



**PART 1**  
**SELLING**  
**FINE ART**  
**PHOTOGRAPHY**

*Successful people do the things  
that unsuccessful people are unwilling to do.*

JOHN MAXWELL



# Chapter 1

## Taking Control of Your Destiny

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We are successful when we take control of our lives instead of waiting for success to come to us. Marketing your work is taking control of your financial destiny instead of hoping that luck will bring you money and fame. By taking control we ensure that specific things will happen because of our actions, our decisions, and our personal abilities, not because of some unknown outside force that may or may not come our way. By deciding today that you will make things happen, instead of waiting for things to happen “someday,” you take control of your life. It is taking control that, eventually, will bring you success.

Making dreams happen carries both costs and sacrifices. In order to be successful running your photography business, you will need to sacrifice some of the time that you would have otherwise spent creating photographs. This time will instead be spent on marketing your work and selling your photographs at shows or in other venues. It will also be spent doing accounting, ordering supplies, and completing the multitude of tasks that are part of running a successful photography business.

If you follow the advice I offer in this book, you can build a successful business. However, you will no longer be able to spend all your time doing photography. This can be seen as a sacrifice. However it can also be seen as success because you will no longer need to have a job that just “pays the bills” and allows you to do photography on the side.

This is all about choices, about knowing what you really want to do and about doing what is required to make your dreams come true. If you really want something—if you want it enough to work as hard as is necessary to get what you want—you can achieve it. This has proven true for me, and I am sure it will prove just as true for you.

### **The Best-Kept Secret**

A poor photograph well marketed will always outsell a great photograph poorly marketed.

Therefore, the goal is to create great photographs and marketing them effectively.

Photographs do not sell simply because they are pretty. Like any product, photographs sell because they are properly marketed. Better cameras and equipment do not lead to better sales. Better marketing leads to better sales.

Most photographers who sell their work spend far too much time and money on equipment and far too little on marketing. In fact, many photographers do not spend *any* time or money marketing their work. Instead, they wait for people to come and buy from them: they wait to be discovered. Needless to say, they are quickly disappointed because artwork is not sold by waiting for customers to knock on your door. Artwork is sold by knocking on the customer's door, either physically or metaphorically.

Why is that? It is because most people have a very difficult time deciding what is good art and what is bad art. This being the case, people rely on information made available to them regarding the artwork they are looking at. They need to know more about the work presented to them before they can decide to buy it. They need to know who the artist is and why they should buy this artwork. Without this information they will rarely buy, and if they do, they will mostly purchase only low-priced pieces.

This information can be provided to them by the artist's representative. If no one is representing you, then you must provide your audience with this information yourself.

You may say, "But I have had articles written about me, I have done interviews, I have a website, and so on. Why can't my customers learn about me that way?" They certainly will learn about you that way, provided they find these articles, interviews, and websites. The problem is, how do you know they will find this information? And how do you know the right people—those who are considering purchasing your work—will find it? The fact is that you don't. And the fact is that most likely they will not find this information.

This being the case, it is your job, as an artist who is marketing your work, to provide prospective customers with this information. You simply cannot expect your customers to find it on their own.

For example, one of the best marketing pieces you will ever have in your hands is your Artist Statement. The Artist Statement is a crucial piece of information about yourself which, if designed and used properly, will help you generate more sales than you ever thought possible. I will address the Artist Statement in more detail in Chapter 20.

## What is Marketing?

Marketing encompasses a wide variety of promotional activities. There is really no limit to the marketing venues and approaches that can be used. The secret (if there is one) is to develop a marketing system that works for you and that you will fine-tune over time. The next step is to apply this system systematically.

## The Goal of Marketing

The goal of marketing is to generate sales that would otherwise not be generated—to convince that part of the audience that is not yet ready to buy, or is not aware of your product’s existence or advantage, to buy your product.

Therefore, the purpose of marketing is persuasion. How this is achieved is the focus of this book.

