

VIDP

Verified Image Disclosure Protocol — Specification v1.1 (Draft)

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1 VIDP — Verified Image Disclosure Protocol

1.1 Specification v1.1

A voluntary disclosure standard for digitally altered transactional imagery.

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1.2 A Note on Language

This specification describes a voluntary standard. The language throughout is intentionally permissive and recommendation-based — words like “should,” “is recommended,” “is best,” and “is appropriate” appear in place of “shall,” “must,” and “required.” This is a deliberate choice.

VIDP is designed for adoption by good-faith producers seeking guidance on how to disclose image edits transparently, before any regulator, association, or platform has imposed a mandatory standard. Strict, mandatory language would alienate the cohort the protocol is designed to serve and would do nothing to constrain producers acting in bad faith. If and when this specification is adopted by a regulatory or organizational body — NAR, OREC, an MLS, a state legislature — that body is in the appropriate position to translate these recommendations into enforceable obligations within their jurisdiction.

Until that time, VIDP describes best practice, not mandated practice.

1.3 1. Purpose and Scope

1.3.1 1.1 Purpose

This specification describes a standardized framework for the voluntary disclosure of digital alterations applied to transactional imagery. It defines a taxonomy of edit types, a visual disclosure system, a verification architecture, and an audit trail structure designed to support transparency between image producers, transacting parties, and regulatory bodies.

1.3.2 1.2 Scope

This specification applies to **transactional imagery**, defined as photographic or video-derived still imagery that depicts a real, identifiable subject upon which a commercial transaction is predicated. Covered domains include, but are not limited to:

- Real estate sales and rental listings
- Short-term rental and hospitality listings
- Automotive sales listings
- Product photography for e-commerce
- Insurance claim and condition documentation
- Auction and collectibles imagery
- Documentary and editorial journalism
- Chain-of-custody forensic imagery

This specification is not intended for imagery where the altered image itself is the commercial product or artistic expression, including fashion editorial, concept art, fine art photography, brand advertising where depicted scenarios are understood as fictive, and entertainment imagery.

1.3.3 1.3 Plainspoken Implementation Note

In plain terms: this protocol is for photos where a buyer is making a decision about a real thing — a house, a car, a rental, a product — based on what the photo shows them. If the buyer would reasonably expect the photo to represent the item as it actually exists, this protocol applies. If the photo is an artistic creation where everyone understands it's not literal, this protocol doesn't apply.

1.4 2. Definitions

1.4.1 2.1 Definitions

Transactional Image — A still image produced for the purpose of informing a commercial transaction regarding a specific, identifiable subject.

Base Image — The fully processed image immediately prior to any element-level edit being applied. Standard processing that may be present in a base image includes HDR bracket merging, global color and exposure correction, lens distortion correction, sharpening, noise reduction, crop adjustment, and dust/sensor-spot removal on the image capture layer. The base image represents the subject as photographed, with only non-representational processing applied.

Element-Level Edit — Any modification that adds, removes, substitutes, or transforms a phys-

ical or environmental element depicted in the image. Element-level edits are distinct from non-representational processing and are the focus of the disclosure recommendations in this specification.

Disclosure Pill — A visual indicator overlaid on a delivered image that identifies the specific category of element-level edit applied. Pills follow the standardized color, format, and placement guidance in Section 5.

Verification Gallery — A publicly accessible repository hosting the base image corresponding to each delivered enhanced image, accessible via QR code or direct link.

Audit Record — A timestamped log entry documenting the edits applied to a specific image, the date of application, the identity of the editing party, and the location of the corresponding base image.

Producing Party — The photographer, editor, production team, or firm responsible for delivering the final imagery. The producing party owns the disclosure decisions for any image delivered under their identity.

1.4.2 2.2 Plainspoken Implementation Note

The “base image” is the version your editor has on screen right before they do a sky swap or a virtual staging. It’s not the raw file from the camera — it’s the fully polished version minus the one edit being disclosed. Think of it as: “what the photo would have been if we’d stopped at color correction.”

