

# MDA and SPECTRUM

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# 1 The Political Background

It is useful to provide a brief overview of the current political and professional climate in UK museums by way of context for MDA's activity.

- 1.2 Museum policy in recent years has been dominated by a social policy agenda which focuses on access to and engagement with collections over their long-term management and care. This focus has delivered some important programmes, not least the national Inspiring Learning for All framework and industry-wide activity to make collections more accessible.
- 1.3 Over the past 12-18 months, however, the sector has seen a shift back towards a more balanced view which appreciates the intrinsic link between effective collections management and the ability of museums to deliver greater access.
- 1.4 The key documents in this shift have been:
  - *Collections for the Future* – the result of an inquiry by the UK Museums Association to identify ways of making collections more 'dynamic'  
(<http://www.museumsassociation.org>)
  - *Understanding the Future – Museums and the 21st Century* – a sector-wide consultation from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport  
(<http://www.culture.gov.uk>) into future priorities for collections
- 1.5 As part of this increased focus on the management and use of collections, there is greater awareness of both the importance and potential of museum documentation and Knowledge Management.

## 2 SPECTRUM – The Story So Far

2.1 SPECTRUM will be familiar to most, if not all, members of CIDOC.

Originally published in 1994 and subsequently revised in two further editions,

SPECTRUM is recognised throughout the UK as the industry standard for documentation practice in museums (<http://www.mda.org.uk/spectrum>).

2.2 The SPECTRUM standard incorporates two main elements:

- A Procedural standard, defining best practice across 21 collections and information management procedures
- An Informational standard, defining over 400 Units of Information that are the basis of a standard architecture for museum information

2.3 SPECTRUM itself has been developed by MDA in partnership with hundreds of museum professionals throughout the UK and internationally. As such, it represents a unique focus for consensus on current best practice.

### 3 SPECTRUM - Revised Edition

3.1 In March 2005, MDA published the Revised Edition of SPECTRUM. This edition represented a significant review and update of the 2nd edition and has since been licensed to over 2500 museum organisations and individuals worldwide.

3.2 The Revised Edition also represents a shift in MDA's thinking about the standard itself. MDA is positioning SPECTRUM as an open standard, published by MDA but owned by the whole of the museum sector. This approach has the following key features:

- SPECTRUM is now available free of charge for non-commercial use from the MDA website (subject to registration)
- Instead of publishing sequential editions, the standard will be kept up to date on an ongoing basis, with revisions being published to the sector periodically
- MDA is keen to encourage the museums industry to contribute to the development of the standard as part of a global community of practitioners

## 4 SPECTRUM XML

- 4.1 The Revised Edition of SPECTRUM was published as a series of XHTML pages as part of MDA's long-term commitment to making the standard more readily accessible to the cultural heritage community.
- 4.2 MDA is now investigating the publication of future editions of SPECTRUM as a structured XML document. A key driver for this work is to provide an update to the SPECTRUM XML Schema version 1.5, originally published by the Consortium for the Interchange of Museum Information (<http://www.cni.org/pub/CIMI/framework.html>)
- 4.3 The ultimate aim of this activity is to ensure that SPECTRUM can be used as the basis of a national and international interchange format for museum information, linked to the Conceptual Reference Model developed by CIDOC (<http://cidoc.ics.forth.gr/>).

## 5 SPECTRUM Internationally

- 5.1 As demonstrated by the worldwide distribution map (see Appendix), the Revised Edition of SPECTRUM has already seen significant interest in the international community. MDA is committed to building this profile and ensuring that as wide a group of practitioners as possible is able to contribute to the ongoing development and implementation of the standard.
- 5.2 MDA has already held discussions with representative organisations in a number of EU Member States about the possibility of licensing the standard (on a non-commercial basis) for translation and localisation, and this work will be progressing over the next few months.
- 5.3 MDA's aim is to enable the creation of national instances of SPECTRUM which support museum practitioners in managing their information. The creation of a SPECTRUM XML schema has the potential to provide a mechanism by which this can happen without impacting on the integrity of the standard.

