

Museum Digital Licensing Collective

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- The Museum Digital Licensing Collective -

The Museum Digital Licensing Collective, Inc. (MDLC) is a Delaware non-profit, non-stock corporation formed to provide technical and financial assistance for the digitization of museum materials, and to manage the storage, distribution, and licensing of digitized materials to educational institutions, such as colleges, universities, elementary and secondary schools, libraries, and museums, as well as the public. The MDLC will be organized and run in conjunction with museums to serve the entire American museum community.

Prominent museums and educational organizations have expressed interest in the development of the MDLC, including the American Association of Museums, with which the MDLC expects to have a special affiliation. Computer services will be performed under contract with major academic research libraries, and the University of California, Berkeley and Cornell University have indicated their willingness to be involved with the MDLC in this respect. It is also anticipated that Sun Microsystems will be the initial technology provider for the MDLC.

Most of the 8,200 American museums do not have the funding or technical resources to digitize large or important portions of their collections. There are also varying standards for digital documentation and imaging. No central and efficient licensing administration exists today to manage the distribution of large amounts of digitized museum collections to hundreds, and potentially thousands, of higher educational institutions, libraries, and K-12 school systems.

The MDLC will solve these problems by funding the necessary technical services to handle all aspects of safely storing and distributing digitized museum materials, and licensing these images to educational institutions and the public. The MDLC will help fund the digitizing by museums of significant museum holdings through grants and donated funds, then license these collections to build a stream of licensing income to fund continuing digitization projects and become self-supporting. A mutually-beneficial relationship will be negotiated between a very large set of potential users -- educational institutions, who are already seeking access to digitized content -- and museums with their vast repositories of cultural, artistic, historical, and scientific collections, but limited financial resources.

The MDLC will offer museums more editorial control and a greater share of licensing income than do commercial companies. By working with the educational and library communities, the MDLC can direct donated funds to building a digital resource that will be of great value to students, scholars and researchers, as well as the general public. The initial digital collection will be materials relating to 19th century American culture.

The MDLC will be developed through a collaborative Task Force process over a 9-12 month organizing phase. Initially, twelve diverse history, art, general, and specialized museums will participate in a Museum Policy Task Force and a Technology Task Force. Representatives from higher education and library associations will assist in developing licensing policies and data standards for the use of museum materials at educational institutions and libraries. Membership will then be expanded as funding is obtained.

Future plans for the MDLC include the possible creation of for-profit subsidiary organizations. For example, a subsidiary might handle the licensing of digitized museum materials to commercial entities, such as print and multimedia publishers, and gift and product manufacturers. Another subsidiary might propose, develop and manage its own multimedia and other commercial products

The organizing phase, which will start after funding, will include the design, development, and testing of relevant technologies, licensing agreements, a business plan, and rules of governance.