

Deblekha

Yeah. Okay. So when you talked a little bit about the closed captions and about the value, both in terms of the principle of making it accessible, but also, making it more discoverable.

But there was other things around assistive technologies and accessibility standards. How does that relate to metadata?

Sarah

So. Basically a lot of metadata as we've seen can serve multiple purposes, whether it's for your internal organizational use, whether it's for discoverability and accessibility is no different. So accessibility is a whole bunch of things that are done to make, in this case, digital content, more available and more accessible to people who maybe can't use it right now for whatever reason. So a lot of the time we think of things like screen readers or adaptive technology. Maybe people who have low vision, whatever it might be.

Extra content can sometimes be added so that a screen reader. When it encounters an image, for example, it can read the alt text of the image. So back to alt texts, which is like a brief description of what is contained in the image. So if you have low vision and you're on a website, your screen reader is reading the text to you, and then it encounters the image.

And it says, this is an image of a cat in a basket. And so, you know what is being presented to you, even if you can't see it. That same little bit of text - the cat in the basket, Google also grabs that. So now it knows that the image on your website is a cat in a basket.

If somebody is going to Google a cat in a basket, now they can get your picture. So it's just a way, another point of matching. So it's great for accessibility, but it also happens to be great for discoverability. It's just one more sort of doorway that Google can use. So alt text on images, subtitles, captions, HTML tags. So anyone doing web development, the HTML tag tells it to display something as a header or a subtitle or a Header 4. It gives you that sort of visual structure, but it also gives you some actual structure structure.

Sarah

And so Google knows to prioritize H1 and H2 as very important information. This is what this website is about. And so it prioritizes that. So if I'm looking for websites that are about cats in baskets, and you don't have any titles that say cats in baskets, I won't find it. But if you've put a header tag around cats in baskets, then Google knows that that's what I want. So again, it's just things that have both sort of a visual and perhaps accessibility, but also just have straight discoverability.

Deblekha

I have a very vague understanding of what SEO is and now I'm getting a better understanding of what metadata is. So I'm wondering if you could tell me kind of what the relationship between those two things are

Sarah

Sure. So SEO search engine optimization, which has that ick factor of e-commerce that a lot of people think about, is actually just how search engines can find and display your stuff to searchers and what they use to do that is metadata.

Google will crawl your site or your content and grab bits of information about it. So it knows what it is. And then when someone's looking for that, it knows to show it to them. That is search engine optimization, the process of you optimizing your metadata so that you are discoverable.

And so e-commerce that we commonly think of, they do it so that your eyeballs will land on their product and buy it. So that's where it really has dominated, sort of the conversation about SEO, but it's exactly the same process for you to make your stuff discoverable by optimizing your metadata. So they're actually SEO uses metadata.

Deblekha

Okay. That helps. It's interesting that you said that the bigger companies are dominating the game, just because it's driven by big, big dollars.

For a lot of the folks that are connected to the digital community, digital storytelling collective, you know, we're talking about low to no budgets. I know it would be different depending on the customized needs of each organization, but say an organization has a modest budget of one to \$5,000 and wants to do the most that they can to try to get into the game, not be left behind, around, all things, metadata and SEO-based.

Sarah

Great. So I think there's a couple of steps to that. And I think the first step would be for the leadership of the organization to do that values based piece. How are we communicating? What is our vocabulary? And really doing that little bit of a thinking piece where we talked about. What are the tags that I might use? What is my appropriate vocabulary?

Once that is done, then a lot of different people could be doing the task level work of actually applying those best practices to each video or to each piece of content or whatever it is. So in your case, you might want to do some thinking and planning about: What's my vocabulary for the different participants I might have in my video, (in consultation with them)? What are my themes? What are the kinds of titles and tags I want to use to organize my stuff in order to make it findable?

You could potentially hire, someone like me could come in and make recommendations, based on interviews with you and then doing some work to pull out the relevant bits, to work with you, to create some guidelines. You could have almost anyone do the task level work once those decisions are made. And once that framework is in place for you. So that's sort of the first piece. You want to get your own house in order first.

Once you're comfortable with what you've got and the kinds of descriptions that you've got on your own material, the trick is then to kind of get it out there. One thing is that, and again, I'm just using Google as an example, because it's so dominant.

Google doesn't just use one piece of information to decide what to show someone. It likes to triangulate information. And so it's looking for multiple sources of information and the more you have that point to you and your content as being of a certain quality or certain nature, the more likely it is that they're going to show it to someone.

They just do that as kind of a proof. If 10 different blog posts all say the same thing is great, it's probably great. Obviously that system can be gamed, but for an organization like yours, what you want to do, once you've got your organizational part under control, is you want to make sure that your website is up to date with the kinds of things that you want to say. So again, if you're talking about your videos and your content and your participants, making sure the language there is great. You want to make sure in your Vimeo or wherever you're hosting your content, that you've got really consistent tagging and descriptions and all of that.

If possible, you want to have other sources of truth on the internet for your stuff. And IMDb, for example, for videos is a good one. Again, there's that ick factor of big business. But they work with Google on such a scale. Google definitely crawls their stuff constantly so that it is very up to date on who's who in movie land. So if you can upload your metadata, not your videos, just your metadata to something big like that, you can actually leverage all of those relationships that Google and IMDb have to then become discoverable through them as well. So what that does is it makes you

discoverable in IMDb, which is great, but it also is one more point of truth for Google to say, 'Oh, they really are who they said they are. They really do have these videos. Oh, these people really did make this stuff.'

