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The Utah State University Digital Library

Project Background

The Digital Library at Utah State University is a part of the regular university library, the Merrill-Cazier Library. The main part of their collection can be found at <http://digital.lib.usu.edu>. The source and time-frame of the funding for the collection is not readily available from their website, however, there a number of places on the website that indicate the source of some of the funds were from grants. The larger organization responsible for the collection and funding is Utah State University itself, and the digital library also functions as an institutional repository for the college. Their mission statement available to view at <http://digital.lib.usu.edu/aboutus.php> reads as follows:

“The USU Merrill-Cazier Library supports the teaching, learning, and research activities of Utah State University, a land grant university, and serves the public through learning, discovery, and engagement. The Digital Initiatives Department creates, organizes, preserves, and maintains open access to digital resources that reflect USU's curriculum, research, unique resources, and achievements. Individually and in collaboration with other educational and cultural heritage institutions, this unit of the Merrill-Cazier Library contributes to the pool of scholarly digital resources accessible to users worldwide.”

The library is set up as a number of searchable digital collections, finding aids, and a podcast collection. They are also collaborative partners with three other organizations. The first of which is the Mountain West Digital Library, an organization

that is devoted to the history of the Mountain West area, i.e. Nevada and Utah. The MWDL provides a single site in which you can search over 350 digital collections specific to the region. (<http://mwdl.org/>) A similar collaborative partner is the Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA), which provides access to 31 digital repositories all over the western United States, including Hawaii, their primary purpose being to serve researchers. (<https://sites.google.com/a/gwla.org/gwla-digital-collections/about-dcc>) Lastly, the USU Digital Library is a contributor to the Western Waters Digital Library, a library that provides digital resources about waterways in the Western U.S.

(<http://www.westernwater.org/>)

The USU digital library is important to the regional Western United States, as well as the state of Utah's history. The digital library, "...provides open access to scholarly works, research, reports, [and] publications... [they] join other universities worldwide in the ongoing development of new knowledge."

(<http://pioneer.utah.gov/utah.html>)

Organization of Resources

The scope of the collection varies a bit. The USU Digital Library houses items of historical significance and artifacts such as photos, journals, and newspapers. In addition, the library also contains the thesis and dissertation collection, and a podcast collection that focuses on folklore. The number of total collections runs at about 30, and many of the collections are still being added to. Each collection varies in size. For example, the Death Valley Region Photo Collection contains only 11 items, whereas the Folklorist Collection has about 135 items.

USU Digital Library is using a Dublin Core metadata schema, and conforms specifically to the Mountain West Digital Library standards.

(<http://digital.lib.usu.edu/aboutus.php>) The descriptions are very thorough, and also incorporate Library of Congress subject headings into the records. Each of those subject headings is then hyperlinked to other records that fall under the same headings within the collections.

Service Features

All materials in the USU Digital Library are made available in a list format on their website, which is organized by collection title. They also provide a central search box on their page that searches “all” collections. Within the results list of the search the software also provides search facets in order to narrow your search to a more manageable number of items. The facets include date ranges, subjects, and media type. Browsing the collections is made very simple; the list of the collections on the main page links to a short description of the collection, and then defaults to a “browse all” items in the collection. ContentDM powers both the searching and browsing features of the collections.

There are a number of criteria listed on <http://digital.lib.usu.edu/aboutus.php> that relates to the evaluation of the materials within the digital library. Digital content must fall into at least one of three categories to be considered for submission. Those categories are:

- USU Library or campus analog resources that are unique, rare, and/or of special regional interest and are deemed to warrant conversion to digital format
- Materials that support USU teaching or research

- Materials that support desirable collaborative projects such as the Mountain West Digital Library, GWLA Western Waters Project, etc.

In addition to the three main criteria there are also a number of other items taken under consideration to determine the appropriateness of the item, and the order in which the material will be digitized. Examples of those criteria are the sources of funding and the value in preservation.

Technologies

The website for the library is very basic, there are no overlapping technologies or confusing layouts to view. The majority of the collections were created using ContentDM, a popular software choice for constructing digital repositories. (Bullen 2008) Those that aren't powered by ContentDM are housed on web pages. Oral interviews are in mp3 format, and photos are displayed in jpeg2000 format. In addition to ContentDM, they also list Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Acrobat Professional (for creating OCR), Filemaker Pro, and Microsoft Excel as software the library uses to help in the digitization process. The hardware used for digitization is an Epson Expression 100000XL scanner. The library has set up an additional digital darkroom with grant funding. The darkroom's purpose is to digitize fragile items and items not suited to scanning.

Evaluation

The USU Digital Library is a valuable resource in my opinion. It provides a vast collection of historical documents that may not otherwise be available to the public. The strengths of the collection lie within the scope of the project and the number of

collaborative partners with the project. The collaborative partners not only help with the funding of the project, but also with getting the collection noticed by researchers and widening the range of access to the items. The weaknesses of the collection would lie within the searching feature, which is actually a feature of the ContentDM software. There is no relevancy ranking within search results, and the advanced search feature is difficult to find. While the simple search works well, it provides too much in the way of results to be useful, and it becomes cumbersome to search within the results.

References

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