



## *Business head-shots: or, this is what I look like*

Head-shots are everywhere in business nowadays: on public websites and company intranets; on social and networking media platforms; in traditional print media, journals, and magazines. They are a great way to connect with clients and colleagues in ways that textual descriptions cannot match. Head-shots help build and portray a brand image to potential customers who are interested in who you are, not just what you do – they provide a professional and consistent approach across all media platforms, which significantly improves networking efforts. It is important to get it right: first impressions count.

This article attempts to approach matters from a client perspective: what should you expect, and how do you go about preparing for a corporate head-shot photo-shoot? Part 2 will explore what to expect during the shoot; and what happens afterwards, including a guide to post-production processes and possibilities.

## *Before the shoot – ‘The Brief’*

On a company level, discuss the brief with your photographer: let them see examples of other current marketing media (so they get an idea of your branding, style, colour schemes, et cetera).

Will the images be environmental portraits (showing people in a work context), or with a studio look? Environmental can be good but also potentially more disruptive if done in a working office; or time consuming and subject to on-location weather conditions. Portraits with a studio 'feel' typically remain timeless: a clean background almost always works best. It's simple and elegant; and efficient.

Decide in advance if you prefer your head-shots galleries to be in a horizontal or vertical format – vertical (or portrait) format is most common, but horizontal can work well, giving space to each image. You could also opt for a square or circular format – but it's always good to plan in advance. Do you prefer tightly cropped head-shots, with or without the top of the head showing; or a more spacious feel? There is no right or wrong answer, but consistency across the board carries a strong professional image.

Ask about re-touching. It's not just about the photo-shoot, although remember that anything more than very basic post-production work is usually charged separately (and can be a highly skilled task). Be open with your photographer (more of this later) and tell them your preferences – freckles and scars are one thing, but blemishes and acne are another (these can be 'zapped' quickly). A lot can be done in re-touching but it's important to discuss openly (e.g. is one eye bigger than the other; does a double chin need hiding?). It doesn't have to be a full-blown magazine-style re-touching effort but rather a more subtle approach to show off each person at their best.

## *Preparing for the photo-shoot*

So, you've booked your photographer and put together a shooting schedule for your office personnel. What can you do to prepare? Looking your best is as much about preparation as it is about the photographic process itself. Most of it is common sense but there are a few things worth mentioning:

- Be well rested and hydrated. Try to get a good night's sleep beforehand and drink plenty of water: it'll make your eyes look brighter, skin look smoother; and reduce any signs of bags under the eyes.
- Glasses on or off? If you are known for wearing glasses, you should probably wear them for the photo-shoot. It's helpful if the lenses are non-reflective since eliminating distracting elements during re-touching can be difficult and time consuming. Also, ensure they are scrupulously clean – dust and other marks show up glaringly and can be a real distraction. If you only wear glasses occasionally and choose not to wear them for the photo-shoot, make sure you leave your glasses off

for a while beforehand, so as to avoid give-away skin marks around the bridge of your nose.

- Hair. Bring a brush or comb. Male or female, think of a hair shampoo advert: you'll like the look of smooth, flowing, neat hair. Use the brush during the shoot if necessary: stray hairs are a distraction and although they can be cleaned-up during post-production, the process is time consuming and difficult. Also, unless you want that 'just cut' look, it's usually best to plan for at least a week between your last hair cut and the photo-shoot. Gents, if you are bald or receding, tell your photographer if you are self-conscious about it: they can always crop off the top of your head to hide the feature.

- Gents, if you are clean shaven, shave. Unwanted 5 o'clock shadow is rarely a good look. Try to schedule your shoot for the morning, or at a time when you can shave just before the shoot starts. If necessary, use a facial balm to calm any heat or soreness.

- Make-up. If you wear make-up, take a little time immediately before the shoot to apply it fresh. Typically, a natural look is best – remember, it's not a big night out. A light application of concealer or foundation can do wonders with reducing shiny or glossy areas (often evident when under studio lights or flash): it can also help disguise pores and minor blemishes, to produce smoother looking skin.

- If you don't wear make-up, often a quick face wash prior to your photo session will work well. Also, some Wet Wipes and a small towel can be helpful during the session if the session is long or the day is warm (remember that studio lights can be quite hot).

- Jewellery. What you normally wear to work will do nicely. Avoid anything too big or distracting.

### *A few pointers about clothing:*

- Wear what you usually wear in your professional environment and clothes that you feel comfortable and confident in.

- It's common nowadays to go without a tie; also without a jacket. Stick to a look that makes you feel good.

- All clothes should be clean, free from unwanted fluff and other marks, and ironed. Bring a lint roller, or some Sellotape.

- Avoid graphic logos, or brand names, or slogans (unless they are part of your company's brand identity and it is a deliberate choice to wear the 'uniform'). Remember: what's topical today might not be so good in a couple years' time (part of the reason why you should ensure you keep your head-shots current – no more than about 3 or 4 years' old).
- Patterns and thin stripes rarely work well. Thin or pin stripes can cause a moiré effect which, when viewed on a screen, can create a secondary ripple pattern.
- If converting to black and white (a popular choice), think about tones and contrast when making your clothing choices. If necessary, ask your photographer for advice. Contrasting tones and textures can work well with black and white images. On the other hand, your favourite light blue shirt and pink tie combination might look great in colour; but in black and white, it will likely create a very bland look.
- Visit the mirror just before the shoot.