Working with graphic design students to promote 'Land of Lost Content' at Leeds Met

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As Leeds Metropolitan is a university of festivals and partnerships, the library was given the opportunity this year to host a festival to promote the library and all its services to the university. The library festival was a week of events and activities to promote the library and its space in new ways. It was a good way to remind staff and students of the value of libraries, not only as places to learn but also as places to enhance our leisure and working lives.

We spend a lot of money on electronic resources and promote them to staff and students via our library website and in training sessions; however, usage statistics suggest the resources are still not as well used as they could be. Google and other search engines are often the first place students look to find information. Therefore we wanted to publicise our resources and also teach students how to use them, by using innovative methods. In November 2008 the academic librarians decided to promote some information databases using the slogan 'database of the week' during the festival. Leeds Metropolitan University library is split

into two campuses and at our civic quarter site we chose to promote the database 'Land of Lost Content'. This was because graphic design and art students are based at our campus and we also thought this database would attract a wide range of students who might otherwise think that electronic databases contain little of interest for them. Our promotion has been so successful in many ways that we would like to share our experience with other librarians.

SUBSCRIBING TO THE DATABASE

We obtained 'Land of Lost Content' in November 2007 after a recommendation from the school of contemporary art and graphic design. The database was initially introduced to the school by urban design specialist Wayne Hemingway, founder of the 'Red or Dead' clothing brand. There was an overwhelming response from the academic staff, who thought this was a resource that our students would greatly benefit from. After we had started our subscription, Wayne Hemingway came to the university to give a talk to Leeds Met students and academic staff, and the talk included a demonstration of the 'Land of Lost Content' database.

WHAT IS 'LAND OF LOST CONTENT'?

'Land of Lost Content' is the largest archive of twentieth-century popular culture, with over 500,000 downloadable images from every area of design, including advertising, graphics, textiles, fashion and product design. It is particularly useful for students in the areas of cultural studies, contemporary art, graphic design, architecture and landscape and design. As well as images the database provides historical, social and artistic background information plus bibliographical material to help with referencing. Examples of material to be found on 'Land of Last Content' include a collection of washing powder packets from every decade of the twentieth century, houses, apartments, public spaces, furniture designs, vintage fonts, illustrations and the contents of a Second World War bomb shelter.

The database is quite different from a lot of electronic information resources because it is eye-catching and colourful, which adds to its appeal to students. The images are of use to a wide range of students. For example, a sociology student investigating feminism might use the database to find images of adverts portraying women. Media and popular culture students might find the images useful for an understanding of twentieth-

century media history, and design students have a wealth of images to choose from, from Philippe Starck furniture to a Mary Quant dress. By using the 'object histories' users can find a detailed historical and social study of the chosen objects. The database is helpful also for those students who simply want to find an appropriate image to illustrate a presentation.

INVOLVING THE ACADEMIC STAFF AND STUDENTS

Once we had decided to promote 'Land of Lost Content' as 'database of the week', we approached the head of school for contemporary arts and graphic design, since we felt our promotion might work best if it was done in close conjunction with the school, particularly by involving the students themselves. We explained that we wanted students to help promote the database by creating posters we could use to advertise the library festival and the workshops. This information was forwarded to appropriate course leaders who then placed the request for volunteers onto student notice boards. Those students who were interested then contacted us directly.

Three motivated, enthusiastic students contacted us. They were a good group, each with different ideas. If more students had contacted us it might have been more difficult to organise. The students came to see us in our office, so we could share ideas and let them know what we had in mind. One of the students decided to design a poster to promote the library festival, and the other two used images from the database in creative ways, to provide practical examples to other students as to how the images could be manipulated and used. They created postcards of images on several themes of subjects within the university, sport, music and film, to demonstrate the database's wide appeal. They advertised the fact that this is a database of twentieth-century images with historical content, by using images with nostalgic appeal, such as 1980s roller-skates.

