

MARKETING ARCHIVES IN THE DIGITAL AGE: WHAT CAN A SMALL ARCHIVES DO?

Presented by Maggie Shapley, University Archivist, Australian National University at the Australian Society of Archivists Annual Conference, Perth, 6-9 August 2008

We've probably all had that experience with a taxi driver where they ask what you do. You say you're an archivist - they don't understand and by way of explanation, you say you 'work in an archives' - you 'look after records' and then they, thinking of 78s and LPs, say 'oh, yes, the Film and Sound Archives'. This is just to illustrate something we already know - that the number of people who know what an archives is and how it might be of interest to them is, to put some positive spin on it, a genuine marketing opportunity.

We all know that once we make the archives personal, people do care, and care passionately and then tell us their life story and that of their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. It is this personal connection that is the subject of just one of the double-page spreads in the publication *Archives Matter!*

This joint project between the Australian Society of Archivists and the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities took as its target audience 'the broad Australian public' and particularly 'people who might think that archives are of no interest to them'. The idea of the publication was that it would convince this audience that archives were relevant to them.

It does this by linking archives to current concerns and agenda, such as climate change and the environment. On another double-page spread, the images tell the story: the degradation of land through mining, rainfall records, the extinct Tasmanian tiger, the Murray River, and the existence of towns in our dry continent. Other pages relate to the preservation of the built environment, social inclusion and community identity, access to information, and of course, the Education Revolution. Some of these words: *education, access, environment*, are quite deliberately emblazoned on the cover.

The publication also deliberately avoids stereotypes of researchers, archivists and archives institutions. None of the researchers are elderly male historians, and all archivists pictured are using technology to do their jobs.

Despite the digital age in which we live, there is still a role for something to hand out, for a visitor, colleague or stranger to take away with them. While it's possible to put the same information on the web (and it's there on the ASA's site at www.archivists.org.au) there is not the same encouragement to browse and find out more, as there is when you have a booklet like *Archives Matter!* in your hand.

The role that this booklet claims is not one that can be met by a webpage, even with exactly the same information on it. But an important feature of the booklet is that it provides web addresses of both its sponsors, CAARA and the ASA, if more information is needed.

You might also find it useful to cut and paste, as it were, from the text in your next budget submission or respond to the question 'what exactly do archivists do?' by quoting from page 5 which summarises 'the role of the archivist'. I would urge all archivists to have a copy of *Archives Matter!* in their briefcase at all times because when you start looking for opportunities to promote archives you will definitely find them.

An important point to make about this publication, for small archives, is that it is available to you for free. It is a good illustration of what I call 'zero-budget marketing principles' for small archives:

- Target internal structures and services
- Target larger institutions and networks
- Organise your promotional activities so others pay
- Invest time and energy rather than cash

Often we know what we should do to market our archives but don't actually have a budget to make it happen. I consider my own archives, the ANU Archives which incorporates the Noel Butlin Archives Centre, as a small archives though I'm conscious that with 17.5 kilometres of records our collection is large, larger than some State Archives and major manuscript collections. What's small is the number of staff for the collection (6.4) and the budget.

No matter what sort of archives you are, chances are you are part of a larger whole. We're always looking for opportunities within our larger organisation, the University, to make others aware of us as an active part of the organisation: any contact with the Chancery is prioritised, such as reference enquiries, and we volunteer our services for University celebrations, events and publications. We also look for opportunities to use services provided by other parts of the organisation: the Outreach area is mostly producing promotional and informational material for students – which is the same old, same old, every year – so it welcomes the opportunity to produce our brochures and signage. The ANU digital repository is primarily for current research, but also serves us as a reliable repository for our electronic transfers and our digitised images.

Being an active part of your larger organisation means that when you are, metaphorically, standing at the entrance to your organisation with a sign that says 'save our archives', you will have supporters, rather than people passing by saying 'what's an archives? What have they ever done for us?'

You also need to be part of larger networks: join listservs and email groups, go to events, and talk to people. And don't wait to be asked, you can ask to be added to invitation lists or email lists.

