

8. The Next Step: Selling

Marketing is a big challenge, but it's really only the first step in building a successful business. Once you've gotten prospective customers interested in your business you need to translate that interest into purchases. That's where selling comes in. With solid sales skills, you'll be able to convert more phone calls and inquiries into customers and take your sales averages to levels you never dreamed of. (And, most importantly, you'll be that much closer to creating the quality of life you want for yourself and your family.) Without good sales skills, the best marketing—and the best photography—in the world will be a total and complete waste!

Marketing? Selling? What's the Difference?

This is an important foundational understanding for your business—and I want to make sure we have our foundation poured before we build our house. In my view, marketing is everything you do up until your phone rings. Sales is everything that happens after that. Now, any sharp business person will tell you that the marketing and sales processes are both taking place every second you are in business, which is true. For the sake of simplicity, though, let's agree (at least for now) that marketing gets your phone to ring, and sales is everything after that.

Selling Makes the World Go 'Round

The whole world's economy revolves around the buying and selling of products and services. From Wall Street to Main Street, our lives are built on the buying and selling principle.

Think about it. You meander into the grocery store on Sunday afternoon to do your weekly shopping and you buy lots of stuff. Let's say that one of those items is a carton of one dozen eggs. When you purchase your carton, that effectively ends the sales process for that particular dozen eggs, but let's work backwards and see what the

process entailed. To begin with, some broker had to sell the store those eggs. Then, there was a farm out there that sold the eggs to the broker's company. For the farmer to be able to collect those eggs, he had to have all the right equipment to handle the eggs with care and to guarantee the health of those eggs. Each of those pieces of equipment was bought and sold by someone—as were all the parts and materials required to build the equipment . . . and so on, and so on.

Those eggs came from chickens. For the chickens to lay eggs, the farmer had to have a rooster, who needs to eat something (as do the chickens). So the farmer had to buy grain and pellets and sterilized water, which means somebody had to sell those products to him. And then there is the actual carton that the eggs go into. All of the raw materials that go into making that carton have to come from somewhere, which means somebody had to buy and sell

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each of them. If we are talking about cardboard, each of the ingredients was probably bought and sold five or six times going back all the way back to when a single tree was standing tall amongst its brothers and sisters in an ancient forest.

All of this buying and selling happens just so that you can go to the store, spend a buck fifty, and buy a dozen eggs to make egg salad sandwiches, or a cake, or breakfast, or a souffles . . . and then you'll also need to buy flour, and sugar, and—oh, you get the point!

If something as simple as a dozen eggs requires that much buying and selling, just think about things such as

a jumbo jet, or x-ray machines, or computers. The world is all about buying and selling. And whether you like selling or not, as a business owner, you are in the business of selling.

Buying is Based on Benefits

People are going to buy things . . . but they also have a lot of choices. So why do people buy the things they do? They do it because it benefits them in some way—it may feed their family, make them feel better about themselves, improve their perceived social standing, etc. The greater the benefits, the more they are motivated to buy, and the more they *will* buy. If you can increase your customers' perception of the benefits of buying from you (their motivation for buying), it will equate to dollars in your bank account.

I can remember a seventeen-year-old who came to our studio several years ago for his senior portraits. His parents were in the process of getting a divorce and neither one was in a position to be able to afford an investment in photography. He had a job—full time job at the local hardware store after school to pay for his car (his pride and joy), lunches, and dinner for his girlfriend now and then.

When he came to me, he asked if I would take his senior portraits. He wanted to be able to give each of his parents a beautiful 20x24-inch canvas wall portrait. He also wanted some 8x10's for grandparents, and of course lots of wallets for his friends and relatives. Being the kind of guy that gives people the benefit of the doubt, and is willing to work with people and their financing, I told him that if he would come in every two weeks and make a payment to me, by graduation he would have the entire amount paid off and he could present his mom and dad with this wonderful gift. This was a good kid with a sharp head on his shoulders and a good set of ethics and values. He was just going through a difficult time at home.

We did the session a few weeks before Christmas and had a great time in the process. At the ordering session, he also decided to give each parent their very own twelve-way folio that they could keep on the shelf, in addition to the rest of his order.

The first two weeks went buy and sure enough, Friday afternoon at 4PM—just like he told me—he showed up to make his first payment. He pulled out a thick envelope

and began to count out \$100 dollar bills until he has a stack of over \$2000—the total order amount.

