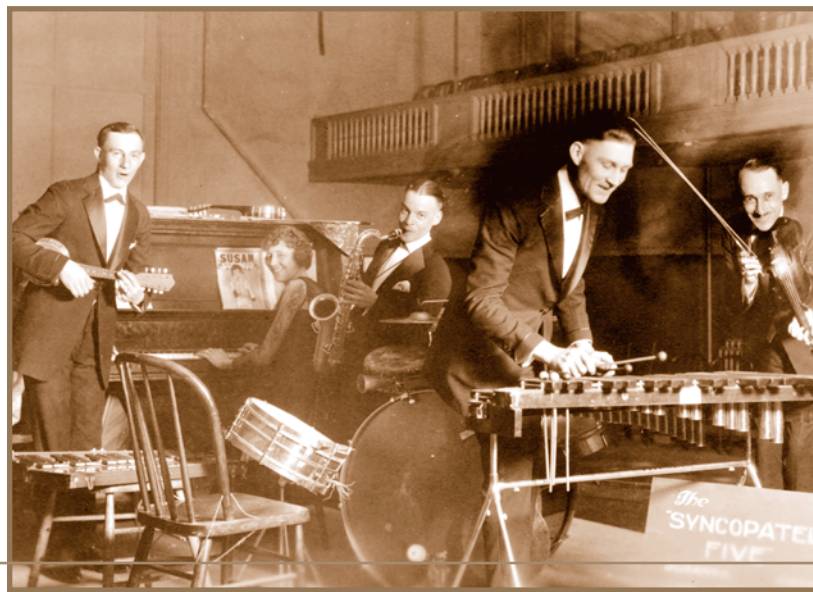


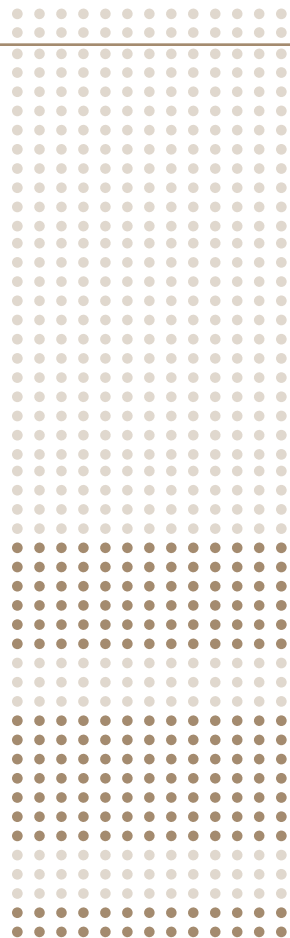
DIGITAL RESOURCES FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE:

A STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP ON
CURRENT STATUS AND FUTURE NEEDS



Syncopated Five Music Group. Courtesy of the Animas Museum Durango, Colo.

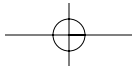
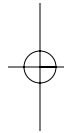
COLLABORATION IS KEY



SUPPORTED BY
**The Institute of Museum
and Library Services**

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS
PREPARED BY
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CONTENTS

A Workshop to Shape the Future	1
Digital Collections for Cultural Heritage: A Progress Report	2
Next Steps: Suggested Action Items	3
Infrastructure	4
Audience Research and Development	4
Collaboration	5
Professional Development	6
Funding: A Critical Factor	6
Recommendations to IMLS	8
Recommendations to the Cultural Heritage Community	9
Conclusion	9
National Initiatives	10
Participant Roster	11

A WORKSHOP TO SHAPE THE FUTURE

On August 25 and 26, 2003, 63 specialists from 26 states, representing libraries, museums, archives, higher education institutions, public broadcasting, research consortia, public and private funding organizations, and service providers, participated in a workshop in Washington, D.C., to assess progress on and plan for the development and use of digital cultural resources. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) provided funding for the workshop.

After opening remarks by **Robert Martin**, Director of IMLS, six invited speakers laid a foundation for subsequent discussions. The speakers described exciting, leading-edge efforts, highlighting powerful changes that digital cultural heritage resources can bring to society and ways in which cultural heritage organizations are reflecting societal change.

