

00:00:00 Welcome to the hair of the dog podcast. I'm your host, Nicole Begley. And today we're chatting with Tracy Munson from Tracy Munson photography in a very small town in new Brunswick, Canada. I'm talking small, I'm talking 100 people or less. You guys that's two zeros. Anyway, if you have ever thought to yourself that I have a market that's too small to make this pet photography thing,

00:00:26 be a full-time thing. Well, think again, come listen to Tracy and story and be inspired. And actually even if, when you're in a big market, the techniques that we're talking about in the marketing strategies that we're discussing during our time together in this episode, well, they work in any market of any size. So stay tuned. Welcome to the hair of the dog podcast.

00:00:52 If you're a pet photographer, ready to make more money and start living a life by your design, you've come to the right place. And now your host, pet photographer, travel addict, chocolate martini connoisseur, Nicole Begley. Hey, everybody, Nicole here from the hair of the dog podcast. And today I have with me, my special guest Tracy Munson from Tracy Monson photography,

00:01:19 Tracy, welcome to the podcast. Hello. I'm so excited to be here. Yay. I'm super excited to have you here. Yeah. So you have recently made like a pretty big change in your life and business. And one of the things that I hear most commonly said from people is to why running a pet photography business might be challenging is that they're they think their market's too small.

00:01:46 So tell us, where are you joining us from up there in new Brunswick, Canada From Harvey, new Brunswick, not the big Harvey of 2000 near Fredericton, but I'm in Harvey parish, which is down near funding, national park. And we have a population of around a hundred people. So we don't even qualify as a village as I understand it.

00:02:09 So there you go. 100, that's only two zeros, Actually. That was only the last time I checked. We were up over a hundred. Like when we moved here, it was like 80. That's crazy. Your major growth going on. Yeah. That is amazing. And you have done a really great job of having a profitable pet photography business in this small town.

00:02:37 So why don't you let's take it back though, before the move and before we'll start to get in the nitty gritty of what you did to find success in the smaller area, but maybe just tell us a little bit about when you started your photography business or what kind of got you into this photography pet photography world. Yeah, well, it kind of happened gradually.

00:02:55 I was a veterinary technician for about 25 years. So I'd been working in vet clinics and stuff for about 10 years, and then I switched to working in animal shelters and I loved at work, but I also got really burnt out eventually. So somewhere along the way, I guess, around

2010, I actually, I think it was mostly because I quit smoking and I phones were fairly new and all the iPhone apps and,

00:03:24 and, you know, editing your photos on the phone and stuff. So I had quit smoking. I needed something to do with my hands. I needed to not go out for cigarettes with my coworkers while we were on breaks. So instead I would sit in the lunch room by myself for 15 minutes and edit photos. And I had a, I had an iPhone three GS at the time,

00:03:46 which I think was like three megapixels. The noise was terrible. Like the pictures were really bad. And so I started using a lot of like artistic effects and stuff to kind of try to make something out of these pictures. That weren't very good. And I, you know, I had an Instagram and stuff and at the time we were also fostering a mother dog and her puppy.

00:04:08 I still have the mother dog Baca now. So, you know, that'll start it. And within a year or so, people were actually asking to buy prints of my pictures from Instagram. These were more like, you know, landscape and nature type, fine art things at that time. And then it just sort of kept going from there. And then in 2012 I decided I wanted to get a DSLR and start taking pictures of the big girl camera.

00:04:36 So I did that. And at first it was really about taking pictures of wildlife and landscapes, because for me it was my escape from work. You know, I saw so much bad and depressing stuff every day at work. I wanted to just create beautiful things in my time off, but then within a year or so, there was a rescue that I was really close with,

00:05:04 that we had gotten one of our dogs from, and they rescued a lot of the senior dogs from the shelter that the shelter deemed on adoptable dogs with health problems and stuff. So this rescue would take them and put them in, in foster homes until they could get adopted. So I really wanted to help them out. So I started doing adoption photos for them because at the time what they had wasn't good.

00:05:26 It was, you know, it was just, it was just them, right. Snapping a quick phone photo of the, of the dog. So I started taking photos for them and, you know, then that sort of moved on into doing calendar fundraisers for them. And then people started inquiring about sessions with me. So this was all the way I was still in Toronto.

00:05:47 So I already, so probably around 2013 to early 2014, I was starting to get occasional paying clients for, for pets, but I never really made too much of it or pushed it very hard while I was in Toronto because I was working full time and, you know, I was tired. Right, right. It's a lot of work, spoiler alert.

00:06:12 It's a lot of work to run a business. So, you know, I had a, I had a business page and stuff and I did little things here and there, but I wasn't really marketing very hard or

anything like that. You know, I was happy to do a handful of sessions a year, so yeah. That was kind of how it started and then just snowballed from there.

00:06:32        And then when I realized that I really wanted to leave that job and we've been kind of thinking for years, we'd been wanting to escape to Atlantic Canada. Yeah. Yeah. It just sort of all started coming together that then, you know, That's fantastic. So I was going to say in, in Toronto, did you build your business to a point in Toronto that you were just doing pet photography as your main source of income then?

00:06:57        Or was it kind of still part-time the whole time you were in Toronto? Oh yeah. Yeah. I worked at the animal shelter in Toronto right up until I left. I mean, Toronto's so expensive to live in and that was so to me actually, like moving here to this small town was kind of the only way I could see to do this because I couldn't really see how I could quit my job in Toronto,

00:07:25        in the big city and afford to pay. Right. If the business wasn't, you know, making a lot of money right. From the start. Whereas we were able to buy a big old farm house out here on six acres. And my mortgage payments are less than a quarter of what my rent was on a basement apartment in Toronto. So, wow.

