

PHOTOGRAPHY MARKETING 101

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Dear friend,

I think I am the best photography marketer alive. I wanna share my secrets with you.

Why?

Why am I sharing these marketing secrets with you?

Because I genuinely believe that these principles will help you make a lot of money through photography, and you can use that money to pull yourself out of poverty. You can use that money to empower your family. To buy your freedom, to have freedom to do what you want to do, when you want to do it, and eventually to use your free time to empower others.

So let's get our hands dirty.

I. Marketing is not evil

First principle: marketing is not evil.

Marketing is just getting a certain message across.

For example, a church can market the message of good works and faith.

A rapper can market the importance of helping the local community (Kendrick Lamar).

A photographer can market messages of positivity, appreciation of everyday life, and beauty in the mundane through their photos.

You need to master marketing, or else your art, message, ideas, and concepts will not reach anybody.

Even the greatest companies need to invest heavily in marketing.

Apple makes the best computer products, and they still pour millions into marketing.

NIKE makes the best shoes and athletic apparel, yet they still pour millions into marketing.

Even non-profits devote a huge portion of their budget to marketing and outreach, to get more donations, to do more social good.

II. You need to market yourself.

If you are hesitant to market yourself, it means you don't have faith in yourself.

It means that you don't think your photography is good enough for people to pay for it.

But honestly, all of us, myself included— we always sell ourselves short.

This is because we are brainwashed into thinking that self-promotion is a sin. That self-promotion is only for losers.

We have this false dream of being 'discovered' by someone. But the truth is, all successful people have had to hustle, and promote themselves before they 'made it.'

If you're the type of person who is more introverted, doesn't like to talk about themselves, and feels shame in self-promotion; entrepreneurship and starting your own photography company might not be for you.

But still, I feel you can learn all these marketing skills.

So first homework assignment: stop being so humble about your skills. Rather, for a year, allow yourself to be shamelessly self-promotional. When people criticize you for promoting yourself, just tell them:

I apologize for being a self-centered, self-promotional, asshole.

And then continue to pimp yourself out.

III. Why do you want to market yourself?

If you want to market yourself as a photographer, consider *why* you wanna do that.

Do you want more people to see your photos and feel inspired by your artistry? If so, *why*?

Do you want to learn how to market yourself, to make a living from your passion in photography? If so, *why*?

For me, I market myself because I believe in my ideas, my truth, and the information I've discovered for myself. I feel it is my ethical duty to share as much information about photography with as many people as I can. Otherwise, I'm being a selfish asshole— hoarding all this information about photography to myself.

For you, if you feel you have photos that have the potential to uplift, motivate, and inspire others— you are doing society a *dis-favor* by *not* sharing your photos, and promoting yourself.

And yes, if you want to market yourself as a photographer to make money and a living — you must market yourself. And you need to be damn good.

IV. Charge 25% more than you think you should

The first principle: if you're selling a product or selling yourself as a photographer, you need to charge more money. Specifically, charge 25% more than you think you should.

The human psyche has a mental shortcut: **we associate price with quality.**

For example, we assume a Rolls-Royce is more quality than a Kia, because the Rolls is more expensive.

We assume the iPhone is better than cheaper Android counter-parts, because the iPhone is more expensive.

We think the \$5 Tylenol will work better than the \$1 Generic, even though the active ingredients are the same — because the Tylenol is more expensive.

I am a sucker to this. I buy more expensive NIKE shoes, because I assume that my \$200 Flyknit shoes are better than other cheaper brands, because they are more expensive. When I order the more expensive \$30 lamb, I assume it will taste better than the \$12 hamburger (although in reality, the burger often tastes better).

We assume \$100 Oysters tastes better than the \$1 big slice of Pizza in NYC— because the oysters are more expensive.

The truth: **price doesn't (always) denote quality.**

For example, a Hyundai Genesis is probably better quality than a BMW 5-Series, although the Hyundai is cheaper.

The \$600 digital Ricoh GR is probably a better camera than the \$7000 digital Leica, even though the Leica is more expensive.

But alas, human brains are lazy (read Daniel's 'Thinking Fast and Slow' book). We have mental shortcuts— aka 'heuristics', to make our day to day living easier.

And the secret is that we think that more expensive things are better.

So if you want your customers, clients, or followers to think you're higher quality, or better— **charge more money** for your services.

For example, when I teach a \$10,000 workshop for a week, you will make the (wrong) assumption that the workshop experience will be better than my competitors' \$100 week-long workshop. Because you assume that if a workshop

costs more money, you will have better amenities, food, coffee, lodging, and goodies.

So the lesson is this: **Be an expensive photographer**. Don't be a Wal-Mart photographer.

V. Branding 101

'Branding' is the buzz-word. Branding just means 'trust.' Trust in a company.

