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Musings on Electronic Publishing

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Abstract

In the tradition of the *VRA Bulletin*'s "Notes from the President" the author helps to inaugurate the first electronic *VRAB* issue and thanks the members of the Visual Resources Association who have participated in the transition from a print publication to an electronic journal. Summary information is provided about the open access movement and new models of electronic publishing. How traditional publication processes change in an electronic environment is also discussed. Detailed information takes potential authors through the steps necessary to contribute articles and the advantages of the automated system are mentioned. VRA members and other information professionals are strongly encouraged to contribute to the *VRAB*. It is suggested that visual resources curators may be able to carve out new roles or add to existing support services by expanding their skill sets with the experience of electronic publishing.

Keywords

electronic journals, publishing, open access movement, scholarly communication, visual resources, librarianship, information professionals, academic community

Biography:

Maureen Burns, currently President of the Visual Resources Association, is an information professional with over 20 years of experience developing and managing teaching resources of analog and digital images at UCI, the Getty Villa, and CSULB. Presently working on a consulting basis, through IMAGinED and the Image Consultant Cooperative, Burns has been handling sales for Archivision, partnering on the Local History Digital Resources Project, and participating in other image-focused work. With a doctorate in Educational Administration from the UCI/UCLA joint Leadership program, Burns provides administrative assistance and research support for UCI's Center for Learning in the Arts, Sciences and Sustainability, which includes systems support and editorial work for the electronic Journal for Learning through the Arts.

It is my distinct pleasure to help inaugurate the electronic version of the *Visual Resources Bulletin (VRAB)* in the Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress) (http://digitalcommons.bepress.com/about/). We have traveled a long road from recommendations in the 2009 Strategic Plan (in Memberclicks) to the 2010 formation of the Publishing Advisory Group (http://www.vraweb.org/organization/committees/pag/index.html) to appointing the Editors in the Summer 2011 (http://online.vraweb.org/vrab/editorialboard.html) to the release of VRA Online in the Winter 2011 (http://online.vraweb.org/). I would like to express my sincerest thanks to everyone involved in making the transition from the print to the electronic format, especially the Strategic Plan Task Force, Publishing Advisory Group, and VRA Board (past and present). Our gratitude goes out to Mark Pompelia for his efforts in sustaining the print publication for over 15 years, and to the editors he worked with and those who preceded him. We greatly appreciate the hard work of the new electronic editors who have stepped up in a big way to take on this new adventure in electronic publishing, Anne Blecksmith (Content) and Jason Miller (Production). Thank you also to Chris Donnelly, Astrid Otey, and Debbie Klein for continuing to work as assistant editors in the new format and to any others who have helped with this work in the past. The great traditions of the *VRA Bulletin* continue with the journal being a reflection of our professional practice, but we now also have the opportunity to be creative with a new format. VRA members and like-minded information professionals are encouraged to consider the types of information that would be most interesting and useful to find here, to contribute to the journal using bepress' dynamic electronic tools, and to communicate your ideas with the editors and, through publication, to your colleagues around the world.

With the emergence of the Internet and networked technology, the scholarly community was able to develop the tools to bring large-scale, barrier-free access to research and scholarship. Often referred to as the "open access or OA movement", it was very much a response to what was considered a "crisis in scholarly communication." The latter has been attributed to the consolidation of the publishing industry, the high cost of academic journals (especially in the sciences), and new journal pricing structures.[1] As Bergman noted in an article that nicely summarizes the trends, "It became clear to all involved that a major paradigm-shift and monumental publishing market corrections were needed. The consequence was that librarians and others became change-agents in a series of enterprises that comprise what has become an international movement to create broader access to scholarship."[2] Institutional repositories, of which the University of California's eScholarship (http://escholarship.org/) is an example, and reasonably priced commercial repositories, such as bepress, also emerged. New models of electronic publishing continue to evolve and it has proven to be an opportunity for information professionals to partner with the academic community.[3] It is exciting that VRA is now participating in one of the new models of scholarly publishing. The shift from a print to an electronic journal is also saving VRA a substantial amount of organizational funds every year.

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[1] Sherrie S. Bergman, "The Scholarly Communication Movement: Highlights and Recent Developments," *Collection Building* 25, no. 4 (2006): 108-128, 10.1108/01604950610705989.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Andrew Richard Albanese, "Revolution or Evolution: Amid Numerous Models, Librarians Find they have New Roles to Play in Shaping the Future of Scholarly Communication," *Library Journal* 126, no. 8 (2001): 48, http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA178186.html.

Many things remain the same with the *VRAB*, but an electronic journal is also a game changer. VRA licenses its place in the cloud, online software tools, and technical support services from bepress, so we have the added prestige of a new publishing partner with 12 years of experience hosting online journals. We join distinguished company in the *Digital Commons*, from the *Administrative Law Review* of American University to the *Zambia Social Science Journal* from Cornell (http://digitalcommons.bepress.com/online-journals/).[4] The *Digital Commons* is bepress' open access digital repository with tools that enable institutions, or in our case a professional organization, to manage, display, and publish their intellectual output. Bepress offers more services beyond electronic journals, such as scholar pages, books, theses & dissertations, image galleries, multimedia, and an online workflow for conferences. There are licensing costs involved in expanding VRA access to the bepress offerings, but the potential is there.

