



It's a Numbers Game
Don Giannatti

IT'S A NUMBERS GAME

How to Play “The Numbers” Game

We have all heard the words, “It’s a numbers game” before. And most of us know what it means. In order to get to a certain level, more attempts than successes must be used.

Selling door to door is a numbers game. The more people a sales person talks to, the more they sell. It may take 10 “No’s” to get to one yes. So the goal is to get through those ten as fast as you can to get to the one yes. Knocking on ten doors a day nets one sale. Knocking on 50 doors nets 10 sales.

A ‘numbers game’

Not much difference in photography, you know.

The more art directors you show your work to, the more chances you have of closing an assignment. The more times you interact with a specific art director, the higher the probability that a gig is forthcoming. The more gigs you complete with excellence, the more excellent gigs you get.

And yet...

I chat with photographers who do none of the above.

They don’t show their work. They don’t ever go back to someone who didn’t immediately hire them. They don’t get enough gigs to make delivering excellence count.

It is... a numbers game.

Of course there are a few givens.

Your work must be top notch. This is a given. All the door knocking and emailing in the world will not work as fast as good work will.

(Now this is where it gets crazy a bit. I think a mediocre photographer who has mad skills at marketing will do better than an ultra-talented photographer who sits in the studio waiting for the phone to ring.)

Why?

Because. It. Is. A. Numbers. Game.

If your work is good, it all falls on you to do the work to get it in front of people who would buy it.

A lot.

Of people, that is.

We have discussed the ways we can find clients before, and how to think about marketing, but in this dispatch, I want to play with numbers.

I recently read where fewer than 80% of photographers spend more than an hour per week marketing. And only a few percent spend more than 15 hours a week marketing.

If we apply the 80-20 rule (20% of the businesses in a niche make 80% of the money) we can see that there may be, just may be a connection between not marketing and losing out on the bulk of the revenue.

We know this stuff works, and yet few of us can 'find the time' or 'get ready' or 'bite the bullet' or fight off whatever last minute resistance pops into our heads that prevents us from moving on this magnificent factoid: it's a numbers game.

Let's stop procrastinating and get to it.

The book is as good as it is gonna be for next week. The site is done, and the images up there are up there. Changes can be made tomorrow, but it is what it is and we move forward. If this is too fast for you, set a date. April 1? June 15th?

It doesn't matter... set a date and keep that date.

We are going to begin by making three contacts per day by sending out three emails each day, and sending postcards on the other two.

Three days a week; Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, we send three emails per day.

On Mondays and Fridays we send three postcards each day. Or we can go out into the real world and introduce ourselves to prospects on those days. These are not traditionally good days for email marketing.

People are either planning for the weekend or recovering from it. Let's give them some air.

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday.

Three emails per day.

Three contacts per day x three days equals 9 email contacts per week, 36 contacts per month, over 400+ contacts per year. To see how that may affect your current status, figure out how many potential clients you contacted last year. Chances are it is less than 400... substantially less.

Six postcards per week is 24 additional contacts per month.

That brings your monthly contacts to 60 per month.

And we can do that with minimum effort.

Sixty contacts per month.

So what happens if we double that?

Six Contacts per day, and six emails. Just imagine.

Six contacts and six emails is 36 contacts per week, is 144 contacts per month.

- Nearly 1500 contacts per year.
- What would that do to your business?
- What impact would that have on your income?
- And how long would it take?

Less than an hour a day for three days.

Here is a Youtube video showing how long it actually takes to do this.

<https://youtu.be/Fl2NCY-JorA?si=aLZa3pNZWFahchSn>

Hint: less than 2 minutes.

Set a dedicated time; 9AM, after lunch, before you shut down at the end of the day... whatever you choose, make it part of your day. Like a habit.

Habits can be very powerful, and a habit to touch 60 contacts per month can be incredibly powerful.

But go ahead, tell me how that won't work for you. Go ahead and tell me that you are so busy not being busy that it is simply not possible to spend an hour a day MAKING YOUR BUSINESS successful.

I am not listening, but go ahead and try. You are only trying to convince yourself.

And really, you are the only one you must convince in order to get this change implemented.

At this point, I will sound a bit rude to some, and I really do not mean it to be rude. However, only you have the control over whether you play the numbers game or do not. Change from non-engagement to being engaged – or not. And in the end, it only affects you.

