

9. The Sales Process

Mmm . . . Cheese!

If you like cheese as much as I do, then you've probably had the opportunity at some point to visit a factory where they make cheese. One of my favorite places is the Tillamook Cheese Factory in Tillamook, Oregon. You walk in and are immediately overcome by the immensity and grandness of the building. If you want, you can take a guided tour behind the scenes and hear about the entire process from beginning to end.

If you know anything about making cheese, you know it all starts with milk from a cow (and if you have ever been to Tillamook, there are cows everywhere). From there, exact ingredients, temperatures, and aging are combined to give each type of cheese its distinctive flavor and texture. There are conveyer belts, and cheese cutters, wrappers, boxers, stackers, and loaders, and quality-control personnel making sure that every single block of cheese meets rigorous standards.

At the end, big boxes are loaded onto a big truck and then carried away to the retail stores, where you and I can go in, buy the block of cheese, and take it home to enjoy! They definitely have their system down; every step along the way is controlled by a process—and at the end of that process, a marvelous block of cheese is produced that tastes exactly like the block of cheese you bought last week at the store. However, if any part of the system fails, the cheese doesn't make it to our bellies.

The Five-Step Process

Just like making a good block of cheese requires a specific process, you should have a well-planned system in place for selling your product. The sales process for photographers is broken down into five steps, meaning you have five different chances to build your relationship, and to build value in your products and services. Let's talk about them now.

Step 1: The Pre-Sell

The pre-sell is everything that you do before a prospective client makes contact with you. Your marketing, networking, the professionalism of your marketing arsenal, your advertising, word of mouth, the irresistibility of your offers, your relationships with people throughout your community—all of these things go into creating value for your work and your business. Together, they comprise the first step in creating an effective sales atmosphere.

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something has for our life.**

Earlier, I mentioned that people make judgments about you within the first five seconds after they are exposed to your voice, your signage, your business card, your physical appearance, your answering machine, etc. That five seconds will either help you build value or it will take it away. If you haven't already done so, I strongly suggest you spend some quiet time with the Five-Second Image Challenge on pages 58–62.

Perception is reality; we all make decisions in our subconscious minds about what kind of value something has for our life and how much we are willing to spend for that value. If you want to be viewed as someone worth spending a lot of money on, every aspect of your studio's brand must be top-notch.

Step 2: The Initial Contact

On the Phone. Our initial contact with a prospective client usually occurs on the phone—and I would venture to say that, for most of, taking phone calls is not our favorite thing to do. You didn't get into photography be-



A well-appointed and well-organized area for taking calls, like this work station in Christa Hoffarth's studio, will make any employee who works in the reception area feel like a real professional.

cause you liked talking on the phone, did you? However, this is the first real opportunity for you to sell yourself, educate the prospect about what they can expect from their experience with you, and begin to build a long-term relationship with them (the key to any successful business). Understanding that the telephone is one of the most important—if not *the* most important—selling tools you have will help you begin to look at it a little differently. After all, when a call comes into your studio, it means your marketing has done its job—and now it's time to begin the sales process.

The first rule to follow is that you always want to be smiling and happy when you answer that phone, even if you are having a bad day. People can sense positive energy and negative vibes through the telephone, so take a deep breath before answering the phone and show your best side. We all have bad days now and then, but you should never let that come across on the phone. As soon as the

phone is answered, it's game time! The goal is to get them excited about you, your photography, and the experience they will have with you

Questions About Pricing. It doesn't matter what country you live in, whether you are located at the far reaches of the earth or in located in downtown Metropolisville, we all get the same question during this first phone call: How much? Since you know that 99 percent of all prospects are going to ask that question, wouldn't it make sense to have some sort of script figured out ahead of time instead of trying to spontaneously come up with an answer?

In many cases, your answers may actually be questions—questions that help you better understand the prospect's needs. After all, people ask about price because they don't know what else to ask. What they really want to know, though, is whether you are the right photographer for them. Are you going to be able to meet their

needs? Allow them to enjoy themselves? That’s what they really want to know . . . but the only question they can think of is, “How much?”

Imagine you walked into a friend’s jewelry store and they said, “Hey, would you do me a favor and watch the store for a few minutes while I go to the bank to make a deposit? The phone hasn’t rung all day, but if it does go ahead and answer it and do the best that you can.” You agree, and he leaves you all alone with a million dollars worth of jewelry . . . and the phone.

All of a sudden the phone rings, so you answer it and a nice young man on the other end of the phone asks, “How much are your diamond rings?” What do you say? At this point you have no useful information for him, because you know nothing about diamonds—but can you think of some questions to ask him? How about:

1. What size diamond are you looking for?
2. Is it for a woman or a man?
3. What type of cut do you want?
4. What type of setting do you want? Gold? Platinum?
5. Do you need the ring by a certain date?
6. Would you like the ring delivered or would you prefer to pick it up?
7. Do you have a budget in mind for the ring?

