we write about the things we build and the things we consume

written by Tom McAdam on 11 February 2014 in engineering, Voila

voila: aliases

As content enters our systems from broadcasters, listings companies and many other places, we give each item our own identifier as it gets saved into our video and audio index, Atlas. This same ID can the be used across all our systems to reference it, be it from the Atlas API itself or elsewhere, such as Voila, our media product engine.

This is generally great as it means you can use this one ID anywhere to, say, record user actions against it, or query its programme information. Occasionally, however, you may need to find out how it was known in the source system, or elsewhere for that matter.

a history lesson

In Atlas 3.0, we store external system identifiers as URIs. Here's the record for an episode of The Inbetweeners from Channel 4:

This harks back to the days when Atlas was known as URIplay, where URIs were considered king. In this case it is fair enough, since the source provides us with URIs. However, many sources can't provide canonical URIs and we've since learnt the hard way that synthesising URIs for datasets that don't have them leads to much confusion.

alias blocks

As I mentioned a while back, we've introduced alias blocks in Atlas 4.0. These allow you to store aliases, scoped according to a particular namespace. We've now made these available in Voila for some, but not all, content types, and they're returned if the `aliases` annotation is provided on `content` requests. For example, that same piece of content from above may have an alias for Channel 4's identifier, as follows:

Do get in touch of you've got any questions about this feature or Voila in general.