

## **MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR DIGITAL SELF-PROMOTION MATERIALS**

### **A Presentation by Mary Virginia Swanson at SPE 2006**

An artist's self-promotion tools are the most important extension of their print portfolio; it is essential that your marketing products be well thought through before investing your time and money in design and production. Your graphic identity and business intentions should be clearly articulated and comprehensible to the end viewer, whether the promotional pieces will be in presented in print, CD-ROM or website format. You should be prepared to deliver your marketing materials in all of these formats to accommodate the different practices and preferences of your target audience(s).

The three most important questions to ask yourself when preparing self-promotion pieces are:

1) **WHAT MARKET ARE YOU TRYING TO REACH?** Having a clear understanding of your target market will determine the depth of information and number of images you should provide to the viewer, as well as the language you utilize within your pieces. The markets for your work may include: fine art, corporate, graphic design, advertising and/or commercial licensing (stock). With the popularity of photography increasing in all of these markets, your goals may be to reach multiple markets, i.e. fine art work to graphic designers for use as book jacket illustrations, commissioned work to galleries for fine print editions, or imagery for placement as corporate décor, among other opportunities. No matter what market(s) you are interested in reaching, be certain that you know as much as possible about what the professionals in the market are interested in acquiring, and for what purpose.

2) **WHO ARE YOU TRYING TO REACH IN THAT MARKET, AND WHAT IS THEIR PREFERRED FORMAT FOR VIEWING YOUR WORK?** This is unquestionably a time of technological transition. If you are introducing your work to museum professionals, it may well be that the Senior Curator prefers prints and/or slides, while the younger Assistant or Associate Curator wishes to view your work on a CD-Rom or a website. It is crucial to offer your materials to industry professionals in the format(s) they prefer, and keep on file for your future reference.

3) **HOW WILL THESE PROFESSIONALS UTILIZE YOUR MATERIALS IN THEIR WORKPLACE?** It is important to understand how the end-viewer will make use of your materials to aid the advancement of your career. If the person you are approaching is not the final decision maker, understand that you need to provide materials that will aid them in acting as your advocate. Don't assume that presenting from your website or CD-ROM will be feasible in every business environment. For example, a museum curator may need to present your work to a curatorial committee, and prefer to have printed materials to share with colleagues. While digital formats may be excellent introductions to your work, for final meetings they may need identical materials that can be literally passed around a table, as an LCP projector with a live link to the internet to view your website may not be possible. A junior photo editor or photo researcher may, on the other hand, work 100% digitally, preferring to create a library of CD-ROM's and establish bookmarks for photographer's websites as their reference library. You should be prepared to provide any of these formats at any time to suit the needs of those with whom you wish to work.

When “less is less” (as opposed to “less is more”): when you have a beautiful, simple portfolio of work as the main element of your marketing piece, accompanied by a phone number and email. What is missing? The ACTION ITEM! In other words, what do you want the curator, gallery owner, art director or the photo researcher to do now that they are viewing your work? Are fine prints for sale? Can they commission you to create new work? Will you consider commercial licensing of some of all of this images in this body of work?

Some of the important points to determine in advance of creating your website:

- a. Your graphic identity or BRANDING must be clear and simple.
- b. Your business model – what are you selling? Your prints and/or your skills? And/or are you introducing new work about which you will continue to inform the audience? If you teach, do you want to list upcoming workshops? Do you have a book for sale? Do you want to share the comments of others about your work as testimonials?
- c. If selling prints, do you want to reveal your technique in making and/or printing the work, and the pricing/editioning structure, or ask that interested parties contact you for this information?
- d. If you have gallery representation, will you, or are you, contractually obliged to refer all inquiries to that business?
- e. If you have a representative for assignment work, will you, or are you, contractually obliged to refer all inquiries to that firm?
- f. Your contact information: do you need to publish your studio and/or mailing address and phone number, or choose not reveal such personal information?

