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LINKFACTORY

DIGITAL STRATEGIES  
FOR MUSEUMS

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info@linkfactory.dk

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## DIGITAL STRATEGIES FOR MUSEUMS

The pandemic has totally changed the museum scene. As social distancing and #stayathome became the new normal, museums had to quickly come up with ideas of how to stay afloat despite the circumstances.

Currently, we can observe the reality slowly coming back to the ways things were before the COVID-19 outbreak. Nevertheless, the need to transfer more and more spheres of our lives into digital ones stays persistent.

Our mission at Linkfactory was always to strive for innovation and solve problems. This is why we teamed up with Kunsten Museum to develop an online database for artefacts, we were instantly on board.

The goal of the following research is to demonstrate different areas and strategies of doing online as a museum.

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# 1. REASONS FOR BUILDING A DIGITAL STRATEGY

- Museums have to accept that they must build online experiences like when newspapers previously accepted they must go online.
- Compared to what happened to newspapers, museums' gargantuan advantage, if they wish to explore it, is that they have not yet gone online properly and there are many possibilities to distinguish themselves.
- Museums' free online experiences have not yet been discovered by the mass public.
- Given that one-third of cultural institutions might close because of the current situation with Covid-19, the industry needs to come together and think about its survival - going online is a must.
- Museums can manifest themselves online in a way that values their work and establishes standards of truth, fair value and trustworthiness.
- Expecting the state to pay for culture as our countries work to recover from the massive economic impact of the coronavirus is unrealistic - all sectors, including museums, must fend for themselves and find ways to be sustainably valuable to survive.

- At the moment, museums have opportunities that are ethical, in line with their mission and do not require state funding. The time that could be spent applying for grants for repetitive research projects can instead be invested in working together to value our cultural sector and remunerate it appropriately.
- Museums' unique selling propositions: collections and expertise.
- Storytelling in imposing buildings, within labeled rooms that guide a viewer from one collection item to the next, with dramatic lighting, surrounded in mystery, and sometimes accompanied by a human or audio guide is a 19th-century immersive experience. It is crucial to come up with other digital solutions. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that audiences value the objects and those who know enough to tell the story about those objects.
- Collections are important because people are a very visual and tactile species, and these artifacts are visual and tactile proof of stories that we might not believe otherwise.
- In an age of fake news and distrust, polarizing opinions and diminishing middle ground, true expertise carries even greater weight. Having non-politicized experts tell us what happened in the past, how artists expressed the invisible and what could happen in the future keeps us sane and at peace with others.

- A defined digital strategy allows museums to leverage digital technologies to connect with their audience, protect their content and cultural data, support their mission more fully, and do so on a budget fit for a collection.
- Building on excellence and the potential for excellence throughout the museum by focusing on web-publishing fundamentals and improving access to collections, community, and content across all platforms.
- Support new kinds of learning, innovation, and knowledge creation inside and outside the Institution.
- Emphasize the role of an institution as the preeminent facilitator of learning for national and global audiences.
- Thanks to going digital, museums can increase their appeal to and relevance for younger audiences.
- Support findability (the combination of search, information architecture, and design that enable digital information to be found).
- Learning as a hybrid of formal education and self-directed discovery that can be brought together and enhanced by online tools and communities.
- Increasing online access to the collections is part of the equation for promoting learning.



- The impact of online collections can be greatly magnified by highlighting the knowledge and insight of the museum's experts, an intellectual property policy that encourages re-use and sharing of the assets (where appropriate), and a matrix of tools, policies, and resources that allows the audiences to be partners in the increase and diffusion of knowledge.
- Attempting to directly monetize access to, and use of, museum content does not appear to be a sustainable business model. Through these low-margin business practices, museums can alienate users, perpetuate the practice of institutions charging each other, discourage research and publications, and undermine their civic mission.