- **Gregory Crane**, Professor in the School of Arts and Sciences of Tufts University, created a vision of interdisciplinary alliances of scholarly work in the humanities that are useful, understandable, and basic to the lives of everyday people in the places where they live and work. Access to the right information in the right place at the right time makes all the difference.
- **Sarah Shreeves** of the University of Illinois Library at Urbana-Champaign described tools and concepts of discovery that would enable researchers, learners, and teachers alike to find and use digital resources anywhere, penetrating the barriers that now separate the Google searcher from the “deep Web” of databases and specialized digital collections. She reminded the participants that browsing is different from searching, and that both methods of discovery should be available to accommodate learners with different goals.
- **Andrea Goethals** of the Florida Center for Library Automation talked about the challenge of bringing the traditional preservation roles of cultural heritage organizations into the digital age. She reviewed the best current thinking about our collective options for archiving and preserving our digital assets.
- **Kenneth Hamma**, Assistant Director of the J. Paul Getty Museum and Senior Advisor for Information Policy of the Getty Trust, spoke about changing priorities in the ways museums regard their Web sites. As museum visitors express their changing expectations for digital information, online services, and digital collections, the museum world will give greater priority to the Web site and to digital presentations and exhibitions as part of the core mission of the institution.

- **David Liroff**, Vice President and Chief Technology Officer of WGBH Boston, spoke about synergies and commonalities between cultural heritage organizations and public broadcasting. He also touched on the many complex issues stemming from the ephemeral nature of the broadcast medium. Changes in the digital infrastructure for public broadcasting, changes in audience expectations, and changes in cost models for digital content all contribute to a volatile business with tremendous potential for partnerships.
- **Liz Bishoff**, former Executive Director of the Colorado Digitization Program, reminded the group about the promise and the peril of collaboration. She remarked that throughout the cultural heritage community, in museums, libraries, archives, and historical societies, we need to identify and define our common vision. Together, we all need to make sure that the goals and objectives of collaborative projects meet the institutional goals of all partners.

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DIGITAL COLLECTIONS FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE: A PROGRESS REPORT

Many of the building blocks for a coordinated effort to develop and present useful cultural and scientific heritage collections in digital form are in place. The momentum is great, and energy among libraries, museums, and other cultural heritage organizations is high. IMLS has been a positive influence, creating an action agenda, setting high expectations, promoting collaboration, encouraging an emphasis on real-life outcomes and impact in learning communities, and setting the stage for development of content through grants that create a network of interconnected achievement. Many elements of a solid foundation are emerging:

- Appropriate standards are available for describing various types of collections, along with best practices in the implementation of standards. Experts are continuing to develop expansions to metadata standards of all kinds. These rich descriptive data elements are the building blocks for achieving the goal of preserving access to digital and physical information.
- Several approaches to “better-than-the-Web” resource discovery and searching, including harvesting and collection-level registries, are now in place, and use of these approaches is growing.
- Many collections are equipped with educator guides that enable ready application in formal learning communities, from preschool through college.
- Rich and varied primary research collections in cultural, historical, and scientific heritage are now available in digital form. The range is impressive and inspiring,

although far from complete. Photographs, films, diaries, oral histories, botanical specimens, maps, music, and data sets are only a few of the ways we can document our history, culture, and experience.

- Methods of archiving and preserving both the original documents and their digital surrogates are being explored so that no learner in the future will face the permanent loss of irreplaceable information.
- Research is under way to tell us more about the ways individuals and learning communities seek cultural heritage resources and how we can present information in ways that meet their needs.
- Cultural heritage organizations are working with exciting new partners, and collaboration across libraries and museums has never been more productive and persistent. Public broadcasting, schools, and professional associations are working together to link those who want and need learning resources with the librarians, curators, and other experts who have created digital resources and put them on the Web.
- In a dynamic, rapidly changing digital environment, it is critical to bring together technologists, scientists, humanists, social scientists, librarians, educators, museum administrators, and other stakeholders to build agreements, share knowledge, and create change in a unified, visionary way. A variety of opportunities for collaboration and exchange are in place.
- Early efforts at sustainable, programmatic digitization are being carefully examined to identify models and success elements.

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NEXT STEPS: SUGGESTED ACTION ITEMS

At this critical stage in the history of cultural institutions and digital resources, participants agreed that future funding by IMLS and other organizations that support digital resource development, management, and preservation in the heritage sector should be directed to four key areas: infrastructure, audience research and development, collaboration, and professional development.

- Focusing on these four action areas will ensure the longevity of existing digital collection efforts and open the door to institutions that heretofore have not had the opportunity to participate in digital collection development activities.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Define a national strategic agenda for the development, maintenance, and preservation of digital cultural collections.

