volusion

The Ultimate Guide to Ecommerce Product Photography

Customers listed product photography as the single most important thing when making a purchase decision.

In this guide, we'll cover:

+ What equipment you'll need

+ Lighting and composition

+ Editing and writing captions

How to Take Perfect Product Photos

Investing in high-quality product photography is one of the best things you can do for your ecommerce store's conversion rate. A 2018 study found that product images had the largest impact on digital purchase decisions, with 83% of respondents saying product images and photos were "very" or "extremely" influential in their decision process. Product photos were ranked as even more important than product descriptions/detailed specs, reviews and star ratings, and videos, demostrating that customers like to see what they are buying.

When shoppers visit your store, their first instinct is to skim over your product images to see if something catches their eye. If your images are high quality and show the value of your product, customers won't hesitate to add the item to their cart and check out.

That being said, producing quality product photography is no easy feat. Whether you're taking your photos with an expensive camera or your smartphone, here are a few steps you must take to produce the best product images.

GUIDE OUTLINE

Part 1: Gather your photography equipment
    a. Find a suitable camera (or smartphone)
    b. Use a tripod for stable, consistent shots
    c. Gather affordable, flexible lighting equipment
    d. Get a backdrop to save editing time
    e. Assemble your "Photographer's Toolbox"

Part 2: Take your product photos
    a. Consider the main types of product photos
    b. Set up your camera for professional shots
    c. Set up a DIY natural light studio for premium visibility
    d. Position a backdrop to bring product details to the forefront

Part 3: Edit and caption your photos
    a. Use top apps to edit your product photos
    b. Add impact to your photos with great captions
    c. Make your photos rank with image alt text

Start taking product photos like a pro

Gather your photography equipment

Before you begin your photo shoot, you must have all the necessary tools on hand. The good news is that the only thing you REALLY need is a camera; however, using some of the pro accessories below can help you take better photos more easily. We've picked out some of our favorite options for product photography at varying price points. If you already have your equipment together, skip to Part 2 where we cover camera and studio setup.

YOUR PRODUCT PHOTOGRAPHY CHECKLIST:

- ☐ **Camera** *(or Smartphone)*

- ☐ **Tripod**

- ☐ **Lighting equipment**

- ☐ **Backdrop**

- ☐ **"Photographer's Toolbox"**

a. Find a suitable camera (or smartphone)

For those with limited resources, a smartphone can do the trick. Some smartphone cameras these days even outperform high-end DSLRs. Professional cameras are always capable of taking better photos, but don't feel defeated if you don't own one at the moment. If you're strapped for cash, your smartphone camera is more than enough.

If you're unsure which camera to use, here are some of the best for product photography:

Google Pixel 3 or above:
While the iPhone is always touted as the smartphone with the best camera, the Pixel is quickly joining the top ranks. It boasts a single lens camera rated at 12.2 megapixels, an f/1.7 aperture, and support for HDR and optical image stabilization.

Photo by Julian Chokkattu/Digital Trends

Panasonic Lumix DC-ZS70:
A point and shoot camera is also a great option for product photography neophytes. Some of its notable features include a 20.3-megapixel sensor, 5-axis hybrid optical image stabilizer, control ring for setting customization, and a post-focus function.

Photo from pocket-lint.com

Canon EOS Rebel T7i:
If you want to invest in a professional camera that will last you a long time, you won't go wrong with this one. It comes armed with a 24.2-megapixel sensor, high-speed continuous shooting of up to 6.0 frames per second, dual pixel CMOS AF that allows for quick snap focus, and DIGIC 7 Image Processor that produces high-quality images even in low-light conditions.

Photo from pcmag.com

b. Use a tripod for stable, consistent shots

For your product photos to be considered top-notch, they should be crisp, consistent, and free of blurs. To ensure that you take the sharpest images, you will need a stabilizing accessory like a tripod. If you're using a smartphone, a simple phone mount can do the trick. You can even get resourceful and use a table or a stack of books too.