00:07:47        That's a big difference. Yeah. Yeah. So I knew we could stay afloat a lot longer here than we couldn't Toronto while I built the business up here. So, I mean, I'm not going to lie the first year was not good. Right. Right. Well, it takes some time. It takes some time for sure. And, you know,

00:08:06        I think that's a great potential reframe that people have. Well, you know, I guess it's different that you are moving to where some people are already in that more rural area maybe, and are kind of use to that cost of living. But if you are taking a, a change and you're wanting to move out of these higher cost of living urban areas to something that's,

00:08:29        you know, a little bit more rural. Yeah. You don't have to make as much money to, to do the same things that you want to do in your life because it's the cost of living can be so much less. So. Yeah. No, that's fantastic. All right. So you moved out there. What year did you guys move out there?

00:08:45        So we Moved in the spring of 2018. Okay. All right. And then started your business. What kind of was going through your head with your, where you moving out there and thinking like, all right, I'm gonna move out here and I'm going to do pet photography. Like, was that your number one goal when you had moved? Perfect.

00:09:05        Okay. And then, you know, obviously you knew you're moving to a small town, kind of, what were you, what was your strategy thinking of? Well, okay. Where am I going to get

these clients kind of, what was your head space or, or strategy around that? So I'm about 15 minutes of Monkton, which the greater Monkton area I think has about 160,000 people.

00:09:27        So I mean, still not huge by, you know, big enough to support me. Right. Right. I mean, I knew that I'd be looking for most of my clients there. So because we had bought a house out here the summer before, but then we didn't want to move just in time for winter. So we thought, you know,

00:09:47        we'll stay in Toronto and then we'll move in the spring. So as soon as we bought this house, though, I changed my Instagram. I changed my website. I changed everything to say, serving Toronto and greater Monkton. You know, I started, I started tagging my photos, dogs of Monkton, even though we weren't in Monkton yet. Like as long as it wasn't a photo with the CN tower in the background,

00:10:12        like who's going to actually say that tree is in Toronto. Yeah. Yeah. So you started doing that like SEO and Instagram or the social media stuff started to get the, did you get a waitlist together? Like before you, before you moved, like when you started changing that? No, not really. Yeah. Really. Just like I say,

00:10:37        tagging things and by the time I moved here, if you search pat photographer, Monkton, I was the top result and I hadn't had a single client here yet. Now mind you, there wasn't really anybody else here doing just pets. So it's not like, you know, I had, you know, giants to jump over on, but Well, yeah.

00:11:00        Any smaller market. Yeah. I was going to say any smaller markets should be fairly, fairly open for grabbing that SEO juice, you know? Cause it's not like you're trying to rank in Toronto or New York city. Meanwhile, at that point in Toronto, I mean, I'd had my business for about at least four years and I think I was still on like page four.

00:11:21        Wow. Yeah. Yeah. Actually funny story there. Something to think about for anybody who thinks still get kind of cutesy with their business name, I've never told you this. But when I first started my business, I thought, well, you know, I love dogs and everybody knows how much I love wine. So the perfect name for my business would be hair of the dog photography.

00:11:45        So terrible dog photography.com on GoDaddy and it was available. So I'm like done, got that domain name, set up a website, got some business cards. And then someday somebody said something to me, but I couldn't, I couldn't find your website when I, when I searched it. And I was like, really? And so then I typed in the way people do right.

00:12:09        People don't type in hair of the dog, graphy.com. They type in hair of the dog. And what came up for pages and pages before me was posts from her, which was, this was I

think pre academy. I think then you were just like hair of the dog Hair of the dog blog.com  
Actually also featured a couple of photographers in the Toronto area.

00:12:37 So people surged hair of the dog and photography. They were getting like my competitors that had been featured on long before they saw me. So don't just look up the domain name, also Google the individual words. Yeah, no, that is a great, great thing to mention. I have a friend, she did family photography still does. And she was in the Philadelphia region and she used her name,

00:13:16 but there was another family, newborn photographer in Texas with the same name. And there's only two of them and their websites were both very clearly marked of Pennsylvania and Texas, but they both, you know, they kind of became friends because it's like, they both had to refer back people all the time of like, oh no, you need this person over here.

00:13:37 So yeah. And it's, it's true that people don't, they don't type in your L's like we should definitely have some URLs that are easy to mention and say for people to type in, but they just go straight to Google and type in, you know, kind of what they're looking for and then just click the links on that search. So that's a really important strategy to,

00:13:57 to make sure it's working. That's funny. That's funny. All right. So you're move 2018. You set up all of your, all of your SEO, your website. That's one of the first things I did when I was moving from Pittsburgh to Charlotte too, is I started changing that I did put up a little waitlist slash kind of model call thing saying on my like Charlotte pet photography page on my Pittsburgh based.

00:14:25 So a website, you know, that I'll be moving to the Charlotte region. And when I do, I'm going to be needing models for different, you know, location scouting, yada yada, yada. So I had kind of a little interest weightless forum. So I started to be able to build my email list before I even moved. So that was a little bit helpful,

00:14:42 but yeah. So you got you're on, you're ranked, you're doing the Instagrams, you get to the market. What was your next steps? How did you finally say, all right, I'm here, let's start, you know, getting some dogs in front of my lens. What did that look like? You know, it's kind of just like when I dropped out of university back in the early nineties and moved to Vancouver and then was shocked to find out that,

00:15:07 you know, half a degree in English got me a job stocking shelves nights at the Superstore, it was kind of the same. I mean, you know, I first moved here and I was like, okay, well I've done all the things. So phone will start ringing soon. Right. But of course it did. Right, Right, Right.

