



Dave Re/ CrossFit Journal

# HIT ME WITH YOUR BEST SHOT

BY EMILY BEERS

With basic technical skills and some practice, affiliates can create great images that showcase their businesses.

One of the most humbling aspects of CrossFit is how it exposes weaknesses—and not just in the realm of fitness.

Each CrossFit gym has a website that requires a modest degree of skill with words, videos and pictures, and these sites can showcase the strengths and weaknesses of those who manage them.

Even if you have the best coaches and facility, posting poor pictures online can give would-be clients the impression a lack of care might spill over into other areas of your business—such as the way you train your clients. It's no mistake CrossFit Founder and CEO Greg Glassman has said he can determine the quality of a gym by the [cleanliness of its bathrooms](#).

Attention to detail is important, and what you post online matters. When a picture is sharp and clear, it can bring a moment to life and make a statement about your business. Taking the time to create quality images can help develop a brand that radiates quality and professionalism.

Affiliate owners certainly don't need to become professional photographers, but a few simple tips can help them dramatically improve the quality of the images that represent their businesses.

## Trading Squats for Shots

Joe Vaughn of CrossFit Mousetrap in Orlando, Florida, always liked taking pictures, but he didn't have a great camera and often used his iPhone to snap action shots of his athletes.

His gym is located more or less across the street from Disney World, so tourists regularly drop in for workouts. One day, Associated Press photographer Evan Vucci showed up at Vaughn's door. In town to cover baseball spring training, Vucci worked out at CrossFit Mousetrap a few times, and to show his appreciation for Vaughn's hospitality, the photographer decided to snap some pictures before he left Orlando.

“(Vaughn's) such a cool guy, and I thought, 'I'd love to do something nice for these guys,' so I brought my camera in one day and started taking pictures,” Vucci explained.

When he gave the shots to Vaughn, the affiliate owner immediately noticed their remarkable quality.

“They were beautiful shots. Action shots that had no motion blur,” Vaughn said.



Associated Press photographer Evan Vucci dropped in at CrossFit Mousetrap and advised owner Joe Vaughn (pictured) on the basics of taking quality photos.



Courtesy of Joe Vaughn

Vaughn's new camera takes great high-resolution photos that have helped increase CrossFit Mousetrap's social-media presence.

Vaughn immediately knew he needed to up his game in the multimedia department, so he asked Vucci—who has been with the Associated Press for 11 years—to offer some advice.

“He told me exactly what camera to buy and what software to use to edit (photos),” Vaughn said.

“The next day, he ordered a new camera and new lenses—everything,” Vucci said.

Vaughn dropped US\$3,300 on a Canon 5D camera and two lenses. Costly as the equipment was, Vaughn admitted it's been a worthwhile investment. His new camera takes great high-resolution images that have helped increase CrossFit Mousetrap's social-media presence. In terms of Facebook metrics, two months before Vaughn bought his Canon 5D his Facebook page listed 4,386 interactions. In the two months after the purchase, the number jumped to 10,364.

**Costly as the equipment was,  
Vaughn admitted it's been a  
worthwhile investment.**

“Essentially, my engagement more than doubled,” he said. And although it's hard to pinpoint exactly what is helping drive new business, Vaughn's membership numbers have increased as his Facebook reach has grown—enough for him to assume there's a significant correlation between the two.

“People are more likely to tag themselves (in posted photos), and friends are more likely to comment,” said Vaughn, who ensures every single picture he posts is stamped with the CrossFit



Courtesy of Joe Vaughn

Vaughn's aim is to create an honest representation of his box through photos. Vucci says an affiliate's athletes are its best advertising.

Mousetrap watermark. And because of their high quality, Vaughn's pictures often become his clients' profile pictures.

At present, if Vaughn goes a week without posting new pictures, members start asking for more.

Similarly, Vaughn's pictures have helped drive business through his advertisements in a local Disney magazine. Since buying his new camera, these advertisements have become second only to word of mouth in bringing in new members.

“It really shows people what they can expect from our program,” Vaughn said of how his ads have consistently attracted new leads.

On top of improving the quality of his pictures, Vaughn invested money in hiring a professional to produce high-quality videos for his homepage. The videos advertise his program by showing the

various types of athletes who work out at his box.

“In the video, we were very strategic. We weren't just showing the fit people. We show people of all different ages, body types. We wanted to create an honest representation of the box,” he said, explaining that it's not just the quality of the media but also the message that matters for a business.

Although we're living in a world where every single device seems to have the ability to take a picture or video of varying quality, Vaughn believes his story shows people still care about quality. He said understanding that has helped his business more than he would have imagined.

Vucci put it this way: “You can't just be good in the gym. You have to be a salesman and a brand owner. It's community relations 101. Make people feel good. Make them be proud to be a part of your brand. Your athletes are your best advertisement.”



High shutter speed allows you to blur the background of a picture so the image you want to focus on really pops out.

## Basic Training

Vucci discovered CrossFit in 2010. Although he travels a lot for work, his home box is CrossFit Balance in Washington, D.C.

The best part about being an Associated Press photographer is that it gives him “a front row seat at history,” Vucci said.

