

Museum Partner Observation #2

Kyle Nolan

LIS: 258 Museum Informatics

Dr. Christine Angel

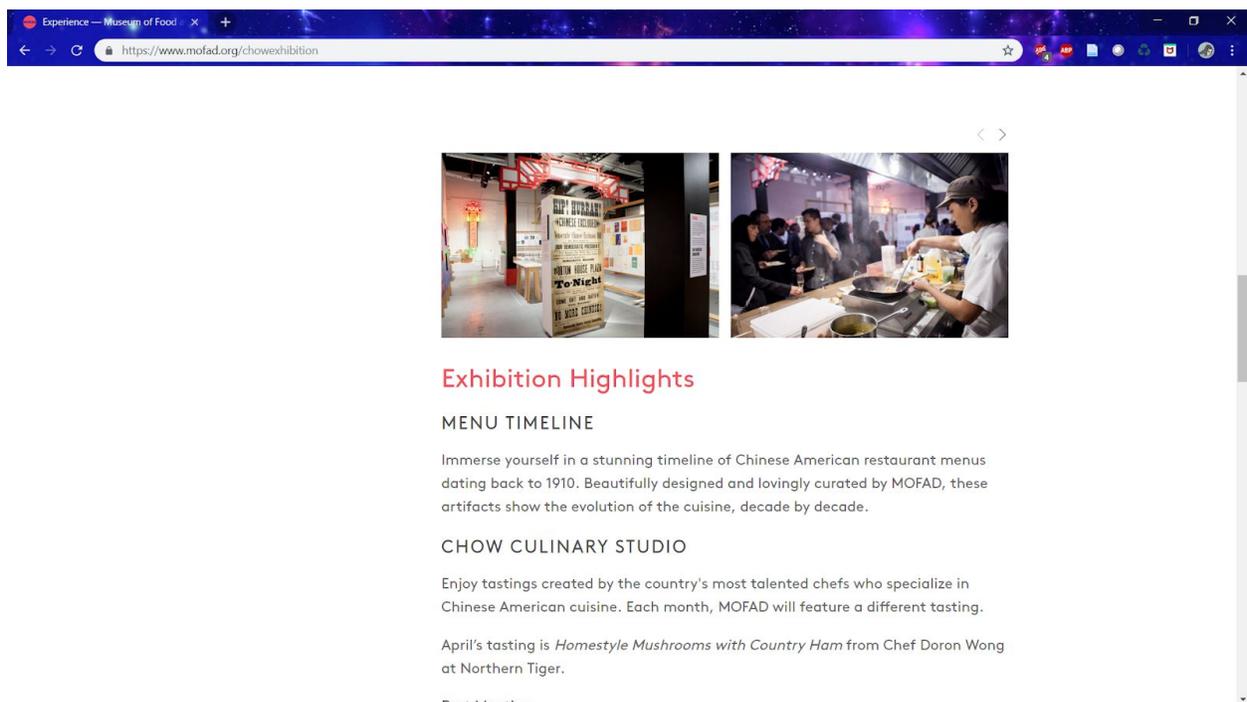
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How can the five principles mentioned in the Science Museum Group's Digital Strategy guide your approach to creating interactively digital & engaging exhibits?

The points brought up in the Science Museum Groups Digital Strategy (SMGDS) aren't specific to their group or the museums affiliated with them. Every museum can benefit from their outlook on the digital in modern museums. Concerning audiences, the strategy presents several good points on how to interact with your audience and incorporate what they want into exhibits. Of the points made in the audience section, to "Ensure that digital content and services are accessible to all," and to "Develop content around clearly defined audiences needs" seem the most valuable to me (Digital Strategy, 2017). In developing digital exhibits, it's always important to consider what an audience would actually benefit from having available rather than what we, as museum professionals, would find interesting. There are times where our professional interests and the needs of audiences overlap, but it is always better to venture out and get a feel for what audiences desire.

