

TEN YEARS OF "YOUR BOTTOM LINE"

By Dr. Henry J. Oles

An Introduction

Whether you are aware of it or not, every photographer who operates a studio enters a war zone. Studio owners are forced to face an onslaught of daily attacks made by a variety of competitors, both large and small. Large competitors include huge photographic companies with annual sales figures reaching hundreds of millions on dollars. These operations possess powerful logistical advantages over independent operators. But, independents have advantages of their own if they operate intelligently.

The professional photographer must also compete with countless other small studios. Unfortunately, many independents choose to fight with each other for the same piece of business by cutting prices and thus profits in order to attract clients. If that isn't enough, photographers are also faced with rapid technological advances and an ever more photographically sophisticated public. The situation results in an increased number of consumers capable of fulfilling their own photographic needs, therefore bypassing professional photographers.

There is another important competitive challenge that professional photographers seldom consider: The hundreds of thousand of non-photographic products which attract consumer leisure dollars. Every time a consumer decides to purchase a neck tie as a gift, instead of a portrait, the professional photographer loses potential income. Even worse, the entire

photographic industry experiences a financial loss whenever leisure dollars are spent on non-photographic products. In summary, professional photographers are not photographic companies if they wish to obtain financial success.

How does one cope with such an overwhelming array of problems? What is the fate of independent photographers? I believe that some are doomed to extinction but others have the opportunity to be highly successful.

In my travels, I meet with countless professionals...from key people working for large photographic operations to small-sized studio owners. Generally, the big guys are extremely successful. In fact, one of the main problems many large studios face is how to cope with rapid growth. On the other hand, there are many independent studio owners heading toward bankruptcy and others who count the days to retirement, hoping to escape before the demise of their business. Fortunately, successful independent photographers, making more money than ever before, also exist. Indeed this is a time of both drought and glorious opportunity.

How does a professional photographer attain feast rather than famine? I have attempted to address this question in a variety of ways over the past ten years in my column, "Your Bottom Line." The ideas presented in these articles are not all my own. While many originate from my life experiences, I have gained great insight from photography industry friends and acquaintances. Collectively, these examples present view points on how to run a successful studio.

Many readers have noticed that these columns seldom discuss photographic artistry. Although important, artistry

is not a critical factor in operating a profitable studio. Acquiring practical, solid business skills is far more significant to success. Unfortunately, most small struggling studio owners place more emphasis on creative artistry than on business management. Large, successful studios, on the other hand, place considerably more importance on business management than on photographic artistry. This data should tell photographers something about what it takes to build a financially successful business.

Most small studios will never be among the large businesses, unless the owners close shop to join them. So, how can a small business survive? The key is to place more emphasis on sound business management and even greater effort on pleasing the customer with highly innovative products and special services. Although this philosophy holds true for large and small businesses alike, independent studios have a distinct advantage over their larger competitors. By being small, they can react to changing situations more rapidly, make immediate use of new products and techniques, as well as provide customers with personalized service and superior products.

It's a big world with plenty of room for photography studios of all sizes to achieve success. Photographers who obtain business management skills, follow a plan and work hard, can build a prosperous business regardless of their studio size.

I hope that my writing efforts and suggestions over the past ten

years have helped readers enjoy their photography careers and elevate their lifestyle by achieving an improved bottom line.

About EPS Photographic

EPS Photographic is one of the most unique manufacturers in the entire photographic industry. It not only specializes in creating a variety of highly innovative products, specifically designed to help professional photographers increase profits, but also places tremendous importance on customer service and customer education.

EPS was stated in the late 1970s by Henry Oles, who created accessories for background projection. The company soon began developing and manufacturing the now highly popular Scene Machine virtual background system. Back then, most professional photographers frowned at the concept of virtual backgrounds and refused to even test it. It was considered a "gimmick."

Today, professional photographers all over the world recognize the Scene Machine as a key component to their studio operation. Through extensive educational efforts, EPS helps photographers learn how to effectively make this tool a profitable addition to their studios. The company offers monthly workshops designed to teach photographers how to properly operate the Scene Machine and incorporate proven promotional techniques into their businesses.

EPS was in the development of "AutoStudio," which incorporated the very first video proofing system. EPS has been instrumental in developing a variety of video proofing systems, today offering the

Gallery and PortraitView digital systems. In addition, EPS has created the Gallery Pro Digital, an all digital studio that is enjoying significant success. EPS also assembles and markets the Lab Pro package printers which create prints from wallets to 16x20's in minutes.

In 1993, EPS Photographic established Pixel Magic, Inc., a sister company which created the Pixel Magic electronic imaging system (now known as the Digital Designer). Pixel Magic has since created a variety of state of the art digital products, including the EIS-1 Event Imaging System, Photo Ditto, First Impressions, PhotoView, and other digital products. In January, 1998, EPS and Pixel Magic Merged.

A special characteristic of EPS Photographic is that the owners have always employed the products they produce in their own photographic studio. For example, Marian Oles Photography is not only a beta testing facility, but also a popular studio serving the needs of the San Marcos community. EPS employs professional photographers to assist with the design and evaluation of products, as well as provide customers with exceptional technical assistance.

For information about EPS Photographic and Pixel Magic Imaging, contact the Marketing Department, PO Drawer 767, San Marcos, Texas 78667. 800-467-4935 or 512-396-7251. You can also check our website at: www.pxlmagic.com