



**The Art of Professional
Business Headshots**



We are going to relentlessly chase perfection, knowing full well we will not catch it, because nothing is perfect. But we are going to relentlessly chase it, because in the process we will catch excellence. I am not remotely interested in just being good.

Vince Lombardi

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**THE ART OF
PROFESSIONAL
HEADSHOTS**



“ Great things are done by a series
of small things brought together. ”

Vincent Van Gogh

MANY SMALL THINGS DONE WELL

I have to stifle a chuckle whenever I hear someone say that shooting a Corporate Headshot is a simple assignment.

Doing the job professionally means creating an image that not only captures your character, but also clearly conveys confidence and approachability.

Not only that, but the image **MUST** suit its intended use: Will the colours of the image clash with your website? Will it crop well in LinkedIn? Is it optimised to load quickly on websites?

Many of my clients have a belief when first contacting me that getting a headshot is simply a matter of booking a 15-30 minute appointment, getting dressed up and then smiling in front of a camera.

The honest truth is that creating a striking portrait takes a great deal of work, skill and planning.

Building rapport is essential to getting a client to look relaxed and natural, but there is so much more to the act of capturing a striking portrait than just ensuring that your client is relaxed.

On the following pages you'll get to see the process that lead to the creation of the portrait on the opposite page.

You'll get a good sense of what runs through my head when I work with a client, and also understand why I insist on meeting with each of my clients before we set a date for the shoot.



THE DIY APPROACH TO CORPORATE IMAGERY

So you've got a camera. Even better, it has a flash!

So you find a wall and get someone to take your photograph. Perhaps you've got a little more time on your hands and you've actually bothered to apply make-up.

Faster than you can say "Cheese!" your image has been saved onto your computer and uploaded to LinkedIn or your website. You do realise of course that many people looking to do business with you will make their first impression of you based on this photograph?

What does an image like this say about your professionalism and your standards?

Now, you may think the above examples are extreme, but take a look through LinkedIn and you'll soon realise that this is how most online profile images look.

Where are these images failing? The answer to this question is not a simple one.

Your gut just tells you that they don't look right, but why?

THE ART OF THE PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER

The images on the opposite page are lacking a LOT of things, and to better explain them, it would be best to look at each little aspect individually.

The point needs to be made right here at the start that ALL of these aspects when combined, are a DELIBERATE decision made by a professional to CREATE a professional image.

We are artists, and that implies both creativity and style. A good image is not a happy accident. It is an expression of the photographer's creativity and skill applied to the individual in front of the camera.

So what does a professional focus on when working with a client?

The list is long, but these are some of the main points.

- Lighting
- Make up and appearance
- Lighting style
- Lens choice
- Background choice
- Wardrobe
- Posing
- Variations – giving your client different options to choose from
- Image editing
- Apply your own creativity and skill to the job

LIGHTING

Having good lighting is not enough



Owning professional equipment does not imply professional skill. Simply putting someone in front of studio lighting is not going to cut the mustard. Understanding how light behaves, how to light a specific subject or specific colours, how to create mood with lighting, how to soften skin, how to accentuate the texture of clothing... These are all skillsets that take time and experience to learn.

This image was shot with studio lighting, and it's a disaster! Where does the background start and the body end? Aside from that, there is no femininity in this image - it is cold and emotionless.



MAKE-UP

It's a no-brainer. Make-up is an important part of creating the right look.

Applying make-up for photography differs substantially from make-up for going out in public. Knowing what to tell your clients (even males) is an important part of doing the job right.



LIGHTING STYLE

Lighting itself is a complicated affair. It isn't merely about getting the brightness right or illuminating your subject properly. Where you put your lights, how many lights you use and how you change the quality of these lights makes a HUGE difference.

Take the above images. All have been lit with 3 lights, but the position of these lights has resulted in 3 very different images. Which is right? Better to ask which is more appropriate. Notice how the light in the 3rd image actually helps to slim the face. This was the setup we decided work with.

Now this is not to say that the others are wrong. They create a different look, and my approach has always been to give my client the right to choose. (An option we discuss at the planning session.)



LENS CHOICE

Your lens choice makes another HUGE difference. Wide angle lenses used close to the subject cause a degree of distortion, and create faces that seem out of proportion.

It's not simply a question of using telephoto lenses. These lenses require some distance between subject and photographer, which a professional studio manages without trouble.

