

Sensible Stock Photography

Secrets Revealed

R. Dodge Woodson

Master Photographer

Sensible Stock Photography

“Secrets Revealed”

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Introduction

I have been carrying a camera around with me for about as long as I can remember. My father told me that my love of photography was a fad that would pass. Well, it has been at least 40 years since then, and I still carry a camera. Photography is my passion.

Most photographers want to believe that they can get published and get paid for their photos. Many of them turn to stock photo agencies when following their dreams. Few photographers get rich selling stock photos, but it can be done.

Selling stock photos is a young photographer's game. The older you are when you start the less likely you will be to see massive income. Why? It usually takes thousands upon thousands of photos on file to make any serious money. But don't despair. There are some ways to cut the corners and get ahead of the youngsters in the race of winning at stock sales.

Many photographers assume that selling stock is easy. You take some pictures, send them to an agency, and wait to get paid. In its most simple terms, this is correct. When you look at the long version of how to sell stock, you will see that it is a business and a procedure, not something that you do on a whim.

How much money can you make with stock photography? Earnings are unlimited. Many authors play up this "Get Rich with Stock Photography" angle to sell books. Come on down to earth. Some stock photographers make well over \$100,000 a year, but they are the exception rather than the rule.

I have been shooting stock for agencies over the last 30 years. The truth of the industry can be hard to swallow and it may not be what you want to hear. Still, stock is a strong outlet for good photos. The money you make might be only a few thousand dollars a year, but it all adds up.

Dedication

No book of mine would be complete without mention of Adam and Afton. They both make me a very proud father as they become adults.

Chapter 1

What is Stock Photography?

What is stock photography? To many photographers it is a path to profits. Other photographers find it to be a hole of frustration. Realistically, stock photography is somewhere between these two extremes.

There are three ways to look at stock photography. The first is the view that photographers have of it. Stock agencies will see stock photography differently. Buyers of stock photos are sure to have their own impression of what stock photography is.

I am assuming that most readers here will be looking at stock agencies through the viewfinder of a photographer. Still, to be successful at stock photography you will need to understand all three angles of the business.

All three views share some common elements. We will start with these shared views as stock photography secrets are revealed.

Is Stock Photography A True Business?

Is stock photography a real business? Many people involved in it will agree that it is very much a business. Some photographers see it as a place to warehouse their mediocre photos. For them, the business element is unlikely to come into play.

Stock photography consists of existing photographs that can be used for various purposes ranging from advertising to educational uses. The concept for buyers is that it is much less expensive to buy a stock photo than it is to commission a photographer for a specific assignment to create similar photos.

Stock Photography As Seen By Buyers

Stock photography is very appealing to buyers. This has never been more true. The creation and growth of micro stock agencies have changed the face of stock photography for everyone involved.



A typical stock photo: BigStock

I entered the stock photo arena back in the old days. You know, back when photos were taken with the use of film. Now we have digital cameras, electronic photo manipulators, and micro stock agencies. Old grey beards, like me, can feel very intimidated by all of the changes in the business.

Back in the film days it was common for stock agencies to send out original slides for potential buyers to review. Now photos are uploaded and emailed and shown in online galleries. The selling process is very different. Stock photography today is instant gratification.

It used to be important to choose an agency that was well known and that had strong connections in the buying world. This is still true, but it is not nearly as important as it used to be. Now if you can get your photos to come up in searches on the Internet, sales can be made. Hell, you don't even need an agent these days.

Buyers are looking for specific types of photos. They don't care if they come from a photographer or a stock agency. If you have the picture that the buyer wants, you have the power.

We will talk more about agencies in a later chapter. This chapter is meant as an overview, not a detailed description of what your options are and how to take advantage of them.

In short, buyers are looking for high-quality photos of specific subject matter that can be licensed for a reasonable fee. It boils down to the picture and the money. There is no loyalty between buyers and stock agencies. Yes, times have changed.



Great sports photo: BigStock

What Are The Basic Goals Of Stock Agencies?

Stock agencies exist to make money. Few agency owners do what they do as a hobby. It is all about the cash. If you can make money for an agency, they will be interested in you and your work.

There are many differences between agencies which we will discuss later. For now, it is enough to simplify the issue by saying that agencies want to represent photos that will sell often and for high prices. You can bet your best lens that agencies see what they do as a business.

Stock Photographers

Stock photographers come in many forms. Some are more serious than others. Photographers often look at stock sales as beer and peanut money. Other photographers make their entire living shooting and selling stock photos.

What type of stock photographer do you want to be? How much money do you want to make from your photos? Will you be happy to see your photos published even if you don't make a lot of money? Since this book is expected to be of the most interest to photographers we will spend more time on this topic.



Macro stock photo of a dandelion seed: R. Dodge Woodson

What do you want?

What do you want from your stock photography? Is your main goal to see your work in print? How important is the income from stock sales to you? Only you can answer these questions, and they must be answered.

If you are looking to make a lot of money, you should look at other means of income. It is surely possible to make big bucks with stock sales, but far more photographers make less rather than more.

Stock photography can provide many things to photographers. The list below identifies some of them:

- *A goal to shoot for*
- *Something worthwhile to do with your photos*
- *A source of unknown and unlimited income*
- *Critical assessments to make you a better photographer*
- *A chance to see more of your work published*
- *Legitimacy for your camera business tax deductions*
- *The excitement of being notified of a sale that you didn't know about*
- *The hope of using stock photography income as part of your retirement*
- *The thrill of competition*

There are, of course, other benefits to be had from stock photography. You will know what is right for you when you try it.



Timeless stock photo: R. Dodge Woodson

An Opportunity

Stock photography is an open opportunity for all photographers. Your existing credentials don't count. It doesn't matter if your name is famous in the industry, although this never hurts. As long as you can produce high-quality photos on a consistent basis, you can be a stock photographer.

It used to be common to be an exclusive photographer for one agency. This type of arrangement still exists, but it is now common for photographers to be represented by multiple agencies at the same time. This can increase sales considerably. Most photographers in the digital age choose non-exclusive representation.

Themes

Some themes sell better than others for stock photographers. I love to shoot macro photos, nature, and wildlife subjects. These types of photos are sometimes purchased from stock agencies, but they are far from the best-selling categories.



Classic wildlife stock photo: BigStock



Macro background: R. Dodge Woodson



People photos sell well: BigStock

Weddings are usually the main moneymaker for local photographers. People photos are the key producers in the stock market. Models have to sign releases, but the work can be simple, easy to plan, and you can produce a high volume of photos in a short time.

Photos that can be used as backgrounds for advertisements are another popular seller through agencies. These can be anything from photos of clouds in the sky to colored pebbles. Creative photographers excel at these pictures.

Food is a very popular seller with most agencies. Shooting a bowl of fruit in a studio might not be your idea of glamorous photography, but it can pay the bills quite handsomely.



Wedding stock photo: BigStock

Objects are another fairly popular category. This could be a jar of candy, a hammer, or a toaster. Avoid trademarks in this type of photography. If it exists, there may be a request for a picture of it at some time.

Releases are not needed for all types of uses for photography, but it is always better to have signed releases when you can get them.

Any release that you use should be prepared by an attorney and customized for use in the state that you will working in. It is not wise to use a generic release. It will cost you some money to have custom released created, but it is money well spent.

Sample Adult Model Release

Adult Model Release to R. Dodge Woodson, Roger Woodson, Creative Consulting, Inc., and Lone Wolf Enterprises, Ltd.

For good and valuable consideration, the receipt of which is acknowledged, I hereby give to Lone Wolf Enterprises, Ltd., R. Dodge Woodson, Roger Woodson, Creative Consulting, Inc., and their heirs, legal representatives and assigns, those for whom Lone Wolf Enterprises, Ltd., R. Dodge Woodson, Roger Woodson, and Creative Consulting, Inc. is acting, and those acting with its authority and permission:

- a) The unrestricted right and permission to copyright and use, re-use, publish, and republish photographic portraits or pictures of me and the negatives, transparencies, prints, or digital information pertaining to them, in still, single, multiple, moving or video format, or in any other medium now known or later discovered, or in which I may be included intact or in part, composite or distorted in character or form, without restriction as to changes or transformations in conjunction with my own or a fictitious name, or reproduction hereof in color or otherwise, made through any and all media now or hereafter known for illustration, art, promotion, advertising, trade, or any other purpose whatsoever.
- b) I also permit the use of any printed or published material in connection therewith.
- c) I hereby relinquish any right that I may have to examine or approve the completed product or products or the advertising copy or printed matter that may be used in conjunction therewith or the use to which it may be applied.
- d) I hereby release, discharge and agree to save harmless Lone Wolf Enterprises, Ltd., R. Dodge Woodson, Roger Woodson, Creative Consulting, Inc. and their heirs, legal representatives or assigns, and all persons functioning under his permission or authority, or those for whom he is functioning, from any liability by virtue of any blurring, distortion, alteration, optical illusion, or use in composite form whether intentional or otherwise, that may occur or be produced in the taking of said picture or in any subsequent processing thereof, as well as any publication thereof, including without limitation any claims for libel, right of publicity, defamation or invasion of privacy.
- e) I hereby affirm that I am over the age of majority and have the right to contract in my own name. I have read the above authorization, release and agreement, prior to its execution; I fully understand the contents thereof and I have not been induced to sign the same other than by the recited considerations, by any representation or statement made by the photographer, his agents, employees or anyone acting on his behalf. This agreement shall be binding upon me and my heirs, legal representatives and assigns.

Dated: _____

Address: _____

Signed _____

City: _____

Printed Name: _____

State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Social Security Number: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Witness: _____

Identification Used to Confirm Age: _____

Sample Minor Model Release

Minor Model Release to R. Dodge Woodson, Roger Woodson, Creative Consulting, Inc., and Lone Wolf Enterprises, Ltd.

For good and valuable consideration, the receipt of which is acknowledged, I hereby give to Lone Wolf Enterprises, Ltd., R. Dodge Woodson, Roger Woodson, Creative Consulting, Inc., and their heirs, legal representatives and assigns, those for whom Lone Wolf Enterprises, Ltd., R. Dodge Woodson, Roger Woodson, and Creative Consulting, Inc. is acting, and those acting with its authority and permission:

- a) The unrestricted right and permission to copyright and use, re-use, publish, and republish photographic portraits or pictures of my minor child/children and the negatives, transparencies, prints, or digital information pertaining to them, in still, single, multiple, moving or video format, or in any other medium now known or later discovered, or in which I may be included intact or in part, composite or distorted in character or form, without restriction as to changes or transformations in conjunction with my own or a fictitious name, or reproduction hereof in color or otherwise, made through any and all media now or hereafter known for illustration, art, promotion, advertising, trade, or any other purpose whatsoever.
- b) I also permit the use of any printed or published material in connection therewith.
- c) I hereby relinquish any right that I may have to examine or approve the completed product or products or the advertising copy or printed matter that may be used in conjunction therewith or the use to which it may be applied.
- d) I hereby release, discharge and agree to save harmless Lone Wolf Enterprises, Ltd., R. Dodge Woodson, Roger Woodson, Creative Consulting, Inc. and their heirs, legal representatives or assigns, and all persons functioning under his permission or authority, or those for whom he is functioning, from any liability by virtue of any blurring, distortion, alteration, optical illusion, or use in composite form whether intentional or otherwise, that may occur or be produced in the taking of said picture or in any subsequent processing thereof, as well as any publication thereof, including without limitation any claims for libel, right of publicity, defamation or invasion of privacy.
- e) I hereby affirm that I am over the age of majority and have the right to contract in my own name. I have read the above authorization, release and agreement, prior to its execution; I fully understand the contents thereof and I have not been induced to sign the same other than by the recited considerations, by any representation or statement made by the photographer, his agents, employees or anyone acting on his behalf. This agreement shall be binding upon me and my heirs, legal representatives and assigns.

Page 1 of 2: Initials of all parties here: _____

Sample Minor Model Release (continued)

Dated: _____

Parent/Guardian (printed name): _____

Minor Child (printed name): _____

Parent/Guardian (signature): _____

Minor Child (signature): _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State/Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Social Security Number (parent/guardian): _____

Date of Birth (parent/guardian) : _____ Date of Birth (minor child): _____

Witness: _____ Identification Used to Confirm Age: _____

Sample Property Release

Property Release to R. Dodge Woodson, Roger Woodson, Creative Consulting, Inc. and Lone Wolf Enterprises, Ltd.

