

Introduction

I am excited to spend some time with you, and I hope you are just as excited to immerse yourself in the business side of your business. The fact that you are investing your time in this book shows that you are one of the few who will make a difference in our industry. I welcome and congratulate you!

In today's overcrowded marketplace, we have more choices and are faced with more decisions than ever before. How do we decide what we should spend our hard-earned money on? In 1980 there were 400 mutual funds; today there are over 10,000. In 1980 alone, 1,500 new grocery products hit the shelves; this year there will be over 15,000. With all these choices, you have to offer something the buyers in your target demographic can't get from anyone else. You need a marketing game plan that is brilliant in its simplicity.

The journey you are about to take is going to change your life forever. While that's a big statement, I guarantee that if you take the marketing principles outlined here seriously, you will tap into a better way of looking at your business and a better quality of life. And that's important. After all, photography is not who we are, it's only what we do.

Motivations

What is the number-one reason for starting your own business? Is it the joy of being a self-employed entrepreneur and an ability to dictate your own hours? Is it the money? The ability to dream your own dreams and reach for the stars? Is it the ability to “breathe life” into your own business creation and watch as it grows and becomes more profitable and successful over time?

Actually, each of these ideals prompt people to put everything on the line and start their own business. However, the number-one reason is that we have a passion for what we do.

I assume that since you are reading this book, you are a professional photographer or are committed to becoming one. That said, I suspect you are technically proficient and can take pretty good pictures. Therefore, this book doesn't cover posing, lighting, camera equipment, or the latest advances in digital technologies. Instead, it is dedicated to getting you fired up and excited about what I call the “fun stuff.”

You will tap into a better way of looking at your business and a better quality of life.

During our time together, I'll challenge your mind, get your creative juices flowing, and turbocharge your studio in fresh, innovative ways. I'll teach you how to make your phone ring and make more money, and that will give you more time off to do the things that are most important to you. As a result, you'll enjoy a renewed vigor in your personal life.

It's easy to fall into that old management trap and get caught up in the day-to-day business details. We end up running our studios instead of designing our lives. We answer phones, retouch images, order supplies, clean the bathroom, and mow the lawn. Before we know it, we are working seven days a week, sixteen hours a day—week after week, month after month. We don't have time for our families, to drop a fishing line in the water, to hit that golf ball up and down the fairway, or to watch our favorite show on the weekend. The things that are most important to us start slowly slipping away, and we become a slave to our business rather than its master.

If you are like most other professional photographers, you are looking for effective and innovative marketing

techniques that will take your business to the next level of sales and profitability and give you the freedom to attain your goals in life. This book will teach you dynamic, profit-oriented methods not only to compete in the battle for customers but also to win the marketing war! The strong will survive, and the weak will perish. Which will you be?

About the Power Corners

Between the chapters in this book, you'll find sections called "Power Corners." When I began to write this book, I knew I wanted not only to share with you the thoughts that were rattling around in my brain but also to bring you ideas and inspirations from the best marketers our industry has to offer. I proceeded to assemble a team of photographers and marketers who were willing to open up and talk about their lives, both personal and professional. Some of these interviews were done via telephone, others were done through e-mail, and still others were conducted in person.

Each person was presented with basically the same set of questions and they responded in their own unique ways. You will notice, however, that even though the answers, approach to life, and perspectives are all a little different, there is a common thread that ties them all

together. They individually believe that life is to be lived to its fullest and photography is but a means to that end.

These contributors are marketers first and photographers second. They do not let their business get in the way of their lives—and there is definitely a lesson for us all in that example. Effective marketing allows you to have a life outside of photography.

The strong will survive, and the weak will perish. Which will you be?

Besides wanting to find out what makes them tick professionally, I wanted to dig deeper and discover who they are as human beings. They all were good sports about it. In fact, the time I spent talking with each of these successful photographers was perhaps the best education I have received in this industry. It motivated and inspired me, and it confirmed in my mind that successful people have many things in common.

I know you will enjoy the nuggets of wisdom they have to share with you—so let's get started right away! The first "Power Corner" begins on the next page.

About the Author

Internationally acclaimed photographer, educator, and best-selling author Mitche Graf has become one of the most sought-after speakers in the industry, with a fun and creative style that has catapulted his program onto the international scene. He brings more than twenty-five years of dynamic sales and marketing experience and ten years of studio experience to these energetic seminars and workshops, which he has presented in nearly every state and in nine countries. Additionally, his articles appear on a regular basis in the pages of *Rangefinder* magazine, *Professional Photographer*, *Image Maker*, and several other industry publications.

Mitche has been involved in many exciting business ventures, from a used bike parts business he ran from his garage in the seventh grade, to a cribbage-board manufacturing company, to a limousine business, to a restaurant, to a portable hot tub rental business, to a drive-through espresso business, to a photography studio, and many more. From this, he has learned that the basic principles of marketing are the same whether you are selling meat, corn, bricks, potatoes, or photography.

