

How to Survive in a Smaller Market

Three ways to win clients and keep them coming back

Wes Kroninger & David Humphreys

Here we are in a medium-sized market, in a pleasant southern city. But it's not Southern California. It's not Manhattan. Our clients can't step out our studio door and hail a cab to SoHo. How do we keep them here? How do we find them in the first place?

Over the years, we've discovered a trifecta of factors that help us win the race to keep our customers coming back: Quality. Facility. Rapport.

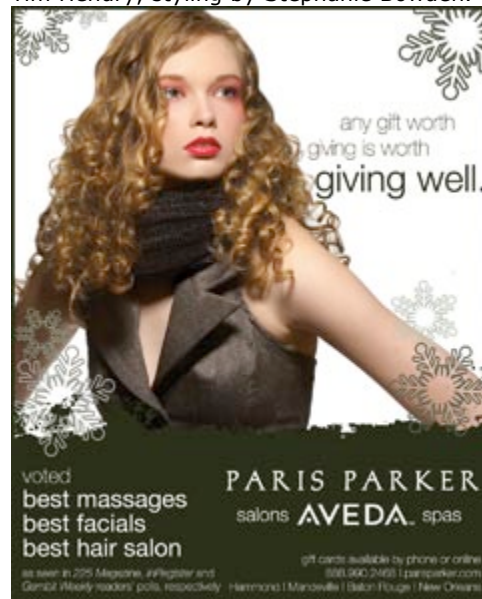
1. **Quality.** There's not a whole lot of explanation necessary for the first criteria. While cost is a consideration for many clients, they want their final product to live up to their expectations. And if they can't get that, a cheap price ultimately doesn't matter. Your work must be as good as what your client can get elsewhere.
2. **Facility.** At this point, this where the facility steps up. It needs to scream professionalism. That doesn't mean you can't work from your home. Our studio is actually attached to one of our homes. It has its own entrance, and we've taken great care to ensure that it has the feel of a sophisticated studio. We've been very careful about both the décor and the amenities. Your clients need to feel that you care about your work—and about them. When you walk into our studio, it looks like we mean business. And while our clients are there we do everything we can to make it easy for them to conduct their business, with a comfortable area where they can work, with phone access—and a must in today's world—high-speed wireless Internet.

We also throw in some touches to make it clear to them that we think they're special. For example, we make sure that the food we cater in for shoots is the best our city has to offer.

3. **Rapport.** It must be very clear to your clients that your focus is to do whatever it takes to help them achieve their goals. That means doing your homework and having the best understanding of what each client wants to achieve. It's hard to get clients to plan ahead, but if you devote some time to conceptualizing with them in advance, it not only makes your job easier. It's another way of letting them know how much you care about



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Wes Kroninger captured both ads in early 2007. The Avatar ad was shot for Modiphy Design Studio with AD Tim Hendry, styling by Stephanie Bowden.



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The Paris Parker Salon & Spa ad, with model Courtney Erickson, was created for the IM Marketing Group and AD Michael Baker.

your work and the product you're producing for them.

Where do we find our clients to begin with? We advertise by using every available resource to let people know what we do: Networking, a good website, traditional advertising.

Before you start letting the world know about your expertise, make sure you know exactly where your expertise lies. What are your key strengths? What kind of photography do you most like to create? Before you get the word out that you do it all, make sure you want to do it all, and that you can do it all well.

We've identified our strengths and, more importantly, areas of photography we really enjoy. For one of us it's food, product shots, commercial photography, and corporate ID. For the other, it's people and editorial photography. You will attract the work you ask for, so make sure you're asking for what you really want.

Can you compete in a world of stock photography? Lots of clients can't use stock. If commercial photography is your thing, look around your community for companies that produce something that can't be replicated in stock.

While we work with—and have great relationships with—several advertising agencies, we don't depend on them. Create your own relationships directly with likely clients. That means reaching into your community with a message that says you're confident in your abilities, ready to exceed your clients' expectations, and determined to show clients they can get the photography they need while supporting their local economy.

Wes Kroninger, of Fine Light Studios, LLC (www.finelightstudios.com), Baton Rouge, LA, age 29, has gained national exposure in Rolling Stone, Nurse Leader, Insider Magazine, and various trade magazines. He is expanding into editorial portraiture with an increasingly national clientele. David Humphreys (www.davidhumphreysphoto.com), Baton Rouge, LA, has photographed food, architecture, and products for 25 years.



© Images by Wes Kroninger and David Humphreys Raising Cane's ad by David Humphreys. The food stylist for the shoot was by Martha Torres.



© Images by Wes Kroninger and David Humphreys Commercial photographer David Humphreys shot the Raising Cane's ad earlier this year for Diane Allen & Associates in Baton Rouge. The food stylist for the shoot was by Martha Torres.

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