

The logo for iMATAG, featuring the word "iMATAG" in a bold, white, sans-serif font. A small teal square is positioned to the left of the letter "i".

iMATAG

The title "Branded Content Protection" is written in a large, bold, black font. Below it, the subtitle "How to Track Your Images and Videos Online?" is written in a slightly smaller, bold, black font. The text is centered within a teal rectangular box that has a blue border on its right and bottom sides.

Branded Content Protection
How to Track Your Images and Videos Online?

A close-up photograph of a person's hands typing on a black laptop keyboard. The background is dark and filled with digital-themed graphics, including binary code (0s and 1s), a padlock icon, and various letters and numbers in a light blue color.

**AN INVISIBLE PROTECTION TO VISIBLY PROTECT
YOUR BUSINESS**



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A GUIDE TO PROTECTING YOUR VISUAL ASSETS.



Protecting your brand is important to your business. Whether you need to safeguard a major product launch or track counterfeits, relying on hashtag mentions, keywords, or logo usage is not sufficient in today's rapidly changing environment. Brand theft is real.

In an era of digital events and livestreams, securing your images and videos prelaunch is vital. The good news is that there are technologies that make it easy and fail-safe.

And once your new product launches, these same technologies make tracking your successful campaign easy while protecting your brand and your customers.

In this guide, **we will take you through the latest technologies to help you track your valuable digital assets, set you on the right path to a successful product launch, and safeguard your brand.**

Ready? Let's get started.



Part 01

Why is protecting your visual assets essential today?



The leak of your prelaunch images and videos are costly to future sales and expose your brand to counterfeiters and scam websites.

PRELAUNCH RISK PREVENTION—DON'T LET YOUR VALUABLE VISUAL ASSETS FALL INTO THE WRONG HANDS.

Protecting your visual content before a major product launch or reveal is critical not only to your brand's image but also to ensuring that current product sales remain strong.

The build-up to a new launch is important. If a leak occurs, the buzz surrounding your new product is lost and your hard work is compromised. Your team is disappointed, and the mistrust among individuals both inside and outside of the organization also hurts team spirit.

Unfortunately, instead of working on the launch, everyone is trying to figure out who leaked the visual content and how.



Furthermore, agencies and third-party partners you admire for their work and with whom you've worked hard to establish great relationships often feel at fault—when, in fact, they were working hard to ensure everyone abided by the strict rules of confidentiality.

And the fact is, **finding the source is often impossible.**

When your visual brand content gets into the wrong hands, it means valuable time is lost, trust among team members is decreased, and your brand is exposed to counterfeiters.

IMPACT OF A PRELAUNCH LEAK.



Fall in sales.



Loss of valuable time and money.



Compromised trust among teams.



Easier for counterfeiters to sell fakes prelaunch.



CASE STUDY – CONSUMER ELECTRONICS

A globally recognized smartphone brand fights leaks by invisibly watermarking all its digital assets.

CHALLENGE

Faced with the growing risk of pre-reveal leaks of future models, a globally recognized smartphone brand required a robust, tamper-proof technology to secure its visual assets without diminishing image quality.

SOLUTION

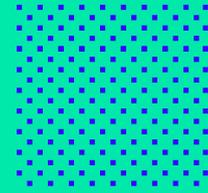
Using the IMATAG Leaks solution, the brand embedded invisible watermarks on all its prelaunch visuals, including those sent to employees, agencies, and commercial partners.

RESULT

The brand systematically and invisibly watermarks all its visual assets, providing a more serene workflow and a secure way of detecting and stopping damaging leaks.

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There was no question of deteriorating the quality of our renderings, as did other solutions that we had already tested. The IMATAG watermark passed all the robustness and imperceptibility tests conducted by our creative operations team.

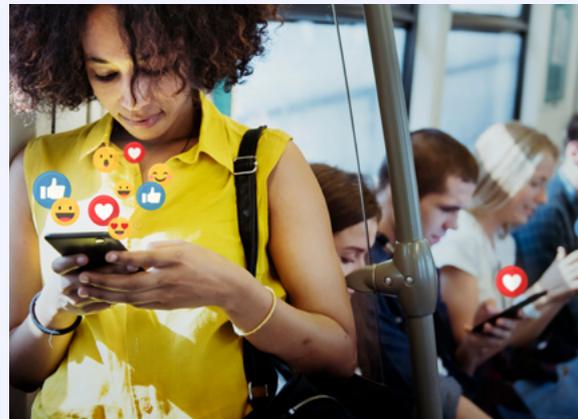


S.W.*,
senior graphic designer

BRAND INVESTMENT SAFEGUARD—DON'T JEOPARDIZE YOUR COSTLY IMAGERY INVESTMENT.

