INFORMATION MANAGEMENT OF THE HELLENIC FESTIVAL WEBSITE

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Abstract

This case study will explore issues regarding the management of Hellenic Festival’s website information. It will provide an overall presentation of the website contents and will describe the data curation process step-by-step, from its initial data collection and preparation phase to the final uploading and testing stage. It will also examine the implications of the process as a result of the complexity of data, as well as human and financial resources’ constraints.

INTRODUCTION

Background Information

The Hellenic Festival was founded in 1955, with the aim of organizing mainly music, drama and dance performances in Athens and Epidaurus in Greece during the summer period (June to August).

The current website of the Festival (www.hellenicfestival.gr or www.greekfestival.gr) was launched in 2007. It displays bilingual information (Greek/English) on the Festival’s seasonal programme, participating artists, the archive which has been recently added as an on-going project, as well as other information (regarding the Organization and its venues, the Press etc.) and the online booking system. The website has attracted 300,000 visitors so far (May 2007 - May 2008).
The website is supervised by the Head of Communications and is managed daily by the website Administrator. The Administrator is responsible for content management, the architectural structure and data entry, overseeing with the Head of Communications two external associates who work on the website’s technical development and graphic environment.

This article discusses the management of the Festival’s website information and explores issues around its digital curation process, regarding the active management and appraisal of data over its entire life cycle (Pennock, 2006).

**Aims**

a. To provide a case study regarding content management of the Hellenic Festival website, by presenting its contents and by describing the data curation process.

b. To set the data curation process within a general managerial context, to which it is dependant.

c. To suggest ways which will facilitate the data curation process and ensure content maintenance.

**A BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE WEBSITE**

The website displays the current programme of performances as well as an archive of past performances (which for the time being includes the 2007 season only).
Information that refers either to the current or the past season is structured in a homogenous way and consists of the following elements:

- Brief descriptions of the performances, billing information and photos
- other supplementary material, such as visitors’ comments, ticket prices, useful links, the duration of performances and their sponsors.
Print screen 3: *The performance page (visitors’ comments)*

- All participant performers (artists, theatrical organizations, music ensembles, dance companies etc), creators (authors, choreographers, composers etc) and technicians
- The principals’ CVs.
Print screen 4: *The artist page (CV and performances where he/she participates)*

- A photographic archive is also displayed for each performance and its participating artists.

Print screen 5: *The image archive in a performance*

To retrieve information for all of the above, a search engine has been developed through which it is possible to make either a simple search, or an advanced search with multiple criteria, and thus retrieve information in different ways. Visitors are therefore given a choice (Shedroff, 2005).

Some search examples are presented below:

**Simple search:**

1. *The performances of June 5, 2008* (simply click the date on the calendar):
2. The performances of “Heiner Müller” (type the name of the person in the filter “insert keyword”):
1. *All dance performances which took place in “Peiraios 260” venue, from June 3 until July 3, 2007* (select the values from the closed list criteria “Type” “Venues” and “Period”).

Print screen 8: *Advanced search (three criteria in archive performances’ search: type, venue, dates)*

Print screen 9: *Advanced search results (three criteria in archive performances’ search: type, venue, dates)*
2. *The translators of drama works* (select the values from the closed list criteria “Profession” and “Event Type”).

Print screen 10: *Advanced search (two criteria in artist search: profession, performance type)*

Print screen 11: *Advanced search results (two criteria in artist search: profession, performance type)*
The examples above demonstrate that the broad content of the Hellenic Festival’s website has been structured in a way that makes it easy to navigate and retrieve information for both inexperienced and experienced users, and to do so in different ways.

From this point there follows a description of methods used to prepare and produce the final digital content of the website.

**THE WEBSITE DATA CURATION PROCESS**

A step-by-step process is followed, in order to collect data and prepare digitilized information for website users. The process refers to the current season of performances as well as the archive and it involves four stages:

1. Collection of material
2. Identification of data
3. Documentation and editing
4. Uploading and testing

**Collection of material**

As far as the programme of the current season is concerned, information comes from the Production Department, which is responsible for the organization of performances and contact with artists, artistic and production companies etc. The information is already digitilized and is placed on the Festival’s common drive, available to all Departments. It concerns images, logos and an excel file that includes information on performances (titles, venues, dates, artists’ biographies, and programme content, etc). It is important to note that this kind of information is not revised and needs editing before publication.

Concerning the archive of past events, the primary source of information is the Festival’s printed material (Catalogues and Programmes), as well as CDs with images (for 2007-2000) and printed images (for 1999-1955). This material is usually stored at the Festival’s analogue archive. Unfortunately, as we step back in years, researching
material inevitably becomes difficult and finding printed images and performance Catalogues for past decades is a very demanding and time-consuming task. Where parts of the Archive are difficult to locate, it is necessary to contact other sources, such as collectors: over its 53 years, the Festival has attracted a noteworthy number of fans who collect Festival publications and who therefore, between them, possess a significant archive of images. Hence, for some decades, it is easier to borrow material from a collector than research it in the analogue Archive.

**Identification of data**

No matter whether we work on the current season or the Archive, it is important to know our data well and obtain a precise idea of the performances’ characteristics. Becoming acquainted with the type and nature of events is preliminary in order to meet the documentation needs.

