

2013

The Use of Digital Strategies to Manage Print Collections More Efficiently, and Provide Global Access to Less-Used Research Collections: A Case Study at a Small U.S. Research University.

Gillian M. McCombs

Southern Methodist University, gmccombs@mail.smu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.smu.edu/libraries_cul_research

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Article citation: Gillian M. McCombs, (2013) "Using digital strategies to manage print collections more efficiently: a case study", *Library Management*, Vol. 34 Iss: 4/5, pp.290 - 298

This document is brought to you for free and open access by the Central University Libraries at SMU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Central University Libraries Research by an authorized administrator of SMU Scholar. For more information, please visit <http://digitalrepository.smu.edu>.

The Use of Digital Strategies to Manage Print Collections More Efficiently, and Provide Global Access to Less-Used Research Collections: A Case Study at a Small U.S. Research University.

Abstract:-

The Libraries at Southern Methodist University, in Dallas, TX, are not unusual in looking to develop digital strategies to manage their research collections. Although the Libraries had long seen the potential of digital technology for harnessing and organizing the intellectual capital of the University, it took several years for the efforts to gain critical mass. This case study documents a four-prong strategy that has been used to manage collections as diverse as nineteenth century photographs, early twentieth century regional art, faculty conference papers, church history and student engaged learning initiatives. Broad topics discussed include organizational culture, faculty and staff readiness, national developments and internal politics.

Print is not dead. We librarians know that, many of our library users know that. Print, particularly in its most well-known collated iteration, the book, continues to be one of the most “inclusionary, transformational and innovative” apps ever developed (IFLA, 2012). But at the same time, our profession needs to demonstrate that we embrace digital technology and are leading the information revolution in our various library communities. All types of libraries are being pushed to show the return on investment to their larger institutions and communities, and to work in an environment of heightened accountability and assessment (Kaufman and Watstein, 2008). Some in authority are even questioning whether there is still a need for physical libraries (Budd, 2005).

This new climate requires us to be strategic in our vision and politic in our alliances. We need to create a bold roadmap that will demonstrate how we enable our institutions to achieve their missions; that will position us in the mix as innovative, fearless leaders, and help us engage our constituencies to make the case for us in our blended digital/print world. Libraries are looking for ways to retain the sense of their original mission to collect, preserve and provide access to the record of human civilization (Weil, 1999), but at the same time, show that they are ‘in the mix’ and leading their institutions in technological initiatives.

This paper documents the path taken by one institution, Southern Methodist University, in its quest to manage its collections more efficiently and increase access while using digital technology. The four pronged approach shows a) how digitizing sampler collections from a unique special collections library led to the creation of b) a digital repository to harness the intellectual capital of the institution. At the same time, c) a grants program was created to digitize born-analog research papers and conference materials. Next on the horizon, the final prong, d) is a potential consortial project to provide online access to pre-1975 government documents as well as to continue joint initiatives with local institutions.

Context

Southern Methodist University (SMU) is a nationally ranked, research intensive, private university with seven degree-granting schools located in the heart of Dallas, Texas <http://www.smu.edu/>. SMU’s 11,000 students benefit from small classes, leadership opportunities, international study and innovative programs. SMU is celebrating the centennial of its founding in 1911 and its opening in 1915. SMU was founded by what is now The United Methodist Church, in partnership with civic leaders, and was shaped by the entrepreneurial spirit of the region. The University is nonsectarian in its teaching and committed

to academic freedom and open inquiry. The University prepares students for leadership in their professions and in their communities. Our location in the heart of Dallas – a thriving center of commerce and culture – offers students challenging experiences on campus and beyond. Relationships with the Dallas region provide a platform for launching careers throughout the world. Central University Libraries (CUL) is the main library system on the SMU campus. The SMU Libraries house more than 3M volumes and comprise the largest private academic library in the southwest.

Although not making its reputation by being on the cutting edge of technology, SMU has several pockets of digital innovation and energy. The Lyle School of Engineering has been a player in the TEDx conferences and created the TEDxKids@SMU conference; the Guildhall is the premier graduate video gaming program in the U.S., and the Meadows School of the Arts is pushing the digital envelope in a variety of arts-related areas. CUL saw a vacuum and a need and decided to forge a leadership role in the creative use of information technology to support SMU's curricular needs. Occasionally, CUL found itself ahead of its constituents, and sometimes – albeit very rarely – behind; but in 2012, it looks as though we are where we should be - just ahead of the main user base and leading our users along gradually. However, it has taken several years, and numerous false starts to build the current momentum.

