

Pratt Institute; School of Information

Bringing The Museum of Interesting Things into the Future with CatalogIt

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INFO-679

Museums and Digital Culture

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December 16, 2024

The Museum of Interesting Things Background and History

The Museum of Interesting Things is a traveling, interactive demonstration and exhibition of antiques and inventions that is based in New York City. Their goal is to inspire innovation and creativity with hands-on experience with different objects to not only learn from the past, but to foster an environment to create a better future. This is done through working with schools and other organizations to bring these objects to bring the museum to people, rather than just relying on people to make their way to the museum. They feature eight specialties: Toys, Math, Music, Science, Medical, Literature, Household, Photography. Outside of these specifics, they offer different themes for organizations to choose from for their experience including “Eureka! The History of Invention”, “Our Green Energy show - The Windup Circus”, “Can You Hear Me Now! The History of Communication”, “The History of Film and Photograph”, “Retro Futurist”, “Suffragist”, “Civil War”, and “Quack Medicine”.

The museum was founded by a man named Denny Daniel. He started as a filmmaker and a photo restorer and had around 20 museum and gallery exhibitions of his own work. He also serves on the board of the 19th Century Society, as an organizer for the NYC Steampunk meet, on the advisory board for the Beaux Arts Society and the New York Stereoscopic Society. He began collecting a personal collection of antiques around the 1980's. After noticing that his neighbor's kids would await new deliveries he got for his collection, he became inspired to start a “museum” with the goal of hands-on exploration of antiques and inventions to spread curiosity. It started as simple birthday parties in 2012, but today he has multiple locations with a goal of a brick-and-mortar 9-5 location in the future. It is still currently a very small institution. It seems that Denny Daniel runs most of the operations with assistance from other professionals, interns and volunteers. It did say on their website that they now have

locations in New Jersey and Massachusetts too, but it is unclear who runs them. At one point, it was just Daniel's home that stored the objects but it seems that it has expanded and whatever locations they use are no longer just storage spaces, but also can be visited on appointment. In an interview with a graduate student at the School of Visual Arts, Daniel said that he wishes to solidify the museum to last beyond him, but if that does not happen in his lifetime, he wishes to donate his collection to the city of New York.

Project Goals

I believe that the addition of a Collection Management System (CMS) would greatly benefit the Museum of Interesting Things through enhancement of the virtual experience for the public, digital preservation, and more efficient and effective collections management. It seems that the current collection does not have a distinct organization system after seeing some interviews in the space. Location tracking would be a beneficial addition to further organize all of their objects and create ease when collecting them for the traveling experience. Their current website is also hard to navigate and not very user friendly (See Appendix A for views of their website). There is not a distinct place to go to look at their entire collection nor are there clear lines of what objects are in each of their specialties. The public interface a CMS system could provide would make this more clear for visitors, patrons, and organizations wishing to either make an appointment or book an experience. A CMS system would also provide an opportunity for digital preservation since the objects in their collections are items they wish to be learned from and are continually used hands-on.

The addition of a CMS satisfies the methods and techniques of digital humanities. It works to both assist the backend with collections management and the public with better access

to the information it can provide. The addition of this digital technology would allow the Museum of Interesting Things to digitize and preserve the objects in their collection while allowing that progress to be publicly accessible through the public interface a CMS provides.

CatalogIt

CatalogIt is a collection management system founded by Dan Rael and Howard Burrows with the goal to create a CMS that was functional and fluent for individual users and institutions that could not afford more expensive systems. Their website features many capabilities that set them apart from other systems (See Appendix B) The two main reasons I chose this system was because it prides itself on its ease of use and cost efficiency. In order to test this before deciding to propose this to The Museum of Interesting Things, I did my own test of the system using a free trial CatalogIt offered (See Appendix C for a view into my trial with the system). After discovering how intuitive it was, I knew that it would be a fantastic first CMS system for a small museum.

The overall main goal of the addition of this system is to get every object in their collection cataloged. They have a few thousand objects and multiples of some of them since they are continually being used. The CatalogIt system would allow for the basic metadata like title, accession number, material, provenance, dimensions, descriptions and even a use field that would work well for their collection since the point is to share the uses of antiques and inventions. Another feature they could utilize is the collections folders. This would allow them to sort by their themes, like “Eureka! The History of Invention” and “Our Green Energy show - The Windup Circus”. This would also allow for quicker collection of objects for each of their traveling exhibitions.

The CatalogIt system also utilizes an app interface that would allow for quick and easy photograph entry. This is particularly useful for a smaller museum without the equipment to take photos with more expensive equipment. When adding photos to CatalogIt, it is even possible to add multiple photos with an option to add captions and descriptions. This could be particularly useful for objects that have multiple parts or uses. Another particularly useful feature, that I will admit might need some more tweaking on from the CatalogIt team but is useful nonetheless, is the ability to add video to record files as well. For The Museum of Interesting Things, this feature would allow them to document exactly how these items are used, so if people are unable to see them in person, the information is on their website. These features would only benefit the museum's mission of inspiring people with objects from the past by digitally preserving these objects, especially since they are being continually used and may degrade over time.

The Museum of Interesting Things from what I can tell does not have very in depth organization of their objects physically. I believe that the CatalogIt object tracking feature would allow for a better organized storage and retrieval of objects for their traveling experiences. The CatalogIt interface allows you to customize locations on a hierarchical scheme so they can sort by state to building to room to shelf to box to folder. You can even create QR codes that will open up the location or the object, making labeling incredibly easy. I would suggest they use QR codes to label boxes and shelves, as well as on objects (along with their object numbers) so they are easily identifiable. The locations can be changed temporarily as well, and are trackable by whoever is moving them, which would be beneficial when objects are taken and returned from events.