For good and valuable consideration, the receipt of which is acknowledged, I hereby give to Lone Wolf Enterprises, Ltd., R. Dodge Woodson, Roger Woodson, Creative Consulting, Inc., and their heirs, legal representatives and assigns, those for whom Lone Wolf Enterprises, Ltd., R. Dodge Woodson, Roger Woodson, and Creative Consulting, Inc. is acting, and those acting with its authority and permission:

- a) The unrestricted right and permission to copyright and use, re-use, publish, and republish photographic portraits or pictures of my property and the negatives, transparencies, prints, or digital information pertaining to them, in still, single, multiple, moving or video format, or in any other medium now known or later discovered, or in which I may be included intact or in part, composite or distorted in character or form, without restriction as to changes or transformations in conjunction with my own or a fictitious name, or reproduction hereof in color or otherwise, made through any and all media now or hereafter known for illustration, art, promotion, advertising, trade, or any other purpose whatsoever.
- b) I also permit the use of any printed or published material in connection therewith.
- c) I hereby relinquish any right that I may have to examine or approve the completed product or products or the advertising copy or printed matter that may be used in conjunction therewith or the use to which it may be applied.
- d) I hereby release, discharge and agree to save harmless Lone Wolf Enterprises, Ltd., R. Dodge Woodson, Roger Woodson, Creative Consulting, Inc. and their heirs, legal representatives or assigns, and all persons functioning under his permission or authority, or those for whom he is functioning, from any liability by virtue of any blurring, distortion, alteration, optical illusion, or use in composite form whether intentional or otherwise, that may occur or be produced in the taking of said picture or in any subsequent processing thereof, as well as any publication thereof, including without limitation any claims for libel, right of publicity, defamation or invasion of privacy.
- e) I hereby affirm that I am over the age of majority and have the right to contract in my own name. I have read the above authorization, release and agreement, prior to its execution; I fully understand the contents thereof and I have not been induced to sign the same other than by the recited considerations, by any representation or statement made by the photographer, his agents, employees or anyone acting on his behalf. This agreement shall be binding upon me and my heirs, legal representatives and assigns.

Dated: _____ Address: _____

Signed _____ City: _____

Printed Name: _____ State/Zip: _____

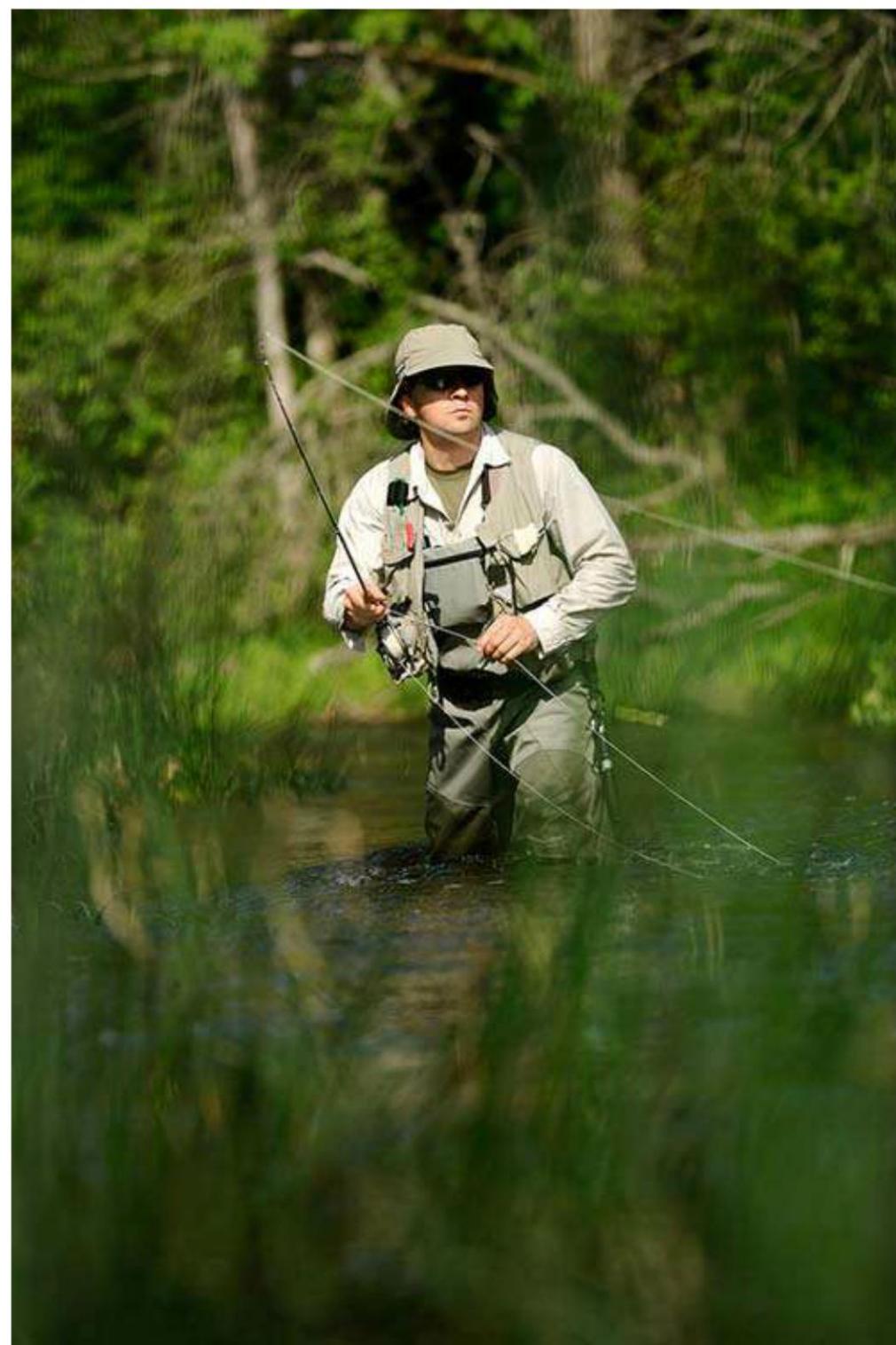
Phone: _____ Social Security Number: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Witness: _____

Identification Used to Confirm Age: _____

It Is What You Make of It.

Stock photography is what you make it. Some photographers consider it a waste of time. A lot of photographers use it for supplemental income. Photographers occasionally make great livings shooting stock. What will you make of it? Well, your feelings now may change considerably by the time you finish this rare, unveiled look at what stock photography really is and what it means to photographers.

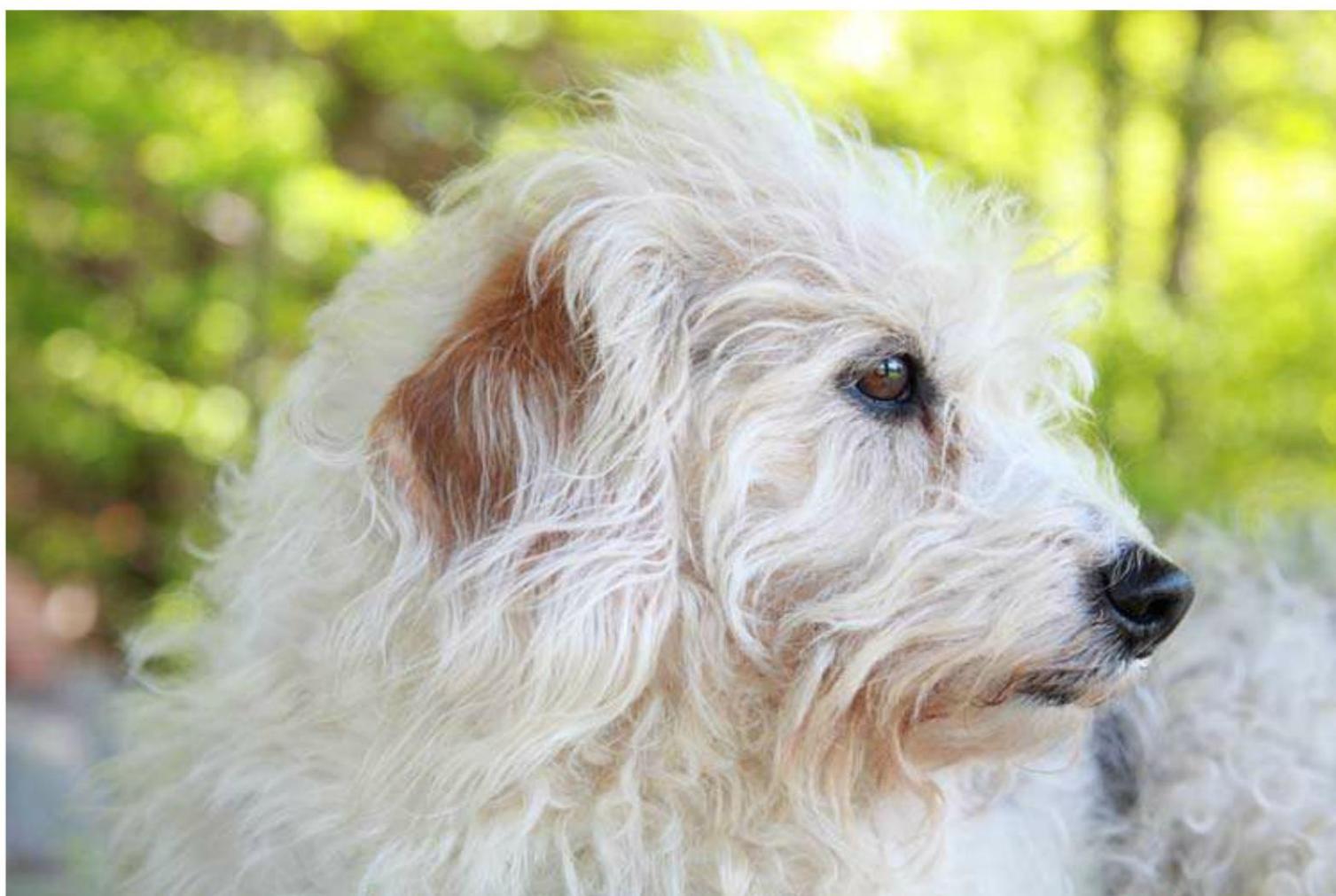


Very good stock photo: BigStock

Chapter 2

Can You Cut The Mustard?

Do you have what it takes to produce professional-quality photos in large numbers? Are your best photos the result of lucky shots? If they are, you are not ready to go pro as a stock photographer. How many usable images can you produce in a day? Did you say 20? Stay home. You are not going to make enough to pay for your gas expenses. Most pros will shoot 250 photos a day as a minimum. Yeah, that is a lot of photos when you do it every day, but it takes a lot of great photos to make consistent money in the stock market.



Pet photos can work well as stock photos: R. Dodge Woodson

If you shoot 50 photos a day and are a part-time photographer, how many images will you have to market at the end of the week? By the time you screen the photos tightly at 100% magnification for flaws, you may wind up with 35 photos a week. That amounts to 420 photos a year. Where does that put you in the stock game?

If you go online and look at some micro stock agencies you can see how many images photographers have on file. One of the best-selling stock pros that I know of has about 27,000 photos listed with one agency. At the rate that you are shooting, you would need about 64 years to catch up if that photographer stopped today. This is not good for you.



Generic background images sell well and for a long time: R. Dodge Woodson

Many working pros have more than 10,000 photos on file with their stock agencies. This is what you will be up against. Now consider that it is common for an agency to have more than 3 million photos available for sale at any given time. Do you think your 420 photos a year might get left in the dust? It's probably a safe bet that you will not be a top-selling stock photographer under these conditions.

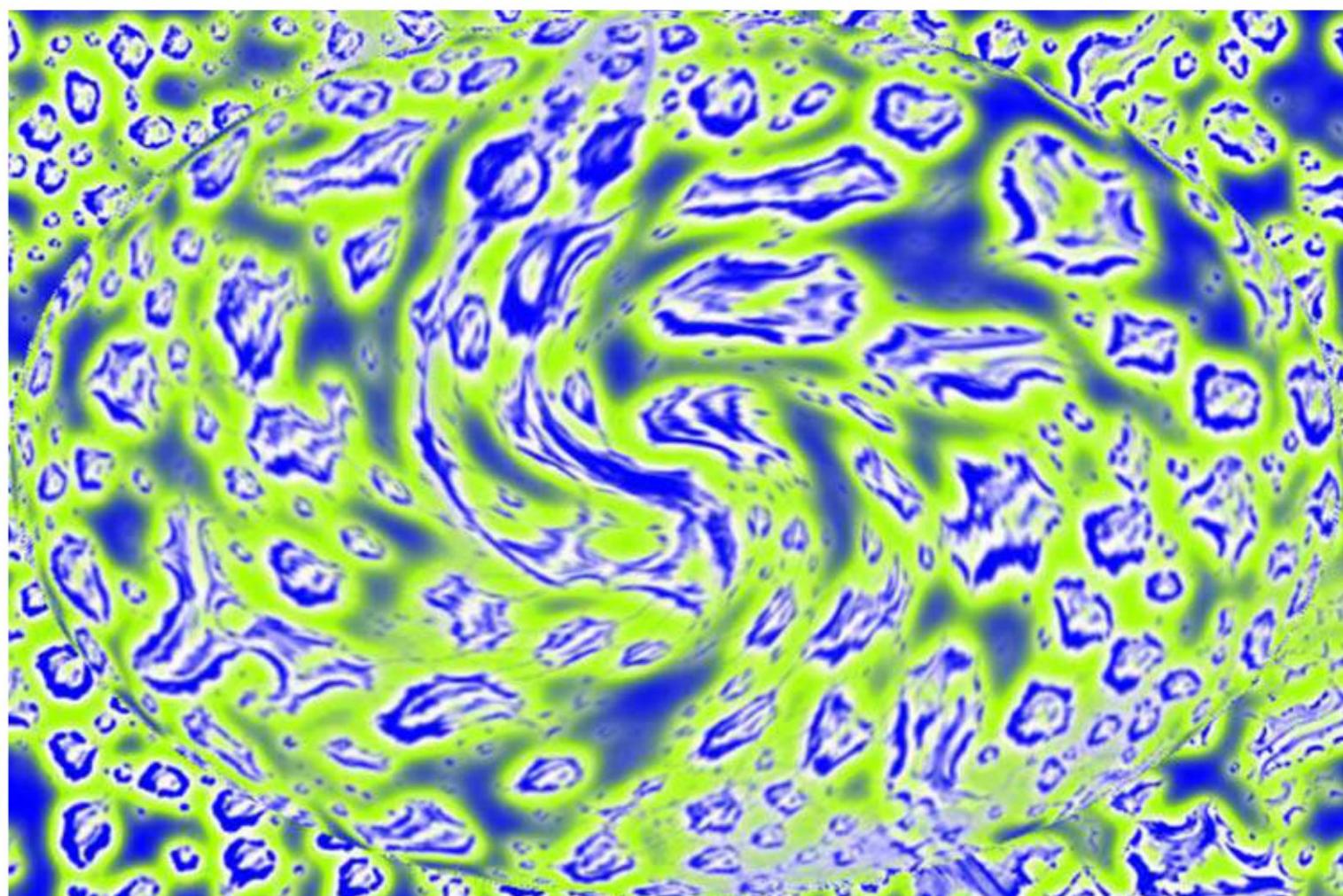
What Can You Do To Compete?

