

Turning “Views” into “Visits”: How Online Exhibits Can Encourage Collection Awareness and Usage

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The University of Florida Digital Collections (UFDC) employ internally designed software (SobekCM) to maintain monthly usage statistics for the digital collections.¹ The statistics enable content managers to monitor how many times a digital item is “viewed” (or “hit”), how many viewers have “visited” the site, as well as a list of “top titles” and “top items” in terms of viewing popularity.² In reviewing these statistics for the Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica Digital Collections in 2012, the Curator was surprised to note that one of the most regularly viewed items was a Yiddish periodical entitled *Gerehtigkayt* (Justice).³ Intrigued by the unexpected rise in interest for this foreign-language magazine, the Curator soon realized that the upsurge in viewing figures arose from the fact that the arresting front cover of *Gerehtigkayt* was part of a rotating display on the Libraries’ homepage, and the cover was directly linked to the digital collection. This discovery raised the idea that if a simple, arresting display linked to the full online version could drive up viewing statistics, then perhaps the visual impact and storytelling power of online exhibitions could be harnessed to direct viewers to the online version and, by so doing, generate a greater awareness and usage of hidden collections.

The Curator assembled a unique collaborative team comprised of the George A. Smathers Libraries’

Exhibits Coordinator and Digital Humanities Librarian (who had worked together previously to promote access to hidden collections through online exhibitions) in order to undertake this more formal assessment project. The items chosen for the project, like *Gerehtigkayt*, would be scarce, somewhat un-inviting-looking, foreign-language materials. The “trick” would be to prove that a strong visual and arresting story would take the reader beyond any perceived barriers with individual items to an awareness of the wider collection and then beyond that to an awareness and appreciation of the library collections as a whole.

“Hidden” Judaic Materials in the University of Florida Libraries

The Gathering Storm: Jewish Life in Germany and Eastern Europe in the 1930s, an exhibition only available online, was created to prove the aforementioned concept. This exhibition features printed items, mostly periodicals, produced by European Jewry in the 1930s. While the subject of Jewish experience during the war has been widely explored, life for Jewish people in the period immediately before the war is less well known (partly due to the scarcity of available material) and therefore demands greater research.⁴ The items, selected by the Price Library Curator, in German, Yiddish,

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Polish and Hungarian, form part of a much larger collection of un-cataloged Judaica that has remained hidden until recently. This larger collection comprising scarce publications from the 20th century consists of approximately 500 pieces. Many of these pieces, which include anniversary editions of rare German and Yiddish newspapers and periodicals, as well as ephemeral publications such as calendars, yearbooks and other communally inspired commemorative works, are in desperate need of digitization for preservation. Limited budgets, however, prevent the Curator from completing this project. In order to raise funds for the collection, the Curator needs to promote greater awareness of the collection and its needs.

Twenty items were chosen from an initial selection of over 30 representative pieces relating to the idea of a “Gathering Storm” for European Jewry.⁵ In consultation with the Exhibits Coordinator, the Curator decided to limit the items on display to 20 in order to create a more engaging and concise exhibition. The items are divided into four distinct categories, representing material from (a) Germany in the early 1930s (b) Germany between 1933-1935 (c) Germany during the period of the Nuremberg Laws and (d) Eastern Europe, 1935-1939.

The narrative descriptions created for each item emphasized the following features (a) how the item relates to the theme and time period of the section (b) how the item relates to the overall theme of the fate of European Jewry (c) focused details of interest within each item, and (d) interesting features of the individual copy belonging to the Price Library. Each piece was placed in the context of the history of the community in which it was produced.

Scarce items in the first section—material from Germany in the 1930s—include printed pieces from some of the major centers of Jewish life in Germany before the Second World War. Two Jewish community newsletters from Berlin and Frankfurt, a community festschrift from Bonn and a community yearbook covering Dresden, Chemnitz and Plauen are included in this section. These items are not only of immense importance for their content (which includes articles by leading Jewish figures, historical sketches, accounts of community members and events, photographs, lists and statistics), they are also objects of great interest in their own right.

