

2. Developing Your Marketing Strategy

Before you can develop a marketing plan, you have to know what it is you want out of life—and I don't just mean setting goals for your business, but striking a balance between the energy you devote to your business and the time that you take for yourself. What is it you want out of your life personally? Time with your family, time to travel, or for your gardening, reading, or other hobbies and passions you may have? Be specific: Do you hope to spend more time listening to some really good music, watching old movies, wetting a fishing line, taking in an art show, reading the funny pages, or golfing?

Taking It All in Stride

To achieve balance between your professional and personal life, you've got to take your job seriously but take yourself lightly. It's called having a sense of humor! And having a sense of humor is not something that we are born with. It is a set of developed skills that allows us to keep flexible in the face of stress and change—and it really has nothing to do with telling jokes, even though most people associate having a good sense of humor with just that.

Do you think you can tell a good joke? More than likely, you don't. Only about 2 percent of the population can remember punch lines and tell a good joke.

On the other hand, do you feel you have a good sense of humor? There are people in this wonderful world of ours who go through life with a case of terminal professionalism. You know the type: "If I'm going to be successful, I must be hard-driving, hardheaded, and serious. I don't have time to laugh and play around. Leave me alone; I'm having a really good bad day!"

Those are the kind of people who end up with nervous breakdowns, end up dead, or worse yet end up old, bitter, cantankerous photographers! We need to enjoy the simple things in life: a newborn baby, a sunny day, a home run in the bottom of the ninth, a great drive off the tee!

Having a sense of humor won't solve the world's problems, but it sure makes it easier to get through the tough days that pop up every now and then. Such an outlook has the magical ability to sustain life. When people are on their deathbeds, they don't say they wished they owned more toys or had more money. They say things like, "I wish I would have worked less and played more."

Part of the reason we find it difficult to keep it light sometimes is the world we live in is full of stress. Stress isn't something new to mankind; our world is in a constant state of change, which is what causes stress. The vast majority of what we know about the world today has been learned in the last twenty years. In the past decade or so

Good marketing is not an expense; it's an investment.

there have been 500,000 new commercials on TV and 10,000 new shopping malls. The Internet as we know it has sprung into existence, and the wonderful world of digital photography has come into being. No wonder we have such a difficult time keeping it light in the face of such radical changes in our world. But you know what? Life is a matter of perspective, and our thoughts can keep us healthy or can make us ill. It's all up to us.

Know Yourself and Your Priorities

Being successful has nothing to do with how much money you make, how many weddings you shoot, or how many sessions you photograph. It's all about proper balance in your life, or what I call perspective. We all need to be reminded from time to time that life is short, fragile, and precious. We need to remember that the job of photog-

rapher is only a job. Success is a constantly evolving journey, not merely a destination. You set your sights on the future to map out your goals in your personal life, just as you do for your business with a good marketing plan.

You must have a vision of where you want to go. After all, we drive with our focus in the distance, not on the highway as it passes beneath us. Remember Alice in Wonderland? When Alice was walking through Wonderland, she came to a fork in the road and met the Cheshire cat. She asked, “Which road do I take?” and the Cheshire cat said, “Well, where do you want to go?” Alice responded, “I don’t know,” and the Cheshire cat said, “Then any road will get you there.”

Know Your Clients and Their Priorities

When I was in seventh grade, I had a business that I ran out of my garage. If you needed a bicycle chain or seat or tire, chances were I had it! If I didn’t, I would trade with the guy down the street to get one. At the time I didn’t really understand any of the dynamics of marketing, but I sure seemed to have a lot of kids coming over!

Understanding who you are is essential to developing a successful marketing plan.

Saturday mornings were the best; all of the neighborhood kids would ride their bikes up and down the street and would stop in to see what the “hot special” was for the day. The best deal I ever made was trading a set of blue handle grips for a dollar and a 45 record. I remember playing that record until the grooves wore out!

I used to take bicycle chains and horns to school to show my friends and classmates. Mondays were always good because a lot of kids received their allowance over the weekend. Sometimes I would get a special order for a banana seat or a sissy bar and would have to trade with someone else to be able to fill the order. In junior high there were a lot of guys who had so-called bike businesses, so I usually found the requested item.