1.5 3. Categories of Edit

Edits are categorized into four classes. Tiers 1 through 3 represent increasing degrees of alteration to the representation of the subject. Tier 0 is reserved for informational overlays that add information *about* the subject without altering the depiction *of* the subject, and is distinguished from the alteration tiers by color and purpose.

1.5.1 3.1 Tier 0 — Informational Overlays (Blue)

Visual elements added to an image that convey information *about* the subject without modifying the depiction of the subject itself. Tier 0 pills are distinguished from alteration pills (Tiers 1–3) because the underlying photograph still represents the subject as it actually exists; the overlay is annotation, not modification.

Included overlay types:

- **BOUNDARY OVERLAY** — Property lines, parcel boundaries, easement markers, or other geographic boundary indicators drawn on aerial or site photography
- **FOCUS ENHANCED** — Selective desaturation, vignetting, dimming, or similar compositional treatments applied to areas outside the subject to direct visual attention; the subject area itself remains representationally unaltered
- **ANNOTATED** — Arrows, callouts, labels, measurements, dimension lines, or other explanatory markings added to the image
- **COMPASS ADDED** — Directional indicators, scale bars, or orientation markers added for geographic or spatial reference

Tier 0 overlays do not replace or supersede other appropriate disclosures. A boundary overlay, for example, does not replace the industry-standard legal disclaimer that boundary lines shown are approximate and not a substitute for a professional survey.

1.5.2 3.2 Tier 1 — Atmospheric/Cosmetic (Green)

Edits that modify atmospheric conditions or cosmetic qualities of the depicted scene without altering physical elements of the subject.

Included edit types:

- **SKY ENHANCED** — Sky replacement, sky color substitution, or cloud manipulation
- **VIRTUAL TWILIGHT** — Conversion of daylight imagery to dusk, night, or golden-hour appearance
- **WINDOW BALANCED** — Window masking beyond standard exposure balance (interior and exterior lighting merged beyond sensor dynamic range)
- **LAWN ENHANCED** — Grass or vegetation color correction beyond standard saturation adjustment (seasonal conversion, browning-to-green)
- **LIGHTING ENHANCED** — Ambient lighting character altered (e.g., overcast to sunny, dramatic lighting added)

1.5.3 3.3 Tier 2 — Additive (Amber)

Edits that add elements not physically present in the photographed scene.

Included edit types:

- **VIRTUALLY STAGED** — Furniture, decor, or accessories added to an unfurnished or differently-furnished space
- **VIRTUAL LANDSCAPING** — Plants, flowers, mulch, hardscape, or other landscape elements added

- VIRTUAL RENOVATION — Finishes, paint, flooring, or fixtures digitally updated to show potential condition; best accompanied by an additional “RENOVATION CONCEPT” label in buyer-facing materials
- DECOR ADDED — Smaller accent additions including artwork, textiles, or styling elements not rising to full staging

1.5.4 3.4 Tier 3 — Subtractive/Substitutive (Red)

Edits that remove, substitute, or conceal physical elements actually present in the photographed scene.

Included edit types:

- ELEMENT REMOVED — Infrastructure, neighboring structures, permanent features, or environmental elements edited out
- DEFECT CORRECTED — Damage, wear, stains, or condition issues digitally repaired
- FEATURE SUBSTITUTED — Physical elements replaced with alternative elements not actually present

Tier 3 edits are strongly discouraged under this specification. When applied, they are best disclosed with maximum prominence and accompanied by written acknowledgment from the party commissioning the imagery confirming that the substitution is intentional, material, and not being used to conceal information that would be material to a reasonable buyer.

