Creating Images More Realistic Than Photos
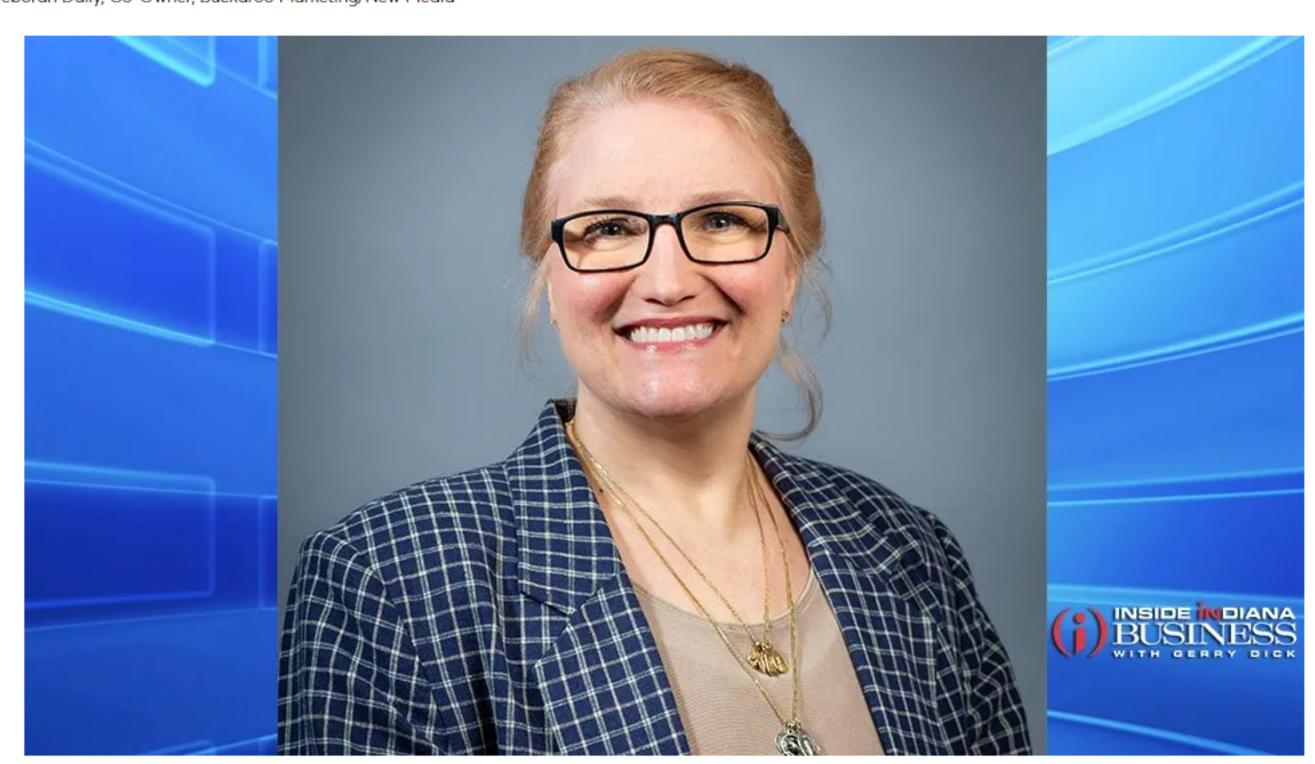
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By Deborah Daily, Co-Owner, Buckaroo Marketing/New Media

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We've all heard a photo is worth a thousand words, but if you're in the business of making or selling products, you might be surprised to learn there's a better alternative that's worth infinitely more than those thousand words.

Marketing and advertising efforts took a giant step forward when high-quality photography became available. Photos offered not only proof of the product's existence but also allowed potential customers to study it and more easily envision how it might serve their needs. Photograph has been refined and improved over the years, but a newer technology may just leave it in the dust.

That technology is 3D photorealistic renderings. As computing resources increase and graphics engines have become more powerful, companies now have the option to present their products in highly detailed three-dimensional files that are not only versatile but can also be adapted easily as changes are needed.

We work with a number of developers of industrial parts and systems. High-quality photography has long been a central element of promoting what those companies make and do. Unfortunately, for all its advantages, photography has its limitations. A photograph captures just one view of a product at one moment in time. The camera angle and lighting determine what parts of the product are visible and just how discernable they are. If the photo focuses on the valve at the top of the product, the set screw at the bottom may be slightly out of focus or hidden in the shadow.