I buy Apple products because I trust the quality of Apple products. I have been very happy with my iPad, MacBook computers, much more so than Windows computers of the past. And that took me a long time to trust Apple (I used to be anti-apple; as a Windows fanboy).

I buy a Rolex watch, because I trust the concept that if I buy a Rolex, I will become more successful, handsome, rich, and powerful.

I buy a Lamborghini, because I trust that driving a Lamborghini will allow me to become more masculine, fast, and less tied down by social convention.

A company builds a 'brand-image' by building trust over time. To build trust means to deliver *above* the expectations of the customer. I trust Amazon, because when I want to return something, they give me benefit of the doubt, and allow me to return it.

I trust North Face, because their products don't fall apart on me after years of use.

As an individual, you want to brand yourself as a reliable, trustworthy, and quality-photographer.

I don't know how other photographers brand themselves, but I build trust and my ERIC KIM brand by delivering high-quality, well-researched, soulful, non-censored, no-bullshit, information for free. I try my best to practice what I preach, even though I am only human and fail most of the time.

People who will spend \$10,000 to do a week-long workshop with me will need trust in me. That means, they will probably read my blog for a long time, watch my videos, read my books, and learn to *trust* me. Trust in my experience, expertise, and honesty.

The best companies or ‘brands’ are people — real names.

For example, study fashion. Calvin Klein, Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton — these are real names. We remember real names more than concepts. So if you’re going to brand yourself as a photographer, use your real name — first and last name. And also in the long run, people will Google you, to discover your website and portfolio. So don’t make your website something cheesy like ‘dreamyimages.com’ or ‘spiritedphotography.com’. It will not last. Build a brand that will out-live you — the best brand is your name.

VI. Starting from 0.

I started with 0 followers. 0 page views. 0 blog posts. 0 videos. 0 confidence.

The secret to success is NIKE:

Just do it.

So, in photography:

Just shoot it.

With blog posts:

Just publish it.

Don’t aim for perfection. It don’t exist.

If you wanna lose body fat, start by cutting out sugar and dessert.

If you wanna build muscle, just get on the ground and crank out as many push-ups as you can. And body-weight squats.

If you wanna become a photography entrepreneur — realize that it will take you a long time to build up your name, brand, and company.

For me, it took me 6 years (2011-2017) before I could charge \$3500 for a week-long workshop (and actually have people to sign-up). It took me 6 years of publishing 1-2 blog posts a day, 7 days week, before I became #2 on Google for 'Street Photography'. Even today, I work 14 hours a day, drink 5-6 espressos, sleep 7 hours, 7 days a week, hustling, grinding, to help as many people as possible. I currently earn \$200,000 USD+ a year (combined with Cindy) as a photographer, and have over \$150,000 USD+ saved in the bank. That took 6 years of sharing the same cup of coffee at the cafe with Cindy, sharing the same single entree, and getting permission from Cindy whenever I wanted to spend more than \$300.

But if you're smart enough, and hustle hard enough, and are lucky — you can build success a lot quicker.

Cindy built HAPTIC in less than two years— and as of 2017, earns between \$20-\$1500 USD a day in 'passive income.' She was able to reach that income and profit margin by making photography notebooks (\$20-30) and getting them printed in California, by collaborating with our friend Lan in Saigon to make camera straps (\$50-100 for wrist strap, \$100-150 for neck strap), and by hand-making limited-edition art portfolios and selling them for \$1,000 USD+.

The secret to making money in terms of products is to create a desirable product, that doesn't exist in the market yet, or is 10x better than the competition.

The secret to monetizing your photography services is to **dominate a small niche that is currently empty**. I dominated the niche of street photography by hard work, perseverance, luck, timing, and now can charge a lot of money for street photography workshops and products.

To build a following, start your own website and blog. Use bluehost.com, and use wordpress.org to build up your platform. I recommend the 'Genesis' theme.

Easy way to build an audience: publish 1 blog post everyday, 7 days a week, for 5 years. How can you not build up an audience by doing that?

Do guest blog posts for popular photography websites, by interviewing prominent or up-and-coming photographers, or by writing informative 'how to' photography articles (10 tip articles work well).

Think of building a following like a redwood tree. You start off as a tiny seed, but over 1,000 years— you can reach the heavens.

VII. Social media is overrated.

I honestly think that social media is overrated.

Instagram is kind of a waste of time. I deleted mine, even when I had 65,000+ followers. It was a major distraction.

Facebook is good to share blog posts and articles. But then again, Leo from zenhabits.com doesn't have a Facebook and is still successful.

Twitter is pretty much dead. Don't use it.

The best 'social media' to use is your blog. Produce new information that will genuinely help people.

What should you blog about? Blog about stuff that you would want to read.

For example, when I started this blog, I was scared shitless of street photography. I couldn't find no information on Google on *how* to shoot street photography, and conquer my fears. So I experimented, learned for myself, and shared my findings on this blog.