Successful marketing is persuasive marketing. A successful marketing campaign is one that persuades a large segment of the audience to buy the product being marketed. An unsuccessful marketing campaign is one that does not persuade a significant segment of the audience to buy the product.

No effort should be spared in persuading customers to buy your product except, of course, illegal or unethical practices. When considering all the marketing venues available, none should be rejected a-priori. Instead each should be carefully considered and then evaluated for its effectiveness.

Effectiveness is the key element in marketing. Fear or insecurity are often reasons people reject a potential marketing approach. Therefore, it is important to eliminate fear from the marketing planning stage.

During the planning stage one must consider not only the positive aspects of a particular approach, but also the negative aspects. For example, a negative outcome is the potential damage to the image and the public perception of a business as a result of a marketing campaign. A marketing campaign must not only be persuasive, it must also keep intact and, preferably, reinforce the image that the business wants to project to its audience. Therefore, an important goal of marketing is the reinforcement of a business image. This is best achieved by the creation of an image that is constantly refined through new marketing campaigns. The goal of each new campaign is to reinforce this business image and to remind the audience why they should buy the advertised products.

## Why Marketing is Indispensable to Success in Photography

What you never want to forget is that marketing is absolutely necessary in order to sell your work. This is true regardless of the type of marketing you decide to do and regardless of the product you decide to sell.

Your marketing can be as simple as talking to your co-workers or as complex as a national campaign orchestrated over a long period of time. The type of marketing you choose to do is not what is important. What is important is that your marketing is aimed at meeting your financial goals and that it reaches your target audience.

When all the expenses are tallied up, creating photographs costs a lot of money. Furthermore, as your level of involvement increases, these costs

*Nobody hangs a \$100 photograph over the mantle in their million-dollar home.*

increase proportionally and, sometimes, unfortunately, exponentially.

For example, if you open a gallery you will have to pay rent for office space, pay for utilities, buy insurance, pay salaries to your employees, and more. All of a sudden you find out that you either need to make additional sales, or you must raise your prices to cover these new expenses. You also find out that your previous marketing approach no longer works because it either does not attract enough customers, or it does not attract customers who are willing to pay your higher prices, or both. As a result, you need to set new financial goals and prepare a marketing campaign designed to reach these goals.

The need for marketing does not make itself known until running your business requires a specific level of income. Until then, marketing is an option. When the time I just described arrives, things take a 180 degree turn and marketing becomes a requirement. At that time marketing is no longer something you *could* do. Instead, marketing becomes something you *must* do. Income from photography is no longer a desire; it is now a necessity and in some instances a dire necessity.

## Crucial Questions

I have seen too many photographers start a business and hope to make a good income without doing much, if any, marketing. Launching a website without doing any marketing is like waiting for a miracle to happen. Opening a gallery without doing any marketing is akin to committing suicide.

Whether you launch a website or open a gallery, if you do not market your work and your location, how are people going to find you? And if people do find you, how do you control who visits your site or walks into your gallery? For you to sell your work, you need to attract people who are interested in your product or services.

At such time, important questions surface such as:

- How will you find the correct marketplace for your work?
- Is there a market for this work in the first place?
- Do you have to compromise and make your work fit a specific marketplace?
- Can you offer a new style or do you have to conform to an existing, sales-proven style?
- Are you going to sell quantity or quality?

These questions are rarely asked by photographers because photographers prefer to focus on getting new camera gear, new software, or new photographic knowledge.

Instead, these questions focus on how to make money by selling your work, something that many artists like to think will happen if they simply do great work. The problem is that great work does not sell itself. Great work, or

any work for that matter, needs marketing in order to sell. You can have the most beautiful photographs in the world, or the best product ever, but it is not going to do you much good if you do not explain to those who are qualified to buy your product *why* they should buy it.

There are countless ways that your work can be marketed, and we will look at many of them in this book. What is important to remember is that marketing has to be done in order to generate the business income you desire.

## Photography Must be Your Career in Order to Succeed

In order to sell your work successfully you need to approach this activity as a career, and not as a hobby. This is because while a hobby is usually done on the side, a career plays a primary importance in your working life. This decision is significant because it will shape how you approach your photography business as a whole.

