HOW TO
SELL ONLINE
PHOTOS • ILLUSTRATIONS • AI • VIDEO
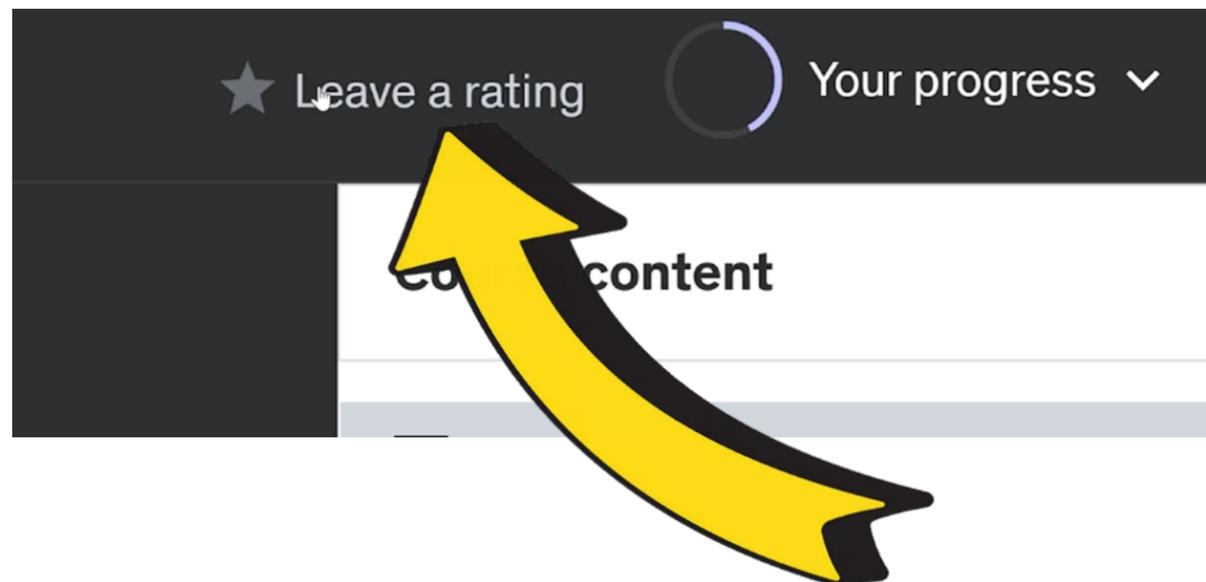

new anthem
LEARNING

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE

- THE AGENCIES WHERE YOU MUST UPLOAD
- THE TOPICS THAT SELL TODAY   • THE DOS AND DON'TS TO HELP YOU GROW

WELCOME!

I spent a great deal of time putting this book together to help you.

If you enjoy the content of the book and the course, it would be a **HUGE HELP** to me if you would leave a review for the course.

It's easy... just click **Leave a Review** at the top of the Udemy screen. I thank you in advance!

HOW TO
SELL ONLINE
PHOTOS • ILLUSTRATIONS • AI • VIDEO

UPDATED: NOVEMBER 2023

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE

• THE AGENCIES WHERE YOU MUST UPLOAD
• THE TOPICS THAT SELL TODAY • THE DOS AND DON'TS TO HELP YOU GROW

THE ESSENTIALS

1: INTRODUCTION

1. You can still do this today!
2. My journey: from $0 to $1.5 million

2. THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

1. This mindset that will help you beat the competition
2. 9 ways to find out what customers need
3. What is or isn't "high commercial value"?

3. CREATE CONTENT THAT WILL SELL

1. My 100 hottest-selling topics
2. How to dominate in the top subjects
3. The agencies say their customers want this...
4. Create content that grabs attention

4. REVIEWING THE TOP AGENCIES

1. Adobe Stock
2. Shutterstock
3. Canva
4. Deposit Photos
5. Istock
6. Quick Takes on Others

5. UPLOADING STRATEGIES

1. Batch sizes
2. Similars
3. Frequency
4. Releases
5. Prioritization
6. Title accuracy
7. Checking the boxes
8. Workflow streamlining

6. THE TRUTH ABOUT THESE MYTHS

1. Should I set up my own website to sell my content?
2. Should I wait until my skills are good enough?
3. Quality vs. quantity -- which is more important?
4. Do I need to promote my work on social media?

COURSE CONTENT

SECTION 1:
INTRODUCTION TO SELLING PHOTOS, VIDEO AND AI IMAGES ONLINE

1: Welcome to the Selling Online Masterclass - You Can Do This!
2: Download the Selling Online Course Book (You did it!)
3: My Income and 15 Years of Learnings from Selling Online

SECTION 2:
PASSIVE INCOME OPPORTUNITY - THE STATE OF SELLING ONLINE TODAY

4: How Much Can You Earn? Commissions at the Agencies
5: The Future of Selling Online - What Are the New Opportunities?
6: Types of Content You Can Sell: Photos, Illustrations, Video, Generative AI
7: The Formulas for Success in Selling Online

SECTION 3:
WHAT SELLS - THE TOPICS YOU SHOULD FOCUS ON

8: How to Learn What is Selling at the Big Agencies
9: My List of 100 Hottest Selling Topics to Generate Passive Income
10: Sources to Help You Find New In-Demand Themes to Cover in Your Work
11: What Do the Agencies Say They Need Right Now?

SECTION 4:
HOW TO TITLE AND KEYWORD TO SELL YOUR WORK TO MORE CUSTOMERS

12: Writing Effective Titles to Help Customers Find and Buy Your Content
13: The Best Ways to Keyword Your Content So Buyers Will Find and Download Your Work

SECTION 5:
THE BEST WORKFLOWS - A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FROM CREATING THROUGH UPLOADING

14: Why Consistent Uploads are Vital - Grow Your Portfolio and Income Potential
15: How to Create a Great Workflow - Here's a Look at Mine
16: Processing Your Work for Uploading - Software Options Including Free Ones!

SECTION 6:
THE BEST AGENCIES FOR UPLOADING AND SELLING YOUR WORK

17: Choosing Where to (and Where Not to) Upload and Sell Your Content
18: The Best Agencies for Selling Your Photos, Illustrations and AI Images
19: The Best Agencies for Selling your Videos, Footage and Animations
20: How to Avoid Rejections and Bans on Your Accounts

SECTION 7:
HOW TO USE AI TO GENERATE ADDITIONAL PASSIVE INCOME

21: Creating Generative AI Images - A Crash Course
22: How AI Chat Can Help You Keyword Your Work to Make Sure Buyers Find You

SECTION 8:
HOW TO TRACK YOUR SALES TO BUILD ON YOUR SUCCESS

23: Methods for Tracking Your Downloads and Learning from Your Hits and Misses
24: Review of Everything You've Learned and Applying it to Grow Your Passive Income

You can still do this today!

No one can promise you you'll make a fortune in microstock. But the people who succeed in this business follow some simple principles that 99% of their competition does not, and this book and course aims to help you understand these essential points to give you a leg up on your competition.

We're going to assume some things to start: you know how to take photographs, do illustrations or create video. And you have a general idea what microstock is. (If you don't, no problem -- that type of basic information is easy to find on the internet.)

Above all else, this book and course should help you appreciate that microstock is a business like any other. If you are able to determine what a customer needs and create something that meets those needs better than your competition, you should see success.

Yes, there are more people around the world entering microstock than ever before. Some say the party is over, that there's no longer money to be made since so many people are joining the agencies.

This reminds me of the Yogi Berra quote: "No one goes there anymore. It's too crowded."

If there was no money to be made in microstock, why are there more contributors than ever before? It's true that most will never see big success, but that's because most jump in after hearing they can make a quick buck by uploading their family vacation photos or everyday snapshots sitting on their phones.

These aren't serious microstockers. But you are, as you're proving by reading this book.

If you're willing to learn, and perhaps change your preconceived notions about what microstock is and what you need to do to win, then you will have an edge. How big your edge will be is up to you. Let's go!


MY JOURNEY: From zero to $1.5 million

Something had to change. In 2008, I was stuck in a rut at work and my growing family needed more income. I had recently started buying microstock images for work projects and wondered if I too could make some income selling my own work.

After a few rough starts finding my way, I soon had a portfolio of photos and illustrations at most of the big agencies, and my first earnings trickled in.

My 20-year background in marketing gave me an early leg up on the competition. Not only did I understand I had to meet the needs of customers, but I was a customer myself. I saw the business from both sides, and this insight led me to quick growth as a contributor.

My microstock earnings:

	income	assets
2008	$308	~200
2009	$17,236	~1,000
2010	$45,433	~2,200
2011	$90,881	~3,800
2012	$113,008	~5,200
2013	$109,958	~6,300
2014	$112,739	~7,500
2015	$110,137	~10,500
2016	$106,295	~13,500
2017	$97,593	~16,500
2018	$91,381	~19,000
2019	$103,721	~21,500
2020	$121,497	~24,000
2021	$134,872	~26,500
2022	$138,967	~29,000
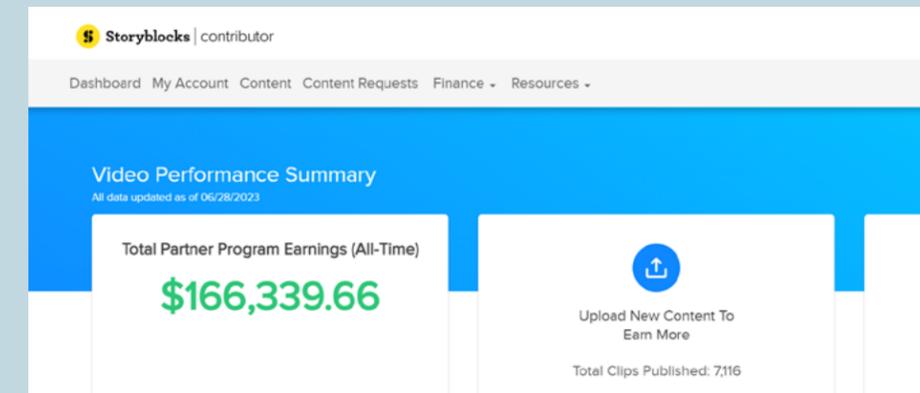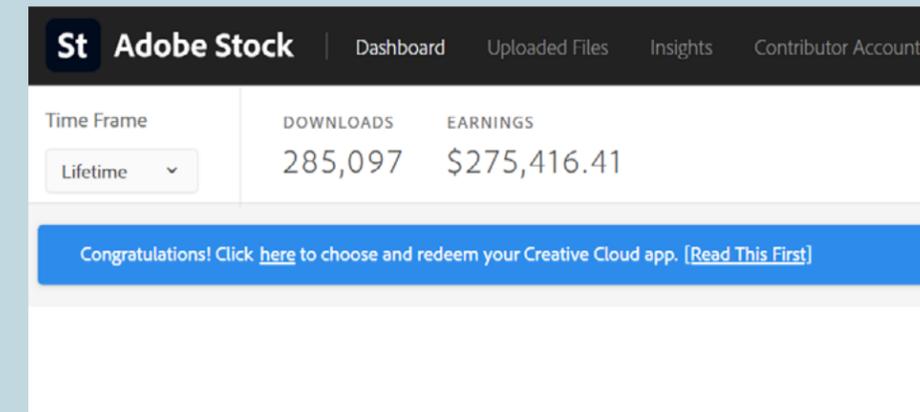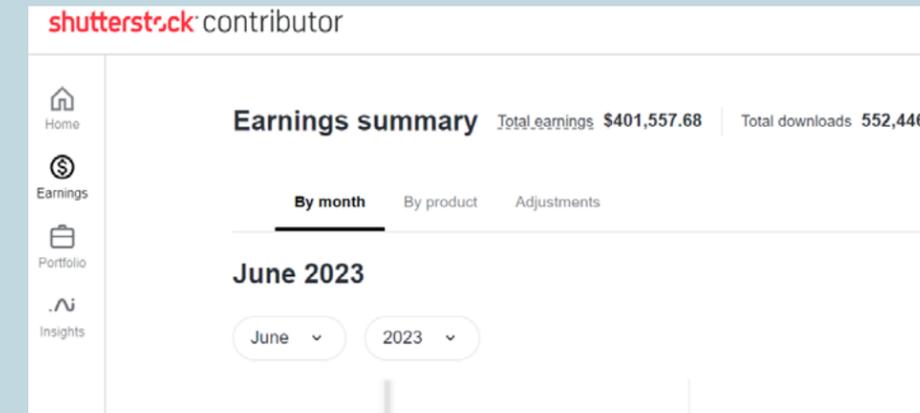
The lesson: I never had great skills as a photographer or illustrator. It's my marketing experience that helped me succeed. That's what I will share with you in this book. Your skills, plus a business mindset, can **help you win!**

This mindset will help you beat the competition

It's not about you. It's about customers.
You might love puppies and rainbows, but there's two reasons why you should NOT upload these: the agencies have more than customers will ever need, and customers need very few of them to begin with.

But you also shouldn't simply force yourself to comply with the most in-demand subjects, throwing your passion to the wind. You need to find the sweet spot where your passion overlaps with in-demand topics. Otherwise you'll start seeing microstock as a grind and lose the spark that gets you excited to create new content each day. That will kill your creativity and ultimately show in your work.

Make a list of the things you love to photograph, illustrate or animate. In a few pages, I'll share what I find to be the hottest, most in-demand subjects today, but don't look ahead. First, make your list and then we'll see where your passion topics merge with market demand.

Successfully figuring this out is like cracking the code of microstock, learning something most contributors never discover. Imagine waking up each day being excited to create new work, knowing you'll be rewarded for it when you upload. It's an adrenaline rush that fuels the most successful microstockers, and it's within your reach!

9 ways to find out what customers need

If only we could get into the minds of our customers, we would know exactly what they want to download before they realize it, and our content would be at the agencies and ready for them. It will never be that easy, but here are some methods that are the next best things!

Some agencies tell us what they need. Pay attention!
Top sites like Shutterstock, Adobe Stock and Storyblocks have sections in their contributor dashboards and/or publish newsletters describing what customers want but is lacking in their libraries. Your competition also sees this, but it's still golden advice!

Read the news, especially certain sources
What's happening in the world today predicts what customers will need tomorrow. But don't just go by headlines or you'll be a step behind. Watch for emerging trends. News outlets on finance or tech are the best predictors of in-demand themes.

Know customers who buy microstock? Ask them!
The best way to find out what a customer actually needs is to ask. While one person doesn't represent the whole market, you could get insights you won't find elsewhere. You can also learn what agencies are preferred, how certain content pops, and more.

Watch the top Google searches for trends
Trends.google.com provides a constantly updated wealth of information on what everyone is curious about right now. We hate when potential customers find an image to grab from Google instead of buying, but learn from them if you want a chance to sell to them.

Follow the authority on your 'sweet spot' topics
In a few pages, you'll see a list of today's hottest subjects to overlay with your passion topics to find your 'sweet spots.' Each of these should have a trade association, conference, news source or other authority you should follow closely to look for emerging trends.

Get hip with the kids, who often shape public taste
They're not microstock customers, but young influencers – sometimes even school-age kids – are big creators and consumers of viral content like TikTok videos, which the corporate world is desperate to emulate in its customer outreach.

Watch contributor forums ... with a grain of salt
Forums like microstockgroup.com can provide great insight on what's selling now, but are also full of people complaining. Learn what you can from those willing to share, but don't be discouraged by whiners and trolls.

Analyze your own data but don't cannibalize yourself
Watch your own views and downloads for clues on what's connecting (create more like this) and what's not (pivot away quickly). Don't just copy what you already have or you'll just compete with our own work. Instead, learn from our success and extend it.

Search 'Most Downloaded' at the agencies
This is last because all your competition is doing this, and it's also backward and not forward-looking, but skipping this is like being blindfolded. Don't just copy what you see. Ask yourself what new spin you could put on top content – how can you do it better?

What is or isn't HIGH COMMERCIAL VALUE?

At some point, it will happen to you. An agency will reject one of your uploads for having low or no "commercial value." This simply means the agency – or the individual reviewer there at that moment in time – believes the particular image or video is not going to meet customer demand.

Maybe you've followed all the advice on determining what customers need, but on a certain upload an agency said you missed the mark. These are three key things to keep in mind:

1. What's high commercial value to one agency might be low to another. Don't be discouraged! Some agencies have unique customer bases with different needs. The same image or video may be accepted at another agency and sell quite well.

2. Ask yourself why and learn from it. Maybe the subject matter is needed by customers but your particular approach isn't right. Experiment with a different style next time, or see how the 'most downloaded' files from other contributors are handling it – be inspired, but don't copy!

3. Understanding 'HCV' is a sixth sense. Don't sweat it in the beginning. As you build experience, you'll know in your gut if a particular idea will sell or won't based on past trial and error.

My hot 100 subjects that sell

The below list is based on my experience. As always, your mileage may vary.
Some of these are evergreen topics, and some are new -- the list is ever changing. Regardless, this is the list I regularly reference when creating new content. Remember the key is to keep a balanced portfolio and not to oversaturate any one topic and compete with your own work.

BUSINESS
Best Job Candidate
Branding
Compliance
Content Marketing
Continuous Learning / Improvement
Credit Ratings / Scores
Customer Needs
Financial Problems / Debt
Growth
Hiring / Interviewing
Hybrid Work / Work from Home
Incentives
Inflation
Initial Public Offering (IPO)
Interest Rates
Investment
Jobs / Careers
Limited Liability Corporation (LLC)
Mentorship
New Customer / Prospecting
Personal Assistant
Profitability
Quarterly Results
Recovery
Risk Management
Sale / Save Money
Side Hustles
Startup / Launch
Tax Issues (Deadline / Deductions)
Training

HEALTH/AGING
Health Care Costs / Medical Bills
Healthy Eating / Dieting
Insurance / Uninsured
Mindfulness
Physical / Mental Health
Retirement

OBJECTS
Blank Check
Note Paper Background
Report Card
State Maps

CONCEPTS
Accountability
Bloopers / Mistakes / Outtakes
Breaking News
Change / Innovation
Confidential / Secret / Classified
Contest / Raffle / Lottery
Cooperation / Collaboration
Curiosity
Done / Complete / Finished
Efficiency / Working Smarter Not Harder
Emergency Action Plan
Empowerment
Event
Expanding Horizon (Leaving Comfort Zone)
Expertise
Feedback
Forecast / Prediction / Outlook
Free
Goals / Vision
Guarantee / Promise / Pledge
How to / Steps / Process
Impact
Introduction / Welcome
Limited Time / Time Running Out / Urgency
New
Practice / Preparation
Quiz / Test / Exam
Recognition / Appreciation
Reputation / Integrity
Reset / Restart / Redo
Results
Safety
Security
Speed
Storytelling
Tips / Advice
Top 10 / Rankings
Trivia
Uncertainty / Fear / Doubt
Uniqueness
Winner / Trophy / Top Performer

REAL ESTATE
Downsizing
Home Inspection
Mortgages
Moving / New Location
New Listings
Sell Your Home

SOCIAL ISSUES
Acceptance / Tolerance
Climate Change / Global Warming
Culture
DEIB (diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging)
Extreme Weather
Gun Violence
Marijuana
Social Security

TECHNOLOGY
Artificial Intelligence
Blockchain / Cryptocurrency
Computer Programming
Digital Marketing
Electric Vehicles

How to dominate in the top subjects

1 **Be there early.** Sometimes you're lucky enough to identify a new, niche topic and be the first to upload high-demand content. If so, count your blessings and "flood the zone!"

2 **Have the best keywords.** Hopefully your images or videos are the best available on the subject, but if not, you can compensate by using the smartest keywords. Look at what words the leading content uses and add to them – others may be "leaving money on the table" by overlooking obvious terms that customers might use to find content on the subject.

3 **Think like a customer.** If you needed images or videos on the subject, how would you use them? What would you be trying to communicate? Reverse engineer the process of content creation by starting with the customer trying to meet a need, rather than starting with your creation and hoping it finds buyers.

4 **Google the topic and see how customers use images and videos about it.** Example: search "hire the best candidate" and you'll find recruitment services, job boards and other sites. Click these to see a range of images and videos – a magnifying glass on the words "perfect candidate," a line of people in white shirts and one wearing blue, a resume with a gold star. These were the "winners" for that site's image search. How would you do it differently?

5 **Upload a variety of treatments.** You might have created the perfect image or video and it's seeing great downloads. Don't stop there. Create different takes in many different styles, colors, angles and more. You might have hit on the exact topic a customer needs, but your competition might have the topic plus style that's desired. Don't lose those downloads by sticking to one or two styles.

6 **Double-dip with unique combinations.** Example: a customer might offer some type of retirement service, like financial planning. Two of the subjects in our "hot 30" list are "urgency" and "retirement." Why not show a middle-aged couple looking at a clock or calendar, checking their wristwatch or some other pose to indicate "time to save for retirement?" And be sure to use all related terms in the keywords!

7 **Keep it fresh by uploading new content periodically.** If you start getting a significant share of the sales on a certain subject, count on other contributors jumping in to steal your downloads. You want to make sure your content stays timely and relevant, and that you have some results showing near the top if customers sort by "newest" content.

8 **Remember you're serving a diverse audience.** Be sure to create content that represents different cultures – use a diversity of models and appeal to many geographic regions. More and more, you're serving a global audience and not all cultures have the same tastes. If you use models, add diverse faces to the mix, or at least include some that can't be immediately described as a specific race or culture.

9 **Learn from what is working – "rinse and repeat."** As you grow, you'll start building your own best practices. You'll apply certain styles to subjects and hopefully some will catch on. Apply those same approaches to many of the top-selling subjects to repeat your success over and over. Repeatability is a big key to success!

10 **Make sure your images or videos stand out from the crowd!** Your content will be surrounded by many that could look just like it (hopefully not better!) What will make yours jump off the search results page and scream "download me?" Be sure to have special qualities, or "unique selling proposition," to ensure customers see your content and consider a purchase. How to do this? It's covered in the next section!

The agencies say their customers want this...

