Cultural and Technological Resources ast the National Gallery of Art:
Issues in Preparing for Electronic Collaboration

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When a cooperative development plan for a multimedia network between institutions is envisioned, certain issues of the process must be addressed. Linking together the cultural and information resources of the individual institutions and organizations into a usable whole requires agreement to an acknowledged result - a vision of the cultural resources each provides. The national Gallery of Art, is considering future partnerships, is looking closely at its own resources and how to prepare for cooperative development. The area of focus are:

1. Technological Infrastructure

Presently the Gallery has a substantial investment in computer systems that cannot be immediately replaced and must be incorporated into new networking concepts. Planned upgrades of systems can never keep pace with advances in technology. Cooperative development of information systems between institutions has to also mean a partnership with manufacturers and suppliers of hardware and software. Access to and availability of technical resources and support from industry is essential for each partner.

Knowledge of the unique requirements of cultural and academic institutions is not, however, the forte of the computer industry. Confidence in the technical path chosen by an institution must be based on informed decisions built on knowledge from institutional sources. Networking within the academic and cultural community can provide information resources drawn iron experience and contacts developed in earlier projects-experts for advice for critical decision making, user groups for clearinghouses for specific technical information, international museum and academic newsletters on project successes- can all help to educate administrators in making these technical choices.

2.Technology Development

The National Gallery of Art has recognized that technology has crossed a threshold that now provides a medium, through the use of the computer, to make multimedia information system a practical and vital tool for primary research in the visual arts and for production of educational programs.. The quality of the electronic imaging continues to improve. Digital images can now be captured, stored, retrieved, and manipulated on a desktop PC, at a quality approaching 35mm photography. The value of images held be cultural institutions has been proven by the many offers from private industry to "help" disseminate images digitally for a percentage of profits from sales. The hesitation to start the enormous job of digitizing images held by cultural institutions has been eased by the advances in technology that show that there are multiple uses, products, and profits from a digital image - image data bases, CD-ROM's, video disks. and color separations for traditional publishing.

Telecommunications technology now exists to enable high resolution images and data to be sent by satellite anywhere in the world in seconds. Further advances in this field will generate new ideas for uses of multimedia networks. However, serious discussions are required for resolution of data standards and formats, if we are to take advantage of these technological advances.

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Traditionally high unit costs for collection and storage of large amounts of data was a deterrent to implementing collaborative projects between public institutions in the past, especially during the recent recession. High volume digital storage devices are now offering more storage space, speed, and economy, allowing cost effective exchange of data between institutions.

3. Cultural Resources

Museums and art galleries have a variety of resources that need coordination both conceptually and technologically to form the multimedia tool that will interface with libraries and universities to form the collaboraTive information base.

Integration of data to form the various components of the Gallery is needed if it is to be made available on a multimedia information network. Library computer systems must become compatible with collection management systems. Photographic quality imaging systems must be incorporated into all areas - with publication, reproduction, and copyright problems recognized. The challenge to the National Gallery now is to integrate the data from thee computer systems of the Department of Conservation, Collection Management, Education, Curatorial Research, Exhibitions, and Photography, as well as the Library and Archives, to create a more comprehensive knowledge base in-house.

The Key to the success of partnerships in creating new multimedia networks is respect for the integrity of the institutions holdings and an appreciation for the institutions view of themselves as a partner and not just a supplier of a commodity. Trying to form an undefined body from distinctive entities invites dissention to the common goal and weakens cooperation.

4 Multimedia Information Networking

Gathering the information from the component departments within the National Gallery of Art is a grew at challenge. The issue of whether now is the time to start seriously looking at true integration of information systems has been answered positively. Technology nor offers a superior advance in the way we view knowledge. Mere technical exercises cannot be a goal. Milestones of success must be components of the plan that clarify the overall view of our goals. Failures we will learn from and will create new challenges. Collaborative extension of institutional resources will more clearly define the difference between information and knowledge

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