OSCI User Study

The Getty Foundation thanks Frankly, Green + Webb digital consultancy for granting permission to share this report on the firm’s evaluation of the OSCI catalogues produced by SFMOMA and the Walker Art Center. Originally presented at 2016 Museums and the Web conference by Laura Mann.
Online Scholarly Catalogues: Data and Insights from OSCI

MWXX
April 2016
The Rauschenberg Research Project provides free worldwide access to a wealth of scholarly research and documentation relating to artworks by Robert Rauschenberg in SFMOMA's permanent collection. The museum's holdings span the artist's career from 1949 to 1998 and include Combines, sculptures, paintings, photographs, and prints and other works on paper. A rich range of materials surrounds the featured works, including newly commissioned essays, numerous images, interview footage, artist's statements, conservation reports, and archival materials, which together provide new insights into the artist's work. These resources may be accessed through the orientation points below. The Rauschenberg Research Project was produced by SFMOMA under the auspices of the Getty Foundation's Online Scholarly Catalogue Initiative, with the support of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation.

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LIVING COLLECTIONS CATALOGUE

Each volume of the Living Collections Catalogue includes media-rich essays on broader themes as well as in-depth investigations of specific works of art. Featured works link to records in the Walker’s collections database, where additional information about the artists and artworks is available. Implicit in the concept of a “Living catalogue” is the dynamic nature of an online volume about the Walker’s collections. Information in the catalogue is updated as new research and presentations occur, while essays are referenced and citable with assurances of a permanent address to the information referenced.

MORE

ART EXPANDED, 1958–1978

ON PERFORMATIVITY
QUESTIONS

1. Reach
2. Use
3. Impact of digital
4. Audience perception
5. Drivers and barriers to success
What We Did

1. Online survey
2. Interviews with users and stakeholders
3. Usability testing
4. Google Analytics
Good News

1. Reaching the scholarly audience
2. Used for research and teaching
3. A trusted source
4. A new form
Reaching the target audience of scholars

69% Primary Audiences
- 25% Graduate students
- 18% Professors
- 16% Curators
- 6% Indep scholars
- 4% Librarians

RRP - Q: What best describes you?

Frankly, Green + Webb
It’s also reaching secondary and wider audiences

**69% Primary Audiences**
- 25% Graduate students
- 18% Professors
- 16% Curators
- 6% Indep scholars
- 4% Librarians

**12% Secondary Audiences**
- 10% Museum educators
- 2% Undergraduates

**20% Other Audiences**
- 10% Other
- 8% Personal interest
- 2% Digital Media/e-publishing

Q: What best describes you?

N=51
Greater and more diverse reach than a comparable print catalogue

9,000 – 25,000

Unique visitors in first 6 months
Greater and more diverse reach than a comparable print catalogue

500

Museum, university and library network domains from around the world
Greater and more diverse reach than a comparable print catalogue

55%

of traffic to Walker’s On Performativity catalogue is from outside the US
How are users finding the online catalogues?
Google is the key to discoverability

45%

Traffic referred by Google
Google is the key to the discoverability of the catalogues

1. General research
2. Narrow searches

I'm Googling for ... some random fact about Rauschenberg in 1953... and I often find that that takes me back to an essay in the RRP.

Graduate student
But the museum website is also key to discoverability

I often go to the Walker site just to **search for objects** when I’m looking for something in the collection.

Curator
Potential for expanding reach

Awareness of Living Collections Catalogue

- Aware: 28%
- Unaware: 72%

Potential users
Where do scholars expect to find online catalogues?
Where do scholars expect to find online catalogues?

...in academic databases?
Where do scholars expect to find the catalogues?

...at the library

...it's parallel to a huge book...I might expect to see to it listed instead in the actual [university] library where they're cataloguing books...

Graduate student
But...there’s **no standardized process** for adding digital publications to library catalogues.
A need for an ongoing communications program

...I would like an email from [the museum] every time a new module is loaded or a new volume published

Art Librarian
What does this mean for you?

- SEO is critical to the findability
- Get an ISBN number
- Art librarians are a target audience
- Generating awareness and traffic requires an ongoing communications program
- Promoting online publications may be a new museum role
How are the catalogues being used?
How are the catalogues being used?

Q: What were your reasons for visiting/using the Rauschenberg Research Project online? (Please select all that apply)  
N=81

- Interest in online catalogues: 33%
- General research: 20%
- Materials and resources to support teaching: 19%
- Researching Robert Rauschenberg: 14%
- Images of Rauschenberg’s work: 12%
- Other: 2%
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Visitors who are interested in the catalogue’s form, rather than its content.

N=81
Deep engagement

15%
Of RRP visitors have made more than
> 9 visits
Q: “How do you rate the content of the Rauschenberg Research Project on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is not at all useful and 5 is extremely useful?

