



LADIES & GENTS ...

There's an old nautical expression that seems very appropriate in today's changing photographic environment: What do you do when the wind stops blowing? You row!

Many photographers are finding that photography paradigms are shifting faster than they can react. It doesn't matter what type of portraiture you do or who buys it, you're probably in the same boat with them. It's now time to row!

There are many ways to row your way out of some very uneasy and unprofitable situations. I have addressed some of the more interesting problems below, as well as some ideas that may help your business to stay afloat.

Wedding Photography

I've heard it a thousand times: Photographers say they are suffering from the "Uncle Fred syndrome." It's also been called the "Soccer Mom phenomenon"; this happens when potential bridal clients use amateur photographers to capture their wedding pictures, only to receive nothing more than a bill and a disc! There are other similar instances I've heard about in which professional photographers get away with the same thing.

In any case, these poor clients ultimately have nothing to show for their weddings. No albums, no parent books, no wall portraits—no nothing! They are advised to go to Sam's Club to get their pictures printed, then go to Wal-Mart to buy an album. For many, when this occurs, they can only adopt an attitude of defeatist acceptance. You cannot allow them this fate. Regardless of how their pictures were taken, there is an opportunity to help these brides.

First and foremost, you need to identify these potential bridal clients. Where can you find them? How can you get to them and tell them about your services? The most convenient way is through

an ad in the bridal section of your local newspaper. Title it "Attention, Disgruntled Brides," or something of that nature, to call attention to your services. Thereafter, alert them to the fact that you are a professional photographer who will use their images (regardless of who took them) to offer them the products and services that they should have had from the start. This should elicit quite a few calls, if only for additional information.

Secondly, post a message on your website and offer these services to non-traditional customers who already have pictures.

Thirdly, protect yourself. Whoever shows

up at your doorstep, pictures in hand, may not understand the liabilities involved. You may be willing to print, mount or frame these images, but you are not liable for their quality or composition. If you choose to put your name on these products, there should be a clear disclaimer regarding their origin. You would never want anyone to think that this is your photographic work.

High School Senior Photography

The business of photographing high school seniors has always been lucrative for photographers. Over the past few years, this business has morphed into three main



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GRAB YOUR OARS!

BY JOEL LEVIN

areas—high-end, contract arrangements and freelance. In each area, photographers are challenged to be highly creative in order to hold onto their revenue base.

High-end senior photographers have always been fortunate enough to draw from the cream of the crop. Their ability to use new technology and digital imaging has produced some innovative imagery. Baseball players with flaming bats and ballet dancers vaulting the Grand Canyon have allowed photographers to please a new generation of consumers looking for something new and freshly inspired. These photographers will need to outdo themselves

each year if they are to maintain the share of the market that they currently enjoy.


Still, the school photography business has become so cutthroat that many talented photographers have left for greener pastures. Stories of cut revenues and under-the-table payments have disillusioned many who have called this venue home for a generation or more.

It doesn't help the level of senior photographic activity that many schools are putting academic guidelines on their students. For example, earning a 2.0 GPA might be a requirement for students attending the senior prom or other various dances. This

practice has cut photographers' revenue considerably—in some cases by as much as 50%. Imagine not having control of your income! Even photographers who freelance are not immune to this phenomenon. For example, many photographers who were receiving portrait business from students who disliked conventional yearbook shots are now hearing things like, "My parents would rather spend \$600 on a computer for my college dorm room." What's a business to do?

Well, just as with the changing wedding business, you need to reassess your potential audience. If capturing high school students is your calling, then you will need to challenge yourself to find a vehicle of exposure through which your images are best seen. Figure out a non-conventional way to get your images circulating among students.

I would suggest, for example, that you consider locating a few singers at each school and offering them a full session for free. In return, they will act as your press agents and show their finished images to all the people they can. This is a small price to pay for excellent word-of-mouth advertising. It eliminates all of the in-school politics and helps to send potential customers running home, insistent that they make an appointment for these unique photos.

The future holds no certainty for any business, especially ours. We need to concentrate on the core values that brought us to this industry in the first place. How can we produce the finest quality images and get our clients to commission our work? And, to further that end, have them accept it into their homes and keep hold of it for generations to come. 

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