The editors have their work cut out for them getting two more 2011 issues published as soon as possible and catching up with three more issues in 2012. Then the *VRAB* should be back on track with its tri-annual publishing schedule. Anne is actively recruiting content and would appreciate hearing from anyone who might be interested in publishing in the *VRAB*, whether you have published anything before or not. The editors are in place to answer your questions and provide whatever support is needed. Jason is starting to work on uploading *VRAB* back issues (in PDF and print)*,* so we will eventually have electronic access to the full run of our professional journal. This will take a fair amount of the Production Editor's time, especially since back issues come in varying formats and some will have to be scanned. We encourage all VRA members and other interested professionals to consider publishing with VRA in this new format. The electronic tools should improve and normalize processes and workflows, increase efficiencies, and expand the *VRAB*'s reach and impact.

What is different about publishing an electronic journal? The physical format and spatial boundaries have changed from waiting for the print version to arrive in the mail or the PDF to be posted in Memberclicks to accessing the *VRAB* in the *Digital Commons* as mentioned above. This means that you can read the abstracts online; bookmark and share news about articles using an array of the most popular social networking tools or e-mail; and download articles to read and save electronically or print. The work of the Visual Resources Association will now be more discoverable online to a global audience who will have persistent access to the ideas and work of image media professionals.

The relationship between authors and editors is also transformed and control is altered. Although the editors still fulfill traditional roles (administration, content reviewing, copyediting, etc.), authors are asked to actively participate in this process and take more control over the article and associated information. VRA members and other interested information professionals build each issue of the *VRAB* in concert with the editors. The policies and standards (http://online.vraweb.org/vrab/policies.html) and submission guidelines (http://online.vraweb.org/vrab/submguide.html) are provided on the web site. Authors will upload the document information (i.e., metadata about the authors and article) and the article itself.

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[4] For the lengthy list of current journals in bepress' *Digital Commons*, see http://digitalcommons.bepress.com/online-journals/.

There is a temporal dimension adjustment too, which allows for great flexibility. You can upload articles any time of the day or night and they remain in the system until published or withdrawn. This means that you can update the document information and upload new versions of the article anytime before the issue is published. You are asked to upload your article in Microsoft Word, Open Office, or RTF formats because, once it is uploaded, the editors go to work and need a format that they can edit.[5] There are peer review tools in the bepress system, but we have chosen to use these for editorial purposes instead. Once the Content Editor reviews your article, she makes a decision about whether additional advice about the appropriateness of the content is necessary and/or whether the article needs to be copy edited. The Assistant Editors are then enlisted for these tasks using the peer review tools or other VRA members with particular expertise might be recruited.[6] They may download your article, edit it using track changes (if substantial changes are required), and return it to the author for adjustments; make minor copy editing decisions and upload a new version themselves; or, send the author a message through the system with comments. In every case, the author will be provided with information and assistance if needed. Therefore, even if you have never published before, much less used electronic tools to do so, there is a network of editorial and systems support staff to assist you.

Throughout this process, the primary editors are brainstorming ideas, soliciting articles, arranging the content into issues, and problem solving. For example, they check on the uploaded article, make sure all the document information added online is complete, and use the online tools to publish. Like with the print *VRAB,* they contemplate themes of special interest to VRA members and communicate with content contributors about everything to do with the journal. Another notable difference is that each issue is also somewhat driven by the serendipity of the content that is uploaded. If VRA members and other information professionals don't upload articles, it will be very difficult to publish three issues per year. We need and want your contributions—feature articles, association news, opinion pieces, reviews, etc.—the electronic journal will only be as good as you make it.

Are you ready to publish with VRA? Please first look at the style and formatting guidelines (http://online.vraweb.org/vrab/submguide.html) to prepare your manuscript. These are rules of thumb to generally guide authors and do not have to be taken literally. But, they can help you to decide on everything from citation style to fonts. Remember, you are publishing electronically and should make full use of dynamic linkages. Please provide full URLs throughout your article and in your references. The guidelines provide specifications for the use of images and other media in or associated with your article too. The system allows for supplemental files that are not actually in the article PDF, but associated with it online. The latter might be a good choice for video, for example. Please note that it is up the author to obtain the rights to any images or other media published, not the editors.

