
***Created Content Committee Annual Project:
A Survey of the Use of CARLI Digital Collections***

Introduction

In January-February 2015, the Created Content Committee designed and conducted a brief survey about the use of the CARLI Digital Collections in repositories such as CONTENTdm. Multiple responses per institution were encouraged. The purpose of the survey was to collect information about both the marketing of the digital collections by the library or institution and the use of the digital collections by faculty in classroom teaching, to be used to share best practices.

The survey was administered by email to directors of CARLI member institutions. There were 134 different respondents from 61 different institutions who identified their institutional affiliation, but only 95 of these from 53 different institutions answered any substantive questions. Six respondents only answered the first question and didn't provide any additional information. The following analysis considers only the remaining 89 responses from 52 different institutions.

The purpose of this survey was to gather information in order to share best practices for the marketing, use, and development of digital collections; the development of associated materials; and usage tracking for digital collections. These efforts involve a variety of library roles. Responses from different individuals at the same institution were welcomed to ensure a rich collection of data. Inevitably this resulted in some inconsistencies in how the efforts of a given institution were presented. For the following analysis, if some respondents from an institution responded positively to "awareness" questions while others responded negatively, it was assumed that the positive responses reflected more knowledge of the particular subject and the negative answers were discarded. It must be noted however that this assumption may not always be accurate since in some cases the respondent may have misinterpreted the question (see "Limitations" section). "Awareness" questions include the following:

- Does your library promote or market digital collections?
- Are any digital collections used in classroom teaching at your institutions?
- Does the potential for classroom teaching influence decisions about digital collection development in your library?
- Does your library create supplemental materials to assist with the use of digital collections in instruction?
- Does your library track the use of digital collections?

Limitations

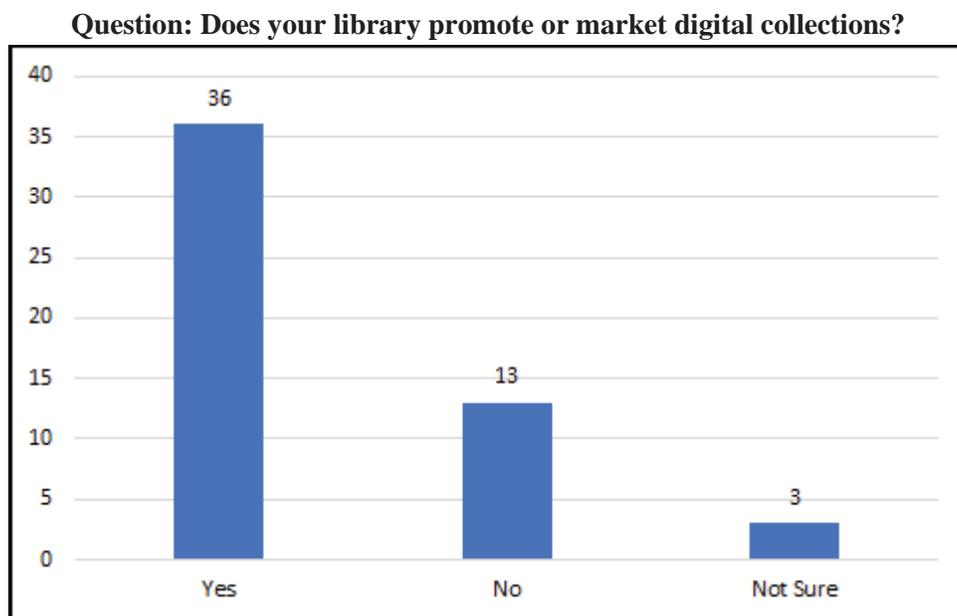
The survey suffered from a lack of clarity regarding library-created digital collections versus purchased electronic resources. This problem was systemic. It was particularly noticeable in the responses describing intra-institutional promotion; identifying who handles promotion and marketing of digital collections, describing the relationship between digital collection usage and the development of digital collections, and describing the types of materials created to supplement or assist the instructional use of digital collections.

Also, although the stated objective of the survey was to gather information about the use of CARLI Digital Collections, the dissemination method and survey design led some respondents to include information about library-created digital collections using other platforms. However, some institutions that have digital collections outside of the CARLI Digital Collections umbrella may not have included information about these collections based on the stated objective in the solicitation email.

Promotion and marketing of digital collections

Survey takers were asked: “Does your library promote or market digital collections?”

