

cover image http://www.sxc.hu/photo/1246846 Micah Burke

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BUDGET

STOCK

PHOTO.com

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# the Best Free Stock Photos

#### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the stockarch.com free stock photo handbook

Sometimes, finding stock photos is harder than it looks, especially finding images for free!

Awkward search systems, sites tying to up-sell you their premium collection when all you want is a simple background to drop into a blog post... Sounds familiar?

We have compiled this guide packed full of image libraries ready to provide you with just what you are looking for.

#### LICENCE TYPES

To those new to the industry all the license terms and jargon used to supply stock photography can be a little confusing! here's a little help:

Free Images are still bound by licenses and copyright so the meaning of these licenses is still important to understand.

A license is the agreement that a photographer or agency provides and that the image user agrees to when they download an image for use - even if the image is free you are usually bound by some kind of license agreement.

There are several types of license available for free images, all are "royalty free images" (you pay no royalties for individual use) but that does not mean that all royalty free images are "free/gratuit"!

#### Creative Commons License

Creative commons licenses are a series of license types that were setup my a non profit organization to help photographer easily license their work. Creative commons licenses allow photographers to protect their work in simple to understand terms while still providing it for use free of charge to image users. Creative commons license always require an attribution (a credit to the image creator) and in a lot of cases require that derivative work be 'shared alike', images are often not available for commercial use. More about creative commons licenses

#### Public Domain

This is usually an absence of license agreement, the image creator has placed their work into the 'public domain' for use by anyone in whatever way they like.

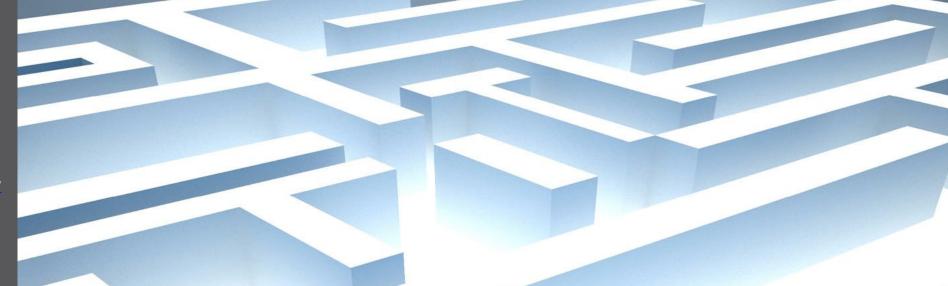


photo: silven001 http://www.sxc.hu/ photo/1145531

© 2014 stockarch.com

#### **Editorial Use**

Images which feature logos, brands, recognizable products, events or celebrities are licensed as editorial use meaning they can only be used as part of newsworthy stories. Editorial images cannot be used in any form of advertising or commercial application.

#### Royalty Free License (RF)

Royalty free has become the default license type of selling stock images (and a search for free images on google often returns a series of royalty free sites - as mentioned earlier royalty free refers to not paying for each image use, it does not mean the image is actually 'free'). It allows flexibility to the designer in that an image only needs to be purchased once for use in unlimited applications. There are however some license limitations, you can usually print up to 1/2 million copies of the image in a publication but you cannot create a derivative products using the image (one where the image forms a part of the products reason for existence e.g. a poster, calendar or t-shirt) for that you need an extended license. All microstock images are licensed as royalty free, there are also a lot of full priced or macrostock agnecies

#### Royalty Free Extended License

An extended license extends the terms of a standard royalty free license so that an image can be used in derivative products (e.g. mugs, t-shits, website templates) there are usually limits on the number of products that can be produced/sold. It sometimes works out cheaper to license an RM image for such usage, but microstock agencies generally offer a cheaper option to low volume use.

#### Copyright Free?

Most people are familiar with the term copyright, and often search for 'copyright free images', that phrase is a bit of a misnomer, very few images are truly copyright free; those images are known as 'public domain'. The vast majority of images are copyrighted and that copyright is owned by the author/photographer. You can still use a copyrighted image, indeed that's what buying stock photography is all about, every image at a stock photo agency website is copyrighted, when you 'buy the image' you in fact license it for use either in a specified way in the case of rights managed, or for unspecified use in the case of 'royalty free'. Always check the license terms to make sure that your application is covered under the license agreement.

