My Upload: Engaging Library Users in Digital Collections

Catalyst Fund Final Report
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Project Goals

A project of the Columbus Metropolitan Library (CML), My Upload provides an easy solution for library users to contribute to digital collections through an online, open-source upload tool that corresponds to a metadata template for simple ingestion into any digital collection database. My Upload:

- **Streamlines the metadata and rights information** capture process by developing a user-friendly submission process that is free of library jargon.
- **Serves a platform-independent tool** that will export a .csv file and images for upload.
- **Is available for everyone to use** under an open-source license on GitHub.

While the idea of an online submission form is not new, this concept has not been fully incorporated into the best practices of the field. Some earlier efforts in this area include the Peace Corps, who did an online upload form for its 50th anniversary in 2011. Among academic libraries, the University of Virginia did a project to collect materials relating to events in Charlottesville in 2017. Many of these projects used a Google form (or something similar) to capture the metadata while relying on staff to connect the digital images and metadata. In many cases, the tools used for the form required extensive copy/paste actions on the part of the staff. Streamlining the back-end process of managing submissions will help staff manage their metadata workload.

With CML's My Upload tool, our goal is to allow the user to upload multiple images at once and add bulk or individual metadata, including title, description and even rights information using the RightsStatements.org framework. The project team wanted to make the user's form free of jargon and with as few clicks as possible. Data from the form would then go to a holding area where it can be edited by librarians before being exported as a tab-delimited file. Librarians will then be able to import the images and metadata into the digital collections software they use, such as CONTENTdm, Omeka or Islandora. The tool is intentionally built to be independent of digital collections software to allow for maximum adoptability among LAMs. CML will developed the tool using Laravel, an open source PHP web framework, and then we will share the code for other libraries to adopt.

As a community engagement tool, My Upload offers LAMs the ability to invite the public to participate in capturing current historical events or scanning their own historical materials.

Process
The project was divided into 4 stages: planning, development, testing and evaluation. During the planning phase the project team focused on developing text for the metadata intake form and finalizing requirements for Buckeye Interactive, the development team.

We narrowed our list of metadata fields down to the most basic information we needed from the user. While we would like the end-user to fill out all of our qualified Dublin Core fields, we knew that it was unrealistic and would lead to fewer people using the tool. User experience principles such as limiting the number of fields, showing the entire form on one page and giving users clear instructions were incorporated into the project plan. The final set of fields used for My Upload were:
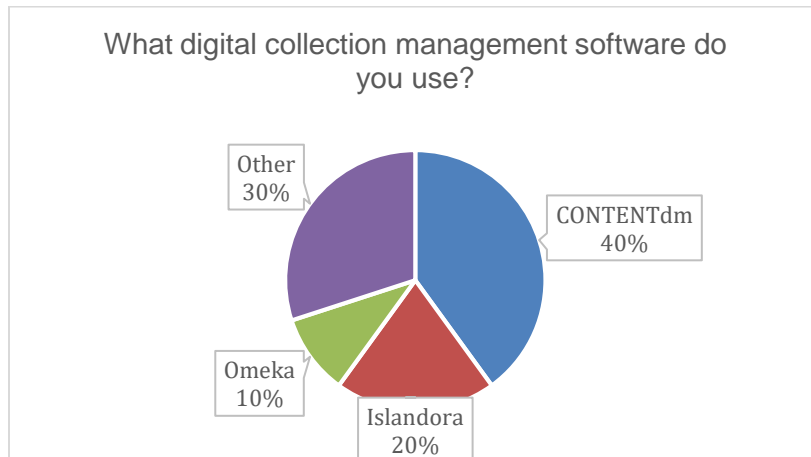
My Upload field	Dublin Core element
Title	Title
Original date	Date
Original location	Coverage
Author/creator	Creator
Description	Description
Copyright	Rights
Credit	none

Although we originally experimented with a subject heading list, we found it to be too confusing and users either ignored it or stopped at that point in the form. Another institution adopting My Upload may choose to experiment with adding a field for user-generated tags to capture this kind of information. Since our process involves librarians editing each record once it is submitted, it made more sense for us to just add subject headings during the editing process.

