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Making archives available

To oblige persons often costs little and helps much.

Baltasar Gracián (1601–58) *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*, 1647

Finally, we have reached what some consider the ultimate archival activity: making archives available for use. Once the archivist has acquired, arranged and described archival materials, and stored them so they are safe from harm, she can, and *should*, open the doors and invite the public in.

Traditionally, that is what archivists did. They opened the doors and invited the public, or a select few, into a reference room, where the users sat, in scholarly silence, waiting for boxes and folders to emerge, like treasures on a platter, from the storage vaults. The medieval archivist in the heart of England did not cart the town's archival treasures around in a wagon and set up roadside exhibits of scrolls and parchments. Original archival materials were kept in locked containers, brought out for the privileged few who were permitted access to the archival *sanctum sanctorum.*

Today, when people can access information through the internet 24 hours a day, archivists still preserve and protect physical, tangible goods, not only paper archives or audiovisual recordings or photographs but also very physical and very expensive computer servers and storage devices used to store and make available irreplaceable electronic archives. But while the physical space for holding archives will not go away, people no longer have to go to the archival reference room for answers to all their questions. Not every item in archival custody will ever be digitized, and helping the researcher in person will still be necessary and valuable, but archivists can make more and more information available online, through databases, websites, digital information networks and social media.

But while computers have made the act of gaining access easier, they have

made the process of providing it much harder. The archivist today faces the challenge of balancing access and privacy, respecting individual rights and protecting both physical and digital holdings from loss or harm, problems which were much easier to manage when everyone wanting access stood in line in front of a reference desk.

The archivist also faces increased pressure to make holdings available instantaneously. Archival access and outreach – once overlooked and neglected components of archival service – are now a priority for funders and decision makers, who often have a mistaken idea about how easy it is to digitize archives and make them available online.

The archivist's first reference responsibility, though, does not change. Once she has gained legal, physical and intellectual control of the holdings in her institution, she needs to make them available for use, in keeping with necessary conditions on access. At a bare minimum, the archivist needs to provide the space and services necessary to allow people to come into her institution and access archives in person.

It is not enough to set aside a corner of the archivist's desk as a 'reference' facility available only when the archivist is not sitting there. Nor is it appropriate to vet researchers to decide if their topic is 'worthy' enough to allow entrée to the archives. If the archival institution exists to support the acquisition and preservation of archives in order to make them available, then they should be made available. But – and there is always a 'but' – reference is a balancing act, as discussed below.

Providing equitable access

In theory, anyone should be welcome in the archival institution. This is particularly true if the facility is supported through public funds and preserves archives for public use. If someone wishes to use the holdings of the repository, and if the materials in question are not restricted, the archivist should not limit use.

In some parts of the world, access to archival facilities and holdings is highly restricted, if not truly onerous. In certain countries, researchers must apply in writing months in advance to obtain permission to visit the institution. In other places, only citizens of that country may access the government's archives. Foreign nationals might not even be allowed into the building. In reality, no archivist can overturn the legal or administrative requirements of her own sponsor agency or government by herself. She is bound by her terms of employment to follow existing laws and regulations. Still, the archivist has a responsibility as a member of her profession to do the

utmost to acquire, preserve and *make available* the materials in her care, with respect for the rights of records creators, other citizens and future users.

Conditions on access

On behalf of her institution, the archivist can establish some reasonable conditions on access, to protect the holdings and ensure the rights of researchers and the public are respected. It is common and sensible, for instance, to ask all researchers to register and provide identification before being admitted to the reference room. Does the user need to provide academic credentials? Does the researcher have to be a citizen of the country? A resident? A taxpayer? Some institutions may welcome children in the reference room, while others may define it as an adults-only space. Some countries may need to limit public service during public holidays or religious festivals, others may be happy to remain open 24/7/365.

Some repositories, such as corporate archives, may only provide access to people within the organization. That may be reasonable. Others, such as community archives, may serve everyone from academic researchers to genealogists to school children. The reference policies of each type of institution will reflect these differences in audience and scope.

Access can also be affected by the nature of the materials. How will the archivist provide access to an extensive but extremely fragile collection of medieval scrolls? How will she provide access to a collection of e-mails stored in the institution's digital repository? In these instances, access depends on resources, from stands to support oversized scrolls to computers for public use in the reference room.

