

Welcome to the podcast. I'm your host, Heather Lahtinen and I'm back this week sharing another installment of our offline photographer challenge. In case you missed it, I introduced this concept in episode 219, but essentially it's a series of challenges we are hosting inside of our Elevate program to help photographers connect, engage, and thrive within their local community. These tasks are carefully crafted to supercharge your in-person marketing strategies because we know just how crucial in-person engagement is for your business growth.

I would love if you would join us inside of Elevate, where one of our elevators just had her first 10 K month. You can check us out at hairofthedogacademy.com/elevate. In today's conversation, I'm chatting with Laura WellWell as she shares a unique perspective on how to expand your marketing efforts by leveraging relationships with other photographers. As always, I hope that you enjoy our conversation,

but more importantly, I hope you take action on this challenge and meet photographers in your area. I'm Nicole Begley, a zoological animal trainer, turned pet and family photographer back in 2010. I embarked on my own adventure in photography, transforming a bootstrapping startup into a thriving six-figure business by 2012. Since then, my mission has been to empower photographers like you,

sharing the knowledge and strategies that have helped me help thousands of photographers build their own profitable businesses. I believe that achieving two to \$3,000 sales is your fastest route to six figure businesses that any technically proficient photographer can consistently hit four figure sales. And no matter if you want photography to be your full-time passion or a part-time pursuit, profitability is possible. If you're a portrait photographer aspiring to craft a business that aligns perfectly with the life you envision,

then you're in exactly the right place with over 350,000 downloads. Welcome to the Freedom Focus Photography podcast. It is great to have you back, Laura, for the offline photographer this month we are talking about networking with other photographers. So meeting other photographers in your area, making friends, maybe sharing some intel or some marketing. And before we hit record, you were telling me that you had done this.

Can you tell us everything? Yeah. So when everything shut down in March of 2020, I was like jonesing. 'cause I didn't have, I couldn't photograph anyone but my own dogs. And so I was like, I need to build some community. I need to do something, I need to talk to other photographers. So I created, it's called Southwestern Ontario Pet Photographer Group.

And so we started a group on Facebook and during Covid it was a little bit more active 'cause we weren't busy with shoots obviously. Right. But I reached out to everyone I knew locally and then they reached out

to folks that they knew locally. So I think we have about 30, 35 of us. Oh My gosh. That's amazing. Yeah. Joanne is in there.

Oh, great, great. Yes, Karen Black, formerly elevated. Yes. If, if you are in Elevate and you are in Southwestern Ontario, feel free to let me know. But, but we, we sort of created this group where originally it was meant to kind of, you know, maybe we would host educational events and bring in people to talk about insurance or dog shows or various niches.

And what it has turned into is kind of more like if we have clients that we can't serve, we refer to each other. If we have rescues that need immediate help, we refer those as well. There's one photographer in there, Jen Wilson, who has been working on sort of having a central place for rescues to go Wow. And then the information goes out to all of us.

So it's been really valuable because all the time, you know, folks get clients who are not the best fit. Yes. Whether, you know, whether that's for style or budget or whatever it is. And having this huge network of other photographers that, you know, like, and trust is, is so helpful that if someone comes to me being like,

you know, I want lifestyle photos in my home. I'm like, that ain't me. But Right. Here are some people who that is, I'm hoping that the group sort of grows and evolves. We've talked a little bit about doing skill shares in our downtime. So, you know, if someone's really great on their studio lighting, we all go to their studio and,

and learn. We haven't done that yet, but I'm, I'm hoping we could have some of those kind of events. This is brilliant. I love this. You think so much bigger than I do. It's almost embarrassing because when I was thinking about, you know, you need a few photographer friends so you can share referrals, I was literally thinking like two or three and you're like,

no, I've got 30, I've got 30 people that I can share clients with and marketing. Because if you are all doing your own independent marketing, then collectively you are so much more powerful in terms of your reach. And by the way, for pet photography specifically, that might even just be the education to the community that it exists first of all.

