NEWFANGLED

# 6 Quick Tricks to Making Stock Imagery Look Custom

# Stock Imagery Doesn't Have to Look "Stock"

**Most experts have a hard enough time simply putting their knowledge to words.** Add creating good supporting *imagery* to the mix and you have a big, painful, and ongoing challenge.

This guide will teach you **six ways** to regularly produce unique and useful imagery that stands out, even though it may start with the same-old stock photos you see everywhere else.

1. **Cropping** — The fastest and cheapest way to transform an image

2. **Colorizing** — The easiest way to integrate images into your visual language

3. **Applying Texture** — A great way of creating space in your layouts and engaging the senses

4. **Abstraction** — A way to choose images that will feel more relevant to your content

5. **Perspective** — The best way to put your prospect directly into your imagery

6. **Setting Rules** — How to create a system that safely hands art direction over to someone else
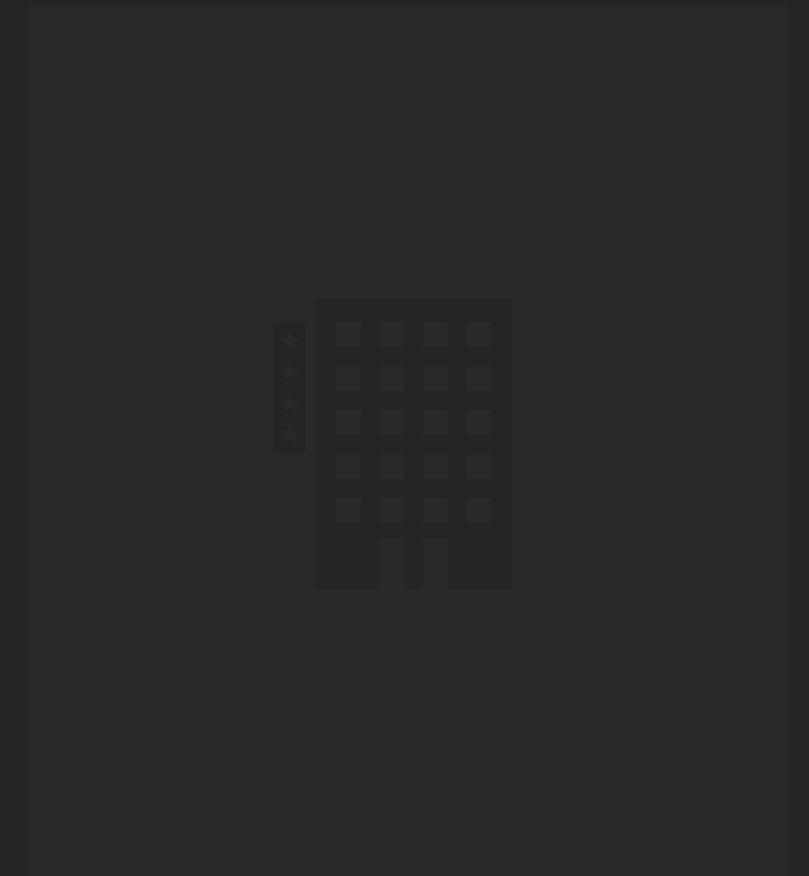
# Cropping Images

The simplest thing you can do to transform a stock image into something uniqe is to crop it.

Cropping helps to remove unnecessary or distracting details from an image and use its new composition to change how a prospect will derive meaning from it.

When cropping, consider guidelines like the rule of thirds.

By dividing your image area into nine equal spaces, you can align focal points within your image to intersections as a way of more intentionally guiding the eye of those who look at it.

**This uncropped image** depicts a group at a business meeting.

By showing the entire scene, it focuses on the situation as a whole. As a result, it carries very general associations, like *meeting*, *collaboration*, or *business*.

**This cropped image** focuses in on smaller details within the scene.

By removing most of the surrounding information, the image's intended meaning can be tranformed.

For example, in the uncropped version, the faces of the group carry the most possible meaning — they're unmistakably happy.

In the cropped image, the hands resting on the table communicate more interior ideas like *thought* or *consideration*.

## Colorizing Images

Every image carries aesthetic properties of its own, often derived from the preferences and sensibilities of its creator.

An images aesthetic properties are likely to conflict with the visual language of your brand if you haven't created the image yourself.

An easy way to integrate stock images into your visual language is to simply alter its colors.

Altering an image's color can also help to more seamlessly integrate an image into a website's structure — allowing for more subtle use of the image in backgrounds or the ability to overlay headlines.

