

Treasures of the East Midlands: Feasibility study

Treasures of the East Midlands: Feasibility study.....	1
1. Executive summary.....	1
2. Introduction.....	4
2.1 The brief.....	4
2.2 Lessons from the Treasures user needs survey.....	4
3. Methodology.....	5
4. Findings and recommendations.....	6
4.1 Survey of museums and archives.....	6
4.2 Audience participation and creation of multimedia resources.....	7
4.3 Distribution of resources to target audiences.....	9
4.4 Online hub.....	11
4.4.1 Online community.....	13
4.5 Other issues.....	14
4.5.1 Project structure.....	14
4.5.2 Branding and identity.....	14
4.5.3 Skills development.....	15
5. Summary of recommendations.....	15
APPENDIX A: Summary of museums and archives survey results.....	17
APPENDIX B: Best practice websites.....	19
APPENDIX C: Additional references and quotes from experts.....	21

1. Executive summary

This feasibility study builds on the Treasures user needs survey. Commissioned by Renaissance East Midlands, Fiona Marshall has consulted with regional museums, other stakeholders and national experts and recommends that the ‘Treasures of the East Midlands’ project should comprise three strands:

1. Audience participation and creation of multimedia resources
2. Distribution of multimedia resources through a range of existing websites and
3. An ‘online hub’ linking to the above resources for showcasing the project and developing online communities.

The first and major strand, **audience participation and creation of multimedia resources**, would build partnerships, motivating and enabling museums to work with learning and community groups and contribute to the process of digital content creation.

Consultation with museums for this feasibility study has shown quite a widespread interest in participating in Treasures. It is important that museums understand the vision for the project and are willing and able to put in the time that will be required to work with their audience groups to reinterpret their collections (objects, archives, exhibitions, historic sites etc). Support needed from Renaissance East Midlands will include **partnership broking, skills development and support and facilitating skills sharing**.

The second strand concentrates on **distributing the new digital resources** through a range of popular, well-established and well-known third party websites and services. The Treasures user needs survey demonstrated that web surfers looking for cultural/heritage information rarely visit museum websites. In part this is because they do not know what museums can provide, but in larger part it is because it is easier and quicker to 'Google it'. The solution is no longer just increased marketing: museums must send their digital resources out to the web venues people DO visit - including social media such as Flickr and YouTube. Other sites, including Culture24, will be reached via Collections Trust's Culture Grid.

The key requirement is the creation of **reusable content** that can be distributed to target audiences through the websites they use. Given the nature of the web and the ever-increasing use of social media, content sharing and more sophisticated communication tools, reusable content is likely to be much longer lived – and therefore more important – than a regional website.

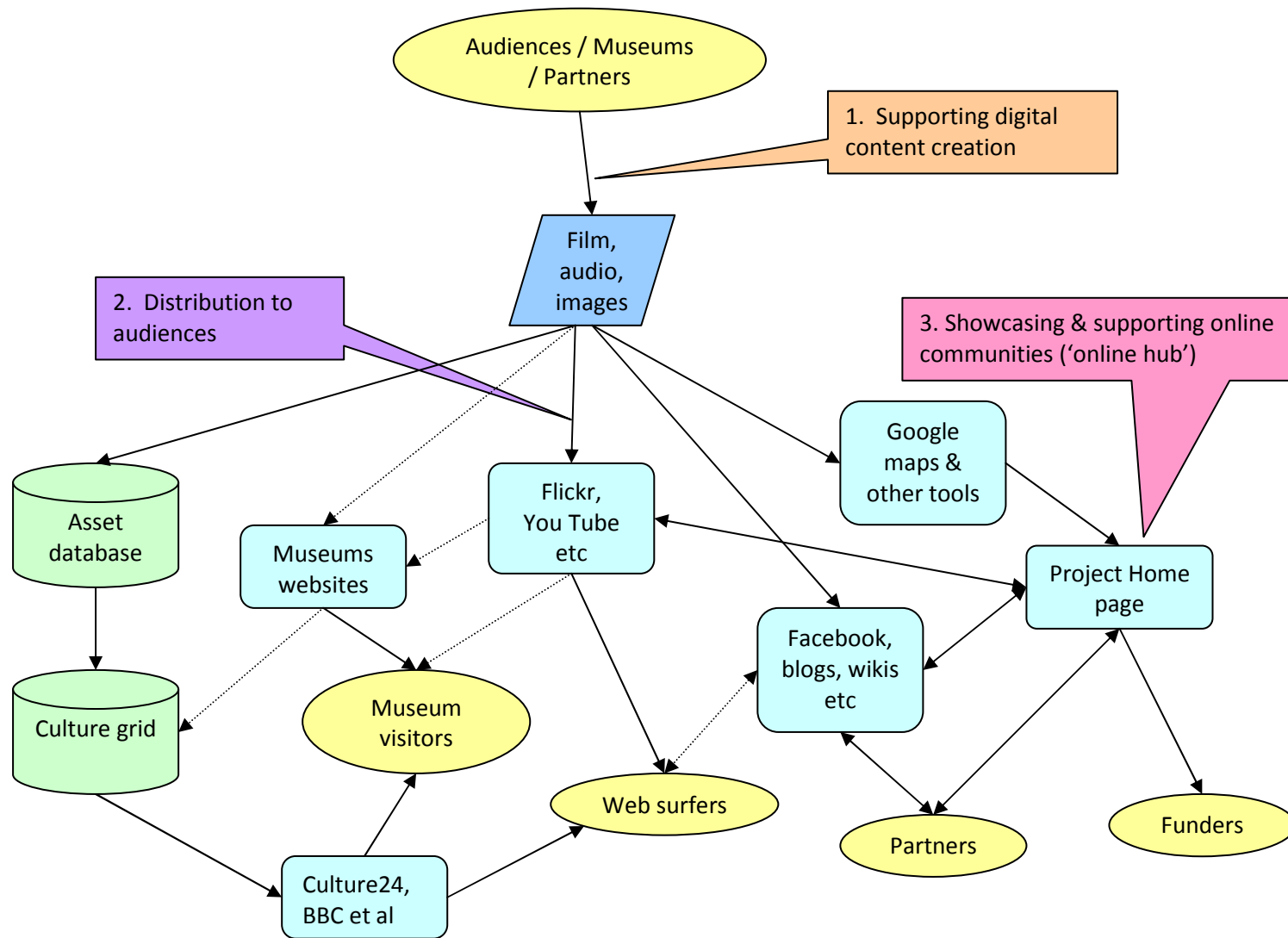
The recommendation is that a New Media support officer be employed to work with museums to upload the digital assets created in strand 1 onto a range of popular social media / portal sites. Part of the officer's role would be to keep up to date with popular sites and research and recommend new destinations, developing prototypes using new web 2.0 tools and technologies.

