FY16 CARLI CCC Whitepaper: The CARLI Digital Collections Tumblr

One of the site's most popular posts, with 47 notes (i.e. likes and re-blogs)

INTRODUCTION

In early 2015, the CARLI Created Content Committee conducted a survey of CARLI member institutions about the use and marketing of digital collections, particularly the CARLI Digital Collections published in CONTENTdm.[1] As one of the outcomes of the survey, the Created Content Committee proposed to investigate ways to assist CARLI institutions with promotion and marketing of the digital collections.

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[1] CARLI Created Content Committee (2015). A Survey of the Use of CARLI Digital Collections. Retrieved from https://www.carli.illinois.edu/sites/files/files/2015CreatedContent_SurveyUseDigitalCollections.pdf

From 2008-2013, the Digital Collections User Group (DCUG) wrote and published a bi-weekly "featured image" from the digital collections on the CARLI website. After the DCUG was discharged in 2013, the newly formed Created Content Committee continued the "featured image" posts for the CARLI website and also revived a monthly "featured digitized book" post starting in 2015. Although the committee regards these regular features as part of its marketing efforts to expose the digital collections to a broader user base, the committee felt this did not go far enough to reach an audience beyond CARLI member libraries.

As a result, the Created Content Committee chose to start a Tumblr blog on a trial basis for promoting CARLI digital collections in addition to the bi-weekly "featured image" posts on the CARLI website. Tumblr is a microblogging site that combines the publishing tools of a blog with social media tools that allow users to easily share and engage with content on Tumblr. Many libraries, archives, and special collections are using Tumblr to meet users where they are, attract new audiences, increase awareness of collections, and grow existing relationships.[2]

PROJECT OUTLINE

The project started in fall 2015 with an initial working group of Jen Wolfe (Newberry Library), Alice Creason (Lewis University), and Margaret Heller (Loyola University Chicago). Jen Wolfe was the only committee member with prior experience working with Tumblr. She started by creating a Gmail account and then establishing a Tumblr account for the committee. She also drafted an initial structure and plan for posting to Tumblr in a shared Google doc. Then the working group created three weeks of sample posts to share with the committee for discussion.

Before creating a Tumblr account, the decisions that need to be made upfront include the title of the Tumblr and the URL. In the case of institutional Tumblrs, most libraries, archives, and special collections use the name of their institution, department, or organization as the title and some form of the institution or department name as part of the URL. For example, the Special Collections and University Archives department at the University of Illinois at Chicago has a Tumblr titled "Special Collections and University Archives, UIC" and the URL is http://uicspecialcollections.tumblr.com/. The committee followed this practice for the pilot project and simply titled the Tumblr "CARLI Digital Collections" and established the URL as http://carlidigcoll.tumblr.com/.

One of the major issues the project faced in the beginning was which digital collections would be eligible for participation in the Tumblr project. The committee discussed the various intellectual property rights asserted over images in the CONTENTdm collections and the permissions that the committee might need to obtain from CARLI institutions to post images from their collections on Tumblr. In addition, Tumblr asserts certain rights over content published on the platform as outlined in its terms of service under the heading "Subscriber Content License to Tumblr."[3] As a result, for the purposes of this trial

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[2] Anderson, Katie Elson (2015). Libraries and Tumblr: A quantitative analysis. *Reference Services Review*, 43(2), -. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.7282/T3M61N00

[3] Tumblr (2014). Terms of Service. Retrieved from https://www.tumblr.com/policy/en/terms-of-service

period, the committee elected to limit the eligible digital collections to only those contributed by the committee member's own institutions.

Institutions Participating in the Tumblr Pilot Project

- Eastern Illinois University
- Illinois Institute of Technology*
- Illinois State University*
- Lewis University
- Loyola University Chicago*
- Newberry Library
- Southern Illinois University--Carbondale
- Southern Illinois University--Edwardsville
- University of Illinois at Chicago

*Do not have content in CARLI's CONTENTdm Digital Collections

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The second issue the committee faced was how often to post to Tumblr. Consistency in posting frequency can contribute to the success of social media marketing endeavors. Many, if not most, of the libraries, archives, museums, and special collections on Tumblr post at least once a day, Monday-Friday, with some institutions posting multiple times per day. The Created Content Committee decided to aim for posting one image a day, Monday-Friday, to build a consistent schedule.

