Christie's

Reinventing print and digital content delivery in the art world to drive new client opportunities on a global scale.

CHRISTIE'S FIRST-KNOWN catalogue, still retained by the company, was produced in London in 1776. Christie's is one of the world's leading global auction houses—selling some of the most sought-after artifacts. Founded by James Christie in 1766, it has primary offices in London and New York, as well as a number of others around the world.

Since the time of its first catalogue, Christie's catalogue production has evolved and expanded in many ways, and is about to change even more with the implementation of a new content platform.

Although catalogues are just one method for how Christie's communicates information about sales and art property to its clientele, catalogues

have been the longstanding, major method for how sales have been transacted for centuries. The question for Christie's was and is – how do they broaden how they can best serve their clients' art interests— in the right place, right method, right time?

In 2013, over 150,000 photos were taken by Christie's 41plus photo studios around the world to promote the available art for sales, often with over 6,000 being processed in a single week. These numbers were increasing rapidly year to year. Consequently, the number of print catalogue pages produced per month was exceeding 12,000 and growing.

It was also important to have information available for use globally at all regional offices. The increasing volume of images and the large amount of detailed information stored for each

property was becoming a more complex content management challenge day by day.

Multiple global systems managed the varied data and assets—from customer relations and art management, to sales and

in the right place, at the right time, according to their preferences would take more than just content and information.

This was further challenged by the fact that the various auction specialist teams at Christie's,

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associated financials. Business was scaling dramatically, while methods for distributing content related to a featured piece of art also expanded. It became clear to Christie's that in order to distribute more content in a broader variety of ways to get to their customers

each with focused expertise on a particular area of art, had highly specific methods for curating the information and presentation of that art type.

Christie's clientele are obviously very discerning customers who

have come to expect a bespoke experience and attention to detail in their engagement with Christie's.

So, when faced with increasing growth, varied workflows, large amounts of content and information across the globe, and the need to plan for unified digital future, Christie's called upon Technology for Publishing (TFP) to help define a suitable direction and approach.

According to Kim Ray, director, IT Business Solutions, Americas, "We needed a partner who could help us organize our vision and lay the building blocks for a content platform that would allow us to tackle a number of content needs across the organization. TFP did just that! As the lead consultant of this project, Margot Knorr Mancini was instrumental in helping us find a solution that met our current

needs for today and can continue to help us grow in the future. "

TFP conducted content process analysis sessions across all of the divisions and teams, documenting their current state and challenges. Also defined as part of this exercise were the future content business objectives for the organization, which were rapidly evolving. This meant understanding where the organization wanted to shift and grow, and then defining the specific gaps that needed to be addressed to move Christie's toward the future direction it envisioned.

The work began by looking at core systems, specifically those that managed photography, other media, catalogue production, and marketing. Many were outdated and reaching end of life, and while upgrades were available as short-term solutions, it was an

opportunity to take a targeted look at what technology foundation could best serve the company going forward.

A number of approaches, architectures, and technologies were considered, but the decision was made that a central solution was necessary to aggregate the content and information from the various enterprise systems and was key to the future vision. The solution needed to be able to integrate data from the property business systems with the digital asset management solution, make it transparent and accessible, and provide a solid platform to publish content in print and digitally to multiple outputs and channels.

"As our catalogues grew and evolved over the years, and our production timelines grew tighter, we optimized every step of our process—but we were in a position

where our information about the state of a sale was locked to the layout. We needed to get ahead of that," says Neil McCutcheon, international director at Christies.

Efficient and fast production of catalogues were essential components to this effort. Because no central repository of data existed, and the curation process for planning sales often went to the last minute, the final content of an auction sale would most often be unknown until a catalogue page was finalized. The catalogue was used as the planning tool for defining sales, which constrained other content distribution opportunities related to sale marketing.

The goal was to make this process more transparent and parallel, and to find ways to aggregate sales details without the vehicle of a physical catalogue.

