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MAKING MEDIA PAY

Rights Management

Foreword

Rightsline and our clients are delighted to have been invited to participate in commissioning DPP's report on Rights Management. As a leading global provider of rights and royalties solutions, we place great emphasis on the importance of industry collaboration in achieving effective rights management. After numerous sessions facilitated by the DPP, this fresh and insightful report offers candid insights from leading broadcasters, distributors, and vendors on the challenges and opportunities of effective rights management.

The report explores the impact of rights information on sales and programming decisions, which in turn affects the content served to the end consumer. For example, Netflix's content library varies between countries like the UK and Germany due to differences in rights availability. So if I want to watch my favorite slice of horror, it might not be available when I travel to Berlin.

If I continue to bare my soul, securing the rights clearance to bring back "I Don't Want to Wait" by Paula Cole to the intro title track of Dawson's Creek made the world right again. Some things just belong together, like tea and biscuits. I want to thank Netflix and Sony Pictures Television[1] for restoring the nostalgia of my youth. My viewing habits and this report clearly bring to light the power of rights data. Simply put, rights and royalties solutions facilitate greater automation and visibility into content libraries when integrated with metadata, finance, and sales data.

These valuable insights into the success criteria for a rights management initiative highlight the need for process transformation and new technology implementation. The journey towards efficient rights management requires a comprehensive approach involving better navigation, management, and content monetisation. DPP's report presents several key takeaways that will benefit industry professionals seeking to enhance their rights management practices.

Overall, we are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this report and share our expertise in rights and royalties solutions. We hope this report serves as a valuable resource for industry professionals, empowering them to navigate the complexities of rights management more effectively.

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[1] https://variety.com/2021/music/news/paula-cole-dawsons-creek-song-restored-netflix-1235055893/

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Introduction

If there's one topic consuming the thoughts of media company boards in 2023, it's how to optimise their effectiveness in order to maximise their return on content investment.

Finding the best balance of subscriptions, advertising, rentals, sales, and syndication is an increasingly difficult equation. Rights owners find themselves with more opportunities – but also more complexity to manage – than ever before.

Rights owners have more opportunities than ever before — if they can seize them

Just like in any manufacturing industry, it is essential for media companies to have a strong grip on supplies, stock, and sales. But many of them report that they have content libraries full of unidentified content, duplicate assets, and unknown rights.

Even those that have a strong understanding of their rights and content often find that the data is spread across multiple systems and formats, making it difficult to truly understand and exploit the full value of the company's assets.

Greater understanding and control of intellectual property assets offers the potential to optimise sales, reduce inefficiency, and maximise return on investment in content. That's why the DPP has spoken to a wide range of media companies and rights management specialists for this research.

This report seeks to understand the challenges and opportunities of effective rights management, and to explore how rights systems and processes should interface with media, metadata, and other key parts of the media supply chain.

Executive Summary

1

Increasing complexity raises the importance of rights management

As distribution platforms multiply, and media companies seek to exploit their library content, the volume of rights information is increasing. There is growing awareness of the need to structure rights data and simplify rights management processes.

2

A well defined rights model is the crucial foundation

Excellent rights management begins with a common understanding of the way that rights are defined and represented. Organisations must define vocabularies for their deal types, distribution media, and more, then map their contracts to this model.

3

Rights evolve, so systems and processes must be flexible

Distribution methods come and go, and no rights model can be truly timeless. Strong data governance and flexible rights systems enable the data to evolve as business needs change, reducing the need to revert to exceptions and manual processes.

4

Integration of rights data enables automation

Many companies still rely on rekeying data and other human interventions to provide rights information to different teams, assure sales, and trigger payments. Modern data integration architectures provide better visibility and enable process automation.

5

Better rights visibility is a commercial enabler

Now more than ever, technology investments must deliver returns. Successful rights management projects deliver improved operational effectiveness and lower business risk. And for content owners, the biggest driver is most often an enhanced ability to understand and exploit their catalogue of content.

Contributors

The content for *Making Media Pay: Rights Management* has been gathered through workshops and interviews with subject matter experts from across the industry. Valuable input has also been provided by our Expert Sponsors, Fincons and Rightsline, and our Contributing Sponsor, Knox Media Hub.

Although the content of this report has been informed by these discussions, it should not be assumed that every contributor shares all the views presented here.

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1 Evolving Rights

Key Insights

The rights landscape is becoming more complex, as more content is exploited in more ways on more platforms

The most prominent example of this is the rise of monetisation options like SVOD and more recently FAST

It is also fuelled by increases in international content distribution and the increasing use of social media

Meanwhile old rights, such as video tape rentals or ringtone sales, may still be tracked even as they become obsolete

The result is a very high volume of rights information, necessitating more scalable systems and processes for rights management

The last few years have seen unprecedented disruption to media business models, as linear broadcasting has been joined – and in some cases supplanted – by streaming and its many different monetisation paradigms. In most cases, rights owners have more options to monetise their content than ever before, so in this chapter we ask: to what extent is this an advantage and also a challenge?

