



COPY-IDENT GLOBAL INFRINGEMENT REPORT

by MEDIA-IDENT Group GmbH

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ABOUT

MEDIA-IDENT is a software company specializing in visual media content protection, and global AI-powered image monitoring. Its solutions support individuals and organizations that publish photography, images, and brand assets online by helping them protect copyrighted content and trademarks from unauthorized use. Because image misuse and infringement are widespread and difficult to track, MEDIA-IDENT provides streamlined tools for monitoring, tracing, and enforcing image rights worldwide. By simplifying license management and IP enforcement, MEDIA-IDENT helps creators and brands safeguard their assets, reduce financial losses, and protect their value without the complexity typically associated with online copyright protection.



**Global Image Copyright
Monitoring**
<https://mediaident.com/copy-ident>



**Global Brand & Product
Monitoring**
<https://mediaident.com/brands-ident>



**Digital Watermark - Invisible
& Personalized**
<https://mediaident.com/source-ident>

INTRODUCTION

More images were used without permission in 2025 than at any point in history, with most creators unaware of the infringement. Images can now be generated, altered, stripped of attribution, and redistributed in seconds - often without clear authorship or ownership. As courts increasingly rule that AI-generated content belongs to no one, the question is no longer "Who owns this image?", but rather "Can ownership still be proven?" As visual content becomes more accessible and easier to replicate, the rise of copyright infringement highlights the need for enhanced monitoring and enforcement to preserve creative value and ensure fair compensation for creators.

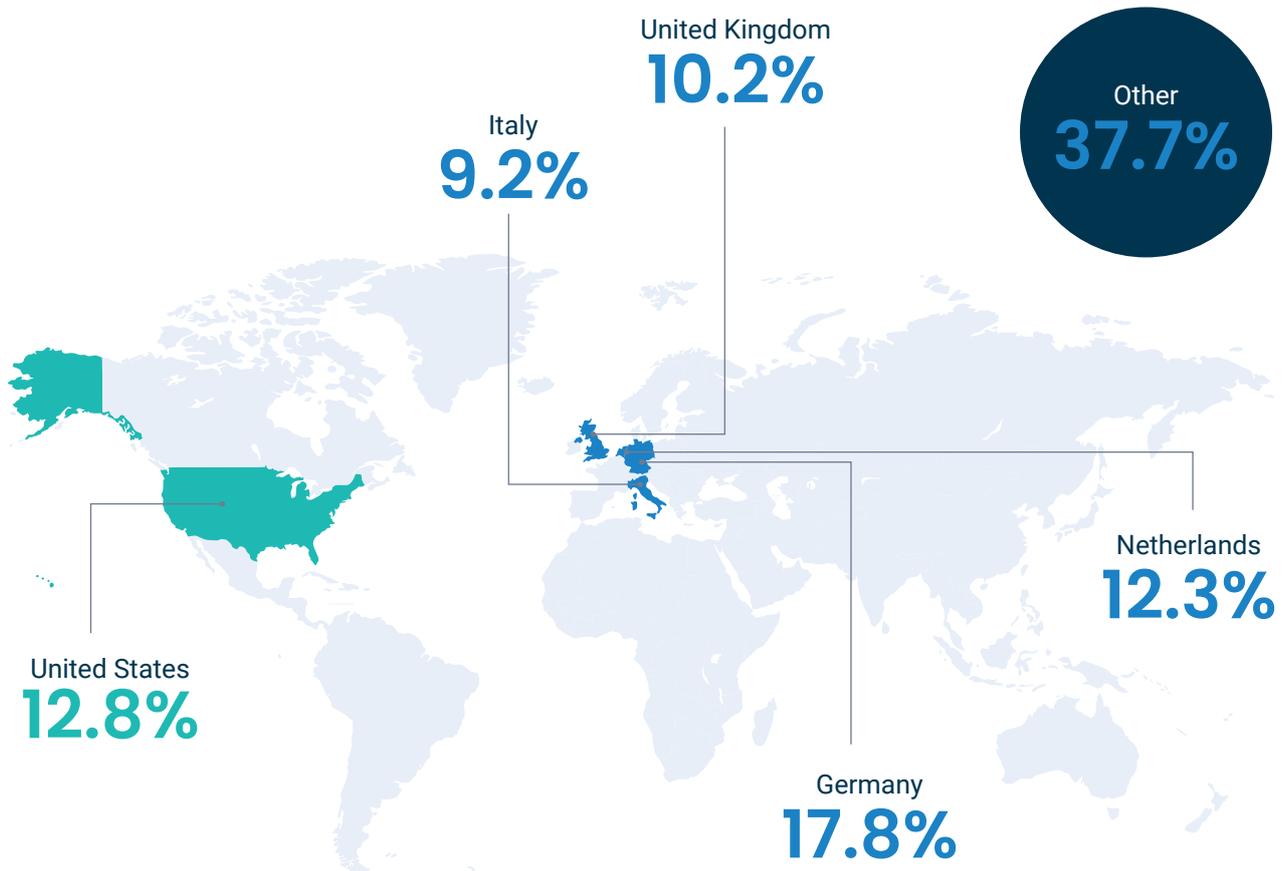
The 2025 COPY-IDENT Global Infringement Report provides an in-depth analysis of these trends, based on collaboration with over 50,000 copyright owners. It examines the global scale of copyright infringement, identifying where and how images are misused, and offering detailed insights into successful enforcement cases and emerging industry patterns. This report uncovers how the digital landscape has evolved and the challenges creators now face in protecting their intellectual property. With actionable data on legal and enforcement strategies, the report serves as a critical resource for rightsholders navigating the complexities of copyright protection in an AI-driven world.



