

## **Sharing the First 48** **Micaela Bensko's popular portrait program for newborns**

By Jeff Kent

Sometimes a photography business expands unintentionally. A photographer will do something out of personal interest, or as a favor to a friend, and then before she knows it, new clients are beating down her door. This is precisely how Micaela Bensko's newborn photography program, First 48, came about.

"The program started in the most organic fashion possible," says Bensko. "Some friends of mine had just had a baby. I went to visit them in the hospital with my camera, and as a gift to them I started taking pictures of them interacting with their new baby. The situation just lent itself so beautifully to the genre of photojournalism. I created a slideshow presentation and emailed it to them the next day. They had Internet access right there in their hospital room, and were so excited that they sent it out to everyone they knew. Almost immediately, their friends and family started asking about the photographer. Is she a professional who would do something like that for us? How can we get a service like this?"

Not long after, Bensko offered a similar favor to two other friends who happened to also be portrait clients. The feedback was even more dramatic. This second couple worked at a real estate brokerage, and they e-mailed the slideshow link to all 500 partners in their firm, as well as an address book full of friends and family. Bensko started receiving inquiries and Web hits in numbers she'd never seen before, including after large wedding jobs.

That's when the true potential for in-hospital newborn portraits hit her. A mother of four herself, Bensko is very familiar with the emotional roller coaster of child birth, as well as the intimate bonding times that go on between parents and their newborn during the first 48 hours of the child's life. So, she decided to create a new division of her business called First 48. Bensko arrives at the hospital within 48 hours of the child's birth and documents the parents with their newborn onsite. She then posts an online slideshow the following day, places the full set of images in a Web gallery for viewing and ordering, and delivers a 5x5 keepsake coffee table album for the parents within two weeks. For an extra fee, she'll produce customized birth announcements, which begin production as soon as the parents have selected their favorite image. She's even booking Special Delivery sessions for those who want the full experience documented.

"The first two days are the most intimate time you will have with your child for the rest of your life," says Bensko. "Bonding for most mothers is precious. You are vulnerable, still discovering your newborn. You experience these moments that you will never have again, and now those moments can be captured and treasured forever. It's one of those experiences where people aren't usually allowed in. This program allows the couple to truly share the arrival of their newborn rather than just sending a portrait two or three months down the road."

Besides, says Bensko, this is not only a valuable service, it is a practical one that helps her clients relax and enjoy their newborn without worrying about sending out notices, trying to take quality pictures themselves, or attempting to describe their new child over the phone to their fifth cousin Bernie up in Omaha. Instead, couples can simply distribute the

link to Bensko's images, and all their friends and family can share in the experience on an emotional level. "It allows them to engage in an experience rather than only receiving a traditional birth announcement in the mail," says Bensko.

Even though this is a business venture, Bensko wants to keep the program very intimate, very personal. As such, she's not blindly promoting this service. She has distributed some brochures with friends, doctors who she knows personally and in certain areas of hospitals where she has a working relationship. Those who are interested can check out her Web site for more information: [www.benskophotography.com](http://www.benskophotography.com).