

Visual Storytelling for **Healthcare Marketers**



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Introduction

Marketers know that compelling visual content has the power to inspire, entertain and educate their followers. On top of that, content-hungry audiences expect top-notch visuals from the brands and institutions they love. This means marketers must deliver in a big way — and the healthcare industry is no exception.

Today, it's critical that healthcare marketers and creatives rise to the occasion to engage their audiences with engaging photos and videos. Strong visuals, after all, can be used for a number of reasons, including:

- Marketing
- Internal communications
- Fundraising
- Education
- Communication with patients and families

Photos and videos also have the power to create connections, foster dialogue and inspire action. This is increasingly important as certain audiences like millennials are most receptive to messaging that aligns with their values and creates a sense of community.

Plus, health and wellness is a hot topic. We're seeing more and more hospitals elevate their visual storytelling to help educate and spark conversation. Hospitals regularly turn to Instagram, for example, to encourage conversation through great photography and relevant hashtags.

Institutions like Cleveland Clinic are shining examples of visual content marketing in the healthcare space. Their content hub, [Health Essentials](#), addresses common concerns, myths and health trends and uses bright photography to highlight resources and make complicated topics easier to digest.

Other institutions like the [University of Maryland Medical System](#) and the [University of Mississippi Medical Center](#) are bringing visuals to the forefront on their websites. They showcase full bleed images across their homepages and various subsections. The images are bright, aspirational and do a great job illustrating health and wellness.

With the need for visual storytelling on the rise across the healthcare industry, use this guide to learn how other healthcare professionals are sourcing and creating visual content, organizing their assets and engaging their audiences online. And, get tips and inspiration to tighten up your team's own visual storytelling strategy and make lasting connections with your followers.



Sourcing and Creating Visual Content

If visual content is key for helping hospitals and healthcare facilities create connections with their followers, then how are organizations sourcing and producing these creative assets?

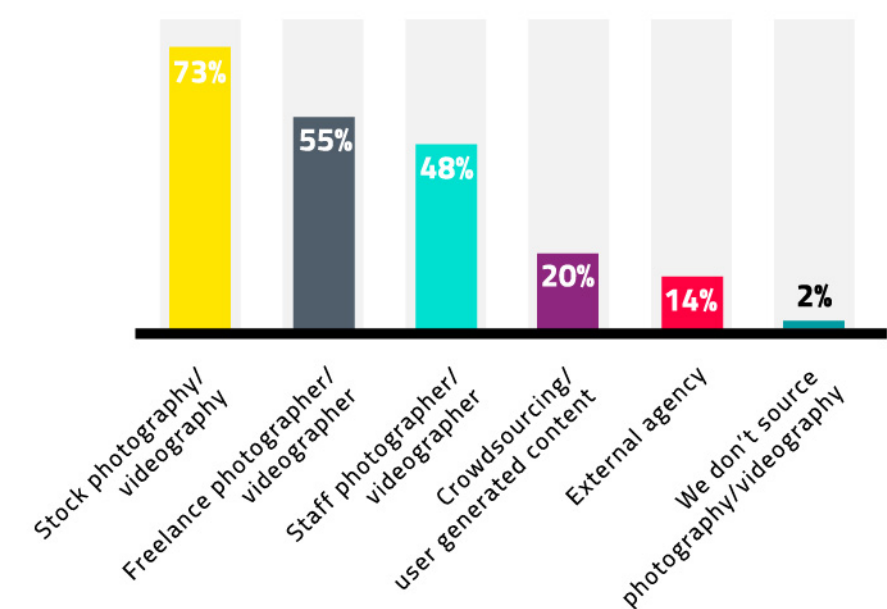


The Perelman Center for Advanced Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, One of six hospitals in their system.

Depending on the resources available, some healthcare organizations may rely solely on stock sites, while others may opt to hire internal staff or freelancers. For many, it’s a combination.

