

Nicole 0:00

Hey everybody, welcome to the Hair of the Dog podcast. I'm your host Nicole Begley and today I'm talking again with Heather Lahtinen and we are sharing a marketing strategy that literally no one that we know of is doing no one. So go ahead and take a listen. Stay tuned.

Voiceover 1:14

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 addict, chocolate martini connoisseur Nicole Begley.

Nicole 1:32

Hey everybody, welcome back to the Hair of the Dog podcast. I'm your host, Nicole Begley and today we've got back once again, productivity ninja, editing ninja, mindset ninja, ninja is coming in all shapes and sizes ... we have Heather Lahtinen.

Heather 1:47

How about breakthrough ninja? I like that breakthrough? Yeah, OK, let's go.

Nicole 1:53

OK, done. That's ... wow. All right. Awesome. Well, welcome everybody back to the podcast. I was gonna say we should have like a little special, like link of all the podcast episodes you've been on, but it would probably take about 10 minutes to read them all off. So ...

Heather 2:10

Let's do it. We should have a special page just for those episodes. I would, I would welcome that.

Nicole 2:14

Oh, it would be a lot of pages. But anyway, today, we thought we would talk about ... because we've been getting quite a few questions of just, you know, if you guys have been around for a bit, you know the Hair of the Dog Academy is my baby, Flourish Academy is Heather's baby. But you're like, but wait, you guys both do so many things. And each other's businesses? What ... what's are they the same? Are you partners? What's happening? So we thought we would give you a little sneak peek behind the curtain? And also give you some -- dare I say -- never before or very rarely tried photography marketing ideas.

Heather 2:55

Yeah, I would say so because we were talking prior to this episode, coming up with some ideas. And I think what we generated is truly unique. At least I haven't heard of it approached this way. I'm not saying anybody has it, but I just haven't heard of it. So yeah, I received a question recently from a mutual friend of ours that was like, how, how do you guys make it work, your relationship? And this is, I think she was curious, both from a, like, strategic standpoint, what does this look like on the back end in terms of promoting Hair of the Dog and the Flourish Academy? And then also just says two really strong, independent women, CEOs? How do you two CEOs make it come together and work so seamlessly? And I was like, oh, my gosh, that's so easy. We're awesome.

Nicole 3:47

Done. Well, you guys aren't students, and you're listening to the podcast? Of course, of course. I'm here. OK. So you guys next?

Heather 3:51

Yeah, yeah, I'm not excluding anyone from that. I think that Nicole and I are both very similar and that we love to work and we love business. And I wouldn't classify us as typical. I don't know. I mean, we just like to work and we just have a lot of the same ideas. We're also mostly -- moreso you than me -- always coming from an abundant standpoint. So there's never any competition, it's always about, like, how can we benefit one another? How can we work together? How can we have fun and make money together ...

Nicole 4:28

Absolutely and over the past 10 years, you and I have both explored many different avenues and I think we both stepped into our zone of genius, which complements each other. So that is quite helpful as well.

Heather 4:39

Yeah, yeah. And And recently, we've refined it even further, which is remarkable that it, it honestly just keeps getting better. So when we were talking pre-episode, we were talking about ways photographers could partner with, you know, I think the obvious which is like vendors in their industry, talk to us about that.

Nicole 5:00

Oh, yeah. So when you think of all right, partnering as a photography business, a lot of times it's like, Okay, let me make a relationship with this groomer, or this specialty dog food store or this veterinarian or this dog trainer, or some sort of business in your area. And that, you know, they would promote you or you would have a display there, you would somehow co-market with them. So not pooh-poohing on that. That's certainly one way to market your business. But I think there can be some other ways that are way outside of the box that might, dare I say, feel a little bit uncomfortable.

Heather 5:39

Yeah, it will feel uncomfortable. And we might even ruffle some feathers. Oh, which I love to do. Because what we're suggesting as that you potentially work directly with your competition. OK. Now, this is interesting. Yeah. So let me take you back about 15 years, maybe actually, 20 years, two decades, when I started my wedding photography business just outside of Pittsburgh. To be honest, I just never struggled to get clients, I just was super passionate, I loved what I was doing. I was a terrible photographer, I was very cheap, whatever, who cares? You know, it was a lot of fun. I started training my competition, actually directly, but I figured there was enough weddings for everyone like we could, I couldn't shoot all the weddings anyway. But ultimately, I landed on a couple of photographer friends that I just developed a really good relationship with. So the three of us were in direct competition, we were all full-time professional wedding, only photographers. And we became friends. And what we did was we just shared clients.

