

Do Better Photos Help Sell Cars?

REDLINE
Driving ROI

They say a picture's worth a thousand words. But how much is a "professional" photo worth? And what do those thousand words say? Redline sought to find out.

Teaser: Car Shoppers value cars with "professional" photos more than you think. And wait till you hear what they have to say about dealers who advertise "poor" photos. Ouch.



Redline surveyed 372 US citizens ages 18+. Then, we narrowed the survey to the 282 respondents who indicated they had owned a vehicle and shopped online for a vehicle in the past three years. We'll refer to this group as "Car Shoppers."

The general methodology of the survey was broken down into three segments:

1. Ask "A/B" questions prior to showing photos of vehicles
2. Show photos of similar vehicles, "professional" vs. "poor"
3. Ask "A/B" questions after showing photos to verify feelings have or have not changed

Let's take a few minutes to review the survey questions and answers.

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Survey Section 1 - Baseline A/B Questions

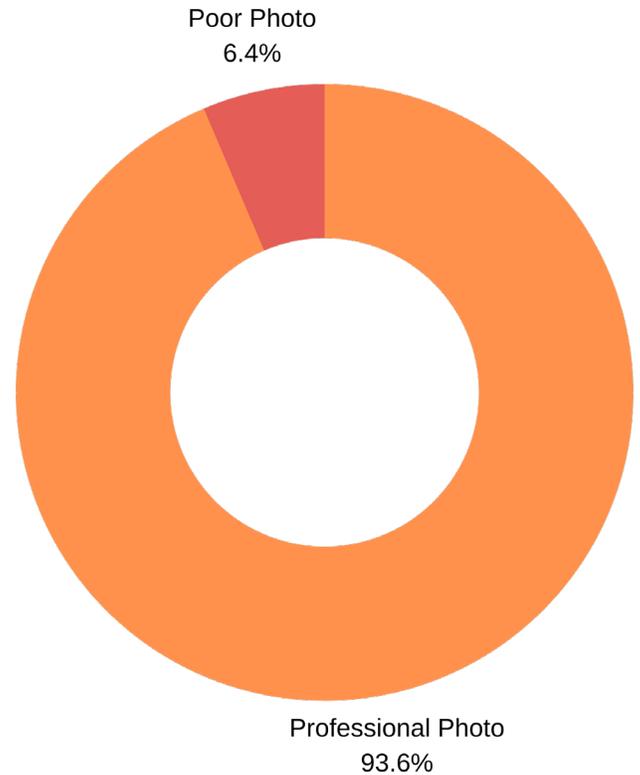
We asked Car shoppers, *"If you find two seemingly identical vehicles online that you are interested in. Which vehicle are you most likely to click on FIRST?"*

As you may have guessed, a landslide, 93.6% of respondents would click on a "professional" photo before clicking on a "poor" photo. It's no surprise that Car Shoppers prefer to see "professional" photos, but the margin by which they prefer professional photos was higher than expected.

It is highly likely that the vehicles with poor photos would still receive a click eventually, but this survey strongly suggests shoppers will click on better photos FIRST. To quote a mythical NASCAR driver... "If you ain't first, you're last."

We next asked *"When shopping for a vehicle online would you be more likely to click on..."* to compare "poor" photography to "stock photography." Surprisingly, 76.2% of Car Shoppers would click on a stock photo and 23.8% would click on a "poor" photo. That means "stock" photos outperform "poor" photos by 321%.

Ok, we have a baseline. Keep in mind, these Car Shoppers have not actually seen a photo yet. But they believe they would clicks on a "professional" photo 14.7x more than a "poor" photo.



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Survey Section 2 - Pro vs. Poor Photos

Here we showed Car Shoppers the four below photo sets. Asking them which vehicle was “professionally” photographed and how that photograph made them feel about the listing dealership.

