Museum Websites: form, function, assessment

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Topics

1. Aims and functions of museum websites
2. Major structural components
3. Assessment of museum websites
1. Aims and functions of museum websites
The website as image maker: Acropolis Museum

Interactive applications

1. Color the Peplos Kore

Archaic Colors
Extending the Museum-Visitor Experience

https://segd.org/extending-museum-visitor-experience
What makes a good museum website?

Good online design

Embracing the open nature of the Internet

Present information in a clear context

Emphasizing powerful images.
The Walker Art Centre, nominated as best on the web

- Minimal „noise”: no visual distractors
- All necessary information easily available
- Positioning important information first: address, opening times, prices
- Interesting information on top: art and artist, magazine
- Entertainment options: separate part
- Fully searchable
More „artistic” art gallery sites

10. on the website ranking list: International Centre of Photography: website as exhibition

2. Whitney Museum of American Art
Moving images offer „sneak peak”, special family page

3. Hirschhorn Museum: art magazine image, „good read”

8. Museum of the Moving Image: combination of info site and art magazine
Just because a museum is famous doesn't mean its website is great — cf. Museum of Modern Art, New York
International museum portals

**Euromuse**: museum exhibitions in Europe

**ICOM** (International Council of Museums) edication page
2. Major structural components
The Walker Art Centre

- Search
- **Visitor information**
  - Calendar of events
  - Support the museum!
- **Education**
  - Entertainment
  - Catering
- Shop
- Newsletter and press info
Science communication on websites

British Museum, Research section

Collection search

Research projects

Blog

Collaborative Doctoral Awards
Research scholarships between the Museum and UK Universities

Maya Research Project
Unifying new technology with past preservation techniques to improve our documentation and understanding of Maya collections.

Excavations at Amara West
Discovering an ancient Egyptian town in Maritza River Basin, South Bulgaria.
Pages for children: Tate Kids

- **Airbrush**: Use your webcam to paint with your whole body!

- **Spin**: Ready, steady, SPIN!

- **DotShop**: Go Dotty for DotShop

- **Cuboom**: Cubism was a new way of representing reality in art invented by Picasso.

- **Wondermind**: Find the art and think it through.

- **Art Lab**: Will you restore or ruin our works?

- **Art Detective**: Discover the facts behind a mysterious object found at Tate Britain!

- **Barbara’s Garden**: Explore the Sculpture Garden and play the treasure hunt.
“Cubists” – a game
Kid’s World at the Deutsches Museum

Das Kinderreich im Deutschen Museum

Computer

Computer können nur, was die Menschen ihnen beigebracht haben – das aber dann sehr schnell.
MOMA pages for children and youth

Metropolitan Museum, Teens

Metropolitan Museum, Art Lab

Families
Personal connections with the audience
Christmas collection of audience members of Museum of Folk Arts, Budapest

Adventi album

Ezen az oldalon a Néprajzi Múzeum közönségének közös fotóalbuma látható. A **fellévássunkra** beérkezett fekete-fehér és színes papírképek, digitális fotók jól tükrözik az 1960-as évektől napjainkig eltelt időszak életformájának változásait, egyben a fényképezés modernizációját is. Az Adventi Album amatőr fotóin keresztül betekinthetünk saját téri hátköznaplajinkba, adventi előkészületeinkbe és az ünnep egy-egy emelkedett pillanatába. A fényképekhez kapcsolódnak történetek a képekhez kattintva elolvashatók.
Dialogue with visitors: e-guestbook
Social responsibility
socially relevant issues promoted on a dedicated museum website

**Boston, Museum of Science**

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**Engineering is all around us.**

The National Center for Technological Literacy, an initiative of the Museum of Science, Boston, is reaching out and improving engineering understanding nationwide to help the nation realize its potential.

Our belief is that all of us should be better equipped to live and work in the human-made world by increasing our collective understanding of engineering and technology.

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**National Centre for Technological Literacy**
Sponsors on the museum web page

Corporate Sponsorship

Bernice Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawai, US
Pages for teachers

- Educational materials to download
- Online educational resources, e.g. Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, paleolit cave paintings
- Worksheets to be used in exhibitions
- Leaflets about exhibitions, see images.
- Information about facilities to meet children’s needs: snack area, cloakroom, WC etc.
- Educational program overview
- Registration page for programs

Educational pages

Natural History Museum, London, Education

Victoria and Albert Museum, London: Education
Group for Education in Museums: Educational tools at GEM Resources

Find a Resource

This page provides quick links to the resources on the GEM website. For more information about each group, use the links to the left.

Advice Notes

Grass Roots (funded by Museums Galleries Scotland)
- Education related policies
- Working with schools
- Working with different groups in the community
- Working with artists
- Using the schools curriculum
- Curricular developments
- Developing learning activities
- Session leading skills

Building a Learning Legacy (funded by CyMAL)
- Family learning Cymraeg
- Learning from objects Cymraeg
- Learning & learning styles Cymraeg
- First person interpretation Cymraeg

Advertise with GEM!
Reach the tuned-in professionals and organisations that matter
- Advertise in Case Studies and the Journal for Education in Museums
- Spread word of your activities or services in a mailout
- Place a recruitment ad on the GEM website
- Advertise your freelance services on the website

More information
4. Evaluating museum websites
Evaluation lenses: two kinds of website visitors
• those planning a visit
• those exploring the site from basic curiosity

Research questions:
• Where is the menu? What did it contain?
• How does the mobile/responsive version appear?
• How are images used? Do they dominate? What are they of?
• How is space and colour used? Margins? Full width? White? Brand colours?