## 2. WHAT IS NEEDED IN ORDER TO CREATE A SIGNIFICANT DIGITAL STRATEGY:

- A cultural change of terms of how digital is perceived and where responsibility for digital content development sits within the organization.
- Devolve responsibility for creating digital content across the organization.
- The management of customer records from different departments (ticketing, bulk email, online shop, fundraising etc.).
- Adapting the museum's internal structure and working model to the digital era.
- Implementing digital knowledge in as many areas and departments as possible to ensure that the digital and analogue contents are integrated and closely interlinked in a unified approach.
- Inventory all Web and New Media tools/functionality and determine the core set to be provided as a shared solution platform (it should include enterprise applications like e-commerce, online donations processing, customer relationship management, search, analytics, and social networking).



- Support the growing role of mobile devices, and configure the museum's sites and exhibitions for availability to wireless/handheld devices.
- Recruit and train a core Web support team to develop technology solutions that can be made available to units on a free and/or cost-chargeback basis  
Analytics: Work with units to establish success criteria for individual site performance. Collect, analyze, and communicate accurate and timely data to all units.
- Digital strategy should be a part of the overall strategy; if a digital strategy is to be effectively implemented, it should arise from your overall organisational strategy.
- The key factor for a successful digital transformation is the acquisition of digital skills at the executive level (this can happen by training up the current leadership in digital skills, training up the digitally savvy people in management skills, or creating a new digital leadership role from scratch).
- The critical success factor for a museum's digital presence is the creation of a networked organisational structure (Kotter, 2011) in which flexible, multidisciplinary teams work together towards shared objectives.
- Conduction of surveys, focus groups and usability testing, and use digital analytics to focus on the elements that users like and to improve aspects that they have issues with.

- Becoming more user-centric and user-led and investing in audience research in order to gain valuable insights into the motivations, behaviour and attitudes of people who visit museums online or physically.
- The most important document that a museum has to create and keep up to date is its digital production roadmap, which should record all the digital activities in progress, regardless of the stage they are in. This document can help to communicate the current status of digital production projects in real time, and encourages decision makers to monitor the work and its progress in relation to organisational objectives. Before a new idea makes it onto the digital roadmap, it should meet a set of clear criteria that are derived from your organisation's key digital principles, objectives, and digital KPIs.
- Investing in digital capacity and skill building. Digital skills are not a core competency of museum staff, so they need to be specifically developed. But improving the digital literacy of existing staff needs is not just about providing training. Internal meetings are also an opportunity for digital staff to share their knowledge with other colleagues, by showing and explaining digital production documentation such as wireframes, functional specifications, workflow diagrams, and analytics reports.

- It is essential to discover the interests of the audience that a museum wants to address.
- It is crucial to know what content a museum has at its disposal (or if it is necessary to generate new content), and to set objectives. Then the most appropriate channels and media can be chosen to make the story reach its target.
- Understand the power of data. Data can be enormously useful if it is collected and used in the right ways. But understanding the data an organisation holds, gathering it and 'cleaning it' so that it can be used to inform decision making, takes time and requires a clear understanding of analytics.
- Museums should base their strategy on audience behaviour and evidence-based insights into your audience's needs and preferences. Understand how audiences use the existing website(s) or respond to the existing social media presence and figure out what they want from it before investing in new platforms.
- Creation of a clear action plan. Including regular reviews and clear responsibilities for each person involved.
- Above all, museums should think of 'digital' not just in terms of new technologies or infrastructure, but in terms of a new relationship with audiences (collaboration, co-creation, sharing and openness), and an opportunity to produce and showcase new types of work for a digital age.

- Analysing data: data can open up new business opportunities, unlocking financial value through commerce, ticketing and membership or through providing evidence of public value for funders and stakeholders. Datasets being collected and analyzed in this sector are increasingly diverse, from the familiar tabular data (website visits, ticket sales) to network data (from social media platforms), text (user feedback from surveys) and video, audio and sensor data.
- In addition to the objects and specimens themselves, museums should digitize the research, descriptions, and interpretive information that places them in context and gives them meaning.
- Identification of existing digital assets — and assess methods used for creating and managing them — at the unit level.
- Development of the requirements for life cycle-management of digital assets to ensure immediate access and long term preservation.
- Building strategic partnerships for content development and management that protect public interest and access.
- Document rights, restrictions, and security requirements for digital assets, in order to clarify access and use issues, identify what assets can be made readily available.
- Empower staff and audiences to use the digital resources by developing user-friendly methods and tools.

- Implement technical best practices and standards for capturing, creating, and using digital assets, and incorporate them into processes and systems.
- Develop and implement a methodology for projecting future digital asset storage and backup requirements, to create sustainable, optimal storage architecture.
- Ensure that trusted digital repositories are available for digital assets requiring long-term preservation and access.
- Develop a business plan for digitization to support the rationales for digitization initiatives.
- Establish guidelines and develop templates for digitization sponsorships and partnerships.
- More professional and flexible processes for project planning and management need to be put in place with a more robust infrastructure to underpin them. Alongside user-centred design, a rigorous culture of analysis is essential to inform a continuous development practice based on genuine digital product and audience insight.
- Sound technical choices need to be made along with building effective supplier relationships. Strong leadership is required as are more appropriate skilled resources in terms of staffing. Digital capacity within the central team alongside competency across the wider workforce should be built.

- Further periodic online surveys to gauge evolving audience appetite in relation to digital service development across the range of platforms should be carried out.
- Digital presents a genuine opportunity to involve the audience in questions they are passionate about and harness their input into extending knowledge and awareness.
- The in-gallery audience is becoming increasingly digitally adept and equipped with their own sophisticated devices for engaging, contributing and sharing content.



[info@linkfactory.dk](mailto:info@linkfactory.dk) [www.linkfactory.dk](http://www.linkfactory.dk)

### 3. ACTIONS TO SUPPORT THE PHYSICAL INSTITUTION:

- Promoting the museum programme in a clear and appealing way onsite and online.
- Offering museum guides onsite and online to inform the visitor experience.
- Providing in-gallery interactives in relation to individual displays.
- Developing narrative-based routes into the collections and portraiture.
- Implementing and evaluating trial interpretive initiatives for the collections.
- Drawing on the collections to encourage contemplation around individual identity.
- Offering a variety of digital activities for children and families.
- Offering digital engagement platforms for young people.
- Providing a range of digital learning resources for schools and colleges.
- Providing a platform for distribution of audio and video content.
- Providing specially tailored content designed to increase access to target audiences.
- Showcasing events to promote and complement live activity at the museum.



- Showcasing projects to encourage and reflect participation.
- Developing digital content to complement national programme initiatives.
- Promoting the museum to members and followers.
- Presenting an appealing prospect for support and involvement.
- Encouraging general and specific online donations.
- Providing simple registration/payment processes for public art competitions.
- Providing effective booking and ticketing for exhibitions and events.
- Promoting the onsite catering offer with ability to book online.
- Promoting opportunities for venue hire, filming and loans.
- Promoting the sale of a profitable range of merchandise through the online shop.
- Offering simple print-on-demand services both onsite and online.
- Providing an effective online mechanism for image licensing.
- Exploiting opportunities to repurpose content through digital publishing.
- Assessing appropriate opportunities for developing digital products.
- Cross-promoting the various elements of the commercial offer online.
- Building customer intelligence by gathering data across a range of systems.

## 4. ACTUAL ACTIONS THAT CAN BE TAKEN:

- Museums can value collections and expertise online through clear business models and understanding Web 3.0 technologies, micropayments, augmented reality and how to leverage them.
- Museums should stop thinking only about re-creating offline exhibitions online.
- Museums should stop giving away things for free.
- Understand the medium, and explore the possibilities.
- Building and expanding the virtual tour concept.
- Live cams and other virtual events to showcase the space and exhibits.
- Educational Opportunities for Learners of all ages (e.g. museums and zoos know about the importance of education as part of their mission. As a result, many of them have taken their educational experience online. Take The James Museum as an example. Its exhibits are now digital, allowing viewers to learn more about the works as well as their larger context. Each week focuses on a different theme, while movies and other media are suggested as companion pieces.)
- Webinars with authors, artists, employees etc.

