

**NEW WINE AND OLD WINESKINS****By Jim Mathis**

I had an interesting phone call recently from a professional photographer in another city. He called to complain my prices were too low. After I figured out he was not joking, I realized he was using a business model many photographers used from the late 1950s into the '90s.

Back then most photographers shot color film and sent it to a pro lab for processing and printing. Fees charged customers for having their photos did not always cover the price of film and processing, so the photographers made money selling expensive enlargements also printed by the photo lab. They tried to boost their income by selling a lot of prints, but the primary people making money were the photo labs. That is why I owned a photo lab during most of those years.

Digital photography did more than eliminate film and processing; it put control of the image back into the hands of the photographer for the first time since the 1950s. It was a paradigm shift in the way photographs were made, requiring a different set of skills, such as expertise with photo-enhancing software, inkjet printing skills, and new pricing formulas.

Apparently many photographers have failed to understand these changes and still send their digital files to photo labs for printing, effectively eliminating the control that comes from using digital technology in the first place. As a result, they have higher expenses with less control.

The importance of adjusting to changes within an industry in a timely way has broader application than just digital photography. Some technologies have the ability to completely change how we live or do business, but if we simply attempt to adapt new capabilities to old practices, we may be missing the point. It would be like purchasing a cell phone, then hanging it on a rack in the kitchen as we did with our landline phones.

Interestingly, even though it is a book many centuries old, the Bible addresses this need to respond to changes. Jesus Christ, for instance, reminded His followers, "*no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins*" (Mark 2:22). Although Jesus was speaking primarily to a spiritual truth, the principle holds true for strategies in the business and professional world as well.

Elsewhere the Bible singles out a group of people, "*men of Issachar who understood the times and knew what (they) should do*" (1 Chronicles 12:32). Things were changing significantly even then, and these wise individuals were observant and recognized how they needed to respond.

With the accelerated pace of change in the 21st century, no matter what type of business or professional work we are engaged in, we need to be constantly evaluating and re-evaluating the way we do things. This could involve technology – ranging from social media to updates in

computer capabilities – or understanding the changing mindset of our potential customers toward the products and services we provide.

We need to consider whether we are unsuccessfully trying to drag old habits into new environments, or if we are truly taking advantage of the new and emerging resources we have available, leveraging them to greater productivity and service to the consumer.

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### **Reflection/Discussion Questions**

1. Since he is a photographer, Mr. Mathis draws his illustration from his own professional pursuits. Have you seen similar changes in your own business? How well have you and your company responded to these new developments?
2. When do you think is the best time for making significant changes in your business model and strategies? As soon as you see your revenues leveling off or taking a downturn – or before that? Explain your answer.
3. Why do you think it is often so difficult to make necessary changes in the way a company does business? How can the wisdom of trusted advisors, especially those who are not directly involved in daily operations, be helpful?
4. In the biblical example cited, Jesus spoke about the foolishness of pouring new wine into old wineskins. However, in the context of His talk, He was not speaking about winemaking. What do you think He meant?

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions of the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages: Proverbs 15:22, 16:9, 18:15, 19:20, 20:18,24, 22:3, 24:5-6, 28:2,26