Business issues for institutional repositories: A Briefing Paper

What is the business mission of an institutional repository?

A digital repository is a critically important tool for managing a university's image and impact on a global scale. There is a cash cost to an institution in establishing a repository but very rarely any cash payoff. Instead, return on investment is measured in other ways, largely related to the mission of the institution in enabling, engendering and encouraging scholarly research and disseminating its findings.

A repository filled with current research outputs attracts widespread usage from around the world. Where outputs were previously visible only to those who had access through subscriptions to academic journals, a repository exposes the products of a university or research institution to Google and other Web search engines. The payoff is hugely increased visibility and presence on the Web for an institution and a greater impact when research made available in this way is used and built upon by others.

The benefits of a repository

- Opens up the outputs of the institution to the world
- Maximizes the visibility and impact of these outputs as a result
- Showcases the institution to interested constituencies – prospective staff, prospective students and other stakeholders
- Collects and curates the digital outputs of the institution
- Manages and measures research and teaching activities
- Provides a workspace for work-in-progress and for collaborative and large-scale projects
- Enables and encourages interdisciplinary approaches to research
- Facilitates the development and sharing of digital teaching materials and aids
- Supports student endeavours, providing access to theses and dissertations and a location for the development of e-portfolios

The business case for a repository

The business case for a repository cannot rest upon promising a cash return since generating cash is not central to the business mission of digital repositories. Instead, the repository joins other IT operations in the institution (the digital library, the email system, the institution's web pages) in helping to fulfil strategic aims. A repository aligns with the core values of a research-focused institution in supporting its aim to enable and disseminate high-quality research. In addition, it provides a management information tool for monitoring and assessing research activity. The business case is thus made on the basis of enhanced visibility of the institution, measurably better impact for its research, more effective institutional marketing, better management of intellectual assets, easier assessment of research outputs, the facilitation of collaborative and interdisciplinary research and the facilitation of workflow for researchers and teachers.

What does a repository cost?

There are examples of repositories that have cost millions of pounds but the average cost to establish a university repository in Europe is around 10000 euros (10000 USD). Ongoing recurrent costs can also vary quite widely.

Set-up costs

The main types of **software** for running repositories are open source (i.e. free of charge: see sidebox overleaf for details). The **hardware** required can be a simple desktop computer workstation or a file server, the former costing a few hundred euros or US dollars and the latter around 1500 euros/dollars. Some institutions use existing servers that have sufficient space available for the purpose. Commercial suppliers also offer repository building (and build-and-host) services if a university does not wish to carry this out in-house.

Repository software

- EPrints (developed by the University of Southampton) www.eprints.org
- DSpace (developed at MIT) www.dspace.org
- FEDORA (developed by Cornell University and the University of Virginia) www.fedora-commons.org/

Staff requirements vary according to the institution's ambitions for the repository but the general staffing complement for setting up a repository is around 1.5 to 3.0 FTEs for a period of 6 months to one year. This includes an initial planning phase which enables various stakeholders (library staff, IT specialists, university administrators, research policymakers) to decide upon the main goals of the repository and the programme for its implementation.

Recurrent costs

Most universities have a staff allocation of between 0.5 and 2.5 FTEs for running the repository. In most universities the repository is managed by the library: existing staff may assume some repository responsibilities as part of their duties or a dedicated repository manager may be appointed. Temporary assistance is frequently procured in the form of graduate student labour. Repository staff carry out a number of tasks which can include quality control, depositing content and promoting the repository within the institution.

Sustainability of the repository

A repository is sustainable if it contributes effectively to the university management's agenda in terms of aiding research management, maximising citation impact and improving the visibility internationally of the institution. Senior management's support is crucial for the financial and political sustainability of a repository as staffing needs are minimised by the adoption of a clear institutional policy. The better the policy in the first place – designed to fully involve research staff in depositing their own work (a process known as 'self-archiving') – the less staff time needs to be allocated to gathering content for the repository on an ongoing basis. Repositories in institutions with a formal mandatory policy on depositing research outputs can be run with a minimum of staff time and they collect content very effectively. Those with weak or no policies require staff continually to advocate their existence and purpose and they collect only a minor proportion of a university's outputs.

Repository services

Engagement of researchers can further be encouraged by repository services that offer useful
tools for their work or the means to help them take an active management role in disseminating their outputs. Some universities are developing services using their repository, both for internal purposes and for external users.

Examples of services for use by a university and its researchers include:

- Using the repository as a management tool for the Research Assessment Exercise
- Measuring the usage and impact of the research output of the university
- Promoting the university's research activities
- A marketing tool for the university
- Generating CVs and personal reference lists

Services for external users include:

- Publishing electronic journals
- As a basis for, or linked with, the university press to publish research monographs
- Making doctoral theses available to the world

This Briefing Paper was written by Alma Swan for OASIS: www.openoasis.org