Nicole 6:38

So were you approximately the same price point.

Heather 6:42

I was, I was significantly higher at that point. I mean, ultimately, they did kind of work their way up towards my ... I was just, I was really bold with my pricing. They were certainly closer to one another than me. But what we did was if I got a request for a date that I was booked, I would send it to these two photographers, I'd be like, I would recommend these two photographers, you know, and I would copy them on an email, Hey, check out these two photographers. And they were doing the same for the others. So you can see how like my friend Leanne, if Leanne was booked, she would send it to myself and the other photographer, and then it just kept bouncing around like that. And as a result, the three of us really did not have to do any marketing. Now, let me be clear, we were of course marketing our own businesses. But what we were doing was capitalizing on the compound effect of one another's marketing. And it was brilliant. Because all of us, the three of us, were always completely filled with dates, like completely filled. And it wasn't, it wasn't hard, it was fun. These recommendations were good. You know, if I sent a client to two photographers, that client trusted me and hire one of those two, and vice versa. So this was all .. this was until I ... until I went into early retirement, this was working for many years, and they're actually still doing it. And they're two of the highest end, I think, the highest end photographers and great photographers, but they're just ... the reason I say that is because they've both been in it for decades. So they have a lot of experience, and between their own referral client base, and marketing themselves, and then ultimately one another, it's just never a struggle to get clients. And I just want to pose that question. Wouldn't it be nice if it was never a struggle to get clients?

Nicole 8:33

All right, I'm gonna play some devil's advocate here.

Heather

Oh, let's go. OK.

Nicole

Are you ready? Buckle up, buttercup. I love this. I love this. But immediately my mind goes to Well, that's great, Heather, but pet photographers don't just shoot on a Saturday. And if we wanted, we could probably take two clients on a Saturday. Whereas you definitely can't take two wedding clients right Saturday. So our businesses, it's easier to work with scheduling when a client reaches out to you that they could stay with you. So there would be potentially less of that sharing, or you'd like just how could that look?

Heather 9:16

Well, you're assuming that there's a limited number of clients out there. You're also assuming that you could photograph all the dogs in Charlotte. Yeah, yeah. And that's not true. So I just want to show you that that thought comes from a place of lack and scarcity. So it was ... it was I'm not faulting your brain, it was an easy assumption to make because you're looking at weddings, and you're like, people typically get married on Saturdays. And they typically get married on Saturdays in the summer. So there's this limited timeframe and there's all of these brides, right? And so you're looking at it like OK, and you're extending that by saying, well, we could shoot any day of the week and I want to keep all the clients from myself, and there's not enough for everybody so I'm never gonna share but you can see now that that's all coming from a place of lack or scarcity or assuming

you're assuming that there's a limited number of clients, if ... if you believed that there was a line of people out the door down the street that you were in so much demand that if you couldn't shoot this one, or you didn't want to, maybe it was just not a good fit. Like maybe you're a studio photographer and somebody's on location, that's an easy one. Yeah, send them, you know, refer them out. But if you believe there was a line of people out the door, you would have no problem. Just hey, yeah, here's a client, here's a couple clients. For you. For you, me, everybody gets a client, you get a client, you get ... everybody has a client.

Nicole 10:39

You're like the pet photography Oprah.

Heather 10:40

I am. Like, it's not ... it's not a problem if you ... this is a big IF ... if you believe that there is an unlimited supply of clients who are ready, willing and able to pay you, that thought you just had wouldn't be an issue.

Nicole 10:57

OK, all right, I can get behind that, I can get behind that. Because there is a limited, I know, for me, currently now 20 clients here is my max like, that is it that is, quite frankly, probably too many, honestly, 15 clients here is kind of my happy place. Because I don't shoot in the summer, it's too hot. In the winter it just looks gross. So I have again, a very limited spot in there. But I was thinking back to when I was doing solely pet photography, you know, my goal would be about 70 clients a year. So does this. I don't believe in the lack. I know that there's, you know, what, there's 2 million people in Charlotte and probably 60% of those making these numbers up have dogs so of course I can't shoot them. But until you start to reach that point where your schedule is getting pretty full. I feel like it might be challenging for people to readily share.

Heather 12:02

Well, let's get your schedule full. Let's meet more people, tell them you're a pet photographer and make them an offer. And if you're working with, you know, two or three photographers that you trust, trust is a key thing.

