15 Imagery

Today's to-do list
In today's session, we will look at choosing the right stock images, and graphics and you will do some product photography in various styles. You don't need a fancy camera and studio set-up. All the images I'm going to show you examples of today have been shot on my iPhone.

Learning objectives:
By the end of this session, you will
Understand what makes a good composition
Know what types of images work for each type of content
Learn how to find appropriate stock images

The cut out
Your photos and the imagery you use on your website and your social media will say a lot about you. Remember the old saying? "An image speaks a thousand words"

In this age of automation and AI, nothing is original anymore, but that allows you to stand out and shine if you make the effort.

Using good images on your site and socials is not just a way to sell, it's a way to stand out, create a brand, create an emotion, and create interest. In your social media, it's the bit that catches the eye and stops that high-speed scroll past your content. In Instagram and Pinterest, it's all about the image, so it's important, not just an afterthought.

This week we have spent several sessions looking at creating the right content and words, but what about the image? Having an original product shot can be a great way of making you stand out from your competitors. Take a look at this example, Bamber's sells sewing machines, this we know. They also spend a great deal of time and effort photographing the machines for their website. Bernina supplies all their agents with the same cut-out white background images. They all look great on individual websites, but what about Google shopping? It's where a huge chunk of shoppers start their product searches. **What stands out to you on this search screen?**

Your eye is drawn to the two boxes that aren't just white cut-outs. One is the Sewing and Knitting Centre, they just use the standard supplied images on a black background and Bamber's, with a styled room set, interest in the background. When the product, price, and spec are all the same, you need to differentiate yourself. Standout.

I'm not trying to say ditch the photographer, I would be lost without Myers Creative and the products he shoots for us, but there is a place for DIY photography**. Web products and social media don't demand such a large file size, social media especially is about quick snaps and sharing moments.** Being able to take a good photo can save you a fortune if you are just starting out in business and can massively speed up the process of getting products online.

We are going to look at a couple of options and I'm going to send you off to take some pictures, a smartphone is more than enough for what we need if you want to use a camera that's fine too. In the last part of the session, we are going to look at some stock libraries, royalty-free graphics, videos and images.

Let's start with the Humble cut-out.

An online essential, if you are going to use sites like eBay and Amazon they prefer an isolated cut-out. It's often useful on your website. **The trick with a cut-out is clarity. Clear, in focus, showing as much detail as you can.**

I like things neat and tidy. When I shoot products for an online shop I work to a template. The idea here is to make the page easy on the eye. Looking at the products one at a time it might not seem worth the effort but the fact they are all the same angle and colour tone means a more comfortable view as you look at the page. Whether it's in the brochure or on the website, there's nothing more distracting than random images, dropped on a page. Our mugs here are all shot with the same angle, detail and lighting.

The whole page is easier to read and looks more considered and organised. It's easier to see the differences between the products and the detail that's there when it's laid out in an orderly fashion. With a little time, thought, and the humble cut-out can become a strong and effective sales tool.

Compare the mugs to the oven gloves. They are different angles, and different lighting, the colours aren't very accurate and it all becomes a bit untidier. These images have all been shot one at a time when the products have come into stock. On different cameras, phones and in different lighting conditions. Just going back and checking the page to see what angle the others are all sat at, even products coming in months apart would still look the same on the page.

Think about the details of the product. Like our Croc Duo here, we want to show the actual product not just the jar so it's shot with the lid off so the customer can see what's inside.

With our threads, the name is important so we make sure the Gutermann name is front and centre in the image.

The idea of the cut-out is simple, effective and clear. It does what it says on the tin, like our pewter keyrings. Close-up to show all the detail. Clear flat lighting. It says
"I'm here. Me, the shiny keyring. Look at me, look at me, nothing else."

When it comes to lighting, you don't need a big fancy studio set. A couple of sheets of plain white paper and some good natural light can do wonders. The mugs were all shot outside on my garden table on white paper on a bright but not sunny day. If you have lots of products you can get a little light box, we have one, and it was about £20 on Amazon. We used it to shoot 300 spools of thread so that the light and position were the same on every spool. Interestingly when you look at the boxes all side by side you can see how much of the thread is reflected in the lightbox. The pink especially has a pinky tinge to the background

where the lightbox is picking up the product colour. That's why I prefer a larger area and in natural light, you don't get the same colour reflections.

