COLLECTION MANAGEMENT SURVEY 2017

carried out by CulturalHeritage.cc Foundation, The Netherlands

"I keep looking for the 'golden goose' of Museum CMS. I haven't found it."

"The system is less fluid - a constant complaint by younger users accustomed to a 'Google world."

"The system is sluggish, time consuming with a confusing layout"

"I think the reasonable yearly fee should be at level of yearly fee for professional accountancy system."

"There is a clear need for libraries to have systems that support archival description where necessary, but also provide museum management of object type collections.
I haven't found a product that clearly does this."

Why did we choose to publish thes selected comments?

Because they prove that there is still a lot of research and/or developing work to be done, until we obtain the "ideal system".
Also, because they made us realize that this is an endless process.

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INTRODUCTION

All data and ratings provided by the participants are presented anonymously.
The main objective of this survey was to learn what the daily users of CMS think, rather than asking vendors or umbrella organization about it.

Note to system vendors: All data are from third parties, CulturalHeritage.cc Foundation could not check all information provided on its truthfulness. For instance pricing as charged by vendors is often unclear. Data provided in this survey sometimes varies largely for the same brand.
License, additional modules and amount of users per system make the control of information as provided complex. Costs of systems are published within ranges low, medium and high, based on the survey scaling. In case of contradictory answers, the price list on the vendors' Websites was checked. It must be said that some pricelists are complex to analyze. We recommend that the buyer of a system ask for a budget based on the Users Terms of References.
In case of mistakes or erroneous data that are noticed, CMS vendors are kindly requested to send us their rectifications including justifications.

Each vendor program, as published in this survey, has a general comment section composed of answers to questions, including: 'Please share with us your opinion on the subject '.
The 'Please share with us your opinion' is published in the end of the report.
Each comment has a list of average ratings by the CMS users. If ratings are not completely or partly published, this means that the ratings were not provided by the participants. (Several participants did not fill in all the sections)
The answers and the advices were selected and merged in such cases when they matched in terms of content and opinion.

To avoid any possibility of a conflict of interest, several programs that were co-developed with the CulturalHeritage.cc Foundation and were reviewed, are not published in this survey.
Home-made or custom-made programs are not shown in detail, because perspectives and cost were so different that we can only publish general answers. Moreover: these programs are not for sale.

If you are interested in contacting successful builders of custom-made systems, our Foundation can establish contact between parties if requested.
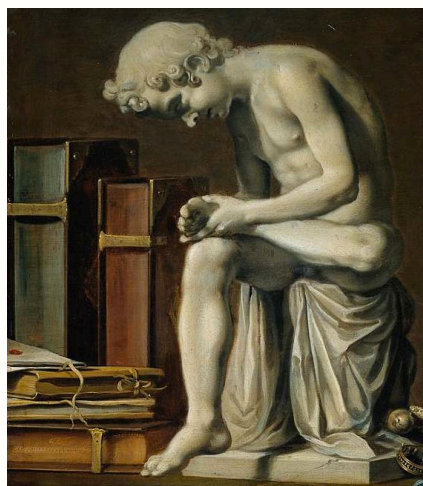
PARTICIPANTS OF THE SURVEY ARE FROM THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES

Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, France, Germany, Italy, Malaysia, Mozambique, Netherlands, New Zealand, Mexico, Nigeria, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, The United Kingdom, The United States and Zimbabwe

TYPE OF SYSTEMS REVIEWED

Cloud based by vendors, Cloud based custom-made, private standalone, private on local server with more users.

SYSTEMS NOT REVIEWED BY PARTICIPANTS

ARGUS/ DBtext, CALM, Collective access, Logos Flow, OpenHeritage system, Mona, Picturae, Robotron*Daphne, SKINsoft, XTree

Additional information on brands not published?
Please use our contact form
see:
https://culturalheritage.cc/

HOW TO READ AND USE THE SURVEY

Please do not consider this survey as the accurate answer to your questions. Use it as reference in order to decide about a future implementation or change of CMS. Because all comments and scaling are made from different perspectives, it turned out to be very difficult to fit all comments in one objective result. Obviously some CMS users have longer experience and rate their program as 'excellent', while others find the same system 'rigid'.
This may result from low quality interface and typography, or illogic hierarchy and navigation.
If the scaling appeared to be contradictory, our team reviewed the programs, to check if the evaluations were correct or almost correct.

