CCC | RightsDirect

Copyright Clearance Center

2025 Copyrighted Content Usage Trends

Information Seeking and Usage Study

OUTSELL®

CCC Executive Summary

The use and sharing of published content is critical to accelerating knowledge and powering innovation at organizations around the world, yet the sharing of third-party published materials without first obtaining the necessary permissions carries potentially significant risk. Since 2007, CCC has partnered with Outsell to conduct independent, quantitative research and analysis into how copyrighted content is used in a variety of industries. Using the latest study data, CCC presents analysis and recommendations to organizations that depend on published content.

Businesses in nearly every industry are rapidly embracing artificial intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI, to revolutionize their operations, enhance productivity, and drive innovation. More than half (52%) of survey respondents report using AI regularly, with executives being well ahead of the curve — 75% use AI frequently. This widespread adoption is transforming how users interact with content and is rapidly becoming a major factor contributing to compliance risk.

Many companies are discussing their copyright policy more frequently with employees. This has resulted in heightened awareness of copyright considerations, yet employees of organizations of all types and sizes continue to report they're sharing copyrighted content in ways that may put their organizations at risk. Ordinary content exchanges that come so naturally in the digital world may increase the risk of copyright infringement, leading to costly lawsuits or settlements, and they may also affect brand reputation.

Responses to the survey indicate that executives have the highest level of copyright policy awareness compared to other job roles, but their actual behavior is not always aligned with their companies' policies, underscoring the elevated compliance risks associated with senior decision-makers. Executives are sharing externally published content more often and with more people than middle management and individual contributors do. Ironically, executives express concern about the implications of copyright infringement but are also most likely to share any and all relevant information, including published materials, to support their organization in a competitive situation.

The frequency of published content sharing and the number of people with whom that information is shared has increased across all the job roles and verticals surveyed in the 2025 study, meaning that total sharing has increased. On average, respondents are sharing work-related content 8.1 times per week with 17 people. Considering that 48% of that content comes from external sources such as scientific journals, news sources, and other publications, there is the potential for 66 instances of unlicensed sharing per employee, per week.

The latest content usage trends from the 2025 Copyrighted Content Usage Trends reportreaffirm the importance of having a solid copyright policy in place, taking steps to support employee education and communication about copyright, and deploying appropriate compliance solutions such as an Annual Copyright License to support a streamlined content workflow. Altogether, it's about protecting the organization while empowering employees to collaborate through sharing content and making use of the latest technology. Read on for detailed data, insights, and information from the latest study, as well as a list of suggested actions you can take to address content challenges and encourage copyright compliance.

The Newest Data Is Here

Since 2007, CCC has partnered with Outsell, the voice of the data, information, and analytics economy, to conduct independent research and analysis into content consumption in the workplace by professionals across industries. Content usage trends from the 2025 Information Seeking and Usage Study offer insights into how employees think about, use, and share copyrighted content, including with AI tools.

Who was surveyed?

To achieve a **95%** confidence level in the study findings with a margin of error of plus or minus **3.9%**, Outsell surveyed 584 professionals in 8 countries who:

- Are employed full-time by an organization with at least 1,000 employees (average # of employees: 51,284)
- Use externally published[1] content in the course of doing their jobs across various primary functions and job levels
- Are enterprise knowledge workers across 14 industries:

  – Finance/Insurance: 11%
  – Hospitals & Healthcare Providers: 11%
  – Wholesale/Retail: 11%
  – Computers & Electronic Components: 11%
  – Transportation & Automotive: 11%
  – Consulting & Professional Services: 5%
  – Food/Beverage & Agriculture: 5%
  – Electric & Gas Utilities: 5%

  – Life Sciences: 5% [2]
  – Software & Systems: 5%
  – Chemicals & Plastics: 5%
  – Oil & Gas Extraction: 5%
  – Law Firms: 5%
  – Aerospace & Defense: 4%

[1] Externally published content refers to third-party content such as news publications, scholarly journals, trade and business publications, etc.
[2] For the purpose of this report, Life Sciences refers to pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, medical devices, and scientific equipment.

