



## STRATEGIES FOR MULTIMEDIA ARCHIVES

Gent, 6 februari 2009

## AUDIENCE REPORT SESSION 3

*This session focused on how users deal with digital material and how institutions make material available for different users, with different backgrounds and purposes. One of the underlying hardships of user studies are the differences between users: it's important to maximize the services and website for as many different groups of users as possible. The main proposition of this afternoon session was to 'listen to the users', and to 'dare to question yourself', since very often the users' opinion is very different from that of the institution. As with all digital developments, it is necessary to stay on top of cultural changes and not to be afraid of the challenges ahead.*

**Jos De Haan** (Sociaal Planbureau, Den Haag) formulated a few conclusions in response to user surveys of Sociaal Planbureau that concerned an inquiry into the profile of the 'cultural visitor', in particular his/her use of the internet and cultural websites as a source for information about museum or theatre visits. De Haan pointed towards the evolution taking place from the user as a *consumer* to the user as a *producer* in the participation in culture (this is often called the 'prosumer'). New media possibilities make more active participation possible. The question remains whether we all are 'prosumers' already. Some numbers illustrate the situation in the Netherlands: they are leading in internet (broadband) diffusion and there is a relatively high level of cultural participation. The technical opportunities are nowadays very high, but to what extent one uses these opportunities for cultural visits and participation?

According to the speaker, there are four types of internet use for cultural purposes, presented in the so-called ICET-model: (1) for information, (2) for communication and community, (3) for entertainment and personal development and (4) for transaction. Additionally, he distinguishes 'nine user profiles' of the cultural heritage (see slides) correlating with nine 'types' of cultural interest: (1) 'allrounders' (4%), (2) 'art-lovers' (8%), (3) 'interest/hobby groups' (6%), (4) 'collectors' (8%), (5) 'bite-size types' (9%), (6) 'family outings' (16%), (7) 'day trippers' (11%), (8) 'readers' (9%) and at last the (biggest) group who isn't interested in culture at all (29%). Groups 1, 2 and 5 use the internet for 100% for their cultural purposes and interests. Groups 7, 8 and 9 consult never internet for that purpose and the other groups seldom. The main conclusion is that there need to be at least a major interest in cultural heritage in the *offline* world to show interest in culture in the *online* world.

De Haan concluded that internet is used most often for practical information, that the profile of digital visitors resemble that of physical visitors (age is an exception), that a website is primarily used before a visit, that media habits are the most important restriction (mostly for elderly) and that the stimulating general characteristics are 24 hours availability, ease, speed and chair selection on theater ticketing sites.

**Thomas Christensen** (Danish Film Institute, Copenhagen) situated the Danish Film Institute<sup>1</sup> in the digital age by pointing several digital strategies: (1) cinematheque, videotheque and library (a venue for film activities for a general audience), (2) the National Filmography (for a general audience, documentation about 5241 films, Danish short fiction films and documentary films), (3) Filmstriben (for education and schools, online access to more than 500 films, non-commercial distribution), (4) European Film Gateway (EU-project between 14 film archives, a pan-European cinema heritage database), (5) Danish Ministry of Culture (for the national heritage).

Christensen stressed some digital dilemmas. It turns out that users are generally interested in downloading films for free, often because older films are not available anymore. It's hard to be against the downloading but it remains illegal. A lot of films will never be commercially available so it's the task of DFI to offer access

---

<sup>1</sup> The Danish Film Institute (DFI) is the Danish government agency responsible for supporting and encouraging film and cinema culture and for conserving these in the national interest. It started in 1997 and is actually three-in-one: Danish Film Institute (feature films), National Film Board (shorts & docs) and the Danish Film Museum (archives).

to these films. But public archives are seeing rising preservation costs, rising access expectations, and rising difficulties and costs in the rights domain. The high costs diminish the number of films that can be made available. Cultural consumers, especially the younger generation, are becoming used to free (illegal) access to cultural products.

