



From ACAP to RightsML: the news industry and the future of ODRL

W3C Workshop on the Future of ODRL
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Who is IPTC? Why are we here?

- IPTC — standards body for news media
- NewsML-G2 • ninjs • NewsCodes • Photo & Video Metadata • RightsML • Media Provenance (C2PA)
- We are implementers as well as standardisers
- This is a practitioner's view, not new formal semantics

Some IPTC Voting Members





How we got here

- ACAP (2006, robots.txt) — failed: search engines wouldn't honour it
- ACAP pivoted to ODRL → handed to IPTC 2011 → re-branded as RightsML
- RightsML 2.0 (2018)
 - one of the first ODRL profiles
 - IPTC helped shape the profile mechanism and wrote two of the implementations
- Profile is now "thin" — nearly all terms come from ODRL: the profile system in action



The screenshot shows the ACAP website with a purple header. The header contains the ACAP logo (stylized arrows pointing to 'ACAP' with 'AUTOMATED CONTENT ACCESS PROTOCOL' below it) and the text 'AUTOMATED CONTENT ACCESS PROTOCOL', 'MAKING COPYRIGHT WORK ON THE NET', and 'UNLOCKING CONTENT FOR ALL'. Below the header is a navigation bar with links: HOME | IMPLEMENT ACAP | DOCUMENTATION | FAQs | CONTACT. The main content area has a yellow background and features the title 'Solutions to address the challenges of communicating digital rights and permissions'. Below this is a section 'So what is ACAP and how does it work?' which describes ACAP as a non-commercial, open, global protocol. To the right of this section is a sidebar with a yellow background containing the heading 'Improving universal access to content' and three paragraphs of text. Below this is another section 'Who is behind ACAP' which states that ACAP was established as a joint initiative of the European Publishers Council, the World Association of Newspapers and the International Publishers Association. Below that is a section 'For Technicians' with a link 'Click here' and the text 'For further information: info@the-acap.org'. At the bottom right of the sidebar is a small logo that says 'ACAP ENABLED'.

ACAP
AUTOMATED CONTENT ACCESS PROTOCOL
MAKING COPYRIGHT WORK ON THE NET
UNLOCKING CONTENT FOR ALL

HOME | IMPLEMENT ACAP | DOCUMENTATION | FAQs | CONTACT

Solutions to address the challenges of communicating digital rights and permissions

So what is ACAP and how does it work?

Launched in 2007, ACAP (Automated Content Access Protocol) is a new non-commercial, open, global protocol devised by the worldwide publishing community that provides content providers with the necessary tools to communicate their copyright terms and conditions online in a language that can be read, understood and interpreted by machines. Put simply, ACAP enables the copyright terms, conditions and permissions that would routinely be read by a human in the offline environment to be read and unambiguously interpreted by the machines that replace the human in the online environment.

ACAP will help maximise the potential of publishing on any web-based device, both in terms of improving the management of the relationship with search engines and other content aggregators, and in terms of facilitating existing, new and future online publishing business models. ACAP is essentially a free-to-use tool for the business-to-business environment, but end-users will benefit when content owners have the confidence, thanks to ACAP, to put their high-value, high-quality, diverse content on the net, safe in the knowledge that third parties can no longer exploit that content without appropriate permission.

ACAP is a crucial tool for the future of internet publishing and for publishers and content providers of all shapes and sizes.

Despite the impressive number of sites and publishers worldwide that have already implemented ACAP, the major search engines and content aggregators have – as of yet – declined to adopt ACAP and have yet to positively engage in any meaningful dialogue with rightsholders about their requirements for more effective control over

Improving universal access to content

It's hard for anyone to make content available for access and use on the network without any rules...
It's hard to follow rules if you don't know what they are...
It's hard to learn how to read and understand rules if you are a machine...unless you have ACAP.

Who is behind ACAP

ACAP was established as a joint initiative of the European Publishers Council, the World Association of Newspapers and the International Publishers Association and is now maintained by the International Press Telecommunications Council IPTC.

For Technicians

Click [here](#)
For further information: info@the-acap.org

ACAP
ENABLED



Recent work: lowering the barrier

- Embed or link rights in NewsML-G2, ninjs, Photo Metadata, Video Metadata Hub (“Linked Encoded Rights Expression”)
- RightsML Generator
 - build policies without hand-writing JSON-LD or RDF/XML
- simplerights.iptc.org
 - restrictions as URIs that content-negotiate to ODRL
- Caveat: a standalone SimpleRights policy has no target — it's really a template



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IPTC RightsML/ODRL Generator: RightsML 2.0

Fill in the form and see the corresponding RightsML document (in ODRL format) as you type. Please note that this form only uses a small portion of the RightsML specification.

