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Subject: **Senior Ambassador Programs may spark new sales!**
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Senior Ambassador Programs Installment 1

A **Senior Ambassador Program** may be what your studio needs to bolster sales. If you are already using senior ambassadors, perhaps a tweak or two here and there might make a good program even better. We have reviewed successful senior ambassador programs for the purpose of the e-zine to provide a comprehensive overview. Important parameters are illustrated or explained to provide the photographer with an outline that depicts several approaches that really work, no theory, just the facts. Because we are using a wide lens on senior ambassadors, this article will be presented in three installments over a three week period.

Our research indicates that senior ambassador programs date back to the 1950's and have grown in popularity during the 1980's. Information presented to you has originated from studios who have been using senior ambassadors over 10+ years; some 20 years. Needless to say studios that developed these programs have refined them over the years to stay current with the digital age. Nearly all use a website to promote their ambassador programs.

A prominent photographic association released a survey that indicated one half of members participating in the survey used an ambassador program with an average of three student ambassadors per studio. What this statistic illustrates is that a small number of well chosen ambassadors can make a big difference in a studio's sitting count.

A successful ambassador program directly relates to two factors:

1. finding the "movers and shakers" in any given senior class and
2. enthusiasm of all parties involved (the ambassador, photographer and staff).

Ambassadors must always have an affable personality, good social skills and lots of self-confidence. Why? Keep in mind the total number of senior flyers each senior will receive from all your competitors. Your ambassadors must be able to break through all this advertising clutter to present your studio as the better choice. Also, keep in mind that your studio may not be the only one using senior ambassadors.

Success depends on getting started now. A successful senior ambassador program just does not happen overnight. Lots of thought and refinement is required. We believe this article will get you there faster. Each section of this article will explain the basic steps to setting up your own ambassador program.

Senior Ambassador Program

1. Goals
2. Policies
3. Recruitment: letters, forms, referrals, interviews etc.
4. Discounts, give aways, prizes and bonuses
5. Ambassador sittings and means of presentation
6. Use of website
7. Ambassador meetings
8. Recruitment of next year's ambassadors

Goals:

As with any project that requires time and money, planning is essential. Your goals should be reasonable and attainable. *Pie in the sky* expectations will only lead to frustration and canning of the program. Consider such goals as: number of ambassadors needed and number of referrals attainable. Keep in mind that most studios have one ambassador for each high school. Ideally, the ratio of ambassadors to class size is 1 per 100 with average sittings booked being 3 to 5 per ambassador. One out of 10 ambassadors will book 10 to 15 classmates. Let's look at some numbers. Most studios draw from an average of three high schools with a class size of 300+. Using this data, ideally the following could result: 900+ total available seniors, using 9 ambassadors equates to 27 to 45 senior bookings. Is that worth your time and effort? Percentage wise 50% of studios would say yes. By increasing the number of ambassadors, results could even be better. Note also that direct mail, word of mouth, website and miscellaneous advertising will be accounting for the rest of your total senior sessions.

Use of ambassadors is actually a form of word of mouth advertising. Your ambassadors will be making contact with many seniors promoting the virtues of your studio depending on their sphere of influence. Their success will depend on 1) the quality of your photography, 2) being motivated by how you display your own personal energy and enthusiasm about your photography and the ambassador program, and 3) the perceived value of benefits received for each senior they book for you. As you can tell much of the success of an ambassador program rests on your shoulders not the ambassador's. This point cannot be overstated given that the success of an ambassador program depends upon it and must be a priority goal.

One of our senior accounts photographs 30+ ambassadors (juniors at this time period) prior to Easter each year. He experiments with new poses and props at this time. He allows up to 6 clothing changes and shoots enough poses (all of which are very carefully planned to illustrate some new poses mixed with standard poses) to adequately fill 3 proof folios with 36 poses minimum. All photography takes place in 30 days or less so that his ambassadors have about 60 days to show their proof folios to fellow classmates before school is out for the summer. Over 350+ seniors are photographed each year from 5 area high schools. His ambassador program has been in the making for over 15 years.

Policies:

Policies must be in writing. Each ambassador must sign a copy. All questions must be addressed and adequately answered. Here your ambassador benefits, discounts and prizes must be clearly stated; and what each ambassador must accomplish to be eligible to receive each benefit, discount or prize. If you

decide to establish "quotas", here is where you need to clearly explain your quotas. Giving a copy to Mom does not hurt given that parents are great motivators too. There are no standard benefits from one studio to the next. Our research indicates that most studios use a percentage or dollar (\$) off discount formula to be applied to a package of your choosing. Here the choice is yours - percentage or dollars off. At the level of 10 seniors booked their package is free at most studios. Some studios add bonuses too. For example, a \$100 to \$250 gift certificate from the local mall. Computers are also offered as mega prizes for those big time achievers. One out of ten ambassadors do exceed the norm. A word of advice: do not expect too much from your ambassador program if your benefits are chintzy. If your competitors are using an ambassador program, try to find out what they are offering so you can establish a baseline for your benefits.

"What do Senior Reps do?" must be clearly stated in your policy statement. Here is how one studio spelled it out. Reps create excitement and discussion about the studio by showing their proof folios, handing out rep cards and money saving coupons, giving personal testimony, setting up tours at the studio, and more. Each duty is important. Example: a tour gives your ambassadors the opportunity to put their personal testimony into action plus your staff has the opportunity to jump in and help with specific details. If Mom came along, the appointment can be made at that time.

Your policy statement should include some hard nose rules on keeping appointments for the ambassador's photo session and proof book pick up. Most studios allow one and only one rescheduling for the photo session. If the prospective ambassador wants to reschedule again, you cancel their ambassadorship immediately. But *do* give them a discount off their regular senior session. You do not want hard feelings.

Obviously you cannot cover everything in your single page policy statement. Most studios use a Q&A methodology to explain some of the sticky points and what happens if policies are not followed. Here each prospective ambassador and Mom can be equally informed. Using the Q&A method you can easily explain how your staff will keep records of referrals booked. You can also cover topics such as:

- if referrals cancel their appointments, what will happen
- how you will handle the situation if a referral gives your studio the name of two reps
- or if a senior photographed forgets to mention the name of the ambassador or turn in the ambassador's promo card.

All these things have happened in the past and will happen again. Be prepared and do not change policies on the fly. Concessions given to one ambassador must apply to all otherwise you will have chaos on your hands. A good Q&A write up will help you cover difficult and potential sticky spots beforehand. Make it easy to read and use understandable language. It will help you save time from having to explain everything over and over again.

To be continued.

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Pechman Imaging Management

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