How to SELL PRINTS

An educational guide by: **PHOTOSHELTER**
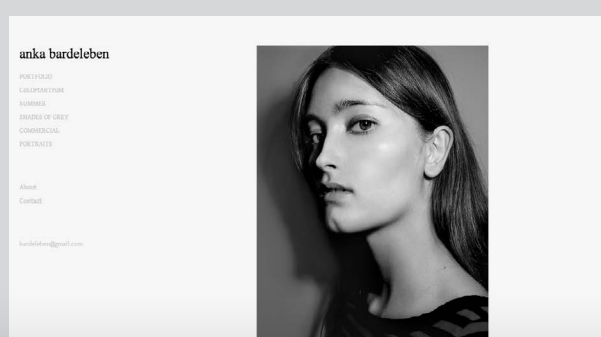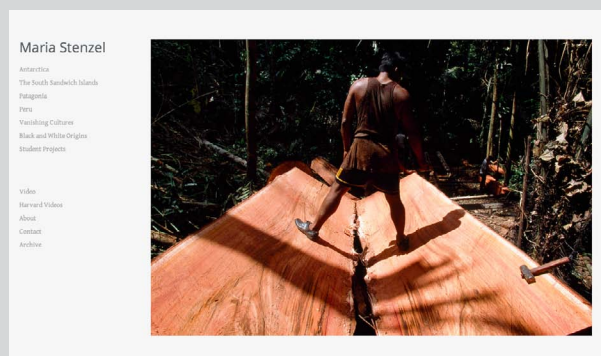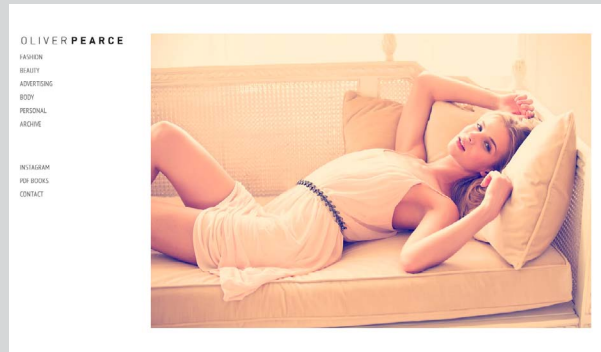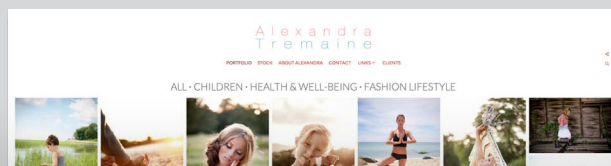
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Introduction

No matter how you slice it, print sales are still a huge element of the photography industry. In certain segments, such as weddings, the number of straight prints sold has declined, but in its place, higher priced products like stretched canvases have filled the void.

And although photography has become highly commoditized with the prevalence of digital cameras, the high-end art photography market has suffered little, with top photographers still commanding top dollar.

Wherever you fall on the spectrum of photography and pricing, we hope that this guide helps introduce new opportunities for you to market and sell your prints. There's no magic bullet for suddenly quadrupling sales, but with a targeted marketing campaign, there's a solid chance you can increase your income by monetizing your existing content, while also becoming more savvy in how you market and to whom you market.

WHY SELL PRINTS?

Print sales can be a supplementary and unexpected revenue stream, and many photographers use print sales as a way to show off personal work, even if they're primarily focused on other areas like commercial photography.

If you're dissuaded by the thought of becoming an expert printer and dealing with profiling and calibration, fear not: You don't have to print anything yourself. PhotoShelter, for example, offers full and partial integration to nearly 200 print vendors around the world (and counting), and these print vendors offer a wider choice of product options and finishes to help you delight your clients.

MODELING YOUR SUCCESS

Every MBA student goes through the process of creating a business plan, which articulates many aspects of expenses, revenues, audience, and challenges in growing a business. The business plan can span many pages and usually includes a financial pro forma (literally, "as a matter of form") that models the financial growth.

Typically, when we talk to photographers about creating a business and/or marketing plan, their eyes glaze over, and we eventually hear, "I'm a photographer, not a business person." We can understand the sentiment. Most photographers always start with their images, and then try to match the images to a target market.

However, creating a plan doesn't necessarily require pages upon pages of written justification to sell a print. Instead, you should consider it as a way to sanity check your assumptions and understand the factors that drive success. Still want to do it the MBA way? Read more in The 2014 Photo Business Plan.

John Mireles is a successful commercial & advertising photographer in San Diego and San Francisco, who had this to say: "When's the last time a photographer used a spreadsheet? …It never goes according to plan, but at least you have an understanding of what it takes to be successful."

In other words, simply creating a Facebook page because someone told you to do it isn't a good way to drive success. But understanding the metrics that would yield print sales (and how a channel like Facebook, for example, could help) is a solid method to generate sales.

For example, let's say you know that 1 in 1,000 visitors to your website ends up buying a print. If you wanted to sell 10 prints per month, you'd need to drive 10,000 visitors to your website. If your [Google Analytics](#) indicate that you only have 400 visitors per month, you have a very specific course of action to take to ensure success: Namely, drive more traffic to your website.

Similarly, you could equate this with a financial goal. If you wanted to generate $1,000/month in print sales, and your average print sells for $50, then you would need to sell 20 prints. You have a few levers that you can shift in this case. The most obvious is that the number of sales linearly equates to the amount of money you're making, so you could consider a price increase. But less directly, you could also increase the average amount per sale by bundling products or offering multi-item discounts.

Whatever the case may be, you need a clear understanding of:

❱ What is your sales target?

❱ Which levers drive sales?

❱ What marketing activity can help you reach your goal?

❱ What are the most productive marketing activities to help reach that goal?

DON'T MISS OPPORTUNITIES

We've said it before, and we'll say it again. Getting someone to visit your website is hard work. So don't fall into the trap of only displaying images when you have fertile ground to consummate a sale. Don't rely on your potential customers to reach out to you to find out whether an image is available for sale.

Having multiple points of "conversion" on your website (from signing up for a newsletter to buying a print) gives you a way to capitalize upon your audience in the brief moment that you have their attention.

Making images available for sale is simple with services like [PhotoShelter](#), and online sales give you the ability to turn a passive viewer into an active buyer, maybe even when you're sleeping. Impulse buying on the web happens all the time, but it can't happen if you have nothing for sale.

This guide will help prepare you to sell prints to both the random buyer and the clients you've cultivated for years. At the very least, enabling print sales from your website helps make your life easier when a client requests it.