To minimise influence on survey results, we used actual first-photos found on AutoTrader, then found similar types of vehicles that Redline photographed. We then displayed those photos as sets.

Vehicle Set 1
Full-size SUVs



Vehicle Set 3
Sports Cars



Vehicle Set 4
Photo Booth



As suspected, 90%+ of Car Shoppers correctly identified the “professional” photos.

After each set of vehicles we then asked a simple A/B “which photo gives...” type question to quantify the perception of the listing dealership based solely on the photo presented. 88% of Car Shoppers believe “professional” photos increase “Confidence,” “Professionalism” and “Trust.”

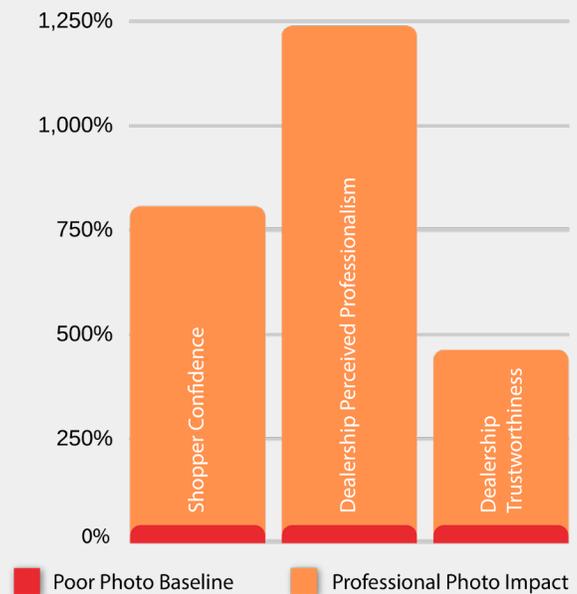
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For Vehicle Set 4 we opted to change up the questions slightly. We were able to find two extremely similar vehicles (BMW 540 vs. Lexus ES350), both targeting a similar buyer, offered in the same color and displayed in a photobooth. We wanted to understand if photos alone could have an impact on the price. We asked, "Which dealership would need to *NEGOTIATE LESS* on price?"

57% of Car Shoppers believe the "dealership" showing the "professionally" photographed BMW would need to negotiate less. Using the "poor" photo as a baseline that's a 132% reduced need to negotiate on price.

Using "poor" photos as the baseline, the graph below shows the impact of "professional" photos.



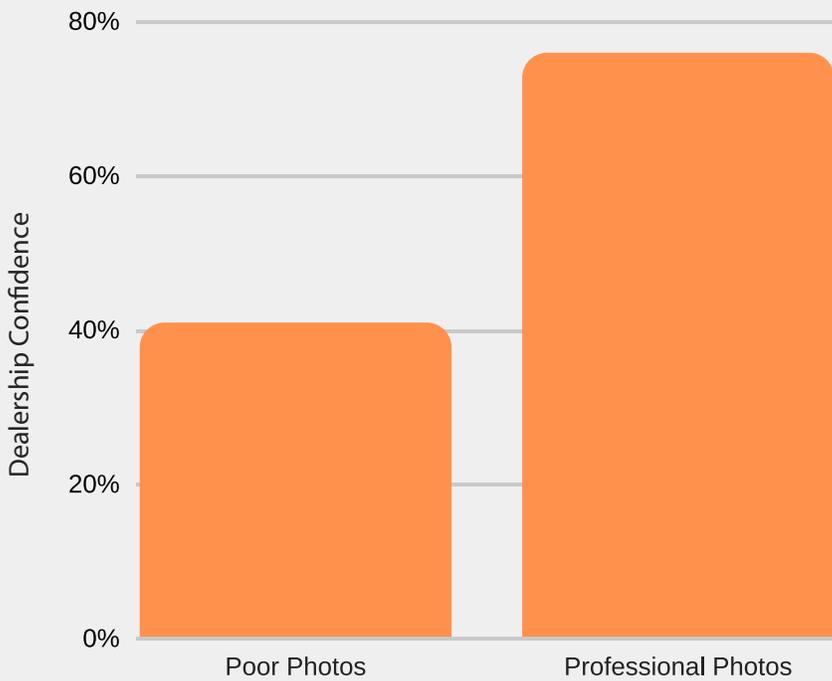
806% increase in shopper confidence
1238% increase in dealership perceived professionalism
462% increase in dealership trustworthiness

