

Metadata: The Oxygen of Media Activation

As artificial intelligence transforms the media industry, one of its most important enablers risks being overlooked. Far from making metadata redundant, AI is making it more essential than ever.

The media industry has spent decades creating, collecting, and storing extraordinary volumes of video and audio content. News broadcasts, sporting events, interviews, and entertainment programming represent an immense reservoir of cultural, editorial, and commercial value.

Yet much of that value remains inaccessible and not reusable.

The problem isn't necessarily that the content has been lost; it's that media organizations often lack a sufficiently detailed understanding of what their archives contain. A recording may be safely stored and correctly cataloged, yet finding a particular person, comment, scene, or moment within it can still involve hours of manual searching.

This is fundamentally a metadata problem. And as the industry increasingly embraces artificial intelligence, it is becoming more important, not less.

The strategic opportunity is to make existing media useful in more ways, to more people, exactly when they need it. This has been Eon Media's focus since 2020, long before the current AI boom. Over the past six years, the company has developed proprietary, purpose-built machine-learning technology and a proven track record with major media organizations, including Business Insider, WRAL, and Cumulus Media. Its mission is to transform previously inaccessible content into valuable editorial, audience, operational, and commercial opportunities. In short, to make the invisible visible.

The oxygen of media activation

Eon Media sees metadata as the oxygen of media activation. Just as oxygen is essential to life, metadata is essential to enabling media content to fulfil its potential.

Metadata provides structured information that helps systems and people understand what exists within a media asset. It identifies people, places, objects, dialogue, topics, events, and other relevant details, ideally connecting them to precise moments within a recording.

Without that information, even the most sophisticated technology has a limited understanding of the content it is expected to work with.

With accurate and extensive metadata, previously invisible material becomes discoverable, measurable, and usable.

Metadata turns those recordings from a collection of files into an accessible source of knowledge. This creates the foundation for media activation: using content and the intelligence it generates to create editorial, operational, audience, and commercial value.

AI needs Content Metadata to Function

One of the more interesting developments in the AI era is that as media workflows become more automated, accurate metadata becomes more important.

Consider **personalization**. A recommendation system cannot reliably connect audiences with relevant material unless it understands what that material contains.

A program title or broad genre classification may be sufficient for basic discovery. But more sophisticated personalization requires deeper intelligence. What subjects are discussed? Which individuals appear? What specific events or themes are covered? At what point does a relevant segment begin?

The same principle applies to **AI-assisted production**.

An automated workflow designed to identify relevant clips, create content selections, or support editorial research needs dependable information about the underlying media. Otherwise, it risks returning irrelevant material, missing important context, or creating additional work for the people reviewing its output.

AI does not eliminate the need for metadata. It increases the number of processes that depend upon it.

This also changes how we should think about metadata's role in media technology. Traditionally, metadata has often been treated primarily as a cataloging requirement, something created to facilitate storage, asset management, and retrieval.

Increasingly, it should be seen as strategic infrastructure: the intelligence layer that lets different technologies, departments, and workflows use the same content productively.

Eon Media's approach to AI

Not every AI challenge requires a Large Language Model (LLM). For media organizations with decades of video and audio content, choosing the right AI technology can dramatically affect processing costs, scalability, and commercial value.

Since 2020, Eon Media has developed proprietary machine-learning models purpose-built to understand media, rather than relying on large language models to do the heavy lifting of archive analysis.

Eon's models use technologies including computer vision, speech recognition, and object detection to identify people, places, brands, dialogue, and other elements within video and audio. They have been developed with real-world footage in mind, including low-resolution recordings, non-standard edits, and challenging archive formats.

Crucially, this approach also changes the economics of AI.

Processing decades of video through token-metered LLM services can create substantial, hard-to-predict costs. Eon Media avoids that dependency for its core analysis: 11 of its 14 AI models run on CPUs, enabling efficient, scalable processing without expensive GPU infrastructure. Instead of opaque token charges, customers receive transparent pricing based on content duration or storage size. The cost to unlock an archive should be clear before the work begins.

Security and control matter just as much as cost. Eon Media does not require customers to supply training datasets and does not share customer data or models across customers. Its purpose-built approach keeps the focus on each organization's content and requirements.

Eon Media also believes that content owners should have a say in the tools that shape their workflows. Customers can collaborate directly with its engineering teams and help inform the product roadmap, rather than treating AI as a black box. The philosophy is straightforward: use the right AI for the job, make the results useful, and give customers visibility into the value to be delivered.

Not all metadata is created equal

Of course, just generating more metadata is not the answer. What matters is its relevance, accuracy, and granularity.

A sports broadcaster may need to identify a particular competitor, race, round, or result. A news organization may need to locate a specific statement within an interview. A sponsorship team may need to establish how frequently a logo appeared, where it appeared, and for how long.

Each requirement demands different information.

A useful metadata strategy should begin with an understanding of the decisions and activities it needs to support. It also needs to distinguish between information *about* a media file and information *within* that file. Technical metadata, such as duration, format, and storage location, is essential for managing content. But it cannot explain who is speaking at a particular moment, which brands appear on screen, or what subjects are being discussed.

That deeper layer of content intelligence lets media organizations move beyond inventory management to activation.

From metadata to practical results

For Business Insider, Eon Media helped turn a 12-year video archive with limited metadata into a searchable resource. Credits and wire-service details previously locked inside recordings became searchable, enabling editors to find relevant clips in seconds. The enriched metadata was also integrated with the organization's existing digital asset management system, bringing this new intelligence into editors' everyday workflows.

For Cumulus Media, Eon Media transformed previously difficult-to-search radio programming into a resource for audience engagement. By automatically identifying topics, speakers, and relevant moments within broadcasts, Eon Media enables producers to find compelling clips, repurpose them for social media, and extend the reach and value of existing content. The results include up to ten times greater social media engagement on posts created through the Eon Media workflow.

From an operational necessity to a commercial asset

The implications extend well beyond faster search.

As media organizations better understand their content, they create opportunities to connect the same assets to more workflows.

A historical interview might support editorial coverage, documentary production, or licensing. A sports broadcast might serve audiences while also providing measurable intelligence about sponsor exposure.

In each case, metadata helps make the underlying content accessible for a purpose that may not have been envisaged when it was created.

It can also reduce dependence on institutional memory. Valuable knowledge about an archive should not disappear when an experienced producer, archivist, or editor leaves an organization.

But this does not mean every task should be fully automated. Content intelligence must remain connected to its source, allowing people to verify important details, exercise editorial judgment, and make informed decisions about rights and reuse.

Good metadata should empower human expertise, not attempt to replace it.

Making the invisible visible

Instead of asking only how much content an organization owns, we should ask how much it genuinely understands. How much can it find, reuse, or make available to audiences and potential buyers?

Metadata is the oxygen of media activation. The more we expect AI to do, the more important that oxygen becomes.

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