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A Pro Photographer Can Be Your Best Friend

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By Deborah Daily, Co-Owner, Buckaroo Marketing/New Media,

It's no surprise that an estimated 8.8 trillion photos were taken worldwide during 2018, given that most of us carry high-quality cameras in our phones. But shooting all those photos doesn't make us photographers.

Digital technology has become a powerful equalizer in so many ways. Everyday people have access to tools that are far more sophisticated than what professionals had at their disposal a couple decades ago. High-school-age musicians can craft 24-track studio recordings in their bedrooms. Moonlighting artists can generate dazzling works of art without ever touching a brush. And anyone can shoot a pretty photo with their phone.

The problem is that having the tools doesn't equate to having the talent, and that's nowhere more evident than when it comes to photography. I've always appreciated the vision and quality professional photographers bring to projects for my clients. While I can envision how I want a product shot to appear on a website or in a trade magazine ad, a photographer will take it to the next level, using lighting, exposure techniques, depth-of-field, and a host of other techniques to bring out the product's most desirable attributes.

Because everyone has those powerful cameras built into their handheld devices, we're encountering companies who don't understand the need to invest in high-quality photography. When we mention arranging for a pro to shoot beauty shots of Model XP23A, they say, "Oh, Bill can grab some shots. You should see the photos from his fishing trip." So Bill walks on the production line and fires off a few images. Invariably, the photos look flat and lifeless. The lighting is all wrong, casting shadows on important features and washing out other areas. When the photos are added to the website or dropped into an ad, they look drab and amateurish.

You've heard that a photo is worth a thousand words. I think that's a spectacular understatement. When we look at a website or an ad, the first thing we notice -- the very first element that registers in our brains -- is the imagery. Long before we've read a headline

or delved into the bullet points about the superiority of Model XP23A, we've drawn conclusions about it based on how the image struck us. If the photo was flat or drab, that's the impression we'll take away.

A great example is food photography. You've seen photographs of entrees and items that simply made your mouth water. You may not have been hungry while driving down the road, but the billboard with 20-foot-high fast-food cheeseburger has just induced a craving. And you've no doubt seen amateur photos of similar dishes that just look bland and unappetizing.

Or consider the last time you had a head shot taken for business. The snapshots taken at family events show off what you'd rather not see -- like the fact you've put on a few more pounds than you want to admit. But a professional photographer uses lighting and camera angles to capture you as the good-looking executive you prefer to portray.

Another aspect professional photographers bring to your needs is an ability to see your product in different ways. You may be thinking about the standard product shot that you've seen hundreds of times, but the photographer is able to approach yours in a unique way that immediately makes it stand out from your competitors. Even something that seems as minor as the choice of a background color or additional of bounce lighting can transform a ho-hum image into a stopper.

I fully understand why companies are willing to make do with amateur photography: it's a lot cheaper, and they think nobody will notice the difference. But when you look at the cost of photography within the context of the total project cost, it's usually a difference of just a few percentage points.

Plus, carefully planning your photography needs will allow you to spread any extra costs over multiple projects and budgets. If the photographer knows you'll need those shots of Model XP23A for your website, a brochure, the products section of your industry's magazine, and your packaging, he or she can shoot it in to give you greater versatility and utility. That's a way to amortize your costs over many thousands of "words" and dramatically increase the value of your investment. I think that's a pretty compelling picture.

Deborah Daily is co-owner of Buckaroo Marketing | New Media

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