

Behind the lens

Choose a business headshot photographer who's right for you

Having a business portrait taken is one of those tasks that many businesspeople avoid for as long as possible. As busy as you are, the whole process of researching a photographer, scheduling a shoot and paying money for a package may seem overwhelming and time-consuming — not to mention the pressure of having to look good for the camera.

In fact, the reason many people procrastinate on having a business headshot done is that they feel insecure about their own knowledge of photography. After all the time and money you'll invest in the process, the last thing you want is to feel unhappy with the results. But there are most likely dozens, even hundreds, of commercial photographers you can choose from in your area. How do you know you're making the right choice when selecting a photographer?

Figuring out what you want

When you first decide it's time to refresh your business portrait (or have one taken for the first time), you might think you just need "a standard headshot" — assuming they're all the same.

But before you open the Yellow Pages and call the first listing under "Photographers," take another look. Every photographer has a different specialization and style. Photographers who tell you they do everything are probably not being truthful — it's likely they do more of some things than others.

Deciding what you want out of your business portrait is the hardest part. If you're like most non-artistic people, you'll know it when you see it. Spend a few days browsing the Web sites of local photographers you've found on search engines or through referrals, just to get familiar with the variety of styles and offerings. To narrow down your choices, consider the following tips:

- Look at photographers who show the kinds of images you want in their portfolios. If you're interested in a more traditional seated business headshot and a photographer's portfolio is mostly made up of wedding photography, portraits of children, or casual images of people (outdoors, posing with pets), you might want to move on to the next photographer. If you particularly like the photographer's style, write him or her an email asking for samples of business headshots. Sometimes photographers have done the kind of work you're looking for but may not showcase it in their portfolios.
- Decide what image you want to portray. How do you think of yourself, and how do you want to come across to business partners? Serious and subdued? Warm and approachable? Or maybe a little edgy and "out there?" Do some brainstorming and write down a list of adjectives that describe the image you'd like to create for yourself, based on your personality and business goals. As you browse photographers' portfo-

lios, write down the first adjectives that come to mind as you look at the images they show. Match up your wish list with the portfolios that seem to fit.

- Go with your gut. Art is subjective — and you naturally like some styles more than others. Bookmark sites featuring photography that draws you in, that engages and intrigues you, and that you enjoy looking at. Don't over-think it at this point; just grab what you like.

Study the quality

Look at the photographs in the portfolio carefully. If the portfolio is online, are the pictures big enough that you can see the details? (If not, the photographer might be trying to hide something.) Ask yourself:

- Are the photos in focus? (Look at the subject's eye closest to the viewer; it should be completely sharp.)
- Are the photos well-composed (balanced and visually interesting)?
- Do the skin tones look natural?
- Is there a sense of connection between the viewer and the subjects?

Most basically and importantly: do the people look good? The photographs might be technically perfect, but if you don't naturally connect with the subjects in the images, it's unlikely you'll be satisfied with the portrait that photographer takes of you.

Comparing packages — and personalities

Contact the photographers you like and compare their packages: the studio fee, price of images and number of images you'll get for each tier or combination.

Try to speak to the photographer on the phone if possible, asking some questions about the session and final deliverables. Reaching out by phone is less about getting the details of pricing and scheduling — you can do all that by email — than about getting to know the photographer. Do you feel like you can talk to him or her easily? Does he or she communicate well and make you feel comfortable? Remember that how you feel during your photo session will be reflected in your final image, so the more relaxed you are, the better your headshot will be.

Photographer checklist

When speaking to a photographer about a business headshot, here are some questions you want to be sure to ask:

- How long with the photography session take?
- Where will the photography session take place?
- What is included in my package/price? Can I upgrade or add on later?
- Will I get a standard or customized setup at my session for my package price?
- What can I expect to happen during the session?
- What is your turnaround time for image post-production?
- Do you offer retouching services?

- Will I receive full-resolution digital images?
- How are the final images delivered? If electronically, do I need special software to download them?
- When is payment due?
- Is there a satisfaction guarantee?

Remember that a good business photographer is someone who's not only skilled at the art of photography, but also at working well with businesspeople. When you choose the right photographer, your entire experience should be professional, convenient — and even fun!

About the author

Cheryl Savan is a San Francisco Bay Area business photographer who helps professionals make a strong first impression through distinctive business portraits. Learn more at <http://www.savanphoto.com/article908>

Want to republish this article? Here are the details:

Permission is granted to re-publish the text in this article provided the article is unchanged and used in its entirety (including all text & links in the bio box). Permission is granted to post & distribute the PDF of this article provided that: 1) the PDF is hosted on your own site (and is not merely linking to the PDF on [savanphoto.com](http://www.savanphoto.com)) and 2) you include text on your site with a short description of the article including a link to <http://www.savanphoto.com/article908>