

James Taylor

Hey there, it's James Taylor and I'm delighted today to have on the show John DeMato. John DeMato is a portrait and virtual photographer who serve speakers, authors and expert based business owners to create persuasive visual storytelling that motivates their audiences to care, connect and take action. I am a huge fan of John and his work, as are many of many top speakers from all over the world. And I'm really excited to have him on today to talk about the work that he does and how he basically helps other speakers tell better stories about ourselves and what and what we what we actually do is living. So John, welcome onto the show.

John DeMato

Thank you for having me, James. Always a pleasure talking to you, my friends. So

James Taylor

shame is a what's happening in your world at the moment.

John DeMato

Well, uh, despite the fact that the world's been a little upside down and sideways, we've been managing to figure some things out and kind of roll with the punches. My lifestyle portrait business took a bit of a header over the past couple of months and fortunately, I was able to spark some inspiration and create something that still allows me to be useful and serve the speakers that I work with. So I'm very fortunate for that.

James Taylor

That unit you and I met I think it was 2018 I'm gonna say 2017 2018 when we did a shoot together in New York City, I been working there and then I I reached out to you, I can't remember there was no speaker. I think it told me about you, maybe Geoffrey shore, and we got together and I was you know, I'm used to like doing photo shoots and speaker with with photographers, and you get maybe three, or maybe four usable shots from from a day. I was blown away. I mean, I think in the shoot that we did, we almost had like 100 shots or something. It was incredible. And that's kind of what you're known for in terms of your portrait work with photographers is just basically creating enough content content for them to use over the course of a year.

John DeMato

Yeah, yeah. I mean, the fact is, is that a speaker's life, you know, although many of us are grounded now. But despite that, you know, when things are normal travel, you're busy, you have multiple tentacles to your business, you don't have a lot of time to continuously invest. So it's

important that when you do get in front of the camera, how many ever times you do that you maximize that value by getting as much out of it as you can.

James Taylor

And I think after we did that, I started seeing your work because you have a style, you know, in terms of photographer, and I thought, Oh, that looks like John's work. Oh, that looks like you know, there were there was there was something about it, there's, there's a certain thing with lighting and a certain kind of feel and emotion as well. So tell tell us about some of the speakers that you've worked with many, many, many of them, we would actually know ourselves.

John DeMato

Yeah. Well, I've been fortunate enough to be interested. Do the into the speaker community through people such as yourself and Sylvia, did you so she introduced me to the National Speakers Association here in the United States and that pretty much opened the door to me to meet a lot of amazing speakers like her and Phil Jones is also a an amazing human being and a great clients. I've worked with other people, like just pet it also within the community. I've also done a lot of virtual work recently with some other speakers such as Vin Jang, and Aaron Kane, Ty Bennett, people that just really blow me away in terms of their presentation and it just makes my life easier photographing them because they're so awesome at what they do.

James Taylor

So I'm not very good at it because I was having a conversation with a speaker the other day and I said, You've got to the speaker had made a real pivot from doing a lot of in person keynotes all around the world and suddenly, like many of us can stuck at home. And they're doing lots of virtual keynotes, lots of virtual workshops as well. I solicit you've got to have a conversation with john and work with john, to get a visual representation of what you're doing. I mean, he's at the moment he's doing like little screenshots and, and I think maybe using little clips of things didn't look great. So I was trying to explain to him what you do when it comes to the virtual so we all know that the kind of photoshoots that speakers we get, you know about speaking on stages or, or you know, in some kind in our offices or whatever. But describe that the virtual thing. First of all, tell us how did it come about? How did that first gig come from, for being a virtual photographer? And then tell us about when you start having conversations with speakers? what they see how you describe what you do,

