

DAM for Heritage and Culture

iBase Professional Digital Asset Management

1 Heritage and Culture – a definition

Although what the term ‘Heritage and Culture’ represents is a somewhat subjective question, for the purposes of this article we’re considering the following representative themes -

- Art
- Sculpture
- Architecture
- Local & regional picture archives
- Industrial history
- Cultural history
- Fabrics
- Ceramics
- Digital preservation

There are a number of heritage and culture case studies on our website, click any of the images below.



2 Types of digital asset

Within heritage and culture most digital assets are representations of a physical object, such as paintings, steam locomotives, vintage cars, pre-digital photographs, films and sound recordings, fabric samples, paper documents, ceramics and so on. But since the digital age began there are now of course assets which have only ever existed in digital form, the term ‘born digital’ is often used to describe these.

A digital asset management system for heritage and culture must be capable of storing absolutely any kind of digital file, and also make it findable and retrievable.

3 Data structure and schemas

A digital asset management system needs to be capable of configuration to any required data structure, whether for compliance to a standard such as Dublin Core, a modification to a standard, or a structure entirely conceived for the organisation's particular needs.

Typically, the metadata required for heritage and culture systems will include -

- A summary description of characteristics of physical objects, including for example colour, length, width, height, material, date or period and date of manufacture.
- Condition notes, ownership details and previous owners might also be needed.
- Work of Art / exhibition / creator's biography linking.
- Conservation / condition Information.
- Value for insurance purposes.

4 DAM features required for heritage and culture

Many of the features required for museums, galleries and archives will be the same as for any other sector, except that integration with a collections management system (CMS)* might also be required.

* **Note:** CMS is primarily used to record and provide workflow for curatorial information, conservation reports, exhibition histories etc... of the physical objects, whereas a digital asset management system is less about workflow and more about storage, searchability and retrieval of digital representations of the objects.

Features most likely to be wanted for a public facing website include -

- Geographical map based location and search retrieval.
- Best sellers and highlights.
- Rights-managed licencing of images.
- Exhibitions embracing records about the same or similar topics.
- A timeline with images grouped by decade so that visitors can explore the historical context of an item.
- Multiple views of physical objects. (See section 5)
- Email links to images.
- Image ordering with ecommerce and immediate digital download options.
- Collections available to group together data and records about the same or similar topics.
- Feedback and comments by email can be sent to System Managers.
- Rotating images on the home page to engage visitors with new and varied content.
- Multiple light-boxes / saved selections.
- Page by page view of documents, including PDFs.
- Comprehensive subject hierarchy to tag images.
- Subjects displayed with micro-thumbs.

5 Multiple views of physical objects

For physical objects it is often useful, or indeed necessary, to have multiple views of an object, and so the digital asset management system needs to be able to keep the multiple views together as a group with a common set of metadata, and also maintain any view specific metadata for the item.

Here's a screen-shot of a record on the Architectural Association School of Architecture's iBase digital asset management system being used for multiple images of the same building.

Cargill Electric Elevator-Buffalo River



select item

Other Items Like This


 Cargill Electric Elevator-Buffalo River


 Cargill Electric Elevator-Buffalo River


 Cargill Electric Elevator-Buffalo River


 Cargill Electric Elevator-Buffalo River


 Cargill Electric Elevator-Buffalo River

Find All Items Like This

Details

iBase ID	44704
Location	Buffalo
Country	USA
Date	1897
Architect	Steel Storage & Elevator Construction Co.
Caption	Cargill Electric Elevator-Buffalo River
Title	Buffalo River
Description	Headhouse
Photographer	Reyner Banham
NUMBER	B.2-049
Date Of Photo	1978
Access Level	Public

Subjects

Subjects > Buildings and Places

Buildings and Places > Industrial > Cargill Superior Elevator-Buffalo

Subjects > Buildings and Places > Industrial

Image was taken by this photographer


 Reyner Banham

6 Digital preservation

Simply making a digital representation of a picture, video, sound recording, a physical object or a document is the first important step towards preservation, but it doesn't end there by any means.

Ultimately, any digital file has to reside on physical hardware somewhere, and physical hardware can fail or degrade to the point of files not being wholly or partly retrievable. Hard drives can and do fail, optical discs such as CDs and DVDs must have a finite life, although we don't yet know with any certainty how long that might be, media formats and their operating systems go out of fashion with alarming rapidity. All of this means that not only is at least one backup copy of everything needed, but each file must also be transferred to new hardware and operating system standards periodically as they evolve.

It is perhaps a little ironic that around the world there are still vast numbers of original paper or similar records that were written 1,000 years ago and more.

The UK National Archives - like many other major institutions - are giving constant attention to the matter of digital preservation. Their [website](#) contains a good deal of useful information and insights into their work on preserving digital collections.

[Contact us](#) by email or phone for more information or to request a free system.