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## ABOUT

Ben Fritz covers digital media, technology and gadgets from the Hollywood angle.



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## This IMF's mission might just be possible.

(Posted by David S. Cohen)

Getting some kind of coordination among the studios can seem well nigh impossible, but it's just a coincidence that the initiative from the Entertainment Technology Center at USC to help the industry settle on a single format for digital masters has been dubbed the I.M.F.

That would be "Interoperable Master Format" to you and me. Not Impossible Mission Force.

This effort addresses one of those tech headaches that lives below the radar for most of us but adds a lot of friction and cost to the seemingly simple task of distributing content on video -- a movie, a TV show, whatever -- to companies that want to sell it.

Right now, masters have to be created specially for each version: 1080p Hi-Def, 720p, Standard-Def, Pan-and-Scan, foreign language and so on. Worse, the ETC's David Wertheimer told us, "There is no standard for how those masters are formatted. If I send somebody a digital file it's not clear they'll know what to do with it."

So the goal of the I.M.F., Wertheimer says, is to "come up with a specification, for what ultimately could be a standard, for a master from which we could create downstream deliverables, for everything outside the theater."

The difference between a spec and a standard can be esoteric, but ETC is getting the studios and the rest of the business on board for a spec, which will be handed off to SMPTE, which sets standards. Once there's a SMPTE standard, the industry will get on the same page, and the entire process of sending out digital video content should get a lot simpler.

The ETC's approach is to set up a single master with all the metadata anyone would need for all the various versions, from Blu-Ray to iTunes to a streaming foreign language version.

So there's a reason to make a mental note of yet another I.M.F., along with the International Monetary Fund and Ethan Hunt's band of spies.

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