

# Making a Great First Impression

*Find out how a professional headshot helps persuade clients to hire you— and why a bad photo could send them to your competitors*

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CHRISTINA ST. JOHN *Studios*

— visual communication agency —

brand development | design | photography



**THE MIGHTY  
MARKETER**

Your guide to making more money as a freelancer

*If you want prospective clients to assume that you're professional, dependable, and worth the money they'll pay for your services, use a professional headshot. In today's digital world, prospective clients are most likely to first see you online (on your website, LinkedIn profile, or other social media profile). You only have a few seconds to make a great first impression.*

## Why Do-it-Yourself is a Bad Choice

Resist the temptation to shoot your own headshot or have a friend do this using a cell phone or a regular camera. Your headshot will look unprofessional and cheap—two things you don't want your prospects to think about you. Just like you hire an accountant to help with your taxes or a lawyer for legal issues, you need to hire a professional photographer if you want a professional headshot.

A professional photographer knows the best poses and facial expressions for a professional headshot, and how to compose and light photos to create the right mood. He or she knows what to do and say to bring out the glint in your eye or the smile that you may not like but is actually very flattering in a photo.

### Ways to Use Your Headshot

- Your website
- Your LinkedIn profile
- Other social media profiles
- Other marketing materials
- Speaking engagements
- Publications

## Finding a Great Photographer

Getting recommendations from other freelancers who have professional headshots is the best way to find a great photographer. If you can't find a photographer near you this way, try an Internet search. Once you've identified potential photographers for your headshot, assess them out using the same process a client might use to decide whether to hire you:

1. **Review the photographer's work.** Pictures speak louder than words. Visit the photographer's website to see his/her portfolio of past work. Things to beware of include:
  - Outdoor photos where the person has dark shadows under the eyes, bright patches of light on the face, or uneven skin tone
  - Studio photos where the person looks too good to be true ("airbrushed to death") or is posed in light that's unflattering to his/her face and shape.
2. **Look for professional headshots.** Make sure the photographer is experienced in headshots.
3. **Get references and contact them.** If you didn't find the photographer through a recommendation, ask for references and talk to a few people who have used the photographer. The photographer's portfolio may be great, but there are other factors to consider, like timely delivery of your photos.

## Case Study: Before and After a Professional Headshot

When Lori De Milto decided to add a photo to her website in 2008, she asked a neighbor who's a good amateur photographer to take her photo. It wasn't bad (see the top photo), and it was much better than some of the photos of freelancers she's seen. But it wasn't a professional headshot. De Milto didn't realize that there was anything wrong with her headshot until she hired Christina Cericola of Christina St. John Studios to take her professional headshot (see the bottom photo) a few years later.



Like many people, De Milto is uncomfortable having her photo taken. She was pleasantly surprised by how easy Cericola made the experience, and how Cericola's instructions about posing resulted in a fabulous professional headshot.



## Making the Most of Your Photo Session

When preparing for your photo session, choose outfits that reflect your style but are professional and project confidence. Don't wear clothes you don't like or find uncomfortable. This will show in your photos.

Bring several outfits to choose from, including one or two blazers, which make you look more professional without being stuffy or uncomfortable. The photographer can help you decide which outfits are most flattering and take photos of you in different outfits.

Women should wear something personal, like a piece of jewelry or a scarf. This can make you seem more personable and approachable. Men should bring a nice shirt, tie and jacket. Everyone should stay away from busy prints, which can be distracting and are difficult to photograph well. Plaids and checkerboard patterns can

### Dressing for Success

- Bring several outfits to your photo session, including one or two blazers
- Stay away from busy prints
- People who wear glasses:  
Consider bringing a pair of empty frames to eliminate glare from lenses
- Women:  
Wear a piece of jewelry or a scarf that reflects your personality
- Men:  
Bring a dress shirt, tie and jacket

create especially unpleasant patterns in photos that make you look less professional. If you always wear glasses and they're a part of your look, consider bringing a pair of empty frames for the photo session to eliminate glare from eyeglass lenses.

## Working with the Photographer

A small, genuine smile usually works best for a professional headshot. The photographer knows what to say and do to get a genuine smile from you. Always ask the photographer to shoot you with and without a smile so you can decide which option looks best for you. During the photo session, the photographer will tell you how to pose for the best photo. To help the photographer direct you effectively, tell him/her what you want your clients to assume about you when they see your professional headshot.

### Posing for Your Headshot

- Sit at a 45-degree angle from the camera so you look less two-dimensional.
- Lean forward slightly and bring your chin out and down to give your jawline a more flattering look and minimize double chins.
- If you're sitting, put your feet up on your toes to straighten your back without looking stiff.
- Don't face your body directly toward the camera, as this can make you look wider than you are.

## Reviewing and Choosing Your Headshot

Show your proofs to colleagues and professional connections. Ask them which they like best and why. Then choose the photos that best meet your marketing needs.

The photographer should give you different files for print and electronic media. Print files, used in magazines, books, and so forth, must be high resolution. Photo files for the web need to be quite small but high quality and not slow down a website. Social media sites use the same file sizes but each site dictates the size and dimensions. For example, if the social media site requires a square photograph, part of your head or arms might be chopped off. Your photographer can size and compose your headshot to get the most out of the space provided.

At a minimum, the photographer should give you high-resolution color and black and white files of the shot you choose. A web designer can re-size the photo for the web if needed but a publisher can't resize a web photo for print. You can also ask the photographer to provide the files in web size, or cropped for certain social media sites.

When submitting your photos for publication, you may need a license from the photographer, who holds the copyright for your photos. The photographer can give this to you.

## Projecting a Professional Image

When clients choose a freelancer, they look for someone they can trust and count on to do a great job. A great headshot lets you become the “face” of your brand and project a professional image.



## Christina St. John Studios

Christina St. John Studios offers a full range of graphic design services and on-location photography.

**Visit Christina St. John Studios**  
[csjstudios.com](http://csjstudios.com)

**Contact Christina St. John Studios**  
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## The Mighty Marketer

Discover the secrets to making more money as a freelancer through The Mighty Marketer. Use our books, free resources, and e-newsletter to:

- Rise above the crowd of freelancers
- Develop high-impact, low- or no-cost marketing tools
- Build your network and reputation
- Get repeat business and referrals, and more.

Find out how freelance writer Lori De Milto tapped into the power of marketing to land as much work as she wanted — usually more—since shortly after launching her business — and how you can do it too. De Milto has been helping clients engage, inform and motivate their audiences through targeted medical copy and content since 1997. She is a fellow of the American Medical Writers Association and frequently writes and presents on marketing for freelancers.

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[TheMightyMarketer.com](http://TheMightyMarketer.com)

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