



Museums, Galleries and Digitisation

Current best practice and recommendations
on measuring impact

Scottish Museums Council
October 2005

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Museums, Galleries and Digitisation was commissioned and managed by Dylan Edgar, ICT Adviser at SMC.

SMC is the main channel for Scottish Executive support to, and the member organisation for, non-national museums and galleries in Scotland. SMC provides strategic leadership and a range of services including grant aid, strategic and operational advice, information and training. SMC has 205 members, which manage 341 museums all over Scotland, including 162 independent, 142 local authorities, seven regimental and 30 university museums.

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Introduction

Objectives

The objective of this project was to review current digitisation projects in the Scottish museums community in order to identify five best practice case studies. Each of the five case studies was then evaluated in terms of its impact on its target audience.

Scope

Within the museums and ICT spheres, “digitisation” is a term with many applications and definitions. The brief for this project defined digitisation as “the process of converting objects and documents, such as museum objects, photographs, manuscripts, printed text and artworks into digital form, for example through digital photography or scanning.” The definition does not include projects which, for example, involved the creation of a digital catalogue of the collection for internal management use only.

The remit of the study was restricted to projects conducted by Scottish institutions, although they did not have to be members of SMC. Due to rapid changes in the technology sphere, only projects that went “live” within the past three years were considered. There was no requirement with regards to an end date providing adequate evaluation had taken place.

Approach

In preparing this project, RGA has undertaken the following tasks:

- Reviewed the background and strategic context for this study.
- Through consultation with key stakeholders and the museums community, prepared a longlist of 20 digitisation projects that might be considered best practice.
- Developed, with SMC, a set of evaluation criteria to identify the best practice case studies.
- Based on these key criteria, developed an electronic questionnaire that was sent to the managers of all projects on the longlist.
- Identified five best practice case studies on the basis of the questionnaire responses.
- Conducted in-depth telephone interviews with the project and organisational manager for each project.
- For three of the studies conducted original end-user research by placing an electronic survey on the project’s website.
- Based on the results of the research and consultation, identified the impact of each of the best practice projects.
- Identified common success factors and lessons learned to inform future good practice in museum digitisation projects.

Background and strategic context

Introduction

In this section, the background and strategic context of the project is presented through reference to relevant policy and strategy documents. Italicised items are those deemed by RGA to have particular relevance to this study.

A national ICT strategy for Scotland's museums

Scottish Museums Council, June 2004

This report is available in full on SMC's website and features inputs from a range of technology, learning and museum stakeholders. It is summarised in this document to provide an overview of SMC's current position regarding ICT within the museums sector.

At the time of writing, the overall vision for the Scottish Museums Council is: "for modern and accessible museums and galleries in Scotland that use their collections to inspire people, shape identity, improve understanding, provide enjoyment and promote confidence."

There are five strategic priorities that underpin this vision:

- Advocating and communicating the crucial role of museums and galleries in contributing to the quality of life of the people of Scotland.
- Promoting and enhancing access, learning and stewardship across the sector.
- Building alliances at national, regional and local levels.
- Making a positive impact on Scottish society.
- Delivering best value in terms of quality and value for money.

The ICT Strategy has four desired outcomes:

1. Increasing Users: enabling museums to understand and engage with different groups and individuals who can make use of electronic museum resources.
2. Building Capacity: increasing ICT awareness, understanding and skill levels among Scottish museums.

3. Improving Performance: Mainstreaming technology within the everyday working environment of museums.
4. Driving up quality: Consistently high quality electronic output from Scottish museums that addresses a range of user needs.

The Strategy acknowledges that ICT currently offers museums many opportunities:

- Encouraging participation
- Embracing technical standards
- Working with communities
- Exploiting e-tourism
- Collaborating with others
- New ways of accessing museums
- Making the most of 21st Century Government
- Tapping public enthusiasm
- Delivering e-learning

However, it recognises that a number of challenges must also be addressed in order that these opportunities are fully realised:

- Infrastructure and skills gaps
- Raised expectations (on behalf of funding bodies and end users)
- Total cost of ownership
- Inter-service political barriers
- Understanding users
- Intellectual property rights issues
- Understanding the extent of ICT uptake by museums
- Investment

The strategy identifies four key priority areas: users; infrastructure; software systems and skills. The “users” priority is most relevant to this study. The strategy states that “museums need to know more about the people who use electronic cultural resources, to tailor projects to meet their needs. They also need to identify non-users and understand why they do not use the resources that museums offer.”

The SMC Strategy states that the following actions are required in this area:

- Research to understand user needs and expectations.
- Raising the technological profile of museums with different user groups by mainstreaming the ICT function across all areas of activity.

The goals for the “users” priority are:

- Encourage a better understanding of user requirements by museums,
- Encourage research into virtual museum audiences,

- Encourage flagship ICT projects that improve the experience of visitors,
- Establish the profile of museums as centres of technological excellence,
- Encourage e-learning,
- Encourage e-tourism.

The Strategy recognises that, as with actual users, virtual users will interact with the information in a variety of ways. It presents this as a “spectrum” of ICT users. The format and type of ICT product developed should therefore depend on who the initiative is trying to target. The wider the range of end users, the more “value added” products are required.

	Un-processed electronic knowledge		Processed value added products
Examples of electronic resources provided by museums:	Collections management database records	Digital images of objects	Teachers' packs
		Digitised photographs	Curriculum based web sites
	Online collection catalogue	Interpretive captions	Tourism web sites
		Digitised audio and video	Subject based CD-ROMs
			Interactive gallery displays
People who use these resources might include:	Museum staff	Content developers, e.g. Scran	Schools
	Researchers		Lifelong learners
		Local history groups and genealogists	e-tourists
		Interpreters and educators	Over the threshold visitors
	First tier users		End users

What Clicks? Electronic access to museum resources in Scotland and e-learning opportunities using museum resources

Jim Devine, Emma Gibson and Michelle Kane, Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, 2004

“What Clicks?” was a Strategic Change Fund project funded by the Scottish Executive and administered by the Scottish Museums Council. The full report is available from the Hunterian Museum and Gallery’s website.

“What Clicks” involved consultation with museums, teachers, pupils, lifelong learning institutions and community learning centres to establish current attitudes to, perceptions of and usage levels of electronic museum resources. The remit of the

report covered all electronic learning resources but its focus was on website provision and use. Some key findings of the report, relevant to this study, are:

- When preparing electronic resources, museums must establish their target audiences. The research with museums suggests that currently they do not do so – of the 63 museums contacted, most (the study does not give an exact figure) stated “general public” or “everyone”.
- Having established their target audiences, they must then consider their requirements.

Previous research with users of museum websites shows that they are used for the following reasons (in declining order of importance):

- To find information on recent exhibits.
- To search museum collections.
- To find information on special events.
- To find directions to museums.
- To find an appropriate image.
- To find information or research.
- To find contact information.
- To buy gifts online.
- To buy tickets online.

Research with teachers from 59 schools across Scotland showed that they would like the following electronic resources to be provided by museums (in declining order of importance):

- Downloadable information for use in class.
- Items of relevance to the Scottish education curriculum.
- Images of the collection to download.
- Games.
- CD-ROMs.
- Written information.
- Multimedia applications.

Having established the requirements of target user groups, it is important to evaluate whether these needs are being met.

Only a quarter of museums surveyed for the study had any information at all about the current use of their website and other electronic resources.

The study team reviewed the websites of 131 museums in Scotland. Given that teachers and the general public put great emphasis on accessing collections, it is somewhat surprising that only 24% of these websites even contain a description of

the collection. 21% have a dedicated collections section and just 8% provide a virtual tour.

The research with Scottish teachers showed the highest requirements were for museum websites that provided information to download and items of relevance to the Scottish curriculum. Just over a third (36%) of websites reviewed had a dedicated education section. 15% showed how the museum could be applied to the Scottish curriculum and 17% had downloadable items for teachers (in the form of educational packs and other items).

The findings of the study suggest that museums do not have sufficient information to understand or cater for the requirements of their users, and that in most cases they do not evaluate the user response to electronic resources in a meaningful way.

Survey of ICT in Scottish museums

Scottish Museums Council, September 2004

The report arose from the National ICT Strategy, which contained as an objective the requirement to map and understand the levels of ICT infrastructure and skills in Scottish museums. The aim of the survey was to build an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of ICT infrastructure and skills in Scottish museums, allowing SMC to target resources more effectively and informing other priorities within the ICT Strategy.

The findings are based on questionnaire responses from 155 SMC member museums, approximately 45% of all member museums, with the sample somewhat skewed towards independent rather than local authority run museums. Key findings related to this study are:

77% of respondents use computers for cataloguing/collections management.

34% of respondents make computers available for public use. 19% use them to allow the public to view interactive displays and 14% for the public to access the catalogue online.

29% of respondents either rely on a volunteer for technical support or have no support available to them. The cost of training is the main barrier to achieving more support.

Just over a third of respondents believe that they have sufficient ICT expertise in-house: the majority buy in expertise using contractors as and when required.

Guidelines for SMC grants programmes 2005-6

Scottish Museums Council

Further insight into the priorities and objectives for SMC can be obtained through examinations of the SMC grants policy for the distribution of Scottish Executive funding. The grant funding criteria reflect the vision and priorities of SMC (see above), with projects most likely to receive funding if they address the following:

- Demonstrate clear links to SMC's ICT and Access Strategies.
- Address long term development and planning needs.
- Improve and strengthen the capacity of the museum.
- Have clear public benefits.
- Have benefits for the museum's collection.
- Promote the work of museums to the public.
- Serve as models of good practice from which others can learn.
- Include partners at national, regional or local level.
- Promote links with tourism, including the development of an improved visitor experience.
- Commit to building staff and volunteer confidence.
- Promote good management, high professional standards and the effective use of resources.
- Respond to the new Registration (now Accreditation) standards.

All applications will be assessed against these criteria. Applicants for small grants (£2,000 or less) must also state how the proposed project fits with other strategic plans and the museum's own forward plan. They must describe how they have planned the project and how they will evaluate its success.

Applicants to the main grants scheme (between £2,000 and £20,000) will be judged against the following criteria:

- Fit with the strategies of SMC and other regional/national bodies.
- Public benefit, including access and social inclusion.
- Fit with museum's Forward Plan or Collections Management Plan.
- Project planning, with a detailed timetable and defined milestones.
- Quality of plans, including evaluation techniques.
- Capacity to deliver – is the organisation able to deliver the project effectively?
- Value for money and sustainability.

Recent trends

Other recent trends and developments in the sector include:

In a submission to the Cultural Commission established by the Scottish Executive, Mark Jones, chairman of Scrان and Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, called for a single, comprehensive online archive of all museum collections held in Scotland. Pointing to similar successful projects in Canada, the Netherlands and Australia, Mr Jones warned that Scotland risked being left behind if such decision

was not taken quickly. The Cultural Commission has yet to consider the submission in detail.

Internet search engine Google recently announced partnerships with five internationally-renowned libraries to digitise selected items for searching and reading online. The full libraries of Michigan and Stanford universities, as well as archives at Harvard, the Bodleian Library at Oxford University and the New York Public Library will be digitised in the project. It is estimated that digitising the collection at Michigan (seven million volumes) will take six years. No adverts will be shown on the library pages but there will be links to online retailer Amazon, as well as to the libraries themselves. Google state that the goal of the project is “to unlock the wealth of information that is offline and bring it online.” Paul LeClerc, president of the New York Public Library, said that the project would greatly improve access to the archive: “It is a significant opportunity to bring our material to the rest of the world. It could solve an age-old problem: if people can’t get to us, how can we get to them?” Michigan librarian John Wilkin said that the project would revolutionise the ways in which the public interact with libraries: “It will be disruptive because some people will worry that this is the beginning of the end of libraries. But this is something that we have to do to revitalise the profession and make it more meaningful. This is the day the world changes.”

