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Website analysis

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A functional website is very important in the archives field, especially in today’s technology-driven world. Not only is a website important but it is also important to have the intuition’s finding aids online as well. Without these, institutions can get lost among those who have many to most of their finding aids online as well as digital collections available to researchers. Thus, having a well organized website is a key part of having an online presence. Finding aids should allow researchers to quickly gather information so that if they cannot find what they need they can move on (Cox, 2007). The following paragraphs will look at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, located at the University of Texas at Austin. This intuition has many holdings that relate to both local and national history. It will analyze the finding aids available online as well as how the holdings are put together online.

1. **Finding Aids**

*1A. Location of the Finding Aids*

To find the Dolph Briscoe Center’s finding aides you have to mouse over the research menu when then gives you the option for clicking on “finding aids” Under hear it says that “A growing number of the Center's finding aids is available at Texas Archival Resources Online (TARO), a website consortium of manuscript repositories in the state.” (The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, 2010, http://www.cah.utexas.edu/services/finding\_items.php). Going to this website, it shows that there are 78 pages of finding aides. These are a lot of pages to go through. Yes, it is in alphabetical order but the formatting of how they are put onto the page is cluttered and it is not easily accessible as if you were to have the alphabet at the top of the page and a person could click on a letter to get to the finding aids under that later (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/browse/browse_cah1.html>). Other than the TARO website, the Dolph Briscoe Center does not having their finding aids listed on their website. By not having their finding aids directly on their website, they do save web space but compared to the ease of access that having them in a better format on their website would bring, it is a small thing. Overall, by not having their finding aids on their actual website, detracts and deters researchers from accessing possible materials. Lastly, when Googled, the results did find the finding aid on the TARO website as well as the link the UT-Austin library catalog.

*1B. Function and parts of a finding aid*

Once the finding aids are located, these are the parts that are included: Name, date, creator, descriptive summary, scope and contents, restrictions, index terms, administrative information, description of series, and finally, inventory. The function of these different parts works well. One thing that really stands out is that when each part is clicked, there is a link that reads “return to the table of contents” which is a good feature if you have more than one page. On the flip side of this, it does not quite work for Dolph Briscoe Center because all their “table of contents” is one page and so it just reverts back to the top of the page. The other part of the finding aids that detracts for their functionality is how their inventory is presented on the webpage. There is lack of spaces between some things and spaces between others. To have it be more functional, equal spacing should be employed. Something that I noticed that I have not seen on a lot of other websites is that the Dolph Briscoe Center employs in their finding aids, index terms. These terms could be helpful to a researcher looking for them to search other places. Overall, the formatting of the finding aids are the same and this leads to a good functionality to the researcher in using them.

**Holdings**

It is hard to tell from this website what the entire Center does hold, though if the TARO is any indication, it is a lot of items. Instead of listing their holdings, the Center has listed their strengths which, according to their website, they focus on Texas, the southwest, and U.S. History (Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, 2010, http://www.cah.utexas.edu/collections/index.php). Under each one, there are different holdings that fall under that category. For example, under the “American South” strength, the Dolph Briscoe Center lists “The Natchez Trace Collection” (Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, 2010, http://www.cah.utexas.edu/collections/american\_south.php). Overall they have sixteen different strengths listed. This helps highlights the collections that the center feels are important to them as well as gives the researcher what type of materials that they are likely to find in this institution.

Another way to look through the Dolph Briscoe Center’s holdings is through their digital media. According to their website, their digital media is “an online database of items digitized from Briscoe Center collections, including documents, photographs, sound recordings, and moving images.” (TheDolph Briscoe Center for American History, 2010, http://www.cah.utexas.edu/services/history\_online.php). There are three ways to do this, either by searching with terms, browsing by collection, or by subject. All three ways are convenient to looking for items that may be needed. When clicking on subject, they are in alphabetical order and run down the page. While this is good, it is clunky and it makes the researcher have to search through the entire page or use the find function of their web browser. A better way would be either to have a drop down menu with all the terms in it or have an alphabet listed at the top and the researcher could click on the letter he or she needed and it would drop them to that section. While browsing, there two problems that immediate became apparent. The first is, when this digital media, at least with the photographs, is that they open up in a new window. This can distract from the viewing of the pictures and can create headaches if the researcher has a pop-up blocker on his or her web browser. The second problem is that many of the photos do not have any descriptions. There is a title but no information about the picture, not to mention on one picture there is an incorrect description.

Lastly, the Dolph Briscoe Center has rich media, which the description for reads “moving images and sound recordings enriched with access tools such as cartographic data, transcripts, and indexes synchronized to audio/visual content” (Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, 2010, http://www.cah.utexas.edu/services/history\_online.php). Just like the digital media, you can search this section in the same ways, except the difference is in the browsing. Here you can do it either by collection or by strength. One major problem that was found was when clicked on the movie, *Silent Night, Silent Day*, there was no sound (http://glifos.cah.utexas.edu/index.php/BBailey:Silent\_Night%2C\_Silent\_Day) even though there is a narrator listed. This is problem because if you have digital media on your site, it should work for all users. Overall, their collection of media in this category is fairly small. It does give the researcher a different approach if looking for different types of resources.

Overall, the Dolph Briscoe Center at the University of Texas-Austin has a well maintained website. There are some things that work well for them, such as putting their holdings underneath headings labeled strengths so show which areas the center is focused on. This would definitely help a researcher who was coming in from out of state to know if the Center was a good place for them to start looking.

The main problem, however, with the Dolph Briscoe Center’s website is in their finding aids. There are several things that contribute to this. The first is that their finding aids are not run by them but rather through Texas Archival Resources Online (TARO), which they do have a link to when you click on their finding aids link. This creates a problem for them because it doesn’t allow them to make their finding aids easily accessible through alphabetizing. Yes, they are alphabetized on TARO but you have to shift through 78 pages to find them. It would be much easier and cleaner if the Dolph Briscoe Center had the finding aids on their website and put the alphabet at the top of the finding aid page with a link on each letter or even sets of letter (IE: A – F) and listed the finding aids for those letters or sets of letters. It would be much easier for the researcher to find a finding aid if done this way.

The other thing that does not work well for their finding aids is really cosmetic and could be fixed easily. One part of this is that they have a link that returns the researcher to the top of the finding aid. However, that is not what this button says it does. It says “return to the table of contents” which does not make sense. The second part is that their organizational structure in the series description is not as easy as it could be to see what is in each box. For most of the finding aids, they are okay but some are not.

In this day, technology is changing the way archivists approach almost everything. One of these things is a website. A good website will lead researchers to your finding aids and get exposure to the items in your collection. Without a good and well designed website, researchers can get lost, frustrated, and even leave before perusing the collections further. Thus, the analysis of finding aids from time to time will lead to a better understanding at how researchers look at finding aids which will help in the creation of your own finding aids.

Bibliography

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