A Model for Online Archives

Web-based access to archival collections rarely occurs through a single platform. Media formats, budget, staff expertise, and other factors influence how points of access are selected and utilized.

The New School Archives and Special Collections offers an example of the way online presentation is fragmented by portals, and suggestions for managing the divide.

CREATE A FLEXIBLE HOME SITE

HOW Use a content management system, like Drupal.

WHY Enable staff to easily edit and publish information.
Create a space to link and describe division between finding aids and digital collections.
Support documentation of complex media collections, like web and email.

ADHERE TO A VISUAL IDENTITY

HOW Build cohesive application themes that reference each other and follow home institution branding guidelines.

WHY Offer a more seamless user experience while navigating between sites.

ESTABLISH DEVELOPMENT REPOSITORIES

HOW Establish two application instances: a public, production version, and a private, development environment.

WHY Support ongoing software upgrades, feature testing, and theme design.
Expose bugs and broken features in the development repository before going live.
Remove fear of unknown outcomes during updates to applications.

RESPOND TO FORMAL AND INFORMAL USER FEEDBACK

HOW Consider stumbling points (and praise!) received while working with researchers.
Develop scalable user studies and accessibility checks to periodically review applications.
Use development environment to incrementally implement changes based on feedback.

WHY Make collecting user feedback a manageable, ongoing effort.
Improve applications as accessibility tools and UX guidance evolves.

CONTRIBUTE TO COLLECTION AGGREGATORS

HOW Identify regional and national aggregators, learn their mapping guidelines.

WHY Receive increased exposure for collection records.
Benefit from digitization support or cataloging direction (smaller institutions).
Become part of cross-institutional and regional cultural heritage networks.

USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO SHARE COLLECTION EXPERTISE

HOW Select platforms and create posting schedule based on staff time and interests.

WHY Engage with curious audiences through observations and narratives from the archives.
Share archival material without adhering to cataloging standards.

AUTHOR
Katie Martinez
martinek@newschool.edu

THE REPOSITORY
The New School is a university for scholars, designers, and artists, located in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City. The Archives has particular strengths in 20th century fashion, interior, and design practices.