

## Exercising your stock options: Image is everything

Your marketing materials say a lot about your firm to potential clients, so consider giving them a makeover with impactful photography. Here's how to get started.

by Vic Wilensky

Since consulting engineering firms are looking more alike to prospective clients these days, a company's image is of increasing importance. Today, busy readers scan rather than read marketing materials, making appropriate, effective images essential to your marketing efforts.

The architecture and engineering professions are fortunate to have finished products such as roadways, bridges and buildings to demonstrate the benefits of working with an architecture or engineering firm. To make your assets tangible for clients, you need not only to use impactful photography to showcase your projects, but also to convey the essence of your company's operating style and principles through powerful visual metaphors. One example is using an Olympic rowing team to illustrate teamwork, commitment and precision.

### Stock and royalty-free images

Glossy catalogues featuring hundreds, if not thousands, of images are available from suppliers of stock and royalty-free photography, covering such popular categories as business and industry, sports, nature, science and technology, etc. Stock and royalty-free agencies also have websites with search capabilities to help you easily locate images within a general area of interest. Many sites have online customer service access to assist you with your search.

Selected images can be downloaded in low-resolution for creating comprehensive layouts, with final images either downloaded in high-resolution, or delivered to you as a transparency, or, in the case of royalty-free images, as a collection of images on a CD-ROM.

Royalty-free images are available individually or as CD-ROM collections in a variety of areas, such as technology, health, medicine, backgrounds, etc. For a one-

time fee, you're free to use these extensively, but, as the saying goes, do read the fine print. For instance, there are restrictions on using images within a logo or trademark. Websites operated by suppliers include: [www.corbisimages.com](http://www.corbisimages.com), [www.eyewire.com](http://www.eyewire.com), [www.photodisc.com](http://www.photodisc.com) and [www.wonderfile.com/](http://www.wonderfile.com/).

As for stock imagery, usage costs for rights are determined by which image you select, and how and where you plan to use it and at what size. Price is also based on printing quantity and geographic distribution. Exclusive use within your industry for a period of, say, one year could be purchased for an additional cost, but this may be worthwhile. The last thing you need is for an image used in your brochure to appear in a competitor's printed piece. Most suppliers will offer to do a quick search of an image's use over the past year by industry, for your reference. Websites where you can find stock images include: [www.comstock.com](http://www.comstock.com), [www.tonystone.com](http://www.tonystone.com), [www.masterfile.com](http://www.masterfile.com) and [www.theimagebank.com/](http://www.theimagebank.com/).

You can also order and pay for stock or royalty-free images online. If you wish to fully explore these sites, you will be asked to register by providing some basic personal information and designating your own password. Although the use of illustration is another topic, you can whet your appetite by visiting [www.images.com](http://www.images.com), the site for The Stock Illustration Source, Inc.

### Professional photography

Before calling the photographer, you need to identify the objectives of a photo shoot. For example, how and where will you use the photos now and in the future—in a brochure, a project profile or on the web? Answering these questions first will help ensure that you get good value for the shoot.



Royalty-free images are available individually or as CD-ROM collections covering various subjects.

You also need to decide whether:

- ◆ the photos will be exterior, interior or aerial shots, or have your staff in them;
- ◆ the photos will be time-related to any particular activity or phase in your business; and
- ◆ you need slides, prints, large format negatives or transparencies, or digital images. A few, well-planned large format shots will have much greater “eye appeal” than several random views taken simply for selection. The tonal range of negatives is far greater than that of transparencies; negatives are not only sharper, they also scan much better to digital output. For digital photography, the final image size and resolution in the end product should be considered.



**Professional shots of your key projects can speak volumes about your accomplishments. Photos on this page: Roger Pensom**

To determine the subject matter, have the various departments in your firm list significant projects by discipline, then finalize your choices. Remember that even with previously photographed projects, a professional’s experienced eye can often increase a project’s promotional value.

You may also want to consider organizing a joint photo shoot with other members of a project team, such as contractors and suppliers, who would benefit from photos of a finished project. This way, the cost can be shared. Just be sure to clarify in advance what each party wants, and convey the specifics to your photographer.

