

Dorset Archives Content Online; An Income Generation Model

Dorset History Centre, the custodian of over 1000 years of written records is the home of the Joint Archives Service (JAS) which serves the Borough of Poole, Bournemouth Borough Council and Dorset County Council.

Dorset Archives Content Online had its origins in the growing imperative on the JAS to generate income to complement the base revenue streams received from the three funding authorities. This followed a decision in 2007 by its governing board to reduce the JAS budget from 2010. The intervening three year period, known as the 'Breathing Space' would allow the JAS to explore income generation opportunities, to test options in order to understand what level of income generation was both realistic and sustainable.

The income generation initiative was further supported by a significant piece of consultancy work which identified Content Online as a key means of meeting this need, albeit supported by other less lucrative, but important revenue streams. These included:

- The introduction of car parking charges;
- Rental of some DHC office space to another Council department;
- Hire of the DHC lecture room;
- Research service;
- Sale of online images.

Content Online itself evolved through a series of internal discussions around how the service could both generate income, but also increase access to collections through the advent of new technologies. Perceived benefits of Content Online included:

- The ability to deliver Dorset-related archival content to wider audiences across the UK and wider world;
- The generation of income for the service through the dissemination of that content;
- Significant and inherent preservation of the original material via the creation of digital surrogates;
- Informing budget setting over the three year service planning cycle;
- Improved marketing of the service via a large, third party contractor, so raising the profile of DHC.

A key prerequisite of the project was that it must be self-funding, in other words, the project costs and financial risks would need to be borne by the third party contractor, not the service. In terms of market place demand for archival sources, far and away the biggest area of interest is family history. Genealogical information has a huge appeal across a wide spectrum of users and it seemed logical that this should be the starting point for any project if it was to attract the necessary interest from contractors. It was therefore this area which DHC concentrated on with a view to maximising interest.

A parallel development to support the efforts to introduce the new revenue generation model was the transition of DHC's public support group, The Friends of Dorset's Archives into The Dorset Archives Trust. This was undertaken in order to instil a new approach in the body with a Board of Trustees and an emphasis on fundraising and advocacy for the JAS.

Target Audience

Worldwide online audience via Ancestry.com as well as significant on-site use of the resource by visitors to DHC.

Aim

The project was motivated by two key drivers:

- The need to generate sustainable income to assist with the running costs of the Joint Archives Service;
- A wish to increase access to Dorset's archival holdings.

We feel that in Content Online these two elements have been successfully brought together without one compromising the other. The project represents a pragmatic response to a varied set of demands and one which offers opportunities to add further appropriate material in the future.

Process

Exploratory conversations with potential contractors were held, and a visit arranged to London Metropolitan Archives which has undertaken a similar project. Staff there were generous with their help and advice. DHC staff surveyed the repository's holdings to develop a series of collection schedules, starting with the most obvious genealogical material – parish, probate and school records. Other series, including business, estate and local government records were also identified.

Working with colleagues in Legal Services and with project management support, an exemption from the County Council's standard tendering procedures was negotiated. A brief for potential contractors was prepared and the tender was circulated. Four, later reduced to three interested parties responded with eventually three full tender submissions received by Dorset County Council. Presentations were made by the three interested parties and a scoring matrix used to determine the preferred contractor.

Ancestry.com was duly selected as the preferred partner and negotiations on the final contract are currently being finalised and work has commenced as to the logistics of getting the project up and running. Two digitisation staff will work onsite at DHC for approximately one year, employed directly by Ancestry. They will work closely with DHC collections staff to ensure efficient processing of material; conservation advice will be provided where fragile materials are accessed for the project. Regular liaison with Ancestry staff will be scheduled and digitised content will be uploaded to Ancestry's site in batches. Ancestry will deliver a local marketing campaign to support and promote the online presence with the close involvement of DHC staff. Physical visitors to DHC will be able to access the Ancestry content free of charge.