In our [2019 Report: Engaging Your Audience with Visual Content](#), we learned that 73% of healthcare marketers turn to stock sites when sourcing photography and videography.

What is your organization’s method for sourcing photography/ videography? Participants could choose all that apply.



Healthcare organizations may rely more heavily on stock photography than other industries, but it’s interesting to note that almost 50% are using in-house staff photographers and videographers to create branded content. The use of stock photography throughout the industry isn’t going away, but we’re starting to see a shift toward in-house content creators.

Full-time staff members who create photos and videos for your institution have a unique advantage. Because they are immersed in your company and culture, they can tell stories from your brand’s point of view. They have behind-the-scenes access to pull back the curtain while always keeping the hospital’s best interests at heart.

Avoiding “Free” Photos

While so many healthcare institutions continue to turn to stock sites to source photography, it’s important to avoid platforms that give away free content. Free content poses a number of potential legal problems that organizations need to consider.

[Unsplash](#), for example, is a huge repository of free photos that helps the parent company market their creative freelancer marketplace. The images can be downloaded and used for any purposes as long they are not resold, but there is one huge caveat. The images do not include any model or property release information.



The Perelman Center for Advanced Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, One of six hospitals in their system.

A photographer may or may not have obtained a model release — and there's no way of knowing. If you download an image that has not been released and use it in a marketing piece for your hospital, you could be sued for infringing on the subject's right of publicity. Without consent of the model, you can't use their likeness. The issue isn't theoretical. A number of companies – including Apple – have been sued for using content from Unsplash that wasn't properly released. The takeaway? Avoid free stock websites if you can.



Working With a Photographer: Chris Rakoczy

Chris Rakoczy is a [documentary event photographer](#) based in Hartford, Connecticut. He works closely with hospitals to produce images that are used for brochures, editorial stories and more. We interviewed Chris to learn what it's like photographing for a hospital, plus advice he has for healthcare marketers working with photographers for the first time.

1. What's your goal as the hospital's photographer? Walk us through what you're trying to accomplish.

Working for a hospital, photography falls into several categories, including:

- Simple headshots to show individuals on brochures, organization charts or web directories
- Internal education or recognition events such as conferences or awards
- Editorial to illustrate a story for internal or external publication

While the first two are documentary in nature, the third is more creative and has a goal other than capturing what happened. In those cases, my goal is to support the story by showing elements, environments and interactions that serve as examples of the story's focus.

For example, we may show the compassionate interaction a nurse has with a patient, or the life activity a patient was able to resume after a successful procedure. In those assignments, I like to talk with the subject for a bit to acclimate them to me and the camera. It also helps me understand what's



Photo by Chris Rakoczy © 2019 Hartford HealthCare

important. Meanwhile, I try to see how the environment we're in could support the story we're trying to tell.

I'm sometimes in places I've never been before with a minimum of gear, and I need to find ways of adapting on the fly to create an image. Examples could be a patient on a weight loss journey in their kitchen with a selection of healthy foods, a man finally able to ride his bicycle again after prostate surgery or a father and son who share a kidney playing basketball in their driveway.

Or I'm in places that are so cluttered, busy and congested, like nurses stations or patient rooms, that the opportunities for a "good picture" seem all but lost until you really start to look around and force yourself to see things differently. And of course, I'm often in auditoriums, lobbies and conference rooms that I've been a hundred times and simply know what settings to use to get the shots I need to get. From assignment to assignment, there are elements of both fresh creativity and tried-and-true repeatability.

2. Do you have a specific kind of aesthetic or message you're trying to communicate through your photos?

I lean towards Rembrandt lighting, which is directional, soft lighting that looks a little enhanced from reality. Most of the light in a hospital is terrible — with mixed color temperatures, brightness, patchy, top-down and generally unusable as the only source of light. I don't see a lot of places around here that I can shoot with totally natural light, so I almost always "double light" with an off-camera flash on a stand.

