The important role of brand photography in visual identity

Category: Identity
written by Stephen Peate | 13 September 2024
How often do you consider the role of brand photography in visual identity? You know your logo, color palette, and similar factors have a direct impact on potential customers, investors, and even employees, but what about your professional headshots, and social media posts?

Too many companies assume that they can fill their marketing materials and assets with stock images, and still forge a powerful connection with their ideal clients or customers.

The truth? Stock photos can actually harm your reputation.

They look generic, lazy, and sometimes even ridiculous – that's why so many people use them to make memes. Professional brand photos, on the other hand, elevate your brand.

They give customers a real insight into your company, your products, and your personality. If you want to create great visual content (for any reason), you need professional photography.

What is brand photography?

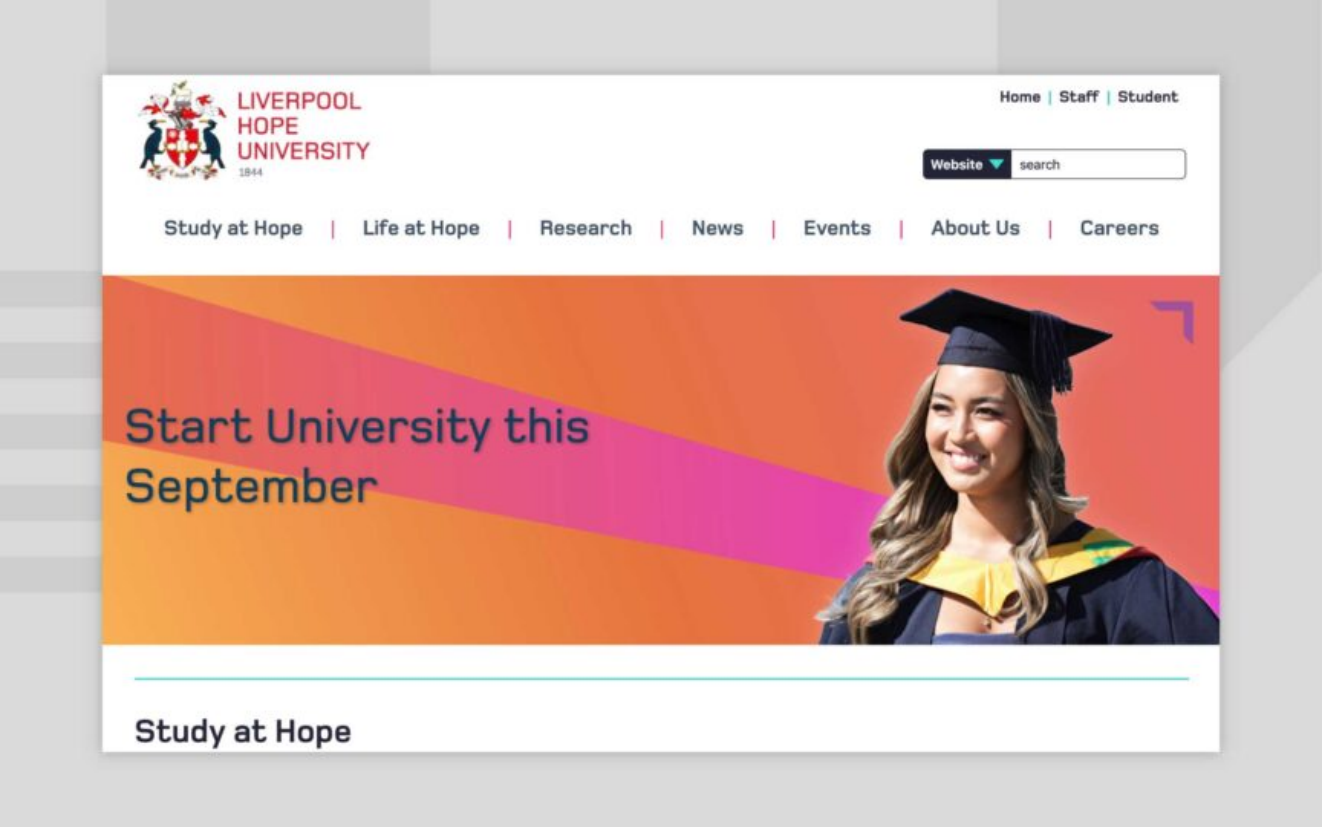
Brand photography is the collection of bespoke (unique) images companies use to represent themselves, and form clear, visual identities. Examples of brand photography range from the professional images you use on your company's "About Us" page, to product photos.

