



Elevate: Master Marketing and Create Momentum

Ignite: Phase Two

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Market & Momentum

This is the basic goal for this phase.

Our Focused Milestone: Land 3–5 Paid Assignments in Your Niche

You've laid the groundwork; portfolio refined, website up, message clear. Now it's time to put that work into motion. Phase Two is all about building visibility, pitching with purpose, and creating consistent opportunities that generate real, paid assignments.

Getting “discovered” is wonderful, but that is not our goal here. It is too passive.

This is taking ownership of your outreach and letting momentum work in your favor.

The Goals of This Phase

- Book real work with real clients
 - Develop repeatable outreach habits
 - Build referral loops and sustainable visibility
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Basic concept

Your “Dream Fifty”

Create a “Dream Fifty” for maximum clarity and impact.

Dream-50

If your marketing plan is sorta like “post some stuff and hope for the best”, well...
You're not alone.
But you're also not in control.

Drumroll please!

Enter the **Dream 50 List** — a game-changer for photographers who are ready to stop the endless waiting and start some sweet *winning*.

The Dream 50 isn't just a list of clients.

This puppy is a full-on *strategy* — a targeted, efficient, and relationship-driven approach to landing the right kind of work with the right kind of clients.

Here's why building your Dream 50 should be your next move:

1. Targeted Outreach

(a.k.a. Stop Wasting Your Damn Time)

When you handpick your Dream 50, you're identifying businesses, agencies, and individuals who are already a great fit for your work.

No more "spray and pray" marketing.

Instead, you focus on the clients who value strong visuals, create content regularly, align with your style — and *treat creatives with respect*.

(Yes, that last one matters. A lot.)

2. Efficiency and Focus

(a.k.a. Save Your Energy for the Right People)

Marketing can feel like shouting into a black hole.

The Dream 50 narrows your field of vision. You're not trying to be everywhere for everyone — you're laser-focused on the 50 relationships that actually matter.

This kind of focus beats "doing all the things" every single time.

3. Strategic Relationship Building

(a.k.a. Play the Long Game)

We're not talking about scary cold calls and cheesy sales pitches.

We're gonna start some real conversations.

How do we do that, you ask?

Simple. We:

- Follow them on social.
- Comment thoughtfully on their posts.
- Send a smart, personalized email introducing yourself and your work.
- Stay in touch with valuable and fresh content, not canned spam.

We're not begging for a job — we're building a connection.

And when they *do* need someone, guess who'll come to mind first?

4. Prioritization and Planning

(a.k.a. Work Smarter)

Your Dream 50 shouldn't be one giant, undifferentiated blob.

Break it down:

- **Tier 1:** *Ready to pitch now.*
- **Tier 2:** *Almost ready — needs more relationship-building.*
- **Tier 3:** *Aspirational clients — the dream gigs.*

This way, you're always working the system.

Shooting personal projects that would appeal to your Tier 2s and 3s?

That's smart, without feeling like heavy-handed marketing.

5. Tracking and Accountability (a.k.a. Grown-Up Business Moves)

Use a CRM.

Or a spreadsheet.

Or sticky notes if you must.

Hell, a pack of *Post-its* is only a buck at the Dollar Store.

The point is: **Track your outreach.**

- Who you contacted.
- When you followed up.
- What you sent them.
- What they said.

Consistency wins.

Sloppy memory loses – every time.

Bottom Line

(a.k.a. Why You Must Get Proactive)

The Dream 50 flips your marketing from *reactive* to *proactive*.

It forces you to get clear on who you want to work with — and then actually do the work to get on their radar.

It's not glamorous. It's not overnight.

But it *works*.

And it's how real, sustainable, and personally aligned businesses are built.

Ready to Build Your Dream 50?

Here's How to Actually Stop Wasting Time.

Today.

Look, hoping for work isn't a marketing plan.

Neither is scrolling LinkedIn and calling it "networking."

If you're serious about getting better clients, it's time to **act like it**.

Here's how to start right now:

Make the List: Write down 50 businesses, agencies, or people you *actually want* to work with. No randoms. No "well, maybe if they asked." Only the ones you'd be proud to put on your roster.

Tier Them:

- **Tier 1:** You could pitch them *today* and feel good about it.
- **Tier 2:** You're close, but you need to warm them up a bit.
- **Tier 3:** Total dream clients. (Start planting seeds anyway.)

Get on Their Radar:

Follow them. Engage with their posts. Send thoughtful emails. (No spammy “just circling back” nonsense.)

Track Everything:

Keep a simple CRM, spreadsheet, or even a notebook. (Amateurs rely on memory. Pros track progress.)
The goal?

Stop waiting to get picked. Start building the relationships that will build your career.

It doesn't take magic.

It takes focus, persistence, and a little bit of guts.

You will be constantly working on your Dream Fifty. Continue the work below as it is being constructed.

Your Key Moves**1. Craft and Send 20 Intro Emails**

Your Dream 50 list isn't just a list, it's your warm-up track. Start by sending 20 personalized emails. Introduce yourself, share a small curated set of images, and include a soft call to action. Keep each message handcrafted and intentional.

2. Shoot 3 Strategic Personal Projects

Shoot what you want to get hired for. Treat them like real assignments. Share the process, BTS, and final images across your channels.

3. Use Your Blog and Instagram Intentionally

Don't just post pretty pictures. Use these platforms to show how you think and how your work solves client problems.

4. Offer a New Client Promo (Smartly)

Run a limited-time offer: a bonus image, a “brand refresh” session, or a short engagement for first-time clients. Make it feel exclusive.

5. Build a Referral List

Reach out to past clients, stylists, copywriters, and designers. Let them know you're available and open to collaboration.

6. Reach Out to 10 Local Businesses

Offer a targeted, limited portfolio-building shoot. Not free work—strategic outreach.

7. Segment Your Email List

Start separating cold, warm, and client leads. Tailor your communication for each group.

8. Collect and Deploy Testimonials

Ask every client for feedback and share their praise on your site, social, and emails.

Mindset Shift

You're no longer waiting to be hired.

You're now creating opportunities and showing the market what working with you looks like.

Chapter 1: The Leap from Learning to Earning

From Practice Mode to Paid Assignments

Let's talk about the gap.

Not the one between taking photos and editing them.
Not the one between Lightroom and delivery.

I'm talking about the gap between *doing the work* and *getting paid to do the work*.

And here's the kicker: it's not talent that closes that gap. It's action. It's systems. It's mindset.

You've spent months—maybe years—building your skills. You've shot products on white, food styled on rustic tabletops, lifestyle scenes lit with care. You know your gear. You know your light. Hell, you might even have a slick-looking website.

But clients? Still a trickle.
Money? Still inconsistent.
Confidence? Riding a roller coaster.

Let's fix that.

What This Chapter is Really About

Phase Two begins when you stop pretending you're "building a portfolio" and start saying, "*I'm open for business.*" This chapter is the mindset shift—and the strategic shove—you need to cross that invisible threshold.

Because let's be real: most photographers don't fail because they lack talent. They fail because they stay stuck in "prep mode."

They build and tweak and polish and plan—waiting for... what, exactly? Permission? A sign from the algorithm gods? That mythical client who finds them on Google and says, "I'll take your full-day rate, thanks"?

Here's your permission: it's time to move.
You are ready.
You're not perfect, but perfect doesn't pay the bills.

The Fear Factor: Why Most Photographers Stall

There's a reason this transition is tough. It's not just logistics—it's psychological.

Here's what creeps in:

- **Imposter syndrome:**
"Why would anyone pay me when there are photographers better than me?"
- **Money fears:**
"What if I quote too much and lose the job—or too little and regret it?"
- **Visibility hang-ups:**
"I hate self-promotion. I just want my work to speak for itself."

The truth? Those aren't problems. They're symptoms.

The problem is the absence of a plan.

And that's what Phase Two gives you: structure, steps, and small wins that build confidence.

The 3–5 Assignment Milestone

This chapter sets up your milestone: book 3–5 paid assignments in your niche.

Why that number?

Because it proves you can:

- Find and connect with the right people
- Solve a business problem with your photography
- Deliver on time and on brief
- Get paid and potentially re-hired

Five jobs isn't a career. But it *is* traction. It's momentum. It's a signal—to yourself and your market—that you're in the game.

The Formula: Skills + Systems = Work

Let's break down what gets you hired.

Most photographers assume it's this:

Good Work → Clients Hire Me

Reality check. It's more like:

Good Work + Visibility + Pitch + Trust = Clients Hire Me

Your job in Phase Two is to build the middle of that equation:

- **Visibility** (people need to know you exist)
- **Pitch** (you need to reach out with value)
- **Trust** (you need to look professional and deliver consistently)

That's the difference between a hidden talent and a working photographer.

Your Business Is a Tiny Factory

Here's a mental model I use with photographers:

Your business is a little factory.

- **Your product?** Visual problem-solving through photography.
- **Your inputs?** Time, skill, outreach, reputation.
- **Your outputs?** Happy clients, money, portfolio pieces, referrals.

The factory only runs if you feed it. And right now, it needs a steady diet of outreach, visible work, and a willingness to treat marketing as part of the craft—not a chore.

Client Work is Not a Mystery. It's a Process.

Let's look at what a *real* Phase Two assignment looks like.

Not a "someday" dream gig. A real-world, small-to-mid-budget client who needs great work.

Imagine this:

- A local baker wants photos for their new pastry line.
- A boutique skincare company needs flat-lays for Instagram.
- A restaurant group wants lifestyle shots for their new patio menu.

These aren't far-fetched. These are right in your backyard. And they're *hireable* right now—if you know how to reach them.

The Commitment: Show Up Like You Already Belong

Phase Two is also about identity.

It's not just about doing what pros do. It's about *thinking* like one.

Pros don't wait for work.

Pros don't feel weird about money.

Pros don't hide behind their portfolios.

They build pipelines. They follow up. They show up.

This doesn't mean turning into a used car salesman. It means showing people how your work solves problems. It means letting them see the *value* you bring—not just the pixels you make.

The Big Takeaway

Phase Two begins the moment you stop preparing and start pitching.

It's time to:

- Put your work in front of people.
- Send the damn email.
- Share the behind-the-scenes process.
- Offer something that makes people say “yes.”

We're not chasing clients.

We're building systems that attract and land them.

You're not a hobbyist anymore.

Let's build that momentum—and start getting paid for what you already know how to do.

Chapter 2: Building a System, Not Just a Portfolio

Consistency Beats Genius (Every Time)

Let's get something straight:
You don't need a better portfolio.
You need a better *system*.

