7 STEPS

TO CHOOSING THE RIGHT IMAGE

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MARKETING MADE EASY

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Choosing the right image for your small business marketing content strategy is essential. A wrong or inappropriate image could confuse or possibly alienate your target audience and impede the success of your content strategy. It might even damage the reputation of your brand and business. Following the seven steps in our eBook will help you choose the right image(s) within your visual marketing.

STEP 1

Know What You Want to Achieve

When choosing images, you must firstly establish what you want the image to achieve, put simply, what is the goal of the image?

You do this by:

1. Knowing your purpose for using the image
2. Deciding where you are going to use the image
3. Ensuring that the image is relevant for your goal.

WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE FOR USING THE IMAGE?

Ask yourself what message are you trying to communicate?

- To illustrate the need for your product or service?
- To create or nurture an emotional engagement with your audience?
- To highlight a value of your brand?
- To build trust in your brand?
- Something else?

Knowing what you hope to achieve is critical to selecting the right image. Without firstly establishing this, the image will not align with your end goal, and the opportunity will be lost to cultivate the desired action with your audience.

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WHERE ARE YOU GOING TO USE THE IMAGE?

This is important both for your market segmentation across different channels and platforms, and for determining the correct image size, shape, orientation and resolution.

Before writing out your brief for a custom image or beginning your search for a stock image, make sure that you have decided on the following usage criteria:

1. Will this image be used on your website, and if so, where?

   - On a blog post as part of your content strategy?
   - On your small business' about page?
   - On a sales page for your product or service?

2. Will this image be used within your email marketing strategy?
3. Will this image be used on your social media, and if so, on what platforms and where exactly?
3. Somewhere else?

After having determined the above usage criteria, ask yourself once more: is the image relevant for my purpose or goal? If the answer is yes, then you will be confident of selecting the most relevant image.

Keeping on Brand

Your images are an integral part of your content strategy, so keeping on brand, by using your consistent brand voice and brand message, is vital when selecting the right image.

If feasible, custom photography can achieve this for you. Working to your photography brief, it can accurately showcase your brand name, tagline, logo, key brand-identified graphics, products and services.

However, you can still ensure that your image stays on brand when using quality photo library stock images.

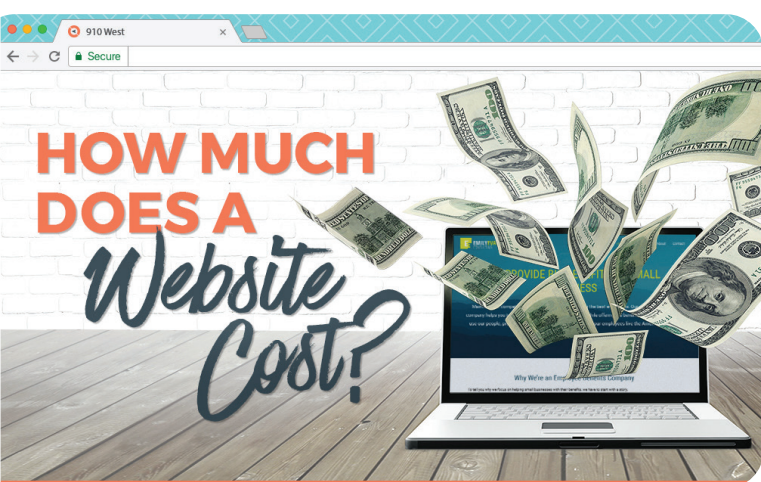**When reviewing library stock image options, consider:**

1. Is this image what your audience expects to see from your brand?
2. Is this image what your audience wants to see?
3. Does this image align with your target audience, e.g., if you are targeting young families should you avoid high end luxury destinations shots? Ask yourself: does this relate to your brand voice and messaging, does it align well? If not, there are plenty of other more suitable images to choose from that will resonate with your brand messaging?

Your brand voice needs to always be consistent across your content marketing strategy. It needs to carry over seamlessly from your copy to your visual marketing. Just as you pay attention to your brand voice's tone and vocabulary in your copy, you need to pay attention to your brand voice's tone and aesthetic in your images.

