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 Infrastructure Manager
 Victoria and Albert Museum*

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INDUSTRY Public Sector

SOLUTIONS **Business Continuity and Replication, Modular Platform**
Hardware — Hitachi Adaptable Modular Storage 1000 (2)
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Victoria and Albert Museum Goes Virtual with Massive Image Bank Supported by Hitachi Storage

As the world's largest art and design museum, the Victoria and Albert takes its responsibility to share its collection with the public very seriously. It developed a digital asset management system to build a digital image archive of all collection pieces and needed a robust, scalable and easy-to-manage storage platform to support it. The Hitachi Data Systems solution it deployed will enable scalability for up to 7 years and fits perfectly with its business continuity and disaster recovery strategy.

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) was founded in 1852 and is the world's greatest museum of decorative arts and design. A landmark building in London's South Kensington, it covers 12.5 acres and features a collection spanning 2,000 years. The museum's mission is to enable everyone, both within the UK and abroad, to enjoy and be inspired by its collection through access to its displays and resources.

As part of this ongoing commitment to preserving and disseminating the world's cultural heritage, the V&A has, for the last 5 years, been working on a project to bring its collection online. By taking high-quality photographs of each item and making them available through its website, the museum plans to make its collection accessible for people all over the world, who may never have the chance to visit the museum itself.

These images are stored in the V&A's digital asset management (DAM) system.

The website and its 8 subsidiary sites currently hold 50,000 images and receive 4 million hits every month, but the museum wanted to increase both its image library and its online audience. Head of Information Systems Services at the V&A, Sarah Winmill, explains: "We'd made a good start with our DAM system, but to continue to grow we needed to upgrade our storage platform. Our existing one was very hard to manage and we were running out of capacity. We were also keen to ensure our business continuity and disaster recovery arrangements were robust. We're responsible for preserving a priceless cultural archive for the nation so it's imperative we do all we can to keep it safe." The museum traditionally used tape to back up

its image library, so it was eager to deploy an alternative solution in order to save both on the time and costs associated with business continuity issues.

The Search for the Perfect Fit

Winmill and her team embarked on a search for the most suitable storage platform to meet their needs for scalable capacity and robust data protection features. As a public organization, the V&A needed to ensure it complied with detailed government procurement rules. The team initially assessed the market to identify what solutions were available to meet its needs. It then produced a series of prequalification questions for solution vendors to find the right combination of storage equipment and expertise in developing large-scale archiving projects similar to the one the museum was seeking. This enabled the team to draw up a short list of 3 vendors, which were then assessed in more detail and measured against key requirements.

"Our first concern was scalability," says Anton Benjamin, infrastructure manager at the V&A. "We needed a solution that would support strong and continued growth both in terms of assets stored and users accessing them. It was also important that it was simple to manage in house, with training and support available when necessary. Finally, we needed a solution that was quick to implement while being robust enough to reliably last a long time without needing to be replaced or upgraded."



"With the storage platform from Hitachi Data Systems and Viglen, we're confident that we will be able to make the V&A digital archive more diverse and more available than ever before."

*Sarah Winmill
Head of Information Systems Services
Victoria and Albert Museum*

As part of the decision process, the team removed all vendor and cost details from the proposals in order to judge them impartially on their technical merits alone. “Not only did the solution from Hitachi Data Systems and Viglen Storage Group win against all of our criteria,” Benjamin comments, “but we then found out it was the most cost-effective solution, too!”

Winmill adds, “We also liked the fact that with the Hitachi platform we can spin down disks that we’re not using. This was a key differentiator for us. The project has also enabled server virtualization, which means that, by the time this project is complete, we will be able to turn off up to 25 pieces of equipment, making us even more energy efficient.”

The V&A deployed a Hitachi Adaptable Modular Storage 1000 system, equipped with 60TB of capacity. This was installed at the museum’s main site in Kensington.

Training in how to manage the new platform was delivered by Hitachi Data Systems to the IT team at the V&A to ensure that they could maintain their close involvement in running the DAM. Monitoring and support are also provided by Hitachi engineers, who ensure that any issues are resolved swiftly. “The services provided by Hitachi and Viglen were of a particularly high standard,” says Winmill. “They were very sympathetic to the type of organization the V&A is and ensured we got a solution that was matched to us.”

Scalability to Support a Diverse Cultural Resource

The museum’s hope when looking for its new DAM storage platform was that it would provide enough capacity for the next 3 years, with scalability for the next 5. The advanced scalability of the Hitachi solution with up to 200TB of potential capacity means that, in fact, the deployed solution will provide the V&A with the scalability to cope easily with data growth for at least the next 7 years. This is a huge advantage given the scope of the archiving project that Winmill and her team are managing. “We’re not just creating 1 image of each item,” she explains. “It’s a lot more complex than that. We have as many as 20 images of each piece, as we need to record different stages of restoration work, for example. We’re also recording copies of our own intranets to preserve details of how the various museum departments work.”

The platform enables the DAM to keep pace seamlessly with this steadily expanding body of digital content, mirroring developments in the museum itself in many cases. For example, to support the refurbishment of the Medieval and Renaissance galleries, all the items included in the

displays were photographed and put online. At the same time, the museum can participate in projects with other cultural bodies in the UK. It is currently working with a group of East London theaters to create an online exhibition of theater memorabilia.

Winmill explains that the museum is facing a paradigm shift in the nature of the V&A’s collection: “Looking to the future, the museum may wish to acquire works of art that are digitally native. At the moment we are recreating physical works of art in a digital environment, but in the lifetime of this equipment, we could start to see new forms of art and design emerge. We need to be sure we can look after these even when there is no physical ‘original.’ With the storage platform from Hitachi Data Systems and Viglen, we’re confident that we will be able to do this and make the V&A digital archive more diverse and more available than ever before.”



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