

what are the benefits of offering and using creative commons licences?



Creative Commons defines the spectrum of possibilities between full copyright — *all rights reserved* — and the public domain — *no rights reserved*. CC licenses help you keep your copyright while inviting certain uses of your work — a “some rights reserved” copyright.

CC provides global recognition. Increasingly, content creators in the digital environment are recognising the CC concept and iconography, easily identifying the specific uses it allows. Content sites such as Flickr, Revver and Blip.tv are employing CC licensing in their upload process, while search sites such as Google and Yahoo! have created CC-specific search engines. CC case studies attesting to the success of the initiative are found at <http://wiki.creativecommons.org/casestudies>.

CC has international application. Creative Commons licences are specifically designed to be global in their application, and to be enforceable with the same effect in any jurisdiction. Jurisdiction-tailored licences currently exist in more than 50 countries around the world. There are also a number of countries at drafting stage, or in which CC offices are in the process of establishing themselves (see <http://creativecommons.org/international/>). These licences have been ported into the legal language of their jurisdiction to ensure they comply with consumer protection and other laws, but are designed to have identical application anywhere in the world. Generic licences also exist for countries that currently do not have jurisdiction-specific licences.

CC licences are easy to choose. Not everyone is a copyright lawyer, so Creative Commons have made it quick and easy for content creators to mark how they are happy for users to reuse their content, while retaining full copyright ownership of their work. Using the licence generator (<http://www.creativecommons.org/license>) on the international Creative Commons website, content creators can simply answer a few questions – such as whether they will allow users to make commercial use of their work – and easily identify the appropriate licence. The source code for the licence generator is available for download, meaning other websites can build it into their own upload process. Photo sharing site Flickr (www.flickr.com) hosts a CC licence generator on its site.

CC licences are easy to understand. In designing the Creative Commons system, particular care has been taken to ensure that the CC licences are easy to understand, both for creators and users. Each licence has its own licence button which can be attached to content to indicate that it is CC licensed and under what terms (e.g., ). By clicking on this button, the user is taken to the ‘Licence Deed’, which provides a bullet-pointed plain-English summary of what the user can do with licensed content. From there they can access the full legal code of the licence, if they would like more detail.

CC material is easy to find. The CC licence generator embeds licence-specific technical code into digital files. That means that it is easy for those who wish to find content available for reuse to search for CC material, and for material that allows particular uses (e.g. for commercial purposes). Google, Yahoo! and a number of other search engines currently allow people to search specifically for CC-licensed material, as does the Mozilla Firefox web browser. Many content sites (such as Flickr and Blip.tv) and programs (such as Lime Wire) allow you to search or organise content based on CC licence terms.

why offer cc?

CC offers flexibility. Creative Commons provides a wide range of licensing options, with licences ranging from non-commercial verbatim reuse only ('Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives' licence) to unrestricted commercial or derivative use as long as there is attribution of the original creator ('Attribution' licence). Furthermore, using the CC licence generator you can give your contributors the option to choose exactly how they want to make their material available, rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all terms of use agreement. Flickr takes this approach. Alternatively, if you would like to be consistent across the site but still allow more flexibility than All Rights Reserved, you can choose to require a specific CC licence. Film distribution site Revver (www.revver.com), for example, uses an 'Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives' licence on all its films.

CC is legally sound. As with all 'open' licences, the CC licences have been meticulously drafted and redrafted, and are constantly subject to ongoing discussion and scrutiny. Each time a new project jurisdiction begins the process of porting the licences, a new set of lawyers cast their eye over the legal code. Furthermore, a number of court hearings around the world have enforced CC licences, providing clear jurisprudence on their application. A significant body of academic discourse has also built up around the licences, which can assist with their interpretation.

CC is remix ready. Because CC is a prior permissions system, licences that allow derivative works are remix friendly, and have, in fact, been specifically designed with remixing in mind. They are fast becoming the most widely recognised and established remixing licences internationally. All CC licences are internally compatible, meaning that creators using your site will be able to draw upon the 140 million plus items currently available for remixing under the CC licences. CC also has a suite of sampling licences which allow for reuse of small parts of an original work, but limit reuse of the entire work.

CC assists with internal rights management. Under a CC licence, you as a content aggregator are also free to use the content under the same terms as users. This gives you the ability to use CC content in various ways (for example in your own films or for promotional activities) as long as you comply with the licence terms. The licences are also designed to be sufficiently broad and technologically neutral to avoid problems such as orphaned works and outdated terms that often arise with more 'specific' copyright licences.

CC reduces licence proliferation. Using Creative Commons licences, rather than writing your own site-specific licence, ensures compatibility of downstream works; i.e., content on your site can be remixed with content worldwide that is also using CC. It also saves you the time and expense of generating your own specific set of licences. Finally, using a standardised licence like CC means that content users are not required to learn another licensing system, adding to the simplicity of your licensing scheme.

CC offers integrity in its licensing model. Given that there are now so many CC organisations worldwide, the integrity of the CC licences is maintained by hosting on the international Creative Commons website (<http://creativecommons.org>). The embedded licence metadata also means that, if attached correctly, the licence information stays with the content regardless of where it is distributed.

CC supports community building + a culture of sharing. Using CC licences can be an effective way of encouraging norms of sharing and reuse within an online community. As the licences set the default rules for the reuse of user-submitted content on your site, they can provide an important tool for structuring relationships between the users of your site.

CC provides access to infrastructure + support materials. By using the CC system, you gain access to all the CC support tools designed to make use of the licensing system easier to use. These include the intuitive licence generator, dedicated CC search engines and licence badges discussed above. There are also a range of support documents and FAQs available on the main CC website (<http://creativecommons.org>).