Okay. So you, you started this after, during, sorry, during the pandemic and you started inviting people. And what were you telling them as you were inviting them to it? It was pretty broad. I, I kind of reached out and I said, you may or may not know me 'cause we haven't met in person, but I'm putting together a group where we can share resources,

share intel if we need to refer each other. Are you interested? And almost everyone responded. Yes. Wow. I think I only got two nos. One because someone was stepping away from pet photography a little bit and, and one that we were pretty sure was gonna be a no right outta the gate. Okay. Yes. But, but it's been really,

really great. Like, we share each other's events, you know, especially around the holidays when people are having minis. If we are not doing the same thing, we're like, Hey, go to my friend. Oh, Nice. They're amazing. So that, that has been really, really nice to, to just know that there are a bunch of us out there trying to do the same thing,

but that we, you know, we can be community instead of competition. Oh, for sure. Rising tide lifts all ships. We always say that. So do you feel like it's helped you and or others, like in the group actually get clients? I think so. I mean, there have definitely been referrals back and forth between a lot of us.

So that is, is probably the strongest part of the group. Oh, For sure. Yeah. That we refer, If you refer each other all the time. I would love to, and I, this is like a pipe dream. I don't know if you've ever watched Narcos, Mexico? I have not. But tell me more. Okay, So this is a terrible example,

but in Narcos, Mexico, all the drug dealers get together and decide that they're gonna have an acceptable price range for their products. Oh, Interesting. And so no one is like way, way out in left field, no one's way in the basement. Yes. So when you come to the drug dealers of Narcos, Mexico, there's like a bubble.

And so clients are getting the same experience no matter who they hire. So then they can just hire based on vibes and, and like Yeah. Fit. Yeah. This is why this is a pipe drink. 'cause it's really tough to get people to talk about their pricing. Yeah, for sure. Yeah. Groups like this. But I think in,

we could just be like, okay, here's what we want all the clients in this area Yes. To know and experience. I think, I think it would just lift us all up. Even That, that is fascinating. What, what would you say about, you know, there's some photographers out there that have like 10, \$20,000 packages. Like how would you kind of work that into something like this?

I think for specialized skills and for folks who are, you know, a luxury experience, that absolutely makes sense. Yes. I think, and all of us do have different packages. Yeah. In, in a way. Like there are some folks who, you know, are very like, I'm gonna deliver 150, like very lightly edited images because that's my model.

And there are some of us who are like, I'm selling products and all of

that. And I think it's just about when we're serious about the business, just not eliminating that shoot and burn because everyone starts somewhere, right? Yes. But For, for those of us who are like running a legit business, having that starting point for all of us be similar.

Yeah. Yeah. Okay. I think this might have legs. I was talking to a friend a couple of days ago, he was saying something similar about the wedding industry. Like how does a bride know the difference between someone starting out, you know, who's gonna charge? And by the way, this was me, my first wedding. I, well after I did the free ones,

my first wedding was \$500. And I told the bride like, I have no clue what I'm doing. I could ruin your wedding and I'm gonna give you all of the files. But they're gonna be very basic. Like, it was cool, you know, 'cause everybody starts there. So like how would we differentiate that? Like here's a, here's a,

here's the group to select from. If essentially you're willing to take a risk or, or, or you don't have the budget and then here's a group that's professional and offers products. I guess you would just have to figure out how, sort of, how to present that. Well if you think about like getting your hair done, there are junior stylists,

there are master stylists, there are elite Stuff. That's true. Yeah. Yeah. I think that's, that's maybe a road too far because we are all running our separate businesses. Yes. But I think even just sharing that information with each other and being like, here are, here are what my packages are. Here are the products I'm selling. Like,

like A rage. What do you Yeah. What, what is working for you? What are your clients purchasing? Because my clients are probably purchasing something very different than yours. Yes. So just sort of, you know, reaching out and, and making sure that all of us are are knowing our worth. Because I think as, as photographers it's so easy to discount your skill and be phenomenal but also be like,

well no. Yeah. Right. You just shrink back. I talk, I was talking to a wedding photographer just a couple hours ago in my area and she is phenomenal. I mean she is like so good and I don't know that she totally knows that, you know, like how good she is. I don't know if she completely believes her worth,

