

00:00:00 Welcome to the hair of the dog podcast. I'm your host, Nicole Begley. And if you are in a photography business and you want to figure out how to get more clients in the door and some ideas for marketing your business, well, you definitely want to stay tuned today. I'm talking with Graham Crichton from Belfast, UK, up in Northern Ireland about his incredible business that he has built over the past seven,

00:00:24 eight years and how he continues to get qualified clients in through the door. Stay tuned. Welcome to the hair of the dog podcast. 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 addicts, chocolate martini, calmness sewer, Nicole Begley.

00:00:50 Hey everybody. Welcome back to the hair, the dog podcast. I'm your host, Nicole vaguely. And today I have a very special guest previous academy member Graham Crichton from Northern Ireland over there in Belfast. Welcome Graham to the podcast. I'm so excited to have you here in chat business because you are very businessly astute. And I love chatting with that kind of stuff.

00:01:19 And yeah, we're gonna seek out on all sorts of good things, but before we get started, why don't you tell us a little bit about your business and, you know, you photograph more than just pets, but I know pets are close to your heart. So tell us a little bit about what your business looks like today. I'm primarily a dog photographer based in Belfast in Northern Ireland.

00:01:40 As Nicole said, we run a commercial portrait studio. So we do dogs and we also do family portraits. We do head shots and we do graduations. So there is a broad range of different things that we do. The primary focus is on pets. We do more pats than we would do of any other genre, but we do a variety of different genres as well.

00:01:59 Nice, nice. And you've have you always done studio or his, have you done natural, like outdoor stuff as well in the past? No. Well, I came from a background of working in theater as a stage manager. And then when I went into photography, the only way into photography at the time was to do weddings. So For years and years,

00:02:19 I think we calculated it. And a total day to over a thousand weddings time, I finished in rallies. So we did weddings, which are obviously on location and then also engagement shoots that went alongside with those. But I never did any portraiture or anything like that on the Wedding. Yeah. It was a lot of Saturday mornings. So it was the wife would say,

00:02:43 Yeah. Yeah, for sure. So, yeah. So you were theater stage director. Did you love the photography part of it? I think we've had conversations in the past where you're like me, that you love the business piece of it. And you really liked the photography part of it too, that

you definitely love the business piece. Kind of what,

00:03:02 what drove you to that photography? I've definitely, I would say to people I'm a business person who takes photographs. I'm not a photographer who runs a business ever since I was about two foot off the ground. I always wanted to be the managing director. I was wanting to be the boss. I always wanted to run my own company. So that's kind of how,

00:03:20 that's how I went from, from being employed then into starting my own business, to become a photographer. I'm one of those weird ones that I know this doesn't get on well with everybody, but I could give up photography tomorrow and it wouldn't be the end of my world. It's as long as I was still my own boss. Yeah. I like to say I'm completely unemployable now because the thought of having to work for someone else,

00:03:42 that's just, that's a non-negotiable It's funny. That was the first thing that hit my head during COVID was, was w whenever everything shut down was what the hell do I do? Because I'm not, I'm qualified to be a stage mileage, and otherwise I'm not qualified to do anything. I'm not even qualified to work at Tesco. So it was actually quite terrifying.

00:04:03 Ah, well, glad we're turning the corner for that, for sure. At least. Yeah. So you did weddings. And then how long ago did you start your studio? Portrait business Started doing studio stuff in 2012 by 2014. So I had a studio at home and I started like photographing babies, and I knew nothing about babies and thugs newborn at the time,

00:04:25 newborn photography. Wasn't really a big thing. So I thought, oh, well. And then I moved into, we rented a commercial space, we're moving hosts. So we needed to get the business out of the house and took on a commercial space and to kind of justify the expense when I needed to make it, I needed to do studio stuff.

00:04:42 So that was, I think, 2015, we moved into we're in an old linen mill. So Belfast is famous for producing Lennon. It was called Linden Annapolis back in the day, it was the capital of linen in the world. So we're in a big old linen. In fact it was the building we're in, it was the largest flux spinning mill in the world.

00:05:00 So it's a really historic Google building. Oh, cool. I bet the building's beautiful. I love those old mill buildings. Oh, you would love this because everybody comes in and says, oh, do you live here? You wouldn't want it. It's freezing cold. Yes. Damp and cold in the winter. I'm sure. That's awesome. Yeah.

00:05:22 I think a lot of people that maybe have some interest in studio didn't fail to get started because of not having the space to do so. And maybe are nervous of setting something up in their home. Did you have a dedicated space in your home because houses in the UK aren't necessarily, you know, like extra spaces everywhere. I mean, it seems to be a lot of the homes

over there are utilizing every space.

00:05:48 So did you, where did you find the space in your home for the studio was a dedicated space. There's only in our house. There's only the way for me and the dog. And back when we were doing that, it, we rented a five bedroom house. So it was a five bedroom, tiny house. So it was a very, very big,

00:06:05 huge house, but it's had an entire floor with a large room, you know, the studio, I think it was three meters by five meters. And then there was a big office. And then there was a big dressing room as well, all on one floor. So it was fantastic. There was a lot of space, but the downside with that was you didn't have parking,

00:06:23 you know, you didn't have signage, it wasn't run as a commercial, a commercial business. You didn't have zoning or anything for it. So it was very limited in what you could do. Yeah. Yeah. How did your business change when you went from the home to the commercial space? Was there anything about it that changed drastically? Well, this there's the pressure of having to pay for this because when I took it on as well,

00:06:45 I do remember thinking, oh God, how the hell am I going to pay for this? Because back then, as well, you didn't, you know, it was only a dream to have customer after customer, after customer a day was a dream. So you could go days and you could go weeks without ever seeing a customer. So there was,

00:06:58 it began like that. It was slow because as well, when you start, like nobody knows doing that, who you are whenever you move premises is we're going to discover by moving premises shortly. Of course, Google won't even know you're there. It takes a while for things like that. So it was, it was better. It was better structure.