What can you do to compete? Start by picking a niche that sells well, such as food photos or backgrounds. Shoot the Hell out of them. Set up a simple studio at home so that you can shoot at night. This can be done on a kitchen table or in a spare bedroom. By focusing your attention on a narrow subject, you are more likely to have your photos found by buyers.



The lighting is a bit too dark on the moose: Bigstock

Consider this. You enjoy doing pet photography and your part-time local business includes pet photography. Get your customers to sign releases to use the photos of their pets. These will be property releases. Most owners will be happy to cooperate with your request.

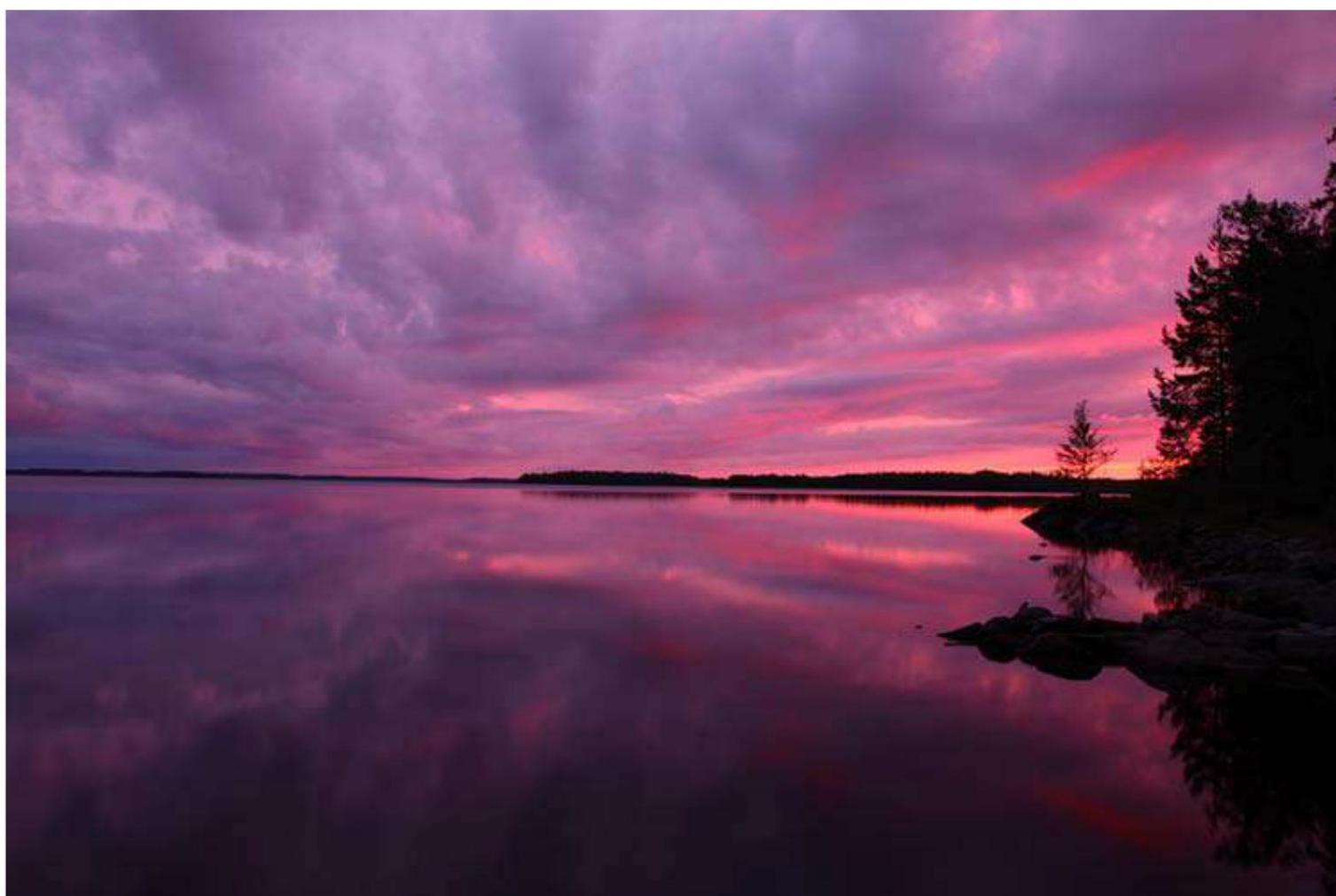


Abstract background photo: R. Dodge Woodson

Stock photo buyers can have a strong interest in various dog breeds involved in various activities. You might have a German Sheppard being used as a guard dog on sentry duty. You can cash in on almost any type of dog photo that you can think of.

You may find it difficult to amass a large number of dog photos in a short time. If you want to speed the process up, offer to set aside a Saturday for free dog photos in the park. Let people bring their dogs to you for portraits in return for signing a release to allow you to sell and publish the photos you take. This can also be an excellent way to build business for your local photography business. Your local newspaper may even give you some free advertisement in the form of notifying the public of your offer. It is a win-win deal for all involved.

Let's use dogs as an example. If you sort through photos that you were paid to take, you are sure to find some stock photos. Spend your spare time taking countless photos of dogs. You could specialize in Norwegian Elkhounds or Cocker Spaniels. Maybe you will go to dog trials for hunting dogs. The end result will be disks full of great dog photos. List these with multiple agencies and shoot some more. Get known as the "Dog Photographer". This type of approach can allow rookies at stock photography to compete fairly with seasoned pros.



Beautiful, but the market is flooded with sunsets: BigStock

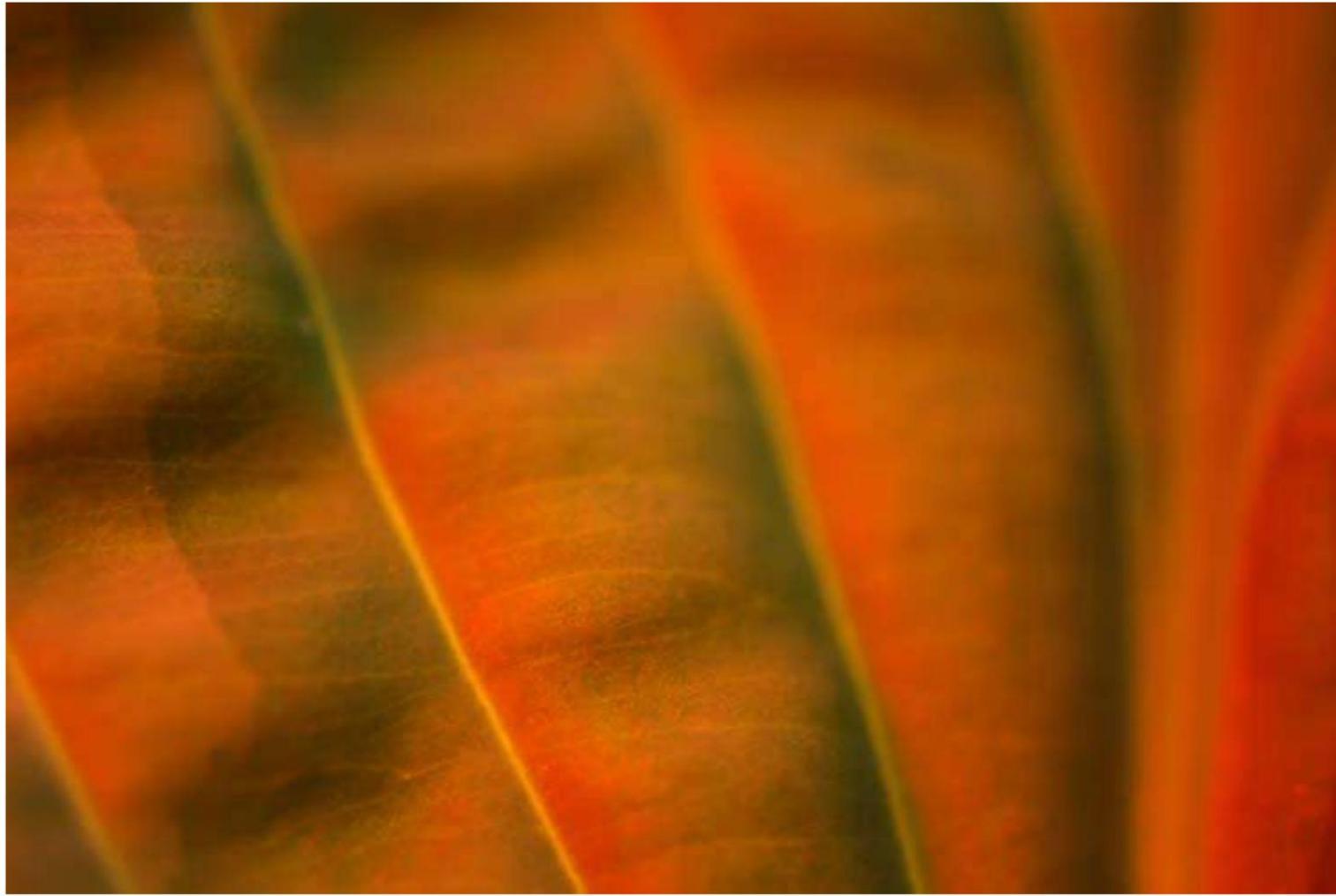
The point is to find something that you are very good at and shoot a lot of it. Sunsets probably will not sell well. I doubt if photos of waves breaking on a beach are going to make you rich. Static pictures of landmarks won't get the job done. You have to kick the bushes and make your own luck.



Sex sells: R. Dodge Woodson

Stock photography is not the venue to get too creative in. Concentrate on the fundamentals. Lighting, composition, and pin-point focus are key elements. Shoot high-quality images with the best gear you can afford. You will be judged solely on your images. Make them pop.

Most stock photos are common concepts. You may shoot a businesswoman on a phone, a golfer at the tee, a child flying a kite, or a couple window shopping. The opportunities are endless.



Creative nature photo with many possible uses: R. Dodge Woodson

Use your creativity to set your work apart from the average pictures available. Visit stock agencies and see what they have for sale. This will give you a strong feel for what an agency wants and the type of images that you must complete with. Concentrate on quality, but don't neglect the need for volume. The more you have on file, the more you are likely to sell.

Look around you. There are probably a lot of potential background subjects in sight. With the right lens and light you can do wonders with simple stuff. If you choose to specialize in background photos, you will not have any problem finding suitable subjects. They may seem too simple, but backgrounds are one of the better sellers with most stock agencies.

You can't go wrong with people photos. These are probably the most desirable stock photos on the market. Advertisers need images of happy, healthy people doing everyday events. It is called lifestyle photography.

It is likely that what you love shooting the most will fail miserably in terms of sales. That is a battle I have dealt with for decades. There is limited demand for some subjects. Be willing to work outside of your passion level. This is not about a hobby or an enjoyable day behind the camera. You are working. If you want to keep working as a photographer, you have to learn to shoot what sells.

Making Money with Models

Making money with models could be a book in itself. You will find a full chapter dedicated to this type of profitable photography later in this book. For now, we are going to take a look at the simple facts of using models to build your stock photo collection.



Potentially a big seller: BigStock

Don't have any models? What about your children, your parents, your wife, your boyfriend, friends at work, or your bowling buddies. You must have a few people who will be willing to let you take pictures of them for a reasonable hourly rate. They may even do it for free. A lot of people, even professional models do. The pros are building up their portfolios without paying photographers to shoot the photos.

Shooting models can be a lot of fun. You don't have to own your own studio to shoot stock photos of people. In fact, most agencies prefer to see people performing natural tasks in all sorts of situations. This could range from flying a kite to putting mail into a rural mailbox.

Work with what you have. Stock photography can be almost anything, but it has to be done well. Put the time into making great photos. You will learn a lot as we go along.

Go online and search some stock photo agencies for the types of pictures you enjoy taking. Pay attention to what they are selling. This will help you decide what types of shots you should be taking. Pay particular attention to how the photographers have left space in their photos to allow advertising text to be dropped into them.



Construction photo that has strong sales potential: BigStock

Always look for ways to shoot your models in simple settings. Plan your shoots in advance with several wardrobes and props scheduled for use. Creating a shoot book will make a huge difference in how productive you are. If you have to think of what to shoot and where to shoot it when models are on the clock, you are losing money and valuable photos. Know what you are going to do and where you are going to do it in advance. You will see a substantial increase in the number of your usable photos.

