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START SPREADING THE NEWS

A journey in social media usage for outreach in a cooperative digitization project

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Abstract:

Social media is an excellent outreach tool that can be an effective and cost-friendly way to be heard and tell people about valuable primary resources. However, as major projects go, they are part of a larger institution – or cooperative group of institutions – and that entails a look at broader or related procedures and collaboration between partners. Ensuring that social media efforts are in accordance with institutional guidelines and policies is crucial. Creating a social media framework and guideline to focus outreach and communication for a particular project is highly recommended. It is also important to focus guidelines in the context of collaborating institutional or organizational partnerships. This alignment of can provide a roadmap between social media efforts for the project and the larger outreach and educational efforts with collaborating institutional partners

The Vermont Digital Newspaper Project, part of the National Digital Newspaper Program, administered by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Library of Congress, is on a journey of social media spreading-the-news activities while at the same time, developing an approach that fits into existing or in-progress institutional policies. In this presentation, the author will present on the project's social media activities and channels. We will explore the challenges and opportunities that arise from coordinating social media efforts between different areas of the organization, the project, the partners and the users. The author will also share his experience in developing social media policy and guidelines.

Keywords: NEWSPAPER DIGITIZATION, OUTREACH, SOCIAL MEDIA, NDNP, CHRONICLING AMERICA

THE NATIONAL DIGITAL NEWSPAPER PROGRAM

The Vermont Digital Newspaper Project (VTDNP) became a part of National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP) in 2010, five years after the initial program rolled out with six pioneering states (California, Utah, Kentucky, Virginia, Florida, and New York). NDNP is a joint effort by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Library of Congress (LC). According to the NDNP website, it “is a long-term effort to develop an Internet-based, searchable database of U.S. newspapers with descriptive

information and select digitization of historic pages. Supported by NEH, this rich digital resource will be developed and permanently maintained at the Library of Congress. An NEH award program will fund the contribution of content from, eventually, all U.S. states and territories.”ⁱ There are approximately 8 million pagesⁱⁱ of digitized content collected from participating states and are freely accessible online via [Chronicling America website](#) (see figure 1 below). This number will increase regularly as more states and territories join NDNP. Newspapers available on the website are those published between 1836-1922.

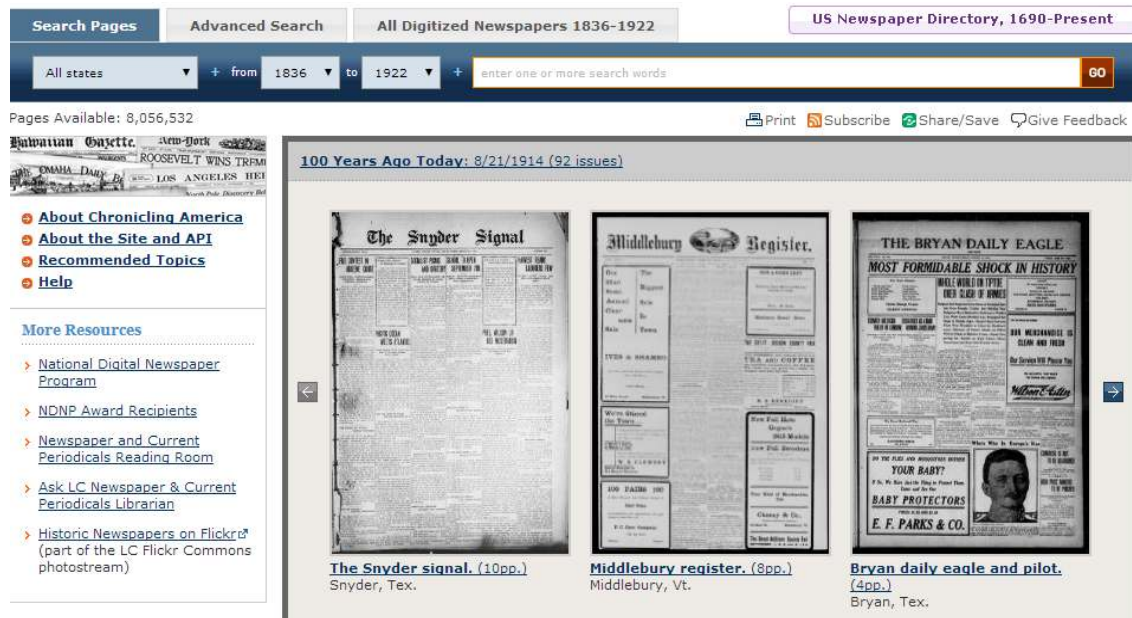


Figure 1 – Chronicling America website utilizing chronam, an open source newspaper viewer software built by LC.