Don't get me wrong — having great work is non-negotiable. You have to be able to deliver. But the portfolio is not your business. It's not your marketing plan. And it sure as hell isn't a system for getting clients.

If your entire marketing strategy is “hope someone sees my work and likes it,” you're gambling with your rent money.

This chapter is about building a simple, repeatable system — one that turns visibility into leads, and leads into clients. One that works when you're not feeling “inspired.” One that takes the guesswork out of what to do next.

Because random actions lead to random results.
And you're here for results that build something.

Why Systems Matter (Even for Creatives)

Photographers — especially the creative ones — resist systems.
They think systems mean selling out, being robotic, or worse... looking like a marketer.

Here's the truth:
Systems are just *habits with a purpose*.

A system is what keeps your outreach consistent.
It's what reminds you to follow up.
It's how you know what to post, when to pitch, and where to show up.

Think of it like this: your art can be spontaneous.
Your business *can't be*.

The Three-Part System Every Photographer Needs

Let's simplify it down to this:

1. **Outreach** — get your work in front of people
2. **Content** — show your value in public
3. **Follow-up** — stay top of mind without being annoying

You don't need ten funnels, paid ads, or a newsletter that reads like a corporate brochure. You need three clear actions, done weekly.

Let's break each one down.

1. Outreach: The Quiet Hustle

Outreach is not “spraying and praying.” It's targeted, thoughtful, and focused on the client's world — not yours.

Your goal here?

Make *real people* aware that you exist, and show them you understand what they need.

Start with this:

- Create a list of 20–30 dream clients or local businesses
- Look at their current marketing images
- Find a gap, an improvement, or a compliment to their brand

Then write them. Not a mass email. A personal note.

Something like:

“Hey [Name], I love the work you're doing with [Brand]. I specialize in [niche work] and had a couple ideas for visual campaigns that might complement your latest product launch. Let me know if you're open to a quick chat or review of my work. Here's a link to a few relevant samples.”

Short. Smart. Direct. Helpful.

And yes — you're going to send these every week. That's the system.

2. Content: Show the Work, Share the Value

Posting pretty photos isn't enough. You need to show *how* you work and *why* it matters.

Start using your blog or Instagram to show three things:

- **Process:** Behind the scenes, lighting setups, planning stages
- **Results:** Before/after, the final image in use, client success
- **Value:** What problem you solved — more sales, more attention, better engagement

This isn't ego, that's marketing that educates.

Clients aren't hiring you for shutter speed or lens choice.
They're hiring you for what your image does *for their business*.
Make that visible.

3. Follow-Up: Where the Money Is

80% of gigs come *after* the first message.
But most photographers stop after one email. Maybe two.

That's not a system. That's a hope.

Here's how to follow up without sounding desperate:

- **1 week after initial email:** “Just making sure this didn't slip through the cracks...”
- **2 weeks after that:** Send a value-based message — a blog post, a new shot you made, a success story
- **Monthly:** Keep the door open. Ask if timing is better now, or if they'd like to be on your list

The tone? Professional, friendly, non-pushy.
And always with *them* in mind, not you.

The Weekly Rhythm That Works

Let's get practical. Here's what a bare-bones weekly system could look like:

Day	Action
Monday	Send 3 intro emails to new leads
Tuesday	Write a short blog or IG caption with value
Wednesday	Follow up with 3 older leads
Thursday	Share one client success story or testimonial
Friday	Review your lead list and update statuses

That's 5–10 hours a week, tops.
And it builds the muscle you need to keep your momentum going.

NOTE: I believe the best contact system is three cold contacts per day, and at least one warm or current client contact per day. Start with the system above and get it going, then add this more advanced on top of it.

But What About When You're Busy?

Ah yes — the classic trap.
You get a gig, you go all in... and stop marketing.

Two months later? Crickets.

That's why your system needs to be so simple it survives chaos.

Batch your content. Schedule your follow-ups. Keep a CRM (even a Google Sheet works). And block time — 90 minutes a day is plenty.

This isn't optional. Marketing is *part of your job now*.

Let's Talk Tools (Keep It Simple)

You don't need to sign up for a hundred apps. Here's a minimalist toolkit:

- **Google Sheets** for tracking leads
- **Notion** or **Trello** for planning posts
- **Canva** for making visuals
- **Instagram + Blog** for publishing
- **Gmail** for direct, personal outreach

That's it. No excuses. No fluff.

The System Will Save You

Creativity is your engine, but systems are your map.
Without one, you're stuck in circles.
With one, you build predictable growth.

This isn't about scaling to 100 clients a year.
It's about booking 3–5 great ones *now*.

A portfolio makes you proud.
A system gets you paid.

Time to build yours.

Chapter 3: Your Niche Is Your Pitch

Why Clarity Wins Clients (Every. Single. Time.)

Here's the uncomfortable truth:

If your portfolio says, "I can shoot anything," clients will assume you're *not great at anything*.

Generalists get ignored.

Specialists get booked.

And no, this doesn't mean you're stuck shooting only coffee bags for the rest of your life.

It means you *position* yourself with focus — so the right clients know you're the right choice.

This chapter is about defining that niche, owning it, and using it to guide everything from your portfolio to your pitches to the projects you share.

Because the facts are:

Clarity is magnetic.

Confusion kills momentum.

The Myth of Being "Too Niche"

I hear this all the time:

"But I don't want to get pigeonholed..."

Listen. You're not getting married to a subject.

You're *building a bridge* to paying clients.

Shooting for a niche doesn't mean you can't take other gigs.

It means your messaging has direction.

It means your website answers the question, "*What do you do?*" in five seconds flat.

When you lead with "I shoot anything," you make the client do the work.

They have to *figure out* if you can help them.

When you say, "I help boutique food brands create craveable, scroll-stopping images," they get it. They understand what that means.

And they're either in or out.

Either way, you win.

Your Niche is the Intersection of 3 Things

Let's get tactical.

Your niche lives where these three elements overlap:

1. **What you love to shoot**
2. **What you're good at**
3. **What people will pay for**

If you've got two out of three, you can survive.
But hit all three? You *thrive*.

Let's walk through it:

1. What You Love to Shoot

This is the work that lights you up. The thing you'd photograph even if no one paid you. It could be food, skincare, tools, bikes, jewelry, people in motion — whatever.

2. What You're Good At

Not just technically — but stylistically. Do you light small shiny objects like a boss? Do you create mood with color and texture? Are you great with people? Find your superpower.

3. What People Will Pay For

This is the market. And this matters. You need to know who's spending money and what their visual needs are. Restaurants, fitness brands, e-comm stores, agencies — all have recurring image needs.

Look for where these three circles intersect. That's where your pitch lives.

Make It Specific. Make It Sharp.

Here are a few examples of strong niche positioning:

- “I shoot plant-based food brands that want vibrant, wholesome imagery for packaging and digital.”
- “I help fitness startups showcase their gear with clean, high-contrast product photography.”
- “I create editorial-style images for skincare and wellness brands who want something more elevated than e-comm.”

Each one of those answers two important questions:

1. Who do you help?
2. What kind of images do you make?

That's what *your* niche needs to do — quickly, confidently, and with a point of view.

But What If I Like Shooting Multiple Things?

Good. That's fuel for creative longevity. But for Phase Two, you *lead* with one focus.

You can still:

- Shoot your side projects
- Take gigs that pay the bills
- Build different portfolios over time

But for now, choose one front door.

Don't water it down with, "I also shoot this and that and family portraits and pets and events and..."

No one hires a Swiss Army knife for high-end work.

They hire the right tool for the job.

Use Your Niche to Guide Your Strategy

Once you define your niche, everything gets easier.

- **Your intro email?** Speaks their language.
- **Your website?** Shows the kind of work they care about.
- **Your blog and Instagram?** Tailored to their interests.
- **Your promos and incentives?** Designed to attract *them*, not everyone.

You go from noise to *signal*.

And in a world full of content, signal wins.

Don't Just Say It — Show It

Saying “I specialize in food photography” is one thing.
But showing a portfolio of beautiful, relevant, on-brand food shots? That seals the deal.

This is where your personal projects become powerful marketing tools.
(We’ll go deep on that in Chapter 5.)

For now, here’s your homework: curate your portfolio for your niche. Ruthlessly.

If you want food clients, don’t lead with portraits.
If you want to shoot products, don’t lead with events.

Be the photographer they’re already imagining.

Test and Adjust — But Stay the Course

Picking a niche doesn’t mean locking yourself into a five-year plan.

You’re allowed to pivot. You’re allowed to explore.

But while you’re in Phase Two, focus matters more than variety.
Momentum matters more than novelty.

Let your results — not your whims — guide the next steps.

You can always change direction.
But you can’t get anywhere if you never start moving.

The Big Takeaway

You can’t market to *everyone* — so stop trying.

Find your niche. Own it. Speak directly to the people in it.

Let your website, your words, your work — all of it — say:
“I see you. I get you. I shoot for you.”

Chapter 4: Crafting the Perfect Intro Email

The Email That Opens Doors (and Gets Replies)

Let's get something out of the way:
You are *not* bothering anyone.

Not if you've done the work.
Not if you've chosen your niche.
Not if your portfolio solves a problem they actually have.

You're not a spammer.
You're a visual problem-solver introducing yourself to someone who needs your kind of help.

This chapter is about writing the kind of email that doesn't get ignored.
The kind that opens conversations.
And eventually, books gigs.

The right intro email doesn't beg.
It doesn't brag.
It communicates value — clearly, quickly, and in the client's language.

Let's write one.

Why Most Cold Emails Fail

Before we build yours, let's look at the usual suspects clogging inboxes:

- Too long
- Too vague
- All about the photographer
- No call to action
- Looks like a copy-paste job sent to 300 people

The worst ones read like this:

"Hi, I'm a commercial photographer. I specialize in portraits, events, products, and landscapes. I thought you might need photos. Let me know."

Yawn.

There's no hook. No connection. No clear offer.
And absolutely zero understanding of the recipient's world.

We're going to do better than that.

The Five-Part Formula That Works

Your email needs to do five things fast:

1. **Greet them like a human**
2. **Show you know who they are**
3. **Make a clear connection between your work and their needs**
4. **Invite them to take the next step**
5. **Make it easy to say yes**

That's it.

Short. Sharp. Specific.

Let's break it down with an example.

Example Email (for a Skincare Brand)

Subject: Visuals for Your Next Product Launch

Hi [Name],

I've been following [Brand] on Instagram — your recent launch for the [product name] line looks fantastic.

I specialize in photography for skincare and wellness brands, especially product-focused content that works across both packaging and social. I had a couple of ideas that might help you with your next launch or seasonal campaign.

