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# Why PRISM Matters to Publishers

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## About the Author

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## About Idealliance

Idealliance (International Digital Enterprise Alliance) is a not-for-profit membership organization that has been a leader in information technology and publishing since 1966. Idealliance advances core technology to develop standards and best practices to enhance efficiency and speed information across the end-to-end digital media supply chain - creation, production, management, and delivery of knowledge-based multimedia content - digitally and in print.

Idealliance is where media creators and technology communities collaborate to craft best practices, advance standards, and certify people, processes, and systems to achieve the highest performance in creation, production and delivery of graphic communications.

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## Why PRISM Matters to Publishers

Surpassing its original role in text content aggregation and syndication, the Idealliance XML specification is a key part of a digital-first strategy to distribute and monetize article content.

Magazines have a unique role in the information universe. Whether they are printed, digital, or both, magazines are similar to other media, and yet very different from each. They have the voluntary intimacy of books, but with a much more varied, kaleidoscopic presentation. They carry the advertising mandate of broadcast media, but in a less obtrusive, more discoverable way. They can be as narrowly focused on issues or interests as the Web, but with less interruption and chaos. They have the brand familiarity of a newspaper (printed or digital), but with greater perceived permanence.

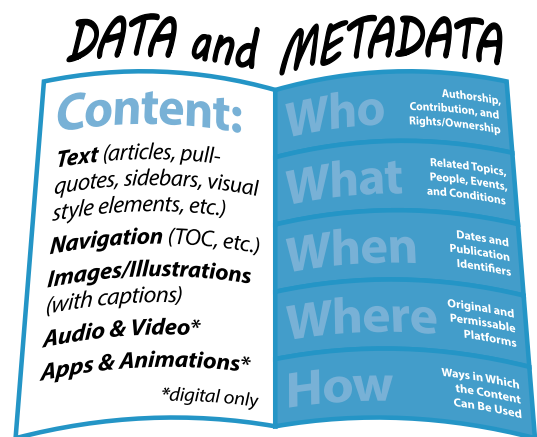
The basic building block of a magazine—the article—is also unique. More than a chapter in a book or a broadcast segment, an article combines multiple media types, and even different uses of the same media (text), in a creatively designed package. Like the magazine it belongs to, the substance of an article is greater than the sum of its many parts.

### The “Articleization” of Content

The dilemma for magazine publishers—facing withering media competition for limited audience mindshare—has little to do with the quality of their complex product. Rather, it is the consumer trend towards content-on-demand, the desire to consume information and entertainment in ever smaller chunks on their device of choice. In the music industry, this led to selling individual songs, and away from selling entire albums. Faced with similar revenue pressure from decreased issue sales,

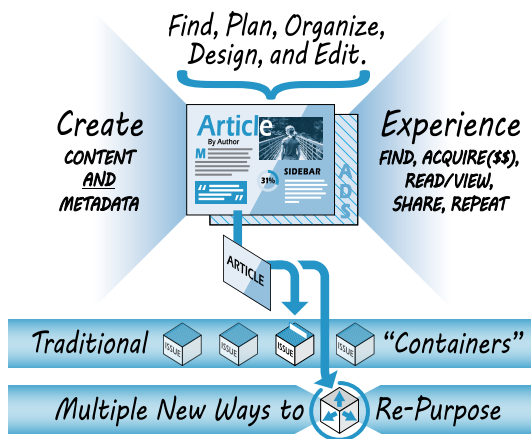
magazine publishers are anxious to distribute and monetize individual articles—and re-purposed content in general.

There is a problem, however. A magazine article is vastly more complicated than an MP3 file, even when considering all the metadata associated with an iTunes or Google Play library. As the “Data and Metadata” illustration shows, articles are in fact containers for multiple user experiences, including separate-but-related text items, images or illustrations (with captions), and even animations, audio, and video components for the digital side. Each of these elements must be readily identifiable to multiple DAM and CMS environments—not only to make them easier to find, but also to track and enforce usage rights, accommodate multiple, simultaneous output platforms, and (most important) ensure that content is paid for—no matter how it is experienced.



By themselves, articles are difficult to sell, especially given publishers’ long habit of giving away their re-purposed digital content. The assumption was that free sharing would prompt greater brand loyalty and increased subscriptions to the traditional content model: the magazine issue. This has not happened. Users want to experience content on their terms, and through the devices and content services of their choice. As the examples in this paper will illustrate, a new syndication model—one that recognizes the inherent complexity of a magazine article—is required.

Such a solution must be a data-driven one. Each element of value in an article must be inherently findable—by both publisher and audience—and universally repurposeable. The text object known as a recipe must work in every conceivable revenue model: part of a monthly issue (print and digital), a special collection, part of a paid, Netflix-like subscription, or a component of some media type not yet invented!



To do this requires a common language, and a framework for automating the process wherever possible. Otherwise, the cost of creating an “iTunes for articles” would be beyond most publishers.

The “holy grail” of a data-driven approach to paid articleization, therefore, is a common specification—employed by content creators and distributors alike.

## Defining Complexity

In 1999, a group of mostly large publishers affiliated with Idealliance began creating a set of XML metadata vocabularies for magazine content. Named the “Publishing Requirements for Industry Standard Metadata” or [PRISM](#), the specification attempted to define the many components of published content—and how to manage complex content across multiple print and digital channels.

“PRISM was ahead of its time,” according to Peter Meirs, former VP at Time Inc. and now Director of Content Systems and Operations Strategy at Consumer Reports. “Back in 1999, few people knew what XML and metadata were. It was extremely difficult to get publishers’ attention or get them to devote resources to it.” Despite this, the initial PRISM specification was instrumental in lowering costs for content syndication for business research databases such as [LexisNexis](#) and [ProQuest](#). Early PRISM adopters (and many publishers today) use it to re-purpose their primarily text-based content and realize additional revenue.

Meirs also noted the great potential of PRISM to aid publishers with internal discovery. When the common framework of PRISM is applied to a Digital Asset Management (DAM) strategy, the potential benefits are enormous. “By being able to find and re-purpose content, publishers can build revenue models—based on PRISM-encoded content—that are worth millions of dollars a year,” he said.

Publishers working with the PRISM specification have tried not to re-invent existing XML conventions, according to Idealliance’s VP of Publishing Technology, Dianne Kennedy. “Wherever there are existing definitions that fit the publishing world, particularly [Dublin Core](#), PRISM follows those conventions,” she said. “Magazine publishers have some very specific and unique metadata requirements, but there are universal elements, like title and author, that do not need reinvention.”

The PRISM specification, now at version 3.0, has grown to meet a variety of conditions for which publishers need a more automated approach. These include usage rights and permissions (the PRISM Rights Language), and an advertising metadata approach, based in part on [AdsML](#) and developed in collaboration with the [Ghent Workgroup](#) and [Ad-ID](#). PRISM workgroups also deal with the metadata requirements of non-text content such as still images and video, as well as complex text combinations like recipes.

Additional elements include the PRISM Aggregator Message (PAM) for delivery of content to syndication services and a more recent version for web and mobile content aggregators (PAMW).

## Taking Issue with Issues

PRISM's original text syndication model relied largely on offshore XML encoding, limiting it to larger publishers with significant content libraries (and budgets). However, with the rise of new digital publishing channels and the proliferation of new media types, Idealliance members saw PRISM as more than a syndication tool. Properly used, it could become a viable alternative to the facsimile or "flip book" approach for creating digital editions. In 2011, the PRISM Source Vocabulary (PSV) was developed in response to the rise of tablets like the Apple iPad, and the growing need for a "dynamic content architecture"—an environment where topic-based content from multiple sources can be automatically pulled in, based on the user's personal preferences.

Joe Cha, President of publishing developer [HIPZONE](#), an active participant in Idealliance initiatives, was quick to point out that article monetization, not incremental cost savings, is the key to PRISM's ROI for small-to-medium size publishers. "Large publishers can save money with PRISM, but smaller ones need a different reason to use it," he said, noting that publishers need to change their habit of selling only issue subscriptions and advertising—and of giving away articles for free. "Unless they are willing to sell article

content apart from the issue, they won't see the value of an XML approach." Cha pointed out that companies like Apple, Google, Facebook, and Amazon are already offering some form of monetization—albeit in a closed, proprietary fashion.

