

EPISODE 38: HOW TO WORK WITH THE HIGH-LEVEL CLIENTS SUCH AS THOUGHT LEADERS with John DeMato

Marketing for Creatives Show
at IntNetworkPlus.com

Announcer:

Turn your hobby and freelance work into a profitable business! Make your marketing easier by applying the strategies of experienced entrepreneurs and have more time to do the work you love. You are listening to the Marketing for Creatives show with your host Marina Barayeva.

Marina Barayeva:

Hi everyone. This is Marina Barayeva. Welcome to another episode of Marketing for Creatives show. In this episode, we gonna talk about how to work with the high-level clients such as thought leaders.

Did you hear everyone saying 'niche down,' 'work with the specific audience'? How scary is it to really narrow it down, right? But those who did that know that it works out well.

I was thinking about bringing you another marketer, but instead, I invited a creative entrepreneur like we are to share his experience of switching his work to the specific market. We'll talk about how he has done it, what challenges he had and how it benefits his work now.

John DeMato is branded content creator who works with high-level, business leaders, thought leaders and various other change agents to produce high-volume, image libraries that present informational, entertaining and inspiring aspects of their brand to their followers.

As a former television producer, he has over 17 years of production experience, and have been featured as a lifestyle photography expert on several NBC Universal daytime talk and reality shows.

Hi John. Welcome to the show. How are you doing today?

John DeMato:

I'm good. Marina. Thanks for having me.

Marina Barayeva:

That's fantastic to have you here. And we wonder to hear about your journey. How did you come to photography?

John DeMato:

How did I come to photography? Well, I originally went to school for television production and had a television career, but I took a class in graduate school my last semester where I took a 35-millimeter black and white class.

It was one of the best classes I ever took in my life. That kind of stayed with me and fast forward about five or six years.

I was getting a little stuck, a little creatively frustrated with my television work. It was very repetitive and very redundant, so I just felt stuck and I picked up a still camera and I just started walking around New York City, taking pictures of the streets, people, landscapes, all different kinds of things.

That really sparked a lot of creativity within me and it eventually built itself up to shooting people in my apartment. People that I worked with, just portraits, just messing around and not really understanding what was going on and eventually that grew.

Then I met my headshot mentor and I started doing headshot photography. From that eventually developed into portraits and here we are.

Marina Barayeva:

Who is your headshot mentor?

John DeMato:

His name is **Peter Hurley**. He's based out of New York.

Marina Barayeva:

Ah, he is awesome!

John DeMato:

Oh, you know him!

Marina Barayeva:

(Laughter) Of course. I'm a photographer. I know those people.

John DeMato:

I actually met Peter on a video shoot during something that I was doing for the television show. I was working in a studio for the first time and I look at his camera. He had a Hasselblad at the time. Now we shoot Canon, but back then it was a Hasselblad.

An I was just like "What the hell is that thing?" Cause you know, I didn't really understand photography on that level, so I'd never seen something like that. I said, "I think it looks like a video camera." He said "Yeah." I like "Wow!"

And then I was hooked.

Marina Barayeva:

When you start your business that time long-time ago with what types of photography did you start with?

John DeMato:

I shot anything that would give me a check. I was a jack of all trades photographer for many, many, many years shooting different types of events, parties and networking events, corporate private parties.

We had a couple of Sweet Sixteen, some Bar Mitzvahs, and Quinceaneras. I shot some wedding receptions and I was all over the place and I didn't really have a direction. It took many years and one particular client to help move me into the niche that I'm in right now.

Marina Barayeva:

What exactly brought you to that point when you niched down your audience, you started specializing in photography in high-level entrepreneurs and thought leaders?

John DeMato:

Pia Silva. She was a client at that time who came to me with a very specific need. She was putting out a book and she had no social media presence. Her publisher asked her to create a presence in order to get some visibility so she can get out there.

She basically called me up and I was like, "OK, what are we going to do?" Like "I don't know what the hell we're going to do. I guess we should figure it out."

From that conversation and then the proceeding a photo session that we conducted, it was completely different from everything I had done before.

