

A Photo for Every Occasion

Choosing the images that suit your particular needs

SUMMARY

When commissioning commercial photography, the first step must be to have a clear idea of the purpose the image(s) are to accomplish. 'What?' must be quickly followed by 'what for?', even before 'how much?' is brought up. Whilst the beginning of the answer to these questions can already be found in your business plan, you will definitely benefit from the advice of a professional image maker in order to determine the type of image that will suit your present and/or future business goals best.

A professional photographer is more than a camera operator: he is also a consultant. Thus, your next step should be to book a consultation with one. As a creative professional, he will be able to guide you through the selection, visualise ideas you had not previously considered, and even offer suggestions on how to get the desired results at a lower cost.

In order to help you make the most out of both the consultation and the subsequent photography –and to save you time, money and grief as well–, this publication has been prepared to acquaint you with the main types of photographs used in marketing and advertising –what they are, how they are produced, when and where they are most effective, and what their expected cost is.

Now, commercial images are legion, but they can be roughly grouped into three chief, broad categories: 'Drop & Shoot', Beauty Shots, and Illustrative Images.



PLATE 1. Vodka is neither blue nor pink; but... just how glamorous can transparent be?

A WORD TO THE WISE: NIBBLE, NIBBLE LIL' MOUSE

The current ubiquitousness of cameras, plus the hype and the ads from camera manufacturers claiming their latest models will turn anyone into a photo master, lead many to believe that hiring a professional photographer is an unnecessary and unjustifiable expense, and that they can safely bet their commercial success on pictures taken in-house, by a friend, or by one of the not so few hobbyists packing a DSLR and offering photographic services on the cheap or in exchange for ego-driven 'photo credit and exposure'.

Do not be taken in. Before you break a piece of the roof of this house of cake and sweets and start nibbling, consider carefully the following truths:

A camera does not a photographer make. A camera is merely a tool. Having one and knowing how to use it effectively are two completely different things. In order to be a photographer one requires, first and foremost, the God-given talent; and then, the investment in time, effort and resources to learn and develop the theoretical foundations and the skills to exercise such talent well.

Photography encompasses the essential disciplines of composition, exposure and lighting. A professional photographer knows how to consistently combine these three to craft images that bring out the appealing features of a subject: something that can't be accomplished merely by pointing a camera and pressing a button.

Images are crucial for purchasing decisions; and this is all the more true in the Age of the Internet, when buyers lack the tactile experience to adequately evaluate products or locations, and must rely on visuals to make informed decisions about buying a product, ordering a dish, or getting in their car to go see a house for sale. It is imperative that photographs contain most of the information potential buyers need to value what you offer.

Sure, Hansel could take a snapshot of the sweet house with his cell phone, and Gretel could easily push a cake against the wall and take snapshots too. However, the million-dollar question is not how much cash you will save by doing it on the cheap, but *how much money and reputation will you lose to 'good enough' pictures?*

THE 'DROP & SHOOT' IMAGE

As the name implies, these images are made by lighting a background, placing the subject on it, and taking a picture.

These photos are simple in concept and quick and inexpensive to produce¹ (typically ~\$20–30 per shot, plus a setup fee). Plus, a group of similar products can all be photographed using the same background/setup.

Uses: catalogues, departmental stores fliers, online stores, print and online ads, product packaging, among others.

Bottom line: 'Drop & Shoot' images are purely informative: they show what your products look like, but they rarely tell the viewer about their actual, real-life benefits.

¹ Please, note that in our current context 'quick and inexpensive' does NOT mean 'shoddy'. Professional 'Drop & Shoot' pictures are *not* snapshots. Point in fact, depending on the subject, some of these photos might require quite elaborate setups. (See the 'Pictures Done Dirt Cheap...' sidebar for a primer and examples of real cheap –and veritably ugly– photos.)



PLATE 2. Since moving buildings around is the province of house lifting experts (or seismic waves), there are no 'drop & shoot' architectural photographs: the term 'record shot' is used instead.

“Drop & Shoot” doesn’t mean *snapshots*!”



PLATE 3. Products for catalogues and online shops are usually shot on white backgrounds so as to be able to isolate them and create composites by dropping them onto a different background or image (see **Plate 12**).



PLATE 4. A typical 'drop & shoot' set: the product, a roll of seamless paper, and as many electronic flashes and reflectors as needed.



PLATE 5. 'Drop & Shoot' images are the salt and pepper of restaurant menus.



PLATE 6. If no compositing will be done, a gradient background can showcase a product or exhibition piece more elegantly than a solid, plain one. 'Drop & shoot' does not mean snapshots!

THE BEAUTY SHOT IMAGE

This is the kind of photograph that aims to make the subject as striking as possible. The purpose is to stop the viewer, turn his attention away from whatever he's doing or thinking, and create in his mind a desire for a product or service.

Beauty Shots are carefully designed, staged and photographed. Locations are duly scouted. Backgrounds are primly selected. Models thoughtfully cast. Camera and lights minutely positioned and adjusted.

Obviously, because Beauty Shots demand more time, thought, and effort, they command a higher price.