Access and privacy

As discussed in Chapter 7, the archivist needs to consider the privacy rights of the creators and the people named in archives. Decisions about access are made first to respect legal or policy requirements, then to respect the wishes of donors, then to protect the physical material from harm. The archivist should not circumvent any such conditions, which should be documented in descriptive tools.

Beyond the privacy of individuals identified in archives, the archivist must also consider the rights of the users of those materials. People access archives for many reasons, from family history to legal research. Some uses of archives might be highly personal and sensitive. What if a researcher is seeking archives that might confirm he was adopted as a baby? He might not want to explain his

research request within earshot of everyone else in the reference room. Another researcher might be researching government records related to mining because he wants to stake a claim. His economic interests could be damaged if his research request is broadcast to other potential prospectors in the building.

The archivist also has to balance competing research demands. How does she provide equitable service to legal researchers on opposing sides of a court case? She needs to do her utmost to provide the same level of assistance to both parties without becoming personally interested in one side or the other, and without violating the privacy of either party.

Respecting diversity and ensuring accessibility

The archivist must also be sensitive to her constituents. If an archival institution serves a bilingual or multicultural population, the archivist needs to consider if and how to address the needs of different members of the community. How can the institution provide the widest possible access to the archives in its care if the records are in different languages? Similarly, archives may illustrate events or activities that are upsetting to some in society. How much responsibility can the archivist take for warning researchers that they may find the materials troubling? More practically, how can the archival institution reasonably support access by people with different abilities or needs? Can she accommodate the needs of researchers with impaired hearing and sight? What is the institution's responsibility for ensuring people using mobility devices like wheelchairs can get into the building?

Establishing a reference and access framework

The archivist needs to formalize policies and processes related to reference and access. These policies explain the institution's responsibility to ensure users can access holdings and benefit from the content in them. Figure 12.1 illustrates a sample reference and access policy for a fictitious community-based archival institution, the Cheswick Historical Society Archives.

> The mandate of the Cheswick Historical Society Archives, as governed by the Cheswick Historical Society Constitution and Bylaws, is to acquire, preserve and make available the documentary heritage of the town of Cheswick and the surrounding community, including archives of the Cheswick local government authority as well as private papers from individuals, businesses and organizations related to the community, in order to illuminate and foster understanding of the history, development and identity of the town of Cheswick and its people.

Figure 12.1 *Cheswick Historical Society Archives reference policy*

The materials collected by the Cheswick Historical Society Archives include archival materials in any media that are concerned with the development and history of the community. The Archives and the Cheswick Museum work closely together to co-ordinate the preservation of both archives and artefacts.

To support equal access to its holdings while protecting the materials for current and future use, the Cheswick Historical Society Archives advises visitors to the institution of the following conditions on access and use.

Hours
The archives' reference room is open to researchers Tuesdays to Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Registration
All researchers are requested to register, providing their name, address, telephone number and signature, and they are required to present proof of identification, including confirmation of address, contact details and, if possible, an e-mail address. Personal information gathered will only be used for security and communication purposes and for statistical analysis and will not be published or disseminated beyond the archival institution.

Reference room conditions of use
1   Researchers may not bring coats, briefcases, backpacks or personal books into the reference room. Storage cubicles are provided in the reception area and locks and keys are available free of charge from the reference archivist. Researchers are advised to keep their valuables, such as wallets, on their person; the Cheswick Historical Society Archives is not responsible for lost or stolen items.
2   Personal computers, small digital cameras, cellular phones with cameras and dictation or recording equipment for personal note taking or for photographing documents or images are permitted in the reference room. Camera flashes, video cameras, tripods and scanning equipment are not permitted.
3   No internet connectivity is provided for users' own computers, but internet access to the online finding aids of neighbouring archives is available through the computer in the reference room. Researchers wishing to access the internet for e-mail or other purposes are asked to consult the list of nearby internet cafés, available in the reference room.
4   Pens or ink of any kind may not be used in the reference room. The archivist will supply pencils on request.
5   Smoking, eating and drinking are prohibited in the reference room. Researchers may access the staff lunch room to consume their own refreshments. Smoking is only permitted outside the building in the designated smoking area.
6   All archival materials must be handled carefully. When working with paper archives, researchers are requested to open only one folder at a time and to keep items in their existing order. They are advised not to place bound materials face down, nor to lean on materials or write on or trace over materials.
7   When handling analogue materials such as audiovisual recordings, researchers will follow the instructions of reference staff for loading and viewing materials on equipment provided in the audiovisual area. Researchers may not use their own equipment for audiovisual playback or recording.

