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BIGGER Isn't Always Better;
Composing & Resizing Photos for the Web

They say a picture is worth a thousand words.
### But what are those words saying?

Using images online or in email is a powerful way to make an impact… but just "any image" is insufficient. The impact you make might be a negative one with the wrong choices. However, by employing a few simple guidelines, you can ensure your photos are working for you.

Subject matters

Just as important as it is to have a clear plan of what you want to convey before you speak, knowing your image's main idea is the first step to having a photograph speak volumes for you. Being specific can help you create an impressive photograph. Try thinking of a single word or a phrase – perhaps a title for your photo – to help you focus your efforts. For example, if you are shooting a group of people at a function, narrow your "subject" to a child with a balloon or three people in line for food.

Setting up a shot

With the advent of digital cameras, you can now take as many shots as you want, then sort through only the ones you like, without additional cost. However, there is a balance between being "trigger happy" and setting yourself up for something good to choose from. Trading the use of quality composition for sheer number of shots certainly means long hours shifting through bad photos, and possibly nothing to show as a result. The best balance is to take just a few seconds to set up a shot, using as many of these guidelines as is reasonable, while also not being afraid to just take a picture, even if its composition is less than ideal.
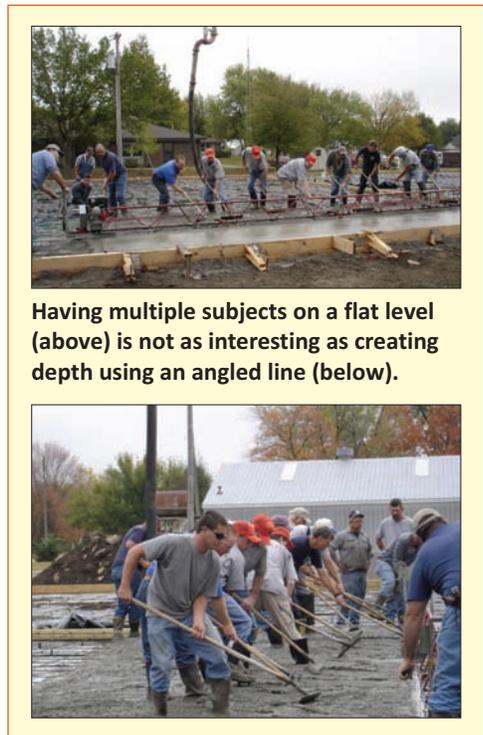
Having multiple subjects on a flat level (above) is not as interesting as creating depth using an angled line (below).

Background: remember to check if your background is too busy or distracting, or better yet, have it add to the subject of your photo.

Background: It is easy to pick out your main subject; equally as easy is forgetting there is a background! As soon as you pick out your subject, take a quick glance at the background to make sure it's not too busy or distracting from your subject. If moving your subject is not possible, try cutting down the background by moving your position or by shooting down from above (bird's-eye view), or shooting up at an angle (worm's-eye view).

Foreground: If you have the opportunity, include a small item off to the side in your foreground. It adds dimension and depth, as well as adding to what you are "saying" with your shot.

Foreground: using foreground subject, also worm's-eye view.

Centering: drawing your frame into thirds, placing subject off center (also example of background secondary subject)

Centering: If you have one subject to shoot, you have two opposite options available to you. The first is to put the subject directly in the center of the frame. This conventional setup can be very useful and simple. There is a universal appeal to symmetry. Conversely, setting the subject slightly off center is a more artistic option that can tell more of a story than a simple subject. To do this, draw in your mind lines that divide your frame into thirds. Place your subject on the left or right line, leaving a larger area for your background, which might contain an interesting side subject that adds to your story.

If you have multiple main subjects to shoot, such as two people, rather than have them stand side by side, try placing one slightly in front of the other to add depth. Or again, placing subjects off center can help make a two-person shot more interesting. If you have a group of people, you can go back to more of a flat level look and focus on making sure each face is shown.

Lines: Any strong vertical or horizontal line should be placed along those imaginary lines dividing your frame into thirds, not directly in the middle of your frame. Angled lines should lead towards the main subject instead of away from it.