The goal of the report is to
(1) examine the patterns of unlicensed image use globally,
(2) analyze factors that contribute to successful enforcement, and
(3) propose best practices for rightsholders to navigate the online ecosystem.

SOURCES OF DATA

All data presented in this report was derived directly from the databases built to service MEDIA-IDENT clients. The distribution of the client base skews in the direction of more developed, western countries, but represents sources spanning the globe.



MEDIA-IDENT’s image matching and detection technology enables round-the-clock monitoring and facilitates continual expansion of international clientele. These clients represent nearly every country on Earth, but the majority are based in the European Union. The accompanying graphic illustrates the breakdown of the COPY-IDENT client base, and thus the origins of the creative works discussed in this report.

The 2025 Global Infringement Report collects data from (1) copyright infringement detected by COPY-IDENT’s monitoring system and (2) copyright enforcement collaboration with more than 50,000 clients and 200 lawyers from January 1st to December 31st, 2025.

MEDIA-IDENT clients span an internationally distributed client base that represents over 120 countries. Since its inception in 2016, COPY-IDENT has assisted photographers, stock agencies, and media companies from every corner of the world, and has developed a more formidable footprint in certain regions for various reasons. Client distribution reflects stronger activity in certain jurisdictions. Germany, for example, provides structured procedural mechanisms for enforcing intellectual property rights, which may contribute to higher reported enforcement activity. The United States similarly offers established legal pathways for rights assertion, including statutory remedies in specific cases. In addition to the US Copyright Act,

the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) offers a detailed procedure to address infringement, such as takedown notices and safe harbor provisions. Dutch creators also have powerful legal mechanisms at their disposal, and have proven to be vigilant regarding their work, and proactive in pursuing statutory damages from infringing activities.

After Germany, the US, and the Netherlands, the next most represented client countries in 2025 were the United Kingdom and Italy. COPY-IDENT collaborates extensively with its global customer base that includes amateur and freelance photographers, small business owners, image agencies, and high-profile companies.



Remark

The 2025 Global Infringement Report by COPY-IDENT presents a summary of online copyright infringement and copyright enforcement through relationships with clients. Therefore, client demographics - working arrangements, photography genres, geographical focus and industry sector - all have direct impacts on the data represented in this report.



In 2025, COPY-IDENT's image monitoring system detected over 90 million image hits globally. Approximately 80% of these matches are likely unauthorized. This corresponds to more than 72 million potential Infringement cases and EUR 25 billion in financial losses for image rights owners, based on historical enforcement data.