Embedding East Midlands' content in national/international sites with a much larger audience than regional sites will increase the profile of the region's museums. Renaissance East Midlands may need to encourage some museums to 'set their content free' in this way: some may need reassurance on copyright - and content will need to be 'branded' to lead back to its point of origin. Renaissance East Midlands may also need to persuade local authorities and others to count resource usage *wherever it takes place* as legitimate performance indicators. Skills development and sharing will also be needed on how best to distribute content across the internet. The project should use a Digital Asset Repository/database to archive and manage the digital assets. The repository need not be complicated and advice should be sought from partners on re-using an existing database.

The final strand involves the development of a lightweight '**online hub**' which would be used to test and 'showcase' new multimedia content and support online communities. As well as online communities, the main audiences for this site would be potential contributors of content (audience groups, museums etc) and potential funders. While some 'casual visitors' will find the online hub, most content is likely to be discovered through strand 2.

The online hub would comprise a project Home page linking out to resources which have been loaded onto external websites. It will have two-way links with social networking sites including Facebook and will also show resources created using web 2.0 tools and online services eg Google maps, timelines. Most of the tools required are freely available and the recommendation is that the New Media support officer tests concepts, prototypes and develops the use of these tools to support an active - and actively changing – community. The hub could also include a regional or subject-based cross-collections search powered by the Culture Grid.

A diagram showing how the three strands would combine can be found on page 3.



2. Introduction

2.1 The brief

Treasures of the East Midlands will:

- *showcase museum collections alongside creative interpretation by our audiences, to tell the story of the East Midlands.*
- *provide a platform for museums to inspire, engage and interact with audiences*
- *be a regional digital project that will bring together collections and audiences through learning and community engagement work.*

The purpose of the feasibility study is to build on the user needs research carried out in June and July 2009 and to liaise with stakeholders and content providers. It will help us to ascertain the format and design of the digital outputs.

Outcomes

- *Liaise with stakeholders that will provide content such as museums in the region, Media Archive Central England and East Midlands Oral History Archives*
- *Identify and recommend best practice from other cultural digital projects*
- *Liaise with partners Culture 24 and Collections Trust*
- *Feasibility study final report and recommendations on next steps*

2.2 Lessons from the Treasures user needs survey

Consultation with adult web surfers, museum visitors and families produced the following findings:

- All user groups currently:
 - Search on **Google** and **Wikipedia** for **places, people, themes** of relevance to museums, rather than searching museum collections websites directly
 - Search on Google for museum **visit information** and are not concerned about the source of the information, which could come from a **TIC** etc, rather than from the museum's own website.
 - Search for their own town or the place they want to visit, eg the Peak District. The 'East Midlands' was not generally understood or used.
- All users say they would use **interactive maps**, if available.
- Families and visitors say they would use **zooming images**, if available.
- Children say they would use **timelines**, if available.
- All user groups would like to see content relating to **social history**, including implications of historical objects to people, how people lived etc.

Other research analysed for this study, particularly that from Ofcom¹, Office for National Statistics² and the National Collections Online Feasibility Study (Flow Associates, in preparation),

¹ <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/research/cm/cmr08/>

² <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/jahi0808.pdf>

showed that a very large proportion of internet users **download video** and use **social networks**. In addition, the e-learning and Learn with Museums consultation³ conducted for Renaissance East Midlands demonstrated that teachers are very keen to download **video and audio** for use in the classroom (if technical barriers can be resolved) and feel that 'local people' would like to upload their own images stories etc. (See the User Needs survey for details.)

The findings of Morris Hargreaves McIntyre's 'Virtually There' evaluation of regional museums' online collections resources⁴ are also summarized in the User Needs survey report.

3. Methodology

This study comprised the following:

- Online survey of museums and archives
- Discussion with:
 - James Patterson, Media Archive of Central England (MACE) and Colin Hyde, East Midlands Oral History Archive (EMOHA)
 - Leicester City Museum's Prehistorica gallery group
 - Collections Trust (Nick Poole, Gordon McKenna)
 - Culture24 (Jane Finnis)
- Advice from other experts: Alice Grant, Alice Grant Consulting; Brian Kelly, UKOLN; Mike Ellis, Eduserv; Bridget McKenzie, Flow Associates; Matthew Cock, The British Museum
- Desk research (see Appendix B for Best practice websites and Appendix C for references and quotes).

The goals of the online survey were to determine whether museums and archives wanted to participate in the project and, if they did, what support they would need. Questions are in Appendix A, together with a summary of the findings. The survey was distributed to regional museum and archive groups (including EMMS, GOSLAM, EMRAC) and also edited by MDOs and sent to museum fora.

The preamble to the survey was as follows:

"Renaissance East Midlands is developing a new regional digital project (working title 'Treasures of the East Midlands') which will bring together collections and audiences through learning and community engagement work.

Please help develop a project that will be of use to your museum in the future by working with your team, learning, community and collections staff to complete the following 8 questions.

By getting involved, you could:

- *Collaborate with partners, audiences, artists and writers to interpret some of your objects in new ways for today's audiences*
- *Put some of your collections and projects on an interactive website perhaps using video, podcasts, interactive maps etc*

³ http://www.renaissanceeastmidlands.org.uk/our_work/learning/elearning.html

⁴ 'Virtually There: Understanding audiences for online collections resources in the East Midlands', Morris Hargreaves McIntyre for Renaissance East Midlands, March 2009.

http://www.renaissanceeastmidlands.org.uk/our_work/digital_access_to_collections/highlights_and.html

- Increase dialogue and collaboration with your audiences through their comments, questions, recommendations, reviews, memories, personal anecdotes and the content they might produce for the site

- Increase visitors to your museum website (through links from the new regional site)

- Attract new visitors into your museum

The need for such a system was established during recent audience research in the region. We are currently consulting potential audiences about the content they would like to see on the new website – and asking museums, libraries and archives for their ideas on how they might contribute to the project.”