If you're interested in getting a tripod, here are some options worth checking out:

Benro Mach3 2 Series Aluminum Tripod: Perfect for newbies, this tripod features a straightforward design that won't intimidate those who are only starting out. It can accommodate compact and lightweight cameras and comes equipped with screw-in rubber feet for enhanced stability.

Source picclick.com

Manfrotto Pixi Evo 2: If you're looking for a tripod that would best suit your smartphone, point-and-shoot, or a mirrorless camera, look no further than the Pixi Evo 2. It offers complete flexibility with adjustable leg and leg angles, and its compact design allows you to tote it around anywhere.

Source macleancomms.blogspot.com

Vanguard Alta Pro 263AT Aluminum Tripod: Ideal for taking overhead shots, this tripod has legs that adjust to 25, 50, and 80-degree angles to allow for low angle photos. Its swivel stop-n-lock system makes sure that your camera is secure in place, while the multi-angle central column enables you to move the camera in various vertical and horizontal positions.

Source amazon.com

c. Gather affordable, flexible lighting equipment

Proper lighting is one of the main differences between professionally-created and amateur photography, and tends to be the main thing that holds new photographers back. Good lighting will do more to improve the quality of your photos than anything else, so before you go drop a thousand dollars on a new DSLR, make sure that your lighting setup is squared away.

Here's a list of some of our favorite (affordable) product photography lighting kits:

Neewer 48 Macro LED Ring Flash Bundle:
This kit offers low-cost and no-frills lighting gear that you simply adhere to your DSLR's hot shoe. It offers a variety of lighting modes, and the brightness of each ring can be adjusted depending on your preferred level of illumination.

Source amazon.com

Fancierstudio Lighting Kit:
This kit is your one-stop shop to all your lighting needs. Compatible with cameras from Nikon, Canon, Sony, Olympus, and more, it includes three lights to employ a three-lighting setup: a key light, a fill light, and a back-light. It even comes with a backdrop and background stand.

Source amazon.com

Amazon Basics Portable Photo Studio:
This is our go-to lightbox for taking product photos of smaller products. It's portable, can be set up or taken down in about a minute, comes with its own integrated LED lights, and is easy on the beginner's budget. This is a great beginner option if you're just getting started and want an affordable lightbox for taking product detail photos.

Source amazon.com

d. Get a backdrop to save editing time

To ensure that you get the best results, it's usually recommended to shoot product photos on a white backdrop. This will significantly reduce the amount of editing and post-processing you will have to do later on. It will also help in creating a consistent look throughout your ecommerce store, making it appear more attractive and professional.

Some different backdrop options are listed below:

Basic poster board:
You can easily set up a white backdrop just by procuring a standard poster board from your local arts and crafts store. If you're on a budget, this is your best bet.

Source diycraftphotography.com

Julius Studio 6 ft X 9 ft White Photo Video Photography Studio Fabric Backdrop Screen:
If you're shooting larger items like furniture, this backdrop is a great option. It's constructed from lightweight fabric so it won't be a pain to lug around, and it has a reflective and non-gloss surface, making cleaning a breeze.

Source amazon.com

LimoStudio 10 x 20 Foot Muslin Backdrop Background:
If you're hiring a model or using a full-length mannequin, a backdrop of at least 10 x 20 feet is required. This particular one already includes crossbars, legs, and clamps, saving you the trouble of sourcing and purchasing additional equipment.

Source limostudio.com

e. Assemble your "Photographer's Toolbox"

We highly recommend that you put together what we call a "Photographer's Toolbox" that you can always rely on. Some of the most important items to include are:

☐ **Tape:** For keeping things in place while they're being photographed. Clear and double-sided tape work best, and masking tape is great for delicate items.

☐ **Clamps:** If you're using a white backdrop or a reflector, you'll need clamps to hold the equipment in the same place for the duration of the shoot.

Source: Pixc

☐ **Pencil and paper:** These are helpful if you need to jot down notes about aperture width or other photography-specific things that may need to be referenced later.

