

The National Gallery in London preserves its collection with Extensis Portfolio Server

The National Gallery in London houses one of the greatest collections of Western European paintings from 1250 to 1900. The Gallery originated in 1824 when the House of Commons agreed to pay £57,000 for the picture collection of banker John Julius Angerstein.

Like many other galleries, museums and heritage sites, The National Gallery has built up a collection of digital images relating not only to its history but also to its on-going work around the collections it houses.

It is the job of the Photography Department to manage these images, providing copies to other departments such as press, new media and design upon request. Previously, this manual process meant that many Gallery Departments were not fully aware of the range of photographic material available to them. Additionally, the process for sharing such assets was both inefficient and time-consuming.

CHALLENGE

- ▶ Implement an easily searchable database system utilising the legacy SQL database
- ▶ Make all archived images easily accessible to all Gallery Departments via a web browser
- ▶ Present the Photographic Department and its work in a professional manner
- ▶ Allow users to identify the image required prior to contacting the photographic department



Photographer: Tom Patterson

The Front of the National Gallery.

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Colin White
Deputy Head of Photography,
The National Gallery in London

OVERVIEW

Company profile

The National Gallery in London houses one of the greatest collections of Western European paintings from 1250 – 1900. The Gallery originated in 1824 and today hosts over 2,300 pictures. It has undertaken an inspired project working in collaboration with various museums and universities to create a National Inventory of European Paintings 1200 – 1900.

Industry

Heritage/Culture

Project goals

- Implement an easy-to-use digital asset management tool
- Facilitate organisation-wide access to online catalogues
- Streamline the image capture, archive and retrieval system

Solution Implemented

- Portfolio Server
- Portfolio SQL-Connect
- Portfolio NetPublish For Server

Result

- Improved image access
- Open channels of communication between the Photographic Department and rest of organisation
- Greater understanding of the role of the Photographic Department and quality of work produced



Contractor working on the National Gallery East Wing Renewal Project

Photographer: Colin Harvey

“ The implementation of Portfolio is part of a larger departmental strategy that has seen us halve our running costs in 5 years.”

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Deputy Head of Photography,
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SOLUTION

In March 2005, The National Gallery Photographic Department bought Portfolio for their multi-user workgroup and also bought into the Extensis Annual Service Agreement (ASA) after a 5-month tendering process that compared a number of Digital Asset Management (DAM) solutions from different vendors. The Photographic Team was impressed with Portfolio's features. One major influence in the purchase decision was Portfolio's expandable SQL-Connect module that enabled Portfolio to function as an 'open' SQL database, making the solution scalable and flexible enough to meet the Galleries' expanding business needs. The fact that SQL-Connect was simple to deploy and could be connected easily to their existing legacy SQL system was also a great advantage.

RESULT

Portfolio Server is an instrumental part of the National Gallery's image archiving, tracking and distribution system. Once images are processed, they are loaded onto Portfolio where relevant keywords and other background information is added directly to the catalogue file as metadata. This information relates to keywords, description, title and photographer as either EXIF or IPTC format. Formerly, all this information was stored on a card index and in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Colin White, Deputy Head of Photography, comments, “Other departments were not aware of the material we had, therefore it was time-consuming to locate images that might interest them. We were emailing literally hundreds of images to them, which is a clunky way of working. Extensis Portfolio opens up greater dialogue with the other departments that use our work, and, in the long term, improves the image quality used throughout the organisation.”

White goes on, “It has always been difficult to convince the rest of the Gallery about the quality of photography produced by our department. Portfolio enables us to let the user see the images they want immediately at their own desktops, which means they no longer have to describe their requirements by saying ‘I want it like that’ or ‘I need this kind of picture’ and will have the full scope of imagery available to them.”

The organisation is also planning to use Portfolio NetPublish to create an easily searchable website for users to conveniently access its image catalogue. White continues, “We initially intend to have one site that can be used to search the entire catalogue online. However, in the future we would like to make more catalogues available online through different sites. The beauty of NetPublish is that it allows unlimited access to unlimited catalogues for all Gallery Departments.”

White concludes, “The implementation of Portfolio is part of a larger departmental strategy that has seen us halve our running costs in 5 years. We are in the early stages of discussing the use of Extensis Portfolio to manage the assets of other departments throughout the Gallery.”

“The Return On Investment (ROI) from employing Extensis Portfolio can be seen in a number of ways,” Richard Bamford, European Business Manager of Extensis explains. “Bottom-line ROI is seen in both general efficiency and Common Knowledge Management.” Bamford continues, “Without Portfolio, it's quite common for companies not to know that certain files exist at all”.

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