

## SHAPING VISITOR EXPERIENCES WITH INTERACTIVE MEDIA

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*This session will explore how interactive media can elicit wonder, engage groups, extend experiences beyond the visit, bridge the onsite and online experience, and empower institutions to keep their content fresh through powerful self-publishing tools. The effectiveness of these diverse approaches will be contrasted with the effort and affordability of each.*

### MONTICELLO EXPLORER IN CONTEXT

Virtual recreations of historically significant places can serve a variety of different functions for an organization. In the case of Monticello, the immersive navigable 3D home and plantation in the Website provided a way for users who cannot get to Charlottesville to explore Monticello, it provided an opportunity for visitors to explore inaccessible parts of the house, it gave visitors access to deeper information than they could get on a visit, it helped them search the contents of the house and contextualize all the objects based on their locations, and it provided the venue to explain how certain features within the house operated. What are other approaches and purposes of virtually recreating a place?

#### ***Exploring the Past***

Sometimes we have the data to recreate things that don't exist anymore: navigable recreations give visitors the ability to experience the past.



In the case of Yin Yu Tang, this Chinese house was disassembled and re-erected in Salem, MA. The site was made and posted when the house was in thousands of parts before its re-erection, providing a forum for understanding the past and what was to come.

#### ***Dynamic Context: Publishing Active Archeological Research***

Place-based interactives can have robust content management tools that make them a publishing system for active research and discovery, as well as a forum for the exchange of ideas.



The Egyptologists of the Theban Mapping Project can post new findings, new photographs, maps and measured drawings to their site which contextualizes the data with compelling models of every tomb in the Valley of the Kings.

### ***3D Recreations in Museums: Virtual Docents and Accessibility***

Kiosks won't do to docents what ATMs did to bank tellers, but they can be a huge help for the self-directed visitor who goes without tours. In addition, virtual recreations can help address accessibility issues when the real place or artifact is not wheelchair accessible.



The New Bedford Whaling Museum received an IMLS grant to make their 80 year old half-size whaling ship model the *Lagoda* accessible. The kiosks next to the model provide a way to navigate throughout the ship—to parts that don't even exist in the model, they identify every feature on the ship, and they connect the parts of the ship with the story of whaling and objects in their collection.

## **SURVEY OF TRENDS IN INTERPRETIVE TECHNOLOGY**

### **Engaging Groups: Interactivity for More than One**

By its most defining nature, interactive media serves the unique inquiries of an individual: users get what they want, the way they want it when they want it. As we have more direct control over how we access information and entertainment in more aspects of our day to day lives, we have less tolerance for passivity and relinquished control. Museum visitors do not want to wait 15 minutes for the next screening of the orientation film, and they have less and less interest in being held hostage to a linear narrative presentation—they want a degree of control over their experience. Unlike a Website on a personal computer, visiting museums is a social experience: as providers of interactive media, our challenge is to provide meaningful control while at the same time serving groups of visitors. How can groups be engaged without anyone feeling like a television viewer without the remote control?

#### ***Repeater, Mimic and Slave Screens***

Single interactive experiences can have large overhead screens to attract other visitors, to extend the experience to others, and help inform others how something is used. In these examples, the computer simply sends the same signal to two screens.



Throughout the National Archives Experience, most interactive installations are visible to bystanders through large overhead LCD repeaters screens.

#### ***Controlling Public Screens***

Large environmental screens for group experiences can have controller screens where individuals modify what the group sees, where individuals learn more about what the group sees, or both.



The Portrait Wall at the National World War One Museum lets visitors learn more about the people that are revealed throughout the lobby on large plasma screens. Through small 15" touch screens, visitors can browse through the photos and reveal more information about each person.



The Autopsy Interactive Table at the National Library of Medicine has one large touchscreen to control a presentation projected on a tabletop for groups to experience.

***My Inquiry + Your Inquiry = Our Outcome***

**In this approach visitors each interact with their own interface and their inquiries affect a communal screen or central feature.**



In the forthcoming Map of the Woodstock Festival at the Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, visitors congregate around an oval table where they can see a time lapse recreation of the festival with active hotspots. The six touch screens around the perimeter allow visitors to each explore the hotspots.



In this National Library of Medicine exhibition visitors can use one of three kiosks to discover women physicians by specialty, region, notable accomplishments and other criteria. Each visitor's inquiries illuminate the pantheon of portraits on a 22' Digital Photo Gallery.

### ***Working Together***

The most powerful group experiences happen when each visitor is a true participant and their personal interactions play out against those of every other participant.



The Great War Tables at the National World War One Museum engage up to 24 simultaneous visitors. Each participant has a unique experience as they each come to understand the broad themes of the conflict from a different country's perspective. Another mode lets individuals walk around the tables where different zones feature different interactivities exploring the strategic and technological aspects of the war.