When the initial working group created their sample posts, they organized their posts around a common theme. For example, Jen Wolfe created a week of cat-themed posts, Margaret Heller posted images of urban streets, and Alice Creason posted images of bridges from the digital collections. The committee decided to stick with this approach when the Tumblr went live. Since the Tumblr project has started, additional themes have included dogs, swimming, botanical images, birthdays, children, and musicians. Individual contributors pick their own themes. They are not decided on by the committee or scheduled in advance.

The working group also created a basic style guide for posting image content from the CARLI Digital Collections on Tumblr which was added to the shared Google doc. Each post consists of a photo which is linked back to its record in CONTENTdm. Through trial and error, the working group also found that the best image quality was produced on Tumblr when the image was downloaded from the CARLI Digital Collections or other participating digital collections site and then uploaded to Tumblr. In addition, the style guide recommended a standard image caption which identifies the title of the image, the name of the contributing institution, and the CARLI Digital Collections or other digital collection site as the source. The caption is followed by a brief, often humorous, description which provides some context for the image, and a link back to the collection homepage from which the image was taken. Finally, all posts

are signed by the contributor, following the practice of the "featured image" posts on the CARLI website.

Contributors also add hashtags before publishing the post on Tumblr. The style guide suggests that each post be tagged with the name of the contributing institution of the image (for example, #lewis university), plus #carli, and #history. Then contributors are encouraged to add any additional hashtags that may be appropriate for their images or theme. Tumblr users can search for content by searching hashtags, so adding relevant tags can help increase discoverability and reach of posts on Tumblr.

Unlike blogging platforms such as Blogger or WordPress, the Tumblr platform has a lively and engaged community of users, and Tumblr includes features that encourage liking and sharing content published on the platform. The committee realized during the planning process that engaging other Tumblr users needed to play a part in the project. When Jen Wolfe created the Tumblr account, she also identified over a hundred other Tumblrs--predominantly other libraries, museums, archives, and special collections--that that the CARLI account could 'follow.' Following another Tumblr means that all of the posts published by that account would appear in a continuous feed on the dashboard of the CARLI Digital Collections Tumblr account.

In addition to the daily post, the contributor checks Tumblr daily for interesting content from the followed blogs to like (which is done in Tumblr by clicking a heart icon to indicate that you enjoyed the content) or reblog (which republishes the content to the CARLI Tumblr). When content is reblogged, Tumblr users have the option to add additional text or comments or the content can be republished as is. Much of this content comes from other libraries or archives, and so is likely to be of interest to our blog followers. This also helps to situate the CARLI Tumblr in the social world of Tumblr and grow our reach.

Seven members of the Created Content Committee volunteered to participate in the Tumblr project by posting regular content. This required the committee to develop a schedule to ensure fair division of labor and consistent content. The committee decided that each contributor would be responsible for an entire week of posts (5 posts, one each Monday-Friday). Alice Creason created a calendar and scheduled each participant's weeks on a rotating schedule through the end of the fiscal year for the pilot project. The calendar was shared with all of the contributors, and contributors were responsible for finding substitutes if they needed to swap a week. Because Tumblr has a feature to schedule posts for future publication, it is possible to do all of the work for the week in one work session, requiring the responsible person only to log in to check for likes and reblogs each day.

In general, the work for the Tumblr each week takes around 2-3 hours to complete. Selecting images for the week and writing captions takes the majority of time, particularly since the committee is limited in the institutions from which it can draw, and is usually unfamiliar with the collections. For people including images from their own institution's collection the time is reduced. The liking and reblogging process only takes a few minutes a day. The Created Content Committee has been able to dedicate enough people to the project so that each person participating only has to cover one week every other

month or so. This is often enough that members do not forget how to use the interface, but not so often that it becomes challenging to complete.

