

Sara Alcorn
LIS 258
St. John's University
Interactive Technology Assignment

Introduction

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. is one of the most internationally recognized and respected museums. The USHMM has created a well-known interactive activity that offers their guest a deeper way to connect with the stories and history of the holocaust. The interactive activity allows guests to pick up an identity card at the beginning of their tour, learn about the person identified on the card throughout the tour, and learn of the outcome of the person at the end of the museum tour. This activity allows their patrons to feel personally connected to an event that many may not be able to connect with previously. However, the in-person activity is not the only interactive exhibit the USHMM provides.

Sample Exhibit

The USHMM, while a phenomenal museum in person, is also known for their online and digital exhibitions. One of the most interesting digital exhibits is the [“Life in Shadows: Hidden Children and the Holocaust”](#). This exhibit features six Jewish children who spent months and even years hiding from the German government. This exhibit is designed to give the viewer a more realistic view of the hardships these children went through at incredibly young ages. Many children were forced to change their appearance, adopt new identities, or hide in unimaginable places to save their lives. This exhibit gives views an interactive and intimate look at an unusual aspect of a major part of history.

Interactive Features

The Hidden Children exhibit features some truly interactive techniques to make the exhibit more personal. To begin, the exhibit features a short film with an explanation of what the exhibit means by 'hidden children', as well as simple Holocaust history. On the right hand side, the exhibit features tabs that allow you to explore the exhibit at will, creating a self-lead tour of the artifacts. The tab "Stories of the Hidden" opens smaller, personal exhibits with a number of different artifacts for each child listed. Each child has a number of different artifacts that can be moved around and expanded for more information. Along with artifacts, each of the mini-exhibits features the recorded stories of the survivor, connecting the artifacts to the living person, to create an intimate connection between the viewer and the exhibit. In addition to the interactive features, the exhibit also provides a study guide for teachers to provide to their students, for a true learning experience.

I believe the designers of this exhibit chose to use different multi-media to create more engagement, while exposing a wider audience to important cultural events. In "Expanding the Concept of Visitors", the authors write about the importance of bringing in a larger audience by creating more exhibits that cater to "more tech-savvy generations" (pg. 17). The USHMM successfully created an exhibit that requires the user to understand how to move, expand, and play artifacts to get the full experience of the exhibit. By marketing this to a more tech-savvy audience, they are creating an atmosphere of true engagement with the artifacts that, in turn, creates larger connections with the history.

Connection to Museum Object

While the connection to my own museum object may seem obvious (children in the holocaust), it is truly the design of this exhibit that caught my eye. I have a special museum object, in that the own of my original object is still alive and willing to recount his stories. Fortunately, this is true for many of the exhibits at the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Museum in Long Island. By creating an online exhibit that showcases a number of personal artifacts, and matching them with connecting stories told by survivors can create a deep, personal connection to visitors.

For my own object, I would love to see this sort of exhibit in which Alex Rosner recounts his time spent in Nazi concentration camps, including possible photographs, paper work such as passports, and perhaps even a video clip of Rosner playing the accordion in the present day. I think using the USHMM's exhibit as a template could create an interactive, innovative, and touching exhibit for the HMTC.

Possible Audience

The first potential audience would be students, particularly young students who are just starting to learn about the Holocaust. By providing young students with a perspective of children, while letting the student learn about the artifacts at their own pace, and allowing them to digitally move the artifacts around could provide a much deeper understanding of the magnitude and importance of the Holocaust. An exhibit about children, with photographs and multimedia could possibly be a more impactful learning experience to those who are the same age or slightly older as those in the exhibit. This exhibit would be especially helpful for students if a study guide were provided to aid students in comprehending the difficult information.

The second possible audience would be distance users. The HMTC is a very localized museum, focusing mostly on survivors and donated materials that have been personally brought into the museum. However, by providing this sort of interactive, online experience to the Internet world, the HMTC could see a huge upswing in national viewers. The interactive aspect of the exhibit makes it exciting and unusual, a factor that will keep users talking about the exhibit. And a larger viewership will most definitely lead to larger donations, financially and materially. By expanding distance user, more scholars and researchers have access to important and influential materials they might not have known existed otherwise.

References:

Johnson, L., Adams Becker, S., Estrada, V., and Freeman, A. (2015). *NMC Horizon Report: 2015 Museum Edition*. Austin, Texas: The New Media Consortium

Life in Shadows: Hidden Children and the Holocaust. (2016). *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/hidden-children/index/>