

# Activities To Consider In Order To Promote Your Depository AND Your Depository Web Sites!

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## Introduction

Anyone who watches very much TV will recognize an annoying advertisement for AFLAC insurance, using a silly duck who keeps trying to tell people about the benefits of “AFLAC!,” loudly and persistently. He follows you onto a roller coaster, he flies beside the window of your passenger plane, he even breaks into your bedroom at night, just when you're trying to “start a family”! Nobody will listen to him, but you have to give him credit – he's persistent! Well, we might be annoyed by him, but we Government Documents Librarians can certainly identify with his problem.

We keep telling our public about the wonders and the information miracles of government information, especially free government information via the Web, but do they listen? ONLY, I would suggest, when they actually need something specific. Otherwise, they are much like the people who are deaf to the AFLAC duck.

What CAN we do to get them to listen? Quite honestly, I have no magic solution for this problem, but I will describe those methods which we have utilized to make our depository known, respected and utilized locally, and even far outside of our normal service area. Other depository librarians have probably already utilized many or all of these same procedures, although we might not have shared them with each other.

All of us are aware that our jobs and our government information environment have changed drastically in the past decade. Either we

ride the wave of World Wide Web expansion and utilize it to our advantage, or we drown in its wake. Grace York, Director of the Government Documents Department at the University of Michigan Library, and a familiar name to most of us, recently gave a presentation to the North Carolina Library Association entitled, “The Web Came True: What Do WE DO?,” in which she carefully outlined and documented the changes we have faced, the more sophisticated information needs of our Web-savvy patrons, and the new roles being created for government documents and reference librarians. In other words, the new “virtual reality”!

The manner in which we promote our collections, our services and our now vastly more complex information resources, will determine a large part of our future in the library and information world.

## Basic Access

First of all, how well known and how accessible is your depository WITHIN the context of your larger institution? For instance, how often do records of your depository documents show up in the regular online catalog of your library, that method which most patrons use for initial access? Are you regularly CATALOGING such materials? And how about the many GPO Web site records which have been coming out for years – are any of those records available in your online catalog? If not, why not consider an inexpensive vendor and load such records on a regular, monthly basis?

Our library has been purchasing MARCIVE records, based upon our depository profile of monographic selections, for about a decade, and we have added well in excess of 100,000 records during that time, retrospectively back through 1980. Shortly after the World Wide Web became popular and GPO catalog records linked to a URL began appearing, we requested that MARCIVE provide ANY records which linked to a URL (ie: a "PURL" record), whether or not we actually selected that item number, and this change alone has added many thousands of records to our catalog, records which our patrons can use for direct linkage to these documents.

Thus, many patrons who use our online catalog may never even know that our depository exists, BUT they still reap the benefit of our cataloging plan for government documents. And just to give you some idea of how many records we are speaking of, during the fiscal year, 2000-2001, we added about 4900 hyperlinked, GPO records to our online catalog, and that number is growing by leaps and bounds every year.

According to our friends at MARCIVE, we were the first depository to request this service, a service which is now carried by at least 60 depository libraries. As of August 29th, an OCLC report indicates that a total of 500,000 records describing electronic resources have been added to their database, with all of these records being available in WorldCat. Now all we have to do is keep the URLs up to date!

Secondly, How "accessible" is your government documents Web site – your documents "home page" – from the main home site of your institution? Is it clearly listed, up front and easily found? If not, what about the sequence of "clicks" necessary for access? A major university should have the library clearly listed on the university home page, and the Government Documents site should be clearly listed on the library home page. Thus, two, easy "clicks" and a patron is in. If this is not the case, then you are making your patrons "hunt" for you, and the attention span for this kind of searching is limited. Patrons will return to the sites which are easily found and easily utilized.

### **Local/Area Libraries**

Regular contact with any and all LIBRARIES in your immediate area which might make use of your resources is imperative. Offer to meet with the appropriate librarian. Notify them of how they might refer patrons to you (phone – email – walk-in, etc.). Suggest that they link to YOUR Web sites rather than creating their own, if yours might serve their purposes better. Some units do not have much Web expertise or resources, so why re-invent the wheel?

Attempt to keep in touch with them on a regular basis in order to remind them of your services and support. Remember – there are all kinds of libraries, including public, business, school, law, higher education, etc. The directors of all such units should have personal knowledge of you, your services, and your Web sites.

