Digital Culture 2014

Arts Centres

Digital R&D Fund for the Arts

Ninety-one 'Multi (combined) arts centres' took part in the 2014 Digital Culture survey, as part of a 3-year study of how arts and cultural organisations in England use technology. Arts centres are a small but distinct group within the wider arts and cultural sample, and are analysed separately from Performing arts venues (such as theatres and concert halls). Their responses provide a good indication of where and how digital technology is being used by arts centres, although due to the sample size not all results shown here are statistically significant.

Overall arts centres say:

- Digital is particularly important for their marketing and operations, and they most commonly feel the impact of technology in terms of public engagement.
- They tend to feel digital technology is more important, and they undertake more digital activities, than the overall arts and culture average.
- They are particularly likely to use digital to provide online access to performances and spaces, including using social media to share video, and sizeable numbers plan to improve digital access to content (both live streamed and archive) in 2015.
- The proportion that see digital as important for business models almost doubled in 2014 (69% from 36%), and they increasingly using data to improve marketing and fundraising. This activity appears to be reflected in higher levels of impact on revenues and profitability.

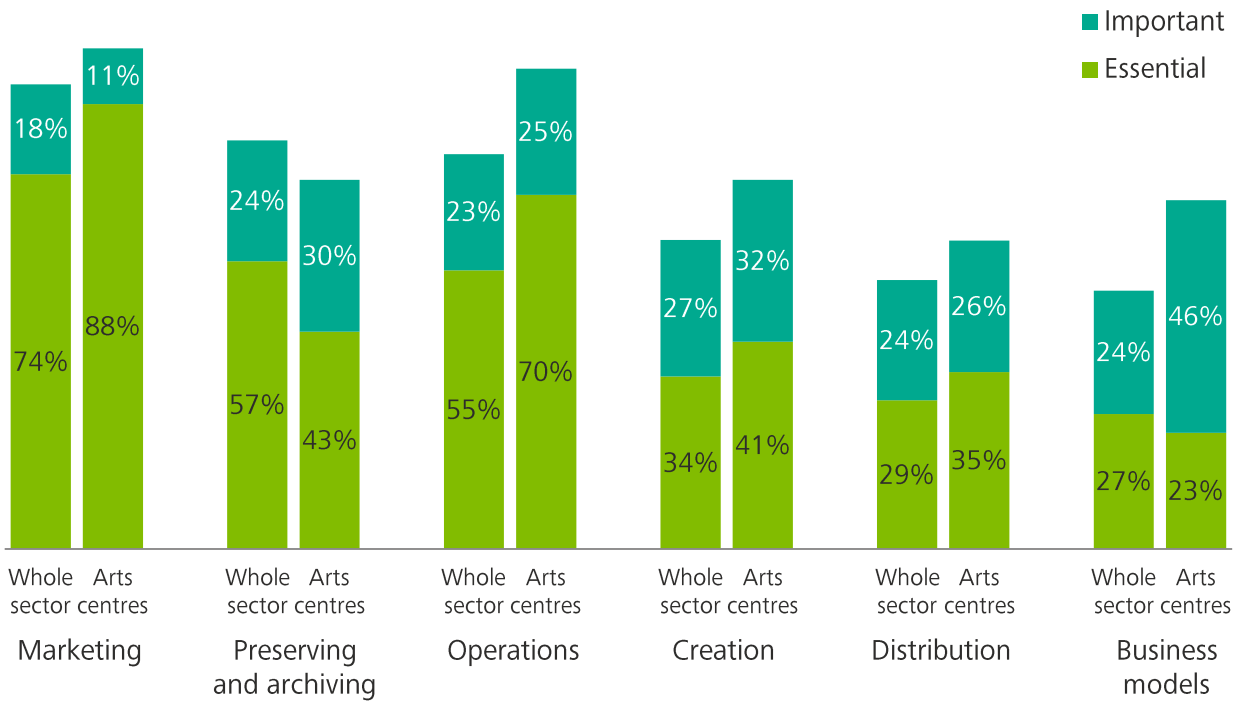
Importance of digital technology

Most important for	Marketing & Operations
Least important for	Business Models and Distribution

Looking across different organisational functions, arts centres think digital is most important for their marketing (99% describe it as important or essential), followed by their operations (95%). They feel it is slightly less important for their business models (69%) and distributing their work (61%).

