

Reveal Digital: An open access model empowering libraries to become publishers

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Up until the second half of the 20th century access to scholarly collections was severely limited by the cost and time required to travel to libraries where content was held. It wasn't until the aerial bombing campaigns of World War II that national libraries in Europe took steps to preserve their cultural heritage material on microfilm. Microfilm, being easy to duplicate and distribute anywhere in the world, led to unprecedented access to historically important collections.

Today many microfilm collections have been digitized and are being delivered via the Internet, making content even more accessible. Yet, while microfilm and the Internet have obliterated the geographic barriers to accessing cultural heritage material, pay walls erected by publishers have been just as effective at limiting access to those collections.

In her Library Journal column "[Crowdfunding Access to Archives](#)", Andréé Rathemaker eloquently stated the position of many librarians and archivists when she said, "Librarians need to resist the enclosure of the cultural commons that is the inevitable outcome of the traditional publication model. This is especially important as new forms of scholarship emerge that require full access to digitized content." Libraries are increasingly turning to and supporting open access models that seek to develop library-based publishing initiatives in the humanities as an answer to the access limitations found in traditional publishing models.

Open access digitization projects in the humanities are not new to academic and public libraries. For years, libraries have sought and obtained grant funding to digitize their own historical collections and have made them openly available on their institutional repositories or library platforms. Vibrant open access digitization programs may be found as often in large well-funded institutions like the [Wellcome Library](#) as in smaller institutions like the [University of North Texas](#). These local projects are typically funded by government grants or private funding agencies and are limited to out-of-copyright content held within the library. Portal entities like Europeana and Digital Public Library of America provide aggregated access to a plethora of local collections, greatly enhancing discovery of the content.

Recently, new models have begun to emerge from entities closely connected to, but outside libraries. These models are built around the concept of library crowdfunding. Knowledge Unlatched (KU) pools money from libraries to fund the development of scholarly monographs. Open Library of the Humanities (OLH) uses a similar model to fund publication of humanities journal articles. Reveal Digital's model, while slightly different from KU and OLH, also pools money from libraries to fund digitization of special collections of other libraries.

Reveal Digital's mission

Reveal Digital was founded on the belief that cultural heritage material held by libraries should be freely accessible to all. However, making content freely accessible is not free. Digitization, rights clearance, platform development, hosting and other activities require human and financial resources. We think it is possible to cover those costs by pooling funds from libraries and foundations.

The Reveal Digital model is based on a long-term successful initiative called the Text Creation Partnership. The Text Creation Partnership (TCP) began in 1999. Over the course of the initiative the TCP took in millions of dollars from 150 libraries to create searchable, encoded text for Early English Books Online (EEBO). Without searchable text, discovery of content was limited to metadata created at the item level. By creating searchable text, more dynamic levels of research, scholarship and learning were made possible.

The TCP was an early example of a library crowdfunding model. The success of the project proved that libraries are willing to come together to pool their resources in support of creating great open-access content.

The Model

Reveal Digital's model builds upon the successes of the TCP. Here's how it works. Through discussions with librarians, Reveal Digital identifies projects that are likely to generate widespread interest and funding support. Projects primarily focus on historical humanities content from special collections that have never been digitized; although, in some instances, it is desirable to include already digitized content to round out a collection.

Once a project concept is identified, Reveal Digital and source libraries collaborate to scope and develop a comprehensive cost model covering every aspect of the project. There are five major cost elements that are scoped during this process including, rights clearance, data conversion, hosting and delivery platform, project management and outreach.

Key source libraries with a vested interest in the success of the project are designated as project

Champions. Champions commit to proactively working with their network of colleagues to promote the project and gain early funding commitments. Wherever possible, financial support from foundations and other granting agencies will be secured in collaboration with Champions to help augment the support from individual libraries.

Once a project is fully defined and its cost threshold established, the project proposal is posted on Reveal Digital's website (revealdigital.com). Librarians come to the website to learn about the project and to make funding commitments. Commitments are tallied and progress toward each project's cost-recovery goal is tracked on the site.

When enough commitments are received to meet a project's cost threshold, the committed libraries are invoiced and the project begun. Each project has a fundraising period that mirrors the typical academic fiscal year, to enable libraries time to identify projects of interest, make commitments and provide funding within one budget cycle.

