

# Nine ideas to get more business and stay competitive

*by Sareesh Sudhakaran*

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Thank you for taking the survey and answering honestly. The response has been overwhelming. I thought I would get a couple of hundred responses at best. Was I wrong. It's going to take me a few weeks just to sort out the answers and make sense of it all.

As promised, this white paper highlights nine strategies that help me get more business and stay competitive. Before we get into it, let me give some context to what I'm about to say.

## **The context**

I'm not Richard Branson. I don't deserve to advise anybody on business, and I humbly request you to avoid seeing me as any sort of expert or guru. I'm just sharing what I've done over the course of a 14-year career. Some highlights:

- Made five shorts and one feature. Produced and directed corporate and training videos, and an educational series.
- Marketed real estate worldwide, launched a five star hotel in Dubai, spearheaded all kinds of media work and large scale events.
- Project Engineer over a large construction project (my first and only job as an engineer) in Abu Dhabi.
- Customer service agent and sales for American Express and AT&T.

In between I've fixed multiple video and film projects of all sorts, and was also an assistant director for a production company making national commercials. I have appeared three times on national television and all three have been because I was ambushed or emotionally blackmailed into appearing on camera.

Finally, I run [Wolfcrow.com](http://Wolfcrow.com), one of the proudest things I've done in a long time.

I have been able to work with all sorts of people, from every country imaginable. I have traveled to many countries. I have made CEOs happy and lowly paid construction workers happy. I've also made them angry.

I have managed to fit all this into a 14-year career, and I'll turn 36 this year.

Can this guy teach you anything about getting more clients and staying competitive? Not really, and I won't presume to. I'm going to share nine of the most important things I know and practice. I've tried my best to keep things practical. I've also used personal examples and anecdotes, except I have avoided using names and specific identifications. If you find even one of my strategies beneficial, that's all that matters.

Please, if I go overboard in my enthusiasm and start preaching, forgive me. I'm human and special, just like you, and just like everybody else.

**The official warning: This is not legal, financial or business advice. Everything in this document is provided for information purposes only. You are responsible for your own actions.** Please do not assume I am right. Even on my best day I'm wrong 50% of the time. Question and challenge everything I say.

## 9 Time is money. Money is not time.

If you kill one hour of your day, and that hour could have netted you \$10, you will have lost \$45,000 in ten years.

Money comes and goes. Time only goes, and it doesn't need your permission for that. When you kill time, you're not killing 'time', but *your time*. Not only are you killing your time, you're also killing all the opportunities, relationships, learning, etc., that you could have done if you hadn't killed it.

Overly dramatic? It's your call. I'm dead serious.

Here's an example from my personal life, from this year: I became overweight, and I needed to lose about 40 pounds (no typo) to get back into shape.

Smart wisdom says I hit the gym and go on a diet. My doctor strongly urged me to try Yoga.

I did neither.

What did I do? I bought the most expensive jumping rope I could find and the most expensive training shoes I could find (after trying them on first!). I bought three months of whey protein, and a ton of protein bars. My relatives, including my wife, think I'm mad. "Why don't you walk, or jog, or go to the gym like regular people?"

Well, here's why:

- It takes fifteen minutes to dress up for gym, and at least half an hour afterwards in the shower (the gym's shower, not mine) and to get dressed.

- It takes half an hour of traveling to the gym, and back.
- I'll spend at least an hour and a half at the gym, sometimes more, depending on who's next to me at the treadmill.
- I have to pay a yearly gym membership.
- I've got to buy a music player and expensive gym clothes to 'blend in'. And I have to worry about adding music, creating playlists and all that crap. And I have to remember to charge the damn thing.
- Once in a while, I'll be "up-selled" to take a spinning class. Pretty girls are the bait.

Here's what I do today:

- I get ready, in my old gym clothes, in about five minutes.
- I straighten out my Nike jumping rope (it's heavy, and if I lash myself the marks stay a while). Twenty seconds.
- I jump rope – 30 minutes. I also watch something relevant or motivational or positive during this time. If nothing else I watch Youtube, Vimeo or one of my favorite movies.
- 10 minute cooling off period and a protein shake (which also counts as my first meal), and I'm off to the shower (mine, not the gym's).
- In fifteen minutes I'm off to my office.