The heritage community has been creating, delivering, organizing, and preserving digital collections for years without a collective vision to steer the process. Individual institutions have taken the initiative to digitize their collections, create teacher packs and lesson plans, and create Web exhibits and databases, all in the desire to use the power of the Web to share more of what has heretofore been unseen. Much effort has been expended to stitch together these collections in various ways—through subject-based searching, for example. What is readily apparent, though, is that it takes more than the enthusiasm of a cadre of colleagues to build a community around the existing digital resources. Without a larger vision for these resources, developments in digital collections will continue as they have in the past, and the needs of audiences who use them will remain, for the most part, unknown and unmet.

The need for a comprehensive, sustainable model, including the infrastructure components required for each activity—capture of digital files, creation of metadata, asset management, short- and long-term preservation, and intellectual property—is great. No proven financial models for sustaining these activities exist. This means that as a community we do not know what combination of outside funds, fee-based services, capital expenditure, and other revenue sources might help an institution sustain its efforts to manage digital content. In the absence of strategic plans for what content to capture, for whom, and why, digital capture of cultural content grows at an inconsistent pace.

AUDIENCE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

- Research and publish findings about needs and expectations for use of digital collections.

It is in our best interest to learn more about the people and organizations that use our digital collections. It is not enough, though, for individual institutions to learn about their own specific audiences. Without a better understanding of the larger audiences (local, regional, national, and international) who use digital resources, why they use them, and how they use them, we will miss opportunities to serve new communities. Some communities already have established networks (teachers, scholars, tour guides, staff, professional organizations), and we need to use those networks to engage them in a collaborative inquiry process. If we do not, we will have little chance of providing meaningful services to those audiences that fall outside of the familiar ones (those who speak languages other than English, for example).

We need to better understand who is looking for or at our digital collections, what they are looking for, why they are using these resources, and what creative ways they have found to use the resources. For instance, a person who is passionate about a hobby, one engaged in formal continuing education, a scholar, and a student working on a school assignment may all use the same digital object or collection in different ways. We must know more about their needs before we can effectively design interfaces through which to deliver packaged content, answer queries, or foster lifelong learning relationships.

In addition, we need to seek out new communities. Audiences may be looking for digital cultural resources and not finding them. Our community will benefit greatly from finding those audiences, opening discussions with them, and building collaborative relationships to explore how to provide digital content that is useful for them. Our users are likely to need new methods of packaging and reusing digital resources, supporting the creation of new scholarship, art, and other forms of knowledge. This flexibility is important to sustaining the vitality of digital collections for the future.



COLLABORATION

- Encourage collaboration through a greater emphasis on following successful leaders in the field.
- Engage industry, government, and private sector organizations in support of strategic infrastructure, technology, and economic needs.

Some institutions are leaders and others are followers. We need both in order to be successful in our collective endeavors. The same applies to building digital collections. Many organizations have accumulated valuable experience working with digital resources. We need to learn from them and follow their lead. We can encourage collaboration with greater emphasis on communicating both successes and how to achieve them, and failures and how to avoid them.

A more structured approach is needed. The development of a digitization superstructure is critical. There is a need for better information about sources of financial support. One possible approach is the development of a national grid of funding sources and priorities. In addition, a registry of completed and in-progress projects would provide a national overview that would be useful to identify resources, reduce duplication, and ensure better coordination for future projects.

In addition to following the leaders in our own field, we need to engage leaders in related fields and industries. Some of the tools and technologies we need are financially beyond our reach. In other cases, the expertise required to use the tools falls outside of our collective capacity. A shared voice, a clear vision, and a national strategic agenda would help to ensure effective progress.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Improve access to hands-on learning, mentoring, and continuing education, as well as formal education of a new generation of creators and managers of digital assets.

Most training courses offered through local computer superstores do not address the day-to-day issues of working with digital collections. Conferences offer abstracted versions of process. Large-group workshops offer an entire day of listening as talking heads share their collective experience. Each of these learning experiences is valid, but none of them is effective at transferring knowledge about specific problems from individual to individual. Media management tools are complex, editing visual content requires special skills, and enabling interoperability between systems requires consistency of approach. To solve day-to-day problems, professional practitioners need access to more peer-to-peer, hands-on learning experiences.