John DeMato

right? Well, the reason that it was even born in the first place was because I was I was sick. I was getting over Coronavirus. I wasn't feeling great. I hadn't picked up the camera in about four weeks. And the NSA, New York City chapter was putting on its first virtual event. And quite frankly, I wanted to feel useful in a little bit more like myself. So I just picked up the camera and I was in my office watching the presentation, Jill shuffle bind was speaking at the time. And I'm

like, you know what, let me get a couple shots to Jill just for the hell of it. And I snapped the couple I looked at the camera the back of the camera, I'm like, wow, these these actually don't suck as much as I am and so I decided to shoot the entire program. And I think Chad highness was on that one. There was a couple of other there was another speaker I think I don't hundred percent remember, but either way, I shot the whole program. And the next day, I've wanted to again feel like kinda like myself, so I decided to write a social post, which I hadn't done in weeks. I put it out. And the next thing you know, I got a ton of reaction from a lot of speakers. And I thought to myself, this might be something. And from that I kind of consulted with some other speakers just pet it was actually one of them. She was one of the first ones I want to talk to about this. And she gave me some ideas on what would be important for speakers to have why these photos are important. And the biggest takeaway from that conversation was, it's about creating image content that speakers can share with meeting planners and organization heads and people who book keynotes or facilitators of any type. And basically what they want to see is the experience that the speaker will create for their audience. And that's how the whole thing was born. And then that's how the whole thing kind of steamrolled and developed from there. And the way that I present it to speakers when I talk to them is about the experience, but it's also the reality of your situation right now, if you're migrating to online and doing virtual presentations, these photos serve the same exact functions as your branded lifestyle portraits, and your live event stuff. Because this is what your business is now and to a certain extent to the future when people, you know, keep this within their repertoire. But either way, the point being is that you need to put out photos that represent who you are and who you serve, and why you do what you do and still have that expression and still have that artistry and still have that ability to capture your audience's attention.

James Taylor

I think the interesting thing about you as well is something we've worked together, we can start off talking about like brand, you know, what you want the brand to say what there's a whole series of quite strategic decisions being made along the way as we were kind of going back and forth, which is not frankly You know we've all been in this if you had to do photo shoots you you can turn up the photographer okay stand there maybe change that shirt and but you can have i do i think you call them as a strategy calls or I don't what you call those, those discussions you go into with the speaker or the thought leader, where you really start to kind of drill into like, What are you trying to say? What is the story that you're trying to say with images? Yeah,

John DeMato

yeah, it's a precession strategy calling it manifests itself in different ways depending upon how I work with a particular client and from where they're coming from in terms of what service they work with me on but But the main point to all of that is there is no show up and shoot or even with virtual there is no here's the zoom link and go make it happen. There is lengthy conversation beforehand because I need to know who you are in order to know what types of expressions I need to capture on your face. What level of artistry I need to include into these photos and how interesting they need to be based on, you know, the the quirks that make you

you and yeah, wardrobe is important. By the way, it's not it's not something that should be dismissed. But it is. It is one piece of the puzzle much like vanity overall is a piece of the puzzle. We need you to look good. But that's not the most important part. That's a foundational element. That's a given not a goal. The goal is to create an image content that will visually punctuate the sentiment of every single story you want to share, whether it's the copy on your website, whether it's social posts, blog posts, whether it's a slide in your presentation of a photo for your book, whatever the case may be, whatever, wherever you put your story, your message, your insights part of your framework, you need to have image content that will punctuate visually that sentiment in order to drive people to get people's attention. So that they care, connect, and ultimately take action with you.

James Taylor

Now you have an interesting role in doing that, because you work with so many different thought leaders and speakers and you're, you're inside of those, whether it's the zoom webinars, or those online conferences, virtual conferences that are going on, as well. So you're also seeing probably from a from a photography standpoint, and from an audio standpoint, what looks good on the in the camera, and I'm gonna put my hand up here, I'm not a big fan of green screen. And, and I love it for certain things. By I feel there's a real danger that we've got so focused on the tech stuff that we've put the aesthetic out of the window a little bit, or you can feel jarring at times if it was being it's being used for just the sake of using it. So from your perspective, as someone who has to shoot these, these sessions, what are you finding is working with Once you take those shots, you can look back and think, ah, this is interesting, these kind of backgrounds or this kind of setting or, or this type of setup what what's working for you?