Today, brands rely heavily on visual content. Social media, livestreams, virtual events, and other digital channels are critical to a successful launch. Outdoing the competition requires a heavy focus on visual imagery. The investment is substantial. With so many people involved, controlling and monitoring who has access to important content is almost impossible.

Protecting your brand doesn't end once products launch. The ongoing visual image of your brand is just as important. Were photos or videos misused or modified so as to degrade the brand and damage the company's image? Have copyrights and intellectual property (IP) rights been respected?





CASE STUDY – REAL ESTATE

An international real estate investment and property management software company safeguards its clients' valuable imagery by invisibly watermarking digital assets.

CHALLENGE

In real estate, investment in high-quality images is a must. Safeguarding its clients' valuable digital assets was a growing concern due to the proliferation of imagery theft. The company initially tried to detect stolen images with reverse image search, but matches were inaccurate, and authentication was impossible, time-consuming, and didn't provide the immediate theft detection needed.

SOLUTION

Using the IMATAG Monitor solution, the company embedded invisible watermarks on all of its clients' images. They now process tens of millions of images daily and are automatically alerted of identical matches. The embedded watermark provides the authentication needed to take immediate legal action.

RESULT

Thanks to the Monitor solution, the company offers its clients a reliable and secure process to detect and stop the illegal usage of images. At the same time, it builds a loyal customer base by offering better services at lower costs.

CUSTOMER SAFETY PRIORITY—DON'T LET YOUR CUSTOMERS FIND SCAM PRODUCTS BEFORE YOU.

Beyond protecting your brand image is the most important factor, which is **safeguarding your customers**. The rise of online shopping means more opportunities for your customers to find and buy your products, but it also means a higher risk of counterfeit products.

Shoppers today can't always distinguish between real and fake. Your customers may think they are buying the authentic product when, in fact, it is fake. **Finding counterfeiters before your customers do so is critical**. Not only are counterfeit products damaging to sales and brand image, but they also pose real safety risks to your customers.



COUNTERFEIT SALES DETERRENCE— DON'T LET SCAMMERS BEAT YOU TO THE MARKET.

Prevention means **identifying the illegal usage of your visual brand content.**

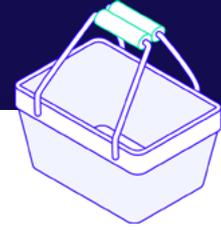
Often counterfeiters use a brand's images to sell their products. Spotting these images before a potential customer does so is now a growing part of protecting a brand. And it often starts before a product is launched.

Counterfeiters know that maximizing sales means setting up fake online stores showcasing new products. These scam websites use prelaunch digital assets not only to sell counterfeit products but also to make them.

Discovering resellers and distributors who are not authorized to sell your products is also a concern. **Controlling the distribution of merchandise is important in protecting your brand.**

Where a product is sold is just as important as how it is sold. Stopping illegal sales early is vital. Finding those infringing product distribution agreements can often start by locating your visual content online.

In a study commissioned by the International Chamber of Commerce, the global economic value of counterfeiting and piracy is estimated to reach **\$4.2 trillion by 2022**. The continual increase in traded counterfeit and pirated products is partly spurred by the growth of e-commerce. It's no surprise that the range of products affected by illegal activities is broad, including luxury consumer products such as leather goods, everyday consumer products such as toys and pharmaceuticals, and business-to-business products such as spare parts and chemicals.



CASE STUDY – CONSUMER GOODS

Thanks to invisible watermarking, a creator of licensed collectible toys, apparel, homeware, and accessories safely shares prelaunch photos to its network of global distributors and retailers.

CHALLENGE

Faced with a rising risk of counterfeit products hitting the market before launch, the creator of licensed consumer goods required a way to quickly spot leaks of images sent to its global network of distributors and retailers.

