

Digital Research in the Archive made easy

New Digital Reading Room of the Federal Archives
with IntraFind Technology

The Digital Reading Room (Digitaler Lesesaal) is a website of the German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv). It allows researchers and the public to easily search and view catalogued archive materials. In the project's first phase, the entire film collection of the Federal Archives was made searchable, and the already digitized films were made available online. In the subsequent phases, additional media such as documents, images, maps, posters, and audio recordings will gradually become searchable. Ultimately, the Digital Reading Room aims to establish a comprehensive portal for researching and utilizing archive materials. The Federal Archives realize this project together with IntraFind as service provider and software manufacturer.



The „Digital Reading Room“ project

At a time when fake news is on the rise, archives are becoming increasingly important. As a central memory institution in Germany, the Federal Archives are aware of their core task of not only preserving archive material as a basis for research, but also providing the public with access to these sources to counter disinformation and media manipulation.

To fulfil this task, the Federal Archives are opening up to a broader public by improving the digital processing of their content and making it searchable across the board in one application. The Digital Reading Room is a new portal to this immense wealth of knowledge.

Customer profile

The **Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv)** are a higher federal authority within the remit of the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. The Federal Archives have the legal mandate to permanently preserve the archives of the Federal Government and make them available for use.

This includes documents such as files, maps, images, posters, films and sound recordings in analog and digital form. The Federal Archives decide, which documents are worthy of archiving, i.e., whether they are of lasting value for researching and understanding the past and present, for safeguarding the legitimate interests of citizens or for legislation, administration and jurisdiction.