☐ **Fishing line:** Shooting tiny or delicate items like jewelry? You'll find a fishing line useful for holding them up and keeping them steady.

☐ **Pocket scissors:** Small scissors are useful for getting rid of loose fabric threads in clothing and for cutting fishing line.

☐ **Glue Dots:** These small blobs of removable adhesive can be great for keeping small items in place or upright during your session.

☐ **Coat Hangers & Adhesive Hooks:** Either of these will help you hang and organize clothing or other items during your shoot.

Source: Pixc

☐ **Safety Pins:** These are useful when you are using a mannequin or hiring a model and need to make sure items of clothing fit precisely.

☐ **Iron or clothes steamer:** Ensuring that your clothes look their best goes a long way in driving purchases. An iron is also helpful for making your fabric backdrop presentable.

☐ **Spare batteries or a charger:** What good is your camera if it suddenly dies in the middle of a shoot? Make sure you have a backup battery or charger just in case.

☐ **Memory card:** Since you'll be taking hundreds (or even thousands) of photos, it's vital to carry a reserve memory card so you won't waste time transferring pictures to a computer mid-shoot.

Taking your product photos

Ecommerce is a different ball game. Unlike in a brick-and-mortar store, customers cannot touch, feel, or try your products, so you have to make sure that the product images you display online are realistic, detailed, and as close to the real thing as possible. Buyers expect a clear, accurate representation of what they're buying, and if your actual product looks even slightly different than your product photos, you can expect complaints and returns.

a. Consider the main types of product photos

To make sure you're giving your customers all of the information they need to feel comfortable making a purchase, there are two main types of ecommerce photos you need to take: **individual**, product-only shots and **lifestyle**/marketing shots.

Individual product detail photos

Individual shots are product images shot against a white or very light background with ample lighting and consistent shadows. They give your store a uniform look and allow customers to easily visualize the item in real life. Keep in mind that they should depict the accurate color, size, and other features of the product to help the user make a purchasing decision.

Given that product-only shots are simple images that require no extra props, shooting them is relatively simple, requiring only a camera, stable surface or tripod, craft paper or mounted backdrop, and space with a window that offers as much natural light as possible. You can also use a lightbox if you're shooting smaller items in areas with low light conditions.

Home > Best-Sellers >

Backpack
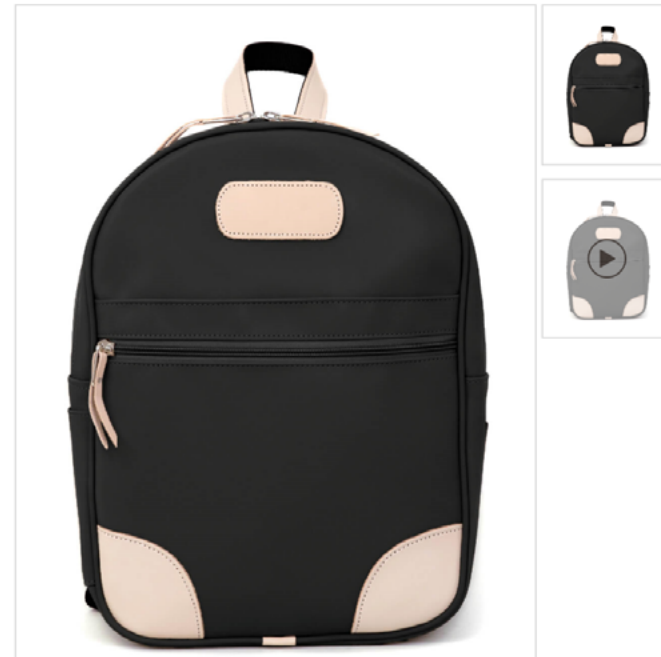
Source: Jon Hart Design

Lifestyle product photos

To add more "oomph" to your photos, you can also opt to shoot in-context (or "lifestyle" images) that present your product in its intended environment and showcase how it's meant to be used. These types of shots allow for more creative freedom and are primarily used for branding rather than for informative purposes.

