

# HOT SHOTS!

How to take stunning photos for an impressive, gig-generating portfolio. BY JENNIFER CHAPIS



KEVIN GOSSELIN

YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL, TALL AND THIN, WITH AN IMPRESSIVE WORK ETHIC TO BOOT. YOU WANT TO BECOME A SUCCESSFUL MODEL MORE THAN ANYTHING, BUT DESPITE YOUR EFFORTS IT HASN'T HAPPENED YET. WHY NOT?

According to the professionals, more than likely it's your photographs. "Photos are the number one thing keeping a lot of great faces from getting that great agent or from being sent out on those big go-sees," says veteran model Saam Adams, who has strutted the runway for Neiman Marcus and Nordstrom, appeared in *Elle* and *Cosmo*, and performed as Tyra Banks' body double on the big screen.

## Great Photos = Modeling Jobs

Good news: The formula is simple. The better your photographs, the more recognition and work you get, almost without exception. Few tools are more effective for landing that Macy's spring catalog contract than your professional portfolio showcasing 10 to 20 eye-catching, heart-stopping shots, and your composite card highlighting the best five.

Here's why: The client may very well see your comp card before they meet you. You get 10

seconds to impress the busy person making the big decision, and you're not even present. So if you plan to get in the door, it's your job to ensure the best possible photos make that great first impression for you.

Ask yourself, "How will the agent or client react to my images?" Be honest. Do your photos scream, "Wow!" and will they stand out from the competition? If not, you have some work to do.

## Research

With more than a decade of experience under her narrow belt, Saam Adams, of La Mesa, Calif., who models with San Diego



## HELPFUL POISING TIPS

- Move slowly, deliberately, smoothly.
- Keep your shoulders and jaw relaxed.
- Exercise almost daily. Yoga, Pilates and dance increase poise, balance and flexibility.
- Create visually interesting angles with your body. Don't just stand straight up and down.
- Create variety. Be aware of repetition of poses. Shift your weight. Hold your arms at different heights.
- Avoid displaying your elbows or armpits.
- Keep your fingers naturally positioned. Not prissy. No claws.
- Minimize your hip width by standing at an angle, with one hip facing the camera and the other pointing away, or by placing one arm down the length of the hip and thigh.
- Point your toe downward when sitting cross legged, so the camera can see the top of your foot and shoe.
- Bite inside your cheeks just slightly to emphasize cheekbones.
- Practice many different smiles. Smile with your eyes, as well.



Model Management, reveals a valuable trade secret: Learn your market. The chief mistake both novice and experienced models make is not understanding their market or how it's changed. This requires mindful research, says Adams. "Look through magazines and catalogs, attend fashion shows, watch the Style Channel, anything to gain knowledge of this fast-paced, ever-changing industry," she says.

Identify models with a look similar to your own, considering body type and age. This will tell you a lot about what kind of work is appropriate for you and what style photos your portfolio needs. High fashion? Fashion? Commercial? Catalog? "Different markets require different results," says professional photographer Gerry Hanan of Austin, Texas. Hanan has photographed models from Elite and LA Models; members of the cast from "Sin City," "Lost" and "Prison Break"; political figures Bill Richardson, John McCain and Rick Perry;

as well as performers Ludacris and Duffy.

Catalog or lifestyle is meant to appear natural, not posed, "whereas a high-fashion shot might require the model to contort a pose to the point it hurts," Hanan explains. Photographer Susanne Kindt agrees: "Study fashion magazines like a law student studies law books," she says. Kindt owns a photography studio in Santa Monica and has nearly a decade of experience in the industry.

### Practice Posing

After you gain an understanding of your client and are familiar with the latest trends, you're ready to practice posing. Take select pages from magazines and catalogs to the mirror, recommends Adams. Try to exactly mimic the facial expressions and body positions. Later you'll be able to draw on your own unique style and tool box full of poses, but mirroring successful predecessors is a great

place to start. "Practice, practice, practice posing," Hanan emphasizes.

First and foremost, a model must know how to take a great photograph, a skill that is acquired only through doing. Los Angeles photographer Kevin Gosselin says it's primarily about three things: knowing how to pose, making your body appear long at every given camera angle and understanding how your body will be captured in the frame of the photograph. "Never lose your neck," he adds, and suggests sticking out your chin slightly to elongate your neck. "And do not forget the light when you practice in the mirror," he continues. "Place lights in different positions to see how it lands on your face." Gosselin's impressive clientele includes Natalie Martinez, who has worked as a spokesmodel for J. Lo. by Jennifer Lopez and appeared in Maxim magazine and the movie "Death Race."

