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Free Photo Resources to Improve Your Social Media Posts

You know the saying, "you shouldn't judge a book by it's cover?"

While it's something we've all been taught since childhood, we humans are actually pretty terrible at it. In fact, did you know people typically form a first impression in a mere 50 milliseconds?

For a small business owner, this statistic can be daunting. The pressure is on to make a good first impression. When people are posting every second of every day using social media marketing, it's even more challenging to stand out.

What's the secret to capturing attention and making a good impression? Sharp, professional images.

Social media posts that include images produce 650 percent higher engagement than text-only posts. Looking for the secret to capturing the attention of prospective customers in a short amount of time? Images are a surefire way to do so.

But, wait a second! You're a small business owner. You may know everything there is to know about baking, financial spreadsheets, fitness classes, real estate, church services, or how to run a restaurant…but photography? That might not be at the top of your list of

specialties. Unless you actually own a photography company, or happen to have a photographer on your staff, chances are you could use some help finding crisp, clean images to use for your marketing.

Want to learn how to use visual marketing to get attention and customers? [Check out our upcoming webinar.](#)

The rules of using free images on the internet

As you're looking for free photo resources, there's a good chance you'll come across some terms you may not understand. Creative Commons, public domain, and royalty-free image rules help outline who can use the photos and how they can be used.

It's important to check the terms and conditions for each site you visit, as well as take note of any required attribution, in order to avoid any copyright or unlawful use issues.

What is Creative Commons?

Creative Commons is an American non-profit organization that provides free, easy-to-use copyright licenses to creators so the public has permission to share and use the work, based on the conditions of the creator's choosing.

If a photo states that it's available under a Creative Commons license, be sure to check what type it is. There are [six main Creative Commons licenses](#) and each one grants users a different level of permissions. For example, a NonCommercial license means that you cannot use the image for commercial purposes, while an Attribution license requires people who use the work in any way to grant credit for the image. Photographers work hard to create these images, so it is important to respect the terms each license requires.

What does it mean if an image is "public domain?"

If you find something that states it is public domain, this means that the creative work has no exclusive intellectual property rights applied to it. In other words, the public owns

the work, not an individual. This means you are free to use the work without obtaining permission.

Please note that just because you found something online does **not** mean that it is in the public domain. Always make sure that you're not using someone else's work without express permission.

What does "royalty-free" mean?

Royalty-free means you have the right to use copyrighted material without the need to pay royalties, or license fees, for each use. This does not mean that the image is free to use, however. Many royalty-free images come with a one-time fee you pay to download the image, but a royalty-free license means that you don't have to pay every time you use it.

Now that you've read the rules, it's time to find free stock photo websites to help you get started.

Free stock image resources (yes, free)

While stock images are oftentimes associated with being fake or cookie cutter, these sites are chock full of authentic images to help your brand stand out.

