

1. The Wonderful World of Power Marketing

So, what does the word marketing mean to you? Simply defined, it means letting potential customers know who you are, what you do, and why they should spend their hard-earned money on your product/services. While the concept is a simple one, many businesspeople put little effort into achieving these goals. They open their doors in the morning and wait for clients to come through the door. Well, I prefer to have control over my business, and I believe you do, too.

To succeed in this industry, you'll need more than a love of photography. You must have a basic understanding of the laws of business and a marketing plan that's second to none. It also demands initiative, self-discipline, and a tremendous amount of mental energy drawn from the depths of your creative being. Small business owners have gigantic challenges to face each and every day, whether it be the increasing costs of doing business, more competition for consumer dollars, regulations from the government, or the need to find the energy to keep your nose to the grindstone when things get tough.

I don't know about you, but I'm self-employed so that I can have more time off and the financial means to fully appreciate that time. And that's where marketing comes in. Having a solid marketing plan will allow you to do the things in life that are most important to you.

You always hear people talking about managing time. Well, you can't *manage* time, you can only decide how to *spend* your time. We sometimes forget that running a successful studio requires a lot more than the day-to-day routine; it requires the vision as well—the stuff from which dreams are made. It's almost mystical as it drives us each and every day to get up and do a better job than we did the day before. It's what we have that others lack.

Whether you live in a thriving metropolis or in a small town, having a well-defined marketing plan is vital to your professional success. Did you know that every ten seconds

in this country there is a business that folds up its tent and goes home? That's an amazing statistic! In five years, four out of five photographers probably won't be around. And guess what most of those photographers don't have? You guessed it—a marketing plan.

I established my business in a small town, like many of you. The town has a population of about 2,400 people. It is predominantly a timber town, which means that we have a very high unemployment rate of anywhere from 14 to 18 percent. This in and of itself creates a new set of obstacles and problems for the small business owner. Entrepreneurs are faced with more and more challenges and obstacles every day. There are times you just want to beat your head against the wall and chuck it all in. That's because we allow our businesses to control us instead of us controlling our business. We need to work hard, play hard, love our families, and love our friends. The rest will fall into place.

Having a solid marketing plan will allow you to do the things in life that are most important to you.

Here's the question: If you only had a limited amount of time left to live, would you work less than you do now? Would you play more? Would you spend more time with loved ones?

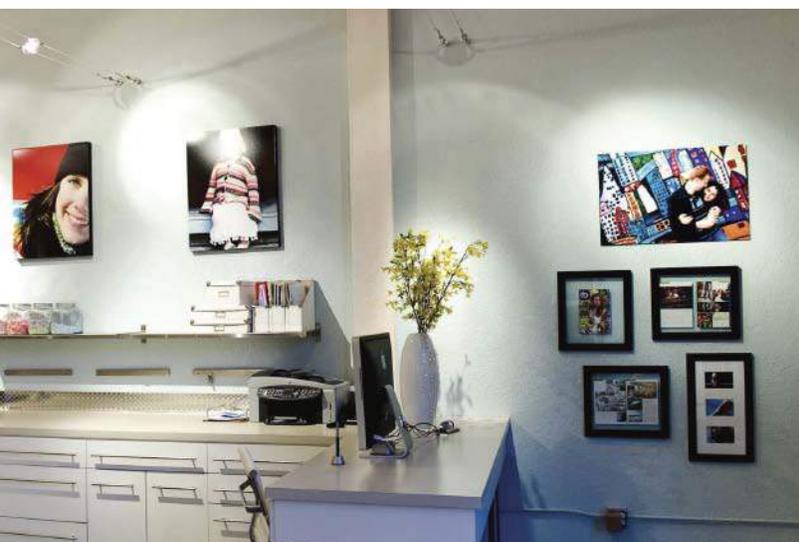
I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but things are not getting any easier for professional photographers. Whether you realize it or not, you already have a marketing plan. It begins the first time someone hears your name, sees your signs, hears your voice on the phone, or walks into your place of business. Marketing is how you create value for yourself and for your products. It creates a demand for

your product long before the phone ever rings or the client walk in the door.

It has been said that the sales process ends when the client writes you a check. Well, everything that happens up to that point determines how large that check will be. That's where the marketing comes in. The better the job we do in marketing, the bigger that check is going to be. Marketing is not rocket science, but the lack of a well-planned strategy is one of the biggest reasons why studios fail. The best product doesn't always win the race. The best marketer does.

You are better off being a top-notch marketer and a good photographer than the reverse. My money is on the

Everything prospective customers see impact what they will be willing to spend. Photographs by Christa Hoffarth.



marketer every time! In photography, people buy because they want to feel good about themselves. They need to be convinced that we offer something special that will add value to their lives.

