

# THE PRO BLOGGER'S GUIDE TO INSPIRING **PHOTOGRAPHY**

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BY CHRISTINA-LAUREN POLLACK



PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS TO ELEVATE YOUR BRAND ONLINE

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BY CHRISTINA-LAUREN POLLACK

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How to get started today toward creating a powerful online presence that will attract more clients, customers, subscribers, and social media followers.

# A NOTE TO INSPIRE YOU

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As the pro lifestyle blogger, digital content creator, and social media influencer behind *Inspirations & Celebrations* since 2011, I've taken, edited, and appeared in thousands of photos that have been seen by millions of people online.

I went from doing quick snaps on my smartphone to staging curated, edited, high quality photos used in sponsored campaigns, brand collaborations, digital ads, and magazines. Plus, I've worked with 300+ brands (inc. Ulta Beauty, Olay, Macy's, and Reebok). If there

is anything I've learned over the past 9 years, it's how to create a strong online brand with eye-catching original photography.

Whether you're an aspiring blogger, dream of becoming a social media influencer, or are a business owner who wants to elevate your brand's presence through digital images, this e-book is for you.

Occasionally, I work with professional photographers on special projects, which has taught me a lot about the art of photography. However, since this can quickly get expensive, I've spent a considerable amount of time learning how to stage, shoot, and edit most of my photos, which saved my company thousands of dollars.

As a small business owner and entrepreneur, I know how valuable high quality photography is for building a brand's online presence. That's why learning how to create beautiful images that heighten the impact of your marketing message will help accelerate your business.



Renowned investor Warren Buffet has been quoted saying, "*Price is what you pay. Value is what you get.*" That being said, my goal for this e-book is to help you gain great value out of these photography tips.

By learning to create pro-quality photographs, you'll be able to more easily take your brand and business to the next level of success.





