

4. The Ten Categories of Power Marketing

If I collected 8x10 prints from everyone reading this book, spread them on the floor in a row, then asked a customer to come and choose the best, they would really have a hard time making a selection. The fact is, all would be very good—and many would look alike. Photographs are like most other products on the market: they are very similar; it's only the packaging and positioning that differs. We all claim to provide fantastic quality, but it's clients who judge the caliber of your work and customer service after they've experienced the way you do business. To lure and keep your clients, therefore, you must appeal to them by positioning your studio based on something beyond mere quality.

The overall goal is to somehow create value for yourself, your products, and your services so you can charge more, make more, and have more time off to do the things you enjoy in life. There are literally hundreds of things you can do to promote your business, but when you break it down, there are only ten categories of Power Marketing. A description of each follows.

1. Literature

This category contains your business cards, price lists, direct mail pieces, handouts, statements, letterhead, envelopes, box stuffers, flyers, brochures—and anything else that is printed with your name on it.

Quality. When a potential client first lays eyes on or touches your business card or portrait package flyer, he or she will immediately form an opinion regarding the quality. How does it look? How does it feel? What would you think if someone were to hand you your business card? Do you use paper stock you find in the clearance bin at the local paper supply store, or do you use a high-quality designer stock? Remember that everything the client sees, touches, smells, observes, or feels goes into determining what they will be willing to pay for your products and

services. It's okay to use the half-priced discontinued stock if you're not aiming for an upscale reputation.

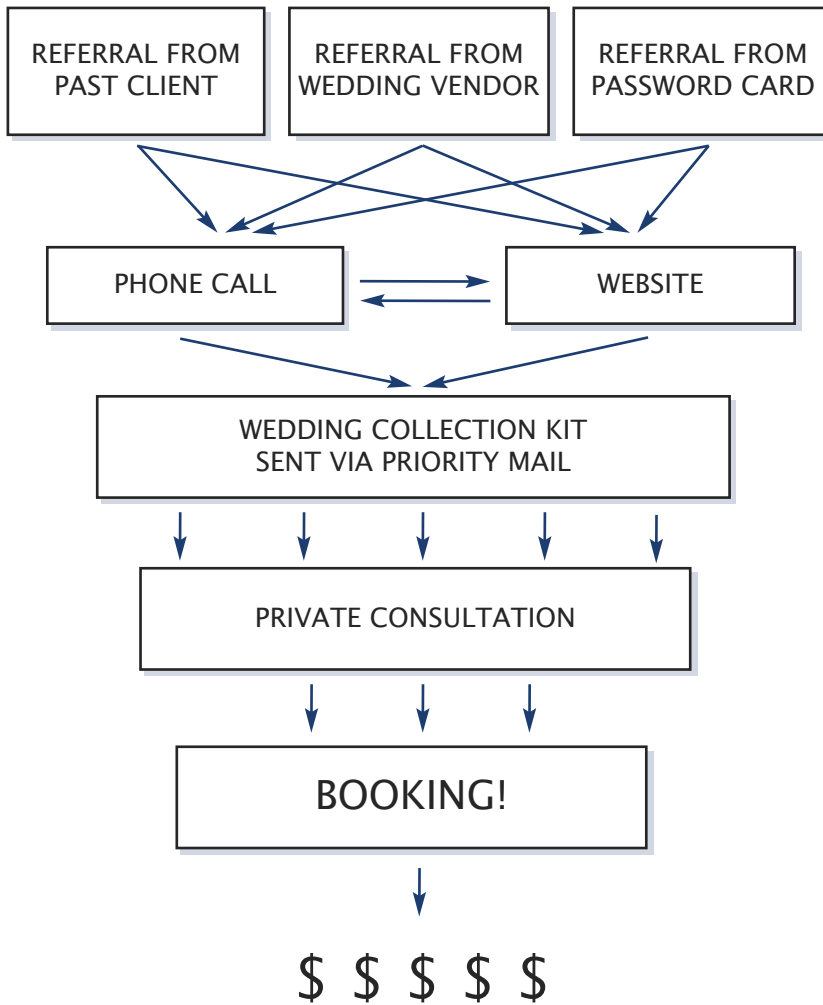
Believe it or not, I had a photographer come up to me after a seminar a couple of years ago who was ready to throw in the towel just because he wasn't getting much business, and the business he was getting wasn't willing to pay very much for his photography. Well, by looking at the hardware around his neck, it was obvious to me he wasn't lacking in photographic expertise or respect from his peers. In fact, he'd received lots of awards and lots of medals. When he handed me his price list and business card, it was immediately apparent what the problem was: his card was printed on thin paper stock with faded black ink, and his photocopied price list had black streaks running through the middle of the page. My first impression? I wouldn't want to invest any time or money with him if I were a customer, regardless of how great a photographer he was.

What would you think if someone were to hand you your business card?

Ask yourself whether the quality of your literature reflects the market position you want to occupy. If not, change it today. We will further examine the role that your literature plays in creating a positive image in a later chapter, but for now you need to be aware of how vital that first exposure to you actually is.

Content. I know of a photographer who ordered 10,000 full-color direct mail pieces to send to prospective customers who lived within his target market. He had recently moved to the area and wanted to introduce his studio to the neighborhood. He offered a free, all-you-

THE WEDDING MONEY FUNNEL



By having a systematic and easy-to-understand lead-generation program, you will guarantee that you will have a steady flow of quality leads into your studio. The above chart details one way to accomplish this.

can-eat pizza feast, complete with breadsticks and soft drinks at his open house. He had a great portrait special, an offer they couldn't refuse, and a deadline of the following week to call to schedule an appointment. He had all the right ingredients for success.