SQ3. Which of the following describes your organization's primary line of business?
SQ4: Approximately how many people work at your entire company?

Respondent Location

Location	%
United States	44%
Germany	14%
Japan	8%
Austria	7%
The Netherlands	7%
UK	7%
India	7%
Switzerland	7%
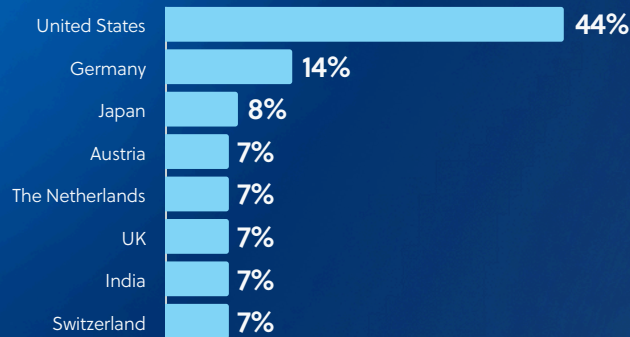
SQ1. In which country or region do you currently reside?

Job Level

- 47% Middle mgmt / Supervisor
- 26% Individual contributor
- 27% Executive

Annual Revenue

16%	18%	22%	43%	1%
$100M– $250M	$250M– $500M	$500M– $1B	>$1B+	Not sure
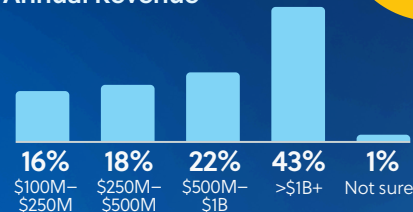
Q3. What was your organization's approximate annual revenue last year?

Importance of content

Published content is at the heart of innovation. **The ease with which teams can access and share published information, such as news, journal articles, research reports, and more, can influence the pace at which organizations and their teams drive innovation and deliver products and services to the market.** Executives report that they depend on an average of 13 critical-to-job print or digital publications; middle managers (7.7) and individual contributors (8.1) rely on fewer. Of the publications accessed, executives report using 8.6 publications per week compared with middle managers (11.5) and individual contributors (7.4).

Across the 14 verticals surveyed, employees at all job levels rely on an average of 9 print or digital publications they deem critical to their innovative research and work. At the high end, employees in Electric and Gas Utilities (17.6), Computers and Electronics (13), Transportation and Automotive (12.2), Life Sciences (10.7), Oil and Gas Extraction (10.3), and Food/Beverage and Agriculture (10) rely on even more.

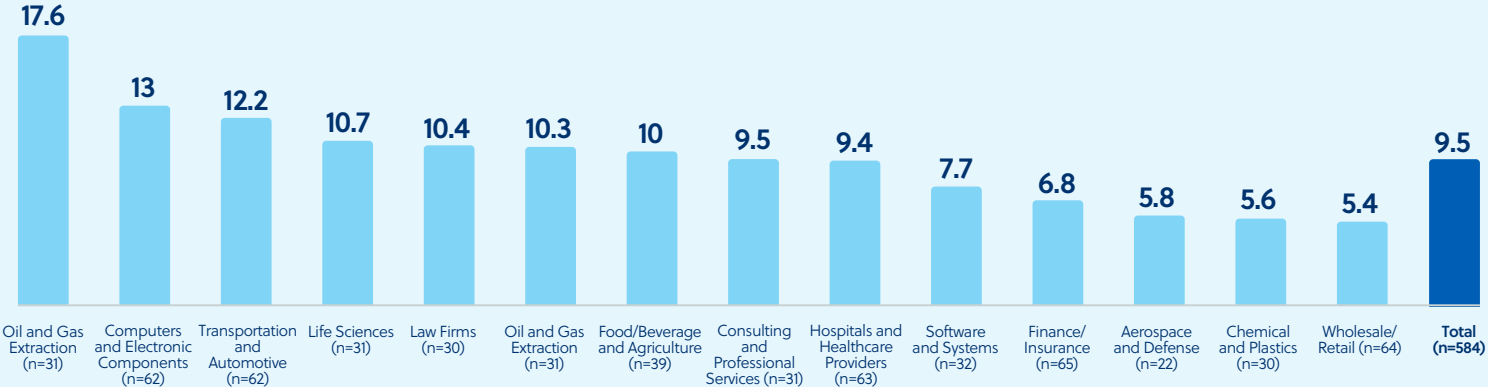| Oil and Gas Extraction (n=31)	Computers and Electronic Components (n=62)	Transportation and Automotive (n=62)	Life Sciences (n=31)	Law Firms (n=30)	Oil and Gas Extraction (n=31)	Food/Beverage and Agriculture (n=39)	Consulting and Professional Services (n=31)	Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (n=63)	Software and Systems (n=32)	Finance/ Insurance (n=65)	Aerospace and Defense (n=22)	Chemical and Plastics (n=30)	Wholesale/ Retail (n=64)	**Total (n=584)**
17.6	13	12.2	10.7	10.4	10.3	10	9.5	9.4	7.7	6.8	5.8	5.6	5.4	**9.5**