she's getting there. But I told her when we were talking this morning and I said, I hope you know how good you are. Like your photos are amazing and worth every penny if not more than you're charging. You know? But that's kind of hard to see when you're not getting clients. You know, like if you're getting clients then you can be like,

oh yeah, here's the evidence to support that. But if you're not, it's

can certainly make you question yourself. So I think just having a group of people like that you've brought together where you can have that transparency and talk about it probably helps everyone. Right. Absolutely. And I know lots of these groups exist within Elevate as well. Maybe not on quite that scale,

but like I have other smaller photography groups like accountability groups. Yes. I know some of your progress lab people have like their their progress. Yes. I don't know what's called Progress pals. Like Yeah. They have a name for themselves. Yep. But having folks who are doing the same thing, who know what the grind is like and it is so much easier for us to cheer lead for someone else.

And it is cheer for yourself. Yeah. So, you know, even on a small scale, just reaching out to a few friends where you can complain when you have a bad client and they can be like, no, you're amazing. Ah, yeah, yeah. Cheer you on, lift you up, elevate you. That's why we have the group.

Laura. That is fantastic. When I was in weddings, I had two or three photographers that I was really close with and gosh, we did what you're talking about. But it was just on, on a different, it was not on the scale, it was smaller. It was just, we just referred clients. Okay. Straight up. We were friends and we were referred clients.

But as a result of that, I never really had trouble filling my calendar. My calendar was always full. Always. And I attribute that to my marketing and their marketing. 'cause we're all, so three of us, I'm thinking of these two other photographers in particular, we're all marketing our businesses individually, which means we're all getting wedding clients. And then there's,

this often happens in the wedding industry, like everybody's booked for this certain date, you know, and hey, do you want this venue? Or this isn't a good fit for me, it's a better fit for you. And all three of us together, it was actually just beautiful. We just didn't have to worry about inquiries or clients. It was,

it was, we had each other's backs, you know? And it, it was like not even a really formalized thing. It was just, we shared referrals. I like this idea of what you've created that's a little more, has a little more structure in your group. And you're talking. So if someone in a different city and maybe even a different genre of photography,

'cause this could be any genre, wanted to do something like this, like start a Facebook group or reach out and c and like create this comradery. How would you recommend they get started? So how I got started was I, I did my research. Like I knew some of the local photographers, but not all. So I looked around, saw who sort of,

if you, you know, if you look on Facebook you can see who, which pages other people have liked. So you can broaden your net. But even starting small, just with people that you know, they're gonna know different people in the business. One of the things that we did early on, because we are regional, which was actually amazing,

was we created a, an Excel sheet I guess, but a location guide. Hmm. So all of us added in locations. Yes. So if someone from London was coming and from photographing in Kitchener, they could be like, oh, here are some great spots in Kitchener. And so it made having, you know, clients in different cities, a lot more accessible for us.

Wow. Yeah. That's really smart. You did location scouting and sharing. How did you create such, I don't know, what would you say? Like sharing helpful kindness among that, amongst that group? Because sometimes photographers are a little close to the vest with that information. Yeah, it was in the group rules. You have to agree. Oh,

nice. Mandatory. And I think in general, like no offense, wedding photographers, family photographers, whatever. I think in general pet photographers are pretty laid back. They're nicer group. Yeah. We, we like to share because there are a lot fewer of us. Yes. We can accept that there are more pets than any of us can ever photograph.

Do we sometimes have clients who reach out to like multiple ones of us. Absolutely. But if you're a better fit with my friend, go pay my friend. Yes, yes. Yeah. And I think overall that just makes for better head space for all of us. Because if you go with my friend, I feel great about that. I'm happy for my friend.

Yes. I don't feel like, oh you've left me and Right. You know, all of that sort of thing. So, you know, just building a good group, you know, holding people to a certain like standard of sharing and and and engaging. Have you ever had to like ask someone to leave An interesting debate that the the other co-man and I had at the beginning was not so much like bouncing people.

