

# ACAP Newsletter: September 2008

---

You have been sent this email because you have previously indicated an interest in being kept informed about the ACAP Project (see <http://www.the-acap.org>). If you do not wish to receive any further mailings from the ACAP Project, please let us know by emailing [info@the-acap.org](mailto:info@the-acap.org). We will immediately remove your name from our mailing list.

## Survey of publisher attitudes

As part of our preparation for a series of ACAP seminars with publishers in Europe, we circulated a questionnaire to test publisher attitudes on a number of key issues relating to ACAP. These provided us with some interesting findings, although the sample size is relatively small, so it would be unwise to draw too many firm conclusions. We are currently considering whether to extend the research – and if so how best we should do this. But in the meantime, here is a summary of the more striking results.

We asked publishers to tell us how much they agreed with a set of statements about rights management. We got a very high degree of agreement (mean 4.6 out of a possible 5, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree) on two statements:

- I believe that we should be able to decide who is allowed to use our content – permissions are ours to give not other people's to take.
- The area of rights management requires further automation in order to make smaller transactions profitable.

This reassuringly confirms that, from the point of view of publishers, ACAP is pursuing its strategy in an area where there is a high degree of consensus over direction. Similarly, publishers broadly acknowledge (mean 4.4) the importance of search:

- I believe that search engines are essential to our business, in enabling customers to find our content

This completely underlines the position that ACAP has taken from the outset – we are not anti-search, or anti-search-engine. We are simply trying to bring better communication to a relationship which is currently ambiguous – and too often characterised by conflict and litigation. And in this context, we got almost as much agreement (mean 4.1) on another statement touching directly on ACAP's specific approach:

- I recognise that an ability to express permissions in a machine-readable form is an essential element of infrastructure for managing relationships in the online supply chain

Three more statements also received a fair degree of agreement (in the range from 3.7 to 3.9):

- I believe that a significant element of our revenues will be derived from digital exploitation of our content by 2012
- I am concerned that third parties may seek to monetize exploitation of our digital content without our permission
- I am worried that the digital distribution channels will in future be dominated by near monopolies.

Interestingly, we found less agreement around two other statements (a score of 3 being “neither agree nor disagree”):

- We have high-value content behind firewalls which we would like to make it as easy as possible for customers to find, so that they can pay for access (mean 3.3)
- We would make more high-value content available on the network if we could be more confident that search engines and other online intermediaries would respect our interests in the content (mean 2.8)

We can hazard that this is because the majority of those responding are newspaper publishers – many of whom make **all** their content freely available online. However, at the same time, they clearly see the need to maintain better control over their right to manage their content. There is no paradox here.

## **Autumn events programme**

The ACAP team, and Mark Bide in particular, have been travelling widely this month, taking the ACAP message to Zurich, Helsinki, Copenhagen, Moscow, Warsaw and Washington DC at various ACAP meetings and other events. There was general support for ACAP and promises of new implementation. Events coming up include: Amsterdam for the WAN digital publishing conference and exhibition, the Frankfurt Book Fair (more information below) and the iCopyright conference in Brussels in October and the Online Information conference and exhibition in London in December.

### ***Mark Bide wrote the following piece in response to one of these events:***

I have been travelling widely in the last month, taking the ACAP message to various meetings and events in Europe and the United States. Aside from leaving me temporarily rather deaf (presumably too many ascents and descents in too short a time), I have been left with what I hope will prove to be some rather more enduring legacies.

One of these was the result of a discussion following my presentation at the Online News Association (ONA) conference in Washington DC on September 12. This is a very busy and lively event, and I was invited to present ACAP in one of three parallel tracks; I got an audience of something over 100 people for a one hour session.

My presentation of ACAP, as is often the case, engendered quite lively debate on a number of issues. One thread was the concern (expressed by Jeff Jarvis of Buzzmachine.com) that

ACAP poses a threat to journalism since it would involve “locking away” news, when the greatest value in what Jeff calls the “link economy” lies in making content as widely available as possible; he holds that it is therefore incumbent on news providers to find some way of monetising that ubiquity. My response to this was the same as always: nobody (least of all me) denies that this provides the basis for a potential business model (and like any other business model is one which is fully supportable within the ACAP framework). However, it is simply not the case that, for the future, there is only one conceivable business model for content on the web; and it is (and should remain) open to publishers to choose which business model they wish to adopt for the publication of their content. ACAP’s role is to enable innovation and diversity in business models, and certainly does not suggest that publishers should hide their content from search.