But there are also digital possibilities. It seems necessary to exploit the new potentials of digital cinema and HDTV distribution to optimize the quality of film heritage. Furthermore, territorial rooting and authenticity through the documentation of context are important factors to create relevance, also online. Another suggested possibility is the offer of online technology for legal access and the constant observation of Creative Commons evolutions in order to come to new IP laws and business models.

**Graham Turnbull** (SCRAN, Edinburgh) stressed that what your own collection holds, is not for your own audience but for a European and international audience. The target audience of the online cultural collection SCRAN<sup>2</sup> varies from professionals, academic to laymen, who all have different interests and purposes. A very important discovery was the evaluation of the website: the SCRAN-team and designers were very pleased with the result and the design of the site, but the users disapproved. Designers are thus certainly not always the ones in the know of what users want. The site seemed not user friendly enough and it had to look more like a 'Disney website' as a user survey suggested (e.g. the colours, the search bar, dynamic, attractive icons, round buttons,...). To please all users, different versions of the website were offered to the different user groups (library page, school websites,...). The design differed and the content was slightly different. But in general the websites were the same.

Turnbull highlighted a few other important criteria: the site has to meet existing standards (e.g. OAI-PMH) in consideration of interoperability and interaction between different institutions. Another important aspect is to offer all kinds of user tools (e.g. pathfinders, features, relevance ranking, toolbar – because users want to *do* something with a picture, just *find* one is not enough anymore,...). The speaker went on to give some examples of *reuse* possibilities of the digital material (e.g. for college projects, exam papers, social network platforms,...). An important conclusion with regard to the *reuse* of digital material is the existing of a significant discrepancy between what one *thinks* people will use the material for and what one *actually* does with it. So the importance and need of constant user studies was once again demonstrated.

An excerpt from the main conclusions of Turnbull: '*finding* material is no longer enough, but *doing* something with it', 'it's theirs, not ours', '*they* are a group, engage the group', 'watch your specialist language', 'listen to the user', 'synthesize what you are told (take the entire scope in consideration)', 'do simple things very well', 'wonderful design can conceal not reveal', 'your site must grow and flex',... with the key conclusion 'design to *use*, not for you!'

Finally, **Richard Morgan** (Victoria and Albert Museum, London) concluded the session with an outline of the situation in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The museum counts more than one million art and design objects, from which only 30.000 objects can be found online, a very low and disappointing percentage (3%). Digitization, and getting the core content of the V&A online is one of the basic objectives of the museum, but digital projects present specific challenges to museums. It is for example necessary that one is able to retrieve the collection of the V&A on Google or Google images, because 90% of the users start with Google when they want to find something.

The opinion of V&A is that not the content but the idioms have to change. It is important to evolve with the new audiences who are not in the museums. What can V&A do for them? Where are the audiences? If the V&A wants to find new audiences, they have to go to Web 2.0 platforms, such as Facebook and iGoogle, and be interoperable with them (e.g. search through catalogue via FB profile). Important characteristics of the online collections are: dynamic, interesting but also relaxing, possibility to download the pictures and share or reuse them in mashups. This often creates new creative content and engages the audience with your collection.

Recently, the V&A joined the National Museums Online Learning Project, where nine of the UK's leading museums and galleries will be combining their own online collections. The collections are available through *WebQuests* and *Creative Spaces*. A *WebQuest* is an online educational tool for use by pupils and teachers, promoting open-ended investigation to solve specific tasks. And the *Creative Spaces* concept is a social web application that will enable users to search across the museum partner collections, document how the collections have inspired their own creative work and process, and share their work and ideas with a like-minded community. It is a social network especially catering to the art world, which is part of a new wave on the net: more and more platforms emerge that cater to specific audiences.

---

<sup>2</sup> SCRAN is an online cultural collection, a charity & online learning resource base with over 360.000 images & media from museums, galleries, archives and the media. It peak serves 980.000 hits a day. SCRAN started 12 years ago and it gathers the digital collections of different cultural institutions in Scotland.