

Proving You Made It: Provenance for Creators

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In a world where anyone can generate anything, the question “who made this first?” decides livelihoods. Provenance is the discipline of answering it with evidence: verifiable records of what you created, when, and in what sequence. The critical fact about provenance is temporal — it only works if you build it before you need it.

THE EVIDENCE STACK

» Cryptographic hash

A fingerprint computed from your file; change one pixel and the hash changes. It proves a specific version existed, without revealing the work.

» Trusted timestamp

The hash anchored to a moment — via a registry, a transparency log, or a chained ledger — proving existence no later than that date.

» Chain of custody

Version history hash-linked in sequence, so each draft commits to the ones before it and history can't be silently rewritten. This is exactly how the SMI Registry anchors records.

» Attribution credentials

C2PA-style signed metadata that travels inside the file, naming creator and tools — the label that survives re-uploads.

WHAT PROVENANCE DOES AND DOESN'T DO

A registry record does not replace copyright registration, and no timestamp stops a determined infringer from copying. What provenance does is shift disputes in your favor: platforms process takedowns faster with dated evidence, clients and courts weigh contemporaneous records heavily, and licensing negotiations start from “here is my documented chain” instead of assertion. It converts your honesty into something checkable.

A WORKING ROUTINE

Hash and anchor finished works (and meaningful drafts) the day they're done. Keep raw files and project sources. Embed attribution credentials where your tools support them. Ten minutes per release, compounding into an unforgeable-by-hindsight archive of your career.

INVESTIGATOR'S TAKEAWAYS

- Provenance must exist before the dispute — build it as routine.
- Hash + timestamp proves a version existed by a date, privately.
- Chained records prevent history from being quietly rewritten.
- Provenance complements — never replaces — formal copyright registration.
- Ten minutes per release compounds into decisive evidence.