DHC and Ancestry are anticipating a ten year contract, with formal stage review points focussing on service levels and performance. The financial details are necessarily confidential, however, the income over the contract period will meet & hopefully exceed, DHC expectations. Whilst the financial details are necessarily confidential, DHC is assured a set income for the first three years of the contract with income for the remaining seven years subject to market uptake. Income will also be generated via users who are 'signposted' from Dorsetforyou.com which acts as an affiliate of the principal Ancestry site.

Dorset History Centre is the first archive service outside London to engage with a contractor to deliver mass digitisation on a commercial basis. We feel that the project represents a good balance between addressing the financial needs of the service, encouraging increased public access and assisting the preservation needs of the collections.

Number of participants

n/a

Impact and outcome

The single most important outcome of the Content Online initiative to date (apart from, obviously, the financial benefits) has been the confidence instilled in the service, its staff and the elected members on the Advisory Board. It has shown that the JAS is capable of addressing its budget challenges through innovative partnership working and of collaborating with a range of professionals both within and outside the authority to achieve this. The Advisory Board, as a result of this confidence was subsequently able to recommend the forward budget 2010/11 to the executives of the three authorities.

Several other points can be made relating to the project and its benefits to the service:

- A huge mass of historical source material placed online for a potential worldwide audience;
- Full costs will be borne by the contractor;
- Major step forward in terms of preserving material through digital surrogacy;
- A guaranteed supplement to DHC's income over three years and potentially longer - particularly positive during a period of increasingly tight public finances;
- It is a project which DHC could never have undertaken on its own;
- Total project costs represent a very significant overall investment in the service;
- Delivers enhanced marketing and promotion of Dorset History Centre and its collections.

It is too early to say what the online uptake to Dorset's archival presence on Ancestry will be, but we anticipate (and Ancestry endorse this view) that there will be very significant and sustained worldwide interest in the material.

Archive services have been in many cases quick to exploit the possibilities of the Internet through the mounting of catalogues and indexes online. This project represents a next step in taking digital representations of the actual records out to users on a huge scale.

Evaluation

Project is ongoing through 2010, so in many ways evaluation will accompany and follow that process. We anticipate multiple benefits (as listed above). The project came about through a particular confluence of circumstances, financial, service-related and technological and it was a mixture of these three which led to the Content Online opportunity moving from theory to reality.

Once the initial sequence of digitisation is complete, we will certainly be discussing further options and opportunities with Ancestry. This phase of the project is, we anticipate far from the end of process.

Tips

In large part, the project has to date, gone according to plan and schedule. However, it would be true to say that as with every project, preparation is absolutely critical – it being the best means of avoiding difficulties down the line. Clarity around the logistics of the operation when digitisation commences and the impact on the service is very important.

Future development

Dorset History Centre will seek to explore all opportunities with Ancestry to develop this service and to attract new users to the collections. We will work with Ancestry and other partners to maximise the opportunities provided by web access. We also recognise however, that there is a strong desire (and recent figures reflect a growing one) to still access the original records onsite here in Dorset.

Project website :

www.dorsetforyou.com

www.ancestry.com

Case study record created on:

19/01/2010

MLA funded:

No

Institution:

Dorset History Centre (DHC)

Key partners:

DHC

Ancestry.com

Team members:

Paul Leivers, Head of Cultural Services

Hugh Jacques, Dorset County Archivist to September 2009

Sam Johnston, Dorset County Archivist from September 2009

Colin Lusted, Project Manager

Jacqui Halewood, Principal Archivist

Rebecca Donnan, Principal Conservator

Tony Elliot, Accountant

Start date:

Pre-project preparation lasted around fifteen months and actual digitisation work on the collections should commence in January or February 2010.

End date:

Work is scheduled to last one year and should therefore complete in Jan/Feb 2011

Contact:

[Sam Johnston](#)

Dorset History Centre

01305 228 929

Alternative contact:

[Colin Lusted](#)

Dorset County Council

01305 221 719

Domains:

Archives

Sector developing role:

Commissioning

Liaison

Partnerships

Social outcomes:

Economic Impact
Celebrating local identity

Geographical Coverage:

International
South West
(South West