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Shoot First and Ask Questions Later! A Social Media Strategy for Building a Wine Label Database

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Abstract

Our collaboration with the University of California Davis to provide cost effective high resolution / high quality digitizing services for their unique social media / crowd sourcing website to build a research database.

Keywords

wine, digitizing, photography, social media, crowd source, database, searchable

Shoot First and Ask Questions Later!

A social media strategy for building a wine label database

When **we're** capturing imagery for an archive at Act 3 Partners, we usually append the relevant metadata for each image as we capture it. It takes some extra time, but it keeps things organized and accurate. But recently we helped with a project for the University of California, Davis that turned this standard approach on its head with a creative social media strategy for getting a lot of metadata into an archive with a limited budget.

The project involved capturing Dr. Maynard **Amerine's** huge collection of wine bottle labels.

U.C. Davis is the premier U.S. institution for the study of viticulture and enology and Dr. Amerine was an immensely popular professor there for nearly four decades. He is widely considered to have been one of the most influential forces behind the development of the California wine industry.

His passion for the subject is clearly reflected in his private collection of over 5,000 wine labels that he gathered over the course of the last century - many of which are accompanied by his handwritten notes on the **wine's** quality as well as the company he enjoyed it with.

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The collection provides a unique window into the history of both winemaking and graphic art during this pivotal time in the industry. The **University's** goal is to make this visual resource available to academics and wine lovers everywhere.

The only catch was cost.

Five thousand labels equate to eight **banker's** boxes full of single notebook pages. To add to the challenge, wine labels are typically designed with stylish fonts and elegant scripts that would stymie the best optical character recognition software. Key-wording was going to require human attention.

Working with Peter Brantley and the Special Collections team at U.C. Davis Library, we determined that if we worked very efficiently, we could capture all the labels at high-resolution within their budget, but capturing metadata would be limited to the name of the source notebook. It would be up to them to enter more complete metadata for each label. In other words: Capture first, label later!

Our capture efficiency was greatly aided by Dr. **Amerine's** neatness. He had precisely pasted the labels into notebooks with two-hole ring bindings. We engineered a custom rig similar to the pin-registered animation stands that old cartoon animators used. That let us streamline our photography while maintaining consistent image placement throughout.

To resolve the finest detail each image was captured at 24 megapixels. For flat artwork like this, we normally use a polarizing filter on the capture lens cross-polarized with polarizing filters on the strobes. This eliminates glare and keeps colors rich and saturated. But we had to be judicious with this on these labels because it can also remove the gleam of the foil on some fancy labels!

Meanwhile, the digital acquisition folks at Davis were cooking up a clever website that would allow them to crowdsource the metadata annotations of the labels.

Called **"Label This"** the site encourages anyone in the public to go online, browse to a label, and then mark and caption the various important elements of that label. The information goes into the database and will ultimately allow the whole collection to be

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searchable. When complete, scholars will be able to search by vintage, varietal, region, or even the type of image on a label.
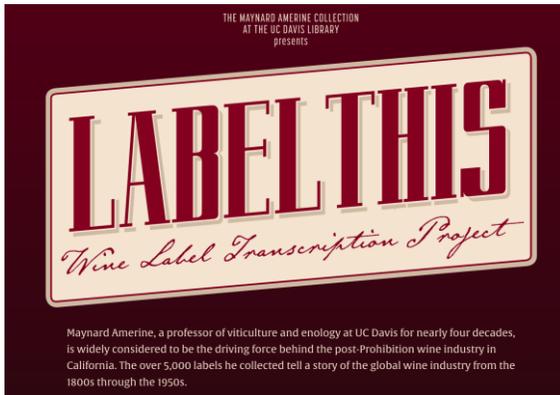
For researchers around the world — historians, sommeliers, oenologists, even novelists looking for period details — this online resource will be a rich vein to mine.

The project is still a work-in-progress. For more information about the project including the software and the team behind it, or to help transcribing labels, go to https://labelthis.lib.ucdavis.edu./

For more information about Act 3 Partners and digitizing visit http://www.act3partners.com/