Professional development can be dynamic. It might even become more formal, as is the case in other disciplines that offer continuing education courses and acknowledgement of new skills. Problem solving is not just about knowing which book or Web site to consult; it is about knowing whom to call with a question and whom to consult about how to move from inspiration to implementation.

Graduate education of library, archival, and museum professionals should incorporate the creation, management, and preservation of digital assets, as well as current research issues and methodologies.

FUNDING: A CRITICAL FACTOR

Professionals in the heritage sector want to create a national agenda that articulates content, technical, and financial priorities on a large scale. Initiatives of this type are under way in other disciplines in the United States and in the heritage sector abroad. We need to create our own version of a sustainable future for the collections we build, deliver, and preserve.

To do this, the community needs assistance from funders in the four key areas outlined above: infrastructure, audience research and development, collaboration, and professional development. Without a shared vision and support to pursue it, all of the potential outcomes from these thoughtful conversations will remain hidden, like so much of the heritage we seek to make visible in the digital environment.

The cultural heritage community is poised for a great advance in the provision of digital resources for education and learning. It has accumulated a body of experience, knowledge, standards, and infrastructure needed to manage digital collections and services that will support the “nation of learners” that cultural heritage organizations serve. Sustainability for both the individual institution’s cultural heritage effort and the collective national

infrastructure is essential. This effort will require coordination, collaboration, and advocacy on the part of IMLS and other funding agencies. It will also require a concerted effort at the local level by libraries, archives, museums, and historical societies, and their strategic partners, to recognize their roles and responsibilities for sustaining digital collections as a cost of doing business, and to form collaborative relationships to achieve economies of scale in managing digital content. This work will ensure that our nation's rich cultural heritage is part of a new information environment that will revolutionize education and support learning and leisure at all levels, for all ages, and in all communities.

In addition to federal agencies, private foundations, and other funding sources, cultural heritage digital content initiatives have explored sustainability options including revenue from sales or fees (such as licensing digital content themselves or selling corollary products such as high-quality print services). Larger institutions have undertaken digital creation and management services such as consulting, metadata management, or conversion services. These activities can be part of the revenue mix, but they will not fund the large-scale creation of new digital resources.

Many larger institutions recognize that museum visitors and library users will increasingly expect them to provide online access to their digital resources; therefore, they regard digital collection management as a core activity. Cultural heritage organizations with significant digitization experience are allocating general operating funds to support staff and infrastructure for management of digital collections. Even organizations with marginal excess operating revenue are providing some operating budget support in addition to other revenue. But nearly all development of digital resource content is based on one-time funding in the form of grants or gifts.

How can the flow of funds for this worthy and future-oriented effort be better organized and further developed? The answer lies in coordination, collaboration, and advocacy.



Two Taos Men standing at river on North side of Taos Pueblo, about 1891. Courtesy of Taos Historic Museums.



Two Boys Playing in the Snow, 1890's. Courtesy of Mystic Seaport.

Museums, libraries and archives are the stewards of cultural heritage. Making these resources available digitally enhances learning by greatly expanding access to and use of important historical materials.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMLS

IMLS should seek additional funding, through appropriations or partnerships, to support increased digitization activities. In addition, IMLS should seek to extend the digitization policies and practices it has developed in its National Leadership Grant program throughout the funding programs it manages and encourage their adoption by other funders.

Under the Library Services and Technology Act, IMLS has authority to provide grants in a number of ways. One is competitive national funding, for which it develops standards and quality review. The other is state-based grants to State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAAs). SLAAs have considerable latitude in how they use and distribute state funding. IMLS should work more closely with the SLAAs to ensure that funds allocated to digitization are well spent and that the digital content created is well managed. It should also encourage state-based efforts to develop a shared digital collection management infrastructure. IMLS could start by identifying the states that have allocated funds to digitization, determining what standards each requires and what outcomes assessments each uses. SLAAs should be strongly encouraged to adopt standards for digitization and asset management similar to those required of applicants for the IMLS National Leadership Grant program.

IMLS should also explore the creation of a parallel state-based program for museums. It is imperative that more funding for digitization be made available to the museum community, in conjunction with requirements for standards. IMLS should lead an effort to ensure that training in digital content creation, preservation, and management is available to museums at the state and regional levels.

