



WAKE UP & SMELL THE COFFEE

Why are people lining up to get their tall, skinny, decaf, dry cappuccino with 2 sweet and lows at Starbucks? Why are some photographers highly successful, even in tough times? It's simple. Winning businesses have a plan. Not only do they have a well-tuned product but also they have a sophisticated well thought out sales and marketing process, AND they follow it religiously. During slow times their marketing doesn't stop, it gets adjusted. During boom times their surplus funds get divided between reinvesting in their business (read juicier ad programs and acquiring items that they need) and savings and investments.

In order to sell your photography services you need to think like a corporate giant. You will need to compete visually, and must develop a sales and marketing process to follow that will bring results. Most of your competitors will still be making decisions willy nilly ("gee I bought space on a portal what shots should I include") but you, ahh you will be different. You will look to the market that you seek to serve, for clues on how to successfully sell. After all, your audience, (ad agencies, corporations, editorial publications graphic design firms,) are the leading national experts in selling and advertising. Why not take their process (you know the one they use to sell to us the consumers?) and turn it back on them.

How do you begin? First let's look at the back end process that's used by major corporations, ad agencies and publications before we ever hear about their product.

In today's market, companies spend thousands of dollars branding themselves. They determine their value to customers and then use that information to "brand their company." The agencies then spend oodles of their client's money researching the audience for this new "brand" and determine which publications they read, what TV shows they watch what web sites they peruse. Then and only then a new campaign is created that speaks the companies message and the products value in a language that resonates with the target market. It's then played out countless times in 4-5 different mediums. How many times have you heard? "Just do it!" Nike's slogan of a few years back resonates even today.

In short, before selling a new product corporations and agency's define the product value, determine who the target audience is, and decide how to most effectively reach them within the clients budget. The magazine industry is equally savvy. Each publication now has a specific focus, a target audience and a message. All articles and the visuals created to illustrate them, are designed to put forth the publications message. Go to your local book store, grab a cappuccino (a tall skinny decaf perhaps?) and hit the magazine racks. Begin to identify what part of our population each publication is going after. What's their core message and how are the visuals different in each?

Are you catching the theme yet?

Corporations, Ad agencies and editorial publications all use a very specific process to sell products to consumers. It's one you can use for your sales and marketing efforts and it looks like this:

- A. Create product, determine and articulate its value to buyers.
- B. Target and research the market and contacts.
- C. Develop a budget and choose 4-5 sales channels, (TV, internet, web site, print, billboards) based on target audience
- D. Create sales message

- E. Develop a complete campaign using different sales channels and variations of the same message for complete and effective coverage.

You can take similar steps. You can be your own corporate giant.

Your job should you accept it is to:

1. Determine your visual message and list the value your work has for your clients.
2. Edit all images shown with your value message in mind.
3. Target your audience, and choose contacts that have the potential to use your value added services. Make sure to choose 3-4 different markets for your contact list.
4. Review your budget
5. Decide which combination of ad tools will effectively deliver your message.
6. Create a campaign using 4-6 different sales channels within both *outreach and **portfolio based, that you will follow for 12 months.
7. Facilitate and review your campaign as it progresses.
8. Give this program (changed during the year as needed) 3 years to effectively work.

*Our reach tools may include: monthly email or direct mail, web site with 2-3 portal listings, online social networking, and blog updates.

** Portfolio based: get your print book to key contacts, yes successful people still sell!

This is an obviously a lot of work. It's not as simple as writing a check to a portal site, or having a template web site built. It requires you be willing to SHOW UP and make decisions about your business. It asks

you to take your business seriously, and it requires that you risk. It demands constant attention. And most importantly it asks you to not GIVE UP. Review, make changes but don't give up!!!!

Most photographers are not willing to make this effort. Many talented creative are never successful because they choose to not accept the responsibility of truly selling and marketing their business. Or they have unreal expectations and simply stop during the process.

People talk constantly about how competitive our business is. My take? Our business is only competitive when one looks at the amount of photographers available for the number of assignments given out. However when you look at the number of photographers selling photo today who actually have a competitive product, (my opinion) you reduce the number of your competitors easily by 50%. Maybe half of those have an effective sales and marketing program. A fraction of them will continue selling consistently beyond the second year. When you consider these factors, the number of competitors you actually have (over time) is quite small.

With this information in mind, go ahead, have that cup of coffee and take a deep breath. Forget about the competition and begin to focus on your product, your message and your journey ahead.