



Resolutions

We're rapidly heading into the holiday season, and before you know it, the new year will be upon us. With that comes the usual look back and chance to project forward.

It's important to look back on the past year, but when you do that, I want you to keep in mind that you are not only looking for what you didn't do, but also what you did. This isn't the time to beat yourself up (actually, it's never the time to do that). Instead, look *objectively* at what good and bad things you did, and what good and bad things you didn't do.

For example, maybe this year was not as lucrative as last year. Maybe your sales dropped by 15%. However, perhaps you decided to fire all your crappy (especially local) clients and begin marketing the real vision you have. Maybe you also didn't buy that sourcebook page at the last minute, even though it was "such a deal." In our example, you have one not-so-great data point (the drop in sales), but you have three good things on your list.

As you make this list, I want you to do one other thing: think about how you **feel** about each item. Perhaps your list will look like this:

15% drop in sales	somewhat disappointed
fired bad clients	empowered
marketing personal vision	excited/nervous
didn't buy page	proud/wise

Making a list like this helps you to see what really does and doesn't work for you in your business. If you find that you have more negative emotions listed, then you probably aren't being true to yourself in your business and need to plan accordingly. The things that excite you are important, of course, but seeing what doesn't work for you is also important. And seeing reality is most important of all.

One completely practical point I would like to make absolutely clear: if you had a drop in sales this year, that may mean *absolutely nothing bad*. How can that be? Two things come into play on this: 1) trend; and, 2) the previous year.

If the trend is generally positive and you have a dip this year, you can't really tell for sure that it is a bad thing until it becomes a downward trend, and that needs more data points. You can also look at the ebb and flow of the year's sales compared to past years, and maybe you just had a negative blip in the 3rd quarter or something. Don't panic.

The previous year comes into play in what sounds like a backwards way of thinking--if you had a great year last year--one that was up 40% from the year before, you can pretty much bet that this year will be worse. This is a simple statistical fact. Think about it--you get that amazing and unusually huge project one year--can you really expect that to happen every year? No. That is unsustainable growth. Healthy stocks follow this "natural" pattern, they rise, then drop some, then start to rise again. What is important, again, is the trend overall. If you average your sales in groups of, say, three years (overlapping--like 2000-2003, 2001-2004, 2002-2005, 2003-

2006, 2004-2007), plot the data, and find that the general trend is up, then you're fine. Again, don't panic.

Getting back to your list, find all the positive action-items (stuff you do--look for verbs) and see if repeating them in the next year is feasible and/or a good idea. For example, you can continue marketing your individual vision, but you can't fire the crappy clients again if you've already done that (you could make a solid policy to give new clients a two-strikes-and-your-out rule, though). The negative action-items? Don't repeat. Yes, it is that simple.

Okay, that simple except for one emotion: fear. There is a high possibility that you will list fear as an emotion for many actually positive things--like dumping bad clients or marketing your vision. If you list fear as an emotion, try to delve deeper. Is it **rational** fear? That is, is the negative outcome you are fearing **really likely** to happen? Not just possible, but significantly probable? In most cases you'll find the fear to be irrational and the probability of positive outcomes greater than the negative. For example, maybe you fear showing only your vision in your marketing materials because you could miss out on getting a great project. Sounds reasonable, but in reality and looking objectively, you are MORE likely to miss out on a great project if you dilute your vision in your marketing. Stick to the vision-based marketing.

Following these list-building steps will get you started on a list of business resolutions for 2008. Of course, you can add new things (in fact, I encourage that kind of thinking!) as well. Is there something you've been thinking about trying? Like maybe traveling to other places to show your book? Add that to the list! How about taking a workshop? Add that.

This list can also serve to help you recommit to your business. If you are one of those photographers who is just starting out or who has recently transitioned from being a generalist of some kind to marketing only your vision, you may not be making enough sales to support your business during this time. This is reality. If you are in this situation, you can resolve to **do whatever it takes** to support yourself while you grow your business. Get a second job (wait tables, work at Starbucks, whatever), for example. Doing whatever it takes does NOT mean taking crappy projects or lowballing, just to get by, because that actively harms your business. Doing whatever it takes means selling stuff, eating Ramen, not buying stuff you don't need, re-using, saying "no" to the family demands for stuff, etc., moving to a cheaper apartment or house (to reduce your needed salary) and, quite possibly, working outside of your business for a year or two while it grows.

This is not unusual. Not just in our industry, but in all small businesses. And it doesn't make you a failure to recognize this reality in your own business. In fact, doing something about it (like getting a job) is an incredibly powerful positive step. And it's a temporary state too.

If you "can't" (read: won't) do that, then perhaps now is a good time to see if being a creative business pro is really the right path for you. It is hard work, but for most of us, it's worth it.

To learn more, check out the Burns Auto Parts website at burnsautoparts.com where you'll find links to the *Super Premium* blog, *Creative Lube* podcasts, as well as more Manuals and other info. You can contact Leslie directly via [email](mailto:le@burnsautoparts.com) or by calling 619.961.5882.