

Metadata in Stock-Photo-Agencies and Photo-Archives

by

Jan Leidicke
(BVPA / Keystone Germany)

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- A photo itself contains, unlike a text, information that is not machine or human readable. Even human often need additional background information to understand the photo's content. So you could say:

information is encrypted in the photo.

Metadata in Stock-Photo-Agencies and Photo-Archives

- In the past, these information was written on the rear of the photos or on the frame of a slide.
- Today we are handling data with no backside and no cover.
- Today we are writing metadata.

Metadata in Stock-Photo-Agencies and Photo-Archives

- All information we need to understand the photo's content, and all information that makes a photo searchable in databases are provided by metadata.
- The only way to keep and to pass on these information, linked with the photo, are embedded metadata.
- The use and the structure of metadata are of vital interest for photo-agencies and for the whole photo-business.

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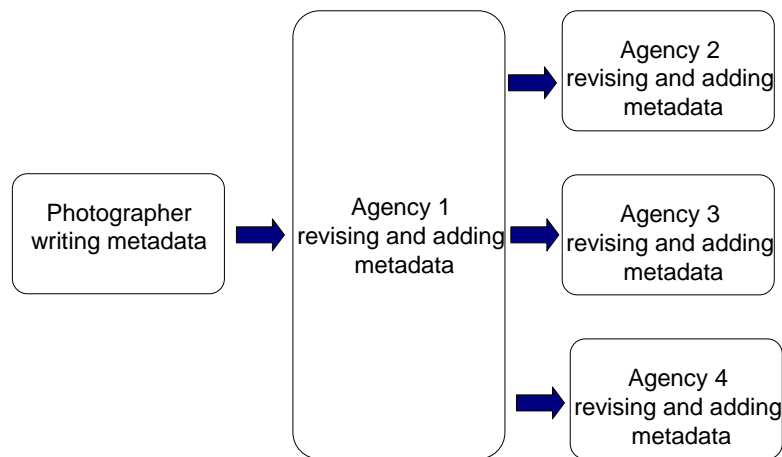
- Today in most stock-photo-agencies and photo-archives the old IIM standard for metadata is used. Even though it is outdated after the release of the IPTC Core, the IIM standard is the least common denominator among all market participants.
- But even the IPTC Core is not able to store metadata in a future-proof structure.

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What is the meaning of future-proof?

- In an environment of appr. 1 billion photos, searchable in online databases worldwide, a detailed data-structure is more and more an urgent need for organising and retrieving these data.
- All metadata should be written into the image only once and should be understood everywhere after this without further revision.
- A controlled vocabulary helps to translate in various languages and to avoid misunderstandings.
- Any revision by human costs money.

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Metadata workflow between photographer and agency

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Why this?

- Due to incompatibilities, metadata are not correctly transmitted.
- Due to information requirements, not covered by existing standards, metadata have to be transformed and / or amended to meet the users needs.
- Due to users faults, fields are used incorrectly.
- Even if two or more users may need the same information, if this specific information is not supported by the existing metadata standard, the information get lost.

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- Picture buyers receive their content from many different sources. They expect to have any information they need to find, understand and finally to use the photo, at always the same places in the metadata. Irrespective of the source being a press agency, a stock photo agency or a photo-archive.
- Though all these kind of sources may have different needs in metadata details, the complete metadata standard should cover all needs of all different sources.

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- The existing metadata standard, regardless if IIM or IPTC Core, is focused on the use of a photo as a news object.
- In contrary to photos of current news, for stock images and for the long time archiving of news-photos a number of additional information is needed. These information are not covered by the existing standards yet.

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- Some examples for different needs for metadata:

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Demonstration against G8
summit

Demonstrators with anti G8
banners

Rostock, Germany

Date: 02.06.2007

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specific name field
Konrad Adenauer
including occupation
Chancellor of Germany
in his home-office

unspecified date field
Date: appr. end of the 50th

model release field
Model release: No

May be used in press and
books, no commercial or
advertisement use

World rights available

structured rights information

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Young Couple in autumn,
outside

model ages field
Model age: appr. 20

emotions from a controlled vocabulary
Emotion: Love

unspecified Date field
Date: beginning of 21st Century

model release field
Model release: Yes

structured rights information
May be used for commercial or
advertisement

original filesize reference
Original filesize: 5000x3400 px

colour space information
Colour space: ECI RGB

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- Today all these information can be submitted only in a very rough structure, that makes it difficult to find and to understand its contents and that covers the risk of not to find an important information.
- Under the aspect of comprehensive information and a detailed data structure it is essential to expand the existing metadata standards to meet the market's needs.
- A free text search in the "Caption" field is not sufficient anymore.

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Searching for „Konrad Adenauer“ in a database you face some interesting results

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- A search for the string “Konrad Adenauer” in a large online portal returns about 1000 hits. Less than 10% show the person Adenauer. The rest shows the Konrad Adenauer airport, events in the Konrad Adenauer House and so on.
- This result is unsatisfactory. Finding photos gets more and more time extensive. By adding a person’s name field a search could be much more precise, quicker and less cost intensive.

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What is needed is:

- Precision in the content’s structure
- Precision in the rights management structure
- Precision in the vocabulary
- Compatibility

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Precision in the rights management structure

- The receiver or the user of a photo only can find a small number of rights information in the metadata.
- It is not to be seen, whether an image is rights managed or royalty free.
- There is a complete address dataset for the photographer, but not for the agency that has sold the photo.
- There is no structured way to find out if there is a model or a property release available.

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- There is no structure to define in what countries a photo may be used.
- And there is no way to store in the metadata what rights the user has bought.
- The only place for all this is one free text field.

Metadata in Stock-Photo-Agencies and Photo-Archives

- Only a standard that meets the requirements of all players on the market, will be accepted by the broad majority of them. Without individual abuse of certain data-fields for special needs and the risk involved of forcing incompatibilities.
- Only a standard that is accurately supported by all software producers will lead to the results we expect from a standard.

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- If a standard is altered or technically changed, it is important that this is well promoted and explained.
- The data-migration from one standard to the other may take a very long period of time.
- Therefore software has to be kept backwards compatible as well for several years, to avoid loss of information.

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Abstract

- For the handling of large numbers of digital photos well structured metadata are a necessity.
- To meet the different needs of different types of photo suppliers, the existing metadata standards must be expanded.
- To facilitate translations and international distribution, as much controlled vocabulary as possible is requested.
- Software must be designed backwards compatible until the worldwide migration process to a new standard is finished.

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Any questions?