



## THE RIGHT STUFF

As a consultant to commercial photographers for the past 30 years, my job has been to guide visual professionals helping them to define and refine their visual product and successfully market their body of work. The concepts, systems and practices that I suggest to my clients are effective universally.

In a nutshell, what every commercial shooter needs to offer clients is a deep, defined body of work, focused around a specific visual approach to your chosen topic.

In addition, photographers need to understand today's selling paradigm and consistently meet the demands required in order to develop market identity.

30 years is a long time to focus ones talent in a specific markets its safe to say, that I've literally "grown up" in our business. It's also fair to say that during this time, the industry has grown shifted and transitioned constantly. I've been a witness and a participant as these changes have occurred and as a result I have much to share with you and excited to have the opportunity to do so.

Here's my first nugget for you.

Everything has changed and nothing has changed.

Confused? Let me shed some light...

While the selling paradigm has shifted, and new marketing tools pop up yearly, while digital has long replaced film, and buyers are more difficult to directly access, the path to achieving success is the same as it always was.

Develop a solid product that has commercial legs.

Target your market, develop 5-7 sales channels, service exceptionally and stay in the game consistently and long enough to succeed. Sounds simple, but the reality of the “doing” is much more complex. There is however a schematic, a grand plan that each photographer can learn and make their own.

When a creative pro accepts the responsibility for their success and begins to work the plan, the path to success has begun. When I look closely at the steps taken by photographers who have achieved successes, I see a different variation of the same process; I call the formula, “The Mix”

First of all, let me be clear, the successful photographers I am talking about are not the Annie Leibovitz’s, of the world. I am talking about photographers you may never hear of, or read about in international trade journals. They may sit next to you at a photo industry meeting. You might have seen their post on one of the many photo blogs, but most likely you’ll never even know they exist.

However, they are successful, as each one at different times in their career has reached their creative and financial goals.

They have achieved their success, by employing not one or two steps of the MIX but by putting all of the essential steps needed into place. They went for the full Monty they worked the complete mix. That’s the key.

You don’t need every sales option, but some components can’t be left out and you will need to choose one option from each section of the process.

Here's the formula:

(\* = Must be included)

- A talent based body of work ready to sell, (this means a defined visual approach around a specific subject with enough samples to build trust in potential clients.)\*
- A deep database of appropriate contacts (and a smaller more researched group of contacts for in person visits)\*
- 4-5 different marketing/sales channels (including direct sales see below for options)\*
- Marketing materials that are visually branded to move the visual message forward\*
- Perseverance\*
- \*Faith\*
- Patience\*

(Allowing for a 2-4 year timeline before seeing consistent results for a completely new business)

Notice that I wrote that those who were successful worked ALL of the steps above not just one or two of them. While there are 8-10 options for sales and marketing tools, you will need to employ at least 4-5.

Marketing is a simple equation and is effective when diversified and done consistently. Effective marketing for any photo business, starts with branding and style combined with an up-to-date database.

Notice the words “diversified” and “consistent”?

For years I have met photographers who get a piece of the MIX but don't jump in completely. Maybe they get the vision piece and then

decided to send direct mail out to promote themselves. That's it, direct mail. Maybe 4 to 6 times a year, period. Then there are Creatives who believe in sending out visual email once a month. End of story. Of course if they hear a panel of art buyers' talk about how much email they get, they decide to no longer send email, now they are onto social networking.

Get the drift? Photographers may now understand that they need to market, but most have not yet embraced the concept of incorporating the MIX.

## YOU NEED THE WHOLE ENCHILLADA

When creating a successful sales and marketing program you need the whole enchilada. (If you find yourself saying "but I can afford to do it all" make a note but read on :)

Everything starts with a complete visual product.

No vision? No need for anything else. All subsequent steps rely on a body of work. ALL your sales and marketing tools are worthless if you don't have the goods. Let's take a look at why.

Let's assume a buyer has a project (finally). They refer back to one of your marketing tools, and call to ask for your print book. If you don't have one (because you're convinced that nobody looks at print books). There goes the assignment. Maybe the next interested creative goes to your site looking for a "deep example" of the type of vision needed for their assignment, and all they see are one or two examples mixed in with lots of other types of photography or approaches. The "body of work" needed isn't there you've wasted their time and your money. They won't be calling YOU again. Clearly, a vision based body of work, is number one.

So, let's assume you have the vision piece down. Who are you going to sell to? If you have the vision and you are selling to the wrong contacts, no success. You need a data base of potential buyers (contacts who may have your type of assignment in the future) chosen carefully and thoughtfully, one that is large enough to support your outreach efforts (direct mail, visual email) and a second more

select group (from the larger database) for in person portfolio visits.  
Work on this.

So now, let's assume you've got the vision-based body of work, and you have developed your database now you need to commit to 4-5 different sales channels.

Yes 4-5!

Sales channel ops:

\*= Must haves

- Web site\*
- Blog
- Visual email\*
- Visual direct mail\*
- In person portfolio showings\*
- In person networking opportunities
- Social Online networking\*
- Portal placement
- Print sourcebook
- Press

You will need to develop “your” plan of approach, one that represents all of the \*must have options and 2-3 other avenues for visibility. BUT before you move forward you must decide on how much of a financial investment you will making this year. As you begin to create a budget take stock of where you are now. Do you need to build a vision? Or is the vision there but you need more examples? Do you have a database? Maybe you need to build a palette of tools. Don't get overwhelmed. Don't get discouraged.

Simply see where you are, and own it. Commit to investing the resources needed in order to move you to the next step not the next 2 or 3. Stay present and move forward with an open heart.

Progress takes time, money, talent and commitment.