A Quick Guide To
Getting Started In Stock Photography

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Introduction:

Thanks for downloading this report. I'll keep it short-and-sweet because all the best photographers I've encountered over the years are always extremely busy and they just aren't interested in 'fluff' .. and I know from experience as soon as they're bored they're out of here! **So here it is ...**

If you're looking at getting into stock for the first time, or perhaps you've tried other outlets and been disappointed, then I'd suggest a fairly simple three-step process.

1. First of all you need to make sure you understand what stock is, what's required and what you need to do to make it work. Stock has changed significantly in recent years and <u>unfortunately a lot of photographers just haven't caught on yet</u>!

2. Then you need to ask yourself some tough questions. <u>There are seven fundamental questions</u> you need to ask yourself that I outline below. There are no right answers and no 'pass mark' but you need to consider each one and make sure you understand the implications of each.

3. Then if you're still keen to give it a go, you need to find an outlet and make a start. It sounds easy, but that's where the real work begins!

The good news is, if you take a few minutes now to work through this 'self-assessment' process, you will be in a much better position to make the right decision for you ...

Whether to make a start now and make it work regardless, or wait a while so you can work on the specific areas where you might be lacking, the important thing is to understand what you're getting into and exactly what's required to make it work.

**There is simply no value in starting with Stock Photography
until you have the knowledge, the photos and the time to do it properly
... it's much better to take your time and get it right!**

Stock Photography 101

As mentioned, this is a brief report, so I'm not going to go into too much detail ... if you are a total newbie, I'd suggest you try a book on the subject or search the internet for some free tutorials.

For years stock was simply any images you happened to have on file. Photographers would build up massive collections of out-takes and shots taken on spec, and when they have enough, they'd approach a stock library and try to get 'taken on'.

The stock library would reject most of the images on principle and tell the photographer to come back in six months with some more. They'd pick through those and gradually the photographer would build up a decent collection, from which they might earn about $1-$2 per image per year.

Generally it seemed to work on the 80-20 rule ... 80% of the sales would go to 20% of the photographers.

Some photographers with particularly marketable work would do well, while many others would basically be there simply to fill the ocassional gaps. The agencies' themselves didn't have to worry ... as long as someone's photos were selling they made money ... it didn't matter who got the actual sales.

For most photographers it was a slow, tedious process, and it wasn't uncommon for some photographers to go years without a sale. Agencies tended to demand 'exclusive' rights to a photographer's stock images, usually with contracts lasting 3-5 years or more, so there wasn't a lot a photographer could do except keep submitting and hope things would pick up.

Enter the Internet/Digital age.

Suddenly a lot of things changed and a whole new era of competition began.

Almost immediately exclusive contracts became a thing of the past. Photographers found they could supply overseas buyers directly, without multiple agents getting involved so their markets expanding overnight. Many also found they could do a lot of the work the agency used to do and so the 50% commission started to get some heavy scrutiny.

New self-service libraries emerged and the existing libraries had to justify their practices and their commissions. Some tried to change, many sold out to the industry *big guns* while others simply closed their doors altogether.

New marketing methods emerged ... from an industry that had been virtually built on commissioned work or 'Rights-Managed' licensing, emerged new marketing models like Royalty Free and Microsite/Subscription downloads.

Whole new markets emerged ... in-house desktop publishing has grown exponentially, web publishing emerged as a whole new market for images, and WAP publishing is already growing at a similar rate. In fact the demand for images has never been higher!

Best read that one again: **The demand for images has never been higher!**

There is a lot that's wrong with our industry and there's no shortage of people preaching doom and gloom, but the bottom line is there have never been so many people needing quality photography! More on that later though...

New contributors have also appeared. With digital photography moving ahead in leaps and bounds, more and more amateurs are finding themselves producing quality images and wanting to sell them.

The result is a vibrant, dynamic industry that is evolving and innovating in a dozen different directions as a pace that no one could have possibly imagined just ten years ago!

While the doom-sayers will tell you it's a hopeless downward spiral, the bottom line is that the demand for quality stock images has never been higher and there have never been so many ways for the enterprising photographer to make their work available to the hungry market.

For all the changes though, some things have stayed very much the same ...

Quality Rules... Don't confuse what's been offered and what's been bought. There is an ocean of rubbish on offer out there, but the vast majority of it will never sell. Photo buyers are by-and-large professionals looking for quality images, and they will instantly recognize and dismiss sub-standard images.

