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A.Daviel

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Copy Control for Web Documents

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Abstract

This memo describes a simple syntax for describing the copyright status of a World-Wide-Web document in a machine-readable way. When implemented in a Web browser it provides an unambiguous notification when permission must be sought to print or copy material obtained from the network.

1. Introduction

Documents on the World-Wide-Web may have varied copyright status. While a human-readable copyright notice is usually included in copyrighted documents, this is usually transparent to automated retrieval agents. This memo describes a simple syntax for defining the copyright status of a document using an HTTP header or HTML META tag. Agents implementing this protocol may refuse to print or save a tagged document, or may display an informational message.

2.1 Protocol

A protocol version is defined. This memo defines version 1.0.

Three copyright-significant actions are defined: print, save and quote. "Print" refers to making a hard copy of a document, or saving a printer-ready version. "Save" refers

to saving a source version of a document to non-volatile media. "Quote" refers to including a portion of a document in a new document.

Three numeric levels are defined: 0 - disallowed, 1 - conditionally allowed, 2 - unconditionally allowed.

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The copy-control directive consists of a list of actions and levels, together with a URL. The URL points to a document describing the copyright status in detail. Action names may be abbreviated to one character. The directive may be given as an HTTP header or as an HTML META tag. The following are valid directives:

```
Copy-Control: version 1.0 print 2 save 2 quote 2
Copy-Control: v 1.0 p 0 s 0 q 1 URL http://some.org/copy.html
Copy-Control: v 1.0 p 1 s 1 q 2 u http://some.org/copy.html
<META HTTP-EQUIV="Copy-Control" CONTENT="v 1.0 p 2 s 2 q 2">
<META HTTP-EQUIV="Copy-Control" CONTENT="version 1.0
print 0 save 0 quote 1 url http://some.org/nocopy.html">
```

2.2 Implementation

In a user agent such as a Web browser, the copy-control actions would correspond to the browser actions of printing, saving to file, and transferring to clipboard. If the level defined for the requested action is zero, the browser should refuse to perform the action. If the level is one, the browser should generate a warning message. If the level is two, no message is generated. Where a message is generated, it should contain a hyperlink to the URL given in the directive, if any.

Typical messages might be:

"This document is copyright. You are not allowed to print it. See <http://some.org/nocopy.html> for details."

"This document is copyright. You are allowed to save it subject to certain restrictions. See <http://some.org/copy.html> for details."

"This document is copyright. You are allowed to quote portions of it subject to certain restrictions. See <http://some.org/copy.html> for details."

The URL would normally also be included in a readable copyright notice.

3. Security Considerations

Implementation of this protocol will not prevent document copying by persons using a non-compliant agent, and is not a substitute for

encryption or secure transport.

4. Author's Address

A.Daviel
Vancouver Webpages Box 357
185-9040 Blundell Rd
Richmond BC
V6Y 1K3

Tel. (604)-377-4796
Fax. (604)-270-8285
<mailto:andrew@vancouver-webpages.com>