
Your Bottom Line

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Location photography bolsters profits

Professional photographers often ask me, "What is the most significant hindrance to the financial growth of a photography studio?" My reply is always the same—a lack of aggressive business promotion. Whether photographers attract clients into the studio, or accommodate customers by traveling to location sites, it is imperative to actively hunt for new business.

I've been partial to location photography ever since opening my first business, producing portraits in client homes. Studio owners who offer location photography services can enjoy considerable financial gain. One sales call, to a prom committee for example, can lead to an abundance of photo opportunities. Aside from photographing numerous prom couples, photographers can make exposures of various cliques of friends and sell group portraits to each subject included in each photo.

Ambitious photographers can generate an infinite number of profitable location photography concepts. However, it is important to be aware that hordes of competitors are prepared to "cash in" on those lucrative ideas. To combat this problem, photographers can decrease prices, offer special client services, or search for fresh photo opportunities.

Although difficult, it is essential to avoid cutting prices and participating in price wars. When a variety of studios, offering similar services, bid for the same job, photography rates are often used as a bargaining tool. However, discounting photography fees leads to diminished profit potential.

Although a photographer may produce beautiful portraits, it is ineffective to merely promote photographic prints as "high quality"—since most studio advertisements use those catch words. Instead, differentiate your studio from others by developing a distinct, desirable photography style.

There are a variety of strategies available for promoting unique products. In this fast-paced world, people still appreciate excellent service. For example, after receiving exceptional service at an elegant Chinese restaurant in San Francisco, my wife and I definitely plan to return, even

though the prices were astronomical. The extraordinary treatment we experienced was so memorable, we will bypass other restaurants to patronize this one again.

Photography clients also respond enthusiastically to top-notch service and adding location photography services can improve a studio's appeal. On those occasions when it is impossible to entice community business leaders into the studio, why not deliver the studio to them?

Organize a project that involves professional photography—such as creating an organizational yearbook for the Rotary Club, which features individual portraits of members. To add more impact to the proposal, offer members a special Rotary insignia background. Bring a variety of backdrops—or use a front-projected background device—to create an assortment of different portrait styles and increase sales. Make two exposures with the Rotary background and four with a second backdrop choice, to yield larger print orders.

Producing photos for a club yearbook greatly enhances a studio's goodwill, reputation, and profits. Photographers who are willing to search for new markets and go on location to provide services unavailable elsewhere, make it easy for potential clients to accept studio proposals. This marketing approach also generates future photographic opportunities.

The same concept works equally well with other organizations, such as the Lions Club, JCs, and Chamber of Commerce. Photographers who pursue location photography can develop a highly successful business, and with special emphasis on backgrounds, implement this idea to reach other markets.

Most people make career choices based on their interests. Fire fighters like to battle blazes and police officers enjoy chasing criminals. Why not create a convenient photography promotion for these groups and transport the studio to fire houses and police stations?

Make the photography experience interesting and exciting by photographing each fire fighter in full uniform, standing

before a blazing fire background. Set up a scene by placing a ladder beside them, rubbing dirt on their faces, and sprinkling water on their coats. Then ask them to hold an ax for an "action" three-fourth-length shot. Will it sell? You bet. And they'll have a great time posing.

After making the "action" photos, ask the subjects to dress in suits for formal portraits. When it's time for clients to view the previews, invite their families to the session, and relish in the sales. The same promotion is profitable with local physicians, attorneys, and "Indian chiefs". Once the list of local professionals is exhausted, move on to other communities.

Creating special, complementary backgrounds plays an important role in securing these promotions. They also make the results more exciting. For some adventurous photographers, location photography has become a full-time occupation. In fact, many transform old buses and trailers into successful traveling photography studios.

The world is saturated with money-making photo opportunities. With thousands of photography businesses going out of business each year, more studio owners should actively seek lucrative photography concepts. Don't be like a person who is lost in a desert, unaware that scratching a hole in the sand can release life-sustaining water. Become a resourceful photographer who discovers lifesaving business opportunities. 