Because rather than just focusing on trying to get pretty photos, just beauty shots and focus on the beauty of the image, the vanity of the person, we now focus on the value that those images provide when they're visually punctuating the stories that she wanted to tell about her business, her brand and her life too.

She writes about that as well and I'm like "Oh, wow! There are a lot of people out there like you that need that." And there was.

I remember the conversation. We were walking from a park right by her studio, her and her husband's studio. We were walking back like, "Man, we could keep doing this." She's like, "I know. Wow"

Marina Barayeva:

So what did you do with your other work with other photography stuff? Did you just cut down everyone?

John DeMato:

Well, first and foremost, I'm an artist and I'm someone who... I can't show it off what I see and what I don't see and I love capturing everything. Don't get me wrong.

But the difference between now and where I was back then a couple years ago when I first started my business is that I don't promote that stuff. I'm not out on the forefront trying to get different types of event work or shoot different types of portraits for different types of clients.

Really what I'm about now is who I serve. Those are the thought leaders, the change agents, the people out there that are looking to create immense impact and they need those images to create that visibility to attract their tribe.

The work doesn't end with the other stuff. It's just more on if someone contacts me, I have time and I'm interested in the project, I'll consider it or I'll do it, but by and large it's really now about the thought leaders.

Marina Barayeva:

And how helpful was it for you to focus on the specific niche?

John DeMato:

Working in the specific niche has been amazing because the one thing that I never really anticipated was the level of insight that I would get into helping a very specific group of people.

But when you focus on working with one group as opposed to being a jack of all trades photographer where you're kind of scratching the surface of a bunch of different types of industries and people now I'm really diving deep into one group.

It's really been amazing because these people inspire me not only during the session, but they inspire me just to be a better person overall based on the amazing expertise that they have and how they serve others. It's inspiring.

Marina Barayeva:

It sounds so great. How did you start getting your high-level clients?

John DeMato:

I started by really focusing on three main areas of my business. Rather than running around trying all these different social media hacks and all this other nonsense that doesn't really work other than take up all my time, I started to focus on three main areas which were outreach, research and the biggest time-consuming piece, which is content creation.

I've created tons and tons of content over the past seven, eight months. I write three blogs a week and I have a daily social post that goes across all the platforms every single day. And working in that world and working on that stuff is really given me a lot of what I mentioned before, that insight and that real in-depth kind of intimate view of what really is needed by these folks.

It's through the content and then figuring out a way through the outreach to get the message out there so people can find me and they can use me to help them get to where they want to go with their image content.

Marina Barayeva:

What do you mean by the outreach? How does this process go?

John DeMato:

Outreach is a couple of different things. It's identifying communities or hubs of people that I serve.

It's researching groups on social, the different types of groups and forums. It's finding individuals that are on a certain level where they clearly need the supplemental content in order to keep their visibility high.

Then it's engaging their content and actually developing relationships and not trying to sell. I don't sell anything. I just provide a lot of value, nurture relationships, allow people to come to me, see what I offer and get some tips and insight that they normally wouldn't get from other photographers.

Eventually, through starting conversations with people by actually taking interest in what they post and sharing their information with my people it creates this reciprocity, it creates this certain level of comfortability and familiarity.

That's really what this is about. It's about creating that climate, creating that type of dynamic and relationship with people so that it's actually an authentic exchange.

Marina Barayeva:

How did you actually started reaching out them? Just "Hi. I'm John. I photographed Pia Silva and now I want to photograph you"?

John DeMato:

I used to do that and that sucked. (Laughter)

Marina Barayeva:

Ok. (Laughter) That's the solution.

John DeMato:

That's. Yeah. I've learned over time that when you do direct reach out to people and they're not ready for you, you're gonna get a lot of different types of responses. But in most cases, you get no response because people don't want to feel pressured.

They want to feel like they're respected, their time is respected, their space on social is respected. Because when you direct message to someone, it's like you're inviting yourself into their house without getting the invite.

