

INTRODUCTION

Collections digitization is expensive. Librarians hope for high returns—many users, many years of use—from these investments, yet the digital products created from preservation and access initiatives are inherently fragile, requiring ongoing attention and care to remain usable.

As more cultural heritage institutions move beyond experimenting with digitization technologies to incorporating digitization into their daily operations, funders, standards bodies, library administrators, and project managers are increasingly concerned about sustainability, a key attribute of good digital collections.

The underlying premise of this report is: Good collections emerge from good programs. Program policies and services are emphasized over technology, which will change frequently. Tradeoffs between operational costs (staffing, training, equipment, purchased services) and quality of digital products are presented.

This report presents building blocks of successful text and image digitization programs as guidance to administrators seeking to develop programs in their institutions.

Although specific standards and technologies are cited, the report primarily aims to answer high-level questions that inform program development and administration. These questions include:

- What are the characteristics of successful digitization programs and projects?
- What foundations should be in place before introducing or integrating digitization into library operations?
- What does an organization need to know about technology—digitization formats, standards, systems, techniques, and services—and where can librarians obtain reliable information?
- What techniques can be used to manage the costs of creating and sustaining digital collections? What operational models achieve a balance of quality and cost?

The reader is presumed to have a basic familiarity with the concepts and terminology of digital imaging and to work in an institution with a well-developed infrastructure (systems, staff, and procedures) for cataloging and description—topics not addressed in this report. Also beyond the scope of this report are detailed discussions of the standards, technologies, and services associated with networked delivery of digital resources and with digital preservation.

Chapters 1 and 2, “Institutional Readiness” and “Managing Digitization,” outline frameworks that should ideally be in place *before* digitization.

Chapters 3 and 4, “Levels of Service for Image Digitization” and “Levels of Service for Text Digitization,” present the baseline processes and services that need to be applied *during* digitization.

Over and above the baseline, low-, medium-, and high-effort system and service configurations are presented to convey the spectrums of complexity, quality, and effort related to digitization. Solutions configured to meet these needs require meaningfully different levels of expertise, technology, and capital.

Ideally, project goals and program capabilities (infrastructure) harmonize. In all cases, clear communications between project planners and digitization service providers are essential.

Chapter 5, "Managing Costs," summarizes tradeoffs among variables of production (quantity), quality, control (ownership), and sustainability—all factors to consider when developing specifications for any given project.

Chapter 6, "Committing to Change," addresses the organizational obligations *after* digitizing the collections, identifying the main cost centers associated with sustaining usability.

The appendixes, "Education and Training" and "Selected Resources" provide pointers to reliable sources of information for the manager and digitization practitioner.