

## THE TOP 5 WAYS TO CONVEY PROFESSIONALISM THROUGH A SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILE PICTURE



**Summary:** Remember the old saying, a picture is worth a thousand words? The same is true with your social media profile picture. Here are the top 5 ways you can show professionalism by selecting a good social media profile picture.

As a brief disclaimer, these rules apply to those who use their social media [profile pictures to apply for jobs](#) or who have the understanding that employers are assessing their qualifications based on viewing their profiles and the accompanying pictures.

### 1) Choose a Photo That Only Shows You

Although it sounds obvious, I cannot tell you how many times I have seen job candidates select a group photo as their profile picture. First off, the employer might not know which of the people in the group photo you are, which sends the wrong impression to the employer that you either (1) don't want to be identified or (2) want the employer to think you are someone else. Sure, a group photo may convey the impression that you have friends and are thus amiable, however, your friends are not the ones trying to secure the big job; you are. By choosing a group photo, you are automatically being scratched off the lists of a significant majority of employers. Also resist the temptation to make your profile picture of the new puppy or kitten you just adopted (yes I have seen this happen). We all know how adorable your pet is, but that does not convey professionalism and employers will likely disqualify your candidacy for choosing "Mittens" as your profile picture. And finally, don't use an avatar as your profile picture. Employers don't want to hire an anonymous person and will automatically suspect something is wrong if you can't even produce a photo of yourself.

### 2) Act Naturally

Another crucial aspect of a professional profile picture is to be yourself and act naturally. Don't strike poses or convey expressions of seriousness or goofiness. A nice and easy smile goes a long way. You want the employer to look at your photo and immediately think "Wow. This person looks pleasant and approachable." Without overdoing it, try to exude confidence, for if an employer sees you are confident in yourself, they are more likely to recognize and appreciate that confidence and seek to hire you. Also, be sure the "natural" photo you choose is a recent photograph. I've seen countless job candidates use a photo from when they were younger, skinnier, or had a full head of hair. Although the immediate reaction to this suggestion is typically that it is superficial, the reality is that it is not. When an employer looks at your photo, they are assuming that photo represents the person they are going to interview and eventually hire. If you show up looking nothing like your picture, employers may feel duped or deceived and be resentful. When you go to the car dealership, you go to buy the new car in the front of the lot. Imagine your surprise after buying your car and seeing the salesman drive up in a used, beat-up four door and exclaim: "Congratulations on buying this car! You two were meant for each other!" Sure this may be a bit of an exaggeration, but you get the point.

### 3) Do Not Wear Accessories

Avoid wearing hats, sunglasses, or any clothing that makes it harder to see you (i.e. scarves or hooded clothing). Wearing hats in a profile picture signal unprofessionalism because they are accessories that are typically never worn in the business world. How many attorneys do you know that show up to the courthouse wearing a fedora or a fitted cap? Although wearing sunglasses is appropriate in many situations, they are not suitable for a profile picture because they obscure your eyes. There is something about human nature that we want to look into someone's eyes to determine what kind of person they are. Denying employers that opportunity to see your eyes could slash your job prospects significantly, for employers might think that if they can't see your eyes, what is it you have to hide?

### 4) Appear Nice and Neat

Although this suggestion is more applicable to men than women (because men have facial hair), it is true of both genders to have a neat, clean, and fresh appearance. For men, don't rock a goatee, mutton chops, or any other type of facial hair, especially a soul patch. You should appear clean shaven in your photo because it looks more professional and will give you a leg up on the guy whose profile picture shows a full "Santa Clause-esque" beard. For both men and women, your attire should err on the side of formality. Now, that does not mean the fellas should wear a tuxedo and the ladies should wear a gown. Here's a little tip I have learned, dress in your photo like you would if you were meeting your future in-laws for the first time. You would probably wear something that was pretty nice and tasteful, but not too over the top like you would if you were attending a ceremony at the White House. Also avoid wearing suggestive clothing in your profile picture, for it can serve as a "distraction" and will lose you professionalism points.

### 5) Hire a Professional Photographer

Although it can be expensive to [hire a professional photographer](#), it is completely worth it. Trained photographers understand lighting and know how to capture the persona and image you wish to convey. In addition, a professional photographer will ensure that the photo is centered, properly sized, and has clear resolution. The photographer will also know how to touch up the photo to naturally enhance your eyes, skin, or hair color without it seeming obvious that you paid your friend \$20 bucks to "fix you up" using Photoshop. Professional quality photos can make a world of difference and despite recent advances in cell phone camera technology, don't use your smartphones to take the picture. When compared to an expensive high quality camera lens, smartphone camera lenses are as outdated and ineffective as trying to stream movies online using a VHS player. When employers view the profile of a candidate whose photo is clear, sharp, and aesthetic, there is an automatic process of embedding whereby the employer will correlate the clarity of your photo with professionalism. Remember, you only get the chance to make one first impression, make it a good one.

Now, these suggestions are not guaranteed to get you the big job you interviewed for last week. They are some simple, logical guidelines intended to help separate you from the masses. You would be surprised how few people actually convey professionalism in their profile pictures. When employers look at a huge number of candidates with similar resumes, similar working experiences, and similar education backgrounds, how are you going to stand out? What is going to make you memorable (in a good way)? Having a clear, bright, and neat profile picture that conveys confidence, an easygoing demeanor, and professionalism can go a long way towards impressing employers and getting those big jobs you seek.

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