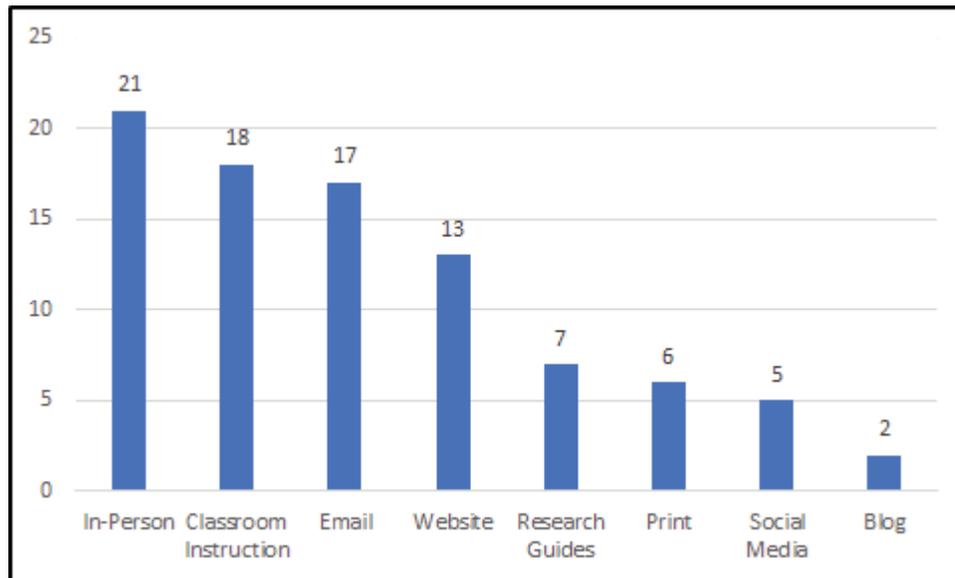
- 36 institutions yes
- 13 institutions no
- 3 institutions not sure



Respondents were then asked to describe promotion to teaching faculty and/or other institutional constituencies. This was a free-form question. Responses were coded as follows:

- In Person (21 respondents)
- Classroom Instruction (18)
- Email (17)
- Website (13)
- Research Guides (7)
- Print (6)
- Social Media (5)
- Blog (2)

Question: Please describe any promotion to teaching faculty and/or other institutional constituencies.



Examples:

“We make faculty aware of the collections if/when we see links between the content of the collection(s) and their courses. This is done by talking with faculty and by email.”

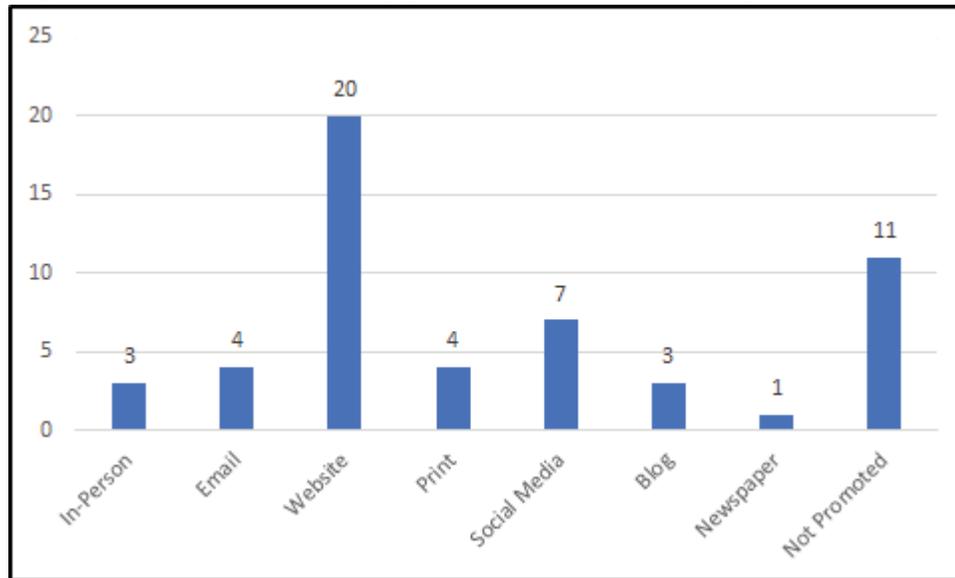
“Featured links to CARLI Digital Collections on the main library web page and Archives web page.”

“Methods specifically used: emails, digital newsletters, physical newsletters and enhanced visibility on both the library and the institution’s website.”