Would you be open to a quick chat next week or a review of my portfolio? Here's a link to a few relevant samples: [portfolio link]

Appreciate the great work you're doing, and I'd love to connect.

Best,

[Your Name]

[Your Website]

[Instagram handle if relevant]

Why it works:

- It's *personal* — mentions their product or campaign
 - It's *focused* — speaks directly to a niche need (skincare visuals)
 - It's *short* — respects their time
 - It's *actionable* — asks for a review or a call, not a vague “let me know”
-

How to Build Your Email List (Without Being Creepy)

You're not buying a list. You're *building* one.

Start with these sources:

- **Instagram** — Brands you already follow. Engage first. Then reach out.
- **Local business directories** — Think boutiques, restaurants, makers
- **LinkedIn** — Look for marketing managers, creative directors, brand owners
- **Referrals** — Ask clients or friends, “Who do you know that could use photography?”

Use a spreadsheet or simple CRM (Notion, Trello, whatever works) to track who you've contacted, when, and how they responded.

This keeps you from pitching the same brand twice. Or worse, ghosting one that was interested.

What NOT to Do

Let's save you some embarrassment.

- Don't copy/paste the same exact email to everyone.
You can use a template — but *customize the middle* every time.
 - Don't attach giant files or PDFs.
Link to your site or a Dropbox folder.
 - Don't make them guess what you do.
Tell them. In one sentence.
 - Don't pitch to a brand you haven't researched.
One glance at their Instagram or website will tell you if your style fits.
-

The Follow-Up Plan

One email isn't a system. It's a wish.

Your follow-up is where the magic happens.

Here's a three-touch plan:

1. **Initial email**
2. **Follow-up in 5–7 days**

“Just circling back in case this slipped through the cracks. Still happy to send over ideas or set up a quick call.”

3. **Value-add in 2 weeks**

Send them something useful: a case study, blog post, recent work you shot that relates to their brand, or even a mini creative idea for them.

Never follow up with “Just checking in.” Add something. Be helpful. Stay human.

And then — let it go. You're planting seeds. Some grow now. Some later. Some not at all.

It's not personal. It's the pipeline.

Subject Lines That Get Opened

Here are a few that work well:

- “Photography for your next launch?”
- “Quick idea for [Brand Name] visuals”
- “Loved your latest [product/campaign] — a thought”
- “Images that match your brand's energy”
- “Let's make something beautiful for [upcoming season/product]”

Avoid spammy stuff like:

“Work with me!” or “Professional photographer available!”

Keep it natural. Friendly. Real.

Your Goal Isn't a Gig — It's a Conversation

This can't be stressed enough:

The goal of your email is not to land a project on the spot.

It's to *start a conversation*.

If they reply? You're in the door.

Now you can ask questions, build a relationship, send work, and eventually — close the deal.

But it all starts with that one short, well-written email.

The Big Takeaway

Your intro email is your handshake.

It's your first impression.

And it doesn't need to be perfect — it just needs to be human, helpful, and clear.

Here's your checklist:

Use their name

Mention their brand or project

Show how your work solves a problem they have

Link to relevant samples

Ask for a simple next step

Then follow up. Professionally. Briefly. Consistently.

You're not a stranger. You're a specialist.

And the right clients are waiting to hear from you.

Chapter 5: The Power of Personal Projects That Sell

Shoot What You Want to Get Hired For

Let's get something straight right off the bat:

Personal projects are not fluff.
They are not filler.
They are not "just for fun."

They are *the most effective marketing tool* you have as a working photographer.

This chapter is all about how to turn your self-directed shoots into client magnets — work that builds your portfolio, sharpens your voice, and gets decision-makers to say, "*We need something like this.*"

Because here's the golden rule:

If you want to get hired for something, you have to show you can do it.

Clients don't imagine what you're capable of.
They hire based on what they *see*.

Let's make sure they're seeing the right thing.

What Personal Projects Are and Aren't

Let's define the terms:

A personal project is a self-assigned, self-produced photo shoot that reflects the kind of work you want to get hired for.
That's the key.

It's not just any shoot. It's not random inspiration.
It's strategic. Focused. Intentional.

Not a portfolio dump of everything you've ever tried — but a tight, curated piece that says:

"I understand this niche, this style, this problem — and here's what I'd do with it."

Think of personal projects as pre-client assignments. You're showing what's possible — without needing someone to pay you first.

Why They Work So Damn Well

Here's why personal projects are dynamite for momentum:

- **They attract the right clients.** You're showing work they already need.
- **They position you as a thinker, not just a shooter.** You're bringing ideas to the table.
- **They're SEO and social fuel.** The process, the results, the behind-the-scenes — it's all content.
- **They help you grow.** You set the bar. You try new techniques. You define your aesthetic.

Every time you make and share a great personal project, you tell the market:
“This is what I do. This is who I do it for. And I can do it right now.”

The 3 Criteria of a Killer Personal Project

You want your projects to hit these three marks:

1. **Relatable**
It should look like the kind of work your target clients already hire photographers to create. A boutique soap company is more likely to respond to a clean, styled tabletop shoot of skincare than an abstract shot of bubbles on glass.
2. **Aspirational**
It should push just a little beyond the average. Better lighting, better concept, better styling — make it look like what your dream client *wishes* their brand looked like.
3. **Reusable**
It should generate more than a final image. Behind-the-scenes shots, before/after comparisons, lighting diagrams, blog posts, reel content — get as much mileage out of it as possible.

What to Shoot (and Why)

Pick projects that make sense *for your niche*. Here's a few examples:

If You're Targeting Food & Beverage:

- A styled shoot of a local bakery's pastries
- A high-end conceptual image of a wine pour with dramatic lighting
- A recipe story featuring seasonal ingredients in a rustic setup

If You're Targeting Product Photography:

- A minimalist tabletop shoot of natural skincare
- Tech gadgets lit cleanly on seamless with subtle motion blur
- Flat-lay compositions styled for e-comm or social

If You're Targeting Lifestyle Brands:

- A styled “morning routine” series with wellness products
- Hands interacting with tools or gear (hello, relatability)
- Still life with context: gym gear, coffee setups, beauty flat-lays

If You're Targeting Local Businesses:

- A visual story about a local maker and their product
- A mock campaign for a nearby restaurant's new menu item
- Packaging detail shots for a local candle or soap brand

Remember — this isn't art school. This is pre-client storytelling. Design your shoots like case studies waiting to be picked up.

Process = Marketing Gold

One of the biggest mistakes photographers make?

They only show the *final shot*.

But the *process* — that's what makes your work sticky. It builds trust. It shows skill. And it teaches clients why your work is valuable.

So share:

- Moodboards and inspiration
- BTS setup shots
- Sketches or layout ideas
- Lighting diagrams or setups
- Challenges and how you solved them

Each of these is a separate piece of content. And all of it builds visibility.

Promote It Like a Pro

You're not just making an image. You're making *a campaign*.

Here's how to promote your personal projects:

1. Blog Post

Walk through your concept, approach, and results. Show what the image solves.

2. Instagram Carousel

- Slide 1: Final shot
- Slide 2: Setup
- Slide 3: Detail
- Slide 4: Before/After
- Slide 5: The result “in use” (mockup, packaging, web layout)

3. Email to Potential Clients

Subject: “New Visuals for Natural Brands — Thought of You”

Body: Include the image, a quick blurb, and a link to more.

4. PDF Promo

Package it up. One-page layout. Send it to warm leads.

You didn't just make an image.

You made a story. A campaign. A pitch.

Turn Personal into Paid

This is the best part.

After you share your project, reach out to 3–5 potential clients *in that niche* and say something like:

“I recently created a concept for brands like yours — thought it might spark ideas for your next campaign. Let me know if you'd be open to chatting.”

If the work is strong and relevant, they'll respond.
Maybe not all — but some.

And that's how personal becomes professional.
Strategic. Consistent. Profitable.

The Big Takeaway

Personal projects are not filler between gigs.
They *create* the gigs.

Every one you do is a business card, a pitch, a case study, and a magnet — all rolled into one.

Don't wait for permission. Don't wait for clients. Don't wait for the perfect time.

Shoot it. Share it. Market the hell out of it.

And watch what happens.

Chapter 6: From Feed to Funnel

How to Turn Instagram + Your Blog Into Marketing Machines

You've shot the work.
You've defined your niche.
You've even crafted that sharp intro email.

Now it's time to make your digital presence do some of the heavy lifting.

Because let's be honest — posting a nice photo on Instagram with “Shot this last week 📷 ✨” isn't getting you anywhere.
Neither is letting your blog collect cobwebs because “nobody reads blogs anymore.”

That's not marketing. That's passive scrolling with a side of creative burnout.

This chapter is about treating your Instagram and blog like strategic assets — not afterthoughts.
We're turning content into connection.
And connection into clients.

Let's Define the Funnel (Don't Worry, No Marketing Jargon)

When we say “funnel,” here's what we mean:

- **Top of Funnel:** Someone finds you — IG, blog, Google, word of mouth
- **Middle of Funnel:** They stick around — check your work, read a caption, click your site
- **Bottom of Funnel:** They reach out, reply to your email, or book a call

Your Instagram and blog live at the *top and middle* of that process.
They introduce you, show your value, and nudge the right people closer to hiring you.

But only if you treat them like tools — not trophies.

Instagram: It's Not Just for Likes

Instagram is your fastest, easiest brand visibility tool.
But only if you shift how you use it.

Here's what works *for photographers in Phase Two*:

1. Show the Work in Context

Clients don't hire images. They hire *results*. So show your images in use:

- On packaging
- In a mockup
- As a magazine ad or e-comm banner
- On an IG grid layout (like they'd use it)

This makes you look like a brand partner — not just a picture-taker.

2. Share Your Process

People love behind-the-scenes. But more than that, they love *knowing how you think*.

- Show your lighting setup
- Talk through how you approached the concept
- Post a reel or time-lapse of the shoot day
- Share what went wrong — and how you fixed it

This builds authority, and more importantly, *trust*.

3. Speak to Your Clients, Not Your Peers

You're not trying to impress other photographers.
You're building trust with people who might hire you.

Use your captions to speak directly to your target clients:

- “If you're a boutique food brand prepping for holiday season, here's what you should be thinking about visually...”
- “Packaging tip for skincare brands: avoid too much white space unless your images are doing the heavy lifting.”
- “This lighting setup is ideal for small product shoots where you need both contrast and soft highlights.”

That's *value*. That's what makes someone save the post, follow you, and eventually reach out.

