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create digital collections

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Case study: Des Plaines Public Library

Digital storytelling of a community's past, present, and future



Steven Giese, Digital Projects Librarian at Des Plaines Public Library, Illinois, talks us through the Library's migration to Quartex and how his small team worked remotely to build and launch a new digital collections site that serves and engages their local community.

The challenge: migrating digital collections to a platform that enables community storytelling

Des Plaines Public Library has been at the heart of the community for over 100 years, serving 400,000 patrons annually, and needed a way of celebrating the city's history, while involving local people in documenting the present and future.

The Library's existing digital collections platform was no longer fit-for-purpose for several reasons, including its inability to allow remote access to the admin interface, limited options to customize front-end sites and a lack of platform development to address the evolving needs of both clients and end users.

"Our licence was due for renewal but we were already keen to start afresh and rebuild our collections elsewhere," says Steven.



The solution: a cloud-based platform with customizable and responsive front-end options

At this point, Steven discovered Quartex and realized that its flexible, intuitive, and cloud-based interface could meet all the Library's needs.

"It was a lifesaving moment. We could see immediately that Quartex was going to be easier to work with and could facilitate how we use our digital collections."

The migration: from lone arranger to a small team, building and learning simultaneously

"I had been a lone arranger for ten years, so it was a matter of putting together a small team to work on this project. My two colleagues were enthusiastic but novices in digital asset management, so a degree of training was necessary before we could really get going."

Rather than import legacy metadata from their existing platform, Steven and his team made the decision to start from scratch and build their collections afresh, learning the platform as they worked and correcting any mistakes along the way.

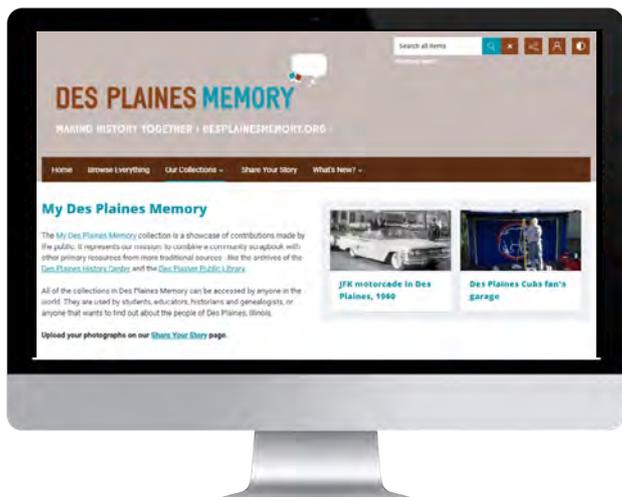
However, the simplicity of working in Quartex – and the ability to work remotely using Quartex – helped the team pick up and drop tasks without major setbacks in progress or schedule.

"The learning curve was not as high as we thought and we quickly began to put our collections together. One reason it was so fast was that we chose three small collections that were photograph-based. We were not doing original cataloging; we were working with metadata exported out of our existing platform, so it was mostly cleaning up and adapting the metadata. And the website creation tool really saved us, this was really, really easy to use."

The existing Des Plaines Memory site's successful track record as a community engagement tool kept the team highly motivated to publish their new site quickly, as a way of keeping their patron base engaged during the pandemic.

“ “ *We could see immediately that Quartex was going to be easier to work with and could facilitate how we use our digital collections.* ” ”

Steven Giese, Digital Projects Librarian, Des Plaines Public Library



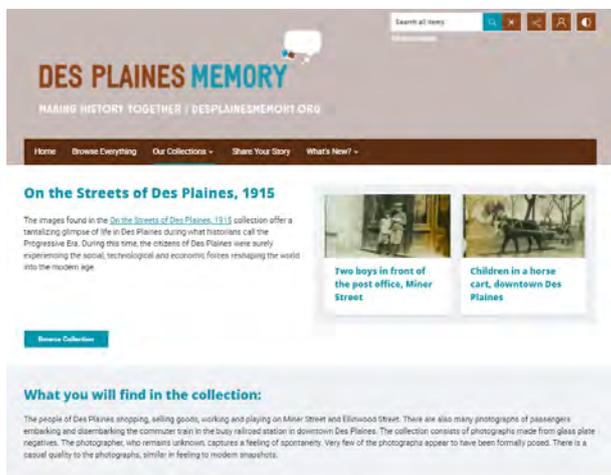
The results: the quickest Quartex site build and three new collections celebrating past, present and future

Following the first training session, Des Plaines Public Library took around three months to reach a point at which the new Des Plaines Memory site could be launched publicly.

Initially, three collections were published, "On the Streets of Des Plaines 1915", "Life During COVID-19", and "My Des Plaines Memory", with the latter two being live, evolving collections inviting community engagement to contextualize assets and further contributions to expand upon each collection.

Steven notes, "With these collections, we wanted to really create the idea that everyone's lived experience is valid and it's all part of our living history."

"We've managed to add six collections within our first year surpassing my expectations & the website itself is an effective tool to encourage our users and community partners to contribute content."



“ “ *The website creation tool really saved us, this was really, really easy to use.* ” ”

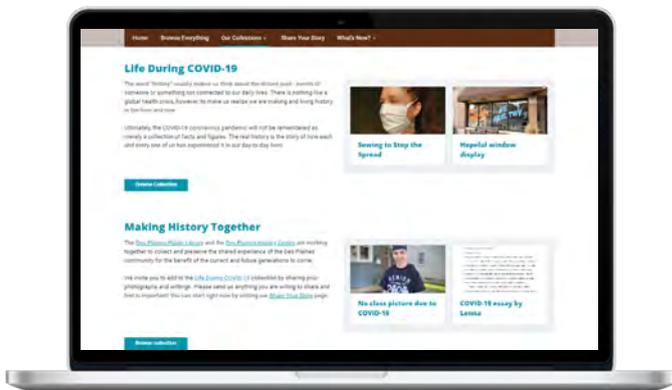
Steven Giese, Digital Projects Librarian, Des Plaines Public Library

The future: the the role of digital collections in storytelling

The team's further plans include the launch of further collections, especially those based upon community contributions that explore further aspects of life in Des Plaines, as well as experimenting with further ways of creatively utilizing Quartex's feature set, such as building on their existing newsletter program.

Steven is a champion for local storytelling and mindful of the thoughtful crafting of metadata and user journeys to link one asset or collection into another, linking facets of community life and exploring the rich canvas that makes up the city's history.

"I saw that it would be really easy to create a website that was a destination and not just an envelope around our digital collections. I'm just really excited by all the opportunities created by having a really full and robust website, as well as a highly discoverable, easy to put together, digital asset management system."



“ I saw that it would be really easy to create a website that was a destination and not just an envelope around our digital collections. ”

Steven Giese, Digital Projects Librarian, Des Plaines Public Library

To explore the Des Plaines Memory site in Quartex, visit:

<https://desplainesmemory.org>

For more about Des Plaines Public Library's experience of launching in lockdown and other partners' work engaging their communities, please visit:

<https://www.quartexcollections.com/resources/webinars>