Figure 12.1 *Continued*

. 8   To access digital holdings, researchers will use the computer set up for digital archives reference. Print facilities are provided for a fee. Researchers must obtain an access code from the archivist before they can log into the computer and printer.

9   No archival material may be removed from the reference room. The archivist reserves the right to inspect all containers, bags or folders when researchers leave the room.

10   Researchers who wish to view restricted materials must contact the individual or agency imposing the restrictions. Staff will be happy to provide contact details whenever they are available but cannot permit access to any restricted materials without written authority from the appropriate agency.

Reproduction, copyright and publication

1   Archival materials are fragile and irreplaceable, and they can be damaged by excessive exposure to the light from photocopiers or scanners. Consequently, researchers are strongly urged to allow enough time to conduct necessary research on site at the archival institution and to request reproductions of documents for off-premises study only if absolutely necessary.

2   No materials may be duplicated that are subject to restrictions on reproduction, either from donors or depositors of the archives or by the terms of copyright law, or because materials are restricted for preservation, processing or other reasons.

3   If materials in question are not restricted or protected by copyright conditions, the Cheswick Historical Society Archives will provide print or digital copies of archival materials for a fee. A schedule of fees is available in the reference room.

4   Researchers requesting copies of items from the archives must sign a request for reproductions form confirming that the materials are for personal or reference use only and will not be published or distributed for any other purpose.

5   The Archives cannot guarantee copies will be made immediately and will advise users of the estimated time required to complete copying requests. Rush orders will only be accepted at the discretion of the archivist and may be subject to additional fees.

6   Researchers may photograph archival materials using small digital cameras or cameras in their cell phones. However, they must sign a request for reproductions form before beginning to make copies and they are expected to abide by the terms and conditions outlined in that form.

7   It is the responsibility of researchers to obtain copyright clearance to publish or distribute any archival material. Whenever possible, the archivist will provide contact information for copyright holders to facilitate the copyright clearance process, but the archivist will not undertake the clearance process on behalf of any researcher.

8   If a researcher wishes to publish material from archival collections and has obtained the necessary permissions, the researcher is asked to credit the archival institution as follows: Cheswick Historical Society Archives, archives title and number, series, volume or file number, title or identification of document and dates of the document. For example:

Cheswick Historical Society Archives, Cheswick Community Festival Society Archives, No. 2006–22, Series 13, File 19, Annual Report on Festivals, 1959, December 12, 1956.

Figure 12.1 *Continued*

Support for users

The Cheswick Historical Society Archives is committed to providing equitable access to archival holdings to everyone, including people with disabilities. As much as possible, the Archives will strive to provide services and resources in a manner that supports access and use regardless of ability, including providing archival descriptions available in different formats and making copies of original material to permit alternate methods of handling and use. The Archives also maintains a list of community service agencies that researchers may consult for assistance with such research.

The staff of the archives will be pleased to assist and advise researchers who visit the archives in person, but given the limited resources available the Cheswick Historical Society Archives can only provide remote research support of no more than one hour every three months to external researchers who cannot visit the institution in person. All requests must be approved in advance. Cases of legal or humanitarian urgency may justify the provision of additional research services, at the Archives' discretion. The Archives maintains a list of professional researchers who can be hired to provide further assistance. However, the Archives does not endorse the people on the list and does not assume any responsibility for the quality of their work.

The Cheswick Historical Society Archives supports remote access to information from and about its holdings by contributing archival descriptions to the national archival descriptive network and by publishing information on its website. For more information, go to www.CheswickHistory.edu.uk.