For example, a commemorative piece entitled *Aus Vergilbten Akten* (of yellowed documents)⁶ is one of

just a few available histories of the Jewish community of Bonn in the late 19th and early 20th century.⁷ By the time *Aus Vergilbten Akten* was written in 1931, the Jews of Bonn numbered around 1,000. The population count fell by over half in 1938 following *Kristallnacht* when the synagogues were destroyed and many Jews fled the city. Towards the end of the war, two hundred of the incarcerated Jewish citizens of Bonn were deported to concentration camps; seven survived. The Price Library copy of this work, according to OCLC, is one of just three copies held in U.S. libraries. It therefore contains material of great research value which, at present, is not easily accessed elsewhere.⁸ Moreover, a stamp on this copy which reads “Offenbach Archival Depot” bears witness to its having survived the Nazi destruction of Jewish books. At the end of the war, millions of looted books were uncovered by the Allies. The books were carefully sorted at the Offenbach Archival Depot by the U.S. book restitution task force and returned to their country of origin. The remaining items that could not be identified were found a home in centers of Judaism and Jewish learning throughout the United States and Israel.⁹

The section of the online exhibition labelled “Germany, 1933-1935” includes items that were published in Germany following the rise of Hitler and the National Socialist Party in 1933. Three of the newspapers featured from 1935 all celebrate the 800th anniversary of the birth of the famous Jewish philosopher, Moses Maimonides. Underlying the theme of celebrating a great Jewish figure, who was also of importance to Christian theological thought, one senses the tension of a people under threat and accused of racial inferiority. The *Israelit* (Orthodox Jewish weekly from Frankfurt)¹⁰ celebrates the life of Maimonides together with articles dealing with growing anti-Semitism in Europe. The *Gemeindeblatt zu Berlin* (community newsletter of Berlin)¹¹ produces a lavish edition in honor of Maimonides, emphasizing the Jewish intellectual contribution to the world. The newspaper *Der Schild* (a Jewish veterans’ publication from Berlin)¹² places the celebration of Maimonides alongside a commemoration of the 250th year of the birth of Johann Sebastian Bach in an attempt to demonstrate a synergy and to emphasize their German patriotism.¹³

The third section of the exhibit, “Nuremberg” comprises scarce periodicals from Speyer, Leipzig, Mannheim and Landau. All manifest evidence of Jewish communities under stress, struggling from the hard-

ships inflicted by the Nuremberg Laws. A rare issue of the Leipzig community newsletter (*Gemeindeblatt der Israelitischen Religionsgemeinde zu Leipzig*) from February 1937 betrays, through its notices and announcements, the harsh financial conditions facing the community, particularly through the winter months. In 1925, the Jewish community of Leipzig had numbered over 13,000 members making it the largest Jewish community in Saxony.¹⁴ After the rise of the Nazis to power in 1933, numbers began to dwindle and, by 1937, a diminished and beleaguered community was having to take measures to tackle these economic pressures. This eight-page issue of the Leipzig newsletter (previously only available on microfilm) contains three separate notices for the *Judische Winterhilfe* (Jewish winter aid)—a Jewish organization founded in 1935 to help needy Jews get through the winter by providing food, medicine and heating.¹⁵ The Jews had been excluded from the general German fund after the Nuremberg Laws were instituted in 1935. The second page opens with a reminder to members to pay their community dues to assist the general welfare, and the third page has a section dedicated to the history and importance of *mishloach manot* (the distribution of food parcels for Purim). Page six has a large section listing Jewish craftsmen and their trades, and the final two pages list Jewish businesses and rooms to let. Just one month after this issue was published, in March 1937, as revealed in a now iconic photograph, three prominent Jewish businessmen were marched through the streets of Leipzig wearing placards that read "Don't buy from the Jews! Shop in German businesses!"¹⁶ The following year, during *Kristallnacht*, the 1855 Moorish Revival synagogue—one of Leipzig's most architecturally significant buildings—was destroyed, as were the other centers of Jewish communal life in Leipzig.¹⁷ Deportations from Leipzig to concentration camps began in January 1942.