Q4. Thinking about the information that you rely on in performing your job responsibilities, how many different print or digital publications do you consider critical to your job function?
Q5: How many print or digital publications do you typically access in a given week?

The **Velocity of Content** is Shifting

The velocity of content is a measure of how quickly externally published information flows inside of an organization. It is calculated by multiplying the data points in this survey for the frequency of sharing, the number of people with whom information is shared, and the percentage of that information that comes from external sources.
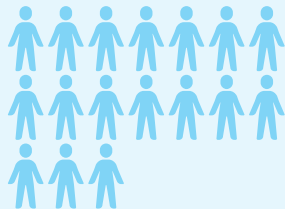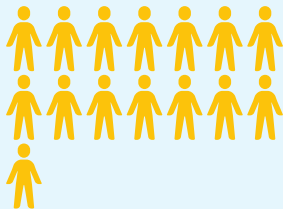

8.1 times per week with
17 people
2025

7.9 times per week with
15 people
2023

In 2025, the average number of potential instances of unlicensed sharing per employee, per week is **66.1**.

The velocity of content remains high. Since the 2023 survey, there is a notable increase in both the number of people with whom published content is shared per week and the number of people with whom that information is shared in all verticals. On average, employees reported that 48% of the information they shared is from externally published sources and 52% is internal to their organization.

52%

48%

■ Internal   ■ Externally Published

Q6. What percentage of the information you share is published internally versus content published by third parties?

Q7. How many times during an average day do you share work-related information such as news articles, journal articles, book excerpts, blog posts, and other content from digital or print sources with colleagues?
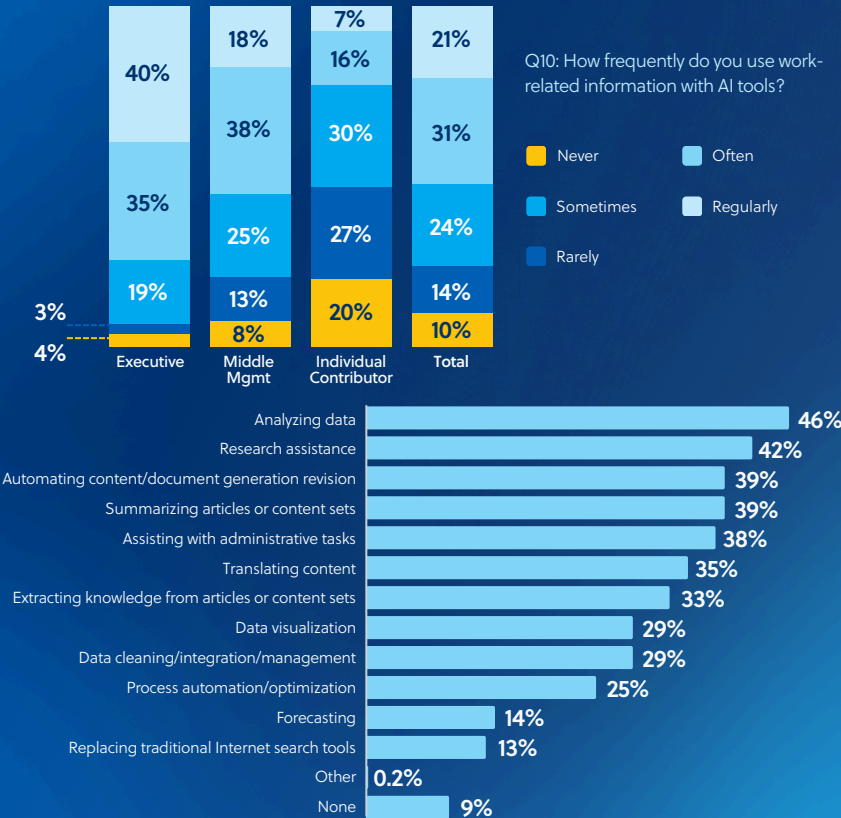
Q8. When you share work-related information via email, collaboration tools or hard copy print-out/photocopy, how many people do you typically share it with?

