

APPROACHES TO DISTRIBUTION OF FEE-FREE IMAGES: CASE STUDIES OF THREE MUSEUMS*

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1 Metropolitan Museum of Art: Working in Collaboration with ARTstor

[NOTE: This section is based on interviews with the following staff members at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on July 14-15, 2008: Doralynn Pines, Associate Director for Administration; Barbara Bridgers, General Manager for Imaging and Photography; Andrew Gessner, Chief Librarian of the Image Library; Peggy Hebard, Senior Financial Manager for Images and Publications; Billy Kwan, Associate Museum Librarian in the Image Library; Shyam Oberoi, Manager of Met Images; Julie Zeffel, Museum Librarian in the Image Library.]

In March 2007, the Metropolitan Museum of Art announced a “pioneering initiative to provide digital images to scholars at no charge.”¹ What background research, infrastructure enhancements, financial analysis, and internal discussions led to this decision?

1.1 Collections Management

The Metropolitan Museum was one of the first major museums to recognize and embrace the potential of electronic management of collections information. Working with Gallery Systems, the commercial vendor of The Museum System (TMS) software,² the museum created a fully automated inventory of objects in the textile collection that was launched simultaneously with the 1995 opening of the Antonio Ratti Textile Center. The records, many of which were accompanied by images, provided the staff and public with virtual access to all the textiles, including those rarely on view due to their fragility. With this momentum, the remaining curatorial departments were brought online one by one as separate TMS databases. While

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[†]<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

¹Metropolitan Museum of Art, “Metropolitan Museum and ARTstor Announce Pioneering Initiative to Provide Digital Images to Scholars at No Charge,” press release, March 12, 2007, available at http://www.metmuseum.org/press_room/full_release.asp?prid=%7BA113E0AD-AA4E-471B-8F04-736A21F1A70A%7D (<http://www.metmuseum.org/press_room/full_release.asp?prid=%7BA113E0AD-AA4E-471B-8F04-736A21F1A70A%7D>).

²Gallery Systems: <http://www.gallerysystems.com/default.htm> (<<http://www.gallerysystems.com/default.htm>>).

this aided management of the individual curatorial collections, the goal of a museum-wide database was unfulfilled. Rather than attempting to merge all the rich but non-standardized information from the separate curatorial TMS databases, the Met ultimately created one additional database and mapped into it only basic descriptive information from the sixteen TMS databases. This centralized collections database represents the collections information that the respective curatorial departments have approved for public access.

1.2 Digital Imaging

1.2.1 Investment in Digital Technology

At the same time the museum was investing in collections management, it was also developing its capacity for digital imaging, thereby transforming the capture, management, and storage of object, event, education, installation, construction, and renovation photography. For over twelve years the museum has employed digital imaging consultants to steer planning and equipment purchase and to train and support staff.³ This investment in outside expertise has helped alert the staff to industry trends and developments that may have an impact on imaging operations.

Outfitting each of twelve photographers with a digital studio requires a capital expenditure of \$150,000–\$165,000, but museum staff members are convinced about the return on investment. Using a film camera formerly took up to four days to photograph a three-dimensional object. Today, using a digital camera, the same work can be shot in less than one day.⁴

1.2.2 Increased Photographic Documentation of the Collection

It is not uncommon for less than 20 percent of any museum collection to be photographed, although museum professionals agree that object photography is a critical means of documenting and publishing the collection. The photographers at the Metropolitan Museum are now producing six to ten photographs of three-dimensional objects per day and an even greater number of photographs of two-dimensional works. This dramatic rise in efficiency helps balance the cost of digital equipment and results in increased photographic documentation of the museum's treasures.

1.2.3 Reduced Production Costs

The price of film and processing for analog photography continues to rise, but direct digital capture eliminates most of those expenses. Furthermore, some pre-press costs associated with publication are reduced or eliminated when working digitally.⁵

³Center for Digital Imaging, Inc.: <http://www.cdiny.com/> (<<http://www.cdiny.com/>>).

⁴Photography of a three-dimensional object is, in itself, an art form. First, a schedule is established for moving the object to the studio. Working with curatorial staff, a photographer plans what views, artist signatures, and maker marks should be documented. Next, lighting decisions are made with a critical eye to highlighting contours and details of each view of the object. In a pre-digital time, instant-developing Polaroid film was used for initial capture, and frequently that temporary photograph was delivered to the curator for comment. The official photography began after adjustments of angle and lighting were made. Each view was captured at three different light settings and shutter speeds through a process called bracketing. These films were sent out for overnight developing, during which time the object could not be moved from the studio. The morning delivery from UPS was much anticipated by the photographer so the previous day's work could be evaluated and the final photography begun. Most orders, internal or external, request only one photographic format, but the labor involved in moving the object to the studio and creating the set-up dictated the common practice of fully documenting the object with three film formats: color transparency, black-and-white negative, and 35mm slide. Each format required a different camera. Each view of the object required these same steps. As a result, one three-dimensional object could take up to four days to photograph. In the digital environment, after the view and lighting are decided, the photographer captures the shot with one digital camera. That image can be downloaded to a computer screen for viewing, then reviewed immediately with curatorial staff. Derivatives of that image in different resolutions or in black-and-white can all be created during a post- production process. With the advent of digital imaging, multiple views of a three-dimensional sculpture can be captured and approved in two to three hours rather than four days. In addition, the burden of labeling and housing fragile color transparencies, black-and-white negatives, and slides is eliminated.

