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DISSECTING DIGITIZATION: PART III
By Karen DePauw, coordinator, IHS Local History Services

For the final part of our digitization series, we are looking at the equipment necessary to have a successful project. Having the appropriate hardware and software ready and available when a digitization project is started can have a big impact on the project's overall success. If you need a refresher on some of the language or want to look at the previous digitization-focused articles check out the April 2017 and June 2017 issues.

HARDWARE
There are many pieces of hardware needed to digitize a collection. The first things an organization will need are a computer and a server. The computer will need to be set-up with an operating system that will support the other hardware and software needed. For instance, if you currently use a computer with Windows 1998, you will need to upgrade your version for everything to run smoothly.

If you are starting with a small number of images, you may be able to use a standard external hard drive in place of a large server to store the digital files when you start out. Ultimately, a dedicated server will offer more storage space and better functionality.

Beyond the computer and server, you will need a way through which you can make a digital copy or representation of a physical item in your collection. There are quite a few options out there and what you choose has a lot to do with what type of items you have and the budget for purchasing equipment.

FROM OUR LENDING RESOURCE CENTER

Digitization and Digital Archiving: A Practical Guide for Librarians
(Elizabeth R. Leggett)

Management: Innovative Practices for Archives and Special Collections
(Kate Theimer, editor)

Preservation Management for Libraries, Archives and Museums
(G. E. Gorman and Sydney J. Shep, editors)

Flatbed Scanner
Pros: simple to use; produces sharp images; easy to find and purchase; can create file as TIFF; great for flat items
Cons: size limitations; only works for flat items

Book/Overhead Scanner
Pros: fairly easy to use; adjustable image angle for bound items; produces sharp images; can create file as TIFF; best for bound objects
Cons: size limitations; object-specific/somewhat inflexible; expensive

Digital Camera
Pros: accommodates variously sized objects; can combine with copy stand or tripod for flexibility; produces RAW images; great for 3-D and oversize objects
Cons: larger learning curve for use; higher risk of user error; expensive; can require additional equipment such as copy stand, tripod or lighting set-up

SOFTWARE

Beyond hardware needs, various software programs are also essential in a digitization project's success. Having a photo editing program of some kind, whether provided through the digitization equipment or purchased separately, will allow for high-quality images. A database to track and link the stored digital files will provide easy access and eliminate potential of inadvertently digitizing the same item twice. This database may be part of your collections management system, or a separate database. Any equipment-specific software will also be important and should come with the equipment when you purchase it.

STORAGE

Now that you have your hardware and software ready to go, and have set your standards as discussed in the April 2017 Collections Advisor, it is nearly time to start digitizing. The one last major question that needs answered is how the institution will store the digital files. There are two options when it comes to hosting the digital information: on-site and off-site. We will discuss each below.

On-site hosting consists of storage devices that are often located in the same building as the organization and the digitization equipment. These might include a server, external hard drive, compact disc, flash drive, or internal hard drive.

Off-site hosting is usually provided by an organization other than the one digitizing the materials and includes cloud-based storage and consortiums. In both instances the digital image and information is stored on a physical storage device (like a server) in a physical location, but the storage device is owned by someone else and the location may be in a different state, even a different country, than the organization doing the digitizing.

Cloud-based storage, such as that provided by companies like Amazon, are when a single

company offers storage space on their server for a fee to anyone willing to purchase it. While the physical server may be stored anywhere in the world, the information on it is made available to the customer anywhere at any time. If using cloud-based storage, be sure to inquire about security of digital information, as each company has different levels of security.

Consortium hosting is very similar in that the physical server may be stored anywhere, but the information is always available. A consortium, however, combines resources of a group of individuals all trying to accomplish a similar thing, rather than a single company controlling the server. Although there are costs involved with both, a consortium often allows individual organizations more say in what happens with their items and the security level at which they are protected.

Regardless of the type of storage, make sure the digital files are backed up somewhere, somehow. If done frequently and regularly, backups can be done on the most affordable, yet reliable, technology available at the time of the backups, for instance your permanent storage might not be on a CD, but your backup might be. Periodically check your backup to make sure it is not corrupting, because there is nothing more frustrating than needing to restore your database from a backup only to find out it has corrupted since the last time you made one.

Now that you have all of your equipment, standards, and understand the language…go forth and digitize!

COLLECTIONS ADVISOR NEEDS YOUR STORIES!

This October we will again be featuring "horror" stories of working with collections. If you have a collections "horror" story you think others would enjoy hearing/learning from, please share! Whether you are an educator or curator, paid staff or volunteer, most of us have had an oh-no moment when working with collection items. If you would like to share a story, please email kdepauw@indianahistory.org and include: the story (in 125 words or less), the lesson you learned from it, your title at the time, and your name (don't worry, only titles will be included in the newsletter to protect the horror-stricken!). Please send submissions by September 8. Need some examples? Check out the last "Collection Horror Stories" edition here.