

Your product photography can be a deal-breaker. Imagery is the first thing that visitors are drawn to when they land on a site. Even with the most informative product descriptions, people will still refer to the photos to get information. Not only do the photos of your products communicate information about the specs, it also shows whether or not the product is high-quality. If it is still early days for your brand and you can't afford to enlist the services of a professional photographer, here are some practical tips for you to help you shoot decent photos on a budget.

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## DIY: Product Photography on a Budget:

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### What's Product Photography?

In a nutshell, product photography uses certain methods and strategies to display your [different products](#) in such a way that your target audience will want to buy it. Even if you do not have an eCommerce site (yet), you will need product photography to advertise your products in print media. From big billboards to basic brochures, there are so many places where you can use product photography to sell your products.

You get two main types of product photography: product-only photos and lifestyle photos. A product-only photo shows the specific product from a variety of angles in its best light. It is sharply in focus and usually set against a white background. With a lifestyle photo, you can show how your product can be used. You can also, for example, include other products that will be the perfect addition to the specific product that you are advertising. In short, lifestyle photos tell a story. Product-only photos tend to be boring, but with lifestyle photos you can be a bit more creative.

Effective [marketing strategies](#) use both product-only images and lifestyle photos. On your product page, you will mainly use product-only images, but by including a few lifestyle shots your target audience will feel more connected to your product. Though, on your social media platforms, you will mostly rely on solely lifestyle images.

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### The Importance of Product Photography

Your product photography forms an integral part of your brand identity. You will use it in social media posts, your [eCommerce website](#) and other digital marketing. Your target audience will base their first impressions about your brand on the quality of your product photos (along with other images).

It will also help boost conversions. Our brains are wired to engage better with visual elements. Like it or not, but the photos of your products will have a greater impact on your target audience than your product descriptions and the rest of your website copy. The quality of your photos will directly affect your products' perceived value.

So, do it right and it will capture your target audience's attention and show that your brand is trustworthy. After all, it is much easier to decide if you should buy a product based on what it actually looks like compared to a written (and often lengthy) description.

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## Which Camera Should You Use?

Needless to say, the camera is the most important element of a product photography shoot. The good news is that as smartphone cameras have advanced tremendously in the past few years, you do not even necessarily have to invest in an expensive DSLR camera. In fact, in some instances you might even end up taking better product shots with your smartphone's camera that you are more familiar and experienced with. With the correct background and lighting, people will not even know that you did not use a DSLR camera.

That being said, DSLR cameras are becoming more affordable. If your budget allows it, a high-quality camera is still better. Just make sure that you select the right lens and get the white balance and aperture correct. Wide-angle lenses and wider apertures tend to cause distortion and blur.

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## To Tripod or Not to Tripod?

Ideally, you should use a tripod. It might not be that important for lifestyle photos, but it is much more important for product-only photos. One of the worst feelings is spending a lot of time getting the background and lighting right, just to have a dozen blurry shots to show for your effort. With a tripod, it is much easier to ensure your photos are in focus. Another advantage of using a tripod is that it adds consistency.

If your budget allows it, consider buying your own tripod as you will use it for several years. Though, if money is an issue, you could probably make do without a tripod. You can, for example, instead simply use a chair or books to help you stabilize your camera.

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## Tools That You Will Need for Product Photography

In addition to a camera and (ideally) a tripod, you will also need the following tools:

- A table
  - Lighting equipment
  - A white backdrop
  - Clamps to position your background
  - Image editing software
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## Tips for Shooting Product Photos

### Use the right background

The right background will make editing (also referred to as post-processing) much easier. White or light matte backgrounds work best for product photography. As reflective surfaces can create unwanted highlights, you might just end up creating more editing work for yourself.

The good news is that you can improvise a background eliminating the need to buy a photo sweep or studio light box. Depending on your type of product, you might be able to get away with a roll of white paper and a chair or table. In fact, the benefit of using a paper roll instead of a sweep or light box is that if a part of the background gets dirty (and this will happen considering that it is white), you can simply cut off that section and roll down a clean piece.

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### Spend a lot of time on lighting

If you know anything about photography, you will know that lighting is probably the most important (and even more critical if you are shooting products). You will spend a lot of time on lighting, but the final results will make it all worthwhile. Plus, it will also help you with editing.

