

Multimedia Licensing Offers Unique Problems

BY SARAH M. JENNIFER



Multiple multimedia capabilities are at loggerheads with copyright law. Licensing practices

"Multimedia" has become a well recognized term over the past few years. Recent advances in computer technology have enabled systems to combine multiple media, such as text, graphics, music, photographs, and video, in a single presentation. These presentations are dynamic and interactive, and offer society a whole new way to learn, communicate, and entertain. Potential applications are limited only by the imagination, and the extent of their social value is beyond our current view.

An illustrative example of a multimedia product is an electronic, multimedia encyclopedia. It allows at the encyclopedia allows a user to select topical areas, and explore each topic through both sight and sound. Film, photographs, music, sound, text, and narrative voice present the topic in an interesting, entertaining fashion. Due to the nature of multimedia capabilities, many products are utilizing an extensive materials, like the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

Today's multimedia computing capabilities, however, are at a stalemate with copyright law and licensing practices. Multimedia product developers want to incorporate copyrighted materials into their products. Authors, in contrast, seek to control the use of their copyrighted works. At the negotiation table, developers and authors have little, if any, middle in compromise. Many negotiations fail or fall short of expectations and thus waste the time, money, and efforts of the parties involved. In the end, when limited multimedia products reach the market, society becomes the

victim of the unresolved negotiations. Unless we correct this failing system, society will likely never realize the full benefits of multimedia computing.

This article then examines the copyright and licensing conflicts surrounding multimedia product development, and proposes a statutory compromise. The first section provides a brief overview of copyright law and licensing practices, and identifies issues of contention between authors, developers, and society. The second section analyzes existing compulsory and blanket license systems that have been implemented in the past to resolve similar conflicts. It then proposes a statutory compulsory license for multimedia product development that will help facilitate a smooth and systematic integration of multimedia technology into our society.

BACKGROUND ON U.S. COPYRIGHT LAW & LICENSING PRACTICES

Developers cannot use copyrighted works in multimedia products without permission from the copyright holder. The success of many types of multimedia products, however, is dependent upon inclusion of copyrighted works. To help explain the current controversies between copyright holders and developers, this section provides background information on U.S. copyright law and licensing practices. Readers who are familiar with basic copyright law should skip directly to the discussion of licensing practices, which identifies problem areas specific to multimedia development.

U.S. Copyright Law

The Constitution provides the

basis for copyright protection in the United States. It grants to Congress the power to "promote the progress of Science and the useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries."¹

The language of this provision explains the primary purpose of our federal copyright system — to promote "science and the useful arts." The language shows that society is the ultimate, intended beneficiary. Authors, on the other hand, are granted rights as a means to that end. This is not to say, however, that the rights of authors should be overlooked. Authors' rights provide an economic incentive to create, and are critical to achieving an increased flow of works in society.

Pursuant to constitutional authority, Congress has enacted the U.S. Copyright Act.² The act records copyright protection to "original works of authorship fixed in any tangible medium of expression."³ "Works of authorship" include literary works; musical works, including any accompanying words; dramatic works, including any accompanying music; pantomimes and choreographic works; pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works; motion pictures and other audiovisual works; and sound recordings.⁴

For these works of authorship the act grants to authors five exclusive, inalienable rights:

- "(1) to reproduce the copyrighted work in copies or phonorecords;
- "(2) to prepare derivative works based upon the copyrighted work;

¹Williamson, Virginia, paper was signed for at 145-145A & Canada Fellowship. *Williamson* was amended annually to qualified applicants and are listed by the U.S. & Canada Enforcement Fund.

"(3) to distribute copies or phonorecords of the copyrighted work in the public by sale or other transfer of ownership, or by rental, lease, or lending;

"(4) ... to perform the copyrighted work publicly; and

"(5) ... to display the copyrighted work publicly."

These five rights are referred to, respectively, as the right of reproduction, adaptation, publication, performance, and display.¹⁰ They are severable and transferable, "by any means or device now or by operation of law."¹¹ For example, an author can transfer his reproduction and publication rights, while retaining all others.