Every agency is different, and the customer needs of each can vary.
Several of them offer guidance to contributors on what their current needs are. Here's some of the content they recently said are in-demand, and where to go for their latest requests:

ADOBE STOCK	SHUTTERSTOCK	DEPOSIT PHOTOS	STORYBLOCKS (video)
▪ backgrounds	▪ road trips	▪ roofing	
▪ seasonal content related to major holidays like Christmas and Valentine's Day	▪ youth sports	▪ golf course	▪ blindness
	▪ seniors in tech	▪ concert	▪ virtual conference
	▪ brutalism in design	▪ happy dog	▪ gender-fluid
▪ conceptual images that are time-consuming to produce with software like Photoshop and Illustrator;	▪ college campus	▪ cleaning service	▪ queer
	▪ lifestyle videos	▪ happy older man	▪ ethnic
	▪ workplace representation	▪ cow pasture	▪ spanish
	▪ LGBTQ+ content	▪ jungle bird	▪ grey hair
▪ lifestyle images that include diverse people	▪ groups taking classes	▪ Brazil	▪ arabic
	▪ cooking videos	▪ entrepreneur	▪ obesity
	▪ urban pets	▪ barley	▪ deafness
	▪ diversity in healthcare, learning	▪ old pharmacy	▪ mid-adult
▪ technology	▪ watercolor aesthetics	▪ shocked woman	▪ social distancing
▪ food	▪ global cuisine	▪ manicure	▪ disability
▪ nature authentic people and personalities	▪ modern office celebrations	▪ Jesus Christ	▪ androgynous
	▪ immersive adventures away	▪ weight loss	▪ asian
	▪ candid office scenes	▪ bicycle helmet	▪ impairment
▪ PNG icon elements	▪ STEM-related activities	▪ African fabric	▪ cane
		▪ biometric verification	▪ multiracial
		▪ cosmetics	▪ minorities in politics
		▪ pink shrimp	▪ senior
		▪ x-ray	▪ interracial
		▪ doctor and patient	▪ black man
		▪ pregnancy	▪ gospel
		▪ sustainability	▪ wrinkles
Learn more	Learn more	Learn more	Learn more

CREATE CONTENT THAT GRABS ATTENTION

Your content must scream "Download Me!"

Your potential customers will see search result screens showing hundreds of images or videos to choose from. How will they notice yours? Here are some ways you can make sure your work grabs attention.

1. Vivid colors. Bright, eye-catching colors help your work jump off the page. When possible, I like to work with reds and yellows, because these colors are known to attract the eye. You can use color as a magnet to pull the customers eyes across the page and right onto your thumbnails, even if they aren't at the top of the page.

2. Faces – eyes, smiles, etc. Ever drive past a billboard with an attractive, smiling face staring right at you, and your eyes are pulled right to it? You might even wonder, what does that person have to do with the message being conveyed? It doesn't matter. The friendly face pulled you in, because we're wired to look at faces. You may not always have the opportunity to feature a face in your image, but when you can, you will be more likely to pull customers in.

3. Words. You may have heard the opposite, but in selling images and videos, I have found that "a word is worth a thousand pictures." If it makes sense for the image or video, consider adding a big word that helps sell the concept. For example, if you're showing a clock, try to add words on it or beside it using Photoshop or 3D software, like "TIME'S RUNNING OUT." If the customer is looking for an image that conveys urgency, your thumbnail will leap off the page.

4. Big & bold. Your thumbnails will be tiny. Test how it will appear to buyers by looking at it in a very small window. Do you see enough detail to decipher what it is? An image with a central object looming large even when constrained to a tiny thumbnail could stand out from a crowded screen of competition.
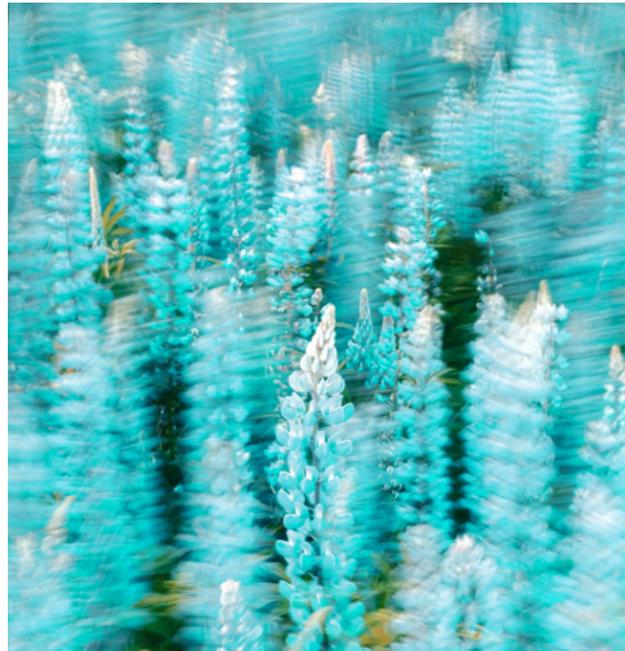
ADOBE STOCK

Veteran microstock artists recall an agency called Fotolia, which was a Tier One agency from the early days of the industry.

Adobe purchased Fotolia in 2015, and the creativity software giant quickly integrated the agency into its suite of services. Fotolia's legacy foothold in the market, plus the instant connections to creative professionals around the world, made Adobe Stock an immediate leader in the space and a must for any microstock artist.

Today, Adobe Stock is one of the most innovative of the agencies, being the first of the legacy companies to accept PNG files from contributors, and allowing AI-generated artwork into its library. While AI has been a point of contention among the contributor community, its inclusion at Adobe Stock signals that Adobe intends to be a leader rather than follower as the AI revolution unfolds.

My own experience: Shortly after Adobe's acquisition of Fotolia, it demonstrated a commitment to learning what customers and contributors wanted. In 2015, Adobe flew a few dozen of its top contributors – including myself – to its annual conference, Adobe Max in Los Angeles, where it collected our feedback on its direction for the future. At that time, I was convinced that Adobe intended to become the world's top microstock agency, and its progress in reaching that position has been remarkable.

ADOBE STOCK AT A GLANCE

ESTABLISHED
2005

IMAGE+VIDEO LIBRARY SIZE*
350,000,000

CONTRIBUTOR COMMISSIONS*
Up to 33% for images and 35% for video. Full details here

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE
Ability for customers to discover and download your content from within Adobe applications

* AS OF JUNE 2023

SUCCEED AT ADOBE STOCK

File types accepted: JPEG, PNG, AI, EPS, MOV, MPEG, MP4 – See full requirements here

How to apply: Sign up online here

Upload limits: Varies, based on your experience as a contributor

EASY UPLOAD SCORE: 8 (OUT OF 10)

Accepts Editorial: Yes (but only what it calls "Illustrative Editorial," and must not include recognizable people")

Keyword limits: 49 for images and videos

Policies on AI: Accepts AI-generated artwork. See full policies here

Important tips:
- **Don't over-manipulate your images.** Adobe asks that you to "process your images subtly — clean color images that are in focus sell well."
- Adobe gives more weight to the first seven or so keywords, so be sure to put your most important terms – those your potential customers are most likely to search – right up front!
- If uploading AI-generated images, be sure to check the box indicating they are generated by AI.
- Adobe is known for its responsive answers to contributor questions or concerns. For example, Mat Hayward, the company's "stock contributor success manager" is a frequent participant in online forums where he quickly addresses contributor inquiries. Have a question? Ask Mat!

THE PROS & CONS OF ADOBE STOCK

+ Great return on investment of your efforts and time
+ Leads on new trends and technologies
+ Access to enormous Adobe creative customer base
+ Great customer and contributor service
+ Relatively easy uploading system
+ Commission system, in my estimation, is relatively fair and transparent, compared to the other agencies

- Potential for rising competition from AI-generated art

MUST UPLOAD!
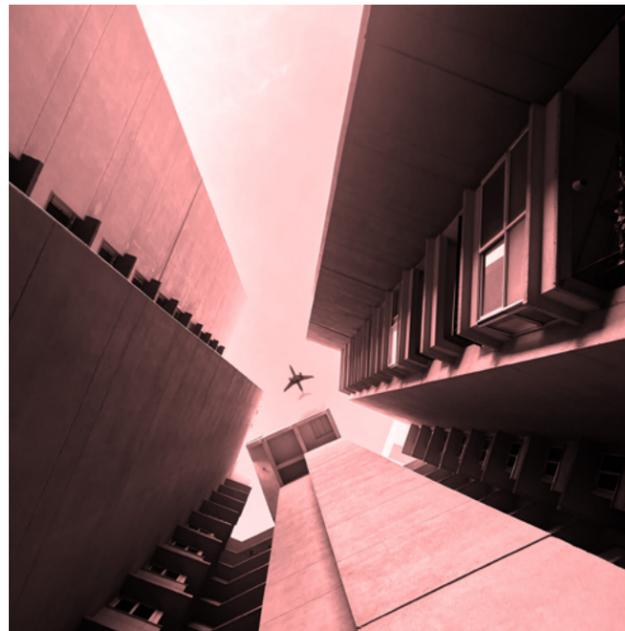
SHUTTERSTOCK

From the earliest days of microstock, Shutterstock was widely acknowledged as the 800-pound gorilla of the industry. It was often the first agency new contributors strived to get into and the yardstick against all other agencies were measured.

In 2023, Shutterstock's standing is diminished, though it is still in the top three earners for most contributors. Changes to commissions have angered many contributors, with the most infamous cut being the 'big reset' each contributor faces on January 1. After a year of climbing the ranks based on downloads, which raises a contributor's commission level, each first day of the year puts you back at level 1.

Still, it's hard to ignore the volume of downloads possible due to Shutterstock's huge market share. While some contributors have taken a stand by ceasing new uploads or pulling their portfolios, it's tough to make a viable pursuit of microstock if you're excluding this leading agency.

My own experience: In Shutterstock's heyday (let's call it 2008 - 2018), they were far and away my top performer, sometimes earning twice what my number two earner brought in. They have contacted me twice over the years as they brainstormed with their top earners on new features they were considering. It's clear they're trying to strike that tricky balance of being competitive with an affordable offer to customers while making uploads worthwhile for contributors.

SHUTTERSTOCK AT A GLANCE

ESTABLISHED
2003

IMAGE+VIDEO LIBRARY SIZE*
460,000,000

CONTRIBUTOR COMMISSIONS*
Six separate earnings levels, from 15% to 40%. You rise through the levels as your download count increases throughout the year, and it resets to Level 1 each January 1. Full details

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE
Big player, lots of customers.

* AS OF JUNE 2023

SUCCEED AT SHUTTERSTOCK

File types accepted: JPEG, TIF, EPS, MOV, MP4 – See full requirements here

How to apply: Sign up online here

Upload limits: Up to 500 images and up to 100 video clips during any 7 day period

EASY UPLOAD SCORE: 8 (OUT OF 10)

Accepts Editorial: Yes

Keyword limits: 50 for images and videos

Policies on AI: Doesn't accept AI-generated artwork. Allows your content to be used to train AI – meaning elements of your artwork could appear in AI art generated on other platforms – unless you opt out.

Important tips:
- **Be aware of the "similars" policy.** I find Shutterstock to be the strictest agency when it comes to images that seem similar. To avoid action taken against your portfolio, keep similars to a minimum, but when you feel the images are different enough to provide unique value to customers, separate them into different upload batches several days apart. The site software may still reject them as similars, but they will be less likely to be flagged by human reviewers if uploaded separately with gaps of time between.
- **Don't keyword spam.** Shutterstock strictly enforces it, and it's a bad idea regardless!

THE PROS & CONS OF SHUTTERSTOCK

+ Still near the top of the agencies with massive customer base

+ One of the easier uploading systems around

+ Contributor dashboard is thorough and easy to use

− The "Big Reset" -- after you claw your way up through the levels all year long, reaching a higher commission rate with each step, you now get knocked back down to Level 1 each January 1. Extremely demoralizing.

− It once had a "honeymoon period" for new content to enjoy great exposure and downloads right after being accepted, today new content has little chance to be seen.

MUST UPLOAD!

CANVA

NOTE: AS OF THIS UPDATE, CANVA IS NOT ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR NEW CONTRIBUTORS. WE RECOMMEND YOU KEEP WATCHING AND APPLY WHEN POSSIBLE.

In the past 15 years, there hasn't been a great deal of innovation in microstock, but Canva is the exception. They developed a platform for customers to easily create their own art by piecing together various artistic elements.

And where does Canva get these artistic elements? That's where you come in! Contributors (which Canva calls "Element Creators") upload a variety of background and isolated elements and earn commissions when customers select and use that content to make their own creations. Use of the site has grown exponentially since its launch, and other agencies are scrambling to come up with similar offerings.

Canva has been a true disruptor in the microstock world, and you should pay attention to the "do it yourself" platforms that will continue to launch and evolve in the coming years. As you create new content, consider elements that could be isolated with transparent backgrounds and placed collage-style in different scenarios. Big opportunity here!

My own experience: Though my portfolio is much smaller at Canva than other agencies, and I don't upload as regularly there, I still earn hundreds a month in reliable, passive income at Canva.
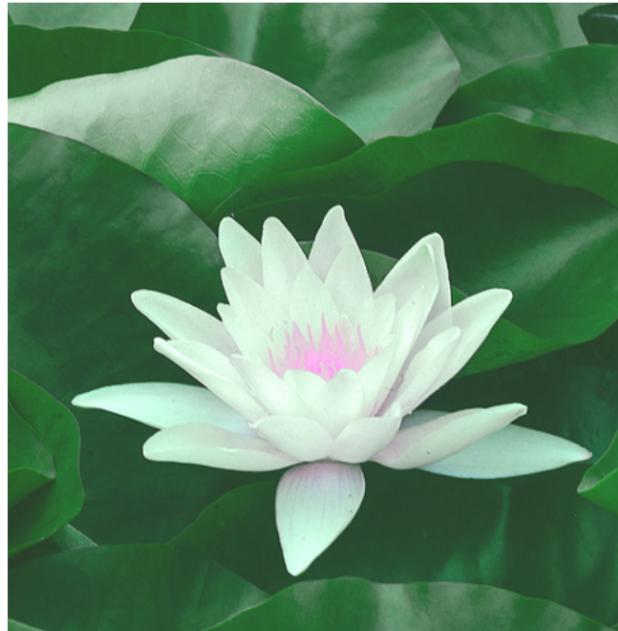
CANVA AT A GLANCE

ESTABLISHED
2013

DESIGN ELEMENT LIBRARY SIZE*
100,000,000

CONTRIBUTOR COMMISSIONS*
35% of every content license purchase. Full details here

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE
Empowers customers to design their own artwork using your uploaded elements, disrupting the microstock world.

* AS OF JUNE 2023

SUCCEED AT CANVA

File types accepted: JPEG, PNG, EPS, SVG – See full requirements here

How to apply: While Canva has paused taking applications for new Element Creators, you can watch here for updates.

EASY UPLOAD SCORE: 6 (OUT OF 10)

Upload limits: No daily upload limit

Accepts Editorial: No

Keyword limits: 50 for images and videos

Policies on AI: Not currently accepting AI-generated artwork.

Important tips:
- **Follow Canva's do's and don'ts.** Here's the link.
- **Consider becoming a "Template Creator."** At this moment, this opportunity is still in beta, but once it opens to more creators, you'll have a chance to add to your Canva revenue stream by combining elements to create in-demand templates customers can use to build their own pieces. You can apply here.
- **Think like a customer.** More than any other agency, success at Canva requires you to think like a customer. What would you build on a certain topic? How could backgrounds or isolated objects from your image library be used by customers to build something unique and effective?

THE PROS & CONS OF CANVA

+ Innovative platform empowering customers to create their own images, already shaping customer expectations of what microstock should be

+ Preparing content for Canva helps you build a collection of imagery that will be ready for other platforms that will inevitably surface in years ahead to challenge Canva.

+ Use of the site is steady and growing

− Stringent reviewers since needs are more specific, tougher to get images accepted here than most other agencies.

MUST UPLOAD!

DEPOSIT PHOTOS

Ukrainian pride is big at the moment, and for good reason given current world events. This agency was founded in Ukraine in 2009, though it was purchased in 2021 by Vistaprints and is currently headquartered in New York.

Despite going up against much bigger players, Deposit Photos proved itself an agile and smart upstart and is today a solid seller for many contributors.

Deposit's management is savvy and is constantly exploring new avenues, such as Canva-style tools for customers to create their own content. This finger to the pulse of the market approach makes Deposit Photos one to keep watching as the industry evolves.

My own experience: It was easy to grow a large portfolio at Deposit Photos thanks to its relatively easy upload process, and it has been one of my bigger earners among the middle or lower tier agencies.

a

DEPOSIT PHOTOS AT A GLANCE

ESTABLISHED
2009

IMAGE+VIDEO LIBRARY SIZE*
267,000,000

CONTRIBUTOR COMMISSIONS*
30% to 38% based on level determined by upload quantity.
Full details here

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE
Fairly easy uploads plus consistent sales make this agency a must-upload for contributors

* AS OF JUNE 2023

SUCCEED AT DEPOSIT PHOTOS

File types accepted: JPEG, AI, EPS, ASF, AVI, DV, FLV, MOV, MPEG/MPG, WMV

   Full requirements here

How to apply: Sign up online here

EASY UPLOAD SCORE: 7 (OUT OF 10)

Upload limits: No daily upload limit

Accepts Editorial: Yes

Keyword limits: 50 for images and videos

Policies on AI: Not currently accepting AI-generated artwork.

Important tips:
- Follow the advice offered for the other top sites, and you should be in good shape for Deposit Photos.
- The site offers a Knowledge Hub to help you stay tuned in to what their customers are looking for. Pay attention to it!
- Deposit's AI-powered search engine empowers customers to filter by a number of criteria, including camera angles and isolations. So it's a good idea to create variations of content to meet a variety of customer tastes – especially if your competition is failing to do so!

THE PROS & CONS OF DEPOSIT PHOTOS

+ Relatively easy uploading system

+ Large customer base

+ Regular, reliable download volume

+ Management keeping pulse of industry changes, creating new opportunities for contributors

− Not a top-tier agency in terms of sales

MUST UPLOAD!

ISTOCK

iStockPhoto was the very first microstock agency. The microstock revolution began in 2000 when an entrepreneur named Bruce Livingstone started iStockPhoto as a site to offer free photos on the Internet. The site became popular and in 2002, he had to begin charging small fees to users, and that started off the business model of charging relatively small amounts for customers to find and download the perfect image, and later video, for their needs.

Getty purchased iStockPhoto in 2006 and eventually dropped 'Photo' from its name to reflect the fact that the site also offered illustration, videos, and more.

Once the dominant microstock site, iStock soon faced increasing competition which began pulling away its market share, with the biggest draw coming from Shutterstock.

Over time, the commission structure at iStock has changed, and not to the benefit of most contributors. The lowering of commissions has helped spur a 'race to the bottom' that many contributors decry. The diminishing returns over time, plus time-consuming uploading process, has led some artists to stop sending new content. Still, iStock attracts many customers, and for some contributors, provides consistent payouts.

ISTOCK AT A GLANCE

ESTABLISHED
2000

CONTRIBUTOR COMMISSIONS*

15% for photos and illustrations. 20% for video. These are the non-exclusive rates. 25% to 45% if you choose to go exclusive with iStock. Full details here

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Large base of customers, thanks to its legacy as the oldest microstock agency.

SUCCEED AT ISTOCK

File types accepted: JPEG, EPS, MOV – See full requirements here

How to apply: Sign up online here

Upload limits: Up to 999 per week

Accepts Editorial: Yes

Keyword limits: 50 for images and videos

Policies on AI: Does not currently accept AI-generated artwork

EASY UPLOAD SCORE: 1 (OUT OF 10)

Important tips:
- Get to know the site. iStock can be picky about what it accepts and rejects, so you may want to save yourself the time spent in its cumbersome submission process if your style isn't a match for the site and its customers.
- If uploading at iStock, give yourself extra time. You'll be asked to match your submission to controlled vocabulary from the agency's established list. In my experience, this is time-consuming, and coupled with declining returns, it has caused me to stop uploading here.

THE PROS & CONS OF ISTOCK

+ Still provides access a sizable base of customers

– Commission structure not as beneficial to contributors as other sites

– Uploading system with a controlled vocabulary and keyword taxonomy requires much more work than other agencies

QUICK TAKES ON OTHER AGENCIES

FREEPIK
Has a large base of users due to having a great deal of free content. If you want to sell there, you will be competing with no-cost files. Commission rates are low.

DREAMSTIME
Once a major player, earnings have significantly decreased for most contributors. Commission structure is fair, though upload system not as easy as other agencies.

BIGSTOCKPHOTO
Owned by Shutterstock, it was once easy to have your new Shutterstock submissions flow over to BigStock, but as of June 2023 it is no longer accepting new commissions. Sales and earnings have always been modest here, so it's not much of a lost opportunity.

123RF
Several years ago, 123RF looked to be joining the ranks of the top agencies, but earnings fell off a cliff (at least for me) and barely registers minimum payouts these days.

ALAMY
A higher-end photo agency, though many contributors report a low quantity of sales and earnings. Its unusually high prices probably keep potential sales low.

STOCKSY
One of the highest-paying agencies around, but also extremely selective in who they allow to admit as contributors and what content they will accept.

STORYBLOCKS
High volume of sales and regular payouts for videos, but shares little information about downloads and earnings and has been known to change its payout algorithms, drastically reducing payouts.

POND5
Footage and animation producers once saw Pond5 as the leader for stock video, but the Shutterstock-owned site now generates vastly lower earnings and payouts for most contributors.

ENVATO
Some have had luck with this collection of different creative platforms such as PhotoDune and VideoHive though its customer base and commissions pose limited opportunities for contributors.

HELPFUL LINKS
Agency insight pages

Several of the agencies tell you what their customers are looking for, and topics that are likely to be in high demand in the weeks, months or even years to come. Bookmark these pages and check them frequently for tips on what you should create next.

ADOBE STOCK Artist Hub: https://stock.adobe.com/pages/artisthub/

ADOBE STOCK Insights (recent top sellers): https://contributor.stock.adobe.com/en/insights/best/contributors

SHUTTERSTOCK The Shot List: https://www.shutterstock.com/explore/the-shot-list

DEPOSIT PHOTOS Knowledge Hub: https://blog.depositphotos.com/depositphotos-review.html

STORYBLOCKS In-Demand Content: https://contribute.storyblocks.com/dashboard/in-demand

Trending searches

One good way to see what customers want right now is to check out the trending search pages at the big agencies, even those that offer free downloads. Your content could still appear on the search result pages of free sites, with links to the agencies selling your work, so you can turn these searches into paying sales.

