



I have a business colleague who designs her own line of scrapbooking embellishments. If you do a web search for her business name, you won't find a website, for she has none. Her reasoning? She says she does not want overseas competitors to copy her. If you know this person the way I know her, you would wonder if her wariness about sharing product images is *actually* because she herself has copied her overseas competitors, and she doesn't want them to find out. (You may smile, here.)

But perhaps that is beside the point. What I really want to say is that our world is so much smaller because of the internet. Researching design and materials has become infinitely easier. Not long ago, if you wanted to know more about machine embroidery, you could take a class, buy a magazine or book, or attend an exhibition and *maybe* find a club or group specializing in the topic. Now you don't have to leave your home. You merely open your internet browser, plug "machine embroidery" into a search box on your browser toolbar, and you have access to thousands of websites and millions of pictures.

If you are a student of machine embroidery it is fantastic. If you are a professional artist employing the technique of machine embroidery, it increases your risk of being copied without recompense. Your digital images can be copied and shared and they are no longer tied to you or your name. Your designs are up for grabs.

It is easy to be cynical, even paranoid. And many artists choose not to promote their artwork online because they can't bear the thought of someone stealing their ideas.

Ideas can't be copyrighted, unfortunately. And if you choose to be an artist with an online presence, you must accept the fact that others may be inspired enough by your work to want to create something similar or even identical. It is flattering, yes, and it is annoying if that wasn't the reason you put your artwork on show.

To anyone who is hesitating to put their work into cyber space I say, have your little whine about the possibility of being copied, then get over yourself. Resolve to put your art images on the web. If your aim is to sell your work, attract students, or write a book, a web presence can be your most valuable promotional tool.

Here are some suggestions for protecting your digital images and design ideas online. None of them is foolproof. The aim here is to make it more difficult to copy your art, or at least make people think twice before they do.

- Put a statement on your website asking visitors to respect your copyright. Here's an example: *All material on this website, including photographs of artwork, is subject to copyright and moral rights. Please do not copy the digital images or the artworks themselves. Thank you.*
- If your website is a blog, put the statement in the sidebar near the top, so it is visible when people first enter your site.
- Think carefully about the names and tags you give each digital image. If you name an image *nunofelt1.jpg*, then people doing an image search online for *nunofelt* are more likely to find it. Likewise, if you create an "alt" tag for the image, so a little box pops up when you place your mouse over it and the box reads *nunofelt*, it is going to be easier to find that image in a search. Who searches for images of *nunofelt*? Someone looking to buy a handmade *nunofelt* scarf? Well, maybe. But it is more likely that feltmakers are searching for *nunofelt* images. They'll be seeking inspiration for their own work, true? They probably already know at least something about the technique if they know what it is called. And felt teachers: if someone was looking for a place to do classes in *nunofelt*, they probably won't be using Google Images to conduct their web search.
- I have started putting my own name and a number of abbreviated codes into image names, rather than a description of the picture. Example: *staceyapeitos09nfl.jpg*. If people choose to copy the image, they will possibly rename it, but at least I have tried to remind them who made the piece.
- If you just want to give people a taste of your image without showing all the details, keep your web images small. Keep your resolution to 72 dpi. This is adequate for viewing on a computer monitor, but not great for printing. And keep your pixel dimensions small too. A *thumbnail image* is around 100 or 150 pixels wide. Images I post on my blogs are rarely more than 500 pixels at their longest dimension – width or height.
- You can add a watermark to your image if it is larger than a thumbnail size. This places a faded logo or line of text across the

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