Mixed Media

Creating a Podcast for Free: The Chicago Open Archives Podcast

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Introduction

The Chicago Area Archivists (CAA) is a group of Chicagoland archivists, historians, librarians, and other archival/library professionals who collaborate to provide discussion, education, and social opportunities for archival professionals in the Chicago metro area. The goals of CAA are to

- "Share information on issues of interest to the local archival community;
- Advocate preservation of and access to historically valuable resources related to the Chicago area; and
- Keep members informed about archival programs and resources." (Chicago Area Archivists, n.d.).

One initiative developed to assist in achieving these goals was Chicago Open Archives (COA). The purpose of Chicago Open Archives was to participate in the celebration of American Archives Month each October by connecting community members and other library/archival professionals to archival repositories throughout the city of Chicago and its suburbs. During this month, various archival institutions hosted events, tours, and other types programming to celebrate and promote their collections.

In an effort to promote the October 2018 COA events, which focused on the Illinois Centennial, the Chicago Area Archivists developed and released a podcast series interviewing past COA event hosts and allowing them the opportunity to share their stories and promote their

upcoming COA events. After the success of season 1 of the COA Podcast, CAA decided to commence a season 2, which is currently released on a monthly basis. After the discontinuation of COA event programming, the COA Podcast committee switched season 2's focus to archival professionals and their "archival origin stories."

This article outlines how members of the COA Podcast committee selected podcast interviewees, recording options, hosting services, and marketing initiatives. To listen to the Chicago Open Archives Podcast, you can visit us on YouTube, Apple Podcasts, and Stitcher. If you have any questions or comments regarding the COA Podcast or on starting your own podcast, please feel free to reach out to Danielle Nowak (daniellenowak20@gmail.com), the project chair for the Chicago Open Archives Podcast.

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Selecting Interviewees

To select interviewees for season 1, the COA Podcast committee chose to reach out to individuals whose institutions had previously hosted a COA and planned to host one in the future. Season 1 includes 13 interviews from a diverse pool of interviewees and institution types that had been active participants in COA. Having a limited pool of individuals to select from was a double-edged sword. On one side, implementing the criteria of being a past COA participant to be interviewed limited the number of individuals the COA Podcast committee had to reach

out to, thereby not overwhelming them with potential choices. On the other side, it was at times challenging to find people from the selected pool who were interested in speaking on their experiences with COA and had the schedule availability to be recorded doing so.

Season 2 presented a different set of challenges in selecting interviewees for the podcast. Because nearly every archival professional has an archival origin story to some degree, the potential list of participants was large. To help narrow it down, we decided to contact professionals with CAA memberships first. Limiting the number of potential interviewees gave the COA Podcast committee members a starting point that was not entirely overwhelming. Knowing that CAA already has a diverse member group also made the membership list an extremely helpful tool. Additionally, because members provide their contact information when joining, the potentially time-consuming step of finding accurate and updated contact information for potential interviewees was eliminated.

Recording

Finding a recording space and someone to edit the interviews was not a challenge for the COA Podcast committee, thanks to CAA's cochair of Programming Subcommittee and WTTW/Chicago PBS and WFMT Chicago's director of Media Archives, Allison Schein Holmes. Holmes was able to secure a studio space at the Renée Crown Public Media Center and edit each of the interviews to be used as podcast episodes. Because of this, professional-sounding episodes were produced for both season 1 and season 2.

However, free or inexpensive recording and editing options exist for those who do not have access to professional equipment or audio engineers. Physical equipment for starting a podcast includes a cell phone (to perform the actual recording), headphones (so speakers can hear what they are saying and what is being said to them), and a microphone (to improve audio quality). While these physical materials can become costly rather quickly, many academic and public libraries have these technologies available to check out. Furthermore, these libraries may also be able to provide a quiet and somewhat private space to record, whether in a conference room, study room, or even an actual recording studio. An assortment of software is available to assist podcast creators in recording and editing their audios. Two popular and free programs are Audacity (which can run on Mac, Windows, and Linux) and Garage Band (only available on Mac and iOS).

Selecting a Platform

Season 1 of the COA Podcast was initially released solely on SoundCloud. On the free basic user plan, an individual can upload up to three hours of audio, with a maximum file size of 4GB. When considering the size of each of the episode's audio files, this limitation was not initially a major hindrance. The 13 episodes in season 1 range in length from 00:04:35 to 00:13:13, combining at just over 01:35:00 in total.

