

Successful studio events can generate buzz, heighten visibility and build brand for your business. Here are 12 tips for a great party.

# Host with the *most*

12 IDEAS FOR THROWING AN ANNUAL EVENT

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To be successful in business, you must do things that give you visibility and build your brand all year long. To be a leader in your market requires doing even more, things that knock the socks off clients and prospects. Once a year, every business should throw an event that creates massive buzz. Think of it as a party to celebrate your clients.

The event must be exciting, enticing and inspiring. People don't want to come to your business to hear a sales pitch, they want to be stimulated. Now's your opportunity to wow them with your creativity.

One of the best reasons to host an event is to bring in people during a slow time, which often for photography studios is the first quarter of the year. You can use an event not only to create buzz, but also to book sessions during typical lulls. When it comes to having successful events, Vicki Taufer, M.Photog., CPP, and husband Jed Taufer, owners of VGallery in Morton, Ill., are some of the best. VGallery has had a Girls Night Out event every winter for eight years. They invite vendors who appeal to women or who have a unique product to set up in their studio during the event. They give each attendee a gift bag stuffed full of goodies from these companies—really great goodies like product samples, not just coupons.

Known for putting on events worth going to, the Taufers launched another successful event, Dog (and Cat) Days of Summer. Promoted solely with an e-mail blast, the event was fully booked in 24 hours. The 30 to 40 animals they'd planned to photograph grew to 120. The event's sales were fantastic, and as part of the promotion, raised enough money to contribute 125 bags of pet food to

Vicki and Jed Taufer's Dog (and Cat) Days of Summer event generated a fantastic response and great press for Vgallery and animal charities.

animal charities. Three newspapers covered the event, and one quoted Vicki Taufer: "We have run specials for children over the years and have never seen a response like this. People love their children, but they must really *love* their pets." The event generated both buzz and revenue, and positioned VGallery in a segment of the market they had not yet tapped, pet photography.

Hosting an event can be stressful when you're new at it. I hope these tips from my own experience will help you create a smashing success.

**SELECT A THEME.** Whether it's a playful tagline or an extravagant design, your event needs consistency. Use the same theme and design elements on the invitations, signage, nametags, packaging, ads and anything else you use to promote this event. This is one

time you can go crazy with fresh looks, but the theme should be consistent with your identity. Whatever the look, do not tamper with your logo.

**POLISH YOUR STUDIO** like never before. Repair any nicks and get rid of anything unattractive or dated. Give the place a fresh coat of paint. When I worked at an advertising agency, a client company rebuilt the front room displays in its hair salon and day spa every six to eight weeks. Our clients knew it would increase sales of add-on products because it was timed with the visiting cycle of the typical customer, so she'd see something new every time she came, yet would still feel at home there. Photographers should reenergize

A great goodie bag goes a long way in creating buzz.



their studio at least once a year, and having an event with lots of “guests” is a great motivator to do it.

#### TIE-IN WITH A CHARITABLE CAUSE.

We always find a way to generate funds for a charity we believe in. For example, we can contribute the event’s session fees to the charity and say so in our promotions. Clients get both a tangible product and emotional satisfaction.

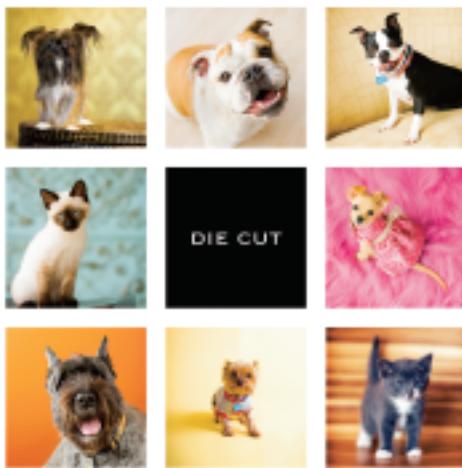
It’s a wonderful feeling to help others and it creates goodwill in the community.

**INTRODUCE SOMETHING NEW.** People look to you as a leader in style and design. They want to see what’s fabulous and new. Maybe it’s a canvas gallery wrap framed with stirring words, or a line of custom art books, or a new metallic media or a unique frame. New products plant seeds for future session sales.