00:07:15 I, I prefer a good, I like a good corporate structure. The wife would say, so I run our businesses. One very corporate, like, and moving over to the home, it set off a size, for example, that you, you know, you had to work and then you go home and still sneaky and turn the laptop on the button.

00:07:32 And what work you can do at home was it's actually good. It's good. Yeah. No, that is a nice, a nice perk because I am very guilty of, oh, let me just pop in my office for a minute. Oh my God. It's been three hours. The wife has to tell me all for going to bed at 3:00 AM in the morning.

00:07:47 And it was just, oh, just give me another week, minute. Just to, That's funny. I never got sucked into the overnight cause I like my sleep too much. And I'm more of a morning person than the night owl. So after 8:00 PM, I am just like spent and nothing good can come out of my brain. But yeah, I know a lot of people that are very opposite of that.

00:08:08        So for sure. All right. So that was back 2015. So were you in that same space because you're moving to a new space right now, were you in that same commercial space for those past, you know, six, seven years? Yeah. It's so it's a 550 school, 550 square foot space. And I've, we've been there since 2015.

00:08:29        So December, 2015, we're moving out in July. I've been told everything will be finished for the end of June. So we're moving light on the differences we're moving from there, which is, you know, it's a studio four, four by five meters studio space, a reception area. That's, you know, products in the wall, a kitchen and then an office.

00:08:49        And we're moving from there to a 1500 square foot space with some like 14 different rooms, you know, it's it's yeah. That's fantastic. What prompted you to make the change? Can you say writing off tax is that Part of the reason we did particularly a good year last year and I thought, you know, why should you sell this money? But also I can see the way I'm usually quite good at seeing things in the industry that are working before they happen.

00:09:19        So I could say that, for example, when I give up weddings, I could see that in Northern Ireland, the wedding industry was on the decline. And I thought to myself, if I don't change, I'm going to be out of business in a few years with pet photography, it starting to get more saturated. But for what I do there aren't really that many studios there aren't we have competitors,

00:09:39        but there really aren't that many, there's lots of different pet photography, but there aren't really many studio pet photographers. And particularly there aren't height, I'm sure you've seen it where you are, but the, what we would call the high street studio, they don't really exist anymore. So I could see a gap in the market for the kind of the resurgence of a high street studio,

00:10:00        but focusing on pets. Cause there isn't anyone really doing that, where we are. Yeah. I actually heard the stat yesterday and it blew my mind. And that is that the pet photography industry is a \$4.1 billion industry. Now billion with a B. That's a lot of zeroes. I, I, I suppose it depends on who you ask. If you ask photographers,

00:10:25        I didn't flip, But it's growing. I mean, it's, it's exponentially growing. And I know a lot of people get in their head. They get really concerned when they start to see more competition in the market of, you know, their brain immediately goes to, oh, they're going to be lower priced. Oh, there's no room for higher end in the market.

00:10:47        Oh, there's too many photographers. There's not enough pets, yada, yada, yada, all these bad places. However, I choose to look at that a little bit differently. I actually like seeing new competitors in the market because until we get to the point where, when somebody asks what you do and you say I'm a pet photographer and their answer,

00:11:05        that's so fun instead of wait, that's a thing like, like so many people don't even know that pet photography is a thing still. So as these additional people enter the market, that's more market awareness. Then that industry is going to continue to grow, continue to expand. And the client base is going to continue to grow too. And that, that level of excellence in the market is always available.

00:11:31        There's always room for more clients when you have an excellent product, when you have great customer service and, and when you are actually getting out there with your business and marketing. So I don't think we need to be afraid of anything. I think competition is a healthy thing and there's a lot of people are very scared of competitors. The industry just going back in history has always been an oversaturated industry.

00:11:58        And you tend to find that ever since the day of the box, Briony there's, the professional photographers have increased tremendously. You will always find though, that will be the way, particularly in times of economic hardship, you find this more photographers, more people start photographic businesses. And one, when the economy recovers, people generally disappear again and it kind of speaks and troughs,

00:12:18        but I think having competition, you should always, you should never ignore your competition. You should always be aware of your competition and know what they are doing. But I think competition is generally quite a healthy thing. My main competitor, I've I one rail competitor, him and I have drinks together. And him and I, when the, when it's hitting the fan,

00:12:36        we're on the phone, each other going, oh God, what are we going to do? You know what we would, we would probably slit each other's throats middle of the night as well. There's always that they're fiercely competitive. I love it. I love it. Yeah, no same here. And my other main competitors here in this market, we're all friends.

00:12:54        We sometimes all get together and have a little, a little dessert and cocktail and yeah, it's a good time. It's, it's really a great thing that we should not be scared of, but just yeah. To use it as a, it's something to continue to keep us on our toes and to continue to make sure that we are providing the best possible product and the best images.