Content Sells ... Photo buyers aren't looking for a high level of technical skill, or a dramatic composition, or even pretty colours ... in fact they aren't even looking for a photograph! **They are looking for an image that conveys the message they need.**

Sometimes this will be a simple illustration, other times it will be more abstract, but their first concern is always **whether your image does the job they need it to**.

While the internet has made it possible to submit every image you have to a library somewhere, there is no value in it. Top selling stock images are almost invariably taken with a clear end-use in mind, more often than not there is a specific buyer-type in mind as well. **Stock is no longer, whatever you've got on file!**

Quantity ... Stock is a numbers game and to make it work you need serious volume. That is why most photographers treat their stock business as a long term project ... something they are prepared to spend years building up.

However, the need for volume means <u>you can't afford to waste a minute on any image that isn't high quality and marketable content</u>.

Stock libraries have always known this and rejected the majority of submission, but the independent online photographer has a real tendancy to try and market anything and everything they happen to have on file.

Your time is too precious for that! You will do much better if you spend that time creating or marketing a better photo!

Niche Markets ... Specialized stock photographers have always excelled. They face less competition and their focus tends to produce stronger work.

In an internet marketing situation this also helps them stand out among the millions of other photographers vying for buyer attention! **Concentrate on what interests you most and do it better than anyone else!**

Professionalism ... While the sale is the end of the process for the photographer, for the buyer, sourcing an image is really just the beginning. If for any reason at all the process falls over, they have to go back to the beginning and start again.

So they are constantly on the alert for any tell-tale signs that might warn them of potential problems. In an online situation ...where they are dealing with an unknown photographer in some remote location ... they can be even more skittish.

So while Stock Photography has become much more accessible to both buyers and photographers in recent years, it is still very much a business where **a professional integrated approach is essential for long term success**.

So, Are You Ready For Stock Photography?

Obviously there's no easy answer to this, but the following questions should help you understand 'where' you are and what areas you might need to focus on if you're going to make it work

1. Are My Images Good Enough?

Let's face it ... with the cameras these days if they press the shutter often enough sooner or later anyone is going to take a great photo. **That's not enough though**.

To make stock work as a business **you need to know** what makes a great photo and you have to be able to edit out those that don't make the grade.

You have to know understand the fundamental technical criteria that render a photo 'good' and you need to understand the more abstract design concepts that make a photo strong. You need to be able to recognize the minor flaws that will make it weaker than others on offer.

You can't rely on other people telling you your photos are good and you can't go into this simply because your mum//husband/children/friends said you should sell them!

You need to know which of your images are really good, which images haven't quite worked and which should never see the light of day again!

If you haven't got this sort of ruthless-confidence when assessing your work, then you should probably work on it a while before you consider stock.

2. Are My Images Suitable For Stock?

Even if you are producing fantastic award-winning photography, that doesn't mean they will always work as stock. Stock Photography needs to communicate a message that a buyer can use. The medium might be a fantastic photograph, but the key element is the message the image conveys.

There is no 'easy' assessment of this ... it's something you will learn by studying the images you see in use every day, and looking for that key element or message that the buyer 'had to have' for each.

Some will be simple illustrations, some will be more abstract, but every single one of them will have been selected because it conveyed a specific message that the buyer wanted.

This means most will have a strong, easily recognized/identifiable foreground subject and there will be minimal clutter and distractions in the background. Technical

perfection is a given, composition will be strong and interesting, aesthetics will be pleasing. Boring *nothing* images will be rare.

Drab grey skies won't get much use unless that is actually a feature of the location or subject, because a buyer will almost always have access to an image taken on a better day.

Likewise stark mid-day lighting won't often get a start, because there will always be more pleasing images available from a photographer who go there earlier or later.

Sunsets and sunrises will tend to be an impressive background to an interesting subject and will rarely feature as the main subject of the image.

People will be in a lot of the images and they will be involved in the situation. They'll have a reason for being there and they won't just be posing for the camera. Their clothing, pose and expression will fit and the combined effect will be to add to the story ... and usually there'll be props in use as well.

Getting the idea? That is barely scratching the surface, but hopefully gives you a few ideas on what you should be looking for in published images, and in your own images ... and eventually, in your own photo ops!

There are some further resources listed in the final section of this report.

3. Do I Have Enough Photos To Start?

Again there is no exact answer but generally for stock you should be planning to build a collection of thousands ... eventually.

Some people might wait until they have 2000 images on file and then take a few weeks off to start sorting and submitting those to a library. Others might find it more effective to make a start with a couple of hundred images and just add a 50 more to that each month, and let things build up at their own pace.