We'll details each of these licence types, and plenty of sites that offer variations based on the terminology above over the next few chapters.

#### Free Images Have Hidden Costs

- Poor search options
   It can take a long time to find a free image when a good usable one off the shelf can cost \$1.
- Limited choice
   Free is not always 'free' when you find an image you will need to check the license terms are suitable, especially if you use a search engine to find images, they might not even be available for use (i.e. they are copyright and no usage license is available from the copyright holder / photographer). Sometimes only the low resolution version of the image is available free, the high resolution may cost money.



 Conditions Apply In terms of free when referring to stock photography, the word invariably refers to you not having to pay for the image, that said there are often some hoops to jump through when using free stock images, they might need an attribution (i.e. a credit/link) where you use the images. They might only be available free of charge for non commercial or non-profit use. In many cases you need to register (for free) on a website to download the full resolution version of the image. Clearly all of these free websites support themselves in one way or another, this is usually in the from of promotional messages or advertising - some good work can be found on free sites but clearly it's more likely that you will find quality images on a paid site even if only at a cost of a few dollars.

#### **CREATIVE COMMONS**

## A godsend for those looking for free photos

Creative Commons images are a special subset of 'free images'. Creative commons came about as way to simplify the minefield that is 'free' content (see later chapter) and allow photographers to provide ('license') their work for free under easy to understand terms which benefit both the photographer and the user.

The good people at creativecommons.org explain this better, but CC allows photographers and illustrators or creators of any content to clearly license their work, and tag it in such a way that it can be found online easily.

For the image user creative commons makes it clear if the images can be used in commercial applications, if changes can be made and in ALL cases an attribution as specified by the creator must be included when the image is used. The details of this attribution are usually displayed along with the image on the source web site often in a series of icons or a link to a licence page: as an example:



The above icon specifies that you can use the specified content for free in non-commercial applications, provided that you attribute (link back) as specified.



"You let others copy, distribute, display, and perform your copyrighted work — and derivative works based upon it — but only if they give credit the way you request."



"You allow others to distribute derivative works only under a license identical to the license that governs your work."



"You let others copy, distribute, display, and perform your work — and derivative works based upon it — but for noncommercial purposes only."



"You let others copy, distribute, display, and perform only verbatim copies of your work, not derivative works based upon it."

The above information was sourced from the creative commons licenses information page. Creative commons is just one of several license types that are commonly used in the stock photography industry to allow photographers and buyers to use and control image use

The "Disadvantage" of Creative Commons (if you could call it that) is that you need to attribute the image i.e. mention the author of the work in return for getting if for free.

#### Sources of Creative Commons Images

I'm not certain on the exact figures but with services like flickr allowing users to easily license their images as creative commons it seems that there are more CC licensed images out there than there are on free photo sites with their own bespoke licenses. BUT a quick look at flickr (more than 100 Million CC images) reveals that most of these are not intended or at all useful for use as stock photos.

The difficulty in creative commons images for stock is actually finding the stock images amongst all the other creative commons content. There are a couple of places I recommend looking:



nsectimages.org specialist Entomology creepycrawlies	Yes site featuring creati	Yes ve commo	1500px ns images	©330 of insets a	nd
ightmatterphotography. imited selection of trave	com Yes el images from aaro	No n logan attr	900px ibution US	600 3.0 license	
ofz.org abstract, grungy and ar some very interesting /	Yes tistic images library, eye catching images	No mostly frer s, share alil	1500px ach languag ke license	11000 e descriptio	ns,
rip album blants listed by scientif esearch tool, attribution		No me, relative	1600px e small res	100's olution, use	ful
unices.org attribution remix license and an interesting colle			<b>₩</b> 800px(y) m a microsto	0 €3500 ock contribu	tor
urbandirty.com grungy textures and su photoshop brushes and	Yes Irfaces, good searc desktop wallpapers	No h tool and s.	3000px(v) a few othe	660 r freebies li	ike
reephotobank.org varied collection includ search feature fails to fi	Yes ing images from about a lot of of the images	No pout 100 co ages, creati	1000px(v) ontributors, ve common	5000 but sadly t s attribution	he
shutterglow.com iny collection of attract	Yes ive landscape and a	No Inimal imag	<b>Ⅲ</b> 2568px(v) es, CC attri	■80 bution licen	se
alegriphotos.com European library of cc eature and broad imag	Yes stock images, scie e selection for it's si	No ence, abstr ze	1600px(v) act, nature,	2600 good sear	ch
matarese.com Small personal collection	Yes n of creative commo	No ns images f	1000px(v)	400 photograph	ner

