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LIS 658 – Archival Management

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Assignment #3 – Archive Outreach

One of the most important responsibilities that archivists have to fulfill on a regular basis is to reach out to their community and convince them to make use of the collections that they are preserving. In order to make sure that the countless stories and memories that make up a community live on, the archivist has to make sure that the audience knows that those collections are there. That way, those stories get told, which allows them to continue living on. That is where outreach events, like programs or exhibits for example, come into play, where the audience can personally interact with some of the materials that can be found within an archive's collection. It's like sampling a food that you have never had before and then, if you so choose of course, diving straight into it.

Trying to give that initial experience to the audience is goal behind an outreach program or initiative, which I aim to accomplish with this paper. For this assignment, I decided that I am going to suggest an outreach event for the National Archives of Japan. The reason why I specifically chose this particular collection is because one of the minors that I graduated from college with is Japanese. I also love Japanese language and culture, which I believe represents part of who I personally am. That is why I want to see if I could spread some of that love enthusiasm to the community, as well as anyone whose curiosity has been sparked by their experience with Japanese materials.

To begin, it would be useful for the audience to gain some insight about the institution who houses these Japanese collections. According to their “About Us” page on their website, the National Archives of Japan was established in 1971 under the Prime Minister’s Office.¹ It has the status of an incorporated administrative agency, who has a vision of becoming a public archives that keeps both its physical and digital doors open to anyone who wants to come in. As stated by their “Our Vision” tab, “We will work to make the National Archives an information center where anyone can touch through our holdings on the past events that have shaped Japan.”² This statement encompasses the ultimate mission that the National Archives of Japan is constantly striving to accomplish. To briefly describe what kinds of materials that NAJ has in their archives, they mainly have historical materials, public records, more that give Japan it’s identity and personality. Ultimately, they aim to reach out to the global community and invite them to come and experience the multitude of stories, materials, memories, and events that have molded Japan into the magnificent country that it is today.

Since they seem to be trying to appeal to the global audience, creating a strong outreach initiative for their digital archives is going to be key. It is going to be a tremendous help in bringing them one step closer towards their ultimate goal. Based on my initial search of their website and archives, it would appear that they are making an effort in trying to reach out to the world. They have a twitter account, which they keep updated on a regular basis. Some of the things that they promote on the page includes exhibition of materials, lectures, and more. Another thing that they are contributing

¹ Outline of the National Archives, *National Archives of Japan*,
<http://www.archives.go.jp/english/abouts/outline.html> (Accessed April 10, 2019).

² Our Vision, *National Archives of Japan*,
<http://www.archives.go.jp/english/abouts/outline.html> (Accessed April 10, 2019).

towards outreaching efforts is that they are sending representatives to different public archives abroad to learn about their systems. As stated by the website's "International Exchanges" tab, "NAJ proactively sends its staff to public archives abroad to study foreign archival systems, as well as their functions and business affairs."³ This shows that NAJ is strengthening their relationship with the world through their foreign colleagues. Not only that, "It also strives to provide information through various activities, such as dispatching its officers and officials to international conferences."⁴ Overall, NAJ recognizes how immensely important it is for them to put a lot energy into outreach efforts if they want the global community to be aware and make use of their collections.

Like I previously mentioned, I believe that in order for them to achieve their goal of appealing to the global community, they will need to promote the digital materials that they have in their collections. To accomplish this task, I believe that the best course of action would be to develop and host an online exhibit that showcases some of NAJ's most important and famous materials. It would be set up like a presentation, which would be run by one of the archive's experts. That expert will act as a kind of online tour guide who will take the global audience on a digital safari, where they can observe the vast array of amazing historical, Japanese materials that NAJ has. They could either conduct this exhibit through the use of pictures and PowerPoint slides or through the use of a webcam that they can use to show valuable materials that are too risky or sensitive to be digitized. Either way, the desired outcome or goal will be to try to connect the global

³ International Exchanges, *National Archives of Japan*,
<http://www.archives.go.jp/english/abouts/outline.html> (Accessed April 10, 2019).

⁴ Ibid.

audience to Japan's history through the use of materials that make the country unique. In other words, we want to increase the visibility of NAJ's collections. We want to give the global audience an experience that they can't find at any other public archives, and creating digital exhibits is going to be the best way to do it.

It should also allow the organization to not have to deal with a lot of the usual issues that are faced with creating and maintaining exhibits. One of the biggest benefits that I believe goes towards NAJ's favor is that they don't have to worry about any physical risks that could be imposed on their collections. The global users who attend this virtual exhibit can freely interact with and manipulate the images/videos of the materials without the fear of damaging them. This benefit was emphasized in a blog post that talks about the boons that virtual exhibits can provide. According to this blog, "Second, virtual exhibits allow us (and the user) more freedom to manipulate objects in the collection."⁵ It allows the audience get that personal experience that the archives wants them to have without damaging the collections in the process.

Like I just said, going the digital route should eliminate most of the common challenges that archives face when organizing an exhibit. However, it does not mean that it will virtually eliminate all issues. There are two challenges that I feel should be kept in mind as this project progresses. The first challenge is obvious in regards to the possibility of technical difficulties. While technology is a wonderful thing, it can also be a complete nightmare when it doesn't want to cooperate with what the person in charge of the program wants to do. A good counter to this is to have a staff member who is

⁵ Decampda, "Benefits of Virtual Exhibits," Informed Comment Blog, entry posted September 16, 2013, <http://benschmidt.org/dighist13/?p=39> (Accessed April 11, 2019).

knowledgeable about computers on hand in case technology wants to try something. They should also be on hand in case any member of the global audience is experiencing problems on their end as well.

That's one potential challenge dealt with. The other challenge would most likely be budgetary. Bringing in technological equipment and maintaining can be pretty expensive. There will most likely be times when the determined budget may not agree with the amount of money that the virtual exhibit might demand. Even so though, considering the goal of reaching out to the global audience, I believe that it is more than worth it. Once the world sees the rich amount of materials that the NAJ has, then they are going to want to come back in the future to make use of them. That in turn will provide more than enough reason keep allocating a portion of the budget to keeping the online exhibit going. I believe that this program is worth investing in, as it has the potential to bring a lot of success to this organization.

Speaking of success, the last question that needs to be answered is how does the National Archives of Japan know if this program is a success. Well, I think that the answer to this question is made up of multiple parts, which are how many users attend the online exhibit, how much feedback/comments is given after the exhibit has concluded, and how many users come back after the first visit. I believe that these specific measures of success are going to be the best way to tell NAJ whether or not this program brings them one step closer towards accomplishing their ultimate goal, which is to appeal to as many members of the global audience as possible. Those members who are impressed with their archives will tell their friends, who will tell their friends and so on and so forth. That in turn will tremendously increase the visibility of the NAJ's collections, which will

lead to increase use. Like the rest of a library, as well businesses in general, patrons are the lifeblood of archives. They are what give archives the motivation to keep collections maintained and updated. In my opinion, the user is the one true measure of success.

If the National Archives of Japan implement this plan, then they will see that success come their way. They have an awesome collection that tells Japan's story, which deserves to be seen by the rest of the world. The materials within these collections deserve to have their adventures told to the global audience. It would be an injustice if they just sit on some shelf in a back room gathering dust. Outreach programs like this one prevents that dust from accumulating. As long as the National Archives of Japan keeps reaching out to different organizations, then they will achieve the vision that they have worked so hard for. I believe that it is going to happen one day. It will happen one day, because consistent outreach programs are what constantly breathe life into archives.

Works Cited Page

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