3-4 hours of gym with some networking opportunities, or 50 minutes plus learning and a meal? I know which one 'normal people' do, but the other path makes me time. I still have three hours to network the hell out of my fellow citizens, and give them my full attention.

By the way, I've lost 22 pounds in less than three months. And I've made money. The three hours I save everyday, even at

\$10 an hour, is \$2,000 saved in three months, or \$8,000 a year. With it, I can almost buy a C300 (which I rent occasionally) for cash. With a two-year finance plan I could buy an F55. I could also buy any DSLR I want with great lenses. Or a used car. Or the new Apple Mac Pro. Or a ton of valuable advertising or marketing dollars.

If you are not that experienced in business, you might be asking – “but Sareesh, you didn’t earn anything in those three hours you saved!”

No? I wake up at six, and by eight I have already scanned hundreds of news to handpick the dozen or so that goes into The Daily Workflow. By ten I’m done exercising and am off to the office. Most days I work till nine or ten at night. Sunday is strictly a ‘no business’ day – but I still have to get The Daily Workflow out.

Those three hours I save are what allows me to publish single-handedly what others consider a super human effort. In return, my blog generates advertising and affiliate revenue.

Enough about me. Arnold Schwarzenegger wrote about his struggles in the bodybuilding days. He would hang out with his friends, and they would insist he share a burger with them. “How’s eating a burger this one time going to hurt you?” Arnold couldn’t explain it to them, and they took offense. He went on to win Mr. Olympia, act in The Terminator and become Governor of California.

One has to decide what is more important. Killing time, or making time. The first is easy (you don’t have to do anything for time to pass), the other might involve ridicule and sacrifice.

Would could you accomplished if you saved three hours every day? Could you make that many more phone calls to

prospects? Could you spend that time putting together more emails? Could you spend that time learning new skills? Or could you spend that extra time with your family?

Become a clock. Wake up on time. You can't? Then leave this business. Soldiers must take up their posts on the dot. Transport workers must be ready when their customers are. Flight schedules only have a delta of a few minutes. Farmers must be ready when the seasons hit. Fishermen must sail through rough waters to where the fish are. Politicians must travel to where the voters are. Your favorite sports person must perform their greatest play when *you* want it, not when they feel like it.

Please don't tell me it's hard. What did you expect – you'll print a few business cards and exchange them for cash?

Some of the strange things I do to remind me of my limited time:

- My alarm rings at six, even on Sunday. It's a reminder that the few extra hours I sleep on Sunday are a gift, not a right.
- I always try to complete a task the first time I attempt it.
- I take a cab to work and back so I can use the ride to check emails and get ready for the day.
- I use Google to schedule my meetings, tasks, priorities, articles, administration, payments, everything.
- When I'm mentally tired I play chess to relax. Or I read, or I make a few phone calls. Your brain works continuously, regardless of what you do. If you feel tired, do something else, but *do*.
- I take the three flights of stairs to my office instead of the elevator, because it saves me a full minute (Trust me, I've calculated).

Am I crazy? Maybe. Am I lazy? Yes. Doing all this takes effort, constant motivation, and will. I assure you it's a constant struggle. If you're having trouble getting pepped up, then hire a coach or mentor. Do whatever it takes to get into the habit of saving time. Learn from successful businessmen if you must. They pay others to do work so they can get more done with their time. If they stopped to do everything themselves they'd have no time left.

Here's an idea: If your client is only willing to pay for a single person crew, then hire another person! You can go two ways:

- Let that person do the job alone for a smaller fee (you pocket the remainder), or
- Both of you do the job in half the time and now you have more time left in the day for another project if you must.

The clock is ticking.

*Lesson – Spend more money to make time. Use that time to make even more money.*

## **8** Listen to Sun Tzu

From “The Art of War” – *In wartime, prepare for peace. In peacetime, prepare for war.*

In other words, you're always busy. A major client dropped me. I've dropped many vendors and freelancers who took me or my business for granted. It happens to everybody, sometimes for unavoidable reasons.