Creating a Group Tumblr: Questions to Consider

❏ What will you call the Tumblr? Is the URL available?
❏ Who will be responsible for posting content?
❏ How often will you post?
❏ What types of content will be published on the Tumblr? (images, text, video, etc.)
❏ Do you need a style guide for posting content?
❏ Do you need any special permissions from your institution to publish your content on Tumblr?
❏ How will you engage other Tumblr users?
❏ How will you measure success?

LESSONS LEARNED

This project has been an excellent experience for the committee overall, despite challenges and the normal process of becoming familiar with a new platform. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the project has been the limited number of participating institutions, which makes selecting content more difficult than it otherwise would be. Committee members attempt to select content from a variety of institutions, but ultimately the institutions with larger or more diverse digital collections tend to be selected more frequently. A way to address this would be to invite more CARLI institutions to participate, particularly as guest curators since they would be experts in unique collections at their own institutions.

Another challenge has been figuring out how to set policies as questions arise about Tumblr. Part of this is learning the culture of Tumblr, which is different than other social media platforms in some ways. For instance, what types of blogs should the CARLI Tumblr follow? The committee made a decision to only follow other institutions rather than individuals, but that could change in the future. Other questions have to do with image rights and increasing the number of institutions participating in the project, as mentioned.

The Tumblr platform is relatively straightforward, but there were some issues in learning it, particularly since most of the committee members do not use it regularly. An early technical error was the establishment of the account as "secondary", a category that Tumblr uses for multiple-editor blogs and for those that are password-protected. While experimenting with the platform, we wanted a way to post content without making it live on the internet, so a password-protected secondary Tumblr account seemed appropriate. It was only after we removed the password protection and posted content for several weeks that we discovered an important limitation of secondary Tumblrs: we were unable to interact with other accounts, i.e. following, reblogging or commenting on posts from the rest of the "Tumblrverse" was disabled. Since the primary goal of the project was social media engagement and

outreach, the inability to engage or reach out to others was a deal breaker, so we quickly created a new, primary Tumblr, migrated our existing posts, and continued from there.

Creating links, creating a post in the standard format, and scheduling posts are examples of tasks that committee members may struggle with after not visiting the interface for a long time. Creating a visually appealing theme for the blog has been less of a focus for the committee, but probably needs additional work. Tumblr has an administrative interface that does not use the main blog theme, so it took some time to realize that, for example, the header image for the blog was sized too small and was not displaying effectively to potential followers on Tumblr. Right now the blog theme is very simple, though improving it would be a useful project to undertake in the future.


Screenshot of recent activity from the Tumblr editor's Dashboard

Measuring usage of the site has been another challenge for the committee. As of mid-May, the CARLI Tumblr has posted 197 times total, and has received 121 "notes" (including likes, reblogs, and comments) in the month before that, according to the Tumblr editor's dashboard. The Tumblr has 82 followers, which includes both institutions and individuals. The blog has had a steady growth in followers, indicating that others are finding value in it. The "biggest fans" (as Tumblr calls the blogs which comment or reblog more content) are libraries or special collections units, only one of which is in Illinois. Unfortunately finding older statistics is difficult within the Tumblr dashboard, so the committee

has recently implemented Google Analytics tracking as of May 24, 2016. This will allow the collection of more robust information (including the number of site pageviews, whereas Tumblr only tracks activity such as likes and reblogs) and the long-term retention of usage reports.

The ability to measure return on investment via usage statistics is a crucial advantage held by Tumblr over the Committee's other engagement efforts. While data-driven decision-making is quickly emerging as a best practice in library operations, we continue to post featured images, books, and podcasts to the CARLI website without any feedback on the success of these activities. In order to use resources responsibly -- especially the resource of time put in by Committee members to craft content promoting CARLI digital collections -- we may be better off moving all outreach efforts to Tumblr if the inability to obtain usage statistics from the CARLI blog and podcasts continues.

