

# Digital definitions for small museums

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## Introduction

What exactly is a digital asset? Confused by technology and wanting to sort your modems from your routers and find out what a tablet is? Then let's start at the very beginning.

## The basics

### Online

This refers to information, products and services which are found and used via the internet. People refer to information being online as well as themselves being online, meaning they are working using the internet or are connected to the internet using a smart phone or mobile device. When someone is working at a computer they are not necessarily online – word processing, databases and other applications are accessed from the brain or hard drive of your computer whereas email and internet searching are online services.

### Operating system (OS)

An operating system is the program that controls how your computer works. Most PCs (commonly branded personal computers such as Dell, Acer, Sony etc) come with Windows® as their operating system as well as a suite of compatible software. Apple computers use their own operating system and computers found in institutions or large organisations may also use a customised operating system.

### Browser

Safari, Firefox, Internet Explorer and Chrome are browsers – programs that provide access to the internet. Not all browsers are equal and information can be displayed quite differently on each browser. Browsers are free to download through the internet. M&G NSW recommends Firefox or Chrome.

## The Internet

### Google

Google is an information indexing service which allows you to find information on the internet. It does this using its search engine, a sophisticated coded program called Googlebot (more generally known as spiders) which trawl through information on websites in order to catalogue it. Google is the most popular search engine in the world, followed by Yahoo and Bing. Google and other search engines are accessed through a browser on your computer.

### Web search

This is the process of using a search engine to find information, commonly referred to as 'Googling something'. Search engines are user-friendly and recognise keywords allowing you to type in a question without the need to identify exact terminology. Google search can respond to very specific commands and entries.

### SEO

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimisation and is a set of principles for building a website or developing online content that ensure the spiders and Googlebots can read and understand your information. This means your website and the information contained within it will be indexed by Google or other search engines.

### Hyperlink

This is a way of connecting two pieces of information together on the internet. Hyperlinks are individually hard-coded into documents and webpages to make finding related information easier. They usually appear as an underlined or coloured portion of text, which when clicked takes the user to another website, opens a document or sometimes a preaddressed email for enquiries.

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## URL

URL stands for Uniform Resource Locator and is the global address for information on the internet. The first part of the URL is called a protocol identifier and it indicates the agreed format for transmitted information, and the second part is the resource name and it specifies the origin and location of the website. Just one example of a url is: [www.mgnsw.org.au](http://www.mgnsw.org.au)

## Wifi

This refers to technology which allows computers and other electronic devices to connect to the internet wirelessly.

## Broadband

This is a transmission of multiple signal types simultaneously. It can be via local telephone line, coaxial, cable or optical fibre. Internet services are delivered via broadband connections.

## NBN

NBN, short for National Broadband Network is the federal government's program to deliver high-speed broadband and telephone services Australia-wide.

## Html, java script, php

These are digital or web languages. They are codes and determine how everything behaves and appears on a website. Different languages do different things and knowledge of each requires specialisation. Google and search engines prefer information to be in html as it is the 'universal language' of the web. However websites built purely of html have poor aesthetic qualities and don't allow interactivity, so in modern websites a number of languages are used.

## CSS

This refers to Cascading Style Sheets. They are sets of data which control the appearance of information on a website including the font, colours, size and position of text. Working in CSS requires knowledge of a number of web languages.

## App

App is abbreviated from the word 'application' and refers to self-contained programs or software designed for specific purposes. Apps are mostly for mobile devices and are bought and downloaded online.

## Responsive

A website is regarded to be responsive or mobile-friendly if the information it contains can adapt itself for use and clarity of display on a smart phone or tablet. As more people move to portable devices to connect to the internet, responsive websites become more important. Websites require custom design and coding to enable them to be responsive.

## Equipment

### Hard drives or hard discs

These are the brain of your computer. It processes, remembers and stores your work. Hard drives have 3 main components – the speed at which it can think (measured in gigahertz), the size of the storage space (measured in gigabytes) and RAM (Random Access Memory) which is the computer's operating memory needed to open, close and respond to your commands.

### Server

This is simply a very big brain. Usually found where there are many computers working independently, the server's job is to 'serve' – to offer up information when called for, to coordinate the different computing activities and to store all information. The server is accessed via individual computers in an organisation called 'clients.'

### Modem

This is a device which modulates or converts an analogue signal to a digital signal. Mostly used in home and office and are located between phone outlet and computer. They are classified by the amount of data (in bits or bytes) they can send per second.