Impact of **AI Tools**

With reported AI adoption rates of more than **50%** across industries, AI is transforming how users interact with content.

Within organizations, executives are ahead of the curve with **75%** using AI frequently, reflecting their need to consume information more quickly in less time. This data also suggests that executives are at greater risk when it comes to compliance, despite claiming to have higher copyright awareness.

As organizations increasingly leverage AI for assistance with conducting research, analyzing data, summarizing articles and content sets, and performing other administrative tasks, a key challenge is confirming that the content used is properly licensed and the associated rights are respected. Only 62% of respondents realize that their organization's copyright policy applies to using third-party information with AI tools, emphasizing the importance of a robust, compliant, and efficient approach to managing copyright.

Q10: How frequently do you use work-related information with AI tools?

Legend:
- Never
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Often
- Regularly

	Executive	Middle Mgmt	Individual Contributor	Total
Regularly	40%	18%	7%	21%
Often	35%	38%	16%	31%
		25%	30%	24%
Sometimes	19%	13%	27%	14%
Rarely	3%			
Never	4%	8%	20%	10%

Q10a: For which of the following tasks, if any, do you use work-related information with AI tools?

Task	%
Analyzing data	46%
Research assistance	42%
Automating content/document generation revision	39%
Summarizing articles or content sets	39%
Assisting with administrative tasks	38%
Translating content	35%
Extracting knowledge from articles or content sets	33%
Data visualization	29%
Data cleaning/integration/management	29%
Process automation/optimization	25%
Forecasting	14%
Replacing traditional Internet search tools	13%
Other	0.2%
None	9%

Collaboration Platforms
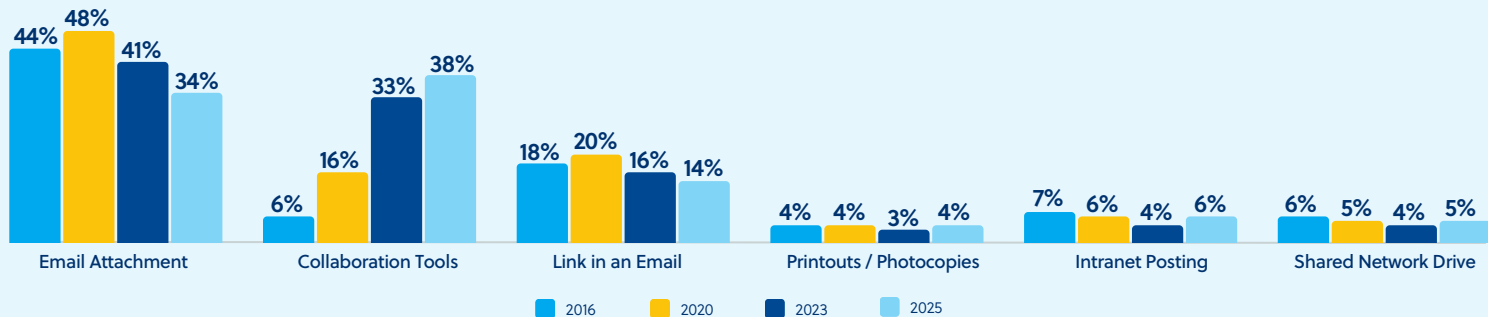## Emerging as Preferred Channel for Content Sharing

The ability to work on digital platforms remains crucial. While email attachments remain the most commonly reported way to share information with colleagues, collaboration tools have surpassed email as the preferred method of sharing information, highlighting a growing reliance on dynamic, team-focused platforms that streamline information sharing in real time.

