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#### **Build It Once: A Basic Primer for the Creation of Online Exhibitions**

By Sarah Goodwin Thiel. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2007. 101 pp. Soft cover. Illustrations. Appendices. Bibliography. Index. ISBN 978-0-8108-5225-9.

An archives serves two important roles: providing a place where collections can be preserved and supplying a space where users can have access to these collections. In an attempt to preserve materials and at the same time encourage greater user awareness and access to specific collections, many archives and libraries with special collections have started online exhibition programs. A thin book, *Build It Once* in eight chapters attempts to be a basic manual for creating online exhibits intended for librarians and archivists who suddenly find themselves thrust into the role of creating exhibitions from scratch. Drawing from her work with online exhibitions at the Spencer Library at the University of Kansas, author Sarah Goodwin Thiel wrote this book with several purposes: first, to give practical advice at the start of a project and guidance along the way; second, to serve as a useful reference guide after the first project is completed and subsequent ones are being considered. The casual tone of this volume, the detailed step-by-step instructions, and the examples drawn from the online exhibitions of the Spencer Library, make readers feel that they are getting advice directly from someone who has been there and knows what she is talking about.

Attempting to walk the reader through the entire process of setting up an "exhibition-style" website is an ambitious undertaking, and so, with no superfluous text, the author gets down to business. Chapter 1 is three pages long and addresses how to define an exhibition's scope. Critical questions must be asked: Who is the target audience? What will the exhibit encompass? What resources do you have and what design considerations do you need to keep in mind before you start? Chapter 2 is two pages longer than the first and discusses the selection of equipment such as scanners, digital cameras, tripods, and imaging and Web-authoring software. Thiel also discusses a pattern common in creative technology projects—no matter how thorough the planning process, something always needs to be reconsidered. Speaking from my own experiences creating three online exhibitions from scratch, this should not be underestimated. Equipment needs, for instance, can evolve once the project is underway either because of the fragility of the material itself, or because of the inefficiency of the equipment initially selected. The author does well to point out that extra funds and lead time should be budgeted into every project, just in case.

Chapters 3 and 4 are surprisingly concise at six pages combined. Here, the author discusses the layout of the main Web page and how it relates to secondary and tertiary pages. She also defines the main exhibition components. At this point, I had expected a more detailed discussion of unifying a website's appearance, but Thiel only states that it is good practice to use cascading stylesheets and tables and then provides instructions for making them. She mentions design principles later, and then only in general terms. Chapters 5 and 6 provide detailed instructions for creating digital images to be used as exhibition graphics, navigation menus, and exhibition material and then how to insert these images once the layout has been established. Chapters 7 and 8 explore how Macromedia Dreamweaver works and how to use it to create an exhibition through step-by-step explanations and checklists. All six of these technical chapters use screenshot examples and fundamental design and Web architecture principles to illustrate the author's points, making all of her instructions very easy to follow.

The final part of the book contains appendices, a bibliography, and an index, and it includes much useful information in a section on the Leab Exhibition Awards evaluation criteria, a digitization glossary, and W3C Quick Tips to Make Websites Accessible. However, I did find this section incomplete for future reference. The bibliography could have benefited from including other good online exhibit sites.

Indeed, in the introduction and in chapter 3, Thiel suggests looking at a wide variety of websites to get ideas, yet I feel a complete novice would probably welcome a few more specific suggestions. For example, <http://www.sil.si.edu/SILPublications/Online-Exhibitions>, the Smithsonian Institution's link to online exhibitions created by libraries, archives, historical societies, and museums, focuses on paper collections, and it is international and multilingual in scope. The author also could have mentioned a few previous winners of the Leab Awards and commented on features that make an exhibit particularly good, or how a technique or style influenced a particular Spencer Library online exhibition. In keeping with the conciseness of the book, this information could have been conveyed in a paragraph or listed in bullet points.

For the most part, the book serves as a case study of how to build an online exhibition using examples from the Spencer Library. The illustrative screenshots included throughout the book, not in color unfortunately, invite the reader to look at all the Spencer Library's online exhibitions. In viewing them, one can see how Web design techniques and style have evolved over time. Although in the bibliography Thiel does refer readers to *Creating a Winning Online Exhibition: A Guide for Libraries, Archives, and Museums* and *Homepage Usability: 50 Websites Deconstructed*, both of which provide in-depth design and usability implementation, she might have recommended other design books that she used herself. I was curious about what key ideas worked for the Spencer

Library's exhibits and how their creators came to some design decisions. I also wondered how earlier facets of one particular exhibit might have influenced decisions on subsequent ones.

The Spencer Library seems to have some fantastic collections, and looking at some of its online exhibitions, one cannot help but be impressed at the range. However, whether the author intended it or not, her book implies to novice Web designers that any special collection will automatically provide enough inspiration to make a good online exhibition. Whether it will or not depends, in fact, on the creativity and intuition of staff. Online exhibitions can be unified visually in three major ways: by color, motif, or metaphor. It would have been helpful to readers if Thiel had analyzed any of the three websites she sampled in her book. She might have stated explicitly how the color scheme for *John Gould: His Birds and His Beasts* was chosen to complement the artist's drawings, watercolors, and prints of the natural world; or how the metallic background image for *The Great Exhibition of the Industry of Nations, 1851*, which resembles an early machine engineering plan, links visually with the Victorian era; or, that in the *Frosted Windows: 300 Years of St. Petersburg Through Western Eyes*, "window" is a metaphor for a limited view into another world. These three techniques work fairly well online, and using them to illustrate design ideas (in addition to creating something practical) need not have detracted from the book's brevity.

The final concern that some readers may have with this book is its emphasis on Macromedia Dreamweaver software. For those who may know some manual HTML/XML coding and are in the process of acquiring software to assist with layout, this book is a useful guide to learning about specific features and advantages of Dreamweaver. For hand-coding technicians, or those who aspire to be, this is probably not the right book. But then it does not claim to be. Thiel intends this book to be a "practical, focused road map" for those who consider themselves "un-techie" or "techno-newbies." She succeeds with this effort overall. This book shows exactly how the world of archives and special collections can thrive in the digital age and gain new audiences, and it provides basic standards and best practices anyone can use.

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