



[A good portrait can upgrade your image](#)

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A picture can be worth a lot more than a thousand words to an attorney, especially when that picture is a headshot for a website. So it makes sense that standing against a white office wall and having someone snap away with their cellphone camera while you say “cheese” may not be in your best interest.

A couple of professional photographers weighed in on how to get a great headshot.

Photographer Stuart Herrick, who owns SMHerrick Photography in Eden Prairie, asks his business subjects to fill out a survey using keywords that their prospective clients would likely use to find their websites. Together, they determine the type of look would appeal most to that audience.

“I approach biz portraiture holistically,” Herrick said. “I’m a really strong advocate for promoting your brand. You know your target. You know what you’re going for.”

He also knows what doesn’t work: photos of lawyers posed before shelves of law books (“It’s like a doctor photographed with a stethoscope around his neck.”) and criminal defense lawyers posed behind bars (“Shock and terror and fear are not really what you want to convey in your portraits.”).

Herrick also eschews trendy clothing in a professional headshot because fashions change so frequently. He prefers that the look be subtle, approachable, neutral, even tie-free, but not sloppy. He advises all his business clients to have fitted suits, shirts or blouses and to take them to a high-end dry cleaner so they’re clean and well pressed. He also advises subjects to have their hair cut a week before their scheduled photo shoot to give the hair time to settle.

“Makeup is great,” Herrick added. “I do have a makeup artist I work with, and I recommend that for men and women. It makes the portrait easy, particularly for women. Really, what it’s about is evening out your skin tone.”

Kerry Meagher, an in-house counsel with the Minneapolis office of First American Title Insurance Co., never liked his headshots and decided last spring to retire them. He hired Herrick, a fellow member of a business networking group, to do the job.

“I just take terrible pictures, typically,” Meagher said. “He is so good at getting somebody to relax and actually take a picture that looks good. I’d never had that experience before. I have a cadre of pictures that I can pick from — a suit with tie to a sweater and tie to an open neck.”

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Herrick and professional photographer Sarah Pierce, who owns Minneapolis Headshots, have studios but can also shoot on-site. Either way, they recommend that photo subjects bring two outfits.

“Certain colors can wash you out depending on your skin tone and your hair color,” Pierce said. “It’s nice to have options.”

Pierce advises against wearing anything loud, such as stripes, or anything that would distract from the face, such as a lot of jewelry. “Especially if you want to keep it for a few years, you want it to be timeless and professional,” she said.

For lawyer headshot backgrounds, she generally uses neutral colors, such as tan or brown. A background called “thunder gray” is popular among male lawyers.

“I usually tell guys to wear their favorite tie,” Pierce said. “I feel that if they bring a couple of choices in, which one makes you feel more comfortable or more confident? I think confidence really can speak through a photo.”

Having a good headshot is important because often it’s the first impression you’ll make on a prospective client, according to Meagher.

That’s especially important when you’re just starting out. Karen Hazel is a second-career lawyer who is starting a small-business practice focusing on business formation and employment law. Hazel chose Pierce to shoot her headshot because the photographer’s website was easy to navigate and highlighted her artistic sense. She also thought Pierce had a reasonable policy on ownership and use of the images, as well as market-rate pricing.

Hazel had worked on Wall Street before moving to the Twin Cities after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. A 25-year veteran of professional headshots, she used to tell each photographer what she wanted. Her experience with Pierce was different.

Hazel took Pierce’s advice of bringing extra clothing, makeup and a hairbrush to Pierce’s Chanhassen studio. In less than 30 minutes, she had several shots from which to choose.

“She’s extremely fun and easy to work with, very kind and gentle with her clients,” Hazel said. “She has a way of suggesting something different without you even knowing it.”

Pierce wrote an article on her website on how to prepare for a business headshot, which can be found at sarahpiercephotography.com. Of course, she recommends using a professional photographer, but for determined do-it-yourselfers, Pierce offered this advice:

- Choose a clean backdrop (such as a wall or outdoor setting with some green in the background).
- Make sure your clothing is pressed and clean looking.
- Set up your camera on a tripod with a timer or have a friend photograph you (preferably someone with some knowledge of how to operate a camera).
- Make sure you are near a window or a source of some nice, natural light.
- Avoid shadows, and do not photograph in direct sunlight.

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“There are a million photographers out there,” he said. “You can go to Target and Wal-Mart to get your photo taken. A professional studio is totally different, and your results are going to be exponentially different.”

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