The new and the old

Around the start of 2020, it might have seemed that subscription video on demand (SVOD) was the only content monetisation that mattered, as major media firms focused their attention on direct to consumer (D2C) services. In some cases, they even removed content or whole channels from pay TV platforms to do so.

> **In 2020, it might have seemed that SVOD was the only model that mattered**

But since then, there has been a resurgence of advertising supported video on demand (AVOD), and the notable rise of free, ad-supported streaming TV (FAST). Meanwhile, beyond the D2C headlines were many broadcasters and producers who continued to favour linear channels and content licensing or syndication.

Other distribution channels remain important too, including transactional video on demand (TVOD), and download to own (DTO) or electronic sell-through (EST). And while social media distribution is far from new, it seems that almost every year brings a new leading platform and video format, and in some cases these are characterised as distinct rights.

The result is that rights owners and licensees now have to understand and document the rights for a huge range of different uses.

As new rights emerge, others fall away from popular usage. But they may not be removed from contracts or rights systems for many years. As a result, rights holders still find themselves tracking usage rights for near-obsolete outlets such as mobile phone ringtones.

> **Some licensors used to restrict licences by the operating system of mobile devices, such as licensing for Android but not iOS. Nobody's doing that any more. The landscape constantly changes and moves.**

Today's rights management systems and processes must be flexible

This constant change means that today's rights management systems and processes must be flexible. The challenge is to identify the right level of granularity to manage different rights options.

> **We've had rights built into our system and codified and then never used them.**

The challenge of volume

New rights outlets are not generally reported to be a problem in themselves. But the sheer amount of content being made available across so many different outlets creates a challenge of volume.

> **The challenges are about volume. VOD is a hungry beast that we need to keep feeding.**

The biggest challenge is the rising volume of rights to manage

For the largest media companies, a highly extensive content library is of course critical to retaining a competitive edge. In some cases this library is exploited only on a single D2C platform. But for most content owners, there is a need to meet audiences where they are, delivering content through many different channels.

This availability of new outlets to reach audiences in more targeted ways is also causing many media companies to look at their archives with fresh eyes. Older or more niche content can often reach new audiences through VOD, FAST, or platforms such as YouTube. And there is also an increasing propensity to exploit content internationally, as explored in The Future of Localisation.

The availability of so many options can create highly complex rights structures. In many cases, content is bundled into very large licensing deals, requiring the rights of many different pieces of content to be aggregated into one contract. Content may in turn be sublicensed, for example to broadcasters and VOD platforms in different countries, meaning that many parties are involved in tracking the rights and payments for a given piece of content.

It is essential for media companies to achieve complete visibility of their inventory

As a result, it is now essential for media companies to achieve complete visibility of their inventory, and to develop the right systems and processes to work effectively at scale.

2 Managing Legacy

Key Insights

Many media companies have rights information split across disparate systems, resulting in reduced visibility

Older rights contracts don't allow for modern distribution mechanisms like streaming, so they require manual interpretation and clarification

Poor data and systems often result in inefficient data entry, rekeying, and manual processes to access information

As a result, rights processes often do not scale well to meet the increased volume of deals and data

Media companies report that these problems are now rising up the organisational priority list, receiving fresh focus and investment

Many media companies have content and rights contracts going back years, decades or even more. And in some cases, they have the systems and processes to match. In this chapter we examine the difficulties that arise from legacy – and the opportunities for improvement.

Content and contracts

Older content poses a range of issues to be overcome. In the first instance, physical contracts may need to be identified, digitised, and associated with the media.

The contract terms may not match the rights structures defined in modern rights systems, and so it is often necessary to have a legal expert review the terms and interpret them. More problematically, the terms of older agreements may simply not provide clarity on the use of content on modern distribution platforms.

Old agreements may not allow for content to be used on modern platforms

> **In our archive we've got such a huge volume of content, and the rights can be quite antiquated. So you need to translate those contract terms into modern systems.**

Legal documents which predate the internet are unlikely to be clear on the use of a programme on VOD platforms, for example. In some cases the terms may be broad enough yet clear enough that it is possible to interpret them directly. But in other cases, it will be necessary to go back to original content owners, producers, or contributors to renegotiate terms. (This is especially challenging in situations where those entities no longer exist.)

Of course, many rights and contracts have already been digitised. But media companies report that the data is often spread across many disparate systems, providing poor visibility.