00:13:14        And you know, that kind of goes the same way with technology. People get really scared with new technology coming out because I mean, I didn't even take my big camera on vacation because my cell phone can capture everything I want from that. And it does a damn good job capturing a lot of images that my DSLR would actually need to have edited. Like it comes out of my phone looking way better than my professional camera.

00:13:38        Before I edit it, I bought a, I bought an iPhone for our marketing person and work on. I must say I took that on holiday recently on the tech camera, the camera, not things fantastic. It is. It's amazing. And the new, I believe it's the new iPhone has a function where you

take a video and say, you know,

00:13:58        whatever, there's a person and a background and your video and you have it focused on the background. Well, the video is taken, it's done. It's in your phone camera roll. You can now go in and say, no, no. I want the focus here on this person and change the focus of the video retroactively. And it's amazing. It really it's it's you can see why people use these cameras.

00:14:21        It's it's fantastic. Actually, I'm blown away, but not that I'm ever going to become an apple fan boy, but I am blown away by the most I've fought so far down in the apple. Aalborg it's, it's not even, it's not even helpful, but yeah, I, I, and I think technology is going to continue to evolve. So then the other place that a lot of people go is to this place of,

00:14:40        oh my gosh, I'm going to become obsolete. But you know, for, for certain, if it's just super basic. Yeah. Maybe, but the phones still can't light. Well, if you don't know what you're looking for for lighting the phones still can't elicit great expression from these animals, the phone doesn't set up a studio, the phone doesn't remove leashes.

00:15:00        The phone, doesn't get great group shots by merging them in Photoshop. If you need to, because none of the dogs are trained. Like there's still so many things that we can create and do and serve that. I don't think we need to be that worried about, about the new technology, like the competitors, keeping an eye on it, but not losing sleep.

00:15:18        The phone is no different though from a 35 mil camera it's, you know, there were, there were 35, but there were millions of those in the wild to make everybody a photographer. And there were those that will the type of phone cameras, et cetera, cheap cameras or people with, with lack of experience, they will cater to a certain crowd.

00:15:36        And there's always going to be that crowd. There's absolutely nothing wrong with that. I say to people, what I sell, for example, I don't sell photographs. I sell, I sell an experience. It just so happens that our experience has photographs. So all of my job of what I do and what I'm selling the photography weirdly is the smallest part of it.

00:15:56        Yeah, no, that's fantastic. What types of things make your experience stand out Really, really good customer service. So it's from the moment that people contact us. You want them to, they want to feel that they're a million pounds, because you want them to spend them as well. The more fuss you make over people. That's what they will remember because people have had photos taken before people have had school photos taken before.

00:16:21        And it's starting to the experience. If you ever say to somebody, oh, would you like to have your photo taken? Most people go, no, because I haven't thought before it's terrible. And they usually relating that to an experience. So if you can create an experience that

is a level above what they're expecting and that you can relate time and time again.

00:16:37        So if their friends come and you can replicate that again and again, you're onto a winner. And then they actually weirdly forget about the photographs. Even though the photograph that, you know, you could, you could take great photos or you can take mediocre food. It's not that I do, but they will be, they'll be more invested in you as a person.

00:16:52        And you're, you're a brand rather than being invested in the actual photographs. And that's how you can get some, you can build tremendous loyalty and those people will tell their friends and that's better than us, better than any money. Cause that will translate the Mormon life. Yeah, absolutely. I see so many people asking, you know, how do I do a referral program?

00:17:09        And I'm a big believer that okay, if you have an official referral program, that's great. But the actual real referral program is just knocking the socks off of all your customers. So they want to sing your praises and let everyone they know know about their experience. And they don't need any motivation Last and leave a review. So many people are scared of asking people to leave reviews review.

00:17:30        Yeah. Well I just case in point, I mean, I just came, I was telling you, I was in Costa Rica last week and we had a chef come to the house one night. We had like some other services and even the house was like, oh, if you could leave a review and I want to, and I, because it was a great experience,

00:17:49        but just today, a possible man. And I'm like, oh, I should look that up and find a place to leave their review. Where like Airbnb, when you stay there, it sends you an automatic email and it's like, oh yeah, I'll leave that review. So people just need, you need to make it easy for them. And you need to remind them because they very much likely want to help you and want to leave a review.

00:18:08        But they're just busy. Well, life gets in the way people, you're not the most. W we, we like to think we're the most important thing going on in those people's lives. Particularly when I did weddings, you'd have people would order their wedding album eight years after the wedding. And you're, you're not the most important person we seem to get hung up on.

00:18:24        You know, we are, but this I, we, for example, give out cards. So every time the is in, when the customer pays, the customer gets a card and it says, we're a small business. Please review us. And you make a point of saying, please you'd really be helping us. If you enjoyed the experience reviews,

00:18:37        if you didn't enjoy the experience, let us know. There's a lot of people as well. Don't take ownership of, and that's, that's a problem to do with experiences too. A lot of people don't take ownership when things go wrong. Those people that it's great to get the good

reviews, but you also have to know how to answer the bad reviews.

00:18:54 And it is heart sinking. Whenever you get a bad review, you're like, oh, it's the worst thing ever. But it is how you respond to that as is more important than the good reviews. Yeah, absolutely. And hopefully you're able to find out about those potential issues before the review time. I think a lot of people are scared to ask because they're scared that the client's gonna not be happy with something,

00:19:17 but if you're asking if they're happy with something and they turn out that they're not, well, then that's a golden opportunity for you to fix it. And I've found when I've had some issues with clients in the past that, you know, maybe something wasn't as expected or there was an issue with their artwork. You know, I fixed it and I made it right.