This photographer purchased an expensive list that gave him only the best-qualified leads for his business. The folks on the list made at least X dollars per year, had X number kids, shopped at X stores, and drove X cars—all the right stuff! He hired a local mail-room company to address and stamp each piece, then he prepared his staff for what was

sure to be a gigantic influx of phone calls and walk-ins on the day the piece was to hit residents' mailboxes.

The day finally came—and went—without so much as a single phone call. He waited and waited and waited. Four days went by before the first call came in, and the person said, “Is this the studio that’s having the free pizza party and the family portrait specials? If so, I would like to schedule a session to take advantage of your special offer. But I’ve got to tell you, it sure was difficult to get a hold of you! Your name, address, and phone number weren’t listed in your mailing.”

Despite the fact that he had put in all of that time and effort—not to mention money—he had forgotten to add his name, phone number, and address—a very expensive mistake! Simple rule #212 is: Always have someone else proofread any marketing materials a client will see. This can prevent a lot of simple-to-correct mistakes.

2. Curb Appeal

Everything about the appearance of your studio—from the signage outside to the general appearance of your studio sends a message to prospective clients. The interior of your studio sends a clear message, too: the lighting

on your gallery prints, the way the phone is answered, the smell that hits you when you walk in the front door of your gallery, and even the cleanliness of your restrooms all impact your position in the market. Are you projecting the proper image for the position you want to own?

3. The World Wide Web

By now, most photographers have established some sort of presence on the Internet—either through a web site, a blog, or at the very least through an e-mail account. With digital photography and online proofing now important

elements of our industry, there is no reason why you should not be on the web.

Developing a web site is a very cost-effective way to introduce yourself to prospective clients, both near and far, to showcase your work, and to outline your session fees and package prices. If you don't have the know-how to build a web site, take a class and start with a simple, one-page site that features your contact information and other basic facts about your studio. If you prefer to outsource the work, there are many companies devoted to designing and maintaining web sites for photographers. Free blogging sites are also widely available.

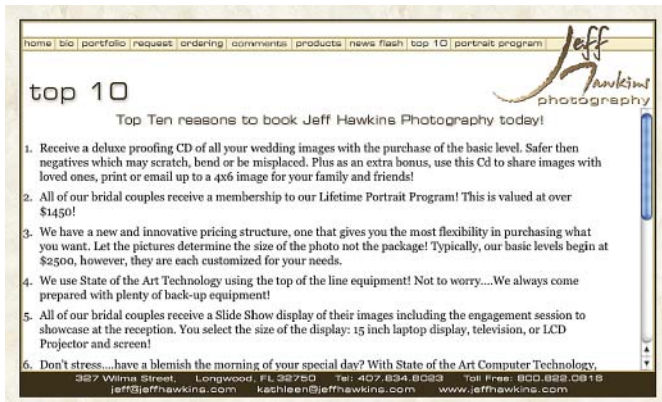
Aside from marketing, the Internet is also a powerful sales tool. You can now create a personal web site for each of your wedding and portrait clients so that Grandma in Florida and Uncle Bob in California can view and purchase your work right from the comfort of their own homes. For instance, when we are finished photographing a wedding, we hand clients a small web site an-

nouncement card with a private password they can use to view all of the images from the day. When the bride and groom's web site goes online a few weeks later, we get a tremendous number of visitors. And guess who many of those guests are? They are next year's clients. They have seen us in person and have gotten to know a little about our style and creativity. They have also viewed our work online, so when they do call the studio, they are calling only to find out if we are available to photograph their wedding.

New referrals are also directed to our web site, which, again, immediately familiarizes them with our work. We give these prospective clients a password and allow them to browse through a wide variety of images. This allows them to get to know us at their convenience without having to schedule an initial sit-down visit. After viewing the images, a face-to-face meeting is scheduled—but only once mutual interest has been generated. Again, our Internet presence saves us a lot of time. If we aren't what



The design, lighting, and merchandising of your studio let clients know where you stand in the market. Photograph by Chatsworth Portrait Studio.



At Jeff Hawkins Photography, their web site makes it clear to clients that they are working with a unique, top-notch professional.

the client is looking for, they find out before they make the trek to our studio, and it saves us from investing time and energy in someone that may or may not be the right client right for us.

Without the Internet, our marketing plan would be very different than it is today. Because of our ability to — post wedding and portrait images on the web and keep in touch with current and potential clients via e-mail, we have been able to tremendously enhance our marketing impact.

4. Advertising

Advertising is the most expensive type of marketing. This category includes yellow pages ads, Val-Pak inserts, newspaper and magazine ads, mall display space, radio and TV commercials, and Little League banners. In essence, it's the type of outreach that you must pay someone to conduct on your behalf. Advertising is considered passive marketing, because it doesn't require you to become personally involved in the success or failure of the program.

You can easily get sucked into advertising in every form, but without careful monitoring you'll eat money faster than you can eat a pig at a pig roast. I prefer to have a Power Marketing approach, meaning I want to play an active role in the success or failures of my programs.

A word of caution: We all need to at least have a listing in the yellow pages so our clients can easily find us, but beware of the salesman who offers you the world on a platter! Regardless of the type of advertising you participate in, you must make sure it fits into your overall goals and objectives for your business and your life. Many businesses have disappeared due to overzealous advertising campaigns, so make sure you have your ducks in a row before jumping into expensive advertising.