But the single most important avoidable reason is – to stay afloat in water you've got to keep flapping.

The keyword for this is hustling. When you're out of luck and no clients are returning your calls, it's time to hustle. When you have more projects than you can handle, make time (number nine) and hustle.

You must not coast, ever. A businessperson must always be like Mohammed Ali – on their toes.

I must confess this is one of my weakest points. If I've given the impression I'm Superman with making time, then I'm Napoleon Dynamite when it comes to networking. I'm an introvert. All I ever want to do is make good movies. Trust me, I know what it feels like.

Hustling is hard. Picking up the phone and cold calling is hard. Delivering an elevator pitch is hard. Taking rejection is hard.

Don't like it? Then open a grocery store. In the video business, no client is going to walk in with a smile and say: "Helloooo, may I have one of those great corporate videos you sell?"

How do you approach a client without them getting bothered? I'm still learning this one, but here's one idea: Don't hustle them, let them hustle you. You do that by meeting them on non-business (in other words, social) terms. Join a business club, become a Toastmaster, volunteer for a charity, whatever it takes. I personally don't like to join free clubs, simply because not everyone in a free club is motivated by money. When members have to pay, the interactions tend to be more focused, if you know what I mean.

If you're an introvert like me, then start surrounding yourself with positive people who will force you out of your comfort zone. If you're living in a place where that's unlikely, then buy

products from mentors or businessmen who started off like you and who are were you want to be.

*Lesson – Always be hustling. Only stop when you're closing shop.*

## 7 Watch the Discovery Channel

Watch tigers hunt. Sometimes they get their prey, but not always. In a split second, they have to decide which road to take, and they don't bring out their calculators or slide presentations or accountants to tell them which. It happens instinctively, and it's so critical for them to get it right.

Failure means starvation.

Your intuition is seriously powerful. Sometimes when I'm sitting across a client/prospect or a freelancer, I'm studying my intuition closely. What is it telling me? Sometimes the alarm bells go off. Then I'm out of there. Sometimes I know instinctively this project is just right, and I follow my instinct. However, there are times when my intuition goes 'ah...um...I don't know...' - and this is when I perk up. I realize I'm in uncharted waters here, and I better get out of my comfort zone and figure this out. No decisions must be made without the consent of your intuition.

Look back at your life. All of us have lives made up of experiences. If you've only spent most of your waking life with your parents, then it's time to run to the other end of the country like Forest Gump. Even an intellectually challenged individual like Forest Gump becomes wise at the end of the movie. It is experience that makes you wise and keeps you on your toes.

Carry yourself to the action. Become uncomfortable and take risks. *Stay* uncomfortable. Soon that place will become comfortable, and it's time to take it up a notch. Normal people look for an oasis in the desert, and pitch their tents for life; but businessmen must take a sip and look for the desert.

I can only say this – discomfort is NOT pain. Scared of calling a client? It's not pain, just discomfort. Awkward conversation with somebody? It's not pain, just discomfort. Physical activity making you uncomfortable? It's not pain, just discomfort.

Isn't it better to determine (right now!) when to recognize if you're in real pain or just discomfort? Most people mistake discomfort for pain, and bail out. What if you just pulled through the discomfort? Surely all of us have had uncomfortable events in our lives, and we've survived so far, right? When has discomfort killed anybody?

Your competitors might have more experience than you do. They've been around for years. They're wiser and smarter. So what? You don't have to convince *them* to do anything, only your client or prospect. Focus on *your* experiences, your strengths and your intuition. It's the best ally you'll ever have.

*Lesson – You can't listen to an intuition you don't have. Intuition is like muscles, you need to work out to make them pop. The best dojo for that is discomfort.*

## **6** How I became an assistant director for a large production house making nation-wide commercials

This one is an anti-climax, but is so typical.

The building no longer exists, but ten years ago most of the major production companies making commercials were

housed in one studio complex. That was convenient, and I was desperate. I printed three hundred resumes, and carried them in.