Identifying best practice

Introduction

In this section, the process of selecting the five best practice case studies is outlined. RGA allocated significant time and resources to making this selection in order to ensure that all potential projects were assessed.

Developing the longlist

Consultation

In order to identify the case studies, a longlist of potential projects was drawn up as a result of consultation with the following organisations:

- **SMC**

Dylan Edgar, ICT Adviser, reviewed SMC funding award records to identify digitisation projects supported by SMC.

SMC is currently engaged in a separate review of best practice in Scottish Museums, covering all aspects of museum activity but with particular emphasis on ICT, Access and Learning and Tourism and Marketing. RGA met with Heather Doherty, Information Manager, and Susan Woods, Case Study Database Manager, to discuss any projects that they had identified which may be relevant to this study and to ensure that we avoided duplication.

In order to ensure that we included digitisation projects that had been supported by SMC for other reasons, we also contacted Emma Talbot, Learning and Access Co-ordinator and Claire Watson, Senior Policy Officer.

- **ICT strategy steering group**

The organisations and individuals who sat on the Steering Group to prepare SMC's ICT Strategy were contacted and asked to recommend examples of best practice. The following individuals provided us with a response:

Elaine Fulton, Scottish Libraries and Information Council

Ian Graham, Learning and Teaching Scotland

Nick Poole, MDA

Jim Devine, Hunterian Museum

Wendy Turner and Evelyn Simpson, National Museums of Scotland

- **Scran**
As a digital resource Scran is clearly a major source of potential projects and this study was discussed with Director Alan Blunt when the project commenced. It was agreed that the number of Scran projects that could qualify for this study was so vast that we would return to Scran later in the study and review their projects to ensure that a range of user groups and types of projects was achieved within the case studies.
- **Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)**
RGA contacted the HLF in Scotland and asked them to review their records to identify any digitisation projects that they had funded.
- **Museums community**
SMC's December newsletter contained an article describing the project and asking the museums community to nominate any projects that they believed worthy of inclusion on the longlist.

Contacting the longlist

The initial consultation phase identified 27 potential projects. RGA contacted each organisation on the longlist to explain the project and to ask whether they were happy to be included in the study. Eight organisations declined the invitation: in three cases the individuals concerned did not believe (despite the referrals from our consultation list) that they had undertaken digitisation work of sufficient merit to be included. In one case the individual who had led the project was leaving the museum and a replacement had not been recruited and the remaining four organisations said that they were just too busy to participate. The result was a list of twenty projects at eighteen different institutions, shown in the table below.

Institution	Project Name	URL
Aberdeen Art Gallery	Explorer	www.aagm.co.uk/code/emuseum.asp
Aberdeen University	LEMUR	http://www.abdn.ac.uk/lemur/
Almond Valley Heritage Centre	Commercial Breaks	www.almondvalley.co.uk/commercial_breaks/cb_abouttheproject.htm
Burns Heritage Park	National Burns Collection	www.nationalburnscollection.com/
Elgin	Digitisation Collection	n/a
Fetlar Museum	Fetlar Museum Digitisation Project	www.fetlar.com/digitisation.htm
Hatii	Glasgow Story	www.theglasgowstory.com
Heriot Watt University	Scottish Textile Heritage Online	www.scottishtextiles.org.uk
Highland Council	Am Baile	www.ambaile.org.uk
Hunterian Museum	Pilot Whistler Project	www.huntsearch.gla.ac.uk/whistler_blue/index.html

Hunterian Museum	Hominid Evolution CD ROM and website	www.hunterian.gla.ac.uk/collections/museum/hominid/hominid_index.shtml
Hunterian Museum	Romans CD Rom and Website	www.hunterian.gla.ac.uk/museum/romans
McLean Museum	Digitisation and new website launch	http://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/Museum_Gallery
Old Haa Museum	Bobby Tulloch Collection	www.bobbytulloch.com
RCAHMS	SWISH	n/a
Scran	Resources for Learning in Scotland	www.rls.org.uk
Shetland Museums	Digitisation of Collections	www.shetland-museum.org.uk/collections/collections.htm
Tain and District Museum	Website	www.tainmuseum.org.uk/
University of Dundee	The Drawn Evidence	http://www.drawn-evidence.dundee.ac.uk/dundee_dr/index.jsp
University of St Andrews	The Visual Evidence	www.visual-evidence.ac.uk/

Longlist evaluation

Evaluation criteria

The purposes and objectives of this study were translated into a set of evaluation criteria for selecting the case studies. It was judged that best practice digitisation projects would have the following characteristics:

- The overall objectives of the project are relevant to this study (for example, addressing access, audience development, conservation, education/outreach or DDA compliance issues).
- The project objectives relate to clearly defined user groups and are “SMART” (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-based).
- Data is available to measure the impact of the project on user groups (number of users, number of hits, quality of experience, etc).
- RGA can access end users (e.g. by posting a questionnaire on the website or sending an email to the museum’s database) if the existing data is not sufficient.

- Contact details are available for the manager of the establishment and the operational project manager (at the time of the project).
- The establishment and project manager have the time to meet with RGA and provide the relevant data (we anticipated that this would require a time commitment of one day)
- The project is recent (went live within the last three years).

There were also some secondary considerations that were not essential in selecting a project but that if they could be taken into account would create a better “range” of case studies for our consideration:

- The target user groups for the project are different from other shortlisted projects.
- The type of organisation is different from other shortlisted projects.
- The organisation can demonstrate impacts on areas other than museum visitors (for example on staff, volunteers or revenue streams).

In order to identify which projects best fit these criteria, a questionnaire was sent to all projects on the longlist in December 2004. The questionnaire is presented in Appendix 1. All twenty organisations completed and returned the questionnaire – a 100% response rate.

Observations arising from the longlist

The process of compiling and reviewing the Longlist raised some interesting issues in its own right. The points below reflect comments and observations from the project team and the consultees who helped develop the longlist.

Our definition of best practice was specifically focussed on the impact of digitisation projects on end users. Whilst consultees welcomed this approach, they experienced some difficulty in identifying suitable projects. This may be because, as projects such as “What Clicks” and the ICT survey have identified, museums have not traditionally approached digitisation projects from this angle. Many digitisation projects begin as conservation or curatorial tools rather than marketing or user development tools and therefore, where impacts are measured, they focus on conservation elements rather than measures of user interests or satisfaction. This focuses attention away from the final impact of the project and instead focuses on the digitisation process itself.

This emphasis on the digitisation process may reflect the extent to which digitisation is a recent phenomenon. Early digitisation projects would have had to allocate a high proportion of resources to the technical elements in order to ensure that the final product was of a sufficiently high standard. Several projects on our shortlist were clearly showing best practice in this area. However, the mechanics of the process were not the focus of this study, and it could be argued that an excellent digitisation process is worthless if the requirements of end users are not considered. As the technical process is refined and museums are able to draw on the experiences of

others when digitising their collection, they should be able to afford to dedicate more time to the requirements and demands of their target user groups. The two should not be mutually exclusive and greater interaction between curatorial, technical and user-focussed staff such as education officers could help to address this issue.

Some consultees felt that this focus by the museums community on process rather than end users resulted in a lack of projects that would fall under our definition of best practice. In this regard, multi-agency projects such as Am Baile or the Scottish Textile Heritage Online project had an advantage because they were defined by collaboration between many different agencies and this made the (shared) target user the common focus for organisations. Often these projects are reliant on ongoing project funding to maintain and advance the digitisation activity, again resulting in a stronger focus on end users as the project team has to convince funders of the impact of previous work.

There was a suggestion from some that limiting the selection criteria to Scottish projects was not in keeping with a digital product that can be accessed anywhere around the world. There may be scope for a wider study examining national and international examples of best practice. This would be especially interesting, particularly in the light of recent submissions to the Cultural Commission to examine the context of varying ICT and digital policies in different countries.

It is interesting to note that academic and local authority museums monopolise the twenty strong longlist. The ICT survey carried out by SMC in 2004 was skewed towards the independent sector and highlighted several significant ICT challenges. Local authority and academic museums may be better informed and placed to take advantage of external funding opportunities for ICT activity. They also have a considerable advantage in that they can draw on high-quality in-house expertise for the technical aspects of the study. This both brings the costs of the project down and reduces the “risk” that may be associated with appointing external technicians without in-depth internal experience.

It should be noted that based on their initial responses, not one of the twenty projects met all of the criteria set out above. Notably, not one could provide us with “SMART” objectives related to user groups, although some did have specific targets in terms of the number of items to be digitised. It is therefore fair to say that although they can be regarded as “leading practice” in terms of the current situation there is still a gap between current activity and best possible standards to which museums should be aspiring.

Within the context of the above points, RGA and SMC has selected four digitisation projects which are, in the opinion of the project team, examples of current best practice in user impact:

Am Baile	Highland Council
Explorer	Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum
Pilot Whistler Project	Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery
Shetland Photographic Archive	Shetland Museums

The following sections contain a description of each of the selected projects and an evaluation of their impact on end users. These are followed by a drawing together of key points from the research to highlight common points that can be taken from the case studies and applied to other digitisation projects in the future.

Am Baile – Highland Council

www.ambaile.org.uk

Project objectives

Overall objectives

Am Baile is described as “a groundbreaking website which provides a new learning and research resource for everyone with an interest in the heritage, culture and language of the Scottish Highlands and Islands. The site can be viewed in English and Gaelic. It is designed as a learning resource to be used in informal and formal settings and presents information in an interactive way this is fun to use. Am Baile brings together unique and interesting material from archives, libraries, museums and private collections such as photographs, rare books and documents as well as short films, audio, comics and interactive games and quizzes. It is also a major resource for understanding the social and economic history of the area – from the lives of individual ordinary people to the events and influences which affected the area as a whole.”

Am Baile is a centralised showcase for collections in the Highlands and Islands regions. It is managed by a consortium led by The Highland Council in partnership with Taigh Chearsabhagh Trust and West Highland Animation. The online collection and resource are drawn from these organisations and other museums or private collections in the area.

The project arose out of a recognition that the Highlands and Islands has a very dispersed population and this presents access issues for people who want to view the various collections in the area. Simultaneously the Scottish Executive and other public agencies were responding to calls for greater emphasis on the development of the Gaelic language. These two strands are combined in Am Baile, where items in the collections are used to provide information about Highland life and culture and to encourage exploration and progression with the Gaelic language.

The stated aims of the project were:

- To draw together a wide range of materials of outstanding cultural, historical and linguistic significance to the communities of the Scottish Highlands and Islands and the Highland Diaspora overseas
- To make these materials accessible to, and usable by, a worldwide audience through digitisation and internet technology
- To develop new resources for lifelong learning based on the digitised items
- To present Gaelic as a living and relevant language

The project was driven by the following vision:

- Encourage the use of the Gaelic language through the use of the website

- Improve access to historical and cultural resources
- Increase awareness and knowledge of the history and culture of the Gaidhealtachd

Project audiences

The project identified four key target markets:

- Gaelic speakers and learners.
- Children (particularly those who are Gaelic speakers and learners).
- General browsers
- Researchers

The original intention was to engage anybody with an interest in Highland history and culture. The project partners recognised that this would necessitate the creation of different levels of interpretation and information; the requirements of a child Gaelic speaker would be very different, for example, than those of an academic researcher. The website structure and content was therefore developed with this broad range of audiences in mind.

