



Impact of Promotional Events and Routes of Access on OurDigitalWorld's (ODW) Digital Newspaper Collection



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Impact

Access

Promotion

Outreach

About ODW

OurDigitalWorld (ODW) is a non-profit organization that “supports digital stewardship of community cultural heritage” by collaborating with libraries, archives, museums, historical societies, and community groups to build and maintain digital collections (1).

Website: <https://ourdigitalworld.net/>

Background

ODW has the fourth largest digital newspaper collection in the world, which consists of two major newspaper portals, Ontario Community Newspapers (OCN) and INK, providing open access to hundreds of local Ontario newspaper titles from 1810 to present, spanning 2 million pages (2).

Digital newspapers provide access to heritage news, birth, marriages, and death (BMD) index records, and newspaper clippings in electronic format, allowing visitors to virtually access the collection while the originals remain on-site (3). Securing grants from government agencies is essential for local heritage organizations to launch, build, and maintain their digitization initiatives in order to ensure the continuity of local culture and heritage of past to people in the future. Thus, assessing the impact of and access to digital newspaper collections is important for determining promotion strategies to increase usage and awareness of the collections.

Executive Summary

In this study, site traffic for 24 newspaper sites from OurDigitalWorld's (ODW) digital newspaper collection and the Ontario Community Newspaper (OCN) aggregate site were analyzed using data from Google Analytics. The study assessed the impact of (e.g. site usage, Web presence) and routes of Web access to the newspaper sites from 2016 to 2018 in order to determine strategies for promotion and outreach of the digital collection.

Results of the Site Usage Analysis suggest that there is a need to increase the Web presence and public awareness of ODW's digital newspaper collection and to educate users about the newspaper sites. The top four Routes of Access to the newspaper sites are Search Engines (especially Google/organic), Direct Access, ODW sites (e.g. news.ourontario.ca), and Library Sites. Peak Usage Analysis led to discovery of channels of promotion for ODW and public libraries. Recommendations for ODW and public libraries include reaching out to external organizations to insert links to newspaper sites and the OCN site, publicizing newspaper-related events on their website and social media pages, and educating users through user guides and workshops. Through promotion, it is hoped that users will gain a sense of familiarity of the newspaper sites in order to perpetuate the continuity of the collection.

Methodology (Brief)

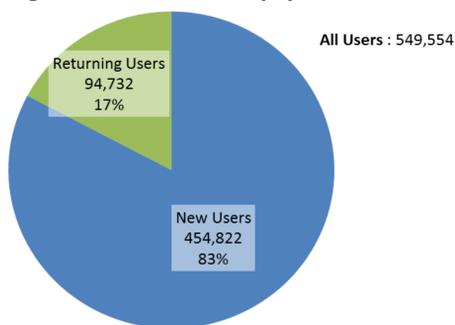
Data was obtained from Google Analytics from March 1, 2016 to March 31, 2018 for the 24 individual Ontario community newspaper sites from ODW's digital newspaper collection and from the Ontario Community Newspaper (OCN) aggregate site. Quantitative data (e.g. number of users, number of sessions) and qualitative data (e.g. source/medium URLs) were exported from Google Analytics as .csv files and copied onto Excel for data analysis. The data from Excel was then analyzed (e.g. sorted into categories) and represented using visual representations (e.g. pie graphs) created with Excel.

Site User Analysis assessed the web presence and public awareness of the collection via the number of new and returning users. Knowing the top 100 Routes of Access of individual newspaper sites helped to infer end-users to target and Web locations to insert Web access points. Peak Usage Analysis of 12 newspaper sites with significant usage peaks (see Newspaper Sites Studied) and sites with low usage explored how promotional events drove site usage.

Findings & Interpretations

Site User Analysis

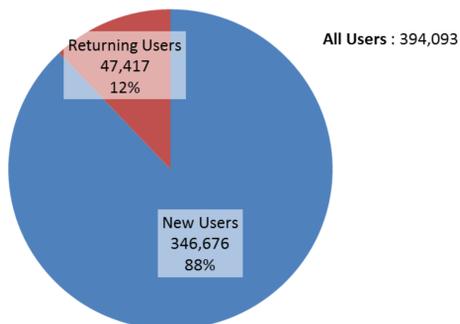
Usage of Individual Newspaper Sites



Based on usage data of 24 newspaper sites from March 1, 2016 to March 31, 2018

Figure 1: Average percentage of returning users and new users of 24 individual newspaper sites.

Usage of Ontario Community Newspaper (OCN) Site



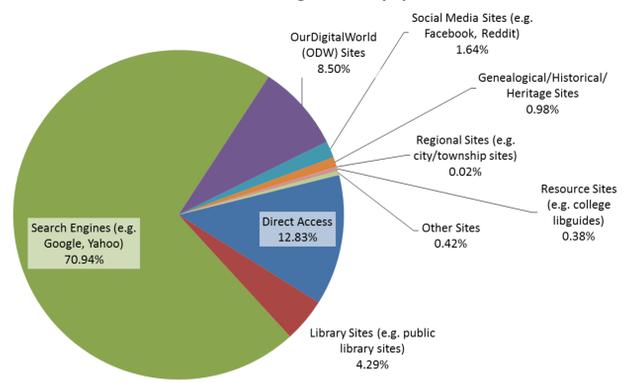
Based on usage data from March 1, 2016 to March 31, 2018

Figure 2: Average percentage of returning users and new users of the OCN aggregate site.