John DeMato

Well, well, from my vantage point green, the virtual background can either be really cool when it's lit well, and there's separation between the speaker and the background so that there's no, there's no spill of the green screen on the person. So they look like the Incredible Hulk, which I've seen a million times or when they move their arms. It's not lit well, so anytime they move their arms, you can see the aliasing around their arms, and you could see where they're what the actual background looks like. So that looks crazy. And it is jarring and you're right. So it's a dicey proposition if you don't really have the proper lighting to do it. But what has worked, I mean, I've seen over 80 of these events, and I've seen some amazing stuff and a lot of it is that simple. As dressing up your office decluttering the background behind your head, creating contrast between what you're wearing and what the color of your background is so that you pop off the background. The bookshelf thing is great. A clean wall is great. I mean, I've seen people just use plain blue walls or plain blue seamless paper or plain white, seamless paper. I've seen people go all the way above and beyond with neon and colors and digital writing boards and all of this stuff. But the most important thing to keep in mind is that what you want to do as a speaker is stand out in the frame 100% of the time, which means whatever you do in that background needs to support that ultimate goal. Because at the end of the day, if it's just you

talking about the lighting on your face is clean. You look good. There's no any weird distraction That's the most important thing, start from there and then build out.

James Taylor

And then what about, you know, obviously, many of the speakers, they're using webcams, some of them may have nice kind of DSLR, high quality kind of cameras with nice lenses that they're using to get little bit of depth of field as well. If someone's just kind of starting on this process, and they're doing more presentations, and they know, let's say they're gonna be working with you, and in a month's time on a project, any advice you would give them in terms of the technical at the camera that they use, for example?

John DeMato

Yeah, sure. Jeff Shaw, Phil Jones, they use DSLRs. It looks great. I saw them prior to using it and the quality differences definitely there. But what I would say is this, don't invest. If you're going to do virtual photos, don't invest in the technology. It's just for the photos. It's not worth it. If this is something that is bigger. That eye you know, you want to present yourself with a little higher resolution with a little depth of field you know or blurry background as you guys say with the blurry background. Yeah, yeah, I'll simplify. Yeah. So if you want if you want the blurry background, you know, then you then and you plan on being on getting paid speaking virtual gigs, yeah, I'll give you the tips. You know, I'll give you the, the HDMI cable you need the DSLR camera that works best in auto and how to frame it and what to frame out and all of that jazz and I go over that with some of the speakers prior to I've had several of those kind of sessions but here's the thing, if it's not that big of a deal for you, and you maybe just want to upgrade to say a couple hundred dollar Logitech that's cool to the point is this. You just need to feel comfortable about the way you're presenting yourself. And then however that looks, that's when you call someone like me to photograph you. Yeah, that's one.

James Taylor

Yeah, it was interesting. I mean, I remember when I was done, we obviously I've been doing the virtual thing for cloud too many years. But I remember when we started doing things while I was using more multi cameras, I just knew I wanted to have a little bit more movement and just, you know, make it more especially the longer sessions. I liked having like maybe three cameras, I could go between a wide shot and an up close and maybe something or even an overhead shot. Yeah. Yeah. And, and I was thinking, God, this is gonna cost me a fortune here. I buy like three digit DSLR you know, I only had one DSLR but let's say I get another. They were like 1500 dollars or \$2,000. By the time you had lenses, and in the end, I had a conversation with one of my speakers. You remembers Tom, Tom lightning, and he's even a lot of video stuff in the past. And he gave me a great little tip. You know, this is a kind of hackers tip. He said, go on to eBay and buy two cameras like a handycam cameras that like almost the prosumer versions, like five years ago, they would have been the top cameras. And he said, you can get them, you get like three of them for like a couple hundred bucks. And just get them like color and color match them

and things or something can give you that without having to spend an absolute fortune, and have your one main nice establishing shot with all the depth of field stuff. He said, but a lot of the things that we do, we don't need a big, you know, fuzzy backgrounds or depth of field, because of the rooms that we're shooting in a lot of times when we're doing virtual.

John DeMato

Yeah, if you're doing if you're doing a solid background, the narrow depth of field with the blurry background, it's some consequence, you're not going to see it, it's gonna be useless. In fact, it'll cause problems potentially with the focus on you as you're talking. Yeah, but in terms of the multi camera, I mean, the thing about the multi camera that I've seen that's been very successful is a getting back to the technical piece, just make sure that the two that you buy are in fact the same because when you switch between three that are all completely different, it's going to look weird and all the matching in the world isn't going to match, just FYI. And if one of those chips in one of those sensors is older than the other, you might have to work harder to match those two. Just keep that in mind. I think that's a good point.