Nicole 12:16

Yeah no, that's huge. Because when you're referring to somebody else's business, it's basically your business is ...

Heather 12:23

An extension.

Nicole 12:24

Yes. So if they have a really terrible time that client is going to then therefore assume that you were also not ideal. So that's huge. And that's also one of the biggest hurdles with making these partner marketing connections in your market. Because you're going to these businesses that are small businesses that they have spent so much of their blood, sweat and tears building just like you have, and they're not going to just willy nilly promote somebody. So you have to make that relationship,

potentially give them a complimentary session to see what the experience is. So they have first hand knowledge of what that experience is. But I want to jump back to this partnering with other photographers. Because I do think -- this is what we were talking about before. And I do think there is some really unique ways to leverage this. And I think a couple things need to happen. Number one, I think, a. you need to trust these other photographers do you need to know them, you need to like them, you need to know that they have their business ish together. Non-negotiable. Number two, I would then look for people that like hopefully you have a strong style, and they have a strong style.

Heather 13:38

That's right.

Nicole 13:38

Like, you don't necessarily want to have just the three of you that all look exactly the same. Because then there's not really going to be ... you're going to have to get that scheduled totally booked first before you're like, oh, I really can't fit it in here you go. Whereas if you are able to create an alliance like, like, it sounds very, very uh ...

Heather 14:04

Survivor, survivor ish. Yeah.

Nicole 14:06

We're gonna create alliances. Anyway, if you are able to create an alliance with other, could be other photographers. Maybe it's family photographer, a senior photographer, a newborn photographer, like maybe those are those but maybe it's all just pet photographers. And you have a great studio photographer, you have a great person for like outdoor photography that really specializes in action, somebody that really specializes in like relationships, pictures with dogs and their owners. So everybody has kind of their moment of expertise, their space of expertise. And then what if, what if ... hear me out here, the three of you marketed collectively?

Heather 14:47

You crazy.

Nicole 14:49

What could that look like? Could that be a special Facebook group? Could that be a podcast? Could that be a separate blog? Could that be, you know, we actually just had Tavia, our mutual friend Tavia Redburn on Hair of the Dog podcast a couple episodes ago talking about content marketing, you guys it is not dead, it is 100% Super effective and still in demand and really easy to do now with the rise of some AI help. So I just ... I think that could be an incredible way, out of the box way to market your business that leverages all of you doing outreach.

Heather 15:30

Here's what I'm thinking. Let me give you an example. This is where my mind goes. I'm thinking if I were a pet photographer in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Nicole 15:39

I don't know any of those.

Heather 15:40

I would be like, how could I get in Nicole Begley's world? How can I become friends with her? Not just because of the Hair of the Dog. But let's say you were still doing only pet photography, I would be asking myself like, how could I become friends with her? Because she does on location, she doesn't she only takes 20 client 15 to 20 clients a year. You know, if when you get to know you, you know you would talk this out. You don't shoot in the summer because it's too hot. The winter's kind of gray and what if this person has a studio, and they're like I shoot in the summer, or I shoot in the offseason. And then you're ... it's a perfect balance, even if there were some crossover and what we could perceive as competition, which I actually don't believe in. Because I think everybody's like so unique, you could just be your ... you know, you ... there is no competition. So you could work just with you. And you would get requests, you're marketing your business, you get requests, and it's an August day or you know, somebody wants to shoot in August, you're like, hey, no, but my friend Stacy has a studio over, you know, in this town and you send them over there, like, I would be looking for photographers in my area that I want to be friends with. But I want to create these relationships, I just want to point out, something you said that is worth repeating is that you have to trust this person and you have to like them. Don't be friends with jerks. OK? If you know that this person is a jerk, but they have a really good business and you don't like them, but you're trying to it's just not gonna work, the energy is not going to be there. You know, like these two wedding photographers I'm talking about to this day, we are all still really good friends, we helped all three of us one another build each other's businesses like and that that is like, lifelong forged friendship and how we started and they're still in it, which is amazing to me. Because I got tired of working on Saturdays. But I think that you could develop relationships with ... and this goes back to like just our relationship ... somebody could potentially perceive us as competition. Even though you're in the dog world, and I'm in the human world. We just were friends. And we're looking for the synergy between the two. Because in our minds, this is a both/and scenario, not an either/or scenario.

Nicole 17:57

Well, on that same vein. I teach workshops with Kaylee and Charlotte, the Barkas. I have Charlotte who runs Unleashed Education with Craig, as a coach in the Hair of the Dog Academy hosting regular calls, like their competition is a myth.

