

AGGREGATING DIGITAL COLLECTIONS: TOWARDS A SOCIAL COMMUNITY FOR IDENTIFICATION, ORGANIZATION AND EVALUATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper details the development of a community-based digital collections repository designed in response to current challenges in identifying, organizing and evaluating digital collections. Built using Drupal, an open source content management platform, the repository enables users to find, review, and recommend digital collections while developing a social community around digital collections.

BACKGROUND

In the past decade, the growth of digital collections has been astounding. Public and academic libraries, museums and cultural heritage organizations, and public and private enterprises have created significant collections of digital content. Unfortunately, identifying these collections remains difficult. Inconsistent application of descriptive metadata [1] hinders their retrieval by search engines, and although several tools have been developed to increase visibility, there is still much to be done to facilitate the discovery and use of digital collections. OAIster [2] is a very comprehensive and successful tool for locating digital items, but searching and browsing at the collection or subject level is not possible. Registries such as Digital Collections and Content [3] and Opening History [4], are organized at the collection level, but users still require assistance to evaluate, compare and understand the purpose, scope and quality of each collection.

Through our digital collections repository, we are attempting to make the process of identifying, organizing, and evaluating digital collections easy and transparent. Users are able to find items at the collection-level, understand how the collection was evaluated, and how the user community views that collection.

DIGITAL COLLECTIONS REPOSITORY SYSTEM

The digital collections repository was designed to be inclusive of the best publicly available digital collections and to facilitate easy access, discovery, and use of those collections. In addition to simple discovery, the repository helps users to make informed decisions about the collections that best meet their research needs. We identified several important features and functionalities that were necessary to build a successful repository and that would enable users to gain the most from the system. These included robust and flexible organization schemas, multiple access points for search and browsing, administrator and user content submission, reviewing and ranking functionality, user/community profiles, and recommendation services.

In addition to feature/functionality identification, we took a number of additional constraints into consideration when choosing the appropriate system. First, the system needed to be an open-source option as there was limited finances to support a proprietary system; second, the system needed to be extensible and robust, offering ways to customize it for our specific repository needs both through programming and add-ons; and third, the system needed to provide strong administrative and user interface options that would allow both administrators and users to personalize and customize the

repository, in order to develop a social community around digital collections. After researching multiple open-source options, Drupal stood out as the best open-source content management system that would provide us with the necessary tools to develop the repository. In addition, Drupal is used successfully in multiple domains [5][6][7] and offers a strong open-source community that is constantly developing and improving the available options.

REPOSITORY FEATURES

- Organizational Schemas – using the built-in Drupal taxonomy, all collections are organized based on Dublin Core metadata and a flexible in-house created subject classification scheme. Users are also able to tag collections with their own words, helping to develop a strong folksonomy.
- Multiple Access Points – users can search and browse collections via access points such as subject, content type and organization. We are currently exploring ways to facilitate additional search and browse strategies.
- Personalization – users can easily register, add, review, comment, save to favorites, and develop a profile within the system.
- Administration – in addition to managing all the content, administrators can develop submission forms, add additional modules, and develop workflows for content management.

USERS

The system offers great benefit to a wide range of people, from the interested layman to the skilled researcher. Additionally, it offers increased benefits to two other groups:

Librarians

At a time where public libraries in particular are facing strict budget cuts, the repository can aid reference librarians by providing an increasingly comprehensive tool for identifying high quality open-access resources. The system has been introduced to members of the Drexel University Special Libraries Association.

Educators & Students

The digital collections repository is used as a teaching and learning tool within the Master of Science in Library and Information Science program at Drexel University. Students taking the Digital Libraries course are required to submit and evaluate digital collection using the system. This process provides a practical application of the theory taught in class, for example, the importance of consistent and descriptive metadata creation, and the ability to evaluate collections based on a range of user-centered criteria.

CURRENT & FUTURE RESEARCH

At the present time, the repository is populated with more than 300 collections, and we are in the process of cultivating a social community around these collections by reaching out to librarians and the public. In addition, we are beginning the process of system evaluation, including heuristic evaluation and usability studies.

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