Digital Environment Scan

The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

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By Robin M. Katz
Digital Library and Metadata Intern,
Digital Projects Unit
THE DIGITAL LIBRARY

The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library’s digital library, as it exists today, has many strengths. Its Digital Images Online interface offers multiple sized jpegs, a well-designed record view, and it displays linked records very clearly. By many measures, it is a top digital library.

The Beinecke’s 2008 Digital Library and Metadata Development Intern was charged with completing a Digital Environmental Scan of “innovative digitization programs, digital collections interfaces, and outreach programs” at institutions across the globe. This document is the result of internal analysis and external surveying completed as research for the environmental scan. It is also the end-of-summer report by the Intern on the Digital Projects Unit’s accomplishments towards implementing new digital initiatives. The Digital Environmental Scan closes with plans for the future in order to continue the progress that has been made this summer.

When surveying digital libraries, no institution can match the British Library’s Turning the Pages\(^1\) technical features of interactive design.

![Turning the Pages](http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/ttp/ttpbooks.html)

But Turning the Pages, despite its wonderful the interface, offers little range. It highlights gems from the British Library in a limited, somewhat buried, highly curated space. A digital library is ideally as exhaustive, comprehensive, and broad-based as a physical library.

Libraries that offer only small, isolated, highly interpretive and hard-to-find digital exhibits often fail to reach the potential offered by digital libraries. These libraries could be reaching more people over further distances and creating a web of virtual connections which are impossible to physically trace. Even if the curated digital collections are fascinating, significant, and well

\(^1\) [http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/ttp/ttpbooks.html](http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/ttp/ttpbooks.html)
presented, the library should be doing this type of work in addition to an all-inclusive digital library.

Examples of highly curated digital collections

The Jewish National University Library’s website links to a collaborative database of digitized Ketubot (Jewish marriage contracts).² Despite its unappealing aesthetics, it will be a great resource for various fields of study. Yet the library would benefit most from having a wide-ranging digital library which included these images and which led to this separate silo with unique features.

Yet it seems that most Special Collections are not even as advanced as the clunky Ketubot database. Indiana University’s Lilly Library offers only curated digital collections:³

² [http://jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/ketubbot/](http://jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/ketubbot/)
The Lilly’s collections are buried within their page, and are structured in many levels. Overly hierarchical web design requires a lot of clicking back and forth, and is not very easy to navigate:  

The Newberry Library is no better:

4 \[ \text{http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/collections/lilly/hohenberger/index.html} \]

5 \[ \text{http://www.newberry.org/collections/online.html} \]
The Huntington Library offers only six digitized collections, one of which is featured here:6

Special Collections digital exhibits are not only sectioned off, but they are generally very unattractive. The National Library of New Zealand’s Digital Collections page7 is much more pleasing to the eye, and it provides increased access by browsing lists organized in various ways, but it still lacks a true digital library:

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6 http://www.huntington.org/LibraryDiv/Isherwood.html
7 http://www.natlib.govt.nz/collections/digital-collections
The Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley does not even appear to host any of its own digitized materials:

By virtue of simply having a comprehensive digitization initiative with a large amount of images available, the Beinecke is already a leader in the field. In order to truly stand out in the profession, the Beinecke need only enhance its interface and add extra features to an already top digital library.

**Moving towards comprehensive digital collections**

8 [http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/]
At the most recent RBMS Preconference, the argument for expansive digitization was echoed from all corners. Barbara Taranto of the NYPL Labs urged Special Collections librarians to move away from project-driven, grant-funded, unsustainable digitization projects and toward an “organic whole.” Richard Szary from UNC Chapel Hill said we need “large bodies of materials” and Jackie Dooley of UC Irvine encouraged members to “digitize with abandon.”

The Beinecke already offers a huge database which is attentively managed and constantly growing. The number one priority for making Digital Images Online a leader in digital libraries is not to change the basic workflow but to continue to aggressively add to it.

**RECOMMENDATION № 1: Maintain a high rate of additions to the digital library**

Items for inclusion will continue to be determined by patron requests, curatorial selection, and special projects. In the near future, it is possible that all photoduplication services will be digital via self-help scanners or online patron requests, like at the University of Virginia:

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RECOMMENDATION № 2: More Digitization, Less Cataloging?

At the RBMS Preconference, Jackie Dooley suggested that to keep a quick pace, we “follow archivists’ lead” and adopt a similar strategy to the Meissner-Greene MPLP approach. “On the Record,” a report of the Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control, calls for increased output, streamlined production, and aggregation of metadata. Or, as Karen Calhoun put it, we need to “get over item-level description.” She invoked David Weinberger’s *Everything is Miscellaneous* when she insisted that “quantity trumps quality.” For the Beinecke, this could mean writing a policy by which to identify cataloging priorities. Certain collections, types of requests, or item formats might require deeper cataloging than others. Although decision making tends to be rather ad-hoc and on a job by job basis, the Digital Projects Unit could determine a rubric by which to make these decisions.