#### Calculating True Costs - Time is not Free!

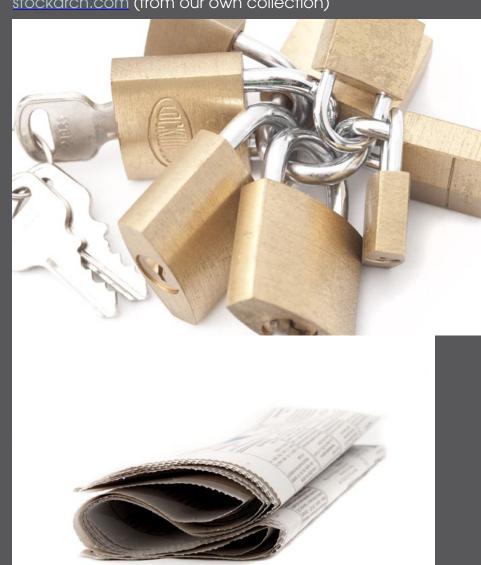
The cost of an image is not just because in it's price to license. The time taken to find the image is often a large factor in the cost. If it takes two hours to find an image that costs just a few dollars then the time factor becomes and important buying choice.



image: http://www.freeimages.co.uk/galleries/ objects/watch/index.htm

#### Creative Commons Samples

stockarch.com (from our own collection)









#### search.creativecommons.org

Allows you to search google and flickr for creative commons images, and several other search providers for non-image based content (try attaching "image of" or "stock photo" to your search terms.

#### images.google.com

Click on "advanced image search" and then select for the "Usage Rights" dropdown, ALWAYS confirm that the images you find are actually licensed as you selected.



erikcharlton animalphotos.info

#### commons.wikimedia.org

more than 10 million categorized, photos, illustrations, footage, sound bytes etc.

#### flickr.com/creativecommons

More than 100 million CC licensed images from the popular photo sharing site (15 million with the most flexible "attribution only" license).

#### geograph.org.uk

contributors submit images covering locations all over the uk sorted on ordiancesurvey map references.

#### everystockphoto.com

Search a selection of free images sites, the license selector in advanced search allows you to filter by creative commons and other free license types.

#### creativity 103.com

unusual selection of textures, backdrops and abstract photos and illustration

#### animalphotos.info

Specialist collection of animal photos, well categorized.

#### carpictures.cc

A rev-heads wet dream, browse car photos organized by marque and model, sourced from flickr

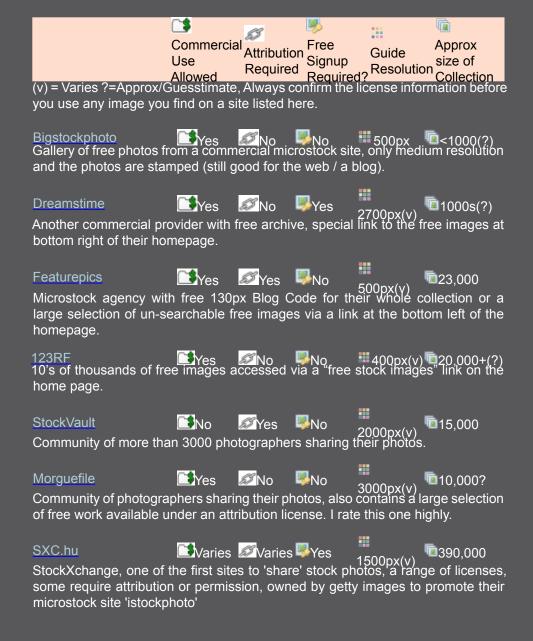
#### FREE PHOTO SITES

Getting images for free is great, and there is a lot of choice out there, but sourcing images from a free site can have its drawbacks, the license that the images are provided with is different on every site you use. Some sites prohibit commercial use of the image, most require an attribution, some require you register or signup to a newsletter to access the images, some ask that you seek permission first etc.