"A model must know what he or she looks

like to the camera at all times," Adams says. Be aware of your body and know your best angles and assets. If you do, you will shine!

### More Practice Please

Ask a friend (maybe another model) to photograph you while you practice posing, or use a tripod and timed camera to photograph yourself. The digital age has come to the rescue of young models. Today you can easily examine each shot as you take it, without any film-developing delay. "By doing this regularly," Adams explains, "you become comfortable being in front of the camera and confident that you know what you look like to the lens, without your mirror telling you."

Study your images after the fact as well. Learn what does and does not work. Discover your problem areas and how to compensate. Get in plenty of practice and learn from as many mistakes as possible before investing in a photo session with a seasoned photographer. When starting out, try the photography department at colleges and art schools. "Students are eager to practice their skills," Adams comments.

Hanan recommends aspiring models shoot with as many different photographers as possible in order to get comfortable posing and taking creative direction. Photographers expanding their portfolios are often willing to shoot on a TFP/TFCD basis (time for prints/time for CD), he explains. This mutually beneficial arrangement involves no fee, and both model and photographer are free to use the images.

### Hire a Professional Photographer

If you are ready to hire a commercial or fashion photographer, consider this: A model cannot take a spectacular photo without a spectacular photographer, no matter how practiced you are, so choose wisely. One of the best ways to find a great photographer is to ask for a referral from a model whose photos you admire, Adams advises. Never hire a photographer without first seeing their portfolio and interviewing them. "Remember, they only put their best work in their book, so if you aren't floored, move on fast," she says. Depending where you live, a test shoot with a professional may cost between \$300 and \$600, with an additional \$100 to \$200 for makeup and hair. (If you're signed with a major agency, your agency may provide assistance.)

Once booked, you will want to explicitly

discuss your vision and expectations with the photographer and stylist(s) before the day of the shoot. What makes a photograph great is communication, cooperation, dedication, skill and creativity, says Hanan. When all these elements come together you will have created an image that stands apart.

### Confidence

You've heard that beauty comes from within. As it turns out, this is true even in the world of modeling. "You need more than a pretty face to be a successful model," Gosselin says. Of course there are physical requirements, but don't underestimate the value of self-confidence and a pleasant personality. A model who feels confident on the inside is better able to exude the necessary beauty, energy and magnetism that warrant a spectacular photograph. "Relax. If you are tense or uncomfortable it will show," Kindt says. "It is essential a model act naturally in front of my camera," she states. "And be fearless."

### Cooperate and Connect

As a model you must aim to be flexible and learn to take direction, says Hanan. "If a model is striving to achieve amazing photographs, they cannot be concerned with how silly they think they look," he says. It's essential you understand the end goal and cooperate with the client, creative director or photographer managing the project. "It's all about acting," continues Hanan. If you're hired to represent a product, then the goal is to make a believable connection with that merchandise. Taking acting courses will help you channel emotions in front of the camera, advises Adams, who studied theater at U.C. Berkeley. Gosselin, still photographer as well as cinematographer, adds, "It all comes together when the model brings the appropriate emotion to the lens that fits the shoot."

### Determination

"Achieving a great portfolio is one of the most difficult things you'll ever do," confesses Adams, who first began modeling in 1994 and says it took her at least three years of consistent effort to put together a book she was proud of. Then suddenly, thankfully, everything changed. "Soon after I had my book up to speed," she smiles, "I was offered a print contract from my runway agency who previously had never considered me for print work."



SUSANNE KINDT PHOTOGRAPHY

After that the real fun begins, as you start collecting tear sheets from the print ads and catalogs in which you've appeared.

The key is to pursue each day with enthusiasm, and enjoy the process as much as the outcome. A spectacular portfolio doesn't happen overnight. Remember to keep diversity and variation in mind when choosing photos for your book. And keep your chin up. When you love what you do and refuse to give up, you significantly increase the probability of success.

"The most amazing model I ever worked with traveled 18 hours by bus to shoot with me," Hanan says. "Looking at her straight on, there is a slight imperfection in her upper lip. She knows it's there, but she compensates by studying and practicing daily." She's appeared in "Cashmere Mafia," "Sex in the City," "Baby Mama," "Law and Order," "Lipstick Jungle" and "The Bourne Ultimatum," proving that determination and a willingness to do what it takes to succeed go a long way in this business. "This model knew what looked good on her," Hanan continues. "She knew where she existed in space, and as a result, she was a posing machine." **AFM**

*Jennifer Chapis has modeled for Jessica McClintock, Champion, Body Glove, Swatch, Mary Kay and Skype, among others. Recently relocated from NYC, Jennifer is a model with San Diego Model Management.*