Further information

Anyone is welcome to contact the Archivist if they have questions or need further information. Contact details are provided below:

Cheswick Historical Society Archives
4556 Stewardson Way
Cheswick, Cambridgeshire CB0 1AW
UK
Tel: 01223 566555
Fax: 01223 566556
Website: www.CheswickHistory.edu.uk
Email: info@CheswickHistory.edu.uk

Figure 12.1 *Continued*

Providing reference services

No matter who comes into the reference room, the archivist needs to create a supportive service environment by investing in resources such as information technology, reference publications, office equipment and general supplies. The basics of a safe and comfortable environment must be a given: desks and chairs, light and heat, access to nearby refreshment facilities and so on. The institution's descriptive tools, print and electronic, should be available for easy use in the reference area. A collection of standard reference materials such as atlases, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, local histories and relevant periodicals or journals is helpful. Beyond those necessities, the archivist needs to consider the following questions:

- Will users be able to access the internet in the reference room to use web-based reference tools? What security issues need to be considered? What are the costs of acquiring, maintaining and upgrading the equipment? How will the archivist address the inevitable problem of researchers misusing the technology or overstaying their welcome at the only computer in the reference room?
- Does the archives collect microfilm, sound recordings, video tapes or other media-dependent materials? If so, how will users access these materials? The institution may need to invest in microfilm readers and printers, tape players, video machines or DVD players.
- Will the institution provide photocopies? Under what conditions? The archivist needs to develop policies about what will or will not be copied, how much users will be charged, how and when copies will be made and how users will be advised of copyright concerns. And the institution will need reliable access to a photocopier.

The archivist also needs to clarify if the institution will set any specific conditions on activities within the reference room. Under what conditions will researchers be allowed to bring computers or cell phones into the room? Will they be allowed to photograph archival materials using their own cameras or cell phones? Permitting researchers to take their own photographs of documents or images can be a great time saver, especially compared with transcribing archives by hand. But immediate and ad hoc reproduction opens the door to potential copyright violations.

The archivist also has to decide if the institution can support the use of personal electronics. She needs to consider if there are enough outlets to allow users to plug in their computers or charge up their cell phones. She needs to set parameters around how and where and when researchers can photograph documents so they do not disturb others in the room. She needs to assess the security measures needed to prevent unauthorized use of the institution's own computer networks.

Individual support for users

To provide quality reference services, the archivist must know her institution's collections and services well. She also needs to understand the different types of visitors who come to the institution. No aspect of archival work is more people oriented than reference. The archivist needs to be comfortable with explaining, often many times over, how the institution operates, what materials it holds and how to use reference tools. Even the

most informative website or orientation guide will not replace human answers to human questions. (In truth, a really good reference archivist is often more interested in the visitor than in the archives.)

If the reference archivist is communicating the same information multiple times, it may be helpful to prepare print or digital reference guides that answer frequently asked questions. Some institutions produce introductory films, available in the lobby and on the institution's web page, explaining the facility and its holdings and services. Leaflets in the reference room can explain to researchers how to access genealogical records or documents related to the history of their house. The investment in good quality reference tools is not inconsiderable, but the savings in time, and the increased public understanding of archives, are often well worth the effort.

Reference interviews

The archivist might conduct an in-depth reference interview to help identify a researcher's particular interests and steer him in the direction of suitable materials. Sometimes this interview is helpful for both parties, but if it becomes obligatory it can become just another bureaucratic hoop. A seasoned academic researcher may only be interested in knowing about recent changes in holdings or services and needs no additional guidance from the reference archivist. But a local citizen investigating his family history may have never visited an archival institution before. He may benefit greatly from a face-to-face conversation with an archivist, who can steer him through the nuances of research and also, perhaps reassure him of the importance of his work and the fact that the institution exists for him too, not just for lawyers or professors or doctoral students.

Online reference

It is rare in the first decades of the 21st century to find an archival institution that does not have some sort of internet presence. Some have basic websites or pages within their sponsor agency's website. Others make all their summary descriptions available online through dedicated archival software, linking digital objects such as photographs or documents to the descriptions, giving the remote researcher comprehensive access to a wide range of virtual content.