How did it start?

In 1998, CUL was fortunate to hire a self-starting young government documents librarian with a prodigious work ethic and advanced technical skills who singlehandedly set the digital ball rolling. Believing that users needed to be able to access documents that few people knew existed without coming to the physical library, he set out to digitize some of the intriguing government documents in the collection under his aegis, focusing specifically on those related to WWII and the Home Front. At first, the database was separate from the library catalog, although available from the library's web page, and it soon generated a devoted cadre of off-campus users. As sometimes happens in specialized collections, these users gave back to the collection by donating their own collections. CUL became the owner of personal collections of photographs from two WWII army photographers, one of whom had already digitized his collection which allowed for easy conversion to public access.

Although this librarian left the university in 2002, it was clear that the future was going digital and that we had a good start. Accordingly, the CUL Dean sought funding to create a digital content manager position to solidify and broaden digital initiatives. CUL is rich in special collections, particularly in the areas of regional art, western Americana, the Borderlands, the oil and gas industry and transportation history, but there was little access to these stunning collections of photographs and archives unless one came on campus. The initiative was funded by the SMU administration for two years – a digital content manager (DCM) was hired, and work began.

Originally, the concept was to create a digital repository (text and images), to engage faculty and to digitize collections they would want to use in either their teaching or research. Clearly, CUL had many collections to choose from, and it was believed that faculty should be the drivers for selecting the collections to be digitized. Unfortunately, this concept worked better in theory than in practice. Faculty either wanted the collections digitized and made accessible 'instantly', asked for new digital collections

to be purchased, or were too busy developing and planning current research projects to be thinking ahead in this way. This general response has been remarked upon by several other institutions (Salo, 2008) which have traveled down the same path. Concurrently, the librarian hired as the DCM proved to be more of a 'big picture' thinker rather than an 'implementer' and the repository itself left much to be desired. The funding ended with little progress made and the library was obliged to rethink its plan to create a digital repository.

The second digital wave – creation of the sampler approach and the first prong of the strategy

Meanwhile, a committee had been convened to assess current 'off the shelf' packages specifically tailored to house images – our collection strength. In 2007, CUL decided to purchase one of the mainstream packages in use in academic libraries, OCLC's CONTENTdm. The first collection to be digitized – the media files of the Senator John Tower collection – was the result of collaboration between SMU and Southwestern University in Georgetown, TX. Southwestern had the collection (Sen. Tower received his BA from Southwestern and his JD from SMU) and SMU had the expertise. Several video clips were digitized in order to ascertain the nature of the collection and the condition of the medium with which we were dealing. After a small group presentation to interested parties, personally very moving for some of Sen. Tower's family members, an initial grant of \$10,000 to jumpstart the project was received from Sen. Tower's daughter, thereby creating the concept of the sampler collection. Entrepreneurial staff used eBay to purchase specialized equipment to convert the original files and began to hone their processes. From the get-go, CUL was committed to providing metadata description of the digital objects and was lucky enough to hire a part-time librarian already skilled in using CONTENTdm and in metadata description.

It quickly became clear that the sampler collection methodology had a variety of advantages. It was a way to develop the processes and understand the condition and scope of the collection that would then help in determining the total cost of digitizing the project; it was also a way to engage donors very tangibly with the material in the collection, and to show them firsthand what could be done. The sampler could then be leveraged to raise additional funds. And in the meantime, digital objects were already available to all potential users on the Internet and gathering usage statistics, giving us more data to underscore why this was important. Most of the collections listed in CUL's digital collections site <http://digitalcollections.smu.edu/all/cul/> began this way. Few of them represent the totality of the collections actually held. From the point of view of the staff, utilizing the sampler approach prevents them from getting overwhelmed by the large number of available objects and the scale of the projects as a whole.

A success story and the maturation of the sampler approach

A particularly successful example of this strategy in action is the story of the early Texas artists collection <http://digitalcollections.smu.edu/all/cul/tar/index.asp> The Hamon Arts Library, part of CUL, is home to the Jerry Bywaters Special Collections, which houses the art, works on paper, manuscripts and archives of Texas artists – in particular the Dallas Nine, including Jerry Bywaters (who had been a professor at SMU as well as a longtime director of the Dallas Museum of Art), Otis Dozier, Everett Spruce and others.

