

MUSEUMS COLLECTIONS - DIGITISATION OF IMAGES

INTRODUCTION

Digital technology now makes it possible for all types of information, including all types of information, (including images and sounds) to be reduced to a complex and easily transmittable pattern of ones and zeros. Application software which achieves this is both available and cheap.

Combined with the right equipment (usually a computer and modem), complete **interactivity** is possible - that is, one is now able to de-materialise (up-load), access, view or listen to and download that image or information. Once downloaded, this material may be reproduced perfectly in its original form - that is, perfect quality reproductions. Only the re-materialisation of 3-D objects still defies us.

In addition, digital technology provides a simple and seamless method of manipulating those digitised images and materials - by adding material to them, by simply sampling specific parts of them and incorporating those parts into new images or in combination with samples from other original artworks, or by simply re-arranging or cropping the subject matter of the image itself. All things are possible - and with great **speed and quality**.

In other words this same technology also permits the;

- (a) Extraction or sample of certain parts of the material;
- (b) The manipulation or adding to the material or parts of it; and
- (c) The seamless integration of any sampled parts of the original material. (This is both good and bad. New art form v. Port Arthur killer image)

The technology is continually developing at an extraordinarily fast rate with both the public and many organisations (including museums) becoming active users of this technology and the so-called **digital rights**.

So What Are Digital Rights?

Right to:

- (a) reproduce material in digital form
- (b) to store and archive in Digital Library
- (c) to permit public to access and retrieve on computer screen
- (d) to transmit/distribute (whether via Internet, Intranet or CD-Rom)

Technology permits all of this. Whether we are authorised to do it is another matter.

If you own the object and the copyright in it, you have the rights.

If not, you don't.

Questions as to the ownership of material is something that museums continually face. The concept of ownership includes the right to grant access to the material. Without access, the ability to digitise the original is limited.

The rights of copyright are another matter.

If you own the material, you don't necessarily own the copyright.

If you have been granted certain rights of copyright, you may or may not have the digital rights - depending on the wording of the documentation.

So who owns the rights? Generally, the copyright owner.

And if there is no copyright in the material? Anyone who gets access to it.

The warning for museums is the need to REVIEW past licences obtained (eg. very likely to be inadequate for use in digital format/environment).

The Effect of Digitisation on Rights Management

Registrars are in the business of rights management.

The ability to manage this **new "resource" or "asset"** is of growing importance and requires a sound knowledge and understanding of: -

- (a) the technology;
- (b) the material held in the collection; and
- (c) business principles.

Planning

It is of fundamental to plan early and to implement **effective asset management systems** for material which might be or is to be digitised and "used" in this way.

- (a) Greater benefits are to be derived through effective and easily maintained management systems.
- (b) Costly? Perhaps, but can be a shared cost between a number of Museums facing the same challenge and requiring the same or similar system(s).

Accurate Cataloguing and Records will be crucial. With details of :-

- (a) Creator's Name (for Moral Rights purposes)

- (b) Copyright status (Has copyright expired or not N.B. Normally after 50 years after end of year of Artist's? Author's death)
- (c) Copyright Owner (May not be the Artist)
- (d) Rights/licences acquired by the Museum/Gallery
- (e) Duration/Term of those licences (i.e. When do they expire and where can you use them)
- (f) Any specific restrictions on uses
- (g) Renewal Dates/triggers for extending term of licence(s)

Licence Fees/royalties (if any) payable;

- (a) When (eg. quarterly/half-yearly)
- (b) To whom?
- (c) By whom?

We are used to these requirements in an atom-based environment. Most collection now routinely maintain such records.

Others don't and should. Why? Because those who don't, are falling far short of professional best practice and, in addition, are exposing their institution to legal liability and themselves to much unnecessary tension.

But when you go digital the administration doubles. Now you must also know:

- WHAT Images/Works you have in your Digital Library;
- WHERE to find it;
- WHICH rights you have to that Work/Image, and
- HOW you can exploit the digital material

There are few museum personnel sufficiently trained in this new environment to make these crucial decisions and few systems which are adequate.

Maintenance and Training

- MAINTENANCE of these records is very important. It is often forgotten that many of the apparent cost savings in digitising collection material is eaten up with the additional costs of administering the new resource.
- PROPER TRAINING for relevant employees is fundamental. This will lead to a new kind of librarian or custodian for digital libraries.

How to Protect The Digitised Images and Unauthorised Uses?

Copyright Implications

From unauthorised reproduction - eg. by downloading image.