That wasn’t so hard, was it? In fact, there are probably many more questions you can think of off the top of your head. So why is it, then, that when someone asks us how much we charge for one of our products or services, we break out into a cold sweat and our stomach starts to churn? Why do we feel that we need to give them some sort of solid answer before we have any information? The biggest mistake many photographers make is that they try to sell every single product they have. As a result, they never really find out what the customer wants. God gave you *two* ears and *one* mouth for a very important reason: you should listen twice as much as you talk.

Price is usually part of the conversation, but rarely is it the deciding factor as to whether or not the client will come to you for their portraits. So, if price isn’t going to be part of the deciding factor for them, then don’t *you* make it the stumbling block. Your ability to discuss pricing confidently is directly related to your strength and be-

lieve in yourself and your products. If you don’t have faith that your product is worth every penny, you won’t be able to sell it. (*Note:* A little later on we will dive into some meat-and-potatoes techniques for handling objections over the phone and in the sales room.)

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Additional Tips. Here are some quick-hitting concepts that you should remember about the initial consultation—whether it is on the phone or in person.

1. Always speak with a clear and professional voice—show confidence in yourself, your prices, and your system. If you sound and act confident, that will rub off on your prospect and they in turn will have confidence in you as well.
2. When asked prices, don’t give specifics, give ranges. Once you have qualified your prospect and know what it is exactly they are looking for, you want to say something like this:

Mrs. Jones, someone in your situation can typically expect to invest between \$300 and \$1200 on their portraits. We have no minimum and you can spend whatever you would like. How does that sound?

This lets them know that you really can work with just about any budget—but you have also planted the seeds for an order north of \$1000. (You may need to adjust your range to fit your particular studio’s numbers, but I think you get the point.) After you have said that, one of two things will happen. Either she will say, “Did you say \$300?” and fall over dead, or she will say, “Oh, that’s fine,” and move on.

3. Planting the “seeds of money” with everything you say is also a big part of the emotionally driven sales process. Use key words and phrases like “wall por-

traits,” “packages,” “collections,” “folios,” “multi-purpose packages,” and “albums” to paint a beautiful picture in their mind about what fantastic work you can do for them.

4. Use qualifying questions to establish the needs, budget, and desires of the client. (Remember the diamond story on page 87?)
5. Accept the fact that not everybody is meant to be your customer. Once you have a solid idea about what a prospect is looking for, if you don't feel they fit into your game plan it's okay to send them down the road to another photographer. Not everyone can afford you, and not everyone has to be your customer. It's okay to just say no.

The Ping-Pong Exercise. Let's take some time right now to do what I call the Ping-Pong Exercise, which will give you a firm grasp on how to handle initial contacts with clients on the phone. Phone conversations are usually just like a tennis match or a ping-pong game, with several volleys back and forth. This exercise is intended to begin for you the process of creating powerful scripts that can be used anytime, anywhere.

Phone conversations are usually just like a tennis match or a ping-pong game . . .

I'm going to give you some examples of statements that prospects all over the world seem to ask photographers on the phone, and I want you to write down how you would respond to each one. This will be the beginning of your phone script. I highly recommend you come back to this exercise later today and give it some more thought—but for right now, go ahead and jot down some short answers. Ready?

1. How much are your 8x10s?
2. How much will family portraits cost me?
3. Can you mail me some information?
4. I will think about it and call you back
5. The guy down the street is a lot less than you are!

6. Wow! Your prices are the most expensive I have found yet!

You may have encountered some questions—or stalls—other than the ones I have mentioned here, so take a minute right now to write those down. Then note how you would respond.

Now we are going to switch gears. I want you to make a list of questions that *you* will ask. Here are some ideas to get you started:

1. How did happen to hear about us?
2. When was the last time you had your family professionally photographed?
3. Do you have a budget for your portraits?
4. Do you have a deadline when you will need these portraits completed?
5. How many people are in your family? What are their names?
6. Do you have any pets you would like to have included in your portraits? What are their names?
7. Do you have a special location where you would like to have your portraits created?
8. Besides the wall portrait for you, have you considered gift portraits for the rest of your family and close friends?
9. How large of a wall portrait are you thinking of for this occasion?
10. What style of photography do you enjoy the most? Traditional? Black & white? Casual?

I hope this exercise got your creative mojo working and started you thinking about how you deal with prospects on the phone. Thinking along these lines will help you access information about what the customer is looking for and will get them talking about themselves and their family—which keeps things on an emotional level. The more you can get them to talk about their family, or their wedding, or their child, the more emotionally attracted they will become to your studio and to you as their photographer. Again, we are in the business of selling emotion. If you can do that, the sales will follow.

Step 3: The Session

Once a prospect has committed to coming into your studio for a session, they no longer are a prospect—they have now earned the stripes of a customer. Hooray! Therefore, the next steps in the sales process are the walk-around and the actual session. Now the customer is actually in your studio, the sales game really gets to be fun and exciting!

