10 Tips to Get Excellent Business Photos

You know you need better photos to give your marketing a boost, but who has time? With these 10 easy tips, you can start today.

Photography plays an important role in small business marketing; images can enliven your website and help you tell engaging stories on social media. If you're intimidated by photography, you're not alone—many small-business owners think the same way you do. However, the more pictures you take, edit, post online or put into your next marketing brochure, the easier it will be. Use these 10 guidelines to help alleviate your photo anxiety, and get more from the photos you take.

Invest in a Good Camera—And Learn to Use It

Yes, your iPhone takes pretty good pics, but it's worth it to invest in a basic DSLR camera. You don't necessarily need all the bells, whistles and lenses, but you do need something that allows you to focus, zoom in and adjust settings. A Canon EOS 1100D or a Nikon D3100 might be a good place to start. And once you get a camera, read its manual and play around with its features. If you need extra guidance, consider taking a photography course at a local community college or on a site like Kelby Training.com.

Take Pictures

Now that you have your high-quality camera, you can take high-quality digital photos. Make a point to take pictures of your products, services, people and events. (You should always have these on hand for representatives of the media when they come calling.) That means taking photos of your products and also carrying your camera to product launches and other public events. If this seems overwhelming, make a list of the pictures you need, and how, when or where you'll get each. Make sure to have a variety of sizes and resolutions available and to update your photos regularly.

Tell Stories with Your Photos

The best photos tell stories about your business and its products or services. While static product shots are necessary, you'll also want to have a steady supply of photos showing people engaging with your products and employees. These photos are especially useful on Facebook and other social media sites, where people expect and want to follow stories. Think about your business's core mission and how best to tell the story about that mission visually.

Avoid Staged Shots

There's nothing worse for marketing—or storytelling—than a row of people grinning fixedly at the camera. Catch people doing things, interacting and being natural.

Make the Most of Natural Lighting

Natural light is almost always better than what comes from a flash, particularly for beginning photographers. If possible, shoot outdoors or in settings that have plenty of natural light.

Remember the Rule of Thirds

This simple principle will give your photos a professional look by keeping you from centering your subjects. That seems counterintuitive, right? But in fact, photos work best—and look less like amateur vacation snapshots—when subjects are slightly off-center. To put this rule into practice, visualize two horizontal lines and two vertical lines crossing the image area of your photo. If you have a face or object you'd like to be the focus of your shot, place it on one of the spots where the lines cross. These "hot zones" are the best spots for your subjects, and using them will give your photos a sense of movement, urgency and interest.

Have a Clear Subject

Photos that are too busy and cluttered can be confusing to viewers. Try to focus on one object, interaction or person in each shot.

Edit, But Don't Overdo It

In addition to having a good camera, you'll want to have good photo editing software. In a pinch you can use the basic editing software that comes with your camera, smartphone or computer; a free online editing program like PicMonkey; or the industry standard, Photoshop. Use your software to crop your photos and to adjust things like brightness and color. Be careful, though, not to over-edit your photos or get too cute with frames or text. Editing should enhance your photos, not overpower them.
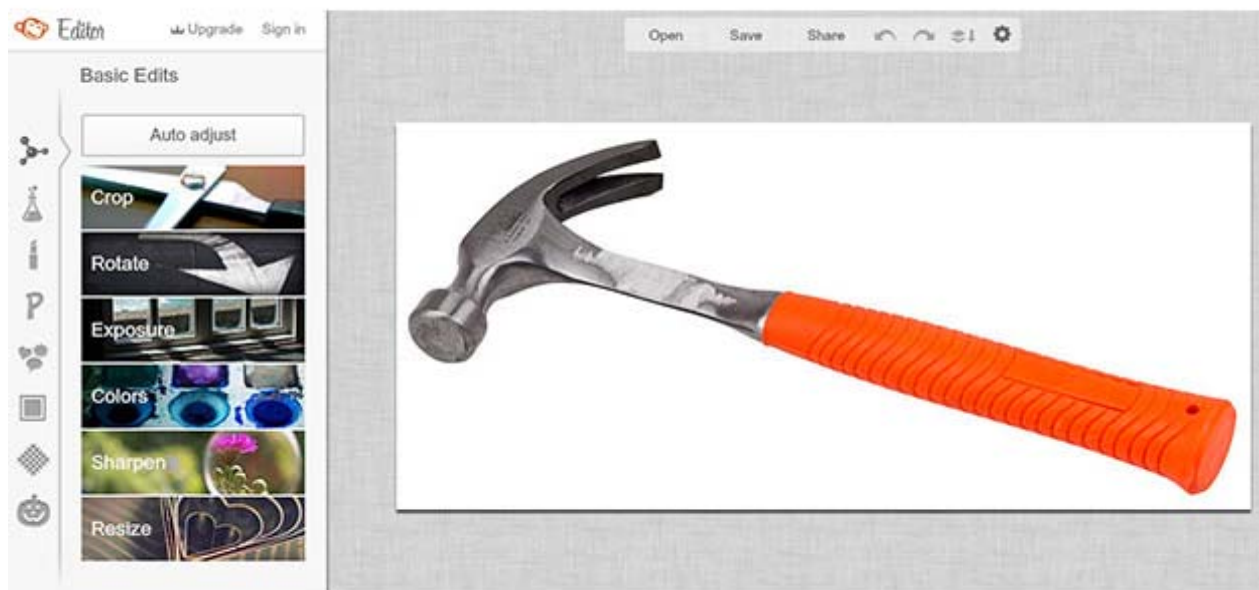
Get Some Head Shots

They're not the most exciting photos, but head shots of all the primary people in your business are important to have—both for the media and for your various social media profiles.

Experiment with Stock Photography

Stock photography sites, such as iStockphoto and Getty Images, can give you a wealth of images to help flesh out your website and marketing materials. You don't want to overuse stock images, since your own photos can tell the story of your business much more accurately and engagingly. But when used wisely, stock photography can play a role in your overall image strategy.

Photography can be intimidating when you're just starting out, but the more you practice, the more comfortable you'll feel. Taking, editing, posting and publishing pictures will become a natural part of your business's day-to-day activities, and you'll soon find these photos form the cornerstone of your marketing strategy.