4. Findings and recommendations

4.1 Survey of museums and archives

To date, 39 responses have been received covering 32 museums and 1 archive. Findings are summarised in two tables in appendix A.

There is quite a lot of enthusiasm for the project, but some responses, particularly from independent museums, indicate some confusion, with several appearing to believe that Treasures will deliver a local website per museum or comprehensive collections digitisation.

“Not clear what you are offering and whether we would have the time to get involved!”

(Respondent from an independent museum)

A very varied list of objects, topics, themes and other material was received. It is important to make sure that all partners understand and accept that Treasures will be audience led and may challenge museums’ preconceptions.

“I would hope that the project team would have some leadership role in researching and defining what these themes might be, presumably driven by the information they have about audience need and demand for this project.” (Respondent from a Renaissance partner museum)

MACE and EMOHA are also very interested in participating in Treasures and increasing their work with museums by supplying copyright cleared films and recordings and perhaps by hosting and delivering movies.

Other information about the situation in the East Midlands

- There are c.27 collections websites in the East Midlands. Of those evaluated with users for the ‘Virtually There’ project, the most popular (in terms of visitor numbers) is ‘Picture the Past’⁵. Other than the live peregrines website⁶, in which Derby Museums is a partner, most of the museums collections websites received few repeat visitors. Many are restricted by council website structures/policies, having small images, very little provision for multimedia, no dialogue with museums, etc. Some are reliant on councils’

⁵ <http://www.picturethepast.org.uk>

⁶ <http://www.derby.gov.uk/LeisureCulture/MuseumsGalleries/EnvironmentalProjects/PeregrineProject.htm>

- web teams to update content. 'Virtually There' demonstrated users' lack of enthusiasm for council branding. See also a survey of local authority museums⁷ conducted by MDA.
- Some museums (eg Northampton) are experimenting with social media such as Flickr⁸ and YouTube. Other museums are eager to experiment, but need support.
 - East Midlands museums have a good record of working with audience/community groups to create resources relating to collections (see 4.2). Museums want to showcase the many examples of multimedia content being produced by participatory work. This is rarely possible on council websites. A group of excluded young people used YouTube to deliver the film they produced for a project with Northampton Museum⁹, but YouTube, along with other social networking sites, is blocked by most school firewalls and cannot therefore be demonstrated in formal learning settings.
 - Some councils' website specification, procurement and development procedures are felt to be slow and cumbersome. Treasures needs to be lighter weight, to work with audiences throughout the development and to experiment with new and novel means of content creation in partnership with young people and other audiences.

4.2 Audience participation and creation of multimedia resources

Renaissance East Midlands has demonstrated, through its learning and community engagement projects, the significant impact that partnership action can have on building new audiences. Many exemplary multimedia resources have been created in partnership, including film projects with excluded young people in Northampton¹⁰ and an audio trail created by a school working with Naseby Battlefield¹¹ through Learning Links. The process of creating these digital resources has inspired young people, teachers and museums staff alike and Treasures will allow this process to extend to other museums and audience groups.

Renaissance East Midlands very wisely intends to start the Treasures project with a few pilots to reinterpret objects already digitised and perhaps already online. Multimedia resources **commissioned for Treasures should be developed in accordance with user needs**, as reported in the user needs survey and previous research. 'Users' in this context obviously includes the audiences participating in resource creation. An initial indication of interest in topics was started during the focus groups and interviews for the user needs survey; this should be extended and built on, understanding that this is a menu of options, not list of targets. Plans for resource creation should be evaluated before and during development through the use of paper mockups/storyboards with focus groups etc.

Renaissance East Midlands proposes to commission new material from artists and writers in residence, journalists and a research scholarship programme. It is important, again, that any externally commissioned resource is developed in accordance with audience needs. Partnerships should be developed with universities and others experienced in multimedia

⁷ http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/online_publishing/la_sites

⁸ http://www.flickr.com/photos/northampton_museum/collections/

⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rs0H21iRD78>

¹⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rs0H21iRD78>

¹¹ <http://www.naseby.com/thelandscape/visitnaseby/audiotour.html>

content creation – including MACE/EMOHA/Leicester University on how to stream video/audio etc. Renaissance East Midlands is developing a **content brief** for Treasures and this should include **principles for commissioned content, including subjects, themes, target audience, style** etc.

Responses to the museums survey for this feasibility study indicate that museums are keen to contribute content to Treasures if capacity issues can be resolved. The content brief is vital in **targeting enthusiastic museums towards audience needs**. Renaissance East Midlands will also have to budget for some **editorial input** – if only for reading quality/consistency, if not for capacity reasons.

It is also important that museums understand the vision for Treasures and are willing and able to put in the time that will be required to work with audience groups and others to reinterpret their collections (objects, archives, exhibitions, historic sites etc). Support needed from Renaissance East Midlands will include **partnership broking, skills development and support and facilitating skills sharing**.

Consultation with museums (reported in section 4.1) also revealed the occasional (inevitable) confusion about Treasures. It is essential that the partners formally agree a succinct **shared vision, aims and objectives**. Independent museum representatives should be involved in the drafting of these to ensure that everyone is aware of the scope and potential benefits of the project.

“Museums face many challenges in trying to engage visitors with digital collections, not least the often complex, conflicted and product-focused organisational objectives for a project, which can make it difficult for projects to satisfy users’ needs.” (Virtually There p.14)

Following is a suggested starting point for aims/objectives and outcomes. These should be discussed, amended and agreed between the partners.

Aims/objectives

- Creatively update/reinterpret existing online content for today’s audiences (eg video, podcasts, interactive maps)
- Collaborate with audience groups, artists, writers and other partners on creation of new multimedia resources
- Create digital content in such a way that it can be reused, syndicated, aggregated and repurposed through third party websites
- Distribute that digital material to the websites and channels that target audiences use
- Support the building of online communities through facilities to ask questions and contribute stories, reviews etc
- Provide training and support for museum staff and create a self-help network
- Link to existing museum websites/Learn with Museums¹², thus increasing their visitors.

¹² <http://www.learnwithmuseums.org.uk/>

Outcomes

- Enable better access to, visibility and understanding of and interaction with regional collections and heritage
- Widen virtual audiences for existing museum websites
- In the longer term, bring more people into regional museums.

4.3 Distribution of resources to target audiences

The Treasures user needs survey demonstrated that web surfers looking for cultural/heritage information rarely visit museum websites. In part this is because they do not know what museums can provide, but in larger part it is because it is easier and quicker to 'Google it'. The solution is no longer just increased marketing: museums must make their objects and themes visible to **Google** and send their digital resources out to the web venues people DO visit - including social media sites such as Flickr and YouTube. The key requirement is the creation of **reusable content** that can be distributed to target audiences through the websites they use. Given the nature of the web and the ever-increasing use of social media, content sharing and more sophisticated communication tools, reusable content is likely to be much longer lived – and therefore more important – than a regional website.

The recommendation is that a **New Media support officer** be employed to work with museums to upload the digital assets created in strand 1 (4.2) onto a range of popular, well-established and well-known third party websites and services such as Flickr and YouTube. Part of the officer's role would be to keep up to date with popular sites and research and recommend new destinations, developing prototypes using new web 2.0 tools and technologies.

"We have progressed from the publishing paradigm which characterised what is now sometimes referred to as Web 1.0, in which small numbers of content creators made use of tools ranging from desktop HTML authoring tools through to enterprise Content Management Systems and corresponding editorial and quality assurance processes to produce content for passive consumption by end users. In a Web 2.0 environment, large numbers of users are creating content using a seemingly ever-increasing variety of tools and devices with such content being made available via a wide variety of commercial Web 2.0 services."

Brian Kelly, UKOLN¹³

The approach proposed in this study has been checked with – and endorsed by - a range of experts in the field (listed in section 3). See also Appendix C for quotations and links to examples of their work.

It is a condition of the funding for Treasures that metadata for resources created should also be copied to Collections Trust's **Culture Grid**¹⁴. Culture 24 is developing a collections search which will use data in the Culture Grid. Collections Trust is actively promoting the Grid to other heavily

¹³ Time To Stop Doing and Start Thinking: A Framework For Exploiting Web 2.0 Service In J. Trant and D. Bearman (eds.). *Museums and the Web 2009: Proceedings*. Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. Published March 31, 2009. <<http://www.archimuse.com/mw2009/papers/kelly/kelly.html>>

¹⁴ <http://openculture.collectionstrustblogs.org.uk/category/grid/>

used sites, including the BBC and Google. Supply of data to the Grid could therefore increase 'click through' traffic to museums' own websites.

Embedding East Midlands material in national/international sites with a much larger audience than regional/museum sites can achieve will increase the profile of the region's museums. Renaissance East Midlands may need to encourage some museums to 'set their content free' in this way: **some may need reassurance on copyright** (see below) - and resources will need to be 'branded' and linked back to their point of origin.

Renaissance East Midlands may also need to persuade local authorities and others to count resource usage *wherever it takes place* as legitimate **performance indicators**. (Culture24 is planning some work in this area.) **Skills development** and sharing will also be needed on how best to distribute content across the internet.

Brian Kelly from UKOLN recommends that Renaissance use a risks and opportunities management approach to the project. In the paper quoted above (a follow-up to his previous 'Time To Stop Thinking and Start Doing'), Kelly investigates concerns from sceptics over the use of Web 2.0 - including sustainability, digital preservation and accessibility. He proposes a risk assessment/management approach and, to aid decision making, suggests a framework covering benefits, risks, missed opportunities and costs.

One issue that should be addressed by this risk assessment approach is the risk that one or more of the external sites chosen for distribution may fail and shutdown. This risk is probably low, but distribution of resources over a range of sites will provide fall-backs if needed. Renaissance East Midlands should steer well clear of exclusive contracts. In addition, the Treasures project should use a Digital Asset Repository/database to archive and manage the digital assets. The repository need not be complicated and advice should be sought from partners on re-using an existing database (eg MACE's film archive, Leicestershire Cultural Services's image archive). (New film footage should in any case be deposited with MACE – see eg <http://www.macearchive.org/Media.html?Title=22186#> . MACE is also happy to discuss hosting and online delivery of clips or whole films.)

Another issue is the blocking of social networking sites such as Facebook – and of some social media sites such as YouTube – by some school firewalls. Renaissance should copy resources to a range of sites and consult with partners and audience groups on accessibility. Where target community or audience groups cannot access YouTube etc, Renaissance could investigate regional providers, eg MACE, local managed learning environments or national / international cultural hosting services such as Artbabble¹⁵. It must be remembered that the vast majority of target audiences *will* have access to social media: resources should be distributed to the most popular of these irrespective of current blocking by schools. There is some excellent advice on evaluating the risks and benefits of social networking services for children and young people on Childnet's Digizen website¹⁶: this material suggests that blocking by schools will probably end soon.

¹⁵ <http://www.artbabble.org/>

¹⁶ <http://www.digizen.org/socialnetworking/>

It is of course vital that the New Media support officer (and indeed the project team) has access to Facebook, YouTube etc. If the host council cannot adjust their filters to allow this, the officer will have to work outside the council's firewall – possibly renting office space from a local university. In fact, this post may be easier appointed to one of the university partners, where they can work with other web 2.0 specialists.

As mentioned above, metadata relevant to a digital resource should be copied to the **Culture Grid**. The Grid also requires a persistent web address where users will find the full resource (larger image, video, object information etc). The web link could be:

- the object page on a museum's own website
- an image on Flickr or video on YouTube or
- a record on MACE's website – see eg <http://www.macearchive.org/Media.html?Title=589#>

With the first option, new resources created as part of the Treasures project could be published to the museum website as well as to Flickr, YouTube etc – or, more economically, the museum could embed a link to Flickr/YouTube on its own website. Museums without their own collections site may need support to create an object page on their current website – or to work with their collections management supplier (eg MODES) to put material on the web. (Note: Once loaded onto Flickr etc, museums with IT support could use the web service's API to create new applications (see eg Powerhouse Museum's map application¹⁷.)

Note on copyright:

Partners should be asked to clear third party copyright permissions and allow downloading and personal use of any content, possibly through a **Creative Commons licence** or equivalent. *"We always thought we could make money from them [images]. But there's so much competition in the marketplace. Basically now we just want people to know where they come from"* - Mel Burns, NMSI (National Collections Online Feasibility Study, Flow Associates)

4.4 Online hub

The proposals in 4.3 will deal with distribution of multimedia resources to different target audiences and raising the profile of existing museum websites. This leaves three main areas that have been suggested as functions for Treasures:

- 'Showcase' multimedia content alongside regional collections
- Support online communities and
- Cross collections searching.

The purpose of the 'showcase' is to bring together resources created for Treasures and distributed to various social media/third party websites. As well as online communities, the main audiences would be potential partners (audience groups, museums etc) and potential funders.

¹⁷ <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/flickr/sv-index.php?page=2>

The recommendation is the development of a lightweight '**online hub**' which would be used to test and showcase new multimedia content and support online communities created by audience engagement projects. While some 'casual visitors' will find the online hub, most content is likely to be discovered through the distribution channels described in 4.3. A diagram showing how the online hub will link to development of digital resources and their distribution can be found on page 3.

While the showcase and services for online communities COULD be provided through a major website development, this would be expensive, would divert staff resources to procurement and away from community building and would not necessarily be successful (as other recent online community projects demonstrate). This study advocates a much 'lighter' approach that should allow regional museums to work more closely – and more responsively – with and for their audiences and to make full use of widely available web tools and techniques.

The online hub would comprise a project Home page linking out to resources which have been loaded onto external websites, including Flickr, YouTube etc. It will also have two-way links with social networking sites including Facebook. All resources would be archived on the asset database.

The project Home page – and YouTube, Facebook, Flickr etc Treasures project pages, as well as individual Treasures resources – should be branded. This is likely to need external specialist design.

The online hub will also show resources created using web tools and online services eg Google maps, timelines. Most of the tools required are freely available and the recommendation is that the New Media support officer tests concepts, prototypes and develops the use of these tools to support an active - and actively changing – community.

Such a model would give the project flexibility to experiment and prototype, try out different things with target users, make amendments in line with user feedback if need required and deliver more quickly – and economically - than a traditional commission, design and build approach. It also follows suggestions in Flow Associates' National Collections Online feasibility study, ie

"Incubate multiple lightweight experiments in technology, letting the successful experiments be sustained and mainstreamed by interest and participation. The multiple experiments might be:

- *Experiment with low-cost trials that combine data and apply third party tools to help people search, map, interpret and personalise content. This could be achieved by announcing a competition for developers, following the model of BBC Backstage.*
- *Working with Google to discuss ways of improving the indexing, tracking and deep searching of collections*
- *Making collections more findable and usable by editors of Wikipedia*
- *Releasing some collections without copyright restrictions for creative use, showcasing possibilities through collaborations with third party web companies such as Flickr."*

Applications should be developed for and with specific target audiences in accordance with the findings of the user needs survey. Facilities prototyped on the online hub could include:

- Interactive maps powered by Google Maps (see appendix B for examples)
- Timelines (see Note below and examples in appendix B)
- Regional or subject-based cross-collections search powered by the Culture Grid.

(Note: The design and content creation (historical events) of timelines can be very difficult, time consuming and expensive. There are tools available to build interactive timelines – and the project should also look at **reusing content from outside the region**, including the British Museum’s World Timelines¹⁸ events (see appendix B), before considering funding new writing.)

Other tools (eg Google Analytics¹⁹ - free) should be used to produce usage statistics on access to different pieces of content in order to inform the development of new content. Partners will also need data on usage of ‘their’ content. The project should use usage stats to help with development – not just for KPI reporting (see Virtually There pp 40 & 42).

“...interests and search terms should be recorded in the system and used to generate further content.” (National Collections Online Feasibility Study, Flow Associates)

As discussed in section 4.1, some audiences may find it difficult to demonstrate the content they have created to their peers, especially in formal learning environments, due to the current blocking of social media sites by school firewalls. Without that ability, involvement of those audiences in content creation projects – and interaction with their local museum service - might reduce. In these cases, the links on the online hub would be to resources held on sites not blocked by participants’ firewalls (eg MACE, learning environments etc).

4.4.1 Online community

It must be said that the focus groups conducted for the Treasures user needs survey found little interest amongst adult and family groups in commenting or adding their own content, but other research shows a strong interest in user generated content (see User Needs survey). The BBC’s ‘People’s War’ website²⁰ was extremely popular with its target audience (ex-servicemen), as is ‘My Brighton & Hove’²¹ (with residents past and present). East Lothian Museums have received some useful comments on photos posted on Flickr²². Furthermore, new digital resources should be developed *with* communities, rather than *for* them. Development of online communities will help with collaborative content creation just as communities of volunteers create content for physical exhibitions.

Lack of interest from the Treasures focus groups may well have been reversed had an example been chosen that sparked a personal interest in one or more of the participants. Some pointers to subjects that might encourage contributions were seen in the topics discussed elsewhere in the focus groups – eg the ‘people side’ of local industries (ex-shoemakers?). The families focus

¹⁸ <http://www.worldtimelines.org.uk/>

¹⁹ <http://www.google.com/analytics/>

²⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/>

²¹ <http://www.mybrightonandhove.org.uk/>

²² <http://www.flickr.com/photos/eastlothian/261376321/>

group also revealed some concerns about cyber-bullying. (There is some excellent advice on this on Childnet's Digizen website²³).

As with any community building project, it is fundamental that adequate time and effort be put into the process of building online communities. This will include 'seeding' discussions and responding to comments. **Partners must commit (formally) to respond** – quickly – to online enquiries and community discussions. (As a good example of the level of commitment required, see 'Tate Kids'²⁴ and 'My Brighton & Hove' (above).)

