



2008 AN-NE MARKETING AWARD SPOTLIGHT: BETH FORESTER

by Angie Wijesinghe, PPA Marketing Specialist



true for my area. After all, being a high school senior is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. While parents may put off coming in for family portraits, they can't put off senior portraits."

But Forester's marketing goes beyond knowing her target. She knows how to connect with the teens and make them part of her marketing campaigns. It's all about viral marketing. "Whether it's instant messaging, Facebook, MySpace, podcasts, blogs, or another form of social media, networking is all they do," Forester laughs.

Before the podcast, her studio was offering DVD slideshows as a price-point purchase. Then, her husband suggested using iTunes and Animoto, a new Web-based service. The idea

for making slideshows available online in podcast form was born. Forester was eager to get the images into the teens' hands, so they could pass it around in a new type of word-of-mouth marketing ("word-of-touch" marketing, perhaps?).

"Only so many folks will come to the clients' homes to see their photos on the wall," Forester says. "But with the podcast, my clients can send their friends to iTunes to download it; they can e-mail it; and they can carry it around with them on their iPods."

An added bonus is that by passing the podcasts along, the seniors pre-qualify their "referrals." After all, they tell each other what they spend on their senior photos. And the others usually want to spend that much or more!

“Every time I enter the AN-NEs (or photographic competitions) I grow and I learn. It’s a way to push myself further and do something different.”

Although many are already feeling the effects of a slowing economy, Beth Forester says her area of Madison, W.Va., seems to have been in a recession since the '60s. And yet, she's going strong. What's the secret to her business survival and marketing success? It's as simple (and complex) as knowing her target market...and the best ways to reach them. This knowledge helped the owner of Beth Forester Photography gain the 2008 AN-NE Marketing Award for Best Use of Multimedia with iTunes podcasts for seniors.

"I read in *USA Today* that research shows teens don't curb their spending in times of a recession," Forester comments. "And I know this is definitely

PPA News & Notes

BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Louis Tonsmeire, *CR.PHOTOG., API*

PPA Member since: 1988

Location: *CARTERSVILLE, GEORGIA*



What are you doing to survive the current crunch and come out on top? As Louis Tonsmeire of Tonsmeire Studio in Cartersville, Ga., says, "Whether in business 2 years or 20, photographers are all feeling the impact of this slower economy."

"Photographers are in survival mode," Tonsmeire continues. And while everyone will have different solutions and slightly different experiences,

some realizations can help universally. For instance, Tonsmeire points out that getting people in the door is key. "But how do you do that when even loyal customers might be dealing with a spouse losing a job...thus, losing that discretionary income?" he adds.

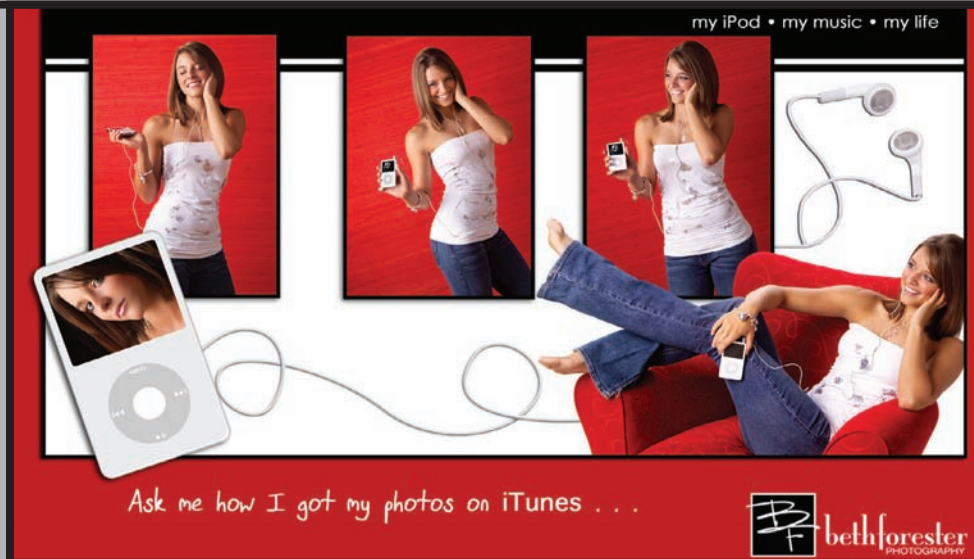
In Tonsmeire's mind, keeping up your customer relationships (and keeping referrals going) is the best thing you can do. "Any incentives that you can

