discovery lessons

Senior Managers	✓
Metadata Creators	
Developers	
Suppliers	✓

Making the Business Case

The Discovery programme has been funded by JISC to improve access to collections that support research and education. This document is part of a series that describes the lessons from 8 JISC projects funded under the Discovery programme in 2011 to explore open metadata for libraries, museums and archives. More information about the projects can be found at: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/inf11/infrastructureforresourcediscovery.aspx
The other documents in the series can be found at: http://discovery.ac.uk

Scope

Selecting the appropriate arguments to make a business case requires considerable thought in the contemporary Higher Education context. This guide presents the business case arguments identified by the eight Discovery projects within a structured framework designed to assist managers in evaluating potential Discovery-related developments.

The Problem Space

The business case for a new service or a new approach to an existing service must address a range of challenges, not only financial but also relating to policy, change and potential risk, typically including:

- Direct and indirect cost of service set up or transformation
- Cost and ownership of sustainable service operation
- Operational risks associated with service change and new models
- Reputational and competitive risk in the marketplace
- Recognition of the benefits by stakeholders (managers, practitioners, researchers, students) who may not identify with the vision
- Positioning of the benefits against institutional and service (library, archive, museum) priorities and strategic plans

In present times it may no longer be sufficient to argue a case at the level of service improvement and fulfilment of service mission (e.g. the university library five year plan). Faced with the twin pressures of the student as customer and institutional financial priorities, the service mission may not always be the ideal foundation for a compelling business case.

When faced with the opportunities presented by new models for resource discovery and utilisation, enabling services such as institutional libraries, archives and museums need to balance the following factors:

- Long-standing and essential professional objectives, typically relating to the local collection and wider resource access;
- Specific and immediate user requirements, spanning from undergraduates to researchers; and
- Institutional mandates for step changes in efficiency and economy.

All these things – not one replacing the other – should be part of a compelling business case.

Outcomes

The eight projects supported under the first phase of the JISC RDTF programme[1] were by definition experimental, exploring ways and means of developing new services based on more discoverable metadata, new formats (including Linked Data) and open licensing. Common technical and professional challenges had to be addressed ahead of any assessment of the business case specific to the host institution.

Nevertheless, it is encouraging that a number of the projects identified several areas of benefit. These might be combined as the operational scenarios mature to present business cases for the service, the institution and, not least, the user.

This guide highlights the 15 areas of benefit, indicating the key RDTF project names in each case. Readers can refer to the Benefits section of each Project Review to find out more detail of the project experience and its particular benefits rationale.

Institutional Level

These benefits are about serving strategic institutional objectives, especially in support of a more effective learning and more efficient research infrastructure.

1 - Some institutions and / or services have a strategic policy commitment to Open Data, which provides a strong basis for this work	Noted in the cases of Cambridge (COMET[2]), Lincoln (Jerome[3]), Sussex (SALDA[4])
2 - New approaches to metadata make a key contribution to other policy directions	Student as Consumer (Lincoln); Collaboration with local stakeholders (Sussex)
3 - This type of development can be a catalyst or enabler for strategic service enhancements (beyond the library, archive or museum)	Personalisation (Lincoln); Connecting research data across domain and institutional boundaries (AIM25); Shaping the idea of the VRE within an international research context (Oxford)
4 - Following the models of players such as Google, opening data to serendipitous development is low cost and may yield unknown benefits	Lincoln explicitly favours this ambition; meanwhile open metadata has led to student development of an iPhone application at Cambridge

1 http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/inf11/infrastructureforresourcediscovery.aspx

2 http://cul-comet.blogspot.com

3 http://jerome.library.lincoln.ac.uk/about

4 http://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/salda

Practitioner Benefits (Librarians, Archivists, Curators)

These benefits relate principally to more economic and effective ways of ensuring the collection is well described.

5 – Making better use of increasingly limited professional time by embedding opportunities for records improvement in core workflows and / or by automating separately	Embedding (Open Metadata Pathway[5]); Automation (SALDA)
6 – Providing more efficient mechanisms to generate more effective indexing and access points, based on standard authorities	A focus of Open Metadata Pathway, OpenART[6] and SALDA
7 – Automating metadata improvement suggestions for cataloguers based on record comparisons	Jerome used Open Library

General User Benefits

These benefits are about the collection being more discoverable, more accessible and linked to other relevant knowledge assets.

8 – Broadening the scope for discovery and achieving greater access and utilisation of the collection	Harvesting (Discovering Babel[7]); Linked Data using open authorities (Open Metadata Pathway, SALDA)
9 – Expanding downstream discovery of relevant resources through Linked Data browsing	CORE; Open Metadata Pathway; SALDA
10 – Using open metadata to provide a richer user experience and create opportunities for a variety of interfaces	New channels such as Kiosks (Jerome) and mobile phones (COMET); new interface (Open Metadata Pathway)
11 – Engaging the user as creator and developer	Serendipitously (COMET); Intentionally (Jerome)

5 http://openmetadatapathway.blogspot.com

6 http://yorkdl.wordpress.com

7 http://blogs.oucs.ox.ac.uk/martinw

Researcher Benefits

These benefits are focused on making a strong contribution to the research ecosystem, within and beyond the institution.

12 – Cultivating the international research ecosystem by minimising duplication of effort and avoiding knowledge silos arising from locally bounded datasets	A primary concern for Discovering Babel
13 - Evolving scholarship by enabling a wider community to participate in testing, refining and building on research results	A primary concern for Discovering Babel
14 – Supporting the unpredictable connections required by interdisciplinary research	Connecting Repositories[8], Discovering Babel
15 – Addressing demand from academics, especially in STM disciplines, for Open Data and machine interfaces to metadata	An initial driver for COMET

Recommendations

1. Services working in this area will benefit from drafting their business case from the start of any potential project or commitment, taking account of all four levels (the institution, the practitioner, the general user and the researcher). This can be iterated as the project progresses and may therefore inform key decision points.
2. This checklist of 15 benefits (plus others that may emerge) should be checked against the strategic objectives of the institution or the service. This will help to identify key wins and also areas of contention or even new thinking.

Key Discovery Projects

- **Institutional business case** – Jerome, SALDA
- **Practitioner business case** – Open Metadata Pathway
- **General User business case** – Jerome, Open Metadata Pathway
- **Researcher business case** - Discovering Babel

[8] http://core-project.kmi.open.ac.uk