The final section, entitled "Eastern Europe, 1935-1939," contains materials that originate from Romania, Poland, Hungary and Latvia, comprising three journals, a calendar and a yearbook. A commemorative issue of the Polish periodical *Glos Gminy Zydowskiej* (the "Jewish Community Voice") celebrates the 75th anniversary of the Polish Uprising in January 1863, and the part played by Jews in supporting their countrymen, thereby emphasizing Jewish loyalty to Poland during a time of rising anti-Semitism.¹⁸ Issued monthly (and occasionally bi-monthly) between Au-

gust 1937 and June 1939, this journal provides important data for research into Polish Jewish history. For example, during its two-year existence, *Glos Gminy Zydowskiej* published 6,000 names in its marriage announcements section: important data which is now incorporated into the JRI-Poland database for genealogical research.¹⁹ This particular issue from 1938 is held at just four institutions worldwide.

Online Exhibitions at the George A. Smathers Libraries

Online exhibitions are more than a marketing tool: they are another way to grant users access to unique and/or hidden collections. Many academic institutions are already providing access through curated digital collections, yet this is often insufficient. Curated digital collections do not provide the interpretation or background necessary to further understand an object. Many collections have a home or landing page that serves as an introduction to the materials, but often this only provides a general cursory view of the collection as a whole.

Online exhibitions linked to full resources within digital collections thus provide the ideal vehicle to highlight and explain rare materials. Online exhibitions also serve as a great companion to physical exhibitions, whether as precursors or complements, since they allow access to the full resource.

The Gathering Storm is a good case in point. This exhibition is only available online due to the fragile nature of some of the objects, as well as the display limitations of a single page or double page view. Furthermore the foreign languages utilized in the newspapers and journals provide a barrier to the majority of local visitors.

The Gathering Storm gives access to and provides context for 20 rare newspapers and journals through carefully constructed interpretive labels written by the exhibition curator. The 20 items are divided into the abovementioned four sub-groups, and each sub-group has its own page and introductory text. From the sub-group page, one can click on the thumbnail of an individual item within that group. Each individual item is represented by four or five representative pages which are linked to a zoomable image of the corresponding page within the University of Florida Digital Collections (UFDC). Additionally, there is a link to view the entire item, from the beginning, also in zoomable form and, when available, a link to other issues from the same publication which are not a part

of the exhibition—as seen in *Der Israelit*.²⁰ Future features within UFDC to enhance the usability of these materials will include the geographical locator and, with the ongoing development of foreign language OCR, the ability to search the materials for specific content.

Online exhibitions from the George A. Smathers Libraries are publicized much the same way as physical exhibitions; although digital collections are not often given the same treatment. For *The Gathering Storm*, the Exhibits Coordinator worked with the Libraries' Director of Communications to write a press release which was then widely distributed to local, state, and national media outlets, as well as campus faculty. The exhibition was also featured on and linked from the Libraries' home page, the Libraries' exhibits website, the Price Library of Judaica's website and their corresponding social media accounts. *The Gathering Storm* was also included in the Smithsonian's Library and Archival Exhibitions on the Web database. Furthermore, the exhibition's URL and a brief description were included in postcards and publicity materials for a future physical exhibition on a related theme, entitled *Testimony*.

The various methods of promotion and the provision of multiple links increase awareness of the exhibition and the materials. These methods of outreach also increase search engine optimization (SEO) for *The Gathering Storm* with a knock-on effect of enhanced visibility for the previously hidden items featured in the exhibition.

Digital Collection Development at the George A. Smathers Libraries

The University of Florida Digital Collections (UFDC) grew out of early and ongoing efforts for digital preservation at the George A. Smathers Libraries, a process which began in the 1990s. In the following years, the Libraries developed a robust system (technologically with a rich set of features for the digital library system and integration with other systems, as well as socio-technically with governance models, sustainability planning, staffing for support and outreach, and integration with collection development and scholarly production) to support preservation and access to digitized materials. The same emphasis on digitization for both preservation and access continues today.²¹

This commitment to both preservation and access is necessary. As the Final Report of the Blue Ribbon

Task Force on Sustainable Digital Preservation and Access states, "Without preservation, there is no access."²² The reverse is also true for digital library materials: without access, there is no preservation. The Committee for Film Preservation and Public Access before The National Film Preservation Board of the Library of Congress clearly states this in speaking about film preservation: "Preservation without access is pointless."²³

After building a system for preservation and access of digitized materials, the George A. Smathers Libraries extended the digital library support to serve larger scholarly needs and thus serve as part of a scholarly cyberinfrastructure. In order to support larger scholarly needs, the Libraries ensure all materials are readily findable through integration with other library and scholarly systems like NINES and 18thConnect as well as through search engine optimization. Building from this accessibility, the Libraries support broader impacts by framing fully digitized materials within aggregations or collections to provide the context necessary for understanding the materials once located, by creating additional materials to increase impact (e.g., lesson plans, teaching materials, online exhibits, and other scholarly works), and by frequently conducting training and outreach ("Broader Impacts Support").

Supporting broader impacts is part of the George A. Smathers Libraries overall commitment to digital scholarship and data curation lifecycle support ("Digital Scholarship Lifecycle Support"). The Libraries are active scholarly partners with other scholars in developing digital collections, digital scholarship, and other scholarly forms using the robust scholarly cyberinfrastructure from the libraries to ensure that the scholarly works are accessible, preserved, findable, and integrated with the larger scholarly communications landscape rather than existing as separate silo projects. Additionally, the Libraries support usage tracking with monthly and total usage counts available for every item, title (supporting multi-volume and serial titles), and collection, and with the usage information readily available online for ease in reporting and promoting collections and materials.

Scholar-curated digital collections and exhibits are thus core to the work of the George A. Smathers Libraries for access, preservation, broader impacts, and digital scholarship and data curation lifecycle support. To ensure the scholar-curated digital col-

lections and exhibits are as successful as possible, all materials for the online exhibit are added to the UFDC and, whenever possible, the full materials for an online exhibit are digitized. For instance, when a book cover is needed for an online exhibit, the full book is digitized and available online in the UFDC. This approach ensures that users viewing the exhibit have access to the full book, the catalog record for the book is available through traditional library systems, and search engines can find the full metadata and full text for the book. Integrated support for digital collection items with online exhibits ensures that materials are placed in context, making the materials themselves more useful and more usable for search engine optimization and for future scholarly works. Instead of acting as a closed or silo work, the online exhibits and materials are provided as part of scholarly communications for engagement by the public as public scholarship and for engagement by scholars that may lead into other opportunities for research and collaboration.

Conclusion

The online exhibition *The Gathering Storm* is serving as a test case to determine the extent to which online exhibitions can help drive greater awareness and increased usage of digital collections and hidden physical collections. In order to take a true reading from the monthly viewing statistics for the digital objects included in *The Gathering Storm*, it was determined that the materials would be digitized and uploaded to the general Judaica Digital Collections, of which there are over 350 items, without creating a sub-collection or landing page. After the release of the online exhibition and its promotion, the viewing statistics for both the exhibition and digital resources will be analyzed for quantitative impact, and feedback from faculty, students, donors and general users will be assessed for qualitative outcomes. Once the data has been analyzed, a sub-collection and landing page will be created for *The Gathering Storm* so that the digital collection may also be discoverable in traditional ways.

At the time of writing these pre-conference proceedings, there are no statistics on the effects of this exhibition available to report. Unfortunately, the project experienced a delay due to the offsite relocation of the Digital Library Center during October to December 2012. However, statistics will be available for presentation at the ACRL conference (Indianapolis, April

2013), and it is hoped that a follow-up publication or report will be possible with recommendations for implementation and best practice at other institutions.

Nevertheless, data to support the effect of online exhibits linked to digital collections can be mined from existing statistics. Thus, for example, *The Reverend Benjamin Safer* collection²⁴—a digital collection of primary source materials pertaining to the Jewish community of Jacksonville, Florida—was viewed 122 times through 12 visits to the website in January 2012. This figure shot up to 1489 views through 98 visits in April 2012 following the launch of the online exhibition *Jewish Jacksonville*.²⁵ As a result of the exhibition, the Curator now receives regular queries about the items in the digital collection and requests for access to more materials pertaining to the history of Jacksonville Jewry. Another unexpected outcome has been an increase in material donations to boost this collection's holdings.

In sum, the idea of linking items in online exhibitions to full digital copies is a simple one, but one that is surprisingly under-used. To this end, we believe that sharing our experience of working collaboratively will help other institutions to realize the potential in harnessing the immediacy and visual impact of exhibitions and linking them to digital collections to engender greater awareness and usage of hidden collections.