Before the creation of software like Adobe's Photoshop, making changes to existing photographs involved a lengthy, expensive process of retouching by hand. So when companies wanted to delete a component that had been removed, alter the lighting or the color, or make similar changes, it involved a major effort. Photoshop simplified that process to some degree, but it's not the magic weapon many people assume it is.

The ability is to make those changes is one area where 3D photorealistic renderings provide a superior advantage. If your part #36AW3 is being modified to include the addition of a set screw, it's easy to incorporate that in the rendering. If the part is now being produced in blue instead of green, it's a comparatively simple fix.

But the real advantages extend far beyond the ability to make modifications. With 3D photorealistic renderings, companies don't have to settle for a single view of their product. Because the file is three-dimensional, prospective customers can rotate and view it from an endless number of angles. Suppose you want to buy a new bathtub faucet online. One retailer posts a single photograph using the standard "three-quarter" view, allowing you to envision how it might fit in your home. But another retailer uses a photorealistic 3D file you can move around to get a better idea of how it will fit in your tub.

The retailers can take it a step further by combining the faucet rendering with renderings of common styles and colors of tubs, so you can match the faucet to a reasonable facsimile of your specific tub.

Let's look at the approach in an industrial context. Your part #36AW3 is designed to rotate in a housing. So instead of simply showing an attractive photo of it on your website or in a video, you combine photorealistic renderings of the part and the housing so customers can see how they work together. You can use cutaway renderings to explain how certain assemblies operate or guide the service technicians who will handle the installation. You can even add text callouts to areas of the part to point out the benefits of choosing your part.
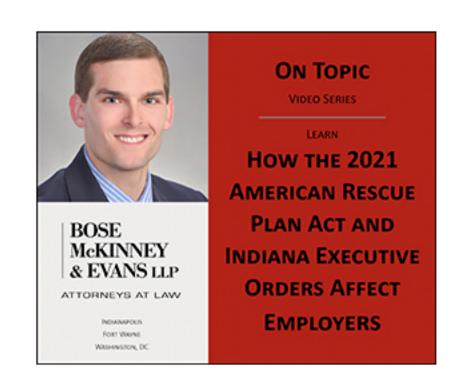
We work with a company that makes interchangeable equipment designed to handle material in a wide variety of production facilities. With animated photorealistic renderings of that equipment, the company can model an installation for a prospect's specific needs and show them exactly how it will operate. Beyond the wow factor of the approach, it allows for a degree of preliminary troubleshooting, as the prospect may see there just isn't enough space for the configuration they envisioned.

While 3D photorealistic renderings are exciting, the process isn't as easy as many users would hope, so it's best left to professionals. And as with many aspects of marketing and advertising, it's generally a good idea to have your marketing agency function as a go-between because they'll have a better sense of how to develop the rendering in ways that provides the greatest flexibility, utility, and value for your investment.

If you haven't explored this exciting new way to present your company and its products, ask your marketing partners about what 3D photorealistic renderings can do for you!

Deborah Daily is co-owner of Buckaroo Marketing | New Media, a Fishers-based advertising agency established in 1999. She can be reached at dldaily@gobuckaroo.com.
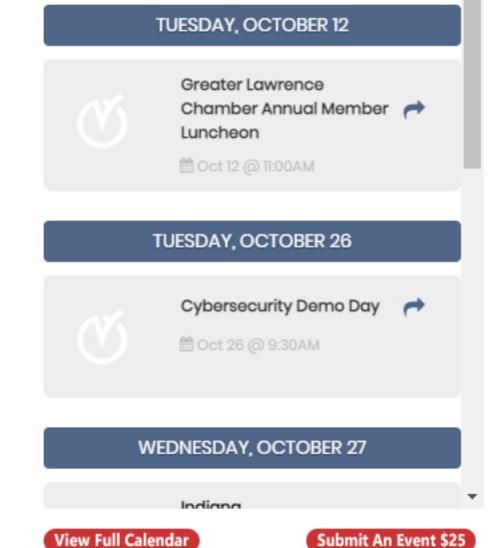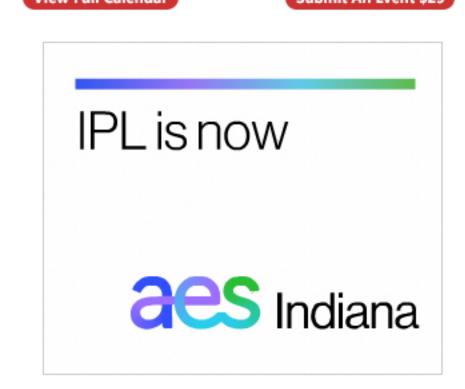
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