



# CREATING AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE THROUGH CLIENT GIFTS

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BY @JASMINESTAR

At a photography conference in 2011, I had the pleasure of meeting with a small group of photographers for an informal Q+A. This event—as simple and nondescript as it was—was one the highlights of my trip. Cramped in a hotel room with 20 photographers reminded me of everything I love and the blessedness of merely connecting with other people. I quickly came down from my high when someone asked if I gave gifts to my clients.

*Awww, hold up...why you gotta put me on blast like that?!*

The answer was no. No, I hadn't sent gifts to my brides...but not because I didn't want to or didn't think it was important. I just didn't plan properly and I didn't make it a priority. Right there, in that hotel room, I made the promise to send a small gift to my brides to express how much I appreciated them.

It took me a few months, but we created a small gift to help ring in the New Year. Each box of personalized J\* Chocolates was mailed to my 2011 and 2012 brides and here's a sneak peek. Each box was covered in customized paper filled with personal images from

the past year—which included quite a few from our travels and Polo, of course!

In light of New Year's, I ordered customized chocolates filled with champagne ganache...who doesn't appreciate a little bubbly?

It took me five years to finally send gifts, but found new ways of incorporating them into my business. I heard of a photographer sending newly signed clients a bottle of Dom Perignon champagne (whoa, he's way fancy), another photographer sending cookies upon the couple's return from their honeymoon, and a photographer who printed an 8x10 during the wedding reception and handed the couple the framed photo before she left the wedding. Regardless of a photographer's budget, thoughtfulness goes a long way in business...even if it's a hand-written note. If you're working with a limited budget, I wrote a blog post listing gift ideas for under \$30 [here](#).

Over the years, I've managed to send gifts to clients as a way to enhance their experience. They are usually so excited to receive the gift they'll



share the photos of it on social media and say very nice things as a result. This endorsement? It's priceless.

I'm the type of person who prefers to give gifts than receive them, so whenever the time comes to brainstorm a new idea, I get overly excited. In 2013, I began talking about my favorite childhood memories of summers past and I casually mentioned fond recollections of backyard science experiments with my mother. One thing led to another and—boom!—a chemistry kit was created and I couldn't wait to send them to clients!

Because I was sending them to clients, the goal was to play up the idea of "creating chemistry" with each other and perfecting a formula for a good time. This is done with a vodka infused watermelon lemonade.

Enclosed in each kit was pop rocks (a little science fizz never hurt!), watermelon lemonade, Stolli vodka, and a collapsible cup.

Another year I collaborated with my amazing print lab, WHCC, to produce a customized photo box for each of my clients. Yup, that's right, the lab has custom wooden boxes that showcase photography, but it only gets better on the inside.

The seamless, sliding box cover opens to seven photos, each mounted on three-millimeter polystyrene board. The thickness of the photos makes them beautiful to share, as well as durable to touch.

I know I say this often, but it's true: I work with the most amazing clients—not only do they allow me to follow my dream, they become ardent supporters of what I do, and who I am. Their reactions are important to me because they also share the gifts on social media... which is a huge honor!

There are a ton of ways to create an experience for clients, but I've found that small gifts go a long way and I encourage you to do the same for your business.

# FOUR WAYS TO CREATE A MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCE THAT WILL LEAVE THEM WANTING MORE!

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BY @HEARTSCONTENTEVENTS

I want you to close your eyes, and remember an exciting moment in your life. Maybe it was a birthday party, a family trip, or the first time you ate a Hershey's Candy Bar. Remember how much fun you had, that smile on your face, and how excited you were to tell someone else how great your experience was. Think about the people, the things, and events that made that experience so special. Think about the way you felt, right in that moment. Now, open your eyes, and write all of that down.