However, it was another thread of the discussion that in retrospect has really caught my attention. This was about the potential of some elements of the ACAP specification to be used maliciously for “cloaking” – for example, leading a search engine inadvertently to point users at malware, which they might download by clicking on an apparently legitimate search result for something entirely innocent.

We accept that there is real possible hazard here; ACAP has always acknowledged this. However, I think the problem is substantially overstated. Because in the end, it can easily be overcome by the establishment of a trusted relationship between crawler and crawled. It seems to me that, rather than worrying about the risks of cloaking, we should rather be concerned about seeking solutions that resolve this general problem of establishing trustworthiness.

I found this view being confirmed only three days later in an interview which Tim Berners Lee gave to the BBC (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/7613201.stm>). Although he was talking about the need for creating trust in information on the web in a slightly different context – primarily seeking to answer the question: how you distinguish between good and bad science on the web – the challenge is by no means dissimilar. The network provides a platform for both reliable and unreliable providers of information in all fields of human endeavour. How do we distinguish between them? From an ACAP point of view, how can we find ways that are acceptable and reliable for indicating (at a machine-to-machine level) that a website is not going to indulge in maliciously inspired cloaking?

Don’t expect to find an instant answer to that question here. Although I have for a long time been working on a model that identifies *authority* (a concept similar but not identical to brand) as an enduring source of added value in the information value chain, a clear mechanism for the establishment of monetisable authority on the internet continues to prove elusive. Nevertheless, it seems to me that we should indeed be focusing more on finding ways of establishing trustworthiness in web content than in explaining why it cannot be done.

One significant effect of ACAP has been to open up a number of crucial debates between different communities –between the different sectors of the content industries, as well as between the content industries and the search community. We are all learning a lot – and we are very pleased that ACAP has facilitated that process.

## **More on Frankfurt**

The IPA is hosting an important event on Friday, 17 October, Hall 6.1, during the Frankfurt Book Fair at which Mark Bide, ACAP Project Director, Simon Juden, Chief Executive of the UK Publishers Association and Piero Attanasio, co-ordinator of the European digital libraries project "ARROW" at the Italian Publishers Association will be discussing what the future holds for rights management and copyright on the Internet and what publishers need to do to prepare for the era of the e-book. For more information, please contact [secretariat@internationalpublishers.org](mailto:secretariat@internationalpublishers.org).

## **Implementation**

Ringier in Switzerland has just announced that it is implementing ACAP on all its sites and a Chinese online publication has also signed up taking us up to 42 countries worldwide.

## **Questions and answers**

Here are some of the questions raised at one of the recent events and, while these may have been answered one way or another in previous newsletters, it may be useful to have them in one place:

### **Experience: what is the feedback from companies using ACAP?**

This question has come up before, typically expressing concern over whether implementing ACAP on your website might in some way be detrimental to online traffic. In last month's newsletter, we showed that this concern to be misplaced; the Independent's weblog for a period before and after ACAP implementation shows no impact in terms of referrals from search engines.

### **What is the position of search engines on ACAP?**

We are still in day-to-day contact with the major search engines and are confident that once we can demonstrate significant take up of ACAP by the publishing community, they will be persuaded of the mutual value of adopting ACAP.

### **Will there be an upgrade to ACAP?**

We have been continuing to work on extensions and improvements to v1.0 of the specification, and once we are getting into more sophisticated implementations, we can anticipate a need for an update to the specification to be published; however, we do not believe that this will invalidate any aspects of the current specification.

We are continuing to work on other Use Cases, particularly those which involve setting permissions for individual media files.

### **How can publishers be sure that the content intermediaries respect the terms and conditions fixed by the publishers through ACAP?**

We can see no reason why it should be necessary to enforce copyright in a business-to-business relationship. In the past, it may have been possible to argue that publishers' permissions were not sufficiently clear. With ACAP, this will no longer be a valid argument.

## **What is the price of ACAP? Small publishers could have difficulties with buying ACAP services**

ACAP implementation is free and takes little effort. However, for publishers wishing to work with ACAP to devise new semantics to suit their own particular business model, there is an annual membership fee of 5,000 euros and the expectation that time and resources will be allocated to work with us.

### **PLEASE CONTINUE TO SPREAD THE WORD...**

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us:

Heidi Lambert, ACAP Marketing Manager

[[heidilambert@hlcltd.demon.co.uk](mailto:heidilambert@hlcltd.demon.co.uk)]

Mark Bide, ACAP Project Director [[mark.bide@rightscom.com](mailto:mark.bide@rightscom.com)]