

THE RESEARCHED GUIDE TO VISUAL MARKETING

Using Photography to Create a Unique
Content Strategy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01	Introduction
02	Blog Posts and SEO
06	Compressing Images
08	Blog post image dos' and don'ts
09	Social Media
11	Social media image do's and don'ts
12	Landing Pages
14	Landing page image do's and don'ts
15	Email Marketing
19	Email image do's and don'ts

INTRODUCTION

In today's world of content marketing, we're constantly trying to think of new ways to inspire our audience. With all of the marketing collateral we make on a daily basis—think emails, landing pages, case studies, and blog posts—we can easily skip over finding the right images for our content, choosing instead a piece of standard imaging that we've all seen a million times. Without using the right imagery, though, all of our hard work with marketing assets tends to fall flat. That's why HubSpot and Unsplash have come together to bring you this guide to visual marketing that'll make it easy for you to find and insert the perfect images in your content strategy.

It's clear that images are incredibly important for content marketing. In fact, 32% of marketers say visual images are the most important form of content for their business, with blogging coming in second. Carefully crafted and chosen photographs allow us to show the human

side of our marketing efforts—there are real people behind our computers, and photographs allow us to peek behind the curtain and relate to our audiences in a real way.

Often composed with an artistic eye, photographs work especially well in marketing assets, spicing up our collateral and helping evoke emotion from our audience. Video, too, has been climbing in the last few years, and isn't stopping anytime soon. In this guide, we'll go through where to use your visual media, and how to make sure it's optimized for a successful marketing strategy.

BLOG POSTS AND SEO

According to Jeff Bullas, articles with images get [94% more total views](#) than articles without images. That's quite a huge delta! Using images in your blog posts makes your posts more interesting, helps to get your point across, and breaks up copy in a way that makes your blog post easier to read and remember. Images allow your posts to stand out as content consumers can trust and come back to. In fact, when people hear information, they're likely to remember only 10% of that information three days later. However, if a relevant image is paired with that same information, people retained 65% of the information three days later. Adding a photograph that speaks to your copy is a perfect way to expand on your blog post's reach and influence.

Finding the right image is critical to expanding your blog post's reach on social media as well. In an analysis of over 1 million articles, BuzzSumo found that articles with an image once every 75-100

words received double the social media shares as articles with fewer images. Adding images to your blog posts doesn't just help your audience digest your post, though. It also helps them find it.

Blog posts with images on them get noticed by Google, which impacts where your website ranks in a Google search and improves your website's SEO. To dive in a little deeper, it's not the images themselves that Google searches for, but the image alt text. An image's alt text lets Google know what the image is depicting, and helps folks using screen readers get more context from your blog post. Google appreciates that, and will rank blog posts with excellent image alt text higher than those without alt text, or with alt text that doesn't convey any information (think something like IMG92804).

Alt text is an attribute that can be added to an image tag in HTML. Here's what a complete image tag might look like for the photograph below (bolding added for emphasis):

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Photo by [Scott Goodwill](#) on [Unsplash](#)

This tag helps Google understand what your image is all about, and how it relates to your blog post. There's more to the story of image ranking, however. One fourth (¼) of all search traffic happens on Google Images today. That's a massive amount of searches! Through

these searches, your audience is clicking through images to get to your website. You want to make sure the images you put forward are ones that are going to be relevant to your audience, and grab their attention in a meaningful way. That's where photography comes in.

« [Tests have] shown that if you do a search on Google Images and you click the 12th image down and a lot of people start doing that, Google will move it up, just like in the web results, but sometimes even more so with images. We think engagement and popularity, what people scroll to, what they click on, what they click through to, matters quite a bit. That's why you should have a very high-quality, highly interesting, highly relevant image, as well as you also want to serve visitor demand. »

Rand Fishkin
Founder of SparkToro

SEO for Photos, Visuals, & Graphics + How to Rank in Google Image Search

Image SEO Basics:

- ① Is it still worthwhile?
 - Visually-sold products + services (Decorators, remodelers, hotels, crafts)
 - Anything designed to earn links and citations (graphs, data, event photos)
 - Visual Content: licensors (photographers, illustrators, stock gallery)
- ~ 1/3 of ALL Google searches in Jumpshots data were image searches
- 12.5% of web searches on Google contain an image pack
- ② Do I have to use original visuals?
 - Unlike web results, duplicates often outrank the original
 - Just make sure you have the right permissions to republish
- ③ How do I figure out if image SEO matters for my market/audience?