Downloading content through any tool makes a new copy of that content — and copying often requires permission. With the rise in the use of collaboration tools, more people may be downloading content from those tools, creating new potential instances of unlicensed sharing.

Preferred Method of Sharing Work-Related Information

Q9. When you share work-related information, how do you share it? (multiple responses allowed)
Q9a. Which method do you use most often?

Bar chart:

Method	2016	2020	2023	2025
Email Attachment	44%	48%	41%	34%
Collaboration Tools	6%	16%	33%	38%
Link in an Email	18%	20%	16%	14%
Printouts / Photocopies	4%	4%	3%	4%
Intranet Posting	7%	6%	4%	6%
Shared Network Drive	6%	5%	4%	5%

The Paradox of **Executive Behaviors**

From research to medical communications, from legal to marketing, sharing content with colleagues across job roles and departments is critical. Executives are sharing significantly more material and more often than colleagues in middle management and individual contributor roles.

According to the 2025 study, executives report the highest level of copyright awareness (94%) but are most likely to share in ways that may not be allowed by their companies' own policies. Ninety-one percent of executives report considering copyright before forwarding information and 90% acknowledge awareness of "serious risks of copyright infringement" when they do. Yet, 81% of executives will share any and all relevant materials to help their organization in competitive, mission-critical, or time-critical situations.

	EXECUTIVE (n=183)	MIDDLE MANAGEMENT (n=295)	INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTOR (n=115)
Frequency of sharing per week (mean)	10.1	8.0	6.1
Number of people shared with (mean)	14.3	19.9	14.4
Percentage of information shared that is externally sourced (mean)	53%	47%	43%
Number of potential instances of unlicensed sharing per employee	76.5	74.8	37.8

While executives still report the highest frequency of sharing, there were notable increases in the with at both the middle management and individual contributor levels. The number of people that middle managers report sharing information with increased by 48.5% and by 41% for individual contributors, raising the potential instances of unlicensed sharing to 74.8 and 37.8 respectively.

Number of people with whom information is shared per week by job role

	Executive	Middle Management	Individual Contributor
2023	20	13	10
2025	14	20	14

Q6. What percentage of the information you share is published internally versus content by third parties?

Q7. How many times during an average day do you share work-related information such as news articles, journal articles, book excerpts, blog posts, and other content from digital or print sources with colleagues?

Q8. When you share work-related information via email, collaboration tools, or hard copy print-out/photocopy, how many people do you typically share it with?

Content Access and Sharing by Industry

Content sharing is influenced by the nature of the industry in which professionals work and collaborate. While some companies may be more reliant on externally created materials such as competitive intelligence, technical standards, and published research, all companies in all industries need to monitor market conditions, changing regulations, and current events. In all cases, companies frequently share these materials.

Employees are accessing more publications than in 2023. In some industries, including Law Firms, Computers and Electronics, Transportation and Automotive, and Oil and Gas Extraction, content access is significantly higher than the survey average.

The potential instances of unlicensed sharing per employee, per week is notable in some industries. Computers and Electronics led the way with 314.5 potential instances, followed by Law Firms (192), Consulting and Professional Services (86.5), and Software and Systems (79.1).