Because the objects they use are also continually used, being able to track conditions would be incredibly assistive. I would suggest that all objects go through a basic condition report

to acknowledge what state they are in. The CatalogIt system allows for a very customizable input in the condition reporting, as well as recommendations. It also has a section for conservation if any objects become unusable and need repairs. This would be a good way to track what objects are in the best shape to be used for their hands-on experiences. I would also recommend that in the interest of preservation, any objects that they have multiple of, they attempt to take the one in the best condition and not use it unless necessary, the same going for whatever is in the worst condition. Besides these main features, there are many other features like accession and donor tracking, document attachment, exhibition planning, tagging, and search term additions that would just make everything more effective and easier on The Museum of Interesting Things.

Interview

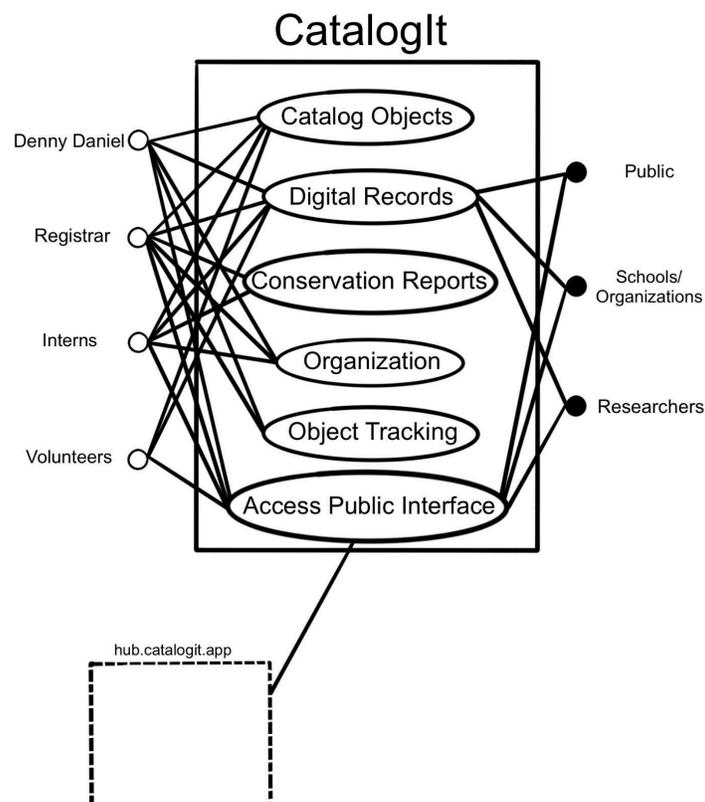
I got the opportunity to interview Marina Mayne, the Registrar at the Raupp Museum in Buffalo Grove, Illinois. The CatalogIt website for inquiring individuals and institutions featured a page of testimonials (See Appendix D). It was here that I saw Mayne's review that said, "When you are choosing a new CMS, don't be scared by how much you can do in CatalogIt because it's so, so easy to use!" The Raupp Museum is a small institution within its local government that explores the history of the area through exhibitions and programs. After inquiring with her through email about doing an interview with me for my project, she was more than happy to find a time to meet. Being a registrar at a small institution made her the perfect person to interview. (See Appendix E to see the Raupp Museum's CatalogIt public interface)

Mayne is one of two staff members at the museum, the other being the curator. She began there six years ago part time and moved to the full time position she is in now. Besides CatalogIt, Mayne has experience with PastPerfect and Microsoft Access. Mayne's main responsibilities at

the museum include managing the collection and assisting with exhibits and education programs. Their collection includes around 6,000 objects and about 4,000 - 5,000 archival objects like photographs and documents. The Raupp Museum previously used PastPerfect as their CMS with the addition of Omeka for their public interface, but moved to CatalogIt in May of 2023. They made the switch due to the affordability and the fact that the public interface hub was built into the cost and the system, so it no longer required a complicated process to make records public like it had with PastPerfect and Omeka. She noted as well that PastPerfect was a one time fee if you used the desktop version, but to move to the web version it required a yearly fee. Another feature that brought the museum to CatalogIt was the app. Being able to use the phone to directly input information or photos when down in the collection space rather than having to go through an entire upload process or to be able to lookup information from anywhere was an enticing feature. When I asked Mayne if they planned on staying with CatalogIt, she confirmed that they do indeed plan to continue use of it. She is looking forward to trying out some of their features she has yet to use, like their inventory page. The only complaints she had was that the printing layout is not as clean and she wishes the system had statistics to show the visitor makeup of their hub. Mayne mostly manages the system by herself, but it is used and appreciated by the curator and volunteers at the museum. Her main advice to other institutions looking to implement CatalogIt would be to test the system thoroughly to understand its features and capabilities. Overall, talking with Marina Mayne was very informative and insightful on the CatalogIt system and its benefits to a small institution. (See Appendix F to see full transcript of the interview)

Use Case Model

I created a Use Case Model to showcase exactly how the system would interact with its users on both the back end and with the public. On the back end of the system, you would have Denny Daniel with access, a registrar position that I am suggesting be hired with grant money, interns and volunteers. Denny Daniel and the Registrar would catalog objects, work on digital records, organize the collection, track objects, and access the public interface. I put in the use case model that Daniel would not work on conservation and condition reporting because ideally he would not spend too much time working on most of this project since he runs the day to day operations. Interns and volunteers would assist with cataloging objects, digital records and assisting with the public interface, and the interns could be utilized to assist with conservation and condition reports and collection organization. The public, schools and organizations, and researchers would have access to the public interface where they could access the digital records through the CatalogIt Hub that is shown as well on the Use Case Model.



