Everything You Need to Know About Using Images on Your Blog

DOZ

Welcome to the world of blogging!

There are nearly 200 millions active blogs online today, and standing out rom the crowd can be tough. Sure, your content is great, your copy is smart, and you think you'll be able to build an audience.

But without images on your site you're going to have trouble doing that. A lot of trouble.

Blog readers love images. How much? **Buffer** reports that content that includes at least one image gets **94% of all page views and is 40 times more likely to be shared on social networks**.

We also know that **humans process visual content far faster** - and with greater recall - than they do textual content.

This means it is not so much a question of whether you'll use images on your blog, but which images you'll use and how you'll use them.

This eBook is designed to help you work with images on your blog in the most effective way. This eBook will help you:

- understand how image licensing works
- find the images you need, and usually for free
- position those images on your site for best effect
- optimize your images for search, especially when it comes to alt-text

Whether you are a food blogger, a budding citizen journalist, or just someone with something to say and a platform to say it from, images are going to help you build the audience you desire and improve the user experience on your site.

Ready to get going? Of course you are.

Let's start with by diving into the world of **Creative Commons**.

Creative Commons

You've written the perfect blog post and now you need to make it look good.

Adding images is a must. Research shows that blog posts with images achieve click-through rates **more than 40% higher than text-only posts.** And finding images is easy. All you have to do is go to **Google Image Search**, type in a few keywords and-

Wait. No. **Don't do that.**

Taking an image from **Google**'s image search results is fast, but it can end up costing you in the long run. Most of the images **Google** or any other search engine have crawled are going to be subject to the protections of copyright. Re-using them without the permission of the rights holder can leave you and your business open to significant penalties, and even legal action. It's the easiest way to find an image, but it could also be the worst in the long term.

Instead of taking an image from a search engine, then, it's worthwhile to search for an image you have the absolute right to re-use. And thanks to what is known as **Creative Commons**, this search doesn't have to be difficult, especially if you know the right questions to ask.

But what is **Creative Commons**? And what sort of **Creative Commons** license am I looking for?

Read on.

Creative Commons

Creative Commons was born of a desire to share images, text, content, and media with others. This had always been possible before, of course, and the **Creative Commons** movement did not override copyright laws or the fair use doctrine in the United States. Instead the **Creative Commons** movement aligned itself with the Open Source movement, and proactively moved to make content more shareable.

Creators of content can assign a **Creative Commons** license to their work that explicitly permits and even encourages others to reprint, reuse, and modify it for their own purposes. Some of this was possible before and remains possible outside of the **Creative Commons** world. However, it is not quite as easy and certainly not as fast as looking for and using material with the appropriate **Creative Commons** license.

The ins-and-outs of **Creative Commons** aren't that difficult to understand, and the team at **Creative Commons** have produced a nice video explaining just how it works for creators, and for end users.

In short, using images licensed under the **Creative Commons** regime is easy, but there are some key questions you'll need to have answers to before you start looking around for images to make sure you find the right one.

What Creative Commons license do I need

In general there are six types of **Creative Commons** licenses, and here is **how Creative Commons explains each one**:

- **CC BY**: "This license lets others distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon your work, even commercially, as long as they credit you for the original creation."

- **CC BY-ND**: "This license allows for redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, as long as it is passed along unchanged and in whole, with credit to you."

- **CC BY-NC-SA**: "This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon your work non-commercially, as long as they credit you and license their new creations under the identical terms."

- **CC BY-SA**: "This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon your work even for commercial purposes, as long as they credit you and license their new creations under the identical terms."

- **CC BY-NC**: "This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon your work non-commercially, and although their new works must also acknowledge you and be non-commercial, they don't have to license their derivative works on the same terms."

- **CC BY-NC-ND**: "This license is the most restrictive of our six main licenses, only allowing others to download your works and share them with others as long as they credit you, but they can't change them in any way or use them commercially."

There is also a broader license known as **Creative Commons Public Domain Mark** wherein creators release their work into the public domain. Works released in that manner can be modified, used commercially or non-commercially, and derivative works need not be licensed as public domain works.
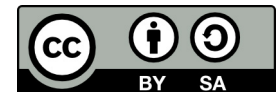
What attribution do I need to provide

In all cases - save for the works in the public domain - you need to attribute the work to the author of the work. The easiest way to do this is to reproduce the original license when using the work on your site. This not only attributes the image to the creator of the image, it also preserves the licensing of the image in case someone else finds the image through your blog post or site at a later date.