That said, I try to make sure my lighting doesn't look fake, unless I'm going for a more dramatic rendition. I'll look for windows, try to match existing color temperatures, use key and fill to create a little shape without calling too much attention to it. I'll still often have to process higher-value images with masks and brushes and adjustments to further refine them.



Photo by Chris Rakoczy © 2019 Hartford HealthCare

3. When taking photos of patients, how do you navigate people who are sick and vulnerable? What's your approach to these sensitive situations?

We don't take pictures of patients who are in really bad shape. That wouldn't make much sense from a marketing perspective. We want to portray people successfully recovering or recovered, who have a good prognosis, or are already transitioned out of acute care.

If I do have to shoot a current patient, I don't like to be the one asking them for permission to photograph. It puts them on the spot, and I believe it can make them feel obligated and or taken advantage of. I always recommend that a provider – typically a nurse – who already has a relationship with the patient ask in advance, even if it's only a few minutes before. They already have a rapport and are sensitive to the patient's needs, appearance and personality. Once they get permission, they introduce me and we have them sign a Patient Media Consent Form. I gauge and adjust my interaction with them – somber, humble or upbeat, humorous – on how they're presenting with their nurse.

It's not just the patients you have to be sensitive to, however. I'm often shooting in a care unit where patients' Private Health Information (PHI) is all over the place on charts, computer screens, dry mark boards, etc. You have to be aware of those in foreground and background, eliminate them from your frame, obscure them with shallow depth of field, or as a worst case, obscure them in post-processing later. Since the penalties for violation of privacy information can be steep, I much prefer to ensure that no PHI is visible or readable in-camera, as it is possible to forget to edit a frame and release it for use with some PHI still intact.

Lastly, PHI isn't just written information. It can even be in the context of a photo. For example, inferring someone has cancer simply because they're near the Infusion Center sign. It's not just about direct patient information you can read, but what story the overall picture tells about the patient.



Photo by Chris Rakoczy © 2019 Hartford HealthCare

4. What advice do you have for healthcare marketers working with photographers for the first time?

My advice would be similar for any marketer working with any photographer for the first time. They should provide enough information for the photographer to be able to do their job in support of your goals. Vague direction and lack of support can result in subpar results and rework.

Also, we've all seen instances of stock photos that depict a stylized version of healthcare and in doing so, portray incomplete equipment and improper technique. There is a lot done in a clinical setting to keep patients safe. When shooting real patients and real providers, we need to portray them in compliance with industry and facility-specific rules and regulations. Personal protective equipment, dress codes, hygiene and sterile field protocols should all be observed. One picture showing something improper could come back to bite you if someone out in the world tries to cite it as an example of the hospital's failure to adhere to proper procedure. Ask the Nurse Managers or Nurse Educators on the unit – they are the best resource for ensuring their team is compliant.

The Need for Photos and Videos

As healthcare marketers confirmed, the need for photos and videos is on the rise in this industry. In fact, 80% said that compared to last year, their need for video had increased, and 64% said their need for photos had increased. This means that marketers must strategize on how to create and source more great content, without relying solely on stock websites to get the job done.

So how are healthcare marketers using photos and videos today? 73% said their main use case for visual content is social media. Top use cases also included advertising, website, PR/media, internal communications and email marketing.

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If almost three quarters of healthcare marketers are using photos and videos primarily for social media, this means that creative teams need to source and share assets that are compelling and relevant to their audience's interests (again, suggesting that healthcare organizations should shift their focus away from stock photography).

As one great example, Beaumont Health in Michigan [produced a video](#) to give their followers an inside look at their expanded facilities. In it, they walk you through a newly renovated Expedited Care Unit, Surgical Suites and Critical Care Unit. The video has an upbeat and approachable feel as you explore the facilities and see the friendly faces of doctors, patients and their families.