A number of organisations have attempted to aggregate the data from multiple systems through a common overview layer, though this is not without its own challenges; this approach is discussed further in the later chapter, Integrating Rights.

Legacy data

Another common challenge is that data has been put into legacy systems which do not have a good model for understanding modern rights. As a result, data has been adapted to fit the container, or the system has been adapted and customised to manage the necessary rights.

> **We launched our own streaming service in 2013, including TVOD, SVOD, and AVOD. But the rights system we have is based on theatrical distribution. So it means we're constantly having to create workarounds.**

Outdated rights systems mean that workarounds are often needed

The process to understand the rights associated with a piece of content can be very complex. A lack of structure in the data can lead to a constant need for manual interpretation.

> " **We had a number of systems that did a number of things, and they kind of talked to each other, but in a very loose way. It was all in free text fields you had to read every time.**

Even when data does exist in a system, experts report that there is often a need to refer back to original contracts, slowing down processes and deals.

All of this means that, when considering any modernisation of rights management tools and processes, data cleansing and migration is often the most challenging step. It is necessary to collate information from multiple sources into one new system or structure, and to ensure that the data is mapped into a common model.

> " **The most painful thing is mapping the rights. And it's not because the technology isn't available, but because the rights are not clear, and not properly described. We're constantly amazed at how little granularity there is to describe what can be done with the content.**

Process bottlenecks

Problems with data and systems often result in additional manual effort. This is especially costly when the individuals performing the manual processes are valuable resources such as lawyers.

> " **The thing about acquisitions and business affairs is that we have highly valuable and skilled people who get sucked into doing basic data entry, because they're the only people who understand the contracts.**

One broadcaster explained the impacts of their strategic schedulers working in spreadsheets without access to rights data. Manual checks are required on every iteration of the schedule, to ensure that rights are available for the desired content on the required output platforms. Clearly, a system which provided this information to the schedulers would be preferable.

This is not to say that experts should not be involved in managing key rights data. Some organisations have identified the processes which need expert input, and created dedicated administrative teams who are trained to perform specialist tasks such as interpreting and summarising contract data.

Such centres of expertise can reduce the load on legal teams, for example. But operations teams are often also burdened with undertaking a lot of manual work that doesn't require specialist expertise, such as entering data, or exporting it from one system to import it into another.

In some cases this may not seem like a high priority problem, as the cost of the manual processes might be less than the investment required to replace them.

> **Having four people rekeying data was cheaper for us than building a new technical solution.**

Excessive manual processes can make small deals unviable

However, this masks the long term impact, as such manual processes do not scale well to meet the needs of the volume challenge identified in the previous chapter. Although the upfront investment in reforming processes and systems may be a barrier at first, the effect of such bottlenecks can be to make small deals or even routine processes unviable.

> **The effort it takes to manage our royalty payments is completely disproportionate to the amount of money. It can take hours of work for payouts that amount to pence.**

Rising awareness

The need for rights processes to scale better and to meet the needs of modern distribution platforms is now gaining greater attention. Where focus might have previously fallen on media and perhaps content metadata, good management of rights information is now being recognised as a critical component of an effective media company.

> **The rights management challenge across the organisation is now being noticed at the executive level.**

The content owners that contributed to this research consistently agreed that there is a greater understanding of the impact of rights management on an organisation's capacity to maximise its return on content investment. But in many cases, it's taken a long time to reach that point.

Rights management impacts a media company's ability to maximise ROI

It took us 25 years to get buy-in, get budgets, and get going. But the business now recognises the importance of rights much more than it did before.

The remainder of this report focuses on the means by which more effective rights management can be achieved.

3   Representing Rights

Key Insights

Efficient and effective rights processes rely on a clear shared understanding of what rights mean

This understanding is codified in a rights model, which defines the rights that an organisation buys or sells in relation to content

A right is defined by specific dimensions such as territory, language, and medium, each of which has a controlled vocabulary of options

The model must be flexible, and have good governance, to allow new types of rights (such as new distribution media) to be implemented

There is no industry standard for a rights model; the most useful step would be to agree a vocabulary to define distribution media types

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The definitive source of rights information is generally contracts and other legal documents, where it is represented in prose. But in order to manage rights data in a computer system and make it visible, understandable, and consistent, it must be represented in a structured way. This chapter considers the implementation of a rights data model.

Defining a rights model

The lack of a clear rights model, comprising unambiguous definitions of rights components, is cited by many as the biggest obstacle to effective rights management.

The lack of a clear data model is the biggest obstacle to effective rights management

To develop effective processes and enable teams to act upon rights information, there must be a common interpretation of the contractual terms used and the rights that are available for use or sale. To put it more simply, staff need to know what the rights are, and what they actually mean.

