Jane Kinne co-founded it. ASPP members helped build it. But lots of us don’t have a clue what it does. Now Picture Professional interviews the principals to find out about PLUS and the much touted PLUS Registry. It’s coming into its own, and it’s going to make a difference in your professional life.

Keeping track of image rights and licenses is an age-old, and never adequately solved, problem. Eleven years ago, ASPP’s Jane Kinne, photographer Jeff Sedlik (then President of the Advertising Photographers of America), and PictureArts president Jeffrey Burke (then president of PACA) decided to do something about it. The result was the formation of the PLUS Coalition—a global, non-profit organization focused exclusively on making it easier to find, understand and manage image rights. PLUS is a collaboration of publishers, ad agencies, design firms, photographers, stock agencies, photo researchers, illustrators, museums, libraries, archives, universities, and standards bodies all over the world, now spanning over 100 countries.

PLUS is run by a non-paid board drawn from all the communities that create, distribute, use, and preserve images. For the last ten years, ASPP members Roger and Judy Feldman have represented ASPP on the PLUS Board (Rog now serves as Chairman). We recently asked Rog and PLUS CEO Jeff Sedlik to sit down with us and answer the questions many of us have about PLUS, and, in particular, the PLUS Registry.
What is PLUS and the PLUS Registry?
The PLUS Coalition is a multi-industry, multi-national, non-profit organization operated by and for the communities that create, buy, sell, use, and preserve images. Besides establishing international standards for image licensing, the Coalition operates the PLUS Registry, an online resource connecting images to rights holders and rights information on a global scale.

Is the PLUS Registry up and running now?
Yes it is. The public BETA test of business and user registration added more than 22,000 users from over 100 countries. The public BETA of the PLUS Registry image recognition and search functions begins in Q4 2013. In the spring of next year we will begin to test license registration. By mid-2014, most key Registry functions will be rolled out and we’ll start testing connections to other registries, DAMS, and related applications.

So I can find rightsholders in the PLUS Registry today?
Absolutely. Right now you can search the Registry by name or PLUS ID. Soon advanced forensic search tools will be added allowing search by other criteria.

I’m an image researcher and buyer, not a rightsholder. What can the PLUS Registry do for me?
Any time you need information about a creator, rightsholder, or licensor of an image, the PLUS Registry can help you find it. Even if you only have the image and nothing else.

Is the PLUS Registry an alternative to stock photo agencies?
Absolutely not. Unlike a commercial stock agency, the PLUS Registry doesn’t offer image browsing, keyword searches, or licensing. It is purely and only about the collection and discovery of image rightholders, rights, and licensing information.

What exactly is a PLUS ID?
The PLUS IDs are unique identifiers issued by PLUS to identify businesses, individuals, images, and licenses registered with PLUS. PLUS IDs are part of the fabric of the PLUS Registry, but the Registry is designed to recognize IDs issued by other authorities as well.

What if you need to find rights information about an image and you don’t have the PLUS ID?
Just upload a low-res copy of the image. If it’s in the Registry, our image recognition function will display all registered contact and rights information.

What if the image is from a book, magazine, or tearsheet?
Scan it or shoot it with your camera or cell phone and upload it. If it’s in the Registry, our image recognition feature will find it and provide you with rights and attribution information submitted by the rights holders.

With image recognition, why do you need a PLUS ID?
Publishers have ISBNs. Manufacturers have UPC codes. And now picture people have the PLUS ID. More than just helping you find an image, PLUS IDs connect the image to rights information submitted by the person or business who registered the image with PLUS.
What can the PLUS Registry do for organizations that manage large numbers of pictures and licenses?
These days, image rights and licensing information is easily and often separated from the image itself. It might be stored in a rightsholder or publisher DAM system somewhere out there, but only the owner of the DAM can access it. But if the image has an embedded PLUS ID, its public rights information can then be accessed by anyone (with the registrant controlling what information is public and what is kept private). The Registry will allow DAM systems to read and import image rights information, greatly simplifying the management of images licensed under any licensing model.

Why not just embed license data in the image?
Even assuming original image metadata survives the review, prepress, and publishing process, an embedded license is only accurate at a particular moment in time. If the license expires or is later amended or extended, any embedded license data is instantly out of date. But when it’s stored outside the image linked by a PLUS ID to current rights information, it can live and change forever. That’s the beauty of the PLUS Registry.

What’s the difference between a PLUS Registration and a copyright registration?
Rightsholders register images with PLUS in order to ensure that current rights information is available to anyone encountering their image, and to help users of those images manage their licenses. Rightsholders register with the Copyright Office to create a public record of copyright ownership and assure remedies in the event of an infringement. In the future, PLUS will be incorporating copyright registration from within the Registry, so you’ll be able to simultaneously register an image with PLUS and the Copyright Office.

How exactly do you record image rights information in the PLUS Registry?
There are many ways to do it. You can embed rights information using the free PLUS License Embedder. You can use Photoshop, Lightroom, Photo Mechanic and other applications that incorporate IPTC/Plus License Data Format fields. You do it through one of the many PLUS-compliant DAMS or automated image licensing platforms. Or you can do it directly in the Registry itself.

What if I want to keep my image rights information confidential?
The PLUS Registry allows users to designate different aspects of rights information as private or public. You can also limit access to specified parties such as the licensee. At the PLUS Registry, access to image metadata is controlled by the user, not PLUS.

Besides rights information, will the Registry ever contain traditional image metadata?
Yes. In the same way that IPTC, a founding member of PLUS, supports PLUS rights metadata, the PLUS registry will soon incorporate IPTC image metadata.

Is the PLUS Registry primarily a resource for U.S. creators, buyers and sellers?
On the contrary. The PLUS Coalition launched with participants from 34 countries, and was from the start an international initiative. Registry users now come from over 100 countries.

Is PLUS involved with the UK Copyright Hub?
PLUS has been working with the UK Intellectual Property Office—the IPO—for a number of years. IPO
has publicly described the PLUS Registry as an important solution for identifying image rights holders and rights information, and invited PLUS to serve in a supporting role for a new “Copyright Hub” currently under development in the UK. The Copyright Hub is not a registry but it does refer searchers to external registries. The PLUS Registry is the first of those.

**Isn’t the PLUS Registry designed to function as a hub itself?**
Yes, but not just to connect to other registries. The PLUS Registry is intended to interconnect with all kinds of image related systems and applications, so that a search of one will search all.

**There are other initiatives working on image rights standards and registries. How does PLUS relate to them?**
PLUS collaborates with all of them and competes with none.

**How is the PLUS Registry funded?**
The Registry operates on a non-profit, cost recovery basis, like a cooperative. Registry listings of creators, rightsholders and businesses are free, but there is a nominal contribution (measured in pennies or fractions thereof) to register images and licenses. Businesses or individuals requesting PLUS IDs make a small annual supporting contribution. Beyond these income streams, the continuing financial and logistical support of leading industry corporations and associations like ASMP, APA, GAG and others allows ongoing development of the PLUS Standards, the PLUS Registry and the operation of the PLUS Coalition.

**Where do I go to find out more about PLUS and the PLUS Registry?**
Go to [www.useplus.org](http://www.useplus.org) to find out more about PLUS. Go to [www.PLUSregistry.org](http://www.PLUSregistry.org) to sign up with the PLUS Registry. If you’d like to participate in the Beta test of the new PLUS Registry image recognition and search functions, click the red “Join” button at [www.PLUSregistry.org](http://www.PLUSregistry.org).

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