What are the ranking elements for Google Images + Image Packs?



- A) Image filename
- B) Image Alt attribute
- C) Image Caption
- D) Surrounding Text Content
- E) Page Title
- F) Page URL
- G) Image Engagement/Popularity
- H) Image Dimensions
- I) Image Size
- J) Embeds of Image
- K) Traditional Web Ranking Factors on Hosting URL

What Steps Should I Take w/ Image SEO?

- ① Determine SEO Goals
- ② Audit Your KW Research/List for Image visibility → KW Explorer
- ③ Create an Image SEO Set of Guidelines for Content Creators/Publishers on Your Site
- ④ Create a Target List of Image SEO Opportunities to Pursue
- ⑤ Audit Existing Images on Your Site for SEO and UX optimization (size, speed, compression, etc)
 - ↳ Ryan Ayres' "How to Perform an Image Optimization Audit"

Image sizes come into play as well. Google wants to rank images that show up easily and clearly in Google

Image search. Generally sticking to some standard sizes will do the trick. For a quick guide to blog image sizing, bookmark [this page](#) and [this guide](#).

COMPRESSING IMAGES

Compressing images, however, is a different ball game. Websites with lots of heavy and complex types of images and/or videos can cause the website load slower, which will decrease your website's page speed. Google doesn't like that, and may rank your page lower down in search if it's slower to load than others with similar content. In order to avoid that as much as possible, think about the file size of the images on your page. Compress your images before uploading them to your CMS using websites like [compressor.io](#) or, for compressing images in bulk, [tinypng.com](#).

There's a ton you can do to optimize your image SEO strategy in order to get more traffic to your website, all thanks to the images you choose to add to your content. The first step to making improvements is an image optimization audit. To get started, check out these resources from [Moz](#) and the folks at [Google](#).

Clearly, images are critical for your blog strategy. However, they need to be valuable in the context of the post. [In 8 Data-Driven Tips for Using Images in Blog Posts](#), Neil Patel shares a helpful tip:

« Nielsen advises using images that are relevant to the user experience. Images used in an article just for the sake of using an image can be unhelpful. But if the image has a purpose, like helping to explain a concept, emphasize a point, translate to an external page or email, or show personality, then it can only help you. »



Wistia does a great job of adding relevant images into their blog posts. The screenshot above is taken from their [blog post on A/B testing video thumbnails](#),

which has a mix of images of employees, and screenshots from their A/B tests.

BLOG POST IMAGE DOS' AND DON'TS:

Do →

create a folder of images for each blog post. Having a folder dedicated to each blog post makes it easy to stay organized with your creative assets. In each blog post's folder, you can add headshots, your featured image, and supporting images for the post.

Do →

add an image every 75-100 words in your blog post. That helps break up the text, makes it easier for your audience to read, and helps add relevant context or emotion to your post.

Do →

credit the image's creator. It's a nice gesture and helps keep your content human.

Don't →

forget your image alt text. This text helps you rank better in Google searches, and makes it easier for folks with screen readers to understand your blog post. For more information on images and accessibility, [this guide from Moz](#) is an excellent resource.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is all about visual content. From beautiful images to inspiring videos, focusing an image on the message your copy is trying to relay is always a good idea, and can mean the difference between a viral post and an unnoticed one. In fact, tweets with images receive a whopping 150% more retweets than tweets without images. If awareness is your goal, adding captivating images is an excellent way to get your social media accounts noticed.

The first thing you'll want to do is choose images that fit social media platforms' sizing requirements. Each platform may have different requirements for image size, [so here's a handy bookmarkable guide](#) to keep with you when creating new visual social media assets.

