Chapter 10
Pulling Content out the Back Door:
Creating an Interactive Digital Collections Experience

Amy J Hunsaker
University of Nevada – Reno, USA

Natasha Majewski
University of Nevada – Reno, USA

Laura E. Rocke
University of Nevada – Reno, USA

ABSTRACT

The University of Nevada, Reno Libraries is building a project and assessment-based organization that utilizes applications to increase the discovery of digital collections, enhances the online user experience, supports a growing Digital Humanities measure on campus, and encourages faculty and students to create projects using digital curation and various existing tools. A GeoHumanities Digital Project Specialist and Digital Humanities Historian were added to the library organization to create interactive exhibits. ESRI software was employed to create place-based storytelling using digital content held by CONTENTdm, CatDV, and other library platforms. By reimagining how we use such tools at our disposal, we can create new ways of interacting with information to create innovative ways for our patrons to re-engage with our materials.

INTRODUCTION

Just as a brick and mortar library needs a solid foundation to support and build physical resources, a digital library needs to have a solid web framework and supportive organizational environment in place before developing tools to expand on standard systems. At the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center, a small but goal-oriented staff is working toward building a project-based organization that focuses on utilizing or creating applications to increase the discovery of digital collections and enhance the online user experience. In addition, the Digital Initiatives team has expanded to support a growing Digital Humanities measure on campus and to encourage more faculty and students to create projects using digital curation and various existing tools. CONTENTdm is the technology tool we use to host and control content, but we have experimented with many ways of distributing the content so as to create a user-focused interactive environment. This chapter will discuss the organizational structure required to support the level of experimentation, development, and creative exploration that has been utilized by the UNR Library organization to make digital content more accessible and discoverable. In addition, specific software used by the Library to create interactive exhibits from digital content will be discussed in detail.

BACKGROUND

The UNR Libraries organization has gone through substantial shifts in the last few years. Although the Library does not have a large staff, personnel have been hired for new and existing positions, work groups have been created to tackle various tasks, and clusters handle projects that require various systems and skillsets. Part of the reorganization of the Libraries include the addition of an Assessment Librarian, Metadata Librarian, GIS Librarian, and Digital Initiatives Librarian. The Assessment Librarian has been instrumental in assisting with web and application development by designing and implementing methods to better understand how users experience digital content. Armed with a variety of assessment strategies, staff have used evidence to inform the design of web tools that are more intuitive, attractive, and consistent with users' work practices and preferences. Usability studies, which will be discussed later in this chapter, informed the most recent iteration of the Library website and Digital Collections interface. The Metadata Librarian provides support across departments by guiding the creation of non-MARC metadata in various systems so that content is easier to access in the web framework. Formatting and metadata standards within and across collections have been an important aspect of content interacting with the new website. In addition, the Metadata Librarian

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