Unsplash.com: https://unsplash.com/trends
Pexels.com: https://www.pexels.com/popular-searches/
Pixabay.com: https://pixabay.com/popular-searches/
iStockPhoto.com: https://www.istockphoto.com/en/visual-gps/insights
Getty Images.com: https://www.gettyimages.com/visual-gps/insights
Depositphotos.com: https://depositphotos.com/stock-photography

BEST UPLOADING STRATEGIES

1. Upload in small batches

Even if you have 10 or 20 images or videos ready to upload, it's a good idea to separate them into smaller batches. Two reasons why: it lowers your risk of a large number of rejections if you have the misfortune of an inexperienced or moody reviewer saying no to an entire batch at once; and it lowers your risk of rejections due to similars (more on this below....)

2. Separate your 'similars' into varied batches

Some agencies (I'm looking at you, Shutterstock!) get a little crazy with rejecting uploads for being too similar to other uploads. I agree that uploads in principle are bad. We shouldn't overwhelm customers with nearly identical images and videos that add no additional value to other content. But sometimes reviewers (and AI algorithms) take it to the extreme. That's why I break up images and videos that could be flagged as similars into separate batches, submitted days or even weeks apart. It doesn't always prevent rejections, but I have noticed a decrease.

3. Submit content regularly – daily if possible

It's well known that your downloads will suffer if you take too long a break between uploading. Don't let this happen to you! Daily uploading is a great target. But we all have periods of being extremely busy or being away (vacations, holidays, etc.) When I see these periods coming, I ramp up my creation in advance and upload (but not submit) extra content right before a break. Then during my down period, I simply go in each day and hit the submit button on a few images and videos at a time. This tells each agency I'm still actively contributing and shouldn't be hit with the 'inactive' hammer, pushing my content lower in search results for customers.

4. Don't forget model and property releases

This should be a no-brainer, but I've seen my share of rejections for forgetting releases. Also, if your content includes objects like newspapers or contracts, agencies may reject them, assuming you're using protected intellectual property, even if you created them yourself. You should provide a release for those types of objects, telling the agencies you created them.

5. Prioritize your top agencies

To maximize the productivity in my daily workflow, I only do daily upload for my very top performing agencies, and bulk upload the rest on a less frequent basis. This frees up a bit of time each time for more content creation, but you do increase the risk of rejections for similars or due to a cranky reviewer saying no to many at once. You might test this a few times first before making this a regular practice.

6. Upload content with accurate titles

Every image or video you upload should be titled with words that accurately reflect the content. I've made the mistake of getting too conceptual with my titles, only to be rejected by reviewers who took the terms too literally. For instance, I submitted an image with a title including the phrase 'nest egg' since it was about saving money for the future, but it was rejected since the image contained neither a nest nor an egg!

7. Check the right boxes

Another mistake I've made, requiring me to waste time uploading a second time... forgetting to check the box for "illustration" at Shutterstock, or uploading an AI-generated image at Adobe Stock without checking that box. These mistakes will earn you quick rejections, or put you at risk of action down the road.

8. For video: fine-tune your upload workflow

Submitting video is a much bigger pain than images, since clips don't include embedded metadata. We have to manually enter a title and keywords for each clip. To streamline the process, I keep a spreadsheet of keywords open and copy the cell with the appropriate keywords once, then paste for the file at each of the three agencies where I actively submit. Then I do the same thing for the file names. It may seem like a minor hack, but it probably saves me 10 minutes a day, which is time I'd rather use creating new content!

THE TRUTH ABOUT THESE MYTHS

Should I set up my own site to sell my content?

In a word, no. Many, including myself, have tried to set up their own site to earn big profits from selling directly to customers. The dream is that you'll earn 100% of the sale as opposed to a commission of around 30% (roughly the agency average). The problem is you would be competing with behemoths offering tens of millions of images and videos. Their SEO is long-established, meaning your content will be so buried in Google search results that buyers would never find it. That being said, if you have a large following of buyers and could share your links through social media and other channels as opposed to having to rely on placing well in search results, you may have a shot at earning more than the costs involved in hosting your own website. If your goal is to have a vanity site to show to friends and family, have at it – just be prepared to lose money with it.

Should I wait until my skills good enough?

When I started, I doubted my artistic skills would earn much money, and four years later I was making six figures annually. If you have just one takeaway from reading this book, I hope it's this: having a basic understanding of photography or illustration or videography is the price of entry, but it's your marketing knowhow that will determine your success or failure. Do NOT feel you have to master your artistic skills before diving into microstock. The sooner you start LEARNING what customers want from trial and error (and with a big leg up from what this book has taught you) the sooner you will start EARNING.

In my first few months in microstock, I reached out to a legendary contributor and asked for his opinion of my early content. He told me I wasn't ready, that I should wait to dive in until I had more finely honed my creative skills. I ignored that advice, and am glad I did. From what I can tell from his posts to forums over the years, my earnings surpassed his own several years ago. I now realize he was likely trying to discourage potential competitors. I hope I'm doing the opposite here. Yes, you might be a future competitor for me, but I have always believed in "paying it forward!"

Quality vs quantity – which is more important?

In most things in life, we're told quality is more important than quantity. I'm tempted to tell you that in microstock they are equally important. But the truth is that quantity should win this battle. I'm NOT saying that you should upload content that is bad by any aesthetic or technical standard. You want customers to see a great portfolio and be enticed to download a lot of your content.

But remember this saying: "The perfect is the enemy of the good." It's a more productive use of your time to be creating and uploading 10 good images or videos a day than one perfect one. The good ones are just as likely to be seen and downloaded by a customer as the perfect one. Again, DON'T upload anything with technical flaws, or strive for mediocrity. Always strive for greatness, but don't throw out your results that reach goodness.

Do I need to promote my work on social media?

Sure, why not – but it's not necessary. I have ZERO social media presence, and without it have earned six figures in microstock for many years. Customers download my work because it meets their needs in the moment. They don't care about me or what my latest uploads look like. Having a big social media following works well for fine artists, who have customers who collect their work. That's a totally different world than microstock, where creators are largely unknown to buyers and audiences. If you're in microstock to earn fans and followers, you're in the wrong business. The goal here should be spending more time creating and uploading, and less time on things that don't contribute to increasing downloads. Social media is definitely in that second bucket.

INTRODUCTION: STARTING YOUR JOURNEY

Welcome! And congratulations! By enrolling in this course, you've decided to make an investment in yourself, and I've always believed that's the best investment you will ever make.

You've decided that selling your photos, AI generated images, illustrations or video online is possible. And you're absolutely right. You can make passive income if you follow the detailed steps and advice I'll share in this course.

This course is structured based on the key topics you'll need to master to succeed at selling your work, and a total of more than 20 modules, so you can learn at your own pace. Whether you take a small step or a big step everyday, remember that each step gets you closer to your goal. This simple concept has helped me on my own goals in life, in all that I've done. Every journey is a series of steps, and if you commit to making some steps each day – whether it's twenty steps or just one – or giant leaps or little movements – the key is, you're closer each day to your goal.
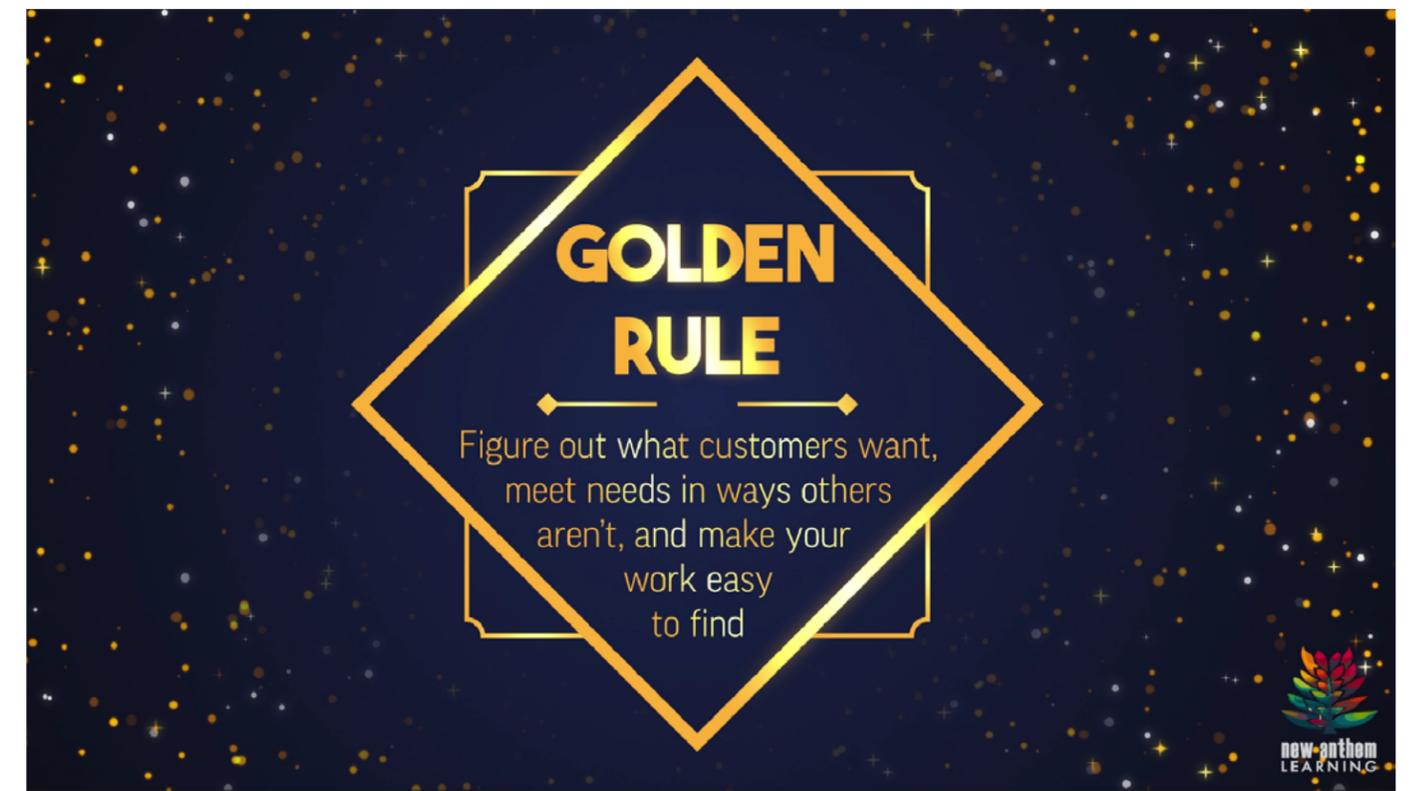
This is an especially important idea in selling your work online. As you start out, you'll probably upload just a few images or videos. And the sales will start out small. But as you learn, you'll upload more – and figure out what buyers like, and create more of that great content. Hopefully, you'll start to see a snowball effect, with success building on success.

This course will help you whether you intend to sell photography, AI images, illustrations or videos. The principles I share will apply to your chosen media, whatever that may be. You see, stock photography is a business, and the principles of serving customers what they need is true no matter what you're selling.

You might be wondering – are my skills good enough to make money at this? As I'll share in a moment, I think I'm a good example of how just about anyone can do this, even if you don't consider your technical skills to be sufficient. Yes, you need to know how to shoot a picture or a video, or how to write a great AI prompt (which I'll teach later), or do some basic illustration. But more important than that is to figure out what customers want, how to meet those needs in a way that others aren't, and make it easy for customers to find your work. That's the winning formula, and if you can master it, your goals will be within reach.

Throughout the course I'm going to be posting the key things that you must remember on screen like you see here. Just about every module will include one of these GOLDEN RULES. So right here in the introduction, we're going to call this GOLDEN RULE #1... it's actually three rules in one, which makes it that much more crucial to follow: Figure out what customers want, meet these needs in a way that others aren't, and make your work easy to find.

This is also a golden rule in marketing, which has always been my day job, so I was fortunate to have my marketing background as a foundation in building my microstock side career. Many of your competitors don't get this basic principle, and now that you know it, if you embrace it, you're going to be ahead of a lot of your competition. In addition to these GOLDEN RULES, I'll also share GOLDEN HACKS because I don't just want to say "Always Do This" without actually showing you "How to Do This." So, Golden Hack #1 explains one way to find out what is selling and to hone in on a lucrative niche. Let's say you have an opportunity coming up to create an image or video of business people – always a popular theme, but also a very competitive one. Go to AdobeStock.com, do a search on business people, -- expand the filters and select photo, illustration or video – whatever it is you plan to create, and this is the key -- sort by Downloads.

GOLDEN RULE

Figure out what customers want, meet needs in ways others aren't, and make your work easy to find

This shows you what the most downloaded images or videos are for that subject. You can learn a number of things here – first is that there are nearly 12 million images so you know there's a lot of competition, which makes it crucial that you choose your approach wisely.

Second, you'll see that there are a number of business women on the page – more than men. That tells you that photos of a business woman may be more in demand than a business man. Next, while there is some diversity in the top selling images, there isn't much. All of this let's you hone in on this conclusion: a business woman, and a diverse business woman of color, may help you stand out in this crowded field. So, GOLDEN HACK #1: Search your topic at a big agency like Adobe, sort by downloads, see what sells and find your niche.

And speaking of niches, I'm going to share with you my 100 hottest selling themes later in the course. I've discovered these by following the steps I'm sharing with you here, as well as learning from my own sales and iterating on the successes I've had. And I'll give you that whole list to see which ones you can add to your portfolio to generate your own sales.

MY STORY: FROM $0 TO $100,000 A YEAR

The year was 2006, and my wife and I reached a huge milestone in our lives. We had triplets, in addition to our first son who was six years old at this point. So, we needed more money. I explored several passive income streams for a few years, going down a few roads that didn't lead me anywhere, and in 2008 I discovered microstock. My day job in marketing required me to find images to help sell our services to our customers, and I started buying images that met those needs. I began to wonder, how much are these photographers or illustrators earning each time I downloaded one of their images. I did my homework and decided this could be the salvation my family needed.

I wasn't much of a photographer or illustrator, but I taught myself enough to upload to the big agencies at the time – Shutterstock, Fotolia, iStock, Dreamstime and a half dozen others – and I was gradually accepted at each one. By the end of 2008, I had small portfolios at about ten agencies, and had earned my first few thousand dollars.

This was an exciting time. I quickly realized that certain images were selling and others weren't, and I adjusted what I was creating to meet customer demands. My very first successes were on business concepts like networking, growing sales, and other topics that I had looked for in my own job. Since I actually was a microstock customer, I could think like a customer. Plus, I had been trained throughout my career to put the need before the product. I shouldn't just create what I wanted to create and expect it to sell. My marketing jobs taught me to talk to customers, gather some intelligence on needs a customer had, and then design a product that would meet certain pain points. I applied that marketing principle to my earliest photos and illustrations I created, and it worked right out of the gate.

I streamlined my workflows and reached a point of creating and uploading 5 to 10 new images every day. My first full year selling images online I had more than 1,200 online and earned more than fifteen thousand dollars. I continued to learn and improve, and began adding video to my portfolio. Within five years I was earning more than $100,000 per year in passive income.

Now, no one can guarantee how much money you can earn if you're starting out today. The truth is, it's much more competitive today than when I started back in 2008. But I intend to teach you some of the most important things I learned so you can have a leg up on the competition. That's the goal of this course – to let you leverage my more than 15 years of trials and errors, my a-ha and my whoops moments – to get you as close to your goal as quickly as possible.

One of the first golden rules I discovered when I began is this... don't wait to perfect your skills – start today and learn as you go. Remember, the perfect is the enemy of the good. I didn't know much about photography, vector illustration or 3d illustration when I started, but I taught myself enough to create my first uploads. To my surprise, they were immediately accepted and began selling. My skills slowly got better as I created and uploaded more and more. And I consider myself much better now than when I started 15 years ago, but I'm so glad that I didn't listen to the negative thoughts that said, you need to wait until you hone your skills perfectly. You have no right to try this yet. Well, I had every right to try it, and people wanted what I created. Don't wait. Accept that it's a journey, but your first steps should start today.

Here's a GOLDEN HACK to build on that GOLDEN RULE. Start simple. Don't aim for creating elaborate sets and hiring multiple models. And if you're still learning illustration, try creating simpler, less detailed objects. One secret to microstock is that simple objects, often isolated on a white background, or simple illustrated patterns, can sell really well. Now, the agencies have way more apples and other common objects isolated on white than they'll ever need, so you'll have to follow steps in the coming sections to find objects and themes to focus on for these simple photos, illustrations and videos. Just remember that you're not out to impress art critics or teachers with your technical skills. You're aiming to grab attention with images that customers need, and often, a simple image or video can meet the need just as well as a complex one.

This is still a principle I follow to this day. I always keep in mind the return on my investment of time and effort. Today, I don't put as much time into creating and uploading new work as I used to. That's the nice thing about having a large portfolio and a steady, established passive income stream. It doesn't take much work to maintain it. Still, I put in about an hour a day to keep uploading fresh new content. I enjoy making it, because it's a great creative outlet for me, and I've been able to streamline the process a great deal. I'll cover some great productivity hacks in the course to share how I've been able to minimize the work while maximizing the return on your time and effort.

HOW MUCH MONEY CAN YOU MAKE?

Now, some of your very first questions are probably, can I make money at microstock today? And how much can I make?

As for how much money you can make, here's a look at the commissions you can earn at the major agencies... this is the current information as of the recording of this course, but you can check the agencies for the latest updates, since earning structures do change from time to time.

At Adobe Stock, there's a number of ways to earn. The most common are with subscription commissions and earnings from on-demand downloads. For images, you're going to earn about 33 to 38% of what the customer paid to download your image. The percent changes based on your lifetime earnings at Adobe. You'll start at 33 and work your way up to 38 percent. Adobe applies that percentage to the amount the customer paid based on the subscription package or on-demand price. You can see here this will range from 33 cents to about three dollars thirty cents, if you're just starting out.

The earnings you get for on-demand or extended license downloads will be considerably higher, though they are much less frequent. Earnings for videos, follow a similar structure, with the minimum commission rate being 35 percent when you're starting out. The other type of commission is referred to as "custom" but these aren't detailed in Adobe Stock's site. These amounts are based on an enterprise customer's subscription rate, which can vary. So that's the structure, and here's a look at my typical daily earnings. You can see the bulk of my earnings are in the 38 to 99 cents range, though there are some that are much higher, though they are much less frequent. The video downloads are easy to spot, as many of them are about $32 or more. On average, I'm earning around $80 or $100 a day at Adobe Stock, with a total portfolio of about 22,000 images and 7,000 videos.

The other ways to earn at Adobe Stock are as follows:

You can submit images and videos to Adobe's free collection. You can earn about $5 per accepted image and $8 per selected video. The periods to nominate assets to the free collection only come up once or twice a year, and Adobe won't accept everything you nominate. Only certain assets will be considered eligible, and I think it's wise to submit those that have not

had many recent downloads. Since you're getting a $5 payout per image placed in the free collection for one year, you're preventing yourself from earning normal commissions on them, so you want to be confident that the $5 upfront payout is more than you would earn in normal commissions for the year. This year, I participated once, and earned about $200 on 40 images accepted into the free collection.

Another bonus way to earn occurred this year when Adobe paid contributors a fee for training its Firefly AI platform. The amounts paid were based on the contributor's activity levels at Adobe, and this year I earned an extra $1,500.

Another bonus you could get from Adobe is free access to its Creative Cloud software. For several years now, I have earned an annual subscription to all Adobe programs, based on my number of downloads from the prior year. This is a value of several hundred dollars a year, so it's a great incentive to perform well at Adobe Stock.

Let's look at Shutterstock.

Earnings are calculated in a similar way at Shutterstock, with the bulk of your income coming from subscription and on-demand downloads. The percentages are a wider range at Shutterstock compared to Adobe, from 15% at level 1 and 40% at level 6.

The biggest difference here is that everyone's level resets to level 1 every January first.

Here's a look at how the earnings structure applies to my Shutterstock income. My daily earnings vary wildly from about $10 per day to around $50 or $60 a day, and it's made up of a wide range of download types – from subscription downloads of ten cents to on demand earnings in the several dollar range.

Somewhat less frequently, I see what Shutterstock calls "Single and other" downloads which are typically in the several dollar range.

So those are two of the leading agencies, and I'll cover more of them in greater detail in a later module. But you can already see there's great potential to earn passive income if you approach uploading to the agencies the right way... and if you're constantly learning, pushing yourself to see new opportunities and adapt your skills to meet customer needs.

Constant learning. We just hit on the next GOLDEN RULE – Push yourself to always be learning. Leave your comfort zone and don't miss out on new trends and technologies. It's easy to fall into a rut of shooting or illustrating the same subjects with the same tools. That can lead to stagnation in your portfolio, and your sales will suffer.

Now to make this idea actionable, here's a GOLDEN HACK – Think vertical. One perfect example of constantly learning is something I noticed a few years ago – as more people consume information on their phones, more vertical oriented photos and videos are needed. If you're like me, you might start creating content in horizontal or landscape mode by default, but for every horizontal image or video you create, do another version in vertical orientation. Don't just crop your horizontal content, but frame a special vertical version when you're shooting or illustrating to take advantage of the vertical aspect ratio. You'll be doubling your available content, which is great, and also making sure you can meet the need for customers who specifically want a vertical image or video. We'll cover the exact specs later in the section on preparing your content.

THE FUTURE OF SELLING ONLINE

You've seen the opportunity exists to make some significant passive income. But, wherever there's money to be made, there's also competition.

And the fact is, there is a lot of competition today -- it's been estimated that there are about 500,000 people with accounts at the various stock agencies. While some point to this as too much competition for anyone to be making any real money today, I see it as proof that it remains a lucrative income stream for a lot of people. It's like the old saying "No one goes to that restaurant anymore – it's too crowded." That logic doesn't make sense. If people aren't making money, there wouldn't be artists uploading new images and videos every day.