⁵In analog production, the printer created color separations and printed proofs. These were then submitted to the editorial staff for review. Frequently the calibration of the press resulted in an incorrect rendering of the object's actual colors, and new

1.2.4 Retrospective Scanning

Simultaneous with the conversion of analog to digital capture, staff initiated a retrospective scanning operation in the image studio. Selection criteria prioritized photography of works being included in the Collection Database and the highly acclaimed Timeline of the History of Art portions of the museum's website.⁶ Photography for these works had the added advantage of descriptive captions recently written and/or vetted by the curatorial staff. Scanning was also undertaken on photography slated for publication in upcoming collection and special exhibition catalogs. The most recently produced color transparencies were favored over older photography in hopes of avoiding the need for extensive digital touch-up of film marred by particulates and scratches. In between color scanning projects, slow but steady progress has been made on converting the one-hundred-year-old archive of black-and-white negatives to digital format. The 35mm film is not being scanned at this time.

1.2.5 Benefits of the Imaging Initiative

The digital imaging initiative benefits the museum in multiple ways. The number of digital images available for the website, publications, and internal use has been dramatically increased. It ensures access to images on film that celebrate the museum's own history, a story covering almost 140 years and told by the visual documentation of people, events, gallery installations, special exhibitions, building construction and renovation, and educational programs. Digital surrogates reduce the handling of negatives and transparencies that have been moved to climate-controlled cold storage, thus increasing the longevity of these unique film masters.

1.3 Met Images Project

Internal discussions about the Met Images project began long in advance of the official launch in fall 2007. Planning involved a team of staff members from Information Systems and Technology, the Photograph Studio, the Image Library, and curatorial departments working together to define and implement an enterprise-wide system for managing digital images. Shyam Oberoi, formerly manager of the Met Images project, describes the goals as twofold:

- Support the museum's core mission to research, document and educate through an essential investment in the museum's assets and infrastructure.
- Strengthen the quality and quantity of available object images and cataloging information so that images could be quickly located and processed for distribution and licensing to both internal and external customers.⁷

Initially, a third goal had been identified— increasing revenue streams for licensing of museum images. However, museum administration provided early feedback that this did not occur, urging that the staff team focus less on revenue generation and more on the value of preservation of, and access to, the digital assets being created throughout the institution.

separations and proofs were required. This outsourced activity was a costly and time-consuming component of any image-rich publication. In the digital era, this pre-press work is done in-house on digital cameras, computer screens, and printers that are carefully calibrated and then frequently recalibrated. The raw digital file is meticulously edited and a new, color-corrected file is saved for production purposes. That file is then sent to the outside printer. The past practice of sending a guide print that accurately presents the object's colors is increasingly eliminated as color calibration software has improved.

⁶Metropolitan Museum of Art, Works of Art Collection Database is available at http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/index.aspx?dep=0&vw=1 (<http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/index.aspx?dep=0&vw=1>). Timeline of Art History is available at <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/splash.htm> (<<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/splash.htm>>).

⁷Oberoi, "Doing the DAM."

Once Met Images was approved, work began on selecting the appropriate digital asset management system (DAMS). Interwoven's MediaBin⁸ was ultimately chosen as the system that could:

- Support centralized management of digital media.
- Scale as a digital archive for object images and, ultimately, the museum's historic photography, images from archaeological expeditions, and other rich media such as audio and video.
- Provide security consistent with role-based profiles already implemented across the Metropolitan's other IT applications.
- Generate image derivatives dynamically to reduce storage of duplicate images of varying resolutions.
- Integrate well with existing museum applications (both TMS and MediaBin run on SQL Servers).

Staff determined that MediaBin would be the repository for images, including data about the images and rights information; and object information, including artist name, nationality, life dates, object basic description, title, date, materials, and dimensions.

Certain work-arounds to MediaBin's data structure were required to support the complex data relationships inherent in TMS, such as repeatable fields and whole/part relationships. TMS object information was ultimately exported into a data file that contains a non-relational, flattened record for each museum object. Nightly uploads from the data file to MediaBin were scheduled to capture edits to existing records and addition of new acquisitions. Loading the digital images into MediaBin was also complex. The photography studio had approximately four thousand CDs and DVDs containing two hundred thousand images. Accompanying spreadsheets provided the link between the images and the objects, but the task was laborious because the data lacked consistency. After the data and image files were loaded in MediaBin, a script was run to establish the association between images and records from the TMS extract data file. This simplified explanation belies the months of planning, learning, data clean-up, and collaboration that led to the operational launch of MediaBin at the Metropolitan Museum in fall 2007.

