
your bottom line

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Madonna, Bing Crosby, and Perry Como

The Madonna generation is alive and well—and living in America. Pink hair, publicly-displayed belly buttons, spike-heeled pumps, rectangular tinted glasses, pierced noses, and triple-pierced ears all have outdated poodle skirts, ducktail hair cuts, bobby socks, and saddle shoes. And, in case you haven't noticed, Perry Como and Bing Crosby albums aren't around much anymore.

Everything changes. If we spend too much time remembering the "good old days," the world is simply going to turn without us. And some of us may lose our grip on our changing photographic markets. When is the last time you looked objectively at your products and marketing strategies? Are they current and diverse enough to appeal to today's consumers?

If you have to think before answering these questions, you're probably losing market share to competitors that maintain in-vogue product and marketing styles.

It isn't easy to keep a firm grip on your market. Major corporations spend thousands of dollars a year on research firms assigned to categorize and label markets for effective selling. You can do this too, and you don't necessarily need a research firm.

The first step is to categorize and label your own market. There are four basic groups of potential customers—the Madonna group, aged sixteen to twenty-four; the Yuppie group, aged twenty-five to forty; the executive group, aged forty-one to sixty-five; and the senior group, aged sixty-five and over. Each of these people have different tastes and desires.

Before you try to determine what these potential customers are looking for, you must decide if you are going to appeal to all four types or just one or two. If you want to lure all four groups into your studio, you must provide each one with appropriate photography styles.

Many photographers believe some adults do not buy portraits merely because they don't want them. But a closer look may tell you that photographers

aren't telling consumers they should spend their disposable dollars on portraits instead of other luxury items. Also, studios may not be providing their changing markets with what they want.

Wah Lui, the successful, Seattle-based portrait photographer, has his own philosophy concerning the problem.

"Most photographers, who look and act like Perry Como, are trying to produce products for the Madonna and Yuppie generations," he says. "But what happens is they wind up producing products that look like something Bing Crosby would have bought."

Producing products that would have appealed to Bing Crosby may be acceptable if you're appealing to people over age fifty-five. But the fact of the matter is, there is a whole new world of young people out there who want something else. They may not know exactly what it is, so you have to tell them.

The Madonna generation is looking for razzle and dazzle. You can provide this by using hot-colored back-drops and modern props like flashy jewelry and clothing. Look in the latest issue of *Rolling Stone* for ideas, or ask your kids.

Yuppies want quality products that will portray them as being successful and prosperous. They want to be pictured standing next to their Maseratis and BMWs, for instance, or perhaps sitting behind office desks where they can look as if they're creatively planning their next achievement. These people have fat spending budgets, and of all age groups, are the most eager to use them.

People between the ages of forty and sixty-five want subtle, understated portrayals of their personalities. They want to be seen as wise and sensitive. These portraits should offer dark wood backgrounds and project an air of worldliness.

Senior citizens want charming portraits that will later endear their memories to their families. These portraits should be lively and bright—portraying their subjects engaged in activities like knitting or playing a musical instrument.

Once you know what your customers want, you must give them everything they pay for and more. The quality of your product is all important. It should be outstanding. If your product is not creative, elegant, and flawless, all of the hard work you do to acquire customers means nothing.

After you have obtained new customers and have provided them with quality products, you must next keep an eagle eye on your competitors. You learned from watching old westerns that "the fastest gunfighter in the west" does not exist. There is always someone who can shoot faster. So it is with photography. Your competitors will always be trying to produce better quality than you. You must keep ahead of them.

You can do this by advertising and getting the word out that you can portray members of all age groups to look the way they want to look, not how you, Bing Crosby, or Perry Como want them to.

Catering to today's changing lifestyles should be the most important aspect of your photography business. It will bring you more customers while working wonders for your bottom line. 