Some of the prime artifacts include the artists' sketchbooks and diaries. The Dallas Museum of Art (DMA) was already working with CUL to digitize the Otis Dozier sketchbooks. Feelers were put out to the Dallas Public Library which also held a substantial collection related to Texas artists. CUL's new digital collections developer (we had used funds from a technology endowment to create a permanent full-time position) put together an alliance that allowed the institutions to submit a successful grant application to the Texas State Library and Archives Commissions (TSLAC) as part of a Train to Share program that provided training on all facets of digital collections development.

As the project grew and a track record was created, more grants funds were received from local foundations. Texans are enormously proud of their culture and history, and this initiative started to attract the attention of several statewide historical associations and art collectors' groups. One of the SMU Libraries Executive Board members was specifically interested in Texas art. She was herself a collector and after her husband died needed a project in which to immerse herself. Accordingly, she was tapped by the CUL Dean to see if she would be interested in leading a fundraising initiative to raise more funds to digitize the early Texas artists' collections. The board member was delighted to have a very specific assignment. She pulled together various groups of friends and arranged for the Dean to give a small presentation at one of the meetings of the Texas Art Collectors' Organization (TACO). At the same time, the digital content developer and the curator for the Jerry Bywaters Special Collections gave presentations at the Center for the Advancement of Early Texas Art (CASETA) conference. The word spread and CUL was asked to host a TACO meeting at the library so the members could see the digital scanning operation in action. The board member had set a fundraising goal of \$10,000 as being a realistic goal to achieve.

The meeting (which also included CASETA members) was very successful. The collectors were delighted to see how thoughtful the University was being in caring for and promulgating access to their beloved Texas art; the images were glorious and small keepsakes - notepads/bookmarks/mugs - were produced. Even the Dean's holiday card that year used an image from this collection. Donations began to come in. A variety of lunches and small one-on-one meetings with potential supporters were conducted, and a gift of \$25,000 was received – very exciting indeed, since that brought the total for this project to \$31,000 (as of May, 2012). The board member had more than achieved her goal and was just ecstatic to have been helpful to the University while doing something she really loved. It had been calculated that to digitize all the images in this particular collection would cost \$50,000. Clearly, we now had more than enough funds to digitize over half the collection, with the potential for more grant funding along the way. We continued to strengthen our track record of solid digitization capability and grantsmanship. In the meantime, other local museums have expressed an interest in participating in the project, and the library now only needs to determine how best to continue the project while remaining true to the CUL mandate to support the teaching and research mission of the University. One of the most important aspects of this project was the delight of the staff involved when fundraising was successful and board members got involved. The staff of the Norwick Center for Digital Services had previously been more focused on backroom projects and processes. The opportunity for them to interact with collection users and donors has made their work much more interesting and meaningful. Today, there are over 10,000 digital images, and both the collections and the usage continue to grow.

The creation of the SMU digital repository – second prong

We had long been aware of the need to create a digital repository (DR), often called an institutional repository, to house and provide access, collectively, to SMU's research output. CUL had explored a number of different options over the last five to ten years, and kept a close watch on other university efforts across the nation. As SMU was ramping up its efforts to become a top 50 institution, that need was only going to become more critical. The challenge had always been, 'Where to start, and how to combine varying needs and current initiatives?' across a campus that was not particularly receptive.

The previous initiative to create a fledgling digital repository has already been outlined above as well as the subsequent decision to focus instead on images in the libraries' collections. However, once the CONTENTdm software was well entrenched, it became clear that it would not be a good platform for an open access institutional repository that would provide access to SMU's collective body of research – either born digital or needing conversion. Library staff then looked to develop a new strategy to engage the campus in creating a DR to store and provide access to SMU's scholarly output. This was a much broader initiative, and it was felt that in order to be successful, the libraries needed to partner with other campus units. Enter the political part of the equation.

In 2008, CUL and the Office of Information Technology (OIT) had partnered to enter into negotiations with the Texas Digital Library to create an SMU institutional repository (McCombs and Gargiulo, 2012) However, subsequent exploration of the product and services offered deemed it not suitable for University needs. In 2010, a new hosted solution, bepress' Digital Commons™ product, was tested and compared to D-Space. The product was favorably reviewed and a cost estimate solicited. At the time, all units at SMU were going through a variety of 2% cutbacks, and other funding needs had priority. There was also concern about how to engage faculty who, in many cases, have been slow to adopt new technology, as well as the need to be prepared to address a variety of copyright concerns. We could not afford the 'build it and they will come' approach that we had used before. It was felt a suitable technical solution would be to use an outsourced, less complex software/hardware solution such as that offered by bepress. However, the cultural issues still remained. We needed another partner, preferably from the academic side of the house.