Each of our lives are filled with a never-ending storybook of great, and sometimes not so great, experiences. These experiences create memories that last a lifetime, and shape who we are now, and who we will ultimately become. As business owners, it's essential to create an incredible client experience that will not only create beautiful memories for those we serve, but that will turn your past clients into your brand evangelists! Seems like a lot of pressure, right? I know you're thinking, "How is this

even possible?" It's so much more than providing a great service—your clients already expect that. But the recipe to a stellar client experience is made of one very key ingredient—*feeling!* From the moment you are introduced to your client to your last interaction (or beyond that!), how do you want your clients to feel?

Whether you want your clients to feel loved, nurtured, at-home, excited, joyful, or anything in between, here are some ways you can create an experience that shows them how much you care, and ultimately leaves them wanting more!

## GET TO KNOW THEM

I know this sounds like a given, but there's more to this than you think! Getting to know your clients means developing a close and genuine relationship with them. Think about the last interaction you had with a client. Maybe you sat down for coffee, and asked them about

their day. What happened next? Did you delve right into the work, or did you take the time to chat with them, or better yet, LISTEN to them a while, and get to know them a little better? Yes, all the items on your agenda are incredibly important, and you may not have all the time in the world, but your clients will appreciate you so much more when you demonstrate how valuable they are to you.

Follow them on social media, put their birthday in your calendar, send them a card letting them know that you're thinking about them and how excited you are to work with them! These are just a few simple things you can do that will create a meaningful experience, and show your clients how much you love and care for them.

#### PUT THEIR MIND AT EASE

As a wedding planner, I receive a lot of brides (and even grooms) who are stressed out to the max about all the details that go into bringing their wedding vision to life. I'm sure that as creative entrepreneurs we all deal with worried clients at some point. What will set us apart from the next person is anticipating their needs. This could be as simple as taking the time to listen to what is stressing clients out, letting them know that you've got it all under control, or as complex as fixing the problem as quickly as you can. This is the perfect opportunity to show your client that you are an expert

in your field, and are perfectly fit to solve the problems they may have. When you put your clients' minds at ease by anticipating and meeting their needs, you increase their confidence in your abilities, and help them to feel cared for in the process!

#### GO THE EXTRA MILE

Our time is precious. Every moment that we spend in our businesses is valuable. Often we find ourselves overthinking as we try to prioritize how we spend our time. I am a strong believer that we make conscious and unconscious decisions everyday about the things and people that are most important to us. As business owners we have to understand that our clients are just as valuable as our time. As a wedding planner, one of my values is making sure that my clients invest time in meaningful relationships. I understand that when I ask them to do that, I want set the example by taking the time to learn each family member's name and face so that I can address them by name as we approach the wedding day. This may even entail a designer to go a little further and provide additional revisions after design services are complete—perhaps asking the photographer to take a few more pictures of the bride and her mother, knowing that moment is special to the both of them. Or it could be giving them a sweet and meaningful gift once

the client books with you, to show them just how excited you are to work with them! It is up to you to determine what is best for your business, but I do believe going the extra mile shows your client just how valuable they are to you and your business!

#### GIVE THEM YOU

The saying is true: “No one can do you like you.” You are the greatest representation of your brand and your core values for your business. You have a unique story, service, and personality that no one else in your market has. You are truly one of a kind! When a client visits your website, surfs through your Instagram feed, or follows you on Facebook, Twitter, or

Snapchat, they catch a glimpse of your life and see who you are both personally and in business. It’s so important that the “you” that you are virtually is the same “you” that you are in person. Make a list of the things that make you different, and insert it into your workflow and your client experience! Figure out the ingredients of your “special sauce,” and project what makes you and your services unique, both virtually and in person. This not only develops trust but helps your clients to remember why they fell in love with you and what you do in the first place. It’s important to remember that your brand, your business, and your client experience is an extension of you. Whether you believe it or not, someone needs the gift of “you,” more than you know!

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#### LET’S TAKE ACTION!