PHOTOSHELTER

Audience

One of the biggest "amateur" mistakes that photographers make is believing that simply having a presence on the web will yield success. There is no doubt that factors like Search Engine Optimization (SEO) can help drive unsolicited visitors to your website, but a major goal of marketing is targeting a qualified audience. If you sell celebrity photos, but the only visitors to your site are teens looking to steal images, a dramatic rise in teen traffic won't help your cause. This seemingly obvious fact is key for understanding efficient marketing activities.

As an extreme example, if you were selling Lady Gaga prints (all legalities aside), spending money on a Google AdWords campaign might initially seem like a good idea. After all, "lady gaga pictures" gets hundreds of thousands of searches per month. However, the vast majority of these searches have no desire to purchase a print. You could literally spend thousands of dollars without generating a penny of return.

In the world of television, Nielsen ratings provide an interesting analogue. Although the average consumer is usually presented with overall numbers, the show producers are really only concerned with the key demographic (usually adults between 18-49). This is because this demographic is the one with buying power, and it appeals to the advertisers that place commercials during the shows.

For photographers, it's key to identify which audience will likely buy prints. In the case of a family or event photographer, that answer is easy—the attendees are your audience. But for a nature or landscape photographer, that question becomes much more difficult, and all the more reason to make a concerted effort to answer. In a recent survey of print sellers within PhotoShelter, we found the second largest audience (14% of all respondents) to be buyers looking for gifts, home or office decor. If your audience fits this description, it's important to determine the effective method of outreach for your particular potential buying base.

A MENTAL EXERCISE

Determining a market size is a good mental exercise. A youth sports photographer, for example, might photograph a local basketball league comprised of 10 teams with 15 players each. Assuming that there's no competition, the market size is 150 families. But to understand "addressable" market size, we have to take some liberal whacks at the number. For example, it's likely that 20% of families have their own camera. Another 20% might never puchase a print no matter how good it is. So the addressable market might very well be 60% of 150, or 90 families.

Once you identify an audience, you need to determine whether it's large enough for you to hit your financial goals. A corporate photographer in a small town isn't likely to generate 100% of his/her income from corporate photography because there probably aren't enough companies to sustain that singular business. That photographer has a few choices:

❱ Diversify the types of photography

❱ Increase the area in which he/she serves

❱ Raise prices

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Raising prices is probably difficult, given that a small area likely doesn't have much pricing flexibility or buyers with deep pockets. But diversifying services and/or increasing the areas serviced makes perfect sense.

The Internet gives us a huge opportunity to inexpensively market into similarly related communities. For example, a food photographer could become a member of the numerous recipe-sharing community sites, and inject him/herself into the conversations to gain credibility and trust. You might say, "I tried this recipe, and this is what it looked like" to build interest in your photography. Then, around the holidays, you might launch a print sale to the community in a very organic and integrated way.

Even sites like flickr or LinkedIn can be potent communities for the consumption of photography. Join a group of like-minded photographers and (subtly) indicate that users can contact you if they're interested in a print. Use your creativity to penetrate the millions of communities that exist online.

Entering (and winning) contests can also generate new audiences for photographers. But lesser established contests rarely have significant reach or clout. Make sure to research a contest before spending time and money on creating an application, as too many contest usurp photographer's copyright on submission, or are simply cheap tactics to raise money through application fees. For tips on which contests we recommend, check out The Photographer's Guide to Contests.

DO THIS:
» Identify your prospective audience

» Determine the approximate "addressable" size of this group

» Determine the best way to reach this group

» Understand demand. What does this group need most?

We'll cover a number of analogues in our case studies to illustrate how photographers are dealing with the addressable market size in their respective fields.

WHAT DOES YOUR AUDIENCE KNOW?
Throughout this guide, you'll hear various suggestions to constantly educate your clients about options like print finishes, papers, inks, etc. But don't overlook even more obvious things like crop and aspect ratios that might confuse your customers.

A completely centered crop to fit a 16x20 print would crop the top of the baby's head.

Most digital SLRs have an aspect ratio of 3:2, which corresponds perfectly to a 4x6 print. But when you sell an 8x10, you're losing 20% of the surface area. That could easily be part of a head or hand that makes the picture. When you're self-fulfilling prints, it's easy to select the best crop, but if you're a high volume event shooter, this might be impractical. You have a few choices: 1) only sell sizes with minimal crop factors (e.g. 8x12, 12x18), or 2) allow the customer to select his/her own crop upon checkout. The PhotoShelter cart , for example, allows the photographer to give his/her customers the choice to select the crop—and while this gives the end user the control, it also assumes they intuitively understand what the crop is and why it exists in the first place.

We've seen enough returned prints to know this isn't an uncommon problem, and it underscores some of the more subtle complexities of selling prints.

Color Profiles, Calibration And Prints: A Brief Guide To Monitor Set-Up

By Mark Joste, previously of [Spectrum Photographic](#)

Ensuring your monitor is set up correctly is a critical factor in the pursuit of predictable print production. Before calibrating your monitor it is important to understand that all the devices in the imaging workflow (camera/scanner, monitor/display and printer) have their own ways of producing colour, which makes the range of colour that they are able to reproduce unique to each device. In order for you to gain consistent and predictable results these devices need to be properly calibrated and colour managed. Also, in order for each device to understand and therefore accurately display an image, each image needs to have an embedded profile. This profile describes the colours in a standardised way so that any profile aware application can handle the image colours correctly.

MONITORS, CALIBRATION AND VIEWING

When preparing digital images for print, the quality of your monitor, its proper calibration (using a hardware calibration device) and the lighting of your workspace and print viewing areas are all factors you need to get right if you wish to achieve predictable and consistent results.

YOUR MONITOR

Buy the best monitor that you can afford. Due to the narrow viewing angle and relatively low cost of laptop screens, these should be considered as unsuitable for colour accurate work, unless of course you plug in an external display and use this instead.

Your monitor should be positioned in an area with consistent and subdued ambient lighting. The surrounding area including yourself should not be brightly coloured or lit. Also, beware of glare, as this reduces contrast, so use a monitor hood to minimise any glare.

Your computer desktop/wallpaper should be a solid grey, and you should replace your monitor every 3 years before it becomes difficult to profile accurately.

MONITOR CALIBRATING: WHY DO IT?

Most monitors, when first purchased, have a brightness in excess of that achievable by any print media and will need calibrating to much more realistic aim values. If not, your prints will always look far too dark when compared to the image on screen.

The idea is to calibrate the monitor, using an onscreen hardware calibration device or 'colourimeter' (think of it as a lightmeter for your monitor), so that the monitor 'mimics' the characteristics of the printed media.

