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KNOW YOUR CROWD: A CASE STUDY IN DIGITAL COLLECTION MARKETING

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Know Your Crowd: A Case Study in Digital Collection Marketing

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INTRODUCTION

Libraries of all varieties have long struggled to identify successful marketing strategies that will entice patrons to their collections and services. Digitized special collections and institutional repositories have not necessarily made such marketing efforts any easier. While giving certain collections an online presence may provide libraries the opportunity to showcase the depth and breadth of their holdings, the collections must still attract use. The authors suggest that broader, active traditional marketing campaigns across university campuses are not effective for digital special collections. Rather, academic libraries need to employ a more focused, community-connecting approach to the online marketing of digital collections in order to engage the users who would have the most interest in these specialized collections.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Cloonan and Dove (2005), the idea of marketing library resources traces back to the five laws of library science created by Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan in 1931, where the third law “Every book, its reader” goes beyond the idea of library patrons looking for just the right resource and introduces the concept of library resources looking to be of use to just the right patron. Ranganathan pointed out that the majority of library patrons do not know enough about available resources to know what to request. Therefore, Ranganathan asserted that it is necessary for librarians to adopt every method possible to attract the public to the library. Cloonan and Dove (2005) are aware of the same issue in the current digital age, saying that electronic resources are hidden from users and only those who already know how to search these resources will get to the information. They emphasized that one of the major responsibilities for librarians is to help these resources find the people who want and need them most, regardless of electronic resources or print materials (Cloonan & Dove, 2005).

Madsen (2009) believed a core but easily overlooked step by libraries in the creation of digital special collections is to make sure potential users know that the digital collections exist. In her recent case study on two Harvard digital collections, Madsen noticed that within a six-month timeframe, one digital collection that had been marketed to users received nearly four times the usage than the other that had not experienced any marketing efforts. The marketing strategies, which cost two percent of the project budget, included email announcements, compiling a list of digital resources for individual instructors,

initiating contacts to relevant websites, distributing printed brochures to more than 2,000 librarians in relevant disciplines, a monthly newsletter, press releases to media outlets, and advertisements in conference publications and relevant journals. She concluded that librarians need to structure the relationships between library patrons and information by means of marketing.

The University of Houston also made efforts in marketing digital special collections. In their article, Westbrook, Prilop, and German (2012) recognized the importance of engaging the reference librarians, one of the most important stakeholders for marketing digital special collections. After consulting with the reference librarians, they designed and launched a new user interface called Image Café, which helped resolve difficult issues of searching and browsing functions on the old digital platform. They then carried out a series of approaches to marketing, including distributing Image Café's link via email to the campus community, reaching out to the Faculty Senate announcement list, providing routine updates to reference librarians, and publicizing on the library social media pages. By implementing these marketing strategies, the digital collection received almost 500 unique viewers in the first three months and a 20% rise in return visitors.

Lally and Dunford (2007) successfully used Wikipedia to promote the University of Washington's digital special collections by adding links to relevant Wikipedia entries. They considered Wikipedia an essential tool for marketing their digital collections to potential users at the point of their information needs. By applying the same marketing strategies, scholars and librarians found that traffic to digital collections driven from Wikipedia outperforms other types of source traffic, and visits increased multiple times after inserting digital special collection links to relevant Wikipedia items (Elder, Westbrook, & Reilly, 2012; Szajewski, 2013; Galloway & DellaCorte, 2014).

There is not much literature on digital special collection or institutional repository marketing to end users. Digital special collections are often very specific in their subject area, and institutional repositories have the exact opposite problem of being extremely broad in the subjects that they cover. The authors attempt to fill this gap by exploring what types of advertising might prove most effective in attracting long-lasting patron use of digital special collections and institutional repositories.

First Forays into Digital Special Collection Marketing

In 2008, the Texas Tech University Libraries became serious about marketing, pioneering the way for other libraries by establishing a department to focus on promoting services. A new full-time director joined the Libraries Communications & Marketing (C&M) department and was laying the ground work for the structure that makes up what is known today as the Libraries' Creative Team. Until that point in time, the Libraries had never had a strategic marketing and communications plan, a master marketing calendar, or a published cohesive and integrated marketing campaign for its services.

Similarly, the digital special collections and its scanning initiative was in its infancy. While scanning had been active since 2005, the whole process was not smooth, and those involved with digital initiatives were still trying to figure out their focus. The items that were online were not utilized as expected, so a marketing push seemed like a good way to let students and faculty know the collections existed.