00:19:34 And then they were even more enthralled with my services because I offered a great solution to take their experience and make sure it was exactly what they wanted. And you won't be able to do that all the time because you will get genuine customers here just bought pieces of work, who will go out of their way just to be a troll. I have been known myself for trolling on Facebook,

00:19:54 but you will get people who go in deliberately that will not be pleased, or that are genuinely in the role who usually comes down to expectations that they've got wrong expectations of it. But again, it comes down to how you handle it because as photographers too, we're, we're too scared. A lot of the time that people will leave bad reviews. We're too scared that people will,

00:20:16 will Bob with us. But the truth is you're a business person and I, I was bullied as a child and I can be damn sure I'm not going to let anybody in my professional career believe me either. So I quite, I kind of live for the day that people leave bad reviews cause I go in for them and they never take me on that.

00:20:35 So shall we say, Oh man, I love it. Yeah, no, those are some good lessons there though. We should not be afraid of it. And, and just, just make sure that we can do what we can and, and approach everything from a business perspective and take ourselves out of it. I think the hard part is that we are so personally attached to this business because if we are running a business selling like widgets,

00:20:58 it's not our personal art that we created in our personal name and all of this, just like personal ego stuff wrapped up in this business. So that makes it sometimes extra hard. And we're quite photographers generally quite insecure people. So it is, it is hard to even meet even my competitors. It doesn't matter how successful you are. You're still scared.

00:21:21 There's not a day that goes by where I don't wake it up with my heart going on my goal. I'll, you know, at the minute, at the minute, it's only about a shot every day. You kind

of, that energy keeps you alive. It's it's I would say, I used to say to people when I did weddings, whenever you stop caring and whenever you stop,

00:21:38 when your heart doesn't beat, when you stop getting scared, then that's when that's when you make mistakes. So it's important to be scared that people will like to think we're, we're not as scared as we are and be bigger than we are, but there's obviously nothing wrong with being scared, Right? Yeah, absolutely. I have people are always surprised when they hear me say that I still get a little nervous before shooting.

00:22:00 I'm like, okay, I hope I can deliver what they expect for me this time. It's been 11 years, but I don't know. I might, I might just not know what I'm doing anymore. It's kind of annoying though. But whenever we would go to a wedding, I would always sit in the car cause I didn't drive. So we'd go to the wedding,

00:22:18 but on the way to every single wedding or even now whenever I go to commercial shoots or anything, I used to clear my throat to TCS. I only ever do it when I'm nervous. Oh, that's funny. I know now that she's pointed out that I do indeed doing that. Whenever I'm nervous. I used to, whenever it was a stage manager,

00:22:41 I used to be the same just before a show would start. I would bail my goal, my goal. And once I went, the lights went up for that show. I was absolutely fine until the end of the show when you go to the thing. Oh Lord. Yeah. Yeah. I think that's a common thing. Whether you're playing sports.

00:22:56 I mean, it's that way with, you know, showing my horse for you in the ring, you're like, oh, a little nervous. Then you start to ride. And you're like, oh, we're good. Same thing with the shoots, with business, with a sales session, with an inquiry. I think all the things we build it up in our heads sometimes so much before that it,

00:23:12 it just, we allow ourselves to focus on what could go wrong instead of focusing on, you know, how we can serve this client, how we can, can have a great outcome. It's very, it's very easily done. The wife says to me that whenever I go into a shoot or whatever, I go into a meeting customer, she says anything customer facing.

00:23:28 She always says to me, I go into show mode. So the grim that our customers see is not the grim at all. Doesn't like ordering pizza over the phone, you know, but the great work has to pick up the phone and talk to people. And she says, there's a real difference. When she sees me open the door to the customer,

00:23:45 all of a sudden it's show mode, you know, the smile goes on the, you talk to people, but I have to hit talking to Talking to me. Oh no, I'm the same way. All right. So let's talk a little bit about, you know, back when you are building your new business. And do you, have you used kind of similar marketing strategies from when you were kind of newer in business

versus now,

00:24:14 or has that changed as your business has grown? I think I've, I've learned a lot from the marketing strategies is that we have used the things that haven't worked, I've thrown money. Like you wouldn't believe it campaigns over the years and some things have worked and some things haven't worked. So I think, and also to be honest over even, you know,

00:24:31 what's up since 20, 20 14 or whatever things have changed, you know, magazine ads, nobody pays for magazine ads, nobody reads magazines. So different things have worked different things. Haven't one of the things that worked really well for me in the past, which I don't know if it, well, again, is trade shows. So exhibitions or expos, those have worked really well.

00:24:52 But now in a post COVID world, I don't know if these are going to work. So it's, you've got to kind of adapt particularly as well, campaigns at the minute for things like what our little Russian friend is doing in Russia, causing a lot of problems. People are going to have less disposable income as a result of that. So you you've gotta be wary.

00:25:10 You've gotta constantly be seeing what the world is doing and adapting, Marketing, adopting and changing you can't, you can't just put all your eggs in one basket and roll died every year. Cause it won't work. Agreed. Yeah. I like to say that like marketing is a hundred percent, a combination of many different avenues and activities. And I feel like so many people are always looking for this one magic solution.

