

## Changes in the Wind

Whenever technology, the economy, or the entire social norm endures change, the whole picture industry flows right along with the change. It remains current, vital and fully aware of customer needs and demands. New ways of addressing these changes became clear at the recent PACA International Conference in New York City (Picture Agency Council of America/pacaoffice.org). Seven top global attendees expressed their place in the industry today, and their visions for a successful future.

**Masterfile (masterfile.com)** hangs their star on a designer friendly website optimized for fast and creative image searching. Geoff Cannon, Executive Vice President based in Toronto, and Tomas Speight, Senior Vice President of International based in Dusseldorf, get excited about demonstrating their full range of rights managed and royalty free high quality content on the latest version of their website, rolled out in July. Their mandate is to have a premium environment for business to business. Their philosophy is, “Great work made easy,” and their goal is to allow the client to save time and find a better picture.

“Customizability and innovative search and display are the key assets of the site,” says Tomas. An art director can have a balance of search results, similars and previews while viewing them all equally. There are five different sizes of thumbnails available, allowing the user to optimize their viewing environment. Pictures can be dragged and dropped into the shopping cart or a lightbox, and new similar images are available in that lightbox when it is reopened, giving constant access to the most current material.

The site also allows for multiple search tabs to be viewed next to each other. There is a *Color Search*, offering instant results for any color scheme that might need a match. There is an *Upload and Find* feature, which allows any picture to be uploaded and matched or aligned with a similar. *The Visual Pairing* feature allows a search for two things at once. For example, images of a mother and child can be matched to look like they belong to the same family. There is also an automatic similar search, allowing a combination of diverse concepts to be matched for a design need.

Each member of the PACA Conference has a reason that they attend these conferences. Geoff, a PACA Board member, says, “Face to face is still powerful. It’s always good for us to be in personal touch with partners. It’s important to network and to share ideas of both the challenges and the opportunities facing our industry.”

**Associated Press (ap.org and apimages.com)** is the new guy on the block. Jonathan Mars is the Partner Development Manager for AP Images. AP is changing with the industry by making a push into stock photos. Jonathan says, “People think of AP for news, politics, entertainment and sports. We are very good at covering those topics, especially breaking news.” Now they hope to offer clients more value when they come to the site. Since they have done deals with the National Football League and the NCAA, they have a new type of client coming to the site.

AP now works with such collections at Image Source, Blend Images, PhotoAlto, Ojo, Glow Images, and some rights managed collections. They have made a lot of upgrades to the site to improve search criteria and to more easily find content. For decades, AP used to think of itself

as a member-owned newsgathering cooperative serving the member needs only – its core mission. Now, with a great marketing team in place for the commercial photo division, they are a full service agency. Their market is global, and they have access in a lot of countries that others don't.

As for the future, Jonathan says, “We have certain core values that we adhere to. We will keep those values as we branch out. We are an editorial company doing some different things. When big events happen around the world, AP is always the first one there. The price of doing that causes us to expand into other business models.” He further adds that AP prides itself on its reach. They cover every game in sports, and have unprecedented access all over the world because of the network of stringers. They are up to date on what is happening second to second.

**Alamy (alamy.com)** is another company that seems nimble enough to keep changing with the times. James Allsworth, Video Content Executive, explains that Alamy is the world's largest online searchable collection of images. They have 26 million images, 28 thousand photographers, and 590 agencies that contribute images, adding about 15 thousand images a day.

James says that their main ethos has not changed. They are very photographer friendly, and they give fair deals to all contributors. They also focus on making the customer experience easy and very fast. Their vast collection includes content from emerging photographers, seasoned professionals and world renowned picture agencies.

Their editing process has remained the same – they do not edit from a content point of view, but only from a technical point of view. According to James, “Who are we to decide what will sell and what will not sell?”

‘Expanding’ is how Alamy is meeting the challenges of today. Their New York office started recently with five people and now it's up to fifteen. They launched in Germany in May 2011 with their first German language version of their site and a German speaking customer service and sales team. They are also expanding their direct sales operations further afield and have recently recruited senior business development and sales staff in Australia and the Middle East. They just launched a live news service and have a news team that sends images to the news desks. This is already proving to be very successful. Alamy is also expanding in video footage. This service will launch in 2012 with all types of subjects covered. They are launching with a simplified licensing model, as customers are looking for more flexibility in the rights they are granted when acquiring the content they need.

Also, Alamy is very unique in that 89% of its profits go to charity, and it supports a medical research lab right in its own offices.

James feels that attending the PACA Conference adds huge value in just putting faces to names. Business is going very well, and connecting with partners is always an asset.

**Avenue Images (avenue-images.com)**, of Germany, is the “one stop shop for royalty free images. Joachim Koutzky, the founder, says they offer all the major collections of RF imagery, along with some specialty collections. They distribute mainly to German, Austrian and Swiss clients. His pricing reflects the current range of offering in RF globally, starting with 20 Euros for easyFotostock and going up to the main brands priced between 80 and 600 Euros. Joachim is branching out into some edited and specialized brands of rights managed to try new markets.

