



CURATIONSOFT BUILD GUIDE

Build an Image Exchange

FREE EXTRACT

A Two-Sided Photography Marketplace
From Idea to First Transaction

Step by Step · Decision by Decision · AI-Assisted Throughout

CurationSoft.ai · Enabling Your AI-Powered Transformation

How to Use This Guide

This is a Build Guide — not a theory course. Everything in this document is designed to move you from reading to building as fast as possible. By the time you reach the end, you will have a functioning two-sided image exchange marketplace either live or ready to launch.

What You Are Building

A local business photography exchange: a marketplace where photographers upload and license their work, and businesses or content creators browse, license, and download images for commercial use. The niche is local business photography — an underserved market where Shutterstock and Getty are overkill and stock photos look generic.

The Format of This Guide

Every major decision made during this build is recorded in a Decision Log box. The decision made in this guide is shown, with the reasoning behind it. Space is provided for you to record your own choice — because your business may differ from the example built here.

Every place where a screenshot belongs is marked with a clearly labelled placeholder box. When you do the build yourself, take a screenshot at that exact moment and drop it into the corresponding position.

AI prompts are embedded throughout — not collected at the end. Each prompt is specific to the step where it is most useful.

Tools Required

Tool	Details / Cost
Sharetribe	Free 30-day trial · sharetribe.com · \$99/month after
Stripe	Free to create · stripe.com · 2.9% + \$0.30 per transaction
Canva	Free plan sufficient · canva.com · for logo and brand assets
Claude or ChatGPT	For all AI-assisted copy in this guide
Google Workspace or Zoho Mail	For your business email address

Namecheap or GoDaddy

For your marketplace domain name

KEY POINT

You can complete the full build in this guide during your Sharetribe free trial. You do not need to pay anything to follow along – only to launch publicly.

CHAPTER 1

The Business Model

Understanding the two-sided marketplace and how the money flows

What Is a Two-Sided Marketplace?

A two-sided marketplace connects two distinct groups who each need something the other has. Your image exchange connects photographers (who have photos and want income) with businesses and content creators (who need professional photos and want to avoid overpriced stock libraries). You are not selling photos — you are facilitating the exchange between people who have them and people who need them.

The business model is built on three relationships:

- Photographers → you: they list their work on your platform in exchange for a distribution channel and income
- Buyers → you: they pay for access to photos they need
- You → both: you provide the infrastructure, trust, and marketplace in exchange for a commission on every transaction

The Chicken-and-Egg Problem — and How to Solve It

Every two-sided marketplace faces the same launch challenge: photographers won't join if there are no buyers, and buyers won't come if there are no photos. This is the chicken-and-egg problem. The solution is always the same: seed one side first.

Always think of Uber or Airbnb. Uber first had to get a small set of drivers in first (supply side) — only then, they could after riders. Airbnb had to get a small set of rooms first (supply side) — on then, they went after guests.

In this build, we seed the supply side first — photographers. We do this through personal outreach before we market to buyers. The goal is to have at least 50 quality listings live on the platform before you send a single buyer to it. A marketplace with 50 photos gives a buyer a real experience. A marketplace with 5 photos sends them away immediately.

DECISION LOG — Which side to seed first

Decision made in this guide:

Always supply side — photographers — first.

Why: Buyers experience the marketplace based on the quality and volume of what is already there. A single buyer arriving to an empty marketplace is a wasted opportunity. Photographers need almost no convincing to list — there is no cost to them and they have nothing to lose.

Your choice: _____

Your rationale: _____

Revenue Model Options

Before building anything, decide how you will make money. There are three primary options for a marketplace like this:

Model	How It Works
Commission (transaction fee)	You take a percentage of every sale — typically 15–20%. Simple to set up. Revenue only when transactions happen. The model chosen for this build.
Subscription (listing fee)	Photographers pay a monthly fee to list their work. Predictable income but harder to sell to photographers who are not yet sure of the platform's value.
Freemium (tiered access)	Basic listings are free. Featured placement, analytics access, or exclusive licensing are paid upgrades. More complex to configure at launch.

DECISION LOG — Revenue model

Decision made in this guide:

Commission at 18% per transaction.

Why: Commission aligns your incentives with photographers — you only earn when they earn. It is the easiest model to explain to both sides and the easiest to configure in Sharetribe. 18% sits between the standard 15–20% range and leaves photographers with an 82% take-home on each sale.

Your choice: _____

Your rationale: _____

Choosing Your Photography Niche

This guide builds a local business photography exchange — photos for restaurants, retail shops, professional services, and event spaces in a specific city or region. This niche is chosen because:

- It is genuinely underserved — Shutterstock and Getty do not provide local, authentic business photography
- The buyer pain is real and expensive — hiring a photographer for each use case costs \$300–\$1,500
- The supply is accessible — there are professional and semi-professional photographers in every city
- It is specific enough to own — you become the go-to platform for this exact type of content

⚡ AI PROMPT — Niche Identification

Copy · Paste · Customize in ChatGPT or Claude

I am building a two-sided image exchange marketplace. I want to specialize in a specific photography niche rather than competing with Shutterstock and Getty on volume. My target region is [city/country]. Generate 10 underserved photography niches where a local exchange would have a genuine advantage over large stock libraries. For each niche: describe the buyer (who needs these photos), the supplier (who takes these photos), the pain point that makes stock libraries a poor substitute, and the realistic price per image a buyer would pay.

Expanding to Video — the Phase 2 Plan

The same infrastructure that powers a photo exchange can handle video with minimal additional configuration. Video is not in scope for the initial build — the launch focus is photos — but the architecture of this build is designed with video expansion in mind. Chapter 7 covers the specific steps to add video listings once the photo marketplace is validated.

The remaining eight decision logs, six chapters, the 30-day launch checklist, and all eight AI prompts are included in the full Build Guide — available inside the CurationSoft AI Business System.