Different papers can have different base whites (which will affect the overall colour balance of the print), so you will need to calibrate your monitor's white point to match the paper you are intending to print on. In other words, a monitor that hasn't been calibrated at all won't match any media, and one that is calibrated to be a good match for an image printed on Fuji Crystal Archive won't be a good match to an image printed on Hahnemuhle German Etch. This is down to a difference in the base white of each media.

HOW?

When using a colourimeter, the software supplied with it will usually have a basic and an advanced/custom mode. (Check before buying the device that there is an advanced mode.)

In order for you to gain consistent and predictable results, your devices need to be properly calibrated and color managed.

As you will be producing a calibration that is unique to your monitor/viewing/printing conditions, you will need to be able to adjust the desired aim values until you reach a setting that works for you. For printing I would recommend the starting values to be a white point of 6000K, a brightness value of 100CD and gamma set to 2.2. This only a starting point, and you will probably have to fine tune this further using a suitable test image.

CONFIRMING THE MATCH BETWEEN YOUR MONITOR & YOUR PRINT

The best way to confirm that your monitor is successfully calibrated for printing is to have a test print made so that you can compare it to the image as it appears on screen. Although there are many standardised test images available online, my personal favourite is the picture disc test file. All you need to do is make a print from this test file using your chosen printer and media combination, whether your own desktop or through one of PhotoShelter's print vendors. (As each printer/media combination has its own unique characteristics, it is important that these test are carried out on the same device that the images you sell to your clients will be fulfilled on).

PRINT VIEWING

It is best to view prints under daylight conditions, as prints can look a different colour when viewed under non daylight balanced light sources (also known as metamerism). Unfortunately the ideal conditions for print viewing are far too bright to be ideal for viewing your monitor and vice versa. Studios will usually have a separate print viewing booth located away from the workstations to keep the lighting around the monitors as subdued as possible.

FURTHER READING

This article is a very brief guide to a small but crucial part of the colour management necessary for successful and predictable print production. If you would like more information on this subject then I recommend that you read; Real World Color Management: Industrial-Strength Production Techniques by Bruce Fraser, Chris Murphy and Fred Bunting, published by Peachpit press.
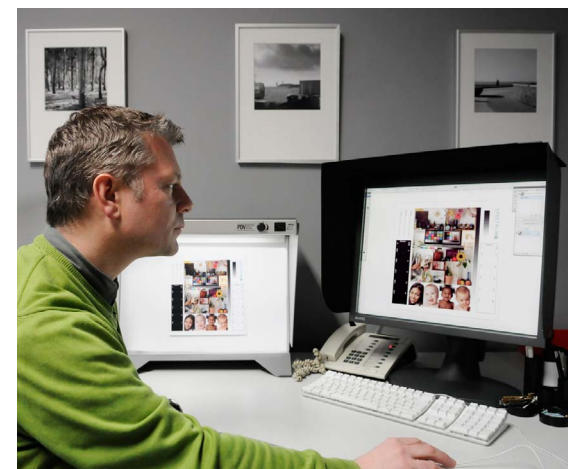
PART IV
Pricing

Pricing can be very arbitrary and frustrating to structure. Why does an Andreas Gursky print sell for $4.3 million, while another photographer's print sells for $25? A number of factors are involved:

❯ Industry standards

❯ Customer price sensitivity

❯ Scarcity / limited editions

❯ Raw materials (ie. paper choice) & production technique

❯ Profit margins

❯ Cost of doing business

INDUSTRY STANDARDS: An analysis of the pricing of your competitors is the best way to grasp "standard" pricing. Obviously, market demands can shift pricing into different tiers. The key is to not underprice (or overprice) your work for a given market. If the stock photography market has taught the broader industry anything, it's that downward pricing pressure (i.e. selling stock for $1) doesn't help photographers at all. Undercutting your competition on price can be a slippery slope, and it's often smarter to figure out how to justify a higher price rather than cater to the bottom of the barrel.

Photographer Dean Oros opined, "A common saying is 'I can only charge what the market will bear.' This is not accurate. It's important to have a range of print offerings that can meet the wants, needs, and desires of the different demographics in the market one serves."

CUSTOMER PRICE SENSITIVITY: When there isn't a huge, fluid market for your work (i.e. high demand and many transactions), you might find that customers have higher price sensitivity. (A higher sensitivity means customers react poorly to every slight price increase and react positively to every slight price decrease.) Feel like you're close to a sale, but the customer is hedging? A slight discount might be all you need to do to push the customer over the edge. Sensitivity will vary widely across markets. An experienced collector of limited edition signed prints is obviously less sensitive to price.

SCARCITY/LIMITED EDITIONS: Limited edition art can amplify demand, which leads to higher prices. Scarcity can be a component of limited editions, but scarcity can also be used in the sense of a limited time offer. Take the approach of a high-end gallery: For collectors who see art as an investment, a limited edition gives them a way to see long-term value. Series of between 5-25 copies are common.

Verifying authenticity of images can be problematic, particularly where digital photographs are concerned. We've anectdotally heard several stories of studio assistants making personal prints from their famous bosses. ArtTrust provides technological solutions for physically tagging artwork with the use of an unremoveable "Bubble Tag™" and then by registering the works via their website.

PROFIT MARGINS & COST OF DOING BUSINESS: These two items are intertwined. To make a living in any occupation, you need to know your cost of doing business, and you need to determine what type of profit you need to clear to maintain a certain lifestyle. If photography is a hobby or secondary revenue stream for

you, calculating profit margin and cost of doing business might seem less relevant. But even hobbyists need new gear, so don't undercut yourself.

One of the best ways to calculate your cost of doing business is the NPPA's online calculator.

An easy way to determine what you can sell an image for is to check out your competition. But we actually prefer to discuss pricing in regards to profitability. Selling a 4x6 for $5 isn't going to make anyone rich, particularly if you're printing and shipping the image yourself. Instead, consider setting up your pricing to incentivize the purchase of high profit margins.

For example, your customers might want 4x6s, but if the price is close enough to an 8x10, you might sway them with the larger, more profitable size.

