
Your Bottom Line

By Dr. Henry J. Oles, Cr.Photos.

Fighting progress can be self-defeating

Many years ago, I read an article titled "The Imperfect Miracle," by Ulrich Meisel of Meisel Color Labs, who is remembered as one of the founding fathers of professional color. In the article he discussed how the color film process was a miracle, but not a perfect process. He warned photographers not to expect absolute perfection, but to use the technology available for maximum benefit.

That article had a lasting affect on me. It encouraged me to capitalize on the positive and to step around the negative. Unfortunately, many people do the opposite, even though it can be self-defeating.

I've been in the industry long enough to remember when many of my colleagues fought the use of color film and paper for portraits and weddings. They preferred black and white. Switching to color was one of the most important things we ever did in our studio. Many of our competitors warned prospective clients against having their weddings photographed in color or risk finding only brightly colored dust when they opened their albums a few months later. But most customers wanted color and, consequently, they came to our studio.

I remember, too, colleagues fighting about using electronic flash for candid and studio work. "Electronic flash is so fast that it doesn't properly expose the layers of the film like a flash bulb or incandescent lighting does," they would say.

I don't think there has ever been a tool that has received so much criticism, by so many so-called "experts," as the background projection process. Every excuse imaginable, most of them unfounded, has been used to condemn a process that has proved to be extraordinarily profitable. Are there any problems with using background projection? Of course, just as there are with any tool; but, the problems are easily manageable and many customers eagerly purchase the results. Nevertheless, it has taken 15 years for background projection to become a respectable tool.

Operating an in-house color lab has also been a bone of contention. While it is easy to mail film and negatives, photog-

raphers can significantly add to the bottom line by using in-house processing equipment for routine work.

Video proofing is a remarkable new tool that streamlines operations, cuts costs, and increases sales. But, most photographers have fought it for the past six years. It would not be nearly as popular as it is today had Kodak not invested millions of dollars in promoting their Prism video proofing system, and had Glamour Shots not installed it in their 200 franchise outlets. Now, even Kmart advertises that they use digital proofing in their studios.

But, there are those photographers who claim they can't sell from video proofs, even though a competitor down the street is enjoying record profits from video proofing.

One of the newest opportunities for professional photographers is electronic imaging. This incredible technology has tremendous potential to enhance sales. As usual, I hear familiar complaints about this "imperfect miracle." For example, some get upset if the color of a fully manipulated print with people and/or backgrounds added or subtracted doesn't precisely match the original's color. Or, they complain if a 20x24-inch print made from an electronically produced negative doesn't look quite as sharp as the original, even though the customer is perfectly happy with it.

The arguments are as absurd as prejudices are. Instead of selling the product, pleasing their customers, and making money, some photographers fight and argue about insignificant factors. Soon there will be even better technology that some photographers will embrace and capitalize, while others will grumble.

Nothing in this world is perfect. Make the best of what you have, whether its your talents and abilities or available tools. The bottom line is obvious. Those who complain and find excuses are not going to benefit. Those who emphasize the positive, who boldly and intelligently explore new territories, are the ones who are going to succeed in business and in life. Which approach do you choose? ■