### **Local/Area Organizations**

Locate any and all GROUPS and ORGANIZATIONS locally, which might make use of your resources, including the local Chamber of Commerce, merchants associations, professional groups, and especially school media center directors. Offer to speak before their annual meetings or provide workshops for their members. If you have an instructional "lab" available where Web resources can be demonstrated for large groups, try to use that facility for your meetings so that patrons can visit your depository!

We have provided programs for the Chamber of Commerce (twice), for the local law library and paralegal association, for the local SCORE chapter, small business annual meeting (twice – we are now a regular at their meeting), for the county public school media center directors, for local nursing and health professionals, AND we promote this service on our Web site--see our "Classroom and Group Instruction on Government Information Sources" site at <http://library.uncg.edu/depts/docs/instruct.html>

If possible, create a Web site which features the group and/or subject upon which you are basing your instructional meeting, such as this "Small

Business Information” site which we created for the annual “SCORE” program and dedicated to their volunteers:  
<http://library.uncg.edu/depts/docs/us/smallbusiness.html>

### **Advertise?**

Advertise locally, if possible. Encourage your local newspaper and/or TV and/or radio to promote your services. This is a difficult proposition, as such media entities generally do not wish to “waste” their time and print space on “us.” We have been able to get the local newspaper to print a large, front page story on the new “electronic” and Web based resources of major libraries, although one of our efforts came up as something of a humorous failure, due to length editing. The story appeared in the Greensboro News and Record, December 1st, 1997, entitled, “Hit The Library From Home,” and described many of the features of a modern, electronic and Web-based library, with our library home Web site prominently displayed. However, since the article ignored many of our best Web resources and said nothing about government sites, I decided to write a follow-up article and fill in the blanks.

That follow-up was published on December 18th, 1997, after some serious editing, which negated much of what I was trying to communicate. Entitled, “A New Electronic World At The Library,” the article which I submitted contained nearly a thousand words, with the longest section, 373 words, concerning Government resources on the Web. I had placed that part at the end, beginning with the statement, “Last but certainly not least, you will notice a link from the main library page to ‘Government Documents.’” Then I expounded, word upon word, the wonders of U.S. Government and other government resources available via the Web, AND made even easier to access via our particular Documents Web sites and links. That section was the crown jewel of the whole article.

What did the newspaper do? Naturally, they edited for length, but not in the normal manner of cutting something from every section. My 373 word “Government Documents” section ended up

with only 26 words, simply noting that government information was available, free of charge! Yep--in the words of Robert Burns, the best laid schemes of mice and men DO “gang aft a-gley”!

### **Local And Other “HOT” Issues**

Keep track of and provide information on any and all locally significant issues OR national issues and reflect those issues prominently on your main Web site. As an example, Greensboro and Guilford County are and have been in an uproar for more than a year over a proposed FedEx airport “hub” being located here. Anyone within shouting distance of the airport is vehemently opposed to this little piece of local “development,” but business leaders are in favor due to jobs and other economic benefits. The FedEx hub is THE local hot-button issue and will continue to be for some time to come.

Our Greensboro, local government link on our main GovDoc site indicates that FedEx information and full text documents are included, and this site <http://library.uncg.edu/depts/docs/nc/greensboro.html> has generated considerable local interest and usage. Naturally, we have also utilized our [Documents](#) homepage for the inclusion of major national issue sites, with three “Terrorist” information sites being included on our homepage at present.

Patrons appreciate quick and easy access to the important issues of the day when they come to your Government Documents sites. In the past, we have put up “Hot Topic” sites, linked off of our main government documents site, on such issues as Gulf War Illness, Holocaust Gold, The Independent Counsel’s Report (Star Print) on the Impeachment of (President) Clinton, The Firestone Tire Recall, The U.S. Embassy Bombings, and many more issues and events.

### **It’s The “HITS” That Count! Web Search Engines and Directories**

Search engines and Web indexes are a must. Send your better subject sites to any and all of the Web search engines and directories for inclusion,

and you will find that lots of people everywhere find YOU! We listed our major subject sites with every search engine and Web directory we could think of, and now receive a steady stream of email requests for information. ("YOU DA MAN!") was one happy reply to an obviously successful email answer!).

