



Small Shop - Big Results

Take Great Shop Photos – Part 5 (Double Takes)

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Since most of the photos I take in the my shop are intended for the purpose of marketing the various repair services I offer (which to me is the most practical use of shop photography for any technician), I would be remiss if I didn't spend a bit of time discussing what I believe to be the most effective marketing tool attainable with the camera – that of the before / after set of photos.

The powerful impact of before / after photos may be easily demonstrated with an example pair of photos (photos 1 and 2). With just two photographs, the end points of the entire process of ivory keytop restoration can here be seen without the intermediary steps in between, making the improvement achieved all the more dramatic.



Photo 1: Before.



Photo 2: After.

I believe that this intentional juxtaposition of the starting and ending points of a procedure creates a “wow” factor, especially when the difference between the two points is pronounced. (To understand why this is so, consider your reaction when you greet a teenage relative to your home whom you haven't seen since they were small. You're reaction is bound to be much more extreme than if you had seen them on every holiday while they were growing up.) This juxtaposition creates the illusion that a sudden change has taken place, even though a great deal of effort went into the transformation!

How does one go about taking a great set of before and after shots? The good news is that it's not nearly as complicated as taking the type of shot featured in last month's installment (cross-section photography). There are, however, a couple things to remember that will greatly improve the chances of producing highly useful photographs.

This may sound silly to some, but the number one rule for a good set of before / after photos is to simply remember to take the before shot. I don't know how many times I've gotten a project in the shop in which I've torn into the job, only to slap myself on the forehead at some point when I realize that I missed the perfect opportunity to do a photo shoot featuring the process involved. Without a photo of the beginning point of the procedure, photographs of the later steps aren't going to mean as much!

If at all possible, have your camera out and ready from the get-go, no matter how large or small the project. If, for example, an entire piano is to be delivered to your shop, consider having your camera out for a shot of the instrument being wheeled in (photo 3).



Photo 3: Delivery

Then, remember to have your camera handy (with the lens cover off and with the batteries fully charged) once again when the piano is picked up again (photo 4) for an interesting pair of photos.



Photo 4: Pick up.

Photos such as these can stand alone, or can serve to illustrate a foreword and afterword for a photo journal of an entire piano restoration. The key is having the camera on the ready both times. Asking your delivery men to stand by while you fetch your camera (or charge up the batteries) would not be in good form! Be ready to go!

A second rule of thumb is that in order to emphasize the improvement obtained by a particular repair or procedure, the more desperate the condition of the project at hand (whatever that project might be) at the beginning of the process, the better. Looking back at photo 1, for example, notice how the missing keytops and

overall grimy appearance surviving tops make the contrast to the finished keyset all the more dramatic. If the keys in the first photo had been all there, but merely in need of a simple cleaning and polishing, the effectiveness of the photo set would not be as great.



Photo 5: As Dave (who works in the shop) said when he first saw this mess, "Holy cow!"

Photo 5 illustrates the importance of the first two rules. I almost missed getting this photo at all – I was on the way out the door as Dave had just started the on the disassembly of the above pedal assembly for reconditioning. He had, in fact, removed the brackets and sustain pedal before it occurred to me that I might want a picture. I got the camera out, and asked if he would mind reassembling it to the point where he could get a good before picture. He did so (after I had left), but in the process put the right hand brackets on backwards (explaining the misaligned pedals).

The photo Dave took of the truly desperate beginning point of the pedal assembly helped showcase the end product (photo 6), but I nearly missed the golden opportunity to take advantage of rule two by almost forgetting rule one!

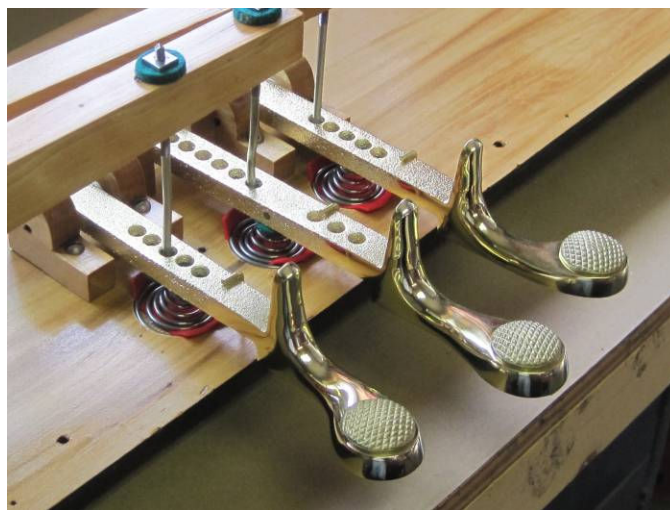


Photo 6: Much better!



Photo 7: Before treatment



Photo 8: After treatment

Although before / after photos most often deal with cosmetic issues, other types of success stories may be documented as well as long as there is some type of visual component to the improvement. In photos 7 and 8, for example, the improvement in torque readings due to an application of C.A. glue on the pinblock is clearly shown. In photo 7 the torque wrench showed 20 inch pounds of torque for an untreated pin. Photo 8 documents the improvement – 60 inch pounds of torque once the pinblock had been treated – a visual (and effective) way to show the success of the treatment.