5. Pricing

Once a potential customer believes something, it is virtually impossible to change their mind. Therefore, it is very important that you carefully consider where you want to position yourself in terms of the price of your work. Yes, my photography is high-priced. Let me tell you why.

If you are known to be the lowest-priced photographer in your market, you will never be associated with high quality or great service. If you walked into a car dealership and saw a BMW for sale for the price of a Yugo or a Ford Escort, you would be suspicious. You'd probably think there must be something wrong with it in order for it to be priced so low. Of course, the opposite is true also—if a Volkswagen was for sale for the price of a Mercedes Benz, there wouldn't be many takers.

A couple of years ago, I had a riding lawn mower I decided to sell, so I took an advertisement out in the local paper asking \$50 for it. The mower had seen better days, but it still ran and would cut grass just fine. I just didn't want to be bothered with the hassle of trying to sell it. A week went by and I didn't get a single call. The second week went by, and still, nothing happened. By the third week, I began to realize what was taking place, and I raised the price up to \$200. Bam! The calls came flooding in, and I got the asking price. At \$50, people thought there must be something wrong with it, and so there were no takers.

When establishing your position in the market, you've got to decide what you are worth. More importantly, what

do you want to be worth? When you work for yourself (like many of us do), you have both the joy and the anguish of deciding what you are worth to someone else, and need to figure out ways to communicate that worth to your potential clients. If you want to be known as the low guy on the totem pole (which I hope nobody out there does), you will never be known for offering the best quality or the best service.

We always expect to pay more for good quality and great service. When you go out for a nice meal complete with soft candlelight and romantic music playing, with a gourmet wine selection and hand-carved chocolate bunnies for dessert, you will pay a premium fee. We call this selling the sizzle with the steak! When you want something quick and easy without all the glitz and glamour, you will pay substantially less.

How do people perceive your studio? Are you the intimate bistro where you would expect to spend \$100 on a nice meal, or are you the drive through where \$2.95 will get you the works? More importantly, where do you want to be in the future? If you are priced too low, people will associate you with low quality, poor workmanship, and bad service. There will always be plenty of business at the bottom of the pile, but it comes with a very high price.

Clients don't pay us for the cost of our time or the cost of their portraits; they pay us for the value of our time and the value we bring to their life. If we show up ten minutes late for a consultation wearing flip-flops and a T-shirt, we show the client that we don't value ourselves very much, so why should we expect them to value us? If you want to be a Cadillac, then act like a Cadillac, dress like a Cadillac, and project an image like a Cadillac. (Or at least like the human equivalent!)

The compliments and referrals that stem from the work you produce for your clients validate your work. When there is a demand for your time, you can charge more for it. That said, you should note that you can build value for yourself by making it appear that you are busier than you really are. If your schedule is wide open, the customer will wonder why. If you make them wait, your value will rise, and so will your profits.

Your prices need to be based on what the market will bear, not on your expenses. When a customer complains about price, you just haven't shown them enough value

for the price you are asking. You should be proud of your prices! Remember, too-low prices scare people away. It's not that our clients won't pay our prices, but rather that we are afraid to charge what we are worth. I'm not saying you need to raise your prices through the roof tomorrow, but you do need to be acutely aware of your current position in the market, and you should have a well-defined course of action to achieve your goals for the future. If you want to position yourself differently down the road, start making changes today that will lead you down the road to success. Don't wait for another day to make the necessary changes to ensure a better tomorrow.

Pricing will be covered in greater detail in the second half of this book.

6. Press Releases

If you can inspire people to talk about you, there is little need to pay people to talk about you. All you need to do is tell the media something about you that might happen, will happen, or has already happened. Just let the media know that you've hired a new employee, that an existing employee received a promotion, that a part-timer is being promoted to full-time, that you'll be expanding your studio, presenting a new line of products, or will be hosting a holiday open house or a summer barbeque.

Editors are constantly looking for any newsworthy item for the business section . . .

You can also let them know when you are invited to speak at a trade association meeting or convention; win awards at your local, state, regional, national, or international competition; earn some sort of degree; or are publishing a book or an article in an industry magazine. These are all legitimate reasons to write a press release, and it costs you nothing.

With press releases, all you need to generate a little interest is a piece of paper, a pen, a fax number, or an e-mail address. If you think that the same businesses are being mentioned time and time again in your local newspaper, you are probably right. Editors are constantly looking for

any newsworthy item for the business section, and they love it when it comes to them in the morning fax.

If you want to be considered the expert, you have to look and sound like one. If nobody has appointed you the expert, appoint yourself! Blow your own horn! Your goal is to create an awareness of your business, which in turn will lead to an increased value for your products and services. If you can generate interest in your business by announcing all of the countless positive changes in your business, why not do it?

7. Time

We are all on equal footing when it comes to time. We each have 24 hours in our day and 365 days in our year, and we can't buy more for any price. The only choice we have is how we spend our time. What kind of value do you put on your time? Are Saturdays and Sundays more valuable to you than weekdays? Are your evenings more valuable than your afternoons?

I imagine most of you will say yes to these questions. If that's the case, why is it that we charge the same for our time on a Sunday morning or a Wednesday night as we do on Tuesday afternoon? It's perfectly okay to offer sessions on Sunday mornings or on a weeknight, but wouldn't it be nice if we could be compensated for giving up our most valuable personal time?

