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Flipbooks for a Change!

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For a bit of photofun you might try experimenting with a technique which is not normally tried with photographs but which has enjoyed great popularity as cartoon art over the years. The flipbook or cartoon is commonly found printed on the top right hand corner of numerous comic books. Flip art consists of a sequence, generally of a comical kind, printed in the upper right hand corner of a variety of books or magazines which allow you to experience the sense of time and motion by the simple expedient of flipping the pages rapidly from front to back. The clear purpose of most of these flipbooks is to amuse. I propose that there may be more serious applications for the technique

Flipbooks or stories are never very long. As mentioned above, they have a single objective in mind which can best be put accross if the elements of time and motion are physically perceived by the viewer. They are simply short animated features. With this in mind it is conceivable that in many photographic situations the flipbook may be an invaluable addition to standard photographic methods as a conveyor of information. It is more informative than a still shot and much cheaper than a motion picture. It has it's place in the business of communication as an adjunct to standard techniques. It may be the one technique that completes the "picture" when other techniques prove to be too complex or too costly to use. It is surprising that it is not thought of more often.

First of all, in order to determine whether a flipbook is an appropriate technique to use in a given situation you must be able to answer "yes" to all of these questions:

- 1.Can the action which I want to convey be illustrated in a 2 to 4 second period?
- 2.Can I secure about 36 pictures of the action which I want to explain?
- 3.Will the extra feeling of motion and passage of time add something of value to the effort?

Assuming that you can answer positively to these questions you should probably proceed to make a flipbook of the event. It may not serve its intended purpose but at least it will generate more conversation and interest than you can possibly imagine at this time.

There are a few obvious facts which you should keep in mind as you start out on this project. First will be the format. Believe it or not 35 mm is usually quite sufficient a size and you can shoot your sequence either as horizontals or verticals. Once you decide on one format, however, you can't change it. You should keep in mind some of the principles of time lapse photography and animation as you produce the sequence. Your subject should not traverse large distances across the frame from shot to shot. It should take about 24 to 30 pictures for something to move from one side of the scene to the other. If it takes less time the motion may appear too fragmented. Assuming that you will

make a sequence of 36 pictures, the time between each of your pictures, should be equal to the time it takes your subject to complete its action divided by 36. Obviously, if the action takes place in a short time you may not be able to take the pictures at a fast enough rate unless you use a motor or winder on your camera.

On the other hand, the time between pictures may be too long for taking the sequence comfortably. In this case an intervalometer can be a decided asset. For example, if you were to photograph the opening sequence of a flower in bloom, the time between pictures may be anywhere from 1 to 10 minutes or more.

If you are "animating" a sequence, then simply make your action move so that it covers its intended pattern in 36 individual moves. Remember that the amount of movement of the subject should at most generally be 1/10 or less of the longest frame dimension or frame size.

Now that you have generated a roll of film with a progressive pattern of images, you need to simply assemble them in order and staple them in sequence. An industrial duty stapler will work best to do the stapling through the 36 prints. To get the best effect, you should keep in mind a few simple facts:

1. Registration is of paramount importance. The best way to insure accurate registration is to use the edges of the picture area or some other mark which remains in the same relative position from image to image, as the registration reference mark. For example one registration reference mark could be the edge of the film, if you are making contact prints. Either of the other two edges of the frame, at right angles to the film edge, can be the second reference mark. Reference marks must remain in the same position from frame to frame in order for them to be useful. The purpose of these reference marks is to make it easy to register the set of prints by simply tapping their edges against a hard surface, forcing them to become flush with each other. Once registered and stapled your flipbook story will flow much more smoothly.

2. Certain papers seem to work better than others. For contact print size images, single weight paper seems to work best. Medium weight paper is quite appropriate for print sizes larger than contact prints. Enlargements are probably best handled if printed on double weight paper. Do not make the enlargements too great. The prints should not be larger than about 2"x 3" for comfortable handling. Do not mount the prints because this generally will only compound your registration problems.

3. As you make the prints make sure that you allow enough room for the border which will be stapled. While it is possible to make a complete flipbook sequence on as little as a single sheet of 8x10 paper it might be more convenient to make two contact sheets with the negatives offset by one image from one sheet to the next. This allows you to use one row of images as a longer border though which the staple will go. If you make small enlargements allow sufficient room at one side for the staple.

4. Make about five extra prints of the first and last frames of your sequence. When added to the beginning and end of your flipbook sequence they will provide a smooth introduction and ending to the scene because it is difficult to get the prints to start to flip evenly and it is equally difficult to perceive the last bit of action if it extends to the very last frame.

5. If you opt for a feature within your image to be your point of reference or registration guide, then make yourself a registration jig by stapling a clear sheet of plastic or acetate onto a board. After sliding the first picture of the sequence under the plastic outline or mark with a waterproof pen those areas which must remain in the same place from shot to shot. Then, add edge reference marks around these to transfer to each of the pictures in the sequence. After marking them in series cut the edges as needed. Finally, tap the edges into register and staple the set together. This will result in the foreground image remaining stationary while the background moves about or viceversa...or something like it.

I don't have a conclusion to this! ;-)

By the way, if you don't think that a simple "gadget" such as a flipbook can impress or motivate or be at least a conversation piece note that some people are making a business out of flipbooks and one commercial outfit that manufactures them and provides general advice about making them is flippies.com