World Digital Library

http://www.wdl.org

Synopsis

The World Digital Library (WDL) is an international effort to create a cross-culture digital library for significant and culturally important resources. Material formats include manuscripts, maps, rare books, musical scores, recordings, films, prints, photographs, and architectural drawings among other resources. Objects were submitted by libraries, archives, and other culture-related institutions. The library is searchable by place, time, topic, type of item, contributing institutions or by a keyword search in seven languages. The WDL is hosted and maintained by the Library of Congress.

Community

The mission of the World Digital Library (WDL) is to "Promote international and intercultural understanding; Expand the volume and variety of the cultural content on the Internet; Provide resources for educators, scholars, and general audiences; Build capacity in partner institutions to narrow the digital divide within and between countries" (World Digital Library, 2009). The WDL was created for a worldwide audience. It was the brainchild of U.S. Librarian of Congress James H. Billington in 2005. His idea was then developed by an international collaboration between the "Library of Congress, UNESCO, and five partner institutions - the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the National Library of Brazil, the National Library and Archives of Egypt, the National Library of Russia, and the Russian State Library [...] and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), and individuals and institutions in more than forty countries" (World Digital Library, 2009). The WDL is hosted and maintained by the Library of Congress. Major funding during development came from Google, Inc.; The Qatar Foundation; The Carnegie Corporation of New York; The King Abdullah University of Science and Technology; Microsoft, Inc.; The Lawrence and Mary Anne Tucker Foundation; The Bridges of Understanding Foundation; The James Madison Council of the Library of Congress (World Digital Library, 2009). The WDL partners meets once a year to look discuss financial sustainability of the project. Other sources of financial assistance were not disclosed on the website.

Content

Contributing institutions have provided a range of materials to the WDL. These formats include "manuscripts, maps, rare books, musical scores, recordings, films, prints, photographs, and architectural drawings" (World Digital Library, 2009) that represent "important and culturally significant content about every UNESCO member country" (World Digital Library, 2009). A collection development policy is reflected in the selection process that can be found at: http://www.wdl.org/en/about/faq.html. Most of the content is submitted by partners from libraries, archives, and other cultural related institutions. It is organized by "place, time, topic, type of item, and contributing institution" (World Digital Library, 2009). While these materials
are from institutions around the world, but the Library of Congress is responsible for hosting and maintaining the WDL.

**Services**

The website is accessible at [http://www.wdl.org](http://www.wdl.org). Anyone with internet access can visit the website. However, due to the structure of the website that objects can be zoomed in on, the visitor's browser must be able to handle the resource intensive zooming features. Videos and audio resources are also included on the website, which may provide problems for users who do not have sound capabilities for their device. Users can either browse the website via place, time, topic, type of item, or contributing institution (World Digital Library, 2009) or by a keyword search in seven languages: Arabic, English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian, and Chinese. These are the official languages of the United Nations (World Digital Library, 2009). In order to make the objects searchable, bibliographic metadata was entered into a standardized form. Each of these entries were then duplicated in all supported languages (World Digital Library, 2009). Any institution who believes they have culturally significant materials are urged to contact the WDL. For visitors needing help in navigating the website and using all of it's features, there is a help page at: [http://www.wdl.org/en/help.html](http://www.wdl.org/en/help.html).

**Technology**

The exact names of hardware and software are not listed on the website. However, technologies which were developed for the website are:

- A new cataloging application was developed to support the metadata requirements.
- A centralized tool with a translation memory was used, which prevents translators from having to translate the same word or phrase twice.
- An interface was developed, which features the WDL content in ways that are appealing to nontraditional users and that encourage exploration of primary sources.
- New technologies continue to be developed, improving workflow and reducing the time elapsed between content selection and availability on the site (World Digital Library, 2009).

The only link to another digital library was to UNESCO's [Memory of the World Project](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/communication-information/memory-of-the-world/). The WDL is a work in progress website that is mature for full usage, but strives to include content from underrepresented countries. However, to gain access to these materials is an issue of funding, political access, technology resources, as well as knowledge of digitization and cataloging processes.

**Bibliography**