Respondents were also asked to describe promotion to extra-institutional users. This was a free-form question. Responses were coded as follows:

- Website (20 respondents)
- Not promoted (11)
- Social media (7)
- Email (4)
- Print (4)
- Blog (3)
- In person (3)
- Newspaper (1)

Question: Please describe any promotion to users outside your institution.



Some respondents noted that web-based promotion efforts mainly geared to institutional constituents are inherently available to users outside of the university. A few respondents described library promotion efforts intentionally directed to extra-institutional audiences that also included information about digital collections. Some libraries partner with other campus constituencies to market their digital collections.

Examples:

“Any community member who follows the library Twitter or Facebook feeds receives notice of promotions. Periodically the campus media will publish or broadcast a story about library collections or events. If digital collections are related, they too are promoted.”

“We use our Digital Commons (institutional repository) in Admissions, Alumni and Advancement work.”

“Web Page Newsletter Press releases from Office of Communications and Marketing.”

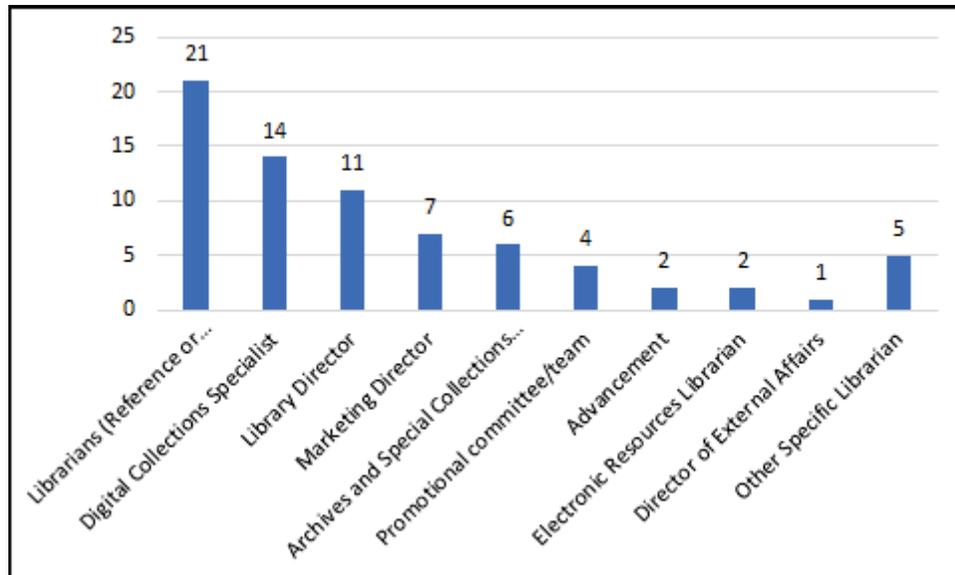
“Our first collection was promoted externally by way of our institution's external publication to friends and alumni.”

Survey takers were asked: “Who handles promotion and/or marketing of digital collections at your library?” This was a free-form question. Responses were coded as follows:

- Librarians (reference or not-specified) (21 respondents)
- Digital Collections Specialist (including institutional repository librarians) (14)
- Library Director (11)
- Marketing Director (7)
- Archives and Special Collections Librarian (6)
- Promotional committee/team (4)
- Advancement (2)

- Electronic Resources Librarian (2)
- Public Service Librarian (2)
- Director of External Affairs (1)
- Other specific librarian (e.g. Distance Education Librarian, Outreach Librarian, etc.) (5 respondents each mentioned a unique librarian title)

Question: Who handles promotion and/or marketing of digital collections at your library?



Some responses distinguished between internal and external promotion. In many cases promotion is handled by various individuals; in some cases they work together as a formally established team while in other cases the effort is less coordinated.

Examples:

“The Coordinator of Library Services handles promotion and marketing for the most part. However, the Coordinator of Library Instructional Services is involved in promoting digital collections to classes and creating materials that work for both class instruction and general promotion or marketing.”

