HTML5 spec editor slams Google & gang's DRM bid

February 25 2012, by Nancy Owano

(PhysOrg.com) -- A draft proposal by Google, Microsoft and Netflix to introduce mechanisms for copy protection on web videos has generated strong opposition and a response that the proposal is "unethical." Reaction has been strong against the powerful trio's bid to see HTML5 carry digital rights management (DRM) tools.

On the opposing side, developers and supporters of open systems argue that the very idea of adding DRM protection to video goes against the spirit of HTML5.

“Any technology whose exclusive goal is to stop users from being able to make use of the content they have purchased is, in my opinion,

unethical," said Ian Hickson, HTML specification editor, in an interview with CNET.

For Hickson, the Google-Microsoft-Netflix proposal is "just a plug-in platform in disguise."

The plan calls for proprietary plug-ins, called CDMs, or content decryption modules, which is not amenable to the open nature of HTML5, according to opposing arguments.

The whole point of HTML5 is to move away from plug-ins; the introduction of such extensions, Hickson argued, would be tantamount to keeping plug-ins around.

Specifically, Google, Microsoft and Netflix this week proposed a new web standard, in the form of the Encrypted Media Extensions proposal, and announced it on a W3C mailing list.

The draft spells out a framework for bringing forth a system that manages protected content on the web browser. The proposed Encrypted Media Extensions standard would add a new set of API extensions for the HTMLMediaElement. The latter defines specialized properties and JavaScript methods available on HTML audio and video elements. These extensions would introduce DRM capabilities to HTML5-provided video.

Whether some form of content protection is even necessary, leave alone ethical, is part of the present debate.

Digital rights management permits only authorized video and audio. A solution to unauthorized copying has been seen in browser plug-ins for DRM protection. Hickson said he would rather see copyright law, not proprietary mechanisms, governing the use of video. He said there was

no need for technology to protect content; the presence of copyright law was adequate.

What next? Since the spec being proposed by the threesome is a draft, tech watchers see no guarantees that what the three propose will become an accepted standard, but at the same time there can be no guarantees that the debate will go south.

Pressure to add some kind of DRM to HTML5 video is likely to continue, writes Scott Gilbertson in *Webmonkey*. “With Hickson very adamantly against it and Mozilla unlikely to support it in its current form, it’s not likely to move beyond the draft stage without some serious revisions.”

More information: lists.w3.org/Archives/Public/p … ml/2012Feb/0274.html
dvcs.w3.org/hg/html-media/raw- … encrypted-media.html