00:25:34 It's like, let, just tell me the one marketing strategy I need to do, but I don't think there is a one marketing strategy. I'll pay them if you knew what it is. Honestly, there kind of is. It's not the only thing you can do, but if you're not doing this, all the other marketing strategies are going to be very,

00:25:53 very hard. And that is actually making connections in your market, talking to people, getting yourself out there, having some brand awareness in your market and just those human to human interaction, relationships that if you are not always focusing on that, then no matter what marketing strategy you're trying to implement, I think it's a lot harder to actually implement because you're,

00:26:16 you're going up the hill because you don't have that relationship basis that all businesses built on. Well, you have to, if you think we're in the industry of people, that's really what it boils down to. And if you don't do that, if you don't approach people and you haven't got people make it aware of you, you haven't built that relationship up.

00:26:33 You haven't got that brand. The phone's not gonna ring. Cause there's going to be nobody. Laughter people, massaging people is the most important part of what we do for them. The new business. Yep. And I can hear all the introverted dog photographers across all

the land shutter in unison as they hear that. I think when, when they're sitting there being introvert thing,

00:26:57 think of me, think of, you know, nobody likes doing it. Nobody really likes doing it. So whenever they're sitting there thinking, I, you know, I could do this. Think to yourself, put the shoe face on and put the show mode on. You're not being a bit, you're being a character. Be that character, be yourself at home.

00:27:13 Yeah. Ask yourself what your business needs and, and be that person. And you know, sometimes maybe you psych yourself up bright down what ne what you need to ask. I know that's what I did for a long time. For anytime I had to phone a client back for an inquiry or I was gonna have my pre-session consult on the phone or anything like that.

00:27:33 Like I had a list. I had kind of a script that I would go from that I wouldn't read word for word, but I had the questions in front of me. So cause my biggest fear was like, I don't, I'm not going to know what to say and or I'm going to forget something important. So, you know, that helped me.

00:27:49 You can practice just with friends. You can practice with other photographers. You know, if you're in our hair, the doc community, their members are a free group. Like get a buddy in there and go through your little inquiry process or do a little call with each other. Like there's, there's so many ways we just like to make excuses on why we can't or why it's hard.

00:28:13 I have a notice board in front of my desk. Do you know what there is pinned my notice for this there's two things immediately in front of my monitor. One is a Nicole Bagley phone script. So I remember watching one of your modules about phone scripts. I, so I've, I've caught all the bits that I like and modify that. And that's my phone script.

00:28:33 The other thing that's in front of me in very large texts on 84 pages, what would you like to do with, have you had a think about what you would like to do with your pictures? And that was again from one of your, one of your modules. So it's the underlying thing. You've got to remember those underlying things. And sometimes we do need help.

00:28:51 We need, we need a script. We're not, we're not old people. You can just come out with stuff like that. You know, if I can make and stuff like that, I'd probably end up in court for a lot of us. So I love it. I love it. Yeah. That, what were you would, what would you like to do with your photos is by far the most important thing,

00:29:11 you can ask your potential clients all the way through the process because it opens the door for being able to have the conversation of what makes you different. Because so many people, you know, it's 20, 22, they come in thinking that, oh, I just want the digital files because they've seen so many photographers, it's like a hundred bucks, all the digital files.

00:29:30 So they just have been trained that, oh, this is what you do now. So they might not even realize that all this artwork and all these other products are even an option. So by asking that it just opens that door and no matter what their answer is, whether it's oh, the digital files or, oh, you know, I'm not sure.

00:29:49 Or the rare unicorn, that's like, oh, I'd like to get some art for my house. And then you're like, yeah, We pull, we as photographers, fall into a hole where we're so used to terms, we watch so many things with so many influences online that we find all these terms, like story storyboards, you know, lay flat albums customers don't give a monkey about those things.

00:30:12 They don't know what they are. So why would we try and say somebody, oh, would you like a folio box? What the hell is a folio box? Why do we not want to simplify? We should be simplifying things as much as possible to make it so easy for people to go, oh, I just want to spend money. Yeah,

00:30:26 exactly. A hundred percent. What are some of your most popular products that you sell over there? In, in Belfast? We sell a well, it'd be different. I know from, from my competitors, I know what he sells. He knows what I sell. One of his staff. I noted my brochure a few weeks ago and I phoned him up and said,

00:30:46 did she download my brochure? And he said that she was meant to not put her name on it. So I said, well, you can say, you can send me a copy of your brochure. And he did, but the most popular product that I would sell, I'm very much about frames. I'm a simpleton. I like things simple. So,

00:31:02 but we sell a, what we call a storyboard for him, which is a collage and a frame. Really? So it's a square for him with, you know, four pictures, nine pictures, 16 pictures in a frame. And it's a very cost-effective product. Nice. But I like them because I have good relationship with my framer. I have a good we've we've,

00:31:20 we've worked together in a good price, but I find them really easy to do. Especially if we're using something like pro select, once you get your templates mocked up, it's easy, but I'd probably sell more of those because those are the ones I know where they're good value. And those are the ones I like. Whereas I should be, I should be selling others.

00:31:36 I was looking today before this call actually a different type. I was looking at multiple frames as one, one order. So what would call a cluster I guess, Because, but I've always stayed clear of them because the profit I find has been in storyboards. I have multiple products. Yeah. Well, it's a nice, I get jealous of your studio photographers because the clusters always look so nice or the storyboards,

00:32:02 things like that when you have multiple images, because the images all have a

very similar lighting and feel, but sometimes when you're off and you're doing an on location session, you have 40 images from, you know, some are Twilight in summer backlit and some, you know, various areas and you're moving around and people are like, oh, I want to put these all on your wall.