A forward-thinking archivist will embrace digital technologies to support reference services as much as the technological infrastructure in her jurisdiction allows. She must be careful, though, not to let the lure of shiny

new digital devices or systems pre-empt core archival responsibilities for accountability, transparency and efficiency in all operations. For instance, there is little benefit to making all descriptive information available in a database but not have an internet connection. Users then have to come into the institution to use a computer in the reference room to find out about holdings, defeating the benefit of digital technologies. And when the researchers come, what happens if they all have to line up to use the only computer in the office? If internet capacity is not possible, it would be better to invest in more computers or to create parallel paper finding aids, at least until the institution has the capacity to become fully digital.

Still, the 21st-century world *is* digital. The archivist needs to assess whether and how she can provide the following web-based resources:

- *Institutional websites*. An institution should have a basic website or a dedicated page within the website of its sponsor agency. Basic information on the site might include mandate statements, policies, acquisition areas, opening hours and contact information. If the institution has responsibility for organizational records as well as archives, the website might be divided into sections for members of the agency (such as records management advice) and members of the public (about accessing and using the archives). If the institution caters to specific groups it might also provide information relevant to their interests, such as genealogy and family history or the history of events, activities or people from the area, such as military bases, religious groups, sports activities, milestone dates, aboriginal communities, political figures and so on. Links can be provided to resources such as how to plan a visit, understanding copyright conditions and fees for reproduction or research, guidelines for potential donors, educational programs offered by the archives and answers to frequently asked questions. A section for current news and another to invite public feedback should also be included.
- *Online descriptive databases*. A database of archival descriptions, with actual digital objects attached as appropriate, can support remote reference. Such a database is often nested within the institution's website. It needs to be maintained continuously and updated regularly. Whenever it needs to be taken offline for servicing or upgrading, an announcement should be posted on the institution's website so users are aware of the situation.
- *Online photographic databases*. Some institutions develop a separate database specifically to hold descriptions and digital copies of

photographs, which are often an institution's most-used holdings. Again, the database needs to be kept up to date and monitored regularly to ensure it is fully operational.

- *Information in archival networks*. Contributing descriptive information about the archives' holdings to regional, national and international archival networks can support reference by making information easily available beyond the institution's own website. It is essential that the archivist adhere to the standards and controls set by the network, and that she ensure descriptions are up to date. Archival networks are becoming more popular in many countries; the websites of national archives and archival associations usually include more information or links to the sites.

- *Digital reference resources*. The institution might also develop self-service tools such as 'how to find your ancestors' or 'researching the Great Flood of 1976'. Lists of mayors in the town over two centuries might be useful information in a municipal archives, while a list of the names of all authors represented in the archives might be useful in an institution devoted to literary history.

Any website or other digital tool used to support any of the institution's services needs to be maintained. The archivist must allocate resources and time to ensuring the information on the site does not go 'stale' and the technology remains as up to date as possible.

Digitization as a reference tool

The digitization of archival materials was introduced in Chapter 9 in relation to preservation. But digitization is also a valuable tool for increasing access to archives. Therefore it can be an important aspect of a reference programme. Digitization can provide remote access to holdings and help support exhibits and outreach.

One of the most disturbing 'unintended consequences' of the internet age is that today too many people assume that if they cannot find something through a Google search, what they seek does not exist. The archivist can enhance access to archives through digitization, but she also has a responsibility to select items for digitization thoughtfully and deliberately, and she must make clear that the items chosen represent only a small portion of all the holdings available.

The archivist also has a moral responsibility to explain why some materials were or were not digitized. Many valuable materials may be protected by

copyright and so cannot be digitized. But if institutions only digitize materials in the public domain and do not explain why, users will not realize why they are seeing what might be a skewed sampling of information. The user needs to know what he is seeing and *not* seeing when he views a virtual exhibit or accesses an online database of digital images.

Documenting reference services

All the work performed and all interactions with researchers, physical or virtual, should be documented in some form, for security and statistical purposes. For instance, all researchers should sign a register each time they visit the institution, including the date and their name, address and signature. The register may also include a space where the researcher can identify his particular topic of interest: this information can provide helpful anecdotal evidence of the types of research being done in the institution, and the statistics can be analysed to show patterns in reference activities.

As already mentioned, this register is also a useful tracking device, allowing the archivist to know which researchers were in the reference room on which day, to locate everyone in an emergency. The tool can also help identify who was using materials, and when, in case archives are not found where they ought to be at the end of the day. If a computerized register is used instead of a paper tool, the data should be backed up several times a day and processes should be established to ensure the information can be accessed remotely in an emergency.