The digital special collections promotion was part of the Libraries' first-ever awareness campaign. This campaign ran during the 2008-2009 academic year with the goal of keeping the Libraries and a handful of highlighted services fresh on the minds of the campaign's audience – students. The goal of the digital

special collections promotion was to increase usage of the items in this collection – specifically art and architecture images, historical family photos, streaming art music, and rare books and materials.

During fall 2008, the digital special collections promotion ran on multiple channels, spanning both print and electronic mediums, beginning November 17 until the last day of classes, December 3. The whole campaign had a total of 1,956 distributed marketing pieces. Marketing collateral for the campaign included:

- News release to the campus newspaper
- Blurb for the Parent & Family Relations department newsletter
- Campus e-mail distribution list
- Website news story
- Printed bookmark
- Door and elevator sleeve inserts
- HTML e-mail for faculty
- Digital poster (in the University Library)
- Print poster (in the University Library, Student Union Building, and Architecture Library)
- Table tent
- Wallpaper images for public computers

Marketing material with messages specific for the segmented art and architecture audiences included:

- HTML e-mail for art and architecture advisors
- Bookmark
- Door and elevator sleeve inserts
- HTML e-mail for faculty
- Digital poster (in the University Library)
- Print poster (in the University Library, Student Union Building, and Architecture Library)
- Table tent
- Wallpaper images for public computers

In the spring of 2009, the digital special collections promotion ran again on multiple channels, spanning both print and electronic mediums, beginning April 14 through the end of the semester, April 29. The Creative Team added the following marketing collateral for the digital special collections promotion:

- E-mail signature for Libraries faculty and staff
- Podcast
- Facebook posts
- Myspace posts
- Window cling
- HTML e-mail for the Graduate School

At the conclusion of the promotion, the team compared usage to previous years-to-date. While other promotions saw successes (i.e., electronic resources' database searches increased by 53 percent and full-text journal usage increased by 25 percent), the digital special collections showed no increase.

This lack of a positive reaction was disheartening considering the campaign's pros: pushed on multiple channels, integrated images, cohesive messaging, and the service had never before been promoted. However, the campaign had its cons, too. The Library only has so much advertising display "real estate"

and the Creative Team had to work with a two-week window of time during the fall and spring to run each promotion. This was not enough time to build awareness of anything. However, the lesson learned from this campaign attempt is more about the audience than the spread of channels the campaign ran on.

Library Services Fair

In 2010, those working with digital special collections were looking for ways to connect their collections to more on-campus patrons. An event that the digital special collections librarians began to participate in was the Library Services Fair, which was an annual event designed to introduce students to services the library offers in a fun carnival setting. Coordinated by C&M, each service was given a booth, candy, and handouts, and some of the services developed games that contributed to the carnival atmosphere. The librarians created playing cards with images from all digital collections for a match game, and a slide show of images from the yearbook displayed on a mobile digital unit next to the booth. In addition to that, cards with links to both the electronic theses and dissertations and yearbook collection were handed out.

Usage on the site did increase in the days before the event as the librarians used the collections to pull and make the materials for the event. After the event, a link to the collections along with pictures from the yearbook were promoted on Facebook on the 15th. There was a slight bump in usage on the 17th at this time, but upon further investigation, it was revealed that this was from a demo of the architecture images collection. That demo resulted in a large increase in usage in the architecture collection, but when the yearbook collection statistics were investigated further, there was no increase in use. In fact, when the spike for the architecture class was removed, it seemed usage of the special digital collections actually decreased after the fair rather than increased as shown in Figure 1.