00:32:20 But then you're like, well, that's all going to look terrible altogether on the wall because things are a little bit different from them. You're you're the one doing that. Your customer's not going to be doing that. You're the person setting doing that. So we've got to remember that what our customers want to buy isn't necessarily what we would want to buy.

00:32:39 So I'm what we think again, you're sitting thinking, going, oh, you know, the colors are different customers. Generally don't give a flying monkey. Not because you care, we're putting that on the customer. So I, yeah, I wouldn't be so concerned about that. But even in a studio, to be honest, you still, it's still a variables.

00:32:58 You know, lights would always flash all the time. You might have a shadow. The subject may be slightly further away. So it's not, it isn't always as rosy as that. Cause people may go ahead. Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Well, I think that's one of the reasons you mentioned how, you know, you sell a lot of the storyboards because you find the value there and that's kind of what you want to be selling.

00:33:18 I love for me just like a big signature piece. So that tends to be more, what, what I sell is just like one image on the wall really, really big. And you know, it's, I have other pet photographer, friends that they just sell albums. I don't sell a ton of albums. There's another Kim Hollis is photographer in my market here in Charlotte that she sells mostly metals.

00:33:41 And I don't even have metals on my price list because I don't love metals. So it's all about finding things that you love. I'm the same with canvases, my framers, trying to get me into doing canvases at the minute. But when I, when I see a canvas, to be honest in my experience of calmness production is I could go into Asda and get a canvas.

00:34:00 So in my head, I'm like, I don't want to sell that everybody has done like we, we don't sell metal or acrylic. And the reason we don't do that is when I started out the cost of production of those products that the professional labs charge is, is hefty. Some of your, your cost of goods Was frames for me. I can produce a frame,

00:34:20 you know, 20% or less. And that's, that's profitable. The framer you're working with, is it a local framer that you have a partnership with? That's fantastic. And then the nice thing about working with locals too, is she's got me out of a hole quite a lot of times. That's nice. That's nice. Perfect. What would you say is,

00:34:42 well, you just mentioned 2021 is a great year, which is awesome. Congratulations. What was your best marketing strategy last year in 2021? I don't rain it well.

Well now 2020 last year for us was a very good year for several reasons. For one people started spending money on pets again, but we also got into doing graduation photography and I saw a gap in the market at the time that the university's role closed,

00:35:08 but there were still, we've two big universities and they have a lot of students, but you can't get the GYNs for graduations because they're all either owned by the universities are owned by companies. So I went, I bought all of the guides for a local universities and that meant in Ireland and Northern. And we were the only people able to do the graduation down.

00:35:28 So it was crazy. And it was crazy. Cause we were in the summer, I was working from 7:00 AM to 10 at night, seven days a week for like four months. But it was crazy. So that was a very good, that was a good one. But with regards to pat, probably building up relationships with local charities and local businesses.

00:35:45 So we had a number of influencers on a number of local businesses who we knew had a lot of followers and building up relationships with them. And then for example, with one company we work with, which is a, a company that manufactures customized clothing and they do it in a really quirky way on this beautiful. This stuff's really beautiful. We work with them and then they would,

00:36:07 for example, give out a gift Fletcher who each customer, but because they're pre-qualified because the people, their customers are pre-qualified by buying their clothing and their clothing isn't cheap, then you you've, pre-qualified the customers to come out to you. Whereas if we'd gone into a really cheap business and given out voters, you've, you've already, people will still come to you,

00:36:28 but it's the opposite effect that won't spend money. And we worked as well with a number of charities and did things was a calendar competition on a dog food brand competition as well. So a number of number of different things, you've got to constantly come up with different ideas. Yeah, absolutely. And testing them and seeing some will work some won't. And just always knowing that that marketing is,

00:36:50 it's always just an experiment and what works for somebody in one market might not work in another. You might have to tweak it a little bit. And like you said, even year to year, things might change. And so you have to adjust things a little bit differently. Question with that business relationship, with the unique outfits, those vouchers did you did,

00:37:13 or the clients, when they get the voucher, did they still have to pay anything to get in front of your lens? Or did that voucher like totally cover their session fee and they Over the entirety of it? However, however, something I did learn again from your fair self was charge a flippant deposit because it really does. It's. I remember when I,

00:37:36 when I watched your video on that, because I didn't use to, because there's

always the fare, you know, of people won't charge a deposit. So we have four vouchers. People pay a 25 pounds. What we call refundable booking fee, because I know as well in your particular part of the world, the word deposit means different things. So we have a refundable booking fee in the PO the terms,

00:37:57 the conditions are that, you know, they come out, they come to the shoot, they come to the viewing, they'll get their 25 pounds back. If they don't buy anything or they'll get 25 pounds off product. But by the time most people generally have forgotten about that 25 funds. I tend to find this a few people won't and bizarrely, the people that don't forget about us are people who work,

00:38:15 who come like wanting something for free. And then they want their 25 points back. And those people are usually you'll love this people who work in the dog industry. We work in the pet industry. We've allowed dog, walkers, dog, groomers, people like that would come out and they they're the ones that they want the money back and they want to buy them.

