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University of Southampton Library Digitisation Unit: Reimagining the Value Proposition

Case Study Update 2011

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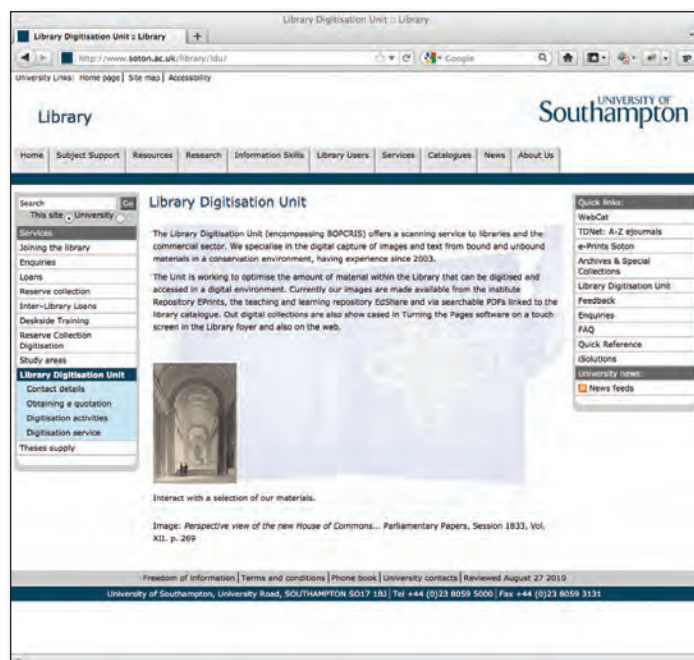**JISC Content**   Ithaka Case Studies in Sustainability

When the original case study was published in 2009, the staff of the BOPCRIS digitisation centre at the University of Southampton's Hartley Library had recently completed three large-scale, grant-funded digitisation projects and were exploring different means of ensuring access to the digital content they had created.[1] An early experiment with local hosting had shown that the Library was unprepared to deal with the ongoing costs of maintaining these resources, and they turned to external content providers – ProQuest and JSTOR – for deals that would allow them to focus on their core competency of digitisation. Over the past two years, the changing economic climate has led to sharp cutbacks in British public funding for large-scale digitisation – the Unit's specialty. As a result, the staff have worked to reshape the Unit, scaling back its capacity for mass digitisation, focusing on materials from Southampton's local collections, and finding partners that can deliver previously digitised content at a lower cost – and changing its name from 'BOPCRIS' to the 'University of Southampton Library Digitisation Unit', which more clearly identifies their connection to the University.

The digitisation efforts at the University of Southampton have their roots in the late 1980s, when a Southampton research scholar helped to spearhead the indexing and scanning of key British government documents.[2] From early days, the staff of the University's Hartley Library were involved in that project, which gradually expanded and found a permanent home within the Library. By the 1990s, the project had grown into a subscription-based online abstracting and indexing service for British parliamentary papers and

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other public records, marketed to academic libraries. The Library made the decision to close that service in the late 1990s when it became clear that the increased availability of full-text documents online had significantly eroded the value proposition for indexing services. ('We've always had a tight budget', notes current Library Digitisation Unit leader Christine Fowler, Head of e-Library Services at Southampton, 'so we've always had to be hard-nosed about where we put our resources.')

Even as that project ended, the Library began receiving government grants to manage the large-scale digitisation of government documents, and it scaled up to tackle ever more complex projects. When we studied it two years ago, the Unit, having benefited greatly from a massive wave of government investment in digitisation, had built up capacity for mass digitisation of delicate documents from multiple university and research library collections – in some ways, a major shift from the tiny scholar-led project that kicked off this programme for Southampton in the 1980s. With continued

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1 When we first studied the Unit, it was called BOPCRIS; BOPCRIS stood for 'British Official Publications Collaborative Reader Information Service'.

2 K. Kirby Smith, 'BOPCRIS Digitisation Centre: Experimentation with Sustainability and Partnerships for Library Digitisation Projects' (New York: Ithaka S+R, 2009), www.ithaka.org/ithaka-s-r/research/ithaka-case-studies-in-sustainability/case-studies/SCA_BMS_CaseStudy_Southampton.pdf

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In 2009, Ithaka S+R published twelve detailed case studies of online digital resources, exploring the strategies project leaders were using to sustain those projects for the long term. All of the case studies have been updated in 2011, to revisit the original sustainability models and see how they have fared over the past two years. To read the original case studies, please visit: www.ithaka.org/ithaka-s-r/research/ithaka-case-studies-in-sustainability

Mlle Riego de la Branchardiere, The Abergeldie winter book, London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1867, www.southampton.ac.uk/library/ldu/gallery.shtml. Image courtesy of the University of Southampton Library.

support from a series of grants, the Unit completed several large-scale digitisation projects focusing on British heritage materials such as parliamentary papers and pamphlets.[3] Collectively, the three multi-year initiatives provided for the digitisation of approximately 2.8 million pages of content. They also left the Unit paying the costs of an expensive infrastructure meant to support a business that serves other institutions – costs that, in the past two years, the Unit ultimately decided it could not support.

