



Small Shop - Big Results

Take Great Shop Photos – Part 6 (Odds and Ends)

By Chuck Behm

Central Iowa Chapter

When using photographs to illustrate a technical document, whether it be an article for the Journal, a tutorial to share with members of your guild chapter, or photo journal of a rebuilding job to email to a customer or whatever purpose you choose to put your photos to, variety of the types of shots you include is bound to make your document more interesting. So far in this series I've focused on techniques for shooting three specific types of photographs – close-ups, cut-away shots, and before and after sets. To finish out this series, I would like to briefly cover three more types of shots that you might consider in order add more variety to your photographic efforts.

1. Action Shots:

Most of us like action in the movies we watch and the novels we read. Why not, then, in the technical articles we pour over?



Photo 1: That's a saw!

What makes a good action shot? First and foremost – authenticity. The best action photos are taken during the commission of an actual procedure, with you (the subject of the photo) focused on the job at hand and not posing for the camera with a tool held motionless and you with a silly smile on your face. In photo 1 above, I was using a saw with a 12" blade to cut a tightly glued top off a Steinway upright. The picture was taken by Dave as I was mid-way through the cut, and I was focusing on the powerful saw in my hands and definitely not thinking about the camera! This was my first go-around with this particular saw and the size of the blade (and the teeth!) really got my attention!

Secondly, an action shot requires motion of some sort to be really effective. Although the movement of the saw in photo 1 is not apparent, the spray of sawdust

coming off the front of the saw is, as is more clearly seen in the blown-up portion below (photo 2).



Photo 2: Sawdust is flying!

Getting a shot showing action can be relatively simple at times, depending on the procedure involved. The shot of me sawing the top off the Steinway was an easy one – Dave snapped several perfectly good photos as I cut from one side to the other, all of which clearly showed the outpouring of sawdust coming from the front of the saw.

At other times, a procedure can be a really challenge to photograph. If a repair procedure is quick, snapping the shutter at just the right moment can be tricky.



Photo 3: Timing is everything.

In photo 3, I wanted a photo showing the drilling of a pinblock. The blade is spinning, of course, but to highlight the drilling action, I wanted chips to be flying when the shutter was snapped. The trouble was, the drilling motion only takes a couple seconds, and whether or not the camera captures the chips flying depends on coordinating the motion of drilling with the snapping of the shutter.

To compound the challenge was the fact that when I drilled this block, I was alone in the shop – no one to assist with the picture while I did the drilling. I set up my camera

on my tripod, put the timer on 10 second delay, and waited until the light started blinking to drill. Unfortunately, it was still blinking when I finished drilling the hole and was backing the bit out. It ended up requiring a half dozen takes, but I got the shot I wanted.



Photo 4: Too slow.

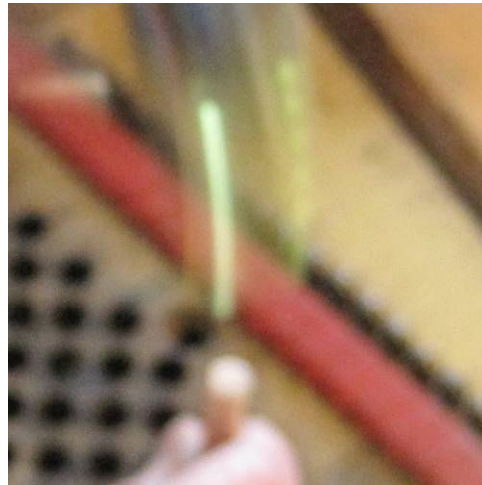


Photo 5: Too fast.

For action shots featuring hand motion, you may have to slow things down a bit for the sake of the photo, especially if you're not using flash. So, for example, if you're pounding pins with a ball peen hammer, or brushing on a finish, try taking several shots at various speeds of motion to get the effect you're looking for. A shot showing your tool frozen in mid-air (photo 4) is not particularly effective but neither is one in which the tool is a blur across the image (photo 5). A photo in which it's obvious that the tool is in motion in relation to the background (but still is definable as a particular tool) works best (photo 6).



Photo 6: Just right.

2. POV Shots:

Any gamer or extreme sport enthusiast is familiar with the POV (point of view) shot is. The camera is mounted to look at the world as through the eyes of the character in the thick of the action. So, for example, a chap leaping off a cliff with a camera strapped to the top of his helmet films his descent so that you (the guy sitting in the armchair) can get the thrill of the experience without the danger (except for the occasional heart attack!) While admittedly this is not the type of shot one would use very often in articles describing piano procedures, if the situation arises where it can be put to good use, why not give it a try?