00:38:32 Right. Right. Oh, that's funny. Oh, I was going to say something else about that. Oh, well it'll come back to me. Yeah. The I'm having, oh, I know what it was the word deposit, which I was always under the impression that there were certain ways that you could, or couldn't refer to retainers or deposits in the U S I just did an interview with Rachel<inaudible> from the law talk.

00:38:54 She's a US-based photographer lawyer, and that is not necessarily true. So you guys will have to listen to Rachel's podcast episode, which just came out a couple before this one, and she will set you straight on what you can and can't call it. So, all right. Awesome. I love it. You know, you know that I also love working with the charities.

00:39:16 I feel like that is. And just it's my, one of my favorite marketing strategies is finding a local charities and offering some special sessions to their supporters that also benefits the charity. Is that how you kind of set up your charitable marketing things? Or do you do anything else unique? You've got to, you've got to remember a charity. Well, first of all,

00:39:40 charity begins at home. So you're all of us are business people. So whenever we do anything that's charitable, we have to ensure that we're still making money. That it's not costing us money. Cause there's no point in you doing a big campaign for charter, then figuring out how do you know? Well, I've actually lost money. Even, even the little,

00:39:55 all of the world's top charities, they will make money in a, it is a business ultimately. So whenever you work with charities as well, it's important to choose the correct charities to work with. So you want to choose charities that will fit in with your brand. They'll fit in with the way you think, because you can then get behind them.

00:40:10 But also at the same time, you want to ensure that if you're doing it for the

purposes of making money, that you're going to get the people through the door that are going to spend the money that you're asking. So you've got to choose your charities very, very wisely and choose the people who do knit to charities very wisely. I tend to find that this might not be for everybody,

00:40:28 but campaigns that we run with different organizations. I tend to find actually the people that spend the least are rescue dog owners. Usually, usually people who are more invested in their pets from being a puppy, tend to, we tend to have better averages of people like that. But we do a lot of stuff with different rescue charities because I like their ethos of rescue trials.

00:40:49 And it's, I think it was while we've got to remember when doing stuff with charity too, it's not all about the business, but it is very much about the business, but it's not all, you still have to make sure that you're giving back. You're not just taking from a charity. So you're not just getting customers, you're giving something in return.

00:41:03 Yup. Yup. Yeah. And that's one of those things too, that I've found that create so much Goodwill towards your brand where I would have people, you know, when I first started my business, I did a lot of things with our, like the Western Pennsylvania humane society, which is our bigger kind of our bigger shelter in the Pittsburgh region and The guy that you were in Pittsburgh.

00:41:25 I used to, I used to go to college in green county in Winnsboro. That's so funny. It just down the road, small world, it's all good. But anyway, for years, even after I didn't have the time to like go in and take photographs for them. So I would volunteer with them and some other ways with charitable marketing and do things that would help raise money instead of necessarily donating my time for like individual things.

00:41:51 But for years, people would always tell me how, oh, I found out about you because your work with humane society. Oh. And you know, because of this, because of that, and it created so much brand Goodwill because they care about that charity, whatever charity you choose to partner with, they care about that. And so then you care about that.

00:42:10 So all of a sudden, now you guys have this in common and that Goodwill rubs off onto your brand. So you're, before you even make that inquiry response to them, they already love you because you've been, you know, helping something that's close to their heart And they, they, they knew what you do. It's also working with charities as well as something,

00:42:29 if you do it right. And that everybody's back, get scratched. You can, you can, you can rule it out again and again, because it is, I find a lot of charities that don't have some, it's not maybe, I don't know, loyalty. There's a lot of, particularly if new photographers come in, they'll just go, oh yeah.

00:42:44 So it's important. The charity wants to pick you again and again and say no to getting other people in the door. Right. Right. Yeah. And that, again comes down to relationships. You know, it comes down to being a good human, to connecting with other humans, to talking to the charity. One of the easiest ways I find to get kind of a foot in the door with those charities is by donating to any silent auctions that they might do.

00:43:08 Do you guys have many auction, silent auction Things Over there? No, But what, what what's, what I would do instead of that is I would donate to cold hard cash because it's tax it's tax deductible, get a receipt sometimes to get into the door of some of these charities. You might actually just have to put your hand in your pocket and give a donation,

00:43:25 you know? Yup, yup. Yeah, for sure. But it's always, it always the conversation with the businesses and the charities always needs to come from a place of, Hey, how can I help you? How can I serve you instead of coming at it from, Hey, I have this idea. That's going to help me because yeah, they,

00:43:46 they, they have to make sure that they're helping themselves because that's their job. Totally. They've got to everybody's back, has to be scratched auctions. Aren't really something we do here that we do what you would call benefits. So we would do dinners and things. But I generally see the praises that we were doing it to charities. Let's say, I give away a framed portrait,

00:44:08 95% of those<inaudible> you would give to charities. You'll never see anyone through the door. We would never have them claim them. I have about 50% claim rate here. I was the one thing I did do on mine that helped get their information quickly. Cause you know, with privacy laws, the charity won't always tell me who won sometimes they do,

00:44:29 which is great. And I'll always ask, Hey, can you let me know who wants so I can reach out to them so they can schedule their prize. But sometimes they won't because of privacy. But what I would put on the voucher that they would win is please contact the studio within seven days to activate. Or you could put a little QR code on it,

00:44:45 like, Hey, go here to activate your voucher, which to make it even easier. It could be like a landing page that just says, Hey, put in your information here and we'll be in touch. So that way they don't have to like go find your email or give you a call because people don't like phones, you know, giving them multiple avenues.