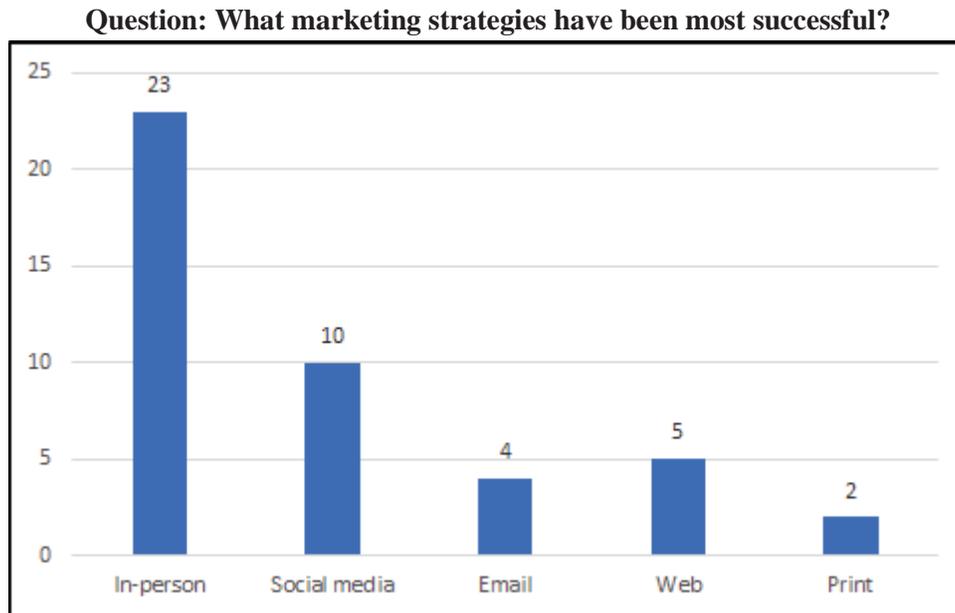
“Largely Outreach Steering, but distributed across units such as Digital Services, Special Collections, Exhibits Committee, Blog Group.”

“We do not do this in a centralized manner - every digital collection is marketed individually.”

Survey takers were asked: “What marketing strategies have been most successful?” This was a free-form question. Responses were coded as follows:

- In person (23 respondents)

- Social media (10)
- Email (4)
- Web (websites, research guides, blogs) (5)
- Print (2)



Many respondents noted that this is not really knowable since it is not measured directly. Other respondents offered subjective assessments.

Examples:

“How is success being measured? We do not review usage statistics in relationship to any promotion, and if this was done, a causal relationship could not be established. That being said, the news items that are promoted via Twitter and Facebook with the use of a url shortener are tracked and see modest web traffic.”

“With other projects the library has worked on, the more we can create buy in from the community, the higher our access statistics have risen. We're excited about our next collections we're about to publish as they have significant relevance to our current students and recent alumni. We've found that physical events to launch digital initiatives, where we can do live demonstrations of a digital tool, answer questions face to face, and invite the local community, have had the most impact on our usage stats.”

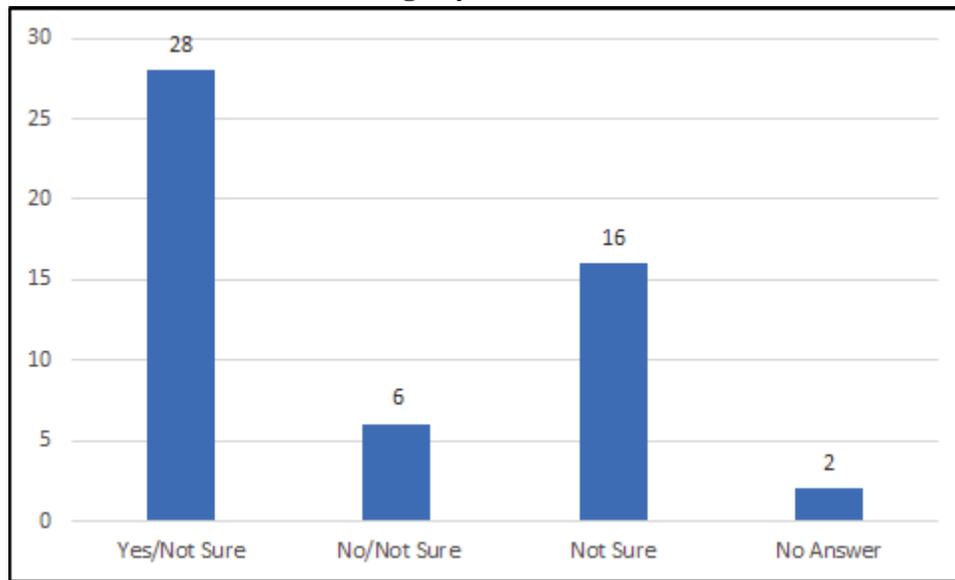
“Having the opportunity to actually show the content has been the most effective.”

Use of digital collections in teaching

Survey takers were asked: “Are any digital collections used in classroom teaching at your institution?”