Regardless of your approach the key is to know where you want to get to, how you plan to get there, and then commit to doing what it takes to achieve that. Of course it will be much easier to keep committed and enthusiastic if you see results along the way.

So as a minimum I'd suggest you don't start until you have a couple of hundred good strong images and you're shooting enough new work that you can add to them regularly after that.

Then you stand a reasonable chance of good early interest, which can make or break your enthusiasm!

4. Can I Add To Them As I Go?

Yes you can and you should. That is essential!

This is a long term project and your best chance of success is to do that is to make a solid start and then get in the habit of adding to your presence in small installments.

Small enough to be manageable, but large enough that you can see visible progress and growth. I would suggest you want to be in a position to add 50 or more image a month to your collection.

If that sounds like 'too much' then you should probably hold off on starting any stock endeavour just yet. Work on building your starting volume and developing a more prolific shooting style.

An Easy Way To Start Shooting More Stock Images:

This is a great habit everyone should get into. Everytime you are faced with a photo op, stop for a moment and think about ALL the potential buyers who might have a use for the subject matter. Think about who they might be and how they would use the photos .

From that you can start to think about EXACTLY what sort of image they might need. What composition? What angles? What style? What mood?

Get the idea ... as you really get to know your potential markets, you should be able to come away from even the most mundane shoot with dozens of very different photos of the same subject, each custom shot for multiple buyer types.

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5. Am I Ready Business-Wise?

If you're a professional photographer then branching into stock is a fairly simple process. About the only this you need to get up to speed on is pricing, licensing and the paper trail.

If you are a total 'newbie', then it's still a fairly straight forward process ... and you still only need to get up to speed on those same three aspects ... pricing, licensing and the associated paperwork.

Again, you'll find several resources to assist with these processes in the final section of this report.

The one intangible here is the 'professionalism' that needs to accompany this new 'business' venture. A lot of amateurs making their first attempts to sell their photography are also making their first foray into 'business' in general ... and all too often it shows!

In those cases I'd suggest you do need to recognize this as something that doesn't just happen. You need to be prepared to work on this, read some books, research some websites for both photography and basic business practices.

Regardless of experience, everyone needs to remember that this is an industry that is constantly changing at a rate of knots, so we all need to put in the time and effort just to keep up to date!

6. Am I Technically Ready?

This is another area that is moving so fast even the 'pros' have to work on keeping up!

When we first started OzImages (back in 1998) everything was film originals. We might see one enquiry every couple of months for a low-end use where a buyer was happy to consider a digital image. Now days it's completely the other way around and we'd be lucky to see one film enquiry every six months!

So it follows that if you are going to operate in this industry you need to be able to supply suitable, high quality digital images to your customers.

That means you have to be up to speed in a number of areas:

Image Sizes: Your images need to be large enough and the resolution should be suitable for printing ... ie 300 dpi. As a rule-of-thumb I would suggest that it's not worth your time and effort marketing any image that can't be reproduced as a full page image, at 300dpi. So for a 10"x8" that is 3000 pixels by 2400 pixels ... as a minimum!

Any less than that you might get some smaller sales but you are locking yourself out of the better paying high end uses.

HINT #1. If you are shooting digital you should capture at the largest possible resolution. Memory cards are cheap so don't limit your options before you even press the shutter!

HINT #2. Save your originals in a loss-less format ... TIF will work, RAW is worth the extra effort ... you can always reduce/compress later, but you can never put back what's been taken out by the camera!

Don't let the 'megapixels' touted by camera manufacturers confuse you ... there is a huge difference between the 10MP Digital SLR and a 10MP point-and-shoot ... if you don't understand what it is, then spend some time now finding out.

Photo Edit Software: Sooner or later you are going to need to make corrections and adjustments to your images and there's a good chance that the free software that came bundled with your camera won't be up to the job. PhotoShop really is the industry standard and sooner or later you should probably get yourself a copy.

You can probably learn a lot of the processes and manipulations on the fly; as buyers ask for specific things you look it up on the web and work out how to do it, but you should have some decent photo-edit software before you start and you should be fairly proficient in using it.

Colour Management: Again this is one you could probably learn, as-you-go, but I'd suggest you make a start on it before you get in to deep.there are some basic tutorials on the web that show you how to set it up and integrate it with your work flow. Like so many things it is far easier to do this from the start!

Scanning: If you have film originals then you are going to need to convert those to digital files ... and that can be a real challenge. I've seen 20 year professional photographers struggle with this to the point where they simply gave up! If you are planning on starting in stock with your film archive, then make a start on'converting' it first, and make sure you are up to the task.