Getting images onto your site and into your blog posts is important, but keeping on the right side of the law is important,too. Using **Creative Commons** licensed images is a fast and easy way to keep everything legal while also maintaining the quality of the images on your site.
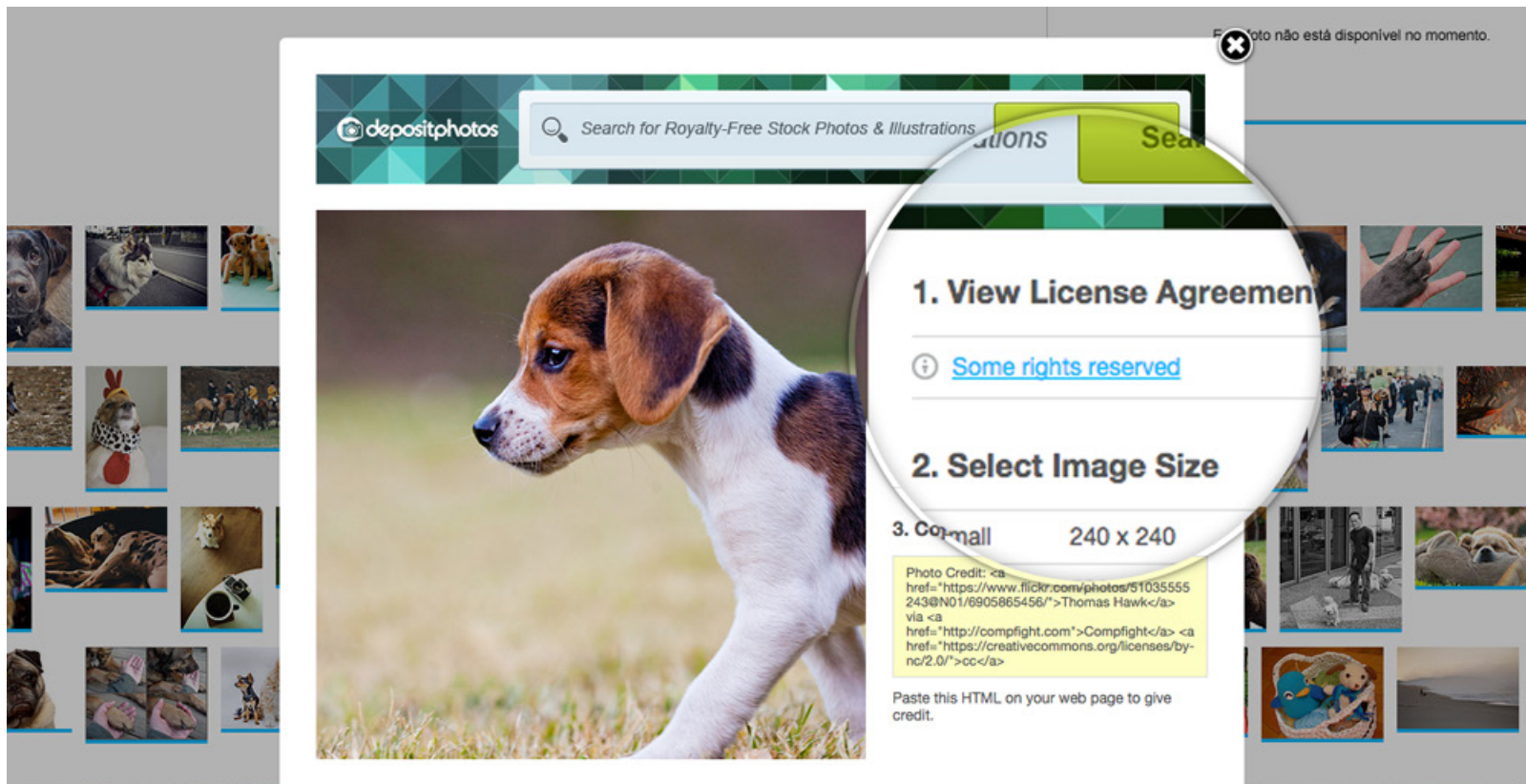
The S.Q.U.E.A.L. Strategy for Choosing the Perfect Image

So hopefully by now you're convinced you need an image for that blog post or web content piece - thank goodness! - but how do you go about choosing the perfect image?

Don't panic: we've got you covered.

Choosing an image for your content is simply a matter of applying the **SQUEAL** strategy. **SQUEAL** stands for:

- **S**ize
- **Q**uality
- **U**se
- **E**xceptional
- **A**lt-Text
- **L**egal

Get these right and you'll be sure to have a faster page load, better on-site SEO, happier readers, and the perfect image every time.

Let's go through them one by one.

S Is For Size

The first decision you need to make concerns the size of your image - how big does you image need to be? If it's a header or feature image you'll want it to be big enough to make an impact on the desktop. If it's something that is going to be used in your social media promotions then you'll need to think about the size of the image for those channels, too. The goal here is to **make sure that image is big enough to do the job** you need it to do.

Things to keep in mind here include things like the width of your blog columns or website theme - you'll want your image to fill the space that you have without being squeezed. You'll also want to consider how the image wraps with text, or if you'll have it wrap at all. Think about the format of the image, too: generally you'll be looking for landscape images (long horizontal side, shorter vertical side) rather than portrait images (the inverse) but it will depend on the specific context to which you are seeking to respond.

