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Collaboration for Promotional Success: The *Western Writers Series Digital Editions* at Boise State University

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Introduction

In the fall of 2008, Boise State University Special Collections published its first online digital collection entitled *Western Writers Series Digital Editions* (1), a selection of titles from the Boise State University Western Writers Series. Published at Boise State University since 1972, volumes in the Western Writers Series provide brief, authoritative introductions to writers and classic texts of the American West. The impetus behind digitizing 23 of the 172 titles was to make accessible the out-of-print booklets that the editors still receive purchasing requests for, as well as showcase one of Boise State University's unique publications. With the booklets at 50-60 pages each, it was an inexpensive digitization project to undertake. To achieve this, Boise State University Albertsons Library formed a partnership with the university's English Department to digitize the out-of-print editions and later made them available using CONTENTdm, the content management system hosted by the Special Collections department. Once the project was completed, discussion commenced regarding how to best promote the new digital collection both on and off-campus. This paper describes the collaboration between Special Collections, departments on campus, and within the community to successfully promote the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions*.

Promotion of *Western Writers Series Digital Editions*

Earlier this year, a post on the academic blog "In the Library with the Lead Pipe" suggested using different terminology to communicate what libraries do, including a call for terms to replace "outreach" altogether. (2) A review of the literature surrounding public outreach in archives and special collections reveals that it lacks both scholarship and consensus: the given definitions are not satisfactory and are used interchangeably with words like marketing and promotion. (3) For purposes of this article, the term "outreach" includes all promotional and marketing activities that librarians and archivists undertook to spread the word about the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions*.

By the time the project was undertaken, budget considerations were a great concern within the library. To combat the budget crisis, the library implemented a number of small, inexpensive ideas to promote the launch and use of the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions*, including the creation of OCLC records, printed materials, a physical exhibit, a public reading in the community, and many other web and non-web based tools.

Going Live

Since the Albertsons Library Digital Collections web site was not yet functional, the committee created a separate homepage for the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions*. The homepage acted as a portal to the digital collection and linked to the Western Writers Series web site and series catalog. It also provided a list of the newly created OCLC records for each of booklets, which included the individual permanent URL. This list allowed other libraries to quickly access the records and add them to their OPACs, thereby increasing access to the digital collection. (4)

Printed materials

After the project had a permanent home on the web, the library produced promotional materials and announcements about the Western Writers Series Digital Editions. The committee discussed different types of promotion and marketing materials and decided upon several formats targeted to different audience demographics. The campus print shop designed and printed a 4x9 inch, two-sided color brochure that provided information about the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions*, including the URL and contact information for both the Special Collections department and the Western Writers Series. Another inexpensive decision used to promote the digital collection was MOO mini cards, which are two-sided cards that are one-third of the size of typical business cards. (5) The front featured a slice of a series' cover, while the back included the name of the project and the URL. Both of these products could be used to attract users both at the university and when distributed at conferences and other related events.

A Physical Exhibit

In addition to hosting the digital collection and preserving the original copies of the series, the Special Collections department holds most of the editorial records of the Western Writers Series. The record group includes correspondence between the editors and authors, published materials, and the series framework. The collection also contains the original artwork from a smattering of the booklet covers by the artist Arny Skov. The Special Collections department felt that it was important to diffuse the perception that "the materials on the web are completely different from those in the reading room." (6) Archivists mounted an exhibit that tied together the physical records of the series, the published booklets and the digital collection at the time of other promotional materials being released to the public.

Faculty Collaboration and the Public Reading at The Cabin

While the brochures, business cards, and exhibit were all more traditional means of promoting the digital collection, the team also discussed other methods of outreach beyond the university campus. It was important to showcase that this particular collection was a vibrant and active research center in which students, faculty, readers, and librarians meet easily and cooperatively over joint ventures. (7) In this instance, the library decided to focus on creating new connections within the community in general and fostering relationships with others in the greater writing community. Together with the English Department, the library approached the professors in the Creative Writing MFA program at Boise State University about putting together a public reading to celebrate both the writing program and unique publications found at the university.