But when you're on social and you're engaging their content, commenting, and sharing it, that's a lot more comfortable and that allows you to get to the opportunity where you get invited into the house and have that type of conversation.

So the way that I would do it, it's just basically going to their page and see content that really resonates with me and leave an authentic comment and share it. That's how you get noticed.

And the next thing they're sharing your stuff. They're commenting on your stuff. Then you can actually have an honest conversation. And it's not about sales. It's about how I can help them get to where they are and that might not have anything to do with photographs.

It might be, "Well, I'm in the market now for a coach to help me with my marketing," or "I'm looking for someone to help me with resiliency" or "I'm trying to shift gears in my business and I need a business coach" or various other things.

But the point is, is to have a conversation about where their pain is and then to help them with their pain by either being a direct service or referring them to people that remind network. That's how it's built.

Marina Barayeva:

It looks like so much work. Do you do everything by yourself: social media, blog posting, reaching out?

John DeMato:

Yeah. It's a hell of a lot of work. And it is every day. But the thing about it is when you do this type of work for other people, you're getting a check and you're beholden to someone else's opinions and directions and all of that, that's one thing.

That can create a certain level of stagnation and frustration and even resentment. In my case, it was a heavy level of resentment. But when you do this work, it's for yourself. It's attached to the meaning and purpose in your life and it goes much, much deeper than just making money. It's a lot easier to handle the work because the work is special to you and it's unique.

And at the end of the day, I created this niche out of the thin blue sky and it's mine and there's a certain level of pride that I take and what I do aside from the value that I provide other people.

You know, I feel good. I feel good when I create these blogs and I know that people are going to benefit from them. Or when I have a session and someone is in front of my camera, I know that these photos are going to make the difference for them. It matters. It means a lot more to me. And it makes the work a lot more palatable.

Marina Barayeva:

What was your blueprint?

John DeMato:

I mean, I want to grow every day. I want to learn new things. I have a certain level of curiosity about certain aspects of life and working with people who are experts in dedicated themselves to understanding and educating those on these areas of life is really fulfilling to me because I'm learning from them too.

And once they're a client, they're now a friend and I'm following them and I'm commenting and I'm supporting them. Photography is a very intimate process because the people in front of the camera are allowing themselves to drop their guard and be very vulnerable and because they're being themselves and being authentic because I don't allow anything else in front of the camera.

There's a lot of methods that I employ that do get on a very intimate personal level and it makes it special.

So that's really the motivation behind all of it. Because it's high when you had a session where you know that everything clicked and all the preparation was worth it and the photos came out phenomenally.

And the client is not only happy because he or she now has this image content that they can use that they need in order to promote themselves, but they feel empowered and confident because of they just one in front of a camera.

Even though they might have felt a little weird about it because it is a bit of a weird process for some people. So it empowers them and emboldens them. It makes them feel like a bad ass because they just got some photos and they look amazing. There's a lot of benefits to do what I do.

Marina Barayeva:

There's a lot of work too. In your service you offer someone like a stylist, but you said that you were by yourself. Do you collaborate with someone or you work with other services? How did you find these people?

John DeMato:

Basically, I am a team of one when it comes to pretty much everything aside of the sessions because during the sessions I'll have a makeup artist, I'll have a stylist there and he or she... I worked with one primarily now, but occasionally clients will have preferences for themselves, so they hire their own people, which is totally fine.

The point for me is, is that I want people on the session day that I'm working with, whether it's a hair and makeup person or if it's an added stylist or if I have my videographer friend, they're capturing video of the whole process, I want people there that are going to support that person in front of the camera and make them feel good.

That is the ultimate goal. We want them to feel confident and comfortable and ready to be photographed because it is a process. As far as the team is concerned basically it's when the photo shoot is actually happening, that I have a team. Otherwise, I'm in my apartment. I'm in my office in my apartment. I'm working pretty much by myself.

Marina Barayeva:

What do you think are important parts of your service that make you really stand out from other photographers?

John DeMato:

Well, there's a couple things. First of all, the preparation process is quite extensive. I have a phone call with every client, a pre-session strategy call where I ask about... I don't know, I just did one on Friday. It was about two hours. And I took pages of notes and from those pages, we created an entire shot sheet, very unique things.

