Short practical guide on online mediation

For **whom**

This guide is aimed at mediators, librarians and/or other professionals wishing to expand their online services through collaboration with other online actors.

If online activities do cost less than standard cultural mediation, there is still a high investment in time to consider.

An online activity could be as simple as a blog post, or as complicated as an in-browser game, depending on the level of interactivity wanted with the public and the available resources. Independently, any project should first go through a conception phase.

Conceiving the project

(1) clarify the project (who, toward whom, what, how, object-oriented or information-oriented, etc.)

(2) establish a benchmark of similar projects

(3) research the specific functionalities of the project (at minimum, so that you can explain its needs to the other actors)

(4) research the material needs of the project (RAM, hosting, etc.)

(5) check the right of usage and licences needed (usually listed in TmPA 18, CopA 39d, DesA 15 and FADP as a whole)

This phase is also here to see how to «establish a close relationship from afar» (Galaup 2012, p. 63, translated), what kind of relay you will create between you and the user, and how to titillate their curiosity (Croizet 2022).

As part of your research, you may stumble upon an already existing application whose functions seem to correspond to your needs. Nevertheless, several elements are to be checked before deciding on using this tool. Firstly, what is its cost? Is it a monthly licence, an annual one, or a once-and-done? If this tool is hosted externally, what are its policies concerning data protection and sharing? Can it reliably show that any data collected by the tool won't be transferred to a third party ? Another point to check is whether that tool could access unrelated information pertaining to your institution. What laws apply to the server hosting the tool depends on its country of residence. Which is why a Swiss or European hosted tool, both of which are bound by stricter data protection laws, are preferable to an American or Canadian one.

This part of the process is particularly difficult, and depending on the technical knowledge needed, should best be left to the IT service of your institution.

If the desired application doesn't exist yet, the needs of your project should then be codified in order to facilitate the communicator with the other actors, by establishing a specification document and a scope of work.

Project **specs**

(1) present the structure the project management

(2) specify the context, the stakes and the objectives of the project

(3) clarify the control object

(4) detail the expected performance

(5) present the methodology (calendar, budget, phases and intermediate validations)

After those first few months of work, the next step is to convince your direction of the utility or the wow effect (Croizet 2022) of your project. Then it will be time to organize the resources, or eventually the call for tenders should you reach to external specialists.

Even with the best planned projects, unforeseen events may still occur. If you may, adding about a third of the expected time as supplementary time to all deadlines could help alleviate the impact of those events.

Concretizing the project

On the basis of the project's specifications, and with all actors, including the steering committee, organized and informed, it is finally time for the project to start concretely.

A light guidance, or at least communicating between all actors may help prevent small problems evolving into less manageable ones. Do be careful not to micromanage, as it can prove to be damaging on both side of the working relationship.

Deploying and **life cycle**

Once deployed, and once the first user errors patched and stabilized, the project is now alive, which also means it might perish some day. If not done during the conception phase, now would be the time to establish the maintenance and the life cycle of the project.

During its active phase, the project will produce data, if only those related to the number of views. Servers will need updating, and if not, then obsolescence will need to planned for. "Identify, gather, order to know [how to] class and choose" (Robert Damien in Merzeau 2017, p.1, translated), it's again about data treatment in order to gain an informed opinion about the project's future.

Its life expectancy may vary considerably depending on its monitoring. For instance, the projects Lectura, later Lectura Plus of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes both lasted 10 years before migrating into website archiving the mediations' online activities. Other projects have been almost immediately abandoned following their deployment.

To plan for the project and its data's archival is an essential step in assuring all your labour won't be suddenly forgotten.

Physical accompaniment

As your project is a part of your institution's ecosystem, it deserves to be valorized. Depending on the scope of your project, you may even need to prepare activities to help your public learn how to use it. Especially since a quarter of the Swiss population is ill at ease with digital tools (BFS 2026).

Physical accompaniment may be as simple as a pamphlet, or as elaborate as the Digital Days at the Stadtbibliothek Biel. This is about finding a solution that accommodates best your public's needs and your own resources.

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