Enhancing Cultural Heritage Collections by Supporting and Analyzing Participation in Flickr

Jacob Jett, Megan Senseney, and Carole L. Palmer

Center for Informatics Research in Science and Scholarship, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Introduction

Intermediary services provided by aggregators can fill a key role for cultural heritage institutions wishing to engage in web 2.0 services such as Flickr. To maximize the benefits of providing intermediary services, aggregators must understand the ways in which user communities contribute to cultural heritage content and develop a framework for providing feedback to the initial data providers.

Project History

In 2009 the IMLS Digital Collections and Content (IMLS DCC) project launched the Flickr Feasibility Study (FFS) by uploading 4,471 photos from 5 cultural heritage institutions into 8 distinct collections consisting of 24 sets (Jett et al., 2010). Over the past three years, the frequency of image views in the IMLS DCC photostream has increased steadily:

As of October 15, 2012, the IMLS DCC photostream has had 535,332 total individual views, 316 photos have been added to 84 groups, and 64 photos have been added to 35 galleries.

Aggregator as Facilitator

In facilitating multiple cultural heritage institutions’ Web 2.0 initiatives, an aggregator achieves economic efficiencies and adds value to the initiative by:

- Providing technical expertise and infrastructure;
- Delivering feedback on user interactions through enhanced metadata and periodic reporting;
- Identifying areas for strategic collection growth;
- Coordinating efforts across organizations; and
- Creating opportunities for collaboration.

Communities Enhance Collections

According to Zarro & Allen (2010) users regularly provide subjective descriptive or contextual information about specific images, through comments, tags or notes, directly enhancing the value of the image within the context of Flickr community spaces by:

1. Providing additional information;
2. Linking to outside resources;
3. Suggesting corrections; and
4. Curating images into new collections.

IMLS DCC / Flickr Feedback Framework Model

This workflow leverages existing IMLS DCC workflows to illustrate a viable feedback framework model in which aggregators:

- Record use statistics and user activities;
- Verify the accuracy of user input and metadata corrections;
- Enhance original metadata record with new information;
- Feed the enhanced metadata records back to original data providers; and
- Generate reports on image re-use, linking, and users’ collection building activities on Flickr.

Communities Reuse Collections

Curating images into new collections, as described above, is just one of several types of image reuse observed during the FFS. The two most frequent types are:

- Retrospective photography, and
- Trails of attribution.

The majority of images in our study used a CC BY 2.0 Creative Commons license that allows for image reuse with formal attribution. Trails of attribution form when users comment on a Flickr image with a link to where the attributed image was re-used.

References

The following are a few examples of current Flickr photos created by the IMLS DCC project.

1) “Bell System exhibit. Seattle World’s Fair. 1962”. Courtesy of King County Snapshots. University of Washington Libraries. (See #4)
2) “Construction of David Denny’s log cabin for his real estate office, Republican St. and Queen Anne Ave., May 1889”. Courtesy of Olympic Peninsula Community Museum. University of Washington Libraries. (See #5)
3) “Cologne, Germany”. Courtesy of Charles Overstreet Collection. Flora Public Library. (See #6)
4) “IMLS DCC Flickr photosstream over 36 months.”
5) “5th Ward, Chicago – 1950’s”. Courtesy of the Charles E. Cushman Collection, Indiana University. Bloomington. (See #7)
6) “The David T. Denny Cabin”
7) “IMLS DCC Flickr photo into a new collection using Flickr Galleries”

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IMLS DCC

Flickr

Augmented Item Metadata

Original Collection Metadata

Metadata Augmentation

DCC OAI Provider

Data Provider

Flickr Usage Reporting

DCC OA

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4. An example of a user-curating an IMLS DCC photo into a new collection using Flickr Galleries

5. An example of reuse through retrospective photography by Flickr user emanistas