



Sustaining Digital Resources

A Briefing Paper for University Librarians

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Those who manage digital resources face a significant challenge: finding the resources to support their project and help it thrive. 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 university and research libraries that host digital scholarly projects
- Librarians and IT staff who work with digital resources

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.
- Higher education research libraries have struggled in recent years with sharp increases in subscription pricing for print periodicals and electronic resources, winnowing the overall budget libraries can make available to their in-house scholarly projects. This makes early sustainability planning for such projects more important than ever.

How can this briefing paper be useful?

- This briefing paper will help university librarians understand the key factors that influence the sustainability of library-based digital projects, 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 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_report.pdf)

Dedicated and entrepreneurial leadership

Leading a library's in-house digital resource program requires specialised skills: not just an understanding of the content and digitisation practices, but also planning for sustainability. If the resource is expected to generate revenue, involvement or guidance from someone with experience working on an earned revenue project will be important.

Craft a strong value proposition

There is a wealth of material held in university special collections and a relative dearth of funding to support its digitisation, so prioritising what to digitise is imperative. Developing a rich understanding of the likely users of your proposed digitisation projects can help identify the real value in your project.

Minimise direct costs

There are many ways to lower the direct costs of a digitisation initiative, from outsourcing elements of the work to engaging volunteer support. Sharing costs with other libraries can be an effective approach, though it can sometimes obscure the true costs of your project, and make the continued sustainability of the project heavily dependent on the continuing support of the partner libraries.

Develop diverse revenue sources

Libraries are experimenting with many revenue models to support in-house digital scholarly projects. Licensing content to external entities is one option, though for some mission-critical projects, the library may decide to support open access to the resource from the institution's operating funds.

Clear accountability and metrics for success

Setting clear goals for your library's in-house digital projects – both to build audience and to meet financial targets – is important for driving the project forward and for communicating the value of that project to university administrators.

How some projects are doing this today

University librarians who manage digital content may face an embarrassment of riches, with scholars seeking the library's support for resources they have developed, in addition to digitisation projects the library may want to undertake itself, based on the special collections it holds. Our case studies provide examples of how university librarians are:

Cultivating multiple revenue models to support the long-term availability of their digitised assets

- Developing diverse revenue sources is important for any scholarly resources project, but may be particularly beneficial for digitisation projects at university libraries – the wide range of special collections available at university libraries is unlikely to be sustained by a single revenue model. The **BOPCRIS Digitisation Centre** at the University of Southampton has pursued a number of licensing agreements with separate publishers who were interested in providing access to different bodies of materials. Although the terms of these agreements were different, each provided for free access to users within the United Kingdom for several years, which satisfied the library's own open access mandate.
- To read more, see the full case study on the BOPCRIS Digitisation Centre http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/07/sca_bms_casestudy_southampton.pdf

Collaborating with other libraries and institutions to support the development of a digital resource

- As budgets tighten, research libraries will likely become increasingly willing to share certain services and functions with each other as a cost-saving measure. The University of Göttingen Library has been able to bear the costs of a German-language scholarly journals archive, **DigiZeitschriften**, in part because it has been able to convince other German research libraries to contribute staff time to costly activities like content selection and rights negotiation.
- To read more, see the full case study on DigiZeitschriften http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/07/sca_bms_casestudy_digizeit.pdf

Providing an institutional base for digital projects, while minimising further investment

- Taking on a digital scholarly project from outside can prove beneficial for libraries, as well. The Bodleian Library at Oxford University absorbed **Electronic Enlightenment**, a database of digitised 18th-century correspondence. The project hoped to benefit from the Bodleian 'brand' in securing an external publishing provider and signing up institutional subscribers. The Bodleian, in turn, hoped to support a project of importance to scholars and make the infrastructure of the Electronic Enlightenment project a 'node' for digital projects developed at the library in the future.
- To read more, see the full case study on Electronic Enlightenment http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/07/sca_bms_casestudy_ee.pdf



The Bodleian Library at Oxford University

Suggestions for further reading

JISC Libraries of the Future (June 2009) www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/campaigns/librariesofthefuture. This brochure highlights a number of JISC programs and published resources for libraries making the move to the digital space.

Raym Crow, *SPARC Campus-Based Partnerships: Case studies* (2009). www.arl.org/sparc/partnering/cases/. This set of three cases provides an overview of steps the libraries of the Universities of Toronto and California, and the Cornell University Library have taken to support and sustain innovative scholarly projects on their respective campuses.

Kevin Guthrie, Rebecca Griffiths, and Nancy Maron. *Sustainability and Revenue Models for Online Academic Resources*. May 2008. http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2008/06/sca_ithaka_sustainability_report-final.pdf.

Liz Bishoff and Nancy Allen, 'Business Planning for Cultural Heritage Institutions,' CLIR (January 2004). www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub124/pub124.pdf.

Paul Courant, 'The Future of the Library in the Research University,' *No Brief Candle: Reconceiving Research Libraries for the 21st Century* (August 2008), pp. 21-27. www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub142/pub142.pdf. The head of the University of Michigan's libraries posits that as libraries transition to digital form, close attention to costs will remain highly important for library leaders.