1.4 Commercial Image Licensing

As the staff at the Metropolitan Museum planned the centralized storage and management of its growing collection of digital images, they were also considering new opportunities for licensing images. Exploring ways to derive more income from commercial licensing led staff to examine the options offered by third-party image distributors. One successful model was the photographic agency of the Réunion des musées nationaux⁹ (RMN) that has an online image base of nearly 450,000 images of works of art from French regional and national museums and other European museums available for both educational and commercial licensing. Colleagues at the Victoria & Albert Museum also met with Met staff to talk about their growing image licensing initiative. After considerable deliberation and study, the Metropolitan Museum of Art decided to outsource commercial licensing, announcing an agreement with Art Resource¹⁰ in January 2007. Subsequently, additional distributors have been added: Scholars Resource,¹¹ Scala,¹² and RMN. The images and information are now exported from MediaBin and sent several times per year to the distributors.

⁸Interwoven MediaBin: <http://www.interwoven.com/components/page.jsp?topic=PRODUCT::MEDIABIN> (<<http://www.interwoven.com/components/page.jsp?topic=PRODUCT::MEDIABIN>>).

⁹Réunion des musées nationaux: <http://www.photo.rmn.fr/c/htm/home.aspx?FR=T> (<<http://www.photo.rmn.fr/c/htm/home.aspx?FR=T>>).

¹⁰Art Resource: <http://www.artres.com/c/htm/Home.aspx> (<<http://www.artres.com/c/htm/Home.aspx>>).

¹¹Scholars Resource: <http://www.scholarsresource.com/> (<<http://www.scholarsresource.com/>>).

¹²Scala: <http://www.scalarchives.com/web/index.asp> (<<http://www.scalarchives.com/web/index.asp>>). (Note: Scala is a sub-license of the Metropolitan Museum's license with Scholars Resource.)

1.5 Scholarly Image Licensing

Traditionally, museums charge less to supply an image (and the permission to reproduce it) for scholarly publication than for commercial publication or product development. The Metropolitan Museum had different rates for commercial and non-commercial licensing, and the unofficial policy was to supply fee-free images to Metropolitan curators writing for non-Metropolitan publications, to professional colleagues at other institutions, and to former Met colleagues. Museum staff wanted to formalize this practice by making fee-free images more widely available for scholarly publication.

Doralynn Pines, Associate Director for Administration at the Metropolitan Museum, describes some of the factors influencing this decision:

- *Change in Internal Environment:* Previously, curators had access to the TMS records for their collection only. With the advent of the DAMS, a new era of sharing was coming; access to basic information about objects would be museum-wide. There was growing acceptance of digital over analog photography and greater use of images by staff throughout their daily work.
- *Perceived Loss of Control over Museum Content:* The time of controlling museum information, text or images, was over. Visitors were producing podcasts of museum visits and thousands of images of Metropolitan Museum objects were already on Google Images. The inferior quality of images in circulation troubled the Metropolitan Museum.
- *Implementation of Digital Asset Management:* Implementing MediaBin enabled the first-ever centralized management of information and images about the museum's collections. It also opened new possibilities for the sharing of that information externally.
- *Criticism of Scholarly Community:* Museums were being criticized by scholars and publishers for charging fees for permissions to publish images when the underlying work was in the public domain. However, the Metropolitan was already frequently waiving the fee for supplying the image and granting permission for scholarly publication. The time seemed right to change practice into official policy, get appropriate credit for taking this bold step, and, by example, encourage other museums to follow suit.
- *Reinforcement of Museum Mission:* Most important, "it simply is the right thing to do," stated Pines.

1.6 Metropolitan Museum of Art and ARTstor Partnership

It is one thing to decide to provide fee-free images for scholarly publication, and quite another to commit staff time, and therefore dollars, to delivering those images. Clearly, the Met needed a partner in this venture and turned to ARTstor.¹³ The museum had been one of the early contributors to the ARTstor Digital Library when its AMICO records were released in 2005. It seemed natural for the museum to turn to ARTstor to build a delivery mechanism for the Metropolitan's publication-quality images for use in scholarly publications. ARTstor readily embraced the idea and the partnership was launched. An ongoing stream of high-resolution images would thus be made available for use in the K-12 schools, colleges, universities, and museums that license ARTstor, and images that could be used in publications were made available for both users and non-users of the ARTstor Digital Library. Scholars would be well served by the ability to obtain publication-quality images, without fees, that could be downloaded immediately.

¹³ARTstor is the non-profit organization that provides nearly one million images in the areas of art, architecture, the humanities, and social sciences with a set of tools to view, present, and manage images to users at over one thousand education, museum, and research institutions. <http://artstor.org> (<<http://artstor.org/>>).

1.6.1 Images for Academic Publishing

Working closely with the staff at the Metropolitan, ARTstor began to build Images for Academic Publishing (IAP) to meet the museum's specifications.¹⁴ The project comprised the preparation of image assets and corresponding metadata, inclusion of these assets in the ARTstor Digital Library, and the development of a new protocol for user download of publication-quality images.

