
Your Bottom Line

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

If you can't walk, use a wheelchair

My grandmother suffered from a crippling arthritic condition during the last 15 years of her life. Although walking was extremely difficult, she refused to use a wheelchair. A wheelchair would have enabled her to be more mobile, and made life easier on the family, but Grandma refused to accept this type of assistance. In essence, her pride kept her from pursuing a more productive life.

My grandmother's attitude is similar to that of many professional photographers who fail to take advantage of aid available to them from many sources. The operation of any business, especially a professional photography studio, requires a vast array of talents and abilities. Most photographers are incapable of adequately performing all the functions needed for success, so it is important to recognize weaknesses and employ experts to help in those areas.

I've met a number of professional photographers who are unable to properly promote their businesses. While they may be aware of this inadequacy, many do nothing to change the condition, which often results in an ailing studio.

No business can succeed without promotion—even if it is only word-of-mouth advertising. I recently read an ad for an advertising agency which said, "A terrible thing happens when you don't advertise...nothing." Although this is true, another "terrible thing" happens when business owners employ ineffective advertising...they lose potential business, and in addition, the dollars they invested in poorly-executed advertising space.

For example, if a studio owner "throws together" an ineffective, amateur ad, and pays \$500 for ad space in a publication, it may discourage potential clients, making the investment worse than worthless. However, if the studio contracts a professional advertising agency for \$200 to create a professional ad, and purchases a \$300 ad space, the studio increases its chances of obtaining a desirable response. Employing a professional may cost considerably less in the long-run, since adver-

tising professionals are experts in helping business owners get results.

A lack of general business and financial training has also plagued many studios. Photography is a business—and studio operators cannot run a business without knowing proper procedures.

Professional photographers may be experts in the camera room, yet unskilled in sales technique. Other photographers may want to handle their own color processing, yet lack time and patience to do it properly. It is helpful to know that there are people who perform these tasks skillfully.

There are many first-class professionals available to help studio owners with business management, ranging from accountants to the Service Core of Retired Executives (SCORE) members.

Photographers who are planning to open a new studio can hire professional designers to construct beautiful edifices to attract clients. Employing qualified experts is infinitely better, and less expensive in the long run, than skimping on the initial investment by contracting amateurs.

In some cases, studio owners may choose to hire full-time professionals. Photographers interested in handling their own color processing need not worry about losing valuable time in the camera room if they hire a photofinishing specialist to operate an in-house color lab.

The day-to-day practices of successfully running a photography business is too complicated for one individual. Studio owners should take time to analyze company needs and hire competent people to perform services with expertise. But photographers should beware of inept individuals and select professionals carefully. □