- 6 institutions answered no/not sure (i.e. some respondents from a given institution answered “no” and others from the same institution answered “not sure”)
- 28 institutions answered yes/not sure
- 16 institutions answered not sure
- 2 institutions did not answer this question

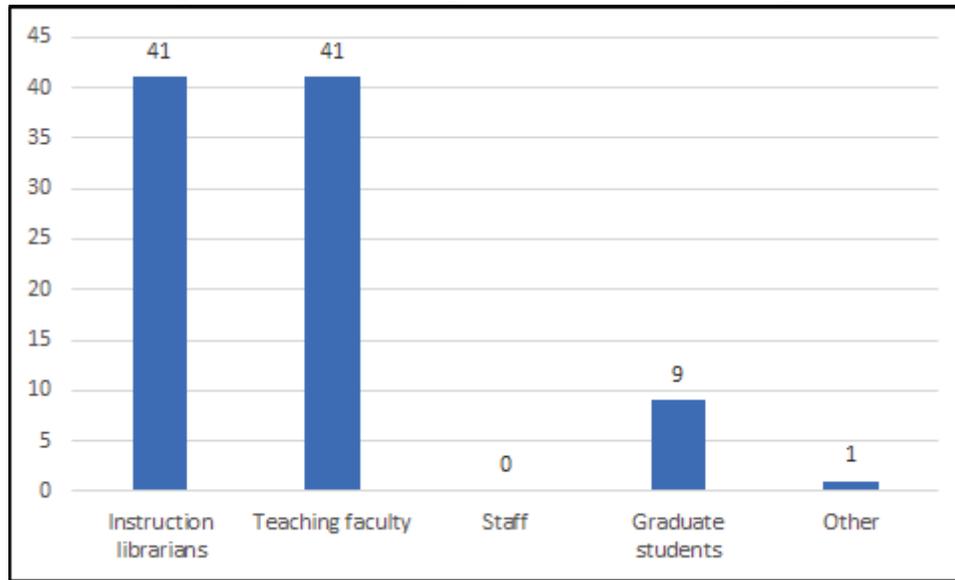
Question: Are any digital collections used in classroom teaching at your institution?



Respondents were asked who uses digital collections for teaching at their institutions. They were given four prompts and the opportunity to specify additional roles and/or comment.

- Instruction librarians (41 respondents)
- Teaching faculty (41)
- Staff (0)
- Graduate students (9)
- Other: Archive and Special Collections Librarian (1)

Question: Who uses digital collections for teaching?

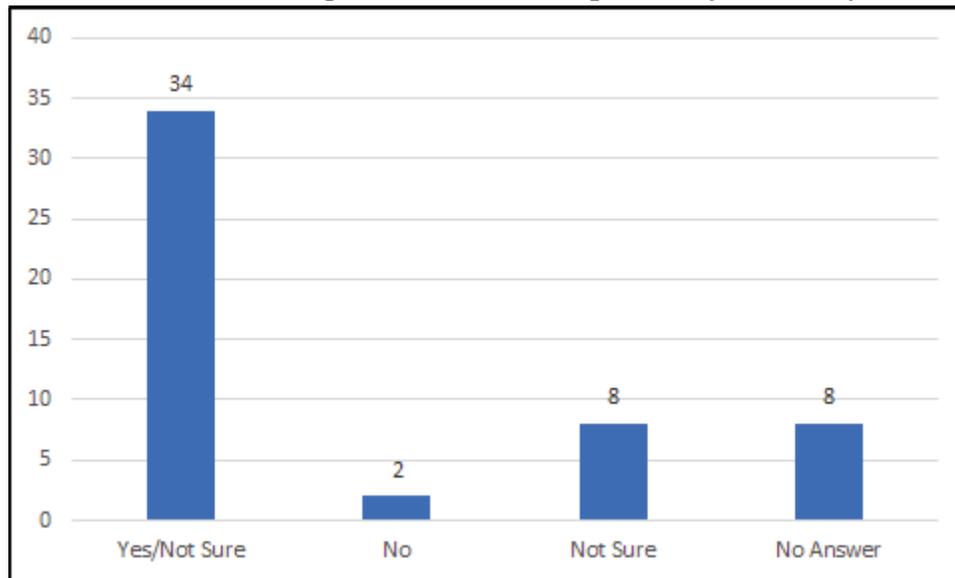


Relationship between digital collection use and digital collection development

Survey takers were asked: “Does the potential for classroom teaching influence decisions about digital collection development in your library?”