The first aspects of copyright subsist automatically upon creation of a work. No application or filing is required to be a copyright holder. There are, however, important reasons to file a copyright application with the U.S. Copyright Office.¹²

The five rights are granted to authors for limited durations.¹³ Generally, copyrights are held from the first of creation until 50 years after the author's death.¹⁴ When copyrights lapse, the work enters the public domain and may be freely used by all.¹⁵

"To establish a successful claim for copyright infringement, the plaintiff must prove: (1) ownership of the copyright, and (2) copying of protectable expression by the defendant."¹⁶ "Copying" is established by proving: (a) that the defendant had prior access to the copyrighted work; and (b) that there was "substantial similarity" between the plaintiff's and defendant's work, with respect to both the general idea and the expression of those ideas.¹⁷ The test to determine substantial similarity is whether, upon comparing the two works, a reasonable person could recognize the copyrighted work in the alleged infringing work.¹⁸ There are, however, statutory exceptions that allow certain types of copyright infringement.¹⁹

Licensing Practices and Problems for Multimedia

A license agreement is a contract under which one party, the licensee, obtains authority to use a copy-

righted work in a manner that would otherwise constitute copyright infringement. In negotiating a license agreement, an author and licensee define terms of use and compensation. When negotiations are successful, the license agreement memorializes the detailed negotiated terms.²⁰

The terms of a license agreement can vary considerably from one to another. Terms of use delineate the context in which a licensee can use the copyrighted work. Some severely restrict the rights of a licensee, while others grant the licensee broad discretion. Terms of payment define the manner and extent to which an author will be paid for the use of the copyrighted work. Some terms set out a flat fee for the entire license agreement, while others define fluctuating payments based on a percentage of the profits. Such fluctuating payments are commonly referred to as "royalties."

While our current licensing practice is effective under many circumstances, it often breaks down in the multimedia arena. The reason for this breakdown is that there is a one to many relationship between a multimedia product and the copyrighted works it includes. In one multiple copyrighted works, each product developer must negotiate multiple license agreements. The more works in a product, the larger the task of securing such agreements. With so many agreements to negotiate, developers cannot spend too much time or money on any one individual license. Generally, for products to financially succeed, developers need authors to cooperate and agree to standard terms.

◀ Bargaining Power ▶

Authors, on the other hand, use their bargaining power to negotiate custom license provisions. They typically expect tailored compensation terms that reflect the originality of their work and persona. Unfortunately, even simple author requests, when spread across hundreds of license negotiations, can delay a project. In addition, legal fees and other delays can

cause a project to run off budget, and make it prohibitively expensive to complete.

Authors have strong bargaining power because the success of the end product turns on the inclusion of their collective works. For example, a multimedia "reference" product must contain adequate textual, graphic, textual, and video information to provide a full account of a particular topic. If one or more authors refuse to cooperate, and those authors hold rights to critical works, then the quality of the overall product may be significantly diminished. Hence, the more authors that drop out of negotiations, the less likely the end product, and the less likely the product will succeed in the marketplace.

Another obvious problem for multimedia developers is to locate the party who holds the electronic rights to a particular work. The modern concept of electronic rights is loosely defined, and not part of the statutory scheme. Generally, it means the right to distribute copyrighted works electronically through various digital means, such as computer software and online services.²¹

Electronic rights are problematic in that they are often transferred through vague transfer provisions. Some authors transfer away their electronic rights unknowingly when they authorize publishers to print their works. For example, some publishers draft contracts with transfer provisions that grant publishers "the right to publish and sell the work in volume and other technological forms."²² Unless specifically defined, the broad term "technological forms" is construed to cover reproduction in all forms of electronic technology, including future technologies not yet defined.²³

Many publishing contracts that preclude the computer age also provide for a broad transfer of rights, but without specifically addressing electronic rights. In many such cases, the issue of who holds the electronic rights remains unclear. Thus, prudent licensors will identify the proper parties and resolve the issue, or risk an invalid license agreement at a later date.