Content Pillars: Know What to Post

Rotate between these four types of posts. It keeps your content fresh, balanced, and effective:

1. **Portfolio Highlights** — Show the work you want more of

2. **Behind the Scenes** — Build trust and curiosity
3. **Client Results or Testimonials** — Prove your work solves problems
4. **Educational/Insightful** — Teach, inspire, or share insights

This gives your feed rhythm. It builds a story. And most importantly — it positions you as a creative *partner*, not just a hired hand.

The Blog: Your SEO Powerhouse

Instagram moves fast. Blogs stick around.

Your blog isn't dead — it's just underused.

Done right, it's how clients *find you, understand you, and decide to work with you* — all without you being in the room.

Let's unpack how to use it.

1. Think Like a Problem-Solver

Your blog isn't a diary. It's a *resource*.

Write articles that answer real questions your target clients might Google:

- “What kind of product photography helps convert more sales?”
- “How to prep your food for a brand shoot”
- “The best lighting setups for showing off packaging texture”

Each one builds trust, improves SEO, and positions you as an expert — not just a vendor.

2. Break Down Your Shoots

Turn personal projects or client work into case studies:

- The challenge
- The approach
- The final results
- The lessons learned

This is *gold* for local SEO, and it gives you tons of content to repurpose across other platforms.

3. Include Strong Calls to Action

Every blog post should end with a nudge:

- “If you’re planning a product launch and need images like these, let’s talk.”
- “Want photos that match your brand’s tone and energy? Drop me a line.”
- “Book a quick consult — let’s build a shot list that works for you.”

Make it easy to go from reader to lead.

How They Work Together

Here’s a sample content flow:

- Shoot a new personal project
- Post BTS and final image on IG (with a short caption)
- Write a blog post about the shoot — concept, execution, results
- Create a PDF one-pager of the shoot for email pitches
- Email your list with the blog post link and invite replies
- Boost one IG post or reel to your target market for visibility

That’s *one* shoot turned into *six* strategic touchpoints.

Now imagine doing that once a month.

Posting Without Burning Out

You don’t have to post every day. But you do need to post consistently.

Here’s a light content calendar:

Day	Post Type	Platform
Mon	BTS + short insight	Instagram
Wed	Blog post or teaser	Blog + IG
Fri	Final image with value caption	Instagram
1x/Month Deep dive shoot breakdown		Blog + Email

Batch it.

Schedule it.

Then focus on the next shoot.

You’re not a content creator. You’re a working photographer who markets like a pro.

The Big Takeaway

Your Instagram and blog aren't just places to show off.
They're bridges between your talent and your next client.

Used right, they create:

- Trust
- Authority
- Visibility
- Momentum

But only if you stop posting like a fan and start showing up like a *partner*.

Think process. Think value. Think *client-first*.

Your feed is the funnel.

Your blog is the anchor.

Together, they keep you top of mind — and at the top of the hiring list.

Chapter 7: Incentives That Spark Action

Without Discounts That Devalue Your Work

Let's start with this:

You don't have to cut your rates to book clients.

You don't have to compete on price.

You *especially* don't have to offer desperate "limited time only" coupons that make your work look like clearance-bin content.

Instead, you use **incentives** — smart, strategic nudges that make potential clients say:

"This looks like a win. Let's do it."

This chapter is about building *urgency without pressure, value without devaluation, and momentum without burnout.*

Because the right incentive doesn't just get the client to book — it builds trust, sets expectations, and often leads to repeat business.

Let's do it right.

What's the Difference Between an Incentive and a Discount?

Let's define terms clearly.

- **A discount says:** "My normal price isn't worth it. Here's a deal."
- **An incentive says:** "This is my normal price — but here's a bonus or advantage for booking now."

The discount hurts your perceived value.

The incentive enhances it.

One makes you look like you're struggling to get work.

The other makes you look like you *have a process.*

See the difference?

You're not lowering your value — you're increasing your *irresistibility.*

The Psychology of a Smart Incentive

Great incentives work because they:

- Create a **reason to act now**
- Feel **customized or exclusive**
- Offer **real value** without reducing price
- Don't feel gimmicky

You want the client to feel like they're getting *more*, not paying *less*.

Incentives are about momentum, not markdowns.

Incentive Ideas That Actually Work

Here are some proven ways to nudge clients toward “yes” — without ever saying “20% off.”

1. New Client Bonus

“All first-time clients get two bonus web-res versions of their favorite image optimized and ready to use.”

Why it works: Adds value. Costs you nothing but a few exports.

2. Limited-Time Concept

“I'm shooting a series of tabletop images around sustainable skincare, only 3 brands will be included.”

Why it works: Creates scarcity and aligns with a niche. Feels curated.

3. Early Booking Perk

“Book before [date] and I'll include one styled flat-lay at no additional cost.”

Why it works: Encourages quick decision-making and feels generous, not cheap.

4. Creative Development Session

“With every new project booked this quarter, I'm offering a free 30-minute concept session to help you develop a strong visual story before we shoot.”

Why it works: Reinforces your value as a creative partner — not just a button-pusher.

5. Bundled Deliverables

“When you book two shoot days in one month, I’ll deliver an extra set of cropped hero images for social, free.”

Why it works: Increases commitment and helps you control your calendar.

Positioning Is Everything

How you *talk about* the incentive matters more than the incentive itself.

Don’t say:

“Here’s a discount, I’m trying to fill my calendar.”

Say:

“This is part of a special promotion I’m offering to brands in [your niche]. It’s a way to show what I can do and create some beautiful, valuable work together.”

You’re offering an opportunity.

Not begging for a booking.

How to Introduce an Incentive (Without Feeling Awkward)

Timing is everything.

Introduce your incentive:

- At the end of your pitch email
- In a dedicated “announcement” post or story
- In your email newsletter
- In a DM after some rapport has built

And keep it *low-pressure*:

“If it’s helpful, I’m running a new client promo through the end of the month. No rush — just wanted to let you know in case it aligns with your plans.”

Simple. Confident. Professional.

Use Scarcity — But Keep It Honest

Scarcity works. But only if it's real.

If you say “only three slots left” — *mean it*.

If you say “booking through Friday” — *close it down Friday*.

You're not creating false pressure — you're maintaining *trust*.

And believe it or not, clients respect structure. Boundaries make you look *booked and serious*, not desperate and scattered.

Bonus Tip: Incentivize Referrals, Too

Your incentive strategy isn't just for cold leads — it works beautifully for warm ones, too.

Try this:

“If you refer a client who books, I'll include a bonus image or a small shoot for you at no charge.”

Referrals are gold. Make them easy and rewarding.

Things to Avoid

Here's what *not* to do when offering incentives:

- Don't offer them too often (it kills urgency)
- Don't lower your fee — *ever* — just to close a deal (Use a line item approach to the bid so you can cut from those lines without altering your shoot fee)
- Don't complicate the offer (keep it clear and easy to say yes to)
- Don't make it about you (“I need work”), keep it about *them* (“You get value”)

And please... no “exposure bucks” or “limited portfolio rates.”
You're a professional. Act like it.

If you want to build your book, do it with strategic positioning.

We're not playing amateur-hour pricing.

The Big Takeaway

Your rates are not the problem.

They never were.

There are clients who pay premium rates every day.

Because they see the value, and if the value doesn't match the price in their heads, they are not interested in going forward.

So pricing is not the problem, but...

Your *presentation* might be.

Smart incentives give people a reason to move forward without making you look cheap.

They create urgency.

They increase value.

And most importantly, they help close the deal *without damaging your reputation*.

Your work is worth it.

Let the way you offer it reflect that.

Chapter 8: The Referral Engine

People Who Talk About You When You're Not in the Room

There's a point in every photographer's career where they stop chasing work — because the work starts finding *them*.

That point almost always comes from referrals.

Someone talks about your work.

Someone shares your name.

Someone says, *"I know a photographer who would be perfect for this."*

And boom: you're in.

This chapter is about building that kind of ecosystem. One where your name circulates even when you're offline.

One where stylists, copywriters, art directors, vendors, and past clients send opportunities your way because you've made it easy, valuable, and smart to do so.

Referrals aren't luck or tricks.

They are designed.

They are structured.

They're *built*.

Let's build yours.

The Power of Being Recommendable

Referrals happen when three things are true:

1. People **like working with you**
2. People **understand what you do**
3. People **remember you when the opportunity arises**

If any one of those three is missing, the chain breaks.

So no, it's not enough to just "do good work."

You have to show up, stay in touch, and be crystal-clear about your niche and value.

Let's make sure you're doing all three.

Step 1: Make a Referral List

Start with the people already in your world:

- Past clients (especially the happy ones)
- Vendors you've worked with (stylists, set designers, retouchers)
- Local business owners
- Fellow photographers who don't shoot what you shoot
- Marketing people, creatives, art directors
- Friends in adjacent industries (event planners, PR, etc.)

Put them all in a spreadsheet or CRM. Give yourself space for:

- Name
- Relationship
- What kind of client they could refer
- Date of last contact
- Notes/follow-ups

This is your *referral engine*.

You're going to nurture it, not spam it.

Step 2: Craft Your Referral Message

Don't overthink this. You're just letting them know what you're doing, and that you'd love a recommendation if someone comes to mind. This is NOT a sales letter, so don't even mention working with them. You are only asking for a friendly referral.

Here's a simple message:

Hey [Name],

Hope you're well! I've been working on some new photography for [niche/market] — mostly focusing on [specific work].

If you ever hear of a brand, agency, or small business needing visuals like that, I'd love an introduction. I always try to go above and beyond for referrals, and it means a ton when my name gets passed along.

Here's a quick link to my recent work: [link]

Thanks again — hope we get to collaborate again soon.

Best,
[Your Name]

That's it. Friendly, non-pushy, clear.

Send 5–10 of these every week.

Keep it natural.

You're planting seeds.

By the time you get back to starting the list again, you can change it up, share some work, and look even more polished. However, you NEVER sell in these emails.

Step 3: Make Referring You Easy

You want to be *referable*. Which means:

- Have a clean, professional portfolio link ready
- Offer a quick one-liner people can use:

“He’s a product photographer who does beautiful, minimal work — especially for food and wellness brands.”

- Make your niche obvious
- Include testimonials on your site
- Have a short, no-fluff bio ready to go

Basically — remove the friction.

Referrals happen faster when you give people the *words* and *confidence* to pitch you to others.

Step 4: Incentivize (Lightly)

Sometimes a small thank-you goes a long way.

You can say:

“If you refer someone who books, I’ll send over a small bonus or do a little shoot for you on the house. Totally optional, of course, just a way to say thanks.”