Hadley, Pat (2017) What do the best museum websites all do?
Row 1 on image on previous slide:
• Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, TX, US
• The Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Middlesbrough, UK
• The Baseball Hall of Fame, Cooperstown, NY, US
• Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY, US

Row 2:
• The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH, US
• MoMA, New York, NY, US
• The National Museum of African-American History and Culture, Washington DC, US
• The Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK

Row 3:
• The Kimbell Museum of Art, Fort Worth, TX, US
• The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, NL
• The Baltic Center for Contemporary Art, Newcastle, UK
• The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MD, US

Row 4:
• The National Portrait Gallery, London, UK
• The Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences, Sydney, AU
• The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Cleveland, OH, US
• The Yiddish Book Center, Amhurst, MA, US

Row 5:
• The Fort Worth Museum of Science and History, Fort Worth, TX, US
• The Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX, US
• The Tate Gallery, London (and elsewhere), UK
• York Art Gallery, York, UK

Row 6:
• The Meadows Museum, Dallas, TX, US
• Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, UK
• The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX, US
• Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, UK
Museum website study, 2017: Results 1

Group 1: Practicals

Where? — Where is the museum? How do I/we get there?

Open? — Is it open? Will it be on the day I’m planning?

How much? — What are the entry costs? Are there discounts?

Coffee? — Is there a cafe? Decent facilities?

VISIT — Most sites currently group this information in a ‘Visit’ or ‘Plan your visit’ section

Hadley, Pat (2017) What do the best museum websites all do?
Tips for Group 1: Practicals

- Clear on mobile
- Clear navigation (not too cool)
- Put key information on the home page
- Crosslinks to/from search and social media
Group 2: Stuff?

Whaddya got?—What’s on display? What will I/we see?  
What can I do?—What if I/we want to do more than just look at the stuff?  
What’s On?—Are there events on currently? In the future?  
What kind of thing?

EVENTS & COLLECTIONS—Most sites currently keep this information in the events, exhibitions and collections areas.

controversial topics? Challenging art?

STORIES & SENTIMENTS—These elements don’t belong in particular sections but have more to do with the design, feel, brand and the whole impression one gets from a site.

Hadley, Pat (2017) What do the best museum websites all do?
Tips for Group 2: Stuff

- Clear collection/exhibition highlights
- Search feels like looking for treasures
- Good event calendar
- Gorgeous images
Group 3: Feelings

How will I feel?—Will I be comfortable? Can my kids be loud? Can I go at my own pace and sit down when I need to?

Will my ideas change?—Is the information clear? Accessible? Do I need to read lots? What about

Hadley, Pat (2017) What do the best museum websites all do?
Tips for Group 3: Feelings

- Accessible language
- Human stories
- Style echoes collections/physical site
- Imagery of people and the site
Navigation

Of 24 museums all but six have header bar navigation.

Most common links were variations on: Visit | What’s on | Collection

These three links help with the questions from Group 1: Practicals and Group 2: Stuff: immediately answering these questions in one click.
Images

- **Grids of images** give a sense of a the diversity of experiences and content on the website and at the physical site. The best of these layouts provoked our curiosity and give a sense that we’re ‘lifting the lid on a treasure chest’.

- In contrast, **single splash/hero images** have to work harder (you cannot get away with a mediocre photograph!) and give a strong sense of identity. Animated carousels are another way to present more images and add dynamism to the home page. These also provide the chance to show images from each of the categories: buildings, collections, visitors.
Images

- **The effect of images** from each of these categories is important to consider. Simplistically, collection images answer the ‘What have you got?’ question, but they also contribute massively to the mood of a home page (**Group 3**): strong colours, historic resonance, exoticism or personal connections.

- **Images of the building/site** tease us with a sense of the space that we (hopefully) want to explore, or make a ‘pilgrimage’ to. Often the imposing or magnificent buildings—when lacking people—inspire something a little reverential, a little akin to awe. Although they may be beautiful shots it’s important to think carefully about the impression this might give to people that feel less welcome in such spaces.

- **Fun shots of families, school groups and trendy young couples** enjoying museums can be trite if done badly, but are potentially the strongest tool available to make the organisation feel welcoming. People can easily project themselves into the museum and see the energy of the space.
Mobile

- In **November 2016, mobile internet traffic exceeded desktop for the first time.**
- Good mobile performance is now crucial to a website’s success. There are some interesting approaches from the sites we studied, with some looking strikingly different from their desktop pages while others had no changes.
- Clear information for visit planning (**Group 1**)on mobile home pages stood out as a very positive element.
Hamel’s model for website analysis 1

- **Management and governance.** Think about how analytics are managed and organised at your museum and how this work is supported by those at the top of the organisational chart.
- **Objectives.** Do you know what you exactly want to use the analytics for?
- **Scope.** Now that the museum content is dispersed across multiple online platforms, do you use and manage analytics for your website only or also cover your mobile apps, social media profiles and third-party sites?
Hamel’s model for website analysis 2

- **Resources.** Do you have dedicated resources to work on analytics within your museum?

- **Methodology and process.** Have you defined and agreed the processes that would cover everything from performance indicators to analysing the data and decision making?

- **Tools and technology.** Do you have the best tools in place, and how well have you customised them and integrated with other technologies?
Hamel’s model for website analysis 3

1. Management, Governance and Adoption,
2. Objectives,
3. Scope,
4. Team and Expertise,
5. Continuous Improvement Process and Analysis Methodology
6. Tools, Technology and Data Integration.

Stéphane Hamel’s Web Analytics Maturity Model (2009) is used in the Tate Gallery, London (2012)
Museum websites – an assessment exercise

Tate Modern, London
https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)
https://www.moma.org/

Hungarian National Gallery  https://mng.hu/en

Museum of Fine Arts, Vienna
https://www.khm.at/en/


Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam
https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en