A good way to create products, blog posts, or things:

Figure out what pisses you off, frustrates you, or what you are personally lacking— and be the change which you wish to see in the world (Gandhi).

Even the reason I'm writing this on photography entrepreneurship: ain't nobody shared the secrets online on how to make real money from photography, how to market and brand themselves, and to build a following.

When you first start your blog, share your articles with your friends on Facebook, or just email them the articles, or tell them to check it out in real life.

Also start to blog about stuff that doesn't exist yet. Either create new information (that doesn't exist yet), or make your articles and blog posts 10x better than the competition (Peter Thiel's principle, in his 'Zero to One' book).

I was lucky that nobody wrote much on *how* to shoot street photography, so that niche was wide open. Now there are a lot of blogs, websites, with good information on street photography. My job here is done.

Yet, there is no real useful information on photography entrepreneurship. We got lots of sites, resources on general entrepreneurship, but not specifically for photography. So I hope to build the platform — and create the information *I* wish I had when I started off. And also, I am one of the few photography bloggers I know who is making over \$100,000 USD+ a year from photography workshops, selling products, etc — so I feel it is my ethical duty to share this information with you and the photo community.

VIII. How to hustle

So okay, you wanna hustle as a photographer. But how?

Step 1: Reduce your living expenses as little as possible.

For example, I don't own a car, a smartphone, and I live in a small studio apartment or 1-bedroom apartment with Cindy.

If I wanna spend more than \$4 on anything, I need to consult Cindy. I am horrible with money, and trust Cindy with all financial decisions.

I can feed myself on eggs and drink only water and coffee. Elon Musk fed himself on less than \$2 a day in spaghetti and hot dogs, lived in his office with his brother, shared 1 laptop, took showers at the local YMCA. If Elon can do it; why can't you?

Step 2: Work

You gotta work. You gotta hustle 12-14 hours a day, 7 days a week, for at least 5 years, before you can call yourself 'successful.'

I wrote over 2,700+ blog posts for 6 years (on average 1-2 blog posts a day), 7 days a week, before I was able to become 'successful' and earn over \$200,000 USD a year.

So friend, if you wanna be a better marketer, you gotta make sure your work shows your quality. So hustle hard.

Spend less time on distractions like email, social media, and business plans. Just make stuff and hustle.

Homework assignment: stop using email. Rather, post your phone number, and say you are contactable by text messages. Trust me, this will help you be more productive.

Homework assignment #2: uninstall email, Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat from your phone. Rather, just listen to music on your phone.

Step 3. Don't eat breakfast or lunch

Breakfast and lunch is a waste of time. Rather, just power up on espresso (no cream or sugar), or black coffee. Get immediately to work, and when you're tired, just take a nap on the couch or your bed.

By not wasting time on breakfast or lunch, you will free up at least 1-2 hours a day, where you can build up your business or company.

And when you're hungry, drink more water or black coffee, do chin-ups on a tree, or do pushups on the ground, or lunges, or do Yoga.

IX. Be the best you can be.

Don't compete with others. Only compete with yourself.

Economics ain't a fixed pie. Rather, as an entrepreneur, you can add more slices of the pie, and expand the pie for the whole market.

So know your potential is infinite. Nothing is holding you back.

At the gym, when I deadlift, I am only competing with myself from a week ago.

With business, hustle, and seek to improve yourself. Ignore everyone else.

For example, improve the artistry of your photos everyday. Just try to be a better photographer today when compared to yesterday.

With my blogging, I just try to make my blog posts a little better than yesterday.

The Japanese call this progress 'kaizen' — constant steady improvement. Like how a redwood tree steadily grows over thousands of years. And a redwood tree started from a tiny seed.

You are that tiny seed. You have infinite potential. You are the redwood tree.

You are an avocado tree. You grow, and make delicious avocados for others to consume. Or you're an almond tree, producing delicious almonds for us to have almond milk cappuccinos.

To become rich, and market yourself — produce more delicious, nutritious fruit.

Your fruit can be your information, your words of advice, or your photos.

Seek to feed others; those starving physically, spiritually, and mentally.

X. How to become rich

I am rich because I have realized I don't need much to sustain my basic living — I eat eggs, drink coffee, and don't own much. What I do own is expensive, but I feel I am focused on helping others to become the best versions of themselves.

I am not a photographer or blogger. I am a philosopher and poet. I love to seek wisdom, and create mostly visual poems (photography).

I am the best master marketer because I feel my message is genuine. I don't bullshit. I spit my personal truth. I don't fake or front. People can love me or hate me; but they know that I'm real.

My gold aint hollow. My gold is in my heart. Your heart is pure gold too.

So friend, master marketing by mastering yourself. Master yourself by finding your personal truth in life; then dedicate your life sharing that truth with others.

Be strong, Eric