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WKU Libraries: Using PastPerfect to Open Hidden Collections

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WKU
Libraries

Using PastPerfect to Open Hidden Collections

By Nancy Richey

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Henry Hardin Cherry had a dream; this dream came true with the completion of the Kentucky Building on Western Kentucky State Teachers college campus, now Western Kentucky University (WKU), in 1939. His goal was "to preserve Kentucky's history and heritage." The building's three floors are now home to the university archives, research library/manuscript collections, and the Kentucky Museum.

The types of materials now housed in the library include more than 75,000 books and periodicals. Additionally, there are church records, genealogical collections, historical manuscript and photograph collections, county and local histories, county and state records, family/biographical files, ephemera, sheet music, and political items. The museum holdings have unique artifacts of local, national, and international importance, including art, quilts, glassware, furniture, clothing and textiles, and archaeological collections.

The Problem of (Our) Hidden Collections

Newspaper headlines—such as the March 29, 2006, issue of *The New York Times*—were fuel for the need to make our collections more visible. An article, "3 out of 4 Visitors to the Met Never Make It to the Front Door," noted that visitors were gaining access to many collections digitally. Speaking of "hidden collections" in libraries and archives is akin to looking up a lady's skirt, shocking both for the looker and lookee! But it's quite a common problem and nothing new, as our personnel (at the Kentucky Building) sought to deal with unprocessed and under-processed backlogs. We knew that we needed a CMS not only because our collections were underused, but also because they were more vulnerable to theft. You cannot protect, process, or promote what you do not know you have.

PastPerfect Museum

KenCat Online Collections

WKU

Home

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Help

Enter one or more keywords, then click Search

Use double quotes around phrases

[Search] [Help]

People ☑
Search Terms ☑

E-Mail spcol@wku.edu. Phone (270) 745-2592. Fax (270) 745-6264.
Write to Kentucky Library & Museum, Western Kentucky University, 1906 College Heights Blvd. #11092,
Bowling Green, KY 42101-1092

This is an MWeb™ Online Catalog.

2:15 AM

Built in 1939, the Kentucky Building is home to the library, archives, and museum collections.

Our diverse collections prior to our use of the collection management software program, PastPerfect, were hidden virtually and accessed using analog card files and finding aids, which often limited their use to in-house researchers. There was an OPAC with its access for books and periodicals and some collection-level records for manuscript and university archives. However, museum objects, photographs, and folklife archives, as well as other nonbook items were accessed only through paper finding aids or the memory of a long-time staffer.

Several proprietary systems (CONTENTdm, Archivists' Toolkit, and PastPerfect) were discussed by staff as well as some open source systems. Although primarily for museums, PastPerfect does include library, photograph, and archives integration in its catalog modules. Thus, PastPerfect was chosen because of its features, its affordability, and its fit with our dual role as library and museum. The basic program did not include the ability to attach images, but we wanted this optional feature and purchased it separately.

What Did We Want or Need?

It was helpful for us to ask the following sample questions as we made our choice:

✔ Open source vs. commercial?

✔ Sustainability—will there be ongoing institutional investment with storage or management requirements?

✔ Have we conducted a needs assessment?

✔ Did we want to publish content to the web?

✔ How would workflows be affected?

✔ What would work best for our situation? A digital asset management (DAM) system (CONTENTdm or Greenstone) or a CMS (PastPerfect or Re:discovery Proficio)?

✔ Did we want a content creation tool that features encoded archival descriptions (EAD) collection descriptions, Metadata Encoding and Transmission Standard (METS), and the ability to create finding aids? Did it export EAD? Did it export Dublin Core metadata, Metadata Object Description Schema (MODS), METS, Metadata Authority Description Schema (MADS), and MARC?

✔ Did we want an integrated system with features such as accessioning/deaccessioning, location, statistics, status, and detailed descriptions?

✔ Were we able to meet the implementation standards, have adequate data storage, and technical support in-house? If not, could we afford the program's technical support?

✔ What exactly is the collection size and scope we were looking at and did we need interoperability and scalability at this time or in the future?

✔ What is our budget?

✔ What are the search and discovery features that we want or that we see are needed? Will a search engine such as Google pick up our online resources?