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

The CMS that obtained the most positive reactions were the custom-made and 'home-made' programs. People tend to be happy with self-made and custom-made products.

The best results seem to be collective developed systems by groups of analogue museums. Group initiatives seem to be the best and most economic way of developing an efficient system. The prime condition for a smooth process is a voluntary cooperation between cultural heritage organizations, not one that is steered by a government.

Since none of these reviewed custom-made systems are for sale, we chose to publish a limited 'objective' scaling.
Judging the cost of the vendor systems was not easy, since prices - if published – vary and are not always transparent.

GENERAL ADVICE

In your search for a CMS:

1. Ask for trial versions. Review at least 3 systems to enable a good judgment. Import a test set of your own data into a demo installation.

2. Send your comments and questions about upgrades specifically focused on your Terms of References to the vendor.

3. Ask about additional features such as Library, Archive and the extra cost of the often called 'modules' or 'Add-ons'.

4. Ask for additional cost if more users are needed.
Regarding Cloud systems:

5. Check if they are fully responsive.

6. Judge the interface in terms of graphic design, ease of work and navigation.

7. Check if the system also provides a public interface.

8. Ask about the overall responsible administrator that has access to all data.
(E.g. some systems are owned by/or related to auction houses, this may cause conflict with the users' privacy)

9. Do not decide without testing a trial version for at least 4 weeks, during which you will be receiving sufficient support and answers to all your questions.

Results of the survey are shown in the following order:

A. **CLOUD BASED SYSTEMS**

The report starts with Cloud based systems
Cloud based is in general reviewed as the best option.
One of the main objectives of the museum collection is dissemination. Cloud based systems seem therefore the best and most up to date option.
The advantages of Cloud based systems are the central generic software (SaaS) and blueprint, support and development, automatic updates, daily back-ups and shared issue tracker. (Issue trackers serve as 24/7 helpdesk, and for documenting issues regarding requested upgrades)

A complete Cloud based systems is supposed to be fully responsive. Meaning: accessible from any device with auto adapted screen size.
Partly Cloud based systems: the original standalone version is replicated into a Cloud based system, but not as complete as the original, and has setbacks.

B. **STANDALONE SYSTEMS**

Stand-alone
        By vendor
Stand-alone
        Home made or commissioned

NOTE: when a system is rated 'bad', 'good' ánd 'excellent' the reason of differences may also be caused by less or more experience with that system.

ABOUT STANDARDS

COMMENT FROM PARTICIPANT

"I'm kind of mixed about this... when I consider how often - worldwide - repeated information is added that 'could' already be imported as Linked Data like authors, artists, places and how good it would be to just import and have all the relevant information available it could already do good in these aspects. However, when I see the state of standardization the industry is in - OMG!

I haven't seen any significant progress in this case in the last 20 years. It's the same discussions over and over and over again, but no real implementation.

What adds up to the problem is that standardization is often done by people disconnected from the real world.

Yes, standardization is a good thing, but your system has to be flexible enough to record things that are specific for your area of interest/research/collection. We try to stay conform with the system of the German National Library (Deutsche Nationalbibliothek) in our keywords, persons and locations sector, but they do give us big headaches, I can tell."

NOTE

Other then the above comment, not much is said about standards in this survey. We do recommend discussion on this subject.

SPECTRUM IMPLEMENTED?

Many users are obviously either not aware of functionalities of Spectrum standards in the system they use, or have there own processes implemented, or are not familiar with the existance of the Spectrum standards.
For that reason we place the link to Spectrum:
http://collectionstrust.org.uk/spectrum/spectrum-5/

Scaling of Custom-made or Home-made systems is hard. To much differences between to many systems. In general it can be said that users of these systems are either happy or not happy at all. So a gereneric result is hardly possible.
If the scaled answer states 'Unclear', Spectrum is either not known or just not available.
Reviews appear in different levels according to the different input of participants.
(e.g. 'in full' and 'unclear' as well)

CLOUD BASED SYSTEMS

Partly
Axiell/Adlib

Unclear / Partly
Collector Systems
TMS Gallery Systems

In full / Unclear
Vernon systems

Some
CUSTOM-MADE

Not
MuseumPlus RIA

STAND ALONE SYSTEMS

In full
Adlb, Axiell, CollectionSpace, Mobydoc, Mimsy XG, Modes Complete.

Partly
Filemaker, MUSNET, Modes Complete, Vernon Systems, QI.