There's a shift happening in the marketing world, especially in social media marketing. Creating content is easier than ever, and the barriers for website creation are being knocked down. Anyone can start a free blog and promote their content on social media. This positive change in marketing, though, allows for low-quality content to slip through the cracks. People are being bombarded with content that feels dry and impersonal.

In 2019, being a brand that brings the human element to your social media marketing is going to be more and more important. HubSpot Social Media Professor Crystal King notes that “consumers want to see that there are real people behind the brands they love, and they want to feel connected to those brands”. These connections are critical when building trust with your audience online, where just copy isn't going to cut it anymore. When choosing social media images, make sure the image feels organic and alive, represents real people, and relates back to your social media post's content.



Photo by [Erik Lucatero](#) on [Unsplash](#)

« [...] consumers want to see that there are real people behind the brands they love, and they want to feel connected to those brands. »

SOCIAL MEDIA IMAGE DO'S AND DON'TS:

Do →

use images of people or places instead of images of things. Research consistently finds that images of people are more engaging than images of things. People respond to, well, each other! In one of Jakob Nielsen's [usability studies](#), he discovered that pictures of people are one of the most engaging forms of web content. Swap out your photos of laptops, mountains, and trees, for photos of folks like you and me. Speaking of which...

Don't →

forget about diversity and inclusion. Keep an eye on who takes up the most space in your images. Make sure your images represent the world around you. Keeping this in mind creates a social media image that everyone can relate to.

Do →

take photos at your company. If you can, take some photos of your company and add those to your social media posts. These are especially relevant to posts about company culture, or anything else delightful and quirky. Let your co-workers shine!

Don't →

use generic photos that don't relate to your content. If you want to make your images more specific, consider a text overlay. Here's an excellent example from Timberland:

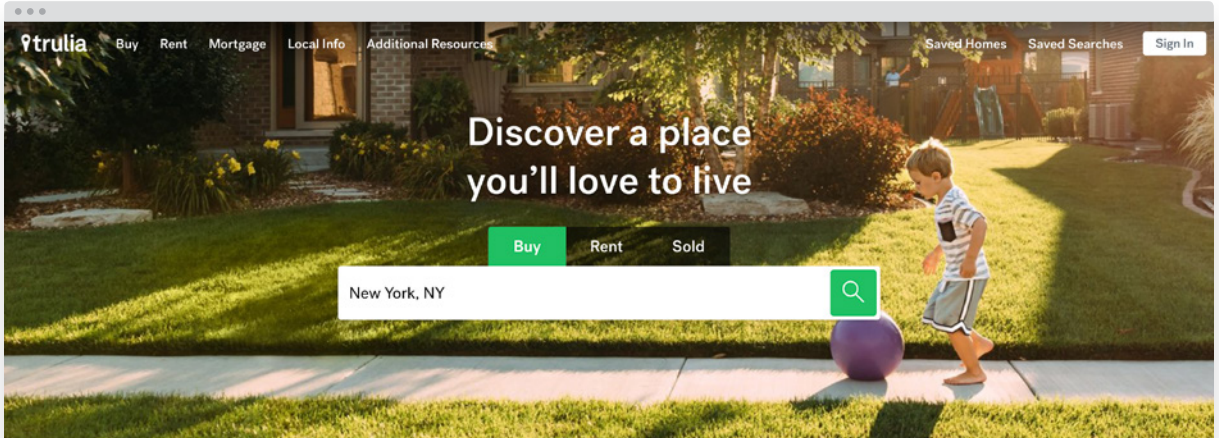


LANDING PAGES

Our friends at WordStream found that the human brain [processes images](#) 60,000 times faster than text, which means the first thing your prospects see on a landing page is the image and the colors you use. This is big news for growth and acquisition marketers. We want our landing pages to convert better every day, and choosing the right images is a big part of a successful landing page recipe.

