

Innovation or Core Business

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Let's face it a life of taking photos, keywording and uploading day-in day-out might not always be the most satisfying lifestyle you can choose.

Serious microstockers are able to mix things up a bit meeting new models, scouting and shooting varied locations and [outsourcing](#) [2] tasks they don't like doing or are not good at... this all helps with sanity.

But there is more to microstock than that. A fair chunk of day-to-day microstock is not spent creating or selling pictures, it's spent on innovation. A lot of it is innovation done without even thinking about it, every article you read, fact you learn, tip you take on-board is knowledge that will better your future photography work. Innovation does not have to be huge new projects and big ideas, it can be simple changes, modifications and improvements to skills and equipment you use every day.

Twitter and Facebook could hardly be called new, some of us started using them later than others, and some still choose not to, but even your mother has heard of them so why do some agencies all but ignore them as a marketing platform? (yes I hear those people shouting "they are a waste of time" and partly I agree).

If you sometimes feel you are getting "bored with microstock" then are you innovating enough? Photographers derive satisfaction from many different things, it's usually not the money (that's obvious considering the average photographer income) seeing images in use, arriving at a solution to depicting a difficult concept, or perhaps making a complete shoot happen smoothly and seeing the results.

Why Change?

Without any innovation your core microstock business would simply stagnate, you can keep doing things the same as always, but the world is forever moving onwards, technology changing, services appearing and disappearing. The difficult part for me is keeping the time spent on innovation and research in control.

Focusing on core business does not mean doing nothing else besides take photos. There is still lots to do just to tread water: staying up-to-date with the latest technology, competitors, new trends and styles, equipment, workflow tools etc.

If you use twitter you will see that they keep adding new features, they do that because they want to stay ahead of the game. If they stagnated someone else would come along with something better. While myspace was a fine example of how a website with horrible usability can gain a massive appeal, at the end of the day if another service does the same thing but better then they steal the market (Facebook).

123rf, Bigstock, and more recently Crestock are just not bothering? Well, A few months back it would have been easy to think that, then suddenly these sites were given some much needed love in the form of a makeover; taking them from something that was looking decidedly dated to (at least by appearances) credible microstock agencies.

Last year panthermedia launched a redesign of their site bringing a fresh new look to something that was getting a little tired, and more recently a new contributor portal. While these little updates are hardly news. It's changes like this that keep a website looking up to date and relevant to current customers. We don't need to understand the underlying technology (ajax, aha, jquery and all that) but things like a search panel popping up or a modal dialog box with login instead of loading a new page are the kinds of features that make the user experience more pleasant.

Your business, no matter how small should go through the same kind of constant regeneration, be that in online or offline technology. Balance: "If it works then keep doing it" with "What works today will not necessarily work tomorrow".

How much Innovation



Yes I think there is such a thing as too much innovation. It's quite easy online to be a serial entrepreneur, constantly trying out new things, starting new ideas and completing few of them in a meaningful way - we're chasing our own tails. I have to be quite strict with myself or I would easily spend more than 40% of my time looking at 'new stuff'. For a working photographer in the online space I think it's quite reasonable to suggest that 10-20% of your time is spent keeping yourself up-dated; included in this are things you might not consider at first glance, reading forums, checking out new cameras and gear.

I'm not suggesting we all turn into Leonardo de Vinci, but if you are feeling fed up with microstock, then take a look at long term goals, and then look back at what you have achieved in the past year; not as a function of images uploaded but measured by how much you and your photography has improved, how much easier your workflow is etc. If you feel stuck in a rut then spend more time on innovation, look for new prospects, look at a different style of photography; **if you feel you can't afford to devote that time then it really is time to take a serious look at whether you are in the right business**, improve your images, the ideas behind them or your workflow as a whole.

Some agencies seem to be in constant flux, launching new products. Fotolia seemingly makes a press release every few months about a tie-in with some specialty image market, mobile app or new plugin. Is this a good thing? It sometimes looks like a lot of energy expended on a product line they'll drop in a few years time. Stability, reliability and routine are also something to aspire to.

Finding a Balance

Innovation is clearly not everything, all the other factors that make business work, a sound model and prices, marketing etc. are just as important if not more so.

If you have read enough of my articles you will already know I have a bee in my bonnet about being able to measure and quantify the things you do. Some innovations are quite tangible, a time saving etc. Some innovations you just have to put down to an improvement in your enjoyment or just a general feeling of satisfaction and progress with what you are doing - think of that as a work/life

balance.

Starting with the simple things, I feel like I write this a lot: If it annoys you then look it straight in the eye. Be it a 'dicky' camera battery that lets you down regularly, or piece of software that takes 'too long', There is likely a solution out there. Some would scoff at the suggestion that buying for example a bigger camera bag to store some equipment in so you had nice fast access when you needed it was 'innovation', and yes it's true that a bag is not going to change your world, it's the small things that make a difference to your day-to-day enjoyment. A happy workforce (and that includes a workforce of one) is a productive one. Work smarter not harder.

- Several little ideas count just as much as a single big one
- Listen and read more, talk less
- Teaching and explaining reveals everything
- Making innovations and changes can be more fun than 'work'... or truly demoralising
- Innovation seems to be an innate skill in the successful

Further Reading

Read more about optimising your microstock processes in our [Workflow Index](#) [3].

[Photographer capability model](#) [4]

[Introduction to microstock outsourcing](#) [2]

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It's quiet in here!

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