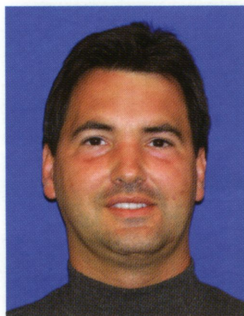


Digital Portrait Photography



by
Tony Soileau, D.D.S.

Dr. Tony Soileau is a general dentist with a practice in Lafayette, Louisiana, which focuses on restorative rehabilitation and cosmetic enhancements. He lectures nationally and internationally on the use of digital photography and computer assistance for diagnosing, treatment planning, and performing comprehensive dental procedures. Dr. Soileau is a faculty member of, and teaches hands-on digital photography at the Institute of Oral Art and Design (IOAD) in Tampa, Florida, and the Pacific Aesthetic Continuum (PAC~Live) in San Francisco. He also is a member of the advisory board for genR8Tnext seminars and is a consultant for several technologies-based dental manufacturers.

PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY AND MARKETING

It takes a combination of several elements—a talented, knowledgeable dentist; friendly, caring staff; and comfortable, inviting office—to create a successful dental practice. Photography can help to bring these components together and communicate them to your patients. Portrait photography, along with “before-and-after” shots, can be a simple yet powerful tool to showcase your office. A beautiful portrait says many things to your patients: It shows how confident other patients are in your talents, it conveys the personality of your office, and it allows others to evaluate your skills and to open a conversation about them.

DIGITAL CAMERAS

Recent advances in digital cameras have simplified their use, but with professional results. Dentists with little or no background in photography no longer need professional photographers to supply them with beautiful portraits of their patients; this now can all be done by the dentist and staff. Several major advances in digital cameras have enabled cosmetic dentists to easily use this technology.

SIMPLICITY

Digital cameras are simple to use. Because digital cameras have, by definition, a computer inside them, many of the functions are automated—the focus, aperture, speed, and lighting settings are done for you. These cameras are, for the most part, “point and shoot.” You then can instantly view and evaluate the images on the camera or a computer monitor. Waiting for film to be developed to find out if the images are of sufficient quality is a chore of the past.

RESOLUTION

The second advancement is resolution or image size. This means that the images are of sufficient size and clarity to print out to 8” x 10” or even larger without losing quality. Several cameras are available today with these



Figure 1

characteristics. The Nikon 880, 950, and 990, and the Olympus 2500 are good cameras for dentists at the lower resolution and cost end; the Canon D30 and Nikon D1X are incredible cameras at the high end. My personal choices are the Nikon 950 and the Canon D30. For portrait photography, I believe that the Canon D30 is the best on the market in terms of simplicity, image size, and image quality. Other competing cameras are entering the market every month. The best camera for each dentist is, of course, a subjective choice. My advice is to look at several different models before you invest in one. Also decide who will be taking the images, you or your staff, before choosing the appropriate camera. Although I prefer the Canon D30, my staff prefers the Nikon 950 (they are not comfortable with the size and weight of the D30, while the Nikon 950 fits in the palm of your hand). The images from the Nikon 950 are not suitable for printing larger than 8" x 10," however.

VERSATILITY

An often-overlooked advantage of digital cameras over traditional 35 mm cameras is the versatility of what can be done with the image after it is captured and stored on your computer. The image can easily be manipulated in limitless ways to enhance its effect, from adjusting the quality to dramatically changing the overall appearance. This could range from lightening and cropping the image to converting it to black-and-white... the only limit is your imagination. Remember that digital cameras don't use film—they use a reusable disk, so you can take as many images as your computer has memory for, save the ones you like, and delete the rest.

EFFECTS TO CONSIDER

There are several aspects of portrait photography that need to be considered in order to capture professional-quality images. These effects will

depend upon each dentist's preferences and how he or she wishes to display the image to the public.

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POSE

The first thing to consider is how you want your subject to be posed. I use a variety of poses, from looking straight back at me, to looking up or down, to not looking at me at all. As you take more and more portraits, trying to come up with different "looks" can be frustrating. To help expand the range of my portraits, I look through magazines, including *Glamour*, *Vogue*, *GQ*, and *Men's Health*, and then cut out the images of models with great smiles in poses I like and place them on a Post-it® sticky board. This allows



Figure 2



Figure 3

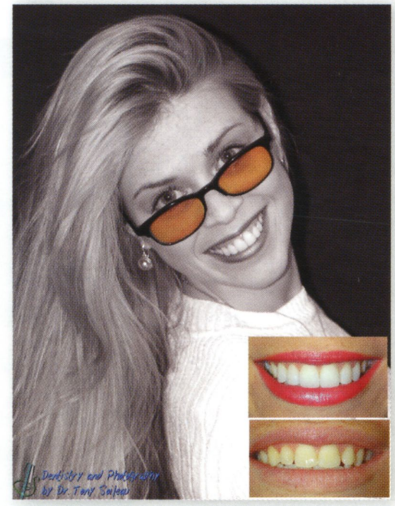


Figure 4

me to show the patient what I am looking for (it also is a nice touch to compare the patient to a professional model) (Fig 1). Some people may choose not even to use formal poses. Some of the best images I have seen are candid shots taken when, for example, a patient sees his or her new smile for the first time; or when a patient is laughing. Just remember to have your camera ready with charged batteries and free memory on the card.