First Impressions. When a customer first steps into your showroom or your gallery, their senses are firing on all cylinders. Their eyes are observing every little detail around the room—your wall portraits, frames, furniture, lighting, carpet, paint colors, curtains, and on and on. Their ears hear every sound that is being made—the music, the sound of traffic on the road, people talking in the background, a small water feature you may have in the corner. Their nose can smell every fragrance—and not all fragrances are considered good. The taste buds in their mouth can even taste the air. All of these senses lead into their heart, and how they *feel* about you and your business.

Be the Best Version of Yourself. It goes without saying that you *must* make sure that everything your customers comes in contact with is the best it can be. However, you also need to be true to yourself and stick to who you are. If you are not the highfalutin, baby-grand-piano, vaulted-ceiling, four-car-garage, hang-out-at-the-country-club type of photographer, then don't pretend you are. Me, I'm more of a barbecue-on-the-back-deck, guitar-in-the-corner, hang-out-at-the-beach, playing-with-my-kids type of guy. That's not to say that I don't enjoy the finer things in life, I definitely do, but we all need to stick to our core values and beliefs—and who we are is expressed in the way we make people feel when they walk through our doors. Just be true to yourself and you will find that like-minded people will flock to you.

Greeting Your Client. The first thing that should happen when clients arrive is a warm welcome to make them feel at home. Take their coats, then offer them something to drink. This is an easy place to go the extra mile and provide an experience they can't get anywhere else. Consider offering soft drinks that come in old-fashioned looking bottles or bottled water with your logo on it. Many people will gladly indulge in cup of gourmet coffee—and even if you are not a coffee drinker, there is no better smell than

fresh coffee brewing coffee. (*Note:* To get the most bang for your buck scent- and taste-wise, invest in a little grinder; don't buy the coffee that comes straight from the can.) You might even offer a selection of locally made wines—consider listing them on high-quality paper in a nice leather folio, like the wine list you would get at a fine restaurant. These ideas will definitely create a great impression—but don't limit yourself. Think out of the box and bring some new and different ideas to the table. What other kinds of things can you do to provide a six-star experience to your customers?

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The Walk-Around. Once your customer is comfortable, they will automatically do what I call the walk-around, meaning that they will gravitate towards the imagery you have around the room. They will look intently at wall portraits, browse through albums, sit in your chairs, and basically absorb everything that you have to offer.

Let them know that if they have any questions at all, you will be more than happy to assist them. You want them to feel like they are in their own home. This will relax their bodies and their minds, which will help you throughout the remainder of the selling process.

The Planning Session. Next, it's time for the sit-down—or what I like to call the “Planting The Seeds of Money” chat. Basically, this is a planning session. If your customer has specific ideas about poses, clothing, style, mood, etc., this is their opportunity to tell about their vision. It's also a chance for you to get to know them a little better. Many times, the conversation may end up being about where they went on their family vacation, or how their team did over the weekend, or what the kids did last summer. Wherever it leads, just be willing to go with the flow—it's part of the relationship building that will make a huge difference in the long run.

The planning session is also an opportunity for you to continue to “plant money seeds” by talking about the



People are more inclined to buy things they can see and touch. So if you want to sell albums, make sure you have a selection of them displayed attractively. Photograph by Christa Hoffarth.

things they can see around the room. Anything that you want to sell should be on display in your showroom—and nothing smaller than a 16x20-inch print should be visible. If they want to see what one of those big ol’ 8x10s looks like, you can direct them to an album. People are more inclined to purchase items that they can see and touch than products that they are only told about. So make sure you display the products and sizes that you want to sell. Wall collections, digital composites, wall folios, family lifestyle albums—whatever products generate good profits for you and give them a memory they can cherish.

This is a great time to begin fishing for what types of products your customer might be thinking about—allowing you to add some water to the money-seeds that

have been planted. To take this metaphor a little farther, it’s almost as if you are a gardener—fertilizing the ground, planting seeds, watering those seeds, making sure there aren’t any weeds growing anywhere. Ultimately, it means that *you* are maintaining control of the entire process, even though your customer really doesn’t notice anything.

Obviously, nothing has to be decided at this point in the process, but you want to at least get them thinking about all the different options that are available to them. If they want to talk about budget, that’s okay—just make sure that you maintain that high level of excitement during this step. Talk about what you plan to do during the session, what combinations you would like try, and what look you feel would be great in black & white, and how great their clothing choices are—get them ecstatic about what is going to happen—and of course, let them know that the session won’t really hurt too much; the bruises should heal in a couple of weeks!

The Session. During the session, there are even more opportunities to plant some seeds. Whether you are photographing a family, a senior, a child, or an engagement session you can easily keep the buying engine revved up by making a couple of simple statements during the session:

Mrs. Jones, this is absolutely stunning, I can’t wait to see this image big on the wall!

Mrs. Jones, this image is so wonderful that I may even consider using it as one of the large prints in my gallery.