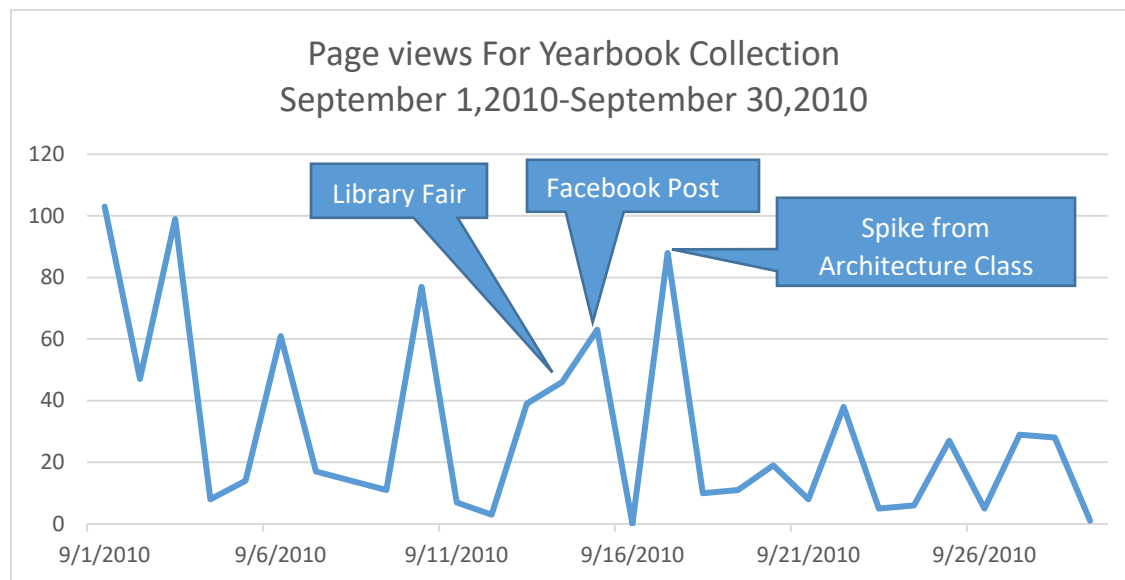


Figure 1 Yearbook digital special collection usage from September 1, 2010, to September 30, 2010.

At the following year's Library Service Fair, the digital special collections group set up a booth and had a "guess how many marbles game" where each marble represented ten theses and dissertations that were available in the library's institutional repository.

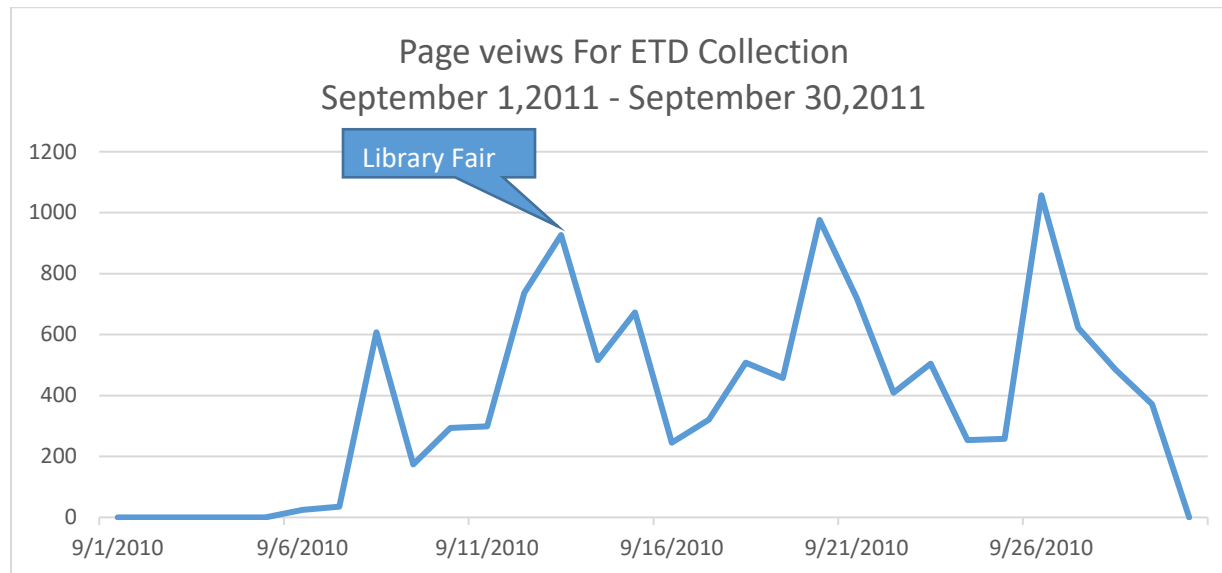


Figure 2 TTU ETD Collection September 1, 2011, to September 30, 2011.

The lesson learned from the two years of participation was that the annual Library Services Fair was not an effective marketing tool for digital special collections. The digital special collections group also began to realize that perhaps they were targeting the wrong audience in their marketing. Current students, they realized, may not have a very strong connection to the history of the university, so they may not be interested in pouring over old yearbooks. A better audience for yearbooks would be alumni. The theses and dissertations are mostly for graduate students, and any graduate student at the university would not need a fair aimed at undergraduates to be made aware of the collection. The other major users of the electronic theses and dissertations were external researchers who would also not benefit from an in-library event. After this year, the group decided not to participate in subsequent Library Services Fairs and to instead look into other marketing strategies.