" **You can have the best system in the world, but it won't work if you don't agree on your understanding of the data.**

This shared understanding is codified in a rights data model. That model must be stable and well understood, yet flexible enough to manage the different rights deals that the company might engage in as they evolve over time.

" **A strong rights model is as important as a clear content hierarchy.**

Within the model, the definition of each individual content right has a number of dimensions, such as the territory, language or version, and the distribution medium.

Rights are defined by dimensions such as territory, language, and media

The model should define the set of potential options for each dimension. For example, distribution territories may use a standard such as the ISO 3166 country codes, while languages may use ISO 639 language codes or the SMPTE/MESA Language Metadata Table. Unfortunately, adoption of such standards is not yet widespread.

" **Despite the ISO standards, every company defines the countries and regions in their own way.**

In many companies, there will be standard packages of options, such as "domestic" and "international" to represent the country in which the content owner operates, and all other countries respectively.

The definition of media types is perhaps the most complex, and the fastest evolving. Widely accepted media today include broadcast linear channels (frequently delineated between pay TV and free to air channels), on demand streaming (broken down into AVOD, SVOD, TVOD), EST, and so on.

Media types can be difficult to define, and are constantly evolving

In some cases additional differentiators are added, such as streaming compared to temporary download, or "catch-up" compared to general AVOD (where catch-up indicates that availability is limited to a fixed time window after linear broadcast).

Once again, standard groupings might be created, such as "broadcast" (including pay and free channels), or "television" (covering broadcast, linear streaming, and catch-up VOD).

Finally, 'restrictions' or 'holdbacks' are used to define areas where a right is *not* granted. This allows a rights model to manage scenarios such as a piece of content being sold for distribution "in all countries except Italy", or "on AVOD platforms worldwide, except in the USA within 30 days after broadcast on linear channels", for example.

FAST problem solving

One of the primary challenges in defining media types is that they change over time. The rate of that change has increased as internet distribution has enabled new business models, aggregators, and content platforms.

An excellent example of this at the time of writing is the emergence of FAST channels. There is currently no common industry agreement on whether the use of content on FAST channels is covered by existing rights (and if so, which rights definition it falls under) or whether a new right must be defined.

> Everyone sees FAST as a different right. Some say it's free TV, some say it's connected to VOD. We just need to agree what type of right it is; then we can implement that easily enough.

There is disagreement on whether or not FAST falls under an existing right

Companies need to collaborate across teams including sales, operations, legal, and business affairs in order to decide how to incorporate a new medium like FAST into their rights model.

A rights model must therefore be designed with the aim of being somewhat future proof. This does not mean defining every possible distribution channel, but rather allowing for flexibility as the industry evolves.

Governance

For a rights model to be defined and agreed – and then to change over time in a controlled way – requires clear governance.

Organisations that have been highly successful in implementing a unified rights model have ensured there is agreement across different departments and teams. They understand who owns which data, and have a well defined process by which changes to the model are agreed.

Successful organisations have clear data ownership and change governance

It is common for the authority over the model definition to rest with legal and business affairs, while implementation in the company's systems may be the responsibility of operations or technology teams.

Some companies provide data quality assurance by restricting the entry of contract information to specialists in legal or operations teams. Others avoid having such gatekeepers, but clear ownership of information is a common characteristic of well run rights processes.

Standardising rights

It is very logical to wonder whether each content company must create its own rights model. Perhaps it would be better if there was an industry standard rights model that was implemented everywhere.

> **It should all be metadata that can be passed quite easily through the supply chain, but we don't have an exchangeable format for that data.**

Many contributors certainly felt that a standardised model would be valuable. The complexity involved in defining and maintaining a model for each organisation could be reduced, while intercompany exchange of rights data would be simplified.

The challenge, of course, is not so much technical, as one of creating industry agreement.

> **Can we create a rights standard? I'm an engineer, so I would say yes. But when I talk to my clients, they don't want to listen.**

## A rights standard is technically possible, but so far lacks industry agreement

Experts are certainly sceptical about the industry appetite to create such a standard.

> **I've had this conversation for years, and everyone agrees that we need a standardised rights model, but nobody seems to do anything about it.**

However, we have also seen that the challenges of rights management are receiving renewed focus. And in the DPP's 2022 survey, **The Truth About Standards**, respondents who are involved in standardisation rated rights as the third most important area for future standardisation work.

To what extent do you feel that more standardisation is required in the following areas?