The main advantage of in-context images is that they make your products more relatable to potential consumers. While product detail photos might be very informative, lifestyle photos can bring your product to life and elicit an emotional response. Find the things that consumers love about your products and make them relatable. If you sell outdoor gear to avid hikers, your marketing campaign might focus on the toughness of your products and the toughness of the people wearing them. If your audience is rugged hikers and your product photos are of someone walking in a manicured park, you're probably missing the mark.

Unlike product-only images, lifestyle images don't necessarily have to be added to your individual product pages. You can display in-context photos on your homepage and collection pages, as well as marketing materials such as newsletters, social media, flyers, posters, look-books, and other marketing paraphernalia. However, a few lifestyle images after your product detail photos can add an emotional impact to your pages and cause potential customers to imagine what it would be like to actually use your product. If your audience is passionate about the kind of products you sell, a lifestyle image can go a long way towards making a sale.
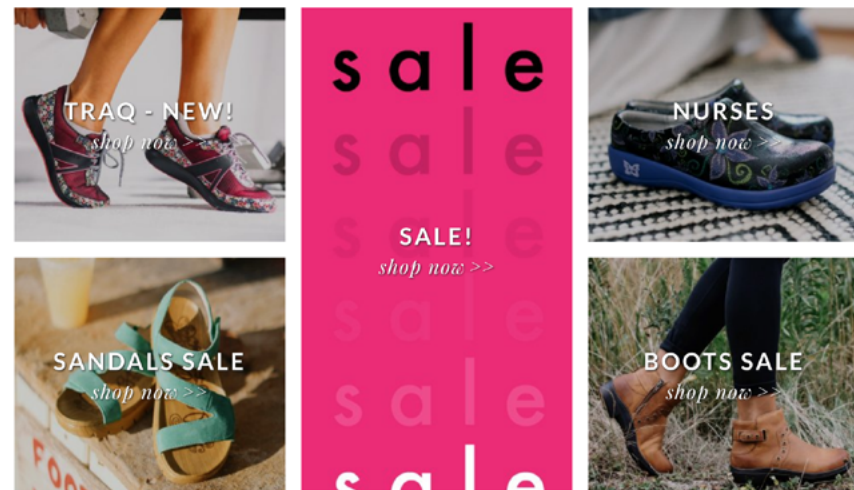

Source: *Alegria Shoe Shop*

b. Set up your camera for professional shots

The quality of your product images largely depends on your camera settings. Of course, you'll need to tailor your setup to best fit your camera and studio, but this quick walk-through will give you basic recommended camera settings for product photography based on the type of camera you are using.

Professional camera setup

- **Choose the largest resolution and the highest quality setting.**
  Remember that you can always shrink images, but blowing up a small photo to a bigger size while preserving the quality is next to impossible. Make sure that the size setting is large (L) and the quality setting is superfine (S).
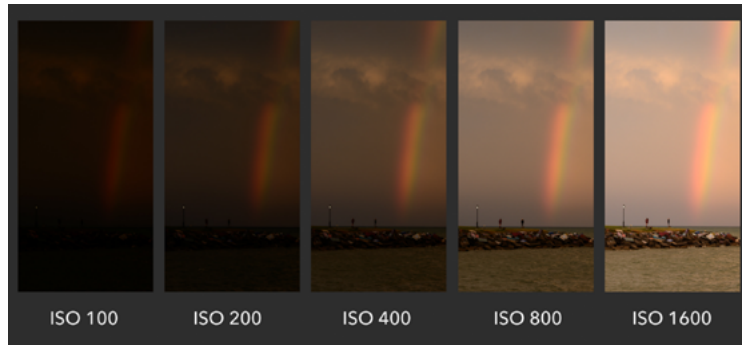
Source: *Photographylife.com*

- **Set your ISO to control the brightness of your photos.** This refers to how sensitive your camera sensor is to light. It can go as low as 25 or as high as 204,800, but the only thing you need to remember is that the lower your ISO, the less sensitive the image is to the light, and would take longer to capture.

