



Family and portrait photographer **Millie Pilkington**

Managing your career whilst in the public limelight, can be a daunting experience. This is exactly what happened to local photographer **Millie Pilkington**, whose career now includes that of 'private photographer' to Prince William and Kate Middleton on their wedding day.

Mogers Magazine caught up with Millie after the Royal event to find out how she's built her career and the measures she's taken to grow her business. We also couldn't resist asking how she managed to secure such an amazing contract!

Where did it all start for you?

I have loved photography since I was given a camera on my 8th birthday. I considered studying photography as my degree but decided that a degree in Spanish and French (which I also enjoyed) would be a more useful one in terms of future employment.

When I married in September 2000, I decided to try out photography as a professional career, seeing it as a wonderful way of being able to juggle work with my future family life. I signed up for an evening diploma course at the Kensington

and Chelsea College, photographed some friends' weddings 'on the cheap' to build up a portfolio, launched a website and on the birth of my first daughter, resigned from my job as Account Director in a marketing agency, throwing myself into motherhood and photography.

How did you know what direction to take?

My business grew from strength to strength through word of mouth, and with a growing family at home, I diversified into children photography. My 8 years of work experience served me well in terms of marketing and running my business, and by the time my 3rd daughter was born, I was very established as a leading children and wedding photographer in London.

When we moved to Dorset in 2007, it was like starting all over again. Whilst I still had a lot of clients in London, it wasn't financially worthwhile trekking back up to London on a regular basis, not to mention the logistics with childcare etc. so I focused all my energies into building up my reputation locally.

I started photographing for Country Child (www.countrychild.co.uk) a newly launched family magazine distributed through Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire), exhibited at school fairs, advertised in local magazines and before long, the local work started flowing in too.

Which is the best business decision you've made?

One of the best moves I made was upgrading my website to enable me to upload the photographs from each commission onto a password protected page on my website, enabling my clients to view and order their photographs online.

Left: Balancing family life with her career, Millie with her family

Millie's own personal advice on developing client relationships

Being offered a commission such as the Royal Wedding is more than just luck, coincidence or good fortune. Millie Pilkington shares her advice on how business owners can ensure long-lasting relationships with their client base.

Developing a strong rapport is essential in the long term growth of a relationship. Ensuring you give 110% on every job you do, however minor or major, is also every bit as important: wonderful opportunities can arise very unexpectedly from even the most insignificant of jobs. Word of mouth is one of the strongest tools in the marketing mix: happy clients not only lead to repeat business, but attract new clients too.

I've found the following also very effective in helping me progress with my business:

- identifying your target audience so you decide how best to market your product(s) to them
- assessing your competition and identifying your unique selling proposition so you can promote yourself accordingly
- having a strong business plan of where you hope to be in 5 to 10 years' time and reviewing this annually to check that you're going in the right direction
- ensuring you have a strong website, not too much text, strong imagery, portfolio of examples, testimonials etc.
- enthusiasm, dedication, sense of humour and patience





Improving online presence to support the long term business plan

Within a couple of months, the traffic on my website increased from about 40 a week to 400 per day. With 200 to 300 people per wedding seeing my photographs, not only did they now have my contact details but they could see all the other types of work I carried out and recommend me to others.

You are a prime example of how nurturing customer relationships can lead to great things! Tell us how you became involved with the Middleton family and the moment you were asked to photograph the family's special day.

Whilst we were still living in London, I photographed the front covers for a magazine called 'Families SouthWest'. One of these cover photographs caught Carole Middleton's attention and she subsequently booked me for a 2 day Party Pieces shoot in September 2006. I've been working for them ever since, and have developed a close working relationship with all the Middleton family.

I first knew of my potential involvement through a letter Kate sent early January saying she would be in touch soon regarding photographing their wedding. It was a heart stopping moment but I didn't really believe it until I arrived in London on the Monday leading up to the wedding. It was all so very surreal, in fact it still is!

Local wedding, Royal wedding ... how do you ensure you know exactly what your client needs?

Preparing for any wedding involves a lot of client liaison to ensure that we're all singing off the same song sheet. We work through timings, logistics, rainy day back ups, types of photographs, who's important to capture, etc... I also like to learn the names of all the direct family members

(from both sides) as well as the bridesmaids, pageboys and ushers etc. that can prove quite testing with weddings most weekends!

Each client's requirements are different and obviously preparing for the Royal Wedding was even more extensive. Aside from numerous phone calls, meetings in London and site visits, I was also a touch more neurotic about my equipment all being fully functional – so took my whole kit to be serviced and cleaned just before, and bought a 3rd back up camera, flash and various duplicate lenses, just in case!

Planning then is critical?

Yes, we spoke in great detail about my role and what they were hoping for me to photograph so I was very well informed. I also had various meetings at Clarence House in the lead up to the wedding to dot the 'i's and cross the 't's, with the logistics meticulously organised by Clarence House.

You were given very intimate access to the Royal couple on the day – this is a real testimony to your relationship with the family.

I left for the Abbey literally seconds after Kate's exit from the Goring, and again left seconds after their exit from the Abbey to capture their arrival back at Buckingham Palace.

Whilst the formal photographs were taking place, I mingled through the reception rooms photographing the Heads of State, Royal family and guests. Thereafter my role was to shadow Kate and William throughout the reception, capturing the speeches, cutting their cake and of course their departure.


I was also given the immense honour of taking some informal, natural and intimate photographs of them together, in a stunning room in the Palace. My role in the evening was much more open, with Kate keen for me to enjoy myself too, but to be surrounded by such stunning people in such a beautiful location on such an incredibly historic occasion and not take photographs, would have been a crime in itself!

You've maintained your professional integrity despite being thrust into the media spotlight. This must've been quite a challenge - how have you managed this?

Clarence House very kindly organized a Press Association interview for me on Saturday 30th April, in which I was permitted to talk about my role and experiences of the day in general terms. Needless to say, as soon as these interviews went live, I received an overwhelming surge of interest from the media, seeking "behind the scenes" gossip.

I turned down all interviews, explaining politely that I was unable and unwilling to comment on anything other than my role on the day, which had already been outlined in my PA interview. Retaining my clients' privacy, trust and respect is integral to all areas of my business, and even more so in this case!

Finally, where are your business plans taking you for the future?

Whilst I love the excitement that photographing a wedding can bring, I'm actually turning my attentions to family photography, particularly the portraiture side of the business. As a mother to three beautiful girls, family time is very precious to me and I'd like to spend as much time at the weekends with them as possible. It's getting the balance right between family and business. 



Derwent Campbell, Managing Partner for Mogers, concurs with Millie Pilkington's

business approach and adds "Maintaining privacy, trust and discretion is key to Mogers' ethos. Like Millie we rely on strong relationships and personal recommendation, and, like Millie, we aspire to excellence in all things, coupled with enthusiasm and a sense of humour."

"Millie demonstrates what all of us in the discrete, bespoke activity sphere must have; discretion, sensitivity and a sense of humour. While at times we'd like to open our books and "confess" who we act for, it is essential to our credibility that discretion at all times is maintained."



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