Funding for system and staff

CatalogIt allows for many different levels and choices for which plan to purchase. For the Museum version that has 25,000 entries, 100 GB and an ability to add up to 10 users, it is \$540 a year. This cost is absolutely comparable to other CMS's. For example, Past Perfect with the same amount of users and storage costs \$2490 for the first year and \$1245 every year after that for their web enabled version to include the public web access. Besides the cost of the actual CatalogIt system, the only other thing I would suggest to be funded is a registrar position. Denny Daniel runs the day to day operations of the museum and adding in a CMS from scratch would be a big uptaking. The museum would benefit from a position specifically designed to spearhead this project, which would be best done by a registrar or collections manager position. Depending on the financial state of the museum currently and the amount of grant money able to be acquired, this could be a part time or temporary position if need be.

When looking for grants that the Museum of Interesting Things could apply for, I struggled mainly because I was unable to find anything about the museum's tax status or finances, so depending on those it may be a requirement to search for other grant opportunities. With the information I have, I am suggesting applying for the Inspire! Grants for Small Museums. This is given by the Institute for Museum and Library Services. Their aim is to "support small museums of all disciplines in project-based efforts to serve the public through exhibitions, educational/interpretive programs, digital learning resources, policy development and institutional planning, technology enhancements, professional development, community outreach, audience development, and/or collections management, curation, care, and conservation." (Inspire! Grants for Small Museums) This project could cover many of these efforts, but most closely fits with collections management, curation, care, and conservation. The

grant is for a 1-3 year program and you could apply for between \$5,000 - \$75,000. I would recommend applying for \$25,000 or less. This would allow you to avoid cost share. It would also give ample money to pay for the startup of the CatalogIt system for a few years and cover paid internships or a part time registrar. If you wished to hire a full time registrar based on the grant, you could apply for \$75,000 if you could provide funds from non-federal sources equal to or greater than the amount asking for, and this would leave room for a full time registrar hire and a few years of payment for CatalogIt.

Conclusion

I believe the implementation of the Collections Management System CatalogIt would highly benefit The Museum of Interesting Things. As a traveling, interactive exhibit, their objects are constantly moving and being used. Condition reports and object tracking would make this more efficient. The museum also has a goal of inspiring people using the past to invoke future innovations, and one of the best ways this could be accomplished would be a user-friendly public interface, allowing for research and exploration all while pushing towards digital preservation. It is obvious after my interview with Marina Mayne at the Raupp Museum that CatalogIt is a perfect fit for a small institution since it is affordable and user-friendly. I hope that more small institutions are able to find affordable digital tools like CatalogIt. I hope that with the new wave of digitization and addition of digital technologies in museums, that we can remember small institutions that we know and love and continue to bring them into this future with us.

Appendix

Appendix A

The Museum of Interesting Things Website; Toy Collection

The screenshots of the website below shows the current way to view any objects in the collection. It is separated by the “8 Popular Specialties” and this specifically shows the Toy Collection.

The screenshot displays the website's interface for the Toy Collection. At the top, the logo for "The Museum of Interesting Things" is centered, flanked by two cartoon characters. Below the logo, a navigation menu includes "ABOUT", "HISTORY", "NEWS/PRESS", "IMAGES/VIDEOS", "CONTACT/BOOKINGS", and "Home". A sidebar on the left lists "8 Popular Specialties": Toys, Math, Music, Science, Medical, Literature, Household, and Photography. The main content area features a heading "Museum Shop" and a sub-heading "Demonstrating The Evolution of the Idea...and Beyond!". Below this, a paragraph describes the museum as a traveling interactive demonstration of antiques and inventions. A call to action states: "A Traveling Show! We can do your next Event or Private Shows - at our location or yours! Call or e-mail for details". A note mentions: "Schools, hospitals, universities, galleries, parties, libraries, anywhere with a room and people, we'll bring things! We are a traveling show -Like a circus...just no elephants".

The main content area is divided into a grid of toy categories, each with a title, an image, and a description:

- *Wind-up Roller Coaster***: An image of a small, colorful roller coaster toy.
- *Somersaulting Clown***: An image of a clown toy in a red and white outfit.
- Spinning Musical Tops**: An image of three colorful spinning tops.
- *Green Power***: A section with text: "Check out our **Green Power** items. They run on alternative energy or mechanical power. They are the items in bold *Green* Maybe we can think of ways to use yesterday's technology to power the future!"
- Cooties**: An image of a box of Cooties baby wipes.
- *Rocket Racer***: An image of a yellow and red rocket-shaped toy car.
- *Toy Organ Grinder***: An image of a red toy organ grinder.
- *Monkey with Cymbals***: An image of a monkey toy holding cymbals.
- *Toy Genola Phonograph ***: An image of a green toy gramophone.
- *Shoe Shine Monkey***: An image of a monkey toy holding a shoe.

At the bottom left, there are social media links: "Like totally" (Facebook), "twitter @dennydaniel", and "instagram @museumthings".

Figure A1. This shows the overall objects in the Toy Category. The left column and information above the images shows on all tabs of their page.

Tin Spinning Tops



Spinning tops have been found in almost all cultures. They may have evolved from early tools used to start fire. Ancient tops were most often spun by hand or using string. Modern mechanical tops are called pump tops, because pumping the handle pushes a plunger along a spiral rod, making the top spin. These tops are made of tin, and make music when they spin. Tops are still very popular toys for babies and young children today. Many modern tops are made of plastic, but some are still made of tin.

Figure A2. This shows the expanded view into certain objects with a paragraph form of information on it. This specific example is of the Tin Spinning Tops in their Toy Collection.

Appendix B

CatalogIt Website; Why Choose CatalogIt

The screenshot below is on the CatalogIt Products page. It shows their reasons for convincing patrons to choose CatalogIt as their new CMS system.