LIGHTING

Lighting is the next effect to consider. This of course will depend upon how you pose your patient. While it is true that the image can be edited to account for any type of lighting, having sufficient and properly placed lighting from the initial capture stages will make life easier. For optimum results, you will need lighting from several directions, each illuminating different parts of your subject. Some of the lighting will highlight certain areas such as the smile or hair, whereas others will be used to eliminate shadows, such as those around the borders of the head and under the chin. The set-up I prefer is two umbrella lights placed on the right and left side of the patient

and a small hair light from above. Each of these lights is synchronized with the camera to go off when I take the image. The two umbrella lights create a diffuse lighting so that there are no shiny spots reflecting off the patient's face. The small hair light is placed directly above the patient to highlight certain parts of his or her hair. To illuminate under the chin, a deflector screen can be placed below the patient with the light directed to this area. You can be as creative as you like with lighting. Every photographer has their own unique style and effect; yours can be as simple as just using the flash off the camera, or as complex as using multiple types of lighting with filters and deflectors.

BACKGROUND

You will also need to consider the background for your image. Deciding where and how you want to display the portrait will help you decide on the background. Blues usually look best for color portraits, and I prefer silver for black-and-white. But there are no rules—you can be as creative as you like. Remember that the background's focus level also can be adjusted. Because digital images are saved onto a

disk that can be reused, I take as many different backgrounds as I can imagine, ranging from blue, black, silver, and tan to setting-type backgrounds from within and around my office. You can purchase professional-grade backgrounds if you wish, but these can be expensive and hard to manage because of their size. I prefer to use expandable car windshield visors for my backgrounds. They are very inexpensive, come in multiple colors, can be folded up, and can be placed behind the patient if I want to take the image while the patient is still in the operator chair.

The image can easily be manipulated in limitless ways to enhance its effect.

POST-PRODUCTION

EDITING

Once the image is captured, the editing begins. This can be done by the camera, computer, or by the printer. You can really have fun at this step. There are several easy editing programs to choose from, including

Thumbs Plus, Image FX, Dicom, and Digident; each of these has a very small learning curve, but can create some dramatic results and simplify the printing process. Start by editing the quality of the image, and then edit the overall look. The contrast, brightness, saturation, cropping, and focus can be adjusted with a few mouse clicks, and then the image's rotation and horizontal and vertical aspects can be adjusted. After these steps are accomplished, the overall effect can be edited. Once again, you are limited only by your imagination.

A simple effect is to change the image to black-and-white (this can be done using the gray scale function). You may want to adjust the brightness again after this step. You also may want to go back and replace parts of the black-and-white images with color—this technique is quite trendy now and is used in many ads. Placing “before and after” shots within the image also can be a powerful way to showcase your work to your patients. All of these editing functions can be accomplished in minutes, even by those with very little computer skill. Adding text to the image is another way to enhance its message. I like to put my logo and “Dentistry and Photography by Dr. Tony Soileau” on every image—this lets patients know that this is truly my work of art, both the dentistry and the photography (Figs 2–4).

PRINTING

Printing your images is easy, but there are some things of which you need to be aware. The resolution of an image that looks great on your monitor is probably not enough to achieve the same quality when it is printed. For an image to look great on a monitor, it needs to have a resolution of only 72ppi. For the image to have the same quality when printed, however, the

resolution needs to be 300ppi. This is why actual images have to be very large to still look good when printed at a large size. I print up to 17” x 36” when I am using the Canon D30.

Printers come in as many different types and models as cameras. Most inexpensive ink-jet printers today do a good job of printing up to 8.5” x 11.5” (assuming that the image is 300ppi at this size). Few models can print to larger sizes. My favorite is the Epson 1280 ink-jet printer. When it comes to the quality of a printed image, printer paper makes as much difference as the printer. The chroma of the paper's whiteness, as well as how the ink sits on the paper, can greatly affect the final print quality. My favorite paper is Olmec 260grm Satin Finish from digitalartsupplies.com or Kodak Medical printer paper.

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DISPLAYING

After you print the images you need to display them. A very professional-looking method is to mat the images and frame them. A simpler and cheaper way is to mount them to 1/4-in. poster board with rubber-based glue; I then cut them out with a scalpel and a straight-edge and mount them on all the walls. I prefer this method because the frame and matting don't compete with the photography for the patient's attention. Let your imagination be your guide.

SELECTING CASES

Deciding which cases to photograph and display is easy—choose all of them. Patients are not nearly as crit-

ical of our work as we are. You should not eliminate a case just because it didn't come out exactly as you planned. If you feel good about your dentistry, so will your patients. Also, patients like looking at others who are similar to them. So displaying portraits of both females and males, young and old, will encourage a wider range of patients to consider having their smiles redone.

The last thing to remember is the most important: Have as much fun as you can in your practice and it will show through in your photography! *ASD*



REMINDER!

Please take note of the following deadlines for future issues of *The Journal of Cosmetic Dentistry*. Manuscripts must be submitted by these dates:

Fall 2002 Issue

due July 1, 2002

Winter 2003 Issue

due September 15, 2002