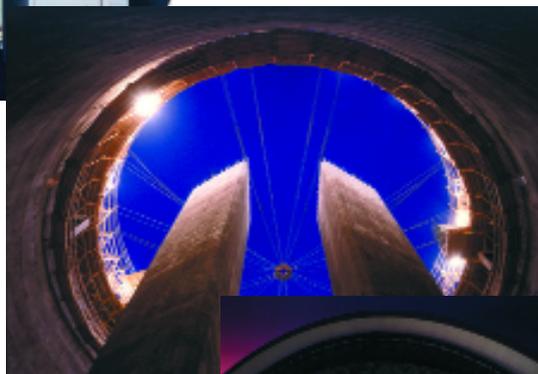
## Selecting a photographer

To select a photographer, identify two or three photographers that specialize in your industry, and arrange to view their portfolios and discuss your requirements with them. You can then ask your preferred photographer(s) to provide price quotes.

Digital photographers may give you files with removable watermarks to secure future reproduction rights. If you are working with a digital photographer, be sure to raise this issue with him or her.

When discussing price, avoid an open-ended agreement based on daily or hourly rates, which might end up increasing the final invoice, should weather or organizational difficulties occur. Instead, get the photographer to agree to a maximum amount per site, based on the number of shots that will need to be set up to provide various perspectives.

Some photographers will ask for a reproduction fee for each use of their copyrighted images. If possible, have them prepare an alternative price quote that includes surrendering the negatives, and vesting all copyrights, to you. This may be less expensive in the long-run, if you plan to keep reusing the images.



## Working with your photographer

To ensure they are captured, communicate clearly to the photographer the key design features that make projects noteworthy. You can do this by providing a site plan and/or existing photos showing construction progress.



If the project is under construction, refer the photographer to the site superintendent, so that key views are identified, and access to vantage points is made available. Be sure to get the client’s clearance for the photo shoot. This could make the exercise much easier for the photographer.

If you are using the digital approach, have the photographer liaise with your graphic designer. This will help ensure that computer files are compatible, establish benchmarks for manipulation (i.e. changing the photo’s look) and advance decisions on requirements before and after delivery.

## Digital professional photography

In many respects, digital photography is superior to traditional “wet photography.” Since problems with pixelization have largely been resolved, prints are now sharper and display greater tonal range.

Many photographers have digital capabilities, but few have made the investment needed to do the job well. High quality digital work requires a seamless transition from conventional technology, and that costs money.

True professionals also understand the limitations of special digital backs for medium or large format cameras, especially when they are used for wide-angle shots. Current digital technology can’t deliver true wide-angle images—the kind that provide impact with architectural or advertising photography. However, this could change over the next three to six months, as the technology is evolving rapidly.

Today, it’s possible to have a photographer visit your site equipped with a special camera back that uses satellite wireless communications to transmit images directly to your computer for approval,

## Pros and cons of the four approaches to photography

### In-house

- ✓ Photos taken in-house are your lowest cost option, and using a digital camera makes reproduction inexpensive and easy.
- ✗ Quite often, the resolution and colour balance and possibly the photographer's eye are not quite up to professional standards. This becomes a problem when you consider that these images will illustrate the best of your firm's work.

### Royalty-free

- ✓ CD-ROMS of royalty-free photography can be purchased for a one-time reasonable charge and used any way you wish with some exceptions (read the fine print).
- ✗ The selection is relatively limited, and it's also quite possible that these images will appear in someone else's materials.

### Stock photography

- ✓ There are literally millions of images to choose from. It takes a trained eye and a specific objective in mind to find just the right image.
- ✗ The relative exclusivity comes at a higher cost. These images are limited to a one-time use for a specific application.

### Professional Photography

- ✓ With an investment similar in cost to stock photography, these images can be applied to all of your marketing needs, from corporate brochures to your website.
- ✗ Timing can be dependent on the season, local weather conditions, and construction status.

A combination of all four approaches can work well in printed pieces. Whereas photos of your own projects provide solid evidence of your capabilities, stock photography can convey an overall message or impression. Royalty-free images can likewise be used as photographic elements and/or backgrounds.

before he or she leaves that location. The issue of cost/quality ratio comes in here; you may need to pay a much higher day rate for this type of service.

For the time being, conventional film should be used to take photos of your projects, and then transferred or scanned into your computer for digital manipulation. This technique uses the best of both digi-

tal and conventional technologies, especially if you are using large format, which provides the best reproduction quality. ♦

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