You may think that adding an image of a computer screen would be a good fit for a computer hardware company's landing page. However, research has found that images are more tied to emotion than anything else—that's why photos of people do better than photos of things. When creating your landing page, think about the emotion you're trying to convey. Then, search for images that really highlight that emotion.

« [...] the human brain processes images 60,000 times faster than text... »



Trulia does an excellent job image selection for their landing page. In it, they show a child playing with a ball on a neighborhood street. This conveys an emotion of happiness, joy, and longing for a home where someone can build a family. It immediately creates trust with the brand, and piques their audience's interest. We'd be curious to see their conversion rates!

When choosing an image for your landing page, make sure you have the customer in mind. Where in the [buyer's journey](#) are they? Do most people come

across your product page when they're ready to buy, or are they really just looking for a solution to a problem? Are they feeling anxious and are in need of a solution immediately, or are they feeling hopeful and aren't pressed for time? Tap into your prospect's emotions when they come across your site, and choose an image that represents that emotion and leads them to their next step.

LANDING PAGE IMAGE DO'S AND DON'TS:

Do →

add images that convey an emotion—whether that's excitement, hope, anxiety, or chaos, tap into what your audience is feeling when they come across your page, and where in the buyer's journey they are.

Do →

test your images with A/B tests. Make sure to test your images, both internally and externally, to make sure that you're choosing the right photos that connect with your audience and lead them to a conversion point. A/B testing is incredibly useful for boosting conversion rates, and getting to know what your audience relates to. Learn how to do be an A/B testing pro with [this guide](#).

Do →

match your image to your color palette on your landing page. Tie in the photograph's main colors with the colors you're using on your website. This helps bring everything on the page together with a clear focus on the call to action.

Don't →

choose standard images of items—even if they relate to your field. Focus more on photos of people for a better outcome.

Don't →

choose cheesy or boring stock photos. Look for unique photographs that folks may not have seen before and that capture the human essence behind your brand. [Unsplash](#) is a great place to find one-of-a-kind photographs for your landing pages.

EMAIL MARKETING

We're all about creating beautiful and delightful emails that get your audience excited to click through. Email is a very visual channel, with emails getting more and more engaging thanks to the use of creative images and media. Whether you're emailing your customers or prospects, free users or repeat visitors, each email you send should have a clear call to action, and a unique image supporting your ask.

When choosing the images you want in your email, make sure that one stands center stage. Add a compelling photograph that begets an emotion and

gets folks excited to click through to your website. Add a text overlay that fits with the image composition, and you'll be in a good place to send. For text overlays and other fine details, there's Photoshop for advanced marketers and designers, and for beginners, there are tons of design resources available [right here](#).



MODA AND FASHION STORE.



WINTER 2016

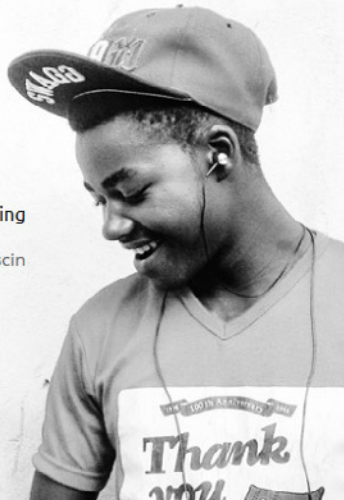
NEW ARRIVAL

Enhanced for conversions raising and marketing

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DISCOVER

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newsletter

We are **alto** a new trending store

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Saloma Tshirt



Zarlo Tshirt



Proto Tshirt

Saloma Tshirt

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ADD TO CART

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SOME EXTRAS

More than a Shop ...