A huge caveat to any pricing, of course, is to ensure that it covers your cost and provides you with a profit that allows you to maintain a certain quality of life.
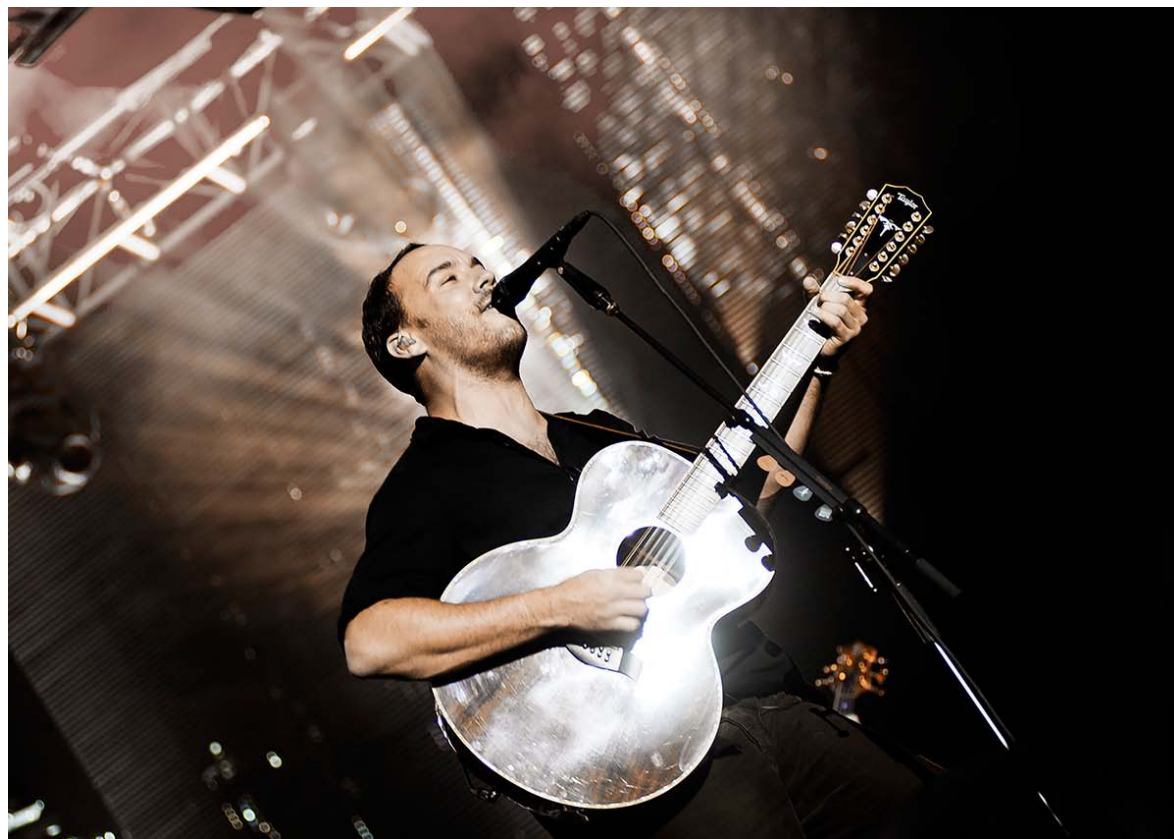
Read our four part series on The Price of Prints on the PhotoShelter blog:
Pricing Practices and Motivating Buyers
How to Avoid Pricing Yourself Out of Business
14 Ways to Increase Photo Print Sales
Advice from Expert Printers

This image, shot by Chris Kennedy, is one of his best selling images.

An analysis of the pricing of your competitors is the best way to grasp "standard" pricing.

A Master Printer Reveals What Sells

by Richard Jackson, Hance Partners/Image Craft

As a fine art print maker for many years, I've noticed some photographers sell more prints than others. I believe there are two main reasons for this. First, the number of people seeing the work matters—more eyeballs translates into more print sales. The second is how the viewer values the work. A small percentage of viewers can see a print once, and that is enough to purchase it. But I believe most viewers must connect with the image in some way to attach enough value to move them to purchase.

THE NUMBERS GAME

I have printed for many photographers who've become very excited about being offered a gallery exhibit. They go through the process of printing, mounting, matting and framing from 15 to 40 prints, bearing the cost themselves. A well-attended opening is usually followed by a run of 30 to 60 days. After that, a handful of prints from the exhibit might reside in the gallery's smaller spaces for a while, but often few or no prints are sold. The exhibit is up for a limited amount of time with a limited number of people coming to see the prints. The photographer typically shows up for the opening, but then has no chance of connecting with the viewer after the run.

By contrast, another photographer for whom I print owns several galleries located in high-end locations with heavy pedestrian traffic. His prints are perpetually on display, so thousands of people see them, and a correspondingly large number purchase them (the percentage of buyers doesn't change—he just has a larger pool). So if I am right about this, part of the secret to selling more is a math problem.

ADDING VALUE

This same photographer makes a point of connecting himself and his work to the viewer by having frequent appearances to sign prints, books and posters at his galleries. Over time, more of his audience can get to know him on a personal level through his stories from the field, and his motivation for creating specific images. This intangible connection adds tremendous value, and I think more people are willing to pay when they have invested feeling or emotion. Over the years of printing for many well-known photographers, I've come to enjoy and appreciate the story of an image as much as the image itself.

I also think I make a better print for my client when I know the backstory. It helps me connect with the photographer in a way that suggests how the print should be presented to the viewer.

Spending the time to educate your customers about the advantages of different papers and printing medium not only builds credibility, but can increase margins. When people are going to spend lots of money on a print, they want to feel that you're transparent because the utility of art isn't as clear as, say, a car.

YOUR GALLERY

Today, photographers are very fortunate because they can reach a much wider audience without owning a brick and mortar gallery. Websites, social media and PhotoShelter are three options for reaching more people. Great images matter, but I can't underscore enough how important it is to build a connection to your audience if you really want to succeed in selling fine art prints.

Selecting Products

When you think about selling prints, the average person likely imagines an 8x10 hanging on a wall. But in the past few years, there has been an explosion of products that can be offered on a small scale. These include ultra large prints, canvas prints, multi-image items (e.g. calendars, books), t-shirts, mousepads, die cut pieces, etc.

Determining which products to sell can affect sales. Having too many products can overwhelm the customer and put them into analysis paralysis. Having inexpensively priced items along with premium items might skew sales towards the low end. Not offering items that your competitors do might drive buyers away.

For example, in the fine art market, face-mounted pieces (large prints mounted onto plexi) are becoming more prevalent. But this technique isn't without issues such as 1) you cannot use an ink jet print with a face mount, because the ink doesn't bind properly (thereby increasing the print's cost), 2) scratches to the plexi can be difficult or impossible to remove, 3) resale of these pieces is untested, given that they cannot be reframed or remounted. On the other hand, the presentation of a large floating piece behind a shiny piece of plastic can be very stunning.

Many photographers we spoke to also mentioned that they are constantly educating their customers on various options for different media, sizes, etc. The process of education is important, because you can often upsell a customer to an item with a higher profit margin.