Unclear
EMU, Mimsy XG, MuseumIndex+ , PastPerfect, Proficio, TMS Gallery Systems.

Not
EmbARK, Filemaker, MuseumPlus RIA, Primus**.**

PRICING

There is no such thing as free use of systems. They may be free for the user, but somewhere funding is needed and in most cases either government funded, or institutional funded ('home made')

The inventory of pricing is so diverse and complicated that we choose to show a list of systems from top (most expensive) to bottom (affordable).

Main conclusion is that pricing is - in most cases - based on the amount of users per institution. E.g. a system charging $85 per Month resulting in $1.020 per year for one user means $ 5.100 per year with 5 users.

CLOUD BASED SYSTEMS

VENDORS
Adlib/Axiell, ArchiveTech, Collector Systems, MuseumPlus RIA (Zetcom), TMS Gallery Systems, Vernon System
NON-VENDORS
CUSTOM-MADE (commissioned), CUSTOM-MADE (In-House), Gruppometa.it

PRICING VENDORS
Expensive systems are also caused by a 'STARTING FEE' and/or PER USER FEE
General From $1.020 up to $ 5.000 and more.

TMS SYSTEMS,
RANGE $ 3,500-5,000 Per Year (and up, depending on users and modules)

Vernon System
RANGE $ 1,500-5,000 Per Year (and up, depending on users and modules)

Adlib/Axiell
RANGE $ 1,500-5,000 Per Year (and up, depending on users and modules)

Collector Systems
FiXED 1 Account: $ 1.020 per year. Extra 1.020 per user

MuseumPlus RIA (Zetcom)
RANGE $ 500-1,500 Per Year (and up, depending on users and modules)

NOTE: If mistakes or wrongly published data are noticed, CMS vendors are requested to send us corrections if appropriate and can be proven as being incorrect information.

PRICING OFFLINE SYSTEMS
Single users or on local server with more users

Mobydoc
Range $2.500 - $3,500 PY

Adlib/Axiell
RANGE $ 1,500-5,000 Per Year (and up,)

EMU
Range $500 - $5,000 PY (depending on users and modules)

Vernon
Range $1.500 - $2,500 PY

Custom-made, EmbARK, Exel, MimsyXG, Modes complete, PastPerfect
Range $500 - $1,500 PY

TMS Gallery systems
Range $500 - $5,000 PY

Collection Space, Qi
Free

Filemaker, Museumindex+, Musnet, Primus
Data not provided

AXIELL / Adlib

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
Rigid

QUALITY OF SERVICE
Average

INTERFACE
Rigid

ADAPTATIONS EXECUTED
Long / 6 to 12 Month

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
YES

COMMENTS

System is only partly cloud based

The system is not responsive. Impossible to work with on handhelds.

CLOUD BASED SYSTEMS

COLLECTOR SYSTEMS

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
70 %   -Good
30 %   -Excellent

QUALITY OF SERVICE
70 %   -Good
30 %   -Excellent

INTERFACE
Good

ADAPTATIONS EXECUTED
25%   -Long / 6 to 12 Month
75%   -Short / 1 to 4 weeks

HOW MANY USERS
Average of 4

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
29% YES
71% NO

CLOUD BASED SYSTEMS

COLLECTOR SYSTEMS

COMMENTS

I found out about CS through word of mouth I think it would be important to let users who have very large databases and need to do very complex searches, that the ability to do complex searches, as well as add user defined fields that do math, is somewhat limited in this database

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Ever considered changing? Yes
I will always consider changing systems if the system can be more efficient for our particular needs.

Collector Systems is an excellent database for a very large collection of works of art in various media. The company offers excellent client service.

I changed from an old ReDiscovery to Collector System. The process was not painful and really detailed. A dedicated staff from CollectorSystem worked for us after I gave our set of information (really large excel and image files). They worked for one month, and then we trouble shoot and update details for a few weeks.
I am happy? no, and I would do not do it again.

CLOUD BASED SYSTEMS

TMS EmbARK

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
Good

QUALITY OF SERVICE
Average

ADAPTATIONS EXECUTED
Average / 4 to 6 Month

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
DOUBT

COMMENTS

We enjoy working with the system. It is the customer service support that is lacking.

CLOUD BASED SYSTEMS

VERNON SYSTEMS eHive

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
Good

QUALITY OF SERVICE
Good - Excellent

INTERFACE
Average

ADAPTATIONS EXECUTED
Short / 1 to 4 weeks

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
50% YES
50% NO

COMMENTS

Organisation is currently considering changing to PastPerfect. Some issues we are grappling with our multi site organisation (20 plus properties with collection of varying size) volunteer run, lack of trading or professional experience.