IMAGE HITS BY CONTINENT

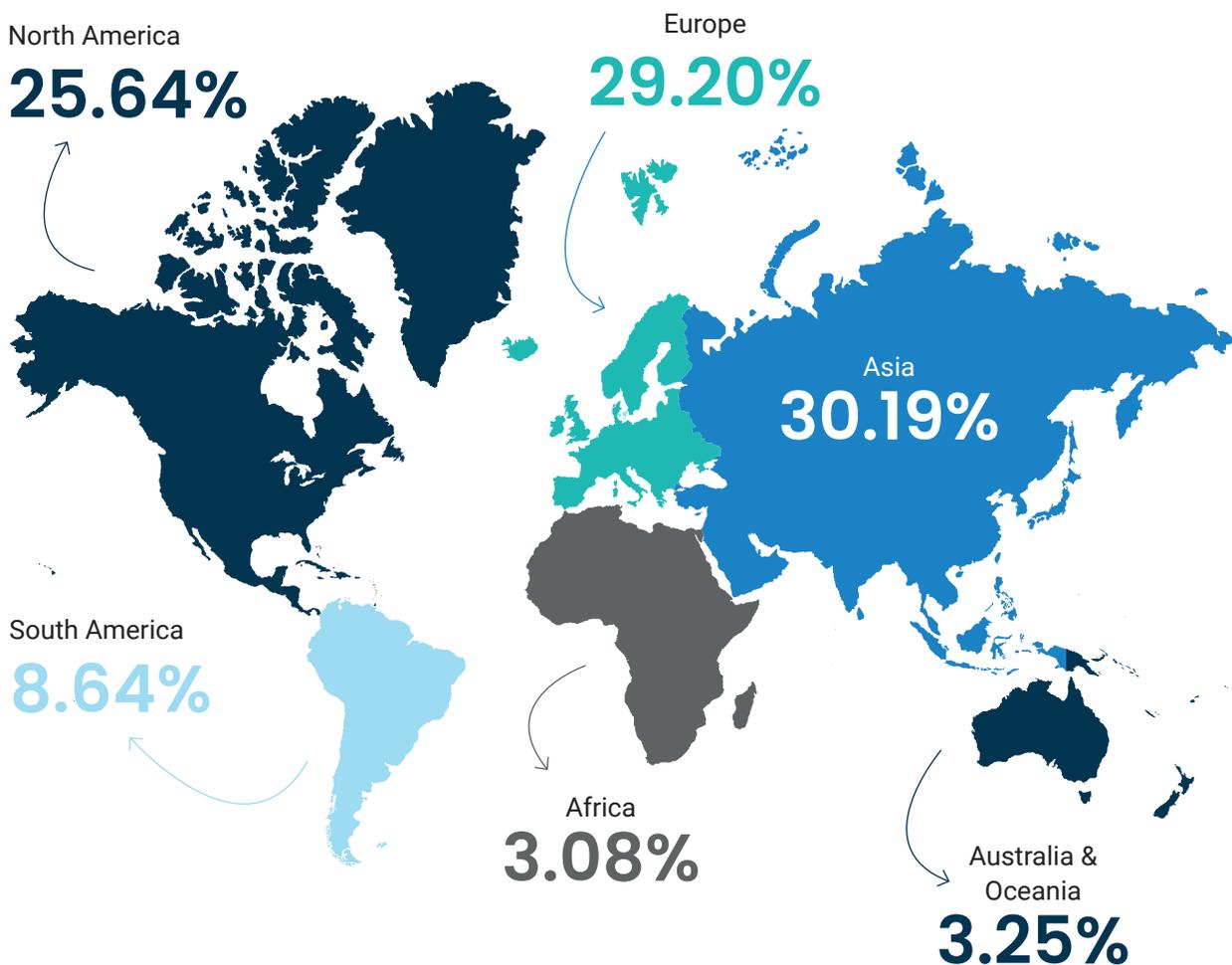


Image hits refer to the instances when the COPY-IDENT monitoring system detects a match of a client's copyrighted imagery on the internet. In 2025, more hits were found in Asia than any other continent, totaling 30.19% globally. This comes as no surprise, however, considering over half of the world's population lives in Asia. China and India were the top contributors by country.

Europe recorded the second-highest number of image hits among all continents in 2025, accounting for 29.20% of detected cases. Europe also represents COPY-IDENT's largest client base, supported by a robust creative industry that produces a large volume of images. Many of these images have commercial value - including editorial, advertising, and stock photography - and are therefore more susceptible to copyright infringement.

North America ranks third in terms of image hits, constituting 25.64% in 2025, of which the United States is responsible for the majority. The US hosts a vast number of content creators, including blogs, businesses, and social media platforms. Images are frequently used to capture attention and to convey a message, thus increasing the likelihood for copyright infringement.

IMAGE HITS BY COUNTRY

The US is responsible for 23.57% of image hits by country, more than any other. Many longstanding COPY-IDENT clients are based in the US and have uploaded millions of images to the COPY-IDENT monitoring system, which increases the incidence of image hits in the US. Also home to a high volume of online content creators and the most frequently visited online platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit, the abundance of images increases the likelihood of potential unlicensed use in the US.



