

Is Your Headshot Telling the Real Story?

By Kimberly Alford Rice

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“A picture is worth a thousand words”. We have all heard this over and over again. The question I would ask is whether **your** headshot tells the story you want to tell.

As we work with our law firm clients on web development, social media, public relations, and other business development initiatives, inevitably the need arises for a current headshot. The push back clients have for not updating their 10+ year old headshot (before color prints became the standard) usually goes something like this: “I was so much thinner/younger/had more hair/taller, etc. back then.”

Ultimately, it does not matter **what** you look like as long as it reflects what you look like *today*. To use and/or post a headshot which does not reflect your “current look” is to appear disingenuous or vain; neither a positive take away.

You may ask, what difference does it make whether you have a current (taken in the last 2-3 years) headshot or one taken a decade ago. Read on...

We are all visual creatures. Most people think and remember primarily through visual cues. And, most people have very short attention spans. Giving people the right visual cues immediately is critical to getting their attention and gaining their trust.

People will likely notice your picture before they actively pay attention to what you have to say. First impressions matter (this is a one-shot deal) and they are almost always visual.

As our world (business world included) has evolved online and social media has mainstreamed into a powerful business development tool, it is no longer enough or productive to display an outdated headshot. You may be missing out on connections because of an inappropriate photo.

I’ll explain.

If you are engaged in active targeted networking and getting in front of qualified prospects, people you have met at these events may be looking for you on social media channels such as LinkedIn (Facebook has quickly become another social media channel source through which professional connections are made).

While it is less common on professional networks, some people still use pictures of things or animals instead of themselves on their profiles. If someone does a search for Susan Smith that produces multiple results, some of which is a picture of some random cat or outdoor shot, they will have to guess which profile belongs to you. Do not miss out on connections because of fear or insecurity of your current headshot or just complacency.

To alleviate your anxiety and support your desire to portray an accurate professional image, you may want to retain the services of a professional photographer. In our experience, investing in a professional headshot is well worth the cost. Moreover, with all the technological strides which have been made via digital photography, the actual cost is miniscule when weighed against the benefit of portraying your true image.

An appropriate profile photo should achieve a balance between being eye-catching and appropriate for your professional position. In the world of first impressions, there is such a thing as negative attention. Pictures that are poor quality or too casual can cast you in a negative light which results in counter-productive marketing efforts. Avoid running this risk.

Ultimately, displaying and uploading a current, appropriate headshot accomplishes the following:

- Provides a visual of who you are physically...placing a face with a name and giving the viewer a sense of reference. So essential in today's visual world.
- Provides the viewer with a personalized feel for you. Regardless of whether you have graying hair (which can tell the story of hard and long-fought experience) or a scar down your neck (as a result of a childhood accident), everything about your physical features tells a **unique** story of you which becomes more alive when viewed.

A current professional headshot immediately communicates that you are a serious professional focused on building and growing your practice. A fresh and updated image gives you an advantage over the person that isn't ready to hit the ground running. Do not to allow your personal discomfort stand in the way of making that happen. Your marketing efforts will pick up steam and you will be glad you did.