When answering reference questions via e-mail or telephone, the archivist should also keep statistics: date and time of contact; nature of the research question; and name and contact details of the person requesting information. Copies of written responses to letters or e-mails should be indexed as part of the archives' own records. These documents may be helpful later to answer a similar question.

Statistics should also be maintained on the use of all web-based and social media resources. How many people accessed which pages in a website? How many Twitter followers does the institution have? How often are descriptions downloaded from the database? The data will show whether changes in tools or resources have changed reference and public use: fewer phone calls and more hits on the website; a decrease in visitors to the institution but an increase in visits to the virtual exhibit? The archivist can then consider if these changes are good, and if the archivist needs to adjust any services. An increase in website traffic, for instance, might mean it is a good investment to update the website more regularly.

Statistics are also essential for presenting a business case for change to the sponsor agency. Resource allocators are more easily persuaded to increase or reallocate budgets when presented with hard data. If the number of online users has doubled in a year, the archivist can lobby for more staff to support web-based services. If the greatest number of public complaints relates to the absence of weekend reference services, the archivist can argue persuasively the logic behind closing to the public on Mondays and opening on Saturdays instead.

Outreach and community engagement

Archives used to be fortresses, and the public – which we have already agreed was a very small public back then – came to the gates and asked for permission to enter. The medieval archivist did not hire the town crier to advertise the existence of the king's archives and urge everyone to come to a family history day at the castle.

Today, outreach and community engagement are central to making the public aware of the resources of the archival institution. Outreach can also foster a greater understanding of the value and purpose of archives in general, which can increase support not just for one particular institution but for archives as a whole. It is tempting, though, for all archivists to embrace the latest and greatest new marketing and outreach techniques and end up being distracted from other core archival responsibilities. Balance, balance, balance.

No matter what other outreach initiatives the archivist considers, she has an obligation first to communicate information to the public concerning the holdings and services of her institution. This is a reference responsibility. Beyond that, the archivist can also create virtual or physical exhibits that illuminate holdings in the collection or highlight issues of relevance to the community. Exhibits and displays can also explain how archives work, what the institution does or does not acquire and how people can engage with their community's archives. The archivist is not a publicist, but she can and should be an advocate. Promoting the value of archives and the wealth of the repository's holdings is an essential part of providing accountable and effective archival service.

Outreach must be planned, like anything else. The first task is to understand the social and cultural milieu in which the archival institution operates. The archivist in a corporate repository that is open to employees only will craft a very different outreach strategy from the archivist in a local historical society archives. A community museum may develop in-house programmes for school children, but a state institution may decide to create

a travelling exhibit to reach citizens across a large region. A digital exhibit may be perfect in a university archives, catering to students, faculty and staff who spend hours at their computers. A similar initiative may be ignored in communities where access to the internet is inconsistent at best.

Still, the potential scope for outreach activities is limitless. A few engagement activities might include the following:

- genealogical workshops
- seminars on the management of personal archives
- on-site or travelling exhibits and displays
- print or digital publications such as guides, brochures and souvenir books
- newspaper or magazine articles
- screenings of archival films in a local auditorium
- local history tours
- open houses or 'visit the archives' events
- local television or radio advertisements or programmes.

The best choices will be made when the archivist consults with her users, so that she can meet the needs and priorities of her particular community.

Web-based and social media tools

The archivist will also want to consider whether the institution will use web-based or social media tools for outreach. Web-based tools are made available through the institution's official website; usually no restrictions are placed on access: anyone who can open up the website can access the information therein. On the other hand, social media tools are computer-based technologies that allow people to create and share information, ideas and content through digital networks, but social media often requires that people become part of a 'virtual community'. They need to register with the social media application on their computer or smart phone, after which they can receive and share information with others in that community through the tool.

Examples of web-based and social-media-oriented outreach activities and tools are discussed below.

Blogs

An archivist might create a blog to discuss archival projects or to provide an account of a visit to another archival repository. She may share news about

upcoming events or stories behind items in the archives. As with any other outreach tool, a blog needs to be suitable for public consumption. Sensitive, confidential or other inappropriate information should not be included. Anyone can read a blog if it is made available through a publicly accessible section of a website, and they can usually add comments, but they cannot change the content.