Photo Quality Requirements

Regardless of what subject matter you decide to work with, you have to produce quality photos. Most agencies will reject any photos that do not meet professional standards. There are a few who will take them, but don't be surprised if your photos find their way into the "Photos for Free" bin.



Pretty lily: R. Dodge Woodson

Photos offered through stock agencies must, and I repeat must, be of pro quality. If you can take them with low-end equipment, that might work. There is plenty of affordable equipment that will give you quality photos. Perhaps the most important tool you have in determining what a great photograph is will be your eye for detail. It may be tempting to left a few so-so pictures slip past your quality control in hopes of padding your numbers. Don't do this. You will come off looking less than professional.

Before you submit your work to agencies, check each image at 100% magnification on your computer. The agencies will do this and you should too. Dust and artifacts can be present at 100% and slip past you at a lower magnification.

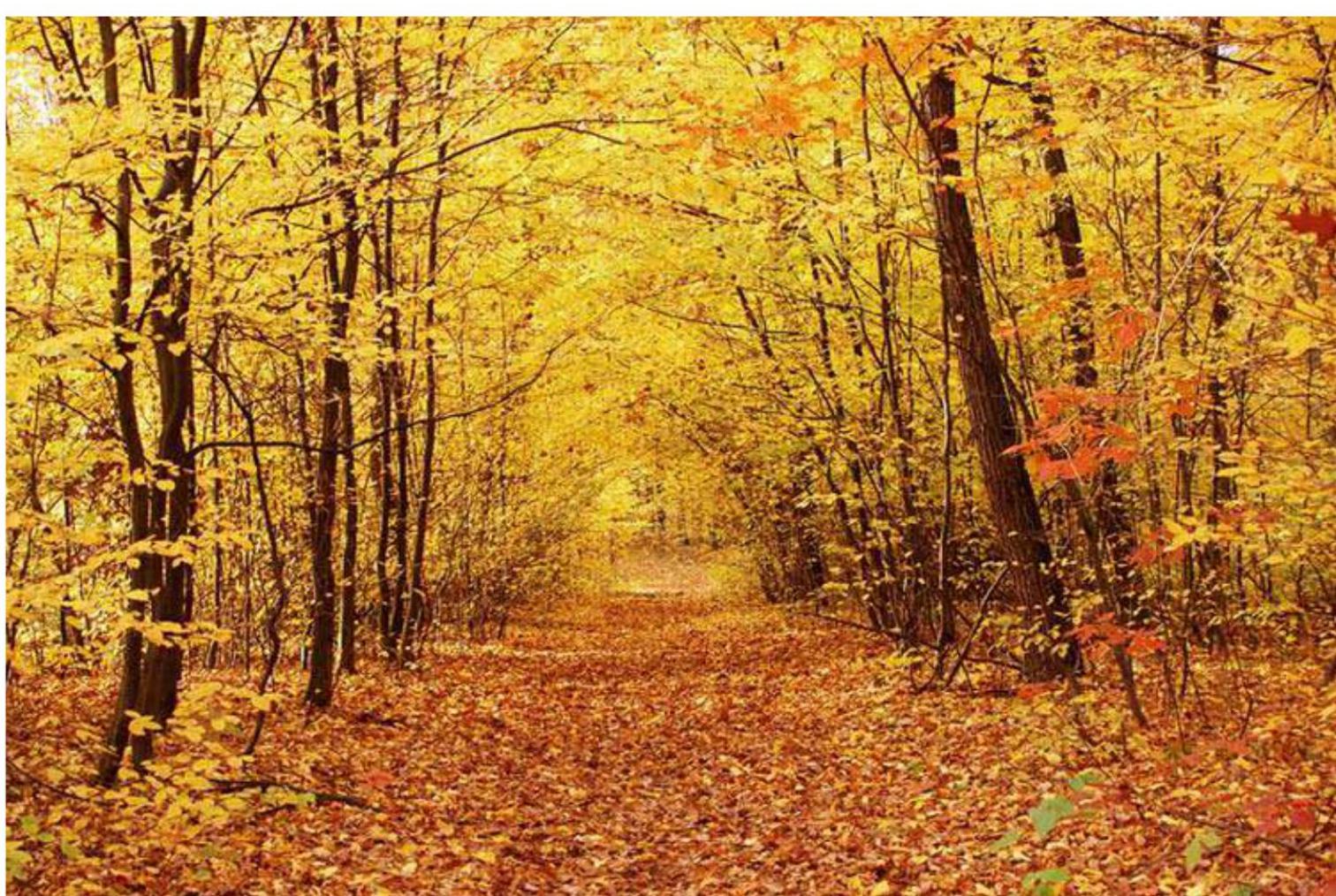
It is a good idea to run your images through cleaning software before they are shipped to potential buyers. Two product names that turn up frequently for this type of software are Noise Ninja® and Neat Image®. Either of these software packages is a good investment. You will save time and start with much cleaner photos.

Stock agencies are generally very picky about what they will accept. If you don't invest the time into making your work good enough, you will see plenty of rejection.

Try not to get depressed when you get rejected. Several agencies will tell you why they rejected your photos. This can be a great learning experience if you maintain the right attitude.



Nice multi-purpose photo: Big Stock



This is nice, but there would be a lot of competition against it: BigStock

Photo Critiques

If you are new to professional photography, I suggest that you fill out a photo critique on selected images. You can learn a lot from this. Be honest with yourself when you are rating your work. If you have friends who are working pros, see if they will rate some of your pictures. Here is an example of a photo critique form.

Sample Photo Critique

20-Point Critique

Photographer:

Image:

- General exposure:
- Subject exposure:
- Subject matter:
- Subject size in image:
- Choice of subject matter:
- Enlargement potential:
- Special lighting:
- Focusing:
- Composition:
- Format:
- Color balance:
- Depth of field:

- Special effects:
- Dust:
- Noise/Grain:
- Model appearance:
- Stock salability:
- General salability:
- Potential for improvement:
- Overall rating:

Minimum Equipment Standards

There are very few equipment requirements in stock photography. Agencies don't care so much what you take pictures with, as long as the photos are of pro quality. One thing that is often required is a minimum pixel rating for camera bodies. This number has been going up over the years as digital cameras get better and less expensive.



A bodyscape that could be captivating: R. Dodge Woodson

What is the pixel rating of your camera? If you don't know, you probably are not ready to shoot pro photos. This book is not meant to be a basic how-to photography book. I am assuming that readers have a good working knowledge of their equipment are just need some help in understanding and assessing stock photography.



Tight macro of Bleeding Heart flower: R. Dodge Woodson

I shoot a Canon 5D Mark II that delivers at 21 megapixels. My first digital camera had a 6 megapixel rating. Now a lot of the better agencies will not accept photos taken with anything less than 8 megapixels.

It is easy to get a good Canon body that allows you to interchange lenses and produce around 10 megapixels for around \$600. There are some cheaper options available. If you plan to shoot stock, plan on a minimum of 8 megapixels and the more the better.



Terrific advertising photo: BigStock

Aside from the resolution that photos are saved at and typical photography standards of acceptance, there are no rules on equipment for stock photography. If you can pump out quality work in quantity, you can be a pro stock photographer.



Here is a good all around stock photo: BigStock

Chapter 3

How Much Money?

It is inevitable. Sooner or later, photographers want to know how much money they can make. No real stock photographer can tell you how much money can be made. The best they can do is to tell you what they make from selling their work. But this is not apples to apples. It doesn't tell you how much you can expect in earnings.

The truth is that no one knows how much money is going to be made from stock sales. I wouldn't count on it to make my house payment. Having been a stock shooter for about 30 years I have learned one thing. I can never predict my stock income.



This photo allows plenty of room for advertising text: R. Dodge Woodson

I'm sorry there isn't much more I can tell you. Oh, I could tell you that you too could be making \$120,000 a year selling stock photos. Well, you might, but I doubt it. What I can do is give you some idea of the real money involved on a per-picture basis.



A Chickadee who likes to pose: R. Dodge Woodson

Calculating Fees

Calculating fees for your work can be tricky. The price for using a photo depends on many issues. Photographers who are making their own deals must know where and how their photos will be used in order to determine a fair price.

Your agency may supply you with a calculator or guide for pricing your work. If not, you can find calculators on the Internet. There is a good one at:

<http://www.stockphotopricecalculator.com/Calculator4.asp>.

Here is an example of what you could expect to see from a calculated report:

Usage Details

Usage Type: Advertising

Usage Details: Magazine - Consumer

Duration: Up To 3 Months

Print Size: 1/2 Page

Circulation: Up To 100,000

Placement: Inside plus Online

Insertions: 2 To 6

Region of Use: United States

Calculator Price : US \$1,389.38

Let's look at another example. Consider the following:

Usage Details

Usage Type: Corporate

Usage Details: Annual Reports

Placement: Inside plus Online

Print Size: Full Page

Circulation: Up To 1,000

Region of Use: United States

Calculator Price : US \$734.05

Note that corporate use does not pay as much as magazine advertising. Now let's look at an editorial sale and see what we find out.

Usage Details

Usage Type: Editorial

Usage Details: Books - Retail

Duration: 3 Years or More

Print Size: 1/4 Page

Print Run: Up To 10,000

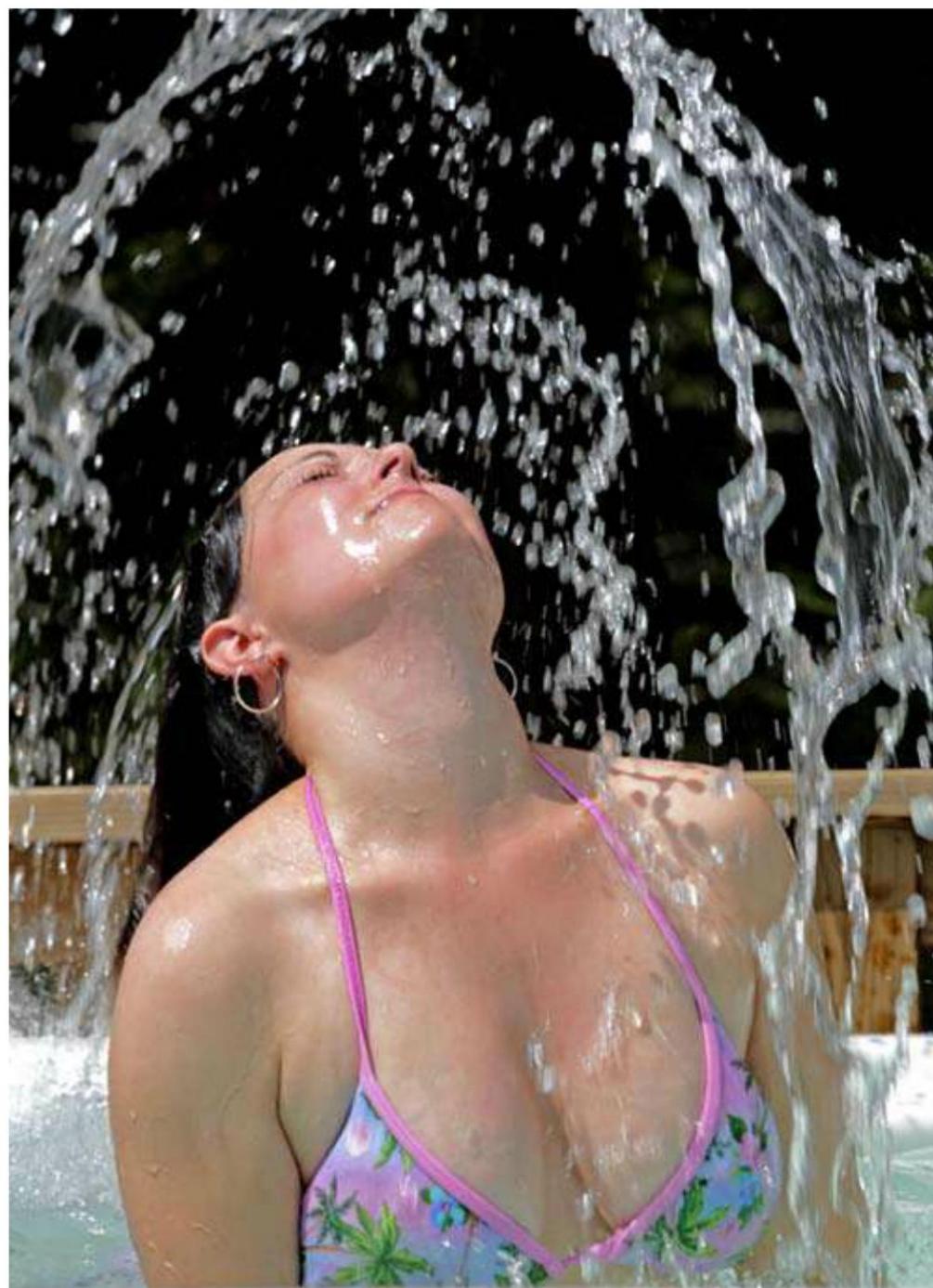
Placement: Chapter Openers

Book Type: Hardcover

Region of Use: United States

Calculator Price : US \$269.93

Okay, now you see what you are supposed to make when you sell your photos. But, what are you likely to make as a stock photographer? Here's a hint. It is not going to fit the mold provided by the calculator.