He firmly believes that life is meant to be lived, not endured, and that taking control of your business can help you achieve all your other goals in life. (For him, that means enjoying the outdoors, gardening, playing guitar, really good wine, great music, reading, barbecuing, and spending lots of time with his family.)

Whether you live in a small town or a metropolitan area, you will find in this book the techniques you need to maximize your success—in both your business and your life. For more information on Mitche Graf or his educational products and services, please visit www.powermarketing101.com.



Power Corner

Focus on . . .

John Hartman



John has his business and his life figured out! He has kept a fresh attitude during his thirty-year photographic career by building a business that serves him, rather than the other way around.

This arrangement affords him time to help other photographers by producing business-building seminars (the John Hartman Marketing Boot Camp), creativity-enhancing products (Quick-Mats™ digital matting system), digital workflow solutions (QuickProofs™), and marketing and sales systems (SeniorMarketing™). His famous “Marketing Boot Camps” are an absolute must for anyone looking to gain a complete understanding of what marketing entails.

For more information on John’s educational materials and seminars, visit www.jhartman.com.

Mitche: What is the biggest challenge facing our industry in the coming years?

John: The electronic revolution is changing our whole business model. The way we shoot, present our images, sell, and produce photographs will never be the same. Similarly, the methodologies we use to locate, sell, and manage our customers have never been more complex. The challenges can be met by flexible, forward-thinking, customer-driven studios. Those that cannot or will not adapt to these changes will eventually die, most likely sooner rather than later.

Describe your marketing philosophy.

Marketing is simply a communication system to drive clients into your studio. The best marketing creates the maximum number of qualified customers at the lowest possible cost and effort per total sales. Note that I did not simply say the lowest possible cost. Marketing that brings in a high response might be expensive to produce, but because the response rate is so high, the result is a very low marketing cost as a percentage of total sales.

To illustrate, one photographer among my senior marketing clients spent \$1,200 on a postcard mailing that produced eight phone inquiries, resulting in three confirmed portrait bookings. Those three sessions brought in a total of \$2,258 in sales. His marketing cost as a percentage of sales was a rather dismal 53 percent and, in his opinion and mine, certainly not worth his time and effort.

He then switched to a more comprehensive mailing strategy—an eight-page sales letter with an eight-page color catalog mailed in a 9x12-inch envelope. Printing and mailing costs for this package were just over \$5,300. He mailed to the same list and this time booked 154 sessions with total sales of \$109,494. His marketing costs as a percentage of sales was under 4.8 percent.

At first, he was petrified of spending \$5,300 at his printer and post office (“I could’ve bought a new digital camera and a couple of lenses for that!”), but his spectacular results helped to change his attitude. Good marketing is not an expense; it’s an investment. For him, every dollar spent returned \$20.00. At that rate, how much would he have been willing to invest? As much as possible!

Another portion of my thinking about marketing is that it should be a tool to keep your studio running as close to full capacity as possible, for as long as you deem necessary. If you have a large staff that likes to get a paycheck every week, you may deem fifty-two weeks a year to be necessary. If you’re a mom-and-pop studio and like time off, you may be able to earn a good living working hard just twenty to twenty-five weeks a year.

Regardless, marketing keeps your schedule from being a hit-or-miss affair. If you are as busy as you want to be, with no holes in your schedule, then your marketing is working. If you aren’t shooting as many weeks a year as you’d like, or if your schedule has 9:30 a.m., 1:00 p.m., and 4:30 p.m. appointments with nothing in between, then your marketing probably needs some fine-tuning.

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

The Power Marketer understands what marketing is and what it can do for his or her studio. A key attribute of the Power Marketer is the ability to see the big picture while being able to focus on details of the here and now (hence my self-portrait). Power Marketers constantly test new

marketing ideas against old, proven ones and don't change until they have found ones that work better, faster, cheaper or with greater yield. Most photographers jump willy-nilly into a new marketing idea they haven't even tested, often abandoning the successful marketing they had been using. The Power Marketer knows that marketing that works should only be substituted with marketing that works better. And the most powerful of Power Marketers will often use these new marketing ideas in tandem with their old ones, rather than substituting them. Doing this allows each studio to build business in its own way, and to compound their marketing results.

Do you feel that Power Marketers are born, or are they self-taught?

Some people have the gift of interpersonal communication, which is often called "born salesmanship." To some extent this is true, but born salespeople do not necessarily make born Power Marketers. Marketing is both an art and a science that requires several abilities and skills.

First is the ability to provide products and services for which customers are willing to pay the price you need to maintain your standard of living—and make sure you're still in business tomorrow. It's not impossible to market a bad product, but it makes the task much more difficult, especially if you rely on repeat business.

Second is the ability to realize that without a customer, you do not have a photography studio, but merely an art gallery. The only way to create customers is through marketing. And the more effective your marketing is, the faster your business grows, and ultimately the faster you will achieve the lifestyle you desire.