Unsplash

With over 850,000 free high-resolution photos submitted by a community of photographers, Unsplash has become a popular option for stock photos. Unsplash has their own license which grants users permission to use all photos published on the site for free, for both commercial and non-commercial purposes, without attribution. While crediting photographers isn't required, it is encouraged – and appreciated!
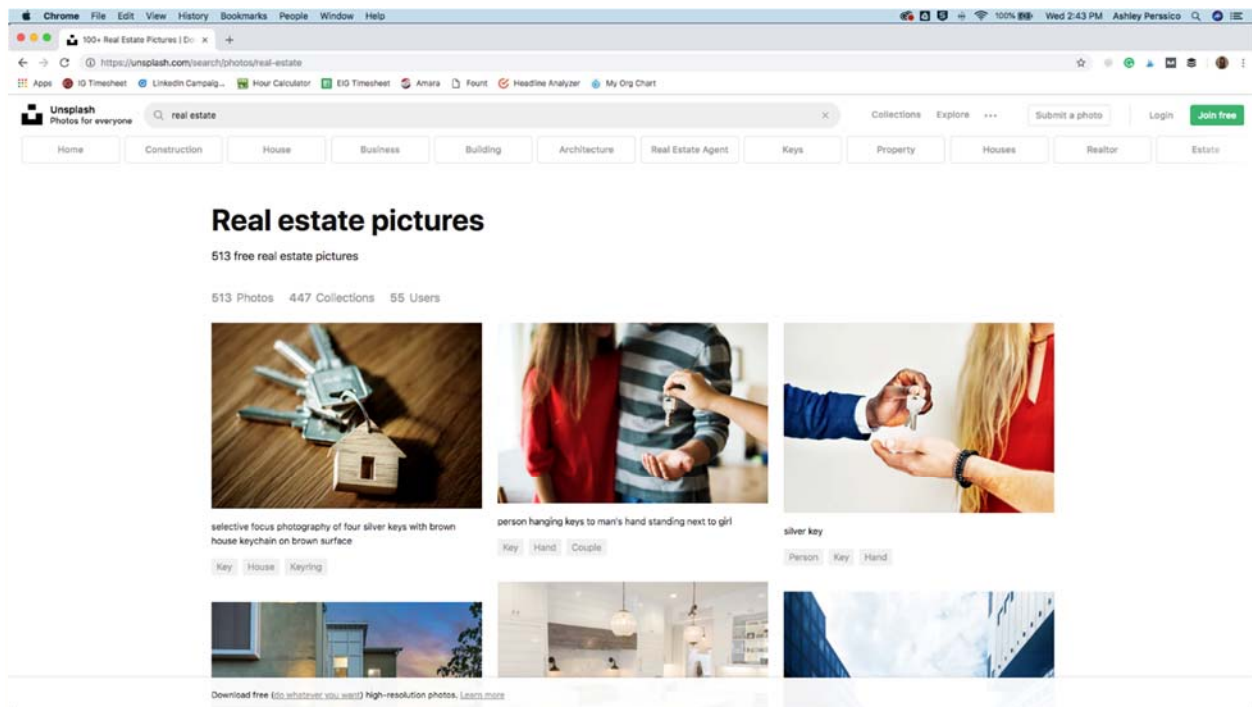
Collections are a great feature of Unsplash. Collections are groups of photos curated by Unsplash users that typically follow a general theme or category. For example, there are Collections for home images, which include photos of living rooms and general decor, as well as entire collections just for photos of denim! You can also create your own Collections and easily share your favorite photos with your team.

Overall, if you're looking for stock photos that feel authentic, unposed, and professional, Unsplash is a great option.

Pexels

Founded in 2014, Pexels provides high quality and completely free stock photos. Their mission is to help empower creators with the beautiful photos they need to create amazing products, designs, stories, websites, and more. Pexels has their own licensethat allows users to use photos on the site for free, for both commercial and non-commercial use. You may also edit and post the photos without attribution.
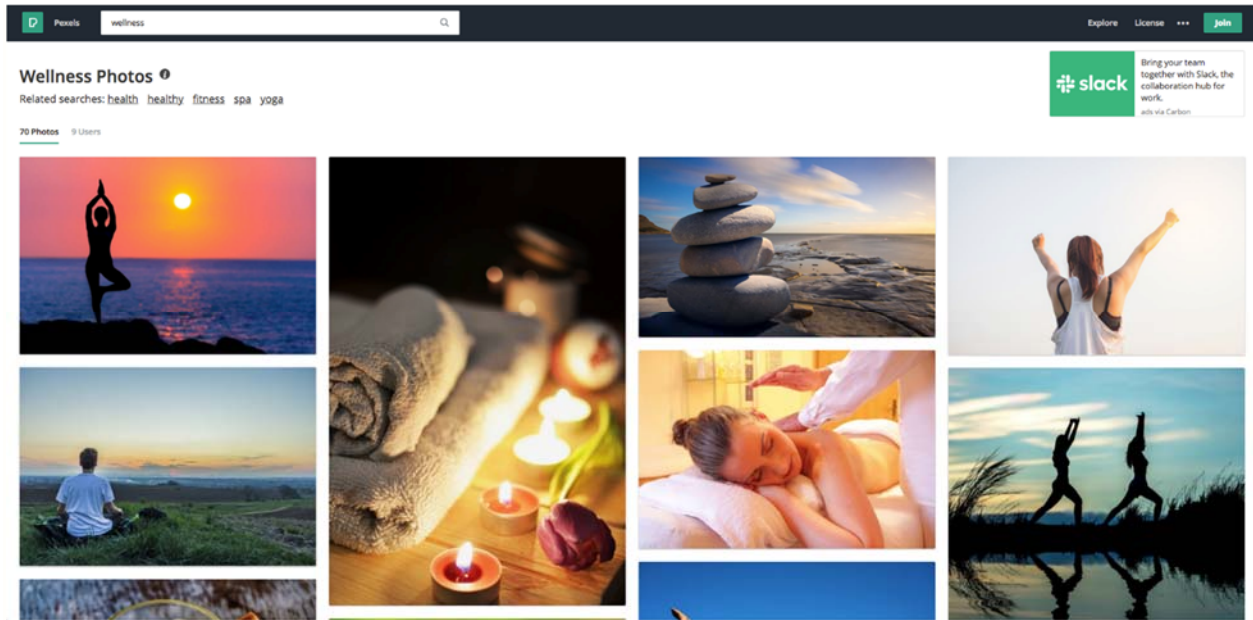
Pexels allows you to search for a keyword and then provides related searches as well. For example, a search for "wellness" yields 50+ photos and additional suggested search terms such as health, fitness, and spa.