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## Router

This is a device which passes digital signals between computers and controls traffic and data flow.

## Tablet

Tablets are small hand-held computer controlled by touch screen or small stylus. It is used primarily for accessing the internet on location or while travelling about. Apples iPad and Samsung's Galaxy are examples of popular tablets though many others exist.

## Collection related

If you are thinking about 'computerising your collection' the following terms are important to understand.

### Digitisation

This is the process of converting objects and documents into a digital asset. This is done through systematic scanning and photography to create a digital file of that object. The digital files are then stored in a catalogue of their own and can be used in many different ways.

### Digital asset

This is information in digital form. The term mostly refers to objects and documents in your collection which have been photographed, scanned, catalogued and made ready for use. The term may also refer to videos and multimedia documentation, or any piece of digital information your organisation values.

### Digital strategy

This is the overall plan which guides the way your museum develops, uses and maintains its digital assets including its online presence.

### Digital photograph

This is an image in a digital format. It may be converted from an existing photograph or born digital using a digital camera or an image creation program such as Photoshop or Illustrator.

## Born digital

This is an artefact that was always digital or 'virtual' as opposed to a tactile, physical object that is digitised.

## Database

This is a collection of organised data or information. Information is usually categorised in a way that supports its use or processing. Database can be simple or extremely complex. Databases can be constructed using simple software such as FileMaker Pro or Microsoft Access or in complex ways using web languages (code) to create relationships across the set of data.

## Collection Management System (CMS)

This refers to the type of computer database and organisational system used to store information relating to the collection. A CMS offers access to object or item records at different security levels to prevent corruption and unauthorised access. They replicate the organisational framework behind card cataloguing systems while allowing information about origin, provenance and condition of an object to be held in one location. M&G NSW recommends eHive, Mosaic and Murkurtu, though there are many other CMS such as Vernon and Emu.

## Content Management System (also has the acronym CMS)

This refers to the interface in the 'back-end' of a website which allows the user to create, organise and publish material online. There are many types of open-source or free systems (eg: WordPress, Drupal and Joomla) as well as proprietary brands on the market. Modern CMS's offer a user-friendly manner of organising information that doesn't require understanding code or web languages.

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## Media

When people talk about media they are referring to the different ways information can be packaged online. Media might refer to an image, video or one of the more sophisticated combinations of picture and sound.

### Metadata

This is a broad term referring to information about information. It is often heard in conjunction with digital images which carry with them details about how big they are, how old they are and where they came from. A lot of metadata is technical and might include the type of camera the photo was taken on and the exposure details. Metadata is important for anyone with a digital collection because important information such as the title of the work, ownership and attribution details can be attached to the image records.

### Rich media

This refers to computer-related material that responds to a user's actions. It mostly refers to interactive information and products including games and video.

### Jpg, pdf, png, tiff

These are different image formats, or file types and are abbreviations of the method by which the digital information is packaged. They all have different characteristics and uses. The most common is jpg, also seen as Jpeg, which allows images to be stored at a relatively small size (so as not to take up excessive space on the computer) while retaining reasonable quality. Higher quality images are usually stored as tiffs.

A png is similar to a jpg except that it doesn't deteriorate with use and allows you to control and set colour palettes so the image always remains constant.

A pdf refers to information that is locked together so that text, pictures and colours etc will display in similar manner despite the application and operating system you are using. Most long documents online are packaged as pdfs. The disadvantage of pdfs is that search engines can't read them.

## Multimedia

This is material that uses a combination of different formats such as text, audio, animation, video or interactive information.

## Social media

Social media refers to a collection of online communication tools. Social media is an excellent way to connect with and develop audiences for small museums as they are free to use and offer excellent opportunity for promotion and advertising.

### Facebook

Facebook is a free social networking service which requires registration. Individuals can register and communicate using a 'profile', whereas organisations can open a 'page' to describe what they do. Organisation pages must be managed by an individual and aim at attracting 'Likes' by adding information of interest to its audience. It is possible to share and comment on information other people and other organisations add to their pages.

### Twitter

Twitter is a micro-blogging technology. Messages restricted to 140 typed characters, pictures and website addresses are sent across the internet to people of like-minded interests. Twitter identifies you using a 'handle', recognised by the '@' sign plus a name. M&G NSW's Twitter handle is @MGNSW as example. Popular topics and issues are identified using a hashtag plus a name, such as #CIta which means information about Cyclone Ita can be found using that hashtag.