



## Terminology for Museum Managers

### The Basics

Although terminology can seem like a very complex and technical area of work, in reality it is very simple – using agreed words (terms) to describe ‘stuff’. Museums are likely to use terminology in two ways:

#### *Object terminology*

This concerns the range of information that is needed to describe objects and their associations (e.g. people, places and events).

There are many published terminologies covering: object names, materials, locations, artists and makers, subjects and historical periods.

#### *Collections management terminology*

This covers the range of information needed to describe the management of objects whilst they are in the care of the organisation (e.g. how the object was acquired, where it is, what condition it is in, or how it is being used.).

There are fewer published terminologies for this type of information. An organisation will need to construct some of their own (e.g. storage and display locations).

### The Benefits

Standardising the use of terminologies within an organisation is a classic change-management process. It requires both investment, in the form of time and capital expenditure, and buy-in from your staff. The return on this investment, however, can be significant. If constructing a business case for the application of terminology do consider:

#### *Direct benefits*

- Ability to retrieve information quickly and simply.
- Cost-savings in staff time spent re-classifying or mining uncategorised material.
- Greater confidence in your information.
- Improved flow of information between areas of curatorial expertise or departments.

- A standards-compliant approach which supports applications for Museum Accreditation.

#### *Indirect benefits*

- Greater clarity to funders about the extent and content of your collections.
- Better-managed intellectual property leading to greater opportunities for commercial activity.
- Enhanced ability to publish information and to make your collections visible online.
- Ability to share your information through portals, local networks etc.
- Ensuring that knowledge is retained and used effectively over time and in spite of changes in staffing.

### How MDA Can Help You

#### *SPECTRUM Terminology*

This is a free service which provides:

- Background information about terminology and why it is important.
- Terminologies and links to terminologies.
- Information about how to construct terminologies.

To find out more go to:

[www.mda.org.uk/spectrum-terminology](http://www.mda.org.uk/spectrum-terminology)

#### *The Future*

MDA is working with a range of partners to look at building new agreed terminologies, for example to address the needs of diverse audiences.

We are committed to exploring the role of museums in the growth of the Semantic Web. The Semantic Web is a way of looking at the Internet which uses terminologies to create much better tools for searching and finding information.

Finally, we are working on an emerging area known as ‘social tagging’ or ‘folksonomy’. This is a new approach which allows users to add their own keywords to information and pictures.

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