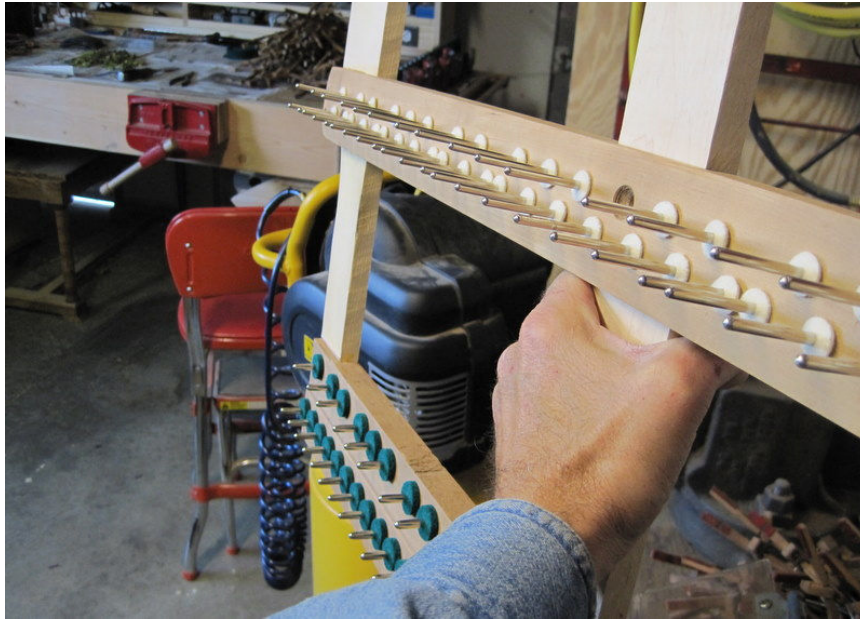


Photo 7: Coming through!

To illustrate how it might be used, consider photo 7. This shot was originally used in a photo journal I put together for a customer to give a transition between the woodworking end of the repairs (the key frame needed remanufacturing due to mouse damage), which was done in one room of the shop, and the keytop work which was done in another room. Obviously, I could have just mentioned the change in locale, but the picture added a bit of variety to the narrative.

3. Relative Size Shots:

At times in writing a technical piece, you have the need to clarify the size of an object being described, especially if the material is intended for a lay audience. If it's something that a mention of inches or feet (or centimeters or meters) can be used to pin down the size with, a simple number will likely suffice (as in, "A 6" crescent wrench is shown being used here."). However, if the object is extremely small or large a more effective approach might be to show the subject matter in a photo in conjunction with another object of a well-known size

The first time I can recall seeing this done was when I saw "Star Wars" for the first time. If you recall the moment that the Death Star comes into view from the Millennium Falcon. Hans Solo, Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi all assume at first

that it's a moon – but then the awful reality hits them. “That’s no moon,” Kenobi breathed softly. “That’s a space station.”*



Photo 8: The Death Star (Wikipedia)

What brings the gigantic size of the Death Star home to the viewer is the contrast to the size of the Millennium Falcon (a known quantity in the movie – pretty big in its own right) as it approaches the giant space ship(Photo 8). The Falcon appears to grow smaller and smaller as it's drawn towards the ship until it's just a mere speck by comparison. You (as a person sitting in the movie theater) are thinking, “Oh my God!” as you hunker down further into your seat.

In the shop, very small objects are more likely to be the subject material of an article than anything of an extremely large nature. As such, using photos to compare the size of a part or a tool may occasionally be an effective approach. Take brass butt plates, for example:



Photo 9: A thimble full of brass.

One might mention their size in terms of a fraction of an inch, but a photo of brass butts filling a thimble (the known quantity) makes their size easier to grasp and remember (photo 9).

*Quote from STAR WARS, by George Lucas



Photo 10: A screw and one thin dime.



Photo 11: Felt and a stack of dimes.

Photos 10 and 11 show two additional examples of how relative size may be used for clarification. Photo 10 shows just how small the screws used for hammer spring replacements are by comparing in size to a single dime. Photo 11 shows just how thick back rail felt is, this time using a stack of dimes for as the known quantity.

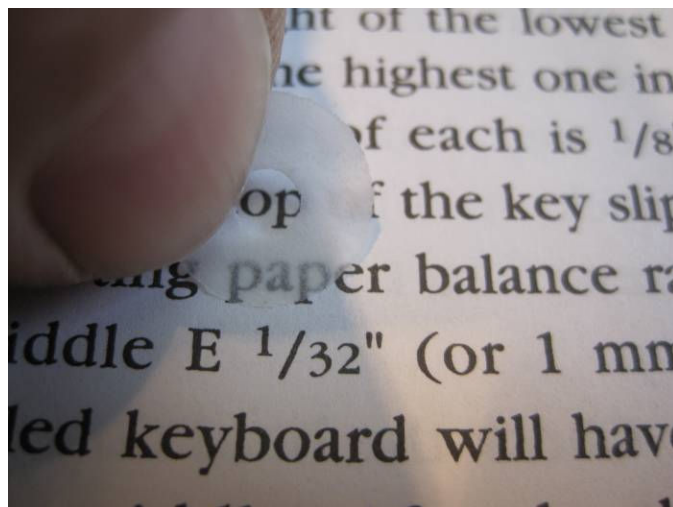


Photo 12: A really thin punching.

Photo 12 shows a somewhat different type of photo – a way to show just how thin a .001” paper punching is – not by comparing it to the size of an object, but instead by showing how easily it can be seen through – a variation on a theme, so to speak.

Hopefully, I’ve given enough ideas in this series for using the camera in the shop that a few of you technicians will give it a try if you haven’t done so already. Shop photography is fun, and it can be rewarding as well.

If you find happen to be passing through Iowa on I-35, be sure to give me a shout – I’ll have the coffee pot on!

Chuck Behm is the owner of River City Piano Restorations in Boone, Iowa. He can be contacted at behmpiano@gmail.com.