1.5.5 3.5 Plainspoken Implementation Note

Blue is “we added information about the property” — boundary lines, annotations, focus treatments. The land itself is real. Green is “we made the photo look nicer” — sky, lighting, seasonal touches. Amber is “we added something that wasn’t there” — furniture, landscaping, renovation concepts. Red is “we removed or changed something that *was* there” — power lines, defects, substituted materials.

Most real estate photography operates in Green and occasionally Amber. Land listings and aerial work frequently add Blue overlays. Red is where the legal problems live. If you’re doing Red-tier work, you should be having a very direct conversation with the agent and seller about why.

1.5.6 3.6 Stacking Order

When multiple tiers apply to a single image, the recommended top-to-bottom stacking order places the most serious disclosure first:

1. Tier 3 (Red) — if present
2. Tier 2 (Amber) — if present

3. Tier 1 (Green) — if present
4. Tier 0 (Blue) — if present, placed at the bottom of the stack because it represents annotation rather than alteration

1.5.7 3.7 Complete Pill Inventory

Tier	Color	Pill	Applies When
0	Blue	BOUNDARY OVERLAY	Property lines or parcel boundaries drawn on the image
0	Blue	FOCUS ENHANCED	Selective desaturation or vignetting directing attention to the subject
0	Blue	ANNOTATED	Arrows, callouts, labels, or measurements added
0	Blue	COMPASS ADDED	Directional indicators, scale bars, or orientation markers added
1	Green	SKY ENHANCED	Sky replacement or cloud manipulation
1	Green	VIRTUAL TWILIGHT	Daytime imagery converted to dusk or night
1	Green	WINDOW BALANCED	Window masking beyond standard exposure balance
1	Green	LAWN ENHANCED	Grass color correction beyond standard saturation

Tier	Color	Pill	Applies When
1	Green	LIGHTING ENHANCED	Ambient lighting character altered
2	Amber	VIRTUALLY STAGED	Furniture, decor, or accessories digitally added
2	Amber	VIRTUAL LANDSCAPING	Plants, mulch, or hardscape digitally added
2	Amber	VIRTUAL RENOVATION	Finishes or fixtures digitally updated to show potential
2	Amber	DECOR ADDED	Smaller accent items digitally added
3	Red	ELEMENT REMOVED	Permanent features or infrastructure edited out
3	Red	DEFECT CORRECTED	Damage, wear, or condition issues digitally repaired
3	Red	FEATURE SUBSTITUTED	Physical elements replaced with alternatives not present

1.5.8 3.8 Disclosure Authority

The application of pills is the responsibility of the producing party — the photographer, editor, or production team that applied the edit. Pills are applied based on the producing party’s knowledge of edits intentionally made to the image, regardless of the visual prominence or perceptibility of those edits to a third-party viewer. If the producing party intentionally applied an edit covered by this specification, the corresponding pill is appropriate; absence of an externally-verifiable visual difference does not relieve the producing party of the disclosure intent.

This specification does not establish an external “perceptibility threshold” because the disclosure is a voluntary statement of producer intent, not a third-party assessment of visual outcome. Verification of the disclosed edit is supported by the base image comparison available in the Verification Gallery (Section 6).

In the case of multi-party production (photographer hands off to a third-party editor, or vice versa), the producing party of record is the entity delivering the final imagery to the commissioning party. The delivering party owns the disclosure obligation for the work product regardless of which individual within the production process applied the underlying edit. This aligns the protocol with established professional accountability norms in regulated industries.

3.8.1 Plainspoken Implementation Note If you did it, pill it. The protocol relies on your professional judgment about what counts as an intentional edit. Trying to rules-lawyer the threshold defeats the purpose of voluntary disclosure. And whoever delivers the image to the client is the one who owns the disclosure — internal accountability between photographer and editor is your business, but the client and the public see one delivering party.

