Checking out digital cameras

Providing tools for Web publishing and interactive multimedia

by Jill Holman

The student approaches, "Can I reserve a digital camera?" Does this make your eyes widen and your heart skip a beat? No need! Checking out digital cameras is a great service for your patrons and costs little for you. Patrons love using the cameras and it is great public relations for the library.

At the University of Oregon (UO) Science Library, we have an Information Technology Center (ITC). The Science ITC offers X-terminals and Macs along with scanners, digital cameras, and sophisticated multimedia and Web publishing software.[1] A campus-wide educational technology fee funds the ITC and other labs and initiatives.[2] The goal is student access to technology, though any person with UO identification can use the facilities.

The ITC niche is Web publishing, multimedia, graphics, modeling, statistics, and programming. The digital cameras are an important part of that service, being especially well-suited for Web publishing. People use the cameras to document their scientific experiments, lab group activities, and field work. The ITC was the first lab on campus to check out digital cameras and continues to lend the newest cameras to the widest population. While others on campus have begun to purchase digital cameras, they restrict access to people in their departments and labs, minimizing access for undergraduate students. The Science Library Electronic Services Librarian supervises the Science ITC. She makes purchases based on reviews and requests by patrons and student assistants who staff the ITC. She is the main contact for the cameras, though all reference librarians help with them.

The checkout process

At the UO Science Library, we track reservations with WebEvent 3.0, a Web-accessible calendar program. This allows any of the librarians to check and modify the calendar from various locations (e.g., the reference desk and each librarian's office). Recording the type of camera, person's name, and phone number allows us to schedule the cameras and contact the person in case of problem.

The checkout process is simple. The patron completes a signout form, recording his or her name, university ID, phone number, status, and department. The patron reads the policies about fines and replacement costs and signs and dates the bottom.[3] While the patron completes the paperwork, the librarian places fresh batteries into the camera and gathers the appropriate components: cable, AC adapter, software, extra batteries, and an informative handout.

The librarian conducts a short training session where he or she explains how to take pictures, how to use the features of the camera, and how to download the pictures. The two people agree on a due date and time. (Usually we check cameras out in the afternoon and they are due by noon the next day; Friday afternoon patrons keep the cameras until Monday.) Finally, we check out the barcoded camera

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through our Innovative Interfaces, Inc. library system, where the cameras are designated as reserve items. This will allow us to bill to the patron's account in case of loss or damage, which we have not had to do.

During the loan period, patrons take pictures and download them. They can alter their images in the ITC or elsewhere using software such as Photoshop, GraphicConvertor, or PaintShopPro. Most often they use the digital images in Web publishing or they also can incorporate them into print publications. We have had very few repairs (a jammed trash button on the Quicktake 100 and a broken cable on the Quicktake 200). All around, this has been a successful and popular service.

The cameras

We first purchased the Apple Quicktake (QT) 100 in 1994 and added the QT150 the following year. These cameras were popular and easy to use. (See Table 1 for a summary of camera details.) By 1997, technology was bounding ahead and for about the same price as our previous purchases, we could buy the favorably reviewed QT200. This camera features a live LCD screen and a closer focal distance (3.5 inches as opposed to 4 feet for the QT100/150). The one negative aspect of the QT200 is its incompatibility with PCs; the other cameras work with both Macs and PCs. This is not a huge obstacle since patrons can download images in the ITC and save them into PC compatible formats.

In 1998, we decided to enter the realm of higher resolution cameras. Kodak's DC210 can record 1152 x 864 pictures and offers a zoom lens and anti-red-eye feature. It takes spectacularly clear pictures and received glowing accolades. A *Macworld* reviewer said, "Kodak's DC210 wins hands down . . . among all 26 consumer models I've used in the past four years."[4] Epson's PhotoPC 600 was our next acquisition;

the picture quality is almost as good as the DC210 and it is even easier to use.

Who is using the cameras?

