

Image Metadata Handbook

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Metadata Handbook

Introduction

By Paul Brown, Head of the CEPIC Technology Committee

Why another Handbook?

Technology is changing at what seems to be an ever-increasing rate, and how business relates to technology must develop as well. The easiest way for developers to keep users of their technology up to date is to send updates as things develop and change but inevitably this leads to users having to trawl through many different update documents and changes, to try and identify the latest update for each feature. Information on the development of the use of IPTC fields is much the same.

This handbook is designed to bring all the recent changes and developments in using IPTC fields together in one place, so that at least at this point in time, all the information is totally up to date and relevant – at least until the next update comes along!

Additionally, the handbook includes other useful information about metadata, the use of metadata, and the importance of metadata which is of particular relevance to the image industry.

You will find information on the practical application of metadata and best practice for ensuring that not only do you have the right information stored in images, but also ways of maximising the information being accessible to the various end users you need to reach.

Why include metadata in the first place?

The answer may appear obvious, but different people will have different reasons, and it is important that all those reasons come together so that all providers add comprehensive metadata to satisfy the needs of everyone within a given workflow in the industry.

- **Identification** – Metadata should contain information on the creator, who, in many countries, has a moral right to be identified as the creator. How can that right be asserted if there is no identification within a digital image? It also contains information on where you can obtain the image, who to credit, and if applicable who can license the image in addition to the creator.
- **Information about the subject of the image** – Metadata should also contain caption information to identify the subject and potentially give further background information about that subject. This is immensely valuable to clients for captioning their own products accurately and in detail, as well as forming the basis of keywords without which images cannot generally be found in online searches, which are

currently the most common way of researching content.

- **Restrictions** – If there are restrictions on the use of an image, how will clients know, unless the restrictions accompany the image and are easily visible to them?

These are some of the most significant reasons for including metadata. There are many others, but these alone should be enough to encourage all creators and their representatives to include metadata in their images.

Metadata stripping and related Orphan Works

Unfortunately, metadata can be removed from images, as well as added to them. Images which appear online can easily be saved or downloaded and if there is no metadata with an image, it effectively becomes an Orphan Work and it is difficult, if not impossible to track the rights holder or someone authorised to license the image should someone wish to use it.

Removal of metadata is illegal under the copyright laws of many countries and there is EU legislation which makes it illegal to use an image from which metadata has been knowingly stripped.

Agencies and representatives should ensure that contracts with rights holders give them permission to add to and manage the metadata supplied with the images so they can operate totally within the law.

They should also respect the moral rights of the rights holders when managing that metadata. Despite it being illegal to remove metadata, it is often done, and not

always deliberately. Some software, when resizing or processing images, strips the metadata automatically.

Education is a necessary part of the work of the IPTC and CEPIC and its member associations, as well as lobbying governments to strengthen the enforcement of legislation around this.

However, ensuring your own metadata is correct and embedded ensures that the problem does not originate with the rights holder or their representatives.

All rights holders and agencies can play their part in this education process though, and should ensure that not only do they populate metadata fields properly and fully, but also make keeping metadata with images one of the conditions of supply to clients.

In this way, your images will not become Orphans, can be licensed properly, and are less likely to be used without a licence due to the difficulty in finding the rights holder or their representative.

The benefits of getting metadata right - for distributors and their agents.

With the change from analogue to digital in the image industry, distribution costs dramatically reduced for companies producing digital, as opposed to analogue images. Identification and captioning by writing on the mount or the back of the print were replaced with adding the information to the IPTC fields.

Instead of transferring caption information from the supplier onto dupes and prints, an agent can now receive images already captioned. As digital media costs significantly less, agencies can supply 10,000 images for not much more than the cost of duping a couple of hundred transparencies. The job of captioning images, done once done by the originating contributor, doesn't have to be done again.

However, in reality, the IPTC guidelines are not always adhered to, different software works in different ways, and different suppliers keyword and use metadata in different ways.

This guide aims to show how workflow operates in the industry between different partners, and how metadata is best used and stored so that when images are supplied they can be imported quickly and easily into the new system.

We hope the guide will help agencies streamline the integration of image collections between agency partners and save a lot of time.

It is unlikely to solve all the issues for everyone as some companies use software systems which may not be up to date on metadata handling. In these cases, it is important to consider how metadata is stored, so it can be integrated in the future.

Storing metadata in the IPTC fields in the image file is one way of keeping metadata safe, but bulk management of data can sometimes be easier if some metadata is stored separately to the image, in fields defined by the IPTC schema. When supplying images to an agent you can send a spreadsheet with the fields separated out, and they can import the metadata into the images in the order that suits their system.

Making sure clients can see metadata

Making sure clients can see your metadata is more difficult, with clients using a much wider variety of image management systems than picture libraries, many of them custom built.

Clients are less likely to adapt their system to suit you, so you have to find ways to ensure they can see your metadata.

The workflow charts included in the guide may help, but you should also consider the following. Some clients, especially newspapers only look at one field, often the caption field. A little research will tell you who looks at what.

If your clients can login and download material, consider adapting your system to insert metadata to the IPTC fields as images are downloaded, mapped to fields which your clients can see.

So for example, if all your newspaper clients mainly view the caption field, then ensure that all the pertinent data

(caption, credit, copyright, special instructions, contact info etc.) that is relevant to them, is imported into the caption field on download. Keep data in the other fields as well, but at least this way they should see everything important to them.

Likewise, if you know that a client uses a software system that doesn't map to IPTC standards, find out which fields they use for what and map accordingly when they download. Its work that shouldn't be necessary, but it does ensure the clients see the relevant data.

Alternatively, you could send your clients the link to this guide and encourage them to use the standards that you and many others have adopted!

*Paul Brown, Mary Evans Picture Library
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