



# working with a **UNIT PHOTOGRAPHER**

Many marketing opportunities exist when effective and engaging photography is captured during production. Often the first visual reference, photography positions a film in the market and shapes audience perception. It needs to pique interest and play up the film's core selling points.

On top of informing the development of marketing materials good photography is a pitching tool; it helps secure film features and cover stories, and can mean the difference between maximum exposure and no exposure at all.

Work with the unit publicist to determine when to bring a unit photographer into the production plan. Identify the key scenes that will capture the essence of the film and take advantage of having key cast and crew available on set. Save money by not having to recreate costuming, lighting and sets or securing access to talent after production has wrapped.

Early discussions with the sales agent and distributor will help to identify photography requirements including:

- Film artwork – to determine how the film should be positioned in marketing materials.
- Publicity – images should match specific publicity angles. Consider varied media placement and what will be useful, eg reviews, profile pieces, news stories, covers, etc.
- Advertising – anticipate unique artwork executions, eg print ads, outdoor and online.
- Promotions – identify promotional angles and core marketing hooks, bespoke artwork for third-party partners and exhibitors.

A timeline is important. Discuss with the sales agent and distributor when approved photography needs to be available for marketing and publicity purposes, eg first-look images, set visit pieces and film festivals.

The unit photographer should be selected based on their fit with the film's aesthetic. They require a unique skill set: the ability to interpret the filmmaker's creative vision and deliver beautiful images whilst being unobtrusive on set, flexible and able to shoot on the run.

Film stills taken from the finished print may supplement the unit photography, but may be less useful in their application due to lower resolution, blur or composition.

## Film stills

Media outlets may have their own unique requirements, but fundamental considerations include:

- Impact – images that stand out because of action, emotion, scenery, colours, etc.
- Variety – an assortment of actors and scenes.
- Size – a mix of portrait and landscape, long crop and short crop.
- Light – dark images may not print well and be unusable. Dark and moody shots can work but consider where they'll be placed.
- Focus – action shots may have movement but images should be clear.
- Format/File size – a mix of 300dpi high-res and low-res images for media. Photos may be needed for a magazine cover and also as a thumbnail image in a newspaper. Stills taken from the finished film may not be high-enough resolution for publication.

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**First-look/Hero image** – as the first image released this decision is very important and timing is crucial. It must capture the essence of the film – story, style, mood, talent – and position the film from the outset. A strong initial image will be used many times, building greater recognition and reinforcing awareness.

**Key set** – a condensed selection of images that encapsulate the film and act as visual shorthand. This selection should contain a variety of images that speak to the narrative of the film:

- make the most of the big names; combinations of marquee talent
- capture the big moments – mood, emotion, action, colour
- capture moments which clearly illustrate the film's synopsis
- key cast
- director and key crew, particularly those with a high profile and accolades
- scenic/atmospheric shots when filming in unique and interesting locations.

**Master set** – a larger selection of approved images that can be used for a broader range of purposes. These support a variety of story angles for publicity beyond traditional film coverage, eg travel/tourism, food/wine, sport, current affairs, automotive, fashion, behind the scenes.

## Special photography

In conjunction with the distributor and production Head of Departments (HODs), create a special photography brief to capture the most suitable images for the creation of the key artwork and publicity opportunities.

**Costume/In-character** – options for creative and key art development, special media placement. Securing in-character special photography during production is important to avoid having to restyle talent to look like their characters if planning to do this after filming wraps.

**Cast/Out-of-character** – special shoot photography can be an incredibly powerful marketing tool for release publicity, especially for high-profile talent, females and emerging talent. Key cast and crew may not be available after a shoot so it's important to set aside time during production.

Create different 'looks' to ensure there is enough variety to offer outlets their own unique images without compromising their sense of exclusivity. Use production wardrobe and hair and make-up or invest in a photoshoot stylist to achieve this.

Shooting some shots against a plain backdrop will allow for deep etching.

Consider allowing access to selected outlets to attain their own special photography during production.

If a US or UK distributor is in place, liaise with their creative and/or publicity department regarding any particular photography/artwork requirements.

## Additional considerations

**Contact sheets** – review contact sheets regularly and circulate with the distributor to ensure suitable images are captured. This will assist in the culling process.

**Image approvals and 'kills'** – be aware of talent approval rights and clarify the approval process with talent representatives. Remove unusable and unflattering images prior to submitting to talent representatives for approval.

**Captioning** – approved images must be accurately captioned and credited.

**Clearances** – negotiate ownership of approved images.