



Meeting the clients

Wedding photography involves two key parties: the couple getting married and the wedding photographer(s). Many photographers approach their relationships with clients as strictly a business relationship, but part of what has made my business so successful is my ability to personalize the relationships I have with the couples with whom I work. This is important because a strong relationship establishes trust and allows the bride and groom to be themselves in front of me, but more importantly, in front of my camera. This is key to capturing the couple in their natural moments during their special occasion.





The importance of wedding photography is emphasized by the fact that most weddings seem to pass by very quickly for brides and grooms. If you ask most married couples to describe their special day, they will tell you it went by in a blink of an eye. This is the main reason wedding photography is so immensely important; it captures in sharp focus the moments of a day that requires months of planning and then so often passes by as blur for the bride and groom. ❁



FIRST IMPRESSION

The Internet has changed the way people shop for everything, including wedding photographers. Most often the first impression someone receives of my work is what he or she sees on my Web site/ blog. But personally, I think there is a more important impression to consider: the impression I leave with my past clients. If the newlyweds are happy with the images I captured of their special day, then they are much more likely to recommend my work to friends and family who are now looking for a photographer. When I am working at a wedding, every person who is in attendance should leave with the feeling that I did a great job and wasn't intrusive. Yet, they should recognize that I always appeared to capture each of the key moments. And most importantly, the bride and groom need to be blown away by the images when they see them.

As with most wedding photographers, the majority of my clients find me through referrals of former clients, friends or they were guests at a wedding I shot previously. This is why it is so important to always put your best foot forward and to network at every opportunity.





That is not to say that you should ignore the Internet and only rely on word of mouth. I don't. I make sure my Web site, www.kennykim.com, shows images I am proud of, are representative of my style, and I regularly update my blog and Facebook pages with images from my current projects. When prospective clients go to my Web site, I want them to be able to imagine themselves in my images. I'll cover the importance of a Web site and brand marketing further in *Appendix 3* of this book.

I have also created a promotional video available on my Web site that describes my workflow and my photographic philosophy to give prospective clients a glimpse of what they can expect before they ever meet with me. ❁





BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP

The most important part of wedding photography is the relationship you build with your clients. That relationship begins with the first meeting and continues to grow with each step of the wedding planning through the presentation of final photographs. In fact, great wedding photographers continue the relationship with past clients long after the couple has received their final product. I'm proud to say that many of my past clients have continued to follow my work on the blog and Facebook and often leave comments on my current postings.

You might be the best photographer and technically brilliant, but to be a great wedding photographer also requires the right kind of personality. You need to sincerely want to be friends with your clients and fully gain their trust.



As a wedding photographer, a bride and groom will be sharing one of the most intimate days in their lives with you. You will be there as they are getting ready, when they see each other for the first time that day, when the bride walks down the aisle toward her future husband and when, as a couple, they walk back down the aisle after the ceremony. You'll be there when the couple is introduced as a married couple for the first time, when they have their first dance, and all the other noteworthy moments during the wedding day.

To best capture all of these intimate moments, you must develop a strong and trusting relationship with both the bride and groom. When I meet new clients, I begin to build this relationship from the very first time I speak with them, by focusing the meeting on their needs, not mine. ❀



INITIAL MEETING

Many of my initial meetings take place on the phone since about half of my clients are from out of state and I don't actually meet them until the engagement shoot (more on this in chapter 2). When meeting by phone or email, it is really important to clearly convey your thoughts and information. Unfortunately, it's entirely too easy to have miscommunications and misunderstandings when only communicating by phone and email. To counteract this, I always try to be really specific and when in doubt, I make sure to ask questions and get clarifications.

When I do get to meet potential clients for the first time in person, I usually let them pick the location. Many people want to meet at a coffee shop and that can be a good choice, but I try to suggest one that isn't very busy so that we can talk with little interruption. Other great locations are nice hotel lobbies or even a quiet restaurant.

There are times I am invited to the client's house, which is great because it lets me get a strong sense of who they are and assess their personal style. Meeting at a



Since first impressions are so important, how you dress conveys a big message to the clients as to what kind of person you are. I usually wear a nice casual dress shirt, a good watch (if you are a guy) and jewelry, and am well groomed and presentable.



client's home also allows me to meet them where they are most comfortable and often helps me understand what direction they may be leaning in regards to their budget and style of photography. I can also learn more about their personalities and interests.

At this initial meeting, I always bring a couple of wedding albums so prospective clients can see more detailed examples of my work. It is important to let them see samples that cover the entire wedding day. For most couples, choosing a wedding photographer is a new experience. Often, they don't realize the depth of services I can provide, so this is a great opportunity to show them how I can fully capture their special day.