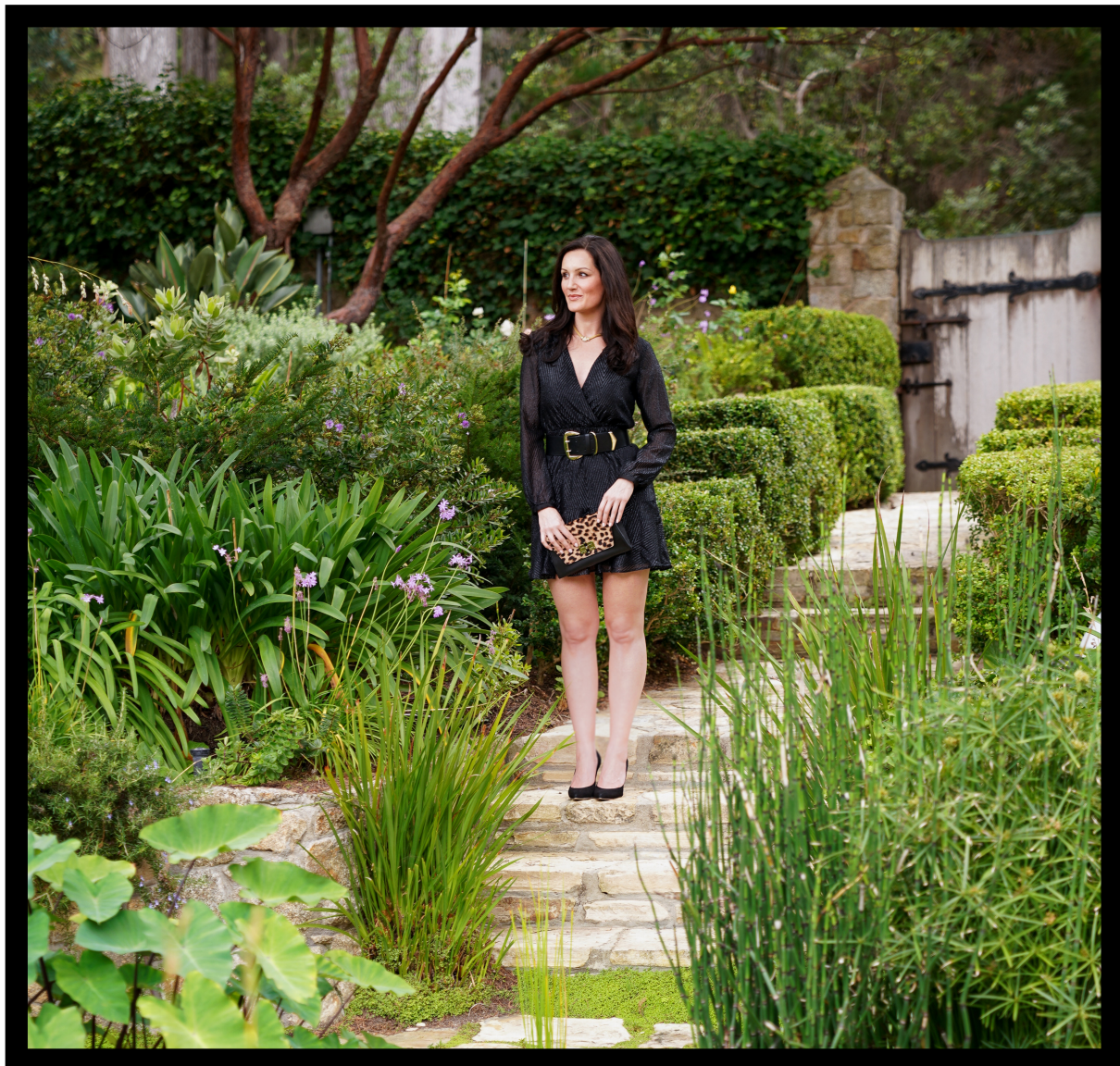
# INTRODUCTION

**Discover why your online brand is one of the most important investments you'll make to grow your business.**

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Think about it. If someone told you about an interesting brand, business, or person - what's the first thing you'd do? Well, if you're like the majority of folks out there, you'd look them up online!

From social media channels (like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) to crowd-sourced reviews (on platforms such as Yelp and OpenTable), our digital presence has become an integral part of our modern lives.







This can either be positive or negative, depending on what your digital image says about you. The bottom line is - the internet has become a way of life for society. That's why your online brand is so influential.

From entrepreneurs, mom & pop shops, and e-commerce retailers to bloggers and social media influencers, our online brand is now often the first (and most lasting) impression we'll ever make on the world.

Even if you never get featured in a magazine or appear on TV, the internet has become one of the best (and cost-free) publicity vehicles you can leverage to build your business. That's why it's imperative that you harness the power of the internet through inspiring photography that aligns with your brand or personal aesthetic.

With digital photography, you have the ability to create a strong online presence that evokes your core messaging, tells a personal story, and showcases your talents, products, or services.



Like the saying goes, “A picture is worth 1000 words”. Well, it's true!

Whether you're looking to grow your following or audience, reach new clients, or attract more customers, this e-book will give you the basic digital photography tools and tips you need to succeed and grow.





# CHAPTER 1

## Photography equipment essentials for pro quality images.

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Having managed and co-founded multiple small businesses over the past 20-years (from a global tech startup to a lifestyle blog with 300k followers, to an e-commerce website), I know how to "bootstrap". As Investopedia defines it, "A bootstrap is a business or an entrepreneur with little or no outside cash or other support launches."

When you are just launching a new company or brand, or are in the process of growing your existing small business, every dollar counts. Unlike a VC-funded enterprise or a major corporation, often times budgets (toward marketing expenses) are limited. That's why being mindful about the photography equipment you purchase is smart.

Since your intention is not necessarily to become a professional photographer (I assume), but rather, to just capture eye-catching images that evoke your brand's message online, here are the basic photography equipment and supplies I'd recommend investing in.



### **Buy a Mirrorless Digital Camera or DSLR Camera**

Sony Alpha 6000 (shown on left) is a great mirrorless digital camera. To start with, it's wireless, meaning you can send photos to a phone via the built-in wifi. This makes it convenient, especially when shooting at events or traveling, as you can quickly transfer pictures to your phone to upload online. It's also compact in size (which means you can put it in a purse or small bag). It's versatile, easy to use, and intuitive to learn.

For just under \$600, you can buy this camera (which usually comes with a "kit lens", which is a 16-50mm retractable zoom lens). This is a budget-friendly way to get started, as the "kit lens" enables you to take all types of photos - from landscape shots to portraits and more.