I said, “Hey, buddy. You are only supposed to pay me a small amount every two weeks until the order is paid in full. What did you do? Go out and sell your car?”

It turned out that was exactly what he had done. “My mom and dad are going through a real hard time right now,” he said, “and I wanted to do something nice for both of them for Christmas and give them their portrait of me. So I went out and sold my car.”

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He wanted those portraits so much, they offered such a significant benefit to him, that he was willing to part with the most cherished thing in his life. Money wasn't the issue, but the value of his portraits was. (Of course, if he'd come in and told me that, I probably would have let him take his order home for Christmas, then pay for it over time—but he beat me to the punch.)

An Emotional Process

Another important lesson you can learn from the previous story is this: In photography, the benefits are mainly emotional. The sale is emotionally driven, then justified logically. Believe it or not, though, the emotional benefits are what motivates most purchases (outside of necessities, like food).

Think back to the most recent big-ticket item you purchased for your family—whether it was a car, a new plasma TV, a boat, or something else that required some serious thought before making the decision to purchase it.

- Why did you make the purchase?
- What were you thinking before you made the purchase?
- What were you thinking about during the purchase?
- What was the deciding factor?
- How did it differ from your original concept?
- How did you feel after the purchase?

The kids are back in school, crisp weather is here and it is the perfect time to pull yourselves together for family portraits. Whether horsing around in a pile of leaves or hamming it up in our studio, seize the opportunity to celebrate your family. Introducing a session that truly invites you to come out and play, discover our new **Wired Collection™** of punchy, spirited images. Brimming with personality and designed for impact, this contemporary collection looks best unframed on a large gallery wrap canvas. They are also perfect for high-gloss Christmas cards. Fall sessions are very popular, so call soon.

We are offering a VERY limited number of weekend sessions this fall. If you are interested, send us an e-mail (sarah@sarahpetty.com). Visit our blog to see the latest happenings (www.sarahpetty.com/blog).

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PULL

This promotional piece from Sarah Petty Photography play to the reader's emotions, selling portrait photography as a way of increasing and celebrating family unity.

- What type of follow-up did you receive?
- What was your budget for this purchase beforehand?
- How much did you actually spend on the purchase?
- Did you end up buying additional features that you didn't figure on before making the initial decision?
- How did you feel once it was completed? Did you have feelings of guilt, or did you justify in your head all the reasons why it was okay to spend what you did?

If you are like most people, quality and price won't be listed among your top motivators. People don't buy for quality or price, they buy for benefits. They may make a purchase to gain the *benefits* of high quality (a luxury car may be more reliable and impress your friends), but once there are enough benefits established, price becomes secondary. People who are motivated enough (*i.e.*, people who see sufficient benefits) will buy just about anything in this world. If you can keep that in the front of your mind as you spend some time immersed in the sales thought process, you will be miles ahead of the game.

Here's the trick, though: benefits are extremely personal and vary from customer to customer. That's where the job of a salesperson comes into play.

Start with the Right Atmosphere

There is a subtle difference the successful and the unsuccessful salesperson. The unsuccessful salesperson attempts to sell whatever it is they have. The successful salesperson creates an atmosphere that makes the customer want to buy whatever it is they have.

Have you ever gone to a restaurant with high expectations, only to have them crushed as soon as you walked in the door? If so, you probably didn't spend as much as you might have—you skipped dessert or didn't order the wine. Conversely, have you wandered into a restaurant without any particular expectations and walked away with a tremendous experience? Some of my most expensive dinners have been at places where I was pleasantly surprised by the tantalizing appetizers, delicious meals and desserts, an extensive wine list, relaxing ambience, and service that was second to none. At that point, it doesn't

really matter what the price is, does it? The experience and the emotion become much more powerful than the price of a bottle of wine.

Remember this: People don't like to be sold to, but they love to buy! I don't know about you, but when I get in the car and head down to the local store to make some sort of purchase, I have an exciting feeling of exuberance and anticipation. Whether it's a new car, a pair of pants, or maybe just the makings for one of your world-famous barbecues, you probably have a little fun shopping for it, right? Often, we also spend more than we anticipated before we left home don't we? Why? Because something in the way the products were packaged, or displayed, or designed made us want to buy them—made us feel the benefit of owning them.

Why Should Customers Choose You?

Before we go any further, let's take an inventory of your sales tools and see where you currently are with your understanding of the sales process. To start, I want to ask you a very important question—and it's probably the most important question you can ever ask yourself about your business:

Why you?

