

Stock Image Buyer Personas

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For experienced [microstock](#) [2] photographers "understanding what buyers want" is part of everyday life. But who exactly are those buyers?

They're not a homogenous group of people who all have the same taste in photographic styles, nor do they have the same budgets. They buy from different agencies.

It's true that many microstock agencies are like clones of each other; broadly speaking they sit in the middle ground and serve up the same or similar ranges of images at similar selling points. Some

agencies stand out by offering subscriptions that tend to attract professional designers, or corporate accounts clearly designed to entice big design groups and business clients.

The microstock marketplace is complex, I often draw a parallel with supermarkets (in the UK at least). In many industries it's wise to stay away from the (dull and mediocre) "middle ground" and either compete on "premium quality" or "good value". Supermarkets and microstock are industries where there is a more complex deciding factor than simply price, service or product range. There is market space in microstock for agencies to have "budget prices", "safe middle ground", "premium and exclusivity". The price difference is often not that much between these agencies. Buyers are just as much interested in things like convenience and choice so measures like size of the image collection, being a one-stop-shop with multiple media types, plus tie-in's with resellers make the mix even more complicated.

What's a Persona?

In marketing terms a persona is a fictional target customer (or website visitor). These characters are used to tailor how a product is presented; they are idealized, averaged or even exaggerated versions of different groups of a target demographic. Some typical examples you might try to target as microstock buyers could be:

Image Editor

Very savvy buyer, accounts at multiple agencies, likes good search and ability to review lots of images in quick succession. Not as cost sensitive as some buyers. Demands the perfect image.

Design Group Nominee

Member of a design group who has been saddled with the image content purse strings, may buy from more than one agency, likely to be interested in subscriptions, paying for one off images only where specially needed.

Corporate Risk Controller

Likes a single agency that can be put in a 'company policy' as exclusive provider of photographic content, likes corporate accounts that allow the management and reporting on numbers of downloads (sub accounts), has less of an interest in the actual content. Price is likely to be somewhat less of a factor than some other buyers, of the opinion that time is money.

Designer Lone Ranger

Time poor, varying levels of cost sensitivity, tending to be price conscious, still has a reasonable understanding of the industry / search / licensing but sometimes not as knowledgeable as you might expect, likely to have varying image needs, resolutions, volume etc.

Good Samaritan or "Long Tail Buyers"

Asked to find a photo for the church newsletter, might know very little in terms of licensing jargon, no idea what an extended license might be, more likely to be looking for something for free, more easily put off buying, and more willing to settle for 'something that will do'. More than average chance of making a one off purchase.

There's plenty more besides this, I know for certain looking at search terms I receive on some stock photography related sites I run that plenty of visitors arrive who are (I presume looking at the keywords and groupings of visits) kids doing their homework, project etc. We could add a persona for people who are completely dead prospects.

Appealing as it might seem targeting the big lucrative buyer might not be the way to go. Like photography in some niches there's more competition for these lucrative customers and a lot less of them, plenty of agencies are staying in business attracting visitors who make one off purchase never to return again.

What does this mean to me as a Contributor?

Ideas like this come in very useful when analysing statistics, be that:

- Analysing views and download stats at an agency
- Checking out details of an agency you plan to submit images to
- Trying to estimate how a social media service might be useful and what audience it might attract.

Analysing why an image has a lot of 'views' while another image gets lots of 'downloads' is like trying to divine water with a stick. By attaching personas to certain images you can often clarify things. It explains why a certain image appears so popular but is never downloaded when you realise the visitors are kids doing their homework.

You can also consider these ideas when deciding to upload to a new agency, while it's only partially relevant to microstock it's definitely true that some agencies through their pricing and image collection editing are better suited to certain groups of buyers. Of course no agency goes out of its way to exclude a particular market demographic in their marketing messages, branding etc.; these agencies are simply not targeted in the direction of some types of buyers.

If you have a niche style, perhaps a style that demands higher prices then match your images to your agencies, and likewise if you shoot 'simple basic stock' match your output to the agencies that have less sophisticated buyers. There is nothing at all wrong with simple stock, and indeed it can sell for 'inflated prices' in some cases but it's better suited to the multi-download, subscription and low cost model that microstock was founded on.

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