These simple statements yield powerful results. Of course, they aren’t going to come out and immediately say, “Yes, I agree, let’s just go ahead and order up one of your 30x40 canvas prints,” but it *will* get them thinking big.

You can even take it as far as this, “Mrs. Jones, come here. I want you to see this! Then have her look through the viewfinder on your camera. This may sound a little unnerving to you, but when Mrs. Jones looks through that viewfinder, she is seeing the results of all your experience, your understanding of lighting control, and posing, and composition, and background, and mood, and color harmony. This is not some simple snapshot that Uncle Bob

took in the backyard, this is a very special image that you have created just for them. I absolutely guarantee you *will* get tears. You will get a few, “Oh my word, my little baby is growing up.” And you also will get a couple, “That is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.” Emotion, emotion, emotion.

The Wrap-Up. The session is now done and everybody gathers all their stuff. Then it’s time for the wrap-up. At this point, it’s advisable that you sit back down at the table so you can have a short chat about how the session went and how they are feeling. If you are doing your job correctly, they should be so excited that they are nearly jumping out of their skins.

Make sure that every image you do show is pleasing to the eye and sellable.

Now, set a time for them to come back to view the images and place their order—plus give them whatever paperwork you want to send home with them. Be sure to include a price list, along with a worksheet they can fill out that lists all of the possible gift recipients on one side (Mom, Dad, brother, sister, Grandma, Grandpa, aunts and uncles, boyfriends, girlfriends, teachers, special family friends, etc.) and print sizes on the other. This will give them the opportunity to do a little bit of homework before they come back for their ordering session.

Scheduling the Viewing Session. Here’s a good rule of thumb: if their session was 3:00PM on a Tuesday, then more than likely 3:00PM next Tuesday will work as well. Never set an appointment for later the same day or even the next day. Let the emotions they are feeling play around for a little bit. Anything good is worth waiting for! On the other hand, if you wait too long, the emotion will start to dissipate. I don’t let it drag out much beyond one week.

During the next several days you will have time to edit, do some black & white conversions, tweak out a couple of images if that’s what you want to do, and prepare the images for viewing. I suggest you at least do what is called “pretouching” on each image—removing any ob-

vious eyesore or embarrassing blemish. You don’t have to completely retouch each image, but at least make sure that every image you do show is pleasing to the eye and sellable.

Step 4: The Sales and Ordering Session

Designing the Sales Area. There are some basic “must have” elements that go into a productive sales area. Again, it doesn’t have to be big and expensive. There are solutions to every problem, and if you want it bad enough, you will find a way to make it work.

- 1. The feeling of home.** The sales area must be tranquil, relaxing, and comfortable.
- 2. All the trappings.** Provide beverages, candles, soft lighting, and homemade cookies or other snacks.
- 3. Visual enticements.** Showcase properly lit prints, storyboards, wall folios, wall portraits, etc. Everything you want to sell (or, more importantly, everything you want your customers to buy) must be in clear sight. I call it the 45 degree “Cone of Money.” Your customers should be able to sit in the comfortable chair and see everything you have within 45 degrees of where they sit.

When the Customer Arrives. Whether you call it a sales session, an ordering session, the premiere, the unveiling, or the preview, when your customer arrives, they should be welcomed with the same vigor and enthusiasm that you met them with the first time. Let them spend a couple of minutes relaxing and taking their minds off of their job, or their kids, or the traffic, or anything else that causes them stress in their lives. Your studio should be a safe place for

Prepare to Sell a Wall Portrait

One of the last things you can do is grab a tape measure, either your own or even an inexpensive giveaway, and go up to a blank spot on the wall—preferably right next to a very large wall portrait. Then, say, “Mrs. Jones, do me a favor. When you get home, I want you to measure the spots on the walls where a potential portrait might hang.”

As you say those words, pull the tape out as if you were actually measuring the space on your wall. Even if you are a small person, you will be able to pull out at least 20 inches of tape for them to see. It’s just another tiny little seed, but it will return very lucrative results. You will never have a person come back and say, “I measured the spot on my wall and I need one of those big 8x10s.”



If you want to sell wall portraits, you have to show wall portraits. Photograph by Sarah Petty.

them to relax their mind and body for just a little while. Offer to take their coats, get them a refreshment, and invite them to take a seat in your sales room—which should have soft music playing and the lights dimmed. Usually, the excitement is so thick you can taste it in the air. (“Mrs. Jones I can’t wait for you to see your images—they turned out fantastic!”)

The Importance of Digital Projection. Even if you are a film shooter, you should still be using digital projection for your sales. For those of you that are still stuck back in the 20th century and are using proofs, I am going to convince you in the next few paragraphs to stop using proofs immediately and convert to a digital projection sys-

tem. Here are the top reasons why you want to sell via projection.

