

A Simple Guide To Photography For Business



Product and People Photography for Businesses

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Product Photography With The Mini-Cove



Product photography has never been easier! Even for the untrained operator, once you have the right gear, within a few minutes you



will be producing shots like this. By shooting your product on a virtually shadowless white background your printing company or computer operator will be able to add any colour or any type of background for advertising or promotional leaflets.

So let's get started

Firstly you will need to paint your Mini-Cove. The best method is to use a mini paint roller and it will require about three coats of matt emulsion. Of course, the cove may be painted with any colour to suit. However, in these examples we have used white, allowing further modification to be created on the computer. One big advantage is that if the cove starts to get a bit scratched or dirty, another coat will bring it back to its' former

condition.

Once the paint is dry, place the cove onto a table or desk.

The polystand is quickly unfolded and the flash head attached to the top of the boom arm. Fit the softbox onto the flash head so that it is pointing straight down. Connect the mains and synchronisation cables and position the head into the top of the cove as shown. It's as simple as that!

Once the modelling lamp has been switched on you will see that you have a seamless, virtually shadowless background in which to place your product.

You will find that using the cove, the flash head will only need to be set at a low power level to give the correct exposure. With a digital camera the exposure can be assessed on the built-in screen and either the power of the light or the camera aperture can be adjusted to give the optimum result. We recommend use of a camera aperture of f11, f16 or f22. This should ensure your product is in focus from front to rear. You could of course take a reading with a flash meter if you have one.



“On-Camera” v. Studio Flash

Of course you could use the built-in flash to take your photographs, but the results will certainly not show your products “in their best light” (sorry I couldn't resist that one)!



Which do you prefer?



On-camera flash is a very small light source which produces a very hard, high contrast light. When any object is illuminated from directly in front, it has the effect of flattening the image. For example, when you are flying in a 'plane and the sun is high in the sky, the earth below looks flat - you can't see the hills or valleys. On-camera flash is the same, but it also does something else to people which is rather nasty!

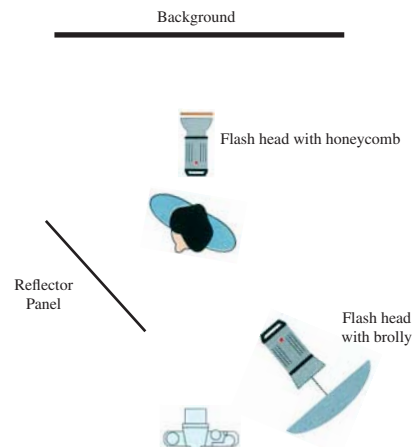


Firstly, you can see that the flash has created a heavy shadow above the shoulders and behind the hair of our model. Secondly, it has given a very unflattering light and thirdly, worst of all it has given her "red-eye". If this was your "Employee of the Month", I think that next month she would make sure she didn't win!



Using a very simple lighting arrangement, this employee would be delighted to win!

Let's have a look at how this was taken. Looking down from above, this was our lighting arrangement.



The main illumination is from the head fitted with a brolly which has the effect of broadening the light. As you can see, we have placed it to one side of the camera so that we have a "lit" side and an "unlit" side to the face of our subject. To the other side we have placed a silver reflector panel which bounces some of the light back onto the unlit side. This still retains a difference in the light falling on each side of our model's face, showing us just how three dimensional she is. With this set-up we would have a very acceptable picture, but on this occasion we have also added a second light behind our subject. Pointing at the background, this light is fitted with a honeycomb which controls the light to ensure that it only illuminates the background. The effect of this light is to lighten the background and give more depth to the picture.



Note:

The honeycomb is fitted onto the front of the head. Since light can only travel in a straight line and the honeycomb grid is about a centimetre thick, the light forms a beam which has a soft edge, making it ideal for a background light.

Now, let's shoot the M.D!

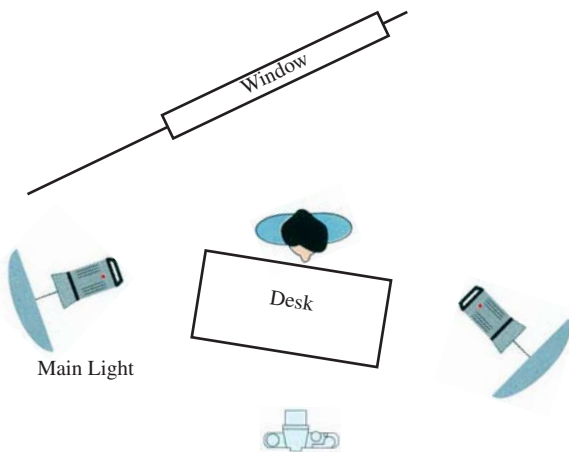
When you need a quick shot of the M.D. for a newsletter or flyer, why not do it yourself? This looks like quite a difficult shot, but it is in fact quite straight forward.

The complication of this photograph is that there is a window in the background, so the light from the window has to balance with the light from the flash.

The best technique is to make it look as though the window is the only light source. In fact if it was we would end up with a silhouette. So, let's see how this



picture was taken. Look at the diagram below, the main light is placed to the left to give a window light effect.