Survey Section 3 - Respondent Controlled Answers

The previous sections were A/B answers, but in this section respondents are given a much wider range of options for survey responses. We gave survey respondents a wider option for responses here because we wanted them to take into consideration the photos they'd seen in section 2.

The first two questions ask respondents to "Rate [their] confidence level in contacting a dealership to inquire about a vehicle with 20+ poor photos". We asked the same question for "professional photos."

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The average confidence level for contacting a dealership who displays “poor” photos was just 41%. For the dealership displaying “professional” photos, confidence levels increased to 76%.

Using the “poor” photos as a baseline, “professional” photos give a 185% increase in confidence when contacting a dealership.

The final set of questions for this survey are about price. The exact question we asked was:

Do you believe that showing “professional” (clear, well lit, well framed) photos of a vehicle increases that vehicle’s perceived value compared with vehicles showing “poor” (blurry, poorly lit, poorly framed) photos?

95.34% of Car Shoppers said “yes” and 4.66% of Car Shoppers said, “no.”

Those who said yes were also asked the following:

In a few words, please describe why you feel professional-quality photos increase a vehicle’s perceived value compared with vehicles showing poor photos.

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If a photo is worth 1,000 words... how much is a “professional” photo worth?
And, what do those 1,000 words say? Turns out, about \$2,371.

- *Clear photos of the actual vehicle (not stock images of that make and model) let you get a sense of if the car has any structural problems. blurry photos feel like they are hiding something.*
- *Professional quality photos send a message to the buyer that the seller understands the importance of presenting the vehicle in the best possible way. The seller is willing to go to the time and expense to do it right.*
- *“Unprofessional” photos makes it seem like you’re dealing with someone shady who might not be truthful in the things they say about the car.*
- *A clear photo with good lighting makes the vehicle appear to have been well-maintained .*
- *If a dealer is willing to pay for professional photos, they’re more likely to take good care of the vehicles they are selling.*
- *A clear photo gives a better estimate of the physical characteristics such as dents, scratches or wrecked/ damage. if the body is not ok it's probably not worth checking out the engine and mechanical portion.*
- *Better lighting highlights the good features and makes it appear newer and better cared for, in general professionalism inspires confidence in people due to perceived belief that quality pictures mean quality cars.*
- *The person taking the picture made more effort, has higher standards of how they represent their product, thus more likely to have higher standards over all.*
- *They usually have something to hide if the pic is bad/ far away, and I wanna see it like I was there looking at it with a magnifying glass!!*
- *It seems the owner is comfortable showing any flaws with the car with a professional quality photo. Gives a clear visual of the car.*
- *Demonstrates a degree of professionalism that may extend to maintenance and preparation.*
- *Cameras are really good these days, so it takes a lot of effort to take bad photos, like the dealership may be hiding something in the car. Further, bad photos indicate a laziness inside the business and I don't want to reward laziness.*

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The general theme from the 300+ open-ended responses we received can be boiled down to three things: trust, care and professionalism. Most of the general public doesn't enjoy the car buying process because there is a preconceived distrust of car sales. Car Shoppers view "poor" photos as unprofessional and correlate that unprofessionalism to a lack of care of the vehicle.

The final and most important question we asked was about money. All the confidence, trust, professionalism, etc. in the word means nothing if people don't value it. We asked:

Assuming you're shopping for a \$35,000 vehicle online. What is the MAXIMUM cost difference that you would still rather CLICK on a vehicle showing "professional" (clear, well lit, well framed) photos compared with a vehicle showing "poor" (blurry, poorly lit, poorly framed) photos?