Since late 1994, we've checked out digital cameras 502 times. Not counting the two newest cameras that just arrived, our cost has been about $4 per checkout ($2,000/495 checkouts). The price of digital cameras has been high enough to prevent many individuals from purchasing them; what a fabulous service for our patrons to be able to use something they cannot afford to buy themselves!

During the last academic year (July 1997–June 1998), we tracked more details from the checkout data. Use has skyrocketed; the 242 checkouts from the last year are almost as many as the total 260 for the three previous years. Undergraduates checked out the cameras 61% of the time, graduate students 23%, faculty 10%, and staff 6%. Among the 242 checkouts during this time period, there were 144 unique users; 42 were repeat users. The checkout patterns of the repeat users followed common sense—most people checked out cameras just a few times and a few people used cameras many times.[5] Patrons checked out the QT200 and the QT150 about the same amount (41% and 40%); the old QT100 went out only 19% of the time.

The cameras circulate to any UO student, faculty member, or staff person. Because of a lack of equipment available in the School of Architecture and Allied Arts (AAA) and their proximity (one building over), we have a sizable AAA clientele. Of the 174 people who entered their departmental affiliations on the signout form, 25% were from AAA. Patrons from the Social Sciences composed 10% of our check out, and those in the Humanities 5%. We also have had 10% use by computer support staff on campus and 6% use by people who work in the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the

Table 1. Camera Comparison

Model	Epson PPC600	Kodak DC210	Apple QT200	Apple QT150	Apple QT100
Date Purchased	1998	1998	1997	1995	1994
Cost	$500	$800	$600	$650	$650
Top Resolution	1024 x768	1152 x 864	640 x 480	640 x 480	640 x 480
LCD	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Images Stored (best quality worst quality)	7-50	8-44	20-30	16-32	8-32
Zoom	Yes	Yes	No	No	No

(Note that prices are for the cameras alone and are higher with add-ons, such as extra cables, batteries, cases, etc.)

Office of International Education and Exchange.

It is no surprise that the largest group, 44% of patrons, were people in the sciences. Of these 79 checkouts, 28% were from the Department of Computer and Information Science, 17% from Exercise and Movement Science, 16% from Physics, 11% from Geology, and 10% from Chemistry. The other 18% were assorted checkouts from 7 other science departments. The status breakdown of the two largest groups, Sciences and Arts, is very different. Undergrads compose nearly all of the Arts usage whereas the Sciences checkouts are roughly 30% graduate students, 20% faculty, 10% staff, and 40% undergrads. Perhaps science faculty and graduate students have been more aware of the cameras by coming into the Science Library or perhaps they are simply more technologically oriented than the AAA faculty. Maybe the AAA students experiment with the cameras as the vanguard and will ignite the interest of their faculty soon.

Usage patterns are not surprising. Usage builds throughout the year and declines during months beginning and ending academic terms. There is a peak in October–November for fall term. February and May have the highest use, forming the peaks of activity for winter and spring terms. People from the Arts barely used the cameras at the beginning of the year and gradually increased through spring term, while Sciences patrons used the cameras more consistently throughout the year. We have handouts available and information on our Web site, but largely we have not advertised the digital cameras. It appears that word-of-mouth is a valuable way in which AAA patrons became aware of the cameras.

Why checkout digital cameras?

Some librarians may question whether checking out digital cameras is a library function. It seems clear that information technology is increasingly important to libraries. We build electronic classrooms, stock our reference areas with machines, and add computer labs where we can fit them. Previously providing bibliographic access tools, Internet search engines, and word processing was adequate, now Web publishing and interactive multimedia presentations present new opportunities for teaching and learning.

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Professors can design models to explain theories, provide illustrative examples, and create interactive tutorials so that students can move through material at their own pace. Students can create dynamic sites showing their mastery of the material and helping to teach others.

On campuses all over the country, libraries and computing centers are collaborating and even unifying into single service centers. Who should do what? The line is drawn in different places on different campuses. At the UO, the library has taken a strong leadership role with information technology. Librarians teach Web publishing workshops in our Information Technology curriculum. In addition, Media Services, which is responsible for all AV support for classroom use, is housed within the main library. The Computing Center teaches students how to use productivity software, such as word processing and spreadsheets, and maintains and upgrades our award-winning campus network.