It is difficult to compare systems and get independent advice. I would like access to case studies of different size organisations and collection types and their solutions as a way of informing decisions about best system to fit our needs and situation.

We will stay with the current system whilst we complete the Collection Inventory and Review. Museum may consider changing to another system in 5 years or more.

All fields need to be edited and appointed were other system offer standard lists, and thesauri. Only a few data types are offered. Laborous system.

PRIVATE & LOCAL SERVER SYSTEMS

AXIELL / Adlib

RATINGS

10% OUTDATED
10% RIGID
50% GOOD
30% EXCELLENT

COMMENTS

We are part of a politically planned change across all national museums right now from older systems to one new system for all, which will be Adlib/Axiell. The process has been a very long one, which started around 2010 - and we do not have the new system in place yet. Despite three intensive years of development and negotiations between State Board, the developer Axiell and the museums, we still do not have a new, well-working system that fits the customer's needs. (...)

We all in all have better experiences with the systems that we have developed ourselves, but also always problems regarding updating and smartening up of the technologies. But I do not think that you can avoid that problem by buying a Commercial system - you often get slower reaction times at a considerable premium.

In the process of identifying a CMS to adopt for the museum. Annual maintenance cost is a limiting issue.
Ever considered changing? Yes

Sufficient but consider changing

We may at some point incorporate our library system into our collection system

Some years ago, Axiell took over Adlib, and announced that they would create a new system based on the best parts of the two systems. This doesn't seem to be happening, but the Adlib Lite is sufficient for our needs and budget at the moment.

AXIELL / EMU

RATINGS

Range: Outdated - Good - Excellent

COMMENTS

We went from Micromusée (which I found very good and pleasant to use) to iMu and eMu because of the lack of availability for new versions of Micromusée in Canada, but also because we wish to better integrate eventually with our partner museums which are iMu/eMu users.

We changed from non-networked iQ to EMu in 2014-2015 and it was one of the most painful experiences. As a local authority, and many in the same situation, our ICT support was extremely reluctant to entertain the idea of an external system. We then had issues about how to connect to EMu. Now we have EMu I don't imagine moving off it for the foreseeable future.

Our database, Emu, is not applicable for art museums. Apparently it was chosen because it was cheap upfront, but we've found that its additional cost is exorbitant and it is wildly out of date.

Ever considered changing? Yes

AXIELL / Mimsy XG

RATINGS

Range: Rigid -Excellent

COMMENTS

We purchased the system because it was intended to support the needs of several users across a municipality. The community museum is the largest user but there are three other collections and five users. Would be difficult to justify change to split the systems today. Mimsy has kept up with basic architectural needs, the interfaces for data input are older in style and the web utilities need the most work but are not part of the main system and are scaleable. The system is less fluid - a constant complaint by younger users accustomed to a 'Google world'.

Ever considered changing? Yes

AXIELL Mobydoc

RATINGS

Quality
Good

Service
Excellent

Adaptations:
longer then 12 month

NO COMMENTS

PastPerfect

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
14% Outdated
21% Average
50% Good
7% Excellent

QUALITY OF SERVICE
7% Poor
14% Average
36% Good
43% Excellent

INTERFACE
75% Average
25% Good

ADAPTATIONS EXECUTED
29%   -Long / 6 to 12 Month
14%   -Average / 4 to 6 Month
57%   -Short / 1 to 4 weeks

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
31% YES
69% NO

COMMENTS

I keep looking for the 'golden goose' of Museum CMS. I haven't found it. For me, Museum Curator in a small historic house museum and archives, I am looking for the ability to migrate data out of PastPerfect, low costs (I'm fine with an annuity if it is reasonable), modern interface and online access (doesn't have to publish online but be accessible online). Unfortunately, I haven't been able to find my 'golden goose' so I am stuck with PastPerfect which was picked before I began my position.
I am constantly keeping an eye out but right now I don't see it.

PastPerfect

COMMENTS

In 2014 the museum changed from Access to PastPerfect V. The transition was less then satisfactory with many records only being partially transferred to not at all. As a result, we have to re-enter data on thousands of records.

I would love to change from PastPerfect to an open-source software like CollectiveAccess, as I feel that this is the future for museum databases.
However, our management and board would not agree, and prefer to use this system, even though it is expensive and time-consuming to use.