When creating exhibits, as an information professional I think it's incredibly important to make sure that the exhibits I work with have a lasting impression. The second section of the SMGDS focused on sustainability, in which museums "implement processes that ensure that content and technology is well maintained" and that they "build for the long-term and for growth" (Digital Strategy, 2017). While this section doesn't talk about sustainability in what I see as the traditional, more environmental approach, it focuses on making sure the museum isn't constantly needing to update equipment and can create lasting exhibits. In regards to the digital, having online exhibits that are easily maintained and updated is a small example of sustainable methods within museums.

One of the most amazing experiences when visiting a museum, for me, is when they take something ordinary, that I've been walking past for years, and turn it into an exhibit that really grabs my attention and pulls me in new directions. The entrepreneurial and innovative section in the SMGDS really covers some major points that I find are often lacking in smaller museums. The suggestion to “Make innovative use of established and proven technologies,” could be applied widely in poorly funded museums, as it's easy to take the tried and true methods and simply turn them on their heads for an exciting new exhibit (Digital Strategy, 2017). One such museum that does this is the MOFAD Lab in Brooklyn, NY. They take the traditional museum experience to a whole other level by making it their own: a kitchen experience in which visitors can actually eat food relevant to the current exhibit (Museum of Food and Drink, 2019).



Screenshot of Museum of Food and Drink Lab “Chow” Exhibit Experience

Additionally, museums must “Respond to the rapidly evolving technology landscape through experimentation that informs future initiatives” (Digital Strategy, 2017). I believe this is simply an important part of interacting with audiences and users, as the technology available to them shapes their everyday lives, museums should strive to incorporate this technology into their exhibits.

From the “Open, Reusable, and Shareable” portion of the SMGDS, I believe that promoting “content reuse through partnerships” and sharing “collection data and other data sets where they will aid external researchers” are principles that should be more overarching (Digital Strategy, 2017). Partnerships with other museums and outside organizations that reuse old exhibits or information allows for a greater spread of the knowledge people gain from those resources. Likewise, allowing external researchers access to data and collections not only enhances the knowledge of the researcher, but also for the museum responsible for the data. Sharing information and knowledge often leads to expanding our knowledge base, ideas, and how we perceive the world. Being more open with information and collections would allow museums to help others, as well as themselves, to move forward.

Finally, the SMGDS talks about embedding across the organisation (2017). From this principle, the concepts of overhauling “processes, guidelines and policies,” and sharing “the impacts and effectiveness of digital initiatives widely” seem the most important to me (Digital Strategy, 2017). As technology and society is always changing, it is important for museums and professionals to adapt policies and guidelines that fit into the current times: if this means a complete upheaval of the old system, then that is what it might take. Once these changes are implemented, sharing with others how they worked will help for future developments of policies

by institutions young and old. Concerning the digital and interactive exhibits, it's easier to look back on others mistakes and successes and learn, rather than start from scratch yourself.