	TOTAL	INDUSTRY VERTICAL													
		Aerospace & Defense	Chemicals & Plastics	Computers & Electronic	Consulting & Prof. Svcs	Electric & Gas Utilities	Financial/ Insurance	Food & Beverage	Hospitals & HC	Law Firms	Life Sciences	Oil & Gas	Software & Systems	Transportation & Automotive	Wholesale/ Retail
Frequency of sharing per week (mean)	8.1	7.9	8.0	14.4	9.3	8.1	6.7	7.2	6.4	15.2	7.8	9.5	8.0	6.0	5.0
Number of people shared with (mean)	17.0	19.2	12.4	39.0	19.8	14.2	12.0	13.2	12.6	27.5	13.2	11.6	18.3	10.7	13.0
Percentage of information shared that is externally sourced (mean)	48%	36%	48%	56%	47%	44%	48%	46%	49%	46%	47%	51%	54%	45%	46%
Number of potential instances of unlicensed sharing per employee	66.1	54.6	47.6	314.5	86.5	50.6	38.6	43.7	39.5	192.0	48.4	56.2	79.1	28.9	29.9

Q6. What percentage of the information you share is published internally versus content published by third parties? (Base = 584)
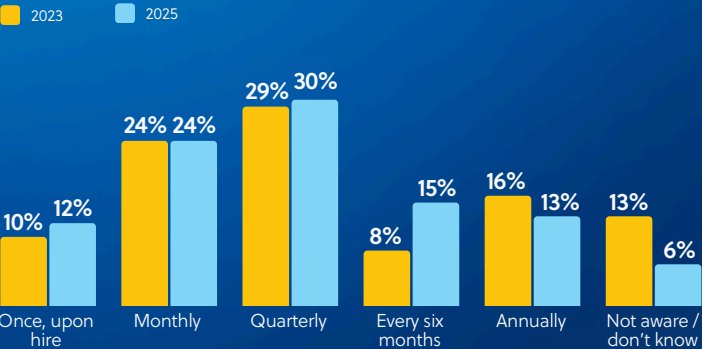Q7. How many times during an average week do you share work-related information such as news articles, journal articles, book excerpts, blog posts and other content from digital or print sources with colleagues? (Base = 584)
Q8. When you share work-related information via email, collaboration tools, or hard copy print-out/photocopy, how many people do you typically share it with? (Base = 584)
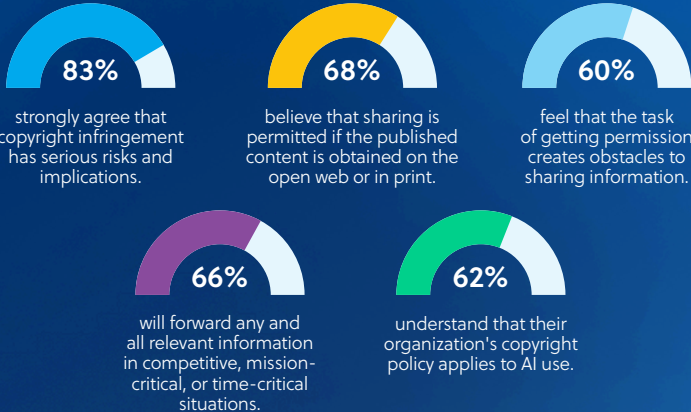
Copyright Awareness and Attitudes

Companies report an increased frequency of communicating copyright policy in the most recent survey compared to 2023. This increased sharing of the policy has likely led to 77% of employees stating that they are aware of their company's copyright policy, up from 74% in 2023. However, employee attitudes and behaviors about copyrighted content are often misaligned with policy expectations, and there is much lower awareness of how copyright policies apply when using AI tools.

Frequency of Communicating Copyright Policy

Legend: 2023, 2025

	Once, upon hire	Monthly	Quarterly	Every six months	Annually	Not aware / don't know
2023	10%	24%	29%	8%	16%	13%
2025	12%	24%	30%	15%	13%	6%

Attitudes About Copyright Awareness

83% strongly agree that copyright infringement has serious risks and implications.

68% believe that sharing is permitted if the published content is obtained on the open web or in print.

60% feel that the task of getting permission creates obstacles to sharing information.

66% will forward any and all relevant information in competitive, mission-critical, or time-critical situations.

62% understand that their organization's copyright policy applies to AI use.

Q10: Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements pertaining to your organization
Q13. Does your organization have a copyright policy regarding the sharing of information?

