

ZUMA Press: fast-growing editorial assignment/stock agency rises in the west

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former agency photographers, was created to meet the needs of both photographers and demanding editors.

When the Picture Group Photo Agency in Providence, RI began to go under in November of 1993, dozens of photographers who had stuck with the troubled agency suddenly realized that they were in danger not only of not getting paid, but of losing their entire file of work.

While the defunct agency wallowed in bankruptcy, one photographer was determined to save his work as well as many of his colleagues' slides.

Just steps ahead of the bank's marshals, Scott McKiernan, with the help of a small army of photo researchers, was able to retrieve dozens of photographers' files and load them into a U-Haul truck bound for California.

"It wasn't a choice...we just wanted to have our stuff well represented," McKiernan said. "We knew the photography business, but none of us had ever worked at an agency or knew how to run one. We learned quick."

With the encouragement of potential German investors, McKiernan decided that a small editorial agency based on the West Coast might finally treat photographers and clients the way he always believed agencies should.

Having been an active shooter himself, and working as a photo editor for several years, McKiernan relied on his experiences on both sides of the light table to form an agency especially attuned to the needs of the buyer while understanding the concerns of the photographer.

"We're brokering things we truly care about," he said, "and we truly care about telling a story. That's what drives us."

In December of 1993, starting with the small base of photographers whose work McKiernan

saved, the new agency began to join the competitive field of editorial photography just as the market was beginning to shrink.

When the German investors backed out after a year, the agency, now named ZUMA Press, was still in its toddler stage, but McKiernan was determined that with the help of a now loyal base of photographers he would make the agency a major player.

After four years, any casual reader of magazines will see the name ZUMA Press after numerous photographers' credits.

ZUMA Press is now the largest full service editorial and personality photo agency west of the Hudson River in New York.

Of course, ZUMA Press did not become successful by sitting around waiting for photos to come to them.

Frequently, several stories from around the world are being coordinated simultaneously, a juggling act made a little easier with the dedicated staff of 10.

"When things go crazy, we burn the midnight oil," McKiernan said. "I think being newer and younger than other agencies we put in the longer hours."

Many editors are surprised to hear that this agency is located in a small artist's beach community 50 miles from Los Angeles but McKiernan explains that with modern electronic communications, his geographical location is irrelevant.

"Technology like quick communication abilities around the globe, a great staff and sophisticated photographers who really know how to contribute" make the agency successful, McKiernan said. "We have an advantage over our competitors in that we're still open a few hours after the New York offices close."

McKiernan said sometimes the going gets rough, as in the case of

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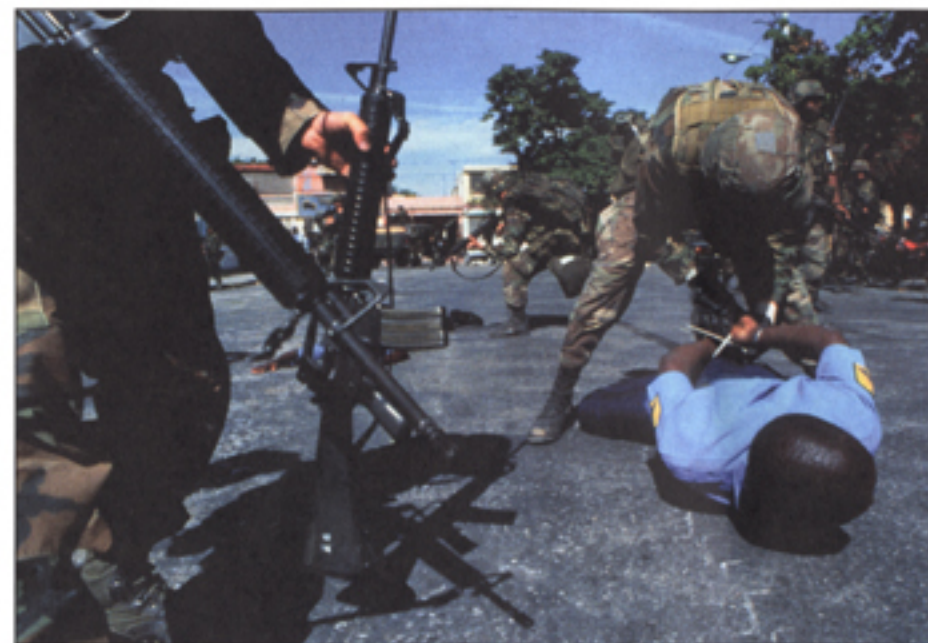
© Chris Kleon/ZUMA PRESS

ABOVE: The *Time* cover is representative of the kinds of photos ZUMA Press ends up selling. ZUMA Press had the photo of Greenspan in stock at the time it was requested by editors.



© Mark Fix/ZUMA PRESS

RIGHT: The tragic murder of six-year-old JonBenét Ramsey was a story ZUMA photographers covered extensively. Shooter Mark Fix was not a ZUMA photographer at the time of the killing—he had shot numerous pageants in Colorado and had this photo of JonBenét. ZUMA Press ended up representing Fix.



© Leif Skoogfors/ZUMA PRESS

Shooter Leif Skoogfors saw this photo, of the United States Army arresting one of the Haitian private policemen in October 1994, appear in an issue of *Newsweek* magazine.



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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Actor Glenn Close ("Dangerous Liaisons") watches grey whales off Baja, California in February 1997.

Gillian Anderson, co-star of television's "The X-Files," hams it up at the 1997 Emmy Awards.

Actor Johnny Depp ("Donnie Brasco") at Hunter S. Thompson's new book celebration (June 1997).

Actor Pierce Brosnan ("Goldeneye") also in Baja whale-watching.

Shock-rocker Marilyn Manson at an early 1997 concert.



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