00:15:25 I mean really meeting people was the important factor for me. So I've been

doing all the online things, but the first summer I was here, there was an art fair in Monkton. That was, you know, it's a pretty big thing. It's at a park people it's over a long weekend. Thousands of people go, people bring their dogs to it because it's outdoors in a park.

00:15:49        And I also, you know, I still sell some landscape and wildlife photography. So I thought, well, I'll take along a bunch of those kinds of prints. And then I'll also have, you know, a draw for a giveaway of a session to build my email list with people that are actually in the same province as me. So that kind of,

00:16:10        that was big because I mean, I still get inquiries now from people who met me at that first art fair over three years ago that are like, I remember I remember you from, from that art fair and stuff, which I also have to say that I've written a lot of the Facebook groups, some of the, the ones about having more, you know,

00:16:32        kind of upscale business models and stuff that, oh, well, you've got to look all professional and stuff. And I mean, I don't know how well you can see it cause it's kind of dark, but I have blue hair. And my mom even, you know, to this day is always like, you're almost 50 years old. Why do you have blue hair?

00:16:48        But I'm like, you know, if I had moved here and didn't have blue hair, I would be just any other chubby middle-aged woman. But now people come up to me in the grocery store and are like, Hey, you're that pet photographer? Right. It's 100% because of my blue hair, there's like remarkable might appear. So sometimes something like that could be a bit of a marketing strategy to not pair you're covered in tattoos or something like that.

00:17:21        Like that's, it's not always a bad thing to stand out. I agreed. And I think a lot of people start to struggle with like how much of themselves do they show and how much of themselves do they share? And, you know, for instance, for me, for my photography business and hair of the dog, chocolate martinis are a hundred percent part of my brand.

00:17:41        Like people see a chocolate martini and many of them think of me. So this is kind of what I want. So it could be your hair, it could be, you know, traveling, it could be your dog, it could be your cat, it could be an iguana, it can be anything under the sun. But if we kind of choose a couple of those kind of personal points of connection and share them with people and just be available in that way,

00:18:04        then it, yeah. It makes that connection and people can then remember, oh right. I remember you from that arch there three years ago, which speaking of, I would love to know kind of what, because I think a lot of people tend to get over and analysis paralysis with the idea of having an art fair table. So can you tell us kind of what you did to prepare for that or what you had at your table?

00:18:33 Because I think some people think you need to run out like four booths with living room furniture and make it like this whole big, amazing spot, Really pretty like thrown together. You know what we have, we got, I got, like I said, I got some, I had some landscape and, and wildlife prints. So I had them just sort of hanging from the walls of the tent with chains,

00:18:57 like two chains hanging down and little S books to hang the pickers all over the tent. So it was just like the walls. Was it like the plastic walls of the tent? And then that, I just thought of it From the, from the, I rented a booth with a 10, like I don't have an event. Right. So we,

00:19:17 the tongue them from the metal frame. And then there was a table at the back that I brought along a monitor and had my iPad playing a slide show. I had an easel at the front with a big print of my two dogs. And then, you know, a sign saying that I was giving away a pet session. And mostly we just,

00:19:41 my partner Graham came with me too. And I mean, we just basically like for the whole three days, everybody, well, I mean, at times when it wasn't super crowded, but when people walked by and certainly if anybody walked by with a dog, we were like, Hey, are you interested in a pet session? Hey, do you have any pets at home?

00:20:00 You know, we just talked to people and I'm pretty introverted. So like, it wasn't easy for me to do three days of that. And I was actually saying just very recently, because we, we did, we did that when the first year, then we did it again the next year. And then we did a big Christmas one and I got quite a lot of business between those three art fairs.

00:20:21 And that, of course, the next couple of years, everything was off. And I was just saying, I'm kind of glad now that I'm sort of at a point where I maybe don't have to do art fairs anymore when they do come back because you know, it really was instrumental, like forcing myself to do that in the beginning because that very first art fairs,

00:20:41 I think the first one, I wasn't even selling anything like session vouchers, all I was doing was collecting email addresses for a draw. And at that one, I met this local groomer who had four dogs. She wanted a photo of her and her dogs on a white background and she wanted it to hang in her grooming salon big. And, and she really wanted it on a white background because she had a photo of an older dog that had since passed away on a white background that she had gotten done when she had lived in another province years before she could not find anybody in Monkton who would have more than one dog in their studio.

00:21:23 Oh, wow. So, Wow. I know someone that, yeah, you're like, I can do that. I didn't even have a studio. I do mostly outdoors or if people want them on a solid color background like that, I set it up in their house or in her case, in her grooming salon. So we did that and she ended

up with a,

00:21:42        you know, a big 36 inch printer that is like the first thing people see when they come into her salon. So, I mean, she alone was probably responsible for about 85% of my customers in the beginning. You know, everybody that found out about me found out about me because of her. That's fantastic. So was, did you have anything specific set up with her or was it truly just this beautiful piece of art and they ask about it and she was just word of mouth,

00:22:12        just evangelizing you Pretty much. I mean, I had said that I would give her some credit, some print credit for everybody. She referred to me and there were a couple of people that she referred to me, but then like, there'd be times even now there'll be times I'll have a session and then it's not until later I'll see her posting pictures of them at her salon.

00:22:33        And I'm like, oh, they probably found out about me through her. Like I haven't really tracked very well. And that's something I kind of want to do moving forward in the future because I now have a vet and a few groomers that have been clients. So I'd like to, I need to start putting that on my form or something. So I know where these referrals are coming from so that I can do something to reward them a little bit better.