While fun, photography is business for him, and he believes CrossFit affiliates only hurt themselves if they don’t make photography part of their business as well. He’s seen how photography has helped CrossFit Mousetrap improve the profile of its brand.

“Every single picture he has a watermark on it ... . It’s a no-brainer for a business,” Vucci said. “The difference between what (Vaughn) is doing at his place (and) iPhone pictures is like night and day.”

While Vucci doesn’t think all affiliate owners should drop \$3,000 on a camera, he explained that the most important feature buyers should look for is high shutter speed. Shutter speed is the amount of time a camera’s shutter is open when you take a picture. If shutter speed is too low, blur is the result when athletes are moving. And when you’re shooting action shots—as is usually the case with CrossFit—blur is the last thing you want.

“You want to freeze the action,” Vucci said, explaining that a higher shutter speed also allows you to blur the background of a picture so the image you want to focus on really pops out.

“More expensive lenses are faster lenses, so you can shoot in darker areas.”  
—Evan Vucci

Vucci’s second tip is to use a fast lens.

“More expensive lenses are faster lenses, so you can shoot in darker areas,” Vucci said. And because many gyms have low light and few windows, a fast lens is particularly important.



Dave Re / CrossFit Journal

CrossFit Inc. photographer Dave Re advises new photographers to learn the timing of their cameras to help capture the right action shot.

Dave Re has been a photographer with CrossFit Inc. since the summer of 2012, and he advises affiliate owners to find a camera that has a manual mode as well as quality high-ISO performance. ISO refers to the level of sensitivity a camera has to available light. Lower ISO means less sensitivity to light, while higher ISO means more sensitivity.

“Inevitably, you’re going to have to shoot at high ISO in most boxes to stop action, because they’re relatively dark,” Re said. But he warns that when ISO is too high, images can become grainy and noisy. So the key is finding a camera that still has the ability to shoot quality pictures at a relatively high ISO.

Most cameras work well if the lighting is good and nobody is moving, Re said. But this isn’t a luxury you have when you’re shooting at a gym, so learning the timing of your camera is also important.

“If you’re trying to shoot someone doing a clean and you want to catch it at the apex of the second pull, you need to know when to hit the trigger. So spend some time learning how to use the different modes on the camera,” Re said.

Re suggests learning about manual, shutter-priority and aperture-priority modes. The aperture is the opening that allows light to travel into the camera through the lens, and a larger aperture— $f/1.8$ , for example—lets more light into the camera.

Re explained the modes: “In manual, you control everything—shutter speed and aperture. In aperture priority, you tell the camera what aperture to use, and then it figures out the right shutter speed. ... In shutter priority, you tell the camera what shutter speed to use, and it figures out the right aperture.”

But to Re, there’s another key to photography that’s even more important than shutter speed, ISO and aperture. The final piece



Dave Re / CrossFit Journal

A camera is only as good as the person behind it, so affiliate owners are encouraged to learn how to use their equipment properly.

of the puzzle is the photographer, who is more important even than the price tag on the camera. Despite the fact that Re often packs around \$20,000 in top-of-the-line equipment, spending a lot of money isn’t the critical aspect of photography.

“It really comes down to the guy trying to use it,” Re said. “There’s not a camera you’ll buy that will take perfect pictures just by pointing and shooting.”

He continued: “There’s this whole crop of cameras that have popped up that are in the \$400-to-\$600 range that do a good job if you know how to use them. ... You can get a camera that knocks it out of the park for \$400 right now.”

Picture quality aside, when it comes to CrossFit photography in particular, the picture’s message is also very important. For example, pictures of round-back deadlifts aren’t ideal.

“Definitely go for quality over quantity, and think about the message you’re sending,” Re said.

He continued: “People will take that image and interpret it as the quality of training you’re going to get at the box. You could have the best trainers in the world, but you don’t want a picture up there that suggests that it wouldn’t be.”

**“People will take that image and interpret it as the quality of training you’re going to get at the box.”**

**—Dave Re**

This doesn't mean you should only post pictures of the fittest people at your box. It simply means you need to be mindful of movement.

"Just catch them in good positions. Even if it's a scaled movement, there's a good time to shoot that movement," Re said.

The bottom line is that you can use your pictures to give an impressive representation of what you do inside your gym.

All this advice doesn't begin to scratch the surface of what you can do with a good camera, but Vucci and Re believe picture quality will go up if you learn about these basic elements and then practice.

## Picture Perfect

Whether they spend \$400, part with \$3,000 or choose to barter a gym membership with a talented photographer, affiliate owners can use photography to enhance both their businesses and their community.

"If you post something that looks good, it gives you the idea that you have a professional thing going on," Re said.

Anyone can snap a shot and post it to social media. But to produce a memorable picture that conveys and elicits emotion is something altogether different. A picture that encourages people to comment and share might even convince someone to join your community. That's the kind of picture an affiliate owner should strive to take. ■

## About the Author

Emily Beers is a CrossFit Journal contributor and coach at [CrossFit Vancouver](#). She finished 37th at the 2014 Reebok CrossFit Games.



Affiliate owners should strive to take photos that encourage people to join their community.

Courtesy of Joe Vaughn