

How to Use Your Website to Bring in More Business

Mike Connors of MorePhotos offers dozens of proven ideas

The number-one rule of marketing is: Get as many people to know you are as possible. The more people who know you exist, the more likely you are to connect with people who want to buy what you're selling.

That's a core philosophy behind MorePhotos, a turnkey, e-commerce solution that enables you to accept orders for your photos from customers around the world. Most MorePhotos clients are photographers who sell to consumers, including wedding, event, portrait, and sports photographers.

Company founder Mike Connors understands marketing because in 1989 he began as a wedding caterer in the highly competitive market of Traverse City, Mich. Then he started publishing wedding guides and providing marketing help to photographers. In 1998, when one photographer wanted to put images online, Connors immediately recognized the value of the idea. It was more work than he expected. But he persevered, and now offers

both Web expertise and marketing savvy.

"Marketing is simply a numbers game," explains Connors. "Some people may strike sales gold after being exposed to 100 people; for others it may take 10,000 people."

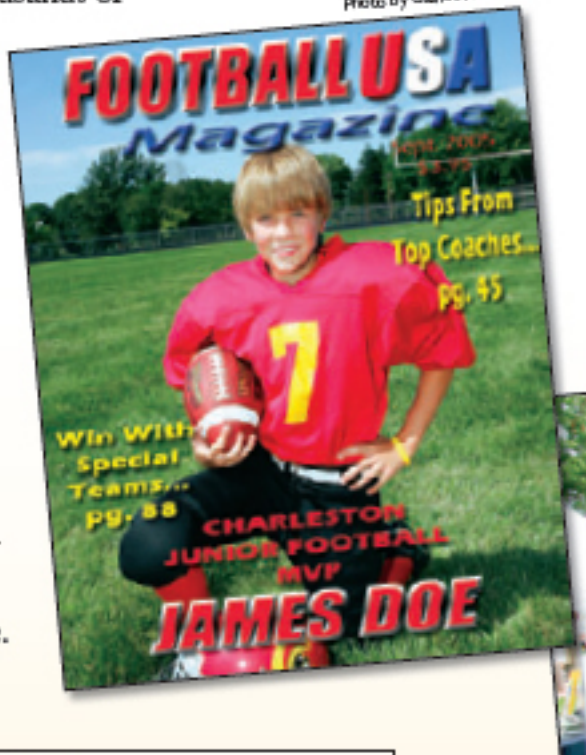
MorePhotos not only gives you a low-cost way to quickly multiply the number of people who know you exist, but more

importantly, it gives you ideas and tools for converting that heightened awareness into sales—not only more sales, but also bigger orders.

As Connors puts it: "Before the Web, at an average wedding with 200 guests, you were lucky if 15 to 20 people knew who you were by the end of the night. But once the bridal couple announced their wedding photos could be viewed on your website, all of a sudden all 200 people at the wedding have a reason to know who you are. Once they bring a couple of friends to the site, your exposure quickly reaches 300 or 400 people."

Small business owners who pay more than \$10,000 a year for search-engine marketing and banner ads don't generate nearly the amount of Web traffic a wedding or event photographer can attract simply by making images available online. Attracting thousands of people to your website is like sending out thousands of brochures—without the printing and mailing costs.

Establishing and maintaining a Web presence and e-commerce site through MorePhotos costs as little as \$600 a year—less than a single newspaper or magazine ad. Pricing depends on how many images you have uploaded at any one time.



THE MOREPHOTOS PHILOSOPHY

Connors is passionate about helping MorePhotos clients grow their businesses. Looking at e-commerce from a photographer's perspective, he came up with a list of three things that you don't need (and which MorePhotos doesn't offer):

1. You don't need anyone to take money from your customers
2. You don't need anyone to tell you where your images should be printed
3. You don't need a co-branded website

Allowing another company's name to appear prominently on the website through which customers order photos is a quick way to confuse your customers, explains Connors. He recalls talking with one young prospective photo buyer who believed a Web-based storefront photo service had shot her friend's wedding, rather than the actual photographer, because that was the website through which she had purchased the images.

