

Collaborative digital collections: Caribbean solutions for effective resource-building and successful partnerships

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Abstract

The Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC) is a cooperative of partners within the Caribbean and circum-Caribbean that provide users with access to Caribbean cultural, historical and research materials held in archives, libraries, and private collections. dLOC was developed as a resource sharing and collection development solution for researchers and information centers seeking to access unique and disparate resources for area studies. The collection is comprised of materials that speak to the regional similarities and differences in histories, cultures, languages and governmental systems.

Founded in 2004, the unique structure of the organization has been critical to the success achieved thus far in developing and growing the initiative. dLOC partners are full participants in governance, formulating collection policy, and addressing membership and sustainability issues. The diversity of the membership ensures the contribution of a variety of resources to meet a wide range of scholarly interests. The impact of the Digital Library of the Caribbean on Caribbean scholarship continues to grow. Currently, over 1.5 million pages of Caribbean research materials are online and freely accessible with only an internet connection. As of July, 2011, the site recorded nearly 4.5 million page views.

The presentation will discuss: collection development strategies for digitization projects, overcoming challenges for collaboration across wide geographic areas and among different language groups, building technical skills for strong partnerships, and promoting collections and sustaining the organization.

Background and organizational development

The concept for the Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC) grew out of an existing collaboration between the University of Florida, University of the Virgin Islands and Florida International University (UVI) and the needs expressed by colleagues at the Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries (or ACURIL). Leaders of libraries and information centers in the region had long sought a solution for overcoming barriers to effective sharing of unique resources that connected peoples, histories, and cultures existing side-by-side, but kept apart by logistics of geography and language. The development of successful digital library models in the 21st Century, willingness of technical experts to share skills, and the fledgling collaboration model between UVI and Florida institutions combined to give founding dLOC partners the confidence to pursue a major collaborative venture. In 2004, representatives of institutions from the three primary language groups joined with United States institutions to embark on digitization as a strategy for preservation and access for their at-risk collections that promote, document, and explain Caribbean issues. Several publications including *Caribbean Libraries in the 21st Century* and “Managing an Open Access, Multi-Institutional, International Digital Library: The Digital Library of the Caribbean” outline the development and governing structure for dLOC. This paper will discuss continuing collection development strategies for the dLOC digitization projects, overcoming challenges for collaboration across wide geographic areas and among different language groups, building technical skills for strong partnerships, and promoting collections for sustaining the organization.

dLOC continues to receive new partners in the United States, the Caribbean and Europe from public and private libraries, archives, museums and other relevant institutions. The colonial beginnings of the Caribbean nations, and the resulting diaspora scattered valuable content with regional significance around the world. dLOC embraces relevant contributions from global partners as these complement and fill gaps in content held within the Caribbean and Latin American institutions. Five founding members received equipment and training to begin capacity building, and dLOC continues to add new partners and offer access to training and the technology infrastructure. The initial investment successfully demonstrated the added value that can come from introducing a digital component to collection development. For libraries with rich and unique collections, it became clear that the digital library dimension was not only attainable but also an opportunity to showcase collections. Professor Barry Chevannes, former Chairman of the Institute of Jamaica (IOJ) speaking at a reception to celebrate the historical launch of the Institute's flagship publication, *Jamaica Journal*, said that the "digitization of the *Jamaica Journal* will mean a de-locking of the document from its imprisonment in time and space and release it to a readership and research community that has the potential to be as wide as cyberspace." Further, the ever-present risk of floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and other disasters all underscore the need to recognize that library and archival collections face threats that require advanced planning and back-up to mitigate potential losses.

Current members include the Archives Nationales d'Haiti, Aruba National Library, Bibliothèque Haïtienne des Pères du St-Esprit, Association of Cultural Equity, Biblioteca Rafael Herrera Cabral, Belize National Library, Caribbean Community Secretariat, Caribbean Information

Resource Network, The College of The Bahamas, Educa Vision Inc., Florida International University, Florida State University, Fundación Global Democracia y Desarrollo, HistoryMiami, National Library of Jamaica, University of Central Florida, University of Florida, University of Miami, University of the Netherlands Antilles, Universidad de Oriente, University of South Florida and the University of the Virgin Islands. The type and level of participation varies greatly across institutions depending on their size, budget, and local priorities.

dLOC is a partnership for content and technology. The digital resources within dLOC are searchable, many full-text, within the project website and via popular search engines like Google and Yahoo; all results are freely available to anyone with an Internet connection. The centralized technologies allow partners to participate in the development of an open source digital library and build skills in the areas of digital asset management and delivery. Consistent on-site training opportunities and regional workshops allow the project's technology experts to receive feedback and ideas for project tools in development. Training workshops vary from standard digital preservation techniques to usability testing to metadata creation. In the last seven years dLOC has established a Digitization Training Program for Partners and conducted 26 on-site trainings reaching more than 400 people and online training modules with over 1,000 documented hits.