■ Very much   ■ Somewhat
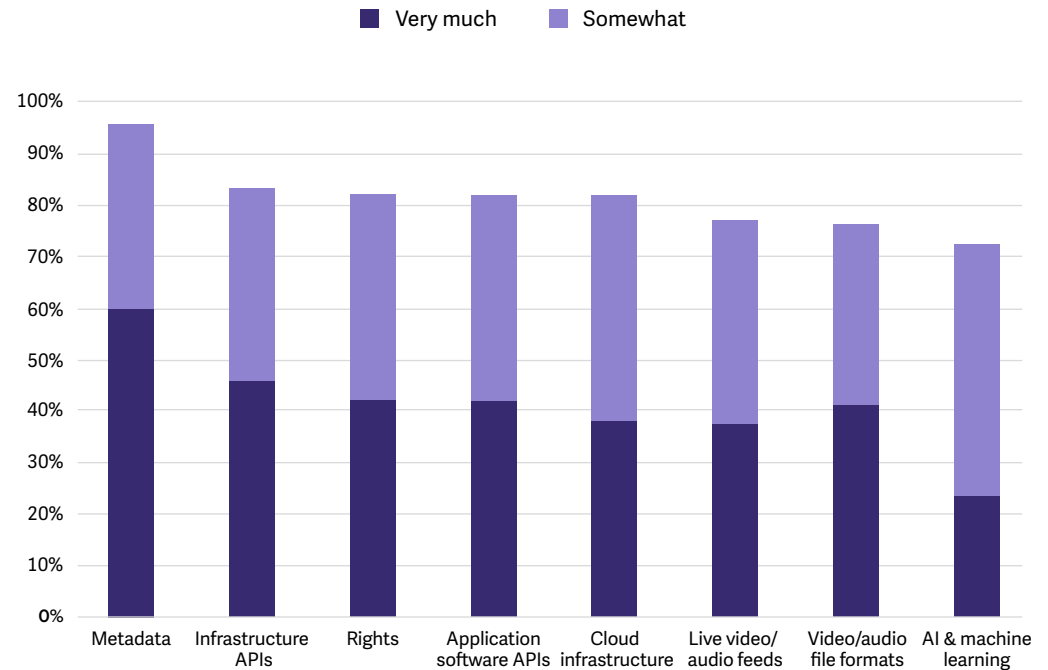
The route to success is likely to be creating standard vocabularies for specific aspects of the data, rather than attempting to define an all-encompassing rights standard.

Success will be achieved through specific vocabularies, not one monolithic standard

As discussed above, there are existing vocabularies which can be used for languages and countries. And elements such as media type might build on related standards, such as **EMA Avails**, which defines a format for communicating content availability windows.

Nevertheless, whether standardised or organisation specific, a strong rights model is the foundation from which the benefits of better rights management can be delivered.

4 Enabling Exploitation

Strong rights management processes, enabled by best in class rights management systems, have the potential to improve efficiency and reduce costs, of course. But the strongest benefits case lies in helping to increase the return on content investment. In this chapter we explore how improved rights management helps organisations maximise the value of their content.

Finding hidden gems

For content owners with large libraries, it can be difficult to understand the value of the catalogue, and what is available to sell. The range of new distribution mechanisms discussed previously has enabled content that would previously have been considered low value to be monetised in new ways.

> **We have a FAST channel in America running exclusively on a show that we'd only previously sold to Australia. Who'd have thought it would fill a whole channel? You never know what's going to work, and there are hidden gems that we should be making more of.**

There are so many hidden gems that we should be making more of

This type of 'mining the catalogue' to monetise older or niche content is increasingly common. But without clear rights information, it can be hard to know what content can be sold or exploited – and which will be most worthwhile.

By developing a coherent understanding of the rights availability for content in its library, a media company can begin to use that rights data to highlight relevant content licensing opportunities.

> **We have 22,000 titles in our catalogue with active rights, going back over 70 years, so no matter how long the salesperson has worked here, they can't know the whole catalogue. Having great title data and rights data means they can find content of interest, understand the rights position, and then go sell it.**

The analysis of rights data in this way is generally referred to as Rights Availability Reporting. At one level, it is simply a different way of viewing information that was already recorded. But when implemented well, it represents a shift in thinking from rights as a set of restrictions on content use, to rights as an enabler of commercial opportunities.

There's a shift in thinking from rights as a set of restrictions, to rights as a commercial enabler

Sales teams can use rights reports to interrogate the library, identify content which has available rights, and construct potential deals. It is for this reason that rights reporting is often seen as the driver for rights modernisation projects.

> **Rights availability reporting has been a key differentiator between our old and new rights systems.**

Retaining flexibility

There are of course challenges when implementing any new system or standardising any data or process. One area of friction can be the need to balance a consistent approach to rights with the flexibility that sales teams demand in order to be at their most effective.

> **We're still doing battle with sales people. I don't think they'll ever be fully happy no matter how good the data is and the system is, because rights are very complex and hard to work with.**

Although the complexity of some rights deals may be impossible to overcome, there are other aspects of the systems and processes which can be improved in order to enable salespeople as much as possible. Fluidity and flexibility are key.

