

FREELANCING & BUSINESS SKILLS

Selling AI-Generated Stock Photos

How to build a genuinely passive, royalty-based income submitting AI-generated images to stock platforms - platforms, genres, generation quality, AI-content policy, keywords, review, exclusivity, and an honestly-scoped 30-day plan.

10 Chapters

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Generated with Claude

CHAPTER 1: THE OPPORTUNITY

Selling AI-Generated Stock Photos

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · The Opportunity

A stock photo doesn't sell once — an approved image can be licensed and downloaded by many different buyers over months or years, earning a small royalty each time. That repeat-earning structure is genuinely different from every other course in this subject, and it comes with a genuinely different, slower kind of honesty about what to expect.

\$0

START-UP COST

Hours

TO FIRST SUBMISSION

Days–Weeks

TO FIRST APPROVAL

Cents–\$

TYPICAL ROYALTY PER
DOWNLOAD

A Genuinely Different Model From the Rest of This Subject

Every Other Course in This Subject

- Mostly self-listed — you publish directly, no approval gate
- Usually one sale per transaction
- A first sale is realistically achievable within weeks

Stock Photo Royalties

- Every single image is reviewed and approved before it can ever earn anything
- One approved image can earn repeatedly, from many different buyers, indefinitely
- Meaningful income realistically takes months to years, not weeks

An Honest Income Reality

This is, plainly, the slowest-building income model covered anywhere in this subject. Individual images typically earn small amounts per download, and building anything close to meaningful income genuinely requires a large catalog — hundreds of approved images — accumulated over a long period. This chapter isn't going to pretend otherwise: if a fast first payday is the priority, this course is a weaker fit than most of its siblings. What it offers instead is a real passive-income structure that keeps earning from work already done, long after the effort of creating it.

Who Actually Buys Stock Photos

Marketers & small businesses

Need website, blog, and ad imagery constantly, in genuinely large ongoing volume.

Designers

Use stock imagery as raw material within larger design projects.

Publishers & bloggers

Need a constant supply of article and content imagery.

Ad agencies

License imagery at real commercial scale across many campaigns.

THE DEMAND IS REAL; THE PER-IMAGE EARNING IS SMALL

The buyer base for stock photography is genuinely enormous and recurring — the slow part isn't a lack of demand, it's that each individual sale earns a small amount. Income here comes from catalog size and patience, not from any single image doing well.

A note on platform-specific figures

Royalty rates, review turnaround times, and platform policies all change over time and vary between platforms. Treat the numbers in this chapter, and the rest of this course, as a realistic starting reference, and re-verify current terms directly on whichever platform you choose before submitting anything.

Coming up next

Chapter 2 compares the main stock photography platforms — Adobe Stock, Shutterstock, and similar — on royalty structure, exclusivity options, and their specific policies on AI-generated content.

CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING STOCK PHOTOGRAPHY PLATFORMS

Selling AI-Generated Stock Photos

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · Understanding Stock Photography Platforms

A handful of platforms dominate the stock photography market, each with a genuinely different royalty structure, distribution advantage, and stance on AI-generated content.

The Main Platforms

Adobe Stock

Integrated directly into Adobe's own Creative Cloud ecosystem — a real distribution advantage, since Creative Cloud users can license and insert stock images directly inside apps like Photoshop and InDesign without leaving their workflow. Royalties are typically a percentage of the sale price. Adobe has been notably open to AI-generated content, with a dedicated content category and disclosure requirement for it.

Shutterstock

One of the largest, most established stock marketplaces, with a significant recurring buyer base. Royalty rates are typically tiered, generally increasing as your own cumulative earnings or tenure on the platform grow — a genuine "build up over time" mechanic, similar in spirit to a seller-level system, though based on cumulative earnings rather than performance metrics. Also maintains its own specific policies and content categorization for AI-generated submissions.