Now imagine me walking down the corridor, knocking or ringing on every door, just like a door-to-door salesman. Most of the time the right person isn't in. I drop my resume and move on, knowing full well it'll be trashed without being read.

Some people are rude. May I drop in my resume? No, we don't accept them. Okay, is there a better time I can return – No! Is there someone – they're no longer listening. I smile, and show myself out. This exact sequence happened many times – like the noon, matinee and night show of the same movie.

I went through every door in the complex, and there were hundreds of them and I lost count. I finally reached the very last corridor, and this office looked like it had some activity. By then I was hungry. I knocked, and a man said "Open!" I opened, but didn't step in (I was used to being rejected). "Are you looking for an assistant director?" (My exact words).

"All the time." said the man in the black beard. Who the hell was he, I thought? (The director, the owner of the production company). "Is it okay if I dropped in my resume?" (What a dumb reply to a cocky opening). He took it, and I turned away to leave. "Wait, you're here, so we might as well take your interview."

I was tired, sweaty and really not in the mood. "Sure." His wife took the interview. "Do you know editing?" "Sure, I know Adobe Premiere Pro" (true, I have been using it since 2002). She shouted across to her husband: "Did you hear that, he knows editing and Adobe Premiere Pro!"

Did I say 'assistant director' or 'assistant editor'? I was so tired I couldn't remember. Before I could tell them, they said: "Okay,

you're hired. When can you start?" "Right now." "Okay, hang around..."

Life is anti-climactic. You have to ask a hundred people before one says yes. Rejection is not something to get disheartened about. We're not in the video business, we're in the rejection business. There are more rejections and dejections than there are projects, and there are more projects than there are payments. If you make peace with this, you'll have the strength to move on.

I have faced this exact same situation many times. There's actually a formula to this. Ready?

1. Call everyone, get rejected.
2. Call everyone a second time, a few might meet you but they'll still reject you.
3. Call everyone again, and some more will meet you. One or two won't reject you, but they won't commit either.
4. Call everyone again. Somebody from last month calls back, and you have a meeting. You pitch. You're rejected.
5. Email everyone but you're warned for spam. You have to call them again. Halfway through somebody from the second month calls back with a job. It's low paying. You don't hear the amount. You say "yes, of course."
6. The "client" makes your life hell, but you don't mind because: Anything to not call everyone again, right? The project doesn't interest you. The client's jokes are borderline punishable by death. They boast about not paying other people, "but you'll be paid on time, don't worry." They look at your DSLR, your pride and joy, and say: Is that thing really professional? I gifted by wife one of those last year.

7. Your intuition (the one you got from watching tigers on Discovery) is screaming for you to get the hell out. But you persist. Just when you thought the job was over, you suddenly realize you have to continue hustling this client – to get paid.
8. You call everyone, and call the client you still owes you money.
9. Calls, meetings. It's all a blur. Somebody sees your work. They'll take a chance on you, but only if you'll do it at a 'string me up and whip me to death' price. Of course, you'll be more than happy to be put through that experience. Anything to get paid at this point.
10. You do the best job you possibly could, while keeping hopes up, and this client pays (Also you were smart enough to ask for an advance). You pay the rent. Finally, the other client relents, and pays 80% of the contract. He knows you won't go after the remaining 20%, because it'll cost you more time and money to get it out of him. Now, you have some money, and some breathing space, and no clients.

It's not that bad. The more you work, and the more you network, things will improve. In a few years you'll have your own camera and office. You'll have more clients than you can handle. And then, you'll forget how hard it was, and you'll stop hustling. You'll start to coast. You'll forget to sharpen your intuition and learn new things. You will no longer be a shiny new object to your client. The next version has come, and this kid has an MBA and can talk like a CEO. He doesn't know gamma from his mamma, but anybody can make pictures now. After all, with a 0% finance plan, any kid can buy any camera nowadays. He's driving a new car his dad gifted him. You're driving a used beat up car *you earned*.

