The state of copyright infringement

(A brief report July 2015 from Uri Lavi of Picscout)

Surprisingly, the prevalence of unlawful use of images on the web has not changed that drastically since the day PicScout was first established.

Over the last 13 years since our foundation, many great new developments and devices have emerged. From consumer devices such as smart phones, tablets and wearable devices to social media and "mobile" apps.

Media consumption has also become more personalized, targeting our unique tastes and predicting our preferences and consumption patterns. Yet despite these advances, the ground truth remains the same: A picture is worth a thousand words. We consume our media first and foremost by grasping it visually, and only subsequently by delving into the stories or news.

While pictures remain the most powerful human language present in our lives, they also continue to be extremely overlooked, unaccredited and unappreciated in terms of honoring or remunerating their creators' efforts and creativity.

Analyzing PicScout's data gathered from crawling the most (technologically) advanced territories such as the US, UK and other EU countries, reveals a gloomy reality as far as unauthorized use is concerned:

- There are around 150 **million commercial** sites
- The majority (70%) of the **commercial sites** use images as their primary means for communicating ideas and services, and each such site uses more than **130 images** on average
- a **fifth (1/5) of the commercial sites** tend to refresh their images **every year, by refreshing at least 39 of their images**
- **Total:** Approximately **14.5 Billion images appear on commercial websites.**
- Let's assume that the commercial sites only use a fraction of stock images. For the sake of an argument, I will use here 30% (it's much higher in reality)
- **An average** of **78%** of commercial sites that are found by PicScout and reported back to our customers, are **identified as unauthorized uses (or unlawful use).**
- If we extrapolate this unauthorized use tendency, the potential number of unlawfully used images is **3.39 Billion**
- To emphasize the overwhelming impact of the above number, let's assume a price of $5 per image (which is **FAR** from the reality of most RF, RM images). This results in estimated potential revenue of **approximately 16.9 Billion USD!**

Needless to say, this startling figure represents a staggering loss of revenue for creative professionals. More importantly, we need to keep in mind that this number represents **only commercial websites in developed countries**. We realize that the scale of the problem is greater still when we take into account **all countries** as well as of **non-commercial images use**.

There are many factors that can explain why, despite the passage of time, the state of imagery infringement has not changed a lot. It starts from search engines that provide access to billions of 3rd party images, without any efforts to point out the legitimate source or owner of the images. It continues with the aggregators and social media that aggregate, consume and thrive on the content, which contain many unaccredited and unauthorized creations. All in all, there is a lack of education, as crediting and remunerating the content owners isn't the main focus of the above platforms.

Having said that, the one positive side that has emerged over the last few years is the development of a reliable technological solution that utilizes robust and scalable visual recognition techniques to identify and facilitate remuneration of the owners.

The PicScout Platform is fast approaching an impressive **300M wholly owned, copyrighted and owner-identified images**. The PicScout Platform enables visual identification of images (even when manipulated) through a simple REST API, and also returns extended metadata which is not only beneficial to identify the owners and license the content, but can also be used to enrich the experience of everybody who uses the images, from a consumer to a platform.