

Graphics & branding



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"Insist on yourself. Never imitate."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Introduction

It is time to talk about photo's and any other graphical elements you might need on your store or your satellite site. Many of the following chapters require you to use images, mainly photo's. Here we will cover how to take them, buy them, modify/resize them and very important for the web make them quick loading. Before we go any further get yourself a free copy of the photo editing software used in this chapter. Download GIMP from www.businessdreams.net. Click on **Resources**, then **Required software**. Scroll down to GIMP and click **download GIMP**. **Double click** on the downloaded file to install.

How to get photo's

This section will show you how to obtain the images you need. It will also teach a few simple skills that are commonly required to make the image suitable for your web site, using the software provided. Feel free to play around with the techniques. The actual application of these skills will come to light in the individual sections where they are required.

There are many types of photo's you might need. Obviously if you can take the picture yourself it will mean you don't have to invest in buying somebody else's pictures. Now if you need something fancy like for example the picture in this manual used for the 'Getting started' or 'Checkouts, backup and security' then you are almost certainly going to have to buy them. The skills and equipment needed for this type of image are way beyond the scope of this manual.

The good news is that I will show you a couple of places to get such images at very reasonable prices and that the most common pictures you will need (the items you sell) can almost certainly be obtained/taken for free.

Taking and borrowing product photo's

Before you go to the cupboard and get the camera out, can you get the pictures free from someone else? First a word of warning. Never pinch them from a competitor if they find out they could take legal action. However the manufacturer or wholesaler will (usually) be more than happy for you to use and amend their pictures. Get permission first then go to their site and copy what you need. This is easy. **Right click** an image and select **save as** (or similar depending upon your choice of browser) and save them to your PC. You can then begin editing them. The other advantage of doing it this way is you don't need to purchase the actual items of stock yet. If you do end up having to buy some or all of the products get the smallest quantity possible. I purchased products in single quantities from a regular shop when I got started. This avoided investing in a bulk order from the wholesaler until I was ready.

Taking photos is not hard. All you need is a basic quality digital camera. The size of image used in most stores on the internet is quite small. So if you can take a reasonable quality full size photo, by the time we have shrunk, edited, optimised and used a few effects any minor blemishes will be invisible. Here are a few tips for getting a decent quality starting image to work with.

Digital cameras need much more light than a film camera. Where possible take your pictures outside in good light. It doesn't necessarily have to be bright sunlight but not dawn or dusk. The best type of light is ambient. Don't put the subject in direct light. In summer I wait until the sun is at the front of the house and then go into the back garden.

Create a neutral background if possible. When you come to make changes to your pictures if there is detail or scenery in the background then this is much harder and getting rid of a background using software is a pain. For small boxes and bottled products I use plain white A4 paper as a background. Either place the paper on the floor and/or make a background with one or more pieces. The fact you have used this technique will not be evident after editing.

Take multiple pictures of the same product. Your first picture will rarely be good enough. Take at least 20 or 30 shots of your product from different angles, lying down, standing up, zoomed to a particular point of interest, different distances away etc. Try doing some really close shots using the macro feature, usually available on even cheap cameras. It is usually represented by a small flower icon. Make sure you get a green focus light at the same time.

Take the product as you would see it on the shelf/peg etc. What I mean by this is if for example the teddy bear comes in a presentation box then this is how you should present it to your customer (initially). It is true that the customer might also want a close up of the eyes or the fluffiness of the fur, but the main, most important shot should be of the product as it would be on the store shelf. This is the format the most successful retailers use. We will cover alternative pictures and how to use them, when we cover optimising sales and visitors in a later chapter.

Buying photo's

The best two sources in my opinion are [istockphoto.com](https://www.istockphoto.com) and [dreamstime.com](https://www.dreamstime.com). They are

both great sources and have no minimum orders. Both require you to place \$10 (£7 approx at time of writing) on your account. You can then buy pictures until that runs out.

They do have some differences however. Generally speaking istockphoto has a much bigger selection and plainly, on some searches, a higher quality. Dreamstime however is usually half the price or less and is always worth checking, because although not as extensive as their competitor, still often has a wide selection depending of course on what your search criteria are. I would estimate 75% of my pictures that I had to purchase came from Dreamstime and 25% from iStockPhoto.

I recommend you sign up with both of them now. Don't deposit any money yet, but experiment with their search facilities. Try searching for your product keywords, terms from your industry, specific product type and even some more general terms like sale, quality, store etc. You will start to get a good idea of what is available.

Don't be tempted to buy loads of images now. Wait until we discuss specific requirements and attributes that will be required in the coming chapters.

It is most likely you might use a purchased picture for category pages and perhaps the header for your store. Where as you will most likely use photo's you took yourself or borrowed for the products themselves.

