

# Selling Stock

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## Does Selling For Small Uses Encourage Stealing?

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Posted June 25th, 2008 by Jim Pickerell

Many photographers are concerned about the new Alamy Novel Use program. They fear that making images available for blogs, social-networking sites and certain educational uses at microstock prices will make it easier for their images to be stolen or used without authorization.

Regardless of whether the photographer licenses an image for \$400 or \$4 (the average price of an iStock download in 2007), if it is placed on the Internet it can be easily stolen. In addition, a high percentage of the images being licensed for commercial print use are also put online by the licensee. If photographers want to be certain their images won't be stolen, never license to anyone for online use. Even images used in print publication can be easily scanned and placed on the Internet, so licensing images for print use alone is also risky.

However, there are several reasons why the risk of thievery is minimal. First, like any other RM sale, there is a license for any Novel Use. The uses this program allows are narrowly and specifically defined. The purchaser cannot legally use the image for any purpose other than the one defined in the license.

Yes, customers could lie about their intended use. They might buy the image cheap and use it much larger for unauthorized commercial use. Unauthorized uses will occasionally happen, regardless of how an image is licensed. But the instances of such unauthorized uses are rare. Commercial customers will not want to take the risk of being caught in order to save a few dollars. Personal users might be tempted, but consider that some iStock photos have been purchased more than 4,000 times after the first license. Once these images were used the first time, why didn't everyone steal them rather than paying for them? Simply, because the uses were priced at a level small users could afford; it was easier to be honest.

Bloggers and other personal users can't justify paying more than a few dollars for an image, given their intended use. Those who intend to use the image for advertising, posters, a million brochures, a cover on *Time* or in a textbook can afford to pay more, if asked, and the price is reasonable. Alamy will continue to charge these users the same prices they always have, and these averaged \$370 per commercial sale in 2007.

Photographers need to accept the fact that the market is changing. The number of print uses is declining and a rapidly growing number of images are available for consideration for a limited number of print uses. This dramatically reduces the odds that any particular image will be chosen for any given use.

In 2007 [less than 4%](#) of all stock images used were RM images used in print publications. That percentage is rapidly declining. RM sellers need to explore the other 96% of the market to determine if they can earn extra revenue from uses.

The major complaint concerning microstock from traditional sellers is not that images are sold for low prices to use on blogs, personal Web sites and students reports, but that they are also sold to commercial print customers for these same low prices.

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