

What does your headshot say about you? By Sharon Haver

Are you missing great business opportunities because of a bad headshot? Today, communication is predominantly nonverbal. Your profile photo on your website or social media profile can make a huge difference in the way you are perceived, and affect your earning potential and positioning as an authority in your field.

As the founder of FocusOnStyle.com since 1999, I was gunshy to be the face of my brand. Ironically, my behind-the-scenes expertise as a New York fashion photography stylist for 15 years made me more self-conscious—until I figured out how easy it would be to DIY my own photos on my own terms and on my own budget. That is how the Simply Amazing Headshots (simplyamazingheadshots.com) movement was born.

The good news is if you don't have access to a professional photographer, you can still get professional-looking results when you know the insider hacks. Your phone or computer will do the trick.

If you want to get fancy and polish up your photos, you can always lightly retouch with one of the photo editing apps out there or hire a retoucher on Upwork. That's exactly what I did for the COVER of my **StyleWORD: Fashion Quotes For Real Style** (www.stylewordbook.com) book. If I can do it, so can you.

Follow these 9 simple tips and you'll have your headshot looking better than ever—and catching the attention of more high-level opportunities, too.

Here's Looking at You

1. Go for an elevated appearance.

Attracting high-level opportunities has to do with showing yourself as both aspirational and authentic. Evaluate how you present yourself

to others and by engineering an image that's favorable to you.

2. Looking fabulous: It's no secret that clothes have an effect on how we are perceived. As a business person, your headshot is what lures people to want to know more about what's on the inside. Keep the styling simple so the photo's focal point is you and not your outfit, unless you have a cultivated, avant garde style,

3. Plan your composition:

Nothing's worse than an otherwise great photo with someone's head chopped off or a mess in the background. Details like those are distracting and they make photos look unbalanced. Make sure there are no distractions behind you.

4. Taking sides: Research shows that individuals prefer photos of the left side of the face over pictures of the same individual's right side of the face. I say, if your "other side" is your good side, simply flip the photo!

Don't forget to hold your camera just a bit above your eyes to flatter your face and avoid the dreaded double chin effect.

5. Set the mood: Slice-of-life photos can actually have a higher impact than overly staged ones—particularly when creating a visual brand. But when you are representing yourself online, you need to look pro, even if you're casual in your everyday surroundings.

6. Open for business: Think of your headshots and profile pics as a storefront for you and your brand. Are you Ricky's NYC or Sephora? Both have their own merit but each has a distinct brand message.

7. Surround yourself: All the things around you complete the story of your visual message. Aim for a natural yet styled setting and avoid fake portrait studio vibes at all costs. Style your background so it doesn't look overly cluttered yet suggests just the right aspirational feeling about who you are.

8. It's all about the light: Lighting sets up a mood and helps you tell your story. Good lighting can also minimize wrinkles as much as bad lighting can maximize imperfections. Most important, the right light can make you look as fabulous as a celebrity.

The most common arrangement for photographers is the 3-point lighting setup. This consists of 3 lights—one main light on the subject (key light), one at 45 degrees to the subject to fill in the shadows created by the main light (the fill light) and one light behind the subject to separate him or her from the background (the back light). If you don't have access to lighting, simply face a window and use household lamps to light your sides.

Daylight can be your best friend; however, direct sunlight can be harsh. If natural light seems harsh, wait for the golden hour. This is a photography term that refers to the points in the day right after sunrise and before sunset when the light is softer and more inviting.

9. Bonus Free Gift: We live in a visual world. Having great photos is key to standing out in any crowded market. So having a library of photos that can be used on social media, your website, promo material, book covers, even dating sites is key to your success, your influence, your reach and whatever you do that is directly connected to how you are perceived.

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Sharon Haver, founder of FocusOnStyle.com, captured this image of herself on her laptop—proof that taking great photos of yourself is easy when you know the right techniques.