Finally, size is also important when it comes to purchasing images. Prices often vary depending on the size of the image that you choose, so make sure you are not wasting money on pixels that you cannot and will not use.
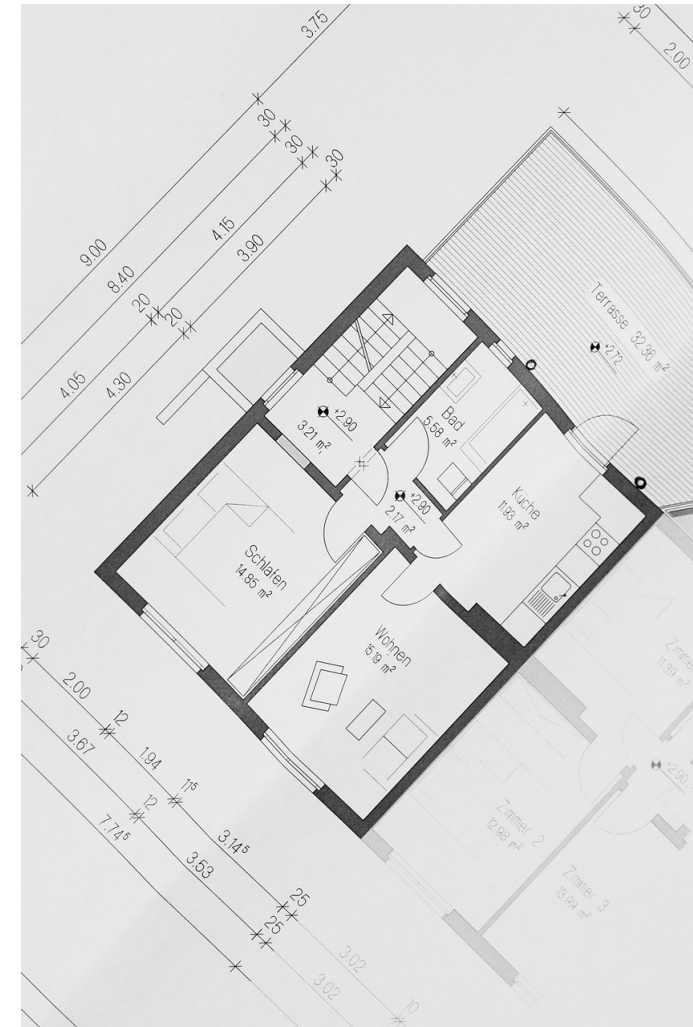
Q Is For Quality

Once you know the size of the image you're looking for the next thing to consider is the quality of the image you're looking for. Now your first reaction might be 'the best quality possible' but, in fact, that's the entirely wrong answer to the question.

One of the most important factors in gaining and keeping readers on your site is **how fast your site loads**. Load fast and you'll keep people happy. Take too long to load up and short attention spans will kick in and click off somewhere else. What slows down load times? Those high resolution, just fantastic quality, but oh-so-HUGE images.
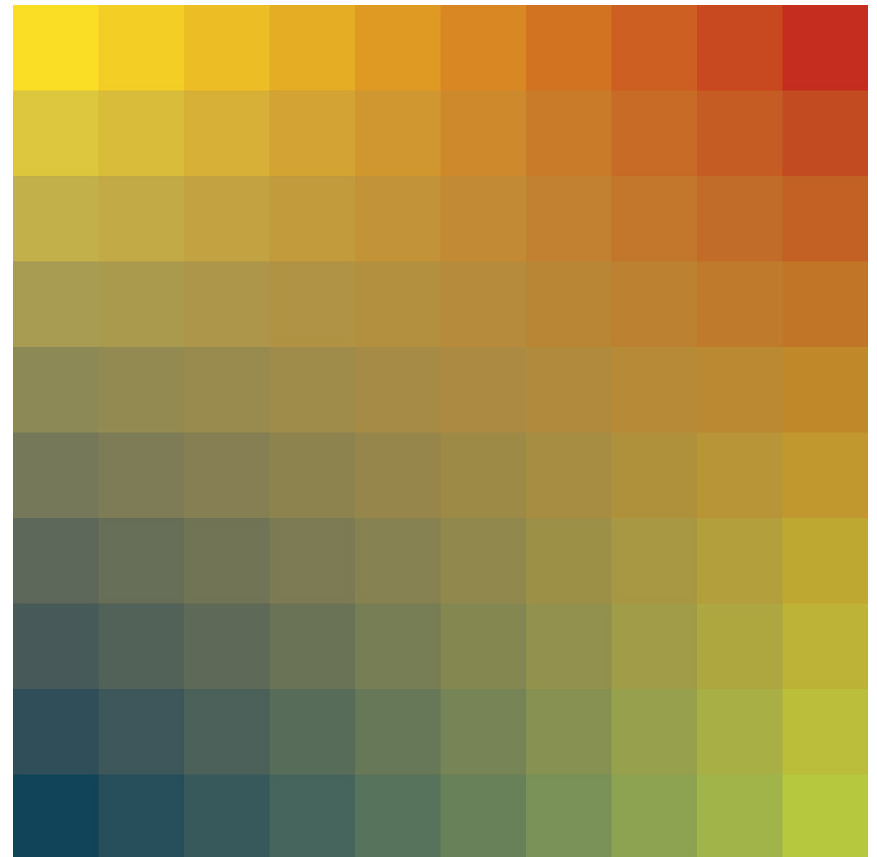
⬆ Consider this image that fills the width of the typical blog column at **DOZ** (640 pixels).