CONVERSION

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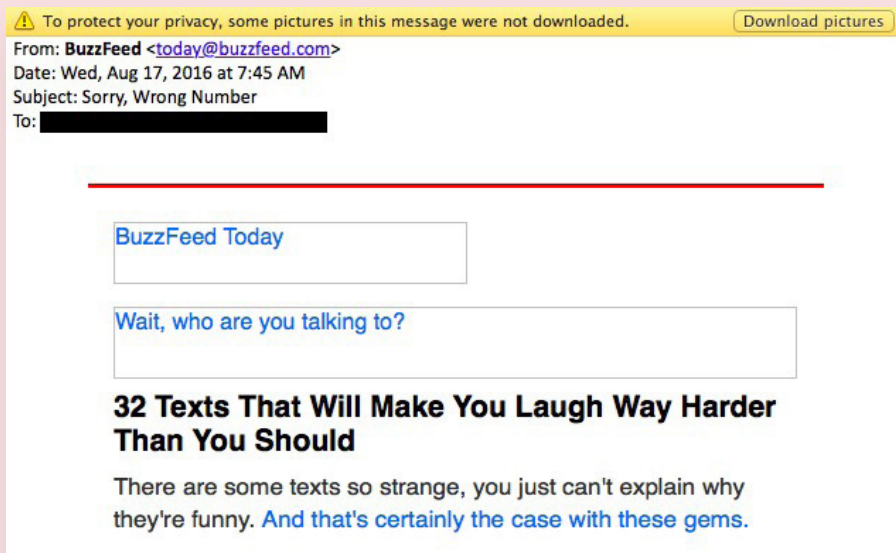
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Email may very well be one of the most difficult channels to nail for image selection. Each email client has different rules around what you can and can't send, and many block images that don't fit within their guidelines. Before you hit send, make sure your emails aren't raising any flags with popular email clients such as Gmail, Outlook, and Apple Mail. Mobile accounts for 46% of all email opens, so make sure your emails look as beautiful on desktop as they do on your phone. Choose images that fit, whether you're viewing on iPhone, Android, or Google Pixel.

Because email clients do block images every once in a while, it's tricky to know when your email will have its images blocked. That's why alt text is as important in email as it is in a blog post. Adding a description of the image in the alt text version of your email makes sure that if your images get blocked, your audience still knows what they were trying to convey. It's also an excellent opportunity for delight, allowing you to get a little silly. Here's an excellent example of good text from BuzzFeed:



Adding video into your email marketing strategy is an excellent way to spice up your emails and give engaging content to your audience, right from the start. However, adding a video player right into your emails may still not be accepted by many email clients. That's where video thumbnails come in. Adding a video thumbnail instead of a screenshot from the video is an effective way to get your audience excited about the content and ready for what comes next.

When adding a video thumbnail, make sure to grab it from a point in your video that's exciting, features a smiling person or an interesting scenario, and makes the viewer want to hit play. When testing, [Wistia found a 21.52% increase in clicks](#) from image to video thumbnails in their emails—that's some actionable data! Try it out for yourself with an A/B test to see how your audience responds to video in email.

« [...] Wistia found a 21.52% increase in clicks from image to video thumbnails in their emails »

EMAIL IMAGE DO'S AND DON'TS:

Do →

make sure your images are sized correctly, and you've got the right alt text behind each image. This is important in case your images are blocked by your audience's email clients.

Do →

hyperlink your images. Each image should be clickable, making it easy for your audience to get to your website without having to scroll down to your CTA.

Don't →

use images that don't convey a message. There are about 111.1 billion consumer emails sent and received every day. We're drowning in content! In order to stand out from the pack, your email images must create an emotional connection to your audience and be engaging enough to get that click.

Don't →

create clickbait emails that don't accurately represent what's behind the click. Your unsubscribe rate depends on it!

When it comes to visual media, creating a human element and an emotional connection to your audience is the most important factor. Keep in mind the technical limitations of your content channel, where your audience is in their buyer's journey when accessing your content, and how they relate to your solution emotionally, and you'll be in a great place to start your search

for the perfect visual accompaniment. Pair that with a bit of organization and planning ahead for a content marketing strategy that shines. Below, find some bookmarkable resources that'll help you get you up and running:

- [25 Instagram Templates for Business](#)
- [HubSpot collection on Unsplash](#)
- [10 Social Media Templates To Help You Manage, Optimize, And Create More Social Content](#)
- [Beautiful Email Newsletters](#)