

YourMoney

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How digital imaging turned a photographer's mind to kung fu

SMALL WORLD
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The studio in Sheung Wan may be modest but it has a steadily increasing local and foreign martial arts following. Proprietor William Wan Kei-ho, addressed as *sifu* (master) by his pupils, is well known locally and overseas, particularly for kung fu.

Last year he was invited to attend a symposium in Britain, before that another in Canada and at the end of this year he will demonstrate his forms in the United States.

Despite such recognition, Mr Wan's venture is a brave one. Until he opened the Wan Kei Ho International Martial Arts Association in March, the professional photographer had been spending most of his working hours in his retail photo-processing lab or on assignment with his camera at weddings and functions.

At nights and weekends, he taught kung fu at community centres and to private groups – usually at al fresco public harbourside locations.

However, with the rise of digital photography he faced a financial dilemma.



William Wan Kei-ho

"To buy the new hardware and software would have cost me over \$1 million," he says. "Even before digital picture processing became so popular, film processing technology was changing so fast that retailers were being forced to upgrade their equipment about twice a year – at a cost of up to \$200,000.

"After thinking what to do, and talking it over with some students who have become good friends, I decided to sell." Mr Wan says the martial arts studio, previously an office, was inexpensive to rent and fit out. Mirrors were mounted on walls and a shower installed. He already owned much of the tradition-

al martial arts equipment, but items such as training pads and punch/kick bags were donated by long-term students.

Marketing is one thing Mr Wan believes in. Colour flyers were printed and distributed in expat areas. Print ads have been placed in Chinese-language newspapers and magazines and a website was launched recently.

"I expect to recover my outlay in the first one to two years," Mr Wan says, "and then make more profit once I am more established."

Weekday evening lessons cost about \$700 for four sessions. One-on-one lessons cost more, but he says these are reasonably priced, given that he has been teaching kung fu for 18 years.

Up to six students participate in the group classes. Mr Wan says individual targets are set for each student, factoring in fitness, agility, coordination and speed of learning. He also sets examinations and grades students.

Although he believes the studio will be a financial success, Mr Wan keeps his feet on the ground, still doing the odd photography commission. "I'm not going to turn down this work while I still have time," he says.

The location is Yue's House, 304 Des Voeux Road, Sheung Wan.