The good news is there are some great tutorials out there to assist ... see below ... and increasingly there are third-party services who will do the job for you at a reasonable rate. The main thing is to make sure you know what's involved before you start because this is a hurdle that can stop people in their tracks!

Basic Tasks: Whatever library you choose to use to promote your work you are going to need to be able to perform some fairly basic tasks. You'll need to resize your images to buyer or library specs, determine filesize and resolution, change the format if required.

You'll need to be able to carry out basic corrections of your image files, and at times you might be asked to clean, remove dust, adjust colour balances, curves and histograms.

You'll need to know your limitations in terms of emailing files to buyers. You may need FTP software. At times you may need burn to DVD or CD. You may need to upload files over an internet connection.

If any of these are sounding like a foreign language to you, then this is something you should probably look into before you go too much further.

7. How Much Time Have I Got For This?

This is probably the most important question of all. Stock can be an incredibly
rewarding and lucrative part of your photography business, but is isn't going to happen
overnight.

So when you think about how much time you have for this, you need to be thinking on
two levels ... how much time you can put into this each week or month, and how long
you can be doing it without significant return before you lose interest!

**If you are in any sort of financial bind and looking for
quick easy income, this probably isn't the answer.**

Stock is a long term option rather than fast cashflow ... think superannuation rather than
Christmas bonus!

How much time you need to put in, and how long you need to put it in for before you
see results will depend on all the factors outlined already ... in particular the quality of
your work the content of your images, the uniqueness of your material and the number
of them you have available.

So rather than set some arbitrary number of hours per month here, I think you need to work in reverse and think about the sort of returns you want and the number of images that might take, and from that the time and effort it's going to take to get you there.

DISCLAIMER: This is theory and a guide only, actual results may vary etc etc ...

Say you decide you want to add $5,000 a year to your business for starters. That's $100 a week ... not particularly impressive, but it's income that comes to you relatively hands-free and you don't have to chase it.

So from that we make the assumption that you need 2,500 images in a library. This is probably the big variable, but $2 per image per year should be a fairly conservative estimate if your images are good stock contenders!

So if then you have a honest look through your collection and decide you have just 100 good stock images on file, if you want to achieve your 'goal' in one year, you will have to shoot and submit 200 new stock images every month.

If you are prepared to take a little longer, you could work on 100 new images a month for two years, or even 50 a month for four years.

Someone who's busy enough already but wants to get something started might be quite happy to plod along adding 10-20 photos every couple of months, and let things build from there.

Get the idea ... it isn't instant, but it is always compounding and accelerating!

If you start out adding 100 a month you will generally find it takes you less and less time to produce and submit that number each month, but rather than drop the number, invest the same amount of time and add more. Before long you might well find you are adding 150 a month in the same time.

Get a few good sales and you might find you have a little more time (and enthusiasm) and suddenly you're adding 200 a month to your library!

And of course everything you do is 'ongoing' ... you do it once and it works for you forever. The first couple of thousand photos might seem to it take forever but once they are done, they are working for you 24/7 for as long as you keep them available.

You keep going and add the same again and you'll double your returns, usually in less time with less effort. Do it one more time and you triple those same returns. And so on.

So probably the most important questions you need to ask yourself are: How much time have you got to put into this? and Is it going to be enough to get you the results you need, to keep you motivated?

If you haven't got enough time this will simply fall by the wayside and you'll forever think 'yeah, stock, tried that and it didn't work'.

Initially you probably want to have a large block of time available to get 'established' ... a lot of people wait for holidays and their 'quiet times' of year so they can spend some serious time getting started. This is highly recommended ... as long as you don't over do it and burn out. <u>Make sure you use some of that time to get out and take photos!</u>

After that I'd have to suggest that unless you have the time to shoot 50 or more new stock images each month, and the time to process them and submit them to a library ... allow about an hour per 20 images ... then you probably should wait until you have more time.

> **Of course this is a guideline only, and one thing I regularly find in this business is that the busiest people who don't have the time to start with, usually end up getting more done than the people with time on their hands!**

I guess it comes back to how much you want this and how real the long term 'dream' is for you. If you can see a real long term benefit and make a strong committment to work on it in small manageable steps, then I think you'll probably get there.

So 'Where To' From Here?

If you've been through that lot and you fee happy to make a start, then the next step is to find a platform for your work. I won't pretend to be unbiased here ... I've been running OzImages for ten years now and I think we've got the best-little-stock library on the internet!