Notice the water in the air, a happy stock photo: R. Dodge Woodson

Direct Sales

You should see your highest sales prices when you sell your work directly to customers. But don't let this fool you. Just because you make more money per sale doesn't mean you will make more money by the end of the year.

Established stock agencies are in a much better position to get sales than the average photographer is. Making less per sale and making a lot of sales can be your most profitable strategy.

Set Your Own Price.

Some agencies allow photographers to set their own sales price. Most don't, but some do. These agencies usually recommend a price of \$20 to \$300. There will be photographers competing with you. They may be offering lower prices for similar photos. Check out what the site has and how much the photos are listed for before pricing your own. I am presently using an agency that works like this.



Family photos are very popular: BigStock

There are modern agencies putting buyers into direct contact with sellers. The two people work out a price and their terms. Once the deal is set, the photographer pays the agency a percentage of the income earned. I was signed up with an agency like this until just recently. The agency was www.photographersdirect. It is a reputable agency that seems to sell more of its work to the European market than the American market. I quit using it to represent myself.

One thing I really liked about *Photographers Direct* is their rating system. When you submit photos they are rated by pro photographers. Getting to see how your work stacks up in the ratings can be a lot of fun.

Commission Deals

A majority of stock agencies work off of commission deals. They take a piece of your sales to compensate themselves for what they do to promote your work. The percentage of the commission varies from agency to agency.

If you sign on as an exclusive photographer, you are likely to be offered a higher percentage of your sales than if you are a non-exclusive photographer. The downside of signing an exclusive contract is that you are limited to the one agency you sign up with.



Here is a cute shot with a lot of possible uses: BigStock

Back in old film days, exclusive contracts and 50/50 splits were basically the industry standard. This is not the case today. I have seen major agencies offering photographers only 20% of their sales. This is terrible for the photographer. I wouldn't place photos with any agency that took more than 50% of the sales price. Good agencies are out there, you just have to shop for them.

When Will You Get Paid?

Be sure to determine when you will get paid. Will you be paid every month or every quarter, or twice a year? These are the common pay periods. Quarterly is fine and twice a year is acceptable. Monthly payments are hard to come by.



Great sports or advertising photo: BigStock

What Rights Are You Selling?

What rights are you selling when you make a deal? Common practice is to sell one-time licensing rights for the use specified in your agreement with the buyer. There are all sorts of tricky sales agreements out there, so be careful. Always know what you are selling before you agree to a deal.

Most well-known agencies are honest and unlikely to take advantage of you. Be careful though, there are always some bottom feeders lurking around to take your money and more.



Holiday and seasonal photos can sell well in their demand seasons: R. Dodge Woodson

Doing the Math

When you are doing the math on potential earnings there are a lot of variables to consider. Even if you knew how many images you were going to sell a year you wouldn't know how much they would sell for.

Consider all of the options. You may have your photos listed with 6 agencies. The agencies may not offer you the same financial deal. You might make \$300 on one sale and \$20 on another sale. In the world of micro stock you might only make a dollar, or so.

Usually stock photography is a numbers game. The more images you have up for sale, the more money you will make. This is not always true. Sometimes photographers who specialize in a niche have fewer images for sale but gets more money for each photo used.

Many years ago I was told that I should figure about one dollar per image on file, per year. In other words, if I had 3,000 photos up for sale with one agency, I should be safe to assume an income of \$3,000 a year. As old as this estimating technique is, I still see it in modern writing.

But suppose you have 3,000 photos and each one is represented by 6 agencies. Should you plan on making \$18,000? I sure wouldn't spend the money until I had it.



This could be a real money maker: R. Dodge Woodson

When you get to the bottom line, little has changed in figuring income potential for stock photographers. Essentially, it is a question that cannot be answered with any certainty. Just shoot as much as you can as often as you can and place your images with agencies that you have confidence in.

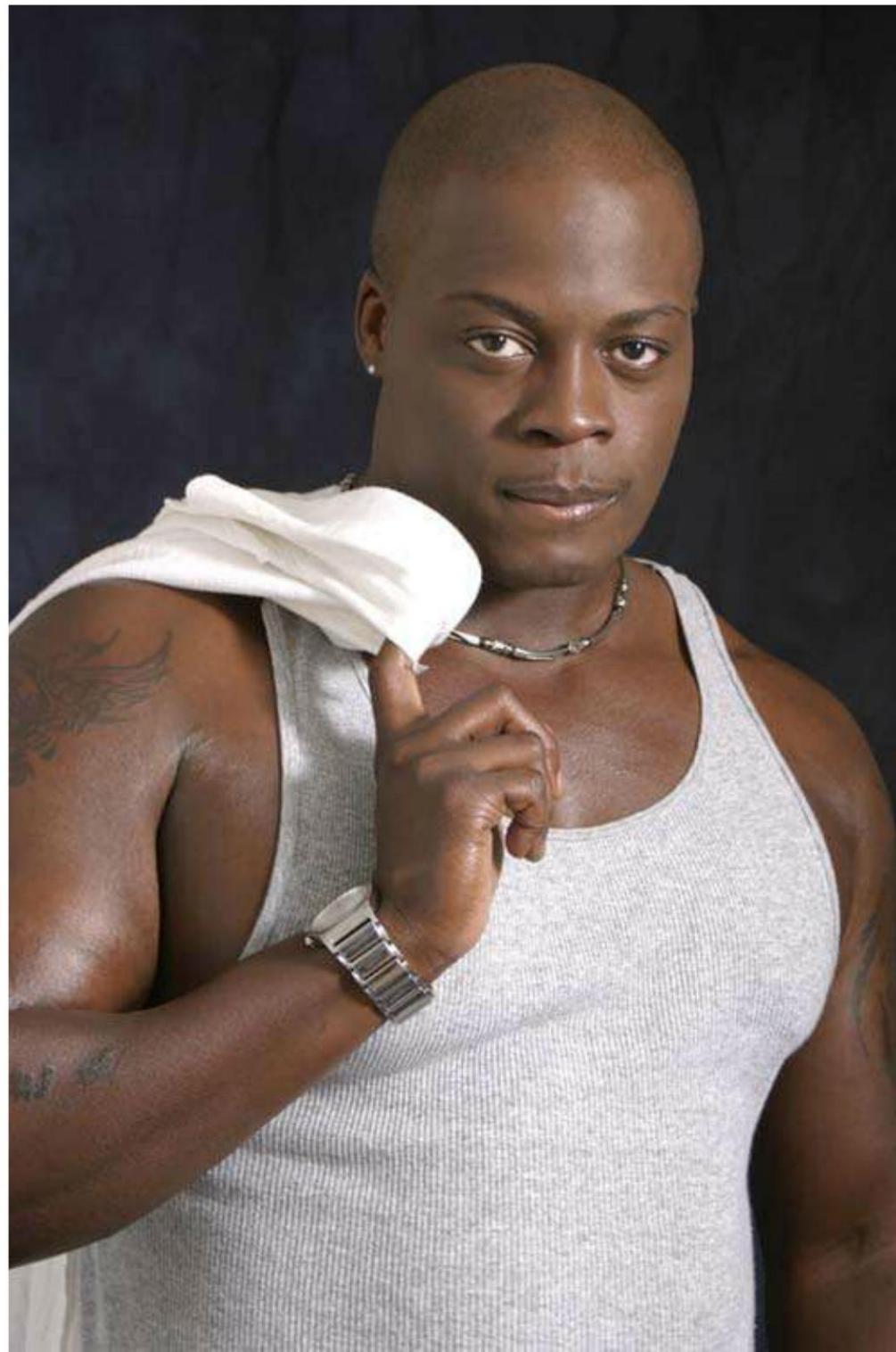
Chapter 4

Micro Stock Agencies

There is plenty of buzz out there on micro agencies. Some people swear by them and others swear at them. You may have heard that you will only make fifty cents per sale with these agencies. This is rarely the case.

Old-school photographers feel like micro sites are for amateurs. Have you been online and looked at the images represented by micro sites. If not, check them out. There is nothing amateurish about the photos advertised. And don't forget, old photographers thought Photoshop® was cheating and would never catch on. Now try to find a roll of Kodacrome 64® to buy.

So, what is the truth about micro agencies? Are they right for you? How do they work? Why do they sell images for such low prices? It seems crazy to basically give away my work on some micro site. This is just some of what you are likely to hear about micro agencies.



Fantastic light, composition, and potential: BigStock

How Many Micro Agencies Are Out There?

I don't know the total number of micro agencies in existence. There are 10 agencies that most pros who deal with micro agencies are willing to work with. Until just recently, I had no first-hand experience with micro agencies.

What I am about to share with you is based solely on my personal experiences in the quest of micro stock agencies. Other photographers may obtain completely different results.

Signing Up With Micro Stock Agencies

Signing up with micro stock agencies can disqualify you from some agencies. I know one agency that will not represent photographers who choose to place work with micro agencies. Even so, there is a lot to be said for having your work displayed at multiple micro agencies.



Very sensual and suggestive: BigStock

When I decided to sign up with micro agencies for my research I chose 8 major agencies. I ruled out one agency because it offers non-exclusive photographers only 20% of the income from sales. Another agency I declined to apply to was located outside of the US and had some “strange” requirements that I did not like. That left me with 8 agencies to pursue.

I never told any of the agencies that I have more than 30 years of experience, shoot professional equipment, and have been published in advertising, on book covers, on magazine covers, in books, and so forth. In other words, I signed up as just a normal photographer in search of an agency to represent my work.



Not a common stock photo, which makes it a good stock photo: BigStock

One of the first things I did was visit the web sites of each agency. I went to their “search by category” section and made note of the types of categories they work with. Remember that I enjoy nature, macro, and wildlife photography. I found some sites that did not have these categories listed. Obviously, they would be a bad match for me. Even so, I applied to them to see what would happen.

Most agencies require samples of your work before they will process your application. There are no upfront fees involved with micro agencies that I researched. You might be asked to supply only 3 photos. This doesn’t give you a lot to sell yourself with, so choose your 3 carefully.

I made formal application to all 8 of the agencies. My sample photos were “seeded” with some less-than-stellar shots. They had dust marks or noise and artifacts in them and should have been rejected. If an agency accepted those photos, they were not working with the quality of photos that I wanted to be associated with. To their credit, none of the agencies accepted the poor photos I submitted. In fact, they were tougher on me than I expected them to be. The quality that they demanded was high.



An artistic flair: R. Dodge Woodson

This is the actual image that I used to test the agencies. You can see the noise and artifacts. The resolution here is low, but even as a RAW file, the problems exist. I did not clean the file properly prior to submitting the work for consideration.

Not all of the agencies that I submitted work to responded to me. I was expecting at least a rejection. There was no word from them. Their lack of professionalism took me by surprise.

Six agencies did respond to my submissions. After reviewing the terms that each agency offered, I signed up with all of the agencies. Keep in mind that I have thousands of photos to spread around.



Timeless campfire: R. Dodge Woodson

Of the 6 agencies, there are 2 that I prefer. The turnaround time of their submission evaluations is fast. Uploading to their site is quick and easy. Key wording is a breeze. I also found one agency that does the key wording for photographers. All in all, getting in the door was not bad.

I uploaded a varied selection of work to the agencies that included more than my nature, macro, and wildlife work. Several of the photos I placed were model photos. There were landscapes, backgrounds, objects, construction shots, and other salable photos submitted.

My highest submission rating was about 68%, which is considered good. My lowest number was around 42%, which is nothing to write home about. An approval rating of 50% is the goal of most photographers. Less than this and you are sending in junk. An approval rating that is over 75% indicates that you are not submitting enough work.

Okay, so I had photos with all of the agencies. The number of images placed with each agency ranged from about 60 photos to about 125 photos. This seemed like a good number to test with since many photographers will not have existing stock to pull from.



Nature's glory, but nature photos can be hard to sell: R. Dodge Woodson

It has been 6 weeks since I uploaded photos and I don't have a single sale. This is not surprising, but it does make me wonder. I heard stories of photographers selling the same image more than 10 times a day. That hasn't been the case for me.

I plan to leave the images with the agencies for 6 months to see what happens. So far I am not sold on the micro idea. It may be great, but time will tell for me. I do know that there are stock photographers making well over \$50,000 a year from their agencies. But, they have a large number of images in circulation.

Chapter 5

Keeping Track of Your Photos

Keeping track of your work when selling stock photos can be a daunting task. Many photographers start collecting digital images and storing them in files without any real order to them. The time comes to organize the photos, and the job is dreadful. Store your digital images properly from the beginning to avoid lost time and frustration later.

No, I am not going to tell you that you have to invest in some high-tech photo database software to keep suitable records of your photos. It is common to put images online at 72 dots per inch (DPI). When a customer wants to license the use of a photo you will be required to deliver a higher resolution. What are you going to do when you get an order for that beautiful sunset over the bay and you can't find the RAW file? Panic is the first thing that comes to my mind.



Will it sell? Probably not. Too much competition: R. Dodge Woodson

Digital Dilemma

When I reluctantly gave up my film cameras and went digital I wasn't thinking much about filing electronic photos. It was easy in the old days. I would put slides in plastic pages and put them in a filing cabinet under a pertinent heading. For example, all of my Virginia Whitetail Deer photos were in one file while all Pickerel Frog photos were in a different file. For an old guy, this system worked well.