ORIGINAL

COLORIZED



This Image Supports a Headline Better than One that Has Not Been Colorized

**This image** has a very saturated color profile that enhances its beauty, but might not work in the aesthetic context of every website.

**This colorized image** integrates it into a visual landscape with a completely different color profile.

By desaturating the original image and placing it behind or within a single color, the image can now play a supporting role in its context, rather than drawing too much attention.

# Applying Texture

Imagery is most effective when it engages the senses and provides an emotional dimension to information — before, during, and after it has been read.

Applying texture can:

· better integrate a sourced image into your visual language

· create a sense of spatial depth

· trick the mind into experiencing tactility

· Enhance the emotional impact of the image

Adding texture can push an image back into the visual space and allow it to create an impression (rather than make a direct statement) while heightening its visual interest.

ORIGINAL

TEXTURED

**This image** has a very saturated color profile that enhances its beauty, but might not work in the aesthetic context of every website.
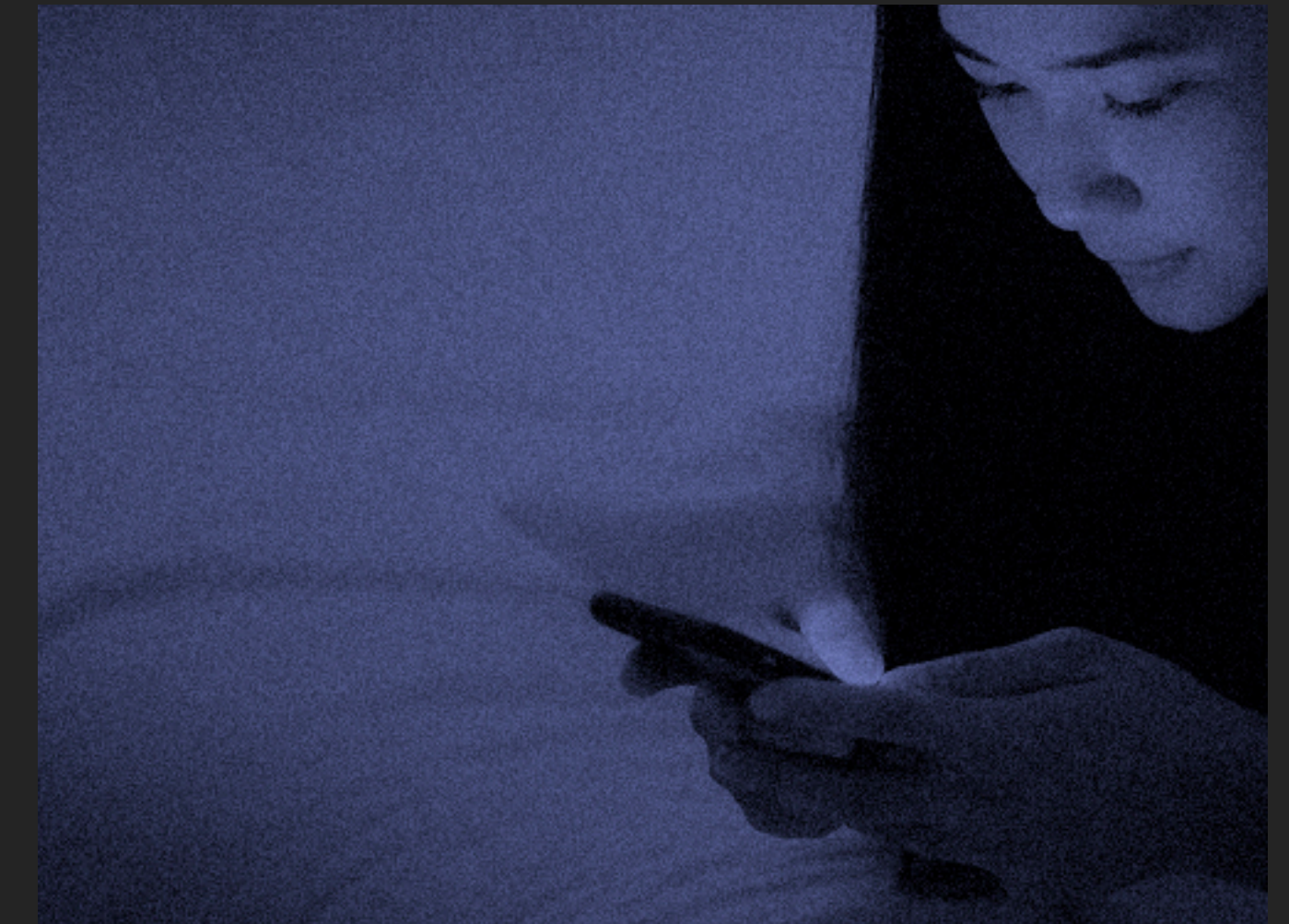
**This version of the same image** has a completely different impact. By adding film grain (as well as cropping and colorizing), this image transforms from one of a person using technology to, possibly, a person experiencing lonliness or urgency.

