

ACAP Executive Summary

What is ACAP?

The Automated Content Access Protocol (“ACAP”) is being developed by publishers and technology partners, including search engines, led by the European Publishers Council and the World Association of Newspapers, to communicate publishers’ usage permissions and policies electronically. The initial focus is on aggregation of content by search engine “spiders” (the systems that create the search engine indexes also known as “robots” and “crawlers”).

Why?

Online licensing is normally undertaken using written licenses. Sometimes it is “hard coded” into DRM systems. Search engines and similar online aggregators rely completely on content created by others and operate on the assumption of a right to create their index. This right is rarely explicitly granted to the search engines, and the different ways they then use the content in their indexes is a matter over which they assume complete control.

While this is frequently harmless and symbiotic at present (because the traffic generated can have a commercial value to publishers), search engines and other aggregators are already causing damage to some publishers business models, while others avoid publishing online in order to maintain control over their rights. This is unlikely to improve in the future as both online publishing and search engine business models get more complex.

Until the development of ACAP, there has been no adequate way of expressing licenses in a way which search engine “robots” can understand. The best we have been able to do is to use a protocol called “robots exclusion protocol” which allows the website operator to state whether a search engine is or is not allowed to access its site. This is inadequate as it creates an all or nothing scenario for both the content providers and search engines. Content providers need to be able to be more sophisticated about online licensing in order to facilitate new and innovative business models now and in the future.

What is ACAP? What is it not?

ACAP will solve this problem. It is a protocol, based on existing technologies, to communicate permissions and licences in a machine-readable way. In future it will be extended to cover other types of users (including potentially end-users) and content (including video and audio). ACAP is not DRM. It does not technically prevent access and use. However it is capable of operating alongside DRM solutions. But (particularly in a business-to-business relationship) it should not be necessary to resort to technical enforcement – or the courts.

Who’s supporting this?

A wide range of book, magazine, newspaper and periodical publishers worldwide have become involved. Those search engines which have been briefed are also broadly supportive of the concept. We are also seeing support growing in other media.

Who benefits?

ACAP will facilitate new business relationships between online content providers, content aggregators (including search engines) and end users. It is designed to give publishers the confidence to put more valuable content online thereby bringing more choice to consumers. It

will take the guesswork out of the ways in which content providers are willing to allow exploitation of their works by third parties and allow them to have more control over how their content is monetized. It will allow more fully automated transactions and business relationships to be developed. It will become an increasingly important tool in developing future online business models. It can give search engines legal certainty, avoiding unnecessary litigation over disputes regarding unauthorized use of copyrighted works.

Everyone benefits.

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