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Content, Credibility, and Readership: Putting Your Institutional Repository on the Map

By Maureen Schlangen, University of Dayton

ABSTRACT: Open-access institutional repositories have become a reliable and stable medium for sharing scholarly work, advancing research, and elevating an institution's profile. However, it takes time and effective marketing to gather content, build the repository's credibility, and attract readership. Here, a handful of successful repository managers share what they have learned from the launch and growth of their repositories.

In the past decade, as open-access archiving has gained wider acceptance across the United States and around the world, institutional repositories have become a reliable and stable medium for sharing scholarly work and advancing research.

However, it takes time and effective marketing to build and promote an institutional repository. Here, a handful of successful repository managers share what they've learned from the launch and growth of their repositories.

Recruiting content, establishing credibility, attracting readers

Institutional repositories can serve several purposes:

- Preserving an institution's scholarly record.
- Managing data
- Promoting research
- Attracting strong faculty, outstanding students, and greater research funding
- Digitally archiving historical items and special collections
- Complying with a federal mandate to make the published results of federally funded research freely available to the public within one year of publication and requiring researchers to better account for and manage the digital data resulting from federally funded scientific research.

In order to fulfill these purposes, a repository needs three things: content, credibility, and readership, said Kathleen Webb, Dean of University Libraries at the University of Dayton in Dayton, Ohio. Communication and marketing have helped with all three.

In 2013, when the University of Dayton launched eCommons as part of the bepress Digital Commons network, the vision, Webb said, was to showcase the university's research, collections, and events. With the assistance of bepress and its "kickstart" content-building service, Webb and what she called a "small but mighty team" of repository stakeholders started with a handful of academic departments, first educating them about the benefits of open-access institutional repositories for scholars, universities, and the advancement of research. Most faculty members granted permission to archive their work, and after thorough review for copyright compliance, they supplied the libraries with the permitted versions of their papers.

Meanwhile, Nichole Rustad, manager of digital projects, archivist Jennifer Brancato, and Frances Rice, director of information systems and digital access, undertook another massive project to digitize and organize decades' worth of the university's publications, news releases, and multimedia archives. With a sampling of diverse content in the repository available for uninitiated users to explore, the libraries' marketing and outreach team launched an education campaign. With the theme "Make Googling yourself more satisfying," they shared the news about the repository in the faculty-staff newsletter, over email, in a library blog, in several social media channels, and in a series of community events for Open Access Week.

Then, Webb enlisted the repository's most enthusiastic contributors as a sort of testimonial sales force — a resource that can go a long way in attracting new works to the repository, said Michael Organ, a digital archivist and manager of repository services at the University of Wollongong in Australia, which launched its repository in 2006; it now has more than 50,000 items and 11 million downloads to date.

"Every repository manager faces indifference, negativity or real gung-ho support," Organ said. "Negativity is about 10 percent; most people are just OK with it; and then 10 percent really gung-ho. You could spend a lot of time dealing with the 10 percent, but is it worthwhile? You've got plenty to do with the ones in the middle."

Overcome the common objections

Repository managers often cite similar concerns from faculty. Paul Royster, scholarly communications coordinator at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, cautioned managers not to spend too much time trying to convert a resistant faculty member.

"Just move on to the next one," said Royster, who launched UNL's Digital Commons repository in 2005; a perennial champion in downloads, the repository has grown to more than 80,000 objects, and in early June, it was approaching a download count of 30 million. If and when the work with receptive researchers is ever completed — "we have a backlog, and it's increasing," he said — go ahead and circle back; their colleagues' millions of downloads might change their minds. Some common objections:

"Open access is just giving my work away."

Not really, Webb said. Researchers cite open-access content just like they do subscriber-only journal content. It's just easier to access — which can translate to more citations, partnerships, and funding.

Organ occasionally appeals to a faculty member's sense of justice, reminding them that their valuable access to subscription-only literature is a privilege of institutional wealth.