### **Environmental Installations: Technology beyond the Kiosk**

Interactive media made its interpretive debut in museums in the form of computers at desks in the corner of galleries. Over time the technology became more integrated into the exhibitry with hidden computers and touch screens. The degree to which interactive media can be seamlessly welded into the overall experience without the traditional segregation between physical exhibitry, A/V media and computer-based media, the more effective the overall experience can be. The more collaboration that occurs between the various creative energies that define a visitor experience, the more difficult it becomes to discern where one medium begins and another ends. What are ways that technology can become more integrated into the museum environment?

#### ***Integrated Projections***

Installations can combine physical exhibitry with technology where projections are part of a display.



The View Upon the Body installation at the national Library of Medicine sets the stage of the forensic medicine exhibition where a 5 minute looped animation is projected on one of the glass surfaces enclosing a draped body on a medical examiner's table. The shadow forms are a mix of imagery in the presentation and real shadows from visitors that pass behind the case.

### ***Being the Stage***

As opposed to a media installation in an environment, a media installation can *be* the environment.



The audience is surrounded by 4 16' projection screens that transform their environment throughout the 15 minute long Third Angle concert "Frozen Music."

### ***Technology?***

Sometimes technology can be so integrated it is assumed it doesn't exist!



The Historigraph Raree-Show at the Portland Armory reveals the history of the landmark building through an old-fashioned peep-show contraption that appears to have no electronics whatsoever.

### ***Mechanical Hybrids: Technology to Touch***

Blending mechanical interactives with computer interactives enhances a visitor's experience when their physical interaction has electronic consequences.



In the Top Secret and Investigations installations at the National Archives, visitors slide screens on a rail to reveal what content is in the archival boxes beyond their reach.

### **Learning from the Web**

What themes in the evolution of Web-based experiences are influencing interpretive technology in museums?

### ***The Power to Change: CMS Tools for Fresh Content***

Content management tools have empowered organizations to control their Web-based communication with the world. No longer holden to the Web designer and programmer, these dynamic Websites allow anyone to edit,

update and maintain content on a site through simple browser-based interfaces. Why should museum professionals expect anything less?



A powerful browser-based content management system allows the staff at the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum to add new stories, images and features to many of the interactives throughout the museum. They can moderate user generated content and filter RSS feeds that supply fresh news stories.

### ***Creating 'Stages': Interactives as Venues***

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 they are craving to be more generic 'stages' 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.

### ***Dynamic Displays: Events Screens & Donor Recognition Walls***

Daily events are important for museum visitors to know about, and communicating this information should not be burdensome. Recognizing patrons and contributors is an important ingredient in securing funding. Sometimes it would be great to add names, change sponsorship levels and give special recognition faster than it would take to order new etched glass!



This artful donor recognition wall at the Portland Armory blends a poetic two-sided projection of names and quotes with the recognition of contributors according to donation level.

### ***Going Both Ways: Kiosks Online and Websites On-site***

Museums can save a lot of money and energy crafting their interactive media with a plan that accounts for the on-site and online efforts simultaneously. Many museums are starting to deploy their kiosks on their Website, as well as making their Web content accessible on the floor of the museum. This is especially valuable for institutions with comprehensive online collections, or deep online exhibitions that can add to the visitor experience in the museum.

### ***Onsite Interactives as Gateways to Deep Online Exploration***

To further bolster the connection between the onsite and online experience, many museums are integrating bookmarking features in a museum to help bridge what one discovers in a museum for deeper online exploration at home. Using barcode scanners, RFID or special handhelds, visitors can add objects they encounter in their experience to a personal collection system which they can retrieve later online. The supporting website retrieves their collections and provides deeper content and connections to other items that might not have been on view.



The modified Acoustiguide wands at the Peabody Essex Museum allow visitors to bookmark everything in the museum. At home they get an email with a link to their bookmarks which become launching points for journeys through the collection in their special ARTscape Website.

### ***Web 2.0: Harvesting User Generated Content***

Possibly the single hottest issue in all of the industry is how to integrate content contributed by the community that the museum serves. While museums have traditionally been the arbiters, mediators and storytellers creating content that audiences passively absorb, there are diverse ways many institutions are attempting to have a more open exchange that integrates audience generated content into the museum's offerings. This can range from

- Harvesting oral histories from visitors in self-directed audio video recording booths and pods;
- Allowing visitors to tag items in a collection, integrating their interpretations of objects, and in some cases, allowing them to contribute media records as objects in a collection;
- Creating storytelling and curation tools for visitors to make and share their own curated and annotated collections;