Most companies also use brand photography to elevate marketing

strategies, creating lifestyle images to appeal to their target audience, or sharing photos on social media platforms and in blog posts.

What differentiates professional brand photography from all the other "photographic images" you might use is that every picture is unique to you. These photos come from a genuine photo shoot, featuring your team members, products, and other specific assets.

As an example, take a look at our client, Liverpool Hope University's website. It's not just packed with generic images of "students".



The images feature genuine students, in actual classrooms, or on the campus grounds.

The importance of brand photography

So, why can't you just use free stock photos instead? Plenty of companies do. After all, we know visual assets make a difference to customer engagement. Visual content receives 94%

more views than text-only content, and it's more likely to connect with customers on an emotional level.

But not all visual content is alike. Stock photos are great for breaking up blocks of text from time to time, but they're not going to tell your customers anything about your brand.

Stock photos are *designed* to be generic, so lots of people can use them.

That means they're never going to differentiate you from the competition, show customers your unique personality, or send the perfect message.

To make matters worse, stock photos just don't look authentic. An obviously staged image of a smiling person won't convince your customers you're trustworthy.

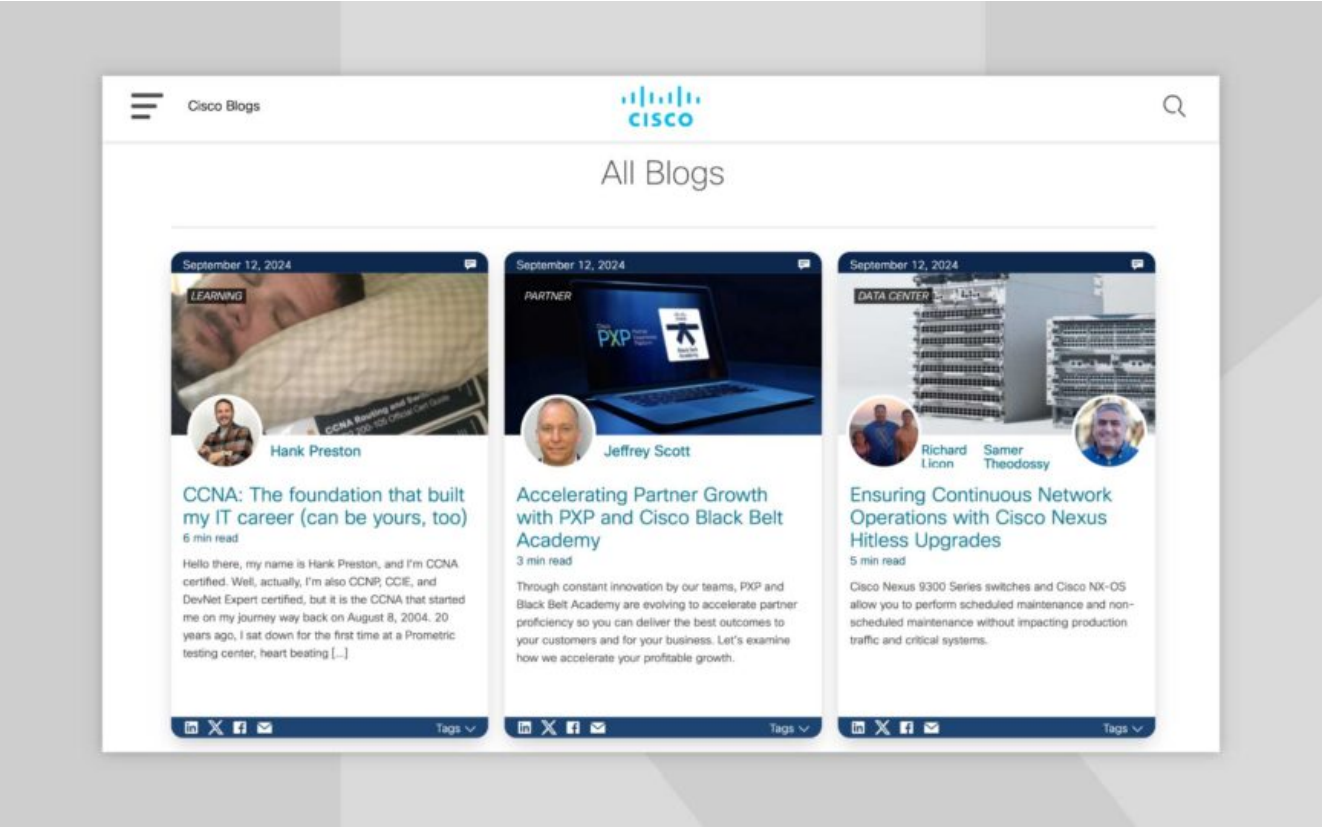
Brand photography, on the other hand, helps you stand out. Professional photographs of your products show customers all the unique features that make your solution compelling.

