Museums & Galleries of NSW

Engaging Art

Design Approaches to Digital Projects - A Beginners Guide

This is a guide to help you develop a digital or transmedia project for your museum or gallery.

A transmedia project aims to enable museums and galleries to tell the story around their exhibitions or collections using different media and platforms - both analogue and digital - utilising interactive devices, smartphones and tablets.

Concept development

Start by brainstorming ideas and concepts as much as possible.

Have a look at other museums and heritage sites and put together a 'wish list'. Don't limit your imagination! (At this stage you should not be limiting yourself by constraints such as budget). Start with 'blue sky' thinking and the next steps will whittle it back to what you can achieve and afford - which may mean staging the project over a number of years according to budget access.

During this phase it is a good idea to consider as many approaches as possible.

You may have started out with an idea for a touch-table application but find that the same idea delivered on a tablet may be more effective. In short, look at all the available technologies to see which one will best fit your vision and goals. Think about shelf-life and adaptability. How long would you like this application or program to be around for? Is this an educational archive or is it specific to a single event? Is this application intended to be used within the confines of the building or for wider dissemination? How will this application stand the test of time in terms of relevance?

Once you have a clear idea it is time to explore feasibility in terms of technology and project management.

At this point you need to consider your budget and deadlines; this is the time to rethink and adapt ideas considering the real-world constraints. You should also reflect on the goals of the project and assess your plans in relation to these goals.

Note: *At this point in the design process you still have not committed to anything. You have explored ideas and concepts and then framed them in the context of the realities of budget, available resources etc.*

Content Development

This is an exploratory phase in which to analyse your content and develop a narrative strategy. What is the story you want to tell and how does the available content best support it? You are aiming to create a memorable visitor experience. Consider if you already have all the content you need, e.g. images and information from your collections database? Or do you need to generate new content, e.g. curator's extended text for digital labels?

Photo by Aneta Pawlik on Unsplash

Now is a good time to collate your content and associated information in a way that supports your project. For example, if the primary content will be images supported by text and audio a good idea would be to create a spreadsheet of the images and link the relevant additional information and audio. This will make it easier to find things at the implementation stage and generally help the development along.

Design Development

This is the stage during which the content, the digital elements, and the exhibition design converge.

Prepare some mood boards with visual references that capture your intentions. Your mood boards can also be used to capture envisioned interactivity. For example, when the user touches an image an audio file will begin to play etc. You do not have to work out all the interactions just the main ones, the development team will work out the fine details for you. Capturing these interactions and themes will greatly assist the development process. You are now ready to take your idea to an agency or developer. For steps on this read our companion resource: https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/resources/online-resources/digital/digital-engagement/

Practical considerations

The choice of your Content Management System (CMS) is crucial for your project and its ability to upgrade. If you are intending to develop an application that utilises your collection you should seriously consider how it will connect to your CMS. Ideally any application that you develop will be able to talk directly with your CMS. This makes for efficient information and data retrieval
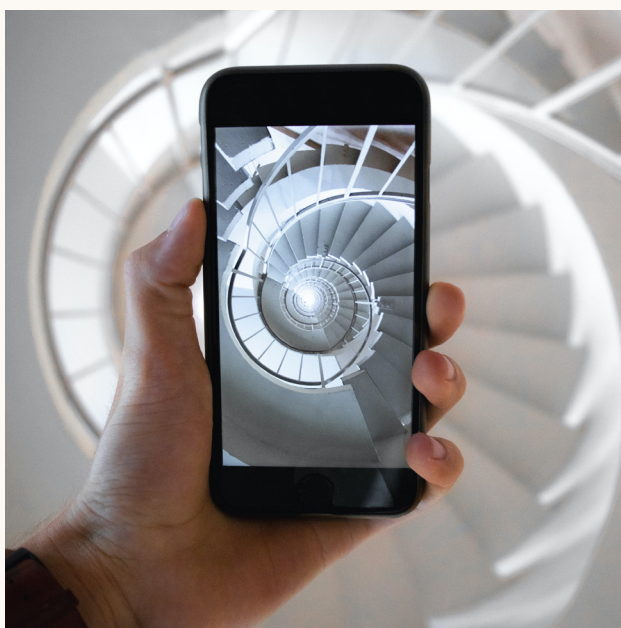

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as well as rapid publication of your application. Read more about choosing a CMS here: https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/resources/online-resources/collection-management/collection-management-systems/

There are possibilities to use solutions that are totally dedicated to transmedia projects. Such platforms use Application Programming Interface (API) connections to CMS content which can be seamlessly integrated into an application (see an example here: https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/resources/online-resources/collection-management/collection-management-systems/). This facilitates storytelling to complement the works of art or objects in a collection.