1. Take some time to listen to your clients and learn more about them! Determine how you will apply what you learn about them to create a personal, and meaningful client experience.
2. How do you anticipate the needs of your clients and alleviate stressors they may have?
3. There is often a fine line between short-changing your services and going the extra mile for your clients. What are some ways that you can “under-promise,” and “over-deliver” on services for your clients?
4. Write down 10 things that make you and your services different from anyone else in your market, and even in your industry? How can you integrate what sets you apart into your client experience?



# START WITH WHY

WHEN THE WHY INFORMS THE HOW,  
YOU CREATE AN EXPERIENCE WITH PURPOSE

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BY @MARYMARANTZ & @JUSTINMARANTZ

If there has been one single game changer in our business, it has been this: ***We Start With Why.*** As photographers, whether we are thinking about how we light, pose, market, brand, price, or create a client experience for our couples, every single one of those decisions first gets filtered through the lens of ***Why we do what we do.*** So today, I think that's where we should start too.

For us, our Why comes down to a picture of my Grandparents.

They got married when they were just nineteen years old. They were just nineteen years old when -without a penny to their name or a clue what they were doing, just a dream in their hearts of a life worth chasing- they got married. Nineteen when they decided to leap and pray the net would appear. Going out on that faith, they started a life together because they believed that life was always worth the risk.

So it only makes sense that not long after our own wedding, I took my brand new husband Justin home to where I grew up in West Virginia,

to see my grandparents (who couldn't make it up to CT for the wedding) and to show them some wedding photos. While we were there, Justin did what Justin does: he took pictures. A lot of pictures. Pictures of just the two of them... just as they are. Together. And after we had spent a few hours with them, on our way out the door he asked to take just one more picture: a standing portrait of the two of them in front of their fireplace, holding their own wedding picture in a silver frame- black & white and 8x10- that had sat on their mantle for the past sixty two and a half years of laughing, living, crying, and loving together in their marriage. The photo was an afterthought, an almost didn't happen. We were already out the front door & on to the porch when he thought to go back for it. The whole thing took about thirty seconds and then we were gone.

And that would have been the end of the story. Would have been, of course, except that we got the call a few short weeks later that my Grandpa Glen had passed away suddenly in the night.



So this picture that started out as an afterthought soon became the very last picture we have of the two of them together in this world. And this picture, in so many ways, represents an entire life together for it contains in its four corners both a picture of Day 1....and a picture of nearly Day Last. And to this day, it serves as a reminder to us of just how fast this beautiful life goes.

As you can imagine when all this happened, I thought a lot about the wedding photographer who was there with them on their day. I wondered if when he pushed the button to create this beautiful image in a silver frame, he could have known that it would be his work that she would be holding on to as she said goodbye to the love of her life. I wondered if he could know the generations in our family that would want copies of it as proof that this life and love are always worth the risk. I wondered if he could have known the sixty two and a half years that this image was both the start of, and would bear witness to as the decades passed

by. I wondered if he knew that in so many ways he was providing the very proof that their love existed in the first place. Because as anyone who has ever lost someone can tell you, when he's gone and she's gone, the pictures are what remain. *And then I wondered if any of us realize that when we push the button now.*

For us, we think that's really what photography does. Time marches on and this moment is gone and that moment is gone. But photography steps in and says "Not this one. This moment stays."

And it's all because a photographer thought to go back and say, just one more. And that right there became the very foundation of Why we do what we do. This is our Why: "We recognize that what we do is about preserving life, preserving love, and preserving history.

To provide the very proof that this love existed in the first place. Therefore, in reverence for the gravity of that which we do, we choose to exercise the restraint



to only tell those stories through the veil of authenticity and to capture the meaningful images that will record that history for the generations yet to come.”

#### WHEN THE WHY INFORMS THE HOW, YOU CREATE AN EXPERIENCE WITH PURPOSE.

Filtering the experience that we wanted to create for our clients through that Why, we quickly knew that we wanted to do far more than just give them gifts for gift's sake. Like everything in our business, we wanted that experience to STAND for something. So we started with Why and we put a ton of heart into it, and we came up with a series of gifts in our client experience that are in every way informed by creating that Legacy of Love generations strong. Here are just two of our favorite examples.

