

Six Tips for DIY Product Shots

By Stacy Strunk

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If you've ever taken pictures of products to place on your Web site or brochure, you know how daunting taking good product shots can be. Still, it's so hard to relinquish \$30 an hour for someone to take pictures of a candle or a tie-die, woolen bath mat.

While only a true professional can capture the subtle differences in the hues contained in your bath mat, with some care, you can create professional looking shots for your Web site or catalog.

1. Invest in a good digital camera or, at least, borrow one. The 3.0 megapixel cameras produce really high-quality photos. Team one up with a photo printer and you would never know those prints didn't come from a traditional 35 mm camera. There are higher resolution cameras available, but they are still very pricey for the casual user.

2. Buy a light blue or black flat sheet for the background. A uniform background adds a touch of professionalism to a shot. Don't assume you can remove the background later using editing software -- it's harder than it looks. And, let's face it, cutouts only look good when they're done by professional graphic artists.

3. Get on the same level as your product to take your picture. If you set it on the floor, get on your hands and knees. If it's on a table, get your tripod out and aim it at the center of your product.

Also, while we're on the topic, tripods are a good idea. They eliminate shaking and other problems that arise from nervous hands.

4. Try to avoid straight-on shots, they look too "forced." This is something you'll get a feel for as you take more product shots, but I've discovered angles over 15 degrees but less than 40 degrees seems to work best. If you can, take candid shots of someone using your product. But take traditional product shots, too.

5. Finally, take lots of pictures. Take a few shots, move around a little bit and take some more. Move closer to the product, then further away. Professional photographers sometimes shoot 30 to 40 pictures to find just one really good shot.

Try to keep all the pictures, even the ones you don't want to use now. They may be useful later.

6. Go to your favorite software store or camera store and ask for help picking out good editing software. You'll want something with an easy interface. And one that automatically adjusts

brightness and contrast will save you valuable time later.

The bottom line, when it comes to product shots, is to take your time and to experiment. With digital cameras, you never have to pay for processing. So the prospect of making a mistake shouldn't be daunting -- or expensive.

And, if the task still seems too scary, you can try to find a photography student at the local community college who might be willing to lend a hand ... for a modest fee.

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