**Documentation and Editing**

**Primary elements**

The primary elements of the performances (titles, venues, dates, ticket prices etc.) are recorded in an MS Access table, in order to facilitate amendments (e.g. a huge number of corrections to typographical errors), which are made according to documentation practices and other internal rules. These primary resources were designed so that its core content is as independent as possible from the means of accessing the final web content. This keeps the finished resource as flexible as possible, allowing it to change and develop to meet unanticipated requirements while avoiding becoming locked into obsolete software, hardware or methods of interacting with data (Hamish, 2005).
Print screen 12: Ms Access Table (indicative primary information of five performances)

Audio-visual material

The next step is to prepare audio-visual material (usually images), which is placed in separate folders, one for each performance. Printed images for Archive use are scanned and placed together with the other digitilized material.

Each image is then re-named to a set standard for all images of the same performance and season. This is so that (a) the material is homogenized and easily recognizable and (b) it facilitates downloading to computers that do not support Greek fonts or special characters (such as the copyright symbol ©) that were part of the previous image name. These elements (image names and captions, photographers’ credits and title of performances) are registered, again in an Ms Access table.
Print screen 13: Ms Access Table (image names of one performance)

After that, all images are re-sized in order to fit with the standard dimensions of the website image archive.

**Participating artists and other names**

Afterwards, the names of participating artists and others in each performance are documented. These names include solo artists (interpreters, authors, choreographers, composers etc), companies (theatre & dance companies, orchestras etc), and technicians.

Another Ms Access table is used, to record the name of each artist, per performance, in Greek and Latin characters, and add their profession (e.g. director, costume designer, conductor, etc.). At the end, we make amendments.
The next task is to collect in Ms Word documents several artists’ CVs. These are produced by the Festival’s Publications Department.

**Billing information and texts**

The last phase is the curation of billing information and texts describing the performance. As far as the current season is concerned, Ms Word documents are used for this purpose: here we copy edited material that again is produced by the Festival’s Publications Department.

Also, for the Archive, relevant material drawn from the Catalogues and Programmes is typed in Ms Word documents.

**Uploading and testing**

The final step is uploading and testing, which takes place progressively at the website Administration forms.

a. firstly, the basic elements, images and texts:
2008 Annual Conference of CIDOC
Athens, September 15 – 18, 2008
Patritsia Massouraki

Languages:

Title:

Search Title:

Sub Title:

With:

Large Descr:

Date/Time Descr:
Print screen 15a: Administration form – part a (billing, text information and images of performances)
Print screen 15b: Administration form – part b (billing, text information of performances in English)

b. secondly, for each performance, the artists, their CVs and their professions:
c. Lastly, any extra information (sponsors etc).

The uploading phase can be realized either when material for all performances is completely prepared, or when material concerning each separate performance is ready (which is more common in practice): as soon as Documentation and Editing of all components of each performance is complete (basic elements, images, artists, billing info and texts), then material can be uploaded to the website, before stepping in a new performance.
Lastly, having uploaded the content to the client site the material is checked, in order to fix bugs and correct mistakes not noticed earlier. Thereafter, checking and updating content should be a regular and ongoing process that refers to more than just data archiving: it should include ‘care for the data’ from the moment of its creation onwards (Doorn Peter and Tjalsma Heiko, 2007).

However, all of the above procedures are crucially affected by certain external factors (below).

**COMMENTS**

Having in mind that:

a. each season contains approximately 80-110 performances, 650 images and 1500 artists;

b. while each season’s programme schedule is announced by the end of January, several changes occur (dates, names etc) between January and June, when the Festival kicks off,

c. the website Administrator is the sole person responsible to realize the procedures described above,

the estimated time to curate and upload data for each season is 5 months, plus a further 6 to 7 seven months for archiving (taking into account time for research of printed material and its digitalization).

As a result, the following constraints weigh upon the Hellenic Festival’s website management:

a. Content publication of each season is completed only a few weeks before the start of the season (beginning of June).

b. Changes to the artistic programme, which are frequent, necessitate going back-and-forth to the data curation process (e.g. having completed artist information and having progressed to the next phase, we then have to interrupt the process - return to artist information – either to add or alter previously completed information).
c. It is not feasible to expand the content and publish more material (e.g. videos, more biographies) due to lack of time and human resources.

d. Lack of time prevents the Administrator from publishing more than one past season of the Archive per year.

e. Developing the website’s administration form, in order to serve internal management purposes (e.g. adding artists’ personal contact details to the database) is not realistically achievable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A further investment in manpower – at least two documentalists per season, to add to external associates who will produce more content (e.g. CVs) – will produce a more successful outcome.

Development of the Archive is a vast project on its own and undoubtedly useful, not only for the Festival but also for the wide community of national and international researchers, artists and dedicated visitors. Its development, however, is tightly dependant on the Festival’s scarce resources and has to be decided by the Management.

CONCLUSIONS

The curation process of the Hellenic Festival’s website, as it has been explored in this paper, is a project that requires a persistent and methodological approach. It contains different stages, from the collection of digital and non-digital material, to its documentation and its uploading and testing. Despite difficulties in the process, some of which are dependant on financial constraints – a very typical characteristic of arts organizations – as well as the complexity of data, nevertheless the importance of the project is evident, providing information to visitors, researchers and the Festival’s employees and contributing to the world wide expansion of cultural information. Thus, we hope that the significant work that has been done so far will provide a basis for discussion regarding its expansion and proper content maintenance.
REFERENCES


