



W H A T ' S T H E B U Z Z A L L A B O U T ?

BY BETH FORESTER

Senior Photography

The 21st century requires us to consider many unconventional styles of marketing. You might have heard the new lingo—word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM), ideavirus, sneezers, permission marketing, “the buzz”—but, what does it all mean to the professional photographer specializing in senior portrait photography? Everything. For almost 10 years now, the “buzz” has kept my West Virginia studio booked with high school seniors, four months in advance. What’s the buzz

all about? Here I reveal my six secrets to generating a senior high school buzz about your studio.

Secret #1: The Anatomy Lesson

Before we try to sell our unique brand of photography, we need to study the basic anatomy of our target client: the 21st century high school senior. Today’s teens are a new breed of purchaser. They are known as Generation Y or the “entitlement generation,” and are spending an estimated

100–150 billion dollars per year. Upon examination, we discover that the teen brain is saturated with consumer ideaviruses galvanized by peer pressure. Teens are on a constant diet of media marketing and social networking. They are plugged in, wired up and continually networking through computers and cell phones. Their natural tendency is to spread their electronic buzz like viral wildfire through text messaging, blogging, instant messaging, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter or the om-



Purple Cow Product #1: Senior Slide Show Podcast

This year we are ramping up the buzz for seniors who reach a certain level of spending. In addition to their DVD slide show, they will receive their show posted to Apple's iTunes store as a podcast. And that's how the viral marketing starts. Our clients share their shows with their family and friends by directing them to the iTunes store to download their podcast. By playing their show for hundreds of friends after downloading it to their own video iPod or iPhone, they are showing your product to hundreds of potential clients. To learn more about how to create your own podcasts for your high school senior clientele, go to the link on my website at www.foresterphoto.com/podcast.

nipresent cell phone. Our goal as high school senior photographers is to become a node—one which is indispensably hooked into this network.

Secret #2: The Psychology Lesson

A couple of years ago I read a book that changed the psychology of the way I marketed my business—*Purple Cow: Transform Your Business by Being Remarkable* by marketing guru Seth Godin. After reading the book, I realized that I had already been doing many of the things that Godin suggests. I had already discovered that the high school senior's psyche demands non-conformity and strives for individuality. Paradoxically, I also knew the teen ego harbors a desperate need to conform to the standards of the peer group. However, the key to my success was in offering services and products that other studios did not. I made products so individual that the buzzing teen peer group would demand them. Seth Godin named these such products "purple cows." Specifically, a purple cow product is a product that will infect your



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clients with so much enthusiasm that they will rave about it to their friends. Once you have invented a purple cow product, you incite your clients into selling it for you. By becoming more assertive about creating remarkable products geared to teenage demands, I began deliberately pursuing high school WOMM, or "the buzz."

Secret #3: The Sociology Lesson

If you do not have the good fortune to have a high school senior living in your home, you will have to do some field research about their habits and tastes. Watch MTV or VH1, scour fashionable teen magazines, or simply take a walk in your local mall. Teen stores such as Urban Outfitters, American Eagle, Abercrombie & Fitch,

My Storyboard

your story-your life-created by you



Purple Cow Product #2: Senior Storyboards

In my search to create an original product to offer my clientele, I looked to companies like Converse and Pottery Barn Teen that were offering customizable products at a premium price. I wanted my product to incorporate images from the sessions with personalized choices to create truly one-of-a-kind pieces of artwork. This quickly became a product called Storyboards, which any photographer may purchase as software at www.photoduds.com. Senior Storyboards showcase the teenager's life story in a way that also displays their personality. I based the concept on something I witnessed in every teen's room I visited: a memory corkboard. Likewise, I studied the appearance and decoration of the teenage pages on MySpace. I noticed how teens arranged icons and decorations to personalize their lives, thoughts and memories. Like a MySpace page, the storyboard idea allows the senior to make various choices. My clients select the major elements of a storyboard: the background, layout and number of images. Additionally, they also choose graphic design elements we call myStory icons, which place their personal stamp on the finished piece. These elements are generally based on various hobbies such as basketball, cheerleading and music. For a minor up-charge, we will even scan and include such items as concert tickets, original poems and lists written by the senior. We take their images and graphic elements and artistically place them into the Storyboard, and voilà, the senior has participated in the creative process. More than ever, the teen now has a personalized, unique fine art piece to brag, blog and buzz about. Thus, teens who visit Forester Photography create their own, ultimate version of my slogan: "Your Story, Your Life."