In the development phase the Buckeye Interactive team worked to develop the initial functionality of the tool and then to refine it. In between the sprint stages is a period of testing, design and review. The tool includes two roles: customer and admin. Rather than starting the customer experience with the customer creating an account, the tool begins with an introductory screen that provides the user with an overview of the process. Customers then upload photos into an "album" so that they can be previewed while adding metadata. Once metadata is added to each photo, the customer submits the images to the admin. In a further effort to simplify the process, the requirement for a user account was eliminated. Instead, users leave contact information (name, phone number, email address) in case we need to contact them later. The email address is used to send a confirmation message when images are received and approved. Once the user submits their images and metadata, librarians from CML review the information and then download a tab-delimited file of metadata and a Zip file of images.

In the testing phase, we first tested the tool within the CML digital collaborative group. Since one of our objectives was to make the tool shareable for other organizations, we want to be sure that other LAMs have the information they need to be able to implement the project on their own. In the middle of our testing phase, CML and libraries across the United States closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the closures and the adjustments to working at home, we were able to do a full round of testing. A call for testing participants went out to the LYRASIS list, the Ohio Digitization Interest Group list and the Society of Ohio Archivists list.

Beyond the CML network, fourteen institutions responded and tested the My Upload tool. Academic libraries (60%) were the most represented, with public libraries, organization or corporate libraries, museums and historical societies and other libraries each equaling 10% of respondents. Participants reported using CONTENTdm (40%), Islandora (20%), Omeka (10%) and other software (30%). Other software included DSpace, SobekCM and OhioLINK's Digital Resource Commons.

What digital collection management software do you use?

All testing participants reported that they were able to upload items and retrieve them from the administrative module during their test. When asked about using the tool themselves, thirteen out of the fourteen participants said that they would either use it themselves and/or recommend it to another institution. Several issues were discovered during the testing and were resolved by Buckeye Interactive:

- Tiff and PDF files were not uploading properly.
- Previews were added for .mp4 files.
- .doc and .docx files were added to the list of supported upload files. (Note this can be configured in the code if an institution wants to add or restrict certain file types).
- In the administrative module, a "save changes" button was added to ensure that all edits were saved.
- Minor text and word choice changes.

Testing participants reported a sporadic, but persistent, issue with uploading large files that we were unable to fully resolve with code changes. It is possible that this issue has to do with individuals' upload speeds, although we have not heard reports of the problem from end-users. We are continuing to monitor the issue and hope that the community of users will be able to provide more information and potential solutions. Also, we would like to be able to eventually capture EXIF data (date, location, shutter speed, camera type) directly from images. This is a promising area of future development.

On July 20, 2020, the full open-source code for My Upload was released on GitHub at: https://github.com/buckeye-interactive/MyUpload

Accomplishments

Our most significant accomplishment is creating an upload tool that is customer focused. By simplifying the language and making the tool easy to use, we believe that library customers will use it to document day-to-day events of historical significance. To date, nearly 200 images have been submitted to CML's My Upload.[1]

We worked with library customers to test language for each field to find the clearest terms. For example, we found that we needed to add "original" to location to help distinguish that we want to know the place in which the item was created. We also found some challenges with users understanding author/creator and added help text "Who took the photo or wrote the document." Remarkably, users have had no difficulty with the description field. While we often add information to the description field to provide context, most submissions have given us an acceptable amount of information to work with.

My Upload is also a contribution to the library, archives and museum community. The code is now available on GitHub and we hope that other organizations will adopt it. As other organizations begin to adopt the tool, we are hopeful that more customizations can be added to the tool.

