



Planning a Digital Library: Reinventing the Tricycle

Martin Bossenbroek
Director of Collections & Services
Koninklijke Bibliotheek
National Library of the Netherlands

Meeting: 190. National Libraries

WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 75TH IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL
23-27 August 2009, Milan, Italy
<http://www.ifla.org/annual-conference/ifla75/index.htm>

Introduction

The new strategic plan 2010-2013 of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, the National Library of the Netherlands, makes the development of a digital library its first priority. This will not come as a surprise to you. In this presentation I will argue that although the need for a digital library is obvious, the actual realization of it is far from obvious. Building a digital library poses many challenging problems which need innovative solutions. This is the paradox we have to face: the core business of a digital library is very traditional in the sense that it involves the collecting and storage of information, and providing access to it. However, the digital context to which this traditional process must be transferred is for the most part virgin territory. In other words, the library must reinvent itself.

Strategy

As a first step we went back to the basic questions:

- “Who are we?”
- “What are we heading for?”

The answers to these questions are to be found in a new strategic orientation, which I would like to share with you:

1. We provide access to all publications in and about The Netherlands, whenever and wherever.
2. We take a central role in the Dutch research information infrastructure.
3. We are a first-rate international partner in the field of digital preservation.

A strategic plan can be compared to a road map, which points the organization in the right direction, step by step, year by year, so that in the end, the situation envisioned will become reality.

Why build a digital library?

The answer to this question is simple. We have to build a digital library in order to be able to realize our vision. Nevertheless I would like to make a few remarks with respect to the notion of ‘digital library’, because the term is often used for different concepts.

First of all, the term ‘digital library’ is used to refer to *digital content* such as born digital or digitized material. In this paper, however, the term ‘digital library’ has a broader implication. It refers to the entire framework that is needed to collect, store and access information sources *within a digital context*. The information sources themselves can be manuscripts, printed documents or digital objects. As long as these information sources have digital metadata attached to them, they can be traced in a digital environment, and therefore they are part of the digital library. In other words, the digital description of physical collections is also taken to be part of the digital library. Finally, the infrastructure that is needed to access all this information, on location or via remote access, is taken to be part of the digital library.

How do we build a digital library?

Right now the KB is working on a Digital Library Program. This program will provide the right environment for a digital library, and it consists of three components:

Building the collection >> Storage >> Access

These three components of the digital library are to be put in a matrix together with the KB’s new strategic orientation, and the result is a scheme that will function as the backbone of our new strategic plan 2010-2013. This scheme is illustrated below, with already some ‘positioned’ items:

	KB <i>We provide access to all publications in and about The Netherlands, whenever and wherever</i>	National <i>We take a central role in the Dutch research information infrastructure</i>	International <i>We are a first-rate international partner in the field of digital preservation</i>
Access		- Extend KB-online (public libraries) - Cooperate with academic libraries	
Storage			- International e-Depot; safe place for international academic publishers - Digital preservation, maintain R&D activities
Building the Collection	- Digitization on the basis of priorities: - Demand-driven - Cooperation with (non-) commercial partners		

Pre-conditions	- Develop the organization		
-----------------------	----------------------------	--	--

Note that a row ‘preconditions’ has been added, which refers to the necessary requirements with respect to human resources, IT facilities etc.

Why is the Digital Library Program innovative?

As I said in my introduction, the core business of a library remains the same in a digital environment, but building a digital library poses challenges that have never been faced before. The biggest challenge is the unprecedented *scale* of the information flow. This has consequences for all three components of the Digital Library Program, which I will now discuss in more detail.

Building the collection

In its collecting policy, the KB focuses on Dutch history, culture and society. We strive to collect all material that is published on these subjects in the Netherlands. Of course, it would be the ultimate dream to digitize all the material that has not yet been digitized, for which we would closely collaborate with university libraries. However, since digitizing everything is virtually impossible, we must prioritize on the basis of our collection profile. In addition to this, the choices are to be demand-driven, in other words we decide in close consultation with the academic field which collections should be digitized to further research initiatives, or by digitization on demand straight away.

Another of our aims is to digitize as efficiently as possible. By enhancing efficiency, we intend to reserve the largest part of our budget for scanning and OCR and the smallest part for selection, copyright issues, preparation of materials, quality controls and project management.

However, it is well-known that digitization involves copyright problems. A major question is how to tackle these in relation to large-scale digitization projects. Since last year, the KB has been active in informing public opinion and governmental policy makers about copyright being a large stumbling block for libraries. An article featured in a leading Dutch newspaper and in *Alexandria*, and we sent a submission to the European Commission’s *Green Paper on Copyright in the Knowledge Economy*. We also took the lead in drafting a common Green Paper reaction co-signed by major Dutch museums and archives, and pay attention to the subject in lectures (see e.g. <http://www.kb.nl/nieuws/2009/digimuzeikbibliotheken-en.html>.) Finally, the KB employs a fulltime legal advisor who is an expert on copyright issues.

Storage

The KB is well-known for its leading role in the research into digital preservation. It employs the coordinator of the *Netherlands Coalition for Digital Preservation* and it also hosts the *European Alliance for Permanent Access*. The e-Depot of the KB guarantees long-term storage to enable permanent access, by way of migration and emulation strategies. It contains the images of large digitization projects, and functions as a back-up for the academic repositories in The Netherlands. The international e-Depot is an archive which offers academic publishers long-term storage of their electronic publications, according to a safe place model.

An important point of discussion in relation to the storage component of the Digital Library Program is whether all digitized and born digital material should be

stored at the same level of permanency. Furthermore, metadata management is an important issue in relation to storage. The standardization of metadata schemes, and the interoperability of these schemes, both in a national and international context, is of vital importance.

Access

Providing access to collections is a library's core business. Digitally, however, this is not always possible for material in which third parties own copyright. It begs the question whether we should only digitize and store material to which we are allowed to provide onsite and/or remote access. Access to third party material can be given via licensing, by collaborating to integrate our information with those of others, or by aggregation services or linking. The KB is also committed to closely work together with the public libraries to introduce a nationwide identity management infrastructure via the National Library Pass.

Preconditions

The row 'preconditions' contains the action "develop the organization". By this I mean proper human resource management. Although mentioned last, the importance of it cannot be underestimated. I am convinced that managing the human resource component is crucial in successfully building a digital library. In the end, change is always about people and not about procedures or technology. Successful change programs generally show the following characteristics: (1) shared vision of the future, (2) top management commitment, (3) understanding of the need of change, (4) employee involvement at all levels, (5) constant and consistent communication. The KB will pay attention to all of these aspects in developing a digital library.

In addition, the KB invests heavily in strategic personnel planning. A digital library requires other skills of its employees than a traditional library. In 2007 the discussion began within the KB about increasing the mobility and employability of its personnel. The reason for this discussion was that the average period of employment at the KB was very high, and that it was very difficult to find suitable candidates for both management and specialized positions. Often there were no internal candidates. In order to tackle at least part of the problem, the KB set up a trainee program for young and talented KB employees. This trainee program offers them a unique chance to develop themselves further both professionally and personally for two years. In this way, the KB hopes to create its own pool of highly qualified staff that can act successfully in a digital environment.

Conclusion

Building a digital library is not just putting old wine in new bottles. The core business of a library may not change, but the context in which the digital library functions, the scale of the data involved, and the management of human resources, pose unprecedented challenges that need innovative solutions.