Other Platforms

A broader landscape exists beyond these two majors — iStock (Getty's related lower-cost tier), Alamy, Dreamstime, and Depositphotos among them. Each has its own royalty structure and AI-content stance, generally smaller in reach than the two above but worth knowing exist as your catalog grows (Chapter 9).

At a Glance

PLATFORM	DISTRIBUTION ADVANTAGE	ROYALTY STRUCTURE
Adobe Stock	In-app licensing across Creative Cloud	Percentage of sale price
Shutterstock	Large, established buyer base	Tiered, rising with cumulative earnings
Other (iStock, Alamy, etc.)	Smaller reach, worth adding later	Varies by platform

EXCLUSIVITY IS A REAL, DISTINCT TRADEOFF HERE

Unlike several sibling courses in this subject where platforms don't compete for exclusivity, stock platforms often offer a genuinely higher royalty rate in exchange for exclusive submission. That's a real decision worth making deliberately, not by default — Chapter 8 covers it in full.

Royalty tiers and policies change

Royalty percentages, tier thresholds, and AI-content policies are all set and adjusted by each platform directly. Check current terms before submitting anything.

Coming up next

Chapter 3 covers what actually sells — the genres and subjects with genuine, consistent stock photography demand.

CHAPTER 3: WHAT SELLS: GENRES AND SUBJECTS IN DEMAND

Selling AI-Generated Stock Photos

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · What Sells: Genres & Subjects in Demand

Stock photography demand splits into a handful of recurring genres, and AI tools are genuinely better suited to some of them than others — a distinction worth understanding before picking where to focus.

The Main Genres

Business & Lifestyle

Office scenes, remote work, everyday moments — the largest, most consistently in-demand category, since marketing and blog content needs it constantly.

Nature & Landscapes

Scenic, seasonal, and travel-adjacent imagery. Steady demand, but also a genre with heavy competition since it's a natural, popular AI-generation subject.

Abstract & Backgrounds

Textures, gradients, and patterns used as design backdrops for websites and presentations.

Concept / Metaphor Imagery

Visual metaphors for abstract ideas — growth shown as a plant, teamwork as connected pieces — genuinely requested a lot by marketers illustrating concepts that have no literal photograph.

Seasonal & Holiday Themes

The same lead-time consideration this subject has already established elsewhere applies here too — list well before the actual season.

Where AI Genuinely Shines, and Where It Struggles

GENRE	AI FIT
Abstract & Backgrounds	Strong — few of the artifacts that plague other genres
Concept / Metaphor Imagery	Strong — AI handles conceptual, non-literal composition well
Nature & Landscapes	Generally good, though heavily competed
Business & Lifestyle (with people)	Weakest — hands, faces, and text are exactly where AI artifacts show up most

AI'S OWN STRENGTHS POINT TOWARD A SPECIFIC STARTING GENRE

Abstract, background, and concept imagery genuinely play to current AI image generation's real strengths, while photorealistic human-subject business imagery is exactly where AI most often introduces visible artifacts (warped hands, uncanny faces, garbled background text). Starting in a genre AI is already good at means fewer rejections to fight through in Chapter 7 — Chapter 4 covers the technical cleanup needed for the harder genres directly.

Seasonal genres still need real lead time

The same lead-time principle this subject has already established for Print-on-Demand Design, Selling E-books on Amazon (KDP), and Selling Digital Templates applies here too — submit seasonal imagery well before the actual season, since review turnaround (Chapter 7) adds real delay on top of it.

Coming up next

Chapter 4 covers actually generating high-quality AI images — prompting for photorealism, avoiding common artifacts, and meeting resolution requirements.

CHAPTER 4: GENERATING HIGH-QUALITY AI IMAGES

Selling AI-Generated Stock Photos

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · Generating High-Quality AI Images

Chapter 3 was honest about where AI struggles — this chapter covers the actual generation workflow that minimizes those weaknesses, regardless of which genre you're working in.

The Generation Workflow

1**Write a specific, detailed prompt**

Lighting, composition, and camera/lens-style descriptors genuinely improve output quality over a vague, short prompt — the same specificity principle this whole subject keeps rediscovering, applied here to visual generation.

