



Motion Picture History

Moving images project offers access to archived video and film.

When silent-film legend Rudolf Valentino's 1922 picture "Beyond the Rocks" resurfaced this past spring after nearly 75 years on the missing films list, an important gap in motion picture history was filled.

Ed Price wants to make sure such classics are not lost again. Director of the Interactive Media Technology Center at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Price heads development of an integrated, searchable online catalog of moving images held by libraries, museums, archives, television broadcasters and the motion picture industry.

A grant from the National Science Foundation is funding the Moving Image Collections project (mic.imtc.gatech.edu). It includes development of a search engine, dynamic Web portal technology and the user interface.

"The Library of Congress is supporting the project, but the final product is meant to search other holdings too," Price says. "We're going to tie many repositories together and make their holdings accessible with a one-stop search engine."

The search function will work much like Google™ and other keyword-searchable programs. The difference — and Price's challenge — is tagging the images with enough information to make searches thorough and efficient.

"Google is a really great tool, but it usually doesn't drill down into library catalogs," Price notes. "We're building a Google-like tool that searches every archive's library of video and film."

"One of our biggest problems is that different places catalog things in different ways, so searching

across multiple catalogs is difficult," he adds. "We ingest each archive's own labeling criteria, and then we map that to our own internal criteria."

Incorporating all the reference and identification data "allows users to search in a more lucid way," Price says. Because moving images exist in various formats, searchers will be directed to the Web sites of the groups holding the material. There, users may view images as streaming video if they have been digitized, or order copies of material that exists only in analog form.

The project's rollout is set for this fall with a cataloged database representing 50,000 moving images linked to a dozen organizations' Web sites, including the Smithsonian, National Geographic and the National Library of Medicine.

Once the system is operating, expanding its scope will be relatively easy, Price notes. He expects the project to eventually catalog several million images from more than 1,000 institutions.

"We'll keep doing additional work to make it (the archive) better, faster and more complete," Price says.

One of the many interesting aspects of the project involves working with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to locate lost motion pictures. "Once they know a certain film exists, they want to preserve it," he explains. "If we can catalog it all now, even if it's something on film, it might stand a chance of lasting a while. If it's not cataloged, and nobody knows it's there, it will just deteriorate and be gone forever."

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Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman starred in "Casablanca," the classic 1943 Oscar-winning film.



All motion pictures made before 1950 were printed on a cellulose nitrate base that deteriorates after exposure to air.

Stacks of film cans represent a tiny fraction of the moving images held by libraries and archives around the world.



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PHOTOGRAPHY BY BLAINE BARTELL

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