00:45:02 However they want to get in touch with you. That's really helped. I would say, oh gosh, I don't have the actual stat in front of me, but well, over half of any auctions that I donated to, since I started doing that, the winner would get in touch with me that first week. And which was great because then I could be like,

00:45:20 all right, what time of year are you thinking? And if it's not to like, oh, we want

to do next January. Then I can put on my calendar, you know, as the month approaches to get in touch with them and say, Hey, it's time let's schedule. So that's, that's definitely super helpful. I find people with,

00:45:37 with vouchers and things, for things like that for auctions it's, for me, it's more of the benefit of, of your name being kind pulled out rather than the actual return. And you've oftentimes with these price things, particularly a few doing, for example, we do a competition in a coffee shop official. They, because they're not pre-qualified clients. You tend to get a okay span.

00:46:00 Not a great span, but no case man. But you have to, again, you've got to not be afraid of putting your hand in your own pocket because was photographers were all like, oh, you know, we want stuff cheap. You see this word all over the web. Does anybody know a reasonable web designer? I don't know. I don't know too many unreasonable web designers and nobody's ever no one's ever punched me,

00:46:18 but we're all too fond of thinking, how do we do stuff cheap? But you've got to feed your marketing is it's. If you were doing Facebook ads, you'd be paying Facebook. But in terms of things like charity things, you still have to pay for that. You just do, you do it a different way. People forget, you have to put your hand in your pocket to make money,

00:46:36 but that's post. Right, right. You just want to make sure that it is beneficial. Like you said, like a magazine advertisement, probably not going to give you much return on your investment, but, but doing something where you're making these relationships with these other businesses definitely could, do you have any tips or tricks for getting in touch with, for profit businesses or these businesses that you've had relationships in the past?

00:46:59 Or do you have any words of wisdom for people that might want to contact a for-profit business? Well, do do your research into who the businesses are, pick somebody who pick businesses that you like send a boatload of things out to them, but the best way to it, social media go onto the social media, become known to them, click like follow don't.

00:47:17 Don't ever contact somebody who you haven't followed, for example, go onto their Facebook or their Instagram, like, like them for a few weeks. And then maybe comment on a few posts. Cause that person then going to know who you are because of course they're sitting at home, bored on their sofa looking, oh, somebody commented on my post, then send them an email,

00:47:36 you know, be, be warm and fluffy, always be warm and fluffy when corresponding with people, particularly small businesses because they're sitting there as well. These for-profit small businesses like us. They want to know how am I going to benefit from this too? Right. I love it. I just had a visual of Graham putting on his warm and fluffy face before you

go off to contact us for business It.

00:48:03 Oh, I'm just kidding. Just check me out. Oh man. Ah, this has been such a good conversation. Thank you for taking the time. I just, yeah. I wanted to kind of have this conversation with you because you are out there doing the marketing, doing the work, you know, you're not sitting and just being like, okay,

00:48:24 I've got a great website and I've got a building now, where are my people? They should come to me. It's like, you're you're up in because the just randomly build it and they will come. Does not actually work. I might be sitting doing that in July when I opened this news, You might need like, yeah, like quick little break after I,

00:48:41 cause I'm sure as with all things construction, it would be the end of June and be like, oh my God, is it ever going to be done? And somehow it'll get done, but it'll be very stressful. I'm sure. Oh man. Oh Graham, thank you so much. Do you have any last minute tips for any pet photographers out there that are just getting this business rolling?

00:49:01 And they're just wondering, man, how do I, how do I start getting some more people into my business? What, what kind of overarching tips do you have for the whole? I would probably say stop worrying. Honestly, take a deep breath. I wish I would probably got years of my life back if I haven't worried as much. So we're also too fond of we've got into this,

00:49:21 this kind of way of, of, if we just Chuck money at stuff, it will, it will happen. Photographers are extremely easily part of their cash. Don't just sit back and have a think and evaluate don't as well, become obsessed with competitors. It's far too easy to become obsessed with what Joe blogs is doing, right? The corner to the point where you actually will fall backwards and you'll forget what you're meant to be doing yourself.

00:49:43 So just take a deep breath and think, always think these two steps ahead, you know, never, never going backwards. Yeah, for sure. I love that. That's great advice. Thanks again, Graham, for being here, can you let everybody know where they can follow you on the interwebs if they want to keep in touch with you? Yeah,

00:50:01 you can go to you can go to retail, tails.com as well. If you would want to follow me, that would be great because we've been nominated for that pet photographer of the year with the Northern paddleboards. So if you could, I know voting begins in June, so I'd really appreciate it. But yeah, we tell tales.com or grim Crighton photo.

00:50:23 I think on Insta thing, I'm not our social media person. I That's fantastic. Ah, Graham, always a pleasure to chat with you and we will see you around. And thanks for being here with us. No worries, Nicole. All right, bye everybody. See you next week. 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.

00:50:57        And we would just love to see how you're listening and a full disclosure. 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 Hare, the dog academy. And while you're there,

00:51:21        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. Thanks for listening to the hair of the dog podcast. This was episode 1 41. If you want to check out the show notes for access to any of the resources that we mentioned, simply go to [www.hairofthedogacademy.com/](http://www.hairofthedogacademy.com/) 1 4 1. Thanks for listening to this episode of hair of the dog podcast.

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