As stated on BHPHOTOVIDEO.com (a leading retailer for professional photography equipment), this "advanced mirrorless camera features a 24.3MP APS-C-sized Exmor APS HD CMOS sensor and BIONZ X image processor to produce high-resolution still images and Full HD movies with marked low-light quality and sensitivity to ISO 25600. Beyond notable imaging traits, the image processor also lends itself to continuous shooting up to 11 fps and an intelligent Fast Hybrid AF system that uses both phase- and contrast-detection methods to quickly and accurately acquire focus. For live view monitoring, image playback, and menu navigation, both a large rear monitor and detailed electronic viewfinder are available. The body design of the a6000 also houses a configurable user interface, built around several customizable buttons and two control dials, for efficient and intuitive access to frequently used camera settings. Additionally, a Multi Interface shoe is available for attaching external flashes, continuous lights, or microphones." In summary, it's a great starter camera.



### **Types of images you can create with this camera:**

- Product and still shots
- Lifestyle photography
- Sports & Action shots
- Landscape & Nature
- Portraits & Weddings
- Up-close & Macro shots
- Fashion & Beauty photos
- Travel photography
- Food & Wine photos
- Special Event photos
- Real Estate & Interiors
- Live Entertainment
- Videography (1080p at 60fps)



## Other equipment + supplies to invest in:

- Tripod: To stabilize your camera for crisp, clear shots, for self-portraits, and for videography (ex. Promaster 7400 Tripod)
- Adjustable Lighting: To add artificial lighting when shooting indoors (ex. Diva Ring Light Super Nova 18" Ring Light with Diva Ring Light Video Tripod)
- Reflector: To add soft lighting to a subject by reflecting the light from another source (ex. Selens 5-in-1 43 Inch Portable Handle Round Reflector Collapsible Multi Disc with Carrying Case for Photography Photo Studio Lighting & Outdoor Lighting)
- Camera Bag: To protect your camera and equipment (ex. Case Logic DCB-306 SLR Camera Holster)
- Kit Lens: For everyday photography (ex. Sony 16-50mm f/3.5-5.6 OSS Alpha E-Mount Retractable Zoom Lens)
- Macro Lens: For up-close shots of small items (ex. Sony SEL30M35 30mm f/3.5 e-mount Macro Fixed Lens)
- Telephoto Lens: For long-distance shots (ex. Sony E 55-210mm F4.5-6.3 OSS Lens)
- 50mm Prime Lens: For portrait or low-aperture shots (ex. Sony - E 50mm F1.8 OSS Portrait Lens (SEL50F18/B))
- Wireless Remote Control (ex. Foto&Tech IR Wireless Remote Control)
- Rechargeable batteries (ex. Powerextra Battery (4-Pack) and Charger)
- Memory Cards (ex. Sony 64GB Class 10 UHS-1 SDXC up to 70MB/s Memory Card)





# CHAPTER 2

## Lifestyle photography tips to create eye-catching images that will capture your brand's core message.

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Lifestyle photography has become one of the most common types of marketing methods used to sell products or services. The reason why this style of photography is so powerful is because it inspires the viewer to think about how the product or service actually fits into and benefits their lives.

Let's use Cupcake Vineyards (pictured on the right) as an example. This popular wine brand is known for refreshing, budget-friendly wines with an upbeat, joyful brand vibe.



Instead of just featuring a product photo of the wine itself, the reason why this imagery is so captivating (for a social media promotion) is because it gives the viewer an idea of how to entertain with this wine. The photograph visually demonstrates types of foods that pair well with the wine, in addition to showing creative tablescape ideas that inspire the reader to host their own party. Essentially, it sets the stage.

By staging a photograph in this manner, it not only helps the image stand-out from basic product shots, but it also helps to stir the imagination of the viewer. Lifestyle photography helps to tell a story, to share a deeper message, and to evoke an emotion.

Since Cupcake Vineyards' brand motto is "Choose Joy", the purpose behind this photo is to encourage party planners to bring joy to their special celebrations by serving this delicious wine to their guests.

Another example of how lifestyle photography can be used to elevate your brand or business online is to feature people in the shots.

According to researchers at the Georgia Institute of Technology and Yahoo Labs, after analyzing over 1 million images on Instagram, the data showed that photos with faces are 38% more likely to receive engagement (such as likes) as compared to photos without faces.





The concept behind lifestyle photography is to capture real moments. While the shot might be staged, the point is to make it look natural.

For example, if you're selling a food product, then you'd want to show it highlighted in a real way - either in a delicious-looking dish or being used by someone in a kitchen (as shown below).

