



It's Different From Books!



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Inventory Overload

If you try to catalogue a library of things one item at a time, you will drive yourself —and all of the people around you— crazy. If you're used to cataloguing books, it's tempting to try and line up your tools, photograph them, and fully catalogue them one item at a time. This is not only incredibly time consuming, but pointless.

With donations of items coming in constantly and other volunteers/colleagues using the space, it's more practical to photograph and catalogue large/popular items first and mark them with a simple sticker, marker, etc. so that you're not duplicating work with others who may be working with you. Affordable hand etching tools can be bought to numbers items as you catalogue them whenever a magic marker won't work.





Image Management

Photographing your collection will be one of the most valuable and time consuming components of building your catalogue. You can have one without photos, but you won't be taking full advantage of your online catalogue. Having lots of good photos on hand also helps with the marking your library. But don't waste time hunting for "official" photos online, take your own.

A valuable freeware tool to have is IrfanView. This tool allow you to batch resize and rename hundreds of photos at a time. And the 64-bit version is lightning fast! Using IrfanView will save you server space, upload time, and (if you're super keen) you can use it to number images to match item numbers. This comes in very handy if you're photographing a lot of items at once; you may not remember what a ball joint tool looks like when cataloguing time rolls around.





Password Management

When building a website and catalogue from scratch you'll quickly gather *a lot* of user names and passwords --and you must keep track of *all* of them. Losing a critical password can put you back a week or more. Rule one: keep all your library's passwords in one place and ensure that several people have access, but not without... Rule two: encryption!

It doesn't matter how "out in the open" your collection of passwords is (indeed, you'll probably be accessing them often) if they're encrypted. Popular password management tools out there include LastPass and others, but my favourite thing to do is store all my login information in a simple text file and encrypt it with The Letter Encrypter, a small but very handy bit of freeware that runs on a USB drive.





To Barcode or Not To Barcode?

Barcoding a library of things effectively involves label paper, access to a high-quality laser printer, label covers, pencil cases and the like for small tools, luggage tags and sundry for items that don't like adhesives, and (last but not least) a barcode scanner. MyTurn offers a barcoding module, but so far we've found that numbering the collection as we catalogue offers the same advantages in

terms of speed and ease of checkout without the extra costs. If you do decide to barcode your library of things, Brodart makes rolls of super high-quality barcodes to any specification you could imagine. But making your own labels is a decent alternative. Employing a word processor, a spreadsheet, some merge commands, and a barcode font is relatively easy and straightforward. Barcodes Inc. has free barcode fonts available for download and a good barcode style for a library is Code 39.

Turn *ABC123* into



[Download the Code 39 truetype barcode font](#)



Open Hours & Volunteers

When running a volunteer library of things, you'll probably have to work your business hours around the hours that your volunteers are available, at least in the beginning. But we found that having open hours on (or close to) Monday and Friday evenings were most important. For a tool library, this allows people to gather what they need for their weekend projects.

If volunteers can't commit to regular open hours every single week, having them sign up on a Google Doc spreadsheet for shifts a month or two in advance is a workable alternative. Hint: have everyone include their contact information on this same spreadsheet. That way when someone needs another volunteer to cover their shift, they can find that volunteer on their own.





Registrations & Payments

MyTurn allows for patrons to sign-up and pay for their annual memberships online, however we found this particular functionality was confusing and limited. As a solution we build commerce functionality into our website using the WooCommerce plug-in for WordPress. Initially, this plug-in will demand that several pages be created on your website (“shop,” “cart,” “my account,” etc.). We

found this really altered the look and feel of our site. But after the plug-in is set up, you can create your own customized menu in WordPress, substitute it for the default one, and the only tab the WooCommerce plug-in insists on keeping is “cart.” This approach also allows for a “Wish List” for items we want purchased for the library. It allows us to solicit donations and sell “pending memberships” (memberships that people buy for others who may not be able to afford a membership of their own).





Collection Development Policy

If your library of things is largely donation-based, in the beginning you'll likely have to accept whatever items come your way. However, after accepting donations of materials for just three or four months, we found that we quickly started running out of space. A collection development policy was needed.

To facilitate this process we listed the Guelph Tool Library's values and the values of our parent organization. We also asked ourselves, "What does our community need?" and "What is practical for us to provide?" Our collection development policy had to exist where all three of these areas overlapped.





Website, Social Media & Knowledge Management

To ensure that social media didn't take up too much time, but remained consistent, we employed HootSuite to make regular posts in advance. We continued to make posts about upcoming events, related libraries in other cities, etc. as they were relevant, but having HootSuite meant not having to worry about posting things regularly.

Our website also has a blog where we can write longer commentaries, but it is our hope that the blog will also serve as a knowledge repository. As people use our tools and become familiar with how to make things, it is our hope that they share links to videos, post operator manuals, share usage

notes, etc. so that our library becomes not just a repository for tools, but for the knowledge on how to build and maintain a sustainable community and sharing economy.



Hootsuite™

Links to Resources

Guelph Tool Library:

www.guelphtoollibrary.org

Brodart:

www.brodart.ca

The Letter Encrypter:

<https://pendriveapps.com>

Barcodes Inc:

www.barcodesinc.com/free-barcode-font

IrfanView:

www.irfanview.com

Links to Resources

Transition Guelph:

www.transitionguelph.org

LastPass:

<https://lastpass.com>

MyTurn:

<https://myturn.com>

WordPress:

www.wordpress.org

HootSuite:

<https://hootsuite.com>

WooCommerce:

<https://woocommerce.com>