There definitely wasn’t much money to be made, but looking back, I learned an important marketing principal:

In order to be successful with any business, you need to understand your potential customers and then develop a strategic plan that attracts them to you. This is probably the most basic definition for the word marketing.

In the real world of business, things are a bit more difficult than they were when I was a kid, but the rules are the same. Before you can develop a marketing strategy, you need to follow certain steps.

First, realize that understanding who you are is essential to developing a successful marketing plan. The self-test you took earlier likely resulted in some self-discovery. Having an intimate understanding of what makes you tick is not only important to your business, but it is important in your life. Knowing your strengths and weaknesses, as well as what challenges and excites you, will help you to be the best you can be.

Recharge Your Personal Batteries

This is where quiet time comes in, because we all get into the 9-to-5 mentality and can become mere observers of our businesses. This outlook taxes your energy level and it doesn’t allow you to focus on the real issue, which is how to make your business more profitable. Nor does it free your mind to allow the expansive thinking that separates “good” from “great.”

Let’s compare your studio to a car with a full tank of gas. At the beginning of a trip you feel pretty good driving down the road and looking at all the sites. You’re excited and enthused about your journey and not too concerned with what lies down the road. As the miles go by, the needle starts to drop on your fuel gauge, and you start thinking about filling up. But the next gas station isn’t for another hundred miles, so you continue driving. If you don’t get gas soon, you will end up stranded on the side of the road! Now, would you let your gas tank get so low you run the risk of running it dry in the middle of nowhere? Likely not. So why would you allow your business to run for long periods of time without adding fuel to its tank?

The fuel for your business comes in the form of your creative juices and mental energy. No one has as much desire to make your studio succeed as you do. The challenge is in figuring out a way to look at your business from an outsider’s point of view. What we would like people to

think of us, and what they actually do think of us, are often vastly different. We may have the best intentions, but for whatever reasons the message doesn't come across the way we intended. We all probably have a few stories to tell.

I have a couple of friends who were in the photography business for over twenty years. They had become weary after all those years of keeping their noses to the grindstone, and they decided to close down their studio and go to work for someone else. After a while, they realized that working for someone else was not their cup of tea, and they reopened their studio. But before they did, they had plenty of opportunity to research new and different ways of photographing, selling, packaging, and just about everything related to running their businesses. This actually began to become quite enjoyable for them, and before long, they had developed a head of steam that has allowed them to totally and completely reinvent the way their studio operates. What a joy it has been to watch as their new studio has grown from the bottom up all over again, and as they have discovered new and exciting ways of conducting their business. It's almost like they are going into business for the very first time, and it's because they allowed themselves the creative freedom to brainstorm for a breakthrough!

Is this something that sounds intriguing to you? Do you have the desire to reinvent your business and replenish your creative juices? Brainstorming will give you the opportunity!

Be Objective in Analyzing Your Business

The most valuable asset you can have as a Power Marketer is an objective perspective of your business. In a sense, you need to put your entire business on a table in front of you, then stand on a chair and look down upon it. Here is a simple test you can take to help identify some objective details about your business. Grab a pen and paper and grade yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being totally unacceptable, 10 being perfect). Are you ready?

1. I am totally satisfied with my staff and feel they are doing the best they can do.
2. I feel my staff is happy and content with their jobs.
3. I have a good understanding of my customer base.

4. I am satisfied with my current suppliers and know I am getting the best possible service, quality, and price.
5. I believe my studio front, gallery, and portrait park (or any other studio area that is visible to clients) are the best they can be.
6. I am satisfied with my current level of sales and profit.
7. I have a thorough understanding of my competition and know their strengths and weaknesses.
8. I feel the products and services I offer are complete, my prices fair, and my profit margins acceptable.
9. I am confident that my ordering procedures and inventory levels are under control.
10. I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses and can list them on paper.

Now, let's see how you did. Add up the ten individual scores to see how you stack up.

90–100—Great job! You obviously are in touch with the pulse of your business.

