# Search Engine Optimization Supports Research Access Online

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"If it's not online, it doesn't exist." Even if it is, can it be discovered by the scholars who need it? In 2012, the University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries digitized J.M. Derscheid's Rwandan history collection. These 800-plus items on 2,021 microfilm frames were primary sources for the research of René Lemarchand, Catharine Newbury, and the late Alison Des Forges, among others. It was the definition of arcane: obscure and esoteric. Most of the contents were in French, copies were scarce, and items had to be identified from carbon copies of a typescript inventory passed from hand to hand, compiled by Des Forges in 1967 as a graduate student.

Simply uploading scholarly works, research materials, or data to a website does not assure they can be retrieved by search engines if an information seeker is unaware of the resource, or doesn't know the title or other descriptive information. Search engines use crawling and indexing to gather metadata (much like the information in catalog records and scholarly citations) and to decide what a webpage is about. The website itself influences how Google determines value and ranks results: technical features are important, including compliant code, but .edu and .org domains are also factors supporting legitimacy, value, and relevance (Wikipedia.org is an excellent example, as it is also among the most visited Web sites). Rich content, dense contextual information within a site, and links to the material from other highly ranked sites are key factors in how a site will appear in search results. Library best practices include providing public metadata for curated materials and, for manuscripts and archives, collection context (finding aids convey a collector's background, describe the scope, physical extent, contents, arrangement and also point to related works). Could these practices be adapted
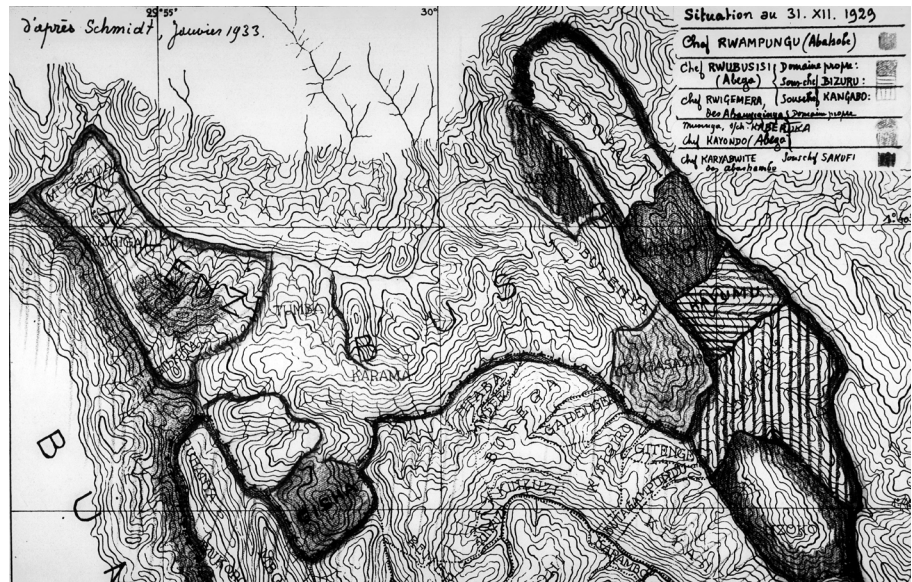
to ensure that the Derscheid Collection is discoverable online by the researchers who will benefit most from using it?

Laurie N. Taylor (Digital Humanities Librarian) and I combined our technical and curatorial efforts in 2011-2012 to collaborate on an award winning project (CRL Primary Source Award for Access, see: http://www.crl.edu/focus/article/8132) to enhance access to the Derscheid Collection using Search Engine Optimization (SEO) techniques. When employed as a public service, SEO promotes the discoverability of resources so that the researchers who need them can find them online, displayed prominently within search results. Library and archival curatorial practices serve as the foundation for applying SEO, helping researchers to find the materials they need online. Briefly, our activities included providing an item by item index online, uploading a translated biography of the collector, writing an extended Wikipedia biography on Derscheid, and securing permission to digitize Lemarchand's 1970 *Rwanda and Burundi* to include on the Derscheid Collection landing page (http://ufdc.ufl.edu/derscheid).

Together, the information in these sources provides an exceptionally rich scholarly context to orient readers and excellent data for search engines to crawl. We promoted the new online availability through social media, blogs, and a brief announcement at the African Studies Association roundtable on David Newbury's 2011 edition of Des Forges' dissertation. We also promoted our work through local workshops, a conference presentation on the theme "Dis/connects: African Studies in the Digital Age" at Oxford (http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00011385), and a forthcoming chapter to be published by its organizers, the Standing Conference on Library Materials on Africa (http://scolma.org/).

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