← CatalogIt Home Products Resources Testimonials Support **LOG IN / SIGN UP** HUB

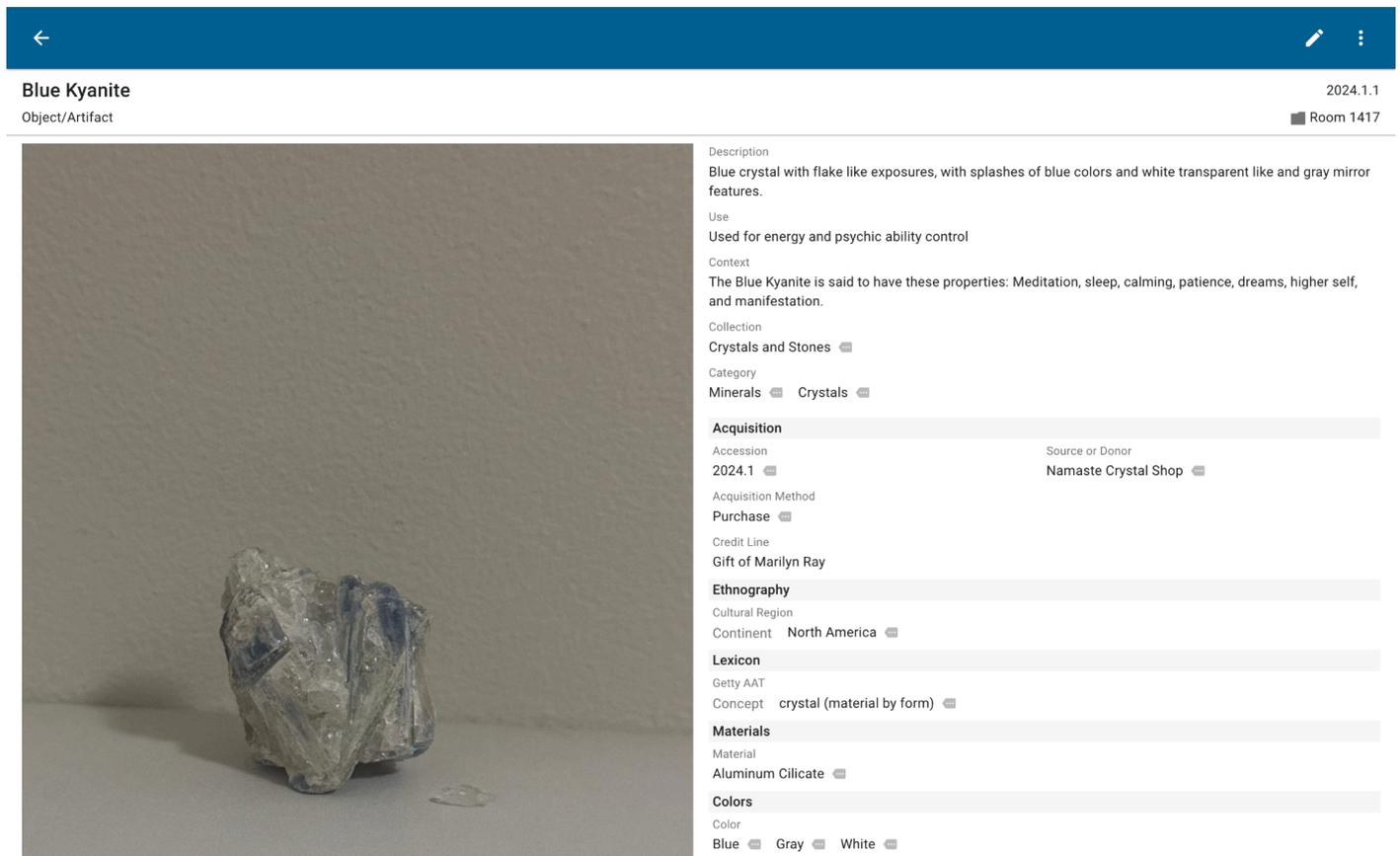
Why choose CatalogIt?

- Intuitive and Accessible**
Enjoy intuitive navigation, data entry, and searching. Document the full scope of data associated with your items, from their materials, dates, and provenance to their historic and ethnographic contexts. Use detailed profiles to enrich your collections, building and revealing new relationships.
- Collaborate anywhere, from any device**
Access collections via smartphone, tablet, laptop, and desktop. Create an entry from your smartphone and it's immediately available for your team to view and edit anywhere. Manage collections with staff and volunteers in real time and empower your team with workflow and organizational features.
- Comprehensive Classifications**
Explore numerous existing CatalogIt classifications, well researched sets of fields designed to precisely document different item types. Use these detailed ontologies to capture the characteristics of each item. CatalogIt conducts extensive research to develop classifications for diverse item types and periodically releases new ones.
- Secure, Private, and Hassle-Free**
CatalogIt is a trusted, secure cloud-based service with modern and robust frontend and backend infrastructure. There's no need for dedicated servers, backups, or concerns about maintenance, security updates, and system upkeep. CatalogIt keeps your data safe, private, and accessible to you 24/7.
- Powerful Tracking and Reporting**
Document the complex histories of your collection's objects. Record and track accessions, loans, and exhibitions. Record your items' condition, conservation, and location histories. Generate quick and customizable reports.
- Easy Data Migration. Easy training**
CatalogIt makes migrating data from diverse formats and systems easy. When your migration is complete, quickly train staff and volunteers on the system, completing a smooth transition. Import data incrementally as new objects arrive.
- Selectively Publish to the Web**
Publish collections to the web through the CatalogIt HUB or to your own website, using our API and WordPress plugin or iframe integration. Choose the data you wish to make public, and keep the rest private. Share your online collections with the world and amplify your digital impact.
- Document Exhibitions and Watch Them Come to Life**
Organize and track exhibitions from start to finish. Manage incoming loans and coordinate your own collections for planned exhibitions. Promote your exhibitions online through the CatalogIt HUB or your own website.