80–89—You have a pretty good understanding of your business, but realize there is room for improvement.

70–79—Things are becoming overwhelming to you, and you are searching for answers.

60–69—Your business is getting out of control and you are probably considering joining a monastery.

59 and below—You are wondering why in the world you got into this industry in the first place.

There are no pass or fail marks, only a better understanding of your business. We need to have a starting point, and now you know where yours is. If you scored lower than you had hoped, don't get discouraged. You just have more opportunities for growth and profitability!

Making Progress

Now that you have a fair idea of your business's strengths and weaknesses, it's time to look at some of the areas in which your business can be improved, no matter your score on the previous quiz.

Understanding Your Customers. We all know that our customers are, without a doubt, our most important

WE WANT YOU!!!

BE INFORMED

It's senior portrait time! Chatsworth Portrait is the studio of choice for seniors who want creativity, variety and individuality in their portraits. At Chatsworth Portrait, the emphasis is always on you. We make sure that the entire experience of having your senior portraits taken is a blast! Your session should be fun, because if you're having a great time, you'll look great. We know how to help you feel relaxed and enjoy your session. We also believe since you're in the middle of getting an education, you should be educated about senior portraits as well. There are lots of choices out there and we want you to be informed so you make the choice that's right for YOU!!

CHATSWORTH PORTRAIT STUDIO 88 NORTH PARK DR. CHATSWORTH GA. 30705



Marketing is essentially a way of asking for business. That's what makes the phone ring. Photography and design by Chatsworth Portrait Studio.

assets. Whether you are just getting started in the photography industry and have a small customer base or have worked to develop one that is extremely large, it is vital that you understand everything you can about them. The value of this information will be obvious when you sit down to plan your first Power Marketing campaign.

There is a small, owner-operated coffee shop. It is located in a tiny town and enjoys a rather lucrative business, offering a wide variety of coffees, fresh bakery items, and a pleasant atmosphere. For many years it has been the cool place to go and hang out. It is constantly packed with patrons. There must be at least ten more coffee shops within a six- or seven-block radius, but this lady's is the best.

One day, I asked the owner what it was that lured the customers into her establishment. She said, "I bet I can tell you the first name and favorite drink of 99 percent of them. I want each person to feel they are my most important customer. Everything I do is with them in mind."

Isn't that a wonderful message? No wonder people come from miles around to sit and visit. She makes them feel like gold. Unfortunately, not everyone has the pizzazz and memory this woman has, but I bet each of us could do a better job of taking care of and listening to our valued customers.

Measuring the Competition. Throughout history, wars have been won and lost by many nations and many

types of people. Some wars were fought because of differences in religious beliefs; others fought over territorial dispute; and still others because of the overinflated egos of their leaders. Regardless of the reasons why people fight wars, it's a given that the winner was well aware of their opponent's strengths and weaknesses and was able to adapt their battle plan in order to effectively compete.

One of the biggest fears of any businessperson is the fear of competition, and in photography, competition is everywhere! Whether you realize it or not, though, competition is vital to the success of your business. It requires you to constantly analyze, adjust, and adapt your own business to a changing market. Those who react the most effectively are the ones who end up on top, while those who don't react at all end up in a different industry!

On the flip side, we are all charged with the responsibility to both introduce consumers to and educate them about our industry. In this respect, you are on the same team with every other photographer in your local area, state, and the country. But that's where the friendly competition ends. Beyond that, the consumer is the battlefield, and the name of the game is survival of the fittest. You are in business to generate net profits and provide for your lifestyle choices, just like your competitors.

If I asked you to list three strengths and weaknesses of your biggest competitor, would you be able to? Most of

us are acutely aware of our strengths but won't admit any glaring weakness. That's human nature. In business, however, you must be able to identify the good and bad in your own enterprise, and in others' endeavors as well.

One of the easiest ways to learn about your competition is to go and visit them. Just sit down and have a cup of coffee with them, visit their studios or, better yet, make friends with them. No rule says that you can't get along with other photographers in your area. Invite some of them to your studio and maybe even exchange some helpful ideas on how to make your respective businesses better. Remember that we are all on the same team, and it is important to help each other. You don't have to give away any trade secrets—nor do they—but you may find that you can help each other out in many ways.