Notes

1. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/>
2. Top Items, Usage Statistics: Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica Digital Collections. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/judaica/usage/items>
3. *Gerekhtigkyat*, 50th anniversary of the Great Revolt, 1910. New York: International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, 1960. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA0000171/00001>
4. A growth of interest in this area is evidenced by the recent publication, *On the Eve: the Jews of Europe before the Second World War* by Bernard Wasserstein (2012).
5. For details of the works included, see the primary sources listed above and the online object list that accompanies the exhibit: <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00013891/00001>
6. Max Cohn, *Aus Vergilbten Akten: Zur Geschichte der Bonner Synagoge. Zukunftsaufgaben der Bonner Synagogengemeinde*. Bonn: Gemeindeblatt der Synagogengemeinde 4, no. 47: 1931. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00013438/00001>
7. For an overview of Jewish history in Bonn, see Zé'ev Wilhem Falk, "Bonn." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. Vol. 4. Detroit: Mac-

- millan Reference USA, 2007. 63-64. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*.
8. Some of the periodicals included in the exhibition have been digitized as part of the German *Compact Memory* database: <http://www.compactmemory.de/>. This is a commendable and highly useful project. Its only drawback, however, is the fact that the scans are produced in black and white. It is possible that the images were derived from microfilm and not actual hardcopies, which renders them less distinct than the copies produced from the originals by UFDC.
 9. Martin Dean and Susanne Brose, *Offenbach Archival Depot: antithesis to Nazi Plunder*. Online exhibit: <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/oad/>
 10. *Der Israelit: Ein Centralorgan für das orthodoxe Judentum* 76, no. 15 (April 1935): 1-16. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00013432/00001>
 11. *Gemeindeblatt der Jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin* 25, no. 13 (March 1935): 1-24. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00013422/00001>
 12. *Der Schild* 13/14 (March 1935): 1-8. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00013421/00001>
 13. For more about this group of veterans, see: "Reichsbund Juedischer Frontsoldaten." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. Vol. 17. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 201. For more details on the Jewish press in Germany, see: David Flinker, Shalom Rosenfeld, Mordechai Tsanin (eds). *The Jewish Press That Was: accounts, evaluations and memoires of Jewish papers in pre-Holocaust Europe*. Tel Aviv: World Federation of Jewish Journalists, 1980.
 14. Jacob Rothschild and Larissa Daemmig. "Leipzig." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. Vol. 12. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 627-628. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*.
 15. Ruth Gay, *The Jews of Germany: A Historical Portrait*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, 260.
 16. See: "The Boycott of Jewish Businesses" *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. Online Learning Site: <http://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007693>
 17. http://www.hgb-leipzig.de/kunstorte/sd_gemeinde.html
 18. For further reading, see: Magdalena Opalski and Israel Bartal, *Poles and Jews: a failed brotherhood*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992.
 19. <http://www.jewishgen.org/jri-pl/jriplweb.htm>
 20. <http://exhibits.uflib.ufl.edu/gatheringstorm/israelit.html>
 21. University of Florida Libraries. "Preservation." <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/sobekcm/preservation>
 22. Blue Ribbon Task Force on Sustainable Digital Preservation and Access. *Sustainable Economics for a Digital Planet Ensuring Long-Term Access to Digital Information: Final Report of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Sustainable Digital Preservation and Access*. Feb. 2010. Washington, DC. 1 Dec 2012 <<http://brtf.sdsc.edu/publications.html>>.
 23. Committee for Film Preservation and Public Access. "Statement by The Committee For Film Preservation and Public Access before The National Film Preservation Board of the Library of Congress." 12 Feb. 1993. Los Angeles, California. 1 Dec. 2012 <http://www.cinemaweb.com/access/pre_stmt.htm>.
 24. The Reverend Benjamin Safer Collection: <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/iufjudrev>
 25. For the *Jewish Jacksonville* online exhibition, see: <http://exhibits.uflib.ufl.edu/jewishjacksonville/>

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University of Florida Libraries. "Digital Scholarship Lifecycle Support." <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/sobekcm/lifecycle>