SOLUTION

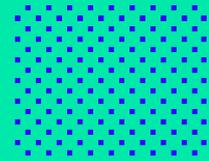
The timing of a reveal means sharing digital assets one month before the launch of a major film or video game. Using the IMATAG Leaks and Monitor solutions, the creator easily integrated the invisible watermarking process into its workflow and now securely shares images to its external network prelaunch.

RESULT

The creator seamlessly integrated invisible watermarking within its workflows, providing continual monitoring for potential leaks while assessing post-launch image usage.

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We were having a very difficult time tracking where leaks were coming from without stamping digital assets with visible watermarks. Now, thanks to IMATAG, we can track where leaks come from quickly.



L.S.*,
Retail marketing

*We deliberately anonymize all our success stories in order to protect the identity of IMATAG leaks customers.



Part 02

What technologies are available today to track your digital assets, and how do they differ?



Quickly knowing how your images and videos are being used and by whom is essential to stopping illegal and damaging usage. Finding the right technology solution is essential.

As we've talked about, there are critical reasons why **you should track your visual content**. In this section, we'll look at the various platforms and technologies available and how they differ. The aim is to reduce the reliance on manual and resource-intensive processes while at the same time ensuring high reliability and the fast identification of your visual assets online.

Reverse image search

The reverse image search is a popular way of locating or verifying images online. Its popularity is more for its ease of use than its effectiveness. Google Image Search is by far the most common way of searching photos using this method. Most search engines offer some form of image search functionality with varying levels of accuracy and results. You'll also find platforms providing similar services.



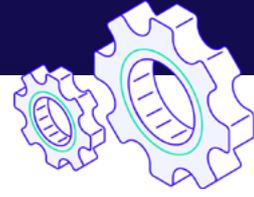
Whether you use a search engine or a paid image search tool, the accuracy of each is primarily based on its proprietary algorithm and the online images it scans into its database. If you've searched images using a search engine, you've probably found that the results vary depending on the platform or search engine used and whether you search for a specific image or a description. **As you'll see, if you do a search across a couple of platforms, each will show different results.**

DRAWBACK #1

MANUAL VERIFICATION OF IMAGES.

Besides low accuracy, a major drawback of reverse image search (using a search engine) is that **it requires manual verification and little or no batch functionality.** This means you'll need to load the images into the search engine one by one and then manually go through the proposed listing of visually similar images.





CASE STUDY – AUTOMOTIVE

A global automotive lifestyle tire brand keeps competing or unauthorized websites from stealing its highly sought-after photos by using invisible watermarking visual assets.

CHALLENGE

For a widely recognized brand in the fast-growing SUV and 4x4 aftermarket segment, securing a substantial investment in visual images was a major concern. Not only were the brand's high-quality images important to sales, but the images were also often stolen by competing or unauthorized sites. Stopping illegal photo theft was becoming increasingly time-consuming and often produced «false positives» using the standard reverse image search on general search engines.

SOLUTION

Using IMATAG Monitor, the tire brand puts an invisible watermark on all its prized images before placing them on its website or distributing them to the brand's global online retailers. Using the solution's extensive crawling capabilities, sites illegally using their images are quickly located.

RESULT

Thanks to the IMATAG Monitor solution, the brand quickly locates stolen images, certifies theft, and sends cease and desist orders to infringing sites. Seamless integration into its workflows means digital assets are automatically invisibly watermarked—avoiding endless false positives and cumbersome manual searches.

DRAWBACK #2

LIMITED BATCHING.

Some paid image search platforms allow for batch processing but still require manual identification of exact image matches. These paid platforms' accuracy is directly dependent on the websites crawled, so **it is essential to know the industries or types of sites crawled before signing up.** They often specialize in specific industries, and as such, their database of crawled images only includes a defined list of websites.

As brands increasingly use video, you'll want to understand if the platform provides a search function and how.

DRAWBACK #3

PRICING BASED ON VOLUME AND NOT ON ACCURACY.

Pricing is usually per image regardless of if a match is found. So, you pay for the search with no control or guarantee of match reliability. You'll also want to know the image formats accepted and if their crawlers can scan PDF files.

And, if monitoring for leaked images is a concern for your brand, you'll want to understand how often they crawl targeted sites and index images because **speed is critical to lessen the proliferation of the stolen images.** Even if you locate the stolen images, unfortunately, you'll not be able to precisely know who breached a non-disclosure agreement or even, unwittingly, shared the images to someone else who leaked them.

