E-REVIEW

Electronic Media Reviews

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The CMAS e-review section evaluates electronic resources, websites, digital archives, blogs, mailing groups and multimedia. This issue examines electronic newsletters and bulletins.

Newsletters delivered electronically via email (e-newsletters) have gained rapid acceptance in the heritage management field. This is not only due to the growing popularity of electronic resources, but also because of their ability to provide easy linkage to further electronic resources on the internet. In this issue we will look at the e-newsletters of three international heritage organizations, the Asian Academy, the Getty Conservation Institute and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. They all have dissemination of information as one of their main aims, and this review compares their accessibility and the degree to which they have used the potential benefits of electronic newsletters over printed ones. As we will see, these e-newsletters differ greatly in terms of accessibility and information provision, including emails in text format with attached documents, the increasingly more common emails in HTML format, and e-newsletters linked to RSS web feeds (see below) on the internet.

Asian Academy Newsletter
Available through www.unescobkk.org/culture/asian-academy/

The Asian Academy for Heritage Management (AAHM), supported by UNESCO and ICCROM, is a network of institutions throughout the Asia-Pacific region offering professional training in the field of cultural heritage management. AAHM undertakes a wide range of activities in education, training and research, all of which are promoted through its website and its e-newsletter. The Asian Academy Newsletter is published three to four times a year, and is available electronically in portable document format (pdf)¹, either as an attachment to an email (easy and free to sign-up to on the website), or downloadable at any time from the website.

The newsletter contains a fair amount of meeting and conference reports by UNESCO, ICCROM and the AAHM, and as such is most useful for those interested in activities relating to the World Heritage field. However, it lives up to its aim of becoming a broader institutional platform, by providing useful and up-to-date news, forthcoming events, short book reviews, and activity reports on a wide range of heritage institutions in the Asia-Pacific region.

Although a very useful resource in itself, the translation of the Asian Academy Newsletter into an electronic newsletter is very traditional. The newsletter seems to
be designed and emailed as a pdf simply to be printed/read, and it is largely a copy of the events and news that are available on the website. Unfortunately, the potential that attached pdfs provide is not used effectively: links to websites and email addresses have not been made operational or simply do not work, and there is little integration with other information on the AAHM website. The design of the newsletter as a traditional newspaper illustrates this further; already slightly difficult to read in paper form, its legibility becomes a real problem in electronic form. In effect, the Asian Academy Newsletter is a useful traditional newsletter that deserves to be more effectively translated into electronic format.

**Getty Conservation Institute Bulletin**

*Available through http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications/*

The Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) has started a new electronic bulletin, the *GCI Bulletin*, which is to be published six times a year. This supplements the existing newsletter *Conservation*, which will continue to be available in both hard copy and online. The *Bulletin* will provide brief updates on projects, conferences, courses and publications, with links to more detailed information on the GCI website. Although it is unclear whether the *Bulletin* is a direct result of the survey that was recently conducted amongst the readers of *Conservation*, it shows that the GCI is taking the information needs of its readers seriously.

The excellent *Conservation* newsletter disseminates the results of both the GCI’s and others’ work in the field, through articles, news, publications and reports. But it requires browsing the complete digital or printed version in order to get a quick overview of news, events and reports. The electronic *Bulletin* is thus an effective supplement, as it provides those in the conservation field with greater access to up-to-date information on GCI programmes, activities, publications and multimedia. The *Bulletin* (for which signing-up is quick, safe and easy) is disseminated by email, in plain text or HTML format. The latter is an extremely useful way of staying up to date with the wide range of GCI activities, without having to browse through the website or the newsletter: short, well-illustrated descriptions link the reader directly to the relevant pages on the GCI website. Overall, a very useful and accessible tool.

**UNESCO World Heritage Centre RSS Feed**

*Available through http://whc.unesco.org/en/syndication*

The *UNESCO World Heritage Newsletter* ceased publication at the end of 2005. In design and scope it was not dissimilar to the Asian Academy Newsletter (above), although it gave the impression of being more of an ‘internal’ newsletter. It covered the activities and programmes of the World Heritage Centre (WHC) and its staff members, as well as providing brief summaries of upcoming news and events. Whilst some of the former information is now accessible through the *World Heritage Review*, the latter was more difficult to track, although some of the material was available via the ‘News and Events’ section on the WHC website.

With the introduction of an RSS feed the WHC has drastically changed their electronic news provision. RSS feeds are simplified versions of web content, containing short news descriptions that link directly to relevant web pages, which are
collected automatically for the reader. As such, readers do not have to browse websites or read emails to check if new items have been posted: according to their specified wishes, users are automatically informed if there is relevant new material. The RSS feeds for the WHC cover all the main news and events that appear on their website, and form an easy way of collecting information; provided users are willing to familiarize themselves with installing and operating RSS readers.

The RSS feed feature will mainly be useful for those following WHC activities closely. For those uncomfortable with the technology, or not wanting the constant access, subscribing to the email newsletters might be an easier option — especially if one enjoys reading the news in printed form over the coffee table. For this, funnily enough, the Asian Academy Newsletter might still be the best option.

Contact

The e-review section of CMAS is a work in progress. We very much welcome comments and assistance by our readers to increase its scope and effectiveness, as well as suggestions for electronic resources (with or without written reviews) for consideration in future e-reviews.

Notes

1 Portable document format is a file format created by Adobe Systems for document exchange. Pdf is used for representing documents in a manner independent of the application software, hardware, and operating system.

2 RSS (rich site summary) web feeds are documents that include full or summarized text, plus metadata such as publishing dates and authorship, normally collated from a number of sources. A piece of software, called an RSS reader, checks the user’s subscribed feeds regularly for any new material, downloads this, and provides a user interface to read the feeds.

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