IMLS has been effective in working with the National Science Foundation's Digital Library Initiative and the National Science Digital Library programs to foster information sharing among grantees. Similar efforts with agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts, the Library of Congress, and the National Endowment for the Humanities would create further benefits for cultural heritage organizations. IMLS could promote the adoption by other funding agencies of its "Specification for Projects Involved in Digitization," which is required for IMLS digitization applications, and its "Framework of Guidance for Building Good Digital Collections," which has been adopted by the National Information Standards Organization.

IMLS should also encourage other funding agencies to adopt its practice of encouraging grant recipients to participate in national registries of digital content. Participation will promote greater conformance to standards and increased access to digital content. These requirements and quality standards are potential models for public policy makers and legislators as they consider new approaches to supporting digital content development initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMUNITY

The library and museum communities can do more as well. Professional associations such as the American Library Association, the American Association of Museums, and the Association of Research Libraries are actively engaged in advocacy relating to legislative matters on a national level, and state library associations often have effective advocacy efforts. Advocacy for state and federal funding programs for creating digital content and digital asset management infrastructure can have positive results. A key part of that advocacy is gathering information about the outcomes of access to digital content. The library and museum communities should produce fact-based reports about how digital educational and learning resources can change lives and should publicize these findings to key decision makers. Professional associations should also provide continuing professional education and training to disseminate information on standards and standards-based systems, interoperability solutions, and program assessment. The museum and library communities have supported the establishment of new organizations or the expansion of existing ones to address digital assets—for example, the Museum Computer Network and the Coalition for Networked Information. These organizations ensure a growing base of informed staff and collectively build the capability for high-quality digital content, associated metadata, and resource preservation.

CONCLUSION

Development of a collaborative agenda for digital cultural heritage collections requires collaboration on a long list of key questions. Some of those have been identified through the conversations held during this workshop; other questions will certainly emerge in the coming years. Examples will suffice to illustrate the hard work needed to reach the goal of a seamless fabric of museum and library collections online that represent every aspect of our heritage and culture.

What partnerships will support a sustainable digital environment? How should the growth of digital content be funded? How can a coordinated collection be built together by many separate organizations? What interoperability solutions will best meet the learners' needs? How will information seekers of today and of tomorrow be different, and how can we track their needs so that we can meet those needs? How can a focus on learning communities and individual learners be the driver determining priorities for content development? What can we do to identify trends in the economic and information environments that can support our own initiatives and directions?

One thing is certain. We have come a long way in the past decade, and the pace of progress is faster than ever. We will continue to work together to envision solutions, apply creativity, develop answers, and listen to the visitors and users of libraries and museums as we move ahead.

NATIONAL INITIATIVES

A few examples of national initiatives that support a strategic approach to the development, use, management, and preservation of digital collections are presented here.

Under its National Science Digital Library Initiative, The **National Science Foundation** is supporting research and development of resources in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. These libraries will consist of an online network of learning environments and resources for the subject areas at all levels. Through a three-track approach, institutions may apply for grants as stewards for content and services, service providers to develop services that support audiences and promote integration of content, and research exploring specific topics that are applicable to both content and services within the context of these digital libraries. See: <http://www.ehr.nsf.gov/duo/programs/nsdl/>.

The **Council for Museums, Libraries, and Archives** in the United Kingdom provides strategic leadership, advocacy, and advice to its constituencies to enable them to engage life-long learners, new audiences, and support for programs and activities that bring heritage into people's lives. See <http://www.resource.gov.uk/>.

The Information Society Technologies (IST) program is part of the **European Union's** research agenda. European research activities are structured around consecutive four-year programmes, or so-called Framework Programmes. The Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) sets out the priorities—including the IST Priority—for research, technological development, and demonstration (RTD) activities for 2003–2006. See <http://www.cordis.lu/ist/about/about.htm>.



Crowd of spectators watching [aviator Charles] Hamilton in his Flying Machine, 1910. Courtesy of the Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford. Scientific and technological progress may be documented in "hidden" local history collections.

