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[Is GoodRelations a Game Changer?](#)

One ontology worth watching might be GoodRelations, which is being implemented by Best Buy. The central component of this architecture was an ontology called GoodRelations developed by [Martin Hepp](#), who presented at SemTech in San Francisco last week via Skype from Munich, Germany. GoodRelations is a retail ontology which uses RDFa from XHTML webpages to populate global ontology. But why would a major retailer use this architecture?

Best Buy discovered that it was impossible to be the top dog in search engine optimization (SEO) in every search category for every product. To do this, they needed to have finely tuned individual pages. They also wanted to provide immediate content about “open box” – returned items at local stores. Looking for a solution that could add more granularity, precision and localization, but still enable global search and have metadata that was controlled by the enterprise.

GoodRelations is a retail ontology, which offers facets or classes, metadata descriptions and attributes that are common in the retail industry. It is expressed in RDFa which is a flavor of RDF that works in web browsers. Yahoo Search Monkey supports RDFa, Facebook directed graphs will support RDF. Google snippets also support RDFa.

Because there is common metadata, it is easy for employees or customers (who are called “user agents” in the semantic world) to tag content via templates which populate the RDF. RDFa can be maintained in a corporate or enterprise repository which can be configured as needed for distribution in the enterprise.

In the GoodRelations RDF, the additional metadata might include price, color, dimensions, model and other attributes that interest consumers. GoodRelations is an ontology that can be shared over any retail enterprise in any country. The cost per webpage, once implemented, is minimal because “user agents” are familiar with how to complete forms over the web. The RDFa can then be appended to an HTML page written in XHTML or HTML5. These HTML code for adding the specific metadata attributes is about 30-50 lines. This creates HTML that has more granularity than a typical <keyword> metatag. The high costs are in the

metadata management.

Adding RDFa as metadata to a webpage should be easy to adopt because it works in the current web paradigm. Google is offering RDFa markup language that can be appended to a webpage called Google Rich Snippets. Snippets is competing with the another format called Microformat. The problem is that every domain needs a shared set of s metadata attributes to enable search across smaller domains. Google is rolling out examples of RDFa for restaurants, currently only has 2500 markup pages. To see an example of snippets, try a search on Google for “Baked Ziti.” Drupal 7 also offers RDF, and has been implemented in www.whitehouse.gov, as part of the Obama Administration transparency initiative.

Why does this interest me as a classy taxonomist (future ontologist)? Clearly, this technology has evolved to a point of adoption, but further adoption depends on political and organizational work to get other applications to take the risk to try RDFa. RDFa depends on common adoption of similar metadata This requires political and organization skills to define and manage common metadata knowledge models. First, taxonomists understand vocabulary and metadata as a way to capture common knowledge and shared metadata. Second, if this innovation becomes more widely adopted and gains traction, there may be interest in building similar process in other applications in making any information that has to be shared.

Further, if RDFa coupled with ontology and metadata management, makes data management and querying easier through SPARQL, then more attention can be paid to the political and organizational work of working with local agencies to contribute good data and content.

There is a long way to go to make this vision a reality.. browsers have to adopt RDFa, applications have to prove the viability and ontologies in other domains need to be created. But in the long run, this might be a more democratic way to extend information access on the web.

However, to move toward this vision, faceted navigation and defining common metadata and taxonomies is good intermediate step. By creating faceted taxonomies and browsing, and collecting data, user communities are moving towards understanding what search fields, common language, and unambiguous terms that matter to their users. A little semantics goes a long way.

~Marlene Rockmore

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