PastPerfect is very user friendly and very well supported.

We would LOVE a new system. Our capacity is such that it would be a major undertaking even with our less than 30,000 objects/photos/slides/archives. We are looking at switching to Filemaker Pro but this will be something that requires a lot of planning and staff input.

We are very happy with PastPerfect

It could be worse; I could be stuck using CHIN/Artefact Canada as our only CM system.

We are transitioning from an in-house database to PastPerfect and have struggled to transfer records due time needed to reformat records and human resources.
We received recommendation from other museum professionals and are satisfied with the system thus far. It has also been a good resource in teaching Art & Heritage Administration students.

Pastperfect provides a very complete CM process. We have adapted it somewhat in how we use the system, but not through any software changes.

PastPerfect

I was trained by this manager, with some over the phone support from PastPerfect staff.
I think it was a case of simple familiarity- the old manager had used PastPerfect before and didn't want to have to learn a new system. No other options were seriously considered.
I think in future, it would benefit museums to seriously consider other options which are free and do not tie you to fee-for-subscription technical support. All alternatives should be fully researched and reviewed before a decision is made. Our current system is workable, but clunky, and we are probably now going to be using it for the next 2- 4 years at least.

I inherited our Pasperfect system, it does not support Unicode which makes it virtually useless for imputing the names of the masks in (e.g. Kwak'wala). We either have to "make do" with a complicated language or Anglicize it, badly. There are a lot of fields that are of no use to us.

TMS Gallery Systems

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
9%   -Outdated
18%   -Average
64%   -Good
9%   -Excellent

QUALITY OF SERVICE
15%   -Poor
39%   -Average
8%   -Good
38%   -Excellent

INTERFACE
17%   -Outdated
67%   -Average
16%   -Good

ADAPTATIONS EXECUTED
13%   -Longer then 12 Month
13%   -Long / 6 to 12 Month
38%   -Average / 4 to 6 Month
36%   -Short / 1 to 4 weeks

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
38% YES
25% DOUBT
37% NO

TMS Gallery Systems

COMMENTS

The TMS system purported to accommodate archives but was not designed for this. The archives and local history library wanted to use a purpose designed archive CMS but was prohibited by the cost.

Our museum is not actively looking for a new Collection Management System (CMS) since we acquired The Museum System (TMS) roughly seven years ago, but we are open to learning about new CMS', which could provide the same amount of data organization as TMS.

The advice for small institutions seeking to acquire a CMS is much better now than at the time but there needs to be more research on the suitability of systems that claim to support objects and archives as to whether they have managed to integrate the systems in a efficient way.
If the system had started out being designed for either one or the other, or is being offered by a company that specialises in one or the other, there can be a tendancy for it to be more effective for that part of the system it was orginally designed for, at the expense of the other.
For instance, TMS was apparently designed for art collections and we had to request changes to locations control that reflected the differences between the way an art collection is managed from a museum object one.

We are building a collections/catalogue raisonné online flexible site which can be adapted and added to as the client requires
We are doing this in conjunction with academics who use the Tate TMS system - which they say is not intuitive and time-consuming to use.

Vernon Systems

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
Excellent

QUALITY OF SERVICE
Excellent

INTERFACE
50%   -Average
50%   -Good

ADAPTATIONS EXECUTED
Short / 1 to 4 weeks

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
50% YES
50% NO

COMMENTS

I have migrated from an unsupported CMS to Vernon Systems at a previous museum, over 1 million artifacts. Vernon mapped and migrated and then supported bugs all within the initial start-up costs.

No other collections management system integrates ISAD (g) compliance with Spectrum compliance and Sites and Monuments all in the same database. We check every few years in case there is something that suits our needs but have not found anything.

CollectionSpace

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
Good

ADAPTATIONS EXECUTED
Short / 1 to 4 weeks

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
YES

COMMENTS

As part of a large project aiming at professionalizing the digital museum practice, we decided to join forces in an international community about to develop an open source collections management system - CollectionSpace - commenced in 2010. We went live with our implementation in 2013. Later this year we will change system again as all museums under the Cultural Ministry are to use a common system that will be based on Axiell/Adlib.
This is a national political decision.