The truth is that as camera technology has advanced, just about any mobile device today can take a stock-quality photograph or video. If you have a high-end, expensive camera, that's great. But it's no longer a requirement. That has leveled the playing field for anyone interested in making passive income. And there are many free photo editing programs available today -- I'll be showing you those in a later module. It's no longer the case that you need to invest in a

crostock revolution began in 2000 when an entrepreneur named Bruce Livingstone started iStockPhoto as a site to offer free photos on the Internet. The site became popular and in 2002, he had to begin charging small fees to users, and that started off the business model of charging relatively small amounts for customers to find and download the perfect image, and later video, for their needs.

Since then, many more agencies have jumped into the market. Shutterstock, Fotolia, Dreamstime, Canva, just to name a few. Some flourished while many others came and went. Today there are only between 5 and 10 that are truly worth uploading to.

It's been estimated that the microstock industry will see about one point five billion dollars in growth through the end of this decade. That's going to be fueled by a number of factors, one of them being artificial intelligence, or AI. Tools like Midjourney and others are enabling just about anyone to create high-quality images on nearly any subject they can dream up.

Some critics fear this will be the end of people like us being able to earn income, but I think that's untrue. I believe it's simply a tool that needs to be used correctly to create work that attracts buyers. I see many people using it to create abstract backgrounds, because those

high-powered computer and software. So, if you have a mobile phone with a decent camera, and access to just about any computer, you can do this.

And the good news is that you're in the right place, taking this course. You're learning how vital it is to focus on high commercial value subjects... and the themes that are way too oversaturated and you should stay away from. This is knowledge that a lot of your competition just doesn't have.

We're going to explore where I think this industry is heading, with factors like AI impacting its future, but let's back up a moment to look at how this industry started, to better see where it may be headed.

Microstock is an evolution of the traditional stock photography business model which has been around since the 1920s. Companies, ad agencies and other large customers would pay hundreds or even thousands of dollars to license an image and typically get exclusive rights to use it, so they wouldn't have to worry about the image appearing in a competitor's materials.

Well, the Internet changed this model, just as it has done to just about all industries. The mi-

are easy. And I see many creating futuristic scenes of robots battling, or animals doing crazy things. None of these things are what buyers want. The key to succeeding is figuring out what buyers want and using all the tools available to you, including AI, to meet those needs. The upcoming section will cover how to figure out what's selling, including my list of 100 hot themes, and later, how to use that knowledge if you choose to create with AI. There are exciting opportunities here if you do this right, but also some risks to avoid, and we will cover those.

Now, with the rise in competition, it's important to understand that succeeding is going to depend on volume. To make significant income, you have to be creating and uploading in-demand content, and a lot of it. And that brings us to the GOLDEN RULE for this module. It's all about quality AND quantity... but quantity wins. Yes, quality is important – you never want to upload an image or video that's low quality. At best, buyers will ignore your portfolio and at worst, agencies will reject your content and if you keep submitting low quality content, perhaps close your account. But keep this in mind... it's better to upload 3 very good images or videos than 1 perfect one that took the same amount of time.

If you're submitting content in a new niche you found, and it's in demand with buyers, they're just as likely to download a good image that meets their specific need, as they are to download a great one. So rather than spend extra hours tweaking an image or video until it hits absolute perfection, make it good or very good and move on to create more. This is key to growing your portfolio and earning more money.

Again, let me stress, you don't want to skimp on the technical details. You have to meet all the requirements of the agencies – you don't want errors or artifacts in your work. That's not what I mean by good vs. great quality. I'm talking about fretting over the perfect lighting or angle or extra creative flair that some of us want to just keep adding to our work until we've perfected the tiniest of details.

You have to keep churning out the content.

And here's a GOLDEN HACK to go along with the rule. Give yourself a quota, and try to hold yourself to it. For me, it's four images and four videos a day. If you can't create content every day, then give yourself a weekly quota. The key here is that you have to get into a routine if you want to grow your portfolio into the hundreds or thousands or tens of thousands. If you told me 15 years ago that my totals would reach 22,000 images and 8,000 videos, I would have thought that was unattainable in my lifetime. But when you take it day by day, and week by week, a

modest, attainable quota can help you reach some big milestones, and the greater the size of your portfolio, the more sales you will reach. Of course, you have to be covering the right themes, and that's coming up.

FILE TYPES YOU CAN UPLOAD

When you think 'stock photography,' what comes to mind? Well, photography of course. And that's traditionally what has driven this market – photographers uploading images of people, objects, buildings, landscapes...

But microstock is so much more than photography. Here are the common categories of work you can create and submit to the agencies:
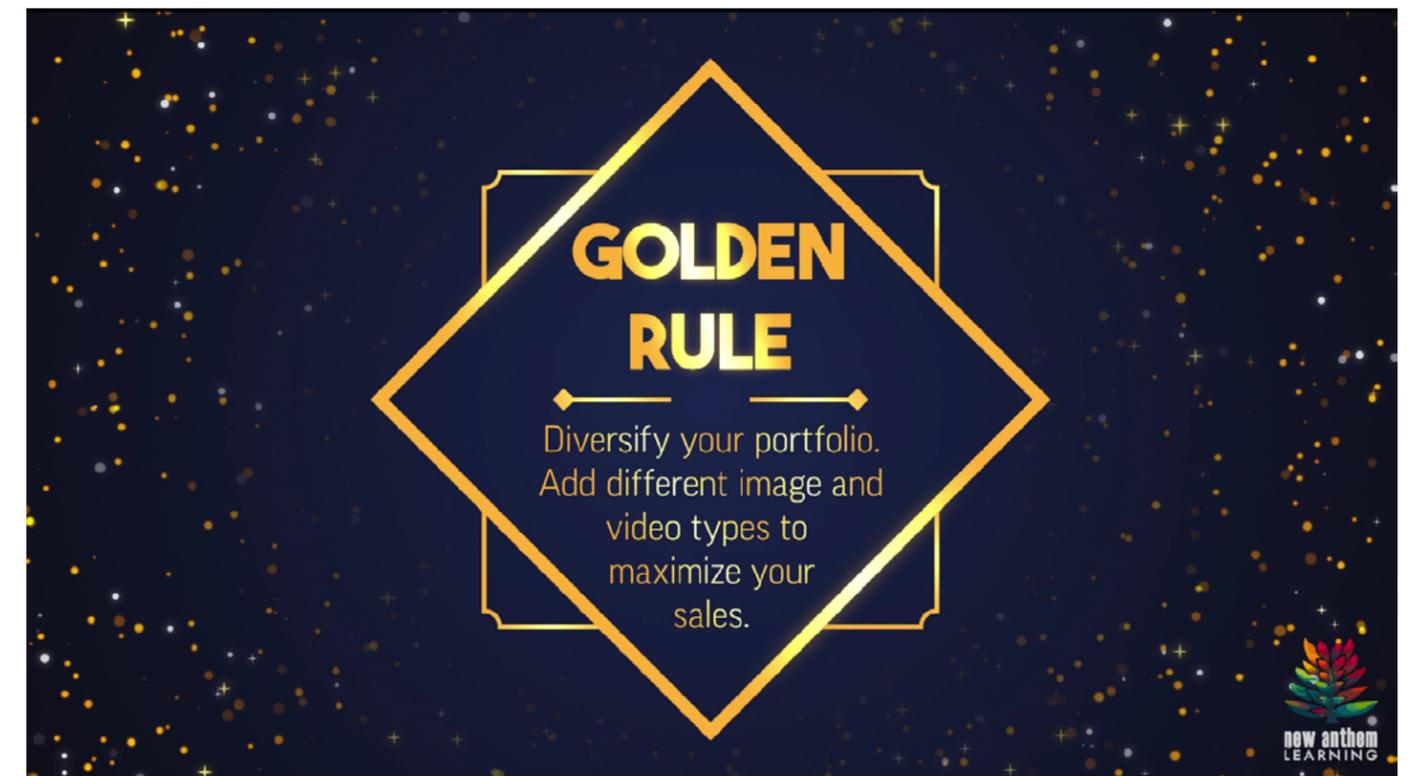
Starting with still images:

- **Photographs**, of course. Still images shot with either a high end camera or now, even a modern smart phone typically has good enough photographic capabilities to meet the technical requirements of the agencies.
- **Illustrations** – the traditional 2-d illustrations that can be cartoon like or appear hand-drawn. Usually these are submitted as vectors and created in programs like Adobe Illustrator.
- **3d renders**. These are images you've certainly scene before that aren't quite photographs and aren't 2d vector illustrations. They can have a simple Pixar-like quality or be super-detailed and realistic. These can be created with expensive software platforms like Maya and 3ds Max, but also inexpensive tools like Cheetah 3d, or even a free platform called Blender.

It's worth noting here that some agencies like Adobe Stock and Canva accept PNG files. This file format allows you to eliminate the background from around an object so the customer may place an isolated image on their own background. It saves the customer from having to do this work themselves, which makes your image an attractive buy for them. So if you're shooting photos or creating illustrations that lend themselves to being isolated with a transparent background, you should really consider saving these as PNGs. I'll cover this more in the section on processing and we'll go over which agencies accept PNGs in the modules reviewing the stock agencies.

Now let's look at the different types of videos you can upload:

- **Footage**. This would be videography shot by traditional cameras or even a mobile device with a good camera, or as well as drones which have become increasingly popular for their ability to get great overhead footage.
- **2d Animations** – These would be full-motion versions of the 2d illustrated work mentioned a moment ago. You can create 2d animations using software like Adobe Animate and After Effects, and if you choose to go this route, you might even consider doing your illustrating right in these programs with an animation as your main output and then save specific frames as illustrations you can submit separately.
- **3d Animations** – The same software that can create still 3d illustrations can also animate those models to create animated videos. Again, you might make creating 3d ani-

mations your primary goal and save specific frames as still images so you're leveraging the work you're putting into a single project for both stills and videos, which maximizes your return on your investment.

Now, there's a newly emerging type of content I mentioned earlier – AI generated images. Whether you want to submit this kind of content or not (and if you do, I'll be covering how to do so in a later section), you should understand what it is, because increasingly, you'll be competing with AI content for sales.

There are a number of platforms for creating AI images. Some are free and some require a monthly subscription, particularly if you want to use the images you create for commercial purposes like selling on the microstock agencies. As of now, the most popular of these platforms is called Midjourney.

I encourage you to try it out, and in fact, I encourage you to try different types of media that I just described. You don't have to be an expert in any of them to get started. There are plenty of YouTube videos and online courses to show you how to get up and running in vector design, 3d illustration and more. Keep in mind the golden hack of starting simple… sometimes a sim-

ple image or animation on a plain white background can often sell very well. So if you're going to start learning in one of these areas, don't push yourself to create Disney or Pixar level work anytime soon. Simple designs can still be impactful, attracting customers and selling very well.

This all leads to the next GOLDEN RULE – Diversify your portfolio. Add different image and video types to maximize your sales. When you attract buyers looking for a particular subject, you just don't know if they will prefer photographic or illustrative content, still images or video. Be ready to meet the need, no matter what the customer has in mind.

And here's a GOLDEN HACK to go with it. Try to create still and video of the same subject, and you can double your output without much extra work. You're already putting in the effort to create something special, so why not maximize your returns on that work? If you're on a photo shoot, can you also capture footage of what you're shooting? If you're creating a 2D or 3D illustration, can you add some simple animation? And vice versa, if you're doing video, can you capture a still of your moving images? You'll be leveraging the work you already put into coming up with your original content, not to mention the time you'll spend titling and keywording. Get the most bang for your buck. Thinking like this will grow your portfolio and your opportunities for more sales.

THE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

I'm going to show you what success in selling online looks like, first in a formula, then in a diagram.

I mentioned in an earlier module that quality and quantity are both important. Yes, quantity ultimately has the edge because it's vital to build a large portfolio. But both are part of the winning formula... which is this...

Success in selling online equals...

Quality – Your work has to meet the technical specs to be accepted, and this gets you in the door.

Plus

Quantity - You need to build a large number of images or videos to give customers choice. They may click on one of your images, decide it's not quite right, but see you have another on the topic, and you get the sale

Plus

Demand – You should be focused on subject matter that customers want today, and will want for years to come.

Plus

Attention-Grabbing – Your work should jump off the screen and demand to be downloaded! Unless you're lucky enough to find in-demand niches that your competition doesn't know about yet, there will be many other images and videos all around yours on the search results page. Yours has to stand up and scream – I'm exactly what you need!

Let's make this the Golden Rule to remember from this module: Success equals quantity plus quality plus demand plus attention grabbing. If you can master all four of these elements, you

will be successful.

But easier said than done, right? How do you find subject matter that's in demand AND you feel passionate about – passionate enough to put the work into creating a lot of quality, attention grabbing content? Well, here's where a diagram for success comes in...

Let's make this an exercise. You can either do it along with me here, or after you watch the module.

List your favorite things – the subjects you are most passionate about. I'll use myself as an example. I love science fiction – robots, ships, etc. And I love dogs. And because I've spent my career in marketing, and around new technologies, you could say I have a passion for those. I'm circling these and labeling this PASSION. Now I want to determine which are the ones I actually have the ability to photograph or illustrate. For me, I can't really photograph robots and spaceships, or even illustrate them well. I could shoot photos and videos of dogs – I have a few and so do friends and family, and could probably do some illustrations as well. Marketing – which would encompass concepts like customers, sales, communications -- I can (and do) create a lot of images on this topic. The same with technology – I can shoot, illustrate and animate things like laptops and phones. I'm going to draw a circle around these and call this ABILITY.
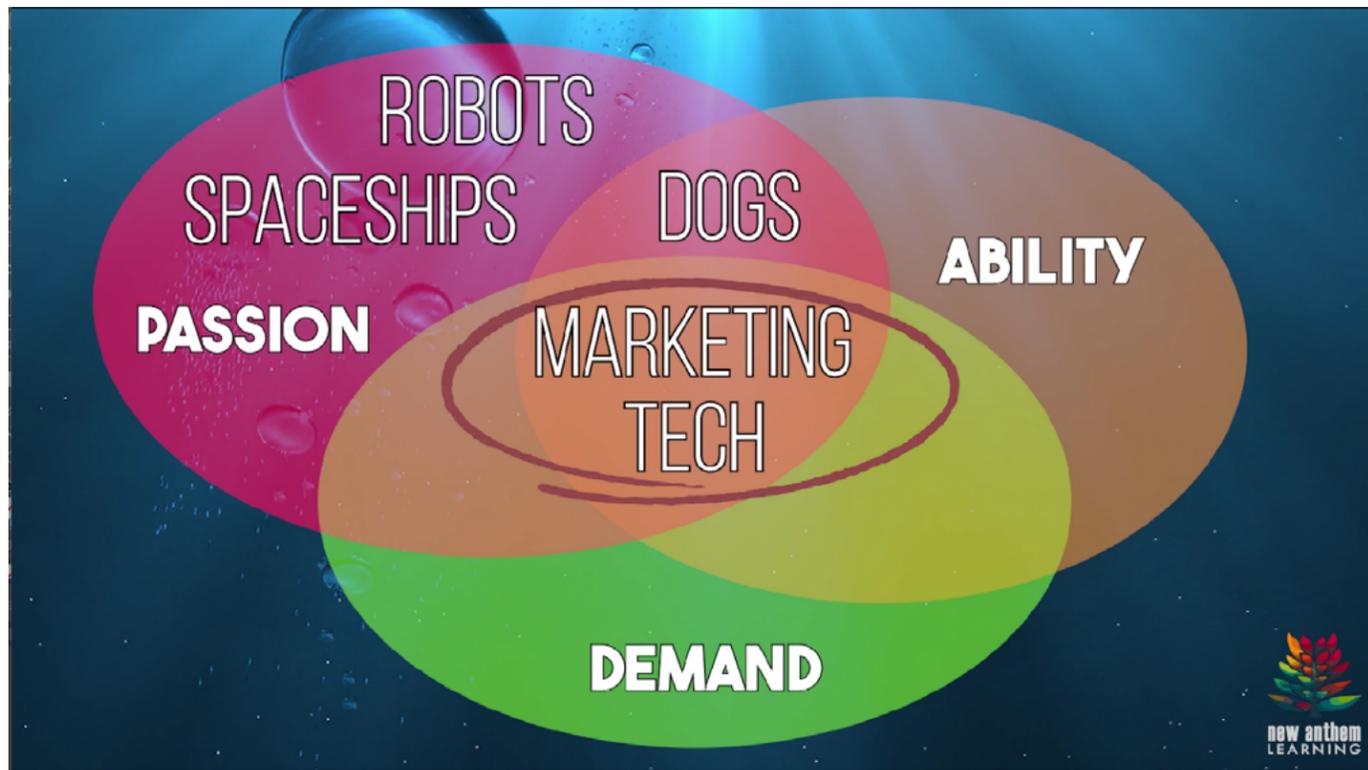
Now I want to determine which are most likely to be in high demand with customers, and ideally in low supply. This takes a bit of research, using tips I shared at the beginning of the course, along with some I'll be covering in the next section.

Looking at my list, what would be in high demand, likely to be very useful to customers who need to communicate with their own audiences? Not the sci fi stuff. And dogs – while some buyers may want some cute shots of dogs for a specific need, it's not exactly high demand, and there are way more photos and illustrations of dogs than anyone could ever need. Now, Marketing and all its concepts it represents – yes, that's a high commercial value theme. And technology – the same. Innovation, disruption, advancement – all high selling subjects. I'm circling these and calling this DEMAND.

Now, I have a venn diagram that tells me I should focus my efforts on marketing and technology – because I'm passionate about them and I'll enjoy working on them, I CAN shoot and illustrate on the topics, and there's high demand. These are two sweet spots for me. I'm not saying they should be for you... but you can use this process to determine where you should focus your time and effort.
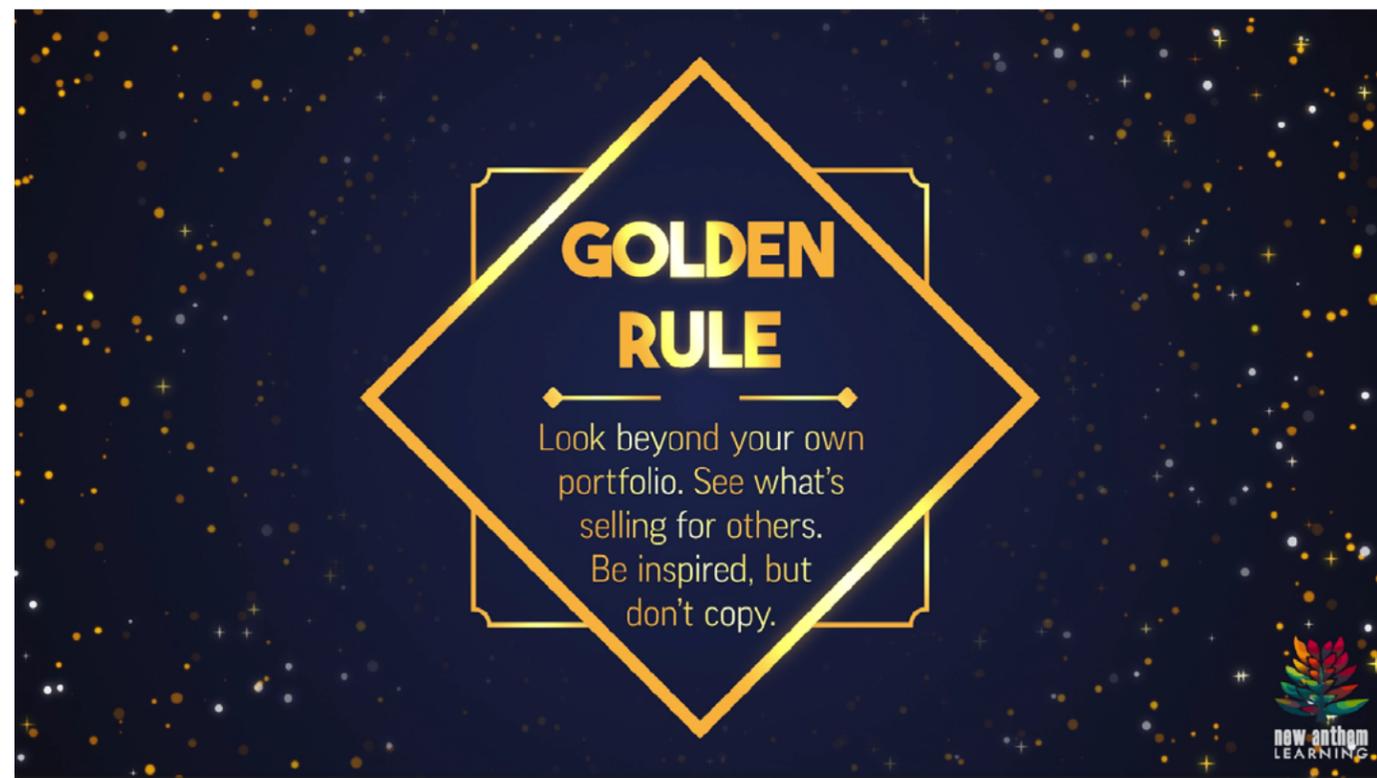
WHAT'S SELLING FOR OTHERS

If you end up with just one takeaway from this course, I hope it's this... I want to train you to develop an instinct for finding hot-selling topics, which is the most valuable skill you need to grow if you're committed to success in selling online. This section includes multiple modules that aim to help you do just that.

First, let's look at what's working for other people. And that's the next Golden Rule: Look beyond your own portfolio – see what's selling for others and be inspired (but don't copy)

Adobe maintains a Recent Top Sellers page. You can get there from your contributor dashboard by clicking Insights at the top, and it's also included in the book for this course. There's a lot of great information here, if you use it wisely. First, note that there's a great diversity here in style and subject matter. You should keep your eye out for photographers or illustrators who are covering things you could cover, and topics you're interested in. In other words, your sweet spots that we went over earlier. Now, you might be tempted to judge these contributors just by their lifetime sales, but you shouldn't. These numbers, according to Adobe, are ranking those

who made the most sales in the previous week, but only considering their uploads from the past six months. So it doesn't necessarily matter that this artist has 1,000 lifetime sales and another has 250,000. We're interested in what's selling now.

I think this one is closest to me in terms of what they're covering and their style. So this page tells me that these themes are selling extremely well for this artist, and that can give me ideas for things I might cover. There's a quote that's been attributed to Pablo Picasso, and also Steve Jobs. Good artists copy, great artists steal. It's a funny quote, but don't take it literally. You never want to simply imitate another's work. Develop your own style. Find inspiration in what others have done, do your research, but create new works that are informed by what customers are looking for today. And to figure this out, you need to be exploring like this to see what the trends are. Just don't copy... other artists' work are covered by copyright, copying could get you banned, and frankly, it's just the wrong thing to do. So, with that in mind, I'm going to dive in deeper to see what this artist has been covering lately to see if it sparks any additional ideas.

