portfolios for new dependable sources of income. Any category of photography that includes people is natural for me so I have many avenues to explore.

One important thing to note here. Like it or not there is more sure money in wedding photography for freelance photographers than almost any other category. Although we have all heard the horror stories surrounding wedding photography, the big bucks are there -- especially if we are prepared and understand today's weddings.

Due to the slow economy fewer couples are having huge, traditional weddings due to the skyrocketing costs. Others simply want a unique ceremony instead of an expensive one. The one desire of both the rich and poor is that they want a wedding that is creative, different and memorable. Standard wedding poses do not necessarily capture the originality and the spirit of the non-traditional or theme ceremony. For example, you could be photographing wedding couples in a hot air balloon, at an amusement park, a cattle ranch, a cave or a castle.

Theme weddings are becoming very popular. In Las

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Opposite page, top: Model Lorie in a traditional bridal gown .

This page, right: Southern Bell Weddings are popular in some regions of the country.

Below: Some brides prefer opulent costumes instead of gowns for their wedding day.

Model: Lorie Reskin
Photos © 2003 by Dennis Hodges .



Vegas weddings range from an inexpensive, drive through chapel to extremely expensive and opulent theme affairs. At Caesar's Palace the bride and groom can dress up in Roman attire and have an entourage of Roman Guards, Gladiators and Women Servants in attendance. Around the country other brides are choosing Renaissance, Southern Bell,

Old West or Cleopatra themes for the full wedding party as opposed to the traditional attire.

If a wedding photographer is to keep up and increase sales, he must be prepared to capture the essence of traditional or unusual ceremonies. A first class portfolio with samples of a full range of wedding photography can influence the decisions of almost any bridal couple.

If you are new to wedding photography, you may use models to create a portfolio. Spend as much time as needed (and you may have to invest a few dollars) to get photos that are really spectacular in traditional and non-traditional wedding settings.

How do you shoot a wedding that is staged? Try to kill two birds with one stone (this is thinking outside the box). For example you may know a model

who needs to expand her portfolio. If so, she might be the perfect model to pose as a bride for your portfolio shots. Know aspiring models who need a basic portfolio? Schedule several of them to pose as bridesmaids. All you need is the proper wedding party attire. Even that is really easier than you might think.

If you live near a city with a costume

shop or a community theater group, contact them. Introduce yourself as a wedding, (portrait or model portfolio) photographer and tell them you occasionally need costumes for your clients. Ask if they are willing to give your clients a break on rental fees or deposits in return for free photos of their costumes to display in their shop. If they are interested, give them an agreed upon number of framed 8 x 10 photos of your clients wearing their costumes. (Make sure you are allowed to display your business card with the photo.) It's a win, win situation. Your clients get a break on the costumes; you get FREE advertising for your full range of photography; the costume shop gets quality photos for advertising or display purposes.

Costumes and More, the largest costume shop in North Kansas City, Missouri is the shop I depend on for the needs of all my clients. This shop carries over 2,000 different costumes plus make-up, props, wigs and accessories of every description. Most of my clients find what they need there.

At this point you should have a good portfolio to show to family, friends and co-workers for the purpose of booking weddings. Hopefully, you have sold some of the portfolio prints to the models. You should be getting FREE advertising in the costume

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shop. And if you are really smart, you've convinced the shop to:

- use your photos for their newspaper advertising or promotional brochures (with photo credit of course).
- refer their clients to you for all of their photography needs.

And you should be scheduling weddings and collecting booking fees. (Use *Wedding Photography Job Contracts*, and refer to *How Freelance Photography Really Works* to make sure you protect your interests as a wedding photographer.)

So the cash starts to roll in, right? It will for sure but one must continue to think outside the box if you hope to stay ahead of the competition. You must constantly explore options beyond the normal traditions. New ones are being established all the time.

For example, some brides have started a new custom that can increase the wedding photographer's income substantially. On the day of the wedding the bride presents the groom with special photo of herself as a token of her love. This is often a romantic pose or a very personal photo -- straight from

a studio or location shoot. A creative image (don't forget the soft lights and soft focus filters) for this purpose can roll in another hundred dollars (or even two hundred) over and above the wedding photos. If your bridal client doesn't ask for it, suggest it!

Digital photography must be considered in your mix of options for expanding your wedding and other photography business. It has influenced the course of wedding photography more than any other technology

in the last forty years -- even for photographers who do NOT use digital cameras! Because digital scanners are available to almost everyone, wedding photographers who still rely on film

shoot any poses that are not satisfactory. Traditions change ...

Remember I also said times are changing? Some wedding photographers who use digital cameras now

believe that during the wedding festivities is the time to sell pictures to almost everyone present while they are full of excitement -- and wine! Equipped with high resolution printers on the scene, they do a good business in candid of families, the wedding party (especially the child attendants) and others. This sort of activity MUST have the prior approval of the bridal couple.

Another option is instead of mixing sales inside the celebration, the photographer casually shoots candid of certain groups or individuals who seem to be having a good time. He has an assistant set up nearby with printing capabilities to produce the prints. The images are then displayed in an area near the exit most likely to be used by the wedding guests. Print prices that can't be refused to encourage sales. A large percentage of the subjects are surprised to see their

photos on display and will joyfully pay for them -- while they are still celebrating. Again, permission must be granted by the bride and groom and the facility.

The determining factor on which is best, film or digital, depends on the photographer's preference. Regardless of the type of camera you use, there is a tremendous amount of money to be made in wedding photography -- especially if you dare -- in these changing times. Ω



LORIE. PERIOD GOWNS SET THE STAGE FOR NON-TRADITIONAL WEDDINGS AT A FRACTION OF THE COST OF A TRADITIONAL GOWN. PHOTOS ©2003 DENNIS HODGES.

must contract the number of prints, the type of albums etc. at the time of the booking and collect a portion of the fees up front.

On the positive side, digital photography has simplified the wedding photography business and opened up totally new markets for those who dare. With the right equipment you can print and show the proofs instantly. Some couples prefer to see the proofs right after the ceremony (others contract), while there is still time to re-

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