Excell

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
Poor

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
YES

COMMENTS

Being a government institution, it is not easy to fund all the museum outlet hence the non compliance with modern system of collection management
It is very difficult working manually on collection of objects both on heritage objects and objects in the collections, looking forward to a day when it will be done digitally

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Filemaker

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
50% Average
50% Excellent

QUALITY OF SERVICE
50% Poor
50% Good

ADAPTATIONS EXECUTED
Long / 6 to 12 Month

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
50% YES
50% NO

COMMENTS

As we can not afford to buy a system, we built it. FileMaker is a common program used by museums in Europe, we think that for the moment it still is a usefull and complete tool for our purpose.

Modes Complete

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
25% Rigid
25% Average
50% Excellent

QUALITY OF SERVICE
75% Good
25% Excellent

ADAPTATIONS EXECUTED
75% Long / 6 to 12 Month
25% Average / 4 to 6 Month

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
50% YES
50% NO

COMMENTS

Ever considered changing?: Yes
We're currently considering this. We're part of a local authority and it's tricky ensuring comparability with our wider organisational system and set up, this has been the issue that has caused most problems - internal ICT support not understanding what we do, and our programmes and requirements not fitting neatly into boxes

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The service has considered changing the CM system used because the Modes system is sluggish, time consuming with a confusing layout that is easily altered and confused if members of staff do not strictly adhere to the cataloguing procedures. (…) If Modes had had a more rigid structure from the outset, like many of the other CM systems, we probably wouldn't be facing many of the issues we currently have. However before we could really consider switching we need to address the current quality of the data. We need to ensure all data is standardised going forward and that older records are amended before a possible switch to a new CM system.

MODES Complete is an easily accessed database with all the fields we need to record objects, ephemera and photographs in ample detail.

MuseumIndex+

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
Outdated

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
YES

COMMENTS

Our museum is planning to upgrade to cloud-based collections management system.

MUSNET

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
Outdated

QUALITY OF SERVICE
Poor

INTERFACE
Outdated

ADAPTATIONS EXECUTED
Longer then 12 Month

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
YES

COMMENTS

The system is on the market for over two decades and stays as one of two most popular but outdated systems in Poland. I can state that it is inflexible, outdated and causes a lot of problems with data import.

Primus

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
Poor

QUALITY OF SERVICE
Poor

INTERFACE
Outdated

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
YES

Proficio

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
Average

QUALITY OF SERVICE
Excellent

ADAPTATIONS EXECUTED
Short / 1 to 4 weeks

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
YES

COMMENTS

Inherited system from previous staff

QI

RATINGS

QUALITY OF SYSTEM
Good

QUALITY OF SERVICE
Average

INTERFACE
Good

ADAPTATIONS EXECUTED
Average / 4 to 6 Month

EVER CONSIDERED CHANGING?
YES

NO COMMENTS

ADVICES AND STATEMENTS IN RANDOM ORDER

Regional and national non-profits coordinates archive system use by museums so that all our museum partners use the same systems and standards, we can collectively negotiate good prices, it's easy to set us shared websites, etc. We follow the consensus of our partners under most circumstances.

For colleagues looking to acquire a system, I would encourage them to acquire references from the company of institutions using the system and meet with their collections management team in order to get full perspective on the system as it works "in the field". Everything can sound and look efficient in a presentation, but understanding how current institutions use the system is most important to knowing if it is the right fit for your institution.

My advice would be to investigate as many solutions as possible and try them out to see if it is useful not only now but also in the future. We looked at other larger systems but found them to be very cumbersome and costly to maintain.

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1) Set up an internal focus group
2) Developed a set of criteria
3) Selected / prioritiesed a set of international standards
4) Benchmark with 5 other museums on their system
5) Made a shortlist of 3 systems on the market

Collection management systems should include:
-List of objects and the length of exhibit times and past histories of temperature, RH, and whether cases are used or objects are unprotected.
-Light levels and RH fluctuations on objects individually and cumulatively over the length of exhibit (to estimate invisible damage)
-History of travel for exhibits loans, including T/RH and light levels (this to avoid unintended over-exposure) and wear and tear in travel.
- training should be provided for handling and choice of materials (e.g. outgassing of acidic vapours from wood or fabric under the heat of lights)

The museums I have worked in did not usually use commercial collection management systems (because of cost, time consumption for learning curve); registrar and curator/s used home-made systems or none.
see comments above.

I think in choosing a system adaptability is a key factor, can it change with the times and new technology? The nature of objects in our film/ sound collections has changed several times over the years and we need to be able to support the new formats as well as the old. Likewise developing the way we deal with the movement of objects using tools such as barcoding and the system being flexible to use this technology in other ways.