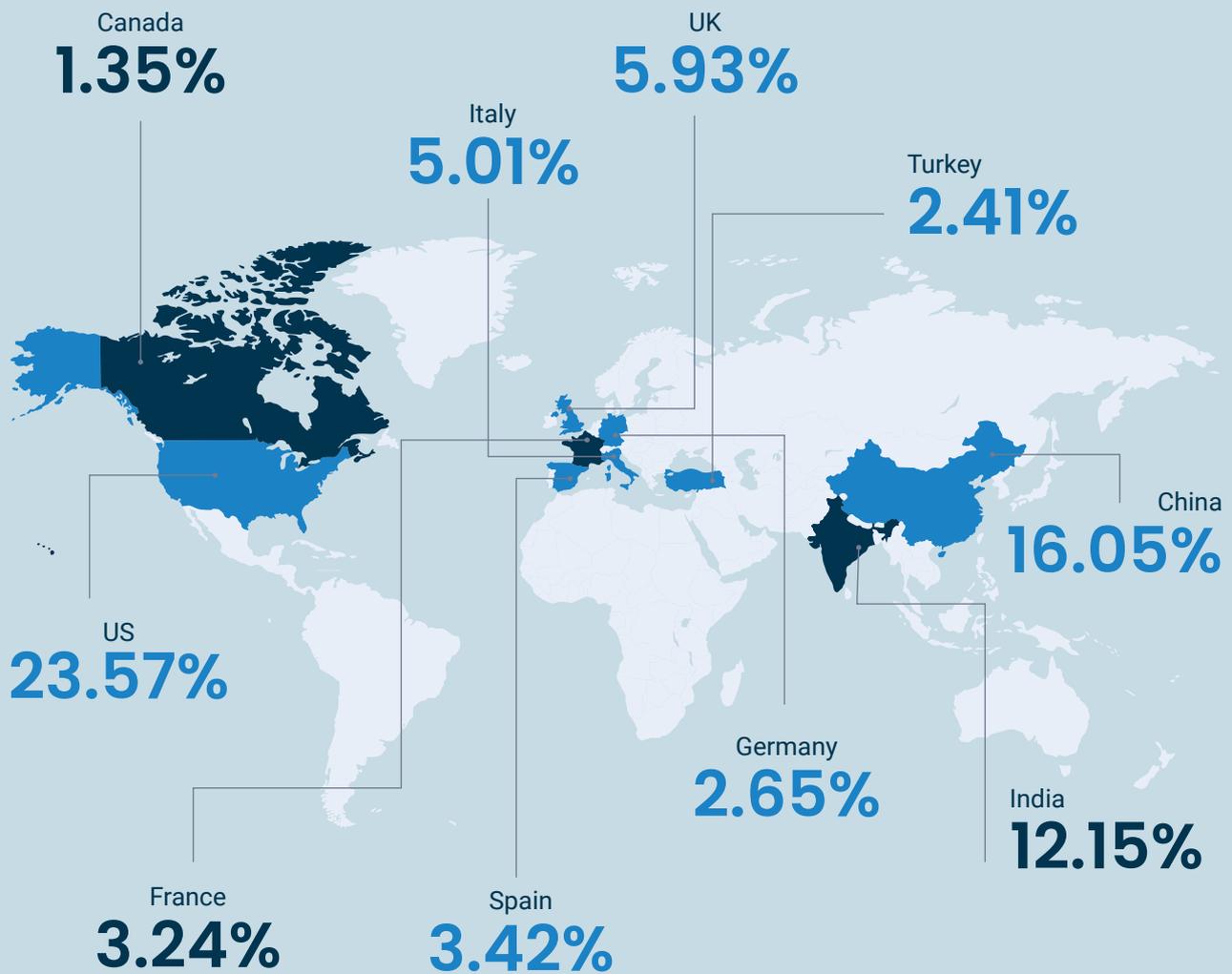
China and India produce the second and third most image hits by country, with 16.05% and 12.15%, respectively. With the world's largest populations and most internet users, these two countries have a rich repertoire of media assets and images, used across different domains. The lively startup scene also suggests that many small businesses operate on tight budgets, which can lead to usage of readily available images from the internet without proper licensing. Image hits from the US, China, and India contribute to over half of the global total (51.77% combined).

European countries represent the next five positions in the image hit hierarchy, with the UK, Italy, Spain, France, and Germany collectively comprising 20.25% of the global total. Home to a large population of professional photographers, media agencies, artists, and cultural institutions, European countries produce a significant volume of high-quality, licensable imagery. The open nature of the EU market could also suggest easier transmission of images among member countries, driving up potential misuse in the prolific artistic hub.



Remark

The ranking of image hits by country does not necessarily indicate that potential infringers are physically located in that country. For example, many websites based outside the US host their content on US-based servers, and companies may use US addresses for domain registrations. Although this ranking reflects a general trend of image hits, these considerations should be taken into account when interpreting the results.



The US, China, and India are responsible for the overwhelming majority of image matches, or hits. Further examination, however, uncovers how and why regional enforcement paints a much different picture.



Image Hits – Top Level Domain

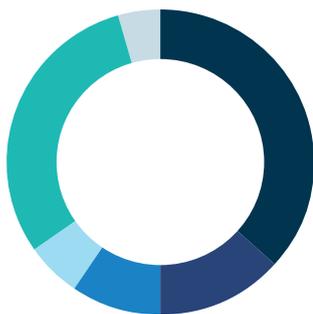
The ranking of image hits by top-level domains (TLD) reflects a combination of factors, such as domain popularity, geographic locations, and user behavior. “.com” is the most widely used TLD globally, encompassing a wide array of websites across different countries and industries. Individuals and companies can register “.com” domains with relatively few restrictions, regardless of their geographical location.