Appendix C

My Test Trial of CatalogIt

The images below show the interface visible through the backend of CatalogIt. I tested this myself using a crystal and other objects in my home. I was able to complete the description and metadata with ease.



The screenshot displays the CatalogIt backend interface for an object record. The header shows a back arrow on the left and edit and menu icons on the right. The object title is "Blue Kyanite" with the type "Object/Artifact" below it. The version "2024.1.1" and location "Room 1417" are in the top right. A large image of the blue kyanite crystal is on the left. The right side contains a metadata form with the following sections:

- Description:** Blue crystal with flake like exposures, with splashes of blue colors and white transparent like and gray mirror features.
- Use:** Used for energy and psychic ability control
- Context:** The Blue Kyanite is said to have these properties: Meditation, sleep, calming, patience, dreams, higher self, and manifestation.
- Collection:** Crystals and Stones
- Category:** Minerals, Crystals
- Acquisition:**
 - Accession: 2024.1
 - Source or Donor: Namaste Crystal Shop
 - Acquisition Method: Purchase
 - Credit Line: Gift of Marilyn Ray
- Ethnography:**
 - Cultural Region:
 - Continent: North America
- Lexicon:**
 - Getty AAT:
 - Concept: crystal (material by form)
- Materials:**
 - Material: Aluminum Silicate
- Colors:**
 - Color: Blue, Gray, White

Figure C1. This shows the metadata view in the object record of the CatalogIt backend interface.

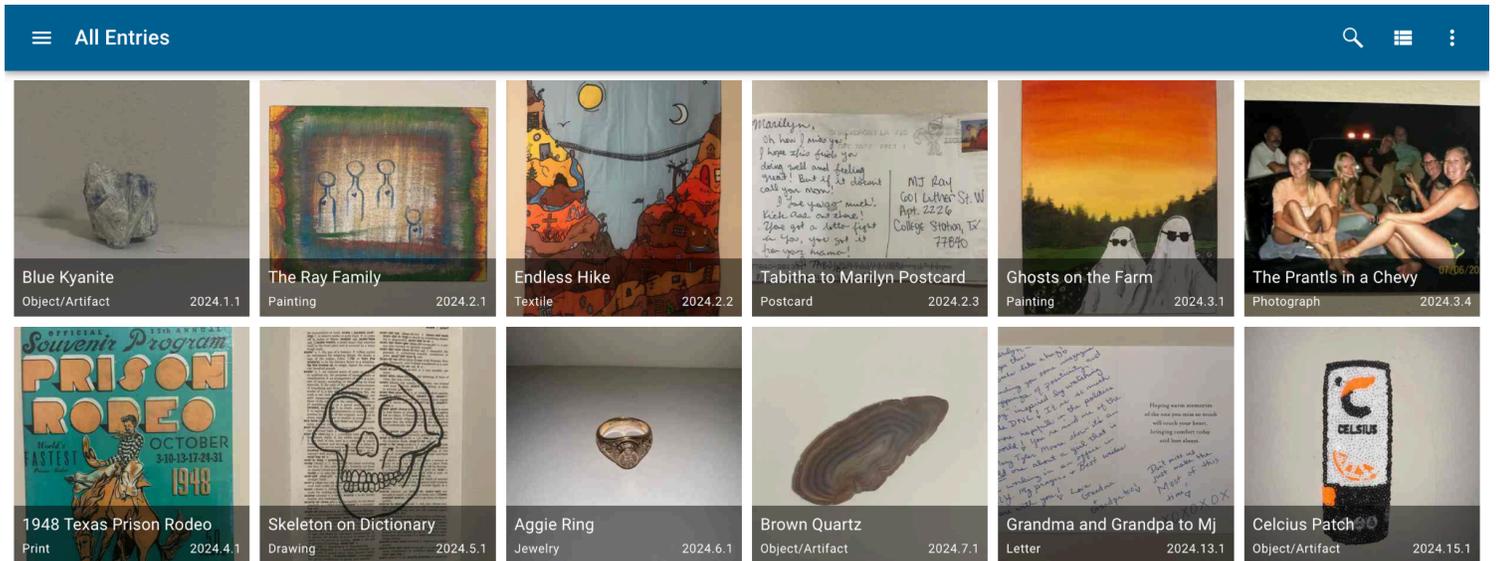


Figure C2. This shows the backend view of the CatalogIt interface when viewing all object entries. Notice it prioritizes the photos and has a search bar in the top right.

Appendix D

CatalogIt Testimonials

The image below shows the website tab of CatalogIt's information page that shows different user's reviews and testimonials of the system. Included here in this image is the testimonial by Marina Mayne at the Raupp Museum.

The screenshot displays the 'Testimonials' section of the CatalogIt website. The navigation bar at the top includes 'Home', 'Products', 'Resources', 'Testimonials', and 'Support', along with 'LOG IN / SIGN UP' and 'HUB' buttons. The testimonials are arranged in a 2x2 grid:

- Congregation B'nai Jehudah (Missouri, USA):** Testimonial by Abby Magariel, Head Curator. Quote: "CatalogIt provides me with everything I need and nothing that I don't need!"
- Temple B'rith Kodesh (New York, USA):** Testimonial by Marjorie Searl, Research Curator. Quote: "CatalogIt has encouraged us to develop a collections management plan which previously had not existed for our collection."
- Camron Stanford House (California, USA):** Testimonial by Iliana Morton, Assistant Director. Quote: "Having a spot in CatalogIt to report all that data and track it has been really (...) life-changing for us."
- Raupp Museum (Illinois, USA):** Testimonial by Marina Mayne, Museum Registrar and Public Educator. Quote: "When you are choosing a new CMS, don't be scared by how much you can do in CatalogIt because it's so, so easy to use!"

