Cornell's MOA Site: A Gift from the Past

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Libraries can now access a great collection of 19th-century journals

"O"nce in a while you can get shown the light in the strangest of places if you look at it right."—The Grateful Dead

Back in 1994, I wrote that we were experiencing the Golden Age of the Internet. At that time, a lot of useful things were appearing on the Internet, free for the taking. My line of reasoning was that the suppliers would allow us to get used to these products and then start charging for them. I have never been more wrong. It turns out that the Internet has become a force so strong it has created its own gravity. In the ensuing years, a lot of great new things have appeared for free, and they fill our bookmark files to the bursting point. However, once in a great while something comes along on the Web that is so good you want to stand up and cheer. I have recently encountered such a page.

I belong to a listserver for scholars and enthusiasts of Mark Twain. A few weeks ago, I saw a message on that list from Jim Zwick, a graduate student at Cornell and Webmaster of what is probably the most complete Web site devoted to Mark Twain. He mentioned that Cornell had recently scanned vast runs of 19th-century journals and put them up on the Web for free at http://library2.library.cornell.edu/MAO/MAOJOURNALS2.html. (See Figure 1.) This was important to Mark Twain scholars because Twain wrote for journals like Scribner's Monthly (Figure 2) as his literary career was advancing beyond California and Nevada. I took an immediate look because this project appealed to both the Twain and systems librarian sides of my nature.

What I saw at the Making of America (MOA) page simply blew me away. The holdings were vast and easy to use, with images of the highest quality. The selection included the most important journals that I knew about. Within a day, I had set up a link to this from our library's Web site. In the ensuing days, I showed this to colleagues at Quinnipiac and to other librarians in Connecticut and New York. The reaction was always, simply, "Wow!" One librarian from a well-heeled public school mentioned that they had always owned Poole's Index and The 19th Century Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature. What they did not have was the journals that were cited, and it was hard to get any of these articles through interlibrary loan. Now that library has both the index and the full-text material.

If you think about it, every library in the world now has this library of 19th-century journals to serve up to their users—they only need access to the Web. Users at the poorest libraries can easily get access to copies of Scientific American (Figure 3) from the 1840s, or the complete Army and Navy records from the Civil War.

Downside?

Common sense would tell you that there has to be a downside to this somewhere. The one only I could see was the absence, so far, of a search engine. To use the collection, you must either browse it or work with an existing book of 19th-century journal citations. I recently spoke with George Kornak, a digital library specialist at Cornell. He told me that the collection would have search capability by May 2000, at the latest. This will be based on a conversion to SGML, but users will still get the data using standard HTML browsers such as Netscape and Internet Explorer. Currently, the collection is made of TIFF images that are converted to browser-friendly GIF images on the fly.

Another possible downside is that the project would go away, at least to those of us who are not affiliated with Cornell or its partner institutions, University of Michigan. To calm my fears, I spoke with Anne R. Kenney, the associate director of the Department of Preservation at Cornell. She assured me that we could count on this collection for years to come—they are perfectly happy sharing it with the world.

Kenney told me that the project has existed in experimental form since 1996, but they just put the whole collection up within the past few months. Though it is still not well known, it is starting to attract more than 4,000 hits a day. Furthermore, Kenney is pleased at the response from librarians around the world.

This project is a visible fruition of work that has been going on at Cornell for quite some time. Kenney mentioned that their people made the first 1 million scans in-house and developed the standards for digitizing. Now they are outsourcing the actual image production so they can concentrate on the delivery of the information.

Other Projects

Even now, the Cornell Digital Library contains other substantial holdings. They have also digitized a collection of more than 600 historical mathematics books. This is a truly international collection as many of the titles are in German. Cornell also provides a collection of books in the history of agriculture, dating back to the mid-19th century.

Kenney was particularly excited about their latest project: digitizing a collection of more than 10,000 anti-slavery pamphlets from the years preceding the Civil War.

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This received funding from "Saving America's Treasures Award," a favorite cause of First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton that has also funded projects like the restoration of both the flag that inspired the writing of "The Star Spangled Banner" and the Wright Brothers' 1905 airplane.

What the Future Holds

"Digital access is not necessarily digital preservation," said Kenney. Over the long haul she is concerned about the future of image formats. To ensure that the work is not vulnerable to catastrophes, she mentioned that microfilm copies of these images are being stored in a cave in Pennsylvania. This protects them from problems and disasters up to and including a nuclear war.

Cornell has long been a leader in the field of imaging. It is exciting that we have arrived at a time where their work is now providing a direct benefit to all of us.

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ILS Unveils Client Management Module, E-Mail Capabilities for SydneyPLUS

International Library Systems Corp. (ILS) has announced the release of the new Client Management module, which is available in SydneyPLUS 9.0—the current release of the company’s library automation system. ILS has also announced the SydneyPLUS new e-mail capabilities that allow libraries to directly contact clients.

Client Management Module

According to the company, the new Client Management module is designed to meet the unique requirements of special libraries and can be used to track requests, build a knowledge base for future use, monitor costs, and manage reference desk activities.