As NDNP grows and enters its 10th year, both NEH and LC have created educational and outreach components for Chronicling America. LC created ‘NDNP Extras!’ that compiles examples from state projects on “reusing digitized historic newspapers and associated metadata records in unique ways”.ⁱⁱⁱ ‘NDNP Extras!’ include sections on searching tips, teaching resources, data reuse, chronam (LC newspaper viewer software), state project blogs, podcasts, and videos.

Meanwhile, the NEH Division of Preservation and Access website has a ‘Featured Projects’ section that highlights different projects they currently administer. NDNP content regularly gets a spot in this section with different state projects taking a turn to highlight interesting content from their newspapers digitized.

NEH also host a website called ‘EDSITEment!’^{iv} with the tagline ‘the best of the humanities on the web’. This website is a partnership between NEH, the National Trust for the Humanities, and Verizon Foundation. It is catered mostly towards teachers, students, and parents. Lesson plans and student resources are available in broad subject areas of literature, foreign languages, art and culture, history, and social studies. Chronicling America stands as a feature of the website with sections on Picturing

America, Literature and Language Arts, History and Social Studies, Current Events in Perspective, Featured Lessons, and Featured Websites (*see figure 2 below*).



Figure 2 – Chronicling America Feature page on NEH’s EDSITEment! Website

NDNP does not provide directives about state-level outreach. However, as evident in LC’s compilation of state level outreach events and initiatives, NDNP is supportive in these efforts. State projects i.e. VTDNP have full authority in deciding the level and type of outreach activities. This level of engagement be local, national, and even international as in the case of VTDNP’s outreach activities.

VERMONT DIGITAL NEWSPAPER PROJECT

VTDNP is a collaborative effort between state partners: the University of Vermont (UVM) Library, Vermont Department of Libraries, Ilsley Public Library, and Vermont Historical Society with location of the VTDNP office and production site situated at UVM Bailey/Howe Library in Burlington.

During VTDNP’s phase 1, 2010-2012, they contributed 129,873 pages and 36 titles (along with 8 title essays).^v While for phase 2, 2012-2014, aside from finishing a couple of titles from phase 1, another 11 titles were be digitized for an approximate total of 120,000 pages.^{vi} VTDNP has been awarded funding for phase 3, 2014-2012, and plans to digitize another 100,000 pages of historic Vermont newspapers.

In terms of outreach, in phase 1, a variety of events and activities took place.^{vii} Presentations were given in several library-related conferences such as the Massachusetts Library Association Conference 2011, New England Library Association Conference 2011, NDNP Awardee Conference 2012, and North American Serials Interest Group 27th Annual Conference (2012). Presentations were also given to a wider (non-library) audience such as at the UVM’s Pechakucha 2011, Turning Points in American History 2012, and Genealogical Society of Vermont meeting 2012.^{viii}

Meanwhile in phase 2, outreach activities were conducted at the Vermont Library Conference 2013 (presentation) & 2014 (poster & booth), International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) World Library & Information Congress (WLIC) 2013 in Singapore (presentation), NDNP Awardee Conference 2013 (presentation & poster), Vermont History Expo 2014 (booth), Vermont Cultural Heritage Professional Gathering 2014 (pecha kucha style presentation), and IFLA Newspapers Section Satellite Meeting 2014 in Geneva, Switzerland (teleconference).

SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

A major part of VTDNP outreach effort is having a presence on the Internet. Currently, VTDNP has a website^{ix}, WordPress blog^x, Flickr account, Pinterest account, and Facebook page^{xi}. The project also created a branding package that included a logo, banner, and VTDNP bookmark (*see figure 3 below*) to accompany Chronicling America bookmarks produced by LC.



Figure 3 - VTDNP Logo and Banner designed by Heather Kennedy. Having a logo and banner provide a consistent branding instrument for the project when conducting outreach on and off-line.