A strong recommendation is that the project team **starts now with a community wiki** or Facebook page for the first prototype (Prehistorica?). The team will need to seed discussions on proposed content, invite **recommendations**, users' **stories** about objects/themes and **questions** to curators *et al* - and respond within, say, 3 days. (Some moderation of user discussions may be needed before publication.) Members should also be invited to register for **email updates/an e-newsletter**.

4.5 Other issues

4.5.1 Project structure

To date, 27 museums and one archive have indicated an interest in participating in this project. The amount of effort required to manage a partnership project involving even half that number of partners cannot be overestimated. Much can be learned from the management of the Creative Spaces²⁵ project (9 partners – see paper by Carolyn Royston²⁶ and discussion in appendix C).

Project monitoring should include external evaluation, perhaps by a university partner, in addition to use of MLA's output reporting tools.

4.5.2 Branding and identity

As mentioned in 4.3, resources should be branded on social media sites and linked to the originating museum's website (and ideally to a page about the specific object featured in the resource). The brand is more important than the access point.

The user needs survey revealed that users were either confused by the coverage of the 'East Midlands' or interested in a more local area or interested in areas over the border. There is a real risk that the name may discourage visitors ('nothing there for me' etc).

²³ <http://www.digizen.org/socialnetworking/>

²⁴ <http://kids.tate.org.uk/>

²⁵ http://www.vam.ac.uk/activ_events/adult_resources/creative_spaces/index.html

²⁶ Royston, C., A Guide to Managing a Large Multi-Institutional Project in the Cultural Sector. In J. Trant and D. Bearman (eds). *Museums and the Web 2009: Proceedings*. Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. Published March 31, 2009.

<http://www.archimuse.com/mw2009/papers/royston/royston.html>

The marketing plan for Treasures should include an e-newsletter. Apart from the publicity, these are good for making links with potential testers.

4.5.3 Skills development

In response to the museums survey (see appendix A), 25 museums said that they need support and skills development to participate. Requirements range from training in digitising images, online audiences, social media, interviewing/recording, evaluation and outreach work - to the need for extra staff resource.

Training should also be signposted or provided in

- working with audiences to specify and create content
- how to conduct user testing
- how to create video.

UKOLN provides training in web 2.0 and some briefing documents²⁷ which are particularly useful for more technical users. Some of the other requirements could be addressed by developing Renaissance's Digital Access to Collections skills development programme run in 2008/09, which included template resources and other material. Systems should be put in place (eg a project website/wiki) for encouraging skills sharing across the partnership based on lessons learnt for that programme.

Proposed collaborative partnerships (eg with MACE, Arts Council England and local universities) should also bring new skills and knowledge to museums.

5. Summary of recommendations

This report recommends that Renaissance East Midlands implement the Treasures project in the following three parallel strands:

1. The first and major strand, **audience participation and creation of multimedia resources**, would build partnerships, motivating and enabling museums to work with learning and community groups and contribute to the process of digital content creation.
2. The second strand concentrates on **distributing the new digital resources** through a range of third party delivery services, including social media and the Culture Grid.
3. The final strand involves the development of a lightweight '**online hub**' which would be used to test and 'showcase' new multimedia content and support online communities created by audience engagement projects.

A diagram showing how the three strands would combine can be found on page 3.

²⁷ <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/cultural-heritage/documents/#micro-blogs>

The three strands will help Renaissance East Midlands to concentrate resources on working with audiences and other partners to produce high quality, accessible content targeted to users' needs.

Next steps

- Work with regional museums to agree vision, aims, objectives
- Create a project wiki or use Facebook to support the first pilot and build an online community
- Commission content in accordance with users' needs
- Appoint a New Media support officer to pilot content on social media networks and experiment with web 2.0 technologies in partnership with museum and audience groups.
- Launch a trial project to seek input/user generated content and evaluate with target user groups
- Encourage regional museums to ensure their resources are highly visible through Google and to check relevant material and links on Wikipedia. (For more on this, see recommendations in the Treasures user needs survey.)

Fiona Marshall would like to thank the following experts for their invaluable help and advice during the course of this study: Nick Poole, Alice Grant, Brian Kelly, Mike Ellis, Jane Finnis and Matthew Cock. Thanks too to Bridget McKenzie for use of Flow Associates' feasibility study on National Collections Online. Thanks are also due to Bryony Robins and Caroline Moore from Renaissance East Midlands and all the museum and archive staff who responded to the online survey and contributed in other ways to the consultation.

APPENDIX A: Summary of museums and archives survey results

1. Online survey analysed 19 July 2009 (21 responses from 15 museums and 1 archive)

Question	Yes	No	Comments
1. Is there any information about any of your objects/collections on the internet?	16	3	
2. Would you be prepared to work with us to re-interpret your collections on the new website?	19	0	Generally dependent on resources etc, but Newark & Sherwood and Brewhouse Yard very enthusiastic. Also Wollaton Hall.
3. Do you have any other digital information about your collections?	19	0	19 Digital photos, 6 gallery interactives, 4 CD-ROMs, 3 'other' including downloadable audio (Naseby Battlefield), video and elearning resources.
4. Do you have any other information that might be re-usable eg contextual/background information about places, historical periods and/or personal stories related to your collections	18	1	Wide range of material.
5. Which five objects from your collection do the public ask about most frequently?			Generally very good and useful lists provided.
6. Do you have any written research that you can share from audience consultation on information that users/non users want about collections?	5	12	
7. Please suggest some 'themes' or subject areas that you would like to collaborate on.			Huge range of suggestions. Also: <i>"I would hope that the project team would have some leadership role in researching and defining what these themes might be, presumably driven by the information they have about audience need and demand for this project."</i>
8. What workforce development support would you require to get involved?	10		Requirements range from digitising images to online audiences, social media, interviewing/recording, evaluation and outreach work.

