JISC

Strategic Content Alliance

building bridges to digital content

ITHAKA S+R

Electronic Enlightenment:
Outreach or Outsource?
The Benefits and Challenges of Partnership

Case Study Update 2011

www.e-enlightenment.com

JISC Content   Ithaka Case Studies in Sustainability

In 2008, the Electronic Enlightenment launched efforts to transition to an institutional subscription model, part of its long-term plan for sustaining itself beyond the period of grant funding. Now housed at Oxford's Bodleian Library, and working with Oxford University Press as its sales, marketing and distribution partner, Electronic Enlightenment is still in the process of building its subscriber base, a task made more challenging by the impact of the recession on library budgets. This update reports on the challenges the project team has faced in reaching its revenue goals, and the steps it is taking to further develop its subscription model and the resource itself.

The Electronic Enlightenment (EE) is an online collection of edited correspondence from the early seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, intended to reconstruct the 'world's first global social network'.[1] It began as a research project at the University of Oxford's Voltaire Foundation, with the original goal of digitising critical editions of the works of Voltaire and other authors published by the Foundation. Between 2001 and its public launch in 2008, with funding primarily from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the project expanded its mission to capture the correspondence not just of the well-known *philosophes* of the Republic of Letters, such as Rousseau, Voltaire, and Diderot, but of all others who at some point came into their orbit, including politicians and ordinary people from across Europe, America, and Asia. The database's value lies in its rich interlinking and cross-searching functions, creating an 'extraordinary web of correspondence that marked the birth of the modern world'.[2] As of March 2011, the resource contained over 58,000 letters and documents from over 7,000 correspondents representing 45 different nationalities and 11 languages, and offered a range of search functions, as well as active links to over 50

www.e-enlightenment.com

online resources, including the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.[3] In recognition of the resource's scholarly value, Electronic Enlightenment received the Digital Award for 2010 from the British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies.[4]

Original sustainability model (2009)

The intention always has been to transition EE from a grant-funded project to a financially sustainable resource, and to achieve this objective the project leadership built a sustainability model with three elements at its core: 1) generation of revenue through institutional subscriptions; 2) an institutional relationship with the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford, which would provide a new base

1 K. Kirby Smith, 'Electronic Enlightenment: Subscription-Based Resource Sold Through a University Press' (New York: Ithaka S+R, 2009), **www.ithaka.org/ithaka-s-r/research/ithaka-case-studies-in-sustainability/case-studies/SCA_BMS_CaseStudy_EE.pdf**

2 Electronic Enlightenment website, **www.e-enlightenment.com/info**

3 For a full description of contents and functionality, see **www.e-enlightenment.com/info/about/ee_facts**

4 **www.oup.com/uk/pressreleases/ee**

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**
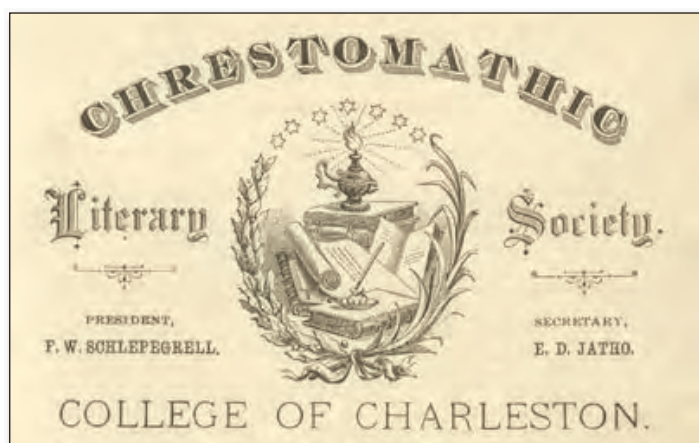
of operations and support for the project; and 3) a business partnership with Oxford University Press (OUP), which would assume responsibility for sales, marketing, distribution, and customer services. Though part of the Bodleian Library, EE pays for physical space, administrative support including staff, technical design and marketing and sales, as well as for further digitisation as needed.

