



Digital Rights Management

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Scope

Predicting the future is always a challenge, predicting the future when it comes to the Internet is foolish, predicting the future of a technology and how people are actually going to use it definitely borders on the insane. Digital Rights Management falls squarely into that last category, it is much maligned, in many cases has been prematurely deployed, and has broadly been rejected by the market. Never-the-less, we are now seeing viable commercial and non-commercial applications of DRM emerging, ranging from BBC iPlayer to the iPhone App Store.

In this article, we will look at technical, legal, commercial and consumer trends and speculate what we can learn from other industries, and how that might impact the geospatial sector.

Current position

DRM is deep in the “trough of disillusionment” – mere mention of the term is often enough to spark raging debate and ill feeling. In many ways the technology has provided a focus for broader issues and concerns associated with Intellectual Property Rights management, data sharing and licensing.

Broadly speaking, approaches for managing and protecting content fall into technical measures to control access and legal measures to control usage. In many ways, DRM aims to bridge those two worlds by enabling electronic licences for both access and usage of content.

In the geospatial sector, the Open Geospatial Consortium approved the Geospatial Digital Rights Management Reference Model in March 2007, which is referenced by the INSPIRE Network Services Architecture Technical Guidance and the UK Location Information Infrastructure Conceptual Design.

Anticipated Changes

As the cost and size of technology continues to fall and interoperable standards for identity management, authentication and content security continue to evolve, technical issues will become less of a barrier to uptake. Legal and legislative aspects, including copyright and the global intellectual property system need to evolve to better enable the flexible and dynamic sharing of content.

However, it is the broader question of ‘cultural change’ which is probably the largest single barrier. The main commercial trend is towards rights-enabled business models where content providers need to maintain a sustainable and profitable business whilst consumers demand are for unfettered access and reuse.

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A key long term goal is to enable the sharing of content based on shared licensing models. Developing these models will take considerable effort and compromise from all parties to make it work.

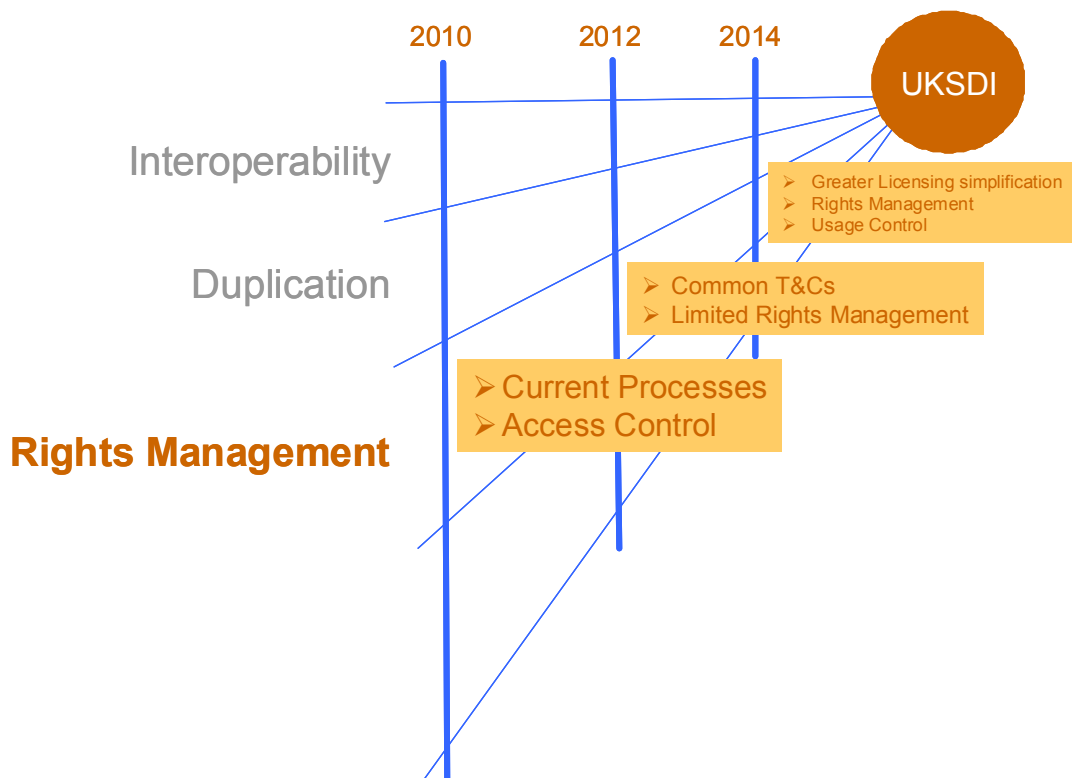
Impact of Changes upon the geospatial industry and upon customers

The impact of DRM on the geospatial industry is likely to be incremental and evolutionary. Initial applications of the technology will be point solutions, which will probably be a source of frustration to customers who need to combine content from multiple sources. Initially content providers will provide data based on their own specific licensing models.

Over time, these point solutions are likely to evolve and will be implemented using more interoperable standards and as appropriate content providers will adopted shared licensing models to support the combining of data from multiple sources.

Scenario

A good scenario to consider for DRM is combining content from multiple sources. Perhaps we could use one of the emerging UKLP Pilot applications as a starting point, where a set of view services are accessed via a rights management layer based on a shared licensing model.



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The figure above is taken from the UKSDI Rights Management Workshop, hosted in January 2009 by Defra. It shows a possible evolutionary path for the uptake of rights management over the coming years. Initially providers are likely to make use of their existing processes to control access to content. Each provider is likely to implement a point solution and we can expect a minimal level of interoperability among providers. As the benefits for better interoperability across providers is more widely understood then we can expect gradual alignment of licensing terms and conditions and the introduction of limited rights management capability. Over time more interoperable licensing approaches may emerge which will enable more automated support for the usage of content.

Summary of 5 key points

1. DRM is in the trough of disillusionment.
2. Geospatial Data is particularly tough when come to dynamically combining content.
3. It is the mother of all cultural changes.
4. Expect an evolutionary path with point solutions initially.
5. Gradually, some order may emerge from the chaos.

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