

Finding and Promoting a Microstock Niche

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Niches divide [microstock](#) [2] photographers into two broad types: the "Generalists" who want to dip their fingers into all photography subjects available, following the dangled carrot of 'more sales' to wherever it leads: and the "Specialists" who focus on a single niche subject area.

A lot of microstock photographers are specialists in some form without even thinking about it; they shoot images around their hobbies and interests. Most photographers specialize in one thing or another but not all could be called niches, some niches are quite loose 'food photography' and some are quite tightly bound 'industrial assets in the oil drilling industry'.

Are Niches Good?

Niches are good, but **not for the reasons that most people think**. Say a typical agency has 10 million images. Of that 10 million say that 500,000 of them feature 'food' in some form. That's a niche, is it a good niche? Well if those 500,000 photos sell more often pro-rata than the 10 million images in the entire collection then yes. If the current sales are dominated by a few photographers and you can do better than they are currently doing then yes. If they sell less often pro-rata and there is lots of competition then being in that niche might not be so good, but it is still not all bad news.

Most people feel that niches are good because there is less competition in the niche, while that's true there are also proportionally less buyers. With lots of photographers looking for that perfect niche if you do 'find' one that turns out to be profitable, it's likely others will jump on the bandwagon regardless of how specialized the knowledge or equipment may need to be.

The benefits of working in niches come from a different angle than any perceived decrease in competition:

- Gained specialist experience or equipment
- Expert knowledge of the subject and market needs
- Focused marketing opportunities
- Networking / contacts / location knowledge and opportunities
- Love (call it passion if you like)

It's easier to become an Expert.

If you work in a niche it's much easier to immerse yourself in current trends in that niche, current

industry news and also learn specialist techniques in photographing your chosen subject whatever that may be. Your niche may also involve specialist camera or studio equipment or a network of contacts or shooting locations. Once you have that knowledge/experience/equipment the cost for you to create an image is significantly less than a 'generalist' looking at [picniche](#) [3] and thinking "that looks like a good subject to try and bag".

In for the penny, in for the pound: there is a big difference between researching and taking a few images to suit some keywords you found in [picniche](#) and actually genuinely working (eat, sleep and breathing) a niche with all that surrounds it to. That's the real way benefits of niche working become tangible - to quote another cliché: "jack of all trades, master of none"

Specialization brings specialist equipment, knowledge and experience.

I've done a few scuba diving trips recently, but I know there is no way that the equipment I have can compete with those photographers who own 1000's of dollars worth of underwater equipment. When it comes to keywording with a limited knowledge of fish and corals I'd face an uphill struggle. It does not stop there, experienced underwater photographers either have more expensive scuba gear that does not create 'fish frightening bubbles' or know from experience how to get up close without sending sea life packing. Work in a niche for long enough and you end up with vast experience on how to get the best photos at the right time as well as a network of contacts and/or locations to work with.

Better Marketing Opportunities



Niches open up doors in B2B marketing, I'd say that few people will subscribe to a feed of your latest images unless they really like the style of your work if it covers many different subjects. If you focus on a specific niche it's easier to target buyers who work exclusively in that area - but note that as I have already said in reducing the competition for your market are you have also just reduced the market size so nothing is gained from being just one of a few photographers who work in a specialist area, if it's profitable others will move in on you.

With less competition it is easier to be best, and being the best will increase your sales as your images start to appear at the top of your niches search results.

Niches are one area of microstock where it does start to pay to create industry contacts. In doing so it will be likely that you are not only selling customers some microstock images for a few dollars, but also placing yourself as a reliable source of industry related specialist photos, ripe to bid for

assignment work or create work to sell for prices higher than micro. This very much depends on the niche you work in.