Jody and Zack Gray, a husband and wife wedding team in Nashville, have a 78" stretched canvas print of themselves hanging in their foyer. When prospective couples come to their home to learn more about their services, they are immediately presented with the image. "That's what you do with professional photography—you hang it on the wall," said Zack. They try to convey the fact that hiring a professional photographer doesn't just mean nice photos on your Facebook page and iPhone—they want their customers to come away with art. They demonstrate a real life example of a large print that incidentally yields a nice profit margin.

Make sure your product offerings meet the needs of your customers, and constantly educate them to sell the products you want them to buy.

DO THIS:

» Determine the breadth of your product selection by talking to real customers and prospects

» Test out new products periodically

» Educate customers about the benefits of higher value items as part of your sell

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PRINT LONGEVITY

There are no industry standards for testing inks and papers, so despite manufacturer claims of archival inks and papers lasting 100 years, there's no empirical evidence to back it up. According to Richard Seiling from West Coast Imaging, chromogenic prints (e.g. Type C, Digital-C, RA-4) are widely accepted archival formats used by top sellers like Thomas Mangelsen and Peter Lik. But in the past few years, the art world has accepted archival inks and papers from manufacturers like HP, Epson and Canon. Of course, with any print, exposure to sunlight can cause accelerated fading, so it's important to educate your clients, particularly when you're selling higher priced prints.

Selling Photo Books

by Ingrid Spangler, [AdoramaPix](#)

Self-publishing books has become a huge business, with services making it possible for individuals to print even a single copy of a book. Many photographers have started to use book publishing services to create leave behind portfolios, while other photographers are looking to self-publish and distribute when they cannot attract the attention of an established publisher.

Designing a photo book for a specific client (e.g. a wedding couple) is very different from designing a book for general sale that needs to appeal to a wide range of clients. When multiple, and repeated sales are your goal, the book needs to feature not only good imagery, but the editing and sequencing can be key in conveying a narrative that will draw multiple users in.

In the case of a wedding, the audience is pre-identified, and so a sale is guaranteed. In that respect, it makes sense to identify an audience for your photo book before you spend time and money producing it, as this significantly focuses the marketing effort to sell books.

For example, concert photographer David Bergman ([tourphotographer.com](#)) assembles books of Bon Jovi images from each concert to sell while he's on tour with the band to supplement the individual image sales that he makes from his PhotoShelter website. Ignoring for a moment his obvious advantage of access, it's worthy to note that he's made a good choice to market to an audience that is literally fanatical about Bon Jovi. This increases the chance for a sale of related paraphernalia. Contrast this to a book of landscapes, and I think you'll agree that one audience is much easier to reach and market to. Although you might not be willing to
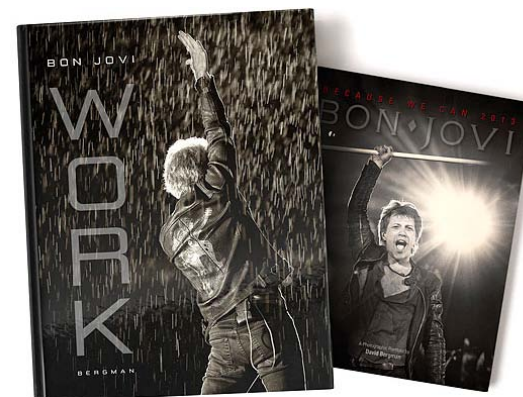
"WORK" by photographer David Bergman

change your area of focus, you might consider whether it's economically viable to produce a book as a secondary revenue source.

Avoid the temptation to get too cute or garish with the book design—the most successful photo books have simple designs that let the images really take the spotlight. Alternately, you might want to consider hiring a graphic designer to give your book a distinctive look and feel.

Ensuring the best quality output is key in presenting your work in the best possible light. All major printing services (including [AdoramaPix](#)) provide ICC color profiles that you can download to your computer to soft proof the images prior to printing. This "extra" step might seem a bit laborious, but it's the only way to ensure the output matches your vision.

Binding (layflat vs. non-layflat), covers (soft, hard, wrap), aspect ratios (square, rectangular) and size all play a part

in the final output and perception. Don't be afraid to experiment to get the product you want.

Finally, when it comes to displaying the book for online sale, take advantage of various technologies that allow the customer to "flip" through the pages, or at the very least, photograph your book in a professional manner and present different angles and pages that show off your product. For example, AdoramaPix offers an embeddable Flash widget that can be added to your website to allow buyers to preview the book, and get a strong sense of the real end product.

Print Fulfillment

It might seem like an afterthought, but the way you package and deliver a print can have a pretty significant effect on the buyer. Most of us are familiar with the experience of opening an Apple product, be it an iPod, iPhone or iMac. The packaging is well-designed and purposed to evoke an emotional response.

On technology blogs like Engadget, it's become commonplace for geeks to video the "unboxing" of new devices for all the world to see. People's tastes are becoming increasingly sophisticated.

As such, consider how you deliver prints to your customers. Are they shrink-wrapped against a rigid piece of cardboard like AdoramaPix (one of PhotoShelter's automated print vendor partners)? Are large-sized prints rolled into a tube, or are they packed flat? Is there branding on the packaging? Is there personalization for the purchaser?

Alternately, you might find that your customers care less about the unboxing experience as much as they do speed of fulfillment or the quality of shipping (i.e. a low lost mail and damage rate). Some mailing services, for example, bundle items with similar destinations together and drop them at major mail hubs to decrease sorting times and physical damage.

Wedding photographer Missy McLamb tackled the issue of cost and presentation in 7 Ironic Truths About Successful Wedding Photographers:

"Managing the [branding] symbols is a slippery slope. You have to be careful not to justify superfluous expenses in an effort to maintain an image. Do you really need to invest thousands of dollars for fluffy packaging to ship your books and prints? Indeed, the packaging you use is a critical branding symbol, but there may be a high-concept and lower cost solution that still conveys your message.

"When I searched for packaging options for my studio, I was floored by the expense of custom-printed boxes. Instead I sourced premade white boxes from a wholesale supplier and high quality, acetate envelopes from a store in Chinatown. Before a wedding book or print order is shipped, and after I have a final inspection of the objects, I 'autograph' the top of the box with a bold Sharpie. It's an elegant, striking and affordable solution."

> The way you package and deliver a print can have a pretty significant effect on the buyer.

[20x200](#) decorates their heavy cardboard flat packaging with a color sticker. Individual pieces celebrate with a certificate of authenticity declaring, "It's Official: You Bought Art!" because the target demographic is first time art buyers. Each piece also includes a letter about the artist and piece.

[John Hryniuk](#) ships via airmail using a white woven envelope. The image is packed between two pieces of sturdy cardboard, and John handwrites framing instructions to ensure longevity of the print. The two pieces of carboard are taped together, and the corners are protected with plastic stays.

