Combining Forces: Using multiple out of the box programs when programmers are out of the question!

Abstract
We will outline the interaction between two third-party software applications for streamlined collection management and user access to Special Collections materials. Combining the accession, donor and patron management, description, and online user interface capabilities of PastPerfect with the more sophisticated digital asset management system of CONTENTdm, we have combined access to our diverse collections, Special Collections, Reference, Collection Management, and Administration Departments have collaborated to make PastPerfect our single access point for over twenty separately maintained Library created databases that are not included in the University System Foundation's catalog. Standardized metadata creation for accession and descriptive records in both PastPerfect and CONTENTdm facilitates interoperability between the two systems. If digital objects are available, we can extract the metadata from PastPerfect using a Dublin Core crosswalk; conversely, our digitization workflow allows for item level metadata from CONTENTdm to be imported into PastPerfect. This ensures that PastPerfect is the one-stop shop for discovery of Special Collections analog and digital materials. Searches now search one interface and return results from our various collections - including finding aids, photographs, fanzines, and university publications - with a link to the digital object in CONTENTdm if one exists. Due to our lack of programming skills it was essential to select out of the box software that offered customization and a high level of support, as opposed to building a program in-house or utilizing open source software. We feel that this is a unique and valuable workflow that has not been implemented by other institutions in similar circumstances.

Contextualization of our prior situation
Conversion to PastPerfect and CONTENTdm began in 2007. The Albin O. Kuhn Library had previously purchased CONTENTdm to manage digital assets. PastPerfect was selected by the Special Collections department to consolidate and streamline donor, accessioning, and description documentation and workflows. At present, four Library departments regularly use PastPerfect. Over 20 data bases were previously in use externally, Special Collections photographs, comics, fanzines, radical literature, literary manuscripts, and theses and dissertations each had their own separate search on the public website. The data bases were configured using MySQL with a scripted PHP front end—which is this a simple arrangement, the technical knowledge to manipulate the arrangement was held by only one person on staff who had many other duties (and he has since left the library) and was not supported by the campus IT department. This is not sustainable. A benefit of the previous web search was that it allowed searching of the photography collection, including digitized and digitized. We didn’t want to lose this feature and create yet another all-search after investing time to reduce the number of search points. Using PastPerfect as our collective search provides results for all items in one location. A feature that we did want to change was the display of the digital images; the descriptive metadata was displayed on a separate page from the image itself, requiring users to page back and forth in order to view both. This is not the case in CONTENTdm. Inquiries made to CONTENTdm, PastPerfect, Archives & Archives Ltd. and the CONTENTdm Ltd in January and March of 2010 revealed that only two other known institutions use both PastPerfect and CONTENTdm: Kentucky Historical Society and the University of Iowa. It is not clear if these programs are linked internally, though they are not connected on their websites. Neither program is required to make this workflow successful and we do not envision either above other options.

About the Hughes Company Glass Negative Collection
The Hughes Company was a commercial photography studio in Baltimore, MD founded by James F. Hughes. The bulk of the images depict Baltimore and environs, street scenes, theatrical productions, and advertising photographs, businesses, churches, schools, monuments, factories, portraits, and signs. The photographs were created c. 1905-1940. Nearly 3,000 images have been scanned and we are in the process of describing them so that they can be accessed online.

Since both programs use Excel as an input/export platform, it is technically simple for people of various skill levels to perform this task and does not require a customized program or assistance from the IT department.

With the technical aspects no longer a barrier, we have been able to spend more time implementing standards of description through the use of Dublin Core and controlled vocabularies, including LCSH, TGM, and AAT. Although the majority of field names in PastPerfect are fixed, we have complete control over the field titles and attributes in CONTENTdm. All CONTENTdm field titles and structures follow professional standards and are mapped to Qualified Dublin Core. PastPerfect fields also map to Dublin Core and we have made use of customizable fields within PastPerfect when necessary. Greater control over the digital item metadata ensures that the content is flexible and may be repurposed through other projects in the future.

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