

# Archives and Museum Informatics

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## Planning for Future Users

The Spring Issue of *Library Hi Tech* (#33) is devoted to the changing face of humanities scholarship and its implications for libraries in the 90's. This week I will participate in a two day symposium at the University of Michigan on the implications of changes in the methods of scholarly research on archives in the 21st century. Last month I attended a series of planning meetings hosted by the Singapore National Computer Board to explore integration of cultural information systems for scholarly, educational and even touristic use as part of its IT 2000 plan for "The Intelligent Island". What is this all about? Simply put, it is planning for an inevitable revolution.

The technologies of extremely high density storage, flat displays, and high speed telecommunications which are already in laboratories and development testing assure that before the end of this decade professionals and students at secondary levels and even lower will be carrying electronic notebooks serving as their personal libraries and voice, fax, and electronic mail boxes and access devices. People equipt with such devices will very rapidly become accustomed to access to multimedia information in processable forms regardless of its storage location or storage format. The implications of this are that institutions and countries which are able to provide information to such users (eg. content-providers) will profit tremendously and those which are unwilling to adjust will fail.

Some disciplines, like classical scholarship and chemical engineering, are making great strides in converting the corpus of their fields so that it is machine-readable and machine usable. Museums and archives possess the most and the best of the cultural evidence of our civilization, and if they take steps to make it available in electronic form they could greatly enrich the universe of electronic data in which future generations will work. They could also stand to generate substantial revenues from being in a position to provide remote access to their holdings. As a practical matter this is becoming much easier to do and it is exciting to see some organizations and countries making plans for the coming decade based on the assumption that to survive will mean digitizing the full range of their information resources and building mechanism to access them. By developing ten-year plans, these organizations can build towards the future without requiring new sources of support or sacrificing today's objectives.

Such forward plans are conceived to take advantage of current work, reduce on-going work loads, and employ existing standards. Standards currently exist for interchange of free text, fielded text, numeric data, still images and sounds. Therefore efforts to capture this information will be investments that can be carried forward. By capturing the information in conjunction with on-going work the institution achieves efficiencies and improves the likelihood that the data it captures will be used again (following a 90:10 rule which holds for most cvollections). Each time current work calls for handling an object, data about that object is recorded. If work calls for an image to be made or supplied, an image is digitized. If conservation is required, a decision can be made to provide a digital surrogate. Over time the database grows and reduces the overall workload. The pace of digital conversion can then increase.

David Bearman, Editor

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