Compared to the arts and culture sector average, arts centres are more likely to view digital technology as important to their work. As shown in Figure 1, the difference is most apparent in terms of business models, operations and creation.

Figure 1: Importance of digital to different business functions (whole sector vs. arts centres)1



Arts Centres n=91, Whole sector n=947

Arts centres indicate digital technology has become more important since 2013 in all of the six areas surveyed.[2] This was most marked for business models, where the proportion who see digital as important increased to 69% from 36%.

Digital activities

Top digital activities	Operating website, publishing content on platforms, email marketing
More likely to…	Use social media platforms
Less likely to…	Maintain a blog

Almost all arts centres use digital for marketing, including operating a website (98%), publishing content onto free platforms (91%) and email marketing (88%), and in general arts centres are more likely to do digital activities than other types of arts and cultural organisations. In particular, they are more likely to use digital technology to provide online access to their work, including live streaming performances (36% vs. 16% of the arts and culture sector as a whole), creating online tours of spaces (22% vs. 10%) and producing stand-alone digital art (47% vs. 26%).[3]

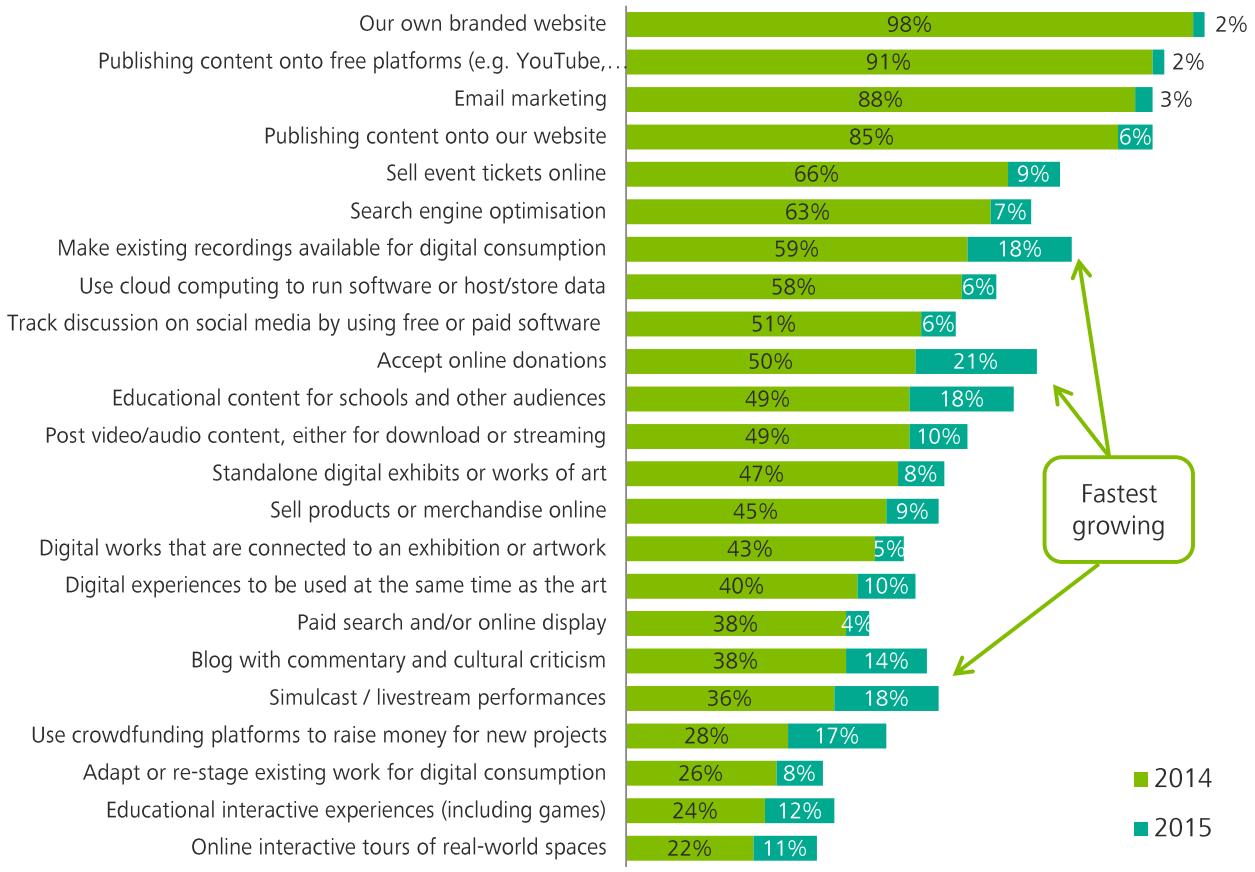
[1] Differences for preserving and archiving, creation and distribution are not significant at a 95% confidence level
[2] Due to the smaller sample size for combined arts centres in 2013 (n = 46) the differences are only statistically significant for operations and business models. However, the sample is large enough to give be directionally correct for comparison
[3] Combined arts centres n=91; Whole sector n=947. Differences are statistically significant

