



A JOINT SOLUTION TO MANAGING CULTURAL DIGITAL ASSETS?

The purpose of my talk today is to lay out my belief that there is scope for an investigation of the different processes that comprise the management of digital assets for the cultural heritage sector.

But first I want to start by giving you some background information about the European Museums' Information Institute – EMII, as a way of putting into context my question on digital asset management.

EMII is a collaborative, virtual network formed by key institutions in the European Union.

Our main purpose is the exchange of best practice and the effective use of standards in information management among European member states and associated countries.

EMII receives financial support from its members and gains funding from grant funding bodies to develop specific products.

EMII latest initiative is the **Distributed Content Framework - EMII-DCF**¹ for short - a project funded by the **Information Society Technologies programme**² of the European Commission.

The project engaged research work in three distinctive areas of activities regarding the creation of cultural digital content:

1. Analysis of researchers' requirements for the creation of digital content.
2. Evaluation of technical standards.
3. And the identification of legal requirements, including copyright and the creation of licensing agreement templates.

It was in the process of managing the work of the project, and with the support of colleagues at mda and Tate - both project partners in the DCF - that I perceived an opportunity.

It is my belief that the cultural heritage sector will gain from a study to evaluate the different processes that comprise the management of digital

¹ <http://www.emii.eu/>

² <http://www.cordis.lu/ist>

collections, with a view of creating the conditions that will enable all to make real valuable use from the digital assets being created.

The issues regarding digital assets management are not new, of course. When I was working at the National Maritime Museum³, back in 1996, my colleague Tina Chambers, Head of Photography, and I initiated the first investigations on digital photography for the museum.

As we were embarking on something new to us, we soon realised that we were dealing with a subject whose impact was not yet fully understood by the majority of our colleagues.

Tina had a very clear, practical vision, and as a result the NMM was then one of the first nationals to embark on a consistent digitisation programme of its collections, considering from the start the commercial as well as the internal uses that this new digital collection would create for the museum.

Tina also wanted to ensure that proper documentation standards and procedures were applied to the contemporary photograph collections - traditional or otherwise - as at the time we were also introducing the new collections management system in the museum.

As a photographer she was aware of the commercial value, as well as the aesthetic value of the assets she and her staff were creating, and she wanted them treated in the same way as the other collections in the museum.

One of my concerns at the time was to insist that we knew whether the museum had the right to exploit, for commercial purposes, the new assets being created - a fact not always clear or considered to be a priority at the time.

Since then, of course, there has been a rapid increase in digitisation activities. This is due especially to the proliferation of digitisation programmes the sector has experienced in the last seven years, and the resulting increased awareness of issues related to the subject.

Different funding opportunities and initiatives are now available to make collections accessible online - notably in the UK the **New Opportunities Funding**⁴ digitising programme, or initiatives such as **Culture Online**⁵ or the **24Hour Museum**⁶ that make use of specific digital culture content for their own online publication purposes.

And, of course, I must also mention the European Union's own recognition of the economical importance of the cultural heritage of Europe, and the consequent acknowledgement of the need to support digitisation initiatives as one of the priorities in its current work programme.

³ <http://www.nmm.ac.uk>

⁴ <http://www.nof-digitise.org>

⁵ <http://www.cultureonline.gov.uk>

⁶ <http://www.24hourmuseum.co.uk>

In practical terms, the **MINERVA project**⁷ is the scheme that is currently coordinating, at governmental level, the digitisation programmes across Europe.

MINERVA aims to achieve this working in collaboration with other initiatives - such as the EMII-DCF project, for example - delivering guidelines and good practice, as well as influencing the political decisions that enable funding and resources to be available at national levels.

The UK partner in the MINERVA project is **Resource**⁸: *the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries*.

Yes, digital assets are being created all over the place! Still, I'd place a bet that when the invitation to this meeting got to you, each one of you thought of a very specific aspect of digital management. Like, for example, one of my contacts in Sweden who said he wasn't attending the meeting because he wasn't into all these legal stuff really. Besides, today is mid summer's day - a major bank holiday in Sweden!

Digital assets management, from his perspective, related primarily to the management of legal issues. And this was not for him because he is mostly interested in technical issues.

Clearly an understanding and positioning in relation to legal issues is fundamental – it is not, however, the full story.

I told you about my experience with the early digitisation programme at the National Maritime Museum because I wanted to illustrate some of the concerns we had at the time. For example, in creating the new digital collection we wanted to:

- Enable proper curatorial management of the collection.
- Apply new photographic techniques & adopt recommended technical standards in creating digital assets.
- Ensure that the digital asset was right for the museum internal use.
- Consider how the digital assets created could provide financial benefit for the museum through relevant commercial use; or to be prepared to anticipate such use.
- And, there was also the awareness of the need to know whether the museum held the rights to exploit, in a commercial environment, the images it was creating.

The diagram in the background is a very simplified means of illustrating the different processes associated with the management of digital assets.

Underpinning all of the processes is the need to specify legal requirements and to secure the legal position.

⁷ <http://www.minervaeurope.org/>

⁸ <http://www.resource.gov.uk>

The diagram also shows the interaction between each of the processes and the legal process - or in other words, at each stage it is important that the relevant legal issues are taken into consideration.

Let me also point out that, although not represented, there will clearly be a whole set of requirements for the management of the information associated with each one of the processes.

What the diagram does not illustrate, of course, is the complex relationship that each of the processes can have one with the other. This is where the real fun begins! And this is why we are all here!

The DCF project made me realise that although there have been several recent project initiatives sponsored by the European Commission on digital asset management, most of these have occurred within the parameters of identifying technical issues. I am not aware of an initiative that evaluates the requirements and sets up guidelines for the management of digital assets for the cultural sector.

And my last point is that even though today cultural organisations are actively undergoing digitisation programmes, and there is more awareness of the issues, I believe it is still rare for us to identify an organisation that has a coherent understanding of the processes that need to be in place for the effective management of a digital collection.

So before handing back to Louise, I want to ask you:

- Is there a joint solution for digital assets management?
- Is there scope for collaborative work that aims to identify the requirements needed for the effective management of digital collections?

I want to invite your comments, and to gauge your interest because your feedback will inform the way forward for me.

Thank you.

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