The Created Content Committee maintains Google Analytics reports for the CARLI CONTENTdm server. The 2016 quarter 3 report (which covers the time since the Tumblr was made public) shows that there were 23 referrals from the CARLI Tumblr to CONTENTdm, meaning that there were 23 clicks from a link in the Tumblr which led someone back to a CARLI collection. There were also 41 referrals from a generic Tumblr URL, some of which may have been the CARLI Tumblr originally. These statistics allow us to track which posts are more likely to draw someone back to learn more about a collection, as well as which posts attracted new users to the CARLI digital collections.
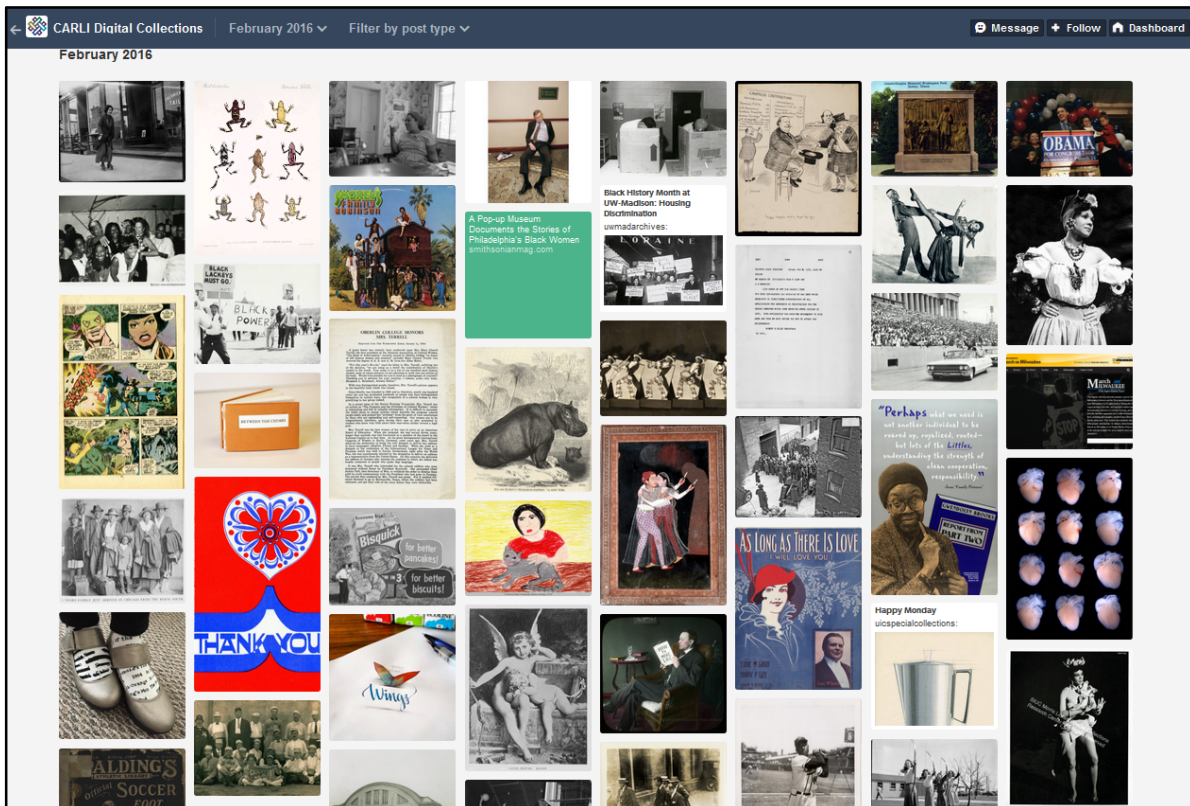
February posts at-a-glance

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

For the people working on the Tumblr project this has been a positive experience, and a pilot project that we feel should graduate to a standard project for the committee. To make that successful, the committee will have to address the challenges identified as well as continue to refine the processes.

The most important next step will be to determine whether and how we can include additional institutions. The committee will work with CARLI governance to address this next fiscal year. An example of an outreach might be a campaign to encourage guest curators from CARLI institutions to contribute posts.

Other steps will be to determine if the current format for posts still works. Weekly topical themes have been a good way to get started, but it will be important to stay fresh and pay attention to what trends are happening on Tumblr and be part of those. Examples might be a day of the week that touches on a certain theme, more than one image per post, or more interaction with followers in posts. A more careful eye to statistics and what types of posts are popular would certainly help with this.