## 6 Working in Partnership

6.1 To coincide with the release of the Revised Edition of SPECTRUM, MDA launched the MDA Partners Scheme. The purpose of the Scheme is to enable MDA to work with software developers and vendors to ensure that the next generation of Collections Management software is directly linked to the development of the SPECTRUM standard.

6.2 The key elements of the Scheme are:

- A license to participating vendors to incorporate the text of SPECTRUM in their software
- A Compliance Framework which allows MDA to validate candidate systems for compliance with SPECTRUM
- The right for vendors to market their software as ‘SPECTRUM Compliant’

6.3 Since its launch in 2005, the MDA Partners Scheme has seen rapid takeup throughout the UK and internationally. Members of the Scheme now include 8 of the world’s leading Collections Management Software vendors, including companies based throughout Europe and in the United States.

6.4 MDA is keen to regard partnership as a mutually beneficial relationship. It provides museums with the reassurance that systems are standards-compliant, while also giving commercial organisations an opportunity to contribute to the ongoing development of the standard.

## 7 MDA’s Work

7.1 Alongside the development of SPECTRUM, MDA has been working to deliver a range of products and services which help museums engage with the standard. These include a UK-wide programme of quality-assured training events and seminars, as well as published material and presentations.

7.2 Alongside this core work, MDA has also developed two national initiatives geared towards raising awareness and professional standards in collections management:

- *Collections for All* – a UK-wide advocacy campaign which is working to provide evidence of the social, economic, professional and intellectual impact of good collections information management (<http://www.collectionsforall.org.uk>)
- *Collections Link* – a national advisory service covering 16 areas of collections management practice including documentation, conservation, online publishing and rights management (<http://www.collectionslink.org.uk>)

## 8 MDA and Terminology

8.1 MDA's work has always included a focus on terminological standards. As an increasing number of UK museums provide online access to their information resources, the application of standard thesauri and ontologies is a key factor in delivering semantically interoperable digital cultural content.

8.2 To address this requirement, MDA has developed SPECTRUM Terminology (<http://www.mda.org.uk/spectrum-terminology/index.htm>), an online service comprising 3 elements:

- *Terminology Essentials* – general information about terminology for museum practitioners
- *Terminology Workshop* – guidance on the creation and application of terminologies
- *Terminology Bank* – a growing repository of existing terminologies and related resources

8.3 The long-term aim for SPECTRUM Terminology is to create an environment in which museum practitioners can share or download terminologies for real-world applications.

8.4 MDA has recently entered into partnership with the University of Leicester, the UK Museums Computer Group and the 24 Hour Museum (<http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk>) to create a Semantic Web Thinktank. The Thinktank will investigate the potential of new approaches including Topic Maps, SKOS and social tagging and their application in museums.

## 9 MDA and Intellectual Property Rights

- 9.1 Rights Management is a key element of the Revised Edition of SPECTRUM, and MDA is working to provide expert advice and guidance for museums in engaging with and managing their documented information as an important part of their Intellectual Property.
- 9.2 MDA supports the work of the Museums Copyright Group (<http://www.museumscopyright.org.uk>) and has established its own Intellectual Property Advisory Committee to help shape the future development of its IP-related work.
- 9.3 In addition, MDA has been working to address the potential and risks associated with emerging open licensing frameworks such as Creative Commons (<http://www.creativecommons.org>) and the BBC Creative Archive (<http://creativearchive.bbc.co.uk/>).

## 10 Future Priorities for MDA and SPECTRUM

- 10.1 Overall, this is an exciting time in MDA's 27-year history. There is increasing awareness both of the importance and potential of information management in museums to support a range of activities including publishing, collections management and dissemination.
- 10.2 MDA welcomes the opportunity of discussing with CIDOC the potential for future collaboration in the development of the SPECTRUM standard. Our particular priorities over the next 2-3 years include:
- The ongoing revision and publication of the SPECTRUM standard in partnership with the cultural heritage community and MDA Partners
  - The development of SPECTRUM XML and the associated schema as a mechanism for data interchange
  - The relationship between SPECTRUM and the development of the Conceptual Reference Model

- The exploration of Topic Maps as a mechanism to support true semantic interoperability between cultural resources and datasets
- The large-scale implications of publication and disclosure of museum information

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