After transitioning a new team of one full time Project Librarian and one part time Digital Support Specialist to the project in phase 2, the initial focus was on workflow and producing deliverables to LC to meet the monthly and project deadline. At the same time, the team also restarted the outreach efforts with a fresh perspective. Since priority was on production, the outreach efforts were limited to the virtual world through social media presence and activities. Adopting social media best practice for state digital newspaper project provides strategic ways to increase VTDNP's presence online. Major and minor adjustments to the VTDNP website were made throughout the years. This effort culminated in a major revamp and shift from html based website to a WordPress based website. The new website base is no stranger to VTDNP staff as WordPress is used for blogging regularly, thus providing a consistent look and feel for VTDNP. As phase 2 goes on, more long form blog posts, essays, articles, and Flickr sets of interesting photos, quips, quotes, and ads were also added. These value-added content are then reshared using shorter format on VTDNP Facebook page. A Pinterest account was established early in 2014^{xii}. Content from Flickr are repurposed and linked to Pinterest as pins (*see figure 4 below*). This linking further increases connectivity of VTDNP contents across social media platforms and improve presence of the project overall on the Internet.

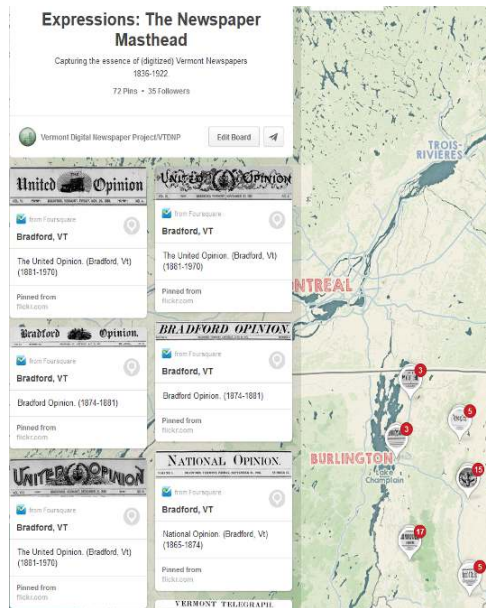


Figure 4 – One VTDNP’s board on Pinterest where content are drawn from a Flickr album of the same title with an added geotagging functionality (in collaboration with Foursquare). As a result, a map of Vermont is populated with points where pins are located; in this case, the publication location of a digitized newspaper.

All of the social media activities mentioned above are part of VTDNP’s idea of value-added content that will be developed overtime. These content, along with those from *Chronicling America*, are available to be repurposed and shared in social media channels to increase presence and increase people’s awareness. Ultimately, when VTDNP goes on a roadshow to public libraries, historical societies, and genealogical societies; the staff will have enough resources to point people to for further exploration. This idea works out well as VTDNP participated in the [Vermont History Expo 2014](#) (Expo), a major history event that happens every two years and organized by one of the state partners, the Vermont Historical Society. The Expo took place on the weekend of June 21-22 where for two full days VTDNP was visited by about 4,000 visitors and [the booth’s](#) variety of displays made many visitors stopped by and talked to VTDNP staff about what it has to offer them (*see figure 5 below*). Several visitors searched for their ancestors using *Chronicling America* and were able to discover new information about their family history. This type of discovery puts NDNP into perspective and makes it worthwhile.



Figure 5 – VTDNP booth at the Vermont History Expo 2014. Displays include print outs of digitized newspaper mastheads, lesson plans, brochures, bookmarks, online access to *Chronicling America*, a guessing game involving old toys ads, and candies.

COORDINATING SOCIAL MEDIA EFFORTS

The increase in VTDNP social media presence and activities began as a new team of Project Librarian and Digital Support Specialist started in mid-2013. Efforts in improving VTDNP Facebook page, adding new content post regularly on different channels, and creation of new social media channels; all happened organically without documented strategic outreach plan mapped out. The only objective was to put out as much value-added content out on the Internet and have a presence at major social media channels that are deemed relevant to VTDNP.

After that initial phase, in consultation with VTDNP Management Group, the team decided to explore creating a project specific social media and outreach guideline. The Management Group consist of 7 members representing VTDNP state partners. Not wanting to reinvent the wheel, the Project Librarian went through many library's social media policy and picked out points relevant to VTDNP. As a draft policy progresses, VTDNP recognized that UVM already have a university-level policy for social media in place^{xiii}. UVM Libraries also have a Social Media Policy taskforce in place and was getting ready to resume after a period of hiatus. All of these happened around the same time.

