

Put Your Best Face Forward

If a picture is worth a thousand words, what does your do-it-yourself head shot say about you? Many small business owners take the do-it-yourself route when submitting head shot photos for media use to save time and money or meet a pressing deadline. This can work well, provided they take care to capture a winning image.

Other times, owners submit images for media use that don't put their best faces forward. Maybe these mug shots would pass for a driver's license or passport, but not for promotional use. As Erma Bombeck once quipped, "If you look like your passport photo, it's time to go home." Face it, just because you own a digital camera doesn't mean you should use it for business. A poor portrait can reflect negatively on your personal brand and reputation.

Newspapers publish executive photos in their "Briefcase" sections, and readers turn to them to learn who has been promoted or moved to new positions. Readers who seek new business prioritize prospecting efforts based on these postings and follow up to extend congratulations and invite new business conversations.

In addition, many papers publish how-to columns from area experts offering tips readers can use to make smarter business decisions. A quality head shot can turn such a column into a credible and persuasive branding tool that can live on as a professional reprint long after the newspaper has faded.

Since your image is on the line, supply a photo that does the best that can be done with what you've got to work with. Then, when editors see your photo, they won't quip that you have a face for radio. Worse yet, they won't exclude your photo from the mix in favor of others of better quality.

Some of the most common missteps with do-it-yourself head shot photography include:

- Unflattering lighting
- A non-neutral background (plants that appear to be growing out of an executive's head)
- Poor wardrobe choices (bold patterns and dated clothing)
- Too much blue eye shadow
- Dated or messy hair styles
- Far more person showing than the standard head-and-shoulders view
- Somber facial expressions
- Submitting a photo from five or ten years ago. This can backfire when folks meet you for the first time. If you are not truthful about your appearance, what else might you fib about? Keep in mind that hair styles, hair colors, and fashion trends change as time marches on. If your reflection in the mirror today doesn't match

your photo, it is time to sit for a new one.

Henry Schulz, principal of Henry Schulz Photography, has photographed Miss Washington candidates for the last seven years, along with numerous local executives for a wide range of publications. Based on his years of photographing the bold and the beautiful, the shy and retiring, and those who are growing older and wider, he offers these tips:

Personal Grooming: Women - Pay special attention to hair and make-up. Apply more blush than usual to avoid appearing washed out. Men - Hair should be neatly styled, and facial hair should be precisely trimmed.

Clothing: Solid, medium to dark tone business attire works best. Faint pin stripes or subtle patterns are acceptable.

Background: A smooth neutral colored background works well. You should be situated at least three feet away from the background, and six feet away is preferable. This helps keep the background out of focus.

Posing: Turn away from the camera at approximately a 45 degree angle. Turn your head directly to the camera with the shoulders still facing away from the camera. The back should be arched slightly with your shoulders back.

Technique: Framing in the camera should be from the bottom of the breast pocket on a man's jacket, or just above the "V" where the blazer meets when buttoned. Allow a few inches of background above the head. Always use your "on camera flash" to take the picture, whether in daylight or inside. Let the subject know when you snap the photo. Saying "cheese" or a similar phrase really works because it tends to put a twinkle in the eye and a smile on the face of the person being photographed.

Cropping: Four by five or five by seven inch images are adequate for most uses.

Digital Quality: Most newspapers and magazines prefer digital photos of at least 300 DPI.

Labeling: Label the images by first and last name and the date.

If you insist on do-it-yourself photography, follow these tips. In the alternative, hire a professional photographer to capture a winning image. The investment of time and money is modest, and the end result will put your best face forward so folks beyond your mother will notice.



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