UNLOCKING THE FUTURE?

THE ROLE OF AI FOR THE RIGHTS BUSINESS: KEY TAKEAWAYS & ACTION POINTS

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Overview:

At the 2024 Frankfurt Rights Meeting by Frankfurter Buchmesse, publishing and legal experts discussed the growing impact of generative AI on copyright, licensing, and rights management. As AI tools rapidly integrate into the content ecosystem, publishing professionals — especially rights managers — face both disruption and opportunity. The one-hour session took place on 17 September 2024. The speakers emphasised not just challenges but clear steps the industry must take to stay proactive.

The speakers were:

Mary Elliott – Management Partner and Head of Publishing & Digital Media, Fox Williams LLP

Sara Lloyd – Group Communications Director & Global AI Lead, Pan Macmillan

Margaret Szymczyk – Rights Director, John Murray Press

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Clarify usage rights for AI training – and signal them clearly

AI developers often use vast datasets without clear permission, creating uncertainty around whether such use is legal.
/ Ensure your contracts specify whether content can be used for AI training.
/ Adopt machine-readable standards like the W3C's TDM Reservation Protocol to signal permitted or prohibited uses to AI crawlers.

Monitor training data disclosures and demand transparency

Lack of transparency about AI training datasets makes it hard to assess infringement or enforce rights.
/ Call on AI developers to disclose training sources.
/ Support or implement auditing tools that trace whether your content has been used.

Advocate for collective and fair licensing models

Individual authors and smaller publishers are typically excluded from direct licensing deals with AI firms.
/ Push for collective licensing frameworks that enable wider participation and fair remuneration.
/ Collaborate with collecting societies and industry bodies to represent rights holders in negotiations with AI companies.

Update internal rights management systems

Many rights databases are not yet equipped to track or manage AI-specific rights.
/ Integrate metadata fields related to AI permissions into contracts and rights databases.
/ Train rights teams to handle requests related to AI-generated content and machine learning use cases.

Engage in policy development and international dialogue

Legal uncertainty remains due to differing interpretations of copyright and text/data mining exceptions.

/ Participate in national and international policy consultations.

/ Align with global publishing associations to ensure your interests are represented as new laws take shape.

Prepare for secondary rights monetisation through AI

AI can create derivative works or summaries based on licensed materials, opening new revenue streams.

/ Explore secondary licensing opportunities with AI companies (e.g. for summaries, synthetic narration, or educational training sets).

/ Build licensing models for machine-use-specific rights, distinct from traditional reprint or translation rights.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of AI demands a more active and technically informed rights strategy. Those who respond early — by updating rights frameworks, embracing technical standards, and entering collective action — will be better positioned to protect and monetise their intellectual property in the AI age.

LOOKING AHEAD: THE CONVERSATION CONTINUES.

The Frankfurt Rights Meeting has been the meeting place for all decision-makers in the field of rights and licenses for over 30 years. This autumn, you can look forward to another dedicated session on AI: **"The AI Dilemma: Balancing Risks and Opportunities" on 2 September 2025, 4:00pm CET**.

Join the discussion and explore new insights in four digital sessions in September and one in-person networking event on the exhibition grounds on Tuesday, 14 October, 5-7 pm CEST. Tickets and further information at: **buchmesse.de/en/frm**

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Frankfurt Rights Meeting Networking Reception 2024 with Keynote by Madeline McIntosh, CEO & Publisher, Authors Equity