2**Generate multiple variations**

Never accept the first output — generate several and compare, the same multi-run testing discipline *Selling AI Prompts* applies to text prompts, applied here to visual quality instead of textual reliability.

3**Select the cleanest result**

Pick the variation with the fewest visible artifacts, using the checklist below.

4**Upscale for resolution requirements**

Stock platforms require specific minimum resolutions for commercial licensing, often higher than an AI tool's native output — an AI upscaling step is frequently a necessary part of the pipeline, not optional.

5**Do a final artifact check at full size**

Zoom into the final, upscaled image and check it carefully — artifacts invisible in a small preview can become obvious at full resolution.

Common Artifacts to Check For

- Warped or extra fingers, or an unnatural number of limbs
- Garbled or nonsensical text anywhere in the background
- Asymmetric or uncanny facial features
- Inconsistent lighting or shadow direction across the image
- Illogical reflections in glass, water, or mirrors

VISUAL RELIABILITY TESTING, THE SAME DISCIPLINE AS TEXT

Selling AI Prompts found that a "lucky" one-off output isn't a reliable product — the same principle applies here. One good-looking image out of ten attempts tells you the prompt can occasionally work, not that it reliably will; generating several and genuinely comparing them is what actually produces a submittable image consistently.

A careless submission wastes real review time

Submitting an image with a visible artifact you could have caught yourself doesn't just risk rejection — it costs the real review turnaround time Chapter 7 covers, time you could have spent on a genuinely submission-ready image instead.

Coming up next

Chapter 5 covers the platform-specific AI-content policies and copyright considerations that apply before any image is ever submitted.

CHAPTER 5: AI-CONTENT POLICIES AND TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Selling AI-Generated Stock Photos

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · Understanding AI-Content Policies & Technical Requirements

A technically clean image from Chapter 4 still has to clear two more gates before it can be submitted: honest compliance with each platform's own AI-content rules, and a genuine copyright/trademark/likeness check — the single most important chapter in this course, since getting it wrong can affect your entire account, not just one image.

AI-Content Disclosure Is Not Optional

Most major platforms require explicit disclosure. Adobe Stock and Shutterstock both require submissions to be honestly tagged as AI-generated content at submission time, not left ambiguous.

Misrepresenting AI content as traditional photography is a real policy violation. This isn't a technicality — platforms actively distinguish AI content in their own catalogs and enforce accurate disclosure.

Disclosure requirements and accepted categories change. Verify the current process on each platform before submitting, per this course's own recurring disclaimer.

Technical Quality Standards

Beyond the artifact-free composition from Chapter 4, stock platforms have real minimum resolution requirements tied to how the image can be commercially licensed — larger formats (print, billboard) need higher- resolution source files. Some platforms also apply noise and compression-quality checks during review, which is part of why the upscaling step from Chapter 4 matters beyond just meeting a raw pixel-count minimum.

The Real Copyright, Trademark & Likeness Risk

This is genuinely different from the deliberate IP risk Print-on-Demand Design covers in its own copyright chapter. There, the risk comes from deliberately designing around an existing character or brand. Here, the risk is often **accidental**: an AI model trained on real-world imagery can sometimes reproduce a recognizable brand logo, a copyrighted piece of art, or a face that closely resembles a real, identifiable person — without you ever intending it.

- Does the image contain any visible brand logo, trademark, or recognizable product design?
- Does any element resemble a specific copyrighted character or artwork?
- Does a generated face read as a specific, identifiable real person rather than a generic one?
- Has the AI-content disclosure been completed accurately for this submission?

THE SAME UNDERLYING RISK, A DIFFERENT CAUSE

Print-on-Demand Design's own copyright chapter and this one cover the same fundamental risk — using protected IP without permission — but the cause here is genuinely different: an AI model can introduce it unintentionally through its own training data, not through a deliberate design choice. That makes checking every image before submission a real, necessary step here, not just good practice.

