Protecting your Online Photo Security

Following conversation in our club Facebook group, this short and (hopefully) easy guide will help club members to understand online security issues for photographers. It covers several areas:

- Club policy on image sharing
- Protecting your Copyright
- Protecting your data privacy
- Preventing Image Theft

Club Policy on Image Sharing

In the Club's *Web and Social Media Policy* we stress that any images you post to social media, whether under the club banner or not, are solely your own responsibility. That includes posts you make to our private Facebook "**Members' Lounge**" group, which only members can see, and to Flickr.

Our Steyning Camera Club **Facebook page** is public-facing and different to the group in that members cannot post to it directly. Occasionally we might wish to share an image in the space, but we will only do so with your permission.

We do report regularly on competition results. When we do this, it will be on our **main website** only. A link to that Post may be shared to Facebook but not the images themselves. When sharing competition images to the Club website we will include on that copy only a generic watermark to illustrate your copyright.

Protecting your Copyright

Copyright is your assertion of ownership as the creator of your image or writing. You own copyright automatically but it is always recommended to assert your right visibly to deter image theft, especially when you publish images anywhere online. You can do this in two ways

a) by making a visible image watermark and
b) by placing a copyright statement in your metadata.

If you do not do this, then your work might be considered an "Orphan Work", where the copyright owner cannot be traced and another may apply to license the work
https://www.copyrightuser.org/understand/orphan-works/

a) Visible Image Watermark

A watermark is a semi-transparent notice that is overlaid discreetly onto an image to indicate its ownership e.g. my own is *©Touching the Light 2024*. The easiest way to do this is to create an image of your text statement to overlay on to the web-sized image that you will upload, not to your original.

Some creators make a branded logo for this purposes; others simply use standard text. The image will probably be on a blank, transparent background with white text, saved as a PNG file to preserve the transparency.

Mine is 340x115px and uses a 36pt font size.

When preparing a web-sized image for online publication (for me usually 1620x1080 at 72ppi):

i. Copy and paste the PNG as a new layer
ii. Move the text image to a suitable place in the image where a) it will be discreet – i.e. be visible but not be a distraction – and b) will be hard to clone out
iii. Adjust the layer transparency to a suitable value, usually between 10 and 25% depending on the background and the typeface you've chosen.
iv. Save or export as a flattened JPG

It is also possible to imprint a watermark digitally i.e. to encode the copyright information invisibly in the image code – information here https://www.digitalguardian.com/blog/digital-watermarking

You should not include a visible watermark on images you supply for entry into club competitions.

b) Copyright in Metadata

Metadata is the information about the image stored either in or with the image. It includes various standard data, some produced by the camera (EXIF) and some created yourself (usually IPTC and XMP).

This cannot be a guide to metadata, which is a hugely complex subject area. Much of the data is used for advanced cataloguing and Press identification, such as Location and subject information as well as keywords / tags.

As a minimum, if you publish an image online, always include the following in your metadata:

> Title | Author | Credit | Description | (Copyright) Marked = Y | Copyright e.g. ©Touching the Light / Ken Scott Photography 2024 | Copyright URL – if you have a website, the address of the page where you publish your copyright statement in full

If you publish to Flickr or to the club website, for example, this metadata is picked up automatically for inclusion in your image title and caption.

You can edit metadata in your chosen editor or in a cataloguing program such as IMatch or Adobe Lightroom or Bridge. Standard fields, such as your Name and the Copyright statement can be added by a standard action.

Protecting Privacy

A couple of Notes:

- For protection of your privacy, do not include personal data in metadata for competitions unless required by a competition organiser and only on condition that the image is not published in that format.
- Always read the competition rules for titling and metadata inclusion

By the same token, when publishing online

- You may wish to include one piece of contact data e.g. an email address to allow your copyright ownership to be traced.
- Take care when publishing images of identifiable people, especially children, and places – subject for another paper.

Preventing Image Theft

Most websites, including our own, have tools available to deter the direct download of images, including disabling of the 'right click' options using a transparent overlay.

You can expressly set some protections in your Flickr settings e.g. to prevent downloading, sharing and listing by third-party indexes.

However, these are only a deterrent and anyone who wants to can copy your image, by screenshot or by accessing the browser cache. Basically if someone can see it on their browser, they have already downloaded it.

Therefore it is always your choice alone as to how your publish your images and where. A few things to ponder:

- Don't upload at a size larger than you want people to view e.g. club projection size. Flickr allows unlimited storage for pro-members, so you can upload your originals, but then make sure to restrict the max viewing size in your settings.
- Choose your privacy settings wisely. Since the likes of Facebook and Instagram permit onward sharing, you might choose to restrict who can view.
- Some social media platforms use to strip out key metadata in the versions they resized. I am not aware if this is still the practice, but it is another reason to cautious.

If you have a lot of images online, you might choose to subscribe to a service such as Pixsy – https://www.pixsy.com/ which provides a alerts when images are used on other sites, allows check and authorisation, and will recover fees in unauthorised cases.

To use Pixsy successfully you must have your metadata and watermarks in order and, if you have your own website, a comprehensive copyright statement and terms of use.

Summary

1. When you Publish anywhere online:
    - Include a visible image watermark
    - Publish a copy at a restricted size
    - Always include your metadata to include Copyright but NOT personal data
2. When you enter a competition in the Club
    - Do NOT include a watermark
    - Resize according to competition requirements
    - Include required metadata in the Title and Description fields in that version of the image
3. When the Club republishes an image, we will
    - Do so with your permission
    - Include a generic watermark, unless you can supply a specific copy for the purpose

Finally, if members need any help with any aspect of this, please do ask.

… Ken Scott
Webmaster
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