DRAWBACK #4

LIMITED OR NO SOCIAL MEDIA CRAWLING.

If social media is important to you, then **you'll need to ensure that the image search service crawls these platforms—many do not.** This is especially true if social media influencers are indispensable in promoting and selling your brand's products. Social media's growing popularity as a sales channel or advertising platform means more opportunities for counterfeiters to use authentic brand images on their social channels.

Due to the increasing volume, brands face an uphill battle to spot illegal usage of images. In its latest report, GhostData, an independent research group focused on social media, reported that the counterfeit market accounted for \$1.2 trillion in 2020. Using other methods such as looking for hashtags leading to sellers of counterfeit products is often not effective, as counterfeiters avoid them to remain invisible.

DRAWBACK #5

LIMITED ABILITY TO MONITOR ROUTINELY SPECIFIC SITES.

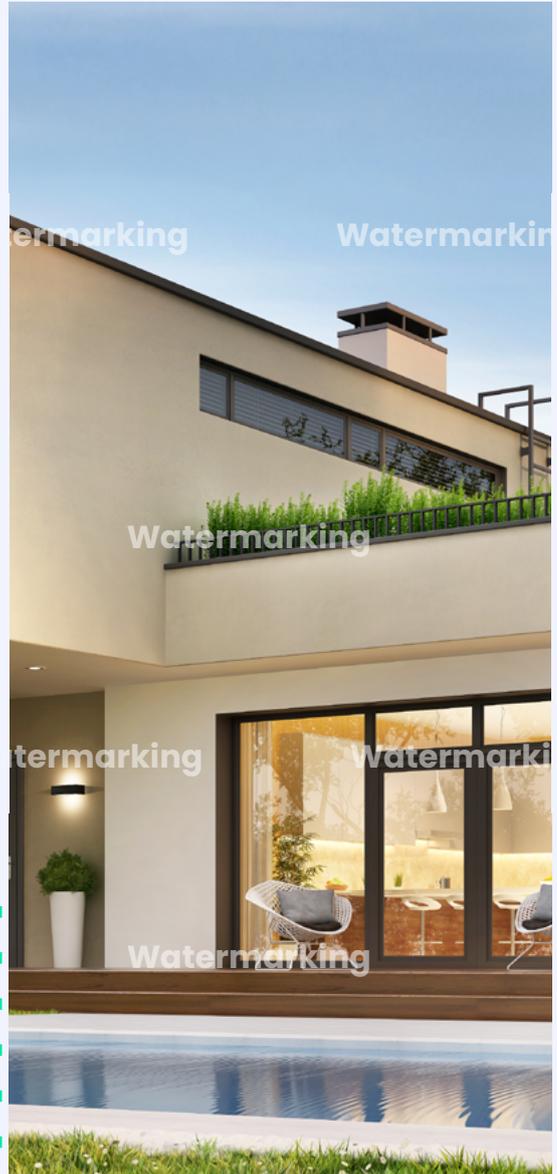
As we've spoken about, **brands often want to monitor specific websites** such as distributors, marketplace sellers, influencers, and media to see how their digital assets are used. If this is a necessary feature for your brand, you'll want to ensure that the search engine crawls the sites or accounts, as not all do.

Visible watermarking

You've perhaps seen or even purchased stock imagery or videos marked with a visible watermark—or even watermarked your brand's visual assets. This type of watermark is used to either brand visual content or to discourage unauthorized usage.

While the process of watermarking is mainly digital today, it actually dates back centuries. Back then, a watermark was only visible when it was either held up to a light or wet. The process only happened while the paper was wet, thus the name 'watermark.'

Today, when we talk about watermarking digital assets, it is the process of superimposing a logo, image, or text onto the front of a photo or within a video. **The idea is that the watermark is visible.** It can be as subtle or as prominent as you like. The watermark can either cover the entire frame or be small and discreetly placed into the corner of your image.



DRAWBACK #1

IMAGE IS VISUALLY DISTORTED.

You may want your watermark to feature copyright information, an identifier like your logo, or status information like 'confidential.' Why you are watermarking your digital assets will greatly determine how you will visually embed the watermark. If you are watermarking a digital image to protect it from being used illegally, then you'd want to **add it where removal will alter or make it impossible to use the image.**

Unfortunately, this distorts the photo or video, makes it difficult to view, and lessens its quality. You may want the watermark to blend in to avoid this, so it still promotes the brand. If you're distributing visual content prelaunch, **you may add text such as 'do not distribute'** to keep it from being unwillingly or inadvertently shared.