Consequences scale with the violation

Depending on severity, a policy or copyright issue can result in a single image being removed, submission privileges being restricted, or more serious account-level consequences for repeated or severe violations — the same account-wide risk pattern this subject has already found in multiple sibling courses. This isn't legal advice; treat this chapter as a practical orientation, and consult a professional for any specific case you're genuinely unsure about.

Coming up next

Chapter 6 covers keyword tagging and metadata — the primary way buyers actually find your images once they're live.

CHAPTER 6: KEYWORD TAGGING AND METADATA

Selling AI-Generated Stock Photos

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Keyword Tagging & Metadata

Stock platform search is almost entirely metadata-driven, and the scale is genuinely bigger than any tag system elsewhere in this subject — stock platforms typically allow dozens of keywords per image, far more than Etsy's own tag limit or KDP's seven backend keyword slots. That scale makes thorough, accurate tagging the single most important discoverability lever you have.

Three Layers of Keywords

Literal

What's physically in the image — "woman," "laptop," "office," "sunrise."

Conceptual

What the image represents — "productivity," "success," "teamwork." Especially critical for the concept/metaphor genre from Chapter 3, since a buyer searching for an abstract idea has nothing literal to search for instead.

Technical

Orientation, color palette, and style descriptors — "horizontal," "blue tones," "minimalist."

Ordering Matters

Most platforms weight earlier keywords more heavily in search relevance — lead with the most important, most accurate terms rather than burying them behind less relevant ones.

Titles and Descriptions

A clear, descriptive title reads naturally, not as a keyword dump. A short, genuinely informative description supports the keyword set rather than duplicating it word for word.

WORKED EXAMPLE — A BUSINESS TEAMWORK CONCEPT IMAGE

Literal: business people, meeting room, handshake, diverse team

Conceptual: teamwork, collaboration, partnership, success, trust

Technical: horizontal, natural light, warm tones, shallow depth of field

THOROUGH COVERAGE, NOT JUST SPECIFIC PHRASING

This subject has repeatedly found that specific phrasing beats generic single words. Here that principle extends one step further: genuine discoverability comes from covering all three keyword layers accurately, not just picking one strong term. A buyer searching "productivity" and one searching "laptop" might both be looking for the exact same image — only thorough tagging across layers catches both.

Irrelevant keywords are a policy violation, not just wasted space

Adding unrelated high-traffic keywords to try to game visibility violates platform content policies, the same finding this subject already reached for KDP's own backend keyword slots. Every keyword should genuinely describe the image.

Coming up next

Chapter 7 covers the actual submission and review process — how approval works, and what causes rejections.

CHAPTER 7: THE SUBMISSION AND REVIEW PROCESS

Selling AI-Generated Stock Photos

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · The Submission & Review Process

A clean, policy-compliant, well-tagged image from Chapters 4–6 still has to pass an actual review before it can earn anything — the gate that makes this course's own model genuinely different from every sibling course in this subject.

How Review Actually Works

Reviewers check technical quality (Chapter 4), policy and disclosure compliance (Chapter 5), and metadata accuracy (Chapter 6) before an image goes live. Turnaround typically takes days, varying by platform and current submission volume — this is one more reason Chapter 1's own honest, slow-build framing matters: even a technically perfect submission doesn't earn anything until review actually completes.

Common Rejection Reasons

- Visible technical artifacts or insufficient resolution (Chapter 4)
- Genuine similarity to content already saturating the catalog
- Inaccurate or excessive keywords (Chapter 6)
- Undisclosed AI content or a genuine copyright/trademark concern (Chapter 5)
- A composition that's commercially unusable — e.g. no clear space for a buyer to overlay their own text

Handling a Rejection

Read the actual reason given, and fix that specific issue — resubmitting the same image unchanged just repeats the same outcome. Most platforms allow resubmission once the

underlying problem is genuinely addressed.

- Have I read the exact rejection reason, not just noted that it was rejected?
- Does my fix address that specific issue, not a guess at what might be wrong?
- Am I checking this same issue on my other in-progress submissions before they're rejected too?