Unique photos of your team showcase the real people behind your organization. They go the extra mile to forge emotional connections, whether you're using them on your website, social media pages, or product packaging.

When companies need custom brand photography

Notably, you don't necessarily need to invest in branding photography packages every time you produce a new blog post. Even global brands use generic photos sometimes.

Here's an example of Cisco using a stock photo for the cover image on a blog post:



But there are times when custom brand photography is absolutely essential, such as when you're:

- **Creating core brand assets:** Whether you're establishing your visual brand identity for the first time, or rebranding your organization, you'll need professional photographs of your executives, team, office, and products.
- **Launching products:** All products should have their own specific photography. You can't use a generic image of a computer or laptop to sell your new tech. You need to actually show customers what's unique about your solution with a photo shoot.
- **Showcasing your team:** If you want to highlight your employees, and boost your employer brand, paying for professional head shots makes sense. It also makes your "About Us" page look more professional than if you were to ask people to upload selfies.

Mastering identity photography: Steps for success

So, how do you create incredible brand photography? After hosting more than a few brand photoshoot sessions for myself, I've learned there's more to it than simply purchasing a professional camera.

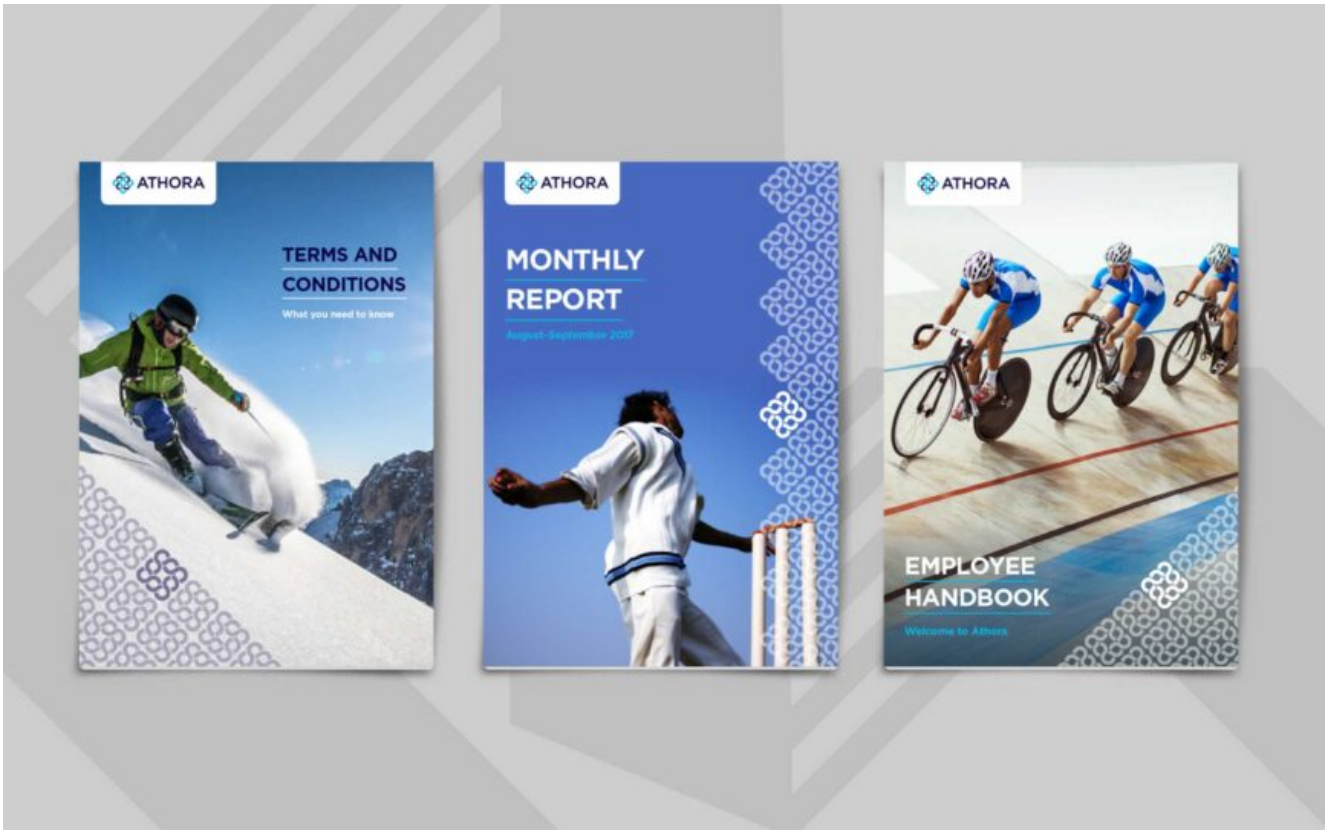
Here are the key steps you'll need to take for a phenomenal brand photography session.

