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Technology left Behind -- How to Get Your Art Fix

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Technology Left Behind — How to Get Your Art Fix

Column Editor: **Cris Ferguson** (Electronic Resources/Serials Librarian, James B. Duke Library, Furman University, 3300 Poinsett Highway, Greenville, SC 29613; Phone: 864-294-2713) <cris.ferguson@furman.edu>

In November 2004, **Kodak** announced the discontinuation of its line of slide projectors. (<http://www.kodak.com/US/en/digital/av/slideProjectors/>) While **Kodak** is only one vendor of slide projector equipment, I fear their decision marks the beginning of the end for slide collections and slide libraries. As more vendors discontinue manufacturing traditional slide projectors lines in favor of digital projectors and other more advanced technologies, the extensive slide collections housed in art departments, museums, special collections, and art and architecture libraries are facing extinction. Replacement parts, like carousels and bulbs, for aging slide projectors are becoming increasingly difficult to find and expensive to pay for. If the equipment breaks and replacements cannot be found, the slides themselves become a virtually useless commodity.

With only five functioning slide projectors (all of which are manufactured by **Kodak**) in the possession of the **Furman University Art Department**, the **Furman University Libraries** and the **Computing and Information Services** department, initiated a project to investigate alternative ways to provide access to the 30,000 images housed in the slide library, once the remaining slide projectors no longer function. Our focus has been on image repositories and the various products available on the market that could help us obtain or provide access to the images we need. We are still in the process of our investigation and we have made no definitive decisions, but for those of you facing the same bleak outlook for your own slide collections, this might help jump start your own investigation.

There are five fairly reasonable ways to fill the gap in access left by broken slide projectors.

1. Hope that 1) the second-hand market for slide projectors and equipment remains strong and 2) there will be enough supply to meet demand.

You can always use online auction sites to purchase parts and bulbs. (**eBay** has a whole category devoted specifically to slide projectors.), a tactic that certainly has its appeal. Find-

ing a way to replace efficiently a slide collection consisting of many thousands of slides can be a daunting task, made all the more difficult by the fact that most institutions are restricted by time and money. It is tempting to stick with our slide projectors, just buying replacement pieces and parts as we find them. If the truth be told, with the slide projectors having only just been discontinued, we could probably go for at least a couple more years before we at **Furman** are completely unable to utilize the slide collection.

2. Purchase / subscribe to collections of images made available in an online database to use in place of your traditional slide library.

This has been our library's primary area of investigation. To my knowledge, there are only a few products that consist solely, or at least primarily, of images. Some examples include:

- **Oxford University Press' Grove Art Online** — <http://www.groveart.com/>
- **Princeton University's Index of Christian Art** — <http://ica.princeton.edu/>
- **The Mellon Foundation's ARTstor** — <http://www.artstor.org/>
- **Art Museum Image Consortium's AMICO Library** — <http://www.amico.org/>

This past winter the **Furman University Libraries** focused on the evaluation of **ARTstor**.

We conducted a university wide trial and solicited feedback from faculty across campus. Through the course of our evaluation, we found a great deal to recommend the database. The database currently contains over 300,000 images and is expected to have half a million by 2006. The images, which include pictures of paintings, photography, sculpture, and more, can be downloaded for use in PowerPoint presentations

and classroom lectures. In addition, professors can create collections of images augmented with their own personal commentary for use in a class or homework assignment. There is also a handy zoom feature that allows users to zoom in and focus on some of the more minute details in a picture. The drawbacks of the **ARTstor** collection include a noticeable gap in coverage of art from the 20th and 21st centuries and the fact that the interface is not very intuitive and still fairly clunky.

While **ARTstor** is quite an impressive collection and offers an excellent approach to obtaining access to digital images of art quickly, it was apparent from the beginning that no single database could even come close to replacing every image in our slide collection. Even with a subscription to all of the resources listed above, we would still be missing access to some of the unique images in our slide collection. Consequently, simultaneous to the examination of **ARTstor**, **Furman's Academic Computing Committee** began investigating the feasibility of building our own databases of images.