Without going into too much detail of the where's and how's of advertising (you can choose to hire an ad designer, cold call, direct mail, advertise online, pay for an ad in a mailing list etc.) It's up to you to work out which will work best for your chosen specialization. Your marketing can range from as little as [creating a few lightboxes](#) [4] and posting links, up to [creating a specialist stock photo site](#) [5] and using paid advertising to get it in front of your niche audience. There is a juggling act here, you are not setting up in competition with the microstock agencies, but promoting your work there. Buyers in niches are looking for a simple good quality solution to their image needs, microstock already meets the demands of "good" and "cheap" but it's not always fast to find something that matches a specific requirement, this does open the opportunity to sell at a slighter higher price (being "good" and "fast" but not quite as cheap as competitors).

As a microstock photographer it's very easy to get carried away thinking that everything happens online these days, in some (most) cases yes it's true, but in some the best way to generate sales is on your feet - knocking on doors, attending industry events or at markets or sales shows. Look for trade journals or magazines, or your local yellow pages or similar directory. Look at an industry catalog such as the [thomas register](#) [6] (US) or [thomasglobal](#) [7] for your chosen industry if applicable.

Does Anything Make A Good Niche?

Probably not, I'm certain that very tight niches and specializations, medical, scientific (zoological, botanical) image collections deserve more reward than microstock offers, and at present are so hard to find that they deserve to be available only as [rights managed](#) [8]. In fact such images would likely be rejected as microstock despite agencies calling out for 'hard find', when it comes to acceptance it's often not that easy. Even if you had the only image of a unicorn even taken they would reject it had a tiny bit of [noise](#) [9].

Some niche photographic areas are also just not compatible with stock photography, event photography and live music, while it's possible to grab a few stock photos, if you love say sports photography you are better off making contacts with a local newspaper or press website.

I would guess (but don't have firm evidence on this) that niches related to popular hobbies or pass-times don't make such good niches, they attract people because they enjoy taking such photos and hence you face greater competition and people willing to work at a loss (based on time spent) as they enjoy what they are doing.

Disadvantages?

Microstock customers are almost exclusively 'agency' based, meaning that they don't really care who took the images, they could come from you or someone else, whichever suits their needs best will be the image they buy. This levels the playing field but also removes part of the benefits of working in a niche. If all you do is upload images and wait for sales then there is no reason to explicitly look for a niche to work exclusively in. Only if you capitalize on marketing and invest in 'living the niche' do you see the benefits I've outlined here. This is easier if it's someone you are interested in or passionate about and very difficult if it's a subject you have little interest in but research tells you is in demand.

Niche Microstock Sites

A few niche microstock sites have started up, not as many as I thought we might see. I also expect to see image resellers distributing specialist collections of microstock covering niche subjects. Perhaps the fact we have not seen more of this suggests the tight margins of microstock don't support selling on niche sites too well.

arcticstock.com [10] arctic and Iceland images

otzarstock.com [11] Jewish images

kosherstock.com [12] more Jewish images

[picjew](https://picjew.com) [13] and some more

Summary

Where do I 'find' a niche

Probably right under your nose. Niches for a lot of amateur microstock are based around hobbies in personal interests, but the most profitable niches are likely based around requirements of a specific industry. Fine art images for things like calendars or post cards are 'a niche' but certainly not a niche you would choose to go into as a microstock photographer looking to earn more.

Shoot what You Love

A lot of people get into photography this way, and then move into microstock, only to lose sight of their passion in a quest to take more saleable photos. There is a lot to be said for following your passion, bearing in mind what I wrote in [how much can I earn from microstock](#) [14] regarding earning 'as much as you want/need to'.

Research

If you don't want to tie yourself to a niche subject area then [analyse your own microstock](#) [15] sales and use something like [picniche](#) [3] before shooting. Remember that if you look at your own portfolio and come to the conclusion that all of your technology subjects or illustrations or people photos sell the best then you already have yourself a niche to work in - albeit a very broad one.

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[What kinds of microstock images sell the best?](#) [17]

[For how long will my photos continue to sell](#) [18] (will images of your niche subject age prematurely?)

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