They are also more likely to use social media to share video. Arts centres are more likely to have accounts on YouTube (66% vs. 56% of the arts and culture sector as a whole) and Vimeo (40% vs. 30%).[4] The only area where arts centres are less likely to use technology is in maintaining a blog: (38% of arts centres run a blog compared to 43% of arts and culture organisations generally).[5]

Arts centres are increasing their use of data to personalise marketing and fundraising campaigns (58% vs. 37% of the arts and culture sector as a whole) and improve membership schemes (31% vs 20%).[6]

Most arts centres anticipate introducing new activities next year – only 11% did not expect to do any new activities in 2015, compared to 18% across the whole sector.[7] As shown in Figure 2, this increasing level of activity is expected to be most pronounced in online donations and access to content (both live streamed and archive).

Figure 2: Digital activities for arts centres (2014 and expected activities in 2015)



Arts Centres n=91

[4] Combined arts centres n = 91; Whole sector n = 944. The differences are not statistically significant
[5] Combined arts centres n = 91; Whole sector n = 946. The differences are not statistically significant
[6] Combined arts centres n = 90; Whole sector n = 935. The differences are statistically significant
[7] Combined arts venues n = 91; Whole sector n = 947. The difference is statistically significant

Impacts of digital activities

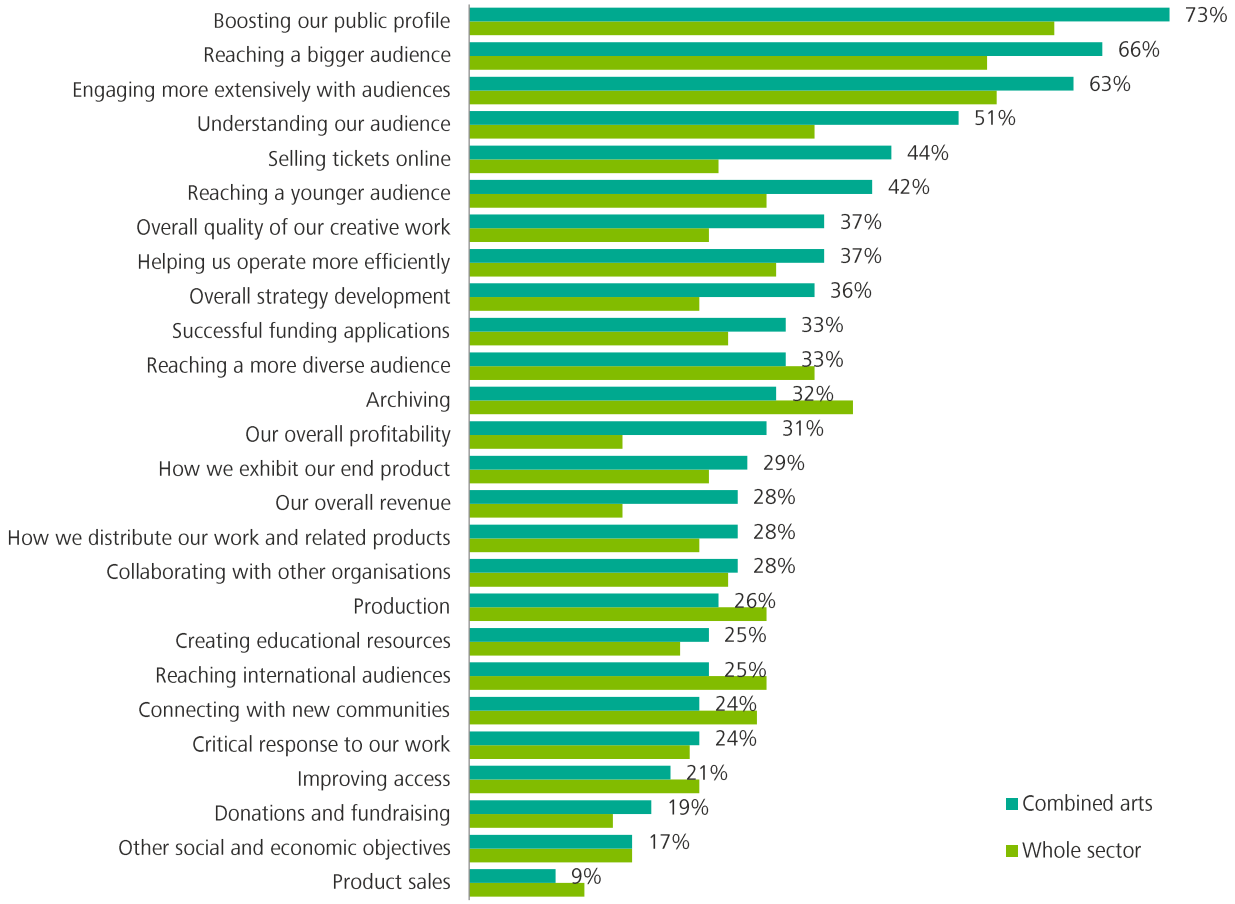
Proportion seeing considerable impacts overall	72%[8]
Main area of impact	Public engagement

