



EBLIDA's comments on INFO2000

1. Introductory

EBLIDA welcomes the attention being paid to the content industry, since it is indeed the element on which the information industry depends.

We feel it would be useful if the advisory committee for INFO2000 (mentioned in Article 5.1 of the Proposal for a Council Decision) could be extended to include representatives of both content providers and information users.

2. Information value chain

We feel that one level has been left out of the value chain matrix: the stage of selecting, evaluating, organising and structuring information. This falls between the 'Content development' and 'Packaging' stage. Although it may be intended that this stage is partially included in 'Packaging', it seems to us important enough to identify separately.

Examples are:

- Electronic works which draw on other sources (print, databases etc) to provide a new product which has added value in the selection, compilation and organisation. An example would be Reuters *Textline*, which draws on news sources (each of which is also available separately) and adds value through the selection itself and by the uniform structuring of the data and the indexing/coding which is added. This type of product can be distinguished from, for example, a single-source database like the Financial Times online. In the biomedical sector, *Excerpta medica* could provide an example. It is worth distinguishing between 'one-source' and 'multi-source' works, both because different types of enterprise may be involved in the creation of each, and because each presents slightly different problems in terms of, for example, intellectual property.
- The library/information centre or museum: either occupying a physical space, or, increasingly, available 'virtually' over networks. A similar process of selection, evaluation and organisation has taken place, in order to meet the needs of the target market for that library/information centre or museum. When considering the role of library/information centres or museums it seems important to make full use of the intellectual effort that has already gone into assembling these 'living' multimedia works, and not simply concentrate on the individual objects they contain. Information professionals should also have a role to play as participants (section 3.3 of the Communication).

3. The Internet

Although it is assumed that 'electronic publishing' is taken to include publishing over networks, there seems room for more consideration of networked information content. The Internet and the widespread use of World Wide Web software and HTML coding has opened up the electronic information world to the consumer to a far greater extent than has been managed by 'traditional' online hosts. The adoption of the Web browser has provided a 'common command' platform, and also accelerated the production of cheap software which makes access to electronic networks easier. Content providers on the Internet include:

- Individuals providing personal or specialist information. This can sometimes be extensive

- eg the China New Daily service and Web site provided by volunteers in the USA;
- Public sector bodies (eg governments or libraries) providing information, often including graphics, sound or video;
 - Commercial companies providing information about their products, sometimes including a wider range of information in order to attract users to their site;
 - Primary and secondary content providers, providing services (free or priced). Examples include Knight Ridder's *Newshound*, Library Corporation's *NlightN*, Elsevier's information services supporting existing subscribers.

This is a fast-growing area which is very much in the public eye. Currently it is dominated by information provided by US individuals or information providers. Since the Internet is likely to have an impact on children, as well as business people and the general public, it seems important to foster European initiatives and ensure that Web sites which reflect European culture and are in more than one European language are encouraged. The creation of imaginative, content-rich European sites could be a valuable cultural, recreational and economic tool.

4. Triggering multimedia potential

The main text (section 3.2 of the Communication) mentions that 'Solutions for electronic advertising, electronic markets and digital revenue collection mechanisms need to be identified, evaluated and encouraged at the European level'. These issues do not seem to be addressed in the Action Lines. Work in this area may be valuable, especially since many initiatives on digital cash are USA-driven.

5. Role of the public sector in the information society

The statement in section 4 seems to underplay the role of the public sector in a disappointing way. Citizens of the European information society will surely expect to have access to as at least as much public information in electronic form as they currently do in printed form (eg statutory information provided by Governments on rights, regulations etc). Therefore public sector bodies will themselves have to rise to the challenge of being electronic content providers, just as they adapted to the need to provide basic printed information to an increasingly literate population.

Educational institutions are also already multimedia content providers over the Internet, and will need to develop the provision of information in this form in order to meet citizens' changing expectations and needs. Public-sector libraries also taking on the role of electronic information compilers and facilitators. Although the latter areas may be covered by other EU programmes, it seems important not to lose sight of the public sector's role as content *distributor*.

6. Comments on specific action lines (Annex 1)

1.1 Creating new markets by raising awareness

Feedback from some EBLIDA members has indicated that information is not being disseminated through the existing National Awareness Partners as effectively as intended. It would perhaps be useful to incorporate a budget for further effectiveness monitoring mechanisms into any further plans for awareness centres (eg sampling the target populations to measure awareness). For the Library and Information Services sector, EBLIDA might provide a route for carrying out such a survey.

1.2 Encouraging clusters of pan-European users

EBLIDA looks forward to playing a role in this area, both in terms of EBLIDA members who are themselves users of multimedia, and as a route to end-users in the community (eg public library users, end-users in business).

2.3 Making use of content resources in the public sector

Please see discussion of libraries' and museums' role under 'General Comments' above. We feel that there could be greater acknowledgement of the value already added by the public sector in terms of selecting and organising material, and feel that it is important that exploitation by the private sector should not be the only option considered, where matters of heritage and culture are concerned.

3.2 Trading multimedia intellectual property rights

What is suggested is reasonable, but does not seem to grasp the root problem: that in the context of multimedia products, distinctions between media and types of intellectual entity (eg Literary works, film, musical works) become increasingly irrelevant. If different laws continue to apply to these different forms of intellectual property, then there will be continuing barriers to the production of successful multimedia products (since dealing with the different rights, lifetimes etc. of the many different items that make up the multimedia work will be a major, time-consuming, effort). The effect may be to favour the large media conglomerates (such as News International) who alone are in a position to put together multimedia works for which they own all the rights, and to handicap severely the SMEs that INFO2000 is trying to encourage.

Although pilot projects may be helpful in identifying key problem areas (although obviously some products and collaborations exist, so it would be useful to gather data on these), it would be very useful if DG XIII could also give a lead in addressing the fundamental issue of harmonisation and rationalisation of legal requirements. Any such harmonisation is likely to be a long and careful process, and it is important that it is addressed as soon as possible.

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