#### THE SILVER FRAME STORIES.

When we go to our clients' weddings, we feel like we're going to the weddings of friends (that's the huge advantage of holding out for your most Ideal Clients... they feel like friends!) We knew that if we were going to a friend's wedding, we would want to bring a gift. So that got us thinking: What if we brought a gift to our couples too? Starting from that place of Why, the obvious choice for a wedding day gift quickly became clear. If we want to be the

photographers who create images that will sit in someone's silver frame for the next sixty two and a half years, what if we were also the people who gave them the frame itself? It was perfect for us! And so at every wedding, we now gift our couples a silver 8x10 Restoration Hardware frame. But we didn't stop there. We wanted to create an experience, rooted in Why, that was truly remarkable (i.e. actually WORTH remarking on!) So we said, “What if when they opened it, there was already a wedding photo there?” Now THAT would be an experience people could talk about. So we researched and found a portable printer, and now at every wedding during dinner we print off a black & white 8x10 print from the day, package it up with our signature ribbon, and give it to the couple about an hour before we leave. And people go crazy over it! I can't tell you how many weddings we've booked from people who see that kind of gesture and want a Legacy from their photographer like that too. When the Why Informs the How, you create an experience with Purpose!

#### CHEERS TO THE NEXT SIXTY YEARS.

The other thing that we do as part of our experience that is driven by our Why, is how we deliver the images. We actually deliver our high res files digitally (in addition to gifts of prints) in an online gallery. So what that allows us to do, is that a few days before the gallery is ready

we can order a bottle of champagne online (wine.com is a great resource for this), drop ship it to our couple, and request delivery tracking. Once we see that the package has been delivered, we can then make the online gallery go live. And now when they open up their package of champagne, there is a card that reads, “The photos are HERE! Pop the champagne and raise a glass, while you relive this amazing day together. Cheers to the next sixty years!” Pretty good, right? :) But the thing is, we would have never thought to make the delivery of their images a celebration of what they are truly the start of (the next sixty years) if we had not first started from that place of Why.

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#### TAKE ACTION:

So here are the major takeaways for you to remember as you begin the work of Starting with Why in your own remarkable client experience:

1. Write out your own “Why” mission statement for your business in full paragraph form. Put it somewhere you can see it often to be reminded of why you do what you do! Now run every step of your experience through the filter of that Why & see how it stands up.
2. Remember that the gift doesn’t have to be expensive. A gift with heart and reason behind it will always make more of an impact than a gift just for gift’s sake.
3. Give them something that will remind them of you and go with them through their marriage. Make it something that every time they see it, it will remind them of who you were and what you stood for!
4. Discussion question: what is your Why and what is one gift you could give that is rooted in that Why?

ARTIST + CLIENT =

# FRIENDS

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BY @ARTBYMEGAN

When I began working full-time as an artist last year, I felt like I was constantly apologizing for not knowing how to do business “properly.” I was a little nervous and ashamed at times that I had such a lack of business knowledge and often felt ill-prepared for this adventure of becoming a professional artist.

But then I had a realization: I could make the client experience seamless, fun, and professional using the skills I already had. I played up my strengths (honestly, to compensate for what I felt that I didn’t know yet) and was friendly, kind, and honest with the clients.

The relationships that I have developed with my clients have become the strongest and most rewarding part of my business. I have worked with wonderful people on commissions and collaborations, and have become friends with them in the process by being casual, but professional, joyful about my work, and genuinely interested in their story. This is not to “toot-my-own-horn,” but to remind you that just maybe your happy, fun personality

and lack of business experience is not a totally detrimental combination.

