

MAKING THE CASE FOR DIGITISATION



Another summer and another trail of destruction as cyclones, floods, and bushfires destroy homes, businesses, schools, and civic buildings around the country. Thankfully, the damage to libraries has been limited this season, but that doesn't mean we can afford to let down our guard.

ALIA has been actively supporting disaster planning for cultural institutions, producing templates and guidelines, running workshops, and providing advice and support to members – and this year we occupy the chair for Blue Shield Australia, the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross.

Whenever we talk about disaster planning, digitisation of collections is something members want to discuss in more detail, and local study collections gain a special mention.

The problem most libraries and local history groups face is finding the funding to digitise their collections, and this isn't confined to small libraries. State and territory libraries are equally challenged, although the State Library of NSW had a big win last year with a \$32.6 million grant from the state government to help digitise its collection.

There is a strong case for digitisation, to help construct a funding bid. The obvious benefits are:

- An online and offsite back up in case disaster strikes – digital copies can never replace the originals, but at least the information is still available to researchers;¹
- Preserving knowledge for future generations;
- Improving easy, convenient, remote access to collections for everyone;
- Promoting our history and culture to scholars interstate and overseas;²
- The opportunity to bring collections to life, linking them

to complementary items held in other collections;

- Making collections more easily searchable and enhancing discovery;³
- Putting the whole collection on show virtually, where limitations on the physical space means only a proportion of it can be displayed at any one time in situ.

Few organisations are able to secure the funding to digitise their entire collection, it is just too big an ask. (Having said that, during the Blue Shield Australia regional disaster planning workshops last year, one North Queensland local history group's fire plan was to put the whole collection in the boot of a small car and head south.) With limited funding available, it is vital to prioritise. There are experts who can help advise you about the significance of items in your collection. This enables you to rank items according to their status as unique, useful, and important.

Digitisation is rarely a short term project and there needs to be a plan that will likely run over several years. Of course, most collections are growing all the time, and this has to be factored in to the funding and process. It is important to consider how to integrate objects that are 'born digital' and there are also the issues around copyright to consider.

The National Library, State Libraries, and universities can provide expert advice as well as a 'fee for service' arrangement to access their digitisation facilities – particularly useful if you have books, manuscripts, newspapers, and other items that benefit from having large scale equipment to hand. Other organisations, such as CAVAL, have invested in digitisation systems and offer this as a service to external groups.

The sheer scale of the task requires many pairs of hands – and eyes – and

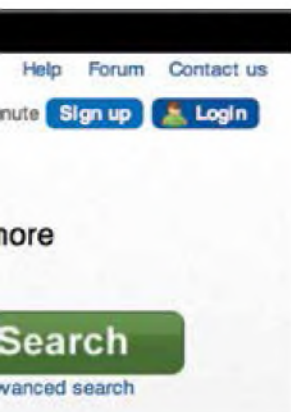
a willing cohort of volunteers is a great asset to any digitisation project. The National Library's digitisation of Australian newspapers has famously involved more than 2000 volunteers, working from home during the day, at evenings, and on weekends, to correct the errors encountered through the use of optical character recognition (OCR), which struggles sometimes with old typeset pages.

The National Library's award-winning Trove initiative, which commenced in March 2007, has already seen nearly 8.5 million pages of Australian newspapers digitised and the Trove database contains more than 331 million Australian and online resources, including books, images, newspapers, maps, music, and other content. The number of items is increasing on a daily, if not hourly, basis. Will yours be the next collection added?

1 During the Victorian bushfires in 2009, Marysville Historical Society lost all its collection. The society put out the call to people who held old photos of the area, copies of documents, artefacts, and the collection is gradually being rebuilt as a digital resource.

2 The British Library was one of the first institutions in the world to recognise the potential of new technologies to bring items which, in their physical form, require special lighting and a controlled atmosphere, into the public realm. The library created a pioneering piece of software called Turning the Pages, which enabled people to 'turn the pages' of medieval manuscripts and rare books. This software was developed at the start of the 2000s and gave a preview of the possibilities which has since been realised by mass market software.

