A S A
Andrea Stern Associates Ltd

visual
consultancy

Andrea Stern Associates Ltd (ASA Ltd)
in partnership with
i-Publishing Consultants Ltd

i-PublishingConsultants
ideas to integration
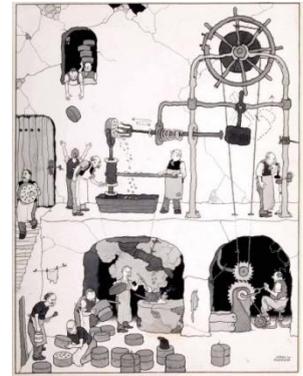
Community History of the UK Gateway: A Living Archive

What is the problem?

Few museums, libraries and archives in the UK are large enough to operate dedicated image licensing services, even though they are often called upon to license their content for a wide range of customers, both commercial and non-commercial. As a result few are able to sell or license images online, an essential tool in reaching picture researchers and other users and reducing the marginal cost of business. They are therefore faced with two choices: to operate as best they can, or license images through a third party such as a picture agency. The former choice often results in under-pricing their services and the latter means reduced profit and ceding control although the same effort will be put into delivering the images to a third party but the profits will be shared.

Collectively, the museums libraries and archives in this position control a huge collection, wide-ranging in depth and breadth of content. They work hard to deliver their public tasks, often freely to the customer and to preserve and promote our heritage. In this they are no different from our national museums and libraries. It is only scale that prevents them from benefitting from the trading opportunities open to larger bodies, and the financial resilience that such trading can deliver.

These smaller organisations are generally those which reflect the essential character and quality of Britain and its history, for example, the museums devoted to Bakelite, Heath Robinson, Vintage Wireless and Television etc; where local historical references can be traced and little-remembered traditions found, and where individuals' contributions to community life can be discovered.

The museums already cover the running cost of these vast archives and make them accessible on request. What is missing is the commercial revenue from licensing and given the lack of staff, an automated online presence.

What is the solution?

The main aim of this project is to offer a searchable e-commerce licensing platform to small and medium-sized cultural heritage institutions (SMIs) which are generally the guardians of local history and represent what is particularly special about a community and place.

Principal objectives:

- Create an e-commerce platform to reach commercial markets and generate income through image and brand licensing, social media, print on demand, etc.;
- Craft a unique online visual history of stories from local and regional communities to promote to creatives and other image licensing users;
- Curate galleries across the aggregated content to inspire users from within the heritage sector as well as in the commercial and public markets;
- Offer reports to enable participating organisations to see the value of their images and how to increase the commercial worth of their collections, highlight their brand broaden their online audiences and grow their visitor numbers;
- Provide internet links across the museum sector for sharing content and stories;
- Assist participating organisations with identification and digitisation of commercial content for the licensing market.

Platform outline

Having surveyed the cultural heritage sector to identify the key challenges and obstacles to achieving a sustainable digital presence here, we have established a consortium* of interested museums which are contributing their experience and helping to articulate and shape the key requirements of this platform.

The Gateway will offer users high quality, authenticated digital images which they can search, license and download responsibly and legally, generating income for the participating organisations as well as making collections more accessible across the heritage sector.

Benefits of an aggregated marketplace for heritage content:

- Creating a database of visual stories providing searchable and accessible content for the creative industries: film makers, broadcasters, journalists, writers, etc
- Providing a broad licensing platform with information on transactions which can be used to understand visitor and customer preferences for greater marketing effectiveness
- Bringing greater awareness of the significance of expertise, authenticity, integrity and provenance in the visual marketplace
- Enabling closer relationships with other organisations through knowledge transfer, and with 3rd parties for commercial opportunity
- Facilitating greater automation resulting in cost cutting benefits, freeing up staff for other work
- Increasing public awareness and understanding of collections
- Supporting education and community involvement, and organisation identity
- Implementing standardised metadata to enhance discoverability
- Promoting the use of image tagging and direct links from search engine browsers to source increasing visitor traffic, destination and brand awareness
- Highlighting regional identity; what and who is important to the community; what are the special traditions; what did they keep and collect, why?

Summary

We aim to achieve this through embracing curation and interpretation of the digital image, adding value and authenticity to the online collections, and always referencing back to the copyright holder or their representative in order to achieve sales.

The pressure on heritage to meet the needs of a creative, digital population is growing. To find ways for smaller organisations to prosper financially whilst protecting the characteristics that make these heritage sites special has proved challenging for the sector. Our focus here is to provide greater access at reduced cost to the individual organisation and offer a business opportunity to sustain and grow commercial value over the next decade.

About Andrea Stern Associates Ltd

ASA Ltd is a leading visual content consultancy with significant operational experience in the heritage sector, working with, and advising on content and copyright related issues in cultural and educational institutions, such as the Victoria and Albert Museum, Oxford University, and Historic England. ASA Ltd is the initiator of The Gateway concept working in partnership with i-Publishing Ltd. to create the Gateway platform.

About i-Publishing Consultants Ltd

i-Publishing works with publishers, cultural heritage organisations and the not-for-profit sector to help them make the very best use of technology and information management and to engage effectively with their customers and members. They are winners of the Stationers' Company Innovation Excellence Social Development Award in 2017 for the development of an app for Calibre, a charity providing spoken books for the blind and partially sighted. Other clients include Yale University Press; SAGE Publications, Ltd.; Efficiency Exchange, Universities UK.

The objective for both ASA Ltd and i-Publishers is to empower image owners and curators to streamline their licensing processes, generate wider use of their images online, profit from increased revenues, measure image usage and make it easy for users to 'do the right thing'.

*The Museum Consortium includes: The Museum of English Rural Life, Reading; Horniman Museum, London; Historic England, Swindon; RAF Museum, Hendon.