

Weddings and maternity and kids, oh my. Growing a business fast and furious may be dazzling at first, but taking the time to invest in long-term client relationships has greater rewards for Angela Lang.

CHILDREN

By Stephanie Boozer



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Angela Lang, of Angela Lang Photography in Oakland, Calif., thinks of photography as a bountiful tree with many branches. “The core, the trunk, is composed of your photography skills and talent; the many kinds of photography you can do are the branches,” says Lang. “It’s a field where you can specialize, or do what I have done—start out in photojournalism, then portraits, then weddings, then maternity, then commercial. It’s a lifetime field if you want it to be. There’s always something new to learn, and that’s what I love.”

After college, Lang took freelance assignments from The Associated Press, and pursued her news career with fervor, until the birth of her first child. “I had to press the reset button; my priorities instantly changed,” says Lang. “I didn’t want to miss out on my daughter’s babyhood.”

As her maternity leave came to an end, Lang made a giant leap and started her own portrait photography business. “That was 10 years ago. I built it from the ground up, with my daughter as my first subject. It was a little scary in the beginning, but it was the best thing I’ve ever done. I’ve never looked back. It put me in control so I could raise a family while pursuing my dream,” Lang says.

Starting out, Lang went to area playgroups to meet other moms. Word soon spread throughout her target market, and Lang’s client base grew steadily. She took the time to nurture her new relationships. Like that branching tree, Lang found it easy to expand into weddings, then maternity and beyond.

Tight-knit bunch

Nurturing client interactions into life-long relationships

"I've always felt that I'm a connector," says Lang. "I'm out there talking to people, and maintaining relationships that I already have. My goal was always to photograph families over the years, so I create photography that captures their true selves. I am a professional, yet treat clients as I would a friend."

KNIT ONE, PURL TWO

The rewards have been numerous. Recently, one of Lang's long-standing client relationships led to her providing the photography for a book on children's knitwear, "Vintage Knits for Modern Babies," by Hadley Fierlinger (Ten Speed Press, 2010). Though the author had moved to New Zealand a few years back, she'd remained enamored of the photographer's work since having Lang make a family portrait, and had commissioned her to create images for her children's knitwear website.



"I'd never done a book before," says Lang. "But, model search aside, the actual photography wasn't hugely different. When photographers take on new projects and new challenges, I think it's easiest to start at a base that feels comfortable. Now that I have this book experience, I want to do more."

Others of Lang's client relationships have led to having her work appear in three catalogs for Pottery Barn Kids, and promotional

images for a local organic baby food company.

"I'm a strong believer in reaching out and getting new clients, but of even greater value to me is creating relationships," says Lang. "I'm patient, intuitive and outgoing, and a listener when it comes to my client's needs. I control the photo session while keeping myself open to suggestions, which makes the client feel that it's a cooperative effort, not just the photographer telling them

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what to do, how to stand, where to look.”

One way Lang builds her clients’ trust—and exceeds their expectations—is by providing complimentary in-home consultations on wall art. Many clients feel uncertain when it comes to ordering large prints, so Lang takes the time to get a feel for their design sense. She brings along a few framed prints as examples, and often leaves with a large order and a big smile of gratitude from the client.

“There’s a confidence they get from my being there. I’ve seen their house, listened to their needs, given them a custom design for their walls,” says Lang. “By the end of the consultation, we’ve gotten to know each other a little better and shared a few laughs. My clients are always so appreciative of the

time and energy I give them, and that makes me feel good. It’s a win-win for everyone. It’s an investment I’ve been willing to make and I’m reaping the benefits of it.”

Camaraderie among her peers is also important to Lang. Two years ago, she marshaled a group of women photographers in her area. “Our tight-knit group has turned into a little village in which we all help each other,” she says. Technically they’re competitors, but in reality, they share support, advice and referrals. “We each have different strengths, and because we share ... we’re all improving and growing together.” ■

See more of Angela Lang’s work at angelalang.com.