You’re not bribing them.

You’re letting them know how much you appreciate them.

Other ways to show gratitude:

- Shout them out on Instagram
- Send a handwritten thank-you
- Buy them a coffee or lunch
- Give them a small credit toward future work

Referrals come from relationships.

Treat them that way.

Step 5: Stay Top of Mind (Without Being Annoying)

This is the long game. You’re building *awareness*, not urgency.

Keep it simple:

- Email your list once a month with a new project or story
- Share BTS and wins on Instagram so people see your progress
- Reconnect every couple months with a quick personal message

Something like:

“Hey, I just wrapped a fun shoot for a local tea brand and it made me think of your client in the wellness space. Maybe there’s an opportunity there. Hope all’s well!”

Low pressure. Human. Effective.

Bonus: Be a Referrer Yourself

You want to receive referrals? Start *giving* them.

- Share stylists, assistants, and copywriters with clients
- Recommend other photographers when a gig’s not your fit
- Send leads to vendors you trust

This builds goodwill and it comes back around.
Every time.

You become the *connector*.
The one people trust.
That's real power.

The Big Takeaway

Your referral engine isn't magic.
It's built through intention, generosity, and clarity.

Here's the formula:

Be likable and professional
Be clear about your niche and value
Stay in touch
Make it easy to refer you
Say thank you
Play the long game

When people talk about you behind your back, in the *best* way, you've built something real.

And that's the kind of marketing money can't buy.

Chapter 9: Portfolio Mini-Shoots with Purpose

Small Shoots. Big Impact. Focused Growth.

Let's be honest for a moment:
Most portfolios are bloated, tired, and curated poorly.

Too many styles.
Too many subjects.
Too much old work.
And not enough *intentional* imagery built to attract the clients you actually want.

This chapter is about fixing that.

We're not going to suggest massive productions or "someday" dream shoots.

We're talking about *mini-shoots*: short, purposeful sessions that take what we've built so far and sharpen your positioning like a blade.

Because in Phase Two, you don't need *more* images.
You need the *right* ones.

Let's build them.

What is a Portfolio Mini-Shoot?

(Let's be clear: I am not talking about the "mini-sessions" that portrait photographers use to ruin and devalue their brand. I am talking about mini-shoots which are small sections of time devoted to the production of an image or series of images. Something we can do in a couple of hours.)

A mini-shoot is a focused, 1-2 hour photography session created with one goal:

Show exactly the kind of work you want to be hired for next.

That means:

- Shot in your chosen niche
- Styled to reflect your target clients' aesthetic
- Showcases your skill in lighting, concept, or storytelling
- Designed to be part of a larger *marketing plan*, not just a pretty image

We're not trying to fill a gallery.
We're creating *client magnets*.

Why Mini-Shoots Work

- They're quick: no production crew, no complicated logistics
- They're affordable: low cost, high value
- They're clear: each image has a job to do
- They give you fresh content for Instagram, blog posts, promos, and emails
- They give *you* confidence: every mini-shoot is another notch in your skill belt

You don't need permission to do them.
You don't need a client.
You just need a clear goal and a plan.

Step 1: Choose a Strategic Subject

Pick something you can shoot solo or with minimal help, but aligns directly with the clients you want to attract.

Here's how to decide:

Ask Yourself:

- What kind of work do I want more of?
- What product or style do my dream clients already use in their branding?
- What visual story could help position me as an expert in this space?

Examples:

Niche	Mini-Shoot Ideas
Skincare	Shoot 2–3 products in natural light on tile with reflections
Food	A small tabletop scene with handmade pastries and props
Lifestyle	Hands with a product (coffee, journal, skincare) in a morning routine
Tools	A set of wrenches lit dramatically on a workshop surface
Fashion accessories	Sunglasses styled on texture-rich surfaces with shadow play

These are 1-setup shoots.
Think *impact*, not scale.

Step 2: Set Constraints

Creativity loves limitations.

Use a framework like:

- One surface
- Two props
- Three lighting variations
- One hour max

This keeps the shoot tight, efficient, and purposeful.

And it forces you to *solve problems visually*: the exact skill clients pay for.

Step 3: Design for Your Target Market

Now get specific. This isn't about making something you like.

It's about creating something *your ideal client* would say, "*That's exactly what we need.*"

Here's how to guide your creative direction:

- Use color palettes that match your target clients' branding
- Style it like it belongs in their Instagram feed
- Use props or textures that suggest lifestyle — without distracting
- Keep compositions flexible for layout or copy space (huge bonus for agencies)

Ask: *Would this look amazing on a landing page, a box insert, or a billboard?*

If the answer is yes — you're on track.

Step 4: Shoot It Clean and Shoot It Bold

In a mini-shoot, you're aiming for two types of images:

1. **Clean hero:** A strong, clear image that shows your skill and lighting control. Could be catalog-style or refined editorial.
2. **Creative standout:** A version that shows some flair, whether they be reflections, interesting angles, more mood or narrative.

You want clients to see both range and clarity.
It's not enough to be technical. It has to *feel* like a brand story.

Step 5: Build a Small Package Around It

You're not just making a shot.
You're creating an *asset*.

So when it's done, take these steps:

- Export web + high-res versions
- Create a simple before/after if retouching was done
- Write a caption or blog post with insight into the concept
- Mock it up in a brand-style layout (optional, but powerful)
- Add it to your portfolio with a strong, targeted description

Then... send it.

Step 6: Use It to Pitch Clients (Softly)

Remember that pitch list you made back in Chapter 4?

Now's the time to use it.

Here's an example email:

Subject: New Work for Natural Brands and I Thought of You

Hey [Name],

Just wrapped a mini-shoot focused on minimalist product imagery for natural skincare. Thought it might spark a few ideas for your next release.

Here's the full set: [link]

Let me know if you ever want to collaborate or chat through ideas — I'd love to connect.

*Best,
[You]*

This isn't a hard sell. It's planting seeds.
And it works.

Keep It Going: 1 Mini-Shoot a Month

That's it. One mini-shoot per month.

No client needed.
No big budget.
No excuses.

Each one gives you:

Portfolio growth
SEO and blog fuel
Social content
Pitch material
A stronger skill set

It's a compounding machine for momentum.

The Big Takeaway

Your next client probably isn't looking for *more images*.
They're looking for the *right photographer* who gets their brand.

This is one of the most important points of this phase, so I will repeat it in bold and italics.

Your next client probably isn't looking for more images.
They're looking for the right photographer who gets their brand.

Mini-shoots prove you're that photographer.

So:

- Keep them small
- Keep them sharp
- Keep them client-focused
- Use them to build relationships and book real work

You're not just making pictures.
You're building a reputation.

One small shoot at a time.

Chapter 10: Segmenting Leads Like a Pro

Warm vs. Cold: Know Who's Ready, Who's Not, and What to Do About It

You've been pitching.

You've been sharing projects.

You've been building your referral network and running mini-shoots like a pro.

Now what?

Now we organize.

Because in Phase Two, is more than getting attention.

Now we are looking closely at *keeping track of that attention*.

You need to know:

- Who's interested (but not ready)
- Who's ready (but needs a push)
- Who's cold (but might warm up later)
- Who booked (and might refer or rehire)

This chapter is about creating a lead management system that actually works, without turning you into a spreadsheet zombie.

We're don't want CRM overload here. We're building a *simple, usable pipeline* so that when someone says, "*Let's talk next quarter,*" you don't forget... and they don't fall through the cracks.

Why Segmenting Matters

If you're not tracking your leads, your marketing turns into guesswork.

- You over follow-up with someone who's not interested
- You ghost someone who *was* ready to book
- You forget which mini-shoot you sent to which client
- You end up with a bunch of "maybe someday" messages and no plan to follow up

But when you know where people are in your pipeline, you can act with confidence and clarity.

No more wondering who to email this week.

You'll know exactly who's warm and who's ice cold.

The Three Buckets of Leads

We're keeping this simple. Your leads fall into one of three buckets:

1. Warm Leads

They've responded. They're aware of your work. They've shown interest.

These people:

- Open your emails
- Engage with your Instagram
- Said "not now" but didn't say no
- Asked about pricing or availability

These folks are your *short game* — you're staying in touch and actively nudging toward a booking.

2. Cold Leads

They haven't responded. You haven't had a conversation yet. They may not know who you are (yet).

These people:

- Were part of a pitch list
- Might've seen your work once
- Haven't replied to your emails
- Follow your content but haven't engaged

This is your *long game* — you're staying visible, offering value, and waiting for the right timing.

3. Clients and Referrers

They've hired you or referred you.

They know you.

Trust you.

Like you.

These people:

- Deserve consistent follow-up
- Should get updates, thank-yous, and sneak peeks
- Are often the fastest path to *new* leads

This bucket is gold. Do not neglect it.

How to Build a Simple Lead Tracker

Forget fancy CRM platforms if they stress you out. Here's what you need to track your lead status in a basic spreadsheet or Notion board:

Name	Company	Status	Last Contact	Next Action	Notes
Jane Smith	Green Fig Naturals	Warm	April 4	Follow-up May 1	Loved skincare flat lay. Budget opens Q3
Tom Riley	Modern Grind Café	Cold	March 10	Send blog post May 10	No reply yet
Maya Lee	Bloom Agency	Client	Ongoing	Send referral gift	Great to work with — mentioned upcoming campaign

Use tags or color codes if you like.

Update it weekly.

The point is *clarity*.

You want to see where your energy should go: **instantly**.

Segmenting Your Email List

If you're building a list in Mailchimp, ConvertKit, or similar — use tags like:

- **Warm Lead: Active**
- **Cold Lead: Passive**
- **Past Client: Retarget**
- **Referral Partner**
- **Newsletter Only**

Now, when you have a new mini-shoot or blog post, you can send:

- *A personalized pitch* to warm leads
- *A light nudge* to cold leads
- *A thank-you and update* to past clients
- *A spotlight feature* for referral partners

Your list becomes a *tool*, not a chore.

Follow-Up by Segment (So You Don't Sound Pushy)

Here's how your follow-up tone shifts based on the lead type:

Warm Lead

“Hey [Name], I just wrapped a project for a brand similar to yours. Thought you'd enjoy seeing the results — let me know if you want to talk about doing something similar this quarter.”

Cold Lead

“Hey [Name], I wrote a short blog post on product photography tips for small brands — thought you might find it helpful. Hope things are going great!”

Referral Partner

“Just wanted to say thanks again for the connection to [Name] — really enjoyed that shoot. If you know anyone else needing fresh visuals, I've got a couple of open slots next month.”

