

# School event video productions

Youth sports opens lucrative studio market

By Dr. Henry J. Oles

Cr.Photog.

**C**an a family-owned studio generate a million dollars in business a year? Loyd and Patty Overcash, of Houston, Texas, are living proof that it can. The Overcash's 1990 gross sales increased 40 percent over the previous year, and the 1991 sales projections are higher—\$1.25 million. Today, with many family-owned studios struggling with less than \$200,000 in gross sales, the Overcashes are actually trying to control their rate of studio growth.

When Loyd Overcash opened a photography studio out of his home 11 years ago, he grossed \$20,000 the first year. His wife, Patty, joined the business in 1983 and together they built a successful Little League photography business—a market often avoided by portrait photographers. Their efforts led to football, soccer, bas-

ketball, and other sport team photography assignments. Because of the moderate climate in Houston, Overcash was able to photograph youth teams almost year-round. He has been known to photograph as many as 3,500 Little League players in one-and-a-half days.

Averaging a \$10 sale per player, the Overcashes generally donate \$1 or \$2 per teammate back to each team, as well as sponsor several Little League teams each year. Because they charge reasonable prices and developed strong relationships with their clients, it is difficult for a competitor to seize their business.

Some photographers may accuse the Overcashes of giving too much away. However, Loyd Overcash considers his "freebies" excellent promotional investments. "I can spend thousands of dollars on news-

paper advertising that may bring nothing," he said, "but I choose to do favors for clients that guarantee financial returns."

The studio not only targets youth sports photography successfully, but has emerged into a full-service studio dedicated to customer service. While most competitors close on Mondays and early on Saturdays, Loyds Photography and Video doors are open from 9 AM to 8 PM on weekdays and 9 AM to 5 PM on Saturdays, enabling "working people" to fit photography sittings into their schedules.

The Overcashes invest heavily in unusual, yet efficient, promotions. For example, the studio videotapes high school football games in the area, at no charge to the schools. The Overcashes also purchase full-page ads in each school football program, encouraging game spectators to purchase a copy of the game videotape for \$20—and generally receive enough orders to more than cover costs.

Videotaping high school athletic events offers the studio the opportunity to conduct "gimmick" promotions. Thousands of spectators see staff members wearing distinctive "Loyds Photography and Video" jackets. In addition, there is a special promotion when a half-time announcement is made over the stadium loud speaker, telling spectators to look for a "red dot" in football programs. The individual who finds the "red dot" wins a game videotape. The cost of one videotape generates free publicity worth hundreds of dollars—a great tradeoff.

The studio currently occupies a 4,500-square-foot space in a popular shopping center strip on Houston's Northwest side. The Overcashes depend on nine full-time and 22 part-time staff members, including contract photographers, to help handle business. They communicate with key personnel with nine two-way radios and two cellular phones, and consider their communications system as valuable as another full-time employee.

Video production is a major component to the studio's success. The Overcashes have at least \$150,000 invested in frequently used video gear, including five three-chip 3/4-inch broadcast-quality units and three camcorders. The complete editing suite contains an assortment of switchers, recorders, editors, and a time-base corrector and handles 3/4-inch, S-VHS, 8mm video, and VHS formats. Special events, such as weddings, are recorded with one to four cameras, depending on the customers' preference. Edited or non-edited results are also available.

"Editing is expensive, so I want to have something available for any pocketbook," Overcash said.

To cover community events, an em-

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ployee monitors police radios from the back room of the studio. When something exciting happens in town, Overcash sends a video team out to record it and frequently sells the footage to local television stations. In fact, television stations often contract Loyds Photography and Video to cover special events they are unable to document. Revenue from these contracts help finance equipment and personnel and enables the studio to make higher profits on conventional video assignments.

Loyds Photography and Video is also making a strong push to increase senior portraiture. The studio already services a number of schools in its area, but to attract more seniors into the studio, the Overcashes installed a front-projection background device. The studio offers high-tech projected-image backgrounds, which seniors find exciting, as well as traditional poses and backdrops to satisfy parents and grandparents.

The studio also increased its wedding photography and video business. One employee was hired specifically to handle the wedding division of the company and books up to six weddings a weekend.

In response to clients' desire for instant gratification, the Overcashes installed a Lab Pro RTS package printer and Colenta processor, which not only saves on lab costs but permits the studio to offer clients faster service. Clients no longer wait two weeks for proofs and four weeks for prints. Now, it takes only three days for clients to pick up final photographs. With this system, the studio can schedule Christ-

mas season portrait sittings as late as December 22.

Overcash doesn't consider himself a photographer any more. He views himself as a business manager running an establishment that produces photography and video productions.

Some time ago I wrote a column expressing considerable concern for the future of typical Mom-and-Pop studios. However, Loyds Photography and Video is not typical, but an exception. As long as this studio maintains its current business approach—which can be adopted by any studio in the country—a healthy bottom line is virtually guaranteed. ■

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