Project targets

The project partners did not set any “SMART” targets for usage or user group benefits.

The only SMART targets for the project related to the number of images and items to be digitised but these were subsequently revised. It was felt that it was more important to provide adequate information about each item than to achieve the digitisation targets and have no explanatory text to accompany the images.

Project budgeting and planning

User consultation and response

There was no formal budget for user consultation during the project planning stage but a two-stage process was undertaken:

- Consultation with other museums, owners of collections and internal Highland Council departments to identify suitable content for the website. This process revealed some interesting issues with smaller independent museums, who were concerned that making the collections available for free over the internet would cannibalise their admissions revenue. Am Baile addressed these concerns by suggesting that the museums put a small proportion of the total collection on the site to act as a “taster”.

- Focus groups with target user groups and intermediaries to test the site. Focus groups were conducted with local history societies and relevant Council employees such as education officers. These resulted in minor changes in terms of the overall look of the site and the way in which the material was presented. The timing of the focus groups – early in the process when the quantity of material on the site was fairly small – ensured that change requests could be accommodated within the overall project budget.

There was no specific budget allocated for user evaluation and response after the project went live, other than the ongoing costs of managing the website.

Marketing and communications

Am Baile had a dedicated promotional budget to raise awareness of the site. In addition to a formal launch event, promotional material (posters and leaflets) was produced and distributed. The site is also showcased at relevant events related to target user groups such as heritage or education fairs. There was no formal evaluation of marketing activity but staff report an increase in recognition – now when they attend fairs they no longer have to explain what the site is about.

The site has its own dedicated web address (rather than being a part of the Highland Council website, for example) and it is believed that this has helped to reinforce the identity of the project and increase awareness.

Impact assessment process

Data collected by the project team

The following information is routinely collected and monitored by the project team:

- Web statistics.
- Email enquiries and feedback.
- Feedback at exhibitions and trade fairs.

Original user research

In order to supplement the internal collection of data, RGA designed a user questionnaire and placed it on the Am Baile website in March/April 2005. The questionnaire was designed to test the objectives of Am Baile and provide an indication of how people are using the site and what they think of it. The questionnaire and full responses are presented in Appendix 2.

Project evaluation

External audiences

Web statistics

Monthly statistics are used to monitor and evaluate the usage of the website. A summary of these is presented in the table below.

Am Baile web statistics, May 2003-February 2005

Month	User sessions	Average duration of user sessions (minutes)	Average page impressions per user session
May-03	4,275	13.43	7.88
Feb-05	22,201	23.55	10.63

Source: Highland Council/RGA

Since Am Baile was launched in May 2003 the number of user sessions per month has increased by an impressive 420% and the average duration of each user session by 75%. This illustrates the growth in popularity of the site, although of course it is not possible to determine from the site whether the figures reflect an increase in the number of users or an increase in the frequency of site usage, or both.

Feedback emails and enquiries

A more qualitative indication of user experience of Am Baile is obtained through feedback emails that are sent to the site. The number of such emails was initially very low, suggesting that whilst people were visiting the site they were not interacting with it at a high level. Staff report that the number of regular emails has now increased although at just 17 in the past reporting quarter (June – October 2004), the number still appears fairly low. As would be expected with a site of this scope, the nature of enquiries ranges but the most common themes are: learning Gaelic; positive feedback about the site; error reports; translation requests; foreign language requests; historical enquiries and library enquiries. This list, although based on a small sample, does suggest that the Gaelic learning element in particular is raising interest with users.

Where the emails relate specifically to site content or presentation they are handled by the Am Baile team; otherwise they are passed on to a relevant organisation or agency for them to handle. There is therefore a clear distinction between the website management aspect of the project and the content element, which potentially means that Am Baile is able to respond to some user feedback more quickly than others.

Gaelic learning

One of the stated aims of the project is to encourage Gaelic learning. No official monitoring has been undertaken on this aspect of the project but it is known that a third of all pages viewed are in Gaelic. Given that only 9% of the Highland population have any knowledge of Gaelic this suggests that the Gaelic language learning focus of the site may be particularly appealing to users. Anecdotally the project team think that exposure to the collections will have had a positive impact on Gaelic learning –

they cite the case of a staff member at one of the design companies working on the project who was inspired to learn Gaelic as a result.

Indeed, the project team felt that the focus on Gaelic represented a barrier to non-Gaelic speakers, particularly just after the launch. The project team therefore worked hard to communicate that although Gaelic is a key component of the site the context is broader than just the language and extends to heritage, history and culture as well. They believe that the increased number of users reflects some success in this area and indeed two-thirds of all pages are viewed in English.

Other feedback opportunities

The attendance at exhibitions and fairs has also presented the project team with a means of gaining feedback from end users and relevant intermediaries. Again this is not formally logged but in broad terms has been very positive. The project team has found that as the content and scope of the site has increased, the quality of feedback and enthusiasm has done likewise; it is easier to communicate the benefits of an extensive resource that people can see and access at an exhibition than a limited one that they cannot.

Direct user consultation

Sixty responses were received to the user questionnaire posted on the Am Baile website between March and April 2005. Full responses are presented in Appendix 2 but some key findings are:

- The vast majority (nearly 70%) of respondents were visiting for personal/general interest reasons, followed by 17% for professional reasons and 15% for academic study. This reflects the broad range of audiences envisaged by the project team.
- During the research phase, 47% of respondents were new to the site, suggesting that Am Baile continues to attract new audiences. There was also a solid base of repeat visitors, with 17% coming more than twenty times in the past year. This high level of repeat visitation suggests that users are satisfied with the site overall.
- 38% of respondents were based in the Scottish Highlands. 22% lived elsewhere in Scotland, 13% elsewhere in the UK and 28% overseas. This is probably to be expected given that the material focuses on the Highland area and taking the significant Scottish diaspora into account.
- Only 30% of respondents were aware of the collections featured on Am Baile before they visited the website and only 22% of the sample had ever visited them. This suggests that Am Baile has achieved one of its central objectives in increasing awareness of the collections and making them more accessible.
- The main reason for most visits is to browse the online collection (45% of the sample), followed by learning more about Highland culture (33%) and

improving Gaelic skills (22%). Again this reflects the broad objectives of the project.

- Out of a maximum of five, respondents gave Am Baile an average rating of 4.09. The highest ratings were achieved for the quality of images (4.04) and the variety and range of items available (3.99). The quality of video and audio clips received the lowest ratings (each 3.67) and this might assist in directing future development activity on the site.
- 53% of the sample had some knowledge of Gaelic, suggesting that the site is attracting an approximately equal number of Gaelic and non-Gaelic speakers. This is further evidenced in that 57% of visitors view the site only in English, with the next largest group (20%) viewing mostly in English but with some Gaelic. This may reflect the mixed level of Gaelic competence within the user group, with 30% of all respondents placing themselves in the “basic” category. Am Baile therefore appears to be attracting Gaelic learners; 64% of visitors expressed a desire to improve the level of their Gaelic understanding.
- 63% of those who wish to improve their Gaelic believe that Am Baile has helped (or will help) them to do so. Therefore, users appear to regard the site as a useful language resource, reflecting the original aims of the project.
- 85% of respondents felt that Am Baile has helped them to better understand Highland Culture, again suggesting that the original objective of the project has been achieved.

Impact on internal audiences

Training and skill acquisition

The process was regarded as a fantastic learning opportunity for the project team, based in Inverness. None of them had website experience before starting work on this project and it was a very steep learning curve. They worked with contractors to provide much of the technical backup, which ensured a high quality product and enabled staff to learn from specialists.

At its peak the project was employing twelve people; Highland Council has now (with support from Highlands and Islands Enterprise) been able to retain five members of the project team to continue working on the site. This creates a sense of legacy for the project and allows the partners to use existing knowledge to plan new activities. This is particularly important for the project in that New Opportunities Funding will expire this year, allowing the project team to move away from the original project plan and explore new areas for development (see below).

Time and cost savings

The photographic archivist at Highland Council has found that the site is useful as an internal resource. Where previously a record search would require a physical review

of the items in storage, it can now be done online. This has direct cost and time saving benefits for staff.

Recognition

Am Baile received the Alan Ball Local History Award, 2004 creating a sense of achievement and recognition with key staff.

It should be noted that the New Opportunities Fund, who were the main funders for the project, require a full and formal evaluation of the project during 2005. Further user research will take place at this time as part of this process.

Future developments

As noted, the New Opportunities Funding will expire later in 2005. There is therefore a requirement for the Partners to drive Am Baile forward.

New content continues to be added to the site and it is encouraging to note that some of those museums who were initially reluctant to digitise their collections have now approached Am Baile and asked to be included.

The future direction of Am Baile is driven by a working party consisting of representatives from Highland Council museums, archives and archaeology, other partners, Heritage Societies, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and other relevant bodies. The working party takes decision on the future content of the site and acts as a project champion – members are active advocates for the site and this continues to drive good publicity within the community.

One idea for future work with user groups is to use Am Baile as an introduction to using the internet for IT classes within the Highlands. It is hoped that this will have a doubly positive impact, developing lifelong learning skills whilst encouraging more users to engage with the site.

Further user interaction is anticipated through the introduction of a new feature on the site allowing users to submit their own stories and reminiscences. It is hoped that this will encourage people to return to the site and increase its visibility within the Highland Community.

Summary and observations

- Overall visitation to the site has increased significantly since it was launched and the duration of visits has also increased. These basic, top-level indicators therefore indicate that the project has been successful in attracting and retaining users.
- Am Baile was conceived as a solution to many of the access issues facing museums and collections in the Highlands and Islands and as a Gaelic language learning resource. It is interesting to note that whilst the former can be evaluated to some extent in terms of user statistics and appear positive,

there is very little internal evaluation of the Gaelic language aspects of the project.

- Original end user research conducted by RGA suggests that 70% of users are completely new to the collections featured on Am Baile. This suggests that Am Baile is achieving its objective of making them more accessible.
- Most of the users are based in the Highland and Islands or overseas (38% and 28% respectively). These were the stated target audiences for the project.
- 85% of respondents believed that Am Baile would improve their understanding of Highland Culture and 63% that it would help them improve the Gaelic language skills. Again this is a positive endorsement by end users for the targets set by the project team.
- The project combined internal staff with external contractors to provide specialist assistance and advice. This enhanced the skill set of Highland Council staff while protecting the quality of the project. Further investment has allowed these staff (and their skills) to be retained in-house.
- The project had its own publicity budget and brand identity (including a dedicated web address), which helped to create awareness and recognition. The response of user groups has improved as the quantity of information on the website increases.
- The site is not static; new information is being added and a working party is in place to move the project forward.
- It is interesting that a project designed to improve access to collections was rejected by some museums because of fears about its impact on revenues. RGA has explored this issue with other museums and discuss it more fully later in this report.

Explorer – Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum

www.aagm.co.uk/code/emuseum.asp

Project objectives

Overall objectives

Explorer set out to “encourage the exploration, understanding and participation about Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums Collections.” The project arose out of a recognition that a large proportion of the collection was never on display and that it would be a public benefit to make aspects of it more accessible. Museum staff wanted to build on other digitisation work, including previous Scran projects, to make the collection available to people without forcing them to come into the museums or gallery. There was also an awareness that the geographical location of Aberdeen represented a barrier to many visitors and it was felt that a website to showcase the digital collection would help to overcome this.

Explorer created digital records for Aberdeen Art Gallery’s catalogue management system. The system is linked to the website to create public access for the collection. When the collections management system is updated it automatically updates the information on the website.