There are many different formats for storytelling such as digital flip books, onscreen collages or chronological timelines combined with augmented reality and gaming features to name a few. These types of approaches have been shown to create an appealing exhibit and add learning value for visitors of all ages.

Touch tables (https://www.wezit.io/2017/12/13/3-new-wezit-kiosks-new-temporary-exhibition-nantes-museum-fine-arts/?lang=en), installed in front of an artwork or object can deliver a range of insights, for example they allow visitors to explore and interact with a static work, read information about the artist and learn about its historical and social context. Geolocated Mobile Apps, Virtual reality tours, 3D online tours and photographic panoramic tours are other technologies you might consider using to tell a story, some of which are listed below.

Case-studies: three very different uses and users

The Grand Palais: The Grand Palais all in one app (https://www.wezit.io/wezit-reference/the-entire-rmn-grand-palais-at-your-fingertips/?lang=en) is published on the iOS and Android stores. The app can publish an unlimited number of temporary exhibitions using a template and serves as a means to connect with audiences outside the museum. This keeps audiences up to date about what's happening inside the museum by sending them notifications. For their Artists and Robots exhibition the museum developed a geolocated app (https://www.wezit.io/wezit-reference/geolocated-application-artistes-and-robots-exhibition/?lang=en) which also has augmented reality features.

The Grand Palais is a large organisation with their own in-house digital team. Their team worked with the contractor to develop the initial application template and back-end. The application and its templates are then managed, updated and modified by the in-house digital team.

Museum of Fine Arts, Nantes (MAN): The MA Visit app (https://museedartsdenantes.nantesmetropole.fr/en/application-ma-visite.html) is available through app stores. The back-end interfaces with the museum's CMS and can automatically import more than 800 works and 600 artists into an online platform which presents this potentially overwhelming data in an viewer-friendly format on various devices (mobile app, located kiosks, 'magnifying glass' touch tables). The app also collates additional information (artwork labels, related images, related indexed artists' files) which can be added in the future by the museum team.

MAN is a medium sized organisation with its own limited in-house digital team that worked with the contractor to develop the initial application templates and back-end. The in-house digital team then collated and organised content for new publications by populating the supplied templates. The templates for the app are static and do not require changes however if new templates are required the museum will need to go back the contractor to build them.

The Museum of Impressionism, Giverny: In this geolocated mobile app (https://www.wezit.io/wezit-reference/geolocation-application-impressionists-museum-trad-en-2/?lang=en)users follow the footsteps of the Impressionist painters, outside the museum walls, along the River Seine.

Visitors can identify the landscapes painted by Impressionist artists by navigating along nine pre-established pathways within the app. These landscapes are then connected with the relevant artworks. Users also have access to detailed explanations of the art works and by overlapping the view with the images in the app it is possible to compare today's landscape with that of the past. This allows the user understand the museum's collection and the work of the Impressionist movement

The Museum of impressionism is a medium sized organisation with very limited in-house digital team that worked with the contractor to develop the initial application templates. The in-house team collates and organises content but relies on the contractor to create and deliver the new tours.

You might also like:

Museums & Galleries of NSW
Digital Engagement: Connecting With Your Audiences

https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/resources/online-resources/digital/digital-engagement/

Cogapp
Museum Digital Strategy: Examples and Resources

https://www.cogapp.com/museum-digital-strategy-examples-resources/

Digital Trends
What is VR? A Beginners Guide to Virtual Reality

https://www.digitaltrends.com/computing/what-is-vr-all-the-basics-of-virtual-reality/

Museums & Galleries of NSW
Collection Management Systems

https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/resources/online-resources/collection-management/collection-management-systems/

Museums & Galleries of NSW
Digital Suppliers List for Museums and Galleries

https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/resources/online-resources/digital/digital-suppliers-list-for-museums-and-galleries/