Each testimonial card features a background image of the institution's interior or exterior, a quote, the user's name and title, and two buttons: 'EXPLORE COLLECTION' and 'READ CASE STUDY'.

Appendix E

Raupp Museum CatalogIt Hub Interface

The image below shows the CatalogIt Hub interface for the Raupp Museum. Every museum that uses the public interface option has their own unique link through the CatalogIt hub. This image features an overview of the museum as well as an item count and different accessible collections within their museum.

Item Count
3758

The Raupp Museum preserves Buffalo Grove's heritage and provides the broadest possible access to community history. The Museum's collection includes over 5,000 objects, archives, and photographs from the past 200 years of Buffalo Grove history. This Museum database is a work in progress. The Museum regularly acquires new objects and conducts research on its collection. For more information, contact the Raupp Museum at 847.850.2135 or email museum@bgparks.org. The Raupp Museum is part of the Buffalo Grove Park District.

Arcadia Farm Collection
21 Items
Object/Artifact, Archive, Photograph
Arcadia Farm was a horse boarding stable, situated along Arlington Heights Road, from 1959 to 1978. The farm was owned and operated by Blanche Kloman and her children. For almost 20 years, people

Books
61 Items
Publication, Book
Explore our collection of historic books from the mid. 1800s until present day. Included are published volumes and books from local organizations and businesses.

Appendix F

Interview with Marina Mayne Transcript

Marina Mayne 0:40

Hi, Marilyn.

Marilyn Ray 0:41

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me.

Marina Mayne 0:50

Yeah, I was curious about your project. If you could explain, are you interviewing just to for CatalogIt, or are you learning about multiple systems?

Marilyn Ray 1:04

Each individual student is doing different systems. So we're basically having to do a proposal to an institution that we choose, or like a digital system that we think that they should add to their institution. And so we each pick a different tool. My tool that I picked was to CatalogIt, and then we are interviewing somebody who uses that tool or uses a similar tool to see how it works to put in our proposal. So we'll learn through other people's projects when others present as well in class.

Marina Mayne 1:43

That's very cool. I had never seen a project quite like it before, but it's a good idea.

Marilyn Ray 1:48

I agree. It's my professor that I have. It's her first time teaching it, and she was really excited. And I think it's a very awesome project, and I think it's very good. It's been very useful so far, because I've only worked with, I think, one like CMS system. So I'm, like, enjoying looking into another one and getting to learn, from people, that are looking at different ones too.

Marina Mayne 2:09

Cool. Thank you. Yeah, whenever you're ready, go ahead.

Marilyn Ray 2:12

Okay, thank you. First off I want to know about, the Raupp Museum and and your role inside the museum.

Marina Mayne 2:29

It's named the Raupp museum for the family that gave the land for the museum. So we're a local history museum in Buffalo Grove, Illinois, in the suburbs of Chicago. So we tell the story of our city of Buffalo Grove and then a little bit of the surrounding county and area, kind of how the suburbs started. We are a small museum, so we only have two full time staff, myself and one other person. We're part of the Buffalo Grove Park District, so we're one of those museums that are situated within local government entity. So we're part of this bigger thing, but our museum staff is pretty small, so I'm the registrar and public educator, so I take care of all of our museum collections and archives, and then I also help build and design exhibits and assist in programs when our curator, who runs most of our programs, needs help. So when you have a just the two of us, you do a lot of different things.

Marilyn Ray 3:33

So you get to be hands on with a lot of different parts of the museum, which is interesting.

Marina Mayne 3:42

Yeah, and our collection, we have, probably, we have around 6000 objects. And then maybe, it's hard to estimate, just because we have some archives that we're still putting in our database, but anywhere from like four to 5000 photographs and documents too. So we're small, but we've got a hefty little collection.

Marilyn Ray 4:13

When did you come into this job?

Marina Mayne 4:15

Yeah, so I've been here for about six years. I was working part time, just as the Registrar for about three years, and then now three years I've been full time. Before this, I was a preservation specialist at the Burke Museum in Seattle, which is their archeology department. And then before that, I was in graduate school like you, for museum studies, and I worked in mainly archeological or history oriented museums. Here, I just moved to the Chicago area to be closer to family again, because we were in Seattle. So, yeah, I started this job then about six years ago.

Marilyn Ray 5:10

When you were at your job prior and graduate school, did you have any experience with any different CMS systems that you used, or any different things like that.

Marina Mayne 5:23

Yeah. So I've worked in about three or four other museums before this position on almost all of them use PastPerfect. So I've used PastPerfect for a long time, and then I've some another one of them also used Microsoft Access, which is like Microsoft's version of database software that they

had built just for their museum. Some of the smaller ones just used to Excel as well. So the smaller history museums that I work with so but in terms of other CMS, just mainly PastPerfect before this CatalogIt.

Marilyn Ray 5:23

How old is the CatalogIt system at the Raupp Museum, like when was it implemented?

Marina Mayne 5:49

I actually handled the whole move over to CatalogIt, and we did it in May of 2023, so we've had it a little over a year now.

Marilyn Ray 6:18

I looked through the CatalogIt public interface for the Raupp Museum and its really impressive. That's a lot to get done.

Marina Mayne 6:29

Yeah, it was. What's nice about CatalogIt is making things public is really easy. So when, when we switched and we have everything in there, it's like one button, then you can make certain things easy. I'd say, like, maybe half of our stuff is public right now on, on what you saw on the hub.

Marilyn Ray 6:50

What did the museum used prior?

Marina Mayne 6:54

Yeah, we were using PastPerfect here as well.

Marilyn Ray 6:59

What about CatalogIt made it the choice to switch over from PastPerfect?