We haven't had to bounce anyone but who we would accept. Oh Right. Because You have a lot of folks who are, who are newer, who are coming in, who want to learn from more established photographers. And so we were like, what are our parameters for letting you into the group? Do you have to have a licensed business? Oh do You,

you know, do you have to have insurance? Do you have to be paying your taxes? So the answer was no. Yes. And yes. Okay. Because in Ontario you can, like, you don't have to register your business with the government, but it's like good practice that you do. So, and then obviously as you start making more money,

you have to do all those things. Right. But we were like at, at a bare

minimum, you need to have insurance for the business you are running and you need to be claiming your income. Oh, I like that, that because that sends the message that you're professional, that you, you're taking it seriously I guess. Exactly. Yeah.

And I think that allowed us to sort of, it allowed people who maybe weren't the best fit to self-select it. Ah, self-select. I love that. So then you aren't having to sort of moderate so much in terms of who's in there because it's been done on the front end. That's good. Forward thinking on your part. I think you should maybe consider having a talk.

Listen. Okay. I love my city and all of our photographers, but there is a Pittsburgh photographers group that is just mean. Okay. There are, oh it's a very big group and there are some mean people in it. So I am like literally afraid to post in there because you never know what somebody's gonna come back with come. So I guess there's something to be said for,

you know, having some rules when you come in and also maybe keeping it the number manageable. Like, I wonder what, I don't know what that number is and I don't think there's a magic wand, but I just know this is a very big group and then it kind of went off the rails. So do you have any thoughts on that? I completely agree.

I think a lot of photography groups, once they balloon to a size where it's harder for either for admins to be managing what's coming in. We also, like photographers love the gossip. Yes. You know, we love the like bad client stories and then we pile on. But then that's where I think the chance for someone to say something wrong and then hurt feelings and da da da.

We've kept this group of very, like, we're not here to complain about our clients. We're not here to, you know, badmouth anyone else in the business. We are here just to present each other with opportunities and support. I love that. Yeah. So Yeah. And it's worked out for everyone. Okay. So let's wrap up by saying that like our challenge this month was to maybe network with two to three or maybe five other photographers in your area to start sharing referrals and talk about marketing or like,

to your point, starting a group where there's 30 plus photographers that you can work with or anything in between. So sometimes when we announce these challenges, people like to use it against themselves and they're like, well I can't do what Laura's doing. That's just like too, too complex. Or I don't wanna manage it. 30 people. That's a lot.

And what I'm suggesting is, could you go meet one other photographer, like, or just a couple to make friends with and then see where that goes. What is your advice? I absolutely agree. And I think even if

you're in a small town where maybe like you are the only photographer in your particular niche, having photographers slightly outside of that niche is just as beneficial.

Yes. I have a, she does weddings now, but she's like a family photographer who's great with dogs. So when I get someone who's like, can you do my extended family and our dog will be there, I'm like, probably I don't want to like, you know, who does. Yes. Perfect. And just, just making a few little connections.

It, it isn't just the benefit of giving each other referrals and having each other's support. You also get access to each other's whole networks. Right. And So if you like big picture, think it, you're just expanding your, your capacity to interact with your community. Oh, oh my gosh, that's so well said. If you're big picture oriented,

you're expanding your capacity and you have to be an abundant thinker. Like everybody wins in this in this scenario versus like, I'm gonna keep it all to myself, my locations, my people, everything that serves no one and in fact doesn't even serve you. So it does take an abundance mindset. Like you said, being able to refer people out doesn't feel like you're losing a client.

It feels like you're helping someone else and you're serving the client because you're helping them find the best fit. Exactly. It's a win-win win for everybody. Everybody win win-win. Thank you so much for being here. Can you let people know where they can find you? Like online you Mean? Yeah, on the interwebs. Yeah. I am [laura wam well.com](#),

which is hard to spell. It's Laura, L-A-U-R-A, WAM. Well WOM as in mother, B as in Bob. WEL l.com. And Laura Longwell photo on Instagram and Facebook. I will make sure that these are all linked in the show notes. So thank you so much for being here. No problem. Thank you.