

Quebec company vies for Canadian Heritage rights management support

A small Quebec rights management company has begun a public relations push to find federal support for a Canadian cultural content portal that would ensure artists get paid for digital distribution of their works. On March 10, Montreal-based **Reeves Communication Inc.** announced support from several well-known Canadian arts groups for its digital rights management (DRM) technology. The effort is intended to pave the way for new partnership agreements with copyright collectives in advance of another crack at the **Canadian Heritage** funding pot.

Reeves president François Reeves tells *Canadian NEW MEDIA* that he's gearing up to negotiate with the copyright collectives to tag their members' content with metadata that would allow content such as music, film, television and dance to be streamed to users with payments and distribution restrictions attached. The content could be hosted on either a central server or on any other web site with real-time reporting built in. It's an attractive proposition, in Reeves' view.

"I talked to a few of them about the idea and they love it. They think it's great," he says.

"We're just covering the Internet. We're not re-thinking their business model or interceding with whatever they had as their way of doing business. We're offering them

a new means of income on the Internet. Right now, the idea is to block any initiative that has to do with the Internet because they feel they're losing control over it. We're going to be providing them with a means of keeping control over what's being done with work from the artists on the Internet. Right now they're scared of the Internet. If that system goes through and we open a dialog with them, then they're going to realize they can tame that beast."

A Reeves Communication media release notes that several high-profile groups and artists support the idea, including pianists Louis Lortie and Angela Hewitt, the **La La La Human Steps** dance company, **Christal Film** and the **Société de soutien aux projets en imagerie numérique pour le cinéma**.

The copyright collectives' support is important if the project is to move forward. Reeves says he received positive feedback about the project from Canadian Heritage, but the department is looking for broader partnerships before funding projects. If Reeves Communication is successful attracting the interest of a collective, it will make another attempt to win *Canadian Culture Online Program* dollars.

Last December, Canadian Heritage announced three new ventures to put copyright clearance and licensing online with funding from the \$3-million *Electronic*

Copyright Fund (CNM, Dec. 11/02). But Reeves says his company's project has a broader scope than those initiatives. Its proposal, he notes, has the added advantage of being a made-in-Canada, open-source technology.

Reeves says **Microsoft Corp.** and **RealNetworks** currently have systems on the market that provide DRM. But he notes that both options carry expensive licensing obligations that can be prohibitive for the small Canadian market.

"We want to make sure that the system we develop works within the Canadian context. We don't have the population here to sustain a very expensive, sophisticated system." Instead of the more expensive options for attaching DRM to content, Reeves Communication has chosen to work with an open-source system from **Apple Computer Inc.**

"I don't think we should have to accept what's being done in the States. We can do it ourselves; it's just a question of getting the right collectives together, getting the artists together and doing it," he says. "Why would 25 different collectives have 25 different solutions when we can all pull together and just do one?"

Reeves Communication is also looking for participation from artists in the form of exclusive content that the company can try to market on the Internet for two years.

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