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston [turns to Instagram](#) to feature their doctors and raise awareness about important health issues and diseases. Here, at the onset of Sjögren's syndrome Awareness Month, they interview Dr. Kanika Monga to shed light and give background on the condition.

Meanwhile, the team at Penn Medicine reposts [uplifting stories from patients](#) on Instagram. It's a great way to feature user-generated content and inspire their audience with real, heart-warming stories.

Valley Children's Healthcare & Hospital in Central California [uses Twitter](#) to showcase photos of their staff dressed up in costumes to bring smiles to their young patients' faces who are receiving treatment.

Putting real people front and center on social media — including patients and employees — is a common trend among hospitals and healthcare organizations. Because many have preconceived notions that hospitals are intimidating and overwhelming places, these photos help convey a more human, friendly and approachable environment.

DOCTOR'S ORDERS

Sourcing and Creating Visual Content

The use of stock photography in healthcare may not be going away, but try to shift your focus. How can you start to utilize the talents of your team or in-house photographers and designers to create visuals that feel more engaging and in sync with your brand?



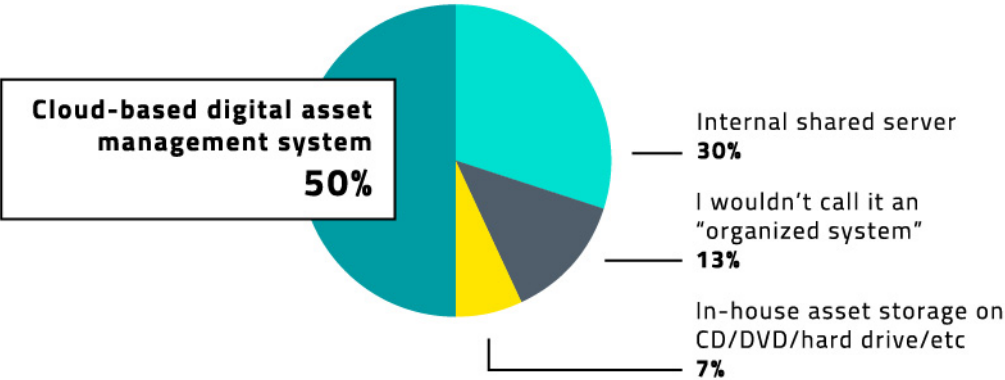
Valley Children's Hospital, [@CareForKids](#)

Organizing Visual Assets

If sharing visual content is fundamental to helping healthcare marketers engage their followers, then how are creative teams making sure they can find that content whenever they need it? Here's what we found.



How would you best describe the system you use to organize your photos and videos?



91% of healthcare marketers also told us that speed is important when looking for an asset to use for marketing purposes. 97% also said that the ability to share assets quickly is more important to their job than compared to previous years.

Clearly, speed is crucial in healthcare marketing. But if you want to find your visual assets quickly, you need to be organized. These findings highlight a major challenge facing healthcare marketers: most healthcare marketers don't have a workflow that is fast enough to meet their needs.

The pace of visual storytelling is changing. Teams with a system in place to share stories quickly will be able to cut through the noise.

How Digital Asset Management Can Empower Your Hospital's Teams and Audience

Health care systems have a number of teams that need access to visual assets. If they don't use a centralized visual media library that is accessible to everyone, they run the risk of visual assets getting stuck in silos.

If you can wrangle content into a centralized location and build standardized practices for accessing the organization's imagery, your team will be set up for success.

A powerful visual asset management system can impact a number of staff members, as well as a number of audiences. A system that's easily accessible and searchable allows marketers, writers, graphic designers and social media managers to find and share assets quickly, saving them hours a week (not to mention, it makes locating photos and videos self-service, and saves the collection manager time on filling image requests). A rich media

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library, paired with efficient processes, streamlines workflow and saves time for staff members across the organization.

But perhaps more important is the end result. Thousands of people consume a healthcare network's content every day. As the brand's storytellers get easier, faster access to high quality photos and videos, communications across the board will improve. That means the organization's broader staff population and community of patients and donors will be drawn in by more compelling, relatable imagery.