Now if you try this and nothing initially jumps out at you, try going back a few weeks. Adobe archives these pages and there's a wealth of information here for you.

Another way to find out what's in demand right now is to look at the trending search pages of

some of the top agencies, even some of the sites that offer free images – they are still good barometers for what large numbers of people want right now – and the free sites typically include ads for the paid agencies that you will be submitted to, so your work could be featured on the free sites and still result in sales for you.

Let's call this the Next Golden Hack: Bookmark the trending searches pages at popular agencies for a constant stream of hot topics.

I have links to these pages in my course book so you can check these sites at any time, but here's a look at what they are showing for top searches as of now. Now, some of these are free sites, and I'm not encouraging you to upload to these, but they still give an indication of what a lot of people are looking for right now, and you can get some great ideas on where you should focus.

Unsplash.com https://unsplash.com/trends

Pexels.com https://www.pexels.com/popular-searches/

Pixabay.com https://pixabay.com/popular-searches/

IStockPhoto.com https://www.istockphoto.com/en/visual-gps/insights

Getty images.com https://www.gettyimages.com/visual-gps/insights

And Depositphotos.com https://depositphotos.com/stock-photography.html?gclsrc=aw.ds&&utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=DP_DEU_DE_Image_Search&utm_term=foto%20stock&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI6qu9ppCA-gIVZJBoCR05tAg-bEAAYASAAEgKps_D_BwE

I'm going to share my full list of top selling themes in the next module. Those are based on my experience. But you can also find other stock artists sharing their analysis for what's selling best at sites like this one. Expert Photography.com list their take on best-selling themes as follows… I can't verify all of them myself, but a number of them do appear on my own list…

MY 100 HOTTEST-SELLING TOPICS

Now, I'm sharing with you a list of the 100 topics or themes that have been performing best for me over the past few years, with some being long-time sellers for much of my 15 years selling images and videos online.

Let's dive in… but don't feel you have to write all these down… keep in mind I'm providing you with a book to accompany this course, and the full list appears there in detail.

First, let's look at the categories. My hottest-selling topics fall into seven main groups, and you can see here where I think the biggest opportunities are. Concepts account for a whopping 41 of my top 100, and business and finance isn't far behind with 31. The other five groups, also include some very hot themes: Social Issues, Health and Aging, Real Estate, Technology and Objects.

CONCEPTS

- ACCOUNTABILITY
- BLOOPERS / MISTAKES / OUTTAKES
- BREAKING NEWS
- CHANGE / INNOVATION
- CONFIDENTIAL / SECRET / CLASSIFIED
- CONTEST / RAFFLE / LOTTERY
- COOPERATION / COLLABORATION
- CURIOSITY
- DONE / COMPLETE / FINISHED
- EFFICIENCFY / WORKING SMART, NOT HARD
- EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN
- EMPOWERMENT
- EVENT
- EXPANDING HORIZON (LEAVE ZONE)
- EXPERTISE
- FEEDBACK
- FORECAST / PREDICITON / OUTLOOK
- FREE
- GOALS / VISION
- GUARANTEE / PROMISE / PLEDGE

new anthem LEARNING

BUSINESS & FINANCE

- BEST JOB CANDIDATE
- BRANDING
- COMPLIANCE
- CONTENT MARKETING
- CONTINUOUS LEARNING / IMPROVEMENT
- CREDIT RATINGS / SCORES
- CUSTOMER NEEDS
- FINANCIAL PROBLEMS / DEBT
- GROWTH
- HIRING / INTERVIEWING
- HYBRID WORK / WORK FROM HOME
- INCENTIVES
- INFLATION
- INITIAL PUBLIC OFFERING (IPO)
- INTEREST RATES
- INVESTMENT

HEALTH & AGING

- HEALTH CARE COSTS / MEDICAL BILLS
- HEALTHY EATING / DIETING
- INSURANCE / UNINSURED
- MINDFULNESS
- PHYSICAL / MENTAL HEALTH
- RETIREMENT

SOCIAL ISSUES

- ACCEPTANCE / TOLERANCE
- CLIMATE CHANGE / GLOBAL WARMING
- CULTURE
- DEIB (DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, BELONGING)
- EXTREME WEATHER
- GUN VIOLENCE
- MARIJUANA
- SOCIAL SECURITY

REAL ESTATE

- DOWNSIZING
- HOME INSPECTION
- MORTGAGES
- MOVING / NEW LOCATION
- NEW LISTINGS
- SELL YOUR HOME

new anthem LEARNING

I do this exercise every so often, crunching the numbers on my top selling themes and it's always enlightening. Not just to see what's selling and what I could be creating more of, but also to learn if things I was sure were going to be hot turn out to be... not so hot. Doing a review of your top sellers every so often tells you where you should be focusing your time, and where you should stop wasting time. So that's the Golden Rule for this section: Analyze your top sellers – do more of what sells, and stop doing what doesn't sell.

Now, a special note here. The more you create on a certain topic, the more you end up simply competing with yourself and cannibalizing your own sales. If you're going to keep going back to the well on your top niches, change up your approach and cover it differently each time.

This makes for a great golden rule to remember: Don't cannibalize your own work. Covering the same topic over and over in the same way just robs sales from your other assets. Keep shifting focus to other high selling topics.

And the next Golden Hack will help you see what your hottest topics are: Analyze your sales. Create categories for the topics that perform best for you, and look for trends, but also recognize where you're becoming oversaturated.

Over the years, I've done this sort of tracking in a spreadsheet that I update from time to time. I'm constantly surprised by new learnings I find, and it helps me plan out my future work. I'll have more ideas on tracking your success in a later module.

WHAT SELLS: WEB, AI & SEARCH LEARNINGS

Earlier I shared that a great thing to do is find a website that is chock full of ideas that match your interests and cover topics that are hot with buyers. Let's explore that idea further so you see what I mean.
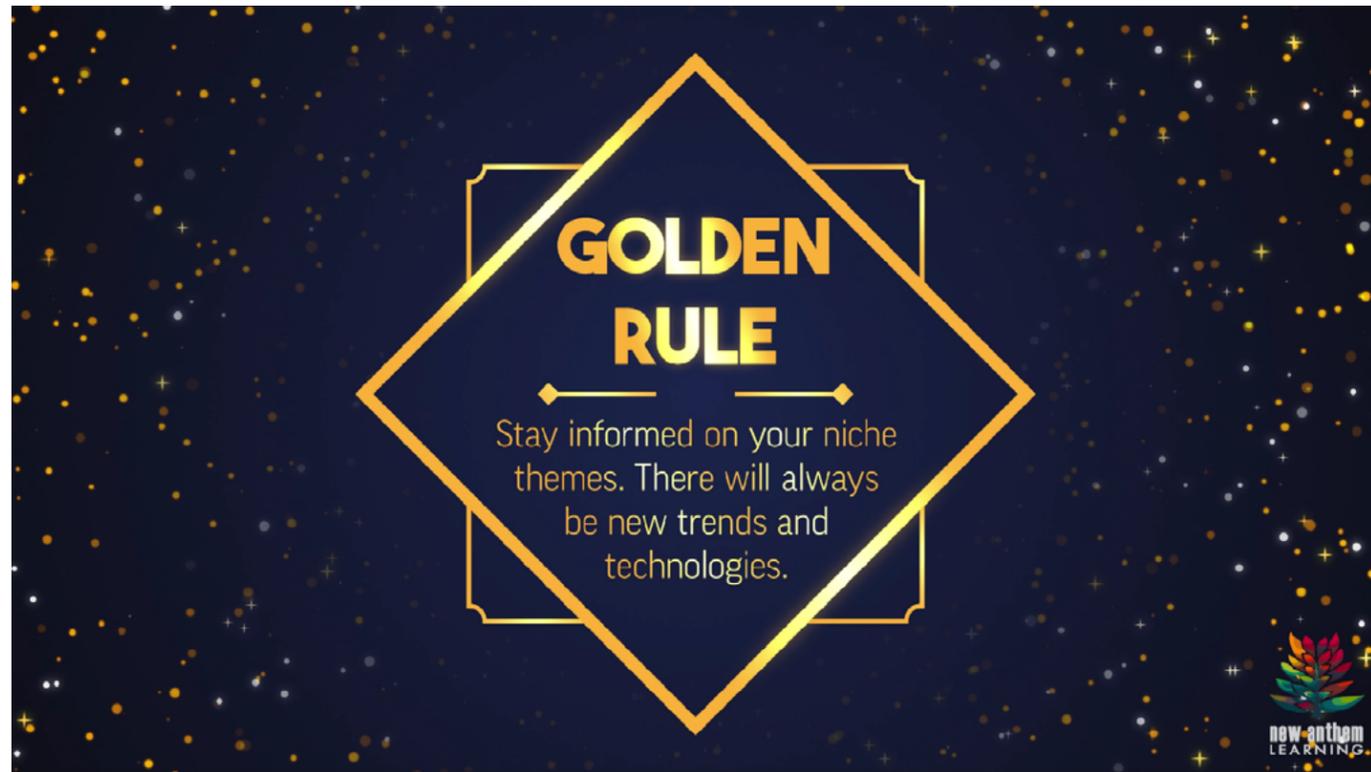
Here's CNBC.com. It's a site I like to check each morning for ideas, though you might find a different site works well for you. The key is to find something that covers your sweet spots I mentioned earlier – where the topics you have a passion about match some themes that are high commercial value. For me, some of these areas are business and finance, new technologies and trends, innovative products, etc. Those are all areas covered extensively at CNBC, and whenever I come to the site, several ideas jump off the page at me as themes I could cover with new photos, illustrations, or animated videos.

So let's check out the page now… (will have to ad lib this part, going through the site and jotting down theme ideas) The key here is best summarized by our next GOLDEN RULE: Stay informed on the topics that you're establishing as niche themes for your portfolio. There will always be new trends, innovations, technologies – whether you're into business, medical, education, sports, or any other topic.

And here's a GOLDEN HACK on how to stay up on the latest topics. Ask AI to list the latest innovations in a certain area. You'll get a list of several ideas, and one or more might spark an a-ha moment for you and you may instantly visualize what you could shoot or illustrate.

Let's try out this idea. There are a number of AI chat sites you could try. The biggest at the moment is Chat GPT, Let's enter "What are the latest innovations in finance" -- I've always found finance to be a hot-selling topic for images and videos, so I'd like to freshen up my portfolio

the terms. You'll see the search volume for the terms, and can even switch to image searches to see how many people are trying to find images of these. Of course, they're not all necessarily potential buyers, but they if you had images at the agencies they could appear watermarked in the search results and some of the people searching might like the image enough to go to the agencies to buy.

Overall, this is a great way to gauge the interest of topics you're considering covering in real time, to verify that it will be worth your time and effort. Here we see that of the three topics (read results).

So these are good ways for you to investigate great topics for high-selling content, but did you know several of the agencies also tell you what they need and what they think will sell? We'll look at how they do that in the next section. See you there.

with some new ideas from the finance world.

And here's what Chat GPT gives me... Note that Chat GPT here acknowledges that it is limited in what it can display, It's admitting that its knowledge base was last updated in September 2021. So we're not getting the latest available information here. That's why it's a good idea to also check the other leading AI chat sites.

Let's run the same search now on Bing Chat. While Bing's Chat AI may be more updated than Chat GPT's, the results it provides here are fairly similar to Chat GPT's but Bing is showing me far fewer. Let's now try Google Bard. So, Google Bard is giving me more results than Bing Chat provided, but not as many as Chat GPT.
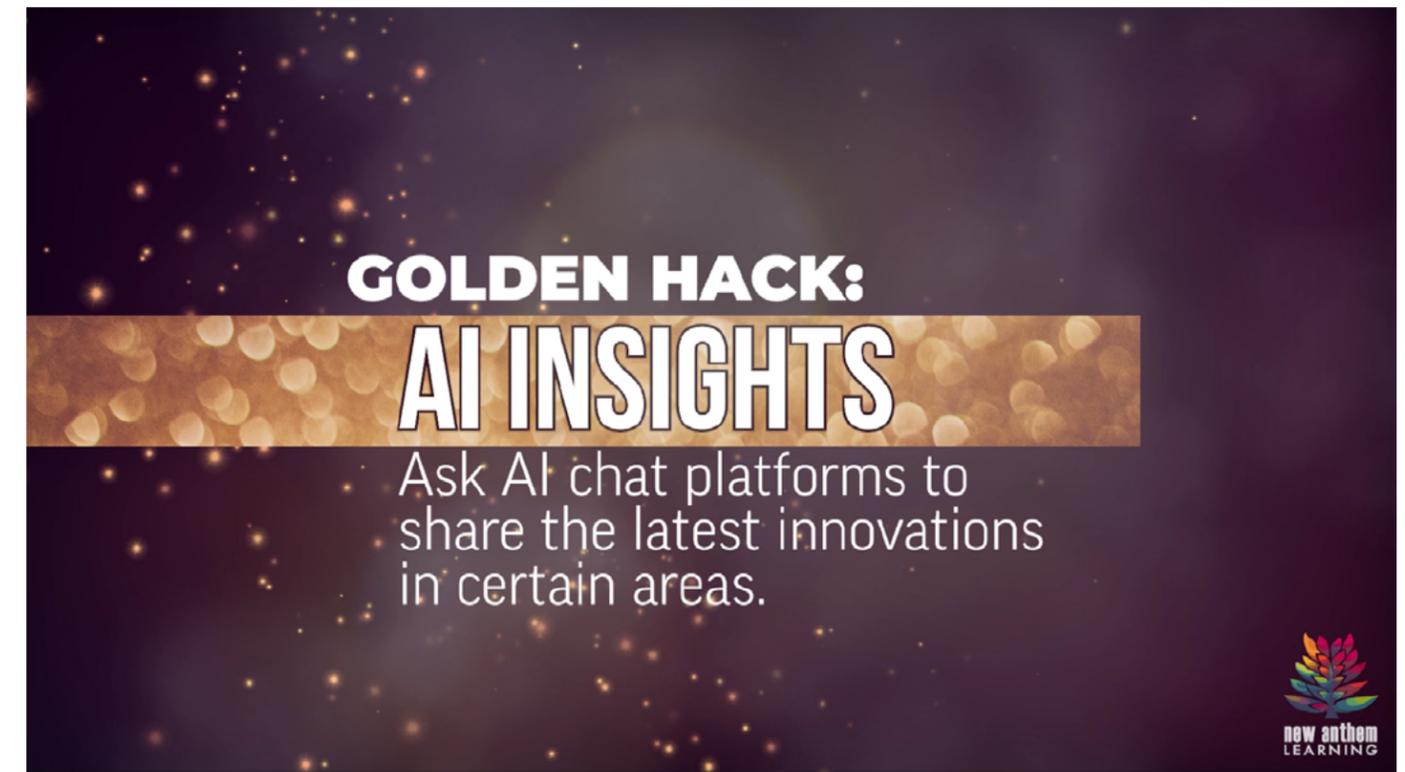
The ideas themselves are pretty similar, though this one looks new, embedded finance. So you can see why it's a good idea to test each of them to make sure you're getting the best possible ideas you can.

OK, there are a number of good ideas here, and we're going to dive deeper to see which ones potential buyers may be most interested in. Here's another GOLDEN HACK. Use Google Trends to verify how hot certain topics are. Go to trends.google.com and enter two or three of

WHAT THE AGENCIES NEED

Trying to figure out what you should be shooting or illustrating may feel overwhelming, but you don't have to feel like you're on your own. In addition to me helping you with a lot of proven high-selling topic ideas in this course, the agencies also have guidance for you.

They know what they have and what they don't. They track their customer searches and know where they have a lack of content based on their current customer demands and what they expect future trends will be. And I'm going to show you how you can stay tuned into their latest findings and advice.

Let's start with Adobe Stock. Since Adobe is the leading agency, it's a great idea to start your research with them to help you decide what your next focus will be.

Adobe shares its research insights in part of its site called the Artist Hub. The link is contained in the book for this course. You can see on this page that Adobe is calling out some specific industries and markets that have growing needs for images and videos. Adobe details what
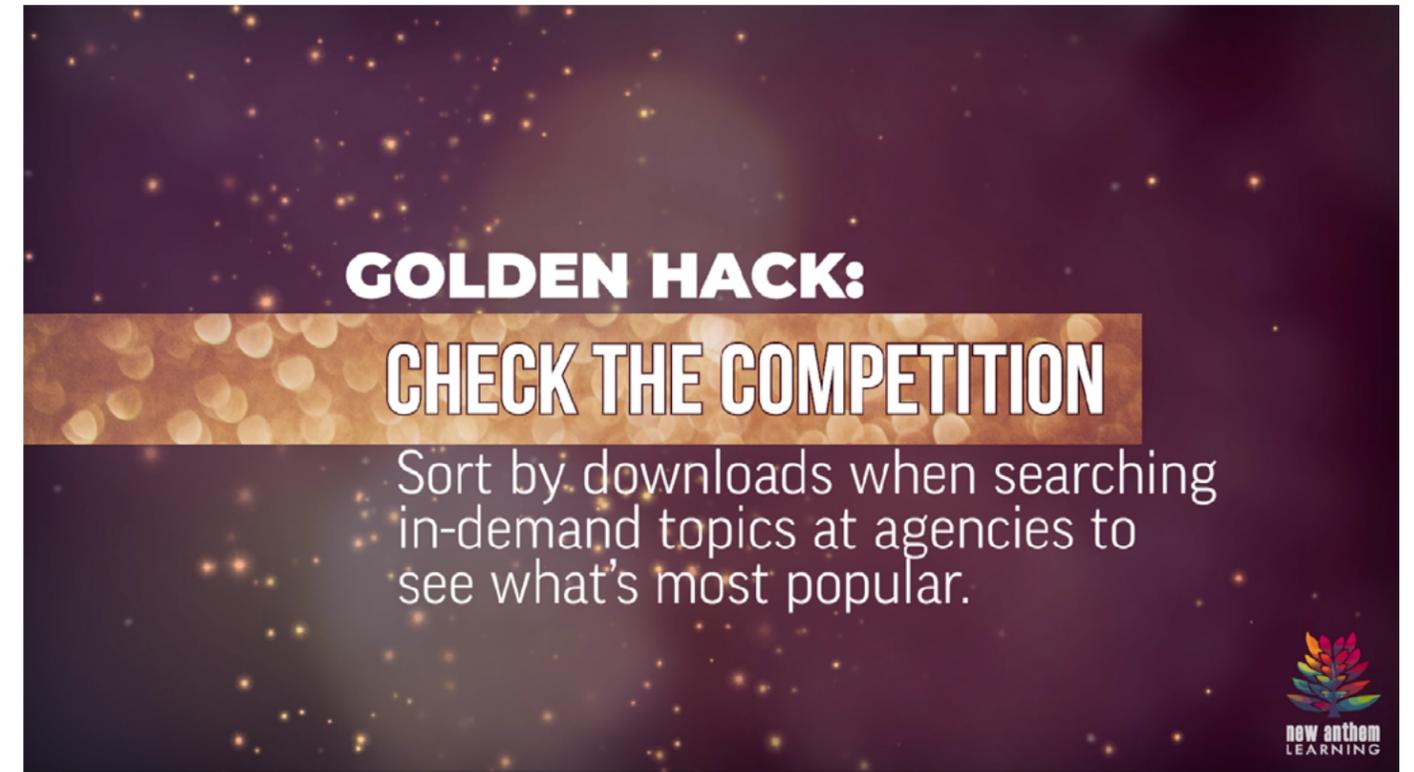
these industries are about and what companies and professionals within them need to communicate to their audiences. Adobe also knows they have a current lack of content in these areas and they are practically begging for you to upload images and videos on them.

Let's get deeper into the insights Adobe is sharing here... this page is detailing the content needs Adobe has this month, but the content changes all the time, so be sure to bookmark this page and keep checking back.

Adobe is also offering you a newsletter of trends and new insights – I receive this and can say it's a helpful resource that you'd be crazy not to sign up for. They're pushing their needs out to you – why not take them up on it?

Also be sure to check out Adobe's Call for Content page. It's another place they're asking you to create new images and videos along specific themes and in specific styles that are selling a lot these days. You might not be in a position to create content on many of the topics that Adobe is asking for, but all it takes is one or two a-ha moments of inspiration to make all of this research worthwhile.

Next, let's look at Shutterstock. They put together something called The Shot List, described as "Our monthly guide to the most requested content." Shutterstock presents it as a look ahead to

the coming month and the topics it believes will be in demand. Theoretically, if you take action now and upload content on these themes in the coming days and weeks, you'll be ready with fresh new images and videos when those customers are ready to buy.

This month, for example, Shutterstock is encouraging you to cover the topics detailed here, but again, this page is constantly refreshed, so you should be checking back here regularly for the latest needs.

Now, don't take the month designations too literally. Unless the topic is seasonal, it's highly likely that topics covered for the past several months are still great for you to consider. Fortunately, Shutterstock gives you these links to jump right into its content requests from the last several months, so be sure to check them all out when you're looking for inspiration.

Let's look specifically at video now, and the agency Storyblocks. When you open an account there, on your dashboard you'll see a section at the bottom left that says "See In Demand Content." When you dive in, you'll see the top three in-demand categories at the top. For quite some time, it has said the same thing – People, Templates and Nature – with a number of subcategories under each one. But when you scroll down beneath those, you'll see a lengthy list of some of the most searched-for content on Storyblocks. There's bound to be something in here that you'd be able to create and meet some urgent needs of this site's buyers.