- 34 institutions answered yes/not sure (i.e. some respondents from a given institution answered “yes” and others from the same institution answered “not sure”)
- 2 institutions answered no
- 8 institutions answered not sure
- 8 institutions did not answer this question

Question: Does the potential for classroom teaching influence decisions about digital collection development in your library?



Respondents were asked to describe how classroom usage of digital collections influences digital collection development. This was a free-form question. It was clear from the responses that some respondents interpreted the question to be about the relationship between usage and collection development for commercial electronic resources. The question instead intended to ask respondents about the potential for classroom use informing decisions about digitization priorities in the creation of digital collections.

Examples of responses that clearly addressed the intended question:

“As a higher level teaching institution, we look toward bringing archival collections of historical significance to a place where they are more accessible and can be used in both research and teaching. We are aware of the collections that we have and the number of times they have been asked about by researchers and faculty. We use this information to assist in prioritizing what to digitize.”

“If a faculty member requests a collection to be digitized, the collection becomes a higher priority than collections that are digitized for preservation purposes or for their distinctiveness.”

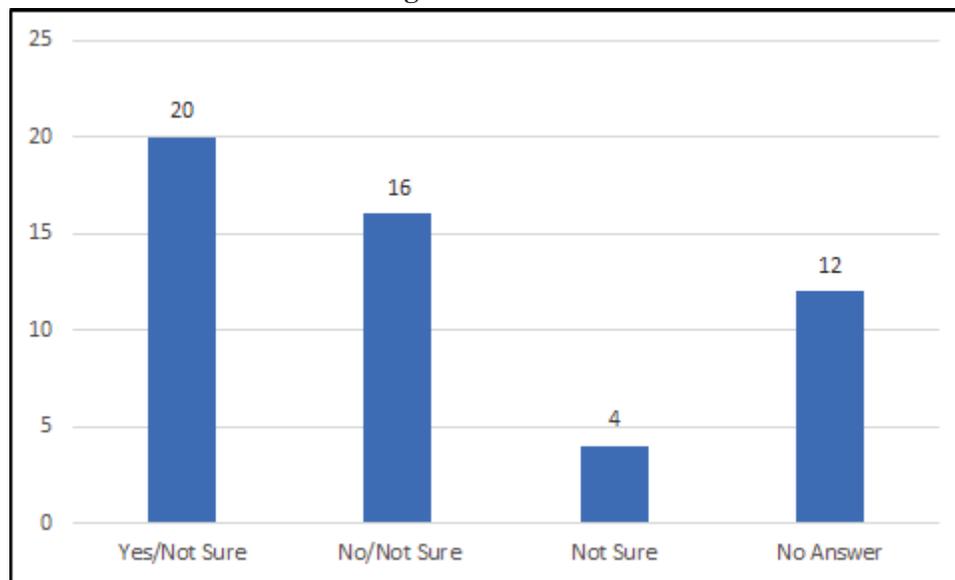
“Archival material has been digitized in several collections as a way to reduce damage from frequent handling.”

Creation of supplemental materials

Survey takers were asked “Does your library create supplemental materials to assist with the use of digital collections in instruction?”

- 20 institutions answered yes/not sure (i.e. some respondents from a given institution answered “yes” and others from the same institution answered “not sure”)
- 16 institutions answered no/not sure
- 4 institutions answered not sure
- 12 institutions did not answer this question

Question: Does your library create supplemental materials to assist with the use of digital collections in instruction?



Respondents were asked to describe the types of materials created to assist with digital collections in instruction. This was a free-form question. It was clear from the responses that some respondents interpreted the question to be about materials created to help library users effectively utilize commercial electronic databases. The question instead intended to ask respondents about supplementary materials provided to guide the use of the library-created digital/digitized special collections.

Examples of responses that clearly addressed the intended question:

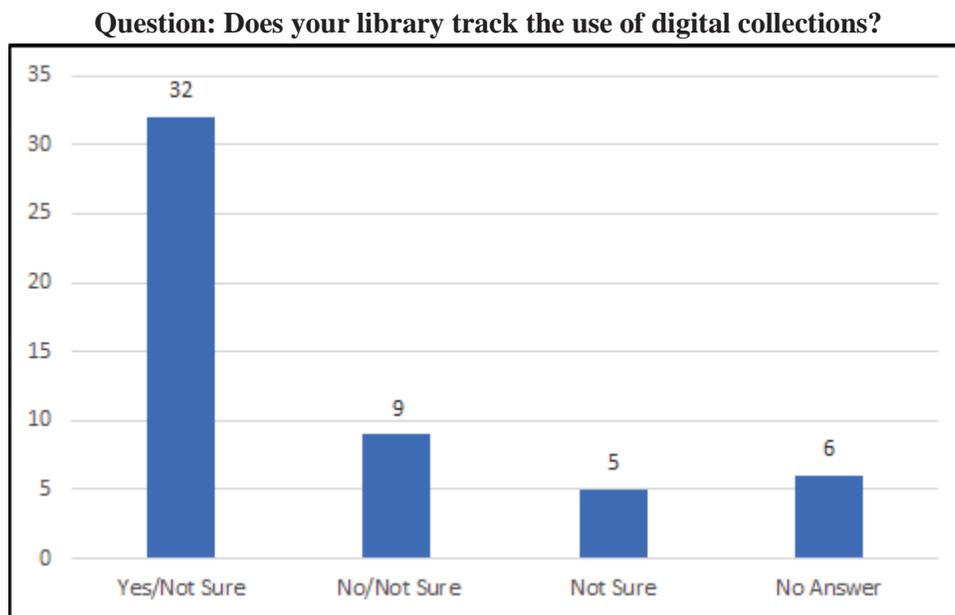
“Tutorials, mostly. These aren't finding aids - these are ‘how to access and how to use.’”

“We have created a web page within our library's pages that allows a user to search directly from our site (results shown through the CONTENTdm interface). With our next collections, we anticipate the need to create some brief instructions on using CONTENTdm as it works differently across browsers and can be confusing for those wanting to search the full text of a compound pdf.”

Usage tracking for digital collections

Survey takers were asked: “Does your library track the use of digital collections?”

- 32 institutions answered yes/not sure (i.e. some respondents from a given institution answered “yes” and others from the same institution answered “not sure”)
- 9 institutions answered no/not sure
- 5 institutions answered not sure
- 6 institutions did not answer this question

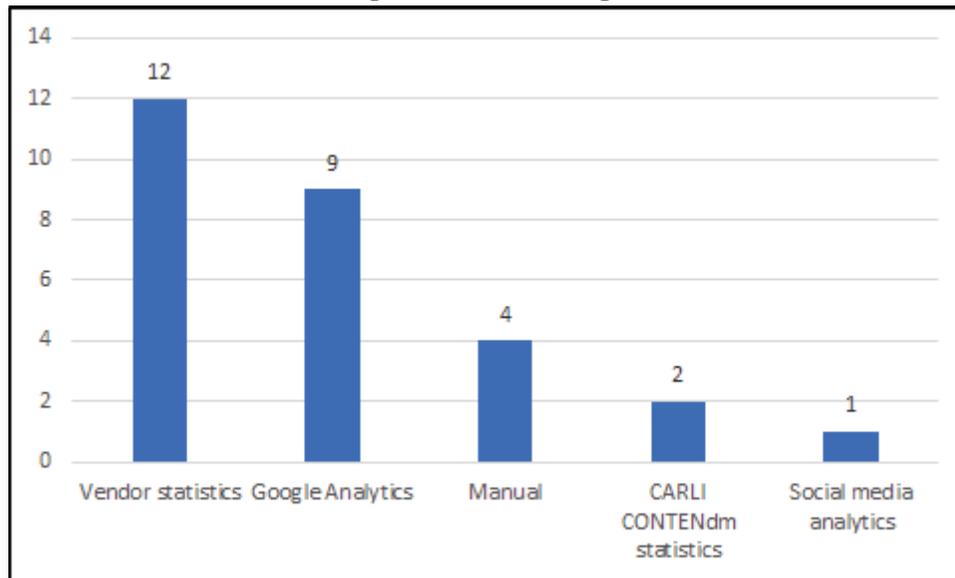


Respondents were asked to describe the methods used to track digital collection usage. Thirty-nine respondents described methods of usage tracking. From these comments, it was clear that some respondents interpreted the question to be about tracking usage of purchased commercial electronic resources. The question instead intended to ask respondents about tracking usage of library-created digital collections.

Responses that clearly addressed the intended question were coded as follows:

- Vendor statistics (bepress, CONTENTdm) (12 respondents)
- Google Analytics (9)
- Manual (4)
- CARLI CONTENTdm statistics (2)
- Social media analytics (1)

Question: Please describe the methods used to track digital collection usage.



Examples:

“Statistics are monitored and promoted for the institutional repository but not for other digital collections.”

