

THE VIRTUALISATION OF OBJECTS

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1. 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.

Complete **interactivity** is possible - that is, we are now able to de-materialise, access, view or listen to and download that image or information.

Once down-loaded, this material may be reproduced perfectly in its original form. Only the rematerialisation of 3-D objects still defies us.

In addition, digital technology provides a simple and seamless method of manipulating those digitised images and materials:

- (a) by adding material to them,
- (b) by simply sampling specific parts of them and
- (c) by incorporating those parts into new images, or
- (d) by simply altering and distorting the subject matter of the image itself.

All things are possible - and with great **speed and quality**.

2. So What Are Digital Rights?

They include the 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 because as you know, just because you own the material, doesn't mean that you own the copyright.

If you have been granted certain rights of copyright, you may or may not have the digital rights. This will depend on the wording of the documentation.

2.2 So who owns the digital rights?

Generally, the copyright owner.

And if there is no copyright in the material?

Anyone who can get access to the material.

The warning for museums is the need to REVIEW existing documentation.

It is very likely to be inadequate for use in digital environment.

3. The Effect of Digitisation on Rights Management

You are all in the business of rights management.

(a) Planning

It is of fundamental importance 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) Great benefits are to be derived through effective and easily maintained digital information management systems.

(b) Costly? Yes. When you go digital, the administration doubles. 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.

In addition to your normal administrative load, you must also know:

- (a) WHAT material do you have in your Digital Library;
- (b) WHERE to find it;
- (c) WHICH rights you have to that Work/Image, and
- (d) HOW you can exploit the digital material
- (e) WHO will have access to that material
- (f) WHAT are the terms of access
- (g) HOW will this be supervised and enforced?

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

- (a) Creator's Name (for Moral Rights purposes)
- (b) Copyright status
- (c) Copyright owner
- (d) Rights acquired by the Museum
- (e) Duration of those rights
- (f) Any specific restrictions on uses
- (g) Renewal Dates/triggers for extending term of licence(s)

- (h) Licence Fees/royalties (if any) payable;
 - (i) When
 - (ii) To whom?
 - (iii) By whom?

Only those organisations with considerable resources are going to be able to maintain professional best practice. Some can't yet achieve it in the current atom-based environment.

4. Personnel Training

An integral part of achieving professional best practice is personnel training.

PROPER TRAINING for relevant employees is fundamental.

This is really a risk management issue. There is no substitute for developing clear, fully articulated procedures and ensuring a high-level of staff training so that all staff members are absolutely clear as to their responsibilities.

Again, this might seem obvious, but it is my experience that, all too often, the implementation issues are left to one or two people within the organisation who are marginalised. We all like to leave responsibility to others but it is important that we find ways of having all of the staff aware of the risk management protocols and, more than that, accept a degree of responsibility for their effectiveness.

5. Asset 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 rights in the collection material ; and
- (c) business principles.

I don't want to discuss technology but I do think we should touch on rights issues and some business principles. So Rochina will deal with some key copyright and moral rights issues and introduce perhaps the most important of all business issues - the difficulty of valuing digital rights.

6. Realising the Potential of Digital Rights

This is not just a question of selling the rights to Mr Gates. Its 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.

- (a) Creates new messaging channels which will reach new "customers"
- (b) Can be an effective and cost-effective tool to increase public awareness of your museum and your collection leading to:-
 - (i) Membership Increase
 - (ii) Visitors Increase
 - (iii) Business and commercial opportunities
 - (iv) Educational opportunities

Does it mean the end of Museums? A shift to “Virtual Museums” where everyone has access to all objects?

Not as yet, because as yet we can't reproduce the experience of seeing the real thing. Be assured that the time will 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? In comparison with what is available today, those early efforts look very clunky.

7. Distribution Of Museum Services

Perhaps the most influential technologies at the moment are:

- (a) dumb CD ROM,
- (b) interactive CD ROM, and
- (c) 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](#).

8. Internet

The Internet is not just a new DISTRIBUTION system.

It is also a new ACCESS system.

If you are going to allow access through the Internet to your databases, you will have to review your existing risk management protocols.

In setting up any such database you should never lose sight of some fundamental questions:

- (a) What level of access do you want to grant 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 database to promote your aims and minimise the attendant dangers?
- (d) What hardware and software assistance can be built in?
- (e) What training is required?

In doing this, you are handling a major collection management issue by acknowledging the risks and adopting non-legalistic methods of meeting those risks. You are dealing with a legal and administrative problem by using largely technologically **delivered** solutions. You are using the **multi-skilled approach** that is so important to risk management in the digital environment.

What you are doing is pro-actively managing a major corporate asset rather than merely waiting for something negative to happen and hiring an expensive lawyer to tell you that there's not much that can be done.

Food for thought?

9. 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.

No one of us has 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.

As to how that might be achieved is a matter that must be further considered.