Lessons learned

Testing for My Upload was just beginning when the library closed for the COVID-19 pandemic. While we were getting our bearings and learning to work from home, we decided to go ahead and do a soft launch of the tool. We launched My Upload as people were beginning quarantine and received a number of submissions from people who were taking photos while on their daily walks. Several users digitized images at home, including one customer who had old images of the Ohio Penitentiary that was demolished in 1988. While it was stressful to launch the new service during a global pandemic, it turned out to be a great resource for community-building in these socially distant times.

One of the most important lessons learned from this project involved marketing and promotion of the My Upload tool. We found that users would actively participate when we had a specific message about the kinds of items we were looking for. A call for COVID-19 photographs, for example, was very successful while a general call for photo submissions only resulted in a few items. To help organizations develop a specific list of items, we added a feature to My Upload where we can post the Top 5 items we are looking for. Institutions that download My Upload for their own use can edit the list from the administrative module.

Another suggestion is to time calls for submissions around significant community events. For example, a Throwback Thursday social media post resulted in several photographs of Columbus' Pride Festival from previous years. Also, many users still want to talk with staff before using My Upload. Librarians often discuss My Upload as part of donor meetings

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[1] View all CML My Upload submissions at: https://rb.gy/owlvia

and reference interactions. This kind of one-on-one promotion tends to result in some of the most significant additions to the collection.

Another lesson learned is that libraries of different types (public, academic, special) collect a wide variety of metadata for digital objects. While our basic set of data is based on the minimum metadata required for the Digital Public Library, many institutions go much further with metadata collection. Therefore, institutions that do collect more metadata will need to spend more time customizing the My Upload code in order to implement it for their institutions.

What's next
CML and Buckeye Interactive released the code for My Upload on GitHub in July 2020 and are looking for organizations to adopt the tool for their own use. We are excited to build a community of users around My Upload and will be talking with our testing participants that indicated they would use it. Institutions interested in using the tool are welcome to reach out to us at history@columbuslibrary.org for more information.

In the coming year, we plan to use My Upload to ask for images for a variety of topics. It will also be incorporated into programming as we remind library users to submit their old photographs and other items. In August, we have a virtual program scheduled on forgotten landmarks of Columbus and plan to encourage attendees to both submit photos they may already have and go out and take new photos.

How can others find out more?

View CML's implementation of My Upload:

> My History digital collection: https://www.columbuslibrary.org/myhistory
> All items submitted through My Upload: https://rb.gy/owlvia

Launch your own version of My Upload:
> GitHub release: https://github.com/buckeye-interactive/MyUpload

PR/Marketing

Initial public relations work consisted of a press release in August 2019 announcing that CML received the award from the LYRASIS Catalyst Fund Local news coverage at that time consisted of an article in the Daily Reporter[2] and CML newsletters. Upon release of My Upload, CML's branded version of My Upload, broader press coverage highlighted the resource on local media. 10TV, the Central Ohio CBS affiliate ran a segment on April 24 that featured user-submitted photographs about the pandemic:

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[2] http://www.thedailyreporteronline.com/news/2019/08/16/library-to-enhance-digital-collection-with-25000-grant/

The following week, the *This Week* family of suburban newspapers ran an article titled, "Columbus Metropolitan Library seeks photo uploads to preserve local history" in all Central Ohio suburban newspapers.[3] My Upload also ran on the library's front page as a featured story between April 20, 2020 and May 13, 2020.

In addition to connecting with end-users, building relationships with other libraries who may also want to use My Upload is an important component of the project. Team members reported on the project at the Ohio Digitization Interest Group (https://ohiodig.org) in January and May 2020. A Society of Ohio Archivists presentation on "Digitizing Community Collections" by the CML team focused on best practices for beginning a community digitization project, metadata guidelines and the library's work with My Upload. We look forward to more opportunities to discuss the project with colleagues in conference settings.

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[3] https://www.thisweeknews.com/news/20200430/columbus-metropolitan-library-seeks-photo-uploads-to-preserve-local-history