PDNEDU ASKS PHOTOGRAPHERS

Q: WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTION YOU'VE TAKEN IN SUPPORT OF YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY BUSINESS?

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[My] most important action [has been] to realize that self-promotion [means] consistent and structured hard work. I regularly update my Web site, take part in photography competitions and also [send out] e-mail promos every month to all the contacts I've met. This allows me to build relations and let my clients see how I've grown or progressed over the years. This method has allowed me to be based in China while getting assignments from everywhere else.

Stefen Chow, currently in Beijing
<www.stefenchow.com>

Over the past couple of years, we've been working toward creating a seamless brand identity for HagePhoto. This is a huge challenge, which you don't fully appreciate until you get into the thick of it. There's all the physical design work that goes into streamlining your appearance as a business: logos, cards, promos, documents, and synching blogs, portfolios and networking Web sites. That's the stuff that makes you look like you know what you're doing. Our brand identity is also used as a tool to keep us true to our mission statement. It dictates the style of photography we are going to promote, what kind of clients we're going to pursue and jobs we're going to accept. This process has helped us find our voice on our professional networking sites. These are the finer points that hold us to our style, work ethic and message to our clients. Providing clients and agencies a clear idea of who we are and what it is we do has made it easier for them to hire (aka trust) us.

Matt & Agnes Hage
<www.hagephoto.com>

I would have to say that the most important step I've taken is the first one. The decision to let myself be vulnerable and put my work out there in a show for the public eye to scrutinize was a big step. Since I've done this, many other doors of opportunity have opened themselves up to me.

Leesha Quigg
PDNedu Storytellers student

Broadening my vision to encompass cinematography and directing was a huge leap at the time (1993)... It paid off then, allowing me to direct music videos and commercials in tandem and in support of my photography. It's paying off even more now as I offer clients a combined photographic and motion/emotion experience package via my XperienceFactory.

The transition from the still image to cinematography was a massive undertaking at the time, both financially and creatively. Going into "production" was always quite an ordeal and involved many hands on deck throughout the process. The experience I gained from producing hybrid motion and still packages back in the day has allowed me to do what I do so seamlessly today. From concept to preproduction to shoot, all the way through post—I offer clients a one-stop shop. The content I [now] provide at the XperienceFactory is a direct result of the action taken to support my business [earlier], long before you were able to flick a switch to go from still to motion capture!

It's crazy to think that a "production" can now fit in my backpack and post can happen in my hotel room overnight! I'm not one of the old-school that pines for film, that's for sure! Give me a D7000 and D3s, a few primes and a Macbook Pro with Final Cut any day of the week...

Mark Humphrey
<www.humphreycreative.com>

Headshot photos © Teo Yen Kai (Chow), HagePhoto (Hage), Scott Church (Quigg), Self portrait (Humphrey)

Surprisingly, teaching and sharing with my social community has yielded some nice rewards, both in business and through relationships established online. I've just completed a book for Peachpit Press entitled *The Passionate Photographer: 10 Steps Toward Becoming Great*, and although its creation has put my personal projects on hold, already I've received assignments from the many tributaries created while writing the book. I've done workshops and lectures based on this book and recently got a plum assignment from someone who was in the audience at my seminar at PhotoPlus Expo in October 2010. I think the more you put yourself out there, the more opportunities come your way. I will be starting a blog to support the book, and I expect even more positive surprises and opportunities to come my way because of this.

Steve Simon
twitter/stevesimon
<www.thepassionatephotographer.com>

I can't point to any one thing. It's a combination of creating my first strongly personal portfolio; defining my voice and what I truly love to shoot, which immediately, by default, created a niche for my work—as I'm not for everyone; learning how to say *no* to the bullshit; letting go of fear; and finally learning the lessons of cash flow: Keep your overhead low!

Doug Menuez
<www.menuez.com>

The single most important step I've taken has been to continue to learn new skills and expand my abilities as a storyteller. In 2010, I went back to school at the University of Miami and got a graduate degree in multimedia. In a time when media is struggling and searching for a new path, I'm finding that I'm busier than ever, telling meaningful stories in new ways for a variety of outlets. It's an exciting time to be a photographer and journalist, and this new skill can create more opportunity for all of us. I think the most important thing artists can do is constantly push and improve their craft.

Ami Vitale
<www.amivitale.com>

Headshot photos © Tanja Rohweder (Simon), Clive Booth (Menuez), Sanjayan Muttulingam (Vitale), Gabriela Herman (Sharma), Eric Barth (Clark), Bruno Senna/Aurora Photos (Rich)

My most important action has been to take my Web presence really seriously. Your identity, branding and the look of your Web site will either make people want to click Next or close your Web site's window. Bad Web sites are deal breakers, and I would encourage anyone who is serious about their photography to work with a Web professional. Never shortchange yourself on taking the time to establish good branding and identity for your business.

Manjari Sharma
<www.manjarisharma.com>

It's hard to pinpoint one specific action that is (or was) most important. Throughout my career I've always pursued personal projects that allow me to create the type of images I want to make. Because I'm not on assignment when I shoot these images, I have complete creative control with little or no pressure, and this allows me to experiment a lot. Hence, I'm able to create images that do very well in the marketplace. And because my portfolio is full of this self-assigned work, I end up getting paid commissions to shoot similar subjects, which is perfect because that's what I want to be shooting. It's the inspiration and experimentation from those self-assignments that helps me out on major projects when the pressure is on. Of course, there's a lot that has gone into my career to make it what it is—much more than just shooting personal projects—but that is the foundation of my business. The rest is built on hard work, perseverance, passion, dumb luck and a lot of trial and error on the business side of things. Making top-notch images is just the first step of the process.

Michael Clark
<www.michaelclarkphoto.com>

The most important business decision I've ever made was to *not* become too focused on the business of making money! I know this sounds counterintuitive, but from the beginning, I adopted a simple philosophy. Remain focused on three core values: 1) Have fun every day 2) work with great people and 3) be creative! I figured that if I did all of that, the money would follow. As it turns out, I was right!

Corey Rich
<www.coreyrich.com>