

Keeping Museums Relevant and Responsive: *Empowering Museum Staff to Manage Dynamic Content*

*Julie Beeler, Principal
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The Web's first wave of influence in museology was to open a powerful new distribution and communication channel for museums to extend their outward interpretive offerings. Museums created brochureware for audiences planning their visit or wanting to learn about the institution. Online exhibitions then became common ancillaries for popular shows, and online collections liberated the thousands of often "not on view" items in a museum collection. In many ways, a museum's Web site became another gallery to stage experiences for online visitors.

Dynamic Web Sites

While first steps online were often modeled on a publishing paradigm, where the content and presentation were crafted, produced, and disseminated in one orchestrated effort, second-generation sites were built on database back-ends that supported a more flexible, dynamic publishing scheme that empowered museum staff to manage content. No longer captive to the Web designer and programmer, dynamic CMS Web sites allow anyone to edit, update, and maintain content on a site through simple browser-based interfaces. As we will see with Ted Wilson's example, an online project at the National Postal Museum, a CMS was extended to experts outside the museum to help harvest specialized knowledge for the public site.

The Web's Influence: On-site Dynamic Media

As the Web continues to influence people's relationship to content, to accessing information, to entertainment, and to daily life, their expectations in a museum experience are also different than they once were. On the other side of the gallery wall, museum professionals have been affected by their enhanced, dynamic communication capabilities online and are expecting the same kind of interpretive tools and content management capabilities on the gallery floors as those available to them in a browser. Welcome to the beginning of the Web-inspired museum visit: dynamic, on-site interpretive media.

The evolution of Web development revealed the value in separating the presentation, the data, and the technology—in doing so, development efforts in one realm could be extensible to support changes in data, technology, or redesigns. The same is happening with interactives, where museum professionals are craving a more generic "stage" that can support different programming pumped through it, the way a stage can support an opera, a play, and a musical in three consecutive nights. The idea of fixed interactive kiosks devoted to communicating specific messages is dying. Next-generation, on-site media installations are communication portals for serving fresh content that curators can control, dynamic Web data, and user-generated content—as we will see with Joe Madeira's example of the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum here in Chicago.

Connecting the Online, On-site, and Interpretive Intranets

Rather than thinking about each interactive or media offering throughout a museum as a discreet, stand-alone unit, some institutions are considering all their offerings as components of a larger, interconnected interpretive intranet deployed throughout the museum. Like a large, comprehensive Web site with different features and components, the system cues up contextual content that is relevant to the areas in which it is deployed. Centralized databases can empower professionals to control both their online and on-site media at once, simplifying their efforts and improving the consistency and messaging of the visitor experience, which might start at home online, move to the museum, and continue back home after the visit. To further bolster the connection between the on-site and online experiences, some museums are integrating features in order to help open up what a visitor discovers in a museum to deeper online exploration at home, a goal which Irene U. Chambers will discuss in relation to the New Visitor Experience at the Library of Congress.

Freedom and Technology:

Using Web-based Technology to Develop, Change, and Manage Exhibition Content

*Joe Madeira, Previous Director of Exhibits and Programs
McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum*

We've Got Issues: Desktop Publishing to the Gallery

Challenge

Create a display that can be changed, or updated frequently, based on issues and trends in the larger society

Objective

- Exhibit some of the current struggles for freedom
- Highlight intense, heated issues, which include (among others):
 - Gun Ownership
 - Abortion
 - Smoking
 - Property Rights
- Present **both** sides to the issue—try to remain neutral
- Be objective and make the **tension** approachable and accessible

Implementation

- Web-based technology, accessible via internet with password
- Design template
 - Divided the screen into four parts, consisting of
 - Headline
 - The case for/or against
 - Picture
 - Recent news
- Slide-show format on a 40" vertical flat screen

Strengths

- Web-based content administration tool
- Ease of use for content manager in terms of design
- Digital universe—drag-and-drop capability, especially for pictures
- Accessible, non-threatening

Weaknesses/Limitations

- Confined to screen size
- Brief introduction to an issue
- Difficult to draw attention

53,269 Hits in 0.28 Seconds? *Human Internet Filtering for Current Events*

Challenge

Show that every day in the news there are literally thousands of stories or events that directly relate to a freedom issue

Objective

- Present (daily) a sample of the multitude of news stories that directly relate to freedom
- Organized into subheadings related to freedom:
 - Free Speech
 - Freedom of the Press
 - Human Rights
 - Freedom of Assembly
- Knowing that all media sources have slants and biases, also present a **variety** of news organizations

Implementation

- Web-based technology, access tool via internet with password
- Created a structure for an ongoing database of stories, updated daily
- Divided into subheadings based on various freedoms
- Worked with ProQuest® (a premier information access and retrieval system) in order to include a variety of sources
- Text only format, presented at sixteen computer stations on the second floor

Strengths

- Ease of use for content manager for design
- RSS feed to assist content manager
- Organized, comprehensive content
- Educational resource
- Daily additions, current and relevant

Weaknesses/Limitations

- Human filtering is labor intensive
- Text only, no pictures

YouTube? (are) YouCrazy? Posting Real-time Videos to the Gallery

Challenge

Allow visitors to produce a 30-second video about what freedom means and allow others to view and create a response (short-term searchable database)

Objective

- Allow visitors to “add their voice” to our exhibits, via a video recording that posts in real time to a monitor just outside the booth
- Facilitate and encourage participation via four questions, of which one can be answered:
 - What does freedom mean to you?
 - What is the greatest threat to freedom?
 - What is the most important freedom?
 - What are some ways in which you express your freedom?
- Knowing that all media sources have slants and biases, also present a **variety** of news organizations

Implementation

- Booth layout and design challenges
- Web-based technology, accessible via internet with password
- Database updated daily
- Searchable by name or question.
- Since typing is involved, used forbidden word filter
- Human monitoring critical; mistakes, mis-starts, the mischievous, and the miscreants

Strengths

- Fantastic, raw content saved in database
- Empowers visitors
- Web-based admin tool, easy to use
- Gives visitors choice (fun or serious)

Weaknesses/Limitations

- Requires constant monitoring; labor intensive
- “Watch out for teens in packs”
- Consumes server space
- Investment costs high

Library of Congress:

New Visitor Experience Opening Spring 2007

*Irene U. Chambers, Chief, Interpretive Programs Office
Library of Congress*

Primary Goals

- For the first time in its more than 200-year history, the Library of Congress is putting the public experience at the heart of its mission: making its curators and collections as accessible as possible to the general public.
- To use technology seamlessly to enable visitors to explore the library's collections and its historic and architecturally inspiring Thomas Jefferson Building and to become lifelong users of the library, on-site and online.
- To incorporate technology into the experience of the Library of Congress (both on-site and online) that allows:
 - Self-exploration by visitors
 - Updating and ready access by staff and curators
 - A continuing, dynamic presentation that can expand limitlessly

Objectives

- To create a variety of dynamic, personalized experiences appealing to diverse audiences
- To provide relevant, authentic, and engaging learning experiences for students, teachers, and lifelong learners
- To provide the tools for curators and exhibition staff to update and edit content and interpretations

Challenges

- Huge collections (over 130 million items, over 9 million digitized)
- Numerous curators (over 300)
- Tight timeframe
- Fundraising

Passport to Knowledge

- Every visitor to the library receives a Passport to Knowledge that personalizes their visit.
- The Passport is a mobile barcode device that visitors can pick up at various locations throughout the library, with a unique code assigned only to them.
- This code will correspond to their personal Web page on www.myloc.gov. As visitors explore the library, they can bookmark items of interest at MyLoC stations.
- The selected items are then added to the visitors' personal pages. From any Web-accessible location, a visitor can extend their visit to the library by accessing their myloc.gov page.
- The printed Passport will provide:
 - Way-finding maps
 - A unique barcode to record each visitor's individual experience
 - A list of the library's "Featured Treasures" and their locations
 - A URL for the home experience

Knowledge Quest

- Fun, game-based activity designed to enliven visitor experience
- Highlights items of particular interest
- Creates a focused pathway through the exhibit

MyLoC Stations

- Provide opportunity to bookmark or save items of interest
- Provide means to explore the art and architecture of the Jefferson building
- Offers a pathway to explore “Featured Treasures” (particularly for visitors with limited time)
- Offers opportunity to send an email of a “Featured Treasure” to a friend
- Provides information on events occurring at the library that day
- Knowledge Quest is played on the MyLoC stations
- Option of associating visitor’s email address with their unique Passport barcode to receive a personalized email reminder with a link to myloc.gov

Myloc.gov Web Site

- Visitors will log in to a personalized page using a link from the email reminder from the library or by typing in the barcode number on back of the Passport
- The personalized page will contain all the items of interest that visitors chose to bookmark while visiting the library.
- Will also provide access to Knowledge Quest, whether the visitor played on-site or not; visitor can continue a quest or start a new one
- Visitors will have access to objects from related collections that were not on display on-site

Arago: People, Postage, and the Post
National Postal Museum

Ted Wilson, Registrar
National Postal Museum

Hand out information unavailable.