If you elect to retain the services of a graphic designer, web designer and/or web programmer to establish your business identity and perhaps to create a CD-ROM and/or website featuring your work, it is essential to clearly understand their role(s) in the design and production process, as well as your role as their client. Budget, deadline and ownership issues must be clarified, as well as subsequent costs for updates to your materials, in advance of signing a contract and commencing production. Your most important responsibility in this process will be to communicate clearly your business model to these professionals - as it exists today as well as outlining your professional goals. Help these professionals create tools for you that can literally expand to accommodate your growth as an artist, without requiring re-design expenses. You will save time and money by thinking now about the full arc of your career, presenting memorable promotional pieces that present you in a consistent manner over time.

A few words about electronically-delivered promotional pieces. If you create e-updates to keep your professional audience apprised of upcoming exhibitions, publications, awards or other items of importance, be sure to clarify whether they will actually be able to open your emails. Many places of business have firewalls in place that prevent opening of emails from a) unfamiliar sources or b) emails with attachments. If persons on your target list are interested in receiving e-updates, keep the dialogue professional, focused on your news, caption any images and keep image files small.

Lastly, remember to register your images that you publish in ANY format (print mailer, CD-ROM, website or e-updates) with the U. S. Copyright office. An excellent resource is [www.editorialphoto.com](http://www.editorialphoto.com), a website created by photographers to help other photographers; the COPYRIGHT SECTION is rich with information gathered from industry trade and advocacy groups, as well as links to download the required registration forms. Learn from the information on this site, and join and support this important organization.

### **A FEW WORDS ABOUT WEBSITES:**

I believe all photographers ready to market their work should invest in a one-page website, at the very least, so that potential clients can find you. This is our new yellow pages. I cannot tell you how often, when I cannot find a contact number for a photographer, I just try typing in their name.com. Voila! You don't want people to have to take valuable time to find you!

The most common problem I've observed is the website (like the print promotion pieces mentioned above) doesn't tell the viewer what to do now that they are on the site. Don't launch a complex website until your business goals are clear.

If you're not yet certain of that, or if you can only afford one page now, plan your design for expansion later.

It is rare to find a great graphic designer who is also a great web programmer. And vice versa. Unless you have found a programmer who is also a GREAT designer, I encourage you to consider a designer to design the site, and a programmer to implement and maintain the site. The graphic designer will more successfully bring the goals of your business to life via your business identity and ensure that the graphic look of your business card, letterhead, promotional pieces and website all are uniform and won't confuse clients. Many times I will consult with a photographer on their career goals, and at the close of a session, we'll look at their website – only to find that it seems to be promoting a completely different photographer. Again know your goals, and that design is NOT the place to cut financial corners.

I'm often asked whether one should use their name as their website domain name vs. a studio name. I believe it's always easier to remember a photographer's name than a studio name (like "midnight sun", "morning light studios" etc.). My best advice is BRAND YOURSELF. It's YOU that you want people to remember and find. Purchase [www.\(yourname\).com](http://www.(yourname).com) ASAP!

*This handout is an excerpt from MVS' "Marketing Guidebook for Photographers" available for sale on her website and is not intended for reproduction in any format without prior permission.*

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## **MARY VIRGINIA SWANSON'S PRESENTATION AT SPE 2006**

### **MORE THAN A PORTFOLIO PIECE: MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR DIGITAL SELF-PROMOTION**

**LIST OF WEBSITES and ARTISTS WORK VIEWED IN MVS'  
PRESENTATION, in order of appearance:**

**Rebeccaswanson.com**

**Dorianromer.com**

**Chipforelli.com**

**Heatherwalsh.com**

**Eirikjohnson.com**

**Vickitopaz.com**

**Radekphoto.com**

**Cathryngriffith.com (family book)**

**Melissateller.com**

**Jeanlaughton.com**

**Paulraphaelson.com**

**davidmaisel.com**

**revealingchicago.org**

**laurenshaw.com**

**savingbodyandsoul.com**

**irelandever.com**

**purpleheartsbook.com**

**ashesandsnow.com**

**heavenearthtequila.com**

**americanruinsexhibit.com**

**photoeye.com**

**(viewed by keywords on Photographer's Showcase)**

**nostringsfoundation.org**

**editorialphoto.org (copyright\_**