AdoramaPix shrink wraps images against cardboard with a packaging slip, which is inserted into a heavy three-dimensional box. The image is placed face down on a piece of foam to reduce scratches.

Incentives, Coupons & Discounts

Of the many tried and true marketing methods, it's hard to beat a sale or a coupon. The modern coupon was introduced by Coca-Cola as a way to get people to try the curious drink in the late 1800s—obviously that worked out pretty well.

Coupons are great not only because it creates a monetary incentive to your customers but because it also generally provides:

URGENCY. Most coupons have an expiration date, and the shorter the duration, the greater the urgency imparted.

SCARCITY. Coupons can be set up so that only a limited number are available.

A REASON TO COMMUNICATE. It's often difficult to come up with a legitimate reason to contact your prospective clients. No one wants "filler" communications, but offering a discount has a meaningful value proposition.

We see a huge uptick in the number of coupons issued and used around the holiday season, followed by a dramatic drop off in the new year. But it is precisely in the lull where opportunity can come knocking. Why not offer a "start the new year right" coupon, or Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, etc.? There's no shortage of holidays and/or reasons to offer your customers a discount.

Once you have issued an incentive, coupon or discount, don't be afraid to remind your audience. Retailers do this incessantly to spur buying behavior (e.g. "Only two days left for the best values of the year"). Your marketing efforts need to be persistent and regular to gain mind-share and results.

Still, you have to start somewhere. Recent survey data indicates almost 25% of PhotoShelter print sellers are doing no marketing at all, and coupons are a great first step, and a perfect excuse to reach out to your customers.

Here are a few ideas for offering discounts to your customers:

❱ Discount purchases of a certain dollar amount

❱ Tier discounts for higher purchase amounts

❱ Discount bundled products

❱ Offer discounts around various holidays—remember that entire holidays have been commandeered by various retailing industries to support sales (Valentine's Day, anyone?)

❱ Discount a first-time purchase

❱ Reward repeat buying (or even one time buying)

❱ Offer a discount when a user signs up for a newsletter

READ MORE:
7 Clever Ways Photographers Use Coupons to Increase Sales
10 Tips to Use Coupons to Market Your Photography

Coupons are great because it creates a monetary incentive for your customers.

Dean Oros

Toronto-based photographer Dean Oros brings in 30% of his work from corporate assignments and 70% from shooting portraits and weddings. A consummate businessman, he quips, "I could write a book on pricing." His pricing is based on the cost of doing business and the market he serves.

Because of the range of photographs and customers that he deals with, he has a broad set of pricing ranging from CAD$10 – CAD$1,000. He adopts different pricing for his stock fine art prints vs. commissioned prints, where some of his profit is already embedded in the daily fee.

Dean's PhotoShelter website is set up to showcase his portfolio and various stock photo galleries. He uses "unlisted" public or pass-worded galleries for his wedding and portrait clients to maintain their privacy, while still making them easily accessible.

All the images within the galleries are priced for online sale, and Dean handles the fulfillment himself to control quality. Products range from 5x7 prints for CAD$25 to a 40x60 gallery wrapped canvas for CAD$1,000. Each gallery has a gallery description that indicates that images have been "treated to Dean Oros' fine art image enhancement." Reinforcing that the photographer spent time retouching the images increases the perceived value. Sales are particularly brisk around the holidays, and Dean manages to usually sell multiple images per sale.

When it comes to the delivery of digital files, he usually balks. "Unless they're well-versed in color profiles, etc., most consumers will take those digital files to a local consumer lab to have inexpensive prints made, which they in turn will share with their friends and family. Your image will never look as you intended by doing this. Handling the printing yourself will ensure you have control over the print process and will ensure your client receives the best quality for the type of print they've ordered."

Poor quality prints are not a part of his brand proposition, so he controls how people perceive his products and services by being mindful of the output. Dean does offer 500 pixel personal use downloads for about CAD$10 to satisfy the desire of his clients to have something to post on Facebook.

Educating clients helps lead to sales of higher margin items that can show off the photography. "Educate yourself and your clients about the differences in printing," he said. "Explain the differences in photographic papers, framing etc. Clients want to make educated buying decisions."

Traditional Marketing Techniques

Depending on your audience, you might find that traditional marketing techniques are more effective than the newfangled online techniques.

WALL ART PROMOTION

Many photographers offer their work to local businesses (particularly restaurants) to hang on the walls as a free form of advertising. Typically the photographer's name and contact information is listed next to each print.

Photographer Blaise Hayward was contacted by the owners of Imagine Swimming, a children's swimming facility in TriBeCa, whose owners taught his children to swim. Although Hayward makes the bulk of his income from his commercial work, he's pursued personal projects for many years, and wants to have fine arts play a larger role in his professional life. Adrift #3 is a 5'x7' facemounted piece that greets all visitors to the lobby area and includes a small placard with Hayward's name. The piece has been up for about a year, and Hayward has received a number of inquiries but no sales yet. Although he isn't aggressively marketing the fine art work, he is still keenly aware that creating sales is the name of the game. "I'm not really in the business of lending art [indefinitely], or I'd be living in a tent," he jokes.

One clever suggestion, depending on your specialty, might be to seek out venues that align well with a theme which you frequently shoot. If you have a fantastic vintage rock collection, for example, rock 'n' roll themed restaurants and cafes might be eager to showcase your prints. Moreover, they might be willing to host an event to hear your stories, if it means more foot traffic in their place of business. A fitness studio might be partial to hanging inspirational, athletic, or even calming images. Use your creativity to market yourself!

GIVEAWAYS

Giveaways can be an effective way to market yourself and get your name out to a broader audience. But giveaways without a call to action can be a waste of time and money. You need to make sure to "close the loop" and follow up to the people who are the recipients of your largess. For example, a campaign to get people to sign up for your newsletter (a great e-mail leads list) could be accompanied by a "free 5x7 print" from a gallery of your favorite images. You benefit by getting an email of a prospect that can be marketed to in the future, and you expose the customer to your work because they have to browse through a gallery of images to make a selection.

As a low-cost way to market her services, portrait photographer Jamie Schultz gives mini "business cards" to her senior portrait clients with their images on the front and her logo on the back. Even though Facebook yields 90% of her senior customers, the physical card augments her efforts, and the personalization for each kid makes it all the more likely to be passed around as social media marketing increases.

Additionally, Jamie started a completely non-photo related blog entitled Thislunchrox.com where she photographs the lunches she makes for her children. Although, it's not specifically designed to be a marketing piece for her photography, the blog's wide readership does provide her with an incidental, extended audience of moms who are perfect clients for her children's portraiture.