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### Article monetization, not incremental cost savings, is the key to PRISM's ROI for small-to-medium size publishers

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Kennedy noted that in addition to using PRISM/PSV/HTML5 as a basis for monetizing article-based content, establishing of a standard mechanism to distribute XML article content across distribution channels is just as critical. She indicated that the Idealliance PRISM Technical Council is currently investigating the feasibility of employing ICE, the Information and Content Exchange format, to make it easier for publishers seeking a non-proprietary way to syndicate article content to any distributor.

ICE was developed by an Idealliance community of 80 content providers and software vendors in the late 1990's, just after XML was launched. ICE was an XML-based protocol and architecture designed to facilitate the secure, automated delivery, update and management of content assets between publishers and their syndication partners. The specification was published in 2000 and an updated Web Services version, ICE 2.0, followed in 2002. ICE was built into technology platforms such as Vignette Story Server and Oracle 8. Adobe funded an open-source implementation of ICE can still be downloaded from [Source Forge](#) today. But like PRISM, ICE was too far ahead of the curve to enjoy the level of adoption we anticipated. According to Kennedy, the trend to freely give content away on the Web fostered the adoption of light weight RSS/ATOM content syndication rather than ICE. It seems that now, fifteen years later, publishers' growing interest to distribute and monetize article content may just provide the incentive to build a standard industry architecture

for the syndication of magazine articles + rich media components on ICE as well as PRISM.

“The trouble with using proprietary channels—even ones that have a good HTML5 workflow—is that they have agendas of their own, that don’t ultimately benefit the publisher.” Kennedy cited Apple and Amazon as two examples of content resellers (of music and books, respectively) whose proprietary environments, however convenient, were not good for the content creators. “Magazine publishers need an open standard,” she said, “and distribution partners willing to use it for everyone’s benefit.”

In response to the successive impacts of Web and mobile app publishing on magazine revenues, many took the relatively easy path of digital facsimiles. By converting their print-ready PDFs to a Flash-based or (later) HTML5-based print replicas, publishers hoped that subscriptions and advertising would simply transition from paper to pixels.

For many the opposite was true. Unlike eBooks, which have reached a stable print/digital equilibrium, digital replica editions did not meet the more complex demands of magazine readers and advertisers. Digital newsstands—apps or web portals for finding and buying digital editions—are commonplace today, but have not offset the overall decline in print revenue. The reason, some feel, is the continued emphasis on the traditional magazine issue.

## The Zinio Journey

Of the early digital edition pioneers, [Zinio](#) is perhaps the best known. Currently serving over 1,500 publishers in 70 countries, Zinio is one of the more successful digital newsstands, but is looking to break out of the “issue” mentality, and become more versatile with article content on a wide range of mobile devices. Doing so has involved adopting an XML strategy and, more specifically, PRISM.

Joan Solà, Zinio’s EVP of Global Markets, described the trend following the 2010 optimism surrounding the Apple iPad. “There was a feeling that digital was going to be the

best thing ever for magazines,” he said, “but the growth was not there. They soon realized that the cost of producing for multiple platforms and different screens, and of maintaining many different storefronts, was prohibitive.” The demands and habits of a mobile audience required a better approach.

The company examined its existing workflow and made some strategic acquisitions, in order to follow a structured metadata approach to content publishing. As a result, Zinio decided to go with PRISM.

Solà also described Zinio’s strategy for articleization of content, which resembles the Netflix approach to video. “It’s not about selling articles,” he said. “It’s about selling access to a pool of titles based on a contract that allows you to do that. PRISM is at the heart of this process. We are in the process to test this functionality in some key International markets.” XML is essential to Zinio’s plan to automatically formatting content to fit any display—and to make that content discoverable by the subscriber and his or her profile.

## What’s Next

Another provider, the startup company Next Issue Media, has embraced the “all-you-can-eat” subscription model for magazine content, using PRISM as an underlying foundation for its [Texture](#) service. CTO Keith Barraclough described the wide variety of content source files—from HTML and PDF to proprietary formats like Adobe’s .folio—and how Texture combines this content with standardized metadata, to create a digital product that is easy to for a subscriber to search and personalize.

“PRISM is an important, standard way of getting rigorous XML from publishers, in a well-understood place in the workflow,” he said. “Getting the full text is important, of course, but so is getting the data that enables us to display it anywhere, and on any device.”