Heather 18:17

Question for you. I forgot that. How? How were you able to get to this point or reconcile all of this that even though they were competition, you still were friendly and wanted to work with them? Like, how did you get here?

Nicole 18:33

I don't know. I think I've always just had that abundance of that. And we were friends. We were friends prior to our education sites, like we host the first Barka before any of us had an education site. So I had the little Hair the Dog blog, but it wasn't ... we didn't have any online courses or anything. It was really just a blog still at that point. So yeah, we were friends.

Heather 18:58

You grew your businesses together just like Leanne and I did. Yeah. Yeah, that's really interesting.

And then there's this trust, and you guys like each other and you trust one another. And, you know, I forget, I tell people about you all the time. OK, I go to church, and I'm like, you gotta meet my friend Nicole. OK, she does his pet photography thing. Like, I tell people everywhere, but I forget who it was, oh, it might have been my niece. I was like, I trust Nicole with my life. With my business. I would, you know, give her the keys to the kingdom. I would trust her with my children. I would trust her with my parents who are kind of like my job, you know? I mean, so there's this like, level of trust I have with you in my business. And I genuinely like you. Like, I like spending time with you. And I don't like a lot of people. So that says something, but I enjoy working with you. And I think that when you win, I win. And so I felt this way about Leanne and the other photographer as well. I felt like I was not in it just for me. I felt like when I could bless them with clients, they would grow their business and they win. Then by extension, I win, we all win.

Nicole 20:11

Well, yeah, here's the thing. I've said this for years that when ... you know pet photography is an interesting niche, because it started off as when I started 10 years ago, there was one, two, maybe in a city. And now there's a plethora of puppy photographers. And a lot of people might choose to look at that and say, oh, great. There's too much competition. Now, it's too hard to find clients, because there's too many photographers. I think that's completely opposite. Because now you have all these photographers marketing, teaching the clients out there that pet photography is a thing, awareness how many? Yeah, how many people? Do we still meet? That? You say? I'm a pet photographer. And they're like, what? You just photograph dogs? Like that's still nine out of 10 responses? Yeah, ever, I mean, anyone. So that tells me there are still a heck of a lot of room and that awareness market before we ever get to a saturation point in the pet photography space. So when you have multiple people reaching out about pet photography, multiple places, letting all these dog owners out there know that, hey, pet photography is a thing? No, it's not weird, look how awesome this is going to be like, oh, then they're going to start looking into it, then they're going to start searching for photographers, then they're going to reach out to somebody that they have a connection with, or they make connection with, with their style, with their voice, or have actually met in real life, and, you know, actually have an in person connection with. So I think there's just nothing but opportunity.

Heather 21:53

So what you're saying essentially is the more the better, the more pet photographers, yeah, the better. So I know that some photographers have this, and I know this because I did early on, it's like you want to be the only one. Right? It would be the only option. And you know that that's not logical, that's just not possible.

Nicole 22:10

And then imagine, imagine the client should be working with is the only one because the people that you know, because we're human, so you're either going to really like someone or maybe you're not going to connect with them. And then you'd have to work with clients that you have no connection with, that you don't really actually enjoy. That they have probably have a great connection with someone else. So yeah.

Heather 22:30

Yeah, it's just not possible to be the only person in your industry, you actually want more because of the education aspect, what you're saying is, the more pet photographers there are in a city, the more awareness there is, and the more awareness the more demand and the more clients and then and everybody wins. You just have to find some people or group of people that you genuinely, genuinely like you enjoy spending time with, you trust, and you can share clients with and it can be really light and easy and fun and productive. And, you know, you ... you might work for some people, it doesn't work out. That's fun. That happened for me, for sure. There were a couple of photographers that were like, oh, we're not, you know, the best fit. So we didn't refer one another and there's no hurt feelings. There's just like we knew so it's, it's OK.

Nicole 23:19

Yeah, I love it. So, to sum this up the ways to make this happen, number one, go down and see who's in your area, make connections with them, reach out, or like, grab dinner, grab a dessert, go get a martini, whatever it is, like, like just get you know, get make connections with people reach out, introduce yourself. And if you reach out, introduce someone and each introduce yourself to someone and they're just like, oh, and they don't receive it. Like that's fine. Just move on. You know, it's it's something that you can't control and I think that's what a lot of people fear is ... is I guess rejection but there's a lot of pet photographers in most markets and I have personally interacted with many of them through the Hair of the Dog world and pretty much all of us are awesome. Really nice agree. I agree. So don't be scared go out and make a connection with some other people in your market who knows might be your next new best friend and ... and then just get to know each other. And then if you have a connection with a couple you know or look and see kind of how everybody's a little bit different or if there's ways that you complement each other then maybe have a conversation: Hey, you know you do studio, I do on location or like I really love action. I know you really love these relationships and things like how can we work together to help benefit both of our businesses.