With every image you select, you either reinforce your brand voice or confuse and possibly alienate your target audience.

If someone saw the image, would they think of your brand, or would they be surprised to discover that your brand put it out? The right image is the one that stays on brand, which is consistent with your brand voice.

How can I talk about
end of life with my parents?

Who do you trust?

What does a
*good business
coach do?*

WHAT MAKES A
GOOD
VISION?

HOW MUCH
DOES A
*Website
Cost?*

Importance of a
WEBSITE

Understand Your Audience's Emotional Responses

It's essential to understand how your audience will interact with the image, through its impact on them and their emotional response, or connection.

Psychologists use the word valance to describe relative values to human reactions.

Attractiveness, good or positive values and reactions are referred to as **positive valence.** For example, care, happiness, loyalty, curiosity, fun and amusement.
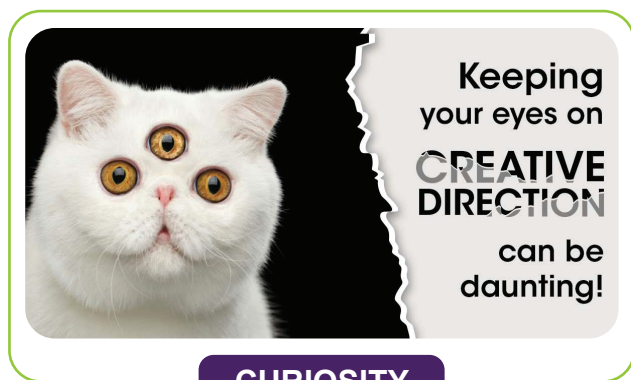
Negative valance means the exact opposite. For example, shock, sadness, fear, anxiety, or despair. These responses can vary in intensity, depending on the image confronting the audience.
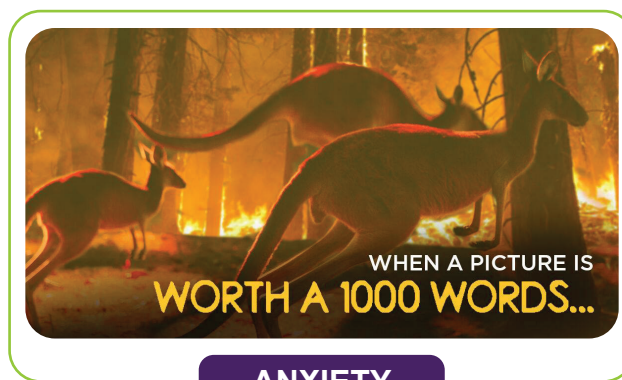

HAPPINESS
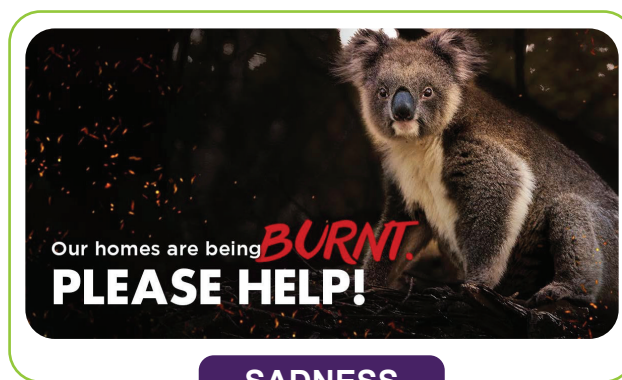
SADNESS

CURIOSITY

ANXIETY

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As examples: an image of cute puppies or kittens will create an intense positive response, with a positive valence. In contrast, an image of a devastating bushfire will create an intense negative response, with a negative valence.

What emotional response do you want your audience to have? Positive? Or negative?

How intense do you want the reaction to be? More intense or less intense?

Both positive and negative responses can be useful, as can more or less intense reactions.

