

2015

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Recommended Citation

Shepp, Mandi; Johnston, Lindsay; and Lupold, Ann (2015) "Optimizing Library Services--Digitizing the Humanities: A How-To Guide for the Savvy Librarian," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 27: Iss. 5, Article 35.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7201>

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Optimizing Library Services — Digitizing the Humanities: A How-To Guide for the Savvy Librarian

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When the makings of an enthusiastic digital project begin to materialize and are suddenly dropped into one's lap, what's a savvy librarian to do? The cornucopia of possibilities involved with making a unique and notable dynamic display can be overwhelming. But before discussing the elements of creating digital content, it is critical to first examine the benefits of digitizing and why all libraries should consider contributing to the fast-growing world of digital scholarship. An exploration of digital possibilities can be confounding, but the doors that are often opened by collaboration and scholarship will prove digitizing is a valuable process. Pairing with larger institutions can give a smaller institution the chance to showcase its assets to a much larger audience, drawing attention to smaller institutions and the collections they have to offer humanities researchers, scholars, and patrons.

Digitizing also offers libraries a chance to maximize their display space, by giving artifacts normally kept in storage due to fragility or lack of display area a chance to be seen without physical limitations by patrons who might otherwise be unaware of their existence. Digital scholarship allows researchers to utilize fragile materials without excessive handling, and see larger collections in their entirety. Social media allows users to have a deeper relationship with digital collections, enabling them to tag items, share them, and discuss them in new ways; patrons are no longer limited by physical access to the collection, allowing for information to be accessed and interpreted in fresh new ways. To ensure that a digital humanities collection is seen as valuable to scholarship, it should be interesting, unique, and relevant within the institution that is housing it. Items within the collection should work together to present a collective message that is relatable to the target audience, and echoes the mission of the library. Yet, items should be selected for the collection with the purpose in mind of enhancing the educational value of the collection as a whole — libraries should not digitize everything, rather, libraries should be selective and think about what items are the most representative of what that specific library has to offer.

Before beginning a digital humanities project, evaluate what is needed to complete the project versus what is already available to the institution; this especially applies to staff and equipment, and also to the concepts of display goals (i.e., what the final result of the digital project should look like and how it will function at the end-user level) for the digital collection and target audience for the collection and the library. Considering the level of detail necessary for the finished product to be most useful to the target audience will help determine the size and scope of the project — is this collection meant primarily for in-house employee usage, or is

the final destination set to be the World Wide Web? Considering what modes of access are going to be the most prominently used will help ensure that your digital humanities collection gets the proper level of public and professional detail. The level of expertise required by staff or volunteers also determines how the end result will appear, and may establish the need for the input of subject experts within the humanities to create a proper level of collection metadata and information displayed to the end user.

Establishing the staff's skill level alongside the desired level of intricacy for the collection assists in determining the requirements for the collection's metadata, and how this information will be displayed and accessed in terms of copyright restrictions and permissions. Sorting out the parameters of what makes the collection metadata complete versus incomplete allows librarians to focus on what information is needed for the project to be considered complete, and what, if any, training is necessary to finish the project. More detailed collections generally require scrutinized information that is specific to the collection and describes the collection's intended scholarly use, particularly when using an established and intricate metadata schema such as Dublin Core. While establishing the expectations for the collection's use, it is also essential to determine the ownership of copyrighted material within the collection: Are the intellectual rights to the items in the collection owned by the library or institution, or are they in the public domain? If they are not owned, has permission to digitize these items been secured? If images in the collection are to be offered for public use and re-use, it is highly important that concise copyright statements that clearly outline the limitations and restrictions for use of items within the collection be written by project staff. This copyright statement for the collection's intended use should be included in the metadata, along with institutional contact information to gain further clarification or permissions if they are needed.

Take a Walk on the Technical Side

The equipment needed to digitize a collection is vital to digital project planning. The requirements for a project are determined by the objects the library is digitizing. Two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects require different methods: scanning and photography, respectively. Scanning is relatively simple, and requires that staff have the ability to use the scanner and corresponding software. Photography requires slightly more space, as well as a capable person to use the camera and process the digital images. Both methods require an assessment of available equipment and whether updates to hardware and/or software are necessary. All digital collections require access to permanent online storage, as well as software to display and create the collections. There is

a variety of software for creating and managing digital collections available at a multitude of skill levels. In the process of selecting what program best suits the needs of the project, the desired end results for displaying the collection and the level of intricacy of displayed information should be considered. If the collection's primary focus is a pictorial collection or a Website-style presentation, simple software is available that is detailed more toward visual aspects of digital objects. When a rich digital exhibit with dynamic or interactive components is desired with the intention of public display, more complex software designed for the purposes of organizing, managing, and displaying collections can be found in many formats.

