

Who's at the door – and what do they want?

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Existing evaluation across multiple resources

- Results of projects to identify, review and analyse existing evaluation across multiple online services.
 - Findings of the *Users and their uses of HEIRs* study (*Heritage and Environmental Information Resources*)
 - Early findings of the Cultural Content Forum's project to review existing evaluation material

Scope of HEIRNET evaluation

- Users of HEIRs
- Purposes of specific HEIR users
- How people used HEIRs
- Adding value to HEIRs
- Mediating HEIRs
- User expectations
- Quality of resources
- Developing audiences
- Disclosure of information

Common issues arising from existing evaluation

- Little known about actual users; still less about their uses of services
- If we know little about our own sites, we know even less about use of resources across many sites, and less still about users' responses to, and actual uses of, portals.
- Problems with divergent approaches to quantitative analysis of services
- Qualitative analysis based on face-to-face and questionnaire surveys are informative. They shed light on the potential of portals but are limited in their ability to define users and uses.

Issues with qualitative user surveys

- Many questions relate to off-line services
- Different questions asked
- Similar questions asked in different ways
- Differences between what service providers were trying to establish
- No clear objective for asking questions
- Highly localised / service-specific questions being asked

Politics, funding, management...

- Tensions within and across services were identified, particularly where:
 - Multiple funders had different expectations of the resources they were funding
 - Funders (or managers) of HEIRs were expected to provide extended support for users who did not fall within the target group.

Target audiences across services

- Some services did not have priority or target audiences
- Definitions of target audience differed
- *All* evaluation material reviewed suggested varying (and often increasing) levels of use by users outside the target user group where the target audience was defined
- Each type of service tended to ask questions of its specific audience, in relation to the scope of the services offered, preventing the direct comparison of evaluation results

Collaborative strengths

- The diversity of HEIR types on offer is necessary to the range of research activities which many individual users wish to undertake
- Users seek to personalise their research, for example by finding specific *and* general resources about buildings
- Users wish to have contextual information made available to them and to be able to move between different types of HEIR in order to add depth and meaning to their research
- Many users currently do not consult multiple, potentially complementary information resources, but expect to find the information they require from a combination of available online or offline resources, augmented by individual mediation

Learning about our users

- To improve our services we need to know more about:
 - the *area of interest* of the user (e.g. planning information, conservation, subject theme);
 - the *background* of the user (e.g. local government department, academic research, personal interest);
 - the *context or mode of use* of HEIR information (e.g. local history information for teaching, general information for a school project, postgraduate paper)
- Current evaluation is beginning to tell us about the first two areas. We know very little about the last.

Looking to the future

- Evaluation is beginning to reflect an overriding shift in emphasis to the provision of *meaningful* information to the general public, who appear to be in search of content which is:
 - *relevant* to their individual line of enquiry;
 - provided *in context*, with explanatory background information as required
 - *engaging* and easy to work through
 - *informative*, providing the right level of information for their level of expertise.
- Portal services provide an opportunity to meet this combination of needs.

Evaluation research agendas

Collecting user profile and use information

To enable the consistent collection of information about users and their uses of HEIRs.

Quantitative website data analysis

To enable the consistent collection and analysis of HEIR website use data.

Improving understanding of HEIR use

To find out more about actual uses of HEIR services.

Developing best-practice guidance

To guide HEIR staff in the development of effective local evaluations strategies and appropriate skills within existing staff.

Cultural Content Forum

Project background

- The Cultural Content Forum is an international collaboration of organisations brought together to share expertise and knowledge on digital cultural content
- Coordinated by the CIMI Consortium, Resource and UKOLN
- Research project aimed to synthesise results from existing surveys of user expectations and users' experiences with digitised cultural heritage.
- Cultural organisations worldwide requested to submit existing published or unpublished material relating to the evaluation of digital cultural resources for review and analysis.
- In collocating information about evaluation work the CCF intended to inform the wider cultural community about existing user research and evaluation and to inform the development of evaluation and user research strategies in the future.

Cultural Content Forum

Project objectives

Stage 1

Research and publish a catalogue of evaluation undertaken relating to digital cultural information resources.

Stage 2

Undertake and publish an analysis of available evaluation material. The aims of this analysis were to:

- identify common indicators and trends relating to the development and use of cultural information resources;
- identify common issues relating to the provision of digital cultural resources;
- identify gaps in available research and propose an evaluation research agenda for the future.

In December 2002 funding was identified to undertake **Stage 1** of the proposed project.

Scope of review

Evaluation material requested relating to digital resources delivered via:

- in-gallery or other on-site applications within libraries, archives and museums;
- CD-ROM-based or other desktop or mobile applications;
- the World Wide Web or other remote or internet-based applications.