You will notice that several of the sites lists are commercial microstock agencies trying to up-sell by offering a selection (often an excellent selection!) of free images to attract visitors.

A word of warning: Expecting that nobody will notice if you make use of an image that you just take without permission is foolish, tools like TinEye make it free and easy to find who has used an image without permission, and stock agencies like getty and others use paid services like picscout.com track image misuse, bill the offender, taking legal action if images are not removed. If you are using images without the correct license, someone will catch up with you sooner or later. here's a typical forum quote "I currently have a demand from getty images for \$1200 over an image I hot-linked to in a blog entry 2 years ago."

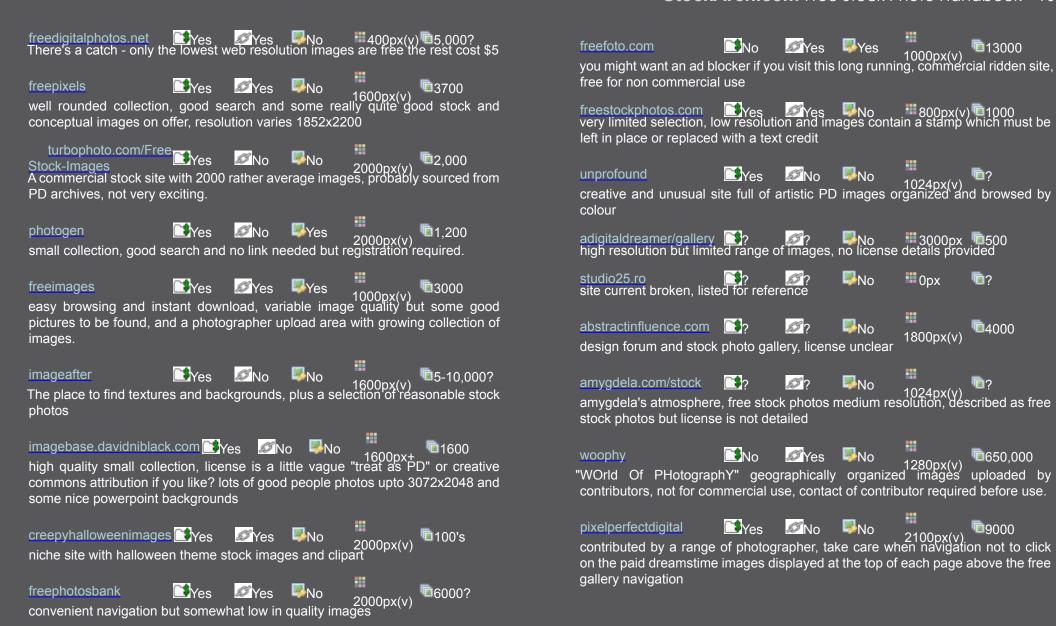
With that in mind, here's our definitive list of resources providing free stock photos...



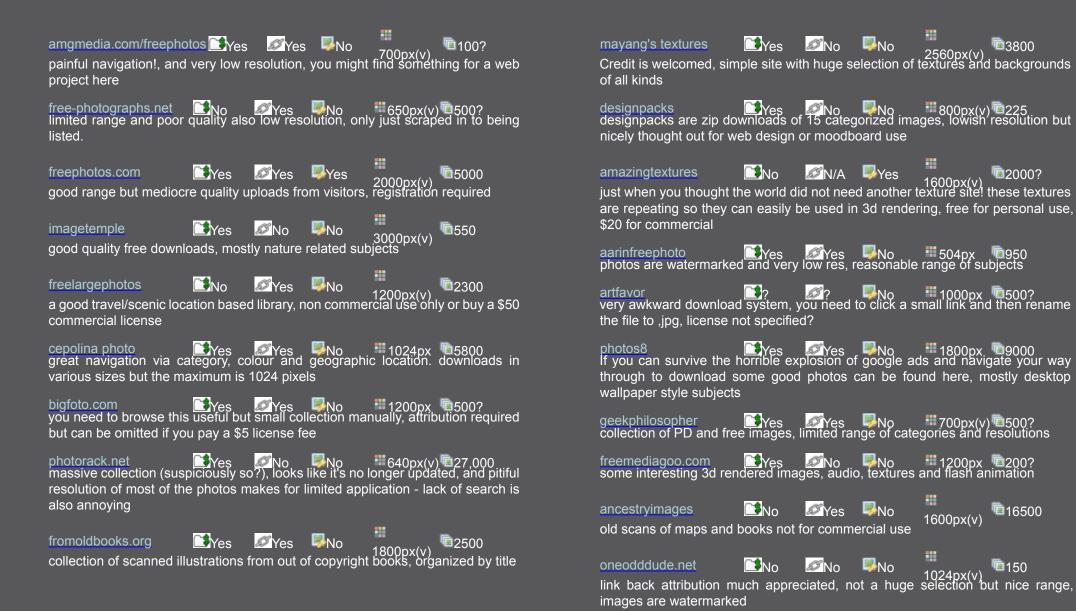
#### StockArch.com Free Stock Photo Handbook - 16

