

[How to Make Money From Your Photography \(Microstock\)](#)

My wife and I began selling photos online over two years ago as a way to earn a little extra money out of something we enjoyed. At the time we had a little 4 megapixel point-n-shoot camera but since my wife knew a little about photo editing from studying graphic design in college. At the time we thought we knew about photography, we soon realized we didn't know that much at all.

In our first month we only earned \$16, yet with some persistence and a lot of internet research we raised this amount to \$270 in six months. Since it was only a part time hobby we certainly weren't expecting it to earn so much so quickly, yet this early success convinced us of the potential that was there and we quickly invested in a digital SLR. That was 2 years ago and we're now earning around \$600 per month and have a modest portfolio of approximately 700 photographs listed with eight agencies. We still consider ourselves hobbyist photographers who create stock photos in our spare time.

Who sells photos in the microstock market? Through my blog I've connected with hundreds of other microstock contributors. There is an amazing variety of people contributing to this market and with a similarly impressive variety of reasons. I know retired couples who just love to see their work published and I know people who earn tens of thousands of dollars each month. There's also a variety of people in the middle for whom microstock is their job or who, like me, have microstock as part of their income. However, one of the biggest groups are photography students - both formal students with photography as their chosen career and hobbyists who study for fun.

Why is microstock so good for students? There are three reasons microstock is so great for students: freedom; money; and education.

To participate with Microstock is free and there are no set work hours, no bosses and most importantly, no due dates. Microstock pays money which is great given that photography isn't a cheap endeavor. If you are interested in learning about the commercial side of photography Microstock is also a great way to educate yourself. What better teacher than a global market of photo buyers?

Isn't microstock 'bad' for the industry? If you do any research about microstock you will quickly find that it's controversial. The concept only works with the Internet and high quality digital cameras, so it's still relatively new. Subsequently there are still many professional stock photographers with strong feelings about the impact microstock is having on the industry.

I have personally spoken with some of the world's most successful stock photographers and they tell me that they're not noticing any impact on their business from microstock. Photos compete on quality and not price (microstock photos sell cheaper but in higher quantity) and there will always be buyers interested in the top level of the market, regardless of the price.

It's also logical to expect that the hundreds of photographers who now make a living with microstock have displaced some 'traditional' stock photographers. This happens with any technological change as big as the Internet and digital photography and it's understandable that those on the receiving end are not happy about it.

To be sure, Microstock has brought new buyers to the market. Prior to Microstock small businesses, charities and bloggers weren't big purchasers of stock photos when each image cost \$350 or more. Now that blog size images are \$1 and print size images are \$10, you can imagine how sales have increased.

Now you might be wondering, how much can I earn in microstock? That question depends on both the quality and quantity of photos you can produce. Many people who work full time and have a portfolio of 7,000 high quality images earn over \$20,000 per MONTH! On the flip side some contributors with only a handful of images earn just a few dollars a month. Like me, you will most likely find yourself between these two extremes.

I earn just a bit under \$1 per photo per month. You can find monthly earnings, figures and links to various portfolios with a quick Google search. With this information you can quickly compare your portfolio or photography skills to figure out, more or less, how much you could expect to earn with your photos in the microstock market.

Is microstock easy? Not at the beginning, it isn't. Many online agencies require a test submission which is generally stricter than their typical review process. Microstock agencies also review submissions based on what sells, which is images that are super sharp, noiseless and commercially appealing. Because of this initial review many of the established and highly skilled photographers experience early rejections and quickly dismiss the microstock opportunity. You can start with some of the middle tier agencies which don't require you to pass a test. In doing this you can easily get an idea of what types of photos are being accepted and which ones sell well. After that, it's relatively easy to start earning money.

Doing some research you can find examples the best selling photos. Typically most are simple shots taken with the intention of selling for stock, but with no more preparation than being in the correct spot with your camera. Many photos can earn over \$30 per month though the potential success will vary between agencies.

It's also not easy creating above-average success. Average per-photo earnings of top microstock contributors can be up to ten times what I earn, so you can imagine the difference in the quality and appeal of the photos they produce. They also need to repeat this many times to create a portfolio large enough to raise their earnings above average.

How can I improve my chances of success? Here are my top suggestions for people who want to get started selling their photos in the microstock market:

It is important to manage your expectations. I know this sounds easier than it actually is. A common sales pitch generally will read, "click here to start earning money from the photos sitting idle on your computer". This is not very realistic and chances are you'll quickly quit if you begin with this expectation. It is important to do your own research to figure out what sells, create those photos well, and be smart about how you contribute. Concentrate on workflow.

If you plan to contribute lots of photos it makes sense to have an efficient workflow so you don't waste time doing unnecessary repetitive tasks. Do your research and refine your workflow so you can get a quality product into the market as efficiently as possible. Microstock is business. If you're an artist more than a commercial photographer you may want to seriously consider if you and microstock are a good match. Artistic photos will sell in the microstock market, but not nearly as well as commercial photos.

Research. I've already given you a few things to research but don't stop with those. Get all your questions answered before you get started so you save time and don't accidentally do anything that doesn't work to your advantage. My blog is written for people selling photos in the microstock market, so I invite you to continue your research with me at Microstock Diaries. If you have any other questions or would like more details, you're also welcome to ask me questions directly via my Contact page.

6 Microstock Sites Where You can Make Money from Your Photos Here are a number of Microstock programs that offer photographers money for their images: Shutterstock, Dreamstime, Crestock, fotolia, 123rf, Stockxpert.

About the Author

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