Past Client

“Hey [Name], I've been creating some new imagery that I think would be a great fit for your next seasonal campaign. Want me to send a quick concept over?”

Each message has:

- A reason for reaching out
- Value or relevance
- A low-pressure next step

You're staying present without pestering.

When to Follow Up (and How Often)

Here's a simple rhythm:

Lead Type	Follow-Up Frequency
Warm Lead	Every 2–3 weeks
Cold Lead	Every 4–6 weeks
Past Client	Monthly or Quarterly
Referral Partner	Every 6–8 weeks

Keep it human. Vary the content:

- A mini-shoot
- A blog post
- A testimonial
- A reminder of availability
- Just a check-in with no pitch

Be the photographer they *enjoy hearing from* — not the one they dread opening emails from.

Tracking Wins (and Losses)

If someone ghosted you after three emails?

Mark it.

If someone books?

Celebrate it and **mark that lead *closed and converted***.

Every 4–6 weeks, review your tracker:

- Who’s moving closer to booking?
- Who’s gone cold?
- Who needs a new touchpoint?

This is how you *stay in motion* — even when leads feel slow.

The Big Takeaway

You don’t need more random names in your inbox.

You need a system that tells you *where people are, what they need, and how to move them forward*.

Segmenting your leads gives you:

Clarity
Focus
Control
Confidence

No more cold guessing.
No more “who was I supposed to follow up with again?”

You’re not winging it anymore.
You’re building a machine.

NOTE: I know this sounds like a lot of work. I get it. I totally get it. But it is the only way to do this and get the clients YOU want to get to hire you, keep hiring you, and present more opportunities. If there was an easier way, that would be great, but there isn’t.

Chapter 11: The Testimonial Trap (And How to Avoid It)

How to Turn “Nice to Work With” into “I Need to Hire Them”

Let’s be real for a second:
Most testimonials suck.
You know this. I know this. Your clients know this.

They’re vague.
They’re bland.
They read like someone got cornered after yoga class and forced to write something nice on the back of a Whole Foods receipt.

“Don was great to work with! Super talented and friendly.”
Nice? Sure.
Helpful? Not at all.

This chapter is about fixing that.

Because in Phase Two, testimonials can’t be just pats on the back

We need them act as *conversion tools*.

They’re trust builders.
Social proof.
The subtle nudge that makes a potential client say,

“Okay, this photographer gets it. Let’s book them.”

Let’s make your testimonials work as hard as your photos do.

Why Most Testimonials Fall Flat

Let’s dissect the problem.

Most testimonials fail because they:

- Focus on your *personality*, not your *impact*
- Don’t say *what* you did or *why* it mattered
- Use generic praise (“super easy to work with!”)
- Sound like they were written under duress

- Don't match the *language your next client uses*

Here's the fix:

Treat testimonials like micro-case studies.

Short, punchy, story-based. Not fluffy.

What Makes a Testimonial Powerful

A good testimonial hits three things:

1. The Problem

“We needed a fresh, cohesive set of product shots that reflected our brand.”

2. The Process

“Don brought clarity to the shoot, from concepting to execution. He understood our aesthetic right away and made the process easy.”

3. The Result

“The images are now the foundation of our campaign — and we've already seen a boost in engagement and conversions.”

That's a *testimonial that sells*.

It tells a *story*. It positions you as a *creative partner*.

And it shows *measurable value*.

That's what future clients are looking for.

How to Get Better Testimonials (Without It Being Weird)

Asking may not be the best approach.

“Hey, can you write something nice about me?”

You've got to *guide the process strategically*.

Here's a quick framework you can send to your client:

Subject: *Quick Favor: 3 Questions for a Testimonial*

Hi [Name],

It was great working together! I'm updating my site and would love to include a short testimonial. If you have 2 minutes, here are three questions to guide it:

- 1. What challenge were you facing before we worked together?*
- 2. What was your experience like during the shoot/project?*
- 3. What kind of results did the work help you achieve?*

You can answer in your own words — even a few sentences would be great.

Thank you again!

[You]

You've made it easy.

With this approach, you're not asking for praise or 'attaboys.'

With this method, you're asking for a *story*.

That's what makes it powerful.

Where to Put Testimonials (And How to Use Them Right)

A great testimonial should *live where trust matters most*.

Here's where to place them strategically:

On Your Website

- On your homepage, near a call-to-action
- Next to a portfolio gallery
- On your contact/booking page
- In a sidebar or footer if evergreen

In Your Email Pitches

Drop a short quote right under your signature or next to the work you're showcasing.

"The images Don created helped us increase click-through rates by 28%."
— Jenn C., Creative Director

Short. Punchy. Strategic.

On Instagram

Don't just share a picture. Share the *client result* behind it.

"This shot helped a local coffee brand launch their new packaging line. The client said it immediately increased in-store engagement."

That's a testimonial in disguise, and it's sticky.

On Your Blog or Case Studies

Weave their words into your shoot breakdowns.

That can make the whole project more credible.

Want to Really Level Up? Add Faces.

A quote with a name is good.

A quote with a name *and a face* is gold.

If your client's cool with it, ask for a photo (even a LinkedIn headshot works).

This adds trust.

Social proof.

Realness.

Or better yet, ask for a 30-second video. Nothing fancy.

"What did the photos do for your brand?"

Even one or two of these on your site puts you in a whole new league of trust.

The Mini-Testimonial Strategy

Not every gig requires a full quoted testimonial.

Sometimes, even a quick DM counts.

Screenshot that message.

Share it in a story.

Add it to a “kind words” highlight.

These small, spontaneous words of praise show real-world impact.

You don’t need full paragraphs or short stories.

You simply need *proof*.

What If They Don’t Respond?

People get busy.

Don’t take it personally.

Wait a week.

Follow up with a simple:

“Hey [Name], just checking in on this testimonial request — totally understand if you’re swamped. Even a few quick lines would help a lot!”

Still nothing?

That’s okay. Go back through your email or DM history.

Pull a line of praise they *already gave you*, and ask if you can quote it.

Nine times out of ten, they’ll say yes.

How Many Do You Need?

Start with 3–5 *strong* ones.

That’s enough to cover:

- Your homepage
- One for each niche or style
- A few to rotate through social or emails

Over time, build a library. Keep them fresh. Update them as your work evolves.

But don't wait for ten perfect ones before you publish.

One clear, client-driven testimonial is better than ten vague blurbs.

The Big Takeaway

A great testimonial is not a gold star.

It's a *marketing asset*.

Show you understand the client's problem

Showcase your value in the process

Share/explain the measurable result

Share it where trust matters

Keep it fresh, keep it real, and make it strategic

The right words from a past client can close your next one.

Stop collecting compliments, start crafting engaging stories of success.

Chapter 12: Follow-Up That Feels Human, Not Hustle

Stay Top of Mind Without Sounding Like a Sales Robot

Let's talk about one of the most misunderstood parts of getting work as a photographer:

Follow-up.

Most photographers simply won't, or don't, do it.
Some will do it in fits and bursts which means badly.
A few do it well.

And they're the ones getting booked again and again.

But you have to understand this rule:

You will rarely book a gig after one email.
Or one message.
Or even one conversation.

Clients are busy.
Budgets move.
Campaigns shift.
People get distracted.

Your work is not designed to pester or annoy anyone..
Your focus is to *stay present*, *stay valuable*, and *stay human*.

This chapter is going to show you how.

Why Most Follow-Ups Fail

Here's the usual pattern:

1. Photographer sends one email.
2. Gets no reply.
3. Assumes rejection.
4. Moves on or (worse) sends a guilt-trip message like:

"Just following up again... haven't heard from you..."

This isn't a good follow-up.
It's follow-annoy.

The fix.

Stop thinking of follow-up as nagging.
Start thinking of it as *relationship-building*.

Done wrong, follow-up can feel like a pitch loop. Semi-spam.
Done right, follow-up feels like a natural continuation of the conversation.

The Golden Rule of Follow-Up

Always add something.

Every time you reach out, bring *value, context, or relevance*.
That's what keeps you welcome in their inbox, and not be seen as spam.

No more "just checking in."
Instead, try:

- A new piece of work
- A behind-the-scenes story
- An insight about their industry
- A relevant blog post or case study
- A short message tied to their timing
(“I know you mentioned May for your next product drop...”)

That way, you're not following up.
You're *continuing the conversation*.

The Follow-Up Framework (Simple + Strategic)

Let's say you sent a pitch on April 1st. Here's what your follow-up rhythm might look like:

Follow-Up 1 (One Week Later)

Subject: Re: Quick idea for [Brand Name]

Hey [Name],

Just wanted to follow up in case this slipped through the cracks. I'd still love to connect and hear more about what you're working on.

Let me know if you'd like me to send a few tailored ideas or jump on a quick call.

Hope all's well!

[You]

Light.
Direct.
Still relevant.

Follow-Up 2 (Two Weeks Later)

Subject: New visual from a recent shoot

*Hi [Name],
I thought you might enjoy seeing a recent image I made for a brand similar to yours — clean, minimal, focused on packaging texture.*

Here's the link if you'd like to see the full set: [link]

Still happy to collaborate if the timing's right on your end.

[You]

Now you're showing value.
You're keeping their interest alive.

Follow-Up 3 (After 3–4 Weeks)

Subject: Planning Q2 shoots — still open to ideas?

*Hi [Name],
I'm mapping out my schedule for the next month or two and wanted to circle back.*

If you're working on any launches, campaigns, or social content — let me know. I'd love to brainstorm a concept or two.

[Don]

Still no hard sell.
Still relevant.
Still useful.

Make It Easy to Say Yes (Or No)

Here's a subtle but powerful move:

“If now's not the right time, just let me know — happy to stay in touch or circle back later.”

This gives them a graceful out. And it keeps the door open *without* making it awkward.

Sometimes they say, “We're good for now.” Great — now you know.

Sometimes they say, “Follow up next month.” Even better — now you have a date.

You're not guessing anymore. You're *in the loop*.

Use Multiple Channels (But Stay Classy)

Not every follow-up has to be an email.

Mix it up with:

- A short Instagram DM
- A thoughtful comment on their post
- A share or save of something they created
- A handwritten thank-you or a small branded mailer
- A quick Loom video if you want to pitch a specific visual idea

The key:

Do be intentional.

Do not spammy.

One channel at a time.

Respect their space.

But don't be afraid to show up where they *already are*.

What If They Ghost You?

Sometimes people just... vanish.

It's not about you.

It's not rejection.

It's just *life*.

Get over it... fast.