When it comes to lighting, you have two options: studio light or natural light. Whichever approach you follow, your goal is to ensure your product is well-lit. As getting the color spot on is so important for product photography, highlights and deep shadows should be avoided.

### Using natural light

Using natural light is the most cost-effective approach. That being said, it is challenging as the light constantly changes and for product photography even lighting is essential. You need to ensure that it looks like your entire product range was shot with the same lighting.

Your big concern is going to be to identify the best time during the day for your shoot. If you are going to be relying on natural light for a lifestyle shoot outside, it is best to do this early in the morning or late in the afternoon. Direct sunlight can create unpleasant shadows which will make editing more difficult than it has to be.

If you will be shooting product-only photos, ensure that you position your table close to a big window. By moving the table closer or farther away from the window, you can create different effects. When your table is closer to the window, the shadows and light will be softer. For more even light, you can move the table farther away (bear in mind that this will also make your shadows appear sharper).

It is easier to reduce natural light by positioning a cloth over the window than to create additional lighting during post-processing. So, plan your product shoot for the brightest time of the day (even if you are not at your brightest then).

### **Using studio lighting**

While studio lighting is more expensive, the major benefit of following this approach is that you have much better control. It might take time to set it up, but once it is done your photos will be consistent (which is key for branding). Also, if you know that you have a big range of products that you need to shoot and that you will be busy for a couple of hours, studio lighting will make it much easier.

If you want to use studio lighting, you will need two lights (at least) and two identical bulbs. Cool colored light bulbs work much better than warm colored ones. Though, a word or warning, it does require some skill to know how to position the lights properly.

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### **Restrict it to five angles**

While product-only photos will typically use various angles to display the key features of your product, it is best to limit it to five angles at most. Typically, people want to see a top-down shot, a shot from each side and, depending on the type of product, a photo that shows the bottom of the product (this will be important for something like shoes). Whichever angles you decide to include, remember to make a note of it in your brand guidelines (more about this later).

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### **Use photo-editing software**

After you have taken your photos, you still need to retouch it. Editing can turn an average photo into a high-quality, professional image. With the help of software, you can correct a wide range of issues like removing backgrounds, correcting the color or adding more shadows. Similar to lighting, it will take some time to familiarize yourself with the software.

There are several [photo editing tools available](#) like Fotor, Snapseed and Canva. So, you do not necessarily have to use Photoshop which is expensive and overkill for beginners. Alternatively, you can also outsource only this step to a professional. There are many companies that will retouch your

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photos for you for a few dollars.

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## Optimize your photos

The majority of platforms have specific photo requirements which you will have to follow. While this might not be the case for your own product pages on your website, it is still good practice to optimize your photos.

Big photos can really reduce the loading speed of your site which in turn will ruin your SEO efforts. By optimizing your photos, you can ensure that your product pages still load quickly without reducing the photo quality. A broad guideline when it comes to optimizing your images is to aim for 200 KB or less.

It is also important that you include as much detail when you name your product photos. Keywords and metadata will help to boost your ranking in the search results.

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## Create brand guidelines

Consistency is key for creating a brand identity. Just like you most likely already have guidelines for your brand voice and story, color palette, and fonts, you should also take the time to create guidelines for product photography and post-processing.

The following are some of the things that should be included:

- The distance between the product and the camera
- Lighting
- Angles
- Saturation
- Shadows
- Composition
- Colors

Luckily, you will not have to spend any money on creating your guidelines. You will only need to put aside some time. As a matter of fact, by taking the time to write down these guidelines, you will actually save money and time as you can simply continue with your next photo shoot where you stopped.

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## Wrapping Things Up

Your product photos play such a crucial role, even more so if you solely rely on eCommerce. Not only do your product photos showcase your actual products, but it also communicates a lot about your brand. So, if your budget allows it, you should ideally enlist the services of a professional product photographer.

If using a professional product photographer is something that you can't afford (at this stage), you can still get high-quality product photos by applying the basic principles. Focus on getting the basics like your background and lighting right and use a photo editing tool to fix any glaring issues. You might even be able to get the job done with just your smartphone in your hand!

Source: [Product Photography on a Budget: Your DIY Guide](#)