Third, Power Marketers understand the reasons that customers do business with them, and from those reasons they develop their hook or unique selling propositions (USPs) to market to their new prospective clients. They constantly query their clients on why they chose their studio over others and then promote those reasons in their marketing. They don't waste marketing space tooting their own horns, but rather, they place a high priority on packing as many customer benefits into their marketing effort as possible. They fully understand that people don't buy photography; they buy the benefits that photography brings them, whatever they may be.

What are the most important things in your life?

How does your marketing come into play with them?

My family, my God, my friends, and my personal development as a contributing human being in the days allotted to me on terra firma are my life priorities. Smart marketing has allowed me time and resources to spend on them, instead of being a slave to my business.

How important is it to you to have the proper balance between your personal and professional life?

Most people spend a good portion (if not all) of their life buying money with their time. Some people tire of this early and learn it is much more efficient to buy time with your money. I do this by delegation. I know what the value of my time is, and if there is someone who is willing to do a job that needs to be done at a lower cost, then I buy that time from them. The more I can delegate, the more personal time I have. You rarely "save" money by doing it yourself if you factor in the value of your time.

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

First, marketing is not a one-shot affair. Its effectiveness can only be measured with repeated efforts and exposures to a targeted prospective clientele. People are not always ready to buy at the exact instant your marketing reaches them. But given enough exposure to your message, they will buy from you when the need finally arises.

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

Second, don't overlook the most obvious and valuable marketing resource you possess: your current customer base. It costs about twenty times more to acquire a new customer than it does to reactivate an old one. For some reason many photographers think their first-time customers are finished buying from them. Nothing could be farther from the truth; they can buy more (up-sell or re-order from existing files), they can buy again (resell or update session), or they can buy something else (cross-sell

or migrate to a new product line). These people have already done business with you; they like what you do, they understand your fee structure. Provide good WIIFM (what's-in-it-for-me) reasons to spend money with you again and, more often than not, they will.

What is your “hook”?

For my photography clients, it's “You get a comfortable and enjoyable session, flattering photographs, and finished image products you will be proud to hang in your home and give to friends and loved ones—guaranteed.”

For my photographer clients, it's “We provide marketing, sales, management and digital workflow solutions that bring additional sessions, higher sales, and time savings all out of proportion to their investment.”

What marketing campaign or concept has been the most productive and successful for you?

Far and away, the best marketing vehicle I have used is direct mail. I've had a single portrait mailing to 4,000 prospects bring in over \$200,000 in sales in one six-week period. One direct mail piece to photographers resulted in over \$33,000 in sales in a single morning. I designed, printed, and sent a mailing to several hundred of my past portrait clients that resulted in over \$6,000 in credit card deposits within forty-eight hours of the mailing.

No other marketing I've used even comes close to this kind of response . . .

No other marketing I've used even comes close to this kind of response. I continue to test Internet marketing, rep marketing, and joint ventures with other businesses, but for fast, immediate sales, direct mail is still king.

What about the least successful?

Yellow pages advertising. I tracked results three years running and found that although the ad produced many inquiries, most were unqualified price shoppers who spent lots of time asking questions but rarely were converted into paying customers. Not only was the actual dollar in-

vestment of the ad wasted, so was a large amount of staff time. In not one of those three years did the sales from those yellow pages ad clients pay for the ad. Dropping to a simple line listing was an easy sell to the ad rep.

What do you do for fun?

I have a loving wife and three sons who require (and receive) lots of my attention. Luckily we all share interesting passions: music (I'm a former professional drummer), gourmet cooking, biking, and downhill skiing. My personal passions are fast cars and investing (you need the latter in order to do the former). And of course I still love to pick up a camera and shoot just for me.

The time spent studying and emulating successful marketing ideas is the most valuable investment you can make in your business. Take away all my photography skills, my Photoshop knowledge, my entire studio, but let me keep my marketing skills, and I'll have it all back in no time. Take away my marketing skills and I'll be stuck at the bottom of the barrel until the bankruptcy court finally calls.

What's the best experience you have had in your life?

Besides being present at the births of my three sons, it was pretty cool to step out of a 40-foot stretch HumVee limo with the Blue Man Group, my staff and seven photographers/musicians in front of the Luxor in Las Vegas (to the cheers and camera flashes of several hundred students posing as “fans”) at Boot Camp in 2002. They pulled off the entire evening including a huge party and my getting to play with the band, without me having a clue. That evening I learned the depth of the camaraderie that exists in this industry, and what a privilege it is to be a part of it.

Who are your biggest inspirations in your life as a photographer/teacher/entrepreneur?

Paul Castle taught me that it's about business, not about photography. Don Feltner showed me how to build that business faster than I ever dreamed possible. Charles Lewis gave me the inspiration to grow outside of my box. Earle Nightengale proved it's not what happens, but what you do about it that matters. Jay Abraham has to be the most creative thinker in the business world. My wife Kathy, who always reminds me that it's nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice!