

File Under “Too Difficult”?

Metadata Analysis

A year ago at IBC2004, many people in our industry had heard the word ‘metadata’ but that was about all. Everyone understands what a camcorder does — or an editing system. But metadata is a new issue and can seem complicated and impenetrable. It is tempting to put the whole subject into the ‘Too Difficult’ filing tray.

Where carefully-selected content is directed to an individual, the power is greatest when the supplier has an accurate profile of the consumer’s needs and full metadata for the content on offer.

However, in the rapidly approaching tapeless world, it is a subject that needs serious thought. Interestingly, the reasons for employing metadata are ones that we have known for a long time.

All organisations are subject to business pressures

- The need to keep up with customer demands
- The need to be efficient
- The need to find new revenue streams
- The need to save money
- The need to innovate and diversify

And although many people still use the word ‘broadcast’, today the rules are being rewritten. In the past, broadcasting has been about delivering content to as broad an audience

as possible via as broad a bandwidth (and therefore high quality) as possible.

Today this is still a requirement, but so is delivering over narrow channels to handheld devices and delivering to individual customers on a one-to-one basis to personal players. These developments will grow the value of the business that our industry provides. But you need to be clever to deliver content

efficiently over such a wide range of channels.

What’s happening?

Before we start looking into the future, it is valuable to draw lessons from the past. Do you remember any of the stages shown below?

This shows some of the changes in our processes



Neil Dunstan: “What was your reaction when non-linear editing appeared? Will you be first this time?”

and that they have each contributed to improving efficiency. As you will know from experience, it takes time to deliver the efficiencies. What started as limited offline editing evolved with time and technical improvements into the powerful nonlinear systems that we know today.

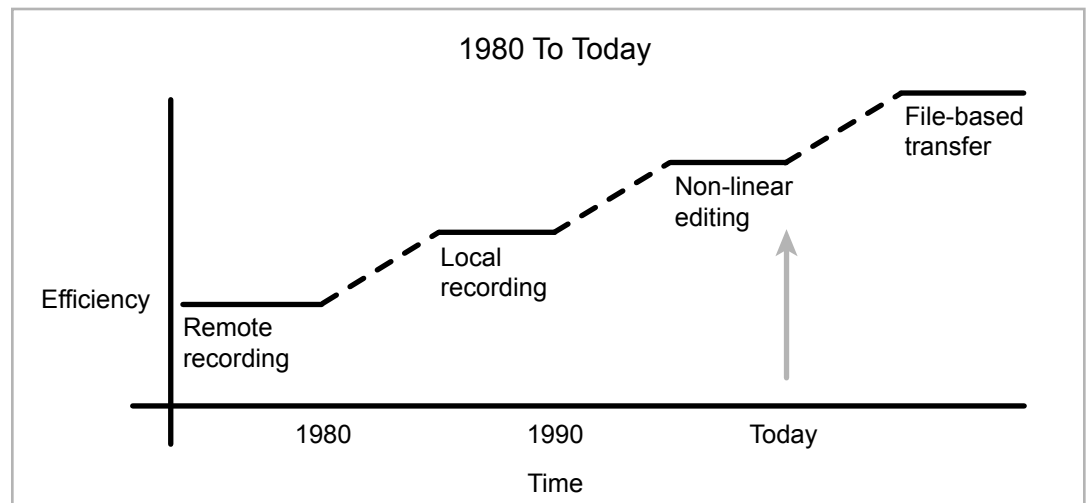
And now we are on the verge of another great breakthrough where the power and ubiquity of computing allows file-based transfer. But as yet, the additional improvements in efficiency that can be achieved using metadata have been hardly explored.

The move to tapeless, file-based programme exchange will bring many benefits, if implemented carefully. Quick, simultaneous access to content by many people, parallel instead of serial processes, speed of playing content to air, easy searching for resale or re-versioning of archive material will all help our business. And standards such as MXF and AAF have been set up to enable this.

What people are saying

During NAB, and recently at IBC, we have spoken to many people who operate within specific areas of the programme chain. For them there is a need for effective overall management of content, but many feel they lack the ‘big picture’, either within their own organisation or across our industry. ‘How does this change my part of the business?’ is not an easy question to answer and people express concern about how they will be impacted by these changes.

Fortunately, experience is starting to become available, as a number of organisations are moving forward with practical



plans which include exploiting metadata to gain maximum payback from their investment — in both content and systems.

At Metaglue we have been able to support companies who wish to make sure that their strategy for metadata reflects both their processes and business goals. Not surprisingly, like the individual employees, even the companies are unsure exactly what the changes will mean in the long term — but they do know their end goal. So they are taking their steps carefully, learning and modifying their approach as they go.

What organisations are doing

Some companies believe that the quickest payback in a tapeless world is achieved through a digital archive. Good use of content labelling means that material can be found quickly and easily, either for sale or repurposing. The

extra income and/or savings come directly from the investment in that project.

If a potential customer wanted clips of a cafe in Paris on a rainy day, how easily could it be found? Could it be found at all? Imagine the cost of re-shooting the content.

Other companies are taking more of a 'beginning to end' approach by capturing metadata at the planning and shooting stages, so that this can be passed down the programme chain and added to along the way. This allows each person and process to benefit from work done before and also to add to the metadata to help others downstream. This way, maximum leverage of the data is achieved.

When combining video footage with computer generated backgrounds, how much easier it would be if the camera

movements and lens information were captured at the acquisition stage which could then control the background movement!

A pattern is emerging that projects employing metadata are either starting out small, taking the opportunity to learn with each advance, or focusing the metadata carefully on particular aspects of the business. In both cases the barriers to starting are low and the combination of metadata labels (the schema) builds as knowledge is gained.

Other obvious benefits are delivered when there are multiple distribution channels to serve (television, online, DVD, handheld devices, etc.) with a different 'format' or 'quality' of content to each. Alternatively, with the potential for personal players where carefully-selected content is directed

to an individual, the power is greatest when the supplier has an accurate profile of the consumer's needs and full metadata for the content on offer — hence achieving a perfect match and maximum revenue.

At IBC it was clear that our industry is getting ready for file-based exchange. It was exciting to hear customers say 'I am determined to be ahead of my competitors. How can I be first to use metadata to satisfy my customers needs?'"

So it is not 'Too Difficult', it is happening now and it is practical to deliver.

And looking back, what was your reaction when non-linear editing appeared? Will you be first this time?

