

France accepts Google role in book scanning

January 12 2010, by Roland Lloyd Parry



France has agreed to work with Google to digitally scan French library books but insists it will not surrender legal control of its cultural heritage to the US Internet giant.

France agreed Tuesday to work with Google to digitally scan French library books but insisted it would not surrender legal control of its cultural heritage to the US Internet giant.

Culture Minister Frederic Mitterrand said he would approach [Google](#) to discuss their involvement while also pressing on with France's own digitisation efforts.

He approved an experts' report published Tuesday which proposed a "partnership" with Google and its online library Google Books.

"We are going to propose to Google... an exchange of documents,

without exclusivity, in a transparent way and with respect for the authors," the minister was quoted as saying by Le Monde newspaper.

France has been searching in recent months for ways to bring its vast cultural holdings into the digital age, including through scanning books and museum objects so they can be viewed online.

Last month President Nicolas Sarkozy announced a 750-million-euro (1.08-billion-dollar) package of state funding for digitisation of "the content of our museums, our [libraries](#) and our cinematographic heritage" via a public-private partnership.

Google, the world leader in Internet searches, is an obvious candidate with the expertise for a mass digitisation project, having already scanned vast numbers of works for its online library Google Books.

Last month it began scanning antique books from the major public collection in the southeastern French city of Lyon under a contract with the municipal library that controversially gives Google the rights to the works for 25 years.

But suspicion of the huge California-based company runs deep and discussions between Google and France's National Library over a similar project raised concerns that French heritage could fall into private hands.

A Paris court ruled separately last month that Google had breached French publishers' copyright by scanning books for its online library.

Mitterrand said meanwhile France should push on with its own book-scanning project, an online catalogue of National Library documents called Gallica, but acknowledged criticisms of it in the report.

"I'm not sure we should keep that name," he told Le Monde. "It's a bit nationalistic and archaic."

The report commissioned by Mitterrand acknowledged Google's status as a leading player in digitisation but urged caution in negotiating the contracts with it to keep commercial control and digital distribution rights.

"No public policy can ignore the advances made by this private operator, at a world and a European level," it said, but added that [France](#) must "keep control of the digitisation process and above all the distribution of the digital content".

Mitterrand said he would visit Google bosses at their US headquarters in March.

"I will say to them again, when I visit them in California, that respect for authors' rights must be a strict condition of any strong and viable partnership," he said.

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