Notes from the President
Allan T. Kohl (Minneapolis College of Art & Design)
President, Visual Resources Association

The recent Mid-year meeting of the VRA Executive Board was an intense three days of work for the Association's officers. During our time together in Atlanta, we inspected all of the facilities that will play host our 28th annual conference next March: session halls; meeting rooms; spaces proposed for the registration desk, the VRAffle, and social functions. We checked out details ranging from the speed and frequency of elevator service to the hotel's proximity to inexpensive public transit from the airport (there's a MARTA stop half a block away; fare direct from the airport: $1.75).

To help make Conference 28 the most affordable in years, we will be trying out a new program model that compresses the core schedule into 72 hours spread over portions of four days (but only three nights!). Brian Shelburne, our Vice President for Conference Arrangements, managed to find a silver lining in the ongoing recession by re-negotiating our hotel contract to reduce our room block obligations, while at the same time arranging to have group room rates lowered from $179 to a mere $155 per night. Fewer nights at a lower rate means that attendees will spend less for their lodging at Conference 28!

The challenge of fitting twelve sessions -- along with Special Interest Groups, Committee and Chapter meetings, the Annual Business Meeting, the Vendor Slam, two engaging keynote speakers to begin and conclude the program, and all of our traditional social events -- into this tighter schedule falls to our Vice President for Conference Program, Heidi Raatz. Those who join us in Atlanta will experience a program rich and substantive in content, yet with ample opportunity to network with your worldwide colleagues. Those who can afford to spend an extra day or two in Atlanta before or after the conference will find themselves strategically located in the midst of an exciting, cosmopolitan city with many historic and cultural attractions. As in previous years, a number of Travel Awards will be available to assist deserving members with their conference expenses.

While conference planning is a major focus of the Board's Mid-year meeting, it is by no means the only task. Each year, the Board discusses the reports submitted by our Appointees, Committees, and regional Chapters, formulating advisory responses to each of these. We finalize the Association's budget for the coming fiscal year. This year, we also had two major projects to review. The first was a preliminary draft of the forthcoming VRA Strategic Plan, the fruit of many months of meticulous, thoughtful work by the Strategic Planning Task Force, ably directed by my Presidential predecessor, Macie Hall, and Betha Whitlow. The final draft of the Strategic Plan will be made available online to the membership this fall, and will be presented formally by the Task Force during Conference 28. The Plan presents a positive, bold, and realistic vision for our Association over the next five years. It sets a course for new initiatives, while also building upon what we are already doing effectively. The second major project, also reviewed in preliminary draft form, was the VRA's White Paper, an organizational response to the shifting institutional culture of universities, museums, and cultural heritage organizations consequent to the ongoing recession. An ad hoc group headed by President-Elect Maureen Burns and Elizabeth Schaub has worked diligently, and under severe time constraints, to prepare this document in time for the beginning of fall semester. More information on this project will be forthcoming in the near future.

Over the years, the document known as the "VRA Officer's Manual" has grown to include a wealth of information about every aspect of our Association. In addition to detailed descriptions of each

Board officer's responsibilities, the Manual also contains information such as each regional Chapter's Bylaws, the charges for each appointed position and committee, qualifications for our two major awards, and publications guidelines. Moreover, there's a wealth of historical information about the Association to be found here as well. Because this content is potentially useful to all of our members, we will be renaming this document the *Visual Resources Association Organizational Policies & Procedures Manual,* and as such it will be available for consultation by all members within the MemberClicks ("My VRA") portion of the VRA web site.

The plight of so many of our members who have recently suffered job losses, or who will be facing the possibility of cutbacks and layoffs over the coming year, was never far from our thoughts. One of our officers had recently lost her position; another only narrowly escaped the fall of the budget-cutting axe. A major goal of the forthcoming White Paper is to give our members an array of pro-active talking points to help inform administrators, faculty members, and library directors more fully about the tangible benefits we as professionals provide to our institutions. In terms of more direct support, the Executive Board also voted to establish as a one-year benefit a new "Unemployed" membership category to help those who have suffered job loss to remain active in the VRA at a nominal rate. Discounted registration for our Unemployed members will also be available for Conference 28: we want to keep all of our colleagues "temporarily without positions" within our professional circle, and offer them the continued support of this community as they network and search for new positions. We urge all such members to update their profiles in MemberClicks to reflect their new contact information: help us to keep in touch with you! And don't forget to keep checking the "Job Opportunities" portion of the VRA web site – or add position postings that come to your attention: http://www.vraweb.org/jobopps.html