There are still lots of gigs to be commissioned. Lots of look-books to be shot. Thousands of pages of editorial and thousands of ads both local and national.

And here is another numbers game for you.

While the chances for getting a gig may be lower than they used to be due to the sheer numbers of competition, the fact is that there is a 100% probability that you will not get hired if they do not know you exist.

So here are a couple of questions for you.

- Will you commit to 15 contacts per week?

- Will you commit to creating an environment that will help possible clients find you?
- Or will you simply let resistance take you off the grid?

I hope you never let resistance win. I really do.

Just remember...

It's a numbers game.

DO THE MATH.

Take a break and put together a plan.

Part Two

We discussed the numbers of getting people to see your work, and how that is so important to build a business. It's been two weeks since that post.

How many of you:

- 1/1. Made the minimum commitment to getting to 6 people per day for three days (Tue/Wed/Thurs)?
- 1/2. Exceeded the minimum commitment and got to more than 18 people in those three days. Which means you have contacted 36+ people about your work at this point.
- 1/3. Found excuses and other things more pressing to get done.

No judgement here, only asking you to face resistance in the eye and either kick its damned ass or continue being acquiescent to it.

Resistance is NOT your friend... and if you found every reason under the sun not to do the minimum of 15 contacts per week, then you know what you have to work on.

This discussion is on the numbers of contacts you make to individuals who you want to work with. We need a number of people to see our work, but we also need to touch those people more than once to get that work.

It is a process. A journey. A vision quest.

OK, so it may not be a vision quest, but it is still a process.

“Only 2% of sales occur at a first meeting”

-- Sales experts.

People in business often hope and expect to do business the first time they meet a prospect. Yet studies reveal that only 2% of sales occur when two parties meet for the first time.

The 2% who buy at a first meeting tend to be people who have already looked into the subject matter, and already know what they're looking for. If they meet someone who ticks all the right boxes and they get on well, then business may well be transacted.

But that is far from the norm. The other 98% will only buy once a certain level of trust has been built up.

The power of following up; The Secret to Sales Success

You know how sometimes you're so close to your business that you miss the simple stuff? The things that could actually make a big difference. They're often right there, hiding in plain sight. Let's talk about one of the best-kept secrets in sales: follow-up.

The Reality of First Impressions

Here's a stat that might surprise you: Only 2% of sales happen at the first meeting. Yep, just 2%. Most folks think they'll close the deal right off the bat, but that's rarely the case. The ones who do buy right away have usually done their homework and know exactly what they want. But for the other 98%, it's about building trust, and inspiring confidence in our work.

Building Relationships, Not Closing Tricks

Forget about those old-school "101 sure-fire closing techniques." That playbook is about as outdated as dial-up internet and the Macarena. Today's successful salespeople focus on understanding their prospects, solving their problems, and proving value. It's relationships, ongoing conversations, and yes, follow-ups that do the trick. No gimmicks needed.

Why People Don't Buy (Right Away)

There are plenty of reasons why people might not jump on your offer immediately. They're busy, they have other priorities, or they're worried about cost. Sometimes, they simply don't know you well enough yet. And here's the kicker: 80% of leads aren't followed up on. That's like throwing away 80% of your opportunities before they even have a chance to grow. We go through all it takes to get a lead, talk to 'em one time, and ghost 'em. And we wonder why we still drive a 10 year old Subaru.

Five Times the Charm

Studies show that 80% of sales happen only after at least five follow-ups. Five! But here's the catch: 92% of salespeople give up before they even get to that fifth try.

Imagine that—if you’re willing to follow up five times, you’re already way ahead of the game. Persistence pays off in sales, big time.

The Five “No’s” Strategy

Here’s a strategy to stack the odds in your favor: commit to a “Five No’s” approach. Keep the conversation going with your prospects until they’ve said “no,” “not now,” or “not yet” at least five times. Every contact is a chance to build the relationship and move a step closer to a “yes.” For us photographers it may take more.

I know a photographer who desperately wanted to work for a specific magazine. It took him over two years before he chatted with her and gave her the job. They asked him how come they hadn’t heard of him before.

Sigh.

