

Rightsphere as a viable alternative to Sherpa/Romeo

by
John Michael Potter

Academic librarians who help faculty deposit their published work in an institutional repository must first determine the publisher's copyright stipulations regarding self-archiving. Although publishers occasionally list their copyright policy online, academic librarians typically begin their search for such policies on a web-accessible database named Sherpa/Romeo. In contrast, corporate librarians checking copyright employ Rightsphere, a new web-based copyright advisory and management service that allows employees to instantaneously determine corporate content reuse rights. Rightsphere software has been lauded for its versatility and may yet hold promise for filling in the gaps left by Sherpa/Romeo.

Sherpa/Romeo

Sherpa/Romeo records the self-archiving policies that publishers incorporate into the copyright transfer agreements (CTA) authors sign prior to publication. The online database employs a color-coding scheme (green, blue, yellow, white) to classify whether and in what form the publisher's CTA allows self-archiving.

Nonetheless, the Sherpa/Romeo database retains several limitations. Dorothea Salo, institutional repository librarian at the University of Wisconsin, notes that Sherpa/Romeo offers no API (application programming interface) that would allow data to be used in a multifunctional manner. For instance, users would need "to screenscape the database just to figure out what (a publisher's) policies are..which is absurd, and it gets in the way of automated deposit procedures"¹.

However, Dorothea Salo asserts that Sherpa/Romeo's "biggest problem..is that they aren't looking to update, and they guard their fences so fiercely that the rest of us can't help either". This weakness forces many users to "keep their own list of publisher policies"².

Corporate librarians have been similarly frustrated. Seeking to determine whether specific company content can legally be shared can be both time-consuming and fraught with uncertainty. For employees, the hurdles inherent in clearing content rights either inhibit content sharing or encourage copyright infringement. If copyright abuse becomes widespread, companies often remedy the situation by incorporating highly restrictive policies on information sharing.

Rightsphere

Fortunately, corporate librarians have begun using Rightsphere, new web-based copyright advisory and management service that allows employees to instantaneously determine their text-content reuse rights. The service supplies detailed content rights to the employee's desktop through a single user-friendly repository. By alleviating the time-consuming need to verify copyright permissions through a third-party, the software enables greater collaboration and improves workflow.

The software is featured as a bookmarklet icon found on an employee's browser toolbar. Clicking the icon produces a list of content reuse options (i.e. share content in a public forum). Clicking the Confirm Permission button provides an instantaneous answer to their query in layman's language (they're granted permission, given conditions on use, or told how to purchase rights). The technology even reconciles content rights from multiples sources to produce a singular result.

The software's administrative module allows librarians to add, modify, or delete detailed information regarding unique content agreements into a database. Thus, database answers can be tailored to display content reuse stipulations granted only to specific employees, departments, or even employees/departments within other countries. Likewise, specific rights granted *in addition* to those provided through blanket licenses can also be displayed.

The product is an innovation from the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), an organization that manages publishing rights for large organizations. The CCC noted that their client's employees frequently needed answers to "How am I allowed to use this content?" The technology goes along way to providing these answers in a precise, coherent, and immediate fashion.

Conclusion

Can Rightsphere be adopted as a replacement for Sherpa/Romeo? Like Sherpa/Romeo, publisher policies regarding self-archiving would be displayed by default. However, *modified* copyright transfer agreements with particular authors could also be included in the database. Indeed, users would have the option of looking at copyright information on an individual, article-by-article basis (and perhaps allowing authors to feel empowered in the process).

Rather than a single global rights repository, colleges and universities would likely need to implement Rightsphere at a consortium level first. Librarians would need to coordinate with faculty about adding, modifying, or deleting their copyright transfer agreements (an admittedly large undertaking). However, if academia came to fully utilize the software, Rightsphere could also be integrated with a document delivery service.

Notes

¹ Correspondence email from Dorothea Salo 6/13/07

² Correspondence email from Dorothea Salo 6/13/07

References

Black, Doug. "Web-based Service Bridges Gap Between Knowledge Sharing and Copyright Compliance." *Copyright Business Wire*. Jun 8, 2006.

Black, Doug. "Copyright Clearance Center Winds Codie Award for Rightsphere." *Business Wire*. Apr 20, 2007.

“Knowledge Sharing and Copyright at AstraZeneca.” *Information Outlook*. Nov 2006.
Vol.10, no.11.

Manafy, Michelle. “Know Your Rights with CCC’s Rightsphere.” *Econtent*. Jul/Aug
2006.