

How to balance skills and enthusiasm of individuals with organisational ownership of external communications

Different experiences were shared:

In some organisations, the use of social media is controlled centrally – every Tweet or Facebook comment is monitored in the same way as other communications, by the marketing department of the organisation.

In other organisations, ‘experts’ from within the staff have been encouraged to lead the way in using social media for the organisation, and staff have led the way in adopting use of social media to meet the needs of users and staff. For some organisations, this is working well, and for others there has been some conflict with their marketing departments over who takes the lead in this area of development. Notably, conflict has focussed on occasions when non-marketing staff development of the use of social media has proved very successful, and there may be an element of jealousy from marketing professionals.

The value of working with researchers

A number of organisations are working in partnership with IT/communication research departments of universities to explore how new technology can support museums to engage better with the public, and this dialogue/sharing of ideas is helpful.

A number of different projects between museums and Edinburgh, Glasgow and Heriot Watt Universities were discussed, where researchers are looking to make museum interfaces more user friendly. Projects are also looking at mark2 mobile e-technology - looking at Google mapping to support museum learning work.

Understanding audiences and the use of social media

Museums need to better understand their audiences, and many have set up focus groups to exchange ideas. Social media provides a tool for extending connection with focus groups on a low budget - it can support sustainability of engagement with users by museums.

Valuing real lives extends peoples' experience and supports/values memory

A number of different projects were discussed which support the collection of memory of local communities:

1. Reel lives

Reel Lives is a partnership between Scottish Screen and Glasgow Museums, set up to record people's stories, memories and testimonies, using archive films and Glasgow Museums' collections as inspiration:

<http://discuss.glasgowguide.co.uk/index.php?showtopic=15958>

2. Parks for People

This HLF funded project looks at how to involve the community in making parks more accessible to local communities, and there is a value in keeping the associated information digital, so that it remains accessible:

<http://www.hlf.org.uk/HowtoApply/programmes/Pages/parksforpeople.aspx>

3. Making collections information accessible, and encouraging communities of interest/individuals to enhance that information

3.1 Glasgow Museums potentially to use Facebook to enhance collections records

Collections records are held on Multi-Mimsi. 200,000 objects are well documented, and the museums service is at the stage of discussing how to make this information accessible to the public and/or how to support the public to (perhaps using Facebook) to add information about/comments on objects.

3.2 Kew Gardens tagging and archiving of collections to make information available

It was proposed that one possible but partial answer to making information about objects information available to the public is the Kew Gardens practice of making accession records available through the National Register of Archives:

<http://www.kew.org/news/kew-blogs/growing-collections-archive-accessions.htm>

3.3 Model of the 'Adopt a Monument' scheme of Archaeology Scotland

Elements of the Adopt a Monument scheme could be useful as a model for encouraging communities or individuals to develop information about individual or groups of objects, to enhance information held by museums. This model encourages a sense of ownership of the object, and the project also provides support in researching and recording information, which may also be helpful:

<http://www.scottisharchaeology.org.uk/?q=node/43>

3.4 Museums Galleries Scotland's Revisiting Collections process to support enhancement of object records by communities

Revisiting Collections is a toolkit providing a framework for capturing visitor information and interpretation, and recording this in collections knowledge management systems. The aim is to connect with communities and help to develop new audiences.

<http://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/what-we-do/collections-development/interpreting-collections/>

<http://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/publications/publication/374/mgg-18>

4. Audio guides and user adaptability/suitability for family audiences

Audio guides can be very long, and often the level of interpretation is very academic. The group discussed the future of this technology, and how it could be better developed with more options for different levels (eg for under-5s, secondary school groups, and other user groups) to be selected by the user, through a simple interface (often the user interface can be difficult to use).

Could laser pointers be used, so that visitors can just select information about a particular object/display of interest, allowing for customisation of a visit?

A key issue was raised, that audio guides are invariably aimed at the individual user, which limits their use by families or other social groups, which make up the majority of visitors to museums. Can an audio guide be developed suitable for use by groups of different ages, with different learning needs?