



A Guide to Profile Photos That Get Results

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Introduction

You know that looks matter.

Of course, personality and character and attitude are vital too.

But those first impressions are hugely important.

That's especially true when you're dating online.

Internet dates won't even *look* at a profile unless the pictures have won their attention.

You do this yourself. You put so much effort into thinking about what you want from a partner, understanding what you *really* want and making yourself as friendly, upbeat and interesting as possible... and what do you do when you reach a dating site?

You look first at the pictures.

When you're browsing the dating search results, the picture is the first thing you see. And if you don't immediately like what you see, it will be the last you see of that single.

Exactly the same thing is happening to you.

You might have a sparkling personality and interests that match exactly those of the person checking out your picture, but if your photos aren't as impressive as your character, you won't get any more than a glance at your page.

That single — maybe your perfect partner — is just going to click on by.



“In an online dating environment, photos are the lifeblood of the system. In real life, do you see people walking around with no faces? Of course not! So, your photo is your ID. It's the first thing people see before they start reading and digging in for all the juicy details.”

Ourtime.com

“I cannot say this enough: Men are all about the photos. It hardly matters what you say in your profile. If you’re a knockout, you could describe yourself as an axe murderer and you’ll still hear from men. That’s because they’ll take one look at your photos and not even bother reading what you’ve written. Well, maybe I’m exaggerating, but not by much.”

Dale Koppel, Ph.D. Author of “The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Online Dating.”

BEFORE



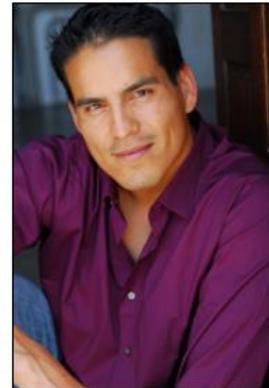
AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER



Fortunately, creating wonderful dating photos is easy. It takes thought and a bit of expertise. But there are people who can help you — and that help starts here. In this guide, we’re going to show you how to get the pictures that will attract the partner you’re looking for.

1. Age Matters

Age is a consideration when you're planning your photos.

In general, you should look relaxed, smiling, comfortable and at ease. You'll want your photos to portray the kind of easy welcome you'd find if you were meeting someone who had heard great things about you, was looking forward to meeting you and was hoping to make a good impression.

That's simple enough. But younger daters can get a little more creative.

In 2010, dating site OK Cupid looked at 7,000 different dating photos and tracked the results the different poses produced.

Some of the site's results were surprising.

While smiling and making eye contact always produced better results for women, men received more messages with unsmiling photos and when they looked away from the camera. (Maybe the pose adds an air of mystery and lets women look without feeling they're being looked at.) The "MySpace pose," a flirty, cleavage-rich shot made by holding the camera above your own head, also produced good results for women.

But here's the kicker.

OK Cupid only looked at singles in big cities aged 18-32. As the subjects aged, the kinds of images that generated the best results changed too:

"For women in their late teens and early twenties, body pictures are the most popular type of shot; outdoor pictures are second. This ordering is reversed by the mid-twenties."

In other words, people who are young, slim and looking for a casual relationship can take a picture that highlights their shape. Singles who are older and more serious will want to think more about expression, setting and personality.



2. The Right Image Produces the Right Responses

There's a difference between a photo that generates lots of responses and a photo that generates a life-long relationship.

A photo shouldn't just show what you look like; it should also show who you are.

For example, if you're a little edgy and rebellious then a preppy photo will attract responses from people who won't be great matches. Conversely, nice guys don't wear ripped tee-shirts and show attitude, even if their female friends swear those are the looks that get responses.

And while cleavage shots might bring women more messages, you know that quantity doesn't mean quality.

Success in online dating isn't based on the number of responses alone. The quality of those responses matter. You don't need to bring in lots of replies; you need to bring in one good one.

3. Clothes Count

What you wear in your dating photo is as important as what you wear on the date.

You should look smart and casual at the same time.

