



# Digital Strategies for Heritage (DISH) 2013

2 & 3 December 2013, De Doelen Rotterdam

## Chefs' Table session

**Table Number:** 11

**Table Session:** 03

**Table Host:** Marc Holtman & Nelleke van Zeeland

**Title:** How to survive as a 21st century photo agency?

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### Introduction

Meet the Maria Austria Institute: a Dutch photo agency that represents fifty-two top photographers, houses over seven million negatives and organizes exhibitions, publications and educational activities. Like so many other photo agencies, the Maria Austria Institute (MAI) struggles to find its position in the digital landscape. Traditional revenues through funds and offline sales for professional use are rapidly declining.

In collaboration with the Amsterdam City Archives, MAI decided on a new approach: open up the archives digitally, make use of the crowd for selecting and describing photo's, target for a broader audience and embrace the online possibilities for presentation, use and sales. This decision implies a break with an existing business model based on exclusivity and sale for professional / commercial use. As a result this has led to fundamental discussions within the organization and with colleagues in the field.

It is clear that this new approach in many ways alters MAI's way of working and thinking. What does it mean to open up the collection to the public? What is a 'broader audience'? How does targeting a larger public affect the profile of an organization, i.e. how does it change the way fellow institutions and the audience interact with the institute? Could the large-scale 'archivist's approach' be a solution for other cultural heritage institutions as well? In this Chef's Table we will raise these questions and discuss them in light of the Maria Austria Institute's newly-accessible archive.

### Discussion

Who am MAI? Maria Austria Institute

The Maria Austria Institute collects and preserves high quality photo archives of photographers connected with Amsterdam. MAI tries to keep the collection a part of the Dutch visual heritage.  
<http://www.maibeeldbank.nl>

The MAI photo agency in Amsterdam represents 53 photographers  
(untill now there only was offline sales of photo's)

In 2012 MAI started a collaboration with Amsterdam City Archive (SAA)

What is the problem? Traditional sales are going down, al lot of (free) competition, cuts on subsidy.

Opportunities?

Niche market: small group, exclusive, top selection

Why does MAI need to continue?

- wealth of the collection
- selling photo's is not the prime business
- preserving the collection

What does opening up mean?

- making the collection accessible
- digitalize everything
- apply lower price rates (sell a lot for less and not less for a lot)
- approach individual costumers
- transparency (clear price rates,

Opening up as a way to survive