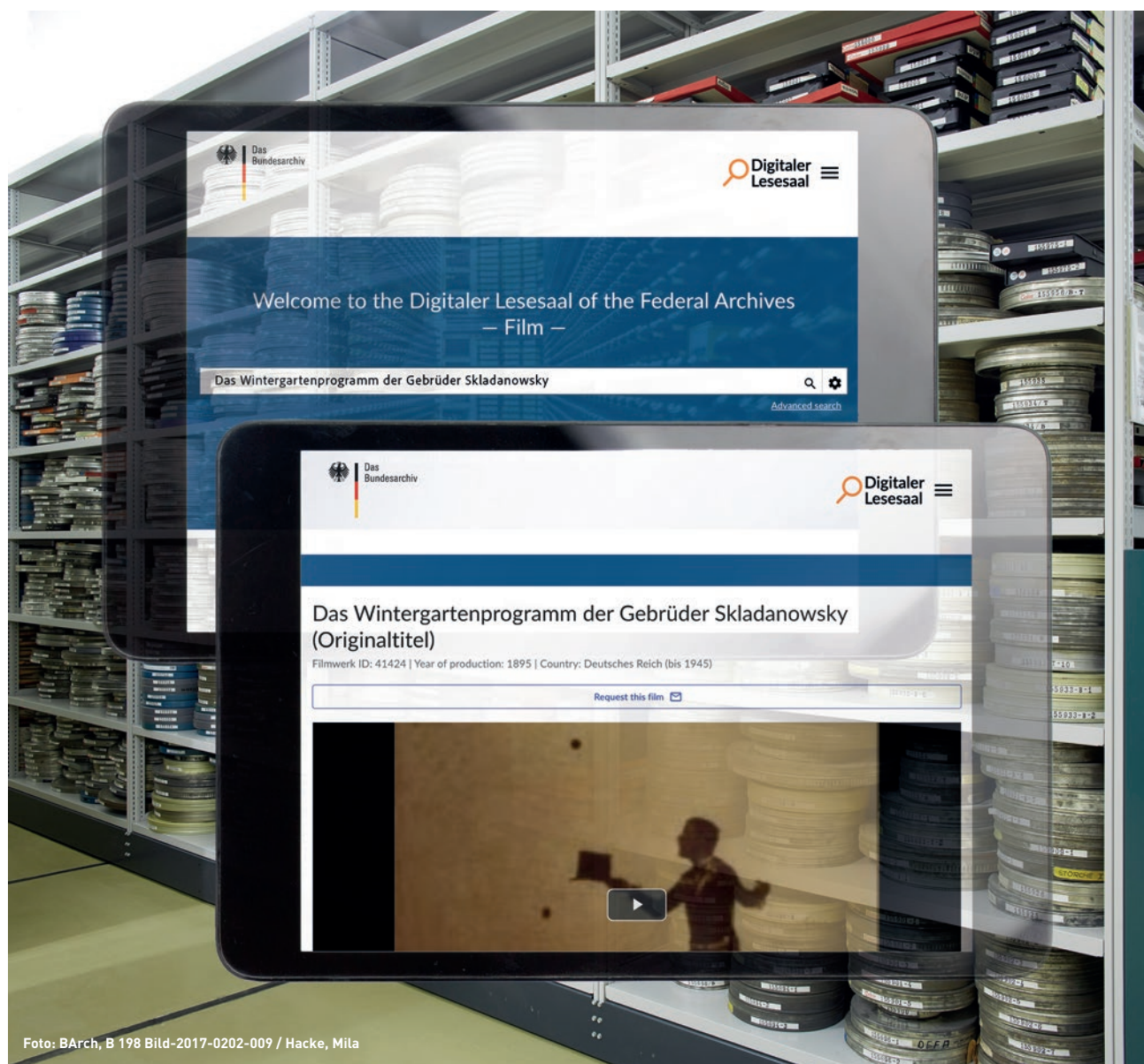


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The technological objective – high quality in research results and presentation

In the Digital Reading Room, the new research and access platform of the Federal Archives, users are able to comprehensively research files, films, photos and much more data and stream, view or order material once all planned project expansion stages have been implemented.

Before starting the project, the key requirements of the new Digital Reading Room from a technological perspective were defined:

- ▶ High-quality search with fast and relevant results
- ▶ A modern and intuitive user experience to reach many different target groups with the Digital Reading Room
- ▶ Optimal research and data quality
- ▶ Good streaming quality - even for the partly older films (digitalized from analogue material)

The challenge – high usability despite complex data

Researching historical data is particularly complex and requires more than just a full-text search. After all, this involves extremely heterogeneous data sets such as files, maps, images, posters, films and sound recordings. A historical file, for example, has completely different metadata than a historical film poster. Nevertheless, when conducting for example a person search on „Fritz Lang“ (the director of the iconic 1927’s movie „Metropolis“), users want to find not only his movies but also letters and other correspondence, files, film posters and photos in one hit list, summarized in one place.

This means that even if the cataloguing data for archive records is complex and heterogeneous, the search must deliver comprehensive results taking into account all these records. As the „Digital Reading Room“ is a publicly accessible platform, the application must also be quickly and easily accessible to users with different levels of technical knowledge.

Project overview

Client: Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv)

Challenge: High research quality and user-friendliness despite complex, heterogeneous sources such as films, files, images, posters and sound recordings

Solution: Intelligent search software iFinder combined with professional services from IntraFind; project with several expansion stages

Benefit: Creation of a modern, user-friendly search platform for the digital utilization of the Federal Archives’ extensive archive material, which now receives several thousand search queries every day.

Implementation with the iFinder

With their iFinder search software, IntraFind is providing the technological implementation of the Digital Reading Room for the Federal Archives. With intelligent linguistic and analysis functions, iFinder ensures high-quality search results in the complex databases. In addition to the full text, the software takes into account metadata and contextual information to quickly present users with the relevant search results. The search solution is intuitively designed for an easy and intuitive use. Users can also find details in a video tutorial.

In the first stage of expansion, more than 320,000 films can now be searched in the Digital Reading Room, including movies and documentaries from the Weimar Republic period, films from the GDR film documentation and newsreels from the periods before, during and after World War II. For the first time, online research on all films and streaming of selected films in the Federal Archives is now possible. The Digital Reading Room replaces the previous film library, in which only part of the archive could be searched. Several thousand films are currently online and can be streamed directly. The range of films on offer is constantly being expanded - in compliance with copyright laws.

In the next stages, the Digital Reading Room will replace the current research platform Invenio and other existing research platforms of the Federal Archives in the coming years. Users will then be able to research specific topics without having to decide in advance whether they are looking for documents, sounds, images or films. The project spans several years and is a good example of how it can make sense to connect such complex and heterogeneous databases to the search solution step by step, and to tackle the next project stages with the experience gained in the process.

„With the Digital Reading Room, we are opening a new chapter in the Federal Archives for anyone interested in history and stories. We are not only strengthening the digitalization and preservation of our holdings, but also making them visible and even easier to access. Our film heritage is the first step, but in the future, we want to set standards for the digital use of our sources in the interests of our users.“

Prof. Dr. Michael Hollmann
President of the Federal Archives

Why iFinder?

- + Standard product with fast integration capability (instead of individual development)
- + Excellent linguistics that enable significantly higher search quality with Elasticsearch
- + 25 per cent more relevant hits compared to the previous system
- + Robust index technology that can also map complex requirements for further project phases
- + Investment security for a project designed for the long term



Try it out here:
<https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/en>



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