What's important is understanding why you are watermarking your digital content clearly, and what you are watermarking.

DRAWBACK #2

EASILY REMOVED MANUALLY OR VIA AN AI-BASED PLATFORM.

Just as the process of adding a watermark is simple, so is removing it. Often, brands will add a watermark, hoping it will protect them from illegal usage and copyright infringement. **Unfortunately, there is no legal protection,** and depending on where the watermark is placed on the image or video, software tools are readily available that can easily remove watermarks. And **these same tools can also remove all traces of the original file,** meaning you're not able to locate who stole your image and how it was stolen.

If the watermark is placed outside of the main image, then it can also be easily cropped out. Even if you decide to put a watermark across the entire image for added protection, **some sites can now automatically detect and remove watermarks from photos using artificial intelligence.** These tools work at scale, process large numbers of images, and produce high-quality, watermark-free images. Demand for these services is growing as popular marketplaces penalize or ban images with visible watermarks.

DRAWBACK #3

LIMITED BRAND IMAGE PROTECTION.

Yes, a watermark can be used to help you build your brand, but only until it is removed. Thievery is as simple as right-clicking and pressing Save As or taking a screenshot. The file is loaded into a watermark remover site that permanently deletes the uploaded file from their server and saves only the watermark-free modified file—protecting the perpetrators. The stolen images or videos also can be easily watermarked by the perpetrator and made to look as if they are the owners.

DRAWBACK #4

IMAGES BLOCKED ON MOST E-COMMERCE SITES.

Protecting your brand on e-commerce marketplaces is a growing concern for brands. With more of your customers buying online, safeguarding the usage of your visual assets on these sites is essential. Adding a visible watermark to product images is one way to protect your brand on e-commerce sites. Unfortunately, these sites and marketplaces **consider watermarks as obstructing elements and block their usage,** requiring brands to use only non-watermarked images.

Therefore, brands are potentially exposed to illegal usage and counterfeiting.

Visible watermarking of your visual assets provides a layer of protection but doesn't give you the peace of mind that your work won't end up in the wrong hands or that your brand is protected.

Invisible Watermarking

A newer technology used to both monitor and track a brand's visual assets is referred to as invisible watermarking. Unlike other technologies earlier discussed, this type of watermark is invisible and is embedded within an image or video frame. Even though its usage has evolved, the technology in and of itself has been around for more than 20 years. **In fact, its use is as fascinating as the technology.**



ADVANTAGE #1

TIME-TESTED SOLUTION.



Invisible watermarking gained popularity due to the varied ways it can be applied across a broad spectrum of mediums and uses ranging from images, video, audio, source code, maps to 3D models, DNA sequences, and even chemical compounds. Remember that Blu-ray™ Disc player that wouldn't play a disc? Or do you ever wonder how the famous Nielsen TV ratings work? Each uses invisible audio watermarking to detect the player piracy or, for Nielsen, what TV show a family is watching.

ADVANTAGE #2

NO DISTORTION OR DEGRADATION OF IMAGES AND VIDEOS.

The magic of an invisible watermark is that it is imperceivable and does not distort or degrade the quality of the medium being monitored or protected.

Due to its virtually undetectable and indestructible nature, it is a fail-safe approach to protecting and monitoring a brand's images and videos, whether purely digital or even in print.



As an invisible watermark does not obstruct or alter the visual appearance, it provides brands like yours with **a way to ensure usage compliance and intelligent monitoring** without compromising your product's and brand's beauty and appeal.

ADVANTAGE #3

DOUBLE-DUTY STRENGTH TO TRACK AND EVEN MONITOR VISUAL ASSETS WITH EASE.



If you're looking for a way to monitor and track your visual assets, then **invisible watermarking technology is a viable option for your brand.** Whether you're worried about leaks of a prelaunch livestream, images, or videos, or whether you need to monitor your digital assets usage patterns, you probably need a single-source-of-truth approach.

By placing an invisible watermark on your brand's visual assets, **you'll be able to track how they are being used online, by whom, where, and when.** This deep level of intelligence means you'll be able to precisely track and continually monitor where and how your visual assets are used.