The answer is *not* allowed to be, "Well, because I create beautiful images for my customers that they can enjoy for generations to come. I know how to pose them, I know how to light them, and I know how to take blemishes off their faces." That's not what we are looking for. Instead, we want to think about specific reasons a prospective customer would choose you to be their photographer instead of any other photographer in your market. Why do your customers buy from *you*? Why are you better than your competitors? What strengths and weaknesses do you have? What strengths and weaknesses do your competitors have? How is your business viewed in the eyes of your competitors?

Keep in mind, it's not enough to list why you are *as good* as your competitors, you must know why you are *better*. If you have to stumble around to come up with that answer, your customers or prospective client will interpret that as insecurity and doubt. In today's fiercely compet-

itive marketplace there has to be something besides the quality of your work that gives people a compelling reason to spend their dough with you.

I want you to be specific with this exercise. Take just a couple of minutes right now and scratch out some thoughts on paper—and, remember, the reasons should *not* be tied to your creative skills or your technical expertise as a professional photographer. Dig deeper and come up with at least three reasons why people should spend a portion of their expendable income with *you*.

Here are the beginnings of a few sentences that may give you some direction for this exercise:

I am the only one who . . .

I am unique because . . .

My prints are more expensive because . . .

We can offer better prices than our competitor because . . .

Okay kids, how did you do? You may have been able to write down ten reasons why someone should choose you, which is great. Or you may have sat there for most of the time thinking intently and coming up with next to nothing. Either way, that's okay. We will get you there—eventually!

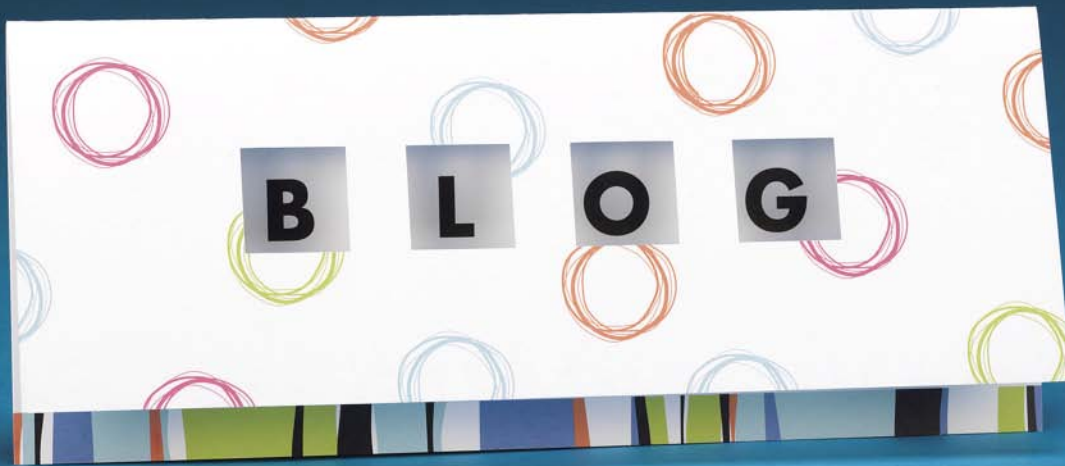
This question—why you?—*must* be answered before you will be ready to become a powerhouse sales dynamo in your business. Over the next couple of days, give it some more thought.

The Power Selling Self Test

While you are sitting there with a pen and paper, this would be a great time to dive into our next exercise, which is the Power Selling Self Test. For each of these questions,

Keep It Light

If everything you have to say is always stuffy and professional, you are likely to lose to someone whose talk is professional *and* friendly—with a touch of funny. Friendly and funny are a million times more engaging than professional. Laughter is universal across all social economic boundaries, across nations, and in all types of industries. If you don't consider yourself someone with a sense of humor, study it, read about it, and most importantly, lighten up! Life is good, and so is having a sense of humor!



Keeping an up-to-date blog can help all your clients feel like insiders. They'll enjoy checking in to see your latest sessions—and be more likely to book one of their own. Promoting your blog with a great-looking card, like this one from Sarah Petty Photography, can get the traffic moving on your site.

I want you to grade yourself on a scale of one to ten, with one being the lowest and ten being the highest. There is no pass of fail for this test, and you will not be graded. It is simply information, and the more useful information you can have about yourself and your business, the more prepared you will be to tackle the challenges and obstacles that appear along the road to sales success. Here we go!