Similarly, photographer Stephen Voss took a 4x5 photo each day for 91 days and sent it to users who "reserved" a day from his tumblr site. Aside from being a great publicity stunt, it accomplished the goal of engaging with a

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new and larger audience. He created a short 1:30 video to illustrate setting up the large format camera, metering, pulling the polaroid, and mailing the print out. The video is a wonderful way to create audience engagement.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Independent photographers often shy away from seeking publicity, but in reality there are few more powerful ways to draw attention to your work. When we speak to photographers about generating press coverage, we frequently get the same response: "How is my work newsworthy?" The answer is simple—you need to make it newsworthy. This takes some strategy and creativity.

Think about your most recent project or print collection, and the likely audience of buyers. How do these people consume information? Are there websites and blogs, local newspapers, or even trade publications that these people read frequently?

Bloggers are wielding more and more power and reach online. Don't focus only on print publications. What would be the effect on your business if you were mentioned on PDNPulse or Strobist.com? Even non-photo specific websites like Gizmodo regularly feature photo projects from all types of photographers. Regularly networking with relevant bloggers and Twitters can substantially impact your business.

Have a look at these publications and understand the typical content they use. Can you structure an event that will attract their attention (online or live in-person)? For example, can you collaborate with a nonprofit or local business for an evening showing of your work? Consider writing a press release or media advisory to attract the attention of these writers. A press release or media advisory is used to alert the media about potential news, so at minimum you want to include the most pertinent details—the who, what, where, why and when associated with your news.

Example of wall art promotion by photographer Blaise Hayward

HOW TO WRITE A PRESS RELEASE

For tips to put together your own press release, check out: www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Press-Release. Obtain the contact information for the publication's editorial staff and email your press release. Be mindful of lead times—print publications like magazines have long leads while blogs can turn around news in a matter of minutes. Follow up is often necessary. Consider that the press is typically busy and on a deadline, so be mindful of respecting their time when getting in touch, and make sure your "pitch" is relevant.

DO THIS:
» Consider the influencers. Focus your PR efforts on the most influential media outlets for your target audience.

» Work in advance. Pre-pitching your news before it actually happens helps the media prepare your story rather than reacting when it is old news.

» Tie your channels together. Ensure your website and contact information are included in your press materials, whether the event is happening online or in-person.

James Bourret

From his home base in Sun Valley, Idaho, James Bourret runs a traditional gallery, as well as maintaining his PhotoShelter website to cater to his clientele. His typical customer runs the gamut from tourists to locals who have seen his work in his gallery, in local restaurants, on his website, or through references.

Selling large landscape prints isn't as easy as selling a 4x6, and it's a distinction that James is well aware of. "To actually sell a large print, however, it often takes making a connection between the image and the buyer, or the artist and the buyer, through the story. It also generally requires that the image contain just as much detail interest as it does subject, graphic or compositional interest, and this cannot be conveyed by any other means than seeing a print up close."

As such, he rarely makes sales online without customers first having seen a print in person. Therefore, his strategy of allowing local restaurants and bookstores to use his work for interior decoration makes a lot of sense.

Networking with gallery owners and art consultants is part of James's marketing efforts. In one case, a gallery owner also turned out to be an art consultant for a corporate interior design firm. He ended up making multiple sales to a large financial firm in Boston as a result of the relationship, and even though he split the commission 50/50 with the consultant, it still was an unexpected windfall.

In the case of the restaurants, James provides the art on loan, and incurs the cost for printing and framing the images. In some cases, to lower his costs, he for-

Credit: James Bourret

goes the framing and instead opts for a simple foamcore mounting. Customers have literally bought the art off the walls, which is great for James because he doesn't need to pay any consignment fee in the venues where he displays his art. And although the prices tend to a be a little lower for this type of sale (ranging from $95-150 for a 17x22 print), it's still a great marketing arrangement that constantly extends his reach.

Despite a decline in his own fine art print sales in the past few years, James believes that the market is picking up once again. "I am located in an area that benefits from a seasonal flow of relatively affluent visitors who have an interest in the outdoors, and I am positioned to provide artwork to that market."

In the long run, James hopes to expand his reach by gaining representation through other galleries, and although he's had limited success in this regard, he knows it's a long term play that could have a significant impact on his print sales revenue in the future.

Networking with gallery owners and art consultants is a large part of James's marketing efforts.

Marketplaces for Prints

The ideal scenario for photographers would be to find a fluid marketplace where the mere listing of a print generated sales. Unfortunately, there are no high-volume options a la Craigslist or eBay for prints, but there are mechanisms that market for you. We cover these briefly.

GALLERIES
A gallery is a physical storefront where prints can be displayed and sold. The main feature of a gallery is that the work is curated by an entity that is typically "in the know" about the types of images that sell.

PHYSICAL
YOUR OWN: You own and maintain the space. Galleries are often associated with studio spaces. The obvious benefit is that you can keep all profits from the sale, but you are also managing all the marketing. If you can generate regular foot traffic (e.g. you have lots of studio bookings or you're centrally located), this can be an effective means.

PAY TO PLAY: Local galleries will often organize group shows where artists pay to have pieces included. The fees help offset marketing costs, and the venues often develop reputations that help get the word out. For example,the Soho Photo Gallery is a membership-based co-op which runs monthly group shows with regular gallery hours. Their Krappy Kamera™ competiton features work from plastic and toy cameras and helps to generate publicity for the gallery on a national level.

STREET FAIRS: There are many levels of street fairs. A basic street fair might require a vending license, and well-organized fairs will generate foot traffic, but not necessarily qualified buyers. The more successful fairs typically have selection criteria and an operational history that help attract a buying audience. For example, the Ann Arbor Street Fair is in its 55th year and features artists of all types including many photographers, who apply to exhibit their work.

TRADITIONAL: Traditional galleries rotate works by different artists over the course of the year. High-end galleries will take up to 70% of the sale from the artist because they can often sell prints at higher prices and have massive real estate and marketing costs to defray. Many galleries will also participate at trade shows like The Armory Show, the leading fine art show of contemporary 20th and 21st century artists, which leads to major sales of images. The average photographer is unlikely to be represented by these galleries.

For example:
Lumas represents approximately 150 artists from the well-established to emerging young artists. An editorial board is responsible for the curation of photos. The pieces are sold in store and online and all production is handled by their print partner White Wall. Pieces range in price from a few hundred to the low thousands.

Pace/McGill Gallery is a high-end gallery that represents many of the finest artists from Richard Misrach to Jackson Pollock. At any given time, they might only be displaying the work of two artists. Pieces range well into the 5-6 figure range. Misrach pieces from his recent "On the Beach" were selling for $85,000 each.

