

Nick's Top Ten List of Winter Activities

By Nick Coury

Published: February 12, 2007

If you are stuck in a cold, snowy environment like I am (Ohio to be specific), you may be looking for some constructive ideas for the next few months. Here are a few that you may want to consider.

1. Sell your excess equipment.

Use classifieds or Ebay, but turn that trash into cash. If you have old film cameras that you are not using, they are depreciating every day. Take the "Auto Junk Yard" approach. "Part out" your medium format equipment and don't sell them as systems. For example, sell your Hasselblad as a body, a back, a finder and a lens. Don't list yours when there are five other 500 CM's listed, wait till yours may be one of a few. You have nothing but time and you need to maximize your sale price. Have any dark room equipment or old 35mm cameras collecting dust? Get rid of them, it may surprise you to see how much money they can generate for you.

2. Research your new equipment purchases.

Everything from cameras to computers will require work and research. This should not be an impulse purchase, it is vital to what you deliver and reducing your work load. Don't buy it now unless you have the cash sitting there and dedicated for new equipment. Ask your friends what they shoot. Find out what they like and dislike about their cameras and systems. Just because you own a few nice pieces of "glass" don't make your next system based on that.

3. Work on your website.

How long has it been since you updated your images or your site look? Is it easy to navigate? Can they find out how to get in touch with you quickly and easily? Are your price lists available as downloadable PDF's from your site? Many if not most of your customers are shopping for their photographer based on their web site. It may be better to put your resources here than #2 equipment. You just might get a larger, more immediate return on investment.

4. Work on promotional materials or go out and "Network" with professional services in your area.

How old are your price lists? What do they look like? Florists, bakers, limousine services, etc. are vital referrals for your wedding business. If you don't do weddings, then find related services and find a way to work into them. Hair salons, clothing stores, specialized resale stores are all potential referral sources.

5. Paint up/clean up/fix up your studio.

Get a fresh pair of eyes to come into your building and tell you what their first opinion is of your studio. Do you know an interior designer that may want to trade out some of your work for services? This can be huge to securing new clients.

6. Visit other studios in your area or when you travel to a convention. Not only will you get some ideas of other ways to pose and light, you may pick up work flow tips to speed up production. See if they have any backgrounds, sets or props that they are tired of and swap them out. A set or drop they have used for two years might be just right for you.

7. New display prints and albums.

Are you still showing several year old samples that are outdated? Do you have the latest "coffee table style album" printed and displayed? If not, how do you intend to sell them? Many labs offer "Studio Sample Prints" in the winter months. Now is the time to update your walls and your sample albums. I know it costs money, but it will cost you 30-50% less right now. Use these seasonal discounts to work with item 4, networking.

8. Master a new program or software application.

If you set aside a specific time each day to study and learn a new program it will be time well spent. There is nothing like trying to master a new technique or program when you are on a deadline. It is so counterproductive and frustrating. There are multiple training DVD's available from great sources like those on www.shootsmarter.com these are affordable and the really great thing is if you don't grasp it the first time, you can back 'em up and watch it again. Just try doing that in a live seminar. My personal favorite RAW processing program is Digital Photo Professional from Canon. You can watch step-by-step instructions for **FREE!** (my favorite four letter word) at www.photoworkshop.com. Consider projecting your images this year? Research the available programs and download trial versions to see how intuitive they are.

9. Calibrate your monitors.

This is something you should be doing on a weekly or biweekly schedule. If you have never done it, this is a good time to teach yourself how to do it. Once calibrated, work with your lab on the off season to see how closely you can get your monitor to match what you receive back from them.

10. Check your lenses for accuracy at different focal length settings.

Even though you use "prime zoom lenses" they can vary at different settings. Especially at the wide angle range of zooms. Fixed focal length lenses are never a problem or a variable.