You have nothing to fear. When the shit hits the fan, this kid will fold. All you have to do is -

*Lesson – Persist. Survive. Keep going on. Listen to this dude’s advice:*

*“Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.” — Thomas Edison.*

## **5** Extreme research

You’re going to hate me or love me after this, depending on how you take it. When comic book heroes go toe to toe, you look at their superpowers – Superman can out-punch the Hulk; Spiderman can out-swing Batman; and Jerry will outrun Tom.

My superpower is ‘extreme research’. When I was in engineering school, in my first year, all I ever wanted to do was become a scientist. There’s something to be said for research. It’s the thing you do so you know which path to take. It works like this:

1. Collect data.
2. Organize data and make some sense out of it.
3. Reject data that is a waste of time.
4. Reject more data, and then some more.
5. Arrive at a handful of data that you want to act upon.
6. Collect more data on the handful of data you want to act upon.
7. Rinse and repeat.

What you’ll have at the end is an extremely specific set of information that you can then put to good use.

All the data and articles you see on Wolfcrow are the result of meticulous research. It’s no longer an effort, because I’ve been

doing it for so long. Let me give you an example of how I used it in my business.

So I wanted to make corporate videos, but there are thousands of industries and companies in my city alone (Mumbai). If I extend the area the number becomes unmanageable. The challenge is to start with a good list of prospects, and not shoot in the dark.

There's this 'thing' in the corporate video business (or any business for that matter) – if you do one type of video you'll get the same type of clients. If you do training videos you get more training videos. If you do music videos you get more music videos. Want to make feature films? Stop making every other kind of video!

It took me three months of research. I collected data from companies, trends, industry and marketing reports, made phone calls, trolled on LinkedIn, Facebook and Google, until I discovered the exact industries that offer the most profits. I tried to whittle my list down to industries that:

- Paid well and on time.
- Delivered better margins.
- Would go better with my interests (we all have hobbies and interests)

I arrived at one spreadsheet with the names, numbers and email addresses of the people I needed to get in touch with, sorted based on the likelihood of them 'getting' me. It's only then I got busy hustling. This is extreme research.

*Lesson – Before you walk into a single meeting, know everything about the company, the person and the business circumstances that will allow you to deliver the right pitch. Research, my friend, is another form of hustling.*

## 4 Flies around your head

If you're a piece of chocolate on the street with flies circling all around you, you should count yourself lucky for the attention. This is marketing. You fish with bait, not your favorite dessert. You need to be comfortable with the discomfort of attention.

This is the lesson where all the lessons we've looked at earlier make their presence felt.

You always want to be in your client's head. It's called being top-of-mind. The moment the client has the urge to make a video; he or she must call you. How do you get them to do it?

The number nine.

Here's how it works. It takes three interactions with a client for him or her to even register your presence (unless you have a reputation, brand or personality like Robert Downey Jr. or Will Smith).

Then, it takes three interactions for the client to get interested in your existence. Finally, it takes three more interactions for a client to acknowledge your importance – but only as a player. From then on, you're allowed to hustle.

Next time you see a commercial for a new product for the first time, notice it and your reactions to it. Then, see how many times you'd have to see the commercial (different media is fine) for you to finally remember it. Not the commercial, but the product. (If all you remember is the commercial, then the agency has failed).

It's not your client's fault if you're invisible. You're just not that sweet piece of chocolate, but maybe you're a piece of paper

floating here and there with no purpose. Maybe all you need to do is stay put and let the flies come to you.

Here's my system, step by step:

1. Make time (lesson nine) to do -
2. Extreme research (lesson five) about your clients to -
3. Really get to know them (lesson seven) so -
4. When you meet them (after a long period of hustle, lesson six) they'll think you're one of them. It's only then that they'll even listen to what you have to say.

Sound simple? Let me change your perspective on this. To a layperson, it looks like you're setting up a meeting, so what's the big deal, right? No, there's a tremendous amount of effort involved to set up a meeting that *you* control. It's like designing a shot or scene in a movie, and you have meticulously placed all the elements into the scene over weeks of effort, just for it to play right. Some stupid kid who walks into the set for the first time thinks it's all too easy (even producers and executives think the same). You know better.