The Beinecke should advertise its aggressive digital acquisitions online. The Biblioteca de Arte-Fundacao Calouste Gulbenkian has inserted an imaging counting its uploads to Flickr:


We could structure our pages so that an RSS feed could update researchers about new additions, like this page\textsuperscript{19} from the National Library of Israel:

![Image](http://aleph500.huji.ac.il/nml/dig/list_new.xml)

The National Library of Australia has a running count\textsuperscript{20} of their various digitization projects as well:

![Image](http://www.nla.gov/digicoll/manuscriptprogress.html)

\textsuperscript{19} [http://aleph500.huji.ac.il/nml/dig/list_new.xml](http://aleph500.huji.ac.il/nml/dig/list_new.xml)

\textsuperscript{20} [http://www.nla.gov/digicoll/manuscriptprogress.html](http://www.nla.gov/digicoll/manuscriptprogress.html)
Improving the Digital Images Online Interface

One of the biggest problems on library homepages is that it is difficult to locate the digital collection, if one exists. Princeton’s Digital Collections\(^{21}\) are difficult to find, and NYU\(^{22}\) and the University of Pennsylvania\(^{23}\) might not (it is difficult to tell) have any. The Beinecke’s home page needs to cater to both the directed scholar and the educated surfer; it needs to provide access through both searching and browsing. The redesign of the Beinecke site, the Yale University Library next-generation OPAC, and the forthcoming update to the Beinecke’s Finding Aid Database provide a unique opportunity for the Digital Projects Unit to reinvent its interface as well.

RECOMMENDATION № 3: Federated Searching for Better Research

Based on her research for “An Integrated Framework for Cornell University Libraries’ Digital Collections,” Karen Calhoun concluded that libraries should model their search functions after the search engines students gravitate towards.\(^{24}\) Federated, Google-like search bars are appearing on the best digital library pages.

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\(^{21}\) [http://library.princeton.edu/](http://library.princeton.edu/)

\(^{22}\) [http://library.nyu.edu/](http://library.nyu.edu/)

\(^{23}\) [http://www.library.upenn.edu/](http://www.library.upenn.edu/)

For example, the “all search” bar on the Library and Archives Canada’s homepage\(^{25}\) yields results from the library catalog, the finding aid database, a genealogical database, and their website:

The National Library of Australia’s online catalog\(^{26}\) searches their digitized collections, manuscripts, books, and other formats. Images, which are embedded in the bibliographic record, appear in the search results.

\(^{25}\) http://www.collectionscanada.gr.ca/website/index-e.html

And searching can be limited to just the digital collections:

![Digital Collections](http://www.nla.gov/digicoll/pictures.html)

Although all digital images can be searched for in the catalog, the National Library of Australia provides guides by format type in order to browse the collections:

![Digital Collections](http://www.nla.gov/digicoll/pictures.html)

The National Library of Australia’s Digital Collections page is an excellent example of curated web content providing outreach to a comprehensive digital library, *not* attempting to substitute a real digital library.

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On a simpler scale, the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan,\(^{28}\) which does not offer federated searching, provides one search bar with radio buttons to select the database. This at least makes researchers aware of all the databases available to them:

RECOMMENDATION № 4: Provide Interpretation & Searching in the Same Place
The University of Iowa perfectly balances federated searching, a comprehensive digital library, and interpretive features.\(^ {29}\)

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\(^{28}\) [http://bentley.umich.edu/](http://bentley.umich.edu/)

\(^{29}\) [http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/](http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/)
Their Digital Library features one Google-like search bar in the corner, with a link to an advanced search\(^{30}\) which allows users to limit by collection:

This type of searching helps most researchers, and the highlights slideshow and collection guides on the homepage facilitate browsing.

**RECOMMENDATION № 5: Improve Digital Library Browsing and Navigation**
Because the underlying foundation of the Beinecke’s digital library is strong, suggested improvements focus on the user interface.

- Add “previous” and “next” features in the Record View within a search, so that a researcher does not have to return to the Gallery View search results
- More navigable paths through the structural metadata, as in this record from the Bibliotheque Nationale’s Gallica\(^{31}\):

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• Enable users to save or gather images, as Harvard’s Visual Information Access\textsuperscript{32} does within the search results:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Link back to the Finding Aid or Orbis Record from within the Digital Images Online Record View to create two-way connections
  \item Near the Permalink on our Record View, provide the HTML needed to embed an image elsewhere, as on the left side of this New York Public Library record\textsuperscript{33}:
\end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \url{http://via.lib.harvard.edu/via/deliver/executeQuery?_collection=via}
  \item \url{http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgkeysearchdetail.cfm?trg=1&strucID=420110&imageID=730290F&word=chrysler&s=1&notword=&d=&c=&f=&lWord=&lField=&sScope=&sLevel=&sLabel=&total=926&num=0&imgs=12&pNum=&pos=3}
\end{itemize}
• Provide searchable lists of collections names or titles, like these themes from the Bibliotheque Nationale’s Gallica database:\(^{34}\):

![Gallica Database](http://gallica2.bnf.fr/FromHomeToThemes?lang=fr)