They have been able to resist the microstock market and still grow, as they give personal and quick service with a focus on one stop shopping. Joachim says, “We have account executives that will spend as much time with the customer as he/she needs.” Time is an important element in serving the customers.

Ninety percent of their customers are agencies. They don’t get involved in the editorial side of the business. Therefore, they are not affected by any decrease in price for the news and editorial market. Also they are adding 50 thousand video clips, which, he says, is very new to the German market.

The wisdom of Avenue Images is that good imagery needs to be offered at a fair price, and needs a good distributor to promote it. Joachim feels that changing with the speed of the market is important. He travels four or five times a year throughout Germany to visit customers and discover their needs first hand.

As for the PACA Conference, Joachim says he has been in this business for twenty years, and the need to say hello to friends continues to be important. Networking and face to face visits give you more information than you can get any other way.

**ageFotostock (agefotostock.com)** is a frequent participant in PACA events. Alfonso Gutierrez has been the CEO for 38 years, and they have offices in Barcelona, Madrid, New York and Paris. Alfonso started as a photographer, with publishers asking him to find them images in the UK market. He says that’s how AGE got started, as he had to shoot and research for clients. That endeavor grew into a full agency. He started in the early ‘70s, and branched out late in that decade with an alliance with FPG. By 1992, the AGE hosting platform (The THP) started digitizing images by testing the Photo CD developed by Eastman Kodak. By 1996 he developed their first website. Previous to the year 2000, they processed 1.5 miles of duping film per day. In 2000 they closed that system and started scanning every transparency. AGE reads like a history lesson in the stock industry.

Also in 2000, they started a full e-commerce system and opened their office in New York City. Needless to say, 2001 slowed down some progress, with their building in New York having to close for a while with the 9/11 event. Alfonso describes, “I have an image in my mind of Broadway with no traffic, silent except for the noise of people walking.” Temporarily, communication with Spain disappeared.

After that, they uploaded everything to their hosting platform and started to invite small image suppliers to host their high resolution imagery on this system in order to work with clients, and to save them the overhead of the new technology downloads.

AGE represents all forms of still imagery, and is building their footage inventory this year. Alfonso says that popular footage subject matter is everything ‘Green.’ Green technology of all kinds – conservation, protection and new energy production are popular subjects. Also requested are clips of anything that represents business – meetings, handshakes and business people talking.

PACA is important to AGE because they have the New York office. Providers want to talk to them, and Alfonso is always a great panelist in some of the excellent PACA seminars. Alfonso’s most important comment of the day, “I think that a tragedy of our industry is not incorporating

photographers in a very active manner. We have to create a triangle to include the photographers.” Microstock does a better job of this, and AGE is striving to achieve that goal of good contributor stats and instant available information.

**Picture Alliance GmbH (picture-alliance.com)** was represented by Edith Stier-Thompson, Managing Director, and Peter Stroh. Edith says they are the number one in Germany for picture sales. They have 18 million images, as well as video clips, infographics, and illustrations. Their inventory covers creative, editorial and historical images. Their market is global but their core focus is Germany, Austria and Switzerland. They do not offer microstock.

Picture Alliance maintains their pricing by offering quality work and more exclusivity with their partners. They are also growing their historical content, which is very valuable to the publishing market. They have a growing request for footage and now offer twenty thousand clips on such material as creative, food, historical, entertainment, and aerials.

Assignment photography is a growing field for them. They can manage the quality and design resources on all levels, offering a deeper connection to their clients. Also, partnering with German sports associations gives them the opportunity to work with the sponsors when they need photography.

They come to the PACA conference to forge relationships that build over time. They feel that one of its values over CEPIC, the European equivalent, is that it is smaller, so individual meeting opportunities are enhanced. According to Peter, “We have a huge archive, a good spirit and a great team.”

**Corbis Images (corbisimages.com)** is the master at keeping up with the times. Jason Brown, Director of Media Partners, says Corbis licenses media across the board, from motion to still images covering news, sports, entertainment, editorial, historical and commercial product. They have offices in New York, London, Paris, Germany, Italy, China and Australia.

This year Corbis is transforming the media part of the organization, which includes news, sports, and entertainment. Next year they will focus on the commercial side of the business. The transformation of Veer, to focus on the price conscious volume customer, has been very successful. According to Jason, “The intent of the transformation was to give more people the tools to create. It is about inspiring the Creative in everyone and offering the tools do great work regardless of budget.”

Corbis is represented at PACA because of the networking opportunities with both the North American and the European partners. But, according to Jason, “The educational conferences at PACA are the best in the industry. If you miss the sessions, they are now available online.” Corbis also works closely with PACA on the legal side. They are very active in chasing infringements of their contributor content.

Realizing that it is a transformative time for the industry, Corbis feels that the customer is of prime importance. “A product needs to be built around the needs of the customer. Identify those needs and fill them.”

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