Wouldn't it be nice if we could be compensated for giving up our most valuable personal time?

I used to shoot about 75 percent of my senior sessions after 5:00PM during the week. I truly believed it just wasn't convenient for the kids to make it in during the day; after all, these students worked, they had practice, and they had other appointments to keep. (Not to mention the light in the evening was outstanding!) After a while, though, I noticed that some other studios were busy during the day and closed at 5:00 or 6:00PM. I also began to realize that other professionals—doctors, dentists, etc.—were open only during business hours, and people managed to find time to visit them.

I found that other studios offered sessions outside of regular business hours, but at a price. Based on this, I instituted “prime time” pricing for these sessions, but offered lower prices during regular business hours. It was amazing how many people magically found time for their sessions during my normal business hours. Yes, there were the people who still needed to have an evening session, but it was now their choice, and I was better compensated for my time.

I still shoot approximately 25 percent of my senior sessions after 5:00PM, but I can now justify spending that little bit of extra time away from my family because of our new pricing strategy. How much value do you put on your time? Would offering prime-time pricing help position your studio in a more favorable light? It's something to look into.

8. Referral Network

The referral network is your biggest ally. It's your most powerful marketing resource, and it can take your business to new levels. After all, referred clients spend more money, are generally happier, stay longer, and come to you already sold. Let's talk about the two types of referral networks that you can build in your business.

Other Professionals. The first network is comprised of other professionals like tuxedo shops, children's clothing stores, mens' and women's clothing stores, D.J. companies, caterers, civic groups (like the local chamber of commerce), florists, dental offices, doctors' offices, health clubs, entertainment centers, golf clubs, and so on. Not only can such businesses/professionals be an excellent source of referrals, but you can also partner with them in cross-promotions.

You may already have partnered with a strong group like this, or maybe you haven't invested much time or effort into developing this circle of peers. In either case, I challenge you to sit down with a pen and notepad and brainstorm until you come up with a list of other businesses you would like to develop a more substantial relationship with.

Once you've created your list, there are some simple things you can do to get the ball rolling. First, you can mail some of these business owners an invitation to a special open house at your studio to talk about how you can

all become part of a new referral network team. During this meeting, you can exchange information on each others' businesses so you become better educated about them, and they can gain knowledge about the many facets of your business, as well.

You can also pick up the phone and give them a call, or go visit them at their place of business. I guarantee they are just as interested in cracking the marketing code as you are. This kind of network is mutually beneficial, and it doesn't cost anything but some time to develop a constructive relationship with other companies that share your goals.

We have relationships with several other vendors in our market area, and they consistently send prospective clients in our direction. These referred clients are already prequalified, meaning the other business has already done a sort of screening for us and, since they know the type of client we are looking for, and what our price ranges are, they only refer people who meet those standards. This fact alone makes my job much easier. When I answer the phone and the person on the other end says "I was talking to Mary at ABC Florist, and she showed me some of your work and your package information. I want to check to see if you are available for my wedding," I can breathe a sigh of relief. With these clients, I don't have to deal with the standard questions most people ask when they find your name in the phone book. Prequalified clients are ready to do business with me.

Past and Present Clients. The second type of referral network, and by far the most neglected by photographers, is comprised of past and present clients. You probably have hundreds if not thousands of past clients in your database who know and trust you, have already purchased your work, and have had a pleasant experience with you. And what are you doing with those happy, satisfied customers? If you are like many photographers, not a whole lot! Their positive testimonies are largely untapped—but you could use them to draw new clients into the fold.

If you aren't already taking advantage of your clients' testimonies to earn referrals, you can begin today. Create a short questionnaire to give to your client once they have picked up their finished portraits. You can have them fill out the questionnaire while they are at your studio, or you can send it home with them to complete and mail back to

you. Be sure that your questionnaire asks them to rate their total experience with your business—from their experience with your staff, to their satisfaction with the session, to their ordering process, and their impression of the final portraits. Try to stay away from questionnaires that let people check a box or write in a number from 1 to 10. You want to obtain as much information as possible from these clients, so ask them to write out their answers in descriptive terms. At the bottom of the questionnaire, you can ask them for the names, addresses, and phone numbers of friends or family members who might be interested in having their portraits created. If your clients are satisfied with their total experience, they will have no problem whatsoever with giving you these leads. And guess what you can do with those new names? You've got it! Send them a letter with an offer they can't refuse, or better yet, ask your client to write a letter to send to them.

Whatever you do, strike while the iron's hot! If you wait too long, the afterglow will diminish.

Whatever you do, strike while the iron's hot! If you wait too long, the afterglow will diminish. The entire sales and marketing game is built on creating a positive emotion, and you will lose your momentum if you wait too long. The best marketers and salespeople understand this dynamic and develop the emotional trappings to guarantee a fantastic experience—and large sales averages. If a customer says to you, "Boy, we sure had a great time with you and we just love our portraits," say, "Great! Can you put that in writing?" Then, do something to thank them for their time (you might, for instance, reward clients who fill out a survey with complimentary gift wallets, a free sandwich and soft drink at the local sandwich shop, or a complimentary session—it's up to you). Testimonials are king. Make getting them your number one priority, then blow your horn and sing your praises to the entire world!