"At the end of the day, open access is a good idea," he said. "There's an incredible number of researchers who don't have access to those databases. They often fail to recognize that people with passwords like themselves are a very small part of the research community. Paywalls turn a lot of people away, and the whole payment-with-credit-card model is unsustainable. Students won't do it. Libraries might — but students will not."

In addition, he said, refusal to provide a version to an open-access medium may be consigning their work to untimely obscurity.

"I already list my publications on my department website."

True, Webb said, but those are usually citations, not downloads, and anyone who sees them must take several steps to find the actual article. The IR is a direct path to research — and keeps track of readership and how people are discovering it.

"I already report my scholarship activities in Digital Measures¹. I don't want to enter it all again."

That is just fine, Royster said. Just give the library the green light to enter the work, and they'll do the rest. "It's more work to fix it than it is to enter it yourself," he said.

"It's shameless self-promotion."

It's not shameless if you think of scholarship the way the Smithsonian Institution does — as contributing to the increase and diffusion of knowledge, Webb said. By submitting scholarship to the repository, a faculty member is elevating the institution's research profile and advancing knowledge.

"I use ResearchGate."

True, social media sites such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu boast more than 22 million subscribers. They also include spammers, scammers, predatory publishers, bogus and unreviewed research, and student scholarship not identified as such. And, depending on the terms of service, these sites and the people on them may be able to use a member's work in ways he or she doesn't intend. For example, just look what a person signs away on Academia.edu:

"By making available any Member Content on or through the Site or Services, you hereby grant to Academia.edu a worldwide, irrevocable, perpetual, non-exclusive, transferable, royalty-free license, with the right to sublicense, to use, view, copy, adapt, modify, distribute, license, sell, transfer, publicly display, publicly perform, transmit, stream, broadcast and otherwise exploit such Member Content only on, through or by means of the Site or Services. Academia.edu does not claim any ownership rights in any Member Content and nothing in these Terms will be deemed to restrict any rights that you may have to use and exploit any Member Content." (From Terms of Use, downloaded Feb. 12, 2015, from <http://www.academia.edu/terms>)

In a February 2015 electronic discussion of Association of College & Research Libraries scholarly communications librarians, one theme prevailed: Social media can be a powerful tool in promoting scholarship when used in combination with your institutional repository.

"While having your papers in many places is great for ease of access and promotion, it makes documenting any activity more difficult since you have to hand-compile the numbers," said Megan O'Donnell, scholarly communications and science and technology librarian at Iowa State University, where as of late May, the repository had crossed 3.5 million downloads.² "There are

ways around hosting your paper in many places. For instance, host everything on the IR, where it's open, and just link to it with these other tools. That way, all of your stats are in one place.”

Get out of your office and see people

Both Royster and Organ contend that the best marketing is interpersonal.

“I’ve never done a brochure,” Royster said. “I have a one-page handout, just a Word document, that I will change the name of the department on and run it off accordingly. I once addressed the faculty senate, and I’ve gone to some department meetings, but one-to-one is a lot more effective. There are few times when faculty are less receptive to new ideas than at a faculty meeting.”

At the University of Wollongong, a mandate for faculty to archive their scholarship nearly quadrupled participation, but before that, face-to-face meetings got more results than any other strategy.

“During those first few years, I spent a lot of time talking to faculty,” Organ said. “Increasing the impact of their work and the institution has always been the main driver, but the mandate helped. Now, the library can find out what’s being published, and we don’t have to rely on faculty to report it.”

Librarian and archivist David Scherer, a scholarly repository specialist for Purdue University’s Digital Commons repository, e-Pubs, suggested leveraging all available relationships to make new connections: “Work with liaison librarians. Speak at department meetings. Design mediated deposit workflows — but don’t stop asking for CVs, because when faculty members actively take a step to include their scholarship, they’re much more likely to become your newest open-access champions.”

Messages that work

Though objections are common, so are successes. Here are some messages that consistently resonate with faculty members:

“I saw your article.”

Appealing to the ego works, Royster said; faculty are no different from any author; they love to hear that someone has seen their work.

“I’d find an eligible article on campus, then email that person and say, ‘I recently saw your article. Did you know this is eligible for archiving in our repository? We’d be happy to do it.’ The moment you say ‘I saw your article,’ you’ve done it,” he said.