It seems that the sciences are often the first to adopt new technologies. Being so involved with grants, scientists often have the money to buy new technologies and due to tight application deadlines and tough competition, scientists often need to save time and improve quality wherever possible. It follows naturally that the Science Library, in order to serve our community, would be early adopters for instructional technology. We chose to focus the ITC on Web publishing and multimedia to serve the needs of the science community. They are clamoring for these tools to improve how they teach and share knowledge. Many science faculty build and use Web sites as a major instructional resource and increasingly students must create Web sites instead of writing term papers. Graduate students are plunging in to multimedia to better model their findings. Increasingly, faculty can share these new multimedia models via electronic journals.

She identified the challenge as one of ". . . how we will move into this new environment, changing the rules and changing the very nature of what it means to be an academic library." She identified this new meaning in terms of the shifting role of the institution of higher education from that of sole provider of educational content to one of guidance to students in their efforts to assemble ". . . learning opportunities, available at a distance from a variety of institutions," into a coherent educational experience.

Professional development and continuing education

Peter Durey, university librarian emeritus at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, defined professional development as ". . . a program which encourages employees to develop their skills and capabilities on a continuing basis." He was clear in his view that such a program be well-planned, resulting from performance reviews and discussions with library staff. He suggested the use of local library resources, expertise elsewhere in the university, and programs offered by external sources, and noted that such training and development is often available in the form of interactive video or via the Internet.

On the third and closing day of the conference, Beverly Lynch of UCLA presented a masterful summary of the various discussions that took place during each of the six theme sessions, highlighting and making reference to several significant papers that were included in each of the six themes.

By any measure, ICONMAL '98 must be considered a major success. The new library building at Peking University is stunning, and this conference, designed to celebrate the centennial of the university and to commemorate the opening of the building, was a most fitting effort. Zhu Qiang, was the primary individual responsible for what we in the United States call "local arrangements."

Zhu and his staff did a truly remarkable job, and their efforts showed clearly throughout the entire conduct of the conference. ■

Checking out digital cameras naturally evolved from the ITC goal of focusing on Web publishing and multimedia. It's the next wave for instructional technology. Checking out digital cameras is easy and cheap and a great boost for library public relations due to its popularity. We highly recommend offering this successful service and welcome any questions regarding how to begin.

Notes

1. http://libweb.uoregon.edu/scilib/slitc.html.

2. Klassen, Tim. "Creating an X Window Terminal-Based Information Technology Center," *Reference Services Review* (Spring 1997): 25–29.

3. For example, fines accrue if the camera is overdue: $2 for the first hour, $.50 per hour after the first hour, with a maximum of $20. The patron is responsible for the camera during check-out and is charged for damage or loss. The replacement value of the camera is $800.

4. McClelland, Deke. "Midrange Digital Cameras," *Macworld* (April 1998): 38–39.

5. One person checked out cameras 11 times, the highest. ■

• **ALA, ACRL Institute for Information Literacy** (IIL, formerly NILI). Formed in 1997 under Cerise Oberman's direction, the IIL aims to train instruction librarians, provide programming for library administrators on information literacy issues, and support ACRL and the National Forum on Information Literacy in various higher education initiatives.

This site provides information on IIL programs and links to related sites on information literacy. Of special interest is a page on the important upcoming IIL Immersion Program, a comprehensive four-and-a-half-day institute for instruction librarians to be held at SUNY Plattsburgh in July 1999. Last update: November 19, 1998. *Access:* http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/nilihp.html.

Notes

1. gopher://ala1.ala.org:70/00/alagophiv/50417007.document.

2. Loanne Snavely and Natasha Cooper. "The Information Literacy Debate," *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, Jan. 1997, V23(N1): 9–14, and Kasman, Joyce Valenza. "Information Literacy is More Than Computer Literacy," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 April 1998, sec. F3, column 2. ■