

# **Beyond WWW and HTML**

## **Standards for Cultural Heritage Information: The RAMA Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

RAMA (Remote Access to Museum Archives) software permits simultaneous access to documentary multimedia databases of European museums. The challenge awaiting specialists in museums, universities, and cultural institutions when the cost of telecommunication go down, for the general public to access cultural heritage information, will lie in the use of common standards by the museum community. RAMA joined CIMI to share a common vision through the use of standards, and sharing the results with similar initiatives. Now RAMA is finding a way to extend this work within Europe in their mission to set up the Global Information Society among the members of the European Union.

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### **Introduction**

This paper is based upon work carried out within the scope of the European project RAMA (*Remote Access to Museum Archives*) and within the CIMI project CHIO (*Cultural Heritage Information Online*). We would like to thank the RAMA and CIMI partners for their share in this work.

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### **RAMA collaborates in CHIO with CIMI**

The RAMA project was asked to participate in CIMI as early as 1993, as the experiment was seen as a positive way to actually detect problems arising from the lack of common standards practice in the

interchange of cultural information online, RAMA accepted immediately, knowing that an international co-operation would guarantee the strength of the approach and the support of prestigious institutions would ensure a wider use of standards among cultural organisations. such as Z39.50 and SGML which will involve the necessity of agreeing upon standard core data model(s) and attribute sets.

For RAMA, the great interest of the CHIO project is two fold:

1. Experimenting with standards already in use on libraries, which will permit a standardized access to various cultural information sources,
2. Accessing a wider variety of text and images stored in relational databases, but also of unstructured text.

So far, the CIMI co-operation is going well and progressing smoothly.

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### The European perspective

In addition to the G7 summit on the Information Society and the rapidly growing interest in the Internet from the general public, the European Union gave to the European Commission the mission to work on standards dealing with general access to contents of databases by the general public. With this in mind, the Commission is setting up a group of experts to work out standards specifications for cultural contents in close relationship with other groups dealing with multimedia information, libraries, medical, messaging, EDI, systems, etc. in order to have a coherent approach to the use of technical standards and a more dedicated content approach. This group will take advantage of the results of current projects in this area and it will rapidly propose participation in/creation of pilot projects to experiment various aspects of the interchange of Cultural Information Online at the international level.

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### Conclusion

The use of largely accepted standards is clearly the only way to realize on a global scale generalised access to Cultural Heritage Information Online. It is a challenge to develop such use of standards widely to make the **Global Information Society** a reality in the third millennium. In the case of Europe, it is necessary for the European Union to share common views, but it is also important for the scientific and cultural community to co-operate internationally. CIMI is the example of such co-operation in which Europe could gain strength, thanks to their extremely rich cultural heritage.