James Taylor

I had that with what I was trying to figure out between I use ECAM and also an ATM switcher for switching and for the email I figured you know what would be because I couldn't get one of the lenses just to match and it always looked off and actually thought you know, I'm going to try and do I'm going to try and make that lens black and white and I'm going to strip all the color from and so I'm not going to try and make it look the same thing. And I kind of experimented with that and I almost going to use it now as my at the side camera like when I'm kind of talking off camera like it's like a like a TV now because you obviously your bank For the people that don't know, you worked in TV for many years as well. So some of the stuff you've maybe done in the past is now coming probably pretty useful for you as well.

John DeMato

Well, while having these conversations with people now that now I get to dust off the producing skills, yeah. And here, but here's the thing, though, with that multi camera where I was getting pointing to before was the fact that when you have multi cameras, yes, doing what you do, when you change the vantage point on you from wide to medium to close to three shots or overhead, it creates that visual variety that you want, and that impulse of people getting bored gets lost when you switch switch switch, that's great. But one of the most effective things that I've seen a lot of folks do a multi cam is to they'll have a sitting, they'll have a sitting camera whether whether in front of the just sitting and talking, maybe sharing slides, then they'll cut to a second camera that has a flip chart. You know

James Taylor

This Vin, I think Vin does that Vin Jang

John DeMato

yeah Vin Vin does that yes. And also Clint Pulver did that the other day. He had a he had a, I think it was three cameras. He had one where he was standing in front of a backdrop. The second one was on his, he's a drummer. So he had one on his drum kit straight on. And then he had an overhead that was straight down on the drum kit. And it's just, I mean, listen, like I said, you don't have to start off with like, you know, bells, whistles, confetti, all this crazy stuff. The fact is, is that you just need to look like a badass and confident and know what your stuff and then you start from there and build out. But there's a lot of flexibility with multicam.

James Taylor

And I think one thing that's interesting getting going where we're kind of starting to move from, you know, from us being a speaker on stage where you had that quite a big canvas to work on. So your body movements are much larger generally, than when you come to a studio in a small camera, they're all those little small facial movements like it's like going from being a theatre actor to a film or TV actor, where you suddenly have to go like slightly kind of smaller and more more focused. I remember working with actors some actors before, and they might have a three cam, three cameras in the room shooting a scene. And and it's, I would say this especially the case of female actors, is they would know exactly what lens was on a certain camera. And they knew which lens worked particularly well for them for certain close ups. Oh, is that the such and such camera is that such a such lens, because they knew they had enough. And I'm almost thinking now for other speakers as we have to get. Obviously we're in we're in version 1.0 of this just now. I can see very quickly getting to the stage where speakers not only know like how to do it on stage and that way, but how to use some of those devices that an actor would use and playing with the camera and having a conversation and treating that how that camera was like your best friend. As well,

John DeMato

yes, that's a very good point. And it's something that I've had to actually coach through some of the stuff that I'm doing not not the real in person real audience events, but the stage events that I photographed with clients a lot. And it it really starts with this number one are what are you presenting? Is this a keynote to an audience? Is this a webinar where you're just basically talking to yourself record pre recording it and sharing it? Is it a mastermind group where it's more of a conversation, hotseat kind of thing, those that dictates immediately what you need, how you need to play with the camera. Because if it's if it's like a mastermind conversation thing, just be yourself just be normal. But if it's something that's going to be in front of an audience whether or a live audience watching in or an audience that's going to watch this purchase it or sign up for it or whatever. You need to be on. And a lot of the times when I work with clients to do their full screen speaker shots, you know, and there's nobody here and it's just us. I in fact, I did this yesterday, I prompt my clients to pull up sections of their keynote, and to be cognizant of the fact that your body language still matters. Even if you're sitting. Yeah, you need to move those hands, you need to move that face, you need those pauses, I need to see all of those

things. Because again, as I said earlier, these photos are a representation of what your business looks like right now. And you need to do the same exact things as if you were in front of a room of 700 people.