You should show that you clean up well without looking stiff and formal. And remember that casual doesn't mean a dirty shirt and baggy sweats. Too casual suggests that you don't care what your partner thinks. That's not a good message to send to someone you want to bring into a relationship.

Before heading to the shoot, pull together several different outfits in strong, solid colors that look good on you and that flatter you in your profile photos.

As you're picking your clothes, try to put together more than one look for the profile. A dressy outfit would show you ready for a dinner date and a more laid back outfit would let the viewer imagine walking with you on the beach or sitting under a tree, enjoying a picnic.

Arrive for the photo session in the dressier look; it's always easier to dress down as the photo session progresses than to try to dress up.

As a general rule, photographers recommend that people avoid busy patterns, prints, stripes, paisley, and elaborate designs. Stick to classic looks that won't date and choose colors that look good with your skin tone. If you're not sure what those are, there's a ton of advice online that will help match shades to skin.



The outfits should be kept on hangers, not folded in a bag, so that they don't wrinkle for the shoot, and a lint roller always comes in handy for removing those flecks of cat hair.

Finally, (and we might have to break this to you gently) before the shoot, ditch the sunglasses and take off the baseball cap. Here's what Match.com expert Kimberly Dawn Neumann has to say about those:

“What’s with the sunglasses in photos, people? Don’t know you that the eyes are the window to your soul? You may think that wearing shades in a photo makes you look like a celebrity or adds an element of mystery, but in truth, most online daters see this photo and get frustrated by the inability to see your entire face. And if you’re wearing a baseball cap (this one is especially true for men), unless there is another photo showing what the top of your head looks like, most women will assume that cap is hiding a bald spot.”



Tips for Men:

- A dress shirt will usually work great.
- Wearing a tie and a suit is a bit much. Keep it dressy but casual.
- No Hawaiian shirts! (This also applies to first dates.)
- No t-shirts or tight shirts... unless you have the figure to carry it off.
- Make sure shoes are stylish and clean.

Tips for Women:

- Dress sexy but not skanky. (Even if you like to be a little revealing, it's low cut or high thigh — never both.)
- Dress comfortably.
- Avoid dress shirts. They look too professional and not enough fun.
- No big or busy patterns.
- Soft, dark V-necks look great.
- Black often works; white hardly ever.
- Wear a strapless, skin color bra that is invisible under outfits.

4. Glamour Shots, Make-Up and Hair

A glamour shot is never about creating a photograph that shows your real personality. It's about creating a shot the photographer finds the most pleasing. The photographer will often use heavy make-up, hair styling, unnatural lighting and lots of post-production retouching.

The result might be fantastic but it fails online.

People avoid these types of dating pictures because they know no one looks like that in real life — and if they do bite, they avoid them after the date because they didn't measure up to the dating photos on the profile.

Here's what eHarmony has to say about glamour shots:

“Come on. Do you really think we're going to fall for that one? We've all seen too many makeover shows to believe that you look anything like this styled, photoshopped person before us. Please remember, we want to see what you're going to look like on our first date. In fact, you can even wear the same clothes, ‘Hi, here's my first date attire.’ Men like to move forward with solid information. Anything less feels disingenuous.”



When it comes to using a make-up artist before having a picture taken, guys can do without. Women probably can too if they're a dab hand with the mascara. One easy option is to stop off at the cosmetics counter at a nearby Sephora, MAC or department store for a free make-up session on the way to the shoot. Bear in mind that spending hundreds of dollars on hair and make-up can backfire. If you can't re-create the same glammed-up, flawless look for your dates, you'll disappoint.

When profile photos don't look like you, they don't serve their purpose.

If you're doing your own make-up, keep it natural. Apply using natural window light even if that means using a room other than the bathroom. Good lighting is essential to a good, even application.

Lips should be shiny, either from transparent or colored lip gloss. (Matte, dark lipstick tends to have an aging effect in photos, so it's best avoided.)

Face foundation and powder should be matte and *exactly* match neck and body skin tone, so that it becomes invisible. You'd be amazed at how many women think they are wearing a perfect skin tone color, when in reality the foundation is visibly darker or lighter than the true skin tone of their neck. The camera sees everything, so you might want to update your make-up supply before their session.

