



When CGI May Be the Better Solution than Photography

How CGI with 3D effects expands the canvas for image creation and changes the economics for multi-channel marketing.

BY
Jack O'Farrell

PUBLISHED
April 20, 2021

Companies adopting CGI have 40% higher online conversion rates and a 30% improvement in average sales prices when using 3D models to replace 2D static images.

HAPTICMEDIA (2019)



Perspective

Computer-Generated Imaging (CGI) creates visual marketing content that is indistinguishable from actual product photographs. Images are captured without the lead time and expense of prototype models, the overhead of scheduled studio time, and the risk of costly re-shoots. Creative teams are free to explore alternate product configurations, designs, styles, color schemes, textures, and backgrounds. Customer interest is rewarded with viewing angles that reassure them before product purchase about what to expect when they complete a transaction. Further, some marketers are beginning to use visualization to gauge demand with customers prior to manufacturing. Those insights can help fine tune an offer prior to molds, internal engineering, or packaging. “Marketing for manufacturing” can help brands expedite their time to market while garnering excitement before they launch.

Traditional photography comes with traditional baggage

Every new product heading to market begins with a physical embodiment and the immediate need to have an image of it that can be used to entice the world. The marketing director must then find a location, book a photographer, staff a crew, rent and transport accessories to the studio, and book a stylist.

“ CGI changes the calculus for e-commerce assets

Only when all those boxes are checked, can the real work begin—moving deliberately through a shot list in support of a marketing brief. When you’re working with prototypes or first articles, the race to the starting line can be exhausting and perilous. Add the restrictions of Covid-19 travel and social distancing and the odds against achieving last year’s results this year—on time and on budget—are fleeting.

Studio Shoot Challenges

- Organizing and shipping products
- Setting up studio equipment
- Editing of images in post-production
- Attending the shoot—here or abroad
- Auditing the shots—live or remote
- Timing the arrival of finished products
- Responding to late-breaking changes



CGI images become versatile creative assets

The economic case for CGI vs. traditional photography had long been gaining momentum. But the logistical demands of the pandemic have thrown the challenges of traditional photography and the advantages of digital imaging both into sharp relief.

Businesses and design teams, faced with the same urgent timelines, are finding digital imaging to be far more than a workaround for the new demands they face. The creative flexibility that teams discovered amid their Covid-19 trial period will likely come to define new best practices for many. But the greater value may be the economic advantages that businesses and brands discover when they leverage those image libraries against future needs.

CGI Imaging Advantages

- Art direct original images
- Place products in-context
- Reconfigure images on the fly
- Replicate variants from one file
- Create a 360° experience from stills
- Conduct A-B tests prior to manufacturing
- Customize images for product websites
- Optimize images for trade shows formats
- Unify the visual brand language across media
- Art direct at scale with full creative freedom



The numbers don't lie on this one

The trendlines for growth in online shopping, moving upwards for years, spiked during the recent shelter at home period. Amazon's plans to hire 100,000 new warehouse and delivery workers in the U.S. this year is just one measure of this uptick. There are others.



22% of returns for e-commerce brands occur because a product looks different than images of it on the website.

INVESP (2020)

83% of shoppers credit product images as the most influential factor in their purchase decision

EMARKETER (2018)

80% of returns can be reduced by using 3D visualization versus static 2D images

FORBES (2019)

8 images per product are the average US shoppers expect to see on ecommerce sites

EMARKETER (2019)

62% of general consumers in the US said they're shopping online more now than pre-Covid-19.

BAZAARVOICE (2020)