00:22:57        But, but yeah, I mean, that was instrumental, but it's all just because I took the chance and went to this art fair at which I sold nothing. Like I still, I didn't sell a single way landscape prints or anything that I took. They did get people in the booth. People are like, oh, that's beautiful. And Hey,

00:23:12        is that in funny national park? Oh, is that here? You know, they, it got, but I didn't sell any of them, but you know, all of my business in the first year or so probably it came from about whatever. Right. That's yeah. That's a great thing to remember too, because I think a lot of times we're really quick to judge whether a marketing venture was a success or not,

00:23:34        or a failure and label it as such, but so much of this business is a long game and it just takes time. I mean, I had, that would contact me and, you know, my prices were more than, than what they realized at the time. And they would come back a couple of years later, you know, not everyone,

00:23:58        but some would, and same thing with these kinds of work. Like I would do some different things with our humane society. And, you know, I volunteered to, they had a big calendar and actually almost all the pet photographers in Pittsburgh at the time took part of it. And, you know, I would sometimes take adoptable photos and things like that.

00:24:17        And I can't tell you how many of my clients would come to me. And they would just, at some point say, I'd love that the work that you do with the volunteer with the humane society and the humane society was never really promoting me. Like we did a little promotion

once or twice, but it wasn't like they were out there constantly promoting me or sessions or offers.

00:24:38        It was just this natural progression of people. See it, and then they remember it and then, you know, it might take them a little time to get moving on it. So we, you know, we still need to be having this marketing, this urgency and, and making offers to people periodically. But I think too many of us are way too fast to label something.

00:25:00        And as that didn't work, because we didn't see an immediate, like my calendar is full now that it just takes time. That just made me think of another thing, actually, that I had completely forgotten I'd even done this. But also then that first year I had gone first, one of the first things I did when I moved here was go to the local SPCA thinking.

00:25:20        I mean, of course they're going to be delighted to have somebody with my background, But they were kind of like, so, you know, I was like, oh, well that didn't, that didn't go very well. So, but it just happened that there like volunteer coordinator though then had contacted me about the possibility of getting a session for herself.

00:25:47        So we had met, but she never did actually end up booking, but she got in touch with me when they had a little Christmas market. And it was just a little thing. I think I paid \$25 or something to be there for like every weekend in December. You know, it wasn't thousands of people or anything like that, but they had a gift wrapping table there.

00:26:10        A few of the shelter staff had little booths they're selling, you know, little crafty things and stuff like that. A lot of the staff were there, all of those weekends. And as we were all there and it was very slow, we would all get chatting. And I regaled them with hilarious stories from my shelter days. And by the end of December,

00:26:37        some of the staff were beginning to have me come in and do pictures. They, well, we've got to get Tracy. So, and I actually, I even did like a sort of model call type session with one of the girls there with her dog and stuff. So then she was promoting me all over the place. And so again, that then became another thing,

00:27:01        right? Like, did I sell anything at that? You know, all those weekends in December, no. Right. Was I, did I have anything better to do no. Right. Yeah. I like to say two for these different, these different events and like vendor fair kind of things. I haven't done like a craft fair vendor fair, but I did do.

00:27:25        And I don't like, like the really big, I don't even know if they still do them after COVID, but like they had those really big, like expensive pet expos are like \$500 a table. Like I wasn't ever prepared to spend that much on that kind of thing. But I loved the like community events that my humane society or some of the other rescues would often put on or like the

community walks,

00:27:49 but really those ones that the rescues would put on, at least for me, when I was in Pittsburgh was my target market. And they would, you know, be doing a run, but it benefited the rescue or it's, you know, these different things and you get together and it's a hundred dollars and you're getting those leads may or may not be selling vouchers.

00:28:06 I know for most of mine when I started, I did not sell vouchers. I just, I was like, you, your first one, I was like, well, I'm just going to get some leads. You know, I didn't even think to have a special offer at the table, but one of the unforeseen benefits of those types of events is the ability before the event starts to kind of go around and connect with some of the other vendors and get to meet some of these other people,

00:28:32 because that's where the magic is. I mean, if you guys have been following along at home and you're seeing a theme here, the theme is human connection. Not, not SEO, it's helpful to have SEO, but being able to make those connections with people is so important, whether you're in a big city or small city. Yeah. 100%. I don't want to put it out there too.

00:28:54 I see a lot of times in various pet photography groups and on heart speak where a lot of times photographers do have trouble kind of getting their foot in the door with shelters and something that's not often addressed, I think is that shelters, often shelter staff are very like once bitten, twice shy about having prefers in there and volunteers really of any kind. It can always be such a double-edged thing because shelters have to make difficult decisions and sometimes volunteers lose their minds and slammed the shelter all over social media and stuff.

00:29:38 When, you know, a dog maybe has to be used in ISED an incident or something, and sometimes shelter staff for whatever confidentiality reasons can't even really share with the volunteers what has happened. You know? So I think that's kind of always a really a big thing. I know it was a big thing when I worked in the shelter and you'd have people come in and you'd be kind of like you could tell right off the bat,

00:30:04 sometimes this person probably going to be Right. And I mean, not to mention that shelters, staff is usually like, they're very overextended. Like the shelter staff is so busy, They need somebody who can come in, do the job with minimal assistance and who isn't going to end up actually being a, like, not thinking of the right word, but like a detriment isn't going to end up actually.

