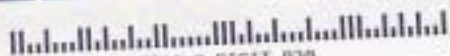


RANGEFINDER

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Marketing:
The Sky's the Limit



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If I were to take an 8x10 print from each one of us, set them side by side, and ask typical customers to choose the best, they would probably have a difficult time. All of the prints would be very good, and all very similar. We know there are differences between us, but the typical customer does not. A photograph is like many other products on the market—they all are very similar. But price, packaging, positioning and perceived value differ.

You need some other way, besides the quality of your work, to separate yourself from the rest of the pack. In the world of marketing, we refer to this as a "hook," or message, and it is probably one of the most important assets of your business. So, what is it that you do better than anyone else? What makes you stand

out from the crowd? What 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, people can't help but

Power Selling

want to do business with you? Do you know what it is, or are you having a little difficulty identifying it?

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. Not everyone

can have the same strengths and be best in all categories, but to maximize your position in the market, you should be at the top in at least one. Which one? Well, that is up to you!

If you look at successful studios around the country, they likely have several things in common: a professional staff that is well trained and motivated, a solid customer base and a top-notch image. They also all have a creative marketing strategy that generates excitement, lures in new customers, and keeps them coming back—something that separates this studio from the rest of the pack. Again, we call this a hook, and it is vital you have a firm grasp on what yours is.

An important factor in determining what you do better than anyone else is finding a quality that no one else

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has already claimed. One of the basic rules of marketing is it's better to be first in your own category than second in someone else's. You need to find an area nobody has taken as their own, and build on it.

Putting **YOU** in Your Marketing Plan

Either you are unique and different, or you are out of business. It's that simple! Having a "me, too" approach will not get you very far down the road to being a successful "Power Marketer." Remember the saying, "The guy at the top of the mountain didn't fall there. There's a reason he's there."

What is it you do better, more efficiently and with better results than everybody else? Is it the fact that you are the only photographer in your market that has an outdoor portrait park with colorful sets, rose gardens and cascading waterfalls? Is it a special black-and-white technique you use? Is it your annual "Kute Kidz Kontest"? Your candid two-photographer wedding coverage? Your wall portraiture? Your extra-large camera room that allows you to photograph large groups on a rainy day? Are you the only one using digital? Are you the only one using film? Is it your location? Your evening and weekend hours? Your unique packaging?

These are only a small handful of possible ideas, and there are literally hundreds more. But when it comes right down to it, the client is hiring you—your talent, your perspective, your personality, your sense of artistic interpretation, your sense of humor, your personality—you. If you can establish a personal

connection with your client, price becomes secondary.

Many photographers are incredible at creating stunning images for their clients and win all sorts of awards from their peers for their technical and artistic expertise. But without the ability to sell themselves or promote their business, failure is not far behind. Long gone are the days when you could hang out a shingle, and

people would flood to you simply because you were good. In today's fiercely competitive field of professional photography, only the strong will survive, and the weak shall perish. Which will you be?

If your customers have a positive experience with you—from the time you answer the phone when they first call to when they pick up their finished portraits—they will become

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Part of developing your hook and increasing your "perceived value" in the mind of your perfect client is to have a powerful slogan. For our studio, the slogan is:

*Graf Creative Group...
elegance, simplicity, sophistication...
with a little KICK!*

Everything I want a prospective client to know is wrapped up in a tidy package called a slogan. It communicates the fact we do very nice, artistic work, but also gets the point across we do it with a little something extra—some style, some attitude, some pizzazz! And everything we do from a marketing standpoint includes this message.

Do you have a slogan for your studio? Can you summarize your marketing message and what position you occupy in one sentence? Creating an effective slogan isn't rocket science, but it does require

some brainstorming juice. It may require some quiet time with you, a pen, a pad and a good cup of coffee!

Undoubtedly, you can identify these companies for their slogans:

Nike... Just do it

Avis... We try harder

John Deere... Nothing runs like a Deere

From Sharp minds come sharp products... Sharp Electronics

You're in good hands... With Allstate

Have it your way... Burger King

We care about the shape you're in... Wonderbra

Your slogan doesn't have to be long and complicated, but it should communicate who you are and what you want your market to know about you—same with 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 match the class of your hook and the market niche you want.

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

A common quality in successful businesspeople is not that they are best at what they do, it is their ability to market and position themselves in the mind of the consumer better than the next guy. When you go to a grocery store, do you buy the best product or the one that is most cleverly marketed?