Stay Top of Mind

Remember, most people aren’t ready to buy immediately. About 63% of prospects won’t purchase for at least three months, and 20% might take over a year to decide. Regular, meaningful follow-ups—every three months or so—keep you on their radar and help you build that “top of mind” awareness.

So, what follow-up strategies do you have in place? Are you giving up after the first “no,” or are you staying in the game until they know you’re the best option? If you commit to the “Five No’s” strategy, you’re not just building sales—you’re building relationships that last. And that’s where the magic happens.

Read through the information above again. Giving up because there is no sale at the first meeting is counter to what you want to achieve.

We are selling ourselves to be considered for something the client can get from a whole host of other talented competitors. We aren’t really ‘selling’ in the traditional meaning of the word, we are promoting ourselves, sharing our work, becoming acquainted with the AD/PE/CD... not ‘selling’ them toner cartridges or accounting.

We cannot really ‘sell’ our work anyway. If there is no gig at the agency that is right for us, or no gig that is requiring photography, no amount of sales techniques or tricks or secrets can get us into a purchase order.

There is NO work that day for us.

So why go?

Because we want to be top of mind when a job DOES come in to the art department. When they think of a photographer to shoot tractors, we want to be the one that comes to mind since we shoot farms and farming equipment so dang well it makes cows give more milk.

THAT is the purpose of the meeting. The touch point.

Top of mind and becoming the one they think of when the time is right.

To do that takes more than one showing of your portfolio.

(Right about now someone is sitting out there saying “Yeah, you ain’t seen MY portfolio... I will show it and get the gig.”)

Yes, you are probably taking the reigns of your unicorn and heading out over the rainbow freeway about now too.

That rarely happens. Really rarely.

Instead what happens is that there is a slow and steady courtship of sorts. You show your work, they ignore you (or seem to) and you keep on showing your work. They may keep on ignoring you... or not.

That ‘or not’ moment is the first of several milestones.

They call you in to see the book. And to size you up.

Are you fun to work with? Are you neat and orderly about your work? Are you trustworthy? Will you be on time and on budget and not insult their client or get drunk with the models and run off to Bermuda with all the cash in hand.

Hey... it happens.

So you go. Show the book. Meet the people.

Entering phase two:

Now there may be more showings in the works, some email contacts, some phone calls, coffee meetings for new work... all kinds of direct mail.

influence the specs, thereby gaining the inside track. Once you have enough data to determine BANT, try to move the prospect toward meeting with a sales rep. As a result of this process, most real prospects will see the meeting as a mutual best next step, and that’s where most Sales teams want to be.

Some say it takes 7-8 touches by a photographer before you get called back. Some say it takes ten or so.

I say it takes more than five and less than a million; plan accordingly. (Note, if they haven’t contacted you after about a hundred, it may be time to pull them from your list and move on. But for those of you really, I mean REALLY committed, 1,247 is the magic number.)

So what counts as a 'touch' for a client?

> Portfolio review.

> Thank you note.

> Direct mail.

> Email.

> Phone call.

> Promotional item.

What may not count are tweets or RT's, Facebook "likes" or pinning their latest designs to your Pinterest boards... seriously?

This is why making the process INTO a process makes sense. Have a way of working that allows you to think about the amount of touches you make with a prospective client. And keep them coming, as there can always be new images and things to share.

NOTE: Spamming them is as bad... no, it's worse, than seeing them once and never going back cause you are all butthurt over not getting that \$100K gig you wanted.

Consider what you think of as being too much.

Yeah... don't do that.

Go with one per month. That seems to be acceptable and enough.

Sales tools and automated sales software. I don't use it, but you should look into them to see if there is something that you may like.

I still use a simple spreadsheet and file cards. And my trusty notebook. That is not to say you shouldn't, only me confessing it takes so long to learn all the things about those software solutions that I lose interest too fast.

Been doing it my way for way too long... heh.

So let's get real here for a moment.

You make a contact with an art director... this means you have a conversation with them. Whether email (OK, but not best) or a personal review (best) and then you start the count.

Show the book, leave a piece for them at the showing, send a thank you card (print?), send a follow up email (2 weeks or so) with another photograph attached. Then wait 6-8 weeks and send another email, and a direct mail piece. Repeat that until you have some new work to show. I count four 'touches' there... five with the follow up a few weeks out.