1.6.2 Data Preparation

The Metropolitan Museum staff decided to express information about their objects using CDWA-Lite,¹⁵ an XML data schema developed as a joint effort between the J. Paul Getty Trust,¹⁶ RLG Programs/OCLC,¹⁷ and ARTstor for describing cultural works and their visual surrogates. CDWA-Lite, based on a small subset of fields from the Categories for the Description of Works of Art (CDWA), represents the minimal set of data fields deemed necessary for describing cultural works and their visual surrogates in preparation for resource discovery in online environments. CDWA-Lite is intentionally "light" to lower the barrier for cultural heritage institutions wishing to share content. The CDWA-Lite schema is designed to be used with the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH)¹⁸ that facilitates the sharing and updating of information between the provider and the distributor. Once MediaBin was fully implemented, the Metropolitan Museum staff and ARTstor began sharing the information formatted according to CDWA-Lite and harvested in a server-to-server exchange.¹⁹ Depending on number and file size, the high-resolution images can be retrieved from an FTP server or sent by overnight mail on a high-density drive.

1.6.3 Functionality

ARTstor's Images for Academic Publishing was launched in March 2007 and functions as follows:

- An IAP logo appears under the thumbnail images contributed by the Metropolitan Museum to identify those images available for high-resolution downloading.
- After clicking an "IAP" image, users receive a message alerting them to a new "space" governed by the terms and conditions of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, not ARTstor.
- Terms and Conditions of Use: educational use and scholarly publications are permitted; The Metropolitan Museum of Art decided that the publication run must be two thousand or fewer; no more than ten images per thirty-day period are allowed for any user;²⁰ electronic use is permitted on educational websites that do not accept advertisements and commercial subscription websites with no more than two thousand subscribers.²¹
- An electronic form appears requesting some information that the Metropolitan Museum requires and some that is requested but not required:
 - Contact information: name, email address, institutional affiliation, title/role (all required).
 - Publication information: author, title, periodical title, intended date of publication, language of publication, regional distribution, publication format (print, electronic, or video)(all requested, not required).²²

¹⁴ARTstor Images for Academic Publishing: <http://www.artstor.org/what-is-artstor/w- html/services-publishing.shtml> (<<http://www.artstor.org/what-is-artstor/w- html/services-publishing.shtml>>).

¹⁵CDWA-Lite: http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/standards/cdwa/cdwalite.html (<http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/standards/cdwa/cdwalite.html>).

¹⁶J. Paul Getty Trust: <http://www.getty.edu/> (<<http://www.getty.edu/>>).

¹⁷OCLC/RLG: <http://www.oclc.org/us/en/default.htm> (<<http://www.oclc.org/us/en/default.htm>>).

¹⁸Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting: <http://www.openarchives.org/pmh/> (<<http://www.openarchives.org/pmh/>>).

¹⁹As of December 2008, harvesting data from the Metropolitan Museum to ARTstor was temporarily suspended due to errors in object content, problems arising from group shot photography, and other data anomalies.

²⁰This limitation is under review by the Metropolitan Museum.

²¹Metropolitan Museum IAP Terms and Conditions for Use: <http://www.artstor.org/what-is-artstor/w- pdf/terms-conditions-iap.pdf> (<<http://www.artstor.org/what-is-artstor/w- pdf/terms-conditions-iap.pdf>>).

²²The Metropolitan Museum is reviewing what information should be required on the ARTstor IAP form.

- File size: users select size of image for downloading, either 5MB, 10MB, or 20MB (all required).
- The image can then be immediately downloaded and saved.

1.7 Metropolitan Museum of Art Conclusion

Initially, IAP was only available to scholars and curators at institutions that license ARTstor, but after several months it was extended to any scholar who contacts either ARTstor or the Image Library at the Metropolitan to obtain a password to access IAP images. As of September 2008, approximately 5,600 images had been contributed to IAP by the Metropolitan Museum. Although this process is under review, the current plan results in additional deliveries of one thousand to two thousand images every four months. The Metropolitan's Image Library staff monitor the ARTstor-generated usage reports that contain the raw information about users and intended uses.²³

During the first year of service, 645 images were downloaded from IAP for scholarly publications. Staff members note that the benefits of working with ARTstor include:

- *Free Distribution of Museum Images:* There is no charge to museums for contributing images for distribution in the ARTstor Digital Library and Images for Academic Publishing.
- *Staff Efficiencies:* There is a reduction in the time Metropolitan Museum staff members spend filling orders for scholarly publication.
- *Improved Service to Scholars:* Scholars can select and immediately download images free of reproduction charges.

2 Victoria & Albert Museum: Delivering Images through the Museum's Website

[NOTE: This section is based on a September 15, 2008, telephone interview with Ian Blatchford, Deputy Director, and email exchanges with Alan Seal, Head of Records and Collections Services, Victoria & Albert Museum.]