The Bottom Line

The return on investment of a robust visual media library, powered by a strong visual asset management system, is the ability to engage your audience with your organization's best stories. Visual assets are crucial to communications with every audience, whether you are sharing stories with your staff, your stakeholders or your community. By centralizing visual assets into one visual media library that is easy for everyone to use, your health care system can improve storytelling across the organization. Visual asset management doesn't just make staff members' jobs easier, it fuels improved communications and helps teams achieve their unified goal of creating a well-informed, healthy community.



Photo by Chris Rakoczy © 2019 Hartford HealthCare

EXAMPLE:

Digital Asset Management at Penn Medicine

Meet Michelle Hinshaw, Director of Creative Services at Penn Medicine. A digital asset management system is key to her team's visual storytelling strategy. She describes why having a cloud-based library like PhotoShelter is so important their workflow.

"We are a large health system of almost 50,000 employees with facilities in Southern Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Because of that (and the fact that these facilities are not on the same servers) we needed an easier way to share basic photos. Having a web-based platform is ideal since it crosses facilities and also provides a portal where people can access during off hours and grab photos for presentations and projects.

In PhotoShelter, we've set up our galleries in the same way we set up our service lines in our project management system and job archiving system. This helped create a familiar structure for employees to start their search and find the visuals they're looking for. We also set up a robust logo folder with secondary galleries so employees would have a go-to for all types of files as needed. This is all saving my group so many hours."

DOCTOR'S ORDERS

Organizing Visual Assets

When it comes to locating and sharing photos and videos, speed is critical. But if you want the ability to find assets quickly, your content must be organized. Consider using a cloud-based digital asset management platform like PhotoShelter for Brands to speed up the way you organize, manage and share your photos and videos across your team.

Engaging Your Audience

As a healthcare marketer, engaging your audience with useful content is a top priority. When it comes to health and wellness, followers are constantly seeking information and look to hospitals for expertise and guidance. Topics and information can also be convoluted, which means relevant visuals are key to helping clearly communicate a message.



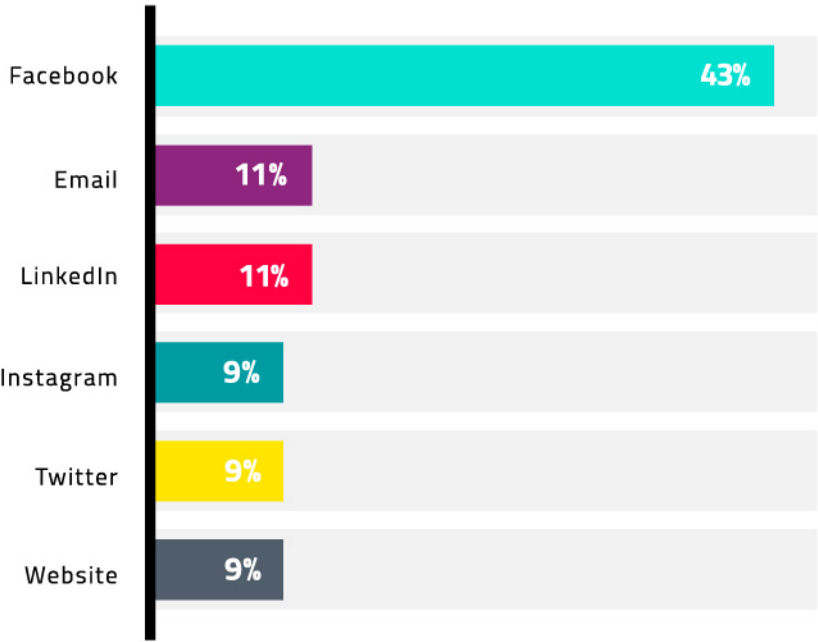
When it comes to communication, hospitals have incredible resources at their fingertips that they can tap into for content, including doctors, physician assistants and nurses. A great tactic is to interview these experts for blog posts, videos, live streams or Instagram stories to cover an array of health-related topics (think: flu season, fighting the common cold, foods to avoid, etc.). If you do interview a doctor for a Facebook video, for example, think about how you might be able to package those tips up into other formats (ie: blog posts or tweets) to give that content a longer shelf life.

