

# How to Take a LinkedIn Headshot that Gets Noticed

By Daniel Baitch

When they open your profile, LinkedIn users' eyes go right to your headshot – before they even read your profile statement. And the impression that your photo projects can determine whether they read your profile or click past you -- to the next potential hire, consultant, business partner, investor, or customer.

It only takes a fraction of a second for others to size you up. Do you appear you warm or cold? Friendly or intimidating? Comfortable or awkward? Happy or troubled? Relaxed or stiff? Professional or amateur? Enjoyable or unpleasant? Your photo can also make or break the impression that you have charisma, personality, gravitas, or star quality. Ultimately, your photo can either help you make valuable connections or it can shut the door on all kinds of opportunities.

It's not about how attractive you are. Or how old you are. In fact, in many cases it's not as much about what you look like as much as it's how your photo makes the viewer feel. Do you look like someone who could help the viewer meet his or her objectives? Do you look like someone who can be trusted? Someone the viewer would feel comfortable talking to, working with, buying from, or partnering with?

Ultimately what works is an image that projects you as relaxed, warm, confident, professional, and easy to talk to. Here are a few guidelines that will help you get results.

**Pose:** Avoid the “mug shot/passport photo/firing squad” position with shoulders straight on to the camera. Instead, turn about 45 degrees to your left (the photographer's right). This will position you facing the profile text. Before taking

each shot, take a deep breath, lift your shoulders, and then let go. Even slightly hunched shoulders can make you look tense.

Take different shots with your head in slightly different positions – with different degrees of turning, and tilting left or right, up or down. Always keep your eyes in the center of the lens. Eye contact is crucial.

**Expression:** When someone likes you, they smile at you. So smile at your camera; sub-consciously it can make the viewer feel more interesting. But be careful here – posed smiles are easy to distinguish; they typically only involve the muscles around the mouth, as if you're saying "cheese". Real smiles involve the muscles around your entire face, including your eyes. A good photographer should bring out your real smile.

**Background:** If a wall is in the background, stand away from it to avoid shadows. A simple, real, blurred background, such as a conference room table, can provide depth. Make sure that the background complements your complexion and hair. For instance, grey hair tends to get lost in light backgrounds. Whatever your background is, keep it simple.

**Make-up:** As with cologne, the general rule is "less is more". (Remember that "cologne" rhymes with "alone".) Too much makeup can also make you look severe, so keep it light.

**Camera positioning:** I can't over-emphasize this...never post a selfie on LinkedIn. When the camera is that close, it distorts your face -- exaggerating things closest to it (your nose), and under-sizing things further away (your ears). So have someone else take your photo from 5-7 feet away and crop it. And selfie sticks? Don't get me started.

**Hair:** Hair that's too perfect can make you look stiff and humorless. Before the shot, run your fingers through your hair and shake your head. Also, regardless of your hair color, a spotlight on your hair can bring out the texture, shine and color.

**Clothing:** Go simple but classy. Take shots with scarves, jackets and ties on and off. When selecting the right shot, err on the side of more formal than less. Avoid heavy patterns; solids work best. It's important for the viewer's eye to be drawn to your eyes, not your tie. Also, if you have blue or green eyes, try wearing a color similar to the shade of your eyes to bring your eye color out. Dark clothing can come off as professional (consultant-like, lawyerly) but often too serious.

**Glasses:** My opinion: Glasses destroy intimacy. The viewer REALLY wants to see your eyes, not your glasses. Lenses are a glass barrier between you and the viewer. And sometimes people assume that if you don't take your glasses off for a shot, you must have poor eyesight. But in some cases (as in my case), circles under the eyes can present a tired look, and glasses can help. Often those circles can be minimized by the right lighting or photo retouching. If you do wear glasses, try to use the light frames, especially frames that follow the contour of those circles. Watch out for bad shadows from frames and reflections that hide your eyes.

**Lighting:** Make sure the light gets into your eyes. Use natural light if you can. Diffused white light, such as that from a window or lampshade, is best and it de-emphasizes deep lines. Avoid direct sunlight and light fixtures from above – it leaves dark shadows and those beautiful eyes will get lost. Never use a shot with a flash right in front of you...you'll end up looking pale and washed out, with a flashbulb shine on your nose, chin, or forehead.

**Retouching:** Your LinkedIn photo should look like you. Don't get caught meeting someone expecting you to look ten years younger. Again, you don't have to look perfect. You just have to look like someone who friendly, professional, and easy to

talk to. So while slight retouching is OK, an image that returns you to the 1980s isn't doing you any favors.

You don't need a professional photographer to create a great LinkedIn photo, but since it's your primary professional face the world, you might want to go this route. If you do, make sure that he or she is someone that can bring out your warmth, professionalism and charisma.

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