THE HERITAGE LAB

Planning a Digitisation Project

All Museums contain a valuable resource of archived material in the form of manuscripts, paintings, three-dimensional objects, maps, and more. Digital imaging technology has changed the way many organisations collect, store and disseminate information and Museums aren't far behind. With the Google Art Project working wonders for Museums across the world, museums in India are now gearing up to convert materials in their collections to digital formats with cameras and scanning equipment which allow greater access to people. Technology also minimises the risk of handling rare and fragile materials.

Leading Museums in India such as the National Museum, Mehrangarh Museum, Dr. Bhau Daji Lad, CSMVS, Salar Jung and others are already experimenting with digitising their collections.

Successful digitisation projects require effective planning collaboration and long-term financial investment. Staff and volunteers must work together to develop digitisation policies that embody the mission and goals of the Museum. This resource highlights how Museums can plan a Digitisation project, assess risks, costs and technology involved.

Where do we begin?

A digitisation project should focus on the creation and long-term management of high-resolution digital substitutes.

Think of this, as a digital representation of material you can access, copy and convert to other digital formats for use in educational programs and exhibits,; for print materials like brochures about the Museum and its activities; and for social media!

Before undertaking a digitization project, a Museum should determine which collections to scan based on a variety of factors. Are there items that would benefit from digitization? How do you prioritize?

✏ Items that have major preservation concerns such as damaged or deteriorating objects / manuscripts / hangings. The goal should be to limit frequent handling

✏ Items that have high historical significance or value.

✏ Items that the public requests to see most often (considering you are in touch with the frequent visitors to the Museum, such as schools)

Remember the more material selected for digitization, the longer the project will take, and the more costly it will become.

Copyright, Intellectual Property and other Attributions

Once the collections are digitized they can be used by a variety of audiences including teachers, researchers, scholars, other museum professionals, etc.
It then becomes even more important to have the right copyright policies and rules of attributions in place.

For example, you can download high-resolution images from the British Museum's collection, but one has to fill a short form, give an undertaking for use, and attribute the image.

In the United States, on the other hand, only works published prior to 1923 are permitted to be digitized and made available in the public domain.

Explore the Costs

A digitisation project includes initial investments, as well as recurring and sustaining costs. Exploring both phases is important when defining short and long-term funding.

Initial Phase:

− includes purchase of scanning equipment and computer software with image-editing capabilities.
− includes the scanning process, which takes time and consists of several steps. Some organizations find outsourcing more cost effective than conducting an in-house digitization project for large collections.

Sustaining the Project:

− includes the purchase of large capacity external hard drives to store high-resolution images. An alternative is an annual subscription for housing images online (cloud storage such as Dropbox). The more images scanned, the more storage you will need for the master digital files.

- You will also want to invest in a content management system. It will keep your digital collection organized and provide a way to track the use of your media in a variety of different formats.

Are you Ready to Digitize?

Question-Checklist when planning for in-house or outsourcing digitization projects:

☐ Who will work on the project?

☐ How large should the project staff be?

☐ If we contract the digitization project, what qualifications are we looking for? How much experience should the individual(s) possess?

☐ If we outsource to a vendor, what are their qualifications and experience?

☐ Based on our initial appraisal of the collection, how long should the project last?

☐ Are we willing to invest time and money into training staff or volunteers to complete and sustain the project?

☐ Are we prepared to budget for the ongoing costs of digitizing and preserving source material?

Pros & Cons of In-House Digitization

Pros: An advantage to conducting projects in house is the ability to maintain control of the collection.

In-house projects require experienced and knowledgeable staff. Conducting in-house projects enables gradual learning as the project moves forward for inexperienced staff or volunteers new to imaging and digital preservation techniques.

Cons: However, even though the "learn by doing method" might seem like the most cost-effective route at first, there are drawbacks to this system.

If your institution lacks experience working with digital imaging technology as well as long-term digital preservation curation techniques, learning on the go will increase time and costs of the project.

It might be wise to hire an experienced individual to design and implement a digitization and curation program and services. The staff's lack of knowledge and experience with technology might prove detrimental to the collection. Furthermore, not handling all aspects of the project correctly in the first place may result in your spending more money fixing mistakes later.

Planning a Digitisation Project

Review the technical aspects of equipment, software and training

Purchasing the right equipment for your project can be difficult. Your organization should weigh the costs of purchasing scanning hardware and software with the needs of its collection. When selecting the right scanner ask yourself these questions:

• What types of physical objects do we plan to scan?
• Do we want to scan paper records and photographs?
• What type of continuous tone images are in the collection (negatives, slides, transparencies)?
• Do we want to scan low or high resolution images?
• What type of storage will we invest in, local (external hard drives) or networked (cloud storage)?
• Will we apply for a grant?
Do we plan to hire a trained individual, or teach ourselves as we go?
• If we outsource our project to a vendor, how we will package and ship our collection?
• What are the costs and risks involved?

Implement a Digitization Policy

Your Museum MUST DEVELOP a collections management policy if you don't have one already! It provides guidance for the long-term care of the treasures in its trust.

When considering the cost of digital conversion, remember to include the long-term measures necessary to care for your new digital collection(s). The Museum advisory body / committee must develop digitization policies that embody the mission and goals of your Museum. The policy should contain the following:
• Primary Policy Aims
• Risk Assessment
• Scope and Objectives
• Roles, Responsibilities and Personnel
• Monitoring and Reviewing of the Policy
• Benefits
• Needs Statement
• Legal, Financial and Technical Requirements
• Costs and Financial Commitments
• Implementation of Policy

Policies are organic and must adapt to the needs of the Museum and its users. Digitization involves a long-term investment; plan your digitization policies to reflect this commitment.

Planning a Digitisation Project

Digitization projects require an understanding of more than just the mission, goals, and needs of the organization and its assets. They require technical knowledge of imaging hardware and software, operating systems, file management, local and network storage, etc.

Before starting a digitization project consult with individuals who have experience with digital imaging technology. Seek guidance through professional associations.

Funding Resources:

Ministry of Culture

Fundraise on your own through Ketto

Tata Trusts

Partner with the Google Art Project

Recommended Reading

The Getty's Introduction to Imaging provides information for project planning, quality control, networks, systems and architecture. It can also help you select the right scanner http://www.getty.edu/research/ publications/electronic_publications/introimages

Cornell's Digital Imaging Tutorial provides excellent training, introducing key concepts and exploring digitization techniques such as selection, conversion, metadata and preservation
http://www.library. cornell.edu/preservation/tutorial/contents.html

Other Useful Links:

https://www.iiap.res.in/archives/pdfs/Gaur.pdf

http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/VC_Matusiak_Johnston_28_B_1400.pdf

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