

The Photographer's Guide to Marketing & Self Promotion

by Maria Piscopo, excerpted from page 83

Roger Ressemeyer, a photographer and former picture agency owner, is now vice president of strategy and corporate development at Getty Images, the world's largest photo agency. Roger made the following comments regarding the stock photographer's essential relationship with stock photo licensing companies:

"1999 was a pivotal year for online image search and digital delivery. Both exploded into dominance in North America. Simultaneously, there was an accelerating consolidation of the larger and many smaller photo agencies. The mergers were triggered in part by the incredible cost of launching and continuously updating an e-commerce enabled web site, and the additional costs of creating digital assets for licensing on those sites.

"Yet another new expense is traffic building, or driving qualified buyers to the web sites. Agencies realized that simply launching a website isn't enough. Many looked to partnerships and/or mergers as a means of minimizing these overwhelming new marketing and technology costs.

"I don't personally believe that the bigger agencies will wipe out the smaller ones. There's plenty of room for niche-market and boutique stock photo agencies. This creates a variety of possibilities. A small group of highly creative photographers showcasing a new style or viewpoint can do very well in today's sales environment. Opportunities abound that rarely existed in the past, such as distributing successful brands through larger companies, or positioning a successful start-up for acquisition.

"Quality is the key. Pay attention to your own heart and vision. Find ways to maximize your own creativity. On the web, you're up against a lot more competition than in the old marketplace of dupes, couriers, and polypropylene sleeves. Clients are increasingly discerning and educated. In this brave new world it's harder to sell "B" quality images since clients have easy and quick access to so many "A" photographs. Avoid creating a complicated, stressful business life – make that part simple so you can concentrate on the images and art that draws us all to photography.

"As an individual photographer, you will probably decide to pursue more than one channel for licensing your work. To be successful you don't need to make a lot of sales. Hold back your best-of-the-best pictures for high-priced sales based on clearly defined, limited usage. To do that, it's very important to protect your most saleable images and their similars from competing with themselves. These will do very well if you place them with stock agencies that specialize in rights-controlled e-commerce.

"The needs of photo agencies and image licensing companies are very synergistic with the needs and interests of creative freelance photographers. It's not an "us-versus-them" world. Keep an open mind and take every opportunity to get to know your art directors and agency colleagues on a personal level. Ask them your questions, voice your concerns, and find ways to work towards common goals."