What is "Power Marketing"?

So, what is Power Marketing? Actually, it's the exact opposite of passive marketing. It demands your personal, proactive involvement and is very systematic. If you want to be a successful Power Marketer, you must be willing to roll up your sleeves, jump in the trenches, and get a little dirty! Sounds like fun, doesn't it? It really can be if you understand the philosophy behind it and can see the benefits you will reap over the long haul.

I once knew a man who owned a successful pet-product manufacturing company, and it seemed no matter what pet store I went into, his product was on the shelf. The packaging was professional looking and colorful, the price was fair, and it was something every pet owner used. What better combination, huh? My opinion of the product was so high that I figured his warehouse was full of brand new, high-tech equipment, the employees dressed in freshly pressed uniforms, and the offices lined with expensive oak furniture.

I remember walking into his building for the first time and feeling my jaw drop to the floor. The building was actually an oversized garage, there were only three employees (most of the work was contracted out) and the "executive office" was a remodeled bathroom with little room to sit. There were file cabinets everywhere (organized alphabetically of course), a small coffee table with one magazine, and two chairs. It was a very clean and organized office, but it was tiny!

I couldn't believe such a "big" company was operating out of such a small area. When I asked him how he had made his company so successful though he was working with so little, his answer was short and to the point—"Marketing, marketing, marketing!" Although he didn't believe in excessive spending, he spared no expense when it came to presenting a professional image to his customers. Everything from the way his secretary answered the phone, to his elegant letterhead, to the way he packaged and presented his product was top-notch. He settled for nothing but the best, and nothing was left to chance.

I remember him telling me that image was the most powerful marketing element, and the only thing that mattered was what the customer thought. His marketing plans were written out a year in advance, and he could show you the results from each and every idea he ever tried—good or bad. If something didn't work, he would either rework it and try it again or move on to something else until he got it right!

The last time I talked with him, his annual sales were over \$10,000,000. There is something to this thing they call marketing.

The Power Marketing Self Test

Before you dive in with both feet, you need to take inventory of your current marketing efforts. So, let's begin with a quick Power Marketing self-test. I can hear the gasping out there, but don't worry—there are no wrong answers to this test, it's just information about your business (and the more information you have, the better prepared you will be when it comes to planning and initiating a Power Marketing campaign).

Now, you may not have answers to all of the questions in the following test. Don't worry. Simply providing any answers you can will help you to lay the foundation for a new way of thinking. Creating a marketing plan is similar to building a house: A good contractor would never build a house on unstable ground or without pouring the concrete first.

A solid marketing foundation is necessary in order to reap positive results and attain the goals we have set for ourselves. I do my best not to let my business run my life. I used to work six to seven days per week, fourteen hours per day, but I realized life is way too short and precious, and I needed to rearrange my priorities.

The reason I run my own business and work hard is to have financially secure time off! Isn't this a goal we all should have, to be able to enjoy the fruits of our labor? Sure, there are times we need to spend long hours at work—occasionally for days on end. Then, there are times we can put a big X through an entire Friday on the calendar and take a three-day or even a four-day weekend, or even an entire week!

So grab your favorite beverage and a pen and notepad. Unplug the phone, put some relaxing music on, then sit

"I only hope that we don't lose sight of one thing . . . that it was all started by a mouse." —Walt Disney

Since 1928 when Steamboat Willie debuted the name, the Walt Disney Company has always stood for excellence. Whether it's the newest cast member or one with over forty years of experience, all the employees are passionate about making magic happen. As a photographer for the Walt Disney Company, that magic takes place each and every day I come to work!

Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse are arguably the most widely recognized names in the world, and the mere mention of their names creates a spark to our imagination and brings a smile to our faces.

Over the past 100 years, Walt Disney has had themes such as "Remember the Magic," "100 Years of Magic," and now "Where Magic Lives." When a bride and groom come to us to photograph their wedding day, they expect us to capture some of that magic, just for them. Ever since they were little girls playing dress-up, they imagined the glass coach, the handsome prince, and the beautiful castle as the ideal place for their own wedding. Let me tell you, when they hire a Walt Disney photographer to photograph their wedding, that's pressure! Their wedding must be as magical as the fairy tale the bride has imagined.

I have been a photographer at Walt Disney World for ten years. In that time I have photographed approximately 3,500 weddings, 1,200 Magic Kingdom Bridal Portraits and an equal number of family portraits, conventions, and commercial assignments. I constantly need to remind myself that it is the client's first time to be exposed to the Magic Kingdom, even though I have taken tens of thousands of exposures.