When you go to the store to purchase something, you aren't just buying a product—you are buying a perception that the product will fill a need you have. We have so many choices when it comes to making a purchase. There are three grades of gasoline, six types of milk, 10 differ-

ent kinds of car batteries, three ticket prices for the ball game, and three different finishes on our portraits. Some people only buy the most expensive, and some people only buy the cheapest.

Regardless of what you are selling, I guarantee there is someone else out there selling it cheaper, better and faster. So why would someone pay more for you? The key is perceived value. Potential customers need to think they will get more from you than from the guy down the street.

It's like the story of Picasso. He was sitting outside one day and a woman passing by asked if he would do a quick sketch of her likeness. When he was done the lady asked how much she owed, and he said, "That will be \$2000 please." The lady said, "For 20 minutes of your time?" And he said, "No, for a lifetime of experience."

If you have something great but don't have a way of letting people know about it, you will fail.

What are you worth? More importantly, what do you want to be worth? When you work for yourself, like many of us do, you have both the joy and the anguish of deciding what you are worth to someone else, and figuring out ways to communicate that to potential clients. If you want to be known as the low guy on the totem pole, you will never be known for offering the best quality or the best service. We always expect to pay more for good quality and great service. When you want to go out to a nice meal complete with soft candlelight and romantic music playing, with a gourmet wine selection and hand-carved chocolate bunnies for dessert, you will pay a premium fee. We call this "selling the sizzle with the steak." When you want something quick and easy without all the glitz and glamour, you will pay substantially less.

How do people perceive your studio? Are you the intimate little bistro

where you would expect to spend \$100 on a nice meal, or are you the drive-through where \$2.95 will get you the works? More importantly, where do you want to be in the future? If you are priced too low, people will associate you with low quality, poor workmanship and bad service. There will always be plenty of business at the bottom of the pile, but it comes with a very high price! If you want to be a Cadillac, act like a Cadillac, dress like a Cadillac, and project an image like a Cadillac!

If you are known to be the lowest priced photographer in your market, you will never be associated with high quality or great service. If you walked into a car dealership and saw a BMW for sale for the price of a Yugo or a Ford Escort, you would be leery and suspicious. Something must be wrong for it to be priced that low. The opposite is true also. If a Volkswagen were for sale for the price of a Mercedes Benz, there wouldn't be

many takers.

Whether you are the Cadillac in your market or the Volkswagen—and there is plenty of room for both—adding value to your customers' lives should be one of the most important aspects of your marketing philosophy. There is always a way to add value, whether real or perceived. Not everyone can be the Cadillac, in fact there's only one, and not everyone wants to buy a Cadillac. Some people want to buy a Lexus, a minivan, a Ford Escort, or a Mustang. And there's plenty of room for all these models, and plenty of profit as well.

There is profit in the \$50 customer, but you need to photograph a lot more of them than you do the \$200, \$500 or \$1000 customer. It all comes down to your goals in life. Sometimes you are better off going fishing than taking a job that doesn't help you achieve your ultimate objectives and goals. It's difficult to turn down business at first, but in the long run it will be healthier for you and your studio. Let's face it—some customers are just not worth having. You have the ultimate say in how you spend your time.

Value is not the same as cost. Cost is what we pay to purchase something. The value needs to be significantly more than the selling price, or the customer won't have an incentive to buy. Let's say you have a product in your studio that sells for \$100, or should I say, that you want to sell for \$100. I think most of us can think of a print size that sells for that price point. Through all your marketing efforts, advertising, promotional pieces, positioning, and image creation, you want customers to flock to your studio and pay \$100 for, let's say, a Black Super Sonic Whatsahoosit Plus widget. Now, whether you are successful at selling the Black Super Sonic Whatsahoosit widget is completely dependent on the "perceived value" it has to your client. Basically, one of three marketing phenomena is going to take place.

1) Your client only perceives your widget as worth \$50, in which case

you would have to discount by 50 percent in order to have a successful campaign. This technique is popular around holidays for many of the chain stores. They lure us in to their retail stores with deep discounts, in the hopes we will purchase more than the discounted item. Groceries stores are famous for this technique. They will run an ad for \$1.49 milk, 5.29 black olives or 10 ears of corn for a buck. And on your way to the farthest corner of the store to pick up your gallon of milk, you pass large end cap

"The greater the discrepancy between the selling price and the perceived value, the higher the level of motivation your customer will have, and the greater the level of sales you will have. This is done primarily by adding additional value to their purchase."

displays with 600 rolls of paper towels, 1000 cans of pumpkin pie filling or cherry cordial for \$.99. You can rest assured those items carry with them a nice profit margin.