LOYALTY

CARE

FUN

STRESSED

DESPAIR

FEAR
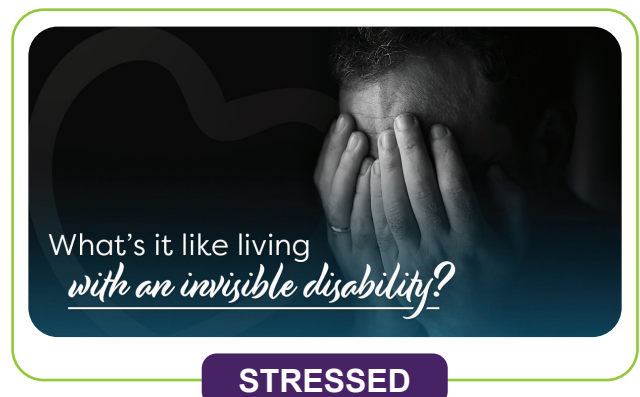
This depends on:

- The purpose of the image
- What message you are trying to communicate
- Where your audience will engage this image
- What call-to-action if any, you want your audience to take in response to your image.

For example, do you want your audience to:

- Tap into their emotions more than their critical thinking processes, perhaps in a discussion of a more emotionally sensitive topic, or in the leadup to a feelings-based sales call-to-action? If so, a more intense image could assist.

- Tap into their critical thinking processes more than their emotions, perhaps within a more scientifically or logically complex argument, or in the leadup to a sales call-to-action based on a more rational argument? If so, a less intense image could assist.

- Feel caution or concern about a problem, challenge, or issue? An image with a negative valence may be more useful.

- Contact you for your services or to purchase your product? An image with a more positive valence would be appropriate.

You can read more about understanding your audience's responses to images here.

Align Your Image to Surrounding Content

You are already staying on brand and being consistent with your brand voice. You have made sure to select an image that produces the appropriate emotional response from your audience.

Additionally, ensure that you align your image to the content surrounding it, and this includes:

- Headings and subheadings
- Copy, whether a blog post, other web copy, social media caption, email copy, white paper copy, guide or user manual copy, etc.
- Highlighted quotes or case studies that particularly stand out on the page, will make a stronger impression on the reader
- Graphs, diagrams, or highlighted statistics
- Other graphics / images

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WHAT DOES THIS MEAN PRACTICALLY?

If you have a blog post discussing team cultural dynamics within a small business, don't use an image showing an unrealistically sized corporate office. Or, if a heading or subheading mentions how your product assists high schoolers with their school curriculum study, don't use an image of primary school age-appropriate coursework or texts.

As much as this may seem obvious, it can become frustrating when searching through seemingly endless stock photography pages for an image that is on brand, and which produces the desired emotional response in your target audience. It could be tempting to go with an image that almost – but doesn't quite – line up with your content.

This is not the time to cut corners, just keep searching for the right on-brand image that produces the desired emotional response and which aligns with your content.

HOW TO AMPLIFY THE EMOTIONAL RESPONSES WITH CLEVER CAPTIONS AND TYPOGRAPHY.

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Customise Your Stock Image

When using stock photography, it is important that you find ways to liven up the stock images to make them look more distinct and interesting.

Do not place a standard stock image without any customised design on your website, as that may be found on hundreds (or more) of other business websites. By customising your selected image, you will help your business stand out and better connect with your target audience.

Through good design, you can customise your stock photos to make them original to your business, brand, and content. Simply adding in the right kind of typography and a clever caption aligned with your brand and messaging will greatly liven up a stock image.

This doesn't have to be complicated, as simple to use free or affordable editing tools are readily available online for business owners and small business marketing teams. It just needs to be well thought through and be aligned with your strategy.

For design editing, including editing still photos, animated photos, videos, and infographics or other data visualisation, the following tools can be helpful:

- Canva
- Crello
- Stencil
- Easil
- Tyle
- Piktochart

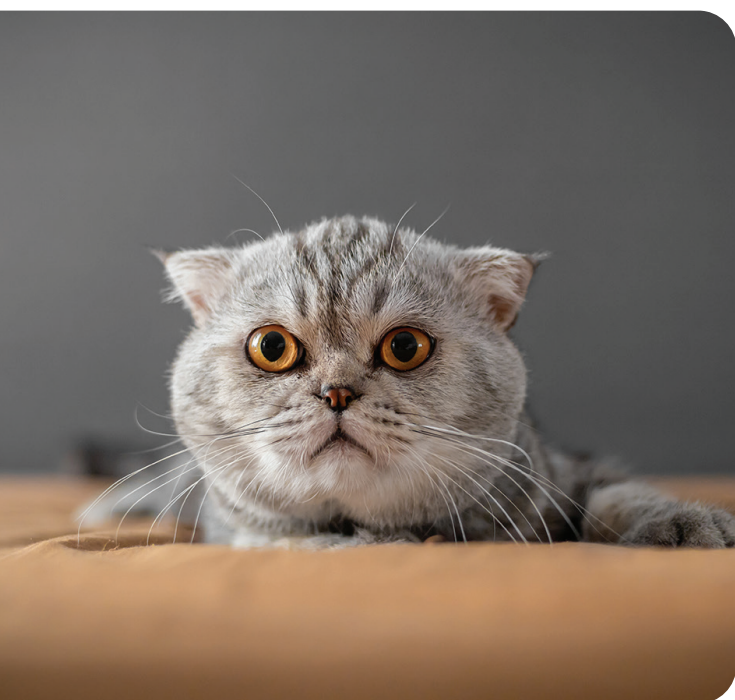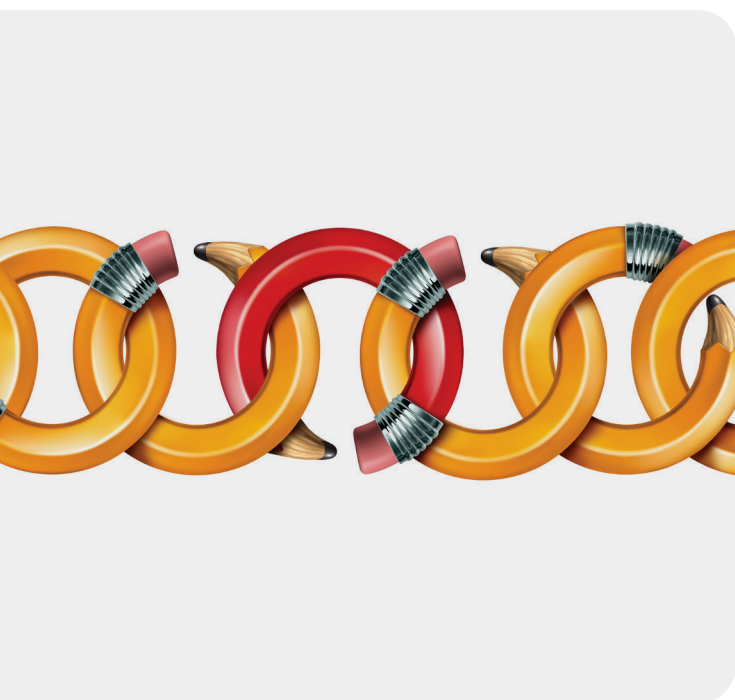For photo editing tools, the following are worth a look:

- Pixlr
- Fotor
- PicMonkey

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For example: Using stock images can be a great, affordable option for your business' visual marketing. By taking the time to liven up your selected image through some simple but smart design work, you can ensure that your business stands out and better engages your target audience.

If you need design help, use a professional service so as not to compromise the overall quality of your brand. Ask us about our affordable design services with quick turnaround for social media, digital marketing and print application.

How to fix your
BROKEN
Content Marketing Strategy?

WHAT'S HAPPENED?
Things aren't
the same anymore...

Use High-Resolution Images

This is another step that should be obvious, but you might be tempted to avoid, when searching for an image that connects your message with your target audience.

You must always use high-resolution images instead of watermarked or pixelated images. This is not a step you can bypass.

The quality of the image you use speaks directly to your audience about the professionalism of your business, your brand and the quality of your products or services. If you opt for a lower resolution image, it will be a far less effective element of your visual marketing and will let down your content strategy.

No matter how perfect the image may seem, if it's watermarked or pixelated, it's not the right image for you.

However, finding quality high-res images doesn't have to be difficult. High-res stock photos are readily available for free from platforms like Unsplash and Pixabay. Alternatively, you can access high-res stock photos within a paid platform like Shutterstock or Adobe Photos.