Here's the same image, taking up the same space, but with a resolution that is twice as good ⬇

⬆ Finally the same image but at 8 times the resolution of the first image

All appear the same size and the difference in quality is barely perceptible.
Yet the first image loads 3 times faster than the second image, and 35 times faster than the third image!

High quality is nice, but don't sacrifice page speed to quality improvements that you and your readers cannot honestly perceive.

U Is For Use

Where are you going to use the image? And will it serve double-duty?

We've posted before about the optimal size for images when used on different social media channels. If your image is going to be used on **Twitter** or **Facebook**, you'll need to make sure that the image is the optimal size for these social networks.

But if you are publishing on your blog - either a post or a static page - you'll also want to think about how the image will be used. Sure, the use on the page is the main thing, but if you have **Twitter Cards** enabled, for example, then your perfect image on the site might also end up on a card, and it will essentially be serving double-duty.

If it's a logo or a background image that will be reproduced on multiple pages or on multiple sites, you'll want to make sure it is possible to optimize that image for the different uses. If you are going to eventually use the image in printed materials then you'll need to make sure it will work for your publishing programs, too - let's avoid BMP files, shall we?

Know going in what you'll use the image for and where you'll use it and you'll save yourself a bunch of time later on.
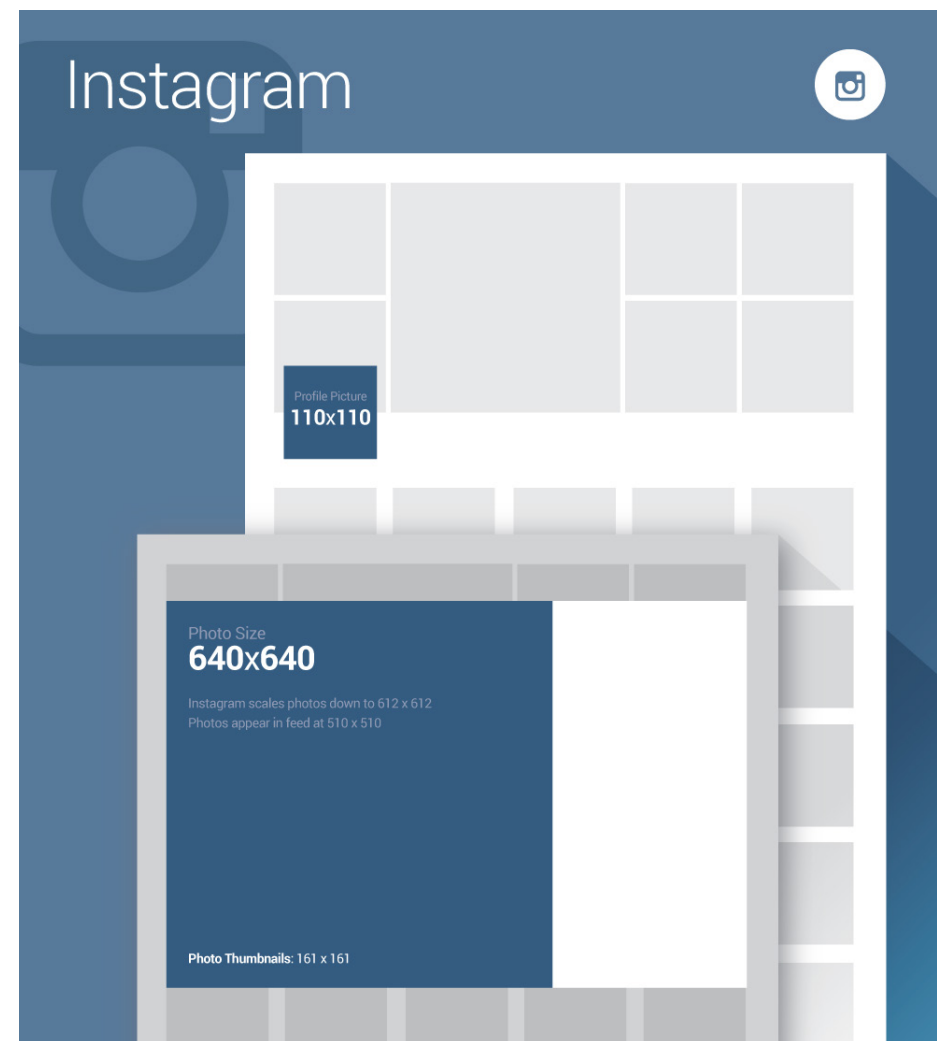

(Click picture for full infographic)

E Is For Exceptional

Sometimes you need your images to be different to anything ever published before. Unique, completely new, and never before seen.

And other times you just need a stock image that fits with the text.