• Incorporate tag clouds of subject headings or name authorities, as on the QueensLibrary’s OPAC:\(^{35}\):

![QueensLibrary OPAC](http://aqua.queenslibrary.org/)

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\(^{34}\) [http://gallica2.bnf.fr/FromHomeToThemes?lang=fr](http://gallica2.bnf.fr/FromHomeToThemes?lang=fr)

\(^{35}\) [http://aqua.queenslibrary.org/](http://aqua.queenslibrary.org/)
• Design the front end to feature a random image generator, like the Denver Library’s Western History Genealogy page\(^\text{36}\), which shows three images each time the page is refreshed, and provides a link to a search which would yield them:

RECOMMENDATION № 6: Transparency in Digitization

Many libraries are publishing their digitization policies, priorities, and methods online. If the Beinecke were to do the same, we could serve interested researchers and we would assume a leadership role among library professionals. For example, the Bibliotheque Nationale provides a streaming online video about their mass digitization project.\(^\text{37}\)

\(^{36}\) http://history.denverlibrary.org/

\(^{37}\) http://www.bnf.fr/pages/zNavigat/frame/bibliotheque_numerique.htm
Here the National Library of the Netherlands\textsuperscript{38} makes documentation similar to that on the Beinecke’s staff site available to the public:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{kb.png}
\caption{KB Digitalisering website screenshot}
\end{figure}

The Library of Congress\textsuperscript{39} publicly tackles the professional challenge of digital preservation, effectively publishing a set of best practices which will undoubtedly influence many other institutions:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{loc.png}
\caption{LOC Digital Preservation website screenshot}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{38} http://www.kb.nl/hrd/digitalisering/index-en.html
\textsuperscript{39} http://www.loc.gov/library/digitalpreservation.html
In the same way that Oxford University’s OPAC\textsuperscript{40} credits records creators by name \textit{and} provides an email address as contact information, we could increase transparency in our digital library by acknowledging metadata creators in the Digital Images Online database. The metadata is already there in our InMagic database and we could then create a script to display the cataloger’s initials in a similar way to this:

![Screenshot](attachment:image.png)

In an effort to encourage communication between the library and users, Iowa’s Digital Collections have posted a simple feedback survey online.\textsuperscript{41} It would be interesting to know what kind of response they have received:

![Screenshot](attachment:image.png)

\textsuperscript{40} http://www.odl.ox.ac.uk/collections/ashmolean_potweb.htm

\textsuperscript{41} http://survey.uiowa.edu/wsb.dll/713/idl-survey.htm
Perhaps most effectively, the NYPL Labs site\textsuperscript{42} reveals “The Process Behind the Product.” This page capitalizes off of blog features, like tagging and monthly archives, to track the digital initiatives at New York Public Library:

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{nypl_labs.png}
\end{center}

**RECOMMENDATION № 7: Add Applications to the Digital Library**

**Timelines**
Using an application to create timelines could especially benefit our finding aids, which often utilize a listed chronology. This tool available from the Center for History and New Media\textsuperscript{43} could add depth to our online utilities:

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{timeline.png}
\end{center}

**E-Cards**
Electronic postcards sent from the Beinecke’s site are a way for users to share images they like. A feature like this would bring new people to our collections and keep users coming back. We could develop an e-card program like those features on the British Library’s site\textsuperscript{44}:

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{ecards.png}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{42} [http://labs.nypl.org/](http://labs.nypl.org/)

\textsuperscript{43} [http://chnm.gmu.edu/tools/timelines/](http://chnm.gmu.edu/tools/timelines/)

\textsuperscript{44} [http://www.bl.uk/ecards/index.html](http://www.bl.uk/ecards/index.html)
Or we could develop an application which could turn any of our digital images into an e-card, accessible from the record view in Digital Images Online.

**Online transactions**
The Beinecke’s website could directly handle patron requests for scanning and prints, whether the services were delivered by the library or by an outside vendor. Either way, it would streamline operations, allow remote users to contact us at their convenience, and create metadata along the way. The Denver Public Library\(^45\) and New York Public Library\(^46\) offer this online ordering of images through CaféPress.com and Pictopia.com, respectively:

\[^45\] [http://history.denverlibrary.org/images/buy_photos.html](http://history.denverlibrary.org/images/buy_photos.html)

\[^46\] [http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgprints_about.cfm](http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgprints_about.cfm)
These vendors also sell gifts that feature images from the collections, as with these Café Press Journals from Denver Public Library:

As the Beinecke’s digital library grows rapidly in size, digital initiatives that bring new users to our collections, that compliment campus outreach, and that provide interpretation for the public are necessary as well. Because the foundation of the Beinecke’s digital program is a comprehensive digital library, we can focus on building our curated content to point to this resource. With this in mind, this summer the Digital Projects Unit established a cell phone audio tour, reinvigorated its podcast program, attempted to join the Flickr Commons, and brainstormed new ideas for curated digital content.

47 http://www.cafepress.com/denverlibrary/230352