1. Do you have a comprehensive sales strategy for your studio—beginning with the first phone call and ending when the portraits are delivered? If so, what is it?
2. Do you feel you are maximizing each and every order that you write as far as the dollar amount?
3. What are your averages for weddings, families, children, seniors, etc.?
4. How do you feel about your sales skills on the telephone? Can you answer their questions effectively, overcome their objections, build a bond between you and the prospective customer, then get them to commit to an appointment time to come in and meet with you?
5. Do you have incentives built in to your price list that encourage your customers to invest more on their portraits? Have you reviewed them lately?
6. Do you have confidence in your price list, and do you communicate that confidence to your prospective and current customers? How?
7. Are you able to overcome objections easily and effectively? What words do you use?
8. Do you have a system for follow-up after your customers have received their portrait order? What is it?
9. Do you have a referral program in place that motivates your customers to send you new business during the year? What is your program?
10. Do you offer incentive-driven packages in your price list that act as a silent salesperson? What are your incentives?

Let's switch gears just a little bit and think about the following statements. These can all be answered with a simple yes or no.

- I feel good about myself and feel confident about my sales skills.
- I usually say the right thing at the right time.
- People seek out my company.
- I don't seem to get too discouraged, even if I fail repeatedly.
- I am an excellent listener.
- I can read people's body language with ease.
- I can see many ways to define a problem and understand its causes.
- I am skilled at drawing out other people's concerns and problems.
- I manage my time so well that I am able to accomplish everything that is important in a typical work day.
- I focus on the big picture goals for my business rather than always reacting to whatever the "crisis of the day" is.
- I keep looking for ways to be more efficient and productive.
- I don't care how long it takes to succeed at a task, because I know I'll succeed in the end.

And we are done. How did you do? This was only an exercise, but I do encourage you to take some time and expand on the answers that you came up with . . . especially when you note areas where you can make improvements. Even if you aren't a born salesperson—even if you sometimes feel like you were born to fail—if you can learn the basic principles of successful selling techniques, you can become a superstar salesperson.

The Secret is You

There is no quick fix or magic wand I can wave, no potion I can give you to create the success you are dreaming of in your life and in your business.

There is, however, a secret formula, which I am about to give you. Grab a pen and get ready for me to rock your world. Are you ready? Come a little closer . . . closer . . . Okay. Here it is: there isn't any secret. There's just *you*—

and that's exactly what successful salespeople are really selling.

Here is what the best salespeople sell—in order of importance:

1. Themselves
2. Their company
3. Their products and services
4. Their price

Average salespeople do things the opposite way:

1. Their price
2. Their products and services
3. Their company
4. Themselves

When it comes down to it, customers buy *you* first—way before they can buy your company or your product. If they like brand "you"—if they respect you, trust you, and enjoy interacting with you—then they will probably buy whatever you want to sell them.

Shared Traits

All successful salespeople have several traits in common. If these descriptions sound like you, great. If not, there may be areas where you can focus on strengthening your skills and boosting your confidence. The best salespeople:

1. **Associate with other positive, encouraging, and successful people.** They stay away from people who bring them down or constantly complain—people

There's just you—and that's exactly what successful salespeople are really selling.

who never seem to go nowhere. You know the type of person I'm talking about here. Invest your time building relationships with other successful people—people who have the same aspirations as you do and want to make a difference in the world.

2. Keep abreast of the newest and hottest ideas.

How much time do you spend each day reading a new magazine, trying new ideas out, or even just watching a new show on television? New information and ideas are essential to success. You can bet that your competition is keeping their eyes open—and so are your clients. Open your mind and look around you. See what other people are doing. You must have a steady diet of change and innovation in order to succeed

Establish Great New Habits

Education is important. We all have been to seminars and workshops where we got so fired up we couldn't wait to get home so we could implement the ideas. We've all read a book that touched us in a very powerful way, or watched a video that opened up our minds to some new and creative technique. Right?

If you are like most other people, though, those fantastic life-altering ideas either fade out or get pushed to the side before they actually get implemented. Our brains get filled up with the chaos of life (kids, cars, grocery shopping, the weather, practice, games, mowing the lawn, sessions, employees, receivables and payables, vacations, and everything else) and those great ideas get filed away in notebooks or simply forgotten.