How exceptional your image needs to be depends on how you'll use it and where. If it's just to make a point or reinforce a headline then perhaps you can get away with a stock image. If the point that you are making is a general one, perhaps this will be enough. Alternatively, if you are introducing something difficult to understand or complex, then sometimes a familiar stock image can help keep the reader on-track and understanding what is being outlined.

Other times, though, you are looking for something original. A header image for a long blog post, an image that is overlaid by a title, or some original elements in an ebook or white paper. In these cases you'll need to seek out something truly exceptional. This might mean contracting out to a professional designer or photographer, jumping onto Canva to design something yourself, taking an original shot with your own camera, or even buying the exclusive use rights to a photo from an agency.
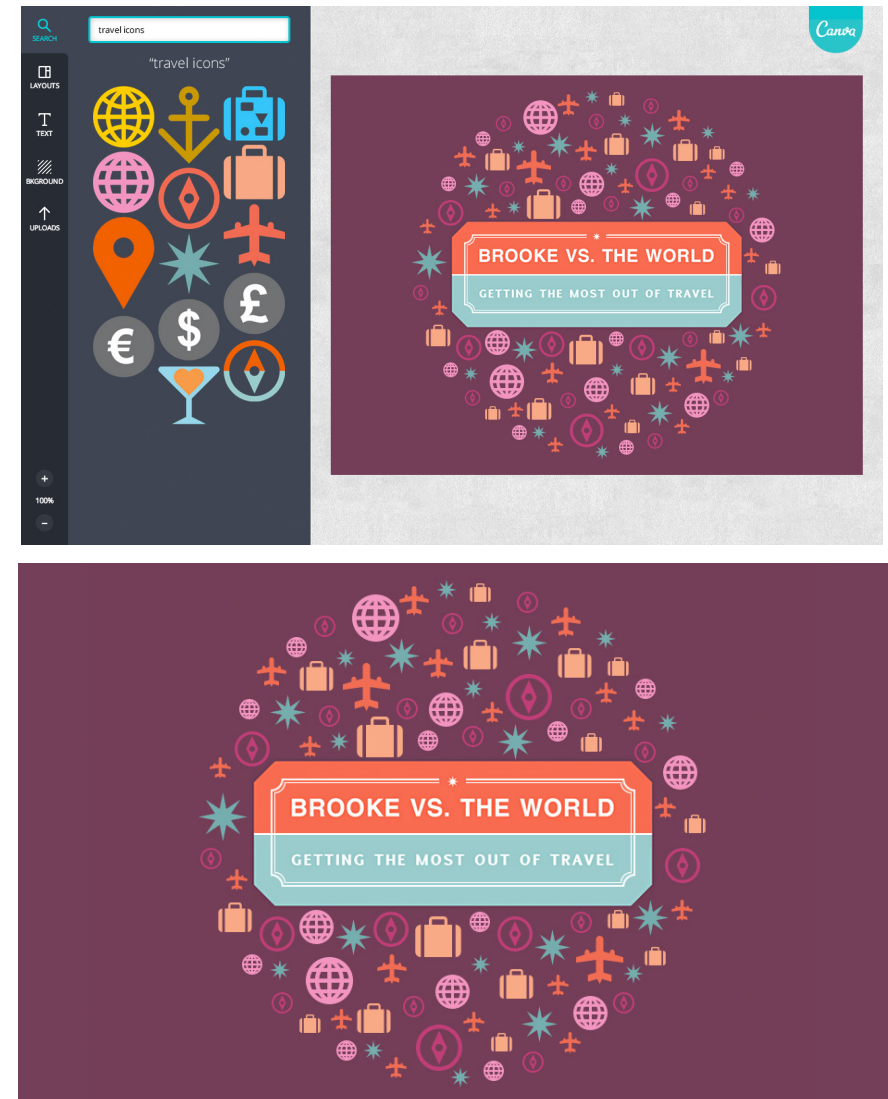
A Is For Alt Text

Before you use your image, you'll need to format it for your site. Part of that process is getting your alt-text right.

There's more on alt-text a little later in the eBook, but it is worthwhile considering when choosing your image, too. Is the connection between your image and the alt-text you'll be attaching to it strong enough? Will people searching for the image on **Google** or **Bing** Image Search fel like clicking on that image when they search for the keyword you've attached to it?

What seems creative to you and may well be attention grabbing might not help you all that much when it comes to a **Google** Image Search. make sure your alt-text keywords align with the image that you intend to use - creativity is good, abstract connections not-so-much.
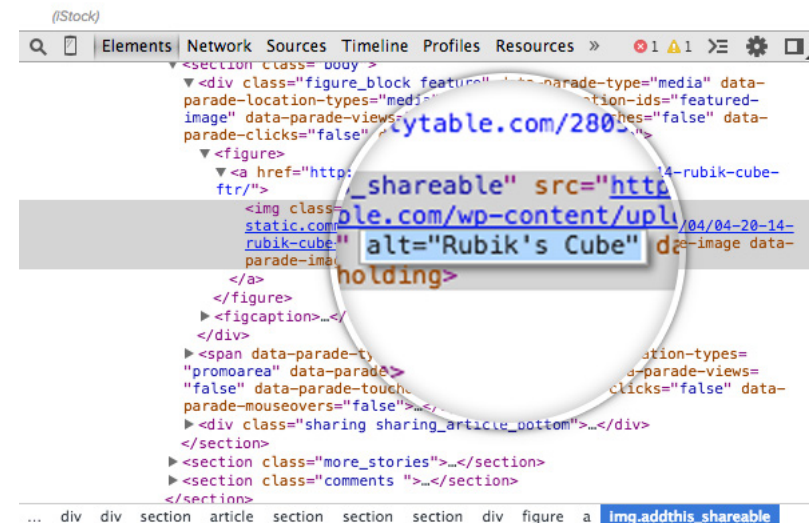
L Is For Legal