Therefore, it is best to set your ISO as low as possible. If working with natural light, you can set it to around 200 to 800. If you're working at a darker location, you may use ISO 800 and above to make up for the lack of ample lighting.
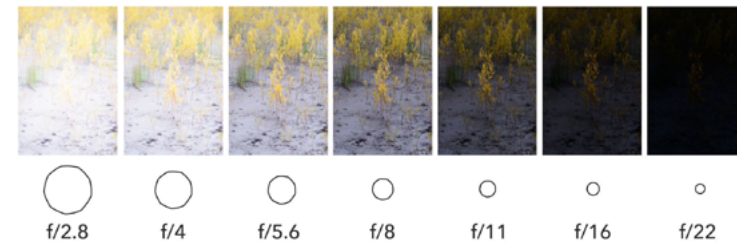

Source: *Photographylife.com*

- **Set the aperture width to change the depth-of-field.** The aperture is the hole within the lens that determines how much light travels into the camera. It's directly linked to the depth of field, as in the area of the photo that is in focus. Measured in f-stops, the smaller the number is, the larger the aperture would be. If you're new to product photography, your safe bet would be setting it between f/4.5 and f/7.1. This isolates the subject by blurring the background while enhancing the sharpness and detail of the product. If you're unable to work with a plain background, an aperture of f/2.8 or lower would aid in blurring everything that is not within the area you chose to focus on.

- **Choose a shutter speed that will give you crisp photos.**
  Shutter speed is the speed at which the camera curtain opens and closes. If you're using a tripod to stabilize your camera, opt for a shutter speed of 1/125 or higher to ensure that the images you take are sharp. If you're working with flash, use at least 1/60.

Smartphone camera setup

- **Find your device's manual photo settings.** Learn everything you can about the internal camera on your phone and how much you can control out of the box. Many smartphones come equipped with several manual settings, including exposure controls, white balance, and post processing.

- **Use an app.** If your smartphone doesn't include these features, add an application like Camera+, Camera ZOOM FX, or VSCOCam for helpful manual controls and editing capabilities. These third-party camera apps typically offer a hugely increased functionality over your default camera software.

- **Choose the highest quality/resolution setting your phone allows.** This will give you the best image possible to start with—you can reduce file size when you edit. Just make sure your phone has enough storage before beginning a shoot—you'll be able to take about 250 high-resolution photos per gigabyte of free memory.
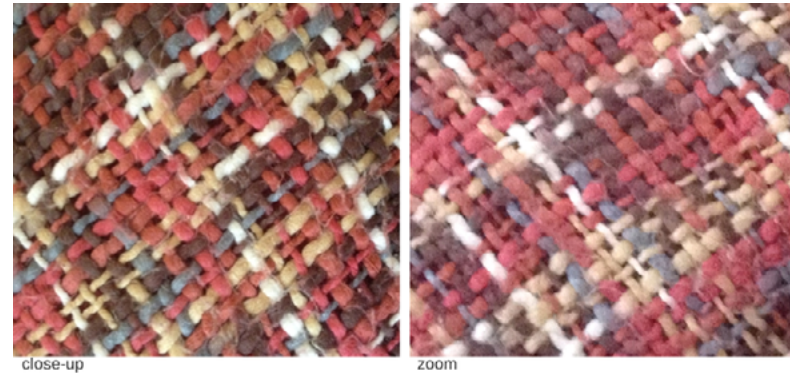
close-up — zoom

- **Don't zoom in.** Digital zoom is not great for picture quality, and it's the only type of zoom a smartphone camera has. If you need a close-up shot, just move in closer to your product—you'll get a much better finished product photo than you would zooming in.

- **Clean your lens.** Lenses are easy to carry everywhere in pockets and purses. Make sure you clean your camera lens well before your photo session or dust, dirt, and smudges will be super noticeable in the finished product.