James Taylor

Now I'm conscious that because this is a audio podcast, people can actually see your work. So we're gonna have links in here as well, but to take us through, let's say if I'm someone listening to this just now, they're a speaker, maybe they've got an upcoming keynote or they're giving a workshop and they really want to use that to be able to do a photo shoot photo shoot Photoshop, or maybe they've got some really want to start promoting their virtual but you don't really need to maybe almost like fake it till you make it and do it do a live type of shoot. Take us through the process of when you work with a speaker, where does it? Where does it start? And what are the stages that you generally go through and speaking?

John DeMato

Well, the first step is I just admit, yeah, this is weird. It's gonna be weird. And it's not the same as doing it live. But it's important. We go, we talk, I, the first part of the strategy that I have with a client is I start with, you know, what, what are they trying to do with these things? Are they just looking to create a landing page and just let people know, hey, speaker, bureau person, hey, meeting planner, this is what I do. And that said, or are they looking to dive a little deeper and create a social strategy? If they're looking to create a social strategy, then we get a little more meaty. Basically what I want to know is, what are the types of presentations that they do is that is the audience usually locked out or brought into these things because that will dictate Whether or not I shoot the Brady Bunch shots, the gallery view all the faces the collection, because my goal in the strategy calls is to kind of identify the key elements in their presentation, whether it's audience, are they using slides? Are they doing live drawings using a tablet? Today? How many cameras do they have? What are the Today's a flip chart, I'm trying to figure out what that presentation looks like so that I make sure that I capture images, fullscreen speaker, speaker with the filmstrip of people on the side filmstrip of the people on the top the audience if the audience is available, and side by side mode with the speaker or the tablet live drawing while they're working. Because my goal much like the branded lifestyle portrait photos or the live event stuff that shoot is to capture that visual variety because we want to be able to sustain them for you know other a sizable amount of time with images of the same event, but from different vantage points, because that's when once I have the elements on their end of what their presentation looks like, if there's an audience, all those things, that's when I take my laptop, get my folding table roll around on the floor and shoot them in different parts of my apartment.

James Taylor

And that's actually important because I think it'd be quite easy to say, Okay, well, so you just take take photos of the Zoom Room or something.

John DeMato

But yeah,

James Taylor

but actually the device, let's say iPad, talk about actually the room this the spacing in which you shoot that because I think it's really important cuz for me as I'm not a speaker, if I'm a client or event professional, and I'm looking at that is suddenly has a more realistic feel. I feel I can imagine myself, you know, so I'm saying this is a vegan now but sell the sizzle, not the steak. It feels like it feels real. Feels like, Oh, I can imagine myself watching that presentation. So you could just briefly describe because you went through that very quickly, like in filming different parts of your room. What in your apartment? Why is that important?

John DeMato

It's, well, it harkens. Well, first of all, you just confirmed what I had said earlier. It's about creating image content that illustrates the experience the viewer would feel if they were tuning in to your presentation at home. Right? So for me, at first, when I first shot those initial shots for NSA, my camera, my computer was tethered to my my office on the desk just the way I work, there was nothing and then the thought of experience, experience experience create the experience Well, they're not going to just watch it on that that's why I include my windows and and my French doors and you know the blinds and shooting on different surfaces and all of that kind of stuff because what that does is it creates that whole vibe, that kind of the scenario. And also, instead of just shooting it against like a white wall or a gray wall, which I could also do, that's not as interesting yet, but when you incorporate outside elements, it adds dimensionality and artistry to the images that captures people's attention. And by the way, it's because of this virtual session that I think I have the most famous apartment in the speaker community now. So many people's photos.

James Taylor

Well, at some some point, I'm going to come and hang out with you. I think the last time we were together, I think we possibly broke a few laws in terms of when we were doing that in person photo shoot of.

John DeMato

Yeah, private property. Yeah. Credit property. Yes. Yes. We're fine. We finally the photos are

James Taylor

so fantastic. So so people, obviously, and it's difficult with it with obviously a podcast interview like this, to really get across what these things look like. So please, we're gonna have a link CEUs people head over to your site and can see what you do. But before we can talk about that

Usually a question I asked all of the speakers isn't normally speakers that we have on the show is I asked them what's in their speaker bag? What isn't that bag that they carry with them to all of their speaking engagements. So your your bag, you know, when we get back to doing live events again, it's going to be a little bit different. So what is in that bag of tricks that you take with you apart from obviously your one movie camera and lens, what the other things that you take with you that maybe speakers don't necessarily think about?