Here's what you do:

- Wait a while (a month or more)
- Send a soft-touch check-in with a little context or update
- Then move them to your *cold list* for periodic value-only updates

And when you *do* hear back weeks or months later?
Act like they never ghosted.

Be gracious.
Be chill.
Be professional.

The long game always wins.

Use Tools to Stay Sane

A simple follow-up tracker (we talked about this in Chapter 10) will save your sanity.

Use:

- A Notion board
- Google Sheets
- A CRM if you're fancy
- Even color-coded inbox labels

Track:

- Who you followed up with
- When
- What you sent
- When to check back

You are no longer winging it.
You're working a system.

Templates That Sound Like You (Not a Bot)

Here are a few more quick-hit follow-up prompts you can swipe:

“The Timing Touch”

“Hey [Name], I remember you mentioned June might be a better time to talk. Wondering if the project we discussed is still on your radar? Hope everything is going well.”

“The Resource Drop”

“Thought of you when I wrote this quick post on brand imagery for summer launches — figured it might be useful. Hope all is great!”

“The Win Share”

“A recent shoot for a wellness brand just went live, and it’s always cool to see the final images in action. If you’re planning something soon, I’d love to collaborate.”

Short.
Friendly.
Relevant.
No cringe.

The Big Takeaway

Follow-up isn’t about hustle.
It’s about *being present*.

You’re not badgering people.
You’re being helpful. Generous. Smart.
You’re showing that you’re in this for the long run — not just chasing a quick paycheck.

Add value
Respect timing
Mix up your messages
Track your outreach
Play the long game

Most photographers stop after one message.

You’re not most photographers.

Chapter 13: Balancing Shooting with Selling

Keeping the Pipeline Full While You're Buried in Work

A funny thing happens when your hard work starts paying off:

You get busy.

Which is great... until it isn't.

Because when you're buried in edits, shoots, emails, and retouching, guess what usually gets dropped first?

Outreach.

Marketing.

Networking.

Anything that doesn't have an immediate deadline.

And that's a hell of a trap.

You work hard to book clients.

Then you get booked.

Then you stop marketing.

Then the work dries up... and you start the hustle all over again.

This chapter is about breaking that cycle.

It's about building a rhythm — a system — that lets you *market even when you're busy*, so the leads keep coming and you stay booked without burning out.

Because shooting is what you love.

But selling is what keeps the shooting going.

Why Photographers Drop the Ball on Marketing

It's not for laziness. It's simply *urgency bias*.

Client deadlines feel real.

Instagram posts don't.

Blog entries don't.

Follow-ups don't.

Until your calendar empties... and suddenly, everything is on fire again.

So let's get real: if your business depends on you *having free time* to market, your business isn't going to grow. It's just going to flatline.

You need marketing habits that run in the background, even when your plate's full.

The Weekly Marketing Minimum

Let's start simple. This is the *minimum* you do each week, no matter how slammed you are:

Day	Action	Time Required
Monday	Send one follow-up email or check in with a warm lead	15 min
Wednesday	Post a behind-the-scenes or process shot	15 min
Friday	Review your leads list and schedule next week's outreach	20 min

That's **50 minutes a week**.

Less than one hour to keep the fire burning.

If you can't spare an hour a week to keep clients coming in, you're not building a business, you're just keeping busy. Hustle porn... it isn't pretty and it isn't productive.

Batching: Your Best Friend

Batching means doing your marketing work in blocks so it's ready when you're not.

Here's how it looks in action:

1. Batch Your Content

Take 1–2 hours once a month to create:

- 4–6 Instagram posts (captions + visuals)
- 1 blog post
- A few email templates or updates

USE AI to help you do this if you need.

Schedule them.

Set and forget.

Now, even when you're mid-shoot and deep in edits, your feed stays active, your SEO keeps rising, and your clients keep seeing you.

2. Batch Your Outreach

Set aside time every other Friday to:

- Pitch 3–5 new leads
- Follow up with warm contacts
- Send a newsletter or update to your referral list

Again, you don't need to do this *daily*.
Just do it *consistently*.

Create a “Busy Week” Marketing Plan

When the calendar is jammed and your brain's cooked, default to your pre-set *Busy Week Plan*:

Your Go-To Moves:

- Repost a past project with a new insight
- Share a testimonial on Instagram
- DM a past client with a simple “thinking of you” note
- Queue up one email using a saved template

No thinking.
No stress.
Just keep showing up.

Create a quick checklist for this.
Keep it on your desktop.
When things get crazy, this is your lifeline.

Automate Where You Can (Without Getting Weird)

Automation doesn't have to be cold or corporate.

Here are a few things worth automating:

- **Email scheduling:** Use tools like Gmail's “schedule send” for follow-ups
- **Social media:** Use Later, Buffer, or Metricool to schedule IG content
- **Blog publishing:** Write your post on Sunday, schedule it for Wednesday
- **CRM reminders:** Set “next step” tasks in your lead tracker

Automation doesn't replace connection.
It just keeps the gears moving so you don't have to reinvent the wheel every time.

Shoot Days Are Sacred — Plan Around Them

If you've got a shoot on Thursday, then you...

- Batch your marketing tasks earlier in the week
- Auto-schedule a post for Thursday morning
- Pre-write your Friday lead review email

No one's saying "market every single day."
I'm saying, *protect the rhythm*.

Make shooting your focus, *without* ghosting your future clients.

We call that pre-ghosting. It is not a good plan.

Delegate If You Can (Even a Little Bit)

If you're getting regular work, consider bringing in help:

- A VA to send follow-ups and organize your inbox
- A copywriter to write blog posts based on your shoots
- A social media manager (even 5 hours/month makes a difference)
- AI agents to help you manage your posting.

Even if it's just someone helping clean up your lead tracker once a month, every bit of support gives you more time to shoot *and* sell.

If you're not there yet financially, no worries, just keep it in mind as you grow.

Bonus: Use Your Shoots as Marketing

You're already doing the work — turn that work into outreach material.

For every project you shoot, ask yourself:

- Can I share this on Instagram with a valuable insight?

- Can I turn this into a blog post or case study?
- Can I send this to a warm lead and say, “Thought this might inspire you”?

You don’t need *extra time* to market.

You just need to turn *your current work* into marketing.

Avoid These Common Pitfalls

Only marketing when you need work

Thinking marketing means posting a perfect photo

Believing you have to be “inspired” to reach out

Waiting until you’re “caught up” to promote yourself

The truth is: you're never really caught up.

So build a system that runs even when you’re in the trenches.

The Big Takeaway

Being solidly booked isn’t the finish line.

It’s the fuel to keep on going.

You don’t stop marketing when you get busy.

You *adapt* your marketing — so it keeps working while you do.

Build a weekly minimum marketing routine

Batch your content and outreach

Create a “busy week” backup plan

Turn every shoot into shareable content

Keep the rhythm going — no matter how full the calendar gets

Your business doesn’t pause when you're shooting.

So your pipeline shouldn't either.

Chapter 14: Tracking Progress Without Losing Your Soul

Measure What Matters, Stay Motivated, and Ignore the Noise

Let's talk about that eight hundred pound gorilla:

You're not a data analyst.

You're not a tech startup.

You don't need to obsess over KPIs, CTRs, SEO heatmaps, or any other alphabet soup.

But...

You *do* need to know what's working.

Because what gets measured gets managed.

And what gets managed gets better.

This chapter is about building a simple, soul-friendly tracking system — one that shows your progress, helps you make smart decisions, and keeps your motivation alive when things feel slow.

We're not talking spreadsheets for the sake of spreadsheets.

We're talking *clarity*, *momentum*, and *proof that this is working*.

Let's build your system.

Why Creative Businesses Struggle with Tracking

Most photographers resist tracking for one of two reasons:

1. They think it'll make them feel bad. ("I didn't get any replies this week — I must suck.")
2. They think it's a waste of time. ("I should be shooting, not logging numbers.")

But here's the truth:

Tracking isn't judgment. It's feedback.

It helps you see:

- What's gaining traction
- What needs to change
- What patterns are forming
- And most importantly — how far you've come

It's not about obsessing over numbers.
It's about noticing progress.

What to Track (And What to Ignore)

Let's focus on *momentum metrics* — things you control, things that lead to bookings, and things that help you improve.

Track These Every Week:

Metric	Why It Matters
Pitches Sent	Measures effort and consistency
Follow-Ups Sent	Keeps your warm leads engaged
Personal Projects Completed	Shows creative momentum
Posts Shared (Blog/IG)	Tracks visibility and consistency
New Leads Added	Tells you if your outreach pipeline is growing
Responses Received	Gauges lead warmth and interest
Conversations Started	Measures engagement and potential
Inquiries Received	A leading indicator of income
Bookings Made	The bottom line is you're getting hired

These are *leading indicators* — they predict success.

Not lagging indicators like “How many likes did I get?”

We're not wasting time tracking vanity.

We're tracking actual *movement*.

How to Track Without Drowning in Admin

Use whatever system feels natural:

- A Google Sheet with simple columns
- A Notion dashboard with toggles and tags
- A physical notebook with weekly tallies
- A whiteboard with three columns: Sent, Replied, Booked

Set aside 15–20 minutes at the end of every week to update it.

That's it.

This is your *check-in*.
Not a report card — a *progress log*.

If you want to really feel that dopamine hit?
Add a column called “**Wins**” and jot down *anything* that felt like a step forward:

- “Client said they loved my process”
- “Got a reply from my dream lead”
- “Posted four times this week”
- “Did a killer shoot with minimal gear”

These count.

Celebrate the small stuff. That’s how you stay in motion.

Set Small, Repeatable Goals

Forget “Make \$10k a month” for a minute.
Let’s look at goals you can actually *act on*.

Try:

- Pitch 5 new leads per week
- Follow up with 3 warm leads
- Post 2 Instagram stories + 1 feed post
- Write 1 blog or email per month
- Do 1 personal project per quarter
- Book 1 paying gig every 30 days

These goals are *inputs*. You control them.
And over time, they lead to *outcomes* — like bookings, visibility, and income.

Track Your Income (But Keep Perspective)

Yes, it is imperative to track your income.

But do it in the context of *progress*, not punishment.

You might not hit your financial goals every month.

That’s okay.

What you want to see is:

- Is it trending upward?
- Are higher-quality clients showing up?
- Are your average project fees rising?
- Are your expenses staying lean?

Track:

- Total jobs booked
- Average fee per job
- Repeat clients vs. new ones
- Expenses (gear, tools, marketing, etc.)

Every 90 days, sit down and look at the numbers.

Not for income necessarily, but *insight*.

