

The business case for a new ACAP-enabled partnership between publishers and search engines

This document has been prepared to provide an overview of the long-term benefits that we believe can accrue from the development and implementation of ACAP in the relationship between publishers and search engines, as business models for the online publishing of content mature. In the first instance, ACAP provides a framework that will allow any publisher, large or small, to express access and use policies in a language that search engines' robot "spiders" can be taught to understand. During future phases of ACAP, we anticipate that the scope will be extended to other business and usage relationships, other content value chains, and other media types.

The ability to express much more sophisticated sets of permissions for access and use of content in the network environment in machine readable form is an essential step towards building robust and mutually beneficial business models for content distribution in the 21st Century. Business relationships between content owners and intermediaries have until now been limited to unrefined "bulk" deals. It is always risky to predict future business models, which are created by the complex ecosystem of the market; ACAP is not intended to formulate future business models, but to enable a broader range of more sophisticated and refined potential business models than is currently possible.

We believe that, to this end, the development of open, flexible and extensible enabling standards is a critical component:

- **Machine-to-machine communication** is essential – the scale of the content value chain on the network is such that human intervention in every content transaction is inconceivable
- **Communication standards** are essential to the effective conduct of many-to-many business relationships – the alternative of multiple bilateral communication protocols is unscalable from both cost and manageability perspectives
- **Flexibility and extensibility** are necessary, because our ability to forecast future requirements in a period of rapid and unpredictable change is low
- **Openness** is critical to keep the barriers to entry as low as possible; proprietary solutions can only result in a reduction in competition, to everyone's detriment

What types of new business might result from the development of ACAP, for search engines and publishers working in partnership?

1. Beginning with content that is freely available on the web, ACAP will allow publishers to be more confident about the use to which their content is put, allowing discrimination (for example) between trusted and untrusted partners and between different usages. ACAP will allow (again as an example) time-based factors to be taken into account in spidering rules, giving publishers much finer control over dissemination of content at different stages in its life-cycle
2. With content that is currently not publicly available, ACAP will create the technological framework for web site owners to allow access to content behind firewalls (book content, for example) with much finer control of the conditions under which it can be spidered – giving confidence to publishers that they can retain a direct influence over what is displayed to users and other access conditions – thus increasing the publishers' confidence that in making their content available for search they are not damaging their core business models
3. A large newspaper publisher that currently keeps its content offline might choose to launch an online archive of its historic material. It might be that the organization decides not to allow the

archive to be spidered indiscriminately. But the organization might be willing to make it available for spidering in partnership with one or more search engines as long as there is agreement about what can be spidered, what can be made available in search results and what can be kept in the search engine's databases. Such conditions can be managed with ACAP in a way that they cannot be managed until today. Because this would be a paid-for service, it would enable various partnership opportunities, potentially different ones with different search engines.

4. ACAP will make possible more sophisticated ways of collaborating in the sharing of revenues – not only advertising revenues, but (for example) revenues from search which result in content sales; there are many proposed “micropayment”, “long tail” and “micro-licensing” models for content commerce on the network that are only economically feasible with the development of much more sophisticated communication within the value chain. Search engines are well placed not only to direct users to content, but to facilitate further uses of that content.
5. ACAP will provide a basis for the greater sharing of structured metadata, enabling for example the development of much more intelligent image search
6. ACAP will create opportunities for the development of collaborative new premium products – for example, structured aggregations which can provide unified and sophisticated presentation of content drawn from a number of different sources
7. Once ACAP can handle more sophisticated permissions we could also look at rights to republish certain material on other sites, or functionality which would allow this to be brokered by a third party like a search engine.
8. With automated rights clearance information, search engine crawler technology can be used as a content and licensing scout for content reusers, retrieving content that can conveniently and legitimately be licensed and reused. Currently, this requires extensive human intervention in many publishing houses, not to mention among music and film clip remixers.
9. By implementing ACAP, a publisher will be exposing its business model in finer detail than has hitherto been the case. From a search engine perspective, this should present opportunities. Certain patterns of permissions and prohibitions may suggest new ways in which the search engine can intermediate more effectively between publisher and end-user. For example, if a publisher is routinely setting time-limits on permissions, this suggests immediately that the publisher is shifting content between public and private areas for business-related reasons, perhaps to create a paid-for archive, a piece of knowledge that a savvy search engine should be able to exploit.

By definition, this list is intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive. Once there is greater granularity in the system, the question becomes one of extending ACAP's specification to allow all these scenarios – and then the only limitation is the imagination of publishers and search engines to devise new collaborative business opportunities

Is there any downside? Well, of course, just as they can today in the terms and conditions they put in “plain English” on their web sites, publishers can choose to express in ACAP access and usage constraints with which a search engine may not agree. But ACAP is not a technical protection measure – it does not prevent a search engine from doing anything that it does today in terms of fair use and other exceptions to copyright.

A more sophisticated capability for the expression of permissions is essential for the future management of content on the network – and ACAP has the broad support essential to making it work.