On this note, keep in mind that there are only two kinds of service: great and bad. Mediocrity makes little or no impression on most people. Make it your goal to go above and beyond the call of duty when it comes to pro-

NAME	DATE	STUDIO	P-BOOK	PAPER	FRIEND	FLORIST	CATERER	CHURCH	WEB	ASSC	TV	RADIO	OTHER	SESSION	ORDER
TOTALS															

FACING PAGE—When a new client calls or walks into your studio, ask them how they heard about you and record their response. This will show you which forms of marketing are working and which aren't. If you are spending \$200 per month on a yellow pages ad and receive only two calls from it, you can probably find a better use for your \$200.

viding gold-medal, top-notch, number-one-rated customer service. This is the best way to create customers for life and to keep the referral highway filled with traffic.

It's easy to fall into the trap of writing checks every month for yellow pages ads, or newspaper ads, or costly mall display space. A few years ago, I spent \$5,000 on a great looking TV commercial that was flashy, trendy, and upbeat. I expected great things to happen as a result of having commercial exposure of that magnitude. Guess what? It was a big bomb! I received a grand total of one phone call. I could have spent that \$5,000 to better generate revenues for my studio. But instead I spent it on a very expensive lesson.

There is absolutely no better marketing program in existence than to build a client base with referrals from other professionals and past satisfied clients. If you can effectively use both types of referral programs to generate clients, you'll never need to spend money on expensive advertising again.

9. Database/Direct-Mail Marketing

While the short-term goal of a marketing campaign is to get customers to come to you for the first time, the overall goal is to keep them coming back over and over again—and to get them to tell their friends and family about you. You already have their names, phone numbers, and buying habits. They already know and trust you. That's what we call the perfect target market! If we can do a great job in nurturing and developing our past and present customers, there will be little need for expensive newspaper advertisements, bridal fairs, big yellow page ads, and the like. All your clients would come to you by way of other clients. Wouldn't that be nice?

10. Phone

The goal of every effective marketing campaign is ultimately to make the phone ring, right? If you can't book the session, all the marketing in the world is useless. But do you know how much it *costs* to make the phone ring?

Understand the Costs. If you already track each call that comes into your studio, this exercise will be easy for you. If you don't, you will need to track every call that comes in for a period of time—let's say one week or a month. (Of course, calls from your family, friends, and pizza delivery shop don't count!) When you've tallied your incoming calls, divide your total expenses by the number of calls you received. You might be surprised by the amount. I've heard of numbers as low as \$3 and as high as \$1,100. You can also add up your total sales for a given period and divide this sum by the number of calls received during that same timeframe. This will give you the approximate dollar amount that each call generated. While it's not an exact science, the exercise will give you an idea of where you are. Are you happy with the results?

Your Voice Mail. When your client reaches your voice mail or answering machine, what do they hear? The first thing you want to do is to listen to your message. This ought to be fun! If I surveyed a hundred studios around the country to determine what was on their answering machines, I'll bet that the average message would play out something like this:

Hello, and thanks for calling. If you've reached this message during normal studio hours, we are either with a client, on the other line, or on location. Please leave us your name and number, and we will give you a call back when we return. Thank you, and have a nice day.

Does your message sound similar? Don't worry; its not just photographers who do that, it's all of America! Don't you think people get tired of listening to the same old thing every time they call a business? So why not add a little pizzazz to the mix? Have some enthusiasm, exhibit some sincerity, and have some excitement in your voice!

There are several things you should pay attention to when listening to your message. Does it sound far away and tinny? Is there enthusiasm in the voice, and is it sincere? Are the words spoken clearly and concisely, or do the words run together and sound rushed?

There is nothing worse than calling another business only to encounter a voice message in which the speaker

sounds bored, irritated, and disgusted. It makes me not want to do business with them. Make sure that your own message is friendly, spirited, and welcoming. This is something you can do right now if you so choose. Grab a piece of scrap paper, write out your script, and put a new message on your machine.

Answering the Phone. The same rules apply when you answer the phone. You want to sound approachable, trustworthy, professional, and upbeat. A simple “Good morning. This is Eric Smith. How can I help you today?” is a good start. (Of course, a number of variations like “Happy holidays. This is Mary. How can I help you today?” work just as well.) If you use your first name, the caller is much more likely to give you their first name without you having to ask for it—and once you have their first name, use it! People feel important and special when they hear their name, and it makes a conversation more personable. Ask the needed questions and then shut up! The best way to show clients you value them is to listen. Hear them out; we were given two ears and one mouth for a reason.

Treat each call that comes into your studio like gold. These calls pay the bills and allow you to buy your new camera equipment. If you have a staff person who handles a majority of the incoming calls, make sure they fully understand that it’s the studio’s image on the line each and every time they pick up the receiver to say hello. The phone is our first opportunity to make a positive impression on potential clients, and there is no second chance to make a first impression.

Final Thoughts

We have so many choices when it comes to making a purchase. There are three grades of gasoline, six types of milk, ten different kinds of car batteries, three ticket prices for the ball game, and three different finishes on our portraits. Some people only buy the most expensive, and some people only buy the cheapest.

Regardless of what you are selling, I guarantee there is someone else out there selling it cheaper, better, and faster. So why should clients pay more for your products and services? The key is in your perceived value. They need to think they will get more from you than the guy down the street. If you don’t already believe in yourself and your ability, why would anyone else? This point is well

illustrated in an often-told story about Pablo Picasso. As the story goes, the artist was sitting outside one day. A woman passing by asked if he would do a quick sketch of her likeness. When he was done, the lady asked how much she owed, and he said, “That will be \$2,000 please.” The lady said, “For twenty minutes of your time?” And he said, “No, for a lifetime of experience.”