Project audiences

The project audience was defined very broadly as “the general public”, particularly those who could not get to the museums themselves. The definition was deliberately kept broad because the initial aim of the project was to make the collection as accessible as possible to everyone and, indeed, to test out which elements they particularly liked. The project aimed to make the content suitable for someone with a reading age of 14 years and above.

Project targets

The project partners did not set any “SMART” targets for usage or user group benefits.

SMART targets were set as to the content of the digitised collection, focussing on the number of brief records, the number of extended label information fields and the number of images. These targets were reached internally but not replicated on the public website due to quality control issues.

Project budgeting and planning

User consultation and response

The website was not tested with the general public before it went live but it was tested internally with museum staff who work with the public and with the IT team.

The overall reaction to the system was positive but the process did lead to some modification as to the wording and presentation of information for some items.

There was no specific budget allocated for user evaluation and response after the project went live, other than the ongoing costs of managing the website.

Marketing and communications

There was no specific budget for marketing the website but some activity did take place. A launch event was organised but it was felt that the quality of information on display during this time did not justify a high-profile launch. Leaflets were produced and the website address is promoted on Council literature. It is notable that unlike Am Baile the Explorer website is part of the overall Aberdeen Council website, which may impact on visibility and recognition for Explorer in its own right. Interestingly, staff reported that participating in this study has helped to raise the profile of the site, particularly internally within the Council.

Impact assessment process

The impact of the site on end users is measured by Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum by collating the following statistics:

- Website statistics.
- Monitoring of email enquiries.
- Revenue generation.

No user evaluation was conducted by RGA for this project. The main aim of the project was to increase audiences and it was judged that this could be measured and evaluated through the measures employed by Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum. The evaluation of any subsequent “higher level” project aims, such as audience engagement and interaction, would require greater interaction with users.

Project evaluation

Impact on external audiences

Web statistics

Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum provided RGA with web statistics for the period February 2003 – February 2005 (the website was launched in June 2002).

As shown in the following table, the number of user sessions over the last two calendar years has been relatively constant at approximately 140,000.

User sessions, Explorer, 2003 and 2004

	2003	2004
User Sessions	143,197*	137,146

Source: Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum/RGA

** The 2003 figures appear to be skewed by a high figure of 20,004 user sessions in January, nearly double the usual figure for the month. Comparing February to December in each of the two years shows an increase in 2004 of approximately 1,000 sessions year-on-year.*

This information can be compared with visitor figures for Aberdeen's museums over the same time period to determine whether overall access to the collections has increased:

User sessions and museum visits, Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums / Explorer

	2003	2004
Aberdeen Art Gallery	186,534	237,646
Maritime Museum	89,443	89,368
Provost Skene's House	58,315	58,216
Explorer user sessions	143,197	137,146
Total "visits"	477,489	522,376

Source: Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum/RGA

The above figures suggest that the overall aim of increasing access to the collection has been successful; the total number of "visits" either to the physical properties or to the website has increased. Much of this growth is driven by Aberdeen Art Gallery, which has a changing exhibition programme and therefore would anticipate a fluctuating attendance pattern. Nevertheless the attendance at the other sites has remained constant, suggesting that an increased online presence does not necessarily dilute admissions; indeed, it may generate visitors. Aberdeen Art Gallery is keen to point out that it does not feature all of the collection on the website so the two are more complementary than competitors.

It is notable that the average duration of each user session is relatively short at between one and one and a half minutes. This suggests that although the project is performing well in terms of access there is limited interaction with the site's content. Arguably this is where the experience of visiting a museum, where staff can interact with users and provide additional information, will be of better value than simply viewing an image of the item on a website.

Email enquiries

Email enquiries have been logged from July 2002 soon after the site first went live. The number of enquiries fluctuates every month, ranging from 88 in August 2002 to 19 in November and December 2004. The average number of monthly enquiries over the period is 51.

Approximately two-thirds of all enquiries are passed to the curatorial team, suggesting that they are specific enquiries about items in the collection or related topics. Where they are retained by the project team they often relate to textual errors or give site feedback. The project team responds to these as appropriate to ensure that the site is as user-friendly as possible.

Digital photograph requests

Visitors can request digital photographs of the items in the collection for a fee of £7.00 per photograph. This is not a new service but is now promoted on the website. Since December 2002 the scheme has generated income of £1,356, suggesting that a total of just under 200 pictures have been issued. The project staff would like to improve this figure and believe that the number of orders would increase if the service was better promoted both on the website and in the gallery and museum.

Impact on internal audiences

Training benefits

Two content officer posts were created during the project to create the digital records. The funding for these posts ended in November 2004 but they have been retained in-house until September 2005. This ensures that the skills developed during the course of the project can be retained and allows the organisation to look at new ways of developing the project.

Curatorial benefits

The cataloguing system is linked to the Explorer website. Staff create the object record and then decide whether the quality of the image is sufficient for it to go onto Explorer. Once it is on the system, then any additional information added to the catalogue record is automatically updated on the website. This ensures that the site remains static, creating a dynamic user resource and saving a great deal of staff time.

Staff have also, unexpectedly, benefited from having a computer catalogue with images. They are able to undertake an initial review of the collection online, for example when planning an exhibition, rather than physically consulting all the records. Again this saves staff time and ensures that they are aware of the full potential of the collection.

There is a conservation impact of the project too, in that if an item deteriorates or goes missing the Art Gallery now has a photographic record of it.

Future developments

There is potential for the online content to expand further but the Art Gallery is struggling to resource the process now that the content officers are also working on other projects.

Having developed broad access to the collections, Aberdeen Art Gallery is now interested in tailoring the content to meet specific user group needs. A children's website, "Getting to Grips with Heritage" is now being developed, with the content specifically geared to the demands of a younger audience. The project will be presented in Aberdeen schools and be linked to Explorer. The project team feels that the Explorer experience has allowed them to gain a greater appreciation of their collection in the same way as the public has done, and they are now interested in creating greater interaction and exploration of the collection items.

There is recognition that for the website to be useful to researchers the quality of accompanying data has to improve, and this is another target for the project team.

It is also recognised that the digital collection could enhance a physical visit to the museum and there are plans to develop on-site terminals for visitors to use as part of their visit. Again, the possibility of seeing an image of an item and then viewing it in a gallery or storeroom should enhance the degree of interaction between the museum and the public. The progression of these plans is dependent on securing appropriate funding.

The project team recognises that monitoring and evaluation procedures could be tighter to better illustrate and understand the impact of the project. An upcoming Service Review later this year may provide an opportunity to undertake additional research with user groups in order to achieve this.

Summary and observations

- Explorer had a very general aim: to increase access to the collections. Examination of web statistics and visitor numbers to the galleries suggests that this aim has been achieved; the challenge now is to tailor the product and delivery mechanisms to meet the specific needs of different user groups and thereby enhance interaction and participation.
- Limited marketing and promotional activity is likely to have affected the extent to which the wider public are aware of the website. This may be exacerbated by the lack of a specific web address for the resource.
- The digitised catalogue management system is clearly saving staff time and improving their own access to the collection by removing the requirement to physically sort through items.

- Whilst the usage statistics collated by the project team are probably sufficient to measure user access, they will not be adequate for measuring the extent of user interaction and experience with the site. Monitoring and evaluation tools that are appropriate for the measurements required should be developed alongside any future initiatives.
- By retaining project staff after funding has expired, Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum has been able to move on to subsequent stages and maintain the momentum generated by Explorer.
- The interaction between the front and back office systems has been essential in maintaining a relevant and useful website resource.

Pilot Whistler project – Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery

www.huntsearch.gla.ac.uk/whistler_blue/index.html

Project objectives

Overall objectives

The Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery in Glasgow (“The Hunterian”) is a high-profile institution in the field of digitisation, reflected in the fact that they had three projects on our longlist. The Pilot Whistler project was a continuation of the Hunterian’s work in this area over the past twelve years and is part of a long-term strategic aim to make the digital museum collections available to everyone.

Originally part of a major and popular year-long exhibition programme, Whistler 2003, the digitisation project aimed to showcase the Hunterian’s Whistler Collection and at the same time test (“pilot”) the new technology developed by the Hunterian for further applications in the future. The stated aims of the project were:

- To develop a Web standards-based, easy-to-use, and accessible way for all of our audiences to search our collections catalogues and find object information and object images (or sound, movies etc).
- To use our Whistler object records as a prototype for this approach.
- To upgrade, and make the Whistler records more accessible and enjoyable by providing interesting and accessible interpretive text, and high-quality images.

The use of digitised images was regarded as a key way to overcome some of the technical and perception difficulties associated with using museum catalogues – it becomes much easier to understand the significance of an item if it is possible to see it. The Hunterian’s catalogue management system already contained digital records – the purpose of this project was to present them in a manner suitable for public use and interest.

Project audiences

The target audiences for the project were:

- The general public: the Hunterian’s aim was to increase awareness of its Whistler collection and, ultimately, all its collections.
- Students and scholars of 19th century art, design and social history, primarily in the further and higher education sectors: it was felt that this group would

benefit from better access to high quality images for study and would not be so dependent on having to visit a museum to gain information.

- The wider museum community: primarily to share the content of the collection and to showcase the techniques employed in presenting it.
- Collaborative data gathering projects such as Scran: again, an opportunity to share the content and techniques used in the project.
- The Hunterian itself: it was hoped that the project would raise public awareness and the profile of the collections (digital or otherwise) and indeed would encourage general awareness between departments, increasing the scope for collaboration.

These particular markets were selected on the basis to which they would be easy to target: all, to some extent, were either current users or had an interest in the subject matter. There was a feeling that the project should not be regarded as one massive audience development initiative but that if it could increase awareness and raise the profile with these target groups then the technology and process could be applied to other areas. It was felt that the publicity created by Whistler 2003 was an opportunity to showcase both the collection and the technology.

Project targets

Although the Hunterian did set out desired outcomes for specific target markets (see above), these were not described in a SMART manner.

Content targets were set and achieved. Approximately 800 digital images were created through the project.

Project budgeting and planning

User consultation and response

There was no formal budget for user consultation but it was assumed and understood by all in the project team that this would be a central part of the overall project. Resources had been allocated to respond to user testing from the earliest stages of the project.

The approach adopted was to set the prototype site up as early as possible and show it to as many people as possible. During the design and construction phase the project was tested with standard web accessibility tools using several browsers (including text-only Lynx), and informal assessment was undertaken by non-specialists and people with particular access difficulties. The process identified some key differences between the way that specialists and non-specialists understand and talk about art, and adjustments were made to reflect the preferences of both groups.

It was felt that the design process was further helped by the close interaction between the programmer, the collections manager and the content editors, all of whom were based at the Hunterian and therefore could communicate and consult informally throughout the project. Again this ensured that the requirements of the various groups were kept at the forefront of the design phase.

Marketing and communications

There was no specific budget allocated for promoting the project to end users but it did have the considerable PR success of being part of Whistler 2003. This created an excellent “hook” to encourage people to engage with the subject and to drive them to the website.

Impact assessment process

Internal assessment

The Hunterian Museum and Gallery monitored the impact of the project in the following ways:

- Website statistics
- Logging and analysis of query terms
- Email enquiries/responses

End user research

In order to enhance the quality of information about end user motivations and experiences of the project, RGA placed an end user questionnaire on the website in March/April 2005. During this time, just nine responses were received. This was disappointing and may reflect the greater number of academic or professional users (as opposed to leisure users) compared with other sites considered in this project. The full questionnaire, with detailed responses, is presented in Appendix 2; due to the small sample size RGA would caution against applying the findings to all users of the Whistler Online Catalogue.

