

ART SLIDE RETRIEVAL: ONE LIBRARY'S SOLUTION

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MC Journal: The Journal of Academic Media Librarianship, v8#2, Winter 2002

INTRODUCTION

Pulling a requested art slide from a collection should be as easy as finding a book on the shelf. However, even complete bibliographic records in our OPAC are not sufficient for accessing art slide sets. A description of the set does nothing to describe the individual works of art represented by each of the slides comprising the set. Specific images are what patrons want to access. Good cataloging provides quick and easy access to desired materials. How can this apply to art slides? Our solution may aid others who experience slide retrieval problems.

A search of the literature shows many institutions automating their slide collections to gain entry to data that has been stored in the computer system and to retrieve needed data by identifying a particular item or set of materials in response to a query. Commercial software exists to access individual slides. Automation seemed the answer, but we were not able to purchase the software. To enjoy the benefits of automated retrieval, we would have to develop an online system to meet our needs.

DESIGNING THE DATABASE

A list of access points used by other institutions had been compiled from information gleaned during the literature search. The Head of the Catalog Department, the Multimedia Librarian, and the Art Department Library Liaison narrowed this list to sixteen: set name, call number, item number (including section number if there is one), artist, life dates, nationality, title, century, date of work, movement, sub-movement, category, object class, medium, location, and site. In addition, this database would have to be easy for staff to maintain and use without much prior training.

Fortunately, NutPlus – a relational file manager – was available in our library. It had been purchased from Fairhaven Software Products (www.fairsoft.com) by the Head of our Automation Services for use by another department. NutPlus (the newer version of which is Client5 and available for \$219.95) was chosen over other evaluated programs because it is capable of handling a large amount of data with accuracy, is easy to use, and is inexpensive. NutPlus is user friendly: two function keys perform all work. It can be easily manipulated and can handle a large amount of data with accuracy. The multiple sort capabilities allow various formats for viewing and printing. The single data entry form makes for efficient inputting and retrieval. Most important is NutPlus' relational capabilities which allow one to combine and use data from different files – or fields within a file - in a variety of ways. Thus, each slide can be accessed through any one of

the sixteen access points or through any combination of them with no limit to the number of access points chosen. One or two words per access point typed on a “find” screen are sufficient to retrieve all appropriate slides. Results of searches appear with remarkable speed.

Our layout has sixteen pre-defined fields: one for each of the access points listed above. Each field may contain as many as eighty characters. All fields are defined as “text” except item number, life dates, and date of work. These three are defined as “number.” This single entry form makes for efficient inputting and retrieval.

INPUTTING DATA

Before inputting any data for a set of slides, each slide is examined to determine what authority work needs to be done. Uniformity is compulsory in any automated file, since uniformity of entry is the only means by which all applicable records can be accessed when a particular term is entered on a “find” screen. Two authority files are maintained on 3 x 5 cards: one for artist, the other for location and site.

The authority card for each artist contains the artist’s name, life dates, nationality, century, movement, and sub-movement. Each time a slide by that artist is found, six of the access points are ready to be entered. A “see” reference card in the authority file under any alternate name leading to the preferred name assures all entries under that artist being entered uniformly. Information for this file may vary depending upon source used. This is the reason that authority files must be maintained and used consistently. An authoritative source is the *Union List of Artist Names* published by the Getty Center and available on the World Wide Web. OCLC’s name authority file and Grove’s *Dictionary of Art* are also worthy choices. Information for nationality, century, movement, and sub-movement appear on the slide frame, slide catalogs, and core works included in BCL’s (*Books for College Libraries*) art collection, i.e. Helen Gardner’s *Art Through the Ages*.

The second file combines location and site. Standard reference works such as *Museums of the World* and *Webster’s New Geographical Dictionary* yield information for this file. If a foreign spelling appears on one slide frame for site and/or location with the English equivalent on another, accessing by these fields requires both being entered under the same term. See reference cards should be made from the term not chosen to the preferred term, i.e. Firenze see Florence. The need to access these two fields may not be great, however, one can never assume what the public will want. For instance, members of our history department often make use of our slide collection and request slides of artworks appearing in a particular place.

The slide frames themselves, or accompanying material, provide information for the other access points: item number (and section number), title, date of work, category, medium, location, and site. These latter two should conform to entries in the authority file.

SAMPLE ENTRIES

Set.....Color Slide Library of World Art.....
Call number.....S 1.....
Item number.....2824.....Section.....18C3.....
Artist.....Picasso, Pablo.....
Life Dates.....1881–1973.....
Nationality.....Spanish.....
Title.....Family of Saltimbanques.....
Century.....20th.....
Date of work.....1905.....
Movement.....Modernism.....
Sub-movement.....Classicism, Cubism, and Surrealism.....
Category.....Painting.....
Object class.....Portrait.....
Medium.....Oil.....
Location.....Washington, D.C.....
Site.....National Gallery of Art.....