The goal in marketing is not to have your competitors fail, but rather to increase your chances of succeeding. If you ask most people, they will tell you marketing is a battle of products and services. In the long run, they figure, the best product will win. Not true! The only things that exist in the world of marketing are perceptions in the minds of consumers. Perception is reality. Everything else is illusion. What the customer perceives as fact is fact.

Identifying Your Hook. So, what is it that you do in your business better than anyone else? What makes you stand out from the crowd and gives the customer a reason to come to you instead of the guy down the block? What is it about your studio that is so compelling that people can't help but want to do business with you? Do you know what it is? Or are you having a little difficulty?

In the world of marketing, we refer to this message that we send to potential clients as a "hook," and it is probably one of the most important assets your business has. Great empires have been built on great messages! If you don't know what yours is, you'll need to grab a pen and paper and spend some quiet time thinking about it. It is important to mention that not everyone can have the same strengths and be best in all categories, but to maximize your position in the market, you should be tops in at least one. Which one? Well, that is up to you to decide.

Once a customer has made up their mind about something, it is nearly impossible to make them believe otherwise. If one of your biggest competitors has spent lots of time, energy, and money to promote their Super Saturday

Seventies Portraits, they probably own that category in the consumer's mind. You need to create a category for which you are known as the best.

In my studio, the slogan is, "Elegance, Simplicity, and Sophistication . . . with a little KICK!" Everything I want a prospective client to know about who I am is wrapped up in that tidy package. It communicates the fact that we do very nice, artistic work, but that we do it with a little something extra—some style, some attitude, some pizzazz! This is the message that I want to communicate to my clients about the way I do business, so everything we do from a marketing standpoint reinforces this message.

Several years ago, I had a wedding client who suggested to me that we get a photo of all the groomsmen jumping off a forty-foot cliff into Lake Coeur d'Alene in Northern Idaho. Well, in North Idaho in June, the water temperature is still pretty chilly, but being the kind of guy I am, I whole-heartedly supported the idea. After the wedding was over and the reception was in full swing, the entire wedding party and about half of the guests got into their cars and headed down to the lake. One of the only people who wasn't allowed to come with us was the groom. By this time, he was a husband, and he wasn't allowed to go play with the boys. His wife told him he needed to stay at the reception so he could meet the rest of her family, who had traveled many miles to come to the wedding.

What is it that you do in your business better than anyone else?

Well, as we got to the location of the jump, the word had spread quickly that we were doing something spectacular with a bunch of groomsmen, so people from all over the shoreline peppered the side of the mountain to watch the event. Of course, there I was with my tuxedo, tripod, and Mamiya in hand, balancing myself on the side of this cliff with a little help from my assistant. After several minutes of coaching each of the six groomsmen as to where to jump—and who was to jump in what order—so we didn't have a major accident on our hands, I loudly counted to three, and away they went!

Needless to say, the jump went off without a hitch, and to this day I use that photograph in many of my promotional pieces. (Believe it or not, the bridesmaids jumped off the same cliff, but the dresses over their heads didn't make for as good a shot.) Because of that single shot, I have had no less than five other wedding parties "take the plunge" off various cliffs and bridges around the Pacific Northwest. People will call and say, "Aren't you the photographer who takes crazy shots like people jumping off of cliffs?" And of course I say, "Yep, that's me!"

For some reason, people think I am the only photographer who can take a photo of people jumping off of things. And they are willing to pay more for that. I don't have the heart to tell them that any photographer could do it. They think, if you want something crazy and spontaneous, call Graf Creative Group! Remember our slogan: "Elegance, Simplicity, and Sophistication . . . with a little KICK!" You can bet I will ride that marketing wave as long as I can.

Now, most wedding parties don't want to jump off a cliff—or anything else, for that matter—but that single image says to my prospective clients that I am willing to have some fun and try something out of the ordinary. This is just the type of client I want, and it's the exact type of client I attract.

