



STYLIZING YOUR BRAND – CREATING STYLED PHOTOSHOOTS TO UPDATE YOUR PORTFOLIO AND BRAND

Quick Guide
Written by Karthika Gupta



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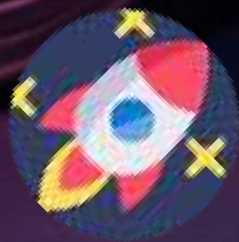
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Photograph by Karthika Gupta -
Memorable Jaunts



Whether you are a new photographer just starting your photography business or a seasoned professional looking to expand your marketing reach, a strong portfolio is crucial to your success. A stylized session for either wedding, portrait, editorial, or lifestyle photography is a wonderful way to build that strong portfolio, promote your brand with stunning imagery, help build industry connections and attract the right type of clients.

You may be wondering what exactly a styled shoot is. Quite simply put, a styled shoot is a planned gathering of a group of vendors or creatives that have put together a 'mock' event with a pre-determined aesthetic for the purpose of adding professional photos to their portfolio and/or submitting photos to a magazine or blog publication to showcase their individual talents. Yes, it is essentially a staged event, but that does not dilute the power of this portfolio-building opportunity.



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Styled shoots can be set up indoors or outdoors depending on your idea/vision for the shoot.

WHY ARE STYLED SHOTS A GOOD IDEA?

In today's technologically connected world, visual stimulation is still one of the best ways to grab a potential customer's attention. As photographers, we have to realize that branding is so much more than just the product or the service. It is about feelings, emotions and experiences associated with the imagery. Clients always look at portfolio pictures not only to get a sense of a photographer's skill, but also to get a sense of their personality and style. Professional, well-executed photos tie the knot between a great product and a great experience. Sometimes either because of client preferences or rushed timelines (especially in the case of weddings) we don't have the luxury and freedom to practice a lot of creative exploration with our imagery. In such cases, a styled shoot is a perfect way to bridge that gap.

By their very nature, styled shoots are meant to showcase the talents of all the involved vendors, both individually as well as collectively. In most

cases, this is a group effort so it is a wonderful opportunity to network with vendors in the same industry. Since it is a pre-determined planned event, it is great for creative exploration and expression to promote products and services of all concerned parties. To get the most out of a styled shoot, use it as an opportunity to really get creative and try out new and exciting product and service ideas. But bear in mind that just because it is a mock event, it does not mean it is stress free. Use this time and space to learn, practice and grow your skills as well as get new and updated photos/product ideas for your business.



Recommended Reading: If you want to avoid boredom and repetition in your photography, you can inject some creativity into your work, by using the fun and challenging assignments in our Creativity Catalog. [Go here now to take a look.](#)



Photograph by Karthika Gupta - Memorable Jaunts

A talent stylist-turned-friend showcasing her craft of designing events during a spring-inspired styled shoot.



Photograph by Karthika
Gupta - Memorable Jaunts

*The spring-inspired
styled shoot was
inspired by spring
florals and working
with hands.*

HOW TO SET UP A STYLED SHOOT

Almost all styled shoots start with a concept or a theme that the team wants to explore. In most cases the styled shoots are driven by a stylist and/or photographer. When you are looking at setting up a styled shoot, something as simple as fabric, a particular color or a mood/emotion can be used as inspiration. The key to remember here is to choose a theme or concept that is simple and not overly elaborate to execute, especially if this is your first time doing a styled shoot. The next thing to figure out is the timing and location of your shoot. I like to give myself at least two weeks to plan a shoot, but I have done shoots that have been six months out or even a few days out. Obviously, the complexity of the shoot dictates the time needed to prepare for it.

Research all the relevant vendors you want to engage with on your styled shoot to make sure their style and brand are in line with what you are trying to achieve. This is another reason why timing is very important. Just like you, most people are very busy juggling a multitude of tasks; just because you have a great idea for a styled shoot does not mean they are going to drop everything to participate with you.

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*Almost all the images
featured someone
actually doing things like
setting a table, creating
a centerpiece or lighting
candle sticks – the art
of intentionally creating
as opposed to buying
ready-made things.*





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Styled shoots are very creatively satisfying projects but are a huge time commitment for all those involved. When you are planning your styled shoot, be very clear on what you expect to gain out of the shoot and what is in it for all those who are participating with you. A statement as simple as 'beautiful pictures for your portfolio' might not cut it for all. However, something like 'A beautifully styled ballet inspired bridal editorial showcasing all things blush and elegant' might be more attractive to vendors who want to be a part of this experience. Also, be very clear on expectation based on budget and payment. I have done shoots both ways where I have paid models and vendors for their services and products as well as shoots where I have traded pictures for the model's time. It just depends on what is the end goal for the shoot.

