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LIBR 256 – Discussion Post - Management

Theme 7 – Digital Records

Case one - Google

You are the head of special collections and your university librarian comes to you with exciting news: Google has asked him to participate in an exciting new project. Google wants to take your existing digital content and repackage it in their new and exciting History Online. Even though all your digital images are already available to researchers online through your web servers and on Flickr, the UL sees broader expansion as a great benefit to researchers. After reading the contract that Google has sent, you see several problems: they want exclusive use without limits on how long their use will last.

1. In your opinion, does the benefit of broader exposure exceed the loss of control?

I would say that it depends on the current state of the archives. Has the audience base shrunk to a point where we are concerned about the longevity of the special collections itself? Has funding been reallocated to other departments because of this perceived decline in interest? Has Google provided projections of use? If broader exposure is needed to keep the special collections relevant and increase a declining client base, then certain concessions can be made regarding control. However, negotiating with Google on the particulars of the contract should be possible. I don't think they are at the point of offering take it or leave it contracts. Also, I think that increasing access to the collection via such very well known entities as Google is actually helping to fulfill the archival mission of access to and use of preserved materials.

2. As Google is clearly doing this to make money, would you ask them to pay a portion of that income to your institution? If they said no, would you recommend ending negotiations?

As I understand it, Google makes the bulk of its revenue by selling adword space on search results pages. First, I would want to understand exactly how they were generating income from our special collection images, and then would determine how best to approach them about sharing that income. If they declined to share the income, then I would see if they might possibly be interested in more of a barter for adword space for the special collection itself. If including our collections in Google's project could allow for the accrual of credits that we could use to advertise our collection through Google adwords then I think that would be beneficial to the future success of the archives. If Google denied both of these requests, then I would go back to asking what sort of exposure are they promising us? Can they commit to a certain number of views or links back to our online collection? What are our outs on the contract should things not seem to be going so well? I'd be hesitant to end negotiations too quickly, as I think the benefits of the relationship could be significant to the future of the repository.

Case two

Our profession has changed and continues to change. These changes are brought on mainly by technological changes in the digital era. In your readings, Fran Blouin makes the case that archivists and historians have lost their traditional relationship. Digital humanists talk about how the archives is "silent" and sees its job as creating digital archives focused on building information about minorities and under-documented populations.

Look at this recent job posting before you answer these questions:

<http://hastac.org/opportunities/unc-charlotte-associate-university-librarian-aul-special-collections>

1. Do you think the profession of archives will disappear? If not, what will its role be in the future?

I think it won't disappear, but I think the archival discipline needs to stop separating itself from libraries, museums, and history disciplines. It needs to instead focus on commonalities with those disciplines in order to establish itself as an integral partner. It can benefit from the partnership intellectually, financially, and in terms of theory and practice. I think it needs to do the same thing with corporations and technology companies—try to work with them, especially in the age of born digital materials and trying to find/create an archival system to store and access those materials. I think the relationship between records managers and archivists also needs to continue to improve. The next stage of the archival professions seems like it will be a transitional one as the shift from paper to digital records occurs.

2. Will archivists have to be more involved in helping humanists create digital archives focusing on various topics rather than collecting such digital archives that have already been created?

I don't think it needs to be one or the other, granted staffing might not be appropriate to do both. I think it really depends on the archival repository's goals and its patrons. Certainly, if an archive wanted to add a revenue generating activity to its services, it might consider helping humanists to create their digital archives. Even if this is actually just internal billing between university departments, it will help the archive be recognized as more than a cost center. Also, it seems like a new or at least shifting role might make most sense for archives to take on to remain relevant.