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LIS 258
Interactive Tech. Assignment

Museum of the City of New York: Future City Labs

Introduction

The interactive Technology that was used for this assignment was the *Future City lab* exhibit which was one of three total exhibits that are a part of a larger theme for the Museum of the City of New York called *New York at its Core*. The exhibition was set up with different stations that either had a digital component to it or a physical format, and from completing the activities, visitors have the opportunity of placing their work alongside other work that was done by previous visitor. There is a total of five to six stations, with three being interactive and two others letting visitors be able to view to digital content, that relates to either the creative space, exhibit data information, or subject video stories.

Exhibit Features

The specific interactive parts of the Future City Lab are a combination of two stations, both providing a look at a problem that NYC has when it comes to the condition of its neighbors and the desirability of the apartments that are here. One of the stations allowed visitors to create their own neighborhood spaces using touchscreen monitors to pick a number of items from what was pictorially listed on the screen and to place the item by dragging it to where they want it to be. The visitor has a choice of what neighborhood they would like to design, choosing from one listed location in either Manhattan, Queens, The Bronx, or Brooklyn. A template of an apartment building, a street, and people walking through is given, then using those items, things can be added, such as beaches, bicycle lanes, and elevated subway tracks. Once a visitor is finished, then their name is added to the finished template and shown on a larger video screen for participants. This large screen allows for individuals to see an image of themselves within the city designs that they and others have personally made. Making use of “natural user interfaces” (Johnson, Becker, Estrada, and Freeman, 2015, 44), as described in the 2015 NMH Horizons Report, the individual is able to interact with the video screen using the movement of their body and seeing their ‘projection’ in the screen mimic those movements in the designed neighborhood. The city design videos shown continue to shift about every minute and a half showing other pieces that visitors have already done.

Design Explanation

The use of digital touch screens for visitors to create the neighborhood designs is purposeful in providing visitors with a simple drag-and-place template to change things in the neighborhood that they see. All of the options for what an individual could place in the neighborhood are there, so they don't have to change screens to complete the design. Within this Future lab exhibit, there are 15 to 20 screens set up for designing neighborhoods placed in groups of five within designed table areas. Using touchscreens would be less expensive than a single larger kiosk for one visitor to design the same neighborhood program at a time. The ability to place screens in groups together allows for a group activity when designing neighborhoods, and provides some possible interaction between other individuals that are using the program about the designs that are being created. This opportunity for individual interaction with others is also the case when the finished designs are shown on the larger video board in presentation. There are three spots on the floor where visitors can stand in front of the video board and have a chance to see themselves reflected into the neighborhood design that is playing on the screen. Being able to see oneself in the neighborhoods that are designed gives the visitor an idea of how they might look in either their own or someone's idea of a neighborhood. People are digitally designed into the neighborhoods that visitors create so there is a realistic view that people can get of the surroundings that their 'projection' is being shown in.

Connection to Museum Object

For the Victory Loan Metal object that I am working with, the use of an interactive exhibit such as this might be useful when looking at an overall collection of medals from WW1 or WW2 and trying to provide a design activity of visitor's creating their own patriotic awards or medallions. These medals on their own are beautiful pieces to look at, but some of the reasoning behind the medallion's creation can be diminished when trying to show their role in the war effort on the home front. The use of an interactive exhibit program can help explain the patriotic mentality that went behind these metals being given out and why ordinary citizens cherished these as they did. The Museum of the City of NY has a wing on its second floor exhibiting wartime propaganda along with clothing and loan award medals, but that area lacks any digital content or design to go along with that collection. Essentially, it leaves that exhibit just as something to visually browse through, but does not completely explain the nationalistic themes that went into what was created by the posters and medals. That is why the use of a

“participatory experience” (Johnson, Becker, Estrada, and Freeman, 2015, 19) as described by the NMH horizons report is the new direction that is being taken by museums. The experience of creating something for oneself that reflects the subject matter of the exhibit can be more impactful for both youth and adults (Johnson, Becker, Estrada, and Freeman, 2015, 19). Youth using an interactive exhibit about wartime metals could possibly experience a accomplishment in creating something that represents America, and adults will gain a greater sense of pride in personally honoring the people that went through that sacrifice to support the country at war.

Audience

An interactive exhibit for the loan medal could be useful for middle or high school students that are learning more about the world wars and the U.S.’s contribution both at home and abroad. Adults with individual military backgrounds or had family members in either world war would be able to appreciate the designing of medals and learning more about the war effort that they would have heard stories about already. In the current divided social climate of having a desire for military intervention around the world, an interactive exhibit can help provide information back to a point in America’s history where the majority of citizens supported the war overseas and as a collective, devoted their personal lives to supporting that effort.

Conclusion

The use of interactive technology to deliver a lasting message to the museum visitor is not a simple task to accomplish. Exhibits can include touch screens and video monitors that can be used to provide more information about the collection as a whole, however, if that digital conception fails to connect the visitor, then the message overall will be wasted. The Future City Lab had the touch screen tables covered in information about the need for better designed neighborhoods that visitors to see while creating their own digital versions, there was a table discussing redevelopment and new building projects that could be seen in the same area. I am not sure that that detailed of an interactive exhibit would be applicable to my collection item, however, such a creative design program could be useful in highlighting the design of wartime materials in general. The best scenario interactive exhibits would be that most of the visitors would have some previous understanding of the issues or subject, so what is experienced can be more impactful and provide more of a lasting memory after they have left the exhibit.

Bibliography

- Future City Lab (2017). In “NY at its Core: 400 Years of NYC” Exhibition. *Museum of the City of New York*. <http://www.mcny.org/exhibitions/core/future-city>
- Johnson, L., Becker, S. A., Estrada, V., and Freeman, A. (2015). NMC Horizon Report: 2015 Museum Edition (pg. 19, 44). Austin, Texas: The New Media Consortium