Please check it out and see what you think ...

 http://www.ozimages.com.au/photographers/

I'll warn you upfront we do things a little differently though, so it may not suit everyone. Have a good read of the information pages though and if it sounds like it might work for you, by all means Register and Submit a Membership Application.

If you decide you're looking for something else, that's fine. I'd encourage you to keep looking.

My one suggestion would be to look for a Rights Managed (RM) library, as opposed to a Royalty Free (RF) library and definitely steer clear of the Microsites that want to give your work away for peanuts.

No matter where you are with your photography, you should understand that once you license an image RF, you lose all control over it, where it might be used, who might use it, how they might use it and where it might turn up next.

That rules it out totally for any RM use in the future.

The best single photo sale I've ever seen was US$10,000 for a single image! That could never have happened if the photographer had ever sold the image RF, or if he'd allowed it to be downloaded even once from a subscription site.

For almost all high-end uses the buyer will demand to know exactly **where an image has been used in the past**, and more often than not they will require control over **where it might appear in the future** ... you simple cannot offer that once you've let an image go RF.

There are many conflicting views on this so all I'll do is encourage you to research it for yourself and explore the options before you make an irreversible decision.

A lot of people will even suggest that you split your images into A, B and C groups and get the best of all worlds ... selling A images through RM licenses, putting the B images into RF libraries and then posting the weakest material, the C images to the Microsites where buyers can grab them for $1 each, or less.

Personally I think that is a recipe for disaster ...

As a business operator, your time is precious and you simply cannot afford to waste it marketing images for a few cents each. If you really believe a photo of yours is only worth a dollar per use, then you are better off throwing it away and getting out and taking a photo that is actually worth something!

As a professional photographer you need to value your work and your time ... if you don't value your products and services, then you can't expect a buyer to.

Nor can you afford to get into a price war with a photo-distributor.

That's what the RF and microsite libraries are ... distributors ... that is the only reason they can afford to sell at that price, and even as distributors many are starting to struggle.

If they had to cover the costs of producing the images as well they would soon go bust ... they only survive because amatuers who don't know any better are happy to give their work away for whatever they can get.

If you want to survive as a photographer long term you need to charge a fair and reasonable usage fee for your images, each and every time. Serious buyers know this and are prepared to pay ... don't sell yourphotos for peanuts for some perceived short term gain ... the long term cost is just way too high.

If you start to explore this you will find plenty of other points of view, and there'l lbe plenty of arguements for and against ... I'll just encourage you to value your work and your time, and act accordingly. Explore your options thoroughly and make sure you understand the real cost of whatever platform you finally choose!

Well that's about it. Thanks again for downloading and reading this report.

I hope you found something useful in amongst it all. If you know anyone else who might be interested in this information, please feel free to pass it on.

There are some great additional resources listed on the next page. Please be sure to check out the various free downloads and boomark those services you might have a usef for at some stage.

Further Reading & Reference Sites

If you have come through this deciding you need to do some work, here are a few resources to help you on your way ...

Digital Photography Secrets eBook : Professional tips and techniques for shooting better images with your digital camera. Everything you want to know about using your digital camera to take stunning photos.
 Digital Photography Secrets eBook

The Worlds Best Photography Project: This is open to everyone and allows you to post images for peer feedback and critique.
  http://www.TheWorldsBestPhotography.com

Photographers Place Web Portal: Set up as a meeting place for working photographers includes photo posts & critiques, articles, links, classifieds and more.
 http://www.PhotographersPlace.com

Recommended Books On Stock Photography: In particular check out Lee Frost's "Stock Photos That Sell" and Michael Heron's "How to Shoot Stock Photos That Sell".
 http://www.Ozimages.com.au/booklist.asp

Business & Digital Resources For Photographers: Free download, highly recommended ... Scroll to the bottom for the free Photographers Reference Guide
http://www.PhotoWebHost.net

Stock Photography Price Calculator: A free online pricing calculator that offers guidance for over 40,000 possible usage combinations!
http://www.StockPhotoPriceCalculator.com

Ewen Chia's eBook Business In A Box: This maybe getting a bit side-tracked, but it's simple and it works even without a website ... and is definitely worth a look!
 Ewen Chias eBook Business In A Box

Matt Brading dot Com: Finally, if you're interested, you can check out my personal website to see the various websites we operate for *Photographers on the Web*. There's a bit of a mixture there and most people seem to find something of interest!
 http://www.MattBrading.com