In spring 2011, learning from our colleagues in Canada, we took a different tack. Instead of starting with the research gold standard – born digital objects – we used a model already in place at Simon Fraser University in Montreal (Bird, 2011.) This required the involvement of the Office of Research and Graduate Studies (ORGS). The Dean was very supportive. A geologist by background, he was himself concerned about how SMU was going to fulfill reporting and access requirements now in place for all recipients of federal funding. However, the global open access initiative combined with the U.S. Federal Research Public Access (FRPA) and America COMPETES Reauthorization Acts created a more auspicious climate for a new initiative. The Dean was also very anxious to look at ways to increase the reputation and awareness of SMU's research capability. SMU was already behind its peers in this area. We had to start somewhere. We believed that this would be a fairly low cost initiative, with buy-in from

three major players (the libraries, OIT and ORGS) who had the expertise, infrastructure, academic standing and commitment to make it succeed.

At the same time, SMU was completing its reaffirmation review by the Southern Association of College and Schools (SACS), and was drafting its requisite Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP.) SMU's focus was engaged learning, and a crucial component included the creation of an online student journaling requirement for which, at that time, there was no appropriate digital infrastructure. Building a DR allowed the University to show SACS that we were providing an appropriate structure to complete these requirements, and also for CUL to show campus administrators that we were supporting students.

We therefore created a pilot project which would, of course, be providing access to born digital research, but would also be digitizing analog faculty research objects for which there was no digital access, hoping to generate a familiarity and comfort with the process/system, and gradually move faculty to include born digital objects and digital access to a variety of campus online journals. Our proposal was to build the technical and administrative infrastructure for an open access digital repository, and then have faculty apply for grants funding (that would be supplied by the Office of Research and Graduate Studies) that would enable us to digitize their work. The projects would be vetted and approved by a combined faculty/library/OIT board, which would have the right to deny any projects deemed not meeting the pre-determined criteria. Success in this venture would determine the need to continue and/or expand. A successful model was well-documented at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, where a retired emeritus professor of physics found that papers he had written pre-Internet on the biological effects of radiation were the most downloaded works in the repository (Howard, 2010)

All three partners were willing to underwrite portions of this project. The CIO found funds to underwrite the software purchase for a three year license; CUL developed a staffing/equipment/implementation plan and the ORGS Dean promised funds for an in-house digitization grants program. It was anticipated that three years funding would be needed to ascertain the success (or not) of the initiative. The DR has now been in operation now for a full academic year and we are delighted with the community response <http://digitalrepository.smu.edu> Using Google Analytics, we can track usage at a micro level. As of May 31, 2012, it hosts 305 papers and other works, and repository materials were downloaded 2,801 times to date. Since the repository's inception on October 1, 2011, it has received 17,636 page views and 3,078 visits. For instance, the site received 286 visits in May and 58% of these were new visitors. 40% of all site visits were conducted from the SMU network (on-campus computers). We can compare month by month and see the top referring sites. Meanwhile, the software tabulates the top ten downloads for the month and sends that information to the content owners. The unveiling of the grant process took a little longer than anticipated, and did not happen until the middle of the spring semester after the first meeting of the Digital Repository Advisory Board (DRAB) which met to talk about processes and the project as a whole. However, grants are in the process of being awarded, and funding will be allocated by the ORGS Dean from next year's funds.

Consortial opportunities – prong 4

The final phase of CUL's digital strategy for providing global access to the libraries' collections and to SMU's research will rely on expanding current consortial initiatives and looking for new partners and opportunities. Part of the success of the Texas Artists project (documented above) was due to creating partnerships with local institutions. Many grant-awarding agencies actually stipulate a partnership requirement, while most others look very favorably at applications that include partners. CUL is now being solicited by other institutions that would like to join the Texas Artists project, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a distinguished local art museum, and is assessing just exactly what the next phase should be in this project.

Meanwhile, there is a sense that the time is right to chart a new direction. Earlier this year, the SMU Libraries were accepted as members of the Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA), a consortium of 32 research libraries located across 16 Midwestern & Western states with common interests in programs related to scholarly communication, interlibrary loan, shared electronic resources, cooperative collection development, digital libraries, staff development and continuing education. GWLA has defined one of its strategic directions to "develop and provide a suite of user-focused services that will improve access to information, be competitive, and will promote reform of the scholarly communication system." (GWLA, 2012) With this as a strategy, several consortial projects have been suggested, including government technical reports of which SMU has many, right from the inception of the federal program. It remains to be seen whether this is the project we will take up next, however, the consortial potential seems unlimited.