- (a) Different copyright laws in different countries.
- (b) Difficulties if accessible on Internet Site.
- (c) Encryption as a possible response.
- (d) Membership to Museum access only - with Membership number as key and payment as part of automatic billing system via the Museum/Gallery billing system
- (e) Detection of infringements will be very difficult
 - (i) anonymity of Internet Users (Identification Issue)
 - (ii) especially if heavily manipulated
- (f) Who should be liable for the infringements via the Internet?
- (g) (Can Museum/Gallery Site result in Museum/Gallery being held liable?)

Moral Rights implications

Proposed Moral Rights legislation

- (a) the right to be acknowledged as the creator of an artistic work (ie the right of attribution; and
- (b) the right to object to or restrain distortions, mutilations or other derogatory actions in respect of a creator's creative work wherever such action adversely affects the honour or reputation of the artist (ie the right of integrity).

How to Protect from unlawful manipulation

- (a) Knowing when it has happened
- (b) IDENTIFICATION of the Infringing party

How To Value The Rights and Uses?

No doubt that they are valuable - eg. Bill Gates certainly thinks so.

Owner/Licensee of Rights has a difficult task in determining VALUE - All turns on the CONTENT in which rights are owned. (eg. More well known images/Artists may be more valuable in the market place?)

Galleries & Museums becoming Content Providers and Distributors.

No longer just providing an exhibition space for important public/community assets.

Consumer values the benefits - "Key to entertainment and knowledge".

- (a) Ease of Access anywhere in the Country/World
- (b) Quality Image reproduction on screen
- (c) Research & Educational Purposes
- (d) Vast range of images accessible for viewing at any one time - unlimited by amount of exhibition space available
- (e) Enhancement to an actual exhibition - Can enable public visitors to "browse" through the other works related to the exhibition not actually exhibited due to lack of exhibition space

New Pricing Models being developed - eg. pay-per-use

- (a) Pay for access?
- (b) Pay for just the amount of data used?
- (c) Pay according to access time?

How To Market and Realise the Enormous Potential of these Rights

This is not just a question of selling the rights the Mr Gates. It's about making the new media an integral part of the delivery of museum services.

Digitisation provides another means of delivering the museum experience and services to your public.

- creates new messaging channels, which will reach new "customers"
- can be an effective and cost-effective tool to increase public awareness of your Museum and your collections - especially the YOUNGER Public (Very active users of this new technology) leading to: -
 - * Membership Increase
 - * Visitors Increase
 - * Business and commercial opportunities
 - * Educational opportunities

Does it mean the end of Museums? A shift to "Virtual Museums" where everyone has access to all object. Of course not. Not as yet, because as yet we can't reproduce the experience of seeing the real thing. Be assured that

the time will probably come when one of the principal experiences that people have of collection objects, is a digital one. No?

- Remember the sense of disbelief when you first saw your first hologram?
- Take a museum such as the Powerhouse and remember how sophisticated we thought its interactive exhibits were when first it opened?

Distribution Of Museum Services

Perhaps the most influential technologies at the moment are:

- dumb CD Rom,
- interactive CD Rom, and
- the Internet/on-line services

These are areas which need in depth discussion. Each has its own features, advantages and disadvantages.

Lets briefly look at just a few Internet Issues.

Internet

This is not just a new DISTRIBUTION system. It is also a new ACCESS system.

If you are going to give clients access through the Internet to your databases, you will have to review your existing protocols.

In setting up any such database you should never loose sight of the following fundamental questions:

- (a) What level of access do you want to provide to third parties?
- (b) What use do you want them to be able to make of the data obtained from this access?
- (c) What design factors need to be built into the data base to promote your aims and minimise the attendant dangers?
- (d) What hardware and software systems can be built in?

EXPAND LIST

Food for thought?

Conclusion

Digitisation of collection material is not just a technological issue. It is that. But it is also a financial, legal, administrative and philosophical issue.

I have spent the last two years heading up a think tank looking at the opportunities and problems created by new technologies, using multi-skilled teams. It is my very strongly held belief that no one, no matter how self-confident, is equipped to plan implement a digital strategy on their own. None of us have sufficient skills. We must use multi-skilled teams.

That said, digitisation is going to play an increasingly important role in the life of the museum. Accordingly I suggest that this group should be at the forefront of these new aspects of professional practice. How? I would suggest consultation and education. We need information on the current digital practices in museums - both here and overseas. We also need to develop a discussion paper, setting out the issues and then run seminars, develop checklists, develop the information and training resources available to museum professionals so that we can better avoid the pitfalls and maximise the benefits of the new media.