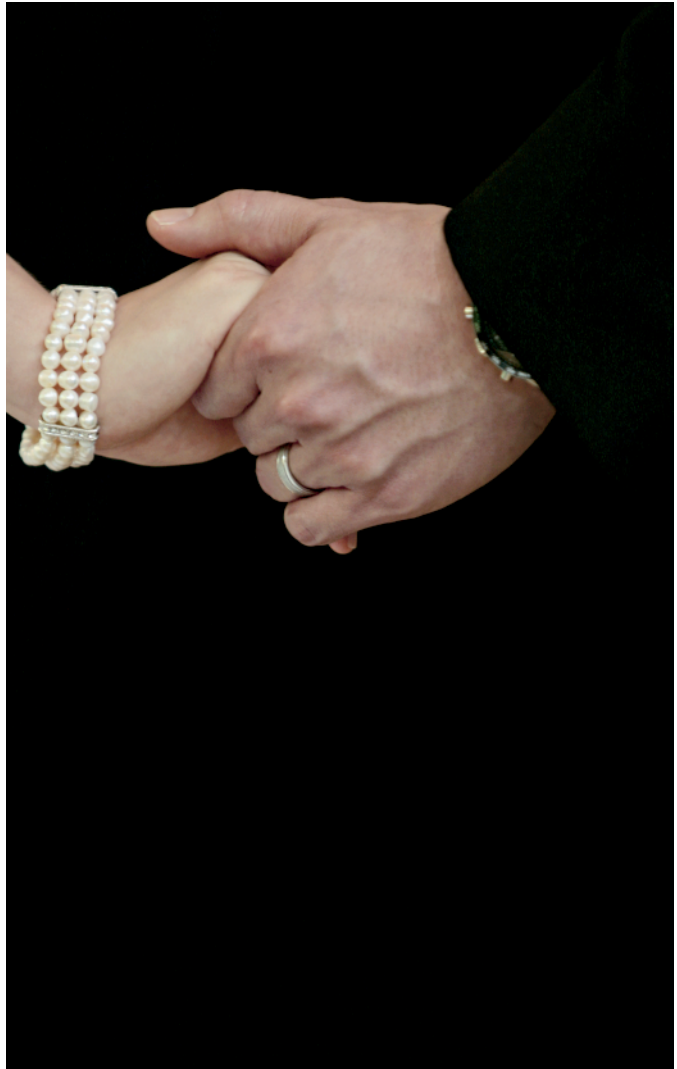
I also bring along a pricing sheet so we don't have to discuss or barter about price and service. I don't ask for a deposit or expect the couple to make a decision immediately. In fact, I don't usually discuss pricing unless the couple brings it up. I just leave them with the pricing guide so they can take the information home and discuss it.



Choosing a wedding photographer is an important decision to make and there is no need to rush it or be pressured into making a decision. I want to make sure potential clients have enough information about what I do and how I do it so they can make an informed decision. I recommend they go home, discuss the meeting, look over my images, and contact me with any additional questions they might have. If they hire me, I want them to feel confident that they chose the best photographer for their special day.

The initial meeting is not just about a business negotiation, but it is a chance to get to know the couple, to see how they interact and to find out about their wedding day. Regardless of whether you are meeting the clients in person, on the phone or through email, try to get as much information about the wedding and the couple as possible. For example, the choice of wedding location and reception are usually significant choices for the couple. Perhaps they picked the historic church because they love the architecture or the museum reception location because they are lovers of art. Knowing these elements would be beneficial for you to know as the photographer and possibly incorporate in the shots.

An important aspect of this initial meeting is that it gives you a chance to educate potential clients about how you work and what they can expect from you. In my experience, while price and their budget can come into play, most people will book me because of my personality, my work, and the experience I bring to the table. The same will be true for you, so the impression you make at the initial meeting will help potential clients determine if you will be a good fit for their wedding.



Questions to ask the couple at the initial meeting

- * Bride's name and contact information
- * Groom's name and contact information
- * Where will the wedding be held?
- * Where will the reception be held?
- * What is the wedding date?
- * What is the wedding schedule?
- * Will there be a rehearsal the night before?
- * Is there a wedding coordinator? If so, need contact information.
- * Why did they choose the locations and date?
- * What are they looking for in a wedding photographer?
- * Find out more about their families
- * How do they want to handle their first meeting—before the wedding or when the bride first walks down the aisle? This will determine the wedding schedule.
- * How did he or she propose?
- * What is the location of the honeymoon
- * Estimated number of guests at the wedding
- * Names of all the people involved in the wedding (family, wedding party, main relatives, helpers)
- * List of all the vendors (which you can use when you credit them in your blog and also for sending your work for publication)
- * Learn more about bride's and groom's backgrounds, including how they met, what they do, and their hobbies and interests





Often when I meet with clients, we talk about everything but wedding photography. We laugh, share stories, get to know each other and in the end briefly discuss the services I provide. By then, they are already comfortable with me and trust that I will provide them with the best service and photos on their wedding day. It comes down to just picking which package or services will best meet their needs.