Making the most of education (whether it's from books, seminars, articles, or other sources) is like hearing a song on the radio. If you hear a song and you like it, you want to hear it again. If you hear it five times, you can sing along. If you hear it ten times, you can sing it on your own without the music. The same is true with marketing and selling ideas: if you want to become a master at these techniques, ten times is the key.

Good habits take time to create, and bad habits take time to break. So, commit yourself to reading every book you can get your hand on, watching every DVD you can find, listening to every CD you come across, and going to seminars and workshops that focus on the business side of your business, instead of only attending ones that teach you the technical side of photography. This is how you'll achieve the critical mass of information it takes to have marketing and selling ideas really sink in.

When you see an idea that you think will work for you, make a plan to implement it not just once, but at least ten times. Whether it's sending a thank-you note to every client after their session or writing a monthly newsletter, once you've done it ten times it will become a productive new habit. Regularly adding these habits to your sales life will quickly make you an expert in salesmanship—and quickly increase the size of your bank account!

3. Set and work toward goals. Decide what you want, then get started attaining those goals. Don't just talk about it, do it. Along with education, setting goals is the surest method I know to set yourself on a course for success. If you don't develop the hunger and courage to pursue your goals, you will lose your nerve and give up. Do you spend some quality time each day setting and reviewing your goals? In the evening, my mind is mush, so I make a point of waking up early every day—when I get my best work done—to do my planning and goal setting, and my best thinking. During this time, there are no phone calls, no people, no crying babies—nothing but my brain and me.

4. Make the most of every opportunity. They take advantage of opportunities that come their way. We've all heard people say, "Boy, she sure is lucky!" or "He seems to get all the lucky breaks!" But luck isn't random—it's the result of hard work, perseverance, and dedication. When an opportunity arises, you must also be able to recognize it (often it shows up in the form of adversity), then act on it. Opportunity is very elusive. It's all over the place, but very few can see it because it usually involves change, which is a very scary thought.

5. Take risks and make mistakes. Taking chances is a very common thread among the ultra-successful business people in the world. If you want to succeed, you better be willing to risk whatever it takes to, as they say, "get 'er done." Thomas Edison failed over 6,000 times before he finally invented the light bulb. Donald Trump has had more than a handful of disasters, and Barry Bonds has struck out more times than almost everybody in the history of professional baseball. I don't think for a minute we would call these people failures, would we? The best teacher I ever had was failure—and, believe me, I've had my fair share of that. If you learn to look at mistakes that you make and failures you have had as learning experiences, though, it puts a whole new perspective on things.

I want you to become more successful with your business, and have a more fruitful life—and to truly believe that you



What kind of experience do clients have at your studio? Notice how Christa Hoffarth's studio decor, seen here, gets every client's visit off to a good start.

can achieve whatever you set your mind to. You must believe in your products, your services, your pricing, your staff, your message, your hook—and, most importantly, you must believe in yourself. Having a high self-esteem will lead to higher success.

Free-Association Exercises

Before we move on to defining each step of the selling process, we are going to do some free-association exercises. I want you use your spoken voice for this—speak the words out loud. (*Note:* People within earshot may think you are going crazy when you begin to talk to yourself, so you may want to send your family on an errand or outside to play with the dog.) Don't worry about making mistakes, I simply want you to do the best that you can.

1. Describe your favorite movie . . .
2. Describe the moon . . .

3. Describe a set of keys . . .
4. Describe love . . .
5. Describe anger . . .
6. Describe a portrait session at your studio . . .
7. Describe one of your 8x10 prints . . .
8. Describe the experience a customer will have at your studio . . .

We communicate facts, feelings, conviction, and emotion to our clients through the words we use. Being good with words—being good at painting irresistible mental pictures—is of the best skills you can have as a salesperson. Doing this means adding vivid details into your sales presentation. Choosing the right words helps to convey your passion, your enthusiasm, and the zest and zeal you have for the craft of photography.

I recommend writing out a list of all products and services you offer. Then, come up with a paragraph or two

that describes each one in a vivid, colorful, and effective way. In fact, why don't you do that before you begin the next chapter? Here are a couple of examples, describing a wedding album, to get you started:

Not so good . . .

At John Doe Studios, your wedding album will include about fifty images, some in color, some in black & white. These will be selected from throughout the wedding day. You can pick the color of the album cover and add whatever text you want.

Much better . . .