Try shooting a headshot in a small room. Invariably you'll be very close to the camera and end up looking like someone you have difficulty recognising.



BACKGROUND

The choice of background is also a deliberate decision. Pure black? Pure white? Something in-between? Colour?

When it comes to Business Portraits this is often a critical decision. Does it need to fit in with the design and colour scheme of the website? Do you have specific corporate colours that need to be adhered to?

Even if there is latitude with choosing a background colour, the choice a photographer makes can impact dramatically on the feel and aesthetic of the image.



WARDROBE

Different clothing creates a different feeling. Whether it be in the balance of the colours of the image or the impression that it creates of your personality, your choice of clothing is another critical piece of the puzzle

My base package always provides more than one image to my business clients. Having the same image on multiple platforms has far less impact than a different image tailored for each place it is displayed. However, wearing the same clothes in all these images will definitely dilute the impact that you're paying to create.



POSING

Posing is a HUGE subject, and even in the context of a Business Portrait, it's far more complex than you'd think.

The great thing is that, in business imagery, there are far fewer options than in glamour photography. No CEO is going to pose with their hands in their hair looking sultry and seductive.

The aim is simple: Create an image that screams "Confidence with Approachability."

POSING FOR EFFECT

How you stand in relation to the camera greatly affects the impression you create. Combine a strong pose with a sterner look and you'll have no trouble looking convincingly serious. But what if that isn't the look you're going for?

Again, this is not about getting a lucky shot.

A professional photographer understands what you're trying to achieve, and can direct your posing to achieve that result.



Poor Jawline



Strong Jawline

JAWLINE

Double chins and thick necks were never fashionable, but they are a common feature of many images simply because they are not dealt with when the image is being taken.

Chin down and head back and you're guaranteed to get it wrong.

This happens because of two things - apprehension and poor posing.

I work hard to keep my subjects at ease - in fact, the planning session is a great part of building rapport and trust so that the day of the shoot does not feel like a day at the dentist.

A professional knows how to talk to his clients and how to direct their posing to eliminate all the small things that weaken an image.



GIVE YOUR CLIENT OPTIONS

A client might say they need AN image for their business profile. The reality is that if one image is needed online, there'll be a use for more images elsewhere on business cards, brochures, other websites and social media platforms.

Meeting your clients unanticipated needs is another hallmark of a professional. Different images, different poses, different potential uses - give your client options.

And from a business point of view, more images bought makes the bank balance a lot happier.



Images with negative
space are great for use
with copy.



EDITING

NO IMAGE IS PERFECT STRAIGHT OUT OF THE CAMERA.

Let me repeat that - NO IMAGE IS PERFECT STRAIGHT OUT OF THE CAMERA.

Every shot we take needs to be worked on.

These 2 images are the before and after.

A professional works tirelessly to get things as close to perfect in-camera, but there is always work to be done in post-processing.

Sometimes it's only a little, sometimes it's quite a bit if we're creating something unusual or unique.

So what do we do in Lightroom and Photoshop?

All or any of the following:

- Cropping
- White Balance correction
- Skin toning
- Colour enhancement
- Skin softening
- Blemish removal
- Compositing (Think correcting closed eyes.)
- Sharpening
- ...and a lot more that I'm not thinking of



CREATIVITY AND SKILL

Every client has a story. Every client needs their imagery to represent them in a striking and professional way.

Sometimes you've got the option to create something very different and uniquely crafted for your client - a bespoke service if you will.

Aside from being a neurolinguistic programmer, this client is also a Powerhoop instructor, and wanted an image to promote this facet of her business life.

Every inch of this image is my idea (okay, Leonardo Da Vinci had a hand in it as well!)

The point being, a professional photographer is an artist, and art is an expression of skill, inspiration and creativity.



PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

There is a massive difference between the DIY approach and an image created by a professional.

Which would you rather have the world look at?

What to look for in your photographer

1. A rock-solid portfolio of images that appeals to your needs.
2. Good testimonials and good word of mouth - you need to know you'll be comfortable with the process and that your photographer has a reputation for good work and great service. A relaxed client is a client that looks natural in their images.
3. Attention to detail - the examples above are clear illustrations of all the small things that combine to make an amazing image. Choose someone who knows what they're doing and who is committed to perfection in their work.
4. Creativity and passion.
5. Professional equipment and professional lighting.
6. An established business.
7. Professional affiliation - are they accredited with a professional photographic body?