Uses: Magazine ads, online ads, billboards, catalogues' front and back pages, product packaging, promo vehicles, tradeshow displays and many more.

Bottom line: Beauty Shots make your products and services more desirable by presenting them as top of their class. The slicker the image, the greater its stopping power and effectiveness.



PLATE 7. Whilst 'Drop & Shoot' images merely tell viewers what a product is and what it looks like, Beauty Shots present it as a must-have item.

“Beauty Shots are meant to stop viewers in their tracks and make them acknowledge your product or service as top of its class”



PLATE 8. Architectural subjects are taken beyond the 'record shot' by carefully choosing angles and lighting that draw viewers in, just as if they were actually standing there.



PLATE 9. Beauty Shots are the icing on the cake for restaurant menus and ads. By closing up on the food energy is imbued into the shot and the patrons are drawn more into the dishes.

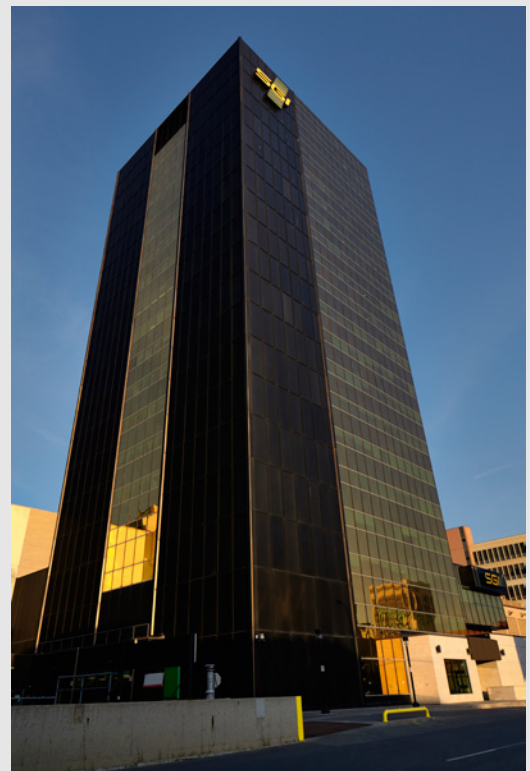


PLATE 10. 'You said "cute"? The lolcatz are cute, man! We? We dazzlin!! (All thankz to our photographer's killer lightin and stagin skillz)'

'PICTURES DONE DIRT CHEAP. SPECIAL RATES ON SUNDAYS AND HOLIDAYS!'

Don't take our word for it. Take the test! Compare these images and decide for yourself which ones draw you more.

- On this corner... a few pictures not unlike some that are regularly spotted on businesses' ads, advertorials, real estate listings, and websites nowadays:



- And on this corner... the same subjects! (Only this time they were imaged by a professional. No Photoshop trickery, no D.J. shenanigans, and no specious— ahem, special rates.)



THE ILLUSTRATIVE IMAGE

This is the kind of picture sweetly whispering or loudly shouting to the viewer how much better his family would live if he bought that house, how stunning she'd look if she wore that necklace, how much cooler the car would look with... you get the idea.

Instead of directly showcasing products or services, Illustrative Images present concepts (love, family, health, expensive, high-tech, fun, safety, etc.); and because they deal with intangibles they are probably the most difficult, trickiest, and expensive type of image to create. Quite often, the product or service being advertised isn't even depicted in the photograph, but rather featured as a subordinate, superimposed Beauty Shot.

Like Beauty Shots, Illustrative Images –sometimes also called by the trendy term 'lifestyle photos'–, are minutely designed, staged, and photographed. Their production can run the gamut from requiring just two people (the photographer and the client or art director) to several individuals (assistants, stylists, technicians, caterers, etc.) all working as a team. Furthermore, production costs can range from a few hundred dollars to several thousands. The sky is really the limit here! It all depends on the complexity of the shot, the people required, the number and type of props needed, the physical risks involved, and other variables not the least of which are the licence fees based on the image usage.

Uses: Advertising. While some of these photos might be used as wall art for your office or corporate headquarters, the mighty ad is the Illustrative Image's real *raison d'être*.

Bottom line: When you want to create or reinforce in your audience a deep desire or sense of need for your products or services, look no further than a finely executed Illustrative Image. These are the pictures that best communicate the **benefits** of what you are offering and why your viewers should choose it over any other similar offers. 📸



PLATE II. The culmination of a company's marketing imagery, Illustrative Images purpose to communicate to viewers how greater, better, and happier they will be by acquiring the product or service being promoted.

“When you want your audience to believe that they can't live breathe without your product or service, aim no lower than a finely crafted Illustrative Image”

PLATE I2. An Illustrative Image of a lightning strike and a 'Drop & Shoot' photo of a battery were used to craft this made-up company's ad.

FEEL THE POWER!

(NEVER ITS SHORTAGE)

THE BATTERY FOR YOUR UPS: SIMPLY BRILLIANT

CALL 888-321-7654

*FULGOR IS NOT A REAL COMPANY OR PRODUCT