The low average percentage of returning users for individual newspaper sites (17%) and the OCN aggregate sites (12%) suggests that users may not be familiar with the site, might not have found the site to be useful, or the site was not easily accessible (Figures 1 & 2). The high percentage of new users for individual newspaper sites (83%) and the OCN aggregate sites (88%) may hint that most users are beginning to build awareness and discovering the usefulness of digital newspapers (Figures 1 & 2).

Routes of Access

How Users Access ODW's Digital Newspaper Collections



Data is based on the number of sessions accessed by users from March 1, 2016 to March 31, 2018

Figure 3: Routes of access to 24 individual newspaper sites and the Ontario Community Newspaper (OCN) aggregate site.

The top four routes of access to the 24 individual newspaper sites and OCN aggregate site (based on the total number of web sessions) are Search Engines (70.94%), Direct Access (12.83%), ODW sites (8.50%), and Library Sites (4.29%) (Figure 3). Other sites of lower percentages are Social Media Sites, Genealogical /Historical /Heritage sites, and Resources Sites (e.g. University LibGuides). The source URLs of the referrals infer that end-users may be the general public (e.g. using sites for personal interest, part of a genealogy group), post-secondary students (e.g. doing research from a LibGuide), library staffs (e.g. dedicated local history and genealogy page), historians, and genealogists.

Peak Usage Analysis

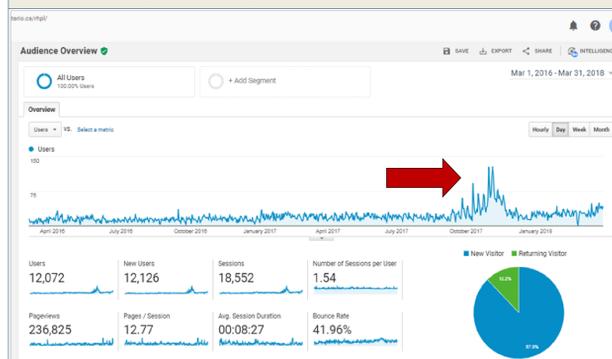


Figure 4: Example of a Peak Usage Analysis. The Google Analytics graph shows usage peaks (red arrow) of Richmond Hill Public Library's newspaper site based on the total number of users on a given date. The date of the usage peak and the top 1-3 referral URLs are then correlated with possible a promotional activity through a procedural search strategy (e.g. search on library's event calendar, new feeds, and social media pages; keyword searches on a search engine).

The Peak Usage Analysis was inconclusive as a result of the ambiguity of search results and the observation that library events are not being archived after one year on library websites and social media pages. The search process for promotional events provided insight and ideas of avenues to pursue for future promotional strategies (e.g. library's e-resource page, Facebook page, and Twitter account) and inferred on the pitfalls of sites with low usage (e.g. no corresponding library website, no links to newspaper or ODW sites).

Recommendations

Based on the findings, there is a great need to increase the Web presence and awareness of newspaper sites in ODW's digital newspaper collection. Below are recommendations for ODW and public libraries for increasing the number of Web access points and site usage and helping users to gain familiarity of the sites.

For ODW

- Reach out to local/regional organizations (e.g. genealogical groups, historical societies, township/regional sites) and ask them to insert links to ODW-related sites and newspaper sites on their websites
- Advise all public libraries to insert their corresponding newspaper site and ODW-related sites on their e-resources page and/or dedicated “Local History and Genealogy” page
- Provide templates of user guides and tutorial videos to libraries, heritage organizations (e.g. genealogical boards), and post-secondary institutions to ease of task of educating the public about ODW's digital newspaper collections
- Continue to publicize events on ODW's news blog and social media pages (e.g. special collections from individual newspaper sites, workshops)

For Public Libraries

- Ensure that the library's website has a dedicated “Local History and Genealogy” page with links to e-resources, including the corresponding newspaper site and ODW-related sites (e.g. news.ontario.ca)
- Post concise user guides and tutorial videos on a dedicated page to educate users about site functions and features (e.g. basic and advanced search) and possible uses (e.g. historical research, genealogical research)
- Publicize library events related to the newspaper collection (e.g. genealogy workshops, newspaper research database workshop) on the library's events calendar, news feed, and social media pages
- Educate patrons about uses of the newspaper sites through online resources and workshops

About the Newspaper Sites Studied

The Ontario Community Newspaper (OCN) aggregate site (<http://news.ourontario.ca/>) allows access to all Ontario-based digital newspapers from ODW's collection. 23 newspaper sites were selected from the list of sites from OurOntario.ca: Newspaper Index (<http://www.ourontario.ca/holdings/News.html>) and analyzed. Note that two of the newspaper sites, Halton News and the Peel Newspaper Index are small regional aggregate sites for two to three individual newspaper agencies. The 24th site, Lincoln Public Library Digital Collection newspaper site (not found on the list) was accessed via the OCN aggregate site.

The 12 newspaper sites with significant usage peaks are: Clarington Digital Newspaper Collection, Halton Hills Newspapers, Karwatha Lakes Public library Digital Archive, Lincoln Public Library Digital Collections, Newmarket's Digital Newspaper Project, Orillia News, Views, & More, Oshawa Newspapers, Mississauga News, Richmond Public Library Digital Collections, Timmins Newspapers, Whitchurch-Stouffville Newspaper Index, and Woodstock Newspapers.

Acknowledgements

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