3. Create your own database of images, building the interface and metadata from scratch.

The benefit to building your own database from scratch is that you get exactly what you want. You can include only those images you need and incorporate whatever metadata you want, formatting the interface and the search feature to perform exactly to your requirements and specifications.

A quick search of the Web reveals a plethora of home-made image databases with varying degrees of sophistication and complexity. Below are some examples, including one from **Furman**. Not all are specifically art related, but the technology used in the creation of the databases could just as easily be applied to digital images of art.

continued on page 89

Leaving the Books Behind from page 87

Those pesky CD's that get superseded so often, also have some recycling benefits. Gardeners have found them to make so much reflection of light, that it scares raiding birds after our seeds. Sign of the times: you can see strings of the CD's swinging in the breeze, flashing their lights everywhere. I have actually used regular LP's as borders for gardens. Even the black ones are rather interesting and neat as the outline to your garden. It helps a little to keep weeds or

grass from dancing into your growing area.

I have used microfilm to make Christmas ornaments, but owing to the degradation of the material chemically, I am not about to risk spontaneous combustion for an ornament. It is probably best to do away with this product in whatever recycling bin will allow it. I think it is too early to talk about DVD's, but I see them in the same category as CD's and their recycling should be equivalent. Books, journals and other interesting pamphlets can be recycled to nursing homes, churches, schools and other places that don't mind old reading or having pictures

to clip. Day care centers are good for this, as they have a great many crafts that require pictures. I talked about computer trash in articles published by *Associates* and *Library Mosaics* (Delete to Where?). Fellow workers are still convinced that the deleted materials go to the rings of Saturn and now to Jupiter's new rings. We will be doing data mining in the future. I just hope that the viruses will all be converted to more useful products! Have some more recycling hints? Give me an email sometime and let me know your methods. Thanks for listening! 🐼

"I'd rather read these tales than eat shrimp & grits on Meeting Street..."

Bruce Strauch is an adopted Charlestonian and — as a professor of law at the Citadel — a genuine Southern colonel in the S.C. "Unorganized" Militia. He has published stupefyingly dull academic journal articles as well as five gore-drenched, mass-market horror novels with his wife Katina. An artist and world traveler, he is convinced that he can speak French.

"I'd rather read these tales than eat shrimp & grits on Meeting Street or bourbon-drizzled pecan pie with cream whipped in the kitchen. Strauch's understanding of the droll sides of Southern culture is deep, wide, and endlessly fertile, and he has the ear of a feeding bat when it comes to setting down the rhythms and nuances of Low Country speech."

— Jerry Leath Mills, author of *The Dead Mule Rides Again*

"Strauch's stories are not the best of the South. They are better. *Southern Psycho Tales* bristles with stories of lies and treachery and things that do more than go bump in the night. They rise from the twisted, tortured and tattooed underbelly of the South. They are about people next door — people whose souls know no sane home."

— Loyd Little, author of *Smokehouse Jam* and whose novels include the PEN-Hemingway winner *Parthian Shot*

Parkway Publishers, Inc.
Books Of Regional Interest & Beyond

"Strauch's entertainingly bizarre imagination soars in *Southern Psycho Tales*. If the players from 'Rockford Files' or 'Twin Peaks' had ever flown to the South, they'd have landed in — and been right at home in — Strauch's riotously venal social landscape. Nowhere else will one find a woman in bondage to a beauty-parlor hair-dryer."