Project evaluation

Impact on external audiences

Website statistics

A monthly website report is made for the site. For the purposes of this study, RGA has chosen to show visitation and usage at the site by examining the figure for average successful requests per day. A summary of the data at key dates is presented in the table below.

Pilot Whistler Project: Average successful requests per day, 2002-2004

Date	Average successful requests per day	Note
September 2002	385	Main development complete but website not officially launched
February 2003	633	Launch of Whistler 2003
December 2003	680	End of Whistler 2003
February 2004	1,176	Original Whistler 2003 site taken down (and replaced with revised site)

Source: Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery/RGA

The table illustrates the significance of Whistler 2003 as a traffic generator for the site and the importance of ongoing revision in generating new visits.

Query term logs

The project team logged the number and nature of the search query terms used on the website. This allowed them to monitor overall activity and see how people were using the site. As with the overall visitor traffic, the number of queries increased during Whistler 2003, growing from 2,681 prior to launch (January 2003) to 4,216 one month later. The number of queries continued at between 2,000 and 5,000 per month throughout 2004.

Monitoring the nature of the query terms revealed some interesting findings about the overall usage of the site and allowed the project team to make adjustments where necessary. For example, one of the most common search terms was “Inca”. This was the name of the database package that the site utilised but visitors to the site thought that it was about Inca artefacts. Monitoring the search queries allowed the project team to redesign the site and avoid confusion.

Emails and informal feedback

Unprompted emails to the project team are not formally logged. It is estimated that they have received “several tens” of emails, and all but two (both about specific object records) have been positive.

Anecdotal feedback from further and higher education students suggests that they are now able to review the collections in much more detail on the internet, saving them time and effort in determining what they want to see at the Gallery.

End user research

Key findings from the end user research (based on a small sample of nine respondents) were:

- There appears to be a clear difference between this and other sites, with no respondents citing general interest as a reason for visiting. The most common reason was academic study, followed by professional/business. This reflects the target audiences for the project, although given a larger sample size we would expect there to be some representation of the leisure market.
- 44% of respondents were new to the website although there was also a loyal cohort which had visited more than twenty times during the past year.
- Nearly half of the sample was based overseas, with a further third based in Glasgow itself.
- 44% of users were not aware of the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery before they visited the website – this suggests that the digital presentation of the Whistler archives can have positive benefits for the institution in terms of increasing awareness.
- Of those who were aware of the Hunterian, all had a degree of familiarity with the Whistler collection. This may reflect the user groups for this website; academic or professional users are probably more likely to be aware of such assets than the general public.
- The main reason for visiting the website was to look at the online catalogue (63% of respondents).
- Out of a maximum of five, the Whistler online collection received an overall rating of 3.67. The quality of the images received the highest rating (3.90) and the search facility the lowest (3.26). It should be noted that these figures are based on a very small, discerning audience and therefore they should be treated with some caution.
- 63% were aware that they could also search for other items online and 75% said that they would look at other parts of the collection in the future. This underlines the extent to which a high-profile collection can be used as a “hook” to promote the wider resource.
- The interaction between digital and physical provision is underlined in that 75% of respondents agreed (50% of them strongly) that looking at the Whistler collection online would encourage them to visit the Hunterian museum and art gallery in the future.

Impact on internal audiences

Training and skills acquisition

Unlike some of the other projects featured in this study, the Hunterian started from a sophisticated technical and digital starting point. The speed and relatively low cost of the project may therefore be a reflection of the ability to harness such expertise in-house rather than relying on external specialists. Much of the work had already been done; the project focussed on making it available and useful to end users.

Having said that, the project was clearly an important test for the technology itself, which will be further applied to other projects in the future.

Time and cost savings

Staff are reported to value the resource in that they can direct the public to it as a first point of reference. It also makes planning and organising an exhibition or loan much easier as much of the information about the object is available as a digital record.

The system upgrades on a weekly basis and so is always up to date. This is considered essential if the online collection is to be regarded as contemporary and reliable. Without a facility such as this it would be very difficult to sustain the project over the longer term.

Future plans

Although formal monitoring ended in December 2003 the project is still ongoing. For example, the Beatrix Whistler collection has recently been added to the site and the Hunterian is planning to undertake similar work for the Charles Rennie Mackintosh collection later this year.

There is a desire to better promote the technology and approach to other museums in the belief that it is an accessible and appropriate tool for them to use.

Summary and observations

- The Hunterian was able to draw on extensive in-house expertise and co-operation for this project, resulting in a well-focussed and cost-effective project.
- User groups were more clearly identified than for other projects in the study although the impact objectives were not SMART.
- The user research (albeit with a small sample) suggests that the site is primarily utilised for academic and, to a lesser extent, professional, reasons. This reflects the target groups and motivations identified by the project team, although the level of leisure interest from the “general public” appears to be relatively low.

- The end user research provides some indication that the site has achieved its aim of increased awareness of both the Hunterian's Whistler Collection and its other resources; nearly half were "new" to the institution and three-quarters agreed that visiting the website made them more likely to visit the Hunterian for themselves.
- User testing, although not a formal process or part of the project plan, was regarded as an integral part of the overall project. The close communication between different elements of the project team (curatorial, technical, content editors) also facilitated a flexible working approach and meant that presentation issues could be resolved relatively quickly.
- The publicity and media coverage generated by Whistler 2003 was effective in driving visitor traffic to the site. The Hunterian was astute in its choice of subject to test the technology.
- Monitoring the number and nature of search queries was an effective means of gauging visitor traffic and understanding what people want to get out of the site.
- The automatic upgrading of the website by linking it to the collections management system has created a sustainable product for end users.

Shetland Photographic Archive – Shetland Museum

www.photos.shetland-museum.org.uk/shetlands/app

Project objectives

Overall objectives

The original objective of the Shetland Photographic Archive project was “to digitise the photographic collections of the Shetland Museum and to make them available using a variety of sources.”

Until the start of the project, very little of the photographic collection had been made available to the public. Some of the images were stored on glass plates, making them difficult to handle, and the remainder were slides or negatives that had never been catalogued or sorted. The bulk of the collection focuses on Shetland life and it was anticipated that the Shetland community could assist in the cataloguing process by providing information about the images in the collection. Digitising the collection would therefore make it available to as many people as possible, which in turn could enhance the quality of available information. It would also make it easier for the museum to respond to requests for prints from the collection without having to handle fragile glass plates all the time.

The collection was digitised and presented on terminals inside Shetland museum (one of which could travel out to various communities) as well as on the website.

Project audiences

The people of Shetland were the primary target audience for this project, both as an audience with a high degree of interest and as a resource to improve the quality of information about the collection. Schools and local and family historians were regarded as particularly likely targets.

The Shetland diaspora, including the various overseas Shetland societies, were anticipated to be an important secondary market, followed by researchers and others with an interest in Shetland life and culture.

Project targets

The project partners did not set any “SMART” targets for usage or user group benefits.

As far as the process was concerned, the original target was to digitise the entire collection of 85,000 images. This was refined as the catalogue was explored in more detail and some images were rejected due to duplication. The final figure was around 70,000.

Project budgeting and planning

User consultation and response

A 6 month period was allocated to piloting the project in terms of the digitisation process but nothing on the same scale was considered for the public-facing aspects.

The site was piloted informally with friends and relatives of the project team. As with other sites the feedback was relatively minor, mainly focusing on the ways in which the information was presented and the usage of the search facility. Overall the response was described as “positive and enthusiastic.”

Marketing and communications

The project plan included provision for a local launch event featuring local radio and press. From this it was anticipated that word of mouth marketing would take over and spread to Shetland societies around the world. Some search engine optimisation work was undertaken and the project team created web links to associated organisations.

With hindsight the project team acknowledges that this was not sufficient. There has been relatively low demand for prints to date from commercial buyers, which has had a negative impact on the revenue generation element. This is attributed to a failure to identify the appropriate purchasing channels for this market.

Impact assessment process

Internal evaluation

The project impact is measured by Shetland Museums through the collection of data on the following areas:

- Website statistics
- Usage of public terminals
- Enquiries
- Print orders

External evaluation

A user questionnaire was designed by RGA and placed on the Shetland Photographic Archive website during April 2005. A total of 33 responses was achieved during this period. The full questionnaire, with associated responses, is presented in Appendix 2. It was hoped to replicate the user survey at the museum itself but the Shetland Museum was moving premises during the time of our study and this was not possible. It is suggested that any future user research does focus on actual as well as virtual visitors, as there may be differences between the two groups.

Project evaluation

Impact on external audiences

Website statistics

A range of website statistics is collected by the technology providers but the website team acknowledges that these do not provide the full picture of site usage. As an indication, the number of visits recorded per month over the past five months is presented in the table below.

Number of visits per month, Shetland Photographic Archive website

Month	Number of visits
October 2004	842
November 2004	1,987
December 2004	1,687
January 2005	2,373
February 2005	3,399

Source: Shetland Islands Council/RGA

It is difficult to arrive at an overall conclusion as to usage from these figures but they do give an indication of the volume of traffic visiting the site.

Public terminal access

The collection is also made available through public terminals at Shetland Museum. Visitation to these is not monitored either, but as an indication the number of terminals increased from one to four in nine months due to the popularity of the service. This suggests that for the local market at least, the photographic collection is appealing and museum staff report anecdotally that they believe it has encouraged people to visit the museum.

There is one other terminal that can be hired by local history societies or other interested organisations and this is reported to be “constantly out”.

Email enquiries

People can contact the museum from the website or the user terminals to ask general questions, provide feedback or provide specific information about the collection. These are processed by a volunteer and passed to the relevant individual for follow-up. The number of email enquiries is not logged but it is estimated that it peaked at around 20 per day. It is felt that in some cases people are reluctant to use the technology to provide information and would rather perhaps deal with people face to face, which is how the museum used to collate information. Nevertheless this process is much faster and makes more efficient use of staff time.

Print orders

The volume of print orders has been lower than originally anticipated by the project team. The current order rate is approximately 64 per month, generating an average monthly income of £500. This is felt to be approximately the same order rate as before the items were digitised but it should be noted that the costs associated with sourcing the image and producing the print have decreased dramatically. The lack of interest in the order system is attributed to two factors; people are content to see the image of a decent size on the public terminals (so do not feel compelled to make a purchase) and there is little effective marketing to the commercial sector.

End user research

The key findings of the end user research (based on a sample of 33 users) are:

- The vast majority of respondents (more than 80%) are visiting the website out of personal or general interest. This reflects the anticipated motivations of the target markets (local residents and the Shetland diaspora).
- Over 80% of respondents had been to the site before, suggesting a loyal core audience. 18% were new to the site, showing that it continues to attract some new audiences.
- 61% of respondents had never viewed the collection on the terminals at Shetland Museum, suggesting that showing the same product in two formats (one physical and one virtual) can attract different audiences.
- 49% of respondents were based in the Shetland Islands and 33% from outside the UK. This broadly reflects the target markets for the project.
- The main reason given for visiting the site was to look at the online catalogue, followed by finding out about local history. Finding out about Shetland culture was also an important motivator, although it was more likely to be cited as an “other” rather than a “main” reason.
- It is interesting that several respondents had very specific research reasons for visiting the site. Often they were looking for images of Shetland-specific items, such as Shetland sheep or fishing boats.
- Out of a maximum of five, respondents gave the website an average rating of 4.6. The variety and choice of images available received the highest rating (4.56), with the quality of item descriptions the lowest at 3.86. The item descriptions issue has already been highlighted by the project team and it is hoped that ongoing contributions from the local community may begin to address this issue.
- Awareness of the “tell us” feature was relatively low at 53%; addressing this issue could be a means of improving the quality of item descriptions. 93% of

respondents said that if they had information about a photograph they would provide it, suggesting that they are willing to interact with the project.