Step 1: Set your brand photography guidelines

Photos *should* tell a story. Every image you share with your audience needs to encompass a narrative about your brand, your product, or what you stand for. The story behind each photo in your visual identity toolkit will vary, depending on its purpose.

However, before you go and hire your professional brand photography team, it's worth establishing a clear idea of your "overall story." This will form your brand photography guidelines.

For inspiration, take a look at the photography used by our client, Athora. It tells a story about achievement, adventure, and exploration.



Ask yourself:

- What should always feature in our photographs? I.e., Real people, specific brand colors, or nature (for sustainable companies).
- What are your key do’s and don’ts? Is there a color style you want to avoid like “Sepia”? Do you want to ensure you differentiate your photography from that of competing brands?
- How will you convey your brand essence in your photography, perhaps with specific lighting, shapes, or props?
- How should photos be edited? Minimalistic photos with less saturation can seem calming and sophisticated, while vibrant imagery is more fun and cinematic.

Step 2: Create a comprehensive brief

When you work with branding experts like Fabrik, we can give you some direction on how to tell your brand story effectively

with the right photos. However, it always helps to go into a brand photography session with clear instructions on what you want to achieve.

First, decide on the type of photos you want. Are you hiring a professional photographer for headshots to help boost your personal brand? Are you creating images for your website that shows of your products, office, or team in a unique way?

Are you launching a new product, and need your brand shoot to include images of your offering from every angle, to attract potential clients? Maybe you're even creating a brand press kit.

Once you know what type of photos you want, outline instructions for your photographer.

Give them:

- A description of where you're going to use your pictures (this will help them to choose the right formatting and ratio for images).
- How many photos you need, and how many different angles and styles you want to explore.
- Who your target audience is, and what you want them to feel and think when they see your photos?

It can even be a good idea to give your photographer a mood board that offers insights into your brand colors, and the types of images you like and dislike.

Step 3: Prepare all the assets you'll need

Remember, your brand photography should be unique to you, which means it needs to include specific things, like certain props, people, and locations. Don't just rely on your photographer to provide everything for you.

Sometimes, the location itself will be part of what you're promoting with your photos, in which case, you'll already know where the shoot will take place. For instance, educational groups like East Kent College typically host shoots on their own campus.



Once you've chosen your location, think about all of the other factors that will influence the visual appeal of your photographs, such as:

- Outfits, hair and makeup for the people in your photos.
- Props like mugs, pets, plants, technology, or anything relevant to your brand.
- The products you need to showcase, and their packaging

If you're not sure exactly what you'll need to provide for the shoot, the brand photography business you work with should be able to give you some direction.

Step 4: Choose the right brand photography services

iPhone photos will only get you so far when it comes to great brand photography. While your standard smartphone can produce some high quality images, nothing is going to give you the same results as a professional branding photography team.

Remember, photographers don't just take the pictures. They also act as a creative director, making sure the lighting and positioning between objects is right. They'll help to ensure you capture the right positive energy in every image, and give your models consistent creative direction.

Plus, they'll be responsible for editing your photos, tweaking all of the little elements that turn a standard picture into a professional-grade image.

Here are a few things to consider when choosing your expert:

- **Experience:** How much experience does the photographer have taking the photos you need. Are they experts in personal brand photography? Do they usually work with larger organizations? Do they feel comfortable with your industry and your target audience?
- **Style:** Most photographers have a specific style. Check out the portfolio of each company you consider to see if their style will match your brand story and needs. Remember, some photographers will be able to work with a range of styles.
- **Budget:** Great photos are going to cost *something*. Don't make the mistake of trying to find the cheapest option. Consider the scope of your project, your shot list, how much editing support you need, and budget accordingly.