During the production phase of a project, funding libraries receive early access to the content as it is loaded onto the delivery platform. Upon completion of the production phase, the content is made open to anyone from anywhere without restriction. Publishers of the material included in a project must therefore agree to the terms of the Creative Commons CC-BY license.

Beyond helping scope a project and provide a mechanism for fundraising, Reveal Digital is a multi-tool that supports libraries as publishers. A project may utilize one or all of the "tools" offered by Reveal Digital, including copyright clearance activities; scanning, OCR and metadata creation; developing and maintaining a hosting and delivery platform; performing marketing and outreach activities. Likewise, a Champion library may want to use their own resources to provide any one of those functions.

Who benefits?

The greatest beneficiaries of this model are the scholars and general researchers world-wide who will forever have access to cultural heritage material that would otherwise be un-digitized or restricted

to paying customers. Because libraries are defining the collections to be digitized, collections developed under this model will closely align with the needs and interests of users, where traditional publishers are further removed and must juggle cost and profit expectations.

Source libraries and Funding libraries have compelling reasons of their own to participate in a Reveal Digital project.

The benefits for source libraries are perhaps the most obvious. Their content is digitized and because rights are cleared for open access, the source library may load their content into their institutional repository or any other platform they wish. Ownership of the original content and resulting digital assets remains with the source library. The cost of pulling, assessing and shipping source material is included in the cost model and the library is reimbursed accordingly. Their content is also combined with other's to create a more complete collection and expanded scope.

The benefits to funding libraries are also valuable. Funding libraries enjoy early access to the content as it is digitized and loaded onto the hosting platform. This exclusive access is maintained until the project is complete, a timeline that typically ranges from nine to eighteen months. Funding libraries may contribute local holdings for inclusion in a project, as long as the material is within the project's scope. Upon request, funding libraries may also receive all, or a subset of, the image, text and metadata files to host in their own repositories or to support text and data mining. Finally, funding libraries receive MARC records and COUNTER-compliant usage statistics, which help better integrate the content into a library's collections and therefore raises awareness of the content to faculty and staff.

Aside from these benefits, because Reveal Digital projects operate under a strict cost-recovery model, funding libraries will pay two to three times less for content than they would for the same content published under traditional publishing models. This approach to publishing provides very real economic benefits to libraries on top of the altruism of supporting open access.

The first project

Launched in 2013 and due to be completed in 2017, Reveal Digital's inaugural project is called Independent Voices. Independent Voices is a four-year project to digitize nearly 800,000 pages from 1,000 alternative press publications from the 1960's, 70's and 80's. Independent Voices is a compilation of "voices" from the 2nd wave of feminism, LGBT activism, GI and student protest movements, black, chicano(a), and native American movements. By bringing these diverse perspectives together Independent Voices offers students and researchers the opportunity to learn new and perhaps unexpected things about the people and movements that still impact our society today.

The idea for Independent Voices grew out of Reveal Digital founder, Jeff Moyer's, interest in alternative press content, developed while he was a publishing director at ProQuest. Years after leaving ProQuest, Mr. Moyer envisioned the opportunity to build an alternative press collection by working directly with source libraries and pooling contributions from supporting libraries.

In 2012, Mr. Moyer connected with librarians from Duke University and Northwestern University, both of which have extensive feminist literature holdings. Librarians from both institutions became active participants in shaping the project, along with a steering committee composed of leaders from California Digital Library, the Committee on Institutional Cooperation and the Center for Research Libraries. The steering committee also benefited from the domain expertise of Ken Wachsberger, editor of the four-volume series, *Voices from the Underground*.

Libraries play a foundational role in the success of Independent Voices as do the rights holders of the publications. Alternative presses by their nature were loosely run. Those responsible for publishing sometimes needed to remain anonymous, thus complicating the process of tracking down rights holders today. Mr. Wachsberger has proven invaluable in his ability to identify and connect with rights holders and to obtain complete open access rights. He attributes his success to the intention

with which the works were originally published. The publishers wanted their voices to be heard as widely as possible. Their publications were not intended to be profit-generating media machines. The fact that Reveal Digital's project is an open access project aligns with this ethos. Once identified and contacted, rights holders have responded enthusiastically to our request to include their publications in Independent Voices.