00:30:31 Yeah, yeah, yeah. For sure. Yeah. And you know, this isn't a shelter conversation. Oh, go ahead. Sorry. I was just gonna say No, you're good. I was going to make another point. Yeah, go, go, go, go, go. Sorry. Sorry. If you don't finish, If you're that kind of sensitive person,

00:30:46 that's totally fine. But maybe shelter work isn't for you anyway. Or like one of

the smaller rescues that has animals in foster or something like that, that you're not going to be going back and seeing the same dogs week after week after week and then asking, oh, where did Yeah. Yeah. You know, I think it's a good point. So that's this,

00:31:08 the point I was gonna make is, you know, I don't want to like dive too deep into shelter ethics, but I think a lot of people have this, you know, and it's just our sensationalized media and everything else that they think, you know, non kill versus like, you know, the, the public shelters and, you know, gosh,

00:31:26 those public shelters, I always worked closely. It was our public shelter that, you know, it was, it was not a no-kill shelter, but like you have to remember every single person there. They're not there for the money they're there because they love those flippanant animals so much. And they want to do right by them. And like, if there's no shelter that will take in because their mission was,

00:31:47 they will take in anything at any point where are no kill shelters. Once they were full, they were full. And then they were turning people away. And then what happens to those animals? And so as with anything in this world, there is no black and white. It is all a very, very deep shade of gray. But I think it's important,

00:32:07 you know, if you're going to be working with these different shelters to remember that the intention of all these employees and the mission of the shelter is to help these animals. It's true. You know, sometimes yeah. No two different leads are very, very mistreated by the public. Like Yeah. Yeah. Often even by other rescues, it always, that was one of the things that really started to get to me in shelter.

00:32:33 It was just the way that these different groups that have the same, like they have the same and yet tear each other apart. And it's like, well, why like obviously, like you say, none of us are here for the money, right? Yes. Yeah. So, you know, depending too. And you know, I think some people start to think,

00:32:56 oh, I do want to give back. I do want to help with the shelter. And they run into these walls. Whether, you know, the shelter is too busy, they don't have a strong volunteer program place where the volunteer program doesn't include like photographs and things like that. They don't have policies in place with that. Or for whatever reason,

00:33:11 they're getting the run around a don't take it personally. The shelter staff is overworked. Be, you know, check with the other. There's gotta be other rescues in your area too. I know I have found I've loved my work. I've done partnering with some of the bigger rescues, but when I've done marketing promotions, I have found that the smaller rescues,

00:33:33 it was more successful for me, even though one out to a smaller number of

people, their supporters were like, so, so I'm just, what's the word I'm looking for. They just, they love this. Yeah. Passionate. They were so passionate about that rescue. And because it was a smaller rescue, they had a much smaller budget. So my,

00:33:56        you know, 500 or a thousand dollar contribution to their budget was a much bigger piece of their pie. Then, you know, one to the county shelter that has a \$2 million budget, you know, that's, that's a drop in the bucket to them, but to the smaller rescue, it's like, oh my gosh, we can do so much more with that.

00:34:14        So they were so much more willing to help promote it because they didn't have all these other promotions they were doing to, you know, bring in the funds to keep up that one and a half, \$2 million budget that they have to do to do that broad scope of work. Those bigger shelters were doing. So anyway, long story short, there's always tons of different rescues charities in your area that are all different sizes and not to discount the small ones.

00:34:41        Sorry. I think we have a bit of a delay and ways to get involved. I mean, you don't have to be just photographing adoptable animals. Right. They, they may not have the infrastructure in place to have you in to do something like that, but they're never going to turn you down for fundraising or doing some kind of third party fundraiser that they don't really have to be,

00:35:05        especially involved in. You just do it. Right. Yeah. And if you do have something that you want them to take part of, like to help spread the word, like if you can make it easy for them and give them the copy, the images, like all of the details. So they literally just have to copy and paste. You're going to be much better off that way.

00:35:23        Yeah. I know. I've, I've gotten to the point to where I just, you know, I wish I had the time to photograph adoptable animals. I just, I just don't. So I give back, you know, and other ways whether it's through fundraisers or things like that. So yeah, that, that's a great point that it doesn't always have to be going in there to photograph,

00:35:40        have you with your new, when you moved, did you make any, like, do any third-party kind of marketing or promotions or anything with kind of nonprofits or charities as part of your marketing strategy? Well, with the, with the SPCA, once I got involved with them than I was for a while doing pictures of their adoptables, that kind of stopped when COVID started,

00:36:02        just pick it back up and they have some issues with their uploading photos on their system, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But they're like, you know what, we'd rather, you spend your time doing fundraising type thing than taking care of your face and don't even make it onto their website before the animal's been adopted. Right. So Right.

00:36:20        But just a good problem to have the animals adopted done, but yeah. Yeah.

Especially, especially, and that's the thing too, especially dogs, right. At least for shelters up here, dogs don't generally last long. So be it, it would be, I would go, I'd take the pictures. I would try to send them that night or the next morning.

00:36:38 But like I say, most of the time the dogs would get adopted within 24 to 48 hours anyway, so Yeah. That's fantastic. So anyway, so yeah, then I did, I did a calendar fundraiser. I've done a calendar fundraiser for them the last three years, and then I'm working on a book project now that also the session fees benefited them and I'll probably be donating a portion of the book.

00:37:02 Nice, nice sales to them, but I'm not at that point. Nice. That's awesome. Did they help you promote for both the calendar sessions and the, the book? Oh yeah. Yeah. Nice. Yeah. So by that time I had that, I did have that relationship with them. Right. You know, I could text them stuff,

00:37:24 you know, so Yeah. Yeah. And you know, people out there too, that might be wondering like, how do I start to make a relationship with these people? And one of the easiest ways, I mean, you could definitely volunteer one of the easiest ways that also becomes a marketing strategy. I don't know if you had done much, many silent auctions Tracy,

00:37:41 or if they're popular up, up your way. But I found that it's like the easiest way to kind of get a foot in the door at any of these charitable organizations. Like if they're having an, an, a gala, whether it's now virtual or, you know, back before COVID in person where they need things for people to, to auction off.