Brand photography examples to learn from

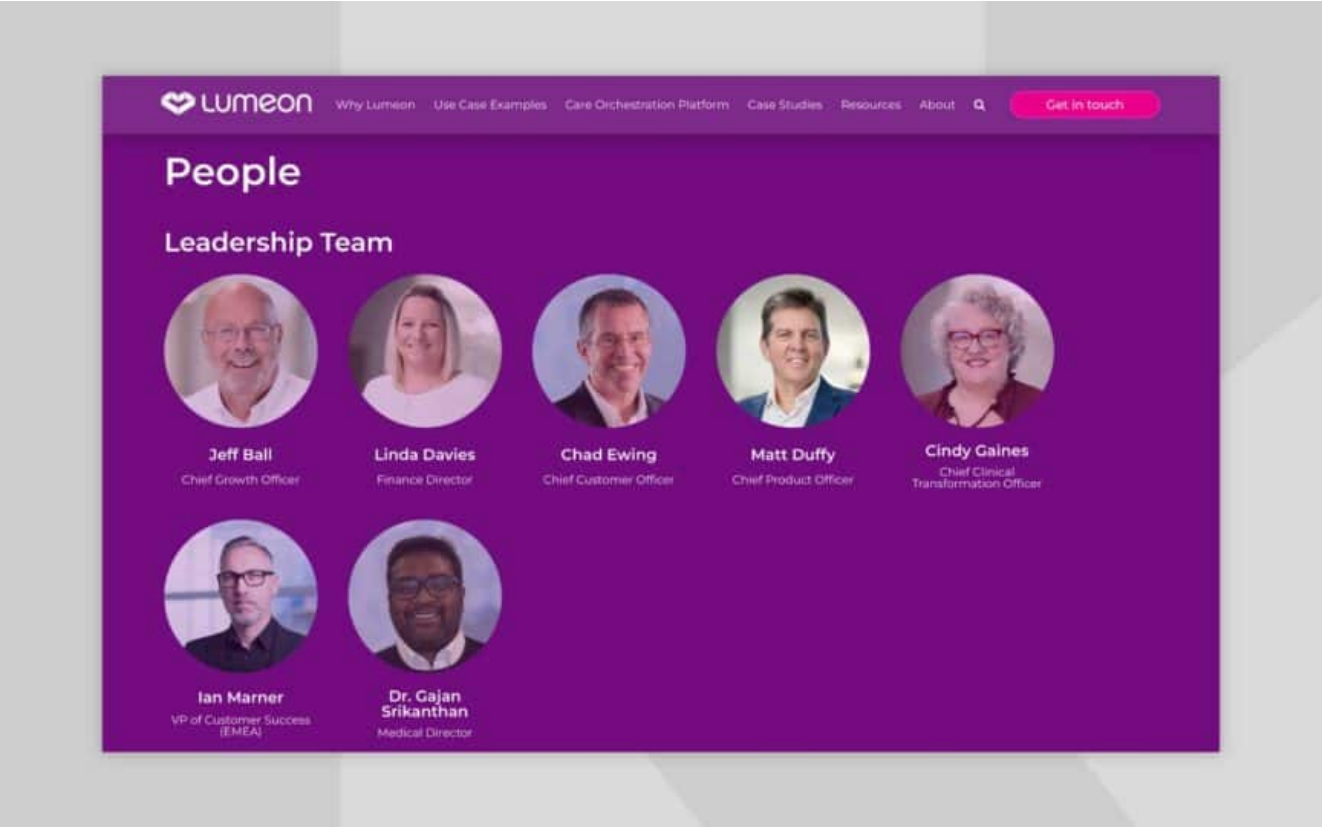
At this point, you know why a branding photoshoot is important, and how you can prepare to get the right results. However, before you dive into your session, you may want a little inspiration.

Here are some great examples of different types of brand photography to help you.

Lumeon: Friendly and professional headshots

Headshots are a common part of a company's brand photography and visual identity toolkit. Today's consumers want to forge connections with the people behind a company, and a good "About" page on your website can help to accomplish that.