A REVIEW OF THE PAST WITH AN EYE FOR THE FUTURE

With multimedia product development now underway, it is time we review our current statutory scheme to determine whether it is accomplishing its intended goal to promote science and the useful arts. We must reexamine the interplay between authors, developers, and society, and determine how to best balance these interests with respect to multimedia.

Fortunately while multimedia technology may be new, the corresponding license and copyright issues that it presents are not. As we revisit these issues, we can rely on past experience and legal precedents. Our responses to technologies of the past, such as piano rolls, phonorecords, and videotapes, will help guide and support our current efforts.

In the past, we have seen both statutory and private responses to similar copyright and licensing problems. Congress, for example, adopted compulsory licenses under the Copyright Act for new inventions such as piano rolls, phonorecords, and videotapes.¹⁷ Private copyright membership organizations, such as ASCAP and BMI, have also established blanket license agreements for their members' works. These are all both good examples of structural license schemes that adjust our copyright system to accommodate new technologies.

This section reviews existing compulsory and blanket licenses currently used in the music industry. From these systems, it extracts components that may help resolve multimedia issues, and proposes a framework for a multimedia statutory compulsory license.

Review of Existing Compulsory and Blanket License Schemes

A compulsory license is a tool by which Congress attempts to harmonize authors' rights and societal interests. Generally, a compulsory license "permits reuse, even of copyrighted works, without the author's consent, but requires the user to adhere to statutory formalities, and to pay specified fees

to the copyright owner." A blanket license agreement is a standard, nonexclusive agreement, offered by multiple authors, under which a licensee can use multiple copyrighted works for a standard fee. Typically authors group together and form private organizations for the purpose of offering blanket license agreements for their collective works.

Compulsory License for Making and Distributing Phonorecords

The phonorecord compulsory license is a good model to examine in connection with multimedia. It balances authors' rights and societal needs, and has been used for many years. Further, the circumstances surrounding the phonorecord compulsory license closely parallel the circumstances surrounding multimedia products.

The phonorecord compulsory license scheme¹⁸ has a most interesting history. In the early 1900s, an invention called the "piano-roll" created a controversy between-composers and the piano industry. Piano rolls provided the piano industry with a means by which they could mechanically reproduce musical compositions. Inventors punched holes in the piano roll paper in an arrangement to correspond with musical compositions. Authors objected to having their compositions "punched" on piano rolls without compensation, claiming copyright infringement. This objection immediately concerns regarding lost profits and loss of control of their works.

The issue reached the Supreme Court in 1930.¹⁹ In the dissent of musical authors, the Court ruled in favor of the piano industry, holding that the punched holes did not constitute "copies" within the meaning of the law.²⁰ Rather, the rolls were merely devices for mechanically performing the music.²¹

Congress disappointingly responded to the Supreme Court decision by reacting (via statutory provisions). Such provisions represented a compromise between the rights of the authors and society's interest in piano rolls. Congress guarded authors the right to control whether a mechanical device will be used to

perform their works²² — but at the same time limited this right of mechanical control by introducing a compulsory license scheme.²³ Specifically, this scheme provided that "if the copyright proprietor himself and is sanctioned for use of his composition in piano-rolls, any other person may lawfully do so upon paying a royalty of two cents for each [roll] manufactured."²⁴ In other words, an author could absolutely prevent his compositions from ever making the piano roll market by exercising the mechanical control granted to him. However, once the author himself selected his composition in mechanical form, or authorized another to do so, then other competitors could do the same with payment of the statutory fee. Ultimately, the scheme limits an author's "mechanistic control of music for recording purposes."²⁵

Since then, the piano roll compulsory license has evolved into a broader compulsory license for making and distributing "phonorecords" for the purpose of such license, the term phonorecords includes:

...material objects in which sounds, other than those accompanying a motion picture or other audiovisual work, are fixed by any method now known or later developed, and from which the sounds can be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated, other than directly with the aid of a machine or device.²⁶

Section 112 of the Copyright Act grants compulsory licenses for making and distributing phonorecords of non-dramatic musical works²⁷:

Specifically, the compulsory license under Section 112 of the act grants to licensees the privilege of making musical arrangements from copyrighted musical compositions, as long as the basic melody or the fundamental character of the musical composition is not changed.²⁸ The compulsory license permits the licensee to assemble his own musicians, singers, sound recording engineers, and equipment for the purpose of making a sound recording of the musical work, which is the subject of the license.²⁹ The license does not permit the compulsory licensee to duplicate a preexisting recording.³⁰

In granting this compulsory license, the act limits the rights of

reproduction and publication granted to authors by Section 106(1) and (2). The effect of this limitation is that an author of a non-dramatic musical work cannot enforce his rights of reproduction and publication against any person who makes and distributes phonorecords of the work, as long as that person complies with the compulsory license provisions.²²

Licenses pay standard royalty rates, regardless of the author, musical style, or popularity of the composition. No private bargaining is necessary. For every phonorecord made and distributed, the royalty is either "one and three-fourths cents, or one-half of one cent per minute of playing time or fraction thereof, whichever amount is larger."²³ This royalty is paid with respect to each copy, as included in the phonorecord²⁴ and is adjusted every 10 years.²⁵

Compulsory license schemes under the Copyright Act are administered by the Copyright Royalty Tribunal (the "Tribunal").²⁶ The Tribunal is a federal agency created to "maximize the availability of creative works to the public [and to] afford the copyright owner a fair return for his creative work and the copyright user a fair income under existing economic conditions."²⁷ The Tribunal participates in compulsory license rate setting and the collection and distribution of the rates.²⁸

Compulsory License for Public Performance: The Jukebox

Another statutory compulsory license scheme exists for jukeboxes.²⁹ When coin-operated jukeboxes were introduced, Congress recognized their societal value and enacted a compulsory scheme for jukeboxes. Under this scheme, jukebox operators can play sound recordings without obtaining permission from the copyright owner.³⁰ To compensate authors for their lost rights of performance, a jukebox operator must currently pay standard royalty fees and comply with other compulsory license provisions.³¹ This compulsory license scheme, like the one for making and distributing phonorecords, furthers the purpose of the Copyright Act by benefiting both the author and the public.

Blanket License Agreements

In the U.S. music industry two very large performing rights groups offer blanket license agreements: the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP)³² and Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI).³³ Both organizations represent members in the music industry, such as publishing companies, authors, and composers. Both organizations issue blanket licenses that grant to licensees the right to perform compositions owned by the members or affiliates.³⁴ Licenses include radio and television stations, nightclubs, hotels, restaurants, and airlines.³⁵

In exchange for the blanket licenses, the organizations collect performing rights royalties. Once collected, the royalties are apportioned among the performing rights organization members on the basis of a statistical determination based on frequency their music has been performed.³⁶ ASCAP and BMI rate structures are extremely complicated, and are based on circumstances concerning each performance.

Proposed Statutory License for Multimedia

A statutory compulsory license for multimedia computing would be an effective response to the copyright and licensing issues generated by it. Like the phonorecord compulsory license, a multimedia compulsory license could establish a compromise between the competing interests of developers, authors, and society. It could facilitate product development, compensate authors for their works, and ensure dissemination of useful products to market.

A compulsory license would likely be more effective than a private, blanket license solution. A blanket license would be too difficult to negotiate and implement. It would be difficult to establish one or more private organizations to represent the many diverse groups of authors. Just with such diverse interests, authors would not likely reach consensus on difficult issues, such as rate structures and authorized uses. Without consensus, blanket license schemes would break down, and

not adequately serve all interested parties.

A multimedia compulsory license necessarily would need to address multiple issues. Of these, the following would be most critical: (a) the scope of copyrighted works subject to the license; (b) the rights of authors subject to the license; (c) the type of products that fall within the realm of multimedia; (d) the overall compensation scheme; and (e) the details of administration.

Scope of Copyrighted Works Subject to the License

The compulsory license statutory scheme would need to define the scope of copyrighted works subject to the license. The broader the scope of works, the more the license will facilitate development of creative multimedia products. For example, works such as film, still photos, artwork, maps, literature, and music are valuable components of multimedia products. If one or more such works are not subject to the compulsory license, the breadth of multimedia products will be correspondingly limited.