Ultimately, the key to good marketing is that you must be heard. If you have something great but don’t have the means to let people know about it, you will fail. You want people to talk about you and be able to easily find you. Your goal is to first create awareness for yourself, then to create value.

The phone is our first opportunity to make a positive impression on potential clients.

And keep in mind that this is not optional—you cannot *not* market, just like you cannot *not* communicate. When someone calls you and you answer the phone, you are marketing. If someone calls and you don’t answer the phone, you are still marketing. If your business card is wrinkled and stained, you are communicating a message. Marketing is the way you shake hands, the way your voice sounds on the phone, how you look, and how you walk. Everything they see and hear determines how potential clients will view your business and the value of your work.

Once again, let’s check in with our marketing experts. Beginning on the next page, we’ll hear from Charles Lewis—a successful photographer who has been teaching marketing to other photographers for many years . . .

Power Corner

Focus on . . .

Charles Lewis



This wonderful and generous man has been teaching photographers how to make top dollar with their photography for many years. Chuck is known for his powerful sales and marketing ideas and for making photography a super profitable profession. He has also created twenty-three video tapes and seventy-four audio tapes.

His passion for sharing with other photographers throughout the world has earned Chuck a reputation as one of our industry's marketing superstars. He had a great deal of good advice to offer, and this was another example of how a fifteen-minute interview can easily turn into ninety minutes!

For more information on Chuck's money-making ideas, e-mail him at cjlphotog@aol.com.

Mitche: What do you see as being the biggest challenges facing our industry now and in the future?

Charles: The number one challenge is digital. Digital is going to be the downfall of an enormous number of photographers because they're putting all of their time, money, and effort on this new technology. I agree that digital is the future of photography, there's no question. But they're putting money they don't have into it and spending time that should be spent on marketing and selling. People are thinking, "Well, I've got to keep up with the times. I've got to keep up with my competitors." But if you can't sell an image on film, you're not going to be able to sell it when it's captured digitally.

Digital is not a magic pill that's going to fix all their problems and help them meet their challenges. They should be spending their time on marketing and sales methods. How you present your photographs is the single most important decision of your entire career. It's more important than any other decision you will ever make. Who cares how you create the photographs? Who cares what f-stop and what equipment you use? What should really matter is putting the time and effort into marketing and selling instead of into the new technology.

I'm sure you've found yourself talking to the top marketers and photographers around the world. The top photographers are using digital as a tool, as just one more thing in their arsenal, not something that's necessarily replacing the way they've done it. It's just one more advantage they can offer their clients to up-sell, to make more dollars, and to make their clients happier and more satisfied.

Exactly! Everything goes back to self-image psychology. I think there are photographers who are so insecure about the fact that they're not making the living that they want to make that they say, "Oh, it must be because I'm using outdated technology. If I put, oh, let's just say \$50,000 into new equipment, my sales will improve. I'll have to borrow the money, but I'll get into digital, and then I'll learn how to use it! I'll learn how to use the software, too, then I can do my own retouching and—oh, man—this is going to be so cool!" Of course, they're losing sight of the fact that if they can't do it with film, they're not going to be able to do it with digital. We are marketers and sell-

ers of photographic services. That's how we earn our living, and so if we don't invest a substantial amount of our time in the marketing and the selling aspects of our business, we're not going to be earning anywhere near the kind of living we should be earning.

If you could describe in a nutshell what your marketing philosophy is, what would you say?

The main thing is that you have to create a huge demand for your limited supply and then control the volume of work you do with the price.

What do you feel are the most important attributes of a good Power Marketer?

Well, there's no real secret. The main attribute is they devote the time, the effort, and the thought. They scratch off at least one full day a week, usually two full days a week, devoted strictly to marketing and selling. They won't take appointments, they won't answer the phone. They'll let either their voice mail take the calls or they'll have other employees and staff who will answer the phone. They know that the only way to create a huge demand for a limited supply and to earn a really good aver-

age sale is by devoting the time to get better at it and figuring out your marketing.

It's all a matter of having goals—knowing where you want to go, what you want to achieve, and how you're going to achieve that. There's no magic formula. It just takes time. So to me, the real difference is that the really good marketers are the people who devote time to it.

Why do you think so many great photographers, find marketing to be such a pain? Why don't they get more excited about it?

None of us went into photography for marketing and selling. Why are we in photography? We love it! We're passionate about it. We're creating something from nothing. We're right-brained, creative, artistic people. So we go ahead and we put all this time and effort into the equipment and the methods and the technology and the f-stops and the vignetting and the diffusion and the depth of field and then we expect—because no one told us differently—that if we have a really good product, it will sell itself. People will line up at our door. It just won't happen that way.

The great Donald Jack, the one man who totally altered my life forever . . . it's just incredible what he did for me when I spent two years understudying with him at his studio in Omaha. The first time I went in to offer my services as an apprentice, he, to my shock, accepted my offer. He said, "I have a wedding this Saturday, why don't you go with me?" Oh man, I was so excited!

The phone is our first opportunity to make a positive impression on potential clients.

So, I got in the car to go to this wedding one Saturday morning. We loaded up the car with all of his equipment, and got in the car. He backed out of his driveway at the studio and he headed down the street toward the wedding. The first thing he says to me is, "So, you're going to be a photographer, huh?" And I went, "Yeah, yeah, Mr. Jack. And I'm really excited. It's going to be really cool!" He said, "Really? How are people going to hear about you?" And I said, "Uh, Don, I'm going to be really good.