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*Advanced Technology is
A Moving Target.*

Hanscom Park, 3201 Woolworth Avenue, Omaha, Nebraska. Horse-drawn bandstand unassembled. 1890-1900. Courtesy of Omaha Public Library, Omaha, NE



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Hanscom Park, 3201 Woolworth Avenue, Omaha, Nebraska. Bandstand set up. 1890-1900. Courtesy of Omaha Public Library, Omaha, NE



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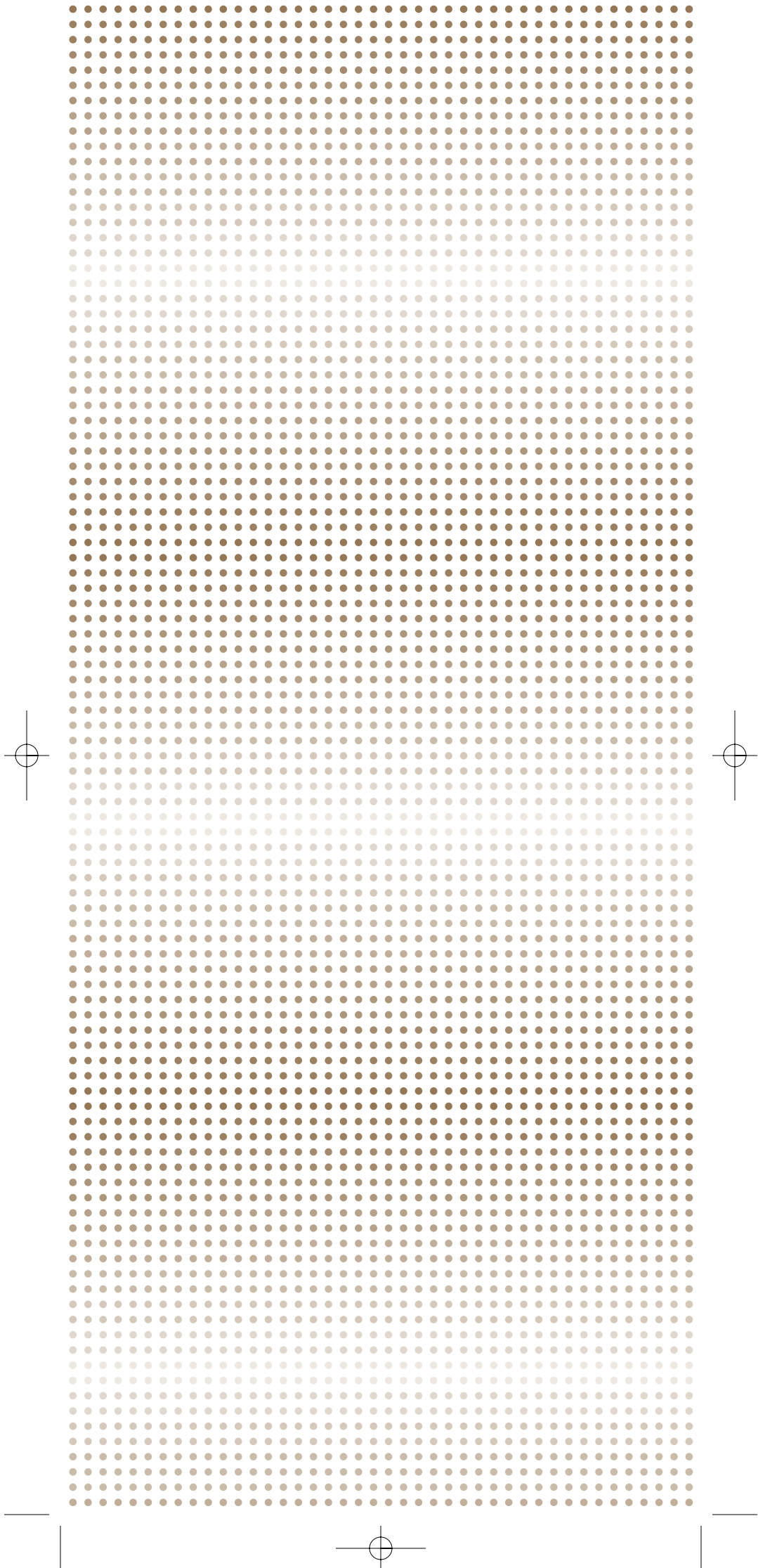
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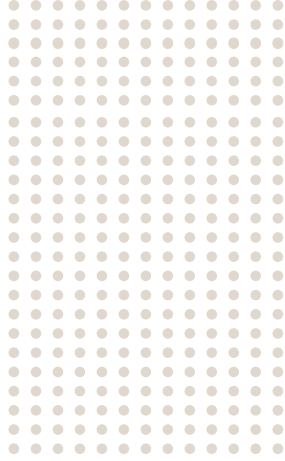
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