

Google's clarification on ACAP welcomed

The World Association of Newspapers (WAN) and other publishers organisations yesterday, Thursday, 19 March 2008, welcomed Google CEO Eric Schmidt's statement supporting the aim of the Automated Content Access Protocol (ACAP) to give publishers more control over the use of their content.

Speaking to a reporter in Sydney earlier this week, Schmidt said that the only barriers to Google's implementation of ACAP were technical, and he denied that Google was reluctant to embrace the system because of commercial self-interest. "It is not that we don't want them [publishers] to be able to control their information," he said.

New publishing standard

ACAP is a new publishing standard that allows website terms and conditions to be placed in machine-readable format so that publishers can have a say in how news aggregators and search engine companies use their content.

Publishers world-wide have begun implementing it on their websites, and WAN last week again called on Google to embrace it. More on the protocol, a joint initiative of the European Publishers Council, the WAN and the International Publishers Association (IAP), can be found at www.the-acap.org.

Schmidt said that ACAP, as currently specified, is incompatible with Google's proprietary search engine technology but that "we have some people working with them to see if the proposal can be modified to work in the way our search engines work."

Gavin O'Reilly, president of WAN and chairman of ACAP, commented, "We are pleased that Google CEO Eric Schmidt has said that they would be willing to implement ACAP if it were not for some technical incompatibility issues. As Mr. Schmidt knows, we have worked very closely with Google at a technical level throughout the past year in the ACAP project phase.

“Remaining technical barriers”

"Naturally, we are disappointed that we have yet to overcome their remaining technical barriers to live implementation, but we have always stressed that we will do whatever is necessary to make ACAP work technically and seamlessly for all search engines. Our aspirations for ACAP have always been led by business needs and not by any preconceived technical solution," he said.

O'Reilly said Schmidt's statement, reported in *IT Wire*, "is hugely reassuring. We really look forward to continuing to work with Google to do the necessary work to match our business requirements with their technical specifications and thus make

it possible for Google to immediately adopt the ACAP protocol for the benefit of digital publishing worldwide.²

Status quo

Google European executive Rob Jonas was quoted as saying last week that Google was happy with the status quo, which "provides everything most publishers need," a statement that is contradicted by the ACAP coalition, which includes news agencies, book and magazine publishers, libraries and search engines as well as newspaper publishers.

The current standard, called robots.txt, allows publishers to accept or reject search engine "crawlers" that are used to find content and re-purpose it on third party websites such as Google News. But it does not allow publishers any options other than allowing full use of content or to completely ban its use. The new ACAP standard allows publishers more options – for example, allowing aggregators to post content for a limited time.

According to ACAP, Schmidt's statement clarifies Google's position regarding the publishing initiative.

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