

Photo Classes – The Next Great Sales Tool

At Chris' Camera Center we've been teaching classes for a long time, and it truly builds customer loyalty. We've probably done more than 100 starter classes – what we call Digital 101.

But **it's the attendees of advanced classes that spend the most money**. That's because those classes deal with the capabilities of DSLR cameras, and it's pretty obvious that when you have a camera that can work with accessories, you're more likely to buy accessories. There's more demand than ever for what we call Digital 201 – Basics of the Digital Single Lens Reflex. I've been spending much of my time lately perfecting the lesson plans and creating variations to play to the owners of the major camera brands. And I've found that new camera owners have never even cracked their books!

Many of our students haven't even figured out how to adjust the diopter of their camera's eyepiece, so they're not even looking at a sharp image in the viewfinder. And a surprisingly large percentage of new camera owners have the exposure compensation control set somewhere other than .0 +/-

For quite some time we were content to focus on those big classes – introductory classes that would have large attendance, that would answer basic needs. But there's room for more.

Smaller, more focuses classes on short subjects help build sales. We took inspiration from the seminars at Home Depot and Lowes, 2 major home improvement stores in USA. They have seminars most every Saturday.

The people who attend these specialty seminars have demonstrated their interest in a specific area. They are likely to make purchases of goods and services in that area. At home improvement stores, people who attend sessions on do-it-yourself tile are good prospects for purchases of tile, grout, mortar, and rental of tile saws.

In the photo industry, when you do a workshop "introduction to studio lighting" you know that the attendees are really interested in that, and are good prospects for related products. Not just the big stuff. This gives you a chance to explain all those little items that are really profitable. And the students are much more open to being told about the virtues of those products than when you've got a store counter between you and them.



"People love to be educated; they're not so thrilled about being sold. When you educate, people think of you as The Expert; and we all want to do business with experts." ...*Adrienne Zoble*

So you not only get some tuition but you've got a really hot prospect list. If you send email or snail mail promos, they're your targeted market. Be sure to give out handouts with good extra-value certificates – with a short expiration date!

Where will you find instructors?

Roger Christian said

"We have a local photographer who had his studio wiped out in the recent Iowa City flood. Fortunately, a photographer near his home has a studio operation he wanted to sell and retire. Howard's misfortune happened to coincide with the sale/retirement, so Howard and a woman he had worked with before, cooperated to take over the existing operation. Howard had been working out of his house for a number of months, and this move gave him a great opportunity.

"He now has a very nice space as a studio, and we will be partnering with him in the near future to do lighting and studio photography classes.

"It's an excellent fit for all. I simply pay him the 'door take' ~ \$250, and he does a 2-3 hour class. We figure to hold the class size to about 6 or so to begin, thought this may be the ending ideal size with so much one-on-one having to take place."

About hiring outsiders

In hiring outsiders - and even some from within your organization - you need to do pre-hire interviews and you need to audit the classes, at least in the beginning.

You don't want an instructor who will tell students to buy all their products from B&H Photo. Unless, of course, you *are* B&H. (this is not a criticism of B&H). You want instructors who will - tactfully - remind the students that all these fine products are available from your store.

If you do it yourself - and I do - you darn sure better know enough to do the job, and you need to plan your content and you need to be able to answer lots of questions.

Check out your staff members, you might be surprised at what they can do. One of my part timers is about to lead a walking photo tour of Aiken, and he knows both the area and the people to make a success of it. It never occurred to me to hold such a class.

Where can you get content?

- Nikon DVDs are great
- Web Photo School www.webphotoschool.com
- Online schools from Nikon, Canon and Pentax, Olympus
- PMA offers some course plans
- Your fellow dealers - at least 2 have developed Power Point lesson plans that they sell. (Chris' Camera Center, Dan's Camera City)

If you see something you like at an online school, don't just steal it. Particularly don't steal the graphics. It's easy but it's illegal. On the other hand, you can easily set up a similar shot that is your own.

Stealing from one source is plagiarism - stealing from many is research.

I was getting set to do a creative lighting workshop and had it pretty well doped out, but the night before I watched the Nikon DVD "Nikon School - Hands On Guide to Creative Lighting". It was gratifying to see how much my own plans looked like theirs but it really helped me refine and polish my presentation. I changed one basic layout because theirs looked better than mine.

Making the presentation topical

I had a flash workshop scheduled for right after the inauguration of the American President. The official presidential portrait of Barack Obama is the first one to be done with a digital camera.

For one flash project I had the students try to replicate the shot. We set up a similar background and then examined clues in the Obama portrait - shadows, catch lights in the



eyes - to see how the photographer had lit the shot.

While one of the students had visited the restroom, the class "elected" him president so when he came back he got to pose for the shot.

Technology: we've found that using the video output from a camera directly into either a monitor or projector is a great tool with our smaller seminars. I can demonstrate the camera settings and the lighting set ups and the results large enough for everyone to see them. For large classes we use a ceiling-mounted projector, but the hanging screen we would use for the projector can get in the way of our lighting set ups.