- 1. You get quicker cash flow.** When your customer places their order, you get usually half (if not all) of the order amount paid up front. With proofs, you may have to wait several weeks, or months before you get your final order *and* any money. I talk to people all the time who have customers who *never* come back and order from their proofs.
- 2. You will get larger orders—guaranteed.** You will at least double, if not triple, your order averages by projecting your images. You will sell more wall portraits, sell more multi-pose packages, and allow your customers to have more fun during the process as well.
- 3. Other people’s opinions are kept out of the sale.** When your proofs go home with a customer, you are leaving yourself open to every Tom, Dick, and Harry who looks at them to throw in their two cents. Then your customer begins to think about things—and you don’t want them *thinking*, you want them *feeling*. The only opinions that matter are yours and your customer’s.
- 4. You’ll reduce copyright infringement.** You won’t have to worry about your customers making illegal copies with their \$99 scanner. If you send proofs home with customers, you may as well start including a scanner as well—you know that’s what they’re doing, don’t you? By projecting, your customer will only get what they order.
- 5. You can address any problems immediately.** Any problem your customer may find with an image can be overcome immediately during their sales and ordering session. If, on the other hand, they take a set of proofs home with them, those objections will fester and grow to the point where they don’t like the image . . . which means they won’t like a certain series of poses . . . then that will lead to them not liking *any* of the images. Sale over. At a projection session, if Mrs. Jones says to you, “I don’t like the blemish on my son’s forehead, and I don’t care for my wrinkles. They make me look old.” You can say, “Well, Mrs. Jones, that’s the great thing about com-

ing to a professional photographer. Before we make any prints at all, we make sure that each image is absolutely to your liking. We will make sure the colors are vibrant, we will remove any blemishes, we can even soften some of those character lines that we all seem to get as we get a little older. Basically, before we print anything, each image will be perfect.” With those few words, the objection is handled effectively.

6. **Only your best work is in the marketplace.** The only prints that are made are ones that they enjoy and want to order, which means all of the ones they didn’t want (I call those the rejects) will never see the light of day. Let’s say you send a set of thirty proofs home with a customer. Realistically, how many of those will they order? Five? Six? Seven? Which means that twenty-three will be rejects. Do you really want to have your customers’ rejects out in the marketplace representing your work? I sure hope not!
7. **You won’t have to chase proofs anymore.** No more calling after twenty-one days and saying, “Mrs. Jones, it’s been three weeks and you need to come in to place your order, or I’m going to have to charge you for the proofs.” Do you think they care? They have already made copies of the ones they like! Having to make a call like certainly doesn’t help the emotional sales process, either—in fact, it puts a big kibosh on it.
8. **Customers absolutely love it.** It’s their family, and you make them feel like gold. You give them a wonderful experience. How could they not love it?
9. **Your images have more impact.** This is the biggest reason that you should project your images: a piece of paper can not evoke the kind of emotion that all of your hard work deserves and demands.

Now, some folks are still out there thinking, “Well that all sounds good, but . . .” I hear all kinds of excuses around the world why photographer feel they can’t use digital projection. Here are some of the leaders (and some notes on why they really aren’t good excuses at all).

1. **I don’t like to sell.** Well then, then find someone who can or learn how to do it yourself. There are

tons of resources out there for you. In fact, you are reading one right now! It’s okay if you don’t like to sell in the traditional sense, but don’t let that keep you from the lifestyle and income you deserve.

2. **I use my proofs as advertising.** You sure do! And we already know that twenty-three out of thirty proofs are rejects. Why would you want your rejects to do your advertising?
3. **I sell my proofs.** Yeah right. And how much do you get if you sell them? Is it enough? Do you think you would have larger order averages if you got rid of your paper proofing?
4. **I don’t have the space.** Okay, that’s a legitimate concern, but you don’t need to have a giant ballroom in order to make an effective sales room. Something as small as a 10x12-foot room will work out just fine. Don’t let space stop you from making the switch.
5. **I don’t have the time.** Let me ask you: if you could invest only one more hour with each customer and potentially double, triple, or quadruple your averages, would you be able to *find* the time? I think so.
6. **I’m a wimp.** The biggest reason I hear: I’m just a big baby and I don’t really have any excuse! When even you yourself realize there’s no excuse, it’s definitely time to get moving and make the change.

Now, let’s get back to the sales and ordering session. Your customer is relaxed, comfortable, and ready to view the images from their sessions.

Do you want your customers’ rejects out in the marketplace representing your work?

The Slide Show. First step is the multi-media slide show that you have produced. There are many great software options out there that do a bang-up job of making your slide show look hip, happening, and cutting edge. (Personally, I recommend ProSelect—check it out at www.timexposure.com.) Most of these programs also



Presenting your images in a digital slide show, rather than sending clients home with paper proofs, has some big advantages for photographers. Here, we see customers relaxing in the projection room at Chatsworth Portrait Studio.

allow you to attach an audio file and then sync your images to the music so they will end at the same time. Royalty free music is available all over these days, so check out what is out there and select some music that captures your style—and their emotion! Make sure that the style of your show reflects the taste and personality of the customer you are with at the time, as well as the type of session. You don't want to use an upbeat rock song with twangy guitars and heavy drums if you are showing heartwarming images of a newborn baby.

