



↑ Photograph © RedRoom Studios/Alamy.



↑ Photograph © Hugh Turvey/Science Photo Library.

The rights stuff

While quality may have improved and use is becoming increasingly widespread, royalty-free licensing still divides photographers. **Katie Scott** gathers opinions

HUGH TURVEY of Gusto Images, a photography outfit that focuses on medical imagery, doesn't sell his images on royalty-free licenses. He is quite aware that many photographers do, and that many make a healthy living from it. However, he has chosen not to. In contrast, Steve Allen, a photographer whose images feature in several different libraries, now makes 95% of his income from royalty-free imagery. Photographers, says Michael Brown of Picture House Marketing and a committee member of the British Institute of Professional Photography (BIPP), are split down the middle on the issue of royalty-free. However, the debate between the two sides seems less vitriolic than in the days when the first royalty-free libraries and distributors, Cadmium, Digital Vision and Image Source crossed the Atlantic a decade ago.

When Turvey first embarked upon his career, royalty-free were the dirtiest words in the business. He explains: 'When I started out seven years ago, royalty-free licensing was the devil itself.' He, like Allen, depicts battle-lines drawn and spies out searching for deserters. Those who believed that royalty-free imagery was corroding the foundations of the

industry glared over the divide at those who recognised they could earn a competitive salary from it. While opinions are still divided, a large number of photographers have now come to see the benefits of selling royalty-free images while continuing to place pictures in libraries under rights-managed contracts.

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Allen is one such convert. Although he began his career doing commissioned work, he was only too happy to give it up as stock library projects became more profitable. He cites the freedom that this has offered him as a distinct advantage: 'I am now my own boss. I can shoot what I want as long as it is marketable. For example, this year, I spent seven and a half months travelling.'

Overseas projects cost a significant amount of money and Allen is proud

that the living he is earning from image libraries allows him to continue them. He has 22 CDs with American Firm Brand X, which earn him £178,000 a year. He has also placed images, both royalty-free and rights-managed, with Alamy, Getty Images and the Science Photo Library. Rights protected images earn him around £16,600, but the remaining 90% comes from royalty-free work.

Bulk buying

Alan Capel, head of content at Alamy is unsurprised by the money that photographers like Allen are earning. His company works on the basis that photographers can either sign a contract whereby 65% of the sale goes to them or 75% if the photographer pays a 10 cent per image monthly storage fee (he says 90% of photographers go for the 65/35% split). Payments are made on a monthly basis through an automated run.

Andrew Wakeford, a commercial photographer based in Germany, has experience of the royalty-free market but still makes the majority of his living from commissioned work. He says: 'The ability to earn a livelihood

from royalty-free images centres on the number of images that you can offer. In 1999 it was fine to provide just 50 shots. We have less than 200 images in royalty-free collections today. If we had 2000 we could live from the income that would generate, however, you have to pay a lot of money up front in order to produce that number of images.'

Allen already had a large number of images in his portfolio when royalty-free libraries were establishing themselves. He was able to earn money from these images while constantly expanding his collection. The trips that he now makes are part of a constant quest to find marketable images for his royalty-free collections. This is necessary when royalty-free images average at £12-£15 per sale compared to rights-protected images, which sell at an average at £100. Allen quantifies this in terms of his own sales: 'In the last quarter of 2003 I earned £41,600 through Brand X for 4500 sales.' Many of these sales would have been made by a distributor contracted to Brand X. Photographers may earn 25% of the sale if this is made by the parent company, but if it is made through one of its distributors the photographer earns less. 'This is usually the case as Brand X only make about 7% of their own sales,' Allen concedes.

Size matters

Allen adds that the file size of images required is also a factor. Alamy says that 48MB is the minimum size it will accept. Allen shoots entirely on digital to meet these specifications and has recently updated his camera to provide even bigger files. He