John DeMato

I can't wait to get back to live events. So my mic, my bag actually has two camera bodies for lenses. And I think now we're going to be That's going to be in my bag now moving forward. When

James Taylor

And what about resources or apps or tools are there any in terms of your we have Really can talk about your your mobile kind of creative process in your own role as a creative a thought leader. But are there any online resources or tools or apps that you find particularly useful for the creative work that you did?

John DeMato

The app that I live in? Well first of all, Google Drive is my that's it's my lifeblood, I work off my phone with it. I work off my Chromebook, my laptop, it has everything. Another app that I have found to be extremely useful is my notebook app. That's the one where I write down idea nuggets that popped into my mind throughout various times of the day. And that one really helps kind of fuel my creativity because when I'm in the mood to write something or find I'm working out a an idea for adding to my services, I just jot it down in there. And then when I'm ready to actually entertain the thought of taking action on it, I go right to that app.

James Taylor

So is that is that Just the one that comes with the phone like the iPhone Oh,

John DeMato

no, no, no, it's, it's, it's an outside app that you pay for. It has interesting ways to chapter and Chronicle stuff. And it's, it's more flexible than the regular one on the iPhone.

James Taylor

And then, if you were to recommend, you know, our listeners just now, obviously, most most of our speakers, but we kind of touched on a little bit in terms of thinking about branding about visual identity, visual storytelling as well. If you can recommend maybe one book to our listeners that can maybe just kind of help them. Think about their brand, you know, visually, it could be a

booking of photography, or it could be just a book that's just gonna like maybe take their mind in a different place. In terms of visuals, what would that book be?

John DeMato

You know, I would probably say the one the one that started at all for me and the young woman that helped me with my niche and discovering this whole, this whole thing. It's bad A brand by Pierre Silva. Um, it's it. She doesn't talk necessarily about visuals, but the way that she talks about brands. It Well, there is a section on on photography. But the point is, is that that book really gets you thinking about putting yourself out there in a unique way and the colorful way she presents herself she's New Yorker. So it really it helps kind of help you see where you are and where you want to go. And from all that good things come,

James Taylor

and I'm suddenly remembered it was clear that is how I first learned about your work. You did amazing shot over. I can see it now. She's wearing a red top. She has quite a

John DeMato

stress like

James Taylor

yes. Yeah. And it was such an iconic type of shot. I thought he answered on the interview that I did for my creative life. I said, Who was that photographer, I want to work with that photographer. And that's how your name came up. So that's when it all kind of coming back round to things. Full Circle,

John DeMato

we made it. What we made came

James Taylor

back around the other end as well. JOHN, let's imagine you woke up tomorrow morning, a New York City there, and you have to start from scratch. So you've got all the tools, your trade, all the knowledge that you've acquired over the years, but I'm gonna take away your address book, you know, no one, no one knows you. What would you do? How would you restart things?

John DeMato

Well, I would probably start to listen, I would go on LinkedIn, I would look up the types of people in which I want to serve. So keynote speakers, facilitators, expert based business owners, look up who is in the New York City tri state area, and start to connect with them and engage their

stuff and don't ask them for anything until they respond back and then have an actual conversation and see where it goes.

James Taylor

While talking about connecting where's the best place for people to go so they can connect with you See some of your work the great work you've done with lots of other other speakers and they reach out to you by getting a virtual getting a photoshoot done soon where's the best place for them to go and do that

John DeMato

that's place is my website. JohnDeMato.com from there you can sign up for my social sign up for my newsletter. You could also follow me there just you know email me from there you can

James Taylor

do that. Well john, it's been a pleasure speaking as always I always love hanging out and I can almost smell the cigar smoke. Are you a big cigar smoker, so I can almost feel feel the New York City vibe with a cigar smoke. Just now please stay safe. Stay. Well, thank you so much for coming on the speakers live and please continue doing the beautiful creative work that you do as well.

John DeMato

Thank you, my friend. I look forward to seeing you in New York soon.