REJECTION IS A NORMAL, EXPECTED PART OF WORKING AT VOLUME

A rejection isn't a personal failure — it's routine feedback that improves your next submission. This matters especially given this course's own honest framing (Chapter 1): building a catalog at real volume (Chapter 9) means encountering rejections regularly, and treating each one as a data point rather than a setback is what keeps the pace sustainable.

Repeated preventable rejections can affect your standing

Consistently submitting images with the same easily-avoidable issues can affect review priority or submission privileges on some platforms. Catching the mistakes described in Chapters 4–6 before submission, not after, protects your standing as much as it saves review time.

Coming up next

Chapter 8 covers a genuine platform-specific decision: exclusive vs. non-exclusive submission, and the real royalty tradeoff between them.

CHAPTER 8: EXCLUSIVE VS. NON-EXCLUSIVE SUBMISSION

Selling AI-Generated Stock Photos

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · Exclusive vs. Non-Exclusive Submission

Chapter 2 flagged this as a genuine, deliberate decision — unlike most sibling courses in this subject, where listing everywhere at once was simply the right default, stock platforms actually reward exclusivity, which makes this a real tradeoff worth thinking through rather than defaulting to either option.

What Each Option Actually Means

Exclusive

- Submitted to only one platform, agreeing not to sell it elsewhere
- A genuinely higher royalty rate on that platform, in exchange
- Simpler to manage — one submission, one place to track
- Locks in reach to that single platform's own buyer base

Non-Exclusive

- The same image submitted to multiple platforms at once
- Each platform's own standard (lower) royalty rate applies
- Broader total reach across different buyer bases
- More administrative overhead — tracking submissions and metadata separately per platform

Working Through the Real Tradeoff

ILLUSTRATIVE SCENARIO

A higher exclusive royalty rate on one dominant platform can genuinely out-earn a lower rate spread across two or three smaller platforms — **if** that one platform's own reach is large enough on its own. But if the combined download volume across several non-exclusive platforms meaningfully exceeds what any single platform alone would generate, non-exclusive often wins on total earnings despite the lower per-download rate.

There's no single universal answer here — it genuinely depends on how dominant your chosen exclusive platform actually is relative to the alternatives.

- Is there one platform with clearly larger reach than the realistic alternatives combined?
- Is my catalog still small enough that the simplicity of managing one platform matters more than maximizing reach?
- Do I want to diversify across platforms as a hedge against any single platform's own policy changes?

A GENUINE DECISION, NOT A DEFAULT

Print-on-Demand Design and Selling Digital Templates both found that listing everywhere at once was simply the correct default for their own platforms. Stock photography genuinely differs: exclusivity carries a real reward here, which makes this the one course in the subject where the "list everywhere" default isn't automatically the right call.

Exclusivity terms can be hard to reverse

Exclusivity agreements and any lock-in period vary by platform and aren't always easy to undo once an image is submitted under those terms. Verify the actual commitment before choosing exclusivity, rather than assuming it works the same way everywhere.

Coming up next

Chapter 9 covers building a sustainable catalog over time — the real strategy behind this whole business model.

CHAPTER 9: BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE CATALOG OVER TIME

Selling AI-Generated Stock Photos

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Building a Sustainable Catalog Over Time

Chapter 1 was honest that income here comes from catalog size, built over a long period, not a fast first sale. This chapter covers the actual strategy for building that catalog sustainably — the real substance behind that early honesty.

The Core Strategy

Batch generation sessions

Work through multiple images with a consistent approach in one focused session, rather than one-off scattered attempts — the same batching discipline AI-Assisted Micro Freelance Services applies to gig delivery, applied here to image generation instead.

A sustainable, regular pace

A modest, consistent number of images submitted every week beats one large burst followed by months of nothing — consistency compounds; bursts don't.

Track what actually performs

Use each platform's own download and earnings data to see which genres (Chapter 3), styles, and keyword approaches (Chapter 6) are genuinely earning, then generate more of what's working.