But the whole purpose of those questions is to not just extract the vanity based type of images that a lot of other photographers go after. It's about finding what makes these people unique and special, who they serve, why they serve those people and how that process looks.

Then what I do is rather than just capture people looking into a camera and smiling, we capture a variety of images with unique and dynamic facial expressions because facial expressions are the key to setting the mood of the image.

As I refer to in a lot of my conversations with people, I create high volume image libraries, but they're also referred to as mood libraries.

Because the whole purpose of these images is to visually punctuate the stories that you want to tell about your business. It's important to have a variety of facial expressions. We really work hard to get that.

The other thing I feel that's different is that I really stress the need to capture lifestyle portraits and it's about capturing them in a candid way where they feel very fluid as if the viewer were a fly on the wall watching the person work.

I want people to get a sense of what work looks like to them, what their processes are. How do you work with your clients? How do you brainstorm?

Then I want to provide clients the option of having photos that they can add texts and branding to the images.

I'll shoot with a lot of negative space in order for them to put in their content there. Because those types of images really resonate with people because it's not only their face. The face

draws them in and then the face then draws them to the words or the branding or the logo or whatever they're promoting on the other side. So, we capture that stuff.

And then the other thing that separates me from other photographers is that when it comes to a high-volume image library. It's not just about photos of you, it's about photos of objects and props of things that either resonate with you because they'd metaphorically represent the things that you provide your clients.

Or it could simply be books and manuals that you use on a daily basis that help generating ideas for your own fault leadership or they inspire you to be a better person.

It's all about sharing these little nuggets, these little interesting quirks about your personality and your process and your thought leadership with your clients in a very authentic and powerful way.

Marina Barayeva:

That's an interesting process. And you know, when people reach out, the photographer, usually one of the first questions they ask, "How much?" Your prices can be quite high to others.

How do you smooth this transition from pricing to service? How do you help people to switch the focus from the price to what you actually deliver?

John DeMato:

Well, Marina, actually, the thing about that is if someone starts off by asking me price 9.9 times out of 10, they're not my client and we're not going to work together. It doesn't work that way.

Because their focus already dictates the fact that they're not ready for me or that they're not my client. And that's totally cool. I have no problem with that.

I used to get really pissed off about that. What do you mean I'm not too expensive? What are you talking about? And this was when I was charging far, far, far less money.

But what I realized was, is when I moved into the thought leader space and focus my energy on serving those folks, those conversations are very, very different. It's not about price, it's about value. And it's about my passion that I have for what I do because the folks that I work with are super passionate, super driven folks.

They don't want to work with people who are going to nickel and dime them. They want value.

They want to feel like they're taken care of. And most importantly, they want to feel like they are going to have an experience because this is not just this thing where you're sitting in front of a camera, someone snapping photos, we hope we get some good stuff, and it's great. No. It's not that.

This is going in very, very hyper-specific purpose. Very, very planned out. And very, very valuable. So we don't just go in and just hope everything works out.

But if someone were to ask me about the price, I have no problem telling them that my brand packages just start \$3,400. That's where it starts.

Actually, I like to put that out there on my website because I want the qualified clients as much as they want to qualify me. Because our time is very precious and we have a lot to do as entrepreneurs.

If I get into a conversation for 30 minutes to find out that this person is going to freak out because they don't want to spend \$3,000-5,000 we both wasted our time.

So I put on my website prices begin at \$3399 and allow people to just let that sink in so they know what they're in for before they even contact me.

Marina Barayeva:

This is kind of your first filter for people who are willing to work with you, right?

John DeMato:

Yes, definitely. You have to. Because I realized through what I just explained and talked about, I've lived it. And it's painful. Because it's like I feel I don't want to get into a negotiation. It's not about negotiation.