I know that most other photographers do fun and creative stuff with their clients all the time, but I am the only one in my market who makes it a point to use those types of images consistently in all of my marketing efforts. We still spend most of our time doing the traditional portraits of mom, dad, grandma, and grandpa looking into the camera smiling, because that's what they buy, but the shots that get us hired in the first place are the fun, crazy, and spontaneous ones. I spend at least ten minutes during each wedding doing off-centered, nontraditional, fun images for my bride and groom. That's what they expect when they hire me, and that's what my studio delivers. So one of the positions or marketing niches that we have developed in our market is the "fun and crazy" position.

Do you have a slogan for your studio? Can you summarize your marketing message and what position you occupy in one sentence (or less)? Creating an effective slogan isn't rocket science, but it does require some of that brainstorming I spoke of earlier. It may also require some quiet time, a pen, a notepad, and a good cup of coffee.

Your slogan doesn't have to be complicated, but it should communicate who you are and what you want your market to know about you. The same is true of your logo. It can be something as simple as your selection of a font, or something with extensive graphics and colors. But whatever it is, it should appeal to the specific demographic you want to attract.

Make sure you are consistent with everything you do, and make an investment in your business cards, your stationery, your signage—anything that projects who you are. Sometimes you need to spend a little money to make a great first impression.

While successful people may not be the very best at what they do, they use top-notch marketing to position themselves in the mind of the consumer as better than the next guy. When you go to a grocery store, do you always buy the best product, or do you choose the one that is most cleverly marketed?

If you look at successful studios around the country, they tend to have several things in common: a staff that is well trained and motivated; a solid customer base; a top-notch image; a creative marketing strategy that generates excitement, lures new customers, and keeps them coming back; and something that separates them from the rest of

Here is little exercise that will show you the incredible power of a good slogan. See if you can identify the companies behind each one.

SLOGANS

1. Just do it.
2. We try harder.
3. Nothing runs like a Deere.
4. From Sharp minds come sharp products.
5. You're in good hands.
6. Have it your way.
7. We care about the shape you're in.
8. Fresh, hot pizza, delivered in 30 minutes or less. Guaranteed!

COMPANIES

- A. Wonderbra
- B. Avis
- C. Sharp Electronics
- D. John Deere
- E. Domino's Pizza
- F. Allstate Insurance
- G. Nike
- H. Burger King

Answers: 1-G; 2-B; 3-D; 4-C; 5-F; 6-H; 7-A; 8-E.

the pack. Again, we call this a hook, and it is vital that you have a firm grasp on what yours is. Some examples of a hook are:

- A special black & white technique that you offer your wedding clients
- A popular kids' portrait club that you have been running for several years
- A portrait park that allows families and other clients to be photographed right on the premises
- A special lighting combination you use in your camera room
- Hours of operation unique to your studio (e.g., Saturday/Sunday sessions, evening sessions, holiday availability, etc.)
- Your willingness to go to a location of your client's choice
- The friendliness of your staff
- Your location (whether it be in town or in a country setting)
- Specialization in children, families, seniors, weddings, pets, etc.
- The fact that you photograph weddings with two photographers instead of one

These are only a small handful of possible ideas, and there are literally hundreds more.

Establish a Personal Connection

When it comes right down to it, the client is drawn by your perspective, personality, sense of artistic interpretation, and/or sense of humor. The client is hiring you, regardless of the style of photographs or albums you sell. The bottom line is that the biggest hook you can offer your clients is yourself. All of the fancy equipment, wonderful sets, and expensive lighting won't get you very far if you don't have the personality to sell yourself. If you can establish a personal connection with your client, price becomes secondary, because they are investing in you.

Following this logic, people who recognize they don't have the personality of a salesperson will be well served to hire someone who does. Many photographers are incredible at creating stunning images for their clients and win all sort of awards from their peers for their technical and

artistic expertise, but without the ability to sell themselves or promote their businesses, failure is not far behind. Long gone are the days when you could hang out a shingle and people would flock to you simply because you were good. In today's fiercely competitive field of professional photography, only the strong will survive!

