

OpenMeta: new open source document management and metadata for OS X

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Ironic Software has released today OpenMeta, a new open sourced standard for metadata on OS X. OpenMeta, working with established OS X technologies, ushers in a new wave of standards based document management solutions. These solutions can scale from single laptops through to large organizations. Ironic is also releasing free tools to work with the OpenMeta standard. 'Tagger' is an application that allows tagging and rating any document, while omtool is a command line utility.

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Most document management systems are large, expensive, proprietary and intrusive. OpenMeta solves many of these problems. "Over the years that we have developed document management tools, like Yep for PDFs, and Leap for more general tasks, we came to the conclusion that the Mac was missing a good document management system", explained Tom Andersen of Ironic Software. "We developed OpenMeta to address an ongoing shortfall in OS X - the lack of good ways to set metadata such as tags and ratings on any file in OS X. We think that this technology will allow companies of any size to organize and find documents with ease".

How it works:

Ironic Software has developed a system that is extensible, open sourced, and based on the OS X file system. Documents are not 'stored' in any special database, instead they are simply put where ever they make sense. A document management system must both store documents (which OpenMeta leaves up to the file system), and metadata about the files - meta data being tags, dates, ratings, people, etc associated with the document.

OpenMeta uses unix 'extended attributes' to store this metadata. By storing both the files and the metadata on the file system, backing up and restoring a document management system can be done with (almost) any normal backup system. For some offices, Time Machine will do more than an adequate job. Storing metadata and files using no special formats or databases allows for very robust future proof behavior. OpenMeta has been designed to last as long as OS X will last.

There are no proprietary databases to deal with. Searching is accomplished using the Spotlight searching capabilities of OS X. These searches can be done using the familiar - but simple Spotlight search tool in OS X Leopard. Richer search and document tools can use standard Apple commands to enhance and extend the basic search functionality of Spotlight.

In addition to Tagger and omtool, Ironic Software has also recently released 'Deep' - an image search and management tool for OS X that allows for searching images by color similarities, tags, size and shape. Deep uses OpenMeta to store color and tag information, and offers a rich immersive search experience. Ironic's other two document management programs, Leap and Yep will be changing over to use OpenMeta in the coming months.

Why Open Source?

Open sourcing the 'way' to set metadata on a file in OS X allows for everyone to do it the same way, but just as important, sends a message to customers looking at an OpenMeta based system. That message being of course that software and solution vendors will have much less 'lock-in' than with a wholly proprietary system.

What is open source in OpenMeta is the formats, attribute names and conventions for metadata storage, along with source code to store, retrieve and in some cases validate the information stored. OpenMeta on its own will not be a solution for anyone but the largest companies willing to do in house development of the tools and systems appropriate for their business.

A simple and effective use for document management involves tagging and rating documents. This way documents can be filed where appropriate, and tags and ratings can be set to further categorize a document. The search for a good tagging solution for OS X has been going on for many years. OpenMeta solves this problem handily, allowing tags to be set on any document in a consistent, robust way. Other developers of tagging software for the Mac are encouraged to look at OpenMeta and incorporate it into their products.

OpenMeta:

<http://code.google.com/p/openmeta/>

Ironic Software:

<http://www.ironicsoftware.com/>

Screenshot: An OpenMeta application:

<http://www.ironicsoftware.com/images/deepSplash.jpg>

Deep: Image Search - Uses OpenMeta:

<http://www.ironicsoftware.com/deep/index.html>

Ironic software. Document Management on the Mac. Our products allow individuals and companies organize documents, images and PDFs using, tags, color and location content and other meta data. Unlike expensive 'locked - in' solutions, Deep, Leap and Yep do not use proprietary databases, or force you to import your files into a library.

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