While photogenic models will never stop being hired for digital or print advertisements, the truth is - many consumers and social media followers have become more interested in seeing how "real people" (who look more like them) actually use and enjoy products or services.

Think about it like this... it's the difference between being inspirational vs. aspirational. One is more achievable (at least in the mind of the viewer), while the latter is more of a dream. Both can be effective in advertising, but for social media and online photography, creating relatable content has become very appealing to many viewers.

This is a big reason why social media influencers and bloggers have become the new "celebrity next door" over the past decade. The transparency and level of authenticity that they bring to online photos

has made them appear to be more relatable than traditional celebrities (like supermodels and actresses).



Whether you plan to appear in your photos or you intend to hire people, keep in mind that "real people" can be just as effective in online photos as models. As an example, in the early part of my career, as a commercial print model, I went on go-sees for brands like Dove and Kotex. Essentially, my job was to look like a relatable "girl next door", rather than a runway or fashion model.



Another aspect to think about when staging lifestyle photography shots is the use of props. Creating an appealing environment is half the effort in setting the stage for a great photo.

Retailers like Target, HomeGoods, and consignment stores are good places to shop for budget-friendly props that will bring a photo to life. Plus, you probably have accessories and items around your home (like entertaining supplies, books, plants, etc.) that would also be useful.



# CHAPTER 3

## **Fashion, Beauty, Event and Travel photography tips and ideas to make your images stand out online.**

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Some of the most common types of photography are fashion, beauty, event, and travel shots.

Whether you're a blogger, a social media influencer, or a business owner, you might find yourself having to create these types of photographs at some point or another.

To start with, for many years I was a fashion writer for various magazines, so I spent a lot of time on set watching the creative director, stylists, models, and photographers work their magic. From hotels to private estates and even warehouses, our team shot exquisite high-end editorial fashion photos in a variety of unique locations. When it comes to fashion photos, choosing an eye-catching background is an integral part of the process. Not only will it help to tell a story and exude a mood, but it can also make the photos stand out more online.



As an example, when I created an online style guide about Valentine's Day outfit ideas, I wanted the photos to evoke a romantic vibe. For this reason, I decided to shoot at a glamorous historic hotel in Carmel-by-the-Sea called The Pine Inn (pictured above). What I especially loved about the ornate setting was that it was visually interesting and provided a truly captivating atmosphere for photography.

Think outside of the box when scouting for locations to shoot fashion photos at. The more unique the background, the better!



Often times, fashion photos are shot indoors. That's why using lighting and equipment (like a reflector) are helpful when shooting in low-light locations, such as a dimly lit or dark room. You can also manually increase the ISO or metering on the camera to lighten the image.

While you can always edit a photo using software, to speed up the process (and save time), adjust the lighting while shooting. That's why I love using a dimmable light and a reflector (to illuminate the subject).





Having covered New York Fashion Week, I've learned how to quickly capture photos of the models on the runway. As fun as it was to shoot, I realized there were three challenges with this type of photography.

To start with, you can't guarantee where you'll be seated (as it's up to the PR firm or brand). Secondly, you don't know what the lighting or setting will be (sometimes it's outdoors in natural lighting, other times it's in a studio with set lighting). Thirdly, the models walk very quickly, so you have to be in the moment to capture their movement.

My tips for capturing fashion week or runway photos are to use a telephoto lens and turn the camera setting on "sports mode". This means your camera will shoot continuously so that it captures these "action shots". It's the easiest way to get crisp, clear photos of models strutting by. The telephoto lens zooms in on the models, provides that sense of bokeh you want, and allows you to be at a distance from the runway (although the photos will look like you were seated front row).



As a beauty blogger, I regularly create online tutorials showing how to use skincare, makeup, or hairstyling tools and even staging beauty product shots.

From Burt's Bees and Ulta Beauty to Estée Lauder and Conair, I've worked with many of the world's leading beauty brands and retailers on campaigns. Over the years, my beauty content has become one of the main types of content that I'm hired by brands to collaborate on.

I occasionally work with a photographer on this, but 99% of the time I take these photos myself. When it comes to taking beauty photos of myself, two of my secrets are good lighting and a clean mirror.

To start with, I recommend shooting in a natural setting, like a bathroom with great vanity lighting. Lighting is always an integral part of any photo, especially beauty shots, as the focal point is on your face. Bright even lighting helps to illuminate the face, minimize shadows, and can even make you look fresh and radiant.