Set.....Color Slide Library of World Art.....
Call number.....S 1.....
Item number.....28931.....Section.....22B.....
Artist.....
Life dates.....
Nationality.....Japanese.....
Title.....Nachi Waterfall.....
Century.....14th.....
Date of work.....
Movement.....Kamakura Dynasty.....
Sub-movement.....
Category.....Painting.....
Object class.....
Medium.....Silk.....
Location.....Tokyo.....
Site.....Nezu Institute of Fine Arts.....

The above illustrate how completed layouts appear. The first shows all categories applying. The second shows blank categories since not all categories apply to that particular slide.

A completed layout for a copy of the same image from another set differs only in the set, call number, and item number fields. Two copies of the same image from the same set can have “2 copies” typed in the call number field. This same field can be used to type in

“lost” for those slides found missing. NutPlus allows retrieval of these additions even though the field is defined as number.

Below is a layout of the sixteen fields followed by our definition of contents:

Set.....the name of the set of which the slide is a part
Call number.....the unique number assigned to the whole set;
also copy and lost/missing slide data
Item number.....the item code assigned to the slide by the company
from which the slide originated; also section number
Artist.....the name of the artist taken from the authority record
Life dates.....the birth and death dates of the artist taken from
the authority record
Nationality.....the nationality of the artist taken from the authority record
Title.....the title as it appears on the frame or accompanying material (If
the same artwork appears in another set under an alternate title,
the alternate title appears in parentheses on both entries.
Example: Mona Lisa (La Gioconda); La Gioconda (Mona
Lisa)) If there is not room in the field for both titles, the
alternate is accessed by the use of only one or two words.
Century.....the century with which the artist is associated
Date of work.....the year(s) artist devoted to that particular work
Movement.....the movement with which the artist is primarily associated
Sub-movement...limits movement; multiple terms entered if appropriate
Category.....painting, sculpture, architecture, minor arts
Object class.....stained glass, mobile, pottery, fresco, engraving, etc.
Medium.....material used; may be more than one term; mixed
Location.....city in which the original artwork may be viewed
Site.....place within the city where the work is located

At present, the NutPlus database is located on computers in the offices of Multimedia and the Art Department – the two locations where it is most useful. However, patrons are invited to view the searches and to make their selections. The chosen slides are then pulled for their use. We expect to expand the availability of the program to Reference for public use with read only access. A copy of both authority files will be made available in case either is needed for access purposes.

RESULTS

Not only are individual slides easily accessed and located, but requests for examples of American conceptual art, Chinese ceramics of the 12th century, Lascaux cave paintings, and other requests requiring a relational approach are just as easily found and pulled.

Three fields from the NutPlus database also are used to supplement the bibliographic records for slide sets appearing in our OPACs. As a slide set is entered into the program,

the layout for each slide is printed and taken to the Catalog Department. A total contents field (505) is entered into the appropriate bibliographic record with the item number preceding each entry. The call number for each slide in that set is now readily available from a combination of the slide set classification number and the item number. The addition of a 710 field for the artist along with a delimiter "t" for title gives an OPAC user access to the title for a particular work under the artist's name. Titles alone are accessed with the addition of a 740 field. These additions to the bibliographic record support our Reference Department as well as those patrons who have access to our OPACs from home.

No longer is it a problem to make use of the slide collection. Determining ownership and locating a particular image are as easy as finding a book.

There are several additional advantages in having a relational electronic retrieval program. Strengths and weaknesses of the collection are immediately obvious. This information is useful when considering the addition of new slide sets. An automatic inventory of the slide collection is achieved while inputting. The instant retrieval of lost or missing slides is valuable in considering replacement. For statistical purposes, an accurate count of all slides owned is immediately available both by total number of entries in the program and by individual set. If needed, the number of copies owned is also available.

Several staff members can be involved in a project such as this. Our Library Associate III, who is trained in authority work, performs this task in conjunction with the Head Cataloger. The latter and the Media Librarian input the data. The Civil Service Library Specialist III enters the 505 and 700 fields into the OPACs. While inputting our original collection, no one worked full time on the project. Even so, our collection of 11,400 art slides was input in less than seven months. The results prove to be well worth the effort.

In retrospect, would we have done anything differently? A field for size could be considered. Even though this field may never be accessed alone, actual dimensions are important in visualizing the original work. If funds were available for the purchase of commercial software it would be well worth the expenditure, however, NutPlus solves our retrieval problems.

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MC Journal: The Journal of Academic Media Librarianship

ISSN 1069-6792

Revised: 1/17/02

URL: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/publications/mcjrnl/v8n2/art.html>