Now, keep in mind on all these sites that other people are looking at these recommendations as they're thinking about what to create next. But so many people ask me, what are the topics that are selling these days or most in need, that it makes me think not a lot of photographers, illustrators or video creators are looking at these calls to action from the agencies. And it's crazy. We're being told by the agencies – create these, and they will sell – but many just aren't paying attention. So if you take it seriously, you might just find yourself serving a need in a niche not many people are covering, which is exactly where you want to be.
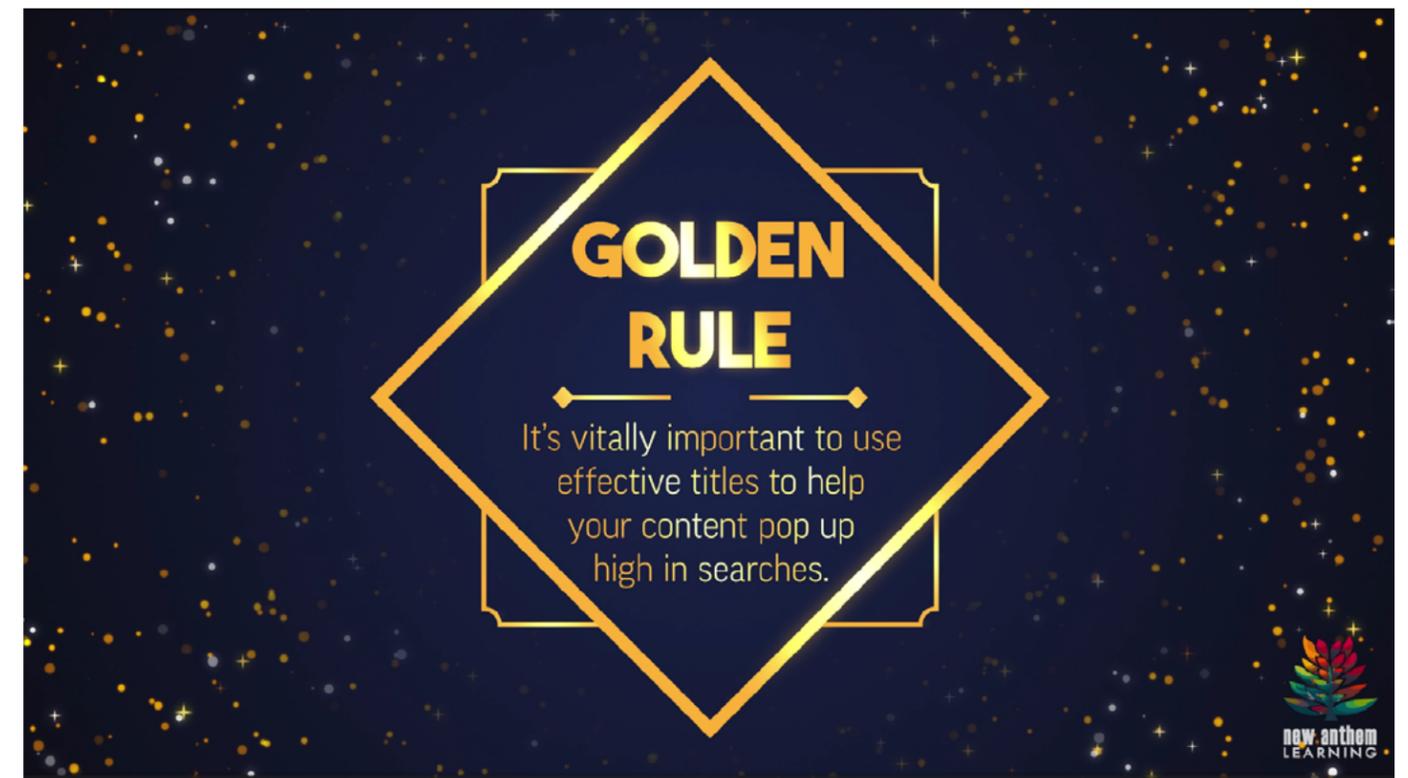
So we can sum this module up in our next GOLDEN RULE – Pay attention to what the agencies say they want. It's free advice, and it's from the people in position to know exactly what customers need.

And here's a GOLDEN HACK – Sort by downloads when researching in-demand topics at agencies. Not only should you search potential topics at the big agencies to see how much content you'd be competing with, but sort the results by downloads to see the images or videos that are most popular for those topics. Don't copy what you see, but put your own spin on these approaches.

WRITING EFFECTIVE TITLES

So you've created some great content that you believe is in-demand with buyers. The next step is making sure it can be found by those buyers. This is why it's vitally important that you do the right things to ensure your content pops as high up in searches as possible, and I'm going to share some steps to do just that.

Now, many people think it's all about the keywording, and keywords are absolutely important, and we'll get to those in a moment. But many don't realize just how crucial it is to have carefully written titles as well. There's a few reasons for this… first, the agencies have algorithms that consider the content of image and video titles when displaying your content in search results. They expect certain things to be in the titles and for them to be within a certain character count. Second, your image and video titles factor into several key parts of a web page that get indexed by search engines like Google. This makes it possible for people to find your content before they even reach a stock agency, as they perform web searches in Google, Bing or other search sites. Good placement in those searches increase the likelihood that people will come to your portfolio at the agencies and download their work.

GOLDEN RULE

It's vitally important to use effective titles to help your content pop up high in searches.

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So let's look at the best way to write titles. Here's what they should include:

- Who or what is the subject of the image or video – a few simple words of description
- Is there an action demonstrated – a few verbs should be included
- Beyond the core person or object, what other elements are included? What is the person or object interacting with?
- Is there a concept at the core of the photo?
- Is the location relevant? If so, include it!

So, looking at this image, let's come up with a title that checks all the boxes we just went over.

- Who are the core subjects in the image? A business woman and business man. It's also a good idea to note race or ethnicity where relevant since diversity, equity and inclusion is such an important topic these days. We could say here A Black business woman and business man. And since there's some debate on the preferred term, we can be more

GOLDEN HACK:
TITLE LENGTH
Run title through an online character counter to ensure you are within the common 150-character limit.

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inclusive to say Black African American business woman, if indeed the photo was taken in the US.
- What's the main action featured? Shaking hands
- Are there core elements included? There is a tablet computer in the shot, but I would say it's not an essential element, so my judgment would be to not include it. If a customer was searching for an image of a tablet, and this image came up because we included it in the title, the customer would not probably not see this as meeting their need. So it's important to think like a potential buyer as you write these titles. Including tablet computer in your title would essentially be spamming, since it's really not what this photo is about.
- Is there a concept in the photo? I would say closing the deal or job interview, and since the photo could meet either of those needs, I would include both.
- Is the location relevant? I would say yes, the scene is a conference room, and if I were a customer looking for an image of business people in an office conference room, it's relevant to have the location in the title, so let's include it.

Putting all those elements together, a good title for this image would be:

Black African-American Business woman and man shaking hands closing the deal in job candidate interview and reaching agreement in an office conference room. It's always a good idea to run your title through an online character counter to make sure your title isn't too long. Many of the agencies have a character limit, with most being around 150 characters. This title comes out to 155 characters. Let's look at it again, because we can actually tighten it up and remove a few unnecessary words so it's safely under the character limit some agencies use.

We have the word 'and' in the title twice. It's really not necessary, and some agencies see the repeating of words in a title as spamming, so let's take out the second instance of 'and' so we don't trigger an alarm bell. It should be clear to any agency that there's no benefit to us in including 'and' twice, but let's take it out to be safe. Plus, the words 'the' and 'in' aren't important, so let's take those out and get the title down to

Black African-American Business woman and man shaking hands closing deal in job candidate interview reaching agreement in office conference room. And we're now at 144 characters.

WRITING EFFECTIVE KEYWORDS

Keywording your images and videos is vitally important to make sure potential buyers find your work. You can have the greatest content available, but if you don't keyword it correctly, no one will find it. But if done correctly, your work can leapfrog over your competition to jump out at customers when they're ready to buy. I want to help you get highest exposure possible, so let's dig in.

Before we begin, our keywording Golden Rule is going to be essential, so let's cover it now. Think like a customer when keywording. Write words and phrases that your customer is likely to use when searching, and put at the top of your list.

When keywording, it's more important than ever to think like a customer. Picture who might buy your latest image or video. What need are you meeting? What are the first words a cus-

tomer is thinking of when coming to look for the perfect content? Those should be the very words you start with when building your list of words. Adobe Stock prioritizes your first ten keywords, giving your content a boost in search results if the terms your potential buyer uses in a search are included in your first ten keywords. So make sure your most important terms are right up front.

And it's important to have a process to build your list of words that helps you track your number of keywords, and makes them easily searchable for future reference. Here's a Golden Hack to let you do just that. Use a spreadsheet to build your keyword list. An Excel or Google Sheets formula can track your keyword count to help you optimize your list.

Most of the agencies allow up to 50 keywords, with Adobe Stock allowing up to 49. So here's how to set up a spreadsheet that will show you how many words you're typing. Enter this formula in a cell… **=LEN(TRIM(C1))-LEN(SUBSTITUTE(C1," ",""))+1**
I've written this code so that it's totaling the words in column C, so put the formula in column B or D, it doesn't matter.

Now begin entering some words, separated by commas, in column C, within the same row you

pasted the formula. One thing to keep in mind is that a phrase of two or more words will count as multiple words here, but Adobe will count a phrase as a single word, so if you have multiple of these, you could go over 49 in your count in the spreadsheet, but Adobe may allow them because they are counting by the phrase and not the word. But this is still a good way to track the general total.

Let's look at the photo we used in the titling module. Picture yourself as the potential buyer of this image. What terms might you use in your search if you were looking for an image just like this one. A good place to start is with the title itself. Black, African American, business, woman, young, shaking, hands, job, interview, meeting, closing, deal, conference room. OK, that's a great start, and our spreadsheet is telling us we're at 15 words. So we know we can include up to 35 more. But we don't necessarily want to use 35, especially if we're filling in words just to max out the list. That's keyword spamming, and it can get you into trouble at the agencies. You should only use words that are relevant to the image or video, and words that a buyer might conceivably use to find your content. Let's continue with this image.

We used the words shaking hands, but someone might type handshake as one word, so let's add that. We didn't include man yet, so let's add that. What are some other terms related to job

GOLDEN HACK: KEYWORD LIST

Use a spreadsheet to build. An Excel or Google Sheets formula can track your keyword count to help optimize your list.

interview? Candidate, hire, open, position, recruit, recruitment. Let's include those. And what if the buyer isn't looking for a job interview photo, but a business meeting in which a sales person closes a deal after a presentation or proposal? Let's add sell, sales, presentation, proposal, opportunity, agreement. We're now up to 27 terms.

And remember that we included diversity related terms in the title. Since diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging are high commercial value themes that are represented in the photo, let's include them. They are also known by the acronyms DEI and DEIB, so we will add those as well. That's a good list, and you could stop there, but we might be overlooking some obvious choices that a buyer might use. Here are a few ideas to help us round out our list.

First, let's look at some similar images that have earned a lot of downloads at Adobe Stock and see if they included words we could be overlooking for our image. I searched the terms Black business woman handshake and sorted by downloads, and I think this one is pretty similar to our example. Expanding the keywords, and a number of terms jump out at me as relevant to ours that I completely missed when writing my keyword list... female, professional, work, career, smile, team, teamwork, colleague. I'm going to add all of these, which brings us to a total of 41 keywords.

But we're not done yet. We want to make sure we don't overlook any words that a potential buyer might use in a search. Another hack I like to use is to look for synonyms for some of the most important terms for the image. I check the site thesaurus.com. Enter a few words that best define your image to find alternate terms that could help a customer find your image. I'm going to enter the word meeting to see what it suggests. In these results, I see a few words I didn't originally think of but I do think would be good additions to our list: company and introduction. I add these to my spreadsheet and we're now at 43 terms, which is a good total – not maxed out, but close, and eying it one more time to make sure we don't have any irrelevant words which would make us look like we're spamming, and I think the list is all on target for this image.

So it seems like we're done, but there's one last thing I like to do to make sure our list is perfect. When you're working quickly, it's easy to mistype words, and without having someone proofread my list, there's a chance I could enter misspellings in my keywords, which would ruin our chances of a buyer finding the image. So I like to spellcheck the list. I'm using Google Sheets, which includes an easy way to check spelling. Highlight the keyword cell, go up to Tools, select Spelling and then Spell Check.
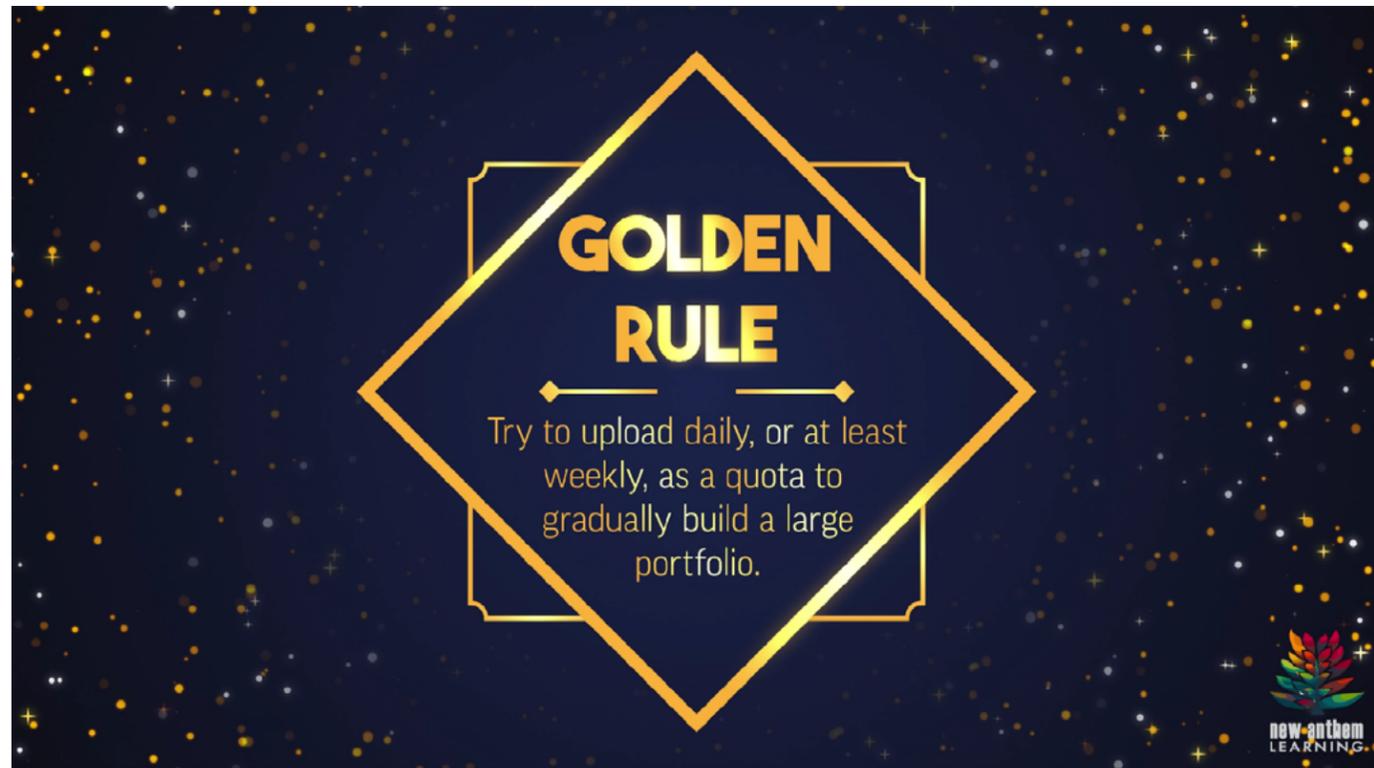
THE IMPORTANCE OF REGULAR UPLOADS

I mentioned earlier that quantity is the name of the game in selling images and videos online. For the most part, individual sales will be very small, which means you need to have a lot of them for this to be worth the effort. And that means being disciplined with a regular routine, and even a quota, to make sure you're staying on pace to build a large portfolio.

I'll give you my example. I aim to upload two images and two videos every day. You can see in this chart how it adds up over time. After one day, I have 4 assets – two images and videos. That's 28 after the first week, and 120 after the first month. Keep at it and I'd nearly 1,500 after year one, 3,000 after year two, and so on.

I have found, and I've heard other contributors say as well, that when you reach thousands of images or videos in your portfolio, this is when you reach critical mass and one sale could lead to more, and more, as buyers find one image they need, and click on your portfolio to see if you have anything else they might want.

GOLDEN RULE

Try to upload daily, or at least weekly, as a quota to gradually build a large portfolio.

GOLDEN HACK:
SET ASIDE TIME

Jot down your typical daily routine. What's the ideal period of the day when you can focus on creating? What's the second and third best time? Pick a main time and back-ups.

You can see how this snowballs over time and you could top 20,000 assets when you get up to year 14 or 15. I've been at this for just over 15 years, and my portfolio is a bit larger than this, because for a while in my early years I pushed myself to create and upload more like six assets a day.

There's another reason to aim to have daily uploads. The agencies recommend that you keep providing fresh content, for the overall health and exposure of your portfolio on their sites. And you'll always have content that appears near the top of search result pages when customers sort by newest content. Sometimes buyers want to download images and videos that no one else has used yet, and you'll get more exposure as they search this way if you're consistently uploading new content.

And on stock forums, some contributors report that when they took a break from uploading, their sales suffered. I've never taken a significant break, so I can't verify it, but it does make sense. Your competition isn't taking a break, and if you do, you'll be falling behind. So consistency is key to keep your portfolio growing and selling.

I believe that having a quota is crucial. You might think that this is in conflict with the artistic

process. How can you force yourself to create new work if you're not inspired. That is definitely something you'll have to learn to deal with. There are days that I get up and stare at the screen trying to plan out my content for the day and nothing comes to mind.

Earlier in the course I shared tips on where to find new ideas. Every morning I start the day by looking at CNBC.com and almost without fail, after about five minutes I get a least a few ideas for topics I could focus on. You might find you work best in the evening, but for me, it's the morning. I'm freshest and more creative in the morning, and I find that when I make progress early in the day, I feel good about myself – that I accomplished my daily goal. But if you find that night time is what works best for you, that's fine too. The key is making the time, and holding yourself to it as much as possible.

To sum up this section, here's our Golden Rule for content creation: Try to upload daily, or at least weekly, as a quota to gradually build a large portfolio and give customers fresh content.

Now, creating a regular workflow is an art form in itself, and I'll share my own workflow in a moment. But first, here's a GOLDEN HACK to help you determine the best time you can devote to your process: Jot down your typical daily routine. What appears to be the ideal period of the day you could focus on creating? What's the second best time? The third best? Pick a time to make your regular content creation period and set a second and third backup, because we all know that things happen, and we have to adjust our daily routines to accommodate special appointments or unforeseen events. Having a back up time to devote to your process will help take the pressure off if your routine is disrupted, and help ensure you keep making progress.

MY 90-MINUTE A DAY WORKFLOW

We've already gone over how success in selling images or videos online depends on being able to generate high commercial value content day in and day out. That may sound like quite a grind, but it doesn't have to be if you develop an efficient workflow, one that streamlines the steps involved to a bare minimum amount of time. That's this module's Golden Rule: Create an efficient workflow, one with streamlined, well defined processes allowing more time for creativity and reducing busy work.

I'm going to share with you how I've been able to do that. My workflow has worked for me for the past 15 years, allowing me to grow my portfolio to about 22,000 images and 7,000 videos, all by putting in only about 90 minutes per day, mostly in the early morning hours before I start my day job.

I consider it a bit of a magic formula, and I'm going to share it with you now.

Step One in my workflow, which takes me about 10 minutes on average, is determining what my subject for the day will be. This calls on me to use a number of the hacks we covered in the earlier modules. I look over my list of sweet spots or niches that I have a passion for, have the ability to create content for, and buyers want. As I mentioned earlier, two of the big ones here are business and technology concepts. I also spend some time looking over CNBC.com and other sites that I find to be a wealth of in-demand ideas for content. By 10 minutes, I have my topic, and sometimes much sooner.

Step Two is envisioning the content I will create – still images and videos, typically two of each – but sometimes three or four if I'm feeling really productive and efficient. How you tackle this

COURSE CONTENT

step depends on what type of media you'll be using for the day – photography, generative AI imagery, vector or 3d illustration or animation, video footage. If you're envisioning a photo or video shoot that you can't conduct today, maybe you're planning out a shoot that you'll do over the weekend and you'll process and upload your content in the days after the shoot. This is the brainstorming stage, and it typically takes me about 10 minutes.

Step Three is the big one – actually creating the content. In the prior two steps we've chosen the topic, and we've visualized what we want to create. Now we're doing it. You could be shooting photography or video footage in your home, outdoors or on location. Or perhaps you're editing photos from a prior shoot, combining elements from them to create new works. You could be creating images in Photoshop, Illustrator or 3d rendering software. Or you could be writing prompts to generate AI imagery on sites like Midjourney. Also included here is any processing you may need to do, correcting color or flaws, checking for potential quality issues and more -- I'll cover these steps in the next module. Usually it takes me about 40 minutes to an hour to create and/or process content for the day.