Finally, once you have your perfect image selected, you need to make sure you have the legal clearance to use it.

While it might be easy to find images online, the fact that you can find the image doesn't necessarily mean you have the right to use that image any way you would like. Most images are copyright restricted and if you use one without permission - whether wittingly or unwittingly, commercially or non-commercially - you could face fines or even legal action. **Getty Images**, in particular, is well known for going after even the smallest fish in the pond seeking damages for using their images without a license and at hundreds of dollars per infringement, the costs quickly add up.

Using a **Creative Commons** licensed image can help you get around these restrictions (we posted on the **Creative Commons** licenses just the other day) or hitting the public domain may be a good option for you, too. There are plenty of its where you can find images licensed for commercial and noncommercial re-use, and of course anything that you create yourself is safe for use on your site - you might even want to make sure that others aren't stealing your images!

Follow all these steps and you'll find yourself an image that is:

- the right **size**
- the best **quality**
- perfect for the required **use**
- as **exceptional** and unique as it needs to be
- aligned with image keyword search and **alt-text** requirements
- and cleared for **legal** use

Seventh Heaven

Seventh Heaven: 7 sites where you can find the perfect image for free

We've written this week about the potential problems that arise from downloading images from a search engine and using them without attribution. If you want to avoid falling into the legal traps that are set - and sprung - by image agencies, you'll need to find alternate sources for your images online.

Luckily, there are plenty of good options you can turn to.

Today we've gathered ten of our favorite image repositories where you can find high quality images. In each case we'll give you the link, describe the sites best features, the licensing restrictions where they apply, and the cost of using an image from the site.

Let's get started.

Pixabay

This is by far our favorite site for sourcing images. It has a strong search engine, includes only high quality images, offers downloads in different sizes and resolutions, and all the images are free to reuse in any way you would like. Well, almost all the images are free: the sole exceptions are the images that form the top line in any search which are from site owner **Shutterstock**. Avoid those - they are clearly marked and, hey, the company has to pay their bills, right? - and you'll be able to search, download, and use the images without spending a cent.

Find them: http://pixabay.com/en

Licence: None: you can "copy, modify, distribute and use the images, even for commercial purposes, all without asking permission and without paying attribution"

Cost: Free, as long as you avoid the **Shutterstock** images in the top line of results.

Unsplash

Unsplash is a great site for high quality images with an artistic bent. It is not as extensive as **Pixabay** but all of the images are free to use and available in high resolutions. That's a bonus, of course, but this also means you'll need to optimize the images for fast loading on your site. There is not a lot of sense in using a large, high res photo if you only need a 300 by 500 pixel shot to illustrate a point in a blog post.

Find them: https://unsplash.com

Licence: None: "All photos published on Unsplash are licensed under **Creative Commons Zero** which means you can copy, modify, distribute and use the photos for free, including commercial purposes, without asking permission from or providing attribution to the photographer or **Unsplash**."

Cost: Free.
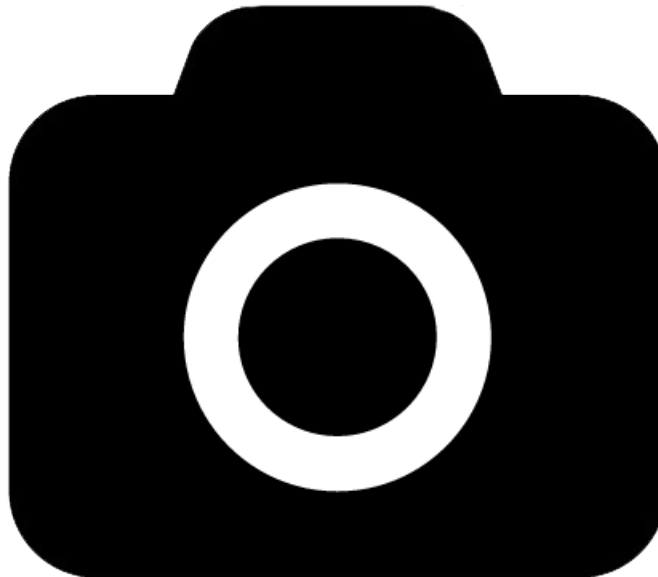
Pexels

Pexels is another great site for **Creative Commons Zero** licensed images. Five new images are added every day and all are high quality and high resolution. **Pexels** is organized around tags and helpfully offers suggestions for images that are similar, seemingly by connecting similarly tagged images. At the base of each image page you'll find links to relevant **Shutterstock** images - these are there to pay the bills and as long as you avoid clicking on them, you won't have to pay for the images you find on **Pexels**.