And forget about that "age-defying" mineral foundation that contains light reflecting particles to give a youthful look. While it might look great in real life, it's not camera-friendly. Self-tanners and bronzers will invariably make skin look orange, and glittery body lotion or make-up tends to show up in pictures as little white flecks.

Shine is the enemy of photography. Dewy skin is attractive in real life, but in photos it looks like an oil slick, so skin should be matte.

Eye shadow can look darker in photos, so if you normally wear a dark color, think about using a lighter shade for their photo session. Mascara, though, will make eyes appear brighter.

Grey hairs and dark roots are also something the camera sees, so if you color your hair, try to have it done no more than a few days before the session.

Ultimately, you should style your hair the way you would normally wear it to a date. If the shoot will take place outdoors, hair spray will tame flyaway strands away from face and hair, hands and nails may also end up in the shot. A plain clear nail polish always works. For dry lips, bring Chap Stick and for dry eyes, there's Visine.

Guys have it easier but it's worth spending a few minutes the day before the shoot tweezing away facial hairs to eliminate nose hair or unibrow.

5. To Smile or Not to Smile?

We've mentioned that smiling is usually a good idea in a dating photo, but not all smiles are created equal.

There are the natural authentic smiles we display when we're genuinely joyful... and then there are the forced smiles we endure for photos and polite social occasions.

Authentic smiles are marked by wrinkles in the eyes and differ from those flat mouth-only smiles.

It's the real, happy grins that get results.



A recent study of authentic smiles, conducted at the University of California, Berkeley, demonstrated the impact of smiling. Researchers analyzed the yearbook pictures of 111 smiling women aged 21. Fifty of the pictures displayed authentic smiles. Participants expressing genuine positive emotions in their yearbook picture were more likely to be married and have higher well-being than their non-smiling classmates.

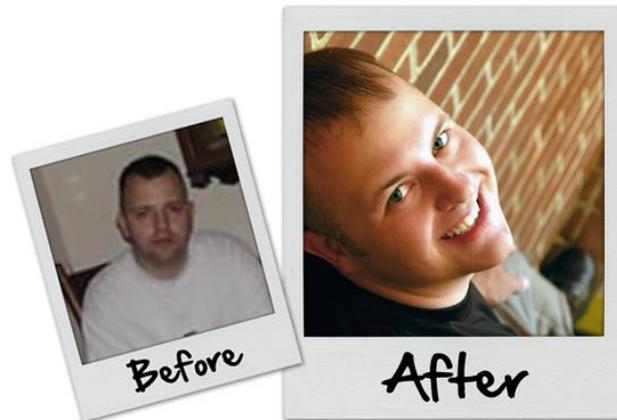
An experienced photographer will know that it's never a good idea to force a smile out of a client. A forced smile isn't genuine and nearly always looks fake and cheesy.

"The original photographer I used didn't make me feel comfortable, she kept telling me to smile, when I'm not a smiling sort of person... I mean, I smile but not the "cheesy" grin that she wanted, I had a tooth repaired and I'm just not comfortable when forced to smile-and my photos showed it-I felt stupid when I saw them and never used the photos, they just sit on my laptop and every time I see them I groan"

"John," 46, San Diego

When your photographer knows how to coax out a real smile, you'll look much better. The muscles used to smile will lift the face, making you appear younger.

And most of us are drawn to people who smile. There is an attraction factor. We want to know a smiling person and figure out what's making them so happy. Frowns, scowls and grimaces all push people away but a smile draws them in



“You know how it feels when you’re out and someone smiles at you? It makes you more likely to approach that person or at least smile back, right? Well, it’s the same with online photos. People want to know what you look like when you’re happy. Why? Subconsciously, they’re also looking for someone who might make them happy. So save the tough — or pouty — face for an additional shot if you really want others to see it. Post a grin as your main shot and reel in a date!”

Match.com expert Kimberly Dawn Neumann.

So smile... but naturally.