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HOW TO EXECUTE A STYLED SHOOT

The biggest challenge I found when collaborating on a styled shoot is during the execution phase of the project. In order to stay organized and on top of the whole process, I have a few suggestions that will make your life easy as the photographer/creative on hand.

a) Compile a checklist

There are, what can seem like, a million different moving parts to organizing a styled shoot, from models to pros to location to lighting to gear etc. Have a running list of items and check them as you go along.

b) Share ideas and inspirations via visual tools like Pinterest boards

In situations where not all vendors are local to you, visual tools are a great way to communicate inspiration and exchange ideas. Additionally, there is no confusion on the exact color of the florals, the size and shape of the cake, the style of makeup etc. if everything is accurately documented.



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c) Gather all relevant contact information

Keep a running list of names, contract numbers and social media handles for all the participating vendors and share them with everyone on the team. That way, if you need to get a hold of anyone last minute, you know exactly where to go to get that information.

d) Collaborate on design and assign tasks

Styled shoots are a lot of work but are extremely satisfying from a creative standpoint if they are executed correctly. Make sure you collaborate effectively as a team and don't be afraid to delegate tasks. I learnt the hard way that I cannot wear all the different hats and be responsible to capture beautiful imagery at the same time. I find it best for everyone's creative sanity that they are responsible for what they do best.



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PHOTOGRAPHING FOR YOUR BRAND

Since you have gone through all this trouble of planning and organizing a styled portfolio-building shoot, make sure that the end result (i.e. photos) reflect exactly what you set out to achieve. It is very easy to get carried away on the day of the shoot and just go through the motions of photographing the mock event in any which way possible. But remember this is not the objective of the shoot. When I plan a styled photoshoot it is for one (or all) of the following reasons:

- a) I want an updated portfolio for my brand/website/portfolio
- b) I want to showcase my talent in doing something I haven't done before with the intention of showing my work to future clients
- c) I want to network with and collaborate with vendors that I want to establish a working relationship with in the future

To that end, I want to ensure that my time and effort are both efficiently and effectively utilized, not to mention that of the team I have brought together. So I prepare the following items to help me during my styled photoshoots:

a) 3-4 branding words that best describe my work

My branding words are 'bright,' 'airy,' 'fun,' 'fresh,' 'organic' and 'authentic.' All my photos try to convey one or more of these words and emotions!

b) A shot list of images that I absolutely have to capture

When you prepare your shot list, pre-visualize how your images are going to add value, solve a potential customer problem and/or elevate your brand impressions.

c) A timeline for the shoot day broken up into small manageable chunks

In this schedule, I include what I will photograph when I first set up the scene, what I will focus on with the model, and what I will take care of when we are winding up the shoot.

d) A content strategy plan for using the images from the portfolio photoshoot

As part of my content strategy, I communicate with the vendors to take behind the scenes images and showcase those on their social media channels during the shoot so we can drum up interest. A few days after the photoshoot, I send a couple of 'sneak peek' images to the vendors so they can showcase those to their audience with the appropriate credits and shout-outs. Once the images are curated and edited, I will send all the participating vendors images for their own use (if that is part of the working contract/expectations for the shoot).




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A styled photoshoot of my daughter cooking her favorite meal was published in a popular online lifestyle blog. This shoot was so simple to set up and execute, yet one of the most satisfying projects I have ever done, for both personal and professional reasons.



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Styled shoots are a lot of fun and exciting to plan and execute, but they are also a huge amount of work for everyone concerned. It is very easy to get carried away and only focus on styled shoots all year round in an effort to create new and fresh content, but that is not the point of this exercise. You should think of styled shoots as a way to create/update your portfolio, but don't discount all the other aspects of building your photography business. Paid clients and paid work always trumps creative gigs, but both are required to stay motivated, inspired and grow a profitable photography business.

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Hey there!

Let's get real for a minute... Learning photography can be super challenging! But we're here to help you every step of the way! Here are 3 of our most useful (*and FREE!*) photography resources:



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Karthika Gupta is a wedding, lifestyle, portrait, and editorial photographer based in Chicago. Her style of photography is fun, fresh, and organic. She strives to capture authentic emotions and interactions among her clients and emotive imagery in her commercial work.

She loves connecting with other creatives and photographers and is always ready for an engaging conversation about photography and the art of storytelling.

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