Barraclough likened the Texture model to Netflix and Spotify, citing the trend for users to select their own

premium content from a variety of sources, and their willingness to pay a monthly subscription for that access. “Ultimately we are not a website delivering snack-able click bait; we provide the reader with a rich immersive reading experience on their device from brands they care about.”

He also noted the value of a common interchange format, as opposed to a proprietary digital format like that of Apple—or even a print-derived approach. “I would like to see PRISM evolve into a true standard XML interchange format. It would have everything from basic layout information, so you could render any variant of an article, with universal identifiers for things like higher fidelity images and re-flowing for all the different devices and platforms. There should be no barrier to rendering a beautiful version of an article on an iPad Pro, and still have a version optimized for mobile, but still convey the same magazine brand.”

## Pressing the Advantage

The PRISM approach is by no means limited to large consumer brands. [Publishers Press](#) VP Dick Ryan described how the company has taken many of its clients past the digital replica stage and into a more searchable, article-centric approach, using PRISM metadata, and working together with [The Magazine Channel](#) to create an immersive reading experience.

“When we looked at our clients’ use of digital editions—basically just their printed product on a different substrate—we saw a friction between what they were doing and how their audience wanted to use digital media,” he said. “No one uses Google to search for ‘Issue 47’ of a publication. They use it to search for a particular topic. Their interest in that topic will be resolved not by delivering an entire issue or container, but by delivering a particular story or article. Our interest in this articleization trend was what led us to work closely with PRISM.”

Ryan noted that Publishers Press will offer its client an online authoring tool—called ContentXpress—that will automatically tag content elements with PRISM XML metadata, eventually eliminating the need to manually add XML. Eventually, he believes, this will allow publishers to produce both digital and print renderings from the same data source.

Publishers Press has also developed custom tools with PRISM, allowing one client to automatically syndicate its content to LexisNexis and, in the near future to automatically export to Adobe InDesign. “PRISM addresses a wide-ranging need for how to manage general magazine content from a structural approach,” he said.

## Vision and Value

Consultant Bill Kasdorf has had a long history with standards and specifications, and had some astute observations on the PRISM model. “If PRISM isn’t universally used in the magazine world, it should be,” he said. “What used to be siloed can no longer be siloed. Publishers have always had their own proprietary databases for managing their content and metadata, but now that we live in a web-based world, that is no longer sufficient. You don’t have to discard your own proprietary systems, but to communicate with the outside world, you need to use a standard. And if it’s magazine content, the standard is PRISM.”

Kasdorf noted the key incentives moving publishers towards a common specification: discovery and delivery. Making article content inherently searchable requires a consistent way to describe the subject matter, and making it truly device independent is critical to automated delivery on the users’ choice of devices and platforms. “Publishers need to adapt to the user, rather than expect the user to adapt to them,” he said, “and standards are the key to making that work.”



Another incentive, interoperability, describes the growing need for not only rendering a publication's content to its audience, but also incorporating content from other sources. "There has to be a uniform, cost effective way to acquire and manage content from different sources," he said.

Ultimately, the value of PRISM is a practical one. "Don't re-invent the plumbing," Kasdorf said. "Publishers should be focusing their efforts on building on top of a common framework, not reinventing it." This should include common identifiers for article elements, rights information, technical information such as file types, and standardized conventions or styles for rendering in HTML.

## Open or Closed

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**Open standards will ultimately be the norm, as the common denominator of article content in a multi-channel media world.**

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PRISM has evolved significantly over its long history—from a largely internal XML specification for large-scale syndication to a promising way for magazine publishers to cope, and even succeed, with the digital/mobile shift. Kennedy noted that the emergence of metadata-aware content creation tools is a promising sign. "Ultimately, the creators and editors are in a better position to know the 'who-what-when-where' data about their content," she said. "I believe that authoring tools will increasingly make this more intuitive and automatic, and that a common XML framework will be the ideal way to express that information. As service providers like Publishers Press, the Magazine Channel, Texture, and Zinio use PRISM data to create great user experiences, I'm confident that all publishers will benefit."

