

'Shoot to Thrill' - Getting the Most Out of Your Photography

By Chris Sikorsky, Owner and Creative Director, Sikipics Productions

In a digital world, it is critical for brands to create photos that pack a punch and engage your audience: technically sound photos that command attention, stand out, tell a story, target your desired market and are rolled out strategically.

Partnering with a professional photographer is ideal, but if you are tasked with producing images

in-house, there are many ways for you or your marketing team to level up before a big shoot.

Let's learn to produce amazing photos supported by strong storytelling, lighting, composition and post-production. The magic happens when the image stops someone in their tracks— so let's shoot with intention, edit like an artist and post like a

ESSENTIAL TOOLS (MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS)

- Camera (camera phone, dslr, film camera, mirrorless, action camera, etc.)
- Basic editing software

ADVANCED TOOLS (LEVEL UP!)

- Lens dynamics (A range of focal lengths for different applications—wide angle, zoom lens, primes, etc.)
- Lighting (on camera flash, off camera flash, continuous lights, etc)
- Modifiers (beauty dish, reflector, soft box, etc)
- Tripod (great tool for low light or long exposures)

STORYTELLING

- Cast models strategically (Feature WHO you want to attract within your photography)
- Environments matter (Choose locations and decor wisely—settings, colours, props, etc. that align with your brand)
- Tell multiple stories in one frame (The sum is greater than the parts—target customer/client, environment, product/service, background models, etc.)

LIGHTING

- Natural vs Manufactured Lighting (Be intentional depending on your subject matter)

- Identify your Key Light (The sun, a window, off-camera-flash, etc.)
- Use Key Light (Light product, people, spaces, etc., to direct focus accordingly)
- Hard vs Soft (Selling margaritas? Think sunshine and hard light. Selling knitted sweaters? Lean towards softer light)
- Properly Expose your Photo (Ideally no portion of the frame should be too bright or too dark, but if that isn't possible, measure the light on your subject and expose accordingly)

COMPOSITION

- Aspect Ratio [Establish where the photo is going to be hosted and if a horizontal (billboard), vertical (trade show screen) or square (profile thumbnail) aspect ratio is best]
- Rule of Thirds (This is a great compositional rule of thumb and a naturally pleasing design technique—but sometimes rules are meant to be broken)
- Blocking (Crucial elements within the composition should not interfere, block, compete, etc, with each other—allow everything to 'breathe' by directing accordingly or moving your feet!)
- Horizon Line (Straight or angled? Straight provides balance and security while angled can convey action)



or a sense of wonder—just be intentional!!)

- Negative Space (Intrigue your viewer with plenty of head room—great for text or a logo in post-production)

POST-PRODUCTION

- Software (Modern photo editing software should do the trick. Images captured in RAW will have the greatest flexibility for colour and exposure correction in post)
- Crop (An essential tool for rotation and ‘trimming the fat’ or unnecessary portions of an image)
- White Balance (Marketing a golf getaway? Warm them up! Selling winter tires? A cooler white balance makes most sense here)
- Colour Grading (Adding punch with contrast and saturation is just one of infinite examples here. The world is your oyster, just be sure not to boost the levels too much and risk ‘overcooking’ your image)
- Retouching (Eliminate distractions with a healing or clone tool or dabble in AI generative remove/fill—for skin retouching we say: “If it’s gone in two weeks, remove it!”)
- Graphic Design (Add logos, call to actions, text, etc. for greater impact)
- Export (Add tags and meta data and save photos as JPEGs or the desired file type as maximum resolution)

POSTING

- Respect Original Crop (Use your full image)
- Organic vs Boosted (Strong content wins every time, but a boost never hurts! If you are proud of your images, it may be wise to set aside some extra budget for the rollout process)
- Captions (Include captions and further content when posting to maximize engagement, along with tagging as many partners as you can)

BONUS POINTS

- Get Creative (Use reflections, silhouettes, symmetry, unique perspectives, advanced post-production, etc.)

Whether you’re branding a new small business or looking to grow a large provincial organization, intentional photography that aligns with your values and creative direction is crucial in connecting with your audience and maximizing engagement.

‘Shoot to Thrill’ and stand out by utilizing the techniques above. Happy shooting! And remember that “Your first 100,000 photos are your worst,” as photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson is quoted as saying. Get out there and experiment!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Sikorsky is the Creative Director at SIKPICS Productions. A graduate of the Western Academy Broadcasting College, Chris started his career as a video journalist with CTV News Saskatoon, covering everything from hard-hitting news to human interest stories. His curiosity and drive led him to the world of creative video production, and he’s never looked back. Chris lives by the mantra, “You can’t make interesting art if you don’t live an interesting life,” and it shows in everything he does—from his love of travelling (25 countries and counting!) to his commitment to helping clients tell their unique stories. When Chris sets his mind to something, you better believe he’s going to tackle it with unmatched enthusiasm and grit.