✔ Would this product aid us in presenting our resources in a way that shows a connection to the institution's mission?

Our Decision

In 2005, after much discussion and an intensive museum/library/archives collaborative process, our staff used the purchase criteria that included the following for us: 1) the cost, ease of setup, and ease of use by the nonsavvy technical staff/patron; 2) the level of in-house IT support that would be required; and 3) our past experience with the software. By fall 2008, with more than 6,000 records, we had upgraded to PastPerfect's online version in order to allow internet searches. We also had purchased the PastPerfect module that allowed us customization and selection of the PastPerfect catalog records, images, and data fields that we wanted the public interface to feature. This made our site user-friendly and "findable," as it also included Google search indexing, visitor search statistics, and feedback forms. It also met our expectation and goal of creating a web presence whereby we could "virtually" open the doors.

Created in 1996, PastPerfect advertises that it provides affordable collection management software for general

history museums; it now has more than 9,000 clients. It has four main components or modules: Objects Catalog, Archives Catalog, Library Catalog, and Photographs Catalog. The software has built-in report capabilities and is equipped with the *Revised Nomenclature for Museum Cataloging* (Chenhall's Nomenclature), *ART and Architecture Thesaurus-Getty Union List of Artist Names,* and *LC Thesaurus for Graphic Materials I: Subject Terms.*

Also important to our decision was that the catalog's subsets provide for detailed descriptions of cartographic elements, individual songs, artists, interview indexing, record box, and container and folder lists, which were all important features in the eyes of our librarians and the university archivist. It also had 22 custom fields in each catalog that allowed use of different authority files for the different catalogs previously mentioned.

PastPerfect does not create EAD finding aids from the data, but it does allow for the import and export of data information from and to Excel, ASCII, and dBase and FoxPro files. We also purchased a support contract that was more cost-efficient than the hourly rate. While the software seems more geared to the general museum and historical society environment, there is much here that is recognizable to the librarian—with call number, control number, copy number, edition, ISBN, LCCN, language, physical description, publication place, and spine label fields.

Also, PastPerfect features fields conforming to international standards and hierarchical description; records can be imported from or exported to MARC and Dublin Core; and search strategies include Boolean and keyword. Google search indexing is also a part of the online version. The software imports scanned images from digital cameras or scanners to the records. Multiple images can be assigned to a single record, which aids in the description and identification of the museum's 3D objects. Metadata pertaining to file size, format, and location of a file is automatically imported, thus eliminating the need for double data entry by staff. Additional metadata
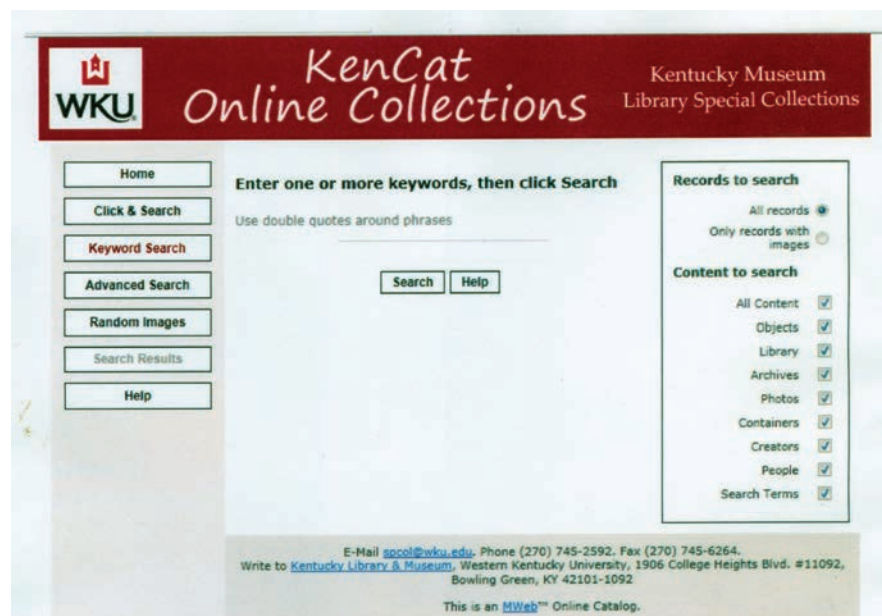
Kentucky Catalog (KenCat) is a window to the collections.