“Librarians can use the Client Management module to keep track of all incoming requests for information,” said Jonathan Milpiras, ILS’s product manager. “By sending and monitoring information requests in one central place, librarians will be able to manage their resources and meet their clients’ needs.”

As information requests are logged over time, the Client Management module can also be used to build up a library’s knowledge base. Other libraries, or even clients, can then search the knowledge base by keyword to find the answers to commonly asked questions or understand the search strategy used to fulfill an information request.

According to the company, the Client Management module is a valuable budgeting and management tool—helping librarians accurately measure and record the time spent researching topics for clients or answering questions. Research time can be charged back to clients or used in preparation of the library’s annual budget. With greater knowledge of how much time is spent dealing with client requests, library managers should find it much easier to allocate resources to meet demand. And by helping librarians manage incoming requests, the Client Management module can also help librarians provide better and faster service to their library patrons.

E-Mail Capabilities

According to the company, SydneyPLUS can be used to generate a wide variety of useful and informative reports, notices, and letters. Now, in addition to previewing this information on-screen, saving it to a file, or sending it to the printer, you can electronically send it to any of the names in your e-mail address book, without leaving the SydneyPLUS interface.

Jacobsen believes that the new e-mail capability will make it much easier to manage the day-to-day operations of a library. “E-mail is the fastest and most direct way to send important notices, letters, and other information to clients and suppliers. SydneyPLUS’ new e-mail feature lets librarians generate and distribute reports electronically, ultimately saving both time and money.”

Any report can be attached to an e-mail, but some reports will likely be distributed through e-mail more often than others. You can send overdue notices to patrons with the click of a button. Claim letters can be e-mailed for journals that haven’t yet been received, ensuring a more prompt reply. Or, you can e-mail the results of a search request to a user. In all these cases, both you and your users or suppliers will benefit from the speed and convenience, according to the company.


Best-Seller, Inc. Launches PortFolio Version 7.04

Best-Seller, Inc. has announced the launch of an enhanced version of its PortFolio library automation software. The Web-based PortFolio allows any library or documentation center to automate all of its operations and provide access to its collections via the Internet. Whether at the library, at the office, or from home, users can access the library’s collection of books, images, sound recordings, and videos with the use of any standard Web browser.

According to the company, PortFolio version 7.04 simultaneously addresses the needs of both North American and European corporate clientele. Features include a new personal empowerment module whereby users can reserve materials that are currently in use, access e-mail messages from the library staff regarding books on reserve, and current loans, modify their passwords, and check the status of outstanding fines. European clients will be able to view account information in their local currencies and the euro simultaneously and access the library’s collection via Minitel (France). In addition, the legal deposit function has been enhanced, and an entire bookshelve has been added.

Todd A. Joron, president and CEO, said, “In addition to the impressive list of functional enhancements in this latest version, the exciting aspect about version 7.04 is that it lays the groundwork for our next generation of GUI, Web-based products which will be rolled out over the next 12 months.”


Livelink Catalogued Library (continued from page 47)

stimulate structured collaboration associated with cataloged resources.

“Open Text has finally integrated collaborative document computing with the structured corporate library in a common framework. Librarians can connect users and research teams with cataloged documents and project folders through the corporate intranet,” said Mike Cunningham, president and CEO of Harvard Computing Group. “This now integrates the corporate library fully into a collaborative enterprise knowledge network. The fusion of these technologies has been long overdue in the marketplace. The benefits will be significant for those organizations taking advantage of both structured library and interactive approaches.”

Even organizations without a formal library can benefit by using the Livelink Catalogued Library for implementing additional control and structured access to business-critical documents such as technical, regulatory compliance, litigation, or corporate archives.

For librarians, the Livelink Catalogued Library adds significant functionality to BASIS Techlib by combining features for library management with document management and knowledge management. Now electronic objects can be attached to catalog data simply by browsing and selecting files. “The integration of BASIS Techlib with Livelink presents a myriad of possibilities for information professionals,” said Dan Laterdère, vice president of product marketing at Open Text. “At its simplest, it puts the library catalog on the corporate intranet. Corporations can also use the Livelink infrastructure to provide seamless access to documents and discussions, research request systems, change agents, and corporate directories. Open Text is pleased to offer this tool to reinforce the library’s role in optimizing use of the enterprise intellectual capital.”

The Livelink Catalogued Library is expected to be generally available this month. It will be sold as an add-on module to Livelink or BASIS Techlib.

Livelink is a highly scalable, collaborative knowledge management application for intranets. According to the company, Livelink’s enterprise document management, virtual team collaboration, business process automation, enterprise group scheduling, and information retrieval services are tightly integrated into an off-the-shelf application that is easily customized and extended to fill a broad range of information and knowledge management needs. Livelink servers are fully Web-based to ensure rapid deployment, requiring just a standard Web browser on users’ desktops to access its full functionality. Livelink runs on Microsoft Windows NT and the leading UNIX platforms and supports most popular relational database management systems.