Even more, you won't be bothered with false positives that are common in a standard browser image search, especially for hard-to-distinguish items.

ADVANTAGE #4

INTEGRATION WITH DAM FOR A FRICTIONLESS WORKFLOW.

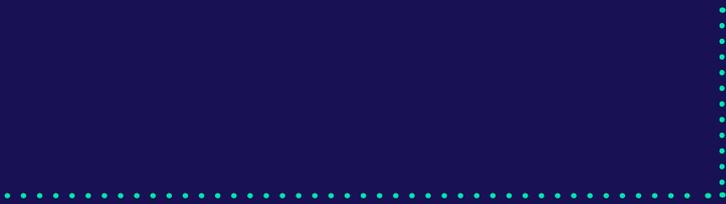
If your brand uses a digital asset management (DAM) system, you'll want to look for a service provider that provides seamless integration. Through an application programming interface (API), a software intermediary that allows two applications to talk to each other, **you can link your DAM to an invisible watermarking service.**





Part 03

How to use its strenghts to protect your brand images and videos?



The inside story of invisible watermarking.

By now, you're probably wondering how invisible watermarking technology works and what types of services and offerings you should look for.

As we've spoken about, invisible watermarking has been around for more than two decades, and **its usage is often extremely discrete. Hollywood has been using it for years to track and catch piracy of blockbuster movies in theaters.**



Even though the technology is sometimes referred to as digital watermarking or image steganography, what **makes it robust, tamper-proof, and invisible** is how a secret code is placed at the pixel level in a photo and even a video. In fact, **the pixel values are changed to convey a secret message.**

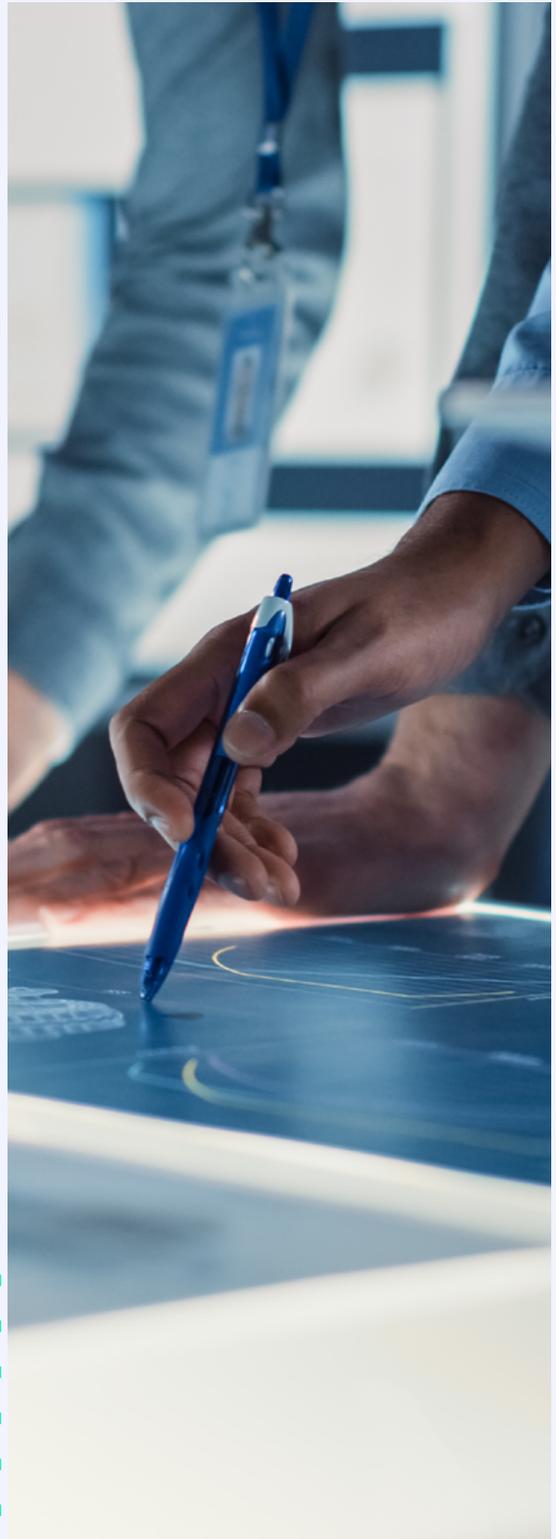
This secret message is written in a binary code that a computer can only decode. This technique is so robust that even if an invisibly watermarked photo or video is cropped, color-edited, compressed, inverted, reframed, recalibrated, screen-shot, or even printed, **the embedded binary code survives.**

INVISIBLE WATERMARKING MEANS YOU AVOID COSTLY LEAKS BY FAST-TRACKING YOUR DIGITAL ASSETS.