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Avoid Cheesy, Staged, or Clichéd Images

Lastly, make sure that you avoid cheesy, staged or clichéd images. This is applicable whether you are using custom or stock photography. While you can customise your image to make it more distinct and interesting, as outlined in Step 5 above, you should still use the best possible image content from the outset.

If arranging custom photos, avoid unclear briefs or poor direction that can lead to overused imagery, or photos that appear staged or less authentic.

If you are choosing an image from stock photos, this step is particularly applicable because cheesy, staged or clichéd photos abound in stock photography.

Additionally, ensure that you align your image to the content surrounding it, and this includes:

- Is recent and appears contemporary, rather than appearing as cheesy or dated
- Looks more naturally posed, rather than appearing as obviously staged
- Stands out from other images you are viewing. This helps ensure that it will stand out as unique to your audience, rather than appearing overused or clichéd

It may take you a little longer to find a more contemporary, natural, or distinct image, but it's worth it to avoid the risk that your image appears as run of the mill or ordinary to your audience. Like selecting a high-res image in Step 6, the quality of the image you use communicates your business and brand's professionalism and the quality of your products or services. It's not worth opting for a shortcut here.

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Meet the Team

MEET THE CONDUCTOR

After recognizing the challenges businesses face when putting together marketing plans and their implementation, Stacy Farrell created Content Box.

Stacy is our creative spark, creating marketing music one project at a time. With a career of expertise in education, design, business marketing and strategic communications sectors, she's the power that fuels our clients' successes.

Stacy has worked in the Asia Pacific B2B sectors and in business management in Australia's education industry. A veteran in the business, she's worked with TAFE NSW, Sydney University, The Xella Group, Which Property, Western International School and many others.

HERE'S OUR ENGINEER

Gregor Lochtie keeps the engine running with his uncanny ability to help businesses achieve their goals with strategic insight, business development and growth. Experienced in international markets, he's achieved double digit sales and financial growth for blue chip multinationals.

With extensive work experience in Asian markets heading up large teams and driving change, Gregor knows what businesses need. Also, a business owner, he understands how to manage change in a number of industries. He's helped companies like American Express, Morgan Stanley, Mastercard, Motorola, Sony and others pivot and grow.

MEET OUR CREATIVE MAGICIAN

Deborah Valencia is our chief designer, turning what could be boring visuals into creative masterpieces. Her ability to conceptualise, interpret and stay on brand, sets her aside from much of the competition. Working across a wide range of industries, she brings to life the creative magic that Content Box has become known for.

OUR CONTENT CREATORS & EDITORS

Content Box has a team of highly skilled content copywriters. Our writers are matched to clients based on the article brief, their industry knowledge, experience and proven track record. All content is released only after multiple rounds of proof reading and editing.

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CHECKLIST TO
CHOOSING THE RIGHT IMAGE

Using the right image in your content can really make or break a reader's interest. Considering that over 65% of the population are visual learners, selecting and correctly using the right image becomes a crucial part of any visual marketing strategy.

Remember that while using custom photography might be preferable and/or essential for some businesses, it may not always be possible to do so. There is a plethora of excellent stock images to choose from and with the application of a bit of creative spark, stock photography can work extremely well when selected correctly.

Use this checklist as a starting point to check if your chosen image is really the best match for your content.

IDENTIFY THE PURPOSE

Why are you using it?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

Is it relevant?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

IS IT ON BRAND?

Is this what is expected?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

Is this what people are wanting to see?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

WHAT EMOTIONAL RESPONSE DO YOU WANT?

Do you want a positive response?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

Do you want a negative response?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

WHERE WILL YOU USE IT?

Does the placement match the content?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

Does it need to be bigger or smaller?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

DOES IT NEED SOME DESIGN ELEMENTS ADDED?

Do the colours need changing?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

Does is need a caption?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

ARE YOU USING A HIGH-QUALITY IMAGE?

Is it pixelated?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

Is any part of the image cut off?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

USING A STOCK IMAGE?

Has it been over used?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

Does it look staged?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

Does it look outdated?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

Does it look authentic for your purpose?

☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

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