

What is the best way to protect yourself and your images from theft.

What is the best way to protect yourself and your images from theft when you put them on a website for prospective customers to view?

The short answer is that your images are not going to be (based on what is available today) fully protected while still providing an excellent user experience. So, my recommendation is to accept that having your images on the web is a far greater advantage for you from a business perspective (in terms of the revenue you're going to generate as a result) than the potential cost to you (lost revenue) from stolen images.

Having said that, I do recommend that you keep images posted to the web as small as is reasonable to minimize what anyone who steals an image is able to do. That doesn't mean keeping them so small that they are virtually useless (remember, user experience is important here), but just to keep them as small as is reasonable. For example, images sized to about 800 pixels on the long side are generally a good size for normal viewing on a monitor for just about any

resolution, and they can only be printed to about a 5"x7" with great quality. Certainly bigger prints are possible, but there's going to be diminishing quality as the output size goes up (the more it is enlarged, the lesser the quality will be).

Naturally, this still leaves open the possibility of theft. In particular, any image appearing on your website can be put on any other website at the same size at exactly the same quality. So there will always be a risk. My feeling is you just have to accept this risk with the understanding that the benefits outweigh those risks.

If this still makes you uncomfortable, the next step is a visible watermark on the images. This can be a company logo or text placed over the image, with the opacity of that text layer reduced to a very low value so it is just barely visible. This minimizes the impact on the website visitor, while still defacing the image enough that it isn't useful to anyone who would steal your images. Done properly this can be effective while minimizing the negative effect on your images, but I still recommend avoiding this if at all possible, as it does create a negative experience (in my opinion at least) for the end user.

So, I recommend that you consider simply leaving the images unprotected (realizing this may sound crazy) and simply keep image sizes relatively small to minimize the risk of theft, and if that isn't enough for you, place a subtle watermark on the images to further reduce the potential value from anyone who would steal your images.

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