Space - it would be nice to have more of it. Since we don't, many of our displays are on wheels so we can make enough room for our classes. Unfortunately that means we can't run classes during normal store hours.

Twice a year we run our **Digital Drop-In Day School**. Starting at 10 am on a Saturday we have about a dozen short, highly-focused sessions that last only 10 or 15 minutes.



Our first Digital Camera Drop-In Day School was inspired by my grand daughter's Drop In Day Care. At least, the name was inspired by that.

We have **never** had so many people in the store at one time. People are crying out for guidance.

We planned and rehearsed for weeks before hand, but as the day approached had no idea if it would fly or not. There were warnings that it might succeed - phone calls and emails asking for more info - but Saturday arrived so bright and clear that it seemed unlikely anyone would want to be inside.

The first clue that it was a big success was when several people showed up 40 minutes before the first scheduled session with copies of the ad in their hands. They wanted to get good seats.

We'd scheduled a pretty full range of mini-sessions:

- Choosing a Digital Camera
- 9 myths of Digital Photography
- What's a DSLR and why would I want one?
- What can I do with all my digital photos?
- Old Family Photos -- How can I save them in the digital age?
- From camera to hard drive, from hard drive to CD
- The Latest and Greatest Cool Toys for Digital Photographers
- Ordering great prints from your digital camera at Chris' Camera Center
- Binoculars and Telescopes - what do all the numbers mean?

- Ordering great prints from your digital camera from your home, while still in your bathrobe and fluffy bunny slippers
- Better Sports Pictures with digital or film cameras
- The care and feeding of memory cards
- Turning your prints and slides into digital files.
- From Snapshot to Portrait in 5 Easy Steps

Associate Melanie Hamer was a huge hit when she appeared for the session on ordering prints from home clad in pajamas, robe and slippers!

Our principal staff members each got to do some of the presentations.

We had prepared short Power Points for most of the topics but felt that some topics were better just using a live computer or kiosk to demonstrate.

I had bought a "Y" splitter cable so we could drive an Epson projector from the kiosk, and we placed a pull-down screen directly over our **DISCO** center (**D**igital **I**mage **S**election **C**ropping and **O**ptimization). Unfortunately this doesn't work with our newer HP Photosmart kiosks. For that it's best to have a camera in video mode looking over the shoulder of the demonstrator.

All our folding chairs were pulled out of the back, every kiosk chair and lab and office chair was pressed into service, and we still had about 10 customers standing at times.

The event was scheduled to start at 10 and the first patrons came in at about 9:20 am, many clutching the newspaper ad in their hands. Some of that first group stayed until 2 pm, but many others wandered in and out during the day.

We had posted a schedule and intended to repeat some sessions more than others, but as the day progressed we fell behind. Just had too much content planned for the available time.

We used feedback sheets and got a lot of names and email addresses.

Most attendees were very complimentary, sought me out to shake hands and thank us.

Many wanted handouts and our Christmas wish lists, specific "At a Glance" sheets on products they liked.

Peak "student" count was about 40. Until about 3 pm, we never had fewer than 20 people in attendance.

Although the objective of a day like this is to win hearts, not make sales - we made a LOT of sales that day. That's gratifying because with all that was going on, it took a concerted effort for customers to buy - all the sales were conducted in whispers!

We've now run this event 3 times with good response - and different attendees - each time.

More information: <http://www.photoimagenews.com/dropin.htm>



How can you promote these small sessions?

That's the tough question. Print advertising and radio or TV can easily cost far more than you could get in tuition. We've tried tucking a line or two in camera ads in the papers, printing 22" x 28" signs for our stanchion sign holders, putting signs in the window.

On line promotion and direct email tends to be the most productive method of getting the word out.

And it's not that much work to program a new message on the bottom of your cash register receipts!

Resources:

Lesson Plans

<http://photoimagenews.com/teachthem.htm>

<http://danscamera.com/Learning/DPU/index.php>

<http://pmai.org>

Online school (for inspiration)

<http://webphotoschool.com>

Canon:

http://www.usa.canon.com/consumer/controller?act=MultiMiscPageAct&key=Learning_Station&fcategorid=2533

Bonus:

I feel very strongly that we in the photo/imaging industry have the sacred obligation to keep our customers - and the rest of the known galaxy - from losing all their family photos.

Why does the job fall to us? Because nobody else is going to do it.

So I've created the slide show I call "Pictures Matter" and uploaded it where you can find it. Here's where you'll find it (and I suggest you right click on the URL and save it)

<http://www.photoimagenews.com/picturesmatter.ppt>

"What's in it for me?" you say. How can you benefit, how can you use it?

It could be good for a free lunch once a week until you've shown it to every service club in your community. It could be a segment in your existing classes or in a Saturday morning session. You could turn it into a video and keep it cycling in your store.

At any rate, please make use of it. If you've got an HP studio system or can otherwise make a similar product, the last several slides are intended to push the CD and DVD with a preview book. Any time you make a live presentation of the slide show, I'd suggest you have a couple of sample CDs to pass around.

Your presenter:

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