

# Future Digitisation Projects

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## Summary

In this paper I want to talk about the following:

- ◆ To introduce HEDS and our services, with focus on how HEDS fits into the overall digital libraries initiatives.
- ◆ To give my personal opinion regarding issues affecting the future success of digitisation projects in the UK.

## Introduction to HEDS Services

The Higher Education Digitisation Service (HEDS) has established a range of value-added services, available through a single point of contact, to support conversion into electronic formats through a total management package. The University of Hertfordshire has established HEDS and we are a JISC funded Service. Our services are also available to non-HE organisations such as public libraries, museums and other non-profit organisations. We provide advice and initial consultations at no cost.

HEDS was established and funded because of a definite requirement within the UK higher education community for centralised digitisation services. Difficult, high value projects and a larger scale conversion infrastructure could only be effectively achieved by a centrally resourced national service - HEDS. HEDS has already worked with the majority of the current university digitisation projects and with some public libraries, archives and museums either providing technical advice or offering conversion services. Our core services are:

- **Complete job management**, from project definition to final product delivery
- Guidance on **selecting the most cost-effective methods** for realising your digitisation aims
- **Advice and consultancy** to clients on the feasibility of digitising collections of material
- Clear and comprehensive **conversion specifications** for digitisation work
- Rigorous **quality assurance** procedures to validate the end product

My paper is about future projects and this sits neatly with HEDS main role - which is to assist and provide services to convert any physical media, whether paper, microfilm, photographs or bound volumes for instance, into any of the many electronic formats available. Digitisation is a tool in the information revolution that we currently find ourselves immersed in. This information society is about empowerment, i.e. making it possible for new, fresh things to happen and for fresh approaches to information resources. By digitising valued resources we are:

- enabling wider potential access
- opening up new avenues of research
- giving a renewed means of perceiving our information heritage.

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I would like to now express my personal views on the future of digitisation. I feel that there are so many wonderful resources that make up the treasure house that is the UK's library and archive system. I hope that many of them will be digitised and made available to a much wider potential audience.

## **The Future Success of Digitisation Projects**

To ensure the future continued success of digitisation projects I feel that the following issues need to be addressed:

### ***Raising revenue.***

We are at the cusp of being able to finally realise revenue from digitisation projects to support further work or the future maintenance and development of the electronic resource. This is not to suggest that all digitised resources will become pay per view access. However, we must address the issues involved in the wider potential audience available, the means to control access and the rise of true E-commerce. This gives the potential to cherry pick certain classes of audience who will be prepared to pay for access either individually or through institutional licence.

So the revenue issues for future digitisation projects will be:

- Do we charge for access?
- Who should we charge?
- How will we charge?

### ***Continued investment & co-ordination in the conversion infrastructure.***

Digitisation is not a neutral act – it takes money and commitment to get projects off the ground, to convert materials into electronic form and to develop an electronic library. The most significant costs are involved in finding and retaining suitably experienced staff and in developing the technical infrastructure to enable the project to succeed.

These resources are scarce and I believe funds will be best spent on developing centralised service providers or using 3<sup>rd</sup> party vendors, rather than every project trying to resource the complete process internally. Equipment purchased, whether scanners or network servers will have strictly limited lifetimes and need experienced staff to operate them. Rather than expend money reinventing the techno-wheel, funds could be directed towards more cataloguing, or resolving specialist subject content or further development of the information resource by using other well developed services to create electronic content and to serve the data.

VIRTUALLY NEW - CREATING THE DIGITAL COLLECTION A Review of Digitisation Projects in Local Authority Libraries and Archives recommends the establishment of an "agency to advise and co-ordinate public library digitisation" and that there "must be substantial new, targeted external funding if any significant volume of work ... is to proceed".  
<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/lic/digitisation/intro.html>

I believe that future digitisation projects will leverage the current experience base and make new partnerships to co-ordinate the technology owners and the collection owners to achieve larger scale electronic content creation. Without this level of co-ordinated co-operation far less content will be achievable with the available resources.

**Technology Catch Up.**

The equipment and software needed to achieve the high standards of conversion required to serve our future needs are becoming available and ever more efficient with less and less human intervention required. This will help to drive down the cost of conversion whilst increasing the standards of electronic images. Improvements in the technology available to the target audience will also make using these electronic resources more worthwhile and rewarding. In particular, improving screen technology will really open up our capacity to view ever more detailed content on screen with more comfort and ease than currently possible.

I believe that technology catch up will encourage future projects to digitise materials previously inaccessible to conversion.

**Maximise the value of information resources.**

There is a tendency towards high profile, large-scale conversion projects that will benefit large audiences in the UK. These are extremely important, but I hope that the funding bodies do not forget the smaller projects with a very focused audience where the cost of content creation are low but the value added to that specific audience are very high.

**Planned growth of digital libraries.**

There is a lesson to be learnt from the Electronic Libraries Programme, which has developed many valuable resources to create digital libraries. However, much of this development has come about through the strong interests and work of relatively few people without institutional review. I believe, there is a need to continue to develop the top level planning to resolve digitisation priorities based on experts within disciplines determining the core resources that would be most valuable for targeted funding.

**Access Issues and Metadata.**

The future unit costs for conversion will continue to drop, but the costs of creating intellectual access and metadata will remain high. I am referring to the means by which we find items once they are in electronic format and the difficulties that are inherent in visually rich materials such as photographs and art works. In some of the archives I visit original items are not catalogued or the level of descriptive information about an item is limited to provenance. This level of information will not be adequate to assist the end-user when they are trying to find a single photograph out of a collection of thousands. The user needs high levels of descriptive information to make finding items as easy as possible. This is costly in human effort and time but will be an essential feature of future digitisation projects, especially in the local history arena.

It is important to develop appropriate levels of content description to enable access mechanisms if the full value of future digital library resources are to be fully realised.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that digitisation is not solely about technology, but more importantly it is about successfully achieving information goals and needs. Having a clear idea of what you want to achieve from your resources and understanding that you are limited only by the nature of your originals and the cost benefit ratios of the conversion to electronic format is vital.

I hope that many of the wonderful information resources available to us in the UK will be digitised and that HEDS will have the opportunity to be involved in their creation.