“Yes, we’ll do it for you.”

“Faculty seem surprised about this, Webb said. “I’m not sure why. We’re from the library. We’re all about service. But they’re really happy when we’re done.”

Royster has had a similar response, but faculty become believers in due time: “Combine the fact that you saw their article with, ‘You don’t have to do anything except reply and say OK,’ and they’re on board.”

“Look at all those downloads.”

“The best thing has been the automated monthly reports,” Royster said. “Those go out around the first of the month, and usually, starting on the second day of the month, I’ll start getting emails asking, ‘Could you put up these three?’”

Once the downloads start multiplying, the repository sells itself, Scherer said.

“At meetings with faculty, I try to get there early and get set up on the computer, open e-Pubs and make sure the download map is running and minimize it,” he said. “At some point in the presentation, I’ll open the real-time readership map, and they can see that in the past 20 minutes, we’ve had 250 downloads. That’s been a major selling point to faculty and to department heads and chairs.”

Keep it in the public eye

In the beginning, Organ suggested, use any reason and every medium to increase visibility.

“We proactively worked to get the content where the data could be harvested,” said Organ, who used Google Scholar and Trove, a nationwide network of Australian libraries, museums, archives, and research organizations, to increase the repository’s discoverability.

“You’ve got to be able to see marketing opportunities,” he said. “If there was an opportunity to market something related to the repository, we had an event and a press release. As they raised the profile, it turned the academics around.”

Marketing to outside users

A well-constructed repository with strong metadata is its own promotional tool for attracting content consumers, Royster said.

“The abstract is really important,” he said. “It’s nothing without an abstract. You have to give those spiders something to crawl. That really makes a difference. The other big thing is just the mass of data. It feeds upon itself. The more content you have, the more hits you get; the more hits you get through Google, the higher you’re ranked; the higher you’re ranked, the more hits you get. We’ve gotten to where the search engines recognize our URL. I’ve seen cases where our version of an article is ranked higher than the publisher’s version.”

Actively introducing the repository to markets beyond academia can both build readership and serve the public, Scherer said.

“At Purdue, we’re a land-grant university, and the research we conduct is for the betterment of the people in the state of Indiana,” said Scherer, whose book *Making Institutional Repositories Work*, co-edited with Andrew Wesolek of Clemson University and Burton Callicott of the College of Charleston, will be released in November.

On Purdue's sponsorship day at the 2012 Indiana State Fair, Scherer said, a library booth showcased content that the common citizen could use.

"We have a very active extension service, and their publications are in the repository," he said. "We highlighted some extension papers on a tablet, and they were relevant. Do you have a garden? Are deer eating your vegetables? Here are some ways to remedy that. You've got bats? Sure, they eat thousands of insects, but maybe you don't want them roosting in your attic. Rather than use a deterrent that would harm them, why not install a bat house? Do you need to fix a screen door or a single-pane window? ... We put our scholarship in the hands of common individual."

As of late May, the 1,000-plus historical documents of the Purdue Cooperative Extension Service had been downloaded more than 35,000 times.

Stay humble

Having one of the most robust repositories in the world is a point of pride for Nebraska, Royster said.

"We sort of have a self-identity issue," he said. "The town has been in a deep depression for years because the football team has not been nationally ranked in the top 10 — but the repository is."

He did note, however, that with a salary of \$2.7 million, the Cornhuskers' new head football coach still earns more.³

¹ Digital Measures is a trademarked system for faculty activity reporting.

² mno@iastate.edu [Megan N. O'Donnell]. "RE: ResearchGate and Academia.edu." Listserv SCHOLCOMM. American Library Association. Web. 12 Feb. 2015.

³ Husker Athletics (Department of Athletics, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Lincoln, NE). "Riley introduced as Huskers' head football coach." UNL Today, Dec. 5, 2014. Downloaded 27 May 2015 from <http://news.unl.edu/newsrooms/unltoday/article/rileyintroducedashuskersheadfootballcoach/>