Pexels also sources photos from other sites, such as Pixabay and Gratisography, to deliver as many high-quality free stock photos as they can.

Reshot

Reshot prides themselves on having "uniquely free photos" and "tons of handpicked, non-stocky images." All photos published on Reshot are free to use for both commercial and non-commercial purposes.

Finding a photo on Reshot is simple. Just type in what you are looking for, click search, and voila – beautiful photos that liven up any social media post. You can also download Reshot's curated Quick Image Packs, such as the Diversity Matters Pack or the Active Lifestyle Pack, by simply sharing a Tweet to download.

Nappy

Diversity can be hard to come by in the world of stock photos. As Nappy's "why nappy?" page explains, it's pretty easy to find a picture of hands holding a cup of coffee. Finding a pair of brown hands holding a cup of coffee? Not as easy.
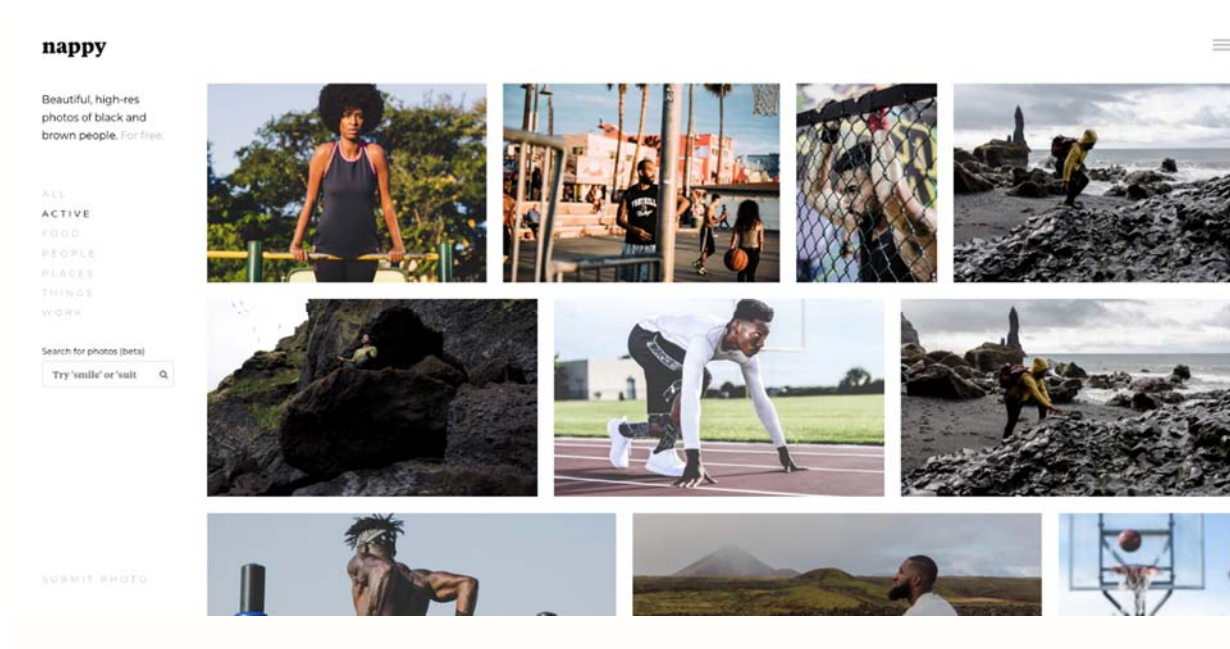
Nappy.co is a stock photography website with "beautiful, high-res photos of black and brown people." The site offers businesses of all sizes to be more purposeful about representation in their marketing. Nappy breaks their photos into categories, such as active, food, people, things, and work, while also allowing users to search for photos using their own keywords.