Our experts reported that their sales teams often like to combine various catalogue items into bundles, for example, and so being able to easily collect titles together and get a clear view of their rights and royalties is important. And while rights structures should be as consistent as possible, custom deal terms are still needed to close a sale in some scenarios, so there must be ways to record these.

> **Sometimes systems with rigid fields can imperil some of the mental fluidity involved in doing a deal, so that salespeople then tend to default to standard deals. And we're encouraging them to think in different ways.**

A good understanding of rights enables more agile deal making

However, structured data yields benefits in being easier to interpret, report on, process, and manipulate. For this reason, it can actually enable greater agility as rights owners look to experiment with different distribution platforms, revenue models, and deal constructions.

> **Greater agility is needed, but you can't work at high speed unless you have a very good understanding of your rights and your inventory.**

Selling and scheduling with confidence

When a content deal is constructed, or when content is added to a linear schedule or VOD schedule, it is important to validate that the rights held for that content are sufficient for the intended use. Errors in this process have serious consequences, and such checks have historically been highly manual.

The availability of structured rights data enables these confidence checks to be automated, reducing business risk by ensuring that any conflicts or points of uncertainty are checked.

> **When scheduling, we must not waste a lot of time. We immediately need to know if we have the rights available.**

If the appropriate connections are made between sales tools and the rights management system, it is also possible to automatically validate against other sales deals. This ensures that content is not 'double sold', and can warn if there are multiple deals in progress which both intend to sell the same rights in a way that would conflict.

Integrated rights management removes the risk of double selling a piece of content

More generally, the ability to validate rights data at key points in workflows such as sales, scheduling, and fulfilment, is enabled by the integration of rights data across the business.

5 Integrating Rights

Key Insights

Most media companies prefer to choose best of breed solutions for key functions such as management of rights, media, metadata, sales, and finance

The greatest value is derived when these tools are connected, by transferring data between them, and/or aggregating data into unified user interfaces

Common integrations with rights management systems include metadata systems, sales, scheduling, media asset management, and enterprise resource planning

The most common integration approach today is using middleware or an enterprise service bus to connect together the APIs of multiple systems

The most advanced media companies are using rights information along with other data sources to automate processes from content delivery to payments

Rights management as a standalone capability provides some useful functionality. But it is when rights data is connected to other sources of business data - and made available to other teams across the business – that it becomes truly powerful. This chapter explores the potential of integrating rights management.

Best of breed

Architects and technology managers face a perpetual balancing act: choosing between large, multi-functional systems that seamlessly combine multiple capabilities, and 'best of breed' individual solutions for each capability. In theory, the former can offer more streamlined user interfaces and lower support overhead, while the latter offers the choice of the best tool for each job and a lower dependence on a single vendor.

In reality, there is a general shift towards a best of breed approach in modern software driven organisations. That is not to say that no solution can combine multiple functions, but huge monolithic solutions are decidedly out of fashion.

Best of breed architectures are preferred, over monoliths

A majority of contributors to this report agreed, preferring the advantages of specialised systems. But there was a very strong sentiment that rights management is not an island; it must be well connected to other systems and processes.

> **Nobody should look for a perfect system that will solve many problems at the same time, unless those problems are very homogeneous. We need systems that are best at one use-case and can talk to each other.**

In some cases, there is overlap. Systems that combine rights and scheduling are not uncommon, for example. But even such systems are much stronger when connected to content metadata repositories, asset management tools, sales management, or finance systems. So in general, we have considered rights management as a discrete functional block which is connected to many others.

Holistic understanding

An objective commonly expressed by media companies building a modern supply chain is to better understand their return on investment for a given piece of content. Achieving this requires an understanding of production or acquisition costs, royalties and other payments, processing and delivery costs, revenue generated, and more.

Understanding content ROI means connecting data about costs, rights, revenue, and more

Sharing such information between systems often makes each tool individually more useful.

A rights catalogue is easier to browse and search if it is enriched with metadata about each piece of content. A scheduler has more confidence in their schedule if they can see availability of rights and media assets. A sales team would like their systems to show not only the availability of a programme or movie, but the cost of its rights, the availability of dub tracks and subtitles, and so on.

In addition, many media companies also aggregate data from multiple systems into some overall management layer or user interface, which is often bespoke.

One broadcaster uses an in-house developed system to commission and 'greenlight' a production, before passing information about it to other systems downstream. Another has created a custom user interface for their staff which combines the capabilities of a number of underlying off-the-shelf systems, including media asset management and rights management.

This approach is common, and for companies choosing it, the requirements for integration capability are extremely important when choosing vendors and products.