After review of a number of solutions and a proof of concept to vet the capabilities, Christie's made the decision to implement Censhare as its solution.

Technology for Publishing led a rapid effort to build a pilot test system that could support and replace the current catalogue production methods. Proving this could work digitally was key to the final decision to move forward. This involved planning the infrastructure and data processes, defining the necessary integrations and data ingestion rules required for the business data and digital asset systems, and working through the development within

a six-week period. The objective was to build a prototype that could provide an end-to-end workflow tailored to work in the process envisioned for the future. It would provide the ability for auction specialist to plan their sales and catalogues
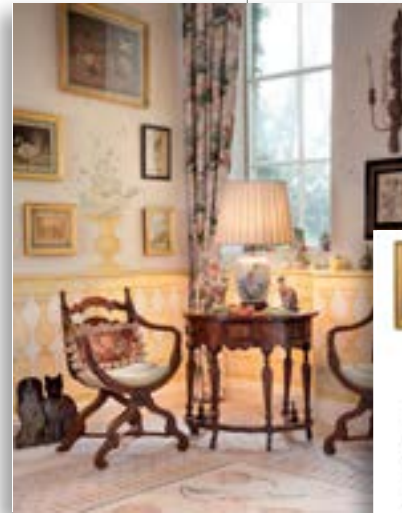
on screen visually, replacing the manual, paper-based methods that were currently in use, and

allow that effort to generate the catalogue proof that would then move through prepress. This aimed to eliminate a decades-old paper-based and manually intensive process for both the auction specialist and prepress.

The ultimate challenge was to deliver the integrated solution within those six weeks, prepare documentation, train a team of specialists and prepress users in two days, and then have them build a complete catalogue within two days—with end-to-end execution of the pilot test within one week.

The challenge was met, and the excitement for this new way of working spread quickly, sparking discussion for what could be and how the business could change.

Once the prototype was vetted via the pilot, the request to proceed with the first- phase buildout was

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approved. Phase 1 focused on replacing the current catalogue production methods with an automated layout solution that would then expand to support the front-end planning tools and other outputs. While this was going on, the integrated systems for business data and image management were also being updated—maintaining

alignment and functionality was key to keeping on track.

Since Christie's catalogues are highly tailored, and the information that needs to be presented for one type of art over another can vary (think painting vs. jewelry vs. furniture), the rules for automated catalogue layout were highly

specific to the type of catalogue being presented and the properties within it. Christie's unique formula for presenting information to its clients is part of what sets it apart and has preserved client loyalty for many decades, so preserving this care and detail was important.

Within a year, mainstream catalogue production was migrated onto the new technology and process. This helped validate the integration approach and new production processes. From there, further planning began for next phase intended to expand and support all art types, and more extensive catalogues and outputs across print and digital.

The most significant shift to come with this expanded phase was a browser-based dashboard that would allow Christie's specialists and other staff to view sale development in motion, in real time, and to be able to manage the planning of sales in a much more transparent and dynamic way.

Given the state of a property or a sale is now literally at the fingertips fo the staff, a sale to occur in many ways, at any time, and in a highly tailored fashion. The new model also brings with it business intelligence about the sale process, the pieces within a sale, and production timelines—providing an operational overview that was not possible given the former state of systems and content. It completely changes when and how Christie's can approach its business, and introduces exciting opportunities for exploring new markets, growth, and expansion.

In a recent interview with Bloomberg, Christie's CEO Guillaume Ceruti said, "Ten years ago, digital was not seen as an asset in the art market; it was even seen as a threat, that it could disrupt the art market. Today we know that it is an asset; it helps our business. It's another channel. Our online sales, for instance, contribute in a major way to the acquisition of new buyers. Last year, during the Da Vinci sale, half a million people worldwide followed the sale online—that's coming from a business where sales used to happen in a room."

Having an integrated global content platform sets the stage for Christie's to dramatically change how it does business and continues to impact the art world.

*Christie's Auction Rockefeller results

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