

## Light a Product Shot in Under an Hour



### STEP 1

#### Choose flat, non-shiny sweep materials

You're going to need a sweep that's wide enough to completely cover the background. My favorite surfaces are textured rubber industrial floor mats, but you can also use paper, Formica or any other esoteric textures. But make sure that whatever you use doesn't have a shiny surface. Glare is problematic, no matter how you light your shot. Hang the background so that it has a smooth sweep to vertical. And whatever you do, don't bring your product to the set until the entire lighting setup is done. A banged up box does not make for a happy set.



### STEP 2

#### Position the lights

Next, hang a soft light over the product area. Be sure to leave at least two or three feet behind the product before the sweep bends. You don't want to have the sweep so close to the product that you cast any shadows on it. Set the flag so it is well behind the product. Center the product under the light.

You may need to fill in the shadows on the front of the product; good reflector cards can be quickly made by gluing or taping cardboard easels to the flip sides of small white cards. The beauty of video vs. film, of course, is that you can instantly see exactly what effect the fill light is having. In certain situations, you may need a little more than a fill card can provide. Use a small, snooted spotlight to gently fill the dark areas.



### STEP 3

#### You're ready to shoot

Voilà! Your product shot is lit. It shouldn't take you more than an hour to set up and shoot this shot. Note that I've lowered the back flag to just above the product itself to give us a beautiful, graded background. Also note that I'm using a long lens and a wide f/stop to let the sweep go out of focus, behind the product.



### STEP 4

#### Get creative with "textured light"

In certain situations—and when you've got more time—you may want to use a few small spotlights to highlight certain areas of the product. Here, I'm shaping black-wrap aluminum foil into a custom shape to highlight the product logo. These custom snoots, coupled with additional light dimmers or scrims, will give you a lot of control.



### STEP 5

#### Dim the lights to find your "beauty spots"

Turn out all of your lights to position your beauty spotlights. I'm using the black-wrap snoot to point up the logo, and a small backlit slash to add texture to the top of the box. Once you've positioned these small spots, turn up the light on your overhead soft light.

Photos by Adam Milt

Do you have a HOT tip or tech question about your gear? Write us at: [studio@accessintel.com](mailto:studio@accessintel.com)



### STEP 6

#### Get ready to zoom slowly

I've used exactly this "textured light" variation for dozens of national commercials. When you begin shooting, do some slow zoom-ins and zoom-backs to lend some mobility and movement to your shot. I generally like a one- to three-second pullback from the logo, and then a three- to five-second hold. Be sure to note if you'll need any supers, and make adequate allowance for them in advance. Don't forget to put enough air around your product to keep it in title safety. A shot like this can take up to two or more hours to set up, but will add tons of production value to your commercial or sales video.



### YOUR GUIDE

**Victor Milt**  
Director/cameraman

Victor Milt is a Clio, Telly and Golden Eagle award-winning director/cameraman with hundreds of national TV commercials and magazine photo credits and covers to his name. A 40-year industry veteran, he started his company InterActive Publishing (formerly Milt Associates) in 1984. His popular how-to video, *Light It Right*, was the best-selling DVD at NAB 2005 in Las Vegas. It can be found at [www.VASST.com](http://www.VASST.com).

### VICTOR SAYS KEEP IN MIND...

The product shot is typically the last shot of the day, when everyone's tired and wants to go home. This method, which uses only one light, will help you do it quickly and easily. For this type of setup, I typically use a sweep made of a rubber floor mat, paper or Formica; a hanging soft light; simple reflectors; and a four-foot flag on a boom. If time allows, you can add small spotlights, custom snoots, dimmers and scrims to get even more control (see steps 4 - 6).

I've lit huge sets and intimate conferences for clients such as Irish Spring, Ajax, Gorton's, and dozens of other nationally branded products. In the end, light is still light. I've gone from black-and-white film, to color film, to videotape, to digital, to high-def; these rules apply to every single one of those formats.

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