

People of Auburn: Public Libraries and Co-Created Community Repositories

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Introduction

Libraries and archives have a long history of educating individuals on how to use, access, organize and preserve their personal, physical information. However, these efforts have not yet fully evolved to include digital media. With the increasing predominance of digital formats over analog ones, it appears that individual practice of information management often falls under the auspices of Google and Microsoft. I will discuss generally why and how information professionals should reassert their skill, credibility and leadership in this area. I will focus particularly on “co-created community repositories” as the means in which libraries and other memory organizations can interconnect with individuals through a multi-faceted approach involving education, technology, community, and shared expertise.

Public libraries and other memory organizations are potentially excellent sources for the provision of education to individuals regarding personal information management practices (Japzon, 2008). Firstly, public libraries are either gaining or creating state-of-the-art knowledge as they develop and maintain their own digital collections (Cole, T. & Shreeves, 2004). Secondly, public libraries are a vital part of communities (Agosto, 2007; Sullivan, 2003) and of the information economy and as such are in position to create connections between the two (Abend & McClure, 1999; Urban Libraries Council, 2007). Thirdly, public libraries already serve the role of educating users through information literacy skills programs (Eisenberg, Lowe & Spitzer, 2008). Lastly, public libraries are creating digital collections of local significance that could easily attract the involvement of community members (Dalbello, 2004).

Individuals are excellent resources for the creation of community collections. They provide knowledge of local history, customs and events and often have a personal interest in supporting community organizations. From the museum science community, Russo and Watkins (2007) have described “community co-creation” as cultural institutions and communities working together to create digital content, each benefiting and learning from the other’s expertise and experience. Library and information professionals working through their organizations provide a technical infrastructure and technical expertise in collection development and maintenance. Community members provide the knowledge that supports content development and contribute personal digital and physical artifacts from their own collections.

Research Questions

What are the practices in public libraries and archives with regards to collecting personal digital manuscripts and other personal digital content types?

How are the current best practices reflected in the digital collections currently being developed by public libraries, given local constraints?

In view of both best practices and local constraints, how can library and information science professionals build co-created community repositories? Or put another, how can LIS professionals teach community members about personal digital information management and how can community members teach LIS professionals about their communities through the individual contributions of its members?

Data Collection and Analysis

The Eckhart Public Library (EPL) in Auburn Indianaⁱ has agreed to work with me to build a co-created community repository, which we have decided to call, "People of Auburn." This year, ten diverse community members will make contributions of personal information to the repository in August 2010. Participants have been asked to contribute in items in both digital and physical formats that represent their connection to the Auburn community. Also, participants will be interviewed and the recording of the interview will be added to the community repository.

EPL's existing technical infrastructure will be used. In February 2010, five students from the School of Library and Information Science developed a guide to the best practices in these areas: privacy, copyright, organization, classification, appraisal, file formats, and storage media. This guide was used to evaluate the local digital collections practices at EPL. This evaluation and the nature of the items contributed by participants will provide the basis for the knowledge exchange component of the co-created community repository. A knowledge exchange workshop is to be scheduled for the fall following the interviewing and collection of personal information items.

Expected Contributions

This research expects to contribute to library practice and research in the following ways. Identify ways in which public libraries can connect with users in their own personal information spaces and at the same build community. Identify methods for teaching and providing information resources to public libraries users on the issues related to long term access to digital information. Suggest a model for LIS education that involves the partnering of LIS faculty, masters level students, and public libraries.

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¹ <http://www.youseemore.com/eckhart/default.asp>