

Public Domain Profits

By Stephen Bucaro

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Copyright law goes back to the founding fathers who, in order "to promote the progress of science and useful arts" in Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution, secured for authors, artists and inventors the exclusive right to their work for 28 years. In 1909, the Copyright Act allowed that after 28 years, protection could be renewed for another 28 years. In 1978, the law was revised to provide protection until 50 years after the creator's death. The 1978 law also extended previous unexpired copyrights for another 47 years.

To put it in simple terms, anything created before 1923 is now in the public domain. Anything created between 1924 and 1963 is in the public domain unless the copyright was renewed. Most of the time these copyrights were not renewed because either the owners weren't making any money off the work, or they just forgot the deadline.

Have you noticed a lot of TV commercials using rock music written in the early 60's. Why be creative when you can steal somebody else's work who didn't renew the copyright?

Another question - can we profit from material in the public domain? Yes, but you may need to be a little creative to do so. And guess what? Once you modify something in the public domain, you automatically have a

copyright on the modified version - until 50 years after your death! Unless you're a corporation, then it's 100 years!

And some of that public domain material is high quality - from authors like Shakespeare, Poe, Dante, as well as well-loved favorites like the Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the Tarzan and Mars books of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Alice's adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll, and thousands of others.

Add to this the fact that you can use anything created by the Federal Government or its employees in the course of their duties. You paid for it with your taxes. This gives you access to millions of great photographs, including those taken by NASA.

You can get these public domain materials **TOTALLY FREE** and keep all the money when you sell them. Let me give you a few profit ideas to get your creativity started.

1. Update an old classic story with new artwork.
2. Take an old classic story and write a variation.
3. Make an old classic into a simulated antique book.
4. Turn an old classic into something else, like a game.
5. Make an old classic or government photo based theme product, for example, a time management notebook.
6. Make an electronic or audio version of an old classic.
7. Turn an old classic into an educational item.
8. Make public domain photographs into a calendar, poster, or screen saver.
9. Gather a library or collection of public domain materials to sell to publishers.

I'm sure you can think of many other creative ideas. Any one of these ideas can be the basis for a Web business.

Where can you find public domain material? You can go to a good search engine and search with the terms "public domain" or "government". Let me give you a few excellent sources of public domain materials to get you started.

- The Gutenberg Project (www.gutenberg.org) is an archive of over 3000 public domain books in plain text format available for free download.

- NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory (www.jpl.nasa.gov)

- US Army Corps of Engineers (www.usace.army.mil) Over 5,900 images cleared available for public release and are free for use. 700 under keyword "scenic".

- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

(www.noaa.org)

- NASA (<http://visibleearth.nasa.gov>)

- Library of Congress - Prints & Photographs Online catalog (www.loc.gov) Not all loc images are in the public domain. If the image is not in the public domain, only a thumbnail image is displayed.

- Images in the Public Domain (www.sru.edu/depts/cisba/compsci/dailey/public/public_domain.htm)

- A directory of Public Domain sites (<http://homepage.mac.com/krohrer/iad/links/clipart.html>)

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