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## 5. EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIONS BY MUSEUMS

- Museums across the USA have jumped on #MuseumFromHome, where they shared their exhibits, asked thought-provoking questions, and built live virtual tours
- Some museums began to solicit audiences for user-generated content, like the “Getty Museum Challenge.” The J. Paul Getty Museum, among others, was asking their followers to recreate art from their collections at home. The result? People posted using the hashtag and the museums, in turn, got great user-generated content that highlighted their exhibits and collections.
- Zoom is taking over the business and personal world. Virtual backgrounds can bring the attraction directly to those living rooms and home offices.
- Embrace user-generated content as an important catalyst to engagement and inquiry, particularly for younger and more “Web 2.0” kinds of audiences.
- Make it easy for online visitors (as well as internal scholars and researchers) to find the content they are, or might be, interested in. Once visitors find content, make it easier for them to find similar and related content elsewhere in the institution.

- Publish more of the collections, images, video, activities, and content of all kinds. Enable network effects in which a critical mass of content and users enables kinds of learning and value-creation that many smaller, isolated pockets of content and users can not.
- Ensure that the museum's content is available in a variety of formats and platforms (create a shared global navigational structure that encourages deep exploration of unit-based content and discovery of content across units).
- Develop expertise in User Experience Design. Convene focus groups to help staff and leadership better understand audience needs. Create an audience segmentation plan that describes and prioritizes roles, online goals, and value to the museum, and correlate that plan to the structure/interaction flows of the museum's website.
- Continue and strengthen an online pan-institutional calendar to aggregate upcoming events and announcements.
- Leverage Facebook to create events and add an additional channel to the museum's marketing).
- Digital Advertising (benefits: expand of the reach, possibility to reach targeted audiences, cost-effective outreach).

- Google grant - in its effort to support non-profit organizations, Google (responsible for more than a third of all digital ad revenue) offers significant financial support to entities like museums. The search engine giant offers grants that match up to \$10,000 in ad spend every month for 501(c)3 organizations.
- Publish content so that it can be shared, tagged, collected, rated, re-purposed, commented on, and exported to other websites. Optimize the museum's digital content with metadata and semantic structure to maximize availability to search engines.
- Dedicate resources to manage and support user interaction and user-generated content.
- Open up the data that the museum has. Reasons: third party developers and organisations can build on your data. They can create new value as a result, such as selling more tickets to events by using the museum's data in a third party listing app that has much better search functionality than the museum's website does; it can save time and money. If an institution is already providing some kind of data to partners then doing it more automatically through an open data system can save a lot of manual work; it is great for audiences. If the museum is sharing the listings, collections or media content data it means that more people will have access to it, either in its original form or when remixed; the information becomes easily accessible and valuable for researchers; open data can be used as the fuel for creative work.

## 6. EXAMPLES OF DIGITAL STRATEGIES:

- Tate (London, UK)

- Tate is an institution that houses, in a network of four art museums, the United Kingdom's national collection of British art, and international modern and contemporary art. It is not a government institution, but its main sponsor is the UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

- The Andy Warhol Museum (North Shore of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the United States)

- The Andy Warhol Museum, a Gallery Systems client, uses GitHub to share their digital strategy, for free, online. They invite other members of the cultural sector to view, adapt, share, and repurpose these documents, and welcome those with concepts to improve digital strategy throughout the cultural sector to submit ideas. Not only does this invitation help to improve possible new digital strategies for museums looking to build theirs for the first time, but it helps to strengthen Warhol's strategy through crowdsourcing.



- The Science Museum Group

- It is a collection of British museums, comprising: The Science Museum in South Kensington, London, the Science and Industry Museum in Manchester, the National Railway Museum in York, the National Railway Museum Shildon in County Durham, the National Science and Media Museum (formerly the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television) in Bradford, and the Science Museum at Wroughton in Swindon, Wiltshire.

- The National Portrait Gallery

- It is an art gallery in London housing a collection of portraits of historically important and famous British people. It was the first portrait gallery in the world when it opened in 1856.

- Städel Museum, officially the Städelisches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, is an art museum in Frankfurt, with one of the most important collections in Germany. The Städel Museum owns 2,700 paintings and a collection of 100,000 drawings and prints as well as 600 sculptures.