1.6 4. Non-Representational Processing (Not Disclosed)

The following processing types are considered standard and do not trigger disclosure recommendations under this specification:

- HDR bracket merging
- Global exposure, contrast, and color correction
- White balance adjustment
- Lens distortion correction
- Perspective correction (standard architectural straightening)
- Crop and aspect ratio adjustment
- Sharpening and noise reduction
- Dust and sensor-spot removal on the image capture layer (not on the photographed subject)
- Standard saturation and tonal adjustment within conventional photographic practice

These adjustments are understood within photographic and legal convention as corrections that do not alter the representation of the depicted subject. California Business & Professions Code §10140.8 (AB 723) explicitly excludes such adjustments from its disclosure requirements, and this specification aligns with that exclusion.

1.6.1 4.1 Plainspoken Implementation Note

The stuff you'd do in Lightroom on a normal shoot doesn't need a pill. Exposure, color, crop, sharpening — that's photography, not alteration. The pill system kicks in when your editor opens Photoshop or a generative AI tool to change something specific in the scene.

1.7 5. Disclosure Pill Specification

1.7.1 5.1 Visual Format

The recommended visual format for each pill:

Shape: Rounded rectangle with 4px corner radius at display size.

Minimum dimensions: 24 pixels tall at 1:1 display size; width determined by text content with 12px horizontal padding.

Color: - Tier 0 (Blue): Background #1565C0, text #FFFFFF - Tier 1 (Green): Background #2E7D32, text #FFFFFF - Tier 2 (Amber): Background #F57C00, text #FFFFFF - Tier 3 (Red): Background #C62828, text #FFFFFF

Typography: Sans-serif, uppercase, letter-spaced for small-size legibility. Recommended weights: 600–700.

Opacity: 75–92% background opacity. **75% is the recommended default** for premium photographic deliverables where minimal visual intrusion is the priority. Opacity toward the higher end of the range is appropriate for images with high-contrast or visually challenging backgrounds (bright skies, snow scenes, white roof lines, beach/coastal sand) where readability of the white pill text is at risk. Producing parties select opacity within this range based on image conditions and aesthetic judgment.

1.7.2 5.2 Placement

Pills are best placed at the **lowest possible position in the bottom-right quadrant** of the image, respecting an edge padding of approximately 2.5% of the image's shorter dimension (16 pixels at reference 1:1 scale, scaling proportionally for larger images). The "lowest position" guidance keeps the pill stack out of the visually dominant portion of the image and preserves the cleanest possible composition.

When multiple pills apply to a single image, they are best stacked vertically with 4-pixel spacing at reference scale (scaling proportionally), right-edge aligned.

Alternative placements are appropriate when image content requires it. Common cases include existing legal disclaimer text occupying the bottom-center region, subject-critical visual elements in the bottom-right corner, or other layout constraints. Acceptable alternatives:

- **Lower-left quadrant** — recommended when lower-right conflicts with image content. When lower-left is selected, consistency across all images in a single delivery is preferred.
- **Bottom-right with QR positioned above the pill stack** — recommended when bottom-spanning legal disclaimer text occupies the lower-center region.

1.7.3 5.3 QR Code Pairing

Each image bearing one or more pills is best accompanied by a QR code linking to the corresponding base image in the Verification Gallery. Recommended QR characteristics:

- Placement immediately adjacent to the pill stack — to the left of the stack or above it, based on image layout and existing elements (such as legal disclaimer text)
- Accompanying label such as “SCAN FOR ORIGINAL” positioned near the QR to prompt user action
- Sized to be prominent without dominating the pill stack
- Linked to the specific image’s base version, not to a general gallery index
- Functional for the duration of the subject’s commercial listing plus 24 months minimum

1.7.4 5.4 Stacking Rules

When multiple edit types apply to a single image, each edit is best given its own pill. Combining pills into aggregate labels (e.g., “MULTIPLE ENHANCEMENTS”) is discouraged because it defeats the purpose of specific disclosure. Each modification is best individually identified. Stacking order follows Section 3.6.