Heather 24:48

There it is. Beautiful question.

Nicole 24:49

And then you guys talk about it and maybe have some plans. Maybe you guys joint host a special limited edition like event. You know, there's ... sky's the limit on different ways that you can come together and create new opportunities in your market.

Heather 25:09

Yeah and so what we're suggesting with this episode is to look beyond partnering with businesses, which is still a very valid strategy. And what would it look like to have some photographer partners? Oh, had never thought of that. Yeah, I know, give it a shot. What do you have to lose?

Nicole 25:25

I love it. I love it. We do want to since we didn't talk about this before, and I know we both wanted to make this point about we're saying partnership, partnership, partnership. But it's not an actual literal business partnership, because that has a lot of hoops. It can be very challenging, very few of them are actually done really, really well. So like Heather, and I work so closely, and we both run completely separate businesses, and are independent contractors for each other. Like there is, there

is no joint business venture. So as you're doing this, like, that's not something that you need to explore, really, truly everybody runs their own business, and you just find ways to help each other, to benefit each other. And if there is where, like, you guys are doing a joint event and one person's collecting all the money and like it's running through one person's business, then you would just pay that, again, not an accountant, but you could then pay the other person and just issue a 1099. They're an independent contractor. So that keeps it really, really clean.

Heather 26:33

I am so glad you brought this up, because I actually did forget about this. This is hugely important. Partnerships never work out in the business world. A lot of times they don't work out. So the best thing you can do is keep your separate businesses and it's just, you know, pay each other when necessary. Nicole and I do so much together. Oftentimes, she'll run something through her business, and then she'll just pay me, 1099 at the end of the year, and then vice versa, I'll pay her, 1099 at the end of the year. We absolutely have separate ... Now I wouldn't say like if somebody says, what's your relationship with Nicole? I'd be like, oh, we're business partners, but I'm using the term very loosely. We work very closely together. But our businesses are completely separate. We just pay each other. Yeah, I would not recommend forming an LLC, with your photographer friends at all. Not on any plan. I've seen those go sideways, many, many times, like 99.999% of the time, from what I've witnessed. So you and you can do this all aboveboard. You know, just working together? How can we work together? So yeah, be careful with the word partnership when talking with someone that just you ... you're really clearly defining what that relationship looks like.

Nicole 27:51

Yeah, yep. Yep. You're just maybe joining together for an event or a relationship, relationship marketing. So anyway, I hope you guys found this helpful. I hope your wheels are turning. And truly, please, everyone. My homework to you is to go make connection with at least two more people in your market in the next month. Actually you need to reach out in the next week, and you need to get together in the next month.

Heather 28:18

That's good. That's good. Yeah, like make a connection this week, and then set something up for the next month. Yeah, you're saying two, I'm saying three. Because one might not work out, you know.

Nicole 28:29

Oh, 100%. I'd start at two, and then I'm like, yeah, just go three. And then you realize it's so much fun. And then maybe you'll have like this whole big meetup of all sorts of pet photographers in your area. Yeah, we've done that we need to do it, we haven't done it since COVID. We've done it here in Charlotte, we need to do that again. Especially there's a dessert bar downtown with martinis and chocolate. And I'm thinking we need to go there.

Heather 28:49

I'm thinking I need to go there.

Nicole 28:52

It's like I'm a Charlotte pet photographer for this week. But anyway, go and do that. If you guys want a place to connect with other pet photographers, did you guys know the Hair of the Dog has a free

Circle community, it's free. We have different sections for our members only, but there is a free portion that you can connect with pet photographers from all over the world. So head on over to www.hairofthedogacademy.com/community and join us there to make those connections.

Heather 29:23

That would be great. I'll see you in the community.

Nicole 29:25

Awesome. All right. You're invited to the community for sure, Heather.

Heather 29:28

I'm gonna show up anyway.

Nicole 29:31

So love it. All right, everybody. That's it for this week. Can't wait to see what kind of connections you make, and I'll talk to you next week. Bye, everyone.

Thanks for listening to the Hair of the Dog podcast. This was episode number 179. 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/179.

Voiceover 30:38

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