SO YOU WANT TO MAKE A DIGITAL ARCHIVE?

Managing physical and digital files, metadata-gathering, and enabling complex internal or public searches of cultural production, ephemera, archives and/or born-digital assets are issues faced by many organizations.

Nowadays there are multiple options for creating digital systems to assist in this management -- even better, creating a collection management system can generate new information from and allow new access to your existing collection, archive, or research data set.

For example, CollectiveAccess, used primarily in GLAM [Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums] communities; and Omeka, used primarily in academic and digital humanities communities, are two open-source software applications used frequently that can address these issues. On the following pages, see some examples.

FOCUS AND STRATEGY QUESTIONS

When considering what kind of software or scope needs your project has, digital archiving projects bring up the following issues:

WHY am I collecting this?
Is it to document an individual, movement, history? Is it to archive for future research
Is it to learn new information your collection could produce? How many items are first editions and prints?
Are existing taxonomies like Getty, the Library or Congress, or linked open data important to connecting this?

WHAT am I collecting and how is it organized?
Is it digital or analog? Do I have digital representations of my collection, or is all the information in text form?
Do I have taxonomies, accession records, or metadata I need to consider? Importing data from one system to another may be worth it, and adds a layer of complexity to any system.
Is my collection large? Rule of thumb: if your set of items is bigger than 100, a database can help you organize and manage it, share or display it, and discover aspects of it.
Is there a specific policy I need to think about?
Will items be moving in and out of your collection and require tracking?

WHO am I collecting it for and who is using this resource?
Will this collection be public or in-house only? Does this collection need any privacy considerations? Do you want it on the web?
Is it for researchers? Academic research requires citability, and sometimes rights management and access.
Who will be producing and/or managing this digital collection? Are they paid or volunteers? Are there many or few? A project with more financial backing can have a larger scope than those without.
THINGS YOU DO IN A DIGITAL COLLECTION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

CREATE & MANAGE ITEMS
You can have different types of items in your collection. Most software come with a standard set, and you can customize this as-needed.

STORE & ORDER METADATA
You can collect and organize different types of information -- metadata -- on the items in your collection. Again, software comes with standard sets correlated to research and library standards, and you can add to these.

Most crucially, metadata creates discoverability in and outside your collection. Using metadata adds big-picture nuance, and allows research to happen.

SEARCHING
Not only can you search, you can create granular searches that allow you to refine results in large collections.

ADDING ITEMS
Sample item-entry screen, CollectiveAccess

Screenshot from Omeka, standard

Screenshot from CollectiveAccess, Dublin Core + custom metadata

Screenshot from CollectiveAccess

Sample item entry screen, Omeka
Past Digital Collection Clients and Projects

CUNY, John Jay Library
http://dc.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/

Software: CollectiveAccess
Specifics: Created research-level DublinCore metadata compliant administrative and public-web interfaces. Customization included theming, individual object pages, and data entry forms.

Clemson University, WLCC Lab
Internal research database

Software: CollectiveAccess
Specifics: Created a research-level, DublinCore metadata compliant administrative web interface for an archeological research team. Import of 90,000 items. Customization of object types and input screens, summary screens and searches.
Interference Archive & Occuprint
http://catalog.interferencearchive.org

Software: CollectiveAccess
Specifics: Consulting and partial development on a research-level, VRA metadata compliant administrative and public-web interfaces.

Queer Zine Archive Project
http://archive.qzap.org/

Software: CollectiveAccess
Specifics: Advising and technical assistance for server and software. Collaboration on the xxZINECORExx metadata standards, to be applied to zine research.

The Fist is Still Raised
http://raisedfist.femmetech.org/

Software: Omeka
Specifics: Research project on political art history. Uses database-specific functionality to learn about and organize images by decade, visual tropes, and material details.
**Digital Archives, Catalogs & Research Databases**

**FAQ**

**Why manage my collection in a digital database?**
Imagine your sock drawer. A database is the difference between putting your socks unmatched in a drawer, versus matching them, rolling them up together, and putting the light socks, gym socks, and winter socks in different areas. Sure they're all in the same drawer in the first situation, but in the database they're organized. This is how you realize that you have a lot of wool socks, how you keep track if you loan out your favorite pair, and how you can easily replace all your socks at once if your sock drawer crashes. Ok, the metaphor isn't perfect.

**Why open-source software?**
#1 Shared code means better code! #2 The community of users around open-source software is a huge asset. From development of documentation and plugins, to having people who can talk about the functionalities and quirks with you, the software we work in the most, CollectiveAccess, and others we recommend -- Omeka and Collection Space -- have fantastic user groups.

**How long will this take?**
How complex do you want this to be? Simple projects can take two months; complex ones can take 18. Any technology project has three players: you/the people working with and generating the archive or collection; us/the developers; and the collection of data or information itself. Each of these will have input to speed up or possibly slow down a project.

**How much does this cost?**
While we do select work with all-volunteer organizations, in general a complex catalog -- especially if it involves an import -- will be around the same price as a professionally-built website of similar complexity.

**What's collaborating with Openflows like?**
We do things a bit differently, in that we explore the needs and vision of our clients iteratively throughout our building work together. We call this working in Phases, and we start any project by dividing the work into large buckets which flow into each other to end at your final database. Openflows includes training and QA testing in all our projects for two reasons: one, discovering bugs is run of the mill in any tech project: our job is to find, track, and prioritize addressing them. Two, running through the functions of your web interface as they are being created allows you, the user, to become familiar with it and have an opportunity to understand your data interaction needs at a deeper level.

**What happens when you're done building it?**
Our hope is that you are fully ready to work with and show off your catalog! We also might work together in an ongoing way to address new things you decide you want, or to provide database security support if you don't have IT staff.

**ABOUT US**
Openflows has over a decade of experience creating complex multi-user sites and web-accessed databases in ongoing collaborations with arts and cultural groups and non-profit organizations. Since 2012 we've applied these skills to creating or collaborating on the archives and collections shown on the previous pages, and teaching digital archiving. From discovery phase, to development, to launch, creating professional digital documentation of cultural work and research is work we love and have a lot of experience in.

Contact Eric Goldhagen [eric@openflows.com] or Hadassah Damien [damien@openflows.com] to discuss a project. Or, check out our digital catalog resources online at: training.openflows.com