You can make your photography business a part-time career or a full-time career. Many start doing this part-time and later move on to doing it full-time. For example, you may look at it as having a “day job” and a “night job,” or a full-time job and a part-time job. Others start right off doing it full-time, often by retiring from a previous career and beginning a new career in photography.

Whichever way you look at all this, keep in mind that it is going to be a lot of work and that it will not be easy. I do not want to hide this fact from you. If this were easy, everyone would do it and everyone would be successful at it.

## Market, Market, and Market Again

An old maxim goes like this: If you do not market your work one thing will happen—nothing.

The saying is true. I verified it for myself when I first tried to sell my work. Let me explain.

When I started selling my photographs I thought that having stunning, high-quality work was the secret to selling it. I believed that my work would speak for itself and that its beauty alone would be enough to generate sales. Therefore, my efforts were focused on constantly improving the quality of my work by acquiring better cameras, better equipment and, overall, by learning how to create better photographs.

The way I “marketed” my work was by displaying my work in galleries. Although I did not realize it then, I was relying on the galleries to market my work. But the fact is, the gallery owners marketed their galleries, not my photography. They promoted the name of their gallery, and when doing so, they included all the artists they represented. My name was featured in their marketing materials along with all the other artists they represented. Because

these galleries represented many artists, the name of each individual artist received little attention. This did not work very well for me. Although I did make a few sales, they were at low prices and irregular intervals. I could not rely on this income to make a living from my photography.

Because I believed that the beauty and the quality of my photography would make people want to buy them, when they did not sell I concluded that my photographs were not good enough and that I had to make them better. Consequently, I spent a lot of time and money doing so. Unfortunately, while the quality of my work did improve, my sales did not increase.

Because I had no idea how to market my work myself I decided to place ads in magazines. Since I did not know which magazines to advertise in, I chose to maximize my chances by advertising in magazines that had a national distribution. These ads were very costly.

Although I did not know how to design an effective ad, I could not afford to hire a professional graphic designer. Therefore, I designed my own ads, making beginners' mistakes. As a result my ads generated only marginal income. At the end of the day I barely covered my costs. I certainly did not make a profit.

## The Breakthrough

All these mistakes cost me a lot of time and money. Eventually, I realized that I needed to generate a sufficient income through the sale of my work or quit trying altogether. I could not sustain these expenses if I was not making a profit.

This is when I realized that I needed to study marketing. Because there were no books explaining how to sell fine art photographs, I studied marketing techniques used to sell a variety of other products and devised ways of applying these techniques to the marketing of fine art photographs.

Completing this research took me years. Testing my findings also took a long time because I could only do it through trial and error. The whole process was very time consuming. However, it led me to the formulation of a successful fine art marketing system that can be used to sell photographs and other fine arts, such as paintings, sculptures, etc. Furthermore, this system can be adapted to sell other products as long as these products are sold on the basis of quality rather than quantity.

I now know that the reason my work wasn't selling well was not because of low quality. My work was not selling because it was not marketed properly. What I needed to improve was the quality of my marketing, not the quality of my work. It took me a long time to understand that, and it took me even longer to devise a successful marketing strategy. The outcome of my efforts is the marketing system that I present in this book.

## Skill Enhancement Exercises

In this book, as in my previous books, at the end of most chapters you will find what I call *Skill Enhancement Exercises*. These exercises are designed to help you get the most out of the information provided in each chapter by applying it to your personal situation.

The first Skill Enhancement Exercise in this book focuses on taking care of your own destiny. It consists of two questions. Answer each question in writing as accurately and as honestly as you can. I recommend you keep all your answers to the various Skill Enhancement Exercises in this book in a single notebook, or a single text file on your computer, so that you can refer to your answers easily and monitor your progress.

### Taking Control of Your Destiny

1. What are you doing right now to take control of your own destiny?
2. What else can you do to take better control of your destiny?