Kat Schmoyer of the Creative at Heart Conference spoke once about the importance of calling clients on the phone instead of working primarily over email. I didn’t know when I heard her speak about this in November of 2015 how much this advice would help me -- it has completely changed my perspective on doing business. I love my phone calls with clients because I get to tell bad jokes, make them laugh, and have a real conversation, which is my favorite. And who doesn’t love a funny phone call with a stranger turned new friend, really?

My takeaway is BE YOURSELF with clients. I am never super serious because for me, that’s just not authentic. I am not excellent yet at writing contracts or working on crunching numbers for my budget, but man, can I chat up a stranger on the phone about the art they dream of for their home or about a painting in memory of a special moment.



*Laura Lee Photography*

Make it personal and fun. NO one will doubt your love for your business if that is what shines through. My joyfulness about Art by Megan is what has led to me hearing the comment time and time again, “Wow, you are so outgoing... for an artist.”

If I can do my part to erase the stereotype of the angry, withdrawn and difficult artist and actually be

fun to work with, I can create a business over time that is not only strong, but also successful, on my terms.

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FOR MORE INFO, YOU CAN VISIT MEGAN [ONLINE](#).

# CLIENT EXPERIENCE TIPS

*from our TuesdaysTogether Leaders*

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Under-promise and Over-deliver! In any way you can, love on your clients by giving them more than they expect- faster timing, better care, more of your service- whatever you can do to prove that you value them in a surprise kind of way!

@JILLGUMPHOTOGRAPHY

Hand written thank you notes with a personal thank you gift goes a very long way!

@KANNEPHOTO

Spoil them with gifts and love! Remember to email them just a reminder that you are here for them (mostly bride) when ever she needs advise. I gift a big goody bag full of Mr/ Mrs mugs, calligraphy print, coasters and custom items for the couple one month before their day. Just to remind them I am just as excited as they are!

@MACYKRALL

Make sure you don't forget the end of the experience!! So often I think we start off with a really great client experience, but after the event/shoot, etc is over we kind of check it off our list! However, at the end is where we wrap up the whole client experience!! For me, this looks like sending a surprise gift at the end that clients love!!

@LAURENRSWANN

Surprise and delight, going above and beyond to make their experience a memorable one. One thing we love doing is sending our clients a personalized website of 20-30 images a day after their wedding. It is unexpected and they are thrilled because they are still on a wedding day dream cloud. We send the same thing to our vendors that worked so very hard to make our clients day so beautiful. My business lives and breathes by this Maya Angelou quote...."I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

@AMALIEORRANGEPHOTOGRAPHY

A great client experience begins from that first initial inquiry. I take the time to get to know, personalize, form thoughtful responses, and I always think about what I would want/have wanted as a bride. I always work to go above and beyond to give them more than what they expect from a wedding vendor, so personal, surprise gifts and exceeding expectations is important to me in offering an exceptional client experience. Not only are those important, but continuing education and always working to improve your business will always help with client experience as well!

@BETHANNEARTHUR

Regardless of if you're in a service or product based industry, we're all in the business of serving others! Finding ways to care for and love your clients & vendors well will remind them that we are "for" them as people, not just as a transaction! From sending an encouraging note to seeing and filling a need, clients will appreciate that you're there for them in all things!

@LAURENLCARNES

Take the time to get to know your clients. Don't be afraid to build relationships with them. (This is especially important in a personalized service industry!)

The relationship you build with each client is the foundation not only for the present but for future referrals and business. So don't be afraid to be open, personal and most importantly, true to yourself. Potential clients look for those they can relate and connect to. Goodness, some of my best friends are past clients and I feel as though it all began with creating a personal and relatable clients experience.

@JACKSONSIGNATUREPHOTOGRAPHY

Treat others how you want to be treated. It can be overwhelming to constantly look at what everyone else does but if you step back and say "How would I like to be treated?" It will make your experience more genuine to you and you'll be happier following through!