Why This Matters

Simple content exchanges may
actually increase risk

Rising Risk of Copyright Infringement

While the sharing of information with co-workers supports collaboration and drives innovation and the use of AI tools increases the volume and speed that content can be consumed, using externally published information without first obtaining the necessary licenses or permissions carries potentially significant risk.

The widespread adoption of AI tools (more than 50% of survey respondents) and lack of understanding that copyright policies also apply to the use of content with AI applications creates additional compliance risks. The routine content exchanges and integration of AI into workflows that improve efficiencies and keep business moving may actually create or increase the risk of copyright infringement, leading to costly lawsuits or settlements and affecting brand reputation.

In summary:

83%
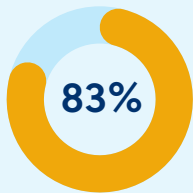
percent of employees surveyed strongly agree that **copyright infringement has serious risks and implications.**

17

On average, the **number of people with whom work-related content is shared 8.1 times per week**, nearly half of which (48%) comes from external sources.

66.1

On average, the number of potential **instances of unlicensed sharing** per employee per week that may put organizations at risk.

What You Can Do

CCC presents the following
recommendations and solutions

Protect Your Organization with **Education and Solutions**

It starts with education. In this case, what your employees don't know can hurt them — and the organization as a whole.

Ask yourself:

How would your organization fare if you audited your environment to uncover the rate of unauthorized content sharing? And how well would your existing compliance policies address the realities of what and how employees share, how often, and with whom?

Start by considering these questions:

- How many publications does your organization subscribe to?
- Who manages those subscriptions and how?
- Who maintains records for written permissions or licenses?
- Do the systems your employees rely on to access and share content incorporate and reinforce your organization's IP protection and copyright compliance initiatives?
- Do your employees understand what materials can be shared with colleagues and external contacts, and what they cannot share without additional permission?
- Do your employees understand what copyright infringement is and how to avoid it?
- Do you have a current copyright policy?

- Does your copyright policy address how different employees should handle different situations (e.g., the CEO who wants to share legal information with the board vs. an individual contributor who wants to share a journal article with colleagues)?
- Does your copyright policy cover the use of content with AI tools and applications?
- How often do you communicate your copyright policy to employees and how (e.g., email, intranet, company-wide meetings)?
- How frequently does your organization provide copyright training sessions?
- Who is the designated copyright policy contact (or contacts) within your organization?
- Do your employees know where to find your copyright policy?

Steps to **Success**

1 First, if you don't have a copyright policy, **CREATE** one, and **UPDATE** your current one to reflect the way your organization works, the tools your employees use, and the ways that information today is shared. CCC provides guidelines for creating a policy as well as a sample policy to use as a model.

2 **PUBLISH** the policy in a central location, like your intranet, and make every employee aware of it and its details, including guidelines for using externally published materials.

3 **PROMOTE** awareness of the policy by sending periodic reminders about how employees can access it and why they should.

4 **EDUCATE** employees on copyright and information use with resources, webcasts, certificate programs and more.

5 **SECURE** needed permissions, annual licenses, and copyright-compliant content workflow software for easy compliance.

CCC | **RightsDirect**
Copyright Clearance Center

Learn more
For more information on how to enable collaboration, simplify copyright compliance, and streamline your content workflow contact us at: **copyright.com**

By taking steps to balance employee reuse of published content with a strong compliance and licensing program, your company can leverage published content sharing to help support collaboration and drive innovation.

Certain publishers' enterprise subscriptions include the rights to reuse their content within your company. What is allowed in these agreements often varies by publisher and subscription. Licensing solutions from CCC and RightsDirect complement publisher agreements and subscriptions by providing you with a consistent set of reuse rights across all participating publishers.

Annual licenses enable teams to collaborate more easily using content from a wide range of sources, simplifying copyright compliance, driving innovation, and providing resources that educate employees about the importance of copyright compliance. For organizations that need content workflow management, our RightFind Suite is a solution that fuels research and simplifies copyright, anytime, anywhere.