Toad that is a good closeup with sales potential: R. Dodge Woodson

Going away from slides and into digital RAW photos was quite an experience. There was plenty to learn. It probably didn't help that I was resistive to changing over to digital photography. Not knowing any better, I started taking photos and filing them in my own way. It proved to be the wrong way.

My original photos are stored in RAW format. The images sent to agencies are in JPEG format. Imagine having hundreds of JPEG photos in one file and the RAW files in another file. Getting a request for a particular JPEG could create considerable work in finding the RAW or TIFF file. Yes, computer junkies could do some fancy searches to find what they were looking for, but this old fart didn't like it much.

After some trial and error methods I came up with one that works for me. I save the RAW files and the JPEG files in the same folder. When I submit photos to stock agencies I save a file with a code for the agency and the date as a filename.



Farm animals can bring in the bacon: R. Dodge Woodson

The RAW photos are stored by numbers that are generated by my camera. I have the JPEG photos keyed to these numbers. This is not a system that I would recommend, but it works for me. I save each folder by date and can narrow my search duties considerably.

Management Software

You don't have to buy photo management software, but it will help you and your stock business. There is plenty of software available for less than \$100 that helps with key wording, file storage, file retrieval, photo uploading to agencies, multiple-agency management, and similar tasks. There are even free programs available as lite versions of stronger software. If you punch "stock photo management software" into your browser, you will see a number of options. Even though I don't use this type of system, I do recommend it. Don't do as I do; do as I say.

How you ultimately decide to manage your photos is up to you. Keep in mind that the photos are your product. Keep them where you can find them on short notice. The sooner you set up a management plan, the easier it will be.

Chapter 6

KeyWording

Whether you are selling your own photos online or submitting them to an agency for sale, great keywording is essential. We are not talking about a few words. Most agencies will want to see a minimum of 8 keywords per image. This really isn't enough. Including good keywords will bring viewers to your images.

Know Your Subject Matter

If you know your subject matter, keywording will be easier than if the subject is foreign to you. Consider a photo of a sailboat. There are a lot of potential keywords for such a photo. However, if you don't know nautical terms, you are at a disadvantage.

If you are a woodworker you should be able to come up with many more keywords than I could for a cross section of a handmade drawer. You do not have to use keywords that are a part of your main subject. For example, if you have a picture of a bluejay in a birch tree, you can use the words birch and tree in your keywording list.



Think about keywords for this photo of a duck.: R. Dodge Woodson



Red Squirrel: R. Dodge Woodson

If you are going to do the type of work that I do, you will need some good reference books to identify your subject matter. It helps to be a naturalist or a biologist, but good photo ID books will get the job done. The best of these books are expensive. You will use them for years. I have some that I bought some 29 years ago. They are well worth the investment if you want to sell your images.

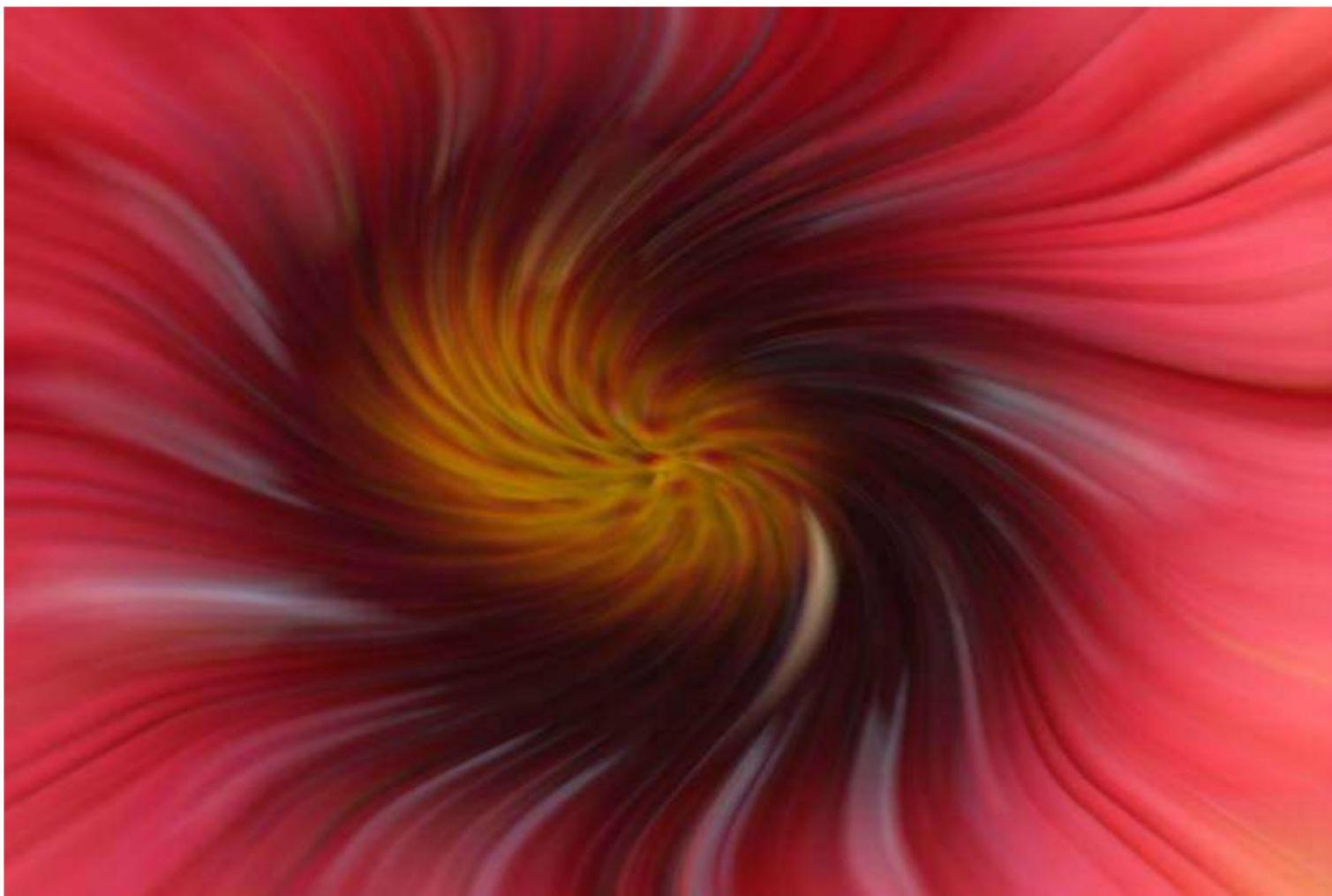
Let's use the photo above of a Red Squirrel as a subject for me to give you some examples of how I might create a keyword list for the photo. When you read the list, take note of the combination words. You want to make your photos easy to find and positioned high on search lists when people type in a keyword.

Here are some keywords that I think would help position and sell this photo in a stock agency or online.

Red Squirrel Key Words

- Squirrel
- Red Squirrel
- Pine Squirrel
- Chickaree
- *Tamiasciurus budsonicus*
- Tree Squirrel
- Mammal
- Rodent
- Wildlife

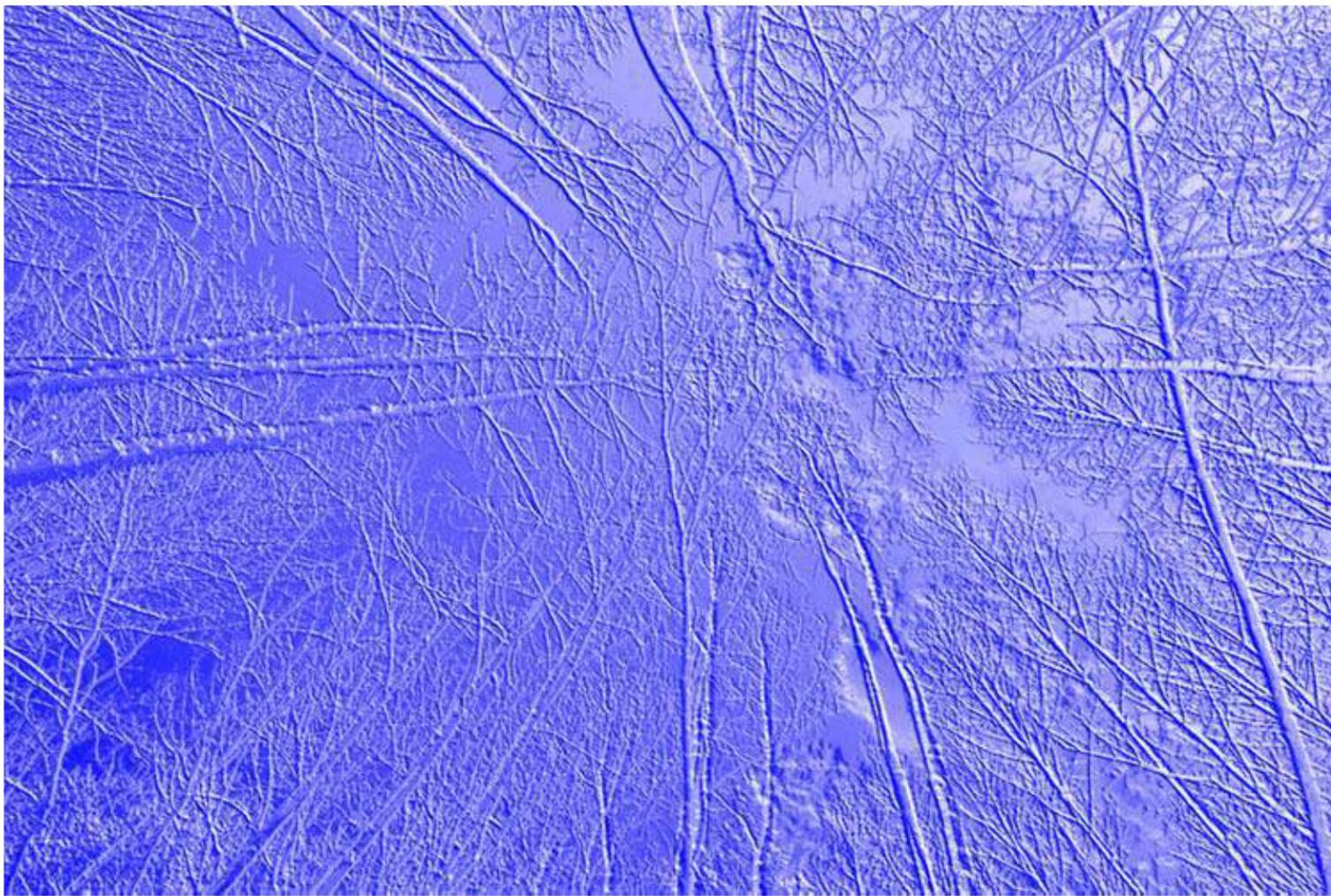
These are what I think of as the primary key words. You could certainly expand on them.



Abstract with a lot of color for many uses: R. Dodge Woodson

When you take a closeup of a wasp will you know how to keyword it? Look the wasp up in an ID book. You will find the formal name of the subject. Be sure to include the Latin name. This is considered standard procedure on natural history photos. Describe what the wasp is doing. For example, the wasp above is clinging to, resting on, or feeding on a yellow wildflower. Keywords could include wing, wings, antenna, bloom, blooming, petals, legs, stinging, insect, and so forth. Use as many viable keywords as you can with keywording your work.

Keywording is a major element in making sales. You can submit your keywords to search engines and to the agencies offering your work for sale. Before you can sell stock photos you have to get people to look at them. Keywords are the answer.



Wide-angle forest photo with a creative style: R. Dodge Woodson

Keywording Software

Look at my photo of a Chickadee, the state bird of Maine. We could play the keyword game again, but let's not. Instead, let's talk about software that can help you with your keywording.

Yes, you can find software to do most of the work for you when it comes to keywording. Some of it is available without any cost. You will find programs under \$50 that do a reasonably good job. A trip to your favorite search engine will reveal plenty of leads for you to check out in your quest for keywording software.

This software takes words that you suggest as keywords and builds upon them with a much longer list of words. The software saves you a tremendous amount of time and makes your images more salable.

Human Keywording Services

If you look into human keywording services you will find a wide range of pricing. There is a company that outsources to India and charges 88 cents per image being keyworded. A US company does the same basic work for \$2 per image. Then you can stumble across companies that what \$3,500 set up fees and \$1,500 annual fees to do your keywording. This is a bit out of my budget.

Can you afford human keywording services? Are they a good value? People selling keywording services a quick to tell you that you must take advantage of their services. Part of the pitch is showing you how much time you will save by having someone else do your keywording. Before you make a decision of how you will produce your keywording, consider the following example.



A forest photo with a spin to it: R. Dodge Woodson

Assume that you do a moderate amount of stock photography on a part-time basis. We will say that you submit an average of 100 keeper photos to your agency each week. In round numbers, this amounts to 5,000 images a year. This is the number we will use to calculate costs.

Using services from India, your annual keywording cost would be \$4,400. If you were paying \$2 per word, the cost per year would be \$10,000. You know how much it will cost for the keywording, but you don't know how much you will make from sales. If we use the rule-of-thumb figure of one dollar per photo, you are making \$5,000 and spending up to \$10,000 to do it. This, of course, makes no financial sense.

I have never used human keywording services. There have been a few times when I considered it, but the cost was prohibitive for me. You will make your own choice, but you will need a good deal of photo income to pay someone to keyword for you.