Yearbook Photo Contest

In the spring of 2013, two digital special collections librarians designed a contest to inspire students to use the digital special collections. The aim of the contest was for students to comb through the 84 volumes of the digitized yearbook collection and select photographs to recreate. They could show how the university had changed over the decades; for example, how did studying in the library look today compared to 50 years ago? Or they could have attempted to recreate a picture they found in the exact location it was taken, pose for pose, right down to the clothing. The competition had been inspired in part by a History Pin project that the University of Texas at Austin Briscoe Center for American History had done (University of Texas, 2013), which documented through historic photographs the evolution of the campus. In addition, the librarians drew from a number of popular social media posts in which people re-

staged decades-old photos in present-day contexts. They had hoped to tap into the interest people have in taking stock of the passage of time and their places in it.

The yearbook photo competition appeared to be a new opportunity for the library to engage with student patrons in a unique way that encouraged creativity, enriching campus history, and exploring the digital collections. Behind the scenes, the contest was also designed as an avenue for the newly formed Digital Resources (DR) Unit to get specific feedback on how the yearbook collection site was organized. The digital special collections had just been moved from CONTENTdm to DSpace, and the DR Unit was curious about how that change in layout would affect usability.

The contest was placed on a quick turnaround in order to have it coincide with the 90th anniversary of the university's founding. The whole project took place during the 2013 fall semester. The librarians shaped the competition around two categories: "Then and Now," for pictures showing how locations have changed over the years and "Nostalgia," for recreating pictures found in the yearbook. There would be one winner for each category in addition to an overall winner. Participation was limited to currently enrolled university students to keep the competition fair. Students would submit their entries via email, and then eligible photos would be posted to the Libraries' Facebook page for voting via "Likes" and "Shares." The winners would receive a gift card as their prize.

The digital special collections librarians worked with the Libraries C&M Department to craft an announcement on the university's listserv, an HTML email for all librarians to send to their individual distribution lists, a website news story, a print poster that was displayed in the library lobby, digital posters that were displayed on monitors in the library and other academic buildings, as well as a wallpaper image that displayed on the library's public computers. C&M also advertised the contest on the Libraries' Facebook page. The campaign would be considered successful if it garnered at least 10 to 15 entries and would be deemed a failure if it only received zero to five entries.

After keeping the submission window open for eight weeks, only one student had entered a photograph in the competition, so the campaign ultimately failed. The one entry, however, was a sign that meaningful participation had been possible. The student had pulled a photograph from deep within one of the yearbook volumes from the 1940s, recreated it from the same spot on campus, and provided an artist statement on what the photograph meant to her.

Possible reasons the competition was not successful include the time of year it was held, lack of interest in the subject matter, the need for different targeted marketing approaches such as getting buy-in from art or photography departments, or the limitations on those who could participate. The better audience for the contest might have been the very alumni whose history is on display in the yearbook digital collection. If the library had partnered with the alumni association for the competition, they might have seen more (and perhaps more enthusiastic) participation. Of course, the lack of participation could have been symptomatic of the difficulty in looking at the yearbooks in the new content management system, DSpace. Even low participation in this marketing attempt provided some insight on the (un)usability of the collection.

If the only way to ensure vast on-campus use of a digital special collection is intense, one-on-one interaction with patrons, this was yet another indicator that these digital collections were not designed for use by traditional on-campus library patrons.

Lesson Learned

In all three cases, the C&M department and DR Unit realized there was a problem with identifying the most engaged audience for the special digital collections. High-quality, intense marketing for a general population is not guaranteed to get someone interested in something for which he or she feels they have no need. Architecture images are really only valuable to the architecture students who are already being introduced to them through informational sessions with the architecture image librarian. The streaming art music collection's audience is music faculty who are already aware of the collection. The historical family photos are mementos of a specific donor's family, and students generally are not interested in someone's family album. The rare books are so specific in nature that there is a very small chance anyone on campus would be interested in their content.

In reconsidering the digital special collections promotion, the DR Unit wondered if they completely had missed the mark on the audience – focused too locally (current students) when they should have been thinking more globally (all researchers who could access our materials from anywhere in the world). They then had to face the challenge of mounting a global marketing strategy on a limited budget.

