

One day last fall, my cell phone rang. A client who had requested images a month before and emailed three weeks later about usage fees was now calling to discuss her budget. Within five minutes we had negotiated a mutually satisfying fee. What made closing this sale interesting was that the client was "glad she caught me in the office," since I am often traveling. What she didn't know, however, is that I was actually out photographing on location at Oregon's Crater Lake. Still, from my perspective, I was in my outdoor office, creating images to license.



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Balancing marketing and shooting can be a dilemma for outdoor photographers: How do you continue to create new images and maintain an office to market and sell the work? A successful nature photography business hinges on both a regular flow of new imagery and selling that imagery.

Some photographers have managers running their offices and others use part-time interns or students. But even with office help, you sometimes have to be accessible to talk with clients or solve a myriad of problems that can crop up while you are away. In today's demanding business climate, the need to be accessible presents some challenges. Missing a call could mean missing a sale, and that is a tough pill to swallow. Luckily, with today's technology and internet-based services, traveling while staying connected is easier than ever.

STAYING CONNECTED

A mobile phone is almost a necessity for photographers wishing to stay connected with clients—despite the occasional connection limitations. State-of-the-art phones with an evolving range of useful services such as email access, text messaging, internet surfing, mapping services and GPS are invaluable to the traveling photographer. For many, the choice is not whether or not to have one, but whether or not to answer the phone in the field.

If you can't or won't take your phone out in the field, another option is a wireless broadband card in a laptop. If you travel in an RV, the satellite internet provided by MotoSat (www.motosat.com) offers internet connections virtually anywhere. Add Skype (www.skype.com) internet phone service at two cents per minute

and you can be connected to the world.

MAIL / FAX

Before your next photo trip, send an email announcement to your established clients notifying them of your upcoming travels. Let them know they can still contact you by phone or email at anytime should they have photo needs you can fill. Even if you can't take the call immediately, let them know you will get to it that day (or whenever you plan to listen to your voice mail) and act on it. This tends to put a positive psychological spin on the issue and may enable you to make a sale. The more passive option (and not one I'd recommend) is the auto responder in your email program that replies to all incoming messages saying you are out of the office and when you'll be back.

If you plan to be on the road for some time, consider using a mail forwarder rather than putting a vacation hold on your mail. Mail Boxes Etc. or Postal Annex are two choices for a postal box. These companies not only accept your packages, but also forward the mail to you on the road at your request. A visit to their websites (www.mbe.com and www.postalannex.com) will provide store locations where you can have your mail sent.

Need to sign an image sale contract and the closest fax is 40 miles away? Consider an internet fax service such as efax.com. Boot up your laptop, connect

with a broadband card, and you can receive the fax, sign it (with a digital signature), and return it all in minutes from your laptop.

MARKETING ON THE ROAD

When the weather is lousy and you are stuck in your camper, why not pull out the laptop and process some images? When you are done, the thumbnails are ready for upload to your website and available to license.

If you don't have an internet presence, consider a simple gallery style website that shows buyers your images. Clients then contact you and negotiate the terms and you can quickly send off the high-resolution image right from your laptop. It takes just minutes to set up a PayPal account, allowing you to request payment before sending the image to a new buyer.

Consider traveling with your web library on a portable, external hard drive which stores your high-resolution images. If your library is too large to be portable and resides on hard drives in your office, consider one of the online remote access services.

Gotomypc.com and letmein.com are two such services offering remote access to your office computer from anywhere. These provide instant access to anything on your PC, including email, bookkeeping and high-resolution stock photos. Images can then be located, emailed or delivered by ftp. The only caveat is that you have to leave your office computer on while you are away.

PASSIVE INCOME

What's better than licensing images and earning income without being involved in the transaction? If you prefer this hands-off approach, there are a variety of ways to generate sales. In today's competitive markets, most outdoor photographers need to pursue any and all options to generate sales of their work.

Take a look at web portals such as Digital Railroad or Photoshelter. You buy a membership, upload your images, set prices and the transactions are automated. Also consider building your own e-commerce website for image sales. Software products by Ktools.com and lightboxphoto.com allow you to build the website, set pricing and generate sales with fully automated transactions.

Drive clients to your websites and portals to generate sales. The most cost effective mass marketing method is the email campaign. You can send email campaigns often and from anywhere you have an internet connection. Since you don't want to spam clients or prospective clients, try buying permission-based lists from companies such as www.freshlist.com and www.agencyaccess.com. Sign up for the email management service provided by Constant Contact (www.constantcontact.com) and those on the email list can easily opt-out of your email campaign if they are not interested in receiving your emails.

Finally, if you are not already in the limited-edition print business, consider online print sales that are sold in volume. Internet-based photo labs are plentiful, and a few—such as

digibug.com, shutterfly.com and mpix.com—offer viable "passive income" options for earning income from prints. The process is fully automated where the lab takes the order, makes the print and ships the products.

SUMMARY

Whatever your outdoor photo specialty, today's wireless technology and the internet simplify running your business while you are on the road. You can talk with clients, upload images and generate sales on the same days you are out creating images. ☺

Charlie Borland has been a professional photographer for close to 30 years, and his images have been used in most major magazines, including National Geographic Adventure, Newsweek, Outdoor Photographer, Outside and Women's Sport and Fitness. He has won many awards for his photography, and for seven years in a row, he received recognition for annual reports he has photographed. Charlie is vice president and cofounder of www.fogstock.com, an online picture agency, and he teaches with www.aspenphotoworkshops.com.



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