Use Tracking to Spot Patterns

When you track your activity and results over time, you start to see patterns:

- Which outreach emails got the most responses?
- What kind of Instagram content led to inquiries?
- When do your leads tend to go cold — and why?
- Do bookings slow down in certain months?

Now you're no longer guessing.
You're *strategizing*.

And that's when business gets fun.

Don't Let Tracking Kill Your Creativity

This is important:

Tracking is a tool.
Not a scoreboard.

Don't let it turn into self-judgment.

If you have a slow week, that's information, not failure. What does it mean?
If your blog post didn't get traction, you learned something. What was it?
If your follow-ups aren't converting, tweak the message. And try again.

Creativity is fluid.

Marketing is a process.

Tracking helps you *tune* both — not restrict them.

Every 90 Days, Do a Check-In

Quarterly reviews are gold. They help you zoom out and reset.
Ask a friend or family member to help you stay in line on this.

Ask Yourself:

- What's working really well?
- What feels heavy or unproductive?
- What kinds of projects felt most rewarding?
- Where did your best leads come from?
- What should I double down on — and what should I drop?

This kind of reflection keeps your business *human*.

It keeps your head in the game — and your heart in the work.

The Big Takeaway

Tracking isn't about perfection.

It's about *paying attention*.

Know what to track

Do it consistently

Review without judgment

Adjust your actions based on feedback

Celebrate your damn wins

You're not building this business in the dark anymore.

You've got a flashlight now.

Use it.

Chapter 15: The Next Phase

Scaling from 5 Clients to Fully Booked

You did the work.

You sent the emails.

You shot the personal projects, followed up like a pro, built your referral engine, and stayed consistent even when life got loud.

Now you've landed 3–5 solid clients. Maybe more.

And that's not just a win. That's proof.

Proof that you have something people want.

Proof that your system works.

Proof that the market is responding to *you*.

This chapter is about what comes next.

Because Phase Two wasn't just about getting booked.

It was about building momentum, and now, it's time to *scale it*.

Let's talk about going from *sometimes busy* to *consistently booked*, without burning out, selling out, or stalling out.

What Does “Fully Booked” Actually Mean?

It's different for everyone.

For some, it's 3–4 high-paying gigs a month.

For others, it's 10–12 fast-turnaround shoots.

It could be a blend of recurring clients and editorial work.

Or a packed content calendar of food brands, tabletop sets, and lifestyle scenes.

What matters is this:

You know what your ideal month looks like, financially, creatively, and logistically.

So let's define it:

Ask Yourself:

- How many client jobs can I handle per month and still deliver great work?

- What is my *minimum* income goal — and my *ideal* income goal?
- What types of projects light me up and attract the best clients?
- What clients do I want more of, and which do I want to let go?

Answer those questions, and you've got your North Star.

Systematize What's Working

Phase Two gives you the playbook.

Now it's time to make it *repeatable*.

What you do now:

- Pitch occasionally when the calendar's light
- Follow up when you remember
- Post when inspiration hits
- Write blogs when there's time
- Deliver shoots one-by-one

What you do next:

- Build *systems* around what works
- Automate or batch your outreach
- Delegate where possible
- Productize your services for clarity
- Schedule marketing like a recurring job

This is the shift from *grind* to *growth*.

Double Down on Your Best Clients

If you've had a great experience with a client, great!

They're your secret weapon.

Now's the time to:

- Offer a quarterly or monthly content package
- Pitch a follow-up shoot based on seasonal needs
- Ask for referrals directly

- Feature them in a case study
- Send them a small gift or thank-you

Keep your best clients close. Make it easier for them to come back.

If one client hires you every quarter, that's *four bookings per year* from one contact.

Scale that across five solid clients?
You're in business.

Refine Your Positioning

As you grow, your niche may evolve.
That's good.
But always stay intentional.

Now's the time to:

- Audit your portfolio: remove anything that doesn't match your ideal client
- Refine your brand voice: make your messaging sharper
- Tune your offerings: package your services in a way that matches what your best clients are buying

You're not a simple photographer anymore.
You're a specialist.
A creative partner.
A go-to resource.

Let your presence, online and offline, reflect that maturity.

Build Capacity Without Burning Out

A lot of people feel that growth is about doing *more*.

But I believe it's about doing the *right things, better*.

Here's how you grow *without losing your mind*:

1. Raise Your Rates (When the Work Justifies It)

More experience = more value.

Don't be afraid to charge what your work is worth — especially if you're delivering measurable results.

2. Create Packages

Simplify decision-making. Make it easy for clients to say yes.

“My Standard Content Package includes: X images, X setup, X turn time, \$X total.”

Now you're selling *solutions*, not time.

3. Outsource or Delegate

Editing. Admin. Post-production. Even marketing.

If you're spending 10 hours editing a \$1,000 shoot — and that time keeps you from booking the next one — you're capping your growth.

Find help. Start small. Grow smart.

Use Slow Periods to Prepare for the Next Wave

There will be slow weeks. Slow months. It happens.

Don't panic, *prepare*.

Use that time to:

- Shoot new personal projects
- Update your lead tracker
- Reconnect with past clients
- Refresh your website or portfolio
- Create a new blog post or promo

The work *you do during the quiet* builds the storm that follows.

Stay Connected to the Vision

Phase Three and the next stage of your business is all about *sustainability*.

Predictable income.
Repeat clients.
Creative autonomy.
A rhythm you can trust.

But you don't get there by luck.

You get there by staying consistent with what's worked, and constantly leveling it up.

That's what you're doing now.

Not just reacting. Not just scrambling.

But *building something real*.

The Big Takeaway

You've proven the concept.
You've landed the clients.
You've built momentum.

Now it's time to scale that momentum into a *business*:

Define what "fully booked" means to you
Double down on your best clients
Refine your messaging and systems
Build in repeatability — from outreach to delivery
Protect your energy so you can keep creating
Use quiet times to gear up — not give up

Phase Two is complete.

You've got the foundation.
You've got the results.
You've got the rhythm.

You go from booked *sometimes*...
to booked *on purpose*.

Let's build that next phase.

Wrap-Up: From Momentum to Mastery

Where You've Been — And Where You're Headed

You've made it through Phase Two.

That's no small thing.

You didn't just read about how to get work...
You *built the machine* that gets it for you.

Let's take a minute to look back at what you've accomplished, and then map the path forward so you can keep growing, booking, and building a photography business on *your* terms.

What You Built in Phase Two

You've moved from *aspiring* to *executing*. From hoping to planning. From sitting on your talent to turning it into traction.

Here's what you now have in place:

- A clear, focused **niche** and client target
- A professional **intro email system** that opens doors
- A portfolio with intentional, **client-aligned mini-shoots**
- Personal projects that do double-duty as marketing
- An Instagram + blog content strategy that works while you sleep
- Strategic **incentives** that create urgency without lowering your value
- A **referral network** that markets for you
- A consistent outreach + **follow-up rhythm**
- A lead tracker that helps you focus your time and energy
- Strong, story-driven **testimonials** that build trust
- Systems that keep marketing alive *even when you're swamped with shoots*
- A custom tracking method to stay motivated, clear, and on point
- A rock-solid foundation for scaling into a *fully booked* creative business

This is no longer theory. It's not "someday." It's real.

You're doing it.

Phase Two Action Plan: 30/60/90

Here's a tactical breakdown of what to focus on next — to cement your progress and step confidently into Phase Three.

Days 1–30: Lock in the Systems

- Finalize your **niche positioning** and update your website to reflect it
- Create and schedule **1–2 mini-shoots** aligned with your dream clients
- Write and send your **intro email** to at least 20 prospects
- Publish a blog post breaking down a personal or client shoot
- Set up your **lead tracker** (Notion, spreadsheet, or CRM)
- Segment your email list: warm leads, cold leads, past clients
- Collect or rewrite 3–5 strong **testimonials**
- Build your **Weekly Marketing Minimum Plan** (and stick to it)

Goal: Finish the month with new leads in your pipeline, visible traction online, and 1–2 inquiries in motion.

Days 31–60: Strengthen Relationships

- Follow up with every warm lead you've contacted
- Send a value-driven email or DM to 5–10 cold leads
- Offer a small **“new client” incentive** to help convert interest into bookings
- Reach out to past clients and referral partners with a thank-you + soft nudge
- Create or repurpose **2+ Instagram posts** that share process or results
- Write a short **“Client Win” story** and post it on your blog or social
- Do another **mini-shoot** and use it as outreach content

Goal: Convert at least 1–2 inquiries into paying clients and book repeat or referral work.

Days 61–90: Scale and Simplify

- Analyze your lead tracker and highlight your most promising connections
- Identify one task to **delegate or automate** (email scheduling, posting, editing)

- Raise your rates or repackage your offers based on experience
- Map out a quarterly **content plan**: blog, email, social
- Create a “best client” list — and pitch an ongoing collaboration
- Batch 1–2 weeks of marketing content so you’re never stuck when things get busy
- Schedule a personal **90-day check-in**: review what worked, what didn’t, and what’s next

Goal: Shift from project-to-project thinking to long-term planning, with systems that keep you moving — even during shoot weeks.

The Toolbox You Should Be Using Now

- **CRM or Spreadsheet** for lead management
- **Calendar system** for marketing rhythm
- **Social post scheduler** (Later, Buffer, Metricool)
- **Content archive** for Instagram captions, testimonials, blog ideas
- **Pricing sheet or rate card** — clean, branded, and easy to send
- **Portfolio organized by niche** — no filler, all killer
- **Documented process** for onboarding, shoot prep, and delivery
- **Folder of outreach templates** — pitch, follow-up, referral, thank-you

These aren’t “nice to have.” They’re your business infrastructure.

Looking Ahead to Phase Three

Phase Three is about sustainability and growth.

Here’s what we’ll focus on:

- Building long-term **client relationships** that lead to recurring revenue
 - **Raising your rates** with confidence and structure
 - Expanding your offer suite — retainer clients, content packages, consulting
 - Getting deeper into **referrals, partnerships, and collaborations**
 - Continuing to refine your brand, messaging, and presence
 - Streamlining your workflow so you can focus more on *creative* and less on *chaos*
 - Planning for stability — not just cash flow, but lifestyle, sanity, and creative fulfillment
-

Final Words: We Are Trading Chaotic Hustling with Focused Building

You're not grinding for gigs anymore.

You've built something.

You've proven that the work *is* there, and that your skills are *valuable* in the market.

Now it's about focus.

Refinement.

Smart action.

Sustainable growth.

The momentum is real.

You're no longer trying to "make it."

You're *in it*.

And the next step is to *own it*.