The Making of a Museum Online Exhibition:
Theory and Practice

Why do we need online exhibitions?

Our goals:
- ✓ Promote the physical show
- ✓ Enhance the museum visit
- ✓ Engage remote audiences
- ✓ Document the show
- ✓ Extend the life of the show
- ✓ Create a teaching and learning resource

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

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

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology

Newberry Hall (State Street entrance)
Photo by Randal Stegmeyer

Upjohn Wing (Maynard Street entrance)
Photo by Randal Stegmeyer

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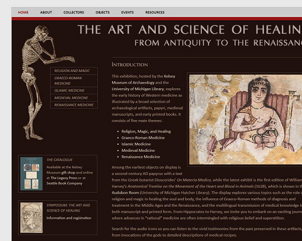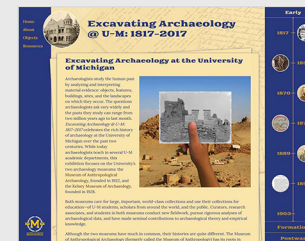- ✓ Creates companion websites for special exhibitions

Featured Online Exhibitions

This online exhibition was built after the show had closed; gallery photos became an integral part of the design.

This website included many chapters and sub-chapters, therefore the topical navigation has been separated from the main menu.

The central piece of this exhibition was the timeline. On the website, it serves as the main navigation tool.

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

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2. Kalfatovic, M. R. Creating a Winning Online Exhibition: A Guide for Libraries, Archives, and Museums. Chicago and London: American Library Association, 2002.

3. Mundy, J. and J. Burton, "Online Exhibitions." In Museums and the Web 2013, N. Proctor & R. Cherry (eds). Silver Spring, MD: Museums and the Web. Published January 31, 2013. Consulted October 18, 2018. https://mw2013.museumsandtheweb.com/paper/online-exhibitions/

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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:	Photos of artifacts
Collections manager:	Information on artifacts
Graphic artist:	Maps and charts
IT coordinator:	Special plugins
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)

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