I once knew a business owner who had the “me too” syndrome.

Again, you are selling yourself, your personality, and the experience you give people who come into your studio. If they have a positive and pleasant experience and enjoy their time with you, there is great value in that, and they will tell their friends, their neighbors, and their families. They will talk highly of you because they enjoyed themselves, not to mention that your talent will show in the images. People are buying emotion when they purchase photography, and there isn't a lot of common sense that goes into it.

Stand Out From the Crowd

An important factor in determining what it is you do better than anyone else is to make sure someone else doesn't already make that claim. One of the basic rules of marketing is that it's better to be first in your own category than to be second in someone else's. You need to find an area that nobody has taken as their own, and then build on it.

I once knew a business owner who had the “me too” syndrome. He always waited to see what everyone else was doing and then he would do the same thing. Big mistake! Over time, customers became aware he was always copying other people's ideas, and he continued to lose business until he had no choice but to get out of the industry. If he would have focused on his uniqueness, he would still be around today!

I'm going to ask you some questions about category ownership, and I want you to think of the answers:

- What is the top computer company? Which company comes in second place?



What do you offer that makes a prospective client want to open your door instead of heading down the road to the next studio? Photograph by Christa Hoffarth.

- What is the top rental car company? Who's in second place?
- What is the top-selling copy machine? Which manufacturer is in second place?
- What is the top-selling facial tissue? Which is the next best-selling brand?
- What are the two top-selling soft drinks? Name the product in third place.
- Who is the number-one manufacturer of jeans? Which brand is in second place?

While you may have figured out that IBM, Hertz, Xerox, Kleenex, Pepsi and Coke, and Levi's hold the top spots in each respective category, you may have run into trouble recalling the names of the runners-up. Are you starting to get the idea? Nobody cares about or even remembers the guy who comes in second place. I hope you are getting those creative juices flowing and realizing what makes you special and unique to your marketplace.

Establish Program Goals and Objectives

John Wooden, the great coach for the UCLA Bruins, used to sit down before each season and write down a list of goals for himself, then for each player, and for the team.

Periodically during the season he would pull them out and reread them. No other coach in the history of college basketball had as much success as John Wooden, and it wasn't by chance.! His ability to set goals, maximize his resources, adjust his methodology as the season progressed, and follow through until the end, produced championship after championship, year after year.

Athletics teaches us a lot about setting goals and working toward them with diligence. Your business requires the same level of commitment in order to achieve your objectives. In marketing, your goals should be based on three considerations:

1. Are the goals realistic and attainable?
2. Does the program help you achieve your ultimate goals and objectives?
3. Will the results be measurable and trackable?

If you can answer yes to all three questions, then your program has the potential to be successful. It may be worth investigating your idea further.

Now, let's take another little break to hear from another of our Power Corner experts, Don MacGregor.

Power Corner

Focus on . . .

Don MacGregor



Perhaps one of the most passionate and gentle men I have ever met, Don MacGregor gives new meaning to the term “image marketing.” I was fortunate to be able to spend some time interviewing him at his photography school on Vancouver Island, British Columbia,

and came away revived and filled with a new sense of what my business could become. His total dedication to his craft is one of the main reasons why he has become one of the most successful marketers in all of Canada, and his insights are extremely valuable and informative.

MacGregor Studios, a Vancouver-based studio for almost thirty years, specializes in portrait and wedding photography. Don’s creative wedding albums and family portraits have been displayed throughout Canada and the U.S. and are included in the permanent collections of the Canadian and American Professional Photographers Association archives as well as the International Exposition of Photography at Epcot Center.

Don teaches across North America and is well known for his passionate programs. This is a man who absolutely loves photography!

For more on Don’s educational materials and workshops, visit www.macgregorstudios.com.

Mitche: What is the biggest challenge that faces our industry now and in the future?