can be recorded, including caption, creator, date created, resolution, size, software, and equipment used to acquire an image. With this information, researchers can determine if an image meets publication needs. Our dual existence as a museum and library/manuscripts/archives means that we receive many donations each year in all of these areas. PastPerfect's unique identifiers, accession number, and object identification (ID) number or exhibition ID number associates that donation with the donor and thus provides us with an excellent digital accession tool.
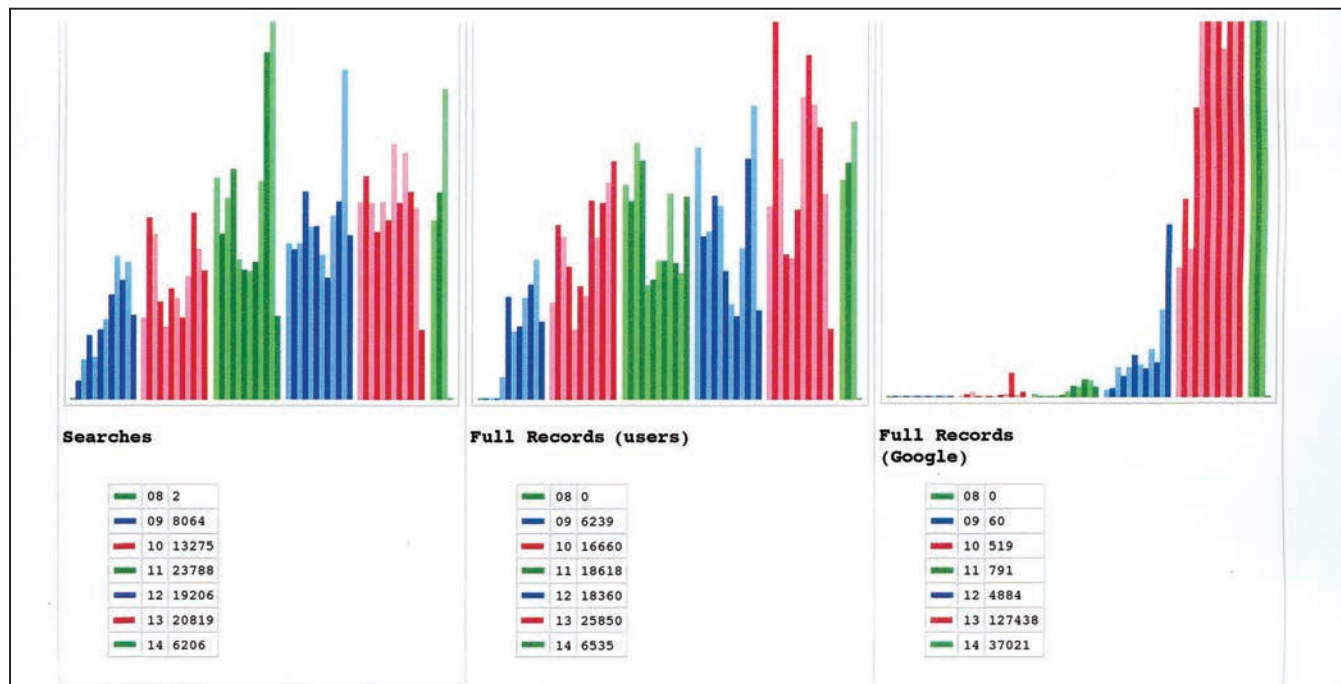
Setting Up and Training

Training was given in-house to staff for 2 days, and after that, one faculty member was chosen as the administrator. PastPerfect is password-protected, granting varying levels of access and editing rights. So we let students be trained by their supervisors and their cataloging/processing access was limited. Additionally, we established a core group of faculty and staff and tasked them with creating a guide/manual to address questions and any problems encountered. At that time, we chose which fields we wanted available for researchers, what should remain in-house (such as donor information), and how images were to be watermarked. We also chose our website design to coordinate with

the school's colors and named our customized version of PastPerfect Online, KenCat (Kentucky Catalog). This gave our users and staff an easy way to remember the site. A bit later, we also created a web address that is simple for researchers to remember (kencat.wku .edu) as opposed to the one provided by PastPerfect (wku.pastperfect-online .com/35749cgi/mweb.exe?request=ks).