2. Survey as updated by MDOs and sent to independent museums

17 museums replied

Question	Yes	No	Comments
1. Is there any information about any of your objects/collections on the internet?	14	3	
(Would you be prepared to work with us to re-interpret your collections on the new website?)	9		<i>(Question 2 combined with question 1)</i> Renaissance East Midlands will need to clarify the scope of the project as many respondents seem to think it will be (full) collections online.
2. Do you have any other digital information about your collections eg: Digital photographs, gallery interactive etc	17	0	All have digital photographs. Two CD ROMs for sale and 2 gallery interactives.
3. Do you have any other information that might be re-usable?	17	0	Extensive archival material, local history etc.
4. Which five objects from your collection or topics to the public ask about most frequently?			Extensive and varied lists of objects and topics provided.
5. Have you ever asked visitors, groups or the public what information they would like? Can you share this information?	3	14	Glossop, Sudbury Hall and RAF Scampton.
6. Suggest some 'themes' or subject areas that you would like to collaborate on.			Extensive and varied suggestions provided.
7. What training/support would you require to get involved?	15		Varied responses, mostly needing more information on the nature of their involvement in the project, eg <i>"Not clear what you are offering and whether we would have the time to get involved!"</i> Some will need extra staff resource to participate.

APPENDIX B: Best practice websites

Video

- <http://www.youtube.com>
- <http://www.artbabble.org/> (A collaboration between a number of American art galleries to distribute videos from their artists/others.)
- <http://www.vimeo.com/>
- (see also <http://www.cultureshock.org.uk/>) (a digital film project in the North East)

Maps

- <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/flickr/sv-index.php?page=2> (Uses Flickr and Google Maps Street View to present archive images from Powerhouse Museum. Very popular in focus groups for the Treasures user needs survey.)
- <http://www.tate.org.uk/artmap/> (needs a PC with plenty of memory) (Aims to map Tate's artworks to Google maps. Project invites users to contribute by confirming locations.)

Timelines

- www.historyworld.net. (A very wide ranging history of the world, written by Bamber Gascoigne. Museums, libraries and archives can [could?] link their objects to the system's timelines: <http://www.historyworld.net/timelines/existing.asp?gtrack=orig>)
- http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/launch_tl_british.shtml (High quality design and interface but, despite the BBC's resources, there are some (inevitable) gaps in the content.
- World timelines: <http://www.worldtimelines.org.uk/>. Leicester City Museums contributed 12 objects to this British Museum project – see <http://www.worldtimelines.org.uk/partners/lcm>). 'Explore Leicester City Museum's collections in Timelines' opens the Flash viewer.
- www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=nav.12 (London Hub's timeline)

Users' comments, eg personal stories, read others' comments, contribute to discussion

- <http://www.mybrightonandhove.org.uk/> : see Introduction to the site for more information about this excellent project
- <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/community/> : see comments, visitors' blogs etc
- <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/click/>
- <http://www.imamuseum.org/connect/interact> : videos (YouTube), Facebook etc.
- <http://www.flickr.com/commons/>

Tag objects

- <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/collections/> - see Freeze tag
- <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/browsekeywords.php>
- <http://www.caboodle.org.uk> (Culture24's pilot site for children to upload pictures of - and discuss - their collections.)
- <http://kids.tate.org.uk/> : see Blog and My Gallery

Access info in museums on mobile phones/GPS

- National Gallery iPhone app: <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/news/iphone-app>
- <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/community/blogosphere/bloggers/2009/04/17/brooklyn-museum-api-the-iphone-app/>

Other functionality

- Zoom into images: www.nationalgallery.org.uk/collection
- Buy prints: www.npg.org.uk/shop/prints.php
- Information about museum objects, zooming images (needs plugin), saving objects and creating your own folder: <http://www.preraaphaelites.org/>
- Save art in folders: www.inspirationbank.com (Birmingham City University)
- Creative Spaces: <http://bm.nmolp.org/creativespaces/> (save objects and comment)
- News/events in museums: <http://www.culture24.org.uk/places+to+go/east+midlands>
- www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk (London Hub's regional collections website)

APPENDIX C: Additional references and quotes from experts

1. Brian Kelly, Responding To Social Web Challenges

<http://blogs.ukoln.ac.uk/cultural-heritage/2009/08/06/responding-to-social-web-challenges/>

An excellent sample of ways in which organisations are using social web services/web 2.0

Many very useful points, including:

“The issue of authenticity in the Social Web is another interesting one. For me, this is a question of information literacy. Yes not everything in Wikipedia, for example, will be true, and users need to appreciate this. But Wikipedia is a very well-used resource. So let’s ensure, at least, that entries in Wikipedia relevant to our areas of interest and expertise benefit from our experiences and knowledge.”

2. Mike Ellis, Don’t think websites think data

<http://www.slideshare.net/dmje/dont-think-websites-think-data>

An excellent presentation on the benefits of unlocking content and ‘setting it free’ / machine readable data

3. Brian Kelly, Is It Really A Good Time To Be Asking For More IT Money?

<http://ukwebfocus.wordpress.com/2009/06/26/is-it-really-a-good-time-to-be-asking-for-more-it-money/>

A blog post on outsourcing web development vs ‘appropriating technology’

4. Nick Poole, Digital Britain / Digital landfill : the challenge to Heritage and HE/FE

<http://www.slideshare.net/nickpoole/digital-britain-or-digital-landfill>

Another excellent presentation – on the strategic need for the Culture Grid

Other quotes from Nick relating to this paper:

*“nobody *likes* the online collections database model anymore - at least from the world of funders and politicians.*

We really do need a new product to excite these people - which might still focus on interacting with Collections in a browser, but in much more imaginative and mediated ways.” (email to MCG, 7/07/09)

“Broadly, the shift in policy is away from mass-production of digital assets and towards digitisation that is prioritised against a known curatorial or public access need. The rationale is that mass-digitisation is equivalent to mass-acquisition. In the same sense that the hyperactive collecting of physical objects in the 70’s and 80’s left us with an uncatalogued morass of stuff, the unconstrained investment in creating new digital assets is resulting in digital landfill rather than useful, meaningful digital collections.

The online collections experience is an impoverished one, really only satisfying the needs of researchers (both formal and informal) rather than the general public – this is an assertion, rather than a demonstrable fact, but all of the evidence indicates that the public really don’t enjoy online collections. A database record about an object, albeit one which includes descriptive/narrative text, doesn’t deliver a whole lot in terms of public interest or value. As funding becomes increasingly constrained, funders are having to look again at this equation and

are deciding that it is better by far to create a smaller number of high-value assets (richly described, contextualised and connected) than it is to pursue a completist agenda of digital surrogacy for all collections, irrespective of type or public appeal. " (Nick Poole, email, 25/06/09)

- You will talk, and we will listen
- They're your collections
- Many voices is better than one
- We will come to you
- You have a fundamental right to Culture
- We will provide the platform for Culture, but it's not our job to construct it

(Nick Poole - <http://openculture.collectionstrustblogs.org.uk/2009/07/>)

5. Kelly, B., Time To Stop Doing and Start Thinking: A Framework For Exploiting Web 2.0 Services. In J. Trant and D. Bearman (eds). *Museums and the Web 2009: Proceedings*. Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. Published March 31, 2009.

<http://www.archimuse.com/mw2009/papers/kelly/kelly.html>

In this paper (a follow-up to the previous 'Time To Stop Thinking and Start Doing'), Brian Kelly investigates concerns over the use of Web 2.0 - including sustainability, digital preservation and accessibility. He proposes a risk assessment/management approach and, to aid decision making, suggests a framework covering benefits, risks, missed opportunities and costs. The paper also includes a useful list of references.

"The challenge now is to revisit some of the concerns which were raised by skeptics, to explore whether such concerns are legitimate and, where they are, to develop approaches for addressing such concerns."

6. Mike Ellis on risks:

"One of the fears which cloud computing – or any hosted application – brings out in museum and other IT professionals is that your up-time becomes reliant on services over which you have no control. I've always argued that although this is a real fear, it's infinitely more likely that the rinky single machine you've got holding your museum website up is going to fall over than an application hosted with Amazon, Google or Yahoo on an enormous server farm."

<http://electronicmuseum.org.uk/category/api/>

7. National Museums Online Project/Creative Spaces

Royston, C., A Guide to Managing a Large Multi-Institutional Project in the Cultural Sector. In J. Trant and D. Bearman (eds). *Museums and the Web 2009: Proceedings*. Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. Published March 31, 2009.

<http://www.archimuse.com/mw2009/papers/royston/royston.html>

A good summary of some of the challenges in managing a large partnership project.

Extracts from a discussion on Creative Spaces at

<http://electronicmuseum.org.uk/2009/03/04/creative-spaces-justwhy/> :

[Creative Spaces] **"utterly fails to grasp what it is about the web that makes people want to engage. I'm astounded that we're this many years into the social web and haven't learnt about the basic building blocks for online communities, and are apparently unable to take a step back from our institutional viewpoint and think like a REAL user, not a museum one."**

The second major reason is that, once again, we're failing to **take our content to our users**. This is a huge shortfalling of Europeana. People want experiences on their own terms, not on ours. C'mon, let's not have **another collections portal**. Spend your social media money adding and updating entries on Wikipedia, or create an object sharing Facebook application. Or just put everything on Flickr. And, please, please, please **create an API** or at the very least an OpenSearch feed."

"My take on the "do it here or do it there" community issue is – it depends, but IMO it is usually far more likely that you'll get users engaging in environments that they already spend their time in rather than trying to pull them to a "destination" site. (Mike Ellis)

"I think I'm just a bit dismayed to see a lack of originality. The whole notion of online 'lightbox' or user-generated collections of images of objects from different museums has been done to death, and never seems to get a great take-up.

The reason for this, I think, is that it fails to address any actual need. If I want to collect images of objects from museums (which itself is a niche need), I can just download them to my computer. I'm not saying that pictures of objects aren't interesting, it's just that this isn't a very engaging interaction. Comments and tags are a start (ala Flickr, Facebook and a few institutional websites themselves), but they're pretty generic and low-level. Why not go further, and encourage people to map 'this artist was inspired by this artist', or 'i've got this object/a similar object at home', or 'here's a link which connects to this object' or a million other options...?

And DON'T limit any tool to just a random collection of museums. Build open platforms/tools, or better still, build upon existing platforms."

(Frankie Roberto)

"Don't re-invent the wheel, embrace social networks that already exist and build on, or in, them – don't go it alone" (Ed Baker)

8. National Collections Online Feasibility Study, Flow Associates (in preparation)

Commissioned by 3 national museums in partnership with NMDC and Culture24, the National Collections Online project evaluated a number of infrastructure options before deciding to use the Integrated Architecture Project - of which the Cultural Grid is a part. The Feasibility Study by Flow Associates (in preparation) explains the options in some detail.

The authors also interviewed a large number of experts, including Seb Chan, as in the following extract:

"In June of 2007, Flickr began a collaboration with the Library of Congress, allowing the public "a voice in describing the content of a publicly-held photography collection". The aim was to give "a taste of the hidden treasures in the world's public photography archives", and to show how input and knowledge from the wider public could make collections "even richer". Another notable user of this system is the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, Australia who used Flickr Commons to open up its Tyrell Collection of photographs.

One month into its experiment with Flickr Seb Chan of the Powerhouse museum wrote:

"Our images have been viewed 39,685 times to yesterday. That's more than an entire year on the old Tyrrell website (which, incidentally, has more images and is better indexed by Google)."

He noted also that:

"75% of our traffic comes from within Flickr, 13% direct, 10% from other websites linking, and less than 1% from search" and "Tonnes of tags have been added and they have been of a

quality that we've not experienced in our other tagging projects. I am firmly of the belief that the quality is a result of the Flickr environment (let's call it 'culture') and its userbase." This seems to add credence to the mantra that if you seek further engagement with cultural collections it pays to go 'where the eyeballs are' - in this case Flickr itself (a natural 'portal' for those interested in photography)."

9. Phil Bradley's blog

http://philbradley.typepad.com/phil_bradleys_weblog/2009/07/cilip-use-of-web-20-technologies.html

Phil Bradley's blog is aimed largely at libraries, but it is well worth monitoring for new web technologies.