ONLINE

CURATED: Like traditional galleries, the curated websites can be highly selective and can take the majority of the sale, but they often don't "represent" an artist exclusively, so there's a better opportunity for new artists to be found and marketed. 20x200.com is an "affordable art" site started by Jen Bekman, a prominent figure in the NY art photography scene. Associate Director Jeffrey Teuton is constantly on the lookout for new artists, "Through 20x200 we are allowed to work with so many new artists that we find in museums and even on the internet. I always go to the artists on 20x200 to curate for our summer group show every year. Choosing artists is a varied and organic process that comes from us seeing as much as possible, taking note, following projects as they develop and then starting to work with an artist on smaller projects and then it grows from there." Interestingly, he also pointed out, "[we] work with artists all over the globe and artists who don't think of themselves as fine artists, since we handle a lot of the printing."

NON-CURATED: Sites like deviantart.com and fineartamerica.com offer a marketplace for art, including photography, with hundreds of thousands of users. The central repository makes it easy to search through the massive catalog, but like any marketplace, it's hard to get noticed unless what you're doing is so unusual or exemplary.

How to Sell Prints Through PhotoShelter

P hotoShelter offers websites and tools to help photographers grow their businesses. Photographers have the ability to set up e-commerce through their website using either PayPal, Stripe or a merchant account. Each option remits funds directly to the photographer at the point of sale, which means no waiting for minimum amounts or 30 days to get paid.

PhotoShelter also allows you to:

❯ Set a default currency

❯ Set a minimum price per order

❯ Set taxation based on location of the customer

❯ Review orders before printing

❯ Replace files (e.g. high resolution files for low res)

❯ Let customers choose their own cropping preferences

❯ Charge different rates for different images

For print sales, we offer three mechanisms:

AUTOMATED PRINT VENDORS
Five fully integrated print vendors offer automated printing and shipping of orders from your PhotoShelter account. Simply pick which items you want to sell from an extensive list of products by affixing your price to the item.

Choose from one of our great partners including AdoramaPix, EZPrints, BWC, Loxley Colour, and White House Custom Colour.

SELF-FULFILLMENT
For the ultimate control, photographers can choose to print and ship items themselves. Self-fulfillment allows the photographer to create standard and custom products, add pricing and shipping options, and oversee packaging before it goes out.

PHOTOSHELTER PRINT VENDOR NETWORK (PVN)
The PhotoShelter Print Vendor Network was designed as a way to allow your boutique or local printer to participate within PhotoShelter. Vendors can sign up for free and provide information about their products and services via downloadable PDFs. Photographers can create self-fulfilled items matching the descriptions from their PVN partner, and when orders come in, they can select the partner to fulfill rather than doing it themselves. When a PVN partner is selected, the order is automatically dispatched with order detail and the high resolution files. Choose to have the prints shipped directly to your client or to you first for the final touches.

Selling Prints Checklist

☐ Consider which images you want to sell.

☐ Define your audience. Who is interested in these types of images?

☐ Research your competition's products and pricing.

☐ Determine print sizes and/or breadth of product selection

☐ Determine whether you want to fulfill orders yourself, or outsource.

☐ Research and find a vendor that suits your needs.

☐ Evaluate whether you want to do your own packaging and shipping or if your vendor can white-label with your personalization.

☐ Order test prints and assess quality, turnaround time.

☐ Determine your prices, being mindful of your margins. Don't forget to consider shipping markup, and remember, pricing is something to be tested and tweaked.

☐ Describe your products and consider ways to educate your customers on printing options, and the premium quality of your selection.

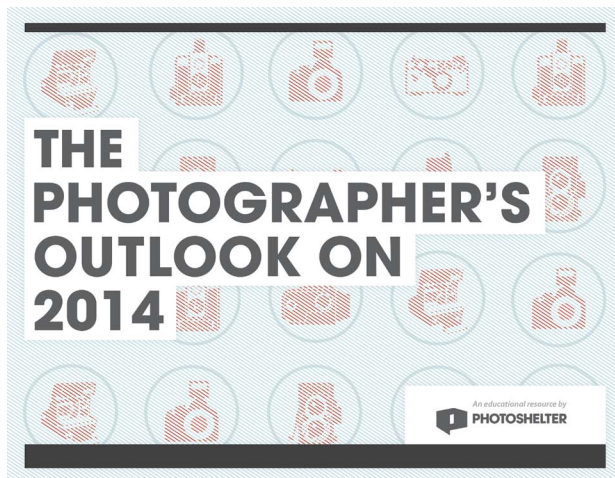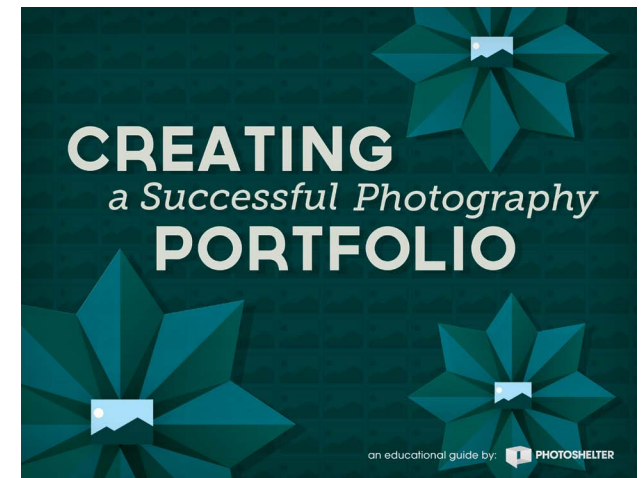☐ Develop a marketing plan, however light, to give your sales momentum.

☐ Understand the relationship between your sales goals and the marketing activity in terms of audience reach and frequency

☐ Evaluate the "place" you sell, whether online via your website, or in person via a storefront or gallery.

☐ Determine which constituencies you can target and how will you reach them:
    ☐ Outbound (email, direct mail, advertising)
    ☐ Inbound (seo, social marketing)
    ☐ Publicity
    ☐ Online communities
    ☐ Newsletters

☐ Develop incentives to spur sales:
    ☐ Coupons
    ☐ Giveaways
    ☐ Sales promotions (seasonal or loyalty-based)
    ☐ Product bundling

☐ Network
    ☐ Let other people market on your behalf by establishing yourself within a relevant community by being a reliable artist.

2013 SURVEY
WHAT BUYERS WANT FROM PHOTOGRAPHERS
an educational guide by: PHOTOSHELTER agencyaccess

spring 2012 PHOTO ASSISTANT HANDBOOK
An educational guide from PHOTOSHELTER
In partnership with the American Photographic Artists' 2012 Photo Assistant Basic Training
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