Wikis

Wikis are websites that allow anyone with full access to the wiki to read, add, edit or remove content. The goal of a wiki is to allow a group of people to share their knowledge about some event, issue or question. The archivist could create a wiki as she describes a body of archives, posing questions about the history of the period or posting digital copies of images so that members of the group can add comments about the people in a photograph or the context of a report. This 'crowd-sourced' information, while not always accurate, adds to the body of knowledge about archives. It can also help engage the public in the effort to arrange, describe and make available documentary resources.

Podcasts

Podcasts are digital audio files that can be downloaded from the internet so people can listen to them on a computer or mobile device such as a smartphone. The archivist could create podcasts of a monthly historical lecture series or oral history interviews from decades in the past. Podcasts can be produced individually or in series. Companies such as iTunes provide access to a vast range of podcasts, some free and some for a charge, but the archivist can establish processes to allow people to subscribe to podcasts directly through the institution's website.

RSS feeds

An RSS (rich site summary) feed is a format for delivering regularly changing web content. It is similar to a syndicated television or radio broadcast, with the next instalment available regularly to whoever wants to receive it. People can sign up for an RSS feed and have guaranteed access to updated blogs, newsletters or other dynamic information. The archivist can encourage people to sign up through the institution's RSS feed so that they automatically receive this regularly changing content. But the archivist who sets up an RSS feed

needs to maintain it; a regularly scheduled update needs to appear as scheduled.

Facebook

Facebook is an American web-based social networking tool that can be accessed on computers and on devices such as smart phones or tablets. To join Facebook, a person registers to use the site, after which they create a user profile, adding information such as their name, occupation, education, age, location, interests and so on. They can then become 'friends' with other users, allowing them to exchange messages or post updates about their activities. An archivist who creates an institutional Facebook page can open the page to anyone who wants to join, and the archivist can then use Facebook to post announcements about upcoming special events, recent acquisitions or other news. One critical challenge with Facebook is that anyone wanting to communicate through Facebook needs to register and have an account with the corporation. Another serious challenge is that, according to many legal interpretations of Facebook's terms of use, the corporation can claim to own all the content on any Facebook page. There have been instances where the relatives of people who have died cannot access their loved one's personal photographs or communications, as they cannot claim to 'be' that person or have rights to that person's digital estate. The archivist deciding to use Facebook is well advised to ensure that it is not the *only* social media tool for sharing information with the public, and that the terms and conditions imposed by the corporation do not negatively influence the archival institution, its sponsor agency or its user community.

Flickr

Flickr is a social media tool that stores still and moving images and allows users to share them with other people, creating an online community of users with common interests. People can see some content on Flickr without creating an account, but they do not receive widespread access to content, nor can they add their own images or videos, until they have created their own account. The archivist can post archival photographs or videos on Flickr for public access, providing a way for the public to see some of the institution's holdings. Copyright conditions are, as always, a challenge: it is wise only to include content free of intellectual property controls or other restrictions.

Pinterest

Like Flickr, Pinterest stores images, but in this case users can 'pin' images they like to a 'board' for later reference. Many people use Pinterest to collect images they find in other sources, whether commercial or personal, like a bulletin board with family photographs or a binder with ideas for decorating the kitchen. The archivist can use Pinterest to create boards for topics such as sports, buildings, parks and so on, pinning digital copies of historical photographs onto the different boards, thus increasing exposure to the institution's holdings.

YouTube

YouTube is a video sharing website where users can upload, view and share video content. Anyone can search for and see content on YouTube but people have to create an account if they want to upload their own videos. The archivist can upload historical films to YouTube to facilitate access, or she can also share recordings of recent events, such as conference speeches, guest lectures or practical demonstrations. The archivist might also produce instructional videos about topics such as how to undertake archival research, trace ancestors or complete a reproduction request. Posting these videos on YouTube creates an online set of self-service reference tools.

