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Heather Geddes
Principal Librarian
Watsonville Public Library



INDUSTRY

- Local Government - Libraries

LOCATION

- Watsonville, California

CHALLENGES

- Degrading microfilm threatened the City's copy of the newspaper archive
- Lengthy staff time required to train and help patrons accessing the microfilm archive
- Inability for out-of-town patrons to access the newspaper archive on their own; staff time required to research on their behalf

BMI SOLUTION

- 669 microfilm rolls digitally converted at BMI's scanning facility
- Hosting of the newspaper digital archive on BMI's secure co-location synced data centers
- Access the digital newspaper archive [here](#) (scroll down to Watsonville Historical Newspaper Archive)

BENEFITS

- Hosted access significantly reduces Library IT staff involvement
- Anytime, anywhere access to the digital archive
- Full-text searching enables research capability never possible with physical microfilm

Case Study



Overview

The Watsonville Public Library has been serving the City's population of 50,000 residents for over 100 years. It is a place where community members can gather information, explore the Town's history, and attend local events.

The Watsonville historical newspapers are an important aspect of the city's past, so the Library's goal was to preserve its historical data and provide its patrons simple, open access to its archive.

Heather Geddes, Principal Librarian, states “We had one local copy of our historical newspapers on microfilm. The microfilm was degrading and we had to pay for maintenance on two older microfilm reader machines. We also regularly received calls from out of the area asking for obituary information or information about a relative. Too much staff time was spent looking for this information.”

Digitally converting the newspaper's archive from microfilm to an easily accessible digital solution became a priority. “Watsonville selected Digital Reel because it was priced competitively. It offers a simple, web-based interface that delivers online access to the historical newspaper archive, opening the information up to on-site and remote visitors like never before,” Geddes says.

The Challenges of Physical Microfilm & the Search for a Digital Solution

The Library has a historical collection of The Register-Pajaronian (including previous titles of the publication) that dates back to the 1860s. The newspaper microfilm collection and two microfilm readers are available to the public for research.

Geddes states, “There are essentially three constituents who access this archive: (1) local historians who regularly access the records, (2) families and students looking for information about a relative or information on topics for a school assignment, and (3) out-of-towners that call the library looking for information regarding an obituary or some other local event in the past.”

Using a microfilm reader is not an everyday occurrence. The library staff would often spend time training users how to load, rewind, and print from the microfilm readers. Staff time would be spent locating information for out-of-town requests. Years of use began to take a toll on the microfilm quality and the machines.

When the Library decided to digitize this archive, Geddes put together a series of questions for potential solution providers to answer. She reached out to a few other libraries to discuss timelines, prices, and what the overall solution might look like. Geddes then identified several companies that could potentially offer a newspaper microfilm conversion solution.

Geddes states, “One of the first things we did is contact the newspaper publisher and request permission to post the newspaper archive online. We received permission as long as we were at least one year behind the current year.”

“A solution that would be online-ready and accessible from our web-site was key to unlocking this archive for all patrons, regardless of their location,” Geddes

states. “BMI’s Digital ReelL offered a full-text searchable Internet-based interface that made it the right solution for our library archive, right now.”

Online Access to the Watsonville Historical Newspaper Archive

Today, the Watsonville Historical [Newspaper Archive](#) (1864-2012) is digital and available online. Anyone who visits the Watsonville Public Library web-site can access this archive. Geddes states, “The BMI staff was incredibly supportive and informative with answering our questions. Their experience with other library newspaper archives helped them understand our requirements.”

Geddes continues, “We put together a small publicity campaign and sent postcards out to some of the more frequent users of this archive. Members of the public are thrilled to be able to access this newspaper archive online. Full-text search has offered a *Google-like* experience for searching.”

Since the digital newspaper archive solution has been live (2016), there has been an average of 25,000+ image requests per month on the Watsonville digital newspaper portal. The archive is now available from anywhere at any time and more people than ever can simultaneously access the archive.

With Digital ReelL, the Library has the assurance that its digital newspaper archive won’t degrade in the future.

Conclusion

Over time, Geddes states that the Library will look to fully retire the physical microfilm collection and the machines, eliminating the maintenance expenses.

Geddes concludes, “Moving forward, we’ll begin to scan the paper copies directly into Digital ReelL so that we can fully eliminate physical microfilm.”