For more information about RightsML, see the [IPTC RightsML pages](#), the [RightsML 2.0 Specification](#) and the [RightsML area on dev.iptc.org](#).

Enter RightsML policy content

View the generated RightsML [Copy to clipboard](#)

Choose output format: ☒ Turtle ☐ JSON-LD ☐ RDF/XML

IPTC Simple Rights Service BETA

Simple URL-based rights statements. Powered by RightsML.

Each URL represents a simple RightsML policy.

When the URL is loaded in a Web browser, a human-readable version of the policy is shown in HTML. When the URL is loaded by a software agent, a machine-readable version of the policy is returned, in RightsML using either Turtle (.ttl), RDF/XML (.xml), or JSON-LD (.json) format.

Use the below example URLs to get a sense of how the service works.

Example URLs

Geographic restriction

- <http://simplerights.iptc.org/geo/only/EE> - only usable in Estonia
- <http://simplerights.iptc.org/geo/exceptfor/EE> - usable anywhere other than Estonia
- <http://simplerights.iptc.org/geo/only/US> - only usable in the United States
- <http://simplerights.iptc.org/geo/exceptfor/US> - usable anywhere other than the United States

Date restriction

- <http://simplerights.iptc.org/date/until/2025-04-17> - only usable until 2025-04-17 (expires)
- <http://simplerights.iptc.org/date/after/2025-01-01> - only usable after 2025-01-01 (embargo)

Platform restriction

- <http://simplerights.iptc.org/platform/only/web> - only usable on Web platform
- <http://simplerights.iptc.org/platform/exceptfor/tv> - not usable on TV



How do news agencies actually convey rights information?

- We asked our members how they signal rights
- Three agencies:



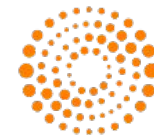
- None uses ODRL in production
- Each built its own answer to handle rights

*** Last-minute addition: PA Media / Alamy does actually use ODRL for syndicated news content! I will pass on details when I receive them.**



Reuters: compact codes, as free text

- "Out codes": Broadcast/Digital : restriction
- Documented in [Reuters Restrictions Guide](#)
- Small set:
 - No Use [Country]
 - No Use [Company]
 - No Archive, No Resales, No New Uses After...
- Carried as free text in usageTerms:
"Broadcast: No Use Brazil. Digital: No Use Brazil."
 - Clear to a human, opaque to a machine
 - English-only



REUTERS®

```
<usageTerms xml:lang="en">Broadcast: None.  
Digital: None.</usageTerms>
```

```
<usageTerms xml:lang="en"> Broadcast: No Use  
Broadcast. Digital: None.</usageTerms>
```

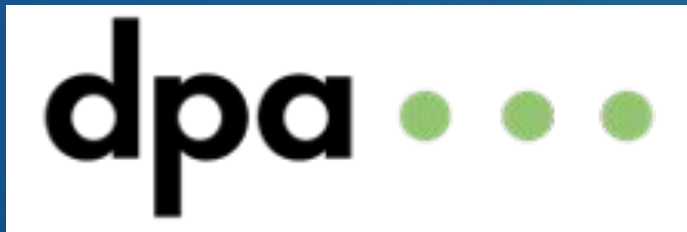
```
<usageTerms xml:lang="en"> Broadcast: None.  
Digital: No Use Digital.</usageTerms>
```

```
<usageTerms xml:lang="en"> Broadcast: No Use  
Brazil. Digital: No Use Brazil.</usageTerms>
```

```
<usageTerms xml:lang="en"> Broadcast: No Use  
CNN. Digital: No Use CNN.</usageTerms>
```



dpa: "ODRL too complex, SimpleRights too simple"



- Needs per-photo territory rights for republished agency photos
- Real need: "only a few countries" or "the world except a few"
- Gaps found: SimpleRights can't do a set of countries; neither names "the world"
- Built their own code:
 - `dnrights:area-AT-CH-DE`
 - `dnrights:area-world--GB--IR`



AP: rights as free text, spread across fields

Restrictions as free text across NewsML-G2 fields:

