

In today's saturated market for outdoor imagery, nature photographers should explore all options in selling their photography. Besides promoting the images on their own, should photographers consider a stock photo agent? The answer depends on each photographer's subject specialty, the volume of the image archive, and how the photographer wishes to run his/hcr business.

### THE AGENT

A stock agent houses images, markets and distributes them and pays royalties to its photographers. Agencies are always on the lookout for talented photographers who consistently produce unique imagery and lots of it. Today, agencies are wary of the photographer who shoots the usual subjects. They have plenty of flowers and all of the standard viewpoints in the national parks, but they still welcome nature photography that illustrates today's outdoor and environmental issues and themes.

### YOUR BUSINESS

How do you envision your business running? Is 75 percent of your time spent in the field and 25 percent in the office or is it just the opposite? Either way, stock agents can be valuable partners. Their websites are open 24/7 and the photographers' work can be licensed at any time. Some agencies have researchers who monitor the industry in areas such as trends, styles, what's selling and what's not, and they share this infor-

mation with their photographers.

Would a stock agent be good for you? Most nature photographers do not have the resources to compete with the mega-agents effectively or expeditiously. With today's demands for instant fulfillment, how many sales might you lose during the next two-week shooting trip since you won't be at your office filling photo requests?

An alternative to partnering with a stock agent is setting up an e-commerce website of your own. The website could prove lucrative, but before making the investment, carefully consider the administration and marketing you would need to put into it in order to compete.

### YOUR WORK

Whether an agent will be good for your business or not depends upon your specialty. For example, if you concentrate on your local community (the parks, the town, local flora and fauna, and community events), will the world be interested? Are these images suitable for national or international markets? If you shoot the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade in your town (population 3,600), who outside the local area would be interested in these images? If there is a little international interest, an agent may not want this work.

However, if your subjects include national parks, major city skylines and current environmental subjects, the potential markets broaden. U.S. parks and cities are major tourist destinations for visitors around the world, and that makes these



*This photograph represents one of the largest stock sales Charlie Borland ever made, and the sale would never have happened without his photo agency. The image was used throughout North America in a major beer company advertising campaign.*

images more appealing to an agent, especially if your coverage can compete with the best that's already available.

If your area of specialty is unusual, such as rare and endangered tropical flowers, how do the buyers of these subjects find you? This is such a niche specialty that a general stock agency may provide little help. A boutique agency or self-marketing may be better options.

### THE BUYER

Does a calendar publisher search for images differently than an ad agency? Sometimes there is no difference; usually there is.

Generally, a calendar publisher is

looking for beautiful images within a subject area. These images may be found searching a picture agency site, but the buyers may find it more efficient to work directly with the photographers they have established relationships with. They create a want list of their needs and email it to the photographers asking them to do the research.

The ad agency, on the other hand, may find a search of a general stock agency website to be more productive, because it is often looking to fill a conceptual need. For example, an ad agency looking for a photo to illustrate family bonds might not even consider using a family of cheetahs on lookout on top of a termite mound until it comes up in a search on "family."

An ad agency cannot use your work unless they know you have it. The best way to get your work in front of them, particularly if you have a lot of concept photography, is to have your images on a picture agency website (and make sure the concepts are keyworded accurately).

### GET STARTED

To find an agency that fits your needs, take a look at the Picture Agency Council of America's website, <http://www.pacaoffice.org/> begin, which lists agencies and their websites. Select the agencies that are a close match to your specialty. There are mega-agencies like Getty, Corbis and Photolibrary that carry all subjects. Regionally specific general-interest agents like Idaho Stock

Photos or Alaska Stock cover specific areas. Specialty agents like Animals Animals (wildlife), Grant Heilman (agriculture/horticulture) and Lonely Planet (exotic travel) cover niches; in fact there's an agency for just about any subject from underwater to sports to science.

Next, determine the licensing structure you are most comfortable with. According to the Picture Licensing Universal System's website glossary, [www.useplus.com](http://www.useplus.com), Rights Managed (RM) is a "model in which the rights to a creative work are carefully controlled by a licensor through use of exact and limiting wording of each successive grant of usage rights." Royalty Free (RF) denotes "a broad or almost unlimited use of an image or group of images by a licensee for a single licensee fee. RF license agreements vary and often include warnings or disclaimers regarding liability in connection with model-released imagery." RF has the majority of sales and RM typically has the highest fees although the two are becoming more competitive.

Microstock and Subscription Stock, which are RF models, are the fastest growing sector but at the low end of usage fees, ranging from \$1 up. You could have a large volume of sales with Microstock, but your commission on each will be minimal.

Agents require a contract and you should expect one that specifies some exclusivity, meaning images chosen by the agent may not be marketed by another agency and possibly not even by you. With the

advent of the web, agencies have global reach and the competition has forced them to demand image exclusivity.

### FINALLY

Selling nature photography to produce a reliable income is tough, but partnering with a photo agent is one more opportunity to increase income. Do your research to ensure a good fit with an agent who needs your work. Then dig in for the long haul, work closely with your agent and, in time, you should realize additional income for your efforts. ☺

*Charlie Borland has been a professional photographer for close to 30 years, and his images have been used in calendars, advertising, books and most major magazines, including National Geographic Adventure, Newsweek, Outdoor Photographer, Outside, Backpacker and Women's Sport and Fitness. Charlie is cofounder of [www.fogstock.com](http://www.fogstock.com), an online picture agency, and he teaches an online course, "The Business of Outdoor and Nature Photography" at The Perfect Picture School, [www.ppsop.com](http://www.ppsop.com).*



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