The digitization and aggregation of unique and valuable content makes Independent Voices an important project in its own right. It also serves as a proof-of-concept for Reveal Digital's library crowdfunding model. The early results are encouraging.

As of this writing, fifteen libraries have provided source content for the collection, either already in digital form or in hard copy. Two dozen are expected to contribute by the time the project is complete.

Seventy-two libraries have provided funding so far, totaling nearly \$1M of the projects \$2M goal. Supporting libraries range from small liberal arts colleges like Oberlin College and Reed College to large Ivy League libraries like Harvard, Yale, Columbia and Dartmouth. Contribution levels are determined by the highest degree awarded in History or English. Association of Research Library (ARL) members contribute the highest amount at \$20,500. Bachelor degree granting institutions contribute the lowest amount at \$5,130. At every level, libraries are contributing 50% or less of what they would pay a traditional publisher like ProQuest or EBSCO for a similarly defined collection.

What's next

Working with institutions like New York University and Wisconsin Historical Society, Reveal Digital has developed four new projects that are available to receive funding commitments. Many of the new projects focus on themes similar to Independent Voices.

The *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Digital Archive* will provide primary source documents related to the

American Civil Rights period and the critical role SNCC played in the movement.

Similarly, the *Highlander Folk School Digital Archive* will cover the Civil Rights period, but it also extends to 1930's labor organization and job training in Appalachia. The Highlander collection includes audio and video material, which will expand the capabilities of Reveal Digital's delivery platform.

The *Liberation News Service Digital Archive* is a small but important collection of photographs from the Vietnam War era taken by photographers around the world and shared Associated Press-style with underground newspapers.

The *Sylvester Manor Digital Archive* is a departure from the focus on social change. This intriguing collection looks at American history from 1650 to present through the lens of one family who owned a Long Island estate throughout that time period.

While all of these collections are focused on American historical themes, Reveal Digital anticipates working with libraries in other countries to develop projects of value within other segments of the international scholarly community.

The Library Response

Reveal Digital's library crowdfunding model challenges the traditional approach to scholarly publishing. It requires librarians to think more like active investors and publishers and less like consumers. This new approach is exciting to many and incomprehensible to some!

Subject specialist librarians and collection development officers have developed tried-and-true methods, honed over 30 or more years, to evaluate new digital collections and make spending decisions. In this consumer approach, librarians sign up for trial access to a digital collection. They evaluate title lists, assess the user interface and do their best to determine student and faculty interest. In some cases the team of subject librarians and the collection officer meet as a voting group and cast votes for the resources on which the library will

spend their budget for that year. This approach helps libraries make difficult choices on how to spend their limited budgets.

The consumer approach does not work well with Reveal Digital collections. There is no product to trial until after libraries have committed funding to a project. There may be targeted title lists, but the content list will necessarily evolve once the project begins as rights holders grant or withhold rights and as new content is identified through the process. The evaluation is therefore a much more strategic exercise that requires librarians to evaluate the concept at a higher level.

When evaluating a Reveal Digital project, librarians determine if the content at a high level will benefit their user community. They evaluate the production plan and projected costs to determine if they are reasonable and sufficient to support a successful project. They evaluate whether Reveal Digital is capable of executing the project providing long-term access and preservation. Beyond and perhaps more important than project evaluation, librarians must decide if the model itself is worth supporting.

In most library organizations, this level of strategic decision making resides with the collection

development officer. The head of collections may ask subject librarians to evaluate a project concept, but ultimately the head of collections must decide whether or not to support the model and a specific project.

The Future

Will librarians sit on the sidelines and let someone else support viable open access initiatives like Reveal Digital's, or will they be inspired by the possibilities and contribute content and funding support? Based on our experience so far, we think libraries will enthusiastically support our vision. We look forward to growing support as more and more librarians discover what we are doing and find a project worth funding.

Since the end of WWII, unimaginable advances in opening access to humanities content have been made. The resulting scholarship has changed the way we understand our history and make decisions about the future. There is much more to be learned from collections not yet digitized. While there will be a place for both traditional and open-access models, we hope that in partnership with libraries, open access models will come to dominate the landscape making more content available to more people in every corner of the world.