Numbers. Then...

- Call for an appointment to show the new work.

- In-person, ZOOM, PDF, pigeon... whatever.
- Show new work.

Send thank you card, follow up email... you know the drill now.

You are making new work, right?

Right?

Especially you guys who didn't make the lousy 18 touches per week... it is because you were heavily shooting... right?

Riiiiiggghhhttt... ?

Part Three

As you go through the three contacts per day, you must realize how that multiplies each month.

When you start out, you are doing three contacts per day, but on the second month, you have double that;

You have the new contacts, and the continuing contact.

You already have the contact information for the one you did last month on this day, but you have to do three new ones this month.

I recommend some sort of system to help you keep track of the contacts you are making. This is not going to add a lot of time to your day, but it will keep you from burning out with confusion.

A lot of folks use Notion to do this.

Month One: Day One.

Contact 1: New

Contact 2: New

Contact 3: New

Month Two: Day One:

Contact 61: New

Contact 62: New

Contact 63: New

Contact 1: Second contact

Contact 2: Second contact

Contact 3: Second contact

Month Three: Day One:

Contact 121: New

Contact 122: New

Contact 123: New

Contact 61: Second contact

Contact 62: Second contact

Contact 63: Second contact

Contact 1: Third contact

Contact 2: Third contact

Contact 3: Third contact

This will need a system. I use cards: file cards. Yes, I'm a damned dinosaur. Feel free to use a system that works for you. Hubspot has CRM (Customer Relationship Management), and so does Mailchimp.

You can see the need for automating this and I suggest you use an email system for all but the first contact. In that email, coming directly from you, you let the prospect know you will be sending one email per month and give them a way to unsubscribe.

If they indeed unsubscribe, tell you no, and not to send them anything else, then you must do that.

It is also important to find out if they are receiving your email. There are several apps that will let you know your email was opened.

If you do not get an unsubscribe, you move them to an automated list so you only have to write that email once, and it goes out to all of your potential customer list.

After the initial postcard, you only send them once per quarter.

Not once a month.

Not once every 6 months.

One postcard per quarter... that is the sweet spot, stick with it until you have an idea of how you can do more, or less, based on data.

Commit to the postcard strategy for three years.

At the end of month six, you will have nearly 250 contacts that you are contacting on a monthly basis.

At this point you can look at some data and start to trim the list.

If Bob's Hardware is not responding (ie: clicking a link to your website, sending back a note, nothing...) then remove them for a while.

And add another one.

Rural areas, towns with less than 20,000 population means you should have about 500 names. These will be from surrounding areas, so think regionally.

Medium sized towns and cities (100,000 – 300,000), think of about 350 names on the active list.

Large cities (over 300,000) may be closer to 300 names to deal with.

These lists can waver as you add genres.

For instance, say you are a generalist in a medium sized town and decide to add food as a specialty. This may require a new list, or a segmented list, to allow you to reach those folks who need food photography. A specialization that may be confusing to the 'generalist' category you are working in.

A big city shooter may decide to add travel to their product and food offering.

Different genre: new list or segment.

Working with a limited amount of names keeps you agile and ready to react.

Things you must do with your list:

1. Edit it to make sure you are getting to the right person.
2. Review it and make sure you are not wasting your time with a company that is clearly not interested.
3. Take time to send a personalize note once or twice per quarter. Aim this toward the high-value clients to remind them that you are sincerely wanting to work with them.
4. Get rid of the deadfall, replenish with new leads.
5. Never stop the system... for any reason. This is vitally important. It takes months (years?) to develop your brand in their mind. Miss a few months and it may be like starting over.

I know this seems like a lot of work.

Because, well, it is a lot of work.

But that is what you signed up for when you decided to become a self-employed creative person.

This IS the gig, folks.

Look, this is not the easiest profession you have chosen. Not sure what that would be unless you like delivering pizza in your Nissan, but this one will wrap you up, chew you to a nub and spit you out in the time it takes that pizza to get cold enough to deliver free.

The winners fight for it. The winners put in the hard, droll, and sometimes messy work of doing what others don't.

92% of sales people quit after the first 'no-sale' show.

Pathetic and terribly sad.

Be the 8%... it's a numbers game.

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