And so it's just one more point of contact, one more doorway in, and a very sort of, well trafficked high visibility one.

There's others too, depending on what people are working with. Some people like to put Wikipedia entries in, for people who are notable in their field or for their organization. It's sometimes hard to get a Wikipedia page to stick, if it's kind of a small organization, but there may be a way to do that, or a way to use links from your organization on an existing Wikipedia page to act as evidence and references on the page. So there's little things that you can do with a big-scale information organization that don't have to cost a lot of money. They may cost a bit of time and also, somebody to figure out how to do that. Like how do I get my content over there? Or what's the best approach for me getting my stuff into IMDb for example. But what you can do then with almost no dollars is leverage other people's SEO spending.

Deblekha

Sounds like you're talking about a three step verification process, to optimize your searchability

Sarah

That's a big one is using a database like IMDb, that's already out there. That's already very dominant. If you can get your content in there. Not all of them are open to having content added. But they're thinking of any other sort of big scale, even just something simple as putting your organization on Google Maps is another point of truth for this organization existing. Another link to your stuff. Another description of what you do. And any time you can kind of get out there in a big name player, it all helps.

IMDb is great for videos because you've got a lot of people who work on videos. And the nice thing is that it becomes a record of their work and their contributions. So it could be that somebody does sound on a lot of videos. And if you can put that in there, then there's a nice, very public record of their experience doing sound on a lot of videos that could help them in a professional way as well. So a lot of people want their stuff in there. Again, it's up to every organization, what works for you, but it can be really helpful.

Deblekha

Okay. Okay. That is a lot of information. Okay. So Sarah, I'm not gonna lie. My head is kind of swimming, but in the interest of trying to lock in some of the new information you've given me, I'm going to try to do a rapid recap of the reasons that I should care about metadata.

One of the first things we talked about is discovery. So like tending to metadata can really help people find our work if we're, if we do a good job of tending to it. Right. Okay. Attribution. That was one thing that we talked about. It's really, really important. If the right people are going to get the right credit for their contributions. It's really important that we are on top of that.

Sarah

Definitely.

Deblekha

Even if we're doing a Creative Commons license, it still matters.

Sarah

Yeah. You still want to give people the credit for their work.

Deblekha

Okay, cool. There's one of the administration headings, I remember you saying something around rights management, like what our permissions are, whether people can and cannot download or remix the work.

Sarah

Yeah. Yeah. So you use metadata to communicate that to the public.

Deblekha

Okay. Okay, cool. And then you talk about findability, which is a lot like discoverability, but not really. Discoverability is more for the wider world. And findability is more for like for my own little zone of chaos in my, in terms of file management?

Sarah

That's right. So think of discoverability as people out there discovering your work and findability is you being able to find it when you need it.

Deblekha

Oh, so wow. You think about if I was really on top of my metadata, I could actually probably not spend four hours a week digging through my files to find things. Okay.

Sarah

A couple things to think about though, are: organization. So again, this is a bit internal, but being able to put together all the different pieces of a project. If you've got a video and some documents and some other things that all go together, you can use metadata to really clearly indicate that in your own files or even in your public files as well on your website.

And then, accessibility. Good metadata will help with adaptive technology and screen readers and the like, but those very same pieces of metadata can do other jobs as well, like help with discoverability.

Deblekha

Okay. Okay. It sounds like, well, anyway, I really feel like I thank you so much for helping me kind of wrap my head around this area. And I guess the great metaphor for me is about, like learning how to become more systematic and better housekeeping so I can declutter my digital life.

Sarah

Okay, great.

Deblekha

Well, you've given me lots of good data to consider. But I am sort of curious if there's anything, speaking to someone who might be metadata curious, but a little bit metadata, reluctant, maybe anything that you haven't had a chance to sort of share here that you'd like to share.

Sarah

I think the biggest thing I'd like to share, and I touched on it at the beginning, is that if you go to look this stuff up, you're going to find a lot of technical complicated spreadsheets that is not interesting to read necessarily or appealing, or even super understandable if it's your first exposure to it.

It's sometimes harder to find entry level information. So you'll look up some metadata stuff and you'll just get like tables and tables of weird numbers and letters. So don't be intimidated by any of that. It's just that there's not a lot of people who are good at communicating about it. A lot of the people who work in this area are working at that level all the time and forget what it was like to not know that.

So don't be overwhelmed. There are good resources out there to kind of give an entry level point of contact to scale this down. Kind of like we did with your Vimeo. Like you can reject a lot of this stuff and use what works for you. We'll include some of that as well to get you started, but don't feel like you have to do all of the things you encounter as you read about this because you don't, you just have to do what works for you.

Deblekha

Awesome. Thank you. There's lots to think about, but I'm feeling a lot less overwhelmed than I was when I first looked at some of the links. And I'm excited about sort of figuring out a few cheat sheets to share with folks.

Sarah

And I think that will help a lot.

Deblekha

And thank you for being one of the people who works in this field, but is willing to talk to people who are starting from scratch

Sarah

Well. It's actually really interesting for me because the whole point of all this behind the scenes metadata work that I do, whether in libraries or outside of libraries is to help people find information. That's the point. And so there's no point in me sitting here typing at a computer all day. I'd rather just tell you about it and we can just help you find your information.

Deblekha

Awesome. Thank you so much, Sarah. I appreciate it.

Sarah

Thank you.

Deblekha

Ciao.