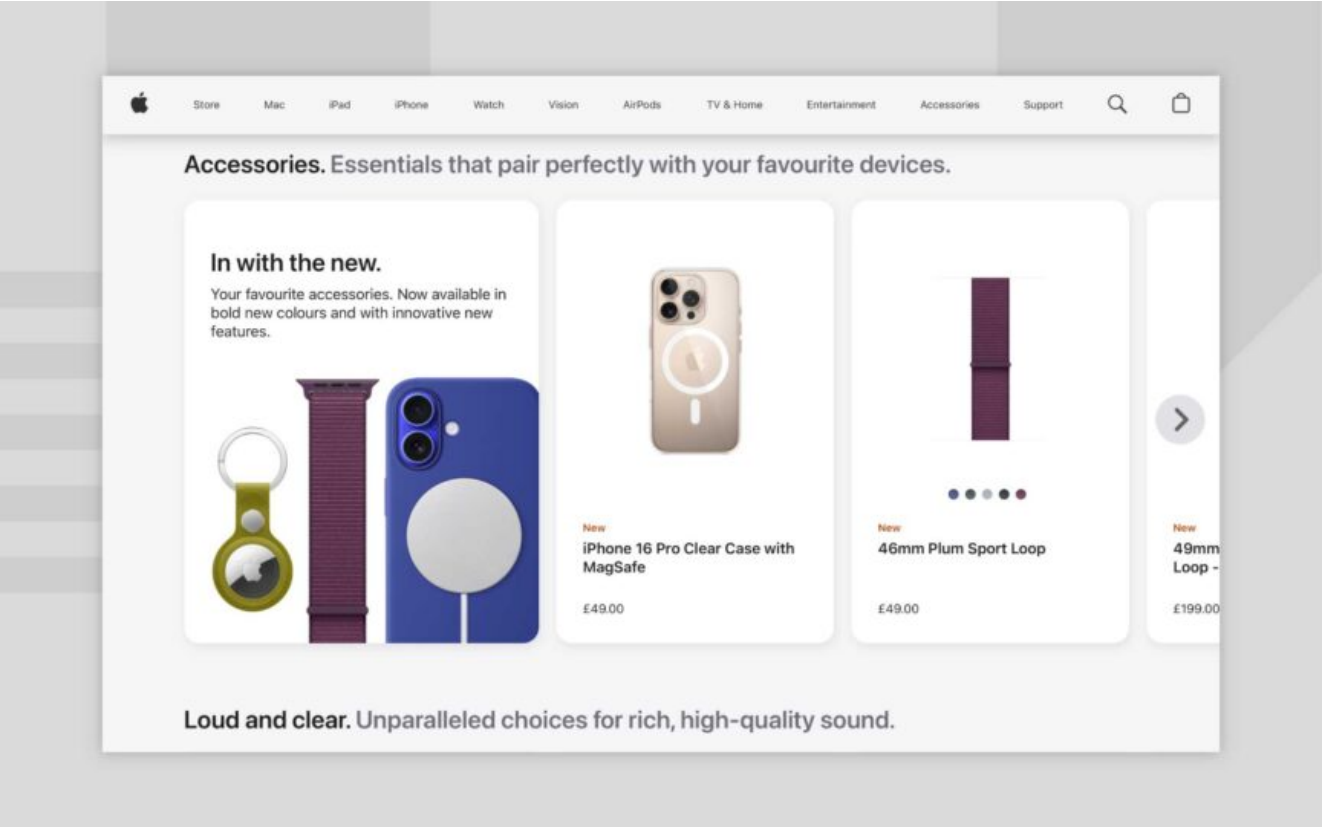
Take a look at our client, Lumeon, its "People" page features headshots of all the core members of its team. You'll notice the headshots are consistent in style and overall positioning, which makes the page look more professional and boosts the credibility of the company.



Apple: Impressive product photography

Product photography is another essential component of any brand photography strategy. The more eye-catching and memorable your product photos are, the more they'll elevate your brand. Plus, high-quality photos will help online shoppers visualize your products, and increase conversions.

Apple uses crisp, clean, and professional photography for all of its images. All products are displayed against a white background, consistent with the company's modern brand. The company shares shots taken from a range of angles, giving customers more information.



Impetus: Workplace photography

Workplace photography can serve a few purposes when you're building your visual brand identity. First, it gives customers, investors, and other stakeholders an excellent behind-the-scenes look at your company. When they see your office, they can visualize your team hard at work.

Secondly, workplace photography can help to boost your employer brand, showing potential team members what it would be like to work with you. Look at how this image of the Impetus Office conveys the modern and forward-thinking nature of the company:

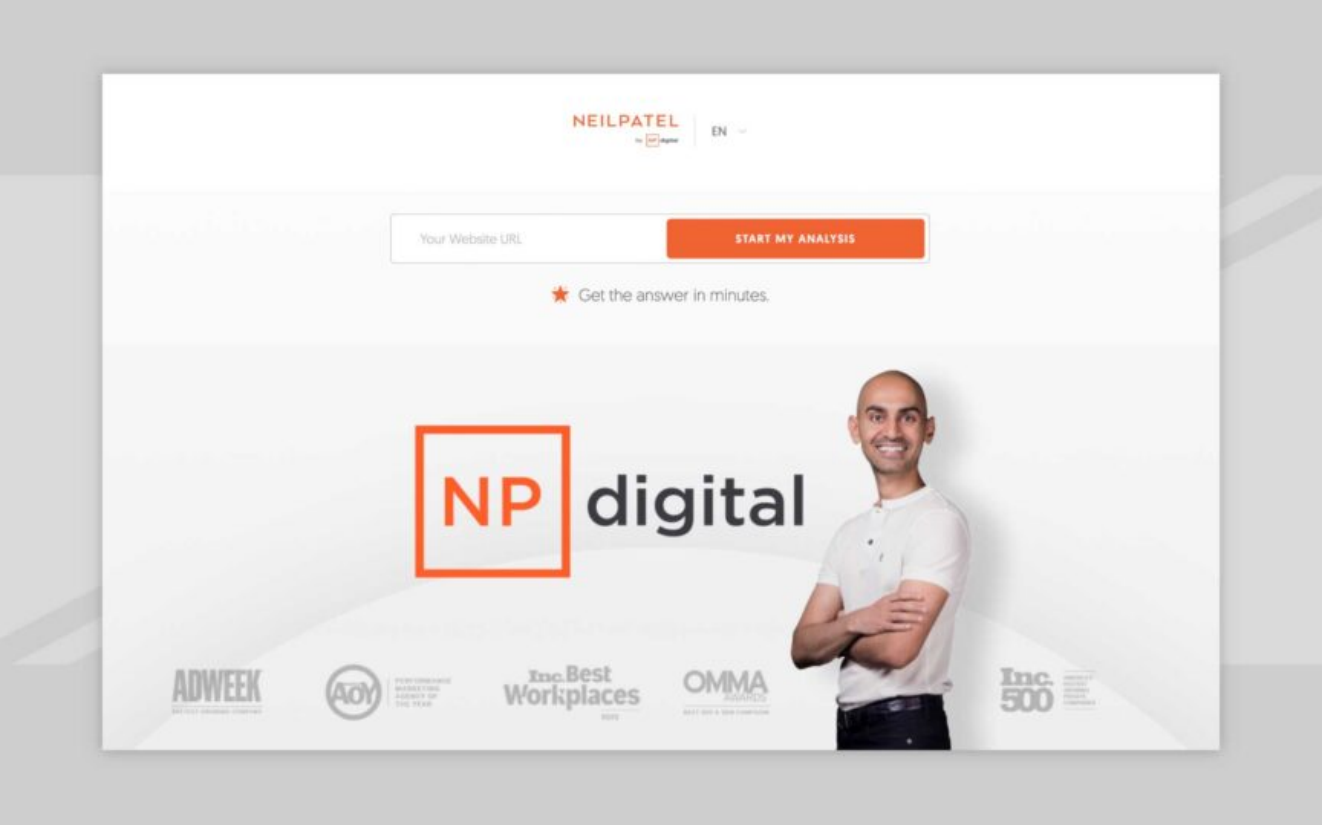


Neil Patel: Personal brand photography

Great brand photography isn’t just crucial for companies. It can be critical to developing a strong personal brand too. After all, with a personal brand, you literally are the face of your business.

Personal brand photography doesn’t just have to revolve around headshots. You can take images for a range of different use cases.