When the site went live, we realized that we wanted additional search fields represented and the order of fields revised. Some of the fields we chose to list include email this site, feedback, and order image. We also included title, description, studio or publisher, print size, search terms, and caption. Search terms can be localized geographically, by family surname and in other ways to take advantage of the localized nature of cataloging in different institutions across the nation. The "order image" transaction request comes directly to the library's web reference account.

Slight Problems

The initial process of setting up Past-Perfect went very smoothly. Our use of it, however, was a bit trial and error. The "learning" mistakes we inevitably made, fortunately, were not fatal and could be corrected. In my opinion, our problems were use-related and did not reflect anything intrinsically wrong

▶

Searches

▬	08	2
▬	09	8064
▬	10	13275
▬	11	23788
▬	12	19206
▬	13	20819
▬	14	6206

Full Records (users)

▬	08	0
▬	09	6239
▬	10	16660
▬	11	18618
▬	12	18360
▬	13	25850
▬	14	6535

Full Records (Google)

▬	08	0
▬	09	60
▬	10	519
▬	11	791
▬	12	4884
▬	13	127438
▬	14	37021

Reports that can inform decisions

with the program. Case in point, we had some difficulties with data entry standardization. For example, with a famous person such as President Bill Clinton, should we use "Clinton, Bill"; "Clinton, William Jefferson"; or "Blythe, William Jefferson, III"? Having the faculty and staff come to a consensus on these terms, combined with a periodic cleanup of the records, went a long way in stopping this type of problem. On the input screen, we also needed to build in reminders for data entry staff not to type entries into data fields but rather to use agreed upon picklists before doing any original data entry. Reminders to use the lists greatly improved consistency of data entry and helped to eliminate typographical errors. PastPerfect consistently updates nomenclature, but the user must also update the picklists with these new names.

We have experienced space/server issues as our eager librarians/curator and university archivist have been busy populating the catalogs. Having the technical support contract has enabled us to work closely with the PastPerfect team to help allay these issues. On the museum side, the program lacks a built-in art thesaurus—e.g., the *Thesaurus of Geographic Names* (*TGN*) or the *Union List of Artists Names* (*ULAN*)—which are helpful for more art-oriented collections. It also requires frequent indexing and backing up, both of which can be time-consuming.

Conclusions

Because of the enhanced discoverability provided by using PastPerfect, our library, manuscript collection, and university archives have seen significant increases in use. We've had more requests for the unique materials housed in our building and more visitors to both the library and museum. As a side benefit, we have also received information regarding unidentified photographs which are unfortunately a significant part of our photographic collections. Monthly statistical reports (MWeb Search Report) are received from PastPerfect with measurements of searches by type, including Top 10 searches/records of the year, errors encountered, searches with more than 10,000 hits, and searches with no hits. From our reports, we can see that the sample search terms and subjects that receive the most hits are University Archives, Bowling Green, Family, Architectural Drawing, and Sheet Music. This detail enables us to see and then prioritize what researchers are looking for and, therefore, what we need to catalog. It also enables the museum to think about what artifacts need to be included in future exhibitions.

Since collections are also browseable through the "random images" feature, this offers the patron a serendipitous opportunity to find things for which they would have had difficulty formulating a search.

Additionally, as patrons have come in looking for sources that they found on KenCat, they can then gain more access to holdings through traditional methods and finding aids that are not, at this time, digitized. KenCat allows us to introduce and share many previously unused materials to existing and new users.

With more than 20 choices for content or digital management systems, there is no one-size-fits-all system. But overall, PastPerfect is an excellent off-the-shelf solution for WKU Libraries' department of special collections and the Kentucky Museum. It has the flexibility needed to handle the range of materials housed in our library, archives, and museum. Technical support from PastPerfect is responsive, and they are quick to return a call or email. The company is also open to suggestions from clients for changes.

We never know what treasures may be hiding in a donation, but from donation to dissemination, we know that this program allows us to process the material and get valuable cultural data out to the researchers. Plus, it produces a very useable, researcher-friendly digital presence for us.

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