



THE PROFESSIONAL HEADSHOT GUIDE

10 Things Every Professional Should Know Before Their Headshot

How to look confident, approachable and unmistakably yourself.



Your headshot is doing some fairly heavy lifting.

A professional headshot is no longer reserved for actors, top-level executives or people who appear on the side of buses.

Today, it is often the first impression you make. It appears on LinkedIn, company websites, speaker profiles, press releases, email signatures and social media—frequently before someone has spoken to you, met you or decided whether they trust you.

A strong professional portrait should help people recognise you, understand something about your personality and feel confident about contacting you. It should look polished without making you appear artificial, approachable without becoming too casual, and professional without draining every ounce of character from your face.

Here are the ten things worth knowing before your session.



01 Your headshot is part of your personal brand

Your headshot isn't simply a photograph of what you look like. It is a visual introduction to who you are and how you work.

Your image should support the message you want your brand to communicate. A financial director may want to appear dependable, confident and composed. A creative director might want something more expressive. A business coach may need to look warm, engaging and trustworthy.

Before your session, choose three words you want people to use after seeing your photograph. Professional? Approachable? Experienced? Creative? Calm? Energetic? Your photographer can shape the lighting, background, clothing and expression around those qualities.



02 You do not need to know how to pose

One of the most common things people say before a session is: “***I’m terrible in photographs***.” Usually, that simply means they have never been properly directed or advised.

A good headshot photographer should not expect you to arrive knowing where to place your chin, what to do with your shoulders or how intensely to stare into a camera without looking as though you are trying to remember where you buried something.

Direction is part of the photographer’s job. Small changes in posture, expression and camera angle make an enormous difference. You should be guided throughout, not left wondering what to do with your face.



03 Choose clothing that feels like you

The best choice usually reflects how you genuinely present yourself professionally. You do not have to wear a suit simply because the photograph is for business—but avoid going casual if clients normally expect formal attire.

Choose clothes that fit well, feel comfortable and make you confident. Solid colours keep attention on your face. Subtle patterns can work, while very fine stripes, bold logos and heavily patterned fabrics may distract.

Bring options. Jackets, overshirts and layers create different looks without a full wardrobe change. Most importantly, avoid something unfamiliar purely because you think it looks “professional. Remember, **If you feel uncomfortable, it will often show.**



04 Your expression matters more than your smile

Not every headshot needs a huge smile. The right expression depends on your personality, profession and intended audience. Some people need to appear warm and friendly; others may want something more composed, confident or authoritative.

The goal is not necessarily to smile. The goal is to look engaged. Even a neutral expression should contain energy around the eyes.

The difference between an effective headshot and a lifeless one is often subtle. A small change in the mouth, eyebrows or eyes can completely alter how approachable or confident someone appears. That is why expression coaching matters.



05 Sleep, hydration and preparation really help

You don't need to begin a six-week detox, but a little preparation goes a long way. Try to sleep reasonably well, drink plenty of water and avoid excessive alcohol the evening before. Arriving rested and hydrated helps your skin, eyes and energy.

Men may want to shave in advance rather than immediately beforehand, which can cause redness. Avoid dramatic last-minute hair or makeup changes unless they are part of the intended look.

Clean glasses, press clothes and check jackets for lint. Small details save time and keep the session focused on creating strong images.



06 Retouching should still leave you looking like you

Professional retouching can reduce temporary blemishes, soften distractions and polish the final image. What it should not do is turn you into an entirely different person.

A good headshot should look like you on your best day—not like a waxwork version of you after twelve hours inside an editing application.

Ask how your photographer approaches retouching. Ideally, permanent features remain while temporary distractions are tidied. **People should recognise you when you walk into a meeting.** Present the best version of you; **do not invent a replacement.**



07 Think about where the image will be used

A LinkedIn headshot must work as a small circular image. A company website may need negative space for text. A speaker biography may require both portrait and landscape versions.

Tell your photographer where the images are likely to appear. This helps them create the right framing, backgrounds and composition—and capture useful variations during the session.

One polished image may be enough for LinkedIn, but a broader personal-brand library gives you flexibility across websites, articles, presentations, social media and marketing.

A good session considers where your business is going, not merely where the photograph will be uploaded tomorrow.



08 Consistency matters for teams

When every member of a company has a different style of headshot, the organisation can look disconnected. One is against a white wall; another is a holiday photograph; someone else appears to have been cropped from a wedding reception.

Consistent headshots make a company appear organised, professional and cohesive. This does not mean everyone has to look identical. Lighting, background and framing can remain consistent while each employee's personality comes through.

For larger teams, create a clear style guide so new starters can be photographed to match. **Your people remain individuals; the visual language says they belong to the same organisation.**



09 A good session should feel collaborative

The most effective headshots are created with you, not simply taken of you. You should feel able to discuss which images seem natural, which expressions suit you and how you want to be represented.

Reviewing photographs as the session progresses is extremely helpful. You and the photographer can see what is working and make small adjustments. You may discover that you prefer one side, a particular angle or a different expression from the one you expected.

Collaboration removes uncertainty and makes the final image feel authentic.



10 Your headshot should be updated regularly

Your headshot has no fixed expiry date, but it should represent how you currently look. A useful rule is every two to three years—or sooner if your appearance, role or personal brand changes significantly.

An outdated image creates an awkward disconnect when you meet people. It should help someone recognise you, not make them wonder whether they have arrived at the wrong meeting.

You may also need a new portrait when launching a business, moving into leadership, becoming a speaker, publishing a book or changing the audience you want to attract. **Your career evolves. Your professional image should evolve with it.**

FINAL THOUGHTS

A successful headshot is not about being naturally photogenic.

It is about preparation, direction, trust and understanding how you want to be perceived.

You do not need to know how to pose or arrive bursting with confidence. You need a photographer who knows how to guide you, put you at ease and bring out expressions that feel genuine.

A great headshot does more than show people what you look like. It helps them see who you are.

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