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TAKE STOCK

DON'T START FROM SCRATCH—MAKE STOCK MEDIA SEEM CUSTOM-MADE

A DESIGNER UNDER DEADLINE, A SALES REP PUTTING TOGETHER a last-minute presentation, a filmmaker looking for additional footage, and a teacher building a class Web site—what do they all have in common? They could save time and money by tapping into the vast array of digital media available instantly online.

Affordable stock media—ready-made artwork you can purchase for use in a project—used to be limited to photography and clip art. Today the options also include film and video footage, Macromedia Flash animation, 3-D animation, Web-design elements, music, illustration, fine art, and more. In fact, there are so many suppliers of stock art that it no longer has the uniform look it was once known for.

Better still, more and more stock media come in mutable forms—photos with clipping paths, scalable clip art, music separated into multiple tracks, digital-video-effects files with matching mattes, and editable Web-design elements. With a little effort and the handy tips included here, you can open up boundless opportunities for taking stock media and making them your own.

Finding Stock Media

When you're looking for just the right photo or Flash animation, the first step is to go online. If you consider the stock-media world

unknown territory, start by browsing the vast Corbis and Getty Images Web sites. Corbis deals primarily in stock photography, although it recently began offering stock digital video as well. Getty Images offers clip art, fonts, music, and Flash animation in addition to photographs and digital video.

If you want to travel off the beaten path, try one of the stock-media boutique agencies, such as Veer or Bigshot Media. In the absence of quantity, they offer a unique style or a specialized type of stock media. (For choice selections from all of the above, see "Stock Options.")

Window-Shopping Web collections offer many conveniences over standard printed catalogs: you can search vast databases, browse thumbnails, listen to sound samples, and watch movie and animation clips. Online stock-media databases let you search using keywords, which can range from specifics such as *birthday cake* to abstract concepts such as *strength*.

If you like what you find, you can register with the Web site and save your selections in a folder, portfolio, or *lightbox*. Most online still-photo and clip-art libraries will let you download free, low-resolution *comps* so that you can try before you buy. These aren't high-enough quality to print, but they'll give you a good

