An Introduction to Involving Users

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Many libraries, archives, and museums provide their users with social computing environments that include the ability to tag collections, annotate objects, and otherwise contribute their thoughts to the knowledge base of the institution. Information professionals have responded to the world of user-created content by developing open source tools to coordinate these activities and researching the best ways to involve users in the co-creation of digital knowledge.

This rapid influx of new technologies and new methods for interacting with users comes at a time when libraries, archives, and museums still struggle to share data across their own institutions, let alone between institutions of different types. Information professionals had barely begun to make progress developing crosswalks and data interoperability standards when, as social computing became the norm on the Web, providing the ability for users to manipulate data changed from a cool toy to a basic expectation. Moving forward—and keeping pace with user expectations—requires the coordination of many different users (in all their variety) as they contribute, participate, shape, and create all types of data in all types of contexts.

This issue of *Library Trends* offers the chance to consider what social computing means for the future of libraries, archives, and museums, and to think carefully about the future trends and long-term implications of involving users in the co-construction of knowledge online. The authors of the following articles have thought broadly about the issues raised when we bring users into the mix in various ways and at various points in the information life cycle. Their efforts contribute to ongoing broad-based discussions about what happens when users are involved in shaping, guiding, and directing the development of online libraries, archives, and museums and their information resources.

Martens's article on *approaching the anti-collection,* for instance, offers a unique look at collections as boundary objects, contrasting the core collections of libraries, archives, and museums with "the set of all publications not held in the local collection"—the anti-collection. Her discussion takes her through case studies exploring what happens when users help co-construct new knowledge—covering such examples as fanfiction archives, arXiv, wikileaks, and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) databases—while her analysis details the similarities and differences between different types of collecting activities.

Feinberg's discussion of *personal expressive bibliographies* continues this conversation by exploring what happens when libraries, archives, and museums encourage their visitors to create their own personal collections of items of interest selected from the institution's holdings. Drawing upon Umberto Eco's notion of the "poetic list," she contrasts the "expressive potential of the poetic collection with traditional descriptive goals of libraries, archives, and museums," and explores how information organizations can benefit from engaging users in the interpretation of their collections.

Bastian, Cloonan, and Harvey's discussion of *digital stewardship pedagogy* explores how an education that offers opportunities for experimentation and innovation can "affect the ability of practitioners to interact with users, as well as how users can become involved with and integrated into the construction of digital stewardship activities." Using the Digital Curriculum Laboratory at Simmons College as a case study, the authors explore the significance of incorporating digital stewardship in the library and information science (LIS) curriculum and reflect on the value of experimental learning when preparing students for careers in digital curation or stewardship.

Galloway continues this theme by examining how an ongoing collaboration between the Goodwill Computer Museum and the School of Information at the University of Texas provides a "laboratory setting for the participation of academic researchers in the field of *digital heritage preservation.*" Her discussion and analysis of the phenomenon of retrocomputing and how users from different backgrounds can contribute their expertise to help document the history of computing has direct implications for academic and nonacademic communities seeking to work together to preserve the future of digital heritage.

Copeland and Barreau's article on how public libraries can help *people to manage and share their digital information* presents a detailed framework for co-created community repositories that addresses "the social, legal, and technical aspects of managing personal, digital information over a lifetime, as well as the cultural, social, and historical benefits of sharing this information." Their research explores how librarians can encourage patrons to engage in the identification and documentation of their own personal histories and help develop co-created community repositories that have a significance that goes beyond the individual contributor.

Somerville and EchoHawk analyze how libraries, archives, and museums can engage their community members in the *co-creation of digital knowledge with community significance*. By analyzing work undertaken at the Center for Colorado and the West in Denver, they discuss how users can help "determine 'significance' for cultural heritage collections and interpretations" through the use of community-generated metadata that provide an appropriate context for images and collections.

De Rijcke and Beaulieu offer a fascinating look at *images as interface*, examining how images in online museums can function as "tools in the production of museum knowledge." Their ethnographic study of the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam illustrates how the use of images as interfaces can engage users by "providing a networked context for digital knowledge" in ways that offer new opportunities for interaction between museum professionals and museum visitors, thereby promoting new forms of distributed collection building.

Terras's study of *Flickr as a platform for amateur cultural and heritage content* examines how the general public can participate in the digitization of cultural heritage, and how libraries, museums, and archives benefit when "pro-amateurs" are encouraged to contribute to the development of online collections. By drawing on empirical data assessing how Flickr.com is used as a "forum for hosting, discussing, and collecting vintage ephemera," Terras offers recommendations for best practice that will help traditional memory institutions make their collections more interesting and more useful for the communities they serve.

Van Hooland, Rodriguez, and Boydens examine the *double-edged impact of user-generated metadata within the cultural heritage sector*, drawing upon a range of research studies—empirical and theoretical—to reflect on the "engagement and coherence process in which users are involved when they are creating metadata." By assessing the role of user comments and social tagging in cultural heritage organizations, the authors illuminate the potential benefits and challenges for information professionals seeking to engage their users through social media.

Finally, Bowler, Koshman, Oh, He, Callery, Bowker, and Cox offer a detailed exploration of *user-centered design in LIS*, examining how the "user-centered paradigm" has influenced LIS theory and practice through the development of concepts such as "personal collections, social bookmarking, finding aids, Web interface design, information architecture, visualization systems, and personalization and adaptive search." The authors provide a valuable and informative look at the sociocultural forces that influence how users are represented in information systems design, as well as the implications for research and teaching in LIS.

The contributions of these authors have improved our understanding of such questions as:

- How are libraries, archives, and museums implementing user-contributed data or descriptions of artifacts, objects, or collections on their websites? What are the long-term implications of involving users in the co-description or co-cataloguing of digital knowledge?
- How are libraries, archives, and museums encouraging users to create online collections of personal favorites or similar items on their websites? What are the long-term implications of involving users in the co-creation or co-curation of digital knowledge?
- How are libraries, archives, and museums encouraging users to create or structure their own online environments, designing personalized websites or portals specifically suited to individual needs? What are the implications of involving users in the design and structuring of online interfaces for the development and presentation of digital knowledge?
- How is the education of library, archives, and museum practitioners (and in particular the increase in online and hybrid learning technologies) influencing the ways practitioners subsequently incorporate technology into their user service environments in libraries, archives, and museums?

It is our hope that this issue of *Library Trends* will encourage even more research on the future trends and long-term implications of the different ways in which information professionals in libraries, archives, and museums can, have, and should involve their users in the co-construction of digital knowledge.

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