Conclusion

There is clearly no "one size fits all" when it comes to creating a digital strategy for preserving and providing access to library collections in the 21st century (Caplan, 2007), but hopefully there are enough different models for everyone to use, build on, tweak and adapt. The library profession is generous in its sharing of best practices for the express purpose of enhancing access and services for users on a global scale. There are many issues to deal with, and each institution will have a different set. One issue that most U.S. academic libraries are dealing with is that of scale. The collections are so many and so huge, where to begin? We have perfected the art of scanning in bulk, but how to create enough metadata to provide the kind of access that is now expected? Can we safely employ 'crowdsourcing' (Shirky, 2009) as a method for increasing the rate of metadata creation, as the NY Public Library has done for both historical maps and the transcription of historical menus (Gan, 2011?)

Developing a strategic plan for digital initiatives must be an integral part of each institution's roadmap. Nancy McGovern has created a very nice image of a three-legged stool to represent her three prong strategy – technology, organization, and resources (both human and financial) (McGovern, 2007) and there are many other models available. One of the important questions to ask is 'Is an institution culturally willing to take risks and be entrepreneurial?' There are few opportunities to begin with a blank slate, so developing a culture that is disposed to change is essential (McCombs and Gargiulo, 2011). The entire library must embrace change and the use of technology to help create change. This modus operandi must be built into the organization's strategic planning processes. SMU's CUL has come a long way since it embarked on this strategy and staff are held accountable every year to the goals set in its

strategic plan (CUL, 2008). Taking advantage of opportunities as they arise, hiring staff with an entrepreneurial spirit and developing and following a thoughtful strategy will help determine success – a win-win for the University, its many constituents, and researchers around the world.

REFERENCES

- Bird, G. (2011), "Small-scale Digitization Goes Big Time." *C&RL News*, Vol. 72 No. 3, pp. 149-152.
- Budd, J. (2005), *The Changing Academic Library: Operations, Culture, Environments*. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries.
- Caplan, P. (2007), "Preserving Digital Collections," WebWise 2007, Pre-Conference Session #1. <http://intranet.library.arizona.edu/teams/dlist/abstracts/WebWise%202007.pdf> (Accessed June 4, 2012)
- Gan, V. (2011), "All Hands on Deck: NYPL turns to the Crowd to develop Digital Collections." <http://www.nypl.org/blog/2011/09/15/all-hands-deck-nypl-turns-crowd-develop-digital-collections> (Accessed June 3, 2012)
- Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA) website. <http://www.gwla.org/> (Accessed June 3, 2012)
- Howard, J. (2010), "Digital Repositories Foment a Quiet Revolution, *Chronicle of Higher Education* 6/23/2010 <http://chronicle.com/article/Digital-Repositories-Foment/65894/> (Accessed June 4, 2012)
- IFLA 2012 conference web site. <http://conference.ifla.org/ifla78/calls-for-papers/treating-print-in-increasing-digital-collection-issues-dilemmas-directions> (Accessed May 30, 2012)
- Kaufman, P. and Watstein, S.B. (2008), "Library Value (return on investment, ROI) and the Challenge of Placing a Value on Public Services." *Reference Services Review*, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 226-231. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00907320810895314> (Accessed 6/5/12)
- McCombs, G.M. and Gargiulo, J. (2012), "Pegasus, PONI and the iPad: a Thirty Year Strategic Alliance Creates and Environment for Technical Innovation and Enhanced Academic Support at Southern Methodist University." *Journal of Library Administration*, Vol. 52, No. 2, pp. 217-229. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01930826.2012.655605> (Accessed June 4, 2012)
- McGovern, N.Y. (2007), "A Digital Decade: Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going in Digital Preservation?" *RLG DigiNews* Vol. 11, no. 1. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/60441> (Accessed June 4, 2012)
- Salo, D. (2008), "Innkeeper at the Roach Motel." *Library Trends*, Vol. 57, No. 2, pp.98-123.
- Shirky, C. (2009), *Here Comes Everybody: the Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. New York, N.Y. : Penguin Press.
- Unbooked & Unbound: Central University Libraries for the Second Century*, Strategic Plan 2008-13. <http://smu.edu/cul/staffresources/stratplan/unbooked.pdf> (Accessed June 4, 2012)

Weil, S.E. (1999), "Introduction." *The New Museum: Selected Writings by John Cotton Dana*, ed. Penniston, W.A., pp. 13-17. Newark, NJ: The Museum.