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Yale University Selects A2iA DocumentReader for Recognition and Keyword Spotting of Cursive Handwriting on Botanical Specimens

A2iA DocumentReader Enables Scientists to Quickly Search an Image Repository Containing 350,000 Specimens

NEW YORK – April 4, 2006 – A2iA, a worldwide leading developer of advanced handwriting and print recognition engines, today announced that the Yale University Peabody Museum of Natural History has selected A2iA DocumentReader for transcribing and searching handwritten information on herbarium specimen labels. Specimen collections are the primary research archives documenting the biological diversity of plants and animals on this planet. Specimens in the Yale University Herbarium collection date as far back as 160 years, making it an important national historical collection. The labels vary in size, format and structure, and do not contain static fields. A2iA DocumentReader will be used to capture handwritten information on the specimen labels, including the scientific name of the plant, where it was collected and who collected it, to quickly and easily enable electronic searching and viewing of the archive.

“A significant amount of manpower would be required to manually transcribe the information contained on the hundreds of thousands of specimens in Yale’s collection and hundreds of millions of plant specimens worldwide,” said Dr. Reed Beaman, associate director for informatics at the Yale Peabody Museum. A2iA DocumentReader overcomes the challenges presented by different sized labels, unstructured formats and very old cursive handwriting.

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A2iA DocumentReader is unlocking valuable cursive handwritten information, previously unavailable in electronic form, for scientists, researchers and educators. Using A2iA's Intelligent Word Recognition (IWR) and document analysis technologies, A2iA DocumentReader enables a computer to mimic a human speed-reader. The world's first keyword spotting tool for unstructured cursive handwritten documents, A2iA DocumentReader quickly locates, segments and processes the information contained on the Peabody Museum's plant specimens. It then converts the handwritten words into electronic data, matching the scientific names against a museum-compiled lexicon. The dictionary used by A2iA DocumentReader was extracted from a lexicon containing 6 million terms. The lexicon will eventually be made up of thousands of taxonomic names, several million place names, and other specialized biological terms.

This project is being conducted as part of Yale's HERBIS project, a collaboration with the New York Botanical Garden and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, funded through the National Science Foundation. Information from specimens is fundamental to biodiversity research, education and natural resource management, and digital technology greatly facilitates information retrieval from globally distributed natural history collections. Currently, however, most of the 2.5 billion collections worldwide remain unavailable in the electronic domain. More than 100 million botanical specimens in herbaria are no exception, with less than 5 percent data records digitized. This project is making informatics tools, including A2iA DocumentReader, available for specimen image and data capture, creating significant efficiencies compared to methods in current use. By wrapping image processing, image to text conversion, and data markup capabilities into distributed interoperable web services, greater efficiency, portability and scalability are achieved.

Images are processed through a cascading set of web services to extract machine-printed and handwritten text. The final result can then be loaded into collection management software along with the corresponding specimen images. The human labor requirements are seconds instead of minutes for capturing data from each specimen.

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“We are pleased that A2iA DocumentReader is able to meet the needs of Yale University for this project, the first official installation of the application, which was released last year,” said Jean-Louis Fages, A2iA’s president and CEO. “A2iA DocumentReader is providing the Peabody Museum with searchable access to information previously only available through cumbersome manual research. Our recognition engine is extremely flexible and intuitive.”

About A2iA Corporation

A2iA (Artificial Intelligence & Image Analysis), founded in 1991, headquartered in New York and Paris, is known as the worldwide leading developer of Intelligent Word Recognition (IWR) technology for extracting information from natural freeform and cursive handwriting on paper documents. The company’s technology has been helping paper-intensive industries reduce data entry costs and improve business process automation for 15 years. A2iA’s recognition engines harmonize their OCR, ICR and IWR technologies with their image analysis, artificial intelligence and neural network systems to enhance solutions from the world’s leading systems integrators and other independent software vendors. For more information: www.a2ia.com.

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