

Introduction to Microstock Outsourcing

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Your [microstock](#) [2] business will reach a wall sooner or later, "not enough time". As we'll find out that does not mean working an 80 hour week, even working part-time you only have so many spare hours in the day. If you are already 'working smarter' and your workflow is as efficient as can be, then your next step to grow your business and earnings is probably outsourcing. Send some of your current in-house work to experienced specialists who you might find can do some parts of your work better than you can.

What to Outsource?

You can choose to outsource various parts of your microstock workflow, in fact I have listened to photographers who have outsourced everything from shooting to submission leaving them to purely manage their businesses. Here I'm going to discuss the following three common areas of outsourcing:

- **Image processing (Retouching)**
- **Keywording**
- **Submission to Agency(ies)**

You can outsource these individually, usually keywording is the first task that photographers what to see the back of! It's common then to move on to a company that deals with multiple parts of the process e.g. all three of the above. Some outsourcing partners offer 'full service' including dealing with resubmissions as needed, If you are willing to let go of editorial control you can even find someone on whom you can dump a shoot worth of images then they will select the best candidate photos and do the rest.

You can start outsourcing with only a few images each month. Even if you are working at microstock part-time e.g. 10 hours a week, the extra time that you no longer spend doing manual repetitive tasks will allow you to submit more images. It's possible to manage 'serious income' (e.g. plenty to live on) working 20-30 hours a week - but it's not "easy" to do. **This is about making those hours count and not spending them doing work that others who specialize in can do better and faster... and for less money.**

Letting Go, Maintaining Quality



One the most difficult parts to making the transition from DIY to outsourcing all or part of your workflow is the feeling that you are kissing goodbye to the control that you once had over all aspects of your work. For many their portfolio is a very personal front to themselves, and it's harder than you think to allow someone else's words be the title of your image, or someone else's taste in retouching change the content of your images. Depending on which parts of your workflow you outsource will leave you with, certainly a perception of, less control. The payoff is more time, once you have built a relationship and trust with an outsourcing company you should feel a lot more comfortable easing your grip on the reigns.

Quality is certainly a concern for many, but looking from a different perspective, even as an experienced microstock contributor your keywording or retouching skills are probably not up to the same standard as someone who does that job all day and has access to the best tools and experience on offer. Some parts of the workflow a pure leg-work, submission of images if often just repetitive clicking, quality for that is easy to measure either the correct Model release was attached, correct category chosen or the wrong one!

Starting with keywording, you can as a photographer stay relatively hands on, you control image selection, and are responsible for processing. Then simply submit images to be keyworded, once keywording is completed you can then submit them as you like and deal with rejections as you currently do.

As you move into outsourcing larger parts of your workflow you will find that the way your chosen service communicates with you, how they handle your images and how they provide you with

feedback becomes more important. Yes "number images accepted" is an important metric to measure but there is a lot more than that to look out for.

What to look for:



Quality: How does your

chosen company deal with quality? What feedback do they provide, reporting and analytics are also valuable tools you can use to improve the quality of future work and select subjects that generate sales.

Communication: does your chosen outsourcing partner provide you with a single point of contact e.g. an account manager who knows your business and style of photography, for a small amount of images each month this might be irrelevant but will grow in importance as you are able to submit more images with the extra time you have available. Match the contact offering to your requirements e.g. do you need fast turnaround, someone on the phone 24/7, or low cost not too urgent processing with email contact answered by the following day?

Price: make a FAIR calculation of the value of your time, then use it to calculate the value of the work being outsourced. It's very easy to think that it takes you 10 minutes to do this, and 30 minutes for that and an hour to keyword a batch, but when you take time to actually measure you soon realise when put together you spent "all day" doing what you optimistically thought was a few hours of work. Outsourcing services report that most photographers are over optimistic when estimating the number of images they will produce.

Lifestyle and Business Growth: as well as price also factor in what the service will do for both your enjoyment of your work and the additional free time to spend growing your business, taking more images etc. even more flexible working, shooting in large batches then letting someone else deal with small amounts of submissions each day or week.

Outsourcing Services

I've listed just a few here, and I make no representations about their quality, but have spoken to various people who recommend and indeed don't recommend some of these; what works for you is very much dependent on the way you build one of these services into your workflow.

[Picworkflow](#) [3] - a workflow assistant tool that is photographer driven, it currently allows you to outsource keywording of your images and provides an automated distribution feature (but not at the moment final submission to agencies). An ideal place to perhaps "test the water" in terms of

outsourcing. [Full picworkflow review](#) [4]

[ProImageExperts \(formerly JaincoTech\)](#) [5]

Large image processing company offering stock solutions for raw processing, retouch (including video retouch) color correction, keywording and submission.

[Keyindia graphics](#) [6]

Offering their Image retouch and keywording service to 3000 photographers and 125 agents worldwide., "No job is too big - or indeed, too small"

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