We need to constantly expand our knowledge and imagination if we expect to continue to exceed the expectations of our brides and grooms.

Walt Disney also said, "All you have to do is own up to your ignorance honestly, and you will find people who are eager to fill your head with information." And might I add imagination!

—Mike Strickland
Director of Photographers, Walt Disney Co.

back, close your eyes, and relax for a few seconds before we begin.

All right, here we go . . .

1. What do your current marketing efforts consist of (e.g., yellow pages, direct mail, newspaper, magazine, or television ads, mall displays, vendor networks, senior referral programs, etc.)?
2. Do you have a way of tracking the results of your current programs? What is it?

3. Do you consistently develop a list of goals before you begin a new program? How do you do it? How do you measure their effectiveness?
4. What have you tried in the past that didn't attain the desired results? Why?
5. What programs in the past exceeded your desired results? Why?
6. Do you have a plan for your upcoming marketing programs? What are your plans?
7. Have you identified the goals and objectives of those programs? What are they?
8. What types of marketing are your competitors using that seem to be successful? Why?
9. Do you have a budget set each and every month for marketing? How much is it?
10. What makes clients come to your business instead of to other studios in your area?
11. What makes them go to your competitors instead?
12. As a consumer, what would you look for from a professional photographer? Do you offer those things?
13. What are your three biggest strengths as a business owner? As a photographer?
14. What are your three biggest weaknesses as a business owner? As a photographer?
15. Do you set aside time each and every day to work on the essence of your business and to develop new ways to improve it? If not, what time of day would work best if you were to start this tomorrow?

Well, how did you do? Did you have a pretty good idea of how to answer each question, or did a few of them give you pause for thought? Remember, there are no right or

wrong answers, only information. I challenge you to ask yourself not only these questions, but to come up with some of your own questions about your business and your effectiveness as a marketer. A top-notch Power Marketer is constantly reviewing, analyzing, and adjusting their techniques to achieve their maximum potential and to get the most out of their employees and their business. Only you have that ultimate responsibility; if you don't do it, nobody else will.

Whether you have been in the industry for several years or have recently decided to jump in with both feet, you probably realize that it takes guts and determination to own and operate a business. If it were easy, everyone in the world would do it. Simple, it's not. It requires a very special person who is willing to take risks, commit themselves to a cause, and to fight the daily battles in order to win the war. Most importantly, you must be willing to do whatever it takes to become successful. You are obviously one of the chosen few!

If I were to list all the issues that contribute to business failure, it would fill this entire book. Of course, you can find thousands of books on hundreds of subjects pertaining to business at your local library, through mail-order catalogs, or through the Internet. Many offer good information, but many do not. I know of only one absolute fact when it comes to operating a business: there is not another business exactly like yours in the entire world, and only you can decide what information is beneficial and what isn't. The following chapters will help you to tailor your marketing efforts to meet your personal goals and enhance your unique business.

But first, let's look at some suggestions from another Power Marketer . . .

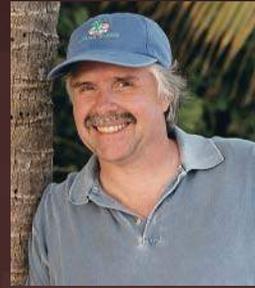


A clean, attractive shooting area will make clients feel comfortable—and make you look like the kind of consummate professional who's worth every penny they'll spend on their images.

Power Corner

Focus on . . .

Michael Redford



If you want energy, spend some time studying with Michael Redford! His powerful presence and witty sense of humor will stimulate your out-of-the-box thinking and give you a new zest for life. In the early '80s, Michael began developing his marketing techniques (now revered as state of the art). Soon, utilizing the marketing systems and sales strategies discussed in-depth during his seminars, he had turned a small studio into a portrait "super studio" grossing over \$1,200,000 per year. Michael has blazed the marketing trail and has taken many arrows over the years. He now has the tried-and-true map to portrait studio success and to maintaining his quality of life. For more information on his seminars and educational materials, visit www.redfordseminars.com.

Mitche: What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the industry?

Michael: I don't see many challenges. I've gotten to the point of nirvana; I can do anything I want to do. Quite frankly, after you've put your mind to work over twenty years and you've boot-strapped everything, you can face so many challenges. You just look at what's next. You know, "What do I want to do next?"

What are your core marketing concepts?

Marketing is the engine of a business. When I want business, I market. When business goes down, I market. When my numbers aren't where they should be, it's because I didn't do my marketing. Over the years I've found out what fuel works best, and what's the best octane.

Important attributes of a Power Marketer?