Considering the library's main constituents (students and faculty), it made sense as an academic unit to partner with programs already on campus to promote the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions*. (8) One of the constituent groups that had an interest in this project is the Creative Writing faculty at Boise State University. Reference librarian Rick Stoddart and English professor and series co-editor Tom Hillard approached the Creative Writing MFA program professors about putting together a public reading to celebrate the digital collection as well as the MFA in Creative Writing and publications found at the university. Additionally, this provided a focal point for the event aside from promoting a new digital collection as well as demonstrated the library's interest in faculty's activities and interests. (9) Four MFA faculty agreed to participate in the public reading, all but one with new or forthcoming publications. (10) Not only did this event promote a valuable asset within the university community, "this cooperation with colleagues in creative writing would promote the [physical and digital collection] in several different but complementary ways," including the preservation and dissemination of authors' papers in the Idaho Writers Archive in Special

Collections. (11)

The next step was deciding on where to hold the public reading. After considering the possible consequences of holding the event on the university campus (likelihood of people not related to the university showing up, less choices for venue and food options, etc.), Stoddart and Hillard approached The Cabin about hosting the public reading, and they graciously agreed to honor their request. (12) As a literary center that celebrates the love of writing and reading, it was an ideal location for the event. (13) By choosing a location off-campus and in the heart of Boise, the hope was that more people from the community would attend as well as other faculty, even those who never pay attention to their library may nonetheless pay attention to one another. (14) The library also took advantage of this event to showcase itself to potential donors through invitations sent by the development director.

Dual Marketing Tools

To promote both the public reading event and the launch of the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions*, the library embraced both web and non-web marketing opportunities. The library posted a banner located at the bottom of the library's homepage for ten days leading up to the event. (15) A blogpost describing the digital collection with the URL and the public reading went online a week before the event. A screen-printed poster was created and hung outside the physical exhibit in Special Collections, around campus and in certain locations around the city, such as bookstores and coffee shops. An announcement in the campus weekly newsletter *Update* mentioned the upcoming event, which reached faculty and staff via email and online. Hillard also promoted the public reading widely among English Department faculty and asked each of them to announce the event in their classes. The Cabin included a posting on their online events list and sent a direct email blitz to their members.

The public reading of four MFA professors was considered a success. Approximately 30 people came to the reading, which included an introduction by the Head of Special Collections on the related collections held by Special Collections and the launch of the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions*. A display in the back of the room included sample volumes of the Western Writers Series, a laptop and projector so people could view the digital collection and copies of other Boise State University writing publications such as *The Idaho Review* and books by *Ahsakta Press*.

So the collection is online.now what? Continue reaching!

Though the public reading at The Cabin succeeded and the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions* was officially available to the public online, the library's outreach and marketing efforts continued. Unlike the initiatives outlined in Ford's "Outreach is (un)dead," where she describes outreach as many times being contained in a separate body or department instead of a part of every librarians' activities, the library continues to promote this digital collection to a variety of constituents and venues. (16) A number of outreach opportunities have arisen for both the professional world of libraries and archives and literary studies, including one paper and four conference presentations, one of which was a poster presentation. (17) In addition, since the web has been recognized as a great vehicle for library outreach (18), the library has continued to embrace it as a cheap and easy way to promote the collection using professional listservs, the library's Twitter account (19), and links from the new Albertsons Library Digital Collections homepage. (20) Another online opportunity to promote the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions* was through adding links from existing Wikipedia articles on individual authors from the Western Writers Series to the digital copy of the text. Using the library's Flickr account (21), the covers of the digitized editions were uploaded with a link to the electronic text hosted at Boise

State University. Most recently, the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions* received city-wide attention after it was voted by the alternative newspaper *Boise Weekly* as "Best Online Lit Browsing," which is distributed both online and in paper at local city hotspots. (22) Each of these actions has produced more access points to the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions*; together, these actions promote the digital collection even further through cross-linking, retweeting, and users tagging the collection.

Conclusion

Public outreach in archives and special collections faces challenges from new ideas and technologies everyday and must constantly examine the successes, challenges and opportunities they provide. Since the terms and activities of outreach, promotion, and marketing are often intertwined and used interchangeably, it is important to consider both traditional and non-traditional avenues for spreading the word both to constituents and the community.

To promote the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions*, Special Collections relied on different techniques and means of communication depending on the targeted audience. Especially during this time of economic hardships and budget restraints, online promotion is a proven way to communicate the library's message using free and simple tools, such as Twitter, Flickr, the library's blog, listservs, and web banners. After evaluating time and resources spent on putting together an event such as the public reading at The Cabin, the library concluded that it was worthwhile in fostering new and existing relationships between the library, Special Collections, the English Department, and the Boise community. (23) The printed marketing materials related to the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions* have been successful in publicizing the collection to a number of audiences; in fact, the editors have already reprinted another thousand of the brochures to be used at a number of repeated events and opportunities, as well as new ones such as used in advertising the collection with print orders that come through the Western Writers Series' office. Likewise, the creation of the OCLC control numbers have allowed other academic and public libraries to quickly add the digital editions to their respective OPACs, thereby further promoting the use of the digital collection. With all the outreach opportunities that Albertsons Library and the English Department embraced collectively, the number of opportunities to access the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions* has increased dramatically.

