

Tactics

These are the ways we do what we do. We call them tactics because they are actionable; That is, they require action to be completed.

They are also measurable, and that is very important as well.

An action with no measurement is not an action at all; it is but a wasted expenditure of energy. And there are way too many ways to waste energy to go flailing about with tactical ideas that have little or no impact.

Letters of Introduction

Yes, the simple business letter can open a lot of doors for you. It can get past the secretaries and other gatekeepers and get your introduction right in front of the owner, the CEO, the CMO, the agency head. The introduction letter is a pure form of business and not something to be brushed off lightly.

If you are a brand-new business, the letter may introduce your services to prospective customers. It may be a great way to get your name in front of a prospect without necessarily "selling" them (that comes later).

You could also use that letter to do some surveying: What is the market looking for? How can you be of benefit to the companies you are targeting? Ask for feedback, and take the information in gracious spirit.

Let them know you will be calling in a few days to discuss the questions – if they have the time to give you, of course. (Then when you do call in a few days, you can honestly say, He/she is expecting my call." You did mention in the letter that you were going to call, right?

Right.

If you are a growing or more mature concern, the business letter can introduce new equipment, techniques, time- and energy-saving methods that could inspire the person to give you a call to discuss.

Remember to let them know how your new acquisition can help them. Simply bragging about your new Apochromatic, distortion-free F2.8 lens is not interesting. Explaining how the edge-to-edge sharpness makes flat-art copying far better than previous technology lets them know that you get what they need.

These tactics can open doors, get leads, and be a first element toward starting a conversation about your photography.

There are always advantages and disadvantages to every tactic. The major disadvantage is that they are targeted toward a single person, and that takes some time. The advantage is that they are targeted toward a single person, and that takes time – and they know it does. People like to be appreciated and feel that they are worth your attention.

Print and mail your letter the old-fashioned way. Follow up with an email if possible. Sign each letter with your personal signature.

Follow up at every opportunity. If you noted in the letter you would call in a few days, then call in a few days. Putting it off will be a disaster for this tactic, as it is about establishing trust.

Do not do this if you have nothing to offer in the letter. Do not think that you can blow smoke and use it as leverage to get in the door. You can't. They get a ton of these and can tell the insincerity from a mile away.

Charities and Community Opportunities

Decide what you want to offer, and then work a way that the charity can benefit as well as you. In fact, the charity should benefit way more than you. Perhaps it is working with their newsletter or doing portraits of the board or print sales or... come one, there are a gazillion ways a good photographer can help raise the visibility of a charity or community group. Yes, your visibility will rise as well, but that is fine. You are doing good, and by doing good you deserve to be recognized.

The advantages are helping others, growing good charities, and meeting important and influential people that also believe in the charity you are helping.

The downside is that many times these groups have some not-so-likable people in charge. Persona pettiness can be tolerated, though; you just have to deal with it.

I have a few guidelines I use for my charity and community service work:

1. I call the shots. I do my work, my way. No exceptions.

If I were to let other people guide me to making less-than-excellent work, then that sounds more like a job than a volunteer situation. If they are paying, they can lead; if I am doing it for free, then I lead.

2. The work is only used for what we agreed it to be used for. Look, I am quite lenient, but I want to know what they have planned. Knowing this is good for me and good for them.

Seminars and Guest Speaking

Ever heard of the Chamber of Commerce? How about Toastmasters? Or the local library's "Speaker Center?" Each of them gives you the opportunity to speak or give a small seminar on what you do, and how you do it can help others who need your service.

You cannot hard sell, but you can still differentiate.

Say you were speaking at the Chamber of Commerce and planned to speak about product photography. You could go in and show your portfolio and tell them how great you are to shoot with and what your fees are. Yeah, you could do that. They will not be listening to you because everyone knows what a commercial is.

How about a presentation on preparing the items you want to have photographed for the photography? Talk about how important it is that the articles are clean and unscratched. Explain how some objects may need to be left slightly unfinished so they can be photographed from different angles. In short, help them with all of their product photography needs, even if they are currently working with another photographer – especially if they are working with another photographer. Double especially if you have information that is more relevant or shows them how the image could be better and makes them wonder two things: Why isn't their guy doing this stuff and, if you are willing to give this much away free, how much more do you know?

Trade Shows/ Events

I have attended a couple of dozen tradeshows/events, and most were very interesting. I rarely got a gig at the show, but I did get a lot of interest down the road. People with which I met and engaged were more willing

to see my stuff, and I was able to meet people face to face that were much harder to reach by phone.

My call on these is to only be involved if you can do so very inexpensively. Remember that most of the attendees are not there at that moment to buy something. Trying to sell them on you or your work could be disastrous.

Trade-Out

There is a lot of this going on these days. Some of it good; some of it not. I do not want to discourage you from trading out, but only to warn you to keep it value for value.

While I may want to trade some photography for a press run of 5000 leave-behinds, trading a half day for a 1/8-page tearsheet of a widget on white is never going to happen. And remember: A tearsheet is no big deal. You can get a copy of the magazine yourself. And if it is a gig, it is already going to be printed.

A trade-out should benefit you as well as the person you are trading out with. Otherwise, it is not a trade out; it is a sucker punch.

Always make the best deal you can, maintain control of your work, and do not give away copyright. Just don't. Access is valuable. Access is currency.

Gaining access to photographing Britney Spears and having her photographs in your "music" portfolio is extremely valuable for a startup photographer, and it is probably still valuable for a newly established photographer. It gains you credibility. However, if they want all rights and you get nothing, that is not a good idea at all. In all of these tactics, time is your expendable.

Time is also a commodity and a currency that must not be wasted. Be prudent and careful and try some of these tactics for yourself.