

Most nature photographers engage in nature photography for the peace, solitude and personal journey that come with it. If they can shoot and sell enough images to make a living, then they're doing OK. However, few nature photographers today make enough sales to provide a living wage.

Wedding, advertising and commercial photographers can make thousands of dollars per day while the nature photographer often doesn't make that in a month. Nature photographers engage in the most competitive sector of professional photography where there's a tremendous overlap of imagery, smaller markets and lower usage rates. And they do it all on speculation, often without a specific client in mind.

The commercial photographer requires more training, more equipment and often works on assignment charging competitive fees. In nature photography, there are few assignments, many photographers have no idea what to charge, and there are few published business standards. By adopting strategies used by commercial photographers, nature photographers can broaden their product line and client base for more lucrative possibilities.

IDENTIFY CURRENT MARKETS

What is your product? Who are your clients? How many of your clients buy imagery from you regularly? A close look at the answers to those questions might provide a bleak outlook on future sales.

One way to increase sales is to expand your product beyond pure nature photography. In the global market for image sales, nature photog-



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raphy is statistically at the bottom of subjects in demand, while business and lifestyle are closer to the top.

There is room to expand into business images without straying too far from nature with industries like farming, logging and the sciences. People pictures are essential to these images. There are also plenty of possibilities to expand into lifestyle imagery by including people in nature scenes after you've photographed the scenes without people. For this article, I am focusing on lifestyle images of people in the outdoors.

Landscapes that include people have a broader market than landscapes without them. Editors like photographs that give viewers a sense of place; images they can identify with.

TAKE AN ADVENTURE

Taking an adventure is an easy way to start building an image file of people

outdoors. Sign up for a rafting trip, a llama trek or an eco-tour, and during the trip, capture activities like hiking, whitewater action, camping and other images where people are involved... and continue to photograph nature images without people too.

Adventure travel participants are paying customers, not models, so before taking any images, request their permission and ask them to sign model releases that you have prepared ahead of time. Parents must sign model releases for their children who are under age 18. Tell the group at the beginning of the trip that you "want to document the adventure." I offer them a spiral-bound booklet of photos in exchange for signing a model release, and I show them a booklet from a previous trip. Back in the office at the end of the trip, I design a simple booklet of pictures, print it on my inkjet printer, bind it, and mail each family or individual a copy.

The cost is low in relation to the value of model-released adventure images.

After doing a few trips, send booklets to adventure outfitters and offer to trade free use of your photos in their marketing campaigns for a free trip. This could lower your costs dramatically, and you might find it easier to obtain model releases with the sanction of the outfitter. And, of course, you would still be able to market your images on your own or through your picture agencies.

MAKE AN ADVENTURE

Getting marketable outdoor images does not require you to take an adventure vacation. Many photographers have created marketable images on a day hike or campout with friends or family. Include your companions in some of the nature images. A person standing at the base of a waterfall, hiking along a trail, backpacking (or pretending to backpack) or doing other activities can be shot on the same outing to photograph the waterfall. Keep a colorful dome tent, camp stove and backpack in the car and you can stage a camp scene anywhere. Using a wireless remote to trigger your camera will allow you to be in your own photos when a model is not available.

Even when photographing friends and family for images you plan to market, request signed model releases. Releases are often requested by end users and/or picture agencies that represent your work.

THINK GLOBAL, SHOOT LOCAL

Most towns and cities have a local tourism association that often buys photography. If you are planning to shoot the local ski area, seek out a

representative from the publicity or public relations department of the travel association. Tell the person your plans and ask if the association has an interest in possibly licensing the resulting images to promote tourism. If interested, request the representative's input for your shoot, making it clear that the company is under no obligation to purchase the resulting images. Tailor your shoot to include scenes that the association tells you it has an interest in. Use friends to model for a few hours.

In addition to extreme sports, many other activities are marketable, such as families canoeing, retired adults around a campfire, or two women hiking or mountain biking. Many urban natural areas are good locations for eco-friendly people activities. Shoot as if on assignment for a national magazine, and these images will have local and national appeal.

Any time you are out shooting landscapes, make note of locations that would be good for images of people hiking or fishing or where a camp scene might be staged, and come back later to capture those.

PRODUCT MANUFACTURERS

Product manufacturers often buy photography of their products in use. Parkas, jackets, footwear, shirts, pants and all the accessories for outdoor activities need to be photographed to sell the product. Some companies assign photographers to shoot their products while others buy images as stock. Pursue these manufacturers by sending printed examples of your adventure images with an offer to shoot their products on speculation.

Make their logos identifiable in the images. Many manufacturers are interested in these speculative arrangements because published images equal free advertising. Some have been known to provide their products, on loan or as gifts, for a shoot by a photographer they know and trust.

DIVERSIFY

There are many ways to grow your business. Start by looking hard at your current markets. It is always easier to sell more to existing clients than to find new ones. Your marketing efforts should include calendar companies and publishers, but also advertising agencies and product manufacturers for a diversified client base. Your business depends on it!

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, Women's Sport and Fitness and others. 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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