Framing: You can add interest by not only changing your point of view (worm's-eye or bird's-eye), but also by getting closer or further away, or if zooming in or out if your

Lines: another example of off-centered Thirds, plus an angled line

Framing: worm's-eye view (above) also closer view bird's-eye view (below)

movement is limited. Try framing the same subject a few different ways.

Candid vs. posed: A natural smile makes for a better photograph than a nervous staged one; that is why candid shots can be quite appealing and genuine. However, if you see an opportunity for a great photo if you just had a little cooperation, don't be shy about posing your subjects.

Creative extras: At times, an opportunity presents itself to be creative without being definitive that might go against conventional guidelines: seize it. An example might be a silhouette, such as a dark subject with backlighting, or reflections in a pool of water or in windows.

Resolution

Resolution settings on your camera can help you overcome mistakes or propel that mediocre shot to a fantastic one. Although you will eventually reduce resolution and file size for use online, set the resolution on your camera to be as high as your memory capacity will allow. This will allow you to crop or otherwise manipulate your photos later. You can never increase resolution once the photograph is taken, but you can easily reduce resolution after the fact.

Resizing

Bigger is not always better. Having a high resolution photograph online is like taking a drink from a fire hose. Resizing images before you place them online or in an email is not only a courtesy, it is also responsible for conserving file space and download times for your patrons. High res images manually confined in aspect but not file size on web pages do not appear in the best viewing quality, despite the actual quality in the image.

The easiest way on a PC to resize a photograph for email use is to use Windows Explorer to navigate to the image file. Then right-click and select Compress & Email. The rest is done for you.

Group photos: seeing each face is important in staging posed photos of larger groups. Having people line up directly behind each other (above) might obscure a face, so stagger your group (below), and use steps if possible.

For web use, the zip/rar option is not the most ideal because of the file type that results. Additionally, if you want more control over image resizing without having to understand much technical detail, download the free utility called **VSO Image Resizer:**
http://www.vso-software.fr/products/image_resizer/

After downloading the executable file, open it and an installer will automatically make this program available for your use. To use it, again use Windows Explorer to navigate to the image file and right-click. (You can also select multiple files with the shift or control key before you right click.) This time select VSO Image Resizer. The program will start and give you options for resizing. You can create different profiles, or different settings for resizing and see how it affects file size and quality to meet the requirements of what you need. As an example, for a Web site an image that is 600 pixels wide at 72 dpi resolution is large on the screen, and high enough quality. For an email or desktop, you could even go as high as 1024 pixels wide at 72 dpi and still have your image be sufficiently large. The file space that you save might be in the megabytes range!
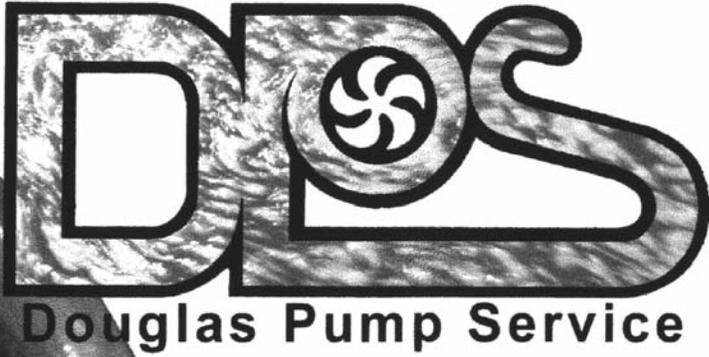
Bigger isn't always better

High resolution, busy photographs might have a place somewhere, but to make the most impact with your images online or in email, keep in mind these simple guidelines. Make your one thousand words meaningful and enjoyable.

Since 1997, Jen Sharp (JenSharp.com) has served business and government across Kansas and the US and even internationally, specializing in web development, design & programming including e-Learning, ecommerce, content management systems, and other small business solutions. Her work has earned National and International awards: krwa.net won Best Website in 2002 from the National Rural Water Association.