

Opening Abraham Lincoln Archives to the World

CUSTOMER

Lincolnarchives
(www.lincolnarchives.us) by
Documents on Wheels

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

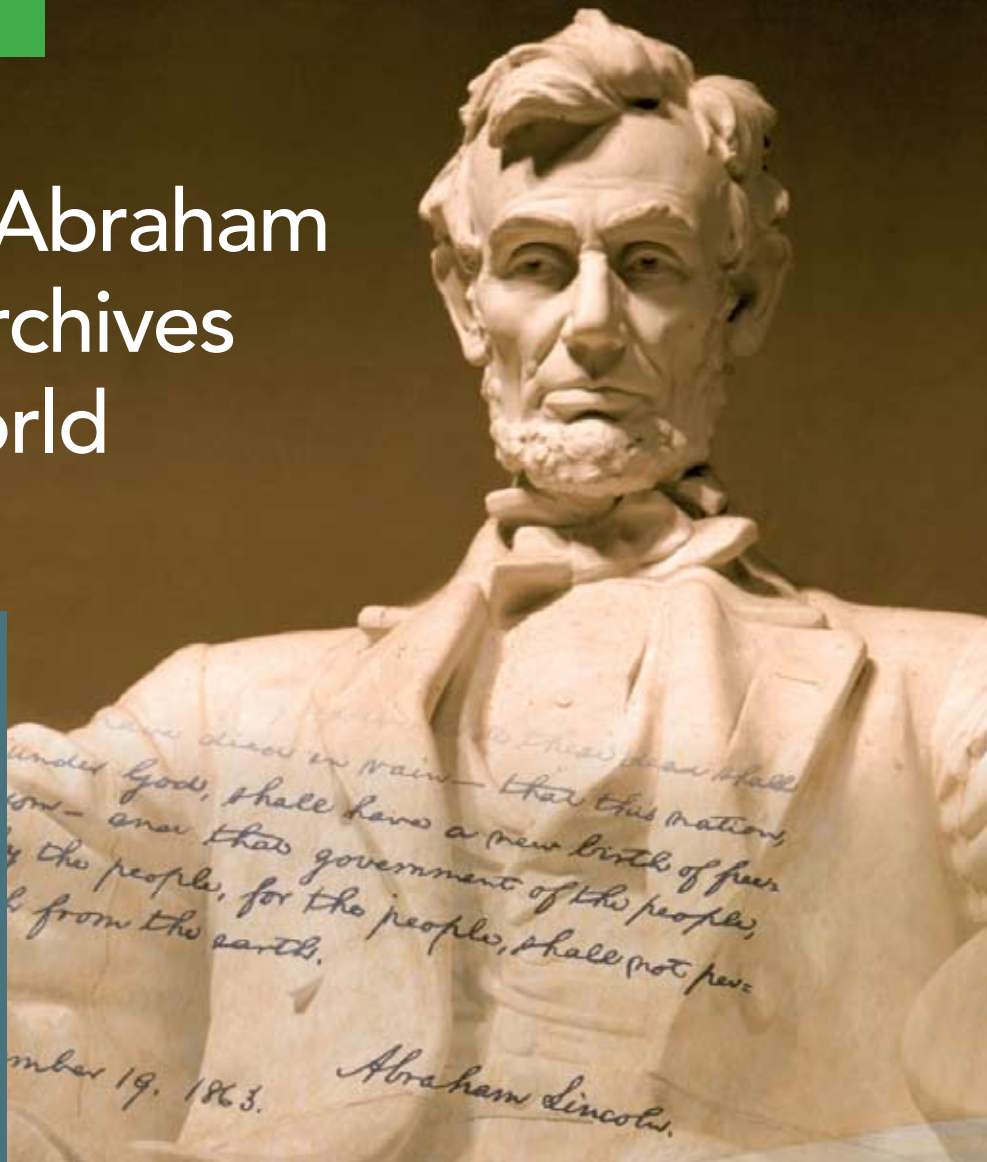
Improve processing efficiency
and user experience

SOLUTION

Greenstone user interface
customized by Digital Library
Consulting

RESULTS

An easier experience for the
archive builder and archive users



ABOUT DIGITAL LIBRARY CONSULTING

Based in Hamilton, New Zealand, Digital Library Consulting are experts in the field of archive digitization using world-renowned Greenstone software. They have worked with a number of leading tertiary institutions and libraries throughout the US, New Zealand, Africa and the Pacific.