Texture can also intentionally make use of a sourced images' limited quality. This images original size was too small to be cropped without stressing its resolution, so intentionally adding film grain obscures that while creating a "cinematic" effect.

## Using Abstraction

Typically, stock imagery is sourced using very literal associations. Search and filtration tools enable you to be extremely specific about the visual details you desire in an image. While that can work well for images depicting people, places, or things, it doesn't work as well for images representing concepts.

Thinking more abstractly about an image's relationship to content can help avoid visual cliches, as well as create a different kind of visual landscape across your content.

Using abstraction doesn't mean simply reducing an image to just lines and colors; it's about opening up the possible meanings an image can convey.

LITERAL



**This image** is a quite literal visualization of a clichéd metaphor — a light bulb representing an *idea*.

ABSTRACT



**This version** communicates the concept of an *idea* by depicting a situation in which an idea is processed.
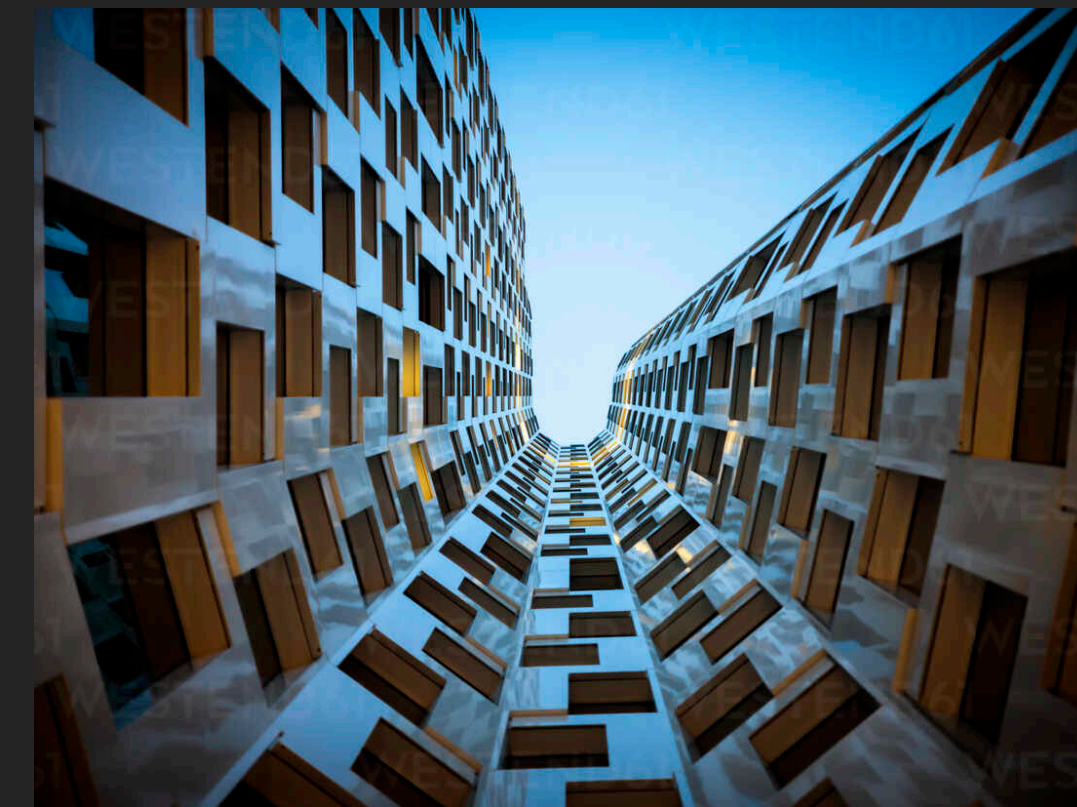
◀ Images for an article about *capturing ideas*.

LITERAL



**This image** is a literal illustration of *strategic planning*. It even includes the word strategy!

ABSTRACT



**This version** supports concepts relevant to strategic planning, like complexity, systematization, time, movement, and the intimidation of large and seemingly insurmountable tasks.