The average response of Car Shoppers was \$2,371; including those who thought there was NO increase in value. If "professional" photos cost an extra \$5 per car that would return a 474x ROI.

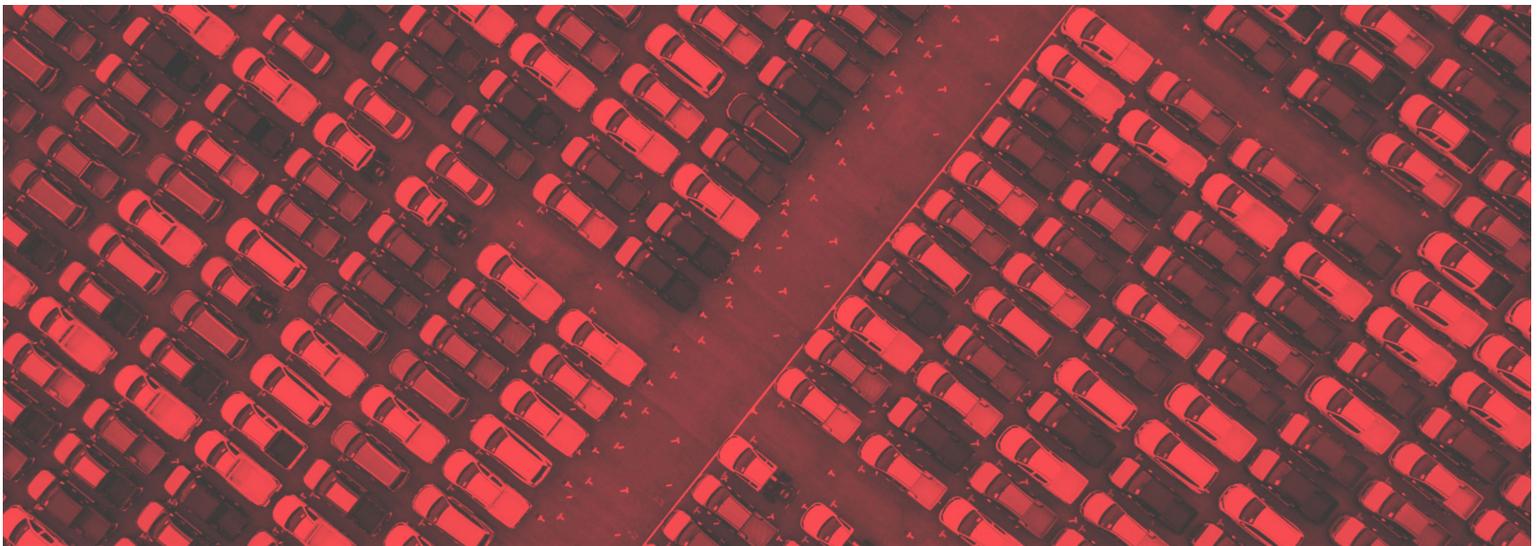
$$\begin{array}{ccc} \$2,371.00 & \div & \$5.00 = 474x \\ \text{additional perceived value} & & \text{spent on photography} \quad \text{return on investment} \end{array}$$

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Summary

Redline sought to better understand how shoppers feel about vehicles with “professional” photography compared to vehicles with “poor” photography by surveying Car Shoppers.



These Shoppers were shown live examples and asked numerous questions comparing “professional” photos to “poor” photos. The messaging from survey respondents showed:

- Car shoppers are able to consistently identify “professional” photography.
- “Professional” photos increase buyer confidence, dealership trustworthiness and dealership professionalism.
- Increasing those positive feelings leads to a higher perceived value of the vehicle.
- Vehicles with high perceived values get clicked on first AND have a lower perceived need to negotiate on price.