Like any other interactive workspace in the cloud, you need to create an account to obtain a user name and password for submitting items online and to check the status of

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[5] The system can accept PDF files, but they are more difficult to edit. There may be instances in which the editors ask an author to upload a PDF, for example, a complex document developed by an advisory group, committee, or task force.
[6] Please send the primary editors your name, e-mail, and areas of expertise if you are interested in assisting with content decisions and they can add you to the system.

current submissions. The system will then walk you through the process of adding the document information and uploading the article, with a click-through author agreement (http://online.vraweb.org/vrab/policies. html#rights) along the way. In order to be prepared for the document information requested by the system, you will need the following data (copy and paste if you can): author(s) name(s), institutional affiliation(s), and e-mail address(es); article title; keywords (specific search terms for your article); subject categories (choose from menu options); acknowledgments (optional); short biographical information about the author or authors (a few sentences); and an abstract of 400 words or less. Then the system will ask you to upload your article from your computer files and the process is finished! If you don't have all of the document information at the start, you can log back in any time to add or edit the metadata.

After publication, when readers download your article, the system adds the document information to a cover page, so whatever you type into the online fields is what you will see later in the PDF. This is also why just the text of your article should be submitted without a title page, abstract, or page numbers within the document. The system generates this information from the metadata and adds page numbers for the whole issue. Once published, articles can be viewed by anyone with access to the Internet, after an initial lockdown to VRA members. Materials can be searched for in the system by author, title, abstract, date, keyword, and other fields. So, full-text searches can be conducted on all articles, although we have yet to see how this will work with the *VRAB* back issues.

The automated system provides other advantages after publication. Authors are automatically provided with use data and the editors with extended statistics for the journal as a whole. The relevance of the information published can be demonstrated in a tangible way. For example, I co-published an article based on my dissertation research in the *Journal for Learning through the Arts* (http://escholarship.org/uc/clta_lta) in 2005 called "ArtsBridge America: Bringing the Arts Back to School." I receive monthly e-mail reports and in February 2012 nine people viewed it and one person downloaded the article equaling 10 requests. Not very impressive until I looked at the historical data and saw that there have been 1,307 requests (views or downloads) to date. An article written by a well-renowned arts education researcher entitled "Conversation and Silence: Transfer of Learning through the Arts" has had 4,236 requests. The journal's most popular article to date is from a Medical Humanities issue entitled "What's Eating Gilbert Grape: A Case Study of Chronic Illness" with 6,167 requests. Traditional academic journals have print runs of around 500-1,000 copies, so the extended reach of an electronic journal is evident. It is also interesting to see how the requests grow over time, from 2,597 requests for the 2011 issue to 16,544 for the 2006 issue.[7] In addition, readers can take advantage of alerting services by signing up to receive e-mail notification when new issues are published or they can opt for RSS feeds. This is what comes of using a stable, sustainable infrastructure with persistent access that makes content easily discoverable online through a highly visible platform.

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[7] The *JLtA* is in the University of California's eScholarship Repository developed by the California Digital Library (http://www.cdlib.org/) and launched in 2002. It began using bepress for its back-end tools and just recently migrated to the Open Journal Systems (http://pkp.sfu.ca/?q=ojs) to partner in the Public Knowledge Project. For more information, see Catherine B. Soehner, "The eScholarship Respository: A University of California Response to the Scholarly Communication Crisis," *Science and Technology Libraries* 22, no. 3-4 (2002): 29-37, http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J122v22n03_04.

A wider distribution of the workload and using electronic tools to do some of the work, distinguish this new form of publishing and make for a streamlined process. Open access allows for digital dissemination, full-text search and display, enhanced discoverability, global access, and increased citation rates that could strengthen resumes, impact professional opportunities, and promote the field of visual resources. Bepress is providing VRA with an organizational repository to capture and preserve the intellectual output of our community. Publishing in this venue allows us to spread the word about what we do and why we do it, raising the visibility of image media professionals. It is an opportunity to reach out to our affiliates and other information professionals, who will hopefully contribute their ideas as well, so we can learn from others doing similar work, share information, and collaborate.

I would argue that publishing is an important way to contribute to the work of the Visual Resources Association, right in there with volunteering for leadership positions. It is not that much extra work to publish your ideas, research, projects, and experiences and it often helps you to think through the issues in more depth. You can check the literature for current information and develop your written communication skills along the way. Think about whether the work you are doing might be of interest to your colleagues and share lessons learned to increase efficiencies: e.g. innovative practices in your VRC, model projects worth emulating, regional events of interest, or a conference presentation that might simply require a little formalizing in terms of formatting or the addition of references to be publishable.

Who knows -- perhaps by broadening your horizons and extending your skill set to the use of an electronic journal, you might be able to carve out an expanded role or provide new support services to your visual resources collection clients. As a recent report prepared for the Association of Research Libraries indicates, new times require new roles.[8] As visual resources curators, we strive to make optimal use of continually emerging technologies to expand access to information resources. We have always worked closely with scholars to support the intellectual content production activities taking place at out institutions. Familiarizing yourself with and publishing in the new electronic *VRAB* could be a significant opportunity -- an experience that might help you forge an even stronger partnership with the academic community. We welcome your participation in this new venture and need your intellectual contributions for the electronic journal to be a complete success.

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[8] Tyler Walters and Katherine Skinner, "New Roles for New Times: Digital Curation for Preservation," *Report Prepared for the Association of Research Libraries* (March 2011), http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/nrnt_digital_curation17mar11.pdf.

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