— Bland Simpson, author of *Ghost Ship of Diamond Shoals*

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Technology Left Behind from page 88

- **Furman's Theatre Digital Image Database** — <http://facweb.furman.edu/~rbryson/index2.php>
- **The University of Michigan's School of Information and Library Studies Art Image Browser** — http://www.si.umich.edu/Art_History/
- **Yale's EIKON: Image Database for Biblical Studies** — <http://research.yale.edu:8084/divdl/eikon/> (Access to the images within *EIKON* is restricted to Yale users, but you can still get a pretty good idea of the structure of the database.)
- **Art Images for College Teaching (AICT)** — <http://arthist.cla.umn.edu/aict/index.html>

The disadvantage to building your own database is that it is hard to do and even harder to maintain. While this approach has been tried at **Furman** on a small scale with some success, we just do not have the man power to maintain the images and the metadata in the database on a large scale. As a result, the majority of the investigation into image repositories focused on taking advantage of an existing piece of database software, either open source or fee-based.

4. Create your own database by scanning and loading images into a piece of open source software.

The primary advantage of open source software is the lack of upfront costs. You get a fairly

robust piece of software without having to put the man hours into building it. Below are the URLs to a couple of open source software products especially formulated for creating image databases.

- **James Madison Digital Image Database (MDID)** — <http://www.mdid.org/>
- **University of Richmond** — <http://oncampus.richmond.edu/academics/library/digital/>
- **Coppermine Photo Gallery** — <http://coppermine.sourceforge.net/>

MDID was initially developed in 1997 at **James Madison University (JMU)** to assist with the art history curriculum. In 2001, the software was made available as a free download. Two years later JMU received a **Mellon Grant** and began collaborating on the development of **ARTstor**. Today the software is available under an open source license and several institutions, including the University of Richmond, are using **MDID** as the basis for their own database of images.

Coppermine, another example of open source software, is an image gallery PHP script written with a **mysql** database on the backend. **Coppermine** allows for the manipulation of image, and, in addition to image files, it can handle various multimedia files, including audio, video, documents, and zip files. **Sourceforge.net** provides extensive information about the software and provides an online demonstration.

Relying on open source software can be tricky. While there are little to no costs upfront,

customizing and adjusting the software to your institution's specific needs may require a fairly large investment of time and effort. In addition, you are dependent upon someone else, many times volunteers, to continue the development of the product. Often, though, the improvements and changes to open source software occur in a more timely manner than with commercial products.

5. Purchase / subscribe to a piece of software that will enable you to scan and load images to create your own database.

While **Furman** initially began its exploration of image repositories concentrating on art images, we very quickly shifted the focus of our investigation, looking beyond the slide collection and the **Art Department** to other departments and other potential uses. **Furman's** database could potentially be used to store images of maps for the **Geosciences Department**, photographs for the **Theatre Department**, or documents for the **University Archives**. There was also significant interest in providing digital access to sculpture and other three-dimensional objects through some kind of virtual reality technology, like **Quicktime VR** (<http://www.apple.com/quicktime/qtvr/>). As a result, several fee-based software products that would accommodate a broad range of file types were also examined.

- **Luna Insight** — <http://www.luna.imaging.com/insight/index.html>
- **Stanford University's Correspondence of Athanasius Kircher** — <http://193.206.220.68/kircher/index.html>

continued on page 90

Technology Left Behind from page 89

- **CONTENTdm** — <http://contentdm.com/>
- **University of Washington Libraries Digital Collections** — <http://content.lib.washington.edu/index.html>

Luna Insight, a product of **Luna Imaging**, accommodates a wide variety of file formats and permits the sharing of collections between its customers and also subscription services, such as the **AMICO Library**. In one example, **Stanford University** makes use of the **Luna Insight** software in its database of the correspondence of **Athanasius Kircher**. (A complete list of participating institutions can be found on the Luna Web site.) In addition to the **Insight** software, **Luna** offers a full range of digitization services, including scanning and/or photographing originals of both print and film and editing the images for color variation, cropping, and sharpness.

CONTENTdm grew out of a project at the **Center for Information Systems Optimization (CISO)** at the **University of Washington**. The product also supports a broad range of file formats. A few image and document files are included on the Website as examples. **OCLC** is handling the marketing of **CONTENTdm** to libraries, museums, and non-profit archives, and those organizations using the product have the

ability to automatically add their collections to **World Cat**. The company offers a free 60 day hosted trial or a full-evaluation copy of the software for interested institutions.