Also building workflows into the system so the system is a guide and channels the user into the right avenues to ensure all required paperwork is collected and information gathered.

Advice to colleagues: First, it's crucial to talk with users of a candidate system to find out how well it works in their institutions. While local context is a key factor in whether a system is a good fit (and each institution has its own functional priorities), system reliability, usability, and vendor responsiveness cut across local factors. Second, it's crucial to move a test set of your own data into a demo installation of a system to get a feel for how well it may work for you; many things can be tuned or refined, but some can't, and the cost and sustainability of bespoke changes can be prohibitive. Well before committing to a system that looks promising, it's best to learn by trial how well you could (or could not) manage and use your data in it.

Be sure to price out EVERYTHING. I firmly believe a wholistic pricing model, versus a pay as you go, will save you in the long run. As institutions change and technology advances, paying for each ticky-tacky add on really adds up. You end up making sacrifices to your system when you don't have the money to purchase the add-on, or additional license, or new upgrade. Having those aspects included in your annual fee makes such a difference.

Consider exactly what you need, communicate with all users of the system and get them invested in the process. Ensure that the data you have is of a good quality and standardised, particularity if you are merging collections that have been managed in a different way in the past. Ensure that all users understand the importance of standardised, high quality data from the outset. Ensure that enough restrictions are in place to enable a minimal number of people to alter or remove data, layouts etc. A system that is adaptable can be a good thing for the wider service, but if it is too adaptable and can be overly personalised, you may find that the quality of data and record structures alter dramatically between records and people.

The fact that the system is made from scratch answer exactly to our needs + the engineer who designed it, is good (code, UX, reliable, innovative, has a vision, etc.)

Other museums in the area use the same system, increasing opportunities for pooling training/technical advice and costs

We spoke with several other museums before making the decision and financial dedication.

CHIN survey was invaluable, although older. Ask lots of questions. Make site visits to see any system you are considering in use.

Key issue is knowing what you need and communicating that clearly. You need to be an intelligent client to get the best from any supplier.

It is difficult to compare systems and get independent advice. I would like access to case studies of different size organisations and collection types and their solutions as a way of informing decisions about best system to fit our needs and situation.

We are part of a politically planned change right now from older systems to one new system for all, which will be Adlib/Axiell.
The process has been a very long one, which started around 2010 - and we do not have the new system in place yet. Despite three intensive years of development and negotiations between The State Board of Cultural Heritage, the developer Axiell and the museums, we still do not have a new, well-working system that fits the customer's needs.

We do not seem to get quite the same from the new system, and that will be a huge challenge in the implementing phase (…) and it will also mean that we have to spend much more time documenting to get the same results and types of data.

In our experience it is not possible to run a large museum without in-house developing skills to both tweak the existing technologies and to implement new solutions to support the work and processes in collecting and documentation.

We all in all have better experiences with the systems that we have developed ourselves, but also always problems regarding updating and smartening up of the technologies. But I do not think that you can avoid that problem by buying a Commercial system - you often get slower reaction times at a considerable premium.

For years I was strongly advocating for merging systems, but now I think that the most important indicator of management system quality is the user and his keenness to adapt to a new system.

We changed from non-networked iO to EMu in 2014-2015 and it was one of the most painful experiences. As a local authority, and many in the same situation, our ICT support was extremely reluctant to entertain the idea of an external system. We then had issues about how to connect to EMu. Now we have EMu I don't imagine moving off it for the foreseeable future.

The key thing I found during the process was managing expectations from my colleagues in-house. It's never going to be an all singing all dancing system straight away, and the data will not, sadly magically clean itself in the new system either. Going live with a new CMS is only the very start of a long process.

(FileMaker) You can buy the system made especially for museums. It's heavy because it is designed for all kind of museums, but it's very complete and you can use what you consider averaged.

Have been involved with Mimsy since version 1.0 more than 10 years ago. I have seen the company through many changes. Key staff is still actively involved and offers great customer service. The product has great potential, but in experience very few have the resources to use the potential it offers.

It's always sensible to maintain awareness of the wider environment of candidate systems, and to weigh the benefits of any one that would be a significant overall improvement against its costs and the significant internal transition costs of a migration. That said, we have no specific intent or plan to migrate to a new system in the foreseeable future.

We would only be able to switch if we could find a system that could seamlessly import all our data and also import our online collection info.

