

The new year is here, and if you haven't yet planned your marketing strategy for the next 12 months, now's the time. With the twists and turns the economy has taken the past couple of years, the need to plan a sound strategy has never been more important. Customers have slashed budgets and maybe you have too, but there are cost-effective ways to market your work.

Develop a plan. Obviously your goal is more sales. But how can you accomplish that goal? Write down your ideas and organize them into logical steps. What steps will you do each month, each week and each day? The more thorough your list, the easier it will be for you to follow through. Your plan of action should include where you are now, where you want to be, and the strategy you will use to get there. My purpose with this article is to help you put together your marketing strategy.

Word of mouth

Word of mouth is still one of the most powerful marketing methods. This comes from successfully working with one client who shares its experience with another. This isn't a license to sit back and wait for the phone to ring after a job well done, however. You must be an active participant in your marketing.

Look at any assignments or projects using your stock images that resulted in a positive customer experience. Capitalize on them by requesting referrals from the clients—would they be so kind as to

refer you to their associates who may be interested in your work? Follow up by contacting those leads, tell them who referred you, and ask for an appointment to show your portfolio or request permission to send a promotional piece.

Promotions

Stay on message. Whether you are doing direct mail, an email campaign or both, keep your message consistent. Promotions should go out on a monthly basis, and the most effective designs show more than pretty pictures. They have a theme; tell a story; are examples of images from a current self-assignment or an assigned project. By going beyond showing a single image or a group of unrelated images, you not only let the recipient know that you have great pictures, but also that you are working. Occasionally, a promotion will trigger a sale of the images within the promotion.

Social networking

Can social networking lead to more assignments, image requests or product sales? Hard to say, but just as hard to dispute that the more your name appears online the better for your business. If your products include books and calendars, they may increase the traffic to your site. Increased traffic could lead to more sales. Facebook, the number one social networking site with more than 120 million users, allows personal and business profiling. As you build on your list of Facebook friends, you increase potential buyers of your products. Social networking may not be as effective as the traditional showing

of your portfolio to one buyer at a time, but the massive reach easily makes up for it.

Weblogs

A weblog describing new images, recent projects, a new website or general news about the business will add to your followers and potential customers. Join nature photography membership sites and participate in the forums. Engaging readers simply to share information builds name recognition, but try to avoid blatant self promotion because it may get you listed as a spammer. Micro-blogging sites like Twitter may not result in quick sales but they can help build additional recognition of your brand. Many businesses are singing the praises about this word-of-mouth approach to networking as they are seeing increased interest in their products. Strategically "tweeting" to a growing list of followers could result in some form of business

Video diaries

Create video diaries of your photo adventures. Many new DSLRs as well as many smaller point-and-shoot cameras are coming with high-definition video ability. In the field, mount the camera to a tripod and begin recording yourself, discussing where you are, what you are photographing, and how you plan to capture the perfect shot. Back in the office, record your Photoshop steps with screen recording software like Camtasia Studio for PCs or SnapZ for Macs. Apple's low-cost Quicktime Pro will allow you to easily edit, combine clips, and add still images for your final video.

Then post on YouTube or Vimeo, add links on your site, and Tweet your followers about the new post. The idea is to go "viral," showing the world and potential clients who you are and how you work. Your readers inform their readers who inform their readers and so on.

Are you an expert?

Make yourself an expert and tell the world. If you have valuable expertise, someone will want to know about it. If you have been working on a personal photo project—for example, the natural ecosystems of the Everglades—there are many potential markets. You can package the project in many ways: sell single images as stock, produce a calendar, publish (or self publish) a book, and put together a multimedia presentation.

They will all feed off of each other. If you start with the Everglades book, for example, send a copy to a calendar publisher who may print your solo calendar. Promote sales of the calendars and books purchased from the printer at the author's discounted rates at your multimedia presentations. Send out notices to various Florida Chambers of Commerce, camera clubs, nature organizations, even business groups, announcing your Everglades presentation, new book and calendar. Announce the same on your Facebook page and Tweet to your followers. Set a reasonable rate for your presentations, but also consider doing some for free, and sell the books, calendars and DVDs to cover your time. Finally, send out press releases to sites like www.fineartamerica.com, [and other free sites that will spread the word.](http://www.pr.com,</p>
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Conclusion

Nature photographers have never been more challenged to promote their business and build name recognition in our competitive business world. Yet, there have never been more tools available to make the job easier. Keep your marketing efforts going full speed by planning and preparing some simple steps using the vast array of internet tools. Start today and have a prosperous year. ☺

Charlie Borland has been a professional photographer for close to 30 years, and his images have been used in calendars, advertising, books and most major magazines, including National Geographic Adventure, Newsweek, Outdoor Photographer, Outside, Backpacker and Women's Sport and Fitness. Charlie is cofounder of www.fogstock.com, an online picture agency, and he teaches an online course, "The Business of Outdoor and Nature Photography" at The Perfect Picture School, www.ppsop.com.



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Nature's SHOWCASE



MONARCH CATERPILLARS
© Larry Lynch

Monarch butterflies use the milkweed bushes in Larry Lynch's backyard year-round to lay their eggs. When the eggs hatch, the caterpillars eat the milkweed so fast that there aren't enough leaves to keep up. To survive, the caterpillars resort to eating the stems and occasionally have to share when the food supply gets particularly scarce. Larry Lynch took this photo in December 2006 with a Nikon D2x camera and Nikon 200mm macro lens, ISO 100 at f/16, shot at 1/5 second.

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