

Context needed in metadata and data retention d

To say it's just the metadata and "it's not about content" fails to appreciate the dynamics of th



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18 August, 2014 15:44



There are many worrying aspects of the current political debate in Australia on proposals relating to the retention of metadata.

Firstly, there is no clear and consistent statement or explanation of what is actually proposed. This is a concern in a democracy.

Secondly, statements from the politicians and senior bureaucrats fronting the media to give an explanation as to what metadata is, demonstrate that they don't understand it and can't explain it.

Thirdly, the rather embarrassing attempts to explain what metadata is – and what the proposals are – indicate a very significant capability gap in public administration around understanding digital architecture.

This is the cause of many other cost and performance issues in government, but in this instance it is manifested in the debate on metadata.



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"It's not about content" – is the reassurance that is given – it's just the metadata, [according to prime minister Tony Abbott](#).

This simplistic statement is incorrect, incomplete and misleading on many levels.

The digital paradigm is defined by – customer, communication, content, commerce, community and context. And it's “context” which provides the richest layer of meaning.

And significantly, it's metadata that enables and describes this level of interoperability and relationships.



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Metadata used to be the rather dry domain of librarians, information management specialists and architects; we've always known that metadata was the oil of the digital economy.

It has been the focus on metadata standards that has driven deeper and more pervasive interoperability across the digital assets of the economy.

And as the Internet of Things also becomes more pervasive, the narrative about “content” and “surfing the web” is clearly an outdated and rudimentary paradigm. We no longer surf the web – the web is pervasive.

All economic, social and even health activities generate metadata: purchasing tickets; online banking; wearable devices; micro-agriculture; smart infrastructure, email, using social sites like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.



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Metadata is also created when we use touch 'n' go public transport cards, and make payments and interact with governments and businesses.

Indeed, this is an extraordinary proposal that has not been explained.

And to say it's just the metadata and “it's not about content” is an appalling statement that fails to appreciate the dynamics and the new paradigm of the digital era.

It's about context – a far more powerful and deeper insight into relationships and meaning.



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And metadata is the means by which this insight is achieved – and it is for this reason that an informed public policy debate is needed.

For those interested in a very coherent and insightful analysis of the metadata debate in Australia, should read the [iiNet submission](#) to the Australian Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs.

Marie Johnson is the managing director and chief digital officer at the Centre for Digital Business. She has extensive public and private sector experience in Australia and internally in technology and innovation, and has led the strategy and implementation of reform programs across government.

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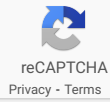
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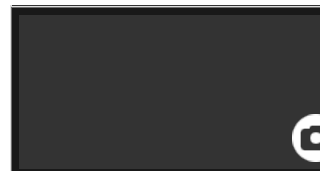
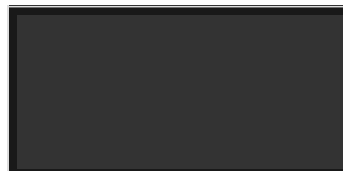
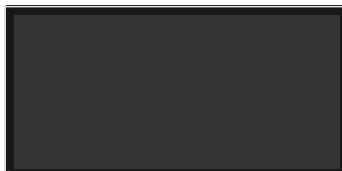
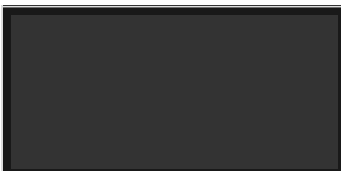
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