Editing photo's

Now you you know how to get the pictures you will need, here is a range of ways to use the provided software to create professional looking images for your store. There is the full GIMP manual on www.businessdreams.net. Click on **Resources** and then on **Manuals**. You can save it to your computer or view it online. It has more extensive help and instructions. Here are the most common tools that you will probably use.

Basic editing tools

Here is an introduction to the most used tools on Gimp. Overleaf is a picture of the Gimp tool selector. I have numbered some of the commonly used tools.

- 1) You can drag a rectangular region to select a rectangular region with which to perform another operation.
- 2) Zoom in and out of your image to see more detail or a better overview.
- 3) Move or select an individual part (called a layer) of your image.
- 4) Create text on your image (more later).
- 5) Fill an entire area selected by tool 1 with a colour.
- 6) A pencil or a brush for freehand drawing on your image.
- 7) A rubber for rubbing out.



Pictures and graphics - The Gimp tool selector

I find one of the most useful tools is the undo key combination. This is the same as in most Windows applications. If you make a mistake simply press and hold **ctrl** then press **Z** for each stage you wish to undo. This is much easier than rubbing things out.

Copying & Pasting

On many occasions you might want to combine 2 or more images. Open both images. **Click** on the image you wish to add to another and press and hold **ctrl** then press **C**. Now select the image you wish to paste to and press and hold **ctrl** then press **V**. You can now do all sorts of things with this extra 'layer' read on for some ideas.

Resizing

To resize your current selection select **Image > Scale Image**. Usually the best way to change an images size is to change either the width(x) or height(y) value and not both. The reason for this is that if the values are not kept at the same ratio you will distort the image. If you change just one then Gimp automatically changes the other to keep it at the same ratio.

Cropping

If you want to chop out a selection from an image then use the select (as described earlier) tool to choose the area you want to KEEP. Then select **Image > Crop To Selection**. Whoosh it's gone.

Special effects

Gimp has loads of these to enhance your images. Select Filters from the main menu and you will see about a dozen options, most with sub options to perform weird and wonderful effects on your image. Play with them to find what you want. Remember you can undo any effects you don't like simply by holding **ctrl** and pressing **z** once.

Optimisation

This is an important topic because it deals with making your image as small a file size as possible so your web site loads quickly and efficiently for your customers. Generally speaking you will want to save your images as .jpg format. This can be done simply by selecting **File > Save As** when you have your finished image. Type the name and add .jpg at the end.

First however make sure your image is the optimum width and height. If your picture will be displayed at 200 pixels wide and 200 high make sure the actual size is that also. Otherwise the web browser might show a nice neat 200 x 200 picture but the customer has to download the full size image first. So look back at Cropping and Resizing if necessary.

Now you need to experiment with the level of compression. When you save a file as .jpg you will be offered a box to select a number between 1 and 100. 100 is a perfect copy of your image with no compression. 1 would be an image distorted to complete unsuitability. You need to experiment to find the lowest number and therefore the smallest file size possible, where you still think the image is the quality you want for your site.

Text on images

This section is after the discussion on optimisation because text does not optimise well. Generally speaking optimise the final result then stick the text on as described here.

I have already indicated the text tool in the previous image number 4. Click on it and then click approximately where you want your text to appear. Note on the main Gimp toolbar while typing text you can also change the font size, colour and style. Click **close** when you have typed your text and select the move tool (number 3) to move it exactly in to position.

Gimp Summary

You might have noticed that this photo editing package is huge. The options are in their thousands. I have tried to give a really quick and hopefully useful summary to get you adding images to your site asap. Well aware that there is more to GIMP than I could possibly cover. So be sure to check out the GIMP manual mentioned earlier.

Software and book images

If you have opted for selling self published books, re-branded software or CD/DVD's produced by yourself then presentation is everything. When the physical product is of little or no physical substance it is even more important to graphically represent your items in a manner that adds value.

You can do this by designing a cover for your book or disc in Gimp and then using the GIMP perspective tool to add depth to the image. Then go buy yourself a nice smart 3d book/disc image from www.Istockphoto.com or www.dreamstime.com and superimpose your cover to the purchased 3d image. That's the cost cutting way of doing it.

If on the other hand you wanted your images to look exceptionally good you could use professional software instead. If you like the look of the images on www.businessdreams.net then you will want to get your hands on a copy of Box Shot 3d.

This unlike most of my other recommendations is NOT free. However the quality and variety of images available is second to none and the cost is only around \$60 at time of printing.

The ease of use is also superb. You can create books in many types and arrangements as well as CD, DVD, Blu-Ray, leaflets and you can even import models downloaded from the Internet for free. I am currently working on a Business Dreams Apache helicopter! No use whatsoever, but a lot of fun.

You can download a free trial at www.boxshot3d.com and if you like it just pay your money and enter the license code. As you know I rarely suggest opening your wallet but if you want stunning 3d product images this could be one time to spend a little bit.