The Selection Process. As the slide show is progressing, make note of the comments that are being made about certain images. You can bring these up later on. Right now, though, let them bask in their glory of seeing their family or themselves up on the big screen. For many people, this will be a once-in-a-lifetime experience—and you need to keep that in mind as you go.

Once the show is over, you will get comments like, “How am I supposed to choose?” or “I want them all!” That's exactly the way you want them to feel.

Explain to the client that the next step is going through all of the images one at a time. For each, have them tell you one of three things: I like it, I don't like it, or I'm not sure yet. Don't worry about doing the side by side comparisons yet—you can get to that later. Just have them judge each image by itself. Then, one at a time, go through each image and let your customer tell you what they think. If they are not sure, it becomes a maybe—that simple.

We all have different philosophies on how many images we shoot and how many we should present to our customers, but I will tell you this: there is a point—a certain number of presented images—beyond which all you are doing is spending more time in the selection process. When you pass this point and the selection process becomes cumbersome, the emotional balloon begins to lose some of its air.

Let's say, for this example, that you started with forty images, which is about right for a family, senior, engagement session, child or baby session. Then let's say that after the first time through, you narrowed it down to twenty-three, meaning they eliminated seventeen. That's a good start.

Now, go through the same process again. This time, the client will be more familiar with the images and have a pretty good idea of what the entire session was like. If they are still not sure about a shot, don't worry about it—they don't have to decide right now.

Introduce Additional Products. At the completion of the second round, let's say you are down to seventeen. At this point, Mrs. Jones is going to be thinking, or saying, “Oh my goodness, how am I ever going to choose?” This is the perfect opportunity to bring in some additional products that they may not have been thinking about initially. That's why they invented albums, folios, and wall collections. We all have products that will accommodate multiple images, and this is when you bring them out. You Might say something like:

Mrs. Jones, we have some options here. First, if you can find one image that you can live without, we can get you into a

sixteen-way folio. If you can find seven that you can do without, you can get a ten-print album. Or if you can eliminate nine—over half—we can get you down to an eight-way folio. Okay?

At this point, you may need to let them discuss amongst themselves what they want to do, which is fine. Remember, they are now emotionally attached to these images and it will be very difficult to let them go—even if it means stretching their budget a bit. Let them talk, let them feel

Break away from your traditional thinking and create something unique for your studio . . .

On at least 75 percent of your sessions, you will be able to sell some type of product that allows your customer to keep a multitude of images in a single product. You will have to look at your product line and decide what those items are. If you don't have any, you will need to create some.

A great place to start is with what we call the Lifestyles Album. We developed this product several years ago as a way for people to be able to keep a large number of their images without having to get individual prints of each one. It's basically just either a 4x5, or a 5x7 album with either ten, twenty, or thirty prints inside. Regardless of what type of session you photographed, you can create a beautiful, one-of-a-kind album that captures the personality of your customer.

Something else that has become quite popular is a Wall Collection, which can accommodate eight to twelve images. There are also digital composites that can be created in Photoshop with a couple of easy strokes. The sky is the limit here, so break away from your traditional thinking and create something unique for your studio that no one else has.

Final Selections. Once they have decided that part of the sale, it's time to move on and select the images for their package. You can use the same process, but now

there are fewer images, so you can switch it up just a little bit. For example:

Now Mrs. Jones, I know you like all of the remaining images, but what we need to do is decide which ones will only be included in your [name product] and which ones we will be doing something else with—images for gift portraits, wall portraits, gift wallets, small folios, etc. Okay?

Suggestive Selling. It may take a couple of times to get down to their final selections, and you may even need to do some suggestive selling here. For example:

Mrs. Jones, if I can recommend something to you, I would suggest using the portrait of the family down by the river as your large wall portrait for the living room. Then, use the black & white of the family in front of the trellis as a smaller wall portrait in the dining room or hallway. How does that sound?

You are the professional and you have earned the right to suggest things to your customers. When you go to the doctor and he makes a suggestion about how to recover from your sprained ankle or tells you what to do to lower your cholesterol, do you listen? You bet you do. Your customers will listen to you as well, just give yourself the chance!

Finally, Select the Wall Portrait. Once the customer has selected the images for their package, their wallets, and other specialty products, the last thing they select is their wall portrait. That way, the process begins with little de-

Should I Do À La Carte Pricing, or Should I Do Packages?

In my mind, the best strategy is to have your à la carte prices listed in order to establish a baseline value for your products. The meat of your sales, though, should come from the sale of packages, bundles, or collections—whatever you want to call them. You can use the techniques we talk about in chapter 14 to help build some packages that not only give your clients a compelling reason to invest at a higher level, but also will give *you* substantial profits. That way, both you and the client go home happy!

cisions and then ends with biggest and most important decision.