00:38:01 So you make a donation of the session fee. I would always do like a, a straight, flat voucher amount that was decent amount. So like 3 75 to \$500 voucher. But I was always very secure in knowing that my, that even if they get that most of my clients are going to spend my usual like two to \$3,000. So you could just do like a,

00:38:25 a smaller voucher amount, like say your regular prints, like \$125, make it like 150. So it's a little bit over, but anyway, sorry, long story short. I say that a lot. I go off on tangents because I want to give people all the information by creating, by offering, getting in touch with them and saying, Hey,

00:38:43 you know, I'm a pet photographer in the area. Do you have any fundraising galas where you need auction donations and offering that auction donation is a great way for them to start to build a relationship with you. You vice versa, get to know that development director, they can then introduce you to other people. If you're like, how else can I help?

00:39:02 Can I chat with your animal care staff? See if I can volunteer with them or photos, or who do I talk to? And then getting to know that development director, if you ever

wanted to do that, third-party kind of marketing thing where, whether it's that book or a calendar, or I would do session fee fundraisers in the past where it's like,

00:39:19 Hey, let's promote these special session fees. So it was a special offer better than what they would get. If they just went to my website and the shelter would help me promote it. And they would get a portion of each session fee booked. And, you know, it was just an easier way. I think if I would've just called up a shelter that I had no relationship with and I said,

00:39:40 Hey, I want you to promote these sessions. And I'm going to give you a kickback from it. You know, you're going to get a fundraising on the back. End of it. That's a big ask because they need to know you like you and trust you because when you're recommending somebody and partnering on this joint marketing partner, like they're putting their,

00:40:00 their brand collateral behind you. So they need to make sure that they trust you and you're going to do a good job for their followers because the last thing they want is that they promoted you and then you don't do a good job. You just take the money and run or whatever, and then it reflects poorly on them. So getting in touch with them in these different ways,

00:40:20 I think just opens up the door for these relationships. And so many more marketing opportunities in the future. It's the same for your clients too, right? It's that like having several points of contact often before they're going to book, like when I started my project, I was amazed because it sold out basically within five days, I had planned to have the registration period open for two.

00:40:41 Wow. Oh, well, I, you know, I just wanted to make sure I had at least 30 animals in the book and I thought I'll have it open for two weeks. And then if I have to, I'll open another couple of weeks in the summer, I'll do another registration period. Within five days I had 46 people sign up over 70 animals.

00:41:00 So, and then I was like, well, this book is going to weigh a hundred pounds. So I just cut it off there and thought better to keep some people, sorry. They missed it for the next book. So that was great. But the thing I noticed is like probably 70% of the names in that book of the people who booked it.

00:41:24 Some of them, some of them were repeat clients, but a lot of them were people that, you know, I've been interacting with over the last three years on Instagram have been commenting on each other's photos, maybe even messaging. Occasionally some of them have inquired with me about sessions in the past, but then not, you know, got booked for whatever reason.

00:41:46 But having that, having a deadline, having something to book that reason to book now was what it took to get them. But it's also all of those points of contact that we've had over the years that made them do it right. If they, if the first time they saw me was when I was promoting the book, they probably wouldn't have signed up for it.

00:42:10 Right. Probably not in five days, having that many people book and five days, you then definitely having that little bit of relationship prior. But I also want to put out there too, that being expensive is also kind of good that way, because when you're expensive, people want what you have and they value it. Whereas when you're inexpensive people don't build up that desire if they want it.

00:42:38 They're like, eh, I can have a big Mac anytime. Right? So every time you go past McDonald's, I hope not. Did you? I know when I started, yeah, it was lower price. So I started and I found that those clients tended to be the ones that would like send the different Pinterest things and had all the opinions that all the opinions of what their final everything needed to be like.

00:43:08 Whereas one side then raised my rates to be more in the, you know, multi thousand dollar, at least minimum four figure sale range. Then the conversation my clients will start to say as well, what do you recommend? I was like, I've really never had, I've really never had nightmare photography clients because I never really was very cheap shooting burn because I was just doing this on the side while I was working a full-time job that,

00:43:38 you know, exhausted me, the people, the people who did book with me generally, like did kind of really want it. And so I was never, I mean, I was cheaper certainly than I am now, but I, I was never super, super, you know, 150 bucks. Here's all your pictures on the USB stick or something.

00:43:58 It's never my business model. And because of that, I have, you know, generally had really good clients, but I also knew this game from working in that clinics. We used to say that all the time, you know, it's the client that you bend over backwards for and do something for that's going to then complain the next time that you can't help them out again,

00:44:20 you know, it's right. The squeaky wheel gets the grease thing is something that actually kind of really bugs me. It was one of the things that really bothered me working in those kinds of businesses. So now I get to pretty much just avoid having the squeaky wheels because I can weed them out pretty fast when they inquire. And you can stand by your policies.

00:44:41 Yeah. I had found not every time, not every time, but a lot of times if I would bend a policy for someone, especially someone that like came in kind of last minute to my photography business, almost always regretted it because like, those policies are in place for a

reason. Right. So trying to think of like different things where, you know,

00:45:06        you start to feel like the empathetic part of me is like, oh, you know, your dog is sick. Okay. Yeah. I'll, I'll change my policy. Okay. We'll squeeze you in. Oh, this or, oh, you know, and it just starts, I don't know. I don't know. Like I said, it's not all the time,

00:45:21        but definitely I would recommend being wary of bending different policies like that. Just randomly, If I go into a shop and there's a blouse on the rack that I'm like, oh, that's really cute. I like that. And I pick it up and it's got a sale tag on it. It's been marked down several times and it's \$5. I'm not going to buy that blouse.