I'm going to be so good that everybody's going to talk about me. I'm going to be really, really good." And he said, "So they're going to just line right up at the door to be photographed by you, huh?" And I said, "Yes sir, yes sir. I'm going to work really hard. I'm really motivated. I'm going to be really good." And he said, "Well, Mr. Lewis, we've got a lot to talk about. . . ."

And how old were you at the time?

I was still wet behind the ears. I was in the Air Force. I must have been about twenty, twenty-one at the most. That's why so many photographers don't like marketing. Because they feel it's so undependable. You can't predict it, they think. You put in money and effort and work and you mail something out and it doesn't work, or you buy a yellow pages ad and it flops. They'd much rather have people just come in and sit down in front of their camera so they can create something nice and beautiful. That's what we do. That's what we love.

The *single* biggest decision of our career is how we present our photographs to our clients. If we mess that up, it doesn't matter how good our photographs are. It doesn't matter, because we're not going to earn the kind of living we deserve.

So the whole secret really is to have a system where every single contact we make counts. We have got to realize that we're selling in everything we do. It's all about selling—not pressure and not trickery and not manipulation. It's just a matter of finding out what people want and helping them to get it. That's what selling is.

What's most important to you in life? How does your marketing plan come into play with that?

There's no question that my family and my time with my family is the single most important thing. When I started my studio I worked 100 hours a week. I loved it, and that's a huge mistake. You can't love it. You've got to love your family, but you can't love photography. You've got to keep things in perspective.

If I had a client—a potential client that was perhaps going to end up being a good sale—I'd come in any day of the week, any time of the day or night. The end result was I was always choosing the studio over my family. My goal was to figure out how to earn a really phenomenal

living in photography in forty hours or less a week, no nights and no weekends. That's when I started discovering all the things that I've put into my system of marketing and selling. I was passionate that if it was a choice between the family or the studio that I was going to dump the studio.

How have you developed a balance?

If you know where you're headed and are passionate about getting there, you'll get there. All of my passion is in spending time with my family, in taking trips. So I've tried to figure out how to earn the kind of living I need to earn on the hours I need to do it so I can take four or five months a year off to do the traveling and the other things that I'm interested in.

We've also realized the 80/20 rule (80 percent of the money in our pocket comes from 20 percent of the work that we do). As the great Donald Jack taught me, to be successful, you must be willing to send some people away. You cannot be all things to all people. We determine who has the greatest potential for helping us reach our goals, and that's who we work with. We send the others away—we're friendly and diplomatic, but we send them away.

That's tough to do sometimes, to say no.

It's very tough. Especially when you're hungry. It's very scary, but it's absolutely a necessity. Otherwise, you're going to be spinning your wheels doing things that are not going to end up earning you the kind of money you need to earn and want to earn.

What could you recommend to a photographer who is looking to improve their marketing?

It is all based on what do they want. I do a lot of one-on-one consulting with photographers all over the world, and we spend an hour each month on the telephone. I'm constantly harassing them with questions—Where do you want to be? What do you want to do? How many sessions do you want to do? What's the average sale that you want? What did you do last year? How many sessions? What's the average sale? Now break it down by the client type and the product line. How many families did you do? What was the average sale? How many weddings did you do? What was the average sale? Because you have to have

the goals. And this is a very difficult thing for people to do because our parents didn't teach us this. Our teachers didn't teach us this. Most of our friends are not goal-oriented. Success is not normal. It's absolutely not normal. If we look around the country, most people are not what you would consider successful. They're not happy where they are, and they don't know what to do to change it. So it's very important that we have goals. I'd have to ask first: Where do you want to go? Where do you want to be a year from now? Where do you want to be five years from now? How many sessions? How many hours a week do you want to put into this?

What is your hook?

Your number one hook should be your guarantee that separates you from everyone else. You should talk about your guarantee all the time. When people are going to make a major buying decision, they're concerned about what happens if you don't deliver. What happens if things don't go the way you're promising me? People can promise anything. Words are cheap. So what will happen if it doesn't turn out the way I want? In my humble opinion,

The single biggest decision of our career is how we present out photographs to our clients.

my number one hook is our guarantee. We absolutely guarantee that you will be thrilled, not just satisfied, with your photographs. If you do not cry tears of joy when you see them for the first time, then we will give you all of your money back. No hard feelings. No hassles. If you're not thrilled, we don't deserve to have your money.

How do you go about communicating your hook to your customers?

The number one way is exhibits. The single best way to create a huge demand for your limited supply is through free exhibits throughout the community. And then on the exhibits you put not just a business card, but what is known as a lift card. The lift card communicates your top two or three hooks. It will have a headline, it's full of tes-

imonials, and then has a call to action, which compels the prospective client to do something. Obviously the number one choice is to go to the telephone and call the studio directly. That's what we'd like people to do, and many of them do.

What we need our marketing to do is to get qualified people to call us.

What we need our marketing to do is to get qualified people to call us. And we don't just mean rich and famous people that have lots of money. Yes, they do need some discretionary dollars, but that's not the key. The key is they need to be educated about how we do business, what is special about us—and they have to kind of agree with that. They have to say, “You know, I like the way this guy or this girl looks at photography. I love the emotion. I love the sensitivity. I like that. And I like the fact that, yeah, they're a little more expensive than the average photographer, but they're going to take really good care of me. They're going to spend a lot of time with me. They're going to meet with me ahead of time before the photography is done and advise me on clothing, makeup, hair, and locations.”