Domains ending with country codes (ccTLDs) reflect the domain registration location where image hits are detected. ccTLDs are used only as a proxy for regional affiliation, acknowledging that such domains do not guarantee physical or legal presence in the corresponding country. “.org” domains are commonly used by non-profit organizations, non-governmental institutions, and open-source projects, but use is not restricted to these groups. “.net” was originally designed for network-related entities but is now used as a general purpose TLD.



Ranking by Top Level Domain

The analysis includes over 20 categories, and the top 5 TLDs were responsible for over 70% of image hits. The distribution provides an overview of where these images were used. Business websites are where most image hits were identified in 2025. Visual content is the cornerstone to digital marketing strategies, so companies often use high-quality and attractive images to showcase their brand identity, products, and services. Informational websites and media outlets utilize diagrams, infographics and illustrative images to complement knowledge sharing, and most e-commerce and travel websites use pictures to showcase their product or services – all of which contributes to a higher percentage of image hits.



- **.com** : 38.55%
- **.de** : 13.92%
- **.nl** : 9.95%
- **.it** : 5.97%
- **other** : 27.07%
- **.co.uk** : 4.54%

FROM IMAGE HITS TO SUCCESSFUL ENFORCEMENT

This COPY-IDENT image hits ranking does not translate directly into effective copyright enforcement and remuneration. Input from clients is important to ensure detected matches constitute infringing activities, which can then be pursued. Pertaining to enforcement, a combination of legal, political, cultural and practical factors contribute to successful outcomes.



Cross-border Enforcement

In the digital age, content is shared extensively every day across national borders. Advanced technologies have made it easier for people to access, create and share content. Generative AI models allow users to create images that resemble copyrighted work in seconds. Users can also use AI to remove visible watermarks on licensed images for commercial use. This presents difficulties to effectively enforce copyright when unauthorized image use takes place.

International frameworks such as the Berne Convention, administered by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), establish standardized practices to protect rightsholders by ensuring works originating in one member country receive equivalent protection in others. However, these treaties can only set minimum standards, and differences in national laws often lead to jurisdictional disputes, as countries' prioritization of local interests can hinder legal action in other jurisdictions. The lack of standardized copyright legislation also means that countries interpret the law differently. Some countries may have weaker mechanisms to combat copyright infringement and limited resources for enforcement.





POLITICAL CONFLICT AND IP ENFORCEMENT

Geo-political conflicts

Political tensions and economic sanctions often impede international cooperation on intellectual property enforcement. In times of conflict, governments may enact local laws that limit the scope of established rights and practices. In 2022, Russia issued a decree in response to economic sanctions imposed by the US, the UK, and the EU, allowing the government to take countermeasures against foreign entities involved in sanction-related activities. Under the decree, companies were permitted to use the patents, trademarks, and copyrights of other companies without compensation, effectively legalizing certain forms of intellectual property infringement. As a result, brands that imitate well-known names and logos, such as Stars Coffee, Makdonalds, and Cool Cola, are exempt from trademark and copyright enforcement.

Geopolitical uncertainties and the evolving international order also complicate the enforcement of agreements on intellectual property rights. For example, due to China's influence in WIPO and tensions between China and Taiwan, European Wikimedia affiliates were reportedly blocked from participating in WIPO's Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights.

COLLECTIVE CREATIVITY AND COPYRIGHT

Cultural Factors

The debate over whether copyright restricts or promotes cultural diversity and creativity reflects differing perspectives on intellectual property protection. Some argue that copyright incentivizes creators to produce original works, while others contend that it can stifle creativity by limiting access to existing works and discouraging derivative creations. In countries where copying from existing works is seen as a legitimate form of learning and innovation, local customs often prioritize collective knowledge and tolerate unauthorized use of images, complicating efforts to assert intellectual property rights.

In China, despite a massive volume of image usage, the cultural and social context surrounding copyright presents significant enforcement challenges. Social media platforms such as Douyin (TikTok), WeChat, and RedNote have become integral to daily life in China, with content frequently generated through remixing and repurposing, blurring the lines of copyright infringement. The sheer scale and rapid dissemination of content further complicate enforcement, despite regulatory efforts. Similarly, in India, the democratization of content through generative artificial intelligence has contributed to a surge in online content sharing. Although awareness of intellectual property rights is growing, enforcement mechanisms struggle to keep pace with the rapid creation and distribution of digital content.



OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES IN COPYRIGHT PROTECTION



Economic Factors

Economic factors also play a significant role in copyright enforcement. In many developing countries, economic growth is often prioritized over stringent intellectual property enforcement. Substantial expenses - such as technology for monitoring and detecting copyright infringement, legal fees, and administrative costs - can hinder effective enforcement. As a result, rightsholders may face challenges pursuing infringement cases due to budgetary constraints and the uncertainty of favorable outcomes, despite widespread unauthorized use of images.