Rights of Authors Subject to the License

The statutory scheme must also define the rights of authors that are subject to the license. It might encompass only limited rights, to prevent the license from being overly burdensome to authors, and to preserve a strong economic incentive to create. For example, the license might encompass only those works that have been published, performed, or displayed.

The statutory scheme might also minimize the burden on authors by establishing a "waiting period" during which multimedia developers could not utilize the subject copyrighted works. This waiting period is modeled after the underlying concept of copyright, that authors are extended rights for a period of time only, before the works fall into the public domain for general use by society. Such a waiting period could commence with the first date of publication, performance, or display, and extend the stated duration.

This would allow authors to create and realize the full economic

value of their works during the period, without interference from the compulsory license.

For example, if a one-year waiting period were instituted, authors would retain exclusive control for one year following the first date of publication, performance, or display. This would allow authors to realize the full economic value of the product for one year. After the year expires, developers could utilize the copyrighted work under the compulsory license.

The waiting period could vary depending on the different types of works, or could be the same for all works subject to the license. Waiting periods could account for different market considerations related to the subject works.

Type of Products that Fall Within the Realm of Multimedia

The statutory scheme should also define the type of products that fall within the realm of multimedia. Only those products that meet the definition could take advantage of the compulsory license. Admittedly, the task of defining multimedia products would be problematic. Hardware, software, and product functionality would have to be considered. Industry standards could also be considered. While no definition would satisfy everyone, even a limited definition would start opening the market gates for multimedia products.

Overall Compensation Scheme

The statutory license would need to define a sub-structure that would satisfactorily compensate authors. Given the complexity of the products and the broad scope of works subject to the license, the rate structure would necessarily need to be complex. An important goal of the compensation structure would be to strike a balance between author compensation and the need to open the market for multimedia products. While authors may receive less than they would expect to receive in individual, privately negotiated contracts, authors could receive payments from multiple products and would benefit from the "pooling" aspect of the compulsory license scheme.

The compensation structure could also address the possibility of a particular work that is included in a product. Fees could be expressed in terms of either percentage of the entire work or the amount of playback presented to the viewer. For example, a developer could pay less to use a few seconds of a musical work than to use two minutes. This would give developers the freedom to use as much or as little of a particular work as they need, while compensating authors accordingly.

Details of Administration

The overall success of such a complex compulsory license would depend, in part, on proper administration and enforcement. The Copyright Royalty Tribunal, in its current role, would be a likely choice to administer and police the compulsory license. The Copyright Royalty Tribunal could utilize informal rule-making procedures under the Administrative Procedure Act to define and maintain appropriate rate structures. Authors and special interest groups could comment under rule-making procedures, and thus provide important and necessary input into the process.

CONCLUSION

The proposed framework for a multimedia compulsory license is a beginning point from which we can address the copyright and licensing problems that currently limit the multimedia marketplace. By expanding this framework, and taking into the competing interests, we can work to achieve a balance that will facilitate development, compensate authors, and ultimately increase market flow. In doing so, we will benefit society as our Constitution suggests, through the promotion of science and the useful arts.

Notes

1. U.S. Const. Article I, Section 8.
2. Current version of 17 U.S.C. § 109, Supp. I 1989, § 109, § 109a.
3. 17 U.S.C. Section 109a (1989).
4. *Id.*
5. 17 U.S.C. Section 109 (1989). See also 17 U.S.C. Section 108, Supp. I 1989 (right of certain libraries to reproduction and display).
6. See 17 U.S.C. Section 105 (Patents and Trademark Office 1976).

