



The Office: Gervais or Carrell?

Solving TV's identity crisis

Assigning a unique number to every programme will benefit the whole industry, says **Clive Bishop**



Watching the Oscars debacle, it struck me how easily such a mix-up can happen – numerous envelopes all with similar

titles: 'best this' and 'best that'. Notwithstanding the distractions of social media, this kind of confusion happens all the time in the audiovisual world. Which version of *39 Steps* do you mean? *The Office* – is that with Ricky Gervais or Steve Carrell?

Of course, a combination of descriptive data fields could help resolve this, but a unique number will nail it every time, without relying on human knowledge or matching algorithms.

If you accept that numbering is the best way to uniquely identify content, then using a common ID that everyone else recognises will bring even more benefits – without requiring huge cross-reference look-up tables of proprietary IDs.

Most industries have long grasped this nettle – for example, the use of ISBN by the publishing industry, or the music industry's adoption of ISRC numbering. Can you imagine online banking without sort codes, swift codes and account numbers?

It's all about delivering business benefits, which ITV, along with its partners, has sought to realise by using the Entertainment Identifier Registry (EIDR). EIDR is a universal

unique identifier for movie and television assets. From top-level titles, edits and DVDs, to encodings, clips and mash-ups, EIDR provides global unique identifiers for the entire range of audiovisual object types that are relevant to entertainment commerce. It was established by the EIDR association, a not-for-profit industry organisation founded by Movielabs, Cablelabs, Comcast and TiVo. The board also includes representatives from Disney, Google, Netflix and Sony.

ITV is using EIDR in a few different ways, one of which is content delivery. Whether it comes from ITV Studios, an indie producer, or is acquired internationally, ITV wants to use its EIDR number and to date more than 100,000 episodes of its shows have been assigned an EIDR. The Digital Production Partnership (DPP) programme delivery file format already has a field for supplying a unique ID and is considering recommendations on greater use.

Making content available to online platforms like Google Play, Netflix and Amazon can be time-consuming. However, using EIDR within the EMA Avails spec significantly automates the process – Google estimates a reduction in avails processing from 50 hours to 10 minutes, enabling transactional revenue reporting as well as title performance aggregation.

Music reporting for collection societies, such as PRS for Music, can be automated by

linking EIDR numbers to music cue sheets. As well as providing increased accuracy of royalty payments to the songwriters and artists, it enables ITV to obtain music cue sheets on international content it acquires.

National film archives and libraries provide an important resource to which many content producers are happy to contribute – the BFI has adopted EIDR in its feature film documentation workflow, helping to easily match which ITV titles the BFI has and plug any gaps.

In the longer term, ITV sees potential benefits in using EIDR for on-demand and catch-up TV platforms featuring content from many sources and broadcasters. This could enhance the viewer experience by linking associated content such as synopses, similar content and merchandise through EPG tools.

Similarly, audience measurement organisations that have to aggregate viewing figures across multiple linear and non-linear platforms would find this task simpler using the same ID for each audiovisual work.

ITV has found many benefits from adopting EIDR into its content work stream, but even greater benefits will be seen when other content owners and broadcasters adopt it, enabling us all to log and track our content with a common identifier. □

■ *Clive Bishop is head of information policy and reporting at ITV and a member of the EIDR board*