Outreach and Copyright Protection at JCPenny.com

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For the corporate archivist, web publishing provides a valuable new tool to serve the public. Many corporate archives are already on the web. Archives sites usually support a company's main web site under a link entitled "History of . . ." or "About . . . ." Wells Fargo, Levi Strauss, Ford Motor Company, Coca Cola, the New York Stock Exchange are just a few examples of companies with historical web sites.

As a public relations tool, a historical web site can be a great asset for a company. The ability to combine text, images, still photographs, movies, sound, and interactivity in a well-designed page allows the archivist and web designer to bring the company's history alive in a rich and engaging way.

Visitors interested in a company often go directly to the archives site to learn more about its history, business philosophy, important personalities, and events. Whether the visitor is a customer, a prospective investor, a supplier, or a student working on a report, an archives site provides company information in a convenient and accessible way (often in greater detail than is available elsewhere). For the casual browser, an interesting archives site may provide a hook to capture the reader's interest and thereby encourage him or her to read on to learn more about the organization.

As a reference tool, an archives site can provide informational brochures and answers to frequently asked questions. Having this information live on the web frees the archives from answering many routine questions that typically take up valuable staff time. A web site is also useful as an outreach tool to tap into the growing internet audience. The recent announcement that NASA received 100 million hits on July 4 when the Mars Pathfinder mission landed on the surface of Mars is evidence of the enormous scale and audience potential of the Internet.

The JCPenney Archives began publishing historical material on the web in February, 1996. This article discusses the JCPenney Archives and Historical Museum web site; what we are doing and where we are going; and a new approach we have employed to secure copyright protection for the images and other media we publish on our web site.

The Archives home page is located on JCPenney's main internet site www.jcpenney.com under a link entitled "History and Guiding Philosophy." Like many sites, Penney's site is under constant modification and development. The site is modest by comparison with efforts at some other companies, but it is carefully tailored to present JCPenney history to JCPenney's customers, associates, and the public in a clear and attractive way.

The Archives home page is simple in design. Because students are likely to visit the site, the page is designed to be light and friendly. A rotating graphic immediately catches the visitor's eye showing a hand-tinted picture of a Golden Rule Store (JCPenney's original name) on one side and a modern JCPenney Store on the other. A multi-colored navigation bar displaying former company logos runs along the left margin. Beneath the rotating store a short introductory paragraph welcomes visitors to the site and explains what the visitor will find during his or her stay. This is followed by several links leading to the site's main features.

Links lead to electronic versions of the Archives' printed brochures. Each section is designed to have its own look and feel, but elements such as the logo navigation bar, page headers, and navigation buttons at the bottom of the page are common to all.

The first link "JCPenney Archives and Historical Museum" describes the Archives' holdings, services, location, hours of operation, and contact information. The second "A Short History of JCPenney" is an informational brochure. Subsections outline the history of the Company from the opening of the first Golden Rule Store by James Cash Penney in Kemmerer, Wyoming in 1902 to the present. Hand-tinted photographs of JCPenney stores and street scenes evoke the Company's early days as a main street merchant.

The next link "JCPenney Milestones" presents a chronology of important events in JCPenney history. Extensive use of photographs and graphics illustrate important sections of the text. A new brochure "James Cash Penney: His Life and Legacy" presents a short biography of the life, philosophy, family, farming interests and philanthropies of Penney's founder.

A final link displays a Quicktime VR movie of Mr. Penney's statue in the main rotunda of the JCPenney Home Office in Plano, Texas. Quicktime VR (VR meaning virtual reality) allows the visitor to view the rotunda in a full 360-degree range of view and to move around the statue and zoom in on interesting details. Since it went live in June, this movie has become the most visited location within the site. This fall, another link entitled "James Cash Penney, the Golden Rule, and Customer Service" will be added that presents Mr. Penney's belief in the principles of the golden rule, and how he instilled those principles in the operations of the JCPenney Company.

The JCPenney Archives and Historical Museum operates two web sites. One site is located on JCPenney's main internet site at www.jcpenney.com and a second site is located on the company's private intranet server called jWeb. These two sites are, for the present, nearly identical, but will be developed independently in the future. While the sites share much in common, each is designed to serve a different audience. The jcpenney.com site was developed with the public in mind, while the jWeb site was intended to provide historical information and communicate corporate culture to an internal audience.

Future developments on the jWeb page could include a store history database, department and product histories, and a quotation finder from Mr. Penney's speeches and written works. Another development could be a virtual museum that may include exhibits, displays, a virtual reality walk through of the museum, and a theater showing video interviews of Mr. Penney.

For those interested in developing their own archives site a few tips on web design might be helpful. First, try to make your site appealing to the eye. Web surfing is the ultimate in short-attention-span theater. You may only have a few seconds to catch your reader's attention. If your page is not immediately appealing, one quick click and you're history. Second, once you've captured your reader's attention, you must keep it with interesting content. This should not be an issue for many archivists, because our collections are generally content rich. But remember, interesting content is what your readers want; give it to them.

Next, a site must be well organized. Links to content pages should be clearly labeled and prominently positioned. The site should also be easy to navigate. You should employ nonlinear navigation so the reader can get back to your home page from lower pages with one click. On individual pages, keep the amount of scrolling required to view the page to a minimum. If you have a wealth of text, consider breaking it up into smaller parts and publish each part as a separate page under a common heading.

Finally, nothing is more frustrating to a reader than to have to wait several minutes for a page to load. To ensure quick load time, do not load large graphic files. Full-screen graphics may be visually appealing, but the time required to load the graphic may cancel their effectiveness. Consider quick-loading features such as side bars, text based pages, and smaller graphic files.

With web publishing comes the question: How do we protect the images, text, and multimedia clips that we include on our pages? JCPenney was concerned about putting previously unpublished images of Mr. Penney and other images from the collection on the web without copyright protection.

To address the question, JCPenney has employed a new form of copyright protection called data hiding, currently under development by the News in the Future group at the Media Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology under the direction of Walter Bender.

Data hiding is not currently available as a commercial product, but the idea is worth noting here. Data hiding is essentially embedding an electronic watermark within a digital file. The watermark is placed in a file so that the digital tags cannot be seen, cannot be separated from the file, and do not noticeably compromise the quality of the file. Instead of preventing access to copyrighted material, this technique allows copyright holders to send a web crawler out on the net to find anyone who is using their material without permission. The web crawler continually searches the Internet. Whenever it finds a file with the embedded tag, it will report to the copyright owner, with the address. If the site using the file is doing so without authorization, the publisher can contact the responsible webmaster directly.

According to international copyright law, a copyright holder who does not try to protect his or her rights can lose them. Having data-hiding technology in place and operating protects copyright ownership. JCPenney includes a copyright notice on the Archives home page notifying readers that photographs are encoded with digital watermarks and may not be reproduced without permission.

Another possible use for the technology includes imbedding

keywords and identification numbers within digital photographs or sound files for quick retrieval. For more information and examples of the data hiding research at MIT, see the data-hiding page at the MIT Media Lab at http://nif.www.media.mit.edu/Data Hiding/.

The era of web publishing is here to stay. As corporate archivists we have much to contribute. Our collections are rich in the stories, images, and sounds of our companies. James Cash Penney once said "Business is just another word for the social, industrial and economic organization of our world." President Calvin Coolidge once said "The chief business of the American people is business." By telling the stories of our companies we are adding to our understanding of our history; not just business history, but social, scientific, industrial, and economic history as well. Web publishing gives us a tool to share that history in ways few of us considered just a few short years ago. It is up to us to put it to use.