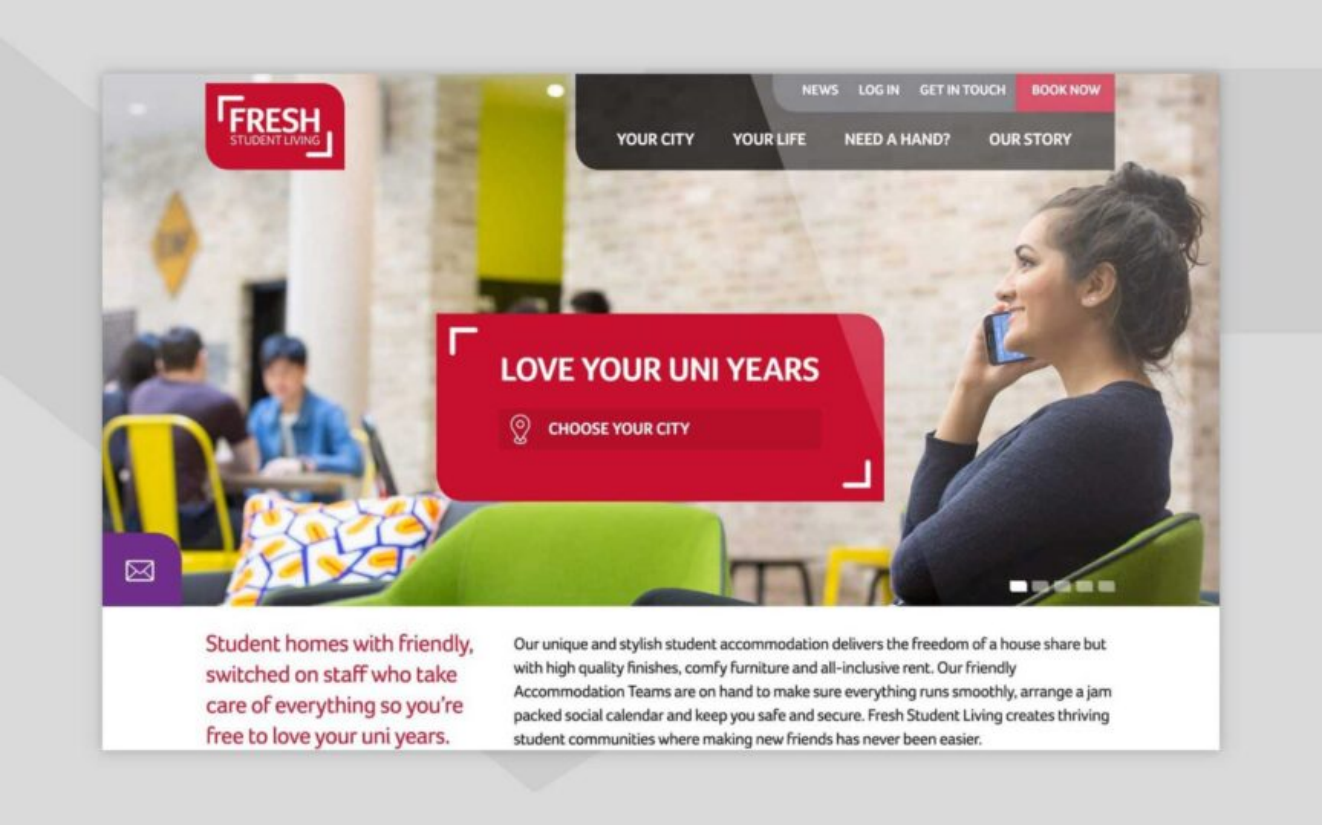
Look at how Neil Patel uses images of himself for everything from his landing pages to the ads he uses on his website:



Fresh Student Living: Lifestyle photography

Lifestyle photography, used as part of your visual brand identity, is how you help customers to envision their lives with your product or service. Companies selling sports equipment, like bicycles, don't just post static images of the bike.

More often than not, they add pictures to their websites and marketing campaigns that show people actually using those products. Similarly, educational accommodation groups like Fresh Student Living fill their websites and marketing campaigns with images of the customers they support.



The key to success with lifestyle photography is making it feel authentic and realistic. Forget obviously staged images and prioritize candid shots.

Tips for better professional brand photography

Before I send you off to create new photos to elevate your overall brand and visual strategy, I want to share a few bonus tips for your creative process. The following best practices should ensure your images have a positive impact on your target audience…

- **Remember your brand personality:** Let your real, genuine personality as a brand shine through. Staged photos rarely deliver the best results, so have some fun with your content, and don't be afraid to think outside of the box.
- **Consider composition:** Your corporate or personal brand photographer should be able to help with this, but

remember that composition is key. Think carefully about where people and products are placed in each shot. Consider lighting and balance.

- **Update your photos regularly:** As your brand evolves, along with your marketing strategy and products, update your photos. Book a new branding photography session every couple of years at a minimum, to keep your assets fresh!
- **Remember editing:** If, for some reason, you choose to take professional photos yourself, don't forget to edit them. Even simple things, like tweaking color, brightness, and contrast can have a huge impact on the effect of your final photos.
- **Pay attention to feedback:** Listen to what customers say about your photos, particularly if you're sharing them on social media. Find out which images resonate best with your customers, and use that guidance to drive your future strategy.

Mastering your photography identity

Your brand's visual identity depends on more than just your logo and color palette. Brand photography also plays an essential role in demonstrating what makes your company unique, and building emotional connections with your audience.

Knowing how to take photos that highlight your brand's personality, capture the attention of the right audience, and convey your brand story will be crucial to your success in the future.

Whether you're launching a new business or product, rebranding your company, or looking for ways to elevate your personal brand, a branding photography session could be a crucial tool for growth.

Reach out to Fabrik today to see how we can leverage our years

of experience in the branding sector, to create photos that enhance your visual identity and marketing strategy.

Fabrik: A branding agency for our times.