Diversify across genres, not within one image

Chapter 6's own specificity principle still applies within each individual image's own keywords. At the catalog level, spreading across a few complementary genres hedges against any single trend fading.

The Feedback Loop

Building a catalog isn't "produce, submit, forget." Real performance data — which images actually get downloaded, and how often — is the single best signal for deciding what to

create next. Over enough time, this feedback loop is what turns Chapter 1's own honest "slow, passive" framing into genuinely compounding income.

THIS IS WHERE THE WHOLE COURSE'S OWN HONESTY PAYS OFF

Patience, consistent volume, and a real feedback loop are the actual mechanism behind the passive-income structure Chapter 1 introduced. There's no shortcut around the time this takes — but this is genuinely how it becomes real income rather than staying a nice idea that never compounds.

Don't abandon the strategy during a quiet early period

Given how slow this specific model's own build-up genuinely is (Chapter 1), it's easy to mistake a normal early quiet period for the whole approach not working. A sustainable, unglamorous weekly cadence, kept up over months, is exactly what this business model actually rewards.

Coming up next

Chapter 10 — the final chapter — turns everything from Chapters 1–9 into an honestly-scoped 30-day plan.

CHAPTER 10: YOUR 30-DAY ACTION PLAN

Selling AI-Generated Stock Photos

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · Your 30-Day Action Plan

Everything from Chapters 1–9 comes together here as one sequence — but this plan is scoped honestly. Thirty days in this specific model realistically gets you a first small batch of approved, live images. It does not get you meaningful income yet. Chapter 1 said this plainly at the start, and it's worth repeating just as plainly here.

Days 1–5

Choose your platform(s) and genre focus

Pick a starting platform from Chapter 2, and a genre from Chapter 3's own AI-fit table — starting with abstract, background, or concept imagery genuinely reduces the rejections you'll fight through later.

Days 6–
15

Generate your first batch

Run Chapter 4's full workflow — prompt, generate multiple variations, select the cleanest, upscale, and do a final artifact check — across a genuine first batch of images, not just one.

Days 16–
20

Clear the policy check and write metadata

Run every image through Chapter 5's own copyright/trademark/likeness checklist and complete accurate AI-content disclosure, then write a thorough, three-layer keyword set for each per Chapter 6.

Days 21–
24

Decide on exclusivity and submit

Make a deliberate exclusive-vs-non-exclusive decision per Chapter 8 if relevant, then submit your first batch.

Days 25–
30

Wait through review, and set your ongoing cadence

Handle any rejections that come back using Chapter 7's own read-the-reason discipline, and set up a realistic, sustainable weekly batching cadence per Chapter 9 — the actual work that continues well beyond day 30.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO DO TODAY

Pick one genre from Chapter 3's own AI-fit table, and generate one real test image today using Chapter 4's workflow, start to finish. A single finished, checked image teaches you more about this whole process than any amount of further planning.

One more honest note before you start

Of every course in this subject, this one has the slowest realistic path to meaningful income. If a fast first payday matters more than a long-term, genuinely passive income stream, one of this subject's other courses is a better fit for that goal. If patience and a large catalog built over months genuinely appeal, this model rewards exactly that.

Course complete

That closes all ten chapters — the submission-royalty opportunity and its honest, slow-build reality (Ch.1), the platforms (Ch.2), in-demand genres and AI's own real strengths/weaknesses (Ch.3), the generation workflow (Ch.4), AI-content policy and copyright risk (Ch.5), keyword tagging (Ch.6), the submission and review process (Ch.7), the exclusivity decision (Ch.8), building a sustainable catalog (Ch.9), and this honestly- scoped 30-day plan. A combined, portable PDF of the full course is available for offline reference.

This course is intended for educational and exploration purposes. Royalty rates, platform policies, AI-content disclosure requirements, and exclusivity terms represent conditions at the time of writing and are set and changed by each platform directly. This is not legal advice. Always verify current terms before submitting anything.