The project team seeks additional grants for sub-projects to enhance content and functionality in specific ways. A recent grant in partnership with the New York Public Library, for example, supported updating its archive of the letters of Voltaire. As another example, EE has partnered with researchers at Stanford University and the University of Oklahoma on a 'Digging into Data' grant co-funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Science Foundation, and the Joint Information Systems Committee, in order to improve search functionality and add some new features.[5]

How the model has fared

Reaching its original sustainability goal has so far been a challenge for this project. The original business plan assumed that EE would go live in 2008 and attract between 250 and 300 subscribers within three years. By February 2009, EE had 47 subscribers, and the total was up to 100 at the end of 2010. As of March 2011, the project had more than 120 subscribing institutions, including 65 from North America. Estimated revenue for the resource is £134,000 ($216,000), though as Director Robert McNamee noted, EE is the 'only OUP electronic resource with a 100% renewal rate'.

Project costs in 2008 were £220,000 ($354,000), excluding royalty payments and commissions to OUP, and have remained steady or have been reduced somewhat. Although one new full-time project manager was hired in 2010, the search for a replacement correspondence editor is on hold for budgetary reasons. Going forward, no expenses have been allocated for data capture or acquisition, since there is a significant backlog of material which still must be added to the site. In 2008, approximately £45,000 ($72,000) was designated for this purpose.

The project is currently operating at a 'hefty' deficit, which is being covered by the Bodleian Library. Although the Library experienced 10% budget cuts in 2010, funds have been earmarked to support EE for the next two years.

Changes in direction and new initiatives

Since the launch of the subscription service in 2008, the priorities of the EE team and its leader, McNamee, have been to improve the value of the resource, re-think some of their business premises, and solidify the relationships with their partners, the Bodleian Library and OUP. Both OUP and McNamee agree that expressing the value of the resource to potential customers has been a challenge.

A new outreach campaign. Going forward, McNamee has obtained approval from the deputy director of the Bodleian to visit 12 key institutions in the United Kingdom to demonstrate the resource for them. He thinks that will make the difference, because these visits will ensure that people will better understand the value of EE. The project team held its first annual colloquium in November, with very good feedback and a large turnout, but McNamee was 'shocked at how many people didn't know' about EE. In addition, there may be more to do to remain in touch with users themselves. While some feedback does come in, McNamee thinks it is likely that many more of these comments go directly to the publisher's site, where he is less likely to see them.

'...libraries are willing to spend more to own a resource outright, rather than pay a subscription rate each year to gain access.'

Additional business model. EE and OUP are developing plans to offer a perpetual-access licence in addition to renewable subscriptions. This is a priority for OUP because it has noticed that this type of purchasing arrangement is preferred in Germany and the Far East, and is gaining in acceptance in the United States, where libraries are willing to spend more to own a resource outright, rather than pay a subscription rate each year to gain access. However, as of early 2011, there were still some technology and rights-clearance issues to address in order to implement this model. And we wonder what the projections concerning pricing and take-up would be, so that this one-time payment model would match or eventually surpass the current revenue that EE is generating through subscriptions.

5   For more information, see **www.diggingintodata.org/Home/ AwardRecipients2009/DiggingintotheEnlightenment/tabid/177/Default.aspx**

Sustainability dashboard

	2009 Case Study*	2011 Update**	What's Changed?
Content	▪ 53,000 letters by 6,000 individuals ▪ 230,000 scholarly annotations	▪ 58,776 letters by 7,114 individuals ▪ 258,408 scholarly annotations	Content is growing
Functionality	▪ Cross-searching among and between letters by keyword, name, nationality, occupation, etc	▪ Re-launched winter 2011 as 'EE2' ▪ External links to 50 scholarly sources ▪ New MARC records ▪ Link to Google Earth ▪ Digital publishing platform for online publishing	Increased functionality
Sustainability Model	▪ Subscription fees ▪ Host institution support	▪ Subscription fees ▪ Host institution support	Same as 2009
Costs	▪ £220,000 ($354,000) direct ▪ £45,000 ($72,000) for data capture and acquisition	▪ Direct costs about the same ▪ No costs budgeted for data capture and acquisition	Costs remain steady, maybe even lower
Revenues	▪ (Subscriptions not yet available)	▪ Estimated £134,000 ($216,000)	Revenue not meeting targets
Impact	▪ (Subscriptions not yet available)	▪ 120+ subscribers with 100% renewal rate ▪ Award from British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (BSECS)	
Sustainability Bottom Line	▪ Transitioning from grant-funded to income-generating model ▪ Expectation of sufficient subscription income to cover operating budget	Strong support from the host institution has been instrumental, as initial efforts with a subscription model have not yet reached desired targets. Exploring new perpetual-access licensing model	

* These costs and revenues reflect EE's 2008 fiscal year.