All photos posted on Nappy are licensed under the Creative Commons Zero (CC0) license and are free to download, edit, share, use, and distribute without credit.

Burst

Burst is a free stock photo platform powered by Shopify, a leading e-commerce platform.

Photos on Burst are available under Creative Commons CC0 license, or a nonexclusive license, both of which you are free to download, use, modify, distribute, and display for commercial and non-commercial use at no charge. These photos are both free and royalty-free – it's the best of both worlds!
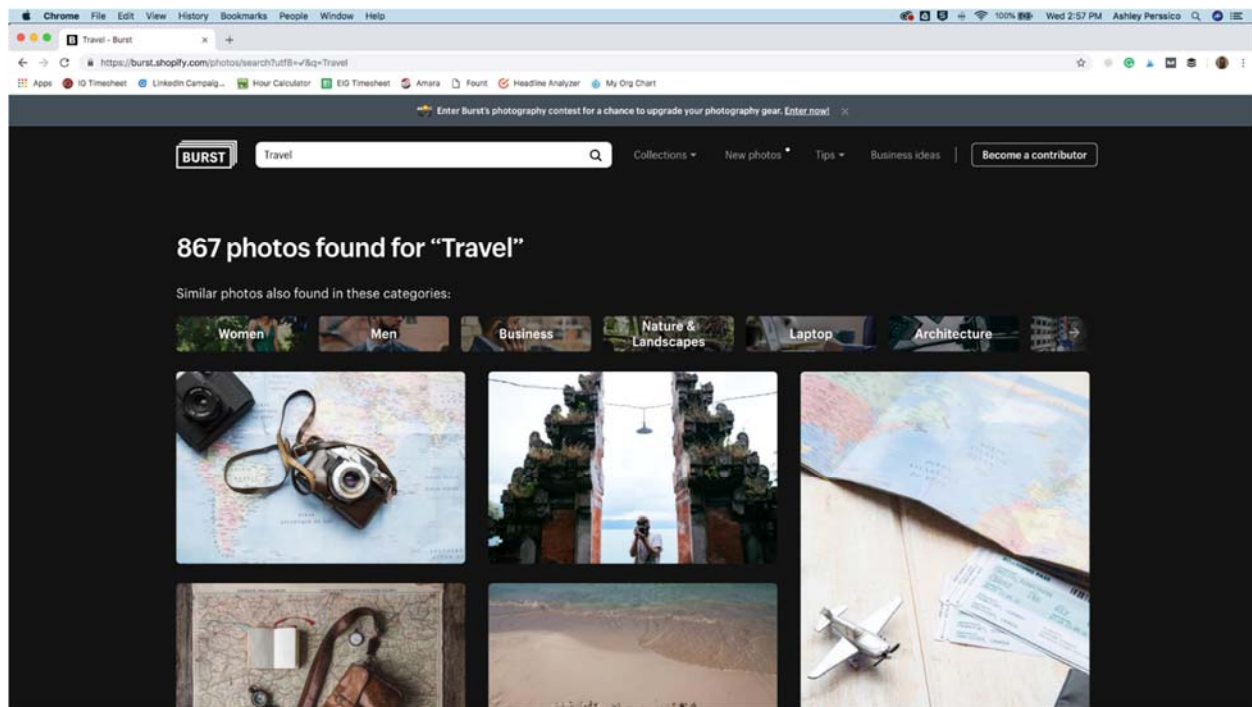
Burst curates Collections, much like Unsplash, but you cannot create them yourself. Collections can be helpful when trying to find a photo that fits into a specific category. Otherwise, you can browse photos by Burst's "top free pics" of the week or search for something specific.

