



Med-Legal Practice: Fixable Website Images

By Beryl Vaughan

Images that are irrelevant or boring, even repellent, are the number one mistake made on a website by forensic psychiatrists and psychologists, and everyone. This guide will help you understand compelling imagery vs. repelling imagery.

Uninspiring portraits are a close second. As a photographer and graphic designer, I know that a visual is the first thing you say to potential clients. Does it say what's most important to them?

Graphic and photographic images can be, at best, a cliché, and at worst, confusing. After critiquing dozens of websites, here are a few of my conclusions, based on experience, reports from experts of their own success, or less-than-stellar feedback from their own clients.

Avoid Stock Photography That's Overused. Finding images that don't present copyright problems is solvable by using stock photography. There are hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of stock photos available. Unfortunately, if you search by "med-legal" or "law" familiar images will pop up that you've seen on other websites. Keep scrolling. However, if a ubiquitous image has personal meaning to you, it's your chance to explain why on your website, thus personalizing you and putting the image in context.

Overused and Losing Impact:

- Gavels
- Stethoscopes
- Caduceus
- Scales of justice
- Blind Lady Justice (yes, that's her name)
- Psychedelic brains

- Court-like buildings (think Greek columns, marble, majesty: either a courthouse or the Federal Reserve)
- Skylines. Is where you do business the most important thing about you? If not, and your skyline isn't immediately recognizable to someone who's not a local, consider adding an iconic image in your city—perhaps further down on the page.
- HUGE monitor-dominating images that force the visitor to scroll to find out something as simple as your name or phone number.
- Overlapping of any of the above imagery.
- And my personal least favorite: Business-suited professionals shaking hands and looking like models, because they are.

Get a Professional Portrait



Portraits are your chance for an attorney to decide how you'll "play" on the stand. It's not a beauty contest.

Your portrait should never be (a) missing, (b) a selfie, or (c) present off-putting demeanor. Think about what you see in your patients. What body language, expressions and behaviors convey they are off-limits? Arms aggressively shielding the chest, forced grins, an unintended grimace, failure to make eye contact? You know the signs and can apply this knowledge to your own portraits.

Portraits of a forensic expert witness should convey you are:

- Knowledgeable
- Trustworthy
- Fair
- Confident

- Personable
- Professional in demeanor

For forensic psychiatrists and psychologists, an additional bar is set. You're up against a jury's preconceived notion of psychiatrists and psychologists. Many jurors will expect you to be:

- Warm
- A good listener
- Friendly. After all, no one wants to tell their secrets to someone they don't like.
- Likable

Attorneys know that during cross-examination, counsel's goal is to goad you to show hostility or defensiveness. Your photo needs to convey you are unlikely to falter.

Secrets to a good photograph:

- Eye contact
- A smile, or a warm resting face
- Clothing that is professional, but not slick or especially expensive
- Posture and body language consistent with the qualities outlined above
- Your face is in context--a little background makes a flat portrait into a message, whether you're behind a desk, on the beach, in front of a law library, standing beside something doctorly or legal, even on a witness stand.
- Good lighting. Go to a professional for your photograph. Poor lighting can ruin even the most compelling expression.

Your facial expression isn't the only feature of an inviting portrait.

Practical details

- Finding a good local photographer is more than geography. It's worth crossing town or traveling to another to get a skilled photographer. Look up a few and then view the photographer's online gallery of business and family portraits. (Almost all photographers have this website feature.) Family portraits reveal how the photographer captures warmth and people at ease in their environment. That subtlety belongs in your photo, in careful proportions.

- Get more than one photograph, in a variety of postures and both full body, partial body, and just your face. This gives you more options later including the chance to present more than one side of your personality.
- Run the results past clients and friends, get feedback before making your final choice.
- If you don't like the photographs, get a different photographer and do it again.

A photograph is one of the most important elements on your website, and everywhere you promote yourself. Further, your photograph is probably all over the internet, on your social media sites, profiles in professional referral services, and the endless mining of photos that Google does every day.

It's worth persevering to get the best photo.

My opinions are based on visuals, graphics and photos that I find on websites to have a repellent effect. The opposite of successful. Repellant means the attorney sees no reason to keep reading about you and is, in fact, inspired to move on to another forensic expert.

In summary, what do the images and photographs on your site say about you?

I recommend talking with a person who is both skilled in your field, marketing in med-legal, marketing to attorneys (aka juries, judges,) graphic design and photography. Skill with Photoshop is a plus because some photographs and graphics can be tailored to your use, such as recoloring to suit a website's color scheme. Photographs that lack good lighting or clarity can be improved with this software. I use it often in my business to create graphics that go with my posts on social media and websites I create for myself and clients. Graphics that accompany text break up the words and establish a rest for the eyes and a shortcut to meaning. A website rich with imagery, relevant to the topic, is more engaging than one that is unbroken text.



This is a compilation of portraits from the Van Goethem law firm website in Antwerp, Netherlands. I selected this example because it shows a range of expressions. I would consider two for a forensic psychiatrist or psychologist. Which do you think they are? You might not like any of these photos, yet they convey the business' personality—for good or ill.