Also think about how photography can help bring inspiring moments to life.

“Our visual content strategy is to share authentic memorable moments in time through images,” says Pamela Saunders, Creative Strategist at Beaumont Health in Michigan. “This works particularly well on Instagram. We also find that infographics are helpful to produce digestible content on social media. We store these files in PhotoShelter, our shared library, so we can repurpose and refresh the assets over time.”

Of course, you want to tailor your content to the platform where you’re sharing it. So which marketing channel is producing the highest engagement for healthcare marketers? Facebook pulled ahead, take a look.

Which digital marketing channel produces the highest engagement? Here are the top responses.



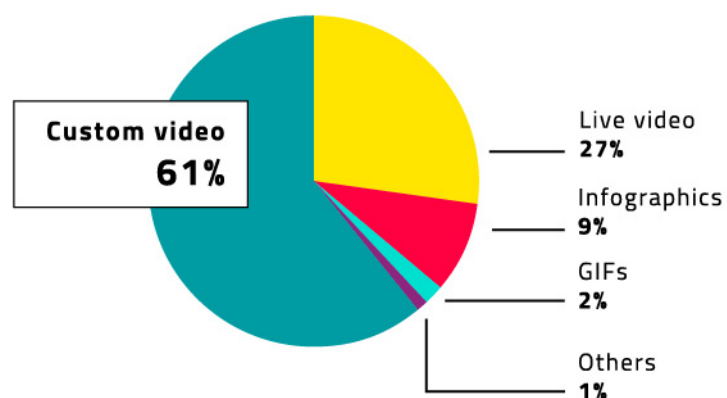
The University of Mississippi Medical Center does a great job featuring native video on Facebook to connect followers with their brand and inspire others to give back. In this [short video](#), for example, former patients gather outside to release green and blue balloons in honor of their organ donors. The video is touching and uplifting — and conveys that through hardship and loss, there is still reason to rejoice and celebrate.

Cleveland Clinic [goes live on Facebook](#) with experts like Dr. Scott Bea to talk about health issues like how to train your brain to cope with anxiety. Interviewing an expert about topical health issues and going live on Facebook helps organizations connect with followers and meet them where they are online. The takeaway? Take advantage of the resources you have. Use those resources to develop content that addresses pain points and answers the questions your audience is asking.

Producing Video

Although 80% of healthcare marketers told us that their need for videos is increasing, many say that custom video is also the hardest content format to produce.

What type of visual content is hardest for your team to produce?



Today your team is sitting on a treasure trove of great stories and videos can be the vehicle to help those stories come to life. In our exclusive webinar, [Behind the Scenes: Content Marketing Video Workflow, Tips & Ideas to Steal](#), learn firsthand how to produce video to elevate your hospital's brand and inspire your followers with amazing content — and do it all on a budget. You'll walk away with a step-by-step video workflow, tips for shooting video, conducting interviews and editing, plus tactics for creating better marketing videos, whether you're a beginner or a more seasoned video producer.

DOCTOR'S ORDERS

Engaging Your Audience

As the need for video content increases, come up with a plan to feature doctors, patients and nurses in short video Q&As on social media. You have a tremendous amount of expertise at your fingertips, which is invaluable for your information-hungry followers.

The Treatment Plan

If healthcare marketers want to make strong connections, inspire and educate their followers, then creative visual storytelling is essential. The trend toward visual storytelling in healthcare will only continue, especially as the need for videos and photos is already dramatically on the rise.