As talks of season 2 began, the COA Podcast committee realized that it would need to find a platform(s) that could hold its growing podcast and extend the podcast's reach. The first step in expanding the podcast's reach was to transfer all of the season 1 episodes from SoundCloud to YouTube and put season 2 episodes on YouTube, rather than SoundCloud, as they were/are being released. According to a 2018 study done by the Pew Research Center, 85% of teens say that they use YouTube, with 35% of them saying they use it most often (Anderson and Jiang, 2018). Because season 2 focuses on career stories, YouTube seemed like an appropriate fit. Additionally, with a verified YouTube account (which is simple to create), users can upload videos of 15 minutes or more, with a maximum file size of 128GB or 12 hours in length. The number of videos an individual can upload appears unlimited. On SoundCloud, season 1 averaged approximately 43 listens per episode. On YouTube, season 2's episodes are averaging approximately 101 listens per episode (after the release of four episodes from October 2019 to January 2020). To upload the audio files as a video in YouTube (which is required), we used iMovie to convert the audio files into .MP4 files that are compatible with YouTube.

After transferring season 1 to YouTube, the process of making the podcast accessible on popular podcast platforms commenced. To do this, the COA Podcast committee selected Podbean as its hosting service. The Podbean basic free version provides a total of five hours of storage space, the podcast's own Podbean site, and an RSS feed compatible with both Apple Podcasts and Stitcher. While the Podbean basic version is an adequate tool for making the podcast available on Apple Podcasts and Stitcher, it provides minimal statistics, only showing its users how many total downloads each episode has had, but not clarifying whether those downloads came from Apple Podcasts or Stitcher, or how many listens there were in total (beyond just downloads).

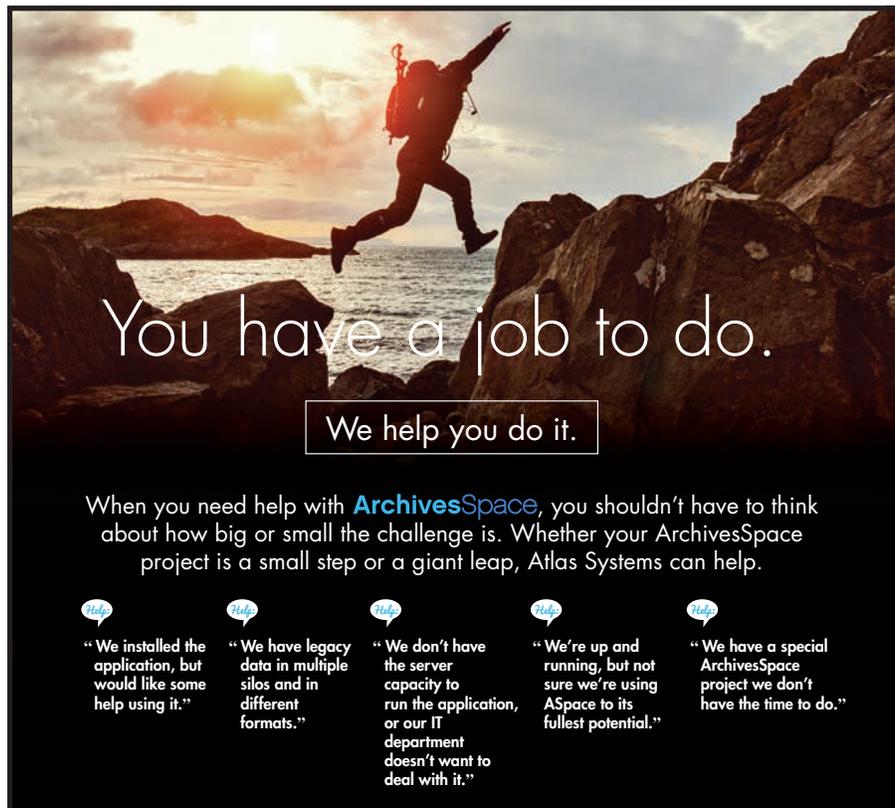*(Continued from page 17)*

Marketing

The marketing strategy for season 2 of the podcast has been more aggressive than that of season 1. The COA Podcast committee released all 13 season 1 episodes onto SoundCloud from August to October 2018. For season 2, one episode is being released each month, spanning seven episodes in seven months. Each month, social media posts are made on CAA's Facebook page and Twitter account. Additionally, notifications of new episode releases are mentioned on CAA's listserv.

Conclusion

Developing the COA Podcast has been a challenging yet rewarding experience. It has given members of the COA Podcast committee the opportunity to learn new skills or expand on previously honed skills. Additionally, it has allowed face-to-face meetings and electronic correspondence between archival professionals that may not have ever happened. Finally, it has allowed interviewees the opportunity to share their stories. We hope that the podcast has inspired someone, somewhere.

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