Watermarks: What, Why, Where, How?

1. Introduction

If you are a creator of digital artwork, you may have spent several years and many thousands of dollars pursuing your craft. Your specialty may be photography, graphic arts, or illustrations. Digital artwork is not just printed and hung on the wall. Your work could be used in projects ranging from books and advertising to TV news programs. I purchase photographs from stock image sites quite often to use in my book projects. So, even with the advent of smart phones, interesting and beautiful digital artwork does still have value!

If you hope to sell your work, you need to protect it from being stolen and freely downloaded.

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Displaying only low-resolution images is one approach, but that approach does not present your work in a very flattering manner. Placing watermarks on the preview examples is a way to display the quality of your work and still prevent theft.

2. What Are Watermarks?

Watermarks consist of some text or a graphic that doesn't really belong there. No one would frame a photo or use it in a project if it has a watermark on it. So watermarking is a way of discouraging people from using your photo without your permission.

3. The Value of Watermarks

Watermarks serve many different functions. Of course, they help to protect your work from theft, but there are other important reasons for using them.

3.1 Marketing and Building Your Brand

If your watermark includes your website address you are pointing potential customers to your website with every image. It doesn't have to be a hyperlink. If your web address is simple enough, it is easy for customers to find you. The more people see your watermark, the more recognizable you become.

3.2 Your Professional Identity

Having watermarks on your photographs represents you as a professional artist. Only professional photographers place watermarks on their photos.

4. Watermark Size and Placement

There are no hard and fast rules for watermark placement, but think about it, common sense and visual appeal should be the rule. You want to make your watermark obvious without destroying the appeal of the image. After all, you want the customer to be pleased with what he sees even though it has a watermark on it!

4.1 Don't Destroy the Image

You want the watermark to be obvious, but you don't want it to be so prominent that it destroys the appeal of the photograph. That would be a big turn off for potential customers. It can be large, but place it out of the way with some transparency. You want the customer to be pleased with the image and want him to purchase it. Compare the following two images. Which one do you prefer?

The first watermark is smaller, has some transparency and is placed out of the way. The second one is obvious, but destroys the aesthetic appeal of the photo. The first watermark can't really be cropped out because you would loose the horizon.

5. How Can You Add a Watermark to an Image?

There are many software packages for producing watermarks, both free and paid. A quick search will reveal several. I like a drawing program called "paint.net." It is a free image-editing package with lots of support.

Here's the simple procedure that I use:

1. Open paint.net and bring up the photo you want to watermark.
2. Save it as a jpeg image with a different name. I usually just add "wm" to the existing name.
3. Add a layer and type your watermark in the place and with the size and color you think is appropriate.
4. Add some transparency to that layer. Depending on the background, I usually like 150 for transparency.
5. Flatten and save.

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