Through marketing research, the stores know for every 10 gallons of milk they sell at \$1.49, they will sell a fair number of other products as well. They make up for their discount on milk with sales from other high-profit items. This technique is called "using a loss-leader" to attract customers in the door, and can easily be adapted to a smaller business. In our industry it's most prevalent in the senior market. Sessions are offered at

pennies on the dollar or free to attract the seniors into the studio. Then the volume is made up with sales from their packages and wall portraits. If you have a strong sales program and effective salespeople, this strategy can be effective.

2) The client's perception of your widget is right at \$100—not more, not less—right at \$100. This strategy is worked to perfection by companies like Nordstrom's, the Bon or Lexus automobiles. They create a demand for their products in such a way that we will gladly pay the asking price so we can be associated with that product. It's more about our image and making us feel special than about what price we pay. They have made us believe the price really isn't that important. We want to belong to the "club," so to speak. When you go to a Lexus dealer, the asking price is also the selling price—no dickering, no negotiating. If you want to drive a Lexus, this is the price. If you are a "Nurdy" (someone who shops at Nordstrom's), you know that they do not offer big sales, except for once a year. The rest of the year, we will pay pretty much their asking price. If you want what they sell, you pay.

3) You manage to create a "perceived value" in the mind of the customer some point more than \$100. Maybe it's \$120, maybe \$150, maybe \$200 or more. The greater the discrepancy between the selling price and the perceived value, the higher the level of motivation your customer will have, and the greater the level of sales you will have. This is done primarily by adding additional value to their purchase. Things like including a frame at no charge, including a free portrait, giving them a mini portfolio, or providing a no-charge session. The sky really is the limit here, and the more creative you get, the better your response will be. Remember one of the basic rules of marketing: Either you are different and unique, or you are out of business. Find out what everyone else is doing, then don't do it. Avoiding the crowd guarantees you will stand out

from the rest of the pack!

Infomercials also use this technique. They will spend the first 25 minutes of the show creating a value in our minds of \$19.95. And most of the time, we probably believe that's what the product is worth. Then all of a sudden, they sweeten the pot with "If you call in the next seven minutes, we will include a second one absolutely free!" You see it time and time again. It works, or they wouldn't continue doing it.

If the value in the mind of the customer is greater than the asking price—BOOM! You have a good chance of making the sale! The bottom line is simple: Always give your customers value that is greater than the price they pay.

That's the question of the day. How can we create a value in our products (perceived or real) that motivates people to do business with us? Perceived value is strongly influenced by emotion, ego, self-image, i.e., intangible things. You should consider these in your marketing programs.

Marketing, positioning and image creation are much more than yellow page ads, direct mail pieces and slogans. Marketing is the expression of who you are and what you do. It's all about what you wear, how you look, the way you walk and talk, the way you communicate with the rest of the world. It's as much about essence as it is substance! Most of us have spent entire careers and great amounts of frustration trying to figure out the magic of marketing.

We become PhDs from the School of Hard Knocks, and constantly try to reinvent the wheel instead of looking outside the box for solutions. Usually, there are simple answers for the challenges our businesses face every day, if we can just open our eyes and see the light!

We have the honor and the privilege to sell fine products and services to our customers, and to sell ourselves as well. Believing in yourself and your abilities as a professional photographer and a Power Marketer can bring you rewards too great to number. The challenge of creating effective mar-

keting programs that position you exactly where you want to be, can be difficult, but can also be one of the most fulfilling and rewarding feelings you will ever have. You just have to be willing to run away from the rest of the crowd. Separating yourself from the rest of the pack is never easy, but can take you places never dreamed of—if you are willing to take

the risk. Life... is NOT a spectator sport!

Good luck and Power Selling!

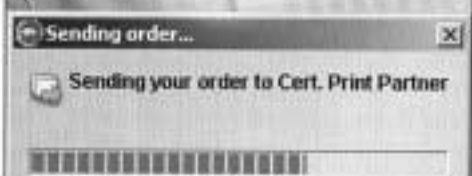
Mitch Graf's studio is located in the beautiful panhandle of North Idaho. His passion for sharing his "Power Marketing" concepts with other photographers has given him the opportunity to lecture throughout the United States and Canada. He can be reached at: mitch@powermarketing101.com or www.mitchgraf.com.

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