

To do a full analysis of the companies that you want to work with, these are the areas that you must be looking into and finding the answers will help you immensely as you begin marketing to them.

For each of the clients you are targeting for a full-on marketing blitz, answer these questions:

1. Who makes the buying decision? Do they have a particular buyer, or do individuals within the organization make the decisions on their own?
2. When and how are the decisions made?
3. How often do they need photographs? How often do they purchase or assign photography?
4. How much do they buy? What is the volume of the assigned photography?
5. How much are they willing to spend? What kinds of numbers are there for fees paid?
6. What factors influence the purchase decision?
7. What are the criteria that is used to buy the work? Can you find out what kind of criteria is used?

The best thing this list can do for you is to create a situation where you are competing for work you can do. That is really a powerful tool for you.

Who is your direct competition?

You can be as generic or specific if you want. List the types of photographers that compete with you or be specific with names and addresses. This is a private list for your eyes only.

If you can, ask your clients who is also bidding on the work you are getting. And if you can, ask them what they like about you that keeps them coming back.

Differential Advantages

What are your differential advantages when it comes to the perceived value of your work? How can you cultivate that and make it more visible?

What are the actual perceived values that your work maintains?

Why do your clients work with you?

Not all of the findings will be positive, you know. We will find out that we lack something or cannot compete on something that our competitors easily beat us on. That is certainly okay and to be expected. No one is going to be the only one. And no one photographer will be the answer to every client's needs or desires.

What are Your “Differential Disadvantages?”

1. Perceived disadvantages: Why may clients not want to work with you? Be honest here, and be thorough. Are there risks associated to working with you that you know of? Ask your clients what they think.

How may you address these perceived disadvantages to mitigate or eliminate them in the minds of your clients?

2. Actual disadvantages: What are some real, honest-to-goodness disadvantages to working with you? Can you identify any clients that may not be using you because of these disadvantages?

What can you do to mitigate or eliminate these disadvantages and create a path to “yes” for your clients?

3. In what ways are you simply different in how you approach your work, client relationships, image presentation, and personality?

Does this help or hurt you in your competitive position? (Be honest!)

Now – imagine you are a fly on the wall listening to one of your best customers discussing using you with another art director or editor. This is a client that is very happy with your work and is satisfied with using you for more upcoming work.

What did they say?

What do you want them to say?

Listening to our customers discuss our work can be very enlightening, but nearly impossible to arrange. So you have to listen between the lines – between the bits of conversation that you have while picking up and delivering the job. Listen intently.

And **ask**. Seriously.

If you have done a few jobs with a client, take them to lunch, let them know how much you appreciate the work, and, if there is something you can do better to help them with their job, then listen. Listening is a most underrated marketing tool. Use it for advantage.