Product Photos: A Guide for Fashion Retailers

A basic guide to creating photos for e-commerce websites

Importance of Product Imagery

Brick and mortar stores are no longer the only option to shop, but they still hold one of the biggest trump cards when it comes to shopping—the ability to see, touch and try products before purchase.

Creating good quality product images in lieu of the ability to actually sense the object are one of the biggest challenges e-commerce industries face.

Product images have been able to capture a large part of the imagination that products evoke offline - they provide a sensory experience in an otherwise impersonal medium.

E-commerce images are important. They set the narrative, convey your brand story, and make that all-important sales connection. They can, in short, make or break your site engagement and conversions.

This guide will help you understand the basics of good product imagery, best practices for product photos, and how tech solutions can help deliver good product imagery for your e-commerce site.

75% of Online Shoppers Rely on Product Photos When Deciding on a Potential Purchase[1]

1.   SeattleWebDesign

A Good Product Image

Good product images have the ability to attract, convert, and retain. There are three basic things that can ensure that your product photos are effective and efficient.

Settings and Background:

A good product image needs to provide a clear, clean, and uncomplicated, appealing picture of the product.

Composition:

Your product image must look balanced and harmonious. This requires the product and parts of the product to be distributed properly inside the frame.

Angle:

The appearance of tri-dimensionality is essential for product images. The traditional way of capturing a product is from the front on a slightly downward-looking angle - though it differs for different types of products. The best product photos actually are multiple photos showing the product from different angles.

When I look at today's most successful brands, the first thing that strikes me are clear identities—at their core, they all tell a story. So finding the right visual narrative is crucial in my mind. Because we don't just buy products anymore: we seek out connections.[1]

Patrick La Roque
Professional photographer, speaker and author.
Fujifilm X Photographer.

1.   Product Photography: How to market products with photos - XCart

Product photos: Best practices

With the right mix of creativity, brand language, and aesthetic flexibility, retailers have the ability to showcase the product in ways that can kindle the shoppers' imagination and curiosity.

There are some best practices to follow that can ensure your photos reach the intended audience, in an intended manner:

- **Optimized size and high-quality** (More details on this in the next section!) that provide your shoppers with the clearest, most accurate picture possible of your product.
- **Alternate views** that showcase the product from different angles and proximities to help your shoppers truly understand how the product looks/flows from different angles. This makes up for the lack of examination that they can do in an offline store.
- **Photo variations** for every color, variation, texture that the product comes in.
- **Zoom features on the site** that allows shoppers to observe details of the product and examine the product as closely as possible from various angles.
- **Consistent** product images (based on brand language) across the site and other channels that display your products.

While the above list functions as a high-level checklist, there are specific aspects of your product images that need more attention to help you deliver the best results. Whether you are hiring a photographer or working on the image by yourself there are two primary elements of product photos that need attention: **Lighting and Background**

67% of consumers say that the quality of a product image is "very important" in selecting and purchasing the product.[1]

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1. It's all about the images - MDGadvertising

Lighting

1. The best lighting gives your product **clarity,** shows its **colors** as close to reality as possible, and highlights **textural aspects** that can otherwise remain in the shadows.

2. While shadows are important to make the photo look realistic, **hard shadows reduce clarity** and must be minimized with balanced lights from different directions.

3. At least **two light sources** are essential.

4. **Natural light** must be used carefully, depending on the type of the product and time of day.

5. Shadows, reflections, and streaming light features can be managed with proper **bounce boards, and plexiglass reflectors**.

Background

The photo background should hit the sweet spot of accentuating the product while not taking attention away from it.

A seamless white or off-white background is most preferred. There are different **seamless background options**. For smaller products, this can be created by placing the product on a slightly folded white poster board or sheet. For larger products or humans, there are bigger versions of these props available.

While these seamless backgrounds can also be achieved while editing during post-production, it needs to be done with care so as to not seem unnatural, artificial, or like the product is eerily floating in space. Retaining a few shadows works well.

