The Portman Archives exists to document the life and architectural career of its founder John C. Portman Jr., and to promote his legacy. Mr. Portman pioneered the concept of “Architect as Developer”, successfully building an architectural firm of international repute—John Portman & Associates—and affiliated real estate development, property management, and wholesale mart companies.

Diversity and growth

The Archives is the repository for a diverse range of materials relating to Mr. Portman. Collection materials include historic items, images, renderings, sketches, drawings, correspondence, awards, and publications; they also include Mr. Portman’s personal and collected artworks, furniture designs, lighting designs and the inventory of two private residences. The core team of four managed tens of thousands of records and images, documented in three different databases. Although archives staff primarily serve the needs of the various Portman companies, even their external requests are increasing year on year—varying from those that can be answered in 15 minutes or less to those which take 8 hours or even a week for one staff member to handle. Many of these external requests come from magazines, students, academics, building owners, and interestingly, movie makers: lots of Portman projects are used in motion pictures such as The Hunger Games, The Divergent Series: Insurgent, and Spider-Man: Homecoming.

The digitization imperative

Archives Manager Andrea Richardson implemented a project to digitize their entire visual materials collection and they needed a way to search and share materials within the company. The Archives quickly grew to include management of two additional databases and their respective materials (artworks, furniture, and architectural drawings), and in order to support this growth, Ms. Richardson required a new archives collections management system. She selected SKCA in part because it could combine all their databases into one system—and critical for Portman Archives strategy, it allowed them to gain improved intellectual control over the materials and data.

“The ability to have everything in one place has made us more effective as a team. We are better able to handle a wide variety of information and image requests using SKCA’s search tools, and we can provide users with information very quickly. Our workflow has been streamlined, and SKCA is aligned with traditional archival practice.”

Andrea Richardson,
Archives Manager
Security, integration, support

Equally important, SKCA accommodates the security imperative: with self-hosting all [their] information stays under their control at all times, which is an IT office mandate. Our IT department fully supports the archive and they are very satisfied with the SKCA system as part of their technology infrastructure.

In addition to meeting Portman’s strategic needs, SKCA offers many features that differentiate it from other archives management solutions: flexible customization, “wonderful customer service...people are always responsive, friendly and resourceful,” minimal training requirements, and purpose-built workflows.

Accelerated productivity

Portman Archives team members are very positive about the system; they find it intuitive to use and it has accelerated cross-training in work duties, enabling them to be much more effective and to respond to requests quickly and completely. Their workflow is much more streamlined and they can handle high volume even at times when there are fewer staff. In the future, they are looking at activating SKCA’s barcode feature to manage the artwork collection and box inventories, and they are likely to begin using the researcher module to track information and image requests, which will further accelerate response time and quality.

A powerful example of SKCA’s power to enhance operational effectiveness is the ability to track locations and run location-specific reports; this was a major factor missing in Portman’s previous system, and they use it to manage the 30% of their collections that are housed in various locations outside the main repository. Another huge advantage is the reporting function, which allows Ms. Richardson and her team to export data for work product review; they also used it to spot all the controlled vocabulary inconsistencies from imported data and get everything aligned under one set of authorities. Now, they save time, and as a result, money.

The virtuous circle

Speaking of alignment, it is of great importance to Ms. Richardson that Portman Archives processes are aligned with archival practice and standards, such as DACS, Dublin Core and the AAT; SKCA fully enables this. It also enables item level processing, which is often impossible for archives to undertake, given the usual collection backlogs. Ms. Richardson explained that if you are doing a digitization process, you must do item level cataloging – and with SKCA’s functionality, collection backlog processing is dramatically accelerated, allowing them to do the item level processing which research has shown brings in more visitors to archives collections. SKCA increases the Portman Archives’ ability to thoroughly document the life, career and world of Mr. Portman, and to further promote his legacy by increasing public awareness of their collections.