3 The Powerhouse Museum is terrific example of how to bring static collections to life online.



Trove website
– trove.nla.gov.au

Digitisation and the copyright issue

In recent years, the message from the Australian government to libraries and archives has been clear: make your collections available online. The internet age has facilitated convenient and equitable access to a wide range of information and cultural content, and libraries are eager to make their content more accessible to the community. There are a few hurdles to be overcome for libraries to really tackle mass digitisation head on – money and staff resources being one; a stable digital format in a rapidly evolving technological environment for another; and looming in the background, copyright laws that permit mass digitisation (copying) and provision of access to content by libraries and archives.

Currently, there is no exception under Australian copyright law that readily facilitates mass digitisation. Flexible dealing, section 200AB of the Copyright Act, has some scope for digitisation, but it comes with conditions: digitisation of that content must not conflict with normal exploitation of the work by the copyright holder or unreasonably prejudice their interests, and must be a special case. What this seems to mean is that where a library is looking to make particular content available online that the copyright holder would also look to provide online (commercially-produced books, for example, transitioning from print to digital), a library won't be able to digitise under section 200AB. The 'special case' requirement also doesn't seem to lend itself to mass digitisation.

The Australian Law Reform Commission is currently undertaking an Inquiry into Copyright & the Digital Economy, and asks whether there should be some provision under copyright law to make enable mass digitisation by libraries and archives. It's a complex issue, with libraries and archives possessing a wide range of material in their collections spanning published books, AV content, government reports, community ephemera, old photographs, maps, and unpublished works. What might be a reasonable solution for commercial works may not be so reasonable for non-commercial works, and vice-versa. Any solution for mass digitisation will have to be flexible enough to account for the wide range of content in our collections, while recognising that libraries and archives serve a public interest purpose in preserving and providing access to our cultural heritage.

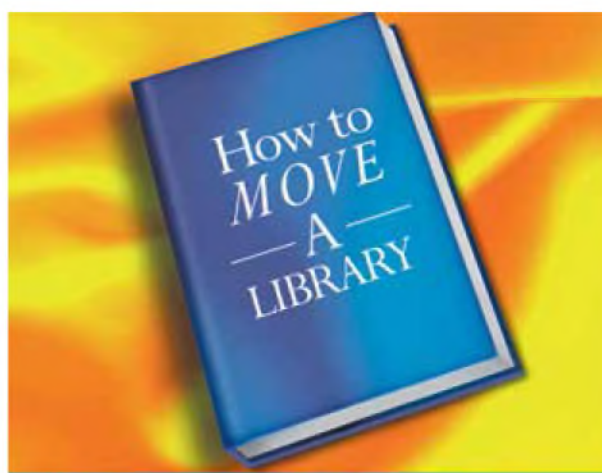
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VICTORIAN LIBTECHS ON TOUR: THE TASMANIAN EDITION

Twenty-two delegates from Victoria, NSW, and Tasmania met up on the Apple Isle recently to tour, talk, and taste. First: a visit to the LINC Tasmania facilities, which house the Allport Museum and Art Gallery, the State Library of Tasmania Reading Room, the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office History Room, and Hobart LINC. Guided by Sandra Harris and Lidia Foley, the delegates gained a fascinating insight into the operations of this unique information service. Thanks to Jo Beck who facilitated the visit.

The next day, delegates toured to the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) Library. The Manager of the Library & Numismatics Collection, Mary Lijnzaad, outlined the history of MONA and spoke about the library's amazing collection of material. MONA is a fascinating place, so be sure to visit if you are close by. We can recommend travelling to MONA from the city via the ferry. It's absolutely wonderful on a bright sunny day. Thank you Mary for allowing us to visit.

And no trip to Hobart would be complete without some time to tour Salamanca Market. The weekend was full of fascinating visits, great company, and fabulous weather. Where will we tour next? Maybe somewhere tropical? You will have to wait and see!



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