6. Body Language

The smile is an important part of body language but it's not the only part. How you sit, where you place your hands, how you hold yourself will all communicate a message to the viewer.

Some dating experts have recommended that singles look away from the camera on the grounds that it makes them look like someone whose attention the viewer needs to win.

We've seen that that look can work for some men, and a 45-degree angle might be worth experimenting with, but playing hard to get isn't a winning strategy for everyone.

A more reliable approach is to stick to the simple stuff, and relax. Avoid crossed arms that can create a barrier, and use open friendlier gestures. An authentic look is way more important.



A lot of good body language lies in the ability of a talented and experienced photographer to help you relax and display your natural, positive expression. Photographers posing people often just makes them more tense.

7. Face Shots, Body Shots and Supporting Photos

Your photographer should create a number of different images. The face is vital, obviously, and the photographer should produce a great portrait that you can use as your primary photo.

But the photographer should also take a variety of photos, including a few half-body and three-quarter body shots. The variety will help.



Supporting photos will reveal a little more about you. They depict your uniqueness, your personality and your life.

These photos could be a picture of you hiking the Grand Canyon, giving a speech at an event, diving in Belize, drinking a cocktail with friends, or even just walking the dog. It's one thing for you to write in a profile that you're active and adventurous but a picture proves it.

But those pictures should be real. If you like golf then add pictures of you on the golf course, not pictures of you holding a golf club. When supporting photos are staged they don't look natural. They look sad and needy.

Family, Friends and Furry Friends

Be careful about how many shots you post with friends or family. While a good photo might depict you as trustworthy and family-oriented, too many shots will portray you as the man or woman who can't leave their mother for more than five minutes.

And while you may think your dog, cat, hamster or turtle is the cutest thing in the world, no one viewing your profile for the first time is looking to know your pet.

They want to see you.

Unless you're looking cute with your pet, those photos are a waste of time. An action photo of you playing fetch with your dog at the park would be great here but a professionally taken picture of owner and pet together just makes you look a little too devoted.

Supporting Photos Tell Stories

A profile should tell a story. It should tell a story of you and your life. The supporting photos should illustrate that story.

If you are a pilot who flies at the weekends, goes to the gym every night and is passionate about cooking then we'll want to see pictures of these activities. Congruency between the profile text and the photos creates an element of trust between you and future dates.

Altogether, your profile should have a few clear headshots, a couple of body shots and a few supporting photos about what makes you unique. And don't forget to delete the old photos. A profile is only as good as its weakest image.

"If you don't have a selection of great looking profile photos then it's going to be much harder for us to get you the great results that you want. The bottom line is better photos will get you better dates - with better people. Unappealing photos will get you unappealing dates - with unappealing people!"

Dating Coaches "The Amazing Clarks"



8. Dating Profile No-No's

Trying to figure out what dating photos should include isn't always easy. But knowing what *not* to do? That's usually a lot clearer.

i. The Cut-Out Ex

There are no circumstances in which it's wise to use a picture with an ex cropped out. Even if you look great in the picture, it's the ex who will dominate. Viewers will assume you're still hung up on them and won't believe that they can fill the space.

ii. Mirror and Webcam Shots

Web cam shots never do you justice. They'll just make you look lonely. The same is true of shots taken in the bathroom mirror. They make the viewer wonder why you don't have a friend to hold the camera.

iii. Old Photos

Online dating photos should be current. The images should show you as you are today. There are no two ways around that. You client might have great senior photos, or have looked at your peak a decade ago but there should be no nasty surprises when you meet your date. The idea that someone can post an old photo and hope that their date will forgive a few white lies just doesn't fly. The reality is that there is no polite way to say "you're not what I expected" while trying to hide a disappointed look.

If your photos are more than two years old, if you have lost (or gained) lots of weight, dropped some hair or changed your teeth... you need new photos.

iv. Photos Surrounded by Other Girls (or Guys)

Some men seem to think it's okay to post photos showing them with a bunch of Hooters waitresses. It's a great idea... if they're trying to impress some other guys. If you're looking to find a girl though, it's a non-starter.