One More Option

One other option that I have not yet discussed is the use of publicly available Websites and databases of art images. If you are interested, there are many free images on the Internet from reputable sources. A series of articles evaluating publicly available art databases accessible via the Web was published in the September, October, and November/December 2004 issues of *Searcher Magazine*. (The full text is available online: <http://www.infotoday.com/searcher/sep04/mattison.shtml>.) The primary reason I neglected to mention this option before now is because **Furman** never really considered using free Websites as a permanent solution to our image access problem. While many of our students use the Internet to obtain access to art images, free Websites won't fulfill all of our needs in the classroom. Our Art professors require greater image quality and image manipulation.

Issues to Consider

As you look for the best solution to your own problem, here are some things to keep in mind.

Metadata — It is important to consider

the metadata that goes along with the images. Who is going to create it? How much will there be for each item? Can you add, edit, or delete metadata? You could put all the images in the world into a database, but without some good indexing and metadata to go with them you may never be able to get them out again. *Image Quality* — If you decide to build your own database, the size and quality of the images in the database is going to affect the amount of storage you require for the database. If you subscribe to a database of images, you have no control over the quality of the images or accompanying metadata.

Functionality — What kinds of things do you want to do with the images? Zoom-in and/or zoom-out? Re-sizing? Side-by-side viewing of images? Downloading? Export for use in a presentation or on a Website? Do you want to use the database for something other than images, such as video, audio, and/or document files? What kind of print quality do you need to have?

Life of the Product — When picking a product, think long term. What ever type of service and/or product you choose, you will most likely have to live with it for a number of years. Choose some-

continued on page 92

2005 Charleston Conference — 25th Annual Issues in Book and Serial Acquisition

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Send ideas by **June 30, 2005**, to any of the Conference Directors listed above.

Or to: **Katina Strauch**, MSC 98, The Citadel, Charleston, SC 29409
843-723-3536 (phone & fax) <kstrauch@comcast.net>
<http://www.katina.info/conference>

Rachel K. Schenk Memorial Scholarship

This year the third **Rachel K. Schenk Memorial Scholarship** of \$1,200 will be awarded to the person who has demonstrated a true love of books. There are three requirements:

- 1) The applicant must write an essay of no more than 600 words on “my love of books.”
- 2) The applicant must be a librarian with a library degree.
- 3) The applicant must be a first-time attendee to the Charleston Conference for 2005.

Please note: The **Rachel K. Schenk Memorial Scholarship** will be given for the next two years and will be an award of \$1,200 per year. So if you don't get it one year, there is always the next year.

Deadline for application is August 20, 2005. For more information, visit <http://www.katina.info/conference/scholarship.html> or contact <kstrauch@comcast.net>.

IMHBCO (In My Humble But Correct Opinion)

Not Even Wrong: Gorman on Google

by **Rick Anderson** (Director of Resource Acquisition, University of Nevada, Reno Libraries, 1664 N. Virginia Street, Reno, NV 89557; Phone: 775-784-6500 x.273; Fax: 775-784-1328) <rickand@unr.edu>

The physicist **Wolfgang Pauli** once famously dismissed a research paper as “not even wrong,” meaning that its content was not significant enough to dispute, or perhaps that its author had defined his target so poorly that to dispute it was impossible or not worth the effort. The phrase “not even wrong” kept ringing in my head as I read an opinion column written for the *Los Angeles Times* by ALA president-elect **Michael Gorman**. In this piece, **Dr. Gorman** takes considerable issue with **Google’s** nascent program of book digitization, one which the company is undertaking in cooperation with several large research libraries and which will make millions of scholarly books available online to the general public at no charge.