This is the kind of thing I'm looking for. So when the telephone actually rings and there's a prospective client on the other end, they're more qualified. Therefore, the phone will ring less, but the booking percentage—the conversion rate, if you will—will be higher.

When you're not working—and you've already told me that you guys love to travel—what do you do for fun?

Travel is number one, because I crave stimulation. I love to learn history. I'm just passionate about history. So we love to travel all over the United States as well as to other countries and learn about their cultures and their history and the things that have happened in the world. That's just fascinating to us. Number two is I'm a radio-control fanatic! I fly radio-controlled airplanes and helicopters, and that's one of the hardest hobbies I've ever had. What

I've always liked about it, though, is that when you are doing that, you cannot be thinking about anything else. You can't be thinking about business, can't be thinking about that sale you had yesterday and what you did wrong and should have done better. You can't be thinking about your next marketing campaign. You have to have 100 percent of your brain cells concentrating on that airplane or that helicopter or it's going to be going into the ground. I've always really enjoyed that.

I had a friend in college who went out—and I don't remember what he spent on the kit—but he built his own airplane. I went with him one day out to this parking lot and he took it off, no problem. Got it up in the air, and then he couldn't figure out how to turn it around and it just kept going straight and eventually he just nosed it into the ground. And that was it. It was so far gone that he couldn't salvage anything. But it was a couple hundred bucks he spent, I think. And that really put a damper on his spirits, and he decided not to continue with that hobby.

And there's the key! There you have it. Bingo! You just hit on the whole key to everything right there! He gave up. He quit. He had one crash. One lousy crash. He had a crash and he gave up. I just love eBay. I'm on eBay all the time because I can buy used helicopters for practically peanuts.

From people that are giving up?

That's right. They give up. They buy it, they build it, they crash it, and most of them fix it again and then they're too afraid. They're too scared to go out and fly it again, and they give up. It's the same with many photographers who are learning to become good marketers. They try something once and then they stop. The key to success is persistence.

What's your favorite book or favorite author?

Napoleon Hill and his *Think and Grow Rich*. No question about that. No hesitation. If you haven't read every book that Napoleon Hill has ever written, you are missing the boat. A huge mistake that most photographers and all businesspeople make is that they study only with the people that are in their profession. There are a lot of brilliant people in this world who are not photographers who can

give us a great deal of advice. Napoleon Hill published *Think and Grow Rich* in 1937, and it's still a classic. That tells you how good this book is.

Do you have a favorite movie of all time?

Back to the Future. The first one. That's one of my all-time favorites. It's one of the best scripts I think I've ever seen put to a movie.

Who is your biggest inspiration in life?

Walt Disney, for sure. Walt Disney started with nothing and suffered enormous failures. His father told him he could never do it. He would never amount to anything. Why don't you face reality? You're just not going to amount to anything. Well, that was the kind of growing up he had. And he suffered a number of huge failures. He never quit. He never gave up. He would always keep going. He would always pick up the pieces. I wear a Mickey Mouse watch because it reminds me of Walt. I have a statue of him holding hands with Mickey Mouse on my desk. I have another plaque over here on my other wall from Walt Disney that has a fantastic quote from him on success. He has enormously influenced my life.

He's followed immediately by Donald Jack in photography—he altered my life forever, and I can never thank him enough. Finally, Harry Houdini. I really enjoy studying his life. He was a master marketer—one of the finest marketers there ever was. Harry Houdini's marketing techniques were phenomenal, and that's why people who are not in the field of magic still know who he was all these years after his death. Because he was a master marketer.

Any additional thoughts?

Be thankful that things are so difficult. If it were easy, everybody would do it. And because everybody would be doing it, it would be *really* hard. But because it's not easy, most people say this is way too much work. You mean I've got to scratch off one or two days a week to put into marketing and selling? You have got to be kidding me! I don't have time to do that kind of stuff. I've got to get to work on my Photoshop retouching. I love Photoshop! So be thankful that things are difficult, because life is a pyramid and you have to determine where on that pyramid you want to be. I'm not the world's greatest photographer,

and I'm certainly not the world's most famous photographer—and that's okay with me. I'm fine with that. I know how much I want to earn. I know the lifestyle I want to have. I know how many hours per week I'm going to put into this. I have other interests that have nothing to do with photography.

You notice I did not say one of my hobbies is to take photographs when I'm on my trips. I don't want anything to do with that. I've got to get away from photography. And yes, I'll take a cheap little digital camera, and I'll do some snapshots, but that's it. Hobbies are so important to have. You must have interests other than photography that can get other parts of the brain stimulated. That way, when you get back into the studio, you will be earning a really great living on as few hours a week as possible. After all, we're in a creative profession and we can't be creative 100 hours a week. We can't do it. Our brains won't let us do it.

Be thankful that things are so difficult. If it were easy, everybody would do it.

So if you want to do the very finest work and have the finest successful business, you have to limit the number of hours you put into it. So if I can show you how to earn a really, really incredible living from your photography on thirty-five hours a week, then you're going to be so much happier because you're going to have other things to do that keep other parts of your brain stimulated. And when you are at the studio, you're going to be doing amazing work, because you're not burned out. You're not sick and tired of it. You're not worried about money problems, and you're going to become a better photographer for it, and a better person, a better father, a better husband, a better brother. That's what I'm all about.