

# A picture is worth a thousand words

What to consider when choosing website imagery

By Kim McCotter



*“All people are naturally drawn to faces, in particular eyes and mouths, so it is best to avoid smiles without eyes. The two go together for full emotional recognition and indicate the practice treats the person not just the teeth...”*

**C**hoosing images is one of the most exciting parts of developing a website. The right image builds your brand, carries your message, captures a potential patient’s imagination and informs them about your offering... all of which persuades them to book an appointment. The wrong image causes inconsistencies, confusion and annoyance which repels website visitors.

## Does the imagery support your brand?

First and foremost, imagery used should support your brand and speak to your target audiences. Often practitioners don’t consider their target audiences and without this consideration, the end result can come across as shallow and insincere. A more genuine approach is to develop a brand personality that is consistent with your practitioners and staff. Work out your point of difference and story (unique selling proposition), then the image selection process becomes much easier.

## Does it convey the correct feeling?

A person’s mood can significantly influence how they process both incoming and self-generated information. If a potential patient is in a positive state of mind, they will be more receptive to your marketing messages.

All people are naturally drawn to faces, in particular eyes and mouths, so it is best to avoid smiles without eyes. The two go together for full emotional recognition and indicate the practice treats the person not just the teeth.

We learn at a very young age to interpret facial expressions quickly to assess people around us. Images that focus on these facial features can be used to portray a practice that is friendly and inviting.

## Does it add information?

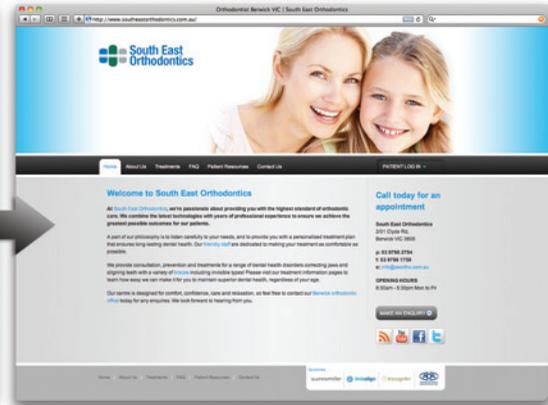
Images makes your website more interesting, but they use precious bandwidth in the process. Use images judiciously, only select ones that add information or support your overall message.

## Different types of imagery

There are six different types of imagery that are commonly used on dental websites, including:

- Still-life photographs - products, inanimate objects;
- Portrait photographs - focuses on people’s faces and is frequently used for staff profile pages;
- Lifestyle photographs - portrays your target market in real life situations and should feature prominently on your website;
- Usage images - before and after case study photographs used in treatment galleries;
- Location imagery - surgery images; and
- Graphic imagery - these are created graphical elements to support your brand or to explain complex treatments.

It is best to limit or avoid before and after images; where necessary, lead with after shots and only reveal before shots with a click or mouse “rollover”. To the general public, a before and after gallery looks like a scene from *Alien versus Predator* - they are just plain scary!



Along a similar line, avoid in-treatment shots, dental mirrors, scalers and drills. Remember that a lot of potential patients get anxious when visiting a dentist; this sort of imagery can compound this anxiety.

### Sourcing imagery

Stock photo libraries are a great way to source appropriate “royalty free” images, but there is a downside. Have you ever seen the same image appear on different websites? Chances are the image was sourced from a stock photo library. The problem with royalty free stock photos is they are available to anybody willing to pay the modest fee, including your competition.

One way to obtain unique imagery is to purchase “rights managed” photography licences. This type of licence gives you usage rights for a specific purpose and for a fixed period of time.

The best way to obtain unique photography is to hire a professional photographer. Happy patients and staff add context, impact and convey authenticity; these shots beat stock photography any day, if you are prepared to make the investment.

If you do use patient and employee images for promotional purposes, you will need their written permission (called a “release”) and be aware that this permission can be withdrawn at anytime.

Budget around \$1,000 - \$3,000 for a full day shoot including post-production. If models are hired, the cost will increase.

### Image style and colouration

Images on a website should sit in the same visual family, take note of the details and the big picture.

Do the model’s clothes match or clash with your website colour scheme? Is the model’s posture and expression appropriate? Is the background appropriate?

### Contextual cropping

When photographs are shot, there is useless space or irrelevant details around the subject. Contextual cropping is where photographs are reduced to the minimum size required to convey the desired meaning.

The purpose is to maintain visitor focus by removing distractions; the smaller the image the less details it should have.

### Quality considerations

Image quality is all about balancing resolution and file size to create an enjoyable visual experience.

Using high resolution photographs directly from a digital camera will result in longer load times. To be usable, images need to be

optimised for the web. This is a process of managing distortion, stretching, pixelation and file size. Areas that require detail like a hero shot attract more scrutiny than the navigation buttons and footer images. Get the balance right and your website will look slick and professional, get it wrong and it will feel cheap and nasty.

### Be SEO friendly

Google has trouble understanding the meaning of website images. It approximates meaning based on alternative text, titles, captions, surrounding content and filenames.

Alternative text is a piece of code that describes the content of an image. This description is particularly important for low bandwidth and visually impaired users that may have difficulty viewing your website. An example alternative text for the image above is “Mother and daughter smiling together”.

Titles and captions aren’t necessary, but are helpful when you have standalone images that require further explanation.

Generic filenames like ‘DSC00001.jpg’ or ‘IMG00054.jpg’ are automatically generated by digital cameras when a photo is taken. Before using these images on your website, rename them to be more descriptive. It is good practice to use dashes (-) or underscores (\_) to separate your words. An example filename for the image above is “smiling-mother-and-daughter.jpg”.

Try to be as descriptive as possible without misleading the general public.

Providing your web designer or SEO consultant with this information saves time, improves usability and searchability.

The next article in the series will focus on creating a patient acquisition strategy.

### About the author

*Mr Kim McCotter is Business Development & Marketing Manager at Levitch Design Associates. With a background and passion for business and marketing, Kim comes to LDA with experience in both service and product based industries. Having over five years of professional services experience and five years of marketing experience, he brings a fresh and professional approach to LDA. Kim holds a Bachelor of Business (UTS), Masters of Business in Marketing (UTS), and a Certificate in Digital Marketing (ADMA). He is continually investigating marketing and business techniques to find the next competitive edge. His methodical business development and marketing approach is outcome driven, his initiatives will be beneficial to the future success of our clients. He can be contacted on (02) 9496-5700.*