Growing a collaborative collection

As the membership grows, so does the extent and diversity of content available in dLOC. Some examples of types of materials include books, manuscripts, maps, photographs, recordings,

newspapers, journals, slides, and other artifacts. The collection includes some unique resources such as the funeral booklets from the USVI, Cuban and Mexican Film posters, and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) cultural festival documents. The language coverage is expanding to include Dutch representation along with English, French, and Spanish. Based on cumulative statistics gathered since 2006, some of the most accessed titles in dLOC include the *Diario de la Marina*, *Aruba Esso News*, *Le Nouvelliste*, *Panama Canal Spillway* and the *Jamaica Journal*; each of these titles have registered more than 100,000 hits. A most recent addition to the top items is the *Directorio Telefonica de Cuba* promoted by a Cuban genealogy group which registered over 150,000 in just one month. Other top items in dLOC include *Sus Mejores Poema* by Ruben Dario, *El Indice alfabetico y defunciones del Ejercito Libertador de Cuba*, *Cuentos frágiles* by Fabio Fiallo, the March 1968 issue of the *Jamaica Journal* and the first volume of *Caribbeana*; each of these items received more than 10,000 hits. Usage for dLOC continues to grow and registered over four million hits on more than 1.5 million pages of content since April 2006.

Promoting dLOC collections

The true test of value of the dLOC content is demonstrated by growing relationships with researchers and educators that create an environment conducive to new digital humanities collaborations. As more content becomes available online, the opportunities for collaboration and innovation in scholarship expand. dLOC in effect serves as a virtual digital humanities center where “new media and technologies are used for humanities-based research, teaching, and intellectual engagement and experimentation” (Zorich, 2008). The collaborative

framework brings together many diverse projects and facilitates both discoverability and long-term electronic access to the materials. As new tools and modes of access develop, “digital Humanists recognize curation as a central feature of the future of the Humanities disciplines” (Presner et al.). The traditional roles of archivists, librarians, academics and educators blur as content now accessible online needs to be organized into collections that serve to make scholarly arguments, support teaching and facilitate preservation and discoverability. Collection development in this environment interweaves curation and organization functions inextricably with curricula and research for achieving measurable outcomes in student learning and growth and diversity of new publications.

The following projects outline several dLOC digital scholarship collaborative projects that are currently underway with scholars, libraries, and other partners:

Caribbean Newspaper Digital Library

While digital copies do not replace the need to preserve the original, there are many cases where full document preservation and restoration are not feasible. Often newspaper preservation falls into this category. When full document restoration is financially unviable, digitization offers a solution to preserve the content. In addition, digitization reduces the need for researchers and students to access originals thereby placing them at risk for damage and also creates new potential research through advanced full text search capabilities. Given the need for preservation and the possibilities for digital research, dLOC established the Caribbean

Newspaper Digital Library (CNDL) to support the ongoing development of Caribbean research resources in serial form, such as newspapers, journals and magazines.

dLOC is working with partner institutions and publishers to digitize historical content, secure permissions to archive and distribute publications still under copyright protection, develop new tools to support online submission of serial publications from project partners. Some of the titles already in CNDL include the *Diario de la Marina* with the Center for Research Libraries and the University of Florida; *Aruba Esso News* with National Library of Aruba; *Sargasso* with the University of Puerto Rico; *Jamaica Journal* with the Institute of Jamaica; *Eme Eme: Estudios Dominicanos* with the Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, *Abeng* and *Struggle* with The Center for Caribbean Thought and Florida International University, and *Guyana Chronicle*, *The Nassau Tribune*, *Dateline Dominican Republic*, *Escapes Panama*, *Spillway*, *Tropic Time* with the University of Florida. Open access journals are another important area of growth that will support Caribbean studies. Currently, several journals including *Caribbean Review of Books* (1991-1993), *Jamaica Journal*, *Journal of Caribbean Archaeology*, *Kyk Over-AI*, *MaComére* and *Sargasso* are all available online. dLOC is working with other publishers to consider making their journals completely open access or archiving back issues online in dLOC.

Haiti: An Island Luminous

In the fall of 2011, dLOC will launch *Haiti: An Island Luminous*, a free-access collection of hundreds of books and manuscripts about Haiti. This collection brings together historical content from Haitian and American archives and libraries and serves as an indispensable

resource for teachers and students alike. The guided tour feature pairs historical documents with expert guest commentary from top scholars including Jean Casimir, Laurent Dubois, Sybille Fischer, John Garrigus, Madison Smartt Bell, Matthew Smith, and others. Functioning like a slideshow and timeline, it navigates students through history, provides links to primary and secondary sources and introduces them to leading scholars, past and present.

Once complete, this project will exemplify the power of digital humanities projects. Combining new scholarly commentary with excerpts from past publications and linking these commentaries to historical primary and secondary sources in an online interface represents a new form of scholarship. A number of people and institutions came together to enable the creation of *Haiti: An Island Luminous*. This project is a model for future collaborative collections and exhibits in dLOC.