1.7.5 5.5 Plainspoken Implementation Note

One pill per edit. Blue for informational overlays like boundary lines. Green for atmospheric stuff like sky swaps. Amber for additions like virtual staging. Red for removals or substitutions. Drop the pills as low as you can in the bottom-right corner without overlapping anything important. Default to 75% opacity — bump it up if the background is bright enough that the white text starts losing readability. Every pill image gets a QR code near the pills (above or to the left, whichever fits best with existing image elements) that links to the base image. The QR stays live for at least two years after the listing closes so if a buyer has a question months later, the verification is still there.

1.8 6. Verification Gallery Recommendations

1.8.1 6.1 Structure

Each subject (property, vehicle, product, etc.) is best given a dedicated gallery containing:

- The final delivered enhanced images with pills applied
- The corresponding base image for each enhanced image
- A human-readable description of the edits applied to each enhanced image

1.8.2 6.2 File Naming Convention

Recommended file naming uses a common stem with differentiating suffixes:

- [listing-id]_[sequence]_enhanced.[ext] (e.g., 123MainSt_04_enhanced.jpg)
- [listing-id]_[sequence]_base.[ext] (e.g., 123MainSt_04_base.jpg)

1.8.3 6.3 Access

Verification Galleries are best made publicly accessible via direct URL and via QR code, without authentication, registration, or payment requirements.

1.8.4 6.4 Retention

Base images are best retained and accessible for the duration of the subject's commercial availability plus a minimum of 24 months following the transaction closing or listing withdrawal.

1.8.5 6.5 Plainspoken Implementation Note

Every shoot has its own folder. In the folder, every edited photo has a matching base photo with the same name but `_base` instead of `_enhanced`. Anyone with the QR code can see both. No logins, no paywalls. You keep them up for at least two years after the listing closes.

1.9 7. Audit Record Recommendations

1.9.1 7.1 Recommended Fields

For each delivered enhanced image, an audit record is best maintained containing:

- Subject identifier (listing address, VIN, SKU, etc.)
- Image filename (both base and enhanced)
- Date of original photography
- Date of editing completion

- Identity of editing party (individual or entity)
- Pills applied (by edit type code)
- Delivering party (photographer or firm)
- Delivery date
- Verification Gallery URL

1.9.2 7.2 Format and Access

Audit records are best maintained in a structured, machine-readable format. Recommended availability includes access on reasonable request to:

- The party commissioning the imagery
- The regulatory body with jurisdiction over the transaction
- Any party in a legal proceeding where the imagery is material evidence

1.9.3 7.3 Retention

Audit records are best retained for a minimum of seven years following the transaction closing or listing withdrawal. This aligns with standard business records retention practice and typical statute-of-limitations windows for transactional disputes.

1.9.4 7.4 Plainspoken Implementation Note

Keep a log. What was shot, when, what edits were applied, who did them, where the base image lives. Seven years is the standard business records retention period — long enough to cover most litigation windows. If someone ever questions an image, you have a clean paper trail.

1.10 8. Compliance Mapping

This specification is designed to support producers in meeting or exceeding the requirements of the following existing regulations and industry standards:

Jurisdiction / Body	Requirement	This Specification’s Response
California AB 723 (Bus. & Prof. Code §10140.8)	Conspicuous disclosure of digital alteration	Section 5: Disclosure Pill system
California AB 723	Access to unaltered original image	Section 6: Verification Gallery

Jurisdiction / Body	Requirement	This Specification's Response
California AB 723	QR code or link acceptable for online listings	Section 5.3: QR code pairing
NAR Code of Ethics Article 12	Truthful presentation in advertising	Full specification
NAR Code of Ethics Article 2	Disclosure of pertinent facts	Sections 3, 5, 6
HAR MLS (Houston)	Watermark on altered images	Section 5: Pill format
CRMLS (California)	Labeling of digitally altered imagery	Section 5: Pill format
Greater Lansing MLS	Built-in watermarks for altered images	Section 5: Pill format
Oklahoma Real Estate License Code §858-312(A)(2)	Prohibition of substantial misrepresentation in advertising	Sections 3.4, 7: Red-tier guidance and audit records
FTC Act §5	Prohibition of deceptive commercial practices	Full specification

