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news

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Alamy boss answers critics

Alamy's CEO has tried to allay photographers' fears that a controversial pricing model is a move into micro-stock.

Earlier this month, Alamy unveiled the Limited Use initiative, which it claimed would help contributors compete in the low cost 'micropayment' market. The scheme is the first to emerge from the Novel Use pricing strategy, which Alamy launched in September last year and to which contributors signed up on a year-long basis.

Under the Limited Use scheme, individual bloggers, social networks users, teachers, academics and higher education students pay just 60p for small images and £1.80 for medium-sized images of around 5.5MB (BJP, 25 June). Alamy contributors have heavily criticised the strategy, describing it as micro-stock with another name.

'We launched the Novel Use scheme to try to give us some scope to address new markets where in the past we couldn't get into without consent from our contributors,' Alamy's CEO James West tells BJP. 'We had a few ideas for this scheme, the first one being Limited Use. These schemes are quite radical, and we couldn't get into them without authorisation.'

'A number of people are saying that we introduced micro-stock but gave it another name,' West adds. 'My definition of micro-stock is royalty-free images at a low price. What we are doing is rights-managed images at a low price. We are targeting different users. These users would never have the money to spend on more expensive images. We chose 60p because it represents one dollar in the US.'

Commenting on the angry backlash to the scheme, which has seen more than 100 comments on Alamy's blog and forums, he adds: 'Those views were overwhelming negative,' West says. 'However, of all our contributors, 75% have yet to decide whether to join the Novel Use scheme. And of the 25% who chose, more than half said yes. The blog comments are misrepresentative. However, we did offer the option to opt-out of the scheme for a few days.'

'I guess the problem that arose was that our contributors had to sign up for something that was still confidential,' he adds. 'We didn't want to let our competition know what we wanted to do. However, we still needed pictures to launch this new scheme. We should have communicated more details of the new scheme when we announced Novel Use.'

West adds that the low price could be changed in the near future, however. 'We will see how the service performs,' he says. 'The price isn't fixed. We might change it based on an assessment of the competition. But, if we want to do business in this area, we have to be competitive. Limited Use, in short, enables us to compete with micro-stock without foregoing the photographers' rights to compete at the higher end of the market.'

West has vowed to improve communication with Alamy's contributors about Limited Use and any other scheme launched under the Novel Use umbrella. 'We would like to try and persuade our contributors to say yes to the scheme,' he says. 'We will explain more about it. In the next 10 days we will launch another new scheme, but on a much smaller scale. It will be a programme pilot.'

West wants to assure contributors that the Limited Use scheme is not the backbone of Alamy's strategy. 'It just is an opportunity to compete in another market. If this doesn't make money for our photographers, it doesn't make money for us.'

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