Color:

The color of the background plays an important role in helping the product pop-out a lot more and highlights features of the products well. A **light or white colored background is ideal** for product images. They make the image product-centric and have a low impact on the image.

There are some exceptions though. Based on the type or function, some images may require a specific background color or image. These need to ensure that the background is not busy, does not contain bright colors, and retains the product as the focus.

- For products on mannequins, a light grey background is often preferred.
- Jewelry brands typically use a black background to make the metal and stones stand out and shine better.
- For furniture images, a wooden or simple carpeted floor that helps replicate the real world as close as possible is necessary.

78% of online shoppers want photographs to bring products to life.[1]

It's important that the photographs of the products look professional. The photos should be clear and in focus with proper exposure, sport a simple background without any distractions, and utilize the rule of thirds for proper placement of the product within the frame. You might wish to invest in a lightbox to help you achieve good lighting and a simple background.[1]

Susan Tuttle
DSLR photographer, iPhoneographer, author of Art of Everyday Photography, online photo artistry instructor.

1.   Product Photography: How to market products with photos - XCart

Photo Technicalities

You may be familiar with some (or all!) of the technical photography terms in this slide. Read on to see what they mean, and how they should be used while building product photos.

Size and resolution:

While the size of the image should be large enough to provide maximum clarity, it should also be small enough to not impact page load time.

The dimensions of images need to be measured in pixels. For e-commerce, **Shopify and many other platforms recommend photo size to be 1024px by 1024px**. It is preferred to keep the images square as much as possible.

Format:

Three kinds of formats are typically used across sites

- GIF files are lower in quality and file size. Only ideal if an animation is a focus.
- PNG files support a range of colors and transparent background. Allows for editing and combining multiple photos.
- **JPEG files are the most common**. Allows for balancing between image quality and file size.

RAW format is unprocessed and uncompressed. Allows for the most flexibility with respect to post-shoot processing. This is usually the best format to shoot photos in - and can then be converted to JPEG or PNG images post-editing.

Photo Technicalities

ISO

ISO (International Standards Organization) regulates the sensitivity of your camera sensor to the available light. If the ISO is high, it can result in a lot of grainy noise in the photo.

For product photography, since there is a lot of light set up, it is best to use as low an ISO setting as possible. Once you should set up your scene and the lighting, begin with the lowest ISO and gradually increase it until the product is properly lit.

Aperture

The aperture is the opening in your camera that allows light in. The wider the aperture, the greater the amount of light that comes in, and the narrower the aperture, the lower the amount of light allowed in. Aperture is measured using a system called F-stops. Higher F-stops allow more of your product to be in focus, while lower F-stops help focus on specific details of the product.

Photo Technicalities

Shutter Speed

Shutter speed indicates how fast the shutter opens and closes. The value is represented in 'stops' of light and measured in fractions of a second. Higher shutter speeds can help to freeze a subject while slower shutter speeds can result in motion blur. For still product images, slow shutter speeds are recommended. For images where a model is involved, faster shutter speeds will be necessary to compensate for motion.

White Balance

To ensure that the whites and colors in your product photos are rendered correctly, you'll need to set the white balance. Based on the background, lighting, and composition of your frame, you can adjust the white balance to ensure it doesn't look too cool (with a blue tint) or too warm (with a yellow/orange tint).

Zoom

Cameras usually have two types of zoom: optical and digital. Digital zoom just creates a zoom effect by cropping the image - this leads to low image quality. Optical zoom uses the lens to magnify the subject and fills the entire image sensor with it. Optical zooms are of higher quality and a better option when required to zoom in on the textural aspects of a product.

Consumers who are shopping online can see what the product looks like on a variety of shapes and sizes, which is really, really important, especially when you can't see the product firsthand... I hope that more brands, especially in e-commerce, will start to think about things like that. How can we make the shopping journey and experience easier for consumers by adding more elements and kind of widening the breadth and moving beyond just traditional models for product shots?