Curated by Adam Silvia, a graduate student in the Department of History at Florida International University, this resource conceptually maps the Haitian content available in dLOC, identifies themes and provides context for the user to experience history in an interactive timeline. dLOC is working closely to develop ties with the Humanities centers to ensure the resource is integrated into research, teaching and community engagement. *Haiti: An Island Luminous* will be peer-reviewed based on the established guidelines from the Modern Language Association's recommendations for reviewing digital works and similar guidelines from related fields. As such, it will provide a framework for similar digital scholarship

collaborations. Once fully launched, it will serve as a valuable tool for academicians, researchers, students, policymakers and members of the general public.

Caribbean Information Resource Network (IRN)

The Caribbean IRN is a network that connects activists, scholars, artists and other individuals and organizations which do research and work on issues related to diverse genders and sexualities in the Caribbean. IRN has partnered with dLOC to build a collection of documents, reports, archival clippings, and other materials to offer a glimpse into the complexity of LGBT lives and experiences in the Caribbean. This collection presents multiple perspectives from the personal to community and political organizing, from health agencies to academic research. It is a small but growing collection brings materials on Caribbean Sexualities together in this way (digital open access) for the first time. A key component of this collection will be the Gay Freedom Movement, active in Jamaica between 1974 and 1983. Commitment from dedicated scholars and limited external funding for this project enable this collection to develop as a resource for future scholarship.

Lessons in Collaboration for Preservation and Access

dLOC's model of collaborative digitization and hosting of content brings together partners from across the region with complementary collections. The strong collegial relationship developed through the Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries enabled the initial and many new dLOC partners to come together regularly via partner and Executive Board meetings to discuss the opportunities and challenges for the project.

Ensuring complete member control of contributed content helps to put partners at ease with sharing resources in this open environment. Several controls, including multiple item views which include low resolution JPEG page images, zoomable JPEG2000 page images and downloadable PDFs allow partners to control the resolution of the digital content and consequently the uses of the content. dLOC successfully addresses community-wide needs for preservation and access to Caribbean research resources and is developing a platform for great Caribbean academic collaboration as well.

Advocacy and marketing through the dLOC collaboration amplifies the volume of the message for promoting library collections. Partner successes are recognized and shared in regular electronic communication, through the dLOC website, and at the annual membership meeting. Educational outreach projects use the entire scope of the collection where appropriate to develop teaching materials at university, primary and secondary levels. Classes as diverse as biology, literature, art, social studies and more can use content from these libraries and develop lesson plans. In order to facilitate this use in the classroom, there is a collection in the Digital Library of the Caribbean dedicated to sharing primary and secondary (and sometimes higher education) resources so other teachers can benefit from the lessons already developed. Currently, the approximately 50 lessons online have been viewed over 6,000 times.

Sustaining the dLOC collaborative

In Diane Zotero's important assessment of Digital Humanities Centers (2008) prepared for the Council on Library and Information Resources, she states that "large-scale, coordinated efforts

to address the “big” issues in building a humanities cyber-infrastructure, such as repositories that enable long-term access to the centers’ digital production, are missing from the current landscape. Collaborations among existing centers are small and focus on individual partner interests; they do not scale up to address community-wide needs.” From its inception, dLOC has worked to develop large scale collaboration with clear partner attribution and rights management protections to ensure that contributing partners retain the commercial, intellectual, and moral rights to their collections while making them accessible for non-exclusive, non-commercial, educational use.

Libraries and archives across the Caribbean are looking towards digital technologies as part of their mandate to preserve history and provide access to research materials. The evolving technology and diversity of resources involved - photographs, negatives, maps, atlases, manuscripts in paper form and on microfilm, bound printed books, sound recordings, several types of film, paper prints, posters, pamphlets, sheet music, and physical collections of artifacts – encourage institutions to collaborate for the preservation of these resources.

As Jennifer M. Joseph and Joan Vacianna reflect in “Resources on Caribbean Cultural Identity: Documentation, Preservation and Access,” a 2008 International Federation of Library Associations publication, “documenting the cultural and social history of a people is one of the key ways in which cultural identity is preserved and recorded for posterity. Libraries in the Caribbean and the Americas play a vital role in this process by gathering, preserving and disseminating this information to ensure that the cultural identity of the small island states of

the Caribbean is not only well safeguarded, but also accessible.” Gathering the resources that serve to document the cultural and social history and safeguarding them is not an easy task, especially with the limited budgets dedicated to libraries and archives and harsh climate for preservation in the Caribbean. Proper digitization provides an opportunity to ensure, with off-site duplication, continued access to cultural and historical resources for generations to come. Collaborative projects like dLOC ensure that holding institutions retain their identity as repositories and their ownership of the digital rights to their materials while leveraging resources to increase collection development, access and discoverability.

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