
Your Bottom Line

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The wheels of progress keep turning

When it comes to operating a successful business, one thing is certain—most techniques and procedures which may have been effective a few years ago are not adequate today. In order to be successful in the current market place, studio owners must always strive to operate at a higher and higher level of sophistication. In order to attain future success, it is essential to elevate skills and products to an even greater level. It's called progress.

As an example, I recently came across a copy of the very first color advertisement created for our studio wedding photography services. It was a 4x8-inch slim line card featuring a color photograph of the first outdoor bridal couple portrait my studio photographed. The text promoted the studio's color photography and innovative outdoor candid wedding images.

Although the photograph wasn't bad, even by today's standards, the promotional piece itself would not receive a high evaluation compared to current wedding photography advertising. Yet, when it was created, the card was extremely innovative and effectively attracted new business.

Because ever more sophisticated advertising and promotional techniques are required to be successful in today's photography market, studio owners must consistently aim to make improvements in both product and promotion.

One of my first professional photography assignments was a class reunion portrait. My studio soon became one of the first in its area to create a group portrait at the beginning of the event, and return to the reunion location with processed black-and-white prints four hours later. Back then, this was highly innovative, and the special service resulted in a significant number of new assignments.

A large number of studios and one-hour labs have entered the reunion photography market, and nearly everyone in the business today returns color prints the same night of the event. Consequently, aggressive photographers are looking for fresh ways to secure reunion contracts and squeeze even more revenue out of them.

I've noticed some excellent methods

for increasing profits. For example, in addition to group photographs, some especially imaginative photographers produce formal portraits of individual class members in studio-style poses. They also shoot a variety of candid photos throughout the event.

These individuals generally receive payment for 8x10-inch class portrait prints immediately. They also increase their profit margin by sending each class member a small, printed booklet about a month after the reunion. This miniature-size "year book" includes individual portraits, a variety of candid photos, plus valuable information about former school mates, such as names, addresses, and biographical information.

In addition, class members receive the "proofs" of the formal portrait created of them, plus an order form for additional photos. The photographer generally calls these individuals a few days after they receive the booklet, to entice them into placing orders. Not only does this kind of service greatly increase the studio's chances of landing another reunion contract, it significantly increases their overall profit potential.

Today's successful photographers should not be satisfied with just making a profit from one group portrait. They recognize much more potential in a class reunion photograph assignment, and do everything possible to make the opportunity more profitable. Although it may require an investment in time and promotional dollars, the positive results to their bottom line is worth the effort. These studio owners take the class reunion photography business to a whole new level. In order to compete, other photographers will have to offer the same services, and more.

Photographers who investigate different marketing approaches may discover that with only a minimal amount of extra effort, they can substantially increase their earnings.

There was a time when wedding portraits consisted of nothing more than formal photos taken in a photographer's studio the day of the wedding. Then came candid wedding albums. Today, a successful

wedding photography business offers a variety of services, including elegant pre-bridal formal portraits, a candid wedding photography album, video production of the ceremony and reception, plus honeymoon photos and family albums.

Even the wedding albums offered today are a far cry from those created just a few years ago. No longer does a bride only order 24 8x10-inch prints. Today's albums feature a wide variety of print sizes in unique arrangements. Again, progress brings change and change opens doors to growth and opportunity. A bride who planned to spend \$500 on wedding photography, can easily be enticed into placing a \$1,500 order—and feel great about her decision.

When I was a high school senior, it was traditional to visit a photography studio and have a half dozen standardized photographs made with the same background. Any photographer who operated this way today would quickly be out of business.

Contemporary senior photographers employ a wide variety of photographic techniques to make their images unique and appealing. This may include indoor and outdoor sittings, background projection, special lighting and posing techniques, and innumerable other ideas. All of these concepts must be presented to senior portrait clients via highly sophisticated promotional material. Again, the goal is to attract more clients and sell more photographs. And, it works.

While it may have become more complicated to be successful in the photography business today, the rewards justify the extra effort. Photographers who continue to operate their businesses using the same methods in past years may find themselves in financial trouble. However, studio owners who continually strive to stay ahead prepare themselves for future growth and a stronger bottom line. 