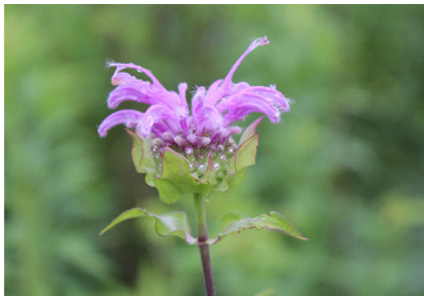


Features

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DIY Video and Photography Tips for Building Community and Driving Sales

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Pictured: When photographing your subject, keep shooting from different angles, including close up, a medium distance and farther away, as shown here.



We're all visual consumers. Beautiful still photos and captivating moving pictures move us to decide we need that particular plant or product in our lives. But they really can be more than just a beauty shot—they can create a connection.

Before the pandemic hit, I would have said hiring a professional is the answer to your photography and video production needs. Like so many other things, COVID-19 has changed the way we consume imagery. In many cases, amateur photos and video are more accepted in business applications now. We've even backed it up with a marketing term, calling it more "authentic."



One of the best ways to highlight your product or service is by using video to tell your story. With smartphone video quality getting better and better, you probably already have decent equipment to get the job done. Video can be a way to connect to your customers, adding a sense of realism to your website, emails and other content.

"When COVID-19 hit, we started creating videos to show live plants and add life to PowerPoint presentations," says Jonathan Pedersen, CEO and President of Monrovia. "Video helped us show color, scale and movement.

We've been able to repurpose video we've shot for our customers, using it for internal teams and consumers, too. It's been a very effective tool."

Video also offers a way to show off the human side of your business. "I cannot think of a better way to personalize and humanize your brand than through video," says Stephanie Whitehouse, retail general manager, Dickman Farms Greenhouses & Garden Center in Auburn, New York. "People buy plants from people, and companies who speak to the end consumer on a level that is informative, fun, and maybe even a little quirky, will always be successful."

Best off all, many garden centers are seeing a direct link between video content and sales. “Customers often come in seeking the items we feature in our videos,” says Jessie Jacobson, owner of Tonkadale Greenhouse in Minnetonka, Minnesota. “All of a sudden, all the plant parents are buying worm castings because we have taught them they are a great soil amendment, and a natural and gentle organic fertilizer for their indoor plants.”

Many photography rules apply to both still images and video. If you're ready to take on your own photo and video work, here are a few tips for gaining an eye for the shot:

Be realistic. Is this a job you can do? Make no mistake, photography, just like video, is an art form. Know your limits and truly recognize the often fleeting opportunity of capturing an image. One benchmark I use is time pressure. If it's a one-time event, without opportunity to reshoot or rework, leave it to the pros.

Take time to plan. Create an outline to map out your shoot and make the most of your time. Planning is essential to getting the shots you need, the sound you want and making sure the story comes together. If you're not hiring a professional crew, consider working with a producer to help frame your stories.

The rule of thirds. Composition is where the “art form” of video and photography shines. Changing the way you approach a subject can make a world of difference. The rule of thirds breaks the frame into a grid of nine squares. Putting the subject at an intersection point of the grid helps makes the image more interesting. Experts say it helps draw you into a photo by putting more emphasis on the subject.

Interview like a pro. The key to shooting video interviews is to give the subject some room. Make sure the upper half of their body is in the frame, shooting from the waist up. Leave some space around the subject in case they move around when they speak. Use a good quality microphone. Don't rely on just the microphone that's installed on your device. A wireless, lavalier microphone is less noticeable on camera and gives your subject freedom to move around.

Edit like a pro (nearly). Editing might seem daunting, but there are some great tools available to help. Chances are you have basic software on our computer already. Simple tasks like cropping and straightening can make a so-so still photo come to life.

Light and color tweaks can make a big difference in the quality of your photos and videos. Just be sure you're limiting the use of these “fixes” and filters. Some filters can add interest, but they can detract from the authenticity and true nature of the image.

Now, let's dive into more nuts and bolts of getting your shot.

Get the Set Up Right

- Start by cleaning your equipment! Nothing like a dirty lens to mess up a shot.
- Make sure your camera is set to its highest megapixel setting.
- For video, place your phone in the horizontal position. For still photography, match the orientation of the photo to the format you need. For example, if you're looking for a Facebook cover photo, horizontal is the way to go. A product shot for the website? A vertical shot may work best.
- Buy a good quality tripod! This tool is helpful for both forms of shooting, but is especially important for video.
- If you're going to move around a lot, try a smaller tripod that can serve as a hand-held grip. These tools help stabilize your shots, giving you a more professional look.

Hold Your Shot and Shoot A LOT!

- For video, pick a shot and stick with it. In most cases, you don't need to zoom, pan or tilt. This is especially true if you're shooting live video or trying not to edit. Unnecessary movement is distracting and makes people lose interest (or even become nauseous!).
- If you want to come in for a close up, use your feet to move forward, not the zoom function on your camera or phone.
- Options are good. Shooting, or even over shooting, your subject will give you more to work with. Try different angles, use different poses, capture movement and action, use props. Just. Keep. Shooting. If it doesn't work out, all you need to do is hit delete. But, more often than not, you'll find some surprises.
- Variety is especially helpful with video editing. Think wide shot, medium shot and tight shot of each subject or location. Hold each shot a minimum of 15 seconds. This will give you plenty of shots to cover unwanted movement or transition from one idea to the next.

Illuminate with Lighting

- Lighting is a crucial part of photography and video. Shooting outside can provide the most natural look. Make sure you're not shooting in blinding sunlight directly overhead. You may have heard of the "Golden Hour" or the "Magic Hour." This is the period of time just after sunrise and before sunset when the light is much redder and softer than midday. This is a very favorable time to capture video, especially when you're featuring people.
- In most cases, you'll want to keep your subjects facing the sun. Backlighting (with the sun behind the subject) makes the object or person you're trying to shoot look dark.
- When shooting inside, make sure you're not shooting directly facing a window.
- Adding a light source in front of your subject makes a world of difference. **GP**

As a former TV news producer and confessed hydrangea and rose fanatic, Kathleen Hennessy considers herself very fortunate to be in horticulture marketing. For more than 25 years, her company, Axiom Marketing, has helped companies in horticulture, building, home products and energy solve their toughest sales and marketing problems. She can be reached at khennessy@axiomcom.com.