



THE CENTER FOR CREATIVE RESOURCES

IMAGE - IDENTITY - VISIBILITY - PERCEPTION

By Noel Hayashi

Anyone who has ever heard me speak about marketing the arts knows that these four words pop up a lot. Before you start creating your marketing materials or putting a promotional plan together, I urge you to read and think about these four terms:

IMAGE

I define image as the outward impression that you give when you first walk on stage, or when your book first hits the bookstores, or when your artwork is unveiled. It immediately evokes a reaction in the observer as to what kind of an artist and/or person you are. If you see someone wearing bright, provocative clothing, with lots of accessories, and a big confident smile on his or her face, you tend to assume that the person is cheery, open, and outgoing. On the other hand if you see someone dressed in more neutral, non-descript clothing, who seems to be trying to fade into the woodwork and avoids eye contact, that tells you that they are more quiet and reserved, perhaps even shy.

The same principles hold true for your marketing efforts. Your materials (postcards, posters, website, ads) must reflect who you are and the caliber of your artistry. Be it bold and flashy, or subtle and understated, there is no right or wrong approach. The most important thing is that it defines who you are and prepares the viewer for what they are about to experience when they come to your performance or exhibition. Your marketing materials are a reflection of you and of your art.

IDENTITY

Your personal identity is what sets you apart from the next guy. If your form of artistic expression happens to be truly unique, you can skip over this section. But in most cases, you will discover that though your parents may have told you that you were “special” and uniquely gifted, in reality there are probably hundreds or even thousands of other people doing the same thing that you do who also believe that they are uniquely gifted. (One only has to view the “American Idol” competition on television to realize how many

misguided singers there are out there who truly believe they are the next American Idol!). So I urge you to think very hard about what it is that sets you apart. I am not talking about gimmicks - wearing a crazy costume or coming out on stage in roller skates. I am talking about seriously analyzing the content and intent of your artistry and determining what it is about your art that is truly unique from any other person. Then capitalize on that feature. It may be the timbre of your voice, or your distinctive choice of repertoire, or your brush technique. Whatever it is, find the thing that truly identifies you, and use it to your best advantage.

VISIBILITY

How visible are you? Has anyone outside your family and friends ever heard of you? Okay, let's say they've heard of you, but do they know what you do? Do they understand what sets you apart? These may seem like silly questions, but when you are planning a marketing campaign of any kind, you need to proceed on the assumption that the person on the receiving end of your postcard/website/flyer knows absolutely nothing about you. With that in mind, ask yourself "how then, in the span of a few lines of type, do I sell myself? In a very tiny amount of space, you have to present yourself to a total stranger, explain what it is you do, and what sets you apart the others, and why they should be interested enough to buy a ticket to come see you. It's a tall order; but with some careful advanced thinking and planning, the use of eye-catching graphics or images, and clear concise text, it is doable.

PERCEPTION

This is my favorite of the four words. Perception, of course, is how something or someone is perceived. I think every artist wants to be perceived as unique, talented, professional, one-of-a-kind, etc. The good news is that it is totally within your power to have people perceive you in a certain way. You can create and shape perception by the way you present yourself – both in your marketing materials and in person. If your materials are cleverly inventive, visually engaging, and appear to be thoughtfully developed and presented in a professional and timely manner, chances are you – and thus your artistry – will be "perceived" as professional. If, however, you spend all of your time, energy, and funds perfecting your art and then, as an after thought, run out to the local print shop to Xerox off some goldenrod flyers made with your little brother's magic markers to post up around town, you end up looking like an amateur. I am not saying you have to spend a lot of money on 4-color, glossy, professionally- designed materials, I am simply pointing out that you will be 'perceived' by the way you represent yourself. If your marketing materials are not at the same level as your artistry, you are selling yourself short.