The students all used the work they produced for us as part of their portfolios, so the work was passed to their lecturers for assessment before being sent to us in the library. When we received the work we then had to pass the images through the university's publicity department for approval before using them in our publicity material. We also contacted the project administrator on the 'Land of Lost Content' project, to let her know about our plans to promote the database, and she sent us some bookmarks, leaflets and A3 posters that we could use. We had checked with her

about buying those images we wanted to use on our PowerPoint presentation, as we wanted images with high resolution. (Initial images found on 'Land of Lost Content' are free; however, they contain a small watermark.) After meeting with the students, the head of school and the publicity manager in the library, we decided to keep the images containing watermarks, rather than pay for the high-resolution images. This kept the cost of the project down, and we also felt that since we were promoting the database, the watermark with the 'Land of Lost Content' logo did not detract from the overall effect of the poster. At this point we also had to negotiate an agreement with the library and the school regarding the cost of printing and paper. The graphic design students put their time in for free because they used their work for their own portfolios.

The wording we used to advertise our sessions covered the following:

'Land of Lost Content: the world's largest archive of 20th century popular culture with over 500,000 images from every area of design. Also provides detailed historical, social and artistic background information which can be used within design work or contextual studies. Drop-in for half an hour to this session. We will explain how to log on and register to use the database. Print off your favourite image and we will add it to our display at the end of the session and give you one to take away. Your name will be entered into the prize draw at the end of the week!'

This information appeared on the poster and on the plasma screens in the university coffee bar and the library.

FEEDBACK AND PARTICIPATION IN WORKSHOPS

We delivered four drop-in sessions on using 'Land of Lost Content' and those students who attended provided us with positive feedback. One student commented that if she had known about the resource earlier it would have saved her a lot of time. She had been searching for an image of an old-fashioned telephone and couldn't find anything suitable using Google. The session with the highest attendance was one that directly followed a lecture in which the lecturer had mentioned the session and suggested that students attend. This told us a lot about the value of timing the sessions to fit in with students' lectures, and the importance of tutors being enthusiastic about such sessions. Unfortunately we had a poor turnout for the other sessions. However, because students had seen posters advertising the database and

Figure 1. Poster advertising our training

the sessions, and also because they were aware of the promotional work being done by the three students, this spread the word about the database, and therefore increased its visibility and usage.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

We learned that without support and encouragement from teaching staff it can be very difficult to persuade students to attend library workshops. When working on any future joint projects we will also be clear right from the beginning about who is going to pay for the printing, materials and so on, to avoid confusion later on.

We feel the whole event was extremely successful as a way of promoting the database by 'word of mouth' and increasing awareness and usage of the resource. Its success stemmed partly from the promotion being very student-led – we found that students seem to listen to other students more than to librarians – and also by the collaborative nature of our working with staff and students in the school. We have built up a very good working relationship with the school of contemporary art and graphic design, and having staff promote the library and its resources is invaluable to us in getting the library message across. The workshops also promoted the database amongst our library staff, since some of them attended the sessions. It not only enhanced the working relationship we have with the school but has encouraged us to work closely with students in any other promotional events. The students taught us to unleash

the full potential of the database, and showed us how they approached a working brief.

At the ARLIS (art librarians) conference in Cambridge (15 – 17 July 2009) we presented another poster that the students designed that displayed all the work we had done during the library festival on 'Land of Lost Content'. It was lovely to discuss the project with other art librarians who were interested in how the project had developed. They were particularly interested to see how the students had used the database and that we were so enthusiastic about the students' work. This was a great conclusion to a project and relationship that had developed over the year.

'I think the Land Of Lost Content website is a valuable source of information. It fascinates me how you can find just about anything through their archives. I could spend days searching through the images, getting inspired by unraveling the past.'

Mari Hughes
Graphic arts and design
Level 3

'As a Graphic arts and design student I have found Land Of Lost Content to be a fantastic resource. The database is full of fasinating by-gone graphics which I have found extremely useful within my own work.'

Sam Stevenson
Graphic arts and design
Level 3

'Using Land Of Lost Content is a very random process as your never quite know what your going to find. I absolutley love this aspect of the site and always find some amazing images each time I search for something. The database is very easy to use and a fantastic archive of inspiring images.'

Kayleigh Smith
Graphic arts and design
Level 3

Figure 2. Student feedback

† Catherine was also recently covering the role of Academic Librarian for Architecture, Landscape & Design; Contemporary Art & Graphic Design; and Film, TV & Performing Art along with Kirsty