The Making of a Museum Online Exhibition: Theory and Practice

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology

- Houses 100,000 ancient artifacts
- Mounts 2-3 exhibitions per year
- Creates companion websites for special exhibitions

Featured Online Exhibitions

What is an online exhibition? How is it different from other websites?
- Microsite: small or medium-size
- Finite project: no updates, no maintenance
- Lifespan: permanent
- Primary audience: general public, students, scholars
- Content: based on a physical exhibition (includes a story and artifacts)

References

Newberry Hall (Entrance Street entrance) Photo by Randall Stieglzyer
Uppin Wing (Maynard Street entrance) Photo by Randall Stieglzyer

Our Workflow

Objective: reduce curator’s workload

Collaborative process (coordinated by Associated Director):

Phase I
- Curator: Exhibition proposal
- Exhibition designer: Design theme
- Web designer: Website prototype

Phase II
- Curator: Text panels and labels
- Editor: Editing the text
- Photographer: Images of artifacts
- Collections manager: Information on artifacts
- Graphic artist: Maps and charts
- IT coordinator: Special features
- Educational coordinator: List of events and activities
- Exhibition designer: Videos and interactives
- Web designer: Beta version of website

Phase III
- Curator: Feedback
- Editor: Proof-reading
- Web designer: Launch of the website
- Educational coordinator: Promotion

Phase IV
- Photographer: Photos of the physical show
- Curator: Final updates
- Editor: Final edits
- Web designer: Final version of the website

What to consider before you start?
- What is the main focus of the exhibition?
- Target audience
- How many topics/chapters?
- Linear narrative or free browsing?
- Functional and topical navigation: separate or not?
- How many artifacts?
- How much text per artifact?
- How many images per artifact?
- Additional assets (audio, video, interactives)

When to start working on the project?

Best practice:
- Build the website concurrently with the physical exhibition; launch on the opening night
- Good for promotion
- Helpful for museum visitors
- Ready for use in the classroom

Alternative scenario:
- Build the website after the show opens
- No strict deadline = less stress
- Content is finalized = no need for updates
- Gallery photos may be incorporated in design

How to build an exhibition website?

Our approach:
- Reuse existing resources:
  - Text (exhibition text panels and labels)
  - Design theme (exhibition design)
  - Multimedia assets (audio, video, interactives)
- Content is king! Create custom structure and layout depending on the content
- Produce a unique website that matches the physical show