The impact of digital is most commonly felt in terms of public engagement:

- 73% report a major positive impact on boosting their public profile
- 66% on reaching a bigger audience
- 63% on engaging their audience more extensively.[9]

They are significantly more likely than average to be benefiting financially from digital technology. A higher proportion experience major positive impacts on their profitability (31% vs. 16% of the arts and culture sector as a whole), revenue generation (28% vs. 16%) and ticket sales (44% vs. 26%).[10]

Figure 3: The impact of digital on business areas (arts centres vs arts and culture overall)



Whole sector n=947, arts centres n=91

[8] Combined arts centres n=91. 72% report major or broadly major positive impact overall, defined as 4 or 5 out of 5 on a scale
[9] Combined arts centres n=91
[10] Combined arts centres n = 91; Whole sector n = 947. The differences are statistically significant

This commercial impact may be driven by arts centres' use of data – they are more likely than organisations across the sector to engage in 8 of the 10 applications of data explored.[11] In particular, arts centres are more likely to use data to personalise marketing and fundraising campaigns (58% vs. 37% of the sector as a whole) and improve membership schemes (31% vs 20%).[12]

Higher levels of activity for arts centres may relate to the fact that they tend to be larger than average – 32% have an annual turnover of £500k+ vs. 19% for the sector as a whole.[13] However, impacts are being felt regardless of size – 50% of small arts centres report a major positive impact overall, compared with 36% of all small organisations and with 42% of arts centres overall.[14]

Management factors

Biggest barrier	Lack of in-house staff time
Biggest skills gap	User interface design and user testing

Like the sector as a whole, arts centres see a lack of resources as a barrier to growing the impact of digital – 70% cite lack of in-house staff time (identical to the sector as a whole), 77% cite lack of internal funding (vs. 70%) and 68% cite lack of external funding (vs. 60%).[15]

The biggest 'skills gap' faced by arts centres is user interface design and user testing (42% say they feel under-served in this area).

[11] The differences is statistically significant in 5 of these data use areas
[12] Combined arts centres n = 90; Whole sector n = 935. The differences are statistically significant
[13] Combined arts centres n=86; Whole sector n=917
[14] Combined arts centres n=91; Small combined arts centres n=36; Small organisations n=299. The differences are not statistically significant due to low base size for small combined arts centres. Major positive impact overall defined as 5 out of 5 on a scale
[15] Combined arts centres n = 91; Whole sector n = 942. The differences are not statistically significant

Digital R&D Fund for the Arts

The Digital R&D fund for the Arts is a £7 million fund that supports collaboration between organisations with arts projects, technology providers, and researchers. The Digital R&D Fund is supported by Nesta, Arts and Humanities Research Council and public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

For more information about its projects and digital R&D stories from around the world, visit Native: Magazine of the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts at artsdigitalrnd.org.uk or connect with us on Twitter @digitalrnd or using the hashtag #artsdigital.