



The National Archives

Provide

and

Enable

The National Archives

Online Strategy

Executive summary

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Provide and Enable: The National Archives Online Strategy is a framework for developing our online services over the next three years. It sets out how our websites will help to make The National Archives' Vision a reality, adapt to the changing online environment and gain the structure and flexibility to continue to provide excellent services in the future.

The evolving web: challenges and opportunities

The World Wide Web has radically changed how we do business, find and use information and interact with each other – and it is still evolving rapidly.

- The web is becoming less like a collection of individual documents and more like a huge database: users can gather data from different sources and put it together in a way that meets their needs.
- How we access the web is changing. Web-enabled mobile telephones and other hand-held devices now make it easy to get online at any time and from almost any location.
- People's expectations have grown – they expect personalised, comprehensive and almost instant online services.
- The Web Continuity programme, led by The National Archives, was set up to manage the problem of broken links to government information by archiving public sector websites regularly.
- The web makes possible many new ways to use public sector information, and there is growing demand for the government to make data available.
- Web 2.0 is not just about technology. It enables us to engage with communities who can add value to the information we hold.

The National Archives' response

Because of our role in government and the information we hold, The National Archives is uniquely placed to grasp the opportunities offered by new technologies. We can also build on our record of innovation and a reputation for providing high-quality online services.

- We already supply millions of public records online, both through our own efforts and in partnership with private sector organisations. Customers will increasingly expect the records to be available online.
- Most new government records are now produced in an electronic format. We need to plan our web services to accommodate a large quantity of these 'born digital' records.

- Our information needs to be clear, easy to use and well structured; we also need to provide help and guidance.
- We have started exploring new ideas and technologies, including using RDFa for publishing the Gazettes. The way we now publish legislation has a key role to play in the further development of the semantic web.
- The web is constantly evolving, and our services need to be flexible enough to allow us to keep up to date with new trends.

Our strategy

All our online services need to aim towards making The National Archives' Vision a reality. We have also set out five statements of purpose, which together make up the mission for all our website work.

The Provide and Enable Online Strategy has five goals. A set of ten principles will guide how we deliver our online services.

Providing services

We will repurpose our online content to form a 'family' of six websites. Each website will meet the needs of particular audiences.

- Corporate - '*The common functions and services of the organisation*': the corporate functions of The National Archives, contact and visiting information and a press centre.
- Records - '*Advice, guidance and access to records*': online catalogues and digitised records.
- Education - '*Source-based, enquiry-led learning: onsite and online*': learning resources and information about onsite teaching services.
- Information Management - '*Leading information management across government*': the primary way of disseminating advice and guidance from The National Archives and OPSI to public officials.
- Legislation - '*Legislation, in two clicks*': easy access to primary and secondary legislation.
- Gazettes - '*Published by authority*': a vehicle to disseminate official, regulatory and legal information online.

Enabling others

- We will allow others to harness the power of our information, leading to a far wider range of products and services than we could provide ourselves.
- We will continue to work with commercial partners to provide online access to millions of records.

- We will continue to use RSS feeds and ATOM to distribute our information to other websites.
- Coding our information in a way that machines and developers can interpret might allow audiences to access and re-use our records directly.
- The Online Panel will look at each of our online services to identify the potential for enabling others to use our content.

A different way of working

The Online Panel

We will establish an Online Panel of experts from across The National Archives. The panel will advise on and guide projects that have an online component, making sure that the ten guiding principles are applied and that all our online services have strategic fit. It will be pro-active in helping colleagues to understand the Online Strategy and will provide a forum for collaboration.

The four agendas

We have identified four agendas that outline how we will embed Provide and Enable within the organisation.

Audience insight agenda

- To make sure we understand our customers' needs, we will examine user intelligence from across the organisation.
- We will fill gaps in our knowledge through testing and research.
- In developing online services, we will use an iterative process of design, prototyping and real-world testing.

Editorial agenda

- The National Archives needs a strong editorial 'voice' in its online activities.
- We will reorganise and rewrite the content of our family of websites to meet the needs of our different audiences.
- We will streamline our guidance to make it clearer and reduce duplication.
- An editorial lead will agree standards for the sites.
- Content owners will be able to maintain their own editorial content easily.

Communication agenda

- Communicating the Online Strategy and the role of the Online Panel widely across the organisation is vital to its long-term success.
- We will build strong partnerships between business owners, content owners and staff in all departments whose work ends up 'online'.
- Key staff within the organisation will receive training in web skills.

Enable agenda

- The main aim of the Enable agenda is to support others to create new and innovative services using our content.

- We will commission research on opening up our content and facilitate discussion between our experts and external organisations.
- We will look at all new online content to see whether it can be presented in a way that makes it easy to re-use.
- We will continue to develop external partnerships with Licensed Internet Associates.