

Copyright Clearance Center Brings Ringgold In-House to Grow its Data Pipeline

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What to Know and Why It Matters

On May 3, Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) announced the acquisition of Ringgold, a provider of persistent organization identifiers (PIDs) for the scholarly communications community.

For the past 19 years, Ringgold has played a central role in the provision of organization disambiguation services for the scholarly community. Its Ringgold Identify database holds 600,000 records of organizations and related metadata that is arranged hierarchically to show the connections among institutions, departments, research units, funders, government agencies, and consortia in one dataset tagged with Ringgold IDs. These disambiguation capabilities and the Ringgold ID are instrumental for the products and services of more than 80 clients and partners.

CCC has partnered with Ringgold since 2014 to disambiguate author affiliations related to article processing charges in its RightsLink for Scientific Communications solution. Elsevier, Clarivate/ScholarOne, Aries Systems, ORCID, IET, IEEE, ASTM, and the Royal Society of Chemistry, among others, have relied on Ringgold's data to develop their offerings.

CCC will invest in Ringgold to scale its operations up and expand its reach in the scholarly communications industry. As a metadata expert with its own IT infrastructure, it will support Ringgold in the identification of new use cases and in bringing the implementation of PIDs further upstream in the research cycle. Scaling up will allow more institutions to attract ideal researchers to collaborate on specific areas of study, support more researchers with grant applications, and assist funders with tracking the results of their investments by institution — all benefiting open science. Ringgold will continue to be the core data pipeline for RightsLink for Scholarly Communications and for CCC's knowledge graphs products, the latest of which, CCC Expert View, was announced on May 2.

Analyst Rating: Positive

In Outsell's opinion, this acquisition is a clear win-win. CCC invested in a reputable and widely used data resource at a time when data-driven applications are growing in strategic importance for all stakeholders in the scholarly communications arena. It will leverage a longstanding relationship with Ringgold and create synergies with its metadata and data analysis expertise while securing a mission-critical asset for its products.

Winners and Losers

The acquisition of Ringgold provides multiple ways for CCC to continue its mission of removing friction in information flows in scholarly communications. First, in taking over Ringgold, CCC has achieved a deeper integration into the scholarly communications ecosystem on both the open access and commercial sides. Persistent identifiers can play a decisive role earlier in the research process to highlight the connections between institutions and researchers, help identify opinion leaders, and highlight the strengths of an institution to funders and students. At the time of publication of an open-access article, PIDs are instrumental in creating transparency to facilitate fee collection through transformative agreements. CCC will be driving a wider and more inclusive reach of Ringgold into the global research ecosystem while growing its brand with the research community.

Furthermore, in bringing Ringgold in-house, CCC takes the transformative step up the value chain of knowledge generation from data and content management to data creation. Interconnectivity is a differentiator in knowledge generation for all industries, from medicine to construction, yet a material leap in evolution is only possible when a critical mass of objects has a tag and becomes identifiable by machines. Persistent identifiers are critical to maintaining data quality and are intended for machine readability. Scaling up Ringgold's capabilities will result in faster digitization of scholarly communications through the ripple effects of greater transparency, growth in machine-readable data, ease of author disambiguation, and smoother interoperability. These impacts will, in turn, drive demand for more high-quality data, which is of utmost importance for CCC to feed its knowledge graphs and ensure meaningful connections among data points that are discoverable, reproducible, and accessible.

The market is in the early stages of digitization, and there are other players seeking to facilitate information flow and create connecting tissue in the scholarly communications marketplace with the help of persistent identifiers or better data management. Providers of faculty information systems (like Interfolio), researcher identity management tools (like Scopus Author ID), and peer-review credit attribution platforms (like Publons) as well as blockchain-based innovator ARTiFACTS all provide services complementary to that of Ringgold. In a discovery and analysis category, the linked research information database Dimensions by Digital Science caters to institutions evaluating their positions in the scholarly communications marketplace by connecting to the Google Big Query engine.

In Outsell's opinion, none of these players are directly competitive with CCC/Ringgold at this stage of market evolution. They will likely see more traction for their products as a result of this acquisition.

What's Next

CCC is well-positioned to make Ringgold's capabilities shine by exposing them to its growing customer base and incorporating Ringgold features into its products. If successful, this will facilitate a leap into the next stage of digitization and be likely to encourage the adoption of other PIDs, like ORCID. A wider reach for Ringgold is also likely to influence the pace of open access adoption in the global south, bringing more institutions into the limelight.

For the wider scholarly communications industry, all of this means a faster shift from processing and publishing articles to enriching content by connecting it to more sources of data. The industry needs to get ready by improving its data management and governance, getting its collective metadata house in order, and brainstorming products that complement the delivery of content.

Essential Actions

CCC's acquisition of Ringgold reminded the market of the value of owning a dataset that is critical to one's own product suite. It also demonstrates the need for interconnectivity of multiple sources of data even at the early stages of digitization. As data, information, and analytics executives plan for the next steps in digitizing their businesses, we have the following points to offer for consideration.

✓ **Conduct an Early Data Audit**

Better data and connected data pay high dividends at the early stages of the adoption of data-driven applications by the market. Conduct a data audit before the adoption or creation of any data-driven products to avoid the risk of having to play catch-up with the market and to cut down on the need for the remediation of bad data.

✓ **Curate High-Quality Data In-House**

Outsell has repeatedly observed the benefits of having proprietary sources of data that can be integrated with third-party data sources. It does not have to be big data, but it has to be high-quality and vetted against a transparent methodology. This data set will work as a differentiator — a “secret sauce” — and will help resist the trend of commoditization of content as digital publishing moves to predominantly open information sources.

✓ Play to Organizational Strengths

The acquisition of Ringgold makes sense strategically for CCC, and its existing IT infrastructure is a strength that allows it to accommodate and grow Ringgold from day one. Equally, both companies share highly complementary data management and governance skill sets that they deploy to support their customers tactically on the route to achieving their strategic goals. These are all important compatibility checkboxes to mark when evaluating partnerships and acquisitions to ensure minimal post-integration friction.

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