- **usageTerms (client)**
- **edNote (internal)**
- **video-script RESTRICTION SUMMARY**

Phrasing echoes Reuters:

- **"No Use in Japan", "No Archiving", "AP Clients Only"**

Only a few items (e.g. expires) are machine-actionable



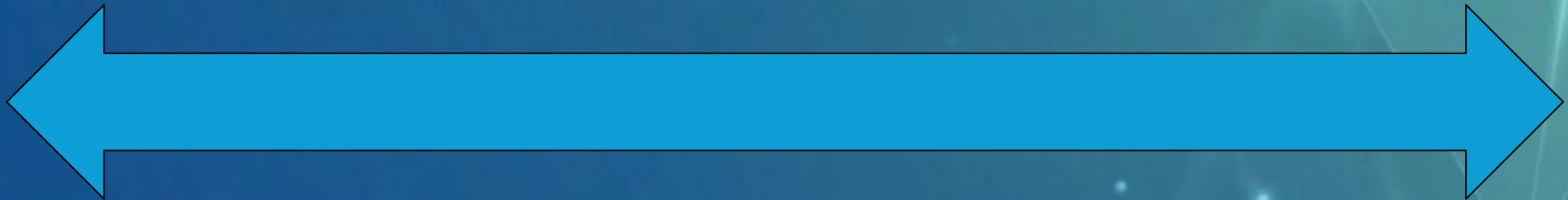
The screenshot shows the 'AP Media Agent Help Center' page. The breadcrumb trail is 'Home > Media Agent help center > Reference guide > Usage instructions and restrictions'. The main heading is 'Usage instructions and restrictions'. Below this, there is a section 'ON THIS PAGE' with a 'Show' link. The main content area is titled 'Use information, special restrictions and editorial notes'. An 'Important' warning icon is present. The text states: 'Always check the following fields for any human-readable rights information, usage limitations, special restrictions and editorial notes:'. It lists two scenarios: 'In JSON: usageterms, ednote, renditions.script_[format] and renditions.shotlist_[format].' and 'In NewsML-G2: usageTerms, edNote, remoteContent[@rendition="aprol:script"] and remoteContent[@rendition="aprol:shotlist"]'. Below this, it says '- **usageterms**. Use information and special restrictions:'. It then lists two sub-points: '- **Use information**; for example, "This content is intended for editorial use only. For other uses, please contact the provider." and '- **Special restrictions** (if any); for example: "No Use in Japan," "No Archiving Permitted" or "AP Clients Only".'

Source: [AP public API docs](#)



The missing middle

- Everyone signals rights as human-readable text; two invented compact codes; none uses ODRL
- A de facto shared vocabulary exists, but isn't standardised
- The solution sits somewhere between the two



ODRL
fully expressive,
too complex

SimpleRights
easy, not expressive
enough



ODRL makes it computable

- “Not in China, not by CNN, not resold” → an ODRL policy:
 - prohibition:
 - `use where spatial = CHN`
 - `use by party CNN`
 - `sell`
- Each clause defined:
 - `country = controlled-vocab URI`
 - `queryable`
 - `enforceable`
 - `language-independent`



What we need from ODRL's future

1. A URI-shortcut / named-policy mechanism
2. Composability of simple expressions:
country sets + party + action
3. Lightweight vocabularies for the common restrictions
4. An explicit notion of scope ("the world" / "all-except")
5. Standard identifiers — countries, and orgs like "CNN" (cf. GMI, ISO IWA 44:2025)
6. Reusable, asset-independent policy templates



Issue: Signalling vs enforcement

- Publishers can express their rights. They can't compel anyone to honour them, least of all an AI crawler
 - The legal system is the ultimate arbiter, but that should be the last resort
- ACAP failed on this point 20 years ago
- For the TDM/AI era: make machine-readable rights simple to author, cheap to adopt, visible on the open web



Thank you!



Happy to discuss these issues
and more

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Appendix: RSL and TDMRep in the news industry

RSL (Really Simple Licensing) defines its own rights framework

- Used by Bild (DE), The Guardian (GB)
- (used by both in a very simplistic way: “prohibit all”)

TDMRep uses ODRL for expressing rich / complex rights

- Used by some news players (none of them IPTC members)
 - Ouest-France (ODRL TDM policy)
 - Le Parisien (ODRL TDM policy)