00:45:48        I there's something wrong with this blouse. Right. And meanwhile, if that same blouse was, I don't know, let's say between 20 and \$80, I'd probably buy it without her second thought, depending how much I liked it. If it was a couple of hundred dollars, I would have to really love that blouse. But you can bet if I did love it enough to buy it,

00:46:14        I would feel like a million bucks. Every time I wore that blouse, I would wear it for special occasions. I would actually like, hang it up in the closet, not just throw it in a pile on the floor, you know, hand wash. I would hand wash it. That is the Biggest Testament. Right. There Could be the same blouse because you know what,

00:46:38        I don't know anything about blouse manufacturing or fashion or textiles or whatever. They could be the same blouse, because the only way I know how to value it is by how much it cost. Wow. That is a great comparison. Does it affect how much I value it, but it will also affect how much I enjoy it because when I wear a \$5 sale blouse off the clearance rack,

00:47:11        I'm not going to feel like a special princess. Right. Right. Yeah. Well, that's fantastic. And you know, you can definitely, I think, see parallels to that in whatever it is that you value. And like, for me, it's travel and food. So, you know, going to spend money on a really nice dinner or like staying at a really nice resort one night,

00:47:36        like yeah. I value that experience so much more and look forward to it and like reflect back on it and enjoy it. Then like, you know, when I'd stop at the normal holiday in for like a horse show weekend where it's like, I'm just coming to this hotel, cause I need a place to sleep. It's just a whole, a whole different level of value that you get out of the product.

00:47:58        So our job is to find those people that value lower offering in that way, The same. Right. I think even my prints, right. I have clients that are like, oh, if, if my house was on fire, if everybody was out safe, that's the thing I would come back for. If I have more than one client, tell me that.

00:48:16        Yeah. With the date deal that same about that same print if they had paid 50

bucks for it. Right. Right. Yeah. And there's all sorts of crazy psychology at play too. Once you get into these pricing and I mean, I've been guilty of this too. With when you see something that seems to be like that really expensive blouse down to \$5,

00:48:38        like you said, what's wrong with this. Or, you know, if you're ever looking for airfare and they have those super discounted airlines and you're like, why is this ticket \$39? Do they do the maintenance on the plane? I'm not sure you start to question all of these things when things are just too inexpensive. And you know, I think that the challenge and I think what,

00:49:00        what holds people back from raising their prices is two things. I think number one, it can be, you know, as the artist, a total just mind game of worthiness and if our work is worthy or not, and we're always so hard on it, much more harder on our own work than anybody else's. And so we start to get in this like,

00:49:27        oh, I'm not worth it. I'm not worth it. I can't get this. I there's no way I can command this. This is crap. Which if you guys are out there feeling that way, the best way to kind of start to get over that is to just really ask a valued opinion from, from someone that, that knows what work is sellable and can give you some honest,

00:49:46        direct feedback on your, on your work. Cause I find that when people are asking that, generally, if they're asking that their work is fine, it's, it's the people that I know It's usually like beautiful. Like, ah, yes, it's gorgeous. But like, if you're asking yourself that question and thinking it's not good enough, nine times out of 10,

00:50:13        it is, or it's like, knock it out of the park. Beautiful. But you're just being way too hard on yourself. And then the other end of the spectrum is I see people that, you know, maybe their work does need some basic, still like the white color might be off or the white balance or the exposure or something like that.

00:50:30        But they're just like, and that was kind of me when I started, I thought it was like, this is awesome. It's the best work I've done yet because it was the best work I had done yet, but it was still crap. But I was like, oh, and this is the best one yet. But if you're there too, you can also still start to start this business.

00:50:50        Because if you're showing your work, your clients are seeing that work and they are liking it too. Even if it's not a, you know, award-winning photography at this point, like it's still, still needs to get a little bit of improvement. Now. I'm not saying like work isn't important or craft is important to everybody. Don't miss hear me. You always want to improve your craft.

00:51:10        And we want to make sure we're selling, you know, good technically correct work. But yeah, I started, oh, Tracy, I look at some of my first photos and I'm like, oh my God, someone paid me for that. And I kind of felt bad and I want to go reshoot them. No, I'm glad my

early photos were rescue dogs.

00:51:33 I wasn't getting like, you know what? The thing to even, I mean, competition has been very, very good for me. Like doing, not competition as a local competition, but doing competitions has been really good for me. Like print competitions for overcoming imposter syndrome and stuff like that. But competition and client work are two very different things. Anyway,

00:51:58 in fact, I have like, I have images that have won big awards that aren't even ones to clients picked. Right. Was it a client work? Was it work that you had shot for the client? Yeah, yeah. Yeah. They, in my opinion purchased the wrong images, but I was like the one I'm going to enter in competition and then,

00:52:22 you know, wins all these awards and stuff. Most cases, maybe one, they got it still in their album or, you know, they've got an eight by 10 and their folio box or something. But in almost every case, the one that they pick for their big piece of Wal-Mart is almost never the one I would have picked with a competition.

00:52:40 I, because clients, aren't looking at a lot of perfection spots that we're looking out for, for competition. They're good for expression. I mean, in fact things like the rule of thirds and stuff, like, I can't tell you how often I've had clients be like, well, I'd like it better. If the dog was more like centered, they don't,

00:53:01 they don't care about those things. They don't want the dog off-center necessarily. They don't, they don't want it to be all artsy. They just want it to be a beautiful picture of their dog. Yup. Yup. Which that doesn't mean we shouldn't still create the artsy. I still create my rule of thirds. Negative space. Yeah. It is funny.

00:53:19 I do find that a lot of my clients, like I have a couple images in there. I'm like, yes, this is the one this is going to look amazing big on their wall. And they're like, man, I like this one. Like what? Really? No you're supposed to like this one. Oh man. Oh my gosh, this has been such a good conversation.