Material could include existing qualitative and quantitative evaluation and user information, including (but not limited to):

- evaluation of specific applications and services;
- user surveys;
- non-user surveys and market research;
- website usage statistics (where these could be attributed to a cultural resource).

Aims of Stage 1

Since funding was available for Stage 1 only, the following aims were identified as the best means of extracting maximum value from a small-scale project:

- undertake a survey requesting evaluation material;
- create a descriptive catalogue of the material able to be used by researchers and content creators;
- provide an overview of the material available.

Survey and respondents

- In January 2003 a request for evaluation material was sent to a professional lists within the cultural, educational and digital content communities, as well as individual contacts.
- Additional follow-up calls were made to potential key providers.
- All respondents received an acknowledgement; widespread interest in the end product was expressed.
- Although a deadline of February 7th was set, contributions continue to arrive.
- Contributions were reviewed and recorded using catalogue format based on DC headings and using an appropriate vocabulary to enable the recording and retrieval of different types of evaluation material.

Overview of results

- 40+ Respondents.
- 85+ items catalogued.
- Mostly English-language from UK, US, Canada and Australia.
- Non-English contributions from Spanish, Latin American and German sources.
- Contributions comprise commissioned research, journal articles, in-house publications, online publications & conference papers.

Describing evaluation material

- Undertook initial review of material to identify common elements, partly based on earlier analysis of built-heritage and environment resource evaluation in the UK.
- Used DC headings and applied them to the description of common element.
- Developed an appropriate descriptive vocabulary which was extended as material was reviewed.

Use of descriptive headings

Key headings included:

- **Subject**
The type of evaluation undertaken – e.g. market research, formative evaluation etc.
- **Description**
Brief summary of the research undertaken and the scope of the resource
- **Type**
Methodologies used and documented in the research – e.g. interviews, focus groups, analysis, questionnaires etc.
- **Identifier**
Reference to online publication where available
- **Audience**
Specific audiences targeted by the research – e.g. general, research, higher education etc.
- **Coverage**
The community within which the research was undertaken – e.g. libraries, museums, archives, country of applicability

Subject

- Used to document the category of evaluation project – terms include:
 - market research
 - formative evaluation
 - summative evaluation
 - query analysis
- About a fifth of the documents submitted were formative research; there was an equal proportion of market research and a lesser number of summative evaluation reports, indicating organisations' comparative reluctance to share this type of material.

Description

- Used to provide a brief abstract / narrative description of the project, including (where appropriate/available):
 - scope of consultation
 - purpose of project
 - methodology
- Although many resources were very rich and extensive, there were others which were not as extensive, however no attempt was made to distinguish levels of detail, size or quality of resource.

Type

- Used to record the evaluation methodologies and tools used, including:
 - interviews
 - questionnaires
 - focus groups
 - analysis (of different forms of documentation)
- Notable were the large number of reports which were based on direct contact with users, including interviews, focus groups and observation of user behaviour.

Identifier

- Provides URL of resource where available.
- Approximately 50% of resources are available online, although some are in summary only.
- Around 50% of the remaining resources could be made available in that they exist in digital form and the owners would be likely to agree to publication.
- About 25% of the material contributed was regarded (even in summary form) as confidential, either providing a competitive advantage to the creator, or regarded as too sensitive for publication.

Audience

- Used to indicate either that the research focused on a specific audience, or that the project being evaluated had a specific target audience. Prevalent in the material were:
 - Researchers
 - Higher education
 - General
- A surprisingly substantial proportion of resources concerned general audiences and were not targeted at specific subgroups of users.

Coverage

- This heading was used to indicate the subject area or domain (geographic, cultural, professional) from which the resource originated, including:
 - Museums/archives/libraries/digital libraries...
 - Germany/US/UK/Canada...
 - art/digital images/teaching/computer science...
- The term 'international' was used only where there was a specific international dimension to the material.
- Museums and digital libraries were the source of most material.

Non-respondents

- Single institutions with investment and/or leading role in evaluation field
- Reluctance to divulge material regarded as 'commercial-in-confidence'
- Reluctance to divulge application-specific or very recent material

Issues arising within Stage 1

- Need to reassure potential contributors about confidentiality, not divulging detail and the aim of extracting general messages from material rather than necessarily divulging details of specific evaluations.
- Separating evaluation from ‘what we did on our project’.
- Coverage of potential material has been uneven.

To learn more...

Users and their Uses of HEIRs

<http://www.britarch.ac.uk/HEIRNET/publications.html>

Cultural Content Forum

www.culturalcontentforum.org

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www.alicegrant.com

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