The Digital Gallery

Of the

National Library of Scotland

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As one of Europe's major research libraries, the National Library of Scotland (NLS) houses over 7 million books, 14 million printed items, and 2 million maps ("Places to visit," 2011). The NLS was established in 1925 by an Act of Parliament and occupies several buildings in the nation's capital, Edinburgh. As a reference library, none of the library's items are available for lending – which makes the NLS' online digital library vital to library patrons ("Digital Gallery," 2011). The digital library, now referred to as the Digital Gallery, can be found online at:

http://www.nls.uk/digital-gallery

Featuring digitized material from the NLS' collections, the goal of the Digital Gallery is to "offer unique glimpses into a variety of chapters of Scotland's story" ("Digital Gallery," 2011). The collection features subjects such as archaeology, archives, industry, law and order, literature, maritime, medicine, music, natural sciences, religion, science and technology, social history, and world cultures. Although the collections span a broad spectrum of knowledge, its strength lies in the fact that it is the world center for the study of Scotland and the Scots people. Some of its key exhibits include items from Robert Burns, Mary Queen of Scots, Douglas Haig, Winston Churchill, Robert Louis Stevenson, modern Scottish writers, and an expansive military and civilian map collection.

Project Background:

Beginning in 1999, the National Library of Scotland has been funded by the Scottish government and answers to the Scottish Parliament. It is governed by a board of trustees, and is one of six legal deposit libraries in the United Kingdom and Ireland. As a legal deposit library, it is entitled to request a copy of all printed items published in the UK and Ireland by legislation. The Legal Deposit Libraries Act of 2003 provides a foundation for further regulations involving non-print publications.

The NLS' strategy for the years 2011 – 2014 anticipates a decline in public spending, so they are currently devising ways of continuing to adequately fund the Digital Gallery. As is the case with many libraries, it is a constant battle for the NLS to demonstrate the importance of the library to the nation in order to maintain public funding ("NLS strategy," 2011).

In 2006, the NLS was awarded £1.8 million to institute a digital repository of blogs, online journals, and e-mails of noteworthy Scots such as author J.K. Rowling. Referring to these items as "manuscripts of the 21-st century," digital curators at the NLS believe they will be used as research materials by biographers and academics (Goodwin, 2006).

Other funding has come from sources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, whose support made the John Murray Archive acquisition possible. The Arts and Humanities Research Council also provides funding for various projects; the mission of the AHRC is to support world-class research that broadens the understanding of human culture and creativity (AHRC, 2010).

Mission Statement of the NLS

The National Library of Scotland exists to:

- Enrich lives and communities

- Encourage and promote lifelong learning, research and scholarship

- Provide universal access to information by comprehensively collecting and making available the recorded knowledge of Scotland

- Promote access to the ideas and cultures of the world

("Our mission," 2011)

The library also strives to exhibit the values of service, learning, innovation, commitment, and excellence. The Digital Gallery itself is an extension of the library's goal. In the NLS' strategy for 2011 – 2014, they acknowledge that as the digital revolution continues, production and access of knowledge will shift from print and paper to electronic formats and media. Within this time frame, they expect to focus on several goals:

- Collecting electronic publications via legal deposits

- Ensuring long-term preservation of digital collections

- Increasing the number of online resources so that customers may use them where or when it suits them

- Joining collections while making them visible and discoverable

- Finding the ideal balance between investing in digital and physical services

("NLS strategy," 2011).

In terms of collaboration, the NLS aims to make all Scottish library and archive collections accessible to researchers by supporting a strategic national approach to collection and

digitization of Scottish material. It is the NLS' priority to share their expertise with the Scottish

library community and to collaborate with UK and Irish legal deposit libraries in the fields of

collection, access, and preservation. By researching their various audiences, the NLS can

develop effective interactive online resources which allow users to contribute to the collections.

By joining administrative efforts and other resources, it is possible to improve services and

reduce costs ("NLS strategy," 2011).

Recently, the NLS has contributed to a picture library taken from Scotland's national

collections to make a collection of images available for licensed reuse.   This collaborative effort

is shared with The National Archives, The National Museums of Scotland, The National Trust

for Scotland, and The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

This project can be viewed at http://www.scotlandsimages.com/

("About us: Scotland's," 2011).

Organization of Resources

The main page of the Digital Gallery displays well-laid out links to thirty-one NLS

digitized collections. With a thumbnail image and description for each of the links, access to

each collection opens up many subheadings with additional items. The initial galleries include

collections as varied as the history of golf in Scotland, Scottish plays, maps, historical

photography, Scottish science, modern Scottish writers, Scottish bookbinding, royalty, religion,

and military history.

Service Features

A search engine on the main Digital Gallery page allows the user to enter search terms applicable to the online gallery, while additional search engines within many of the exhibits support refined searching. Additional links can be found in each particular exhibit, providing contact information, "About" pages, and bibliographical resources ("The NLS digital archive," 2009).

The Digital Gallery is also a portal to the NLS' "Digital Archive," where patrons may browse books, photographs, documents, and various other resources. This Beta version of the Digital Archive provides full-text images of some of the books from the library's collection including a Gutenberg Bible from 1455 (one of only about 20 to have survived), the Aberdeen Breviary from 1510, and the first collection of Robert Burns' poems from 1786 ("Digital archive," 2011). It is noted that the website remains in an active state of evolution; more images and features will be added in the coming months.

Representing a refined selection of items from the NLS' Digital Object Database (DOD), the Digital Gallery contains images and metadata specifically intended for online display to be used by the public. The Digital Object Database contains all the digitization work completed by the NLS thus far ("The NLS digital archive," 2009).

Technologies

The NLS Digital Gallery supports education by providing remote access to some of the key items in the collections of the NLS. In 2009, the Scottish Digital Library Consortium

upgraded the NLS and the Edinburgh University Library to a new Online Public Access Catalog, the Voyager 7.x OPAC. Worrying that support for the original version of their OPAC (Ex Libris) was about to end, the Scottish Digital Library Consortium (SDLC) decided that it would be better able to function on its own with workshops and tailored sessions for its new OPAC ("Voyager 7 OPAC implementation," 2009).

Evaluation

The Digital Gallery of the National Library of Scotland is an ideal example of a digital library fulfilling its purpose and mission statement. At first glimpse, it appears that this digital library may be minimalistic, but its simplicity is deceptive. With an easy user-interface, the gallery page leads to a wealth of information with associated images and further links. Once introduced to the Digital Gallery homepage, it is tempting to browse – not only in the gallery itself, but in the Digital Archive whose link is apparent at the top of the page. More than likely, it is the quest for knowledge of the Scots culture or people which has attracted the attention of the patron to the NLS website. Once on the site, the Digital Gallery is without a doubt the most fascinating and informative component of the NLS' online experience. In accordance with their goals for 2011-2014, the NLS has successfully provided access to substantial information from their collections for the user "where or when it suits them." The galleries contained within are extremely comprehensive, and offer a detailed view of exactly what they claim to: "unique glimpses of a variety of chapters of Scotland's story" ("Digital gallery," 2011).

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