2.1 Building the Infrastructure

The task of implementing electronic recordkeeping at the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) for its collections, numbering nearly 4.6 million objects, represents ongoing work that began more than two decades ago. By the late 1990s, three systems were in place: the Collections Information System (CIS) for inventory control, cataloging, and accessioning museum objects; the Photo Cataloguing System for information about analog and digital photographs of objects, books, events, gallery installations, and staff; and the Image Arena, in which medium-resolution images were stored and made accessible to the other two systems. All three resources were used to extract the data and images that originally fed the collections area of the V&A website. By 2005, the museum began investigating digital asset management systems (DAMS) to replace the Photo Cataloguing system, and ultimately implemented their DAMS, called Vadar (V&A Digital Asset Repository), during 2006. A storage area network, also brought online in 2006, greatly increased storage capacity and now allows the museum to access the high-resolution master images online rather than offline from an ever-expanding collection of CD-ROMs. Since putting the masters onto their storage area network, they no longer save copies on CD-ROM, even for archival purposes. A back-up routine of the online files is in place both for recovery in the event of disk failure and for business continuity.

²³In Spring 2009 Bryn Mawr College contributed 3,900 images of Classical and Near Eastern archaeology to ARTstor to be available for scholarly publishing through Images for Academic Publishing: <http://www.artstor.org/what-is-artstor/w-html/col-bryn-mawr-melli.shtml> (<<http://www.artstor.org/what-is-artstor/w-html/col-bryn-mawr-melli.shtml>>).

2.2 Data Standards

As the technical infrastructure was growing, staff were also considering the best ways to prepare and openly share data and images on the museum's website and possibly on other nonprofit educational websites. They plan to support data harvesting giving aggregators a choice of Dublin Core, CDWA-Lite or PND S²⁴ file formats, all of which will be generated on the fly from the database outside the firewall. The V&A has already implemented a Universal Resource Indicator (URI) link in the V&A records so the distributor's site can lead the user back to the V&A website to view the fuller catalog information. This approach will allow the museum to avoid the synchronization problems of preparing different record formats for each distributor. The open-source routines could dramatically simplify contributing both new records and edits to existing records. In addition, the V&A is on the international team of museums working in partnership with OCLC/RLG Programs on the Museum Data Exchange Project, which is testing data exchange processes using the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH).²⁵

2.3 Digital Imaging

New digital photography is being done in concert with the ongoing program of capital improvements at the museum. The renovation of the William and Judith Bollinger Jewellery Gallery, which opened in spring 2008, afforded the opportunity to fund photography of 3,500 objects. Likewise, 35,000 objects from the encyclopedic and global ceramics collection are being photographed during the current redevelopment of the Ceramics Galleries that will be opened in September 2009. This program of thorough photographic documentation is a direct by-product of the refurbishment of galleries. In each case, it anticipates the worldwide scholarly attention that is focused on the museum as collections, long off-view, are returned to the public eye in freshly interpreted, elegantly presented spaces.

2.4 Impetus for Supplying Fee-free Images

In December 2006, the V&A announced that it would drop charges for the reproduction of images in scholarly books and magazines, a decision the *Art Newspaper* heralded as "a move which could transform art publishing?"²⁶ V&A Deputy Director Ian Blatchford explained that, although the government encourages museums to provide this public access to collections, it is not a funded mandate. He described, instead, the internal factors leading to this policy:

- *Revenue*: Many museums fail to examine the rights and licensing operation to compare their licensing revenue against the actual cost of service provision. The V&A, however, has undertaken such an internal review and arrived at a highly important finding: **The revenue earned from licensing for scholarly publication was insignificant compared to licensing for commercial use.**
- *Branding*: One factor was the desire to create stronger V&A branding. Many museums have great collections, but the museum felt that if more people could easily access high-quality images of V&A objects, there would be a greater understanding that the museum is the world's preeminent place for the decorative and applied arts.

²⁴PND S DCAP stands for the People's Network Discovery Service Dublin Core Application Profile used to describe resources being made available via the UK Museums, Libraries, Archives Council's (MLA) People's Discovery Network Service (PND S). Content providers to the PND S will expose metadata about their content using this application profile and the OAI-PMH: <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/metadata/pns/pndsdcap/> (<<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/metadata/pns/pndsdcap/>>).

²⁵Museum Data Exchange Project, funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. See: <http://www.oclc.org/programs/ourwork/collectivecoll/sharecoll/museumdata.htm> (<<http://www.oclc.org/programs/ourwork/collectivecoll/sharecoll/museumdata.htm>>).

²⁶Martin Bailey, "V&A to scrap academic reproduction fees," *Art Newspaper*, January 12, 2006, 175.

- *Research*: The curators of the V&A are actively engaged in scholarly writing. They have a deep understanding of the impediments museums place on obtaining high-resolution images for scholarly publishing and were, therefore, supportive of their own institution's lowering the barrier to acquiring images.
- *Image Access*: Access to images has been transformed for the museum's actual and virtual visitors. People photograph in the V&A galleries, scan images from books, and "right-click" images from the V&A website. Ian Blatchford says, "Museums that are not loosening up on the provision of images are in a fantasy world. The images are out there already; why not ensure easy access to high-quality images and information?"
- *Leadership*: V&A Director Mark Jones's personal passion for making collections available was the starting point. He had stressed that there is a public benefit in museums sharing the collections they hold in trust for the nation, and he feels strongly that not making them easily available is simply unacceptable. Furthermore, the Board of Trustees was completely behind the decision. Both Director and Board understand that visits to the website, which continue to grow annually, provide new ways for the public to experience the collections. They also hoped that delivering free images for scholarship might encourage other museums to follow their lead.

2.5 Delivery Mechanism

The V&A decided to integrate the delivery of high-resolution images for scholarly publishing into the "Collections" area of its website. The "Collections" database includes thirty thousand works represented by more than fifty thousand images and is expected to grow by about twenty thousand images per year. In addition to simple and advanced searching options, the user finds explanations on the website of three ways to obtain images:

- *Standard Web Image*: Free, web-sized images can be downloaded by right-clicking.
- *High-Resolution Image*: Free, high-resolution images are available for "privileged usage," defined as academic/educational/scholarly publications; scholarly journals; student theses; private study and research; critical editorial use; charity, society, and trust newsletters. The user must agree to the Terms and Conditions of Use and register his/her email address to set up an account. Up to thirty images can be requested per order (this is a functional constraint only; users can place multiple orders). The user is sent a separate email message with a link to the site where the images are available for downloading.
- *Commercial Usage*: Commercial users are directed to V&A Images to discuss individual projects and obtain high-resolution images.

At the same time that the museum is foregoing licensing income from scholarly publishing, it is very actively marketing commercial use of images. These include filming at the V&A, licensing short educational films produced by the museum, photo-shoots, commissioned photography, and a customized high-quality print service.

2.6 Victoria & Albert Museum Conclusion

During the first year of the fee-free image service there has been "no collapse in the finances of the Picture Library; indeed, the results of providing images without charge for scholarly publishing have been completely neutral with regard to the bottom line." Only about twenty people have downloaded as many as two hundred images during the year, which is well within the terms and conditions of use established by the museum.

In the future, upgrades to the web application will enable the museum to track the download frequency of individual images and to study, over time, the way in which this growing body of images is used. "We care about branding; if people see our content online and realize the V&A is a great place to visit, we win."

3 Smithsonian Institution: Delivering Images through The Commons on Flickr

[NOTE: This case study is based on a document prepared by the Smithsonian Institution and sent to the author in October 2008, and a telephone conference on October 9, 2008, with Anne Van Camp, Archivist, Smithsonian Institution, and Katherine Spiess, Director, Central Digitization Office.]

In June 2008, the Smithsonian Institution²⁷ released nine hundred public domain images in The Commons on Flickr.²⁸ By November 2008, the number had grown to over two thousand. The images vary in file size, but the largest are suitable for publication. How and why did the Smithsonian Institution decide to become a member of Flickr, a popular and commercial photo-sharing website? Does The Commons provide a viable delivery mechanism of images for scholarly publication?

3.1 Background

The Smithsonian Institution (SI) is a federated institution comprised of nineteen museums, nine research centers, and the National Zoo, all of which have photographic holdings in digital and analog formats. The estimated thirteen million images in the Smithsonian photographic collections have historic, artistic, and scientific import. They also document the history of photographic processes and techniques.

One strategic goal of the SI is to unite the collections virtually in a digital asset management system. A pan-institutional assessment of photographic holdings is needed to establish collection priorities and determine the resources needed to undertake a unified, large-scale digitization, cataloging, and access program. In the absence of such an assessment, the individual SI units have developed separate websites to present whatever fraction of their photographic collections have been digitized and cataloged in sufficient depth to support discovery and research.

Against this backdrop, the Smithsonian Photography Initiative (SPI) was established in 2001.²⁹ It serves as a central, web-based programming unit designed to stimulate dialogue about the cultural impact of photography with new and existing Smithsonian audiences. Organized as a series of integrated programs, the website *Click! photography changes everything*³⁰ invites the public to consider ways in which photography enables people to see, experience, and interact with the world. Although the Search Images feature of the website presents a relatively small percentage of art, science, culture, and history images available in each of the Smithsonian's units, it does present the only pan-institutional image cross-section. SPI does not provide sales or licensing services; instead it redirects web visitors via links to the websites of the SI units, which each manage their own images and content. There is no consistent policy regarding licensing fees across the units of the Smithsonian Institution, and some work with third-party licensing agencies such as Corbis and Art Resource.

At the same time the Smithsonian Photography Initiative was launched, Smithsonian Images³¹ was created as a pilot web program with the goals of using credit cards for e-commerce and increasing visibility and access to its online digital images. Fees charged for non-commercial use were designated for recovery of

²⁷Smithsonian Institution: <http://www.si.edu/> (<<http://www.si.edu/>>).