6. Activity one

For your first activity, I would like you to go off and find 4 products, ideally, it wants to be a similar thing so it might be 4 spoons or 4 pens. **Set yourself up a little bit of space and photograph your 4 products.**

Think about the product position – keeping them all the same but making sure that it's appropriate for the product's details. Don't worry too much about the lighting, I know it's not going to be possible to go and sit in the garden in the sun. Just try and get them clear and as even as you can.

Think about your position - we aren't using a tripod here so you need to make sure you put the camera in the same place each time.

You are going to use these products for the rest of the activities so make sure you are happy with them.

Simple sets

Moving on from our basic cut-out, we have a simple set. **A nice background can make a product stand out. If you have a site with lots of very similar products then changing up the background can add interest and colour.** Look at our octopus pin badge for instance. We have our nice white clear cut-out for the main screen but then an option with a background. It's pinned to the fabric so you can see it in context and it gives you a better idea of size. We did the same with the cufflinks. Shot on a men's shirt, you get a better idea of the cufflink's size when it's against the shirt and how it would look in situ.

It is great for when you don't have a massive inventory of products but still need to make your social media posts look different. Like our tattoo products. There are only half a dozen products in the range so if we just used the same image over and over it's soon going to look boring. Think about that Instagram grid, just the same pictures repeated over and over. Utilising different backgrounds like my plant Percy, you get a completely different look, and the posts we used this image on did far better than just the plain cut out too. It just shows that the images you use do matter, different things catch people's eye.

At this point, we are just taking backgrounds so fabric, a worktop, or some texture or colour that's appropriate to the product. These are great for social media, additional website images and banner or detail images on a site page.

Again, think about the detail, what do you need to show? This simple set for Bernina presser feet shows the foot in situ on a machine. The customers can see the item number and more importantly how the foot fits into the machine. These type A feet have a completely different fit than the other types. People use product images to check if it's the right thing. If it has the correct fit or is the right colour. Being as accurate as you can is important.

Activity two

For your second activity, I would like you to use the same products and find yourself a nice background, you can do two or three options if you like. I want to see something that will add interest, is appropriate to the product or show it in situ/context so we get a better idea of size. Nothing too complicated for now, just a background.

Group shots

These are the kind of shots that are perfect for social media and ideal for promo banners and category pages. Most of the time, selling to a retail customer is selling desire not need. You can show people a kit of products, very useful and practical stuff that everyone needs but it's making them *want* to buy it that's key. I need bin bags but they are not on top of my want list when I get paid each month. Show me a pretty pair of *shoes*…

The key to a good group shot is composition. Depending on your product that could be regimented or a grid formation. Because we want to show the products as kits I went with shape and height. I wanted them to be interesting and make the most of the bright colours in the thread but, all importantly, I want to make sure that everything in the kit featured in the shot. I also like balance, so even numbers of products on each side and a centrepiece.

I am a big believer in *"if it's in there, show it".* It helps not only to make the group look better because there's more of it, but it can sometimes mean the difference between a sale or not. A product you might think of as insignificant or unattractive so you leave it out might show up in someone else's kit and the customer buys that one instead. It is also about what's left out. There are no extras here. We have a plain background, there can be no misunderstandings about what's on offer.

Shooting a well-arranged group means that proportions and sizes are correct. It's easy to create a group from a set of cut-outs but if you get the sizes wrong it's misleading to the customer. People buy with their eyes. Just because you told someone the thimble is 20 mm high, if you show it the same size as a coffee cup they believe their eyes rather than the numbers they might not bother to read.

At the end of the day, as with the humble cut-out, the group shot has a specific message. *"Look at all the well-thought-out stuff I have, all done for you, aren't I pretty?"*

Activity three

For your next set, put a bundle together. Even if it's just knives, forks, plates, and a bowl. Think about how you can show everything but try and keep it fairly square. Don't include anything that isn't going to feature in your bundle. You can use backgrounds if you like but no additional props.

