

World Digital Library to launch at UNESCO

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Dr. Abdul Waheed Khan (R), UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, shakes hands with Dr. James H. Billington, Librarian of Congress, at UNESCO headquarters in Paris in 2007. The World Digital Library, a website offering free access to rare books, maps, manuscripts, films and photographs from across the globe, launches Tuesday at UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

The World Digital Library, a website offering free access to rare books, maps, manuscripts, films and photographs from across the globe, launches Tuesday at UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

Bringing together priceless material, from ancient Chinese or Persian calligraphy to early Latin American photography, it is the world's third major digital library, after Google Book Search and the EU's new project, Europeana.

Drawing on content from libraries and [archives](#) worldwide, it aims to reduce the rich-poor digital divide, expand "non-Western" content on the web, promote better understanding between cultures and provide a global teaching resource.

Launched by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and 32 partner institutions, it was the brainchild of James Billington, the Librarian of Congress, the world's biggest library.

The world library will be available in seven core languages -- Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish -- with additional material in other languages.

Libraries and cultural institutions from Brazil to Britain, China, Egypt, France, Japan, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United States contributed content -- on a non-exclusive basis -- as well as expertise.

Billington, who launched a prototype in 2007 at www.worlddigitallibrary.org, will co-chair the official launch alongside UNESCO director general Koichiro Matsuura.

They hope to build partnerships with 60 countries by year end, with Morocco, Uganda, Mexico and Slovakia already signed up to work with the project.

Pioneer in the digital library field, Google launched its "Google Book Search" project in late 2004, and claims to have seven million works scanned and uploaded onto the web at books.google.com.

The Internet giant has proceeded full speed thanks to tie ups with universities in the United States and elsewhere.

Last October, Google cleared a key hurdle as US authors and publishers

groups agreed to drop copyright lawsuits against it after two years of negotiations.

Their 125 million dollar settlement lays out a framework for dividing future revenue, from book sales and advertising, between US rightsholders and Google.

Books in the public domain are available on Google for full download, while users will eventually have free access to 20 percent of copyrighted material, with an option to pay for full viewing.

US software giant Microsoft launched its own online library project at the end of 2006, but abandoned it 18 months later after having scanned some 750,000 works -- in what was effectively a surrender to Google.

Billed as a public sector rival to [Google](#) Books, the European Union's digital library, Europeana, launched to great fanfare in November, only to crash within hours as it was swamped by visitors.

Back on line since the New Year, at www.europeana.eu, a prototype set to operate until the end of 2010, currently draws around 40,000 visitors per day.

The project gives users free access to some 4.6 million public domain books, films, paintings, photographs, sound recordings, maps, manuscripts, newspapers kept in European libraries.

It aims to have some 10 million items scanned and uploaded by 2010 -- still a drop in the ocean against the 2.5 billion books in Europe's common [libraries](#).

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