

Recognized with the 2007 PPA AN-NE Marketing Award, these three marketing campaigns share a focus on the importance of targeted promotion, attention to detail, and maintaining effective Web sites and blogs.

BY LORNA GENTRY

# Married to marketing

INNOVATIVE  
MARKETING  
STRATEGIES

“Every year there are 22 percent more photographers in the marketplace,” says an animated Christa Hoffarth of South Lake Tahoe, Calif. “That number scares me.”

A healthy fear of competition may propel Hoffarth to work harder, but what distances her from the pack is smart marketing for her eponymous wedding photography business. Her deft techniques were recently recognized with the 2007 PPA AN-NE Marketing Award for her outstanding wedding marketing campaign. The annual award, which honors member photographers’ creativity and effectiveness in marketing, also went to finalists Peter Holcombe, API, CPP,

All images ©Cheryl Pearson



Christa Hoffarth designed her AN-NE award winning-wedding marketing campaign to make a big first impression on upscale clients.

of Holcombe Photography in Lafayette, Colo., and Albert Lewis of Mulberry Photography in Truckee, Calif.

These three photographers agree on the importance of focused promotion, paying attention to detail, and maintaining effective Web sites and blogs. They differ in approach when it comes to brochures, due in part to their differing markets, business strategies and targeted audiences. The three promotions are a study in contrasts, but the effect is the same: greater profits.

Christa Hoffarth is a natural at marketing. Last year she designed a new brochure and other promotional material for her wedding photography business. Because most of her clients are out-of-towners, Hoffarth says her Web site and brochure are the only selling tools she has. And because competition in her marketing area—San Francisco, San Jose, Sacramento and Lake Tahoe—is fierce, she has to make a lasting first impression in print.

Targeted at upscale wedding clients, her brochure denotes sophistication. “My clients spend anywhere from \$200,000 to \$1 million on their weddings, with the average being \$300,000,” says Hoffarth. “Most of my brides are MBA grads. In fact, a lot of my brides were together in the same MBA program, like at Stanford, for example.”

**CHAIN REACTION.** To appeal to these monied professionals, Hoffarth’s brochure design is eye-catching, sleek, contemporary and fun. The six pages of the 6x6-inch, matte-finish brochure are bound with an elegant silver chain. Her printer, Blossom Publishing in Winona, Minn., drills holes in the card-stock pages, and Hoffarth finishes each hole with a silver grommet before threading the ball chain through the pages. Following the photo-imprinted cover page are two pages on pricing, a page about reprints and albums, a



Albert Lewis targets his brochure to event planners. The quality of every component communicates the sophisticated aesthetic that he will bring to a wedding.

press information page, and a page with an explanation of her philosophy of wedding photography. A DVD of her work—an “indispensable portable marketing tool,” she says—is seated in a sleeve affixed to the back. A clear plastic routed business card foil-stamped with her contact information goes on the front cover. For mailing, she slips the brochure into a transparent self-sealing envelope.

“These brochures have texture appeal and sound to them,” says Hoffarth. “They have a feeling of immediacy, and the clear plastic envelope makes the brochure even more apparent.”

Each brochure costs \$3.50 to produce, so Hoffarth pre-qualifies brides who request one. She got the idea for the piece from her enjoyment of saving shopping bags from expensive boutiques. “I use them again and again,” she admits, because they’re well made

and aesthetically pleasing. She figured her clients would feel the same way about high-quality promotional items, and apparently she was right. “My brides keep these brochures and give them to their friends, so they continue to market for me for years.”

Once a couple hires Hoffarth, she mails the contract and payment information with thank-you cards and a complimentary bride’s emergency survival kit in a clear acrylic box. Inside are dress chalk, safety pins, hairpins, deodorant, stain remover, sewing kit, breath mints and pain reliever.

Ever mindful of branding, all her packaging and marketing materials are color and logo coordinated. Hoffarth’s colors are a concentrated light blue and white, which appear as solid colors and in a loose floral pattern. “I still print proofs, so I package them in a beautiful black-and-white box and use my brand colors as accents—a blue silk ribbon



Peter and Kathy Holcombe garnered the favor of wedding planners by sending them four-packs of custom-labeled Jones Soda.

and custom tag that I write a personal note on. With the package I send a gift, a 3x3-inch bride book. We also send a first-year wedding anniversary gift, an accordion photo book in our colors with graphics and black-and-white images. The outside of the box is a floral black-and-white print that matches our marketing motif.”

**NATIONAL FOCUS.** Like Hoffarth, ANNE finalist Albert Lewis of Truckee, Calif., caters to affluent wedding clients in the Lake Tahoe area, as well as in Palm Springs. Lewis, too, relies on a sophisticated brochure to sell his services. Unlike Hoffarth’s, however, Lewis’ targets wedding coordinators and event planners. “Eight-five percent of my brochures go to event planners,” he says. “The piece communicates quality and the

wedding coordinators have been very complimentary. Many tell me they keep it on their desks, and some call after they receive it. Because our clients come from all over the country, we mail it nationwide.”

Clean and elegant, the gate-folded brochure opens to an impressive 26 inches long. Inside is a mini portfolio of the studio’s work, which is showcased on individual sheets of heavy matte card stock held in place by small rivets. The outside cover is fine-ribbed, grayish-green paper embossed with the studio’s logo, a stylized mulberry tree. Inside, the colors are cream and a serene green, with the exception of the contact page, which is standout mauve, the color of mulberries.

