

A Textiles History of Kernersville

Marketing and Outreach

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The world of archives and special collections has been changing rapidly in recent years. In the past those worlds were notoriously viewed as elitist. They were considered to be there for the use of a select few under the careful guardianship of librarians and archivists who controlled their access. While this image may never have been completely accurate, the very nature of special collections and archives lend themselves to such misconceptions. The typical library patron is accustomed to a certain environment. Shelves of books stretch out in front of them. They are free to browse at their leisure. All the options that particular library has to offer is right at their fingertips. Librarians are available to help patrons but they are free to take their time in the stacks. Special collections offer a very different picture with stacks that are closed and access to the physical items being limited. That could easily be seen as intimidating or daunting to someone unaccustomed to their rules.

Outreach has been crucial in challenging and changing those perceptions of special collections. Institutions can shape their outreach in many forms and to serve a variety of goals. Outreach has long been a useful tool in gaining the attention of potential donors for both archives and special collections. These donors could be contributing funds or items for collections. Outreach is now being directed not just to donors but to the everyday user.

In an effort to gain a better understanding of how different institutions are approaching their user outreach I have examined several sources. In 2012, Sean Heyliger, Juli McLoone, and Nikki Lynn Thomas conducted a survey of social media outreach in repositories in the United States and Canada. In their article “Making Connections: A Survey of Special Collections’ Social Media Outreach”, the authors sought to find a better understanding of both the

expectations for social media in a professional setting and how successfully those expectations are being fulfilled (2013). They examined primary source repositories using at least one of three forms of social media: blogs, Facebook or Twitter. A multiple choice questionnaire was provided to the 524 institutions that fulfilled that criteria. 212 repositories responded to that questionnaire. An open-ended survey was sent as a follow-up to the initial survey.

This article provided a great deal of useful information. In regards to demographic, the largest percentage of participants were colleges and universities. They made up over 50 percent of respondents. The remaining group was made up of government repositories, museums, historical societies, public libraries, and research centers. More than 50 percent of those responding were from metropolitan areas of more than 300,000 people (p. 378).

There are a few results that were specifically interesting. The survey showed that most repositories specifically format each post to the specific platform with the most overlap falling between Facebook and Twitter posts (p. 381). Facebook and Twitter users were also reported as using recycled content at much higher rates. Repositories also believe that Facebook has a very different audience than their blog or other outlets. They reported the importance of directing Facebook traffic to blogs or websites (p. 382). Size of repository and number of staff also have a great impact on both nature of content and how often posts are made. Unsurprising, the more staff at a repository the more in depth and frequent posts occur (p. 385).

In terms of goals and success, despite the differences in repository type and size, these were similar. The common responses indicated that most repositories wanted to increase awareness of collections, highlighting specific materials and promote specific events. The overwhelming response was that social media was successful at achieving these primary goals

(p. 392). This was an interesting, large scale look at how social media is being used and some of the limitations that come with its use.

Next, I looked at some very specific uses of social media for insight in dealing with unique collections. Suzanna Conrad's article provides an in depth look at digital storytelling through a case study of her experiences as an intern with the Monterey Park Bruggemeyer Library (2013). Conrad identified three primary functions for digital storytelling: education, outreach, and preservation of history (p. 462). She also discussed several challenges that can impact a project. One of the first issues to be considered is the actual production process. Depending on the desired finished product this can require specific software for editing or music and sound. Preservation of the digital documents then poses another challenge. She notes that long term preservation of digital assets can be a time consuming task (p. 461). Finally, copyright is a point of concern in digital storytelling. This is especially concerning because it is not only a matter of the copyright on any music or images uses. The ethical rights of the storyteller must be considered. Consent and release forms are important to avoid these issues (p. 462).

Conrad notes the outcomes of this project as successfully encouraging outreach and community involvement. They also created a digital local history record (p. 469). But this was with the assistance of a grant that provided both tools and training to create these digital stories. I feel that is important to consider as many small institutions will not have those advantages. Either the scope would need to be adjusted significantly or this would be a wonderful project to consider for a grant application.

