Digital Asset Management in Transition:

Archiving 2.0

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Digital Asset Management in Transition
This session seeks to explore how various types of digital assets originating in cultural institutions are archived, cataloged and accessed. Museums, archives and libraries increasingly create digital content with respect to collections, exhibitions, and other events, which the institution owns or has generated for educational purposes. These digital assets can take many forms, such as collection records, image surrogates, finding aids of exhibition histories, web-based artworks, podcasts of gallery talks, and individual exhibition web sites. They can be managed by various departments within an institution, utilizing many different technologies. A variety of digital assets will be discussed, as well as the underlying hardware and software employed to catalog and/or make them accessible to staff and the public.


Speakers: Layna White, Head of Collections Information and Access, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Bret Nicely, Web Generalist, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Sue Maberry, Director of the Library and Instructional Technology, Otis College of Art and Design
Otis College of art and design was established 1918 in Los Angeles near Downtown. 10 years ago we moved to the Westside.

We have about 1100 undergraduates plus 60 graduate students
The Library has about 45,000 volumes and about 5,000 video/dvds.

The Visual Resources Department at Otis --and at many art and design colleges-- is part of the Library.

We have 3 professional librarians, 3 paraprofessionals, and some part timers.
Since 2001, we have played a key role in technology leadership at the college. That’s when we installed the MDID software, stopped making slides and managed to get all the faculty to start using digital images.

In 2004, I was officially assigned the role of Director of Instructional Technology at the college I work closely with the Director of Academic Computing and a Director of Administrative Computing. But I report to the Provost.
Thanks to a grant from the Getty from 2002-2004, we were able to catalog and digitize our collection of about 2000 artists' books.
We purchased Content DM as our Digital Asset Management System to hold the artists’ books. This is a system used by many libraries, now owned by OCLC.

Content DM is a digital asset management system and, as such, has the potential of managing many collections. And we had a vision for many more projects.
The Otis archives were completely unorganized, uncataloged, and scattered throughout various offices.
We had no archivist. Just a vision to tackle the institutional archives…

So, in our spare time, we created a pilot project.

We thought that if administrators could see value, we could get more funding to continue.
We scanned about 150 items, many with multiple pages, totally about 1000 images and put them in CONTENTdm. Everyone liked having this resource.

But we didn’t get to hire an archivist.
What we got instead was more responsibility for instructional technology.

I’m not saying this was forced upon me. I could see for myself what the organizational priorities should be.

Faculty were expressing a need for e-portfolio software so that students could display their work. And they wanted websites for themselves and their courses.

I was asked to recommend software for this.

In 2005, we acquired an e-Portfolio system from Digication, software developed by RISD faculty. It happened to come with a Learning Management System. So we started managing that as well.

We call it OSpace
Everything was changing. And so were we.
In 2005, we received a substantial 3-year grant to create a Teaching Learning Center within the Library so that faculty could experiment with new technologies and discover ways in which technology might improve student learning.

We got to hire one extra person to accomplish this. And we also had money to provide small incentives to faculty for this exploration.
We helped faculty and students create and use e-portfolios...
Then they began to experiment with wikis...
Blogging was embraced by several of the English faculty.
Flash learning objects got created.
We acquired land in Second Life and we built things. And students built things. A sculpture faculty even figured out how to build objects in Second Life and output their design into real life 3D models using the school’s rapid prototyping equipment.
Art historians, and social scientists created audio and enhanced podcasts. This was particularly helpful for non-native English speakers and students with learning disabilities.
And, when Apple decided to expand iTunesU, we were right there.

In fact, they featured our site, among others, in their announcements-- which got us a lot of press. Needless to say, the Administration was very happy about this development.
Many faculty became interested in making video Learning Objects for their courses. But it became obvious that they had neither the time, nor skills to create them alone.

So, using that grant $, we began another pilot. We produced videos FOR them.…

How To skill based videos
Interviews with Faculty
Information literacy tutorials
We recorded lectures by visiting artists

This is a very popular program.
When YouTube announced their collaboration with higher ed in 2007 and we created an Otis Channel.
Over the past 3 years, as an institution, we’ve created a huge number of all kinds of digital assets.

Over the past year alone, we’ve uploaded 65 videos to our YouTube Channel.
In 2007, we took 14 people to the New Media Consortium Conference where we won a Centers of Excellence Award for the TLC.
The buzz about Web 2.0 has continued to grow at Otis as has the use of all sorts of web 2.0 technologies.
We’re trying them all.

I encouraged the Admissions Director to create this Facebook page and he got over a hundred fans in just a couple of days— with no advertising.
It’s been a frenzy of activity which we have encouraged.
But we did not stop to worry about archiving.

Luckily the College recently updated its server and back-up systems in the past year so at least everything on internal servers is getting backed up.
But, now the grant funding is ending, we’re coming back to our original vision of collecting our institutional archives in one place.

But there’s still the problem...

How to you archive without an archivist?
Take the Otis Gallery for example.

They have decades worth of slides, press releases, catalogs, and now videos which comprise their exhibition records.
Their only thought at first was making webpages to document their history.
We convinced them to use ContentDM.

