

Set your camera on high resolution!

I have frequently had clients who want to use their own photography in an ad or a marketing brochure and it often makes a lot of sense. For example, you might have “before”, “during” and “after” photographs of a major construction. These aren't the kind of photos that you can reconstruct with a professional photographer after the fact. The moment is gone and the beautifully shot “after” photo might be meaningless without the comparison to the “before” photo

 By [Ann Druce](#) 13 Mar 2009



The all-too-frequent problem, however, is that the photos are simply not of an acceptable standard. Now I am not being precious here; I'm not talking artistic standards or photographic composition. I'm not even talking lighting. The issue is resolution.

Almost too good to be true

Digital cameras have made instant photography accessible to almost everyone. And the speed and convenience of being able to email a photograph to your ad agency and have them use it in your brochure giving you exactly the pic you want, with no expensive photography, sounds almost too good to be true.

Sadly, all too often it is. And the client is left with the sneaking suspicion that the agency is being unhelpful and simply wants to use a professional photographer for no reason other than ego or the markup they charge on photography.

But this doesn't have to be an issue. The problem is very easily solved. All you need to do is set your camera on high resolution. It is ironic that, while even entry-level digital cameras offer more megapixels than you are ever likely to need, this technology is not being put to good use. Instead, users are setting their cameras on low resolution, giving them photographs that are unsuitable for litho printing.

The reality is that a photograph might look perfect on your computer screen. It might even look fine printed out on your laser or inkjet printer. But that doesn't mean you can use it in a newspaper or a magazine. A combination of size of the photograph, and the resolution at which the camera is set determines where and how you can use that photo.

Brand image compromised

The consequences of using a photo at low resolution is that, in print, your picture will lose definition and clarity. It will become blurry and rough around the edges, and you might even see little squares of colour instead of a smooth transition from one shade to the next, where pixilation is severe. Basically, the quality of

the ad, the communication and the image of the brand are compromised.

There are people who will tell you that they can transform a 70dpi photo into a 300dpi photo. But while the numbers can be converted, you cannot add in resolution. It is as simple as that. Alternatively, however, you can take a large size, high resolution photo and convert it to small size for easy emailing and use on websites.

In fact, the software to convert high res to low res is probably already installed on your computer. *And it certainly is more courteous (and self-serving) to email low res pics to online publications - no-one wants their bandwidth eaten up by high res pics they don't need and certainly won't look kindly on you (or your PR article) if you clog up their system!* [Couldn't have said it better myself! - Assistant Editor]

But as long as you start off with a high res photo, you will be able to convert it and use it for litho print and online.

Memory card too small?

So why don't people take photos on high res? Perhaps because they leave their camera as it was set when they bought it because they don't know how to change it. It might be because they like to email their photos and the high res ones are too slow or use up their bandwidth. Or perhaps the memory card that came with the camera is so small that if they set their camera on high res they can only fit two or three photos on the card.

The answer is to buy a practical memory card. 1GB cards are very reasonably priced and will give you enough memory for most of your needs. You can leave your camera set on high resolution and be confident that you will be able to use your photographs for advertising and promotional material, and the only debate will be the aesthetics of the photograph.

If you are in a technical environment where employees are asked to take photographs of projects with their own cameras, I would suggest that you allow them to claim the cost of a good memory card. The cost is negligible in comparison with the lost opportunity cost when you have a great PR story, only to discover that the publications won't accept your article because the quality of the photograph is unsuitable.

Oh and by the way, that lovely photo you copied from your website? No, that won't work in print media either.

ABOUT ANN DRUCE

Ann Druce spent 15 years on the client side of the business, marketing major FMCG brands for big name companies, including Unilever and Adcock Ingram, before moving to the other side of the desk and joining an ad agency. Today she heads up Octarine Communications www.octarine.co.za, an advertising and design agency based in Durban, with national clients in the industrial, professional and consumer sectors. Contact Ann on tel (0)31 564 6921 or email ann@octarine.co.za. Read the Octarine blog at <http://octarineopinions.blogspot.com>.
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