What these museums are doing:

- Being more accessible

They're trying to provide the audience with a more open access to the collection and images. In their digital strategies, Tate mentioned enriching their own online collections with projects like Art & Artists, Transforming Tate Britain as well as Archives and Access projects. National Portrait Gallery talked about extending the range and ways of viewing digital images of their collections and addressed the importance of open and shareable in terms of software and data standards. Also, the Städel Museum referred to a list of their on-going digital projects and how they should keep developing and optimizing them. A very intriguing one is their digitorials. It is a multimedia preparation for / follow-up on selected special exhibitions that the audience can read before, during or after they go to the exhibits.

- Making the museum website more accessible

As suggested in the report, National Portrait Gallery would prioritize investment in redesign of its main website and aim to make this their core delivery system for all online content. Meanwhile, it would make better use of social media embedded into the main website and use it to give the site more currency. Besides, the report raised the topic of creating seamless user experience across different systems, which I think would be very helpful for accessibility.

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Making the museum staff/curators more accessible has also been trending. The Warhol Museum's report introduced a communication strategy highlighting behind-the-scenes activity, as well as an open call for digital users to provide feedback and information about objects in the museum's collection. Tate mentioned seeking greater curatorial engagement with the online art and archive collection to provide more open and shareable content for its online users.

- Being more engaging

The museums want to engage audiences with on-site digital experience. In these reports, Tate brought up their Digital learning studios, and how artist sketchbooks and scrapbooks from Tate Archive would be made accessible through touch screens at Tate Britain. Similarly, the Science Museum Group talked about having the Digital Lab, where a set of activities that would build capability, explore the full potential of digital and establish the digital reputation of the Group. Also, the Group's strategy mentioned establishing an online crowdsourcing initiative to allow the public to share their expertise around the collection.

- More revenue/funding

Using various digital methods to generate more revenue and funding is no doubt another trend based on the reports.

Each of them has their unique strategies which are all very interesting. The Warhol Museum suggested better UX design to make online funding easier for individual and cooperative donors. Additionally, they would try to evolve from a digital project-based funding model to a digital operating-based funding model. This would allow digital staff to be opportunistic with initiatives, in addition to making iteration and rapid development key elements to the museum's digital activities. Tate's document focused more on their digital products, i.e., online courses, apps, ebooks, paid onsite multimedia tour etc. They would also introduce self-serving ticketing to create an easier visiting experience for the audience. Similarly, the National Portrait Gallery report also talked about encouraging general and specific online donations, providing simple registration/payment processes for public art competitions, effective booking and ticketing for exhibitions and events. They also mentioned offering simple print-on-demand services both onsite and online, which is already available.

# 7. ADVANTAGES OF GOING DIGITAL:

- Counteracting existing cultural trends

Museum attendance has been in decline for decades, and the same has been true for most zoos. Audiences are more distracted by other, more 'exciting' alternatives while many simply choose to stay home. Digital lessons learned during the Coronavirus may well play a major role in beginning to reverse that trend.

- Standing out from the competition

Museums which do comprehensive digital shifts now have a significant advantage over their competition for audience attention, and that advantage is unlikely to go away anytime soon (strong digital experience is paired with the returning in-person experience). Combining the two will make your attraction seem more comprehensive, and attract more audiences, than your competition focusing only on one side of the equation.

- Enhancing physical visit experience

While virtual visits and other digital events are great opportunities now because they're the only option, they can remain effective even while in-person experiences return. A strong virtual tour, or a viral video, does nothing to take away from the actual visit.

- Making the case for the in-person visit

The right digital strategy makes the perfect case for an in-person visit. How could a virtual workshop hosted by the children's museum lead to a physical, communal experience with other children? Built right, these virtual experiences are the perfect argument to make the visit.

- After the content comes the promotion: getting the word out about virtual museum content

Museums need to get the word out. Exactly how this can be done should not be a surprise: this is where marketing channels come into play.

