

Foreword

Academic progress can often be measured by those instances when specialty areas break from their own containment within self-imposed silos. This collection of case studies builds bridges across those silos by providing real world examples of how electronic information can be stored and used in new and creative ways. The three sections of this work reflect a wide range of applied areas: education and libraries, medicine, and law and government. Within each section are chapters chronicling novel approaches to apply new principles, which improve systems while creating better access for users. Each chapter serves as a model for innovation as the digital information world challenges prior assumptions, established practices, and user preferences.

This edited work offers solid examples of how established information systems might be expanded and enhanced to provide more coherent platforms to facilitate the storage and retrieval of electronic records. Included in the various cases are specific instances where internal, technical considerations of information infrastructure were redesigned to provide for more effective use by the system's intended clientele. The individual chapter authors provide evidence of how a particular system with a specialized content might be redesigned, enhanced, or recreated using new assumptions. The focus of the majority of chapters points to how the system could improve its functionality and service to end-users. Of particular note is the number of cases where information that had been considered extraneous, such as vendor records, could be incorporated in a meaningful way to improve access to library catalogs and databases.

The span of the topics covered in this collection is remarkable in its scope and in its depth. Included are such application areas as dissertations, image collections, internment camp information, digital repositories, electronic subscriptions, medical and patient records, translation and transliteration issues, electronic court records, legislative materials, born-digital government records, records management for NASA, EPA, and state documents. The coverage includes United States cases and international examples from Taiwan, Nigeria, Malaysia, Brazil, and Italy. The treat-

ment of open source and open access systems is tempered in real world applications with the inclusion of digitization issues and problems. Topics range from large systems to micro-collections, which will be especially useful for those requiring concrete examples of potential solutions to real-world information retrieval problems.

This collection of cases offers new approaches to problem areas that, heretofore, were isolated systems containing electronic records often built onto prior manual systems. The evolved systems were functional but not dynamic. This text provides for the creative redefinition of the various retrieval systems, and it chronicles how creative resource management approaches can be used across different systems. A special contribution of this collection is its use of cases in one subject domain that could profitably be applied to other domains. This approach results in a springboard effect where a status quo environment is enhanced with new system components based on information management improvements that can then serve as system prototypes for other subject areas. This work will be especially important for students and practitioners seeking to understand and discuss how a complex problem can be unpacked into its core components to isolate critical technical features while attending to desirable outcomes.

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