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Copyrights and wrongs >

Executive Summary:
Be careful what you "steal" from the Web for your own use. You could be violating copyright.

By Janeson Keeley

Have you ever seen an image, article, or site design on the Web and thought, "That is really cool. I could use that on my Web site!"? If so, you're not alone. With the advent of the Web, its vast array of resources, and the ease of downloading images, page copy, and designs, the temptation to "borrow" from other Web sites can be very strong. It is, however, a temptation that you should be very wary of, because doing so may constitute copyright infringement, which can result in legal action against you.

Dave Cohan, attorney with Gentry Locke Rakes & Moore (also cited in the June, 2010 issue of *FRONT*, "You paid for it, but you you own it?") answers some questions here that were posed by business owners, do-it-yourself Web developers, and Web professionals.

Can I use images that appear in Google Images on my Web site? "Just because images are on the Internet doesn't mean they are free to use. Your use of Internet images may be copyright infringement, regardless of whether you give credit to the copyright owner."

Can I publish articles on my Web site that were written by others? "This would be considered copyright infringement if you do not have the written permission of the copyright owner. However, reprinting quotes or short passages, especially if they are for fair use purposes such as review of or comment on the articles or news reporting, would not be considered infringement."

Can I borrow a page template and change a few things to make it mine? "Under the doctrine of 'substantial similarity,' a work can be found to infringe copyright even if the wording of text has been changed or visual or audible elements are altered."

Given all these restrictions, is there anything you can use from the Web? Yes!

Need images for your Web site? Free photos and clip art images are available to Microsoft Office license holders at Microsoft Clip Gallery Live (office.microsoft.com/en-us/images). WikiMedia (meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Free_image_resources) provides a list of sources for free images, and there are low-cost royalty-free stock photo sites, such as iStockPhoto (www.istockphoto.com) and Fotolia (us.fotolia.com).

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