It was through our membership of the National Archives' Consultative Forum in Canberra that we heard of their plans to mount an exhibition of the photographs of Max Dupain. We also have many photographs taken by Dupain but not the facilities or budget to mount our own exhibition of them. As a result of this network we developed a joint exhibition *Max Dupain on Assignment* with the National Archives which featured 20 of our images from the CSR Collection. We were able to publicise it on our campus with a small display at the Chifley Library, but the promotional benefits flowing the other way (to us from National Archives' promotion of the exhibition) were far greater, and added to that was the benefit of skills transfer to our staff in the management of items for display. The larger institution also benefits: extending the content of their exhibition and being seen to be collaborating and supporting a smaller institution.

We mount our own small exhibitions – usually only 4–6 display cases – to highlight parts of our collection for researchers, visitors and students. We are now digitising the contents of each exhibition as it is dismantled and plan to produce online exhibitions to extend the life of each exhibition. The first of these is an exhibition on sugar growing and milling in Fiji. We

try to link our exhibitions in with other events on campus: the sugar growing exhibition was in place for a series of Pacific-related conferences starting with Asia-Pacific Week in January, through to June with the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau.

We currently have a photographic exhibition in conjunction with the Vivid National Photography Festival being held in Canberra this year. It began with a conference held on the ANU campus: we distributed photocopied flyers to participants and also benefited from inclusion in the National Library's Vivid website at www.nla.gov.au/vivid.

We also lend material to other institutions' exhibitions: one example, we lent material from the Elders Collection to the SA Museum for the *Muslim Cameleers* exhibition which was on in Adelaide and then toured to Broken Hill, the National Library in Canberra, then Albury, Alice Springs and Port Pirie. Note that usually the receiving institution pays for transport so this can indeed be a zero-budget activity.

We have also produced two books through the University's E Press: these are volumes of transcribed letters, *In the Service of the Company: Letters of Sir Edward Parry, Commissioner to the Australian Agricultural Company*. The cost of a substantial print run would be prohibitive for us but with electronic publishing it is cost-effective to print a small number of copies at a time and many users are satisfied with electronic access.

As I mentioned before we are always looking for opportunities to get in University publications: articles in the alumni magazine *The ANU Reporter*, the Information Guide for students and staff, and last year we sourced images and information for the *ANU Diary* and as a result were featured for the month of March.

It almost goes without saying that you must have at least a webpage, if not your own website. If you don't, you can use the Collections Australia Network (www.collectionsaustralia.net) to establish a web presence. You can deliver an important message about your archives just by including your web address on anything you produce in hard copy – forms, brochures – we even have 'www.archives.anu.edu.au' printed on our box labels. The reader gets the message that there is more information available if they need it, and that they are dealing with an institution which is part of the digital age.

You should also consider the possibilities of contributing to other websites: some we contribute to are the *ANU Heritage* website (heritage.anu.edu.au), the *Australian Trade Union Archives* site (www.atua.org.au), National Archives' *Australia's Prime Ministers* site (primeministers.naa.gov.au) and the National Library's *PictureAustralia* (www.pictureaustralia.org). We had an initial project which placed 300 images on *PictureAustralia* (and we did need a budget for that), but now we choose additions from the images that our researchers request. We add metadata to the image which is transferred into the ANU's digital repository and then to *PictureAustralia*.

Another low-budget activity is our annual lecture. Because we belong to a larger institution we hire the venue without cost, the marketing area promotes it as part of the *ANU Public Lecture* series, advertises it in the press, designs a flyer and distributes to their networks. We colour-photocopy the flyer and also distribute it to our networks by email. The Friends of the Noel Butlin Archives Centre provide the wine and cheese. Depending on the speaker we may also need to pay for an airfare or a night's accommodation. Last year we organised a podcast of the lecture to go on the *ANU Events* website and this cost only a few hundred dollars. Because it was a local lecturer this was the only expense for the lecture. This seems a useful way to get further value from a lecture held on only one night and was the perfect

answer to people who couldn't attend and those requesting transcripts of the lecture after the event.

I hope from the examples I've given, you can already see some opportunities for your own small archives: that you have already thought of a website or newsletter you can contribute to, a conversation you can have, a collaboration you can plan, or the person you will offer a copy of *Archives Matter!* to.