Learning how to network. Learning how to get in touch with people that can help your business grow. Learning which people they are. Learning your target market. What is your target market? Who they are? And finding who you want to deal with—then learning how to talk with people and talking to the ones who can put you in touch with the end result that you're looking for.

What are the most important things to you?

How does your marketing come into play?

Quality of life is everything to me. And how does marketing relate to that? The better I market, the better quality of life I have. You have to learn how to do business, but once that's all done, what makes it all function is the marketing. It all starts with marketing. The phone doesn't ring unless you've asked for business. The definition of marketing, in my opinion, is asking for more business. And after you've learned that, then the question becomes how to ask for the best quality of business.

How do you balance everything?

I just work until I'm tired of working, and then I do something else. It's all about quality of life. First of all, do I get eight to ten hours of sleep? Yes, because that's part of the quality of life. The reason I chose photography is that I don't have to get up at 6:00 or 7:00 a.m. I don't do that. I wake up at 8:00 or 9:00 a.m., and I gently get up

and go about working. And when I'm done working for the day and I've accomplished all that I have to respond to, I go and do my social stuff.

What would you recommend to someone who is looking to take their marketing to the next level?

Define whom you really want to work with. Do you want to work with a couponer, or do you want to work with upscale people who have expendable income, are easier to work with, and for whom money is secondary in the game? I've found that after it's all said and done I'm going to take the same amount of pictures and I'm going to do the same amount of hours, so I might as well do it with people who can afford more—and there's much more profit involved there. You've got to go for the profit level that gets you the quality of life that we've talked about. And, dealing with coupons is going to eat you up. I mean, that's what the department stores are for. They're for the couponers. You're for the higher-end clients who want to have a little bit more expendable income and who appreciate what we do.

What is your hook?

It's the image that I've created. The hook nowadays is that the name has been created, it's just living up to it daily. I've been very successful in integrating the systems necessary to live up to the image.

Would you call it a designer brand?

It absolutely is. It's just all about quality service and a creative look. It's all based on very good photography, by the way. Everything I have is truly first of all based on good photography and then from that point on it's good customer service. Then it's good marketing to keep them coming. The marketing is first, but you have to have a good, quality brand. You can market until you're blue in the face, but if you can't take good pictures, that ain't going to work. It's all got to be congruent.

What has been the most successful marketing philosophy, concept, or campaign that you've ever had in the years that you've been in the industry?

A country club promotion where we go to the country club and offer them good, high-end executive portraits of their leaders. We initially photograph the board and the president and then invite the other members to call Redford Photography. We often have family portraits created at this location or at our studio. We put their names on the bottom of an 8x10-inch print. We put that print into an

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album, and on the front cover it says The Golf Club at Nevelwood (or whatever country club we're working with). We buy everything for the photography of the presidents and all the board members. At the same time, though, that country club is turning me on to other business because of the complimentary service I provide.

My point is, it's a very, very good networking idea. It drives as many families to try your studio as you think you could possibly handle each year. Now we're working with two country clubs, and I'm a little scared that it's almost

too much. The first country club we did has 600 members, and we did eighty members the first year, and now I've got two of those. I mean, I don't know if I can handle all the business they can throw at me.

How many shooters do you have?

Four. I photograph children and families. I have another gentleman who does all the high school seniors and the weddings. My wife does the children and families with me, and then my other son does the high school seniors that the other gentleman can't.

You don't photograph any seniors yourself?

No. Only in emergencies. I'll do twenty or thirty a year. We do about 600 to 650 seniors. I'll do twenty or thirty of those simply because my photographers are sick or out of the studio. Of the 650 seniors, you're going to have ten or twenty who need special treatment. I'm totally capable of doing it, but I don't wish to do it. I'd rather use the time on the boat!

Is there an experience that you've had that just stands head and shoulders above everything else?

I have a friend who's a billionaire—one of the world's richest men. I get to work with him all the time; I'm his photographer. I'm around Jerry Seinfeld and people like that, because he is . . . well, he's a billionaire, so he has private parties with people like Jerry Seinfeld, Bill Cosby, Jeff Foxworthy—the biggest of the big. I even met Robin Williams! These people are brought in for private parties of fifty to sixty people, and I get to rub elbows and take pictures of these people, and it's just really, really fun stuff!

Who are your biggest inspirations?

I've got to say Jesus Christ because I am a Christian, and I truly believe that he is the strength. Walt Disney for sure. Sam Walton, Ted Turner, people like that. These are people who just came from nothing and worked to have everything through their sheer understanding of capitalism, of trading services, and the sheer understanding of looking through all the red tape, seeing exactly what needed to be done, and doing it.