

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

The Shoot Day Playbook

A small business guide to planning a commercial photo shoot that pays for itself

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Contents

Introduction 3

1 Know what the photos are for 4

List every place a photo will appear 4

Give every photo a job 5

2 Build a shot list that earns its keep 7

Sort your shots into three piles 7

Write each shot so a stranger could take it 8

3 Get the location and people ready 10

The day-before checklist 10

Help people relax in front of the camera 10

4 On the day 12

5 After the shoot 13

About the author 14

Introduction

Good photos are one of the few marketing costs that keep paying you back. The same picture can sit on your website, your menus and your social media for years. But most of the value of a shoot is decided before the photographer arrives. This guide walks you through the preparation I ask every client to do, in the order I ask them to do it.

01

Know what the photos are for

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER

You can name every place your new photos will appear and what each one needs to show.

Most shoots that disappoint go wrong weeks before anyone picks up a camera. The photographer turns up, the light is lovely, and nobody can say where the pictures are going. You end up with forty beautiful images and still no photo for your About page.

So we start with the dull question that saves the most money: where will these photos live?

1.1 List every place a photo will appear

Walk through your business the way a customer does. Write down every screen, page and printed thing that needs a picture. Be specific: "the website" is not one place, it is six.

- Home page banner, wide, with space for a headline
- About page: you, looking like someone people would trust
- One clear photo for each product or service page
- Social media, in square and upright crops
- Print: menus, brochures, signage and event stands

TIP

Ask your web designer for the exact image sizes before the shoot. A wide banner and an upright story need very different framing, and it is far cheaper to get both on the day than to crop one badly later.

1.2 Give every photo a job

A good commercial photo has one job. Before the shoot, give each one a single sentence: "This photo shows that our kitchen is spotless." "This one shows a real person enjoying the product." If you cannot write the sentence, you probably do not need the photo.

FROM MY EXPERIENCE

The forty-photo shoot with no About picture

A café owner booked me for a full day to "get loads of nice shots". We got them: coffee pours, pastries, morning light on the counter. Three weeks later she emailed to ask for a photo of herself for the website. She had spent the whole day behind the camera, carrying trays. Every shot list I agree now starts with the people who run the business.

WORKSHEET

Where will your photos live?

Fill in one row for every place a photo will appear.

Where it appears	Shape	What it must show

Which three photos matter most to your business?

02

Build a shot list that earns its keep

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER

You have a prioritised shot list your photographer can plan the day around.

A shot list is not a wish list. It is the order of play for the day, with the most important pictures first, while everyone is fresh and the light is right.

2.1 Sort your shots into three piles

1. **Must have.** The photos the business cannot do without. Usually five to eight.
2. **Should have.** Useful, but the world will not end without them.
3. **Nice to have.** The extras you grab if time allows.

How a shot list comes together



Each step builds on the one before. Most clients need about an hour in total.

2.2 Write each shot so a stranger could take it

"Team photo" is not a shot. "All six staff outside the front door, smiling, with room above for the logo" is. The more specific each line, the faster the day goes.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Plan no more than about twelve set-ups for a half day. Every change of room, outfit or lighting takes ten to twenty minutes, however organised everyone is.

WORKSHEET

Your must-have shots

Tick each one off on the day.

- [ ] Owner portrait for the About page, upright, plain background
- [ ] Shop front, wide, in morning light
- [ ] Three product close-ups on the counter
- [ ] The team at work, natural, not looking at the camera
- [ ] Details: hands, tools and textures

Anything else that would be a shame to miss?

03

Get the location and people ready

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER

Your space, products and people are ready the day before, not the hour before.

The camera notices everything you have stopped noticing: the extension lead behind the till, the sun-faded poster, the sticky note on the fridge. An hour of tidying the day before saves an afternoon of retouching.

3.1 The day-before checklist

- [ ] Clear every surface that will appear in a wide shot
- [ ] Clean windows, mirrors and anything glass or chrome
- [ ] Choose and press outfits, with a spare top for everyone
- [ ] Have products ready, clean and labelled facing forward
- [ ] Tell neighbours or staff when and where you will be shooting
- [ ] Charge phones so you can post a behind-the-scenes story

3.2 Help people relax in front of the camera

Most people dislike being photographed, and it shows in the first twenty minutes. Start with the shots where people are busy doing their job. Leave the posed portraits until everyone has forgotten the camera is there.

Usually works well	Usually best avoided
Plain, mid-tone colours	Small checks and fine stripes
Clothes that fit well now	Brand-new shoes
Your usual work clothes	Big logos from other brands

> **TIP**
>
> Ask people to bring the outfit on a hanger rather than wearing it in. Creases from the car show up in every photo.

04

On the day

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER

You know your role during the shoot, and what to leave to the photographer.

Your job on the day is to make decisions quickly, keep people and products moving, and protect the must-have list. The photographer will handle light, framing and timing.

- Keep a printed shot list and tick things off
- Have one person in charge of answering questions
- Check the back of the camera after each set-up, not each photo

05

After the shoot

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER

You choose, store and use your photos so they keep working for years.

Choose your favourites within a week, while the day is fresh. Name and store them so anyone in the business can find the right photo in under a minute, and plan where each one will appear in the next three months.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Orla Brennan

Orla Brennan is a fictional commercial photographer, invented to show what Sell on Repeat Studio Lite can make. The advice is real; the author is not.

Plan a shoot that runs on time, stays on budget and gives you photos you will use for years.

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