Each John Doe Studios wedding album is elegantly designed to tell the story of your special day, with all its beauty and romance. We will combine breathtaking color and black & white images with meaningful words to produce an album that will make you laugh and bring tears to your eyes—an album that is as unique as you are.

Another Big Secret Revealed . . .

I have been to countless seminars and workshops, read dozens of books, listened to umpteen tapes, watched numerous DVDs, and spent time with some of the best and richest salespeople in the entire world.

After exposing myself to all that education, here's what I can tell you. There are thousands of ways to do just about everything—thousands of different closing techniques, conversational “ice breakers,” different ways to overcome objections, to say hello on the phone, etc. It's very easy to become intimidated and overwhelmed with the overload of information. As a result, most people simply do nothing.

Fancy techniques won't amount to a hill of beans if your clients don't like you.

With that in mind, I have boiled every speck of knowledge that I have ever learned about successful selling into one little golden nugget—and I am about to give you that secret so you can have unsurpassed sales success and wealth beyond your wildest dreams. Are you ready? Here it is . . . *be nice*. That's it. People buy from people they like. All the fancy techniques in the world won't amount to a hill of beans if your clients don't like you. So, be nice.



A well appointed studio sets the stage for building a good relationship with your client. Photos by Michael Warshall.

Power Corner

Focus on . . .

Bambi Cantrell



Bambi was my first mentor and teacher when I was just breaking into the industry. She sees the big picture much better than most people and her insights on how brides think have broken new ground. An acclaimed wedding photographer and teacher, she has been on the faculty of Hasselblad University and the Winona International School of Photog-

raphy. Her cutting-edge images have appeared in Martha Stewart Living, Professional Photographer, American Photo, Time, and Ebony—just to name a few. She is one of the country's most sought-after workshop instructors and her creative energies seem to have no end! With Skip Coben (see page 70), she is also the author of several excellent instructional books for professional photographers. For additional information on Bambi Cantrell's programs and studio, visit www.cantrellportraits.com.

Mitche: In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge that faces our industry now and in the future?

Bambi: I think there are a number of challenges. Sure, the economy is not very good and obviously that is a major challenge for all studios. But, I think, equally as challenging is the struggle that photographers are having with technology. There are as many headaches with digital as there were with film—if not more. An enormous amount of work goes into it, and photographers don't appreciate the value of their time. We are generally just folks who would do this for nothing because we love what we do. We're very passionate about our craft, and we don't tend to appreciate the value of our time.

If you can, describe in a nutshell what your marketing philosophy is.

I do not allow myself to become the purse police. In other words, I don't allow myself to prejudge a person's ability to pay a healthy sum for my services, and I don't look at them and assume, well, nobody in my town would be able to afford this or that because no one has ever charged that before. It's like saying that only a rich person buys a Mercedes or a BMW, when in reality there are a lot of people from blue-collar neighborhoods who buy things like that. Though they are really beyond their means, they do it because it makes them feel good and they want to buy it. We wouldn't have a national debt in the United States if people shopped within their means. So, first, it's not judging people and basing my pricing upon what I assume that they can afford to pay.

Is there a step one-two-three that you actually go through with your marketing to achieve this?

Yes there is. I can tell you exactly what I do. I study fashion magazines like a guru. I study them very thoroughly to see how people who are successful at marketing handle marketing. And then I absolutely copy their concepts—not what they're doing, but I copy their concepts and philosophies. These people spend millions of dollars trying to attract my client, so rather than look at other photographers, I study how other businesses do it. To me, we make the biggest mistake by being little lemmings who just copy one another's pricing.

So, I prefer to tailor my marketing after successful companies like Calvin Klein, Armani, and Gucci—those that are successful at making their products become a designer label. People who are successful like that have very good advertising agencies that work for them, and so I use their concepts.

I try to create a product that is very unique looking, and then I am very careful not to underprice it. That's the worst thing you can do. There's a firm and absolute truth in our world: you're only as good as what you charge. And it's about perception and about the perceived value of a product, not its actual value. We all pay the same amount of money for the basic paper that our work is printed on, but not everyone creates a Bambi Cantrell or a Joe Buissink. It's what's on that paper that counts.

Here's a follow-up question to what you said about perceived value: do you have certain things that you can recommend to someone who is either (a) getting into the industry for the first time, or (b) they've been in it for so long, they've gotten complacent with their promotions and their marketing and forget that perceived value and real value are not necessarily the same?