Find them: http://www.pexels.com

Licence: None: "all photos on **Pexels** are licensed under the **Creative Commons Zero** (CC0) license. This means you can copy, modify, distribute and perform the photos. The pictures are free for personal and even for commercial use. All without asking for permission or setting a link to the source."

Cost: Free.

Stock Up

Stock Up has high quality, high resolution stock photos. Their business model is a little different to Pexels and Unsplash in that it links to the free images on other sites rather than simply collecting the images themselves. Stock Up acts as search engine for 22 variously licensed repositories so it can be a great place to search multiple sites - including **Pexels** and **Unsplash** - from a single portal. Note, though, that the images returned from a search may be licensed in different ways - check the fine print for each image.

Find them: http://www.sitebuilderreport.com/stock-up

Licence: Various: "**Stock Up** is a search engine that searches across many free stock photo websites— each with their own individual usage guidelines. So refer to each individual website for usage guidelines."

Cost: Various, depending on license.

STOCK UP

StockVault

StockVault is a large repository - really large. Like 54,000 free images large. That makes for a massive database of images but the search capability of the site and the categories that most photos are grouped into help with navigation. This helps explain the more than 12 million downloads that **StockVault** has enabled since its launch. There's a catch, though: the images are only available for non-commercial use, so if you are planning a content piece that you'll end up selling or looking for an image to promote your company, you're out of luck.

Find them: http://www.stockvault.net

Licence: Non-commercial use only: "In digital format on non-commercial websites, multimedia presentations, broadcast film and video, cell phones; in printed non-commercial materials, magazines, newspapers, books, brochures, flyers, CD/DVD covers, etc; along with your non-commercial identity on business cards, letterhead, etc; to decorate your home, your office or any public place."

Cost: Free for non-commercial use

Raumrot

If **StockVault** is about delivering the largest repository around, then **Raumrot** is the opposite. Forget 54,000 images - **Raumrot**'s front page claims less than 600. The trade off in the size of the repository, though, signals an increase in quality and a consistency in resolution and image size across the site. What's more, the images at **Raumrot** are all cleared for commercial and non-commercial use alike - take them, use them, and just attribute the image to the author.

Find them: http://raumrot.com

Licence: Creative Commons Attribute the Author: "Some rights reserved. Please keep attribution to the creator. CC-BY."

Cost: Free.

New Old Stock

Sometimes you want a high quality stock image but not necessarily something brand new. You're looking for something older, and not 1980s old - really old. In that case **New Old Stock** has you covered. Here is a collection of public domain stock imagery, mostly black and white, and all free to use in campaigns that are non-commercial (and most for commercial use, too) should you wish. Downloading is simple and there's plenty to inspire your imagination.

Find them: New Old Stock

Licence: "These are to the best of my knowledge available in the public domain based on the institutions participation in the **Flickr Commons** and the rules of **Flickr Commons**. All photos are at the very least available for personal and non-commercial use..."

Cost: Free.

New Old Stock

Everything You Need To Know About Alt Text

There's a lot you can do to improve SEO on your site, but one of the simplest is optimizing the alt-text. It's not a major factor in your ranking, but every little adjustment counts and when it is this simple, how can you possibly refuse?

Here we outline the ten things you need to know about alt-text, SEO, and how to make your images work for you on **Google, Bing, Yahoo**, and beyond.

What is Alt-text?

Let's start with a confession. Alt-text is not alt-text. Alt-text is actually a contraction, a shorter version of 'alternative text' - and that provide a clue as to what alt-text actually is. Alt-text is a part of the code related to an image, and it serves as an alternative to the image if the image itself is unavailable. It looks something like this:

```
1
2
3  <img src="10-things-you-need-to-know-about-alt-text.png" alt="10 Things You Need to Know About Alt-Text Header">
4
5
```

Everything You Need To Know About Alt Text

Why is it important?

There are two groups of people that find alt-text really useful.

The first are those with accessibility issues. For example, people with difficulties reading webpages because of problems with their vision often use screen reading software to 'speak' the webpage to them. When this software encounters an image that, obviously, cannot be 'spoken', the software instead reads the alt-text out loud.

The second group of people that find alt-text useful are not people. They are robots. Specifically, they are the robot crawlers and bots that search engines send across the web to discover your site. The alt-text helps the bots to understand more about the context of the image and the text on the page, and will usually aid in ranking the image in specific image search engines, too. As a result, alt-text is an on-site SEO factor.

What must be included in the alt-text?