CUSTOMER

The Lincoln Archives digital project (www.lincolnarchives.us) was launched by Documents on Wheels in March 2002 to digitize the enormous store of federal records held of the Abraham Lincoln White House years (1861-1865).

A first of its kind, the project is digitizing the entire holdings of a US presidential administration and provides a complete inventory of all records relating to Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War that are held at National Archives in Washington D.C. As well as State, Treasury, War, Justice and Interior records it contains primary and secondary sources such as maps, photographs, newspaper articles, political cartoons, letters and journals.

Karen Needles of College Park, MD-based Documents on Wheels and creator of the Lincoln Archives, says she dreamed of sharing the wealth of information held in National Archives. "A large majority of Lincoln and Civil War enthusiasts and scholars, not only from the United States, but worldwide, will never be able to come to Washington, D.C. to see the actual documents. We wanted to provide online access to these people from the comfort of their homes and offices".

"We've had people contact us because they've found a document that they didn't even know existed. That's another delight with this project - there are a lot of goldmines, lots of these documents haven't even been viewed in years".

Karen Needles, Documents on Wheels.



Document



Microfilming



Digitization



OCR



Delivery to users

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

With an extensive history and research background, Lincolnophile Karen saw the importance of digitizing these records to preserve and protect them from further handling and deterioration.

"Lincoln and the Civil War seem to be of interest not only in the US but around the world; people have a fascination with Abraham Lincoln."

She identified three key stages for the project:

1. Systematic search and scan of all Lincoln White House records in the National Archives throughout the US - which Karen estimated would take 10-12 years due to the amount of documents relating to this period.
2. Transcribing the documents and insertion of metadata for search capabilities. Inserting links to relevant documents, maps, newspaper articles, and biographies to provide users with further material of interest.
3. Insertion of annotations and footnotes by Civil War and Lincoln scholars to assure readers of the reliability of the information.

Each year, summer intern students participate in a two week hands-on program scanning and transcribing documents. Volunteers from around the country also assist with transcribing the documents.

The project began with documents being scanned and uploaded to the Lincoln Archives website. Due to the sheer volume of information however it quickly became apparent Documents on Wheels would need a system to assist them to scan, upload and categorize information more efficiently. An online interface would then be required to enable users to search and access the records easily.

SELECTING DIGITAL LIBRARY CONSULTING

Documents on Wheels identified the Greenstone digital library platform as an ideal fit for their project and during Karen's research she found that Digital Library Consulting were acknowledged experts in building Greenstone-based systems.

Being open source, Greenstone appealed to Karen. "One of the big things I liked about Greenstone was that it was open source. Greenstone just had so many pluses and people are constantly updating it. When you're dealing with millions of documents, you don't want to get a project started and then realize that the software is not going to be updated".

Digital Library Consulting was able to take Karen's existing website and adapt it using Greenstone software.

MAKING LIFE EASIER

The solution delivered by Digital Library Consulting has transformed the project's productivity. A web form was developed to reduce the amount of time spent scanning and uploading documents. "It was so much easier, it was such a wonderful feeling," says Karen.

"We now simply add the necessary meta data to the system, upload the image and Greenstone creates the document and does everything for me. Greenstone has made our job so much more efficient - we can now upload twice as many documents online every day," says Karen.

User feedback to the system delivered by Digital Library Consulting has been overwhelmingly positive, says Karen. "We've had people contact us because they've found a document that they didn't even know existed. That's another delight with this project - there are a lot of goldmines, lots of these documents haven't even been viewed in years".

The collection has opened up the wealth of historical information for everyone around the world to view. Before, people had to physically visit Washington DC and then order specific records from the National Archives to be able to view the documents.

"The software is now enabling us to put millions of documents online from all of these different record groups and because of the meta data, if there's a related document for example from the state department records, the treasury records or in the war department, the Greenstone search engine will link those instantly", says Karen.

Karen says Digital Library Consulting have been her foundation throughout the project, offering advice and ideas on ways to improve the system. "They're a nice group of guys; I could not do this project without them. I really feel with Digital Library Consulting that I am getting something accomplished with the project".

Karen will continue to scan and upload records to the Lincoln Archives collection and is talking to Digital Library Consulting about specific footnote functionality whereby Lincoln scholars will have permission to add footnotes or annotate the collection.

The Lincoln Archives collection can be accessed at <http://www.lincolnarchives.us/>



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