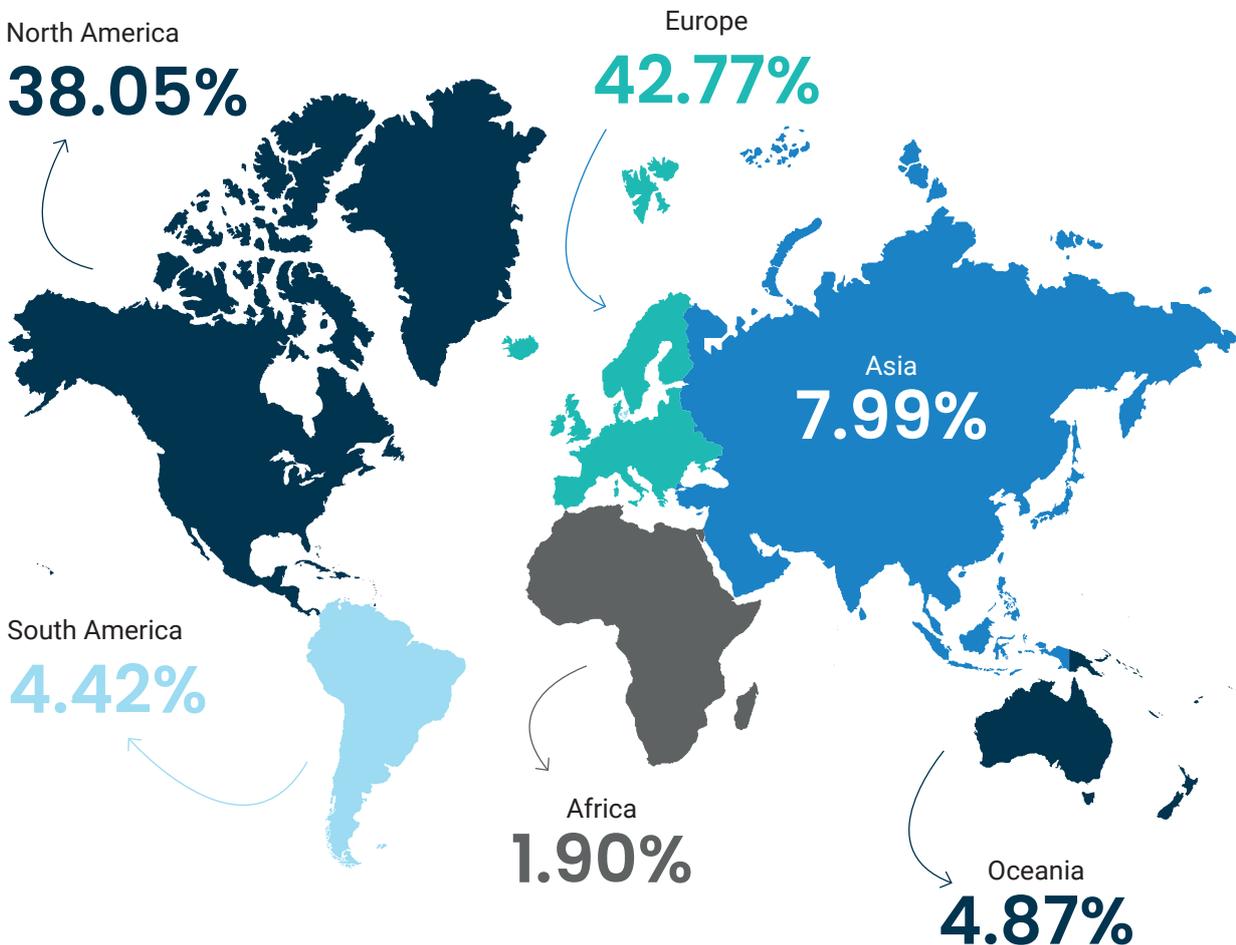


COPY-IDENT's Legal Network and Practical Experiences

COPY-IDENT's expansive legal partner network is essential to the mission of effectively enforcing copyright across multiple jurisdictions. In regions such as Europe and North America, long-established partnerships with experienced intellectual property attorneys are maintained. These local experts possess in-depth knowledge of their legal systems and are well-equipped to develop tailored strategies that align with national laws to address copyright infringement. Additionally, these partners provide practical experience that helps mitigate risks associated with procedural errors, ensuring correct filings and timely submissions.

The current digital sphere is increasingly challenged by infringing activities, driven by rapid content creation through artificial intelligence and the widespread dissemination of virtual assets across social media platforms. COPY-IDENT's growing global alliance with law firms offers clients region-specific IP expertise and comprehensive support in pursuing legal action.