There is a clear need for libraries to have systems that support archival description where necessary, but also provide museum management of object type collections. I haven't found a product that clearly does this.

We are currently surveying other systems to gather information about changing to another system.

I will always consider changing systems if the system can be more efficient for our particular needs.

I think it would be important to let users who have very large databases and need to do very complex searches, that the ability to do complex searches, as well as add user defined fields that do math, is somewhat limited in this database.

Our museum was one of the co-creators of this system and the first cultural collections to move into a natural history-focused CMS. We love it and the cost of using it is via supporting the programmer through grant applications and sharing other expenses between institutions. (moved from 4D into Arctos)

Advice appears to have been from an IT person who thinks it is good to save money. Registration and Conservation staff has never been consulted, there was no research nor comparison of purpose built software, no consideration of SPECTRUM, ICOM or CIDOC standards, nor was a tender briefing document developed.

As we have never acquired a new system, would like to learn from other colleagues

We discarded the possibility to adopt proprietary software, because the main companies don't have any office or agent in our country, and the software's are not compliant with the national standards for documentation. (Italy)

After all, we are completely satisfied with digiCULT's service and features, we admire the noncommercial focus. The success of digiCULT is based on the fact that database developers and cultural scholars are working side by side in the same Office on a daily basis.

See https://www.digicult-verbund.de/index.php?p=Project

Having data in the cloud may be a good idea - especially for back up, but what if a cloud-based company goes under -- what happens to the data? What are the associated costs for retrieval (if it is possible)?

We are currently undertaking a CMS review and so this is something I am just beginning to consider. As our system includes archives as well as the institutional archive, conservation database, images, video and audio, barcoding, it is managed in-house and can be easily modified. I believe it is cost effective as well as easy to adjust to our needs.
The downside of this is that it can become quite unwieldy and this is one of the main reasons for considering a change. I feel a change would not achieve what the users want and we would be better to retain the system but use a scheduled software upgrade to rethink the user interfaces for the different user groups.

I strongly recommend that if you are going to change over to a new system that the Curator, Assistant Curator, registrar and Director are prominently involved to ensure all records are properly transferred including all relevant information. If they are not, the adviser should be notified immediately.

Availability and quality of client support is a key factor in a successful implementation - research the quality of services and product documentation before making the investment in a collection management system.

However the biggest problem we currently face is the quality of data that has been input over a number of years. Historical issues and changes in staff have resulted in data being input on to the system in different formats. The Modes record structure is very easy to alter, which, on one hand, allows a museum to adapt it to their exact requirements, but on the other it allows a user to adapt it to their personal requirements, which can result in inconsistent and poor quality data.

Need every bit of advice I can get from experienced colleagues

CONCLUSIONS

We advice the reader of this survey to make conclusions based mainly on comments and advices as provided by the Survey participants.
Scaling of quality and prices have proven difficult to fit into objective scaling. The variety of answers to questions on specific systems make objective rating difficult, if not impossible.

However, it is clear that a large part of the participants is either looking for a new or better system. 40% of the participants expressed their search for a new system, 7% are uncertain (scaled 'doubt').

Scattered systems
Beside the use of a CMS', most institutions work with several other software applications such as relation management, library, archive, ticketing, website, etc. The reluctance to migrate data from present CMS to a new CMS seems caused by fear of the data transfer process.
Nevertheless, merging all scattered systems into one would streamline the work processes.

Public interface
Although little is said about public interfaces, direct connection between the CMS as back office and the front office would be ideal. Most systems need either export or an API to serve a website with relevant public data.
Making temporary online exhibitions is now an elaborate process that would not be necessary if the CMS is well structured.
After all, dissemination is the overall objective of the museum tasks, and should be served at best.

Marketing & Quality
The survey shows that best-selling CMS' are not necessarily the best systems. Marketing and the history of 'time to market' caused a situation resulting in the offering of systems that were either not ready, or not fully adapted to the demands, or of low quality at the time.
The result is a large number of users of outdated systems that are reluctant for change, due to expected migration process.
The survey shows that system vendors are bought. Sometimes acquisitions are clearly not based on the quality of the systems, but on the number of their users.
Also, public advertising and sponsoring by CMS vendors does not guarantee quality.
Publication of vendors on presumed 'independent' websites are no guarantee for quality, since vendors have to pay to be listed.

Conclusion
The search for systems should be based on extensive research and tests of several systems, before making proper decisions.
See our recommendation on page 7.