



The Importance of Professional Photography in Marketing

We've all been there – you just miss the magic moment when your 2nd grader hits his first home run; Grandma is blinking, again, in the 25th take of the family photo; that really hairy guy in his Speedo passes behind you and your new husband during the last sunset of your honeymoon. Just as we rely on photographs to capture the essence of our life's milestones, good photography is what captures the essence of your product in a way that is second only to experiencing it first-hand.

So, why is it necessary to hire a professional for this all-important photography? How do I make sure I get what I need? And, what makes good photography good anyway? These are all legitimate concerns, and ones we'll address in this issue of *Fresh Findings*.

Why Do I Need It?

As mentioned above, we've all been there when we didn't get the shot we wanted – just ask the bride who let cousin Earl shoot her wedding. In marketing, image is everything. If your photography misses the mark, your brand message will only be diluted. Compelling messaging must be supported by compelling imagery. Just as important, but for more practical reasons, professionally shot photography is essential to ensuring quality reproduction in printing. If you're spending reasonable dollars on good graphic design and quality collateral production, don't scrimp on the photography – it will show.

How Do I Get It?

Foremost, budget for it! Professional photography can be expensive – you're paying for expertise garnered from years of professional training and experience. Significant amounts of time spent before, during and after the shoot, natural talent, expensive equipment, and ownership/usage rights of copyrighted materials all figure into the cost of working with a professional photographer.

You must plan for photography and allot the appropriate time needed to develop it. Shoot planning, propping, location scouting, acquiring models, etc., all take significant amounts of time and coordination long *before* the day of your photo shoot. Time during the shoot for makeup, propping, lighting, multiple shots, etc., all take more time than expected *during* your photo shoot. And, editing, color correction, retouching, etc., all take time *after* your photo shoot. Getting good photography isn't quick.

Let your agency select your photographer and direct your shoot. One of the biggest misunderstandings in photography is that a photographer is a photographer. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are fashion photographers, product photographers, architectural photographers, lifestyle photographers...and the list goes on. Allowing your agency to select the right kind of photographer will help ensure you get the end results you need. Letting your agency direct the photo shoot will also ensure you get those results (it will also take a load off your shoulders). Plus, they're the ones working with the shots anyway, so why not make sure they get what they need to make your marketing sing?!

Stock vs. Custom

Many of you might be saying, "wait, wait...what about all that photography available on the web? I can get whole disks of images now. Why do I have to hire my own photographer?" In short, custom photography is the only way to showcase the uniqueness of your product. In our line of work, real estate and hospitality, nothing compares to being able to show the real thing – the town center, the first row of homes built, kids playing in your neighborhood park. Stock photography has come a long way and it can be a great tool for specific projects, or a mid-way point

until you can afford or schedule your custom photography. If purchased from a reputable company, reproduction value will be good, it almost always saves time, and there is a huge variety available now. But, bottom line is that stock photography is shot with the idea that anyone can use it. You don't want your property perceived as "anywhere USA."

Stock photography can also limit the creative direction of your marketing. More on this in the next section...

Shoot For End Use

Images selected for marketing must meet the objectives dictated by the creative direction of your campaign. These images must also meet the requirements of the medium used. Investing in professional photography is great at any point in the game, but it's best when it's done at the beginning. When your marketing firm develops the strategic brand message for your product, followed by a subsequent creative platform, the next best step is to get custom photography that meets these objectives head on. You can use the old "square peg in a round hole" analogy here – if you shoot your photography before your creative platform is established, your marketing firm will forever be trying to fit their square peg into a round hole. However, if you allow the creative platform to develop first, followed by supporting photography, you have a custom-made creative campaign that should answer all your marketing objectives. The same is true of using stock photography instead of custom photography – your agency will be forced to develop a creative platform around what already exists, instead of developing the best creative direction for executing your brand message.

What Makes Good Photography Good?

Photography is an art form, and like all art, determining what constitutes "good" is subjective. There is, however, consensus that all "good" photographs have a pleasing composition with a center of interest, are technically well-produced and creatively tell a story. In addition to this, your photography should support your marketing objectives and brand message. If it doesn't, it's time to look at freshening your photo library.

Fresh Creative is a communications and design firm that specializes in marketing real estate development and hospitality properties. We use strategic process and experience to develop comprehensive solutions that create distinctive impressions.

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