

# THINGS CHANGE

## But Much Remains the Same

**T**hirty years ago, in an effort to jumpstart my photography career, I was out showing my portfolio. One art director told me he had reviewed many portfolios and seen plenty of photographers come and go. Those he worked with had been in business a long time, he said, and he suggested the key to my success would be consistency.

I followed his advice as I planned my marketing and self-promotion, and while being consistent and constant might have been effective, it was also time-consuming and costly. As I remember those early days and the struggles of building a new business, I still wonder if there could have been an easier way. Success in professional photography has never been easy. I hung in there though, and in hindsight my persistence clearly played a role in a career I feel has been long and gratifying.

That was the mid-eighties, and a very different photography world existed back then. To find clients I used the yellow pages from major cities to look up graphic designers and advertising agencies. When I travelled, I made note of the post card, book and calendar publishers I found in visitor centers and retail settings. I used resources offered at the public library, like *Magazine Market Place* (MMP) or *Literary Market Place* (LMP). After compiling a list, I'd call the agencies and designers and request a meeting to show my portfolio. For the publishers, I mailed a cover letter along with a color print of my nature imagery. To avoid "out of sight, out of mind," I printed postcards and mailed them every few months to stay connected with anyone with whom I'd made contact.

While traveling, I stopped once a day at a pay phone to call my answering machine back home, check for messages and return calls. If an image request came in, I'd call an assistant to pull the image and mail it. There was no internet or email, no cell phones or iPads, and image archiving required a large office and many file cabinets. Fax machines were widely popular for quick correspondence and Federal Express and other overnight carriers were fairly new. Photo submissions usually went by snail mail; and if you could not make the deadline, you did not make the sale.

Doing business is different these days. We have many tools that make our jobs easier. We can communicate with our clients from almost anywhere and at anytime. We can access our home offices from any

computer, iPad or even smart phone. Our images can be housed online, rights purchased and paid for there, and downloaded by clients at anytime, no matter where we are.

Yet, while much has gotten easier, there is no question that marketing is still necessary and time-consuming. In the old days you sent postcards, faxes and letters, and you made phone calls. Today, there are more options. Rather than yellow pages and library books, you can search online for commercial clients in every industry and niche. You can find calendar publishers at Publishers Global (<http://www.publishersglobal.com>); graphic designers on the website Design Firms (<http://www.designfirms.org>); and the American Association of Advertising Agencies has a member directory (<http://www.aaa.org>).

Marketing has primarily gone electronic and press releases can be sent out from a smart phone on a moment's notice. There is Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube, blogs, and each has the potential to reach vastly more people than we ever could with postcards. The tools to run our businesses have clearly changed and are cheaper and easier to use, but they are not for everybody.

The markets for nature photography have historically been publishers, fine art and an occasional commercial usage. While the commercial markets are down and likely not to recover for some time, the number of photography enthusiasts has exploded. For nature photographers who need to expand their product services, the growing market of amateurs with new digital cameras may be the growth market. Some photographers have noticed, as evidenced by the increase in photo workshops, eBooks and online print sales. This is all great, but it matters not what services you offer if they are poorly marketed.

So what are the best and most effective marketing tools? It isn't hard to figure out. If you are marketing your stock images to commercial clients, will they follow you on Twitter and read your Tweets? If you are marketing your eBook, is it cost-effective to send postcards announcing your newest edition? Certainly there is crossover, but a survey (<http://www.aPhotoeditor.com/2010/07/08/photo-editor-and-art-buyer-survey/>) showed that only eight percent of commercial buyers polled actually use Twitter or Facebook to find photographers. Their overwhelming preference

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLIE FORLAND



*This image, originally shot with a 4x5 camera, was duplicated on 70mm dupe film. These duplicates were then widely distributed and on occasion, we ran out of duplicates. Today, it has been drum scanned and the digital high resolution file can be distributed or downloaded as many times as requested.*

was listed as postcards and emails. The photography enthusiasts however, by following you, may be reached more effectively through your blog, Facebook page, or Twitter.

If you are working with video, you're in luck as video has never been easier to use as a marketing tool. Consider a search on Google where the results often include websites, images and YouTube videos. People search based on a need for information and since Google owns YouTube, search results could include your video if it meets Google's search terms. You can set up your own YouTube channel and include subjects like imagery, how you work, tools you employ, and photography techniques.

If your video is effective and entertaining, it might become popular. The most popular videos are shared by viewers with friends who also share it to a point where it goes viral, bringing in more views for your products and services. These videos can be shared

across all platforms and embedded on your blog or website.

As you diversify your business, you need to diversify your marketing and use the tools appropriate for the intended target. Determining who your clients are and which marketing tools are best for each group increases chances of a better response. Targeted marketing is still essential! Think about how you shop. If you need a transmission repair, would you search Facebook or look in the Yellow Pages? Remember: the wrong message to the right client means no business and wasted effort.

What marketing comes down to is that we need to do the same things photographers did 30 years ago: provide a product to a market that wants it! And the best news is that the most effective marketing tools these days are free! So use them and don't forget that consistency is key. Things change, but much remains the same. ☺