June 2003

Call for Papers -- Charleston Conference 2003

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Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4145
Desperately Seeking Copyright
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- Broad availability of premium content;
- Fast and cost-effective ways to redistribute content lawfully;
- Understandable, and, where possible, uniform licensing agreements; and
- Centralized clearance mechanisms.

Are these perspectives on DRM really at odds? Arguably not. The publishing game is several centuries old now (at least), and DRM is but the latest addition to the ways to get quality content to interested consumers. This technology, as any adjunct to any publishing system, must address the needs on both sides of this relationship.

Successful DRM technologies are about providing access tools and license management information—business intelligence about content, if you will. Even aside from the financial transaction, the value of capturing this business intelligence about content lies in publishers and library managers knowing how well the licensed material is performing. For example, it can tell publishers whether they are distributing useful content to their customers. It can also help library managers decide whether or not they are getting good value out of the time and money they invest in licensing certain material. Both sides need to know: "Are we serving our customers well?"

So what's on the horizon for such technology that could further benefit information professionals and publishers? "Superdistribution," a term coined by Brad Cox several years ago, envisions continuous reuse of content by users, while maintaining content integrity and rights management information. This is becoming possible, as metadata becomes part and parcel of digital content. Additional superdistribution functions might include: the ability to forward content to additional project participants, possibly prepaying for colleagues. Superdistribution functionality like this will enable content to travel to users who need it, without loss of its commercial value.

Other up and coming DRM features, such as persistent usage tracking and event logging (on forward, download, print, etc.) are additional functionalities that will enable publishers to see how well their content is doing. Like record charts and box office numbers, this will help print publishers identify "winning" content, in order to produce more and market better.

These functions will not be in place for all content, nor should they be. Privacy protections, including what author Julie Cohen has called the "right to read anonymously" will also persist.

Similarly, library and information center managers have long sought better, and more standardized, tracking information on the use of content and databases licensed through the library. Such information enhances the services of the library, and indicates the value the library has to its own organizational or project performance. Some examples of this "library manager" functionality could include: the enabling of price formulae for volume (corporate-wide) discounts; the creation of additional licenses on-demand; adjustment of content access levels; and subscription management.

Better search functionality will also become a must-have. Finally, usage reports that show cost, usage patterns, popular content and laggards will help inform content decisions. Shortly, then, functionalities such as these will begin to round out the standard DRM offering from the library manager's point of view.

Ultimately, the publishing equation is an economic one. The perception of value on both sides must be roughly equal, or at least equitable. DRM systems, now and in the near future, should and must provide efficiencies and greater value to both sides in this equation.

Perhaps in a few years, the answer to Mark Twain's question will be: Everybody's doing something about DRM!

Endnotes