Remember--it is one level of access for a Web search engine to merely turn up your site in a keyword search. It is an entirely different level to be listed in a subject directory of sites. Whether or not the really MAJOR indexes and directories, such as Yahoo, will include your site, is an open question. Generally, they will include sites which they find to be helpful to their potential patrons, BUT I would never suggest paying in order to have your site or sites listed.

As stated in the "Administrative Notes" article, after one of our sites was listed by USAToday, it received nearly 7000 "page views" the following month, and our overall statistics for Web usage have increased dramatically ever since. Total "page views" for 1999-2000 were 145,000 and for 2000-2001 nearly 190,000, an increase of about 24%. This is NOT an earth-shaking number, and I am certain that many of you folks generate a much larger annual "page view" or "hit" total on your government documents sites. Remember that in counting your Web statistics, there is a significant difference between counting an individual opening of a site ("page view") and counting every separate site item (images, etc.) which opens on that site when it is viewed ("hit").

When our Government Documents home page is opened, it actually generates four "hits," and the library home page generates eight "hits," and this number is quite low in comparison to many similar sites around the country. I suspect that the library profession will eventually move in the direction of using "page views" as the accepted method of statistical analysis of service, but that is for others (ALA, FDLP?) to decide.

Our department does not maintain a huge number of Web sites, although it sometimes seems that way when we attempt to correct all the dead URLs! Of our approximately 160 sites, perhaps 150 are actual reference sites which provide

government information links and must be continuously maintained.

Where are our patrons accessing us? We know that the majority of our annual "page views" or "hits" come from off campus, an indication that our Web sites ARE doing the job. If you are not yet counting and reporting your government information Web site "page views" or "hits" on an annual basis, perhaps this is something you should consider, if your institution is technically capable of providing this information. With all of our walk-in traffic, paper and fiche documents use, AND direct reference questions, declining in recent years, we needed a new measure of our effectiveness, and the success and popularity of our Web sites has fulfilled this need.

### **Technical Issues**

A few technical suggestions: Complex, highly graphic Web sites don't open efficiently, especially from home computers. If your government informational Web sites have lots of "bells and whistles," you may turn patrons off right at the start and lose their future business. Keep your sites simple and to-the-point.

Personally, I would avoid any type of split screen, frame, or pop-up, as these features can be troublesome and annoying. When the information I want to read or copy only appears in a tiny window which is perhaps one fourth of a normal screen, I tend to get more than a little irritated, and printing from such screens can be tricky. Little nude cherubs which fly back and forth across the top of your Web site might be decorative and enticing to some, but for most they will simply be an annoyance.

Frankly, there are many U.S. Government Web sites which give us problems when we attempt to use them, problems such as making our workstations crash, severe printing problems, or simply jamming the contact to the extent of our having to end the Netscape session and reopen the window. I do not suggest that all your sites must be "plain vanilla." Get some colleague and patron feed back, if possible. I am simply suggesting that a very high level of complexity

for your Web sites is often NOT in the best interest of patron access!

### **Interaction!**

Do you have a clearly indicated email question link and phone number for questions? We named our email question function, “Ask-A-Doc”, and we actually answer our department phone on a direct line, NOT with an instructional answering system! Email questions should go automatically to several staff members, in a hierarchy, so that each question will be promptly answered, whether or not someone is on vacation. Prompt reply to inquiries is a key to depository success and will encourage further business and better support.

### **Your Own Institutional Pubs/News**

Remember your own institutional and library publications, and “Web News” type sites. Every opportunity you have to include an article or some type of “mention” or “blurb” about

government documents, your depository services, or government information via the Web, should be taken! We have a regular library promotional publication ([Library Columns](#), see the September 2000 issue, page 5, for a brief Government Documents article), several campus news vehicles, and library news and campus news Web sites, and we use them regularly! This does not necessarily increase your visibility OFF campus, but every little bit helps.

### **Sharing!**

Last but not least, why not share your best efforts and most successful activities with the rest of us? The GPO FDLP “Administrative Notes” is a good vehicle for this, as are the ALA Documents Roundtable publications, and the Documents sections of your state library associations. And don't forget Grace York's excellent GODORT “Handout Exchange” which can be found at <http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/godort.html>. If it works for you, perhaps it will work for the rest of us as well!