Yes! They need to go shopping. That sounds very simplistic but they need to go shopping and they need to study. They are not going for the entertainment value; they're going to study how successful companies are continuing to market their products. It's not only about marketing, but it's also never getting complacent and doing the same thing over and over again. I hear photographers all the time say things like, "Well, if it isn't broke, I'm not fixing it." Photography is a profession that changes. I got married in 1975, and when I got married, the double ex-

Everything I've ever learned about photography, I've learned from fashion magazines.

posure was the rage. Well, if you do that technique today, would you be real popular in the photo industry? Of course not. I must say, however, that a lot of that double imagery, a lot of the digital stuff that we're seeing right now, is very similar to the double exposures of the 1970s.

What are the most important attributes of a Power Marketer? Is it a photographer's ability to separate themselves from the rest of the pack and do things so uniquely different that nobody could compare or compete with them?

I think that's basically it. It's the photographers who do not allow themselves to become complacent and continue to do things the same way, but who, every single week and every single day are always striving. These photographers ask, "What can I do that's different? Where can I go next?" And they're giving themselves lots of visual imagery to help them to grow. I go back to fashion magazines. Everything I've ever learned about photography,

I've learned from fashion magazines. There, things aren't always technically correct, but when it comes to being successful, you can't focus just on what is technically correct. Besides, brides do not know what a technically perfect photograph looks like—the only thing they understand is impact. Impact is absolutely everything. And so my Power Marketing stems from the standpoint that I never allow myself to become complacent and always, every single day, I'm pushing myself. I ask myself, "What can I do differently? How can I grow? Where are the trends at not only now, but where are they leading me?" This way, my photography can be on the cutting edge every single day, and I can continue to do new things and reinvent myself. You have to reinvent yourself. That is especially important when the economy is in a bad slump. Everybody and their brother has a camera now, so you must continue to reinvent yourself if you want to keep your uniqueness and be able to continue to be one of those people who are sought after—even in difficult times.

Do you think Power Marketers are born, or can they be self-taught?

I think there are some people who are born marketers, but I don't think that it's something you can't learn. I think you can learn it. You have to develop a plan and you have to continue to strive for that. You can't just try something one time and go, "Okay, it didn't work," and then go lay down and do the same thing you've always done. You have to have a particular plan. You have to lock yourself up in your office for two days and say, "This is really important." I know a lot of mediocre photographers who are outrageously good at marketing; they do a fantastic job of that and are very successful. And I know, on the other side of the coin, some of the world's top photographers who are starving to death because they do not know how to sell their products and they give themselves away.

What's most important to you in life, and how does your marketing come into play with those things?

Everything centers around my family. Photography is not my religion, it's only my profession. I want to be successful in my profession so that I can pursue the more important things in my life, which are religion, my family—things that have more lasting value. Photography is a real

nice thing, and I am very grateful that that's what I love to do, but it is not like it's the absolute Holy Grail. It's not what life's all about. That's probably one of the most difficult things—that balancing of one's spirituality with their career and then keeping balance with your family and your goals as a family.

It is a constant battle, but one of the rules of my household is always that we always have at least one meal together every day, and we have dinner together literally every day except for on the weekends. It's tough when you have a kid who's eighteen and wants to have their own life. But we try to make it a special point of having meals together every single day, and we don't allow business things to get in the way of the more important things in life. Another thing that I've done too is that I give myself permission to take time off. I think that's one of the problems with small business owners—we tend to work all the time.

I'm in my office every day at 6:00AM, but I make a point of taking a weekend off every month, even in the busy season. Even if I've got tons of weddings in the summertime, once I have three weekends booked, I take the fourth weekend off. That way I have a weekend off that I can spend with my family and have a normal life. So many times we tend to just work, work, work, work, work for six months, and then we crash and burn and our family doesn't see us for six months. Well, about two years ago the little light bulb finally went on in my head, and I said to myself, "You know what? You're not going to starve to death if you just do three weekends a month. Raise your rates a little bit and then do three weekends." It's worked out really well. So, now I have a weekend off next month. I'm going on vacation with my family at a normal time of the year, and so that's what we do.

What two things could you recommend to somebody either getting into the business or someone who's been doing it for a long time and wants to take their marketing to the next level?

Here's what I would do. Step one: I would buy all the top fashion magazines.

Step two: I would go through those magazines and I would pick out the ads that stand out. They can be really outrageously shocking, and that's a good thing too.