Original sustainability model (2009)

When we first studied the Unit, its staff defined sustainability as the ability to generate sufficient revenue to maintain their infrastructure for digitisation, as well as to ensure that the materials they digitised were continuously available:

■ The Library experimented with digitising and hosting locally a collection of historical materials, Enhanced British Parliamentary Papers on Ireland, 1801–1922 and a local version of the Eighteenth-Century Parliamentary Papers collection. This experiment led the Library's management to the conclusion that they are not well-positioned to sustain the costs of long-term access, user support, and updating for a large number of digitisation projects. With this in mind, the Unit began to explore partnerships that would allow the Library to transfer this responsibility to a third-party provider for their other major digitisation projects.

■ For Eighteenth-Century Parliamentary Papers, a grant-funded digitisation project for which 43% of the content came from Cambridge University and the British Library, Southampton and its partners on the grant entered into a licensing agreement with commercial content provider ProQuest. Although the exact terms of the deal are protected by a non-disclosure agreement, ProQuest agreed to make the content freely available to higher

education institutions in the United Kingdom until September 2012, while selling perpetual-access licences to institutions in other countries. While research for this case study update was under way, the agreement covering ProQuest's exclusivity period expired, so Southampton is potentially free to make the scanned images available should the partners see fit to do so.

■ The content digitised by the Nineteenth-Century Pamphlets Online project, which was gathered from several research libraries in the United Kingdom, is now sold via subscription by JSTOR.[4] Although Southampton and its partners do not receive any royalties, the arrangement provides free access to this content to UK higher education institutions for 25 years from the date of launch, allowing Southampton to avoid long-term hosting and storage costs.

How the model has fared

Two factors have forced the Unit to reshape its strategy. First, the project team perceived a significant decline in the amount of available grant funding for digitisation projects, which the Unit had depended on as they scaled up to handle large projects. Although the Unit had originally been funded to become a 'centre of excellence' for large-scale scanning, not enough grant-funded projects from other institutions were being funnelled to Southampton to support the costs of the infrastructure they had built.

'...the ongoing costs associated with hosting and preserving digitised content on the Library's servers and in a dark store... had become more pronounced in a challenging economic climate.'

Second, the ongoing costs associated with hosting and preserving digitised content on the Library's servers and in a dark store – an issue that the project team acknowledged when we first studied the Unit – had become more pronounced in a challenging economic climate. Faced with mounting costs, the Unit has identified partners that could host the digitised content, and has eliminated the custom-built local hosting platforms that had been launched to host the individual digitisation projects.

Changes in direction and new initiatives

As a result of the economic changes and the realities of the competitive market the Unit has faced in the past two years, it has had to make strategic decisions about how

3   www.southampton.ac.uk/library/bopcris/projects.html

4   In the interest of disclosure: Ithaka S+R, the authors of this report, and JSTOR are part of the same organisation, ITHAKA.

Sustainability dashboard

	2009 Case Study*	2011 Update**	What's Changed?
Content	Three major mass digitisation collections: ■ Historical pamphlets ■ Two government document collections	Smaller-scale digitisation projects, including: ■ Library's special collections ■ Theses and dissertations ■ Reading lists	Funding for mass digitisation has decreased
Functionality	Not applicable to this case study, which focuses on the Unit as a whole		
Sustainability Model	■ Vendor licensing fees ■ Grants ■ Internal funding	■ Limited vendor licensing fees ■ Internal funding	Less grant funding available
Costs	Core staffing and costs included: ■ 3.6 FTE permanent staff ■ 2.0 FTE contract staff ■ £25,000/year to maintain robotic scanner	Core staffing and costs include: ■ 4.5 FTE central staff ■ No contract staff	■ Added a business administrator and a laboratory support officer to the permanent staff ■ Sold robotic scanner
Revenues	■ Multi-year digitisation grants ■ Licensing fees from vendors	■ Internal funding from host institution ■ Monitoring possibilities for further collaborative work	■ Grant funding for mass digitisation less available ■ Main vendor licensing arrangement will provide limited future payments
Sustainability Bottom Line	BOPCRIS had scaled up to take on mass digitisation of content from multiple institutions, for which it was dependent on grant funding.	The Unit, renamed the University of Southampton Library Digitisation Unit, now focuses on digitising locally held materials. The Unit still aims for partial cost recovery from commissions and grants, but does not cover costs completely. Software has been updated from royalty revenues to provide capacity for further collaborative mass digitisation should opportunities emerge	

* These costs and revenues reflect the project's 2007-08 fiscal year.