SUCCESSFUL ENFORCEMENT



In 2025, the majority of COPY-IDENT's successful copyright enforcement occurred in Europe (42.77%) and North America (38.05%). These results do not correspond with the prevalence of image use by region, as one might expect Asia to rank higher considering the rate of image hits in China and India. Cross-border enforcement challenges, along with cultural and economic factors in these countries, significantly limit favorable outcomes.

Instead, the distribution more closely reflects the geographic locations of COPY-IDENT clients. From the outset, collaborations with law firms in Europe and the North America have supported clients in enforcing copyright. Extensive knowledge of local copyright laws, combined with practical experience, enables effective pursuit of fair compensation for infringing activities. More developed countries also benefit from well-established legal frameworks, efficient judicial systems, and mechanisms that facilitate successful enforcement.

IMAGE USE AND LICENSING



Compensation

Covers the damages caused by unauthorized use up to when the settlement was agreed upon. This, however, does not grant rights to future use, which means continuous use of the image without a license may constitute a new infringement.



Post-Licensing Fee

Covers past damages AND provides users with a valid license and a peace of mind to continue using the photo for one year from the date of payment.

CASE PROCESSING

In terms of copyright enforcement, COPY-IDENT employs several approaches to maximize the likelihood of success. Clients are guided through the rights and restrictions associated with each case to ensure a clear, shared understanding before enforcement actions are pursued.



Direct Resolution

Direct communication with image users is one frequent outlet. Cases might be closed within 1 DAY, if an amicable settlement is reached or the image license is clarified.



Commercial Collection

If direct communication does not yield an effective resolution, commercial debt collection may be introduced to pursue compensation, which usually takes one to four weeks.



Legal Action

The duration of formal enforcement proceedings varies significantly depending on jurisdiction and case complexity and usually take three months to a year.

In 2025, it required on average 64 days to process one infringing activity, while the fastest resolution took under three hours.

COPYRIGHT IN THE GENAI ERA

Generative artificial intelligence models have for many become an integral part of everyday life, used by people from all walks of life, on a multitude of tasks. Despite the tremendous convenience, the vast usage of GenAI models poses challenges to copyright protection and brings uncertainty to the creative industry. It is important that image owners and creators are well informed about the copyright implications to continue creating with confidence and security.

REMARK:

Given the rapid evolution of AI technology, legal precedents, and regulatory framework, it is essential to consult the most recent information when making a decision related to AI and copyright enforcement. This report summarizes important court decisions and highlights key areas to observe as of February 2026 so that image owners have the knowledge to navigate the creative industry in the generative AI era.



AI Training

As many generative AI models are trained on large datasets collected from a variety of sources, including web scraping, public datasets, and other text repositories, they often incorporate copyrighted material. In December 2023, The New York Times filed a federal lawsuit against OpenAI and Microsoft, alleging that the companies used millions of its articles without permission to help train the large language models that power tools such as ChatGPT and Copilot. The complaint asserts that some model outputs can recite or closely summarize Times content, potentially harming subscription and advertising revenue by reducing traffic to the newspaper's own platforms. OpenAI and Microsoft have maintained that use of publicly available

text for AI training is protected under the fair use doctrine of US copyright law, and they have sought dismissal of portions of the suit. As of February 2026, the case remains active in US federal court, with litigation ongoing and no definitive judgment on the core copyright claims.

In *Andersen et al. v. Stability AI Ltd.*, visual artists filed a class action in the United States alleging that copyrighted works were used without authorization to train generative AI models. The court allowed certain direct copyright infringement claims to proceed while dismissing others with leave to amend. The litigation raises unresolved questions regarding the use of copyrighted works in AI training datasets and continues to attract significant attention within the copyright community.

AI GENERATED CONTENT AND AUTHORSHIP

Many jurisdictions currently require human authorship as a prerequisite for copyright protection. In 2025, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit reaffirmed that U.S. copyright law requires works to be authored by a human being. The decision reinforces the prevailing interpretation that fully autonomous AI-generated output, absent sufficient human creative contribution, does not qualify for copyright protection under U.S. law.

Similarly, courts in several European jurisdictions have emphasized the requirement of human creative input. In 2024, the Prague Municipal Court declined to recognize copyright protection for an AI-generated image where the claimant could not demonstrate sufficient creative authorship beyond the prompt. The court underscored that copyright protection presupposes demonstrable human intellectual contribution.

In contrast, a Chinese court in 2023 recognized copyright protection for an AI-generated image, emphasizing the originality and intellectual contribution reflected in the prompting and refinement process. The decision illustrates that approaches to AI-assisted authorship may vary across jurisdictions, particularly where human input in the generative process is deemed sufficiently creative.

