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# Your Bottom Line

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

## Photokina—a crystal ball

Have you ever wished for a look into the future of photography? Imagine what that prophetic look could do for your planning of day-to-day and long-term business activities. It would enable you to offer unique new products and services, attracting new customers and propelling you light-years ahead of the competition. That look into the future would, in short, increase your profits.

One way to glimpse the future of the photographic industry goes unnoticed by many American photographers. I recently attended the 20th biannual Photokina, the World's Fair of Imaging Systems, held in Cologne, West Germany. The world's largest exposition of photographic products by far, Photokina is the best way I know to foresee the future of professional photography.

Attending Photokina is an exciting educational experience, since virtually every major photographic manufacturer in the world displays its wares at the fair, and the size of individual exhibits is often tremendous. Imagine, for instance, a Kodak exhibit larger than the entire trade show area at most regional conventions! In addition, hundreds of smaller companies show products that may not be available on the U.S. market. Each exhibitor at the fair strives to show its very latest items, and many are displayed as prototypes of future products.

Traditionally held in September or October, Photokina has grown with each occurrence to its 1988 size of more than 1,200 exhibitors, from 37 countries, in a 14-building convention facility. It runs from 9 AM to 6 PM for a full week—and a fair-goer would need every hour for just a cursory look at the merchandise in each booth. In fact, merely walking from one end of exhibition to the other occupies a full half-hour. With such an overwhelming array of products, photographers must be selective about which exhibits they examine.

Photokina also offers the opportunity to talk with company owners, managing directors, and other key personnel at al-

most every exhibit, for better insights on trends and products.

As for "the future," visitors to this year's fair observed the tremendous impact of the "electronic revolution" on professional photography. Only four years ago, for example, electronic still video cameras were first introduced at Photokina, but were quite expensive and of marginal quality. This year, all major camera manufacturers showed their still-video models, featuring significant advances that should prompt professionals to consider the role of still-video imaging in their photography studios.

Color copiers also made news at the exposition. Insert a 4x5 color portrait into one of these sophisticated machines, and it produces a matching print in sizes up to 8x10 inches—of such high quality that it is difficult to distinguish from the original. Print-to-print photographic copies will certainly be important to photo studios in the near future.

Photokina 1988 emphasized video as well, including the best in consumer- and broadcast-level merchandise. Most video-equipment exhibitors allow fair-goers to experiment with the equipment in demonstration areas for their own evaluation. In addition, an abundance of minilab equipment at the exposition demonstrated the expanding popularity of one-hour photo processing.

Professionals attending Photokina, and observing the evidence of electronic revolution, may be somewhat intimidated by impending technological changes—but there is another way to look at it. Change is inevitable. Instead of being daunted by it, view it as an opportunity for growth. Cultivate the opportunity, and change can be a ticket to a more secure and profitable future.

Photo-industry entrepreneurs may also create new business opportunities. Exhibitors display many products that are not distributed in the United States, and have been passed over by major suppliers. Manufacturers may be willing to make arrangements with an enterprising studio owner,

who markets the product to other studio owners, simply to gain some U.S. distribution. Many import and distribution businesses started exactly this way.

Surprisingly, very few American professional photographers take advantage of the opportunities at Photokina. The next Photokina is scheduled for the fall of 1990. Now is the time to begin planning—start by writing the German American Chamber of Commerce, New York City, for information on Photokina 1990 and assistance in booking lodging. Early preparations are necessary as available lodging becomes scarce closer to exposition time.

Cologne is a fascinating city with a wide array of sites and experiences, and an efficient public transportation system that makes getting around easy. A trip to Photokina is the ideal focal point for a German or European vacation.

I have attended three Photokina exhibitions, each bigger and better than the last. The World's Fair of Imaging Systems can indeed be your window to the future—and the passport to a more secure bottom line. 