Especially worth noting is the abundance of Open Source (OS) software programs that are focused toward the creation and management of digital content. The strengths of the Open Access movement can be seen clearly in OS software programs, which are another demonstration of collaborative power in a digital setting. "Open Source software development provides a model for collaborative scholarly work, as it makes knowledge production modular and provides access to a range of expertise," (Spiro, 2012, p. 69). OS software can improve the traffic to a digital collection, as it is often equipped with apps, plug-ins, or widgets meant for search engine optimization (maximizing the amount of Web traffic that encounters your digital collection by making it come up higher in the results retrieved by a search engine, like **Google**). OS software also has other applications that can enhance a digital collection's content and message, such as interactive mapping and geocoding or geocaching of items. The ability to customize OS software collections with plug-ins, templates, and apps makes it an excellent option for both beginners and more advanced content creators, and the Open Access element makes it easy to find user assistance through development forums and direct contact with the program developers. OS software is notoriously user-friendly, and its wide range of capabilities makes it easy to create robust narratives and professional layouts for digital collections — and perhaps best of all, OS software is generally available for free.

Examples of Open Source software programs include, but are not limited to:

1. Omeka (<http://www.omeka.org>)
2. Collective Access (<http://www.collectiveaccess.org>)
3. Open Exhibits (<http://www.openexhibits.org>)
4. SobekCM (<http://sobekrepository.org>)
5. Collection Space (<http://www.collectionspace.org>)

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While OS software and tech-savvy volunteers or staff can be very helpful in assessing the funding needs for a digital humanities project, it is often collaboration that can be the most financially influential. Collaboration can aid in cutting project costs while allowing new ideas to develop, and can also assist in locating possible funding options for these projects (Note: Navigating the potentially overwhelming territory of funding can sometimes be seen as a technical skill itself, which is why I chose to discuss it in this article. There are also many grants available for the purpose of enhancing technical skills for digitizing). Collaborating with larger institutions or consortia is often a way to open doors to better funding options on larger scales, and can also allow a smaller institution to have better access to the necessary training for the completion of digital humanities projects. Knowledge of how to attain such funding is vital for members of a digital project team. **Lampert and Vaughan** (2009) have found that a majority of digital projects and programs put forth by members of the **Association of Research Libraries** received support from a combination of large and small grants, with the second largest number of libraries surveyed reporting support coming from either large or small grants awarded on an individual basis (p. 123).

On a federal level, many grants are available to bolster digitization activity within libraries and museums. There are several grants offered by the **Institute of Museum and Library Services**, with the goal to strengthen museums for lifelong learning and raise awareness of these institutions in their communities. These grants are primarily meant to encourage staff to experiment with the technological aspects of creating digital exhibits, increase public awareness of collections, and assist with the preservation or conservation of collections. The **National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)** offers a convenient service that pairs digital project ideas with potential grants to apply for that would best suit the needs of the project. The **NEH Preservation Assistance Grant for Small Institutions** offers assistance to smaller institutions for the purpose of training and educating staff about the digital preservation process. The **Digital Humanities Start Up Grants** program, also offered by the **NEH**, is meant to provide help during the initial planning stages of a digital humanities project and is focused around using technology in new and innovative ways to enhance humanities scholarship and humanities-oriented education. The **National Historical Publications & Records Commission (NHPRC)**, which focuses on the digitization of historical documents and records, offers grants within their Documenting Democracy: Access to Historical Records program which has a primary goal of facilitating and enhancing end user access to primary source materials, particularly archival records.

Many privately funded grants are available through larger foundations such as the **Knight Foundation**, which is geared toward the fusion of the arts and technology, and has a larger goal of bringing communities together through open information. Bridging communities and

encouraging collaboration via technological development is a technique that works on both large and small levels. Enhancements to this technique by the growth of the participatory Web are demonstrated by the rise in popularity and ubiquity of crowdsourcing, a method of obtaining input from a number of people who are generally attracted to a project through the Internet via social media or digital campaigning. Crowdsourcing can be seen as a modern interpretation of traditional fundraising through social events in order to raise interest in an institution or project; having access to a wider audience through the Internet poses a change in the type of donors, where a larger number of people with smaller individual amounts to donate towards a cause can be just as powerful as a traditionally small number of donors with larger monetary donations. Sites like *Kickstarter.com* use incentives at various donation tiers to appeal to the widest number of people and encourage long-term relationships with the project and institution. *Kickstarter.com* campaigns have proven effective in raising interest as well as support within the academic research community (Brown Center for Public Humanities, 2013). Whatever fundraising option is chosen for a digital project, institutions small and large alike should be aware of the large variety of methods available, and prepare to utilize them in creative and innovative new ways.

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Further details on my research in digitizing humanities can be found in my **IGI Global** chapter "Digitizing the Humanities: A Future for Libraries" from the title *Supporting Digital Humanities for Knowledge Acquisition in Modern Libraries*. 🌿

Amanda M. Shepp received her MLS in Library & Information Science in 2013 from the State University of New York at Buffalo (University at Buffalo). After graduation, she was hired by the Center for Inquiry Transnational to digitize various collections, such as the holdings of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum, as well as planning and executing steps to completely remodel a digital-only museum, The Skeptiseum, where she also served as Digital Director. In 2014, she was hired by the Lily Dale Assembly where she currently serves as the sole Librarian of the Marion H. Skidmore Library, a special collections facility which houses several collections of rare books pertaining to the history of Modern American Spiritualism, psychical research, and the Occult Sciences. She presents and writes on topics related to the digitization of institutional collections, particularly special library collections and museum collections; additionally, she presents on historical subjects within the realms of the paranormal, Spiritualism, and the Occult.