Rare Lady Slipper Flower: R. Dodge Woodson

Chapter 6

Use Your Own Website

Use your own web site to promote your photos. You may even be able to sell prints from your website. If you sign up as a non-exclusive stock photographer, there is nothing to keep you from selling your own photos.



Stylish nature macro photo: R. Dodge Woodson

Photographers who have a passion for photos that stock agencies are not interested in can use their own websites to sell their work as wallhangings. Who knows, you might get a contract with a major motel chain to provide wall art for all of their rooms.

Can you image how much money a contract like this could be worth? I think it would beat stock photography earnings for most photographers.

With a little research, you can easily find a large number of sources where you can showcase your work. I feel that the expense of having your own web site is well worth the cost if you are serious about selling your services and your stock photography.

Chapter 7

Promotional Possibilities

It is common for stock photographers to want to stay away from direct sales. This is one reason why they shoot stock. They place their photos and forget them. You can take this approach and make some sales, or you can take an active role in marketing and sell more work.



Photos that set a mood sell: R. Dodge Woodson

If you have your mind set to avoid marketing at all costs, you can skip this chapter. I am not going to get into great depth on marketing methods here. What I am going to do is offer up some suggestions for ways to make the most of marketing and sales opportunities.

Let's consider an example involving two stock photographers. One of the photographers has photos listed with an agency. This photographer, we will dub the photographer as Photog 1. He doesn't do any additional marketing. The second photographer, Photog 2, did as much as possible to make sales of stock images.

Photog 1 sees average sales of \$1 per image on file per year. This was good enough to please the photographer. The competing photographer had a different plan and wanted to make more money. Photog 2 used the suggestions given in this chapter and cleaned the clock of Photog 1 both in sales and money earned.

What did Photog 2 do in addition to submitting photos to a stock agency? Photog 2 followed the path of many successful photographers to create more sales and make more money. What follows are suggestions of tips and techniques to promote stock photo sales. You might not want to use all of them, but maybe you will find a few that you like.

The more you do to sell your photos, the more sales you are likely to make. Even if you are shy, there are plenty of tips here that don't require you to deal with people face to face or ear to ear.

Marketing Tips

- Use your own website to promote and sell your photos.
- Write and give away a free newsletter that is aimed at potential photo buyers.
- Give away some of your work to get the attention of photo buyers. If they like what you give them, they may come back to buy more pictures.
- Submit your photos to as many agencies as you can manage.
- Spend adequate time keywording your photos.
- Submit photos to magazines for publication.
- Submit photos to online sources for publication.
- Write articles to accompany your articles. Words make pictures easier to sell and pictures make words easier to sell.
- Submit your articles and photos to fee article sites on the Web. This can lead to syndication and more exposure for you.
- Submit your photo locations to search engines.
- Offer yourself up for interviews. Writers are often looking for sources to interview. As a stock photographer, you have the sort of career that people dream of and that writers love to write about.

- List yourself in online directories.
- Join social networking sites, like Twitter®, to increase sales.
- Spend some time on photo forums.
- Join professional organizations for credibility and experience.
- Give free seminars.
- Mail contact sheets and your business cards to perspective buyers.
- Get creative.
- Think outside of the box.
- Don't be afraid to try new techniques.
- Keep your name in the public.

A little marketing can go a long way. Devote 2 hours a week to marketing your work. You might be very pleased and surprised by the results. It is worth a try. Sales mean money and marketing and advertising means sales.

Chapter 8

Managing Models

Finding and managing models is foreign to some photographers. If you want to sell a lot of stock photos, you had better build a stable of models. Keep in mind that your models do not have to be gorgeous. In most cases, models who look like average people will sell better than fancy models will.

People photos are the mainstay of stock photographers. You can get people to model for you without paying them. I have used a vast list of models over the year and only a few of them required payment for their time. I did, however, give them some perks from time to time.



Photo with attitude: BigStock

The people you will work with as models will have diverse backgrounds, features, advantages, and disadvantages. It is up to you to find the best circumstances to use each model in.

The idea of arranging for nude models is too much for some photographers. I have done many nude shoots, but you won't do many for stock agencies. In fact, few agencies will accept photos that show full nudity. This said, we will not focus on nude models in this book.

What types of models should you look for? Where will you find them? How will you get them to work with you? How much should you pay them? Is it possible to get professional models without paying them?

These are just some of the questions that commonly come up. The type of stock that you shoot will influence the types of models that you will want. For example, you might need a man to look the part of someone who is fly fishing on a stream. Maybe you need a woman dressed as a business executive or gardening.

Most stock photographers have a list of models that range from young to old, male to female, and many other criteria as well. You can't have too many models. If you find willing models, sign them up. Oh yeah, you will need them to sign model releases before you can sell their photos, so take a look at the sample releases that follow and then we will start talking about the types of models you may want to work with.



Hanging in there. Uncommon photo that could sell well: R. Dodge Woodson

A photo like this requires a signed model release before it can be sold. There are three types of releases: adult releases, minor releases, and property releases. Always confirm a model's age before taking any pictures. If they are not of the age of majority, you will need a signature from the model's parent or legal guardian.



Wild bird photos have a decent market: R. Dodge Woodson

I generally complete a model questionnaire form for each model I plan to work with. This form helps me to identify which models are suitable for a particular type of work.

The questionnaire can take any form you like. Mine is pretty simple, but it is effective. You can see a sample of my form on the next page.

Model Questionnaire

Name:

Address:

Phone number:

Email address:

Age:

Days available to work:

Nights available to work:

Times available to work:

Minimum hourly fee that is acceptable:

Any tattoos?:

Any scars?:

Any birthmarks?:

Types of photography you will model for:

- Stock _____
- Editorial _____
- Advertising _____
- Fashion _____
- Underwater _____
- Tasteful Nude _____
- Lingerie _____
- Hand modeling _____
- Foot modeling _____

How Old?

How old should models be? Do they have to be less than 25 years of age? No. Older models are in great demand. Really, any age group is suitable. There is a constant need for middle-aged people, young seniors, and elderly folks. Look at the ads around you. It is easy to see what a huge variety of models can be used.

Males or Females

Which models are better, males or females? It depends on what you are shooting. Typically there is more demand for women, but there is also a healthy market for photos of men. You could stage construction shots, business shots, hobby shots, and similar shoots for either sex.

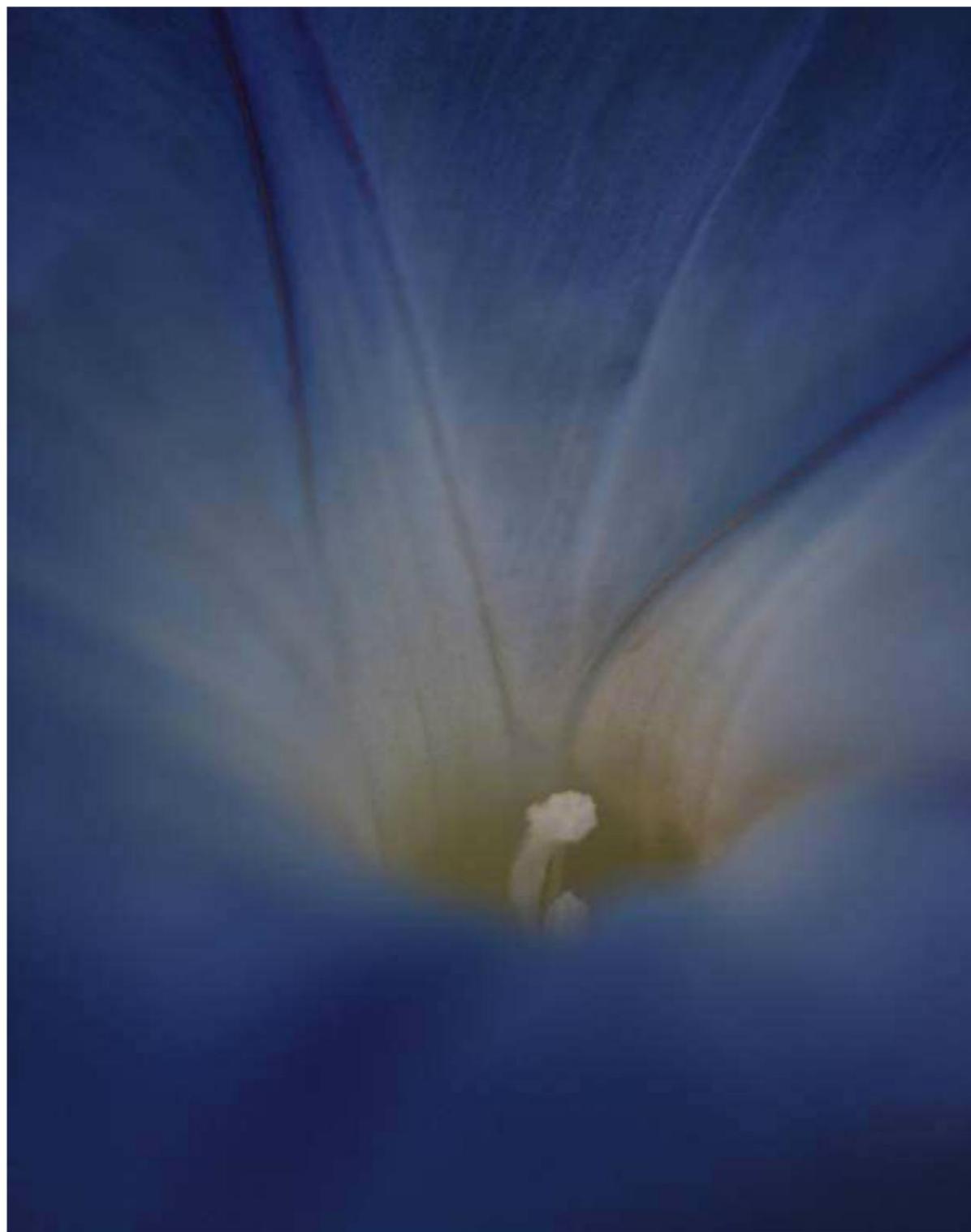


Tight bird portrait with strong sales potential: R. Dodge Woodson

Pretty

How pretty do female models have to be? Some jobs call for beautiful women, but many opportunities exist for most any type of woman. You can even specialize in particular types of models. For example, you might shoot extensive work involving plus-size models. There are really no limits.

Men can be rugged. Scars are okay on men. At the same time, men with shaved chests can be popular. Match your models to your shooting sessions. The best models look the part naturally.

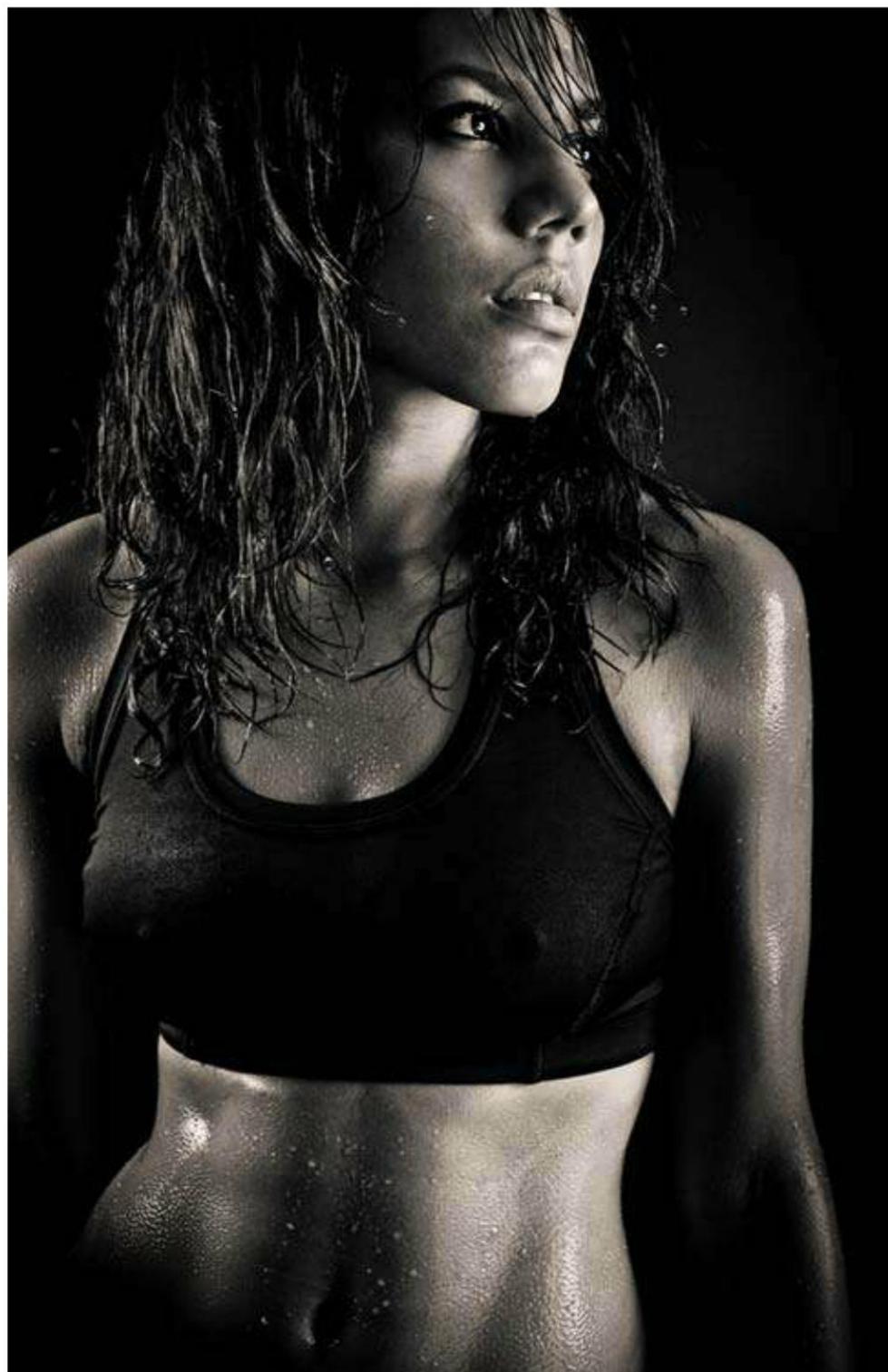


Simply says serene: R. Dodge Woodson

Pro Models

How can you get professional models to model for you without being paid? Does this sound nearly impossible? It is not. Pro models are easy to work with, easy to find, and will usually work in exchange of some high-res photos of their session. Don't believe me? I have done it for years, and it works. Let me give you an example of a recent group of pro models who wanted to work with me.

