

Your Bottom Line

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Investing for the future

I recently saw a comic strip that applies to most businesses today, particularly photography studios. In the strip a small group of soldiers were hopelessly outnumbered and completely surrounded by the enemy. Both sides carried old-fashioned weapons, the kind that you have to stop to load powder and a single lead shot before firing again, like muskets. Standing next to the commander of the army was a salesman holding a machine gun that he wanted to demonstrate. "You idiot," the commander barked at him. "Can't you see that I have a war to fight? I don't have time to talk to a stupid salesman."

This is typical of many photography studio owners. It is easy to get so involved in fighting the day-to-day battle of running a business that we don't believe we have time to invest in finding better, more profitable ways to win the war. We plod along with our old ways when solutions to our problems are right under our noses.

While it's hard to take time to investigate possibilities for the future, it is something that absolutely must be done if you are to survive. I have often put off hiring new employees simply because I didn't feel I had time to do the interviewing and training. Obviously, continuing to use this excuse makes growth impossible.

Stop and think about the things you need to do to improve your business. How many things are you putting off simply because you feel you don't have enough time to get them started? Has it occurred to you that you may never have time unless you make the time?

There are so many things that studio owners put off. We don't advertise. We don't finish our paper work. We don't hire new employees. We don't take courses on new techniques. We don't buy new photographic tools that would enable us to produce more, hence make more money. We slide along, day in and day out, never making any real progress. The only way to end this downward spiral is to force yourself into action.

Many people have asked me how I started EPS Photographic. My story is a perfect example of procrastination. I was enthralled with the success we were having in our studio with front projection and was surprised that no one had yet published

anything on the subject. There were not even decent instruction manuals for the projectors that were being sold. I considered writing a "how to" book on background projection for more than a year, but I kept putting it off. Finally, one afternoon I forced myself to do it.

Before I wrote the first word, I created advertisements to appear in three major studio publications, wrote checks to pay for them, sealed the envelopes, and put them in the mail. Then I was committed to the project. I knew what I wanted to say, but if I had not roped myself into performing, *Successful Projected Environmental Photography* would never have been written and EPS might never have been started. Spending the money to advertise in advance obligated me to perform. By the time the first order arrived, the book was finished. To this day my staff criticizes me if I start to advertise a product before it is finished, but it is a sure way to get things done.

Electronic imaging is another area ripe for growth. The pros and cons of electronic imaging abound in today's magazines. You may be thinking about incorporating the technology into your business, but that would mean dedicating time to learn it. However, not taking the time may one day find you being forced into electronic imaging after your most aggressive competitors have made big money with it.

You may have plans to incorporate a color lab into your operation. You haven't done so because it is so easy to send your work to a professional lab and you continue to do so even though you know how much you could be saving. Buying the equipment and having it installed would force you to learn how to use it.

The advancement and continued success of a business is directly related to the owner's willingness to make commitments and to take risks. Force yourself to invest today and your bottom line will reflect those investments tomorrow. 