Understanding and being able to communicate the value of marketing, particularly if the museum has to invest resources into the strategy and execution during budget-strapped times.

Build the target audience, which includes both understanding who that audience is and finding different ways to define it through demographics and interests/desires.

Focus on the right digital channels, defined not by hunches or your own preferences but those of the audience. Even if you prefer Twitter, your audience may be in love with Instagram. Follow them instead of making them find you.

Create creative, visual, attention-grabbing content. That's what the rest of this guide has been about, but it does need to meet your audience's needs and expectations.

Running targeted, focused digital ads that 'close the deal' by driving your audience to the virtual events you need them to experience does need to meet your audience's needs and expectations.

Continually measure your ROI to understand which of your tactics are working and why. That helps you make improvements over time and build a better marketing campaign in the long run.



- Broaden access

Making more resources available digitally greatly increases public access, expedites the work of scholars and researchers worldwide, and opens new possibilities to educators in every setting. Digitized materials will help reach underserved audiences, as well as those not inclined to see museums as a source of information.

- Preserve collections

Museums have to constantly battle the destructive forces of time and environment. Despite the best efforts, plastics discolor, wax cylinder recordings distort, and botanical specimens become brittle. Digitization offers a way to make objects — and the valuable information they contain — available without jeopardizing their integrity by handling or by exposure to the elements. Digitization will help make the museum's activities such as conservation and loans from the collections easier, and assist us in leveraging staff skills, knowledge, and expertise more effectively.

- Support education

Digitization of museums gives the public access to a much greater percentage of the resources, providing better tools with which to spark learning.

- Enrich context

Sharing not only the object itself but also details, records, and other interpretative data associated with it makes for a richer interaction and enhances a user's understanding of the object's context and meaning. Digitization will facilitate the efforts of experts working remotely to compare their artifacts and specimens, enriching information about these holdings at a faster rate. Equally important, it creates the potential for people the world over to add impressions, associations, and stories to the permanent record.

## **8. MONETIZING IDEAS:**

- A basic business model is to create social and economic value through the increase and diffusion of knowledge. Web and New Media programs are both an intrinsic part of this overarching model and an opportunity to develop new kinds of revenue in harmony with the mission. There is a potential for a new revenue model based on users and content. Amazon's success is linked to the way it harnesses the collective intelligence of its huge base of users through recommendations and rankings.

Google develops powerful information-access tools, then gives them to its users—for free—and makes billions by selling ads. In these models, the revenue-generating potential of a Web site is exponentially amplified by the size and activities of its audience.

- Option to book an actual museum visit through the website.
- Gift shop e.g. with mugs, prints, books, postcards etc.
- Donations (corporate, individual etc.).
- Webinars (and later e.g. a promo code for a museum visit or something from the giftshop).
- Crowdfunding.

## 9. POTENTIAL POLICY

- Revenue Generation: Use a coordinated approach to revenue generation across the organization.
- Incentives: Establish a model that offers units incentives to participate in business development. These include increased revenue share, visibility, traffic, and access to shared tools that reduce labor and costs.
- Success Metrics: Require that business plans be created to evaluate the cost/benefit profile of proposed online revenue-generating initiatives and ensure that business owners track performance against that plan.

- Revenue in Harmony with Mission: Develop opportunities that are efficient and scalable and that harmonize with the overall mission to increase and diffuse knowledge.
- Marketing and Promotion: Create pan-institutional and museum-specific online marketing campaigns to drive site traffic and grow audiences for content, philanthropic, and e-commerce purposes.
- Audience Development: Focus on creating dramatically larger and more engaged audiences by providing consistently outstanding content, experiences, and engagement across all Web and New Media properties.
- Gradually reduce the dependence on access and use fees by aggregating a larger number of visitors under a strong brand supported by sponsorships and other value-added products and services. It is likely that the museum will make more money by promoting “free” resources to a large audience than it can by charging small amounts for small transactions to a small audience, and it is a much better fit with the mission.
- Attract the funding necessary to update the museum’s web and new media operations and business models.

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**WWW.LINKFACTORY.DK**

info@linkfactory.dk www.linkfactory.dk

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