

GUIDE TO MANAGING HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

Developing a significant collection

Digitisation

In this digital age there are many exciting ways that societies can use digitisation techniques to help preserve the collection, make items in the collection more accessible to the public, promote the collection and create audience interaction and interest, especially in displays.

Equipment for digitisation is becoming more readily available and affordable and more user friendly to operate – therefore becoming more accessible for members of historical societies to own and use.

Scanners can be used to digitise a range of materials including photographs, documents, maps, slides, negatives etc. Digital cameras are used for photographing objects in collections as well as larger paper based items. Digital voice recorders and digital video recorders allow interviews to be transferred directly to computers. Optical character recognition (OCR) software allows text in scanned documents to be reconverted to word documents, Excel spreadsheets etc. Voice recognition software allows the spoken word to be transcribed directly to computer. The list goes on. The blog, *Information technology and local history* - <http://itlochist.blogspot.com/> - contains posts providing information about digitisation projects.

Before undertaking digitisation projects a digitisation plan should be prepared.

Image digitisation of local history collections, a digitisation manual prepared in 2002 to provide guidelines for digitising material in local studies collections in public libraries, includes a section on requirements for a digitisation plan as well as information about digitisation – <http://tinyurl.com/24zx9ad>.

The online resource, *Capture your collections - A digitisation course for remote and regional museums and galleries* – http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector_info_item/10, also provides information and exercises as an introduction to establishing a digitisation project for smaller organisations. The course planner – <http://archive.amol.org.au/capture/course/planner.html> – outlines the topics covered in this resource which can be investigated individually or in sequence.

The first consideration is to establish why the collection is to be digitised. Reasons might be

- to improve access to the collection,
- promotion of the collection,
- preservation of the collection,
- inclusion of images in publications,
- provision of digital images to the public or
- creation of online exhibitions.

The second consideration deals with the users of the digitised material. Who is going to use the digitised images –

- researchers at the society,
- researchers using an online catalogue,
- researchers requiring a particular image for publication,
- viewers of online exhibitions?

Allied with this is how the digitised material will be used –

- images attached to catalogue records in a database,
- images attached to records in an online database,
- images stored on CD-ROM.

How will the images be made available to members of the public purchasing digital images?

The third consideration concerns management issues relating to digitisation. The first issue involves determining the roles and responsibilities of the people undertaking the digitisation –

- who is going to do what and
- how is each task to be undertaken.

Other digitisation issues to be addressed include

- the development of copyright and access rights policy / procedures for the society,
- the checking of the copyright status of the items to be digitised,
- specifications required for digitising material, particularly images,
- specifications required for publishing any digitised material, especially images, on the internet and
- what collections and part of collections will be digitised.

An evaluation of the collection is needed to determine the extent of the collection to be digitised.

It might be decided to digitise

- a section of the collection or
- a representative sample of parts of the collection or
- only items on request.

It might be decided to digitise fragile items to make the image of the item accessible but to protect the original.

Items may be digitised for an exhibition –

- to be used for display instead of an original or
- to complement a display in the form of a slide show or other presentation or
- used in a database to showcase related items that are not included in the exhibition due to space restrictions.

In the digitisation plan sections of the collection would be listed with notes referring to items or percentage of items to be digitised and possibly the priority for the digitisation of each section.

Other management related issues are the standards and guidelines to be used for digitisation and, if cataloguing is involved, the thesaurus to be used.

Equipment and software for the project may need to be acquired and in some cases additional furniture may be needed. Funding for a digitisation project may also need to include associated costs for printing, if required, batteries etc.

Moving theory into practice: digital imaging tutorial from Cornell University – <http://www.library.cornell.edu/preservation/tutorial/index.html> – provides information on types of equipment used for scanning for different projects. Models of scanners constantly change so it is necessary to check for the latest via the Internet or contact a local computer supplier. There are a number of online newsletters and interest groups that provide useful information. About.com: printers /scanners – <http://printscan.about.com/> – is one resource that may be useful. The type and size of the scanner will depend on the project and the budget. Digital cameras can also be used especially if an image of a three dimensional item is required.

Scanners usually come with basic image editing software. A range of image editing software is available for a range of prices. Adobe Photoshop, one of many image editing programs, is available in different versions depending on the project and the budget available. Freeware and shareware image editing programs can also be downloaded from the Internet.

Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software allows the computer to recognise written text in a scanned image and treat that text as a word document for example allowing for the content to be edited or added to other text. The type of software required will depend on the digitisation project.

Resolution (number of pixels per inch – dpi), size of image and compression of image are other considerations. Both the *Image digitisation of local history collections* and *Capture your collections* provide detailed information on this topic.

Below are some minimum guidelines for scanning images.

Required resolution

- 75 dpi sufficient for images to be viewed on computer and Internet
- 300 + dpi for printing on paper - at output size

Size of image

- Normally – size of the original scanned at 300 dpi (for preservation)
- Normally – size of the original scanned at 300 dpi (for printing images on paper)
- Smaller items such as lantern slides and glass negatives should be scanned at 600 + dpi so that the scan is equivalent to 20 cm x 25 cm at 300 dpi. The image resolution can then be reduced for screen use.
- Fixed size of image on screen (for Internet, largest dimensions no larger than 520 pixels – probably width of 300 pixels would suffice)
- If a database has the ability to enlarge image on screen for computer catalogue (be careful not to make the size of the image too small)

Issues determining publishing images on the Internet

- Size of file should be small
 - Users can view image and copy image for projects but cannot successfully enlarge image
 - Image files download quickly

Digitised items may be saved in a variety of resolutions and sizes depending on how they are to be used. An example may be -

- Scanned at 300 dpi and saved as Tif files on to CD or other device such as a portable hard drive – this would be the Master File
- Resaved with resolution of 75 dpi and saved as jpeg for use with computer catalogue
- Resave after resizing image for Internet – this can be done in a batch using a thumbnails program such as Easy Thumbnails.

Copyright and moral rights are other issues to be considered. The Copyright Council of Australia provides a series of information sheets on all aspects of copyright - <http://www.copyright.org.au/publications/infosheets.htm>. *Copyright and cultural institutions – guidelines for digitisation* was published in 2005 to provide staff at cultural institutions with practical information about key copyright issues relating to the digitisation of collection material – <http://www.law.unimelb.edu.au/cmcl/publications/> .

Storage of digitised material is another consideration. Digital files can take up considerable space so alternative storage such as a portable hard drive or multiple cd-roms may be a solution. When determining the costs of a digitisation project the cost of hardware and resources for storing digital files need to be included.

Backing up digital material is essential. At least one copy of the back up files should be stored off-site.

The durability of digital material and the equipment used to access the digital material is another concern. The digital files will eventually need to be transferred to another medium / equipment in the future. *Electronic media collections care for small museums and archives* (information about longevity and storage of electronic media) – http://www.cci-icc.gc.ca/headlines/elecmediacare/index_e.aspx – discusses the expected lifespan of different forms of electronic media, storage of digital media and reformatting of digital media collections.