Dressed Sets

Unless that's your thing, I'm not talking full Ikea room sets here. We are looking at propped setups, dressing the product up for added interest. These types of shots are great for web banners, social and for more content-based uses like blogs and articles. These are the shots that are not necessarily for selling. They might be a single product with some dressing or a range/collection group shot to show on a category page. This is where you can let your

imagination run free. The key is to make sure your centrepiece is always your product and that you show it in full. You also want to make sure that your props are appropriate to your product. This is one of Bamber's vintage sewing machines from a huge collection. They wanted to do a gallery blog about them. They aren't for sale but the customers love them so it's more for content and interest. Just shot as a plain product cut-out wouldn't really do them justice so we put together a little set to show them off better. The problem was the machines are decades even hundreds of years old and the shop is full of new stuff.

After a good hour of rummaging around the shop, I found second-hand buttons from the charity box, old second-hand dress patterns, less plastic-looking spools of thread and traditional fabrics. All the props looked appropriate to the era, with crochet trim rather than a satin ribbon, and vintage steel scissors instead of plastic. It all went to create a feel in keeping with the machines. We were set when we raided one of the old sewing tables in the cellar for the tabletop. I have added background on here afterwards just because the only space we had available had a manky bit of wall behind it but proper planning or some kind of backdrop and you wouldn't need to do that.

Products like beauty and healthcare often work well with props that mirror ingredients. Like this Body Smoother from Xenca. The products are organic so they didn't want anything over the top. In this case, the natural scrub reinforced the natural message of the contents and was appropriate to what the product would be used for. The orange worked well for colour and was one of the main ingredients.

Mini sets like these cosmetics bags are all about creating a lifestyle feel. You get the context of size against the other products and they offer up a feeling rather for a product that's not every day essential.

You might want to do a behind-the-scenes for your social. This kind of content always works well. People like to see what you are up to so shooting the shoot is always a popular option.

Activity four
Using your products, I would like you to do a final set as a little dressed layout. Incorporate props, backgrounds, and bits of wall or room. Decide what you are shooting it for – additional website image, social media, or website banner so that you can make sure the layout is an appropriate size. A Facebook or website banner image is going to need to be longer and thinner, an Instagram post is going to be square.

Stock images and infographics
There are lots of other image styles you can utilise to enhance your products or social. Close-ups and details are always good, especially if it's a product that you might normally see from further away like these fabric close-ups for a new product range. They not only give you more content but more reasons to talk about the same product without it getting overly boring.

Using your own product images is always better if you can, but it's not always possible or the right concept for the post. If you are service-based then a product image isn't going to suit your content. Remember our Fertility Clinic in the Instagram session? Photos are not

what we want to be using on those posts but an edited infographic worked brilliantly. There are plenty of free stock image sites available like Pixabay, Unsplash, Pexels, and Dreamstime and there are more coming along all the time. Don't forget that a lot of people use these free images so try and find something a bit different, not just the first one it offers you. If you want something specific or something special then there are loads of stock sites like Shutterstock, Adobe Stock and iStock that offer royalty-free images starting from a few pounds. You can buy credits and use them against your choices.

Infographics are always great to show ideas and concepts.

You have your Canva session tomorrow so you will soon know how to create different graphics and post them straight to your socials. Remember each platform has its own image specification.
Instagram likes squares for posts to sit neatly on the grid or portrait for stories and reels. LinkedIn likes a slightly more landscape shape.

There is a useful cheat sheet from Hootsuite in your useful links doc that has the latest set of image formats for every platform.

For the last few minutes, I would like you to go off and have a look for some appropriate stock images and infographics that you can use tomorrow in your Canva session.

Don't forget
Make sure you submit your work from today then it can be added to your learner file. Use the uploader on today's page to send them to us. You can also use the links to download a copy of today's notes and slides.

Today's session page in your learner dashboard has a useful links document that will cover all the tools, resources and articles we have discussed in the session and some useful guides and articles to take you further.

Make sure you revisit your FABs and set yourself some goals specific to today's session.

Extra help
If you need any help with anything from today's session feel free to message in the WhatsApp group. If you have any other issues or problems related to the course or the tools speak to Andrew and Irfana, they are here to help you.