Remember when we talked about the single-source-of-truth approach? Well, this is where invisible watermarking makes it possible. When the binary (secret code) is embedded within an image's pixels, **the information can be as specific as you want it to be.**

For example, if you are in charge of a big product reveal and your team is working on all the prelaunch images, then you'd ideally want to avoid any leaks. You'd also like to know who has access to a specific image, so if a leak did accidentally or inadvertently happen, you'd know quickly and **be able to trace it back to the source.** Thanks to invisible watermarking, this is possible. Each image or video is individually watermarked with a code unique to its recipient. A security key can be set up for added protection, whereas only the watermarking software can detect and read the embedded message.

This is also a good way to protect and even ensure that **journalists and publishers aren't susceptible to leaks.**



IF DONE CORRECTLY, INVISIBLE WATERMARKING CAN HELP YOU OUTSMART COMPRESSION.

Due to the growing importance of e-commerce marketplaces and social media channels, **invisible watermarking provides an optimal way to monitor specific accounts and sites.** Because social media sites remove metadata and compress images, tracking and monitoring usage is almost impossible, except with digital watermarking. Even with the metadata stripped from your images, by embedding the invisible watermark, you're able to retrace your images back to their source. And, depending on the service provider you choose for your invisible watermarking, **the embedded code's resistance to even the most severe compression can be impressive.**

INVISIBLE WATERMARKING MEANS NO MORE MANUAL IMAGE-MATCH CHECK TO GET THE ACCURACY YOUR BRAND DEMANDS.

Monitoring images is difficult for some brands as their products are similar to competitors' or previous models. This is often the case for products like jeans, tires, and tennis shoes. Trying to locate digital images through a simple image search is often impossible. **By embedding an invisible watermark, you can identify your image quickly and accurately.** Even if these images are screenshot or downloaded and broadcast out onto websites or online magazines, you'll be able to locate them. What's more, **you'll be able to detect modifications to the original images.**



INVISIBLE WATERMARKING MEANS NO MORE TAMPERING WITH YOUR VISUAL ASSETS.

So, you're probably asking if it is possible to tamper with the embedded code. The answer is yes and no. If you choose heavy-duty invisible watermarking software, tampering with the embedded code is virtually impossible, even if the image is altered or compressed.



INVISIBLE WATERMARKING MEANS YOU'RE IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT.

To understand if and how your images and videos are used on or by specific websites, marketplaces, social media accounts, influencers, and your distributors and resellers, **invisible watermarking is the best way to quickly and accurately monitor and track usage patterns.**

You'll not only save time and money, but **you will also know the types of visual assets that resonate best with your audience.**



Part 04

How to select the right technology and solution for your brand?