This is completely the opposite of how most photographers have done their sales in the past. However, having the customer select the wall portrait *first* effectively kills any chance of them ordering large packages, or albums—or anything else for that matter. They are asked to sprint to the finish line and make the biggest decision first, which leaves lots of emotion (and dollars) scattered along the way. You will be fighting an uphill battle for the rest of the session. Additionally, the wall portrait should be your customer's favorite image from the session, and that takes some time for them to decide.

People won't remember what you did or said, they will remember how you made them feel.

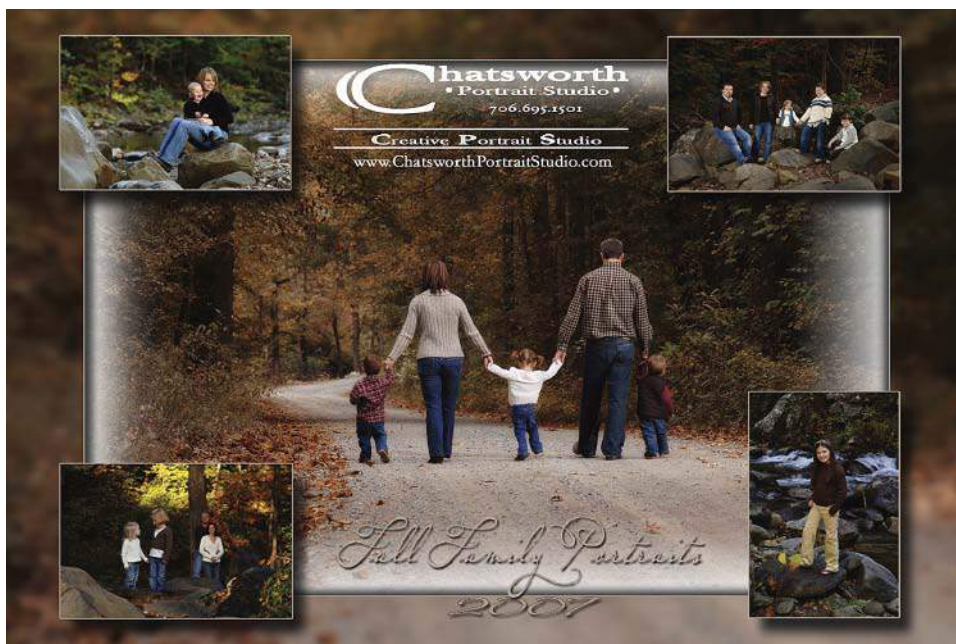
At this stage, the order is complete. Your customer has selected the images and products they wanted, they have known the prices throughout the entire process, and they are completely and totally immersed in your sales system without even knowing it—or feeling it! They have also made all their own decisions along the way . . . with a little help from you, of course!

Step 5: The Follow-Up

The last step in the sales process is the follow up, which I believe is one of the most important parts. Keep in mind that this is one stage of the process where little things really mean a lot. Writing a thank-you note within twenty-four hours after each client's session is always nice, as is making a quick phone call two to three days after their finished order is picked up. You could even consider sending out complimentary gift certificates for them to give out to their friends and family—or even a thank-you gift like a gift certificate to the local coffee house for some free cappuccinos.

Are your competitors doing this? Do you want to swim in a red ocean with every other photographer in your market, all fighting over the same customers with the same techniques, the same products, the same service . . . or do you want to create a blue ocean where you are the only swimmer in the sea?

In the end, people won't remember what you did or what you said, they will remember how you made them *feel*. Passion is the fulcrum point of all sales. If you show passion during your relationship with your customers, that emotion will transfer to them, and will create a desire in their hearts to *buy*. Passion is an emotional feeling that is like the mumps—it's very contagious!



A piece from Chatsworth Portrait Studio strikes the right emotional note in promoting their fall family portraits.

Power Corner

Focus on . . .

Tim and Beverly Walden



I met Tim and Bev several years ago at a PPA convention and can remember how impressed I was with their attitude toward life: family first, then business. They have figured out over the years how to blend their individual talents and skills into one successful partnership, and their forward-thinking approach to business has

carved out a niche that is an example to the entire industry. Their work is truly inspirational and, as you will be able to tell from this interview, they love living. For information on Tim and Bev, log onto www.waldensphotography.com.

Mitche: What is the biggest challenge facing the industry and your business in the coming years?

Tim: I think it is the same challenges that faced us for years, its separating yourself from the crowd, defining yourself—especially right now. We have all this diversity with technology, with equipment, and we've got people entering this profession in numbers unseen before. So I think the real challenge is defining yourself as unique, so that in the midst of all the voices, all the faces, all the photographs in the crowd, you can stand out. That's easy to say, but in the execution it is very challenging. And while defining yourself you are maintaining excellence amidst all the novelty. Technology has provided so many avenues that a range of people are getting into this. If we are not careful, we also forget to maintain the excellence.

