Food photography for brand packaging.

Tips for a successful photo shoot for your brand packaging.

If you are managing an emerging brand in the natural and organic food space, you probably have been thinking about photography of your product. Photos are essential. They communicate appetite appeal on your packaging, website, and social media posts.

This article is focusing on food photography for packaging.

Stock Photos vs. Custom Photography
One of the challenges of bringing an emerging brand to market is that more often than not, you are working with a limited budget. Which leaves you with two options: Custom Photography or Stock Photography. Let's discuss both.

Stock photos are photographs that are cataloged, searchable, and downloaded from websites such as Getty Images, iStock, and Shutterstock, etc. For instance, you can search for shrimp scampi and hundreds of images of various images dishes, cooking, and ingredients, related to shrimp scampi will appear.

It is a convenient and reasonably priced solution for you to add appetite appeal to your package design. But you should be aware that if you purchase and download a photo for your brand packaging, someone else can purchase that same exact photo for their brand. And even with thousand photos available, you may not find the photo that recently represents your product.

Custom Photography
Custom food photography is a specialization within the vast world of professional photography. It is also the best choice for owning images that accurately reflect your product. While hiring a photographer is more expensive than downloading stock photos, the cost is nominal when you consider the importance of appetite appeal on your brand packaging, on the retail shelf, and in the consumer's shopping cart.

If you negotiate the contract with the photographer where you, the client, own the images in perpetuity, you can use them not only in packaging, but in advertising, trade show banners, Point of sale materials, and lobby displays. Again, you must negotiate these usages with the photographer.

Many photographers can shoot a variety of subjects. Yet some choose to specialize in people, automotive, and architectural, to name a few. It is highly important that you choose a photographer that has experience shooting food, because there are skills and techniques to achieving the best appetite appeal.

The Team
You (the client)

Technical Advisor (you, the client, or someone from R&D that can be sure that the food photography

displays the product properly, with the correct ratios of ingredients represented.)

Photographer and Assistant

Art Director (designer or creative director)

Stylists (food stylist & assistant). These are people that specialize in prepping food and creating the best appetite appeal for the purpose of photography. They often have a culinary background.

Prop stylist. People responsible for providing the plates, surfaces, and additional props.

Make-up, hair, and wardrobe stylist —if people are to be in the photo.

Plan Ahead
Don't walk into the studio unprepared thinking somehow, it's all going to come together.

Before cameras, computers, and lighting equipment gets set up, there should be a shared plan in place between you, the photographer, and the food stylist. It's often beneficial to have a pre-production (pre-pro) meeting before the first day of the photo shoot. The agenda for this meeting should include:

- **Scheduling:** What time do all the team members need to arrive at the studio? Depending on their role, everyone does not need to show up at the same time. For example, your R&D person should arrive early with the food stylist to prep all the food to be shot that day. The art director should arrive early enough to confirm that the set-up is moving forward as planned. There are times when upper management wants to stop by the studio to check in on the process. Their time is usually limited, so let them know that the best time to arrive is after everything is set up and during the time when photos are actually taken.

- **Concepts:** Review the approved concepts for each photograph with the photographer and food stylist. This is the time when special ingredients are discussed and props such as plates, backgrounds, surfaces, and additional props are planned. Decide who is responsible for acquiring these items. Sometimes the studio has a supply of props. Is there a rental fee? Are some items to be purchased? If so, who owns them after the photo shoot?

- **Delivery of the product to be photographed:**
  • How much product is needed? This is often more than you think. The food stylist will need to sort through the product and select the best samples for the photo.
  • Who is responsible for shipping and receiving the product? If it's perishable, are there adequate refrigerators or freezers readily available?

- **Location:** Are you shooting in a studio, or on location (on a site other than the studio)? If the photo shoot is to take place at a restaurant or poolside at a hotel, there are various details that are important:
  • Who is the contact person for the day?
  • Is parking available for your team, and the photo crew?
  • Who needs directions to the location?
  • How much time is allotted for that location?
  • Are permits form the city necessary?

- Product from production

- Ingredients to support the product

- Additional ingredients for styling

- Props
  - Prop stylist
  - Shopping
  - Props from Studio
  - Backgrounds and surfaces

So, your planning paid off and you had a successful photo shoot. You proudly walk into the office the next morning and with your boss, the marketing team, or upper management are gathered around while you click through the images on your computer. Then you realize that you have a group of art critics over your shoulder asking a lot of questions as to why that camera angle was chosen, or why was the food styled a certain way. This is why approval from upper management, to marketing, of the concepts before the day of the shoot is so important.

**Let's back up to before the photo shoot.**

If your photos are to appear on the principle display panel (PDP) of your product packaging, there are already inherent restrictions and requirements that will dictate how the product is photographed. Your creative team (in-house or outside agency) should be responsible for this part of the process.

For example, if the package design of your product line is already established, and you are shooting photos for several products, then there is already a template to follow. You want the food to be photographed with the most appetite appeal possible, while making accommodations for the necessary logos, typography, and other mandatory graphics. Then your creative team should design the photo within that template. For instance, it will determine if the shot is from above, or something like a 45° angle.

Ask your designer to mock-up your packaging (often known as "comps") with an example of the photo as a placeholder as a guide to how the product will eventually be photographed. Then this can be used for the approval process with the other key stakeholders in your organization.

