

LSTA Grant Evaluation

Project Name: Oregon Digital Library
Awardee: Oregon State University
Project Director: Terry Reese
Project number: 10-09-5a

Evaluator: Karen Estlund
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Summary of Evaluation

The Oregon Digital Library project was created to provide increased access to digitized content from the cultural heritage organizations in Oregon. Although a lot of content has been digitized, it is either inaccessible online, hard to find, or lacks additional technologies to aid in search engine optimization. By utilizing LibraryFind™, these collections will be searchable from a single interface providing greater and more convenient access. In addition, by including these materials together in one searchable interface, users will also have the advantage of discovering related materials that may exist at different institutions, providing a richer wealth of information. The project objectives of integrating data for approximately 500,000 items and creating a user-interface design for the Oregon Digital Library were successfully achieved. Future efforts will include adding more collections and implementing user feedback into the interface design. By creating a single place for users to search, typically underserved populations such as the k-12 audience may be able to more easily utilize digitized Oregon heritage materials. Digital content creators may also use the Oregon Digital Library for collection development decisions and help provide a richer selection of historic materials. Future digitization projects should adhere to open metadata standards that would allow them to be searchable through the Oregon Digital Library. The ability to publicize and make the project known will largely determine its future success.

Project Objectives

In order to create a useful initial launch of this project to make the digitized items for Oregon cultural heritage institutions more accessible, there were two main objectives. The first project objective was to ingest data for approximately 500,000 items into the Oregon Digital Library. This amount of content provides not only a broad selection of content for users but also enough data to test multiple functions of the software and interface design. The second objective was to create a user interface for the project with branding for the Oregon Digital Library and any specialized options suited to this multiple institutions and collections interface.

Project Method

The staff required for this project included: Terry Reese as the project director who also contacted the institutions and configured LibraryFind, a unix administrator for system support, and student graphic designers to create the logo, design the user-interface, and create stylesheets.

Initial steps in the process included purchasing the servers to run the Oregon Digital Library and contacting institutions about collections to include. Most institutions were enthusiastic about having the data about their content included in the site, but did not want the content itself harvested. One particular institution reconfigured their system in order to allow only non-restricted materials to be harvested. The plan for the initial release was to start with Oregon University System institutions

After the collections were identified, the LibraryFind software was configured and installed and harvesting began. The collections were harvested using OAI-PMH protocol. LibraryFind was further developed specifically on theming, sub-collection searching, and indexing of full-text. After software modifications were made, a full re-harvest was done on the materials.

The user-interface development began at the same time as the installation of LibraryFind. The student graphic designers generated wire frames for the user-interface. Focus groups were then conducted on the wire frames. Feedback was integrated into the design and then implementation of the design began in LibraryFind.

After the initial collections were successfully harvested and a custom user-interface was implemented, the project director began identifying additional collections to include for future harvests.

Project Results

The Oregon Digital Library Project successfully harvested data for approximately 500,000 digital objects from Oregon cultural heritage organizations and delivered them in a customized installation of LibraryFind: <http://odl.library.oregonstate.edu/> These results correspond with the original objectives of the project.

The Oregon Digital Library will launch the project to the public in March 2011. Before that launch, they will seek user feedback with a soft-launch in early February. Feedback from those users will be evaluated and may inform additional modification to the user-interface and design.

Additional results in the future will include ingesting additional collections including the LSTA funded Oregon Digital Newspaper Project content. During the project, the project director also discovered that many institutions, particularly museums, small public libraries and historical societies, were utilizing a software called Past Perfect, which does not allow OAI harvesting. The project team is looking into alternatives for exporting or additional hosting, in order to provide access to the content in these systems.

Project Impact

If publicized well, this project should greatly increase access to previously digitized cultural heritage materials in Oregon. The Oregon Digital Library will especially benefit audiences that are unlikely to seek out multiple institutions to find digitized material. This may be very relevant for audiences such as the k-12 population.

In addition to providing the end-user with access to related collection content through the Oregon Digital Library, the project may also impact content creators and help organizations in Oregon be more informed about collections they choose to digitize and related materials in other organizations. This could result in both broader and deeper collections of digitized historic Oregon material.

One of the greatest lessons from this project may be that other projects should adhere to a certain set of standards when creating digital content, in order to make that content accessible to Oregonians and beyond. Projects should follow digitization and metadata standards but also ensure that the metadata is harvestable or otherwise accessible outside the immediate organizations. A key to this may be creating leader partners in the state to help guide other digital projects or to create a set of standards and criteria to be used for future funded digitization projects.

Suggestions for Improvement

Aggregated collections often present some challenges for users when going between the aggregated search results and individual items at home collection sites. This project chose to address these challenges by presenting the individual object in a new browser tab or window. There are many trade-offs between this approach and others such as presenting the results in the same tab or window. I recommend that some user testing be conducted on the effectiveness of this decision and if users are able to navigate back to the aggregated results. I also suggest conducting some accessibility testing on this approach with screen reader or other Section 508 tools if not already conducted.

As the project is launched and continues to grow, its success will largely be determined by how many people use it, so more publicity is encouraged, as well as getting partner institutions to link to the site.