Don: The digital revolution’s obviously the key part of the biggest change. With innovative products and software, anybody can get into digital photography. Therefore, our biggest challenge, as professionals, is to set ourselves apart. You’ve got to really know your lighting, composition, and elegant or very free-flowing posing and be able to put it together exceptionally well. We can no longer rely on the fact that it’s some mystical kind of thing, because everybody and everybody’s brother is going to have the same cameras that we have. So we’ve got to become better photographers. A lot of people will almost have to relearn the craft. As wonderful as digital is, it’s got some great things we can add into our tool collection, so to speak. But shooting digitally today requires a lot of stronger skills in exposure, for example. It takes a great deal more time. It’s a lot more expensive.

What percentage of your clients purchase wall portraits?

100 percent! If we don’t sell a 30-inch or larger family portrait, it’s because the client is not pre-sold or properly prequalified before they come to place their order. Pre-selling, for me, is helping clients by making their purchasing decisions easier. Sales are not created in a sales room. Sales are created in a mall when you first talk to the client. We do our very best to create a portrait they will want to display as a wall portrait. With a lot of our wall portraits, we do the consultations in the homes. We do the sales in the homes as well. I try to do all the projections right in the client’s home. You’re helping them put a piece of art on their wall.

Describe your marketing philosophy.

At a conference that I went to many years ago, I learned a saying: “Is the price too high or the purchasing desire not high enough?” I don’t think there are any more powerful words in our business than those words. Is the price too high or the purchasing desire not high enough? So, my marketing philosophy is to do whatever I can to create a strong purchasing desire. Utilizing emotional symbolism, in other words, putting something into those images that has a special meaning, is the way to do it.

How many mall displays do you have at any given time?

We probably do anywhere from six to ten a year. They’re fairly expensive. Up in Vancouver, Canada, it runs about \$1,600 a week for us to do a mall display, so that’s a fairly big chunk of change. The other thing that we’ve gotten involved in over the past couple of years is linking ourselves to activities that have the right kind of client. An auction to benefit the arts or the heart or stroke foundation, or breast cancer organizations—any kind of an auction—is good for business. Not a silent auction. I’m not a real believer in that. I want a verbal auction. I choose auctions where people are spending serious amounts of

money—where bidding \$1,000 is nothing. You want your photography to be perceived as a valuable product, so you have to get it out into these markets to see a real benefit.

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

One of the key things is discipline—having a yearly outline, and then a monthly outline, and then a weekly outline. The Power Marketer in our industry is somebody who is very disciplined and has a very structured plan that they are going to accomplish. And that usually requires somebody dedicated to do it.

Do you feel that Power Marketers are born, or can you learn to become a savvy marketer?

Yes, you can. I think you can learn to become a great marketer, but it's going to take some passion. The problem with many people in our business is that all they want to do is take pictures. They don't want to collect sales. It's something really simple that you can do.

How do you balance the passion for your photography and the necessity of having to be efficient with your business and your marketing?

I'm starting to learn how to delegate, to say, "This is what I want you doing," so I can really concentrate on getting the time to market." We have one of those dry-erase boards in the studio, and when we have a project, I mark it down on the wall. I give one project to each of my employees and say, "When the project is complete, erase it." It's interesting to see somebody who's got three projects up there, while the others have completed and erased theirs. The person who is lagging behind is going to try to catch up. It's a competitive atmosphere, but it makes us more efficient.

What are the most important things to you in life, not so much photography but in your life?

I'm a person who is driven by goals and challenges. I just have to have a challenge to do it. Obviously things like family are important to anybody. I also love my dogs!

At one point several years ago, I was losing my joy in my photography. I had forgotten the reason why I got into the business, which is that I love taking photographs.

One day I picked up a travel magazine and I saw these people on kayaks and with killer whales and I thought, man, that looks like fun! So in 1991, I organized a trip and I took eight people along! I rented kayaks, a boat, and all this kind of razzle-dazzle, and I just had fun taking photographs. That trip rekindled my passion!

What would you recommend to somebody who is looking to raise the bar on their marketing efforts?

