

# LIGHTING ESSENTIALS

## tech sheet



A clean shot of a rather mundane tech item. The color makes it more interesting and the angle makes it big.

### PRODUCT SHOT WITH SHINY SURFACES

#### TECH HARD DRIVE FOR CATALOG

A simple product shot can sometimes present a lot of challenges for the photographer not used to thinking about reflected specular lighting. In this shot, the product is practically lit with specular reflection. There is very little direct light on the Hard Drive case, rather we have built an environment where the unit is simply reflecting all that surrounds it with our control to make it look fantastic.

Let's look at the item itself. It has a brushed aluminum front panel that is a full curve facing camera, an aluminum base and a flat side panel with etched logo.

We of course want to see all of that, and that means lighting control. On the shot to the left you will see the well rounded front panel, an evenly lit side panel and the etching appears clear and clean against the dark gray. There is a small rim light on the edge of the front panel and a delicate rim along the back panel. We also are showing the lights within the unit as being lit which adds a little 'drama' to it and brings the item to life.

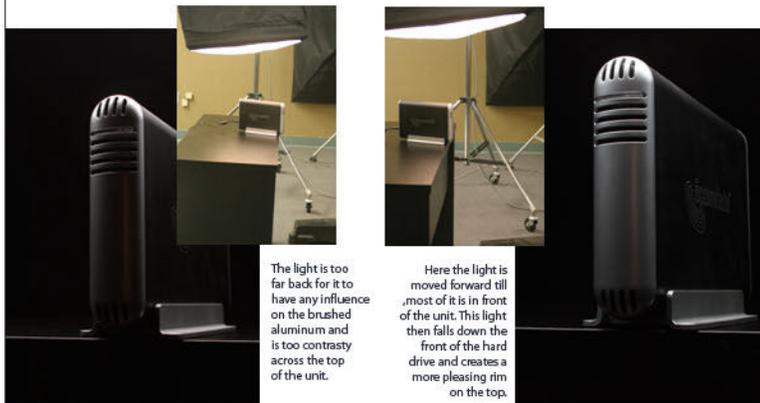
While this is a fairly easy shot to do, it does require careful placement of light and fill/reflector cards to provide smooth, even light that has dimension to it. We want to see the curves as they are one of the defining elements of this design, and curves mean a wide reaching reflection.



Hard Drive assembly sitting on the table. Camera is mounted on a camera stand for this shot. You can see that the camera is tilted slightly up for the "hero" look.

Strip light is mounted on a boom and placed above the unit. This is the preliminary setup so I can get an idea of what I really want to shoot.

NOTE: The camera is too high on these: we see the table.



The light is too far back for it to have any influence on the brushed aluminum and is too contrasty across the top of the unit.

Here the light is moved forward till most of it is in front of the unit. This light then falls down the front of the hard drive and creates a more pleasing rim on the top.

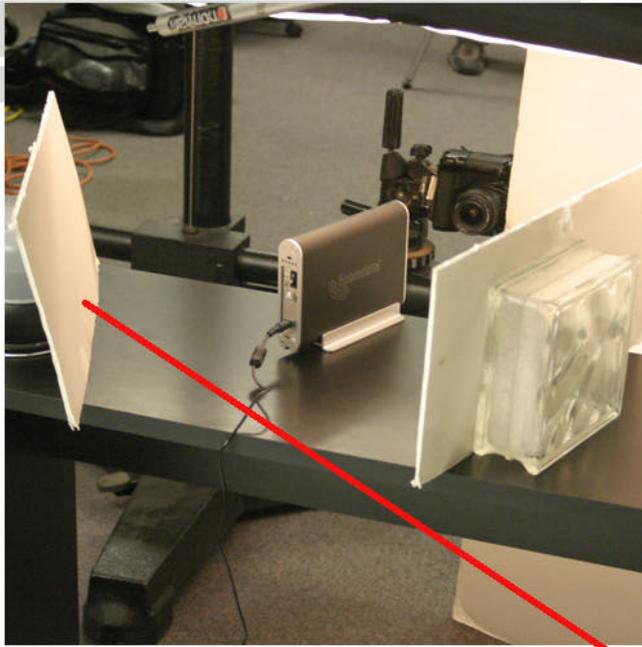
Placement in the frame is also very important and we want to make the item the "hero" of this ad or catalog shot. One way to do that is to shoot slightly "up" at the item creating a "towering" presence. It is also important in this shot that we don't show the table that it is sitting on as that would make it more mundane and it would appear as a hard drive sitting on a table... boring.

To the left you can see how important the placement of the overhead light is. We want it to be subtle and not overpowering in the final shot. We will be using the natural reflectiveness of the item to build the light around.

On the right is a shot of vertical alignment. The camera aimed at an oblique angle to the table and the hard drive sitting at a slight angle in order to show depth. I am using a wide angle lens here to help create a little drama in the shot. In the end, though, I was zoomed out a bit as the wide angle was too much.