Marina Mayne 7:07

Our PastPerfect system, it worked, but we were really looking to make the collection more accessible, so that people could look at things online, or people could do projects or research, because we have a lot of local students who like to look in the collection, or genealogy research, that sort of thing. So we wanted to make the collection more accessible. And I was using PastPerfect but I was using the desktop version, which is what we had, which you pay the one time fee, and then you're good. But if you want to do it online, you have to pay them the yearly fee. So I was using, actually, Omeka. I don't know if you've heard of Omeka before. It's kind of

like an online collection system, but it's geared towards libraries, but museums can use it too. It's open, source, but they have an online portion where I was putting some of our collection on there, because it was really affordable, yeah, to use that, but I would have to upload things into PastPerfect and then upload them again into Omeka. So it was a lot of work, so that's why we were looking for a different system where we could do everything at once. Which was one reason that we chose CatalogIt. It has the whole hub is just built into the cost, so you don't have to pay extra to do that.

Marilyn Ray 8:45

I noticed that myself. They have a free trial for an individual and so I was looking through it, I noticed it was everything all in one. I know a lot of systems, like even TMS you have to use an outside source, like Gallery Systems. So that's one reason why I wanted to use catalog it for my project. Is it because of that same reason, that it's all built into one, that you guys still stick with it? Are you still liking it and want to stick with it for the future?

Marina Mayne 9:15

Yeah, it was. It was a few things. I looked at a number of different programs, primarily for CatalogIt was both the having the online part built in, but also the affordability. For us, we're such a small museum, you know, we don't have a huge budget. So this was around like \$500 a year, which is one of the more affordable cloud based collection systems here. In addition, it being cloud based also helps too, because then we can access it from anywhere, especially if you're doing some kind of database work from home now or a different site. And for PastPerfect you can have on your server, but it's not as easy to access. So we made the choice for both the affordability and the ease of use. I also really liked and what brought me to this system was the app. So they also have the app feature. Before I would run down to the collection space and take a laptop, and then you have to take a picture and then upload the picture and then put in the program. Whereas with the app, you could take a picture right in CatalogIt and it just uploads it onto your object record. It's way easier that way. Or you can look up things that you're trying to find for an exhibit without having to bring a laptop or something.

Marilyn Ray 10:40

Have you done a lot of the object photography through the phone app that they have?

Marina Mayne 10:47

Yes, I do that now. Before, I was using, like a smaller, professional camera, but now I have a small space down there to take photos with a little background and just use that, because now with cameras on phones nowadays, with the newest phones, it's pretty easy to take nice pictures and just upload into the database. I do that for all the object photos in there, for archival things and photographs, I still scan them and as tiffs and high res, and then keep a TIFF and upload a JPEG into CatalogIt. just use the app for all my other photography. That's one thing I think that makes it very accessible, especially to smaller institutions.

Marilyn Ray 11:35

The institution I'm going to be proposing it too, is also a small institution, which is another reason I'm glad to talk to you. But how developed do you have the system today? What you guys want to do? Do you have a final goal?

Marina Mayne 11:55

Yeah, I'd say we have like 80% of the objects in there from but that were in PastPerfect to begin with. So for me, the next step would be to use catalog it to do a full inventory in the next year or so and try out that feature that they didn't have as much in PastPerfect. So they have a whole inventory page and feature in CatalogIt, which is something I'm going to test out next. Even though it's been over a year, I still kind of am learning new things in CatalogIt. The staff there in the system, they're always making updates. They only recently in the last month, added an AI descriptive feature. So when you upload and photo into your object catalog, you can click this button and it'll take the photo and write a description of that object for you. And I've tested it, it's pretty good. Sometimes I'll use it as an outline, and then edit things. The one thing that's a little strange, or not strange, but that I don't like is it will use descriptors that are subjective. But one thing that I've asked the company about adding is knowing the statistics behind how many people are actually visiting your hub. So that's one feature they haven't added yet that they're thinking of adding in the future, because it's good to know who's how many people are coming and using that site. And also I still like to print off an object's record and keep a paper copy in our filing system and their printing layout is is not as clean, I guess, as I would like it to be. PastPerfect's was pretty clean. So even I'm still like, what do I want to do next with this? What do I want to tackle first?

Marilyn Ray 14:42

Which is really nice that you have a lot of options, especially with an affordable system. You said you've talked to them a little bit about things you might want to add. Overall, is their customer service very helpful?

Marina Mayne 14:58

Their their staff are wonderful. They're really helpful. You can just submit a ticket or email them at any time, and they're very quick and with response and helping. They have their own wiki page where they have a whole support of things to do. For the transition for PastPerfect, that was probably the easiest. You just give them your PastPerfect data. They transfer everything into CatalogIt in like like two weeks that it took them, not that long, and then they just give you the login. They also create these Excel sheets where there's problems that they encounter that you might not have realized that you had in your PastPerfect, so as they're integrating your system, they identify things for you to look at. They let you know by what's most critical to address and what's least critical. So if there's like, object number issues or in inconsistencies, you know to fix those first. But then there could be things like, in your people tab, where you have all your historic people and catalogers and donors, you can have multiple names of the same person, only spelled slightly differently, and it gets transferred to your database with three different spellings. So they'll let you know like, you need to put these three people together somehow. There's like a

function to do that pretty easily, but you have to kind of edit the data a little, and when you first get it.

Marilyn Ray 16:55

But that's fantastic, because I know when I worked with TMS, there was a lot of things like that, and you just stumble upon them. You don't have a whole list of them. So that's really fantastic, that while they're doing that transition, they help you out like that. Really glad to hear that. How were you able to sort of customize it to specifically your needs for your museum?