And the same is true of girls surrounded by lots of guys. Guys do want their girlfriend to be fun but they don't want to have to battle every guy in the bar for her attention. Photos like these don't work for guys and they don't work for girls either.

v. Expensive Toys

A flashy car or a big boat might be impressive but they're even more impressive when they're enjoyed, not shown off. A photo of a guy leaning against his Porsche just looks sad, not attractive.

vi. Children

An online dating site is not the place to show photos of children to strangers. The words in your profile are the right place to mention kids but their photos shouldn't be on the site. Security and privacy issues aside, your profile is about you — and no one else.

vii. Shirtless Photos

Men under 30 with the body of a supermodel can pull off shirtless shots... but only them.

Here's what eHarmony says about shirtless photos for men:

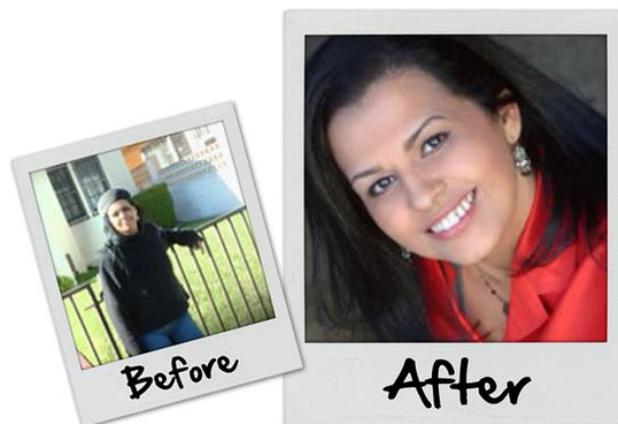
“We suppose men who submit shirtless profile photos are showing a certain confidence. We all know that women love confidence. We also know that women hate profile photos of shirtless men. Why? It shows a cavalier attitude. It shows a lack of good graces. Women might wonder, is this a man I want to introduce to my father? Like so many of these terrible profile photos, more than anything it seems to show a lack of judgment about what is appropriate. No matter how hard your abs may be.”

9. Studio or Location?

Professional photographers can take online dating pictures in a studio or on location. Many will offer both options leaving it up to you to make what can look like a difficult choice.

Location shots are popular. People think that being outdoors will let them look more relaxed and at ease.

That can be true: relaxed photos with the subject in sharp focus and a blurred natural background can produce better results. But good dating profile photos have more to do with the skill of the photographer than the places the images were shot. Talented photographers have the ability to create beautiful images in a range of different conditions and even with minimal lighting equipment.



The decision to sit in the photographer's studio or on location should have more to do with your convenience than the quality of the result. Even shooting in a studio, a good photographer will avoid an old school cheesy look and keep you relaxed and friendly.

So there should be no props such as chairs or tall bar stools, and none of those backgrounds that look like the inside of a brown supernova. Your image should be in sharp focus and the only background should be blurred and natural.

A good outdoors location could be a local park, a bench or anywhere that lets you feel comfortable.

10. Two Things You Should Know When Taking Your Own Pictures

You don't have to use a professional photographer to take your dating pictures. Clearly, a professional will give you better images, better results and help you find your ideal partner faster (and that partner is likely to be closer to your ideal) but it is possible to take your own pictures or give a camera to a friend.

If you are doing that, there are at least a couple of vital points you need to keep in mind.

1. Use shallow depth of field

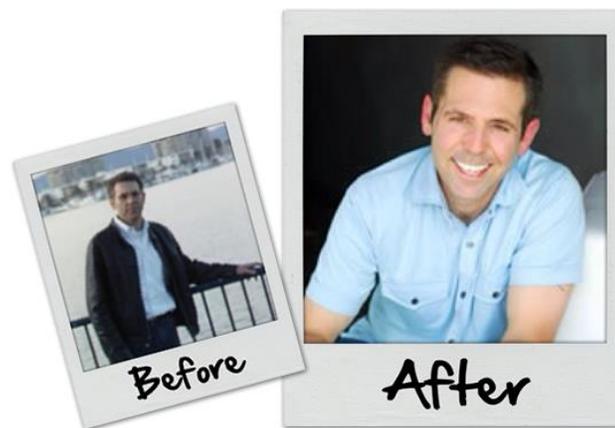
Profile photos that have a “wow factor” often use low f numbers — a shallow depth of field. The subject is in sharp focus while the rest of the picture is blurred.

