Making digital content in Europe more accessible and user friendly

The eContentplus programme focuses on stimulating the development of digital content and services in areas of public interest - geographic information, cultural, scientific and educational content.

The Information Society brings a wealth of benefits to European citizens and the European economy – more efficient companies and administrations, a more creative working life, improved healthcare, better education and training, to mention but a few.

These benefits all derive from digital content and services. The strength of the Information Society is that these services can be used on a wide variety of devices (PCs, mobile phones, televisions, etc.), customised to the user's needs and location.

The Information Society brings a wealth of benefits to European citizens and the European economy

Digital content and services are a crucial stimulus to the development of high-speed, mobile communications in Europe and a potential source of new jobs.

Barriers to Growth

Some barriers are technological, organisational or legal (intellectual property rights, digital rights management), and have a strong global component. Others are more unique to Europe, such as the cultural and linguistic barriers which prevent the sector from developing Single Market economies of scale.

The eContent Programme (2001-2005), a major part of the EU's answer to these challenges, is now followed by the *e*Content*plus* programme (2005-2008).

*e*Content*plus* (2005-2008)

The mid-term evaluation of eContent found that the benefits were substantial, compared with the resources allocated: *"eContent has catalyzed the collaboration of many market players to realize a* *number of projects that would not have been otherwise realized with the same depth or breadth."*

The evaluation recommended a follow-up programme with a somewhat narrower scope and tighter focus to optimise impact.

*e*Content*plus* therefore focuses on areas of public interest, namely geographic information, cultural, scientific and educational content, where European digital content would not develop, or would develop at a slower pace, if left to market forces alone.

Main Principles

*e*Content*plus* will ensure that all citizens and users benefit from digital content and services by increasing accessibility and creating a better environment for investment and innovation.

While the production of digital content will be left to the market and, where appropriate, other specific Community initiatives, *e*Content*plus* will focus on methods, tools and processes related to the design, development, access and distribution of high quality digital content.

The overriding principle is to maximise the impact on as many actors as possible, not just programme participants.

*e*Content*plus* activities will:

- promote pan-European infrastructures for the re-use of digital content by private companies and end users throughout Europe;

- showcase the advantages of enriching content with metadata to help market players and users discover, access and use digital content;

- integrate multicultural and multilingual aspects of digital content in all eContentplus activities in Europe.

Focus on 3 target areas

To maximise its impact, the *e*Contentplus programme addresses areas which are of public interest:

i) Geographic information

*e*Content*plus* stimulates the aggregation of existing national datasets into cross-border datasets. This will create new business opportunities (new information services and products).

ii) Educational content

*e*Content*plus* supports the emergence of an adequate information infrastructure, and encourages the use of open standards to stimulate the deployment of effective pan-European learning services.

iii) Cultural and scientific/scholarly content

*e*Content*plus* supports the development of interoperable collections and objects from cultural and/or scientific institutions (e.g. archives, libraries and museums), and solutions to facilitate exposure, discovery and retrieval of these resources.

State of Play

The European Parliament and the Council adopted the *e*Content*plus* Programme in March 2005.

The programme will run for 4 years (2005-08) and has a budget of € 149 million.

The work programme and first call for proposals were published in September 2005.

Related Initiatives

*e*Content*plus* is part of the Commission policy i2010 "A European Information Society for Growth and Employment".

*e*Content*plus* also builds on:

- the Directive on the Harmonisation of Copyright and Related Rights in the Information Society (2001/29/EC) and the Copyright Directive (2001/29/EC): both adopted in 2001, these look at intellectual property issues on a European level, particularly in the field of digital content;

- the Public Sector Information Directive (2003/98/EC): adopted in 2003, which provides a set of rules on the reuse of information resources held by public sector organisations like the National Land Survey and the Tourist Boards, e.g. maps and tourist information.

Other EU activities:

- **Research:** Information Society Technology (IST) research features strategic objectives focusing on technologies crucial to the digital content industry in fields as diverse as learning, entertainment and knowledge systems;

- **MEDIA Programme (2001-2005):** strengthens the competitiveness of Europe's audiovisual industry, which includes preparing the sector for innovations such as the distribution and exhibition of digital films and finding ways to digitise – and hence preserve - Europe's rich archives of audiovisual material;

- **Safer Internet plus Programme (2005-2008):** aims at promoting safer use of the Internet and new online technologies, particularly for children, at fighting illegal or undesirable content or giving parents and teachers sufficient knowledge about the means to protect children from unsuitable content.

See also:

- Fact sheet 18: Safer Internet plus Programme

- Fact sheet 20: IPR and Digital Rights Management

- Fact sheet 21: Public Sector Information

- Fact sheet 35: i2010 – A practical Policy Framework for achieving economic Growth and Jobs

All fact sheets and more can be downloaded from "Europe's Information Society: Thematic Portal":

http://europa.eu.int/information_society/factsheets/index_en.htm

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Further information:

- **eContentplus:** http://europa.eu.int/econtentplus/

- **i2010:** http://europa.eu.int/i2010/

- **Europe's Information Society: Thematic Portal** http://europa.eu.int/information_society

- **Information Society and Media Directorate-General:** Av. de Beaulieu 24, 1160 Brussels infso-desk@cec.eu.int

- http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/information_society/index_en.htm