While the podcast earned Forester a 2008 AN-NE Marketing Award, it is really only one “piece of the puzzle,” as she calls it. She started her viral campaigning on MySpace. After seeing that social media spot evolve, she hit the scene more aggressively. Forester added a blog to her Web site, got on Facebook, and has now added podcasts through iTunes.

The key to having effective viral marketing (besides being in the right spots) is simply having something worth chatting about. Forester is always looking for new products, services, and looks to add to her repertoire. “I want to find things that people will talk about,” she says. And talk they do. In fact, Forester once got a call from a mother trying to book a senior session four years in advance... because everyone was talking about Beth Forester Photography and how hard it was to get appointments.

Interestingly enough, Forester has also found that people are more likely to actually read her blog than they are her Web site or printed pieces. If she puts pricing info and ideas about what to wear to a session on her site, she'll always get calls or e-mails asking for that same info. But if she writes something about that on her blog, the customers will read it.

As much as Forester is reveling in the viral marketing phenomenon she's



created, there are still some things she's had to try and then stop. And projection/video proofs is one of them.

“Oddly, that didn't work for me. The proofs walking out the door became a big part of my marketing,” she explains. “Plus, my system allows seniors to keep a certain number of proofs based on the package they choose. The more they spend, the more proofs they keep. And almost 80 percent get to a price point where they can keep them all.”

This just goes to show that what works in one area of photography may not work for another. But, as Forester states emphatically, “You have to figure out YOUR clientele and YOUR personality.” Then you can base your

marketing on that...and run with it. And who knows, you might find the same kind of viral success as Beth Forester.

Beth Forester
Beth Forester Photography
Madison, WV
www.foresterphoto.com
(visit her Pro section to learn more about podcasts)

The annual AN-NE Marketing Awards competition recognizes outstanding ingenuity and effectiveness in real-world marketing endeavors. Named in honor of Ann Monteith and Marvel Nelson, both marketing gurus and past PPA Presidents, the competition is open exclusively to PPA members. More information is online at www.ppa.com (Competitions section).

give to the clients that you do have, do it,” he says. But remember: there is really no more wiggle room. Now, when customers say they can only spend \$200, you really can't upsell them. To combat that, Tonsmeire suggests finding ways to make it affordable and worth the money.

Incentive buying is probably one of the best things you can do to entice customers right now. For one thing, you protect yourself from discounting your services and products so much that it “bites you when the economy turns,” as Tonsmeire comments. If you discount now, customers will expect it later. But if you have a deal where

customers buy more to get more (greater discount, more/bigger products, etc.), you aren't devaluing yourself.

Tonsmeire also suggests trying these four things to help survive the slower economy:

1. Get by with what you have. Remember: your camera was just as good as it was three months ago, and the economy won't always be this bad...you can get the new goodies when things get a little better.
2. Be careful of discounting too much (use incentive buying instead).
3. Watch what others are doing to get ideas for keeping the business

going. Imaging USA (January 11-13, 2009) is one of the best places to do this. But don't forget about all the PPA Webinars and Studio Management Services classes—great ways to improve your business.

4. Don't sound so “doomsday” when talking to others. When people ask you how your business is, be positive. Being gloomy won't be inviting to any prospective customer.

“As hard as everything is, it's not as bad as it could be,” Louis concludes.

A new year is starting...it's time to make your business resolutions and meet the coming days head on.