N=35
Praise for usefulness, quality, depth and breadth of catalogue content

98% of the primary audience said they were likely to use the RRP for any future research on Rauschenberg
A deeper level of access to museum information
Features for the academic audience

1. Citation tools
2. Downloadability

[Recommended format for citation is] super super important...in terms of training our students in research and documentation.

Professor
Content + Downloadability = Value

Allowing scholars access to all of the "extras" is amazing...curatorial and conservation documents, interviews, multiple views...personal photos, etc. Perhaps the most useful aspect...is...that users can download these resources to their own computers.

Independent scholar
Distinctive vision and voice

There can be a tendency on the web for museums to strike a kind of neutral, very bland quasi-bureaucratic tone when they talk about their work. These texts had a lot of personality to them more so than you usually see in a museum frame and a kind of independent scholarly seriousness that I appreciated.

Professor
And new types of scholarship

...seems somewhat unique in the aggregation of very high quality images...detailed object information and particular essays geared toward those objects...its a new kind of form

Graduate student
The audience trusted the catalogues as scholarly sources

30%

indicated that they were very likely or extremely likely to cite the LCC in future research or publications

...generally...I don't cite online material...but because of the rigor that was used in this project, I felt comfortable citing it

Graduate student
The audience trusted the catalogues as scholarly sources

85% of the primary audience that had used the LCC rated it as a very credible or extremely credible place to have their own work published
Signifiers of academic authority

1. Institutional brand
2. Well-known contributors
3. Proper academic formatting and citations of scholarly essays

...presents itself as something that makes me trust it to a very high standard

Curator
These are very good people...I know the people and I know their work. I don’t care too much about peer review.
Professor
The catalogues are having an impact on scholarship

I am writing my dissertation on the work of Allan Kaprow, and although I wasn’t planning to write about *Mushroom*, I will, since the photographs and especially the letters [in On Performativity] enable me to deal with the happening in a nuanced, substantial way.

Graduate student
What does this mean for you?

- Online catalogues need specialized functionality to meet the needs of a scholarly audience
- The features support working process and signify academic authority
- Online catalogues offer opportunities for innovation in content and form
- Invest your resources in securing well-known contributors
Challenges

1. Usability
2. Structure and boundaries
3. Permanence
4. Status
Usability challenge: Most users don’t land on the home page

[A colleague] sent me a link directly to the essay. I wasn’t exactly sure what it was ...It’s a nice new take and it’s very ambitious but that’s why it took some time for me to figure out what I was looking at.

Curator
Usability challenge: how do we communicate the scale of an online publication?

I was disappointed that it didn't have a little map of the structure of the thing...or at least a list of here are the basic sections and the essays. Graduate student
The Rauschenberg Research Project provides free worldwide access to a wealth of scholarly research and documentation related to Robert Rauschenberg in SFMOMA’s permanent collection. The museum’s holdings span the artist’s career from 1946 to the present and include Combines, sculptures, paintings, photographs, and other works on paper. A rich range of materials surround Rauschenberg’s works, including newly commissioned essays, numerous interviews, footage, artist’s statements, conservation reports, and archival materials, which together provide new insights into the artist’s work. These resources may be accessed through the orientation points below. The Rauschenberg Research Project is produced by SFMOMA under the auspices of the Getty Foundation Online Scholarly Catalogue Initiative, with the support of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.


Collection  
1954/455  
Painting  
oil, paper, fabric, wood, and metal on canvas  

Now on view in the exhibition Pop Artists from the Anderson Collection at SFMOMA at Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University.
Boundaries and structure: where does an online publication begin and end?

Where is the container that makes this into a separate publication? Does it bleed out into the rest of the website? Where does the publication begin and where does it end? And how do you tell when you're in it or not in it?

Graduate student
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ON PERFORMATIVITY
Permanence: will this be here in 20 years?
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20 years from now, will we be able to read this data? ...If it's in a library catalogue...will that URL be stable?
Graduate student

if you cite something there's the possibility that it would disappear.
There's a lot of scholarly nervousness about that
Graduate student
Status: what is the value of an online scholarly catalogue?
Status: what is the value of an online scholarly catalogue?

It doesn't feel as prestigious [as a printed catalogue] but I think that's changing...I wouldn't hesitate to sign on to a project that was digital

Curator
Status: what is the value of an online scholarly catalogue?

I have published in museum publications before. And... what I've been told is that they don't count towards tenure review... they... aren't considered tenure-worthy.

But... the RRP that's some new territory I think...

Graduate student
Status: what is the value of an online scholarly catalogue?

It changed my opinion... it served for me as an example of what's possible. Graduate student
What does this mean for you?

- Clear boundaries need to be balanced with findability
- Online catalogues need to be permanent, updatable and archival
- Perceptions of online catalogues are shaped by larger issues of status and publication record in the academic community
Images thanks to Flickr Commons:
The hidden treasures of the Worlds Public Archives
http://www.flickr.com/commons