Want to add text, borders, overlays, and more? Check out these free editing resources:

Now that you've found that perfect picture, it's time to make some edits! Whether you simply want to tweak the brightness, add a text overlay that connects the photo to the content of your social media post, or add your logo, these free tools make you look like a pro in no time.

Canva

Canva is an easy-to-use image editor with a drag-and-drop feature and professional layouts to design eye-catching graphics. You can design presentations, social media graphics, invitations, menus, and more with Canva. The best part? They already have all of the correct social media image sizes so you don't even need to remember

them! [Canva also offers free stock photos](#) to use in your projects, or you can upload a picture that you have already downloaded from one of the sites above.
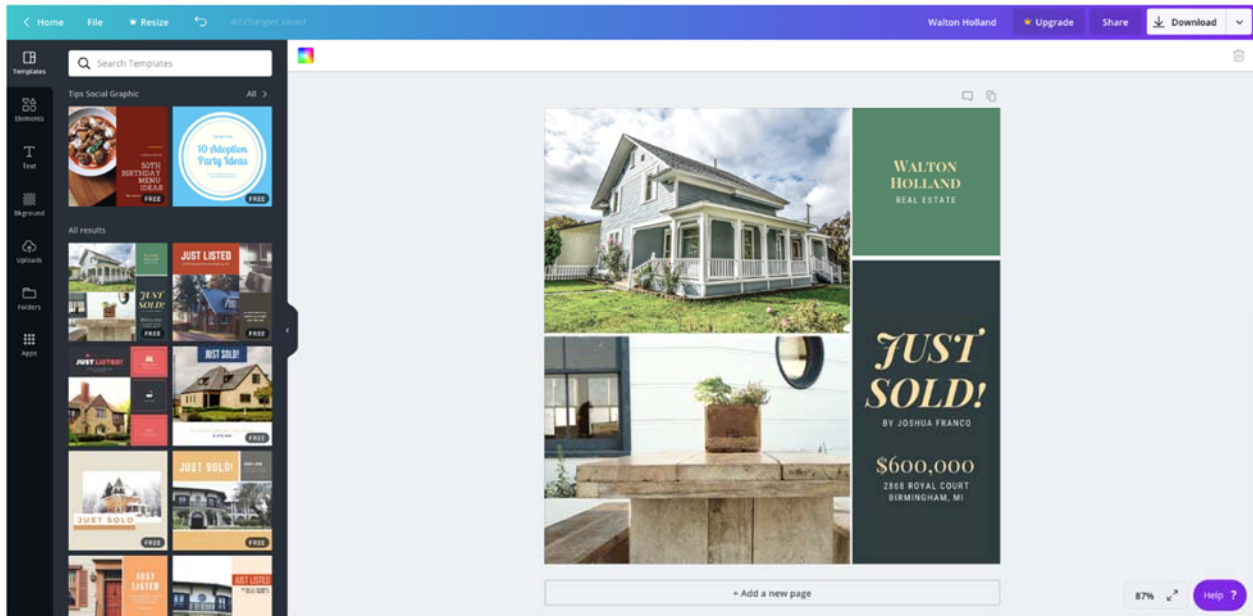
Canva has hundreds of templates, even broken down by industry or topic, that you can use for free. They also have premium templates that cost $1 each. When you're done, download the graphic and upload it to your next social post!