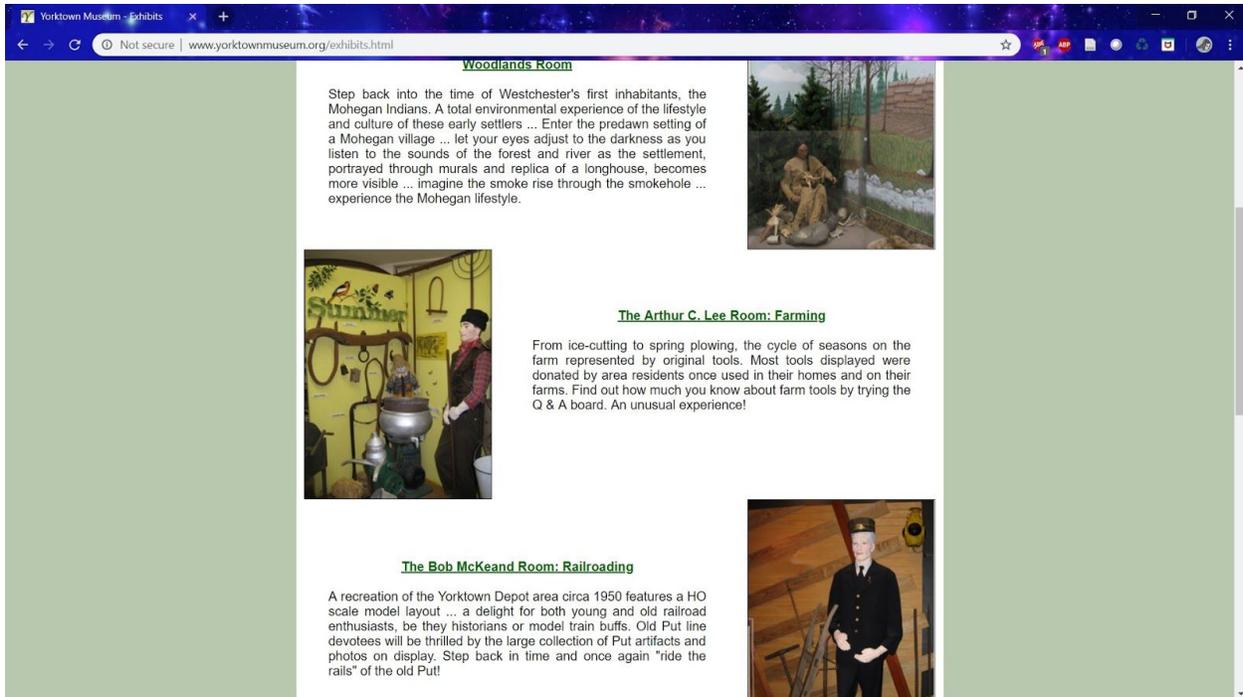
All in all, an important balance of all five principles mentioned in the SMGDS is needed. They all build off of each other, which then allows us to create engaging and inviting digital/interactive exhibits.

How do we as Information professionals blend the digital and physical worlds in our museums?

As Information Professionals, the digital world is becoming more present each year. Several museums have online databases or exhibits showcasing photographs of physical objects; interactive kiosks or audio tours allow visitors to get both aspects of the digital and physical; and digitizing documents and objects creates two separate, yet conjoined, copies of the same item. Some museums take it to another level, using Virtual Reality (VR) headsets for a portion of an exhibit or have online tours for those who cannot physically make it to the museum. However, the most common form of blending the digital and physical worlds is through digitization, as it allows the development of those online exhibits while still maintaining the physical objects.

How does your museum-partner attempt to do this?

It is an unfortunate reality that the Yorktown Museum in Yorktown Heights, New York has no interactive or digital exhibits. There is minimal digitization (as in, only a few objects and documents are currently digitized) and no online accessibility at all. None of the exhibits have any digital aspects, though the farming exhibit has an interactive quiz board for visitors



Screenshot of Farming exhibit on Yorktown Museum website

The most interactive and engaging aspect of the Yorktown Museum is the research room, which is available to visitors during operating hours and by appointment (Yorktown Museum, 2018).

The research room allows for visitors to do their own studies and track histories within the town and local areas for their own use.

How can you make your pre-selected Museum object interactive within your own Museum-Partner?

Honestly, it'd be a great idea to have some sort of tablet in the rooms with objects like a barn loom or other old tools used during colonial times. I'm sure there's plenty of software out there that would allow people to get a better look at the items, as the museum follows the principles of look, don't touch. Some sort of point and click interactive exhibit that goes further in depth with some of the objects would be interesting to see. With the barn loom in the Sylvia Thorne Room,

it would be possible to show a simulation of how one would use a barn loom, even a paired video would be a good possibility. However, they could always pair up with the local high school/technical school to develop some program, as was done by the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library out in Cedar Rapids, IA with their “Guts and Glory” exhibit (2018). With this exhibit, they recruited the local high schools technical classes to help develop a VR and create box cars for visitors to interact with in addition to the exhibit (NCSML, 2018).



Screenshot of “Guts & Glory” exhibit on the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library website

Incorporating the barn loom into a larger interactive exhibit including other objects from the same era would make for an interesting outlook on the standard exhibit done by the Yorktown Museum.

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