Shelley Sweeney of the University of Manitoba presents a very interesting approach to the promotion of one of their most notable and unique collections, the Hamilton Family fonds (2014). The collection itself is quite unique. The Hamilton Family fonds is comprised of the

investigations of Doctor Thomas Glendenning Hamilton and his wife into the possibility life after death. The most interesting items are the shocking and sometimes disturbing séance photographs (p. 17). Attempts to draw attention began as early as 1997 with a simple website with the finding aid for the collection. This evolved into small digital exhibit in 2001 (p. 21). But the most interesting approach to outreach and increasing visibility of this collection came in 2008 with the creation of a YouTube video. Thanks to a fortunate series of events they had just the right combination of materials, staff and funds allotted for outreach to create a dynamic product. The finished product was simple but both eerie and compelling.

The response to the video was impressive. The video received attention from both local and national newspapers and the story appeared on a national nightly news program. As of the time this article was written the video had been viewed 250,000 with almost 800 comments (p. 25). YouTube was a new technology at this time. Sweeney sites a significant part of their success to a very supportive environment at the University of Manitoba Libraries as well as a university public affairs department with the skills to make the most of this innovative effort. The video did elicit quite a bit of controversy and some negative commentary. Some views questioned the veracity of the materials that were being presented as authentic (p. 28). This is a good reminder that the word “authentic” holds different meanings at different levels. As a whole this project provides a wonderful look at an innovative use of technology. They also used a format to play to the unique characteristics of the collection. Eight years later the video is still compelling.

In the article “The War of 1812 in 140 Characters or Less: SuperCool or Super Un-Tweet Worthy?” the authors detail an innovative approach to using social media to engage their audience (2014). The Archives of Ontario are home to a collection of dairies dating from 1801

to 1853. These diaries were written by a man named Ely Playter: a militia officer, farmer, tavern owner, lay preacher, and member of the Upper Canada House of Assembly. Playter recorded his daily life in vivid detail, even the most basic things (p. 559). With the bicentennial of the War of 1812 the Archives of Ontario decided to use an interesting approach to promoting the collection. They created a Twitter feed to document the war from the perspective of Ely Playter. They set out to create one to three tweets per day generated from the Playter dairies to line up as closely as possible with the actual diary entries. They did face some challenges as Playter did not write every day and sometimes not for several weeks (p. 563). This required some creativity on their part. They created a page on the Archives website to introduce the project and digitized the diary pages but largely the goal was to let the tweets speak for themselves. One of their goals that I found most interesting was their desire to target students in grades seven to ten. Despite a lack of truly measurable results they do consider this project a success as they utilized social media in a very different way.

These articles gave me some terrific insight into some uses of social media, both traditional and untraditional. It also led me to consider the target audience for both my project and this collection as a whole. A Textiles History of Kernersville is currently an active exhibit at the Kernersville Museum. This is a very small facility with only one full time staff member. Currently they are only open one day per month on a seasonal basis. Collections rotation infrequently, largely due to the time constraints of making large changes. Community involvement has been integral in building this collection. This collection could continue to reside at the Kernersville Museum for some time and after the physical collection has been rotated it can now continue to live on through the website.

I think I would target outreach efforts for this collection, both the physical collection and the website, towards two primary groups. First, I would be interested in focusing on those interested in North Carolina history. It is clear there was a tremendous effort in the local community to help gather information and photographs to build the collection. I think the outreach should extend beyond the local history community. Those individuals are clearly already engaged in this collection. Outreach would be focused to engage a wider audience for North Carolina history and mill history. Mill communities are no oddity across the state but the evolution of the Kernersville mill community is different from the typically mill town.

The second group I would be interested in focusing my outreach efforts on would be students in the local area. This collection is very personal to Kernersville. So many people in Kernersville were employed by the mills. We drive past the sites of former mills every day and are unaware of the history. It represents an opportunity to instill an early appreciation of that local history in the students that will be future historians and archivists. Many of these students very likely have family members who worked at the mills or had another mill connection. As they learn about the history of their town they can also learn about their own family history.

In order to

## References

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