- **Turn the flash off.** The flash on your phone is...not so good. Get your lighting right and let your flashlight remain a flashlight—it will do no favors for your product photography.

- **Edit:** It's time for editing to bring out your photos' best qualities and help you convey the perfect brand message. Photoshop and AfterLight are great editing tools. To get a head start on getting that perfect product photo, try playing around with these basic settings:

  - **Brightness:** Increasing the brightness of your image will hide imperfections and provide an attractive glow.

  - **Contrast:** Increasing the contrast will help your product pop against the background or backdrop.

  - **White balance:** Your camera doesn't always get it right—play with this scale to get the most natural colors.

  - **Sharpness:** Increasing the sharpness will help highlight the intricate details of your product and improve image quality.

c. Set up a DIY natural light studio for premium visibility

Once you have all the necessary photography tools, the next step is making sure that your chosen shooting area is well-organized to facilitate a seamless shooting session. If you're relying on natural lighting, you would need a table, craft paper, two pieces of scrap wood, and clamps to create a makeshift sweep (backdrop).

Tape the two pieces of scrap wood on the edge of the table. Then, attach the white craft paper using the clamps on each piece to ensure stability. If you don't have an extra table, a large sturdy chair would also work.

Ideally, you should be shooting around noon or early afternoon when the sun is at its brightest. But make sure that your table isn't being directly hit by the sunlight. If you find that the lighting is too intense, stick a sheet of paper on the window to diffuse it. If you notice that the shadows are too harsh, you can use a foam board as a reflector to control it.

As for setting up the products, arrange them in a way that they will remain stable. You'll find that smaller items are trickier to stabilize, but you can use tape or glue to set them in place.

d. Position a backdrop to bring product details to the forefront

Looking at these two photos, which one would you say is better at selling the product and making you want to purchase?

The item on the left conveys a bright white background, which brings the product to the forefront. The graphic on the right is unclear as to what's being sold, since there are three different options. The background takes away from its clarity and may drive traffic away.

The easier it is for your customers to see what they're purchasing, the more likely they are to stay on page and continue down the purchasing path. You have 8 to 10 seconds to keep their attention—make it count!

Edit and caption your photos

Your product images have been captured, and you're ready to upload them to your ecommerce site for your customers to see. But despite all the equipment and preparation, simply snapping photos and then uploading them will not get you the best possible result. Editing your photos after the fact is a must to ensure that your products are displayed in a way that maximizes their potential to convert shoppers into buyers. Additionally, captioning them properly in the code of your site will allow them to be found more easily online.

a. Use top apps to edit your product photos

Whether you have a nice desktop you can use for editing or you need to rely on your smartphone, there is plenty to choose from when it comes to quality editing software. But with so many apps, it's hard to know where to start. Here are a few options for each scenario that will bring your photos to product image greatness.

Desktop Editing

1. [Adobe Photoshop](#)

Adobe Photoshop has and probably always will be the gold standard of photo manipulation apps. It packs a laundry list of features and doesn't set a limit on creativity. It's capable of basic editing tasks such as color adjustment and exposure enhancement, and it can also do major tweaks like background removal, graphic design, and a whole lot more. Photoshop is expensive, but it's worth the investment if you're planning on being a power user.

2. [Gimp](#)

If you don't want to spend a dime but still want an app that can accommodate your photo editing and retouching needs, Gimp is a viable option. This open-source image editor is compatible with various platforms, including Windows, Mac, and Linux. Like Photoshop, it features layers, filters, and masks, and it has useful tools like saturation slider, auto white balance, and healing tool. You might find Gimp's interface clunkier than standard photo editing apps, but it gets the job done.

3. [PhotoScape X](#)

The latest iteration of the much-revered PhotoScape, this app can serve as your all-in-one photo editing solution. It has all the features one would expect in a powerful platform, including an intuitive editor, batch editing, collage maker, background remover, brushes, filters, and special effects. This tool is perfect for beginners who don't want to deal with an app that has a steep learning curve since the interface is easy to use and understand.