Pablo

Pablo, part of the [Buffer](#) family, is a simple online graphic editor. With Pablo, you have access to the [Unsplash](#) photo library directly in the image box, or you can upload your own image to use. Pablo offers three sizes optimize for Pinterest, Instagram, and Facebook/Twitter.
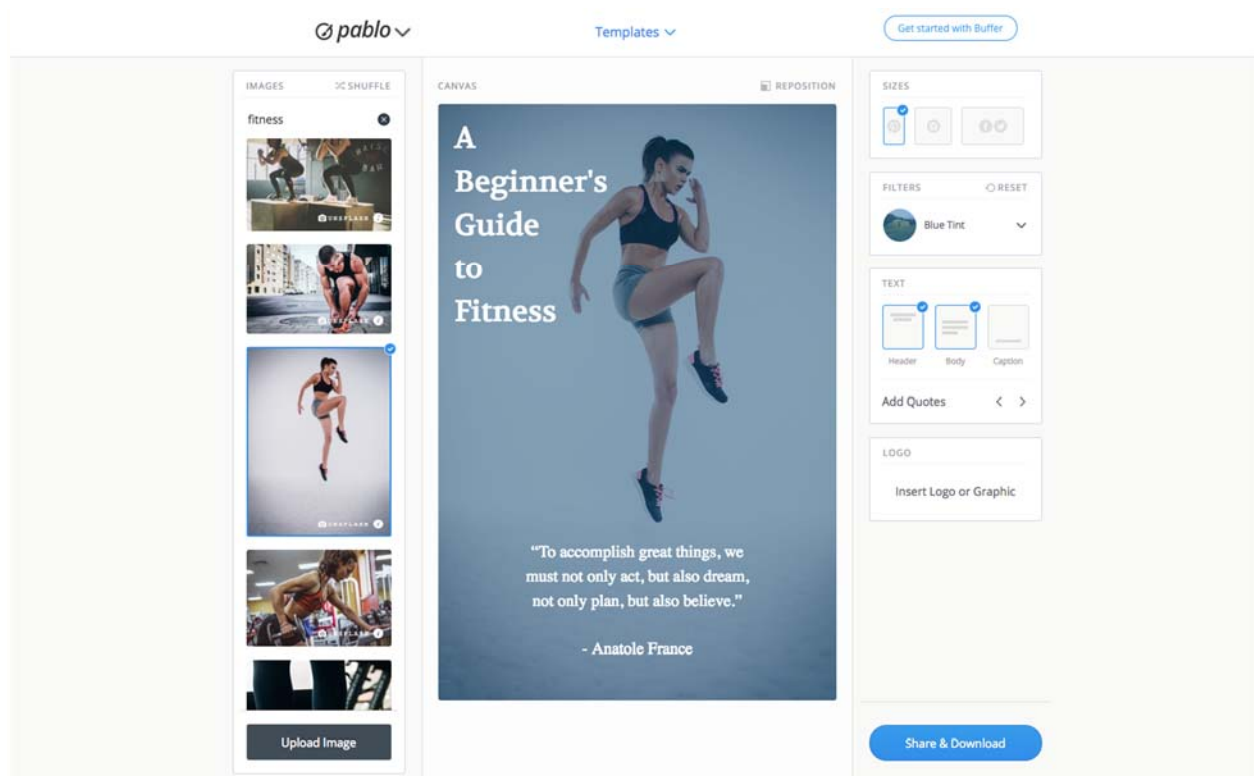
You can easily add filters such as contrast or blur to make your text stand out, or grayscale and color tints to make an image fit your style. There are options to add text overlays and even a library of quotes to include in your image. Finally, you can insert your logo or graphic to quickly brand the image and make it ready for your social media posts.

You don't need to be a pro to create beautiful social media graphics

With these tools and resources, you're ready to start sharing graphics that capture your customer's attention and drive them to your website or your store.