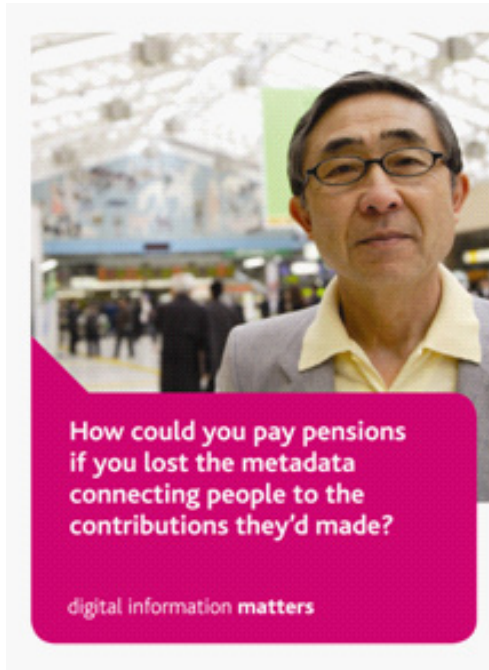


Digital information management factsheet: What is metadata? (And why does it matter?)



Metadata is descriptive information about data.

Good quality metadata can help you find, manage and use your digital information. It can tell you what your information is about, when it was created, where it came from and how you and others can use or reuse it.

This factsheet provides an overview of what metadata is, why it's important and how you can create and use it within your organisation.

Where can metadata be used?

Metadata can be applied to many different types of digital information in a wide range of formats, including documents, images and sound recordings. Metadata can also be used to describe more complex formats, such as web pages.

You can use metadata to describe individual digital files - but this may become very repetitive. It is often useful to describe groups of files too (for example, a folder containing many documents, or a whole website). In many cases, you will choose to combine these approaches.

Which metadata terms do I need?

Your choice of descriptive terms will depend on the digital formats you're working with and the business activity you need to support. As a minimum, you should choose terms that will help you find, understand, (re)use and protect your information. For example:

- To describe a document, you might choose to capture its author, date created, title, security classification and subject
- To describe an image, it may be important to capture date taken, photographer, location, client for whom it was taken and the copyright terms under which it can be reused

This all seems like a lot of effort...

For digital information, much of the metadata you need can (and should) be captured automatically. For example

- Date created and author are likely to be held within your IT systems
- Copyright can take a default value such as 'Crown copyright' for central government, so only needs to be captured for exceptions
- The identifier is often inherent in the location where the document is stored

IT systems increasingly use metadata internally to classify and organise the information they hold. For example, SharePoint 2010 uses Dublin Core - which defines a widely recognised set of metadata terms. In fact, if you work digitally, you probably create, store and use metadata already.

You should check that the metadata in your IT systems fully supports your business requirements for finding, using and sharing information. You may need additional fields. Or more likely, you may require the ability to view, export or reuse the data you already hold.

Minimum metadata

When publishing information, we recommend you use the following six terms to describe each digital document:

1. Title

A meaningful title

2. Identifier

Not a system-generated ID number, but the path of files or folders which supplies context for the document. This may be a URI or file-plan classification

3. Date created

Not the date the record was copied to its current location! Other dates, such as date last modified, can be useful too

4. Creator

The name of the creating department or organisation - for internal use, you may also wish to capture the names of individual authors

5. Rights

Copyright. For UK Government records this is Crown Copyright

6. Protective marking

All published documents will be UNCLASSIFIED. However for internal use, it may be useful to capture the protective marking of the documents explicitly

Why do we need metadata standards?

Creating metadata in a consistent way helps you share and reuse information. Standardisation means information created by one organisation can be used and understood by other departments or the public. When you transfer records to The National Archives, we will ask you to provide metadata that conforms to UK Government standards. This will help us handle your information correctly, make it available at the right time, and enable future researchers to understand and work with it.

Guidance is available on which metadata terms to choose and how to record the information: e-GMS, the e-Government Metadata Standard is being revised and a new version will be released in 2013. The standard is based on the terms recommended by the Dublin Core Metadata Initiative at dublincore.org/documents/dcmi-terms

Examples

1. Publishing to a public-facing website

Title	Organised Crime Strategy
Identifier	www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/crime/organised-crime-strategy.doc
Date Created	28 July 2011
Creator	Home Office
Rights: Copyright	Crown

2. Publishing to an intranet, file plan or extranet

Title	INFORMATION POLICY :Privacy Impact Assessment Policy v1.0
Identifier	www.homeoffice.gov.uk/Intranet/policy/PIA v1.doc
Date Created	27 May 2010
Creator	Home Office
Author	A N Other
Rights: Copyright	Crown
Protective marking	IL0

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