One of the key things is going to be to identify the type of photography they want to do. The jack-of-all-trades is a thing of the past. You've got to have a game plan! Some of us get a little arrogant and think, "I'm a real photographer, I'm a Master Photographer, I am an artist." Well, I take photographs and I sell them. There's no "we are artists." There are a lot of guys who want to be the artist

You have to make a decision about where you want to take your business.

because they don't channel their efforts toward the people who can afford to buy profitable items, and then there are some people who want to make a good living. It's just the volume of work. That would be the first key thing. You have to make a decision about where you want to take your business. What type of branding do you want?

Once you've made that decision, then you start to build that game plan, and you do it with realistic goals. Most photographers fail with their projects because all they ever see is the whole project and they just don't get anywhere. If you break down that big project into steps, it becomes more manageable—divide and conquer. You've got to think, "I'm only going to look at step one right now and then soon enough, step two." Then tear it up!

What is your hook? What is it that makes you unique and different in your marketing?

Our environmental work and our canvas wall portraits. There are so many calls that we get because we built an identity for our studio with these products. I built a powerful identity around wall portraits and environmental work.

What marketing campaign has been the most successful for you?

Mall displays. Actually, any kind of displays—malls, home shows, etc. However, while the home shows are good, you get a lot of people who go to them just looking for a good deal. But if you get into a mall—a higher profile mall that has some pretty good stores—it can work pretty well. I want a mall that has expensive clothing stores. I want that type of high-quality store that's frequented by people who are real nice to talk to.

To make it work, you've got to make your display a very good one. You've got to put good dollars into that display. So many people try to do displays on the cheap, and they pay a very dear price! There's no second chance to make a first impression. That is so vital.

Even the clothing you wear, how you physically present yourself is important. Yes, a lot of us wear jeans sometimes—but I don't wear jeans to the studio. I will wear khakis that look nice, and I dress well. It creates that image, that package, that perception.

Have you done something that was just a bomb?

Yes! Our newspaper ads. With my goals and prices, I'm expecting a four-figure purchase for every family session. That's not something you just pick up, like a pair of shoes. You've got to have a need for them. It's hard to create emotion with an ad in a newspaper. It was a waste of money for us. Also, our yellow pages ads—but there's a lot of controversy in that. I still think they're good in a lot of ways. People that do need to find us can find us. But for our kind of business, the newspapers have not worked. If I had a high-volume business, there's no question that I'd be in the yellow pages and in the papers a lot. If a photographer wants to reach clients who will invest a couple hundred dollars on their portraits, then newspaper ads could work.

What was the best experience in your life?

Probably when I've been out camping and hiking. I've got very fond memories of that. Actually, there's one memory in particular. My good friend Mike and I took off to a place called Flores Island—just the two of us and his dog. We built a campfire and decided to take a walk down the beach. When we arrived at the beach, we sud-

denly realized that we were going to get a fantastic sunset. We looked back out to where our cameras were and thought, "We'll never make it there and back again." So the two of us walked over, hiked up on these rocks, watched the tide come in, and watched the sunset for at least an hour. No cameras, no words.

Who are your biggest inspirations?

It would have to be photography people, because that's been my whole life ever since I was young. I photographed my first wedding when I was still in grade twelve.

Are you serious? Did you go to school for it?

The first two years of my wedding photography career, my grandmother used to drive me to my weddings because I was not able to get my license.

Frank Cricchio is a strong influence in my career; Al Silver is, too. Paul Skipworth has had a tremendous affect on my life. The man is very smart and disciplined. He is also an incredibly fine photographer. He is one of those who are a step above in terms of the marketing, and he is so excited about his marketing. He wants to have great photographs that elevate him up above the rest.

I think for us and for a lot of other photographers, it makes sense to have a passion for building emotional sym-

I'm actually selling clients that emotional symbolism . . .

bolism in our photographs. It makes it a lot easier to sell them! It relates back to the theory that if you're priced higher, there will be a bigger demand for your services. Emotional symbolism actually is an incredibly powerful sales tool. You educate the client about the value of the image that you're making as it relates to their emotional return. "Mrs. Jones, you know, this portrait is going to give you such enjoyment. Every time you look at it you're going to remember, and you will get goose bumps." I'm actually selling clients that emotional symbolism, and it has worked extremely well.