

A Practical Guide to Photography for Legal Marketers

There are a variety of uses for photography in legal marketing. This piece is intended as a guide to legal marketers charged with overseeing their firm's photography. It will focus on portraits used for the web directory, biographies, press releases, and legal recruiting.

In this age of branding, it probably goes without saying that design decisions with respect to all photography should be consistent with the firm's image/brand. At the outset be clear with the photographer about any design decisions that affect photography, such as:

- How large are the pictures to be displayed?
- What are their proportions and dimensions?
- What are the intended uses (print/web/both)?
- What should the overall look and feel of the pictures be?

The better informed the photographer is, the better s/he will be able to work with you to realize your goals.

With project parameters established, it is important to be clear with attorneys and staff about the goals for the pictures. It is essential that the attorneys recognize that photography is an integral part of the firm's (as well as their own personal) marketing efforts. The adage is true; a picture is worth a thousand words.

A portrait, even a simple headshot, is a collaboration between photographer and subject. Each subject should make every effort to look their best in front of the camera (see tips below). You want your attorneys to come across as professional, intelligent, engaged, confident, and approachable, in pictures that are well lit and well composed. This is most likely to happen when the subjects show up informed, appropriately dressed and somewhat willing.

If your firm doesn't have an existing relationship with a photographer, or if you are looking to make a change, ask colleagues in other firms for referrals. Do your due diligence before making any decisions. Look at websites for quality and consistency, call photographers in and interview them. You want to be certain you hire someone who will fit in with your firm's culture, someone who will be able to work well with you, and someone with whom your attorneys will feel comfortable and confident.

Issues to consider when hiring a photographer include:

- Does the photographer work on location or only in their studio? One or the other may be more convenient for you.
- Does the photographer "get" what you are trying to do? Be specific about expectations, discuss scheduling, budget, etc.
- How much retouching will the photographer do and will there be an additional cost?
- Does the photographer understand the technical requirements of the job?
- How will s/he deliver the images and how soon after the shoot will they be received?

Other basic considerations for photography:

Basic head and shoulders

- Simple, straightforward, effectively puts a face to a name
- Least amount of real estate for the greatest identification value
- Doubles well for press releases as most publications crop all photos to include only head and shoulders

Half, three quarters or full-length portraits

- Emphasis moved away from the face
- Less recognition value unless larger on the page
- May achieve some design consideration, such as consistency with collateral marketing materials
- Can give a sense of style

Backgrounds

- Studio backdrop or in an environment (office, courthouse, exterior, etc.)
- If in an environment, do you have enough backgrounds to maintain an interesting variety, if not you may be better off using a backdrop
- Studio backdrops, usually seamless paper or painted canvas, can be smooth-toned or mottled and almost any color, choose one that will work with a range of colors and flesh tones, such as a neutral or muted color
- Keep it simple

Poses

- Eye contact is important, the subject should look straight into the lens actively engaging the viewer, avoid “the deer caught in the headlight” look
- The hand on the chin almost always looks hokey, avoid such gratuitous poses
- Let the subjects be themselves, if they are serious let them be serious and if they tend to smile let them smile, they should look and feel natural
- Recruiting pictures are usually less formal than those for bios and press release

What to tell the lawyers – tips for taking a good photo

- Simple patterns and solids photograph well, avoid high contrast designs
- Darker colors ground the subject conveying solidity and authority
- White shirts, the brightest thing in a picture, compete with the face
- Men should wear shirts with the right collar size
- If there is a policy that men must wear jackets and ties or if there is any other “dress code” for the pictures, inform them beforehand and repeatedly
- If they are planning to get a haircut, they should do so and ideally several days before the shoot
- As to makeup, don’t overdo it; with respect to jewelry, less is more
- Get a good night’s sleep
- Most of all relax, a relaxed subject almost always photographs well

It is the photographer’s job to draw the subjects out, make them look alive, and help them pick the best of the take. Undoubtedly, the photographs will be taken digitally and thus many simple things can be corrected in the selected pictures. In Photoshop, eyes, smiles, eyebrows, hairlines can be moved; blemishes, razor burn, scars, moles removed; dark circles, crows feet, wrinkles, five o’clock shadow, double chins, triple chins minimized; hair, pounds, years trimmed. A good photographer will be able to make these adjustments while maintaining the integrity of the image.