Kaleigh Moore
Writer, SaaS and E-commerce

Product Photos for Fashion

There is no underplaying the importance of product photos in fashion retail. The first impression is created because of the photo. Whether the shopper is or isn't going to click on the product, read the description, add it to their cart, and buy it - are all decisions influenced by the product photo.

Here are a few best practices specifically for fashion product photos.

Preparing the Product

Preparing the product is an essential, non-negotiable part of fashion e-commerce product photos.

- Clothing samples need to be ironed, **crease-free** and in finished conditions.
- If there is any **detailing** on the product, it should be made properly visible.

Product Photos for Fashion

The Need for On-Model Photos

Product photos need to be high-quality and depict the product as realistically as possible. Photographing a garment or product on a model helps achieve this for fashion products. It helps shoppers see how the garment fits and falls on a person or the proportion of the product's size to a human.

- Shoppers are able to **understand the product better** as they know what it looks like on a person.
- Showing products on models also helps **improve engagement and reduce returns.** Since shoppers are more confident of what they are buying, they are not met with any surprises when the product is actually delivered.
- On-model imagery makes the **product look more credible**. Shoppers are likely to trust a brand and a product more if they are able to associate a face with it. Showing garments and accessories on models builds a certain amount of confidence in the shopper's mind about the product.

Product Photos for Fashion

The Case for Additional Visual Content

While products should be shown in different angles and poses, they should also be shown on different types of models. This has more benefits than one, and can impact both conversions and overall brand image.

- Shoppers are able to **relate to the product better**. They are able to understand exactly what the product looks like on someone of their shape and skin tone. How a product would fit on their shape and what the colors look like against their skin tone aren't things they need to imagine anymore.

- This improved understanding also helps shoppers **make quicker decisions and convert faster**. Plus, it helps them buy products that they may have otherwise skipped because they see (and like!) what it looks like on somebody like them.

- Product photos with models of different shapes and ethnicities help in making a **brand more inclusive**. And considering **41%** of shoppers move away from retailers who don't show inclusivity, this is incredibly essential for brands today.[1]

> **Vue.ai has developed a technology that can generate images of how a garment looks on models of different sizes**. The average American model is about 6' tall, size 0 and the average American consumer is 5' 4", size 14. **Garments get returned** because the **fit** is not there, or the opposite happens where the **customer doesn't even buy** it because she thinks, "there is no way I am going to be able to **pull it off"**. But when she s**ees that dress in different sizes** or in a body of her size, she'll think "**wow** that actually looks pretty good," so we can actually increase **conversions and purchase** but also **decrease returns**.

Julia Dietmar
CPO, Vue.ai

An A.I. Solution for Fashion Product Photos

With A.I., retailers can automate building on-model fashion imagery. Using either photos of real models or 3D generated virtual models, A.I. can help visualize products on a person.

VueModel is Vue.ai's product imagery solution. It automates the creation of on-model imagery. Using A.I., VueModel transforms basic product photos into high-quality fashion imagery that retailers can use across their platforms.

High-quality imagery without elaborate processes

With inputs of a product image and a model image, VueModel's A.I. can morph the product on the model, adjusting it to take the natural shape, twists and turns of the model's body position. It **removes the need for elaborate photoshoots** involving multiple people.

An A.I. Solution for Fashion Product Photos

Customizable Model and Image Options

Since A.I. generated imagery does not have time and resource restrictions like a model photoshoot, it is a lot more customizable. Retailers can choose from models of different types, ethnicities, sizes, and in many different poses - all with a single input image of the product. This makes building inclusive product photos accessible to all retailers.

A.I. can build product imagery at **1/4th the cost and 5 times the speed** of traditional photoshoots.

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Vue.ai is an end-to-end retail automation platform that is redesigning the future of retail with Artificial Intelligence. Using Image Recognition and Data Science - we extract catalog data, analyze it with user behavior and help your marketing, product and cataloging teams get actionable insights that improve customer experiences, drive conversions and reduce costs. We help you digitally map your products' DNA to create one-of-a-kind retail experiences for your customers and translate product information into the language that your teams can understand and make business decisions with.

Making Retail Teams AI-Ready

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