



# **THE "DO NOT SELL"** **PHOTOGRAPHERS GUIDE** **TO BOOKING CLIENTS**

Learn how to convert potential Clients, into  
contracted Clients, without selling

by: Natalie Sousa

[www.virtualstudiomanager.com](http://www.virtualstudiomanager.com)



# Table of Contents:



**Introduction: What, Where and Who**  
About this guide



**Step 1: Setting the Scene**  
Before meeting any Clients, do this



**Step 2: Meet & Greet**  
Set the tone and order of things to come



**Step 3: Look, Listen & Learn**  
Understand and be the expert



**Step 4: Seeing is Believing**  
What do they love and what is important



**Step 5: The Negotiator**  
Be confident with your service and pricing



**Step 6: To Contract or Not to Contract**  
Set clear expectations and next steps

About this guide

### **What Can You Expect?**

Obtaining a meeting with a potential Client or “buyer” is a great accomplishment - and much harder to do these days! The Internet allows buyers to pre-qualify their vendors from the convenience of their home (or job!), making the need to meet with multiple photographers less of a reality.

When you do land the “all important” meeting, its imperative that you take full advantage of that opportunity. This will be the Clients first and last impression of you, before making a hiring decision.

**This guide will help you create an effective Meeting Plan that maximizes your message, making it easier to convert potential Clients into contracted Clients.**

This specific Meeting Plan is designed for a wedding photographer, but the approach can be applied toward any type of photography and/or video assignment.

#### **Where can you get more?**

Visit [www.virtualstudiomanager.com](http://www.virtualstudiomanager.com) for tools, tips and information (like this) to help you build a better business!



**VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER**  
Get behind your camera... not your desk!

### **Who Wrote This?**

Natalie Sousa has over 15 years of experience as a professional photographer, is a co-founder of Webster Hill Photography Agency and Virtual Studio Manager.

## Part 1 | Setting the Scene

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Before meeting any Clients, do this

### The Establishing Shot

An establishing shot is the first sequence of a new scene, designed to give the audience an overview of the scene that follows. This is a popular film and television term that should also be considered when meeting with a potential Client.

Humans unconsciously make short cut conclusions instantly! Whether you agree with the message or not, your meeting space reveals a great deal about you.

### Create a Meeting Space That Promotes Your Brand

If you're a minimalist, your meeting space should be kept simple. Incorporate lots of natural light, clean lines and zero clutter. Make the only focus in the room your conversation and your portfolio.

If you meet at a local coffee shop, use "convenience" as your theme. Everything you do should be easy for your Clients, and flexible.

Meeting at the Four Seasons Hotel over tea suggests your brand is refined, and elegant. Make certain that every bound album, every brochure and the clothes you wear convey that message.

**VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER.COM TIP:**



**To uncover what your meeting space says about you, get behind your camera!**

Take a photograph of the space and have it printed. Hold it in your hands and take a good look. Ask yourself, if you walked into that room today, what does it say about that person? Write what you feel on paper so you can reference it later.

This will help you identify what needs to be corrected, and give you a sense of what your potential Clients feel when they meet with you.

### **The 15 Minute Rule**

Give yourself at least 15 minutes of down-time before every meeting. Have your studio ready! Arrive at your meeting place with enough time to organize your meeting materials and gain focus. Do not cheat yourself of this prep time!

### **Review Their Details**

Have a copy of the couples Shooting Day Details form, or any information you have obtained from the couple previously, readily available to reference.

Use the information to guide the meeting and make the couple aware that you are invested in their plans.

If you have photographed an event at the same location that they are holding their wedding, have those photographs as a reference. If the location is new to you, visit their website and learn about their features, and incorporate what you know in your conversation.

**VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER.COM TIP:**

**Have a personalized letter ready for the Couple.**

Brochures and postcards, are super convenient ready-made handouts, but a customized letter is a really simply way to send a positive message to the Couple. Its says you understand what your Client needs, are professional and honest.



**Download sample letters and helpful worksheets at:**  
[www.virtualstudiomanager.com](http://www.virtualstudiomanager.com)

### **A Controlled Experiment**

In scientific terms, a controlled experiment compares the results obtained from an experimental sample, against a controlled sample. This approach will help you create an effective Meeting Plan!