In simple terms, the alt-text should be a plain English description of the image. The more detailed the alt-text, the better off you will be. Imagine you are in the business of selling electronics and you include an image of a portable computer on your site. Which of the following is the best example of alt-text for an image on your site:

- computer;
- laptop computer;
- apple laptop computer;
- apple macbook air laptop computer; or
- apple macbook air 13 inch laptop computer

Yes, the last one is the best. If your electronics store is selling different types of laptop computers you'll want the image you use to include the alt-text that explains the brand, the size, and the model. Remember, one of the groups that relies on alt-text are those who cannot tell that your picture of a 'laptop computer' is from **Apple** and not **Lenovo** simply by looking.

Everything You Need To Know About Alt Text

Does this mean I should use keywords?

Yes. Using keywords in the alt-text is smart and provides additional ranking help for your page (hopefully you've optimized the image and the page to the same keyword).

Note, though, that search engines do not reward keyword 'stuffing'. Hence, you don't want to label that image of the laptop with the alt-text:

- apple laptop macbook laptop aid laptop 13 laptop inch laptop computer

Not only will you feel kinda silly typing that out, but you'll cop a SEO penalty for doing it.

Instead, keep it natural, keep it specific, keep the keywords, but don't 'stuff the alt-text with keywords hoping for a reward.

What about formatting?

Remember that example tag from earlier in the eBook?

```
1
2
3    <img src="10-things-you-need-to-know-about-alt-text.png" alt="10 Things You Need to Know About Alt-Text Header">
4
5
```

The part of the tag that comes first (10-things-you-need-to-know-about-alt-text.png) is the title of the file. If you downloaded that file then that would be the name of the film, hyphens included.

But note that the alt-text (10 Things You Need to Know About Alt-Text Header) doesn't include the hyphens? That's because, as mentioned earlier, the alt-text needs to be natural text. Imagine the screen reading software going over your text and match your alt-text to what you'd like someone to read aloud to another - easy, right?

Everything You Need To Know About Alt Text

How long should my alt-text be?

OK. So you understand that the alt-text is a natural, English language description of the image, but how long should that description be?

Testing in 2014 and 2015 suggests that **16 words is the maximum number of words that a Googlebot will crawl** in the alt-text of an image. In reality, 16 words is more than enough for most images. As demonstrated in our apple laptop example above, at seven words we have explained the make, model, size, and type of product. A couple more words might tell us the speed and memory of the product, but it would be a stretch to get out to 16 words.

Note that you can include more than 16 words, but the evidence suggests that the **Googlebot** just ignores these.

As long as you keep your alt-text to 16 words or less, fit in the keywords you are optimizing for, and match those keywords to the keywords on the page, you should be fine for length.

Should I use alt-text for every image on my site?

No, there are some exceptions. Let me explain.

You should use alt-text on the feature images on your blog, the images you use on your website, your headers, in your sidebars, in posts and on pages, and throughout any visual content that you produce and publish online that **Google** or other search engines will crawl.

So what do you avoid? In other words, what is left?

Things that don't serve a purpose as images are things to avoid adding alt-text to. Things like bullets used to make a list, or horizontal spacers or bars that serve to break up a webpage. A background element that is an image instead of part of the style sheet may not benefit from alt-text, and anything that doesn't add to the information or value of the page need not have alt-text.

Everything You Need To Know About Alt Text

Should I include information about the size of the image in the alt-text?

No. Keep you text to useful information that could serve as an alternative to the image in case it could not be rendered. While the alt-text '10 Things You Need to Know About Alt-Text Header' is useful, the alt-text '10 Things You Need to Know About Alt-Text Header 1024px512px' is not.

Leave the size of the images for the back end, and keep the alt-text for the keywords and descriptions that will help in your SEO efforts.

Conclusion

Getting your alt-text right is a small part of your on-site SEO effort, but it is an important part. If your images are optimized for search and if you make your site more accessible for those who have issues reading a site normally, you'll see a pay off in terms of rankings and in terms of traffic, too.

Conclusion

Copyblogger's Brian Clark once remarked that you shouldn't focus on having a great blog but instead focus on having a blog that is great for your readers. If this eBook could have only one message it is that using images on your blog is essential to the user experience of your readers, and the key to growing the number of readers you have.

Choosing the right image for your posts and for your blog will get easier with time, and you'll find that getting into the habit of adding alt-text to every image is something that becomes automatic after a while. You'll be able to negotiate the licensing issues around copyright and the **Creative Commons** with increasing ease, and your readers will find more reasons to stay on your site as your visual content improves.

"

Don't focus on having a great blog. Focus on producing a blog that's great for your readers.

Brian Clark from Copyblogger

DOZ

In 2013 DOZ was launched as the world's first crowd-powered online marketing service. DOZ's innovative platform helped brands to connect with a network of marketing experts around the world and draw on the local knowledge of professionals to run effective and profitable campaigns.

More than 300 brands around the world have connected with experts through the DOZ platform and worked with the DOZ team to manage their campaigns.

DOZ is the complete software service solution for every marketing team. Brands can take control of their campaigns and enjoy the space to strategize, organize, direct, and communicate with both internal and external teams. They can manage digital assets, plan and cooperate on campaigns, manage marketing tasks and quality assurance programs, and collaborate with marketing experts in a secure online environment.