

How to Style Photos that Will Stop Tracks on Social Media

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As the digital landscape expands, people adjust the way they respond to various kinds of online content. The magnitude of content on digital platforms has resulted in people skimming more and stopping less to read through a post. This means that to stand out, content sharers must post compelling images to make viewers stop and pay attention. It's clear that this method is working – and snowballing in popularity. Today, visual content dominates, and some of the fastest-growing social media channels – like Instagram and Pinterest – are visually based. The strategy is successful: **Social media posts with photos get up to 650% more engagement than those without.** And research has shown that people are much more likely to remember information they gather from an image.

So what does this mean for your brand? It means that, to grab the attention of your customers and make a memorable impression online, you must post engaging visual content. But not just any photo will do. To stand out from the clutter, you need to post compelling, well-composed images that showcase your brand and products in new ways. Following are tips on how to do just that.

Lighting

Lighting is a crucial element that can make or break your shot. Without good lighting, a beautifully arranged, colorful photo can appear dull and flat. Shooting in natural light, whether you're outside or in front of a window, is the easiest way to ensure that your photos look great. If you're shooting indoors and using a window as a natural light source,

you can hold up a piece of white tagboard to help reflect light from the window onto your subject. If a photo op crops up in a place where you are unable to control the lighting, try artificially adding light to the photo by adjusting brightness levels when you edit it.

Backdrop

Add texture and visual interest by shooting your merchandise against an interesting backdrop. It can be anything from outdoor scenery to a vintage wooden table top. Once you get used to styling photos, you'll find yourself keeping an eye out for things that could be used as an aesthetic backdrop, such as a fun, colorful rug or a piece of scrapbook paper.

Composition

Even an ordinary object can appear vastly different and intriguing based on the way it's shot. Change the perspective of your photo by shooting your subject at different angles. How does the photo change when you shoot close up? From above? Does your subject look better when it's filling the frame? What visual interest is created when only part of your subject is in the photo? Does

is to practice – so take several shots and see what looks best.

Create additional interest by playing with the Rule of Thirds, which assumes you can capture a more balanced and natural shot by dividing a photo into thirds both horizontally and vertically, and then shooting your subject so that it is in line with these imaginary grid lines. On an iPhone, you can practice this concept by shooting photos with an actual grid. Open the Settings app on your phone, and then click Photos & Camera. Scroll down until you see the Grid button, and enable this function, which gets gridlines to appear when you're taking photos. The grid should help you line up the shot so that your subject isn't always being photographed directly straight on, making it appear more natural in its environment.

Finally, experiment with white space, which is the space where your subject is not, to see how it can emphasize the key elements in your photo. For example, if your subject is on the left side of the "grid" following the Rule of Thirds, you may want to position your photo so that there is white space on the right side to help the viewer's eye move about the shot. While it is okay to have several ele-

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your subject look better in the foreground or background? The best way to find the perfect composition for a photo

ments in a photo, it's always beneficial to provide some "negative space" that will give your viewer's eyes a rest and make

your subject stand out.

Props

Adding props to a photo can not only increase its creative appeal, but also help tell a story with or about your subject and show consumers how your product can fit into their lives. For example, can you adorn a pair of shoes with fabric? Scattered buttons? Leaves? Shoelaces? For messier props, such as glitter or even a brush stroke of shoe polish, consider shooting on a disposable backdrop for easy clean-up. Try to make your props look natural. In “real” life, objects around the subject of a photo probably wouldn’t form a perfect pattern, so your props probably shouldn’t be in “perfect” order either. Try gently tossing them onto the surface you’re shooting on to see how they fall at random. Then, do any necessary rearranging to get the best possible shot. Think

of your props as garnishes – they should add a little something special to your main subject, not take away from it.

Stock Photos

As a rule of thumb, it is always best to use original content and photos, because doing so will ensure that your brand and products remain fresh and engaging. However, there will probably be times when you need to show something specific in a photo that you are unable to set up and shoot yourself. When this happens, look for a stock photo that suits your needs. Websites like search.creativecommons.org and thestocks.im compile thousands of searchable photos that you can use in a pinch, often at no cost. Be sure to check the photo’s attribution requirements to see whether you need to give any credit when using it, and in what context you can share it. Also, keep the size of

the photo in mind so that the resolution doesn’t deteriorate if you have to enlarge it.

Sharing great visual content will help your brand stand out amidst the clutter of the social media landscape. Stunning photos don’t always happen overnight, but with a little practice you can generate visual content that will have customers stopping to notice and engage with your brand online. If you need additional inspiration, check out the #photostyling hashtag on Instagram — you might get a great idea for how to compose your next shot! ■

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can go wrong.

The section on “aftershocks” may be of most importance for a reader who is considering selling. Assuming that the sale goes well, then what happens to the various stakeholders? Pellegrin’s experience selling comes through and he does a thorough job helping the reader foresee issues and opportunities

to address.

The final chapter includes “Jonathan’s Rules,” the points he feels are most important to the selling strategy: creating a strong selling team, managing your banker, establishing criteria for the buyer, having alternatives, conducting due diligence, tailoring your story to fit with buyer’s needs, and negotiating tips and having an unbiased coach.

That gives Pellegrin’s book a fitting ending. If there is one thing we know

that family business owners love, it’s talking to others who understand them and will tell them when they are right – and, perhaps more important, when they are wrong. ■

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ble they “locker stock” inventory. Basically, this requires the vendor to warehouse the back-up inventory being reordered weekly, instead of the store having to hold it. This practice alone reduces inventory and increases turnover.

In years past, some retailers (and vendors) might have considered this type of

approach too aggressive. In today’s retail environment, managing vendor assortment is essential. Brand loyalty must be a win-win. Gone are the days when retailers should be expected to buy unconditionally a line that is under-performing, simply because they always have. Retailers cannot afford to carry a line for a handful of customers who, in some cases, don’t buy until the line goes on sale anyway. If the store is not profitable with a particular

line, the sooner the problem is dealt with, the better. The resource profits when the store profits – which is the point, isn’t it? ■

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