Your “controlled sample”, will incorporate techniques that you identify as having consistently lead you to a successful result.

Look towards previous meetings and interactions with contracted Clients for information. If you’ve repeatedly been told that you are “friendly, and really easy to work with” or “they just loved those poster-sized prints hanging in your studio”, those are things you are doing well – do more of it, whenever possible. This is your “controlled sample”.

Your “experimental sample” should focus on modifying what potential Clients are not responding to positively.

### **A Controlled Experiment** continued

If you find that Clients tend to change their tone, become vague with their language, appear to be uncomfortable or physically tense up every time you present your albums – your albums need updating! Look for similar signs during your meetings, and quickly work to resolve those issues.

Maintaining your “controlled sample” (what you do well) and adjusting your “experimental sample” (what you don’t do well) will result in a successful Meeting Plan, making it easier for you to deliver your message effectively and convert the couple to a paying customer.

#### **VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER.COM TIP:**

Do not attempt to test more than one “experimental sample” at a time, unless you can easily separate and evaluate the end results.



You risk mixing and matching good and bad techniques, which may make it hard to carve out what is working, from what needs fixing.

### **Observe and You Will Learn**

Understanding your customers is the only way to successfully convert them to a paying Client.

People communicate in many different ways and don’t always use their words to express themselves. Uncover clues that help you understand what your potential Client is thinking by, being a good listener and paying careful attention to their body language. You also want to keep in mind what messages you are unconsciously sending with your body language.

### **Observe and You Will Learn** continued

If your potential Client is leaning towards you, asking questions and maintaining good eye contact, these are great signs!

If, on the other hand, they are fidgeting, have kept their distance and have their feet pointed towards the door or away from you, they are disinterested and not involved.

#### **VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER.COM TIP:**

##### **Body language tips:**

- Maintaining good, comfortable eye contact says you are attentive and involved
- Keeping your head level, says you are confident and sure of yourself
- Having your arms open, and at your sides indicates receptiveness
- Leaning your body towards someone reveals that you are engaged and interested



### **Do NOT Sell**

By nature, people do not want to feel obligated or pushed into making a decision. The goal at every meeting is to be yourself, have fun and send a clear message about what you do and how you can help the potential Client.

## The Log Line

A log line is a quick, one or two sentence description that writers use to pitch their scripts to a network or studio. Its purpose is to quickly summarize the story, grab your attention, and entice the reader with an emotional hook. You should also have a log line!

It's not necessary to communicate the log line to your potential Clients, but it should be used as a thread throughout your meeting. Everything you say and do should support your log line.

**When creating your log line use clear, simple language and try to answer the following questions within the statement:**

- What do you do
- What makes you unique
- How will it help the Client

### VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER.COM TIP:

**Below are a few sample log lines:**

Virtual Studio Manager is an easy to use, online application that helps photographers keep track of their Clients, and save time.

This guide will help you create an effective Meeting Plan that maximizes your message, making it easier to convert potential Clients into contracted Clients.

Webster Hill Photography Agency is the simple way to hire a great photographer.



### **Be Confident**

When meeting with a potential Client always remember that YOU have the advantage. The couple decided that they wanted to take the time to meet with you, because they are interested in a service you provide.

Rather than selling a service to someone who doesn't need it, you are instead sharing information to a potential Client who has expressed interested in hiring you!

Knowing this will help you to maintain your confidence.

Set the tone and order of things to come

### **First Impressions**

Greet the Bride and/or Groom with a warm, friendly hello and a handshake. Say your name and exchange small talk prior to getting into business. Make them feel welcome and maintain good eye contact.

### **Be Respectful of Their Time and Efficient**

Hand them a welcome letter outlining information about your services, along with details on pricing and deliverables. Tell them what you will discuss, and how much time they can expect the meeting to take. This may sound a bit stiff, but you can share the information with them naturally in a manner that's relaxed and informative.

"Here are a few helpful materials I've put together for you outlining what we'll talk about today.

We'll start off by talking about your wedding for June 1<sup>st</sup> - I'd love to learn more about your plans! We'll also chat about any concerns you have and review my portfolio.

I'm here all day, so feel free to stick around – but we should be done in about 45 minutes or so. I promise to make it easy, and if we're both lucky, we might just have fun!"

