



Barriers to collaboration:

Conflicting interests influencing content licensing decisions in potential partner organisations

UK organisations funded by the Department for Culture Media and Sport

British Museum

Imperial War Museum

National Gallery

Science Museum Group

Tate

Victoria and Albert Museum

The current situation

Organisations operate commercial image libraries which are private companies

People who work for them are reliant on the organisations keeping their content closed so they can sell them.

Publicly owned objects held in public trust by a publicly funded organisation who use public money to create images they then sell back to that public (and people in other countries).

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Welcome to British Museum Images

The British Museum is the authoritative source of images depicting world culture and history including ceramics, sculpture, prints, drawings, and paintings.



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British Museum collection:

35 million British Museum website visitors per year

23 million page views per month on Wikimedia projects

Consequences

Conflict within the organisations between commercial interests and educational interests

Lots less people see the images

Crappy or no images of culturally important objects on Wikipedia

Problem: Lack of informed debate

The public and the government who pay for these organisations don't know if they make a profit out of selling the images

Weird thing: Some of these organisations do not know if this makes money or not

One possible solution: Freedom of Information requests

Freedom of Information laws (FOI laws) allow access by the general public to data held by national governments.

My requests on WhatDoTheyKnow.com:

Please could you tell me how much profit, giving a year by year breakdown (including all expenses (e.g. digitisation) and associated costs that are deducted) has the [name of organisation] made from image sales for the past 10 years or as many as the service has been running for if less than 10 years.

For reference

£1 = \$1.56 USD = €1.42

Imperial War Museum

2) Information is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the public authority holding it).'

National Gallery

Tate

Victoria and Albert Museum

Image sales are managed by a separate corporate entity, the National Gallery Company, which is owned by the National Gallery Trust. The National Gallery Company is not a public authority nor owned by one and is therefore not subject to Freedom of Information legislation.

Natural History Museum

The information was actually publicly available in their annual report on data.gov.uk (but not on the version on their website)

£155,000 loss in 4 years

Geffrye Museum

(sales not profit)

2003 - 2013 = £16864

National Museum Wales

“National Museum Wales made a profit from the sale of images was in 2012 – 2013 with a profit of £1,201. I can confirm that all previous years we have not record any profits for the sale of images”

British Museum

Me: Asked image profit question

BM: We don't include digitisation costs in our calculation of profit for image sales

Me: Ok, how much does digitisation cost?

BM: It's too big a question, please be specific e.g staff salaries

Me: What are the salaries of people working on digitisation?

BM: We can't tell you, its too difficult

Proposal

A community effort to FOI request and collate existing FOI requests for all relevant content holding organisations in every country you can do FOI requests for and collate it all in a big table somewhere public.

Could include:

- Knowledge sharing of successful results and legal requirements
- Pro forma for each country using successful FOI requests
- Some way of automating these requests

Drawbacks:

- FOI can be seen as combative
- Wikimedia is seen as a threat to an income stream
- I'm basing this on experience in the UK which may not work in other countries
- Has someone done this already somewhere? If so I can't find it

Benefits:

Information is public and may inform:

- Organisations who may then rethink their licensing policies
- Inform other content holders about whether profitability is normal or even possible
- Decision makers eg DCMS
- Funding bodies to then consider opening their licence more