Be aware that if an actual photo is used as a placeholder in the mock-up, it can be a distraction to getting the needed approval because that photo will not 100% represent your product. Plus, you do not want to plagiarize an existing photo that may be copyrighted by another company, or photographer. So, a way to avoid this situation is to "keep it loose". Here's how:

Request that someone on your creative team provide rough sketches of each photo to be taken of each product that needs to be shot. Yes, I mean having someone put pencil to paper, which seems rare in this digital age. But it works for a few of reasons. First, it's fast. A pencil in the hand of a creative mind can knock out a lot of different ideas in short order. Remember these are rough sketches, not finished works of art. Second, without all the details accurately rendered out, it leaves room for the creative process to evolve in front of the camera. You simply can't plan where every pea, carrot, or pasta noodle will be placed. Third, the people that need to grant approval will not be distracted by the details. They will understand that the sketch is simply a guide to what you are attempting to accomplish in the photo studio, if these sketches are scanned and digitally layered within a template of your package design.
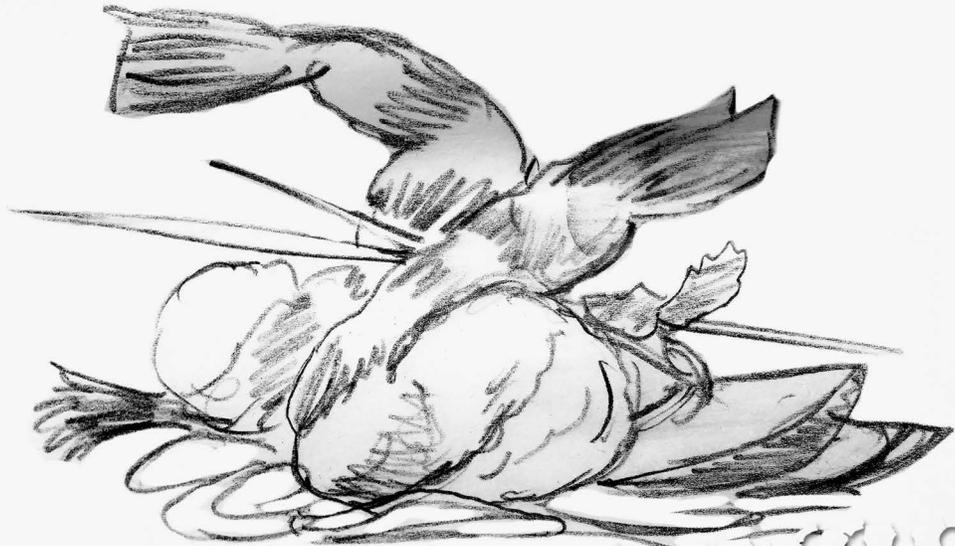
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GRILLED TAILS

The templates of your package design will be quite beneficial on the day of the photo shoot. The art director provides the photographer with a digital file of the templates that can be layered over the photograph in the computer. This informs everyone, the art director, photographer, food stylist, and your boss, if any critical elements are to be adjusted to fit within the confines of the package design. It's frustrating to make something fit after the photo shoot and when you are under a deadline to deliver artwork to the packaging supplier.
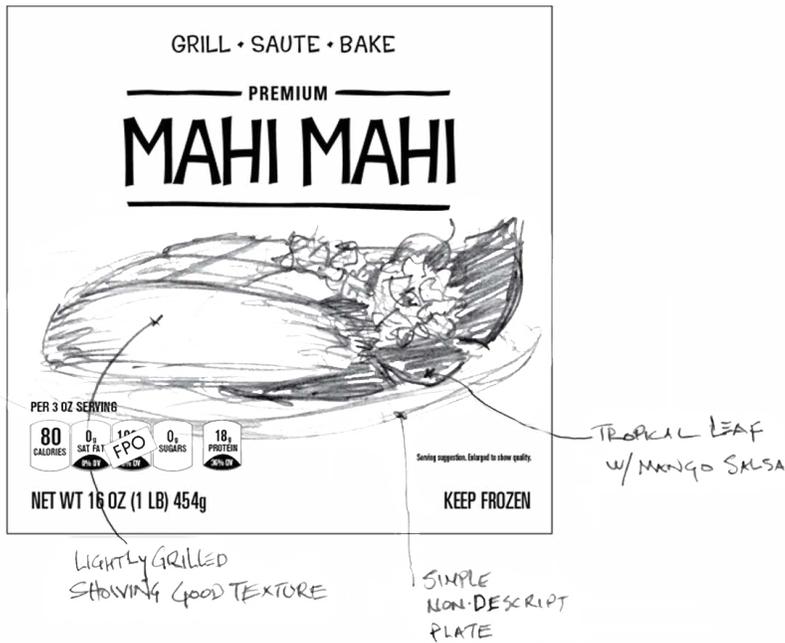
Deliverables from the photographer.
    - Low resolution JPGs for F.P.O.
    - Final retouched photo files from photographer. The photographer may need to retouch and compose several shots together for the final image.

Keeping the images accessible.
File & Categorize Images

    - File names from the photographer are not always the best name for the image for you and everyone else that may need access to the photo.

    - Once you've received the files from the photographer, backup the images yourself.
(Many photographers charge a fee to retrieve images from their archives after a certain amount of time after the photo shoot.

If you have more questions about coordinating a successful photo shoot for your brand packaging, we'd love to start a conversation with you. Contact us at: **310-489-8446**, **info@launch17.com**, or **Launch17.com.**

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Branding and packaging for natural products.