**□**4000

**650.000** 



**16500** 







offered, 'worrying cut and paste terms of use'





NB: Always confirm the license details before you use the images, all of the sites listed here clearly display their terms of use which must be followed. Commercial use means that you can use the images in advertisements NOT that you can create products for sale using the images - This is possible but in almost all cases you will need to contact the provider or negotiate an 'extended license'.





#### Disadvantages of Free Sites

Although free sites are great, there is a good reason that most of the images on them are free, they are usually not up to the same quality as those on paid sites. They might be only be suitable for use as a small online images. Just like with PD images it's often hard to find an image suitable for your needs unless your requirements are for simple non conceptual images like landscapes, flowers, nature or travel. As an simpler, and safer alternative you can look at a microstock agency (quality images, huge selection, easy search and priced from \$1).

#### Free Photo Search Services

photopy.com search through PD and creative commons licenses from flickr and wikimedia - unfortunately very limited cover!

picfindr.com search displays results from 6 or 7 sites, some commercial (microstock), some pd and come independent free image sites.

veezzle.com searches several free stock photos sites in one go.



#### imagetemple.com



#### **PUBLIC DOMAIN**

PD Images are pictures that have been placed into the world 'public domain' and are free to use by anyone, they are sometimes also referred to as 'copyright free'.in some cases though there are special requests made that the author of the photos be attributed so read the terms of use on each site you plan to source your images from.

There are some great images to be found, below we have listed some of the better sites we have come across:

Site:	Resolution (typ.)	Collection Size
pdphoto.org	1024x768	<b>№</b> 1000's
unclesamsphotos.com	N1/A	4
showcasing pd images from the US government public-domain-photos.com	N/A	Directory
lots of flowers, landscapes and travel images from the creators of pdphoto.org oldbookillustrations.com	1024x768	<b>1</b> 3000
some lovely old illustrations and etching from bygone books publicdomainpictures.net	400x600	100's
nicely setup archive of user contributed PD images grin.hq.nasa.gov and/or nix.nasa.gov	1280x900	<b>a</b> 4000
Great images in nasa is a collection of high resolution space related images. usa.gov/Topics/Graphics.shtml	1000x1000 varies	1000+
US Government Photos, wide selection of topics	N/A	Directory
photo.itc.nps.gov/storage/images Photos from american national parks, in photo CD (.PCD) format	up to 2048 x 3072	<b>1000</b>

openclipart.org		
PD licensed clipart from contributors and via wikimedia commons photolib.noaa.gov	small / varies	<b>@</b> ?
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration Photo Library gimp-savvy.com/photo-archive	1024x768 varies	<b>1</b> 32,000
collection of PD images from US government sites ars.usda.gov/is/graphics/photos	small / varies	<b>27000</b>
US Department of Agriculture. animals, crops, research, fruits and veggies - good quality nps.gov/features/yell/slidefile/index.htm	2700x1850 (varies)	1000's
gallery if PD images from yellowstone national park logodesignweb.com/stockphoto	2000x1300 (varies)	1000's
small collection, described as PD but credit required	600x400	100's
burningwell.org community repository of free use images photolibrary.fema.gov	3072x2048	<b>2000?</b>
federal emergency management agency photolibrary, some useful PD images depicting disasters, floods, forestfire etc copyrightfreephotos.com	3747x2498 (varies)	<b>1</b> 6,500
small collection of location within the uk, nature, technology public-photo.net	1700x100 (varies)	<b>1</b> 300?
somewhat ordinary in terms of subject / composition quality	3072x2304 (varies)	<b>a</b> 3500
defense.gov/photos US department of defnece image collection logotypes.ru/default_e.asp	2100x1300 (varies)	Lots
almost 5000 company logos in vector format (for editorial use only) public-domain-image.com	adobe illustrator .ai files	<b>5</b> 000
just horrible when it comes to ads, but good categories of reasonable res PD stock	2700 (varies)	<u>2000?</u>