- 70% of the sample had visited Shetland Museum in the past, reflecting the characteristics of the audience as people with a connection to the area. 72% said that viewing the collection online would encourage them to visit in the future.

Impact on internal audiences

Training and skills

The project employed two staff to carry out the internal scanning work of the glass plates. Other scanning work was outsourced, as was the writing of the descriptive text. The funded staff posts ended in December 2003 but they were retained internally because the work was still ongoing. There is at least one staff member still at the museum who would be capable of running further digitisation projects.

Time and cost savings

Staff are now able to refer public enquiries to the digital resource as a first reference point. There has also been a significant reduction in the time taken to process print orders (see above).

Curatorial benefits

The process has increased staff familiarity with the collection, making it easier to use the images in a more imaginative way.

Future plans

There is the facility to add further images to the archive but the staff resources at present will not allow it. Shetland is in the process of a major organisational and physical change and there is no spare capacity. This has meant that on occasion offers of other collections have been declined.

Should the resources become available, the project team recognise that there is potential in many other areas – paintings, maps and so on. There is also interest in developing sound and video collections.

Summary and observations

- This was an interactive project that aimed to generate information about the collection by making it available to as wide a user group as possible.
- A six-month period was dedicated to developing the digitisation process. Whilst this was clearly important it is notable that there was no similar formal process for understanding user requirements. Shetland Museum is certainly

not alone in this area – in most cases user response and reaction to the product was assessed on an informal basis.

- The project appears to have been very popular with end users, particularly in Shetland, and may be responsible for driving visitors to the museum. However without detailed visitor and usage statistics it is not possible to argue this definitively.
- The website is used by both local residents and Shetland diaspora around the world, mostly for leisure/general interest. Many are therefore familiar with Shetland Museum, although the majority have not used the terminals to view the collection. This suggests that the terminals and the website are reaching different audiences.
- The project receives high ratings from users (average rating of 4.6 out of 5) and over 90% would contribute information about the images. Awareness of the facility to do this was relatively low; better promoting this aspect of the site might work to improve the quality of information available.
- The project has not generated as much revenue through print orders as was originally anticipated. This is partially attributed to poor promotional techniques, especially with commercial buyers (and reinforced by low levels of business usage on the site).
- A critical mass of local support for the project appears to have built up, illustrated by the increase in demand for public terminals and the offer of donations from other private collections. However, a lack of resources within the organisation after the project officially ended has meant that these offers have had to be declined. This illustrates the importance of creating an exit strategy for a project.
- Despite a current lack of capacity, Shetland Museums have been able to retain some of the digitisation skills developed during the project. The potential to build on the project by increasing the digitised collection therefore still exists, albeit dependent on finding sufficient time to undertake the work.

Case study observations

The case studies were all very different in terms of their scope, scale and aims, and this will necessarily impact on the ways in which their impacts are measured. In broad terms, however, there are some common features that define them as current best practice:

- The material selected for digitisation has been suitable for the target audiences and the project objectives.
- In all cases there has been some monitoring of the impact of evaluation on end users.
- Within the constraints of the project budget, the organisations were able to respond to user comments at the testing stage and after the project went live.
- Organisations have addressed issues of skill retention and project sustainability, again as far as the project budgets would allow.
- All organisations report positive impacts on internal users.

However it is fair to say that in all cases the level of evaluation with end users carried out by the institutions does not provide a full picture of who is using the site, why they are using it and what they think of it. Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum had a very simple aim – to increase exposure to the museum collection. For this project, web statistics provide a partial indication as to whether they have succeeded. However, they do not say anything at all about the quality of the experience; access does mean more than simply being able to see the item (or an image of an item) and there is very little formal monitoring of user impacts at these more involved levels.

RGA therefore conducted original research with end users for three of the projects. In all three cases the results showed that the sites were achieving positive impacts in relation to their stated objectives. The user ratings of various elements of the site could be useful in allocating funds to future activity on the project.

It is our belief that such research (and other techniques where applicable) should be standard practice for all projects that aim to convey a benefit to end users. By collating and managing the data as the project progresses, in the same way that the number of images digitised or the number of user sessions is monitored, museums will be provided with a longitudinal picture of how their target audiences view the output. This will ensure that the existing product can be modified and adapted to meet user requirements. It may also identify new directions or concepts for future projects and the data provides funders and stakeholders with a meaningful indicator as to the value of their investment. As RGA's research has shown, it is neither expensive nor particularly time-consuming to undertake this research, particularly using new technology. Funders can assist in this process by increasing the

requirement for monitoring and evaluation reports (measuring progress against the original stated objectives of the project) throughout the funding period.

The end-user research provided RGA with an opportunity to explore in more detail the relationship between the digital and physical presentations of a collection. This has many relevancies for the museums sector, including for example the reported reluctance of some smaller museums to donate their collections to Am Baile for fear of reducing their physical visitor numbers. In all three of the user surveys (placed on Am Baile, the Whistler On-line Catalogue and the Shetland Photographic Archive), respondents were asked whether they agreed with the following statements:

“It is easier to use a website like this than to go to a museum directly.”

“I have been able to find more information here than I would have in a museum.”

“This website makes me want to visit the museum and find out more.”

“Using websites like this is better than visiting museums.”

The responses from the three surveys were collated (total sample size of 82 digital museum resource users) and the results presented in the table below. A rating of 5 means “agree strongly” and a rating of 1 means “disagree strongly”.

Responses to attitudinal statements, RGA end user research, April 2005

	Average rating (N=82)
“It is easier to use a website like this than to go to a museum directly.”	3.9
“This website makes me want to visit the museum and find out more.”	3.8
“I have been able to find more information here than I would have in a museum.”	3.2
“Using websites like this is better than visiting museums.”	2.6

Source: RGA

The results suggest that the main benefit of digitisation projects presented on the web is, not surprisingly, that they do remove some of the barriers to accessing the physical collection. This is particularly relevant for the case studies here, which had relatively high levels of national or international users. However, there is also a recognition of the limitations of virtual access to a digital collection compared with an actual visit to a museum. This may suggest that if museums want to increase the quality of user experience at the digital level, then they need to focus on the way in which the digital collection is presented and improve the quality of the information that accompanies the image; this should be a natural progression as the technological expertise required to digitise a collection becomes more established. There is some suggestion, including the case studies presented here, that the digital

“exhibitions” can act as a showcase for the museum, generating demand for increased physical visits. This may provide some reassurance for the smaller independent museums reliant on admission charges.

The relationship between the physical and digital presentation of collections is interesting and in essence the two appear to complement, rather than compete with, each other to produce positive impacts for both groups of end users. The research presented here only provides a small snapshot of the overall situation and if museums are particularly interested in, or concerned about the impact of a digitised collection on their physical presence then again we would recommend detailed research to identify key issues.

“Best practice” checklist for museums

During the course of the research RGA has identified several criteria that appear to define best practice end user digitisation projects. Many of these have been achieved by the projects discussed in this report, but it is important to note that not one project undertook all of these tasks. This reinforces our earlier observation that although the selected projects are “best practice” at present, there is still considerable scope for improvement in the overall process. The key focus of our study, measuring the impact of digitisation projects on end users, is in fact the area that appears the most neglected. Given the reliance on public funding for many of these projects, it is surely vital that museums and other cultural bodies should adopt such a measurement process. RGA would expect that as projects continue to evolve they should be aspiring to achieve this. The standard of “best practice” should be improving all the time, reflecting increased expertise and understanding.

In our opinion, to achieve a best practice digitisation project, museums should:

- Involve all museum staff (not just curators or technology specialists) in the whole process, from project planning to ongoing monitoring
- Define user groups at the start of the project and be specific about the desired outcomes for each. Objectives should be related to the overall aims of the project and should be “SMART”: Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based. Examples of SMART objectives include:
 - *“to increase the number of registered users from 100 to 300 by 2007.”*
 - *“to increase the number of registered older people (aged 60+) from 100 to 150 by 2007.”*
 - *“to generate an average of £1.50 in revenue for every registered user in 2006.”*
 - *“to increase the average duration of a user session from five minutes to seven minutes by 2007.”*
 - *“to achieve an average satisfaction rating of 4 out of a maximum of 5 in a survey of end users in 2006.”*
 - *“to achieve high levels of recommendation in end users: 9 out of 10 users in 2005 would recommend the project to a friend in a user survey.”*
- Design a suitable monitoring and evaluation tool for each target market – different outcomes will require different research techniques. Allocate sufficient resources in the budget to do this – it is the only way project success can be determined. Good results also make impressive advocacy statements to potential new funders, and can be used to gain publicity.
- Allocate time in the project planning stages and once the project has gone live for end user testing, and allocate adequate financial resources to respond to this research if necessary.

- Promote the project to drive interest – if no-one knows about it there will be no impact. Discuss the most suitable promotional strategy at the planning stage and allocate a budget accordingly. Consider the requirements of each target market separately to ensure that communication is appropriate. A dedicated website address would appear to assist in this process. Think about the timing of promotion – too early and there may not be enough material on the site to convince users. Non-electronic, as well as digital promotions, should be considered.
- A digital project can age very quickly unless the content is refreshed and updated – the public resource should link to a collections management system if this is possible and appropriate and the institution should also respond to user comments. An iterative development programme should be expected and indeed aspired to. Again, the project planning process should ensure that the resources are in place to achieve this.
- Ensure that there is a suitable exit strategy in place to retain or, at worst, transfer the skills and expertise developed as part of the project and maintain momentum. Given that in most cases this will necessitate further funding applications, it may be sensible to identify areas that could be addressed through future digitisation work and are appealing to funders and to transfer the content as appropriate.
- Ensure that the technology is as flexible as possible, for example so that new items can be added and the system transferred from an in-house terminal to a website. This will broaden the application, making future planning more cost-effective and straightforward.
- Ensure that the end user monitoring actually takes place – web statistics are easy to obtain but are often confusing and only ever tell a small part of the story.

Implications for funding bodies

The projects reviewed in this study are in many cases the result of successful applications to funding bodies. As noted in here, the strategic context for Scottish museums is favourable for ICT and digitisation projects and therefore funding for good projects is available. In many cases these projects are also first-time ventures into digitisation for museums, often resulting in steep learning curves as the required technological expertise is accumulated and a high allocation of resources to the digitisation process itself.

The danger of this approach, if funders continue to support new projects exclusively, is that in several years the internet will contain numerous dated, static digitisation projects with no resources for ongoing development. This study has identified the requirement for an iterative development programme and indeed this is vital for raising the “best practice” standard, and hence user impacts. Our conversations with the current best practice institutions suggest that in many cases such a development programme would be impossible to maintain in-house from existing revenue budgets; the implication therefore is that funding bodies would, in time, have to shift their own funding priorities from instigating new projects to developing and redefining existing ones.

As a wider point, funders have an essential role in encouraging the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of projects, particularly in the context of end users. They should ensure that an adequate monitoring and evaluation budget is built into the project plan, and should request periodical evaluation reports once the project goes live. In this way they can emphasise the importance of measuring impact on end users and the project managers will be made aware of changing user requirements. This should result in high impacts on end users against key objectives, a clear measurement for funding bodies in relation to the value of their investment and an advocacy tool for museums in applying for further development resources.

Appendix 1: Evaluation questionnaire

Dear (Organisation contact name)

Further to recent correspondence, you will be aware that RGA is in the process of identifying best practice digitisation projects as part of a project for SMC. Our brief is to identify five projects from within Scotland that demonstrate best practice with regard to end users, and to evaluate the impacts of these projects.