Twitter

Twitter is an online social networking and news sharing service. Users have to create an account, then they can post messages, called 'tweets' (which are restricted to 140 characters) about anything they like. Users interested in different people or organizations can 'follow' them on Twitter so that they always receive new messages posted by that person or group. The archivist can use Twitter to promote events or share news. For instance, a tweet can announce an upcoming lecture series and include a link to the registration page, or advise that the computer servers in the reference room are going to be offline for the morning while an upgrade is being performed. Twitter is an extremely fast and nimble way of sharing immediate news, but it is not a useful forum for complex debates. The archivist using Twitter would be wise to establish ground rules around how the institution will use the tool, or else the person in charge of Twitter for the institution could end up caught in arguments with users about anything from changed reference room hours to decisions about public funding. Those are difficult arguments to have with only 140 characters to spare.

Incorporating archival information into web resources

In addition to these web-based and social media tools (and many others, such as Instagram, Snapchat, Vine, Tumblr . . . the list goes on), the archivist should consider incorporating information from and about archives into publicly available web-based resources.

A prime candidate for archival input is the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, which includes entries on over 5 million separate topics and is viewed by as many as 15 billion people each month. Many archivists around the world regularly add information about archival collections to relevant Wikipedia pages, such as the biographies of people whose archives are in their institutions, along with links to their institutional web pages or to other descriptive tools.[1]

The potential for disseminating archival information through Wikipedia is tremendous, allowing the archivist to bypass archives-specific descriptive networks entirely in the quest to inform the public about holdings. But a mention in Wikipedia does not replace a good description of archival materials. And the archivist deciding to add content to Wikipedia needs to review the guidelines for adding content and ensure the terms and conditions suit her institutional requirements.

Social media pros and cons

Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia and other web-based and social media tools can help break down the borders between the institution and the public. The very use of such tools by an archival institution is a signal to the public that the institution is not stuck in the past. Some have argued that archival institutions can reach a younger demographic by remaining technologically current. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the use of Facebook, Twitter or other technologies has resulted in increased hits on institutional websites, more visits to the facility and more donations and financial contributions.

The web environment also fosters collaboration, allowing the user to become an active contributor to the archives, not just a passive recipient of archival services. Engaging citizens in deciphering and decoding their history can generate a wealth of information and promote a sense of community. Web-based and social media tools help to break down the barriers between 'experts' and the 'common folk'.

There is a danger, though, of becoming swept up in technology. Before she commits the institution to the latest and greatest digital innovation the archivist needs to have satisfactory answers to the following sort of questions:

- Will the tools support the institution's core goals?
- What are the hard and soft costs of investing in these technologies?
- What equipment and resources will be needed, and what training will staff need to use the tools effectively?
- Can the institution commit to updating Facebook or web pages weekly, or more frequently, to ensure content remains fresh?
- Does the institution have enough 'new' news to disseminate?
- Will using tools such as Facebook or Twitter put the institution's holdings, information or staff – or the public – at risk?
- What controls must be established to protect the individual privacy of people accessing web resources?
- What protections are needed against possible copyright violations or other infringements?
- Will the communications created using social media be records? If so, how will they be captured and saved, and how long should they be kept?

Whatever technologies she chooses, the archivist must ensure they are sustainable *and* sustained. A broken link to a website is not just frustrating: for someone desperately trying to seek archival evidence that supports a lawsuit or a family search, hitting a dead end on an archives' website can be heartbreaking.

Some archivists vigorously support the use of new technologies and the creation of more collaborative approaches. Others are concerned about the role of the archival institution as a place of evidence and look askance at the idea of inviting the public to help co-create archival tools and resources. Regardless of whether or not archivists like it, though, digital technologies are not going away. Different social media tools and platforms will emerge and others will disappear. But the internet is not a transitory contrivance. The archivist needs to consider strategies for participating in the world of social networking, while still protecting the irreplaceable archival materials in her care.

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Having addressed the last piece of the archival puzzle, providing access to archives and encouraging public engagement and use, the only task left in this book is to conclude with a brief speculation on the future of archives . . . and archivists.

Note

1 Professional archival associations are now starting to hold Wikipedia 'edit-a-thons': scheduled virtual meetings of archivists who come together to edit Wikipedia pages to add archival information. By working together, more experienced archivists can help newcomers understand how Wikipedia works, and by working as a group, archivists can focus on chosen topics, such as editing all entries related to 19th-century political figures in their country or all entries related to science and industry.