



An easy-to-use collection management solution for historic materials

Situation

Staff at the University of Houston Libraries were faced with a problem. They had made a big push to digitize their historic and culturally significant materials, but had no real viable way to provide online access or to index them. The static HTML pages they had created to offer online access to their digitized materials were difficult to maintain and made it hard to refresh their content.

In 2009, Michele Reilly, Digital Projects Program Director, was brought on board to lead the development of the University of Houston Libraries' Digital Library. She understood the issues the Libraries faced and knew that they needed to be able to manage those digital collections in a systematic way. And she wanted a collection management solution that would make their digital collections viewable online more quickly and easily.

Solution

"We selected CONTENTdm® Digital Collection Management Software because it allowed us a lot of flexibility and agility with our digital collections," Reilly explains.

Prior to implementing the software, the Digital Projects team attended Amigos Library Services' CONTENTdm training. Reilly had worked with CONTENTdm before, so she was already familiar with the software's key processes and functionality, but she decided to take additional courses on customizing CONTENTdm.

Reilly has this to say about the Libraries' transition to CONTENTdm: "We were in the unique position of using CONTENTdm to start fresh. We had materials already

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Michele Reilly, University of Houston Libraries

AT A GLANCE

University of Houston Digital Library

- More than 20 digital collections incorporating over 7,500 digital items
- Web access to historic photographs, postcards, scanned scrapbook items and letters
- <http://digital.lib.uh.edu/>

waiting in the wings so we used those to write up and work out procedures and workflows, making our transition to CONTENTdm an easy one."

Before going live with their Digital Library, staff worked to get a pilot collection up and running using about 2,500 items. From that experience, they wrote a collection development policy and checklist. The development of that collection policy, as well as a detailed standardized workflow for the Digital Projects team, has been crucial to the Digital Library's success. Collection development begins with a project proposal, which allows the Digital Projects team to determine whether there are enough items to constitute a collection and to prioritize groups of items for digitization.

Once the team has set priorities for entering the proposed collections, students—under the supervision of a digital photo technician—begin the scanning of the primary source materials using overhead and flatbed scanners.

Students also begin compiling available metadata into a spreadsheet. From the spreadsheet, a metadata librarian and specialist develop the various metadata fields. The collection's owner also verifies the metadata, does quality assurance and, if necessary, adds metadata to the title or description fields. This very collaborative metadata development process is then completed by metadata specialists. Along the entire way, the team members log their progress to keep everyone informed about the various stages of digitization and curation.

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For libraries considering CONTENTdm for their digital collections, Reilly offers this view: “Out-of-the-box, CONTENTdm is the easiest and most flexible content management system around. It takes little or no coding skills to get first-rate collections up online quickly. Also, it is easy to use and easy to teach others how to use. We use a lot of student and intern workers to help us process our collections, so the ease of use was a big factor in our decision to use CONTENTdm.”

Results

In just one year, the Digital Projects team developed an exciting set of digital collections focused mainly, though not exclusively, on Houston and Texas history. More than 20 collections, incorporating more than 7,500 items, are now available online from The University of Houston’s Digital Library at <http://digital.lib.uh.edu/>.

“Our most popular collections are Historic Houston Photographs, Luis Marquez Photographs and India Illustrated,” says Reilly. “They constitute the largest portion of our hits.”

These online collections have received widespread support and great feedback from the campus and local community. Each month, 75 percent of visits come from users in Texas and 80 percent of those visits are from users in the Houston

area. The Digital Library staff also often receives feedback about how much users enjoy looking at the images. The University’s students like the collections because they can use the historic images in class presentations and papers.

In addition to leading the development of digital collections, Reilly works to promote their awareness and visibility using a number of tools from social media, including Facebook and YouTube, to WorldCat.org™. She uses the OCLC® WorldCat® Digital Collection Gateway, a Web-based, self-service tool, to upload the metadata of almost all their collections to WorldCat for added exposure.

“There are a few neat features [about the WorldCat Digital Collection Gateway] that I particularly like,” says Reilly. “One, you choose which collections that you want to upload. Some, all or none. That gives you a lot of flexibility in what you want to present to the world. Two, the upload is very easy. It literally walks you through it. Once you decide on your metadata fields, it takes care of the rest. Three, the added exposure to the items in your collections. How people find and get to your site doesn’t have to be serendipity. Giving them multiple places to find your materials is never a bad thing.”

“Our ultimate mission,” says Reilly, “is to provide our faculty and students with a really great resource for primary objects, so that they can further their own research.”



(LEFT) *Tipos del Edo de Guerrero* is from the Luis Marquez Photograph collection. These hand-tinted photos are by the Mexican photographer, who gave this collection to Mrs. Joe Betsy Allred, wife of Governor James Allred, after she visited Mexico in 1937.

(RIGHT) The photo of the Chempauk Palace is from the rare book titled, *India Illustrated*, which features fascinating photographs of early 20th century India under British rule. The book was published by Bennett, Coleman, & Co. circa 1905.