²⁸The Commons on Flickr was launched on January 16, 2008, as a pilot project with the Library of Congress. The announcement explained, "There are two main aims to The Commons project, starting with the pilot: firstly, to increase exposure to the amazing content currently held in the public collections of civic institutions around the world, and secondly, to facilitate the collection of general knowledge about these collections, with the hope that this information can feed back into the catalogs, making them richer and easier to search." <http://blog.flickr.net/en/2008/01/16/many-hands-make-light-work/> (<<http://blog.flickr.net/en/2008/01/16/many-hands-make-light-work/>>). Information about the public collections currently available in The Commons is available at: <http://flickr.com/commons> (<<http://flickr.com/commons>>).

²⁹Smithsonian Photographic Initiative: <http://photography.si.edu/ProjectHistory.aspx> (<<http://photography.si.edu/ProjectHistory.aspx>>).

³⁰The Smithsonian Institution explains that "Click! photography changes everything" is a collection of essays and stories by experts (<<http://click.si.edu/Contributors.aspx>>) who discuss how photography shapes our culture and our lives. [It explores] how photography changes Who We Are (<<http://click.si.edu/Theme.aspx?theme=1>>), What We Do (<<http://click.si.edu/Theme.aspx?theme=5>>), What We See (<<http://click.si.edu/Theme.aspx?theme=3>>), Where We Go (<<http://click.si.edu/Theme.aspx?theme=2>>), What We Want (<<http://click.si.edu/Theme.aspx?theme=4>>) and What We Remember (<<http://click.si.edu/Theme.aspx?theme=6>>)." <http://click.si.edu/> (<<http://click.si.edu/>>).

³¹Smithsonian Images: http://smithsonianimages.si.edu/siphoto/siphoto.portal?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=content&contentpath=about.html (<http://smithsonianimages.si.edu/siphoto/siphoto.portal?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=content&contentpath=about.html>).

distribution costs rather than to generate profit for the Institution. From its inception, Smithsonian Images has permitted free download of digital images at a non-publication resolution for educational, scholarly and personal use under the terms of “fair use.”

Early in 2007, the Smithsonian Institution’s Digitization Steering Committee issued a report with recommendations about the resources and infrastructure needed to create, manage, provide access to, and use the Institution’s digital assets to effectively meet the needs of real and virtual visitors. In April 2007, the Smithsonian met with Library of Congress staff to discuss technology infrastructure requirements to support digitization and various procedural considerations, including intellectual property rights. The Smithsonian Digital Media Use Committee was formed in July 2007 to create a new pan-institutional policy reflecting current technologies and SI’s commitment to providing broad access to digital assets in a manner consistent with its legal and stewardship responsibilities.

3.2 Barriers to Making Images Available Free of Charge

Although the Smithsonian Institution seeks to increase access for educational and research purposes, it cites the following reasons for not making images available free of charge for scholarly publishing:

- *Cost of Collections Management and Documentation:* Tens of thousands of images, analog and digital, in the separate SI collections need research to verify or improve their descriptive information. In addition, there is no single digital asset management system (DAMS) for storing high-resolution images and associated cataloging in one location. The SI units believe that revenue from image sales is needed to recoup some of the costs necessary to improve collections documentation and implement a DAMS.
- *Cost of Rights Research:* Smithsonian staff members take their stewardship responsibilities seriously and are meticulous in verifying that every image released has “no known restrictions.” To do so, they must consult both manual and automated collections documentation systems, a labor-intensive and therefore costly undertaking, given the massive size of the SI photographic collections.

3.3 Smithsonian Institution Joins The Commons on Flickr

In January 2008, the Library of Congress announced a new pilot project launched with Flickr that was designed to:

help address at least two major challenges: how to ensure better and better access to our collections, and how to ensure that we have the best possible information about those collections for the benefit of researchers and posterity. . . . 3,000 photos from two of our most popular collections are being made available on our new Flickr page³², to include only images for which no copyright restrictions are known to exist. . . . We want people to tag, comment and make notes on the images, just like any other Flickr photo, which will benefit not only the community but also the collections themselves. . . . We’re also very excited that, as part of this pilot, Flickr has created a new publication model for publicly held photographic collections called The Commons³³. Flickr hopes, as do we, that the project will eventually capture the imagination and involvement of other public institutions, as well.³⁴

Staff at the Smithsonian Institution were meeting with Library of Congress staff about digital issues during 2007 and early 2008. The early success of the LC/Flickr pilot helped convince Smithsonian units

³²http://www.flickr.com/photos/library_of_congress/

³³<http://www.flickr.com/commons>

³⁴Library of Congress Blog, January 16, 2008. <http://www.loc.gov/blog/?p=233> (<<http://www.loc.gov/blog/?p=233>>).

to launch their own Flickr project.³⁵ They formed a core team that drew its members from the SI library, archives and museum communities, central programmatic units that support public programs, and from the Office of the Chief Information Office. In February 2008, the group issued a call to the Smithsonian community for digital images to be used in the Flickr project with a goal of providing approximately two thousand digital photographic images from a variety of collections throughout the Institution.