As a result, VTDNP Project Librarian joined a team of 7 library faculty and staff members that makes up the Social Media Policy Task Force. The task force met sporadically at first but ramped up its meeting frequency to once a month and then once every two weeks in early 2014. The task force took upon itself to create a policy from scratch after agreeing upon the elements to be covered in the policy. Once a draft policy was available, the task force morphed into the Social Media Policy and Action Task Force. The draft policy was put into test using a pilot program of faculty and staff involved taking scheduled turns to monitor and create content for UVM Libraries social media channels. After 2-3 months of testing and revising the document, the draft policy was considered final. It is currently awaiting the final approval from the Dean of Library.

OPPORTUNITIES

As mentioned earlier, creating value-added content on the Internet and establishing a presence on many social media channels provide VTDNP with enough materials and avenue for outreach, virtually and in-person. Once a critical mass of value-added content is available, paired with an increasing number of digitized newspaper pages available on Chronicling America (Vermont content: 243,952 pages, as of August 2014)^{xiv}, it becomes more visible and easier to discover or stumble upon Chronicling America as a valuable database for primary resource. This combination also provide a greater chance of serendipity when it comes to history or genealogy research. All of this leads to endless possibilities of using and reusing data that are made free and available online. All of the outreach and marketing efforts would assist in getting this multimillion dollar extensive project more exposure and usage. Of course, this emphasis on marketing and outreach can and should be applied to other major digitization and digital projects around the world.

CONCLUSION & OBSERVATION

It is crucial to promote and market a digital resource that is freely accessible online. It is the duty of the program/project to inform taxpayers and the world about a wonderful resource such as Chronicling America. All the great endeavour and energy in creating a website & database, and the state projects that contribute content to the website must be recognized by the general public so that they can utilize it for their own purposes.

With that in mind, each project will have their own quirks and characteristics when it comes to implementing a social media and outreach program. To each, its own.

However, that does not mean that each state has to reinvent the wheel and fly blind when it comes to conducting outreach and social media activities. Learn from each other. NDNP state projects are part of a mailing list where members are very helpful in answering questions of different topics related to the program. NDNP also host a wiki with many resources available related to outreach and marketing. One can always contact any of the state projects or other successful social media effort on the Internet (preferably still in the realm of library, results of contacting beyond this realm is unknown). It is generally OK to borrow an outreach or social media effort, as long as proper credit is given.

Having a sound social media and outreach policy provides a better framework in implementing a more wholesome outreach program. And having this better outreach framework gives a project the head start in spreading the word to the community in a project funding based environment. It pushes the project to become more effective in its outreach efforts.

It is also essential to understand that social media is fluid. Facebook will not last forever (Remember [MySpace?](#)). It is a moving target and can't wait for bureaucratic red tape to play catch up. Many new social media platforms are popping up, many will not be relevant for this purpose but some other will. It is important to be flexible with social media and keep an open mind.

Lastly, remember that social media is only one element of an overall outreach effort. There are other elements that contribute to a successful outreach effort. For VTDNP, social media provides a sandbox to innovate and discover ways to reach out to different user groups. From there, value-added content is added piece by piece. Once a critical mass is reached, enough content is available to take the show offline and on the road. Workshops, presentations, posters, and public talks; all can benefit from the value-added content initially created online. These content can be repurposed and reused in different ways depending on the target audience. All of these outreach efforts are to ensure that the community knows about this resource (in this case, Chronicling America website).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In memory of Birdie MacLennan.

FOOTNOTES

- ⁱ <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/about/>
- ⁱⁱ As of August 2014
- ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.loc.gov/ndnp/extras/>
- ^{iv} <http://edsitement.neh.gov/>
- ^v <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/awardees/>
- ^{vi} <http://library.uvm.edu/vtnp/titles.html>
- ^{vii} <http://library.uvm.edu/vtnp/presentations.html>
- ^{viii} http://library.uvm.edu/vtnp/wordpress/?page_id=1817
- ^{ix} <http://library.uvm.edu/vtnp/index.html>
- ^x <http://vtdnp.wordpress.com/>
- ^{xi} <https://www.facebook.com/VTDNP>
- ^{xii} <http://www.pinterest.com/vtdnp/>
- ^{xiii} <http://www.uvm.edu/policies/cit/socialmedia.pdf>
- ^{xiv} <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/awardees/>