There's a wedding gown designer by the name of Reem Acra who for years had this wonderful ad of this bride wearing red—bright red—eye shadow. It was very shocking! Like any of our real brides in the entire world would probably wear red eye shadow. But the point was is that it

My hook is the fact that I have all of the elements that a designer label has.

was so outrageous that it was like, "Wow!" You had to stop and look at the ad. That's the whole point in advertising—to get people to stop and look at your stuff. Find out what the common denominator is between all the ads, and adapt that to what you're doing. Take notes and say, okay, what did they do to get me to notice this ad? What does it look like?

Step three: Create some photographs that have the same feel and are outrageously different from what you usually do.

And it doesn't matter what kind of photography you do, right?

Right. It can be portraits, weddings, any style. This is not about weddings. This is about portraiture in general. Today's high school seniors are so fashionable it's not even funny. Calvin Klein to me is top dog, number one—absolutely!—because they have found a way to make men's underwear so completely interesting that men will spend \$18.00 for a stupid pair of underwear! \$18.00 for a pair of underwear! Look at its box, look what comes in it.

What is your hook? What separates you from the rest of the pack?

I've become a designer label. That's what my hook is. I am a designer label in Northern California.

So, over the years you have branded yourself as a designer label?

Absolutely! I have branded myself. My hook is the fact that I have all of the elements that a designer label has.

What are those elements?

I start with a unique product, an interesting product. Not a perfect product by PPA standards, but a product that is very interesting. And that product changes every season. It changes weekly, monthly. It continues to adapt. The second thing that I've done is I charge a very healthy premium price for my product. If you look at Calvin Klein and Armani and Gucci—and people buy those stupid little purses with the ducks on them!—what separates those from the cheap products is the fact that they've found a way to make their products look unique and people feel secure buying that product because they are paying more for it. When a Tiffany's opened in our town, I thought, "A Tiffany's store? Why in the world would they have one here in our little town when there's all kinds of jewelry stores that sell for much less?" Well, it's because some people prefer to spend more money at certain occasions—like for a wedding. It's one time in their life that they're going to splurge and not go cheap.

If I'm going to be a designer label, I have to do my advertising like a designer label does.

When it comes to the wedding arena and pricing, logic does not reign as king. They're not buying a carton of eggs from us. They're buying a piece of artwork. They're buying something that's a very unique product that they can't get anywhere else. And when it comes to a wedding, I have found that the more expensive I've become, the more sought after I've become because it's like, "Well, I want the very best for my wedding. I should hire Bambi because she's very expensive, but she's also very good." You get what you pay for—which constantly comes to the floor on the wedding day.

With the designer label you've created, how do you go about communicating that to your customers?

If I'm going to be a designer label, I have to do my advertising like a designer label does. In other words, my ad in a magazine is going to be very striking. It's going to be captivating. I'm going to do images that are very unique

and very exciting. Not the typical picture of a bride standing at the altar. They're never going to see a typical advertisement featuring the normal picture that everybody has in their studios. You would never see that from me. I don't want them to believe that what I do is like everyone else's work, because that gives them a reason to go price shop.

Which marketing campaign or promotion has been the most successful and most productive for you?

I have a very specific type of approach to my wedding business and my portrait business where I do advertise, but it's very soft sell. I'm not one who's going to go out and do tons and tons of advertising. I'm not after large numbers, I'm after quality—the very elegant, high-end type of client. So what I basically do then is make sure that the promotional literature that is going to go out to a bride is very unique, that it's beautiful and that it's not like anything that they've ever seen.

Has anything failed miserably?

I can tell you exactly what failed miserably. It's when I tried to be the cheapest guy in town! I'm not kidding you. When I started as a photographer on my own about fifteen years ago, I decided that I would be the cheapest photographer in town, and I'd generate so much business that people couldn't stand it and they had to come in to see me, and they'd hire me. I'd be so busy that I'd beat everybody else to death, right? Well, I was the cheapest photographer in town, and I just about starved to death that first year because people kept thinking, well, if you're that cheap, then you really must be horrible.

When you're not working, what do you do for fun?

I really like taking pictures for myself.

Do you take your camera with you on vacation?

Yeah, I take my camera when I go on vacation. My favorite vacation though is spending time with my son, and I go scuba diving. But other than that, when I'm on vacation I like to lay and become a little beach potato and read. I want to read everything on the bestseller list. I want to do absolutely nothing. It's going to be a chore for me to get up and go walk on the beach!