In deciding to move forward with participation in The Commons, the Smithsonian defined the following goals for the project:

- Increase public knowledge of, and access to, the Smithsonian’s digital collections, programs, expertise, and other resources.
 - Use photographic collections to draw new visitors to the Smithsonian, those who might not otherwise come to SI museums, libraries, and archives in pursuit of their interests.
- Develop a Smithsonian online community by reaching out to audiences.
 - Explore the interests of “digital natives” who use social networking sites in ways the SI has yet to understand.
- Improve public outreach by learning more about SI audiences through social tagging, public comments, and the resulting social dialogue.
 - Gather information about the interests of SI audiences and enhance the documentation and interpretation of its collections using the knowledge, perspectives, and experiences of these audiences.

On June 16, 2008, nine hundred images were uploaded from the Smithsonian Institution to The Commons; by October 2008, the number of SI images available in The Commons had doubled. All the images in The Commons can be viewed and downloaded at five different resolutions; the original image, contributed by the owning institution, determines the size of the largest file.³⁶ In the case of the Smithsonian, there is no pan-institutional policy about what size the “original” image should be; each SI unit makes that determination independently. As a result, only a portion of the SI images in The Commons are, at this time, of adequate size to download for publication. Recognizing that Flickr is commercial, and therefore not a trusted website in many educational environments, SI has added the same images to the Smithsonian Photography Initiative website, which is educational, trusted, and branded with the Smithsonian Institution imprimatur. Each SI image appearing on a Flickr Commons page links back to the same image on the SPI website, *Click*.³⁷

3.4 Copyright and The Commons

The Smithsonian Institution researches images contributed to The Commons, releasing those they believe have no known legal restrictions. This includes copyright and other legal restrictions, such as those required by the donor of the image or the underlying object. The images are flagged with the rights statement, “No known copyright restrictions,” and viewed on The Commons with two associated links. One link leads to the generic Flickr rights page that reminds users to conduct “an independent analysis of applicable law before proceeding with a particular new use.”³⁸ The other link takes the user to the explicit rights statement for

³⁵Public.Resource.Org (<<http://public.resource.org/>>) (<http://public.resource.org/> (<<http://public.resource.org/>>)) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the creation of public works projects on the Internet. It focuses on increasing the flow of information in both directions between people and the U.S. government. On May 19, 2007, Public.Resource.Org posted over six thousand images harvested from the Smithsonian Institution’s Images website to the commercial site Flickr, expressing the hope that their action would cause the Smithsonian Institution to broaden its image distribution policies. In fact, the Smithsonian Institution was already working on ways to provide better access to its rich photographic collections, as it demonstrated in June 2008.

³⁶The Smithsonian Institution registered for a Flickr “Pro” account, which costs \$24.95 per year and allows the upload of images up to 20MB each. Flickr officially supports JPEGs, non-animated GIFs, and PNGs. TIFFs can be uploaded as well, but they are automatically converted and stored as JPEGs.

³⁷See Search Images section of Click. <http://photography.si.edu/SearchImage.aspx> (<<http://photography.si.edu/SearchImage.aspx>>).

³⁸See usage page of The Commons, <http://www.flickr.com/commons/usage/> (<<http://www.flickr.com/commons/usage/>>).

the image provided by the contributing institution. In the case of the SI images, the link takes the user to the “Copyright: Terms and Conditions” page of the Smithsonian Institution website to learn:

*Anyone wishing to use any of these files or images for commercial use, publication, or any purpose other than fair use as defined by law, must request and receive prior written permission from the Smithsonian Institution. Permission for such use is granted on a case-by-case basis at the sole discretion of Smithsonian’s Office of Product Development and Licensing. A usage fee may be assessed depending on the type and nature of the proposed use.*³⁹

At present, this leads to some confusion for users, as the statement suggests that some of the SI content on The Commons may be by protected by usage restrictions. SI is aware of this discrepancy and is working to develop new, more accurate language.

3.5 Smithsonian Institution Conclusion

The Smithsonian Institution joined The Commons on Flickr to make its content more widely accessible. After the first four months, it found that Flickr definitely increased exposure of their images to more individuals. “Portraits of Scientists,” a set of images of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scientists and inventors, has been on the Smithsonian Libraries’ website since 2003. In the first three months the set was on The Commons, the images received nearly as many visits as during the previous five years on the Smithsonian site. SI is not currently using The Commons to delivery fee-free, high-resolution images for scholarly publication, but may consider doing so in the future.

The Commons is a space for public institutions to share images of their collections. “Pro” membership in The Commons permits museums to upload an unlimited number of images as large as twenty megabytes in size. The Smithsonian Institution’s goal in providing images to The Commons is to expand access to its photographic collections, not explicitly to supply high-resolution images for scholarly publication. Other museums, however, may find that The Commons provides a cost-effective delivery mechanism of fee-free images for scholarly publication.

³⁹<http://www.si.edu/copyright/>.