Once you start looking for potential subject matter for before / after photos, all sorts of situations seem to arise where they may be quite useful. To illustrate this, consider photos 9 and 10 below. The point I wanted to make with these photos was the importance of the condition of the surface of hammers on the tone of the piano, showing a how a badly worn hammer wraps around the strings, in contrast to a hammer producing a clean blow:

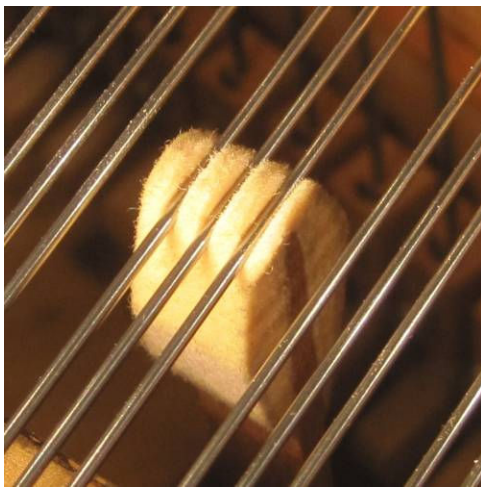


Photo 9: All wrapped up.

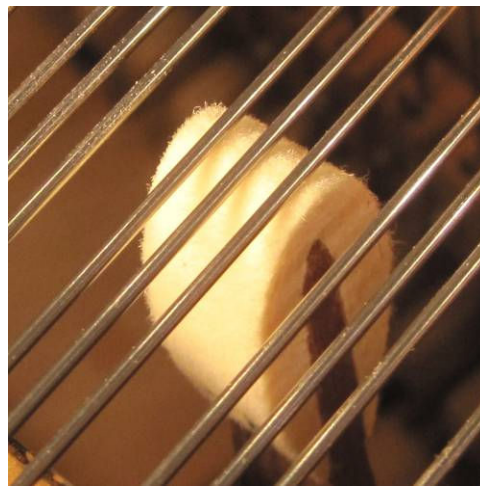


Photo 10: A cleaner blow.

After I had taken and printed the set of photos (which are actually of two different hammers), I found that explaining the importance of the condition of the hammers was much simpler. If a good photograph is worth a 1000 words, these two photos have certainly proved their worth by saving me a ton of words!

As far as other creative ways to display before / after photos (besides the simple side-by-side method illustrated already), you might consider the following methods:

1. Before and after in one shot:



Photo 11:

If you are duplicating a part where you still have the original part is still intact when you get done, taking a single photograph of the new part and the old part along side each other is effective (photo 11). I think that this type of shot really captures the attention of the viewer in that (for me, at least) the eye goes back and forth between the two versions of the part, (perhaps looking for discrepancies?)

2. Before and after using insets:



Photos 10, 11: Capstan before and after polishing. Photos 12, 13: Case work before and after finishing.

For a simple subject, such as the brass capstan (Photos 10 and 11), or the sample of casework (Photos 12 and 13) a small inset of the before shot placed inside a larger photo works to get the point across in a minimum of space. The method seems to work the best if the alignment of the subject matter in the two photos match. Putting a border

around the photos, as is done with black lines in the photo set to the left and grey lines in the photo set to the right, clarifies the fact that there are in fact two photos involved.

3. Before and after with the “ABRACADABRA” effect.

Back in the 1970’s and 80’s, I began carrying around a packet of 4 X 6 photos in my tool case of before and after shots taken of pianos I had refinished in my shop. When a customer was interested in the idea of having their piano refinished / restored, I would sit down with them at their kitchen table and flip through the set.

I noticed time and time again during these impromptu presentations that the photo sets that elicited the most dramatic response were those where the positioning of the pianos in the before and after shot was identical. With the before photo on the top of the stack, I would whip it off revealing the after shot below it with the piano identically placed in the photo. Oftentimes, I noticed that the customer would catch her breath, or whisper, “Wow!”



Photo 14: First blush.



Photo 15: The end result.

When the transformation is presented this way (photos 14 and 15), it almost seems magical, as if it came about with absolutely no effort (Ha!). If only it were so! (These two photos show an 1890’s Tryber and Sweetland upright, first as we found it in an unheated outbuilding of an Iowa farm, and then in our shop after extensive work had been done.)

If you would like to stage an “after” photograph so that it matches the “before” photo try this simple method:

- A. Print a copy of the first photograph (draft quality will do for your purposes).
- B. Position yourself with your camera in the approximate position (relative to the piano or the project) where the first photo was taken.

- C. Compare the image in the viewfinder or on the display screen with the photo, moving the camera around until the angles you see in the display screen match the angles in the photo.
- D. Use a tripod if possible, but if you're holding the photo in one hand and the camera in the other without benefit of a tripod, set the timer on the camera so that you can hold it motionless when it snaps the picture.

For my own refinishing / rebuilding business, before / after photos of piano projects that have come in and out of the shop have made a huge difference in the amount of work that we book. My goal is to keep Dave (seen in numerous "Small Shop" photos) busy all the time, and at the moment I have enough work booked to keep him going for quite some time in the future. When customers see these photos, they start imagining what their own piano (or action, keyset, etc.) could look like, if we were to work on it for them. I'm hoping you'll consider using before and after shots in building your own business.

Next month's installment, "Odds and Ends" will wrap up the shop photography series with a discussion of three miscellaneous types of photos that you might want to try your hand at.

If you find yourself in our neck of the woods, be sure to stop by. The coffee pot's plugged in and the Folgers is perking!

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