" **When we are looking at new products, our main question is if they are API-first products. We want to control them from our custom front end.**

Integration capabilities are extremely important when choosing products

The challenge is to ensure that data is represented consistently, and properly understood in each system or interface. This is where an organisation-wide rights model reinforces its value, though it's also an area where experts express frustration today.

The underlying integration technology is widespread, but there are improvements to be made in having a common understanding of data, and in exposing the right information to the right user at the right time. One vendor explained this succinctly:

" **We have the technology to do these integrations, but what I'm hearing is that users are still being under-served.**

The ultimate aim is to have a common understanding of rights data wherever it is surfaced, such that users are never forced to refer back to other systems in order to clarify the information they're presented with.

Common rights integrations

There are many different possibilities for integrating rights management with other systems.
No organisation will implement them all, but most implement some.
Many of the most common integrations are summarised below.

▶ **Metadata / title management**
Such integrations are used to provide descriptive programme information in the rights system, connecting rights to the underlying editorial entity. Sometimes they also provide rights information in the programme catalogue, or link rights to cast and crew information to assist with managing royalties.

▶ **Sales / customer relationship management**
A very common integration for content owners and distributors. The purpose is to assign rights to a sales deal, validate the rights availability for deals, and to associate contract parties, rights licensees, and so on. Sales opportunity information may also be used to update rights availability once content is sold.

▶ **Scheduling / broadcast management systems**
A very common integration for broadcasters. Rights information is provided to schedulers in order to ensure that content in the schedule is appropriately cleared. Rights and royalties costs can also be used to assist with budgeting and content planning.

▶ **Media asset management / workflow**
MAM integrations can connect the rights to content assets, potentially offering the capability to order additional outputs such as localised assets (dubbing/subtitles) which are required for a deal. In some cases, rights information is provided for raw material which is to be edited or included in a new programme.

▶ **Finance / enterprise resource planning (ERP)**
By connecting rights to financial systems, billing or payment requests can be automatically triggered. Details of the deal, such as payment terms and status, can be updated between the two systems. Amortisation of a rights asset over time can also be made visible.

▶ **eSignature**
Many rights systems can be used to generate contracts which are then published to an eSignature platform for approval and signature.

▶ **Content protection**
As discussed earlier in this report, rights for a piece of content are often restricted by time and geography. These restrictions may be enforced by digital rights management (DRM) or other content protection technologies, which can be initiated from the rights system. These technologies are discussed further in another report in this series, Content Protection.

Integration architectures

There are many architectures available for integrating data from multiple software systems, as explored in Delivering Seamless Integration.

Historically, point-to-point integrations between systems were common, but it is more common now to use a more loosely coupled solution.

Loosely coupled integrations are usually favoured over point-to-point solutions

Most software systems now offer REST APIs, which use web technologies to provide an interface by which another system can query or update information. Unless they have been specifically designed to work together in a point-to-point manner, systems with REST APIs often need an external system to connect them together.

This might be a custom 'middleware', an enterprise service bus (ESB), or another type of integration platform. In any case, it acts as a client to the API of each individual system, retrieving data from one system and updating it in another, for example.

Rights	Metadata	Media Assets
↕	↕	↕

Integration Platform
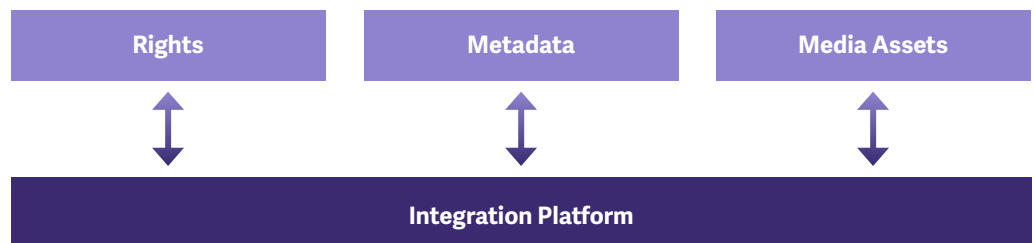
Another increasingly popular alternative to using REST APIs is to implement an event based architecture. In this model, each system publishes 'events' such as notifications of new or changed data onto a message bus. Other systems subscribe to receive these events and act accordingly, by updating their own databases or triggering other actions.

There is an onus on the customer to integrate their systems

In either case, the result is to place the onus on the customer (the media company) to connect the various systems together, or to use an integration specialist to do so. Some media companies have sizable development teams for this purpose, and they can provide additional capabilities such as implementing custom business logic.

It also allows them to make data available across the organisation in other ways, including through low-code and no-code application platforms. Such capabilities are discussed further in the DPP's *Making Integration Work* series of reports.