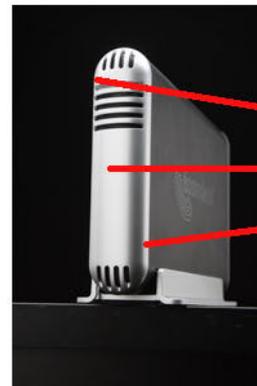
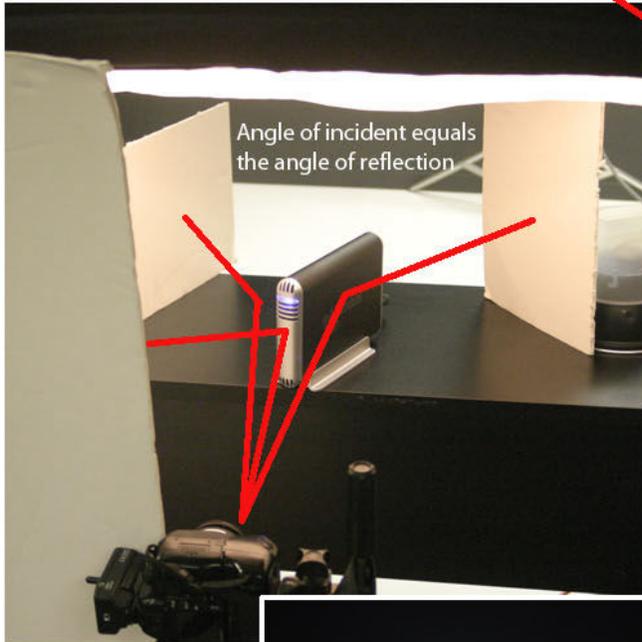
### PRODUCT SHOT WITH SHINY SURFACES TECH HARD DRIVE FOR CATALOG



Here you can see the basic setup. We have a large fill card in front of the unit and right up next to the camera lens. The cards you see on the table are creating the highlights on the sides of the unit. They are angled to slightly catch the light from the strip light above and become bright enough to be reflected by the units curves and materials right back into the lens... soft, wide, liquid specular highlights.

This fill card is not tall enough or angled correctly to provide a good highlight on the side of the unit.

Changing the angle and turning it vertical added a clean wide specular down the side of the unit, also showing the logo as an embossed highlight. That was easy.



We added a "spray" light to the background by placing a head with a small parabolic reflector directly opposite the lens and right against the wall... in this case it is only about 4" from the wall. I stand and sight the lens to see the light.

This spray can be controlled by moving it closer to the wall, changing the power settings or putting some type of diffusion over the head.

I tried some long exposures to find the one that would let the light of the unit shine and we went with that exposure for shutter speed, and the flash exposure for f-stop. In this shot it was f-11 at ISO 100 at 1 second. The 1 second exposure was for the light to burn in... sometimes called dragging the shutter.





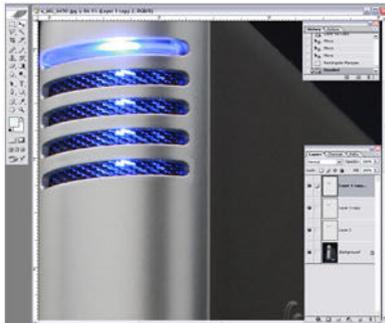
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Final setup shows the added fill card on camera right. It took the dark area to the right of the previous image front plate and cancelled it out with a soft reflected highlight that really offset the bright highlight on the rim of the front plate. Looking carefully at the shots below you can see the differences.

We decided a blue gel would nicely set off the blue light inside the unit so a double set of blue gels were added to the front of the spray light and clamped in place. The modeling light was then turned off to prevent heat build up in the reflector.

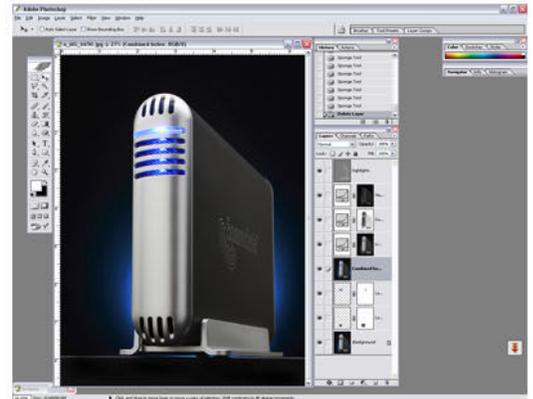


I began post by making cutouts of the top blue panel and cloning it into the openings below. This made the light shine in every slot.



The surfaces are well represented, but I don't like the gray background spray. The dark vertical on the front of the unit seems too distracting as well. Blue Gel and another fill card to camera right fix these little distractions.

Final shot with blue gelled spray and added fill card to camera right.



I also lightened the grid in the small slots below by cutting it out, moving it to a new layer, changing the lightness with curves and blending the edges back in with a layer mask.

The unit looks more real now with the lights all shining. You could change them a little if you wanted, but I liked the symmetry of them being the same.

Finally I used luminosity masks to increase the contrast locally and give the image a little more punch.

I added a layer above all and filled with 50% gray, set to a blend mode of soft light. With a soft brush at 5% I gently painted in a little highlight on the base and shaded the side of the unit very slightly.