Secondly, to capture these photos, I use a mirrorless digital camera (the Sony A6000) with a 50mm lens (set to a low aperture, like 1.8 and



aim the camera directly at the mirror.

This makes your face the focal point while allowing the shallow background to become somewhat blurred out (which creates that sense of “bokeh”).

To do this, use one hand to take the photo, while the other hand should be doing a natural motion (like applying makeup or touching your hair). If you have to stage a shot where you're using both hands (like for hairstyling), use a tripod.



Often times for beauty campaigns, brands request that I take photos of the products themselves too, in addition to lifestyle or in-use shots.

Instead of always staging beauty products in a traditional setting (like on a bathroom vanity or tray), I like to get creative. I love using live plants, flowers, and other natural elements to add visual interest. I find that this technique highlights the products in an eye-catching way (which is always the goal of any marketing campaign).

As an example, the photo above featured makeup set on a natural bed of moss and fresh flowers. To make the photo dreamier, in post-editing, I increased the vignette around the photo (to darken the border) and pumped up the saturation of the colors (for more vibrancy). This helped to highlight the product in the center of the photo while diffusing the rest of the picture. While I often use a 50mm lens to shoot products, sometimes for small objects (like lipgloss), I would recommend a macro lens, as it helps to capture more details.



From Outside Lands Music & Arts Festival and Macy's Glamorama to Pebble Beach Food & Wine and Monterey Car Week, I've spent years covering live and special events.

While each event setting varies (some are in tents, others are hosted at hotels, and some events are held in outside venues like Golden Gate Park), here are a few tips to keep in mind for event photography.





To start with, I recommend bringing 3 types of camera lenses:

- a versatile “kit” lens (with a range of 16mm-50mm)
- a fixed prime lens (50mm lens with a low 1.8 aperture)
- a telephoto lens (with a 55mm-300mm range).

This will enable you to capture different types of photos, from long-distance shots (like the photo above of The Weeknd performing live on stage) to up-close shots (when attending food or wine tasting events).

In addition to these lens options, I recommend using a padded camera bag to keep your equipment safe. Bring several charged batteries and extra memory cards so you can keep shooting. I learned my lesson when I once ran out of memory on an SD card and didn't have any backups with me.

Bottom line: when shooting at an event, always come prepared.





In addition to capturing highlights of an event (such as a live performance, a cooking demo, or other types of entertainment), I also suggest taking atmosphere photos that exude the essence of the event.

As shown above, this was a photo I took during the Janelle Monáe concert at Outside Lands Music & Arts Festival in San Francisco. This beautiful moment showed the audience creating heart signs with their hands, which perfectly captured the positive spirit of the festival.

One of the joys of doing event photography is being in the moment.

If there's ever a time to be truly present, an event is that opportunity. Use your senses, look around the venue, notice the people, the action, the spectacle of it all. Events are a great opportunity to get inspired and test your photography skills, as there's so much to capture!

One of the greatest joys of going on vacation is capturing the memories on camera so that you can reminisce anytime you want. To help you get better travel photos, here are some helpful tips.

From photographing iconic landmarks and beautiful architecture to capturing images of must-see destination spots, nature, experiences, and the local culture, travel photography is always an exciting way to make (and preserve) memorable moments in a new place.







To start with, when you walk into a space (like a hotel or restaurant), think about whatever captures your attention first.

As an example, when I stepped into the swanky bar at the Hudson New York hotel (pictured above), the first thing I noticed was a playful photo of a fashionable cow with a flamboyant hat on its head.

This cheeky artwork exuded the vibe of the hotel (which is owned by the SBE Group, who often do avant-garde decor at their properties).

I wanted to capture the essence of the space, as the overall tone was sexy, moody, and sultry. To do this, in post-editing, I increased the contrast to accentuate the drama of the decor. The photo gives the viewer a sense of the artwork and furnishings in the hotel while getting a distinct feeling that it's a romantic and cool hangout.



Another tip for travel photography is to get creative with your photography style. As an example, you can add a dreamy effect to your pictures by playing with bokeh.

Defined by Wikipedia, "in photography, bokeh is the aesthetic quality of the blur produced in the out-of-focus parts of an image produced by a lens. Bokeh has been defined as "the way the lens renders out-of-focus points of light"."