Step Four is titling and keywording. I'm following the checklist of items that go into a great title, like we covered earlier. As for keywording, I may employ all the steps that we covered in our keywording module from the last section, or just some of them, based on how confident I feel about the keywords I'm coming up with. I'll look at similar high-selling content, look up synonyms, and even use ChatGPT to help in keywording – I'll cover how to do that later. All in all, I should be done keywording in about 10 minutes. Since the content I'm creating each day is typically all on the same subject, I'm only coming up with one core group of keywords that will work for all my daily content, adding a few extra words as needed based on the specifics of each image or video. That helps me keep the keywording step down to 10 minutes.
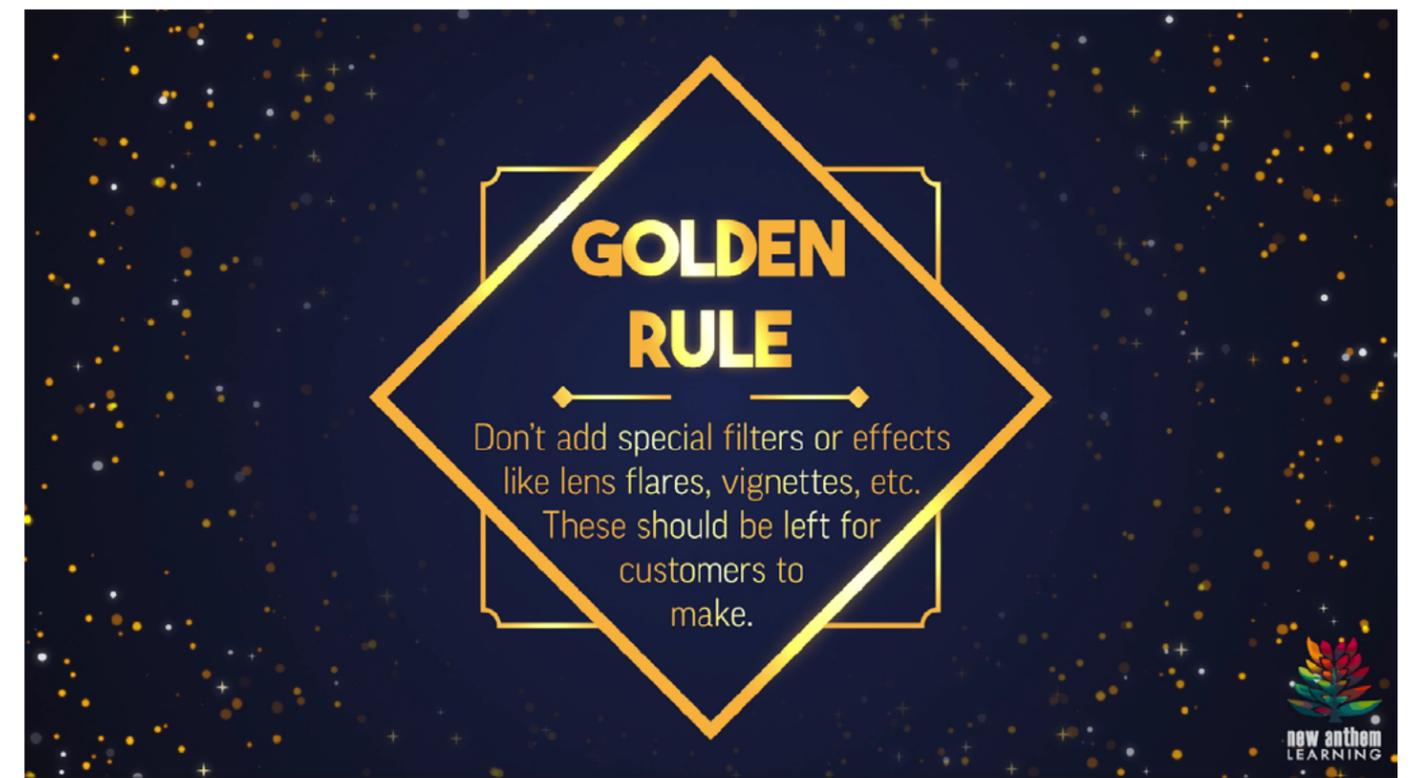
Step Five is uploading and submitting to the best agencies. This can be done pretty quickly because on a daily basis I'm only uploading to a half dozen or so agencies each day. As I'll cover later in the section on agencies, there are only a handful that are going to generate the bulk of your sales, and I haven't found it to be worth my time and effort to upload to the lower performing sites. We'll cover which ones these are later. This entire process should only take about 10 to 15 minutes.

So there you have it, my five step daily workflow that I can typically complete in about 90 minutes. I may not be able to do it all at once. Sometimes, for example, I'll create some 3d renders

that may take much of the day to process, and I'll wait until after my main job is complete and do my processing and uploading in the evening. Every day can be a bit different, and that keeps the work fresh and interesting, and doesn't make me feel that I'm in a rut. I've never felt burned out by the process over the course of 15 years, partly because I've expanded my toolbox by learning new skills in photography, illustration, and now, generative AI. Every day is a bit of a new adventure creating and uploading content, and it's incredibly rewarding being able to earn passive income from 90 minutes of work.

PROCESSING TIPS

There are a number of important things you need to consider when creating and preparing your content for the agencies. These include file type, size, resolution, color profile, checking for artifacts and other errors, and properly embedding your description and keyword in the files.

GOLDEN RULE

Don't add special filters or effects like lens flares, vignettes, etc. These should be left for customers to make.

Let's take these items one by one, starting with file type.
While a few agencies accept different file types, you can't go wrong saving your images as JPEGs. All the agencies will accept them this way, so save them as JPEGs and make sure you set it at the highest quality level to ensure you don't have issues when the agencies review them.

Next, file size. Your files should not exceed 45 megabytes when saved. And in terms of megapixels, they can be between 4 and 100 megapixels.

But I find that I don't really need to worry about file size or megabytes when I set the resolution correctly. I typically aim to submit images that are around five thousand pixels on the longest side, and around three thousand pixels on the shorter side, with file resolution at 72 dpi, or dots per inch.

Save your images with the SRGB color profile, or color space.

Next, let's zoom in on the image at 100% and scrutinize it for any possible errors like artifacts

or pixelation. Here are some examples from images discussed at an Adobe Stock forum. If you see things like these in your images, you'll need to edit these or eliminate them from your upload batches, since they are sure to be rejected. And too many rejections could cause your account to come under review at put it at risk of closure. Unfortunately these types of problems can be common with AI generated images, so be extremely careful if you're using AI.

There are some things you should always avoid doing when processing your images, and we're going to make that the Golden Rule for this module: Don't add special filters or effects to your images like lens flares, vignettes, patterns or frames. Adobe and other agencies want to leave decisions to add effects like these to their customers, and will reject your work for this type of overprocessing.

Earlier I suggested creating a vertical and horizontal version of an image, but that's not a matter of cropping. That's composing the original shot taking advantage of the portrait or landscape aspect ratio. Compose your shot or illustration differently in a way that makes sense for the canvas orientation. Don't just create new versions through cropping.

Next let's look at how you can embed your title or description and keywords inside your file. In Photoshop, you can go to File and then File Info to open up the window to embed your information. The quick keys are Alt – Shift – Control – I on a PC, and Shift – Option – Command – I on a Mac.

Here you can past your title into the fields marked title and description. Some agencies may pull from the title field, and some from the description field, so I paste what we wrote as the title for the image into both fields. Then copy the list of keywords from our spreadsheet into the keyword field in Photoshop and save the file as a JPEG.

So, those are the key things to look at when getting your images ready to upload, but what about videos?

For file format, I save as a format that all the major agencies accept, which are Quicktime MOV files, which get saves as MP4 files, and using the H264 encoding option.

For resolution, you have a few different options, but you want to consider some important things before you decide. You could go with traditional HD, which is 1920 by 1080 pixels, or you could future proof your video portfolio and upload in 4K resolution, since that's increasingly be-

GOLDEN HACK:
FREE SOFTWARE
Consider free alternatives to expensive software. There are many free programs with active communities to help you get up and running.

coming a standard for display on large formats like televisions. There are even a few different types of 4K: traditional 4K which is 4096 by 2160 pixels, or 16 by 9 ratio of films which is 4096 by 2304 pixels. Just keep in mind that saving your work this way will make your files huge and you could quickly fill up your hard drives, plus they will take considerably longer to upload. A few years ago I began uploading video in 4K, in the traditional 4096 by 2160 size, but stopped due to the storage challenge and uploading times. When I look back at my sales of traditional HD videos versus 4K videos, I see no difference, so I continue to upload in 1920 by 1080. I may go back to uploading in 4K if trends change, but for now, I'm sticking with 1080 HD.

You should view your videos at 100% size just as you do with still images, and watch for any artifacts or errors. Quality is crucial when uploading videos.

Finally, as for embedding titles and keywords, unfortunately that's not possible with videos. You'll have to upload your videos to the agencies, and paste in your titles and keywords manually when you go to submit your files for review.

Now, I mentioned Photoshop earlier as my image editor of choice. Another option for processing of images is Adobe Lightroom. I have access to Photoshop and Lightroom, and all the Adobe products for free because I reached a level in their bonus program and entitled me to a free Creative Cloud account.

You may be thinking you'll have to pay hundreds of dollars on software to create or process your work, but here's a Golden Hack that can help you out... Consider free alternatives to expensive software. There are many free programs with active communities to help you get up and running.

For free Photoshop alternatives, there are:

GIMP (which stands for GNU Image Manipulation Program) is one of the most well-known and comprehensive free Photoshop alternatives. It offers a wide range of editing tools and features, including layer support, advanced selection tools, and a variety of filters and plugins. GIMP is available for Windows, macOS, and Linux.

Krita: Krita is an open-source digital painting application that also includes robust image editing features. It's particularly popular among digital artists and illustrators but can be used for general photo editing as well. Krita is available for Windows, macOS, and Linux.

Photopea is a web-based image editor that closely resembles Photoshop's interface and functionality. It's accessible through a web browser, which means you can use it on any operating system without installing any software.

Pixlr is another web-based image editing tool that offers both a web app and a mobile app. It provides a user-friendly interface and a range of editing options, making it suitable for quick photo enhancements and simple design tasks.

Seashore: Seashore is a macOS-only image editor that is based on GIMP but tailored for Mac users. It offers a simplified interface and focuses on the essential editing features.

Here are some alternatives to Adobe Lightroom that are free:

Darktable is a powerful open-source alternative to Adobe Lightroom. It offers non-destructive editing, RAW image support, and advanced color correction tools. It's available for Windows, macOS, and Linux.

RawTherapee is a free, cross-platform RAW photo processing software. It provides a wide range of editing tools, including exposure adjustments, color correction, and sharpening. It's available for Windows, macOS, and Linux.

LightZone is an open-source photo editing and retouching software that focuses on non-destructive editing. It offers a unique zone-based editing system and is available for Windows, macOS, and Linux.

digiKam is primarily an open-source photo management tool that also includes basic editing capabilities. It's known for its robust photo organization features and is available for Windows, macOS, and Linux.

And finally, my favorite of the free software group, is a free alternative to expensive 3d rendering programs like Maya or 3DSMax: Blender is a great free tool to create great 3d illustrations and animations, and there's a big community online to help you get started including fantastic tutorials on YouTube.
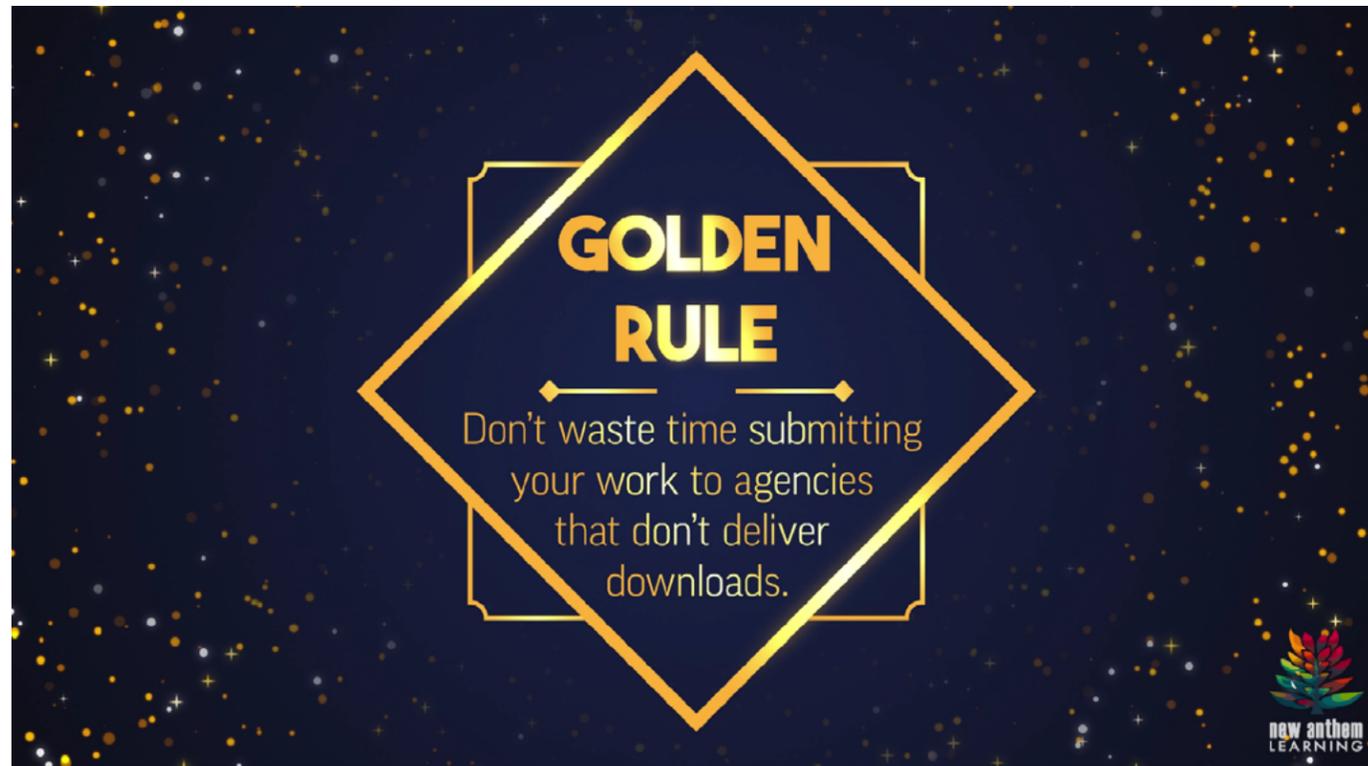
SELECTING AGENCIES

Deciding what agencies will sell your work online boils down, for me, to one essential question: what will be the return on my investment of time and effort to upload and submit to the agency?

Yes, there are other things to consider, such as "Will the agency pay me a fair amount for my work?" and for me, this question eliminates a number of the free or almost free sites from consideration.

Most of the agencies, even the ones at the top of my list, pay a very small amount per download, on average. There's no avoiding this fact. It's what puts the 'micro' in 'microstock.' This is something you'll have to make peace with when you decide to jump into the world of selling online. You'll have to brace yourself for looking at your earnings as they come in, and seeing a lot of 30 cent sales, 20 cent, and even 10 cent sales. There will be days early on where you see just a few 10 cent sales and you'll ask yourself if it's fair for agencies to be paying you such small amounts for your hard work.

GOLDEN HACK:
FASTER UPLOADS
Cut time in uploading and submitting by sending your work to the agencies all at once. Open each in separate browser tabs and jump from one to the other to upload and submit files.

GOLDEN RULE

Don't waste time submitting your work to agencies that don't deliver downloads.

new anthem LEARNING

You'll have to remember on these darkest of days as you start out that this is all about volume, and the image or video that earns just pennies today may end up earning you hundreds of dollars in the long run. I have some images and videos that have earned in the thousands over a dozen years or more. So keep the long game in mind.

That being said, I think it's important to not just judge an agency on the commission rate it will be offering you but also the size of its audience and the number of downloads it could bring you. That means I'm placing some agencies higher on my list even though agencies lower down on my list may pay more per download.

And it also means that I'm deeming some agencies simply not worth my time. I don't feel that the time I spend uploading and submitting to them will result in money that justifies all that effort. I'd rather use that time creating more content, or better yet, on quality moments with friends and family. Remember, I try to keep to an efficient workflow of about 90 minutes a day, and spending time uploadinig to agencies that I've found to not deliver much payoff, just isn't worth it.

With this in mind, here's another Golden Rule: Don't waste time submitting your work to agencies that don't deliver downloads. That time is better spent creating more content, or just enjoying life.

And once you've determined the list of agencies where you will submit your work, there are ways to optimize your uploading process so it takes the least amount of time possible. Now, a number of services are out there to offer to do this work for you, but I've never used them. Instead, I've felt most comfortable doing this work myself, not giving anyone else access to my accounts. What I do is best summed up by this Golden Hack:

Cut time in uploading and submitting by sending your work to all the agencies at once. Have the agencies opened in separate tabs in a browser and jump from one to the next to upload your files. For video: Copy and paste the titles for each agency, then copy and paste the keywords.

If you're uploading video, that last part is especially useful. Since we can't embed titles and keywords in videos, you'll have to enter those manually at the agencies, and I find that copying my keywords once from my keyword spreadsheet and then pasting them at each agency in a row, without having to go back and copy repeatedly, makes the process much less frustrating.

So in the next few modules, I'm going to share which agencies are worth uploading to, broken up into separate modules for images, and for videos. I'll include the agencies that are musts for uploading your work, and a few that I'd consider on the bubble and worth you doing the homework and deciding for yourself if they make sense for you.

There are a number of agencies that I'm not going to mention, and you can take that to mean I don't feel they're worth your time and effort. And after we review the lists of agencies, I'm going to share some vital tips to help make sure the agencies don't reject your work, or ultimately ban your account. So let's dive in for a closer look at the agencies.

THE BEST AGENCIES FOR IMAGES

The world of microstock has seen a lot of changes over the past 15 years or so. Agencies that were once dominant are smaller players today, while a mid level agency was bought and turned into the agency that is the 800 pound gorilla of microstock today.

I'm talking, of course, about Adobe Stock. It formed in 2014 when Adobe purchased an agency called Fotolia, and quickly began integrating it into the Adobe Creative Cloud platform, giving its vast network of users easy access to creative assets to use in their work. It was a brilliant move that immediately started eating into the market share of the previous leaders in the space, Shutterstock and iStockPhoto.

So it should go without saying that I'm recommending you make Adobe Stock your first agency to upload to. In fact, as you research what sells at an agency and make decisions about content creation, you should make Adobe Stock the agency that guides those decisions.

As we go through the agencies, I will show some detail on each, and you can get more inside the book I created for this course.

Let's begin with the sites I believe should be your priorities, in this order:

Number one is Adobe Stock. Some of its key selling points include:

> + It's a leader on new trends and technologies, such as AI
> + In fact, it's the only large agency that accepts AI generated images as of right now, creating a unique opportunity for you.
> + Because of the great potential for significant sales, it's a great return on investment of your efforts and time
> + That great sales potential is thanks to the visibility you'll enjoy with the enormous Adobe creative customer base
> + Adobe has great customer and contributor service
> + And it has a relatively easy uploading system
> + Finally, the commission system, in my estimation, is relatively fair and transparent, compared to the other agencies

The next agency I'd consider a must for uploading images is Shutterstock.

+ Just a few years ago Shutterstock was THE dominant agency. While it has slipped to number two for many contributors, it still has a massive customer base, and if you're doing things right, it has the potential to deliver a high volume of sales.
+ Shutterstock has one of the easier uploading systems around
+ And its contributor dashboard is thorough and easy to use

- One downside if you're planning to generate AI images is that Shutterstock currently does not accept them.
- I'd be remiss if I didn't mention one of the big down sides to Shutterstock, and that's a policy that's come to be known among contributors as the "Big Reset" -- after you claw your way up through the levels all year long, reaching a higher commission rate with each step, you get knocked back down to Level 1 each January 1, and you have to start climbing back up to higher commission levels all over again.

There's just one other agency I consider a must for uploading. It may be a controversial choice for some contributors, but I've always found this agency to be a great performer, and it's been my number three for several years now. That agency is Deposit Photos.

+ I find that Deposit generates a decent, consistent volume of downloads.
+ I think its commission structure is fair.
+ And it has one of the easiest upload systems around.

- One drawback is that if you generate AI images, Deposit doesn't currently officially accept them. So of the must-upload agencies, Adobe is really your only outlet for selling AI images.

Now, if you want to upload to others beyond the three we just covered, there are a few others that are worth considering, though your opportunity for sales may be significantly lower.

The first of these is Canva, which has been a big up and coming agency for the past few years, giving customers the ability to create their own designs with assets you create. I uploaded fairly early after Canva launched, and it's been a consistent source of sales for me, but as of today, Canva isn't accepting new artists, though that could change. I recommend you keep an eye on Canva's contributor page and apply if and when they open up again to new contributors.

The second of these is Dreamstime, which was a big generator of downloads for me for many years, but has fallen significantly. It still brings me some consistent though much lower sales than the big three I covered earlier. The big downside with Dreamstime is that its submission system is one of the more tedious ones out there.

Finally, you could consider uploading to iStockPhoto, one of the huge agencies from the early days of microstock. It still has a fairly large customer base, and it still delivers sales for many contributors today. However, its commission structure is deemed to be one of the lowest, and its upload and submission process is, in my opinion, the most difficult to navigate.

There are a number of other agencies that I haven't mentioned, and based on my experience, in my opinion I just don't think they should be a focus for you. If you want other opinions, by all means, do some research at sites like microstockgroup.com, where contributors share their experiences with different agencies.

THE BEST AGENCIES FOR VIDEOS

We covered the best sites for uploading still images, and now we'll go into detail on the best sites for uploading your videos. In a few cases, the names will be familiar to you from the last module, but we have a few new names as well. Let's dive in.

The first site that's a must for video, is also the first site we covered for images, Adobe Stock. The reasons are the same, and I'll just add here that Adobe has shown significant growth for me in videos over the past few years, overtaking the other sites where I upload. With Adobe making it so easy for users of its programs like Adobe Premiere and After Effects to download video clips from Adobe Stock, it's a no brainer to establish a portfolio there.

Second, is also my second agency for images, Shutterstock. They don't sell as many clips for me as they used to, but with its large customer base, fairly consistent earnings and easy uploading and submitting, you should be sending your video to Shutterstock.

Third is one that I have to suggest for consideration with a grain of salt. Storyblocks. It's a site that offers unlimited downloads for a low fixed price, and many video artists refuse to upload for this reason. I decided to try them out for a while, and found that the volume of earnings they generated was significant. But there's a few things that don't sit well with me. There's a lack of transparency in how much you earn per download. You don't get to see daily activity like just about every other site shows you, so it becomes a matter of trust. And Storyblocks recently implemented a change in its earnings structure that significantly lowered earnings for many artists overnight. So look into Storyblocks, but read up a bit more on them at sites like Micros-tockGroup.com and decide if you'd like to try them out.

Another that's worth considering for video is Pond5. This is one that many video contributors have mixed results with, and lately, many have been saying that their earnings have fallen a great deal. Pond5 was recently acquired by Shutterstock, and time will tell what the future will hold for the agency and its contributors.

Just as I mentioned in the prior module, there are additional sites out there that would love to sell your videos, but I believe the ones worth prioritizing first are the ones we just covered.

GOLDEN RULE

Stay tuned in to trends at the agencies. If a site stops performing for you, don't keep uploading.

new anthem LEARNING

To wrap up our look at the agencies, here's a Golden Rule… Stay tuned in to trends at the agencies. If a site stops performing for you, don't just keep uploading. Save that time for creating more content. I've experienced it a half dozen times… an agency that once performed well hits a downward trend that continues to a point that continuing to upload becomes a waste of time. And you might see new agencies pop up and be tempted to jump on board. As always, do your research, see if others are saying the returns are worth your investment of time and effort, and make careful decisions.

