PART III

POSTERS

Targeted Access for Varied Audiences to Integrated, Heterogeneous Digital Information Resources

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Portals have emerged as an important tool for facilitating single-point-access to digital resources. This poster presents an overview of the University of North Texas (UNT) Libraries' "Portal to Texas History" project, which aims to integrate and ensure long-term access to large quantities of heterogeneous digital resources from many different institutions. The UNT library is undertaking the leadership role by creating the application framework, setting project standards and guidelines, and facilitating collaborative efforts for content building. Also discussed are expanded services for targeted audiences, project approaches to preservation challenges, collaboration benefits, and other issues that emerged in the process of building a platform for the portal system.

Introduction

Libraries, publishers, museums, historical societies, and federal and state agencies collectively hold a tremendous body of educational, cultural and historical material, the value of which would be greatly enhanced if it could be made accessible from one centralized Web site. Web applications are making resource integration much easier, allowing portals to provide content and services that span myriad technologies across institutions. In this regard, the Portal to Texas History Project addresses various issues related to putting portal technology into practice.

Portal to Texas History Project

The UNT Libraries received a Texas Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund competitive grant to create a Web Portal to Texas History. The project created the entry point on the Web for access to vast and heterogeneous primary source material about Texas History. In collaboration with many stakeholders, including libraries, museums, researchers, young scholars, teachers, and historians, the portal provides access to an ever-growing diverse and multi-platform collection of published and unpublished resources (datasets, manuscripts, letters, maps, oral histories, photographs, etc.) at school, home, office, or anyplace with a computer and Internet connection.

Collaboration and Portal Technology

The growing use of global networks together with the growing numbers of digital library initiatives have made the need for collaboration and compliance with standards more critical than ever. Standards aim to link and integrate various digital collections into a single unified resource, interoperable and accessible for exploring and searching by anyone, from anyplace, at anytime. Collaboration among all stakeholders (universities, museums, libraries, state agencies, and other organizations with Texas history related materials) helps to facilitate resource sharing on a wider geographic scale and to provide access to a more diverse collection than any one group or institution would be able to provide alone. Even small institutions own unique resources that provide depth and richness to the collection of available

materials, and this group of institutions benefits greatly from collaborative efforts that assist them with technology and other resources for digitization and public access.

The Portal to Texas History project required the creation of a sophisticated application framework to manage metadata and digital resources from institutions across the state, store discovery and preservation metadata, and provide search and retrieval capabilities. Software functionality includes harvesting capabilities for capturing materials for preservation and access, ingest and export capabilities for batch loading and exporting metadata in special formats.

The application framework also enabled special types of services for different audiences. Services for teachers include restricted access to curricula that integrate the materials provided by the portal into classroom and homework activities, and password protected classroom space for cross-school-district interactions such as chat or sharing of resources. Sophisticated, full-text search and retrieval services are provided for the researcher and scholar, and browsing services offer topic guidance. Researchers may build customized services.

In addition to creating the application framework, the project team established project standards, wrote best practices guidelines for the project, continues to coordinate funding and other collaborative efforts for participating institutions, and provides training.

Ensuring Long-Term Access

In order to meet the needs of diversified users, reliable, long-term access to information resources must be assured. The Portal project emphasizes preservation as a priority in a changing information landscape. Among other interrelated activities, implementing preservation metadata system is the most important steps in dealing with longevity issue. A detail description of the Portal project's preservation metadata element set can be viewed at the project's Web site http://texashistory.unt.edu/ Elements in the set were chosen to offer flexibility for varied resource types and to meet the needs of collaborating institutions.

Summary

Although the role of information clearinghouse has long been performed by libraries, in the system of knowledge creation and use, a Web portal serves as a tool to identify and retain important sources of information and to ensure continuing access to them. Web portals have the potential of bringing about real change to our professional and organizational culture to provide immediate, unlimited access through one site to materials in multiple collections. Participating in more cooperative programs with other organizations, including ones outside the library community, and implementing information systems that support standards, will enable libraries to integrate previously unavailable heterogeneous digital content.

The synergies of numerous emerging trends (individualized library portals, cross-discipline collaborations, etc.) provide new ways to reach out to new audiences to enhance the libraries abilities to teach, influence, and play an active role in the Web environment.

As an academic library of the 21st century, the UNT library is undertaking the leadership role by creating the application framework, setting project standards and guidelines, and facilitating collaborative efforts for content building. In this regard, the resulting 'Portal to Texas History' site provides varied services to various users (researchers, teachers, young scholars, etc.) and certainly, it has the potential for far-reaching impact on the future teaching and scholarship for Texas history.

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