Branding & Logos.

Like many of the topics in this book, branding and logos could easily have taken up a whole book on its own about the various aspects of marketing. Any good book covering the subject of branding would certainly also discuss other aspects of marketing before any web site was started.

The problem with considering the branding of an entire web site is that if you manage to come up with a cool brand you then have to get the web site specifically designed. Then because the web site is unique, 9 times out of 10 the open source – free software solutions will almost certainly become unusable. So immediately the cost of getting your business off the ground has soared. Certainly into the thousands. Now, perhaps surprisingly, this is not the main reason why I advise against getting a professional to do your branding and site building.

Once you have a bespoke business you have ongoing bespoke requirements. If you want to change something or add a graphic etc, almost certainly the professional will have to do it for you. Worse still they will probably insist you host your web site with them, again, almost certainly at an

exorbitant monthly fee.

Now there is no harm in commissioning a professional to do just a logo or perhaps a logo with site header because the expense would be a one off. You would not be tied to that person for any other aspect of your business. You could then use there professional design and colour scheme throughout the development of the rest of your business. I am going to assume you want to do everything yourself and talk to you about designing a logo and thinking about colours. Then when you come to making your web site header graphic later you will already have a logo and some colour scheme ideas.

If you do want to contract out logo or header design, try this website:

www.elance.com

You can receive ideas and bids for your work from independent professionals with no obligation. I almost succumbed to the temptation of using Elance to design the cover to this book. Some of you might think I should have succumbed!?

Anyway on with the show.

Discovering theme and colours

Think about some specifics of your business to help you.

- What is the name of your product/service/business?
- Do you have a catch phrase/slogan/unique aspect to your business?
- Do you already have some colour schemes in mind?
- Is there a specific message you want your logo/brand to put across?
- What else is important about your business?

Now we need to find ideas and examples to inspire your possible choices. There are 3 sources I always use when looking for inspiration.

My competitors. Do they have colourful, flamboyant logos and themes? What colours do they use? Do they use a graphic for the logo or just text? If they use text what fonts, colours and sizes do they use. Do I like there designs?

Google Image Search. Here is a wealth of ideas. Go to Google. Click on 'image search' in the top left and type words and phrases related to your business/products/services. Vary the search phrases including adding words like style, logo, and brand on to the end. You will find many images, colour schemes and web sites to inspire your choice. Obviously don't just pinch someone's logo off of Google. Instead start to build up a colour scheme, style and logo in your mind.

Stock image web sites. My favourites I have already mentioned are istockphoto.com and dreamstime.com but there are loads more. Just google for 'stock images' and you will be overwhelmed with choice. Do similar searches to that which you did on Google. Remember to repeat searches with the extra words (brand, logo, theme) on the end.

Implementing your logo and brand

Open up Gimp. And as explained previously use the text tool to type your company name, or whatever words are going to be part of your logo. What fonts do your competitors use? Try changing to those or similar. Experiment with different sizes and styles for different parts of your text.

Did you discover a great idea for font colour while doing your research? No? Go and have another look. Try changing the font colours. Did you find any cool images or ready made logos on any of the stock picture web sites. Pinch the graphic and experiment with it. You only need to buy it if you decide to actually use it. Don't go buying up loads of images just to experiment with.

Don't spend too long at this stage. The reason for this is that the size and shape requirements will vary depending upon which store software you have decided to use. Specific instructions about size etc. are contained within the relevant upcoming sections.

Hopefully by now you are starting to get a feel for what you like and the colours that work well together and are appropriate for your business. By appropriate I mean that if your business is a 'serious' one. Perhaps you offer some kind of bereavement counselling don't use a fun font like 'balloonist'.



Coping With Loss.com

At the end of the day if branding and logos are causing you a problem, don't worry. Just keep it really simple. Put your company/web site name in an appropriate font and colour on a white background. With perhaps your slogan inset in a smaller font underneath. Many really big names have very simple brands. Look at google. All white with a nice smart Google in the middle. That's it.

As you progress with your business you will come across opportunities to impose a bit more of your brand. The obvious example is when we put the header on your web site. But there are other opportunities as well like when you learn how to add graphics, products and articles. Later chapters also discuss changing background colours etc.

The ultimate opportunity to impose your business brand will come near the end of the book when we talk about how to find and choose an entirely new template at very little or no cost. At that stage it will be worth having a really solid idea about your brand so you can find the perfect template to use to make your business and web site unique to you.

For now keep it simple or make it flamboyant, whatever suits you best. Remember that by building your site from scratch you have complete flexibility to change, update or start your branding process again. Don't let imperfections with logo design or branding stop you from moving forward. I made that mistake once and it slowed me down for weeks. If your struggling just keep it really simple and plain then move on.

Now lets do some more work to your site.