Digital Scene and Heard
Edited by Elizabeth Meyer (University of Cincinnati)
Digital Initiatives Advisory Group

Guest Editor Marta Bustillo (Rhode Island School of Design)
Visual Resources Blogs

In recent years, blogs have become a popular way for VR professionals to promote Visual Resources facilities, to inform users about their services, and to offer interesting image or art-related information. Blogs are easy to create and they don't require any web design expertise, and they can be quickly updated – all features which make them ideal tools in VR facilities. For the past couple of months, I have been compiling a list of links to VR blogs which you can find here. They provide a fascinating insight into the profession, highlighting some of the many hats that we wear in our daily jobs, be it cataloger or technology instructor. As I was looking at the wealth of information gathered in all the blogs in my list, it quickly became clear that there are a number of features that make a VR blog successful, and hopefully popular with users. The following is a list of 'top 5' tips for a successful VR blog, coupled with examples I have borrowed from several VR facilities:

1. It should include easily accessible general information about your VR facility and its services, including location and hours of operation, clear information about policies and, most importantly, regular updates about new acquisitions. Tagging entries is important, and a search box can be very useful.

For some very simple yet great examples of general information about VR services, see:

Otis VR blog's *Policies and Procedures* tab: https://blogs.otis.edu/vrclib/policies-and-procedures/

Order-update documents for faculty at Ithaca College's Visual Resources Collection blog: http://www.ithaca.edu/hs/vrc/orders/

A great New Year's post in January 2009 from the VR Center at the College of Built Environment, University of Washington, summarizing all images added to the VR database the previous year: http://vrc-cbe-uw.blogspot.com/2008/12/new-vrc-accessions-in-2008.html

2. Technical tips are a great bonus in a VR blog. Often users need help when the facility is not open, and a section on Tech Tips on the blog can be a life saver.

Here are three favorites gathered from the VR blogosphere:

UC Berkeley History of Art VR tips for using Powerpoint:
http://havrc.blogspot.com/search/label/powerpoint

Savannah College of Art and Design VR Center's Blog *Help Guides* Tab:
http://blog.scad.edu/vrc/help-guides/

The University of Texas at Austin's SOA Visual Resources Collection's training videos about finding digital images, blogs and RSS feeds, Powerpoint tips, slide scanning and web resources:
http://soa.utexas.edu/vrc/blog/2008/09/vrc-videos-available-on-youtube/

3. The web is now awash with all sorts of digital imagery, yet our users are still finding it difficult to manage this flood of visual information. Choosing good quality images for lectures and projects can be a particularly time-consuming task, and VR blogs are ideal tools for delivering information about fair use image sites to beleaguered faculty and students. However, at present many blogs seem to be writing about the same sites, such as the Flickr Commons, Google's Life Photo Archive, the World Digital Library, and VADS to name a few. Although every institution has a different mission and curriculum focus, it should be possible for VR professionals to collaborate on a master list of good fair use image sites that can be used for educational purposes, in addition to local and subscription databases. Wellesley College's Digital Image Wiki [http://digital-image-collections.wikispaces.com/] is a good starting point for this process, but one wonders whether the VRA as an association should put together a well-managed bookmark site with links to sources of good quality images that fall under the fair use category. However, long lists of urls can also be very intimidating, therefore a combination of well managed bookmark sites and regular 'spotlight' posts about particularly good image sites will help users most.

Two good examples of bookmark sites taken from VR blogs are:

University of Colorado at Boulder VR delicious bookmarks: http://delicious.com/aahvrc

Rhode Island School of Design Visual Resources bookmarks: http://delicious.com/risdvr

Here is also an example of a short 'spotlight' post about the NASA Image Website from Plato's Cave, Iowa State University VR's blog: http://www.vrc.iastate.edu/?p=112

4. Good use of web 2.0 features such as RSS feeds, links to social networking sites, and embedded video can make the task of keeping the blog updated a lot easier. For instance, instead of having to report regularly on ARTstor news, a widget displaying RSS feeds from the ARTstor blog can automatically offer user updates. Similarly, one can add visual interest to a blog by adding a Flickr widget, which can display up to 10 photographs from Flickr group pools. Or, if a VR facility has a Twitter account for quick communication with users, it is easy to add an RSS feed to it on the VR blog, displaying as many entries as one chooses. Interesting art-related embedded video can also be a good way of attracting followers to the VR blog.