If you look at the amount of light falling onto the side of our MD's face, and the amount on the wall at the right, you will see that it is almost equal.

The first thing you need to do is place the two lights as shown. The distance between the main light and the subject, and the second light and the subject should be about the same. Set the second head to half power which will retain the natural window light effect. Ascertain the correct exposure for the flash and set the camera aperture accordingly (don't worry about the window at this

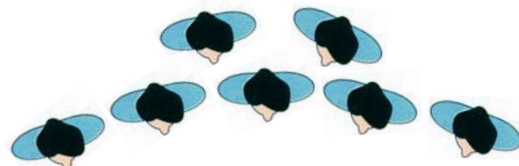
stage). The exposure can be set on a digital camera by using the built-in monitor, or with an exposure meter. Once this is achieved, by altering the shutter speed you will find that you can make the window lighter or darker. If you use a slower speed the window will be brighter and vice versa. It is interesting that the flash exposure will remain the same.

Note:

Most cameras have a maximum shutter speed that can be used with flash - please check the camera instructions. Any speed slower than this may be used, but remember that if you are shooting at less than 1/30th of a second you might get camera shake. Camera shake is caused by movement of the camera whilst the shutter is open. One way of avoiding this is to use a tripod.

Groups and Presentations

The most simple way of photographing groups of people is to use two lights set at equal power, placed one each side of the camera. The lighting should be even across the width of the picture, and with the modelling lights you should be able to see if there are any difficult shadows across faces. For bigger groups you can of course move the lights further out, but be careful you don't get a dark area in the centre!

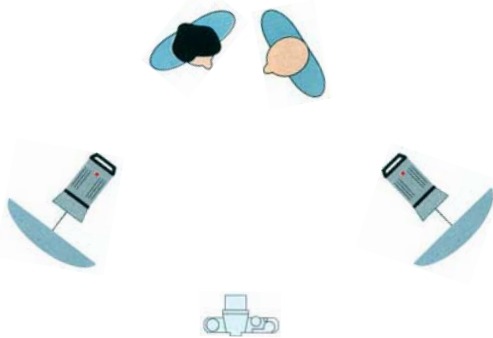


Both lights are placed fairly high and angled down slightly to give a natural "light from above" look.

Note:

A bigger umbrella will give a softer light with softer shadows.

The same lighting set-up can be used to photograph presentations etc. Be careful if someone is being presented with a shiny cup or framed certificate, to watch for any unwanted reflections. The modelling lights on the flash heads will show you where these reflections are, and just tilting the cup or frame will get rid of them. For subjects wearing spectacles move the lights higher and further out to reduce reflections.



Using a softbox for people

We have already seen the softbox in action with the Mini-Cove and for people pictures it's hard to beat. It gives a really soft, diffused light which is very flattering. It's other

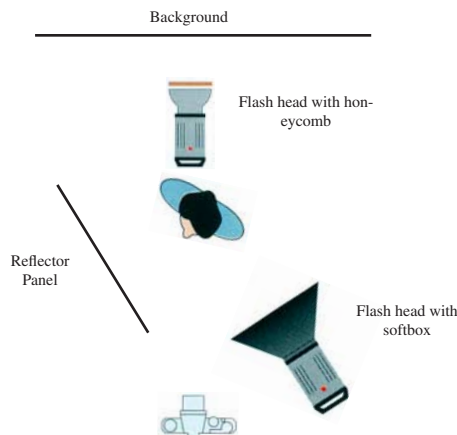


big advantage is that it is much more directional than a brolly. When photographing people in a small room with a brolly, the light is spread over a big area. If the room has painted walls it is very easy to get a reflection of that colour over your

subject, creating an unwanted colour cast. Another of the basic rules of lighting is that the bigger the light source, the softer the light is. By using a softbox very close (just out of

the view of the camera) you will get the softest light.

Look at the diagram and the example below. Compare this with the previous shot, you can certainly see the difference.



Don't forget the uses that this equipment can also be put to at home. For example, photographing valuables makes any insurance claim much easier. What did your room look like before the flood? Digital cameras are great fun, and you could soon be producing great portraits of your family using this equipment.

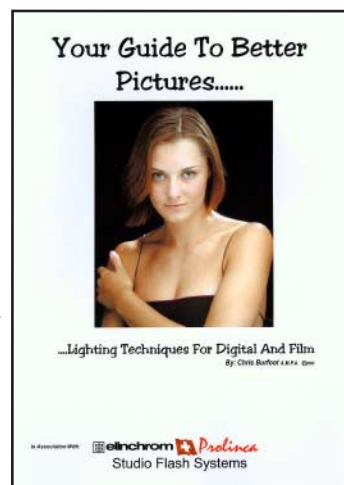


Even more ideas!

Once you find that you have been bitten by the photography bug, we can offer you even more help.

Firstly, by the same author we have a lighting guide called "Your Guide To Better Pictures".

This concentrates on people pictures and gives many examples of lighting arrangements using a variety of different accessories. Secondly, we have two videos by the top



American portrait photographer, Joe Craig. Contact The Flash Centre on 020 7837 5649 or on the Web at theflashcentre.co.uk for further details.