We have undertaken a consultation exercise with the museums community and other key stakeholders in order to arrive at a longlist of potential projects and I am delighted to say that (name of project) has been included on it. The best practice case studies will be selected from this longlist using the responses to the attached questionnaire. I would be grateful if you, or another suitable individual within your organisation, could complete the questionnaire and return it to me at RGA by **Monday January 31st 2005**. Completed questionnaires can be emailed to helen@rgaconsulting.co.uk, faxed to 0131 558 3299 or posted to RGA, 10A Forth Street, Edinburgh EH1 3LD.

Once we have received all the responses, RGA and SMC will decide on the five projects that are most suitable for further study. We will contact all respondents at the beginning of February to communicate our decisions and an analysis of the responses, along with any “lessons learned” from them, will form part of our final report.

I look forward to receiving your questionnaire response – if you would like to discuss it, or any other aspect of the study, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0131 558 1529.

Kind regards and many thanks for your co-operation.

Helen Thomas
Manager

SMC Digitisation Best Practice Evaluation Questionnaire

1. Project Details

Establishment/organisation name:

Project Name

Project Description.

Please provide a brief description of the project in the space below.

Please tell us the key dates for the project (when it started, when it went “live” to user groups and when it formally ended, if appropriate)

Start Date:

“Live” Date:

End Date:

Please tell us the total cost of the project by ticking the relevant box:

£9,999 or less	<input type="checkbox"/>	£10,000 - £19,999	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20,000-£49,999	<input type="checkbox"/>
£50,000-£99,999	<input type="checkbox"/>	£100,000 or over	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Please tell us whether the digitised collection was presented wholly within a physical space (such as a museum gallery), wholly in a virtual space (such as a website) or whether it used a combination of the two.

100% physical ☐

100% virtual ☐

Combination ☐

2. Contact Details

Please provide us with the contact details for the manager of your organisation

Name _____
Designation _____
Address _____
Telephone _____
Email Address _____

Please provide us with the contact details for the individual who managed the project (if this is the same as the organisation manager, please write "as above").

Name _____
Designation _____
Address _____
Telephone _____
Email Address _____

3. User Groups

For the purposes of this study, we are interested in the impact of digitisation projects on **end users**.

Please set out the objectives for the project, particularly any that relate to your target user groups.

Please define the target user groups for your project.

Please tell us about any activities that you or the project team are undertaking to monitor the impact of the project on user groups (please note that at this stage it is not necessary to tell us the results of these activities).

4. Study Requirements

In undertaking this study, RGA may wish to contact the target end users (for example by sending out a questionnaire to an email list or putting a questionnaire on a website). All such activity will be conducted in accordance with Data Protection legislation and of course you will receive full feedback on the results.

Are you willing to let us contact your target user groups?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If your project is selected as an example of best practice, RGA would require some time inputs from you in order to undertake the project evaluation. We anticipate that we would require approximately a day of your time in order to review the project, collect available data, collect contact details for end users (if appropriate) and discuss the impact of the project on other aspects such as staff, volunteers and revenue generation.

Discussions with you would take place in February/March 2005 and will be conducted in person or by telephone at your convenience.

Would you be able to allocate the required time to the project?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Responses can be returned by email to helen@rgaconsulting.co.uk , by fax to 0131 558 3299 or by post to RGA, 10A Forth Street, Edinburgh EH1 3LD. If you have any questions about the questionnaire or would like to discuss the project in more detail then please send me an email or call me on 0131 558 1529.

Appendix 2: End user research results

Am Baile survey results

Data Collection Methods

A pop-up invitation (in Gaelic and English) was placed on the Am Baile website from March 16th – April 17th 2005. The invitation explained that the survey was being conducted as part of an SMC project and invited visitors to the site to participate. A total of sixty responses were received – an average of three per day.

The questions posed in the survey are presented below with the appropriate response rates.

NOTE: The small sample size and limited duration of the survey means that caution should be taken in using these results. Whilst we believe that the responses provide a good indication of the views of current users they are not statistically significant and should not be applied to all Am Baile users.

1. Please select one box from the list below that best describes your reason for visiting Am Baile today.

Reason	% of respondents (N=60)
Personal/general interest	68%
Professional/business	17%
Academic Study	15%
Other	0%

2. How many times have you visited Am Baile in the past year?

Number of Visits	% of respondents (N=60)
Never, this is my first visit	47%
Between one and ten times	27%
Between eleven and twenty times	10%
More than twenty times	17%

3. How did you find out about Am Baile? Please select as many as apply.

Information source	% of respondents (N=60)
Search Engine	27%
The Highland Council	17%
Colleague at work	12%

Tutor/teacher	7%
Fellow student	2%
Taigh Chearsabhair	2%
Other	43%

“Other” responses were:

Scots Magazine (9)
 Library (2)
 Leaflets (2)
 Clan Munro Magazine (2)
 Recommendation through Caithness Family History.
 Wikipedia
 My son
 Just stumbled across it
 Advertising
 Friend
 Genealogy Mailing List
 Information from a relative in Scotland
 Oban Times
 Fellow choir member
 Local information
 Nigel Tranter email letters
 Poster at work

4. Please tell us where you are based by selecting one box from the list below.

Location	% of respondents (N=60)
Scottish Highlands	37%
Elsewhere in Scotland	22%
Elsewhere in the UK	13%
Outside the UK	28%

5. Before your first visit to this website, were you aware of the collections featured on it?

Awareness Level	% of respondents (N=60)
No, I was not aware at all	68%
Yes, I had some awareness	25%
Yes, I was familiar with some of the collections but not all of them	5%
Yes, I was very familiar with all of the collections	2%

6. Before your first visit to Am Baile, had you seen any of the following collections? Please select all that apply.

Collection	% of respondents (N=60)
Highland Council Archive	13%
Taigh Chearsabhaigh	12%
Whyte Collection	8%
Nairn Collection	8%
Cook Collection	5%
Duncan Macpherson Collection	0%
None of the above	72%

7. Please tell us how you use (or intend to use) Am Baile. Please select ONE main reason in the first column. Then select any other reasons for using the website in the second column. You can select as many reasons as you wish in this column.

Reason	Main Reason*	Other Reason
Browse the online collection	45%	27%
Learn more about Highland culture	33%	39%
Improve my Gaelic language skills	22%	12%
Look at the factsheets	20%	35%
Play Games	8%	6%

*Several respondents failed to follow the instructions for this question and highlighted several “main” reasons. Nevertheless, responses have been included in this format because it is felt that they do distinguish between main and other reasons. In both cases, multiple responses mean that columns do not total 100%.

8. If there is another reason for visiting Am Baile, please explain it in the box below.

There were seven responses to this question:

Previously worked at Aberdeen University with the George Washington Wilson Collection.

Research related to work, sourcing of information not necessarily available elsewhere. To find material that will be useful to someone I work with and advise them where to find the relevant information.

Having got involved in this survey, I've forgotten why I'm here tonight! Usually, general interest, or to go elsewhere via the excellent links (please get the

Macdougall Collection Oban on the links – I think their site is “Friends of the Macdougall Collection”).
 My main reason is to consult the Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record.
 Very interesting site.
 Suim sa teanga.

9. Please rate the following aspects of Am Baile, where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent.

Collection	Average Rating (N=47)
Quality of images	4.04
Variety and range of items available	3.99
Search Facility	3.81
Quality of item descriptions and text	3.81
Quality of video clips	3.67
Quality of audio clips	3.67
Am Baile overall	4.09

10 Please tell us the level of your Gaelic understanding by selecting one box from the list below.

Competence Level	Response Rate (N=47)
Fluent – I can speak, read and write Gaelic	11%
Intermediate – I can understand and communicate in Gaelic but I would not say I was fluent	13%
Basic – I have some limited understanding of Gaelic	30%
I cannot understand Gaelic at all	47%

11. Would you like to improve your level of Gaelic understanding? (excludes respondents who described themselves as “fluent”).

	Response Rate (N=47)
Yes	64%
No	14%
Don't Know	21%

12. Do you believe that Am Baile has helped (or will help) you to learn Gaelic? (excludes those who do not want to improve their level of Gaelic understanding)

	Response Rate (N=32)
Yes, definitely	16%
Yes, probably	47%
No, probably not	22%
No, definitely not	6%
Don't know	9%

13. If you would like to explain your answer please do so below.

Four responses were received:

Truly a great web-based resource!
Haven't gone in depth to study the site, however fully intend to do so.
Already speak it fluently.
Bha i agam mus deach mi faisg air an larach-lin seo!

14. Do you think that Am Baile has helped you to better understand Highland culture?

	Response Rate (N=32)
Yes, a lot	20%
Yes, a bit	65%
No, not a lot	4%
No, not at all	0%
Don't know	11%

15. If you would like to explain your answer please do so below.

Four responses were received:

Only had time to give the site a quick look over, was brought up in Inverness; therefore already have an understanding of Scottish history and culture.
Don't panic [in response to a "no" answer]; I have studied the Highlands for some time – Am Baile is likely in the long run to improve it, but have limited access, and only just found it!
In-law came from the Outer Hebrides.
I am interested in Highland culture as all my ancestors were crofters and visited them every year for our summer holidays and loved the lifestyle. Still go to the old house for a tranquil break and breathtaking scenery. My wife and I love the Scottish Highlands.

16. Please tell us how much of the site you view in English and how much in Gaelic.

	Response Rate (N=46)
All in English	57%
Mostly in English but some Gaelic	20%
Equal between Gaelic and English	9%
Mostly in Gaelic but some English	13%
All in Gaelic	2%

17. Finally, please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. 1 means strongly agree and 5 means strongly disagree.

	Average Rating (N=46)
"It is easier to use a website like this than to go to a museum directly	3.82
"I have been able to find more information here than I would have in a museum"	3.47
"This website makes me want to visit Taigh Chearsabhagh and the other collections to find out more."	3.90
"Using websites like these is better than visiting museums"	2.60

18. If you would like to make any further comments, please do so in the box below.

"I think it depends. I don't think anything can beat the value of a museum visit and the magic of the real thing, but for certain information Am Baile is really useful. Being a website it can hold far more information on permanent display than a museum could ever show all at once. For searching and certain types of research it has obvious advantages."

"It's an excellent backup but difficult to find - I remember the postcards a few years ago but didn't know that they related to anything else, let alone something as useful as this. I have ceased to chase randomly offered websites as they are usually commercial."

"As I live in a remote area of the West Highlands, the website is very useful as I am not able to visit museums or collections often. However I still enjoy museums and collections and would not want to replace them with a website."

Pilot Whistler project survey results

Data Collection Methods

A pop-up invitation was placed on the Pilot Whistler website from March 26th – April 25th 2005. The invitation explained that the survey was being conducted as part of an SMC project and invited visitors to the site to participate. A total of 9 responses were received. This was disappointing given the volume of traffic to the site during this period (2,146 users recorded). The project team moved the popup to the search page in the belief that visitors may have been accessing the site directly at this page. This appeared to be moderately successful (the number of responses increased by seven) but the overall response rate remained low. It is possible that, given the further education target audience for this site, users have a higher propensity to block popups or ignore visitor surveys than the “leisure” users more applicable to Am Baile and Shetland.

The questions posed in the survey are presented below with the appropriate response rates.

NOTE: The very small sample size and limited duration of the survey means that caution should be taken in using these results. Whilst we believe that the responses provide a good indication of the views of current users they are not statistically significant and should not be applied to all users of the Whistler Online Catalogue.

1. Please select one box from the list below that best describes your reason for visiting the Whistler online catalogue today.

