Measuring Kelsey Museum Digital Image Collection in Communities

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Abstract: Kelsey Museum of Archeology at University of Michigan houses over 105,000 ancient objects from the Mediterranean and the Near East. The collection department started to create collection images in 1920s with film camera and around 2003, the department launched digital image making for both internal and external use.

So far the collection has created over 50,000 images. These images play its role as the primary image source for both internal usages and external services. The collection's present practices include image creation, digital asset management, storage and online presentation. However, the system cannot guarantee a sustainable development yet because it is not capable of supporting efficient retrieval, the image quality cannot always meet the needs of users and the external users can only have online access to less than 4000 images.

The challenges that Kelsey faces bring our attention to the problems that university museums can encounter. Meanwhile, Kelsey can embrace many opportunities from the communities. These opportunities point us to a strategy that university museums can adopt to secure a sustainable image collection with the support from the communities.

The challenges here include the way to guarantee the image quality, the method to maintain a retrievable image system and the standards that introduce the coherent object and image description.

The opportunities come from both communities that university museums belong to: the museum and the university communities. Both communities provide technical guidance and support. Among all the opportunities, open source software and the collaboration with professionals in communities are keys to develop a robust image system.

About the author:

Xiaoli Ma studies at School of Information, University of Michigan. As a master student, she specialized in Archives and Records Management. She has strong interests in image collections. She worked as an image cataloger for over three years. Before pursuing this master degree, she obtained a master degree in Art History at University of South Florida.