Dating website OK Cupid says:

“Photos with the low f numbers feel more intimate and personal; they get a better viewer response.”

2. Avoid harsh lighting

The best times to schedule photo sessions are in the morning and afternoons when the light is dimmer and when you can avoid using the flash. Artificial light can add years.



11. The Night Before the Photo Session

It's a good idea to get a good night's sleep the night before the photo session. (So avoid partying that night; alcohol and cigarette smoke, even second hand smoke, can make eyes look red and puffy). Smokers should hold off immediately before the shoot; cigarettes deprive the skin of oxygen and make it look gray.

Pimples aren't a great problem. If one pops up the night before the shoot, don't touch it, as this will make it redder and harder to cover. But most photographers have no problem covering one or two pimples with make-up or digital retouching. Don't experiment with skin treatments the night before the photo session, though. The last thing you want is a skin irritation or allergic reaction.

On the day of the shoot itself, you should know how to reach the studio or location and avoid wearing glasses for a couple of hours before the shoot; they leave marks on the bridge of the nose.



12. Handling Nerves

With the right photographer your job is just to show up. You're not required or expected to know any modeling poses or to present your best angle. If you are fretting over real or imagined flaws and how they will look on camera, the photographer can work around those concerns during the shoot.

Nor should you be worried if a professional photographer at a location shoot asks you to pose in a mundane location, like a doorway or street location. The background won't be noticeable in the headshot. It's all about the best lighting for the face and the light that makes your eyes "pop."

Remember that, by the time you arrive for the shoot, if you've done the groundwork — selected your outfits and done your grooming — there's really nothing else to worry about. The only thing to do now is relax and be yourself in front of the camera.

If you are worried that you're not very photogenic, you're not alone. That's a pretty common feeling and it usually comes down to two reasons:

A poor photographer. It takes skill to make someone look good in a profile pic. While good luck can produce great profile pictures, poor composition or poor lighting guarantee poor results. A good, experienced, professional photographer knows how to make the conditions work.

You felt uncomfortable, tense or posed when taking the photos. A good portrait photographer also knows how to get the most out of his or her subjects. The photographer will help you relax and shoot you looking your best. A good way to relax during the photo session is to think about memories of events that made you feel good in the past and experience those same feelings of joy and fun as you are being photographed.

With the right photographer, you will be photogenic, get the profile photos you deserve and win better dates.

13. After the Shoot: When to Retouch?

Photo retouching is best left to remove a stray hair, to correct color and lighting or help someone who has a minor acne breakout or razor burn. But no more than that.

“Often people work too much and get bags under their eyes for lack of sleep. Digital retouching can remove a few minor lines and show them looking their best. But if you have a mole the size of a quarter on your forehead, and you want it removed, people are going to notice and there is no point looking like someone you don’t in real life.”

Giles Fabris, LookBetterOnline.com

Retouching should enable you to look as you do on your best day. It shouldn’t change a body or a look. On dating sites, stories of such deceit abound. One 46-year-old male recalls his first face-to-face encounter with a woman he’d met online:

“I spotted her blond hair and tapped her on the shoulder,” he says. “When she turned around, I jumped back—terrible of me, I know, but I was just so shocked. She looked much older in person, and I barely recognized her. She must have taken out every wrinkle from her profile picture. Her lines weren’t the turnoff, but who wants to start a relationship on a lie?”

Photoshop is like the Force. There’s a light side and a dark side. Our advice is to stay on the light side.



I hope you’ve enjoyed our article, if you have any questions, comments or suggestions please don’t hesitate to contact us at www2.lookbetteronline.com/home/contact.asp

Warmest regards

Giles Fabris
CEO & Director of operations
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