EU AI Act

In June 2024, the European Union adopted the world's first comprehensive framework for regulating artificial intelligence, known as the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (EU AI Act). Under its transparency provisions, certain generative AI models are required to publish summaries of copyrighted material used in training. These obligations are expected to apply 12 months after the Act's entry into force, providing AI developers with a transition period to achieve compliance. The transparency requirements are intended to strengthen protections for artists and copyright holders, and may encourage greater collaboration among major media stakeholders to safeguard originality and creative production.

With the EU AI Act scheduled to become fully applicable in August 2026, organizations within the EU and beyond are expected to implement appropriate compliance measures related to the development, deployment, and oversight of AI systems. The Act is also likely to influence regulatory approaches in other jurisdictions, as additional countries and regions consider adopting AI-specific legislation modeled on the EU framework. While the Act does not directly amend copyright law, its requirements for transparency, traceability, and risk management help clarify the complex intersection between AI and copyrighted works. By establishing clear obligations for AI developers and users, these regulations aim to balance technological innovation with the protection of creators' rights.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

With laws and regulations varying widely across jurisdictions, creators and companies are navigating a fragmented global landscape where enforcement is inconsistent, and cross-border collaboration remains a complex, if not impossible, task. This report highlights regions where copyright enforcement has seen success and those where it falters, often due to geopolitical factors and cultural attitudes toward intellectual property. The stark reality is that, in an era of rapidly evolving AI, the ability to protect creative works now hinges on a combination of legal expertise, technological innovation, and an understanding of the global forces shaping intellectual property law. As the digital world continues to decentralize, safeguarding intellectual property in this new environment will require not only new tools but also fresh approaches to enforcement and international cooperation.

As generative AI continues to advance, the notion of creative ownership has been upended. With images now easily generated, altered, and redistributed without attribution, traditional copyright mechanisms are struggling to keep up with the rapid pace of digital content production. This report demonstrates how these changes contribute to an exponential rise in copyright infringement, with over 72 million infringement cases detected globally, leading to potential financial losses amounting to billions of euros. As AI-driven content generation becomes the norm, protecting intellectual property and ensuring fair compensation for creators requires more than just legal frameworks - it calls for a proactive, technology-driven approach to monitoring and enforcement.

In this context, MEDIA-IDENT's advanced monitoring tools and image matching technology are essential for combating the rising tide of unauthorized image use. With visual content becoming increasingly ubiquitous and difficult to track, these solutions provide creators and companies with the necessary tools to protect and enforce their rights in an AI-dominated world. Don't wait for copyright infringement to impact your livelihood. Act now to restore control over your intellectual property in this rapidly evolving digital era.



BEST PRACTICES



Protect Your Rights

Secure automatic copyright protection that preserves proof of creation, strengthens legal ownership claims, enables enforceable infringement actions, safeguards long-term image value, and reduces the risk of unauthorized use.



Assert Ownership

Make ownership immediately visible and signal professional image control by embedding invisible digital watermarks like SOURCE-IDENT that deter misuse, prevent unauthorized cropping, and protect brand recognition.



Prove Authorship

Embed verifiable ownership data and invisible digital watermarks like SOURCE-IDENT to establish clear authorship records, preserve metadata integrity, strengthen evidence credibility, and support legal dispute resolution.



Control Distribution

Use image monitoring tools like COPY-IDENT or BRANDS-IDENT to track image and brand use, maintain control over licensing, and monetize images effectively.



Detect Infringement

Automatically monitor images to identify unauthorized use, uncover hidden infringements, reduce manual tracking, and enable quick, confident enforcement of rights.



Enforce Confidently

Define clear licensing terms to prevent costly misunderstandings, strengthen contractual protections, stay ahead of legal changes, navigate evolving AI regulations, and safeguard creative investments.



Protect Your Brand

Monitor and protect your brand online. Control image use, deter misuse, and reinforce professional and legal safeguards.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The 2025 COPY-IDENT Global Infringement Report has been created and published in February 2026 by MEDIA-IDENT Group GmbH. MEDIA-IDENT is a Berlin-based software company that specializes in the global monitoring and protection of media assets. Our solutions equip rightsholders and brands with tools to keep track of their online presence and to detect potential infringement timely, which helps reduce loss of revenue and achieve fair remuneration.

This report conducts analysis based on:

(1) Copyright infringements detected from January 2025 to December 2025 from COPY-IDENT's monitoring system and (2) Copyright enforcement collaboration with over 50,000 clients and over 40 law firms.

**To learn more about
MEDIA-IDENT's monitoring
solutions, please visit:**

www.media-ident.com

The findings presented in this report are based on automated classification and aggregated workflow data. They do not constitute judicial determinations of infringement and are intended solely for analytical and informational purposes.

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