For some interesting examples of uses of web 2.0 features, see the following:

MassArt's Visual Resourcefulness Video: *We are so Web 2.0 It Hurts* -
http://visualresourcefulness.wordpress.com/2009/04/22/new-video-by-us/

University of Colorado at Boulder VR blog: http://aahvrc.blogspot.com/. See their links to the JISC's *Finding images on Flickr*: http://aahvrc.blogspot.com/2009/07/finding-images-on-flickr-advice.html,

and to Common Craft's *Twitter Search in Plain English*:
http://aahvrc.blogspot.com/2009/07/twitter-search-in-plain-english.html

5. Commenting on recent art news, recent exhibitions, or films added to the VR collections can be a good way of interesting our users in the activities of the VR facility. Most VR blogs also have some quirky image news, which are bound to attract the attention of the students.

Here are some favorites:

Now that's artistic devotion: http://ucsbvrc.wordpress.com/2009/06/16/now-thats-artistic-devotion/

Archives building collapses in Cologne, Germany: http://vrc-cbe-uw.blogspot.com/2009/03/two-recent-news-items.html

But does it float?: *http://blogs.wheatoncollege.edu/visual_resources/2009/04/28/but-does-it-float/*

One of the benefits of VR blogs should be to draw the attention of our institution's administrators to the variety of work that we do, and to its importance to the institution's mission. The more we think carefully about who our readers are, and what type of information would be most useful to them, the more likely it will be that our activities will be noticed. So keep blogging, keep discussing interesting topics, and make your blog a focal point for all users of visual materials in your institution. In the current financial climate, this kind of PR could be essential.

Upcoming Conferences
Submitted by Brooke Cox (DePauw University)

Library & Information Technology Association (lita) National Forum
October 1-4, 2009
Salt Lake City, UT
http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/lita/litaevents/forum2009/index.cfm

Digital Preservation Management Workshop
October 11-16, 2009
Ann Arbor, MI
http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/dpm/workshops/fiveday.html

Southeastern College Art Conference (SECAC)
October 24-26, 2009
Mobile, Alabama
http://www.secollegeart.org/annual-conference.html

Internet Librarian 2009
October 26-28, 2009
Monterey, CA
http://www.infotoday.com/il2009/

EDUCAUSE 2009 Annual Conference
November 3-6, 2009
Denver, CO
http://net.educause.edu/e09

Brick & Click Libraries
November 6, 2009
Maryville, MO
http://brickandclick.org/

SLA Presents: Ask the Copyright Experts!
November 10, 2009
Webinar
http://www.sla.org/content/learn/members/webinars/webinar111009.cfm

Museum Computer Network
November 11-14, 2009
Portland, OR
http://www.mcn.edu/conferences/index.asp

Computers and the History of Art (CHArt)
November 12-13, 2009
http://www.chart.ac.uk

Chapter News

Mid-Atlantic Chapter

By Virginia (Macie) Hall (Johns Hopkins University)

The VRA Mid-Atlantic Chapter met at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, on Friday, May 29, 2009. The meeting was held in the beautiful new East Campus Library at the Center for Instructional Technology. Christina Updike (James Madison) organized and hosted the event.

The day-long chapter event "Engaging in New Technologies," was facilitated by staff from the JMU Center for Instructional Technology, and introduced Chapter members to several tools that can be used by visual resources professionals to promote their services and create an online presence for their Visual Resources Centers. Hands-on experience with tools such as Google forms/sites/groups, Blogger, Twitter, Flipcams and YouTube, was the focus of the day. The JMU CIT staff developed the clever theme of "speed dating" for introducing these new technologies. The goal for the day was for members to find the "technology of their dreams." A website was created for the training, and is now available for others to view: https://sites.google.com/site/vramidatlantic/Home . We invite others to make use of the great resources available on the site.

During the lunch break, a Chapter meeting was held. We were also given a preview of MDID 3 by developers Andreas Knab and Kevin Hegg.

At the end of the day a Flipcam was awarded in a drawing. Steve Tatum (Virginia Tech) was the lucky winner. Others in attendance were: Liz Gushee (UVA), Macie Hall (Johns Hopkins), Pam Hawkes (William & Mary), Jeannine Keefer (U. of Richmond), Tina Updike (JMU), Ann Woodward (Johns Hopkins), Martine Sherrill (Wake Forest), and Grace Barth (JMU).

Special thanks go to JMU CIT staff members Sarah Cheverton, Jamie Calgano, Mary Ann Chappell, and Andrea Adams.