I make a point to pay for the drinks and/or meal during that first meeting. Think of this as a goodwill gesture. The couple sitting across from you plans to invest a lot of money in you. The least you can do is show that you are genuinely interested in them and you are there to serve them. I recall a personal experience when I met with a financial advisor for breakfast. The bill was about \$20, and he didn't even cover my check even though he invited me to invest my money and trust in him. He was asking me for thousands of dollars on which I'm sure he would have gotten a nice commission. Let's just say that my relationship with him did not continue. You need to invest in things like this; even though it's a small gesture, it goes a long way toward building a strong relationship with your clients. ❁

Initial Meeting Checklist

- ❁ Meet in person when possible
- ❁ Let the client choose the location
- ❁ Dress appropriately for the occasion
- ❁ Pay for your clients' coffee or drinks
- ❁ Take sample photo albums
- ❁ Take a calendar updated with all previous obligations
- ❁ Provide a price list for the client to take home
- ❁ Discuss expectations, both yours and the clients'
- ❁ Take a laptop or notebook for notes
- ❁ Don't expect or require the couple to make an immediate decision

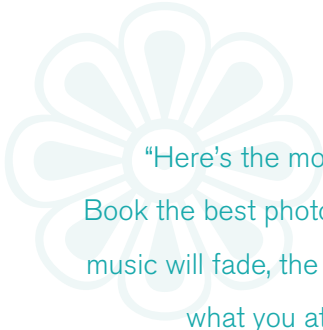


BEING ON THE SAME PAGE

While it isn't usually great business practice to turn down clients, it is important to recognize when a couple may not be a good fit for your business. I consider my style to be something I call "Invisible Observation," a term coined by a friend after seeing me work at a wedding. I try to see everything and capture it all without being seen myself. If the clients are looking for a more traditional photographer who will show up with a big tripod and medium format camera to take classical portraits, then I'm not the right photographer for their wedding.

While there's an innate desire to want to book every wedding, it is not usually possible from a scheduling standpoint, and certainly not desirable. You have to select wisely, ensuring that you and the client will both be happy in the end. Chances are, if you are booking every wedding, you're not being selective enough. The case may also be that you are not pricing yourself appropriately. ✱





"Here's the most important thing you need to know about wedding pictures: Book the best photographer you can afford as soon as you set the date. The wedding music will fade, the flowers will die, and you won't even remember if you ate, let alone what you ate, at the reception. But the wedding pictures last forever."

Leslie Milk, *It's Her Wedding but I'll Cry If I Want To*



CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

Often the biggest hurdle in finalizing a deal is price. Weddings are expensive, and there are lots of unexpected costs that couples won't anticipate. But after the food has all been eaten, the thank you notes written, the dress hung up and their life as a married couple well on the way, the photographs from the wedding will still be there to transport them back to that day, that time. Even if the couple doesn't understand how important their wedding photos will be, I do and I know how much my work is worth.



Negotiating is fine, but too often wedding photographers (photographers in general really) are tempted to lower our prices just to get the job. As photographers, we need to value the time and the investment we have made in our businesses, and when you negotiate lower prices, you are potentially losing profit in your business. If you respect yourself and your talents, clients will too. Remember that even if you do not get this client, there will be another opportunity waiting for you.

In fact, I've known a few couples who regretted their choice after deciding to work with a less expensive photographer. When they've communicated their concerns, it's already too late for me to do anything except offer them my sympathy. However, perhaps this

indicates that I didn't properly communicate the importance of photography to them from the start. If you experience this, I suggest asking them what you could have said or done before the wedding to prevail upon them the importance of choosing the right photographer for them. This may help you better communicate the importance of photography to your future potential clients.

It is important to make sure your clients understand what they will be getting in return for their money, and help them see the value in what you will provide. When a couple wants to hire me, I send them a contract, which details the services I will provide so there are no surprises later on. I include an advance fee due to reserve the date and lock me in as their photographer. I do not use the term "deposit" because legally a deposit can be refunded. Make sure they are clear that this fee is non-refundable because you are setting this date aside for them alone, and cannot take on any other jobs that day. It is not acceptable for them to cancel when you may have turned down other potential clients. ❀





*Some of the important information
covered in my contract includes:*

- * Client contact information
- * Venue location
- * Event date
- * The amount of time I will be shooting on their wedding day
- * Engagement photos
- * Assistant costs
- * Second shooter costs
- * Incidentals and travel costs
- * Album costs
- * Prints
- * Fee schedule, including amount due for "date-reservation"
- * When the clients can expect to receive their final images
- * What happens if I cannot make it due to an act of God, accident or other legal issues?
- * What happens if they are forced to cancel or reschedule their wedding?



SUMMARY

As you begin your relationship with new clients, it is important to gain their trust and remember that while you may shoot dozens of weddings each year, this is most likely a once in a lifetime experience for them. I cringe when I hear married couples complain about their wedding photographers. But when I hear a couple express how fabulous their photographer was, I smile. Although I probably don't know who that photographer was, I want to shake his or her hand and say "well done." Imagine the positive impact you can have on the couples you photograph. Let them know you understand the significance of this event and want to be part of their special day. They will appreciate you for rest of their lives. ❁