Hand assembled, each brochure costs Lewis a whopping \$32, but he maintains that these head-turners are generating high-end business.

Naturally, he’s selective about whom he markets to, and he screens the recipients carefully.

With a background in graphic design, fashion photography and art direction (he was an art director for Nordstrom and Neiman Marcus), Lewis knows good visual marketing. “My degree is in graphic design so it’s in my blood,” he chuckles. “It’s hard to design for yourself, so I work with a design firm. With the brochure, we tried to integrate the photography and guts of the piece with the overall design. The design catches the eye of the type of client we’re going for. This is not in-your-face marketing. We wanted to create a mood and drive business on the sophistication of the piece. This brochure says, ‘If we can do this, then we can apply these same aesthetics to photographing your wedding.’”

Lewis’ 2007 ad campaign also included five No. 10 envelope-size cards mailed periodically throughout the year. Each card featured images from a wedding the studio photographed, along with one-word headlines (such as “Luminous,” “Bliss,” “Captivating”) and a heartfelt account of how he and his wife and fellow photographer, Tari, felt about the wedding. There is no sales language. Reading like a wedding photographer’s blog, these cards are intended to generate enthusiasm, showcase Mulberry’s work, and keep the studio’s name in the eye of their target audience.

**MAILBOX WOW.** Peter and Kathy Holcombe’s printed brochure wasn’t taking their business in the direction they wanted to go. “In 2005 we were averaging \$3,500 on wedding packages,” says Peter. “We wanted to break out of that mold and go after high-end clientele. So in 2006 we did something different from the tri-fold, printed piece we had been doing.”

“We feel a brochure is limiting,” Kathy adds. “It doesn’t show off our images or demon-

strate the quality of our work. We decided to produce a DVD that shows how we're different."

Once the Holcombes created the DVD, they packaged it in a striking way. "Our materials arrive in a padded silver envelope, which gives it the 'wow' factor right out of the mailbox. The DVD is wrapped in a rectangular aluminum tin with a custom sticker, ribbons and tissue paper. Fitted inside the tin is a brochure with rounded corners." Brides feel that opening the tin first gives them the feeling of opening a gift. "It has really given us a leg up."

Right away the results were dramatic. Within a year bookings increased and the Holcombes averaged \$7,800 per wedding, which handsomely offset the \$10-per cost of the mailing. (They also screen brides before going to the expense of mailing to them.) Now Holcombe Photography attracts a clientele that's in the 27 to 32 age range, who, says Kathy, are professionals with at least a B.A. degree. Peter adds, "We do get the younger clients too, usually from families who can afford [an upscale] wedding."

**JONESING FOR ATTENTION.** In 2007, the Holcombes decided to continue with the tins, and go out a little further on the creative limb with a dynamic new campaign involving Jones Soda. This time the target wasn't brides but event planners at upscale venues in the area. The Holcombes had been knocking on their doors for five years with little success.

Peter likes to research marketing ideas on the Web, and he learned from *Photojojo*, an online photo newsletter ([photojojo.com](http://photojojo.com)), that the makers of the popular soft drink Jones Soda will print personal photos on its bottles for a fee. "We thought it would be a clever way to make a first impression on people we've been trying to get to know," says Kathy.

They ordered 16 sets of four-bottle packages in four Jones Soda flavors. One of

four wedding photographs was printed on each bottle, along with catchy messages on the labels, such as, "Holcombe Photography: refreshingly unique," "Don't trust your wedding photography to the bland," and "Call us for full-flavored images and service."

On the bottlenecks they hung custom-made tags with fun wedding images, like a close-up of a bride putting on mascara, along with such pithy tag lines as "Keep an eye out for us."

The Holcombes shipped the bottles by UPS and FedEx so they could track delivery.

## MARKETING ON THE ROAD

Christa Hoffarth shares her marketing knowledge this month alongside another savvy marketer, Laura Novak ([www.novakphotography.com](http://www.novakphotography.com)), in a workshop at Novak's Wilmington, Del., studio, March 4-5.

Hoffarth creates templates that photographers can use in their promotions to ensure their brand is uniformly reinforced in their brochures, business cards, letterhead, tags and more. Checkout Hoffarth's marketing site for photographers, [Jellyfingers.wordpress.com](http://Jellyfingers.wordpress.com).

Kathy and Peter Holcombe share their know-how in increasing wedding sales at the Imaging Workshops of Colorado, ([www.coloradoworkshops.com](http://www.coloradoworkshops.com)) May 19-21.

now display their wall portraits and books. The cost of the campaign was high, about \$70 per venue, but the return on the investment more than paid for it, they say. The Holcombes now average \$12,000 per wedding.

Says Peter, "I think marketing is one of the most exciting aspects of this business. It's all problem-solving and thinking through." "We're passionate about marketing and our business," adds Kathy. "We calculate carefully. At the beginning of each year we figure out how much we want to work, how much we need to make, and then design our [marketing] materials according to that."

For the Holcombes, provocative marketing fuels a business that underwrites the good life. ■

*Lorna Gentry is a freelance writer in Atlanta.*

A day after delivery, they called each recipient, and they were blown away by the response. "The amazing thing is that we got thank-you notes from these coordinators," says Kathy. "I don't think anyone gets thank-you notes for promo materials," Peter marvels. "Our goal of

the follow-up phone call was to set up a meeting to show our book and get to know them. We got a meeting with everyone."

This imaginative campaign put Holcombe Photography on 12 of the 16 venues' preferred photographer list, and five of the venues