As exhibited in the photo above, I used the Sony A6000 mirrorless camera and a 50mm lens to focus on the firepit (in the foreground) of this restaurant. This made everything else look blurred-out, which created a magical vibe. While it showed the overall setting, it exuded a nearly dream-like element by making the bokeh a prominent feature.



# CHAPTER 4

## Quick and easy photography software and apps.

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Whether you're a blogger, a social media influencer, a small business owner, or just a busy person - if there's one key message I hope you take from this book it's this: your time is valuable!

The more time that you spend laboring over a photo, the less time you have to do other projects that can grow your brand or excel your business.

There's a difference between creating photography on a professional level (like a wedding or fashion photographer, who often charge high rates for hours spent editing photos) versus doing photography for your own commercial purpose (like promoting your products, talents, or services). They're making money from editing, whereas, you're not.

That's why learning how to edit photos quickly, easily, and effectively will save you time and money. For that reason, Adobe Lightroom is one of the best photography editing software programs to use.

This easy-to-use program saves your photos in the cloud (freeing up valuable storage space on your devices), plus it allows you to edit pics from your smartphone (via the app) and on your desktop computer.

In addition to these features, it also enables you to use presets and create your own, which dramatically reduces editing time (as it saves your preferred settings for lighting, coloration, etc.).





Other popular photography editing apps that can be used on-the-go (via your smartphone) include VSCO and Snapseed. These can be helpful when you're traveling or at an event, but feel limited on time, since you often want to upload photos to social media in real-time. That's when these quick and easy editing apps are especially useful.

In addition to photo editing apps, I highly recommend using Dropbox or Google Drive. These cloud-based platforms enable you to upload and organize your photos (via titled albums that you create). Not only do these programs securely store your valuable photos online (in a private, password-protected account), but they're also accessible via your desktop computer and your smartphone, which is convenient.

Not only does this mean you don't have to store all your photos on your computer or phone (which takes up a lot of memory), but you can stay organized and save yourself time searching for images by name.



# CHAPTER 5

## Basic photo editing tips to elevate your images.

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Whether you're drawn to highly-edited or airbrushed images or you prefer a more natural look, a key step toward developing the aesthetic of your online brand is to decide on a stylized form of photography.

For example, I tend to prefer photos with vibrant colors and dramatic contrasting tones. This means I often increase the saturation and contrast, while sometimes adding a vignette (to darken the border a bit).



If you're wondering what style of editing you resonate best with (or that reflects your business or product line), a couple of great places to look for inspiration and examples are on Pinterest and Instagram. Both sites feature a plethora of varying types of images. Once you determine your visual preference, then the next step is editing your pictures.

For example, a popular style of editing that is loved by many bloggers and influencers is a desaturated photo with warmer hues. This editing style exudes a bright, beachy-inspired vintage effect. The easiest type of editing is done using Presets (on Adobe Lightroom). You can either buy Presets (pre-made editing corrections that work with the click of a button), or you can create your own customized edits in the program.

Beyond lighting and coloration adjustments (which vary by photo), I always recommend increasing the clarity as it makes objects look sharper and more crisp. In addition to that, one of the best-kept secrets is the selector tool. It's truly a game-changer!

Once you learn how to selectively edit different parts of a photo (such as brightening a person's face only), it will radically improve the overall image with just a few minor edits. All of this can be done in Lightroom!





# CONCLUSION

**How to get started today toward creating a powerful online presence that will attract more clients, customers, subscribers, and social media followers.**

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Whether you're just getting started online or you've been in business for a while, developing your own personal style through the art of photography can help you take your brand to the next level.

Think about your vision and mission statement - who are you, what is your purpose, and what message are you trying to convey to the world? These deeper questions will help you figure out the types and style of photography you want to create. In addition to which, you'll also be able to more easily find photos that inspire you (which will keep you motivated throughout the process).



Whether you're looking to promote a service, sell products online, or become a lifestyle blogger or influencer, determining what your brand is about and creating consistent messaging will help you stay true to your core by developing online images that clearly reflect your brand.

As you learn to create photos that exude your personal style and vision, your online audience will begin to identify with your images. An example of this is Michael Kors - his fashion photos *always* exude a luxurious lifestyle. When a customer sees his photos, they instantly know it's his brand. That, in summary, illustrates the power of brand photography.