

Dynamic data ■ Virtual learning in India ■ eBooks in public library consortia  
A bookless library in the US ■ Digital publishing for the V&A ■ e-paper smartphone

# welcome



eBooks are on the agenda for libraries of all kinds from higher education to public libraries. Our special focus this month reflects this, with contributions from the UK, USA and India, exploring real life experiences along with statistics and research into this developing trend.

Warm regards,

Catherine Dhanjal, Managing Editor

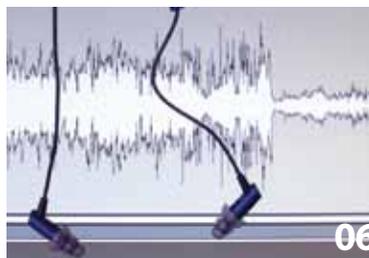
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# The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) takes to the digital stage



**Linda Wakeman of Mag+ provides an insight into the V&A's moves towards digital publishing and apps and how they appeal to new and existing audiences. A video on the new iPad app is available here: [www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=-lZlg1QBWMg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=-lZlg1QBWMg).**

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) has been a favourite UK attraction since 1852, when it was founded on the principles of making works of art available to all, educating working people and inspiring British designers and manufacturers. The clarity of its purpose has ensured the London Museum's lasting popularity; with over 3 million visitors flocking to see the V&A collections over the last year.

a V&A app would provide different content to appeal to a wide audience of digital consumers that was different to — but would also complement — a traditional newsletter or exhibition

Many of the museum's artefacts have international significance, spanning from pop culture and fashion to architecture and sculpture. But while the V&A has always offered something for everyone, advances in digital technologies and ubiquitous, quality mobile devices have now created new opportunities for museum curators to share the collections. Like many in the museum industry, the V&A has begun to construct its future as a multiplatform brand, both extending the scope of content it can affordably make available, and providing new ways for existing and new audiences to engage.

Tasked with helping to realise this future, Malcolm Sutherland joined the V&A in 2010, with a responsibility for digital projects and apps.

## Strategy

When it comes to digital publishing, the V&A has to maintain a delicate balance between its traditional audience who prefer to see information in print and those who may consider viewing content within an app.

ubiquitous, quality mobile devices have now created new opportunities for museum curators to share their collections

It was seen that a V&A app would provide different content to appeal to a wide audience of digital consumers that was different to — but would also complement — a traditional newsletter or exhibition experience.

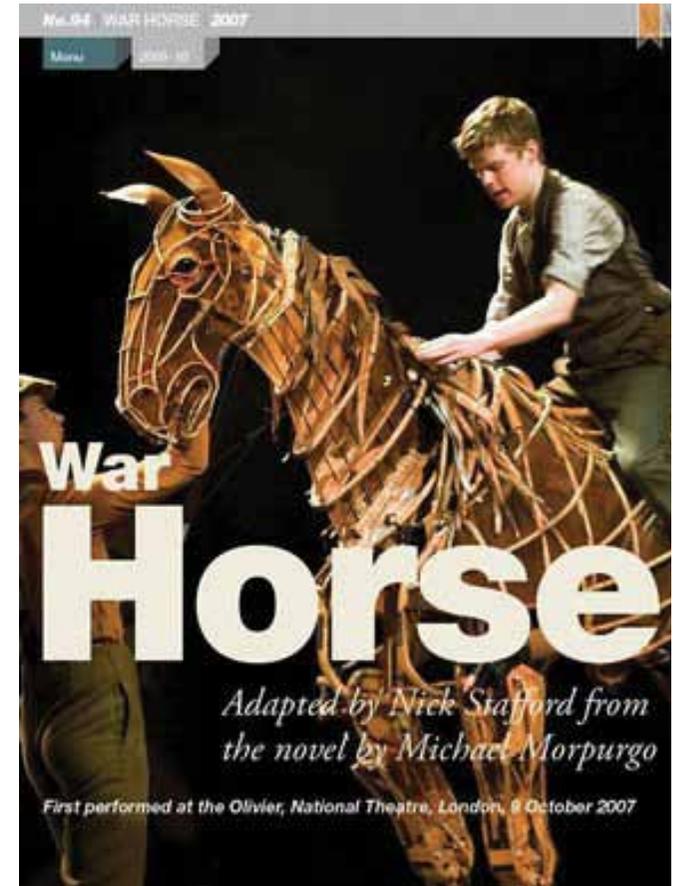
Once this direction had been established, Sutherland was able to discuss with Mag+ what the V&A was looking for from the digital publishing platform Mag+.

## Test first: The V&A calendar

In February 2012 the V&A released an exhibition calendar app using Mag+. The format, although simple, proved that an app could be at once a popular and cost-effective resource for the Museum to produce. It also gave the opportunity to gather user feedback, for instance the tap navigation wasn't something that was intuitive for the test groups, who preferred simple scrolling. It also revealed that users wanted more content available on tablets, hinting at a welcome audience for future apps.

The calendar app is free and has been downloaded over 16,000 times to date — also storming into iTunes' top 5 free lifestyle apps for iPad.

The introduction of the calendar app actually helped to solve an information architecture problem. It was also successfully used internally within the museum, acting as a useful reference for the exhibition schedules, events and workshops. The daily tours, for example, are now reformatted from the calendar app for display on the public messaging screens.



