Commercial Photographic Image Suitability Test

Choosing Photographic Imagery

It's difficult to know what images to use for promoting your business sometimes. Some of the questions people ask me include:

- Where can I you find photographs?
- Can I use the ones I've found?
- WIll other people be using them too?
- Will they work for me?

With such an abundance of media in our lives, it can be genuinely difficult to know the answers to these things. Added to that, Google and others have developed and are refining image based searches which see where an image has been used on the Internet. This will let owners of images check where their images are used, and catch out those who have not paid for them.

With so many images being repeatedly used now; what are the risks of using 'off the shelf' images?

1. looking like you've used someone else's images
2. 'site only' licenses or 'Internet only' licenses mean you need to keep track of what you've purchased images for, and using them for print can be problematic as it costs much more

But perhaps the biggest risk is something we don't think of immediately. Because images communicate before people read the words, there's a real risk that potential customers will literally dismiss your communication before they read your words because the imagery doesn't look genuine or unique, and doesn't actually represent your business properly. This is really important. People know when they are being 'mass marketed' to. The authenticity of your images reflected on your authenticity and the integrity of your business.

Most of us if we look at web ads and flyers that come to our door will recognise certain graphics as being widely used. These were effective for the first people to use them. They however became not just ineffective, but actually detracted from the message once the images were more widely used. The sad thing is that the better the image or graphic, the more chance there is of this happening; and even if you don't see anyone else using it today, once you've published the content containing the images, someone else may use them quite visibly within a short period of time, undermining your authenticity and integrity.

So although it's an overhead to have authentic images shot, it may be necessary to have people take you seriously, and it will stop you 'shooting yourself in the foot' when the images you're depending on to reinforce your message pop up elsewhere. In the end, the authenticity that your own images portray has much more impact and is so much more important than people give credit for!

Critiquing Photographs for Commercial Use

No matter where you get your images from, there are some things that need to be considered for them to decently reinforce the message of your content. Leaving aside cultural issues (we can often tell when stock photos are from other places such as North America or Asia); local context (the appearance of locations within Australia differs a lot too) and organisational context (people may look for uniforms, signage etc as a sign of authenticity), there are things we all evaluate in a single photo or a series of photos used in a context. Let's have a look at single photos first.

Single Photos

Here's a brief check-list:

Quality:
- Is the subject obvious?
- Is the subject sharply in focus?
- Is enough of the subject in focus to be as crisp as you really require?
  Selling glasses may mean a person's eyes should be in focus, but the rest of the face doesn't need to be as sharp, and the rest of the body can be quite blurred
- Does the lighting have an integral feel; does it work well rather than detracting from the photo? (no weird light spots or shadows)
- Does the background work well; is it free of distractions and noise?
- Are any shadows natural rather than overpowering?
- Is any of the image losing detail because it's too dark (under-exposed or under-lit) or too light (over-exposed or over-lit)

Usage:
- Is the image ok to use ethically and legally?
- Is the image sufficiently large for quality reproduction on the media you have planned?

Sets of photos

Magazines such as National Geographic are wonderful to read, and we all admire the beautiful images they carry in their articles. It's a fact that not all people will read all the way through an

article and digest what it's saying; but they sure do look at all the images, and expect the images to tell a story.

If we're going to use a set of images to tell our story, we need some consistency in order to have the look of authenticity, so here's a check-list for assembling a set of images to use together:

Quality:
- Are the photos consistent as far as depth of field is concerned? (how sharp of blurry the background is)
- Are the photos consistent as far as white balance is concerned?
- Do the colour themes read ok. If they differ, is there a good reason for it?
- Is the saturation and contrast about the same?
- Are the images consistent is use of light? If there are some that have made heavy use of artificial light such as a flash, does it jar somewhat against the other images?
- Are the photos framed/cropped in a consistent manner?

Usage:
- Are the images of consistent quality over all
- Are the images all about the same detail (pixel size and sharpness) so you can use them as a set in other media channels (print, HD video, HD web) cohesively?

If you're lost when trying to address any of this, please call me on 0423 311 839, text me or use this contact form on my web site www.ballaratbusiness.media/contact. I can help you to:

1. Confirm (or develop) your branding and marketing strategy
2. Plan campaigns that will reach your demographic
3. Decide on media channels and usage, then pull the pieces together to make a campaign work
4. Execute and monitor the campaign, so you know what works for you in reaching your customers!

My aim is to make your business look good! That means I do everything I can to provide media that works for you, establish practices and systems that are attractive and retentive for customers, and make sure I work with you ongoing so you don't lose your investment or your focus on winning in the sphere of media and marketing.

Call me NOW on 0423 311 839 and I'll throw in a ONE HOUR FREE CONSULTATION to benchmark your business. Call me!

Ballarat
Business Media

Steve Barnes

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