Reason	% of respondents (N=9)
Academic Study	78%
Professional/business	11%
Personal/general interest	0%
Other	11%

“Other” response was:

“Asked by another person living abroad.”

2. How many times have you visited the Whistler online catalogue in the past year?

Number of Visits	% of respondents (N=9)
Never, this is my first visit	44%
Between one and ten times	11%
Between eleven and twenty times	22%

More than twenty times 22%

3. How did you find out about the Whistler online catalogue? Please select as many as apply.

Information source	% of respondents (N=9)
Search Engine	33%
Colleague at work	33%
Tutor/teacher	11%
The Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery	11%
Fellow student	0%
Other	11%

“Other” responses were:
University publication

4. Please tell us where you are based by selecting one box from the list below.

Location	% of respondents (N=9)
Glasgow, Scotland	33%
Elsewhere in Scotland	22%
Elsewhere in the UK	0%
Outside the UK	44%

5. Please think about the first time you visited this website. Before your first visit, were you aware of the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery in Glasgow?

Awareness Level	% of respondents (N=9)
Yes	56%
No	44%
Don't know	0%

6. Before your first visit to this website, were you aware of the Hunterian's Whistler Collection? (includes only those respondents who were aware of the Hunterian Museum)

Awareness Level	% of respondents (N=5)
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No, I was not aware at all	0%
Yes, I had some awareness	40%
Yes, I was familiar with the Hunterian's Whistler Collection	60%

7. Please tell how you use (or intend to use) this online catalogue. Please select ONE main reason in the first column. Then select any other reasons for using the website in the second column. You can select as many reasons as you wish in this column.

Reason (N=8)	Main Reason*	Other Reason
Look at the online catalogue	63%	25%
Find out about James Whistler	38%	25%
Find out about Beatrix Whistler	25%	25%
Find out about the history of the Hunterian's Whistler Collection	13%	50%
Find out about the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery	13%	25%
Find out about the University of Glasgow	13%	0%

*Several respondents failed to follow the instructions for this question and highlighted several "main" reasons. Nevertheless, responses have been included in this format because it is felt that they do distinguish between main and other reasons. In both cases, multiple responses mean that columns do not total 100%.

8 If there is another reason for visiting the Whistler online catalogue, please explain it in the box below.

There was one response to this question:

"I am trying to provenance a drawing found in the estate of a recently deceased family member. The pen and ink drawing of a boy signed "Whistler 1869" was found in a folio from an art store in New York."

9. Please rate the following aspects of the Whistler online catalogue, where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent.

Collection	Average Rating (N=8)
Quality of images	3.90
Quality of item descriptions	3.78
Variety and choice of items available	3.39
Search Facility	3.26
Site overall	3.67

10 The Whistler online catalogue is only one part of the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery's online collection. It is possible to search for and view many other items from the collection online.

Were you aware of this feature?

	Response Rate (N=8)
Yes	63%
No	38%
Don't know	0%

11. Have you ever browsed other areas of the Hunterian's collection online?

	Response Rate (N=8)
Yes	38%
No	63%
Don't know	0%

12. Do you think that you will look at other parts of the collection in the future?

	Response Rate (N=8)
Yes, definitely	50%
Yes, probably	25%
No, probably not	13%
No, definitely not	0%
Don't know	13%

13. Have you ever visited the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery in Glasgow?

	Response Rate (N=8)
Yes	63%
No	37%

14. Do you think that looking at the Whistler online catalogue will encourage you to visit the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery in the future?

	Response Rate (N=8)
Yes, definitely	50%
Yes, possibly	25%
No, possibly not	13%
No, definitely not	0
Don't know	13%

15. If you would like to explain your answer please do so below.

One response was received:

"My family ancestry is from Scotland and I have a "cruise buddy" who hales from Edinburgh. I have been invited often to come and visit and am hopeful that this may occur in the near future."

16. Finally, please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. 1 means strongly agree and 5 means strongly disagree.

	Average Rating (N=8)
"It is easier to use a website like this than to go to a museum directly	3.49
"I have been able to find more information here than I would have in a museum"	2.71
"This website makes me want to visit the Hunterian to find out more."	3.36
"Using websites like these is better than visiting museums"	1.96

17. If you would like to make any further comments, please do so in the box below.

No further comments were received.

Shetland Photographic Archive Survey Results

Data Collection Methods

A pop-up invitation was placed on the Shetland Museums website from April 6th –25th 2005. The invitation explained that the survey was being conducted as part of an SMC project and invited visitors to the site to participate. A total of 33 responses were received. It was originally hoped to put a pop-up survey on the terminals in the museum to gain responses from museum visitors but the Shetland Museum was moving properties during the time of our study and this was not possible. It is suggested that any future user research does focus on actual as well as virtual visitors as there may be different user requirements between the two groups.

The questions posed in the survey are presented below with the appropriate response rates.

NOTE: The small sample size and limited duration of the survey means that caution should be taken in using these results. Whilst we believe that the responses provide a good indication of the views of current users they are not statistically significant and should not be applied to all users of the Shetland Photographic Archive.

1. Please select one box from the list below that best describes your reason for visiting the Shetland Museum Photographic Archive today.

Reason	% of respondents (N=33)
Academic Study	15%
Professional/business	3%
Personal/general interest	82%

2. How many times have you visited the Shetland Museum Photographic Archive in the past year?

Number of Visits	% of respondents (N=33)
Never, this is my first visit	18%
Between one and ten times	46%
Between eleven and twenty times	15%
More than twenty times	21%

3. How many times have you looked at the Shetland Museum Photographic Archive on the public terminals at Shetland Museum in the past year?

Number of Visits	% of respondents (N=33)
Never	61%
Between one and ten times	33%
Between eleven and twenty times	3%
More than twenty times	3%

4. How did you find out about the Shetland Museum Photographic Archive? Please select as many as apply.

Information source	% of respondents (N=33)
Shetland Museum	24%
Search Engine	24%
Colleague at work	15%
Tutor/teacher	6%
Fellow student	3%
Other	40%

“Other” included:

Friend/family (6)

Shetland Islands Council Website

Scots Magazine

Through the NASSA (North American Shetland Sheep Breeders Association)

Shetland Sheep Breeders List

Shetland Family History Society booklet.

A message post in a newsgroup regarding silent films

Radio Shetland

5. Please tell us where you are based by selecting one box from the list below.

Location	% of respondents (N=33)
Shetland Island	49%
Elsewhere in Scotland	9%
Elsewhere in the UK	9%
Outside the UK	33%

6. Please think about the first time you visited this website. Before your first visit, were you aware of Shetland Museums?

Awareness Level	% of respondents (N=33)
Yes	64%
No	27%
Don't know	9%

7. Before you first visited the website or viewed the public terminals in Shetland Museum, were you aware of the Photographic Archive? (includes only those respondents who were aware of Shetland Museums)

Awareness Level	% of respondents (N=21)
No, I was not aware at all	14%
Yes, I had some awareness	67%
Yes, I was familiar with the Photographic Archive	4%

8. Please tell us why you are visiting the Shetland Museum Photographic Archive. Please select ONE main reason in the first column. Then select any other reasons for using the website in the second column. You can select as many reasons as you wish in this column.

Reason	Main Reason*	Other Reason
Look at the online catalogue	45%	21%
Find out about my local history	24%	28%
Find out more about Shetland culture	21%	38%
Research my family history	17%	24%
Find out about Shetland Museums	0%	28%

*Several respondents failed to follow the instructions for this question and selected several "main" reasons. Nevertheless, responses have been included in this format because it is felt that they do distinguish between main and other reasons. In both cases, multiple responses mean that columns do not total 100%.

9. If there is another reason for visiting the Shetland Museum Photographic Archive, please explain it in the box below.

There were nine responses to this question:

"This is mainly chance. Immediate interest memories of the war time Shetland Bus, and memories of a very brief visit to Lerwick about 1944."

"I own a flock of 40 Shetland sheep - courtesy of the original official importation to Canada in 1980 - and I want some original photos of the sheep and Shetland for a

display: "Shetlands Then & Now" which I am currently assembling. This will be used at a local (Wisconsin, USA) Scottish Festival this summer."

"A fellow Shetland sheep breeder told us list members that this website has photographs of spotted and patterned Shetland sheep."

"I used to live in Shetland."

"I teach history in an Italian liceo and I'm interested in herring fishery during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."

"My principal interest is shipping, and the J. Hughson collection in particular is an endless source of delight. I bought a number of prints from him when he was alive, but only a very tiny fraction of what is now available to be enjoyed on your website."

"Research on Shetland boats."

"Researching Shetland archaeology."

"Research on past practice and events for Contaminated Land Survey."

10. Please rate the following aspects of the Shetland Photographic Archive, where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent. If you have not used a facility or feel unable to comment then please select the "n/a" column.

Collection	Average Rating (N=32)	n/a
Variety and choice of items available	4.56	16%
Quality of images	4.32	12%
Search Facility	4.22	16%
Quality of item descriptions	3.86	12%
Site overall	4.60	16%

11 The photographic archive has a "tell us" feature. This allows visitors (online and in the museum) to provide additional information about the photographs in the archive. In doing so, museum staff hope that the quality of information in the archive will continue to improve.

Were you aware of this feature?

	Response Rate (N=30)
Yes	53%
No	43%
Don't know	3%

12. Have you ever provided Museum staff with information about a photograph on the archive?

Response Rate (N=30)

Yes	20%
No, but I do have information about a photograph	10%
No, because I do not have any information to provide	70%

13. Do you think that if you had information about a photograph you would provide it in the future?

	Response Rate (N=30)
Yes, definitely	63%
Yes, probably	30%
No, probably not	3%
No, definitely not	0%
Don't know	3%

14. Have you ever visited Shetland Museum?

	Response Rate (N=30)
Yes	70%
No	30%

15. Do you think that looking at the Shetland Museum Photographic Archive online will encourage you to visit Shetland Museum in the future?

	Response Rate (N=29)
Yes, definitely	41%
Yes, possibly	31%
No, possibly not	14%
No, definitely not	3%
Don't know	10%

16. If you would like to explain your answer please do so below.

Eight responses were received:

“Haven't yet got as far as entering it.”

“Seeing the “real thing” trumps photos of it!”

“Not certain if I will have the opportunity to visit the Shetland Islands, as I live in the USA.”

“I’ve never seen anything like this.”

“Yes, I would love to visit the Shetland Museum one day, but it would depend on finances. But if I ever got to Shetland I would definitely visit.”

“I will definitely visit Shetland the next time I visit Shetland – whenever that may be!”

“I’m bound to visit the Museum whenever I’m in Shetland, but I won’t be coming to Shetland specifically in order to visit it.”

“About five years ago I made an appointment to view knitted lace shawls at the Museums. I travelled up to Shetland from Orkney specially. When I turned up at the appointed hour I was told no one could see me, and that no one would be available for the five remaining days of my stay. I was not impressed. The online service is TOTALLY different – most helpful!”

17. Finally, please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. 1 means strongly agree and 5 means strongly disagree.

	Average Rating (N=28)
“It is easier to use a website like this than to go to a museum directly	4.07
“I have been able to find more information here than I would have in a museum”	3.00
“This website makes me want to visit Shetland Museums to find out more.”	3.61
“Using websites like these is better than visiting museums”	2.64

18. If you would like to make any further comments, please do so in the box below.

“Although I agree that it is “easier” to visit the website, it would still be preferable to visit the museum, if that were possible.”

“I would never have visited this museum if it was not available through the internet.”

“Thank you for maintaining the website!”

“Watermarks in images are too prominent.”