I contacted one man and one woman from a modeling agency. Their session fees were steep. As it turned out, they both wanted to add to their portfolios. I cut a deal where they could have high-res files of any photos that I took during a session in return for being my model and signing a model release. The man jumped on it. He wanted street scenes that included him. I checked with the woman to see if she would act has the man's wife. She was willing to do so. All that was left was to go into town and follow the models with my camera as they did window shopping, stopped at a hot dog stand, waited for a taxi, and other street activities.



Sexy, exercise, healthy, you make the call: BigStock

It was perfect. No cost for the models and no need for a studio. What better way can you get good, free models? Once word spreads between models, and it will, models will be calling you wanting to make bartering deals.

Wannabe Models

The world is full of wannabe models. They are a dime a dozen. Placing a simple classified ad in a local paper can produce nearly immediate results. This group of people is not experienced professionals. They may have some training, but the models will probably be rough around the edges.

A word of caution is due here. If you are male and you will be using non-professional female models, be careful. There are sometimes boyfriends or husbands who won't like their women modeling for you. This can turn nasty quickly.



Fun in the snow: R. Dodge Woodson

As a part of my model registration procedure I ask if there is anyone who should be informed in advance about the modeling test session. I am almost always told that there is no one who needs to be notified. Unfortunately, I have found this is not always the case. Men have actually come to my home and my studio to “settle” things with me for photographing their women. This can get tense. Even if you are doing innocent gardening photos, some people will assume that you are doing nude centerfold shoots. Just be careful.

Inexperienced models will work for free. They want the glory and the experience. It is common for wannabe models to come to photographers and model consultants to build their portfolios. This is a good way to get paid for shooting the portfolio shots while meeting new models.

Studio Sessions

Studio sessions are not as popular as they once were. I am finding that most stock agencies want real backgrounds. They want to see people doing real activities in the real world. This is good. It reduces your cost by not having to own or rent a studio.

Photographers and models have to feel comfortable with each other to create great photos. This should come naturally. There will be some models who won't like you. A model may get on your nerves and make your sessions miserable. Build solid relations with your models with test shoot before you go out on money-making shoots. Models can certainly add greatly to your income from stock photography.

Chapter 9

What sells?

What sells in stock photography? We have covered the words on this, so let's look at some images and see how salable they are for an average stock agency.

Is there any money to be made with this everyday image? You can even specialize in shooting photos that will be used as backgrounds for advertising. There can be serious money in this type of photograph. It may seem too simple to be real, but believe me, it is real. When you shoot backgrounds, they never go out of style.



Ride the wave: R. Dodge Woodson

When was the photo of the sky taken? Was it today or last year? You can't tell. This type of photo is timeless and that spells profits for stock photos. I am not saying that you should shoot backgrounds exclusively, but I recommend that you add many of them to your submitted photos.

Sunsets are a tough sell in the stock arena. You are probably wasting your time to put very many scenic sunsets in your portfolio. Spend your time on more sought-after photos.

I like to go onto agency websites and do searches of what they have so that I can provide what they don't have. It is amazing sometimes what they don't have. For example, bluejays are very common birds and can be photographed near a backyard bird feeder.

I figured photos of bluejays were not worth pursuing. When I searched my primary stock agency, I found that it had less than 50 photos of bluejays.

When there are only a small number of photos available that depict a specific item, you should start shooting that object. Your work will stand out with 50 competing photos much better than it will against 1,500 competing photos. This is a simple, effective tip. I don't know why more people don't take advantage of the search options on agency sites.

Be honest with yourself. If your photos are junk, learn from them and replace them. Never try to pass off poor photos as pro photos. You will not get away with it and your reputation will be tarnished. Self criticism can be difficult, but it is necessary. You have to admit that a photo is not suitable for publication if you find this to be the case. Judge your work with a keen eye.

Chapter 10

Moving On

It is about time for us to be moving on. Before we call it quits, I have a few more pro tips for you. Here they are:

- Very few professional photographers rely on stock sales for their entire income.
- Even if you don't plan to amass thousands of stock photos, pick two agencies and put a few hundred images on them. Add to them a little at a time. Have fun with it. Who knows, you might make enough to buy that special lens you have been wanting.
- Read all terms and conditions closely when agreeing to deals with agencies.
- If you put your photos online, use a low-res version. I use either 72 dpi or 100 dpi. This limits what thieves can do with the photos should they steal them.
- Bundle 250 of your best nature photos on a dvd and sell all rights to it as clip art.
- Stay in touch with changes in the photography industry.
- Join professional organizations.
- Take workshops and courses when you can.
- Go on shoots with other pros. You can both learn from each other and have some fun along the way.
- Submit only your best work to stock agencies.
- Always get model releases signed before a shoot.
- Confirm the age of all models before taking any photos.
- Invest in specialized books and publications. For example, I recently completed an E-book entitled [Macro Photography: Choosing the Right Equipment](#). When you buy a book like this, you get the detailed information you want without buying or reading a huge book that you are only interested in parts of.
- Donate some of your photos to good causes.
- Be willing to do interviews.
- Write and submit online articles with links to your photos in them.
- Don't spend money from stock photography that you don't have in the bank.
- Have fun.
- Follow your dreams.
- Produce passionate photos that you believe in.

Life is short. I am 54 years old and I nearly died three times two winters ago. An unusual infection made its way into my leg and gave me a fit. I spent two weeks, at different times, in a hospital. When the doctors released me, they said that on 3 occasions my odds of living dipped below 50%. It was an eye-opener that changed my life.

Don't let your lifelong dream elude you. Go out there and stake your claim in the field of stock photography. Capitalize on it while you can and while you are young enough and healthy enough to make the most of it. You can do it if you are willing to work at it.

I wish you the best of luck and perhaps our paths will cross in the world of stock photography.

Appendix I

Photo Forums

<http://photo.net/>

<http://photography-on-the.net/forum/>

<http://www.dpreview.com/forums/>

<http://www.openphotographyforums.com/>

<http://forums.popphoto.com/>

<http://www.thephotothread.com/>

<http://www.openphotographyforums.com/forums/>

<http://www.naturephotographers.net/rf.html>

<http://www.asiaphoto.com/forum/>

<http://www.naturescapes.net/docs/>

http://www.photolinks.com/Photography_Newsgroups_Forum.html

http://www.freephotosgallery.info/photo_forums_and_chats/

<http://forums.qj.net/photography-forums/>

<http://www.usphotoforums.com/>

<http://www.nikonians.org/>

<http://www.phototakers.com/forum/>

<http://forums.powershot-a.com/>

<http://www.clubsnap.com/forums/forumdisplay.php?f=39>

<http://www.dpreview.com/forums/forum.asp?forum=1010>

<http://www.big-boards.com/highlight/1423/>

<http://www.outdooreyes.com/>

<http://www.ultimatenaturegear.co.uk/forum/>

<http://birdphotoph.proboards.com/index.cgi>

<http://www.birdingtop500.com/index.php?a=stats&u=pbp>

<http://www.birdforum.net/>

<http://www.macrophotography.org/>

<http://photography-on-the.net/forum/forumdisplay.php?f=38>

<http://www.fredmiranda.com/forum/board/45>

<http://www.worldphotographyforum.com/forumdisplay.php?f=7>

<http://www.wildaboutbritain.co.uk/forums/wildlife-photography/369-macro-photography.html>

<http://www.sportsshooter.com/>

<http://forum.digitalcamerareview.com/showthread.php?t=754>

<http://www.thephotothread.com/forum/>

<http://ilovephotography.com/forums/>

<http://www.aristoncollanderphotography.com/blog/photography/the-best-portrait-photography-forum-posts/>

<http://www.luminous-landscape.com/forum/>

<http://www.outdoorphotographer.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=2513>

<http://www.californiaphotoforum.com/forum/f74-california-photography-organizations.html>

<http://www.travellerspoint.com/forum.cfm?thread=786>

Stock Photo Calculator

<http://photographersindex.com/stockprice.htm>

Currency Calculator

<http://www.x-rates.com/calculator.html>

Self Publishing

<http://www.lulu.com/>

<http://www.iuniverse.com/>

<http://www.selfpublishing.com/>

<http://www.authorhouse.com/>

<http://www.booksurge.com/>

<http://book-publishers-compared.com/>

Photo Magazines

<http://www.naturephotographers.net/>

<http://www.world-newspapers.com/photography.html>

<http://www.photosecrets.com/links.magazines.html>

<http://www.shutterbug.com/>

<http://www.bobatkins.com/photography/magazines/>

<http://art-support.com/magazines.htm>

<http://www.magazines.com/category/photography>

<http://www.acecam.com/magazine.html>

<http://www.bjp-online.com/>

Places Where You Might Get Published

http://www.tide-mark.com/photo_guidelines.html

<http://www.outdoorphotographer.com/submissions.html>

<http://www.tfhmagazine.com/inside-tfh/photo-submission-guidelines/>

<http://www.arizonahighways.com/static/index.cfm?contentID=775>

http://www.santafephotogallery.com/?p=submission_guidelines

<http://cbs2.com/photosubmissionguidelines>

<http://www.birdersworld.com/brd/default.aspx?c=a&id=112>

<http://www.weather-calendar.com/guidelines.html>

http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/site/bwd_corporate/sg_photo.aspx

<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/ocal/submit.html>

<http://www.miamicountyin.gov/PhotoSubmissionGuidelines.htm>

<http://www.mynorth.com/My-North/Contact-Us/Photo-Submission-Guidelines/>

<https://www.wsorrrailroad.com/gallery/submit.html>

<http://www.onegate.com/go/og/text-services/onegate-photo-submission-guidelines/>

Stock Agencies

<http://www.shutterpoint.com/Photos-Guidelines.cfm>

<http://www.photographersdirect.com>

<http://www.gettyimages.com/>

<http://www.tssphoto.com/>

http://www.magnumphotos.com/Archive/C.aspx?VP=XSspecific_MAG.AgencyHome_VPage&id=2K7O3R1VX08V

<http://www.betterphoto.com/forms/linkAll.asp?catID=43&pageID=1&rows=30>

Photography Organizations and Associations

<http://www.wpomembers.com>

<http://www.ppa.com/>

<http://www.asmp.org/>

<http://www.apanational.com/index.cfm>

<http://www.editorialphoto.com/>

http://www.wpja.com/for_the_photographer/join_wpja_organization/

http://www.freephoto gallery.info/photography_organizations/usa/

http://www.freephoto gallery.info/photography_organizations/

<http://www.irishphotographers.com/>

<http://www.thempa.com/>

<http://www.photoshopuser.com/>

<http://ppaofpa.org/>

<http://www.nanpa.org/>

Resources

<http://www.landscape-photo.net/>

<http://www.xeromag.com/fyresrc.html>

<http://mashable.com/2007/06/23/photography-toolbox/>

<http://www.photography-world.net/>

<http://www.eos-pro.com/photography/all>

<http://www.naturescapes.net/store/product.php?productid=150>

<http://www.photographydirectory.org/>

<http://book-publishers-compared.com/>

Photography Travel Information

<http://www.infocustravel.com/>

<http://www.travel-destination-pictures.com/>

<http://www.fostertravel.com/MENUSHO.html>

<http://arizonaphotographyworkshops.com/AZ1/Home.html>

<http://www.2adventure.com/>

<http://www.ecophotoexplorers.com/travel.asp>

<http://www.4x4wire.com/destinations/>

Macro Photography Sites:

[Macro Photography for beginners](#) - Tom Hicks offers a series of tutorials and tips for beginning macro photographers.

[Wonderful Photos: Macro Articles](#) - Some of the best Macro Photography articles on the WEB!

[Dalantech's Blog "No Cropping Zone"](#) - No Cropping Zone Macro Photography Explained.

Bug Identification Sites:

[What's That Bug?](#) - When not online, Whatsthatbug is in the garden researching your bug questions.

[BugGuide](#) - Identification, Images, and Information For Insects, Spiders and Their Kin.

[North American Insects and Spiders](#) - Explore over 6,500 closeup pictures of live, wild insects and spiders with descriptions and taxonomy.