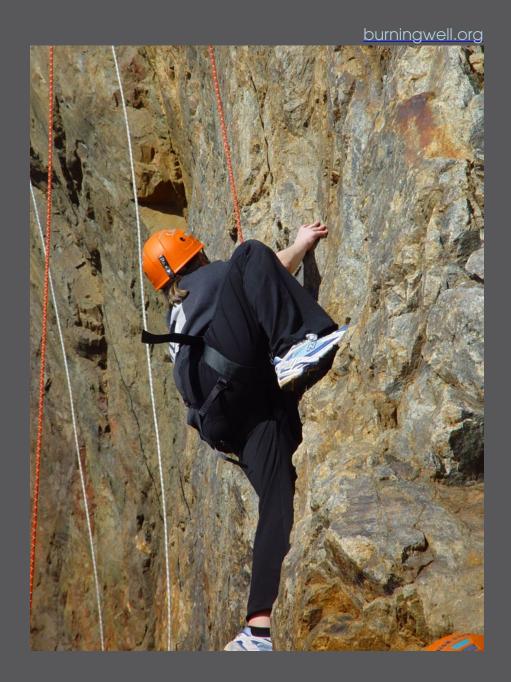
#### Disadvantages of using PD Images

Very limited choice, although there appears to be lots of PD images out there, it's actually quite difficult to find an image suitable for most concept topics (lifestyle, metaphors, images with people suitable for advertising etc) wide coverage is limited to areas where US government agencies are involved so there are some good pickings to be found in agriculture, food, minerals etc.

Stylish, up to date stock images... hmm, no, look elsewhere, or look every hard indeed!

Most of the images are dated looking or have some technical problems, while you can correct some of this issues in photo shop its often better to save time and spend a couple of dollars on a microstock image if your budget allows.

Unlike creative commons there is no easy way to search several PD websites at ones, a typically each site only have a few thousand images, unless you regularly need images on a specific topic that is served by one of the PD sites then you will spend a lot of time searching for suitable pictures.



#### **SPECIALITY IMAGES**

#### Travel

Free Sites (Global)

#### woophy.com

Community based creative commons image library of geo tagged photos

#### photoeverywhere.co.uk

A good selection of creative commons travel images from the UK and around the world

#### freelargephotos.com

free collection categorised mostly on geographic location

Location Specific Free Sites & Creative Commons

#### freeaussiestock.com

Small collection australian stock photography

#### geograph.org.uk

aiming to photograp every bit of UK and Ireland



image: http://freelargephotos.com/?subject=Ottawa



#### Christmas and Festive

Free Sites

Pixelperfectdigital.com/free\_stock\_photos/showgallery.php/cat/576

Selection of good quality free christmas stock photos uploaded by visitor contributors

#### Christmasstockimages.com

Small collection free frestive and seasonal photos for web/ online use

#### Vintage Christmas Clipart

Very small collection, but great looking christmas illustrations

#### Festive at FreePixels

About 200 free xmas holiday stock images

Seasonal and Celebration at www.freeimages.co.uk Christmas stock and festive backgrounds / light effects

Image: ChristmasStockImages.com



#### Halloween

Free Sites

free-images.org.uk/halloween/index.htm Small selection of halloween photos, low resolution, attribution required

freedigitalphotos.net/images/Halloween\_g164.html 21 halloween images from freedigitalphotos.net