Integration drives automation

Considerable value can be achieved by simply having visibility of the same data across multiple applications. But maximum benefit is achieved when integration is used to drive automation.

> # Maximum benefit is achieved when integration is used to drive automation

The specifics of each company's workflows will differ, of course. But the possibilities for efficiency gains are considerable.

Simpler use-cases might involve updating information based on changes in other systems, such as removing rights availability when a content deal is finalised. More advanced implementations involve functionality such as automating licence and royalty payments based on rights deals.

Rights data might also be used to enable other automations, such as automated scheduling of FAST channels or VOD windows. And many media companies operate increasingly automated media supply chains to retrieve, process, and deliver content based on order information which might include rights clearances.

The potential benefits of integrating rights data with other business data sources are significant. However, such benefits need not all be achieved at once. Even the most advanced media companies take such improvements a step at a time.

Conclusion: The Right Approach

With new and ever changing distribution media, and a desire to reach audiences wherever they are, content companies are performing more content deals and generating a greater volume of rights information to be managed. That's why a strong rights model provides the foundation for success, and good data systems and management can save a considerable amount of manual effort.

Improved rights management capabilities also enhance the ability to capitalise on commercial opportunities, while delivering greater operational efficiency. This is especially true when rights systems are integrated with other tools and workflows. But the approach to implementation is also key.

Understanding value

Of course, any investment in new technology or processes must be accompanied by a strong business case. It is notable that the case for investment in rights management differs for different companies.

For a broadcaster, the objective might be to capture the rights and clearances for each piece of content smoothly and accurately, and to integrate this data into the scheduling process. This ensures that the content is distributed in line with the rights they have acquired, even as their distribution mechanisms multiply and complexity increases.

For a studio or content owner, the benefit might be found in mining the catalogue, producing availability reports, and simplifying the sales process.

Benefits might be reducing risk, enabling commercial opportunities, or both

One is about reducing business risk, the other about enabling commercial opportunities. In reality, most organisations may seek an element of both types of benefits, along with a reduction in manual effort and inefficiencies.

The business must buy in to any change process, and in a challenging economic climate, there must be a clear return on investment that is recognised by senior leaders.

> **Where I've seen rights projects work really well is where the CFO has personally got involved and championed the project, because they see it as a competitive advantage.**

Step by step

The full benefits of implementing a new rights model, system, and/or process will only be achieved once the whole organisation is aligned around it. But implementation need not take a 'big bang' approach.

Implementation need not be a big bang

Many content companies who have had some success in modernising their rights capability report that they've done so in incremental stages. They might roll out new tools and data structures to a team at a time, beginning with content licensing before moving on to consumer sales, or scheduling, for example.

Or they may implement a rights library in one step, but add integrations to other systems and processes over time (tolerating some manual rekeying in the short term).

> **We slowly chipped away at the dual keying and the legacy systems, adding an integration at a time.**

Process and people

We have identified that rights management capability is becoming more important as the volume of rights increases and content deals require more agility. So we might reasonably expect more companies to make investments in their rights systems and data.

But for change to deliver business value, it must be considered in the context of the overall business function. Technology investment in isolation rarely succeeds. Change management is a crucial component of any project, and must consider all the impacted people and processes, which might range from production and acquisition, to legal and business affairs, to sales and finance.

Technology investment in isolation rarely delivers success

> **One thing we didn't do very well when we implemented a rights management product was to push back on some of the antiquated business processes that wouldn't work and wouldn't lead to consistent data.**

A complete rights project can be large. Designing a model, implementing a system, enriching decades of historic data, developing integrations, improving processes, and managing change, all take time.

> **It's taken us a number of years to get there. We did some big migration projects, and had to go back to contracts to ensure the data was right. But it was worth it in the long run.**

The result can be greater efficiency, improved sales agility, reduced business risk, and new commercial opportunities. Successful media companies with strong rights management capabilities are able to understand and take control of the intellectual property assets which are ultimately the core materials in their media supply chain.

About Rightsline

Rightsline is a global rights and royalties SaaS suite that provides IP owners of all sizes with innovative technology tools to navigate, manage, and monetize content across the entire IP content management process. Serving global companies across several industries, including media and entertainment, gaming, publishing, consumer products, life sciences, high tech, and more, Rightsline gives finance, legal, operations, and strategy teams 360-degree visibility into their content's rights, royalties, contracts, and additional sales opportunities. Rightsline's customers include Amazon, BBC Studios, Spotify, FIFA, IBM, Merck, EA, Hallmark, and other leading global IP holders. Founded in 2012, Rightsline has over 170 employees and field offices in Boston, London, Los Angeles, New York, and Toronto. For more information, please visit rightsline.com and join the conversation on LinkedIn.

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