◀ Images for an article about *strategic planning*.

# Perspective

The most important thing your imagery can do is help your prospects connect to your expertise.

Considering perspective means thinking about *where* your prospect is in the imagery you choose. Does the image you've chosen depict your prospect, or does it depict what your prospect sees?

Both approaches can work, but one is more likely to *not* work than another. After all, people in photographs can't change. If your prospects don't see themselves in thos people, they will have a harder time connecting to your expertise.

It's better to show them images that look like the world they see, or the world they want to see.

SUBJECT



**In this image** the woman seated by the window is the main subject of the image. A prospect might see herself in this woman, but just as easily may not.

POINT OF VIEW



**This image** is taken from the point of view of a passenger, making the experience of air travel its subject, rather than a specific person.

An image like this allows your prospect to imagine an experience for themselves, rather than imagining themselves in someone else's shoes.

**Setting Rules**

*Art Direction* is more than the choice of imagery initially made when a website is first designed.

Sustaining a visual language — especially how it is expressed through content imagery — is one of the most critical jobs of art direction. Every individual piece of content requires that someone think about the best way to use visual aids to support, strengthen, and enhance its message.

Most organizations struggle with this, because even if they have allocated time and resources toward content strategy, it's rare to have done the same for art direction.

A simple and direct set of rules can help content creators and administrators maintain a consistent visual language without relying upon design work for every publication.

A good set of rules will result in what you might call a **Stock Imagery Style Guide**.

A **Stock Imagery Style Guide** is a form of art direction documentation. It serves as a surrogate for a designer's eye at the content level, and helps to preserve brand consistency as a website's content grows and evolves.
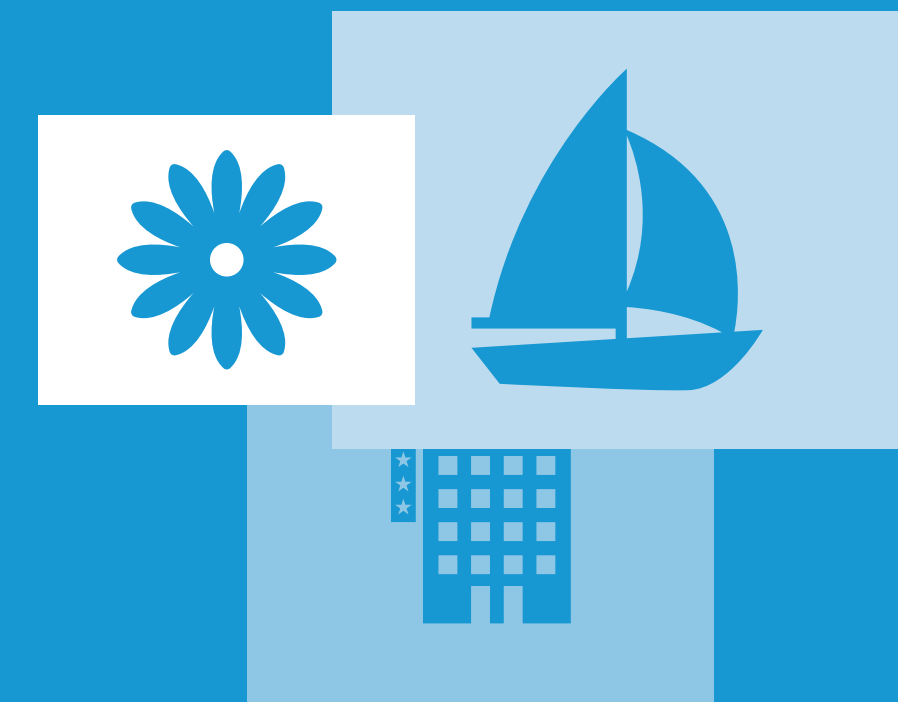
A good style guide will document all the *dos* and *don'ts* that an art director might practice out of instinct so that others can produce content that remains visually in-line with the brand.

A Stock Imagery Style Guide should include:

1. **Content Guidelines**, which define the right image subjects and topics to support your content.

2. **Aesthetic Parameters**, which are the details of how a design system extends to imagery.

3. **Layout Requirements**, which specify the sizes, aspect ratios, and position of images when inserted into content.

**Download a Free Stock Imagery Style Guide Template**

Download a free example stock imagery style guide that itemizes and visualizes our recommendations for using stock imagery in your website's marketing content.

Download the Style Guide Now