One of the best advice I've read (which I fail to follow 80% of the time) is to not talk about your interests. In other words, don't pitch, converse. Ask questions and let the client answer. Ask about their business, their troubles, their hobbies, their problems. Listen hard, and then solve them. This is hard for me, but I'm getting better at it every day. I put a lot of focus in this area. I do this whenever I can (lesson eight).

If the Lord of the Rings were the analogy, the character businessmen have to be is the Ent. Stay put, let others come to you. But when they do, show them you're the real deal.

*Lesson - Approach them nine times, at least. Then the game begins.*

### 3 A preemptive strike

This is a tactic that only works sometimes.

If you want to buy a Barbie doll for your niece, and you call up the toy store, and they say they have just one in stock but a customer called them up a few minutes ago and said she'd be there on the double, what do you do?

You'll rush to the store and buy the Barbie doll. This is a preemptive strike.

Clients (and your competitors) are not this easy. They give time to all those they consider potentials (lesson four). If they are smart, they will give you a wide berth so you can hang yourself and make their decision easier. When you're approaching bigger clients, be extremely well prepared.

I used to sit on the opposite table, as a media buyer. Everyday I used to get calls and emails from newspapers, magazines, journals, television networks, radio stations, signage companies, video production companies, 3D animation companies, SMS and email marketing companies. I met the ones that approached our marketing mix, and I had to accept or reject quickly (they were smart, and the offers were always time bound). I learnt very fast that I didn't have to play their game. I could just sit back and watch them until somebody folded. The ones who wanted it the most (lesson six) always made the greatest impression.

It's cruel. Welcome to the corporate world. They don't blink an eye when they have to lay off 50,000 people, but they want your 'loyalty' and your 'patronage' and your 'money' and your 'attention'. As a video producer or filmmaker, you're always on a lower rung to the guy who holds the purse strings, or at least

that's the case in their eyes. They always want to believe it's their show. All you have to do to get your way is, sustain that illusion.

This has nothing to do with 'corporate' or 'clients' or whatever, it's basic human nature. People like to believe they are in control. You do too. When there are many egos in the room, someone has to take a back seat. Otherwise nothing gets done. The producer or filmmaker is usually the loser. How many stories have you heard of contractors winning ego battles over their employers?

Okay, so what has this got to do with the preemptive strike? Just this: People are so busy listening to themselves in their head, that they don't usually see what other people are doing. Even the wisest and most cunning of clients are more interested in their problems than your sales pitch. The easiest way to get their attention, then, is to give them what they want before they ask for it. If they already have the product in their lap, they don't have to go through the pain of creating it.

Imagine this. A product is back-ordered and you've called up all the stores and they've all put you on the waiting list. Suddenly one store calls you – they have the product in stock. Would you like it to be shipped? Would I ever!

Your client has to interview many individuals or businesses, so how cool would it be to them if someone (you) called them up and said: "Listen, I've got your video done already. Want to see it?"

I'm not talking about your showreel. Everybody's got that, and nobody wants to see it. A smart client has seen hundreds of showreels. If nothing else they've seen television and cinema and they have some standards of their own. All they want to know is: Can you do *their* stuff?

This means, once you know the job is big, you have the choice to go create a video on spec. It's a risk, but remember what I said about spending money to make time (lesson nine)? You save the client's time, and you have a good chance of being rewarded for it.

This also works if you're an employee. If you want to get promoted, tell your boss your ambitions. Most people just shut up and expect the 'company' to take care of them. If you've pitched for a job or a project, follow up and talk to the client. Show them your interest. Tell them you really want the project, and you're the best person for the job. It's all a part of the hustling game.

But it doesn't work all the time. One of my current clients gave me a long term contract because I did a work on spec. I then got cocky and did another video on spec as an up-sell. That didn't work. Luckily for me it wasn't that big of a drain, but lesson learnt.

