

11 TIPS FOR 2011: BUILDING YOUR BRAND

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The ladder to success in stock? Images that work on an emotional, visceral or conceptual level are always popular, and abstract images sell well because they allow the client to introduce their own brand, products or text. Image © Blackout Concepts/Alamy.

With economic forecasters predicting slow recovery for the year ahead, now is the time to take stock of what's working and what isn't. So we asked 11 experts – many of them leaders in their field, advising photographers and serving their businesses – for their New Year advice on how to survive and prosper in 2011.

*Mary Virginia Swanson is a photo marketing and licensing consultant. She's the first of our 11 experts to share, over the next 10 days, their advice on how to prosper, as a photographer, in 2011. **Her advice: Take steps to build your brand.***

Photographs are an integral part of our daily life. Our medium is our universal language, and today technology makes that language accessible in many forms. As is often the case in times of abundance, the bar has been raised: quality images have outpaced mediocrity. The world is rich

with great talent to commission, and great images are available for licensing with the click of the computer keyboard. So how can you make an impression and stand out from the masses?

First, study. Look hard at images in every media that come into your daily life. What are photographers being hired to shoot? Portraits, products, moments that mark history... In these instances, a stock photo will rarely be sufficient. Which industries can visualise their mission in one existing image? Businesses that have a strong metaphor as their corporate culture can easily opt for use of existing images rather than hire a photographer. Observe which markets rely on hiring photographers to create current images, and which feature stock or archive imagery in their campaigns. Gain a clear sense of what market segments you should target, and what approach is appropriate to these professionals.

In today's market, diversify – don't plan on years of commissions from repeat clients in one market. And be entrepreneurial. Be prepared to conduct business yourself, whether that means negotiating terms for a commission, fees for licensing existing imagery in print or online, placement fees for a multimedia story on the web, and more. Believe in the value of your talent and your images, and price accordingly. Don't be afraid of saying no when you feel the placement takes your subjects out of context or you won't be paid an appropriate fee.

Stay current with technology and embrace all elements that tell your story more effectively. Clients are increasingly looking to photographers to provide motion and audio in addition to still imagery. To quote Brian Storm, founder and executive producer of Mediastorm, "Got Sound?" Communicate effectively. Whether you are seeking work from young creatives at ad agencies, sage photo editors or graphic designers, you must communicate in a style they relate to. The language you use in your website and promotional materials must reflect an understanding of their industry and its image needs.

Your website is nearly always the first point of contact with you and your work, and it must be perfect. Be smart about what message you are projecting on your website, and state it in the opening pages. Clients in smaller and mid-sized markets are more likely to hire you to shoot a variety of tasks, and will get to know you as well as your work. Higher-end clients will want to hire the best portraitist, the best product shooter, the best food photographer and so forth. They want to know that this is what you have mastered. Clients have many choices of who to hire today, and collaborating with a like-minded person is always preferred: your skills as well your passions should resonate with the viewer.

If your mailing list is finely tuned (that's to say, it includes 100 hand-picked individuals, rather than 1000 names), consider creating mailers that have a personal touch, simple pieces that feature a graphic identity consistent with your website and, if relevant to your target market, reveals your storytelling capabilities. Your attention to craft and presentation details will reflect the respect you have for your work and generate a stronger first impression.