@ERIKAMILLSPHOTO

Put a system in place to walk your clients through a consistent experience from beginning to end. Don't try to recreate the wheel with each client! I use an online system to keep myself

organized. I automate the emails that make sense to automate (e.g. Simple reminder emails) and the system keeps my other email templates and to-dos in order so I don't miss a step. It's so much easier to create a cohesive experience when you've taken the time to design it all together (but don't be afraid to make tweaks along the way!)

@ALLIESIARTO

When spending money on client gifts, don't believe it has to come out of your pocket. HUGE business advice: Add that cost into your pricing. Super simple.

@AUSTYNELIZABETH

Most often the phrase client experience brings to mind giving gifts to your clients. Loving on your clients through gifting is a great way to uplift the experience of your service, but it is equally if not more important that you focus on the systems of your business that drive your service from start to finish. Have you thought through how easy it is or not for a client to work with you? Do you have a system in place for online booking where customers can sign contracts electronically instead of printing and scanning? Do you offer online payment processing to simplify completing invoices? Can you implement project management tools to make expectations clear and keep both parties on track? Carve out time to map out your inquiry to proposal to booking to service steps to completion and the follow up to make sure your client experience is seamless and effortless for them to do business with you!

@MEGANMARTINCREATIVE



I feel like it is really important to ask questions about your client, their life, and what it is that makes them happy. This gets them talking, allows you to connect with them, and makes them feel like you truly care about them as a person versus a client. As a wedding photographer, my couples love it when I ask about how they met and how their engagement story went. I am on Instagram as [@LAPIERRENICOLE](#)

To me, client experience is all about making your clients feel valued and taken care of. While client gifts are a part of their overall experience, I try to focus on the little details we work through along the way that often get overlooked. For example, one of my favorite things (and something I have received great feedback on!) is making my price proposals not only informative, but beautiful. I include styled desktop photos in the background of my processes page, photos of some of my favorite previous custom invitation suites alongside my brand mission, clean white space to showcase their personalized pricing details, a page detailing the breakdown of their payment schedule so they can see how it will be managed comfortably for them, and a final page with a sweet picture of me letting them know that they can contact me with any questions, and that I can't wait to work with them! It might seem little, but it is the first visual touch point I have with my brides once they show interest in my services, and going the extra mile in this

step really helps them feel loved, informed, and excited to start their design process! [@SIMPLYJESSICAMARIE](#)

Genuine hospitality is a cornerstone of our wedding planning company. We hire based on a spirit of hospitality over skills. Skills can be taught but a heart for serving others is a special character that not everyone has. We also like to keep the wedding planning process a fun and celebration for our clients, so we greet them with a champagne bucket filled with festive beverages at all their meetings, send them home with gifts like bridal magazines and our "wedding swag bag" filled with goodies from our favorite wedding pro's, and we give a nice bottle of champagne to them on their wedding day - it's a theme that carries through our whole planning process and keeps the client experience fun! We also try to hone in on ways to surprise them on their wedding day, whether it be upgrading their place setting with the gold chargers they had their eyes on or hiring an unique pedi-cab to take the couple away at the end of the night because they weren't thrilled with the town car. It's all about personalizing the experience, keeping it fun and keeping a genuine heart for hospitality! [@PERFECTLYPOSHEVENTS](#)

TUESDAYSTOGETHER

# GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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- **Icebreaker:** Share a personal experience about a company (outside of your industry) that provides an amazing client experience.
- What are some things you do to create an amazing experience for your clients?
- How can you add value to your services or products without increasing your cost?
- Do you give gifts to your clients? If so, what have you found that works well? Is that gift connected to your brand?
- What aspect of your business differs from what everyone else around you offers? How does that factor into your client experience?
- **Activity:** Map out the “story” of your client’s experience from the time they see your marketing material through you delivering your product or service. What are their pain points? Where can you eliminate pain and add value along the way?

*These are just to start the discussion. Feel free to include your own and encourage group members to do the same!*

THANK YOU TO OUR TUESDAYSTOGETHER LEADERS,  
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*Rising Tide*