Possible Solution: Focused Community Connections

While these three active marketing efforts were going on, the librarians also worked on a different approach to digital special collection marketing. These efforts included increasing the crawlability of the digital special collections by putting them into DSpace and linking specific items to outside resources. The digital special collections librarians finally found some measure of success by alerting niche communities to the existence of digital collections relevant to their interests. Just as Ranganathan's Law dictated that every book has its reader, the DR Unit librarians explored the possibility that every collection has its community.

One of the most specific digital collections the DR Unit curated was a faculty member's collection of photographs of sailing ships. This was not a collection designed for casual student browsing, but this faculty member knew of a community of sailing ship enthusiasts that would find this collection fascinating. The faculty member brought the website the Shipindex.org to the attention of the group. The Shipindex.org is a site dedicated to listing references to specific sailing ships in books and other media. The Digital Resources Unit contacted the site owner and provided them with a spreadsheet of the item titles, the specifics for each of the ships, and a link to each item. The ship collection has maintained strong use over time because it was connected to the right audience in an effective way. Putting the items in the index was a simple task that took less than half an hour to do and has had consistent payoff. This collection was fortunate that there was already a known community resource online to which the items could be linked. If there is an online community of researchers studying that topic, connecting those resources to that community should be the top priority for digital collection marketing.

The unit also experimented with a different kind of focused community connection, linking specific collection items to relevant Wikipedia articles. One item from the sailing ship collection was added to a relevant page on Wikipedia for Abner Coburn. From early 2010 to late 2013 (the time period the collections were in CONTENTdm), 3,380 page views came to the ship collection from Wikipedia, while 220 page views came from shipindex.org. Comparing this to the total 15,227 lifetime page views that the collection received, that means 23.6% of the collection's lifetime views came in from focused community

connections. The simple act of connecting this collection to two different communities brought in 23.6% more usage than if the collections were not connected.

Connecting digital special collections to Wikipedia, however, is not as simple as it may initially appear. Identifying appropriate pages for each item or collection takes time. The group has experimented with having student assistants do this work, but they lack an understanding of subject appropriateness. They found trying to connect each item with just the right page to be overwhelming. The librarians will therefore be taking up this work in the future. While adding to Wikipedia can be a tedious process, the DR Unit is confident in its success as a means to attract meaningful use. In the process of studying these usages statistics, the digital collections librarians became aware of other people linking collections to Wikipedia which revealed unknown strengths in the institutional repository, such as having rare, seminal works on human sacrifices and circumcision. It was exciting to learn a small number of users were already using the digital special collections to connect with focused communities.

Another solution that the digital special collections librarians are looking into includes linking the special collections to other collections through harvested metadata. Having the items represented in the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), for example, would be ideal. DPLA claims that collections linked to its digital library have received up to 55% more usage (2013). DPLA would allow the library to connect its digital special collections to communities within the broader context of other libraries' and museums' digital collections. The time and effort put into getting the collection linked to a repository that would be harvested by DPLA would be minimal compared to the time and effort of running multiple physical campaigns.

CONCLUSION

Marketing directly to university patrons is a constant effort that requires human, financial, and time resources and is limited to the immediate physical campus community. The students who come into the building have very specific majors and very specific information needs that the digital special collections have a very low chance of meeting. Focused community connection efforts such as resource linking and Wikipedia linking have been more effective than direct marketing efforts because they require little to no maintenance after they are implemented, and they have a greater chance of reaching appropriate audiences. Digital libraries can help transform small campus communities into large global ones, and institutions must be willing to take unconventional steps to reach new audiences with specific needs.

Future research will have to be done on how plausible it is to connect most resources to external online resources or if it is only possible to connect a few key items with the given resources. It is also not known at this time how much maintenance these links will require or if the Wikipedia approach is maintainable at a larger scale. Currently, a list is kept of Wikipedia entries and a notification is set up if those pages are edited to see if the link has been removed or changed. This is certainly not possible to do for more than a few dozen items without hiring someone else to focus on Wikipedia almost exclusively.

Instead of relying on finding communities of researchers to inform them about collections and link collections, the library could focus on developing these online communities. Instead of making a static digital collection that gets linked to from other places, the digital special collections campaign could focus more on the increased and enhanced opportunities available through social media (e.g., YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter), wikis, blogs and influential bloggers who speak to research audiences, and niche

forums. Paying attention to the referrals in Google Analytics could also be a way of identifying new communities or subjects to develop or highlight. A digital special collections campaign could be targeted not for the general masses, but the niche audiences who, collectively, create a much farther reach than any campaign could. Put simply, a long-tail marketing campaign, not an awareness campaign, could be the future of enticing users to the digital special collections (Anderson, 2004).

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