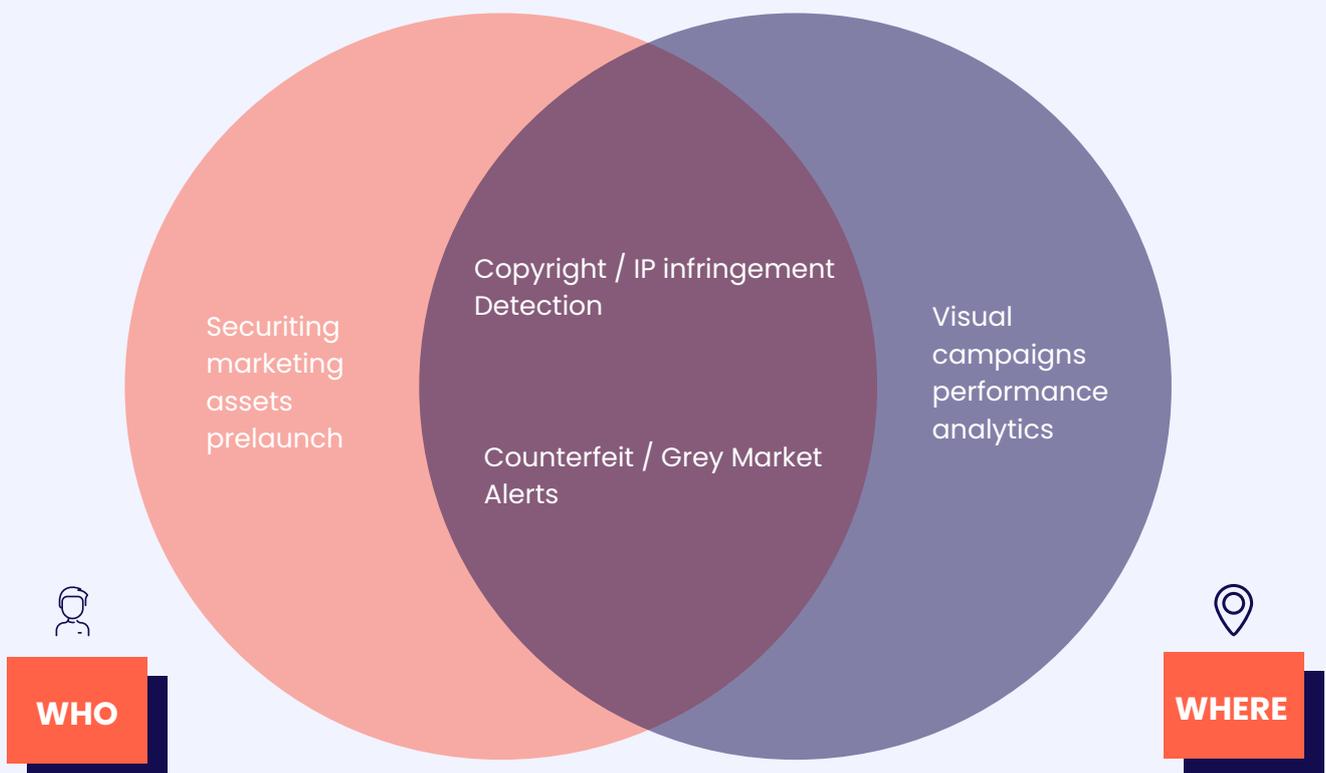


In the previous sections, we've taken an in-depth look at the technology and solutions currently available today. **The best one will greatly depend on your brand's overriding needs.** You'll need to ask yourself if accuracy is critical. Are leaks a major issue? Is monitoring important? Are your teams concerned about potential misuse before reveals? Are counterfeits or grey markets a growing concern? Whatever your requirements, the solution needs to adapt to your brand.

To help you find the best solution for your brand and teams, we've put together an easy-to-use chart that lists the technologies discussed and matched them with the key benefits and features to consider when selecting the right solution.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR ?

Depending on the context, your need will be to know WHO was the initial source of the leak/theft, or WHERE your content is being used.



NEED TO KNOW WHERE YOUR IMAGES ARE BEING USED

	«Search by image» on search engines	Reverse image monitoring solutions	Reverse image monitoring with certified match
Batch Processing	no		
Automatic Image Match Verification	no	 (With similary errors)	 
Continual Match Reporting	no		
Video Tracking	no		 (Imatag)
DAM Frictionless Integration	no	Depends on API aviability	 (Imatag)
Custom crowling	no	Limited	 Public Account (Imatag)
Social Media Crawling	no	Limited	 (Imatag)
Youtube Channel Crawler	Limited	Limited	

NEED TO KNOW WHO WAS THE INITIAL SOURCE OF LEAK/THEFT

	Visual Watermark	Invisible Watermark	IMATAG
Image Degradation / Distortion	Visible		
Tamper-Proof	No	✓	✓ ✓
Compression Resistant		✓	✓ ✓
Fast Leak Detection			✓ ✓
Digital Image Integrity		✓	✓ ✓
Video Protection			✓ ✓
Simplified, Workflow Integration		Moderate	✓ ✓



Are you ready to protect your images and videos? Let us help. To learn more about IMATAG solutions, visit us at [Imatag.com](https://imatag.com).

Ready to take the next step? Book your free consultation and demo with our team of experts.

[Need a demo ?](#)



IMATAG

We are experts in Digital Watermarking and Visual recognition.
Our mission is to secure and accelerate businesses relying on visual content.



www.imatag.com