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# Your Bottom Line

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## Finding lucrative alternatives

In many ways, photographers are creatures of habit—content to generate the same photography style and offer the same products for years. Often, studio owners maintain a status quo because other photographers operate their businesses in a similar fashion. As a result, these photographers miss golden opportunities to break away from the crowd.

Instead of offering a broad variety of photographic products, many photographers strive to sell a limited assortment of standard print styles and attempt to be competitive by promoting “quality” photography at reduced prices.

Nearly every studio offers standard color prints, but how many photographers promote hand-oil-painted products? Some photographers may consider this concept ridiculous, since oil coloring prints went out of style when conventional color printing methods became available. However, prudent business owners should consider the advantages of oil-coloring. Promoting this product could create a premium market and generate large profits.

It is important to determine the distinctive advantages this once-popular product has over conventional color prints. One major benefit oil-colored prints offer is permanence. It's no secret that today's color prints lack long life expectancy. Although many photographers market standard color prints to consumers as a “treasured value,” conventional color prints generally last about 20 years, and negatives also fade in time. Whereas oil-colored prints can survive for more than 100 years—offering photographers a glowing business opportunity.

Permanence is extremely important, since many clients are interested in acquiring portraits that become family heirlooms. Because an artistic effort is required for a quality oil-painted portrait, compared to machine prints, clients may be willing to spend more for this product.

Since few studios offer this unique concept, photographers who promote oil-painted portraits can enjoy additional benefits. Satisfied customers may quickly spread the word about this “new” product avail-

able at your studio, and competitors may not catch on to this lucrative idea for years. It is also unlikely that high-volume discount studios will ever offer oils, since their studio operations revolve around volume print sales.

In addition, since customers are unable to make unauthorized, quality copies of oil-painted photography—because they do not print well on laser printers—photographers can enjoy larger print orders.

With the availability of the Kodak Create-A-Print II machine, which enables consumers to make their own enlargements for a couple of dollars a print, many photography clients are becoming more aware of printing costs. As a result, clients may complain when a photographer charges \$100 for a print that they believe can be copied for only \$5. But with oil-colored prints, clients recognize the extra artistic efforts involved, and may purchase these items without questioning price.

A typical 16x20-inch color print may cost a photographer \$50 for printing, spotting, spraying and mounting. In turn, the studio may charge a client \$100, yielding a gross profit of \$50. However, a 16x20-inch oil print, which may cost a photographer \$100 for printing and painting services, may be sold to a client for \$500—a considerable profit increase.

Oil coloring is nearly a lost art. Although thousands of people specialized in oil coloring years ago, only a handful are experts in this art form today. Wallace Laboratories, San Angelo, Texas, is one of the only labs in the country that routinely offers oil coloring services. However, if more photographers began promoting oil-colored products, a new generation of specialists might develop.

Another unique product photographers may want to feature is the Polaroid image transfer process, which yields a highly unusual and salable product. This process involves making an exposure on Polaroid instant print film and immediately laying the developing Polaroid material on artist matte paper. What many may consider a “mistake” or novelty, is becom-

ing a lucrative product. The key component to making it successful is promotion and marketing. Polaroid Corporation conducts seminars across the country to teach professional photographers how to profit from this technique.

Another consideration is a process of applying a color print to ceramic products, such as a plate or mug. Although this old-time process is offered by a few studios, the concept has great profit potential, particularly when marketed effectively.

There are many other alternative products that studio owners can offer in an effort to increase business. Photographers are in an enviable position. They do not have to play the typical “price-comparison” game. Studio owners can engage the curiosity of prospective clients by offering variety. For example, when potential customers ask how much you charge for a standard 8x10-inch color print, take their attention away from price by introducing alternative products. Describe the virtues of oil coloring, image transfer, and ceramic prints. It may result in the sale of a highly profitable product.

There are many product variations available to help photographers increase business and fight the competition. Make your bottom line soar by offering unique products that are not available from the competition. 