It is difficult to imagine the **ALA** — an organization that seeks to “ensure access to information for all” — registering public disapproval of a project that will make the content of millions of books accessible to anyone with Internet access. Making these books fully searchable and offering significant portions of them for free online viewing will result in a significant increase in the amount of scholarly information available to those not privileged with access to research libraries. **Google’s** project seems like one that an organization like the **ALA** would embrace. **Dr. Gorman** himself seems to have found it hard to object. While he felt that objection was necessary, he seemed to have trouble coming up with legitimate criticisms. Instead, he offers the following arguments — some of which are simply wrong, and others of which are not even well-defined or relevant enough to be wrong:

“Information isn’t knowledge.” (No, but information is the tool we use to transmit knowledge. If we want to increase the amount of knowledge in the world, we’re going to have to start by getting more and better information to more people.)

“The books in great libraries are much more than the sum of their parts.” (Well,

yes, and so are the books in not-so-great libraries. But the relevant question is this: given the choice between access to a book’s component parts and no access to the book at all, isn’t the former preferable to the latter?)

“Not many would choose to stare at a screen long enough to [read a book online].” (Isn’t having online access to the book better than having no access at all? Wouldn’t we librarians rather see more books made available to more people even if they are in a format that isn’t optimal for long-term reading?)

“Books in great libraries are designed to be read sequentially and cumulatively.” (Actually, most are designed to be read individually, and a great many books — collections, anthologies, etc. — are specifically designed to be read piecemeal.)

“The nub of the matter lies in the distinction between information and recorded knowledge.” (The “nub of the matter” lies in the difference between imperfect access and no access at all. The **Google** project would give imperfect access to many people for whom traditional libraries have offered no access at all.)

“(Google’s digitization project is a) solution in search of a problem.” (I would submit that **Google’s** digitization project is a solution to one of the central problems that the **ALA** identifies in its own mission statements: namely, that most people don’t have easy, affordable access to a rich collection of high-quality books.)

Libraries exist to solve a basic problem:

there’s more information out there than any individual can afford to buy and house. The perfect solution would be for everyone to have access to all information, and for it all to be organized in a way that permits quick, easy access to whatever particular chunk of information (be it an article, a birthdate, a journal issue or a book) one needs at a given moment. Unfortunately, that perfect solution isn’t yet possible. In the spirit of compromise, communities have

traditionally gotten together to buy, organize, and house copies of many books and magazines so that their patrons can take turns reading them. It’s been a pretty good model, and it has made lots of information available to people who otherwise would have had no access at all. Granted, the arrangement was kind of clumsy and inconvenient — not everyone had access to a library, and no library had everything you might want, and even if you could get to a library that had

what you wanted, you couldn’t be sure it would be available when you got there — but as a compromise it worked pretty well.

The problem is that many of us have fallen in love with the compromise model itself and allowed our world view to calcify around it. Now that a better model is emerging — a model that makes much more information available to many more people much more conveniently (and at much less cost) — we’re responding by pointing out how the model falls short of perfection. When others point out how much better it is than the current arrangement, we respond with resonant but empty slogans or, in some cases, snide dismissiveness.

For those who subscribe to this line of thinking, it appears that access to information is not

continued on page 94

Technology Left Behind from page 90

thing that will satisfy your needs now, but also accommodate future projects. On the other hand, another important factor to consider is the portability of the images and the data within the database. If for some reason you don’t like your first choice and you want to move the content to another database platform, there should be some way to export the images and the metadata, possibly as XML data.

For further information and resources on image databases, the Websites below offer links to additional resources.

Image and Multimedia Database Resources — <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Imaging/Databases/>

Imagelib and the Clearinghouse of Image Databases — <http://elearn.arizona.edu/imagelib/>

Author’s Note: The list of products, databases, and services mentioned above is by no means comprehensive. It is merely a small

representative sample of the kinds of services you can expect to find if you undertake such a project yourself. (So, please don’t email me if I left you off of the list.)

Many thanks to Katina for giving me the opportunity to write this column and contribute to ATG on a regular basis. Also, special thanks to Cort Haldaman, Academic Specialist in Furman’s Computing and Information Services department, and Scott Salzman, the Systems Librarian for the Furman University Libraries, for their feedback and assistance. 🍷