** These costs and revenues reflect EE's 2010 fiscal year.

Enriching the content base... through new partnerships.
EE is pursuing a preliminary offer from a music organisation to provide a fellowship for a researcher to edit correspondence between composers from this period, and it is in discussion with the History of Science Department at Oxford and with the Wellcome Library in London about forming working groups for science and medicine. Finally, EE aims to develop translation programmes in the United States in which graduate students would assist in converting content to other languages.

Enriching the content base... through crowd-sourcing.
To further build the database, EE expects to add correspondence that may not yet have the level of scholarly annotation that has thus far been a hallmark of the resource. The project leaders have invited the community not only to assist in locating this correspondence in special collections, but also to add scholarly commentary and other born-digital material to it. They have created a digital publishing platform which will provide a complete workflow for this online publishing. The primary aim of this initiative is to build community involvement for the resource, but it will also

yield some cost-savings benefits. To date, six collections of correspondence have been offered to EE, bypassing traditional publication through an academic press. A review board will be created to assess the material. It is a proof in practice of the growing desire for academic participation in the development of such resources.

Enhancing features and functionality. EE relaunched its website in 2010 to emphasise functionality that makes it more useful to libraries, including new MARC records and more interconnections with WorldCat, a large network of library content and services. For the end user, the project has added a 'map room' that offers high-quality images of historical maps, as well as the ability to link to Google Earth to find locations that appear in correspondence. The site also includes an EE classroom, with resources to help teachers use the collection.

Increasing discoverability. There is some concern that the paywall hinders Google from crawling the site's content. While EE wants to provide free access to enough materials 'to give people a sense of what is inside', its managers realise

that in order to generate income from subscriptions, they have to restrict access to the bulk of the content to paying subscribers.. One new effort involves moving a blurb about each person cited in the correspondence to outside the paywall, but for the most part EE still plans to restrict access to the edited versions of the biographies.

Sustainability outlook

Today the Electronic Enlightenment is in an interesting position. The critical response to the resource has been excellent. However, it has not yet become a 'must-have' purchase for libraries and is not self-sustaining; it is operating at a deficit, which is currently covered by the Bodleian Library. EE's management realises that the success of niche resources depends on the ability of the scholarly community to convince academic libraries that they and their students need to have those resources.

EE's business partnership with OUP has proven to be an efficient way to market the project. However, in the long run, such a distribution arrangement might also inadvertently have the effect of distancing the project team from direct and very valuable interaction with customers and end users of the service. Therefore EE has to create new avenues to stay in touch with its customers beyond OUP's marketing efforts.

Looking ahead, the project team's efforts to develop new initiatives and increase awareness will be quite important. By launching new outreach campaigns and increasing discoverability and functionality, EE hopes to create awareness in the scholarly community and to increase its customer base.

Lessons learnt over the past two years

- Strong support from the host institution is vital, particularly when revenue models are in their early days and not yet reaching targets

- Selling subscriptions is hard work and requires an insider's understanding of the needs and interests of the target audience and how best to communicate with them

- Even when content is licensed to a third party, it may be very important to maintain ties both to customers and to end users, both as a means of receiving feedback and for purposes of outreach

Interviewees

Robert McNamee, Director, Electronic Enlightenment, University of Oxford, 14 December 2010

Rebecca Seger, Library and Online Sales Director, Oxford University Press USA, 16 March 2011

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

Summary of revenues and costs

	2008	2010	Comments
Total revenue	**n/a**	**£134,000**	**In 2009, subscription service had not yet been launched**
Subscription fees	n/a	100%	
Total costs	**£220,000**	**n/a**	**Costs are the same or possibly lower**
Personnel costs	60%	84%	
Non-personnel costs	40%	16%	
Number of staff	2.0 FTE	2.0 FTE	
In-kind/volunteer contributions	**n/a**	**n/a**	

Explanatory note

The information presented in this table is intended as a broad picture of revenues and budgeted costs associated with the project, not as a detailed financial report. It does not include in-kind contributions or other unbudgeted items, though these are described where they are known. The financial data, which are presented in the currency in which the project reported the information, were compiled as part of the interview process with project leaders and staff, and in some cases were supplemented with publicly available documents, such as annual reports. Many of the figures are rounded or best estimates. Some leaders preferred not to offer figures at all, but suggested percentages instead. Because of the variability in the way each institution estimated the various categories of revenues and costs, the information presented in the table is of limited value for detailed cross-project comparisons.