Connors understands why MorePhoto's competitors would want to feature their names on your website. Many photographers tend to use the same products and services that fellow pros use, so having the name of your online storefront provider on your site helps them grow their business. But what does it do for yours? Connors believes co-branding can hurt your business.

One new MorePhotos customer said she turned to MorePhotos for marketing help after she saw how quickly a new competitor using MorePhotos had cut into her own long-established photography business. She didn't understand how this newcomer had gotten so much business so quickly until she attended a baby shower, where she heard the guests urging each other to go visit the photographer's website to check out portrait photos.

As for printing, Connors firmly believes you should decide what option is right for you—sending images to a lab or printing your own.

And with PayPal or other merchant account services, there is no need for any other service provider to get between you and your customers' money.

Connors understands why a more inclusive Web/printing/shipping service might initially appear to be more convenient. But in terms of growing your own business, how much does that convenience really cost you?

For example, by allowing a lab to drop-ship prints you miss a valuable marketing opportunity to build a relationship with your customer. Connors suggests that when you ship your own images, you can include a warm and friendly letter that mentions other photography services you provide, along with a coupon for future orders. One MorePhotos customer reports getting new orders from 20 percent of the customers to whom he sends the letters.

Customers who receive a personalized letter from you with a coupon are likely to recommend you to friends or family members seeking good photographers. A referral from a friend or family member who has used your services is infinitely more effective than even the fanciest ad in a magazine or newspaper.

THREE TESTED TIPS

A self-proclaimed business junkie, Connors is brimming with good marketing ideas that he eagerly shares with MorePhotos clients. To make sure his ideas aren't just pie-in-the-sky theories, he collaborates with MorePhotos clients to test his ideas with real photo buyers. So far, many of his theories have proven to have a measurable impact on the photographers'

sales. For instance, here are just three of the concepts that MorePhotos has tested:

1. **Leave your pictures up for a shorter period of time.** If you give people more time to make a buying decision, some people tend to put it off, and then forget about it. When Connors teamed up with a MorePhotos client to test whether it was more effective to leave event photos online for 30 days or 60 days, they found that the 30-day posting resulted in \$5,000 worth of sales, compared to \$4,000 for the 60-day posting. Other MorePhotos clients who have tried the suggestion affirm that this theory works.
2. **Offer a discount when you first post the pictures.** In experiments with wedding and portrait photographers, offering discounts from the start helped increase sales from 15 to 65 percent. One MorePhotos client initially resisted the idea because he thought it would "cheapen him" as a photographer. But when he gave the technique a try with a couple of weddings, he ended up with six or seven more orders than usual.
3. **Offer specialty and novelty products such as photo-imaged jewelry, magazine covers, blankets, coffee mugs, and wood bowls.** This can boost your sales from 30 to 50 percent, says Connors, probably because consumers only have so much wall space for 5x7 and 8x10 photos.

Unlike photo prints, which are a direct reflection of your studio's photography capabilities, it makes sense to outsource the printing and shipping of specialty items. You can choose any supplier you like, but MorePhotos maintains a list of labs that are capable of doing so.

You don't have to risk your reputation as an artist by hawking specialty items personally. But if you make them available through your MorePhotos site, you may be surprised at how many people will buy them.

Connors is so enthusiastic about helping you succeed that he makes dozens of other marketing tips

available to MorePhotos customers. You can find that at <http://morephotos.com/whyus.asp>.

He also continually adapts MorePhotos services in response to suggestions from customers. For example, the MorePhotos service lets you create multiple price sheets to reflect different pricing structures for senior portraits and weddings. And, the MorePhotos software is set up to connect seamlessly with other tools in your studio, ranging from Photoshop to QuickBooks.

You can easily export information about people who have ordered online into your customer database, from which you can prepare letters, Christmas card lists, and marketing campaigns to generate additional orders.

If you spend some of your marketing money on links at sites such as The Knot, the Chamber of Commerce, or various associations, MorePhotos' optional website traffic statistics generator can help you track which of your links are bringing you the greatest number of viewers to your site. Thus, you can reallocate your marketing dollars only to the links that have been proven to bring you new business. -U