80% of healthcare marketers say their results are better when using visuals in their marketing, versus when they don't. This means that moving forward, photos and videos can no longer be an afterthought in your marketing, internal communications, fundraising and more. Marketers should seek to create and share visual stories that are humanizing, encourage conversation and address the questions and pain points of their audience. A visual-first content strategy will help better educate your audience about health and wellness and solidify your expertise and reputation in the marketplace.



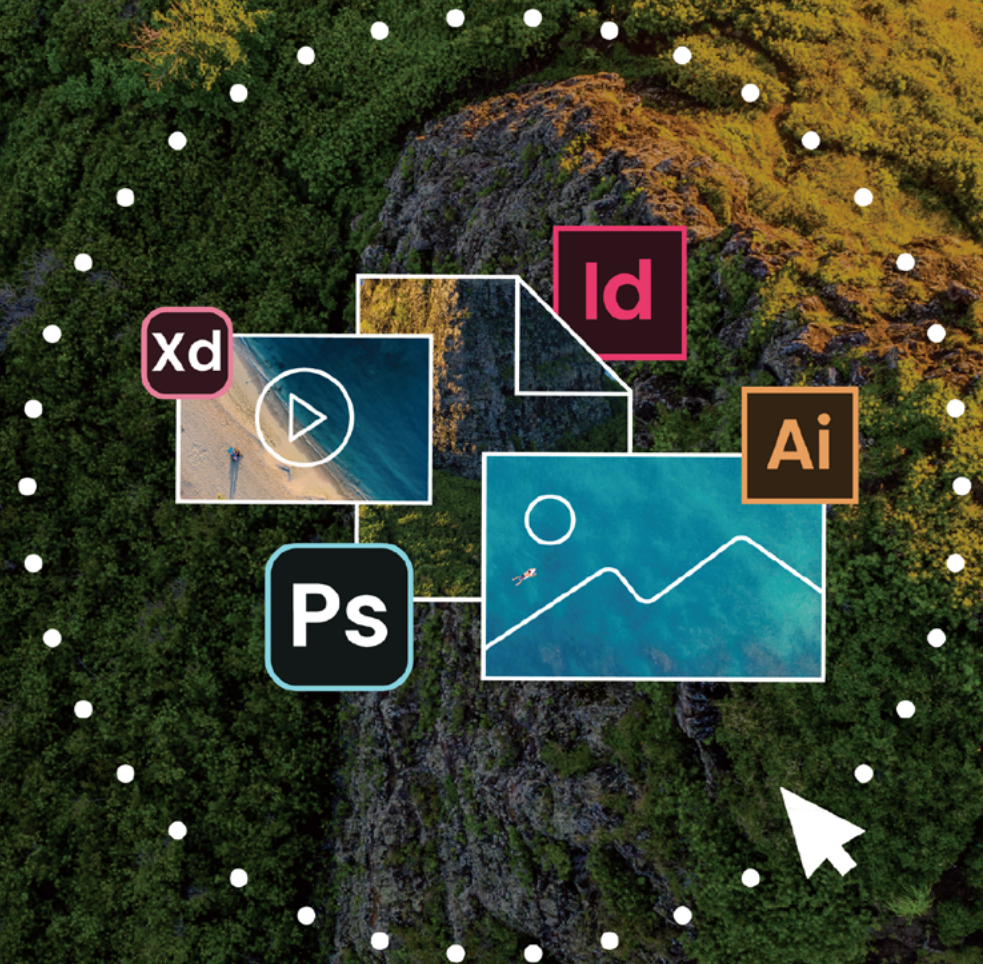
Help Your Creative Team Thrive with PhotoShelter

Are you ready to explore the power of dynamic asset management for your brand?

Our team at PhotoShelter is on a mission to help creative people thrive. As you work to engage your audience and fuel your business, let us take work off your plate.

Get started today, and unlock the possibilities of your brand's biggest moments.

GET STARTED



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