1.10.1 8.1 Plainspoken Implementation Note

A producer following VIDP recommendations is well-positioned to also meet AB 723, the NAR Code of Ethics, every major MLS rule, Oklahoma's existing advertising statute, and FTC deceptive-practices standards. This specification is designed to be a single operational standard that supports all of them simultaneously. Note that meeting any specific legal or regulatory obligation remains the responsibility of the producer; VIDP supports compliance but does not substitute for legal review.

1.11 9. Conformance Levels

Implementations may describe themselves at one of three conformance levels:

1.11.1 9.1 Full Conformance

Implementation follows the recommendations in Sections 5, 6, and 7. Disclosed imagery includes pills, QR codes, a functional Verification Gallery, and a maintained audit record.

1.11.2 9.2 Disclosure Conformance

Implementation follows Section 5 (pills) and Section 6 (Verification Gallery) but does not maintain a formal audit record per Section 7. Appropriate for independent photographers without infrastructure support.

1.11.3 9.3 Minimum Conformance

Implementation follows Section 5 (pills) only. Appropriate as an interim step during protocol adoption; not recommended as a final state.

Implementations meeting Full Conformance may describe themselves as “Fully VIDP Verified.”

1.12 10. Governance and Versioning

1.12.1 10.1 Authorship

This specification is authored by Kenneth Wheeler, Kenneth Wheeler Photography, Chickasha, Oklahoma.

1.12.2 10.2 License

This specification is published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). Adoption, adaptation, and distribution are permitted provided that attribution to the author and a link to the canonical specification are preserved.

Recommended attribution string:

“Based on the Verified Image Disclosure Protocol (VIDP) by Kenneth Wheeler, Kenneth Wheeler Photography. Licensed under CC BY 4.0. Available at [URL].”

1.12.3 10.3 Versioning

Amendments to this specification are issued as numbered versions (v1.1, v1.2, v2.0) with published changelogs. Prior versions remain publicly accessible at the canonical URL.

Changelog:

Version	Date	Changes
1.1	Draft	<p>Comprehensive language clarification: converted mandatory language (“shall,” “must,” “required”) throughout to voluntary equivalents reflecting the protocol’s voluntary nature.</p> <p>Added Section 3.8 (Disclosure Authority) clarifying that pill application is determined by the producing party’s intent, not external perceptibility.</p> <p>Refined Section 5.1 opacity range to 75–92% with 75% as the recommended default.</p> <p>Refined Section 5.2 placement guidance to favor the lowest possible bottom-right position with documented alternatives.</p> <p>Added “A Note on Language” preface. Added Producing Party to Section 2 definitions.</p> <p>Added Tier 0 (Blue) Informational Overlays class with four pills: BOUNDARY OVERLAY, FOCUS ENHANCED, ANNOTATED, COMPASS ADDED.</p> <p>Added Section 3.6 (Stacking Order).</p>

Version	Date	Changes
1.0	Draft	Initial specification: three-tier alteration classification (Green/Amber/Red), twelve pill types, verification gallery recommendations, audit record recommendations, compliance matrix.

1.12.4 10.4 Feedback and Proposed Amendments

Feedback, proposed amendments, and implementation reports may be submitted to [contact email to be assigned].

1.13 11. Disclaimer

This specification is a voluntary industry standard. It does not constitute legal advice. Adopters remain responsible for compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, and professional obligations in their jurisdiction. The author makes no warranty that adoption of this specification satisfies any specific legal requirement in any specific jurisdiction.

End of Specification v1.1

This document is a draft for review. Final publication version will include assigned canonical URL, publication date, and contact information.