## Played in Britain: Modern Theatre in 100 Plays

For Sutherland and the team, curator Dr Kate Dorney and designer Az Mohammad, attention then turned to developing *Played in Britain: Modern Theatre in 100 Plays*. This tablet app was designed to highlight the immensely rich, archive of theatrical photos and materials within the V&A's Theatre and Performance department.

The resulting app, released in December 2012, showcases



the wide variety and volume of content Mag+ can incorporate into an app, with over 600 images, videos, audio, original script extracts, essays, cast lists, first night reviews and interviews. It also uses audio clips throughout and is introduced and narrated by actor Simon Callow, a star of one of the featured plays.

The photographs span productions from 1945 to 2010 and although five of the 100 plays were not actually made in Britain, Britain heavily influenced their content or success. The app also includes many images from the archive of Douglas H Jeffery — who was a prolific theatre photographer between 1955 and 2008 — acquired recently by the museum, as well as a number of other archived collections.

Mag+'s optional double text layer and borderless layouts

also provided the V&A with an unobstructed way to really show off the 600+ photos in the app. The photographs can be enlarged, contextualised and viewed without borders.

With all this content, the size of the app was a challenge, but Mag+'s support team was able to reduce the 2GB app by over two thirds to 780MB.

The determination to make *Played in Britain: Modern Theatre in 100 Plays* exceptional value and quality has resulted in a hugely satisfying app for users. It retails at £7.99.

### Impact on V&A

For the app to reach its full potential, the Mag+ team worked closely with the V&A. Although outsourcing the process entirely is now something that Mag+ offers as a separate service, the V&A preferred to handle the process internally, and the in-house team of three remained the same, with a lead curator, strategist and designer.

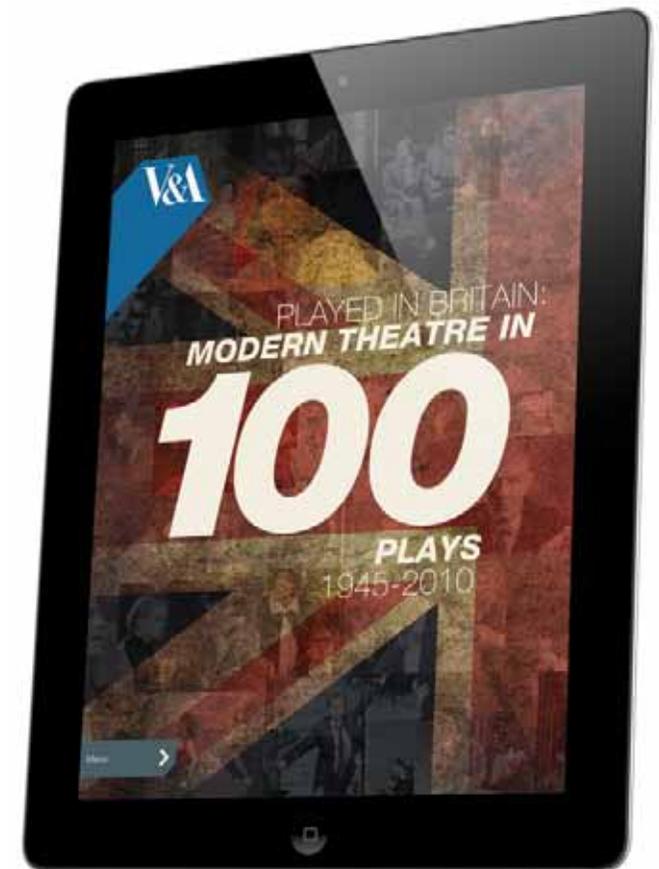
### Looking Forward

In his introduction, Simon Callow praises the app as “something that you can enjoy at your own pace, wherever in the world you are”. This illustrates perfectly how apps can benefit the V&A, opening up the museum’s archives to a global audience.

The museum plans to further diversify its offering of digital apps and having just updated its calendar app in February 2013, is still experimenting and evolving new content. ■

*The V&A is the world's leading museum of art and design with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity. It was established to make works of art available to all and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. Today, the V&A's collections, which span over 2000 years of human creativity in virtually every medium and from many parts of the world, continue to intrigue, inspire and inform. [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk)*

*Mag+ ([www.magplus.com](http://www.magplus.com)) is a complete digital-publishing ecosystem comprising a plug-in for InDesign CS4-CS6, a powerful web-based backend, and white-labelled reader apps for iOS, Android and Kindle devices. It gives users the fastest,*



*simplest publishing platform to create content optimised for touchscreen devices, without the need for programming skills. From publishers to catalogue marketers, design agencies and app developers, Mag+ is designed for anyone who wants to bring beautiful, immersive content to the millions using the new generation of digital devices.*

coming soon...

# coming soon...

August: focus on data security,  
data management, SaaS

November: focus on elearning

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*Your articles, photographs, reviews, thoughts and suggestions for the journal are always welcome, just contact Catherine Dhanjal on [catherine.dhanjal@theansweruk.com](mailto:catherine.dhanjal@theansweruk.com) or call +44 (0)800 998 7990.*



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