Since the *Western Writers Series Digital Editions* project, Special Collections has added three collections to the Digital Collections website and has embraced some of these discussed successes for public outreach. With the announcement of each digital collection, archivists have discussed within the unit what types of promotion and publicity are worthwhile, as well as what is worth outsourcing. Regardless of the size or topic of each digital collection, Boise State University Special Collections will continue to emphasize the importance of public outreach and accessibility to both the university campus and community at large using a collaborative model.

Notes

1. Boise State University Albertsons Library, "Western Writers Series Digital Editions," Boise State University, <http://library.boisestate.edu/westernwriters> (accessed September 2, 2009).
2. Emily Ford, "Outreach is (un)dead," In the Library with the Lead Pipe Blog, entry posted September 2, 2009, <http://inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2009/outreach-is-undead/> (accessed September 3, 2009).

3. Ford, "Outreach is (un)dead"; Tina Schneider, "Outreach, Why, How and Who? Academic Libraries and Their Involvement in the Community," *Reference Librarian* 39, no. 82 (2004): 200; Daniel Traister, "Public Services and Outreach in Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Libraries," *Library Trends* 52, no. 1 (2003): 87-89, 102.
4. Seven libraries outside Boise State have downloaded the records into their OPACs: Ada Community Library (ID), Lewis-Clark State College (ID), North Idaho College, University of Idaho, University of California-Merced, University of Montana, and Tacoma Community College (WA).
5. "MiniCards: Unique Mini Business Cards," MOO USA, <http://us.moo.com/en/products/minicards.php> (accessed August 23, 2009).
6. Terry Abraham, "Unlocking the Door to Special Collections: Using the Web Combination," *Library Philosophy and Practice* 3, no. 2 (2001): 7.
7. Traister, 103.
8. Schneider, 210.
9. Traister, 96.
10. Four professors participated in the public reading on December 4, 2008: Janet Holmes, Clay Morgan, Brady Udall, and Mitch Wieland.
11. Traister, 95.
12. "The Cabin, a Literary Center for Idaho," The Cabin, <http://www.thecabinidaho.org/>(accessed August 23, 2009).
13. Ibid.
14. Traister, 96.
15. "Western Writers Series Digital Editions," @thelibrary Blog, entry posted November 26, 2008, http://albertsonslibrary.blogspot.com/2008_11_01_archive.html (accessed August 23, 2009).
16. Ford, "Outreach is (un)dead."
17. Librarians and Archivist gave presentations at the 2008 Online Northwest (Corvallis, OR), 2009 Southwest Idaho Library Association (Caldwell, ID), and the 2009 Pacific Northwest Library Association (Missoula, MT). English Professor and Series co-editor Tom Hillard promoted the digital collection at the 2008 Western Literature Association conference in Boulder, CO and the 2009 Association for the Study of Literature and Environment conference in Victoria, British Columbia.
18. Micaela Morales and Jeff Rosen, "Accessing the Old and the New: Outreach via Web Exhibits and Archive Collections at the University of Arizona Library," *Reference Librarian* 32, no. 67 (2001): 62.
19. "BSULibrary on Twitter," Boise State University Albertsons Library, <http://twitter.com/BSULibrary> (accessed August 23, 2009).
20. "Albertsons Library Digital Collections," Boise State University Albertsons

Library,<http://digital.boisestate.edu> (accessed August 23, 2009).

21. Western Writers Series Flickr Set," Boise State University Albertsons Library,<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bsulibrary/sets/72157608824030247/> (accessed September 3, 2009).

22. "Best of Boise 2009: Best Online Lit Browsing," Boise Weekly,<http://www.boiseweekly.com/boise/best-online-lit-browsing/BestOf?oid=1196167> (accessed September 24, 2009).

23. One significant outcome of this launch event was opening discussions with the Ahsahta Press about digitizing their works in the same manner as the Western Writers Series Digital Editions. The launch event demonstrated the potential of such a partnership to the editor of the Ahsahta Press.

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