00:53:41 And I could like, we could go off into like a whole entire rabbit hole on like print competition, all those other things, but maybe I'll have to have you back on a future podcast. We can talk all about that rabbit hole, but Tracy, thank you for sharing all this to wrap up. What would be your word of advice for somebody that's sitting,

00:53:58 you know, in a smaller market and you know, starting to question on if this is achievable, if they can actually, you know, make a go of this pet photography thing, what's kind of the secret to success or your advice for them? Well, I think the secret to success probably

with any businesses, partly just persistence. Yeah. And,

00:54:19 and doing it like you kind of have to do the stuff, right? Like when I first got here, when we first got here, we bought this old farm house. We spent the first few months fixing stuff up and everything. I wasn't really pushing myself overly too to get out there, but those clients didn't start coming in until I started getting out there,

00:54:39 meeting people, making connections with local pet shops and stuff. One thing that I did that I think was really good was the second year that it did a calendar for the SPCA, I made it a pet-friendly Monkton calendar. And so it was actually pet-friendly businesses that paid to be in the calendar. So there was like a couple of local like brew pub type places that didn't serve food.

00:55:15 So they allowed pets. There was a pet-friendly hotel that has since been actually a big supporter of a couple of other fundraising things we've done to there. There was just a whole bunch of different. And then also, you know, there was like a local pet shop, a groomer. There was, there was a whole bunch and that just gave me the chance to connect with those people.

00:55:42 Did I make any significant money off of that? No, but I made more connections in the pet business and pet friendly community. And it's all just building that community around you. And I mean, sometimes you just have to decide when you're going to work for free don't work for free for clients work for free for fundraising or for causes that you believe in that are going to get you,

00:56:11 not that you know, exposure. Oh, do it for exposure, but get you actual like exposure with people that matter to become friends With. I always like to say, I always like to say for the working with free, like if it's your idea, like, I think people get this, like I've been told I can't work for free. I can't work for free.

00:56:30 And they think that like they can never, ever do anything for free ever. No, no, no, no. If it's your idea a hundred percent work for free, if it's for a great cause if it's something that makes you feel good, if it's something to create a connection in your market that will lead to other opportunities later, then yes,

00:56:47 you can work for free. It's when other people are asking you to work for free without any like, you know, and you're like, I don't feel like I'm getting anything out of the steel that's when you say no, but there's definitely still places to work for free. I also love what you said too about, you know, just doing it and it gets easier over time.

00:57:05 That is huge. And so, so true. I mean, just think back to your first art show fair versus like your third, because I don't think any of us, even if you're like a crazy extrovert, think

that like I had dropped me off in this crowd, I'm just going to like small talk and get people to like, come sign up for stuff all day.

00:57:23 Like, no, unless you're a psychopath that is really not fun for any of us, but, but you just do it and then you realize, okay, it's not so bad. You start to get a little bit more comfortable with it. And you know, I think that's the cause for a lot of the procrastination and a lot of our business is that we don't know how to do it,

00:57:44 or we're scared to do it for some reason or another. And really the only way to get over either of those is just, just to do it. And it gets easier as you do it more often Last thought that I would like to leave people with is when I moved in here, I left a union job with, you know, a fair bit of well so-called security.

00:58:04 I don't really necessarily feel that union jobs are that secure these days, but that's a whole, A union job where I had 15 years seniority. I had a pension plan. I had health benefits. I was, you know, about a year away from five weeks of vacation time. You know, I, a lot of people thought I was crazy right to leave that job,

00:58:31 but it was also like killing my soul. So I asked myself if I do this, if I leave this job, if I move out there, like what is the worst that's going to happen? If this doesn't work out, I was like, okay, if this doesn't work out, I might end up working at the gas station down the road,

00:58:51 but you know what? I'll be living in a beautiful place on my beautiful property with my beautiful view. I won't have the same kind of stress I have working at the animal shelter. I can just be happy working at a gas station in a small community. I have no problem with that. I was like, am I going to die? Like if I do this,

00:59:15 am I going to die? No. And then I thought, what if I stay? What's the worst that can happen? And I realized that I was way more afraid that five years from now, I would still be there than I was a virtually any outcome I could imagine from taking the punch and Wow, those are great questions. I often ask the what's the worst that can happen.

00:59:49 But I forget. And I think a lot of other people forget to ask, well, what is the cost of staying where I am? Because as humans, we, Right, Right. Cause like, as humans, we are comfortable staying in the uncomfortable for a long time because the change can be scarier than something that is not pleasurable, even because we know like the,

01:00:13 I forgot what the quote, but basically like the known discomfort is better than the potential. Like unknown, even if it could be better. So yeah. Asking yourself those two questions can help you get some, some pretty big clarity pretty quickly. Thank you again for sharing all this. Tracy really appreciate your time. And this conversation I think, is going to help a

lot of people before we go.

01:00:37 Why don't you let people know where they can find you though out there on those interwebs or if they're, you know, swing through Harvey, new Brunswick, the small Harvey Harvey, the small one, You can find me on Tracy Munson photography everywhere on Instagram, on Facebook, on other places that I don't really do anything except auto-post perfect. Tracy wants to photography everywhere.

01:01:07 Awesome. Well thank you Tracy, for being here with us really appreciate it. Have a great holiday season and we will talk to you soon. If you enjoy this podcast episode, go ahead and take a screenshot of this episode on your phone and post it up there on your Instagram stories and be sure to tag us at hair of the dog academy. And we would just love to see how you're listening and a full disclosure.

01:01:34 Sometimes we just like to give away a little pet photographer, swag in the form of hair of the dog t-shirts and sweatshirts. So what are you waiting for? Go ahead and share that screenshot of this episode. And don't forget to tag us at hair, the dog academy. And while you're there, maybe you want to jump on over to our account and see what we're up to on the gram would love to connect with you.

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