Bev: With so many young people jumping into the industry without a lot of background, I think excellence will be the key. Excellence and actually understanding lighting, and quality photography, and all the different things that we have studied for decades, is going to be the difference between making it or not.

In a nutshell, what is your marketing philosophy?

Tim: To sell the results of your art, not your art itself. I think that there is a lesson to be learned from that sentence. Too many photographers sell 8x10s, they sell texture sprays, they sell mounting. Really successful people, in my opinion, sell the way the art makes you feel. They sell the results of the art. They build the relationship. People want to buy the experience, they want to buy feeling, they want to buy a celebration. That, to me, in a nutshell, is what we are selling. Brand yourself tighter than you ever have before.

Bev: When you think of that brand or who you are, it isn't something to be taken lightly. You are going to be doing it for a long time. Most importantly for us, it is selling the relationship. When you are branding it isn't an overnight thing, it is something that takes time and years of your message going out.

What is the most important attribute for becoming a Power Marketer for photographers?

Tim: The first thing that comes to my mind is having a clearly defined vision. I think photographers are their own

worst enemies. We are so taken by all the things that are around us—but there are some wonderful things that other people do that I don't do. When I look at it, I admire it, but I don't always go home and do it. That sounds like an odd statement, but you clearly need to define your own vision so that everything lines up with your own style of photography—your thoughts, your logo, your paper color—and then you have to stick with it. Unless you clearly define yourself you are going to find yourself with whatever the wind blows tomorrow, and people out there are going to say, "Cool paper, but I have never heard of this person before." The most powerful tools are not cool, clever little things. They are principles that we have known for years but rarely do. Not giving up and being patient are also important.

How does your marketing come into play with all the priorities that you have set for your life?

Deb: The most important thing to us is our family above everything. It is so easy to push that aside when you are building a business, but you have to make yourself realize

that you have your children for only a certain amount of time. The importance of our family also ties into our love for photography—we are helping others to celebrate those relationships that we have enjoyed with our children. I don't really think we became great photographers until we had our children.

How many children do you have? Are they part of the business at all?

Bev: We have two daughters. They are pretty grown, but they still need Mommy and Daddy. We are training our oldest in the business right now. I have been teaching her Photoshop. She wants to work behind the scenes.

If you could recommend two things to someone who is just beginning, what would they be?

Tim: These are simple to say, but difficult to execute. First, define yourself in the marketplace. Find your niche. Brand yourself. And do one thing extremely well. While maintaining your excellence, that will define your marketing. If

We create emotion in our portraits, so we started promoting it in our marketing.

you create the desire, then your marketing can fulfill that desire in the people giving you the opportunity. Second, develop your hook. Anytime that you can add emotion to your imagery, then you sell the results of your art, not the art itself. When images speak for the relationship between a father and son, a mother and daughter, or a husband and wife, it can be taken into your marketing to start selling that relationship, not that piece of paper.

What has been your most successful marketing philosophy or campaign?

Bev: It was when we learned the value of emotion and started treating that in our marketing. We create emotion in our portraits, so we started promoting it in our marketing pieces, running ads with faces and the slogan “Behind Every Face is a Story.” Everything changed with that slogan, and we matched everything to it—business cards,

banners, letterhead, website, etc. We are also running a campaign right now called “Few Things in Life are Black and White.”

When you are away from the studio, what do you guys do for fun?

Tim: Together or individually? We enjoy watching movies. We love going to Starbucks and hang out and talk. We met our daughter the other day and just talked for a couple of hours about nothing. And we enjoy spending time with friends—friends are very special gifts. We hang out with our friends as much as we can.

Bev: I like when the house is quiet and I work on projects on the computer. I love designing on the computer. I also do Girls Night out with my girlfriends and spend quality time with them. And I love spending time with my daughter. It isn't just a mother-daughter relationship; she's in her late twenties and it is a best friend relationship now.

Who is your biggest inspiration in business or life in general?

Bev: Early on, it was David Peters. I was in love with his work and we followed his work for a long while. Now, there is a mixture. Tim is actually my main inspiration, because he keeps me laughing. We were put together for a reason.

Tim: Photographically, my father, who I lost a few years ago. Arnold Newman, who recently passed away, has always inspired me. Of today's image makers, I respect Mike Taylor—I like his work. David Peters, too, mostly because of the emotional base. Beverly, as well—she keeps me emotionally based. We are a great fit.

Biggest experience?

Tim: In our personal lives, our children. Photographically, I remember the first time watching my father make a print in the dark room. It was like watching David Copperfield. It was like magic. I remember it like it was yesterday—I remember the smells and the chemicals.

Bev: The miracle of life—our children. Photographically, our trip to Italy. We were finally taking photographs for ourselves and not someone else. We played with photography and got re-inspired—out of our rut. It was a magical trip to me.