It's about really spending the time to focus on how we're going to get you the types of images that you need in order to get the visibility that you desire rather than "Could you take a couple of hundred dollars off?" (Laughter)

Because the people that come to me certainly don't want that for their services. That's why there's a level of respect when it comes to value in setting a price and respecting that value. Quite frankly, the clients appreciate the work more when they pay what it's worth.

Marina Barayeva:

What was your biggest challenge when you started working with the high-level clients or thought leaders?

John DeMato:

Having the confidence in myself to work with such high-level folks. That was the biggest. The biggest challenge at the beginning was believing in myself because as an artist, you know, when you're on your own and you're shooting for yourself, it's fun, it's great. When it's a side hobby or a side hustle, which it started out for me as the pressure is a lot lower.

When it's your main deal and it's who you go after and you realize that now I'm going after people that are authors and speakers and very, very high-level folks that do a lot of awesome stuff, it was intimidating.

I had to really, really get myself comfortable with the idea of working with these types of folks who expect high results, which on its own I am of that mindset as well. But when you're doing it for other people, it at first was a little scary, but now it's awesome!

Marina Barayeva:

It seems all those challenges worth that.

John DeMato:

Oh yeah. On many levels.

Marina Barayeva:

And right. Now, what would be the three key things that you would recommend to our listeners who are thinking about niching down in their business and start working with high-level clients? They're still in doubt.

John DeMato:

The first thing that I would say is you first have to identify the types of people that you want to work with. Now, what does that mean? That's such a broad statement. It can be broken down into a couple of things.

One, just the industry in which you want to work with. Who are those folks? Who are the people that let you up in the morning that you really get excited about wanting to work with as a freelancer or someone who works with a business? I would think about that and identify those folks.

Then the second thing is can they pay you what you want to get paid? A lesson: at the end of the day, there's a lot of value and the reciprocity of sharing value between me and clients is amazing and I loved that, but ultimately at the end of the day, I still need to be able to pay my utility bills.

You have to really identify:

- What your value is
- How much you want to charge
- Can those people that you really want to work with affording you?

So those are those two things.

Then, the next step would be to start to look out there and see who else is doing what you want to do or if it even exists at all.

For me, for example, there are a million and a half photographers and I'm in New York City, so double that here.

But what separates me is I use terminology and phrasing and I niched to a certain group that is not really focused on by other photographers. So that's what makes me unique. And that's what you have to kind of figure out as well. See what other people are doing and see how you can separate yourself from that.

And then the third step is ultimately believing in yourself and taking the leap because that's the most important one. Because if you don't do that, it's always going to live in your head and you're never going to do a damn thing about it. If you do that, then that's going to become a very regretful situation.

But having your ducks in a row and taking care of the aforementioned things before this up, it will definitely go a long way because once you actually start to put one foot in front of the other, momentum begins.

That is how you start an upward spiral towards, living more of a life that you want, show up in the world the way you want and have a niche that really you can serve and feel fulfilled from it.

Marina Barayeva:

"Momentum begins" - well said. There were a lot of tips. Thank you so much, John. Please share with us how can we learn more about you and how can we connect with you?

John DeMato:

You can connect with me on my website johndemato.com and sign up for my three emails a week newsletter that I send out there. I have some goodies in there for you there. The other good place to find me is Instagram. My handle is [@DeMatoPhoto](https://www.instagram.com/DeMatoPhoto). Come on by and check out my stuff there.

Marina Barayeva:

Fantastic. Thank you so much, John. It was great to have you here.

John DeMato:

Thank you, Marina. Appreciate it.

Marina Barayeva:

Thank you for joining me for this episode today. You can find the show notes and the full transcript of the episode at intnetworkplus.com.

And by the way, give me feedback. What other topics do you want to hear? Do you think this is good, do you think there is nothing for you here? I want to hear everything that you have. You can always email me at marina@intnetworkplus.com, and your email will get right to my inbox. That's all for today, and I'll see you next time.

Announcer:

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Resources from this interview:

- Learn more about John DeMato on johndemato.com
- Check the work of [Peter Hurley](#)
- Listen to the episode [How to Get Out of The Rat Race of Constantly Hunting for Clients](#) with Pia Silva
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