Delia's and Hollister will inundate you with the latest hot looks in teen fashion. Observe the young, trendy colors of the season so you can reflect them in the sets, backgrounds and marketing pieces you use. Likewise, you can learn as much about current trends by checking out the latest teen movies. If this doesn't interest you, hire a part-time student to help in the studio. Your part-time student will be such an important employee and a loyal sneezer (someone who will spread your ideas and get people to believe in them).

Secret #4: The Cyberspace Lesson

To inspire cyberspace WOMM, you must





have an account on MySpace and Facebook. You also need to provide low-res images with your studio logo for your clients to post on their own MySpace and Facebook pages. Within hours of posting, it is amazing how many views and comments the photos will receive. Moreover, you need to create a blog to reach out to teens and to promote a dialog in their digital world. On a blog, tout yourself a little. It is totally acceptable to reveal your excitement about images, techniques and events at your studio and in the community. Make it easy to share your images, photos and products through links and comments. Recently, we started featuring a "Senior of the Week" on

our blog. Knowing that the chosen senior would be emailing friends and family with a link to our site meant advertising for us and WOMM was inevitable.

Secret #5: The Purple Cow Creativity Lesson

Armed with research and Godin's ideas, I spark the buzz by constantly creating innovative new products and services, which is just as effective as any other advertising means available. Whereas many studios were limiting senior sessions in subtle ways, we became the studio that gave them more. For example, a few years ago I introduced the "Experience Sessions," which

were geared toward seniors who wanted it all. These sessions were positioned as creative sessions, which included more time in the studio, and as part of the experience we presented seniors with a goody bag when they arrived. Included in the goody bag are snacks, fortune cookies in a Chinese take-out container, a custom collector's tin for wallet photos, coupons for special items such as framing, and our own brand of bottled water. To accompany this service, I also offered exclusive "purple cow" products such as personalized signature images and designer art composites. They needed to be unique because ordinary "brown cow" products were everywhere.


Secret #6: Create a Frenzy

Even though teens identify with branded consumer choices, they also like exclusivity. So when introducing a new "buzz" product, service or session, I purposefully limit the number of orders I will take, making teens want the new product even more. Then I let the blogging, messaging and talking create a whirlwind of exposure. For example, I casually mentioned to a 2008 senior client that next year I would be offering a very special senior session, while hinting that the session would require a high dollar investment. Then I explained that it takes so much time that I am limiting it to only 10 of the 2009 seniors in my area. I am

delighted, but not surprised, that I booked four such sessions before even publishing a word about it! The buzz worked in spite of the \$1750 minimum purchase price tag, and a \$350 session fee. Plus, the buzz saved me advance-advertising expenses. My best-kept secret is knowing my clients will go out and tell every detail about what session they have chosen, and that many of their friends will want that super session too. Even if they do not choose it, the sneezers are spreading the buzz virus about my studio.

Armed with these six secrets, I know I will soon be hearing the buzz about your studio! In the meantime, for more infor-



mation about my work, drop by www.foresterphoto.com, check out my work and feel the buzz. 

Beth Forester, CPP, M. Photog. Cr., is owner and operator of a studio in the small town of Madison, WV, where she specializes in senior portraiture. She has been named West Virginia Photographer of the Year three times (2004, 2006 and 2007). She has also received the prestigious honor of being twice named Mid-East States Photographer of the Year in 2006 and 2007. She is also the concept creator of the new product line, photoDUDS, which is a series of DVDs created for the professional photographer and designed to help aid in the creation of designer products, marketing pieces and portraits. For more information about Beth, her studio or photoDUDS, please visit her website at www.foresterphoto.com.