Kennedy noted that several proprietary systems are already attempting to do this, but with a catch. "When Apple or Facebook offer to articleize magazine content, they are

ultimately not looking out for the best interests of the publisher," she said. She pointed out that although the major mobile players are adept at presenting monetized content in HTML5, their proprietary approach is clearly intended to gain their own market share. "Magazine publishers need to control their own destiny, and an open XML specification is the best way to do that."

Although proprietary newsstands and content subscription systems will continue to exist, Kennedy is confident that open standards will ultimately be the norm, as the common denominator of article content in a multi-channel media world.

## What's a Publisher to Do?

Today, many publishers and aggregators are using parts of the PRISM approach for a variety of reasons, mostly related to syndication cost savings and internal discoverability. Many more are planning to do so, or would be if they had a compelling reason. That reason has everything to do with the intrinsic quality and value of the magazine article experience.

Magazine publishers offer a product experience that is unique (as we described at the start of this paper) and intrinsically valuable. Like movie and television studios, they should always leverage that intrinsic value and quality to their would-be distribution partners. There will always be proprietary, "my way or the highway" content distributors, whose aim is ultimately to be the dominant player. However, offering short-term convenience is not in the publishers' best interest.

There's also the very real possibility that proprietary distributors will falter, damaging publishers who bet on the wrong horse. The only viable alternative—and a bargaining advantage for publishers—is a common, always evolving, and relentlessly open framework for defining, packaging, and making more discoverable that delightful content experience we call a magazine article.

## Participation Matters

As with any open standard or specification, PRISM is the ongoing product of working groups, made up of visionaries and experts from the publishing community. Contrasted with the proprietary approach, PRISM evolves and changes to meet the broader needs of publishers. (For example, the concept of a recipe has a logical structure familiar to most readers—ingredients, directions, and illustrations—but are not part of generic XML. PRISM exists, in part, to define such unique publishing “objects” in a way that benefits all publishers.

To become more involved in shaping PRISM, and creating better tools for content monetization, contact Dianne Kennedy at [EMAIL?]. The PRISM working group is only one reason to support Idealliance’s efforts on behalf of the publishing and graphic arts community.

## Case Study 1: PRISM Provides an Advertising Advantage, Meredith Publishing

Meredith leverages PRISM metadata to win new advertising revenue.

## PRISM Case Study #1

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**PRISM Provides an Advertising Advantage. Meredith leverages PRISM metadata to win new advertising revenue.**

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A magazine's core value is its editorial content—its uniquely informative and/or entertaining articles that attract and retain a loyal audience. A prime example of this is [Meredith](#), a leading media and marketing presence in the home, food, and lifestyle categories. Article content is the lifeblood of its many major print and digital brands, whose readers are especially attractive to consumer product advertisers.

With so much content, the need for a robust Digital Asset Management (DAM) approach is paramount. Keeping track of text, images, and (increasingly) non-print media is a business necessity—not just for editorial and production efficiency, but to manage rights issues, re-package older content in new forms, and leverage the full value of each article.

### Don't Reinvent the Wheel

With such a large, complex collection of assets, magnified by the rapid changes in digital publishing technology, a publisher's DAM strategy must be efficient—and capable of change without continually starting from scratch. It must also be interoperable with other systems, especially those of distribution partners. For Meredith, doing this requires a uniform non-proprietary approach, namely Idealliance's evolving XML approach, the [Publishing Requirements for Industry Standard Metadata](#) or PRISM.

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**The detail provided in a PRISM-based DAM gives consumer brands a compelling reason to advertise.**

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Patty Bellus, Meredith's Associate Director of DAM Systems, knows full well how valuable it is to know where everything is, and how it has been (or can be) used. She also knows that while proprietary XML may solve an immediate problem, it will ultimately lead to unnecessary costs. In 2011, Meredith's full text search DAM system originally employed some non-PRISM XML, but all exported data are now expressed as PAM 2.0 (PRISM Aggregator Message).

### Targeting Advertisers

PRISM has provided a distinct benefit, besides the general cost savings of efficient internal search. Bellus noted that their DAM system's full text search has given some brands the ability to provide compelling statistics when pitching new advertising campaigns. "Our reps can find out exactly how often a specific consumer product name was used, in what publication, on what dates, and in how many different ways," she said. "For existing advertisers, this keeps the relationship fresh and positive. It's also used to sell new campaigns." She noted that the detail provided in a PRISM-based DAM gives consumer brands a compelling reason to advertise.