#### creepyhalloweenimages.com

Around 400 free halloween photos in resolution up to 1600px (3000px for free subscribers)

www.holidaygraphics.com/halloween Mostly low resolution clipart for web use

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Halloween\_images Creative halloween some commons images on wikipedia



image: creepyhalloweenimages.com

#### **GLOSSARY**

#### Terms and Jargon - here's a little help:

• Key Terminology: "Copyright Free Images?" Very few photos are copyright free, only PD photos have no copyright attached. In most all other cases the original photographer still owns the copyright over the image because they created it. That does not mean that you can't use the image, but in order to use any image you need a license to do so. In the case of free and creative commons images the license is given away with no charge, in the case of paid "stock photography" then you need to pay for the license depending on what use you make of the image. When you buy a stock photo you are not buying the copyright of it, you are simply buying a license to use the image.

#### • Stock Photo

A stock photo is simply an "off the shelf" image that was taken with the intention of being reused in a design, web site etc, this compared to having someone take a custom photo for you. Stock photos can be obtained either free or by purchase. The term stock photo is used differentiate these images from those which were taken as artworks, or for documentary or editorial purposes.

#### • PD

Public domain images, images that have been made available for free use and have no terms attached, typically the choice of subjects and image resolution or quality is limited - there's no such thing as a free lunch!

#### • License

The terms which you agree to when you 'buy' an image for use, these typically prohibit you from reselling the image or using it in certain predefined ways, as stated above then you 'buy' an image you are in fact buying a license to use it, you are not buying the copyright of the image, a common misunderstanding amongst amateur image buyers. Licenses vary from site to site so always check you can use the image in the way you intend. There are two main license types in stock photography Rights Managed (RM) and Royalty Free (RF) More about stock photo license types on our website

#### Creative Commons

A system of licenses which allows photographers to provide their work for free under certain well defined conditions, these typically exclude the image being used in commercial applications and ALWAYS stipulate that the photographer be attributed where the pictures are used. Many photographers use creative commons as a way of promoting their work infront of a wider audience.

#### Microstock

A term applied to Royalty free stock photo agencies who source their images from not just professional photographers but also amateurs via a strictly controlled review process. Microstock sites are a marketplace for 1000's of photographers to sell their work to you, but buyers only need to deal with the agency itself. Most sites allow you to buy credits that afford you a number of downloads of varying resolutions, most also sell vector illustrations and some sell stock footage (video).

#### Resolution

Strictly speaking the term refers to how many pixels (the smallest elements of a digital image) are displayed or printed in a defined area (i.e. 300 dots per inch - 300dpi) but the term is often used to refer to the dimensions of an image in pixels e.g. 1200x1600 pixels. The higher the number of pixels the larger you will be able to print or display the image without losing quality.

## Subscription Images You pay a monthly or annual fee to access a pre defined number of photos as you need them, this works out cheaper if you need images on a regular basis.

#### Editorial Photo

This term is usually applied to images of events or celebrities, they have special license terms applied to them, they normally cannot be used in advertising or promotional material.

#### Extended License

A term used by stock agencies to allow images to be used in more applications than normally allowed e.g. to resell a photo as a derivative product like a framed print, website template, poster etc. then you need to buy an extended license or merchandise license, these cost more than standard royalty free licenses.

# Royalty Free (RF) Stock photos which are supplied for unlimited use (within the license terms which do sometimes include restrictions) are called royalty free because you do not pay a royalty each time the image is used or how many times it is displayed. Microstock images are sold as RF.

# Rights Managed (RM) Rights managed is usually the most expensive way to buy stock photos, but has some key benefits in exclusivity, as rights managed images are strictly controlled, you pay to use them on a per use basis e.g. on the from of 10,000 copies of a magazine, or on the front page of a web site for 1 year.

• Attribution / Credit Link An attribution or credit is piece of text or web link displayed along side an image when you use it, unless used in editorial applications paid stock images almost never require a credit. Conversely a large majority of free stock photo licenses stipulate some kind of 'credit' as do all creative commons licenses, in this case you can think of the attribution being made in lieu of payment to the photographer. If you use the images without making the credit then you will be breaking the terms of the license leaving you open to legal action - a pitfall a lot of people fall into when the simply download a photo they see in the internet and use it.

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Think we have missed a site from the list? then let us know

Document rev 2c