### Suggested Timeline

Below is an outline that will help you establish good meeting habits, making it easier for you to discuss important details and eliminating the “oh I forgot to mention that!” mistake:

- Introduction
- Discussion
- Portfolio Review
- Pricing and Options
- Contracting

#### VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER.COM TIP:

##### **Do NOT let the Client view your portfolio first!**

You can adjust the order of the timeline to suit your needs, but you always want to have the Client view your portfolio after they have talked about their plans.

While you do want to impress them with your portfolio, you don't want to distract them from giving you the essentials needed to make them your Client.

The couple (Bride especially), is heavily focused on every detail of the wedding planning - not just photography. Its too easy for the Bride to tune-out and think to herself “wow, I love the flowers in this photograph” or “that’s exactly how I want my hair done”, when she should be giving you important information about what she needs from the photographer she will be hiring.



Understand and be the expert

### **Let Them Talk About Their Plans**

This is your opportunity to focus, listen and understand the couple! They will tell you everything you need to know either with their words, or with their body language. Keep your eyes and ears open and useful information will become apparent.

### **Play Up to Their Personality**

If they are shy, it'll become evident very quickly. Put them at ease, and speak to them in a manner that expresses you understand how they feel. Speak plainly and be sure to provide an answer in your response. For example, you could say:

“ Many of the couples I worked with tell me they don't remember seeing me! I try to blend in and capture what naturally unfolds... which tends to make people feel more comfortable in front of the camera. ”

The Bride might come equipped with an enormous binder full of wedding planning materials. Immediately you'll know she pays attention to detail, would like things well documented and clearly explained. Adjust your conversation to address her personality.

“ I'm open to any suggestions or thoughts you may have. Do you have any particular images you'd like me to focus on? Here's a list of suggested photographs that I like to refer to. We can go it over together.”

### **Play Up to Their Personality** continued

If all the couple talks about is how excited they are to catch up with college buddies, let them know you are fun and flexible. Remind them that their wedding is a great big party and you'll capture images of them mingling with family and friends.

“ Being able to see people excited, and interacting with each other is my favorite part of the day. We'll be able to capture a lot of those moments during the cocktail hour. ”

### **Unleash the Expert**

This maybe first time the couple has meet with a professional photographer, and its your job is to make it easy for them to hire you - without selling.

Draw them in and ask questions they probably haven't considered in their planning. Make suggestions for a timeline or possible shooting locations and ask about other vendors they have hired for the day.

This simple approach reminds the couple that you are an expert and your professional experience will make it easier for them. You know exactly what needs to be accomplished and will get the job done.

**VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER.COM TIP:**

**A few questions you can consider asking are:**

Do you have a wedding coordinate that I can send a Shooting Plan to for review?

Does the church have any specific rules that I should be aware of?

I make it a point to introduce myself to the Catering Manager during the reception, who will you be working with?

That church has a great staircase! We should consider it a possible shooting location for the group photograph you mentioned.



### **Learn About Their Concerns**

Ask the couple if they have any questions or concerns and address their needs thoughtfully. You won't know what they are thinking, unless you actually ask the question!

They may have attended a friend's wedding where they experienced a pushy photographer, or they are worried that the chapel is really small and has poor lighting. Get them to open up to you and eliminate their concerns with a clear reply and resolution.

This gives you an opportunity to solve a problem for them, instill confidence and confirm that you have their interests in mind.

## Part 4 | Seeing is Believing

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What do they love and what is important

### Portfolio

By this stage the couple should feel very comfortable with your professionalism and your ability to understand their needs. Now its time to impress them with your portfolio!

Watch them as they flip through your albums, and answer any questions they have. Keep in mind which images they pay special attention to – good or bad, and use that information to your advantage.

### Storytelling

Talk about your experience and approach toward documenting a wedding. Discuss your shooting style and how some of the photographs were captured. Refer to specific photographs and talk about what went into capturing that moment.

#### VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER.COM TIP:

Here's an example of storytelling:

(referring to a black and white, candid photograph of a Groom crossing a busy street...)

"I had to chase after the Groom for this photograph and he didn't realize I was behind him! It was their tradition to kidnap the Bride during the reception, and the Groom had find her. Turns out she was taken to the coffee shop where they first met."



