

OFC White Paper

Order From Chaos
Organisation, Digitisation, Exploitation

[In a nutshell...](#)

Organise and Digitise: Take any set of things (for example, a suitcase of photos, a crammed attic, or the contents of a Stately Home), rapidly apply novel optimised methods of sorting, arranging, image capturing and indexing, and produce an organised and easily accessible physical set plus a digitised equivalent (the core – or a better name).

Exploit: Use the digitised core to support access to the physical set, to extend the combined physical set and core, and to reproduce the core in any manor of formats (for example, handcrafted book, framed picture, web site, or DVD presentation)

[So what's new in that?](#)

The Methods - optimised to enable very rapid sorting, arrangement, image capture and indexing. Sorting out loads of stuff can take huge amounts of time. These methods enable it to be done much quicker and very effectively.

The Reproduction Channels – established but customisable formats produced by carefully selected craftspeople who work on a franchise basis, for example, a bookbinder.

The End-to-End Package – a customer can acquire an OFC core in the certain knowledge that it will provide a capability which will be fully extensible and exploitable.

[Tell us about these Methods...](#)

Sorting – approaches to physically picking up, moving, and placing the physical items. When there's a lot of stuff, different approaches to this can make huge differences to the overall time spent.

Arrangement – approaches to the way in which items are placed together, piled, boxed or unpacked. This is a critical determinant of the indexing quality and to the ease of ongoing organisation, access and cleaning.

Image Capture – this is likely to involve a stand on which to place items and a camera set up to photograph the stand, and standard routines to pass each item through Image Capture as it is being sorted or after it has been arranged. The efficiency of this stage can save much time when hundreds of items are involved.

Indexing – Prefabricated indexes, with standard fields based on XML schemas and facilities to easily customise them, ready to be populated as sorting and arranging is performed.

Planning – The selection and customisation of these methods is based on the initial meeting with the client at which the physical set is inspected, requirements are

described, options discussed and an approach agreed. Following this exchange the strategy is defined and documented, and confirmation obtained from the client.

[How would all this work in practice?](#)

Envisioning tale 1 – the company storeroom: During the initial meeting the client showed us the storeroom. It was about 40 feet long by 15 feet wide and was crammed with a bewildering variety of old office furniture, archive storage boxes, loose files, and bits of computing equipment. The shelving on both side walls was overflowing and the floorspace was piled high leaving just narrow passageways to walk through. The client wanted to get rid of all useless office furniture and computing equipment and wanted to know what paperwork there was before taking a decision about what to do with it. The strategy agreed with the client was to move everything on the floor of the room to the area outside, separating it in the process to piles of defunct equipment, other equipment and files. Then to make some space on the shelving by moving boxed material to the centre of the floor, and then to start a proper sort of the paperwork and arranging it on the vacated shelving. Defunct equipment was piled separately and disposed of. Non-defunct equipment was indexed, labelled with unique numbers and photographed. In the course of the sort, three types of paperwork were identified – archive material stored by individuals who had changed jobs or left the company, old invoices and other accounting archives, and old marketing brochures and exhibition materials. An index was created for the archive boxes with each box being labelled with a unique number, the contents of the box summarised in a description field and a photo attached of the open box showing its contents. The boxes were arranged in order down the middle of the room. For the shelving, an index was established with discernable sections of each shelf being given a unique reference number, and the index entry for each section providing a brief description of its contents and an accompanying photo. A portion of the shelving was given over to the marketing material with an example of each different item being indexed and photographed. Subsequently the client requested that a reference DVD be created of the marketing materials showing what had been used in the past. Assistance in making the DVD was provided by a member of staff who had been in the marketing department for some time and who provided a commentary on camera for the DVD.

Envisioning tale 2 – the clearance: The initial meeting established that an elderly couple had been left a large four bedroomed house and all its contents, in the will of a distant aunt. The clients wanted to know what was in the house so that they could choose particular artefacts and family history material to keep for themselves, and then to sell the remaining material prior to selling the house itself. The strategy agreed was to leave most of the large furniture where it was, but to use different rooms for different types of artefacts – namely documents/photographs/records/tapes, pottery/crockery/glassware, kitchen equipment including cutlery, electrical equipment, clothing, bedding/towels and other linen, small furniture. Separate indexes were created for each type of artefact and each major item labelled with a unique number and photographed. Collections of items such as cutlery were placed in containers and treated as a single individual item for indexing purposes. The clients subsequently used the indexes to choose and remove the artefacts they wanted to keep. The remaining material was separated into specialist pieces for sale on Ebay, and the remainder was put in the hands of a local auction house. OFC conducted the Ebay sale for a percentage of the price realised; and the local auctioneer commissioned OFC to produce 400 copies of a hardcopy catalogue of the remaining material to advertise the auction.

Envisioning tale 3 – the stately house on the hill: At the initial meeting in the house concerned, the client explained that it had become impossible to maintain the 16th century building without generating further income, and that he wanted to open the house and grounds to the public while remaining to live in a separate wing. He needed to decide what pieces to put on show and to provide descriptive labels for each one. He was also concerned about the security of the contents in the face of many visitors walking through the house. The strategy agreed was to create a single index in which each piece could be defined as a particular type of object. Initial types, such as furniture, paintings, pottery, were agreed and other types would be added as identified. Each room of the house was to be catalogued in turn, with each object being fitted with an RFID transmitter on which a unique number would be painted. Each object would also be photographed from up to six angles as appropriate (front, back, left, right, top, bottom). The attic and basements would be subjected to more conventional sorting activities to separate the junk from the useful artefacts. The initial cataloguing work took place over a three week period after which the client was able to use the indexes to both select the items to be put on show and to write label text for them. Printed plaques were then produced of the specified label text and placed at appropriate points in the rooms. A security system was installed which received the RFID signals and identified when an artefact was being moved. The index was used to produce a number of colour catalogues of the most interesting artefacts, a series of postcards of the best artefacts, and also a DVD of the building and its contents with the owner providing a commentary on camera. All these items were put on sale in the visitor's shop

Envisioning tale 4 – the grandfather's diaries: At the initial meeting the client explained that his grandfather had been a well known author and esotericist, and that he wanted to research his grandfather's life and to possibly take the work further. His grandfather had left extensive diaries, keepsakes and photos in a large trunk and he wanted these organising and digitising. Furthermore he wanted to keep a diary of his explorations in the style of his grandfather, and for this he wanted a crafted paper-based diary system which could easily be added to the digital core. The strategy agreed with the client involved sorting the trunk's contents into diaries, photos and other sets to be identified on the day. The diaries were indexed separately, labelled with a unique number on the inside front cover and stored in cardboard boxes. The Photos were matched to the negatives and each one uniquely numbered on the back. The photo index included fields for Date, Events, People, Places and Things which could be filled in by the client in the course of his researches. After the sorting and indexing work had been completed, those negatives that existed were digitised and those photos without negatives were scanned. The images were then attached to the relevant index entries. In parallel, a handcrafted leather writing case containing luxury sheet paper specially designed to facilitate subsequent scanning. Samples of the client's handwriting was taken and used to train handwriting recognition software. The client was provided with appropriate equipment and software to enable him to scan his own diary pages and to add them to the digital core. The client subsequently requested that the grandfather's diaries be scanned so each page could be studied on screen and notes could be added. OFC did this work and provided a fully indexed set of the scanned pages of each diary with optical character recognition applied to produce the digitised text. The client was subsequently able to verify or correct the OCR'd text as appropriate.

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