

Protecting Intellectual Property

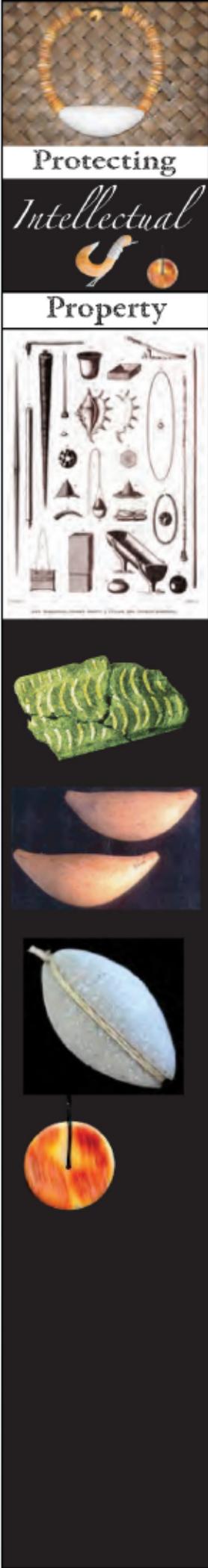
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Why You Should Consider Uncopyright for Your Art

A presentation by

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Why You Should Consider Uncopyright for Your Art

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In 2008, after becoming a full-time blogger and author with several ebooks and a print book, I decided to do something really scary: uncopyright my work.

This was scary, because it was a releasing of the rights to my work -- and I support my family of six kids on this work! I had no idea if releasing copyright would ruin my business as a writer.

But it was also hugely liberating, because no longer did I have to try to hold on tightly to my work, or protect it from “pirates”, or stress out about any of this. That’s a major relief.

What is uncopyright? **Uncopyright is the releasing of your copyright, so that your work is now in the public domain, and people no longer need to ask permission to use or share your work.**

I did this because I believe in sharing, and believe that generosity comes back to you. I believe we build our art on the shoulders of those who came before us, and that others should be able to do the same on our shoulders. I believe that sharing helps the artist (and the user of your art), and that putting up barriers to sharing only hurts the artist.

What were the results? I’ll share them here, along with some reasons you might consider uncopyright.

The Results of My Uncopyright Experiment

Since releasing copyright of my works in 2008 (5 years), here’s what’s happened:

- My blog has grown from about 50,000 subscribers to more than 300,000 subscribers (and more than 1 million readers per month). I believe uncopyright helped me reach a greater number of readers.
- My books have sold better than ever – about 10x as many books sold since releasing copyright.
- My income has increased dramatically (as a result of greater readership), and I make about 6x as much as before.
- My work has been used in other people’s books, in magazines, in newsletters sent to hundreds of thousands of people, in classroom materials and blogs and ebooks. This is amazing to me.
- Some people have resold my books, without giving me a share of the profits. At first this irritated me a bit, but soon I let go of that and don’t worry about it. The benefits outweigh this small irritation, and it hasn’t hurt the sales of my books one bit.



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- Thousands of people have thanked me for my uncopyright, generating a large amount of goodwill from my readers (an unmeasurable benefit) and many more have written nice things about my uncopyright and linked to me (generating even more readership).

I call this a powerfully, incredibly successful experiment. This is why I believe strongly in uncopyright, and hope you'll consider it as well.

Why You Should Consider Uncopyright

While uncopyright might not be for everyone, I really think it's a great thing for any artist. Some reasons you might consider it:

1. **Removing the barriers to sharing your work is an amazing way for your work to be spread.** Think of how hard it would be to get permission from J.K. Rowling to reprint a chapter of Harry Potter, or Nike to reprint their logo. The difficulty would probably mean you'd never even try. If the same applies to using your work, other people won't even ask permission – they just won't share your work. Remove the barriers.
2. **You didn't make your work alone.** Every piece of art (painting, music, sculpture, jewelry, writing) owes credit to art that came before it. We get inspiration from others, we use ideas and images from others and remix it into something of our own. We didn't invent anything, we just make it into our own unique blend. And so why can't we share our work with others, and let others use our work in their own work? Others helped us, so we should pass that on.
3. **Sharing is better than selfishness.** When you share with others, they are grateful. When you share, you are enriching the lives of others. When you're selfish, this makes the culture you're contributing one of selfishness. I believe a world built on sharing is one that I want to be a part of, and I hope you'll contribute to this as well.
4. **Your income could go up.** There are no guarantees, but I've found really strong results in both readership and income from uncopyright. I was worried about the opposite, but my numbers have only gone up.
5. **You worry less.** When you hold onto copyright, you must guard it. That means you have to watch out for who else might be pirating your work, and if you find anyone who is stealing your copyrighted work, you have to get mad at them, and then try to stop them. That means sending out angry letters, or hiring a lawyer. This is not fun (I've tried it). And then the person getting the letter is also mad. Lots of stress all around. Get rid of copyright, and you get rid of the anger and stress.
6. **Uncopyright didn't hurt Shakespeare or Da Vinci.** These masters have been dead for centuries, and were born before copyright laws were invented, and their work has been spread to millions and millions of people who have loved them. Their works are treasured, and copyright wasn't necessary for that.



7. **Copyright only helps the powerful corporations.** Music artists, for example, aren't helped by copyright – it only helps the corporations that make money off the artists. When an independent artist gives up copyright, his or her work is spread to many more people, which is good for the artist. Only the powerful can really protect copyrights anyway – the individual artist doesn't have the resources to hire expensive lawyers.
8. **People will thank you.** People love generosity and sharing. They will love you for uncopyright, and you'll get letters and emails thanking you if anyone shares your work. The goodwill you generate from this is powerful and immeasurable.

Those are just a few reasons to consider uncopyright – the full effects can't be described but must be experienced.

Common Questions

Uncopyright is such an unusual notion, that many people have questions and concerns. This is normal.

A few common questions, with my answers:

Q: Won't I lose revenues?

A: If people buy my ebook and then distribute it (without permission) to 20 people, and each of those distributes it to 20 more, and those to 20 more ... that's 8,000 copies of my ebook, and at \$9.50 I've lost \$76,000 in ebook revenues. Perhaps. That's if you agree with the assumption that all those people would have bought the ebook if it hadn't been freely distributed. I don't buy that. In this example, thousands of people are reading my work (and learning about Zen Habits) who wouldn't have otherwise. That's good for any content creator. Also: I've made way more money since releasing copyright, than when I had copyright.

Q: Who knows what people will do with your work?

A: Someone could take my work, turn it into a piece of crap, and put my name on it. They could translate it with all kinds of errors. They could ... well, they could do just about anything. But that kind of thinking stems from a mind that wants to control content ... while I am of the opinion that you can't control it, and even if you can, it's not a good thing. What if someone takes my work and turns it into something brilliant, and becomes the next James Joyce? Or more likely, what if they take the work and extend the concepts and make it even more useful, to even more people? Release control, and see what happens. People are wonderful, creative creatures. Let's see what they can do.

Q: What if someone publishes a book with all your content and makes a million dollars off it?

A: I hope they at least give me credit. And my deepest desire is that they give some of that money to a good cause.

Q: But ... they're stealing from you!

A: You can't steal what is given freely. I call this sharing, not piracy.





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