### **A Warm Fuzzy Feeling**

Ask the couple to describe what images they picture in their mind, when they think of the moments they want to remember of their wedding day.

This is an important question, and one you've probably never asked before. You'll gain valuable information from the couples reaction, and they'll tell you exactly the moments you need to focus heavily on when you are photographing their wedding!

Some clients respond quickly with a list of images they've always wanted, while others will smile, look at each other and giggle. In either case, you just made the Client delighted!

All this talk about planning, didn't get the couple to stop and really imagine photographs of themselves on there big day! They'll remember being excited when they meet with you, and will reflect on those feelings when making a hiring decision.

## Part 5 | The Negotiator

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Be confident with your service and pricing

### Pricing Review

Review your pricing structure with the couple. Your packages should be clear and easy to understand. Speak confidently, while being thoughtful and attentive.

Talk about the items included in the package, as well as the turn-around times and additional services. Costs such as extra shooting time, travel, shipping and handling, and reservation fees should also be discussed.

Answer any questions they have and continue to be open and friendly. If they ask you a question and you are unsure of the answer, its best to be honest and let them know you are not exactly sure and that you'll follow up with them. (remember to follow up!)

#### VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER.COM TIP:

##### Highlight features that make you unique!

What separates you from the sea of wedding photographers available for their wedding date?

If you offer a money-back guarantee, let them know! This is a feature most photographers don't provide their Clients; tell them know how it works and why its useful.

If you offer complete packages with flat rate pricing, remind the couple that the rates they see are final. There are no surprise costs that will pop up later and it'll be easier for them to budget their wedding expenses.

Find what makes you different, why it will help you get the job done, or how it helps the couple and communicate the benefits.



### **Who Will be Paying**

Find out who is responsible for paying for the services and use this information to better understand the situation.

If the Groom's parent's will be handling the payment, and they did not attend the meeting, you now know you will not be receiving a deposit at the close of the meeting. Send the couple home with extra materials about your services, and samples of your work, for the Groom's parents to review.

Use the information you've learned and position yourself for the situation.

### **What Are They Looking to Spend**

Learn about the couples budget and what package they are considering. You can suggest services to them, or recommend features and products based on the details you learned about their wedding.

#### **VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER.COM TIP:**

**Use information the couple has shared with you for direction.**

If they mentioned many out-of-town guests will be traveling for their wedding, suggest including an Online Gallery with their package as a convenient way form them to easily share their images with family and friends.

Use the services you provide, to solve a problem or make it easier for the potential Client.



### **Up-Selling**

This word makes me feel icky inside, but there are simple tricks you can implement that won't make you feel awkward.

Show off your good stuff! People don't usually buy what they can't see. Display your work in high-end, library bound albums, super large matted prints, or framed and hung on the walls. Choose really unique cover treatments, include multiple pages and make it extra large in size.

The couple will have a chance to gain a personal experience with the products, making it easier for them to imagine having a series of images hanging in their living room, or a custom album created.

### **Negotiating**

Talking down pricing tends not to be a favorite amongst photographers, but it's a method some couples may try - especially if they are meeting with more than one photographer.

Negotiating may never be your favorite part of any meeting, but it's important to feel comfortable and confident with your skills, service and pricing structure.

**VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER.COM TIP:**

**Price cutting is typically not the best approach.**

Think twice before dropping your rate as it will have an impact on how the potential Client perceives the services you offer. Reducing your price can leave them with the impression that your service is less valuable.

Rather than reduce your cost, always ask the potential Client for something, in exchange for your adjustment.

For example, if the Client is asking you to lower your price, offer them a "reservation bonus". You can include an engagement portrait session valued at a few hundred dollars, provided they contract you for their wedding date within the next 5 days.

Offer a service that incurs less out of pocket expenses to your bottom line, while gaining the potential Client's excitement.



## Part 6 | To Contract or Not to Contract

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Set clear expectations and next steps

### Now What

You've made it this far, excellent! Now its time to figure out if the Client would like to reserve you for their wedding. An equally important question to ask yourself is, are they the right Client for you?

If you have a hard time asking the couple, "Would you like to reserve my services for your wedding date", find other ways to open the topic for discussion that will lead them to answer the question. Here's an example:

"Based on what we talked about today, it seems like the 6 hour package might work out well for you guys. Do you agree?"

#### VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER.COM TIP:

**Phrase your questions so that the potential Clients answers "yes".**

You want the couple to remember that they found themselves often agreeing with you, which leaves them with the sense that you really understand what they need from a photographer.

By asking the question, "Do you have any questions about my terms and conditions?", you've lead the potential Client to feasible answer "no". Even if they do have concerns, they are more likely to say no, as most people don't want to feel like they are asking a stupid question.

Instead ask, "Would you like me to review my terms and conditions with you?". The probable answer to this question is "yes".



### **If the Potential Client Says YES**

It's rare that a couple will reserve you on the spot, great job!

Go over your contract, terms and conditions and deposit requirements... add them to your calendar!

### **If the Potential Client Says MAYBE**

Couples are inundated with information, which makes it perfectly reasonable to take a few days before committing to such a large purchase decision.

Your next step is to set clear expectations, establish a deadline and follow up.

### **Set a Deadline**

Let the Client know to you will send them an email including a link to their online contract detailing the package you discussed.

The contract will be dated and due within a week (or less) of the meeting date to obtain the reservation. Tell them how simple it is to complete the contract, and they'll immediately receive an email receipt confirming the booking and you'll begin to create a Shooting Plan for the big day.

If you are using paper-based contracts, this same approach can be applied.

### Create a Consequence

The Client needs to be aware of what happens if they don't reserve you within the deadline stated.

Clearly express that they have the right to reserve your services first, within the timeframe given, and in the event you receive an inquiry for the same date, you'll call them prior to meeting with another potential Client.

#### VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER.COM TIP:

**This is important for multiple reasons.** Not only does it give you a set timeframe to expect an answer from the couple, it also conveys that you are a professional and understand that it is likely for another Client to inquire about your services for the same date.

This creates a sense of urgency for the potential Client and sends a subtle "you may lose your opportunity to reserve me" message, that will encourage the potential Client to follow up with you in a timely manner.



### Follow Up

After having sent the dated online contract (on the day of the meeting), send a thank you email the following day.

Check in with the couple and ask if they have any specific questions about the selected package or your terms and conditions. Ask them to keep you updated with their hiring decisions, either way, and you'll follow up with them in the next 5 days, (or within the deadline communicated) if you don't hear from them first.

### **Follow Up** continued

The goal is to maintain an open line of communication with the couple. Keep your emails short, easy to read and friendly.

On the day the contract is due, assuming you haven't heard from the couple, send them a follow up email. In the email tell them that you will call them later that day and indicate a specific time frame.

By providing the couple a point of reference and letting them know what to expect, it will make it much easier for you to make the call and start the conversation. They will know exactly why you are calling and will be prepared to talk to you.

#### **VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER.COM TIP:**

##### **When should you stop checking in with the Client?**

There should be least 5 points of contact with the couple after the meeting. If you haven't heard from them at any point, they are an unresponsive Client and its best to move on.

- Email the online contract (day of the meeting)
- Follow up email, asking if they have any questions
- Email the couple on the day the contract is due
- Call the couple on the day the contract is due
- A final email should be sent a week after the contract due date



### **If the Potential Client Says NO**

In these situations, hearing “no” is never easy but you should be getting more “nos” than “yeses”!

Whether by phone or by email, if the couple decided not to reserve you, never make them feel uncomfortable with their choice. Instead thank them for their time and wish them luck.

If you want to inquire about what went into making their decision, ask them if there is anything you could have done better that may have resulted in hiring you as their photographer.

**Whatever you do, don’t feel discouraged! There is always something to learn from the experience.**

#### **VIRTUAL STUDIO MANAGER.COM TIP:**

**On average, you should be contracting 1 out of every 3 potential Clients you meet with.**

If your booking rate is more than 1 out of every 3 meetings, then your prices are likely too low. Not everyone should be able to afford you, and you are clearly offering a service that people find valuable.

If your average booking rate is lower than 1 out of every 3 meetings, then evaluate your message, branding, advertising outlets, albums, meeting space , etc. and uncover what needs fixing.



For more information, tools and tips to help you build a better business, visit Virtual Studio Manager at:  
<http://www.virtualstudiomanager.com>



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Get behind your camera... not your desk!