Sustaining Digital Resources
A Briefing Paper for Curators, Archivists, and Librarians

For museums, archives, libraries and other cultural heritage institutions, developing financial support for the digital resources they create is very important. With the support of the UK Strategic Content Alliance and the Joint information Systems Committee and the US National Endowment for the Humanities and National Science Foundation, Ithaka S+R has completed a multi-year investigation of innovative funding models to sustain digital projects, culminating in a summary paper and twelve detailed case studies. This document highlights suggestions drawn from this project, and suggests how the examples provided by some of the case studies might be especially useful to projects like yours.

Who is this briefing paper for?

- Leaders of digital projects at museums, national libraries or archives, or other cultural organisations with the central mission to preserve and provide public access to materials related to arts and heritage.

- Leaders whose projects must serve multiple audiences, and who need to balance mission-related public access concerns with revenue-related considerations

Why is sustainability planning important?

- Digital projects can be expensive to launch and require continual investment of resources to ensure that they remain up-to-date and keep pace with evolving user needs.

- As cultural institutions share more content online, figuring out how to develop, enhance, and preserve this content in a way that meets audience needs while covering the ongoing costs of providing digital access becomes increasingly important.

How can this briefing paper be useful?

- This briefing paper will help leaders of projects at cultural heritage institutions understand the key factors that influence project sustainability, and highlights the relevant examples from the set of Ithaka case studies which help point towards ways in which these factors can operate on a practical level.

Key Factors for Sustainability

The report *Sustaining Digital Resources: An On-the-Ground View of Projects Today* identifies five key factors essential for the ongoing success and sustainability of digital initiatives in not-for-profit sectors. (The full report is available here: **http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/07/sca_ithaka_ sustainingdigitalresources_with_casestudies_sm.pdf**)

Dedicated and entrepreneurial leadership

Managing digital projects requires a skill set which may be different from that of museum curators, archivists, or other content specialists working within the cultural heritage sector. If the digital resource is expected to generate revenue, guidance from someone with the appropriate experience and background is important.

Craft a strong value proposition

Cultural institutions hold valuable content, but deciding what to digitise and how to present it to users may be difficult. Understanding the needs of your users – keeping in mind that different audiences may have different needs – can help focus your efforts.

Minimise direct costs

There are many ways to lower direct costs of a digital project, from outsourcing, to partnerships, to volunteer support. At cultural heritage institutions, it is not uncommon for these projects to have access to 'free' services from other departments at the institution, though it is important to understand the value and cost of these contributions, since this may end up obscuring the true costs of your project.

Develop diverse revenue sources

The rich content at cultural heritage organisations can lend itself to a wide range of revenue models. There are many ways to balance a public access mission with income generating strategies, in particular by developing clearly differentiated products and services for different audience segments.

Clear accountability and metrics for success

Setting clear goals and targets that your project has to meet can help create the conditions for success. In addition to financial metrics, value-based measures such as targets for audience growth can also be developed to fit the broader mission of the institution.

How some projects are doing this today

Cultural heritage organisations face some specific challenges when thinking about sustainability. Our case studies provide some examples of how some cultural heritage institutions today are:

Balancing mission goals and revenue targets

At cultural heritage institutions the desire to make digital content freely available can sometimes conflict with efforts to generate revenue to support the work. It is important to evaluate how mission goals and financial targets impact each other. The case study of **Victoria and Albert Museum's** V&A Images division demonstrates how one institution balanced goals to increase public access to digital content with the requirements of running an image licensing operation.

To read more, see the full case study on V&A Images: **http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/07/sca_bms_casestudy_vaimages.pdf**

Also see case studies on:
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (**http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/07/sca_bms_casestudy_sep.pdf**)
Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (**http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/07/sca_bms_casestudy_tlg.pdf**)

Carefully defining different services for different audiences

By researching and understanding the needs of different segments of your audience (eg scholars, publishers, or students), projects can better serve their users while also developing diverse revenue streams customised to the preferences of each group. For example, the **Institut national de l'audiovisuel** (INA), France's national radio and TV archive, clearly differentiated the services offered to the general public and to those who license content for professional use. The public website **www.ina.fr** can continue to experiment with several revenue models and offer Open Access content, while preserving the value of sales to the professional market.

To read more, see the full case study on INA: **http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/07/sca_bms_casestudy_ina.pdf**

Also see case studies on:
Centre for Computing in the Humanities (**http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/07/sca_bms_casestudy_cch.pdf**)
eBird (**http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/07/sca_bms_casestudy_ebird.pdf**)

Saving direct costs by working with commercial partners

Licensing content to publishers can help projects reach new audiences while reducing costs around digitisation, lowering the direct costs borne by an institution compared to the expense of developing and hosting a resource internally. In the case of **The National Archives** (UK), the Licensed Internet Associates program has made it possible to digitise over 80 million documents in just over four years at minimal cost to TNA through partnerships with commercial genealogy websites.
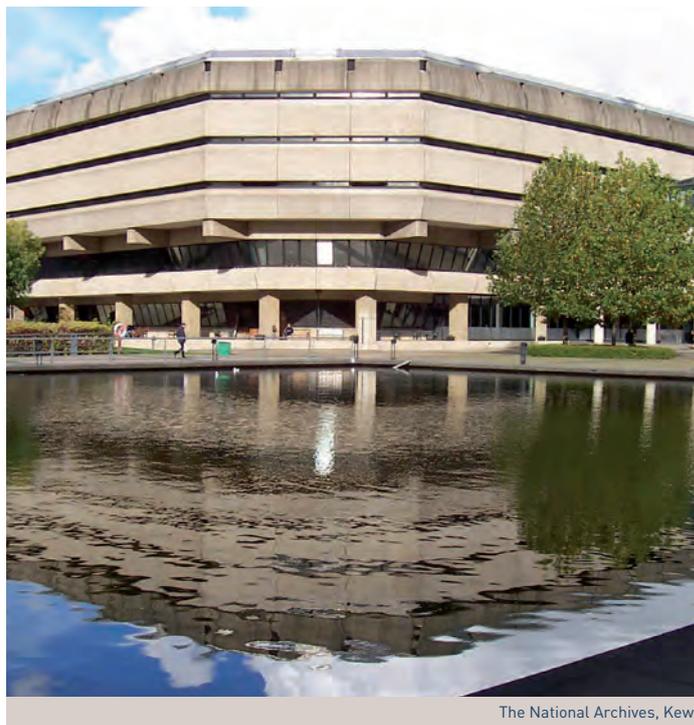
The National Archives, Kew

To read more, see the full case study on TNA: **http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/07/sca_bms_casestudy_natarchives.pdf**

Also see the case study on
BOPCRIS Digitisation Centre at the University of Southampton (**http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/07/sca_bms_casestudy_southampton.pdf**)

Suggestions for further reading

Sustainability and Revenue Models for Online Academic Resources: **http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2008/06/sca_ithaka_sustainability_report-final.pdf**

Business Planning for Cultural Heritage Organisations: **www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub124/contents.html**

Reproduction Charging Models & Rights Policy for Digital Images in American Art Museums: **www.kdcs.kcl.ac.uk/pubs/USMuseum_SimonTanner.pdf**

Art Museum Images in Scholarly Publishing: **http://cnx.org/content/col10728/1.1**

Audience Research: A Briefing Paper for Cultural Sector Practitioners: **http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/04/sca_audiences_briefing_culturalsectorpractitioners.pdf**

On Building a New Market for Culture: Virtue and Necessity in a Screen-based Economy: **http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/07/sca_intelligenttv_sponsorship_report_v1-final.pdf**