** These costs and revenues reflect the project's 2010-11 fiscal year.

best to fulfil its mission, given limited new funding for mass digitisation. The group is shifting from providing a wide range of digitisation activities to a focus on specialised, small-batch materials such as manuscripts, music scores, diaries and maps – rare materials that reflect the Unit's core expertise. Although the Unit continues to seek projects from other institutions and commercial clients, the immediate focus is on digitising materials owned by the University:

■ *Scaling back physical infrastructure*: In 2009, the Unit sold its mass-digitising robotic scanner, which had been a major investment. The fact that the machine was aging played into the decision, but the primary motivation was an insufficient market demand for mass digitisation services in the academic sector. Faced with a difficult question about the Unit's primary purpose, the Library's leadership came to the decision that paying the ongoing costs of maintaining equipment for mass digitisation was a mismatch with the Unit's core focus on delicate materials. 'There just wasn't a sufficient business case to keep it', says University Librarian Mark Brown. Selling the scanner enabled the Library to repurpose valuable space, generated modest revenue that could be reinvested in other activities, and led to cost savings from

the termination of the maintenance contract. Some of these savings have been invested in commissioning new workflow software to streamline production.

■ *Dismantling custom-built local platforms*: The Library had maintained local hosting for two of its significant collections, the Enhanced British Parliamentary Papers on Ireland and the Eighteenth-Century Parliamentary Papers collection. In an effort to reduce costs, the Library decided to discontinue the custom platform for this resource in 2010, handing the content to a major UK research library, which will be responsible for long-term preservation. The Library estimates that this will yield annual savings of £10,575 ($17,000) in storage charges.

■ *Focusing on material owned by Southampton*: In general, the Unit is more closely emphasising its relation to the University, in part by digitising more material directly in support of Southampton faculty's research and teaching activities. (Although the Unit has done some commercial contract digitisation work over the past two years, they do not advertise and have not actively sought out such contracts. Brown noted that they 'don't want to be seen as a bureau for digitisation services'.) Currently, in terms of local work, the unit is scanning all Southampton theses for

input into the University's institutional repository.[5] Course reading list texts are also scanned under agreement with the UK Copyright Licensing Authority, and the Unit works with Southampton's academic staff to create content for the University's learning object repository.[6] Closer alignment with the Archives and Special Collections Department continues to provide new opportunities for digitisation of rare materials: Fowler pointed to the Library's purchase within the past several years of a major archival collection related to British colonial history as one major opportunity for the Unit to help make the University's significant collections more widely available.[7] And, from a practical perspective, the Unit renamed itself, partly in order to communicate more clearly its relationship to the host university.

Sustainability outlook

Today, the Unit's role is very different from how it was originally envisioned when it was launched in the 1980s. Like many other scholarly digital projects, as the Unit grew, it faced tension between generating external funds and serving local needs. For now, the Unit's leadership has chosen to focus on the latter, in part because funding for external projects is limited.

'...the future will tell whether the other parties to these agreements will continue to provide access to these valuable resources if their commercial imperatives and missions should change.'

Looking ahead, there are two major challenges for the Unit. First, for the content that Southampton has already digitised, a range of third-party arrangements have helped the Unit to keep its ongoing costs for hosting and preservation low. However, these deals have also forced Southampton to give up some control over this content, and the future will tell whether the other parties to these agreements will continue to provide access to these valuable resources if their commercial imperatives and missions should change.

Second, as the Unit explores the implications of a shift from being an external publisher of digitised rare collections to becoming an internal service provider for the University, it will need to continue to demonstrate value to the Library and other Southampton units. Accordingly, the Unit plans to continue to take part in new research collaborations and to experiment with different services for projects with the University, ranging from high-end, preservation-level scanning to basic web copy. Proving the value of its services to University constituents and administrators will be of continuous importance if the Unit remains heavily dependent on internal funding in the future. The Unit will continue to explore options for future collaborative work to offset costs, and this remains an element in its business plan.

Lessons learnt over the past two years

- Project leaders must consider the life-cycle costs of digital content and infrastructure, as the one-time costs of digitising content mask a much wider range of outlays around infrastructure maintenance, user support, and digital hosting and preservation

- The intentions for an operation like this are important: if a project is to serve external customers, it needs to have a clear mission and vision for operating as an ongoing business, including a business plan and an understanding of the competitive market in which it operates

Interviewees

Mark Brown, University Librarian, Hartley Library, University of Southampton, 5 May 2010

Christine Fowler, Head of e-Library Services, Hartley Library, University of Southampton, 28 January 2011 and 1 June 2011

This case study update was researched and written by Matthew Loy as part of the Ithaka Case Studies in Sustainability project.

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5   http://eprints.soton.ac.uk

6   www.edshare.soton.ac.uk

7   Chris Woolgar, 'Broadlands Archives Fundraising Campaign Successfully Completed', November 2009, www.southampton.ac.uk/archives/Broadlands/index.html