*What is the lesson? People are like babies. They want things NOW! Those who give it to them are their heroes.*

## 2 Cash is king

One of the reasons most businesses fail is because they can't maintain a positive cash flow. The concept is simple. Every month, you must earn more than you spend that month. The same applies to every year, and every decade.

Cash flow is easy to calculate when you're employed. You get paid on a certain date, and you just have to watch your expenses. As a business owner or freelancer, it's a lot more complicated. You have late paying customers, bills due on various dates and schedules, incomes from various sources,

different categories of accounts, admin and office duties, gray areas like 'should this be in my business account or my personal account?' and so on.

You can't just keep track of one month, but multiple months at the same time. In addition to that, you must also look at 'quarters' to gauge your financial performance. You must also look at annual balance sheets and profit-and-loss statements. You must also look at 3-5 year projections.

You can't do this on your own if your aim is to be a big business. Ultimately you must delegate all this to an accountant or you'll simply be overwhelmed through lack of time. Actually, the biggest detriment to a single person crew or business is *staying that way*. What if something happens to you? What if your gear is stolen? What if you have a bad patch and can't get business no matter how hard you try? What if you want to learn a new skill but don't have the time for it?

The smart thing to do is to know your strengths. If your core strength is business development, then delegate the actual shooting to someone else. If you are genius with the camera, then find someone to handle business development. Hire someone to take care of admin and accounts and payrolls. Everyone has to spend. The people who fail are the ones who spend on the *wrong things*. If you're weak in getting new clients don't waste your money buying a new camera. If you can't edit for shit don't buy the new Mac Pro. If your work is restricted to a small town or locality, don't buy a car!

See where I'm going with this? Don't covet your neighbor's camera. Be within your means. Every successful business does it, and so can you.

*Lesson – the primary job of every business is to sustain a positive cash flow. If you can't for whatever reason, it's a strong signal to hire someone to do things you are not good at.*

## 1 **Never underbid**

I'm going to make this short and sweet. Never underbid, period!

By underbidding, you might win *this* project, but you will lose many projects in the future.

Look at any industry, there's always a 'common' product and a 'luxury' product. Each side looks at the other with disdain, yet both have customers! See here:

- Airplanes – economy vs first
- Watches – Casio vs the population of Switzerland
- Cameras – Canon DSLRs vs Leica, Phase One
- Videos – Youtube vs Hollywood
- Food – McDonalds vs The Oak Room
- Clothing – Rags vs Designer Wear

Wherever there are humans, there are always two economies. Most of us come from humble beginnings, so we never get to see how things are in the 'rich' side of the world. Guess what? It's exactly the same, and the same rules apply. All you have to change to get there is the uniform.

If you walk the walk and talk the talk, you're there. Of course, you also have to deliver the goods but at least you'll get the opportunity. To do this, you must read what your clients read,

hang out where your clients hang out, live like they live. If you're an experienced camera person or editor wouldn't you be able to smell a poser from a mile away? They can too. You can't fake these things. But, it's not my place or anybody's to tell you how to live your life.

Eventually, it's your call. What's your calling? Know that, and know your situation. You'll arrive at a price per hour beyond which your operation is worthless. Underbid even once and you put your enterprise at risk. In fact, I strongly urge you to overbid. You would be surprised how much people are really willing to pay. E.g., if you create a project on spec and 'magically' drop it into your client's lap, they might be happy to pay you a premium for the efforts you saved them.

I have been asked many times to lower my rates, especially with on-going clients. I don't, and they're okay with that. There's nothing to fear. If you walk into a store and try to bargain, and it doesn't work out, nobody bears a grudge. It's a game. It's their duty to ask, and it's your duty to say no!

*Lesson – Know your value, and keep your price. You'll get it eventually, and then you'll cross it.*

Well, that's it! I hope you have found at least one of my ideas useful and practical. If any of this did resonate with you, please email back and tell me what you think. It could be feedback, criticism or advice (I need the occasional pat on the back, too, you know). If you need clarifications feel free to ask me.

Happy hunting!

**Sareesh Sudhakaran**  
*Producer and Consultant, Wolfcrow*