Smartphone Editing
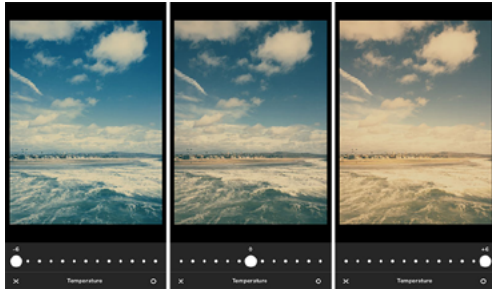
1. VSCO

This app is the go-to for a lot of photographers. The software comes with a few free filters with additional filter packs available for an added cost. If you want to, you can choose your favorite filter and make it "the look" for your business, applying it to all your photos before you post them. VSCO has additional image-editing tools that allow for a lot of precision while still being intuitive and easy to use. When you're done, you can easily export right into Instagram or to your camera roll for sharing. (Available on Apple and Android phones.)

2. Adobe Lightroom

If you've used Adobe Lightroom on the computer, the features in this app should look familiar, but a bit scaled down. It isn't quite as intuitive to use as VSCO Cam and doesn't have as many filters available, but the precision is fantastic, which is perfect for detail-oriented photographers. (Available on Apple, Android, and Windows phones.)
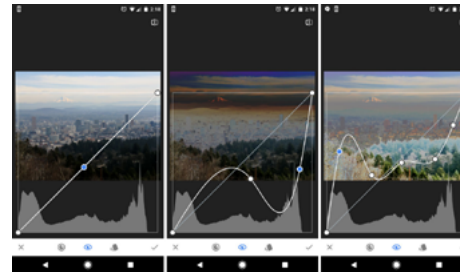
3. Snapseed

Snapseed is similar to Lightroom in that it allows for some more specialized tweaks. One great feature is the "healing" tool, where you can easily remove scratches. However, if you don't want to fiddle with all those details, you may want to stick with something easier. (Available on Apple, Android, and Windows phones.)

b. Add impact to your photos with great captions

People read captions more than they read the headline. This means the detailed descriptions throughout your site may go unread, whereas small snippets that clarify your product images are more likely to be read.

Without context in photos, users can be left with ambiguity, asking questions about the size of the object or wondering how it works. Take a tobacco pipe, for example. You may post a picture of a luxurious pipe against a white background, but without a caption, users may be unsure of the size or material. Is the wooden pipe as big as the user's hand or just big enough to produce a few good puffs before being refilled? Is it made from an oak tree or an olive tree?

Tobacco Pipe

Handcrafted Olive-Wood Pipe for Smoking Tobacco and Other Herbs

Overall, providing captions under images can help shoppers make a decision more quickly and give them confidence that this is the product they are looking for. The description should be more than a few words and less than a few sentences. When writing, it's important to:

- **Know your audience.** Target a description that details how the product is used or what it is used for. Is your product for professionals? Is it innovative? Knowing who you are selling to will help you create relevant descriptions that appeal to that demographic.

- **Be descriptive.** While images on product pages may work together to paint an obvious understanding of the product, images that appear elsewhere on your site may confuse visitors. Make sure your captions explain what is happening in the picture. Your image may show a person in an armchair smoking a pipe. Captions can help users understand that you are only selling the pipe as opposed to accessories or herbs to go in the pipe depicted in your picture.

- **Keep it simple.** Since your shoppers are more likely to read your captions over your product details, you will want something engaging and easy to digest. The goal is to find the balance between something that piques their interest and has them wanting to learn more and something that showcases what your product has to offer over your competitors. For example, a basic caption can be made into a better caption by adding descriptive content.

- **Be inclusive.** Captions can also double as alt text, which tells search engines what is in the image while also helping visually impaired people understand what the image is about. Modern technology allows websites to be accessible by reading captions aloud so that everyone can interact with the image and visualize the contents. An unclear or missing caption can confuse potential buyers.

c. Make your photos rank with image alt text

One often-overlooked way to make your photos rank in search engines is by adding image alt text. Image alt text is a simple HTML tag that lets you display text in the event that an image doesn't load properly. Since search engines take them into account when deciding which sites and photos should rank first, it's important to make sure that your alt text includes the keywords you're trying to rank for.