For Meredith's Special Interest Publications, PRISM provides increased efficiency, as well as the potential to draw advertisers. The standardized XML definitions for special combinations of tags—like recipes and projects—make it easy to find and repurpose these elements.

## Efficiency and Beyond

Meredith's use of PRISM metadata also benefits the article planning process. Editors and writers can use the system's full text search to easily find all previous articles on a particular topic. It can also limit the search to individual publications, reducing the potential for rights conflicts.

Bellus also noted another, more recent PRISM application, namely Meredith's participation in [Texture](#), the joint venture previously known as Next Issue Media. "As soon as we get new files, we export them as PAM 2.0, and ship them off to Texture," she said. The XML so provided by Meredith affords Texture users the ability to search for desired content.

By using a common standard across all content—including multiple brands and special publications—Meredith has not only reduced internal costs but increased its potential for new revenue, making PRISM a factor in its financial future.

## Case Study 2: The Rights Stuff, Time, Inc.

XML publishing pioneer Time Incorporated continues to use PRISM to more efficiently deal with the complications of rights management for syndicated content.

## PRISM Case Study #2

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**The “Rights Stuff”. XML publishing pioneer Time Incorporated continues to use PRISM to more efficiently deal with the complications of rights management for syndicated content.**

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When a multi-title publisher has a strong reputation, content aggregators and syndication services often seek access to its published articles—preferably at a savings—to serve the needs of schools, corporations, and public libraries. Organizations like research database [EBSCO](#) readily provide subscription-based access to such content.

The devil is of course in the details. Published content is nearly always rights-protected, making such syndication a potentially costly chore. To make matters worse, magazine content is uniquely complex—contrasted with books or even research papers. Separate text elements like sidebars and photo credits have to be clearly identified and handled, so that each syndication partner can correctly render it for print or Web output.

An XML-based approach to handling the data is the recognized best practice for addressing these issues. For magazine-specific article and issue content, that has meant Idealliance’s Publishing Requirements for Industry Standard Metadata, or PRISM.

### Time Inc.

Time Inc. has been an active participant in the [PRISM Initiative](#) since 2004. We spoke with Dai Ichikawa, Digital Asset Systems Manager for Time Inc. Digital Content Production, to get a better idea of how the company uses the specification—and how that has benefitted the publishing process.

Ichikawa noted that all Time Inc. content elements are identified in the company’s Digital Asset Management (DAM) system with PRISM-specific tags. This includes general metadata such as publication, issue, date, article,

title, author, article text, and the like, as well as semantic information such as the type of article. It also includes identifiers for special, magazine-specific elements like sidebars and photo credits.

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**PRISM is designed to help publishers reduce the cost (and complexity) of syndicating their legally-protected content in a fast-moving, international publishing ecosystem.**

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Significantly, it also includes identifiers that describe the often complex legal rights associated with each article. Rights management is a far from simple process. The PRISM approach is designed to help publishers reduce the cost (and complexity) of syndicating their legally-protected content in a fast-moving, international publishing ecosystem.

### Rights Management

“Our systems process the print and web content for archiving in our DAM,” Ichikawa said. “That makes all our content searchable within the company. It’s also distributed to third parties like EBSCO. Since we also manage the rights, we make that information available to our licensing department.” Third-party aggregators like EBSCO contract with Time for to receive its content library. Rights management at the article level is required to determine which articles can be licensed/distributed to third parties.

“The rights tagging lives with the article inside our DAM,” Ichikawa noted, “so if we have a new customer who wants

all of our content for a particular publication, we know that when we do a bulk export, only the rights-cleared articles from that publication will be included. All the others will be filtered out.”

## The Bottom Line

For Time Inc., PRISM reduces the complexity of setting up new content aggregator partners, and of providing them with newly published and archived content automatically. At the end of the day, this means lower overall operating costs.

Ichikawa also noted that the XML format in general (and the PRISM implementation in particular) is a shared, common approach for anyone who needs to deliver original content in widely varying print or digital contexts. “It’s reassuring that if we’re going to tag some aspect of an article, we have an industry-standard way of doing it,” he said. “We wouldn’t have to create it ourselves.”

For something as complex and potentially litigious as rights management, such a standard is worth its weight in code.