

## ETIPS & TRAPS: What is meta data?

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What is metadata? Where is it? How is it used?

Put simply, metadata is data about data. Metadata is contained in virtually every device that collects data today.

For example, document files leave detailed snippets including who created and edited the item and when it was created, edited or printed.

We looked at an accident case recently in which a company created files and submitted them as evidence. Thankfully, for this case, printers also produce metadata on the pages they print. Manufacturers print on every page a dot sequence identifying the company and the actual model. Metadata in this case revealed the document was printed six months before it was created.

Clearly, someone tampered with the evidence. Attorneys appreciate these kinds of discoveries.

In a product liability case, the name of an engineer who made a good witness for our team was discovered via metadata. This led to a productive deposition.

Many consumers and employees do not realize the tracks they leave behind in all the devices they use for fun and / or work:

- Metadata in digital cameras includes the name of the manufacturer, lens settings, dates photos were taken, even lighting conditions. When you upload a photo, more metadata is created on your computer.
- Metadata in CDs includes the date of production, artist, genre, copyright and owner. This data can be accessed by specialized music playback and / or editing applications.

In an effort to fight piracy, the Motion Picture Association of America [MPAA] has created techniques and tracks to identify each individual film that is distributed. The movie you see at the theater most likely has scratches or a light code imbedded in it.

Pirates who bring cameras in the theater routinely get convicted when the prosecution discovers the embedded data from the original.

The FBI and U.S. Secret Service use similar techniques in their investigations of child pornography and counterfeiting.

Metadata is also found when corporations use browser cookies to look at the buying habits and interests of consumers.

The burgeoning practices of data mining and piracy worldwide have led governments, corporations and consumers to engage in a fierce dialogue, leading the U.S. Congress to consider controversial measures including the Stop Online Piracy Act known as SOPA and the PROTECT-IP Act known as PIPA. As we went to press last week, mass protests on-line and in the streets led many in Congress to drop support for the legislation.

As proposed, SOPA would allow the U.S. government to shut down websites and prevent access to sites considered offensive. At the other end of the spectrum, the government of Sweden has a recognized a group that promotes file-sharing as a religion. The Church of Kopimism ["copy me"] sees copyright laws as violating freedom of information and its key symbols are "Ctrl C" and "Ctrl V." Reuters reports that about 15 percent of Swedes are active "file-sharers" or what the MPPA might call "pirates."

Bill Murray is president of EdocMasters LLC, a company that takes the mystery out of e-documentation for the legal industry. Andy Thibault, author of books including Law & Justice In Everyday Life, blogs at The Cool Justice Report, <http://cooljustice.blogspot.com/>

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