“Google Analytics, but we don't spend enough time/no clear responsibility in who uses this info and if we actually use it to inform our decisions.”

“We use Google Analytics, bepress reports and CONTENTdm reports on usage, downloads, hits, geo-location of users, etc.”

Other comments

The survey ended by inviting additional comments about practices regarding the promotion of digital collections or their use in the classroom. Selected comments:

“I would attribute the lack of promotion to assignment of duties and workload (i.e., digital collections are a fraction of the workload of the employees responsible for their creation, and also those individuals have far less direct contact with faculty/students).”

“We are a member of Chicago Collections Consortium which will be offering another access point to existence of our collections and to our finding aids. ArtStor asked for permission to load one of our digital collections into their database; this provides greater exposure.”

“I ... did a radio interview with NPR about the collection, which was very hard to track the effectiveness but I got a few kudos via e-mail and site traffic was high that day!”

“... I was actively promoting our digital collections by giving presentations on campus and professional conferences, posting information about the collections in my several physical exhibit cases on campus, handing out ‘trading cards’ featuring individual items from our digital collections, mentioning the digital collections in our popular blog posts, Facebook posts, etc. ... Outreach has been cut from my position, unfortunately.”

“To be blunt, folks, promotion is not yet high on our priority list. Just getting stuff up is.”

“We're currently studying the impact of adding images to Flickr on collection traffic. We expect this will make a significant difference. A follow-up will be to seed links into Wikipedia and measure the impact from that platform.”

Conclusions

Promotion and marketing of digital collections

Intra-institutional promotion efforts loosely fell into two areas: (1) specific relevance-driven promotion, and (2) intrinsic with more general library promotion. Promotion is generally handled by librarians, digital collections/special collections specialists, or marketing/outreach specialists. This provides insight into one dilemma regarding the promotion of digital collections: the professionals who are knowledgeable about library services and/or digital collection content may not be the same professionals who are knowledgeable about marketing techniques. One respondent noted that the people responsible for digital collections typically have less contact with users. Less effort is made to promote digital collections to extra-institutional audiences.

One promising practice involves creating coordinated teams within the library to handle promotion and marketing. Another strategy is for the library to partner with the university marketing department or alumni relations to promote digital collections.

A few respondents did not see the value or purpose in having a coordinated strategy to market digital collections. In one case the respondent seemed to feel marketing was relatively unimportant in comparison with other pressing responsibilities. Another respondent stated that the idea of marketing library services was ideologically uncomfortable: the library's role was to provide resources, not to sell them.

While libraries use various technological means (Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Flickr, Wikipedia, blogs) to promote their digital collections, most respondents feel that an in-person demonstration is the most effective way to engage users. However, one respondent noted participation in aggregating agencies like the Chicago Collections Consortium and ArtStor increases exposure to digital collections.

Use of digital collections in teaching, effect of instructional use on digital collection development, and creation of supplemental materials

Instruction librarians and teaching faculty are the primary users of digital collections as teaching tools. The potential for use in both research and teaching is a factor in prioritizing digitization to create digital expressions of archival collections. For one institution, faculty demand trumps preservation or uniqueness as a criterion for prioritizing digitization. Demand for physical materials also influences digitization from

the standpoint of protecting physical archival materials from use-related damage. Supplemental materials created to assist the instructional use of digital collections focus on access to and effective navigation of the collection rather than providing information about the collection content.

Usage tracking for digital collections

Libraries that track digital collection usage primarily utilize Google Analytics, CONTENTdm statistics (directly or through CARLI), and bepress statistics for Digital Commons repositories. One respondent admitted that while some data was gathered, it was not done systematically or used to inform decisions. However, a few institutions did have a clear picture of how collections were marketed and how to measure that success with usage statistics. Investing the time in learning how to effectively use web analytics would be a relatively easy practice to implement and would aid in making collection development decisions.

Next steps

In light of the data gathered through the survey, the Created Content Committee proposes to investigate ways to help CARLI institutions promote and market digital collections. Marketing digitized archival material and special collections comes with its own set of challenges and a strategic approach is needed to be most effective in reaching potential users. Many responses received from the survey indicate that librarians tend to engage users using traditional library methods such as face-to-face instruction rather than using marketing strategies. The Created Content Committee plans to use the findings from this survey to inform future projects, such as proposing best practices for marketing digital collections and teaching library staff at CARLI institutions, or how targeted marketing strategies can create a deeper level of engagement between the library and its users and expose the rich resources of the CARLI Digital Collections to a wider number of students, faculty, and researchers both within and without the individual institutions.