Editing image alt text within HTML

If you're working directly with the image's HTML, you'll need to add an Alt attribute within your image tag:

Product photo HTML without anchor text:
<img src="waxedcanvastote1.jpg">

Product photo HTML with anchor text:
<img src="waxedcanvastote1.jpg" alt="Waxed canvas tote bag with leather handles and two external pockets">

Writing great alt text for product photos

The good news about writing alt text for product photos is that it's usually easy—product photos tend to focus on one single item (the product), so all you have to do is describe your product. Start by pretending you're describing the photo to a friend who isn't able to see it, and write that down. After that, find the 1-2 most important things you listed and summarize them in a single sentence. Follow these guidelines to write great image alt text:

- Be descriptive, but brief. Alt text should describe the image to those who can't see it

- Limit alt text to 15 words or fewer

- Make sure your most important keywords are near the beginning

- Avoid keyword stuffing (cramming your alt text full of SEO keywords). Pick 1-2 relevant keywords to include

- Don't include "picture of" or "image of" within your alt tags. Also, avoid including information like resolution, file format, and other technical information. Alt text is about the content of an image—NOT the image itself

- Avoid writing alt text that isn't descriptive of the image

Real world examples: Writing image alt text

Let's use this cotton tote bag as an example. Your first step would be to write a description of the object in whatever words feel most comfortable to you. It can help to pretend that you're describing the image to someone in another room.

Photo description: A waxed-canvas tote bag sitting on a wooden desk with a white background. The bag has a leather handle attached with rivets, and two pockets on the front. It is light tan/brown in color, and has some visible creases from the wax.

Now that we have a full description, we'll make a list of all of the features we included and decide which are most important. We'll exclude any mention of the background since it is not important to the image. Because this is a photo of the entire product, we'll also avoid going too deep into detailed descriptions.

Example Photo Features:
Waxed canvas
Tote bag
~~Wooden desk~~
~~White background~~
Leather handle attached with rivets
Two front pockets
Light brown
~~Visible creases from the wax~~

Now we'll use our important features listed previously to write some image alt text. While this alt text doesn't convey all of the details about our product, it gets the most important information across. If our example photo were a detailed close-up of the way the handle is riveted to the body, we'd want our alt text to focus on the rivets and leather handle instead of providing a broad product description.

Example Photo Features:

Waxed canvas tote bag - light brown with leather handle and front pockets

The final step is to add the alt text to our image. If you want to check an image's alt text on your site, right click the image and choose "inspect"—this will bring up the HTML image tag, where you can find the alt attribute. If you're not able to find an alt attribute tag, or if it's blank, that means that you don't have any alt text for that image.

Start taking product photos like a pro

Product photography may sound intimidating—especially if it's your first time. Just remember that ultimately, your product photos will serve as ambassadors for your brand. They are what consumers will scrutinize when browsing your store, what you amplify on social media, and what your current customers share with other people. In short, product images speak for you.

If you don't pin down a seamless process right away, don't worry—you can always experiment with angles, lighting, and techniques until you find a system that works best for you. The secret is getting all your photos to appear informative and consistent so that customers—both old and new—can better visualize your slate of product offerings, which should yield a boost in sales.

Even if you're not a professional photographer, you can take your own great product photos for your online store with a few tools, tips, and tricks. Once those shots are ready to go, take things to the next level with a professionally-designed ecommerce theme that will perfectly complement your images. You'll have an online store that impresses customers and makes the sale in no time.

Special Thanks to Holly Cardew of **Pixc** for contributing to this guide. If you have product photos already and need photo editing assistance, Pixc's platform allows you to remove backgrounds, add natural shadows, resize and format, and more with next-day service. **Learn more** and explore the before vs. after gallery.

Created by ◇ volusion + pixc