7. 17 U.S.C. Section 201 (1989).
8. *Id.*
9. 17 U.S.C. Section 101 (1989).
10. See the Copyright Act of 1909, revised Section 301 (1976), 17 U.S.C. § 301, 17 U.S.C. § 302, 17 U.S.C. § 303, 17 U.S.C. § 304, 17 U.S.C. § 305, 17 U.S.C. § 306, 17 U.S.C. § 307, 17 U.S.C. § 308, 17 U.S.C. § 309, 17 U.S.C. § 310, 17 U.S.C. § 311, 17 U.S.C. § 312, 17 U.S.C. § 313, 17 U.S.C. § 314, 17 U.S.C. § 315, 17 U.S.C. § 316, 17 U.S.C. § 317, 17 U.S.C. § 318, 17 U.S.C. § 319, 17 U.S.C. § 320, 17 U.S.C. § 321, 17 U.S.C. § 322, 17 U.S.C. § 323, 17 U.S.C. § 324, 17 U.S.C. § 325, 17 U.S.C. § 326, 17 U.S.C. § 327, 17 U.S.C. § 328, 17 U.S.C. § 329, 17 U.S.C. § 330, 17 U.S.C. § 331, 17 U.S.C. § 332, 17 U.S.C. § 333, 17 U.S.C. § 334, 17 U.S.C. § 335, 17 U.S.C. § 336, 17 U.S.C. § 337, 17 U.S.C. § 338, 17 U.S.C. § 339, 17 U.S.C. § 340, 17 U.S.C. § 341, 17 U.S.C. § 342, 17 U.S.C. § 343, 17 U.S.C. § 344, 17 U.S.C. § 345, 17 U.S.C. § 346, 17 U.S.C. § 347, 17 U.S.C. § 348, 17 U.S.C. § 349, 17 U.S.C. § 350, 17 U.S.C. § 351, 17 U.S.C. § 352, 17 U.S.C. § 353, 17 U.S.C. § 354, 17 U.S.C. § 355, 17 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37. *D'Almeida v. Boston Herald*, 253 F.2d 1001, 1002 (1st Cir. 1956).
38. *D'Almeida v. Boston Herald*, 253 F.2d 1001, 1002 (1st Cir. 1956).
39. *D'Almeida v. Boston Herald*, 253 F.2d 1001, 1002 (1st Cir. 1956).
40. *Id.*
41. *Id.*
42. 17 U.S.C. Section 106 (1980), for a detailed discussion of this compulsory license system, see *Office of Copyright*, Section 106: The new "fair use" is not used by the courts, but is routinely adopted to explain the more advanced statutory language. See 17 *Section of Copyright*, Section 106: The statute says the term "compulsory mechanical license" means what it naturally denotes as:
- a. a license to derive that—
- (1) is employed solely for the performance of phonorecords intended to be distributed by means of phonorecords upon being obtained by means of sales, leasing, rental, or other means, and in their original form;
- (2) is located in an establishment that

- may be visited or visited through its admission;
- (3) is accompanied by a list of the titles of all the recorded works available for performance (28 U.S.C. § 106);
- (4) offers a choice of works available for performance and permits the choice to be made by the patron of the establishment available to it (28 U.S.C. Sec. 106).
43. *Id.*
44. "The operation of the non-exclusive mechanical license may cause secondary harm to publicize the work publicly or that otherwise follows by being lost circulation (see the Copyright Office, *Office of Copyright*, and *Office of Copyright*) as required by Section 106 of the 1976 Act. Section 106 (1980).
45. ASCAP is the oldest of the national non-performing rights organizations. Started in 1894, it came into compliance with the 1909 Copyright law when it established an office

- for the publication of compositions entitled the "American Music Publishers' Association" (see *Music Publishers' Association*, 17 *Office of Copyright*, Section 106 (1980)).
46. ASCAP is a nonprofit organization that was organized in 1930 for the purpose of supporting the performing rights system. *Section 106*, for a detailed discussion of the law, see 17 U.S.C. § 106 (1980).
47. *Section 106*, for a general discussion of the law, see 17 U.S.C. § 106 (1980). The ASCAP Membership Manual says that, in all, the member's right of performance and the right of printing, for example, are copyright. *Section 106*, Section 106 (1980).
48. ASCAP and American Music Publishers are the largest users of music, and share all of the national market income, according to ASCAP and BMI. *Section 106*, Section 106 (1980).
49. *Section 106*, Section 106 (1980).
50. See *Section 106* of this article.