AVOIDING REJECTIONS AND ACCOUNT BANS

Just about as important as learning what to do in uploading your work, is learning what not to do. Many of these rules are straight from Adobe's list of prohibited actions, but in general, most of these should apply to just about all the agencies.

Let's start out with the most obvious thing to avoid:

Stealing others' content or violating copyright. It might be blatant theft — downloading someone's image or video and uploading it as your own. It might be using someone's image as a source and creating a vector or other illustration from it. Whatever the case — don't do it! It's an almost certain path to being banned.

It's generally a bad idea to have more than one account at an agency. Technically, allows you to have more than one account to "track different asset types in separate accounts" or if your account gets close to reaching 1 million assets – they actually used this number as an example though it's hard to imagine a single contributor having that many files. But you CAN'T have multiple accounts to spam with identical content or get around AI upload limits. It's generally a better idea to have a single account, since a buyer might like one of your images or videos then look at your portfolio to see what else you have, which could lead to multiple sales. You lose this ability if you open multiple accounts.

You could be suspended for having unusual activity on your account. There have been cases of contributors conspiring to download each others' work to boost their rankings, or just making fraudulent purchases. But I've also seen cases of the contributor doing nothing wrong, and

there was simply a sudden popularity for an image resulting in many downloads, which looked suspicious to the agency. This one can be out of your hands, and you'll need to appeal to the agency to convince them you did nothing wrong.

Don't upload multiple versions of the same file. Never spam the agencies with nearly identical images or videos. There needs to be significant differences in your submissions that would make a buyer choose one over another. Don't simply provide different crops or versions that include filters added. In fact, as noted earlier, stay away from filter effects like lens flares altogether.

Don't show recognizable faces without a release. This has always been a no-no and is a growing problem now that some agencies are accepting AI generated images. The work you create using tools like Midjourney may place an actual person's face (or close enough to one) in your images, and if you don't have a release, you're violating contributor terms and could find yourself banned. Many contributors submitting AI work are now finding it safest to only show people from the back, or from a far enough distance that faces are not identifiable.

Never referencing other artists' names. Another AI-driven violation. Some contributors gen-

erating AI images are including "in the style of (artist name)" in their prompts, and then using those names in their titles or keywords. This is strictly prohibited, and there have been many cases of contributors being banned for doing this.

Don't include trademarks or logos, unless you're uploading files as editorial. If you've been a contributor for a while, you've already learned to erase the Apple logo from a phone or computer, the Nike 'swoosh' from shoes, and other well-known trademarks from your images. But in the new frontier of AI, these artifacts can be hidden in images without the contributor realizing it, and an eagle-eyed agency reviewer will be quick to spot them, and you could be rejected or even banned. Don't make this mistake.

If you're submitting AI content to Adobe, this one is crucial – be sure to check the box that says "AI generated." It's hard to imagine someone making this simple mistake, but it can be easy to miss and get rejected or banned as a result.

So let's say you made one or more of these mistakes and find your account blocked. What do you do?

If you find yourself suspended, there's really only one way to try to resolve the situation. And here's a Golden Hack that covers it.

If you've been banned at an agency, don't bother asking other contributors for help or calling the agency's headquarters. The best course of action is to send an email to the contributor relations email address at the agency. For example, at Adobe Stock, it's *contributor-support@adobe.com*. Request clarification on why your account has been blocked. They should respond via email that they are looking into the matter, and hopefully before long, write back with the reason for your block. You can write back acknowledging the issue and offering to take steps to correct the violation. With any luck, a sincere willingness to address your misstep (assuming there was one) may help you get your account unblocked, unless you purposely stole copyrighted work or committed fraud.

So, I've been mentioning AI in quite a few of the modules, and in the next section we'll cover how you can use AI to create images, or even help you keyword your work. See you in the next module.

CREATING IMAGES WITH AI

If there's one big trend reshaping the world of stock images today, it's the rise of generative AI. You may already be using it and wondering how to earn more money with it, or you may be interested in how to get started.

First, if you're already using it, I believe you can earn more by integrating everything you've learned in this course so far. The key learnings in this course – from figuring out the topics most in demand with customers, to how to best keyword your images – apply to AI just as they do to other forms of stock. Work the Golden Rules and Hacks into your AI workflows, and you should see good results.

But if you're new to AI and want to try it out, I'm going to show you how to get started, and some of the best prompts to use to generate images for your high commercial value themes. There are a number of sites generating AI images that you could use, but we're going to focus on one of the most popular today, Midjourney. Many of the tips we'll go over should also generally apply to other sites. The steps may be a bit different, but the key ideas here will be the same.

PARTS OF A PROMPT

1. **PREFIX:** FORM OF MEDIA TO EMULATE
2. **SCENE:** CONTENT OF THE IMAGE
3. **SUFFIX:** MODULATES THE IMAGE
4. **PARAMETERS:** DEFINES STYLE, SIZE, ETC.

Since Midjourney runs on a site called Discord, which requires its own login, you'll first need to set up a free account at Discord, and then visit Midjourney and select a subscription level. Unfortunately, there's no free option at Midjourney. Some of the other generative AI sites do offer free access, but Midjourney does not. I've tried several of the AI sites, but in my opinion -- one that is shared by many others -- Midjourney currently delivers the best results and is worth a small monthly fee. So if you're just trying it out, I suggest spending $10 for the Standard level for your first month to see if you like it. That will get you 200 images to generate, at least at the time I'm recording this course. Check details when you sign up, as terms at Midjourney are frequently updated.

So you've logged in to your Discord and Midjourney accounts and are ready to start generating some images. You'll need to click on a channel within the site, one that's designated either general or newbie. This page is where you'll create your images, and they will show up in a stream on the page, along with images generated by others.

And here is where the magic happens. You're going to type "/imagine" in the line at the bottom and this is the start of your prompt. And this is where the magic happens, and where you need to carefully craft a command to give you just what you're hoping to see.

The key parts of a prompt are:

- A prefix, which typically includes the form of media you want to emulate, like a photograph, illustration or a painting
- Scene, which defines what you want in the content of the image, like the detailed house description I used as an example
- A suffix, which modulates the image, such as defining the color palette, level of focus, and other visual elements
- And parameters which further define size and styles using numeric settings

So, let's build a description as an example: For prefix, let's say 2d illustration. For scene, let's aim to create something based on one of the high commercial value topics that I mentioned in the earlier section about what sells. The concept of limited time, or time running out, is something that has always sold well for me, so let's ask Midjourney to create a young woman, brown skin, in business attire, running on a track beside a large round clock.

Now, you might think we're done, but there's one more part to a great prompt, and that's the parameter list. You can tell Midjourney to give you an image in a certain aspect ratio, tell it to exclude certain elements like people or cars, make it more or less stylized, and a number of other commands.

On screen here is a more comprehensive look at the various parameters Midjourney allows. I won't go through them in detail now, but you can read up on them in the course book.

For parameters in our test, let's say we want an image in 16 by 9 aspect ratio, and we want the image to be somewhat stylized but not over the top. Combining these parameters with the prefix, scene and suffix, we now have:

"Illustration, Young woman, brown skin, in business attire, running on a track beside a large round clock, --ar 16:9 --stylize 50"

So this looks fairly complex, but in reality it's considered a pretty short prompt for Midjourney. Some people write prompts that go on forever, but it's important to note that Midjourney will only be able to process a certain number of inputs, or tokens, which is the term counting not words but phrases and bits of general information that Midjourney will consider as individual elements for creating the image. But it's not a concern for our prompt here, this should be well

within the token limit for Midjourney.

So now we have written or pasted our prompt into the input field in Midjourney and we can hit enter. Depending on how many people are accessing the server to generate images, your image may be processed in seconds or a few minutes.

Now, since Midjourney is displaying everyone's results in the same feed, and you might decide to get up and get a drink or take a bathroom break, and come back expecting your image to be

 sitting there waiting for you to look at it, but this almost never happens. It has probably appeared and then quickly become buried by other people's images. You could scroll to try to find it, but here's a trick. Open the Inbox in the upper right and click "Mentions." This shows you all the mentions of you account name from the feed, and your image should pop right up in this window.

So now you can see the four images that Midjourney generated from our prompt, and we have a few choices on what to do next. We could say, one of these is perfect, so let's upscale it to

a higher resolution so we can download it. Or we could say, one of these is close, and let's do some variations on it. Or we could say, none of these are good and either adjust our prompt or simply run it again to see if we get four different images we like better. Midjourney is fairly random, so you won't get the exact four images by running the same prompt over and over.

LIST OF MIDJOURNEY PARAMETERS (from midjourney.com)

Aspect Ratios
--aspect, or --ar Change the aspect ratio of a generation.

Chaos
--chaos <number 0–100> Change how varied the results will be. Higher values produce more unusual and unexpected generations.

Fast
--fast override your current setting and run a single job using Fast Mode.

Image Weight
--iw <0–2> Sets image prompt weight relative to text weight. The default value is 1.

No
--no Negative prompting, --no plants would try to remove plants from the image.

Quality
--quality <.25, .5, or 1>, or --q <.25, .5, or 1> How much rendering quality time you want to spend. The default value is 1. Higher values use more GPU minutes; lower values use less.

Random
--style random, add a random 32 base styles Style Tuner code to your prompt. You can also use --style random-16, --style random-64 or --style random-128 to use random results from other lengths of Style Tuners.

Relax
--relax override your current setting and run a single job using Relax Mode.

Repeat
--repeat <1–40>, or --r <1–40> Create multiple Jobs from a single prompt. --repeat is useful for quickly rerunning a job multiple times.

Seed
--seed <integer between 0–4294967295> The Midjourney bot uses a seed number to create a field of visual noise, like television static, as a starting point to generate the initial image grids. Seed numbers are generated randomly for each image but can be specified with the --seed or --sameseed parameter. Using the same seed number and prompt will produce similar ending images.

Stop
--stop <integer between 10–100> Use the --stop parameter to finish a Job partway through the process. Stopping a Job at an earlier percentage can create blurrier, less detailed results.

Style
--style <raw> Switch between versions of the Midjourney Model Version 5.1 and 5.2.
--style <4a, 4b, or 4c> Switch between versions of the Midjourney Model Version 4.
--style <cute, expressive, original, or scenic> Switch between versions of the Niji Model Version 5. Use the /tune command to create a Style Tuner and generate custom style codes.

Stylize
--stylize <number>, or --s <number> parameter influences how strongly Midjourney's default aesthetic style is applied to Jobs.

Tile
--tile parameter generates images that can be used as repeating tiles to create seamless patterns.

Turbo
--turbo override your current setting and run a single job using Turbo Mode.

Weird
--weird <number 0–3000>, or --w <number 0–3000> Explore unusual aesthetics with the experimental --weird parameter.

Also keep in mind that these AI platforms tend to have difficulty giving you accurate words or numbers. You can see on these clocks the numbers aren't quite right, so we're going to ask Midjourney to regenerate some new images. Let's say we like this version the most but want to see some variations on it. We will click that number, with the image numbers being 1 and 2 on the top and 3 and 4 on the bottom. So we'll pick this one and give it a moment to generate new images for us. OK, so here's what we get, and we can keep regenerating until we get something we like.

OK, after some additional runs on my prompt, I have an image that I like, and I finally got a clock with numbers that are accurate.

I do believe we have something that has high commercial value. Think about all the in-demand concepts we have in this image: diversity, business woman, racing against time, time running out, stress. I know from experience that these are all high-selling themes, so I believe this image will sell for me.

So, I'm going to click the appropriate U button, which tells Midjourney to Upscale this one. What we now have is an image that looks nice and large on our screen, but is not large enough resolution to submit to the agencies. We need to click on the 4X upscaling button to get an image that we can download, title and keyword, and upscale to the agencies.

Or at least, in theory we can. You should always open your AI images in a program like Photoshop and scrutinize all the details. Midjourney and other AI platforms can sometimes get a bit funky on the small details like fingers, or chair legs or wheels on a vehicle. You may have too many or not enough. And as noted earlier, make sure there are no logos on items like computers or phones or shoes. And that there are no recognizable faces, or even buildings or landmarks that would require a property release. There are so many places you could get yourself in trouble over AI images, and you don't want your account to get banned from something you overlooked.

And remember this Golden Rule: When it's time to title and keyword, do not include the phrase "in the style of" a particular artist. You will be banned for doing this. And be sure to click the button for "generated by AI" if uploading to Adobe Stock, which is a strict requirement for AI submissions.

So that's our crash course in creating AI generated images. I encourage you to sign up for Mi-

djourney for a month, try it out and have some fun creating. But remember – you may have fun creating something and be really pleased with the results, but if you're not creating on topics that are high commercial value like we discussed earlier, your AI images just won't sell.

KEYWORDING WITH AI

We just covered how we can use AI to create images on high commercial value topics to help drive more downloads in our portfolio, but have you ever considered that AI can also help you with the sometimes tedious task of keywording your images and videos?

Here we're going to look at how the main AI chat platforms can be fed a description of your image or video and provide a list of keywords, separated by commas if you ask it to. It's a technique that I've used a number of times, not every time I keyword, but it's a helpful hack if you're just mentally worn out and having a hard time thinking of all the possible words a customer might use to search for content like yours. I'll show you how it's done.

First, we'll start with our chat program of choice. There's ChatGPT, probably the most well-known platform. But there's also Bing Chat and Google Bard. All three of them can do this, so it's really up to your preference. We'll use ChatGPT for this demonstration.

Go to chat.openai.com and either log in if you've used it before, or you can set up a free account. Then you'll need to pick either the standard Chat 3.5 model or the more advanced 4.0 model, which requires a paid subscription. For our purposes, the 3.5 model will do just fine.

For a test, let's use the image we generated with Midjourney. We're going to describe it for ChatGPT in a prompt and ask it to give us keyword ideas. Just as with Midjourney, it's important to write a great prompt to get desired results. And here's a description of the image in a prompt structure that has worked well for me… and to describe the image, we can even use the scene description we entered into Midjourney, but with a few modifications to make sure I capture all the concepts that I think give this image so much potential to meet a customer's need on multiple topics.

Write 50 keywords describing an illustration of a young African American business woman in business attire, running on a track beside a large round clock, feeling anxiety and stress, trying to beat a deadline or countdown. Use all lower case letters, and separate with commas.

I prefer to always enter my keywords in lower case, and separating with commas will help us in finalizing the list we want to copy over, so it's important to give these instructions to ChatGPT.

And in just a few seconds, I get my results. Now, the first thing I like to do is take the list and move it over into my spreadsheet to see how many words it has given me. You can see that I do have more than 50, because ChatGPT gave me some phrases as keywords and my spreadsheet will count a two word phrase as two words. I'm going to edit the list down so I get it down under 50, and it's important to do some editing also important because we really need to remove any words that don't represent what is in the image. Remember our reminders earlier not to spam with your keywords… that will get your image rejected, and if caught too many times doing it, potentially banned.

So I'm doing some careful editing of my list here to get rid of anything that doesn't belong and also get my count under 50. Now, as noted earlier, Adobe Stock will count phrases as a single word, so we should end up well under the limit of 49, but it's a good exercise to prune out anything that isn't really representative of the image.

What I also want to do during this editing step is to move the most important words to the top of the list, because, as we covered already, Adobe Stock will give priority to the first ten keywords, which will help give the image or video a boost in the customer's search results.

I have my list now in good shape, and it's ready for me to copy and paste into Photoshop, or if this were a video, into the submission screen at the agencies.

And that's it, a pretty simple hack but a powerful one to help make sure you're not overlooking any keywords that a customer might use when trying to find an image like yours. Remember that you can have the best content available, but if your keywording leaves out important words or phrases, customers may not find your work, and this will all be wasted effort.

We're nearing the end of the course, and we've covered a lot of ground, but there's an important step that should never be overlooked, and that's tracking your success and learning from your successful and failed attempts to meet customer needs. I'll share how I do this in the next module. See you there.

TRACKING YOUR SUCCESS

So we've talked about researching what sells, titling and keywording to help customers find your work, uploading to the best agencies, and a lot more. Here's some important advice: when you generate sales, the learnings won't be over – they'll be just beginning. You'll be on your own journey, following a path guided by the niches you find and the response of customers to what you're creating.

You're certain to find that some of your niches perform better than others, and you'll want to base future decisions on that knowledge. But how do you collect that data and analyze it? Now I'll share some steps that were helpful for me to grow my own stock business over the last 15 years.

Back in the module focused on my 100 top selling themes, I shared that I regularly analyze my downloads to see what's selling the most. That's one thing I recommend you do. Adobe lets you download your sales data, and you can edit it in a spreadsheet, putting each image or video into a bucket based on the different topics or niches as appropriate and then watching for trends over time. You're sure to see that some of the themes go up over time while others go down. It will be essential to watch for this movement, because if you just upload and ignore whether it's connecting with customers… well, you're just blindly throwing things at the wall and not even watching to see if it sticks.

GOLDEN RULE

Don't just create what you feel like creating, but what customers acutally want.

new anthem LEARNING

Now, one thing to keep in mind is that you don't want to get oversaturated in particular themes. You'll cannibalize your own sales because some customers may just need a single image or video on a topic, and if you have one, or ten or thirty to choose from, they are still just picking one and your own content becomes your competition. Plus, if you create a lot of content on a few topics, and track your sales, be careful when you review your data.

Of course those themes are going to look like they are performing well. It may just be because you have so much of it compared to other topics. You should do some calculations on how many downloads and how much money you made per image or video you have on the topic. Looking at your data per image or video in your portfolio will help you see through the distortion that having a huge amount of content in a certain theme will create.

Shutterstock also offers a few interesting things to look at. First, in your dashboard, under Insights, you can see your Top Performers. You can't download this data, but it's still worth looking at from time to time to see what content is getting downloaded the most from Shutterstock. You can look at your sales since you started selling on Shutterstock, or after you've been selling there a while, narrow the data down to the past 5 years, 1 year or 6 months. This is

COURSE CONTENT

interesting to see what content is standing the test of time, and what might be trending more now versus in the past. Plus, here you can also see what keywords are resulting in the most sales, shown as a percentage. A few more things Shutterstock shows you are your total sales and downloads over time, and a view of where the customers of your most recent downloads are located around the world. This could be helpful if you notice that customers in certain countries are really connecting with your content, you might want to look into what the themes are that are driving sales in those areas and perhaps research news and trends in that country related to the content that is popular there.

And here's a look at how Storyblocks gives you some insight on your video sales if you choose to upload there. I mentioned earlier that they don't provide a lot of specific information about your day to day sales, which is disappointing, but here's something useful they do share. They show you the top categories that your most downloaded content falls under. Videos tend to take more commitment to produce, upload and submit, so having these kinds of insights can help you judge if you should be creating more or less in certain areas to maximize the return on your investment.

And that's what all this analysis is about, fine tuning where you are putting your efforts to make sure you'll see results. It's going to show you what you should be making more of, but also just as important, where you should cut your losses. One of the very first points we went over was that it's important to not just create what you feel like creating, but what customers actually want. Earlier, when you're searching for niches, the question is theoretical. But once you have content and can review your actual sales, now you have proof of how well you guessed about what would sell. If you were right about focusing on certain topics, that's great. Now wash and repeat on all the steps from this course to keep having more successes. But if you were wrong, learn from that.

Here's a Golden Rule to hopefully inspire you when you experience failures... and you will, just as I have many times... Every mistake you make is progress, bringing you closer to success. Took a wrong turn? Now you know what direction to avoid. Over time, you will fine tune your path to success.

SUMMARY AND KEEP GROWING

Over the course of nearly two dozen modules, we've covered the key aspects of what it takes to be successful at selling images and videos online today. Let's review:

THE OPPORTUNITY
You learned the amount of money you can earn from selling your content. You got the formula for success -- as having quality and quantity, with in demand subjects and being attention grabbing. And you saw a way to determine what niches you should be focused on for success.

WHAT SELLS
You learned ways to find out what's selling right now at the agencies. You got to see a list of my 100 hottest selling topics. And you saw what the agencies themselves are telling you they need.

EFFECTIVE TITLING AND KEYWORDING
You learned how to write an effective title for your images and videos and why it's so important

And you got some powerful ways to include the best keywords for your content to help customers find your work.

WORKFLOWS
You learned why consistently uploading new content is so important. You saw my daily routine and how it's helped me grow a huge portfolio. And you got tips on how to establish an effective workflow that helps you get results.

THE BEST AGENCIES
You saw my list of the agencies that are the top performers today. You learned the file requirements of each of those agencies. And you got important tips on how to avoid file rejections and account bans.

HOW AI CAN HELP YOU
You got a crash course in creating and uploading AI generated images. And you learned how AI chat platforms can help you keyword your images and videos.

TRACKING YOUR SUCCESSES
And finally, you learned why it's so important to track your downloads and what you can learn from your successes and failures.

So we've packed a lot into these two hours of modules, and I truly believe that if you can put many of these practices into use as you create and upload content to the agencies, you'll have a great chance to realize your goals for selling online. I wish these were things that I knew when I started out back in 2008, but I'm glad to be able to pack 15 years of learnings together for you to help you get started or to grow your current portfolio.

I want to wrap up by re-stressing what I think are the most important things I shared in the course. If you leave retaining just a few bits of wisdom from what I shared, I hope it's these points:

You must determine what customers need, meet those needs in a way that others aren't, and make sure customers can find your work.

Your perfect niche is one you have a passion for creating content for, have the ability to create content for, and customers have a need for. Find the sweet spot where the three overlap, and dominate your competition there.

And finally, leave your comfort zone. Learn new media like illustrations or AI. Push yourself to grow and take advantage of the exciting opportunities in front of you.

I want this course to be an ongoing source of learnings for you. That's why I created the course book PDF that you can revisit as you want to spend more time with what I've shared. And I encourage you to reach out to me with questions. I'll do my best to make sure you feel that your time spent in the course was well worth it, and you had a five star experience.

You can also find me uploading videos on my own microstock journey on YouTube under the channel name Microstock Life, and be sure to watch for new courses I hope to present right here in the future.

I wish you the best of luck on your journey selling online. Please be successful, and please be safe. Thank you.