**PROVIDE A GUESTBOOK.** Your database is one of your most important assets. Make sure you capture the names of everyone attending your event and add the newcomers to your database. You can also collect new names and updates with register-to-win studio gift certificates. You could have people register to win a television set or other unrelated prizes, but you gain an opportunity for additional sales if the reward is a sitting.

#### OFFER BEVERAGES AND ENTICING SNACKS.

Pastries, hors d’oeuvres, soda and even adult beverages for evening events can stimulate conversations and make people comfortable in your setting. Make sure the time of your event accommodates different lifestyles. Stay-at-home moms are usually



Color scheme and design should be fresh and suit the theme, but still consistent with your studio's brand and identity.

## THERE'S ALWAYS A REASON TO HAVE A PARTY

If you’ve recently changed the name or logo of your business, an event is an opportunity to keep people attached to your brand. When you make major changes to your business, people want to know that they are positive changes.

If you just opened your first retail studio space, have expanded or changed location, everybody is curious to see your new space. Make every detail perfect and celebrate with everyone you know.

If you transition from proofs to projection, an event can help educate clients on how it benefits them. Set up a projector and show large images with music. It will give you a chance to explain how you can shoot more, how you can help them with

framing and in-home design and more.

Events bring traffic during slow times. Planning an event allows you to be proactive and boosts the cash flow.

Generating money for a favorite charity not only feels good, but also makes people feel good about you. It would be hard for many of us to donate \$2,500 to a charity out of our own pocket, but if we can do it through our business, how wonderful is that!

When you want to overcome objections, an event can be the solution. Have you ever heard, “We don’t want our home to be a shrine to our kids.”? Because my clients purchase large wall portraits, they sometimes have concerns that they’ll run out of space. I want them to come to my own home and

see how to decorate with artful portraits of one’s family. Right before Christmas, I hosted a holiday open house at my home. Welcoming my best clients into my home strengthened the bond between us.

If you are expanding your services, an event can be a catalyst for growth. For example, if you are starting to offer senior photography, plan something exciting to get seniors to come see your cool space.

Even if you don’t have a specific reason to stage an event, throw a fun party and hang out with the people who love your photography the most. Make hosting an event a goal for your business in the new year.

available until the kids get home from school, and working parents like to come right after work. Yes, 10 a.m. until 7 p.m. is a long time, but heck, you've done all the work, the more the merrier.

**FREE GIFT FOR EVERYONE.** I strongly advise studios to invest in an impressive promotional item. Coffee mugs and pens just don't cut it anymore. I have given offset-printed custom calendars housed in CD jewel cases. Twelve sheets of paper fit nicely; turn over the calendar and there's a second year. Our art will be sitting in front of the client for two years after the event. At the Dog Days of Summer, VGallery gave visitors gift bags donated by a local bakery holding custom-made VGallery dog biscuits.

**BE GENEROUS.** We produce hundreds more calendars than we'll need for the event. I give several copies to everyone whose child was featured in it—we like to use some of our best clients as models—and they delight in passing them along to friends.

**PROSPECT FOR NEW CLIENTS.** Target ads and announcements at select neighborhoods, groups or organizations to stir up new business.

**CONSIDER CO-MARKETING.** For example, if you specialize in children's photography, you could photograph select clients of children's clothing shops in town and display them in a unique way during your event. Build goodwill with the store by inviting everyone on the clothing store's mailing list.

**INVITE FRIENDS AND FAMILY.** It's smart to invite the people who care about you. It helps fill your studio, which makes it seem more exciting, and because they want to see you succeed, they're some of your best salespeople.

**GENERATE PUBLICITY AND MAXIMIZE EXPOSURE.** Because you're generating money for charity, your event is newsworthy. Not only should you send a press release,

but on the day of the event, take the time to make phone calls to the targeted reporters at the newspaper and television stations. One thing about events: there are no guarantees, warns Vicki Taufer. "You can't control things like weather or other events

that might be taking place at the same time as yours. Remember that events typically grow each year, so don't get frustrated if you don't have a huge turnout for your first. On the other hand, we know photographers who've had 400 people at their first event." ■