We put in samples.
We made a space for them. With their input, we created the cataloging format, metadata scheme, work flow methods, etc.

But, in 4 years’ time, nothing much got done.

Not for lack of will. There just is never enough time.

And this is the truth I came to realize and must constantly remember…. It’s more fun to create the projects than to archive them.

Even DOCUMENTING projects is often built into the consciousness of the faculty and event organizers. But actually going the next step and putting those assets someplace where others can find and use them…. That’s the issue.

I’m sure that most museums and large universities have long since recognized the need for archiving their institutions and have people in place who are responsible for this work. But it certainly isn’t true of many smaller institutions.
I actually have no answers for you. I only have questions.

All I know is that at Otis there has been a recent explosion of content created and it appears to be spiraling out of control. It’s all very exciting. But my librarian side is beginning to freak out about how to proceed with managing all these digital assets.

Let me talk about a few of the issues I need to confront very soon.
Academic Departments have been collecting theses and final projects for decades. Sometimes they give them to the Library. Sometimes they keep them in boxes in their departments. Some keep everything. Some only keep selected projects. We do not have a method for dealing with these.

We just finished our accreditation process this winter and it has become clear that e-portfolios that students would keep throughout all 4-years could be an important assessment tool, as well as provide material for a capstone experience in their last year. The portfolios could include visual, written and multimedia materials.

Now they are asking the library for assistance with this issue.

We've convened a task force of faculty and librarians to consider the options and make a plan.
We have two options each with advantages and disadvantages. Both handle multiple formats of digital content.

We are already providing software for students to create their own portfolios through Digication. But we don’t archive or control that content. Students could take down that work at any time. Also the images are small and can’t be easily re-purposed. But it’s very easy.

Creating portfolios in ContentDM is a methodology which would truly archive student work as well provide more options for use in assessment, in particular. But the Library and the department would have to manage that process. And, it would be a lot of work.
Here’s another issue.

All that multimedia content. 65 videos, scores of audio podcasts with a lot more on the way.

It’s so easy to add items to YouTube and ITunes. Anyone can do it. They are readily accessible. But we really need to save those videos in a higher resolution. What about the audio podcasts. Are they all valuable and worth archiving? What about all that source footage? If easily accessible, it and could be repurposed and used by others. But it would take a lot of work to catalog. Saving moving footage files on servers seems impractical to me. File sizes are huge, capturing takes a lot of time, and there are format issues to contend with.

I’m clear that we have outgrown the system we have now which is “ask Kathleen, she’ll remember.” But she can’t remember any more. There’s just too much. Our summer project will be to make a simple log of each source tape and a storage system for the tapes along with some method to search those logs so that, as we go forward, we can find and use content we have already shot. My staff is easily capable of doing this, but I will have to insist that they stop creating long enough to handle what I perceive to be a potential loss of digital assets.
Here’s another project I’d like to tackle which would be an important service to the college.

Whenever you ask people in the Publications Department how they are archiving images and publications, they say, “Oh, it’s on my hard drive.”

As Otis Librarians, we have a vision that selected excellent images that represent the college and student and faculty work should be available to others. I fear that there is such a mass of these digital assets out there that taking this on will overwhelm my staff. Yet, the longer we wait, the more out of control it will become. If only we could have a methodology for capturing the most important college assets and putting them in Contentdm…
And what about Flickr? Many departments are using it to document not only college activities, but student and course activities as well.

The Admissions Department now has hundreds, maybe thousands of images on Flickr. It’s just so easy to use. How could we ever compete? Even if we trained them to use CONTENTdm and asked them to selectively upload some of their images, I doubt if they would have the time to really take that on.
What about websites?
The college is launching a new website this summer. Is it important to archive this old site? From time to time, we have wanted to trace the history of our website and we’ve had to rely on the Wayback Machine, which has proven less than adequate. Would it be enough to simply create a PDF of an old web page and save that?

I also have to migrate all the library pages and have to figure out how to organize and provide access to all the various web 2.0 projects that are available. Many in our community are overwhelmed by all the various websites used now. The Web Team has been discussing the concept of “small pieces loosely joined,” but I would love to figure out a clearer, easier way to provide access to everything for those who are just beginning to explore.
Conclusions?

It’s one thing to put things up on the Web. It’s another thing to actually archive them for the institution. We’re a college without a well organized institutional archive of print materials, now faced with an exponentially increasing number of born digital assets. I have to ask myself now, which are the priorities for projects that I should tackle.

With all the new technologies, everyone is a creator and potential publisher of content. What is to be the role of librarians is all this? I wonder if is it important to archive all web 2.0 projects including course blogs and wikis? Maybe just representative samples? Many Web 2.0 technologies are meant to be informal. Can (or should) we archive them in a formal manner? Also, what does it even mean to “archive” a wiki? Or a blog? Or Second Life objects? In what way would that be possible and useful?

I see that the enthusiasm for creating and making public is greater than the enthusiasm for archiving— at least in many places. But I greatly admire all the digital archiving projects that I see happening in libraries. Our role is changing and I’ll be interested to see where we end up.