Marina Mayne 17:41

There's not too much customization. You can customize how you want your object ID number to be formatted. You have to let them know, and then they'll edit in the background. So like for us, when you have multiple objects that's part of a grouping, like maybe a tea cup and tea saucer, so you want it under the same object ID, but you want an A and a B, or something like that, you have to kind of let them know. So you can customize that end of it. There's not too much other customization in this system, which I think is probably why, for maybe a bigger institution, it might be a little bit harder to use. I wish I could customize the layout of the printing stuff. You can pick which fields you want to include and everything like that but the design, the format's pretty set.

Marilyn Ray 19:08

Do you have to do any like maintaining metadata or working with other systems? I know that you, you said it works all in one, but also I know you had like it linked it to the website for the whole system of the Buffalo Grove.

Marina Mayne 19:35

So CatalogIt does have as API interface feature where you can literally put it on your website, almost like, integrate it. I haven't used that yet, but it's something that I've considered in the future. For now, I just had links on our park district website, so I have to work with our marketing department to add links in certain areas and put different designs. I do make online exhibit pages on the park district site that have different topics, and then I'll link the object photos to the CatalogIt hub. So mainly it's just putting in those links to people to go to our hub. So there's not too much like in the back end I have to do there.

Marilyn Ray 19:37

You said that the training, onboarding process is really easy, and does the curator also work on the system as well, or does it kind of all run by you on your end?

Marina Mayne 20:06

It was pretty much me. I did all of the onboarding for it. Our curator, she uses it just she uses it for her own research, like to look things up and stuff, but I manage all the back end and all the cataloging. We do have a lot of volunteers who come over the summer. So we have a lot of high school and college volunteers who come and work in the system, and they have found it much easier to use than PastPerfect, which was another reason I use it. It's easier to train them on. So yea all the management is just just me.

Marilyn Ray 21:25

That's really impressive. I did want to ask, overall if, what advice would you give to individuals or organizations looking to adopt CatalogIt?

Marina Mayne 21:47

I've actually just had a meeting with with another museum near us last week, They were asking about CatalogIt too. I would say, really test it, because there are certain features that are very different that they don't expect. So for example, for CatalogIt a lot of the data kind of centers around the object. So what I mean by that if you want to put in what exhibits the object was in or relationships with other objects, you do all of that in the object record. You can't do it in the exhibit record. So if you go to your exhibit section and you want to talk about some exhibit you had, and let's say 15th anniversary of the town, and you want to put in all the objects that were in that exhibit. You can't just write it in to that exhibit record. You have to put it that each object was in that exhibit. So you have to go into each object record, put that it was in this exhibit, instead of the other way around, which works a little different than PastPerfect. The like relationships work differently than other systems I've used, but I have found that you just it just takes a little getting used to. So I would say that overall, for advice for other organizations is make sure you try it out and see if that organization, the way the database works, works for you. But also that it, it's easy to use CatalogIt, but it can be difficult to or there's a lot to master. So even if you feel like doing your daily stuff is very easy, there's lots in the back end where you can add more and more stuff. I and one of my favorite features, actually, is the search feature too. My favorite feature, well, there's two. The QR codes, because in PastPerfect you have to pay extra for QR codes, and CatalogIt has it for free. So I now put QR codes on all my boxes and stuff, so I can scan and see what's in the box, and then the search function is really nice, because you can search just generally, like if I'm searching for women's boots, I can type in women's boots, and if those words are in any record in any field, it will come up. Versus in previous databases, you had to choose what sections I want to search in. You can do very specific searches too. So now they've added, actually, like the last year, where you can search by description, or you can search, I want everything with this title and this number, so you can still do those very specific things. But you can also search just wide in general, which is awesome.

Marilyn Ray 25:24

I wish more systems were like that. I always got frustrated with that. It did remind me of one more thing that I just thought of that I should ask. Keeping track of objects in CatalogIt, is it relatively easy.

Marina Mayne 25:50

CatalogIT has, like, this tiered, relational thing for their location. So you have to create, like, if I have a box 80, box 80 then gets placed inside this shelf on this bank, in this room. And so you have to create multiple locations, though. So you have to create the room as a location. And then you have to create each bank as a location, and then each shelf on that bank and then the box number, yeah. But once you do that, it's really nice, because now you can just type it in, and all those locations are there. So when you make a new box, you already have bank two with shelf three on, you know, this section. So it's easy to keep track of all the records in there.

Marilyn Ray 26:51

That answered my question. I cannot think of anything in particular. I think we kind of covered everything that I had in mind. Do you have anything that you'd like to say, or any questions for me?

Marina Mayne 27:04

Let me see, I'm just looking over if there was anything. One thing I'll mention that was surprising too, that I had to get used to, but now that I like is the people function. So in most systems, it's separated by you have donors in one part. You have, staff in one part of the system. You have historic related people, or whatever, in a different but CatalogIt has everybody in the same folder, so they're all in people. So it's like all your donors, all your staff, are listed in the people category but you can still assign them roles. It actually ended up being easier because sometimes donors also are related to a historic object. So now I like it, but I would say it's easier for people with a lot of volunteers, easier for small museums. My one question was, do I get to read about your project when it's all done?

Marilyn Ray 28:07

Of course! If you want to, I can email you, my final proposal project. It's like a paper. So I can definitely email that to you if you want to read it.

Marina Mayne 28:18

Yeah, just to see everything you learn and what you decide on.

Marilyn Ray 28:23

Yeah, that'd be amazing. I would love to send you that. And thank you, really. Thank you so much for talking to me. I really appreciate it. It was really amazing.

Marina Mayne 28:48

Not a problem. I'm glad you reached out. And of course, if you know you think of something after or have a follow up question, feel free to email me too.

Marilyn Ray 28:55

Of course, thank you so much, and let me know if there's anything else you need or want to hear from me. I will send you my project when it's finished.

Marina Mayne 29:05

No worries. Thanks Marilyn.

Marilyn Ray 29:07

Thank you so much.

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