

Providing Access to Library and Archives Canada's Collection: A Multi-Pronged Digitization Strategy

National heritage institutions must find creative solutions for providing better and increased access to our collections. At Library and Archives Canada (LAC) our mandate is to provide access to the Canadian documentary heritage to people across the country, not just the fortunate few who are located in the national capital. Increasingly this means providing access to our collection through the web. To fulfill this mandate, LAC has developed a digitization strategy that is based on three approaches: (1) partnerships and collaborative arrangements; (2) In-house digitization; and finally (3) outside supply arrangements.

Providing an integrated process for digitization and access, requires that we use multiple channels. Using partnerships alone cannot guarantee that a wide selection of materials will get digitized. LAC does not have the capacity to do wide scale mass digitization, but partnerships can provide access to materials that are frequently in high demand at little to no direct cost to LAC. The last approach, outside supply arrangements can help with e-linking and indexing of record sets as well as the production and distribution of digital surrogates. The focus of this presentation will be on the challenges and issues related to partnerships and collaborative arrangements, although we will briefly touch upon the other two approaches.

Partnerships and collaborative arrangements

As cultural heritage institutions balance conflicting agendas of meeting their clients information needs and preserving their collections, collaborative arrangements can be an avenue to share some of the risks, costs and benefits of increasing access to their collections. Trying to keep up with the public demand for these materials can make collaborative arrangements very appealing, however, there are inherent challenges in working with outside organizations and integrating the fruit of the collaboration can create internal pressures as institutions deal with competing needs. Collaborative arrangements can also provide a great opportunity for organizations to re-examine their own practices and procedures, and come up with innovative ways to meet client needs.

Using as case study LAC's collaborative arrangement with Ancestry.ca, the paper will explore some of the challenges that cultural heritage institutions face in meeting demand for public access to their unique collections, and suggestions on how to approach collaborative arrangements to ensure a mutually beneficial outcome that ultimately serves the public need and provides the platform for future inspiration.

In-House Digitization

Investing resources in digitization requires a solid knowledge of the workflows involved in the task at hand. Every step of the workflow has to be examined and understood in terms of long-term repercussions: standards, best practices, preservation issues, file names, transfers, e-linking, systems. Without an in-depth understanding of the workflows involved, it is impossible to manage a large-scale in-house digitization project.

Outside Supply Arrangements

LAC will look at the outsourcing of specific types of activities in the digitization workflow, such as e-linking, indexing, or the task of reproducing certain types of works. These types of activities are not our core mandate and can be better done by outside parties.